THE TANGLED WEB

By Ethel Watts-Mumford Grant
Author of "Dupes," "Whitewash," Etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

The nurse rose as Wendham entered the room, and raised the window shade. The light illumined the face on the pillow. She looked like a tortured child, infinitely pathetic and innocent.

"Has she been restless?" he asked, as he bent over her.

The nurse nodded. "Yes, somewhat. She has persistent delusions. The trouble seems to have taken deep root in her mind. But the wound is in good condition."

Nellie Gaynor stirred uneasily. There was a painful attempt to turn the wounded neck. At the sound of Wendham's voice she half opened her eyes. She spoke thickly and with effort, trying to raise her hand to the bandages about her throat.

"Oh, my dear, my dear! you have found it out. I'd rather have died."

In spite of his self-control the doctor flushed crimson, hardly daring to raise his eyes to the calm face of the nurse.

"She has been repeating something of that sort at intervals," the woman said, as she smoothed the pillow. "Here's the chart." The matter-of-fact tone and the systematic and familiar paper helped him to regain his mental poise.

"H'm! Bad temperature. We have our work laid out for us. Get a drop or two of this down her throat, if you can. The swelling will soon prevent her swallowing or speaking, poor woman. Now go lie down for a while, Miss Tredlay. You'll have to be up all night."

"Thank you, doctor," she said, and left the room.

As the door closed Wendham took hold of Nellie's slender fingers, gently caressing them. She turned toward him with a movement so slight that it hardly disturbed the folds of her pillow yet it suggested immeasurable relief and confidence. His soothing touch sought her heated brow, while he repeated over and over such assurances as a mother gives her child frightened by the imaginary terrors of the night. Something of the peace and reliance that the comforted child knows in that crooning protection descended not only upon her, but upon his own troubled soul.

The hours wore on. Outside the storm raged, venting its fury upon wooded hills and open plain with a passion of destruction. Darkness, wind-swept, and sound-tortured, came early. By four o'clock the room was dark. Wendham lighted the green-shaded lamp, and drew the curtains at the window.

Nellie was sleeping gently, apparently without pain; her pulse beating regularly. Only the swollen lips and fluttering eyelids gave sign that fever still held sway. A gentle knock announced Adele. She entered, her eyes fixed upon his face with agonized questioning.

"She is doing very well indeed," he said. "We have every hope, we must—" He broke off abruptly. They stood, facing each other. It came again—a knock, light, but insistent, at the window. What could it mean? There! this time rapid, yet discreetly softened as by one soliciting attention and secrecy.

A thrill of superstitious fear smote at his heart. But the next instant he had drawn back the curtains, raised the shade, and was looking out into the night.

"What is it?" gasped Adele's voice close beside him.

All was still for a moment. He strained his sight, shading his face with his hands the better to penetrate the shadows without. For a moment the wind lulled to a sigh, but the next a sharp squall tore screaming by. A line like a whiplash snapped against the window pane—a streamer of ivy torn from its hold, beating with subdued insistence.

"The vines," he said in quiet explanation to the girl beside him. His own words aroused him. "The vines!" And what of—might not this tempest relentlessly reveal everything? There was no time to be lost. "Stay here, Adele," he ordered. "Miss Tredlay will be back presently. I sent her to rest. Mrs. Gaynor has been asking about her little pillow—no—I'm going up. I'll get it and send it down by one of the maids."

Adele settled herself near the bed, and Wendham hurried from the room. He paused before Mrs. Gaynor's door in the guest wing. The corridor was empty. Not a sound save the howling of the wind and the thrash of rain. Quickly opening the door, he found himself in the deserted room. The window showed opposite as a pale square. He crossed hastily and raised the sash. Instantly the warring elements entered, the curtains bellied inward. The flutter of flying papers and the click and rustle of striking objects sounded loud in his ears. He must be quick.

He leaned far out, feeling along the face of the wall. Far down as his hand would reach his fingers found a nail beneath the whispering leaves. A wire hung from it, but no weight held it taut. He raised it. It was loose for about four feet, and its end was doubled and curled as if untied. The bag was not there. A gasp escaped him. Feverishly he felt among the vines for another nail and wire. His hand grasped two, but they were too far away from the window to have been reached by Adele, and they were so firmly fastened below that they were evidently the "trainers" that the gardeners had laid for the growing tendrils.

A sound reached his ears, like the regular thump and splash of a cantering horse upon the drive. He made out an approaching bulk. A moment later the lights by the entrance shone upon two figures streaming and steaming before the porch—a horse, thoroughbred and spattered saddle-high with mud, and his rider, a stalwart man, a soaked hunting cap drawn over his eyes, and a slicker covering him to the tops of his puttees. Wendham drew back.

"I'll ride over and leave the nag with Billings," he heard Stacy's voice tell the butler. "I'm all right. I'll walk over. Ask Mr. Evelyn if he'll be so good as to lend me some old hunting puttees—the rest of me's dry."

Man and horse disappeared from the misty circle of light before the door and were lost in the darkness.

Wendham closed the window. His mind was in a whirl of speculation. One thing was certain, he must make instant search at the foot of the vines. Perhaps the bag had not been securely tied. It might have dropped below. He scratched a match, snatched up that which was the excuse of his visit, and hastening down once more, delivered it into Adele's hands. In the hanging closet beneath the stairs he found a mackintosh. He threw it over his shoulders, and, unobserved, made his way into the tempestuous night, under the windows of Mrs. Gaynor's former room, and with eager haste felt the rain-soaked earth. The bag was not there. For ten feet to left and right he explored the ground. He ran his arms and hands into the dripping foliage, in hope that the object of his search had caught upon some projection in its fall. His efforts were fruitless.

In despair he re-entered the house, cast aside his sodden outer garment, and threw himself down upon the sitting-room lounge to fathom this new and menacing mystery.

Alice bounded down the stairs two steps at a time. As she would have put it herself, she was "gotten up regardless," meaning her black velvet concession to evening customs, and her grandfather's diamond pin in the soft folds of her stock.

"Joe Stacy," she exclaimed, "you are a brick; but I had no idea I was letting you in for a Walpurgis night when I called you up. You must be cold as Greenland's icy mountains. Come, have a ball."

"Thank you, Alice; you're a good guesser." The young man smiled delightedly at his companion. He was small and trim as a jockey, but broad of shoulder and iron in muscle. His square countenance was dark with tan, in which blue-gray eyes shone in pale contrast. Well-groomed blond hair and a tawny, close-clipped mustache, intensified his personification of "neatness and dispatch." Everyone swore by Joe Stacy if he did have to earn his living by his very capable management of the Laughton estates. But no one did this as frequently and fervently as the tomboy beside him.

"There you are, old man," she said, as, standing before the laden sideboard, she ministered to his wants. "Here, take one of Charlie's private-stock cigarettes." She offered him the square silver box, and presented the matches. "Now, come, I want to talk to you. You don't suppose I dragged you out like this just for greens, when I know you are as busy as a terrier in a rat hole?"

"No, I didn't think you did, and I've had softening of the brain trying to guess why. You've all become so spectacular over here that anything is possible. Has that blond Easter Chicken accused you of her troubles?"

"No; and besides," Alice laughed, "Charlie has found out her real name—it's 'Skirling Harpie.' He got that off all by himself. You can imagine what pressure he was under. Let's go to the gun room; the fire is lit there, and nobody will be down for an hour. By the way, I told Charlie I wanted your advice about Tiddledywinks' shoulder, and the news from the stable; so give me a line of pony flip at table. Now, listen. Take that chair; it's comfortable. First of all, I don't need to say that you're the only person in the world I'd trust with this. I didn't call you in because you happened to be the nearest doctor."

"Good girl," said Stacy. "I'm your man Friday. Out with it."

CHAPTER XIV.

Alice suddenly fell silent, leaning forward, elbow on knee, and chin in hand.

"And?" Stacy suggested.

"One of Patty's macaws, that rainbow live theater hat, by the door yonder, got away this morning. I'd been watching them doing turns on their rings. They really are most picturesque gymnasts. Then Mr. Joseph's Coat breaks the chain on his foot, and, whoop la! out of the door, which had been standing open to let the smoke out of the hall. Of course, I flew out, and a great chase we made of it. Snap-shotted by the reporters in full cry. One of the gardeners saw us, dropped his rake, and joined the hunt. That wretched bird set us some stiff country, too. I don't care for hurdling on my own legs, and as for brush work—the gardener and I burrowed into hedges and rose bushes, and every time we thought we had the beast, off he'd go again. At last he flopped up against the house and hung for dear life to the ivy, right under Nellie Gaynor's window—the end window in the guest wing. I coaxed and threw pebbles at it, but there it hung. Its feet had become entangled, and we couldn't reach it nor dislodge it. So the gardener went for a ladder. We put it up and I offered to go up, because the silly cuss bird is used to me, though you wouldn't have noticed it to see it give me the chase. The gardener wasn't keen to get his fingers nipped. So 'ladies first' and up I go. The feather duster squawked and struggled, but couldn't get loose. I got hold of it with one hand and started to dislodge his claws with the other, when I nearly lost my balance and fell off. There, right under my hand, tied to a wire, hung a flat red leather bag. My pet had given it a first-class clawing. I saw just one thing—Mrs. Lawdon's ruby pendant. I gave a yowl in spite of myself.

"'Did he bite you?' the gardener asked me. Lucky he did, for it saved me from making a prize blunder.

"Yes," I said. "Go to Lizzie or somebody and bring me a couple of pieces of sugar and a towel to cover his head. He can't get loose. His foot is caught."

"Gardener went off on a run, and in a jiffy I had that bag stuffed inside my shirtwaist. I tugged the wire and found it was fastened to a nail within reaching distance of the window. The man came back and I caught my bird in the towel, and handed it down to him. I knew that would keep him busy. He'd never notice even though I bulged like a pouter pigeon if he had the macaw. He was as afraid of it as of dynamite. I kept behind him, and rang for the butler when we reached the hall. I started for the stairs and called over to anchor the theater hat to its ring. Jove! when I reached my room, I was sick, Joe, like a kiddy at her first jump. I locked myself in and looked at the find. It's all there. I've got them now, hidden up the chimney, and I'm so afraid some one will happen on them that I'm green."

"Why don't you give them to Cass, or the Lawdon?" Stacy interrupted.

"Because," said Alice slowly, "there isn't any doubt in my mind, nor would there be in his or hers, as to who took them. And I want to get that stuff back so nobody can guess who was responsible."

"The maid?"

Alice gave him a queer look. "Have you heard what happened this morning?' He shook his head. "Mrs. Gaynor shot herself—by—er—accident."

"What!"

"Here in the gun room; right there behind you, in fact, with Cass's revolver from the top of that rack."

Stacy turned with a start as if he expected to see the tragedy instantly re-enacted.

"She developed brain fever."

"I'd heard that," he said quickly.

"Yes, but she was sane then. I saw her. I was 'way down the line there; Cass was over in the drawing-room. I saw her run across the room, hesitate, and turn in here. She looked in there," she jerked an indicative thumb over her shoulder, "threw up her hands, and—and then—bingo! It's a miracle she didn't succeed."

"But what made her? Who was in the den?"

"Wendham and Adele. He'd brought the girl down to explain the mechanism of some apparatus he wanted her to use on Nellie. That's what Lizzie told me. She was left to watch Mrs. Gaynor when they went; only Patty rang. So off she goes, and Nellie has a flash of intuition, and gets out——"

"But what the deuce are you driving at?" Stacy looked the girl straight in the eyes. She met his gaze keenly.

"Nellie thought Wendham was getting the truth out of Adele, that's what; and she thought the game was up."

"Good heavens! you don't believe that! Why——"

"Yes, I do. It's been one thing and another thing, and two and two till I can't help it. It's just up to this. Nellie, sweet old Nellie—yes, and I love her better than a sister. But I don't believe the races is where she's got the money she's scattered around these last few years."

"Alice," he said slowly, "you're either a genius or a——"

"I'm neither, thank you," she interrupted. "But how in the world can I get it back to the Lawdon and incriminate no one? Suppose it's 'mysteriously returned' in the house To the day of our deaths every one of us will be suspected. It's got to come from the outside, and somebody's got to take it out——"

"And that person's yours truly, I suppose," Stacy finished her sentence.

"Be a brick," she begged. "I've busted my head to think it out. Perhaps you can plan better."

Stacy was silent. "Do you think Wendham knows?" he asked at length.

She shook her head. "No, or else he's an actor in a million. Besides, he's in love with her. You couldn't convince him with a meat ax. If she lives—poor lamb—and she'll have him, he'll marry her. What? Did you think I'd go to him with my find? Not much!"

"How the devil will you get the things to me?"

"You've got to do the rest,' she said seriously. "The burden is on you now, thank goodness!" She made a gesture of lavish bestowal.

"You're very good." He bowed. "I wish I could take all of your burdens, Alice. It's a bore I'm such a non-eligible, isn't it?"

"You bet,"' she agreed cordially, "but I'm not exactly a pauper, you know."

"Wait a bit. If Alvord——"

"I wouldn't be half bad in the horse business myself," she ventured.

"That's it—I have it!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "The ponies will save us all yet, see if they don't. I'm to look your Ge over. You said that's what you told Cass, isn't it? Well, when you do, it will be just before I start—see? Give me the stuff. It will be a cold day if we can't find a good excuse to keep the grooms busy. I've got my slicker; you put on a what-you-may-call-um-cape—transfer—and may God have mercy upon my soul!"

"There, I knew it'd be all right if I got you into it." She smiled calmly. "You're a great comfort, Stacy. I feel already as if I didn't have jewel to burn in my fireplace."

"Who's to find the—er—swag?" asked Stacy dreamily, after a moment's pause.

"How in the world should I know? I'm not the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter."

Stacy turned clear and laughing eyes upon her. "My dear, kind, Christian friend, you don't intend to let Provy look after the whole matter, do you? What's to prevent some vagabond or other happening upon the spoil, if you casually drop it; or suppose it falls into the hands of a detective, and he thinks no one knows and the thief doesn't dare make a roar? What's the few thousands of reward against the whole cheese? Don't you see that some one vitally interested must know, must be advised that the 'Skirling Harpie's' decorations are on the rebound?"

"That's a fact," exclaimed Alice, "and we can't write a thing, can we?"

"We can cut words from a newspaper and paste them, and produce a perfectly non-committal communication."

(To be continued.)

Pantagruellic Feast.

Pantagruellic feasting up to date. At Szeged in Hungary, there has come to a close a triple wedding feast on a scale of Pantagruellic profusion, rare even for that country of mediæval survivals. Three brothers were married together, and the festivities lasted eight days. Seven hundred guests assembled, and at the first day's feast there were served two oxen, two calves, 18 lambs, 130 head of poultry, 200 dishes of pigs' feet and ears in jelly, and 80 enormous cakes. When the first dance, a czardas, was called, 200 couples stood up. Feasting in this way, with singing and dancing, continued daily, and during the whole of this time music never ceased day or night, quite a number of bands taking successive turns. But the company could hardly face the music. When the eighth day closed, only a dozen young folks remained to take leave of their hosts.—London Globe.

Not What He Wanted.

Brigadier-General E. J. Stuart Wortley, of the King's army, speaking at the mayor's banquet at Folkestone, England, said that many of the unemployed did not desire to be employed One day, on his estate in Hampshire, a man asked him for work. He said, "Yes; go to my bailiff, and he will give you a spade, and I will pay you sixteen shillings a week."

"Thank God!" said the man. "I cannot tell you how much obliged I am."

The man then disappeared, and in two weeks' time he observed written on his gate the following words:

"Do not apply for work here, because you will get it."

No Hope.

Miss Irene Gillicuddy of Millville, Miss., writes: "I have a gentleman friend who has been keeping company with me all this year, but who has never inuicated or intimated that he wishes to be considered other than a friend of mine. I am 19 years old, with ruby lips, rose-pink cheeks, golden hair, azure eyes and a gentle disposition. Do you think I should hang up some mistletoe and accidentally stand beath it while he is around, just to encourage him?" Irene, if a young man needs the encouragement of mistletoe under the circumstances, there is no hope for him.

Weight of Air.

There is no uniform weight for air. For instance, say the weight of a cubic foot of air at sea level is 1,700 grains, the pressure removed, say, by its elevation to an altitude of 10,000 feet, its weight would be about the half of 1,700 grains. In other words, the cubic foot, at ten or twelve thousand feet above the sea, would expand to two cubic feet, each of about 850 grains weigh.

Loafers at the Pool Table.

The best pool players in any town are generally the young fellows who never hang onto one job very long at a time.

DEER HUNTING BY RAIL

Animals Killed by Trains and Engineers Stop Buying Beef and Are Eating Venison.

Washington, N. J.—Deer are so numerous in Warren county that they are being killed by railroad trains as they cross the tracks. Such killings have become so common recently that engineers, especially those employed on the Lackawanna Railroad, have ceased buying beef and are feeding their families on venison. One of the first questions the housewife asks her engineer husband nowadays when he returns home from his run is how many deer he killed on the trip.

The animals, which are so keen in fleeing from ordinary foes, seem to be paralyzed with fright when they see trains bearing down on them. One was caught between a Lackawanna train and a steep bank yesterday. Instead of leaping up the bank it did its utmost to beat the locomotive with the track for a race-course, with the result that it was struck, hurled and injured so badly it was killed to put it out of its agony. Another deer rushed down the mountain side to the tracks day before yesterday and tried issues with the locomotive. It, too, was injured mortally. The game wardens assert that unless the slaughter ceases all the engineers will be compelled to take out hunter's licenses and also take their chances in prosecution for killing deer out of season.

NEW "PANTALOON GOWN."

Newest Feminine Creation Parts Above Knees, Revealing Trousers.

New York City. — "Pantaloon gowns" are now seen in Fifth avenue and Broadway and the new thriller in feminine wearing apparel sets the Directoire gown upon a pedestal of modesty.

It is made of light olive chiffon broadcloth, with a train fifty-six inches in length, trimmed with French cord embroidery, embroidered ecru Chantilly lace and black satin. Twelve dozen self colored buttons are used. It has the Directoire back, long effect, Louis XIV. front and bolero shape. Seven yards of cloth compose the whole dress.

But that is not the point. When the wearer stands still it resembles an ordinary, pretty costume. The moment she moves it is quite different.

What has seemed a skirt parts just

The Pantaloon Costume.

above the knees and regular trousers come into view. Trousers—just trousers. They make no pretence of being anything else.

They measure thirty-six inches around the bottom and reach to the shoe soles. A seam that goes up the front of the skirt from the knees to the waist gives an all pantaloon appearance to the front of the garment.

No underskirts can be worn with this costume and the lingerie bills of those who adopt it will be a negligible quantity.

LYING DUE TO MENTAL LAZINESS

W. H. P. Faunce, President of Brown, Explains Suspension of Students.

Providence, R. I.—"Intellectual slovenliness" is the greatest cause of falsehood in this country, in the opinion of President W. H. P. Faunce of Brown University. When nine students at the university were suspended for "cribbing," the president commented on the affair in these words:

"The great source of untruth in American life is not deliberate resolve to lie. No man consciously chooses falsehood as his mode of success. The real source of the evil is intellectual slovenliness, unwillingness to buckle down to hard work and willingness to take shelter in the first and easiest refuge that offers."

BATTLE WITH SIX EAGLES.

Virginia Lumber Dealer Attacked in Woods and Nearly Overcome.

Norfolk, Va.—J. L. Durnell, a lumber dealer of this city, while looking over some timber land on Sand Hills plantation in Princess Anne county had to fight for his life with six eagles.

The great birds swooped down on him, and falling into a hole he was momentarily helpless. With their talons and beaks scratching his flesh and tearing his clothing he regained his feet and fought them with a big stick for 300 yards before gaining shelter. He was then almost helpless and without protection soon would have been overcome by the eagles.

Short Sermons For a Sunday Half-Hour

Theme:

THE ROCK OF AGES

By Rev. John White Chadwick

Text: "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock." —Matthew vii., 25.

Because all men are much wiser than the individual, because our great social generalizations concerning property and marriage, concerning duty, Immortality and God, are part and parcel of the Rock of Ages, are the deposits of unnumbered generations of co-operating thought, of countless individual minds working in a social medium, it behooves the modern thinker to hasten slowly when he would wipe out all these generalizations, as if they were a milkman's score, and make a brand new start: Here is no plea for slavish acquiescence in a traditional belief, but here is a solemn warning to respect and not too rashly set aside those institutions and opinions which are the naturally selected products of a course of evolution which began five hundred thousand years ago, and has perhaps as long a time to continue. Nay, but why suggest a limit to the process, either way? Let us follow the Old Testament Rock. The craving for the supernatural resents the naturalizing, humanizing processes of evolutionary thought, as if they were atheistic, as if they eliminated God. But what they do in sober fact is to recognize him and declare him in all times and things and places, and not merely here or there in an irrational and arbitrary isolation. More surely than the rock-ribbed earth came from the sun's perfervid, nebulous mass, so surely as the earth's alluvial mantle is woven from the crystalline stuff of the primeval hills and studded with their gems, the process of man's social evolution is a thing of God, the product of his mighty heart, close-woven of the stuff wherewith he covers himself as with a garment. Nor is the story told when we have carried back the process by as many vast removes from the man to the ascidian, from the ascidian to the lifeless earth condensing its steaming vapors into floods and rivers whereunto the Mississippi and the Amazon are purling streams. No; but every instant of the process carries with it the life and spirit, purpose, energy, and inspiration of the ever-present, all surrounding, and upholding God in whom we live and move and have our being. Surely, our house of life is builded on the Everlasting Rock; and the rain may fall, and the floods come, and the winds beat upon this house, and it will not fall because its foundations are imbedded in the impregnable reality of things.

What is more wonderful than the atomic structure of the earth and stars, so many millions of atoms in the smallest space on which the most powerful microscope can seize, nor one of them (if we may trust some of the loftier recent speculations) without its individual life? I will tell you what is much more wonderful than this. It is the atomic structure of that Rock of Ages, that social accumulation capitalized for the joy and peace and blessing of the generations ever surging up from the great central deep. If we could see what that is made of, it would be a sight as much more wonderful than the dance of atoms, as the dance of atoms is more wonderful than that of midgets in the summer's quiet air. What countless struggles, failures, and successes,—failures that look like successes often, and successes that look like failures! What duties done, though hard, what sorrows sweetly borne, what searching for the truth, what loyalty to it as far as known, what grand dissatisfactions with things as they are, what resolute endeavors for the things that ought to be, what tears and laughter, and what peaceful joy of faithful wedded hearts—nay, but the catalogue so lengthens out as to defy our speech! And here I bring my sermon home to every private heart. This surely must go unsaid, that the Rock of Ages considered as the social fund of human experience, massed in the present social order, is much more the product of innumerable, infinitesimal fidelities than of isolated genius making here and there its splendid contribution to the good of life. Innumerable the increments by whose strength we live and in whose virtue we rejoice. And who is there of us that cannot think some thought, or do some work, or ease some burdened heart, and so make the Rock of Ages such a foundation that men may build upon it with a sweeter confidence than heretofore, and find its ragged crevices abloom with tenderer and more lovely flowers, their beauty breathing balm for spirits wounded grievously in life's hard fray?

I found it difficult the other night to cross a muddy street because of the deep shadow cast by my own body, which stood between the electric light and the walk over which I was crossing. Not a little of the time, I fear, do we stand in our own spiritual light, making our own pathway black with ugly shadows cast by our own personality, while the light flashes all around us. If you would avoid the shadows, walk toward the electric light in the heavens and let its beam fall in your face.—George L. Perin.