

ASTBURY'S BARGAIN.

BY CHARLES GIBBON.

CHAPTER VI.

The Overton Park carriage was at the gate of Cedar Cottage, and the footman was at the door respectfully awaiting the command of Mrs. Silverton. The carriage had been sent from the Park by Mrs. Dacon to bring her mother and cousin to the grand juvenile fête which was to celebrate the fifth birthday of Mr. and Mrs. Dacon's only child, little Hetty. The widow liked to have the Overton carriage with its two fine bays standing in front of her house and to have the footman in his quiet and conspicuous livery standing at her door; and whenever she was sent for, contrived to keep the equipage waiting some time. On this occasion there was an extra delay, which was not Mrs. Silverton's fault, but Daisy's.

When ready to start, the postman had delivered a letter from Gilbert. It informed her that he had arrived in Liverpool, and was just starting for London, of course traveling under the name by which he was not known. He intended to make his way at once to the Cottage, and begged her, if she should be going out, to leave a message appointing an early hour for a meeting. Certain information had reached him which explained Dacon's strange illness, and he was most anxious to talk to her about it.

Daisy had not concealed from Aunt Silverton the correspondence with Gilbert; but as any communication between Cedar Cottage and that young man was entirely disapproved of, she did not tell her much. Consequently, she was at a loss how to act in the present juncture, being excited by the unexpected intimation of Gilbert's speedy arrival. His sudden return plainly indicated that some calamity was about to befall the master of Overton Park. She determined to say nothing to her aunt until she had seen Gilbert, and simply left a note with the housemaid for "Mr. Harrison" telling him where a message would find her.

"I never knew you take so long to dress before, Daisy," exclaimed Mrs. Silverton as she lay back in the carriage with a delightful sense of her own grandeur and importance; "and yet it is only a children's party."

The fête was to be a very grand one, Dacon had attended to every detail himself, determined to produce for his child a scene of fairy wonders which should transcend all the pictures in the Arabian Nights. The autumn tints of the foliage on the Park trees were to lend their aid to the effects produced by the thousands of Chinese lanterns which were cunningly hung throughout the grounds; and a grand display of fireworks was to close the amusements of the young people after they were tired of dancing and feasting, and the home-bearing carriages were arriving.

Five-year-old Hetty was at the top of the lawn, receiving her numerous tiny guests and their grown-up guardians with as much composure as if she had been a queen accustomed to levees. Her father had made so much a companion of her that she was old-fashioned and self-possessed without being rude or obtrusive—a rare combination in a child. The only impatience she displayed was when she turned to her mother with the repeated question: "But where is papa? He promised to be here early, and he always comes at the time he says he will."

"He is late," said Mrs. Dacon, standing behind her daughter and looking anxiously down the avenue. "But, my dear, he cannot always leave the office at a fixed hour, and he is very busy just now."

Then the fun commenced; and the bands of merry youngsters were conducted through the shrubbery to the tennis-ground, which had been transformed into a miniature fair. There were swings and merry-go-rounds, a Punch and Judy show, a marionette show, a conjurer's and a fortune-teller's tents, and a fancy fair of toys of every description, to be distributed according to the number taken from a wheel-of-fortune at the entrance for every passer to dip in and draw out a ticket.

Besides all this, there was a brass band playing with brassy loudness all sorts of merry tunes to make hearts glad and feet patter chirpingly on the smooth grass.

And so when the fun was at its height, papa came home looking very weary and haggard. He did not go out into the midst of the merry throng, but went straight up to his bedroom, and sent for his wife. "Don't make any fuss, dear," he said, when she came; "but I am too ill for anything except going to bed. I want to get a sleep. Maybe I will wake up refreshed enough to join the party. Go on with our arrangements as if there was nothing the matter. Promise me that."

"Of course, Henry; but you look so ill that I must send for the doctor."

"Nonsense, my dear; I shall be all right after a nap."

"Papa, papa!" cried little Hetty, who had somehow discovered his arrival, and rushed into the room, her bright amber hair touched by the rays of the setting sun and looking like gold. "I am so glad you are here. Do come and see how the beautiful dollies are moving about just like real people."

He took her up in his arms and kissed her—he seemed to gasp as he held her to his breast. "Yes, darling, I will see the dollies by-and-by."

The child kissed him, wondering that he should refuse to join her immediately in the play as she had requested. He had never done so before.

"You won't be long, papa," she said, moving hesitatingly away; "the dollies are so beautiful and look so real."

"No, not long, pet. But you must

go now—I am so tired." He kissed her again and again, seeming to gasp for breath as he did so. The child, with a pretty toss of the head and a merry laugh, skipped away to mingle with her playing companions in the pleasures so lavishly provided for them.

"I want to have a sleep, Hetty," he said very tenderly to his wife; "you know I have not had any for many nights; but I feel drowsy now. So as the doctors say, I must sleep if there is to be any chance of recovery, you will not on any account try to wake me if you should find me in a doze.—There now, go, and do what you can to make the little folks happy, and let me rest."

The wife very reluctantly left him to return to her duties as hostess; but she found it difficult to smile, although the merry shouts of laughter filled the atmosphere with a sense of unclouded joy.

The twilight was fading into darkness when the fireworks were started, and three huge rockets ending in variegated sprays of blue and red inaugurated the programme. Before the first stick fell, a footman found Daisy, and informed her that Mr. Harrison desired to see her.

She immediately followed the man in the direction of the house, but had only gone about a score of paces when she saw a gentleman advancing towards her. She felt her hand grasped with a fervour which sent a thrill of pleasure through her veins and brought the hot blood into her cheeks. That was Gilbert's grasp; but the sensation it produced was somewhat different from what it used to be. In bygone times she trembled with the delight of touching his hand, because she believed it could never be her own. Now it seemed as if by some occult influence he had conveyed to her mind the impression that the hand was her own and brought with it a true and undivided affection.

"You are not sorry to see me here again?" he said.

"I am very glad. It is what I have always wished; but your last letter frightened me."

"Let us cross the lawn to the beeches. We can talk there without interruption. Will you take my arm?"

The acquiescing action was his answer; and they passed quietly into the shadow of the trees, where the garing lights of the fireworks, now in full progress, could not discover them to the guests, even if the guests had not been too much preoccupied by the brilliant display to think of peering into shady nooks.

"I do not know how to prepare you for what I have to say," Gilbert began, while he tried to see her face in the shadow. "I had a letter from Dacon, which, read beside your last, telling me of his strange illness and of—there was the briefest hesitation before he pronounced the name—and of Mrs. Dacon's anxiety, determined me to get back to London as quickly as steamers and trains could carry me."

Daisy observed with satisfaction that he spoke of "Mrs. Dacon," not Hetty, as it used to be; and of course it was right that he should do so. But she pretended not to observe the change.

"What did he tell you that could alter your resolution so suddenly? Hetty is only unhappy on his account, and is in no need of your help."

"It was much my thought of you that brought me back as my concern for Dacon."

"For him!" she interrupted. "Then it was not for Hetty?"

"Oh, yes, for her too, and I fear what may happen to her. Dacon's letter told me that he was absolutely ruined."

"He ruined!" she exclaimed, utterly unable to grasp the possibility of such a thing.

Yes; the bankruptcy of the great house of Elliott & Co., will be announced in a few days.

"I do not understand. How can he have lost such an enormous fortune?"

"That is easily done by a man who confesses himself to have been a mad gambler from the moment when he first had the power to juggle with stocks and shares, and with such desperate ventures as no one in his senses would have anything to do with."

He says he was insane, and now realizes it when too late to retrieve himself. I have his permission to tell you everything, or I would not tell even you Daisy, that it was this mad passion that led him to perpetrate the frauds, from the consequences of which he was first screened by my flight, and then saved by the sudden death of his uncle, which gave him the means to take up all the forged bills. But even that terrible lesson did not cure him.

As soon as his hands were free, with the whole capital of the firm under his control, he lost every glimmer of reason and business knowledge he ever possessed, and now he says nothing can save him."

"And Hetty—poor Hetty—what is to become of her?"

"She will not be poor so far as money is concerned. He tells me that the one consolation he finds in the midst of the wreck he has made is the assurance, that, no matter what happens to him, his wife and daughter are provided for."

The marriage settlements were made when he was perfectly solvent, and they give to her Overton Park, with a sufficient income for its maintenance. The creditors cannot touch the settlements."

"But you, Gilbert—how will this affect you?" was her next eager inquiry.

"Will you be safe? Will you be cleared of all blame?"

"I do not know. However, it seems that he has told everything to Mr. Ardwick, who has promised to protect me from any charge in connection with the forgeries, and I will see him to-morrow. Dacon's chief object in telling me this was to persuade me to yield to his prayer that the knowledge of his crime might be kept from the edge of his daughter, if possible, from his wife and daughter in ignorance of it and I want you to help me."

"I will do whatever you think should be done."

"Ah, then—Daisy!—you will come back with me to Rio."

She had no desire to resist the pressure of his hand as he drew her close to him and kissed her. She had no time to wonder then how it came to be that she was not more surprised at finding herself elated in a moment from the ranks of the "unattached," to the blissful heights of the Betrothed; she had no time then to wonder how it all

came to be settled in such a simple way and everything understood between them with so few words—no time, for they were startled by the furious clatter of a horse's hoofs passing at full gallop down the avenue, from which they were screened by the beeches and shrubbery.

The band was playing one of Strauss's gayest melodies, and the children were shouting in wild glee at every new marvel of the firework display, and yet Daisy and Gilbert heard that horse's hoofs as distinctly as if there had been perfect stillness around them, and every stamp was like a loud bugle-note of alarm in their ears.

"There is something wrong at the house!" cried Daisy with instinctive dread. "That man is going for the doctor. Come, Gilbert; we must help her."

He knew that she meant her cousin, and they were speedily convinced that she stood in sore need of help.

"The anxious wife had at intervals stoed away from her guests to see how her husband fared. He seemed to be sleeping so soundly that she feared every fresh outburst of merriment, lest it should awaken him. By-and-by she was rendered uneasy by his stillness, for he did not seem to breathe. She touched him, and he did not stir. 'Henry!' she whispered tenderly in his ear; but he made no response. Then, becoming alarmed, she raised his arm, releasing it, and it fell lifeless by his side. She uttered a shriek of horror and anguish as she fell upon the bed beside the man she loved and believed to be so noble. The cry attracted a servant, who at once brought Mrs. Silverton. That lady's dismay did not prevent her from promptly taking the practical measures necessary under the circumstances. She sent for the doctor, and had her insensible daughter removed to another room, where Daisy presently came to assist in waiting upon her."

On the arrival of the doctor, he said he could be of no service to Mr. Dacon, who had been dead for two hours at least; the cause of death was prussic acid. So, Henry Dacon was consistent to the last, and sought escape from the consequences of his follies at any cost save that of manfully enduring them.

In Dacon's private desk was found a packet addressed to Gilbert Astbury, containing two documents. The first was a plain acknowledgment of his guilt, and a full explanation of how the frauds for which Gilbert had been blamed were perpetrated. As a partner in the firm, Dacon had the right of endorsing bills, and he had forged the names of the correspondents who were supposed to have drawn them.

In the ordinary course of business, Gilbert had got the bills discounted and received the money, which he handed to Dacon. Then it stated why Gilbert had agreed to screen him at the sacrifice of his own good name. "But his sacrifice has been a torture to me," the confession of the miserable man went on. "I did hope to retrieve everything by my daring speculations and to restore Astbury to his right position. I failed. Great as was the fortune left to me, I have lost it all."

The second paper was a letter to Gilbert, in which the writer stated that he had now made the only reparation in his power, and left him free to make any use of it that might best satisfy Astbury's bargain.

His only expressed wish of him. He only expressed the wish of a dying man that some way might be found to keep his wife and child in ignorance of the past.

Gilbert showed the papers to Daisy; and before he told her what he intended to do, she said in her calm, wise way: "We will put these things out of sight, and say nothing about them, Gilbert. You are safe, and that is enough for me. Hetty is well off, thanks to the marriage settlements, and that should satisfy"—she was going to say "you," but arrested herself and said "us all.—But do you think you can forgive me for being wicked and spiteful about something?"

"I don't know," she answered, smiling as she looked into those clear blue eyes.

"What are you spiteful about?"

"I cannot help wishing Hetty to know that she is not a victim, but that she is a woman who has been wronged by a man who was abusing her trust and burning the proofs of his guilt and your innocence."

"Yes, Daisy, that was a hard time for me. But whilst doing it and suffering her scorn, I was preparing the way for winning you—my own better self."

There could not have been a more satisfactory answer than that. They were not, however, compelled to return to Rio—although they did so for a time—or to retain the pseudonym of Harrison. Dacon's attempt at reparation was a dying man's only expressed wish of him.

The information he had given to Mr. Ardwick enabled that gentleman in the course of the winding up of Elliott & Co.'s affairs to satisfy every one that Mrs. Dacon had not perpetrated the frauds which had been placed to his account.

Mrs. Dacon and her child still remain in the blissful faith that Henry Dacon was a paragon of manhood; and Hetty is sure that Gilbert is innocent because "Henry had always said so." Mrs. Silverton carefully concealed the indignation she felt in regard to her deceased son-in-law for so recklessly squandering her daughter's great fortune, as she considered it. She always took a lenient view of the sins of the rich; and success so completely restored Gilbert to her good graces, that even without the public announcement of his innocence, she would have been pleased to distinguish him as "her dear friend and relative."

(The End.)

AT THE DOOR.

I thought myself indeed secure, So fast the door, so firm the lock; But, lo! he toddling comes to lure My parent ear with timorous knock.

My heart were stone could it withstand The sweetness of my baby's plea— That timorous baby knocking and, "Please let me in—it's only me."

Farther aside the unfinished work, Regardless of its tempting charms, And, opening wide the door, I took My laughing darling in my arms.

Who knows but in Eternity, I, like a truant child, shall wait The glories of a life to be, Beyond the Heavenly Father's gate!

And will that Heavenly Father heed The truant's supplicating cry, As at the outer door I plead, "Tis I, O Father! only I!"

—Eugene Field.

AN ALTERED PURPOSE.

CHAPTER I.

A cutting March wind, driving before it a small rain, which a little extra sharpness would have converted into hail or sleet, swept Byerley Street pretty clear of passengers, and furnished a good excuse, if one were sought, for two men, who walked on the more sheltered side of the road, seeking refuge in the Byerley Arms, a tavern which stood at an angle just where the wind and rain were coldest. This was not a "swell" hotel, or indeed, a high-class place at all. Byerley Street was a low street, and the Arms, as it was usually called, was a low house; but a good fire was burning in its public room, and save for one man, who sat moodily in a corner with folded arms and half asleep, the friends had the place to themselves. They were friends, or had been so until lately, and partners in business; but divers matters had arisen, which need not here be detailed, causing much irritation, with many unpleasant arguments between Messrs. Sparle and Otterson, the two persons of whom we have been speaking, and some of this unpleasantness was still fermenting in their minds.

The hot gin and water, which should have been cheering and soothing, failed in its effect, and, indeed, after a second tumbler, their conversation, which had been carried on in guarded tones, grew a little louder, and some personal remarks which were also deficient in cheering and soothing qualities, were exchanged, it was evident that business transactions, and especially those of finance, were at the base of all this dispute, which increased in acerbity, until Otterson exclaimed: "I won't have it, Jack!—and that is all about it. Pay me out, and I'll go. I will go cheap. As for all the stock, horse, van, and everything, I don't want them. Give me a fifty-pound note and you shall keep the lot. Only let us have a settlement soon."

"It is very well to talk like that, Steve," returned the other; "and I don't say I will not settle with you on your own terms; but what would you have said if I had the chucked the affair up as suddenly as this, and left you to find a partner where you could?"

"I leave you with all the best of it, don't I?" retorted Otterson. "What is fifty pounds to the value of the things I am giving up? You will find a partner soon enough; perhaps you have got one ready. I don't know a likelier man than Jack Sparle for such a dodge."

"You know a good deal better than that, Steve," said Sparle, who was the elder of the pair. "You want to quarrel; but we can part without that. I do not know where to find a man; I wish I did. Men who will stick to the business, and can put in some money—although it is not much—are not to be met with every day. I would give something to hear of one."

"Would you?" exclaimed the third person present. "The interruption startled both the others, who each uttered an angry ejaculation; Otterson following this with an oath."

"You had better mind your own business, sir," said Sparle; "and leave ours alone."

"I am attending to my own business, and I mean what I say," continued the stranger. "I have not listened purposely; but it was impossible to avoid hearing your arguments. I want something to do. Your trade, with its going about the country, will suit me."

"We should want some money first," interrupted Sparle, eyeing the shabby, slovenly figure of the speaker, a young man of somewhat dissolute appearance, with no great favour.

"I understand that well enough," returned the other. "I can find some. I can pay a deposit at this moment, and find the rest on credit. If your terms are moderate, I will be set against me on account of my looks. You may have known before to-day others who were under a cloud and glad to be out of the way; that is my case."

Each of his hearers gave a sardonic laugh, and Otterson said: "Most of our pals have been like that at some time or another—it is a little in my way at present. But if you really mean business, we don't care about the 'cloud,' and now is your chance."

An animated conversation followed; the first two men appearing in much better temper, and preliminaries were tolerably well adjusted at once.

The business in which the partners had been engaged was merely the traveling in the western provinces with a large van, fitted up for the sale of goods; attending fairs and races, and doing a little betting at some of the latter meetings, where they were known.

"Always on the square, you understand," explained Mr. Sparle; Mr. Otterson emphasizing this with an oath or two, as seemed his custom.

If the young man was in earnest—thus proceeded Mr. Sparle—and liked to do business sharp, he could go and see the horse and van at once, and see people, too, who would satisfy him that all was correct. He could then put his fifty pounds in for any such money; although Steve Otterson, who has a nasty temper—I don't mind saying so—before him—may pretend he is willing to go out for that. Only that a second party was necessary, nobody should come in at all. As it was, the party would have to put down a second fifty, or perhaps a little more according to valuation for his share; and even that would not include the betting, for which separate funds must be provided. This is a brief summary of the lengthy explanation, given by Mr. Sparle, with divers interjections by his late partner.

The stranger gave some proof of his business-like intentions by exhibiting a couple of five-pound notes. "These are all I have," he said; "and I know too well that no more can be got where

they came from." His tone changed as he said this, perhaps involuntarily; but his hearers, who were among the most cunning of their class, each glanced sharply at him, and each felt added confidence from that moment, that he did mean business.

"The stranger went on: 'I have a friend who will help me at once, as far as your price goes; and if I join I will do my best for you in the work.'

"What is your name?" demanded Sparle. "I mean, what are we to call you? I can tell well enough that whatever you give us will not be right; but we shall not argue about that. Names don't count for much with us, and all our agreements are by word of mouth."

A curious smile, apparently in spite of himself, had moved the lips of the young man while Mr. Sparle was speaking. "I rather like your free and easy style," resumed the stranger, after a brief pause. "Your name, I learn, is Sparle; mine will be Frank Rodbury. Here are the ten pounds. Late as it is, I am ready to go on with the business to-night. I will see what you have to offer; and I am quite sure my friend will not mind a call from me at any hour. Will you go on?"

(To Be Continued.)

NO ROOM FOR HIM IN GERMANY.

A Scholar's Struggle and Despair and His Violent Ending of Five Lives.

Germany has a peculiarly German kind of wretchedness—the wretchedness of the highly educated poor. Hardly a winter passes without some school-master's dying for want of the ordinary necessities of life. The never-ending production of doctors of philosophy, doctors of law, doctors of music, and doctors of theology, has filled the offices of the Church and State and school to overflowing. So around the fringe of official life the whole length and breadth of the empire there hangs a hungry, poorly clad, disheartened, and embittered contingent of Ph. D.'s, L. D.'s, and other less betitled scholars. If a man wished to write a dark page in the everyday life of the German people to-day, he would need only to record the suicides of men who were trained to fill high places that never were left vacant, or were left behind in the mighty struggle of university graduates for offices which would yield them the unbuttered bread of life.

If any person wishes to learn how bitter is the end of one of these unemployed scholars he should read the story of Paul Eulenburg, doctor of jurisprudence, who took his life in Blasewitz three weeks ago. He was the son of a Berlin professor of medicine. He married twelve years ago and lived in unmarred happiness with his wife. He had three children, 9, 5, and 2 1-2 years old, all girls. He had written much for magazines and newspapers, had published several modest books, and had turned his hand to one play, "Our Bismarck," which was presented repeatedly in small Saxon towns last winter. He and his wife lived in a flat in Blasewitz, and were supposed to eke out a fairly decent living with his earnings in literature. They belonged to all the local societies, such as abound in a German town of Blasewitz's size, seemed cheerful and comfortable, and for some time paid their debts with exemplary promptness.

Then Eulenburg began to put off his creditors. His income grew smaller, and he made the most desperate effort to increase it by tutoring, by writing, by copying, and by odd jobs at law. In Germany such efforts are doomed to failure; the man who makes them finds every avenue crowded beyond the possibility of admitting the casual struggler.

On Oct. 15 a tradesman came to Eulenburg with a bill for \$125.00. Eulenburg pawed part of his furniture and paid it. Then came another bill for \$8, another for \$3, and still others that must be paid from the proceeds of further pledges. Finally a bill for 70 cents found him at the end of all his resources. He locked the doors and windows of his flat; he did not open them to the man who called for his 70 cents. This creditor got an order from a court to enable him to seize part of Eulenburg's furniture. He and a court officer broke in the front door of the Eulenburg flat. In the first room they found the three children in a row on the floor, their faces waxen white and cold, and a sheet tucked evenly under their chins. All three were dead. In the next room lay Eulenburg and his wife on the bed, both waxen white, as were the children, and dead in each other's arms.

Dr. Eulenburg left a note saying that the struggle for a chance to earn his bread had become hopeless. He had poisoned the children, his wife, and himself with prussic acid. The tradesman found his 70 cents in a little nickel pile on the bureau, accompanied with a copy of the bill. The janitress found her month's pay in an envelope addressed to her. Eulenburg had paid his last debt. He gave up the struggle, just even with the world, which had nothing for him, as he had nothing for it.

WHERE WOMEN PROPOSE.

Persia is a powerful tribe, among whom an extraordinary custom prevails. Woman's rights have apparently received full recognition, for the ladies of the tribe can choose their own husbands. All a single woman has to do when she wishes to change her state is to send a servant to pin a handkerchief to the hat of the man whom her fancy lights, and he is obliged to marry her, unless he can show he is too poor to purchase her at the price her father requires.

First, "Whet-man" (a beginner)—Strange how a fellow will run into things when he first begins to ride. Second, "Whet-man"—Yes, I ran into debt to get my wheel.