

THE THREAD OF LIFE,

OR,
SUNSHINE AND SHADE.

CHAPTER XL.—SINK OR SWIM?

Hugh was selfish, heartless, and unscrupulous; but he was not physically a coward, a cur, or a paterer. Without one second's thought, he rushed wildly down to the water's edge, and balancing himself for a plunge, with his hands above his head, on the roots of the big tree, he dived boldly into that wild current, against whose terrific force he had once already struggled so vainly on the morning of his first arrival at Whitestrand.

Elsie had had but a few seconds' start of him; with his powerful arms to aid him in the quest, he must surely overtake and save her before she could drown, even in that mad and swirling tidal torrent. He flung himself on the water with all his force, and goaded by remorse, pity, and love—for, after all, he loved her, he loved her—he drew unwonted strength from the internal fires, as he pushed back the fierce flood on either side with arms and thaws of feverish energy. At each strong push, he moved forward apace with the gliding current, and in the course of a few stout strokes he was already many yards on his way seaward from the point at which he had originally started. But his boots and clothes clogged his movements terribly, and his sleeves in particular so impeded his arms that he could hardly use them to any sensible advantage. He felt conscious at once that, under such hampering conditions, it would be impossible to swim for many minutes at a stretch. He must find Elsie and save her almost immediately, or both must go down and drown together.

He wanted nothing more than to drown with her now. "Elsie, Elsie, my darling Elsie!" he cried aloud on the top of the wave. "I lose Elsie was to lose everything. The sea was running high as he neared the bay, and Elsie had disappeared as if by magic. Even in that dark black water at that moonless night, he wondered he couldn't catch a single glimpse of her white dress by the reflected starlight. But the truth was the current had sucked her under—sucked her under wildly with its irresistible force only to fling her up again, a senseless burden, where sea and river met at last in fierce conflict among the roaring breakers that danced and shivered upon the shallow bar.

He swam about blindly looking round him on every side through the thick darkness with eager eyes for some glimpse of Elsie's white dress in a stray gleam of starlight; but he saw not a trace of her presence anywhere. Groping and feeling his way still with numb limbs, that grew weary and stiff with the frantic effort, he battled on through the gurgling eddy till he reached the breakers on the bar itself. There, his strength proved of no avail—he might as well have tried to stem Niagara. The great waves, rolling their serried line against the stream from the land, caught him and twisted him about resistlessly, raising him now aloft on their foaming crest, dashing him now down deep in their hollow trough, and then flinging him back again over some great curling mountain of water far on to the current from which he had just emerged with his stout endeavor. For ten minutes or more he struggled madly against those titanic enemies: then his courage and his muscle failed together, and he gave up the unequal contest of sheer fatigue and physical inability to continue it longer. It was indeed an awful and appalling situation. Alone there in the dark, whirled about by a current that no man could stem, and confronted with a rearing wall of water that no man could face, he threw himself wearily back for a moment at full length looked up in his anguish from his floating couch to the cold stars overhead, whose faint light the spray every instant hid from his sight as it showered over him from the curling crests of the great billows beyond him. And it was to this that he had driven poor innocent, trustful, wronged Elsie! the one woman who, with all the force of a profound nature—profounder ten thousand times than his own—had truly loved him!

Elsie was tossing up and down there just as hopelessly now, no doubt. But Elsie had no pang of conscience added to torment her. She had only a broken heart to reckon with.

He let himself float idly where wind and waves might happen to bear him. There was no help for it: he could swim no farther. It was all over, all over now. Elsie was lost, and for all the rest he cared that moment less than nothing. Winifred! He scorned and hated her very name. He might drown at his ease, for anything he would ever do himself to prevent it. The waves broke over him again and again. He let them burst across his face or limbs, and floated on, without endeavoring to swim or guide himself at all. Would he never sink? Was he to float and float and float like this to all eternity?

Roar—roar—roar on the bar, each roar growing fainter and fainter in his ears. Clearly receding, receding still. The current was carrying him along in a back eddy, that set strongly south-westward towards the dike of the salt marshes.

He let himself drift wherever it might take him. It took him back, back, back, steadily, till he saw the white crest of the breakers on the ridge extend like a long gray line in the dim distance upon the sea beyond him. He was well into safer water by this time: the estuary was only very rough here. He might swim if he chose. But he did not choose. He cared nothing for life, since Elsie was gone. In a sudden revulsion of wild despair, a frantic burst of hopeless yearning, he knew, for the first time in his whole life, now it was too late, how truly and deeply and intensely he had loved her. As truly and deeply as he was capable of loving anything on earth except himself; and that, after all, was nothing much to boast of.

Still, it was enough to overwhelm him for the moment with agonies of remorse, regret, and pity to make him long just then and there for instant death, as the easiest escape from his own angry and accusing conscience. He wanted to die; he yearned and prayed for it. But death obstinately refused to come to his aid. He turned himself around on his face now, and striking out just once with his wearied thighs, gazed away blankly towards the foam on the bar, where Elsie's body must still be tossing in a horrible ghastly dance of death among the careering breakers.

As he looked, a gleam of ruddy light

showed for a second from a masthead just beyond the bar. A smack—a smack! coming in to the river! The sight refilled him with a faint fresh hope. That hope was too like despair; but still it was something. He swam out once more with the spasmodic energy of utter despondency. The smack might still be in time to save Elsie! He would make his way out to it, though it ran him down; if it ran him down, so much the better! If he would shout aloud at the top of his voice, to out roar the breakers: "A lady is drowning! Save her!—save her!"

He struck out again with mad haste through the back current. This time he had to fight against it with his wearied limbs, and to plough his way with prodigious efforts. The current was stronger, now he came to face it, than he had at all imagined when he merely let himself drift on its surface. Battling with all his might against the fierce swirls, he hardly seemed to make any headway at all through the angry water. His strength was almost all used up now; he could scarcely last till he reached the smack.—Great heavens, what was this? She was turning!—she was turning! The surf was too much for her timbers. She couldn't make the mouth of the creek. She was luffing seaward again, and it was all up, all up with Elsie.

It was Warren Relf's yawl, bearing down from Lowestoft, and trying for the first time to enter the river through the wall of breakers.

Oh, if only he had lain right in her path just then, as she rode over the waves, that she might run him down and sink him for ever, with his weight of infamy, beneath the curling billows! He could never endure to go ashore again—and to feel that he had virtually murdered Elsie.

Elsie, Elsie, poor murdered Elsie! He should hate to live, now he had murdered Elsie!

And then, as he battled still fiercely with the tide, in a flash of his nerves, he felt suddenly a wild spasm of pain seize on both his thighs, and an utter disablement affect his entire faculty of bodily motion. It was a paroxysm of cramp—overwhelming—inexpressible—and it left him in one second powerless to move or think or act or plan, a mere dead log, incapable of anything but a cry of pain, and helpless as a baby in the midst of that cruel and unheeding eddy.

He flung himself back for dead on the water once more. A choking sensation seized hold of his senses. The sea was pouring in at his nostrils and his ears. He knew he was going, and he was glad to know it. He would rather die than live with that burden of guilt upon his black soul. The waves washed over his face in serried ranks. He didn't mind: he didn't struggle; he didn't try for one instant to save himself. He floated on, unconscious at last, back, slowly back, towards the bank of the salt marsh.

When Hugh Massinger next knew anything, he was dimly conscious of lying at full length on a very cold bed, and fumbling with his fingers to pull the bed-clothes closer around him. But there were no bed-clothes, and everything about was soaking wet. He must be stretched in a pool of water, he thought—so damp it was all round to the touch—with a soft mattress or couch spread beneath him. He put out his hands to feel the mattress. He came upon mud, mud, deep layers of mud; all cold and slimy in the dusk of night. And then with a flash he remembered all—Elsie dead! Elsie drowned!—and knew he was stranded by the ebbing tide on the edge of the embankment. No hope of helping Elsie now. With a violent effort, he roused himself to consciousness, and crawled feebly on his knees to the firm ground. It was difficult work, floundering through the mud, with his numb limbs; but he floundered on, upon hands and feet, till he reached the shore, and stood at last, dripping with brine and crusted with soft slimy tidal ooze, on the broad bank of the moated dike that hemmed in the salt marshes from the mud-bank of the estuary. It was still dark night, but the moon had risen. He could hardly say what the time might be, for his watch had stopped, of course, by immersion in the water; but he roughly guessed, by the look of the stars, it was somewhere about half-past ten. We have a vague sense of the lapse of time even during sleep or other unconscious states; and Hugh was certain he couldn't have been floating for much more than an hour or thereabouts.

He gazed around him vaguely at the misty meadows. He was a mile or more from the village inn. The estuary, with its acid flats of mud, lay between him and the hard at Whitestrand. Sheets of white surf still shimmered dimly on the bar far out to sea. And Elsie was lost—lost to him irrevocably.

He sat down and pondered on the bank for a while. Those five minutes were the turning-point of his life. What should he do and how comport himself under these sudden and awful and unexpected circumstances? Dazed as he was, he saw even then the full horror of the dilemma that hedged him in. Awe and shame brought him back with a rush to reason. If he went home and told the whole horrid truth, everybody would say he was Elsie's murderer. Perhaps they would even suggest that he pushed her in—to get rid of her. He dared not tell it; he dared not face it. Should he fly the village—the country—the country? That would be foolish and precipitate indeed, not to say wicked: a criminal surrender. All was not lost, though Elsie was lost to him. In his calmer mood, no longer heroic with the throes of despondency, sitting shivering there with cold in the keen breezes, between his dripping clothes, upon the bear swept bank, he said to himself many times over that all was not lost; he might still go back—and marry Winifred.

Hideous—horrible—inhuman, he reckoned even so his chance with Winifred.

The shrewd wind blew chill upon his wet clothes. It howled and roared with hoarse groans round the stakes on the dike sluices. His head was whirling still with asphyxia and numbness. He felt hardly in a condition to think or reason. But this was a crisis, a life and death crisis. He must pull himself together like a man, and work it all out, his doubtful course for the next three hours, or else sink for ever in a sea of obloquy, remembered only as Elsie's murderer. Everything was at stake for him—live or die. Should he jump once more into

the cold wild stream—or go home quietly like a sensible man, and play his hand out to marry Winifred?

If he meant to go, he must go at once. It was no use to think of delaying or shilly-shallying. By eleven o'clock, the inn would be closed. He must steal in, unperceived, by the open French windows before eleven, if he intended still to keep the game going. But he must have his plan of action definitely mapped out none the less beforehand; and to map it out, he must wait a moment still; he must sum up chances in this desperate emergency.

Life is a calculus of varying probabilities. Was it likely he had been perceived at the Hall that evening? Did anybody know he had been walking with Elsie?

He fancied not—he believed not.—He was certain not, now he came to think of it. Thank Heaven, he had made the appointment verbally. If he'd written a note, that damning evidence might have been produced against him at the coroner's inquest. Inquest? Unless they found the body—Elsie's body—pah! how horrible to think of—but still, a man must steel himself to face facts, however ghastly and however horrible. Unless they found the body, then, there would be no inquest; and if only things were managed well and cleverly, there needn't even be any inquiry. Unless they found the body—Elsie's body!—poor Elsie's body, whirled about by the waves!—But they would never find it—they would never find it. The current had sucked it under at once, and carried it away careering madly to the sea. It would toss and whirl on the breakers for a while, and then sink unseen to the fathomless abysses of the German Ocean.

He hated himself for thinking all this—with Elsie drowned—or not yet drowned even—and yet he thought it, because he was not man enough to face the alternative.

Had Elsie told any one she was going to meet him? No; she wouldn't even tell Winifred of that, he was sure. She met him there often by appointment, it was true, but always quietly; they kept their meetings a profound secret between them.

Had any one seen them that evening together? He couldn't remember noticing anybody.—How shrill the wind blew through his dripping clothes. It cut him in two; and his head reeled still.—No; nobody, nobody. He was quite safe upon that score at least. Nobody knew he was out with Elsie.

Could he go back, then, and keep it all quiet, saying nothing himself, but leaving the world to form its own conclusions? A sudden thought flashed in an intuitive moment across his brain. A Plan!—a Plan! How happy! A Policy. He saw his way out of it all at once. He could set everything right by a simple method. Yes, that would do. It was bold, but not risky. He might go now; the scheme for the future was all matured. Nobody need ever suspect anything. A capital idea! Honour was saved; and he might still go back and marry Winifred.

Elsie dead! Elsie drowned! The world lost, and his life a blank! But he might still go back and marry Winifred.

He rose and shook himself in the wind like a dog. The Plan was growing more definite and rounded in his mind each moment. He turned his face slowly towards the lights at Whitestrand. The estuary spread between him and them with its wide mud-flats. Cold and tired as he was, he must make all speed for the point where it narrowed into the running stream near Snake meadows. He must swim the river there, with what legs he had left, and cross to the village. There was no time to be lost. It was neck or nothing. At all hazards, he must do his best to reach the inn before the doors were shut and locked at eleven.

When he left the spot where he had been tossed ashore, his idea for the future was fully worked out. He ran along the bank with eager haste in the direction of Whitestrand. Once only did he turn and look behind him. A ship's light gleamed feebly in the offing across the angry sea. She was bearing up against a headwind to catch the breeze outside towards Lowestoft or Yarmouth.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

How to Make Your Own Condition Powders.

Answering a correspondent, *Poultry-Keeper* says:

"Now, condition powders depend upon what you desire them for. If for assisting to form egg material, we will give and explain the ingredients, as follows:

"Ground bone, one pound (phosphoric acid and lime); ground meat or blood, three pounds (nitrogenous, forming albumen); linseed meal, one-half pound (nitrogenous, carbonaceous, and laxative, used for regulating the bowels); charcoal, one pound (used for promoting digestion and assisting to correct acidity); sulphur, one ounce (a necessary constituent of an egg, and assists in warding off disease), salt, half pound (very necessary, and often neglected); ground ginger two ounces, red pepper one tablespoonful, fenugreek half a pound, gentian one ounce (stimulants and correctives); chloride of iron, one ounce (an invigorator of the system).

"In giving the above the reader will at once notice why condition powders make hens lay. The ingredients of the egg and the assistants to digestion are there. Give a tablespoonful of the mixture once a day, to ten hens, in the soft food. It is sufficient, with what they will derive from their food. Now, for a lot of sick fowls, a different kind of condition powder is required.

"Gentian, one pound; red pepper, half ounce; sulphur, one ounce; sulphur, one ounce; salt, one ounce; chloride of iron, one ounce; hyposulphite of soda, two ounces; Peruvian bark, one ounce; black antimony, one ounce; charcoal, half a pound.

"Give a tablespoonful to two hens, in the soft feed, once a day, till better. Then use the other one. These powders can be made in large quantity, at a small cost, the only expensive articles being the Peruvian bark and gentian. We would suggest that a tablespoonful of the Douglas mixture be added to every quart of drinking water. It is made as follows: Water, two gallons; copperas (sulphate of iron), one pound; sulphuric acid (oil of vitriol), a gill. We do not claim the above to be infallible, but considering the cost should be in the hands of all. In the use of sulphur too much should not be given, especially in damp weather. The proportion given above is small enough."

STATISTICS.

The production of raisins in California was last year 800,000 boxes. In 1873 it was only 6,000 boxes.

There are 37 tunnels of more than 1,000 yards in England, the longest being that of the Severn—7,664.

Secretary Endicot shows that since its creation at the outset of the civil war the United States army retired list has cost \$16,530,000.

It is stated that at least 1,000,000 tons of commercial fertilizers are now annually used in this country at a cost to the buyers of \$30,000,000.

It is estimated that to collect one pound of honey from clover, 62,000 heads of clover must be deprived of their nectar, and 3,750,000 visits from bees would be necessitated.

Madagascar is almost a miracle of missionary triumph. The native Christians of that island have given more than \$4,000,000 for the spread of the gospel during the last ten years.

The total value of green fruit bought by the United States in Canada last year was \$210,000, nearly the entire sum having been paid for apples, of which 56,912 barrels were from Ontario and 42,151 barrels from Nova Scotia.

The ensilage society of England, of which Lord Walsingham is president, reports that while the system was practically unknown five years ago yet in 1887 statistics showed in Great Britain alone 2,700 silos and 1,300 stacks of ensilage.

The city of Paris is shown by official statistics to have consumed last year 4,000,000 eggs. It also drank 87,560,000 gallons of wine, 3,217,000 gallons of spirits and liquors, and something over, 12,000,000 gallons of cider and of beer, or 6,000,000 and over of each.

Population in India, according to the principal religions: Hindus, 187,937,438; Mahomedans, 50,121,598; Aborigines, 6,426,511; Buddhists, 3,418,895; Christians, 1,862,626; Sikhs, 1,853,426; Jains, 1,221,855; Parsis, 85,397; Jews, 12,009; others, 932,066; total, 253,891,821.

According to the official trade returns, Ireland sent to Great Britain last year 669,253 cattle, 548,568 sheep, and 1,698,741 pigs. Yet Mr. Curran, of Montreal, seems to think that Ireland would be benefited by a war of tariffs between her and England, such as that prevailing between Canada and the States.

The population of the five largest cities of the world is: London, 3,832,441; Paris, 2,269,023; Canton, 1,500,000; Berlin, 1,315,297; New York, 1,209,577. If that cluster of people on and about Manhattan Island be taken into consideration, New York's population would figure over 2,500,000, and would be the second largest city in the world.

Recent statistics go to show that during the past year the Southern States have been rapidly developing their industries. During the first six months of the present year Alabama invested \$14,000,000 in new enterprises conducted by stock companies: Kentucky, \$3,000,000; Texas, \$11,000,000; Georgia, \$5,000,000; Virginia, \$5,000,000. It is said that the manufactured and mining products of Alabama will exceed by fifty times the amount of cotton to be shipped to the centres of trade.

Mr. Matthews, of Quebec, presented a statistical report showing that there were 4,000,000 communicants of the Church in the world, equivalent to 20,000,000 adherents. He said that education was much looked after as the principles they held did not commend themselves to persons without education. Respecting missions, 60,000 communicants had been gathered into the Presbyterian Church from heathenism and over 500 ministers had been sent to preach the gospel to the heathen.

It appears that from 1845 to 1847, when bleeding prevailed in the treatment of pneumonia, according to The Medical Record, but one person in sixteen treated for that disease in the Pennsylvania Hospital died; while, on the contrary, from 1884 to 1886, after this treatment had been abandoned, the proportion of deaths was 1 in 3.2. Facts are stubborn things, and the question arises whether, in every case, we have always gained by ignoring the simple and old-fashioned methods of healing.

Mr. E. I. Seward says:—The total coal production in the world is put at 420,000,000 tons, of which Great Britain produces 160,000,000, the United States 120,000,000, and Germany 75,000,000 tons. The production in the United States is divided between thirty-one States and territories, the largest, of course, being Pennsylvania, which last year gave us 34,000,000 anthracite and 30,000,000 of bituminous. In the money value the output in the United States is safely \$500,000,000 in the markets where used. This is greater than the value of gold, silver, cotton, and petroleum produced in our country.

At Canton, China, some 250,000 people live continuously upon boats, and many never step foot on shore from one year's end to another. The young children have a habit of continually falling overboard and thus cause a great deal of trouble in effecting a rescue, while in many instances this is impossible and a child is drowned. China is an over-populated country and the Chinese have profited by this drowning proclivity in reducing the surplus population. They attach floats to the male children so that they can be fished out when they tumble into the river. The females are without such protection and are usually left to drown.

The following statistics are of French origin, and pointed. Under Napoleon III the Crimean war cost France 200,000 men and 2 milliards of money; England 23,000 men and 5 milliards of money; Piedmont, 2,000 men and 175,000,000 francs of money; Russia, 6,000,000 men and 4 milliards of money; Turkey, 35,000 men and 400,000,000. In 1858 the Italian war cost France 80,000 men and 1 milliard of money; Italy, 60,000 men and 150,000,000. In the Mexican war France spent 500,000,000 money and 70,000 men. The Syrian expedition cost 15,000 men and 125,000,000 money. In the Franco-German war France lost 225,000 men and 9,228,000,000 of money. And now France is bristling with Boulangerism and will be compelled to go with Russia ere long in a struggle more terrible than all before it. The estimate is that France and Russia together can put in the field 9,500,000 of men, while Germany, Austria and Italy can meet them with as many more. Think of 20,000,000 men eager for each other's lives on European battle plains—and what has been the gain of it all.



MRS. DART'S TRIPLETS.

President Cleveland's Prize for the three best babies at the Aurora County Fair, in 1887, was given to these triplets, Mollie, Ida and Ray, children of Mrs. A. K. Dart, Hamburg, N. Y. She writes: "Last August the little ones became very sick, and as I could get no other food that would agree with them, I commenced the use of Lactated Food. It helped them immediately, and they were soon as well as ever, and I consider it very largely due to the Food that they are now so well."

Cabinet photo. of these triplets sent free to the mother of any baby born this year.

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The Shoe and Leather Reporter, N. Y., and the Shoe and Leather Review, Chicago, the leading trade papers of the U.S. in the Hides line, have sent their representatives to investigate Mr. Page's business, and after a thorough examination and comparison, the Reporter gives his endorsement:

"We believe that in extent of light-weight raw material collected and carried, Mr. Page holds the lead of any competitor and that his present stock is the largest held by any house in this country."

And the Review says:

"After a most thorough investigation of Mr. Page's business, as compared with others in same line, we have become fully satisfied that in his specialty, light weight stock, he is unquestionably the largest dealer in this country, while in superiority of quality, he is confessedly at the head."

QUERY: If Mr. Page's business is the largest in its line in the United States, is it not the best possible proof of his ability to pay highest prices? If he did not do so, would he naturally get more Skins than any of his competitors in the same line?