

A STIFF-NECKED GENERATION!

FROM BLACKWOOD'S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE.

CHAPTER XXXVI.—Continued.

"Yes, consult with papa—go in now and consult with him,—oh, that will do," as Catherine's mouth was opening to begin again; "I tell you, you may go if you want—only do not stand arguing and expounding there—" the words were scarcely out of her lips, ere their astonished auditor, in terror of a revocation, and already coming over the means by which she could with propriety carry out so delightful a permission (she told herself she did not mind in the least Rosamund's being cross over it), sped off like the wind and the letter's end was attained.

She was alone; and only a large black-edged envelope remained in her hand, which neither the one sister, nor the other, dreamed could contain anything worth any one's waiting for.

It was probably some milliner's or dressmaker's bill; and the person chiefly interested in these, did not covet over-much being present when one of them came in. Catherine's spring orders had been tolerably extensive, and had somewhat startled even herself by the sum total to which they had amounted—she would not, on account of some tiresome shop-woman, delay seeking out dear papa, and telling him what Rosamund had said—(it was a way of this young diplomatist's always to father a sentiment of her own, on somebody else, when possible)—and accordingly, she was well out of sight, ere the other absently undid the fastenings of the despised document.

The next moment saw it despoiled no longer.

"Emily Gilbert!" she exclaimed aloud, as the signature in large letters caught her eye,—Emily Gilbert! And writing to me! What is it—what can it be?"

With feverish haste her eye flew over the page, and the blood seemed to surge back from her heart.

He was dead—the man who had loved and lost her.

Dead! She paused to think, to understand. Dead! How, dead? Dead! Yes, the words were there, unmistakably here.

He had been killed in a night sortie among the frontier mountains, some weeks before. Some weeks before! And she—she had never heard, had never been told, and had been going on her way, contented and happy;—even beginning to—to—her cheek burned all over with a deep crimson flush.

Gilbert dead—some time dead—and she had not even mourned him!

That, for a few moments, swallowed up every other thought and emotion.

But how had she not heard—how not known?

The writer explained that only now had her poor brother's effects arrived at his sorrowing home, and that she thought it probable Miss Liscard had not noticed the record of his death in the newspapers, there having been a mistake in the name which no one had cared to rectify till too late. She now only intruded, poor Emily wrote—a mournful indignation shadowing itself forth beneath the humility—she only intruded because the enclosed had been found among her brother's papers. As the enclosed had been addressed to Miss Liscard, she had felt that Miss Liscard would like to have it, or that at least they ought to send it.

In the whole there was a pitiful attempt at dignity which was hardly successful. Just where the brother would have succeeded, the sister failed.

Rosamund, however, was in no mood to carp. The strange, sudden, terrible tidings were enough; the little packet with her name upon it in writing once so familiar—could she have eyes for aught beside?

The paper had a dark-red stain upon it. "Dear," it ran, "I feel to-night, although I know not why, as if I must write one word to you for the last—last time. I had never meant that you should hear from me again; but neither will you, unless the strange forebodings which have haunted me so unceasingly of late, prove to be true. I will bear this in my bosom, and only by my death, shall it find its way to you. It may be a weak fancy, Rosamund, but I seem to feel that the end is coming at last, and coming soon. I have not sought death, but neither have I shunned it. I have hoped for it and expected it, and I think I shall have it, perhaps before many hours are over. There has been an outbreak among the natives here, and who knows to what extent the mischief may not have spread? It is a wild, dark night, and we are going out upon the hills in search of the rebels. They tell me these rebels give no quarter. Why should they? We give them none. . . . Oh, Rosamund, Rosamund! why are you with me day and night, day and night now? I am looking at you as I write. I see you standing there in the dim light. I hear your voice; I almost feel your breath. Where are you? I wonder what you are doing. I wonder if

you are happy. My dear, if my love would have made you so, you had it all, you have it now: whether I live or die, I am yours only, and yours wholly. But mine was not enough. Be Hartland's wife then, if you can love him. I know he loves you. Marry him, and remember that this is what I wish and desire. I no longer doubt him; I feel convinced that I never ought to have doubted him, and you must tell him so,—when he tells you as he will, what once I felt. I have written to him a few words also. He may like to have them straight from me. Why need I mind saying more? I shall have left this world if your eye ever falls upon these pages, and why should I not tell you that I humbly hope I shall have left it for a better? Rosamund, by the grace of God the ruin of my earthly happiness has been the means of leading me to seek it from a higher source. I turned to my Maker, and He heard me, and will receive me. May He bless you, preserve you keep you, make you happy here and hereafter—" The writing ended in a pale smear: a summons had come in haste, and the hand that had dropped the pen, had lain stiff and powerless ere the morrow's light had dawned.

The paper had been thrust into his bosom, as he had said, and had been there—the dark stain told when.

With bursting sighs and blinding tears she hung over the page, at times invisible and almost incomprehensible. How often had she wondered what would be the end?—What the years would bring?—Whether he would forget?—Would suffer his wound to be gently healed?—Would ever again cross her path?

And now in that far-off clime he had fallen—not gloriously as in the field, leading his men to victory with the sound of trumpet and the clang of arms,—but in some dismal, unknown spot, nameless and unhonoured. To this, she cried—to this her hand had driven him! Great Heaven! was she never to come to the end of that harvest of her thoughtless sowing?

True, his sorrow had brought him a rich return, but in that she had had no share. The one had been of her making, but not the other; and can we blame her if at the moment this was the pang that was uppermost?

A step upon the gravel—a voice in her ear. "I think," said a man's deep undertone, subdued to tenderness unmistakable—"I think, Rosamund, that we have both heard the same tidings. . . . Shall I show you mine?" But she scarcely knew whether his arm enfolded her, or whether he or she held the new letter; or whether she read with his eyes or her own.

"You are a man of honour," it ran. "If I ever tried to doubt it, time and reflection have proved too strong for me. But I think I always believed in you, Lord Hartland—though it was a kind of opiate to my pain to resolve that I did not. Tonight I go into action, and before going I shall write to Rosamund. Show her this. Win her if you can. Make her happy." The command had been obeyed on the instant.

"Have I made you happy?" said Hartland, a few years afterwards. "Have I done all I ever hoped and vowed to do? Is there anything you desire, anything that would make my Rosamund happier? What? There is? Speak, dearest—I can trust you. You have but to name your wish. You shall go where you will, do what you will—" The answer came so low that he could scarcely catch it—"I want to see his grave."

A few words in conclusion about the other personages who have played their parts before our readers.

And first, for Lady Julia. Her cup was now full to the brim, and would have run and bubbled over, but for the little daily friction occasioned by the sight of Catherine reigning unchecked, and in all her glory at King's-Common. Had she known how long that reign was to last—extending until the very sight of her name as Miss Liscard became odious in the eyes of the thin-visaged, sharp-voiced spinster, suitor after suitor having been frightened away by her ill-concealed shrewishness, and the subjection of her only remaining parent—even Aunt Julia would have been satisfied. As it was it was perhaps really as well that the good aunt had that crumpled rose-leaf, all the rest of her bed was so wondrous easy.

Rosamund, with a chastened spirit and nobler views of life, growing ever gentler and tenderer, while regaining yearly more and more of the radiance of her youth in the sunshine of such a home, was perhaps the first darling of her heart. But Hartland was a close second—and deserved it. He, too, could never show her affection enough.

Mr. Liscard never re-entered the married state, getting on fairly well without a

second wife,—though it was said of him that he never again had so good a time, as during that first year of his widowhood, and more especially during the three first months of it.

Mrs. Waterfield, on hearing of Rosamund's new engagement, made no remark of any kind, no choosing to animadvert, and perhaps not feeling drawn towards exhibiting any very exuberant demonstrations of pleasure. Perhaps these could hardly have been expected of her. Diana was out, too, by this time.

Jack Stoneby married well and happily, but kept his secret—a secret of which neither Lord nor Lady Hartland ever had the slightest suspicion—to the end of his life.

Clementina also married, having found out that the next best thing to a devoted brother is a devoted husband.

Billy Barley thrived apace, and had to be incessantly watched and scolded, or he would have had a dip in the mill-dam again as regularly as the summer came round, in spite of his father's pride in pointing at him and saying, "Ay, it's nought but a corp that boy there o' ours would ha' been this day, if it hadn't been for one of the grandest gentlemen i' the land, who's gone himself now—the Lord bless his memory!"

It was said of Lady Hartland in after years, that nothing could be more beautiful and touching than the care with which she began to train her little troop of high-spirited sons and daughters, even from their cradles.

It was one of the rules of her life to mark and learn the character of each child, to win the confidence of all, and to give her own in return.

She never sought to master them by sheer dint of strength and will, nor to override them with the upper hand; still less to provoke them by her prejudices and unreasonableness to assert their crude and immature judgments in defiance of her own.

But what was, perhaps, more effectual than even this, was the humility and readiness with which, so soon as she found herself mistaken, or learned that she had been in error, Rosamund was willing to avow it.

Such example could not fail to have more effect than any amount of precept; and it is therefore not to be wondered at that the children of such a mother, though by no means likely to become either a tame or timid crew, were, on the other hand, tolerably sure never to draw upon themselves the epithet of A Stiff-necked Generation.

[THE END.]

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Sometimes one cannot help but feel that Col. V. Robert Ingersoll has been very grossly misunderstood and subjected to many charges of which he was never guilty. In a recent interview at Boston, he is reported to have said:—"I do not say that death ends all, neither do I say that man is immortal. I say that I do not know. To know is one thing, to believe is another, and to hope is still another. I hope for all good, for all joy, for the children of men. All I can say about immortality is this: There was a time when I was not, after that I was, now I am, and it may be that it is no more wonderful that I should continue forever, now that I have a start, than it was that I should begin. We love, and those we love die, and we cling to the hope, to the wish, that we may meet again. Love was the first to dream of immortality, and as long as we love we shall hope," he says in the most emphatic language that he could use, that he hopes for a life here-after.

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