THE HEIR OF SANTLEIGH

OR THE STEWARD'S SON

CHAPTER XIX.—(Continued.)

"Give me a glass of champagne, please," he said to the footman in attendance, and, having got it, he went outside again.

Becca had ceased crying, but she was still shaken by dry little sobs.

"There," said Cyril, "drink that, and then run away and dance. Take my word for it, Becca, there is scarcely anything in the world worth crying over," he added, bitterly, as he thought of his own trouble.

Becca took the wine in both her trembling hands and drank it, then she looked up at Cyril, with a strange expression in her face.

"You're—you're very kind to me, sir," she said.

"Oh, nonsense," said Cyril, rather impatiently; he was anxious to be off. "The man who would turn from a woman in distress,' you know. Are you all right now?"

But it seemed as if there were still something troubling Becca, which the glass of unwonted champagne could not dispel.

"Mr.—Mr. Burne," she faltered, "I—I ought to have told you——" Then she stopped.

"What ought you to have told me,' said Cyril, half absently.

Becca's face grew red, and she looked at his boots and plucked at the flounce of her dress irresolutely and nervously.

"It's—it's something I've found," she said.

"Something of mine, Becca? Well, what is it?" and he smiled. "Don't be so frightened. I don't suppose it's anything of consequence."

"I—I meant to give it to you when I saw you," said poor Becca, faltering for the first time in her life over a fib; "but—but it slipped my mind. Here it is," and she held out the ring, which she had taken from her pocket and held in her hand while he had gone for the champagne.

"Oh, my ring," he said, carelessly. "Why, is that what has been troubling you? or partly, eh? What a silly child you are! Why, I don't care anything about it; see here, Becca, findings are keepings. As you've found it, you shall have it."

He spoke thoughtlessly, and with the carelessness characteristic of him. It did not occur to him that there was any imprudence or indiscretion in giving a twopenny-half-penny ring to a girl who had happened to find it.

"You shall have it if you like, Becca," he said.

"Oh, sir!"

"There you are," said Cyril. "Here hold out your hand, and I'll put it on for you."

Becca, a smile struggling upon her face, held up her hand, and at that moment two persons came to the opening of the marquee and looked out.

They were Guildford Berton and Norah.

"A lovely night, but dark," he said. "I think I did right in advising you to get a breath of fresh air, Lady Norah."

She was about to make some reply when her eyes fell upon Cyril and Becca. Cyril's back was turned toward Norah, and Becca was too intent upon Cyril to see the pair looking at them.

"It fits as if it were made for you," Cyril said, as he slipped the ring on her finger.

Becca's eyes filled with tears as she looked at the ring—stolen property no longer, but her own, her very own. Then she took Cyril's hand and put it to her lips.

Cyril started and almost snatched his hand away, and there flashed upon him for the first time during the transaction the doubt as to its wisdom.

"Oh, come," he said, "don't make a fuss about such a trumpery present, Becca; and let me take you back to the tent."

Guildford Berton had stood looking for Cyril and Becca to Norah with a gleam of gratification in his dark eyes. He felt Norah's arm quiver as if a spasm of pain had shaken her, and saw her face grow, slowly, slowly white; then in a low voice said:

"I'm afraid we are intruding upon a little love scene, and are rather de trop. Let us efface ourselves."

"Will you take me to Lady Ferndale, Mr. Berton?" and in silence he led her to the line of dowagers at the other end of the room, and, with a low, reverential bow, left her.

Meanwhile Cyril had taken Becca's arm, and was hurrying her to the tent; but at the door Becca drew back half shyly.

"I—I don't want to go back just yet," she murmured. "You go and leave me, Mr. Burne. I've given you trouble enough already."

"You'd like to stay in the air a little while longer? Very well, Becca go and sit down again until you feel all right," he said, and with a nod and a smile he left her, feeling, if the truth must be told, greatly relieved. He entered the marquee during an interval in the dances, and at once looked round for Norah.

She was sitting beside Lady Ferndale, still pale but composed, though her heart was aching, her brain burning, with the emotion that threatened to overmaster her.

What did it mean? Could it be possible that Cyril, her hero, her god, whose faith and honor she would have answered for with her life, was false to her?

Had the scene she had witnessed been a trick of her imagination? She had seen him place a ring on Becca's finger, had seen the girl look up into his face with tear-dimmed eyes, and kiss his hand with a passionate devotion! And he had danced with her, and with her alone of all women in the room. He had been walking in the darkness with her, making love to her—a shudder ran through Norah's frame, and her eyes filled with proud and burning tears—while she, she, the woman whose heart he had won, the woman with whom he had exchanged solemn vows of eternal love, had been neglected by him.

It was insult past all comprehension, exceeding all belief. And yet she had seen those two with her own eyes!

A feeling of shame swept over her—shame for him who could be so false, for herself in that she had loved and trusted him.

She longed to plead some excuse and go home, to fly from the heat that seemed to be stifling her, the hideous din of the band, the clatter and laughter which sounded like the voices of so many mocking demons in her ears.

"Are you tired, Norah, dear? It has been a long day."

"No—yes, I think I am a little tired." ...

Then a wave of attraction, repulsion, swept over her, for she saw Cyril approaching them.

Her heart, her soul went out toward him, but her insulted, injured womanhood recoiled. She would have risen and moved away, but her limbs refused to obey her will, and she sat motionless, statuesque, looking straight before her.

"What a handsome man!" said an old lady to Lady Ferndale. "Who is he, my dear? I don't remember seeing him before."

"Oh, a great favorite of mine. He is Mr. Cyril Burne, who is going to be a famous artist; isn't he, Norah?"

Norah did not answer. Cyril was close upon them.

"Well, Mr. Burne," said Lady Ferndale, "you have come to make those excuses you owe me?"

"I have come to ask Lady Norah to be gracious enough to give me the next dance, Lady Ferndale. Will you give me this dance, Lady Norah?

"Thank you, but I am tired."

The icy words fell upon Cyril's heart like so many stabs.

At last, in desperation, he said:

"What a capital ball room this makes, Lady Norah."

Without looking at him she dropped a cold "Yes," and resumed her conversation with Lady Ferndale.

He could not say, "Lady Norah, will you come with me? I have something to say to you:" he could not say this openly, with Lady Ferndale and all these old women sitting by; and yet he must speak with her, and alone.

He saw the people streaming toward the end of the tent into the supper room, but with eyes that noticed nothing; and it was with a start that he found Guildford Berton suddenly before them.

"Will you let me take you in to supper, Lady Norah?"

Cyril's heart felt like lead as she rose and placed her hand on Guildford Berton's arm, and, rising himself, he stood and stared after them, as they walked away, like a man in a dream.

What had he done, he asked himself, that she should treat him with such cold disdain? Ah, if she could only know what he had endured during that fortnight of absence from her!

"I'm afraid you will have to take me or some other old lady, Mr. Burne," said Lady Ferndale, eyeing him with a half smile of amusement.

Cyril started, and offered her his arm, but Lady Ferndale turned to one of the dowagers.

"Lady Tressington, let me introduce Mr. Cyril Burne," and Cyril feeling that he must be dreaming out of his senses, gave his arm to the old lady and led her off.

It was not for the honor and pleasure of taking Countess of Tressington in to supper that he had dashed down from London; and yet it seemed as if it would be his only reward, for when he reached the supper room he found that the only seats vacant were at the end of the long table, and that Norah was far away from him at the upper end.

The meal appeared to Cyril to stretch into eternity; but Lady Tressington rose at last, and he took her back to the ball room.

"Now you have done your duty, Mr. Burne, don't let me keep you," said Lady Tressington, settling herself in the chair she had occupied during the whole of the evening. "Can you tell me the time? I suppose it will not last much longer. I have a young daughter here somewhere, and we must be thinking of going."

Cyril looked at his watch and told her.

"So late!" she said. "It is quite time my girl was in bed. Will you be so good as to find her for me. There she is, the one with the dark rose in her hair."

Cyril went off, thinking with dismay as he went that in a short, a very short time he too must be off; that is, if he meant to catch the market train, which would enable him to keep his appointment with Lord Newall.

He found Lady Tressington's daughter, a young girl just out of the schoolroom, and full to the brim with delight in her first ball, and delivered the message.

"Oh, dear! So soon!" she said, pouting her fresh young lips, and looking at Cyril reproachfully. "Are you sure mamma said we were going? I thought you were going to ask me to dance!" she added, with the naivete of a schoolgirl.

Poor Cyril's heart fell.

"That is what I should like," he said. "Perhaps Lady Tressington will be gracious enough to permit us."

"Let us dance first, and ask mamma afterward," suggested the young lady, demurely, and Cyril, with a laugh of despair that must have sounded rather oddly in Lady Anne's ears, put his arm around her waist.

The dance seemed, like the supper, endless. He saw the minutes racing away, and carrying with them his last opportunity of speaking with Norah. Lady Anne was pretty and charming enough to win the heart of any man, but it is to be feared that Cyril went very near to actually disliking her.

The moment the music ceased he took her to her mother, and, metaphorically, almost threw her at Lady Tressington. Then, pale with excitement and anxiety, he went round in search of Norah.

He could not see her anywhere. He looked at his watch; there was very little more time left than would suffice for him to go back to The Chequers and get his things and catch the train.

At last he saw Lady Ferndale standing by the opening of the tent, and he made his way to her.

"So soon, Mr. Burne?" she said, thinking he was going.

"I am afraid so," said Cyril. "Thank you for so very pleasant an evening——" Then he out with his question with a suddenness that almost startled himself. "Have you seen Lady Norah, Lady Ferndale? I—I want to beg a dance."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Lady Ferndale. "She was tired. It has been a long day, and she has been so good in helping us! She has gone in to the house, and to bed, I hope; but I am really sorry that you should miss your dance."

Cyril stared at her for a moment aghast, then in a bewildered kind of way he made for the cloakroom, and got his hat and coat, and went into the open air.

There he stood with his hands thrust into his pockets, staring vacantly at the stars.

Norah gone! The last chance of seeing and speaking to her lost! And he was going away perhaps for months. And there was no way of communicating with her!

Go! Leave her with nothing to take with him but the remembrance of her strange, inexplicable coldness! Not he! Lord Newall and his picture might go hang! Then he thought of his high resolve, of the chance which luck had given him, of what Jack would say, of what Norah herself would say if he let it slip; and he groaned.

Was there no way of letting her know where he was going and why, no way of telling her how cruelly she had made him suffer that night, and begging her for an explanation? Even as he asked himself the question he saw Becca South coming from the tent.

She was wrapped in a shawl, and was evidently going home in company with some of the girls of the village who were with her.

Her presence naturally supplied him with an idea. She had carried a message for him once: she should do so again.

Joining the group, he went up to her, and, touching her arm, whispered her name.

She started, and turned her face to him, and its pallor struck him as it had done when he had run against her on his way from the supper room.

"Come with me a minute, Becca," he said in a whisper.

She did not hesitate for a second, but, obeying him as if he had a right to command, took her arm from that of the girl next to her, and said, "Go on, Emily; I'll catch you up directly."

The girl, indeed the whole of the little group, looked at her and at Cyril, and the one she addressed as Emily giggled knowingly, and whispered something which made the rest laugh as they looked over their shoulders.

Cyril was half a dozen yards in the darkness, Becca following. Then he stopped.

"Becca," he said, "will you do something for me?"

She nodded, her black eyes fixed upon his face.

"That's a good girl," he said. "I want you to take a letter to"—he faltered for a moment—"to Lady Norah."

Becca nodded silently again.

"I—I wanted to say something to her," said Cyril, "but could not get a chance to-night. Will you give her a note from me; give it to her when you are alone with her? You took a message from me once, you know—"

"I know. Give me the letter, Mr. Burne."

"It isn't written yet, Becca, and where am I to get—Wait!" he hunted his pockets and found an old letter. "Come this way," he said, quickly.

Becca followed him to the edge of the shubbery, and, kneeling down, Cyril spread out the half sheet of paper on his hat.

"Now take this matchbox and light a match—one after the other; keep them going till I've finished. There's a good girl, Becca," he said.

She struck a wax match, and held it close to the paper, and lit others in succession as he wrote the following:

"I have been absent on important business. I could not come to you I could not write. Are you angry because of my absence? I have done nothing to deserve your coldness. To-morrow—to-day—I must leave England. I may be away months. I cannot leave you without a word begging you to tell me why you have treated me so cruelly. Norah! Have you forgotten in a short fortnight all that has passed between us? Write me a line, and at once, to 'Lorient, Brittany.' I shall know no happiness until I hear from you, till I know that you still love me.

"Cyril."

"There! You will give it to her, Becca? And soon! And—I've no envelope, Becca!"

"No one shall see it. You can trust me, Mr. Burne."

"Yes," he said gravely, "I can trust you, Becca. Take it, then—and for God's sake take care of it. You can't know how important it is——" His face was pale in the light of the match, and his lips quivered.

"You can trust me!" she repeated.

He watched her intently as she carefully hid the letter away in the bosom of her dress.

"Thank you, Becca," he said. "And goodby for the present. I must go now. Let me see you on your road."

"No, no," she said.

"I understand," he said. "Perhaps we had better go separately—" Even as he spoke a young man and woman passed close to him, and looked curiously at them, and the girl called out:

"Good-night, Becca."

"Go on now, then," said Cyril. "I will wait here until you have got into the road. Good-night, and thank you! I hope your trouble has all gone now, Becca," he added.

"My trouble? Oh, yes, sir. Good-night. You needn't fear about the letter. You can trust me."

Cyril looked after her, anxiously, thinking only of his precious letter; then he set off across the park at a sharp trot.

Once he pulled up, suddenly smitten by one of those unaccountable impulses which fall upon us at times—the impulse to run after Becca, and see her safely to the village.

If he had only done so! But he thrust the impulse from him and hurried on his own way.

(To be Continued.)

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OLD SHIPS OF THE LINE

THEIR COST AND SPEED IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS.

Naval Architects Seek Lessons From the Ships of Time of Trafalgar.

Before the Institution of Naval Architects, in London, Sir Philip Watts recently read an interesting paper on British warships at the time of Trafalgar.

The records as to the rate of sailing, he said, were of necessity very indefinite. The speeds attained, however, were slow, even if judged by the speed of large modern sailing vessels. The maximum speed recorded for frigates at the time under consideration was ten knots running free, and eight to eight and a half knots when close hauled. At Trafalgar the average age of the English line-of-battle ships was 17 years. That the French ships in 1805 were mostly newer than ours was mainly due to the enormous losses which their navy had suffered in the preceding half-century. Between 1789 and 1800 there were 48 French line-of-battle ships and 53 frigates lost by wreck and capture.

COST OF OLD MEN-O'-WAR.

The cost of ships varied largely from time to time. The Royal William, of 1,918 tons burden, built in 1719, cost about £30,800, being £16 per ton. The Royal George, of 2,046 tons, built in 1756, cost £54,700, or £26.7 per ton. In 1800 ships of the line cost £21 per ton, while in 1805 the cost had risen to £35.4 per ton. The time of building varied, in the case of ships of the line, from about five to ten years, but was often longer than would have otherwise been necessary, in order to allow the frame to season well before being planked. The armaments of English and foreign ships had hardly altered more than the ships themselves during the half-century before Trafalgar.

CHANGE TO TO-DAY.

There was so little change in naval material during the century before Trafalgar that both the designing and fighting of ships was less experimental in character than in modern times. There was no question of gun versus torpedo; no doubts about ram submarine or mines; no problems as to the relative value of speed as against coal endurance, or additional guns or protection; not speculations as to the best distribution of armor and the comparative risk of belt deck or thin side perforation. The sides being of oak, no progressive improvement was possible in the protective material, as was the case at present, when processes for manufacturing improved armor were being continually discovered. Since that date steam propulsion in its varied forms, shell fire, iron and steel armor, steel hulls, breech-loading and rifled guns, torpedoes, mines, high explosives, electrical appliances, submarines, had all been introduced.

BIG GUN THE FACTOR.

These changes had been threatened, but had still left intact, the supremacy of the big gun in the big ship as it existed at Trafalgar. In the old days, as now, there was sometimes a strong disposition to discover defects in British ships. Our vessels, it was said sailed slower, carried smaller and poorer guns at a less height, and were of inferior form to those of the enemy; they were designed with finer ends, so that they pitched more heavily and even endangered their masts; they were older than the enemy's, for we had not to build so many new ships to replace injured ones. Yet, in spite of it all, they generally brought the enemy to action, and on the whole they generally beat him. One might hope that, should need unhappily arise this, too, might be repeated in our day.

SPEED WON FOR TOGO.

The discussion was opened by Admiral Sir N. Bowden-Smith, who said that at this time our thoughts were necessarily carried from Trafalgar to Japan. Trafalgar had ensured us peace on the high seas for 100 years, and we might hope the same would be true with Japanese victory at Tsu-shima. Speed, he thought, had enabled Admiral Togo at that battle to place his ships where he pleased; and, though every warship must be a compromise, he hoped that speed would not be one of the factors in their construction that would be lightly thrown over.

FISHING IN FRANCE.

Now is the season for fishing in France; don't imagine that fish here are the size of your trout in your clearwater lakes and rivers. Fishing in the Seine means satisfying the passion for fishing, and catching nothing, or else one or two fish so small that it is necessary to use a magnifying glass to find out what kind they are. In this fishing season, you will daily see an army of men turning their backs upon work and the beauties of Paris for five or six long hours, holding out fishing poles and lines, the latter sinking to no purpose, except to bring up an old shoe, incidentally.

"Is Fred out of danger?" "No; Millie hasn't given him an answer to his proposal yet."