

Literature, &c.

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From Chambers's Miscellany.

WOMEN'S TRIALS IN HUMBLE
LIFE.

STORY OF ISBEL LUCAS,

A NUMBER of years ago, a woman of the name of Isbel Lucas kept a small lodging-house in the southern suburbs of Edinburgh. She was the daughter of a respectable teacher in the city, who, at his death, had bequeathed to her, as his sole surviving relation, about three hundred pounds, together with the furniture of a house. The latter part of the legacy suggested to her the propriety of endeavouring to support herself by keeping lodgings, while the part which consisted in money promised to stand effectually between her and all the mischances that could be expected to befall her in such a walk of life. She accordingly, for several years, let one or two rooms to students and other persons, and thus contrived to live very decently, without trenching upon her little capital, till at length she attained the age of two-and-forty.

Isbel had at no period of life been a beauty. She had an iron-grey complexion, and a cast of features bespeaking rather strength of character than feminine grace. She was now less a beauty than ever, and for years had tacitly acknowledged her sense of the fact, by abandoning all those modes and materials of dress which women wear so long as they have any thoughts of matrimony. Where, however, is the woman at that, or any more juvenile period of life, in whose bosom the spark of love lies dead beyond recall? If any such there be, Isbel's was not of the number.

Among her lodgers was an individual of the name of Fordyne, who kept a grocer's shop of an inferior kind in the neighborhood. This person gave himself out for a native of the Isle of Man, and stated that he had made a little money as mess man of a militia regiment, by which he had been enabled to set up in business. He was a large, dark, coarse man, of about five and thirty, with a somewhat unpromising cast of face, and a slight twist in his left eye. Fordyne seemed to be a man of great industry and application, and used to speak of his circumstances as agreeable in every respect, except that he wanted a wife. This he said was a great want. There were many things about his shop that no one but a female could properly attend to. Without such a helpmate things were continually going wrong; but with her, all would go right. One point however he must be clear about: she who should be his wife would require to bring something with her, to add to his stock, and buy the necessary house furniture. He cared little about good looks, if there were good sense; and indeed a woman of some experience in the world would answer his purpose best.

Honest Isbel began in a little while to turn all these matters in her mind. She one day took a steady look at Fordyne, and discovered that he had a good upright carriage of body, and that though his mouth was of the largest yet his teeth were among the best she had ever seen. Next time she visited his shop she took a glance at the room behind, and found that it had a nice outlook upon Salisbury crags. Fordyne observing that she glanced into his back shop, invited her to come in and see what a fine house he had, for such it really was, though unfurnished. Isbel very quickly saw that there was one capital bedroom, a parlour, and a kitchen, and a vast variety of closets, where trunks could be put "off one's hand." One press, Mr Fordyne showed, was already furnished, being tenanted by a huge dram bottle and a server full of short bread, which he said had been lately required to treat his customers, on account of the new year. Of this he made Isbel a partaker, drinking in his turn to her good health, and a good man to her before the next recurrence of the season. This exchange of compliments did not take place without some effect. Isbel ascended the stair in a kind of reverie, and found herself entering the next door above, instead of her own, before she was aware. In a month therefore the two were married.

Three days after the nuptials, Mrs Fordyne was sitting in her little parlour, waiting supper for her husband, and reflecting on the step she was about to take next day—namely, the transference of her household furniture to the apartments behind Fordyne's shop, and the surrender of her little fortune into his hands. Her eye happened, in the course of her cogitations, to wander to a portrait of her father, which hung opposite; and as she gazed on it, she could hardly help thinking that its naturally stern and even sour features assumed an expression still sterner and sourer. No doubt this was the mere effect of some inward pleading of conscience, for she could not but acknowledge secretly to herself that the step she had taken was not of that kind which her parent would have approved. She withdrew her eyes with a disturbed mind, and again looked musingly towards the fire, when she thought she heard the outer door open, and a person come in. At first she supposed that this must be her husband, and she began, therefore, to transfer the supper from the fire to the table. On listening, however, she heard that the footsteps were accompanied by the sound of a walking-cane, which assured her

that it could not be Fordyne. She stood for a minute motionless and silent, and distinctly heard the sound as of an old man walking along the passage with a stick—sounds which at once brought to her recollection her departed father. She sunk into her chair; the sounds died away in the distance; and almost at that minute her husband came in to cheer her, calling to the servant as he passed, in his loud and boisterous way, that she had stupidly left the outer door open.

Though Isbel Lucas had committed a very imprudent action, in marrying a man who was a perfect stranger to her, nevertheless the predominant feature of her mind was prudence. The impressions just made upon her senses were of a very agitating nature; yet knowing that it was too late to act upon them, she concealed her emotions. There could be no doubt that she had received what in her native country is called a "warning;" yet conceiving that her best course was to go on, and betray no suspicion, she never faltered in any of her promises to her husband. She was next day installed in Mr. Fordyne's own house, to whom, in return, she committed a sum rather above four hundred pounds; for to that extent had she increased her stock in the course of her late employment.

For some time matters proceeded very well. Her husband professed to lay out part of her money upon those goods which he had formerly represented himself as unable to buy. His habits of application were rather increased than diminished, and a few customers of a more respectable kind than any he had hitherto had, began to frequent the shop, being drawn thither in consideration of his wife. Among the new articles he dealt in was whisky, which he bought in large quantities from the distilleries, and sold wholesale to a number of the neighbouring dealers. By and by this branch of his trade seemed to outgrow all the rest, and he found himself occasionally obliged to pay visits to the places where the liquor was manufactured, in order to purchase it at the greatest advantage. His wife in a little while became accustomed to his absence for a day or two at a time, and having every reason to believe that the affairs were in a very prosperous state, began to forget all her former misgivings.

On one occasion he left her on what he described as a circuit of the Highland distilleries, intending he said, to be absent for at least a week, and carrying with him money to the amount of nearly a thousand pounds, which he said he would probably spend upon whisky before he came back. Nothing that could awaken the least suspicion occurred at their parting; but next day while his wife superintended matters in the shop, she was surprised when a large bill was presented, for which he had made no provision. On inspecting it, she was still farther surprised to find that it referred to a transaction, which she understood at the time to be a ready money one. Having dismissed the presenter of the bill, she lost no time in repairing to the counting house of a large commission house in Leith, with which she knew her husband to have had large transactions. There, on making some indirect inquiries, she found that his purchases instead of being entirely for ready money, as he had represented to her, were mostly paid by bills, some of which were on the point of becoming due. It was now but too apparent that this unprincipled man had taken his final leave of her and his creditors, bearing with him all the spoils that his ingenuity could collect.

Isbel Lucas was not a person to sit down in idle despair on such an event. She was a steady Scotchwoman, with a stout heart for difficulty; and her resolution was soon taken. She instantly proceeded to the Glasgow coach offices, and ascertained, as she expected, that a man answering to the description of her husband had taken a place for that city the day before. The small quantity of money that had been collected in the shop since his departure she put into her pocket; the shop she committed to the porter and her old servant Jenny; and having made up a small bundle of extra clothes, she set off by the coach to Glasgow. On alighting in the Trogate, the first person she saw was a female friend from Edinburgh, who asked, with surprise, how she and her husband happened to be travelling at the same time. "Why do you ask that question?" asked Isbel. "Because," replied the other, "I shook hands with Mr. Fordyne yesterday, as he was going on board the Isle of Man steamboat at the Promielaw." This was enough for Isbel. She immediately ascertained the time when the Isle of Man steamboat would next sail, and to her great joy, found that she would not be two days later than her husband in reaching the island. On landing in proper time at Douglas in Man, she found her purse almost empty; but her desperate circumstances made her resolve to prosecute the search, though she should beg her way back.

It was morning when she landed at Douglas. The whole forenoon she spent in wandering about the streets, in the hope of encountering her faithless husband, and inquiring after him at the inns. At last she satisfied herself that he must have left the town that very day for a remote part of the island, and on foot. She immediately set out upon the same road, and with the same means of conveyance, determined to sink with fatigue, or subject herself to any kind of danger, rather than return without her object. At first the road passed over a moorish part of the country, but after proceeding several miles, it began to border on the sea, in some places edging on the precipices which overhung the shore, and

at others in the deep recesses of the country. At length, on coming to the opening of a long reach of the road, she saw a figure which she took for that of her husband, just disappearing at the opposite extremity. Immediately gathering fresh strength, she pushed briskly on, and after an hour's toilsome march, had the satisfaction, on turning a projection, to find her husband sitting right before her on a stone.

Fordyne was certainly very much surprised at her appearance, which was totally unexpected, but he soon recovered his composure. He met her with more than even unusual kindness, as if concerned at her having thought proper to perform so toilsome a journey. He hastened to explain that some information he had received at Glasgow respecting the dangerous state of his mother, had induced him to make a start out of his way to see her, after which he would immediately return. It was then his turn to ask explanations from her, but this subject he pressed very lightly, and, for her part, she hardly dared, in the lonely place, to avow the suspicions which had induced her to undertake the journey. "It is all very well," said Fordyne, with affected complaisance; "you'll just go forward with me to my mother's house, and she will be the better pleased to see me since I bring you with me." Isbel, smothering her feelings, agreed to do this, though it well may be supposed that, after what he had already done, she must have entertained a comfortable prospect of her night's adventure. On then they walked through a country which seemed destitute of houses and inhabitants, and where the universal stillness was hardly ever broken by the sound of any animal, wild or tame.

The road, as formerly was partly on the edge of a sea-worn precipice, over which a victim might be dashed in a moment, with hardly the least chance of ever been seen heard of, and partly in the recesses of a rugged country, in whose pathless wilderness the work of murder might be almost a secret effected. Isbel Lucas, knowing how much reason her husband had to wish her out of the world, was fully alive to the danger of her path, and at every place that seemed more convenient than another for such a work, regarded him, in the midst of a civil conversation, with the watchful eye of one who dreads the spring of a tiger at every brake. So contrived to keep upon the side of the road most remote from the precipices, and carried in her pocket an unclasped penknife, though almost hopeless that her womanly nerves would permit her to use it. They did walk on for several miles, till at length, all of a sudden Fordyne started off the road, and was instantly lost in a wild, tortuous ravine. His event was so different from any which he had feared, that for a moment Isbel stood motionless with surprise. Another moment, however, sufficed to make up her mind as to her future course, and she immediately plunged into the defile, following as nearly in the direction which the fugitive appeared to have taken. On, on she toiled, through thick entangling bushes, and over much soft and mossy ground, her limbs every moment threatening to sink beneath her with fatigue, with they certainly would have done very speedily, if the desperate anxieties which filled her mind had not rendered her in a great measure insensible to the languor of her body. At length became a more pressing object with her to find some place where she could be sheltered for the night, than to follow in so helpless a pursuit, and she therefore experienced great joy on perceiving light at a distance. As she approached the place whence his seemed to proceed, she discovered a cottage, whence she could hear the sounds of singing and dancing. With great caution she drew near the window through which the light was glancing, and there, peeping into the apartment, she saw her husband capering in furious mirth amidst a set of coarse peasant-like individuals, mingled with a few who bore all the appearance of sea-smugglers. An old woman, of most unamiable aspect, sat by the fireside, occasionally giving orders for the preparation of food, and now and then addressing a complimentary expression to Fordyne, whom Isbel therefore guessed to be her son. After the party seemed to have become tired of dancing, the sat down to a rude but plentiful repast; and after that was concluded the whole party addressed themselves to repose. Some retired into an apartment at the opposite end of the house; but most stretched themselves on straw, which lay in various corners of the room in which they had been feasting. The single bed which stood in this apartment was appropriated to Fordyne; apparently on account of his being the most important individual in the party, and he therefore continued under the unsuspected observance of his wife till he had consigned himself to repose. Previous to doing so, she observed him place something with great caution beneath his pillow.

For another hour Isbel stood at the window inspecting the interior of the house, which was now very imperfectly lighted by the expiring fire. At length when every recumbent figure seemed to have been bound securely in sleep, she first uttered one brief but fervent and emphatic prayer, and then undid the loose fastenings of the door, and glided into the apartment, carefully avoiding the straw platts which lay stretched around, she approached the bed whereon lay the treacherous Fordyne, and slowly and softly withdrew the large pocket book from beneath the pillow. Other inexpressible joy she succeeded in executing this manœuvre without giving him the

least disturbance. Grasping the book fast in one hand, she piloted her way back with the other, and in a few seconds regained the exterior of the cottage.

As she had expected she found the large sum which Fordyne had taken away almost entire. Transferring the precious parcel to her bosom, she set forward instantly upon a pathway which led from the cottage, apparently in the direction of Douglas. This she pursued a little way, till she regained the road she had formerly left, along which she immediately proceeded with all possible haste. Fortunately, she had not advanced far, when a peasant came up behind her in an empty cart, and readily consented to give her a lift for a few miles. By means of this help she reached Douglas at an early hour in the morning, where, finding a steamboat just ready to sail, she immediately embarked, and was soon beyond all danger from her husband.

The intrepid Isbel Lucas returned in a few days to Edinburgh, with a sufficient sum to satisfy all her husband's creditors, and enough over to set her up once more in her former way of life. She was never again troubled with the wretched Fordyne, who, a few years afterwards she had the satisfaction of hearing had died a natural death of an epidemic fever in the bridewell of Tralee, Ireland.

From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

THE CONVICT'S DAUGHTER.

The following narrative is borrowed from the interesting work of M. Maurice Alhoy on the convict prisons of France:—

"It is now some years," says this writer, "since I passed several months in the town of Rochefort. It became my daily habit to walk in the gloomy avenues of the public garden, and there I used to watch the convicts as they worked in pairs, carrying heavy burdens, and gladly purchasing, by the performance of the most laborious tasks, the favor of being allowed to escape for a few hours from the pestilential atmosphere of the prison. I had remarked a young girl who passed before me several times, casting an anxious and longing look towards the building in which the ropewalks were carried on. The young girl wore the Vendean costume. She seated herself upon a bench under the trees, and remained apparently lost in thought. I approached and recognised her. I had seen her the preceding evening at the house of the gatekeeper, and had then been informed of the object of her journey. The young girl was engaged to be married, and her father was in the convict prison. Entrope, the peasant to whom she was betrothed, was acquainted with the guilt of his future father-in-law, for the same village had been their home. He was conscious how much he might loose in the esteem of others by marrying the daughter of a convict; but Tienette was beloved, and Entrope's affection for her made him shut his eyes to the possibility that any painful result might arise from their union.

"He wished to marry the companion of his childhood; but he desired that this father, who in the eyes of the law was dead, who had no longer any right over his daughter, and whose remembrance it was well to banish, should no more be spoken of. Tienette loved her father, and the contempt with which others regarded the author of her days, only redoubled the affection of his daughter. She was desirous that he should sign her marriage contract, and bestow upon her a father's blessing. Entrope had long resisted this wish of Tienette; he still objected to the step she proposed to take; and it was with an unwilling heart he undertook with her the journey to Rochefort. It was not long before he joined us, after making some purchases which had detained him for a time from his betrothed.

"I took upon myself to interpret to him the wishes of Tienette. I told Entrope that a father is never guilty in the eyes of his daughter; that no laws, judges, or juries can unloose the ties of nature; and that the filial piety of Tienette ought to be considered by him as a previous pledge of the virtues of his future wife. The girl did not speak, but her eyes were fastened on the countenance of Entrope. She watched its every movement, as if to gather from them his acquiescence in her desire. Entrope listened to me with his eyes fixed upon the ground. When I had done speaking he made me no reply, offered no objection, but took the arm of Tienette within his own, and together the young couple turned their steps towards the prison. I followed them, and the poor girl, who seemed to consider my presence as useful in confirming the vacillating resolutions of her lover, encouraged me by her looks to remain with them. We found on her arrival that the aged convict had been ill for some days. He was no longer in the prison but had been conveyed to the hospital. We silently traversed the long court and mounted the staircase. When we reached the entrance of the wards, the young girl trembled violently, her cheeks became deadly pale, and her heart seemed to sink within her. Entrope and Tienette were permitted to approach the prisoner's bed; and I was refused admittance by the turnkey, and I could only see from a distance the remainder of this touching scene. At the foot of the convict's bed stood Entrope, whilst Tienette approached her father with an expression of fearfulness which she vainly strove to conceal. He raised his languid head, and turned his dimmed eye upon his child and a faint smile passed over his sunburnt countenance. The turnkey who had introduced the two young people into the ward remained gazing upon the scene, a good Sister of charity supported the sick man, he