POETRY.

THE BOYS.

THE COUNTRY BOY.

He comes to town a-whistlin' one o' them
good ol' tunes.
In a hick'ry 'nd straw hat 'nd faded panta-
loons,
He has a smile upon his face, a twinkle in
his eye,
'Nd allus sez "How air ye?" when we see
him goin' by
He comes drivin' up our alley, the lines a
hangin' down,
An' raisin' a racket bigger'n anyone in
town.
He brings us eggs an' butter, 'nd garden
truck an' sich,
'Nd turns his hosses with a "gee er haw"—
I don't know which.
He stops there at the grocery an' leans ag'in
the barrels,
'Nd asks 'em what they're payin' now fer
rabbits 'nd fer squirrels;
He reads the bills 'at's posted, 'nd hears us
fellers gassin';
Maybe buys some groceries, an' he won't
take no sassin'.
We hear his "git up" 'nd the wagon rattlin'
crost the bridge,
'Nd see the dust a-raisin' when he goes be-
hind the ridge.

THE CITY BOY.

He comes out in the summer with his
uncles er his aunts,
In a b'iled shirt, standup collar, long-tailed
coat 'nd store-made pants;
Comes to the crossin' on the cars, dad brings
him out from there,
He jes' shakes hands with all of us 'nd sits
down in a chair
'Nd stares around at this 'nd that 'nd never
sez a thing
'Ceptin' to ask where 'taters grow er why
the robins sing.
He likes to play at hide an' seek an' help to
do the chores,
Ride the horses to worter an' swing on the
granary doors.
'Nd he's got sich funny idees o' how things
orter be done.
But somehow we sorter like him 'nd air
lonesome when he's gone.

SELECT STORY.

AN UNBROKEN PROMISE.

—OR—

A CASTAWAY.

PART III.

CONTINUED.

CHAPTER VII.

A CRISIS.

The news that the old General was seriously ill had spread a gloom over this day's meeting, and even those who had been most opposed to him in argument, on social and political questions, joined in lamenting his absence and its cause, acknowledging, as they did, that, though censorious and irritating, he was always a perfectly honorable and gentlemanly opponent. True it was that the arrival in their midst of Captain Cleethorpe, who had come straight from Wheatcroft, with the news that there was a decided improvement in Sir Geoffrey's condition that day—so great an improvement that he intended getting up and sitting in the library for some hours—had a cheering influence on the assemblage. But the old man's absence was most noticeable; a dozen occasions arose on which, as it was felt by most present, he would have dashed in with some trenchant remarks, which would have had the effect of changing the whole line of argument. On Captain Cleethorpe, especially, this feeling fell with fullest force; he owned to himself that he was dull and dispirited, and impressed with a consciousness of an impending something which he could not explain. He was glad that he had brought the mare into town. Instead of going straight home to the Bungalow, he would take a stiffish ride round the country in the hope of thus driving away this attack of low spirits.

So the Captain, admirably got up after his neat, trim, soldierly fashion, and looking infinitely better, sounder, and more lovable than many a youngster of half his age, went rambling through the streets, jauntily returning the salutations which showered upon him from right and left, in evidence of his popularity. He had passed the boundary of the town, and was crossing the road near a little substation of the railway, within some three miles of the principal terminus, when a man, suddenly emerging from the narrow lane leading to the station, caused the mare to swerve, and her owner to be grateful for the possession of an excellent cavalry seat. It did not take the Captain an instant to recover himself, and as he patted the mare's neck and gentled her, he looked round for the cause of the commotion.

This was a tall, bright-looking young man, well set up, and of springy, active step, who advanced towards the horseman and was raising his hat, apparently about to apologise for the disturbance which he had involuntarily created, but as he approached nearer to discern the features of the gentleman whom he was about to address, he hesitated, stopped, and then, without saying a word, pulled his hat over his eyes and strode away.

The Captain gazed after him in extreme wonderment, not unmixed with disgust. He was very punctilious in his notions of breeding and behavior, and though there had been no necessity for an apology, yet for the young man to come forward merely to scowl and disappear, was a breach of manners of which Captain Cleethorpe did not at all approve.

"The man must be mad," Cleethorpe muttered to himself, looking after the rapidly retreating figure, "or what on earth could have induced him to rush away like that, as soon as he recognised me? For he did recognise me, I am sure of that, and that was the cause of his trouble. Couldn't be one of my quarter-sessions friends? That young fellow was too well looking, too frank and bright for a jail bird. Too—stay where have I seen that face before? somewhere, I'll be sworn. That expression of pain and trouble which flitted across it for an instant seemed familiar to me. Now let me think this out quietly.

And the Captain turned round easily in his saddle, and, checking the mare to a walk, fell into a train of reflection which lasted some little time. At last he seemed to find the sought for clue, he raised his head, brought his whip-hand down upon his thigh with a smack that startled the mare into a canter, and never drew rein until he overtook a lady walking along the road, who, turning quickly round as Captain Cleethorpe pulled up beside her, proved to be Mrs. Pickering.

"The very person of all others I most wished to see," said the Captain, raising his hat. "Will you permit me, my dear Mrs. Pickering, to walk beside you for a short distance, for I have something of real importance to talk to you about."

As he spoke he jumped nimbly from the saddle, and hanging the bridle over his arm, commenced walking by her side.

"Your manner is somewhat alarming, Captain Cleethorpe," said Madge with a sad smile. "I trust you have no further bad news to tell me? Sir Geoffry's illness is about as much as we can bear just now."

"No, I won't say bad news, but something odd and strange has happened which you ought to hear of. You recollect your asking me some time ago whether our old friend Sir Geoffry had any family?"

"Yes, yes!"

And my mentioning that he had a boy who had—who had—in point of fact gone to grief? Well, Mrs. Pickering, that boy, now grown into a young man, I saw not ten minutes ago."

"Here?" said Madge faintly. "You saw him here, in this place?"

"Here!" repeated the Captain, "coming down from the railway, close by Abbott's Farm."

"Oh, Captain Cleethorpe!" cried Madge laying her hand upon his arm, "would you mind riding back and seeing if you can overtake this young man? He is doubtless down here with the intention of seeing his father, and it is all-important that any meeting between them should be prevented, at all events, just now. You will help me in trying to stop this?"

"My dear Mrs. Pickering, I woud do anything in the world to serve you or Sir Geoffry, only I should like to know——"

"Don't wait an instant, you shall know all some other time."

And the Captain feigned to be content, raised his hat in adieu, jumped on to the mare, and cantered off.

* * * *

"No, sir, Mr. Drage has not returned," said the Rector's neat little maid to a stranger, inquiring somewhat later on the same afternoon at the rectory gate. "I'm not sure, sir, but I think he's gone up to Wheatcroft."

"Wheatcroft, eh?" said the stranger. "Sir Geoffry Heriot's place, isn't it?"

"Yes, if you please, sir," said the little maid, half awed, half fascinated by the great black beard and brilliant teeth on which she was gazing. "Sir Geoffry's much better today, sir, and I heard Mr. Drage say he should go up and have a chat with him."

"Thank you, good-day,," said the stranger, turning away. "Much better, is he? that's not good hearing. However I suppose Asprey could not be wrong in his diagnosis, and this sudden improvement in the old gentleman is but one of those flashes which so frequently precedes total extinction. What a confounded nuisance that this parson should be away from home just when I wanted him. I must see him, for I must learn from him where to find Madge. He is probably the only person who could give me that information, and even if she were still in this place, which I very much doubt, it would not do for me to be poking about and asking questions which might elicit unpleasant enquiries. The old gentleman would not be up to much conversation, and I should think that he and Drage must have had it all out by this time. I'll walk up towards Wheatcroft and meet the parson on his way back.'

So Mr. Philip Vane, for it was he, strode leisurely away. The rectory was situate in the outskirts of the town, and on that autumnal evening there were but few chance passers-by. Yet Philip Vane thought it advisable to diverge from the high road, and climbing a gate, to proceed along a narrow beaten track on the other side of the hedge, keeping at the same time a sharp look-out for the person whom he expected to meet. He was annoyed when he found himself close to Wheatcroft without having seen any sign of Mr. Drage. The train by which he was to return to London would start in an hour, and unless he made good use of his time now, his expedition would have been in vain. He thought he would go up to the house, where Mr. Drage had probably been detained. There was no chance of his seeing Sir Geoffry, who would doubtless be confined to his room, nor was it probable that any of the servants, even if they saw him, would recognise him in the dusk.

He leaped a light fence, which separated the field he had been traversing from the Wheatcroft grounds and passing through a young and struggling plantation, came upon the lawn in front of the house. The blinds were all down, and no light shone from any window. All was dull and blank and deathlike. Philip Vane shrugged his shoulders, and muttering, "Cheerful this" to himself, stole quietly round the angle of the house.

In an instant he found himself in the full blaze of a moderator lamp, standing on a table in the window. In an instant he heard a thin querulous voice call out,

"Halloo, you sir! Come here!"

Philip Vane looked up, and saw Sir Geoffry Heriot sitting in an easy chair by the French window, one half of which was open. The old man's face was very pale, but his eyes were blazing, and his outstretched hand trembled visibly.

"Halloo, you sir! Come here!" he repeated.

"What's the matter, Sir Geoffry?" said Vane, stepping into the room. "You must have forgotten whom you are addressing, by your tone."

"Not at all, I know who you are, and I am glad you have come, for you have saved me the trouble of sending for you."

"Sending for me? Did you want me Sir Geoffry?"

"Not I sir, but the police, whom I was about to instruct to arrest you."

"The police! You're an old man Sir Geoffry, and an invalid, but if you recover you shall answer for this insult.

"Not I sir; no code will compel me to go out with a swindler and forger! Here is Irving's letter here—no, you shall not escape if I can only reach the bell."

Weak and shattered as he was, the old man staggered from his seat and threw himself upon Vane, who had turned to the window. The remains of those nerves of steel, which had gained him so much renown in the old days, and enabled him to undergo so many hardships, had not entirely deserted Sir Geoffry, for his grasp was rivetted on his antagonist, and Vane found it impossible to shake it off. Twice Van struck the upturned face with his clenched fist, until it was streaming with blood; but the old man still held on. At length Vane, freeing one hand, seized Sir Geoffry's loose neckcloth and twisted it round and round. At the first motion of his wrist the old man's strength suddenly relaxed, and with a groan he fell backwards.

Shaking himself free, Vane darted towards the window, but recoiled in horror as he saw his wife standing in the open air, and looking on with terror-stricken eyes.

His hesitation, however, was but for an instant, and he rushed straight at the window, pushing Madge aside and flinging her to the ground with stunning force and tore across the lawn to a point at which he had entered the plantation. So far no one had followed him. While crossing the lawn he had seen the dim outline of a figure making its way up the carriage sweep; but it had taken no notice of him, and probably, indeed, not seen him. So far then, he was safe.

The man whom Philip Vane had noticed in the carriage sweep strode steadily on until he reached the plateau on which the house stood, when he paused and looked round. The flood of light from the open window attracted his attention, and he crept towards it. Suddenly he came upon the prostrate figure of a woman, and looking beyond saw a sight calculated to frighten a stouter heart than his. Springing into the room, he gently raised Sir Geoffry's body in his arms, and was about to attempt to lay it on the couch, when the door behind him was thrown open. He heard the shouting of men and the screaming of women, felt himself suddenly pinioned, and a strong rough hand at his neck. The lamp had been overturned in the hubbub, but some of the servants had candles with them, and one of the men called for a light to look at the ruffian. But after he had raised the candle up to his captive's face, he let it drop to the ground, as he cried in heart-piercing tones:—

"Ah, wirra, wirra, Masther George!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ABANDONED.

Two hours after the event just narrated the household at Wheatcroft began to settle down into something like order again. True that here and there in the passages were still to be seen two or three women gathered together in knots, some weeping, some gesticulating, all talking. True that in the servants' hall a group comprising the gardeners, grooms, and out-door servants of the establishment, partly paralysed with horror, kept their mugs of beer suspended in the air, as they listened to the footman's thrilling narrative of his discovery of the body. True that Mr. Johnson, the butler, had a select audience in the pantry of men of his own standing, well-qualified judges of a bottle of excellent Madeira, which he thought the solemhity of the occasion warranted him in broaching. But the crowd of townspeople, which immediately on the dreadful news being bruited abroad had come surging up from Springside and spread itself around the house, standing at tip-toe to peer over the hedges, staring up at the windows and over the chimney-pots, as though expectant of some revelation from them, eagerly demanding news in feverish whispers, and charging up to the lodge gates to glare at any one going in or out of them, had dispersed. A large portion of it had followed the fly, in which the prisoner and superintendent of police, with two constables on the box, had driven away to the cells in the old Guildhall; followed it with roars of bitter execration and threats of personal violence; for not only had the dead man been well liked in Springside, but the rumor had got abroad that the murderer was his son—his son, who had always been a prodigal, a black sheep, and a castaway, and who had on more than one occasion threatened his father's life.

In the library, everything remained just as at the time of the struggle. The body, by Doctor Chenoweth's direction, had been placed upon the couch, where it lay, the dull outline of the profile and the projecting feet showing under the white sheet, which had been thrown over it. But the overturned table on which the lamp had stood—the lamp itself, bent and broken, and surrounded with a thousand particles of shattered glass; the window curtain torn away from its rings, and hanging over in a ragged festoon; the book which the dead man had been reading, and which had dropped from his hand when he first caught sight of his assailant—all these mute, inanimate objects lay just as they were at the time of the struggle. There was confusion and chaos, but there was no stain of blood on the carpet, nor anything to indicate the deadly end of the encounter that had taken place; the disorder might have been the result of some drunken frolic, save for the presence of that awful form which lay still and motionless on the couch, over which hung the pictured semblance of what it once had been in the prime of its life and the days of its glory.

It was by Captain Cleethorpe's orders that the room had been left exactly as they found it, and that the door had been locked, not to be opened until the coroner's jury assembled for the inquest. It was with the greatest difficulty that Riley had been induced to obey these orders. The soldier-servant pleaded in heart-piercing accents to be allowed to remain by the dead body of the master whom in life he had loved so well and served so faithfully. After his first wild shriek of horror and surprise when he recognized the man whom he had seized, the old man became strangely silent. In answer to the eager enquiries of the by-standers, to whom Gerald was unknown, he was compelled to admit that the young man standing there, closely guarded by two grooms whilst the assistance of the police was being summoned, was indeed Sir Geoffry Heriot's son, but more than this he would not say. He kept his back studiously turned upon the prisoner, who, deadly white, and quivering in every limb, yet preserved a certain proud appearance, and gazed fearlessly round, and seeming to ignore everything that was going on, knelt by the side of the body, and apostrophised it in simple mournful lamentation. The old man was the last of all to quit the room, and when Mr. Drage gently led him away, he broke from the kind hand that was guiding his tottering footsteps, and rushing to his own chamber, flung himself upon his bed in any agony of grief.

In the dining-room, Captain Cleethorpe and Mr. Drage were seated, one on either side the fire. The fire had been lit for the first time that season, not that the evening was chilly, but rather in the vain hope of doing something to dispel the awful gloom which hung over the entire house; but the wood was damp, and only a thin smoky tongue of flame flickered fitfully in the grate. With the same hope the butler had placed wine glasses upon the table, but they remained untouched. Mr. Drage had evidently been unable to control his emotion, there were traces of tears upon his cheeks; his head was bowed down upon his breast, and from time to time a convulsive sob shook his wasted frame. When Captain Cleethorpe was at rest, he sat biting his nether lip and pulling at the ends of his moustache, but every now and then he would rise from his chair, plunge his hands into his pockets, and wander vaguely up and down the room, occasionally pausing to shrug his shoulders and rub his forehead, and then returning to his seat with the same dazed and puzzled air.

The silence which had lasted for some time, was broken by the Captain.

"It is of no use," he said, "it is perfectly impossible for me to realise what has occurred. There was a time when I was accustomed to look upon death in every shape, and when the excitement of my life was so great, that even an occurence like this would not have struck me with any great amount of wonderment or dismay. But I am growing old I suppose, and the quiet time I have had of it down here for the last few years, has had the effect of robbing me of my pluck. I am as nervous and as weak as——"

"As I am—you were going to say," said the Rector.

"On the contrary," said Captain Cleethorpe; "I was perfectly astonished to see how you, in your weak state of health, contrived to have all your senses about you, and to give exactly such orders as should have been given, under the effect of this sudden blow. That poor fellow Riley would never have suffered anyone else to lead him from the room; and in several other instances your thoughtfulness and presence of mind were invaluable."

"I, too, am accustomed to death; though of course, not under such fearful circumstances as these," said the Rector, quietly. "I have seen more of it recently than you. Perhaps too, there is something in the fact of my knowing that, notwithstanding the little rally which he made, our poor friend was inevitably doomed; and Dr. Chenoweth had warned me that his stay with us was probably limited to two hours. But the reaction is upon me now, and I feel myself rapidly giving way."

"It seems strange," said Cleethorpe, not heeding the last remark, "that a man whose lease from nature had so nearly expired should die a violent death!"

"It is by no means certain that such was the case."

"What do you mean?" asked Cleethorpe bending forward with astonishment.

"Simply this," said the Rector, adding quietly, "don't mind me shuddering; the mere thought of the thing turns me sick. Chenoweth told me that from the cursory examination he had made of the—of the body, he found no indications of violence sufficient to bring about the fatal result."

"But I myself saw the poor face clotted with blood! said Captain Cleethorpe.

"True; but this was merely surface blood produced by the blows which had been struck. These blows, Chenoweth thinks, were probably inflicted by the hand, certainly not by any weapon. There were no wounds from which the blood could have flown; there was a slight discoloration of the neck under the cravat, as though the assassin had attempted to strangle his victim, but Chenoweth has very little doubt that the excitement of the struggle brought on an access of the heart disease under which our poor friend was gradually sinking, and that in fact he died a natural death."

"Good heavens!" cried Cleethorpe, springing to an upright posrtion from his chair. "If the doctor proves this on the trial this scoundrel will cheat the gallows!"

Mr. Drage looked up at his companion for a moment, then said, "I think you will find that the man who made the attack upon Sir Geoffry will still by the law be held liable for his death, even though Doctor Chenoweth's opinions were verified."

"How on earth do you know anything about the law?" asked Cleethorpe.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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