THE MALICE OF JOHN MASON.

"She's only a worker's daughter, is my Kit, an' you are a rich man, Mr. Richwell, but she loves your son as fondly an' truly as any peer's daughter could, an' she'd make him a jolly sight better wife."

"That will do, Mason, I have heard quite enough about this nonsense," returned the iron-founder, severely. "I have been very patient about the matter so far—absurdly so. I am sorry, of course, your girl has formed this ridiculous attachment to my son, who is no doubt to blame to some extent——"

"He can't be blamed for loving Kit," Mason interrupted, with pride in his voice.

"But," continued Mr. Richwell in a loud tone, "the notion that my son—my son—should marry the daughter of one of my own employees is manifestly wild—anyone not blinded by maudlin sentiment, as my son and your daughter are, would realize in an instant that the whole thing is monumentally preposterous."

"An' class distinctions are to stand atween a man an' a girl whose happiness for life depends upon each other, eh ?" said Mason, bringing his hand down with a bang upon his master's desk. "Class distinctions are to doom a man—a father of my age, nigh on fifty, to seeing her sweet face grow paler an' thinner, her heart heavier an' sadder every day until she slips out of my reach—she who is dearer than life to me, eh ? Surely, man alive, if you have no soft feeling for my Kit, you've some consideration for your son—your own flesh and blood, your——"

"Confound your glib tongue ! It is just because he is my flesh and blood that I cannot allow him to throw himself away on a laborer's girl !"

"I am not a laborer, Mr. Richwell; I am a skilled worker, the best in the foundry, an' we both know it. It's my brains that has made your money. Take care that it's not my brains that work your ruin."

There was something so significant in his tone and the delivery of the last sentence that Mr. Richwell looked up consciously. No one knew better than he how valuable were Mason's services to him, else the worker would have been dismissed on the spot for daring to plead that Hugh Richwell should be allowed to marry where his heart was bound.

Richwell's foundry might be said to be working on Mason's brains, for Mason had the true inventor's genius, and in every department he had introduced improvements of his own invention. He had never benefited a penny by so doing, while Richwell himself had reaped thousands.

"You needn't threaten me, Mason" the employer replied softly. "If you had come to me and asked for a rise in salary, I would have said 'yes, you deserve it.' But what you ask is impossible. If I can resist my son's pleadings I can certainly resist yours ; and to you, as to him, I say, once for all, N—O !"

"Very well. Then I leave your employ. I am going over to Wilkins', an' with my brains in their foundry I'll undo the good I done you during these thirty years. Mark my words, Mr. Richwell, before my hair is quite white, Wilkins' will be where Richwells are to-day, an' I will be head of 'em."

"You're a very foolish fellow, Mason. You'd better stop with me."

"You can buy me, mind, body an' soul, for my Kitty's happiness, but not for less. Ever since I saw where her dear heart was going, I've been slaving, slaving to perfect an idea which would make me greater than you, so I could come to you as I have done, an' plead the lovers' cause knowing that you'd rue it if you refused me. You have, an' you will. Wilkins' haven't the spare cash to pay my price for my idea, so I go to them a partner, an' I know what my idea will make my partnership worth. Good-day, sir. I bear you no grudge ; I play for my daughter's happiness, an' your son's, an' if I crush you in the process of humbling your pride the blame must rest on you."

Not wishing to be questioned upon what he had said, John Mason walked quickly out of the room before Mr. Richwell could speak.

He went straight to his little cottage home muttering : "Purse-proud ape, my Kit's worth any thirty gross of sons you could have," over and over again. At the low gate in the high hedge skirting his front garden, he came upon two figures he recognized immediately.

"Ay, an' what are you doing here now, my young sir ?" he demanded of the man. "Didn't your father forbid you to come within a hundred miles of my daughter again, eh ? An' haven't I jest come away from him after agreeing in the best possible manner that this young woman is far below your reach ? Far, far, my young sir. Go home, an' forget her !"

"Father !" exclaimed the girl, in a tone of great surprise, "I expected—don't laugh at us when we're so wretched. Mr. Richwell has threatened Hugh—threatened to turn him out of his home and leave him penniless unless he gives me up."

"I have left my father's house, Mr. Mason," said Hugh Richwell, stoutly, and without much regret. "I told him that I had made up my mind to marry Kit, and he replied that if that were so, I could leave his house at once and never look to him again for a penny or a word. I must make my own way in the world, that's all."

"I like your bounce, Mr. Hugh," Mason returned, "but you can't set up home an' live on nothing. Nor do I think either of you'd be really happy unless you had Mr. Richwell's consent. A man who defies his father takes a very serious step, Mr. Hugh. I say to you go home an' wait. I'm going to boss this show, an' if your father doesn't change his mind within a twelvemonth——"

"A twelvemonth !" cried the young man.

"How he goes !" Mason exclaimed. "Do you fancy now, that if you leave home an' start to make your own living, unused as you are to such a thing, you'll be in a position to marry, an' keep a wife in less than a year ? Because I'm certain you won't."

The soundness of this argument could not be contested, and Hugh and Kit fell in with Mason's suggestion.

Late the same night it occurred to Mason that considering he had to deal with a resolute and daring man in Mr. Richwell, it would be wise to remove from the foundry all traces of the secret process of quick-hardening steel which was to buy him his partnership in Wilkins' and a good husband for his Kit.

Accordingly he set out for Richwell's without delay. He went straight to the "Shop" which his master had set apart for him to make his experiments in, and having gathered together all the papers relating to his great discovery, he commenced to destroy all those things which would afford anyone a clue as to the nature of his invention. He had almost finished his task, when in turning round towards a window he beheld an ashy face pressed to one of the panes, watching with eager eyes his movements. How long the face had been there he could not guess. But it was important to learn, for the face belonged to Mr. Richwell.

He sprang to the door, and caught his employer by the arm, and drew him gently, but firmly into the shop.

"How long have you been there, sir ?" he asked, anxiously.

"How dare you assault me in this outrageous manner, you scoundrel !"

The answer, and Mr. Richwell's angry expression satisfied Mason. He knew his master well enough to feel certain that if he had been watching long enough to guess the nature of the hardening process, his answer would have been defiant instead of indignant, his expression exultant instead of angry.

"Come, Mr. Richwell," said Mason good-humouredly, taking up a roll of the papers he had collected, "I offer you these as the price of your consent to Mr. Hugh marrying my Kit. It's a discovery which will make you the richest iron-founder in the world, or beggar you by making Wilkins that. On the day Mr. Hugh weds my girl an' you attend the wedding wearing your best smile, I'll give this roll to you. Meantime, it shall not be opened. What do ye say ? I'm not built to be a rich man ; I only want enough to rub along with. What do ye say ?"

"No, you scoundrel ! I'd sooner see him dead first, if only because you have taken up this cause." Richwell replied, in a voice of thunder. "Get out of my workshop—out of my foundry. Go to Wilkins', and be hanged to you ! They're on their last legs now. In six months you'll be without a job, cringing to my office for work, and I'll see you very much confounded before I take you on again. Out you go, now, or I'll call the watchman, and give you in charge for trespass !"

"Very well, Mr. Richwell," replied Mason, white with passion, but in the civilest manner. "Before my hair is white your eyes will open to the fact that marriage between Mr. Hugh an' my Kit's the most desirable thing in the world."

"Will you clear off my foundry ?"

"I'm going now, sir, but I'll be back again before long, an' you won't speak to me like that then."

Next day Mason "went over" to Wilkins'.

* * * * * *

"The naval authorities have been experimenting with some new steel plates which are claimed to be greatly superior to any hitherto produced, and eighteen or twenty per cent. cheaper. In consequence of the success of the experiments, the Admiralty have placed with Messrs. Wilkins and Mason, of Rusper, a large order for these plates, which will be used in the construction of the five men-of-war shortly to be put down, and in all repairs to armor in future executed in H. M. dockyards. It is said that the contract obtained by Messrs. Wilkins and Mason is one of the largest given out for steel plates by the Admiralty for many years."

Mr. Richwell read the marked paragraph in a sort of stupor. It was contained in a copy of the Rusper Mirror, which had been directed to him in a handwriting he thought he recognized as that of John Mason, who eleven months before was his servant.

Eleven months ! Mr. Richwell groaned. It seemed like eleven years so great was the change that had come upon him and his fortune in that short space of time.

"He hasn't played a fair game," he said aloud to himself, thinking bitterly of Mason. "I could have fought Wilkins', and held my own, if they hadn't undercut me on every possible occasion."

"There's more in it than that," returned Colonel Jenner, his friend and confidant, who had a small interest in Richwell's Foundry. "They produce a better, harder—much harder steel than you can, in a third of your time. The saving of time allows them to undercut everyone in the market, and yet make big profits and give a better article. I tell you, Richwell, you made a beastly ass of yourself—ruined yourself and hit me hard when you quarrelled with Mason. You should have bought his invention first—he'd have sold it for a song—and then quarrelled with him, if you had to."

"I know I should," said the founder, weakly.

"Wilkins' have taken up practically the whole of your market. Your output isn't a twentieth of what it was a year ago, and I've a very shrewd suspicion that you've been keeping the place in labor at a dead loss, merely to bluff Mason."

"Confound you ! I don't want to know your shrewd suspicions. Find me some new capital, that's what I want you to do."

"I could find a cool million for Wilkins' in a week, Richwell, if they wanted it, but I wouldn't—couldn't induce anyone to put a penny in your concern as it's been going the last few months."

"It's the only way to save your money in the foundry, Jenner," Richwell said, very gravely. "I have not been open with you for your own sake. I will now be quite so." He opened a drawer at his side, and took out a sheaf of papers. "Do you know what these are ? . . . Writs." He took up a long unaddressed envelope. "Do you guess what this is ? . . . A bankruptcy petition against me for eight thousand and sixty pounds. It was filed a day or two ago on behalf of Sevil and Wrightson. Those writs are for over twenty thousand."

"Phew ! This is fiendish ! What the dickens have you been doing with the business ?"

"Reaping the whirlwind of a man's malice," said Richwell, bitterly.

"But assets ! What about assets?"

"Sufficient to pay twelve shillings in the pound on my liabilities, providing a purchaser can be found for these premises, and that he is foolish enough to pay what they cost me to erect."

"You'd better shut down at once."

Richwell leant sideways towards his friend, and laid a trembling hand upon his knee.

"Jenner, I shall have to this week-end," he said, with tears in his voice, "for I haven't enough cash at the bank to run the foundry for another six days."

"Phew ! This is fiendish !"

"Wilkins' have shot up like a rocket, and I've fallen down like a stone. At sixty years of age, when I hoped and expected to retire from active business, I find myself where I started forty long years ago, penniless, humbled to the dust, friendless——"

"Excepting me, Richwell."

"Thank you, gratefully. My very house and lands are mortgaged. And all this has come about in about eleven months, through the genius of that brigand Mason !"

A knock fell on the door, which opened, and the cheery, kindly face of John Mason, of Messrs. Wilkins and Mason, looked in.

"Busy, Mr. Richwell ? Oh, company ! Never mind. I'll look in later."

"Come in, Mr. Mason," said Mr. Richwell, dreamily, indifferent. "It is a long time since I saw you here," he added, his thoughts going back to that fatal evening when he refused a fortune and began his own ruination.

"Tidish time, Mr. Richwell. Things have changed a lot since then. I believe we had a bit of a difference last time I was in the foundry, eh ? Aye, pity. Let us forget that. We were younger then ; more foolish. When can I see you privately on business, Mr. Richwell ?"

"I'll see you again later Richwell," said Colonel Jenner, putting on his hat.

Richwell nodded, thoughtfully. He would have liked to have given his friend a hint to stay ; he thought he knew what Mason had come for ; but he was too worried, too wretched, to quite know how to do it without giving himself away to Mason. So the Colonel went.

"You wished to see me on business ?" said Richwell, laying a slight stress on the last word.

"Aye, I sent you a paper this morning, with a paragraph marked——"

"I had it," said Richwell, icily.

"I thought it would help prepare the way for what I had to say. You see we're busy. We haven't room enough at the foundry to turn out a third of the orders coming in, much less tackle the Government contract at once, as we want to. We're building as fast as we can, but we can't run up a city in twelve hours."

A cold sweat broke out on Richwell's forehead. Was Mason going to offer to buy the foundry ? It would be humiliating indeed, but it would enable him to meet his creditors.

"Well—er, I don't want to make myself offensive to you," continued Mason, awkwardly, "but you don't seem to have been up to your throat in contracts lately. I mean you're slack, could offer us practically a free foundry. I have put it to my partner, as a matter of form, that your foundry, being in full working order, yet capable of taking our overflow orders on would be worth a deal of money to us, as it would let us out of our corner."

"You want to buy the foundry as a going concern," said Richwell, his heart beating like a frightened woman's.

"No. I thought you and ours might amalgamate. You join us, and we make ourselves responsible for all your debts. We shall walk as one firm."

Richwell's ashy face quivered, his mouth twitched violently and tears forced themselves into his eyes.

"Do you mean that. Mr. Mason ?"

"Aye, it's a business proposal."

"My foundry is stagnant."

"All the better ; it can take more of our jobs."

"Twenty thousand pounds won't cover my liabilities."

"Pity, but if that's so it can't be helped."

"You do mean it then ?"

"It's a plain business offer."

"It is not ; it is the offer of a great man who, to humble a fool's pride, thrusts him to the gulf of ruin and then rescues him."

"That's not plain business ; that's pure sentiment. If you come over to us, you must come at once. When can you come ?"

"To-morrow—to-day."

"That's business—settled. I'll arrange details with you later. See you again."

"Wait ! Stop !"

Mason hesitated.

"Last time you were here, Mr. Mason, I insulted you, and you said when next you came here I wouldn't speak like that to you."

"And you haven't," said Mason, pleasantly.

"You offered me something that night."

"Stop a bit ! I think I see where you are drifting. I brought my Kit along with me, guessing perhaps you might be interested to see whether she looked a respectable young woman or not, whether she was fit to marry a respectable young man who loves her almost as much as she loves him."

"Yes, yes. Ask her up—in here. Let me give her a blessing for Hugh's sake before my heart gives way."

"She's here, Mr. Richwell," said Mason softly, drawing his pretty Kit in from an adjoining room.

Mr. Richwell hurried towards her, and took her hand in his.

"Miss Mason," he said, "can you forgive me ? I am coming to your wedding as one of your sincerest well-wishers, and the proudest, happiest of your friends."

"Thank you," she returned simply, blushing a little in her delight and surprise.

"Pity Hugh's not here," muttered Mr. Richwell.

"I'll find him," returned Mason, with boisterous good humor. "I saw him in the foundry as I came up." And he left Kit to seal his victory over Mr. Richwell.—Pearson's Weekly.

BOUGHT A BIG RANCH.

Michigan Man Will Move to the Northwest.

The Immigration Department at Ottawa is constantly receiving evidence, that the immigration policy is not only bringing in large numbers of settlers from the United States, but is also attracting to the Western prairies men of wealth and position, who have already made a success of life, and who may be expected to take an active interest in the development of the districts in which they locate.

One of the most recent cases of this kind is reported by Mr. M. V. MacInnes, Dominion Agent at Detroit, who forwards particulars respecting the location of Mr. Peter Muirhead, of Orchard Lake, Michigan, on a ranch of 3,000 acres, near Calgary. Mr. Muirhead is worth $300,000, and bought the property for a home and paid cash for it. It is understood that a hundred or more families will follow his lead. In a letter to Mr. MacInnes, Mr. Muirhead says, with respect to a trip he made to the Canadian West:

"I have lived all my life in Michigan, but after seeing your exhibit at the State Fair last year at Pontiac, and having several talks with you regarding the country, I decided to take your advice and go and see the country for myself. I visited every part of it, and found the farmers contented, prosperous and happy—the climate grand—the land, I believe, the best on earth. The country will go ahead, and the settlers will do likewise. I bought a ranch, 3,000 acres of deeded land, with 1,500 head of cattle and 150 head of horses, a $5,000 house, furnished, from Walter C. Shrine, near Calgary, and paid him $51,000 cash. I am going back at once, and I will take with me six carloads of fine stock and two cars of effects, and I think about forty settlers (friends of mine) will accompany me back. Beautiful Southern Alberta, in my mind the finest stock-raising land on earth, will be my home after the first of the coming month."

A schoolmistress who has a dread of all kinds of contagious diseases sent a child home the other day because her mother was ill. The next morning the little girl presented herself at school, with her finger in her mouth and a little hood swinging by the string, and said : "We've got a baby at our house, but mamma says I was to tell you it's not catching !"

TOLD BY THE OLD CIRCUS MAN

Appearance on Crutches of the Greatest of All Giants.

"In his later years," said the old circus man, "the greatest of all giants suffered a good deal from rheumatism, and sometimes one or the other of his legs, but more generally his right leg, would be so drawn up that he had to go about on crutches. But that didn't put the great giant out of business.

"I was telling you the other day about the impression he made on the people when they saw him marching at the head of the circus parade on stilts; he made just about as much of an impression, though of course in a different sort of way, when he appeared there walking, as he sometimes did, after the rheumatism struck him, on crutches.

"You see, he was a cheerful man, the giant, always ; he never liked to give up. And then he didn't want to, either, on the old man's account; he hated to disappoint him.

"I never'll forget how the old man felt over it the first time the giant got so bad. 'Well,' says the old man, 'I suppose that's the last of the giant for the parades till he gets over the rheumatism.'

"You see we always featured the great giant, in some way, in the parades. But, no sir, the great giant said, that wasn't the last of him ; he'd turn out on crutches, and so he did.

"For a time. And a most remarkable figure he cut in that way, too, I can tell you ; something a little bit different, I venture to say, from anything ever seen in a circus parade before or since. But the effort was just a lee-tle too much for him, finally, and he had to tell the old man after a while that

HE'D HAVE TO GIVE IT UP.

"But he suggested himself, the giant did, in place of his walking in the procession, something that he could do when he was thus disabled, that turned out, simple a thing as it was, to be really one of the greatest acts the giant ever did at all. This consisted simply in his standing, supported on his crutches at some conspicuous spot in whatever town we were showing in and there handing out bills advertising the show.

"Now, you know, to see a man of his stupendous stature standing even in the ordinary fashion of a man and handing out bills would have been something wonderful; but to see such a man on crutches, and with his right leg bent back from the knee and supported in a sling passed up over his shoulder, standing there passing out bills, was something wonderful indeed.

"And it did use to draw the people. You might have marched the whole show by on the other side of the street after he'd once taken up his position and had nobody to look at it ; they were all 'round the giant. And the more they saw of him close to, like that, the more wonderful he seemed.

"A person five feet tall could walk upright under that bent knee; and the crutches under his arms preventing the giant's bending down very much to people, it was only tall men that could take the bills he gave out direct from his own hand. As a matter of fact when the giant was giving out bills in this way we always had a man alongside of him standing about half-way up on a step ladder, who would take the bills from the giant and hand them down to the people.

"It was one of the best things the giant ever did, surely, that act on crutches."

DECIDED TO SUBM'T.

The other morning a gentleman, on the way to his office, overtook a friend who was evidently much perturbed in mind, and asked him the cause.

"Oh," said he, "I'm going down to the gas company's office to have a row."

"I suppose they've overcharged you ?" inquired the friend.

"I should think they have ! My house was shut up all last quarter, and yet here's a bill ever so much larger than the quarter before. Why don't they knock a man down and rob him ? I'll see the whole lot farther before I pay a farthing."

Towards evening the two men happened to meet again, and the man who was so much over-charged was asked by his friend if he had had the row at the gas office.

"Of course, I intended to, but—but——"

"I supposed they bluffed you ?"

"Hardly that."

"But you told them your house was closed all the quarter ?"

"Oh, yes."

"And you——"

"Well, I said, 'send a man up with me to see how the house has been left.' He came and found that a gas stove had been alight all the time ; so I decided to submit to the robbery."

THE KING AND THE MAN.

When King Edward was supposed to be in full health some of the Irish proposed to mark his coronation by a day of mourning ; when he was prostrated they were all sympathetic. Recalls the old picture of two "Whiteboys" with guns lying in wait behind a hedge by the roadside to "pot" the landlord when he drives past. "He's very late, Pat." "He is, indeed, Mike ; I hope the poor man hasn't met with any accident."