DARE HE?

OR, A SAD LIFE STORY

CHAPTER XXIX.—(Continued).

But at this Mr. Burgoyne's auditor looks so hopelessly bewildered that he thinks it the simplest plan at once, in the fewest possible words, to put her in possession of the tale of her son's achievements and disasters. He does this, partly to stem the torrent of her questions, the form that they have hitherto taken producing in him a feeling of frenzied indignation, which he doubts his own power much longer to conceal—partly in order to set Elizabeth's conduct with the least possible delay in its true light before her. Surely, when she has been told of her magnanimous renunciation, she will do her justice, will cease to load her with those hard names and insulting assertions that have made him grind his own teeth to listen to. But in this expectation he soon finds that he is mistaken. The wrath of Mrs. Byng against Elizabeth for having "drawn in" her son, as she persists in stating the case, is surpassed only by indignation at her insolence in having "thrown him over." As to the genuineness of this last action she expresses, it is true, the most complete incredulity.

"It was only to enhance her own value. Do you suppose that she expected him to take her at her word? She thought, of course, that he would follow her—that he would employ detectives;—it is a proof"—with an angry laugh—"that he cannot be quite so bad as you make him out, that he has not done so."

"I would not put it into his head if I were you," replies Jim, with an anger no less real, and a merriment no less spurious than her own.

By this time they have reached the hotel; and Jim, having helped his companion out of the fiacre, shows symptoms of leaving her.

"Will not you stay to breakfast with me?" she asks, a little aghast at this unexpected manoeuvre; "I cannot make my toilette till the luggage arrives; and I suppose that he"—her eyes wandering wistfully over the hotel front till they rest on her son's closed persiennes—"that he is not up yet; it would be a sin to wake him; do stay with me."

"I am afraid I cannot."

"Why cannot you?"—with an impatient but friendly little mocking imitation of his tone. "You are not"—with a conciliatory smile—"angry with an old hen for standing up for her one chick?"

Jim smiles too.

"I do not think that the old hen need have clucked quite so loudly; but that is not why I am leaving her; I must go?"

"Where must you go?"

"To the Anglo-Americain."

She lifts her eyebrows.

"At this hour?—you forget how early it is. Well, Amelia has got you into good training; but I can assure you that you will still find her in bed."

He sighs.

"I am afraid that there is not much doubt of that."

"What do you mean?—she is not ill surely?"—in a tone of lively surprise—"Amelia ill?—impossible!"

He looks at her with an irrational stupefaction. It appears to him now, in the distortion of all objects that the last fortnight has brought, as if Amelia's illness had spread over the whole of his life, as if there had never been a time when she had not been ill, and yet of this event, immense as it seems to him in its duration, the woman before him has obviously never heard. When he comes to think of it, how should she? In point of fact it is not a fortnight since Miss Wilson fell sick, and during that fortnight he himself has not written her a line, neither, heis equally sure, has her son.

"I am evidently very much behind the time,' she says, noting the, to her, unintelligible astonishment in his face; "but you must remember that I have been kept completely in the dark—has she been ill?"

In answer he tells her, with as much brevity and compression as he had employed in the tale of Elizabeth's disappearance, that of Amelia's illness, often interrupted by her expressions of sympathy. At the end she says:

"I am so thankful I did not hear till she was getting better! It would have made me so wretched to be such a long way off!"

Her adoption of his trouble as her own, an adoption whose sincerity is confirmed by her impulsive seizure of his hand, and the feeling look in her handsome eyes make him forgive the exaggeration of her statement, and go some way towards replacing her in that position in his esteem which her diatribes against Elizabeth had gone near to making her forfeit.

"But it will be all right now," continues she sanguinely; "there will be nothing to do but to build up her strength again, and she is young—at least"—as the reminiscence of Amelia's unyouthful appearance evidently flashes across her mind; of that prematurely middle-aged look which an unequal fortune gives to some plain women—"at least young enough for all practical purposes."

Whether it be due to the possession of this modified form of juvenility, to an excellent constitution, or to what other reason, certain it is that the next two days go by without any diminution, rather with a sensible and steady increase in Miss Wilson's favorable symptoms, and, on the afternoon of the latter of these days, Cecilia, in rather impatient answer to Jim's long daily string of questions about her, says:

"You could judge much better if you saw her yourself. I do not see why you should not see her to-morrow for a minute, that is to say if you would promise not to talk or ask her any questions."

"But would it be safe?" inquires he, with a tremble in his voice. He desires passionately to see her; until he does he will never believe that she is really going to live; he has a hunger to assure himself that no terrible metamorphosis has passed over her in these nightmare days; and yet, coupled with that hunger, is a deep dread, which translates itself into his next halting words.

"Shall I be—shall I be very much shocked? is she—is she very much changed?"

"She does look pretty bad," replies Cecilia half sadly, yet with the sublying cheerfulness of assured hope; "for one thing she is so wasted. I suppose that that is what makes her look so much older; but then you know Amelia never did look young."

It is the second time within two days that the fact of his betrothed's maturity has been impressed upon him, and formerly it would have caused him a pang; but now, of what moment is it to him that she looks a hundred, if only she is living, and going to live?

"Has she—has she asked after me?"

"We do not allow her to speak, but if any one mentions your name there comes a sort of smile over her face, such a ridiculous-sized face as it is now!"

The tears have come into Cecilia's large stupid eyes, and Jim himself is, with regard to her, in the position of the great Plantagenet, when he heard the lovely tale of York and Suffolk's high death.

"I blame you not;
For hearing this, I must perforce compound
With mistful eyes; or they will issue too!"

As he walks away he is filled with a solemn joy, one of those deep serious gladnesses with which not the stranger, no, not even the close friend or loving kinsman intermeddleth. He is under an engagement to meet Mrs. Byng at a certain hour, but although that hour has already come and passed, he feels that he cannot face all her sincere congratulations without some preparatory toning down of his mood.

The streets, with their gay va-et-vient, their cracking whips and shouting drivers, seem all too secular and everyday to match the profundity of his reverent thankfulness. He takes it with him into the great cool church that stands so nigh at hand to his hotel, Santa Maria Novella. The doors fall behind him noiselessly as he enters, shutting out the fiery hot piazza, and the garish noises of the world. In the great dim interior, cold and tranquil, there is the usual sprinkling of tourists peering up at its soaring columns, trying to read themselves, out of their guide-books, into a proper admiration for Cimabue's large-faced Virgin and ugly Bambino, folded, with all its gold and sombre colors, in the dignity of its twice two centuries of gloom. There are the usual three or four blue-trousered soldiers strolling leisurely about, there is a curly-tailed little dog trotting hither and thither unforbidden, ringing his bell, and there are the invariable tanned peasant women kneeling at the side altars. He does not belong to the ancient church, but to-day he kneels beside them, and the tears he had hastened away to hide from Cecilia, come back to make yet dimmer to his view the details of the dim altar-pieces behind the tall candles. His eye, as he rises to his feet again, falls on the contadina nearest him. What is she praying for? In the expansion of his own deep joy, he longs to tell her how much he hopes that, whatever it is, she will obtain it. It is not the contadina who, standing a little behind, joins him as he turns away from the altar.

"I saw you go into the church," says Mrs. Byng, her smile growing somewhat diffident as she sees the solemnity of his face, "so I thought I would follow you; do you mind? Shall I go away?"

He would, of the two, have preferred that she had not followed him, that he had been given five more minutes to himself; but he naturally does not say so.

"Since we are here, shall we go into the cloisters?" and he assents.

A small Dominican monk, with a smile and a bunch of keys, is opening a door to some strangers, prowling like our friends about the church. The latter follow, the little monk enveloping them too in his civil smile. Down some steps into the great cloister, under whose arches pale frescoes cover the ancient walls—where in Florence are there not frescoes?—and the hands that painted them seem all to have wielded their brushes in that astounding fifteenth century, which was to Florence's life what May is to Italy's year. For some moments they stand silent, side by side, perhaps picking out familiar scenes from among the sweet, faded groups—a slim Rebecca listening to Eleazar's tale, and looking maiden pleasure at his gifts; a shivering Adam and Eve chased out of Paradise; an Adam and Eve dismally digging and stitching respectively; Old Testament stories that time has blurred, that weather—even in this dry air—has rubbed out and bedimmed, and that yet, in many cases, still tell their curious faint tale decipherably.

"Good news this evening, I hope?" says Mrs. Byng presently, growing a little tired of her companion's taciturnity; being indeed always one of those persons who are of opinion that the gold of which silence is said to be made has a good deal of alloy in it.

"I am to see her to-morrow."

He speaks almost under his breath, either because he has no great confidence in his voice, if he employs a higher key, or because there seems to him a certain sanctity in this promised meeting on the kindly hither side of the grave which has so lately yawned.

Mrs. Byng is much too old and intimate a friend of Jim's not to have been pretty well aware of the state of his feelings during the past eight years, though certainly not through any communication from him. So it is, perhaps, scarcely to be wondered at that she presently says, in a tone hinged with admiring surprise—

"How fond you are of her!"

He receives the remark in a jarred silence, his eye resting on the square of neglected graves in the middle of the cloister, how unlike our turfy squads and lawns. A common-place nineteenth century photographer, with his vulgar camera planted on the time-worn stones, is evidently trying to persuade the little monk to pose for his picture. The gentle-looking Fra laughs, and draws up his cowl, then lowers it again, folding his arms, and trying various postures.

"You are so much fonder of her than you were!"

This speech—though such is certainly far from the good-natured speaker's intention—stings Burgoyne like a whip-lash.

"I was always fond of her—I always thought her the very best woman in the world; you know!"—with an accent of almost anguished appeal—"that I always thought her the very best woman in the world."

"Oh, yes; of course, I know you did," replies she, astonished and concerned at the evident and extreme distress of his tone. "That is not quite the same thing as being fond of her, is it? But"—with a laugh that is at once uneasy and reassuring—"what does that matter now? Now your fondness for her is as indisputable as Tilburina's madness; and, for my part, I always think people get on quite as well, if not better, afterwards, if they do not begin quite so volcanically."

But her light and well-meant words fail to remove the painful impression from her hearer's mind. Has she, during all these years, been crediting him with a wish for Amelia's death, that she should be so much astonished at his thankfulness for her being given back to him?

"I believe that this illness is the best thing that could have happened to you both," continues Mrs. Byng, feeling uncomfortably that she has not been happy in her choice of a topic, and yet unable to leave it alone. "It will have drawn you so much together; in fact"—again laughing nervously—"I think we are all looking up. As I told you, after the first shock, Willy really was rather glad to see me; and you would not believe how discreetly I handle the burning subject—yes, everything is on the mend, and we are all going to have a jolly time, as the Yankees say!"

CHAPTER XXX.

The words are scarcely out of Mrs. Byng's mouth before she adds, in a changed key, and with an altered direction to the eyes—

"Is this person looking for you? He seems to be coming straight towards us."

Jim turns his head at her speech, and at once recognizes, in the figure hastening towards them, the porter of the Anglo-Americain hotel. The man looks strangely, and carries a slip of paper, unfolded and open, in his hand.

In a second Jim has sprung to his side, has snatched the paper, and is staring at its contents. They are hardly legible, scrawled tremblingly with a pencil, and for a moment he cannot make them out. Then, as he looks, in one horrible flash their import has sprung into his eyes and brain.

"She is gone; come to us!"

Mrs. Byng is reading too, over his shoulder.

In going over the scene in memory afterwards, he believes that she gives a sort of scream, and says, "Oh, what does it mean? It is not true!" But at the time he hears, he knows nothing.

He is out of the church; he is in the fiacre waiting at the door; he is tearing through the streets, with the hot summer air flowing in a quick current against his face. He thinks afterwards at what a pace the horse must have been going, and how the poor jade must have been lashed to keep it up to that useless speed. At the time he thinks nothing, he feels nothing. He rushes through the court of the hotel, rushes through what seems to be people; he thinks afterwards that they must have been waiters and chambermaids, and that there comes a sort of compassionate murmur from them as he passed. He is up the stairs, the three flights; as he tears up, three steps at a time, there comes across his numbed intelligence why they always give Amelia the worst room. He is at the door, outside which he has spent so many hours of breathless listening; he need no longer stay outside it now. It is open, inviting him in. He is across that, as yet, unpassed threshold, that threshold over which he was to have stepped in careful, soft-footed joy to-morrow. He has pushed through the people—why must there be people everywhere?—of whom the room seems full, unnecessarily full; he is at the bedside. Across the foot a figure seems thrown—he learns afterward that that is Sybilla. Another figure is prostrate on the floor, heaving, in dreadful dry sobs; that is Cecilia. A third is standing upright and tearless, looking down upon what, an hour ago, was his most patient daughter. They have let her alone now—have ceased to tease her. They no longer hold a looking-glass to her pale mouth, or beat her tired feet, or pour useless cordials between her lips. They have ceased to cry out upon her name, having realized that she is much too far away to hear them. Neither does he cry out. He just goes and stands by the father, and takes his thin old hand in his; and together they gaze on that poor temple, out of which the spirit that was so much too lovely for it has fleeted. Later on, they tell him how it came about; later on, when they are all sitting huddled in the little dark salon. Cecilia is the spokeswoman, and Sybilla puts in subbing corrections now and again.

(To be continued.)

ON THE FARM

FAILURE AND SUCCESS IN DAIRYING.

My brother and I purchased a farm for which we were able to pay $14,250, writes Mr. H. Van Dresser. There was a mortgage of $6,500 on that farm. In my boyhood I worked for 25 cents a day. As I grew older I got more, and when I was 21 from the fourth day of September to the first day of April I worked for $21 and an overcoat. My brother taught school and we put our little amounts together for a few years and worked a farm on shares. We made a little money and then purchased the farm named. We had 33 head of scrub cows. We took our milk to the cheese factory and did without the necessities of life in order to get along; but with all our economy, when the year came round, we did not have money enough to pay our interest.

We bought that farm when the products were low, and they brought less every year. So we were in a terrible frame of mind. If we put the farm on the market we could not get the purchase price, and then we thought we would go through another year. Our wives were just as economical as they could be and helped us in the dairy and so on, and when the year came around my brother and I on April 1st took our money and went down to the cow stable and counted it. We could not pay our interest. There was that mortgage staring us in the face. There had to be a revolution of things. Something had to be done. Stories that my grandfather told us about cattle were so vivid in our minds that an idea sugested itself. As we talked it over we thought the best thing to do was to have an auction, advertise those scrubs and sell them, the scrub sire and all. And we did. Then we put another mortgage of $1,050 on the place and with some of the money paid the back interest, and although there were two mortgages on the farm, we quietly went away to purchase a herd of pure bred cattle.

We had to sneak off as it were. In a few days, however, the neighbors found it out, and I will never forget what our wives said when we came home. Two of our neighbors, old gentlemen, very considerate men, who had farms paid for and coupons in the bank, came to our house in our absence just to sympathize with our wives and to tell them that we two boys were fit subjects for the lunatic asylum. When we came home with the cows our wives came out and helped put the cattle in the stable. During the supper hour they told us who had been there and what had been said, and it didn't set well. We took a lantern, went to the barn and looked over the investment, and we were more pleased with it, and had more confidence in it than before. I am mighty glad that those old gentlemen made those predictions, because it increased our determination to succeed.

The great secret of our success was in the selection of the herd. We purchased of a very conscientious man, told him our condition, how much money we had, and wanted him to give us the equivalent. We did not want to misplace confidence in the animal or the man we purchased it of. Our foundation stock was the secret of our success; it was splendid. And as we developed the animals we put them on the market as opportunity occurred and sold what we could spare, to pay our debt. Now, in the old way my brother and I could not pay our interest. In the new way, in nine years, we lifted the indebtedness and paid off the mortgage.

PASTURE FOR SOW AND PIGS.

I have found it good practice to construct a number of half-acre lots, placing a portable house in every other one and giving a sow and her pigs an individual house, writes Mr. W. H. Underwood. By the time they will have eaten or stamped down all the green stuff on this half acre, the house can easily be lifted over the fence to the next lot and the hogs moved where they will have plenty of fresh, green pasture.

The lot from which they have been taken can then be plowed up and sowed in rye or forage crops that grow comparatively fast. By the time they have exhausted the second lot they can be returned to the original one. Thus the two lots will support the sow and pigs until the pigs are old enough to wean. If properly cared for they will support the sows the year round.

I have also found it good practice to have a larger lot, if possible, of from five to ten acres, to turn all the pigs into after they have been weaned. I allow them to remain there until they are four or five months old. I feed them in the meantime and allow them plenty of ground and exercise so that they may develop bone and muscle. They will then be in a good, healthy condition to go into the feed lot.

In building these portable houses there is one thing that must ever be borne in mind, and that is, no matter how or where they are built, they should provide good, clean, dry sleeping quarters, and, above everything else, be sanitary.

HOW TO DESTROY WEEDS AND INCREASE YIELD.

Most soils have plenty of weed seeds in them. In the corn field grass is a weed. Now, by taking a little pains it is impossible to cause most of these to sprout and then destroy them. Thus you will not be troubled with them later. To do this, work the land down finely and perhaps roll it, or go over with a clod crusher. Then leave it undisturbed for a few days. If it is growing weather the weeds will soon start by the million. Then work the land thoroughly when the sun shines and kill them. This is the proper way to destroy weeds, that is just as they get started. They haven't used up any plant food to speak of then. You save it for the crop. The corn should have all there is in soil, sod and manure. If weeds are allowed to grow to some size, their substances, after they are destroyed, may not get back to the corn roots this season. Think of this all through the summer. But we are not done with this matter of tillage yet. All soils have have quite large quantities of plant food elements in them in any unavailable form. You can take a piece of loamy land or clayey, in such a way as to make little of this available this year, or considerable, just as you please.

PUTTING HIS FOOT IN IT.

Some people are perpetually giving offence in the most unconscious way.

"Now, do let me propose you as a member of the club," says Smith.

"But suppose they blackmail me?" replies Brown.

"Pooh! Absurd! Why, my dear fellow, there's not a man in the club who knows you, even!"

A lady, very desirous of concealing the awful fact that she is the same age as her husband, observed to a visitor:—

"My husband is forty; there are just five years between us."

"Is it possible?" was the unguarded reply of her friend. "I give you my word, you look as young as he does."

As unexpected must have been the reply of the husband whose wife said:—

"You have never taken me to the cemetery."

"No, dear," he answered; "that is a pleasure I have yet in anticipation!"

It is related of a portrait painter that, having recently painted the portrait of a lady, a critic who had just dropped in to see what was going on in the studio exclaimed:—

"It is very nicely painted; but why do you take such an ugly model?"

"It is my mother!" calmly replied the artist.

"Oh, pardon, a thousand times!" from the critic, in great confusion. "I ought to have perceived it. She resembles you completely!"

On a similar occasion a facetious friend, inspecting a portrait, said to the artist:—

"And this is Tom Evans, is it? Dear, dear! And I remember him. Such a handsome, jolly-looking chap a month ago. Dear, dear!"

RETURNED WITH THANKS.

"I couldn't help it, papa." She looked up into his face with her frank blue eyes, and it was impossible to doubt her.

"But you didn't seem to be protesting very much," said the old gentleman.

"But it was so sudden that I couldn't," she insisted.

"Tell me about it," he said.

"Well, he adopted a very clever ruse, you see. He got me to look the other way, and then, before I knew it, he had kissed me on the cheek."

"The scoundrel!"

"It was wrong of him, of course."

"What did you do then?"

"I was very angry; I told him it was an insult."

"Indeed it was, and you should have ordered him to leave the house. Did you?"

"N-no; not exactly."

"Well, what did you do?"

"I told him it was an insult, and that he must take it back."

"And then?"

"He was taking it back when you came in and saw him."

SPRING POEM.

How the breezes
'Mongst the treeses
Give us colds and little sneezes.

As the posies
Spring discloses,
We pursue with frozen noses.

HIS OPPORTUNITIES.

Rupert—"When your brother was camping out did he kill anything?"

Hubert—"Yes, nearly everybody. He was the cook!"