DARE HE?

OR, A SAD LIFE STORY

CHAPTER LXIII.

The Byngs are gone, having got off just within the time first suggested by the sick man's mother. But, after all, he has to be carried on board the Eugene Perrere. Since his interview with Miss Le Marchant, his progress towards recovery has scarcely been so smooth or so fast as before; and perhaps his mother is right to bear him away with what seems such overhaste, even though it be on men's shoulders that he has to make his exit. At all events, he is gone. The hotel—of which a part of the inmates have seen him only prostrate and bleeding, and the other and larger part have not seen him at all, but have had their curiosity whetted by the tale of his calamitous arrival, only to have it balked by his hurried departure—crowd into the entrance-hall, some on one pretext, some on another, most on no pretext at all, to see him go. There are only two of the visitors whose faces cannot be seen among the good-naturedly curious and sympathetically [illegible] group that watch the exodus of [illegible]y. Who shall say how [illegible] the hour of Byng's de- [illegible] lives? Jim has ac- [illegible] to the quay to see the [illegible] tayed with him till the [illegible] assengers off the [illegible] all the proper requests and adjurations to let him know how the sick man bears the voyage; how they get on, etc. But as Mrs. Byng stands on the upper deck and watches the trail of churned water lengthening between her and the dwindling high white town, she has a feeling that her old friend does not like her as well as h did, and that it will never again be quite the same thing between them.

The Byngs are gone—have been gone a fortnight—and March is here. Over the villa faces the bignonias have broken into riotous flower, and the snowy-blossomed fruit-trees, that have put on their snowy garments but lately, stand out in bright fragility against the heavy green that never, even in January, ceases to wrap itself about the lovely Moslem town.

Every day for the last fortnight, Jim, too, has been going, but he is not gone yet. His guns have arrived ten days ago, and his friend has expressed by post and wire his weariness of exploring the bazaars of Tunis alone. But he is not yet gone to join that impatient friend. Why does he still linger in a place where, as he had justly explained to Cecilia, there is nothing for him to do? Why indeed? It is a question that, by night and day, by the insolence of the staring moonlight which slides in upon his restless open eyes by night, under the fires of the great spring sun at noon, he asks himself. All the answer he can give is that it would be hardly friendly to choose this moment, when she is so down in the world, to leave Elizabeth.

She is down in the world; there can be no mistake about that. Even her father, who has returned from his wanderings, must be aware of this fact. Perhaps that is the reason why he no longer snubs her as much as he did; why he even accepts, with some semblance of graciousness, those affectionate and watchful ministrations which she tenders him with as gentle an assiduity as in her brighter days.. But he has still no great appetite for her society; and she, unresentfully divining it, gives up to him, without repining, the one great solace of her melancholy—her mother's company. If Jim were gone, the most part of her life would be spent alone. She tells him so—tells him, with a sweet flattering smile, how much his comradeship is to her. Has he any right to rob her of that last prop? It is only to himself that the breathless clamberings up the steep short cut to El Biar, deep and brambly as her own Devonshire lanes, that the gazings in common over the pigeon-necked sea and the amanth hills, can do any harm. They may put a sting into his own after-life—a sting that all the empty years that follow may be powerless to extract; but to her they serve only as a narcotic to numb the intensity of that ache which the cured madness of Byng has left behind it. Some day, of course, he must leave her; he cannot pass his whole life at her side; some day soon leave her to walk and sit and study her Italian grammar forlornly alone. But it must not be until she has a little plucked up her spirits.

As soon as he sees any signs of this occurring, he will quit Algiers—quit it comfortably, with the consciousness of having done a good-natured thing, by which nobody is the worse. This is the compromise at which he arrives with the inward adviser—conscience, common-sense, what you will—that is hourly admonishing him to be gone. Does Elizabeth guess that her retention of the companion to whom she so desolately clings hangs on her remaining always as crushed as the first ten days after those cruel interviews with the Byngs, mother and son, had left her? If she did, she would probably seek to check the first faint revivings of cheerfulness in her inveteratly gay spirit. Instead, while her heart is yet at its sickest, she earnestly tries to foster the tiny seeds of cheerfulness, saying to herself that it is mere selfishness in her to inflict her dismalness upon her one friend; seeking rather to lift his spirits, which seem scarcely less drooping than her own.

Does he enter into her motive? Does not it rather strike him with a species of shock how superficial must be the nature, how on the surface the suffering, of one who can already begin again to take a mischievous interest in the Widow Wadman's amours, and to mimic afresh the Cockney twang of the French vicomte's English governess?

It is three weeks to-day since the Byngs left. The weather is fine, and a hot sunbeam is lighting up the painful indecision of Jim's face, as he stands in his bedroom with an open telegram in his hand, which two hours ago was put into it. It is from his friend at Tunis, and is conceived in terms which demonstrate that the indignation of the sender has got the better of his economy. It contains a stringent representation of his inability any longer to dance attendance upon Burgoyne's whims, and a peremptory request, answer paid, to be at once informed either that he will join him immediately, or that the idea of their joint excursion has been entirely abandoned. He is standing holding the paper in miserable uncertainty, torn by doubts, rent in twain by conflicting emotions, when the noise of voices and laughter outside the house draws him to the window.

The room he has occupied since he vacated his own for Byng looks out over the hall-door, and in front of that door a small group is gathered—the vicomte, his two boys, his girl, her governess, a coal-black negro who serves as kitchen-maid to the establishment, and—Elizabeth. They are all gathered round a tiny donkey, such a bourriquot as the valiant Tartarin slew, which has evidently been brought up for sale by its Arab master. Attached to its head-gear are two long reins, and holding these reins is Miss Le Marchant. As Jim looks out, the bourriquot, taking some strange freak into its little brown head, sets off galloping at a prodigious rate; and Elizabeth—white gown and blonde hair flying—gallops after it. As she is dragged at racing pace down the drive, her immoderate laughter comes borne back on the wind to the spectator of whom she is unconscious.

The latter has turned away from the window, and sat down to his writing-table, where he is scribbling a hasty answer to the missive which has cost him such long deliberation. It does not take a minute to pen now that he has once made up his mind, nor can it be more than five from the moment of the donkey's start to that when the telegram is on its way to the Post Office in Zameth the porter's hand. The die is cast. When this is the case after long irresolution, there must always be a sense of relief, and, perhaps, therefore, it is relief which Jim's face, thrown down upon his arms rested on the table, expresses. Since no man can see that hidden face, it is impossible to say. He has certainly no wish that Elizabeth should be unhappy. Her patient white misery had filled him with tender pity and ruth; and yet her laugh, sweet and delicate as it was with all its excess of merriment, rings jarringly in his ears. She is incapable of a great constancy. He had promised himself to stay with her until her spirits were restored. Well, he has kept his promise handsomely. He has done with her, and her contradictions now. It will be someone else's turn with her next. Whose? The vicomte's, perhaps.

By-and-bye he rouses himself. Only a part of his task is yet done. He must tell them that he is going. As he passes the looking-glass, he sees that his hair is roughened and erected by his late attitude. He passes a brush hastily over it. He must not look a Bedlamite like Byng. He finds Mr. and Mrs. Le Marchant sitting under the ficus-tree on the terrace—the terrace which, at this hour, they have to themselves. She is reading aloud to him paragraphs out of the Algerian paper, translating as she goes along, since his French is about on a par with that of most Englishmen of his standing.

He is leaning back in a wicker chair, with an expression of placid good-humor on his face. Across his knees the hotel cat—a plain and ill-natured animal—lies, loudly purring, while he obligingly scratches her judiciously whenever she indicates a wish for that relaxation. As Burgoyne remembers, Mr. Le Marchant had always been on very friendly terms with the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air. About the little group there is such an air of content, of harmony, of completeness in itself, that none can connect the idea of a third person with it in anything but an interloping attitude. And yet there is a third person whose presence must be continually infringing its happy duality, since niche of her own in life she has none.

"Are you looking for Elizabeth?" asks Elizabeth's mother, laying down her paper as the new-comer draws near; "she has walked to Biermandreis."

The intimate friendliness of her smile as she gives him this bit of information—the matter of course taking for granted that he must be seeking her whose society he has so wholly monopolized of late—plants a new sting in Jim's sore heart, and robs him for the moment of the power to make his announcement.

"She has not been gone more than ten minutes"—still with that bright look of kindly confidence that she is answering his thoughts.

"I am looking for you all," he answers abruptly. "I came to tell you that I am off to-morrow."

The shaft is sped. Though he is not looking at Mrs. Le Marchant, he knows that her face has fallen. Upon Mr. Le Marchant's, on the contrary, an added shade of cheerfulness is visible. Mr. Le Marchant has ceased any overt apposition to the young man's intimacy with his family; but none the less is the young man aware that the father has acquiesced but grudgingly in the footing in which he had found Jim on his return from his tour.

"I have had a wire from my friend in Tunis; he is becoming dangerous"—laughing, oh, how forcedly.

"You are going to Tunis?" says Mr. Le Marchant, almost cordially. "You are quite right; it is a very interesting place. One does really see the genuine East there, not the mongrel hotch-potch one has here."

"Is not it rather late for a trip into the interior?" asks the wife. The geniality has gone out of her tone, and the sunshine out of her face. There is a touch of involuntary wistfulness in both.

"The interior? Oh, yes, of course. Mw dawdling!"—more laughter—"has knocked that on the head. I have let the time for that go by. We intend to run over to Spain and see the Alhambra and the Escurial."

There is a general silence. Well, it is done. Neilther husband or wife makes any effort to alter his resolution or detain him. They do not even put any questions to him as to his future projects. He has nothing to do but remove himself and allow them to resume that happy little duet which he had disturbed.

"The train sets off at such an unearthly hour to-morrow morning—six o'clock or thereabouts; it would take three days to get there if it did not—that I must put my things together this afternoon. I shall see you again, of course, before I go."

"Oh, of course," replies Mr. Le Marchant, in the easy and comfortable tone of one to whom it is a matter of supreme indifference whether or not that farewell meeting ever takes place, and Mrs. Le Marchant says nothing at all.

He has adduced his necessary packings as an excuse for leaving them; though, indeed, they are neither wished for nor asked as an excuse; yet nothing is further from his intentions than to enter at once upon that occupation. She has walked to Biermandreis. In five minutes he is walking thither too. There are a couple of roads that lead there, and of course he takes the wrong one—the same, that is, that she had taken, so that, although he walks fast, yet, thanks to her start of him, he has reached the pretty little flower-shaded French village which, with its white church and its Ecole Communale, looks as if it were taken to pieces at night and put to bed in a toy-box—he has reached it, and has, moreover, traced half his homeward way, before he overtakes her. The path by which he returns is a rough Arab track, cut in low steps up the hill, each step a mass of fossil-shells—whelk, and scallop and oyster shells, whose inhabitants died—strange thought!—before Adam saw Eden's fair light. It is a charming road, cut, in part, through the red rock, over which the southern greenery tumbles. He has approached quite close to her before she sees him. She is sitting on a camp-stool by the wayside, looking vacantly before her. Her figure is rather stooped, and her straight back bent, as if it were not worth the trouble to hold it up. Beside her, on the ground, lie a little tin color-box and water-bottle and a drawing-board. He wishes, with a new pang, that he had not come upon her so suddenly. He is afraid that this is one of the aspects of her that will stick most pertinaciously in his memory. Catching sight of him, her whole sad, listless face lights up.

"It is you! I was sure you would come. I told them to tell you where I had gone. I meant to sketch"—with a glance at her neglected implements—"but"—with a sigh—"as you see, I did not."

"Are you down on your luck?" he asks, sitting down by her side; "you did not seem so"—trying to harden his heart by forcing a recollection of her extravagant gaiety—"a little while ago, when you were prancing after that jackass."

"Is not he a darling?" cries she, hurrying up the end of her sigh to make room for a smile of pleasure. "I want to buy him; only I am afraid he might die of sea-sickness going home."

"Perhaps"—scarcely knowing what he is saying.

"I should like to buy a little cart to harness him to—such a one as I saw just now going along the road, drawn by a tiny bourriquot that might have been twin brother to mine. Some Arab children had dressed out both him and his cart with branches of that great yellow fennel—his long ears and his little nose peeped out so pathetically between; another child walked after barefoot, waving a great acanthus-leaf. You never saw anything so pretty! Yes, you must break mine in for me," smiling again, "it will not take more than a week, I am sure."

If it did not take more than a day even, I am afraid I should have to decline the appointment"—seizing this opening to blurt out his news. "I am off at six o'clock to-morrow morning. I—I want to see the Escurial."

She had been almost garrulous about the little donkey, and he had wished to stop her. In that he has undoubtedly succeeded.

How the asphodels cover the banks on either hand! They have come into full flower since last he passed this way; tall branching stem, white blossom, and pinky bud; here they are in thousands.

It is a soft day, on which scents lie heavy, and their strong odor—that is scarcely perfume, and yet has an odd acrid charm—fills the air.

"Everything must come to an end," he says baldly.

She is apparently not going to make any more effort to detain him than her mother. He has every right to come and go where and when he pleases. Since Amelia died, to no human being is he accountable for his actions, and yet there is both guilt and misery in his voice as he utters his platitude.

"It has been great good luck for me that you have stayed so long; I know that it is out of pure kindness that you have done it, and it has made all the difference to me. I—I am quite set up again now, thanks to you; and—and summer is coming on, and I shall do very well—capitally."

She has detected—what is, indeed, pretty obvious—the deep distress of his face and voice, and, in her habitual unselfishness, her own thought is to relieve him of any self-reproachful misgivings that he is doing aught cruel in robbing her of the support of his companionship. In her tone is nothing but the meekest gratitude. It is her misfortune, not her fault, that in it there is not cheerfulness too. But her "gentle physic," instead of curing, seems to aggravate his ill.

"It must come to an end some time or other!" he murmurs wretchedly, as if to himself.

"Yes!"

Dead silence.

Below the slight eminence where they sit, the road winds white, and upon the opulent low green hills on its further side, what a banquet of color! On one steep slope the plough is driving its difficult furrows, turning up the rich red earth, shaded with deeper claret and lighter pink stains.

Beneath a square of stone-pines looks like a green velvet handkerchief spread on the hillside, and over the rest of the upland eucalyptus, and olive, and cactus hold their riot of various verdure; while on the tiptop of everything against a weirdly pale-blue sky-field, a Moorish villa lifts its white flank.

How long have they both been staring dully at that fair prospect before Elizabeth again speaks!—

"You were a very good friend to me!"

She had not meant that past tense as an arrow to shoot into his heart; but it sticks there barbed.

"I do not know how."

"And friends—real good friends—should not have concealments from each other, should they? They should tell one another about themselves?"

"Yes."

A pause.

"I have often wished—often tried to tell you about myself; but I could not. I never could! I can tell you to-day; if you wish, if you care to hear. Do you care?"

"Do I care?"

What a small battlefield those three words make for the anger and agony they express to fight upon!

Another long pause.

She has taken off her hat, and now passes her handkerchief over her damp forehead.

"I shall be all right when I have once begun, but it is bad to make a start."

"Do not make it! do not tell me! I adjure you not to tell me! it hurts you too much!"

"It would hurt me more to let you go without telling you. Do you remember"—rushing desperately into her subject—"at the time you stayed with us at the Moat, that there was a great talk among us of my having my portrait painted?"

He knit his brows in an eager straining of his memory.

"Yes. I recollect."

"Father was wonderfully proud of me in those days; it seems impossible to believe it now"—with a passing look of incredulity at her own statement—"but he was."

"Yes, yes."

"Do you remember all the arranging and planning as to who was to be the artist, and that he was to come and stay in the house to paint it?"

Jim has put his hand up to his forehead as if to quicken the return of those faint and distant impressions which are coming out in stronger and stronger colors on memory's surface.

"Yes, yes; he was not an Englishman, was he We used to laugh about him"—adding stroke to stroke in order to convince her of the accuracy of his recollections—"used to call him the 'distinguished foreigner.'"

"Did we? Yes"—slowly—"I remember now that we did. Well"—gathering herself up for a supreme effort, panting painfully, and turning her head quite aside so that he may have no glimpse of her face—"he came and he stayed two months, and at the end of those two months I—I—ran away with him!"

(To be continued).

JUST THE OPPOSITE.

"They call the town you live in a woman's paradise, do they?" said the man with the pointed nose. "Because the women outnumber the men five or six to one?"

"Not at all," answered the man with the bulging brow. "Because the men outnumber the women five or six to one."

ON THE FARM

CARE OF YOUNG PIGS.

The prospect is that the supply of bacon hogs will be short the coming winter and spring, and that prices will rule high in this country. The outlook is the same in England, where the packers and dealers are complaining bitterly of the shortage of pigs, and are forced to handle more second-class product from outside sources than they would if the supply of first-class were sufficient. Many farmers fail to make a success of feeding fall pigs during the winter months, and many have become discouraged through failure and have abandoned the work. On the other hand, not a few have succeeded satisfactorily, and made it a profitable business. What is the secret of their success? is a question others should observe and study, in order that they may share in the good prices going. Probably part of the difficulty in carrying pigs through the winter in a growing and improving condition is due to having the litters come too late in the fall. September and October are the favorite months to have them come, as they may be kept running out on the ground and the grass a good part of the time for two or three months, treatment which is essential to the growth of bone, the development of muscle, and the laying of the foundation of a vigorous constitution, which will enable them to withstand the effects of the enforced confinement due to snow and the

COLD WEATHER IN WINTER.

Much trouble is experienced from crippling of pigs in winter, apparently from rheumatism, but probably from inactive livers and imperfect digestion or derangement of the stomach, due to lack of exercise, and possibly from feeding too much cold, sloppy food, which, in cold weather, may well account for a sluggish circulation of the blood and consequent inaction of the organs of the system which perform the functions of digestion and assimilation. If there is reason to believe that the ailments which so often check the growth and health of pigs in winter are due to the system of feeding above indicated why not try the system of feeding by which the grain is fed dry, either whole or ground, and the drink given in a separate trough, to be taken when required. We have seen pigs thrive admirably in winter in very ordinary quarters, fed in this way. Most of the hogs raised in the corn-growing States are fed whole corn, on the ear, or shelled and scattered on the ground or on plank platforms; and nowhere are so many so successfully raised and fitted for market, the principal difficulty there being that the hogs, being kept in such large numbers, bunch together too closely, and are liable to become overheated from contact of their bodies, and to catch cold when separated. It is, we believe, sound doctrine that food eaten slowly, and thoroughly masticated and mixed with the saliva of the glands of the mouth, is best fitted for being readily digested, the exertion required to pick up thinly scattered grain or meal in a flat-bottomed trough tends to keep up the blood circulation, and the process of mastication is much more complete than in swallowing sloppy food. In the early years of farming in this country, it was the common practice to keep porkers till they were fifteen to eighteen months old before fattening; they were carried over the first winter almost invariably by scattering whole peas on the frozen ground or on plank floors, or in troughs, and given water separately, and were fattened at last to great weights on whole peas, with water to drink, yet rheumatism and winter crippling was practically

AN UNKNOWN AILMENT.

Pigs seldom go wrong in summer where they are allowed to run on the ground, with access to grit and grass, and if we cannot have summer conditions in winter, the best we can do, it would appear, is to get as near as we can to it by adopting methods of treatment which aid nature to do its work, despite the handicaps of frost and snow. To this end, it is surely worth while to experiment, by supplying the needs of the animal system, by providing bone-and-muscle-forming foods, and feeding them in the manner best calculated to aid digestion and assimilation. Well-cured clover or alfalfa hay, cut up fine, and fed in combination with pulped mangles or sugar beets and a little meal, should answer admirably for this purpose, and should greatly reduce the cost of production, as compared with the common practice of heavy feeding of grain meals, much of which is often worse than wasted when the animals are knocked off their balance, and lose ground, instead of gaining in condition and weight. It would cost but little to provide a load or two of gravel in a covered place, or to carry over the coal ashes for this purpose, or to partially burn, under cover of earth, some of the rough wood lying around the yards to produce charcoal, to which the pigs could be given access. A mixture of salt and sulphur and wood ashes, as a condiment, kept under cover in a low, flat box, so the pigs can help themselves, may prove the savior of life and vigor. These are but hints which may serve a helpful purpose in solving the problem of successful winter production of bacon to meet the good demand and prices of the present. At least, the suggestions offered are open to discussion, which is earnestly invited. Who will be the first to take a hand in it, and add his quota to the solution of the question?