

ASTBURY'S BARGAIN.

CHAPTER I. Continued.

As she made this declaration there was something strangely, almost startlingly beautiful in the fair face with the halo of impregnable, undoubting love upon it. To win such a love as that which would not any man give—to be worthy of it, what would not any man sacrifice? So thought Gilbert as he carefully tore into fragments the paper he had taken from the packet, whilst he moved towards the fireplace.

"Do not go yet—stay only a minute. I am going, and you are not likely to see me again." He was dropping the fragments of paper into the fire as he spoke, and they made a merry blaze which seemed to mock at his misery. When the last bit had turned into a black film and a draught from the partly opened door had whisked it up the chimney, he replaced the packet in his bag. "There is no more to say. Good-bye." He was at the door, holding out his hand; but she drew back, startled by his abrupt manner, and he misunderstood the movement for one of refusal to take his hand. "Good-bye," he repeated hastily. "God bless you; and may you never have cause to be sorry for the answer you have given me to-day."

The outer door had closed behind him before the dazed girl could recover from the bewilderment caused by his words and conduct. The burning of that paper with so much care and deliberation had perplexed her sorely; and rousing herself, she darted to the fireplace to see if any scrap remained on which might be found some legible words to give a clue to the meaning of his action. But the work of destruction had been too thoroughly accomplished to leave the faintest trace of what the paper had been, or what had been written on it.

Then the girl sat down and cried. Angry as she had been with her visitor, she was sorry for him, because she liked him. He had been a trusted friend and companion; and he had introduced Henry Dacon to her. Naturally, too, she had a kindly regard for the man who had wished to marry her, and who, until quite recently had borne his rejection patiently. But she could not help his disappointment when he discovered that she liked Dacon so much as to prefer him before all others as the man to whom she was ready to entrust her future. It was not her fault that she should prefer him. Love was not a fault, and could not be got up to order. Can love be regulated in its growth to suit convenience, prudence, circumstances, and climate? All history and fable answer—"No."

But Gilbert had been a dear friend, and he was now under a very dark cloud. She would have liked to show her sympathy for him—would have been glad to speak any comforting words of hope at her command; but his conduct in attempting to shield himself from blame, as she fancied, and accusing his friend had closed her mouth, and suppressed the sympathy she would willingly have given him. And now, when he had vexed and worried her almost beyond endurance, she could not help feeling sorry for him—he looked so very ill when he said: "God bless you; and may you never have cause to be sorry for the answer you have given me to-day."

The words, the burning of the letter, and his manner, bewildered and distressed her exceedingly. So she could only find relief in tears, and wish that Henry would come soon to help to explain Gilbert's mysterious behaviour. Of course, whilst speaking to him and in her rage it had been all plain enough; a rejected lover was simply doing his best and worst to oust his rival from the first place in her regard. But now that he was gone and she could remember the many traits of a brave, upright, generous nature displayed by Gilbert during years of friendly intercourse, in which, if there had been evil in his character, some sign of it must have been manifested—now, when she remembered this and could think over it, she could only feel bewildered and sorry for him.

The source of all the trouble lay in the recent discovery that a series of gigantic frauds had been perpetrated on the firm of Elliott & Co., the extensive ship-brokers and ship-owners. No one had been yet directly accused of the crime; but investigations were in progress and suspicion pointed to one of two persons, because they alone seemed to have it in their power to perpetrate the frauds. Henry Dacon, nephew of Mr. Elliott, the head of the firm, and a junior partner, and Gilbert Astbury, the confidential clerk, were the only persons in England who had the right of access to the documents and information, the possession of which rendered the frauds possible.

The position of the first named seemed to place him beyond suspicion; and little doubt was entertained as to who the real culprit must be. But John Elliott, in his seventieth year, was still a clear-headed, strong-willed man, and sternly just. He would pronounce no opinion; he would accuse no one until the proofs of guilt had been fully collected. Therefore the investigation proceeded without any arrest being made and the two suspected persons were presumed to be giving their utmost aid in its prosecution. The assistance of the police had not yet been called for, as Mr. Elliott desired to avoid fuss and scandal until he could say: "There is the forger—arrest him." He was the more strongly moved to this course as there was a bare possibility that a third person might be involved in the crime, and that person was the most important and most trusted of the foreign agents of the house. The possibility was so very remote, however, that this name was not mentioned.

At Cedar Cottage the terrible cloud

which hung over them had been talked about in confidence by Dacon and Gilbert. Naturally, it produced the greatest anxiety and excitement in the breasts of the three ladies who had so far carefully preserved the secret from their most intimate friends. There were, however, mysterious rumors in the City and mysterious paragraphs in the money articles of the leading daily papers which at length so clearly indicated the house of Elliott & Co. that the crisis was at hand when the whole transaction must become public and pass into the hands of the police.

It was at this juncture that Gilbert paid his hasty visit to the Cottage, and left it with that look of absolute despair which only appears when a man knows that his doom is sealed, and that no earthly power can save him from utter ruin and disgrace.

He did not observe Daisy put down the watering-can and advance to meet him as he was walking blindly towards the gate. She was frightened by his expression and clasped his arm with her soft hand. "You are very ill, Gilbert," she exclaimed. "What has happened?"

He smiled faintly as he took her hand, pressing it gratefully; for there was no mistaking the depth of the girl's solicitude on his account. "Little more has happened than I expected, Daisy; and yet that little makes all the difference in the world to me. You will not see me again—or if you do, it will only be to shun me and feel ashamed that you ever called me your friend."

"I shall never feel that," she responded quietly; "and you ought to know it. Whatever misfortune may happen to you, it cannot alter my regard for you."

"I believe you think so now," she said with a melancholy movement of the head; "but you do not know—you cannot guess what you will soon hear about me. All the same I wish I could thank you as I would like to do for the comfort your words give me."

"I won't believe anything I hear about you if it is bad," was her decisive comment, and with shrewd instinct she went straight to the point: "You have persuaded Hetty to see you, and she has been unkind to you. So you are in the dumps, and fancy that all the world is against you. You have been bothered and worried about this nasty business in the City. You have got ill over it, and consequently you are looking at everything through a false glass which distorts the appearance and meaning of all that you see."

He smiled again faintly. She was so much in earnest in her endeavor to cheer him that she helped him more than she could have imagined to bear the heavy burden he had resolved to take upon himself. They were standing under the shadow of the cedar tree, and his voice was full of subdued emotion.

"Thank you again, Daisy, for what you have said. I shall remember the words all my life—they will always be the most precious memories of this bitter day. Good-bye."

Although he uttered the last word in the manner of one who is taking leave of a dear friend for a long time, Daisy refused to accept it in that sense. So, with affected confidence she inquired: "When are we to see you again?"

"I do not know—maybe you will never see me again."

"Are you going away anywhere?" "Yes I start this afternoon on what will probably be a very long journey. I do not yet know what my destination is to be."

"But you will write and tell—aunt?" "There will be no letters," he answered gloomily.

"I think you are trying to frighten me, Gilbert," she ejaculated with a shade of impatience, as they parted at the gate.

She watched him hurrying down the green lane, and fancied that his steps were somewhat unsteady, as if from exhaustion. At the old graveyard he halted, looked back, and seeing Daisy, waved his hand. Then he turned the corner and was out of sight.

CHAPTER II.

The latest editions of the evening papers contained a brief paragraph under big headlines: "Great Frauds in the City!"—"Flight of the Suspected Criminal!"—and so forth. The information given under these startling lines was somewhat meagre. Messrs. Elliott & Co., the well-known ship-owners and ship-brokers of Fenchurch Street, had recently discovered that a series of ingenious forgeries had been perpetrated by some one in their employment. The sums obtained by these forgeries, so far as could be at present estimated, amounted to the enormous total of ninety thousand pounds. A rigid investigation into the affair was in progress, and in the meanwhile it was discovered that the confidential clerk of the firm, named Gilbert Astbury, had absconded. He had been aware for several days that he was under suspicion, and his sudden flight seemed to justify it. The police were on his track, and no doubt of his speedy arrest was entertained.

The news of Gilbert's disappearance was the cause of much excitement to the inmates of Cedar Cottage; but the views taken of it by each of the three women differed. Hetty regarded it as an unquestionable proof of the innocence of Henry Dacon; and whilst she lamented the position of his and her former friend, she was glad that her lover was thus exonerated from all possibility of doubt as to his complicity in the fraud. Mrs. Silvertown was painfully conscious of the injury which her acknowledged relationship with the criminal—she had at once accepted the theory that he was guilty, since he had fled from the investigation—would entail upon her and hers. To Daisy the views taken by her aunt and cousin were incomprehensible. She could partly understand Hetty; but she could not understand her aunt.

"If it is true that Gilbert has gone away," she said with quiet confidence, "it is not to save himself, but to shield some one else."

"What nonsense you talk, child!" exclaimed Mrs. Silvertown, putting on her gold-mounted pince-nez to examine the girl attentively, as if to discover whether or not the defence was made seriously. "Gilbert is not a fool, and must have been perfectly aware of what his disappearance at this moment meant to him. An innocent man never runs away when such a dreadful charge as this is hanging over him. Poor fellow—it is terrible and most incomprehensible. He had such a chance in life as few young men without fortune ever obtain."

"That is just it, aunt," persisted Daisy in her low voice, but without lifting her eyes to meet the glittering glasses which were fixed upon her. "He had the chance, and he was worthy of it. Therefore his conduct is, as you say, incomprehensible, and that is why I think he is innocent."

"Daisy!—my dear, I said that an innocent man goes his way." There was a degree of amazement in the tone of the exclamation, and a degree of reproach in the mild reminder of Mrs. Silvertown's infallibility, which indicated that she was a lady quite unaccustomed to contradiction anywhere, and certainly not in her own immediate family circle.

Daisy was silenced. As a rule, she submitted without a sign of rebellion to her aunt's verdict; but this time there was a slight flush on the pale cheeks and a compression of the lips suggestive of irritation at the widow's self-sufficiency. Hetty was too well pleased to find that every possible suspicion was cleared away from Henry to pay much heed to the trifling passage between her mother and cousin.

Mrs. Silvertown was more astounded by the audacity of her niece than by the assumed guilt of the fugitive, although that was most offensive and, as she fancied, derogatory to her; for she had been his friend and sponsor. She had—when he seemed to be prospering—even admitted that there was a distant family relationship between them; and the remembrance of that admission rankled in her mind now. Instead of experiencing any sense of pity for Gilbert, she was angry with him, for his defection was a direct personal injury. She would have been relieved if there had been any way in which she could save her own reputation for perspicacity by hinting that she had always had a misgiving about the young man. But such consolation was denied her. His success had been so rapid; the favorable impression he made upon every one to whom he had been presented so marked, that she had not been able to resist the delight of playing the patron to the favorite of the hour. Thus she had committed herself too definitely as voucher for his respectability to dare to shirk it now.

She could only exclaim that she was horrified—that she had never been so deceived in all her life, and that it almost shattered her faith in the honesty of the whole human race. She had done so much for him on account of his poor dear mother, who had been mercifully spared by Providence the spectacle of his disgrace—that she could never forgive him, or forget her own weakness in being led so far astray by misplaced confidence.

Her imagination so far exaggerated the benefits she had conferred on the ungrateful creature, that it misled her into the delusion that she had introduced him to Henry Dacon. The fact was that Gilbert had brought his friend to Cedar Cottage, thereby earning the special approbation of the widow, who saw in the nephew of John Elliott, of Overton Park a most desirable match for her dowryless daughter. She had thought of Gilbert as a possibly acceptable suitor; but she repudiated the bare idea of it as soon as Dacon frankly declared his intentions and was accepted by Hetty. She pretended to herself that she had never thought of such an alliance, and was angry with Gilbert for having been so ambitious as to fancy she would ever have sanctioned it.

Mrs. Silvertown was a plump, fair, lively, lady, still on the higher side of fifty, but it was carefully held in hand by a large measure of common-sense. She was good-natured to this extent—she would help anybody, if the help required did not tax her pocket, whilst it redounded to her credit. She was blessed with unlimited faith in herself, in her own wisdom, foresight, charity, and all the other noblest qualities of humanity; and she had admirers enough of both sexes—sincere and sycophantic—to sustain her in the creed which makes life most agreeable.

It was only this faith which enabled her to bear with equanimity the open rebellion of Daisy in regard to Gilbert. As she had forgotten the circumstance that it was he who had brought her into contact with the desirable son-in-law, so she had been long oblivious to the quarterly payment regularly received from the late Mr. Forester's executors which defrayed all Daisy's expenses, and was pleased to think of herself as the generous benefactor of the orphan niece.

Moreover, but excusably, she ignored the item that the girl was quietly making in her own way for herself in authorship, which might have permitted her—even without the settled provision made for her to adopt an independent position.

Such a thought, however, never crossed Daisy's mind. She had grown up under the influence of her aunt, who naturally held the position of a parent to her, and looked upon Cedar Cottage as her only home. She accepted so implicitly the theory that her aunt's protection was a necessity for which the submission of a daughter was due, that she had never dreamed of asserting independence.

The advent of Gilbert Astbury had altered her views of everything. At first, it had brought new light and joy into her life; new strength, new hope, inspired her vision of the future. He was poor, she knew; he was clever, she was sure; he was ambitious, she could easily divine. Might not she, somehow, help him to win the goal of his ambition? Then for the first time she had begun to consider her position. She found out what means were at her disposal; and with the sanguine ideas which the first cheque from a publisher inspires in the budding author, she imagined that with hard work and an average continuance of the success her early efforts promised, she might be able to do wonderful things in helping forward the man she loved.

The castles in the air thus built were very beautiful; and the dreams were very sweet, when she filled them with very sweet. Then the castles and the dreams were all blown into thin air by one soft breath of the man for whose sake they had been all created.

Gilbert, attracted by her quiet, thoughtful, and gentle nature, had early accepted her as his friend, and he soon made her his confidant. When the rapid success he was making—and she was so proud of it—was confirmed by the statements of his friend Harry Dacon as well as by his own cheerful humour, Gilbert gave her the bit of confidence which for the time turned day into night. He loved Hetty. He worked and lived only for her.

Daisy was silent, stunned by the disastrous mistake she had made, and the utter darkness into which the sudden discovery thrust her. The golden fancies which had made the world so beautiful to her were all gone; and it was

the more misery to her to know that he, too, must presently step into the same dark region, unpenetrated by any ray of hope to save him from despair. She shrank from telling him that she knew he must undergo the same pangs he had unconsciously and innocently inflicted upon her. She loved him so much that he was at once exonerated from all blame in her mind; and she felt pity for him as keen as for herself. Hetty had told her that she was engaged to Henry Dacon. Gilbert must find that out for himself. The bitter knowledge would come upon him soon enough, and, judging by her own sensations, he would be glad that she had left him a few days—or, it might be, even a few hours—to revel in the paradise of hope.

He did learn the truth soon; and then had followed much unhappiness for the two men and for Hetty, whilst Daisy looked on with her own sorrow hidden and unsuspected. She tried patiently and tenderly to help the others without one of them guessing that she herself stood in so much need of sympathy.

The discovery of the forgeries in which the names of the accepted and the rejected lover were involved had caused a diversion of the anxieties of the five people most interested in the result of the investigations which had been instituted. But Daisy had not the faintest doubt that whatever the upshot might be, Gilbert would come forth scathless. She had no thought that it would be so soon necessary for her to assert this faith against the common-place inferences which directed her aunt's judgment of his conduct; and she was considerably surprised that Hetty did not attempt to speak one good word for him. She was satisfied, however, that this silence was not due to callousness, but to Hetty's anxiety for Dacon's appearance. She too, began to wish for his arrival, so that some more light might be thrown on the state of affairs. She had no doubt that he would come, from the way in which Hetty listened to the sound of passing wheels and her frequent visits to the window.

(To be Continued.)

REGARDING DIVERS.

About Their Dress and the Depth at Which They May Safely Work.

The dress of a fully equipped diver weighs 169 1-2 lb., and costs about \$500. First of all comes 8 1-2 lb. of thick underclothing, then follows the dress itself, weighing 14 lb.; boots, 32 lb.; monstrous things with leaden soles; breast and back weights, 80 lb.; and, lastly, the helmet, which weighs 35 lb. When the hull of the Great Eastern was cleaned by divers as she was being loaded with the cable for the India submarine telegraph the contract price for the work was £1,800, and it was completed in six weeks by twelve divers. The incrustation on her bottom was more than a foot thick, and after it was removed she lifted fully two inches. The greatest depth at which a diver may safely work is 150 feet. There have been, however, rare instances of diving to 204 feet, and sustaining a pressure of 88 1-2 lb. on every square inch on the body of the diver. Diving was first invented by the action of the elephant in crossing a deep river, when he swims beneath the water, elevating his trunk, by which method he breathes. The work of a diver consists in recovering lost articles, and sinking them in such a manner that they can be easily hauled up, cleaning and coppering ships' bottoms, cleaning propellers, and communicating by slate and voice. When able to work at a depth of 120 feet a diver is considered fully qualified. The flag ships in the British navy carry eight divers, and the cruisers four each, fully equipped.

HE "BEAT" HIS WAY.

The Strange Passenger Brought Into Montreal by the C. P. R.

There was an interesting squirrel hunt in the train shed of the Windsor station, Montreal, the other day. One of the incoming passenger trains had through some peculiar accident brought along with it a big brown squirrel. The animal had not been expressed, and was, so to speak, beating its way. It is supposed that while passing through wooded land the squirrel had dropped on a passing coach from an overhanging bough. Be that as it may, the trainmen, after the coaches had been shunted into the shed, saw Mr. Squirrel jump from a car and scurry along the platform. Everything was forgotten in the excitement of the chase, and it fell to the lot of one of the red caps, a boy named Macdonald, to capture the little deadbeast. In the capture the squirrel bit his captor's hand quite severely, but the boy bore him no malice, and, depositing him in a box, took him home with him to make a household pet.

PEARLS OF TRUTH.

Remember that if the opportunities for great deeds should never come, the opportunity or good deeds is renewed for you day by day. The thing for us to long for is goodness, not glory.

You cannot go through life, no matter how humble your sphere, without being called upon many times to decide whether you will be true or false to honor and duty. Duty and honor must go hand in hand. They are your lives useful, beautiful, and noble. You can make them worthless and contemptible.

Look upon the bright side of your condition; then your discontents will disperse. Pore not upon your losses, but recount your mercies.

Friendship is the reciprocity of affection; and he who has come to bestow has no right to expect any in return. There is no rigid line between duties to self and duties to another. They blend into one another; they act and react upon each other; and, when the right balance between them is destroyed, neither can be perfectly fulfilled.

Having a purpose in life is essential to right living. If a man does not know what he is living for, he may well doubt whether his life is worth living. Unless a man is living to a purpose he has either not yet begun to live or he has got through living. In either case he is out of place in the world.

A COURT SCENE.

How an Official Was Mortified by His Indiscretion.

There was not very long ago an imposing function in progress at the English court, and the Lord Chamberlain and the Lord Steward, who were the managers of the ceremonial, were having not a little trouble in arranging the details and in putting every one in the right place.

There were heralds, ushers, officials of the royal household, maids of honor, ladies and gentlemen in waiting, and other functionaries without number to be stationed according to tradition and custom; and there were royal personages to be disposed of in the order of precedence regulated by a rigorous court etiquette. The pawns and minor pieces could be moved about with impunity, but the royal dignitaries were more unmanageable and less easily approached.

One of the managers after making futile efforts to evolve order from confusion, and to make the royal personages understand what they were to do and where they were to stand, was unable to conceal his annoyance. Suddenly coming face to face with one of his intimate associates at the court he exclaimed with irritation and explosive temper:

"Confound these royalties! They are an awful nuisance. There is no doing anything with them."

The angry official was warned at once by the expression of his companion's face that he had spoken in too loud a key, and had been overheard by some of the eminent people of whom he was complaining. Turning quickly about, he perceived that two of the Queen's sons were standing directly behind him and laughing heartily. He was mortified by his indiscretion, and betrayed his embarrassment by his heightened color. The princes at once set him at his ease by smiling graciously and waving their hands toward him.

"Never mind us," said one of them with uncontrollable amusement. "We know that we are an awful nuisance; but we are doing our best."

The princes turned away laughing, and the two officials smiled in their turn under the stimulus of royal example. The procession was finally formed, and the function proceeded with stately pomp and courtly propriety.

The etiquette of a court is very often irksome to members of royal families. From their youth they are accustomed to live under constant restraint, and to accept the homage and flatteries of all around them. They are constantly on exhibition, and cannot escape from wearisome ceremony and pomp. The Eastern fable of the monarch who was in the habit of going about his capital in disguise for the sake of mingling freely with his subjects and enjoying a sense of liberty, expresses the natural discontent of royalty with artificial conditions of existence.

Princes are not the happiest men in the world, even when they are "doing their best." Living in narrow circles, and hedged about by social barriers, many of them sigh for the privilege of breathing freely and being like other men.

THE LABRADOR INDIANS.

They Are Reported to Be in a State of Utter Destitution.

Commander Wakeham, of the Gulf Protection Service, speaking recently at Ottawa of the unhappy conditions of life which exist among the Indians in the inland of the Labrador peninsula states that news was brought to the St. Lawrence coast recently that five families had perished of starvation while many more were on the bounds of the same. The Indians belong to the height of land away back in the interior. They border closely on the Esquimaux. They dwell on Canadian soil, but are not treaty Indians, consequently they are not under the direct care of the department like the greater part of the Indians in the west. Food is at no time abundant, and it is when it falls, as it did last year, they suffer from want. If they could make their way through to the Hudson's Bay Company's forts and the Hudson's Bay coast their wants would be attended to, or if they could get down to the Gulf coast, where there are settlements, there would be no danger of suffering from hunger, but travel in the winter is necessarily very slow. They travel in families. The Government can do nothing in the matter. The agents along the St. Lawrence coast have instructions to afford assistance wherever it is needed, and this is as far as they can go. Mr. Wakeham adds that the white settlers along the Labrador coast opposite Newfoundland are in an extremely poverty-stricken condition, through the failure of the fisheries, and they will have to get help through the winter months.

NOTES ON STATIONERY.

The old, old fashion that used to prevail before envelopes were invented is coming back into favour, particularly for notes where only one side of a sheet of paper be used. The other is folded over square, addressed and stamped, and stuck down at each corner with seal and wax.

Only light-tinted stationery is favoured by the woman who follows the vagaries of fashion in this as in other fields. White, the palest grays and blues are in most demand, deep blues and purples are relegated to the strong-minded person who disregards fads and foibles.

The mode of monogram most desired is called the ring monogram. The letters are intertwined on a round coloured background in some contrasting shade to the colour of the stationery used, and the whole is enclosed in a decorative ring. Room for discretion and taste in the matter of harmony is in the power of the purchaser.

Cards are still so thin that fifty may easily be accommodated at once in an ordinary card case. It is rumoured that autograph cards will take the place of the present popular block lettering, which has at least the merit of being plain and unpretentious. In many cases autograph cards might prove puzzling and even the cause of endless embarrassing positions.