DARE HE?

OR, A SAD LIFE STORY

CHAPTER V.

There is no particular reason why Burgoyne should not impart to his companion what he knows—after all it is not very much—about their two countrywomen. Upon reflection he had told himself this, and conquered a reluctance, that he cannot account for, to mentioning their name; and to relating the story of those shadowy idyllic two months of his life, which form all of it, that has ever come into contact with theirs. So that by the time—some thirty-six hours later—when they reach Florence, the younger man is in possession of as much information about the objects of their common interest, as it is in the power of the elder one to impart.

To neither of them, meanwhile, is any second glimpse vouchsafed of those objects, eagerly—though with different degrees of overtness in that eagerness—as they both look out for them among the luggage-piles and the tweed-clad English ladies at the station. It had been the intention of Burgoyne that he and his friend should put up at the same hotel as that inhabited by his betrothed and her family; but finding that it is full, he orders rooms at the Minerva, and in the fallen dusk of a rather chill spring night, finds himself traversing the short distance from the railway to that hotel.

As he and Byng sit over their coffee after dinner in the salle a manger, almost its only tenents at that late hour, the younger man remarks matter-of-factly, as if stating a proposition almost too obvious to be worth uttering—

"I suppose you are off to the Anglo-American now."

"I think not," replies Jim slowly; "it is past ten, you see, and they are early people." He adds a moment later, as if suspecting his own excuse of insufficiency, "Mr. Wilson is rather an invalid, and there is also an invalid, or semi-invalid sister; I think that I had better not disturb them to-night."

Byng has never been engaged to be married, except in theory, and it is certainly no business of his to blow his friend's flagging ardor into flame, so he contents himself with an acquiescent observation to the effect that the tarin must have been late. But at all events the next morning finds Burgoyne paying his fiacre at the door of the Anglo-American, with the confidence of a person who is certain of finding those he seeks, a confidence justified by the result; for, having followed a waiter across a court-yard, and heard him knock at a door on the ground-floor, that door opens with an instantaneousness which gives the idea of an ear having been pricked to catch the expectant rap, and the next moment, the intervening garcon having withdrawn, Jim stands face to face with his Amelia. Her features are all alight with pleasure, but her first words are not particularly amorous.

"Would you mind coming into the dining-room? Sybilla is in the drawing-room already this morning. She said she was afraid it was going to be one of her bad days, so I thought" (rather regretfully) "that possibly she would be a little later than usual in coming down; but, on the contrary, she is much earlier."

It is possible that an extremely ardent love may be independent of surroundings; may burn with as fierce a flame, when its owner or victim is seated on a hard horse-hair chair beside a dining-room table in a little dull hotel back room, as when the senses are courted by softly-cushioned lounges, penetrating flower scents, and cunningly arranged bric-a-brac; but perhaps Jim's passion is not of this intense and Spartan quality. At all events a chill steals over him as Amelia leads the way into that small and uncheerful chamber where the Wilson family daily banquet. He is not so lost to all sense of what England and Amelia expect of him, as not to take her in his arms and kiss her very kindly and warmly, before they sit down on two hard chairs side by side; and even when they have done so, he still holds her hand, and kisses it now and then. He has a great many things to say to her, but "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" is not invariably true. Sometimes that very abundance clogs the utterance, and, after a ten months' separation, the hinges of even lovers' tongues are apt at first to be somewhat rusty.

"And are you really glad to see me again?" asks the woman—she is scarcely a girl, having the doubtful advantage of being her betrothed's senior by two years. The horsehair chairs are obviously powerless to take the edge off her bliss; and she can scarcely command her voice as she asks the question.

"I decline to answer all such futile inquiries," replies he, smiling not unkindly; but there is no tremor in his voice. "Even if I did not discourage them on principle, I should have no time to answer them to-day; I have so much to say to you that I do not know where to begin."

"After ten months that is not surprising," rejoins she, with a stifled sigh. There is no sentimental reproach in her words or tone; but in both lurks a note of wistfulness which gives his conscience a prick.

"Of course not! of course not!" he rejoins, hastily; "but it is not really ten months—no, surely——"

"Ten months, one week, two days, four hours and a half!"

Against such exactitude of memory what appeal has he? He attempts none, and only thinks with a faint unjust irritation that she might have spared him the odd hours.

"And how are things going? How are you all getting on?" he asks, precipitating himself upon a fresh subject, since he feels prevented by circumstances from saying anything likely to bring him much distinction upon the old one. "Your father?"

"His throat is better"—with an accent of hesitating filial piety, as if there were something else about him that was not better.

"And Sybilla?"

"Oh, poor Sybilla! she has her bad days now and then."

"And, like the early Christians, she resolves to have all things in common. I expect that her family have their bad days, too, says Jim, drily.

"Well, we do sometimes," replies Amelia with reluctant admission; "but she really does try to control herself, poor thing; she is hardly ever unbearable now."

"And Cecilia?"

"She is rather in trouble just now; I fear there is no doubt that the man she was engaged to has thrown her over. You never saw him? Oh, no! Of course the affair came on after you left England."

Burgoyne's eyebrows have gone up, and his face has assumed an expression less of surprise than admiration at this piece of news.

"How many does that make? Four? Well, courage! There is luck in odd numbers; perhaps she will land the fifth."

"She will tell you about it herself," says Amelia; "she tells everybody; she likes talking about it—it is very odd, but she does. When you throw me over"—rubbing his hand, which she holds, with shy and deprecating caressingness against her own cheek—"I shall tell nobody; I sha.. keep my misfortune very dark."

"When I do!" repeats he, with laughing emphasis; but to his own ear both the emphasis and the laughter sound flat. This is perhaps the cause why he, a second time runs away from his subject; or, more probably, he is really in haste to get to the new one. "Meanwhile," he says, his eyes involuntarily dropping to the carpet, as if he had rather not see the effect of his words upon her; "meanwhile, some one has thrown me over."

"You?"

"Yes, me; I did not write it to you, because I do not see much use in putting down bad news in black and white, and even with this little delay, I am afraid," with a dry smile, "that you will have plenty of time to enjoy it."

He pauses for an instant, and she does not hurry him with any teasing questions; but waits, with meek patience, till he feels inclined to go on.

"My aunt is going to be married."

If he has wished that his news shall produce the effect of a torpedo, he has no cause to complain of his want of success. His placid Amelia vaults to her feet.

"Married!" she repeats with a gasp. "Why, she is quite, quite old!"

"She is sixty-five!"

The color has flooded all Amelia's face; the blazing color that means not pleasure, but consternation. It is some moments before she can frame her next query.

"And is he?—do you?—has she chosen wisely, I mean?"

Jim laughs again.

"Can one choose wisely at sixty-five? Well, whether she has or no is a matter of opinion; she has chosen the curate of the parish, who, by reason of his extreme juvenility is still in deacon's orders."

Miss Wilson's limbs are shaking so that she cannot maintain her standing attitude. She sinks down by the dining-table again in her hard chair. It is a very hard chair on which to receive such ill-news.

"And you cannot hinder it, cannot you dissuade her?" she asks falteringly.

"I shall not try; poor old woman. After all, she has a right to pursue her own happiness in her own way, only I wish that she had made up her mind twenty years ago; though to be sure, how could she?"—with another smile—"since, at that time, her bridegroom was not much more than born."

A dead silence supervenes—a silence of shocked stupefaction on the one side, of rather dismal brooding on the other. At length Amelia nerves herself to put a question upon which it seems to her, not very incorrectly, that her whole future hangs. She does it in such a low voice that none but very sharp ears could have caught it. Jim's ears are so; practised as they are in listening for the stealthy tread of wild animals, and for the indescribable sounds of mountain solitudes at night.

"Will it—will it—make a great difference to you?"

Burgoyne lifts his eyes, which have been idly bent on the floor, and looks straight and full at her across the corner of the table.

"It will make all the difference!" he answers slowly.

Poor Amelia is holding her handkerchief in her hand. She lifts it to her mouth and bites a corner of it to hide the quivering of her lips and chin. She does not wish to add to his pain by any breakdown on her own part. But Jim divines the quivering even under the morsel of cambric, and looks away again.

"Her money is almost entirely in her own power," he continues, in an unemotional voice; "and when she announced her marriage to me, she also announced her intention of settling the whole of it upon her—her"—he pauses a second, as if resolved to keep out of his voice the accent of satire and bitterness that pierces through its calm—"her husband."

Amelia has dropped both shielding hand and handkerchief into her lap. She has forgotten her effort to conceal the blankness of her dismay. Unless she conceals the whole of her face indeed, the attempt would be in vain, since each feature speaks it equally.

"Her whole fortune?" she repeats, almost inaudibly. "All?"

"What, all my pretty chickens
and their dam?"

says Jim, oppressed by her overwhelmed look into an artificial and dreary levity, and in not particularly apt quotation. "My dear, do not look so broken-hearted. I am not absolutely destitute; I need not become a sandwich man. I have still got my £800 a year, my very own, which neither man nor mouse, neither curate nor vicar can take from me. I can still go on rioting upon that; the question is"—his words coming more slowly, and his tone growing graver—"have I any right to ask you to riot on it too?"

Her hand has gone in feverish haste out to his for answer, and her eyes, into which the tears are welling, look with an intense dumb wistfulness into his; but, for the moment, it remains dumb. There is something painful to Burgoyne in that wistfulness, almost more painful than the telling of that news which has produced it. He looks down upon the table-cloth, and, with his disengaged hand, the one not imprisoned in his betrothed's fond hold, draws patterns with a paper-knife accidentally left there.

"The only thing I blame her for," he continues, not following up the branch of the subject that his last speech had begun to open up, and speaking with a composure which, to the stricken Amelia, appears to evidence his attainment of the highest pinnacle of manly fortitude, "the only thing I blame her for, is her having hindered my adopting any profession. Poor old woman, it was not malice prepense, I know; she had not seen her Jessamey then, probably had not even a prophetic instinct of him, but as things turned out"—stifling a sigh—"it would have been kinder to have put me in the way of earning my own living."

Amelia's head has sunk down upon his hand—he feels her hot tears upon it; but now that the theme has no longer reference to herself, she can speak. She straightens herself, and there is a flash, such as he has very seldom seen there, in her rather colorless orbs.

"It was monstrous of her!" she cries, with the almost exaggerated passion of a usually very self-controlled person. "After having always told you that you were to be her heir!"

"But had she told me so?" replies Jim, passing his hand with a perplexed air over his own face. "That is what I have been trying to recall for the last few days. I never remember the time when I did not believe it, so I suppose that some one must have told me so; but I could not swear that she herself had ever put it down in black and white. However," tossing his head back with a gesture as of one who throws off his shoulders a useless burden, "what does that matter now? I am not her heir, I am nobody's heir; we must look facts in the face! Amelia, dear"—in a tone of reluctant tender affection, as of one compelled, yet most unwilling, to give a little child, or some other soft, helpless creature, pain—"we must look facts in the face!"

There is something in his voice that makes Amelia's heart stand still; but she attempts no interruption.

"It is very hard for me, dear, after all these"—he pauses a second; he is about to say "weary years' waiting," but his conscience arrests him; to him they have not been weary, so after a hardly-perceptible break, he goes on—"after all these many years' waiting, to have come to this, is not it?"

He had not calculated on the effect which would be produced by his melancholy words and his caressing tone. She buries her face on his shoulder, sobbing uncontrollably.

"They were not long!" she murmurs brokenly. "Nothing is, nothing can be, long to me as long as I have you, or the hope of you!"

CHAPTER VI.

It is, perhaps, fortunate for Amelia that she cannot see the expression of the face which looks out above her prostrate head into space, with a blankness equal to what had been her own, a blankness streaked, as hers was not, with remorse. He would give anything to be able to answer her in her own key, to tell her that, as long as he can keep her, the going or coming of any lesser good hurts him as little as the brushing past his cheek of a summer moth or wind-blown feather. But when he tries to frame a sentence of this kind his tongue cleaves to the roof of his mouth. He can only hold her to him in an affectionate clasp, whose dumbness he hopes that she attributes to silencing emotion. She herself indulges in no very prolonged manifestation of her passion. In a few moments she is again sitting up beside him with wiped eyes, none the handsomer, poor soul, for having cried, and listening with a deep attention to an exposition of her lover's position and prospects, which he is at no pains to tinge with a factitious rose-color.

"Have you realized," he says, "that I shall never be better off than I am now? never! never! For though of course I shall try to get work, one knows how successful that quest generally is in the case of a man with no special aptitudes, no technical training, and who starts in the race handicapped by being ten years too late!"

But the dismalness of his panorama raises no answering gloom in the young woman's face. She nods her head gently.

"I realize it."

"And this is what I have brought you to, after all these years' waiting," he continues, in a tone of profound regret. "All I can offer you at the end of them is a not particularly genteel poverty, not even a cottage with a double coach-house!"—laughing grimly.

"I do not want a double coach-house, nor even a single one!" replies Amelia stoutly, and laughing too, a little through returning tears. "Do not you know that I had rather drive a costermonger's barrow with you than go in a coach and six without you!"

This is the highest flight of imagination of which Jim has ever known his matter-of-fact Amelia guilty, and he can pay his thanks for it only in compunctious kisses. Perhaps it is they, perhaps it is the thought which dictates her next hesitating speech that bring a light into Amelia's tear-reddened eyes.

"If you will never be better off——" She stops.

"Yes, dear, go on; 'If I shall never be better off'—I certainly never shall; I feel sure that you will be able to put my earnings for the next ten years into your eye, and see none the worse for them!"

"If — you — will—never—be—better—off," she repeats again, more slowly, and breaking off at the same place.

"Well, dear?"

"If you will never be better off." This time she finishes her sentence; but it is rendered almost inaudible by the fact of her flushed face and quivering lips being pressed against his breast. "Why should we wait any longer?"

"Why should we wait any longer?" To most persons, granted the usual condition of feeling of a betrothed couple, this would seem a very natural and legitimate deduction from the premises; but, strange to say, it comes upon Burgoyne with the shock of a surprise. He has been thinking vaguely of his change of fortune as a cause for unlimited delay, perhaps for the rupture of his engagement, never as a reason for its immediate fulfilment.

He gives a sort of breathless gasp, which is happily too low for Amelia with her still hidden face to hear. To be married at once! To sit down for all time to Amelia and £800 a year! To forego for ever the thrilling wandering life; the nights under the northern stars, the stealthy tracking of shy forest creatures; the scarce coarse delicious food, the cold, the fatigue, the hourly peril, that, since its probable loss is ever in sight, makes life so sweetly worth having—all in short that goes to make up so many an Englishman's ideal of felicity; that has certainly hitherto gone to make up Jim's. To renounce it all! There is no doubt that the bitterness of this thought comes first; but presently, supplanting it, chasing it away, there follows another, a self-reproachful light flashing over his past eight years, showing him his own selfishness colossal and complete for the first time. In a paroxysm of remorse, he has lifted Amelia's face, and, framing it with his hands, looks searchingly into it.

"I believe," he says in a shaken voice, "that you would have married me eight years ago, on my pittance, if I had asked you!"

No "Yes" was ever written in larger print than that which he read in her patient pale eyes. Even at this instant there darts across him a wish that they were not quite so pale, but he detests himself for it.

"And I never suspected it!" he cries, compunctiously. "I give you my word of honor, I never suspected it! I thought you looked upon my poverty in as prohibitory a light as I did myself."

"I do not call it such great poverty," replies Amelia, her practical mind reassuming its habitual sway over her emotions. "Of course it is an income that would require a little management; but if we cut our coat according to our cloth, and did not want to move about too much, we might live either in a not very fashionable part of London, or in some cheap district in the country very comfortably."

Despite his remorses, a cold shiver runs down Burgoyne's spine at the picture that rises, conjured up with too much distinctness by her words, before his mind's eye; the picture of a smug Bayswater villa, with a picturesque parlormaid, or the alternative cottage in some dreary Wiltshire or Dorsetshire village, with a shrubbery of three Aucuba bushes, and a kitchen-garden of half an acre. It may be that, her frame being in such close proximity to his, she feels the influence of his shiver, and that it suggests her next sentence, which is in a less sanguine key.

(To be continued).

ON THE FARM

ADVANTAGES OF A HAND SEPARATOR.

The hand separator has greatly reduced the expense of hauling raw product to the factory. Not only does cream require less space, but also less time, for as milk is delivered six times a week it is not necessary to deliver cream as often, and the load being so much lighter it is transported more rapidly and at less cost. This, I believe, is a very important item to consider in connection with the hand separator problem, writes Prof. A. L. Haecker.

Going on the basis that a man and team on the farm or a man and horse have a value respecting labor, it is not difficult to figure or ascertain the expense of transporting milk or cream to market, and it often happens that the time taken out for this delivering is most valuable time, as in cases where certain important work is in progress on the farm, such as harvesting, planting, haying, etc. It often happens that a farmer's time can really not be estimated by the hour, for there are rush seasons, when his time becomes very valuable. It is therefore fair to figure that his time throughout the year, whether rushed or not, has at least a certain value and that this value is not by any means small.

Secondly, the value of fresh skim-milk on the farm is often underestimated. By the use of a hand separator night and morning at milking time, the by-product skim milk can be brought to its highest possible value. This should not be lost sight of, and, by a careful calculation, may be figured to be worth all the way from 15 to 40 cents per 100 pounds.

The third and last important item under the advantage of the hand separator may be considered as, independence of the producer. As cream is a marketable product it may be sold to any buyer or it may be made into butter on the farm.

Considering all the advantages that are here stated, it is not more than fair that the producer be somewhat independent in his decision as to whether or not he finds the hand separator a practical machine for him to use. There are many sections of the country where creameries are close together and the short haul makes the hand separator less necessary.

SCIENCE OF MILKING COWS CLEAN.

It is well known that the average milker gets less milk than he who does a thorough job, that incomplete milking means not only direct but indirect loss, not only an immediate lessening of the fat yield, but tends toward drying the cow. A Danish scientist has recently developed a special system of udder manipulation, a sort of massage of the mammary gland, as it were, which it is claimed augments the flow. The Hegelund method, as it is called, involves three manipulations, each thrice repeated, or until no milk is obtained. First, the pressure of the quarter on each side against each other thrice repeated, followed by removal of the milk; second, the pressure of the glands together on each side, the fore quarter being first manipulated and then the hind quarters, followed by removal of the milk; and third, the fore quarters are pressed between hand and body, the hands holding the teats loosely, then the hind quarters also, followed by milking.

Trials of the scheme made at the Wisconsin and New York stations afforded a daily average increase per cow of a pound of milk and two ounces of butter. The after milk was very rich in fat, testing above 10 per cent. This after milking takes not to exceed five minutes' time, often only two or three minutes. The two ounces of butter may be held at a low estimate to be worth 2 cents. This would be a fair pay for five minutes' work, 24 cents an hour and the skim milk thrown in. Not only is more milk and butter made, but the secretion is stimulated and the lactation period prolonged. It may be remarked, however, that the differences in milk and butter yields between this method and careful stripping are not great. This Danish method emphasizes more perhaps than has hitherto been done, the actual and potential losses due to incomplete milking.

THAT SETTLED IT.

Mr. Sproggins: "And if I decline to let you have my daughter, what do you propose to do?"

Mr. Wibblesen: "I warn you that in that case we are prepared to act. Even now, beloved Aurelia has her best clothes on, and awaits me near a railway station. If you decide against us, we will flee together and never come back."

Mr. Sproggins (without a moment's hesitation): "Then I refuse."

A foreigner, who had heard of the Yankee propensity for bragging, thought he would beat the natives at their own game. Seeing some very large watermelons on a market-woman's stand, he exclaimed: "What! don't you raise larger apples than those in America?" The quick-witted woman then replied: "Apples! Anybody might know you are a foreigner; them's gooseberries."