DARE HE?

OR, A SAD LIFE STORY

CHAPTER XL.—(Continued).

Her delicate suffering mouth quivers, but she is perfectly composed.

"Oh, but of course you must see him! you quite, quite misunderstand me! Much chance there would be"—with a wretched stunted laugh—"of getting him away without a sight of you! How little you know him!"

Elizabeth does not dispute the fact of her want of acquaintance with Byng's character, nor does she help his floundering parent by any suggestion. She merely goes on listening to her with that civil white look, while the sportive seamews still play at hide-and-seek with the sun-rays on the wide blue fields of heaven.

"It is dreadful that I should have to say these things to you," says Mrs. Byng, in a voice of the strongest revolt and ire against her destiny—"insult you in this unprovoked way; but, in point of fact, you are the only person in the world who can convince him that—that—it is impossible—that it cannot be. Of course he will be very urgent and pressing, and I know how persuasive he is. Do not you suppose that I, his own mother, know how hard it is to refuse him anything? and, of course, in his present weak state it must be very carefully done. He could not stand any violent contradiction. You would have to be gentle; dear me!"—with a fresh access of angry remorse—"as if you ever could be anything else."

This compliment also its pale object receives in silence.

"You know one has always heard that there are two kinds of 'No,'" goes on Mrs. Byng with another dwarfish laugh, which has a touch of the hysteric in it—"a woman's 'No,' as it is called, that means 'Yes'; and a 'No' which anyone—which even he—must understand to be final. If you could—I daresay I am asking you an impossibility—but if you could make him understand that this time it is final!"

There is a silence between them. An unruler billow than usual, yet more masterless in its Titan play, is hurling itself with a colossal thud and bang against the causeway; and Elizabeth waits till its clamor is subsided before she speaks.

"Yes," she answers slowly, "I understand, thank you for telling me what you wish. I think I may promise that I shall be able to—that I shall make him understand that it is final."

A moment or two later they are on their way back to the Amiraute. The ocean is at its glorious pastimes all around them; the hill-climbing, shining town smiles upon them from its slope; but upon both has fallen a blindness. The feelings of Mrs. Byng are perhaps the least enviable of the two.

They are nearly back at the beginning of the breakwater, when she stops short. Probably when cool reflection comes, when she is removed from the charm and pathos of Elizabeth's meek white presence, lovely and unreproachful, she will not repent her work; but at the present moment of impulse and remorse she feels as if the expunging of the last half-hour would be cheaply purchased by the sacrifice of six months of her remaining life.

"I suppose it is not the least use my asking you to try and forgive me—to make allowances for me?" she says, with unsteady toned humility; "oh how you must hate me! If the case were reversed, how I should hate you! How you will hate me all your life!"

The tears are rolling down her cheeks, and in an instant Elizabeth's hand has gone out to her. As it does so, the grotesque regret flashes across the elder woman's mind that any future daughter-in-law of hers will be most unlikely to be the possessor of such a hand.

"Why should I hate you? you cannot"—with a heart-wrung smile—"possibly think me more undesirable than I do myself; and even if it were not so, I do not think it is in me to hate anyone very much."

On their drive home they meet with one or two little incidents quite as funny as the old Jews kissing each other; but this time they do not move poor Miss Le Marchant to any laughter.

CHAPTER XLI.

Two days later she is called upon to perform the task she has undertaken. Probably she has spent those two days, and also the appertaining nights, in bracing her mind to it, for Jim can plainly see the marks of that struggle, though he is not aware of its existence, graved upon her face, on the third morning after the excursion to the Mole. He does not find her in her accustomed corner of the terrace, but, looking down over the balustrade, sees her sitting below and alone on a small tree-shaded plateau that seems to have been levelled for lawn-tennis or bowls. Probably the giggling and chaffering of the girls on the terrace, and the respectful but persistent importunities of the Omars and Ahmeds to buy their colorful wares outspread on the hot flags, have oppressed her spirits.

Fritz has carried down for her an armchair, a cane table, and a Persian rug for her feet, and she looks as if she were established for the day.

Since Byng has been out of danger Elizabeth has returned to her embroidery. She is one of those women to whom needlework is unaffectedly dear, like that other sweet woman "who was so delicate with her needle."

Before she catches sight of him he watches for a few moments her bright bent head and flying white fingers, and is able to perceive how many sighs she is sewing into the pattern.

"What a morning!" he says, running down the steps and joining her. "No one has any excuse for being an invalid today, has he?"

There is no second seat, so he stands beside her, looking up over her head at the tall trees above her, from which immense garlands of ivy are hanging and swinging in the warm breeze. That potent ivy has killed one tree altogether.

She glances up at him mutely, knowing that he has not come merely to tell her that the day is fine.

"We can hardly keep him on his sofa; he is virtually almost well, so well that he is quite up to seeing people. He would like—he has been asking—to see you."

He had thought her nearly as pale as it was possible for her to be when he had first come upon her. He now realizes how many degrees of color she then had left to lose. While he speaks she has been mechanically pulling her thread through, and as he ceases, her lifted hand stops as if paralyzed, and remains holding her needle in the air.

It has come then. For all her two days' bracing, is she ready for it?

"Now?"

The whisper in which this monosyllable is breathed is so stamped with a fear that borders on terror, that his one astonished thought is how best to reassure her

"Not if you do not feel inclined, of course—not unless you like. It can perfectly well be put off to another time. I can tell him—there will not be the least difficulty in making him understand—that you do not feel up to it this morning; that you would rather have more notice."

"But I would not," she says, standing up suddenly, and with trembling hands laying her work down upon the table, and beginning from dainty habit to pin it up in its protecting white cloth. "What good would more notice—a year's notice—do me?"

She turns away from him and fixes her unseeing eyes, glassy and dilated, upon a poplar tree that is hanging tasselled catkins out against the sky. Then once again she faces him, and he sees that there are cold beads of agony upon her forehead.

"Wish for me," she says huskily—"wish very hard for me, that I may get through it—that we may both get through it—alive!"

Then, motioning to him with her hand not to follow her, she walks quickly towards the hotel.

It is impossible to him to stay quiet. He wanders restlessly away, straying he knows not whither. The mimosas are out charmingly in the gardens, sending delicious whiffs of perfume from the soft yellow fluff of their flowers. The pinky almond-trees are out too, but not till long afterwards does he know it.

By-and-by he finds himself strolling, unhindered by a gardener placidly digging, through the grounds of a villa to let. Gigantic violets send their messages to his nostrils, the big and innumerable blue blossoms predominating over the leaves, which in England have to be so carefully searched for them. Superabundant oranges tumble about his feet; arum lilies, just discovering the white secret hid in their green sheaths, stand in tall rows on either side of him; a bed of broad beans points out the phenomenon of her February flowers to him. He sees and smells none of them. Have his senses stolen away with his heart into Byng's chamber? They must have done so, or he could not see with such extraordinary vividness the scene enacting there. He has himself helped to place it in such astonishing reality before himself. Does not he know the exact position of the chair she is to occupy? Did not he place it for her before he went to fetch her? Nor can his reason prevent his distorted fancy from presenting the interview as one between happy and confessed lovers. Even the recollection of her features, ghastly and with beads of agony dewing them, cannot correct the picture of his mind as he persistently sees it. That she meant, when he parted from her, to renounce Byng, he has no manner of doubt. But does not he know the pliancy of her nature? Is not he convinced that the rock on which her life has split is her inability ever to refuse anyone anything that they ask with sufficient urgency or with enough plausibility to persuade her that she can do them a kindness by yielding?

How much more, then, will she be incapable of resisting the importunate passion of her own heart's chosen one, freshly risen from a bed of death? Presently his restless feet carry him away out of the villa grounds again. He finds himself on the Boulevard Mustapha, and sits down on the low wall by the roadside, staring absently at a broken line of dusky stone-pines, cutting the verdent blue of the African sky on the hill opposite, and at an arcaded campagne throned high up among the verdure. He knows that it belongs to an Englishman who made reels of cotton, and the idle thought saunters across his mind how strange it is that reels of cotton should wind anyone into such a lofty white Eden! Can the interview be lasting all this while? Is not it yet ended? May not his tormented fancy see the chair by Byng's sofa once again empty or occupied by nurse or mother? Will not Mrs. Byng, will not Elizabeth herself, have seen the unfitness of taxing the sick man's faint powers by so extreme a strain upon them? But no sooner has this suggested idea shed a ray of light upon his darkness than an opposing one comes and blows it out. Has not Byng a will of his own? Will he be likely so soon to let her go? Nay, having once recovered her, will he ever let her out of his sight again? The thought restores him to restless action, and, although with sedulous slowness, he begins to retrace his steps towards the hotel. At a point about a quarter of a mile distant from it, the lane which leads to the Villa Wilson debouches into the road, and debouching also into the road he sees the figure of Cecilia, who, catching sight of him, as if unable to wait for him to join her, almost runs to meet him.

"I was coming to call upon you," says she eagerly. "Oh!"—with a laugh—"to-day I really cannot stay to think of the proprieties, and you have not been to see us for such centuries!"

"I have been nursing Byng."

"Oh, yes; poor man! How dreadfully ill he must have been! I was so glad to hear he was better."

There is such a flat tepidity in the tone of these expressions of commiseration, something so different from the tender alertness of Cecilia's former interest in thir object, that Jim, roused out of his own reflections to regard her more attentively than he has yet done, sees that she is preoccupied by some subject quite alien to the invalid.

"I have a piece of news to tell you"—with a sort of angry chuckle. "Such a piece of news! I am sure you will be delighted at it."

At her words a wonder as idle and slack as his late thought about the reels of cotton crosses him as to what possible piece of news to be told him by the buxom and excited person before him could give him the faintest pleasure. That wonder sends up his eyebrows, and throws a mild animation into his voice.

"Indeed?"

"Do you like"—still chuckling—"to be told a piece of news or to guess it?"

"I like to be told it."

"Well, then,"—with a dramatic pause—"we are going to have a wedding in the family!"

"My dear girl!" cries he smiling very good-naturedly, and with a sensation that, though not violent, is the reverse of annoyance. "Hurrah! so he has come at last! Who is he? How dark you have kept him!"

Cecilia shakes her head and gives a short and rosy laugh.

"Oh, it is not I! You are wide of the mark."

"Your father?"—in a shocked voice.

He has a confused and illogical feeling that a second marriage on the part of Mr. Wilson would be a slight upon Amelia's memory.

"Father!" with an accent that plainly shows him he is still further afield than in his first conjecture—"poor father! No, indeed; Heaven forbid! Fancy me with a stepmother!"

She pauses to give a shudder at the idea, while Jim gapes blankly at her, wondering whether she has gone off her head.

"Oh, no; it is neither father nor I! No wonder you look mystified. It is—Sybilla!"

"Sybilla!!!"

Although Mr. Burgoyne has not got it on his conscience that he has ever either expressed or felt anything but the most strenuous and entire disbelief in Sybilla's maladies, yet it has never occurred to him as possible that she should engage in any occupation nearer akin to the ordinary avocations of life than imbibing tonics through tubes and eating beef essences out of cups.

"She is going to marry Dr. Crump!" continues Cecilia, not on the whole dissatisfied with the effect of her torpedo. "When she told father, she said that he had saved her life, and that the least she could do was to dedicate the poor remainder of it to him. She tells other people that she is marrying him because we wish it! You know that that was always her way."

"Sybilla!!"

"I thought that there must be something in the wind, as since the beginning of the month she has never once wished me good-bye; and the housemaid upset the ink bottle over the book of prescriptions without her ever finding it out; and the clinical thermometer has not appeared for a week!"

"Sybilla!!"

"I thought I should surprise you; it gives one a disgust for the idea of marrying, does not it? I have come to the conclusion that I do not care now if I never marry. Father and I get on quite happily together; and when one is well off, one can really be very fairly content in a single state; and, at all events, I am sure I do not envy Sybilla."

"Nor I Crump"—with an emphasis so intense that Cecilia bursts out into a laugh of a more genuine character than any she has yet indulged in.

"You will have to give her away!" she cries, as soon as she can speak distinctly. "Father will marry her, of course, and you must give her away. I am sure she will insist upon it."

"She will have to make haste, then," returns he, recovering enough from his first stupefaction to join Cecilia in her mirth; "for I shall not be here much longer."

"You are going away?"—raising her eyebrows, and with a tinge of meaningness in her tones which vaguely frets him.

"Why should not I go?" he asks irritably, his short and joyless merriment quite quenched. "What is there for a man to do here? I have stayed already much longer than I meant. I am engaged to meet a friend at Tunis—the man with whom I went to the Himalayas three years ago; we are going to make an excursion into the interior. I am only waiting for some guns and things. Why should not I go?"

"There is no earthly reason," replies she demurely; "only that I did not know you had any such intention. But then, to be sure, it is not so long since I have seen you—not, I think," glancing at him for confirmation of her statement rather too innocently, "since the lovers—ha! ha!—and I met you and Miss Le Marchant driving on the quay."

(To be continued).

CHILDREN'S LONG SLEEPS

QUEER INSTANCES OF INFANTILE SLUMBERS.

Absolutely Necessary to Call on Medical Science In Order to Awaken Them.

I attended a child some months ago who frightened its mother as well as me by sleeping steadily for twenty-four days—or rather more than three weeks, writes a well-known physician in London Tit-Bits. The child was six weeks old, perfectly normal in every function of its body save that since it was two weeks of age it had never opened its eyes or cried as a healthy baby is supposed to do.

At that time it was taken with a high fever, which I succeeded in reducing, but the sleep into which the infant sank continued. It indicated hunger by what I believe was an entirely muscular and instinctive pursing of its lips, and we fed it sparingly on cow's milk. For twenty-four days the child showed no indication of awaking, and then quite suddenly it emitted a long cry and opened its eyes. We had done everything known to medical science to arouse it, and just as we had almost given up hope she fooled us all by waking up very much alive. The child was heavier than when she fell asleep, and the indications are that she will grow into a strong woman. She has since shown no desire to slumber longer than is usual with infants.

Another child—a boy of seven—whom I attended, and whose name was George Rice,

SLEPT FOR OVER A MONTH.

In this case we were able to rouse him for intervals of a minute or so two or three times a day, and feed him on milk. The boy had been studious at school, and it is my impression that overwork had brought him to this condition. We tried all sorts of things to arouse him, but it was no good. Electricity had no power to bring about even the quivering of an eyelash, and at last we were compelled to leave him to finish his sleep out. Each day we weighed him, and each day showed that he had become a fraction lighter. His case attracted a lot of attention, and we had all sorts of queer "cures" sent to us, some of which we tried.

Perhaps the queerest remedy was sent by a woman, who wrote: "I have read an account of George Rice's strange sleep, and I write to say that I knew a young woman who was similarly affected. I made an ointment which cured her. One application is all that is needed. It destroys germs and is as harmless as milk." We tried this peculiar remedy, but all the effect it had was to induce Rice to take on a new lease of slumber. Music was tried, hypnotism, fanning, ice-packs, and a hundred other things; and finally, when, we let him alone, he awoke of his own accord, and seemed none the worse for his long sleep.

There is, of course, such a thing as the "sleeping sickness," but this is a disease and not to be confounded with those long slumbers where the body is in a normal condition.

THE "SLEEPING SICKNESS"

is invariably fatal, and no cure that I have ever heard of has yet been discovered, or anything which will even retard its progress. A man can suffer from sleeping sickness for a year or two years, and though he may not be absolutely unconscious during the whole of that time he only has moments of wakefulness of sufficient duration to make him realize his terrible position. The disease is caused by a germ, but whether the germ will ever be discovered I cannot say. There are just now many scientists on its track.

These long sleeps are found more often among the young than the middle-aged or old. As a man or woman gets on in years less slumber is required, and you will often meet men and women of sixty and over who get along very comfortably on from two to four hours' sleep during the night. Heavy sleepers among the aged are very rare. But to return to youth and long sleeps. Perhaps you recollect the case of Heinrich Burgstaller, the German science student, who fell asleep on his sixteenth birthday and was a year older before he awoke again.

In this instance, too, the cause of the long slumber was due to overwork and anxiety. No attempts beyond the simplest were made to awake Burgstaller, the efforts of the doctors being directed towards keeping up his strength and weight by every means in their power. Every morning he was bathed in

THIN OATMEAL GRUEL,

in the belief that his body would absorb much of the nutrition contained in the feed, while quantities of milk were forced down his throat. By these means his strength was preserved, and when Burgstaller finally awoke, quite naturally, after more than a year of slumber, his weight had only decreased some seven pounds.

A story was current some time ago of a Russian child named Olga Piatkowska having slept on end from her third to her sixth birthday, but I could not vouch for the truth of it. According to the report the infant was the daughter of poor parents, whose father labored in the forest and whose mother worked in the fields. The child was usually locked into a room during the absence of the parents, a neighbor calling in every two hours to feed and look after it.

One day when the good woman came she found the child sleeping very heavily and left her, returning in two hours. The baby still slumbered, and continued to slumber when the mother arrived. Nothing aroused it, and when three days had passed a doctor was called. He evinced an interest in the case and took the child to a St. Petersburg hospital, where it was watched for months by interested scientists. The child was fed artificially, principally through the nose, and everything was done to nourish it. But the baby eyes remained closed for three years, when, without any warning, the watcher beside the bed was astonished to see them open. For a second or two sleep appeared to have at last fled, but almost instantly the eyelids drooped again, there was a faint sigh, and death had taken the place of slumber.

WOMAN REBUKED BY A SHEIKH.

In a Novel Winnifred Graham Disclosed Secrets of Moslem Shrine.

Novelists, both men and women, receive many queer letters—letters of praise, of condemnation, of all sorts. But Miss Winnifred Graham, the English authoress, is probably unique in having received an epistolary "roast" from a high and mighty sheikh of the Soudanese Desert. In the course of it she and all other women are told their value from the Mohammedan viewpoint, which is, it seems, that they are of no consequence in the universe, except as potential mothers.

"World Without End," written by Miss Graham, was published a few months ago. One of its most interesting features is a detailed and picturesque description of the hitherto hidden mysteries of a Moslem shrine. This Mohammedan holy of holies is strictly forbidden to the eyes of all infidels and Christian dogs.

Strange as it may seem, a copy of the novel found its way into the desert. Perhaps a Cook's tourist threw it aside or left it at some stopping place on the Nile. At any rate an Arab presented a copy to Sheikh Ali Mohammed of Moudiriat-Darfour, known as the Holy Man of the Desert.

The laying bare of the secrets of a Moslem shrine horrified him and the discovery that a woman had done this intensified the horror. So the learned sheikh composed a long screed, which his secretary prepared and sent to Miss Graham, through her publishers. This document begins,

"In the name of God, the most gracious, and after saluting yourself:

"We have received one of your books and have noted its contents through one of our friends who has come to us from remote countries and joined us."

After which introduction the sheikh proceeds to rebuke the novelist for venturing to deal with a religious subject "which demands very careful investigation," and declares:

"You are a woman and have no value in the universe, except that you might be a mother; you will bring down upon yourself the displeasure of the Almighty God, and he will punish you."

Then follows a stern denunciation of the "calumnies which you have spread abroad concerning this sacred country," and in closing the author is urged to send her son, if she has one, to Mecca to pray for her forgiveness.

TRUTH SIFTINGS.

It's better to fall out than it is to be kicked out.

Fortune smiles on the few, and grins on the many.

A blunt person is apt to make the most cutting remarks.

The man who is always right is always a nuisance.

A coquette's heart probably looks like an empty honeycomb.

Sometimes you see a woman who looks pretty when she is angry.

Never judge what a woman wants to do by the thing she does.

Nothing pleases a little man more than an opportunity to act big.

Consistency is a jewel, but so many people do not care for jewellery.

Aren't you glad you don't own the earth when it is taxpaying time?

Many a man sows wild oats at his leisure that his children must reap in haste.

Two fishermen named Smith, living near each other, had met with misfortune, the one having lost his wife and the other his boat. A lady visitor called on the one who had lost his boat, thinking it was the one who had lost his wife. "Good morning, Mr. Smith, I am sorry to hear of your sad loss." "Oh, it ain't much mutter, mum. She warn't up to much." "Dear me, you don't say so." "Aye, she was a rickety old crock. When I went out with her I was always in danger of my life. Indeed, I offered her to my mate only last week, but he wouldn't have her. I have had my eye on another for some time now." But the lady could stand no more of the old man's denunciation of the weaker sex, and hurriedly took her departure.