POETRY.

THE WIND OF MARCH.

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER.

Up from the sea the wild north wind is blowing
Under the sky's gray arch;
Smiling, I watch the shaken elm-boughs, knowing
It is the wind of March.

The stormy farewell of a passing season,
Leaving, however rude
Or sad in painful recollection, reason
For reverent gratitude.

Welcome to weary hearts its harsh forewarning
Of light and warmth to come,
The longed-for joy of Nature's Easter morning,
The earth arisen in bloom!

In the loud tumult Winter's strength is breaking;
I listen to the sound,
As to a voice of resurrection, waking
To life the dead, cold ground.

Between these gusts, to the soft lapse I hearken
Of rivulets on their way:
I see these tossed and naked tree-tops darken
With the fresh leaves of May.

This roar of storm, this sky so gray and lowering,
Invite the airs of spring,
A warmer sunshine over fields of flowering,
The bluebird's song and wing.

Closely behind, the Gulf's warm breezes follow
This northern hurricane,
And, borne thereon, the bobolink and swallow
Shall visit us again.

And in green wood-paths, in the kine-fed pasture,
And by the whispering rills,
Shall flowers repeat the lesson of the Master,
Taught on His Syrian hills.

Blow, then, wild wind! thy roar shall end in singing,
Thy chill in blossoming;
Come, like Bethesda's troubling angel, bringing
The healing of the spring!

SELECT STORY.

AN UNBROKEN PROMISE.

—OR—

A CASTAWAY.

PART II.

CONTINUED.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE BUNGALOW.

See him now, on this bright evening in early autumn, standing in his dining room, the large French windows of which open out upon the close-shaven lawn, carefully uncorking two or three bottles of prime wine, which he has just brought up from the cellar, in honor of the arrival on a visit of his old comrade, Captain Norman. See him now with his bright eyes, his trim moustache, his long brown thoroughbred hands, well cut light grey suit, neat boots and unmistakable air of ease; and you will acknowledge that there is no better looking fifty-year-old to be found in the country.

"Well, Cooke," he says, as his tall, strapping, red-haired soldier servant appears at the door, "has the Captain got everything he wanted upstairs?"

"Yes, sir." said the man "the Captain wants to know whether it is full dress tonight, sir, or not?"

"Full dress?" echoes Cleethorpe, laughing. "Of course not; tell him there are no ladies, and that he and I will be alone at dinner, and that he can put on his shooting jacket and slippers, or whatever he feels most comfortable in."

"Right, sir," replies Cook and away he goes.

"Jack will be glad of that," thinks Captain Cleethorpe to himself when he is alone again; "evening dress must be as bad as a suit of armour to him now. What an enormous size he has grown! But he seems just the same simple-hearted dear old fellow that he has been ever since I have known him."

Further meditation is put an end to by the entrance of Captain Norman. As his old comrade had remarked, the Captain had grown enormously stout. Looking at his double chin and slow, ponderous gait, one could scarcely recognize in him the handsome light dragoon who made so favorable an impression when told off on escort duty, and whose good looks and splendid horsemanship, when acting as galloper to the general commanding on a field day at Aldershot, won the hand and fortune of the lady who was now his wife.

Dinner concluded, the gentlemen took their cigars into the garden, where the table, with coffee, etc., had already been prepared for them.

"That's about the pattern to suit you, Jack," said Cleethorpe, pointing to an enormous bamboo seat, half chair, half sofa; "put your manly form into that, and make yourself comfortable.

"Right you are," said Captain Norman, following his friend's advice. "I have seen one of these machines before, on board a P. and O. boat, when I went to see some friends off at Southampton."

"Yes," said Cleethorpe; "I brought it home with me from India."

"You must have pleasant associations with India, I should think, Cleethorpe," said Captain Norman, stretching himself lazily. "You call your house the Bungalow, I see."

"Well, yes," said Cleethorpe; "a man who has been much out there, never entirely rids himself from its associations, more especially if his lines of life be cast in such a place as this. Here we have a perfect eastern colony, eat Anglo-Indian dishes, and look out for our fortnightly batch of the Calcutta Englishman than for our daily times."

"Ah," said Norman, with a yawn, "rather dull, isn't it? Dreary old birds most of them, I should say."

"Well, they would not be lively to you," said Cleethorpe, laughing, "while just in the same way your county magnates, with their airs, and your bucolic friends, with their dissertations on mangolds and swedes, would be insupportable to me However, we are likely to have a pleasant addition to our set; a charming place in this neighborhood has just been bought by a man whom you know, I think; or, at all events, of whom you have heard me speak."

"Who is that?"

"Sir Geoffrey; the father of that young fellow who was in our regiment, and who had a row in the billiard room, you recollect?"

"I recollect! I should think I did."

"Well; I had a letter from Goole, our colonel, you know, yesterday morning, telling me that Sir Geoffry, unable to endure his solitary life any longer, had sold his place in the country, and knowing that there were sure to be many of his old comrades about here, had bought a lovely little box within two miles of this, where old General Chowder died a month ago. Goole asks me to call upon Sir Geoffry, and do the civil to him, but, beyond that, he intrusts me with a commission; he wants me to get him a housekeeper."

"A housekeeper!" echoed Norman, lazily. "Then the old boy has never married again."

"Not he; from my recollection of what Goole told me of his married life, he has acted on the 'once bit, twice shy' principle."

And do you know any nice motherly old woman whom you could recommend to look after the General's socks, make his jams, and rob him herself, instead of letting the tradespeople rob him?"

Cleethorpe looked at his friend in admiration. "Certainly marriage has developed you amazingly in every way, Jack!" he said. "I certainly do know a lady who is neither old nor motherly, but who is decidedly nice, and whom I thought of recommending to Sir Geoffry, though I doubt whether she could fulfil all the functions which you have named."

"And who is she—a protege of yours?"

"No, indeed, I know comparatively little of her."

"Maid, wife or widow?"

"A widow of the name of Pickering; her husband had held a very inferior position in some government office, I believe, and when she came here after his death, some three years ago, she had an idea of seeking employment as a nursery governess, or companion to a lady, or something of that kind. But the reaction consequent upon the fatigues of nursing him in his last illness, so I undeastood, was too much for her; she fell ill herself and would have died had it not been for the devoted manner in which she was nursed by a young sister, who accompanied her, and the kindness which she received from our parson and his wife."

"And his wife!" echoed Captain Norman. "Mrs. Pickering, then, is rather plain, I take it."

"Another observation springing from your domestic experience," said Cleethorpe; but this time you are wrong. Mrs. Pickering is a remarkably handsome woman."

"And the parson and his wife attended to her in her illness?"

"Not merely that. During this illness they discovered that she was miserably poor; that her husband had left her no pension, no life insurance, absolutely nothing at all; that both she and her sister were quick and intelligent, and willing to do anything to earn their livelihood."

"Poor creatures, how very creditable!" said Captain Norman, placidly sipping his glass of curacoa.

"Well, our parson—Drage his name is, Onesiphorus Drage, queer name isn't it?; is the son of a man who is a great gun in the city, director of banks and all sorts of things, and, amongst others, of one of the telegraph companies. Drage wrote up to his father, and the old man offered to have them put into the telegraph office in London, but somehow or other Mrs. Pickering had a great objection to that, and so it ended in both of them being made clerks in the Branch office down here. They got on wonderfully, especially the younger one, who showed such singular ability that, when an important vacancy occurred in the head office in London, they offered her the berth, and as the salary and chances were really good, and they found a respectable person for her to live with, Mrs. Pickering made no further objection, and about a year ago the girl went to town, and there she remains."

And what became of Mrs. Pickering?"

"Well, just before that. Mrs. Drage was taken ill and died, and on her death bed she spoke to Mrs. Pickering, who had attended her throughout, and implored her to be a mother to the little girl whom she was leaving."

"Ah, ha!" said Captain Norman, "which means also to be a wife to the reverend old—what do you call him."

"Not at all. The Reverend Onesiphorus who is delicate on his chest, has been away for the last twelve months, yachting with his father in the Mediteranean, and left his flock in charge of his curate, while Mrs. Pickering, relieved of her telegraphic duties, has been living at the rectory, and educating and taking care of little Bertha."

"And when does the parson come back?" asked Captain Norman.

"Mrs. Pickering expected him the night before last, and cleared out into her old lodging to give him possesion."

"And you propose to make Mrs. Pickering old Heriot's housekeeper?" asked Norman.

"Exactly."

"Then you are doing a decidedly unhandsome thing, Cleethorpe, and outraging the laws of nature and three-volume novels."

"What do you mean?"

"Why of course this parson ought to come back full of gratitude and all that sort of thing, and ought to marry the telegraph woman, and live happy ever after."

"Yes," said Cleethorpe, "perhaps so; but then you see, Jack, you don't know Mrs. Pickering."

"No, and I don't know the parson, for the matter of that."

"You will have that felictity presently for I asked him to come up here this evening to hear about my proposition. No, Drage is not a young man, nor scarcely what you would call a lady killer, but he is young enough to set the world talking if such a woman as Mrs. Pickering were to become his house-keeper; whereas, with such a tough old bamboo cane as Sir Geoffry Heriot, the veriest Mrs. Grundy in Springside, and there are some good specimens of the breed amongst them, I can tell you, could find no opportunity for scandal."

"Hem," said Captain Norman; my experience of women is, that when they give their minds to it, there is nobody and nothing that they could not contrive to say something disagreeable about. By the way, what became of Sir Geoffry's son, after the row with that great hulking brute whose name I forget?"

"No one ever heard anything about him," said Cleethorpe. "I have asked Goole more than once, but could no tidings of the lad. He told me that he received a polite but formal acknowledgment of a letter, which he thought it his duty to write to Sir Geoffry after the row, and that when once, on the first occasion of their meeting afterwards, he was beginning to allude to the circumstances, the old man stopped him by saying, 'I have no son now, sir; you will oblige me by never mentioning his name again.' Goole and Sir Geoffrey have met several times since then, and are, I believe rather intimate, as indeed, this letter proves, but the subject has never been touched upon by either of them."

"It was a queer business that funking of his, and one which I could never understand, for, from the little I saw of him, the lad seemed to have plenty of pluck."

"He was a nice boy," said Cleethorpe. "I think of him very often, always when his father is named; this letter brought all the circumstances fresh into my mind, and only yesterday morning I was wondering what had become of him."

"Taken the queen's shilling, perhaps," said Norman, "or gone out to Australia."

"No," said Cleethorpe, reflectively; "he struck me as more likely to fall on his feet in a better way than that. He was the sort of lad that people would take a fancy to, scarcely knowing why they did so."

"By Jove!" interrupted Captain Norman, striking his fist upon the table with such violence as to make the cups and glasses ring, "I have got it at last."

"So had I, very nearly," said Captain Cleethorpe, moving out of the way of some dripping coffee, "and hot too; but what is it that you have got, Jack?"

"An idea," said Captain Norman.

"Keep it, book it, and register it at once as 'Norman's patent,' or no one will ever believe you came by it honestly," said Cleethorpe.

"Don't you be funny, but listen," said his friend. "Do you know what it is to be haunted by a face?"

"I did, said Cleethorpe, half sadly. "I have been haunted by a good many in my time."

"Ay, those were women's," said Norman; "but I don't mean that, nor in that way. Do you know what it is to see a face which you recognize at once as being familiar to you, but to which you cannot put a name; which you have seen somewhere, but you cannot tell whether in real life or in a dream; which perpetually rises before you, always in the same unsatisfactory manner; the identity of which it is impossible to discover, while the more you try to link it with a personality the more vague do your thoughts grow, and the more dispirited are you as to your chances of succes?"

"Yes," said Cleethorpe. "You have a fine poetical flow, Jack, but I know what you mean."

"Well, I have suffered from this sort of haunting for months past," said Norman. "We were in town in the spring, the first time we had been there for some years, and, amongst other places, we went to the house of a Mrs. Entwistle, a kind of connection of my wife's, who is a swell in her way, and had never taken any notice of us before. She is an eccentric old woman, but very well off, they say, and goes into very good society. At her house I noticed a young man, whose face and manner seemed somehow familiar to me, though I felt that both had altered since the last time I saw him. He was talking to the guests, giving orders to the servants, and altogether making himself so much at home that I had the curiosity to enquire who he was. I learned that he was a Mr. Hardinge, a young man whom the old lady for a year or two past had adopted as her son, but whether he was related to her by blood, or whether her adoption of him was only one of her many eccentricities, I could not gather. Having gleaned thus much from an old fellow who used to dine at the next table to me at the 'Rag," and who seemed to know everything about everybody in town, I went from the staircase, where I had carried on the pumping process, back into the rooms, and found my young friend in full swing as before. This time he caught me looking at him, started, turned rapidly on his heel, and for the rest of the evening carefully avoided coming near me. I met him several times afterwards in the park, at the theatre, in society, but invariably with the same result. He shunned me, Sir, regularly shunned me; made a point of turning away whenever I approached him. During the whole of that time, and very frequently since, I have endeavored to recall to my mind where I had seen that young man before, and who he was. As you spoke, it suddenly flashed upon me, and I have not the smallest doubt about it. The place where I last saw him was the inn at Cheseborough, and his real name is George Heriot."

"Singular," said Captain Cleethorpe, when his companion had finished speaking, "very singular indeed. You are not generally very clear in these matters, Jack, but your reasoning convinces me that in the present instance you must be right. Do you imagine the boy recognised you?"

"Now I think it over I have not a doubt of it, though I cannot understand how I failed to recognise him. He has just that same cheeky kind of way that he had when he told me that it would be good for my health if he were my player at pool, and that he would give me plenty of exercise in walking after my ball."

"Do you imagine that his father knows of his position?"

"I have no means of judging, but I should say decidedly not."

"Did you ever get anything out of the old lady, Mrs. Entwistle?"

"What do you mean — money?"

"No, no," said Cleethorpe, laughing; "any information about the lad?"

"No, I didn't myself, but now I recollect perfectly that Lou, that's my wife, told me on one occasion when she was having luncheon with the old lady alone, she happened to mentisn Sir Geoffry Heriot's name, that Mrs. Entwistle turned as white as a sheet, and asked her in a very agitated manner, if she knew the General. When she found Lou did not, she became all right again; but my Lou, who is a remarkably sharp woman, at least so I think, thought it was funny altogether, and told me of it when she came home."

"Mrs. Norman is a woman of great acuteness, I am sure," said Cleethorpe, "and it is a curious business altogether. However, since the old General is left solitary, and likely to remain so, the greater reason that he should be provided with a comely house-keeper who will do her duty by him without ultimate designs on his person or his purse. Mrs. Pickering is exactly the lady for the situation, and no possible objection can be made by anybody to her undertaking it, unless by——"

"The Reverend Mr. Drage, sir," said Cooke, appearing at the master's elbow.

CHAPTER II.

A REVELATION.

In an old-fashioned terrace of high houses, leading off one of the principal thoroughfares of Springside, and approached odly enough, first by a flight of crooked steps, and then by a narrow winding path, dwelt Mrs. Pickering, of whom Captain Cleethorpe had so much to say, and who has erst been known to the readers of this story as Madge Pierrepoint.

In the three years which have elapsed since we last caught sight of her, she has materially improved in appearance. The rest and ease, the freedom from professional annoyances and private worry, the soft, bright, health-giving atmosphere, have had their invariably good effect, and her cheek is plumper, her eyes brighter, her figure more erect, and her footstep more light, than they have been since the days of her childhood. When she rose convalescent from the illness which attacked her on her first arrival at Springside, Madge felt that a vast amount of not merely bodily, but mental disorder, which had long been hanging around hor, had passed away. Gone was that fever of expectation, gone that restless, unsatisfied longing. No longer had she to dread the arrival of bad news, no longer to await, with trembling anxiety, the caprices of a man, who, while his affection for her had departed, still possessed the right of disposing of her time and talent to suit his own purpose.

So far, at least, Philip Vane had kept his word. Whether by design or accident, most probably the latter (for neither in the telegraph clerk, nor in the governess, leading a peaceful hum-drum life with her little charge, would he have ever dreamt of looking for the popular actress) he had never crossed her path.

Nor was Madge's tranquil life clouded by a doubt as to the wisdom of her conduct in regard to Gerald Hardinge. Whatever might have been the feelings which had animated her during that brief season, when, stung by Philip's scorn, and touched by Gerald's devotion, she had hesitated what course to pursue, they were quite gone ere the doctor pronounced her convalescent, and knew she was herself once again. Closely shutting out from mental retrospection any thought of occurrences in which Philip Vane had borne a part, she yet longed occasionally to linger over the momory of her final interview with Gerald, and even over the details of that night of agony, when she renounced all hope of ever being anything to him, perhaps of ever seeing him again. For by that renunciation she had done her duty, and was she not now reaping her reward? No trace of that passion, which, as she acknowledged to herself, she had entertained for him during those agonizing hours of doubt, now remained, She could think of him—she did think of him often — with womanly tenderness and regard, so pure that the whole world might have known of it! She should like to see him, she should like to see his wife, for he must have a wife by this time, Madge thought; she would like him to think well of her, as an old friend, but nothing more.

It is the morning after the arrival of Captain Norman at his old friend's quarters, and Madge is seated at her little table in the window looking down upon the flagged terrace walk, with the green railings in front. Before her is her little old-fashioned, brass-bound writing desk, with the blotting book lying open upon it, and on that again a little almanac which she has been consulting. She has somewhat more color in her cheeks than in the days when we first knew her; but there is the same bright, frank, earnest look in her eyes, and the long brown hair is a luxuriant as ever.

"Just three years ago," she said to herself, referring again to the almanac, "just three years since I fled from Wexeter, and was directed, providentially as it seems now, to this place. By that act I seem to have closed and clasped, as it were, the first book of my life, shutting in with it certain figures, which so far as I am concerned will, in all human probability, never appear again. There, entombed as I may say, for he is in every sense dead to me, is my husband, Philip Vane! His ghost never haunts my memory, and the only material thing I have to remind me of him is this."

TO BE CONTINUED.

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