DARE HE?

OR, A SAD LIFE STORY

CHAPTER XXVIII.—(Continued).

For a moment Jim stands dumb with consternation at the announcement of this intention; but, reflecting that it would not be a whit more irrational to attempt to reason with a madman who had reached the padded-room stage of lunacy, than with his present companion, he contents himself with saying:

"And supposing that you do not learn to-night where she has gone?"

"There is no use in supposing anything so impossible!"

But as the hours go by, the possibility becomes a probability, the probability a certainty! Midnight comes, and the closed telegraph-office puts a final extinguisher upon the expectation, which no one but the unhappy lover had ever entertained, that Florence would be enlightened before the dawn of another day as to the place whither her two truants have fled.

Burgoyne has accompanied his friend upon his last importunate visit to the now-going-to-bed and justly-incensed 12 Bis. He has been ashamed again to present himself at the so-often-attacked door, so has waited at the bottom of the stairs, has heard Byng's hoarse query, and the negative—curter and less suave than the last one—that follows it; has heard the door shut again, and the hopeless footsteps that come staggering down to him.

"You will go home now?"

"'Perchance, Iago, I shall ne'er go home!'"

replies Byng; and, though he is compelled to admit that there is no longer any possibility of his to-night obtaining the information for which he so madly hungers, that there can consequently be no question of his setting off by one of the early trains, since he would not know in which direction to go, and might only be fleeing further from her whom he would fain rejoin, yet he still keeps with fevered pertinacity to his project of spending the night a la belle etoile.

Finding it impossible to dissuade him, Jim resigns himself to bearing him company. It is with very little reluctance that he does so. There is no truer truism than that all sorrows, however mountainous, are more easily carried under God's high roof than man's low ones, and he who does not sleep has for compensation that at least he can have no dreadful waking. So the two men wander about all night in the boon southern air.

There are not many hours of a summer's night during which the stir of life has ceased and has not yet reawaked in an Italian town, the talk and the tread and the mulebells, and the flutes of the voiceful people lasting on till near the small hours, and beginning again ere those hours have had strength to grow big. But yet there is a space of time when Florence lies silent, baring her beauty to the constellations alone; and under this unfamiliar and solemn and lovely aspect the two night-wanderers see her. They see her Campanile

"Commencing with the skies,"

with no distracting human bustle about her feet; they see her Perseus battailing beneath her Loggia, and her San Giorgio standing wakeful at his post on Or san Michele. They see her smiling palace rows, her stealing river, and her spanning bridges—palaces out of which no head peeps, a river on which no boat oars, bridges upon which no horse-hoof rings. They have all her churches—Santa Groce, Arnolpho's great "Bride," that new Maria that is now four hundred years old and more, the humbly glorious San Marco—to themselves; all her treasure houses, all her memories, all her flower-embalmed air—for a few hours they possess them all. She is but a little city, this fair Firenze, and in these few hours they traverse her in her length and breadth, rambling aimlessly wherever Byng's feverishly miserable impulses lead them. Burgoyne offers no opposition to any of these, but accompanies his friend silently down slumbrous thoroughfares, or across sleeping Piazza, by Arno side, under colonnade or arch. It is all one to him; nor is he sensible of any fatigue, when at length, at about the hour when Byng had meant to have caught the early morning train, they return to the hotel, and the younger man, happily dead-beat at last, worn out with want of food, tears, and weariness, flings himself down, dressed, upon his bed, and instantly falls into a leaden sleep. Jim feels no desire, nor indeed any power, of following his example. He is not easily tired, and his former life of travel and hardship has made him always willing to dispense with the—to him—unnecessary luxury of a bed; and, under ordinary circumstances, a night passed in the open air would have had an effect upon him rather exhilarating than other wise. He has his bath, dresses, breakfasts, and then jumps into a fiacre, and has himself driven to the Anglo-Americain.

The day is so exactly the counterpart of its predecessor, in its even assured splendor, that Jim has a hazy feeling that they both make only one divided into two parts by the narrow dark blue ribbon of the exquisite brief night. When did yesterday end and to-day begin? As he is borne along, his memory, made more alert by sleeplessness, reproduces—merely, as it seems to him, the better to fill him with pain and remorse—the different states of mind in which he had passed over the often trodden ground. Here, at the street corner, what a nausea had come over him at the thought of the interest he would have to feign in those humdrum details, so dear to Amelia's soul, of their future menage, with all its candle-end economies and depressing restrictions. Here, in the church shadow, how he had tried to lash himself up into a more probable semblance of pleasure in her expected and dreaded caresses. There seems to be scarcely an inch of the way when he has not had some harsh or weary thought of her; he is thankful when the brief transit, that has appeared to him so long, is over. And yet the change is only from the sharp sting of recollected unkindnesses to the dull bruising ache of anticipated ill.—A garcon is sweeping out the salon, for the hour is yet much beyond eight, so Jim goes into the dreary little dining-room, where two places are laid with coffee-cups and rolls. Only two. And, though he knows that nothing short of a miracle could have already restored Amelia so completely as to enable her to come down to breakfast, yet the ocular demonstration of the fact that her place is and will be empty, strikes a chill to his boding heart. He is presently joined by Cecilia, whose carelessly-dressed hair, heavy eyelids, and tired puffy face, sufficiently show that not to her, any more than to himself, has night brought

"Sweet child-sleep, the filmy-eyed."

"How fresh and cool you are!" she cries, with an almost reproachful intonation. "Do not look at me!"—covering her face with her hot hands—"I am not fit to be seen; but what does that matter? What do I care?"—beginning to cry—"Oh, she is so bad! We have spent such a dreadful night! As I tell you, I am a shocking sick-nurse; I never know what to do; I lose my head completely; and she has been so odd—she has been talking such gibberish!"

"Delirious?"

"Yes, I suppose that is what you would call it. I never saw anybody delirious before, so I do not know. I have seen Sybilla in hysterics, but I never believed that they were real—I always thought that a bucket of water would bring her round."

As a general rule, Jim may be counted upon for cordial co-operation in any hit directed against Sybilla, but now he is too spiritless even to notice it.

"I was so frightened," continues Cecilia; "it is not cheerful being all alone at the dead of night with a person talking such nonsense as she was. Amelia, of all people, to talk nonsense! I could not make out quite what it was about, but it seemed to have more or less reference to you. She was begging you to forgive her for something she had done, as far as I could gather; some treat she had prepared for you, and that you had not liked. Have you the least idea what she could have meant?"

He has every idea; but it would seem profanation to explain that her poor wandering brain is still distressedly laboring with the abortive project she had so happily framed for his enjoyment.

"She is quieter now. Sybilla's maid is with her; Sybilla really has not behaved badly—for her; she let her maid look in several times during the night; but still, for the most part I was alone with her! Oh, I do trust"—shuddering—"that I may never again have to be alone at night with a person who is not right in her head!"

This aspiration on the part of the youngest Miss Wilson is, for the present occasion, at least, likely to be gratified; for, by the time that another night settles down on Florence, Amelia's illness has been declared by Dr. Coldstream to have every symptom of developing into the malarious Florentine fever, which not unfrequently lays low the chilled or over-fatigued, or generally imprudent foreign visitor to that little Eden. Amelia has Florentine fever; and the verification of this fact is followed by all the paraphernalia of serious sickness—night and day nurses, disinfectants, physic phials.

The announcement of her being attacked by a definite and recognized disease brings at first a sort of relief to Burgoyne's mind, which, under Cecilia's frightened and frightening word-pictures, had been beset by terrors great in proportion to their vagueness. Now that Amelia is confessedly sick of a fever, there is nothing abnormal in her being "odd," and 'stupid," and "wandering," these being only the inevitable stages on a road which will—which must lead to ultimate recovery. His heart is heavy, yet scarcely so heavy as it had been upon his arrival in the morning, when, late in the afternoon—not sooner do the claims upon him of the disorganized and helpless family of his betrothed relax—he returns to the Minerva to look after Byng. Having had every reason to fear that he will not find him at the hotel, but will be obliged again to set off in pursuit of him through the streets and squares so repeatedly traversed last night, he is relieved to learn from the hotel servants that the young man is in his bed-room. He finds him there indeed; no longer stretched in the blessed oblivion of deep sleep upon his bed, but sitting on a hard chair by the open window, his arms resting upon the back, and his face crushed down upon them. By no slightest movement does he show consciousness of his friend's entrance.

"I am afraid I have been a long time away," says the latter kindly.

"Have you?" answers Byng, his voice coming muffled through lips still buried in his own coat-sleeve. "I do not know; I have done with time!"

"I do not know how you have managed that," rejoins Jim, still indulgently, though a shade drily. "Have you been here all day?"

"I do not know where I have been. Yes,"—lifting his head—"I do; I have been to the Piazza d'Azeglio."

"Well?"

"They know where she is. They were packing her things; through the door I saw them tying the label on the box; if I had tried I could have read the address on the label, but I did not. She had forbidden them to give it to me; in her telegram she had forbidden them to give it to anyone."

CHAPTER XXIX.

Jim refrains from saying how likely this culmination of his friend's woes has appeared to him, since it would have been the height of the illogical for the Le Marchants to have put themselves to extreme inconvenience in order to escape from a person to whom they immediately afterwards gave the power of following them. He refrains from saying it, because he knows of how very little consoling power the "told you so" philosophy is possessed.

"And what will you do now?"

"Do! What is there to do? What does a man do when he is shot through the heart?"

"I believe that in point of fact he jumps his own height in the air. I know that a Buffalo does," replies Burgoyne, with a matter-of-fact dryness, which proceeds less from want of sympathy, than from an honest belief that it is the best and kindest method of dealing with Byng's heroics.

"Shot through the heart!" murmurs the latter, repeating his own phrase as if he found a dismal pleasure in it. "I had always been told that it was a painless death; I now know to the contrary."

"Shall you stay here? There is no longer any use in your staying here."

"There is no longer any use in my doing anything, or leaving anything undone.

"'There's nothing in this world can make me joy.
Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale,
Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man.'"

So saying, he replaces his head upon his arms, and his arms upon the chair-rail, with the air of one who, upon mature consideration, has decided to maintain that attitude for the remainder of his life.

. . . . . .

A week has passed; a week upon which Burgoyne looks back as upon a blur of wretchedness, with distinct points of pain sticking up here and there out of it. It is a blur; for it is a time-space, without the usual limitations and divisions of time; a week not cut up into orderly lengths of day and night, but in which each has puzzlingly run into and overlapped each other. There have been nights when he has not been in bed at all, and there have been days when he has slept heavily at unaccustomed hours. He has not dined at any particular time; he has shared forlorn breakfasts, dotted about the morning, as the less or more anxiety about Amelia dictated, with the Wilsons. He has drunk more tea than he ever did in his life before, and the result of this whole condition of things is, that he cannot for the life of him tell whether the day of the week is Wednesday, or Thursday, or Friday, and that he has lost all sense of proportion. He has not the least idea whether the dreadful moments when he stood on the landing outside Amelia's door, and heard her heart-renderingly beg him not to go away from her for quite so long, to be a little gladder to see her when he came back; or again affectingly assure him that she can do quite well, be quite cheerful without him, whether, I say, those dreadful moments were really only moments, or stretched into hours.

Besides the agony of remorse that the impotent listening to those pathetic prayers and unselfish assurances cause him, he suffers too from another agony of shame, that the father and sister, standing, like himself with ears stretched at that shut door, should be let into the long secret of his cruelty and coldness, that secret, which for eight years she has so gallantly been hiding. It is an inexpressible relief to him that at least the old man's thickened hearing admits, but very imperfectly, his daughter's rapid utterances.

"Poor soul! I cannot quite make out what it is all about," he says, with his hand to his ear; "but I catch your name over and over again, Jim; I suppose it is all about you."

Cecilia, however, naturally hears as well as he himself does, and apparently pitying the drawn misery of his face, whispers to him comfortingly—

"You must not mind, you know it is all nonsense. She talks very differently when she is well."

The Wilson family have never hitherto shown any very marked affection for Burgoyne, but now it seems as if they could hardly bear him out of their sight. They cling to him not because he is he—Jim makes himself no illusion on that head—but because they have got into such a habit of leaning, that it is no longer possible to them to stand upright. He had never realized till now how helpless they are. He had known that Amelia was the pivot upon which the whole family turned; but he had not brought home to himself how utterly the machine fell to pieces when that pivot was withdrawn.

(To be continued).

ON THE FARM

APPLYING FARM MANURE.

A generation ago it was the usual practice, in handling manure, to haul it from the barnyard to the field when convenient, pile it there in small heaps, and leave it in these heaps until the time came to plow the land, when the manure was scattered just ahead of the plow and turned under as quickly as possible, the idea being that the drying of the manure would cause the larger part of its virtue to be lost, writes Charles E. Thorne.

Few farmers of that day knew that the pungent, but invisible gas escaping from the manure heap was, in fact, its most valuable constituent. The majority did not know that this gas was constantly being formed, so long as the manure lay in moist heaps, and was as constantly passing from the heaps into the air; they did not know that the drying of the manure took away from it only water, leaving all the actual plant food behind, and that, in fact, the complete removal of the water would leave the manure in better condition for preservation than before.

We now know that the decomposition of manure can only take place in the presence of moisture; that if we can withdraw all moisture the residue will preserve its fertilizing qualities indefinitely, and that when the moisture is evaporated from the manure heaps it carries with it none of these fertilizing qualities, but goes into the atmosphere simply as watery vapor.

Everybody knows that when brine is evaporated all the salt is left behind, and this is equally true of the manure water. There are two and only two ways in which manure loses its value. These are leaching by rain and the heating which accompanies chemical action. When the manure is heaped in the field both these agencies begin their action. The rain falls upon the heap and washes its more valuable constituents into the ground immediately under and around the heap, and chemical, or more properly, bacterial action begins in the heap, liberating its nitrogen and converting its phosphorous and potassium into more soluble forms to be washed down by the next shower.

Of all the ways in which manure is ever handled, therefore, this old way of pulling it in small heaps in the field is the most wasteful. It is worse than leaving it under the barn eaves and letting it leach out there, because of the waste of labor involved in hauling it to the field, and because the excess of fertilizing material washed into the soil under the manure heaps is an actual injury to the soil, if the heaps be permitted to lie for any time. The overgrowth of lodged and half-filled grain over such spots ought to be sufficient to convince any man of the mistake of such a method, and yet there are thousands of farmers who still follow it.

If we would but stop and reflect that fully half the potential fertilizing value of the manure, as it is voided by the animal, is found in the salts dissolved in the liquid portion; that the full effect of neither the soil nor the liquid portion can be realized except when used in connection with each other; that when the liquid is permitted to flow away in the stable or yard or where it is displaced by rain and separated from the solid portion, whether in yard or field, it carries with it these fertilizing salts; but that when it is merely evaporated they are left behind and still combined with those of the solid portion, it would be easy to realize that the one and only right way to handle manure is to collect the liquid by abundant absorbents, get it to the field where its effect is wanted as promptly as possible, spread it there at once and as perfectly as possible, and then let sunshine and rain do their work. Sunshine will evaporate the water, but that only, and the rain which follows will re-dissolve the salts and wash them into the entire surface of the soil where they are needed, and not simply into little spots here and there.

VALUE OF THE MANURE SPREADER.

When we come to understand the nature and value of manure, the need of thorough distribution becomes apparent. When it is spread with the fork there will inevitably be lumps in one place and bare spots in another, thus losing part of the possible effect in one place by excess and in another by deficiency. It is true that the distribution of manure that has been spread with the fork may be very much improved by following with the smoothing harrow, but even with this extra labor the work cannot be so well done as with the manure spreader.

Another great advantage in the manure spreader is that it is always ready for its special purpose, and therefore the manure is much more likely to be drawn promptly to the field than if a wagon, used chiefly for other purposes, must be got ready for this job every time a lot of manure is to be moved.

Not only is manure distributed more uniformly by the spreader than by hand, but the work is done more cheaply. With the steadily increasing cost of labor it becomes constantly more important to devise means for substituting the labor of horses for that of men, and with the spreader a team will unload a ton of manure in a small fraction of the time that would be required to do it by hand.

Considering the convenience, the perfection and the economy of its work, I believe that the manure spreader should be ranked next to the automatic harvester in importance as a farm implement.

Many farmers fear that if they spread manure on frozen ground, especially on hillsides, it will be in danger of being washed away by the spring freshets; but clay is a powerful absorbent, and the rain that would carry away the fertilizing salts of the manure would very soon thaw the surface of the soil so that it would extract these salts from the water passing over it.

Admitting that there may be occasional small losses from this source, such losses are unquestionably insignificant, as compared with those which occur in the average barnyard, or in the small manure heaps in the field.

Thirty years ago the writer was in charge of a large farm on which a considerable quantity of manure was produced. This manure was collected throughout the winter in a basin shaped yard, where it was permitted to lie until August, when it was drawn out and spread at once as a top-dressing upon land that had been plowed for wheat. This method represented the practice of the best farmers of that period. A practice which is by no means obsolete to-day.

There were several apparently very good reasons for the practice. In the first place, August was a convenient season for manure hauling, harvest being over, and as observing farmers had learned the value of a short summer fallow the stubbles had been plowed for the next wheat crop, so that it was a time of comparative leisure. In addition to this was the fact, that the manure had had several months in which to rot, so there was considerable less of it to handle than there would have been earlier in the season.

This practice was an advance upon that which had prevailed at an earlier date, when the manure was piled in heaps in the field and spread in advance of the plow, for the latter method permitted earlier plowing, thus gaining the benefit of the short fallow, and it also left the manure where it was of some advantage as a shelter to the wheat plants through the winter and as a fertilizer for the young grass following the wheat.

In one of the experiments of the Ohio experiment station one plot receives manure applied as a top-dressing to corn and wheat in a five-year rotation of corn, oats, wheat, clover and timothy, the manure being used at the rate of eight tons per acre in each case and being open yard manure, treated as in the practice above described, thus following closely a method which has been and still is a very common one. This experiment has been in progress for 13 years, and the result has been an average increase per acre for the first ten years of 7 2-3 bushels wheat and a little more than 15 bushels corn per acre.

On the same farm and on ground of the same character, another experiment has been in progress for ten years, in which manure has been applied at the same rate per acre to corn in a three-year rotation of corn, wheat and clover. In this test one plot has received manure which has been in an open barnyard during the winter, while an adjoining plot has been treated with manure taken directly from the stable to the field without exposure to the weather.

The result has been a ten-year average increase for the open yard manure of 16 bushels per acre, less than a bushel more than that from the same quantity of similar manure in the longer rotation—while the fresh manure has given an average increase of 22 bushels per acre, or practically 50% more than the yard manure. As we have thrown considerably more than a ton of manure into the barnyard for every ton hauled out, it will be seen that the actual difference has been more than 50%.

These experiments do not furnish any direct comparison of the effect of open yard and fresh manure in wheat; but in the short rotation the wheat, which eats at second table after corn, has made an average increase of 8 1-5 bushels per acre from the yard manure—or a little more than that produced by the direct application of the same kind of manure to the wheat, while that following the fresh manure has given an increase of 9¾ bushels per acre.

In other words, a dressing of manure which has first been applied to corn has there produced a large increase of crop, has produced a further increase in the wheat crop following the corn, greater than that given by the same quantity of manure applied direct to the wheat later on in the season.

It is evident, therefore, that the proper way to handle the winter accumulation of manure is to get it as promptly as possible upon spring crops. Many farmers have learned this lesson, and the practice is steadily increasing, although there are still far too many who follow the old wasteful method.

Young Mrs. Gotrox (at her first breakfast with her elderly "catch"): "You eat with your knife, don't you, John, dear?" Old Mr. Gotrox (noticing his opportunity, and with severity and dignity): "No, madam, I do not. I eat with my mouth. I frequently convey food from my plate to my facial aperture with my knife, but I do my own eating with my own exclusive mouth, and until further notice I will myself furnish all the instructions respecting the methods to be employed."