

LITERATURE, &c.

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BROKEN BONDS.

A TALE FOR EMIGRANTS.

By Georgina C. Munro.

ON the verge of a dense mass of jungle, covering the side of a far spreading hill, in that tract of country lying just without the old boundary line of Cape Colony, three travellers were idly lounging away the hours of summer noon-tide, within the shadow of the trees. They had left the land of settlers and cultivation, and penetrated that wild region to visit some friends residing at one of the small isolated military posts, planted here and there for the preservation of peace; and now, on their return they were pausing awhile to rest during the hottest period of the day. Two young girls and a youth, a few years their senior, formed the party, who were conversing together with all the gaiety of young and buoyant spirits, and with all the ease of near relationship. From the demeanor of the two former, the travellers might have been pronounced sisters and a brother, but a keen eye might have traced other than a brother's feelings in the intemperance with which Henry Shoreland listened to every word uttered by his elder and lovelier charge; in the frequent glances which he cast upon her, as though he would read her very soul; and in the bright glow which had so often lit his eye and flushed his cheek as he addressed her. The younger lady was, in truth his sister, but the other, though bearing equally his father's name, was but the daughter of that father's cousin, left an orphan in early childhood, and ever since dependent on the kindness of her relations, with whose family she had become so completely identified, that it rarely occurred to her to remember that she was not actually the child of her adopted parents.

Their only Hottentot attendant lay at a distance basking in the fiery sun-ray, while their horses strayed over the undulating plain, cropping the greener grass which lingered in the hollows. The bright moments fled by on the swift wings of happiness; at length the deepening shadows warned them it was time their steeds were saddled, and they were proceeding on their homeward way. Then at a word from Henry, the Hottentot rose and went to collect the horses, which were scattered over the flat. Suddenly a loud cry from Peit drew on him the attention of the Shorelands. He was standing on a knoll, waving his arms frantically in horror or in warning. Then leaping on a horse, he galloped madly from the spot. Henry turned at once in the direction which he had faced, and beheld a large lion approaching by easy bounds along the edge of the jungle, having as it proved, been aroused from his lair in a deep kloof by some hunters.

'Agnes! Emily! fly!' burst from the young man's lips. At the same moment, the girls perceiving their danger, and with a wild scream, his sister fled into the bush. Agnes, also attempted to escape, but stumbled in her haste and fell. In an agony of despair, her cousin sprang, gun in hand, between her and the lion, which was now close upon them. Quick as thought he fired, but as the bullet struck his chest, the fierce animal only shook his mane in anger, and roared aloud. In an instant the second barrel was discharged, loaded merely with small shot, which fell like sand from his tawny breast; then for a moment he crouched, preparatory to the fatal spring upon his prey. One rapid glance told Shoreland that his cousin had regained her feet; and thinking one brief prayer that the lion might be content with one victim, he stood firm to receive him. But just as a tremor through the huge frame foretold the deadly bound, there was the report of a gun behind young Shoreland, and with one terrific roar, the huge animal rolled over on his side, his brain pierced by a bullet; and after a few struggles, all was still.

How joyfully, then, Henry turned to join his cousin, in thanking the successful marksman, who now issued from the jungle close at hand. He was a stranger, who had been shooting in the bush; nor, under the circumstances, might their gratitude have been affected by the knowledge that he had for some time past been unperceived observing them, attracted by the beauty of the fairer travellers, and thus lingered on to be one a witness to their peril, and under cover of the trees, had opportunity and coolness to avert it. But this event had transformed him at once from a stranger into a dear and valued friend; and it was as such that, accompanying them into the colony, Richard Woodbridge was welcomed at the Shorelands' residence, Klip Fontein, or Stony Fountain. Here he became a constant visitor, stealing every possible hour from his duties as a solicitor in Graham's Town, where he was recently established. For many weeks this lasted, during which Henry, who might have otherwise divined his motive, was away at Cape Town; and he in his absence could scarcely feel uneasy, for he knew that a chance expression had betrayed his feelings to Woodbridge, and there was something in the latter's manner of receiving the unpurposed confidence which bade him put all trust in his new friend.

Meanwhile, however, Woodbridge was but the more assiduous in his endeavors to win Agnes's affections; and the origin of their acquaintance, in itself, have more than half sufficed for his success. For in his she beheld the well-skilled hand by which her terrible foe had been stricken down, and her very life ap-

peared his gift. Woodbridge had acted well, and his guerdon was a noble one—the deep and enthusiastic attachment of a beautiful and amiable girl; gentle and true in heart, fair in person, and generous though proud in spirit; one formed to carry sunshine and gladness into any dwelling which might boast her as its mistress.

It was already nightfall when young Shoreland arrived unexpectedly at Klip Fontein; and family and guest alike were wandering amid the moonlit trees around the house. He stood within an open window considering where he should seek them, when he heard footsteps beneath, and then a voice—it was Woodbridge's—whispered distinctly 'Thanks, dearest Agnes, mine, now and forever! that little syllable has sealed my happiness for life!' It was enough; he knew at once that while he dreamed Woodbridge had acted; and that his dreams and hopes were altogether at an end. 'Mine, now and forever!' how these words thrilled in Henry's ear, in all their terrible and torturing eloquence! and how strangely, too, they sounded in after years when memory still whispered them.

Months and years had passed away since the hour which gave her hand to Woodbridge; and save that Agnes had wept the death of her only child, there was no visible cloud on her horizon. But all was not so serene as it appeared, and her happiness was often sadly marred by him who should have done most to insure it. For though Woodbridge was gay, good humoured, and agreeable in his intercourse with the world, and could sometimes even wear the pleasant disguise at home. Agnes had soon discovered that she had wedded a tyrant in heart; one of those delightful persons more aptly than politely described by the Scottish expression—'a causeway saint and a house devil.' But he loved her still, after his own fashion, and in that there was some hope for Agnes, whose devoted affection had lived through all the many trials to which it had been exposed; bowing with patient sweetness to the storm, and welcoming the sunshine whenever it beamed forth, without resentful memory of past suffering, or reproach for his unkindness; of late, too he had seemed more gentle, and Agnes often hoped that in after days she would be happier.

One day, just after his return from spending a few weeks in George, Woodbridge went out desiring Agnes to be ready by three, to accompany him to pay some visits—for even in such matters he assumed despotic sway. Strictly obedient, she was fully equipped before the hour appointed, even her gloves on, for she knew how displeased Woodbridge always was to be left an instant waiting. But he was not himself so punctual; indeed he was never remarkable for any exact observance of his own appointments. Time passed on without his return; and for more than two hours she sat there, not daring to lay aside a single adjunct of her dress; for, however unlikely she considered it that he would still keep his intention of visiting, he was so accustomed to deny her right to think at all on subjects connected with his will, that she feared to anticipate it. At length Woodbridge returned, having, as it chanced, been somewhat annoyed that day, of which Agnes, of course, knew nothing; nor was she aware he was in the house, until he entered the room where she was sitting. To find her in her walking dress, reading quietly, was, at that moment, quite sufficient to enrage him.

'So, madam, where may you be going? you're always out, I think. And just the very hour you knew I would be coming home, must be the time you choose!—Home indeed! a pretty home, truly; with a wife that's always gadding. But that's what it is—it is no matter whether a man is happy or miserable, vexed or pleased, it is all the same to his wife; she does not care so long as she can dress and gad about all day.'

Agnes might have reminded him that she had not been out for the last week, except to church; but, as was her wont she said not a word, while he continued to pour forth a torrent of most unmerited reproach. But while listening to the tirade, she unconsciously, and from an instinctive desire to rid herself of the appendages which had aroused his anger, threw off her gloves, let her shawl fall on her arm, and unfastened her bonnet; in truth she felt as though the strings would check her breathing. Woodbridge found in this fresh subject for rebuke. 'Really madam,' he exclaimed, in the inflated style frequent with him when in a passion, though he would sometimes descend to abuse of a lower class, which was might not have deemed it needful to imitate, 'I think you mistake! This is not your dressing room, I believe, though you appear to look on it as such. What a vast hurry you seem to be in to disrobe! 'tis a pity almost that you should have been at the trouble of attiring yourself for the promenade, since all the splendour was to be laid aside without an opportunity for display.'

'My dear Richard,' said Agnes timidly, 'I have no wish to go anywhere, and should not have thought of dressing if you had not told me.'

'Oh, then I suppose I am a tyrant, am I? and I drag you about against your will.'

'Hush, hush, Richard,' cried Agnes, darting to his side with a beseeching look, and laying her hand on his arm. He turned round to see Mr Shoreland, who having heard the last few sentences, stood motionless with astonishment.

'I won't hush,' replied Richard shaking her off. 'You had best go to your guardian and tell him that I'm always in the wrong.'

'My dear Woodbridge,' said Mr Shoreland

in a pacifying voice. 'I do not wish to know who is in the wrong, or who is in the right. I have no business to interfere. Only when people have to live together all their lives, it is unwise to quarrel about trifles.'

'All their lives! that is just the worst of it,' muttered Woodbridge. 'When a man gets a wife, she and her family expect to rule him for the remainder of his days!' so saying he strode out of the room, and out of the house, slamming every door after him, with undissembled fury, and leaving poor Agnes to make the best excuse she could for a scene which had equally surprised and grieved her relative.

As Woodbridge sat alone that evening, his conscience smote him for his unworthy conduct, as it often did after a fit of passion, though this time Mr Shoreland's ill-timed presence, and Agnes having dared to answer him, made him unusually reluctant to acknowledge it, even to himself. To divert his thoughts he turned over a file of old Colonial newspapers, seeking some occurrence which a suit placed in his hands demanded reference. While thus employed, one amongst the reported law cases arrested his attention. He started as though some fact till then unknown had been revealed to him. And yet there was nothing strange in what he read, nothing at least with which his examination of Cape laws, on reaching the Colony, had not acquainted him. But never before had it appeared to him in the light which it then did; and though it might be too much to say that it had any direct influence on his conduct or intentions, certain it is that thenceforth he felt less difficulty in reconciling his behavior to his conscience, and less inclination to compensate for ill temper by intermediate kindness.

Thenceforward, consequently matters grew gradually worse; and though Agnes was too proud to breathe the secret of her unhappiness to any one human being, the world at last began to whisper that all was not right with the Woodbridges. All indeed, was very wrong; for hours of sunshine were now rare indeed, and the storm raged almost continually; and though the unvarying affection of Agnes enabled her to endure patiently much to which she could not otherwise have submitted, it likewise imparted a more cruel poison and a deeper sting to many things; among which the most bitter far was first the haunting fear, then the agonising conviction, that Woodbridge no longer loved her, that she 'had outlived his liking.' Hard, very hard to bear was this discovery, and east Agnes more tears than all her husband's doubled tyranny. Still gently and uncomplainingly she strove to pursue her course of entire submission and unquestioning obedience, sometimes deluded by the vain hope of eventually regaining the affection which—though how she knew not—she had lost. But all this availed her not; the more she bore the more was given her to bear; and with her best endeavors, Agnes could not, day after day submit to unwarranted censure and capricious ill-temper, without (often unconsciously) betraying her sense of the injustice; and the slightest indication of such feeling never failed to incense him further. At length, irritated by some well-deserved and unanswerable reproach—not of word, but look—he struck her. All the pride of Agnes, and she had not a little, though it had long lain dormant, was aroused by this outrage. Taught also by sad experience that Woodbridge never drew back a step he had advanced, she saw no room for hope that this insult would not be repeated; and this thought was too much for even her forbearance. Seeing, therefore no other mode of preserving her self-respect, Agnes signified her intention of quitting the house. No effort was made to alter her resolve. On the contrary, Woodbridge goaded her on by taunts, which might have confirmed the most fluctuating purpose.

Agnes accordingly left the home where she was no longer loved or prized; and though she did not, even to her relatives, mention the climax of her provocation to this course, none could doubt its being sufficient. And here, too, she was hardly placed, for not only did her pride recoil from the idea of making any pecuniary claim on Woodbridge, but the tenour of many of his extraordinary accusations rendered her firm in her unwillingness to return to Klip Fontein, or receive from the Shorelands that maintenance which her husband did not proffer, and which from him she would not ask. There was then no resource save her own energies, shattered as they had been by the few last years' events. She at first opened a school, but its profits were small; and when, after some months, an offer to accompany a family to Australia was made, she had no choice but to accept it. But she had not left the Colony a month, when the Shorelands were thunderstruck by the intelligence, that Woodbridge had taken the first step towards obtaining a divorce.

'He must be mad to dream of such a thing!' exclaimed Mr Shoreland. 'There is not one word or act even levity which he can possibly allege against her.'

'There needs nothing of the sort in this case; no proof or even accusation against Mrs. Woodbridge is required,' said his informant, pointing to an advertisement in a Cape Town paper, calling upon Agnes to appear either in person or by attorney, on a specified day, to show cause why she had withdrawn herself from her husband's roof without his leave. 'You see,' he continued, 'it is impossible that Mrs. Woodbridge can even be aware of this summons until the expiration of that time; and when it passes unanswered, as pass it must, there is nothing to prevent his procuring the divorce as soon as the regular proceedings can be gone through.'

All the Shorelands' indignation was of no

avail—their friend proved a true interpreter of the existing law; though in all the years they had been in the colony, no instance having occurred within the circle of their observation, it had escaped their knowledge. Nevertheless, it had been acted on many times within that period; and links forged in England had been severed as readily and completely as those of colonial formation. And by this agency, having taken so mean an advantage of the opportunity to prevent any possibility of his wife's justifying her conduct, Woodbridge was soon rendered as free as before he had offered his hand to her acceptance.

Within a year he paid a second visit to George, and brought thence a Dutch girl of good family, and most unexceptionable in every point, to occupy the place of the amiable and unfortunate Agnes; for the second Mrs. Woodbridge wounded no prejudices of her nation by this marriage, which her own laws promoted, and her own pastors sanctioned.

'And so,' exclaimed Mr Shoreland with great bitterness, 'if a man takes a fancy to a new face, all he has to do is to render his house insupportable to his wife, and then he gets free to marry again. But had I known this, I should have taken care that Agnes never left the Cape, but remained to give good reasons for her conduct, and so have disappointed him!'

We will not attempt to describe the feelings of Agnes when these tidings, first of the divorce, then of that second marriage, reached her in the distant land where she was sojourning. Through all his harshness, through all his unkindness, her affection for Woodbridge had not faltered; and still almost against reason her heart had clung to the hope that his feelings towards her would become softened, and that for the future there might be reconciliation and happiness.—But that hope was ended now; they were severed forever, and the blow fell heavily indeed. When too, she heard of his union with another, her very attachment appeared a crime of whose guilt she should divest herself. All the conflicting emotions thus aroused we must leave to imagination.—Many months passed under their influence. At length the lady with whom Agnes was residing became a widow, and quitted Australia for England; and she who, in her own heart, felt neither wedded nor unwedded finding her health unequal to further exertions for her own support, was compelled to return to South Africa. This was a trial both to herself and Henry, for well as he had thought he guarded his secret, she had, much to her own surprise, discovered it during the preparation for her marriage; nor would the subsequent remarks of Woodbridge have left her otherwise in ignorance; and long musing on the events of the last two years had rendered her feeling towards her cousin such as they could not have been had that divorce never been pronounced.

But for all that she felt that, though Woodbridge had cast her off; had, according to the decree of Moses, 'given her a writing of divorce, and put her away,' though the law of a land wherein she was not born had called him free, and his marriage had left her at liberty to follow his example, still in the eyes of God he was her husband, and she was his wife; and while he lived she could not wed another. The no word on the subject passed between them, Henry knew what must be her sentiments, and his own coincided. He did not therefore, intrude one whisper of his long and hopeless attachment on her ear, nor oppose her residing with his sister who was now married.

So passed two or three more years, until one beautiful evening in early summer, white tents were pitched in a pleasant spot, between the bushman's and Sunday's rivers, and with bullock waggons outspanned near, knee haltered horses limped about, bespoke the presence of several travellers. Emily and her husband were on their way to England, whither Agnes resolutely persisted in accompanying them. She felt that it was best; and that she should perhaps be calmer, when thousands of miles lay between her and both these beings who had so strangely influenced her destiny. There was in the route then used many a rocky hill, almost a precipice, up or down which the wayfarer was condemned to journey. One of this description, which they had lately descended, was in full view of the halting party; and while wandering amid the park-like groups of trees studding the sunken plain, their attention was arrested by the appearance of a horse-wagon on the very brink of the steep declivity. The animals were without a driver, and at full gallop, and dashed down the hill at the same furious pace. The spectators gazed on them, fully expecting every instant to see the vehicle overturned; but on it came to the level ground in safety, though dragged by the reckless violence of eight ungovernable horses, whirling the wagon, like a toy, from side to side of the road. Suddenly they left the highway, when one of the wheels was caught by a stone, and the wagon was dashed to the earth with a rebound, which threw out a gentleman who had been sitting near the front. But the furious steeds paused not but bounded on, dragging the wagon over the fallen man, and then over the rocks and mounds, until, in a few minutes, one of the leaders braving his leg in a mole's borrow, came to the ground disabled.

While his brother-in-law hastened to the wagon, Henry bent over the motionless form that had been cast on the roadside. What were his feelings on recognising the features of the sometime husband of Agnes? he who had first insulted, and then discarded her? There lay before him the friend who had deceived him, yet still preserved his friendship through long years, until the discovery of his cousin's sufferings robbed Woodbridge of the