The Columbian.

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BLOOMSBURG, PA., FRIDAY, JULY 15, 1887.

THE COLUMBIAN, VOL. XXI, NO 28
COLUMBIA DEMOCRAT, VOL. LI, NO 17

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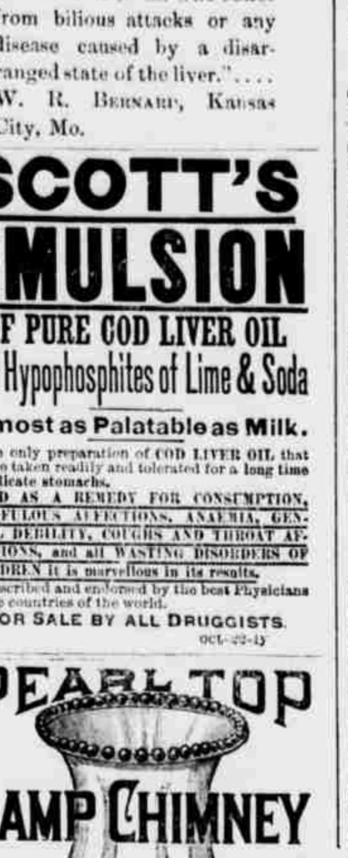

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THE WITCH'S HEAD.

By H. RIDER HAGGARD.

Eva never answered Ernest's letter. Once she began an answer, but bethought her of Florence's sage advice, and changed her mind. "He will write again," she said to herself. She did not know Ernest; his was not a nature to humble himself before a woman. Could she have seen her lover hanging about the steps of the Maritzburg postoffice when the English mail was being delivered, in order to go back to the window when the people had dispersed, and ask the tired clerk if he was "sure" that there were no more letters for Ernest Beyton, and get severely snubbed for his pains, perhaps her heart would have relented. And yet it was a performance which poor Ernest went through once a week out there in Natal.

One mail day Mr. Alston went with him.

"Well, Ernest, has it come?" he asked, as he came down the steps, a letter from Dorothy in his hand.

"No, Alston, and never will. She has thrown me over."

Mr. Alston took his arm, and walked away with him across the market square.

"Look here, my lad," he said; "the woman who deserts a man in trouble, or as soon as his back is turned, is worthless. It is a sharp lesson to learn, but, as most men have cause to know, the world is full of sharp lessons and worthless women. You know that she got your letter?"

"Yes, she told my friend so."

"Then I tell you that your Eva, or whatever her name is, is more worthless than most of them. She has been tried and found wanting. Look," he went on, pointing to a shapely Kaffer girl passing with a pot of native beer on her head, "you had better take that Intombi to wife than such a woman as this Eva. She at any rate would stand by you in trouble, and if you fell would stop to be killed over your dead body. Come, be a man, and have done with her."

"Aye, by Heaven, I will!" answered Ernest.

"That's right; and now, look here, the wagons will be at Lydonburg in a week. Let us take the post cart to-morrow and go up. Then we can have a month's widerbeeste and koodo shooting until it is safe to go into the fever country. Once you get among the big game, you won't think any more about that woman. Women are all very well in their way, but if it comes to choosing between them and big game shooting, give me the big game."

CHAPTER XX.

JEREMY'S IDEA OF A SHAKING.

Two months or so after Ernest's flight there came a letter from him to Mr. Cardus in answer to the one sent by his uncle. He thanked his uncle warmly for his kindness, and more especially for not joining in the hue and cry against him. As regards money, he hoped to be able to make a living for himself, but if he wanted any he would draw. The letter, which was short, ended thus:

"Thank Doll and Jeremy for their letters. I would answer them, but I am too down on my luck to write much; writing stirs up so many painful memories, and makes me think of all the dear folks at home more than is good for me. The fact is, my dear uncle, what between one thing and another I never was so miserable in my life, and as for loneliness I never knew what it meant before. Sometimes I wish that my cousin had hit me instead of my hitting him, and that I was dead and buried, clean out of the way. Alston, who was my second in that unhappy affair, and with whom I am going up country shooting, has been most kind to me, and has introduced me to a good many people here. They are very hospitable; everybody is hospitable in a colony; but somehow a hundred new faces cannot make up for one old one, and I should think old Atterleigh a cheerful companion beside the best of them. What is more, I feel myself an impostor intruding myself on them under an assumed name. Good by, my dear uncle. It would be difficult for me to explain how grateful I am for your goodness to me. Love to dear Doll and Jeremy. Ever your affectionate nephew,

"E. K."

All the party at Dum's Ness were much touched by this letter, more especially Dorothy, who could not bear to think of Ernest all alone out there in that strange, far off land. Her tender little heart grew all alive with love and sorrow as she lay awake at night and thought of him traveling over the great African plains. She got all the books that were to be had about South Africa and read them, so that she might be the better able to follow his life in her thoughts. One day when Florence came to see her she read her part of Ernest's letter, and when she had finished was astonished to see a tear in her visitor's keen eyes. She liked Florence the better for that tear. Could she have seen the conflict that was raging in the fierce heart of the woman before her she would have started from her as though she had been a poisonous snake. The letter touched Florence—touched her to the quick. The tale of Ernest's loneliness almost overcame her resolution, for she alone knew why he was so utterly lonely and what it was that crushed him. Had Ernest alone been concerned it is probable that she would then and there have thrown up her cruel game, but he was not alone concerned. There was her sister, who had robbed her of her lover—her sister, whose loveliness was a standing affront to her as her sweetness was a standing reproach. She was sorry for Ernest, and would have been glad to make him happier, but as that could only be done by foregoing her revenge upon her sister, Ernest must continue to suffer. And after all why should he not suffer? she argued. Did not she suffer?

When Florence got home she told Eva about the letter from her lover, but she said nothing of his evident distress. He was making friends, he expected great pleasure from his shooting—altogether he was getting on well.

Eva listened, hardened her heart and went out district visiting with Mr. Plowden.

Time went on, and no letters came from Ernest. One month, two months, six months passed, and there was no intelligence of him. Dorothy grew very anxious, and so did Mr. Cardus, but they did not speak of the matter much, except to remark that the reason, no doubt, was that he was away on his shooting excursion.

Jeremy also, in his slow way, grew intensely preoccupied with the fact that they never heard from Ernest now, and that his life was consequently a blank. He sat upon the stool in his uncle's outer office and made pretense to copy deeds and drafts, but in reality occupied his time in assiduously polishing his nails and thinking. As for the deeds and drafts he gave them to his grandfather to copy.

"It kept the old gentleman employed," he would explain to Dorothy, "and from indulging in bad thoughts about the devil."

But it was one night out duck shooting that his great inspiration came. It was a bitter night, a night on which no sane creature except Jeremy would ever have dreamed of going to shoot ducks or anything else. The marshes were partially frozen, and a fierce east wind was blowing across them; but utterly regardless of the cold, there sat Jeremy under the lee of a dike bank, listening for the sound of the duck's wings as they passed to their feeding grounds, and occasionally getting a shot at them as they crossed the moon above him. There were not many ducks, and the solitude and silence were inducive to contemplation. Ernest did not write. Was he dead? Not probable, or they would have heard of it. Where was he, then? Impossible to say, impossible to discover. Was it impossible? "Swish, swish, bang!" and down came a mallard at his feet. A quick shot, that! Yes, it was impossible; they had no means of inquiry here. The inquiry, if any, must be made there, on the other side of the water, but who was to make it? Ah, an idea struck him. Why should not he, Jeremy, make that inquiry? Why should he not go to south Africa and look for Ernest? A flight of ducks passed over head unheeded. What did he care for ducks! He had solved the problem which had been troubling him all these months. He would go to south Africa and look for Ernest. If Mr. Cardus would not give him the money, he would work his way out. Anyhow he would go. He could bear the suspense no longer.

Jeremy rose in the new found strength of his purpose, and gathering up the slain—there were only three—whispered to his retriever, and made his way back to Dum's Ness.

He found Mr. Cardus and Dorothy before the fire in the sitting room. Hard riding Atterleigh was there too, in his place in the inglenook, a riding whip in his ink stained hand, with which he was tapping his top boot. They turned as he entered, except his grandfather, who did not hear him.

"What sport have you had Jeremy," asked his sister, with a sad little smile. Her face had grown very sad of late.

"Three ducks," he answered, shortly, advancing his powerful form out of the shadows into the firelight. "I came home just as they were beginning to fly."

"You found it cold, I suppose," said Mr. Cardus, absently. They had been talking of Ernest, and he was still thinking of him.

"No, I did not think of the cold. I came home because I had an idea."

Both his hearers looked up surprised. Ideas were not very common to Jeremy, or if they were he kept them to himself.

"Well, Jeremy?" said Dorothy, inquiringly.

"Well, it is this. I cannot stand this about Ernest any longer, and I am going to look for him. If you don't give me the money," he went on, addressing Mr. Cardus almost fiercely, "I will work my way out. It is no credit to me," he added; "I lead a dog's life while I don't know where he is."

Dorothy flushed a pale pink with pleasure. Rising, she went up to her great strong brother, and standing on tiptoe managed to kiss him on the chin.

"That is like you, Jeremy, dear," she said, softly.

Mr. Cardus looked up too, and after his fashion let his eyes wander round Jeremy before he spoke.

"You shall have as much money as you like, Jeremy," he said presently, "and if you bring Ernest back safe, I will leave you £20,000"—and he struck his hand down upon his knee, an evidence of excitement which it was unusual for him to display.

"I don't want your £20,000—I want Ernest," answered the young man gruffly.

"No, I know you don't, my lad; I know you don't. But find him and keep him safe, you shall have it. Money is not to be sneezed at, let me tell you. I say keep him, for I forgot you cannot bring him back till this accursed business has blown over. When will you go?"

"By the next mail, of course. They leave every Friday; I will not waste a day. To-day is Saturday. I will sail next Friday."

"That is right; you shall go at once. I will give you a check for £500 to-morrow, and mind, Jeremy, you are not to spare money. If he has gone to the Zambesi, you must follow him. Never think of the money; I will think of that."

Jeremy soon made his preparations. These consisted chiefly of rifles. He was to leave Dum's Ness early on the Thursday. On Wednesday afternoon it occurred to him that he might as well tell Eva Ceswick that he was going in search of Ernest, and ask if she had any message. Jeremy was the only person, or thought that he was the only person, in the secret of Ernest's affection for Eva. Ernest had asked him to keep it secret, and he had kept it as secret as the dead, never breathing a word of it, even to his sister.

It was about 5 o'clock on a windy March afternoon when he set out for the Cottage. On the edge of the hamlet of Kesterwick, some 300 yards from the cliff, stood two or three little hovels, turning their naked faces to the full fury of the sea blast. He was drawing near to these when he came to a stile which gave passage over a sod wall that ran to the edge of the cliff, marking the limits of the village common. As he approached the stile the wind brought him the sound of voices—a man's and a woman's—engaged apparently in angry dispute on the further side of the wall. Instead of getting over the stile, he stepped to the right and looked over the wall and saw the new clergyman, Mr. Plowden, standing with his back toward him, and, apparently very much against her will, holding Eva Ceswick by the hand. Jeremy was too far off to overhear his words, but from his voice it was clear that Plowden was talking in an excited, masterful tone. Just then Eva turned her head a little, and he did hear what she said, her voice being so much clearer:

"No, Mr. Plowden, no! Let go my hand. Ah, why will you not take an answer?"

Just at that moment she succeeded in wrenching her imprisoned hand from his strong grasp, and, without waiting for any more words, set off toward Kesterwick almost at a run.

Jeremy was a man of slow mind, though when once his mind was made up it was of a singularly determined nature. At first he did not quite take in the full significance of the scene, but when he did a great red flush spread over his honest face and the big gray eyes sparkled dangerously. Presently Mr. Plowden turned and saw him. Jeremy noticed that the "sign of the cross" was remarkably visible on his forehead, and that his face wore an expression by no means pleasant to behold—anything but Christian, in short.

"Hullo!" he said to Jeremy; "what are you doing there?"

Before answering Jeremy put his hand on the top of the sod wall, and, vaulting over, walked straight up to the clergyman.

"I was watching you," he said, looking him straight in the eyes.

"Indeed!—an honorable employment; eavesdropping I think it is generally called."

Whatever had passed between Mr. Plowden and Eva Ceswick, it had clearly not improved the former's temper.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say."

"Well, Mr. Plowden, I may as well tell you what I mean; I am not good at talking, but I know that I shall be able to make you understand. I saw you just now assaulting Miss Ceswick."

"It is a lie!"

"That is not a gentleman-like word, Mr. Plowden; but, as you are not a gentleman, I will overlook it." Jeremy, after the dangerous fashion of the Anglo-Saxon race, always got wonderfully cool as a row thickened. "I repeat that I saw you holding her, notwithstanding her struggles to get away."

"And what is that to you, confound you?" said Mr. Plowden, shaking with fury, and raising a thick stick he held in his hand in a suggestive manner.

"Don't lose your temper, and you shall hear. Miss Eva Ceswick is engaged to my friend, Ernest Kershaw, or something very like it, and as he is not here to look after his own interests I must look after them for him."

"Ah, yes," answered Mr. Plowden, with a ghastly smile, "I have heard of that. The murderer, you mean?"

"I recommend you, Mr. Plowden, in your own interest, to be a little more careful in your terms."

"And supposing that there has been something between your—your friend?"

"Much better term, Mr. Plowden?"

"And Miss Eva Ceswick, what, I should like to know, is to prevent her having changed her mind?"

Jeremy laughed aloud, it must be admitted rather insolently, and in a way calculated to irritate people of meeker mind than Mr. Plowden.

"To any one, Mr. Plowden, who has the privilege of your acquaintance, and who also knows Ernest Kershaw, your question would seem absurd. You see, there are some people between whom there can be no comparison. It is not possible that after caring for Ernest, any woman could care for you;" and Jeremy laughed again.

Mr. Plowden's thick lips turned quite pale, the veinous cross upon his forehead throbbed till Jeremy thought that it would burst, and his eyes shone with the concentrated light of hate. His vanity was his weakest point. He controlled himself with an effort, however, though if there had been any deadly weapon at hand it might have gone hard with Jeremy.

"Perhaps you will explain the meaning of your interference and your insolence, and let me go on."

"Oh, with pleasure," answered Jeremy, with refreshing cheerfulness. "It is just this; if I catch you at any such tricks again, you shall suffer for it. One can't thrash a clergyman, and one can't fight him, because he won't fight; but look here, one can shake him, for that leaves no marks, and if you go on with these games, so sure as my name is Jeremy Jones, I will shake your teeth down your throat! Good night!" and Jeremy turned to go.

It was not wise to turn one's back upon an infuriated animal, and at that moment Mr. Plowden was nothing more. Even as he turned Jeremy remembered this, and gave himself a slue to one side. It was fortunate for him that he did so, for at that moment Mr. Plowden's heavy blackthorn stick, directed downward with all the strength of Mr. Plowden's powerful arm, passed within a few inches of his head, out of which, had he not turned, it would have probably knocked the brains. As it was, it struck the ground with such force that the jar sent it flying out of its owner's hand.

"Ah, you would!" was Jeremy's reflection as he sprung at his assailant.

Now, Mr. Plowden was a very powerful man, but he was no match for Jeremy, who in after days came to be known as the strongest man in the east of England, and so he was destined to find out. Once Jeremy got a grip of him, for his respect for the church prevented him from trying to knock him down, he seemed to crumple up like a piece of paper in his iron grasp. Jeremy could easily have thrown him, but he would not, he had his own ends in view. So he just held him tight enough to prevent his doing him (Jeremy) any serious injury, and let him struggle frantically till he thought he was sufficiently exhausted for his purpose. Then he suddenly gave him a violent twist, got behind him and set to work with a will to fulfill his promise of a shaking. Oh, what a shake that was! First of all he shook him backward and forward for Ernest's sake, then he alternated the motion and shook him from side to side for his own sake, and finally he shook him every possible way for the sake of Eva Ceswick.

It was a wonderful sight to see the great burly clergyman, his hat off, his white tie undone and his coat tails waving like streamers, bounding and gamboling on the breezy cliffs, his head, legs and arms jerking in every possible direction, like those of a galvanized frog, while behind him, his legs slightly apart to get a better grip of the ground, and his teeth firmly clinched, Jeremy shook away with the fixity of fate.

At last, getting exhausted, he stopped, and holding Mr. Plowden still, gave him a drop kick—only one. But Jeremy's leg was very strong, and he always wore thick boots, and the result was startling. Mr. Plowden rose some inches off the ground and went on his face into a furze bush.

"He will hardly like to show that honorable wound," reflected Jeremy, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow with every sign of satisfaction.

Then he went and picked his fallen enemy out of the bush, where he had nearly fainted, smoothed his clothes, tied the white tie as neatly as he could and put the wide hat on the disheveled hair. Then he sat him down on the ground to recover himself.

"Good night, Mr. Plowden, good night. Next time you wish to hit a man with a big stick, do not wait till his back is turned. Ah, I dare say your head aches. I should advise you [illegible]e and have a nice sleep."

[illegible]y departed on his way, filled [illegible] joy.

[illegible] reached the Cottage he found [illegible] a state of confusion. Miss Ceswick [illegible] appeared, been suddenly taken very seriously ill; indeed, it was feared that she had got a stroke of apoplexy. He managed, however to send up a message to Eva to say that he wished to speak to her for a minute. Presently she came down, crying.

"Oh, my poor aunt is so dreadfully ill," she said. "We think that she is dying."

Jeremy offered some awkward condolences, and indeed was much distressed. He liked old Miss Ceswick.

"I am going to south Africa to-morrow, Miss Eva," he said.

She started violently, and blushed up to her hair.

"Going to south Africa! What for?

"I am going to look for Ernest. We are afraid that something has happened to him."

"Oh, don't say that!" she said. "Perhaps he has—amusements which prevent his writing."

"I may as well tell you that I saw something of what passed between you and Mr. Plowden."

Again Eva blushed.

"Mr. Plowden was very rude," she said.

"So I thought; but I think that he is sorry for it now."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I nearly shook his ugly head off for him."

"Oh, how could you?" Eva asked, severely; but there was no severity on her face.

Just then Florence's voice was heard calling imperatively.

"I must go," said Eva.

"Have you any message for Ernest if I find him?"

Eva hesitated.

"I know all about it," said Jeremy, considerately turning his head.

"Oh, no, I have no message—that is—oh, tell him that I love him dearly!" and she turned and fled up stairs.

CHAPTER XXI.

FLORENCE ON MARRIAGE.

Miss Ceswick's seizure turned out to be even worse than was anticipated. Once she appeared to regain consciousness, and began to mutter something, then she sunk back into a torpor, out of which she never woke again.

It was fortunate that her condition was not such as to require the services of the clergyman, for Mr. Plowden was for some days after the events described in the last chapter not in a condition to give them. Whether it was the shaking, or the well planted kick, or the shock to his system, it is impossible to say, but he was in the upshot constrained to keep his bed for several days. Indeed, the first service that he took was on the occasion of the opening of the ancient Ceswick vault to receive the remains of the recently deceased lady. The only territorial possession which remained to the Ceswicks was their vault. Indeed, as Florence afterward remarked to her sister, there was a certain irony in the reflection that of all their wide acres there remained only the few square feet of soil which for centuries had covered the bones of the race.

When their aunt was dead and buried the two girls went back to the Cottage, and were very desolate. They had both of them loved the old lady in their separate ways, more especially Florence, both because she possessed the deeper nature of the two and because she had lived the longest with her.

But the grief of youth at the departure of age is not inconsolable, and after a month or so they conquered the worst of their sorrow. Then it was that the question what they were to do came prominently to the fore. Such little property as their aunt had possessed was equally divided between them, and the Cottage left to their joint use. This gave them enough to live on in their quiet way, but it undoubtedly left them in a very lonely and unprotected position. Such as it was, however, they, or rather Florence, for she managed all the business, decided to make the best of it. At Kesterwick they were, at any rate, known, and it was, they felt, better to stay there than to float away and become waifs and strays on the great sea of English life. So they settled to stay.

Florence had, moreover, her own reasons for staying. She had come to the conclusion that it would be desirable that her sister Eva should marry Mr. Plowden. Not that she liked Mr. Plowden—her lady's instincts rose up in rebellion against the man—but if Eva did not marry him, it was probable that she would in the long run marry Ernest, and Ernest, Florence swore, she should not marry. To prevent such a marriage was the main purpose of her life. Her jealousy and hatred of her sister had become a part of herself; the gratification of her revenge was the evil star by which she shaped her course. It may seem a terrible thing that so young a woman could give the best energies of her life to such a purpose, but it was none the less the truth.

Hers was a wild, strange nature, a nature capable of violent love and violent hate; the same pendulum could swing with equal ease to each extreme. Eva had robbed her of her lover; she would rob Eva, and put the prize out of her reach, too. Little she recked of the wickedness of her design, for where in the long record of human crime is there a wickedness to surpass the deliberate separation, for no good reason, of two people who love each other with all their hearts? Surely there is none. She knew this, but she did not hesitate on that account. She was not hypocritical. She made no excuses to herself. She knew well that on every ground it was best that Eva should marry Ernest, and pursue her natural destiny, happy in his love and in her own. But she would have none of it. If once they should meet again the game would pass out of her hands, for the weakest woman grows strong of purpose when she has her lover's arm to lean on. Florence realized this, and determined that they should never set eyes on each other until an impassable barrier in the shape of Mr. Plowden had been raised between the two. Having thus finally determined on the sacrifice, she set about whetting the knife.

One day, a month or so after Miss Ceswick was buried, Mr. Plowden called at the Cottage on some of the endless details of which district visiting was the parent. He had hardly seen Eva since that never to be forgotten day, when he had learned what Jeremy's ideas of shaking were, for the very good reason that she had carefully kept out of his way.

So it came to pass that when, looking out of the window on the afternoon in question, she saw the crown of a clerical hat coming along the road, Eva promptly gathered up her work and commenced a hasty retreat to her bedroom.

"Where are you going to, Eva?" asked her sister.

"Upstairs—here he comes."

"He! who is 'he?'"

"Mr. Plowden, of course."

"And why should you run away because Mr. Plowden is coming?"

"I do not like Mr. Plowden."

"Really, Eva, you are too bad. You know what a friendless position we are in just now, and you go and get up a dislike to one of the few men we know. It is very selfish of you and most unreasonable."

At that moment the front door bell rang, and Eva fled.

Mr. Plowden on entering looked round the room with a somewhat disappointed air.

"If you are looking for my sister," said Florence, "she is not very well."

"Indeed, I am afraid that her health is not good; she is so often indisposed."

Florence smiled, and they dropped into the district visiting. Presently, however, Florence dropped out again.

"By the way, Mr. Plowden, I want to tell you of something I heard the other day, and which concerns you. Indeed, I think that it is only right that I should do so. I heard that you were seen talking to my sister, not very far from the Titheburgh abbey cottages, and that she—she ran away from you. Then Mr. Jones jumped over the wall and also began to talk with you. Presently he also turned, and, so said my informant, you struck at him with a heavy stick, but missed him. Thereupon a tussle ensued, and you got the worst of it."

"He irritated me beyond all endurance," broke in Mr. Plowden, excitedly.

"Oh, then the story is true?"

Mr. Plowden saw that he had made a fatal mistake, but it was too late to deny it.

"To a certain extent," he said, sulkily. "That young ruffian told me that I was not a gentleman."

"Really! Of course that was unpleasant. But how glad you must feel that you missed him, especially as his back was turned. It would have looked so bad for a clergyman to be had up for assault, or worse, wouldn't it?"

Mr. Plowden turned pale and bit his lip. He began to feel that he was in the power of this quiet, dignified young woman, and the feeling was not pleasant.

"And it would not look very well if the story got round here, would it? I mean even if it was not known that you hit at him with the stick when he was not looking, because, you see, it would sound so absurd! The idea of a clergyman, more than six feet high, being shaken like a naughty child! I suppose Mr. Jones is very strong?"

Mr. Plowden winced beneath her mockery, and rising seized his hat, but she motioned him back to his chair.

"Don't go yet," she said. "I wanted to tell you that you ought to be much obliged to me for thinking of all this for you. I thought that it would be painful to you to have the story all over the country side, so I nipped it in the bud."

Mr. Plowden groaned in spirit. If these were the results of a story nipped in the bud, what would its uninjured bloom be like?

"Who told you?" he asked brusquely. "Jones went away."

"Yes. How glad you must be, by the way, that he is gone! But it was not Mr. Jones; it was a person who oversaw the difference of opinion. No, never mind who it was. I have found means to silence that person."

Little did Mr. Plowden guess that during the whole course of his love scene and the subsequent affair with Jeremy there had leaned gracefully in an angle of the sod wall, not twenty yards away, a figure uncommonly resembling that of an ancient mariner in an attitude of the most intense and solemn contemplation; but so it was.

"I am grateful to you, Miss Ceswick."

"Thank you, Mr. Plowden, it is refreshing to meet with true gratitude; it is a scarce flower in this world; but really I don't deserve any. The observer who oversaw the painful scene between you and Mr. Jones also oversaw a scene preceding it that, so far as I can gather, seems to have been hardly less painful in its way."

Mr. Plowden colored, but said nothing.

"Now, you see, Mr. Plowden, I am left in rather a peculiar position as regards my sister; she is younger than I am, and has always been accustomed to look up to me, so, as you will easily understand, I feel my responsibilities to weigh upon me. Consequently I feel bound to ask you what I am to understand from the report of my informant?"

"Simply this, Miss Ceswick: I proposed to your sister and she refused me."

"Indeed! you were unfortunate that afternoon."

"Miss Ceswick," went on Mr. Plowden, after a pause, "if I could find means to induce your sister to change her verdict, would my suit have your support?"

Florence raised her piercing eyes from her work and for a second fixed them on the clergyman's face.

"That depends, Mr. Plowden."

"I am well off," he went on, eagerly, "and I will tell you a secret. I have bought the advowson of this living; I happened to hear that it was going and got it at a bargain. I don't think that Halford's life is worth five years' purchase."

"Why do you want to marry Eva, Mr. Plowden?" asked Florence, ignoring this piece of information; "you are not in love with her?"

"In love! No, Miss Ceswick. I don't think that sensible men fall in love; they leave that to boys and women!"

"Oh! Then why do you want to marry Eva? It will be best to tell me frankly, Mr. Plowden."

He hesitated, and then came to the conclusion that with a person of Florence's penetration frankness was the best game.

"Well, as you must know, your sister is an extraordinarily beautiful women."

"And would therefore form a desirable addition to your establishment?"

"Precisely," said Mr. Plowden. "Also," he went on, "she is a distinguished looking woman, and quite the lady."

Florence shuddered at the phrase.

"And would therefore give you social status, Mr. Plowden?"

"Yes. She is also sprung from an ancient family."

Florence smiled, and looked at Mr. Plowden with an air that said more plainly than any words, "Which you clearly are not."

"In short, I am anxious to get married, and I admire your sister Eva more than anybody I ever saw."

"All of which are very satisfactory reasons, Mr. Plowden; all you have to do is to convince my sister of the many advantages you have to offer her, and—to win her affection."

"Ah, Miss Ceswick, that is just the point. She told me that her affections were irredeemably engaged, and that she had none to give. If only I have the opportunity, however, I shall hope to be able to distance my rival."

Florence looked at him scrutinizingly as she answered:

"You do not know Ernest Kershaw, or you would not be so confident."

"Why, am I not as good as this Ernest?" he asked; for Florence's remark, identical as it was with that of Jeremy, wounded his vanity intensely.

"Well, Mr. Plowden, I do not want to be rude, but it is impossible for me to conceive a woman's affections being won away from Ernest Kershaw by you. You are so very different."

If Mr. Plowden wanted a straightforward answer he had certainly got it. For some moments he sat in sulky silence, and then he said:

"I suppose, if that is the case, there is nothing to be done."

"I never said that. Women are frequently married whose affections are very much engaged elsewhere. You know how they win their wives in savage countries, Mr. Plowden; they catch them. Marriage by capture is one of the oldest institutions in the world."

"Well?"

"Well, the same institution still obtains in England, only we don't call it by that name. Do you suppose that no women are hunted down nowadays? Ah, very many are; the would be husband heads the pack, and all the loving relatives swell its cry."

"You mean that your sister can be hunted down," he said, bluntly.

"I! I mean nothing except that the persistent suitor on the spot often has a better chance than the lover at a distance, however dear he may be."

Then Mr. Plowden took his leave. Florence watched him walking down the garden path.

"I am glad Jeremy shook you soundly," she said, aloud. "Poor Eva!"

[TO BE CONTINUED IN OUR NEXT.]

The Street Car Conductor Talks.

The callow conductor poked his head into the car and said in a loud, distinct tone, "Fourteenth street station."

"When that young fellow knows his business he'll say, 'Fourteenth street,'" commented the veteran of the road, who had just informed the passengers that the street they had reached was "Teenth."

"Know any funny stories? See that gentleman in the second seat there? He's a broker, and a great covey for practical jokes. He's getting fat now, and will die of apoplexy one of these days laughing over his own fakes. When he goes from his house or office to take a train, he will walk very leisurely until he is within a few yards of the station, when he will suddenly break into a run and rush up the stairs. If there's one thing more than another that a man hates to miss it is an elevated train, and when the fellows behind him see the broker begin to run, every Tom, Dick and Harry of them within five blocks rushes pellmell to the station. The broker appears to enjoy it. I've heard say that running was good exercise; but it seems to make some men swear a great deal. Haven't they got onto it by this time? Young man, when you have lived as many years in the world as I have, you will find out that nothing that appeals to the gullibility of human nature ever becomes a chestnut.

"Yes, I'm somewhat of a philosopher, but it was the profession that made me so. You will notice that a woman never gets out of this end of the car. It doesn't matter even if she is in the rear seat, when she wants to get out she will push her way right through the car, though it is packed like a sardine box. Is it superstition or fashion? Well, that's hard to say. In a horse car she will always walk out the other way, but perhaps in that case she is afraid of the horses."—New York Sun.

The Divers in Torres Strait.

No white diver ever tried pearl fishing in Torres strait who could begin to fill the place of the amphibious natives. They work for hours at a time, at depths of 90 to 100 feet under water. They are more venturesome, too, than the white divers, and think nothing of sticking their hands into all the holes in the coral, although the marine monsters they find at these depths are not always pleasant acquaintances to stir up.

The white divers were found to be useless as soon as the shallow waters around the island were worked out. When the fishers had to go out to sea for shell, the black fellows proved that they could stay under longer and go deeper than the whites. The result was that they drove their white competitors out of the business. The supply of divers for the purposes of the first class pearl shell trade is not abundant even among the natives, and the rivalry for their services is so great that they command enormous wages. Many of them get $100 a month and a good percentage of the pearls they find. Black fellows who can stay below many hours in ninety feet of water often earn from $2,000 to $2,500 a year, though in any other business they could not command $4 a week. After eight or nine months' hard fishing they usually strike work, whether the bosses like it or not, and off they post in parties of five or six to Sydney, where they lead riotous lives for a month or six weeks until all their money is spent. Agents of the white employers always go along to induce them to spend their cash as fast as possible and get back to work again.—New York Sun.

An Artist's Dance.

Everybody knows of Edwin A. Abbey, the clever artist whose drawings for Harper's of "She Stoops to Conquer," "Sally in Our Alley," and this month of "Kitty of Coleraine," are so much admired. His friends say that it is one of Mr. Abbey's little eccentricities that whenever some piece of work just finished particularly pleases him, he gives vent to his feelings in some utterly unconventional way. Not long ago a lady called on him just while he was finishing the best of the Kitty of Coleraine pictures—"The Devil a Pitcher was Whole in Coleraine." He was just in the working mood, so he begged her to sit down for a few minutes until he had finished.

She sat down, and presently Abbey forgot all about her. He worked and worked, and finally he completed the picture. He stepped back, took a good look, then gave a long drawn whistle of satisfaction. The next moment the whistle brightened up into a rattling melody, and Abbey "did" a first class jig that would have done honor to a professional. The lady, surprised, but not to be outdone, commenced to "pat," but that recalled the artist to himself. He turned and saw the lady, flushed slightly, and apologized. But the apology wasn't necessary, for it isn't every one who has the honor of seeing one of America's leading artists doing a little "pas seul."—Baltimore American.

The World's Commercial Center.

Occasionally one meets some New Yorker who has philosophically studied the future of this great metropolis. Such a man is Simon Stevens, the attorney, who says: "It is a curious thing in the study of the world's history to see how the commercial center has shifted from time to time in a general course around the globe. You can go back to a time when Antwerp was the center of the world's commerce. Next Amsterdam held the threads of commercial venture. Then the center was shifted to Liverpool. Now it is London, and next it will be New York. A careful study of the world's commerce at the present time gives sure indications that the power and prestige of England in her commercial relations is beginning to be shaken, while the commercial empire is drifting across the Atlantic to the metropolis of the new world."—New York Tribune.

An Officer on the Run.

The city marshal of Portsmouth, N. H., started for the train one day recently and had to run for it. Half a hundred persons seeing the officer run supposed he was after a criminal and started in to help him, and by the time the perspiring marshal had reached the depot two or three hundred men and boys were close at his heels. There were a great many persons in that crowd who felt like having themselves kicked when the marshal told them what he was running for.—Chicago Times.

An Extraordinary Accident.

An extraordinary accident is reported from the neighborhood of Maidenstone, England. A lad 8 years of age was flying a kite when he stepped backward into a forty-foot quarry, to the great horror of the bystanders. Fortunately for the little fellow the string of the kite was tight around his wrist, and the kite, acting as a parachute, effectually broke the violence of the fall and he was only slightly bruised.

The Gettysburg Oration.

Edward McPherson denies that he told an interviewer he rode with Lincoln to Gettysburg and urged him to prepare a speech, and that in consequence of the urging Lincoln wrote his great speech on his knee. He expresses the belief that Lincoln prepared his great speech after he reached Gettysburg in a bed room, but utterly repudiates the car story.

Dion Boucicault says that one reason why he retains his youth is because "drink writes no wrinkles" on his brow. He never was tipsy in his life.

Essaying the Knock Out Blow.

"The reason why so many pugilists are breaking their arms in fights," said a local boxer, "is found in their crazy recklessness to get in a knock out blow. This blow is aimed at the jugular vein, and the pugilist, in attempting to accomplish this feat, often strikes too high, driving his hand with terrific force against his opponent's skull and snapping the big bone in his wrist as though it were a pipe stem. It often happens, too, that the pugilist essaying the knock out blow drives his hand against his opponent's elbow, which has been thrown up as a guard. This proves almost as disastrous to the aggressor as the cranium hit. It is time that this swinging knock out blow was discarded. A straight punch from the shoulder was good enough for the old timers. It ought to be good enough now."—Chicago Herald.

A Group of "Earthquakes."

At a fancy dress ball in Paris the great success of the evening was accorded to a group of "earthquakers," a party of young men who were attired in overcoats, crush hats and nightgowns, while each of them carried a black leather handbag. The realism and appropriateness of this disguise called forth much laughter and applause.—Chicago Times.

Mary Clemmer's Contract.

Mary Clemmer once entered into a contract to write a column a day for three years, on any subject assigned her. She never failed for a day to fulfill her task, which included every sort of subject, from book reviews and political articles to a common advertising paragraph. During the last year of the contract she received a salary of $5,000.—Phila. Call.