Bernard Holly—Hero

I.

What would happen? Bah! what could happen? Mr. Owen Loder, sole surviving proprietor of the Hepburn smelting works, paused in his feverish pacing to peer through the library window at that faint glow above the town down there. For days the ring of mystery had seemed to surround it; even the newspapers were at fault; nothing reached the big house on the hill save vague, unnerving rumors. He had pooh-pooh-ed them all, and kept a smiling, resourceful face turned to the world; yet, in secret, he was fighting the tensest battle of his career. In one scale lay his well-known pride and stubborn self-justification; in the other, the dead loss already of several thousand pounds and the galling fact that Blanchards, the rival firm two miles away, were throwing their tentacles over all the advance contracts and making money fast. Below all, there palpitated the sickly dread that the men, rendered desperate by their six weeks' strike, might just possibly take some subtle vengeance into their own hands. It was the crisis of his life, and it might even——

"Dad! where are you, dad?" It was his Vera's breathless whisper at the doorway. She had burst in, her hands strained together, and eyes wide with imploring fear. "You must think of something; you must end this—you must! They have held secret meetings, with outposts, I hear. They have turned me back, wouldn't let the carriage drive into Hepburn. Something would have happened, I'm sure of it, only Mr. Justin Blanchard came by and said something to Cordell, the leader, and got the horses away. Dad, you can't, you wouldn't, let it come to a question of life and death for the sake of a few hundreds extra a year. Oh, think!"

"Think!" he repeated, fiercely. "You're a woman; you'd never understand. Someone is behind this action of theirs—someone is working in the dark against me for a purpose. If I give way now, I may again, and again. It shall go on till it ends—where it ends."

"It's not only me," she persisted, faintly. "I wouldn't worry you, but there's another letter from Bernard Holly, with an enclosure for you. He implores you to suggest a compromise while there's time. Will you read it?"

"Where's the letter?" She held it out. Next instant it was lying in scraps. "My answer, from to-night! Let him keep away. I believed in that man at one time; to-day I name him the deepest walking fraud within fifty miles. See for yourself—if your infatuation for him hasn't blinded you quite! Where's all his boasted influence over the men? Two years ago, when he came here to assist the lame vicar, he was going to change everything, with his social clubs, pleasant evenings, brotherhood notions, and his 'self-sacrifice!' Where is he now? What is he doing?"

"Shame! Fighting might and main to bring about peace—to prove that all his efforts have not been in vain. And you know it!" she breathed.

"Bah! He is all for the men, and therefore my enemy. His position has become impossible I'll say at once what I mean. I have never definitely acknowledged his hopes of winning my daughter; unless he justifies his attitude in this crisis I shall decline to think of it. No, stand back, don't make it more painful for me. If he really cares for you, if he is all he wishes to be thought, here is his life-chance to prove it. The men idolize him, you hear—he has spent all his money upon them; now let him bring them to their senses. He could, but he won't. Then, he goes! A dreamer, a fraud; and I'll tell him so to his face."

Awed into silence she crept out. The house-keeper waited there, with a face almost as troubled as her own.

"I thought I'd better speak," said she; "that Mr. Justin Blanchard must have followed you home. I don't like that gentleman, and I don't know why he should be lounging out there by the side gate as if he thinks of buying the house."

"Out here?" Vera's whiteness deepened. It had been one more stifled fear—the fear that her father might learn how for months this dark, sinster, cynical son of his business rival had been pestering her with furtive attentions. She would end it at once. Her heart thumping, she stepped out and down the side path, and paused a little way from a tall figure leaning over the gate there. "Is that you, Mr. Blanchard? I believe I thanked you for what you did this evening?" She said this as coolly as if she had never learned to tremble.

"Miss Loder! It was nothing. I'd do far more than that every day for you!" he said, with hot eagerness. "Yes, I half thought of calling upon your father. Why not? My father and he were old friends once, and could be again. I think I've kept in the background very patiently, Miss Loder; I don't know why you dislike me—as your face shows. Because I mean to change you!"

"Indeed?" She nerved herself for the effort. "It may be because—well, I think you won't deny that you have helped to foment this sad misunderstanding with the abstract object of crippling us and proposing amalgamation."

"A lie!" he flared out, huskily. "You may want a man with means and power to help you here—perhaps sooner than you think. Good-night! Aye," he whispered to himself. "You've guessed well for a woman! Cripple you it shall, before I let you marry Mr. Bernard Holly."

Vera had barely closed the door and recrossed the hall when she heard that quick, dear step on the gravel drive. The door was open, and her arms locked tightly around Bernard's neck in the dusk, drawing down the haggard face to hers.

"My boy!—at last! So white and so worried! Oh, what will be the end of this suspense? And Dad is so stern and changed. He seems to think that you could have done something to avert—to prove that you——"

"Just it," he said, with what sounded like a stifled sob. "I have something to say to him; I must say it to-night—or never."

"That I'm not to know!" The warm clasp fell away, the rapture died slowly out of her face. "What does it all mean? Why are you so strained, so quiet, so afraid I might kiss you again? There, no, I won't ask; I can trust you to do the right thing, whatever it is. Something has been said again about me and my money, and that you are playing double; you feel that you ought to explain to him clearly; you want to win me—not steal me! And if he says no, you feel that I ought to obey him. There, now say that every woman cannot read one man's mind aright! In the library, dear!"

Dazedly Bernard Holly stepped forward. Sweat-drops were beading on his forehead as he knocked at the door and entered the glow of lamplight. "Only me," he whispered, in answer to Mr. Loder's start and stare. "I won't detain you. I only came to say that I have quite failed. Failed! All that one man could do, I have done. But I am barred out—mistrusted. You can guess why. I have been seen coming to and from this house. They have held their final meeting, but I was locked out. It is all over."

"Exactly! Just what I was warned to expect from the first!" He swung round to his papers, with a short, stinging laugh. He would not betray that his last tense hope had snapped here. "I knew as much; your whole work is wasted. Very good! At the first sign of trouble I'll communicate with the military; that will scotch their schemes. Failed!—you, who had such a hold upon them. Then that ends all hope of a settlement through forbearance and common sense."

"I do not say so!" Bernard said, his face working as with inward agony that no one must understand. "Whatever happens, I will keep in with my conscience. I have tried to end the strike, although you do not believe it; some influence has been at work that I cannot fathom. I only admit that but for the one fact that I have been seen here so often it might not have happened. They would have turned to me, and taken my advice. I know them; they trusted me. As it is, have you realized your position? If you beat them, do you not still lose? You are wealthy; there is yet time to meet them fairly, to compromise. Could you not, for your own sake——"

"No!" Mr. Loder's voice went up to a shout. "Let them do their worst, and pay the price. Dare ever to suggest that again, here or outside, and, whatever my regard for you in the past, I must ask you not to call here again upon any grounds, much less to see my daughter!"

"No, no!" Bernard pleaded, faintly. "I'm going. I must think again—think for all. I'll try once more. Good-night!"

And next moment he had stumbled across the hall and was gone.

II.

It was soon after dusk, twenty-four hours later. Not ten minutes ago word had arrived that sections of the men had been seen massing away from the town under cover of the dusk. It could mean only one thing—they were going to march upon the hill mansion itself.

"Fasten every door and window," Mr. Loder ordered. The blow had fallen with paralyzing swiftness, and there was no one willing to risk getting into Hepburn with his request for mounted police from outlying districts. "If common sense won't keep those madmen at bay, my revolver shall. But they won't dare that length. If they do——" He turned with a bitter sneer to Vera, who had caught pleadingly at his arm. "Yes, where's your Bernard now? Here to protect you?"

"He knows; that is everything," she could only whisper, white and dazed herself. "He would not let it come to the worst, unless——"

She could not finish. They awaited, with staring eyes and strained ears. And then, of a thrilling sudden, came a voice and a banging at the hall door. Vera shrank in instinctive fear as Justin Blanchard's tall figure leaped from his horse and sprang across into the drawing-room.

"Here! Mr. Loder! Pardon me, but are you mad? I galloped off the moment I heard. You must go at once. If one, there are two hundred men on the way here; they will wreck your house. Their safety is in numbers; the few police are powerless, taken by surprise. At once!"

"To stand and see my house ruined? Never! What can I do? What would you suggest?" he muttered, his dry lips grey with the first touch of fear he had shown outwardly. "No, it's uexpectedly kind of you, seeing that we are deserted; but I'll never leave the house to them. Perhaps, if you think there is real danger, you would persuade my daughter to——"

"No, sir! If you stay, I stay with you. They know me; they may listen to me. Hang it, Mr. Loder, we are neighbors, if competitors in trade—up till now. We've been really sorry all along. No! If I can talk them back, one of your servants could surely get across to our place and fetch up our men to help; they've not left work yet. If they won't help—the sack, to-morrow! That's me, sir. Hark! By Jove, it's touch-and-go, though; here they come!"

"Save my house!" Mr. Loder whispered, in a sudden frenzy. "Keep them back; save the place, and I'll never forget it!"

"I will!" Justin Blanchard sprang to the door, closed it, and turned. He had flashed pale, and his voice shook strangely. "Why shouldn't I help? Why shouldn't I say at once what prompted me to come at such a moment, when, if ever, I can back my words with action? Mr. Loder, I don't know why your daughter should dislike me. Heaven knows, I have not forced myself upon her; and yet, if I may say so, I'd make her the best husband; and there is no reason why the two firms should not combine to mutual advantage. Perhaps, as she will not put me out of anxiety, you will speak for her! I'll only say that, with such a hope, I'll risk my life to-night to save your house and all in it!"

Now the sound outside was clearly a confused hum of voices and it seemed to chill Mr. Loder's very blood. One hand clutched his revolver; the other shook upon Justin Blanchard's arm. That moment!

"I—I had half guessed it, and thought of it. She will; she understands; she obeys me. Save the house, my boy—do something! Vera, you hear? Speak! Think of the house and the money—and our future here. Give him some hope, at least—the right to protect you!"

"Never!" She had stood like one in a dream; now the indignant cry struggled from her lips. "Dad, you cannot mean it! That man—I hate him! I say it now to his false face. Can't you see? He has waited and worked for this; schemed so that he can turn the scale one way or another, and gain his end at the crucial moment. I'll answer him now. No—never! Let him go!"

One last pause, while Justin Blanchard stood with teeth bared and eyes blazing. Then, just as that handful of stones crashed through the darkness into the room he strode out, crossed the hall, and was gone.

* * * * * *

"Come out! Show your face! You daren't!"

A determined surging forward of the shadowy mass, and the house was surrounded. No sound came from it; it might have been deserted. A whispering, a pause like the indefinite quiet before a storm, and then as by magic a long plank swung up above the crowd. The forward rush for the main door had begun, indeed, when the balcony window burst open. Old Mr. Loder stood there, grim and determined again, his revolver steadily levelled.

"You shall have it," he thundered. "I count just five, and then—take all six chambers!"

"Give us what we ask!" rose the shout, in waves.

"Never! One—two—three. . . . ."

And then? One ironic cheer, and then a sort of spell seemed to grip the dramatic scene. All movement ceased, all sound was suspended, as that panting, haggard figure sprang forward from the ranks, stumbled up the balcony steps, swung back the pointed weapon, and stretched out arms to them with a yearning never forgotten in Hepburn. It was Bernard Holly, come at the right moment—come to save the situation, at the greatest price, surely, ever demanded of a man.

"Men! Brothers! Give me this one last minute before you act; hear my last word in Hepburn! You forgot the old days, you lost all your faith in me when you discovered that the woman I love was daughter of the man you think you hate; but you'll hear this! . . . Is that you, Jim Cordell? I stood by you when your little lad was dying; there was something that made you say you would never forget. Remember it now; let your men listen. They may even do more when I tell them that if I can win back your hearts and confidence to-night I give up that love of mine, here and now. Is that a proof?" and that gasp in the faded light was his best answer. "Yes, she is here! She hears and understands. Before her, before you all, I am willing to put away my hopes to save you to-night. Now will you trust me? It is all over; I do it for you! Pause and think. Take as brave fellows what seems like a defeat to-night, for the sake of your wives and children to-morrow. You have not burned the house—except in thought. I am only one man still, but if that one man can help you by increased effort, you may live to thank him. For this vital moment I ask you to accept my counsel, as you did once, and to see what to-morrow brings forth. That is all. Faces homeward, all of us!"

A dead, never-forgotten pause; and then Jim Cordell's husky voice rang out: "Mates, I haven't stopped you. I'll only ask—could a man do more than that?"

Bernard had not heard that, nor the shuffling of many feet that gradually died away. The house, the tragedy, the blur of faces, had faded out. He was unconscious even of the beating heart against which his head was pillowed. That wrecked window was all that remained to show what might have happened but for Bernard Holly's sacrifice.

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To-day they still tell in Hepburn how the men waited in hushed groups around Bernard Holly's house, to tell him something, to hear the doctor's latest word; how Mr. Justin Blanchard was hooted whenever he appeared; and how smoke poured again from the furnaces one week later, and the clang of hammers broke the long lethargy. They are apt to tighten their lips when asked what it was that touched Mr. Loder's heart that night. Pressed, they will declare that the cost of the compromise never found its way from that pocket, but that Miss Eera's ten thousand pounds, banked in her own right, had dwindled to as many hundreds by the day on which she wedded. They may be wrong, but they like to tell of a return sacrifice made by such a woman for the man she loved. And what can it matter when you remember the wedding it was?—London Tit-Bits.

USE OF TOBACCO.

Paeans in Its Praise and Maledictions on the Weed.

One of the most difficult things in the world is to get any authoritative conclusion about the effects of using tobacco. Literature is filled with paeans in its praise and maledictions in equal measure says the Philadelphia Ledger. There is abundant medical opinion on its evil effects on the heart, on the throat and lungs, on the nerves, and everybody knows the chronic smoker whose appetite is ruined, digestion impaired, whose nerves are torn to shreds, who is a hypochondriac, a lamentable object and a cross to his friends. On the other hand, nearly everybody smokes, and there is no easier way of starting a mutiny on land or sea than to cut off the tobacco supply of soldier or sailor. Persons who are engaged in hard labor, or in exhausting pursuits of any kind, know that a smoke, banishes fatigue, knits up the ravelled sleeve of care. If your dentist be complaisant he will tell you that smoking preserves the teeth and "kills the germs"; your doctor if he knows nothing about the subject and wants to stand high in your estimation, will tell you to "use tobacco, but use it in moderation; the doctor who has studied the subject is sure that the "abuse of tobacco" is a very bad thing. The London Lancet a conservative authority, is not sure that the moderate use of tobacco by persons of a certain consitution and temperament is injurious; and then we have the sage advice that you are to give up the use of tobacco if you can do so with less wear and tear on your happiness and welfare than the continuance of the habit would cost you. And so we come back to fundamentals: Do not smoke if the results are harmful.

But some things we do know about tobacco: It costs a prodigious deal of money, is one of the most important industries in the world, and an important source of revenue to all nations. Americans consume 7,000,000,000 cigars annually, and the yearly increase in the consumption is nearly 600,000,000. Smokers use 3,000,000,000 cigarettes annually, and consume in other forms, as in snuff, plug and smoking tobacco, 315,000,000 pounds, exclusive of the tobacco exported and that used in manufacture of cigars and cigaretts. The federal treasury receives $65,000,000 annual revenue from the tobacco tax; the manufacturers alone pay in salaries $10,000,000 and in wages $50,000,000 a year, and the annual value of the manufactured product in this country is upward of $200,000,000.

COLDLESS COOL.

An Irishwoman was looking at refrigerators in a house-furnishing establishment some weeks ago. After inquiring into the merits and qualities of a number of them, she purchased the one that the salesman assured her would keep food the best.

Some days afterwards the woman called and requested them to take that refrigerator back, as it would not keep anything better than in the old-fashioned meat-safe in the larder.

The salesman mildly suggested that possibly she had not put enough ice in it to keep the things cold.

"Enough ice in it? Why, is it crazy, yez arre? I don't put anny ice in it. Shure, anything will keep cowld if you put ice in it. I bought the refrigerator so as I wouldn't need the ice."

Maisie—"The diamond in this engagement ring is awfully small." Morton—"I told the jeweller it was for the smallest hand in the city."

THE USE OF SOAP.

It is But an Aid to Assist the Removal of Dust and Grime.

A paper on the use of soap naturally involves the consideration of a number of facts regarding the skin and its uses.

The skin by virtue of its excretory function rids the system of an immense amount of the impurities held in solution in the watery elements of the body. Moisture evaporates, leaving no trace of its presence, but the more solid portions remain on the surface of the skin and these, together with dust and grime, must be removed if one would keep the skin healthy and up to its highest standard as an excretory organ.

Perhaps every one is aware that in certain parts of the world where water is scarce, the use of clean sand is employed as a cleansing agent for the skin. For the mass of mankind the use of water is more convenient, and is of course practically the only agent employed to rid the skin of impurities.

Soap is but an aid to assist the removal of dust and grime by virtue of its solvent properties. Soap is also desirable when the water employed is hard; that is, when it contains mineral properties which cause it to be less solvent than water free from mineral matter.

It is unnecessary to say that all soap used as an aid to cleansing the skin should be of good quality, since it is well known that soaps containing alkali in a free state are irritating and make the skin dry and harsh.

The use of soap is generally omitted or restricted on parts of the body like the face, where the skin is thin and where it is not subjected to the intimate contact with dust which falls to the lot of the hands.

When soap is employed frequently on the face, the protective, oily substances of the skin are removed to a greater extent than is compatible with its healthy condition, and the same is true, although perhaps to a less extent, in the case of the scalp.

After the use of soap-suds on the scalp, which is occasionally resorted to by most persons as a hygenic measure, the use of some oily substance may be employed with advantage. This acts as a temporary substitute until nature has had time to replenish the hair with oil. A better plan is to wash the scalp and hair with water in which a teaspoonful of vinegar has been stirred.

After exposure to sun and winds, the use of soap on the face should never be resorted to, but rather some soothing, oily preparation; as for example, vaseline, cold cream or cocoa butter. As a precautionary measure any one of these may be used beforehand, to prevent irritation from exposure; this is especially useful in very dry climates.

It was formerly the custom to use buttermilk for the skin, and the application of this homely remedy, as a protective against sun and wind, is doubtless all that it is claimed to be as a preservative of a good complexion.

The use of soap on the hands in cold weather, during exposure to winds, and in hot weather, during exposure to the sun, should be supplemented by the use of an oily preparation for keeping the skin in a healthy state and free from the many disorders, of greater or less severity of which weather extremes may be the starting-point.—Youth's Companion.

A WIDOW'S PORCINE PET.

"Biddy," a 400-Pound Hog, Taught Good Manners.

Mrs. Ellen Canby, an aged childless widow, of English, Ind., says a Chicago Chronicle correspondent, has a pig for a pet, and the animal seems to show genuine affection for her. Biddy, as she calls the pig, was one of a too numerous family and a gift to the widow.

Biddy has been taught to come no further into the residence than the doorway, where she enjoys a rug. She never forgets the limit of her privilege. She always follows her mistress to the door of the grocery, church or neighbor's residence when Mrs. Canby occasionally visits, but never presumes upon entrance. Mrs. Canby always carried a rug for her protegee on such occasions, and, as Biddy is kept scrupulously clean and is good mannered, she is always welcome.

Biddy weighs now about 400 pounds, and during the late boom in pork Mrs. Canby refused the highest market price for her pet, excusing herself on the plea that she honestly believed the pig's watchfulness and love had more than once saved the house from attack by robbers who imagine there is money in the house.

ONE MORE INJUSTICE.

Some time ago, while on a holiday, cycling in Ireland, a young man saw a curious sight. Turning a bend in the road, he saw a collection of household furniture scattered in every direction outside the door of a small cabin. In the midst of this scene of disorder sat an old woman.

It led him to believe that an eviction had taken place. Full of sympathy, he dismounted, and, placing a few silver coins in her hand, asked why she was evicted.

"Ah, shure, sir," said she, after pocketing the money, "Pat is white-washin' to-day!"