COUNTRY LUCK

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CHAPTER XIII.
"WHILE YET AFAR OFF."

THINNER and thinner became the roll of bank notes in Philip Hayn's pocket; nearer and nearer came the day when he must depart from the city—depart without any hope that he might ever return. The thought was intolerable; but what could be done to banish it? He might again, and several times, make excuses to leave home and come to New York for a day or two, perhaps on Sol Mantring's sloop, and keep up after a fashion the acquaintance he had made, but to remain in the city any length of time and spend money as he had been doing, was not to be thought of; the money could not be taken from the family purse or saved in any way that he could devise.

Oh that he might speculate! Oh that the people who had thought of Hayn farm as a site for a cottage village would make haste to decide and purchase, so the family's property might be in money instead of land—solid earth, which could not be spent while in its earthy condition. Oh that he might at least find occupation in New York; he would deny himself anything for the sake of replacing himself on the farm by a laborer, who would be fully as useful with two hands as he, if he might remain in the city. Why had he never had the sense to study any business but farming? There were two stores and a factory at Haynton; had he taken employment in either of these, as he had been invited to do, he might have learned something that would be of avail in New York.

But, alas! it was too late. He must go back to the farm—go away from Lucia. How should he say farewell to her? Could he ask her to accept an occasional letter from him and to reply? Would the Tramlays want to spend the next summer at Hayn farm? he wondered. Should they come and Lucia see him carrying a pail of pea pods to the pig sty, or starting off with oil skins and a big black basket for a day's fishing off shore, would not her pretty lip curl in disdain? Or if the family wanted to go to the beach for a bath, would he come in from the fields in faded cotton shirt and trousers and bandless old straw hat to drive them down?

No; none of these things should occur. The Tramlays should not again board at Hayn farm, unless he could manage in some way to be away from home at the time. He would oppose it with all his might. And yet, what could he say by way of explanation to his parents? There are some things that one cannot explain—not if one is a young man who has suddenly had his head turned by change of scene.

How he should say farewell to Lucia troubled him a great deal, particularly as the time was approaching rapidly. To tell her of his love would be unmanly, while he was unable to carry love forward to its natural fruition; but, on the other hand, would it be right for him to take mere friendly leave after having betrayed himself over her hand at the carriage window? And if her manifestations of jealousy at the Dinon party meant anything more than mere desire to monopolize his attention, would she not hate him if he went away without some expression of tenderness?

The longer he cudgeled his wits the more inactive they became. He resolved to call at once and trust to chance, and perhaps a merciful Providence, to help him to a proper leave taking. He wondered if she would be at home; he had heard her recapituiate a succession of engagements which seemed to him to dispose of a week of afternoons and evenings. He would seek her father and ask him when Lucia could be found at home.

He acted at once upon the impulse, but Tramlay was not at his office. As the time was about noon, Phil strolled to the restaurant to which the iron merchant had taken him. Tramlay was not there, so the young man took a seat and ordered luncheon. Just as it was served, Marge passed him, without seeing him, and a young man at a table behind Phil said to his companion:

"That Marge is a lucky dog. Have you heard that he's going to marry Tramlay's daughter? She'll be rich; iron is looking up."

"Is that so," asked the other. "When did it come out?"

"I don't know whether it's announced yet," was the reply, "but one of the fellows at the bank told me, and I suppose he got it from Marge; he knows him very well."

Phil's appetite departed at once: it seemed to him his life would accompany it. His mind was in a daze; his heart was like lead. His feelings reached his face, and, abstracted and stupid though he felt, he could not help seeing that he was attracting attention, so he paid his bill, went out, and hurried along the street. The first distinct impression of which he was conscious was that there need no longer be any doubt about how to say goodby to Lucia; a formal courteous note would suffice; he would not trust himself to meet her. Could he blame her? No; he certainly had no claim upon her heart, nor any reason to really believe she had regarded him as more than a pleasant acquaintance. She had let him kiss her hand; but had not she herself taught him that this was merely an old time form of salutation? She had the right to marry whom she would; yet Marge—The thought of that man—that lazy, listless, cold, dry stick—being bound for life to a merry, sensitive soul like Lucia drove him almost mad.

Well, the blow was a blessing in one way; now he could go back to the farm without any fears or hesitation. Go back?—yes, he would hasten back; he could not too soon put behind him the city and all its memories. After all, it was not the city he had dreaded to leave; it was Lucia, and whatever through her seemed necessary. Now that she must be forgotten, all else might go. He would go back to the hotel, pack his clothes—how he longed for the money they had cost him!—write a line to Lucia, and take the first train for home. Home! How shamefully he had forgotten it in the past fortnight! Perhaps this disappointment was his punishment; if so, although severe, it was no more than just. Home! Why, he would rejoice to be once more inside his dirty oilskin fishing clothes—to obliterate the city man he had been aping for a fortnight. Heaven had evidently intended him to be a drudge; well, heaven's will should be done.

Thus reasoned the spirit; but the flesh did not rapidly conform to its leader's will. Phil's teeth and lips were twitching; he felt it was so; he noticed that people stared at him, just as they did while he was in the restaurant. This at least he could escape, and he would; so he turned into the first side street, to avoid the throng. Within a moment he feared he was losing his reason, for it seemed to him that people were pursuing him. There certainly was an unusual clatter of hurrying feet behind him, but—pshaw!—it was probably a crowd running to a fire or a fight. The noise increased; several wilds yells arose, and some one shouted, "Stop thief!" Then Phil's heart stopped beating, for a heavy hand fell on his shoulder. He started violently aside, but there was no shaking off the grasp of that heavy hand; he looked wildly around, and into the eyes of his father.

"Bless you, old boy, how—how fast you do walk!" panted the old man. "I was 'way up—on the other side of the road when—when I saw you turnin' down here. Sol Mantring said I wouldn't know you—if I saw you. Why—I knowed you at first sight."

"Wot's he done?" bleated a small boy in front, for the crowd had already surrounded the couple.

"What's who done?" asked the old man, angrily, after he had looked around and seen the crowd. "Why, you tarnal loafers, can't a man run down the road to catch up with his own son without you thinkin' there's somethin' wrong? I've heerd that in New York ev'ry man suspects ev'ry other man of bein' a thief. Git out! go about your business, if you've got any."

The crowd, looking sadly disappointed and disgusted, slowly dispersed, one very red faced man remarking that the entire proceeding had been "a durned skin."

The father and son walked along until comparatively alone; then the father said:

"Somethin's wrong, old boy. What is it?"

Phil did not reply.

"Out of money an' afraid to send me word?"

"No," Phil replied.

"Then it's her, eh?"

Phil nodded. His father squeezed his hand and after a moment continued:

"Proposed to her an' been refused?"

"No," said Phil; "another man has proposed and been accepted."

"Dear! dear!" sighed the old man. "An' she's dead in love with him, I s'pose?"

"I never saw any sign of it," said Phil, his face wrinkling. "I don't see how she can; he's a dry old stick."

"Rich?"

"Um-m—I don't know," said Phil.

"Know him?"

"Yes, a little. Mr. Tramlay says he lives on his income."

"Easy enough for a bachelor to do that in New York," said the old man, "an' still not have much."

They walked in silence a few minutes; then the old man continued:

"Sure you weren't mistaken, bub?"

"About what?"

"Sure you reelly fell in love? Sure you warn't only in a fit of powerful admiration? Lots of young fellers get took in that way an' spend a lifetime bein' sorry for it."

Phil shook his head.

"She's mighty good lookin'; I know it. I can take in the p'ints of a gal as good as if she was a colt. Good stock in her, too; that father of hern is full of grit an' go, an' her mother's a lady. Still, you might have been kind o' upset, an' not knowed your own mind as well as you might."

"Father," said Phil, "you remember what you've often said about your horse Black Billy?—'There's only one horse in the world, and that's Billy.' Well, for me there's only one girl in the world—Lucia."

"That's the Hayn blood, all over," said the old man, with a laugh that grated harshly on Phil's ear.

"And I've lost her," Phil continued. "Don't let's talk about her any more. Don't remind me of her."

"Don't remind you?" shouted the old man, stopping short on the sidewalk. "See here, young man," the father continued, shaking his forefinger impressively, "if I was you, an' felt like you, do you know what I'd do?"

"No," said Phil, amazed at this demonstration by a man whom he scarcely ever had seen excited.

"Well, sir, I'd stay right on the ground, an' I'd cut that other feller out, or I'd die a-tryin'. You'll never be good for anythin' if you don't do one thing or t'other."

Phil smiled feebly and replied: "You don't understand; there are a great many obstacles that I can't explain."

"'There's a lion in the way, says the slothful man; I shall be slain,'" quoted the old man from the Book which he had accepted as an all sufficient guide to faith and practice.

"I've made a fool of myself," said Phil sullenly, "and I want to go home and take my punishment. I want to go by the first train I can get. I've a long list of things I've promised to buy for different people, but I can't endure New York another day."

The old man studied his son's face keenly for a while, as they resumed their walk; then he said, gently:

"Perhaps it's best that way. Go ahead. Give me your list an' I'll 'tend to it. I'll take a day or two in New York myself; it's a long time since I had one. Give us the list and get out."

Phil fumbled in his pockets for the memoranda that he had neglected so long. Then a new fear came to him, and he said:

"Father, you know about everything, and can do almost anything you attempt, but don't go to trying to mend this wretched affair of mine: if I"——

"What?" interrupted the old man. "Meddle in a love scrape? Have I got to be this old to be suspected by my son of bein' an old fool? No, sir; I never did any love makin' except for myself, an' I'm not goin' to begin now. You go home an' brace up; I reckon you need a mouthful of country air to set your head right."

CHAPTER XIV.
GOING HOME.

PHILIP HAYN accounted it a special mercy of Providence that the impulse to leave New York had been so timed that the train which he caught would land him at Haynton station after dark. He did not feel like seeing old acquaintances that day; he felt that his face was being a persistent, detestable telltale, and that he could not train and command it while so busy with his thoughts. If seen at all, he intended to offer as few suggestions for remark as possible; so, before leaving his hotel, he divested himself of every visible trace of city raiment, and clothed himself in the Sunday suit which Haynton had seen often enough to pass without remark. He could not restore his shorn superfluity of hair, but he again put on that hat which for a year had been his best at home. He even went so far as to leave for his father a new trunk which he had purchased, putting his own personal property into the antique carpet-bag—real carpet—which the old farmer had brought down.

Lastly, that he might not appear in the least like a city youth, he carried with him two religious weeklies which some society for the reformation of hotel boarders had caused to be placed in his box in the hotel office, and he read them quite faithfully on the train.

Reminders of the old life to which he was returning came to him thick and fast when the train got fairly out of the city. In a field he saw a man stripping the leaves from standing corn stalks, and although the view was what photographers term "instantaneous," it was long enough to show the shabby attire, brown face, shocking bad hat, clumsy boots, and general air of resignation that marked all farmers in the vicinity of Haynton. Two or three miles farther along he saw a half grown boy picking up stones in a field of thin soil and adding them to piles which were painfully significant of much similar work in past days.

Down in a marshy pasture beside the railway embankment two men were digging a drainage ditch; they were too far apart to be company for each other, and too muddy to be attractive to themselves. Phil at once recalled much work of like nature he had done, and more that still depended upon his muscle to make the entire acreage of Hayn farm available for cultivation. Estimating according to past experience and newly acquired knowledge, he found that the number of days of work required, if paid for at the lowest rate of common laborers in New York, would amount to twice as much as the value of the land when improved. It was easy to see why farmers never got rich. Still, the farm was his natural sphere; he had been born to it. Heaven, in arranging his life career, knew in advance what he was fit for, and his own difference of opinion would probably be explained away in time by the logic of events which he could not foresee.

In a dusty road near a little station at which the train stopped he saw two farmers' wagons meet, stop, and their owners engage in conversation. Thus would he, the observer, soon be obtaining whatever news he acquired; instead of every morning opening a newspaper recording the previous day's doings throughout the civilized world, he would be restricted to stories of how Joddles' horse, who had cast himself, was getting along with his scraped hip joint, and when Bragfew thought he might be likely to kill a beef if he could find somebody to take a fore quarter which hadn't been spoken for yet, the chances of Nemy Perkins being "churched" for calling Deacon Thewser a sneaking old sheep thief, and much more information equally entertaining and instructive. Well, why not? What better news would he himself be likely to offer? He was not going to fall into the sin, warning of which had been given by one of the apostles, of esteeming himself more highly than his neighbors; some people in the vicinity of Haynton did not seem much better than fools, but probably none of them had ever been so idiotic as to fall in love with women far above them in social station and consequently far beyond their reach.

Farther and farther the train left the city behind; more and more desolate the country appeared. It was late October; all crops had been harvested, and many trees had shed all their leaves; the only green was that of grass and evergreens, the latter looking almost funereal under the overcast sky. The train entered a region of pine barrens, through openings in which some sand dunes could occasionally be seen. At times when the train stopped the wind brought up the sound of the surf pounding the beach not far away, and the noise was not as cheering as Phil had often thought it in earlier days.

Then empty seats in the cars became numerous. All city people who lived out of town had already left the train, and the few who got on afterward belonged in the vicinage. Phil had noted the change as it gradually occurred, and to a well dressed couple, the last of their kind, who occupied seats not far in front of him, his gaze clung as mournfully as a toper's eye when fixed upon the last drops that his bottle can give him.

Finally they too disappeared, and their place was taken by a sallow country woman in a home made brown dress and a gray bonnet trimmed with green ribbons. He tried to console himself with the thought that the car would soon be too dark for colors to be annoying, and that Haynton was but an hour distant. Then the brilliant thought came to him that he might change the scene. He acted upon it, went into the next car, and took a seat. The rustic in front of him turned his head, stared, and drawled:

"Gret Gosh! Ef it ain't Phil Hayn, then I'm a clam shell! Well, I'd never have knowed ye ef twa'n't fer your father's mouth an' chin." Then the rustic deliberately gathered his feet and knees into his seat, and twisted his body until his shoulders were almost squared to the rear of the car, his whole air being that of a man who had suddenly found a job greatly to his liking, and one to which he intended at once to address himself with all his might.

"Been down to York, eh?" the rustic continued, after getting his frame satisfactorily braced.

"Yes."

The rustic looked so steadily, earnestly, hungrily into the face before him that Phil hastily looked through the window. Some men have been impressed by the historic "stony British stare," others have admired the penetrating glance of the typical detective, or the frontiersman "sizing up" a new arrival; but the Briton, the detective and the frontiersman combined could not equal the stare of the countryman whose tastes tend toward the affairs of his neighbors.

"York's a good deal of a town, I s'pose," the countryman remarked, after some earnest scrutiny.

"Yes."

"Find anythin' to pay the 'xpenses of the trip?" This after another soulful gaze.

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Carpet bag seems pooty well stuffed," said the tormentor, after having transferred his glance for a moment to the old satchel that occupied half of Phil's seat.

"Mother wanted a few things that she couldn't find at any of our stores," said Phil.

"See anybody ye knowed?" was the next question, after the stare had returned to its principal duty.

"Not much," Phil replied, with a shudder, well knowing to whom the man alluded. "How did your turnips average on that new ground, Mr. Bloke?"

"Only so so. Ye put up at old—what the somethin' was his name?—oh, Trammerly—ye stopped with him, I s'pose?"

"Of course not. Mr. Tramlay doesn't take boarders."

"Ort to hev been willin' to take ye in for a few days, though, I should think, considerin'. Didn't he even offer to?"

"No. Why should he?" asked Phil, beginning to lose his temper. "He paid his way while he was here; I paid mine in New York."

"Oh!" drawled the rustic; then he put on a judicial air and devoted two or three minutes to analyzing Phil's statement and logic. Either accepting both or mentally noting an exception for future use he continued:

"His gal's as pooty as ever, I s'pose?"

"Which one?"

The questioner's gaze changed somewhat; by various complicated twitches he slowly worked the blankness out of his face and replaced it by an attempt at a smile; then he slowly extended a long arm over the back of the seat, and unfolded a massive forefinger, which he thrust violently into the region of Phil's vest pocket as with a leer he exclaimed:

"Kee!"

"Don't be a jackass!" exclaimed Phil, frowning angrily at the fellow. Instead of being abashed the boor seemed highly delighted, and exclaimed, in somewhat the accent of the animal Phil had named:

"Haw, haw, haw! Give ye the mitten, did she?"

"It'll be time for any girl to give me the mitten when I give her the chance, Mr. Bloke," said Phil, picking up his bag and starting toward another seat.

"Oh, set down; I didn't think ye was the kind o' feller to go an' git mad at an old neighbor that's only showin' a friendly interest in ye," said the man, in tones of reproach. "Set down. Why, I hain't asked ye half what I want to; you've gone an' put a lot of it out of my head, too, by flyin' off of the handle in that way."

"Haynton!" shouted the conductor, as the train stopped with a crash. Phil hastily rose; so did his tormentor, whose face was an absolute agony of appeal as he said:

"Lemme help ye up to the house with yer bag. I j'st remembered that Naomi has been at me for a week to ask your mother somethin' when I druv by. Might ez well do it to-night as any time; then I can give ye a friendly lift."

"I'm not going to walk out home," said Phil, hastily, "if I can"——

"Well, I'd jest as lieve ride," said the man.

"Two men and a driver and a big bag aren't going to squeeze into a buggy with seats for only two, if I can help it," said Phil.

"Say," whispered the native, confidentially, as the two reached the platform, "I b'lieve I know where I can borry a team as easy as fallin' off of a log. Jest you stand here a minute or two—all the boys is dyin' to see you—an' I'll hook up an' be back."

The man disappeared with great rapidity for a being of his structural peculiarities. Phil looked quickly about, dashed across the track and under some sheltering trees in a small unlighted street, then he made a detour through the outskirts of the little village to reach, without being observed, the road to his father's farm. The sound of an approaching wagon caused him to hide quickly behind a clump of wild blackberries; but when he saw the driver was not his persecutor he again took the road, muttering, as he plodded along:

"Bloke isn't half through with me yet, he said to himself. And he is only one of fifty or sixty men a good deal like him—to say nothing of women! 'My punishment is greater than I can bear.'"

Thanks to the charity of deep twilight, there was nothing unsightly about the familiar road, and as Phil neared the mass of shadow from which two lights gleamed just as they had done nightly ever since he had first approached his home after dark, his heart gave a mighty bound. Then his heart reproached him that he had thought so little about his mother during his absence that he had not brought her even the simplest present. He would write back to his father to get him something which he knew would please her; and in the mean time he would try to give her more love than ever before. If he could not have a certain new occupant for his heart, he would at least be as much as possible to those whom the Lord had given him.

Once within the gate, his better self took entire possession of him. Neither his mother nor his brothers should find him other than he had ever been—affectionate, cheerful and attentive. He stole softly to a window of the sitting room, to see if the family were alone.

He saw his two little brothers absorbed in a game of checkers. His mother sat by the table, reading a letter which Phil recognized by the hotel's printed heading; it was his only letter home, written so many days ago that it must have been received long before that evening. Evidently she was re-reading it—the dear soul!—as people will sometimes do with letters which contain too little, as well as those which are full.

Phil had to keep back some tears of remorse as he sprang upon the veranda and threw the door open. Down dropped the letter, over went the checker table and board, two chairs, and one small boy, and in a moment several country people were as happy as if the sea had given up its dead or a long time wanderer had returned. There are some glorious compensations for being simple minded.

CHAPTER XV.
THE FATTED CALF—BUT THE NEIGHBORS, TOO.

A THOUGHTFUL man once remarked that a special proof of divine wisdom was that the dear old story of the Prodigal Son did not reproduce any of the conversation of the neighbors with or regarding the naughty boy, for had this also been given as it really occurred no subsequent penitent would ever have dared to follow the amateur swineherd's example.

Philip Hayn was not a prodigal; he had spent none of his inheritance except as specially ordered by his father, and his only ground of self reproach was regarding an affair about which the neighbors had no means of obtaining information; yet the special efforts made by the family to manifest their joy at regaining him were unequal to the task of overcoming the disquieting effects of the neighbors' tongues.

The dreadful man who had caught Phil on the train had spread the news of the boy's return, so next morning the road from the village to Hayn Farm presented an appearance as animated as if an auction had been announced in that vicinity, or if some one had been found dead in the woods. Men old and young, wives and maidens, and even little children, devised excuses for visiting the farm. People who came from the other direction were already supplied with the standard excuse—they wanted to borrow something; those who had really borrowed so often as to doubt their welcome made heroic efforts to return what they had already borrowed.

To escape the succession of visitors at the house Phil went to the barn yard to see a new family of pigs of which his little brothers had informed him, but just above the fence line he saw two pairs of eyes—with their attendant heads, of course—that had been lying in wait for an hour or two, after the manner of that class of countrymen, evidently among the last offshoots from the brutes, who apparently have an inherited animal apprehension of harm should they enter the den of any species higher than their own.

"Guess you didn't see any pigs like them down to York?" shouted the owner of one pair of eyes, while the other pair opened as if they would engulf the returned traveler. Phil nodded his head negatively and precipitately retreated to the barn, where he found quite a respectable old farmer studying the beach wagon.

"Reuben reckoned mebbe he could gimme a bargain if I'd take this off his hands," he said, by way of explanation, "so I thought I'd take a look at it." The old man shook the wheels, tapped the bed, examined the iron work closely, remarking, as he did so:

"Reckon, by his wantin' to dispose of it, that them city folks ain't a comin' here next summer to be druv down to the beach, eh?"

"I don't know," said the unhappy youth. He was grateful to the old fellow for not looking him in the eye, like a witness teaser, as he asked the question, yet he longed to kick him out of the barn and lock the doors, so that there would be one less place for the enemy to lie in wait. He returned to the house, and entered the kitchen just in time to hear a feminine neighbor say:

"I s'pose he'll wear his new clothes—them that Sol Mantring fetched word about—to church on Sunday?"

Phil abruptly got an ax and went to the wood lot; his first impulse was to take his gun, but half in jest and half in earnest he told himself that he would not dare to have arms in his hands if the torment was to continue. Yet even while in the depths of the ancestral forest he was not safe, for, on the hollow pretense of tracking a dog who had been stealing sheep, a neighbor followed Phil to the woods, found him by the tell tale blows of the ax, and had him at his mercy for a full hour. The visitor had mentally set apart a half day for the work.

"There's one way o' gettin' rid of this raft o' people," said Mrs. Hayn, who rapidly became as indignant as her son at the persistency with which people brought Lucia's name into conversation. "One would s'pose that the world had got back to the way it was in old Father Adam's day, as far as gals was concerned, an' there was only one female that anybody could take a notion to. They come a-pesterin' the life out o' me, just as if I knowed any more about it than they do—which I don't." Then the anxious mother looked slyly, and somewhat reproachfully, at her son, who flushed and said:

"Tell us the way of getting out of it, mother, and at least one of your children will arise and call you blessed."

"Why, it's to have the minister an' his wife to tea. It's manners, an' pretty much everybody knows it, not to disturb anybody the day they're goin' to have the minister."

"Let's have him," said Phil, eagerly; "I'll do anything to help you get ready—beat eggs, stone raisins—anything but go to the store for nutmegs and be caught by the proprietor and all his customers. Say, mother, why can't you invite the other ministers too, on successive days?"

"You will wear your new clothes, though, when the minister comes, won't you?" asked the old lady with some timidity. "You know I hain't seen 'em on you yet, an' I'm a-dyin' to, though I hain't liked to put you to the trouble of dressin' up on purpose, knowin' how men hate to try things on."

Phil promised; he could not resist his mother's appealing eyes. As the old lady prophesied, the family were not annoyed the day of the supper to the minister. Phil's conscience was not easy in anticipation of the expected guest, for he knew he would be questioned about the appearance of noted New York divines whom he would be supposed to have heard, whereas the only service he had attended was at the Tramlays' church, the pastor of which had no notoriety at all.

Perhaps it was to punish his youthful parishioner for neglect of religious privileges that the good man questioned Phil quite closely about the Tramlay family and delivered a thoughtful analysis of the character of the oldest daughter, with comments upon the probable effects of marriage on various qualities of her nature. After each statement he appealed to Phil for corroboration, and on his way home confided to his wife that he believed he had fully prepared the dear young brother for what he might expect should he take the important step upon which in all probability he was resolved.

Phil endured with becoming fortitude the minister's remarks about Lucia, and the whispered but not unheard comments of the minister's wife on the "store clothes," which had been worn in deference to Mrs. Hayn's request. He ate the three kinds of solid cake without which no supper to a Haynton minister was supposed to be complete. He made unusual effort, his father being away, to cause the visit one to be pleasantly remembered by the good pastor. He was rewarded by discovering that his trip to the city which he had heard called the "Modern Sodom" and the "American Babylon" had not destroyed or even weakened his interest in religious subjects, and he was prepared to retire with a more peaceable mind than he had known in several days. But after the table had been cleared and the uneaten pieces of cake carefully put in an earthen jar against the next Sunday's tea, and Phil was about to go to his room, his mother said:

"Dearie, I s'pose you'll wear your new black things to meetin' Sunday mornin', won't you?"

"Oh, mother," said Phil, with a frown quickly succeeded by a laugh, "nobody ever wears such a coat to church. Everybody would laugh at me."

"Dear me!" said the old lady, evidently disappointed quite deeply. "I want to know! Then when be you goin' to wear it?"

"Never, I suppose," said Phil, his smile vanishing. "I was an extravagant fool to buy that coat. I'll never forgive myself for it."

"Never?" the old lady had echoed. "Then your poor old mother, who loves you better than anybody in the world, is never to see you in it?"

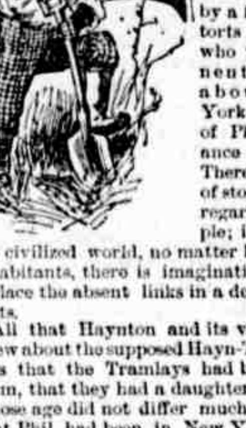
"She shan't wait another hour!" said Phil, hurrying out of the room, and telling himself that his mother cared more for him than all his New York friends combined. He dressed himself anew, with as much care, though not as much trepidation, as when preparing for the Dinon party; he even slipped out of doors and by lighting two or three matches selected a bud from a rose bush which was carefully covered from the frost every night. He dressed his hair carefully, caressed his moustache into the form a barber had told him was most becoming to his style of face, and squeezed his feet into the low, tight, patent leather shoes which a shoemaker had assured him were the only proper thing for evening dress. Then he came down stairs, whistling "Hail to the Chief."

Mrs. Hayn hastily adjusted the spectacles she had been polishing, and as Phil entered the room she threw up both hands in amazement and delight. It was worth the price of a coat, thought Phil to himself, to enable that dear, honest old face to express so much enjoyment. As his mother gazed at him, Phil went through the various poses which had been demanded of him when he was a child—even later—and clothes were being fitted to him by the trustworthy Sarah Tweege; he turned around, presented one side view and the other, walked across the room and back, and saluted his mother with his most profound bow. His mother's delight knew no bounds. Finally the good old lady took both his hands, held him at arms' length, looked as if she never could see enough of him; then she gave him a motherly hug and exclaimed:

"I should think she'd have fell dead in love with you the minute she clapped her eyes on you with all those things on."

Phil retired hastily, and when he removed his dress coat he savagely shook his fist at it.

CHAPTER XVI.
MORE NEWS THAT WAS NOT ENOUGH.



LITTLE by little the excitement over Phil's return abated, being merged in curiosity as to why his father was remaining in the city. Local curiosity was somewhat discouraged, too, by a few sharp retorts to persons who were impertinently inquisitive about the New York developments of Phil's acquaintance with Lucia. There was no lack of stories, however, regarding the couple; in any part of the civilized world, no matter how stolid the inhabitants, there is imagination enough to replace the absent links in a desired chain of facts.

All that Haynton and its vicinity really knew about the supposed Hayn-Tramlay affair was that the Tramlays had been at Hayn farm, that they had a daughter named Lucia whose age did not differ much from Phil's, that Phil had been in New York for more than a fortnight, that he had gone direct from Sol Mantring's sloop to Tramlay's office, that he had been seen in New York in store clothes, and that he admitted having seen Lucia once or twice. Out of these few facts, which would have been useless to even a detective were he unable to treat them as mere clews to be followed carefully, the enterprising people of Haynton constructed a number of stories, each of which hung together admirably. That they differed radically from one another was not the fault of the local romancers; they had honestly done their best with the material at hand.

Phil did not regard the matter in this light. When day by day his little brothers returned from school with tales they had heard from class mates and wondered greatly that they had not first heard them at home, Phil's temper broke loose so suddenly that the boys almost feared to repeat all they had heard. The wrathful young man learned that he had proposed to Lucia and been refused, that he had been accepted, apparently at the same interview, that Tramlay was to build a handsome house on the water front of Hayn Farm for his daughter as a wedding present, that Phil took his refusal so seriously to heart that he was going to study for the ministry, and that while in New York he had fallen into drinking habits so deeply that Tramlay had been obliged to write Farmer Hayn to hurry to the city and remove his unfortunate son from the scene of temptation.

Phil grumbled and stormed; he even vowed that if gossip about him did not end he would go to sea. He thought seriously of publishing a list of denials in the weekly paper, edited in the county town, which devoted a column or two to Haynton news. Then he wondered whether he might not make a confidant of the minister and beg that a sermon be preached on the sinfulness of gossip; but this plan disappeared abruptly when the statement of his approaching marriage was traced, almost with certainty, to the minister himself.

But the worst trial of all remained. On Sunday he met at church and in the young people's Bible class all the girls who lived at or near Haynton. Some of them belonged to churches other than that which included the Hayn family among its members, but for once they waived denominational preferences and went to the First church, and not only to see Phil's new clothes and cane, of which Sol Mantring had brought such astonishing reports.

They were as good and sweet hearted, those Haynton girls, as any of their sex on the face of the earth. Fashions a trifle old and lack of professional advice as to how best to enhance their natural charms by borrowing from art could not disguise the fact that some of them were quite pretty. It was not their fault that Phil's heart had gone elsewhere for a mate, but that the young man himself was greatly to blame for such a course was the general opinion among them, and they would have at least the consolation of seeing how he had been affected by a step so unusual among Haynton youth. And what questions those girls' eyes did ask! There was no need that they should put any of them into words; Phil understood them all, with the result that never before on Sunday had he heard so little of sermon, hymn or prayer, or betrayed so feeble a grasp of the topic of the day in the Bible class.

So seriously was his mind disturbed that he held himself sharply to account, "examined his evidences" in the time honored and orthodox manner, and resolved that lack of occupation was at the bottom of his trouble. He would begin bright and early Monday morning an extension of the big ditch in the marsh land; if the mud and stones and roots and quicksands, the tugging and straining and perspiring, sure to be incident to the work would not cure him, he grimly told himself, then his case was hopeless indeed.

Bravely he kept his word. At sunrise he was already on his way to the marsh, and by the middle of the morning a single sensation encompassed his entire mind; it was that ditching was the hardest, dirtiest, forlornest work that ever fell to a farmer's lot. He dragged one heavily booted foot after the other from the ooze, leaned on his spade and offered himself five minutes' rest.

He looked wearily along the prolongation of the line of the ditch already completed, and wondered how many hundred days the entire improvement would require. Before he decided his calculations were disturbed by the sound of the family dinner bell. He looked at the sun, which was his only timepiece while at work, and wondered what could have befallen the hitherto faithful family clock. Again the bell sounded, and when he looked in the direction of the house he saw, on the brow of the hill behind the orchard, his mother waving her apron to him. Something was the matter; what could it be? a tramp?—a persistent lightning rod man? He hurried toward the house, and soon saw that his mother was waving also something that looked like a handkerchief and then like a piece of paper. A little nearer and he heard his mother shouting:

"Father's writ. We've got a letter!"

Phil ran nearly all the way up the hill; he had not performed that difficult feat since he and another boy had raced up, in coasting time, in wild strife as to which should capture a popular girl and take her down on his sled. A letter from his father was indeed an unusual event, for the old man had not been away from home before, except when on jury duty in the county town, in many years, yet from the old lady's manner it seemed the letter must contain something unusual. As he reached the hill top his mother placed the sheet in his hand, saying:

"I thought mebbe you'd better see it at once."

Phil took it and read aloud, as follows:

"DEAR OLD GIRL—Your husband is about as usual, though the well water in this town ain't fit for decent cattle to drink. I've seen some of the sights, and wished more than once that I had you along; if things turn out as they look, though, I'll bring you down in style yet. I've run against the folks that looked at our south ridge with a view to making a cottage village, and, as luck would have it, they knew Mr. Tramlay, who's rolled up his sleeves and done his best to help clinch things and make a good thing out of it for me. I need Phil; Mr. Tramlay wants him too; and I wish you'd tell him to pack his bag and get back here as soon as he can. The boys can take care of the animals, and there's nothing else on the farm but can wait till I get back.

"The Lord be with you all, so no more at present, from your loving husband,

"REUBEN."

"P. S.—That gal ain't no more engaged than I am."

Phil took off his hat, rubbed his eyes, looked away in the direction of the ditch extension, and made a face at the faithful old spade.

"I s'pose you'd better be thinkin' about gettin' off at once," said his mother.

"Father's will is law," said Phil, in the calmest tone he could command. "Do you think the boys and Carlo can help you take care of the place for a few days?"

"To be sure," said his mother, "an' a powerful sight o' days besides, if it's goin' to save your father from drudgin' away the rest of his days. An' I ain't above sayin' that I'd stand a good deal of loneliness if I thought 'twould end in my stoppin' trottin' around in a pint pot day in an' day out. An' you," said the old lady, looking at her son, "I want to see the time come when I can take them old boots out to a brush heap an' burn 'em out o' sight an' knowledge. But what does your father mean about that gal not bein' engaged? Is it that Tramlay gal?"

"I suppose so," said Phil, carelessly, though his manner was the result of prodigious effort. "When he found me he asked me about her, along with the other folks, and I told him, just as I'd heard, that she was engaged to be married. Father must have been asking some pointed questions about her. It does beat everything the interest that old men sometimes take in young women who aren't kith nor kin to them, doesn't it? I guess it's about as well that I'm going back, if only to keep the old gentleman's country curiosity within proper bounds. Don't you think so?"

"She ain't engaged," said Mrs. Hayn, ignoring her son's explanation and his attempt at joking. "She ain't engaged," the old lady repeated; so you"——

The sentence was not completed, but Phil's face flushed and he looked down at his muddy boots. For the first time since his return he had heard an allusion to Lucia that did not make him uncomfortable.

Within two hours Haynton was shaken from center—the railway station—to circumference by the announcement that Phil Hayn, in his store clothes, had bought a ticket for New York and was already well on his journey. Meanwhile, at Hayn Farm, an old woman as deeply interested as any one in the business and other possibilities that had been foreshadowed was doing all in her power to further them; she was spending the afternoon on her knees at her bedside.

CHAPTER XVII.
FATHER AND SON.

YOUTH has some advantages peculiarly its own in the general battle for fame and fortune and in capacity for enjoyment, but for discovering all that may be pleasing in whatever is nearest at hand it is left far behind by age. The school girl does not care for dainty flavors unless they have candy for a basis; her mother, with a palate which has been in training for half a century, will get truer enjoyment out of a neighbor's loaf of home made cake than the girl can find in a shop full of bonbons. A boy will ramble through an orchard in search of the tree which is fullest and has the largest fruit; his father, in late autumn, will find higher flavor, and more of it, in the late windfalls which his stick discovers among the dead leaves.

Farmer Hayn was old and weary; he was alone in his rambles about the metropolis, and he kept close guard on his pocketbook; but no country youth who ever hurried to the city to squander his patrimony could have had so good a time. He saw everything that the local guide books called attention to, and so much else which was interesting that Tramlay, whom he had occasion to see for a few minutes each day, said one morning at the breakfast table:

"I wish, my dear, that I could steal a week or two from business, so that you and I could poke about New York, personally conducted by that old farmer."

"Edgar!" exclaimed Mrs. Tramlay, "I sometimes fear that old age is taking sudden possession of you, you get such queer notions. The idea of New York people seeing their own city with a countryman for a guide!"

"There's nothing queer about facts, my dear," replied Tramlay, "except that they may be right under our eyes for years without being seen. A few years ago you and I spent nearly a thousand dollars in visiting some European battlefields. Today that old fellow has carefully done the Revolutionary battlefields of New York and Brooklyn, at a total expense of a quarter of a dollar; even then he had a penny left to give to a beggar."

"I never heard of a battlefield in New York or Brooklyn," said Mrs. Tramlay.

"Nor I," her husband replied; "at least not in so long a time that I'd forgotten the localities. But that old fellow knows all about them; when I drew him out a little he made me plans of each, with pencil on the back of an envelope, and explained how we lost Long Island and New York, as well as nearly two thousand men, when men were far scarcer than they are now. Here"—the merchant drew a mass of letters from his pocket and extracted from them a scrap of paper—"here's the way it happened; let me explain"——

"I'm not interested in those stupid old times," said Mrs. Tramlay, with a deprecatory wave of her hand. "I've heard that in those days there wasn't a house above Wall street, no park to drive in, and parties began before sunset."

"Ah! to be sure," said Tramlay, with a sigh. "But old Hayn has seen modern New York too; I was intensely interested in his description of the work being done in some of the industrial schools, where hundreds of little street Arabs are coaxed in by a promise of full stomachs, and taught to be good for something; the boys learn how to use tools, and the girls are taught every branch of housekeeping."

"I really don't see," said Mrs. Tramlay, as she nibbled a roll, "what there is to interest us in the doings of such people."

"They're the people," said her husband, raising his voice a little, "who generally supply us with paupers and criminals, they being untaught at home, and consequently having to beg or steal for a living. It is because of such people that we have iron bars on our dining room windows and area door, and hire a detective whenever we give a party, and put a chain on our door mat and pay taxes to build jails and asylums and"——

"Oh, Edgar," said Mrs. Tramlay, plaintively, "our minister told us all this in a sermon nearly a year ago. I'm sure I listened patiently to it then; I don't think it's very kind of you to go all over it again."

"No, I suppose not," sighed the merchant, hastily kissing his family good-by and starting for his office. In a moment he returned, and said:

"Just a word with you, my dear. It's nothing about farmers, or battles, or industrial—— Say," he whispered, as his wife joined him in the hall, "don't you think I'd better have the doctor drop in to see Lucia? I'm afraid she's going to be sick. She's looked poorly for days, and doesn't seem to have any spirit."

"I'm sure she's lively enough when she's out of temper," said Mrs. Tramlay, "which she is nearly all the while. She's snapped at the children until they hate the sight of her, and I can't speak to her without being greeted by a flood of tears. Margie seems the only one who can do anything with her."

"Umph!" muttered the merchant, taking much time to arrange his hat before the mirror of the hat rack.

Meanwhile the old farmer and his son were having a long chat in a hotel bedroom.

"So you see how the land lies," said the old man. "Though I never held that part of the farm at over two hundred an acre, the soil bein' thinner than the lower lyin' land, an' requirin' a good deal more manure to make decent crops, Tramlay says it'll fetch a clean two thousand an acre when it's cut up, if the scheme takes hold as it's likely to. That's why he advised me to retain an interest, instead of sellin' out an' out. I'm to get five thousand in cash for the forty acres, an' have a quarter interest in all sales; that means twenty thousand in the end, if things turn out as Tramlay thinks."

"My!" ejaculated Phil, his eyes opening very wide, and going into a brown study. The old man contemplated him for some time with a smile of supreme satisfaction. Finally he said:

"Makes you feel a little bit as if you was a rich man's son, don't it, old boy?"

"Indeed it does," Phil replied. "But I don't see how I can help you about it."

"Don't, eh! Well, I'll tell you," said the old man, eyeing his son closely. "That forty acres is about quarter of the farm land in value, I calculate, counting out the house an' other buildin's. If I was makin' my will an' dividin' things up among the family, I'd leave just about that much land to you, with an interest in the house, stock, etcetery, when the Lord sees fit to call your mother. So"—here the old man intensified his gaze—"I've arranged to give my quarter interest in the enterprise to you, as your inheritance; that'll make you a director in the comp'ny, with as much say as anybody else. It'll keep you in York a good deal, though."

"Father!" exclaimed Phil.

"An'," continued the old man, dropping his eyes as soon as his son looked at him, and putting on the countenance in which he usually discussed the ordinary affairs of the farm, "as it may need some money for you to keep up proper style with the people whom you'll have to deal with, I propose to put the five thousand in bank here to our joint account, so you can draw whenever you need cash."

The old man began to pare fine shavings from the tooth pick which he had cherished ever since he left the dining room, but Phil compelled a suspension of industry for a moment by going over to his father's chair and pressing the gray head to his breast.

"The other principal stockholders," said the old man, as soon as he was able to resume his whittling, "are Tramlay an' a man named Marge."

"Marge!" Phil echoed.

"You seem to know him," said the farmer, looking up from under his eyebrows.

"I should think so," said Phil, frowning and twitching his lips a great deal. "He's the man"——

"Well?" asked the old man, for Phil had not finished his sentence. There was no reply, so he continued:

"The man you thought had caught the gal?"

Phil nodded affirmatively.

"Now you see what comes of goin' off at half cock," said the farmer. "Lost your expenses two ways, to say nothin' of peace o' mind."

"I heard one man telling another it," said Phil, quite humbly; "so what was I to think?"

"If you believe ev'rythin' you hear about men an' women, my boy, you'll be off your course all your life long. Take a good grip on that."

Again Phil went into a brown study, from which he emerged suddenly to say:

"It's just what you did when you supposed you learned she wasn't engaged, isn't it? You believed it and wrote it at once to me."

"Oh, no!" said the old man, with an air of superiority, as he put a very sharp point on what remained of the toothpick. "Not much. I've learned always to go to headquarters for information."

"Why, father," Phil exclaimed, excitedly, "you don't mean to say, after what you promised me, that you went—and—and"——

"Poked my nose into other people's business? Not I. Mr. Tramlay took me home to dinner—say, what an outlandish way these city folks have got of not eatin' dinner till nigh onto bedtime! an' after the meal, 'long about the edge o' the evenin', when Tramlay had gone for some papers to show me, an' the old lady was out of the room for somethin', I took 'casion to congratulate the gal on her engagement; that's the proper thing in such cases made an' purvided, you know. She looked kind o' flabbergasted, an' at last she said 'twas the fust she'd heerd of it. I tried to git out of it by sayin' if it wa'n't true it ort to be, if young men in York had eyes in their heads. But it didn't seem to work. She asked how I heerd of it, an' I had to say that somebody in the city had told my son about it."

Phil frowned.

"Then," continued the old man, "she bust out cryin'."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Phil.

"Well," said the old man, "I see somethin' had to be done, so I put my arms around her"——

"Why, father!" said Phil, in alarm.

"I put my arms around her, an' said that when a gal was cryin' she ort to have her parents to comfort her, an', as neither of 'em was present, I hoped she'd make b'lieve for a minute or two that I was her grandfather. So she took my advice; an' it seemed to do her a sight o' good."

"What advice did you give her?" asked Phil.

"None—in words," said the old man. "Wait till you're my age; then you'll understand."

"I don't see," said Phil, after a moment or two of silence, "that things are much better than they were. Perhaps she's not engaged; but that fellow Marge is hanging about her all the time. From what I've heard people remark, he's been paying attention to her for a year or two. When the family were at our house last summer he was the only man she talked about. I'm pretty sure, too, from what I've seen, that her mother favors him. So, putting everything together, and thinking about it a good deal, as I've had to do in spite of myself since I've been up home, I've made up my mind that it's a foregone conclusion."

"So you're goin' to flop like a stuck pig an' let it go on, are you? Just because you've thought somethin' you're goin' to do nothin'. If I'd thought that of you I don't b'lieve I'd have brought you down here to be a business man in the city. A fellow that hain't got the grit to fight for a gal that he wants is likely to make a mighty poor fist of it fightin' for a fortune. No, sir; you're not goin' to knuckle under while you've got a father to egg you on. I don't say she's in ev'ry way the gal I'd have picked out for you, but any gal that'll live up to the best that's in her is good enough for any man alive. If you care as much for her as you thought you did when I met you in the street that day, that gal is the one for you to tie to, unless she breaks the rope. A man sometimes gets a bad lickin' in a love fight, an' a powerful big scar besides, but both together don't do him as much harm as backin' out an' playin' coward."

"I'm not a coward, father," protested Phil, and his eyes flashed as if he meant it.

"You don't mean to be, my boy," said the old man, with a pat on his son's shoulder, "but ev'rythin' in this affair is new to you, an' you're in the dark about some things that mebbe look bigger than they are. That sort of thing'll make cowards out of the best of men, if they give in to it; that's the reason I'm crackin' the whip at you."

"I wonder what Mr. Tramlay wants of me," said Phil, a moment later.

"Reckon you'd better go down and find out," the old man replied.

Continued next Saturday.

NOTICE TO TRESPASSERS AND GUNNERS.—All persons are hereby forbidden to trespass on any of the lands of the Cornwall and Speedwell estates in Lebanon or Lancaster counties, whether inclosed or uninclosed, either for the purpose of shooting or fishing, as the law will be rigidly enforced against all trespassing on said lands of the undersigned after this notice.

WM. COLEMAN FREEMAN
R. PERCY ALDEN,
EDW. C. FREEMAN,
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