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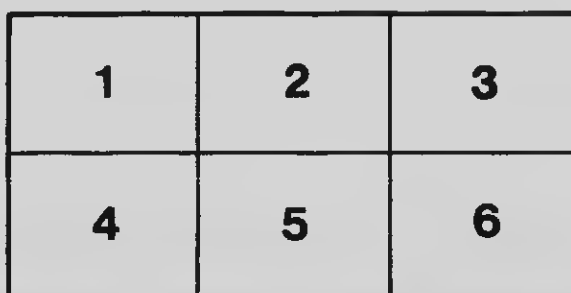
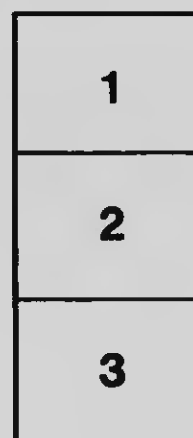
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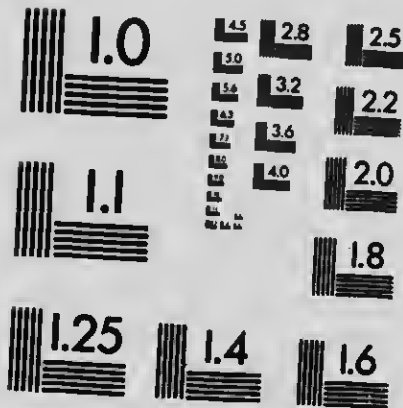
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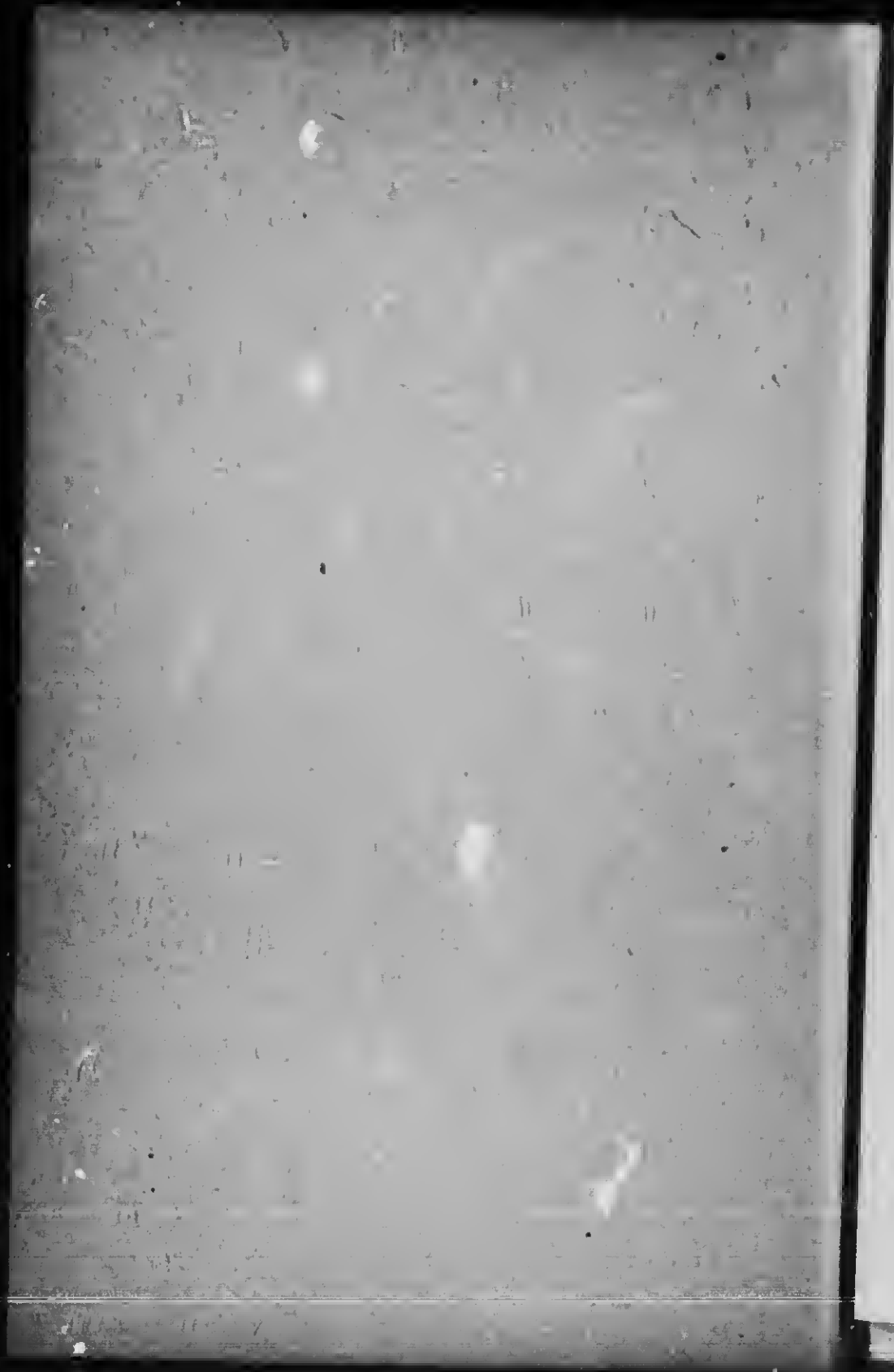
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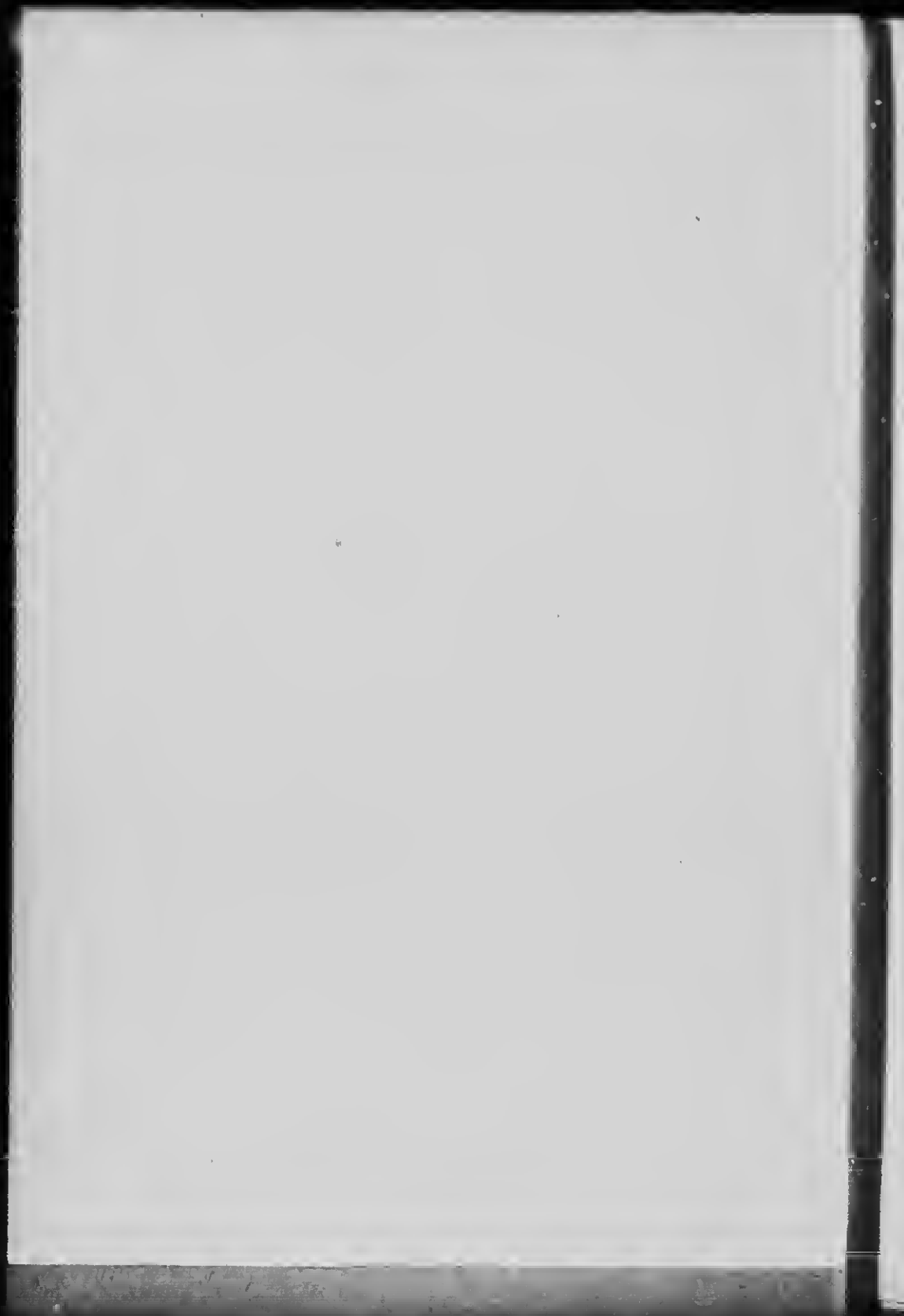
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1906.



**THE HARVEST OF  
MOLOCH**









VIOLET MICKLEDOOL.

Frontispiece.

# THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

A STORY OF TO-DAY

BY

MRS. J. K. LAWSON

Illustrated by I. R. Henri  
Cover Illustration by John Innes

JOHN M. POOLE & CO.  
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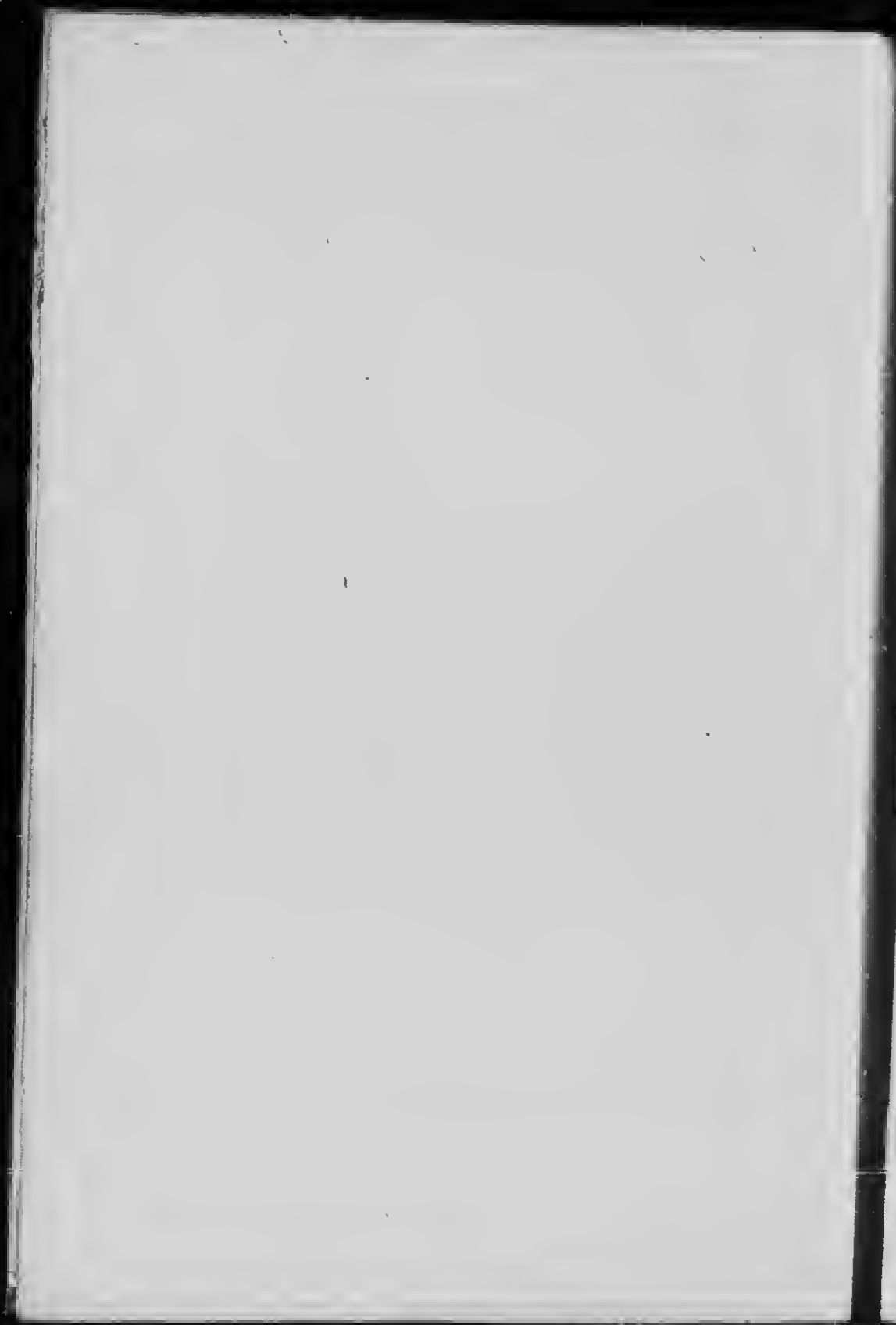
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Entered according to Act of the Parliament  
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To all who dare speak the truth;  
To all workers in the cause of temperance  
everywhere;  
To the assailants of Moloch; and  
To the victims of Moloch,  
This Story is

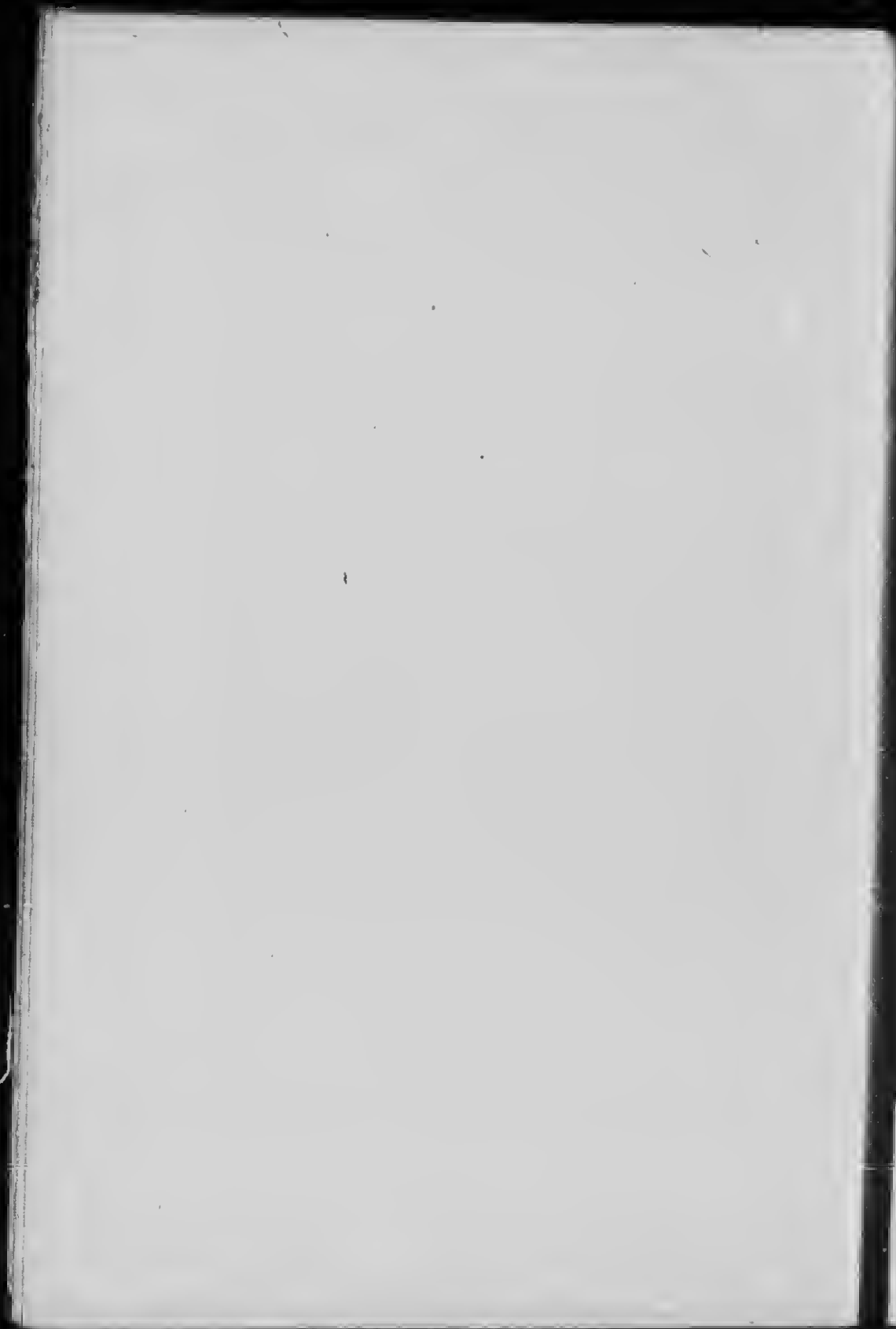
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## PROLOGUE

THE altar of the god is piled high with sheaves, so high that as the sun moves from east to west, the shadow of it is as the shadow of the Great Pyramid falling black athwart the land. The sheaves are the forfeit lives of men and women, and the people on whom the shadow of the great altar falls wring their hands and cry, "How long, O Lord, how long!" For there is no spring nor summer but only autumn and reaping-time in the age of Moloch. All year long the sickles flash and sweep, and the sheaves fall, and the moaning of the victims as they are laid on the altar is grievous and fills the land with gloom. For the blood drips piteously, and the sobbing of the little children ceases not day nor night, while the people cry, "Where is God? Oh! where is God that He comes not to deliver us from the cruel harvesting of Moloch?"

And the laugh of Moloch echoes with hollow mirth. "Yea? Where is God? Does not the gold from this my harvest build Him temples, feed His priests, house His children left homeless because of my ceaseless harvesting! Do not His servants bow down and lick the clay feet of my golden image. Go to! I, *Moloch*, am God in this land."







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# The Harvest of Moloch

## BOOK I.

### CHAPTER I.

#### JAMIE.

HE had a basket of laundried linen on his head, and was marching up Queen Street, whistling like a mavis, when a stout elderly gentleman passed him, striding on towards the station. The morning being unusually warm and the gentleman perspiring, Jamie was not at all surprised to see him slacken his pace, strip off his light overcoat and throw it over his arm. What did surprise him, however, was to see a pocket-book drop from the swinging coat to the pavement, the gentleman holding on his way with his head in the air, all unaware of his loss.

"Ahoy, sir! Hi, there! Whew—ew—ew!" called and whistled Jamie, but as well might he have called and whistled to the bronze statues in the square.

Not that the gentleman did not hear—he heard both call and whistle; but what did he, Robert Auld, wholesale merchant, and prominent citizen of Glasgow, to do with street arach calls and whistles, especially when on his way to catch the 8.50 train, with his head full of business, and his plump pocket-hook full of bank notes, snug in his coat here? What indeed!

But since he could he neither called nor whistled

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

back, Jamie must needs hurry up to him; although, how that was to be done was another thing. For the basket he carried on his head was rather heavy for a boy of his age; and, being filled with shirts, collars, and cuffs, stiffly starched, the latter on top, with only a snowy light cloth to cover them, had a trick of leaping down upon the pavement when violently shaken, as he well knew from sad experience. Jamie, however, was a lad of resource. He was well-known to the policeman at the corner below the station; not, indeed, as too many boys were known, sinisterly; but as a youngster who must be a blessing to the mother who owned him. For on a certain day of every week, rain or shine, came Jamie with his basket on his head, whistling—always whistling. Only once had the policeman seen him turn the corner with a funeral aspect, and then it occurred to him to ask the boy who was dead in the family; but on nearing saw that the lad had a virulent cold sore on each lip, and could not whistle for the life of him.

Jamie picked up the pocket-book and hastened as fast as he dared to the corner, and there, a little way down, beheld his friend the policeman.

"Say, a gentleman drappit this an' I want to rin after 'im," he said breathlessly, laying down his basket on the kerbstone; "will ye keep an e'e on thae claes till I rin into the station?"

"A' richt, Jamie," laughed the good-natured protector of the city. "Look sharp. Ye'll get half-a-croon for that, my man."

Sure enough, Jamie got his half-crown. He found the gentleman at the first-class wicket, fumbling, with blank consternation in his countenance, for his absent pocket-book. So intent was he, plunging out of one

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

pocket into another, that a second and more vigorous tug at his coat tails was necessary to make him turn wildly to find the reason thereof.

"That's what ye drappit. I cried a' my might an' whistled, but I couldna' make ye hear," explained Jamie in apology.

The gentleman took the pocket-book, looked at Jamie, slipped his hand into his pocket and pulled out half-a-crown.

"Look here, my lad, take this now. You've done me a service, a great service indeed. I haven't time now to look if the cash is all right, but I daresay it is, I daresay it is. Return to Edinburgh, please." This last to the ticket clerk.

"And—wait a minute—my lad, if I find it's all right, and you are as honest as you seem to be, come up to 'Auld's' in — Street, you know?"

Jamie nodded to intimate that he did know, and the old gentleman added—

"Well, I'll be home the day after to-morrow. You come up to my office and ask for Mr. Auld, and perhaps I may give you a little more."

So saying, he pocketed his ticket and stepped over to the carriage, taking no more notice of the boy.

Jamie darted out of the station, the happy possessor of half-a-crown, which he showed with great glee to the policeman.

"You ought to treat with that now," said the man of buttons, grinning down upon the boy in a fatherly way; but Jamie understood, and lifting his basket to his head again, bestowed a wink of thanks on his friend and was off, whistling as usual.

On his way home some half-an-hour after this, he was so silent and thoughtful that he forgot to whistle.

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

The spending of half-a-crown was a serious responsibility, and Jamie had been brought up to look at things from the responsible side. First of all, he had to take it home to his mother, and the delight she would be sure to express at the sight of the unexpected coin was a thought to gloat over.

But on the way home he would have a look at what he could buy with it anyhow, and this was why an inverted basket, with a pair of boy's legs under it, was seen to pause motionless for a full quarter of an hour at a time before certain shop windows in Argyle Street on the eventful morning.

Jamie had left the house at quarter-past six; it was a quarter-past eleven when he returned. His mother, who had been listening anxiously for his foot on the stairs, flew to open the door with a cry of relief.

"In a' the face o' the earth, Jamie! what keepit ye, laddie!" Before Jamie had time to reply, she sank upon a chair and gave way to tears. Her anxiety had been so intense, her relief so great. Not that she had the slightest fear of Jamie going any "ill gate"; Jamie was not of that kind, she told herself proudly. But it was just because he was so reliable and to be depended upon, that as nine, ten and eleven o'clock rang out, her anxiety deepened to distress and positive alarm. He had done no ill, of that she was as certain as that the sun shone; but what had befallen the boy? She had lost his father through an accident only four years ago, on just such a sunny day as this, when she had the table spread nicely, and a savory dinner ready to serve the moment he entered; and she had unlatched the door so that he could come straight into the clear house without having to wait one moment for her to answer his ring at the

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

bell, since somehow he had lost his key. And on that day, as to-day, the hours one after another had passed and the dinner was spoiled, and tea-time was coming on, and she began to wonder what had kept him at the shop, but felt no alarm, and still kept his dinner warm. Then a man whom they knew, an elder of the church, called, accompanied by their minister, and she was very glad to see them; until after a few remarks on the weather she told them how she had been wondering what had kept John. Then the elder said that we should live perhaps for disappointments.

"Man," said he, looking down upon the floor, while his voice shook, "Man is like the grass. In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up; in the evening it withereth and is cut down. But," he added with a sigh, still avoiding her eyes, "the Lord gave and the Lord taketh away, an' what can we say? Maybe we'd better have a word o' prayer, sir."

And according to the elder's suggestion the minister rose and prayed, and as he prayed little Jamie saw his mother's eyes close and her head swing backward, and with a loud cry of fear he ran to her; but her eyes were shut, and she did not hear him. And then the elder patted Jamie on the back and said he mustn't cry, but be a man to his mother, for God had called his father away to Heaven. Jamie was but eight years old when all this happened, but the elder's grave adjuration to be a man to his mother had sunk into his heart and abode with him; the feeling that he was that man to her never left him; he worshipped her with all the honest adoration of a boy.

At this moment he felt he had been a wicked wretch for lingering so long, but with his nose in the air he said grandly, "Oh, don't you be fear'd for me,

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

mither; I'll tak' care o' mysel'. Look at *that*, will ye?"

She glanced at the half-crown which he showed, with alarm.

"Jamie!"

"Ay, mither; it's mine. Gness where I got it."

She could guess nothing; she only knew one thing—he must have got it honestly, and she said so.

"Ah! I dinna ken about that," quoth Jamie, venturing on a little humorous jeer at his mother's open confidence in him.

"Naething happened the claes, Jamie?"

"Naething 'cept a policeman had charge o' them for a wee."

"A policeman!" she cried; and Jamie, unable to withstand the look of fear in her eyes, became serious, tossed the half-crown into her lap, and told her the whole story, adding in conclusion—

"An' I was looking at the tartans in Buchanan Street. Yon dark blue and green with the yellow check. My! wouldn't you look fine in ane o' yon? An' there was a brooch doon in Argyle Street; I would have gane in an' priced it, but I had the basket on my head. I thocht I would better wait an' see what you said first. Doon in yon shop where they have a' thae hairy bears' and teegers' skins, I saw a mnff that would be the very thing for you, mither. I opened the door an' gaed in to speir what it was worth, but a grand gentleman ordered me get oot o' that, because I dang ower a stuffed hoolet wi' the basket. If he had kent I'd a half-crown o' my pooch he wadna crawled sae crouse—would he, mither?"

Mrs. Watson had listened to her son's narration of the finding and restoration of the pocket-book, but an



## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

angry sparkle kindled in her eye at Mr. Auld's bestowal of the half-crown. She was a proud and ambitious woman, and had her own dreams of Jamie's future greatness.

The fact that she had to earn her living by laundry work did not affect these one whit. Fate had dealt hardly with her, it is true; washing and ironing more fortunate people's clothes had certainly been the last thing she had dreamed of when a happy wife; but since the future must be looked in the face, and since laundrying brought her in more money for the time spent than anything else, she proposed with industry and a pair of capable hands to retain her independence and flout Fate with soap-suds. *Her son was no pauper, nor ever would be.*

"Jamie, my man," she said solemnly, "we've need naething frae naebody sae far, an' we'll tak' naething but what we work for. Ye'll just tak' haeck that half-crown to Mr. Auld's office this afternoon, an' tell him—"

"But, mither, he'll no be hame till the morn's nicht," the boy cried in unmistakable dismay.

"Nae matter! Tak' it back an' tell the hook-keeper what ye got it for. Say ye're much obliged to Mr. Auld, but your mither disna expect ye to be paid for doin' what's richt."

Jamie swung his foot back and forward upon the floor, and raising his hand looked critically at his finger tips without seeing them.

"I daresay ye're hungry, laddie. I've a sausage and fine mashed tatties in the oven here, enough to mak' your teeth watter," she said, opening the oven door and setting free a most appetizing odor of well-cooked food.

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

Jamie was feeling very sore over that half-crown; no one but himself could guess the delight he had known in spending it over and over again in fancy as he stood eclipsed by the laundry basket before the shop windows; but with a sigh he drew in his chair to the table and ate his dinner. When nearly finished his mother reached over his shoulder and laid a large red-cheeked apple before him, and he was comforted. He was saying to himself now that he wouldn't give a bawbee for all the half-crowns in the world.

The wily mother saw her opportunity and explained—

“ Jamie, my man, ye see there's twa-three things in this world that can neither be bocht nor sold. An' ane o' thae things is honesty. Ye canna buy it, nor can ye sell it. An' ye're no to aloo *ony* man to think ye can be paid for no bein' a thief. The idea o' him tellin' you that he would look the pocket-book an' gie you mair if it was a' richt! We'll let him see whether you're honest or no. If we dinna respect coorsel's naeither body will. Tak' ye back his half-croon.”

A dim glimmering of what his mother meant at last dawned in the lad; he seemed to catch a spark of the unquenchable Scotch fire in her eye; and, taking up the half-crown, he seized his cap and made for the door.

“ I wouldna' hae't noo if he paid me for't,” he said to himself when he reached the pavement; nor all the way to the warehouse did he so much as glance at a shop window.

## CHAPTER II.

### HOW HE WAS LAUNCHED.

"Ah, is there a boy here named Jamie Watson?" queried Mr. Auld, as he stood at Mrs. Watson's door some two weeks later.

"Yes, he lives here. Come in," was the prompt reply, and Mrs. Watson showed the way into the front room.

"And you are his mother, I suppose?" the gentleman said, sitting down in the proffered armchair and sharply scrutinizing the apartment, furnished as it was with a fine mahogany chest of drawers, with looking-glass and toilet ornaments on top; a round table; a black haircloth sofa and half-a-dozen chairs in the same style; ornaments on the mantel-shelf, and engravings on the papered walls.

"Yes, I am his mother," Mrs. Watson answered, sitting down opposite and folding her hands in her lap.

"Did he find a pocket-hook one morning?"

"Oh, ay! the pocket-hook—he telled me a' ahoc: it, puir laddie. But ye ken, Mr. Auld, I couldna' let him tak' half-a-crown for doin' jnst what he ocht to hae done; ye've to be carefu' wi' the bringin' up o' hairns—laddies especially. They have to learn to do richt for richt's sake. It's dangerous to learn them to expect ony reward but a satisfied conscience. Ye see it greatly depends on me an' what I airt him to what kin' o' a man he'll be. Did ye get haek the half-crown a' richt?"

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

Mr. Auld looked at Mrs. Watson through his gold-rimmed spectacles, and an amused smile wrinkled his face.

"Bnt I told him to come to the office; I wanted to see him after I had examined the pocket-book. There were some valuable papers in it. I intended to give him more than half-a-crown."

Mrs. Watson, with some slight embarrassment of manner, smoothed down her apron.

"Aweel, to tell ye the truth, Mr. Auld, I was very angry at that. It wasna' that I despised the money, an' maybe I micht have let him keep it; but wia he told me that ye would examine the pocket-book afore you would mak' up your mind whether he was honest or no, I couldna' afford to keep it. Nae man that looks in my Jamie's face could doot his honesty for a meenit. He's his father's born image."

"Oh, ho!" said Mr. Auld, and again he smiled.

"I have to be very particular," she said in explanation, "I have but the a'e laddie, an' ir's 'learn young, learn fair.' I was a kind o' vexed for him though, for it was sae lanchable, the things he had laid oot to buy wi' that puir half-crown. I dinna think a five pound note would hae paid for them a'. The puir silly bairn! what better did he ken? But, Mr. Auld, since ye let a laddie grow up wi' the notion that siller is the main thing, nae maitter hoo ye get it or what ye sacrifice for't, there's nae sayin' whaur he may stop. Noo, my way is that siller is far waur than poverty if ye get it at the expense o' your ain self-respect; so, if ye're offended at the laddie for bringin' the half-crown, ye maun e'en blame me. Aweel, it was a sair backset to him, till i let him see

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

he was every inch as good a man as the next, an' entitled to the same respect. You'll excuse me, bnt I'm a plain ootspoken woman, an' maun say just what I think."

While Mrs. Watson was speaking the gentleman kept his eyes on the carpet, listening intently and nodding his head now and again.

"Yes—yes—so I see; a very plain-spoken woman indeed. But a very good mother for a young Scotchman, Mrs. Watson—very good indeed. We don't gather figs off thistles, Madam. Now, what have you thought of for the boy's future way of living?"

"Oh, weel, he maun gang to the schule another year yet anyway. There's nae chance in the world noo without education."

"But can you afford it, Mrs. Watson? I hear you live by washing and ironing. Is that true?"

"Perfectly true, Mr. Auld. I'm no ashamed to say't, though I little thocht I would ever hae to do it for a livin'. An' I can quite weel afford to keep the laddie at the schule."

"Is he good at arithmetic, do you know?"

"Jamie! He coonts like winkin', Mr. Auld," she said, suddenly pausing, with a wild flush of hope dyeing her cheeks. "What for d'ye ask me that?"

"I have come to offer him a boy's place in my warehouse, where he can work himself up if he has a mind to do well. I have waited, feeling sure he would come back, although Graham, my book-keeper, insisted that he never would. The rascal would not so much as leave his address, so that we could find him, and I have had no end of trouble hunting you up."

The prond, ambitious woman was sufficiently humble now. The shield of pride upheld between her

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

self and her visitor in defence of her poverty was lowered. The great ambition of her life—to see Jamie in one of Glasgow's big business houses—was in her grasp, offered to her by the man she had flouted.

She covered her eyes with her hand, and tears trickled out between her fingers. Mr. Auld leant his elbow over on the sofa arm and tapped gently with his finger-tips on the carved mahogany while he waited her answer.

“ I'm perfectly ashamed o' mysel', Mr. Auld,” she said at last, drying her eyes and looking up. “ We'll be mair than thankfu' for your kind offer, an' I'll promise ye ye'll never be sorry that ye took the laddie. He's as true as steel—although I'm no the ane to say't. But ye'll find oot for yoursel'. The only thing is takin' him frae the schule.”

“ Well, if that is the only thing, I shall see that his studies are continued at a night school under proper teachers. At present I have a vacancy in my counting-house, where the hours will be short and the work light. I'll see that it is made so, anyway; and this Jamie Watson of yours is the sort of boy I want to get into the office. Boys who, as you put it, are trained to do right for right's sake are few and far between. When one considers the positively vicious training of the young, the perpetual sacrificing of the great things of life to the lesser—principle everywhere offered up to expediency—it seems to me a mystery that half the boys turn out so well as they do.”

“ Deed ay, that's true,” responded Mrs. Watson.

“ Shall we consider this as settled, then? Will the boy himself care to come? His wages will be five shillings a week for the first year, the second year—”

“ Mr. Auld, don't speak about wages; see hoo he

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

does first. But I ken Jamie'll be a' richt. He's will-  
in' an' oòligin', an' anxious to get on. But I maun  
tell ye he's nae saint. He's as fu' o' fun as an egg's  
fu' o' meat. He'll be sure to whistle at his work, for  
he whistles in his very sleep."

Mr. Auld laughed as he shook hands with this con-  
scientious mother.

"Oh, I don't object to a whistle at work, so long  
as the tune's brisk enough," he said with a merry  
gleam of the spectacles.

When he had departed Mrs. Watson found it hard  
to return to her wash-tub. This sudden realization of  
one of her ambitions was perfectly overwhelming.  
She had dreamed for something like this for Jamie so  
long; wondering and scheming, and lamenting in-  
wardly that they had so few friends who could speak  
for him. Indeed, there had been times when she had  
despaired of ever getting such a chance for the boy—  
and now! To think of it! Who could deny an over-  
ruling Providence after that?

No thought of his failing to give satisfaction ever  
entered her mind. He was Jamie Watson, and that  
was enough. She had brought him up to believe in  
himself, to rely on himself, to respect himself; he was  
come of a sterling stock, and "what's bred in the  
bone," etc. It did not trouble her a bit that more  
than once on his way home from school he had cast  
his coat and soundly thrashed boys who had called him  
names and taunted him with his laundry basket; the  
blood on his knuckles did not frighten her any; she  
was rather proud to see him able to hold his own  
when it became necessary. She would have thrashed  
him herself had she known him to submit to insult  
from any one of them. Her's was one of those na-

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tures which poverty sharpens as with a whetstone. As he held his own now, so he would when a man. The lie, the theft, the foul word eschewed now would be impossible later on. There was plenty of latitude for youthful vigor and healthy animal spirits apart from these, she maintained, all unaware that she had unconsciously grasped the great scientific idea of habit of mind.

It was no use; she could wash no more that forenoon; she needed to think over it, to smile well pleased over it, to cry over it a little, as she thought how proud John would have been to see Jamie installed at five shillings a week in Auld & Co.'s warehouse. So she laid away the tub, tidied about, and prepared a savory dinner for the lad, and had the door unlatched for him when he came upstairs with his books under his arm at noon, too hungry to whistle.

The years after this slipped by, as the most happy years do, uneventfully, save for Jamie's annual promotions in the warehouse of Auld & Co., which meant proportionate increase of salary.

He was now a tall, well-formed man, with clear, limpid eyes, set in a fair and ruddy countenance, and with that look of "uncorrupt youth" which Emerson has recorded as a distinguishing and beautiful feature of British early manhood.

At nineteen he had insisted that the laundrying should be renounced at once and for ever. He had now a salary sufficient to keep himself and his mother in comfort—and in comfort he meant she should live for the rest of her life.

Only too proud of her son and his consideration



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for her, she consented. They moved out to a neat little house a few miles beyond the suburbs, Jamie going and returning by train morning and evening. And if ever there existed a happy mother and an adored son, it was the two who lived in Ivy Dale Cottage.

But Mrs. Watson had not been without friends and acquaintances during all those years of strenuous industry, and though she now spent most of her ample leisure in sewing or reading—she could also enjoy an afternoon “crack” with an old acquaintance or friend from the city.

And the visitors, of course, brought news, and Mrs. Watson made good tea—and, like most foolish mothers, talked appreciatively of her son.

One old lady nodded over her tea cup, and said she should make the most of him while she had him. It would not be long. “My son’s my son till he gets a wife; my dochter’s my dochter a’ her life,” she quoted; but Mrs. Watson tossed up her head in a fine laugh and said her son was worth a’ the dochters that ever were born.

“Maybe sae; nae doot, nae doot; but, my certiel if he gets the ane he’s gaun wi’ the noo, she’ll kaim his head for him—ay, an’ yours too, or I’m sair mista’en.”

“I’m no feared for the woman Jamie mak’s his choice,” was the mother’s confident rejoinder; but when, some six months later, Jamie announced his intention to get married, and brought his prospective bride to introduce her, Mrs. Watson’s heart sank within her. She had reckoned on Jamie’s straightforwardness and love of what was good and true to bring him a suitable helpmeet—even so unexpectedly

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soon as this—but it never occurred to her that his very best qualities had made him unwary of guile.

And guile was in every featur of the pretty girl he had engaged himself to, in every sinuous turn of her studied poses, every modulation of her voice. Her seniority of some three or four years was no objection in Mrs. Watson's eyes; it was the seniority in perception, in assumption, in subtlety, in worldly knowledge, the *staleness* of the girl that she took such a dislike to, though she did her best to conceal it.

"Of course, mother, you will live with us," he said when the visit was happily over, and they were once more alone, with the consciousness of a barrier such as never before had been felt between them; "I'm sure you like Emma—don't you?"

"She's a very bonnie lassie; her profile would just look splendid in a photograph," she answered, giving honestly what praise she could. "But, Jamie, my man, young folk should hae their bit hoosie an' their fireside to themselves. But there's nae hurry; ye'll no be marryin' for a year or twa yet. Ye're no much past twenty."

Jamie looked thoughtful; a wrinkle, the first, creased his broad brow.

"I'm no' in ony particular hurry; but she's no' happy where she is. Her half-brother an' his wife are never pleased. They are aye naggin' at her. She was a clerk in his shop for a while, but it seems things didn't please him, so she left the shop and stayed with them till she got another situation. But the wife is very disagreeable—and—mother—I want her to come here—I hate to see her so vexed. She's cried more than once to me about the way she's treated. I don't see why we can't marry now; my

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salary can keep the three of us comfortably. As she says, we're not going to grudge you your bite and sup."

"Did she say that?" asked Mrs. Watson, a fire kindling in her eyes, a flush of wounded pride reddening her cheeks. That *she* should be offered hite and sup by yon sly, sweet-face! That such a thing as *giving* her should be discussed by that hussy! That she, who had held her own and seen *him* safe to where he was, should be spoken of as one who should need at any one's hands!

The sword that sooner or later pierces the heart of every mother had found Mrs. Watson, but her unsuspecting son never dreamed how hard he was thrusting it home, how mercilessly he was dethroning her to make room for this acquaintance of three months' standing.

An uncontrollable choking was in her throast. If only it had been any other kind of a woman! But *this!*

"Dinna be rash, Jamie. Wait a wee. Ye haena been lang acquaint yet. If ye're no worth waitin' for ye're no worth haein.'"

"What fault have you to her, mother?"

"None."

"Don't you like her?"

Then Mrs. Watson, true to herself as ever, turned and stabbed him with the one word "No!"

And until he brought home his wife the two lived together with hearts that ached for the old love and the old confidence, destroyed for ever.

"I'm a fule; I had nae business to say whether I liket her or no. Yet hoo could I lee to him, my ain only bairn?" moaned the mother to herself afterward;

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but deep down in her heart was the conviction that she had acted wisely when she left the pretty Ivy Cottage to them, and went with her own furniture to a modest house of her own, letting a room of it to a business man in the city.

And as time wore on, by degrees the old tenderness for the boy returned. Her heart bled within her when reports of unhappiness reached her, justifying her instinctive forebodings. Nevertheless she kept silence, nor by word or sign betrayed what she knew or feared for the future.

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## CHAPTER III.

### THE BITTER AFTERMATH.

THE face of James Watson was hard and set and stern as he stood looking round upon the well-furnished but miserably untidy room. On a couch lay his wife, ostensibly reading a novel, in reality sulking. Her's was a bold type of beauty—the type that ripens to coarseness, instead of developing into richer, mellower womanhood. Her hair was tumbled and twisted into a small knot at the back of her head, and long strands hung in tails about her face and ears. Her complexion was ruddy and her features faultless, save for the lean red lips that at times could close in an unpleasant line, smooth and cold as the lips of a snake.

“Dinner ready?” he enquired at last.

“I didn't make any dinner to-day—my head was so bad. There's some bread and butter and jam in the cupboard, and you can make yourself a cup of cocoa.”

All this she said in a languid voice, without lifting her eyes from the novel.

The young man's brow clouded. He had gone out at eight o'clock in the morning; it was now half-past five, and though he had taken a snatch lunch in the city at noon, he was now faint and hungry. Without a word he strode into the kitchen. The grate was white with unswept ashes, the fire low; on the table

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was a pile of unwashed dishes; in the sink a couple of pots wherein yesterday's dinner had been cooked. The floor was littered, and the whole air of the place was that of neglect and discomfort. And this although the look of newness had not yet worn off the furniture, the pair having been wedded only six months.

Something like a sob escaped him as he took in the sight, and he seemed suddenly to collapse. Throwing himself down upon a chair, he leant his arm upon the table where stood the unwashed dishes, and bowed his head upon it, moaning audibly—

“My God! my God! is it to be like this all the time?”

An empty stomach may have prompted the utterance, none the less it was the wail of a disappointed soul—one who from the heights of young and ardent hope had been cast into the abyss of despair.

It was no new experience. Time and again he had come home and found things as they were to-day, but his despair was that no frequency could make him get used to it—that every repetition of it became harder to bear. To-day it seemed absolutely unendurable. Something in his wife's face as she spoke had struck him with a slow, creeping dislike, which both pained and alarmed him. For was not this the woman he had sworn to love and protect? He had excused the first few lapses, which made his homecoming a thing to be dreaded by him, and he had been very patient and very forbearing when he discovered that she was liable to “spells” which required the aid of stimulants to keep her spirits up. He began to think that women were weak and mysterious in their ways—though he had never detected

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either weakness or mystery in his mother in twenty years of close companionship.

The anguish of his mind, coupled with the physical faintness of the moment, was more than he could bear. He rose, thrust on his hat, and, slipping out by the back door, walked rapidly down the street, and, for the first time in his life, turned towards the Red Banner Inn.

In about an hour he returned—in hilarious spirits, all his despair vanished. An air of silly jollification had replaced the stern expression of pain with which he had set out; life held neither care nor pain for him now. His nerves were too unsteady for whistling, but he trolled out a rollicking fragment from the "Mikado" as he swung into the house, snatched the book from his astonished wife, and, lifting her up by main force, set her upon his knee.

"Oh, my good gracious!" she protested in genuine alarm, "you are drunk! Oh, oh! you will be discharged—paid off—and then how are we to live without a salary?"

"Never mind that, old lady; we'll get drunk together, 'we'll fight together, we'll die together, as all the world very well knows,'" he sang, swinging her about to the tune. But she resisted, and, freeing herself, turned upon him a torrent of reproach and vituperation.

"And when I had such a headache, too!" she wound up. "You are a brute, and I shall tell everybody the way you ill-use me."

But the liquor was in his brain, and the surcease from his troubles was so sweet that he refused to be angry with her, conscious only in a vague way of the sensuous beauty which had lured him into this marital

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bondage. With her voice still sounding angrily on his dazed consciousness, he stretched himself on the sofa and slept. When he awoke next morning he found it was so late that there was no time for breakfast, even if he had desired any. His head ached, and a dull loathing of himself made him hurry off to work, wondering what excuse he could frame for his absence at the usual hour. The only one he could invent was "illness," for had he not been ill indeed, both in mind and body?

Being one of the men they could trust in the office, his excuse was accepted with a ready sympathy that cut him to the core. But, indeed, his looks bore out his words; he appeared both ill and miserable, and they told him so. He went out and took a lunch at a restaurant, and returned straight hack to his accounts, trying in the stress of work to forget the lapse he had made yesterday—his first lapse—but, please God, the last. So he said to himself over and over again, the degradation he felt driving the resolution home like a sledge hammer.

When at last at closing time he went home, he met within a few doors of his own house an old friend of his mother, a woman whom he had known and respected from boyhood.

"I want to see you," she said, as he shook hands with her. "Come down to my house a minute or two; I'll not detain you."

He turned with her, wondering what the business could be—but he had not long to wait.

"Oh, how I have wanted to see you, and speak like a friend to you for your mother's sake. If she comes to hear of this it will be the death of her."



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"What do you mean?" he asked, his face paling with visible apprehension.

"Just this, that you must forbid that man dangling about your wife when you are away in the city. It is becoming a public scandal, and you ought not to allow it."

Whiter and yet whiter grew the young man's face, until he looked as if stricken to death.

"I don't know what you refer to," he said with visible effort.

"I said so," the woman exclaimed in triumph. "I was sure you would never permit such a thing as your wife drinking all day long with a man of such a character."

"For mercy's sake, explain yourself! I know nothing of this you speak of."

Then the woman told him a tale that explained much that had worried him of late; the cause of many uncooked dinners, of the steady deterioration going on in his wife.

How he got home to his own house after that he never knew. He had suffered and borne much through the great mistake of his hasty marriage, but this scandal was a new and crushing blow to him.

His wife stood swaying unsteadily in the room when he entered; the odor of cigars and liquor was strong. His eye fell on a half-smoked cigar lying inside the fender.

"Do you smoke cigars, Emma?" he queried, pointing to the half-consumed weed.

"No, I don't. That was a stump I found when I was dusting, and threw it there. Your tea is ready."

He seemed to accept the explanation, and sat down to tea. Without eating a morsel, he drank one cup

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

after another, and pushed back his chair from the table.

"Don't you want anything to eat?" she asked in some surprise.

"No, thanks; I'm not the least hungry. Finish your tea. I want to speak with you afterwards."

"Oh, you do, eh?" she responded in a tone of defiance. "I know. You've been listening to the low gossip of this miserable little suburb. A woman can't turn in her own house but they must comment on it."

"A good woman does not need to care for any unfavorable comments whatever," he retorted, "so long as those who live with her know her to be good."

"That's to say *I'm* not good?"

He answered her with grim silence only. It exasperated her. She looked at him for a moment, her eyes blazing with anger, then dashed a cup of hot tea in his face, blinding him.

He started up, and a sudden oath shot from his unaccustomed lips.

"Ha ha!" she laughed flippantly, "you can swear like other people, you model young man!"

He made as if to take a threatening stride towards her, but restrained himself, and with hands that shook mopped his burning face. Then he went over and sat down in his armchair by the fire, glowering into it moodily.

"Well," she scoffed, "I'm through with my tea. What have you got to say?"

"What I have to say I shall say when you are fit to hear and understand—when you are sober—tomorrow morning perhaps."

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

"Sober! Who says I'm not sober?" she demanded. But he closed his lips the firmer.

"Speak up, you coward! What lies have you been hearing about me?"

His eyebrows twitched and his lips grew thinner, but there was no other indication that he had heard her voice.

Then the demon within her leaped to her eyes, her lips, her every feature. She stood before him an incarnate fury, pouring forth torrents of the vilest invective. The violence of her abuse constrained him to turn and look at her, and as he did so he shuddered with unutterable loathing.

Merciful God! was *this* the woman he had loved—this brazen fury, foul of speech and hard of visage—*this* the woman he had dreamed of as the beautiful and beloved mother of his children to be—the honored mistress of his home?

He sat staring at her, in blank amazement at his own blindness, wondering what had held his eyes from seeing her then as he saw her now with the mask off—the mask of fine blandishments, of wooing eyes and soft-voiced lure of speech. So engrossed did he become with the problem of his own lack of discernment—so great was the shock of his awakening—that he became deaf to her reiterations of abuse.

The twilight closed in and darkness filled the room, while she fitfully subsided into a drowsy maundering, and at last fell into a doze on the corner of the lounge.

Suddenly he remembered that he was due to attend a meeting of the citizens for some local business, and rose to light the gas to dress by. To his surprise, he heard the click of a check-key in the lock, the street door stealthily opened and closed again. A heavy

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step came into the room, and by the blinking firelight he recognized the man against whom he had been warned—a man whom he knew by sight.

In a flash he thought he saw the whole arrangement. His wife, knowing of his proposed attendance at this meeting, had laid her plans accordingly, and arranged this meeting.

“Out of my house!” he thundered, and in another moment closed with the man. The scuffle awoke the drowsing woman; she started up and threw herself upon them, screaming wildly.

The man, seizing the opportunity of his opponent being weakened by the intervention, struck out brutally, heedless where his blows fell, and Watson, shaking off the grasp of his wife, saw her fall heavily to the floor, striking her head on the massive iron fender. The next instant the front door banged behind the retreating intruder.

Breathless and trembling with excitement, Watson lit the gas, and stood horror stricken over the still form of his wife.

“My God!” he breathed, “I have killed her!”

He remembered a heavy reckless swing of his arm, a wrenching asunder from his antagonist, and then the heavy fall. He did not dream it was the man he had swung aside with that mighty swerve, still less did he suspect that his wife was unconscious ere she fell, stunned by a blind blow from the reckless fist of her visitor.

He lifted her up and laid her on the lounge from which she had risen, calling her by name, appealing to her to answer him, to forgive him.

But no answer came from the mute lips stilled so brutally. He felt her pulse, but the tips of his

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

shaking fingers detected no flutter of life. She was dead—murdered—and by him!

It was too monstrous, too awful for belief. Again he pressed the tips of his fingers into the hollow of her wrist bone above the artery and kept them there, holding his breath with the tension between hope and despair. At last he loosened his hold; the hand dropped dead by her side. There was no pulse—not the slightest!

He stood up, and before him rose the future, stark and awful; a horrible, undeserved fate. Undeserved—for what had he not borne and suffered those last three months ere it had come to this—this rash, unintentional blow, which nevertheless had no name but “murder!” He folded his arms across his chest, while his brows drew together and a look of resolution set grim upon his features.

“I suppose I must give myself up—the sooner the better,” he murmured as one murmurs in sleep. But suddenly he started, and, throwing up his arms in a sickening agony of remembrance, he groaned—

“My mother! my mother!”

## CHAPTER IV.

### WHAT HAD HE DONE WITH THE BODY?

Mrs. Watson was in her cosy little kitchen, attending to some household trifles, when she heard a knock on the door. With nimble step and glad she flew to open it, recognizing Jamie's own peculiar knock.

"Come awa', laddie," she cried, kissing him joyously; but as she did so he moaned aloud, and, closing the door, turned the key in it.

"Mercy, laddie! what's ado?" she exclaimed, with vague foreboding.

"Are ye all alone, mother?" he asked.

"Ay; my roomer's awa'. He left yestreen. Come inbye here, Jamie."

Once inside the tidy parlor with the gas turned up, she uttered a cry of alarm.

"Jamie! my Jamie! What ails ye? What gars ye look at me in that kind o' way?"

He did not—he could not—answer her. He was shivering as if with ague; his eyes were glittering with suppressed excitement; his hands, which she held in hers, were cold and clammy.

She drew him gently down into an easy-chair, and sat by his side.

"I ken what it is, my bairn; dinna speak—I ken fine what it is," she murmured soothingly. "I've been hearin' about the ongauns, an' it's been a sair heart to me. O, sic a pity! sic a pity! But ye maun try an' thole, Jamie; try an' thole, my laddie."

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She's your wife, an' she's bonnie, an' if it werena for that weary, weary drink, ye might be as happy as twa doos in a doocot."

Her eye caught sight of his dishevelled neckwear, there was a tear on the sleeve of his coat, and her face grew more troubled.

"Ye didna lift hands to ither, surely?" she queried in awed reprobation.

"Mother," he said in a hoarse whisper, "she's dead!"

Mrs. Watson recoiled.

"Jamie! Dead!—not dead?"

"Yes, I killed her."

Mrs. Watson rose to her feet and staggered back from him with eyes of horror and grief.

"Jamie! Jamie!" she moaned, her voice breaking into a long agonized wail, "don't say that, my laddie! Oh, my bairn! My bonnie Jamie! Don't say that—tak' it back—tak' it back!"

"I wish I could, mother. God knows I wish I could. I would gi'e my life to bring her's back, though I never once intended to hurt her."

Still uttering low irrepressible moans, she went to the windows and drew down the blinds, closing the shutters tightly.

"Ye dinna need to tell me that, my laddie. I ken mair than you think I do of a' ye've put up wi' this while; but ye would never lift your hand to her—I ken that. Tell me hoo it a' cam' about."

She knelt before him and took his hands firmly in hers, looking up into his face with adoring pity.

"My bonnie lamb! My a'e wee laddie! To think a' oor sair strivin' to do weel in the world should come to this—to *this*! Oh, Jamie, dinna say it was *you*

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did this thing. God Almichty! ye're no gaun to tell me—your mither—that you're a murderer!"

He bowed his head above the hands she held and groaned aloud.

"It's no true; I'll never believe sic a thing. It's no in ye—nor in ane belangin' ye," she cried, raising to her feet and confronting him wildly. "Hoo daur ye come an' break my heart wi' sic a story, Jamie Watson! Tell me—oh, my laddie!" she cried, lapsing into tenderness again—into tearful, agonized silence.

"I'll try to tell you everything, mother—everything from the beginning, and then there'll be one at least who knows the truth when I am condemned."

She resumed her seat, wringing and twisting her fingers and swaying to and fro on the chair in her agony, while he told her the miserable story of his blighted married life, in which he had promised himself so much of happiness.

When he described the man who had come in that evening, evidently by appointment, being furnished with a private key—

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "that was an auld sweet-heart o' hers. He's a private detective, they say. That's the man I was telled aboot; but, Jamie, I was feared to interfere. It's kittl comin' in atween man and wife."

At last the whole story was told, and for a few eloquent minutes there was silence, broken by fitful moans from the agonized mother.

Suddenly she seized his wrist with a grip that put strength in him.

"Jamie!" she said in a firm, vibrant tone, "there's justice an' there's justice. There's man's justice an' there's God's justice—ane's uphaudden by the law, the



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ither hy an honest conscience afore God. It's no' at *your* door that woman's murder lies—it's at her ain. Whaur is she? Does anybody ken yet?"

"She is lying on the lounge in the room. Nobody knows, hnt they soon will know. I came to yon first; I wanted yon to ken the truth, mother, before I gave myself np."

"Ye'll *not* gie yersel' up," she cried in fierce distress; "ye'll not! I daur ye to gie up John Watson's son to the shame o' the gallows—*your* honest life for the life o' a limmer that drank an' got a licht name afore ye ever saw her face. Ah, ha!" she langhed hitterly, seeing him start with surprise at her words, "ye see I kent mair than you did ahoot her. D'ye mind yon nicht six weeks afore ye marrit her, when I said ye had better wait a wee an' ca' canny till ye kent ither hetter afore mairryin' in a wud dream? D'ye mind hoo ye flew on my tap an' said women were hard on ane anither, an' aye ready to put the warst thocht o' ither foremost, an' there wasna a sweeter an' purer lassie in God's nniverse than she was? Ah, laddie, bnt I kent better, though I sang dumh an' let on what pleased yon pleased me—a' for peace—a' for peace!"

"Gie yersel' np? I daur ye! I would rather choke the life out o' ye wi' my ain twa hands. No; it's early in the nicht yet. Naehody kens yet, ye say?"

He nodded moodily.

"Aweel, ye'll tak' the first train to the city; then ye'll wait there till the London train starts. Ye'll tak' that, an' from London mak' your way to some o' thae far awa' lands, an' live yonr life fair an' honest afore God, as ye did afore that woman cam'

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across ye like an' ill thing, an' got ye to marry her an' keep her without workin'. For that was a' she wantit—it's a' the half o' the women want nooadays—somebody to keep them fed an' dressed in idleness, grudgin' the very care o' weans, sae eaten up wi' laziness are they. That was the kind o' a wife roped you in, puir ignorant laddie, an' noo ye offer yer life for hers—the life ye never took, though ye may x ye did. Hae ye nae consideration for *me*, Jamie? Hae ye forgotten a' the happy years we spent thegither afore she glamored ye wi her wiles? Jamie, if ye gie yersel' up ye'll hae a real murder at your door, for I'll certainly no live to see my only son hung on the gallows."

The young man's face had been slowly changing its expression as he listened, the strong, savage sense of injustice which his mother felt seemed to inspire him as he remembered everything in his blameless, honorable past; his conscious lack of all intention to hurt his wife also hraced him; he felt his mother's reproach—he ought to consider her too.

"Will ye go, Jamie? Think on me, Jamie! Oh, my laddie go—flee awa' frae it a'! I'm willin' never to see or hear frae ye in this world again if ye'll only get awa' oot o' the road as lang as there's a chance."

"By Heaven, I will!" he said with intense energy, starting to his feet; "for your sake, for my own sake, I will. I have tried to do right all along and it has landed me here—now——."

"Now, my laddie," she cried, throwing her arms about him in a wild ecstasy of love and grief, "now yon'll just continue doin' weel, gang where ye like. Wait," she said, hurriedly breacking from him and disappearing into the next room. When she returned

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he was standing staring straight before him, his hands clenched by his side, his face set and resolved.

"There," she said, "that's thirty pound; tak' it an' welcome, Jamie. Ye canna traivel without it. I have a wee bittie mair in the bank—the maist o't your ain winnin', for ye were a gude son to me in thae auld days."

He took the money and looked long and eloquently into her eyes.

"Mother," he said, "I am going at your bidding; and, as you say, I cannot travel without money. I must e'en tak' it if I am to escape, as you advise. If I am a murderer, I am so without intent to harm, far less take life."

"Don't write, Jamie; dinna risk it. I believe in you, an' you believe in me, an', wha kens—God may be gude to us yet."

They fell into each other's arms, mother and son. Then he set her softly into the chair, and kissing her, went out. She heard the key turn back in the lock, and she bounded out after him.

"Jamie," she whispered, "tak' my name—my maiden name, ye ken—whaeveer ye gang. I might hear o't an' be glad. Farewell! an' God keep ye!"

The door closed, she turned the key in it again, and staggered back to her bedroom.

She caught sight of her own reflection in the glass and started.

"Is that *me*—Jamie Watson's mither? Oh, 'deed, an' I needna' fear I'll be kent. Oot I maun gang; I couldna bide in the hoose. I maun see he gets safe awa'. But, oh, my laddie! my laddie! was it for this I brocht ye up in the way o' weel-doin'?"

For some minutes she sat down and sobbed convul-

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sively, then she dried her tears, dressed herself, and went out, turning towards the railway station. For two long, miserably apprehensive hours she waited, but her son did not come to board either of the three trains that left during that time. There were no others that night, and, sickening with dread of his arrest, she came home.

As she entered the house a slip of paper touched her foot. She tossed it outside and shut the door.

The milkman picked it up in the grey of the morning, and read:—

“DEAREST MOTHER,—I have decided to go by another way than you planned. I also want to say that I would rather you would, if questioned, say flatly that I killed my wife, lest any one else may be blamed—that man, for instance.  
—J. W.”

Here was a most remarkable letter! So remarkable that the startled man beckoned to a policeman lounging on his beat, and handed it to him.

“That’s more in your line than mine,” said he.

When Watson failed to show up at the office for two days, a messenger was despatched to his house to ascertain the reason of his non-appearance. He came back to say that there was no one there. He had rung twice and knocked twice, but, no answer coming, he left.

Another two days elapsed, and then the elder Mrs. Watson was applied to for information. But she was not to be found. She too had gone, no one knew whither.

A great sensation followed—the disappearance of one of Mr. Auld’s trusted clerks, and the finding of a very strange letter, signed “J. W.”—the letter of a man accusing himself of killing his wife. This letter had been dropped at Mrs. Watson’s door, and picked

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up and handed to the police. Young Watson's house was immediately searched, found tenantless, and evidences of a terrible scuffle visible in the parlor. The room was in disorder, chairs upset, the mantle drapery torn from its fastenings, and blood dried on the hearthrug. That murder most foul had been done there could be no doubt whatever, still less when a private detective, an acquaintance, gave evidence that he saw Watson quarrelling violently with his wife when he had called in the evening, and that he had left, feeling himself *de trop*.

No other reason than the murder of his wife could be assigned for the disappearance of Watson. The picked-up letter, there could be no doubt, was in his handwriting, and signed with his initials.

But what had he done with the body?

All the machinery of the law was set in motion, telegrams flashed from port to port, but no sign could be seen of the fugitive, who hitherto had borne such a spotless reputation. Spotless even yet, so far as his accounts went, for, not only were his books and cash in good shape, there was a quarter's salary waiting for him to draw.

Then by and by whispers circulated that tended to throw a sinister light on his family life. It came out that he was unhappy in his marriage—some were bold enough to say that, whatever had happened, they could wager the wife had brought it on herself. Latterly the sympathy of the public was with Watson. But—what had he done with the body?

## CHAPTER V.

### BERNARD CATHOART'S VOW.

THEN another sensation happened. At four o'clock one morning a large furniture van, with two stout horses, drew up at the door of Mrs. Watson's cottage, and two men entering, began to lift out the entire furniture, piling it into the van.

In the face of what had transpired, the night watchman made it his business to enquire whither Mrs. Watson was taking her household goods. The man replied that the goods were no longer Mrs. Watson's but the property of a broker to whom she had sold them, and that they were moving the goods in obedience to a telephone message from the broker. When the town woke up that day and the news spread abroad, there were the two questions still remaining to be answered—first, what had Watson done with the body of his wife? and, second, whither had his mother fled, and why? Many and strange were the rumors afloat. One man, who had occasion to get up very early to catch the first mail to London, declared on coming back a week later that when hurrying to the station he saw in the dim grey of the coming dawn an elderly-looking figure, closely veiled, emerge from the side entrance of James Watson's house, and also make for the station. He would have paid no attention to the figure being there at that early hour but for the fact that she seemed to be staggering under the weight

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of a Gladstone bag and a big bundle which she carried. Moreover, when she saw him passing on the other side she paused, as if hesitating or afraid. This narration made people look at each other with appalled interrogation in their eyes. What was in that dread bundle—that Gladstone bag—being smuggled away from James Watson's house in the dim grey dawning? *Ay, what?* Had they not read in the papers about mutilated remains found long after in the most unheard-of places—at the bottom of the river, indeed, or buried—dear knows where? To say the least, it didn't look well, especially as it was known that there was no love lost between Mrs. Watson and her daughter-in-law. And what more natural than that, once the deed was done and could not be undone, the poor, distracted woman would seek to hide the body in order to shield her son? A daft-like notion; but what will desperate folk not do?

There were some old friends of Mrs. Watson's, however, who scoffed at such an imputation, and with a whiff of common sense blew scorn on all these theories. The simple fact, they averred, was that Mrs. Watson was a high-spirited woman, uncommonly proud and fond of her son, and this terrible thing happening had just broken both heart and spirit. There was nothing to wonder at in her disappearance. She had paid her rent up to the term, like the honest woman she was, and gone where she could be away from the scene of her trouble—very likely to America. Meanwhile every effort was being made by the detective force to find the more important missing individual—Watson himself—but as yet no clue to his hiding place could be found further than that he had gone to London. The unfortunate circumstances of the mur-

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der not having been discovered until two days afterwards had allowed him ample time to get away, and he could not hide himself anywhere more effectually than in London.

There was one man, however, who made a vow that he would hunt the world over and bring Watson to justice, if he were alive. That man was Bernard Cathcart, the real cause of the unpremeditated tragedy. He had cleverly managed to extricate himself from legal blame in the matter, merely stating that he had come out and left the couple wrangling. But those who knew all the circumstances were not deceived at his outspoken determination to find Watson; it was not justice he sought, but the gratification of personal vengeance.

His jealous hatred of Watson was no sudden passion; it was the growth of years, beginning with his dismissal from Auld & Co.'s as a youth of hopelessly unpunctual habits, and the instalment of Jamie Watson in his place. That dismissal, it is true, had cured him of his unpunctuality, but none the less he still bore a grudge against "that goody-goody prig, Watson," who had, without any effort of his own, been appointed his substitute. Cathcart was not essentially a bad fellow at heart, but he had a tendency to blame others for the "ill-luck" which he brought upon himself; and, when arrived at manhood, he fell a victim to the sensuous beauty of Emma Notman, finding in her a warm, if interested, sympathizer. For he had at last attained to a position of considerable trust in a commercial house in the city, and his prospects for a comfortable salary in the near future made him in Emma's eyes a rather desirable man to marry. Besides, she was flattered



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by his devotion, which was sincere; though his impatience was very frankly expressed when she insisted on waiting another three months for his promised promotion before consenting to the marriage. However, he consented; three months would pass, although the intoxication of her beauty made it seem an age, and he manfully set himself to still more diligence in business, so as to make assurance doubly sure.

Before a fortnight of the three months had passed the house in which he was employed came down with a crash—one of the commercial failures from which there is no recovery. Cathcart was in despair. The loss of his position meant the postponement of his marriage, and as time passed and he could find no other suitable opening, Emma grew decidedly cool in her manner—so much so that he began to inspire himself with Dutch courage, finding his own oozing away in despair. Then a friend to whom he had written, a distant relation, invited him to come to London, hinting that there were other openings besides those in commercial life. How would he like to go in for detective work?

Now, the detective instinct had, from boyhood up, been one of Cathcart's strong points—a talent which, had he cultivated it, might have placed him among the first of the profession. His relative in London had more than once urged him to apply for a trial on the staff where he himself held a responsible position, promising to use his influence to secure him acceptance—on probation at least. Hitherto Cathcart had poo-pooed his friend's kindly meant offers, but now he determined to "try his luck," as he called it, at the only thing he was eminently fitted for. He left the city with a heavy heart. Emma, instead of support-

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ing him in his efforts, quarrelled with him over the proposal that she should come up and be married in London as soon as he got into employment. Without the slightest hesitation she refused point blank, and said she had had enough of poverty, though when he had secured a position with a decent salary she might consider the matter. And poor Cathcart, when he thought over all this in the train that whirled him away to London, could not but confess that, after all, she was very sensible and prudent. And yet—oh, yet!—was it only in books—in novels—that women made sacrifices for love? What would he not sacrifice for her—ay, his very soul!

All the way up to London, as he leant his head back in the corner and closed his eyes, he conjured up her image—the fashion of her hair, the way she wore her hat, that coquettish toss of her head when pretending to be offended, the smile in her eyes, on her ruddy lips, when in her merry moods. Ah, heavens! how he loved her!

But if there was any virtue in man, if attention to duty would secure promotion and pay—such pay as she would consent to marry on—then he would obtain it, and that soon. After all, Emma—dear Emma—was only prudent in restraining him from such a hasty marriage as he had proposed. He would write to her as soon as he got a position secured. And so on, and so on his thoughts ran, keeping time to the rumbling and the rolling of the wheels.

It was prudence indeed which had inspired Emma, but prudence inspired by an unexpected introduction to young Watson at a private party in the house of a friend. This friend, being himself an employee of the firm of Auld & Co., had lauded Jamie Watson

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to her as the rising man in their warehouse, had declared emphatically that the next few months would see him in a position which only the special favor of Mr. Auld himself could help him to, and that, no doubt, he would probably one day become a junior partner. To meet this young man of promise, Emma had attired herself with more than ordinary care; and, understanding something, too, of his high moral reputation, set herself to impress him by all her arts, instinctive and acquired. James Watson thought he had never in his life before seen such a combination of beauty and innocence. She was so frank and candid, so anxious to be told by him the things she did not know; it was such a new and delightful sensation to feel himself looked up to by such a pair of lovely eyes. The remembrance of them haunted his dreams by night; her pretty sayings, her evident anxiety to be taught by him filled his thoughts by day; the result being that he became a frequent visitor at his friend's house, where he met her again and again, always seeing her home, as in duty bound. Then one night, when she seemed more bewitching than ever—the die was cast—he told her the old story, and met with a reluctant, shy response. She confessed she loved him, but was not worthy of him.

The fact of their marriage came like a blow to Cathcart, with whom she had kept up a correspondence to the last day, afraid if she did not answer his hopeful letters that he might come down in person and spoil all. So on the morning of her marriage day she wrote him a pathetic farewell; the fates had decreed that she must marry this man, James Watson, and—he must forgive her—and *not forget her*—quite—etc., etc.

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

When Cathcart read this letter the veins stood out on his temples like whipcords. Watson! That prig who had supplanted him in Auld's years ago! Was this the man she had married? Man? Why, he was only a hoy. So he had supplanted him once more—stolen the woman he loved from him, with his smooth face and fine moral character, forsooth! Well—let them both go to the devil!

From that day forth Cathcart gave such evidence of ability in his profession that he was given his choice on promotion either to remain in London or to go down to Glasgow to take charge of a branch office there, with several subordinates under him. With a grim smile he chose Glasgow, for on that very day he had received notice that a comfortable legacy had been left him by an all-but-forgotten relative in Australia. Yes, he would go to Glasgow, and while doing his duty there up to the hilt, he would still have abundance of leisure to resume the acquaintance of his old flame, even though she was the wife of the man he most hated. Perhaps she would see now that he would have been the better match of the two, if she had but waited—been as true to him as he had been to her. Anyhow, he was determined that he should see her and speak with her again, if only for once.

For once! No sooner had he looked on her face and heard the studied, caressing tones of her voice than he cursed the day Watson had ever seen her. For, after all, as she explained in her suave, insinuating way, she had fairly been driven to it—she was so unhappy with her half-brother. Oh, surely Bernard Cathcart must have known how hard she was beset before she had consented—to—to—forget—ah, me! would that she could forget! So sang the siren day after day.

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And Cathcart believed it all—believed it was to drown remembrance that she had grown a little—just a little too fond of the modern waters of Lethe. Then he began to drop in of an afternoon when off duty, just to cheer her up a bit. To speak the truth, their intimacy had gone no further than an hour's chatting and laughing together, with a glass of something comfortable between them, while he smoked a cigar. That was all; but deep down in Cathcart's heart grew daily stronger the conviction that one day he would ruin himself for this woman—lose his position and his own self-respect. He felt she was surely drawing him down to perdition, yet such was the influence she exerted that he was becoming daily more and more infatuated. On the day previous to the tragedy he had playfully appropriated her latch key, telling her he would look in next evening for a few minutes while the meeting in the Town Hall was in progress, but his feelings may be imagined when he was confronted and half-throttled by the master of the house. As he strode from the place in disgust he cursed himself, and resolved to break off this thing once and for ever.

But when eventually he learned not only that Watson had accused himself of killing his wife, but also that the murderer had made away with the body—the body of the woman he had loved so long—a sinister change came over the man. For his sake she had suffered death. Very well; his task was to bring her murderer to justice. His legacy had come in good time; it would give him the chance to prosecute enquiries on his own hook. Far into the night he sat with his elbows on the office table and his chin in his hands, brooding, scheming, planning how he could best get his enemy into the clutches of the law.

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At last an idea struck him—a plan to be worked out, sooner or later, by a subordinate, a sort of human ferret, who could find the clue if it was to be found at all. His plan was to discover the mother, and through her the son. For find him he would, or soon or late, even if it became necessary to throw up his official position, and, hound-like, follow the scent in person.

But the years passed, the murder had become a memory, and no trace of mother or son had yet been found.

## CHAPTER VI.

### MORE SHEAVES FOR MOLOCH.

THE family at Mount Classic, a beautiful country house, surrounded by trees and finely laid out grounds, were seated at breakfast. There were Mr. Mickledool, the famous distiller of the brand of whisky known by his name, his wife, and his daughter Violet. His son, just graduated from one of the Theological Universities, was not present, he being in the city.

The letters had just been brought in—several business communications for Mr. Mickledool, some notices of church work for the lady of the house, and a letter from Albany, New York, addressed to Miss Violet Mickledool.

The girl was fair, sweet, and gentle yet not without indications of possessing a will of her own, which she could exert when necessary.

"From Albany," she murmured, scanning the postmark; "from whom can this be?"

Mr. Mickledool from his place glanced at the writing.

"Upon my word! I haven't seen that writing for over twenty years, but I know it yet. You'll see it's from your Aunt Betty. You never saw her, nor she you, but she knows all about you."

Violet, marvelling greatly, opened the letter, and, glancing at the end of the last page, saw that it was signed "Elizabeth Mickledool."

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

“ You are right, papa; it is from your sister. Why, how strange it seems!”

It was a rather remarkable letter:—

“ My dear niece, whom I have never seen, but of whom I have heard so favorably, that I want to see her in the worst way. I am not long for this world now—my doctor tells me this is my last year on earth—but before I go I want to see you so badly that I must ask you to get your father’s permission to come over to me.

“ We quarrelled, your father and I, some thirty years ago—never mind what about—my conscience is easy, and an easy conscience has enabled me to bear the long estrangement.

“ But the old love for my brother is not dead by any means, though on some matters we can never agree, and I wish to show this by leaving the little bit I have saved to you, his daughter. I wish to give it to you with my own hands, and you need not be afraid to use it. It is the clean and honest fruit of my own industry, as wholesome as honey with the scent of clover in it; no penny of it cost pain or loss to any less fortunate than myself. No orphan’s curse sticks to a dollar of it.”

Mr. Micklethorp broke into a hearty laugh, which shook his portly figure, but in his keen blue eyes there was just the hint of a steely twinkle of resentment.

“ The same old Betty yet—talks just as she did in the old days. Still, I’m sorry to hear she is in ill health. She does not say what is the matter, does she?”

Violet read on, but there was no mention of any malady—merely a few kindly messages to her mother



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and herself, and an imploring appeal to come as soon as possible. "I enclose cheque which will cover all expenses," it ended, "as I much prefer that my own money should be used in this way."

"How very absurd! Betty always was, and years have only made her more set in her notions," said Mrs. Mickledool—a tall, thin woman, richly dressed, and still retaining traces of a well-featured youth. Her aspect was inclined to be somewhat severe, the effect of years of conventional piety and strict observance, but no one could say that Mrs. Mickledool had been close-fisted in her charities. She was President of no end of Church Societies; to elect Mrs. Mickledool to be President of any Committee whatever was to endow it with both means and prestige. Her exertions and donations to Ragged Boys' Missions were chronicled in every report; her praise was in all the churches.

"What did you quarrel about, papa?" inquired Violet, looking up.

"Oh, well!—no use raking up old scores at this hour of the day. Betty was on the eve of her marriage with a young fellow when he died. After that her head seemed to be turned with absurd ideas of one kind or another, and when I couldn't see eye to eye with her—why, she went her way and I mine. If I had listened to her I would have been a beggar, or next door to it, to-day."

"H'm," mused Violet, not very much enlightened, but still wondering what the quarrel could be about.

"Betty, poor girl, always *was* pronounced," explained Mrs. Mickledool, "too pronounced altogether. She forgot Paul's injunction, 'Temperance in all things.' There is a golden medium. Still, since she

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wishes you to have what money she has to leave—perhaps, papa—ah—what do you think?”

“Just as you like! I offer no objection to Violet going for a trip to Albany in the circumstances. By all means go and see your Aunt Betty—if only to let her see I am not such a monster as she made me out to be.”

“Oh, papa!” protested Violet, shrinking in evident pain; “I don’t want to know Aunt Betty if she thinks such horrible things of you. How can she? What did you ever do that she should think such a thing?”

“I differed from her, my dear. And she—though she is my own sister—is one of those people you must not differ from if you wish to retain their friendship or respect.”

“Yes,” murmured Mrs. Mickledool, “there are too many of that stamp about. They are full of malice and all uncharitableness; they see only the evil side of things; they positively refuse to look at the good. Still, as I say, since she wishes you to go to her, I think we ought to allow you to go—if you are not afraid of the ocean voyage. But you cannot very well go alone.”

“No need of that,” said Mr. Mickledool. “John Simpson, one of our partners, is going over next week to bring home his wife; so if you care to take the chance, there it is. I would like you to humor Betty so far, poor old girl.”

“Of course, the money is a consideration,” put in Mrs. Mickledool.

“Oh! that is the only hateful thing about it,” cried Violet. “I hope Aunt Betty won’t think I go to visit her for that. If I thought she would

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think me so mean as that I would not go. Why, if she was poor we would give her all she required—wouldn't we?"

"She wouldn't take a penny," grunted Mr. Mickledool.

"Why?"

A shrug of the shoulders and a grim smile was all the answer he gave, and Mrs. Mickledool, rising from the table, led the way into the next room, where the servants, including the coachman and gardeners, were assembled for morning prayers.

Mrs. Mickledool greeted them with her usual grave "Good morning" as she entered. Violet followed, smiling radiantly on them all. The master of the house with a quick step strode up to the table, whereon lay a large Bible and several hymn books, and, seating himself in a business way, took out a pair of gold spectacles and adjusted them on his nose. Mrs. Mickledool herself handed round the hymn books to her servants, and Violet on the piano led the tune.

It was the grandest of all grand hymns, voicing the faith of all the ages:—

" Oh God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come;  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home."

The broad mullioned windows were open, and looked out on the beautifully laid off grounds and the fair green country beyond, and the hymn of faith in the Eternal Fatherland sounded solemnly sweet. The blackbirds in the trees outside also sang, voicing the upwelling joy within them.

When Violet turned from the piano at the close, Mr. Mickledool, who generally read a chapter, with,

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at his wife's request, a slight running commentary thereon, read aloud—

“ ‘ Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one shall not fall to the ground without your Father ? ’ ”

“ This, ” he remarked, “ is one of the most beautiful illustrations of God's protecting care to be found in the New Testament. Further on we read, ‘ For the hairs of your head are all numbered. ’ Think of it—the love of God for His children—how it is manifested here ! Can you imagine anything that could shake your faith in God's protecting care in the face of such an assurance as that ? ”

Mr. Mickledool paused to let the question sink into the consciousness of his hearers, and the lady of the house, sitting with meekly folded hands, sighed softly.

The answer came—the desperate shriek of a woman fleeing past the open window, with a baby in her arms, and in furious pursuit of her a man—wild, haggard—muttering ominously. Then an awful tumult in the kitchen at the far end of the corridor, the dashing about of furniture, a shrilling cry of despair—then silence !

The little assembly stared for a moment into each other's faces ; ejaculations broke from master, mistress, and servants alike ; and there was a trembling and hurried exodus to discover the meaning of the unholy tumult.

On the snow-white flags of the kitchen lay a young woman, bleeding to death, and in her arms the baby, already dead, its skull smashed in.

Down the avenue and away over the fields sped a madman, running he knew not why, fleeing he knew not where—only conscious of a vague necessity for

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fight—away! away! away! On he sped, never swerving, never halting; a poor, haunted soul, encircled by fire, and pursued by shapes so awful that hell itself were a refuge from them. On! on! on! holding blindly forward, till with a violent lurch over the brink of the railway bank he plunged, rolling and whirling in his descent, till, thrown out with the impetus, he lay upon the steel track in a daze of returning sanity. He had outrun the furies—they were gone! But where was he? What was he doing here? Where was Margaret, his wife—and Lily, his baby—sweet wee Lily? God! had he been drunk again—vexed Margaret again? He looked at the blood on his hands and clothes and shuddered. He looked up into the blue above, and his manhood woke and stirred within him as he vainly tried to remember. Then he rose and stood looking around him, his eyes full of mental anguish.

In his distress he lifted both arms high over his head in desperate supplication.

“Oh, Lord God Almighty! to whom I used to pray, hear me and help me to keep the vow I make here before Thee, and in Thy strength only. Never again shall drink cross these lips; never again shall my Margaret weep over my selfish weakness; never again shall the little daughter Thou has given us grow up to be ashamed of her father. Hear me, oh God! Hear me and save me!”

While yet he stood with uplifted arms there was a low, thunderous rumble nearing and still nearing, but he did not hear it. Round the curve and down the grade swept the belated train, making up for lost time. He turned—gazed at the screaming, whistling

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monster bearing down upon him, unable to move—incapable of comprehension.

“What’s that?” the startled passengers inquired of each other as the train jolted, slowed, and finally stopped.

Ah, Heaven! What was it?

Had the despairing appeal of that wrecked soul been thus mercifully answered?

In the kitchen at Mount Classic, Violet tried to take the dead baby from the arms that clasped it, but the woman tightened her hold with all her little remaining strength. Mr. Mickledool had sent off two messengers at top speed—one for a doctor, another to the Police Office to order the man’s immediate arrest.

The cook laid a pillow under the woman’s head, but Mr. Mickledool, anticipating inquiries on the arrival of the police, said she must not be lifted till the doctor came. Some of the men-servants mopped up the blood, and sacks were thrown down around her.

“What is this?” said Violet, picking up a broken flask, to the side of which a gay-colored label still clung. She read it and started: “*Mickledool’s Ivy Blend.*”

“What does this mean?” she queried, but her father and mother had both left the apartment to consult what had best be done.

“It means,” said the dying woman in gasping intervals, “that *that* is the cause of all our misery. I had the best of husbands till he took to *that*. Mickledool’s Blend has ruined us. My last word is a curse upon it. Oh, my John! my John! How happy we were together before—before——.”

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"WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?" SHE QUERIED.





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The fire of her indignation suddenly died out. She lay panting and exhausted, while Violet, a prey to strange new thoughts, stood staring at that label bearing her father's name. When the doctor came the woman was dead. The man, a superior type of mechanic, much respected until lately, when he had given way to drink, with his murdered wife and baby, were buried side by side in the quiet cemetery.

"It is such a pity that terrible thing happened when Violet was in the house," remarked Mrs. Mickle-dool. "She wants you to do away with your name on those labels."

"H'mph!" retorted the master, "I suppose she lays the responsibility of all the ills that flesh is heir to on my broad shoulders. Betty will back her up there."

"Oh, no! I don't think Betty would say anything prejudicial to the child. Anyhow, until all the talk about this thing dies down she will be better away out of hearing of it. Young people nowadays have a most provoking way of asking all sorts of questions, and really it worries one to answer."

## CHAPTER VII.

### AUNT BETTY.

So it came about that a week later Violet was on board the "Majestic," among other saloon passengers from Liverpool to New York.

When she arrived at Alhany she found her aunt confined in bed, and much nearer the end of life than the doctor had at first predicted. But Miss Betty Mickledool welcomed her niece none the less warmly, and the tender sympathy of the girl, who was just turned twenty, was very sweet to the lonely woman.

"You are myself, as I remember, my dear, years ago, the summer before *he* died. There was no more summer after that for me. I suppose you have plenty of lovers?"

"No—not one—that is, not one I should care to have for a lover," said Violet, smiling frankly.

"So much the better; you will choose the more wisely. My darling was killed on the eve of our wedding day."

"Oh, Aunt! How cruel!"

"Yes, my dear, it was cruel that he and I should suffer so for the sins of others. He was ruthlessly slain in his own room when trying to control the paroxysms of a madman."

"Oh, Aunt!—dear Aunt! How could you hear it?"

The pale, wasted face of Miss Mickledool lit up with an ineffable smile.

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

"It won't be for long now, Violet; every day brings me nearer to him; and I shall know him—ah, yes!—and he knows. He has never once left my side. You know what Tennyson says in that wonderful world-voice of his—'In Memoriam?'—

'Eternal form shall still divide  
The eternal soul from all beside,  
And I shall know him when we meet.'

Ah, yes! I shall know him when we meet—when we meet—my darling."

Violet's face was lambent with tender sympathy.

"I am so sorry, Aunt Betty—oh, I am *so* sorry. How sweet of you to be true to him all those years, when you might have married some other. But why did you quarrel with papa? Surely he had no blame in your lover's death. What did papa and you quarrel about?"

"Oh, a mere matter of sentiment—of opinion. But it is sentiment and opinion that either welds people together or drives them apart. We were driven apart—that is all, Violet, my dear. What else there was you will find out in time. Only this, I want you to have that eight hundred pounds—all I have saved—to yourself. I think you will like to have it some day, because it is clean money, fairly earned, and therefore no curse will go with it. Your brother does not need it."

Violet mused. What a strange hobby this was of Aunt Betty's about money being clean and all that, and about a curse not going with it!

Immediately, however, her mind reverted to the sad love story which had such interest for her, and she inquired softly—

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"Do you mind telling me how it all happened, Annt Betty? It must have been very hard on you."

"Oh, I don't mind telling you, dear. Thank God, there was nothing in him to be ashamed of. He had a friend—they had been boys at school together—and in their young manhood it was a case of David and Jonathan. But somehow, James Hepburn had fallen into habits my Willie objected to; and when he had quite disgraced himself once or twice Willie remonstrated with him. He retorted that Willie had no right to rebuke him for what he did himself. Then said my Willie—'I shall give myself the right to speak what I think. From this hour forth no intoxicant shall pass my lips. So help me, God!' And he was a man of his word. He labored—how he did, labor to save his friend from his fatal habit!—and for a time he was successful, too. James Hepburn straightened up, regained the position he had lost, and all was going well when he was sent by his firm to Glasgow and Edinburgh to transact important business for them. He bungled the business, and came back worse than he had ever been before. That was just near the time set for our marriage, and James was to have been groomsman. Of course, he had made that impossible now. Whether he felt the loss of Willie's friendship or the humiliation of it being cancelled we never knew; all we did know was that, while in an irresponsible state of mind, he came over to Willie's rooms, and some hot words must have passed between them."

Here the frail invalid passed her thin hand over her eyes, as if to shut out some dreadful sight.

"The doctor said he was mad—mad with alcoholic

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madness. My darling was found dead—strangled to death with cruel fingers. The unnatural strength of the madman had overpowered him. He had been dead hours before we knew. Then when James Hephurn, in a lucid moment, realized what he had done—he blew out his own brains.”

“Oh, Auntie!—dear Auntie!” murmured Violet, hending to kiss the meek face on the sofa cushions, “what a terrible thing that drink seems to be!”

“I am glad to hear you say so, Violet; you will come to the light yet. When I look at you I seem to see as in a mirror my past youth and beauty.”

She looked at her niece with a world of adoring love and admiration as she spoke, regretting now for the first time that the days she had yet to live were so few.

For the love of the girl was to the lonely woman as sweet incense, the remembered scent of which she had all but forgotten. The face she looked at so wistfully was fair—very fair. A white, broad brow, half shaded by curling laps of brown hair; a pair of strong, level eyebrows swept curving over a pair of clear, brown eyes; her nose was small, delicate, and tip-tilted, giving an expression of liveliness and energy to the face; a mobile mouth, and firm, rounded chin completed a countenance whose chief expression as yet was sympathetic gentleness.

“My girl, do you think you could promise me one thing?”

“Anything, Auntie. I know you will ask nothing I could not promise.”

“Well, no; I hope not. It is this: when the truth appears to you, though it be in the most unwelcome

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and disagreeable form, will you promise not to turn away your eyes from beholding it, nor your ears from hearing it, because it is disagreeable? Will you promise to keep your mind open to conviction of what is truth, nor allow yourself to be turned from facts by plausible sophistries of those who may be interested in cloaking the truth and making it appear other than it is?"

Violet's eyes grew round with wonder as her aunt spoke.

"Why, Auntie, dear! that goes without saying. Besides, who would attempt to make me believe that things are other than as I see them? What would anybody gain by such an attempt?"

"Nothing—nothing but loss—loss of moral perception—that's all. Don't *you* come to that, Violet."

"Never fear; I have a will of my own, Auntie, though I don't look much. Keep your mind easy; I shall keep my promise, simply because I could not do otherwise."

"I am content—content. The dawn will come—the light of truth. It is bound to come. Kiss me good-night, dear, and go to bed. I feel tired traveling back so far over the weary past."

Violet went to her own room, and the attendant who waited on Miss Micklethorp reported her as all right later on in the evening. Nevertheless, a vague anxiety haunted Violet. There was something in her aunt's face she had not observed before—something that was neither languor nor weariness, yet resembled both—something that seemed to change yet beautify the features. She felt impelled to look in for one last word before she went to bed; and, arrayed in her long

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nightgown she slipped into the room, where the night lamp burned low, shedding a subdued light. Her aunt seemed to be asleep. Yes, she was asleep, with her long, beautiful, white hair spread in two heavy plaits on the pillow. But—how strangely young she looked, lying on her side, with one thin palm beneath her cheek! How pretty Auntie must have been in her youth!

Afraid of disturbing her, she tiptoed again toward the door, turning on the threshold to look back at the sleeper. Then the extreme stillness of the room struck her. There was no perceptible breath or sound of breathing. The silence appalled her. She took one more look at the still, pure face, so strangely young to-night, then fled along the passage to the attendant's room.

"Come quickly," she whispered; "Auntie looks so different—so —."

The attendant was in the room the next minute, and bending over the quiet, reposeful face, straining her ear for living breath.

Then, white as the dead herself, she looked up.

"She is gone!"

Violet had only been away three months when her name again appeared on the passenger list of the "Majestic"—this time *en route* for Liverpool. She was in mourning attire, and more grave and thoughtful than on her way out in the same vessel. It was winter now, and there were but few passengers in the saloon.

It had been pretty rough all afternoon, but she was not in the least sea-sick, and stayed on deck to enjoy

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the sight of an Atlantic gale. Her spirits rose to a state of ecstasy as she grasped the rails of the hurricane deck and held on, while the noble ship ducked and curtsied between great green liquid walls on either side, now riding triumphantly over the towering foam, now chafing and churning through mountainous seas that sent hoary sheets of spray hissing over her bows. It was magnificent.

Once, however, when Violet was a little off guard, a mighty wave, driven by the side wind, struck the vessel to starboard with terrific force, tossing her over like a cork, and launching tons of water upon the lower decks. Ere she was aware, Violet was thrown across the hurricane deck, and must have been dashed with violence against the benches on the opposite side had not a strong arm clutched her, and, by the aid of a rope, held her until the ship righted.

"Don't you think you had better go below until the gale dies down?" said the voice of a man. She turned and recognized a fellow-passenger who usually sat opposite her at meals in the saloon.

She smiled nervously as she tightened her clutch on his sleeve to steady herself.

"Well—yes. But how to get there is the question. It was stupid of me to stay so long."

"If you will allow me, perhaps I could assist you down. It is hardly safe for a lady up here in such a storm."

"Thank you," she said, and took his arm, but again the heaving boat threatened to separate them.

"Allow me," he said; and, throwing a long, strong arm about her, he held her closely till they reached the bottom of the saloon steps, where he deposited her in safety.



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"I hope you will pardon me," he said, lifting his hat and bowing with the air of a courtier, "but there was nothing else could be done in such a sea."

"Thank you; don't mention it, pray. I am glad to be here safe."

As indeed she was, for that strong, kindly grip was in itself an assurance of safety; it seemed to her characteristic of the man.

After such an introduction—by Neptune himself, as it were—the acquaintance of these two ripened fast. What struck Violet as unique about the man was his original ideas. His conversation was singularly suggestive of thought; what he said germinated in her mind, until she found herself debating whether he took the correct view of things. She found it peculiarly hard to think as he did, to look at things as he did; but at last she took up the challenge he threw down one day—resolved to inquire and investigate as to the truth of his rather strong statements. He did not dream that the smiling girl would do any such thing. When they touched land she would forget all about his assertions—and himself. Whereupon he sighed. On parting at the end of the voyage they exchanged addresses. His card read—"Geoffrey Webster, engineer and surveyor;" hers, "Miss Mickledool, Mount Classic."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A PASTORAL VISIT.

MRS. MCBIRNIE—so her neighbors said—had a tongue “that would clip cloots.” Not that she was a mere tongue-wagger, always on the go, spiteful or abusive. Far from it. In these respects her organ of speech was much less unruly than most. She had never quarrelled with a neighbor but once, and then she stood silent, looking steadfastly into the eyes of the railing fury, until a lull in the torrent of stair-head vituperation occurred, when she quietly took her two hands off the rail where they rested as she listened.

“Ye puir misguided creatur!” she sighed, slipped into her own house, and shut the door gently—with studied gentleness.

It had been a great disappointment to the neighbors in the stair, whose heads looked down over the hannisters and up from below to hear the anticipated combat.

And the wonder at the silence of such a notable speaker deepened when it transpired that she had been in the right—had, indeed, been “leed on.”

But there were times when Mrs. McBirnie spoke voluhly—times when she was “fairly roosed”—and then the incisiveness of her speech, the forcible thrill of truth in her sarcastic remarks, the keen observation that pierced through the conventional sophisms with which the real ugliness of existing facts were clothed

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quite justified the cutting quality with which her tongue was credited.

Clip cloots? Mrs. McBirnie's speech cut into tougher things than cloots.

She was an elderly woman, with keen dark eyes and hair prematurely grey; tall and full-bosomed; a woman whose eye did not quail before the ordinary fetishes to which women in general bow; a woman who, strange to say, was a landlady—one who kept lodgers—and yet retained her honesty and independence—albeit she was out of pocket many a time because of those very admirable qualities. She was a widow, and had already lived her own life. In her heart there was more than one grave which, unknown to all save One, she tended with flowers of memory and watered with unsuspected tears.

But the past was past; she had bowed her head while the storms swept over it, and now lifted a grave front to the world wherein she had single-handed to make an honorable living. She was a voracious reader—read everything she could get her hands on—and the prime luxury of life was to get into bed when the duties of the day were done and the cloth laid for to-morrow's breakfast: there, with the latest novel, magazine, or book of poems, to refresh herself and forget the weariness of house-keeping monotony. It is true she had often wakened in the early morning to find the lamp still burning; but what was waste of paraffin compared with the enjoyment she received from her reading—with the surcease from cares, memories, regrets, it gave! As for fear of fire—

“Hoots! it's no' the thing ye fear that happens. Dear sirs! we maunna tak' sugar in oor tea nor butter

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to oor bread for fear o' getting indigestion; an' we're no' to read in bed because it's ill for the e'en, an' for fear o' fire. Losh, bless me! sic anither business to get safe an' respectably to the grave I never saw!"

To-day she had been "fair roosed" by a call from a young minister, the newly-appointed assistant in the church she attended.

He was a ruddy, well-groomed young man, beardless as yet—one who had evidently been well fed and well nurtured in a comfortable home—and this was his introductory visit to Mrs. McBirnie.

At first the pleasure of meeting was mutual. She saw the goodly face and clear eyes of a wholesome, well-featured lad, and her maternal instincts warmed to him at once. Moreover, a feeling of kindly pity for his youth, his ignorance and inexperience, swelled and grew till the young man thought she had rather a benevolent sort of countenance—ah—for a woman of her class. One thing he missed, however, and it irked him a little.

In his other visitations he had been received with a certain fussy deference to the cloth—an evident desire to appear to advantage in the eyes of the young minister. The mothers were gracious, with the utmost graciousness that conventionality allowed; the daughters blushing and prim and delighted. The fathers and sons had eyed him critically, but tolerantly and kindly.

Mrs. McBirnie stood on her own floor, and, shaking hands, looked at him as she might look at her own son.

Then she set the great chair for him, and asked him to excuse her for a minnte—she had a pot of potatoes put on. The young probationer smiled at the

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mention of the potatoes, remembering the way his tea used to vanish from his caddy in his student days spent in lodgings.

But when she returned and sat down opposite and looked at him with such supreme composure he hardly knew what to make of her. The other landladies he knew would have apologized for their working apron. She did not; she wore it as a queen might her robe of state.

"An' hoo d'ye think you'll like your folk here?" she queried, after the usual weatherwise remarks.

"Oh, very well," he said, without hesitation; "I find the congregation very kind indeed."

"I dinna see hoo they could be itherwise," she said, smiling admiration at his fair young face. "We should be kind to a'—the young especially."

He fidgetted slightly and smiled.

"The more familiar custom is to be kind to the old," he said in a clerical tone.

"Aweel, that's richt, too—when they come to their second childhood. 'Auld folk's twice bairns,' ye ken. But afore that, the auld need less kindness an' consideration than the young. They've been through the mill, an' the caff an' the strae's been weel thrashed oot o' them. They ken what to expect o' life—what's worth an' what's worthless. But you young folk—pnr bairns—it maist gars a body greet for a' ye have to learn, an' a' ye maun suffer afore ye come to ken what life means."

Well! well! well! What a very pecnliar person this woman who kept lodgers was, to be sure! Actually pitying *him*—a college graduate—a prohatoner in the ministry!

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He straightened himself up with a sensation of pique, feeling he must maintain the dignity of his office.

"That may be true—ah—to a certain extent; but the rule of life as laid down in the Word of God is a safe and sure guide, and to those who walk according to its light no evil can come."

"What d'ye ca' evil?" queried this woman, looking at him with interest.

The question took him aback. He had come on a pleasant pastoral visit, not at all prepared to define "evil" to a lodging landlady.

"I mean nothing that can hurt or destroy can have power over those who walk by this rule."

She made no answer—no attempt at answer—but sat eyeing him in silent wonder. Was this the language of faith or merely the shibboleth of his profession? Totally misunderstanding her silence, he said amicably and with kind toleration of the woman—

"I am sure you will not dispute the statements of Holy Writ—of David?"

"No—oh, no—no' me! But I'm thinkin' it was the Jews Dauvit was speakin' about. The Jews are gude to their ain folk, so they say. Christians are different. If Dauvit had lived in oor day he would have seen baith the righteous forsaken an' his seed beggin' bread—ay, mony a time. In fack, maist o' them puir an' forsaken because they couldna see their way to be rich an' keep a conscience clean afore God."

The young man began to suspect that he had run amuck of a female Socialist. It was astonnding the way such ideas were spreading. A smile of superior knowledge was on his lips as he said—

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"Do you not hold rather peculiar views of God's dealings with men?"

The visible conceit in the young beardless face touched her weak point. Mrs. McBirnie was "roosed" at last.

"Aweel," she said drily, elevating her eyebrows and keeping them elevated as she spoke, "I see plenty in men's dealin's wi' men to convince me that God is no in *their* councils—no, nor in their thochts. Maybe I am peculiar in my views; folk that see when they look, an' think on what they see gaun on in this world, an' speak the truth ahoot things are ca'ed 'peculiar.' They are 'fules' an' 'fanatics,' an' very uncomfortho kind o' folk to get along wi'; they canna haud the cat while they play wi' the kitten—no them! Noo, crackin' ahoot the righteous no bein' forsaken; there's auld Wattie Maurlin an' his wife —."

"What name did you say?" queried the young man, deftly producing a note-book and pencil. "This is a case of distress, I presume. One of the congregation?"

"Ay!" she retorted, her face flushing and her dark eyes glowing with the heat of her indignation, "they belong to a higger congregation than yours, Mr. Mickledool—the congregation o' the honest an' hard-workin' pair, left to choose atween the pairhoose an' starvation, after a century an' mair an' mair o' ill-paid wark an' Godly livin'. I tell ye, it tak's a' the pith oot o' me when I see twa decent auld folk like Wattie an' his wife cairtit awa' like worn oot beasts o' hurden to the pairhoose, whaur they are separatit an' can neither eat thegither nor crack

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together; auld bodies o' seventy and seventy-five, that have been marrit cronies an' freends sin' their youth, no' alloed even to lie in their beds an' crack to ither about the bairns that are dead an' awa', nor the tane tell the tither when they've a sair head. It's that kind o' thing that sets me a-wonderin' whaur's a' this Christianity there's sic a braggin' aboot, an' sic an eternal collectin' o' siller to keep up."

The young man was as nearly angry at this presumptuous speech as his profession would allow him to be, but he said with bland dignity—

"I think it is hardly fair to blame Christianity for those sad things. If we are had with Christianity, certainly we should be much worse without it."

"Withoot what?" she queried, with wide open eyes.

"Christianity."

"Whaur is't?" she demanded drily; "I would like to see some sign o't. I'll no say but what we're a kind o' civileezed—in a way; we dinna rin nakit an' eat ane anither noo—that's true; but, my faigs! if we dinna hite oor neehors wi' oor teeth, we sting them to death wi' oor tongues. An' we wear claes, an' we bide in hooses, an' some o's play the pianny—an' we're terrible respectable. Eh, losh keep me, ay! Extraordinar' respectable! But that's no Christianity—that's no Christ's Christianity. God forbid! If there was naething better than that we'd ha'e a cauld coal to hlaw at. I see ye're thinkin' I've a tinkler's tongue in my head; but, oh! you that's young, *there's* a kind an' Christ-like joh for ye—something that would gar folk believe in the love o' God manifest in you His servant, set apart for his special work. Keep puir auld Watty an' his wife frae that cruel puirhoose.



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"Think on't; he had three bonnie sons—an' died an' twa were drooned—an' an orphan laddie they adopted an' brocht up wi' their ain, he gaed awa' foreign, an' they saw *his* death in the papers."

The young man shook his head sagely—despairingly. It was an inglorious topic this everyday tragedy of the poor, but he brought such philosophy as he himself had been taught to bear on the subject.

"Very sad, very sad," he assented; "but the great trouble among the masses, Mrs. McBirnie, is—*improvidence*. It is the source of half their wretchedness. They should really be taught to save, and never live beyond their income. If this rule were carried into practice, they would at the end of such a long life as that of this couple be comparatively well off."

While he thus delivered himself with the oracular certainty of ignorance and inexperience, Mrs. McBirnie, listening, seemed to undergo some inner mental collapse. Her eyebrows fell to their usual straight, strong level, her lips set in an eloquent line of calm hopelessness. The young man was astounded by the sudden agreeable change in her manner. She was meek as pussy, and seemed ready to pnr.

"And how is the minister?" she inquired with the most suave politeness. "I hope, now you are here to relieve him o' his dnties a little, be'll get stronger. We have had fine weather for the country this whilie."

The young man rose, murmuring some appropriate assent—in truth, rather glad to end his pastoral visit to this extraordinary woman.

Still, something in her dark eyes held him.

"If you wish," he said with involuntary apology, "I can mention the case of these people—ah—wbat

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did you say the name was? I will lay it before the next meeting of the ——”

“ Oh, no—never fash! They’re gaun the morn ony-way,” she said, quietly opening the door for him; “ an’ ye’ll exense me—good-hye. I smell my taties hurnin’.”

She closed the door on him, and, flying into the kitchen, snatched the singeing pot off the fire, and, emptying the potatoes into a dish, set them in the oven to keep warm. Then she sat down and laughed grimly. The inclination to laugh became so strong that she started up with determined self-control.

“ I maun stop this, or I’ll be like thae silly gowks that giggle themsel’s into hysterics. But, sirse! what’s mair laughable than the wisdom o’ the folk that ken naething about it? Save for a rainy day—an’ it rainin’ a’ the time! Save for your auld age aff sixteen, an’ aichteen, an’ maybe twenty shillin’s a week! Lord sake! there’s auld age in the doin’ o’t. Pay rent, an’ water, an’ firin’, an’ meat, an’ claes, an’ shoon for yonrsel’ an’ the wife an’ the hairns, an’ the lyin’-in expenses ilka wee while—wi’ short time an’ aff days dookit—a’ aff sixteen an’ aichteen shillin’s a week! An’ boilin’ beef aichtpence an’ tenpence, an’ steak fifteen pence the pnnnd! O, the weary, weary wisdom o’ the folk that sit at ease! O, the waefu’ extravagance, the terrihle improvidence o’ thae workin’ classés!”

She ended her audihle cogitations hy a snort of un-speakable contempt, but presently the smile of derision faded from her countenance; she lapsed into a reverie, in which her expression grew tender and thoughtful.

“ Bnt surely, surely,” she murmured softly, “ if we, the hard-workin’, hae a Father in Heaven ava—if

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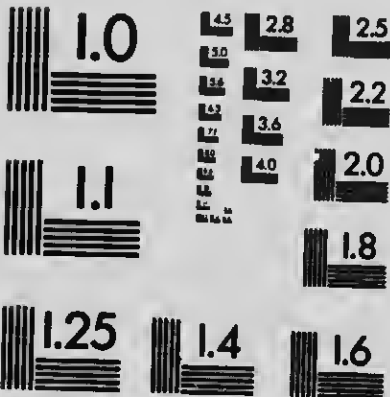
it be true that the hairs o' oor head are a' numbered—the day *maun* come when men will be something mair than mere beasts o' burden; human machines for makin' wealth they get nae share o' beyond what keeps up their brute strength for work—ay, an' no aye that."

"Forget not, in Thy book record their groans." she quoted, for Mrs. McBirnie was as familiar with Milton as with Scott and Dickens, and many others of the "choir invisible" who had contributed their share towards making her inner life not only worth living, but enjoyable indeed.



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## CHAPTER IX.

### MRS. M'BIRNIE TO THE RESCUE.

MANY and many a dim century has passed since Jacob wrestled with the Angel, but the days of wrestling with angels are with us yet, either for far-reaching victory or base defeat.

Mrs. McBirnie had attended to her lodger—she had only one at present, but had advertised for another—had finished up her household duties for the night by forestalling those of next day; and now, unbuckling her corsets, she slipped herself into the untrammelled comfort of a loose wrapper, and sat down in her ample easy-chair to enjoy the luxury of self-emancipation; also to refresh herself in the society to be found in an old number of *Blackwood* which she had laid hands on to-night, for lack of something newer. Before long she was quite absorbed in the racy critiques of the "Old Salon."

Slowly, however, she began to be aware of holding inner converse with some presence which she neither saw nor heard, but with which, nevertheless, she must perforce argue with conscious irritation, even answering the questions propounded to her promptly.

"You are really going to let those two old people go to the workhouse?" queried this inner voice—the voice of the wrestling Angel.

"Bless me! what can I do?" she moaned.

"Take them to live with you."

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"But I've naething but what I earn," she protested.

"Then just go on earning. It is good to be able to earn."

"Ay! But I'll hae a'e room the less to let to lodgers."

"What if you do? 'He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord.'"

"Don't quote that detestable text to me. Am I a usurer that I should lend to the Lord in the hope o' gettin' profit by the transaction? Na, na; if I gi'e—I'll gi'e—I'll be upsides wi' the Lord Himsel' there. Nane o' your lendin' for me. But if I tak' the auld folk, it'll be only for pure selfishness after a'—ay, an' for fear o' *you*. I ken ye! An' I couldna stand ye comin' soughin' roond me at night, when the wind's in the lum, reproachin' me for lettin' slip the opportunity that may never come again. Ye'll thrane and mane in my waukin' lug a' nicht, till ye mak' me oot a fair mnrderer for no doin' what I should have done."

"H'm—yes; you are wise to think of that in time. I am afraid I *would* be apt to remind you that you had allowed two kindly old hearts to break when you might have prevented it by a little self-denial." Here the Angel bent closer and whispered, sobbing—"And who knows but some one to-night may be doing a good turn to one dear to *you*—ah, me! on what far nn-known strand?"

"Enough! enough!" she implored, covering her eyes with a shapely, capable hand. "Let the auld pair sleep! Let the auld pair sleep! I'll bring them here this very nicht. But, O! why *will* folk turn this bonnie world into a waste wilderness for sae mony pnir

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souls? Needlessly, needlessly—an' a' for cursed greed."

So Mrs. McBirnie wrestled with the Angel—her own better self—that would not down or keep consenting silence in the presence of suffering. So she conquered her natural desire for a little more ease and a little less work in the coming grey years, wherein she might be tempted to say, "I have no pleasure in them."

*Blackwood* fell from her lap to the floor and lay there as she stood up and looked at the clock.

"The puir auld creatur's! I'll tak' a cab an' bring them. They'll be no sleepin' yet—nae fear o' them—the last nicht they'll spend thegither—so *they* think."

Such a woman of moods she was! Actually chuckling to herself now as her imagination ran riot over the stupefaction of the old couple when they should hear of their reprieve from the poorhouse.

With nervous haste she donned a couple of skirts above her wrapper; buttoned a roomy jacket across her full, deep bosom; and tied on her bonnet tidily. She had opened the door, purse in hand, when, struck by an afterthought, she came in again, opened a little back room, lit the gas, and applied a flaming match to the ready-laid fire.

"Auld folk are cauld rife," she remarked by way of apology for this piece of extravagance. "That'll be burnt up fine an' cosy when they come back. I declare," she laughed, "I would be disappointed if they didna come noo."

But Mrs. McBirnie was not to be disappointed. It took but a few minutes for the cab to reach the old tenement house some few streets down, where, in a scant and comfortless apartment the old couple waited



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the miserable morning. It had been a bitter day that, when tempted by the lingering love of life, they had applied for parochial relief, and been told very civilly, but very officially, that they would be received into the Union Poorhouse.

It was the first time the faith of either had failed in the long and toilsome journey of life, and it took some time to familiarize them with the idea; but each for the sake of the other consented to go, because the one could not bear to see the other starve.

Mrs. Maurlin had shed bitter tears telling it all to Mrs. McBirnie on the previous day, and tears in the eyes of seventy-five, bitter as November rain, are not good to see.

The woman from whom they had the room was not yet in bed, but there was no light under the old people's door to indicate they were still up.

"They've gaen to bed early, I'm thinkin'," said the woman. "Ye ken they're gaun to the puirhoose the morn's mornin'."

"So I heard," said Mrs. McBirnie, "but they'll no need to gang noo. A freend has provided for them at the last meenit, an' they're to ha'e a room an' board at my hoose as lang as they like to stay."

"Aweel," quoth the woman eagerly, "if they can pay their rent an' board forbye, they needna flit frae here."

Mrs. McBirlie drew herself up with an air of importance.

"But, ye see, I'm no at liberty to gang beyond my instructions; it's a private maitter. An auld freend has come forrit, an' they're to bide wi' me frae this oot."

"Oh, weel, of course, it's *your* interest to mak' your

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ain o' the offer. I canna expect ye to put the water past yer ain mill."

Mrs. McBirnie's eyes twinkled as she answered—

"'Deed no; I would be a fule if I did. If ye've sic a thing as a caunel, ye micht licht it, an' I'll just slip in an' steek their door ahint me. Ye see, the cab's at the door waitin'."

"The cah!" gasped the woman. "Faith, an' ye'll no ken gentry but just whaur they are."

And while Mrs. McBirnie softly opened the old people's door the woman dived into the front apartment, threw up the window and thrust out head and shoulders to assure herself that Mrs. McBirnie had spoken the truth.

The cab was there! A cab! to fetch twa auld paupers in! Was the world comin' to an end?

The flickering light of the candle fell on a sight which made Mrs. McBirnie glad she had listened to the voice of the wrestling Angel within her.

Wattie Maurlin was sitting in an old arm chair before the extinct fire, and beside him—her chair drawn close up to his—sat his wife, her withered arms locked about his neck, her grey head sunk upon his shoulder, and his white beard half hiding her withered face. Both were asleep, his head leaning over and resting upon hers.

"God forgi'e me, that ever I should have thocht twice aboot it," murmured their visitor, feeling choky at the throat; "the twa pnair auld creatures have grutten theirsels to sleep like twa bairns—thocht it would be the last nicht they would ever spend thegither. Eh, hut it's a hard, heathenish place this hraw Christian land o' oors! I fancy I'll hae to tell them as mony lees as'll sink my sowl to perdition.

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Ah—well! thanks be! The Lord looketh on the heart. He'll no be *ower* hard on me."

She set the candle on the mantel-shelf, and laid a gentle hand on the old woman's shoulder.

"Mrs. Maurlin, my woman," she whispered kindly, "wauken up. There's a cab at the door waitin' to tak' ye whaur ye'll be fine an' comfortable."

Both moved uneasily, and Wattie himself opened his eyes with a stupefied air.

"Hech, hech! an' maun we really go?" he groaned; and, roused by his voice, his wife loosened her arms from his neck and stared at their visitor.

"Is't Mrs. McBirnie?" she faltered in astonishment.

"'Deed ay, an' wha but me? Noo, you're to cock your lugs an' listen, an' no say one word," chirruped their visitor.

And then, inwardly hoping she might be forgiven, she spun a plausible romance about an old friend, who did not wish to be mentioned by name, having heard of the poorhouse plan, had arranged for the two old people to live in her back room instead, where they could take their ease and live together as long as she (Mrs. McBirnie) lived. After that—well—the Lord would find.

"So you'll just come awa' at once," she concluded; "there's a cab at the door, an' there's a cheery fire in the wee room, an' frae this oot ye'll just sleep below your ain vine an' fig tree, as the Scriptor says, nane daurin' to mak' ye afraid."

So dazed were the old people that they were as wax in her hands, and rose and came with her. Ouly once did they exchange words as they tottered frailly down the stone steps to the cab. It was the old woman who

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broke the silence. Her conscience was troubling her over the failure of her trust in God. She felt she had been another Job's wife; if she had not told Wattie to curse God and die, she had come perilously near it.

"I was wrang, Wattie—faur wrang. I think shame o' mysel'. The Lord hasna forsaken us after a'."

"No," responded Wattie, while his stick clicked carefully on the stone steps in their descent; "an' may the blessin' o' him that was ready to perish licht on them that cam' forrit for twa auld folk that never can pay them back. Ye'll tell them we're thankfu', Mrs. McBirnie," he urged as they stepped into the cab; "ye'll no' forget to tell them we're real thankfu'!"

Mrs. McBirnie solemnly assured them she would convey their thanks to the proper quarter, and so, under the cover of night, the rescue was effected.

They had been domesticated in the snug little back room for a couple of months, to the mutual advantage of landlady and lodgers, when Mrs. McBirnie, glancing as usual at the morning paper, saw something which made her breath come faster than usual.

It was an advertisement in the personal column, but while she stood wondering what this might portend the bell rang, and she went to open the front door.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE YOUNG MAN DEPARTS WITH A FLEA IN HIS EAR.

It was the Rev. Mr. Mickledool come to pay his second visit to Mrs. McBirnie.

He looked in radiant health, and was in the most cheerful spirits.

"Good morning, Mrs. McBirnie. I hope I see you quite well?"

"Very well, thank ye. Come in. I needna ask how *you* are—your face tells that," she rejoined facetiously.

As the young man stepped through the hall to the parlor he caught a glimpse of an old man entering a door at the opposite side.

"Ah, Mrs. McBirnie," he said, drawing the daily paper from his pocket, "I saw this advertisement at breakfast this morning, and as it concerned the two elderly people who are boarded with you, I thought I would call your attention to it. Of course, had I known the name of the party who so nobly came to their help at the eleventh hour, I should have called there first; hut, failing that, I have brought it to you. I knew you were too husy a woman to read newspapers."

"I saw the advertisement," said Mrs. McBirnie, calmly.

"Yon did?"

"Ay; I get the paper every mornin' at seven o'clock, an' I manage to read a' that's worth readin';

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but this forenoon I happened to tak' it up the second time, and there it was. It maun be somebody that kent the auld folk."

"Evidently. Well, if you will kindly furnish me with the address of the party who so charitably provides for them—ah—don't you think they ought to be informed as to this advertisement, whatever it may mean?"

"They ken; they saw the advortisement."

"Why—when? Are you sure? It is only ten o'clock."

"Office men are in their offices by ten," she said drily.

"True—that is true."

His spirits had sunk somewhat. This Mrs. McBirnie had a most aggravating way with her.

Still, she was evidently trusted by people of means.

"Ah, Mrs. McBirnie, I happened to mention the case of Maurlin and his wife both to the minister—and also to my mother, who was down here on a visit. She wishes me to ask you if you would take care of another infirm old couple—ah —."

"No!" she interjected with tense vigor. "I have my two gentlemen lodgers. I require no more lodgers."

"No? h, well, then! I thought it might put something in your way. They are old pensioners of mother's; she is very liberal in her charities."

"Women are mair gi'en to that kind o' thing than men," remarked Mrs. McBirnie.

"Well, my father is not behind there, I assure you. Only his liberality takes another form. I suppose you heard of the Mickledool gift to Trinity College?"

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"It's no Mr. Mickledool, the big distiller, you mean?" she inquired blandly.

"The same," he answered with a certain pride. "My father's last gift to the Missionary Society and my gift to the University had been marvellous; he felt the prestige they gave him.

Mrs. McBirnie seemed impressed. She sat twirling her thumbs slowly, her eyes fixed on the cat before the fire. Then she sighed heavily as she spoke.

"I was thinkin' o' what ye prayed for last Sabbath, Mr. Mickledool—indeed, every Sabbath since ye cam'."

"Ah, what special request do you refer to?" not displeased at her attention.

"D'ye no mind? Ye aye pray that the kingdoms o' this world may become the Kingdoms of God and His Christ."

"Oh, yes—of course, that is what we all hope and pray for. I have been familiar with that prayer from childhood, and I like to use it. It embodies the whole aim and end of Christian work in the world. My father has used the same form at family worship ever since I can remember."

"Ah, weel, it's a bonnie prayer—a bonnie prayer," she responded musingly. "An' I would say it was the duty o' every Christian to see they do naething that would hinder that blessed time, but a' they can to help it on."

"I—I do not quite comprehend you, Mrs. McBirnie."

"No; hoo could ye, wi' the upbringing ye've had? Hoo can folk pray for their ain ruin? Let me tell ye, the kingdoms of this world will never be the Kingdoms of God an' His Christ sae lang as there's a

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distillery in the land or pubs at ilka corner to lure men to ruin. The blood o' the yearly slain cries oot to the God ye pray to, an' spiers why sic things are permitted in this world; sic things as folk livin' aff—ay, makin' fortunes aff—the infirmities an' the weaknesses, the misery an' the death o' their fellow-creatures."

"Woman!" cried the irate young man, starting to his feet, "you forget yourself—you are abusive. Such talk is absurd—the height of absurdity. A man is responsible for no man's sins but his own. If men drink, it is at their own risk; they know the danger —"

"But still your folk go on providin' the danger—makin' heavy profits oot o' the danger. That's the axle the iniquity turns on—the makin' o' profit oot o' the ruin o' ither men; buildin' up fortunes oot o' the degradation o' humanity; ay, an' debauchin' the public mind by gifts o' thoosands to this institution an' that—the price o' public shame, the blood money o' murdered wives an' martyred weans! Deny it if ye can—prove it's onything but a curse if ye can. Why, ye daurna open a public-boose in a respectable locality; it would lessen the value o' the property! But there's nae word o' lessenin' the value o' men an' women by a public-boose ilka ither door in the dirty streets, wbaur the puir maun herd in lairs like swine."

Mrs. McBirnie's tongue was "clipping cloots" now with a vengeance. She had forgotten berself entirely—forgotten that she was speaking to a young minister of the Gospel of peace and pnrity and unselfishness. In her heat she did not observe that the fine ruddy color had faded from his cheeks, that a perplexed



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frown had brought his eyebrows together, that his white upper teeth were compressed hard upon his lower lip.

"D'ye ken," she resumed in an apologetic tone, "there's some real gude folk that think—ay, an' say ahint my hack—that I'm fair intolerant on this subject. Gude, kindly folk they are, an' they argue sae fairly that I feel mysel' a perfect Laocoon in the grip o' the serpents—the serpent sophistries that they use to justify themsel's, tryin' to mak' fair foul an' foul fair—till I begin to think—am I really sic a narrow-minded wretch as a' that? But, then, I'm comin' up some Saturday night after eleven o'clock. Did ye ever tak' a dauder doon the Gallowgate atween Saturday night an' Sabbath mornin'?"

"No, Mrs. McBirnie; I am generally too busy preparing my sermon for the Sabbath," the young minister said coldly.

"Sermon! Gang ye doon there, an' ye'll get a sermon ye'll no forget. That's the time when the streets look as if the pit had opened its mooth an' vomited forth creatures such below the beasts that perish; when the air o' Glasgow streets reek wi' blasphemous oaths an' curses, an' language sae vile that it sticks to ye like pitch, an' ye feel that the Clyde hasna water enough to wash ye clean o' the hearin' o't. An' hame they stagger to sic lairs as they ca' hame; an' hairns flee to hide frae their fathers—ay, an' their mithers—as they would frae wild, ravenin' beasts o' prey; an' wretches sleepin' aff the beast, and wankenin' wi' a shiver to find themsel's men again—men, hut wi' tongues like Dives in torment. Mr. Mickledool, when I see the like o' that, I ken that I'm *richt*, an' that the kingdoms o'

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this world will never be the Kingdom o' God an' His Christ sae lang as Christians keep silent and condone sic wholesale destruction o' human bein's for the sake o' makin' siller aff o't. I could stand it better if it wasna for the bairns—the innocent bairns!—starved an' kicked an' cuffed—ay, an' murdered—an' a' because there's money in the husiness."

The young man felt so angry at first that he sat in dumb wrath; now he rose with a hasty "good-bye," feeling a secret dismay that the words of a mad woman should cut into him so keenly. God! was it truth or a lie the woman was uttering—that struck him silent—unable to make any defence? Was it really off such misery as she described that the foundations of the fortune he hoped to inherit one day were laid? Forbid it, heaven!

Mrs. McBirnie clasped her hands together in despair of herself.

"There, I've made an ass o' mysel' again! A bonnie-like Christian I am! But the idea o' a Mickle-dool daurin' to preach the Gospel! But—what am I thrawin' at? Isna' the Gospel spread an' ministers keepit up wi' the proceeds o' drink sellin' an' drink hrewin'? I'm a fule—a fule! But, oh, my heart—my heart!" she moaned, with her hand pressed against her side, "it's *here* the grudge lies—the hither grudge—an' death itsel' canna lift it."

She was weary after all this unexpected excitement, and for a moment or two closed her eyes and leaned back in her chair.

Then she remembered the advertisement, and hurriedly went to find the paper.

## CHAPTER XI.

“ HE WAS DEAD AND IS ALIVE AGAIN!”

THE advertisement wanted information regarding Walter Maurlin and his wife, aged people.

Here followed a statement of the different places wherein they had lived many years ago, adding that the information was wanted by Geoffrey Wehster.

“ Lordsake!” exclaimed the astonished woman, “ that maun he Jeff—the laddie they hrocht up. An’ they thocht he was dead years syne.”

That day, for the first time in two years’ experience, Mrs. McBirnie’s lodger had to wait ten minutes before his dinner was served.

That she was lahorng under some suppressed excitement he could see, hut she was not the kind of woman to invite questioning. She did not even apologize for being late. The truth was, she had on reading the advertisement left everything, and, dressing herself, repaired to the newspaper office of the *Weekly Herald* to give the desired information.

Her plans were speedily laid. If this boy, whom the Maurlins had shared their hard-earned crusts with in his helpless youth, had come back a ne’er-do-weel, with the intention of sponging on the old folk, then he should be sent away with a lively flea in his ear.

The Maurlins had just settled down into as perfect content as this disappointing world admits of; they

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were improving in health and appearance; and as many times as there were hours in the day Mrs. McBirnie told herself that they were really a positive advantage to her. For did not Wattie keep an eye on the fire and an open ear for the door bell when she was out, and did not the old wife knit stockings like a five-year-auld?—stockings for which she found a ready sale, according to Mrs. McBirnie's statement. What! the auld body was makin' money!

Now, that any feckless young man should come in and disturb the equilibrium of the happy state of things so adroitly established was not to be tolerated. She was set on that.

All the remainder of that day and the next she did not stir outside the door lest the expected tramp should arrive in her absence; moreover, she kept herself dressed with more care than ordinary, as an aid to her dignity, should the exercise of it be necessary to impress the ne'er-do-weel, as no doubt he was.

"No' that I care for dress mysel', but, losh keep me! it's terrible the effect claes—just claes—has on a stranger. In an auld goon ye're naebody; but rig yoursel' oot in your best, an' ye can see the price o't in their e'en. It's a daft world—clean daft; a'thing outside in an' upside doon; a stage, as Shakespeare says, an' the whole jing-bang o's play-actors, whether we like it or no. Hard to tell which we get maist o'—comedy or tragedy. Ay, deed ay, sirse!"

A long sigh and the reminiscent sadness which at times settled like a shadow on her patient face told that though she had more than once turned an impending tragedy into an agreeable comedy in the case of others, she herself had not been spared her own tragic experience.

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The tinkle of the door bell dispelled the cloud. In a moment she was herself again, and, with the door knob in her hand, was critically scanning the sun-burned but rather distinguished-looking gentleman who bowed, hat in hand, with fine politeness, and inquired whether he beheld Mrs. McBirnie.

Supposing him to be a possible lodger, she suavely showed him into her well-furnished front parlor.

"About that advertisement," he began, seating himself. "I am sorry I happened to be out of town when ——."

"Oh, that's about the parlor bedroom? Yes; just step in this way, an' I'll show ye ——."

"Oh, no, no! It is *my* advertisement I refer to. I am Geoffrey Webster."

"*You!*"

Her utter astonishment seemed to please the stranger. He smiled genially, and the smile wonderfully improved his face, which was rather strong and stern.

"You can tell me, I believe, where my dear old father and mother can be found?"

"Ay, I ken whaur they are—they're no far awa.' But if you're Jeff I've heard them aye speakin' aboot, what for didna ye write years syne?"

"Write? I wrote and wrote, and all my letters were returned from the Dead Letter Office. I hegan to suspect that they too were dead. I never dreamed they had come to Glasgow t<sup>o</sup> live."

"Oh, that would accoont for nae word comin'. It's a wonder ye didna find them in the puirhoose."

"What!" he exclaimed, a thunderous gloom gathering in his dark eyes. "Where are Tom and Jack—and ——?"

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"Dead—a' dead an' awa'! Tom died; the ithers were drooned."

An exclamation of pain escaped the man. The look of anguish on his face evoked her pity.

He sat perfectly still for a few moments, and then said simply—"I did not know. I thought them well and doin, well. I came in proposing to take some of them out with me. Will you be so kind as to give me the address of —?"

"Ay, wait a meenit," she said; then, leaving the room, she plunged across the hall, and, entering the back room, shut the door close behind her.

"It's an auld freend come to see ye," she hurriedly explained. Seizing a towel from the little washstand, she dipped it in water, soaped it well, and before they well knew what was happening, had washed and dried the old man's face, repeating the action on the astounded wife.

"There," she added, thrusting a comb upon them, "redd your hair a bit—the twa o' ye—an' look decent when I bring him in. Haste ye!"

The two old faces, polished and shining with soap, were all alert, and the comb was applied with vigor.

"This'll be the freend we're obleeged till, is't?" inquired the wife eagerly, as Mrs. McBirnie flew like a bird about the room, impelled by her instinct of tidiness to put everything to rights.

"Oo ay, if ye like," she responded, in gleeful enjoyment of her little comedy; and, leaving them, she returned to the parlor, which she entered with a short apologetic laugh.

"To tell the truth, Mr. Webster, the auld folk are no' far awa'—they're hidin' wi' me. Just come ben."

"Here! with you?" he exclaimed. But he rose

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and followed her to the back room. For a few moments his tall form filled the doorway, while his strong face relaxed and grew tender, softened by the rare beauty of his smile.

"Mother! Father! Don't you know me?"

At the sight of his smile and the sound of his voice the old woman threw up her arms and moved dreamily toward him, muttering as she went, "Wattie, Wattie! it's Jeff! He's no dead. I ken the auld lauch in his ee'n."

Jeff stepped in and took them both in his long, strong arms, while Mrs. McBirnie ran into the kitchen and hid her face in her apron.

Jeff's history was short but practical. What romance it had was the romance of hard work and applied ability.

When, after completing his apprenticeship as engineer, he, with the consent of his adopted parents, took the chance of a voyage to New York, working his passage out as assistant in the engine-room of the "Sicilian," the first thing that happened him on landing was a calamity—at least so he considered it at the time, though afterward he looked back on that trouble as the gate through which he passed on to success. Having been carried to the hospital to be cured of a fever, contracted either on board or before he left, he lay there for some weeks, the first of which were spent in unconsciousness. During his convalescence he became acquainted with another patient, also an engineer. His particular branch, however, was railroad-making, bridge-building, etc. As the young journeyman and the elder man grew better acquainted a strong friendship was formed, the foundation of which was love of Scotland—otherwise called clannish-

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ness. So soon as the elder man heard the young patient in the next bed babbling the dear old Doric in his delirium, his heart warmed to him. For was not the tongue he spoke that of the land he himself had left thirty years ago—the land of Scott and Burns, and the immortal memories recorded in their songs and stories? He declared to the nurse that the sound of the lad's voice sent a thrill of new health and strength through his fever-depleted veins—did him more good than all their medicines.

As convalescence proceeded and he discovered that the lad had come from his own birthplace in the North, that he had come out on the chance of securing work and better wages than could be obtained at home, his interest became fatherly, and he advised his young compatriot to study other branches of engineering as well—his own, for instance. When he himself recovered sufficiently to resume his place, he saw that Jeff was also provided with a situation in the employ of the same Company. For years afterward the two worked together in the different parts of the continent to which they were sent, constructing railroads and bridges over yawning gaps and turbulent torrents; Jeff's manifest ability securing him steady promotion, until he was appointed "boss" of still greater undertakings. His prudence and simple life had given him command of funds which he had invested in safe and paying undertakings, chiefly shares in the railways he had built; and now that the opportunity had been offered him to visit England on a commission of trust for the Company, he had made it his first duty to hunt up, by advertising, the honest couple who had been father and mother to him when deprived of his own. As he had already stated to Mrs. Mc-



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Birnie, all his letters had been returned from the Dead Letter Office, and it had been his one source of regret in his prosperous career that he had lost sight of them so strangely. He had written to the minister of the town asking if he knew aught of them. The reply had come that they had left the town over a year ago, but it was uncertain whether to London or not. He believed one of the sons had desired to go there. So the silence fell, and the years had passed until now, when he had proposed to induce his two foster-brothers to go out with him, little dreaming that they had passed beyond this world's toil and toil, leaving the old couple desolate.

Needless to say, he at once left his rooms in St. Enoch's Hotel and took Mrs. McBirnie's front parlor, so as to be under the same roof with them during his stay in Glasgow.

"Do you know," he said a few days afterward, "the old folk seem to be laboring under the strange delusion that you have been corresponding with me, and that I had forwarded money for their support here? How on earth have they got such an idea into their heads?"

Mrs. McBirnie waved her hands protestingly.

"I'll tell ye hoo they got that daft-like notion. When I gaed in yesterday to tell them a gentleman had come to see them, they took for granted it was the friend I wouldna name to them, an'—weel, I just humored the auld hodies and let them think awa' there."

"I see, I see. But, now that I am here, I must ask you to give me the information you withheld from them, so I may discharge my deht to that very kind friend."

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Mrs. McBirnie looked alarmed.

"O, I wouldna fash; I'm sure the folk wouldna like it to be kent."

Jeff mused over the unnecessary mystery.

"Well, then, Mrs. McBirnie, I shall write you ont a cheque and yon can give it with my warmest thanks to the party who rescned them from the workhouse. I am sure it would have been the death of them."

He took out his cheque-book, but Mrs. McBirnie started up hastily.

"No; ye'll do naething o' the kind. Them that did that want naething back. Believe you that."

"But, Mrs. McBirnie, I cannot afford to be considered a monster of 'ingratitude.'"

"Wha is? G'wa ben; I hear Mrs. Maurlin callin' ye. But, speak; keep up the joke—just let them think it was yon."

She good-naturedly pushed him out of the room, but as he went a light dawned on him. He turned back, and, meeting her coming out with his breakfast tray in her hand, took it from her amazed hands and carried it into the kitchen.

Then he folded his arms across his chest, and smiled down upon her quizzically.

"Yon are a lady, Mrs. McBirnie; in the real old Saxon sense of the word—a 'bread-giver.'"

"Bless me!" she exclaimed, and dropped him a courtesy. "Ye've made an extraordinar' discovery."

"But," he said, suddenly seizing both her hands in his iron grip, "may my right hand forget its cunning if I forget what you have done for *them*—ay, for me!"

"The man's daft!" she cried, with a vain attempt at keeping up; but it was no use trying deception

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under the steadfast scrutiny of Geoffrey Webster's clear grey eyes.

"Weel, weel," she said, waving him aside; "think what ye like. It's a free country. But, for gudesake, keep your thochts to yoursel', an' just let the auld folk be happy thinkin' it was you. An' if the yonng minister we ha'e should happen to come up, never let on. He's but a youngster--his name's Mr. Mickledool--an' I lost my temper a'e day, an' said what I needna said. He canna help it."

"MickleDool!" echoed Geoff eagerly, and with a sudden warm light kindling in his eyes. "I came over in the "Majestic" with a young lady of that name. Her home, she said, was at Mount Classic--some few miles outside the city."

"That maun be his sister," said Mrs. McBirnie. "I've heard that auld Mickledool had but the twa--a son an' a dochter. His son is oor young assistant," she added, with a laugh so grim that Geoff looked his interrogations.

But Mrs. McBirnie turned to the washing of her dishes, and Geoff went out.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A CHANCE MEETING.

He walked thoughtfully up a couple of blocks, emerging at last into the main street traversed by the cars. The one going in the desired direction had just passed; there was nothing for it but to wait for the next. And while he stood there, a dainty form, accompanied by a young cleric, came tripping across the street, the subject of his thoughts at that very moment—Violet Mickledool—his fellow-voyager upon the Atlantic.

That she recognized him was very evident from her bright smile and the quick step with which she approached the corner where he stood.

"What a delightful surprise to meet you here, Mr. Webster!" she exclaimed, extending to him a small, immaculately gloved hand.

"Much more so to me, Miss Mickledool," he returned gallantly; "I see you are safe home, and none the worse for that rough trip we had."

"Worse! No, indeed; but much the better. It was a fine experience to have—that is," she added, smiling, "on a safe and seaworthy vessel. But allow me to introduce you to my brother. Mr. Webster, from America, Frank, the gentleman who came over with us, as I told you."

Both men bowed suavely, mentally measuring each other, while exchanging the conventional remarks on weather, etc.

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"You see," said Violet, with an arch brightness which yet conveyed significant meaning to him, "I have lost no time in taking up your challenge. I just took a couple of days' rest, thinking over all you said. You remember?"

"Yes, I remember," he answered, "but there was no need to hurry. The facts will wait. Twenty years after this they will still be there as emphatic as to-day, I'm afraid."

"Anyhow, I am here now. I wired to my brother to meet me at the station, and behold me arrived to do your behests."

"Behests!" echoed her brother, with raised eyebrows.

"Oh, no, no!" protested Geoffrey, "not behests. I merely —."

"Yes, yes. You merely said, 'Go here, go there, and judge for yourself whether my contention is just.' Was not that a behest? A very imperious one indeed—to me at least, Mr. Webster."

She dropped from her bright vivacity to such sudden gravity that he could not restrain the question—

"Why to you more than to the others of our company around the table that day?"

She hesitated, glanced at her brother, who was patting a dog that had come sniffing about his feet, and said—

"I see you do not know. If you are still in ignorance of my special interest in this question, when next I see you I shall enlighten you. By the way, I think you mentioned St. Enoch's Hotel, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I do not put up there now. Here is my address for the present—for the next fortnight at

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least," he said, pencilling Mrs. McBirnie's name and number on the reverse side of his card.

She looked at it with some surprise, evidently expecting a more well-to-do locality; but with a quiet "Thank you" she slipped it into the little morocco satchel she carried.

"We shall be pleased to see you at my brother's rooms," she said as their car came up. "Next door to the Free Church Manse, Kelvinside Terrace—you'll remember?"

"I shall remember," he said, and handed her into the car, her brother bowing him a stiff adieu.

The car moved off, and Geoffrey Webster stood looking after it with a new tumultuous gladness pulsing within him.

More than once he had wondered whether he would ever again in this world meet the bright girl who had been his fellow-passenger during those too brief days on the ocean. She had already become a beautiful memory, but now her presence had flashed on him again, a vision of delight, stirring in him a vague unrest and dissatisfaction.

Her words, too, awoke a certain compunction that made him seem a wretch in his own eyes for challenging her to test the truth of what he asserted. It had been all very well in the heat of a mixed debate, amid the luxurious environment of the saloon, to ask her to satisfy her doubts with ocular demonstration; but that she should so promptly act upon his advice was a possibility of which he had not dreamed. As he strode on he saw a long, waving line of brilliant color curving round the corner, and winding in sinuous movements toward him. At first he could not make out what the long and ever-advancing column

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of flaring color meant, but, nearing it, he saw that it was a line of sandwich men, invisible save from their knees downward, so enclosed were they by the huge boards which they pushed forward on small wheels as they walked between them. The boards were covered with great yellow, green, and blue posters, advertising "*Mickledool's Ivy Blend*" in letters of gold.

The absurdity of the flaring show at first struck him; then the name—"Mickledool!" Good heavens! That was the name of the great distiller. Immediately he remembered what Mrs. McBirnie had said about some one of that name having a son and daughter, and—yes, she did say, too, that the son was a clergyman!

"Impossible!" he said to himself; but he had received such a shock at the bare supposition of a possible relationship, that he suddenly turned on his heel and walked with a quick step back over the way he had come.

Mrs. McBirnie was busy polishing up her door-brasses when Webster came up the stairs.

"Come in a minute, will you, please?" he said. "I won't detain you long."

She gathered her cloths together in her hand, with her polishing paste, and, following him in, shut the door.

"Anything wrang, Mr. Webster?" she queried.

"I don't know yet; I have just come back all the way to see. Can you tell me anything about Mickledool, the distiller—the man who has sandwich men walking up and down the streets advertising his whisky?"

"As if there wasna mair than enough o't doin' its

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deevil work already!" snorted Mrs. McBirnie. "Oh, ay! I ken about *him* brawly. He's rich an' weel aff, an' lives in a fine country seat, wi' nae end o' servants; an' the folk he mak's his siller aff—weel, the half o' them are in the slums an' the jails an' the mad-houses, an' the tither half are qualifyin' for the same institutions. I ken that much about him."

The bitterness of her tone struck him with surprise; he had never seen her in this mood before. She seemed inspired by some personal grudge.

"Yes, I know—I know; I confess I am inclined to your way of thinking there. But it is of his family I wished to inquire."

Mrs. McBirnie raised sarcastic eyebrows.

"Oo, ye ken, Mr. Webster, ye maun tak' aff your hat to ane o' his family at least. His son is a licensed minister o' the Gospel, bless your heart!"

"It is rather an incongruity," remarked Webster. "Bnt didn't you say—or was I mistaken—that Mickledool had a daughter too? There is no likelihood of a mistake in the name? The address of the Mickledool I mean is Mount Classic—a country house, I believe."

"The very same. There's jst a'e son an' a'e dochter, an' the mither is a great woman for church work an' a' thae mission businesses, ye ken. Oo, ay! I believe she's a fine enough woman in her way, puir creature."

Geoffrey Webster took out the card Violet had given him and read it, a grim expression settling on his strong face.

"Thank you, Mrs. McBirnie," he said, "that was all I wanted to know. I must hurry up to town now."



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Once outside the door again, he gave vent to a deprecating groan.

"Well, I have put my foot in it effectually this time. What a brute she must think me! Why did I not consider that she might have relations in the trade? Oh, heavens! what did I say—rather, what did I not say? This, then, explains the special interest she had in the subject. I shall never be able to face the girl again after the way I denounced them all. The truth? Of course—certainly—it was all the truth; it admits of no exaggeration—but *she* knows nothing of it all. Oh, the unmitigated brute I have been! I, who wouldn't hurt a hair of her head—that I should have trampled rough shod over her feelings! How the poor girl must have suffered! And how she will suffer if, as she says, she will do as I suggested, visit the slums, the Police Court, the jails! I am heartily glad her brother is on hand; he will put a well-deserved spoke in my investigation wheel. He will prevent the carrying out of her unsavory research; thanks be for that crumb of Hope's comfort."

So ran his thoughts as he strode up towards the city.

Meanwhile Violet and her brother had reached his rooms at Kelvinside Terrace, and in the well-furnished apartment, looking down through the leafless trees upon the quietly drawling Kelvin, she stood, considering how best to introduce the subject of her visit to her brother—at the present moment consulting anent lunch with the landlady.

She was prepared for the most strenuous opposition—nothing else was to be expected—just such opposition as she herself would have set up six months ago had Frank come to her with such a proposition in her

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then happy state of unthinking ignorance. But the more she thought of it the harder the introduction of her intention seemed; and Frank entering then, she gave up scheming as to ways and means, and trusted to chance to win the way.

The very first words he spoke threw it wide.

"What did you mean, Violet, by saying you had come to prove the truth of that man's contention? What contention?"

Her answer in the form of a question was so irrelevant that he was dumfounded by it.

"When does the Police Court sit?" she asked, looking at her watch.

"The Police Court? Violet! What do you, of all people, want to know for?"

"I want you to take me there this morning. *Do*, Frank—there's a dear. I'm going in for a little more knowledge—more information about the way this old world rolls along—and I want to take my notes and observations at first hand."

"H'm," mused the young cleric aloud. "I suppose if you want to go I must accompany you. But I rather think you will be shocked. Rather a low phase of life exhibited there, I should say, judging from the newspaper reports."

"Yes, I am prepared for that. The overnight gleaning of 'drunks' and 'disorderlies.' Isn't that what they call them?"

"I think so; it is the shibboleth of the newspaper reporters anyway."

"Yes, and there will be the wife-beating cases, and the children with heads in bandages and all bruised, with small broken backs and wee old, old faces, such as I have seen in the streets many a time, stared at

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with the unseeing eye of a thoughtless well-to-do. Now, I propose looking at certain social phenomena with a new optic called the seeing eye—shall listen also with a hearing ear.”

Frank Mickledool regarded his sister closely as she spoke, looking down into the Kelvin the while. If her investigations proved the truth of what had been spoken more than once in his hearing—if blood-guiltiness really lay at their door—what then?

For the first time in his whole theological course, the words of Christ were thrust home to him in their true meaning—“I come not to send peace, but a sword.” Would the truth, smelted from the awful fires of reality, of living, incontrovertible facts, become the dividing sword which would cause the son to rise up against the father and the daughter against the mother? Time alone could tell, for he, too, after a few sleepless nights and thoughtful days, had decided to investigate and judge for himself—had been about to set out, indeed, when his sister’s telegraphic message to meet her had reached him.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A WATCH WITH A MANAIC.

IN one of the comfortable rooms of a city mansion the mistress of the house, weeping and wailing and wringing her hands, paced restlessly up and down the floor.

Sitting near, and looking dolorous enough, were her daughter, a bright girl of eighteen or so, and a small, quiet man, in a grey suit and blue spectacles.

"I wouldn't worry about him, Mrs. Mason," said the man in a sedate voice; "he's just winding up this bout now. Perhaps when he comes to himself this time he may be more careful. I'll give him a good talking to as soon as I see he is fit for it. He always listens to me when I speak seriously to him."

But Mrs. Mason shook her head despairingly, moaning as she rocked herself to and fro.

"I'm so afraid. He said he would do it. He has the loaded pistol on the table before him, and you know the determined will he has. Oh, this dreadful, dreadful curse!"

Her distress as she paused, with tight locked fingers and bent head, was pitiful to see.

"My poor, misguided boy!"

"Misguided! Who has misguided him but himself? Not you, mother. I am beginning to think he might do worse than blow out his miserable brains!" broke out the girl impetuously; but, in contradiction

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to the harshness of her words, she immediately hurst into wild weeping.

"I don't care," she cried, angrily dashing away the rush of tears. "Nobody liked him hetter than I did; no one defended him more when he first hegan. But he has tired me out with his low, disgusting ways. Nothing but sheer perverseness would make a man do as he does. If he wants to die—let him. I am ashamed to say he is any hrother of mine."

A loud laugh from the next room greeted this speech, and "Go it, Bess; go it!" a thick voice shouted.

"Oh, hush—sh! He must have wakened and heard you, Bessie," whispered the mother, white with alarm.

The girl herself looked startled, and dried her eyes hastily. She had not intended her hrother to hear her indignant outburst, forced from her in a moment of keenest agony and shame. The quiet man rose to his feet.

"I'll go in and see if I can do anything with him. You had hetter go upstairs to hed and leave him with me. I'll manage him."

"Be careful—oh, be careful! That pistol ——!"

"Yes, John," whispered Bessie, "he might shoot you as well as himself. You go upstairs to bed, mother; I'll stay till he's quieted down for the night. You know the sight of your troubled face exasperates him when he is like this."

Mrs. Mason, a faded heauty, in shadowy autumnal prime, gave way before the younger and more resolute spirits, and with another warning to take care, allowed herself to be led upstairs by her daughter.

John Rowan stepped out and stood on the threshold of the drawing-room, peering cautiously through the

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edge of the portiere. The sad but too familiar sight he saw was a young man of about thirty, seated before the drawing-room fire, with his legs stretched across the hearth, his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets, his head in drunken imbecility hanging forward upon his breast. A most pitiable sight, and one which John Rowan could never get accustomed to look upon without pain. For the man was handsome, with features indicating strength rather than weakness, and here the time-worn excuse of being driven to drink for lack of home comforts was out of the question. The apartment he sat in, despite its present disarrangement—its litter of papers, cigar stumps, and offensive spirituous odor—was a picture of luxury and refinement. The finest Turkey carpeted the floor; rare works of art adorned the walls; individuality and taste were apparent everywhere. The whole was an inheritance from the young man's father—a man of wealth and cultivated tastes—a man who, in addition to his great business talent, had a fine appreciation of the artistic side of life—a man, alas! whose sun had gone down at noon in a horror of great darkness, leaving his son to inherit not only his money and this luxurious home, but also the curse of alcoholic desire.

John Rowan was the late Mr. Mason's sister's son, and somehow the task of looking after and keeping straight the young inehriate seemed to fall naturally upon this grave cousin, some fifteen years his senior. But for John, Archie Mason, the young bank manager, must long since have come to grief. As things looked now, becoming less fit to occupy that position, his removal had begun to loom up as an ultimate certainty—a mere matter of time, distant as yet, but inevitable.

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Archie's outbreaks, besides being more frequent, were now more violent and dangerous. At certain stages of inebriation he seemed to become insane and irresponsible, and yet there was a clear thread of reason and remembrance running through his maddest imaginings.

By his side there stood a rare ornate table, which the late Mr. Mason had picked up somewhere—a marvel of color and workmanship—with azure glints of *lapis lazuli* inlaid here and there in its mosaic top. This table Archie had cleared of its hric-a-hrac at one swoop of his arm, scattering the precious *debris* on the carpet, and drawing it in toward him, had covered it with several half-smoked cigars, a half-empty hottle of liquor, a glass and a loaded pistol.

This latter he was staring at, apostrophizing it occasionally.

“ Oh, yesh! Takes Besh to shpeak up. Can't do better than hlow out his miserable hrains, eh? 'Shamed to call me brother now, is she? Well—who hlames her? I don't. She's devilish fine girl is Besh, hut when I put that little hole in my head—she'll cry and hreak her heart. Yesh, she will, poor Besh! Guv'nor went in the D.T.'s. I sha'nt wait for the D.T.'s. I'll have another swig, and then —.”

“ Are you at leisure, Archie? May I come in?” said John Rowan in an easy tone, as his head appeared inside the portiere.

“ Shertainly, come in. I want something t' say 'fore I end this business.”

John, assuming a hlythe air, stepped within the curtains.

“ Ah! Got cigars, I see. Give me one, will you?” Archie rose—or rather tried to rise—in order to

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reach down a cigar-case from the mantel-shelf, but the moment he assumed the perpendicular he swung over and fell heavily upon the hearth.

In an instant John Rowan pounced upon the pistol and dexterously hid it behind a lounge. The act was unobserved by the befuddled man, but the weapon was the first thing his eye sought when, by John's aid, he was reseated.

"Where—where is my pistol?" he demanded, with a dazed look at the table.

"Pistol, Archie? I see no pistol. What do you want with a pistol, anyway?"

"I want my pistol, I tell you," he cried, staggering to his feet again, his anger steadying him somewhat.

"I have no pistol. Sit down, Archie. I thought you wanted to talk to me."

"So I do; but I want my pistol first. I'm going to put an end to all this sort of thing. I'm not going to live and be a thing for people to point their fingers at, and I can't be anything else. I've tried and tried, and it's all no use."

"Come, come, Archie!" said John Rowan, with sudden sternness. "I can't have you talking nonsense like this, frightening your mother and Bessie out of their wits. It's a shame, and you know better. Come, and let me help you upstairs to bed." He put an arm around Archie, but the angry man shook him off and stood up; wonderfully straight.

"You think I'm drunk? It's *you* that's drunk. I'm going to die this night, drunk or sober, do you hear?"

"I hear," answered John, folding his arms quietly over his chest.



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"I'm going to blow my brains out," insisted Archie.

"No yon won't," said John calmly.

"I will!" thundered the maniac, making a lunge at his mentor, but clutching instead a curtain which draped an easel.

Easel, picture and curtain were swept to the floor with a crash, and an angry light burned in the eyes of the foiled man. Bessie's face, pale and frightened appeared at the portiere, and John's jaw set squarely.

"Now, look here, Archie; consider Bessie and your mother. This is cowardly—unmanly. I never did think you could be a coward."

At the word the madman grew still for a moment, as if thinking out what it all meant. Then he laughed—burst into wild, hideous laughter.

"A coward am I? I will show you whether I am a coward or not. What time is it?" he asked, with an appearance of sudden sobering up.

"Half-past eight."

"Then I shall be in time," said Archie, staggering into the hall and fumbling at the hat rack.

"Where are you going, Archie? Look here —," began John in a coaxing tone; but with an impetuous back stroke of his arm the furious man threw his cousin with violence against the wall, and while Bessie, with a shriek, ran toward John, he wrenched open the door, and, banging it behind him, staggered down the wide steps into the night.

"John—oh, John! Has he killed yon?"

"Not quite," John answered smiling, but holding his head; "I never saw him so bad as he is to-night."

"Father just went the same way—before—before the end, mother says," whispered Bessie, shivering.

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John picked up his spectacles, which had been dashed off, and, adjusting them, took his overcoat from the rack.

"I must after him as fast as I can," hurrying into the coat.

"If you go, I go too, John. He is your cousin, but he is my brother, and—and—he is mad—mad! That isn't our Archie that used to be."

"Better stay with your mother, Bessie. You can do no good."

"I cannot stay; I must go after him too, John. I must!—I *must!*"

John Rowan knew Bessie of old; the strong Mason will was in her, as in her brother. He resolved to let her go with him so far at least, and they went out together.

The night was dark and murky; the street lamps shed a yellow and sickly light. Which way to turn they knew not.

"He asked me what time it was, and said he would be in time. I wonder if he thought of catching the 8.50 train," murmured John, as if thinking aloud.

"Let us take the car to the station," eagerly suggested Bessie.

To please her, he hailed a car, thinking he would be as likely to find him on the platform as anywhere, and in a few minutes they entered the station. Here John accosted a friend whom he met.

"Did you observe my cousin, Archie Mason, on the platform here to-night—a little while ago. We have missed him somehow."

"He *was* here not a minute ago, but ——" The speaker paused and looked significantly into John's eyes.



BESSIE MASON.



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John nodded comprehension, and passed on to where Bessie stood looking around.

"He *has* been here, it seems," he said, trying to speak unconcernedly. "Let us take a walk up and down. Perhaps we may foregather with him."

"And what if we do, John?"

"I shall go wherever he goes," answered John promptly.

But Archie did not appear. If he had come to that platform he must have gone away again, for he certainly was not there now.

"Where can we go, John? What's the use? Who can tell what was in his head? Have you no notion at all what he could mean by asking you the time?"

"No, unless he meant the train—and he isn't here."

"Perhaps he may have changed his mind—or—perhaps if he thought of going anywhere, he ——. Yes, let us go home; he may be there before us."

Home they came; but Archie had not returned. Mrs. Mason came slipping downstairs in her dressing-gown to make inquiries.

"He has gone out, and will probably be in all right in half-an-hour or so. I got the pistol away from him, so keep your mind easy about *that* Auntie."

"Oh, thank God! What we would do without you, John, I dare not think."

Mrs. Mason went upstairs to bed, and her nephew and Bessie sat up to wait for Archie.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### ON HIS WORD OF HONOR.

John Rowan had taken up a book, and to outward appearance was calmly reading. In reality he was covertly watching Bessie glancing at her through his spectacles under pretence of turning over a leaf. She was making no attempt at hiding her anxiety, but sat in the great easy-chair before the dying fire, now with her chin in her palm, frowning moodily; now fidgeting about, uttering impatient sighs.

"How is all this to end?" she at last broke forth. "I cannot stand it much longer; it is killing both mamma and me. How *can* he behave so?"

"That is not so much the question as why can't he do better. Honestly, Bessie, I do not think he can. I question how far he is responsible."

"Fudge! I have no patience with you, Cousin John. When he knows his weakness lies that way, why doesn't he try to overcome it? Goodness knows, he can be stubborn enough when he likes. Why doesn't he set himself stubbornly against his appetite for drink? Think of the disgrace, the misery closing in upon us, as if we hadn't had enough of it!"

John closed his book, and, throwing one leg over the other, laid his hands on his knee, and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"It is nothing more than hundreds—ay, and thousands—are enduring every day in this city from the same cause," he said after a pause.

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"Why, then, it is a shame, and shouldn't be allowed."

"What shouldn't be allowed?"

"People shouldn't be allowed to drink so much."

"It certainly is responsible for no end of misery."

"Misery? I should say so—and death as well. Oh!"

"I cannot understand you, Bessie," said John gravely. "You detest drink and all the misery it brings, and yet you are prepared to live an easy and luxurious life on the wealth derived from that very misery. I cannot understand that sort of thing."

Bessie's face crimsoned slowly.

"You are referring to my engagement to Frank Mickledool? *He* wouldn't taste the horrid stuff. Not he! He knows better."

"Why?" demanded John Rowan, turning his blue lenses full upon her.

Bessie did not answer, but lapsed into silence. John, resuming his book, sighed softly. "If Frank could only be content to live on his stipend." They sat thus until the great bell boomed the hour of midnight, when both started and looked inquiringly at each other. In the stillness they heard the sound of voices and a fumbling at the front door. To their surprise, it opened, and presently Archie walked in. His eyes glimmered with the sudden change from darkness into light, but he looked sober. Bessie started to her feet and swept past him, the picture of outraged patience and long-suffering.

"Come away, Archie. I must be going, now you have come in," said John, rising.

Archie laid two heavy hands on his cousin's shoulders and bore him into the chair again.

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

"Sit down. Stay here all night with me. I want you, John."

John looked at him in surprise; he had sobered so much since he had gone out some hours ago, this was a new experience altogether. He made no remark, however, except a murmur about being expected at home.

Archie responded with a grim laugh.

"No, they won't expect you, John. They know I am in for a spree just now. They don't expect it to be over so soon as this, eh?"

"Is it over, Archie?"

"It is—over for ever. I have drunk my last glass."

John Rowan felt very uncomfortable. There was a ring of firmness, of resolution, of certainty in his cousin's voice that startled him. Great heavens! was the suicidal mania also inherited—that now, when the alcoholic insanity had left him and he was clear-headed, the determination to end his life still remained, strong as ever? What could he do to dissuade him? Must the black family tragedy be again repeated, making life a horror, a memory of wasted talents, of power misused—a long, dismal frustration?

"I see you don't believe me," said Archie, a faint haziness still apparent in his look.

"I wish I could," replied John, with a sigh.

"Well, you'll see. This is the last night of it, John Rowan, whether you believe it or not."

John was too dejected to answer. This determination in semi-sobriety was worse than vain boasting in drink. *Then* he was insane, irresponsible; now, although not quite clear of the dizzying fumes, he



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could see that he was quite sane—quite aware of what he was saying.

“ Archie!” he burst out in a heart-breaking tone, “ have you no love, no consideration for any one of us? Your sister has this moment left the room, speechless at the disgrace you are bringing upon her and your mother. We heard a woman’s voice outside when you came to the door.”

“ Well?” whispered Archie, leaning forward in an attitude of challenge.

“ Oh, come now, Archie! ——.”

John Rowan finished by turning away from him with a gesture of contempt.

Archie raised himself up slowly, his blue eyes clearing and his face set.

“ Look here; were you not John Rowan, I should not answer you. But, since you are my cousin and John Rowan to boot, I take the trouble to tell you that you have made an awful mistake, you and Bess. I made a resolve to-night—I, who never resolve on principle—and if my resolution is fixed as the eternal hills, then it is because of that woman whom you heard speaking.”

“ Archie! Archie! Spare us this fresh trial! My God! you are young yet; all life is before you, if you will only make an effort—one more strong effort—to break off this enslaving habit. What do you want to die for?”

“ Die!” shouted Archie, “ who talks of dying? Am I not telling you with all my might that I am going to *live*? To *live*, I say—not exist like a brute beast, but live a man’s life—the life I used to live before this drink demon got me into its clutches.”

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As he spoke he beat his breast and clutched at it, as in illustration of the sensation he felt.

John's blue spectacles stared at him immovably. John's lips parted in sheer astonishment.

"Don't you believe me?" asked Archie.

"I give it up," answered John; "either you are mad or I am. I wish I could believe you."

Worn out, he leant back with a weary sigh, but Archie bent over to him, every feature softened in a smile.

"You are a good fellow, John. No one else would have done as you have, but it is over now—believe me. There," he said, extending his hand, "did you ever know of me breaking my word solemnly given? No? Then shake. On my word of honor, I drink no more."

"But —," began John, when, with quick perception of his meaning, Archie interposed.

"But, all the same, I shall live, you know. Keep your mind easy, old fellow, and don't worry about that any more. I'm going to live; believe that. Good-night; I'm going to bed. Won't you come?"

## CHAPTER XV.

### OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD.

NOTWITHSTANDING Archie's solemn assurance, John Rowan, during the still, small hours that followed, slept, as the phrase goes, with one eye open. It was no surprise to him, therefore, when, as the town clock rang out six, he heard his cousin get up stealthily, dress, and slip away downstairs. In another minute he followed in the semi-undress in which he had apprehensively slept all night.

The drawing-room gas was already lit, and under the gasalier stood Archie, with arms folded across his breast, grimly surveying the scene of last night's debauch.

"Why! how you scare a fellow getting up at this unearthly hour," grumbled John behind him.

"I thought you were asleep," Archie responded, looking around.

"Asleep! Humph!" and John shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"I wanted to see how things looked last night," Archie explained further. "I also wished to give the servant some orders about this room."

He pulled the bell, and the housemaid, frightened almost out of her wits at this early summons, appeared at the door.

"Did you ring, sir?" she asked, reassured by the presence of John Rowan.

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"Yes. I wish to leave this room exactly as it is. Don't touch or move a single article in it."

"Yes, sir," said the maid, but her eyes wandered with a troubled look to the little table with the liquor and cigar ends upon it.

He noticed her hesitation and smiled.

"Not a single thing, Jennie," he reiterated with quiet emphasis. "You are neither to sweep, nor dust, nor enter this room at all until I give you leave to do so. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"You can show any visitors into the breakfast-room or into the library."

"Very well, sir."

"And here is something for frightening you to death about it," he concluded, slipping a half-sovereign into the trembling woman's hand. She thanked him and vanished, to report to her companion in the kitchen the master's newest departure.

"Now, is not that a delectable sight, John?" he said, folding his arms and surveying the scene. "I shall have a row with Bess and my mother about having things left in this condition, but I am going to have it so all the same. I only wish you had photographed me in the midst of it all—a maudlin beast. Faugh! that smell of stale tobacco; it sickens one!" And here his eye fell upon the fragments of hric-a-hrac which he had swept down on the carpet the previous night. He stopped and picked them up. "Good heavens! how was this broken?"

John Rowan shook his head and murmured that it was a pity. It was a rare vase which the late Mr. Mason had brought from St. Petersburg, where he had purchased it at enormous cost from an old Jew.

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

"Yes, it was a great pity," repeated John.

Archie understood, and set his lips more firmly.

"Perhaps the pieces could be put together—cemented, you know, like old china," suggested John, mildly.

"Perhaps, John; very likely. But we will leave them there for the present—with everything else."

"Let us go upstairs," John pleaded; "I am not half slept."

Archie reached out, screwed out the gas, and they went upstairs to the bedroom again. Inside, Archie locked the door and sat down on the front of the bed and looked over at John, who had rolled an eider-down quilt about him on the sofa.

"I know I shall have a devil of a time, John; but I am going to be a free man, cost what it will."

While he spoke he began to tremble and shake, and finally laid hold of the bedpost as with a grasp of iron.

"Run down to those wenches in the kitchen, John, and get me a cup of coffee, hot and strong; and, for any sake, be quick about it. I loathe it, but I shall drink it."

John—patient John—obeyed, and soon appeared with a great breakfast cup of steaming hot coffee, having neither sugar or milk in it. Archie met him at the door and seized it greedily.

It was hot enough to bring the water to his eyes, but he drank it to the dregs and lay down upon the bed.

"That has fixed me up," he said, with a blunt laugh. "I shall go to the doctor this afternoon and see what he can do for me."

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"I have no doubt but he can do a great deal, so long as you have the nerve to follow his prescription."

"I shall do it. Do you know where I went last night when I left here?"

"I do not. Bessie and I went out after you, took a car, and went on the platform, but could see nothing of you."

"Bessie! You allowed Bessie to come?"

"I could not detain her; she would go. You had been speaking pretty wildly, Archie. Of course, you didn't know what you were saying, but it sounded alarming to her and your mother."

"What a brute—what a monster I have been! But I meant it all, John. I was as determined to die last night as I am now determined to live and conquer this appetite. And I *will* conquer it."

John looked at his cousin with new interest, and then, dropping his words slowly and with conviction, he said—

"I verily—believe—you—*will*, Archie."

"Thanks, old fellow; but first let me tell you what befell last night. I walked straight to the station through the platform, watched my chance in the darkness, jumped down upon the rails, and walked along to meet the train. The cool night air cleared my head a little; I sobered considerably. But the more sober I grew, the stronger grew my determination to put an end to my worthless life. The sooner the better, I said to myself, before I get my dismissal at the bank, and those dependent on me are left disgraced. I have tried more than anyone can ever know to resist this demoniac craving, and every attempt has only deepened my despair. It was close upon train time, and I waited for that engine to wipe me out of exist-

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ence. But the train was late; I felt myself growing  
-ll and sleepy, and I decided to walk up the track  
and lie down upon the rails. If I slept, so much the  
better. I walked up a few rods and lay down, but  
sleep I could not—it was so raw and chilly. I waited  
a long time, but still the train delayed; and at length,  
in a sort of stupefied curiosity to see how late it  
really was, I sat up, lit a match, and looked at my  
watch. It was half-past nine. Then, like a lightning  
flash, I remembered that I had promised to send a  
thousand pounds from his account to a man—one of  
our customers—that night to meet a pressing con-  
tingency—some family affair, involving some trouble  
to be kept secret. I cannot betray confidence, you  
know. And now to rush back and get it off in time  
was my first thought. I hurried back into the city,  
called a hansom and drove like mad, called up the  
caretaker, explained to the watchman, and, entering,  
opened the safe and secured the amount. Then I  
drove out to his place in the suburb with the money.  
The man thanked me, with tears rolling down his  
cheeks. The demand had come on him suddenly,  
to-morrow would be too late; and, feeling I had not  
lived that one night in vain, I concluded to come home  
once more, settle up some other business I remembered  
to have neglected, and then—I went into a hotel and  
drank some brandy, and turned homewards—not  
sober exactly, but pretty clear, considering. I turned  
up a quiet street, and there I saw a woman walking  
sharply before me. As I passed her I lurched un-  
steadily, and, unintentionally, almost knocked her  
over. Instead of protesting, she started, gave a little  
cry, and then came up to and looked at me closely.  
'Mr. Mason! Is it possible?' she said; and do you

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know, John, in my hazy state the voice seemed not unfamiliar. 'Come, take hold of my arm, and I will see you safe home.' "

"Oh, ho!" laughed John, "and what did you say?"

"Oh, I suppose I was drunk enough to laugh aloud, for she said, 'Hush! if I am to see you home, you must behave like the gentleman you are!'"

"Well, upon my word," exclaimed John, "she was quite proper in her way, eh?"

"Proper! I should say she was. Talked like a Dutch uncle; asked me if I did not find these Bacchanalian pleasures like apples of Sodom; said the good in me must up and overcome the evil."

"Hear, hear! I tell you that!" murmured John, in sarcastic approval.

"We talked all the way up to the door; and, believe it or not, I felt myself growing more sober every moment."

"'Who are you?' I asked, and tried to get a glimpse of her face, but she waved me off."

"'Don't forget you are a gentleman,' she said; 'behave like one, and I will tell you *what* I am. I am a woman, and therefore entitled to your protection and respect. Hitherto you have believed in the power of evil over good. Instead, you will begin from this hour to prove the power of good over evil. You are not drunk now; you will not drink after this night; the good in you will be too strong for the evil. Can you believe that?' I tell you, John, her voice went thrilling through and through me. 'I believe anything you say,' I cried, with an impulse I could not resist.



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“ ‘Then believe in yourself—in the *good* in yourself—in the power of that good to overcome.’

“ ‘With an impulse I could not resist I cried—

“ ‘I will; so help me, God!’ And I felt as sober at that moment as I am now, and quite as much in earnest.

“ ‘Of course, you will; certainly you will,’ she said. ‘Good-night and good-bye.’ And off she went, John, straight from the door here, and I could not have gone after her if I had tried. My head had grown quite clear. I know this is a good woman, whoever she is. Did I look drunk when I came in?’

“ ‘N—no; you certainly knew what you were saying and doing,’ admitted John, dubiously.

“ ‘Well, then, I’m going to prove the truth of what that woman says. I shall liberate myself from this infernal, slavish habit. I shall prove that good is stronger than evil. Why, I never thought of it in that light. It is preposterous, the idea of a man with a man’s soul in him lying prone and helpless before *any* accursed appetite, a perfect bond-slave!’

“ ‘That’s so,’ said John, drily; ‘but why you want the drawing-room to lie like a pig-pen I don’t understand. It seems to me that a little consideration for the feelings of others would be a desirable manifestation of this good with which you propose to overcome evil. Eh?’

“ ‘H’m—m! perhaps you are right, John. I feel myself getting frightfully humble. You are right, however; I see that. I shall ring and countermand that order about the drawing-room. My mother and Bessie ought to be considered first.’

“ ‘Well, rather,’ grunted John.

“ ‘But—I don’t want you to think it was only a fit

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of grumpiness, John. I wanted to fortify myself with the sight of that room whenever I began to feel weak-kneed again. I wanted to see myself as others see me in my cups—a beastly lunatic. I thought it would strengthen me. You understand? But, there—is not that itself an admission of the ~~power~~ of evil—a concession to weakness at the expense of others? No; let the good stand on its own legs.” Here he rang the bell, and Jennie shortly after tapped at the door.

“I have changed my mind about the drawing-room. Have it all tidy as usual before your mistress comes down.”

“Very well, sir,” answered the servant, in no way astonished. She had long since ceased to be astonished at anything Mr. Archie could do or say.

“Well, I think I shall have a sleep, with your permission, Archie. I have a balance-sheet to make out to-day, and a little oblivion won’t hurt between this and ten o’clock,” remarked John.

“Do, John. I am a selfish brute not to think of you. Go to sleep. I am going downstairs to pick up the fragments of that vase before Jennie sweeps them into the dust pan.”

A grunt from the eider-down quilt was the only response.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE EAVESDROPPER.

Mrs. McBirnie's one lodger having been transferred from the Glasgow to the London office of the Company who employed him, her east room, as it was called, was consequently vacant. According to her custom, she hung out her modest sign of "Apartments to Let" under the window; and on the afternoon of that day a man of a quiet, clerkly appearance, and with good references, took the room for a month. Mrs. McBirnie took a vague dislike to the man, but, seeing he paid for his room in advance, took his meals at a restaurant, and was away a good deal of the time, she quashed the inner instinct of distrust and let him stay the month. If the man was black, his siller was white—and she might err in her likes and dislikes.

Geoffrey Wehster had been up in London all the week, and, having successfully completed the business which brought him across the water, had returned to Glasgow again, to the great joy of the old people.

The new lodger was about to ring the bell for entrance next day when the door was thrown wide, and Geoffrey's tall form stepped out. He looked at the man, and inquired his business there.

"Well, I lodge here," answered the man, scrutinizing Geoffrey with more than ordinary interest.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Geoffrey, and made way for him to enter.

"I met your son going out, Mrs. McBirnie," said

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the new lodger suavely, entering the clean and cozy kitchen.

For an instant Mrs. McBirnie's ruddy countenance went white, but, recovering herself, she said with her most dignified air—

“ You're mistaken; that is Mr. Webster—a gentleman and a very respected friend o' mine.”

“ Oh, I thought him a son of yours. Fine-looking fellow.”

“ He is that—an', what's mair, he's weel-maintained, an' would no more think o' walkin' into my kitchen, an' him a stranger, as you've done, than he would think o' fleein' in the air.”

“ Oh, I meant no offence, I assure you, and I beg your pardon.”

“ That's granted; but keep to your ain room after this. Ye're a stranger to me, an' I allow no familiarity whatever frae my lodgers.”

The man slunk out of the kitchen, and while Mrs. McBirnie pressed her hand on her heart to still it's wild fluttering, he turned into his room, and so soon as he had shut the door behind him he smote his thigh in triumph.

“ It's the same! I've gained that much, anyway.”

Before he sat down, however, he set the door just off the latch—not quite ajar, but as if it had accidentally slipped in closing. Then he drew his chair up to the corner of the table next the door, and sat there. The afternoon was cold, and he would have been more comfortable near the brightly burning fire, but evidently he considered that too far from the chink he had left at the door.

He had not moved once when Geoffrey returned, about an hour afterward, just at the darkening.

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"Oh, you're here, Mrs. McBirnie," the listener heard Geoffrey say in his hearty voice. "Come in to the parlor a minute, will you. I want to have a confab before I see father and mother."

The listener rose softly and pressed his forefinger on the door to give it the appearance of being closely shnt and latched, waiting so until they entered the parlor and closed the door behind them. Then he let go, slipped off his shoes, and, widening the door gradually, stepped soft-footed across the hall, and, standing on the woolly mat, applied his ear to the panel of the door.

There was no need; he could have heard Geoffrey's hearty speech without any such effort.

His voice was full and clear, and he was evidently a man of business.

"You see," he was saying, "I calculated on having another two or three weeks to spend with the old folks, but this letter by the afternoon's mail has upset all my plans. The Canadian Government has granted our Company—which, I needn't say, is an English one—the charter they have been waiting for to run several hundred miles of railway through the wilds of Manitoba, and they write for me to be on deck at the earliest possible date. It's a big disappointment that I can't stay here a while longer; but business is inexorable."

"Ay, that's true. I'm real sorry ye maun leave the auld folk sae sune, but ye maun just try an' come back as fast as ye can again."

"That I will, you may depend. And now, Mrs. McBirnie, I want you to do me a favor. I was out Ayrshire way the other day, and in a little town there

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I saw a pretty cottage, which I thought I might induce you to take for yourself and my old folks. I will guarantee all expense, and if you like the place I will make you a present of it. It is called Ivydale Cottage, and——. Bless me! Mrs. McBirnie, are you ill?"

"Ay—no—it's naething—it'll wear awa'. Just a kind o' a sick dwam comes ower me noo an' then. I'm better noo. But, Mr. Wehster, I thank ye kindly; but I think I wad rather bide whaur I am. I like the toon, an' I'm used to the flats, an' I've my lodgers, ye see."

"But, dear Mrs. McBirnie, what I want you to do is to keep, if you will, my father and mother, and don't bother about any lodgers. There is no use beating about the hush. It was you who rescued the poor old creatures in their darkest hour of need. Not another word, now—I am going to have my own way in this. I have just been to the hank and placed two hundred pounds to your credit, and now I am, figuratively speaking, on my hended knees to you, asking you to give up your room-letting, and let them be all one family with you. Mind you, no financial arrangement could, to my mind, ever discharge my debt to you; hnt if there is anything you would like me to do—anything whatever wherein I can serve you—just say so, and if it is in the power of man to do it, it shall be done."

The man's voice thrilled with the earnestness of his feeling. He ceased suddenly, and for a long time there was silence. Then, in a voice that the listener outside could scarcely recognize, Mrs. McBirnie spoke brokenly—

"You're a gude man, Geoffrey Webster—a gude

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an' loyal man. I believe ye would serve me if ye could; but my trouble—my ain inner trouble—is no ain that human hands can lift."

"I wish I could lift it for you, whatever it is, Mrs. McBirnie," said Geoffrey with a gentleness that touched her so that she spoke again.

"Oh, if I could only tell ye—if I could only tell *somebody* my trouble for aince, it would relieve me. But I daurna—I daurna. I maun e'en dree my sair an' ill-deserved weird."

The eavesdropper heard a movement as of a chair being shifted, then Geoffrey's voice again.

"Confide in me, Mrs. McBirnie; I will not fail or disappoint such a faithful friend as you have been to mine."

Again there was silence, broken by a sudden, irrepressible wail, a burst of wild weeping, and quiet, sobbing subsidence. Then Mrs. McBirnie's voice again—

"Yes, I'll trust ye, Geoffrey Webster; I'll tell ye my heart-break—a' about it."

And, little dreaming that a less sympathetic ear than Geoffrey's was strained to catch every word she uttered, Mrs. McBirnie laid bare her heart wounds that bled incessantly—told of the tears shed only in secret.

"Dear friend, dear friend!" murmured Webster, "if I could only express the sympathy I feel! But I cannot. I can only say this—that if ever—what did you say the name was?"

The listener pressed his ear hard to the chink at the edge of the door, but he could not catch the name. What he did hear, however, was "Sifton, Manitoba."

"I'll remember that easily enough; that's just

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where I'm going to spend this spring," said Geoffrey heartily. "I only hope I may get the opportunity to show my gratitude. If I don't, it won't be for lack of looking it up. And, now, you think you can continue the adoption of the old folks under the new arrangement? It would leave me such an easy mind to know they are always safe and well with you."

"Gang your wa's," she responded, more in her usual blythe tone, "gang your wa's; I'll keep them, an' I'll keep the siller as weel—never fear. It'll sair to thack oor last wee hooses for us onyway, without comin' on the parish."

"And, Mrs. McBirnie, *do* take some rest. Get a stout girl to do your work—."

"A girl!" she said, with smiling contempt; "I wouldna' see a girl in my road. Feckless, handless creatur's the half o' them—gude for naething but gabhin' to the polis at the corners. Na, na; I can do my ain turn yet. But the auld folk'll be wearyin'."

Two swift noiseless strides landed the listener once more within his own room, and when the door came out from their confab the door opposite was shut, and the occupant whistling a tune inside.

And once more, as he heard them talking to the old people in cheerful tones across the hall, he brought down his hand with a hilarious slap upon his thigh.

"By gum! I thought it would take weeks to ferret out the infernal thing, and here—it has dropped into my mouth like an over-ripe pear. If I don't chevy Cathcart about this—if I don't make him fork out for this precious piece of information—call me by some other name than Sam Snyder."

So elated was he with his own cleverness that he



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slipped on his coat and went out, running up the street to catch the uptown car.

He alighted before a tall building, rented for offices, and, springing lightly upstairs, walked along a dusty corridor to No. 9, a door which showed the words "Detective Chambers" on a brass plate. This he opened, and, walking straight in with well-accustomed step, threw wide another door marked "Private." Seeing the room empty, he growled—

"Hello! Where's Cathcart?"

An office boy, sitting behind a desk doing nothing, said Mr. Cathcart had gone to London; wouldn't be back till to-morrow noon.

"The deuce! Then I shall leave a note for him. See that he gets it first thing when he comes in."

Mr. Snyderley thereupon seated himself before the desk in the private room, and wrote the following remarkable epistle:—

"DEAR CATHCART,—Mad as a hatter. Came down to report—found bird flown—'nuff make saint swear—item—same identical hairpin—close as wax—no getting near her—gave me the G. B. out of her kitchen—result of identical mention—white paper not in it—plucky, though—but the clue was there. Lucky star ascendant—door closed on confidential relations—tympanum of yours truly glued to door panel—identity placed beyond dispute—Sifton, Manitoba—whew—not for Joseph—temperature 46 below zero last reports—oh, no, no—not for Joseph, if he knows it—nor yet in summer—temperature 120 in the shade—ground exhaling alkali—horæ flies—bulldog flies—befogged in mosquitoes—bad water—walking typhoid—no, thanks, Cathcart, my boy—as I remarked previously, not for Joseph—meantime have filled the

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bill—herewith present invoice—requesting ten pounds plank on nail—*vide* agreement. Olive oil—no Manitoba for me—have to go yourself and fetch coveted article *in propria personae*—send cheque *not negotiable*—address care of Mrs. McBirnie, 53 Chestnut Street, City. S. SNYDLEY.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE YOUNG MINISTER'S THIRD VISIT.

ABOUT three weeks after Geoffrey Webster had sailed, the Rev. Mr. Mickledool called once more upon Mrs. McBirnie. The two old people were in the front parlor, where a bright fire blazed, when he was shown in. To tell the truth, he scarcely recognized them as the poor, broken-down, sorrow-stricken couple he had caught a passing glimpse of last time he had called. Wattie Maurlin was attired in a soft grey tweed suit, was clean shaven, his white hair a fine frame for his hale and benevolent countenance. A pair of new gold spectacles rested on his high nose, and enabled him to enjoy his newspaper, as he seemed to be doing now. His wife, dressed in fine black cashmere trimmed with silk, with a becoming lace cap on her head, was also adorned with gold spectacles, by the aid of which she was knitting a pair of socks for Geoffrey.

From a friend the young man had heard all about the return of their adopted son and his provision for them, and he shook hands warmly with both.

Mrs. McBirnie was quietly civil, inquiring for his health and that of the old minister.

He replied that he himself was well, though somewhat tired from late hours and extra outside work he had been engaged in since he last saw her.

"The fact is, Mrs. McBirnie, I have come to say good-bye to you."

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"Good-bye! Ye'll hae gotten a call, then?" she said.

"Yes, a call—and I have come to thank you."

She looked at him in perplexed wonder.

"Me! Ye've made some mistake, I'm thinkin'. I canna understand this."

He smiled, enjoying her perplexity for a moment.

"Do you believe that as you sow so shall ye reap?" he inquired.

"I used to believe that, but experience has taught me to swallow that, like mony ither things, wi' a lick o' saut. I ken I sawed gude seed wi' muckle care, an' what hae I reaped? Dule and wae—only dule an' wae—bitter an' ill-deserved."

"But we cannot see the end from the beginning, the glimpses we get of God's purposes are of necessity so fragmentary—only He can see the whole. And perhaps when we are called to our account—."

She made one of her sudden characteristic gestures with her hand, interrupting him, while her dark eyes flashed ominously.

"When I come to my last account afore the Judgment Seat, I'll stand up an' mak' no apologies whatever. I've dune what was just an' richt accordin' to my lights, an' if the whup has come doon on the wrang shouthers it's no me is to blame, but them that —. Oh!" she cried, checking herself, "never mind me, Mr. Mickledool; but ye fairly fickle me aboot your call."

He smiled again, but as she regarded him she noted how much paler and older he looked. He had fallen away in flesh, too; the ruddy, lingering boyishness had vanished, giving place to something more strong—more resolute.

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"Well," he said, with firm gravity, "last time I was here—the last time, indeed—you broke soil and sowed seeds of thought, and I find there are other scourges than improvidence. To-day I am here an outcast from my father's house—forbidden ever to enter it again on penalty of being expelled by force. The fortune I should in the ordinary course of events have inherited is transferred elsewhere. I—I have obeyed Christ—taken up my cross—and intend to follow him at all hazards. Harder perhaps than all, I shall probably lose the young lady to whom I have been engaged for years—when she knows of my resolution. This is partly the result of all you said to me at my last visit, Mrs. McBirnie, and I thank you now with heartfelt sincerity for speaking as you did. I feel I can preach the Gospel now without self-reproach."

Mrs. McBirnie was fairly broken down.

"Ye maun forgi'e me if I hurt your feelings," she said, with genuine contrition. "I should ha'e minded it wasna your fau't; though, aside frae that, I canna see hoo I can tak' back what I said o' the truth."

The old people, with innate delicacy, discerned that this was a private matter, and slipped from the room, excusing themselves.

"I hope you will not think of such a thing, Mrs. McBirnie," resumed the young man; "the truth needs no amending. I thought over all you said, and set myself to investigate and study this terrible question. Like you, I feel I am on the rock of right at last. Facts have convinced me that drink is the curse of this land; that it is responsible for more destitution, misery, and crime than any other cause whatever; and"—here he paused a moment—"con-

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sequently the manufacture of such a curse for the money in it—the reaping of wealth by its continued production—is a crime against our fellow-men.”

“Ha’e ye really come to that?” murmured the agitated woman, in meek awe of the young man’s earnestness.

“I have. More; I have resolved to spend my life in combating the sophistries which try to persuade men that this instrument of devastation is a ‘good creature of God,’ forsooth!”

“A ‘good creature of God,’ Mr. Mickledool! Praise be to the Almichty that ye’ve come to see it as it is at the outset o’ your career. When I think o’ what’s in the power o’ the ministers o’ this country, when by a strong, honest, combined endeavor they could sweep this fell scourge oot o’ the land, just as Christ Himsel’ scourged the money-changers oot o’ the Temple; when I think o’ a’ that might be done that they dinna do, or only do in a half-hearted way, I—weel—I despair. An’ what’s waur, I canna bnt doot their sincerity in devotin’ themselves to the work o’ savin’ men’s souls when they sing dumb ower sic a wholesale destroyer o’ souls.”

“Mrs. McBirnie,” he said, “it is evident you have been a sufferer.”

“Have I no, then?”

She rose and closed the door carefully, and then with all the confidence of a friend she told her story as she had told it to Geoffrey Webster. Deeply touched, he laid his hand in hers in token of sympathy, his face expressing it in every line.

“I’m confidin’ in ye, so ye can judge whether the hardest I can say is hard enough,” she exclaimed. “Judge you, an’ see, as the Scripture says, ‘if there

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*be any sorrow like until my sorrow.*' But I ken my secret is safe wi' you. Are ye leavin' the ministry?"

"No; I think I can do more effective work against the common enemy in the Church than out of it. I shall combat the love of money, which is really at the root of this legalized evil, and I intend to speak the truth as I know it, if I preach the pews empty."

"Nae fears o' that," laughed Mrs. McBirnie; "there's naething folk enjoy like a gude tongue-threshin' frae the poopit. The harder ye bring the whup doon on their sins the mair folk will rin to see and hear their neebors threshed—aye, even though the tail o' the whup should come stingin' athort their ain lugs. Nae fears o' empty pews; you speak the truth an' tak' the risk."

"That's just what I am doing," he said, rising; "so good-hye. I know there is *one* at least of our present congregation whose prayers and sympathies are with me wherever I go."

"Ane? Dizzens!—scores!—hunders! Dinna be like Elijah, thinkin' you're the only prophet on the Lord's side. No, hut ye'll find hunders that have never yet bowed the knee to this Baal—no, nor passed their children through the fire to the Moloch o' modern greed. Nae fears o' ye preachin' to empty pews!"

So these two very different heings understood each other at last.

As he stepped into the street again, thinking of all she had told him, it struck him painfully that she was but one of thousands who cover up the inner tragedy of their lives from the cruel scrutiny of the world, shielding dear offenders from open shame, only the caustic cynicism of their speech betraying the fact

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of a hidden grave in the heart. And it seemed to him then that all the festering social sores which had been laid bare to him during the investigations of himself and his sister—the awful death-in-life existences, the miseries, the infamies of wanton cruelty, the nameless crimes perpetrated, the horrors too foul to be recorded in the public prints—were as nothing to the great aggregate of hidden, scarce suspected domestic misery amongst respectable, well-to-do families. And with a pang he realized that the greater the area of blighted humanity, the greater the gains to the producers and the distributors of the curse.

God! why had he never seen all this in its true light before?

If his resolution had ever failed him, if ever he had been tempted to repent the sacrifice he had made, he was strengthened and steeled to it now. It would be the heaviest end of the cross he had taken up to find that the renunciation of his father's fortune meant the loss of Bessie Mason; but even for that he was prepared—more resolute than ever, indeed—to purge himself from even the appearance of profiting by humanity's loss.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### AN INRUSH OF NEW IDEAS.

FIVE o'clock had struck when John Rowan, making his way through the Gallowgate, suddenly stopped short and stared straight before him, an incarnation of astonishment.

"Bessie! what on earth are you up to now?" he exclaimed, as his cousin, attired in a black dress, plain black jacket, and rather shabby turban hat, approached him.

For answer she slipped her arm into his, and, turning back, they presently found themselves in a more respectable quarter of the city.

"Let us go to the Athenæum," she said; "I want a cup of tea—and I want to talk to you, John."

John knew her moods, and divined by the look of her eyes that beneath all this there was something troubling her.

They were served in a little private compartment, well apart from the others, and could talk freely. They drank a cup of tea before she spoke.

"Do you remember what you said to me long ago—that night when Archie—oh, *you know?* I complained of the misery we had to endure, and you said it was no more than hundreds and thousands of other women had to endure day after day and night after night?"

"Did I say that, Bessie?" said John, ruefully; "if I did, it was brutal of me at such a time. But truth

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is generally brutal, and, cousin mine, that really is a fact."

"Well, that set me a-thinking, and I've been thinking ever since about these things, more or less. You always were my confessor, John. I have been wandering about the slums of this city these ten days. I have gone into these public-houses, where men and women go in sane and come out maniacs, and in every one of them I saw bottles labelled and big chromos hung up on the walls with 'The Mickledool Ivy Blend' written in large gold letters. And I have seen—oh! what have I *not* seen day after day? It haunts me, John—the degraded men, the unsexed women; the poor, *poor* little children, naked, dirty, starving, unnaturally old! John Rowan, before I would eat one solitary meal purchased with the profits of the Mickledool Blend I would take my violin and go round the streets playing for a living. It would be clean and honest and blameless at least."

"That's so; clean and honest," echoed John.

"And now for my conditions. If Frank will give up all interest in this horrid business, then I shall marry him—not otherwise."

"He'll not consider you very honorable, I am afraid," murmured John, doubtfully.

"I cannot help that. Mother will be vexed, I know; but when I became engaged to Frank I was not aware of the enormity of this thing—no, not even although my own father lost his life by it, and though it all but ruined Archie. We are so used to take everything for granted in this world, especially where the law of the land makes the infamous respectable."

John Rowan smiled, much amused, but he merely remarked—

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"Won't it be rather hard on you, though? When two people are fond of each other——"

"Yes, it will be hard—very hard. But, John," she said, leaning forward and whispering, "don't you think you see me—ME—the Mickledool Ivy Blend written all over me—on my dress, my fur-lined cloak, my gloves, my hat trimmed with it, my purse full of it? Can you imagine it, John? I should be afraid to look behind lest I should see a long train of ghosts of starved and deformed children shaking gaunt arms at me, pointing to my dress, and shrieking how many human souls it cost. I should feel as if I myself were a bottle of the Mickledool Ivy Blend in petticoats."

"One thing is clear to me, Bessie—you could never be happy thinking as you do now," said John, gravely.

"If Frank thinks me worth sacrifice—well, I shall adore him; if he doesn't—and, of course, he won't—there's an end of it."

Subsequently John escorted her home, and left her at the door, wondering how self-willed Bessie would end it all.

Frank Mickledool had nerved himself, as he thought, strongly for the interview which was to determine his fate so far as Bessie was concerned. Yet so soon as he stood in her presence and faced the possibility of losing her altogether he began to realize with sickening pain the weight of the cross he had taken up.

It was not so much her beauty as a certain wholesome loveliness that won on him, as it did on others, but to-day there seemed to be an added charm—something akin to anxiety that looked from her eyes, while her lips spoke with their usual candor.

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"You see, Frank," she said, sitting down opposite him, "I have been wanting to see you so much. And, then, I heard that Violet was in town, and living with *you*, of all people, as if our hospitality had been denied her. I did not know what to think. So at last I wrote you this note, and was just going out with it when you came in."

She handed him the note, and his breath shortened as he read:—

"I wish to speak to you respecting the continuation of our engagement——."

Immediately he flashed to the conclusion that she must have heard of his change of views, of his renunciation—and his determination.

His face paled and took on a sternness new to her, and, crushing up the note in his fist, he looked into her troubled eyes with equal trouble.

"Well! I am here now; speak out, Bessie. I have been bracing up for this. I think I understand."

The response was not what she expected. The expression of his face, the pain in his eyes—so new and unusual—smote her with compunction.

She sat down, and suddenly hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, Frank! I cannot—I cannot, if you are going to look at me like that!"

A little sob escaped her as she lifted a grieved face to him.

"It isn't that I don't love you just the same as ever; it's—it's because I have been thinking of things—Cousin John has been saying things—and, oh! I love you dear—I do—but I cannot marry you!"

The young man looked at her, and his hands clenched till the knuckles stood out white.

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"Then, this is because of the fortune I was to inherit?" he asked, drily.

"Just that and nothing else, Frank. Please, don't think it is anything—any change in my feelings towards you yourself. It is just the money. I did not think of it until Cousin John spoke to me one night—oh! one awful night!—when Archie—you know what I mean?"

He nodded, and she went on—

"Well, I have thought over it till I'm sick, and I see no way out of it but to break off our engagement. But, please—oh, please—don't condemn me. I have tried to reconcile myself to the thought of it; I have looked at it from all points, and I cannot risk it. I'm afraid I should be miserable."

He cleared his throat with some difficulty ere he spoke—

"You have saved me some trouble, Bessie. I half expected this, but hardly so promptly. I cannot see, however, that you can be blamed. You have all your life been accustomed to this luxurious home."

"Home! Yes, but it takes more than means and luxury to make home. Can I forget my father—and the horror of it all? And then, there's Archie—though at last he seems to have made a stand. The humblest cottage in the land is happier than this same luxurious home."

He did not answer at once. He was wondering how he could make her understand that it was because of these things he had renounced all, and braced himself to the loss even of her. Evidently argument would be useless, since she had already decided to give him up, not because of anything in himself, but the prospective lack of money. A keen

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sense of disappointment struck him. He had not been aware of the strength of his unspoken hope until she had extinguished it, even before he could put in a plea for himself. The cloud on his face deepened till her heart was wrung within her.

"If you could only see this as I see it," she pleaded pitifully; "but that is impossible."

"Oh, no; by no means, Bessie. I quite understand. It is not to be expected that, having engaged yourself to a prospectively rich man, you should be content to share his comparative poverty. For I shall at least have a decent living when I get a church."

She pushed back the curls from her white brow and looked at him uncomprehendingly, while he went on, trying to be manly—to be gentle—notwithstanding his pain.

"I think I shall go abroad. It will be better for us all round. In the meantime there is nothing more to be said but—good-bye."

She threw herself upon the couch, and buried her face in the cushions.

"Oh, it is hard—so hard! If you only knew, Frank! Oh, if you only knew!"

He took her hand and pressed it to his lips. It was hard—harder than he had dreamed it could be—but, young as he was, he was not one to put his hand to the plough and look back. He had loved her with quiet satisfaction for these three years, but not until now had he known the strength of his love. The sting of disappointment was keen. He had never once suspected her of being mercenary; even now he would not entertain such a thought. It must be from sheer dread of unaccustomed poverty that she shrank back from her engagement. Certainly she had come short

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of the nobility he had dreamed of; nevertheless, he felt he could never think of another woman.

"Good-bye, Bessie. I do not blame you, and—I shall always love you."

Sobbing among the pillows, she did not hear him pass from the room until the door closed, when, starting up with an agonized cry, she called after him.

He turned—hesitated—and came back.

"I thought it was better to go," he apologized.

"Nothing more can be said."

"Nothing more, Frank? Has it not occurred to you that there is one thing that you can do to show your love for me?"

He was pale as ashes now, but he answered without hesitation—

"Yes, I know. But don't you, of all people, tempt me to do it."

"It seems to me that, if our engagement is to continue, I, of all people, have most interest in your action."

There was a ring in her voice that sounded very like contempt, and he was just in the mood to note it.

"Yes, I do. But do you think that love—the love that is to last us all our days—demands that a man should stifle his conscience, sin against the light he has earnestly prayed for, make him contemptible in his own eyes, in order that he may live more luxuriously than his fellows?"

She stared at him as though feeling that one of them must be demented. What was he saying? Her hand rose to her temples as if to still the confusion of her thoughts; a little wrinkle appeared in her

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brow; her eyes seemed to appeal for explanation of his words.

"Bessie," he pleaded in a tone there was no mistaking, so thrilled was it with intense feeling, "I beseech you to consider what it is you ask me to do, in the name of the love that has been so sweet to us. It means—Shall I or shall I not follow the multitude to do evil? Shall I serve God or Mammon? I have renounced for conscience sake a fortune which would have secured to us a life of ease, but I have saved my soul alive. Surely you do not ask me to give it up to moral death? A month ago I was sinless in this matter, simply because I did not see things as I see them now—as I shall continue to see them so long as life lasts or memory endures—."

His hands were suddenly caught in Bessie's strong, impulsive grip.

"Frank! Frank! What is this you are telling me?"

He smiled grimly.

"What evidently you already know—that from henceforth I have only what I can earn—my salary from the Church."

"That is—Frank!" she cried ecstatically, "does it mean that you have really—that Saul also is among the prophets? Oh, it is too good to be true! And all this time I have been trying to give you up—because—because I could not—marry you with the burden of that money on my soul."

"What! Bessie!" he cried, incredulously. "Then it is not the loss of the money, but its possession you objected to? Oh, my darling! my darling! How could I mistake you so? God is good. This is compensation to the full already."



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It was indeed. They felt it so, as for one long, blissful moment they stood clasped together, heart to heart, two young, earnest souls, who, in following the light, had found each other not wanting in the qualities which go to make the nobler type of men and women.

Naturally a long explanation followed.

Frank related how his anger and annoyance at several rather outspoken denunciations of his father's business had first irritated, then rankled, then developed into hideous doubts—doubts strengthened by daily occurrences reported in the papers—without comment, and certainly without sentiment. Not that he had been ignorant of all those things before. Did not the files of the press for half a century back contain the long, dreary record of the Harvest of Moloch? But that he and his should, all those years of worldly comfort and freedom from care, have derived their income from such a base source, such an idea had never once entered his mind. But now that it had germinated and sprung up there, the incongruity of his position as a preacher of the Gospel became so clear as to seem intolerable. While in this state of mental upheaval his sister had returned from a visit to her aunt, from whom she had imbibed the same disturbing ideas. Being of a more practical turn of mind, she had insisted on a personal and private investigation. For days they had attended the Police Court sittings, interviewed Magistrates, visited in the slums, and looked upon the awful vision of death-in-life till sickened with horror and despair.

"The only thing that disturbs me is the thought of Violet. As you may imagine, it was harder for her than for me; but if I was firm, she was still more

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so. She is about to enter a school for training nurses for work among the poor."

"Violet! How strange! There seems to have been a movement all along the line at one and the same time. I feel sorry for your mother; she really must feel your desertion terribly."

"I am sure she does. But surely it is better we should leave home in the performance of duty than in a sadder and more disastrous way—as poor McClure's family went, for instance—fine fellows, all of them—straight to ruin. Of course, I am already out in the world, and the fact of Violet adopting nursing as a profession will be looked upon merely as a young lady's whim—a 'fad.' No one will ever suspect the real motive."

"Is Violet still at your rooms?"

"She will be there till next week."

"Then I am going up now, if you will take me. She must come and stay with me the rest of the time—at least, until she enters the school."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE DIVIDING SWORD.

AS FRANK had said, it was harder for his sister than for him to break away from the beautiful home they had been reared in so happily. But what Violet had seen and heard had been burned and branded into her soul so mercilessly that there was no choice left her. To continue to live amid luxury and refinement derived from this terrible unending human holocaust had become an impossibility.

"Mother, dear," she pleaded, "do you not see—can you not understand—how horribly un-Christian such a business is—how wicked it is for any one to profit by drunkenness? Surely, surely, if no drunkard shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, still less shall they whose wealth comes from producing that which not only debars men from the Kingdom of Heaven, but turns God's fair earth into a veritable hell for thousands. The degradation, the staring, hideous misery I have seen in Glasgow streets from this cause alone is simply appalling. It is a blot on our boasted civilization, on our advanced municipal Socialism—a cruel, deliberate sin against humanity. I cannot have lot or part in it one day longer."

Mrs. Micklethorp's long, lean figure sat bolt upright in her chair. Her features were rigid, but her hands worked restlessly in her lap as she in her astonishment took in the words of her daughter.

"This is the result of your visit to Aunt Betty,"

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she said in a cold, clear voice. "I had a strong presentiment that she would inoculate you with her narrow ideas, but I hardly expected you would go so far as she did. The death of her intended upset her mind, but you have no such excuse. You forget that it is to God alone that each man stands or falls. 'Temperance in all things' was Paul's motto, but the intemperance of language by those so-called temperance people is simply deplorable. No one asks people to drink; they drink of their own free will, and it is the wretched improvidence of the poor that causes all their misery. They have no business to drink whisky—they cannot afford it; and when they make maniacs of themselves, and kill their wives, and brawl, and use such shocking profanity, you turn upon the distillers and publicans and blame *them!* My dear Violet, you have gone, as you tell me, and witnessed these scenes in the city, and you seem to think it is the sale of the liquor in the cities your father and others are depending on. It is a great mistake, my dear—a great mistake. If Glasgow or Edinburgh didn't buy a drop, the distilleries would still be kept busy with orders from abroad. India, Africa, Australia, Canada—all the colonies, in fact, are supplied. The trade is simply immense, and increasing yearly."

"Yes, mother—God forgive us!—it is. It is more deadly to the black man than even to the white. It is no longer the Bible and the sword, but the Bible and the bottle we send to civilize the savage races. The Indian and the African are alike consumed by it. It is the curse of the black man as well as of the white. Mother! mother! I wash my hands of it! I *cannot* be a party to such a gigantic agent of human misery!

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I shall earn my own living from this day forth, and the 'clean, honest money' Aunt Betty left me I shall spend in feeding and clothing those whom this business of ours has made homeless."

"I must call your father," said Mrs. Mickledeool, rising in great agitation; "you must be mad. Earn your living, indeed! How, pray? This is our return for all the love and care, for all the expense of your education. Ingrate!"

Violet laid hold of her mother's arm.

"You needn't call father; he knows, and just laughs at me. He is quite willing I should go and learn nursing."

"Nursing!" gasped the astounded mother, who suddenly calmed down. "Well, at least that would bring no scandal. It is quite fashionable for young ladies, I believe."

"At least, give me your good wishes, mother."

"That goes without asking, Violet. Were it not so annoying, your fulminations would be simply amusing. You will soon tire of earning your own living, as you call it. I give you three months ere you come back, a sadder and wiser girl."

And Mrs. Mickledeool bent and kissed her recalcitrant daughter, feeling she could afford to laugh at the girlish whim. As Dr. Macsawder remarked in last Sunday's sermon, the age was an age of unrest; people were no longer content to walk in the old paths; the cry was for something new. And here, surely, was the newest of new things—his crusade against a good creature of God. For herself, she had a clear conscience; she had never habituated herself nor her children to its use; she had even warned her son from his earliest years against tampering with

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the glass, knowing that that way madness lay, and ruin and death!

When the two girls met, it was with a rush into each other's arms.

"I see it is all right, Bessie, dear," said Violet. "I felt sure you would stand by Frank. Oh, I am so glad."

"Oh, well, indeed, we didn't understand each other at all at first. You see, I had taken the same stand as you before he came, and each was expecting the other to give the cold shoulder, when, behold! it all came out. And he told me you mean to be a nurse, Violet."

"And what is your opinion of my new move?"

"Good gracious! can you ask? Only, Vi, dear, do you think you will be able to stand the work?"

"I intend to try, anyway. I feel I ought to do something to alleviate the suffering which hitherto I have been profiting by. Oh!" she shuddered, "if you had seen what Frank and I have seen!"

"Bessie, we are not Christians at all to allow such a state of things to exist. It is bad enough for those who are blameless comparatively to keep dumb or only to make a fitful protest now and then; but to think that we, calling ourselves followers of the Saviour of Men, should actually live and grow rich by providing temptation and the means of destruction to thousands! I loathe myself when I think of it. Be thankful, Bessie, dear, that you have been a sufferer only—not one who has contributed to it and fattened on it."

Bessie smiled ruefully.

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"It's bad enough to be a sufferer, I assure you, Vi; but somehow I have an idea that brighter days are coming. John Rowan told me a remarkable thing. He says that Archie has sworn off, and he is certain that this time he will reform for good. John tells me that the strange circumstances happened to bring him to this resolution. Cousin John, you know, is the family guide, philosopher, and friend, and we tell each other everything. Do you know, Vi, that my brother had actually gone out to put an end to himself, feeling it was better to die than to live on, sinking lower and lower. He had honestly tried, time and again, to break off, but at regular intervals, after a spell of complete sobriety, there he was again—helpless in the grasp of the fiend. Well, something happened to prevent his making away with himself that night—I'll tell you more fully some other time—and he came home half-sobered. Here now is where the strange incident comes in—though, do you know, I'm inclined to think it is some delusion he labors under. For, mind you, he still persists in believing it, and, as I say to John, why, let him believe it when the effect is so satisfactory."

"But hurry and tell me what the mystery is," interposed Violet with unwonted eagerness.

"Well, John says that a woman spoke to Archie that night—fancy!—a stranger—though he thought the voice familiar—and it seems she walked up to our very door, and all the time talked to him about this terrible habit, and said he should not allow good to be overcome of evil, and all that. I think, Violet, she must have been some of these mission women, or Bible women, or Salvation Army people, who speak in that way to anyone, you know."

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Violet's fair face flushed crimson, and a short, uneasy laugh escaped her.

"Can you keep a secret, Bessie?"

"I hope so, if I am requested to do so."

"It was I."

"Violet! You?"

Bessie stared at her dumbly, overcome with astonishment.

"Yes; let me explain. It was Wednesday, Frank's prayer-meeting night, and, since I dared not go alone down in the dark places we were visiting, he put me under the protection of a policeman. I had just parted from him on my way home, feeling perfectly safe in the more respectable part of the city, especially towards the Kelvin, when a man, walking along with an occasional swerve, sufficient to show he was intoxicated, staggered against me as I passed. 'Another victim,' I said to myself mentally, when under the lamp I saw it was Archie! And, oh, Bessie! I don't know what inspired me with the courage to speak to him, but I did. In a moment I saw that he did not recognize me in the dark old dress I wore, and—well, I said all that came in my heart to say. I reasoned with him, warned him, pleaded as for my own life. I couldn't have done it in cold blood, but the condition just strung me up to such a tension that I said what I could never, I am sure, say again."

Bessie took a long breath.

"Well, well, well! What would my brother say if he knew it was you who so pulled him up?"

"But he must not know—he must never know. Think of the humiliation he would feel at being seen in that condition."

"Keep your mind easy. I shan't tell him—or



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anyone, Violet. I am only too glad to see that whatever you said seems to have had a very beneficial effect. Pray God it may last. Sometimes a word straight from the heart goes to the heart, when ordinary advice or reproof would be resented. When do you enter on your duties?"

"Day after to-morrow. Bnt, oh, Bessie, how delightful it is that Frank and you have come to an understanding! It will be some compensation to him for father's anger. Father is dreadfully angry, but it is because he doesn't see the wrong. That's the awful thing about doing anything there is a doubt about—you go on doing and doing till a sort of paralysis of the moral faculties sets in, and there is no getting back to clear vision—the evil is always so smooth-spoken and propped up by such suave sophisms. Father just laughed me out of the house, but he is furiously angry with Frank. It is simply inability to see things as they are. I verily believe father thinks he is doing right."

"I have no doubt whatever about that. Still, I think if it were not the money that is in the business the right or wrong of it would be seen more clearly. Not that it in any one case absolves the victim from blame—he is responsible for his actions; but whereas the one is tempted, the other is in the position of the tempter, and the lower the tempted falls the more the tempter gains—in cash and all that cash can command."

"Yes, Bessie, that is where it stings me. Bnt now let us talk no more about it. Why, here comes Frank!"

The happy lover entered, radiant and smiling, holding a letter in his hand.

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"A letter for you, Violet," he said; "I met the carrier at the door coming in, and brought it up."

Violet glanced at the envelope, and saw it was from New York.

"Well," she said, "now you have come in, Frank, I shall leave you to entertain Bessie while I go upstairs and read my letter."

The letter was in a strange hand, and she tore open the envelope with a half hope stirring her pulses. It began—

"Dear Miss Mickledool," but that giving no clue, she turned to the end of the fourth page, and then saw, in firm, strong characters, the name—

"Geoffrey Webster."

A long sigh escaped her as she turned to read. So he had written after all! He had not behaved ungentlemanly, as she had supposed. He had not ignored her existence after being invited to call at her brother's rooms. What had he to say?

"It was a great disappointment to me not to be able to see you before my enforced departure from Glasgow. I went up to Loudon on business after meeting you in the street with your brother, and on the day of my return found a letter from the Company urging my immediate presence in Canada. Hurried as I was, however, I found time to call at your address in Kelvindale Terrace, but, to my great disappointment, found you had, with your brother, gone out for the evening, and were not expected in until a late hour. As my train left at 9.30, there was nothing for it but to leave my card, on which I pencilled a word or two.

"And now I would like to say here what I came to say then—that I owe you an apology for the too

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strong way in which I expressed my antagonism to certain kinds of business. Had I known then what I discovered subsequently—that you were specially interested in one of those establishments which I so sweepingly condemned—I never so far should have forgotten good manners as to have spoken my convictions in your presence. I trust you will forgive my unintentional rudeness, and believe that I would rather have kept silence as to these convictions than wounded your feelings, as I must have done. I assure you, I shall never forgive myself; and if my words have caused you any unpleasantness, pray forget them, or remember them only as words which, though true, were spoken in undue heat, and in ignorance of the interest you had in the subject. Wishing you all the best that life has to offer,—I am, with kindest remembrances, yours sincerely,

“GEOFFREY WEBSTER.”

So he had called after all! A glow of satisfaction lit up her face. He was all the manly man she had supposed him to be. But why had that card not been delivered to her?

The pleasure she felt made her realize what a keen disappointment his supposed lack of polite attention had really been. But that card?

She ran downstairs and inquired of the landlady whether anyone had called on one of those evenings when she was out with her brother.

The landlady paused to think. Ah!—yes—now she recalled that time, she was almost sure a gentleman *did* call. Yes—now she remembered—a tall gentleman, bronzed complexion and kind of foreign-looking. Yes, he called just after they had gone out—and—let her see—didn't he leave a card? Why, yes!

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How stupid of her to forget! Here it lay among that pile of cards and things on the cabinet—yes, sure enough—a card with something pencilled on it.

Violet controlled her resentment at the woman's carelessness, and, taking the card from her hand, read underneath the name the words—“*Sorry to miss you. Leave to-night. Will write and explain.*”

## BOOK II.

### CHAPTER I.

#### MANTOBA.

A FAR, low line of hills undulating like a bank of cloud against a limpid opal horizon, a vast stretch of wild prairie rolling up toward it like a sea. Above, the cloudless, beautiful blue, illumined by the effulgence of a newly-risen sun; below, far as vision extends, the white pearly glimmer of heavy dews on rugged reaches of low scrub, on infrequent green copses, on the billowy miles of grass and flowers that lend soft coloring to the plain. And over all a sweet, odorous silence, broken by the distant howl of a retreating coyote, or the nearer and more pleasant "cluck, cluck" of the prairie chicken admonishing her young.

In the midst of this limitless, sunlit land, not far from a green copse of graceful birches, were squatted a group of rude wooden sheds, "shacks" as they were called; one large enough to furnish dining space for a couple of hundred men, the others varying from a good-sized sentry-box to those large enough to house a family.

Around these "shacks" the smoke rose lazily from the "smudges," fires built of mosses and rotten wood, which smouldered all night long, but did not blaze, the object being to fill the air with smoke, the only protection from the mosquitoes, whose faint, keen

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"ping!" sounded everywhere beyond its reach. To protect the horses and secure rest to them from these tormentors during the hours of sleep, they were coralled within a circle of those "smudges," now mere heaps of hoary ashes in the glare of the morning sun.

Suddenly the harsh metallic reverberations of a gong, beaten by no unwilling hand, filled the air with a pandemonium of sound, the shack doors were thrown wide, and half-attired men, of all nations and tongues, tumbled out for their morning ablutions in the tin wash-basins, set in a row upon the bench running along the back of the shack.

Presently a man from one of the lesser shacks stepped out and looked around him with the only eye he possessed. He was attired, like the others, in his trousers only, and as he folded his arms across his chest he showed a set of muscles and a torso which would have delighted a sculptor. He was sunburned in face and hands, with firmly-set features and a sharp mouth and chin beneath a dark moustache. The loss of his right eye gave a peculiarly lifeless appearance to one profile, but the alertness, the force and energy in the other, lit up as it was with an eye like that of an eagle, had sufficient life for both. With that solitary but powerful eye he now scanned the long brown cutting.

"Mike," he called to a man who was busily attaching his suspenders to his trousers by the aid of a piece of wire drawn through a hole in the band, "you'll have to take your squad and raise the track where it's sunk from that last rain. Raise it and lay a new switch at the curve yonder."

"Ahl right," answered Mike, thrusting his red

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head into the tail of a jersey, while his arms waved and rotated above his head in his efforts to locate himself comfortably within it.

"Ahl right, Boss," he repeated when at last his head emerged from the top end, with his locks in fiery disorder. "Soon as iver I get mesilf outside av a beefsteak an' fried potatoes, with a cup o' coffee to wash it down, I'll be afther goin'."

The "Boss," however, did not hear him. His eye was fixed on a figure moving unsteadily up the cutting, evidently making for the camp.

For a few seconds he watched the moving thing with interest; then, uttering a short laugh, he turned and craned his head towards the open door.

"Look here, McBirnie," he said, and presently the timekeeper, a tall, fair, young man of about thirty or so, stepped out. His face, naturally open and candid, wore an expression of gravity and thoughtfulness that distinguished him from every other man in the camp, and his rare smiles only emphasized it. His eyes were deep blue, and scanned every new-comer to the camp with keen scrutiny. The one-eyed "Boss" of the track-laying gang, Joe Wark, got along very well indeed with the timekeeper, the two having come down together from Crow's Nest Pass to run this line through, as they had done others in British Columbia.

When they had arrived they found the road draughted and laid out by the engineer, "G. W.," as the track "Boss" familiarly called him, and they were now in daily expectation of his return to inspect the long miles they had already laid.

Joe pointed the timekeeper to the figure swaying to and fro along the long red cutting. McBirnie

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glanced over the dew-pearled expanse, and saw it was a man.

"That must have been one of the fellows who lost the train at Dauphin last night," he remarked. "Seems top-heavy, doesn't he?"

"Rather!" snorted Joe, contemptuously. "Now, I go on a tear myself once in a while, but I've no use for a feller who can't be on deck and ready for work at 7 A.M., no matter how full he may be the night before."

"It's not every man can do that, though," said McBirnie, with one of his rare smiles. "You know you are one in a thousand."

"Maybe," responded Joe, with a shrug of his broad bare shoulders; "bnt all I say is, he'll better get here slick, and sober up before G. W. happens along. If G. W. smells liquor on him he may just take his tie-pass and get right back to Dauphin. G. W. is a corker on them kind o' hoodlums."

While he strode inside to wash himself McBirnie watched the erratic progress of the man staggering up the line.

"He's down!" he exclaimed, as the figure disappeared. "Good thing you're going down there this morning."

With hands dripping, and face and neck well lathered with soap, Joe came out again and glanced down the cutting.

"The darned jackass! Full as a tick at this hour! Well, I've been full as often as any man, but I'll be darned if I'd make such a sooblime panorama of myself at six o'clock in the morning."

"The black flies and mosquitoes will have him eaten up, I'm afraid. Send some of your fellows down with



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the hand-car, won't you, Joe? Hustle them up, old fellow."

"All right, McBirnie; keep your warm Scotch heart easy, you old woman, you."

As the timekeeper feared, by the time the gang got down the black flies and mosquitoes had swarmed in myriads upon the prostrate man. They rose in a dense buzzing cloud from the body as the track men lifted him up.

"At this hour o' the mornin'!" snorted Joe, flipping the buzzing insects, and noting at the same time that the stranger was a dark-a-vised man, with a healed scar on one cheek, half-hidden by abundant black whiskers. His moustache and beard were one, the former completely hiding his month. For the rest he was fairly comely, so far as straight features went; the eyes were closed and sunken.

"Put him on the hand-car, Mike, and let a couple of your gang bowl him up to the camp. McBirnie can see to him till he sobers up."

"Faith, then, a soberer day than he has now the poor devil will never be after seein'. Sorra a taste has he widin the four walls av his stomach. It's the fayver he's down wid, God help him."

"Go away, Mike; what are ye givin' us?" retorted Joe. Nevertheless he drew near and took the man's wrist in his fingers.

"By thunderation! I believe you're right, Mike. I thought the blame fool was tight."

"Tight enough, Lord save us all! Here, give me a lift into the hand-car wid him."

Joe himself bent his broad back, and with his aid the stranger was laid upon the car and bowled up the length of line already finished to the camp.

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"Here's a poor devil down wid the fayver, Mистер McBirnie," said Mike, as the timekeeper left his books to meet them at the door.

"The fever!" he gasped. "Why, we thought he was full."

"Nary a full. The Boss said you were to see till 'im. Where are ye goin' to be afther layin' him?"

"Take him into my shack and put him into my bunk. Better strip those dirty togs off him first. I'll get you a clean night-shirt of my own you can slip him into."

The men soon did the undressing and redressing, McBirnie instructing one of them to fold the clothes and put them into a box under the table, which he shut and locked until the stranger should need them again.

When they had stretched him comfortably upon the bed and departed, the timekeeper stepped out and entered the small shack close by, where a telegraph instrument was temporarily in use.

"Hello! Wire to Dauphin. Tell Dr. Gunther to come up immediately and bring medicines. Man down with fever," he said, and returned to his shack.

The face of the unconscious man, deathly pale as it was, looked travel-stained—the fine alkali dust of the soil sticking to his brow and cheeks. Moved with pity, McBirnie took a towel, and, dipping a corner of it in water, gently sponged off the dust. The coolness seemed to revive the man; he opened his eyes languidly, immediately closing them again. But even that momentary glimpse of the eyes made the timekeeper start and look at the man more critically. A strange, suspicious look darkened the fair, sad face

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of the young Scotchman. He sank down upon the bench, muttering—

“Impossible! He was florid and clean-shaven; inclined to be stout, too. This man is gaunt and hairy, and too old-looking. Still, the resemblance is strong—very strong.”

For a few minutes longer he sat musing over the face of the unconscious man, then he rose and stooped to lift the box into which the clothes had been folded to a more convenient space in the limited shack.

As he did so, his eye fell on a folded paper which had evidently dropped from the man's pocket. Picking it up, he started in surprise to see his own name in a strange hand written upon it.

“How has this come here?” he murmured aloud; but as he unfolded it and his eye took in the contents, a red flush rose to his forehead, a sudden rush of blood to the brain, then passed, leaving him pale as ashes. It was a grim—a very grim—smile that lit up his face as he looked from the paper to the man in the bunk.

“I have often heard and read of ‘the irony of fate’—this certainly is a practical experience of it,” he said, aloud.

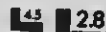
Then he folded up the paper, lapsed into silence, and with his arms crossed over his chest stood holding stern communion with himself. At last his lips moved, and slowly, one by one, the words fell from him in a low murmur—

“‘If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.’ Yes,” he groaned, “but who is sufficient for these things? All the same,” he added,



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pulling himself together with tense vigor, "I shall have a try at it—so here goes."

He unlocked the box, shook out the man's coat, slipped the paper into the breast pocket, and returned the garment, carefully folded, to the box, which he again locked and put away.

"Now we shall await developments," he said, standing up with set lips, but a new light in his eyes.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE ARRIVAL OF G. W., ENGINEER AND INSPECTOR.

ABOUT mid-day, the doctor, in a cool light suit and wide straw hat, arrived at the camp.

"Is it here you have him?" he said, entering the timekeeper's shack. "I met Wark, and he told me the poor chap was picked up off the track. Do you know who he is? Don't look much like a navvy, does he? Hands too soft for that."

So murmured the doctor as he took out his clinical thermometer and slipped it under the arm of his patient.

The doctor had plenty to do in that region of marsh water and typhoid. Danphin was too newly settled to have a pure water supply, or even preventive sanitation as yet, the result being that his splendid strength and Herculean physique were tried to the uttermost. He was a man who could be relied on to come to people in extremity at any hour of the night or day. He had been known to ride 40 miles through muskegs—soft, soggy, expanses of treacherous green bog, where his horse sank flank deep; across rivers through which it swam bravely; through miles and miles of "gumbo," a reddish clayey soil, which derived its name from its gummy, sticky qualities; looking when he reached his destination more mud than man. Dr. Gnnther, a Canadian of good old North of Ireland stock, had become to the dwellers in it far

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northwest land a synonym for reliability, skill, and general worth.

"H'm—pretty hadly knocked up—temperature hundred and five," he remarked, withdrawing the register and returning it to its case. "I suppose we'd better have him sent to the hospital?"

"No," said McBirnie, with such decision that the doctor looked at him in surprise.

"Can't very well keep him here, can you?"

"I'll see to him. You leave the medicines and instructions, doctor. I'll obey you to the letter," said McBirnie. "I—I think he's a Scotchman."

The doctor laughed aloud.

"Clannish lot! Well, if you think you can manage to give him a chance for life, I don't mind. The hospital is pretty hadly crowded just now. All the countryside down with typhoid. I didn't get home till two this morning, and your message came at half-past six. All the rest of the camp in good trim?"

"Yes—all right, so far."

"Well, then, I must be off. Just do as I said—this every two hours—that every four hours. Milk only for food. I see you have got him sponged off and laid quite snug already. Don't forget to boil your drinking water—though the well you have is good and deep—better than we have at Danphin. He'll not give you much trouble for a couple of weeks. I'll ride over to-morrow and have a look at him."

He slapped a mosquito that was settling on his hand, and strode out, leaving a sense of sudden emptiness in the shack.

McBirnie slipped a spoonful of medicine between the lips of the unconscious man, covered him deftly with a mosquito net, darkened the window to make it



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cool, and went about his work, which included superintending the giving out of stores, keeping the men's time, and other duties.

When Joe Wark returned with his gang at six o'clock he found the shack most deliciously cool after a day's work under an almost tropical sun. McBirnie had improvised an awning of boards which he kept cool by dashing a pail of water on it occasionally; and as the sun had now veered round, casting the shadow of the big shack upon the lesser, the result was an appreciable decrease in the temperature of the little apartment.

"Whew! I tell ye what—you're fixed up here, aren't ye? What does Dr. Gnnther say about him?"

"Typhoid," answered McBirnie, "the hospital is crowded, so we'll have to keep him here."

"You will, eh? But where are you going to bunk?"

"Well, Joe—I was wondering if you would care to bunk in the telegraph shack with the operator, so I can have your bed," said McBirnie somewhat anxiously. "You see he'll need some watching in the night time, and it would never do for you not to get your sleep. You have to work too hard all day to stand broken rest at night."

Joe turned his eagle eye on the timekeeper.

"And how about yourself, Mack?"

"Oh, well!—yon know I'm not kept so hard at it as you fellows—so if you don't mind——."

"Oh, I'll go to the other shack all right. But—holy smoke! Won't you have a sweet time! One of the horses dropped to-day, and they've buried him out yonder in the open. If the coyotes scent him

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there'll be a grand shiverree to-night, and don't you forget it."

McBirnie looked at the darkened wall where his rifle hung.

"I'll have a shot at them," he said quietly.

As he spoke, a black and white collie dog, shamefaced, and with his tail drooped, slunk into the "shack."

Both men sprang back, and held their noses.

"Geehosophat! Thunderation! He's been huntin' a skunk," shouted Joe—his eye eloquent of supreme disgust; also of alarm, lest the beast should touch him.

He had good cause. The poor dog himself seemed cowed with the disgrace of the vile smell of his contact with the skunk. It took some coaxing to get him out of the shack, but at last out he came, an incarnation of humblest apology, looking thoroughly wretched. No sooner had he turned the corner, however, than he uttered a succession of loud joyous barks, leaping and gamboling frantically.

"Bet you that's G. W.," exclaimed Joe, glancing with his keen optic round the gable.

"Yes it is, by gum! That's G. W.'s dog. Left him behind when he was up surveying the line, so they tell me."

A moan from the patient in the bunk brought the timekeeper to his side.

His lips set hard as he looked down on the sunken face, now turned toward the door.

McBirnie took a tin can with a lid on it, and striding away over toward the outsheds, found a youth milking a fine cow.

"I want some milk for my sick man, Charlie."

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With hands swollen and red from mosquito bites the lad tipped the pail and filled the can with the warm white froth, remarking as he did so, "You'll have to lower it down the well to keep cool and sweet all night."

When he came back to the shack carrying the milk Joe was there, showing the sick man to the engineer, and relating the circumstances of his arrival.

"Oh, here's Mack," he exclaimed, as the time-keeper entered and set down the pail on a bench.

"Mr. Wehster," he continued, "this is our time-keeper—came over with me from Crow's Nest Pass. Make your best bow, McBirnie—you'll find there's no flies on the Inspector more than on yourself."

Joe's facetious ending to this off-hand introduction was lost on Geoffrey Wehster.

"McBirnie," he echoed with sudden interest. "I know a person in Glasgow of that name—a much valued friend of mine. You're not from old St. Mungo's, are you?"

"No, I don't belong there," said McBirnie, while into his keen blue eyes as he scrutinized the Inspector came a look as of inner pain.

"If you will excuse me a minute," he said, "I must give our patient some milk now. It's time he had it."

The Inspector stood aside and watched him pour a little of the milk into a cup, and with a spoon feed it slowly into the patient's mouth.

And as he watched something in McBirnie's profile seemed to rivet his attention.

"How do you like it up here?" he asked, when the sick man was laid down again and covered with the mosquito net.

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"Very well. Tho climate of British Columbia is pleasanter—more temperate—but it's all right here. Better in some respects. We're nearer civilization."

"You are a Scotchman like myself, I see. We may speak the purest English, but the accent betrays us. I feel like saying—'Hoo's a' wi' ye!'"

McBirnie smiled, answering in the broadest Doric—

"Ay, it's a gude auld tongue, an' it's gude to hear the twang o't again."

"Is it long since you left the old land?" queried Webster.

"A gude while noo."

"An' when are ye thinkin' o' gaun back?"

"I havena gi'en that a thocht yet."

"Well! well! Look here, Joe. I call you to witness that I have discovered the first Scotchman who hadn't all his plans laid and the time appointed for his return to Scotland."

"Oh! He's Scotch to the backbone all the same," said Joe. "Better believe that Mr. Webster—there's a living proof of it. D'ye know why he took it in hand to see that fellow through? 'Cos he thought he might be a Scottie!"

McBirnie, who at first smiled, looked as if tired of Joe's facetiousness, and moved outside the door. There on a bench Webster and he sat down, and, each puffing at a pipe, whose smoke banished the mosquitoes, began to talk over the details of the road building, while the sun sank and the air grew more cool. All over the camp the men lounged and rested and smoked and chatted together after their day's work, while in the west glowed and blazoned such ineffable glory as can be witnessed only in those wild north regions.

Long after Inspector Webster and Joe had retired

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for the night, while the tired men filled the big dormitories in the shacks with stertorous rhythmic snoring, McBirnie sat on the bench and watched the golden effulgence still glowing in the west. Vivid purple upon the plain, it deepened at the horizon into scarlet, which again melted upward into ruddy molten gold, fading into cool primrose and opal as it neared the deep dark violet, studded with stars. As he looked a great bow of the most brilliant white suddenly spanned the northern hemisphere. From the horizon toward the zenith shot up the fantastic apparitional display of the aurora borealis—flitting, dancing, disappearing, like ghosts on a stage lit up by electric footlights.

It was a magnificent and never-to-be-forgotten scene; and McBirnie gazed on it with awe and rapture, for the moment lifted out of himself and above all earthly cares. But presently the wondrous beauty of the scene was marred by the loud, harsh snarling of the prairie wolves, the coyotes, wrangling and growling and snapping at each other as they unearthed and tore with savage fangs the carcass of the resurrected horse.

Their howling seemed to disturb the sick man's fitful slumbers. His head rolled on the pillow, and an occasional moan escaped him.

McBirnie slipped into the shack, took down his rifle, and turning his back upon the glories of the west, stole away out in the direction of the copse under the tender smile of a new moon.

His intention was to get within range of the yelping pack and disperse them with a shot or two, but ere he could reach them his attention was arrested by two dim grey figures hurrying stealthily towards the camp.

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In the dusky distance they looked like wolves as they galloped, and sighting them as best he could, McBirnie pulled the trigger and fired. A loud cry, followed by a string of oaths in a familiar tongue, made his blood curdle.

They were not wolves he had fired at—they were men!

Throwing down his rifle, he ran forward to find two of the track-layers swearing exhaustively over a broken stone jar of about gallon capacity, the neck of which one of them still held ruefully in his hand.

The smell of spilt whisky was strong in the air, but both men were unhurt.

"Was it you that fired, Boss?" queried the man that held the jar neck in his fist. "There's a gallon o' good whisky lost."

"Whisky," cried McBirnie, indignantly. "Be thankful it wasn't your heart's blood. What business have you prowling about like this at midnight when you ought to be in bed? And what are you bringing that infernal stuff into camp for when you know it is forbidden?"

He was thoroughly shaken with the shock he had received, and spoke with the severity he felt. The possibility of having their blood on his hands through their breach of the rules made him furious. Never before had the men seen the gentle timekeeper in such a mood.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE SICK MAN—A LETTER FROM HOME.

"I'LL tell ye how it was, sorr," explained one of them, a lithe, little Irishman, with a lean, dun face, sandy hair and whiskers, and bland, oily speech. "It's Dave here; he gets tuk wid the spazzums in his innards, terr'ble bad. An' sure he was just after bein' tuk wid them at the dar'kenin', an' says I to him, 'Sure,' says I, 'it's a sup av good ould rye would warm your innards an' kape off the spazzums.' So we wint up the trail to the Captain's—that's him wid the gay wife that's started a shanty wid refreshments for man an' baste—an' I says to him, says I, 'For the love o' God, give us a sup o' good whisky for the spazzums av David.' An', begorra, he gave us the full av that greybeard, so we'd have it handy when he'd be tnk. An' now—wirra, wirra! to think av the good whisky all gone, wid never the sign av a sup left. Glory be to God!"

McBirnie's voice had resumed its usual mellowness when he responded to this ingenious yarn. He had an idea that this was not the first time David and Tim, not to mention others, had made a midnight journey in quest of a cure for "spazzums;" but so great was his relief from his escape of blood-guiltiness that he felt inclined to be lenient.

"Well, Tim," he said, "I'm glad I shot the greybeard instead of yon, and I won't report you this time. But, mind, I cannot have this sort of thing

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going on in the camp. You can't drink and work both, and this line must be done within the prescribed time, or the Company are bound to lose money. How much did you pay for that whisky soaking into the ground?"

"Divil a copper, boss—divil a copper. He just gimme the sup for the love o' God an' the good o' me innards."

"I thought it was Dave's interior," laughed McBirnie.

"Sure, an' it's all wan, sorr."

"Well, better get into bed as fast as you can. I'll get the Inspector to look up this Captain and his gay wife who supplies the men of this camp with illegal whisky."

The men were moving<sup>1</sup> off, the little Irishman bewailing the loss of the liquor they had smuggled so far in safety, when a couple of coyotes tore past them, hurrying to the feast where their companions worried hideously.

"Wait," cried McBirnie, and ran back to pick up the rifle he had thrown from him when he fled. As he did so he saw in the distance something emerging from the camp that made his eyes start in their sockets. It was a tall white figure, tottering and swaying like a reed in the wind, and with a cry of alarm he rushed on toward it. It was the fever patient, roused by the unearthly howling of coyotes, and now wandering up towards them, muttering aloud in his delirium.

McBirnie threw his arms about the swaying figure, and was surprised to find how strong the sick man was.

"I shall find him if he is on the top of this round earth," he was muttering. "That brute of an Indian



## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

thought he had done for me when I went prowling round his wigwam last year; but I shan't die till I find my man. He made away with her; but I'll be even with him yet. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Come, come," said McBirnie gently; "you'll get your death out here."

"Death! death!" the man murmured in a dazed fashion, as, impelled by McBirnie's strong arm, he stepped with bare feet over the rough ground towards the shack.

Whether it was that contact with the bare earth and the cool night breeze playing about his head quelled the fever and cleared his brain for the moment it would be hard to say, but suddenly he looked at his companion with consciousness, glanced at the long, dim outline of the shacks, and then his eyes catching the display of auroral flame in the heavens, he stood gazing at it with wonder and terror.

"Is it hell?" he whispered. "Look! It is hell! See the flames! God! see them leap!"

Ere McBirnie could prevent him he had broken away and dashed into the shack, shrieking as he flew. McBirnie rushed in after him, and, seizing him in a mighty grip, threw him by sheer force into the hunk.

Panting with excitement, he stood over him, anticipating a fresh outbreak; but presently he lit a lamp, and its light showed that the man had swooned. In haste he slipped a few drops of the medicine between the parched lips, and after a time consciousness revived; the sick man moved uneasily, and again began to mutter. McBirnie gently covered him up, for though the days were hot the nights were chill; and, closing the door, he himself turned in, resolved to sleep with one eye and one ear open for the patient's

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benefit. As a precaution he bolted the door, fastening it securely, but leaving the little window, protected by mosquito net, wide for air. There was no need, however; the man lay motionless as a log—only the words babbling from his lips indicated life. Thrice in the night did the watcher get up and pour the necessary medicine and nourishment between his teeth; but when the dawn broke over the far lone prairie the patient fell into a deep sleep. McBirnie, pale and haggard, stood watching him gloomily.

What had the unconscious lips babbled of to drive sleep from the eyes of the tireless watcher? What words were these that made him spring from his bed, shaking as if with palsy, while he stared at the gaunt face, eagerly listening? What riveted him to that rude bedside, while the dawn broke and the sun rose gloriously on that wide illimitable land? What demon stood by him, as Abishai stood by David before the sleeping Saul, whispering—"The Lord hath delivered thine enemy into thy hands." And, ah! what angel flew up through that dewy sunlight blue to record in the Book of Eternal Remembrance the answer, clear and decisive in the watcher's heart—"If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink!"

It soon became evident that the care of the patient by night and the work throughout the day was telling on the timekeeper.

Joe remarked on it to the engineer in his own emphatic way, protesting that it was a shame—an anathematized shame—and that McBirnie was a doubly anathematized fool to wreck his health in trying to save a stranger whose anathematized life was probably not worth the saving.

Engineer Webster agreed with Joe, and promised to

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protest. Although control of the men was not in his line, he could speak to McBirnie as friend to friend—as Scot to brither Scot.

The opportunity for speech, however, was hard to find, for as the line extended at the rate of more than a mile a day, the boarding car, a sort of house-boat on wheels, had come up to follow the gangs with housing and board, the result being that Webster was away most of the time, returning to the draughting shack in the yard only once in a while. On these occasions there were generally letters and papers, brought up by the mail car, awaiting him, and on his arrival to-day McBirnie carried them out to him.

Webster was shocked at the timekeeper's gaunt and careworn appearance.

"I say, McBirnie, this won't do. You look quite knocked out. You must let some other fellow take a turn with you in nursing this stranger, whoever he is."

McBirnie smiled as he counted down the letters.

"Oh, he is no trouble at all now; he is convalescing rapidly. I'm afraid to trust him with anyone but myself. They might let him have solid food too soon. And that, you know, means certain death."

"You look as if you wanted to be taken care of yourself," said Webster, opening a letter on the address of which McBirnie's eyes were fixed with wondering curiosity.

"Oh!" exclaimed Webster, with evident pleasure, "a letter from my old father and mother. It is so good to hear from them now. Do you know, McBirnie, I lost sight of them for years—didn't know whether they were dead or alive—till I hunted them up when I went over."

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He continued to read till he came near the end, when he glanced up from the letter and turned over the rest of the correspondence, as if in search of something.

"Ah, this will be it," he said, drawing out a paste-board envelope tied carefully with string, open at the ends, and labelled "Photographs only."

He cut the string and was about to undo the paper wrappings round the photograph, when he hesitated and laid it down again.

"Shouldn't wonder if there was another mail up to-night," said McBirnie, preparing to leave the shack, when Webster said hastily, "Wait a minute, Mack."

As he spoke he unveiled the photograph and looked at it with pathetic interest. Then he put it into the breast pocket of his coat and looked at the timekeeper.

"McBirnie," he said, "I am going to say to you now what I have been waiting to say ever since I came up. As a brother Scot, I want you to know that I am your friend always and in any circumstances whatever. *In any circumstances whatever.* I—well, I've a notion of you, as our folks would say; and if you want either money, or time, or anything else that I can give, they are yours without stint. Will you believe that?"

McBirnie looked surprised, but, with a faint smile, said—

"I am bound to believe whatever you may say, Mr. Webster; though why you——"

"Never mind why," interrupted Webster; "all I want is your promise to use me whenever you need a friend."

"I promise that all right," laughed McBirnie in an

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

amused way, and as their hands met the grip Webster gave was so emphatic that the timekeeper winced.

"Is that what you call the Masonic grip?" he asked, shaking his bruised fingers good-humoredly.

"Masonic? No—but more; that grip means respect, gratitude, heartfelt sympathy."

McBirnie glanced at him with sudden inquiry, but the engineer had turned to the rest of his correspondence, and was now knitting his brows over a natty envelope, addressed to him in a lady's neat hand. A slow flush crept up over his cheeks as he opened it.

McBirnie left the shack without another word, in a state of stupefied wonder at Webster's words. "Respect," he could quite understand that; but "gratitude and heartfelt sympathy"—what did the man mean? He was not aware of anything he had ever done to earn his gratitude; and why had he offered his sympathy?

In the shack the now convalescent man was sitting up, supported with pillows.

"Had your sleep out?" McBirnie asked cheerily.

The man's eyes followed him with a strange, interrogative scrutiny. So intent was he in searching the countenance of the timekeeper that he forgot to answer him.

"Are you thirsty? Would you like some milk?"

"No; I should like a drink of water," he said.

McBirnie produced a little tin can of water from a corner where a lump of ice lay in a box of sawdust.

"Is this fresh from the well?" asked the man, eyeing the water suspiciously.

"No, but you can have some fresh if you'd rather," answered McBirnie with grim amusement. "Hey,

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Charlie!" he called to the young man who milked and did general chores around the camp, "get this man a fresh draw from the well, and give it to him with your own hand."

"Man, what are ye afraid of! If I wanted to poison ye I had plenty opportunity before now. I didn't lose my rest and the flesh off my bones staving off death only to throw you back into his arms again. That would be an idiotic piece of work, and I'm not an idiot. Moreover, you may as well understand once for all that I can see through a millstone as well as you can, so—enough said. Here's Charlie with your water."

He strode out of the shack as Charlie entered, indicating with a gesture that he should hand a cup of it to the sick man. Charlie, quick-witted as all young Canadians are, saw that the timekeeper was annoyed, and resenting it as a personal affront, dipped the cup hastily into the pail and thrust it uncivilly into the man's wasted hands.

"Take time, youngster; no hurry," said the man as the water dripped on the bedclothes.

"Time! you've a pretty darned cheek, you have," retorted Charlie. "If I were Mr. McBirnie I'd have you out o' that P.D.Q., 'stead o' keepin' you here as he's done, watchin' o' nights when you was looney, an' nursin' o' days when he'd his work to do as well. By gum, so I would."

And throwing down the cup which the patient had emptied he stepped outside, growling at the man who he felt had been saying something unbecomin' to his special friend, the timekeeper.

At the corner of the shack he collided with Dr. Gunther.

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"Hello! McBirnie in there?" inquired the doctor in his hearty voice.

"No, sir, he aint; only that white-faced, lantern-jawed cuss, with a heard on him like a hnffalo."

The doctor smiled, and passed in. Charlie was a privileged individual, and Dr. Gunther had been his divinity, adored and adorable, ever since he had mended the lad's broken leg seven years ago, when, as Charlie expressed it, "he was jnst a kid."

The nuts he had hrought him! the child books! the pictures—funny ones cut from comic papers. Ah! those six weeks he looked back on now as the happiest in his life; he would have hailed another broken leg with delight if it hrought Dr. Gunther to the honse again.

That this stranger in the hnuk had never once in his hearing praised the doctor or McBirnie since he had come hack to life again, impressed Charlie most unfavorahly, hence his explosion.

"Well, my man, and how are you feeling to-day?" said the doctor, taking the man's wrist in his fingers.

"Can't complain," was the answer; "only they keep feeding me on sloppy stuff, milk and such like—I'm sick of it. I'll never get strong on such stuff. I feel I'd just be myself again if I had one good square meal. McBirnie starves me."

The doctor's genial countenance darkened as he listened; there was an ominous glow in the deeps of his blue eyes.

"So you want a good square meal, eh? Better order it then. But make your will first, and say whether you would like your hearse with plumes or without. For that one meal you want so hadly will be your last."

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"Is that really so, doctor?" gasped the man, evidently impressed.

"That is so. McBirnie, in giving you liquid, or sloppy food, as you call it, is following my instructions to the letter. If he gave you the solid food you crave to-night you'd be dead to-morrow. McBirnie refuses you because he knows that if he gave you what you want it would be the last of you."

The man mused silently for a moment, while the doctor took up his hat and stick to depart.

"Why doesn't he do it, I wonder?" he murmured.

"Do what?" snapped the doctor, generally so patient and forbearing.

"Kill me off with a meal, when I'm crying for it."

The doctor strode out of the shack, but presently returned and stood in the doorway.

"Now, remember what I tell you, and don't be tormenting the life out of McBirnie about square meals. He's attended you like a mother, and pulled you through this far, and if you are a living man to-day you owe it to him. A doctor may prescribe, but it's the good nursing that tells when a man's mortally ill. And you sailed as close to the wind as ever man did. So mind what I say."

The doctor's tone was sharp and peremptory; his clearly enunciated words fell firm and distinct on the ears of the patient, who could not choose but hear. If he heard, he did not answer, so profound was the fit of musing he had fallen into.

Long after the doctor had gone he still mused, till at last, worn out with much wondering, he lay back upon his pillow, muttering to himself—

"Why doesn't he do it? Nothing easier. Why doesn't he do it?"



## CHAPTER IV.

JAMIE WATSON.

IN the meantime Geoffrey Webster sat reading the letter he had opened when McBirnie left him, the glow on his strong features softening them with a warm inner light. It was a good half-hour now since he opened it, but he still sat in the draughting shack alone, reading and re-reading that letter.

It was dated from the General Hospital, and ran thus:—

“DEAR MR. WEBSTER,—I have received your letter, written from New York, and though it is clear from the tenor of it that you expected no response, I have nevertheless taken the trouble to find your address, in order to answer it. I confess I was rather surprised to find that you had not called on us at Kelvindale Terrace before you left—at least, such had been my belief until your letter arrived. Our landlady, amid the multitude of her cares, had quite forgotten to mention your visit, nor did I know that your card had been left until it was produced on inquiry respecting it, after reading your letter.

“With regard to your apology, while I quite appreciate the feeling that prompted it, I cannot deplore your frankness of speech as you yourself do. It is to relieve your mind of any regret in the matter that I now write, confident that, instead of repenting your wise and forcible presentation of the truth, you

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will rather rejoice that the effect has been to open my eyes to things which, but for your words, I might never have seen, or only seen in part through rose-colored spectacles. I need not enter into details here, but would like you to know that, as a result of inquiries and personal investigation made by my brother and myself, we have both broken connection with our past existence so far as sharing in our father's income is concerned. After witnessing what was laid bare to us in that nightmare of sin and sorrow, of want and woe, during our weeks of research; when we reflected that from such a never-ending sacrifice of human well-being and human happiness we had been drawing an income which supported us in luxury, it seemed as if our whole individuality became like Lady Macbeth's hand—that nothing in earth nor all the waters of the seas could ever cleanse us from our fellow-creatures' blood, which had stuck to us, unconsciously so far as we were concerned, ever since we were born. After that there was no choice left but to purge ourselves of it in the only way we could by refusing from henceforth to have any part or lot in such an unholy means of money-making, and by going into the world to earn our own living honestly and helpfully, as all Christians should.

“It was a happy circumstance for me that my brother had about the same time been startled into thinking for himself by the bitter words of a woman of his congregation—a Mrs. McBirnie—whom he had occasion to call upon in the way of pastoral visitation. Evidently she had suffered personally, for her words sounded almost like insult at first to Frank. He has since felt that the half was not told him, and has acknowledged to her, as I now to you, that it was all

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too sadly—too bitterly—true. I have chosen nursing as a profession, and even here a great deal of new experience only deepens my painful convictions in the matter. I trust, then, Mr. Wehster, that you will at once and for ever cease to regret any word of the truth you have spoken, but rather be glad that, like the poet's song, it has found lodgment in the heart of a friend. With sincere gratitude, I am, cordially yours,  
VIOLET MICKLEDOOL."

It was only by a mighty effort of will that Webster folded this letter away and took up one by one his business letters, marking some for future attention, answering others then and there with expedition and despatch.

When he had finished he drew forth the photo again, and looked long and earnestly at it. Then with a heavy sigh he put it back in his coat pocket and went over to McBirnie's shack, followed by his dog.

When he entered the timekeeper was bending over his hooks, evidently busy; while the convalescent man lay eyeing his nurse with a peculiar, puzzled expression, as he might have eyed some animal he had never before seen, and was trying hard to classify.

"Busy?" queried Wehster, seeing the timekeeper too intent on his work to observe his presence.

McBirnie started and glanced up.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Wehster; I didn't know you were there till you spoke."

Wehster smiled indulgently.

"I'm afraid you're too hard-worked, Mack. You will have to hurry up and get better," he said, turning to the man in the bunk. "If you don't, we will be having McBirnie down where you are."

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"I'd put on my clothes to-morrow if I had them," the man said.

"Better not," said McBirnie. "I hope you are not going to worry about your clothes as you do about your food. He is crazy to get solid food, Mr. Webster, and you know how it would simply be the death of him if he got what he wanted. When the doctor says he is fit to get up the clothes are ready in that box, under lock and key, where the men put them the day he was carried in. I've never seen them since."

"What!" cried the man, in genuine astonishment, "you mean to say you haven't overhauled all my pockets and my papers to find out who I am and all about me?"

McBirnie rose with an expression of patient, contemptuous long-suffering that could not be misinterpreted.

"Did you wish to talk to me, Mr. Webster—any order?" he said in a quiet voice. "I'll walk over to your shack, if you like."

"No, I can't say I wanted anything particular, except just to say that I think a week or two travelling on a boarding-car might be a change and do you good. I daresay you could manage now without your constituted nurse, couldn't you?" Webster continued addressing the man. "Charlie could see to you."

"That impudent young devil? He couldn't give me a drink of water."

"That means you would rather McBirnie continued his ministrations," laughed Webster.

"I don't ask him to," said the man ungraciously. As he spoke he tossed his arm over the bunk, his lank white hand with the hairs on the back of it almost touched Webster.

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The dog saw it, and curling his lip over his teeth snarled warningly.

"Hello! Towzer! what ails you? Never saw you snarl like that before."

The man withdrew his hand hastily, and McBirnie smiled, much amused.

"'Tisn't like our peaceful Towzer that; but as we Scotch say, 'He kens his ain ken best.' A dog's instinct is sometimes more correct than human discernment."

"Fact!" said Webster, turning on his heel with strange indecision. "Let me see—oh, I know what I wanted to speak to you about. What sort of a character is this 'Captain' who has opened a kind of temperance hotel up the trail between this and Swan River somewhere? Do you know anything of the fellow?"

McBirnie bent for a moment over his book, and a smile flitted across his features.

"Ah! I see you know!" exclaimed the engineer eagerly.

"No, really I don't," protested McBirnie, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes. "I know nothing further than this. Shortly after our friend was brought here—just when he lay in the trough of the fever—the men buried a horse that had dropped over by the copse, and you know the row the coyotes kick up over a find like that. It was dusk, but not dark, and our friend here began to squirm and groan when an extra big howl came bowling down on the night air. So I got my rifle out and went for them, as I thought—two figures, scuttling along through the scrub for all they were worth. I fired, and I tell you I got a scare when I heard the voices of some of our

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men making the air blue after their own fashion when excited.

"You had not shot one of them?" cried Webster, with eager interest.

"No, thank God! but I shot and smashed what they seemed to value as much as their own blood—a jar—a greybeard full of whisky."

"Ah! ha! they had been smuggling it into camp. Where did they get it?"

"At the 'Captain's,' so they told me, and spun a yarn as long as my arm about not paying for it, and how it was given them for the love of God and the pains in their innards."

"The devil! What are their names? This whisky smuggling will play the deuce with the men. These Galicians are not such bad fellows, but if the Irish and Italians get tight there'll be wholesale knifing all round. Tell me the names of those men."

McBirnie looked into Webster's eyes and smiled.

"I think I shall say I have forgotten them at present, Mr. Webster. The fact is that I was so relieved to find I had no human blood on my hands—even by accident—that I promised the men I would not report them this time; but, of course, I told them it must not happen again."

"H'm," mused Webster. "It was Joe who told me about this Yankee captain and his wife—rather a gay piece, the very sort of a harpy to lure the men with illegal whisky. Joe calls her quite a stunner in her way."

"Joe has been up there, then?" cried the timekeeper in surprise.

"Yes; and I'm just dreading lest he break loose and knock us all endwise. He is the best fellow and

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the best foreman the Company ever had. He can get more work out of his gang than any other trackman I know. He never bullies them, never worries them, but squats right down and hugs his knees, with a sonorous 'Now then, boys, hooraw!' And they go for their work as no other gang does, just because of that one eagle eye of his and that 'Hooraw!'

"He has 150 dollars a month, and I've known him work seven months steady, and then go off with 1,000 dollars in his pocket, and at the end of a fortnight come back penniless and unkempt—every cent lost on a big tear. The poor fellow can't help himself. His father was the same; went off on periodic jamborees, and spent all he had. Terrible thing that alcoholic here'd y. We'll have to get the 'Captain' and his gay lady friend out of the way if we are to build this line without murder among the men. The Finns when they get it are of no use whatever. Confound the 'Captain' anyway!"

When Webster took off his coat that night, preparatory to undressing for bed, he noticed the corner of the photo sticking out of his breast pocket.

He took it out, and, holding it close to the lamp at arm's length, looked at it with tender pity.

"Poor fellow! Poor fellow! What a fine candid face. What a pair of true eyes—the same as they look now, but for that sadness hack of them. A bonnie boy! Little wonder it broke her heart. God bless her!"

The face of the portrait he thus apostrophized was that of Jamie Watson, with the happy glow of nineteen summers upon it.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE "CAPTAIN" AND HIS WIFE.

THE house which the "Captain" had dignified by the name of Wayside Rest was a stout, disused log building of fair-sized dimensions, having a loft, reached by a ladder, for the second storey—a general dormitory and lumber room. At one time it had been intended for a permanent homestead, but had long been left desolate by its builder, for whom the rigors of climate, the work, or the life in general had been too much.

Nowhere on earth does Nature so rigorously apply the "survival of the fittest" test to man as in the wilds of Manitoba—that illimitable area of exhaustless resources. Fertilized yearly by the snows that blanket it during the long winter months, and melt and sink into the soil with rich refreshment as the sun waxes strong, the land bursts forth into green and flowery beauty. There the spring is but a glimpse, so quickly is it followed by the fervid glowing summer, gilding the vast wheat fields into a boundless yellow sea of ripening grain. There are stretches of brush, too, where the raspberries blush rose-pink with ripeness on countless bushes, where the wild strawberry literally carpets the earth, where the wholesome black currant abounds and blueberries grow among the rocky places, free to all, Indian and white, who care to gather them. A wonderful, fertile land, but one whose alkaline soil and extremes of heat and cold make it habitable only for the "fittest."



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But no considerations of environment or climate stand in the way of the vendor of illegal whisky, for such was the "Captain," although ostensibly posing as "a freighter"—that is, one who carries supplies to the sub-contractors for so much per hundred-weight. The carrying of supplies afforded splendid opportunities for smuggling into unlicensed territory; and the barrels of harmless "hard cider" with which the lone loghouse cellar was stocked seemed to undergo a change—a miraculous change—inexplicable as all miracles are.

The effect on the men who spent their Sunday leisure in quaffing draughts from the "Captain's cider" barrels was, to say the least, remarkable. It could hardly have been a case of atavism, seeing they were chiefly Europeans; but the Indian war dance grew tame and ineffectual when compared with the hilarious madness, the wild uproarious revel, the startling blasphemies which that miraculous cider evoked. It made a centre of pandemonium discord in the midst of Nature's far-hrooding Sabbathic peace. Yet such was the invariable effect of a "swig" or two of the "Captain's hard cider"—good hard cider—the harmless juice of the nourishing apple—nothing stronger—on the Captain's word and honor!

The Captain's wife herself took a "swig" of it occasionally—though the Captain swore at her for doing so, since it had the effect of making her quite too talkative. A loose-tongued woman was hardly one to be left in charge of a house where only temperance drinks, such as hard cider, were sold.

"There were always mean spies a-sneakin' and a-snoopin' round wherever a feller set out to make a livin'," he said, "and she might split on the whole

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blame business if some of them happened around when he was away freightin'. She didn't ought to be a-foolin' with that there cider, which wasn't the thing for a woman's nerves—only men's.

That she had been "foolin' with cider" was very evident to Geoffrey Webster when he dismounted at the door and tied his horse to a birch tree that rose, graceful and stately, in front of the house—a lovely thing to look on in a lovely land.

A sturdy, fair-haired Galician girl showed him into the public room, which was furnished with a long, plain, deal table in the midst of the floor, with wooden chairs set close to the white walls, on which hung several prints and chromos. The most striking and brilliantly colored of these was one in a gilt frame, representing a pretty waitress, with rosy cheeks, bright eyes, and shining white teeth, holding up a wine-glass with tempting abandon. Above her head bent a rainbow, with the words—"Just Try Mickle-dool's Ivy Blend." The picture hung facing the door, and was the first thing that arrested the engineer's attention as he entered. The irony of the situation fascinated him. That the name *she* bore should be blazoned in this shebeen—here on the far sunny lands of Manitoba!

He walked across the room and stood before it, smiling grimly.

While he stood thus a woman's hand was laid on his shoulder, a breath redolent of strong waters saluted his nostrils, and a voice which was not without a certain caressing sweetness, said—

"Pretty, isn't it?"

Geoffrey started as if stung, and, wheeling round, saw a fine, handsome-featured woman, with big black

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eyes, smiling on him with frank familiarity. She was arrayed in a Turkey-red wrapper, trimmed with lace which had once been white, but was now of a more or less dun color.

"Don't you think that's awful pretty?" she repeated, pointing to the chromo, her smile slightly maudlin.

"I'm not a connoisseur in that class of art," returned Geoffrey, admiring the woman's fine features in spite of himself. "Are you the Captain's wife?"

"I am," she said. "I'm Mrs. Captain Clayfoot. Hot outside, ain't it?"

"Yes, very. You keep cool drinks here, don't you?"

"Well, rather," she said significantly. "How would a drink of good hard cider strike you?"

"If you please," he answered.

"You're polite," she said; "good deal more than the men on the railway. They come up here, and they're all right till they have had their cider. After that they're just brutes. Ugh! not at all nice, like you."

She looked with mandlin approbation at Geoffrey, whose heart was moved to pity at the sight of such a magnificent woman ripening to destruction. Her beauty held him in thrall for the moment; for the moment he forgot that it was the beauty of the flesh only—the soulless beauty that palls ere it fades. Above her hung the flaring chromo, with the name on it—the name he had begun to whisper to his own heart only—and he shuddered to think it could be associated with such ruin as this.

But he roused himself. He had come for a purpose:

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—to see whether it was really here that his men were being demoralized, and made worse than useless.

He took out a gold dollar and threw it upon the table.

“Let me have a drink of your cider, please,” he said, persistently avoiding her eyes, which he felt were upon him.

She took up the coin, and turned to serve him, but presently lurched slightly, and bent toward him.

“Want the best, of course?” she whispered, and convinced now that there was something underhand in the business, he waited to see what she would bring him.

His anticipations were quite correct; a tumbler of yellow whisky was set before him by the Galician girl. The pungent smell left no doubt whatever on the subject.

“I ordered cider,” he said. “Take away that whisky.”

“You said you wanted the best. That ain’t whisky; it’s the best cider,” said Mrs. Clayfoot, who came behind the girl.

“Well, let me have some of the ordinary cider—or stay, have you a cow? I should like a good cool glass of milk if you have it.”

“Milk!”

It was but one word, but it contained volumes, and there was a world of contempt in the look she threw upon him.

“Milk! for God’s sake, Janiska, run into the milk-house and bring this gentleman a bowl of milk,” she cried derisively, and coming over to the table at which he had seated himself, she sat down opposite

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and rested her round elbows on the table with her chin between her hands.

"Well, now, you are a queer fish. Where do you belong to anyway? You're the first man ever came to these diggin's and called for milk. Now, of a Sunday, all the fellers come up the trail—from Swan River way—and then there's the railway men—we supply them, too—but lawk! who ever heard of a man calling for milk?"

"You have heard and seen one now," said Geoffrey, proceeding to look over some papers he had taken from his breast pocket, fearing he had forgotten a drawing he had made an outline of for future use.

"Are you the new doctor?" she asked; "I heard that a new doctor had come to Dauphin. I thought maybe you might be him."

"No, I am not that gentleman," Geoffrey answered, amused at her curiosity; but presently she uttered a little exclamation which called Geoffrey's attention to her.

She had taken her hands from her face, and was staring at an envelope which lay among the papers, an envelope with the Glasgow post-mark on it in clear black letters.

"You've friends in Glasgow, I see," she said as the Galician maid set a plate with a glass of milk on it before him. "The Glasgow folk wouldn't refuse cider."

"No," laughed Geoffrey, drinking down the draught with evident relish. "I'll have another if you can spare it."

"Janiska; the gentleman wants another glass. Well, well, this is something I must tell the Captain when he comes home. He'll take forty fits when I

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tell him you had two glasses—of milk! He won't believe me; he'll say I'm a liar. Oh, yes! the Captain can be mighty nasty when his back's up, I tell you. Not near so nice as you are, I'm sure. You look like a man could feel for a woman now. Won't you have a little drop of my cider—real good stuff; just a little taste to keep me company?"

"Not this afternoon, thank you, Mrs. Clayfoot."

Feeling somehow baffled and in a superior presence, she took her eyes from his face and watched his hands turning over the papers and returning them one by one to his pocket.

Suddenly she startled him by springing to her feet, and, uttering a loud shriek as of terror, she fled from the room.

"Is the woman mad?" queried Geoffrey of the Galician girl, who seemed to understand English fairly well. She was rather heavy and stolid to look at, but a gleam of intelligence fired her blue eyes as she looked at Geoffrey, and with a droll but eloquent gesture raised her hand with the little finger cocked to her mouth, as though emptying a glass into it. It was enough; Geoffrey smiled comprehendingly, and handed the girl "a quarter" as he passed out.

In another minute he had leaped into the saddle, and was cantering easily toward Dauphin, with the intention of meeting Captain Clayfoot returning thence.

To people who consider physical appearance as indicative of mental furnishing it was quite natural that Geoffrey Webster should be mistaken for a physician.

Of an intellectual cast of countenance, with a splendid physique, strong features, and an eminently

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benevolent expression in his clear grey eyes, he looked the beau ideal of one whose profession it was to ameliorate the suffering of humanity.

Captain Clayfoot, the moment he came within easy distance of the man cantering toward him, concluded that this man must be the new doctor who had recently set up in Dauphin as rival to Dr. Gunther.

Consequently, he was inclined to be amiable, and almost communicative—so far as he considered it safe.

Captain Clayfoot was tall, thin and muscular; a man of about fifty, with yellowish leathern visage, white monstache and goatee, and a pair of shrewd eyes gleaming from under strong black eyebrows. He wore a light suit, consisting of a belted blouse and trousers, with a turn-down collar of grey flannel that made his long leathern neck seem still more elongated, while a brilliant red tie and a white panama lent a dandified air to his general appearance.

He was a pensioner of the American Government; had fought Indians on the Mexican frontier, as well as in Minnesota and Dakota; and now in Canada was known as a "freighter" to the contractors on the railway lines, as well as keeper of a wayside place of refreshment for man and beast. He had met his wife in a restaurant in New York, and had married her off-hand without asking any question excepting the one; being magnanimous enough to consider that she had as much right to ask questions of him regarding his past as he of her regarding her past, and since she made no inquiries—why, neither did he—he wasn't going to be meaner than a woman. Showing that chivalry has not yet disappeared, though one must needs go to the uttermost parts of the earth to find it.

The only thing that really "riled" him was her

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fondness for cider, but his fondness for her being greater, he helplessly continued to forgive her—as, God help him, what could he do? She was all he had in this world in the way of humanity to care for; before he had met her he had nobody to stand in the doorway and wait for his homecoming; the sight of her red wrapper sent a thrill to his heart and a glow into his eyes when he was half a mile off. By gosh! what a dam-fine thing it was to have a wife. It made the tough old frontiersman tremble to think that that woman's little finger was more to him and dearer than all the world besides. She was actually more to him than the Gold Badge of the Grand Army of the Republic, which he wore ostentatiously on the left side of his coat, right above his heart.



## CHAPTER VI.

### WHAT DID YOU DO WITH HER?

CAPTAIN CLAYFOOT was not at all surprised when Geoffrey pulled up and made him "Good afternoon." It was too lone a land as yet for men to pass each other without a courteous word by the way.

"Good afternoon," returned the Captain, saluting and pulling up his horses. "How are ye, doctor? Goin' to White Swan?"

"Yes; but I'm no doctor. Your wife thought I was one, too. I'm not such a great man as all that, only engineer of the new line along here."

"Wall now! I thought you were the Doc. sure. So you were in my Wayside Rest, eh? Got what you wanted all right?"

"Yes; I got what I wanted, Captain. What have you there?" said Geoffrey, pointing to a harrel end visible amid a crowd of general merchandise in bags, bundles, and boxes.

"Cider—good hard cider. Didn't you get some up at the house?"

"Your wife showed me some of what she called the best."

"Keerect! this is another lot of the self-same brand."

"The best, I snnpose," Geoffrey remarked with smiling significance.

Totally misinterpreting him, the Captain, with heavy emphasis, exclaimed—

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"You bet! Mickledeool's Ivy Blend."

Geoffrey reined up his horse closer to the wagon side and leaned over towards the Captain.

"Look here, Captain Clayfoot; I am not going to turn informer on you or any man, but I give you honest warning that if you don't quit selling whisky——"

"Whisky?" thundered the Captain dramatically.

"Who says I sell whisky! Show me the man who says I sell the darned thing an' I'll eternally wipe the floor with him."

"I say it," said Geoffrey calmly. "You call it cider, but whatever name you give it, it is whisky all the same. Now, the men from the railway camp and from the boarding cars are getting demoralized up at your place. They are not worth their salt to work after a Sunday spent up at your Wayside Rest, and we don't propose to have the laying of the track dragging into the winter just because you want to make a little money."

The Captain stood up in his wagon and struck a fine dramatic attitude, lifting his hand to heaven while his other held the reins.

"On my holy aff'davit, boss, as sure as I stand in this blamed wagon, there hain't no more whisky in them cider barrels than there is in my hat. Look at that!"

He snatched his hat off and held it out to witness his innocence.

Geoffrey could scarcely repress a laugh.

"We'll not argue the question, Captain. There is no necessity. We know that you are illegally selling drink to our men, and it's playing the very devil with them, seriously interfering with the work. Now take

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your choice. That house of yours is on the Company's land, and either you stop selling cider to the men or go. You hear? It's stop or get out."

Without a word in reply the Captain clapped his hat on his head, sat down, and jerking the reins, cried "Gee!" and resumed his journey home.

Even in the midst of his vexations, as he came in sight of the house, he looked for the red gown in the doorway, but it was not there. He felt he was down on his luck. It would have been comfort in this worriment to know that whatsoever went crooked she was there all straight, to stand by him like a ship by another ship in a storm. By thunder! yes—it heartened a man.

"Where's Mrs. Clayfoot, little gal?" he demanded of the Galician maid, as he jumped from the wagon.

"She is lying down," she answered.

"Lyin' down, eh? What fur? Sick?"

The Galician shook her head to signify she did not know.

"Well, I'm goin' in to see," he said, striding into the house, and into the little room where they slept.

"What's up, ole woman?" he inquired, with a perceptible softening of the voice.

"Oh! nothing very much," she said, rising and throwing her arms about his neck.

"I had such a headache—I'll be better now, lovey, you're here."

"You het your bottom dollar on that there statement, sissy. But say—you hain't been long lain down, eh? That engineer chap that runs the line told me he was here and you served him. What did you give him?"

"Milk."

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"What?"

"Yes, milk—sure."

"What you take me for, Mis' Clayfoot? A durn fool?"

"Ask Janiska if you don't believe me—he had two glasses of milk."

"Of milk! mi-lk! Holy smoke! But say—he told me you gave him whisky."

"Course I did—so would you if you'd a-bin here. He wouldn't have it, and called for milk instead."

"Holy smoke! He must be the calf they killed the fatted prodigal for. Anyhow, that feller's a tarnation, low-down intermeddlin' cuss. He b'longs to the infernal Company we rented this shanty from, an' he's down on the hard cider the men get—says it's playin' the holy dooce with them—and a whole lot of that kind of rot. Says we've got to stop sellin' or git out."

"We sha'n't do neither, so we sha'n't," said his wife with energy. "I know a trick worth two of that."

"You do, eh?"

"Trust me."

"Rather," he said with emphasis, "what is it, ole woman?"

She again threw her arms about his neck and whispered something which made his long, thin slit of a mouth extend in a smile from ear to ear.

"Ole woman, you're a brick, you are. There ain't no flies on you. You don't know what a comfort you air to a poor feller down on his luck."

She smiled and kissed him, and playfully pushed him off the side of the bed into the chair.

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"And look here, Cap. I'm going to drink only milk myself after this."

He looked at her with some alarm.

"Honest Injnn? what for?"

"I'm not going to touch cider again. It don't agree with me. I want you to keep on this place, Cap. Mind you, it's going to be a mighty fine place this, once the railway is through, and we'll build a fine new hotel and have everything up to the handle, and all the country boys coming over of a Sunday—why we'll haul in the spondalicks just hand-over-fist."

"By gosh!" exclaimed the Captain, in admiration, "if I'd a known women were so clever, I'd have had a wife twenty years ago—I would—sure."

"So you see why I want to live on here, and keep myself fit—that cider is too strong—it makes me looney."

The Captain's wife may have had ambitious dreams, as she had intimated to him, but she did not tell the real reason for her sudden reformation, her determination to stay in this lone place for the present at least.

She did not tell the Captain that she had seen among the engineer's papers as they lay upon the table something which clutched her heart like the grip of a dead hand, something which sobered her in an instant, and roused all the determination in her nature to keep her wits sharply about her, ready for any unexpected contingency, ready to ward off whatever might rouse suspicion. She had fooled the Captain into marrying her, she had managed to get control of his money, the savings of twenty years; she had twined him round her little finger as easily as a thread of silk, laughing in her heart to see how the

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untapped affection of half a lifetime had flowed upon her without stint, how she had become his very life and breath. But she also knew that the day she should be known to him for what she was—so surely would a bullet from his unerring shooter avenge his outraged love and betrayed confidence. The possibility of such a thing had struck terror into her for the first time when she started up shrieking at the sight of Geoffrey Webster's belongings. The world which she had hitherto thought so great and wide had grown suddenly small; so frightfully small as to be dangerous, no telling whom next she might meet in those days of linking continents together by "hooks of steel."

The Captain, after this, disappeared every day for several hours, and no one could tell whither he had gone. Certainly he was not engaged in freighting, the horses being in the log stable at the back of the house. Another strange circumstance happened. No more of that brand of cider could be had for love or money at the Captain's. He swore he had none. As a proof of his statement, when it was doubted some weeks later, he opened his cellar door wide and requested any man among them to step down and try if he could find a drop. Some inquisitive souls went down to investigate, but not one solitary barrel of cider could they see by the light of the lamp, which shone on the grey deal boards with which the cellar was lined, also on the earthen floor which looked as if it had been raised slightly.

There was some grumbling among the men, but the work progressed satisfactorily, and the threatened temporary loss of Joe, with consequent disorganization of his gang, was averted.

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In the interval, there had been a strange passage-at-arms between McBirnie and the convalescent stranger now known as Bernard Cathcart.

The doctor had at last given permission for his patient to leave bed for a little every day; so drawing the boxes from under the table McBirnie unlocked it, and lifting the garments one by one, shook the creases out and laid them upon his bed.

"There they are," he said. "I'll give you some clean undershirts of mine, which you can wear while you send your own to the wash."

Cathcart did not answer. He seized his coat, and plunging his hand into it pulled out a folded blue foolscap document, opened it, and glanced furtively at the contents.

McBirnie watched him, and smiled to see the haste with which he put the paper back in its place.

"Keep your mind easy, Cathcart. I read that document the day you were brought in here."

"Thought you never overhauled my things?" growled Cathcart.

"Neither I did. But when your things were being removed by the men this must have fallen from your pocket. Anyhow, after the men went out that day, when I stooped to put the box where it has lain ever since—I found this paper with my name on a document in a stranger's possession—and concluded it was intended for me. Then I put it back into the pocket it had evidently dropped from, and locked it in the box."

"By God!" breathed the man, "this knocks me out."

"It needn't," said McBirnie calmly. "The only incongruity I see in the whole thing is that you—you

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of all people, should have taken upon yourself this task. Was there no other man could have been detailed off for this but you? Common decency I should imagine would have deterred you."

"Decency!" growled the man, "who cares for decency? It's revenge I want—that I wanted, I mean."

"Well—it seems to me that I had more right to revenge on you than you on me. You were the miserable cause of all the trouble."

"No, but you were. She was promised to me long before she saw you, but I was so long out of a job—and then I went to London, and you were in a good position in Auld's; everybody said it would only be a matter of time getting into the firm, and you hurried up the marriage for all you were worth—never let her alone till you had her."

"Who told you that, Cathcart?" queried McBirnie grimly.

"She told me herself, James Watson."

"She did! Well, never mind—it doesn't matter now. It has been a bad job all round. And let me say this—believe me or not—I did not know you had ever seen or spoken to, or had any acquaintance with my wife before I married her. She told me I was her first and only sweetheart. Well—now you are better—get strong and do what you came to do."

"You say that but you don't mean it," the man muttered shamefacedly.

"Have I not shown that I mean it?"

The question was unanswerable, but the hate that had burned so long and so fiercely in Cathcart's heart could not die out all at once.

"Look here, Watson—we're both men—and I



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loved her first, last, and for ever. I can't forgive you taking her from me. I would have gone to hell with that woman—though there were plenty good girls would have led me to heaven. You know it isn't the best woman can hold us—no, but the worst. The devil's in it, but that's the truth. Maybe it's because there's so much of the worst in ourselves. Anyhow, I could have borne it and hated you less if you had left her grave to me; for I love her—yes—I love her dead as I loved her living. If I only had had her grave to visit, but you robbed me even of that. Man, what did you do with her after you murdered her? Did you carry her to the river and let the tide wash her away? You must have done it out of sheer spite to me. All the countryside knew you had murdered her—they found your confession of the murder—in your own handwriting—on your mother's doorstep. It couldn't be to hide the murder that you made away with her body. Tell me, man," he cried, rising up in a fury, "what did you do with her?"

## CHAPTER VII.

### HOW CATHCART SERVED THE ARREST WARRANT.

JAMES WATSON sank helplessly upon the bench and stared at Cathcart in dumb amazement. The look of astonishment in his eyes was so utterly sincere—it staggered the man.

“You might at least have left her to me to bury.”

McBirnie’s face was ashen pale! his lips could scarcely shape his words.

“What—do—you mean—Cath-cart? I—I—God help me!—I left her lying there. I thought of getting a doctor, but—she—was dead—stone dead. I laid my fingers deep on her pulse, but there was no life. She—she was dead—and I had—killed her—fighting you.

“After I went and told—my mother—I came back to the house and sat there sobbing my heart out—and then I kissed her dead face, and left her lying there. I took the morning boat to London, and went from that to California, and got to Vancouver on this work; and now, Cathcart, at last you have found me. Do your worst.”

While McBirnie spoke slowly, as in a dream, the man had left the bed, and now stood on the floor before him.

“Watson, I’m bound to believe what you say. Put your hand in mine, which would have been dust to-day but for you, and swear solemnly, as God is your witness, that you did not take away her body.”

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McBirnie complied, and, looking calmly into Cathcart's eyes, said simply—

"I did not; I swear it."

The man sat down, half nude as he was, upon the bench, the picture of utter perplexity.

"Then, who did it?" he demanded.

"Was she not found there next morning?"

"No; the murder didn't come out for some days. Nohody went in to see till it all came out through your being missing, and then that paper the milkman found at your mother's doorstep. Then they went and saw the place all in an uproar—all the marks of the fight we had, and a pool of blood, dried, and hairs sticking to it—all signs of a murder, as you confessed it in that paper. But she was not there; some one must have carried the body away. You are sure she was quite dead?"

"Too sure—too sure! I took her wrist and pressed my fingers deep into the artery, hut not the slightest pulse was there. But don't think for a moment I escaped from the law for my own sake, or from mere cowardice. It was for my mother's sake, and at my mother's earnest protests, that I fled; and I also felt that I had not forfeited my life justly. It was a horrible, cruel accident, which should never have been possible. But this is the most astounding news to me. Who could have taken the body away? And why? Could——?"

He paused suddenly, remembering his mother's wild energy—her fierce desire to save him. Could she have——? Yes, she might. She was a woman to whom all things were possible when shielding her own. Could she really have done this thing?

He kept his thoughts to himself, however; and,

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shaking off a nervous shiver which remembrance had brought on, resumed control of himself.

"Better get on your things, Cathcart," he said, handing him his trousers and vest; "the weather is warm, but you are not yourself yet. Better take care; a relapse is a bad thing."

Cathcart, in a half-dazed way, thrust himself into his garments, but the face of the timekeeper seemed to fascinate him. Despite its paleness—its look of haggard weariness—there was that in its expression which seemed to glorify it with some inner light.

"Watson, I don't believe you could lie if you tried."

"But why should I try?" was the quiet query.

"To save your neck."

"And lose my soul? No, thanks. It isn't worth a man's while. It has been bad enough for me to bear my mother's maiden name all this time instead of my own; but, as I told you, I was bound to consider her. When you, however——"

"Once more, Watson!—for God's sake! Did you not know about her body being taken away till I told you? It seems so incredible."

"No; I solemnly assure you, I did not."

"Then may I be eternally damned if I hurt a hair of your head!"

With fierce and trembling energy Cathcart suddenly plucked the document from his coat pocket, tore it into a thousand fragments, and sanded the floor of the shack with them.

"There," he said, "that was the warrant for your arrest on a charge of murder. I swore I'd track you to the ends of the earth, and I've done it, only to find you are a better man than I am or ever could be."

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Yes—and I say it here and now—that you'd have made her a better husband than I coul<sup>d</sup> have done."

To McBirnie's great surprise, Cathcart finally broke down, and, burying his face in his hands, wept aloud, the tears dripping through his fingers.

"Come, come, Cathcart, be a man. I don't want to have it to do all over again; you'll be ill."

As he spoke he poured out a strengthening draught, and, gently supporting the broken man, persuaded him to swallow it.

When Cathcart became more composed he looked up into McBirnie's face with a hungry, questioning look.

"I wonder if I dare ask you to do one thing more for me, Watson?"

"I guess so; what is it?"

Cathcart held out his long white hand with piteous entreaty.

"Do you think you could bring yourself to lay your hand there and say one word to me—only one word?"

"I guess so; what is the word?"

"Forgiven!"

"Why, certainly Cathcart!" said McBirnie, laying his brown hand in the white palm, which closed on it.

"Forgiven be it. But the word is stale now. I forgave everybody long ago. When a man comes to sit under a shadow such as I have known all these years he becomes ready to forgive any one of God's erring creatures. There!"

The next day—Sunday—Geoffrey Webster sat in the boarding car composing a letter which cost him more thought and trouble to write than all his other correspondence. He occupied the little private compartment reserved for the use of the officers of the

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road, and outspread on the table before him lay Violet Mickledeool's letter.

The first one he had written to her had come easy, it having been an apology and explanation which he felt in duty bound to make.

The present was a very different thing altogether. The letter lying before him was a courteous acknowledgment that she had received and accepted his apologies, also a kind assurance that so far from giving offence by his words, no thought, save that of gratitude, was cherished towards him. The letter, it was clear, required no answer, nor was there a word in it to signify that the writer expected one.

Yet he had a strong disinclination to fold away this letter and close the correspondence so strangely begun, just as he might fold away a page of his life that he was over and done with for ever.

He could not still the clamant desire he felt to keep in touch with this bright spirit, on whose mind his words had had such a marked effect; to the extent even of altering the whole course of her life.

He wanted to write to her, to express his sympathy, and to wish her every success in her new and untried profession. He really wanted to express all that, but the chief motive, only half confessed to himself, was the hope of evoking another letter from her by way of reply.

What excuse to invent for writing, or what he would say, he was at a loss to conceive, but at last he struck the bold idea of saying that he thought an account of a railroad maker's life in the Canadian North-West might possibly interest her. He felt this to be a "fake," and himself a "fakir" in writing a graphic sketch of the life up here, but—hang it!—write he

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must—and as well speak of that as of anything else, since it was all quite remote from what lay unspoken in his innermost heart.

When at last he had finished, however, he confessed he might have done worse; she might really be interested; the reading of it might afford her a pleasant ten minutes or so—and then he screwed up his courage and added that it was rather lonely up here, and if she would spare time to write a line or two from the Old Land, or to send a newspaper occasionally, he would be more than glad to get either. Yes—from mute wandering in long lone avenues of thought—he had come to this—he would be glad even of a paper which her fingers had folded and addressed. Anything to keep him in friendly touch with her.

He enclosed the letter in an envelope, one of the Company's envelopes, and addressed it to the Hospital from which hers had been dated.

Then, with a sense of having prepared a future pleasure for himself, he took another sheet and wrote on it in a glad free hand—

“My dear Mrs. McBirnie.”

Ere he could proceed further there was a tap on the door, and his friend the timekeeper, from the shackyard down the line, entered.

With an unobserved movement Webster turned the sheet on which he had been writing face downward—while greeting the new-comer.

“McBirnie! Glad to see you, old man. Close the door and find a seat—if you can. Nothing disagreeable up at the camp? No? Well, then, awfully glad to see you.”

“Am I interrupting you?” queried McBirnie, seeing the addressed letters on the desk.

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"No, oh, bless you, no! I do my business correspondence during working days; my letters of friendship I reserve for Sunday peace and Sunday memories. It is like speaking to old friends again."

"Would you like to take a stroll with me, Webster?" said McBirnie, and as Webster looked at him he saw that the habitual sadness in his eyes had deepened, and that beneath his outward calm there was some unusual agitation.

"I don't mind," said he, reaching down his hat. "It is comparatively cool to-day. Where shall we go? What do you say, to the berry-patch? It's not far from the Captain's place, and we can have a feast of wild strawberries as we rest ourselves."

"Anywhere. Yes, the berry-patch is fine just now. We can lie down among the hushes where it's shady if it gets too hot."

They tramped down the line and out into the open, wading knee-deep in tall, flowering grasses, flushed with every hue of floral color, and exhaling faint, sweet, clovery odors. The sun had long since dried up the dew, but the grasses were still damp at the roots, and made cool walking.

Beyond the trail, as they neared a hirsch copse, the grass and wild flowers grew thinner, eaten out by low, scrubby vegetation, and bushes that bore fruits of all kinds.

At the root of a wide hirsch, whose over-arching branches afforded them a grateful shade, they sat down.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### CONFIDENCES.

THE trees in the copse grew thickly, the underbrush being dense enough to enclose them all round. Both men took out cigars, and began to smoke in order to clear the air of flies. McBirnie spoke first.

"I wanted to talk with you, Webster. That's why I asked you to come out here. I wanted to speak of things that had better be spoken where there are no walls with ears. Besides, I felt I must get into the air or choke."

"I thought you wanted to speak," said Webster, kindly. "Has that fellow Cathcart been bothering you again?"

"Oh, there are worse folk in the world after all. I'm afraid you will think little enough of me when I tell you that all this time I have been masquerading under a false name, that I have been wanted by the police for the last few years, and that the man Cathcart was a detective who carried a warrant for my arrest on the charge of murdering my wife."

He paused to watch the effect of his startling statement on Webster, but was surprised to see that his friend still sat hugging his knees and puffing at his cigar without any perceptible change of countenance.

"You don't seem at all surprised," he added, after a pause.

"Didn't I say I'm your friend in all circumstances whatever?"

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"But then you were not aware that you were speaking to a criminal."

"A criminal! To be a criminal one must have the nature of one. Is this all you have to tell me?"

"That is the gist of it. But I would like you to know the whole story from the beginning. As you say, I am not a criminal, nor please God, ever will be. I shall tell you the whole thing, and then I am going to ask your advice as to what course I should pursue."

"Go ahead, old man," said Webster coolly.

McBirnie hesitated a minute, but laying aside his cigar he presently began the story of his life as James Watson, from the date of his marriage up till now. In no way did he seek to extenuate or belittle his own faults. "Perhaps I ought to have been more patient with her," he concluded regretfully. "I daresay she thought no harm in Cathcart visiting her—she was not to know he was so much in love with her—and I should have waited to hear his explanation that night instead of flying at his throat as I did."

"You did perfectly right, McBirnie; I'd have done the same thing in the same circumstances. As for your wife—well, we are told to speak no ill of the dead—but, to tell the truth, you were just too indulgent, and you needn't think she didn't know perfectly well what she was doing. Her death does not alter facts. Look here, my friend," he continued, drawing out a photograph from his pocket and keeping it face downward, "What advice did you expect to get from me?"

"Shall I, or rather ought I, to go and give myself up, now that Cathcart has found me? I'd sooner go voluntarily than be compelled to."

"But, great heavens, you don't think that man

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would betray you after what has already passed between you?"

"I don't know," said McBirnie sadly; "I believe he was in good earnest for the time being, otherwise he would not have torn up the warrant as he did. I don't care; I am sick of the burden of it all, and, but for my mother——"

"Ay, your mother—you are bound to consider her. What would you say if I told you that your mother is a very special friend of mine?"

"Of yours?"

"Yes; and don't you for a moment think of breaking such a heart as hers, though indeed, that has been done already."

"My mother! You know my mother?"

"I do—look what she sent me."

He turned up the face of the photograph, and held it towards the timekeeper, the sunny face of Jamie Watson at nineteen.

"Oh, my God!" murmured Watson, gazing on his own young likeness through gathering tears, "was there ever a time when I was such a light-hearted lad as that?"

"Hardly like you now, Mack—though your mother sent me that to trace you by."

Then, while the timekeeper listened in wonder, Geoffrey Webster told the story of his acquaintance with Mrs. McBirnie—or rather, Mrs. Watson—she having renounced that name and taken her own maiden name after moving from the scene of the tragedy into the city with the hope of losing her identity. He had scarcely concluded his narration when he turned quickly, in a listening attitude.

"I thought I heard voices."

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"So did I," said McBirnie. "It's some people over yonder in the berry-patch. Let us back further into the bush, Webster. I hate the thought of being seen by any living soul just now."

Geoffrey humored his friend by rising and going with him a few feet further back from the open, where they could sit and see without being seen through the screen of low brushwood. There he summed up the whole matter finally.

"Now you will understand why I must ever be the friend of your mother's son. As soon as I saw you in the shack I knew you—first the name made me look, and then I saw the resemblance, not to be mistaken anywhere. Keep your mind easy—it will be a great day for her when she hears from me that you are in my keeping. For that you are. As for giving yourself up—absurd! Why, you don't even know for certain whether it was your blow or Cathcart's that killed her. More likely his, I should say, and you all fighting in the dark—Sh—sh! Here's some one!"

They sat motionless, and as they peeped through the brush into the open berry-patch, a ringing, gurgling woman's laugh, also the sound of Captain Clayfoot's voice, gleefully relating some yarn, floated to them. Nearer and still nearer sounded the voices, the woman now speaking volubly. Presently the Captain, and beside him his wife, in a new red gown, with a wide straw hat tilted back jauntily from her face, came into view.

"I declare!" whispered Webster, laughing, "it's the Captain and his gay spouse. Look! look! Mack, isn't she a stunner? Wonder where he picked her up? By Jove! they've been a-berrying—the happy pair."

McBirnie, who was behind his friend, had risen to

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his knees, resting his hand on Geoffrey's shoulder while looking in the direction pointed out. Suddenly, as the pair sauntered past, all unconscious of being observed, McBirnie's hand gripped the shoulder he leaned on like a vice, while the woman, passing close, within a few feet of them, turned her face full toward the copse, laughing gaily.

Then the grip on Webster's shoulder relaxed, and McBirnie crashed softly among the underbrush.

"What do you think of her, Mack?" said Webster, still intent on the retreating pair.

No answer coming, he turned, and saw to his horror that McBirnie lay in a heap behind him, either dead or in a mortal swoon.

"Great heavens!" he cried, springing to his feet, and hending over the deathlike face; "the poor fellow is fairly done for with all this trouble."

He rushed out of the thicket with the intention of calling the Captain and his wife, but seeing they had foregathered with a party of men from the camp, he turned in again beside his unconscious friend. Perhaps McBirnie would prefer not to be seen by any but himself for the present.

A score of plans, for McBirnie's removal from the camp altogether, flitting through his mind as he lowered his head and waited for him to come to. This would never do—the poor chap was quite run down—what with work and all this wearing hurden of trouble getting heavier every day. Webster made up his mind to write at once to the Company and ask for a better position for McBirnie in some of their new South African enterprises. Surely he would be safe from the sleuth-hounds of the law out there!

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While he speculated and planned, McBirnie opened his eyes, and sat up like one roused from a dream.

"Where—where am I?" he breathed, looking round till his eyes rested on Webster. "Ah! it is you—what's up?"

"What's up?" echoed Webster heartily, right glad to see him so far recovered; "why, man, you went off in a dead faint."

"Did I?" breathed the astonished man. "How was that? I don't think I ever fainted in my life before. I can't understand it."

"Well, you see, old man, you're run down till you're weak as a cat. That talk we had about by-gones was too much for you; and when Mrs. Clayfoot in her fine red gown came—"

McBirnie, suddenly clasping his head in both hands, uttered a strange, half-strangled cry.

"Mack, be careful, old man—you frighten me," cried Webster, thoroughly alarmed at the wild, convulsive working of McBirnie's countenance; "let me help you—there's a good fellow—you'll be all right when you get to your feet. Can you stand upright?"

Once upon his feet, McBirnie laid hold of Webster's arm with both hands, and, wild-eyed, whispered fearfully—

"I think—I'm awfully afraid—this trouble is weakening my brain. Do you know I saw—I saw—her—my dead wife—and she laughed in my face just as I remember. I knew the laugh—the old laugh when she was in her gay moods. Oh, God!—Webster, do you think I am going insane."

"Stuff and nonsense," burst out Webster in his anxiety to conceal his real alarm. "What you did see was the Captain's wife—Mrs. Clayfoot—in a flaring

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red gown and a white straw hat. You—'a your weak condition, and having just been talking of things—ha! ha! ha! This is rich—the Captain's wife is no ghost I can tell you."

"The Captain's wife!—then you, too, saw her! In the red dress—did you say the Captain's wife?"

"Of course she is—a stunning lass, too—so far as looks go."

The scared, wild expression faded from McBirnie's face; with every muscle rigid he stood looking into Webster's eyes, a thousand questions crowding visibly into his own.

"Webster," he said in a sane, firm, significant tone, "that woman you call the Captain's wife is my wife. I have good reason to remember her."

The man he addressed staggered back. On a sudden the same overwhelming possibility had seized him, too, stunning him with the weight of its meaning.

"McBirnie!—Watson!—for God's sake!—do you think—?"

"I don't think—I know. I saw my wife pass before my eyes and laugh as she used to laugh; her voice—I could tell it anywhere."

"Then——" said Geoffrey in bewilderment.

"Ay, then—it means—that I—oh, God! my God! I thank Thee!"

Upon his knees he sank, burying his face in his hands in long rapt silence.

Webster could only stand by and look on—the whole meaning of this dramatic episode slowly unfolding itself to his mind.

He stooped down and threw an arm about his kneeling friend.

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"Watson—dear old chap—you're sure there can be no mistake? Some women look so much alike."

"No! no! there is no mistake," he said, rising up and gripping the hand that hung over his shoulder. "It was she and no other."

Geoffrey wrenched his hand free, and seizing Watson by the shoulders shook him in savage joy.

"Mack! Good heavens! do you realize what this means to you? Think, dear boy, what it will mean to a certain woman mourning in Glasgow for the son she dare not own."

"Webster—don't—it is surely too good to be true. And yet it is true—my wife is not dead, but alive, and—laughing as heartily as ever."

The thought of it, and all it meant, set himself to laughing so loudly and shrilly that Webster seized him and shook him roughly.

"You infernal fool!—you've borne trouble like a Spartan all these years, and now, when fortune snatches the fox away from your vitals, you hoot like a fool. Shut up!"

The healthy raillery of his friend brought him to his senses—in a little while the whole thing seemed clear as day—though how the supposed murdered woman had got away unobserved, and why she had gone, were as yet among the mysteries.

"Look here, McBirnie," said Webster, "not one word of this to that fellow Cathcart until I make sure of the thing. You get straight to camp and keep to your shack till I come down this evening. If this is really your wife—then she's a slippery customer; and if she gets wind of you being here, she'll slope off again, certain. We must make sure of her. If she's your wife, then I've got to have a few questions



## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

answered to my satisfaction before we lose sight of her again. Leave this thing in my hands, Mack—there's a good fellow—you're not fit to attend to it yourself. Besides—we are not yet absolutely certain that this woman and your wife are one and the same."

"Oh, yes, it is she," said McBirnie, with decision.

"So much the better for you then. See, there is Joe Wark over in the open yonder. I'll send him down to camp with you—I'm afraid you are hardly fit to go alone."

McBirnie was about to protest, when a shrill whistle from Geoffrey made the track foreman wheel about and come in their direction.

"Look here, Joe. Mr. McBirnie is under the weather a bit; will you see he is howled safely down to the camp? I've got to go over to the Captain's. Ta, ta, Mack; I'll run down on the hand-car in the evening."

Joe, reconnoitring McBirnie with his one eloquent eye, remarked that further would be the proper man to see to the timekeeper. His appearance certainly bore out Webster's words. That he was very much under the weather, indeed, was quite apparent, and as he turned away with Joe, Webster lit his cigar afresh and strode through the hush to the trail in the direction of Captain Clayfoot's house, his strong face set and resolved.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A REMARKABLE AFFIDAVIT.

As HE had hoped, Mrs. Clayfoot was alone, picking the berries she had brought home. Her husband, she explained, had taken the horse and ridden up the line to the boarding-car to ascertain if there were any particular orders for to-morrow—private and personal orders for the men—the Captain being extremely obliging in his way.

The engineer sat down at the table and made himself particularly agreeable. An old Scotch proverb had recurred to him, as forgotten things will at times of mental excitement or tension, and it stimulated him to an excess of politeness. He smiled as he thought of its aptness in this case—"It tak's a lang spoon to sup wi' the de'il."

He said it to himself as Mrs. Clayfoot greeted him at the door effusively. He repeated it mentally as she sat down at the table opposite him, with her dish of berries and her finger-tips dyed with the juice. He had half-hoped to find her as free of speech as on the last occasion, but, to his surprise, she treated him with respect, and was evidently on guard. The truth was the woman was thinking of that which she had caught a glimpse of among his papers during his first visit—the photograph of the man whose life she had laid waste.

For a few moments he chatted with her in a desultory fashion, while he debated with himself as to the

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

best method of surprising her into a confession of the truth, when the question was suddenly settled by her asking him very prettily if he would be inclined to do her a favor. Webster was all blandness and suavity.

Certainly—that went without saying—if the granting of that favor were in his power.

“The last time you were here,” she said, smiling, with head to one side, “I noticed a photo among your papers.”

“Aha! oh!” thought Webster. But to her he said meditatively, as if trying to recollect—

“A photo?”

“Yes; it lay on the table there. I just got a glimpse of it. I thought it looked like some cue I knew, but I might have been mistaken.”

“I have only one photo here,” he said, dipping his fingers into his coat pocket and producing the likeness she had already seen. “It can’t be any one you know. That’s an old countryman—a friend of mine.”

She took the photo from his hand and looked at it with assumed indifference. But all her attempted *ouichalance* could not prevent the blanching of her cheeks or the blood leaving her lips till they showed livid.

Webster was entirely satisfied. The blue drawn lips, though silent, told him all he wanted to know.

“A friend of yours, is he? Do you know, I thought he looked like an old acquaintance of mine. But he isn’t; it isn’t him at all. Where is your friend at present?”

Webster felt that now he must use the *loug spoon* in supping. So he answered—

“In South Africa somewhere.”

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"In South Africa!" she exclaimed, and the long breath of relief she drew, bringing back the flush to her face and the crimson to her lips, was another proof of her identity.

"Why do you carry his portrait about? Most men would have a woman's portrait—not a man's."

"That's so; but this man—his name was Watson, James Watson—was a good deal better than a hundred women."

"Oh, oh!" she laughed, quite herself again.

"I assure you, he was. But he had a very sad history, poor fellow—a sad, sad history. His whole life was ruined by a hasty marriage with a shameless woman."

"Oh, of course, blame the woman! It's always the woman," she scoffed, but her cheeks tingled and her eyes sparkled more angrily than she knew.

"Well, look here, I'll tell you his story; and you, Mrs. Clayfoot—you're a pretty and a clever woman—you shall judge for yourself. I know both him and his mother well."

"But what interest can I have in his story? 'Tisn't the man I thought in the photo. But if you like to tell the story, since it is so sad—I like sad stories in books—they make me cry. I hope you won't make me cry."

"Oh, no; no fear of that," responded Geoffrey cheerfully.

He smiled at her thinly-veiled curiosity, and while she continued to pick the berries he went on with his parable.

"My friend was the son of a widow, a good woman, who made it the aim and end of her life to train up her only son to be that 'noblest work of God,' an

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honest man. She succeeded; he is that still. But when still young he met a girl—a woman rather, I should say—of determined will but shady morals, one who possessed beauty, but certainly did not turn it to an end divine. Quite the contrary. She had a lover, this girl—a man, like herself not too fastidious, but very seriously in love with her. They had had a tiff over something or other—a lover's quarrel. He, being out of a job, went to London, where he, through the influence of friends, was made one of a private detective company, with branches in Scotland. When he came back from London he found this woman he was still crazy after married to my friend Watson. She was tired of the necessity of working for herself, and James Watson was a good catch, with every prospect of rising in the business he was in. So she snared him with her good-looking face and nice manners; but the poor fellow soon found what a terrible mistake he had made. A lazy woman is bad enough, but when laziness and drink are combined it is hard on the man who is joined to such a woman."

He paused a moment, ostensibly to shake the ash from the cigar, which he found such an aid in the wielding of the long spoon, and as he took a fresh puff he looked at her through the smoke. A dark frown puckered her forehead, her lips were set, and on each cheek-bone there burned a hot-red spot.

"Yes," he resumed, more sure of his ground than ever, "I'm naturally inclined to like women in general; but for the woman who lures a man into marrying her in order to be supported by him, gives his honest name over to open shame—well—I don't call that a woman at all—I have quite another name altogether for such as she."

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"Oh, pahaw! I don't want to hear any more of that sort of stuff," interposed Mrs. Clayfoot sharply.

"I like to hear of pleasanter things."

"Ah, but you haven't heard the end of it yet. Let me tell you how that woman made my friend a wanderer and an outcast on the face of the earth."

She went on with her berry-picking, making no further protest. She suddenly remembered that she could not afford to offend the Engineer of the Company on whose land their house stood. The man who had so effectually interdicted the cider selling was a man to be borne with.

"This woman," resumed Webster, "renewed her acquaintance with her former lover, spent hours in his company when my poor friend was at the warehouse in the city, and as a consequence scandals arose. Watson heard nothing until one day some well-meaning friend warned him, and that same evening he was astounded to see the man step in as though the house had been his own. It was almost dark, and evidently the man expected the master of the house would be away. Ontraged at this proof of what he had heard, Watson, being a man, flew at the intruder as he entered the darkened room, and a struggle followed. They grappled as men blind with rage grapple and fight; the woman interfered, and somehow got a bad blow, which felled her. Watson fled, thinking he was a murderer—he thinks so still. The woman fled also—and here I find her alive and gay—the wife of Captain Clayfoot!"

Webster brought his parable to such a sudden ending that the woman sprang to her feet, white and panting.

"It's a lie—all a lie—every bit of that yarn is lies.

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THE WOMAN SPRANG TO HER FEET, WHITE AND PANTING.

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You are down on us because we sell liquor to the men. It's low-down mean to get up a string of lies about me like that."

Webster smiled quietly at her bravado. Notwithstanding her wild denials, he could see she was trembling in every limb.

"Now, see here, Mrs. Watson; the more frank you behave in this affair the better for yourself. I have no wish to disturb your relations with the Captain—he seems to think a lot of you—but I owe a duty to my friend. I must have him at once and forever exonerated from the charge of murdering you. I shall prepare an affidavit, which you must sign, setting forth that you are alive and well, and that you wilfully disappeared in order that people might think Watson had made away with you."

"No, I won't," she cried, with a fierce stamp of her foot; "I'll do nothing of the kind. I'll tell Clayfoot you insulted me; he'll shoot you on the spot you stand on. You don't know Clayfoot as I do."

"Oh, yes, I do. When I produce the warrant, which I have here, for your apprehension on the charge of bigamy," he said, tapping his breast pocket while he supped with his long spoon, "Clayfoot will be more likely to shoot yourself."

The baited woman stood like a tigress at bay, but she quailed visibly before the power in his steady grey eyes—before the stern look of the strong set features. This was neither Watson nor Clayfoot. This was not a man to be trifled with.

"What'll you do if I sign that thing?" she queried, sullenly.

"Go and leave you in peace for ever. It is noth-

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ing to me, woman, with whom you choose to spend your life, but it is everything to me that the reputation of a good man should be cleared."

"And you won't tell Clayfoot, now or afterward?"

"Certainly not; why should I? All I ask and am determined to have is your declaration that you are alive and well; also your explanation as to how you happen to be so after my friend's confession that he had accidentally killed you."

"You swear you won't tell Clayfoot? He'd shoot me," she said, shuddering visibly.

"I swear, on my word of honor, that the Captain will never know from me. I shall want two witnesses to your signature, of course, but they need not know what the document contains. I shall get the track foreman and one of his men to witness it. Now for it!"

He took out a folded sheet of foolscap, and thereon began to write rapidly, the woman looking on in sullen helplessness.

In a few graphic sentences, interspersed with many a legal "whereas," "said," and "aforesaid," he set forth the case, until he came to the climax—the disappearance of the body of the supposed murdered woman. Then he stopped and looked up at her.

"Now, will you just relate how you happened to come to and get away? In as few words as possible."

A black frown made her well-featured face repulsive as she answered—

"Well, if you must have it, I had come to when he came in, and I didn't know how long he'd been out or where he'd been. But I felt awful queer, and my head ached, so I lay still. Then Watson came up and felt my pulse. He did not know my pulse was not on

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

the inside of my wrist, like most people's, but round the back of my thumb. Of course, he felt no beat, so he dropped my hand, and said, 'Dead—stone dead!' Whenever I heard him say that I knew he thought he had killed me; and there he sat a long time and cried like a baby. But when he went away I got up, and lay on the lounge till early morning, and slept a little. When I awoke it was four o'clock, and I never forgot what a sight I was when I looked in the glass that morning. My face was all swollen, a big blue lump was on my temple, and my eyes, too, were swollen in my head. Do you think I was going to let anybody see me looking like that? I couldn't stand it. So I got up, and took all the money there was in the house—£8 or £9—and I dressed myself like an old woman, and put a thick veil on my face—thick black gauze—and in the grey of the morning I crept down to the station, and got away into the city by the last night train. I thought Watson would be glad to see I wasn't killed, but I decided to stay away where I wasn't known for two or three months, till I was as pretty as ever, and then I'd go back to him. I had no idea he would think anything else but that I'd run away. Besides, I was mortal tired of him. He was too good—too soft for a man. If he had thrashed me I'd liked him better. But when he wasn't pleased about me taking a little drop he'd never say a word, but just sit, and sit like an owl; and then Cathcart used to come and bring a flask of wine with him to keep me from wearying—and, of course, all the town began to talk. And, anyway, I thought the best thing after this row would be to clear out. That's the God's truth—why I went. Have you got that all down?"

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Geoffrey was writing at lightning speed, not losing a word, and her pause gave him time to catch up.

"There," he said at last. "Now, how did you come to go to America?"

"I'll tell you how. At the place where I lodged, which was in a house near the docks, I met a woman who was going back to New York. My face had healed and was all right again by this time. She kept a restaurant there, she said, and she offered me big money if I would go out with her and serve in the restaurant, because she liked to get girls who were smart and good-looking. I had £5, and she paid the rest of the fare—so I thought I'd go and have my fling for a while—just to spite them all. But I'd no idea they thought I was dead till I saw an old paper in New York with an account of the murder, and how Watson wasn't to be found anywhere. After that I didn't want to go back—I didn't like his mother, and I knew she didn't like me—and I knew I was disgraced for ever anyway among the gossiping lot. Oh, how I hated them all!"

Wehster selected the salient points when she began to be discursive, and soon had them all down.

"Now, then—about the Captain. Weren't you afraid to marry the man? Weren't you afraid of being arrested for bigamy?"

"Oh, well—the Captain had money, and his business took him into the country to live, and there wasn't much chance of being found out. People don't expect to meet dead folk, and it heats me to think how ever you came to know me."

"I daresay," he said grimly, "but I shan't enlighten you. Now, then, get on your hat, and walk down as far as the line with me. I have two men at

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the camp—we'll just be in time to catch them coming up on the hand car. Joe Wark and Mike Moran will witness your signature."

"If the Captain sees me he'll kill me," she protested in genuine alarm.

"He won't see you. Didn't you say he had gone down to the boarding car? That's miles along the line now. Anyhow, I'm going to have this business cleared up at once and for all time. James Watson has suffered long enough by your capriciousness."

It was rather a harsh way to speak, but the callousness, the heartlessness of the woman so disgusted him that he forgot the claims of her sex, and only saw in her the cold-blooded wretch who had wilfully blasted a good man's life rather than face the consequences of her own selfishness and folly.

They were yet a long distance from the line when they saw the car come bowling up from the camp, and probably they would have missed it had not Webster by a long shrill whistle arrested the attention of the men and brought them to a halt.

"We got him home all right, boss," said Joe Wark, cheerfully, when Webster and the Captain's wife drew nigh, but his solitary eye looked the interrogations he did not speak.

"Who got home all right?" the woman queried with sudden suspicion.

"McBirnie—my time-keeper," said Webster calmly. "Now, then, boys, I want you to witness that you have seen Mrs. Clayfoot sign this document. I am not going to read it to you—a matter of private business you know—but you will see her sign it, and then you will sign your names as witnesses."

The whole thing was done in a few minutes, Web-

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ster signing after Mrs. Clayfoot—who signed her name Emma Watson. Joe followed with a flourish, and lastly Mike, with apologies, wrote his name largely and with no little labor across the foot of the page.

“Now, then, Joe,” concluded the engineer, “I’ll trouble you to bowl me up to camp again, and then we’ll all return together to our boarding car in the evening. Good-bye, Madam. Keep your mind quite easy.”

She tossed her head like a discomfited animal, and pointed down the new-made track.

“Yes—easy for you to say that. Look yonder—I was just afraid of that.”

They looked in the direction indicated, and sure enough there was Captain Clayfoot cantering towards them.

“Well—settle it as best you can,” said Webster coolly, “we must be off. Let her go, boys.”

As the three went at a good speed along the line the Captain reined up.

## CHAPTER X.

### CATHCART VISITS MRS. CLAYFOOT.

"WHAT the tarnation blunderbuss are ye doin' here, Mrs. Clayfoot?"

"Nothing, Cap. I just came down for a walk and fell a-talking to the engineer a bit."

The Captain's sallow visage took on a greenish hue, and his eyes glistened like two burnished steel points.

"Waal, as we'd been to the berry patch this afternoon already, I thought you'd had walking enough for one day."

"So I had, Cap. I didn't want to come, I'm sure—but the engineer he asked me, and I know you didn't want to offend him. That's why I came down as far as the line. Don't get mad, Cap. If you don't want me to speak to the man, why, I won't."

"Better not. I don't want my wife walkin' an' talkin' with any of them railway galoots. If you're goin' to be Mrs. Clayfoot, why, then, be Mrs. Clayfoot; but I'll be eternally smashed if I'll have you a-flirtin' an' philanderin' with any feller, no matter who he is."

"Oh, Captain, such nonsense," said his wife, in a tone of genuine vexation; "you know very well I'm none of the flirting kind. And, Captain, old man, I'll never speak to a solitary man on that line again—never."

There could be no doubt of her sincerity, no doubt but that she meant every word she said; her earnest-

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ness carried conviction to the Captain. His eyes softened, the green hne faded from his visage, leaving him only a shade paler than his wont.

He jumped from his horse, and, leading it by the bridle, threw his arm about her waist, and walked homeward.

“Do yon know, Mrs. Clayfoot, that if I thought you’d ever fancy any other feller, me bein’ an old chap, I’d go right out of my seven senses. I would. When I was a young feller I never had no gal like other fellers had. I was allers a-fightin’ Injuns an’ sich, an’ never had no time for philanderin’ with women folks.

“An’ then when, I saw you, an’ you let on you wouldn’t mind havin’ me for your husband, by gosh! it was like goin’ over the falls of Niagara. That’s how I lit on to matrimony. I was the river swoopin’ clean over the falls, an’ all the spray a-flyin’ up an’ blindin’ me. I was so blame happy. An’ I bin happy so bad sometimes that I got scared, an’ says I to myself—it’s not nateral for a man to be so happy in this vale of tears—it’s too darned good to last—summat’s goin’ to happen, sure. An’ when I come home hustlin’, home for all I was worth, just to have the afternoon ’longside o’ yon, a-feared you would be lonely, and I sees you down to the line a-talkin’ to that dam engineer—it was like an Injun had drawn on me, an’ his bowie gone straight through my heart. That’s why I spoke so sharp to ye, lovey, an’ I b’lieve if I’d a had my rifle I’d a-shot the whole caboose of ye on sight, I was that tarnation mad.”

His wife shnddered visibly; bnt, not observing it, he went on—

“You see, I never had many folks as could care for



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a feller, an' what I had is dead an' gone to glory, an' you air the only livin' soul on God's airth I have to call my own. An' dy'e know, I went an' got my life insured last time I was in Dauphin, because, as I said to the agent there, life is uncertain, an' if I should be called on to hand in my checks one of these days, I want Mrs. Clayfoot to be purvided fur. As I said to the agent, says I—When I get to the other world, I don't want to be sittin' up there with a gold crown on my head an' a harp in my hand, as the preachers tell about, an' my poor widdy down here going out washin' for 75 cents a day. Not much! So you bein', as I say, my own, I want ye fur my own, an' nobody else's, an' I'm bound to do the square thing by you every time. S'help me God!"

When at last they reached their own door the face of the Captain's wife was wan and drawn. The dread of this man who loved her so utterly was more appalling than a world's hatred.

In the meantime Geoffrey Webster, arrived at the camp, had alighted from the hand-car, and, with a more than ordinarily quick stride crossed the yard to the timekeeper's shack.

McBirnie was lying on his back in the bunk, his arms thrown up over his head, his eyes staring straight before him.

"All alone?" queried Webster. "Where's Cathcart?"

"He's gone out somewhere," said McBirnie; "been out ever since I came."

"Ah! that's well. I want to see you alone. There's lots to tell. Mrs. Clayfoot is the late Mrs. James Watson all right."

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He shut the door, but it never occurred to him that Cathcart might be sitting in the open air on the other side, drowsing in the heat, with his back against the board wall of the shack, and, as it happened, a knot-hole in the board against which his head rested. Through this knot-hole the sound of the Inspector's hearty voice came to the drowsing ear.

"Oh, I cornered my lady beautifully," Webster proceeded. "At first she was a little inclined to bluff me, but I told her a little story that brought her to her senses. One thing I can see—she is mortally afraid of old Clayfoot."

"Did you tell her I was here?" queried the time-keeper.

"What do you take me for? No; she thinks you are in South Africa. I hope I am a man humane as men go, but I felt as hard as the nether millstone when dickering with that woman. I don't believe she has a heart in her body. There," he continued, drawing out the affidavit from his pocket, "that goes per registered post to the Procurator-Fiscal of your old district, and maybe its publication won't create a sensation! And maybe my dear friend, Mrs. McBirnie to wit, will not go down on her knees and thank God that her faith in Him and her belief in the triumph of good over evil have been justified—after all these bitter years. Oh! maybe not!"

McBirnie glanced at the paper, but after reading a few lines turned so faint that he could not make out Webster's hasty handwriting.

"Read it to me, Webster; I am afraid I may lose any of it; I am afraid I may wake up and find all this is only a dream."

Webster took the statement he had written, and

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

read it aloud in clear, distinct tones, little dreaming of the audience he had outside—an audience quite as interested in the startling news as McBirnie himself.

He related how this confession had been extorted from Clayfoot's wife—how he had compelled her to come down with him to the line to have her signature witnessed by Joe Wark and Mike Moran. And while he yet spoke, the shack door opened, and a ghastly face peered in—the face of Cathcart, changed by some terrible emotion.

"I was going away from here to-morrow," he said, in a strange voice, "bnt outside there I heard all yon've been saying."

"The deuce, you did!" cried Webster, indignantly, "then understand I want this business kept quiet."

"No danger, Mr. Webster. I could have gone and never said 'boo,' bnt what I've heard has paralyzed me. Do you mean to say that——?"

"That my wife, whose murder yon came here to arrest me for, is not dead at all, but very mnch alive," interposed Watson, sitting np on the edge of the bnk with sudden energy.

"But how did you find out?"

"Saw her, Cathcart, with my own eyes. So, my man, all your trouble and toil was vain; all your eager thirst for revenge amounts to—well—what? The fact is, my late wife has fooled us both, and poor Clayfoot worst of all."

"She won't fool him much longer," cried Cathcart, darkly, turning out of the shack. Webster, however, laid a firm hand on him.

"What are yon going to do? Don't yon dare mention the matter to Clayfoot. The woman deserves little consideration after all she has made others suf-

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

fer; but I gave her my word of honor that Clayfoot would not be told who or what she was. I think my friend here ought to be consulted before you take any steps in the matter. Besides, it is not your affair; it's Watson's."

"Cathcart won't tell Clayfoot, now he knows how it is. You may trust Cathcart for that," said McBirnie, kindly.

Cathcart cast one of his old wondering looks on the timekeeper; he had not exhausted him yet.

"No, I won't see Clayfoot, since you don't want me to; but I tell you I'm going to see her. It's as much my affair as Watson's—now. So don't be surprised if I don't come back; I was going to leave for the old land to-morrow anyhow."

"No—not yet, Cathcart; you're not quite strong enough to travel yet."

Cathcart laughed.

"Oh, yes, I am—thanks to you, Watson. I'll have great news to carry home. But first I'm going to have a chat with Mrs. Clayfoot."

With feverish haste he gathered together the few articles he possessed, and was ready to go, when Webster came over to him, his hand in his breast pocket.

"Look here, if you must go, Cathcart, have some of this money."

"All right," said Cathcart, readily; "if you can give me fifty dollars or so, I'll send it to you when I get home."

"Never mind sending it. If you feel particularly flush any time you can give it to my mother."

The money changed hands, and at last Cathcart stood in the doorway, as if loth to go.

## THE HARVEST OF MOLOCH

Webster had not spoken for a few minutes, but now he said, in a softened tone—

“ If you'll wait a few minutes, Cathcart, I'll go with you on the hand-car. Joe and Mike are waiting for me. But first, Mack, I want a long envelope and sealing wax—I suppose I'll never be able to call you anything other than Mack.”

Cathcart mutely seated himself, while Webster at the timekeeper's desk wrote rapidly on one of the Company's sheets, filling the paper to the bottom.

When he had finished he folded and enclosed it with the statement, adding a postscript that he and the two witnesses were prepared to make affidavits at any moment as to the truth of the assertions therein made.

This packet he sealed carefully, using the Company's seal, and addressed it in large, bold letters—  
“ TO THE PROCURATOR-FISCAL, RENFREWSHIRE, SCOTLAND.”

“ Now then, go to bed and sleep, Watson; you are a free man at last in every sense of the word. I'll mail this when the train comes up to-night. Are you ready, Cathcart?”

Webster was a man of action; he never hesitated when anything was to be done, and it was with some impatience that he saw Cathcart still lingering after he himself had said “ Good-bye ” to Watson. But the timekeeper somehow understood, and with a wink and gesture indicated to Webster to go on. As soon as the Inspector's tall, broad back was turned, Watson held out his hand to Cathcart.

“ It's all right, Cathcart; I bear you no hard feeling. You were a detective, and had to do your duty.”

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Cathcart's voice was husky, and he gripped the proffered hand eagerly.

"Watson, if I should never look on your honest face again—and I've a queer presentiment that I never shall—I want you to know that you've made me ashamed of myself—that you've made me a better man. I've eaten a peck o' salt with you now, and I respect you as I never respected man before. Good-bye, and God bless you."

He was off, and overtook Webster at the car, in which they bowled down the line until opposite Clayfoot's house, where he got out.

"Now be cautious, Cathcart," said Webster.

"Don't be afraid. She has your word, and you have mine. I shan't speak to him."

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE LAST OF THE CLAYFOOTS.

MRS. CLAYFOOT came to the door that evening, and looked out in a not very pleasant mood. Things had worried her a good deal throughout that day—the visit of Webster had itself been exhausting, and notwithstanding his assurance that the Captain would not be informed of anything whatever, a nameless dread of impending evil oppressed her. To make matters worse, she had all the housework to do herself, and that neither improved her looks nor her temper. The Galician girl's month being up, she had been taken away with her family to live on the farm allocated to them by the Government, and the Captain had not been able to get another to help, as well as be company for his wife when he was away.

The Captain himself having partaken of a hearty supper, had gone into the bedroom to stretch himself upon the bed while his wife cleared the table, and, drowsiness overtaking him after his long ride, he had fallen asleep. For the first time his wife said to herself that she had made a great mistake, that it was a lonely and miserable life she led, and not even so safe as she had supposed. The Captain—old fool—she was sick and tired of him—oh! why had she ever run away from Watson? She could have induced him to move into the city, where there was less chance of gossip—and she might have had a good time after all between one thing and another. She smiled at

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one recollection—she had at least got even with that mother of his. Now, what a mighty to-do there would be in all the papers over there when the truth came out—the truth sent home by that terrible man, that big engineer, with his grey gimlet eyes boring her through and through. How—oh, how had he ever found her out—ever recognized her?

Ah! she was weary—so weary of this life in Manitoba! She must try to persuade the Captain to leave the place and go elsewhere—to some place where there would be more life—where they could sell hard cider without being peremptorily shut up by a milk-drinking calf of a railroad man. They had money enough—and, ah! she had forgotten—it was really good of the Captain to insure his life in her name—awfully good of old Cap.—but then, what was the use? These tough old frontiersmen—they lived for ever! They really did! The Captain was good for another twenty years yet, and what would be the use of money to her when she was an old woman and no more fun to be had out of life! If now—an accident could only happen to him—his revolver to go off, or he were to be thrown by his horse—but, pshaw! no danger—he was too clever an expert in the handling of both for any such luck. True, he might eat something that might disagree with him. Yes, that was more likely

While her thoughts flitted and floated and danced like imps of the pit on the brink of the awful chasm towards which she was surely moving, she caught sight of a dim figure advancing slowly across the open towards the house. Her first impulse was to rush in, shut and bolt the door, and call the Captain; but immediately she remembered the big engineer, and



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what he knew. Great heavens! Had he repented of his promise, and come back to give her away to the Captain after all?

Her knees shook and her color faded as she thought of the possibility, for though she was tired of the Captain and his affection for her, she by no means liked the idea of facing his just wrath. Therefore, instead of going in, she stayed outside, and walked a pace or two forward to meet the new-comer.

As he came nearer her fear vanished; it certainly was not the big engineer anyway, though something in the swinging gait of the man as he approached seemed familiar, reminding her of—whom? Good gracious! how very like Cathcart the man walked! Poor Cathcart! Wonder how he took the runaway business?

Nearer and nearer drew the man, still swinging one arm, while the other held a hundle under it, his face dimly visible now. A pale, pale face—not at all like Cathcart's—jolly old Cathcart, who was notably florid.

A few more steps forward, however, and she suppressed a cry; a few more steps, and the man stood gazing at her in the dim auroral light.

"You—you here?" she gasped with livid lips.

"Yes, here I am," he responded, with hard, cynical smile; "and I confess it's the first time in my life I ever saw a ghost. Is this part of your penance, Mrs. Watson—to wander about these plains of Manitoba?"

"Cathcart—is it really you?" she whispered.

"What are you doing here in this God-forsaken place? What brought you here?"

"What brought me here?" he echoed, stepping up to the door and throwing down his hundle, while he

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sank exhausted on the step. "Well, I came up here looking for the man that killed you and made away with your body. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sh!—oh, hush!" she whispered, "somebody is sleeping inside; I don't want him awakened."

"Oh, you don't—eh? Well, Mrs. Watson," he said, lowering his voice, "instead of finding your murderer, I find you. Jolly isn't it? 'Tisn't every one who gets a chance to live a second life on earth."

Something in Cathcart's voice and tone jarred on her—it was not at all as of old.

In the meantime Captain Clayfoot, keen of hearing as an Indian on the trail, had caught the murmur of voices as he dozed, and, raising himself on his elbow, heard with astonishment a man's voice speaking at the front of the house. With noiseless footfall, he slipped out of the bedroom, and, crossing in the black shadow of the wall, stood close by the door, seeing the man sitting on the step and his wife standing before him.

"You needn't sneer at me, Bernard Cathcart," she was saying. "But for you, nothing of the kind would have happened, and you know that. I'll tell you how it all came about, and——"

Cathcart waved his hand impatiently.

"Needn't trouble. I know all about it; I'm a detective, you know—and detectives sometimes find out a good deal more than they set out to seek. One of the things found out which I didn't know before was that James Watson, so far from being a narrow screw, as you represented him to be—a man who didn't give you enough to eat—is a man in a thousand—such a man as I have never before met the like of."

"I might have thought more of him if I hadn't

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thought so much of you," she retorted sullenly. "But tell me how you got to know I was living up here."

"No, Emma, I don't think it worth while. You've gone and fooled this poor old Captain as you fooled both Watson and myself—married the old fellow when you weren't free to marry. Well, I'm coming to lodge with you, and—"

"Oh, no—no—you can't! The Captain is dreadfully jealous—he won't let me speak to a soul, and I'm tired of him. Oh, Lord, if you knew how tired I am of him! Bernard Cathcart, I never loved any man but your own self, as sure as death. I can't stand that old Yankee any longer. I have lots of money—and—oh, Bernard! take me away and I'll go with you and be your own true wife—"

"With the Yank's money, eh? Poor devil!"

"Well, I didn't steal it; he gave it to me," she protested.

"And after all that has come and gone, you ask me to elope with you?"

"I do, Bernard, I do," she said, eagerly, in her mad infatuation, in her mortal terror, failing to detect the withering scorn, the contempt in the man's voice, the disgust in his expression.

Without a word he rose from the step, picked up his bundle and was about to pass her, when she threw her arms about his neck, and pressed her lips to his.

"Don't go; wait till I get the money, and I'll go with you."

"Woman! devil! let me go!" he cried, thrusting her from him in fury.

At that moment two shots in quick succession startled the vast silences, and as Cathcart swung the

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woman away from him, he fell prone on his face, and the woman reeled and fell above him.

In the doorway, with a smoking revolver in his right hand, stood the Captain, a fierce cynical grin on his face, his left hand clenched till the knuckles stood white.

"Thar," he said, looking down upon the two mute figures lying still in the dimness, while the far-off howl of a coyote floated up, "you've got to kingdom-come good deal sooner'n you calkilated, I guess; but when we meet at the judgment seat I'll stand up an' face you, an' make no bones about it. The Jedge—ye can't bribe Him. No, by gosh! I leave it to Him to square me for this."

He thrust his revolver into his hip pocket as he turned into the house again, and, striking a match along his uplifted thigh, lit a small paraffin lamp, raised the trap door in the kitchen, and descended into the cellar, hunting round till he found a hatchet.

Then he set the lamp on the cellar steps, and in a furore of rage tore open the planks that lined the walls, behind which he had secreted, at his wife's suggestion, the barrels of "hard cider." With the strength of a maniac he rolled them out, and smashed in the ends, liberating the liquor and flooding the floor, while the air became surcharged with the inflammable fumes of "Mickledool's Ivy Bleud."

"Thar," he exclaimed, taking up the lamp and viewing the scene before he descended again; "there's a darned end to you two. That was one of *her* dodges, a-sneakin' you in thar out o' sight. Mebbe the smell o' hard-cider will keep them coyotes from sniffin' round the pair of 'em—for a while anyhow. Mebbe——."

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His soliloquy was suddenly arrested by a sharp report; there was a vivid blue flash, and in a moment the cellar was filled by living, roaring flames that leaped at him, licking off his grey goatee and eyebrows, and sending him at one bound to the top of the steps, where, in breathless haste, he shut down the trap door, and stood on it, white and trembling.

"Hell and blazes!" he gasped. "I might have known the spirit would catch fire at the lamp."

Coming up from the direction of the boarding car, and taking the shortest cut to "Clayfoot's," a man came striding rapidly through the long grasses in the deepening twilight. Suddenly he stopped and looked straight ahead; his vision riveted on a tall, black column rising from the house to which he was so eagerly advancing. That it was smoke was evident from the way it rose into the soft starlit sky.

"Thunderation! must be Clayfoot's stable afire," he muttered, when he was still further astounded by seeing some bulky thing plunging towards him, and presently a maddened cow, with tail on end, dashed past, and bowled away out of sight. He was still staring after her when he heard a series of short, sharp shouts, the cracking of a whip, and the wild galloping of horses driven by a madman, as it seemed. Then Clayfoot's team, with the Captain standing upright in the wagon, tugging at the reins and laying on the whip, shot past and careened away over the plain: galloping—galloping—galloping into the dimness and the mystery of the limitless starlit prairie that swallowed him up for ever.

"Holy smoke!" breathed Joe, "what's up? 'Tain't for nothing old Clayfoot's tearing round like that."

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As he spoke, a sudden red glow flashed on the deep violet of the sky; not the flamboyant vagaries of the aurora, but a lurid angry red, centred and steady. The imprisoned flames had burst up through the floor from the cellar—Clayfoot's house was on fire! Joe uttered an exclamation of horror, and ran swiftly towards it. Why was Clayfoot galloping away from his burning house—alone? When he arrived, out of breath, he read his answer in the grim hieroglyph outlined by the leaping flame that had not yet broken through the front wall of the house. There, in their mingled blood lay Clayfoot's wife and Cathcart; the shattered skull of the one and the red blood oozing from the side of the other telling too surely the terrible tale. For a time the onlooker stood in the fierce heat that reddened his white horrified face, stunned, yet comprehending it all; then, as with a crackling roar the roof fell in, and the flames shot up and out through door and windows—he fled the scene.

Fled, with the fear of death and vengeance behind him, determined to keep his lips sealed on the awful tragedy he had discovered—for who could say that he himself might not be blamed for this devil-work? Or how could he account for his presence there at that hour without bringing suspicion on himself? Who would believe that all he came for was "hard cider?"

Shortly after sunrise next morning only a pale wreath of blue smoke hovered ghost-like between the two trees that still indicated the locality of "Clayfoot's." But only one man in all the busy beehive of the camp that morning paused to look across the open, and as he did so, it was with a face paler than its wont—more grave, too, and more meditative.

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There was little time, however, for reflection. That section of the line being completed, the shacks were being ripped asunder and the boards piled on a car, the whole camp to be shifted another hundred miles further north.

When towards afternoon they at last left the old camping ground, one man seated on top of the lumber car looked back on the vanishing scene—on the spot where even the last whiff of smoke had vanished from Clayfoot's. He shivered as if with cold, then, with a stern settling on his features, muttered to himself, "That has done for me. No! never again—s'help me God—so long's my name's Joe Wark."

Time passed, and the prairie took on the hues of the autumn; the copses were no longer green, but brilliant crimson, gold, and rich russet. Where yellow oceans of wheat had billowed in the sunshine and ripened under great round moons, there was now but a vast stretch of undulating plain, striped with interminable brown furrows of early fall ploughing. Then great grey curtains of heavy vapor shnt out the crystalline bine of the heavens—a few brooding melancholy days without sun or moon or stars—and the snow flew scantily, in minute flakes at first, then heavily and fast; falling—falling—falling all day and all night, till the whole land lay white from sunrise to sunset, and the square of grey ashes with the little pile of charred human bones on the site of a doorstep was hid from the face of day for ever.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CHIEF NEWS OF THE DAY—BANQUET HOST.

ATTIRED in a becoming dark dress, rich black cape—this last the gift of Geoffrey Webster—and crowned with a natty new bonnet, Mrs. McBirnie crossed through the North British Station to Queen Street on some business of her own. She was looking well, and seemed in very good spirits, judging from the brightness of her face and the lightness of her step—a lightness caused by a recent letter from Manitoba—news from Geoffrey Webster.

It was a clear, cold day, and as she came down near the corner of St. Vincent Street Mrs. McBirnie saw a poorly clad woman sitting on the kerbstone selling papers. A thin, shivering girl of some ten or twelve years was assisting her to spread out the announcement sheets upon the edge of the road, and as usual Mrs. McBirnie's fingers went rummaging into her purse for a threepenny bit. Failing that, she produced a sixpence. She had read any amount of literature on the evils of indiscriminate charity, and quite endorsed all that had been written for the purpose of restraining the impulsive and generous-hearted from opening their purse-strings at the sight of human misery, but then Mrs. McBirnie, on this point at least, was a model of inconsistency. It was simply impossible for her to pass a poverty-stricken wretch without tendering some mute token of sympathy—such as a sixpence. It was very wrong,



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she naively acknowledged, but to-day she felt she must really do something to soften the insolence of her fur-lined silk cape in the presence of a sister woman's rags. So she bought a penny paper, and told the woman never to mind the change of the sixpence. She was quite used to "God bless you's" from old Irishwomen; so, heedless of the profuse thanks, she folded her paper, and was about to continue her walk, when her glance fell on a glaring announcement spread out on the pavement. Then all the color faded from her healthy face—a mist swam before her eyes—there was a loud singing noise in her ears.

In large black letters on a white ground stared the words, "DEVELOPMENT OF THE WATSON MURDER CASE." "STATEMENT RECEIVED BY THE PROCURATOR-FISCAL."

Feeling mortally sick, Mrs. McBirnie turned, walked slowly along St. Vincent Street, and took a car home. Under her cape she held the paper, close as a Spartan might have held the gnawing fox, making no sign. She smiled amiably on the conductor while paying her fare, even tendered him a courteous "thank ye" for the ticket. But home reached, and once into her own room with the door shut behind her, she fell upon her knees and gave vent to her anguish at this cruel opening of an old wound.

"Father!—oh, Father in Heaven! gi'e me strength to bear whatever mair is to come upon me," she prayed, in this her own inner Gethsemane.

For what she thought, could this new statement to the Procurator-Fiscal mean, but that James Watson, her Jamie, overburdened with his secret, had, after all, written to give himself up. And just after Geoffrey

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Webster discovering him to be her son, too—though Jamie as yet didn't know that.

"Ah, weel!—the back must bear its burden, if he maun gi'e up his life aifter a'."

Her speech failed her; she gave way to a burst of long pent-up tears, the tears of mature life that flow only on bitter occasions.

At last, however, she loosened her cape, took off her bonnet, and seating herself, opened the paper. Yes! there it was, in the same startling headlines she had already seen, but what else was this?

"THE WATSON MURDER NO MURDER AT ALL. THE SUPPOSED MURDERED WIFE ALIVE AND WELL, AND MARRIED TO ANOTHER MAN!"

"Jamie! Jamie Watson!" she cried, forgetting in the shock of her joy the name she had assumed. In her excitement she threw wide the room door and at the top of her voice called "Mrs. Maurlin!" bringing both the old people in hurried alarm.

"Look! look! see!" she cried, pointing to the paper. "It's no true—it never was true—the limmer's livin'—she's no dead ava—naebody ever killed her—faur less my Jamie."

Half crazed with joy she paced up and down the floor, now raising her clasped hands in mute thankfulness, now wringing them helplessly in her effort to realize what glad new life it meant.

While the old woman looked on with no little alarm at Mrs. McBirnie's strange outbreak, Wattie, through his gold spectacles, was busily scanning the wondrous news.

"Hech! hech!" he said, "did ever ye hear tell o' the like? I mind o' the murder quite weel. Eh—

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ah—thae Watson's 'ill be freends o' yours then, Mrs. McBirnie? Nae wunner than ye're glad."

Suddenly the excited woman remembered that to these old people she was only Mrs. McBirnie, and also realized how strange her conduct, her extravagant joy, must seem to them. But what did it matter? She felt reckless, utterly reckless—she did not care now though all the world knew that she was Mrs. Watson, the heart-broken woman who so long had hidden her identity under her own maiden name. The time, the happy time had come to throw off the hated mask; once more she, Mrs. Watson, of unsullied reputation, could lift up her face as such in the light of the blessed sun.

"D'ye no see? Can ye no jalouse? An' me gaun on like a mounthank! I'm Mrs. Watson," she cried, throwing her arms wide as if to show herself in her entirety. "Look—I'm Mrs. Watson—my ill-used laddie's mither. It's my own son's wife they thocht he had killed—him—my Jamie—that wouldna hurt a flea. Oh, that limmer, that limmer! God forgi'e her! for I canna. An' winna!" she added with sharp emphasis, her sense of justice getting uppermost.

It took some time before the two old people could take it all in with full understanding; before she herself could fully adjust her mind to the altered circumstances which this belated confession had created.

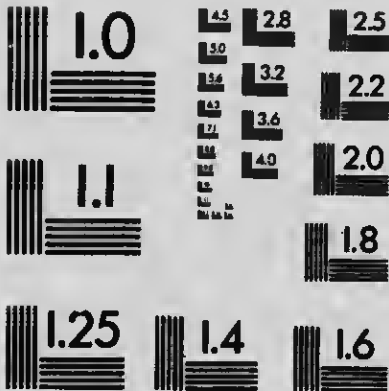
After she had calmed down, however, she read the whole statement aloud from beginning to end, pausing only to give vent to her feelings by a pithy interjection here and there.

"But what's this?" she demanded, as her eye



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caught another paragraph relating to the same subject directly underneath.

It ran thus:—

“ The above statement was made by the woman known as the wife of Captain Clayfoot—in reality the wife of James Watson, and supposed to have been murdered by him—to Geoffrey Webster, Esq., railway engineer, Swan River, Manitoba. When it was written down the woman signed her name with her own hand, her signature being witnessed by Mr. Webster himself, by Joseph Wark, and Michael Moran—all servants of the company now engaged in laying a branch of the railway in that district. These witnesses are prepared to make affidavit as to the woman's signature of the confession. The woman had accidentally been recognized by one who knew her well in this country. It was this recognition which led to her discovery as Watson's wife, and her subsequent confession that she was the woman so long supposed to be dead. Needless to say that after this James Watson no longer occupies the position of one under suspicion, but that of a deeply wronged man. That the sympathy of every right-minded person will be with him now goes without saying.”

“ Wattie!” cried the distracted woman through streaming tears, “ are ye sure a' this is no' a dream? I've a gude mind to rin a preen into mysel' to see if I'll no wauken up to the auld misery again. Is't possible that my laddie's innocence is really proclaimed through the length and breadth o' this country? Is't possible? An' then—to think it was Geoffrey, your mnckle, wiselike son—the son ye never bore—Mrs. Maurlin, that fand a' oot! Eh, my heart! it's juist like to burst wi' thankfu'ness for't a'.”

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That same afternoon Mr. Auld, now a very old but by no means infirm gentleman, sat in his own private room in the warehouse, his gold spectacles astride his long nose, and his daily newspaper before him.

Whatever he was reading seemed to interest him most unusually. He fidgeted in his chair, took off his spectacles, rubbed them carefully with his immaculate handkerchief, and, adjusting them again, resumed his reading, his nervous fidgeting and running comments.

"Most astonishing! Most extraordinary! Most unheard-of conduct! What a remarkably wicked person his wife must have been!"

Unable longer to bear the tension of his feelings without expressing them, he placed his finger on the little gong, and its musical call brought a clerk to the door.

"Ah, Robert, ask Mr. Furnish to come here for a minute."

Mr. Furnish, the head bookkeeper, rose at the summons, and, sticking his pen behind his ear, presented himself before the head of the firm.

"Ah, you're there, Furnish. Shut that door. You remember Watson—James Watson—poor fellow—that terrible affair some years ago—you recollect?"

"Yes, Mr. Auld. You may perhaps be able to call to mind what I said about that business—that, in my opinion, there were wheels within wheels, and if Watson did that deed he must have been driven to it."

The old gentleman chuckled delightedly.

"Not he. Never did it at all. Read that."

He fairly thrust the paper under the bookkeeper's nose, gloating over the surprised expression as he read.

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"Well, Mr. Auld, if that doesn't beat everything!" he said at last. "I've always defended Watson, though it was an ugly thing for the house to be connected with—even remotely."

"Well, you know, Furnish, that boy was a special protege of mine, and I never could understand how a lad of his upbringing could come to crime. Now that everything is cleared up, however, and James is still the man I took him for, something must be done at once to reinstate him in the eye of the public. There is still some salary owing to him, isn't there?"

"Yes, sir; nearly a quarter's salary, and the interest of that to date."

"Well, yes; I think that was about it. And we had every reason to be satisfied with him?"

"Every reason, Mr. Auld. He was devoted to the house and its interests."

"H'm. Couldn't you find out where his mother went to—if she is alive—which I doubt? I should suppose she is the sort of woman disgrace would kill."

"If you recollect, we did our utmost to discover her at the time of the disaster, Mr. Auld. You were anxious that the quarter's salary should be paid to her, but no trace of her could be found."

"Ah, yes; I remember. But suppose we tried now? Say we advertise."

There was a tap at the door, and the clerk handed in a card, on which was written in a neat hand, "Mrs. Watson."

For Mrs. McBirnie—once more Mrs. Watson—knew what was what; knew how to conduct herself when she went to call upon people whom she respected. Therefore, despite her haste, she bought a packet of cards on her way down, and taking out one in the shop,



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wrote her name on it, and when she reached the warehouse sent it in to Mr. Auld.

" Bless my soul! not Mrs. Watson—my—my old friend, if I might say so!" he exclaimed as she entered.

" Weel," she laughed bravely, " ye were a gude friend to me an' mine when friends were few, Mr. Auld. An' I'm sure you'll no think your friendship was misplaced after a' when ye read this."

She took a paper from under her cloak, and Mr. Auld turned to the bookkeeper.

" Ah—Mr. Furnish—you might close that door when you go out—we'll discuss the matter later."

Mr. Furnish took the hint, closed the door carefully behind him, and returned to his books.

Mr. Auld turned to Mrs. Watson, and held out his hand with significant friendliness.

" Let me congratulate you. I have just read the good news. What you must have suffered all this time!" he said.

" Ay, Mr. Auld, 'naebody kens, but I'm no gaun to grumble noo. What I cam' to say to ye was that my word held guid. Jamie was never onything but what I promised he would be—he never disappointed ye."

" Never, Mrs. Watson. I was just talking the matter over with Mr. F'urnish as you came in. We had no better man in our establishment."

" Ye couldna," returned the confident n other.  
" An', oh! if ye only kent the life he led wi' that limmer."

" Dear me! Dear me! Lamentable! Lamentable! It has always been a matter of surprise to me how a

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man like Watson came to marry such a person. Do you know anything of her family?"

"Ay, I ken noo, Mr. Auld—I didna then. Her mither was to blame, she just let the lassie grow like a weed, an' sent her into the city to work for her livin', an' stay in her half-brother's, an' that she never liket. Ye see, Mr. Auld, my son's wife's mither was, so they say, the daughter o' a gentleman; but for a' that, the mither was nae leddy. She gaed a' to the tide wi' drink. Folk said it was because the gentleman wouldna marry her, but, a' the same, she compounded wi' him for twa-ree hunder pound, an' promised to ca' the bairn by her ain name. Weel, the bairn, this gentleman's daughter, bein' left to the mercy o' the world 'an' the guidance o' a drucken mither, she, when she grew up, just gaed the same gait, an' anither lassie was born—this Emma that brocht a' the trouble to Jamie Watson. Her mither mairrit a decent man after that, but the ill bluid o' the deceiver, her grandfather, was in her, and the desire for drink was inherited frae the mither. An' what could ye expect? The auld word hauds gude—nae gatherin' o' figs aff thistles. But what angers me is the way innocent folk have to suffer for the misdeeds o' folk they never saw."

"Very strange, indeed, Mrs. Watson; very remarkable," assented Mr. Auld, deferentially.

"It's no fair—it's simply no fair. Here's a man thinks he can throw aff his responsibility for a human soul, thinks he does grand if he gets aff Scot free for twa-ree bawbees he never misses, an' the bairn is left to become a curse instead o' the blessin' she might be wi' a faither's care. An' her bairn again, wi' the warst o' baith faither an' mither in her, grows up to

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be a scourge an' a heartbreak to folk tryin' hard to live to some purpose in the world. It's no fair, Mr. Auld. That's just hoo me an' mine have been punished for ither folk's sins. It's not only 'as ye sow so shall ye reap,' but as ye sow so shall ither folk reap—folk ye never saw atween the een. I ken we've reapit a sair hairst frae Emma Notman's sowin'."

Mr. Auld started visibly.

"Eh?—what? What name did you say?"

"Emma Notman. That was her name, ay, an' her mither's afore her. The mither's dead noo."

"Notman! Notman! Emma Notman!" mused the old gentleman aloud, his face clouding with inner retrospection.

"Ay—deed ay! the first Emma Notman's lang dead an' awa. But the evil o' her influence lives ahint her yet, as ye see. But that's no what I cam' to say, Mr. Auld, an' ye maun forgie my tongue rinnin' awa' wi' me. I couldna rest till I brocht ye this paper to let ye see that my son is no the man he's appeared to be in the world's een this lang while. I kent ye would mak' me welcome wi' sic a message in my hand."

"Very glad to see you, indeed, Mrs. Watson," said Mr. Auld, but with a sort of nervous trepidation, "in fact, we wanted to find you out. There is some salary due your son, bnt when you write to him I would like you to say—to say—that his place in this warehouse is still open as before—whenever he likes to come back—and—and—did you say Emma Notman was the name of his wife? Yon're sure that was the name?"

"Perfectly sure, they lived out Paisley way in the mother's time—an' baith mother an' grandmother had the same maiden names—mair's the shame o't."

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"When will you be hearing from your son?"

"That's mair than I can say. He's in Manitoba—been there a' summer—but I think he'll be glad to get hame noo."

When Mrs. Watson left, Mr. Furnish thought Mr. Auld might wish to see him, and so made an errand into the private office. He tapped at the door, once, twice, and a third time, but receiving no answer, stood for a space debating whether or not he ought to enter. Getting alarmed at the profound stillness, however, he gently set the door ajar and stepped in.

Mr. Auld, with his spectacles between finger and thumb of one hand, while the other grasped the arm of the chair, sat staring straight before him.

"Mr. Auld," said the bookkeeper in a quiet voice, but the head of the firm never spoke nor moved.

"Mr. Auld, sir, I hope you are not ill," said Furnish, laying a respectful touch on his shoulder.

The voice and touch woke the old man from the deep trance of retrospection into which the mention of a name, all but forgotten, had thrown him.

He gave utterance to a long shivering sigh, and looked up at the bookkeeper.

"Ah! it is you, Furnish," he murmured, with the air of one disturbed in his sleep.

"Yes, Mr. Auld; I thought you might wish to conclude our private conversation after Mrs. Watson went out."

"Ah! about Emma Notman?" the old gentleman queried, dazedly.

"I beg your pardon?" the bookkeeper responded, in astonishment that increased as Mr. Auld went on—

"Yes, it is true; her remarks are just. We put off our responsibilities with money we don't miss, and

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we think we have managed it cleverly; hut it is a mistake—a mistake. Banquo is dead and turned to clay, but Banquo still attends at the feast of life. Remarkable man, Shakespeare! Remarkable man. Ah! you're there, Furnish!" he added, with a start. "I thought it was—Banquo."

At a loss what to think, Mr. Furnish made a show of picking up one or two papers that had fluttered down to the floor, when Mr. Auld, passing his hand across his eyes, said, in a tired voice—

"I think, Mr. Furnish, I shall go home. I—I am not feeling very well. Will you send Robert to call a cab?"

"Certainly, Mr. Auld. Shall I ask Mr. Howieson to go with you?"

"No! no! not at all! I just wish to go home; not quite up to the mark somehow."

The bookkeeper had his misgivings as to Mr. Auld's health. That his mental condition was perfectly sound he knew; only this morning he had given him some orders which showed that his old shrewdness in business was as keen as ever. But—how very strangely he talked; and what name was that he mentioned?—a woman's name? Emma—something or other. Yes: he confessed he had a fear that the old gentleman was breaking up; his incoherency of speech and the way he rambled pointed to that.

As soon as he had seen him safely into the cab, he thought it his duty to mention to Mr. Howieson, and the other two members of the firm his doubts on the subject, and in doing so at once surprised and alarmed them. For never had Mr. Auld seemed in better health and finer spirits than on that very morning.

It was a surprise to his maiden sister, Miss Deborah

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Auld, as well as to the trim maids of his household, to see the master return from the office at that unusual hour; but Mr. Auld explained to Miss Deborah that there was nothing whatever wrong with him, he had merely grown a little tired of the office, and thought he would come home and spend a quiet hour in his own library.

When Mr. Howieson, the next senior partner, called to inquire for Mr. Auld an hour later, he found him looking over some old papers that might have been of his own age—so old and yellow were they. The metal box from which they had been taken stood on the table with the lid thrown back; the key, a brass one, was in the lock, the ring with a bunch of keys pendant from it.

Mr. Auld did not seem at all grateful for his partner's visit.

"How absurd of Mr. Furnish to alarm you, Howieson. Bless my soul! a man may be allowed to have a headache without rousing the whole warehouse in this manner."

His tone, so unusually acrid, inclined the partner to apologize.

"Oh, no, no, Mr. Auld. I happened to be coming in this direction anyway, and as Mr. Furnish had expressed some anxiety I thought I had better drop in in passing to reassure him when I got back."

With a few cursory remarks, which Mr. Auld listened to with his hand outspread on a yellow memorandum book lying open before him, Howieson took his leave. When the library door closed Mr. Auld lifted his broad palm from the book, and through his spectacles read the faded handwriting, his own

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handwriting fifty-five years ago, in the days of his youth.

After turning over several pages of his old diary of the past he came upon this—

“New Year’s Day, 18—

“I, John Auld, have this day, before God only, made a vow never from this hour forward to allow any intoxicating liquor whatever to pass my lips. Through indulgence at convivial meetings and in private I have been led into sins and follies which have lowered me in my own esteem and deeply injured not only myself but others. Therefore—God helping me—I shall never again by my own act put my faculties beyond my own complete mental control.”

“March 24.

“A miserable end to my follies. Would to God I had never met young Saurin, with his sophisms and luring ways, his laudations in praise of wine, his infectious atmosphere of sensuous pleasure. It was he who introduced me to that company, and took me in spite of myself to Notman’s. And now comes the bitter aftermath of all my gay roystering. Mary Lanellan, my first and only love, the woman who loved me and had promised to become my wife, has written peremptorily to break off our engagement. She has heard of the child—and tells me it is my duty to marry the mother. This I cannot bring myself to. If Mary Lanellan will not marry me, then I shall call no other woman wife. I have played the fool, and here is the penalty. But, oh, Mary!—Mary!—if you only knew how bitter has been my repentance!”

“April 10.

“Went out into the country to-day, and settled matters. Paid Emma Notman two hundred and fifty

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pounds in satisfaction of all claims present or future, the child to bear her mother's name. Receipt gives entire quittance of any further trouble in the matter. Glad to have the affair over and done with for ever."

Mr. Auld leant back in his chair and groaned aloud.

"Over and done with, indeed! Here, at the close of my life—my long, lonely life—after denying myself the ordinary happiness of my fellowmen—this sin of my youth rises and bars my way to a peaceful grave. God forgive me! I thought when I paid down money I had squared with my conscience; I thought when my folly cost me Mary Lanellan I had done ample penance. But I never gave a thought to the human soul I had paid cash to get rid of. Great God! that my child—my own flesh and blood—should have grown up to be a shameless drunkard! That my grand-daughter should be this worthless wretch, whose infamous career is reported in every paper in the country! That one of my own blood should be the creature who has brought such pain and trouble—to the innocent—as Mrs. Watson says. That woman's speech cuts like a two-edged sword."

There was a cheerful fire burning in the grate, and, glancing at it, Mr. Auld rose, tore up the diary, threw the leaves on the fire, and watched them burn. All papers and correspondence of this date he also burned.

"To think—I had forgotten all about these records of my youth! To think of my solicitor going through my papers and finding these! At least, they would have explained why I have persistently refused to become an elder or hold office in the church. I could not bring myself to that. And now for compensation for the evil those of my blood have wrought."



## CHAPTER XIII.

### HIS LAST WILL.

FIRST Mr. Auld put away the metal box, then opened a secret drawer in his desk, took therefrom several papers, and arranging them in order, went out into the corridor and called—"Deborah—are you there?"

"Yes, John!" answered Miss Auld, stepping down the softly carpeted stairs, her face anxious, the trimming of her black and mauve cap fluttering about her white side curls.

"Don't come down—don't come down. I merely wished to ask you to see that I'm not disturbed for a few hours. No matter who calls—I'm engaged."

"Very well, John," said the devoted sister. Mr. Auld returned to the library and shut the door.

About two hours afterwards as one of the maids happened to pass the library, she was startled by a heavy fall within, and listening, she thought she heard a sound as of heavy, labored breathing. In considerable alarm she hastened to Miss Auld's room and told what she had heard.

"O, nonsense, Jane," said Miss Auld, laying down her fancy wool-work nevertheless, "Mr. Auld may have overturned a chair—or—"

Here the absurdity of any of those heavily-padded carved oak chairs being overturned occurred to her, and, murmuring that he had given strict orders not to be disturbed, she stepped softly down the stairs.

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"It's only me, John. Did you call?" she said, raising her voice but slightly outside the panel. No answer coming to her, she softly turned the handle and widened the door sufficiently to admit her head.

Then she rushed in, an incoherent cry escaping her, and bringing the maid in fear to the room.

"Run for the doctor, Jane! Run, run, for pity's sake! Mr. Auld is in a fit!"

It was no vain alarm. Mr. Auld, evidently when rising from his chair, had been seized with apoplexy, and now lay on the floor like a log—his face purple, his breathing hoarse and spasmodic. Between his fingers, with the ink still wet on it, lay the pen with which he had been writing, and on the table lay a large envelope superscribed, "My last will and testament, to which I have added a codicil on this — day of November, 18—."

Beside it lay a half-finished letter to his solicitor, and it was evident that it was while writing this he had risen from his chair and been seized with sudden death. For death it was. To the great grief of his sister and the unmixed regret of the firm and of all who knew him, Mr. Auld died next day without regaining consciousness.

Questioned by the doctor as to whether Mr. Auld had received any bad news or shock of any kind, both Miss Auld and the heads of the warehouse averred that they were not aware of any shock, Miss Auld being confident that, if there had been, her brother would certainly have mentioned the matter to her. Mr. Furnish alone suggested that the unexpected announcement of James Watson's innocence might have agitated him, but since that was a matter for congratulation rather than distress, it was scarcely

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likely to have hastened this catastrophe. Still, when after a funeral attended by all the prominent men of the city, the will was read, some color was lent to the suggestion.

Inside the large envelope which held the will, to which Mr. Auld had attached a codicil only an hour or so before his death, was found another envelope, sealed carefully, marked "Private and Personal," and addressed to "James Watson, of the firm of Auld & Co."

The will itself caused no surprise whatever, until it came to the reading of the codicil, which revoked some of the foregoing clauses. That was a surprise indeed to all, the solicitor himself included. In this codicil, dated on the day of his death, and written and signed by his own hand, the testator revoked certain bequests previously made in favor of public institutions generally to the extent of £15,000, which sum was placed to the credit of James Watson as his share in the firm of which he was herewith made a partner, the testator requesting as a personal favor his acceptance of the same as a tribute to his personal worth; also as a token of profound sympathy with his late trials, now happily ended. A bequest of £1,000 was also made to Mrs. Watson, mother of the aforesaid James Watson, as an appreciation of her worth and the bravery with which she had borne undeserved trouble. And this, his herewith expressed wish, he desired carried out in its entirety—without hesitation or dispute. "The sealed letter, enclosed in the larger envelope, is to be given to my solicitor in trust for James Watson, in the event of my death before his return from Manitoba."

The letter to his solicitor was but half finished.

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“ My Dear Sampson,—You will no doubt be surprised when you see the alteration I have made in my will, which I send you herewith. It is my intention to take a couple of months’ sojourn in Italy—my sister going with me, of course. I feel more under the weather than for years past, and lest anything should happen me while away, I send you these for safe keeping. Should James Watson return after I go, see that my wishes as to the partnership are carried out. I wish him to be reinstated and acknowledged as one of the firm before I come back. I have private reasons for these changes, which my letter to Watson will explain. In the meantime——.”

Here there was a blot and a blur; here the hand of death had been laid on him, forbidding the journey to Italy, and closing his record for ever.

When Mrs. McBirnie reached her own house that day, after leaving Mr. Auld’s office, she was surprised to hear voices talking in the parlor. To her surprise, it was the Rev. Frank Mickledool with his wife, Bessie Mason. He had received a call to a church in a pleasant suburban town some six months previously, and on moving there to take charge, married and took his wife with him. His views and principles at first rather surprised his congregation, so lulled had they been by the somnolent doctrinal discourses of the old minister now retired. But it was astonishing how soon they fell in with his ideas, and how heartily they backed him up in his efforts to get a sympathetic hold of the young men—in his desire to imbue them with higher ideals of life. He insisted that while the manse was his, it was theirs also, and he expected they would come and spend an

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hour with him whenever they felt like it. He said to them he was a young man himself, and therefore knew the peculiar temptations to which young men were subjected, and he wished them to join him in a league of offence and defence against the evil powers that be.

In his efforts he was ably seconded by his wife, who was already a favorite in the parish, her native loveliness and the total absence of affectation of superiority on her part being appreciated to the full.

"We were just waiting for you, Mrs. McBirnie," said the young man, shaking hands heartily. He had brought up his wife before to see Mrs. McBirnie, so there was no need for introduction.

"And I, for one, wasn't going until we had seen and congratulated you," said the young wife. "We saw the blessed news in the papers early this morning, and felt we must be the first to wish you joy over it. Of course, when the news appeared, Frank told me what he had not told me before—that you were Mrs. Watson. When I learned that, nothing could keep me back from catching the first train, and here we are. I am so glad—oh, so glad!"

Mrs. Watson, resuming her own name from henceforth, was keenly touched with this kindly token of sympathy.

"I'm like Job," she said, a smile twinkling through the tears she tried to wink away, "a' my gude is comin' back to me again. But only Ane can ken hoo thankfu' I am. I've juist been doon to let Mr. Auld see the paper. He was the first to tak' my puir orphan lad by the hand, and I made sure he wad be the first to ken he hadna disappointed him after a'."

"Quite right; I'm sure Mr. Auld will only be too

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delighted. He has been a man of singularly pure life himself all through, I am told, and it must be a pleasure for him to know of Watson's innocence in this sad affair. Wasn't he very pleased to see you?"

"Pleased? Ay, that he was. What do you think he told me to tell Jamie when I wrote?"

"Sent him his warmest congratulations, of course," hazarded Bessie.

"Na, mair than that—mair to the purpose. He tell't me his place was open for him there whenever he liket to come hack. Think o' that!"

"That was very handsome of Mr. Auld—very handsome indeed. It will quite reinstate your son in the eyes of the public. He was well up in the establishment, wasn't he?"

"As high as he could be no to be manager. He would have been that if that limmer—oh, excuse me, Mrs. Mickledool—I really wish I were Christian enough to forgi'e that woman, hut I'm no. I canna, even noo."

"Leave her to God, Mrs. Watson. Think of what Burns says—'What's done we partly may compute, we know not what's resisted.' Her sin will find her out, as all sin finds the perpetrator out sooner or later. How do we know but that she may have repented ere now? You can afford to think gently of her now."

So spoke Frank Mickledool, little dreaming of the charred hones of a wayward woman lying under the snows in front of the hurned-down house on the far plains of Manitoba. But deep in his inner heart hurned the thought that there were those who reaped profit in hard cash from this and other women's slow process of destruction.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A CONJUGAL PASSAGE-AT-ARMS.

THE master and mistress of Mount Classic sat together by their lonely hearth, for lonely it was and bleak, notwithstanding the rich furniture, the rare bric-a-brac, and the high-priced works of art which adorned the walls of the room wherein they sat. In the beautifully tiled fireplace the brass andirons twinkled and shone like gold as the cheerful flames leapt upward, while the subdued light of a shaded lamp fell softly on the open Bible which Mrs. Mickledool had been reading, and from which she had just turned away with a pensive, meditative sigh. The storm outside moaned and wept among the trees, as if sympathetically voicing a world's woe; at times a sound like a mighty sob came down the chimney.

But the heavy curtains of silk brocade were drawn closely across the windows, and the rain beating the panes like a whip lash outside only emphasized the luxurious comfort within.

Mr. Mickledool, attired in comfortable dressing-gown and embroidered slippers, sat with his feet upon the fender, staring into the red heart of the fire. Mrs. Mickledool, unchanged in appearance, sat with long white hands crossed in her lap, now looking into the fire, and now stealing a furtive glance at the gloomy expression of her husband.

For, ever since that disagreeable episode in their lives, when both son and daughter had made a choice

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reflecting deeply on the morality of his business, Mr. Mickledool's temper and moods had been very uncertain. Any attempt to mention the matter of their children's unnatural defection he crushed with a word, though from both Violet and Frank came weekly the same dutiful letters.

These letters, which kept up the connection and were admittedly a comfort to Mrs. Mickledool, since she could smilingly say to her friends that she had had a letter from "dear Violet" or "dear Frank" this morning, Mr. Mickledool could not be induced to look at. His son and daughter had gone their own gait—two ingrates—after all the money he had spent on their education—let them go!

To-night, however, Mrs. Mickledool, after a few glances at his face, thought she might venture to approach the subject.

"Alexander," she said, with a preliminary cough, the same with which she was wont to preface her addresses as President of the Ragged Boys' Association.

"Alexander."

"Yes—say on—I know what you are going to say. What has Violet been writing to you?"

Mrs. Mickledool's heart leaped. This was a concession, the like of which he had never vouchsafed her before.

"Violet hasn't said anything more than usual. It is over a fortnight since I heard from her, but I think we should give them both another chance. Frank has married well—no doubt his wife will be well provided for, and——"

"Frank!" hurst forth Mr. Mickledool wrathfully; "why, look at that."



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Here he drew from his vest pocket a folded note, and tossed it over to his wife.

"There's a letter I received to-day from one of my best customers in Fuddleton, complaining that my son, with his preaching and lecturing to the young men of that town, is just ruining his business. Says he may as well put up the shutters. Actually preaching total abstinence as a basis of reliability in a young man. Don't talk to me about Frank; he's a fool—a freak. I never knew a swindler yet that wasn't a total abstainer or some such idiotic ranter."

Mrs. Mickledool wrung her hands. In her own shallow way she loved her children, and now she felt like a hen who stands on the brink of a pond and sees her ducklings swimming where she could not venture.

"It is very foolish of Frank—very. But, Alexander—Violet is different. I am sure that by this time she must be tired of the fatigue and strain of nursing these wretched people. Think of the scenes she must daily witness, the danger she is exposed to."

"Well, write and tell her to come baek, and no apologies will be required or questions asked."

Mrs. Mickledool shook her head dolefully.

"I have already done so, but it is of no use. I even represented to her that if she wished to devote herself to work among the poor that she could do it under my auspices, and take my place at the meetings."

"You might have had more sense, then," said Mr. Mickledool with brutal frankness. "It is no use in these days of printing presses and education to think you can pull the wool over people's eyes as in the days when the mass of the people neither read nor thought. Violet knows this—knows that all these meetings and all this sort of thing you call 'work'

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is mere humbug—rot—ntter rot. If you knew what it was to get up at five every morning and go out and work all day from six to six, and then come home and do your own housework and wash your children's clothes when other people are sleeping, you'd know what 'work' is, my lady. That's what my mother did when I was a youngster, just so high—before that legacy from my uncle in Australia came and set us on our feet."

"Dear me, Alexander! Why refer to things better forgotten?"

"Forgotten! I don't know about that. Some things are hard to forget. I know the hardships I was forced to endure as a boy made me determine to become rich by hook or by crook, and when I came of age and got my share of the legacy—and it was a good one, seeing there was only mother and myself left, the rest of us being killed off by cold and hunger—I went into distilling, simply because there was more money in that 'han any other business, if properly condneted. And I have succeeded. I am one of the richest distillers in the country. You can't find a country under the sun where 'Mickledool's Ivy Blend' isn't to be found; it goes with the Bible and the sword among the savage races, and does more towards civilizing them off the face of the earth than all other agencies put together."

He paused to utter a loud "Ha, ha!" at his own sarcasms, but presently resumed.

"I am not like you, Marion; I do not think the children are wrong. On the contrary, they are perfectly right. I do make my money by catering to the vices and weaknesses of the people; and, what's more, I intend to continne catering to them. When the

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demand ceases, then the supply will—not before. Though I play piety and keep family worship in this house, you know it is only to please you, Marion—just as I gave that last few thousands to the Benevolent Institution. I know that if whisky-making was abolished and the secret of it thrown into the sea, humanity would be immensely benefited, and there would be fewer ragged boys for you to trouble your head about.”

“ But, Alexander!” interposed the astonished wife, in no small alarm, “ are you, too——?”

He interrupted her with a satirical laugh.

“ Don’t be alarmed, Marion; Saul Mickledool is not among the prophets by any means. What I want to let you understand is that I am not such a fool as to think my business is a boon to the country or the world. It is a curse—a deadly curse—but it is the individual who makes it so, each for himself. I don’t ask any man to drink—no tavernkeeper does—but if people like to come in and buy the stuff, it is my business to make it for them. Why, I’m not going to refuse the profits. Certainly not! If I did and stepped out, there are plenty ready to take my place. One thing I have learned, and that is—money is power. I can count several clergymen as my special friends, who sit at my table, enjoy my hospitality, and laugh at my jokes; but not one of them ever so much as hinted to me what my own son spoke right out to my face, in plain language—‘ Your business is an infamous one; it grows and thrives off human misery. No man has a right to grow rich off the destruction of his fellowmen.’ ”

“ By God! I could have struck him down where he

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stood—and yet I'll be hanged if I don't respect him for it, after all. He's no sneak anyhow."

Mrs. Mickledool wrung her white hands in real distress. Not in years before had she heard her husband swear, and now she repented having mentioned the matter, since it roused him so.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Marion—and that, too, to please you," he said, noting her distress; for, though rather cross-grained, he was not unkind to the wife who never quarrelled or found fault with him. "I'll write to Violet myself, and I'll tell her that if she will give up her nursing of that dirty lot I'll send you and her to the Riviera at once to spend the winter there. I'll hint that you are not so well as you have been, and——"

"It's no use, Alexander—no use. She won't use a penny of the income from the distillery. And, do you know, she tells me that she has already spent half of her aunt's legacy on the purchase of clothes for the naked children of worthless drunkards. Such a wretched policy! Such a waste of good money! Such ignorance of the habits of the class she goes among! Why, the silly girl cannot see that these good clothes she puts on these children are stripped off them again by drunken parents and changed into money at the pawnshop——"

"Ha, ha, ha! O, ho, ho, ho! And so Aunt Betty's 'clean money' comes back to me in the regular way of business! Ha, ha, ha! this is too rich for anything!"

The grim humor of the thing seemed to tickle Mr. Mickledool immensely. Aunt Betty had boasted of her "clean money," and here it was actually coming circuitously into the distiller's pocket *via* the pawnbroker's shop.

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"I suppose, then," he said, suddenly lapsing into his usual heavy gravity, "there's no use of me writing to Violet?"

"No, Alexander; I think not. I am sure that if we were both dead and the fortune you have made were left between them, they would give it all up to some Inebriate Asylum, or something of that kind."

A dark frown gathered on his face, and his lips parted in a mirthless smile.

"They will never get the chance. If we are to be childless in life, then we can be so in death. I'll found an Inebriate Asylum with the fortune inebriates have helped me to make. Poetic justice for ever!"

Mrs. Mickledool sat sad and silent. Vain, weak, shallow woman though she was, her heart longed for her erratic children. The wind outside still moaned, and the rain still lashed the windows, and the text she had often explained to her scholars in the Sunday School seemed borne to her on the wings of the wandering winds with cruel meaning—"He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me."

At that moment she envied the poorest of those on whom she had bestowed her charities. They were happier than she—she with all the world could give here, yet childless—childless—and miserable.

The tears at last brimmed over and fell. Mickledool, indeed, looked rather uncertain of himself, when a loud peal at the front door bell startled them both.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, while his wife hastily mopped her eyes and smoothed away all traces of grief after the manner of women.

In another minute a trim servant maid, in white

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cap and apron, entered, bearing two letters on a silver salver.

The messenger who had brought the letters on such a night of wind and rain was from the hospital from which Violet had graduated. A fortnight ago she had come on a visit to her friend the Matron, staying a couple of days there; but only that evening had a letter written by her been discovered on the Matron's desk. It had been found between the blotting-pad and the paper, and seeing the address with the word "immediate" written upon it, also the stamp, the Matron at once divined that Miss Mickledool must have intended this to be mailed to Mount Classic. Considering the time that had elapsed since the letter was written and the evident anxiety that Mrs. Mickledool should have it at once, the Matron deemed it her duty to write a note to Mrs. Mickledool, explaining the unfortunate circumstance which had detained the letter, sending it now by a special messenger, to prevent another moment's delay. On inquiry it was found that the messenger, who had come by train and walked up from the station, had already gone. Mrs. Mickledool opened the letter from her daughter with a hand that shook visibly.

"So strange," she murmured, "to send in such a night! I do hope nothing is wrong. It is the first time she ever let a fortnight pass without writing." It was but a short note.

"MY DEAR MOTHER,—You will be surprised to learn that once more I am going across the ocean, not to the United States as before, but to Canada. I am going to Halifax, and thence to Winnipeg, where I hear a friend of mine lies very ill, and in sad need of competent nursing. I shall write you as soon as I

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get there, and meantime wish you to think I am all right and in the best of health. With love to father and yourself, from  
VIOLET."

"Well, well! what next will that girl do?" murmured the mother irritably, as she handed the letter over to Mr. Mickledool. "I shall go into the city to-morrow morning and positively forbid her to do anything of the kind. It is simply preposterous. And what friend can she have there, pray?"

Mr. Mickledool also read the letter, after which he tossed it down contemptuously.

"The sooner we face the fact that we made a big mistake in letting her go out to Betty at first the better," he grunted. "That's the American style of girl to a 'T.' As soon as she grows up she starts in life for herself—claims as a right to do just exactly as she pleases, without reference to anybody else. That's what we got by sending her to America. Got her imbued with all this temperance rot, and now—well, let her go, and be hanged to her!"

"Bnt, Alexander!—dear me!—why, here is another note from the Matron of the hospital. She states that Violet's letter is over a fortnight old. She must be nearly there by this time. Let me read this to you."

Mr. Mickledool listened with but scanty grace while the Matron's letter was being read; that he felt bitter over his daughter's defections was evident.

"Well, at least that settles the question of my writing to her. She is her Aunt Betty over again—got extravagant ideas, and likes the notion of making a martyr of herself. Pity we hadn't been Catholics;

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she'd have gone off to a nunnery, most likely, rather than continue to eat our bread."

"But who can this friend be she speaks of?" queried Mrs. Mickledool, with vain attempt at remembrance.

She would have taxed her imagination and her guessing powers to their utmost before coming near the truth regarding that friend.

The fact was, that when informed by her brother of the strange news in the papers, Violet at once went to congratulate Mrs. Watson on her recovered happiness. She had more than once paid her a visit with Bessie Mason and her brother; indeed, her admiration for the way in which she had befriended Geoffrey Webster's adopted parents when apparently forsaken by all else, had grown on closer acquaintance into genuine affection.

She found that her ring at the bell had interrupted Mrs. Watson in the reading of a letter from her son—the first letter—in which he stated that he would have been on his way home now but for the unfortunate circumstance of Geoffrey Webster having been seized with an illness, which, he feared, was going to develop into fever. "The great want out here," he went on, "is nurses—properly qualified nurses in cases of this kind. At present we are still in our boarding-house in Winnipeg, and though the landlady is kindness itself, if we had a good nurse to supplement the doctor's care we could more surely pull him through."

This was what Violet read when Mrs. Watson handed her her son's letter to read—a proud woman to be able to show it openly.

The thoughts that passed through her mind, the impulse that came to her like a mighty heart-throb—



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compelling, irresistible—Violet kept her lips sealed on; but, shortening her visit as much as she could with decency, she came back to her old room at the hospital, and there communed with her heart.

## CHAPTER XV.

### IN HALIFAX.

As if to brace herself to the occasion, Violet took from her little repository the last letter she received from Geoffrey Webster—the one he had written with such dumb yearnings in the shack at Manitoba. It was a lengthy but straightforward and manly letter which the writer had evidently tried to make interesting by describing the life up there, telling how mile by mile the road was being laid—the road which, he was safe to predict, would continue its civilizing course straight through to the Pacific.

Only this and nothing more to the eye of a stranger, but to her there was a subtle sense of something more between the lines—an inner perception of the feeling that had inspired the man as he wrote. When at the end he referred to the pleasant talks they had had on board ship, and expressed concern lest her health might break down in the arduous and unaccustomed work, his image rose vividly before her—tall and of splendid proportions, with a pair of earnest grey eyes, lit up with kindly inner fire.

And he was now laid low in the grasp of fever, possibly dying, and no one to give him proper attendance. Violet was nothing if not a woman of action; in a few minutes of rapid calculation her mind was made up. She had the address from Mrs. Watson—it was Friday evening now—to-morrow a fast liner left Liverpool for Halifax—if she was to go at all,

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she must be off by the 9.50 train that night. There was only time to write a couple of letters and to pack some warm clothing. Her writing to Mount Classic was a matter of minutes. She hoped and trusted her parents would not be too much annoyed at this sudden step, but—Geoffrey Webster was in need, and go to him she must—if only to hear his last words, to once more clasp his hand—alas! it might be to close his eyes in death.

Another letter she wrote—a business communication—which also she sealed and stamped; and, asking the hospital servant to see that these letters she had left on the desk were posted, she went into the Matron's room, bade her a hurried good-bye, and was off.

When the servant went to pick up the letters to post them there was only one to be seen. And invisible the other remained until found accidentally by the Matron in the fold of the blotting-pad.

Although in the late fall of the year, the voyage was an unusually rapid one, the wind being favorable all the way, with only an hour or two of fog.

It was Sunday morning when they landed, and, to Violet's surprise, it was mild and warm beneath the brilliant blue of the Canadian sky. She was infinitely amused to see how nicely the steerage passengers bloomed out beyond all recognition in the smart attire they had saved for landing. The dingy garments and frowsy heads had vanished, the comfortable dresses and bright-colored feathers and flowers in the women's hats made the landing stage bright with color, and when all assembled in the Customs shed the class distinction so rigid on board ship disappeared utterly, each minding his or her business,

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which at present was the evading of the irksome Customs duties.

A train was in readiness to convey them to Montreal, but it being impossible to get all the luggage on the train in less than an hour and a half, Violet, having been cleared of the Customs, left her little trunk in charge, and walked up from the wharf to get a view of the country. It was exceedingly beautiful, even now when trees were leafless and only the delicate tracery of the twigs were outlined against the blue. For here, in the heart of November, that wondrous phantom of fervid summer glory was brooding on the land; hazy, slumbrous, indescribable; the brief but lovely Indian summer that comes after the first biting blasts have stripped the woods of the crimson and the gold, after the first snow has fallen and thawed under the slanting beams of a low traveling sun.

In the Halifax harbor the waters of the wild Atlantic lay at peace, calm as a child lulled to sleep in its mother's arms. The brown banks were dotted with white buildings, which sparkled like jewels in the sunlight, and stretched on either side in long curves, and beyond them rose the peaceful land, with its background of everlasting slopes and more remote cliffs.

Walking on slowly and merely following the road, Violet presently came to a turn leading inland, when she saw two men, the one leaning heavily on the other as they walked slowly towards her.

As they approached she saw that the face of the taller man seemed gaunt and pale, while that of the other was by no means ruddy. Both wore peaked caps, which shaded their eyes from the sun.

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Evidently one was an invalid, whom the other was walking out for an airing. Without looking at them further she held forward, now turning to the right and now to the left, in appreciation of the scenery. In another minute she was about to pass without looking in their direction, when an exclamation from one of the men arrested her attention, and, turning, she saw before her—Geoffrey Webster!

"Miss Mickledool, is it possible?" he said, extending a thin hand to her, while his companion looked on in wonder.

Mechanically and by sheer force of habit she took the proffered hand, looking into his gleaming grey eyes in mute astonishment.

"I suppose I look so hattered and broken up you do not know me," he laughed, somewhat nervously, but Violet had recovered herself.

"It is such a surprise, Mr. Webster; I thought you were in Winnipeg."

"We have just come from there," he explained.

"You have been ill?" she asked, with unusual hesitation, for suddenly she saw herself in a most absurdly foolish position. She was on her way to Winnipeg to nurse a sick man back to health; and, lo! he was recovered and standing before her.

"Yes, I was pretty low for a while, but my friend here helped to pull me through. Allow me to introduce him to you, Miss Mickledool—Mr. Watson."

"Mr. Watson! This indeed is a pleasure to meet you. And you are going home?" she said, shaking hands with hearty significance. "Oh, how glad your mother will be! I saw her before I came away; she is looking well."

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"It is good to hear that," Watson replied. "I hope to see her in another ten days or so."

"So that is why you are in Halifax—you are on your way home?" she said, turning to Webster.

"Yes; our boat sails to-morrow. We arrived last night, and are at a hotel waiting for our boat. Are you traveling too, may I ask!"

"Well, yes, but not far," she said, her face glowing crimson at the ridiculousness of her position. It would have been all very well to have gone and taken up her place as nurse by his bedside while he lay helpless, but now—she could not for the life of her confess that it was for this she had come across the ocean.

"It is possible I may return next ship after yours. I—I have very little to do here, and must get back soon."

She had already with quick decision made up her mind what to do—stay a few days, and take the next vessel back to Liverpool.

On no account could she allow him to suspect for what purpose she had come. But not being an expert either in evasion or prevarication, it was difficult for Violet to entirely conceal her embarrassment.

Watson observed it more than Webster, the latter being too full of his own surging thoughts to notice keenly. The pleasure of this unexpected meeting was enough for the moment. Watson glanced from one to the other, and divined that his absence might be appreciated for a time.

"I find I have left something behind, Geoffrey. Do you mind walking on with Miss Mickledool while I run back? I shall soon overtake you."

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"Oh, I shan't have much time," cried Violet in alarm. "Our train goes in an hour or so."

"Your train? Are you not staying here in Halifax?"

"No—oh, no! Our vessel only arrived this morning; we have just passed the Customs. I thought I might come up from the station and have a look at the place."

"Why, Miss Mickledool—"

"Excuse me, then; I'll run back to the hotel," interposed Watson, and was off.

Geoffrey in astonishment turned to Violet.

"Then you have only landed?" he said. "How far do you intend to go—to Ontario?"

"No—no further than to Halifax here," she answered decidedly.

Understanding her decisive tone to mean she did not wish to be questioned further, Geoffrey remained silent. There was something about this meeting he could not make out. He had an instinct that she was concealing something from him purposely, but the pleasure of meeting her again was so great that it lessened all other feelings.

"I feel somewhat tired," he said, and he looked it.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, a world of self-reproach in the sound. "So careless of me not to remember you have been ill. Let us sit down on this fallen tree till Mr. Watson comes back."

They sat down, and, looking at him, she inquired—

"Do you think you are fit to travel, Mr. Webster? Typhoid fever is such a long and tedious trouble."

"Oh, it wasn't just typhoid, though something of that nature, I believe. I got better sooner than Watson expected; and, of course, knowing him to be

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full of anxiety to get home, I made myself out better than I really was. However, I guess we'll arrive all right. The sea breezes will set me up again."

"I do hope so," she said quietly. "Are you not glad to know that Mr. Watson is at last cleared of the dreadful suspicion attached to him?"

"Yes," said Geoffrey. "But how did you know?"

"I saw the statement you sent to the Procurator-Fiscal in the papers. And then I went to congratulate his mother. She had just had a letter from him that day. It was she who told me you were ill."

Violet suddenly bit her lip with vexation. She had not intended to tell him she knew of his illness, but she was too transparent to hide anything successfully.

"I got your letter, Miss Mickledool. It was a great comfort to me up in that lone land."

"Oh, I am glad! Yours, too, was most interesting. It is wonderful the way the roads are laid in such wild unpopulated countries."

"Was it not strange that we should meet here—both so unexpectedly?" he said. "How do you like this new profession you have taken up?"

"It is a very instructive one," she responded gravely. "I think doctors and nurses see more of the seamy side of human nature than all the professions put together. Of course, in my case I see more than the ordinary nurse called in to comfortable homes."

"Inevitably. But you have renounced it before you came out here?"

"Oh, no! By no means. The obligation is too strong on me to give up."



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There was a pause, and Geoffrey's face grew grave.

"I must take this first chance of saying how much I regretted my too strong speech, Miss Mickledool. I cannot forgive myself. To think I should have been the cause of such a break-up in your family! It seems to me——"

"Mr. Webster," she interposed with decision, "it was not you who caused the division; it was the truth. Had your words come short of the truth they would have been unavailing. We—my brother and I—put them to the test, and—well, we had no choice. Our father's business—his and others—were responsible for so much that we simply had no choice left if we were to remain self-respecting Christians."

She paused, and, shaking her head despairingly, repeated—"No choice! no choice!"

"But you must have suffered?"

"Well, mentally, yes. The truth, when it broke upon us both—I need not say broke, rather was thrust upon us by daily facts—was terrible. It was awful to reflect that from such a source of constant degradation of our fellows we had hitherto lived in ease and abundance; but it was something to have my brother with me through it all. He has now a church in Fuddleton, and is doing good work there—he and his wife—against the enemy. We have not cut any ties of blood between our parents and ourselves; we simply refuse to participate in the income. I write to mother every week or so."

"Ah, I am so glad of that," said Geoffrey.

"By the way," said Geoffrey abruptly, "when does the next boat after ours sail?"

"I—I am not sure," said Violet, quite taken aback; "some time after yours, I believe."

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"Because I don't see why we can't wait a few days longer, and have the pleasure of going over in your company, if that would be agreeable to you."

All the blood in Violet's body seemed to surge into her face; prevarication was out of her line entirely, and the longer she stayed there the more impossible it grew for her to tell him that she had crossed the seas in her anxiety to be of service to him.

"Oh," she faltered, "I beg you will not think of such a thing. It would be both selfish and cruel to keep James Watson an hour longer than can be helped. If you only knew how Mrs. Watson looks forward to his coming! He is no prodigal, as you know, but I think she will use the words of the prodigal's father—'This, my son, was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' Don't, please, think of waiting for me. I shall be quite happy, though alone."

Geoffrey scarce restrained himself from saying. "Yes, but I shan't be." However, he did not venture so far, but, suppressing himself, looked wistfully at the profile between him and the landscape.

"You are tired?" she said.

"Yes, a little. Watson will be back soon, though, and then we can walk on. Shall we see you again before you go?"

"I'm afraid not; in fact, the train will be going in an hour—much less than that now."

Geoffrey wondered inwardly at the manifest discrepancy of her statements, but it was not for him to point them out to her. Appearing to acquiesce, he said, "Supposing we walk on towards the station slowly. Watson, when he does not meet us, will conclude we have gone on, and will follow."

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She rose and assisted him to get up, her heart swelling with tenderness for the great, stalwart fellow reduced to such feebleness.

"Won't you lean on my arm, Mr. Webster, for a few steps at least? You see, I'm a professional nurse now, and know just what is needed for a convalescent."

He allowed her to draw his arm within hers, and they walked on slowly, he feeling that it was worth all his sickness to have won this privilege of walking by her side.

"How I wish you were going over with us, Miss Mickledool," he could not help saying. "I shall never forget our first voyage together."

"Nor I," she said, so simply and sincerely that his heart leaped, and a wild hope sprang up in him.

"You see," she explained, "so much came about as the result of our acquaintance on board that ship that I couldn't forget it if I tried."

His heart sank. Ah, it was only this she remembered the voyage for—only this! He personally was remembered only in connection with these results—a mere passing acquaintance, whose only chance of remembrance was his plain speaking on some subjects. He became still more weary, though it was wonderfully sweet and soothing to be walking thus beside her.

A step sounded behind them, and Watson's voice called briskly—

"Whither away, Webster? Aren't you walking too far?"

"Oh, I daresay not," responded Geoffrey; "I thought of going to the station to see Miss Mickledool off."

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As he spoke he withdrew his arm from its support and tried to straighten himself up, but his great weakness was only too apparent.

"You mustn't think of going to the station," said Violet with professional peremptoriness. "You must take care of yourself, and get safe home to the old people in Glasgow. I shall see you there, I hope, quite restored. In the meantime—ah! excuse me."

A light springed democrat wagon at that moment came driving up, evidently empty, and without a word of warning she darted across the road and held up her finger to the driver, who stopped, smiling pleasantly at her eager face.

"This gentleman over here has walked too far; will you kindly give him a lift as far as you are going? He has been in ill-health, and will be glad of the drive back to the city."

"Certain; I guess there's room for all of you there," said the obliging driver.

"Now, come; here is an excellent chance for you," said Violet, still with her professional air. "This gentleman will drive you in, and I shall say *au revoir* till I meet you in Glasgow, later on."

There was something singularly insistent in her tone, but she was in desperation to be rid of both men, for if they went to the dock-station with her, and saw her trunks labelled "Winnipeg," what—oh, what—could she say? how explain these labels away?

"That was a bright idea, Miss Mickledool," said James Watson, much relieved; "in fact, I was just thinking of leaving him here with you and going to fetch a cab."

But when Geoffrey had passively mounted into the seat and shaken hands with her, he said to himself,

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"How cleverly she got rid of me. What an ass I have been ever to think she would look at me. Still, Violet, my love, I am yours for all time."

A jovial little party of friends stood on the platform at the Central Station, waiting for the train which was to bring James Watson home, a reinstated man, to his own country.

Rev. Frank Miekledool and his wife, though having no personal acquaintance with him, for his mother's sake and knowing his sad history, had deemed it their duty to come and welcome him back to his honored place among his fellows. Archie Mason and John Rowan were also there, in company with several members of the firm of Auld & Co., on whom the codicil made by Mr Auld on the day of his death had made a profound impression. Mrs. Watson, in holiday attire, had stayed at home with the old people, who were also dressed for the happy occasion. Her anticipated meeting with her son would be too sacred an affair for vulgar eyes—no stranger should intermeddle with or witness their first unspeakable joy.

Geoffrey Webster was the first to alight from the train, to find his hand seized by that of the Rev. Frank Miekledool. He was immensely improved by the voyage, and, though still thin, had recovered much of his old vitality.

When James Watson stepped out and saw by whom he was surrounded and welcomed, he paled with the intensity of his emotion. Mr. Howieson gripped his hand, and said in his hearty voice, "Welcome back, Watson; we'll all rejoice to have you back in the warehouse again." It seemed all a dream—something too good to be true.

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Archie Mason and John Rowan completely mystified him by adding to their welcome their congratulations on his becoming a partner of the old-established firm of Auld & Co. This was the first inkling he had heard of such a thing, having missed his mother's letter by coming away.

It was only after tea, at home with his mother and Geoffrey, that he understood what this ovation meant, and his astonishment was not to be expressed in words.

In the midst of their family confab there was a sharp ring at the bell, and, to the surprise of all, Mr. Sampson, Mr. Auld's family solicitor, appeared. His presence was so suggestive of business that Geoffrey, with Mrs. Watson and the old people, left the parlor, and closed the door upon James and his visitor.

Mr. Sampson was a thin, florid, clean-shaven, wiry-looking man, sharp-featured, with keen, observant blue eyes—a typical legal face, framed in silver-grey hair cropped close to his head.

"I shall have to introduce myself to you, Mr. Watson," he said, as he took the chair offered him. "I had the honor to be family and business solicitor for the late Mr. Auld, and as such I came as soon as I heard of your arrival to offer you my congratulations on your becoming a partner."

James Watson bowed.

"I assure you, Mr. Sampson," he said, "this is an honor as unexpected as undeserved. My only grief is that Mr. Auld is no longer here. I know he would have had a word of welcome for me."

Mr. Sampson drew from his deep breast pocket a large envelope, and laid it down upon the table.

"About the deserving part of it, Mr. Watson,"

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he said, smiling courteously, "I think I should be inclined to pin my faith to my late friend and client's opinion rather than to yours. But first let me apologize for breaking in on your family reunion in so unconventional a manner. I have urgent business which I must attend to personally in Paris—business which may detain me for a fortnight—and as I could not leave my late friend's wishes unattended all that time, I thought I would just call personally."

"It is extremely kind of you, Mr. Sampson," said Watson; "in fact, I run some risk of being killed by kindness since my return."

Mr. Sampson then proceeded to business, in his own concise way detailing the events of Mr. Auld's death, the amount placed to Watson's credit as partner of the house of Auld & Co., also the legacy to Mrs. Watson.

"I cannot understand it all," said Watson. "That Mr. Auld was my sincere friend I never doubted. He seemed to have taken a liking to me from the day in which a simple accident threw me in his way, and it was one of the bitterest drops in a bitter cup to think that, through misfortune, I should have sunk in his estimation. But this—well, I can only think he felt so deeply for me when he came to know the truth—and—"

"Perhaps this will explain his motive," said Mr. Sampson, producing the letter addressed to Watson, and marked "Private and Personal."

James Watson broke the seal, and while the lawyer busied himself with his papers he read the message from the dead hand with strange and conflicting feelings:—

"MY DEAR WATSON,—The codicil attached to my

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will is not only an expression of respect and good will to one whom I have long esteemed; it is also a slight attempt at compensation for the wrong and shame you have undeservedly suffered through one of my own flesh and blood. It has to-day only accidentally come to my knowledge that your wife, Emma Notman, was the daughter of a woman of the same name. That means that your wife's mother was my daughter, whose career, at this late hour of my life, rises up to remind me of long-forgotten follies and sins. This I confide to you with entire faith in your honor. The secret is divulged to you alone, in order that you may accept and understand the full meaning of my gift. May it bring you success and prosperity, and give to the mind of the giver a modicum of peace.—In confidence, yours sincerely,

“JOHN AULD.”

Mr. Sampson glanced up twice at Watson, but still found him, with knit brows and troubled eyes, perusing and re-perusing that letter. To tell the truth, the lawyer's curiosity was aroused not a little—almost to pique—for was he not the old family solicitor, who knew everything—the family confessor, as it were?

Certainly he expected Watson would hand him the letter when he had read it; but, to his surprise, when at last he looked up he merely met his eyes for some moments with a musing, dreamy stare. Then, tearing the letter across and across, he leaned over to the grate and dropped it among the leaping flames.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### IN LIVERPOOL.

MEANWHILE Mrs. Watson sat in the next room with Geoffrey and the old people—the latter happy beyond measure, and looking younger rather than older.

“Ye ken,” she said, “I could hardly believe Jamie when he wrote ye were comin’ hame wi’ him. Ye see, in his letter afore that he said you were laid up, an’ he feared you might ha’e weeks o’t, an’ was wishin’ a gude trained nurse could be gotten, they were sae scarce up there. Of course, when Miss Mickledool cam’ in at the time I gave her a’ the news, but though I could see she was a kind o’ put about, did I ever dream she would think o’ gaun oot there hersel’? But she sticks at naethin’ if she aince tak’s it into her head.”

“Out there herself? You mean Miss Mickledool thought of going to Winnipeg?” queried Geoffrey with sudden interest.

“Ay, whaur else?” echoed Mrs. Watson. “She said naething to me, but I saw she lookit anxious when she left. So when I got this last letter, sayin’ ye were better an’ able to travel, I thoct what’s the use o’ keepin’ the lassie in a state o’ wonderment aboot him; an’ awa’ I gaed to the Matron o’ the hospital a’e day to see whaur I could find Miss Mickledool. But, me! ye might ha’e knockit me doon wi’ a feather when she tell’t me she was awa’ to Winnipeg a’ the road, to nurse a freend she had ill

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there. Of course, I kent the freend was yoursel'—though I wasna gaen to tell the Matron that, ye may be sure."

After this Mrs. Watson went on in her chatty way, rambling from one topic to another in her happiest mood, until the door closed on Mr. Sampson; and her son, looking pale and lahorng under suppressed excitement, came in and told them all the news of Sampson's interview—all except the episode of the letter, which he kept his lips sealed on, then and for ever.

Next day Geoffrey surprised them all by stating that he would have to be out of town on husiness for some days. He did not state where he was going, and he took no luggage save his usual well-packed valise.

The day following he turned up at the office of the Allan Line Company in Liverpool, inquiring when the next hoat was due from Halifax. They told him the Parisian would be due the day after to-morrow, she being a fast boat—in fact, the hoat Violet had gone out on.

Only two days, hnt to Geoffrey Webster's enlightened consciensness it seemed two centuries of impatient waiting. For at last he understood the emharrassment, the evasions, the discrepaucies that puzzled him so in Halifax on that lovely Indian summer day. He divined now what had hrought her out—understood her emharrassment—understood, too, the fine feeling that prevented her from telling him the truth—that she had crossed the ocean for his sake. For his sake! The thought made him dizzy! The joy of it sent the blood tingling through his veins like sap rising in the spring to the topmost tree twig. He tried in vain to persuade himself

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to believe she had gone all that distance to nurse him for sweet charity's sake; he laughed as he thought of the nervous rapidity with which she got rid of them both that day on the road overlooking the harbor. Yet, as the hours passed, bringing her nearer, when at last the "Parisian" had been reported off the headland, his heart sank and his hopes grew fainter and fainter. For what, after all, should lead him to think that she regarded him other than as a mere acquaintance? Might she not have gone out in a purely professional capacity to Manitoba? But, then, she had not gone!

To allay the fever of his thoughts while waiting, he took from his pocket a letter which he had found waiting for him in Glasgow. It was from the Company, thanking him for the highly satisfactory way in which the last section of railway had been laid, and requesting him to submit plans for a still further extension. To mark their appreciation of the value of his services they begged to notify him that he had been appointed an Honorary Director of the Company. A smile of satisfaction illumined his features.

"Well, that's so much; but what good would it all be to me without her?" he murmured.

When at last the ship glided into dock, amid the waving of handkerchiefs from waiting friends on the landing-stage, he took up his position at the foot of the first saloon gangway, and, with a face pale with expectancy, waited until the last passenger had come down.

"Are all the saloon passengers landed?" he asked an officer.

"All ashore," was the answer.

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Sick at heart, Geoffrey turned and threaded his way through the chatting, laughing, glad-to-be-home-again crowds that thronged the sheds. With a faint hope that he might have missed her, he stood for a few minutes carefully scanning every feminine object in sight.

"Heavens! what can have happened?" he murmured audibly, when some one touched his arm, and a sweet voice inquired—

"Whom are you looking for, Mr. Webster?"

"For you, of course," came his blunt, glad answer, as he wheeled about and took both her hands in his.

"But whatever brought you to meet me?" she inquired, with naive surprise.

He paused a moment, and then said—

"I want to ask you a question."

"Well?"

"Why did you set out for Winnipeg?"

She flushed rose red, but retorted, coquettishly—

"I answer that by asking you another, Mr. Webster. Why did you come to meet me here?"

"Shall I tell you the truth?" he asked, turning pale.

"Certainly; I prefer truth always."

"Because I love you."

A deeper flood of color swept over her face, but she raised her eyes to his in a happy smile.

"Why didn't you tell me that in Halifax? Then we could have come home together."

"Do you really mean it, Violet?" he asked, hending to her.

"I mean it, Geoffrey," she said, with such sweet gravity that he doubted his own hearing.

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"You love me, and will marry me? Just as I am?"

"I love you, and will marry you, because you are just what you are—my ideal."

All round them surged and talked and shouted the crowds amid the luggage; all around them rose and fell the hubbub and confusion of landing; but, oblivious to everything save the infinite joy that was in him, he then and there took her in his arms and kissed her.

"My wife! my wife!"

No one observed them; no one saw anything unusual going on. There is always plenty of kissing when ships come in.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE LAST ECHO FROM THE PRAIRIE.

It is suggestive as well as instructive to note how the everflowing tide of life eloses over and behind the most important and disturbing events, resuming its everyday aspect as though nothing unusual had occurred to break its apparent monotony. To-day the noble ship, conscious of her tragedy, plunges with her shuddering, living freight into the ocean deeps, and the waters sob and moan as they engulf her. But to-morrow the blue expanse again spreads unbroken from horizon to horizon, reflecting the benign smile of the heavens, giving no hint of the wrecks that strew the green silences of the ocean floor.

So to all outward appearance life flowed on after the events which to those concerned had seemed so fateful.

Geoffrey and Violet had been quietly married at the house of the bride's brother, no sign either of approval or disapproval coming from Mount Classie, although proper notice of the event had been given. Shortly afterwards, however, Mrs. Mickledool, on the plea of failing health, resigned the Presidentship of the various Societies she had formed connection with for the amelioration of the submerged. Mr Mickledool himself was in London, one of a deputation sent to protest against the proposed stringent rules regulating the liquor traffic in Afriez, rules which amounted almost to prohibition of the sale of liquor among the

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blacks, Diana of the Erythesians being still great as in ancient Greece.

James Watson had taken the place assigned him in the firm by the late Mr. Auld with the simple and unaffected dignity of a man who has sounded alike the shallows and deeps of life, and found that the soul of a man need not drown in either.

He had bought a small hut comfortable suburban villa, to which he had moved his mother and Geoffrey's adopted parents—the latter to occupy apartments of their own, with a reliable domestic to attend to their wants.

To-night there was a double event there, a meeting of friends, which was at once a house-warming and a farewell union, Geoffrey and his wife intending to sail on the next day for Halifax *en route* for Vancouver, and Frank and Bessie, Archie Mason and John Rowan—these latter hopeless bachelors—with several members of the firm of Auld's, were welcomed by James Watson and his mother, who introduced the bride and bridegroom to them as the chief guests of the evening. Later on, Geoffrey brought in his adopted father and mother, who went through the ceremony of introduction to the company with the dignity born of worth, age, and experience. He felt proud of them, as they were of him.

It was a pleasant and merry party, and the time flew so fast with social converse, spiced as it was with the dry humor, the unpremeditated flashes of wit and repartee, that distinguishes the intelligent Scotch, that midnight was upon them ere they were aware of it.

Before the guests had all left, however, their host managed to get a word with Geoffrey in private.

"Can you spare me a few minutes to-morrow

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morning, Geoffrey? I'll come down to the office at nine instead of ten. Will that suit you?"

"Very well indeed. I shall be afoot early tomorrow to see to things anyway."

"Thanks. I want to ask your advice about a matter that is burdening my mind."

At 9 a.m. punctual the friends met in the private office assigned to Mr. Watson in Auld's.

"I have been debating with myself about this thing, Webster, ever since Fate turned the tables, and now I want to ask you whether you think I ought not to make some provision for that unfortunate woman who was once my wife."

Geoffrey started, looked at his friend, the ex-time-keeper, and began stroking his moustache meditatively.

"I think you need not bother about her any more, Watson."

"But—I must. Apart from the relation she once stood in to me, I have other reasons for my desire to provide for her in case anything should happen to Clayfoot, and she be left in poverty. I want to settle something yearly upon her, so she can always be above fear of want."

Geoffrey cleared his throat and continued to stroke his moustache. His face began to take on a look of trouble, and his brows were knit in a sort of frown, while he averted his eyes from Watson's earnest regard.

But Watson was so intent on the subject in hand that he did not notice his friend's growing embarrassment—his manifest dislike to discussion of the matter.

"I know," pursued Watson slowly, "that it must



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seem strange to you, this anxiety that the woman who brought such calamity upon me should have her share of the money which has been left me by Mr. Auld. But, Webster, you will not resent my keeping the reason of my insistence on this arrangement from you when I tell you I am bound in honor to be silent on that reason. But it must be done, and I want you to engineer the business for me. I don't want her to know this provision for her future comes from me at all. I wish her to——."

He stopped short, arrested by the impatient waving of Geoffrey's hand, the pregnant expression of Geoffrey's face.

"For God's sake, Watson, say no more. You compel me to divulge something which I had hoped to keep hidden from you—something which, I am afraid, will pain you very much; and, Heaven knows, I would spare you it if I could."

"Go on," said Watson, quietly, "you cannot bring me any worse than I have already borne. What has poor Emma been doing now?"

"Nothing, Watson. She is dead!"

"Dead!"

In the long pause that followed Watson looked at his friend with a stupefied expression.

"Dead? How did you know Webster? Perhaps this is another trick; I believed her dead for years, you know."

"Oh, no; this is no trick. She is dead. If you can spare the time, I will tell you all I know."

"Tell me everything—everything—Webster, if you are still my friend, as you swore to be once."

"I am, Watson; and if I have not before told you, it was to spare you—and, then, Joe himself thought

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it better to keep silence. But here is how it happened. When Joe Wark and I parted, it was with a distinct understanding that if I wrote him he should come and take charge of a gang on whatever line I might be sent to engineer. There is no better man going than Joe Wark."

"No—no better, barring his periodical weakness when he loses control of himself," responded Watson heartily.

"Ah! yes. It was touching on that very subject which brought me the information I then drew from him. I was counselling him as a friend to try and combat these periodic attacks of alcoholic desire, and lamenting that a man of his ability should never have a penny he could call his own, notwithstanding the capital pay he always received. You know when he went on those awful tears how his money melted, or was stolen from him—hard to tell which. But Joe gave me quite a surprise when he said in his blunt way—'Never you fear, Inspector; Joe Wark will keep the spondulieks he earns from this out, and don't you forget it. When we moved the shacks from the camp near the Dauphin track I swore off, once and for all time, and when I say I'll do a thing, I'll do it.'

"Of course, I expressed my delight, and we were about to part, when he continued to hold my hand after he had shaken it. This in Joe was remarkable; there is no gush in Joe Wark, as you know. But there he stood, holding my hand, and evidently debating with himself about something. At last he said, 'I think I'll tell you, Inspector. It's too big a hurden to carry on my mind alone; but mum's the word to Watson.'

"Then he told me how the desire for a long, deep

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drink had come upon him that night as we bowled down the line in the boarding-car after leaving Cathcart off, opposite Clayfoot's. He said it had been creeping upon him for days, at intermittent intervals; but when we left Cathcart off, and he thought of him going up to Clayfoot's, and possibly being refreshed there with 'hard cider,' the overpowering desire mastered him, and so soon, as he had landed myself and Mike, what does he do but bribe Mike to go back in the hand-car with him, and wait on the track till he came back from Clayfoot's with a supply of 'cider' under his arm. I had interdicted the sale of the stuff to the men, as you know; but now, when Clayfoot knew we were shifting for good, Joe thought he could easily induce him to supply him for the last time. He said that as he walked up toward the house the desire became intolerable. He strode through the grass like a man possessed, when all at once he saw smoke rising from Clayfoot's house, and Clayfoot himself, lashing his team, tearing across the open, and disappearing northward. The next sensation was flames bursting from Clayfoot's house, and, rushing forward in breathless haste, Joe saw what quenched the demon of desire in him, and got a shock which actually broke the spell of alcoholic mania. But, Watson, I need not go into details. Let it suffice, my dear fellow, to know that your late wife was even then dead."

"That is not enough, Geoffrey. I must have all the details there are. Keep back nothing," Watson said, with grave decision.

Geoffrey hesitated, then gave in.

"Well, since you must have the whole truth, it is this: Before the door, not ten yards from it, the

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woman called Clayfoot's wife lay, shot through the heart, and beside her Catheart, shot through the head. Clayfoot must have shot them both at once, and then fired the house and fled."

Watson covered his eyes with his hands for a few minutes before he could find any response.

"And this is the truth, Webster—the truth?"

"The solemn truth, Watson. I never intended to tell you, but you have wrung it from me."

"Poor Emma," said Watson dreamily. "After all, she was more to be pitied than blamed."

An impatient lift of Geoffrey's eyebrows showed how little he thought of Watson's judgment—in this particular case at least. But, then, he did not know what Watson knew of her neglected childhood; nor, like him, understand that she too was but another sheaf in the Harvest of Moloch.

THE END.

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