

The Alchemist of Seville

'But one more change, my child, and the precious secret will be mine; then your father's name shall be sounded through every kingdom as the greatest benefactor of mankind. Gold! gold! That which will buy you silks and jewels; the universal remedy for the poor man's sufferings; the unfailing panacea for the sick man's misery; the source of every blessing. Gold, I say, shall be mine.'

'But, father, there is not a pistole in the house with which to buy our morning's meal; the last went to your crucible for this evening's transmutation.'

'And is not this the evening, child, when, by the dreams and omens of these two seven nights, the secret is to be revealed? Has a life spent in the glorious pursuit been all in vain? No! Something tells me that this night I shall attain the happiness I long have striven for. Then the king upon his throne might envy the poor alchemist, and the queen wish she had been his daughter.'

The alchemist rose hastily, as though rather ashamed of having expressed himself so freely on his favorite science, gathered his long robe about him, and passed into his laboratory.

It was a low, dark room, lighted by a small window just under the eaves of the dwelling, furnished only with the requisites for carrying on the pursuits of the occupant.

Along one side, on a rude shelf, stood a variety of jars, retorts, test tubes, connecting cylinders, etc., while under them, on a mahogany table with feet of the pattern of bird's claws grasping a ball, were placed the more ponderous utensils of the alchemist's profession.

A charcoal furnace was just kindling on the hearth, throwing out golden sparks like the bright dreams that were glowing in the breast of the man, while near it stood the crucible, the alloy, vials of fluid, tubes of prepared metal, and other articles awaiting their use in the evening's experiments.

Slowly burned the coals on the hearth, mournfully howled the wind down the square chimney.

The old man gazed moodily out of the window into the gathering darkness then, as though out of patience, seized an old pair of asthmatic bellows, and soon fanned the hesitating embers into a lively flame.

'How glad some it burns!' he exclaimed. 'Never let me harbor the thought of abandoning the object of my life, especially just as my labors shall have their reward. Tonight at twelve o'clock, said the dream, I am to reap the fruit of all my years of toil; to learn the one secret that shall gladden the remnant of my days.'

'How ruddy lights the flame up now! Aye, burn, simmer, consuming human we! Peace shall arise like the Phoenix from those ashes; prosperity dawn on the world of want.'

'Ah! I have but little more of the transmuting elixir. How clear and golden its color is. I can get no more. That was purchased from an eastern magician, who told wonderful tales of its mystic powers. My daughter's diamond locket went to satisfy his greedy lust for gain; but what an insignificant sacrifice, a paltry price, to pay for such a treasure as this night will make known to me.'

'Now a few grains more of the pure bullion—there! the mass is complete in all its essentials. Already it assumes the colour and consistence indicated in the formula. While it simmers and fuses, I will seat myself in the old easy-chair and watch the glowing embers. Eleven o'clock rings out the convent bell; in an hour the secret will be revealed, and the thankless world, slumbering so quietly while I watch, be aroused by the momentous discovery.'

The old alchemist flung himself back in his chair, drew his robe closer about him as a protection against the chilliness of the night, and watched the crucible.

His naturally robust frame was worn by the vigils of many nights, and as he gazed intently into the sparkling coals, the film of drowsy nature would despite his eagerness, occasionally gather over his eyes. Suddenly there appeared to him a change in the molten mass.

It was beginning to approach the true tinge and consistence of the coveted metal; but yet, although it was gold to all appearance, a something was wanting.

Vial after vial was tried by minute grains; metal after metal was added, and the change noted carefully.

The last grain of gold was given to the craving element, and still the composition remained but a very little removed from

the sterling metal.

Yet that little was an immense cloud over the alchemist's hopes.

Despair was overwhelming his spirit.

The toil of years lay before him as a vain pursuit after the elixir vitae when the fiery blast of the furnace was obscured by a puff of thick smoke, and from out the ascending vapour came a sepulchral voice, starting the still night air with—

'Thy maiden's heart must drop its life blood into the crucible ere the change be made.'

The old alchemist started.

The neighbouring convent bell tolled out the hour.

In breathless silence the old man counted ten, eleven, twelve?

The perspiration gathered on his wrinkled brow.

This, then, was the long expected, long-desired secret; this the revelation he had prayed for!

The blood of a maiden's heart—his own child—the only element which could be the means of bringing happiness to mankind; the only substitute for the gold mines!

'Be it so,' said the father; 'Abraham spared not his only son; Jephtha fulfilled his vow at the sacrifice of his daughter; shall I deny a suffering world my child? Zitelletta is no schoolgirl to whimper at the sacrifice.'

Slowly, reluctantly, he sought his daughter's room.

More than once he thought of returning; more than once he felt his spirit die within him, as the old stairs to the gable chamber creaked beneath his stealthy tread.

He would go back—he would set fire to the laboratory, and the temptation should perish in the flames.

Yes, and with it the hopes of mankind, the ripening fruit of threescore years of toil, the glorious result of all his studious and costly experiments.

No! he would be indeed a craven did he grudge any sacrifice for the cherished rejuvenation of humanity.

As he entered the chamber the moon shone clear and calm into the face of the sleeping maiden.

Often had he watched her innocent slumber as he nightly returned from his nocturnal toil, but surely not often had she looked so beautiful as now.

The graceful arm was thrown carelessly over her head, the snowy bosom was freed from the drapery of the couch, while it gently rose and fell; the long eyelashes rested on the fair cheek with the pure slumber of girlish innocence.

He gazed but a moment on the fair vision, lest its beauty should move his heart to begrudge the sacrifice.

'Zitelletta! Zitelletta!' he cried. 'Awake! there is but one thing lacking to crown my life labors with success; in that your aid is needed, but it may be a dangerous experiment for you.'

'Has the revelation been declared?'

asked the alchemist's daughter, seeming to overlook the last sentence entirely.

'It has, and at the hour of twelve precisely. It is in obedience to it that I have called you. Have you strength to undertake this experiment? Its end will be glorious, but its accomplishment may hazard your very being.'

'I should be no Spanish maiden did the question of a few more hours of living influence my actions,' answered the girl, with the air of haughty pride.

'Spoken like my child!' cried the alchemist. 'Come below with me.'

With nervous haste the old man led the way to the laboratory.

In her loose negligé garments, her long hair bound carelessly up over her shoulders, with an air of conscious heroism the Spanish maiden followed him.

Arriving there, the old man paused. A deadly sickness came over him as he made the preparations for the sacrifice.

'Why do you tarry, father?' impatiently cried the daughter.

The alchemist rallied.

'Now, my child, lean over the crucible and blow through this tube; your breath shall thus impregnate the mass.'

The girl boldly took the tube.

Her father watched her eagerly.

The moment her fair bosom was over the crucible was his moment to strike.

He could see the rising charms of youth heave with her respiration.

Should he plunge into her heart the hidden knife?

He must; else where were the hopes of humanity?

He raised his arm, and—

A terrific explosion rent the laboratory.

He looked—his daughter was gone; no trace of that young, fair form which had gladdened the gloomy studio remained.

In despair he burst open the door and ran to her room.

Was it a dream, or was it his living daughter that lay before him, on the self-same couch, in the self-same position, where he had found her, it seemed, years ago?

That was no dream, that fair virgin face, that long dark hair which lay dishevelled over the snowy pillow and the scarcely less snowy breast.

The old man's heart leaped for joy; his daughter was yet alive.

From the bewildering explosion of the laboratory, like the phoenix from its ashes, had the fair presence arisen which was now in the slumber of pure maidenhood before him.

The selfishness of the many years he had secluded himself from the only being who loved him, the paltry worth of the yellow dross as compared with the pure gold of her priceless love, across in self condemnation before him, and he gasped out—

'My daughter! oh, my daughter!'

Then all was dark, and he saw nothing more.

On the hills behind Seville was a rustic cottage, where the olive displayed its glossy fruit, the grape its luxuriant clusters, and the myrtle ran over the decaying stumps of the superannuated orange trees.

A fair girl sat singing in the cottage doorway, and an old man moved mildly about the homestead, and watched her every motion.

'I am so happy, father!'

'Indeed my child!'

'Yes the pleasure of seeing you well from that fearful fever, the joy of having you near me, and loving me in the place of your laboratory, is almost too much bliss, leaving out of my thoughts the smiles of Jose, whom I hear whistling as he comes up the path.'

'You love him, then my daughter?' said the old man.

'Well I only thought we three might live together here, and it might gladden your declining years to know that you would leave me with one who loved me when you went to your home beyond the stars.'

'Always loving some one more than you love yourself, dear Zitelletta,' said the old man with playful affection as he passed into the cottage.

This is no other than our friend the Alchemist of Seville.

Whether he has found the philosopher's stone whether love alone could supply the place of gold we leave the reader to judge.

Saved by an Eyeglass.

The London Daily Mail tells a story about a traveller, recently returned from the Gold Coast, who had an experience which was not only startling but, in the retrospect, amusing.

Mr. Bennett, the returned traveller, is a land-surveyor by profession, and was at a town not far from the boundary of Ashanti. The only white man near him was a young mining prospector at a mining camp some distance away.

These two Englishmen, far apart, and yet feeling themselves to be neighbors, learned of the Ashanti rising by the wholesale desertion of the black men. The mining prospector went to a native chief for protection. It was promised him, and he was given a dinner. When he had eaten, the villagers rushed upon him and killed him.

Mr. Bennett heard this terrible story as he was about to move. He was powerless, and feared a similar fate. On the advice of an educated native he went to the head village and made a dash for the chief's hut. He was well received and promised protection. But so had been the other Englishman.

While the situation was still critical Mr. Bennett put his eyeglass in. The 'glass eye' highly amused a shiny little black boy, one of the chief's sons. He roared with laughter. Mr. Bennett grinned at him and let the monocle drop. The effect was great. The natives made a circle round the Englishman, greatly mystified by and delighted with his extra eye.

'I had to do some monkey tricks with that eyeglass,' says Mr. Bennett, 'and I completed the conquest by managing to screw it in the eye of one of the chief's wives, who strutted around proud of her distinction.'

Mr. Bennett was saved by his eyeglass. It became a sort of fetish. The chief entertained him as an honored guest. He was given an escort, and after many days of privation, arrived safely at the coast.

Obeysing Orders.

General Harney was an officer of the old school, a strict disciplinarian who took no excuses for hesitation in obeying orders. When he was on his way to Mexico, when the United States was at war with that

country, he engaged teams to transport the baggage, and placed in charge of them a Texan named Carter. The streams were all up, and Carter had much trouble, but whenever he tried to modify the general's requirements he was cut short with the admonition, 'All you've got to do is to obey orders.'

Says Noah Smithwick, in his recollections called 'The Evolution of a State':

They camped one night near the Nueces River, which Carter found to be impassable. He said nothing about it to the general, and the next morning the order was given to move on. Carter started with the wagon train and halted at the river, which was absolutely impassable. Harney came blustering up.

'Didn't you know that river was up?' he demanded.

'Yes, sir,' meekly replied the wagon-master.

'Why didn't you tell me?'

'You didn't ask me, sir. You said my business was to obey orders. You ordered me to hitch up and move on, and I did it.'

'You did quite right, sir. Turn round and drive back to the camp.'

If the general had been 'done' he was not going to show it.

The Hint Courteous.

The author of 'Life and Sport on the Pacific Slope' says that in assemblages where a little patience and good humor temper what is disagreeable, the people of the Pacific slope are at their best.

Once, at a performance of some play several youths were gazing the principal character, to the annoyance of everybody else. Suddenly a gentleman said to them, very politely:

'That lady on the stage is making so much noise that we cannot hear what you are saying. But I hope we shall have the pleasure of listening to you criticisms later, when the actor is over.' Silence followed the remark.

At times something more forcible is needed. A certain lady had, one day, been rudely treated by a minor railway official. She was very indignant, and quite at a loss for words; but she had a saving sense of humor, and turned to a stranger at her elbow.

'Sir,' said she, 'will you tell this man what I think of him?'

The stranger, without betraying the least excitement, said in a melancholy drawl:

'Sir, this lady thinks you are an under-strapper, clothed with a little brief authority, whose only qualification for the position you occupy is your extraordinary impudence.'

Anticipatory Action.

'Hiram, I am considering a proposal of marriage, and, as you have been coming to see me for nearly six years, I thought it would be no more than right to tell you of it.'

'Why, Bella, I—I have always wanted to ask you myself!'

'Why haven't you done it?'

'I—I haven't dared to. Will you marry me Bella?'

'Yes.'

'You dear girl!' (Pause, properly filled up.) 'Tell me, now, Bella whose proposal of marriage you were considering.'

'Yours, Hiram.'



A COSY CORNER.