

Grodgers Syrup

IS A POSITIVE CURE FOR NERVOUSNESS AND LOSS OF SLEEP

THE AMERICAN BARON.

(BY JAMES DE MILLE.)

Continued.

But all these thoughts and ravings were destined to come to a full and sudden stop, and to be changed to others of a far different character. This change took place when Girasole, after visiting the ladies, came with Mrs. Willoughby to his room. As Dacres lay on the floor he heard the voice of the Italian, and the faint, mournful, pleading tones of a woman's voice, and, finally, he saw the flash of a light, and perhaps this woman also. He held his breath in suspense. What did it mean? The tone of Girasole was not the tone of love.

The light drew nearer, the footsteps too—a heavy footfall, the tread of a man, the other lighter, the step of a woman. He waited almost breathless.

At last she appeared. There she was before him, and with the Italian; but oh, how changed from that demon woman of his fancies, who was to appear before him with this enemy to gloat over his sufferings! Was there a trace of fiend in that beautiful and gentle face? Was there there of joy or exultation over him in that noble and mournful lady, whose melancholy grace and tearful eyes now riveted his gaze. Was there the foul traitor who had done to death her husband and her friend? Where was the miscreant who had sacrificed all to a guilty passion? Not there; not with that face; not with those tears; to think that was impossible—it was unholy. He might rave when he did not see her, but now that his eyes beheld her those mad fancies were all dissipated.

There was only one thing there—a woman full of loveliness and grace, in the very bloom of her life, overwhelmed with suffering which this Italian was inflicting on her. Why? Could he indulge the unholy thought that the Italian had cast her off, and supplied her place with the younger beauty? Away with such a thought. It was not jealousy of that younger lady that Dacres perceived; it was the cry of a loving, yearning heart that clung to that other one, from whom the Italian had violently severed her.

There was no mistake as to the source of this sorrow. Nothing was left to the imagination. Her own words told all.

Then the light was taken away, and the lady crouched upon the floor. Dacres could no longer see her amidst that gloom; but he could hear her, and every sob, and every sigh and every moan went straight to his heart and thrilled through every fibre of his being. He lay there listening, and quivering thus as he listened with very intensity of sympathy that shut out from his mind every other thought except that of the mourning, stricken one before him.

Thus a long time passed, and the lady wept still, and other sounds arose, and there were footsteps in the house, and whisperings, and people passing to and fro; but to all these Dacres was deaf, and they caused no more impression on his senses than if they were not. His ears and his sense of hearing existed only for these sobs and these sighs.

At last a pistol-shot roused him. The lady sprang up and called in despair. A cry came back and the lady was about to venture to the other room, when she was driven back by the stern voice of Girasole. Then she stood for a moment, after which she knelt, and Dacres heard her voice in prayer. The prayer was not audible, but now and then words struck upon his ears which gave the key to her other words, and he knew that it was no remorse for guilt, but a cry for help in sore affliction.

Had anything more been needed to destroy the last vestige of Dacres' former suspicions it was furnished by the words which he now heard.

Oh, Heaven! he thought; can this woman be what I have thought her? But if not what a villain am I! Yet now I must rather believe myself to be a villain than her!

In the midst of this paper Girasole's voice sounded, and then Minnie's tone came clearly audible. The lady rose and listened, and a great sigh of relief escaped her. Then Girasole descended the stairs, and the lady again sank upon her knees.

Thus far there seemed a spell upon Dacres; but this last incident and the clear child voice of Minnie seemed to break it. He could no longer keep silence. His emotion was as intense as ever, but the bonds which had bound his lips seemed now to be loosened.

Oh, Arethusa! he moaned.

At the sound of his voice Mrs. Willoughby started, and rose to her feet. So great had been her anxiety and agitation that for some time she had not thought of another being in the room, and there had been no sound from him to suggest his existence. But now his voice startled her. She gave no answer however.

Arethusa! repeated Dacres, gently and longingly and tenderly.

Poor fellow! thought Mrs. Willoughby; he's dreaming.

Arethusa! oh, Arethusa! said Dacres once more. Do not keep away. Come to me. I am calm now.

Poor fellow! thought Willoughby. He doesn't seem to sleep. He's talking to me. I really think he is.

Arethusa, said Dacres again, will you answer me one question?

Mrs. Willoughby hesitated for a moment, but now perceived that Dacres was really speaking to her. He's in delirium,

who altogether misinterpreted her words, and the emphasis she placed on them; and in his voice there was such peace, and such gentle, exultant happiness, that Mrs. Willoughby again felt touched.

Poor fellow! she thought; how he must have suffered!

Where are you fastened? she whispered as she bent over him. Dacres let her breath upon his cheek; the hem of her garment touched his sleeve, and a thrill passed through him. He felt as though he would like to be forever thus, with her bending over him.

My hands are fastened behind me, said he.

I have a knife, said Mrs. Willoughby. She did not stop to think of danger. It was chiefly pity that incited her to this. She could not bear to see him lying thus in pain which he had perhaps, as she supposed, encountered for her. She was impulsive, and though she thought of his assistance toward the escape of Minnie and herself, yet pity and compassion were her chief inspiring motives.

Mrs. Willoughby had told Girasole that she had no knife; but this was not quite true, for she now produced one, and cut the cords that bound his wrists. Again a thrill flashed through him at the touch of her little fingers; she then cut the cords that bound his ankles.

Dacres sat up. His ankles and wrists were badly swollen, but he was no longer conscious of pain. There was rapture in his soul, and of that alone was he conscious.

Be careful! she whispered warningly; guards are all around, and listeners. Be careful! If you can think of a way to escape, do so.

Dacres rubbed his hand over his forehead.

Am I dreaming? said he; or is it all true? A while ago I was suffering from some hideous vision; yet now you say you forgive me!

Mrs. Willoughby saw in this a sign of returning delirium. But the poor fellow must be humored, I suppose, she thought.

Oh, there is nothing for me to forgive, said she.

But if there were anything, would you? Yes.

Freely? he cried, with strong emphasis. Yes, freely.

Oh, could you answer me one question? Oh, could you?

No, no, not now—not now, I entreat you, said Mrs. Willoughby, in nervous dread. She was afraid that his delirium would bring him upon delicate ground and she tried to hold him back.

But I must ask you, said Dacres, trembling fearfully—I must—now or never. Tell me my doom; I have suffered so much. Oh, Heavens! Answer me. Can you? Can you feel toward me as you once did?

He's utterly mad, thought Mrs. Willoughby; but he'll get worse if I don't soothe him. Poor fellow! I ought to answer him.

Yes, she said in a low voice.

Oh, my darling! murmured Dacres, in rapture inexpressible; my darling! he repeated; and grasping Mrs. Willoughby's hand, he pressed it to his lips. And you will love me again—you will love me?

Mrs. Willoughby paused. The man was mad, but the ground was so dangerous! Yes, she must humor him. She felt his hot kisses on her hand.

You will—you will love me, will you not? he repeated. Oh, answer me! Answer me, or I shall die!

Yes, whispered Mrs. Willoughby, faintly.

As she said this a cold chill passed through her. He had drawn her to him, and pressed her against his breast, and she felt hot tears upon her head.

Oh, Arethusa! cried Dacres, as soon as she could extricate herself, there's a mistake, you know.

A mistake, darling?

Oh, dear, what shall I do? thought Mrs. Willoughby; he's beginning again. I must stop this, and bring him to his senses. How terrible it is to humor a delirious man!

Oh, Arethusa! sighed Dacres once more.

Mrs. Willoughby arose.

I'm not Arethusa at all, said she; that isn't my name. If you can shake off your delirium, I wish you would, I really do.

What! cried Dacres in amazement. I'm not Arethusa at all; that isn't my name.

Not your name?

No; my name's Kitty.

Kitty! cried Dacres starting to his feet.

At that instant the report of a gun burst upon their ears, followed by another and another; then there were wild calls and loud shouts. Other guns were heard.

Yet amidst all this wild alarm there was nothing which had so tremendous an effect upon Dacres as this last remark of Mrs. Willoughby's.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CRISIS OF LIFE.

When the Irish priest conjectured that it was about two o'clock in the morning he was not very far astray in his calculation. The short remarks that were exchanged between him and Ethel, and afterward between him and the men, were followed by a profound silence. Ethel sat by the side of the priest, with her head bent forward and her eyes closed as though she were sleeping; yet sleep was farther from her than ever it had been, and the thrilling events of the night afforded sufficient material to keep her awake for many a long hour yet to come. Her mind was now filled with a thousand conflicting and most exciting fancies in the midst which she might again have sunk into despair had she not been sustained by the assurance of the priest.

Sitting near Ethel, the priest for some time looked fixedly ahead of him as though he were contemplating the solemn midnight scene, or meditating upon the beauties of nature. In truth, the scene around was one which was deserving even of the close attention which the priest appeared to give. Immediately before him lay the lake, its shore not far

beneath and almost at their feet. Around it rose the wooded hills, whose dark forms darker from the gloom of night, threw profound shadows over the opposite shores. Near by the shore extended on their side. On the right there were fires now burning low, yet occasionally sending forth flashes, on the left, and at some distance might be seen the dusky outline of the old stone house. Behind them was the forest, vast, gloomy, clothed in impenetrable shade, in which lay their only hope of safety, yet where even now there lurked the watchful guards of the brigands. It was close behind them. Once in its shelter, and they might gain freedom; yet between them and it was an impassable barrier of enemies, and there also lay a still more impassable barrier in the grave where Hawbury lay. To fly even if they could fly, would be to give him up to death; yet to remain, as they must remain, would be to doom him to death none the less, and themselves too.

Seated there, with his eyes directed toward the water, the priest saw nothing of the scene before him; his eyes were fixed on vacancy; his thoughts were endeavoring to grapple with the situation, and master it. Yet so complicated was the situation, and so perplexing the dilemma in which he found himself—a dilemma where death perched upon either horn—that the good priest found his faculties becoming gradually more and more unable to deal with the difficulty, and he found himself once more sinking down deeper and deeper into that abyss of despair, from which he had recently extricated himself.

And still the time passed, and the precious moments laden with the fate not only of Hawbury, but of all the others—the moments of the night during which alone any escape was to be thought of—moved all too swiftly away.

Now in this hour of perplexity the good priest bethought him of a friend whose fidelity had been proved through the varied events of a life—a friend which in his life of celibacy, had found in his heart something of that place which a fond and faithful wife might hold in the heart of a more fortunate man. It was a little friend, a twany and somewhat grimy friend; it was in the pocket of his coat; it was a clay; in fact it was nothing else than a dudder.

Where in the world had the good priest who lived in this remote corner of Italy got that emblem of his green native isle? Perhaps he had brought it with him in the band of his hat when he first turned his back upon his country, or perhaps he had obtained it from the same quarter which had supplied him with that very black plug of tobacco which he brought forth shortly afterward. (The one was the complement of the other, and each was handled with equal love and care. Soon the occupation of cutting up the tobacco and rubbing it gave a temporary distraction to his thoughts, which distraction was prolonged by the further operation of pressing the tobacco into the bowl of the dudder.)

Here the priest paused, and cast a look toward the fire, which was not far away.

Would you have any objection to let me go and get a coal to light the pipe? said he to one of the men.

The man had an objection, and a very strong one.

Would one of you be kind enough to go and get me a brand or a hot coal?

This led to an earnest debate, and finally one of the men thought that he might venture. Before doing so however, a solemn promise was extorted from the priest that he would not try to escape during his absence. This the priest gave.

Escape! said he—it's a smoke I want. Besides how can I escape with three of ye watching me? And then, what would I want to escape for? I'm safe enough here.

The man now went off, and returned in a short time with a brand. The priest gave him his blessing, and received the brand with a quiet exultation that was pleasing to behold.

Matches, said he, ruin the smoke. They give it a sulphur taste. There's nothing like a hot coal.

Saying this he lighted his pipe. This operation was accomplished with a series of those short, quick hard, successive puffs with which the Irish race in every clime on this terrestrial ball perform the solemn rite.

And now the thoughts of the priest became more calm and regular and manageable. His confusion departed, and gradually, as the smoke ascended to the skies, there was diffused over his soul a certain soothing and all-pervading calm.

He now began to face the full difficulty of his position. He saw that escape was impossible and death inevitable. He made up his mind to die. The discovery would surely be made in the morning that Hawbury had been substituted for the robber; he would be found and punished and the priest would be involved in his fate. His only care now was for Ethel; and he turned his thoughts toward the formation of some plan by which he might obtain mercy for her.

He was in the midst of these thoughts—for himself resigned, for Ethel anxious—and turning over in his mind all the various modes by which the emotion of pity or mercy might be roused in a merciless and pitiless nature; he was thinking of an appeal to the brigands themselves, and had already decided that in this there lay his best hope of success—when all of a sudden these thoughts were rudely interrupted and dissipated and scattered to the winds by a most startling cry.

Ethel started to her feet.

Oh Heaven! she cried, what was that? Down! down! cried the men wrathfully; but before Ethel could obey the sound was repeated, and the men themselves were arrested by it.

The sound that thus interrupted the meditations of the priest was the explosion of a rifle. As Ethel started up another followed. This excited the men themselves, who now listened intently to learn the cause.

They did not have to wait long.

To be continued.

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