

# A House of Mystery

## OR, THE GIRL IN BLUE

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

And so we gossiped on, crossing the Park and entering Kensington Gardens—those beautiful pleasure grounds that always seem so neglected by the majority of Londoners—while the sun sank and disappeared in its blood-red afterglow. She spoke of her life abroad, declaring that she loved London and was always pleased to return to its wild, turbulent life. She had spent some time in Paris, in Vienna, in Berlin, but neither was half as interesting, she declared, as London.

"But you are not a Londoner, are you?" I asked.

"No, not exactly," she responded, "although I've lived here such a long time that I've become almost a Cockney. Are you a Londoner?"

"No," I answered; "I'm a countryman, born and bred."

"I heard the Colonel remark that other night that you had been afflicted by blindness for some time. Is that so?"

I responded in the affirmative.

"Terrible!" she ejaculated, glancing at me with those wonderful dark eyes of hers that seemed to hold me in fascination and look me through and through. "We who possess our eyesight cannot imagine the great disadvantages under which the blind are placed. How fortunate that you are cured!"

"Yes," I explained. "The cure is little short of a miracle. The three greatest oculists in London all agreed that I was incurable, yet there one day came to me a man who said he could give me back my sight. I allowed him to experiment, and he was successful. From the day that I could see plainly he, curiously enough, disappeared."

"How strange! Did he never come and see you afterwards?"

"No. He took no reward, but simply discontinued his visits. I do not even know his real name."

"How extraordinary!" she observed, greatly interested. "I really believe that there is often more romance and mystery in real life than in books. Such a circumstance appears absolutely bewildering."

"If to you, Miss Anson, then how much more to me! I, who had relinquished all hope of again looking upon the world and enjoying life, now find myself actually in possession of my vision and able to mix with my fellow-men. Place your self for a moment in my position, and try to imagine my constant thankfulness."

"You must feel that a new life is opened to you—that you have begun a fresh existence," she observed with a true touch of sympathy in her sweet voice. Then she added, as if by afterthought, "How many of us would be glad to commence life afresh!"

The tone in which she uttered that sentence seemed incongruous. A few moments before she had been all brightness and gaiety, but in those words there vibrated a distinctly gloomy note.

"Surely you do not desire to commence your life again?" I said.

She sighed slightly.

"All of us have our burden of regrets," she answered vaguely, raising her eyes for an instant to mine, and then lowering them.

We appeared in those moments to grow confidential. The crimson and orange was fast fading from the sky. It was growing dark beneath the shadow of the great elms, and already the fine of street-lamps out in Kensington Gardens were twinkling through the foliage on our left. No one was in the vicinity, and we were walking very slowly, for, truth to tell, I desired to delay our parting until the very last moment. Of all the leafy spots in giant London, there is none so rural, so romantic, or so picturesque in summer as that portion of Kensington Gardens lying between Queen's Gate and the Broad Walk. Save for the dull roar of distant traffic, one might easily fancy one's self far in the country, a hundred miles from the sound of Bow Bells.

"But you are young, Miss Anson," I observed philosophically, after a brief pause. "And if I may be permitted to say so, you have scarcely begun to live your life. Yet you actually wish to commence afresh!"

"Yes," she responded briefly, "I do. Strange, is it not?"

"Is the past, then, so full of bitterness?" I asked, the Colonel's strange warning recurring to me at the same moment.

"His bitterness is combined with regrets," she answered hesitantly, in a low voice.

"But you, young, bright, happy, and talented, who need not think of the terrors of everyday life, should surely have no regrets so deep as to cause you this anxiety and despair," I said with a feeling of tenderness. "I am ten years older than you, therefore I may be permitted to speak like this, even though my words may sound presumptuous."

"Continue," she exclaimed, "I assure you that in my present position I appreciate any words of sympathy."

"You have my deepest sympathy, Miss Anson; of that I assure you," I declared, detecting in her words a desire to confide in me. "If at your age you already

desire to recommence life, your past cannot have been a happy one."

"It has been far from happy," she answered in a strange, mechanical voice. "Sometimes I think that I am the unhappiest woman in all the world."

"No, no," I hastened to reassure her. "We all, when in trouble, imagine that our burden is greater than that of any of our fellows, and that while others escape, upon us alone fall the graver misfortunes."

"I know, I know," she said. "But a pleasant face and an air of carelessness oftentimes conceal the most sorrowful heart. It is so in my case."

"And your sorrow causes you regret, and makes you wish to end your present life and commence afresh," I said gravely. "To myself, ignorant of the circumstances, it would seem as though you repented of some act or other."

"What do you mean?" she gasped quickly, looking at me with a strange expression in her dark eyes. "I do not repent—I repent nothing!"

I saw that I had made a grave mistake. In my fond and shortsighted enthusiasm I had allowed myself to speak a little too confidentially, whereupon her natural dignity had instantly rebelled. At once I apologized, and in an instant she became appeased.

"I regret extremely that you should have such a weight of anxiety upon your heart," I said. "If I can do anything to assist you, rely upon me."

"You are extremely kind," she answered in a gloomy tone; "but there is nothing—absolutely nothing."

"I really can't understand the reason why, with every happiness around you, you should find yourself thus plunged in this despair," I remarked, puzzled. "Your home life is, I presume, happy enough?"

"Perfectly. I am entirely my own mistress, save in those things which might break through the ordinary conventionalities of life. I must admit to you that I am rather unconventional sometimes."

I had wondered whether, like so many other girls, she had some imaginary grievance in her home; but now, finding that this was not so, it naturally occurred to me that the cause of her strange desire to live over again arose through the action of some faithless lover. How many hundreds of girls with wealth and beauty, perfectly happy in all else, are daily wearing out their lives because of the fickleness of the men to whom they have foolishly given their hearts! The tightly laced corsets of every eight girls in ten conceal a heart filled by the regrets of a love long past; the men smile airily through the wreaths of their tobacco-smoke, while the women, in those little fits of melancholy which they love to indulge in, sit and reflect in silence upon the might-have-beens. Is there, I wonder, a single one of us, man or woman, who does not remember our first love, the deep immensity of that pair of eyes; the kindly sympathy of that face, which in our immature years we thought our ideal, and thereupon bowed the knee in worship? If such there be, then they are mere unrefined bores without a spark of romance in their nature, or poetry within their soul. Indeed, the regrets arising from a long-forgotten love oftentimes mingle pleasure with sadness, and through one's whole life form cherished memories of those flushed days of a buoyant youth. To how many of those who read these lines will be recalled vivid recollections of a summer idyll of long ago; a day when, with the dainty or manly object of their affections, they wandered beside the blue sea, or on the banks of the tranquil, willow-lined river, or perhaps hand-in-hand strolled beneath the great old forest trees, where the sunlight glistened and touched the gnarled trunks with grey and gold! To each will come back the sweet recollection of a sunset hour now long, long ago, when they pressed the Eps of the one they loved, and thought the rough world as easy as that summer afterglow. The regret of those days always remains—often times a pleasant memory, but, alas! sometimes a lamentation bordering upon despair, until the end of our days.

"And may I not know something, however little, of the cause of this oppression upon you?" I asked of her, after we had walked some distance in silence.

"You tell me that you desire to wipe out the past and commence afresh. The reason of this interests me," I added.

"I don't know why you should interest yourself in me," she murmured. "It is really unnecessary."

"No, no," I exclaimed hastily. "Although our acquaintance has been of but brief duration, I am bold enough to believe that you count me among your friends. Is it not so?"

"Certainly, or I would not have given your permission to walk with me here," she answered with a sweetness which showed her unostentatious delicacy of character.

"Then, as your friend, I beg of you to repose whatever confidence in me you may think fit, and to be assured that I will never abuse it."

"Confidences are unnecessary between us," she responded. "I have to bear my grief alone."

"Your words sound strange, coming

from one whom I had thought so merry and light-hearted," I said.

"Are you, then, ignorant of the faculty a woman has of concealing her sorrows behind an outward show of gaiety—that a woman always possesses two countenances, the face and the mask?"

"You are scarcely complimentary to your own sex," I answered with a smile. "Yet that is surely no reason why you should be thus wretched and down-hearted."

Her manner puzzled me, for since the commencement of our conversation she had grown strangely melancholy—entirely unlike her own bright self. I tried to obtain from her some clue to the cause of her sadness, but in vain. My short acquaintance with her did not warrant me pressing upon her a subject which was palpably distasteful; nevertheless, it seemed to me more than strange that she should thus acknowledge to me her sorrow at a moment when any other woman would have practised coquetry.

"I can only suffer in silence," she responded, when I asked her to tell me something of the cause of her unhappiness.

"Excuse my depression this evening. I know that to you I must seem a hypochondriac, but I will promise you to wear the mask—if ever we meet again."

"Why do you speak so vaguely?" I inquired in quick apprehension. "I certainly hope that we shall meet again, many, many times. Your words would make it appear as though such meeting is improbable."

"I think it is," she answered simply. "You are very kind to have borne with me like this," she added, her manner quickly changing; "and if we do meet, I'll try not to have another fit of melancholy."

"Yes, Miss Anson," I said, halting in the path, "let us meet again. Remember that we have to-day commenced a friendship—a friendship which I trust will last always."

But she slowly shook her head, as though the heavy sadness of her heart still possessed her.

"Friendship may exist between us, but frequent meetings are, I fear, impossible."

"Why? You told me only a moment ago that you were your own mistress," I observed.

"And so I am in most things," she answered. "But as far as meeting you, we can only leave that to chance."

"Why?"

"Please do not endeavor to force me to explanations," she answered with firmness. "I merely tell you that frequent meetings with you are unlikely—that is all."

We had walked on, and were nearing the gate leading out into the High Street, Kensington.

"In other words, then, you are not altogether pleased with my companionship?"

"No, really," she laughed sweetly. "I didn't say that. You have no reason to jump at such conclusion. I thank you very much indeed for your words of sympathy."

"And you have no desire to see me again?" I interrupted, in a tone of bitter disappointment.

"If such were the case, ours would be a very extraordinary friendship, wouldn't it?" and she lifted her eyes to mine with a kindly look.

"Then I am to take it that my companionship on this walk has not been distasteful to you?" I asked anxiously.

She inclined her head with a dignified air, saying, "Certainly. I feel that this evening I have at least found a friend—a pleasant thought when one is comparatively friendless."

"And as your friend—your devoted friend—I ask to be permitted to see you sometimes," I said earnestly, for, lingering at her side, I was very loth to part from her. "If I can ever be of any assistance, command me."

"You are very kind," she answered, with a slight tremor in her voice. "I shall remember your words always. Then, putting forth her well-gloved hand, as we stood upon the kerb of the High Street, she added, "It is getting late. We've taken such a long time across the Park that I must drive home," and she made a gesture to a passing hansom.

"Before we part," I said, "I will give you a card, so that should you require any service of me you will know where to write;" and, as we stood beneath the street-lamp, I drew out a card and, with a pencil I took from my vest-pocket, scribbled my address.

In silence she watched, but just as I had finished she suddenly gripped my hand, uttering a loud cry of amazement.

"What's that you have there?" she demanded. "Let me see it!"

Next instant—before, indeed, I could be aware of her intention—she had snatched the pencil from my grasp, and was examining it closely beneath the gaslight.

"Ah!" she gasped, glaring at me in alarm. "It is—yes, it is his!"

The small gold pencil which I had inadvertently used was the one I had taken from the pocket of the dead unknown on that fateful August night.

(To be Continued.)

# ON THE FARM

## THE COSTLY THREE-YEAR-OLD STEER.

A most important phase of economical beef production is emphasized in a contribution to "The Farmer's Advocate" from Thos. B. Scott & Son, Middlesex Co., Ont., who outline their method of rearing calves, to be turned off as finished heaves around ten months of age, at weights of 850 to 900 pounds. Only well-bred calves of Shorthorn blood are raised, liberal use being made of skim milk, on which the calves are pushed rapidly forward, without losing their calf flesh. This system results in the production of plump baby heaves, which outclass all other material for building up a butchers' trade. That there is profit in raising them, no one who has tried it properly will doubt, providing, always, that the calf is out of a cow capable of squaring her own maintenance account at the pail, so that the youngster is not handicapped at the start by a heavy bill charged up against him for his mother's board. It is in the production of these milk-fed heaves that the dual-purpose cow makes her best showing in profit. For their production, perfection of beef type is not of so much importance as in the case of animals intended for marketing at a maturer age. In fact butchers will often take well-fed Holsteins at this age at the same price offered for Shorthorns, although, as a general thing, the latter breed will give best satisfaction for the purpose. Jersey and Guernsey steers should be avoided.

The writer has raised many veal-beeves of various strains of breeding, and has found that, with a fair start on whole milk, tapered to skim milk at two or three weeks old, the calf being then fed about a gallon or more (warmed), three times a day, until four or five months old, and then a smaller quantity until ready for the block, weights of 800 to 900 pounds could be easily attained by eleven or twelve months with the use of a very little bran and oil-cake meal, combined with good clover hay, ensilage, roots and miscellaneous roughage. The calves were invariably kept in a comfortable basement stable for the first six months, at least, and usually the whole twelve-month, being tied or stanchioned only at feeding time. The stable was always kept clean and reasonably dry. This is important. Fall calves are preferable to those dropped in spring, and the favorite time for marketing is May or June, when beef almost invariably commands the best price of the year. Sometimes the calves have been sold at considerably less and sometimes considerably over a year, according as might be necessary to strike the best market, for they were fit to kill at any age.

Of course, many may try this plan and fail through lack of pains and kindly interest in their charges. The greatest secret lies not in the feed, but in the feeding and general care, although the feed is certainly important, especially the skim-milk part. By allowing a proportion of whole milk sucked from the cow, and by using skim milk more liberally than the writer of this article has been accustomed to do, Messrs. Scott have secured exceptionally rapid gains. The prevalent practice described by them, of rearing pot-bellied, bloated, scouring, stunted spring calves on a grass lot, with separator milk or whey to drink almost from the first, with flies to pester, and not always shade to protect, is an ideal way to dissipate all hope of ever making them good doers and a source of profit to the community. Some feeder, buying them at two and a half or three years for three and a half or four cents a pound, may scrape a small profit out of his speculation through the increased value per pound given to the original carcasses, but his profit will not compensate for the loss incurred by the farmer who raised the feeders. If cost were closely calculated, it would be found that the ultimate returns of such a beast ordinarily amount to a sorry price for the total feed, pasturage and care bestowed upon him from birth. The only hope of coming out even is in cheap pasture, and there is very little such that could not be turned to far better account. The three-year-old feeder or stocker has no place in a well-ordered system of agriculture. Eighteen or twenty months should be the limit of age for marketing cattle for the domestic trade, while ample weights for exporters should be attained at twenty-four to thirty. It is a matter of more intelligent business perception, more liberal feeding, and better herdsmen.

FARM NOTES.

Your success for this year depends on how you do spring work. See to it that everything is done just right.

Have a box at the barn to receive all the odd bolts, hinges, handles and such things. There surely will be many times when you will go and hunt in that box for something you need.

During the process of producing each crop the progressive farmer sees points at which he can make the labor a little lighter next year, the cost of production a little less, and the quality of the crop a little better.

The man with a stout heart, willing hands, the intelligence to direct, and the patience to overcome difficulties and the philosophy to accept misfortune cheerfully, will succeed no matter where he finds himself, but, in every instance, it is the man that slays that wins.

Does the spring work crowd you? Do not get into a fret. Remember the largest house is built simply by laying one brick upon another. Lay out, beforehand, a definite amount of work for each day—not more than you can comfortably

get through with—and then do it. You will be surprised in a short time to find how steadily everything is moving, and how easily, too.

## BLIGHT OF PENAL COLONIES.

### Why It Does Not Pay to Found Them in Regions Worth Developing.

It is not likely that a convict colony will ever again be established in any region whose resources are sufficient to support a large number of law-abiding people.

New Caledonia is an example of the evil effects of giving to a naturally rich region the bad repute of a penal colony. Even the children of the convicts there are clamoring to-day for the total abolition of the convict settlement. Though their parents are free citizens, and they themselves are free citizens, and they say there will be no prosperity in New Caledonia as long as it is a prison for convicts.

Mr. Legrand in his recent description of it says the island would easily support 1,000,000 inhabitants. But France has failed to induce free colonists to settle there.

Though the Government reserves only 50,000 acres for the use of the convicts and though for ten years not a criminal has been sent to the island and a free grant of land and other assistance are offered to agricultural immigrants, the free Europeans scarcely outnumber the convicts and most of them are in the Government service.

Twenty years after Australia was opened to free immigration the protests of the colonists against the system of transportation resulted in its abolition. It is sixty-seven years since a convict was landed in East Australia, and long ago the convict element was completely mixed in the rest of the population and all sense of humiliation associated with the early penal settlements disappeared.

The island of Fernando de Noronha is the best example of the kind of territory that a penal colony should occupy. As the island is only five miles long and two and a half miles wide it can be used as a penal colony without sacrificing rich regions that immigrants will not enter as long as criminals are their neighbors. The island is out in the Atlantic, 300 miles from Pernambuco, and the worst convicts of the State of that name are kept there. There is no capital punishment in Brazil; and the island is the prison of 355 convicts in a total of 442 convicts. The conditions are ideal for such a settlement. The land is wonderfully fertile and its cotton commands a special price.

The convicts are out in the fields at 6 a.m. and work for the State until 2 p.m., after which they may work for themselves till 6 on little plots which the State allots to each of them. Only thirty police are required to control the convicts and there is no chance for them to escape.

No trees suitable for rafts are permitted to grow on the island and only a few trunks are allowed to fish around the coasts. Their boats are tiny catamarans, too small for sea use. The convicts live in comfort at a cost that is said to make their island home the cheapest prison in the world.

About 6,000 of the toughest criminals of France and her colonies, including Algerian Arabs and negroes, are scattered in settlements along the Maroni and Otona rivers in the eastern part of French Guiana, South America. The Government selected as the homes of these criminal exiles districts that were regarded as very unhealthy.

"The dry guillotine" was the popular name among the convicts for the malarious region in which they were placed. But most of the wretched victims lived, and the cure of the country would really be the convict settlements if this region were adapted for and able to attract colonists in any numbers.

## WARS BORN OF BOYCOTTS.

### Nations Do Not Relish Being "Touched" in Their Pockets.

Although the recent unpleasantness between China and Japan, due to the seizure by the former of the Tatsu Maru, has been officially declared to have been settled by the release of the impounded steamship, it seems not unlikely that war may yet break out owing to the persistent boycott which China is now declaring against all Japanese goods.

For history teems with wars due to this very cause. And that although the word only dates back to 1880, when a certain Captain Boycott, of Lough Mask Farm, in Ireland, was so served by his indignant neighbors.

But the practice was known long previously. To it was due the war which lost the British Empire the few samples in all those rich and magnificent territories that now comprise the United States of America. The colonists would have none of Britain's goods, nor goods borne in British ships. They threw overboard in Boston Harbor the tea Britain sent them, and made bonfires of other more inflammable commodities. Then Britain landed troops to compel them to do otherwise, and hostilities broke out.

To Napoleon's Berlin decree, again, was due, more than to anything else, the share Britain took in the series of wars that led to his downfall. It declared a boycott—the biggest on record—against British commerce the world over. If it had succeeded, there would to-day have been no British Empire. Our forefathers, shrewd, hard-headed, old chaps, for saw this, and forthwith voted \$550,000,000 for his overthrow.

And as did Britain then, so very likely may Japan do to-day. No more than individuals, do nations relish being "touched" in their pockets.

Even a cheap young man may cost his parents a lot of money.

## ON THE MIGHTY DEEP.

The great ocean liner rolled and pitched.

"Henry," faltered the young bride, "do you still love me?"

"More than ever, darling," was Henry's fervent answer.

Then there was a eloquent silence.

"Henry," she gasped, turning her pale, ghastly face away, "I thought that would make me feel better, but it doesn't!"

CHILDREN OF THE RICH.

"Father!"

"Well?"

"Johnny wants a million dollars to take his sulphur and molasses."