

Literature, &c.

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PAUL JONES AND MERRAN BLAIR.

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[Continued from our last.]

CHAPTER V.

Those were happy weeks for Merran which followed John's departure. They were some of the happiest of her life, for she was making preparations for house-keeping, and meanwhile dreaming of the bright, beautiful future. But as time passed on this enthusiasm became less intense. She did not intend or wish to cherish less enthusiasm, but, I must say it, it is not in such natures as hers that love exists only to grow stronger and glow ever brighter and brighter by its own undying light.

When John Paul was with her she forgot got all the world beside. But when he was away, when she no longer felt the magnetism of his presence, her love could not sustain its fervor—the "common day" would come and mix with its pure light—her mood would change under the action of the nearest external influence, until her soul, in its weakness, would forget and leave its holiest things and go down to rejoice in the atmosphere of flattery and folly.

Some months after his departure Merran received a communication from Mrs. Bradshaw. The lady said she was ill, confined to her room, unable to receive company and dying of ennui; she begged Merran to come and spend a few weeks with her. Merran remembered her last meeting with John and hesitated. But there was great pleasure in the thought of going. This will be my last visit, she thought; I see nobody here, and why should he care about it? He knows I will not forget him, and why should he care where I am when he is away? Besides, Mrs. Bradshaw has treated me very kindly and I must not be ungrateful. Two months before Merran would have found this tone of thought impossible. But now it suited her feelings and wishes. Accordingly she went.

On arriving at Dumfries, she was a little surprised to find the lady looking as usual and with no appearance of indisposition. Kerr was sitting with her when Merran entered and they both greeted her with a great show of cordiality. It seemed that Mrs. Bradshaw, who had ever shown a due horror of death, had insisted she was sick with all the symptoms of severe fever, and her physician, who was willing to humor her whims and profit by them, had ordered her to keep her room. But her confinement grew wearisome, she wanted amusement, and at Kerr's suggestion she had sent for her protegee.

Week after week passed. Mrs. Bradshaw professed to have regained her usual health; yet on one pretence and another, she contrived to retain Merran, who indeed was not unwilling to stay. To do the lady justice, I must say, she was really interested in her young protegee. She herself felt much flattered by the admiration which Merran excited, and really thought she was doing her a great kindness in withdrawing her from old associations and forming her for a different sphere. And, besides, she had another motive; she desired to please Kerr, to whom Capt. Bradshaw was under pecuniary obligations. For some reason, what it was she did not take the trouble to ascertain, Kerr was very anxious that she should retain Merran as long as possible. And had she enquired into the matter more closely, it was not very likely that Andrew Kerr would whisper to her, or to any one else, that he was influenced by his deathless hatred to John Paul. He knew how passionately John loved Merran. By some means he had become aware of their betrothal, and he had sworn a fearful oath to himself that the marriage should never—never be consummated.

She continued with Mrs. Bradshaw, and the winter came and passed gayly. She gave herself up to that lady's direction, and willingly received all sorts of attentions and flatteries from the many who appeared as her admirers, and glad and giddy in that bad atmosphere, she had but little time or heart to remember that she was not her own, or to think of the moment when she said to John Paul, "thine and thine only!" Merran did not mean to be false to him, but, alas! she was very weak.

Amidst these thoughtless gaieties there came a report which roused her again, and awakened all her better nature. To use the language of his biographer, John Paul was accused of torturing one of his crew by flagellation in such a manner as to cause his death. With this charge there came a cloud of black rumors, which made him seem the basest of villains. Merran did not, would not, could not credit these representations. They came to her from every quarter, seemingly well authenticated, but she was indignant and omitted no occasion to repel them as slanders. Oh, why did she not remember what she was to him; and, in truth to that ideal of her which she knew he cherished, grow sick of the life she was living, hasten to Arbigland, and there wait his return? Alas!

A prosecution against him was begun in England, and to use his own words, notwithstanding that he gave the world every satisfaction in his power, and stalked fortune, honor and life for six long months on the verdict of a British jury; notwithstanding that none of his accusers had the courage to confront him—yet so effectually had slander done its work, and so general was the prejudice against him, that some even of his earliest and best friends,

among whom was Mr. Craik, the patron of his father and the protector of his mother and sisters, were loud in his condemnation.

Merran was surprised to find Andrew Kerr earnest in his defence. She had not believed he could be so generous. She began to feel that she had wronged him, and as no one else expressed much sympathy with her present feelings, their acquaintance became more intimate and she received him and spoke to him with all the frank cordiality of her nature. She little dreamed how industriously and artfully he plotted to create these reports, or what a dark significance he contrived to give them even while he seemed anxious for their refutation. She waited impatiently to hear John speak for himself. At length she began to doubt and be at a loss for her letters to him were unanswered. Several weeks elapsed after the close of the prosecution before aware of it. Then she grew nervous with expectation, for she knew he would come to Scotland. But he did not appear, and, for the first time, her confidence began to give way. What was she to believe? Kerr, who had eagerly sought her society hitherto, now seemed studious to avoid her. When she found opportunity to question, he seemed confused and distressed, and endeavored to evade a direct reply. She was alarmed by his manner, and in answer to her entreaties he admitted, but apparently with much reluctance, that he had good reason to believe they had both been deceived and that most of the reports about John Paul were true. He felt unwilling, he said, to distress her, but the fact that he had sailed for America without visiting his old mother or any of his old friends, was a tacit confession of his guilt.

"Left England! Gone to America!" she exclaimed, grasping his arm and gazing in his face, as if in doubt whether she heard aright.

"Yes, he sailed more than four weeks ago," was the reply.

For one moment Kerr was frightened at the sudden, death-like paleness that overspread her face. He involuntarily extended his arms to support her, but, with a gesture of impatience, she motioned him away, and covering her face with her hands, silently left the room. Oh, the sudden wreck of a great hope! Merran had never before felt anything like this. He was indeed changed and become unworthy, she thought; for she knew him well enough to feel sure that nothing but his own will—no, not even a world of slanders supported by an army of demons, could have induced him to leave the country without seeing her.

CHAPTER VI.

The ardent and impetuous nature of John Paul was poorly adapted to support, with any degree of patience, a long and wearisome process of litigation. Many circumstances combined to make him morbid and irritable. His letters to Merran were unanswered; and though his faith in her was deep and illimitable as the capacity of his own soul, yet he saw in this circumstance a presentiment of evil and brooded over it with an intensity that almost amounted to madness. He saw the prosecution close, and departed for Scotland in a state of excitement bordering on agony.

He landed, reached Arbigland, and went directly to find Merran. She was not there. "She is at Dumfries, staying with Mrs. Bradshaw," they told him. "At Dumfries! Staying with Mrs. Bradshaw! How can she be there! Has she too changed! Oh, my God! has all the world forsaken me! But I will see her."

It was evening when he arrived at Dumfries, and without bestowing a thought on his disordered, travel-soiled dress, he proceeded directly to the residence of Mrs. Bradshaw. Long, flickering gleams of light stole through the interstices of the curtains, and as the doors were opened, the brilliant lights within, and the low hum of many voices announced the presence of company. He bade the servant inform Miss Blair that a gentleman wished to speak with her.

"Do you hear, fellow? Tell her a gentleman wishes to speak with her on urgent business," he added, sternly as he marked the supercilious stare which the servant bestowed on his wild, disordered appearance.

There was something in his voice and manner which could not be trifled with. Therefore, the servant politely handed him a seat and went to deliver his message. Merran was in the midst of a group of ladies, and the servant, finding it difficult to approach her, delivered his message to Mrs. Bradshaw.

"A strange man wishes to speak with Miss Blair," he said.

"A strange man? What is he? A gentleman?"

"I don't know, ma'am, what he is. He speaks short enough to be a gentleman, but for all that, he may be something else."

"He has sent no card, I see. Some country cousin, I dare say. Tell him Miss Blair is engaged."

"Engaged!" exclaimed John Paul, springing to his feet. "Engaged! and did you tell her—go back, fellow, and tell that—but no," he muttered, interrupting himself. "This is no time—and flinging the servant an ample douceur, he disappeared and retraced his way to the hotel."

He paced his room and tried to think, but he could not think of anything connectedly. He was only conscious that he was grieved, pained, indignant—that he was angry with Merran and therefore angry with the whole world. At length a strain of music caught his ear. It was the voice of a woman, in a distant room, singing the air of a wild and touching ballad, which his mother was accustomed to sing as she turned her wheel, and

which he had taught to Merran long ago. He was soothed. The music went into his soul like the song of a spirit, and he wept. He finally went to his bed to dream of gentle and beautiful things, and live over again some of the happiest scenes of his childhood.

Early the next morning, Andrew Kerr harshly entered Mrs. Bradshaw's sitting room, and eagerly enquired "Where is Merran? Where is Miss Blair?"

"Why? what now, mon ami? Have you come this morning to make proposals?" replied the lady, laughing. "Though I have assumed blindness for some weeks past," she continued, "let me tell you, my precious Benedict, that no one will be permitted to carry off my prize without my consent."

"You mistake," replied Kerr, with more than his usual cool indifference; "I called merely to let you know that her old acquaintance, John Paul, is in town. This may be needless, however, for he will soon be here to speak for himself."

"What do you say? That base cruel monster in Dumfries! Surely he will not have the audacity to present himself here?"

"He surely will present himself here. If he has not undergone a most miraculous change, he has audacity enough to do anything. He will come here, and, what is more, he will see Merran."

"He will not see Merran. He cannot be received here on any terms. She must not appear to have the slightest connection with such a character. He shall not see her. I will not consent to it."

"He will not be very likely to ask your consent," said Kerr, with a provoking smile, "believe me, the girl likes him. They were inseparable from childhood. I have heard whispers of a betrothal. I know them both. He will see her—and when he speaks to her, she will believe every thing he says and forget every body else. Keep a sharp look out, my wise cousin, or your pretty prize will be borne off right under your eyes."

"We shall see. But pshaw! you are a little jealous, mon ami. She does not care a fig for him. Now I think or it, it must have been this fellow who called here last night. I will ask Davis what sort of a creature he was and prepare him to act properly when the fellow comes again. We will see what he can do."

She was absent some minutes and had scarcely returned, when Davis announced the name of Captain Paul, who requested an interview with Miss Blair.

"Go," said the lady, in a tone sufficiently loud to be heard in the parlor where Paul was sitting, "go deliver the gentleman's message to Miss Blair, and bring her answer. And then she added in a low, significant whisper—"Remember! Davis you know what you are to do."

In a few minutes Davis returned. He went on into the parlor and Mrs. Bradshaw listened breathlessly at the door. A smile went over her face as she heard him say—

"Miss Blair directs me to tell Captain Paul that she is too much fatigued to receive company."

For a moment John Paul was paralysed. He had a momentary sense of suffocation, as if the startled blood had all rushed to his heart. At length he rose, and after pacing the room a few times he suddenly turned to the servant, and, seizing him by the shoulder, said huskily—"Fellow, you lie! she did not—she could not say that!" Then as suddenly releasing his hold, he staggered against the wall and muttered to himself—"Oh, my God! there is nothing true! Nothing! nothing! Yes, she has proved weak and worthless—else how could she stay here—how could she say that? But no! 'Tis a base lie! She did not say it! I know she will see me!"

Mrs. Bradshaw appeared and bade Davis show that madman the door. Then frightened by his appearance, she was about to call others when he suddenly laid his hand on her arm, and, in a voice that was rendered frightful by an attempt at calmness, he whispered hoarsely—"Silence! woman, and hear me! Does that fellow speak the truth? Is it true that Merran Blair refuses to see me?"

"Really, sir, this is extraordinary conduct and language to a lady in her own house. You have heard the truth, sir. Miss Blair will not see you; she cannot do so without injury to her reputation. And if she were disposed to act otherwise, I should deem it an imperative duty, as her protectress, to put an end to an acquaintance so improper and injurious."

He swallowed the malediction that rose to his lips. "Protectress," he said, turning away; "Protectress! Oh, that I had left her in the protection of death! Then what men call truth might continue to seem reality." Drawing his cap over his face, he sprang through the door and unconsciously went on out of the city.

A week after that interview with Mrs. Bradshaw, with a wild tumult of many inexpressible feelings, he watched from the deck of his vessel the white cliffs of England, as, one after another, they sank below the horizon, and took, as he supposed, his last look of his native country.

He took up his residence in Tobago, and here time, assisted by the genial influence of the sunny South, brought a degree of calmness, if not happiness. Thoughts of his mother began to act like a charm in his mind, and gave something like interest to the commercial speculations in which he was engaged. He heard occasionally from Scotland, but he never mentioned Merran's name, and had sworn to himself to forget her, or, at least think of her with entire indifference; yet the news of her mar-

riage with Andrew Kerr made him feel how vain was the endeavour to do so.

Restless, aimless, and careless, he longed to be perpetually moving. He sailed for the colonies in North America, and, wishing to elude all enquiry, and perhaps desiring also to forget what he had been, assumed the name of Jones, and sought seclusion in the country. Meanwhile the American revolution began, under the direction of those glorious men,

—'who have a right to rank;
With the true Makers'—

and sentiments and feelings began to awaken in his soul, of which he had supposed himself no longer capable. Here was a field for all the self-dependent force, the self-willed energy, the adventurous boldness and reckless daring of his nature. He found a suitable aim, and giving up his whole soul to dreams of glory, he offered his services and embarked in the cause of the colonies.

CHAPTER VII.

On the 17th of April, 1778, a heavily laden merchantman might have been seen off Wicklow Head largely bearing up for Dublin bay. He was followed by another vessel, which certainly presented no very warlike demonstrations; and had it been otherwise, the easy Englishman would have been very slow to dream of encountering enemies there. A shot was fired across the Englishman's bow, and he was commanded to come aboard and give account of himself. He was thunderstruck, and endeavored to save himself by flight. But a few well directed shot, which relieved him of some of his canvass and unfortunately wounded several of his men, soon brought him to terms, and the lazy Englishman, instead of going to Dublin, found himself a prisoner to the American sloop-of-war Ranger. The prize proved to be the Lord Chatham, from London. As they were very near the coast, no time was to be lost. The wounded men were speedily transferred to the Ranger, and the prize manned and ordered to Brest. The captain of the Ranger stood on his quarter deck, watching the prize, which was now disappearing in the distance, when his lieutenant approached and said one of the wounded prisoners desired to speak with him.

He immediately went below, and inquired of the man if everything necessary had been done for his comfort.

"Oh, ye! They have given themselves a deal of trouble about me; but d'ye see, it's of no use," was the hoarse reply. "Then looking in the officer's face with something like an expression of grim malice, he continued, 'But you don't know me captain?'"

The Captain looked closely at the worn, villainous features of the man, now distorted with pain, and shook his head.

"I have a better memory and may be I shall bring your's to life presently. I know you in spite of that outlandish uniform. You are John Paul, curse you!"

Paul Jones looked at him again, intently, and replied in a gentle tone, "I know not why you curse me; but, my poor fellow, curses ill befit the lips of one in your situation. You are mortally wounded!"

"Aye, aye, your honor. You have riddled my bulk finely. I am bleeding to death—I know it—and I want to have a bit of talk with you before my pipes are stopped. Have you forgot all about Arbigland, and the bonie Merran Blair and the rest of them?"

"Fellow!" cried Paul, with sudden vehemence "What do you mean? What have you to say to me?"

"Oh, you begin to remember, do you? You thought the bonie lassie jilted you. Oh, you were brawly gullied! With all your wisdom you was no match for that cunning, born devil, Andrew Kerr. How nicely he contrived to send you off from Scotland without seeing Merran, though she was greetin' her heart out for your sake! And she, like a silly lass, believed him when he told her that you went away without coming there and that you had forsaken her. I, too, had a hand in the matter. We stopped your letters and told a million of lies about you. I only wanted to see how you would feel to hear about old times."

"Rascal! Devil!" shouted Paul Jones, "Speak the truth, or by the heavens above—"

"Umph! What does a man with a bullet in his breast care for your threats? Ha! ha! warn't we pretty ones!"

A fit of coughing succeeded his horrible attempt at mirth. For a moment he seemed dying. Paul bent over the convulsed wretch and wiped away the bloody froth from his mouth in an agony of suspense.

"Aye that was a hard one," the fellow muttered; "that cursed bullet has carried away all my staves."

"But who are you?" said Paul, endeavoring to be calm, "and why have you wished to injure me?"

"And have you forgotten who it was you nicknamed Crouchie Tam? Have you forgotten when you laughed at my hiltin gait and called me crabsided? And she—she gecked at me and looked asklent when I spoke to her. She was bonnie, yes, she was bonnie, and you were proud of your braw figure, and I hated you—yes, I hated you both! Andrew Kerr had gold; and gold can do anything. With a plenty of gold he found enough to do his bidding. How nicely he contrived to get all your letters! Oh, we read them together; ye scrieve off gleely, captain. What fine things we could say to each other! What a sight of cunning lies we invented! But Andrew Kerr, he continued fiercely, 'is a devil, a horn devil, and may a thousand curses light on him!'"

Paul looked again at the distorted face, and