

DARE HE?

OR, A SAD LIFE STORY

CHAPTER XLII.

Elizabeth's feeble tap at Byng's door is irritably answered by the nurse, who, opening it smilingly to admit her, the next moment, evidently in accordance with directions received, passes out herself and shuts it behind her. Elizabeth, deprived of the chaperonage of her cap and apron, and left stranded upon the threshold, has no resource but to cross the floor as steadily as a most trembling pair of legs will let her.

The room is a square one, two of its thick walls pierced by Moorish windows. Drawn up to one of those windows—the one through which Jim had caught his first glimpse of Elizabeth on the night of his arrival—is the sick man's sofa. At the side of that sofa his visitor has, all too soon, arrived. She had prepared a little set speech to deliver at once—a speech which will give the keynote to the after-interview: but, alas! every word of it has gone out of her head. Unable to articulate a syllable, she stands beside him, and if anyone is to give the keynote, it must be he.

"This is very, very good of you. It seems a shame to ask you to come here, with all this horrid paraphernalia of physic about; but I really could not wait until they let me be moved into another room."

"She has not yet dared to lift her eyes to his face, in terror lest the sight of the change in it shall overset her most unsteady composure. Already, indeed, she has greedily asked and obtained every detail of the alteration wrought in him. She knows that his head is shaved, that his features are sharp, and that his voice is faint; and, when as he ceases speaking, she at last wins resolution enough to look at him, she sees that she has been told the truth. His head is shaven, his nose is as sharp as a pen, and his voice is faint. She has been told all this; but what is there that she has not been told? What is his voice besides faint?"

"Will not you sit down? It seems monstrous that I should be lying here letting you wait upon yourself. Will you try that one?" pointing to the chair which is figuring at the same moment in Jim's tormented fancy. "I am afraid you will not find it very comfortable. I have not tried it yet, but it looks as hard as a board."

She sits down meekly as he bids her, glad to be no longer obliged to depend upon her shaky limbs and answers:

"Thank you; it is quite comfortable." "Would not it be better if you had a cushion?"—looking all around the room for one.

His voice is courteous, tender almost, in its solicitude for her ease. But is she asleep or awake? Can this be the same voice that poured the frenzy of its heart-rending adjurations into her ear scarce a month ago? Can this long, cool, white saint—he looks somewhat like a young saint in his emaciation and his scull-cap—be the stammering maniac who, when last she saw him, crashed down high dead at her feet, slain by three words from her mouth?

At the stupefaction engendered by these questions, her own brain seems turning, but she feebly tries to recover herself.

"I—I am so glad you are better." "Thank you so much. Yes it is nice; nice to be

"Not burnt with thirsting, nor with hot fingers, nor with temples bursting."

De you remember Keats?"

After all, there is something of the original Byng left, and the ghost of his old spouting voice in which he recites the above couplet gives her back a greater measure of composure than could almost anything else.

"It is nice, only one would like to be able to jump, not 'the life to come'—ha! ha!—but the convalescence to come. My mother is even more impatient than I am. She has made up her mind that we are to be off in three days, even if I am carried on board on a shutter."

She can see now that he is very much embarrassed—that his fluency is but the uneasy cover of some emotion—and the discovery enables her yet further to regain possession of herself.

"I should think," she says in her gentle voice, "that you would be very glad to get out of this room where—where you have suffered so much."

"Well, yes; one does grow a little tired of seeing

"The casement slowly grow a glimmering square!"

but—with a rather forced laugh—"at least, I have had cause to be thankful that there is no wall-paper to count the pattern of. I have blessed the white wall for its featureless face."

She moves a little in her chair, as if to assure herself that she is really awake. That stupefaction is beginning to numb her again—that hazy feeling that this is not Byng at all, this polite invalid, making such civil conversation for her; this is somebody else.

"But I must not fire myself out before I have said what I want to say to you," he continues, his embarrassment percept-

tibly deepening, while his transparent hand fidgets uneasily with the border of the coverlet thrown over him, "or"—laughing again—"I shall have that tyrant of a nurse down upon me, and I do wish—I have wished so much—so unspeakably—to see you, to speak to you."

She sits immovable, listening, while a ray of something—can it be hope? why should it be hope?—darts across her heart. After all, this may be Byng—her Byng; this strange new manner may be only the garment in which sickness has dressed his passion—a worn-out garment soon to drop away from him in rags and tatters, and in which cannot she already discern the first rent? After all, she may have need for her armor—that armor which, so far, has seemed so pitifully needless.

"I knew that it would be no use asking leave to send for you any sooner; they would have told me off with some excuse; so I kept a 'still sough.' Do you know that I never mentioned your name until to-day? But it has been hard work, I can tell you; for the last two days I have scarcely been able to bear it, I have so hungered to see you."

Her eyelids tremble, and she instinctively puts up her hand to cover her tell-tale mouth. Surely there is, in all events, a smatch of it in his last words; and again that prick of illogical joy quickens the beats of her fainting heart, though she tries to chide it away, asking herself why she should be in any measure glad that the love which she has come here for no other purpose than to renounce still lives and stirs.

"You may think I am exaggerating, but in point of fact I cannot by any expression less strong than the gnaw of downright hunger convey the longing I have had to see you."

He pauses with a momentary failure of his still feeble powers.

She catches her breath. Now is the time for her to strike in, to arrest him before he has time to say anything more definite. Now is the time for her to fulfil her promise, her inhuman promise, which yet never for one instant strikes her as anything but irrevocably binding. Does he see her intention, that he plunges, in order to anticipate it, into so hurried a resumption of his interrupted sentence?

"To see you in order to beg—to supplicate you to forgive me for my conduct to you."

She gives an almost imperceptible start. This ending is not what she had expected, not the one to defend herself against which she has been fastening on her buckler and grasping her shield. The words that it demands in answer are not those with which she has been furnishing herself, and it is a moment or two before she can supply herself with others. He must be referring, of course, to his last meeting with her—that one so violently broken off by the catastrophe of his collapse.

"I do not know what I am to forgive," she says, half bewildered. "You were not accountable for your actions. You were too ill to know what you were doing."

"Oh, you think I am alluding to that last time," cries he, precipitately correcting her. "No, no; you are right. I was not accountable then. You might as well have reasoned with a wild beast or a manerger. I was a perfect Bedlamite then. No—going on very rapidly, as if in desperate anxiety to make her comprehend with the least possible delay—"what I am asking you—asking you on my knees—to forgive me for, is my whole conduct to you from the beginning."

The two white faces are looking breathlessly into each other, and though of late he has been tussling with death on a bed, and she has been walking about, and plying her embroidery, and dining at a public table, hers is far the whiter of the two. It must be the unwonted exertion of talking so much that makes him bring out his next speech in jerks and gasps.

"I forced my acquaintance upon you at the very beginning; I watched you like a detective; I beset you wherever you went; I pestered you with my visits. Jim always told me that it was not the conduct of a gentleman, but I would not believe him—not even when"—how difficult it is! he finds it almost as hard work as his mother had done upon the Mole—"not even when, by my importunities, I had driven you away—obliged you to rush away almost by night from a place you liked—a place you were happy in—to escape me. And I have no excuse to offer you—none; unless, indeed, as I sometimes think, my mind was off its balance even then. I express myself wretchedly!"—in a tone of real distress—"but you will overlook that, will not you? You will—will understand what I mean?"

She makes an assenting motion with her head. At this moment she cannot speak; she will be able to do so again directly, but she must have just a minute or two. Yet she must not leave him for an instant in doubt that she understands him. Oh, yes, she understands him—understands that he is apologizing for having ever loved her; that he is awk-

wardly trying to draw the mantle of insanity over even the Vallombrosan wood. It is true that he does it with every sign of discomfort and pain; and he looks away from her, as Mrs. Byng, too, had found it pleasanter to do.

"Do you remember what Schiller said when he was dying? 'Many things are growing clearer to me.' I thought a good deal of those words as I lay over there"—glancing towards the now neatly-arranged and empty bed. "One night they thought it was all up with me—I heard them say so. They did not think I was conscious, but I was; and it did strike me that I had made a poor thing of it, and that if ever I was given the chance I would make a new start."

Again that little assenting movement of her fair head. How perfectly comprehensible he still is! How well she understands that he is renouncing her among the other follies of his "salad days"—college bear-fights, music-halls, gambling clubs. Well, why should not he? Has not she come here on purpose to renounce him? Can she quarrel with him for having saved her the trouble? "And I thought that I could not begin better than by falling on my knees to you!"—with a momentary expression of extreme impatience at his own bodily weakness—"and ask you most humbly and tenderly and reverently to pardon me."

She looks at him, and sees his wasted face flushing with fatigue and worry and mental suffering. Oh, what a bitter wave of desolateness rolls over her! But she smiles.

"I still do not understand what I am to forgive you for. I suppose that you could no more help having once thought you loved me, than you can help"—she stops abruptly in compassion for the look of acute regret, shame and remorse that crosses his sharp features, and, in her mercy to him, gives a different close to her phrase from that which its beginning had seemed to bespeak—"than you can help having been so ill."

Her tone, quite unconsciously to herself, is inexpressibly touching; and Byng, weakened by illness, turns his face upon the pillow, and breaks into violent weeping. His mother had cried too. It seems to be in the family.

She has risen—what further is there for her to stay for?—and pauses quietly at his side till the paroxysm is past. Her standing posture tells him that she is going, and he consequently struggles to recover himself in some degree; but having never cultivated self-control when he was in health, it declines to come at his enfeebled bidding now.

"Forgive me! forgive me!" is all he can stammer.

She looks down upon him with a strange and tender smile, in which for the moment the selfless, plying sweetness has swallowed up the misery.

"Which am I to forgive you far—for having loved me? or for having ceased to love me? For having been mad? or for being sane? Yes, of course I forgive you from the very bottom of my heart! God bless you! Make haste and get well!"

She walks cheerfully to the door, and, reaching it, turns, still wearing that smile, that he may see how perfectly friendly is her last look; but he does not see it. He has rolled over on his face, and the whole sofa is shaking with his sobs.

(To be continued.)

OUR OLD SUPERSTITIONS.

Many of Our Customs Date Back to Dark Ages.

Many of our customs date back to the dark ages, and are based on superstition. We sit up with our dead because long ago our ancestors kept watch by night lest evil spirits come and bear the body away.

We shake hands with the right hand because that is the right hand and means that we disarm ourselves in the presence of a friend.

We bow our head in passing others because our ancestors were wont to bow before the real yoke of the oppressor.

Men bare their heads because they had to unmask in the days of chivalry before the queen of beauty.

SOLD BABIES IN ITALY.

Plump Twins Brought \$40 Each, But Police Interfered.

A Rome despatch brings the story of an attempt to sell children in the market at Avellino. A peasant and his wife brought two of their children, twins, four months old, and in open market offered to sell them for \$40 each. The babies were plump and healthy, and were bought by a man who offered the price required. He was taking the children away when police stepped in and arrested both the buyers and sellers.

QUAKE ENRICHED TOWN.

"With all the harm that earthquakes do," said a rug dealer, "it is pleasant to hear of an entire town that an earthquake enriched. The town I mean is Ouzoun-Ada, on the Caspian Sea, the terminus of the Trans-Caspian and Seamerikand railway. Ouzoun-Ada in the past had a miserable port, but a few years ago an earthquake visited her, and on its departure she found herself the richer by a harbor deep enough to float the largest ships. Since that fortunate visit Ouzoun-Ada's population and wealth have trebled."

In a lazy man the bump of hope is abnormally developed.

Fire-proof buildings cost 12 per cent. more than ordinary ones.

Ghosts probably walk at night in order to keep in the shade.

ON THE FARM

WHY INCUBATOR CHICKS DIE IN THE SHELL.

There seems to be wide and varied opinions as to why chicks die in the shell. Many claim, which is true in a sense, that the germ is weak, caused by too close inbreeding. It is true also that there may be weak germs at times when the parent stock is not related. Too close confinement, with little or no exercise, or improper feeding, will also cause chicks to die in the shell, the germ not being strong enough to withstand the various changes during incubation.

The writer is fully convinced after many careful demonstrations that while the above causes are partially true that the main cause is improper ventilation, that chicks suffocate from insufficient air. The ventilation of almost all makes of incubators remain practically the same from the beginning to the end of the hatch, and that while the ventilation may be just right at some stage of the hatch, it certainly is not right all the way through. If the proper amount of air passes through at the beginning of the hatch, the ventilators being of a given and stationary size, then as the chick grows it must have a greater amount of air, and as it is not forthcoming, suffocation follows.

The system of ventilation in incubators of to-day is such as to cause a draught, drying the eggs too fast, causing the membrane or lining beneath the shell of the egg to become tough, so much so that at hatching time the chick is unable to break through, many even dying in the shell after being picked, whereas if this membrane should be kept soft and brittle, as when fresh laid, the chick would easily have picked its way out.

BETTER ROADS.

Good roads are indicative of a high state of civilization. The improvement in the condition of the common highways proclaims, in mute yet unmistakable language, the advancement in the civilization of the country. Highly specialized industries, which usually attend upon the high state of civilization among the people, seldom flourish where means is unprovided for a quick exchange of commodities. As the standard of living in a community rises, it soon finds expression in a demand for better roads.

The most natural system to follow in road building is to begin the improvement in the city or village, working outward in the different directions on the lines of least resistance, but at all times striving to reach the greatest population and the heaviest traffic.

The work should be placed in charge of a man who understands road building and road repair. The statement is equally true whether there be much or little money available for the work. The system which permits the appointment of men as road supervisors regardless of their fitness for the position is accountable in a great measure for poor roads and for the feeble interest in road improvement. Probably there is no more road work in many countries than would be superintended by one man, and that man could be selected with an eye to his qualifications for the work to be done, which would result not only in better roads but also in greater efficiency and economy.

LIVE STOCK NOTES.

Do not forget the old hens and old cocks. If they are worth keeping for breeders, they may need special care during the later fall moult.

The custom in former years was to keep live stock till they were of mature age before fattening them. Now the butcher and shipper demand young animals and light weight. The farmer must meet this demand, and it is far more profitable to do so than follow the old way. Early maturity is now the keynote with breeders of cattle, hogs and mutton sheep.

The practice of giving additional food to cows when pastures run short is becoming more general of late years, yet there are still a great many who do not do it. Men who make a business of dairying know that their profits depend upon the cows having enough to eat, but those farmers who keep but a few cows—just enough to make butter with which to buy groceries—pay very little attention to it. If the cows shrink in milk, they will complain and tell you they don't get enough to pay for milking; but say not a word about feeding them anything extra.

The Ohio experiment station made some careful experiments with ordinary leached barnyard manure, and carefully saved unleached manure, and came to the conclusion that the leached manure benefited the crop so little that it barely paid the cost of the application.

Never leave your tools and implements exposed to the sun in summer any longer than is absolutely necessary because they are injured more than they would be by the inclement weather at other seasons. The wooden portions, becoming very dry, shrink, crack and warp, and soon the entire implement becomes loose and shaky. The fact is, the hurry of harvest should not be an excuse for leaving any implement in the field. When they are left unprotected in this way it will cost more to repair the neglect than one will earn by having a little more time at his disposal.

Swamp muck varies very widely in

fertilizing constituents. Sometimes it is little better than ordinary soil, and then again it is quite valuable. The material should be thrown out during the fall and winter where it will weather and freeze. It may then be spread upon grass lands or used by spreading on the surface of plowed lands. By digging it and allowing it to dry out only half as much weight will have to be moved as if drawn directly upon the land. Then, too, most muck is sour, and must be exposed to the air before the plant food is available. It is usually best applied on the surface to grass lands, from twenty to 50 loads per acre. Its real value cannot be determined without noting the effect upon the crop.

THEIR LOVE FOR NATURE.

Its Enjoyment is Due to Long Training and Education.

"I often wonder," said the High School principal, "how many of the people who are travelling across our continent and the sea to view nature at her wildest appreciate the fact that their enjoyment of her handiwork in its most awesome aspects is a result due rather to long training and education than to any innate sense of the beautiful and the aesthetic. There was a time, and not so many centuries ago, when the attitude of cultivated men and women toward nature was quite different to what it is to-day. The eighteenth century looked askance at what the nineteenth and twentieth go to no end of trouble, inconvenience and expense to pay the warmest sort of tribute and the highest admiration.

"Without being able to lay my hands on the passage, I remember that Addison speaks somewhere, I believe in his letters, about the barbarous and abhorrent scenery of the Alps. Macaulay writing about the Celtic wilds of Scotland, tells us that it excited nothing but contempt and loathing. Wood, water and crag, he observes, were in so wise different then from what they are now, when they are being visited by no end of those who come to sketch or merely to praise and see.

"In 1730 Capt. Burt, an English traveller of intelligence and cultivation, wrote of the mountains of Inverness, with the feeling—and the sentiment common to his age, that they were monstrous excrescences, the deformity of which made the sterile plains seem lovely by comparison. In fine weather he found them still more disagreeable, for the clearer the day the more disagreeably did these misshapen masses of gloomy brown and dirty purple affect the eye. The tame and subdued beauties of Richmond Hill he found admirable by contrast.

"Even Oliver Goldsmith, poet though he was and alive to the beauties of nature when tame and subdued, was repelled by the scenery of the highlands and declared that he found infinitely more pleasing the conventional and sober beauties of the cultivated country around Leyden.

DISASTERS FROM FIREWORKS.

Five Explosions Occurred in Italy in One Month.

Fatal accidents in fireworks factories are so alarmingly on the increase in Italy that politicians are being inundated with petitions from all quarters to devise special preventive legislation. As is generally known, Italy has an enormous inland trade in fireworks, and in the southern provinces and Sicily pyrotechnic displays form an indispensable item in every sort of public rejoicing.

During last month alone five terrible explosions were recorded through carelessness in the process of manufacture, costing in each case the lives of from one to five persons. The other day two further mishaps swelled the list of victims.

Several hundredweights of gunpowder blew up at a factory in the comune of Saint Antonio, in the suburbs of Naples, killing three workmen and inflicting fatal injuries on seven others. The explosion was so terrific as to set fire to a big storage of hemp nearly a mile away.

The other disaster occurred at Lecce, where a large consignment of fireworks ready for a popular festival, exploded. Of three brothers, partners in the firm, who happened to be standing near, one was blown to pieces and the other two were horribly lacerated.

THROWN TO THE SHARKS.

Women Flung Screaming Into the Sea by Turks.

Discharged Turkish soldiers who arrived at Hodeidah from the inland part of Yemen, but were prevented from going home immediately by the lack of steamers, have been committing excesses of the gravest kind. When one steamer did arrive 2,000 soldiers embarked thereon, several with their sweethearts. Terrible quarrels broke out on board, and 110 people were killed or wounded.

The women were thrown overboard alive to the sharks surrounding the steamer, and there was an awful scene as the tigers of the sea seized their screaming, struggling prey.

Then came 1,800 more discharged men who, not finding any transports, cut the waterpipes, attacked the shops and destroyed everything within reach. They also seized the general in command of the troops and dragged him about amidst coarse insults.

More discharged soldiers are expected, and therefore the town is greatly excited. The Italians have asked the Governor of Erythra to send a ship, and a British vessel is expected at Hodeidah.