

ONLY A MONTH;

OR, A CURIOUS MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

CHAPTER XV.—(Cont'd)

"I feel sorry for him," she added. "He always bows very politely when I meet him, and he is remarkably good-looking, though with a disagreeable expression."

"When one is hungry one seldom looks agreeable," said Miss Charlotte. "I wish I had noticed him before."

"Suppose," she said, timidly, "suppose I were to take him a little of the stewed beef we shall have for supper."

"Send it up by the girl," said Miss Turnour, "she is still in the kitchen. Don't take it yourself; it would be awkward for both of you."

So Miss Charlotte meekly obeyed, and sent up by the shabby servant girl a most savory little supper. Unluckily the girl was a pert cockney, and her loud, abrupt knock at the door in itself irritated Frithiof.

"Come in," he said, in a surly tone.

"Look here," said the girl, "here's something to put you in a better temper. Missus's compliments, and she begs you'll accept it," and she thrust the tray at him with a derisive grin.

"Have the goodness to take that down again," said Frithiof, in a fit of unreasoning anger. "I'll not be treated like your mistress's pet dog."

Something in his manner cowed the girl. She beat a hasty retreat, and was planning how she could manage to eat the despised supper herself, when at the foot of the stairs she met Miss Charlotte, and her project was nipped in the bud.

"It ain't no use, miss, 'e won't touch it," she explained; "'e was as angry as could be, and says 'e, 'Take it away! I'll not be treated like your mistress's pet dog,' says 'e. So, bein' frightened, I ran down-stairs agen."

Miss Charlotte looked troubled, and later on, when as usual she took up the jug of hot water, she felt nervous and uncomfortable, and her knock was more timid than ever. However, she had scarcely set down the jug on the floor when there came sounds of hasty footsteps in the room, and Frithiof flung open the door.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "You meant to be kind, I'm sure, but the girl was rude, and I lost my temper. I ask your forgiveness."

"I am so sorry the girl was rude," Miss Charlotte said. "I wish I had brought it myself. You see, it was in this way: we all thought you looking so poorly, and we were having the beef for supper, and we thought perhaps you might fancy some, and—"

"It was very good of you," he said, touched by the kindness. "I regret what I said, but you must make allowance for a bad-tempered man with a splitting headache."

"Is that the reason you tie it up?" asked Miss Charlotte.

"It keeps it cooler," he said, "and I can get through more work."

She glanced at the table, and saw that it was covered with papers and books.

"Are you wise to do so much work after being busy all day?" she said. "It seems to me that you are not looking well."

"It is nothing but headache," he said. "And the work is the only pleasure I have in the world."

"I was afraid from your looks that you had a hard life," she said, hesitatingly.

"It is not hard outwardly. As far as work goes it is easy enough, but there is a deal of monotony about it."

And as he glanced out at the sunny street and heard the sound of horses' hoofs in the road, a wild longing used to seize him for the freedom and variety of his life in Norway, and the old fierce rebellion against his fate woke once more in his heart, and made him ready to fly into a rage on the smallest provocation.

One day he was sent for to Mr. Boniface's private room; he was quite well aware that his manner, even to Roy himself, whom he liked, had been disagreeable in the extreme, and the thought crossed his mind that he was going to receive notice to leave.

Mr. Boniface was sitting at his

writing-table, the sunlight fell on his quiet, refined face, lighted up his white hair and trim beard, and made his kindly gray eyes brighter than ever. "I wanted a few words with you, Falck," he said. "Sit down. It seems to me that you have not been looking well lately, and I thought perhaps you had better take your holiday at once instead of the third week in August. I have spoken to Darnell, and he would be willing to give you his turn and take the later time. What do you think?"

"You are very good, sir," said Frithiof, "but I shall do very well with the August holiday, and, as a matter of fact, it will only mean that I shall do more translating."

"Would you not do well to go home. Come, think of it, I would give you three weeks if you want to go to Bergen."

"Thank you," he said, with an effort; "but I can not go back to Norway."

"Now, tell me candidly, is it the question of expense that hinders you?" said Mr. Boniface. "Because if it is merely that, I would gladly lend you the money. You must remember that you have had a great deal to bear lately, and I think you ought to give yourself a good rest."

"Thank you," replied Frithiof, "but it is not exactly the expense. I have money enough in hand to pay for my passage, but I have made up my mind not to go back till I can clear off the last of the debts of—of our firm."

"It is a noble resolution," said Mr. Boniface, "and I would not for a moment discourage you. Still you must remember that it is a great undertaking, and that without good health you can never hope for success. I don't think you get enough exercise. Now, why don't you join our cricket club?"

"I don't play," said Frithiof. "In Norway we are not great at those games, or indeed at any kind of exercise for the mere sake of exercise. That is an idea that one only finds among Englishmen."

"Possibly; but living in our climate, you would do well to follow our habits. Come, let me persuade you to join the club. You look to me as if you needed greater variety."

"I will think about it for next year; but just now I have work for Herr Sivertsen on hand which I can't put aside," said Frithiof.

"Well, then, things must go on as they are for the present," said Mr. Boniface; "but at least you can bring your translating down to Rowan Tree House, and spend your holiday with us."

"You are very kind," said Frithiof. "I shall be only too delighted."

And the interview seemed somehow to have done him good, for during the next few days he was less irritable, and found his work in consequence less irksome.

CHAPTER XVI.

But the change for the better did not last long, for Frithiof was without the motive which "makes drudgery divine." And there was no denying that the work he had to do was real drudgery.

About the middle of July the Bonifaces went down to Devonshire for their usual summer holiday, and Frithiof found that, as Roy had predicted, Mr. Horner made himself most disagreeable, and never lost a chance of interfering. A miserable-looking dog unluckily made its way into the shop one morning and disturbed Mr. Horner in his sanctum.

"What is the meaning of this?" he exclaimed, bearing down upon Frithiof. "Can you not keep stray curs off the premises? Just now too, with hydrophobia raging!" And he drove and kicked the dog to the door.

Now there is one thing which no Norseman can tolerate for a moment, and that is any sort of cruelty to animals. Frithiof, in his fury, did not measure his words, or speak as the employed to the employer, and from that time Mr. Horner's hatred of him increased tenfold.

He was sitting at his desk one morning adding up a column which had been twice interrupted, and which had three times come to a different result, when once again the swing-door was pushed open

and a shadow falling across his account-book warned him that the customer had come to the song counter.

The customer was evidently an Italian. He was young and strikingly handsome. Beside him was a bright-eyed boy who looked up curiously at the Norseman, as though wondering how on such a sunny day any one could wear such a clouded face.

Now Frithiof was quite in the humor to dislike any one, more especially a man who was young, handsome, well dressed, and prosperous looking; but some subtle influence crept over him the instant he heard the Italian's voice, his hard eyes softened a little, and without being able to explain it he felt a strong desire to help this man in finding the song which he had come to inquire about, knowing only the words and the air, not the name of the composer. Frithiof, who would ordinarily have been inclined to grumble at the trouble which the search involved, now threw himself into it heart and soul, and was as pleased as his customer when after some little time he chanced to find the song.

"A thousand thanks," said the Italian, warmly. "I am delighted to get hold of this; it is for a friend who has long wanted to hear it again, but who was only able to write down the first part of the air."

And he compared with the printed song the little bit of manuscript which he had shown to Frithiof. "Now, was it only a happy fluke that made you think of Knight's name?"

"I know another of his songs, and thought this bore a sort of likeness to it," said Frithiof.

"You know much more of English music than I do, most likely," said the Italian, "yet surely you, too, are a foreigner."

"Yes," replied Frithiof; "I am Norwegian. I have only been here for nine months, but to try and learn a little about the music is the only interesting part of this work."

The stranger's sympathetic insight showed him much of the weariness, and discontent, and Heimweh which lay beneath these words.

"Ah, yes," he said, "I suppose both work and country seem flat and dull after your life among the fjords and mountains. I know well enough the depression of one's first year in a new climate. But courage! the worst will pass. I have grown to love this England which once I detested."

"It is the airlessness of London which depresses me," said poor Frithiof, rolling up the song.

"Yes, it is certainly very oppressive to-day," said the Italian; "I am sorry to have given you so much trouble in hunting up this song for me. We may as well take it with us, Gigi, as we are going home."

(To be continued.)

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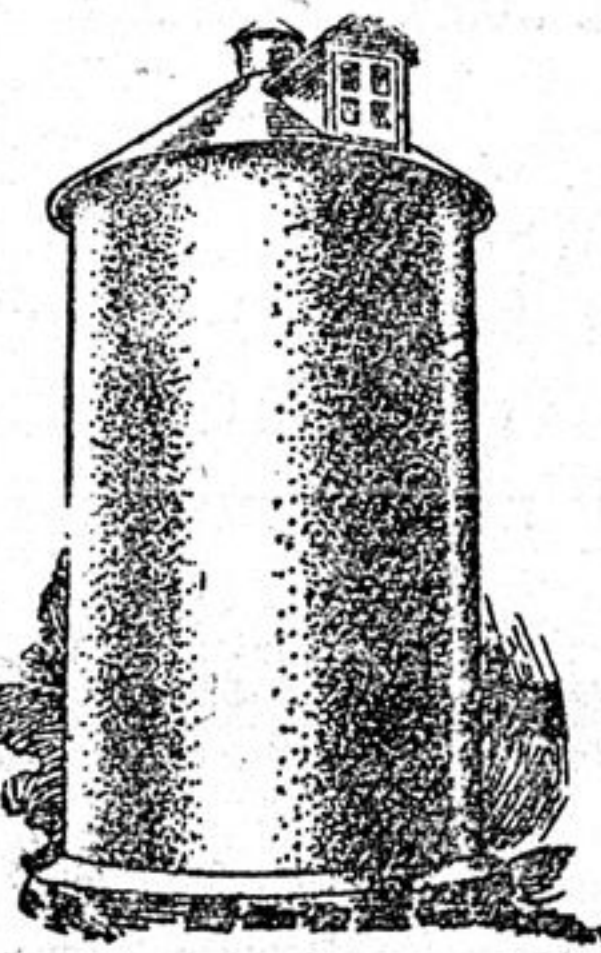
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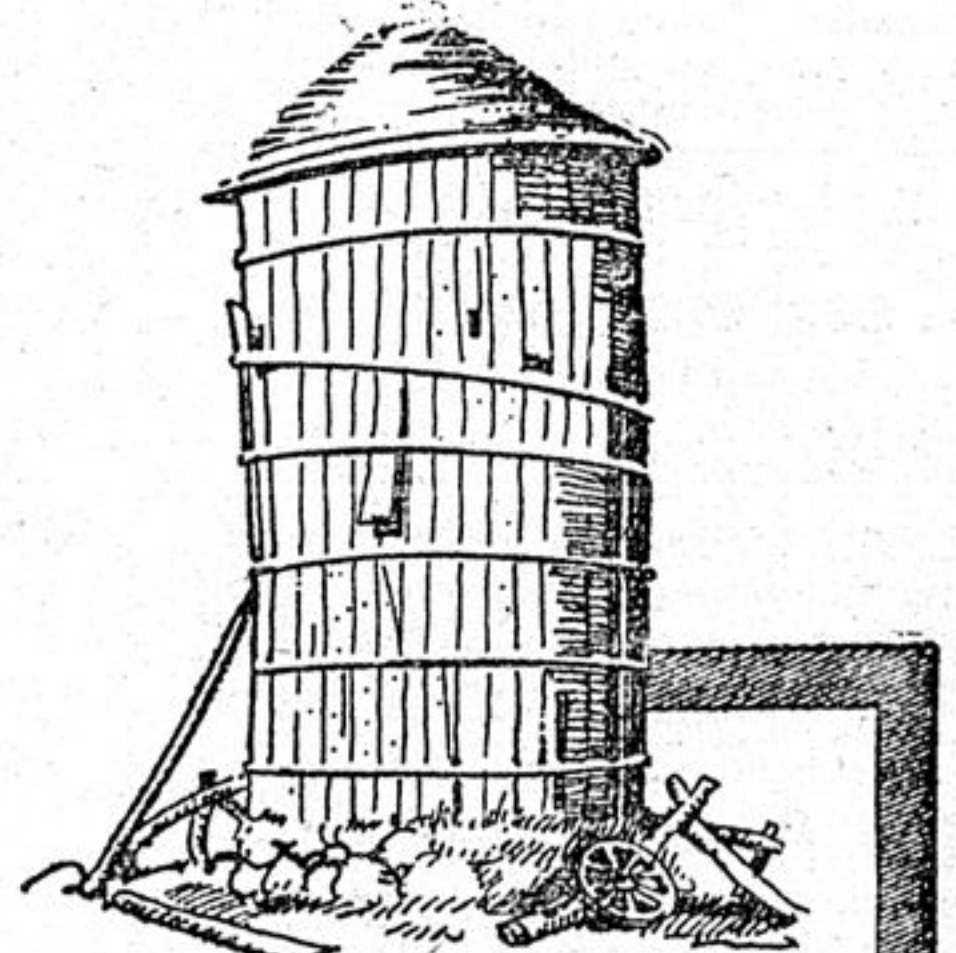
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