A MAN'S REVENGE;

OR, THE CONVICT'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER V.—(Continued).

"Illgot or no, it's kept you nigh on nineteen years. As you've begun you may as well go on. You owe me much more than you can pay by doin' what I ask, then you'd be free to follow your own will. But first mine must be obeyed. Will you do this thing, yes or no?"

Sunbeam straightened herself and looked bravely into his face.

"You mean me to enter houses so as to report on them, so as to show you the way about them? Is that your meaning?"

He nodded.

"You're sharp enough. I'm glad you're gein' to cotion to it."

A quiver ran through her. Her face grew pale as death.

"Then, father, I'm sorry, but I can't. Ask me anything but that. I'll work my fingers to the bone, but that I cannot do."

His face darkened again. A low curse broke from his lips. She drew back trembling before the glare of his little eyes.

"You can't! Well, you must. I give you till to-night. If you still say no I'll then tell you how I punish an undootiful, ungrateful doughter wot doesn't think o' her father's comforts. I bet then you'll wish you'd sed yes—Let me pass. My hand itches to spank you. But I'll wait till to-night. You'll give me your answer then."

"It will always be the same," murmured the girl.

But he had banged the door in her face and was already outside.

With a cry, like that of a wounded bird, Sunbeam flew to her aunt's arms and sobbed out her distress.

"I thought he loved me, auntie, and yet he wants me to do what I cannot do!" she exclaimed.

"My duck, my duck. Try to come to his way o' thinkin', it will be best. Or——"

"What, you also? Oh, auntie, I cannot. I would rather die. Why did you rear me? Why did you make me love you so? I cannot do this thing."

"And yet you're his child. You must obey one or t'other. Bill is a terrible man if roused. And this is the first time you two come to loggerheads. I might have known he'd something like this up his sleeve."

"He's never asked it before!" moaned the girl.

"I might have guessed he would," said the woman stroking her hair lovingly. "But you must be brave, darling, and try to give in or things will be worse."

"Nothing can be worse," exclaimed the girl hotly. "He has managed alone so long. Why should he want me now? Let me go away and earn my living, not——"

"You owe him something, my duck. He's been a good father to you, working and risking himself, whilst you had all the comforts he could get. And he loves you. Yes, you owe him something, Sunbeam."

"But not my self-respect, auntie. Oh, how can you urge me to give in?"

"Because I think it's wisest now. My dear, I once had to help him. It's too terrible. I've been lady's maid many a time to help him."

Sunbeam looked with horrified eyes into the comely face.

"Oh, auntie, you!" she exclaimed, feeling as though indeed the ground had given beneath her feet.

"Yes, me. And it hasn't made me so bad, has it? And I didn't have a high eddication to bribe me to it. I did it, that's all."

"And I can't," murmured Sunbeam, the tears filling her eyes again.

"Well, worse awaits you to-night," replied the woman, sadly.

"What can be worse? Death? Not in my eyes! Will he kill me? I should prefer it!"

"Lor, no! He's never committed murder yet. But he means to make you marry Gentleman Dan. You'll remember him, the man with the black eyes who used to frighten you so."

The girl's slight figure swayed from side to side. She clung to her aunt as though for support.

"So you'd better do the other thing. After all, where's the harm? You ought to be rich and riding in your carriage. Them what has them ain't a patch on you. Some don't know how to spend their money right. So there's little harm in doing such a simple thing as showing the ways of a big house. That isn't stealing yourself."

"I can't, I can't," reiterated Sunbeam, clasping her hands despairingly.

"Then, God help you, for I can't. I'm tied myself. And once Gentleman Dan has you for a wife he——"

"But he won't. They can't force me to marry him. My father loves me. He won't be so cruel."

Hetty shook her head dolefully.

"When the devil's in your father nothing can turn him. I know; Lor how I know! He's set on this. You'll have to bend one way or t'other. I read that in his eye. That's what he had in view all these years."

"I can denounce Gentleman Dan," murmured Sunbeam in a low voice.

"And your father with him? Not if I knows you, my duck. It's because he could ruin your father that one of these two things must be done. Your father's in his power, and wants to shake him off. No doubt the rogue is sly and has asked for you. Perhaps it's the love your father bears you that makes him give you another chance. Not that I know anything. It's just as much a shock to me as it is to you. And yet it's natural that he should want to make use of you. It makes his work less dangerous to have someone he knows in the houses."

"Is there nothing I can do?" pleaded the girl, lifting a pale face in which despair had already begun to work.

"Nothing, I'm afraid," replied Hetty, the ready tears rushing to her eyes at the sight of so much misery. Only the night before she had sworn that Bill would kill anyone who chased the joy from his child's face. And yet he had been the one to do that. Her ire rose against him. She would have given worlds to be a man herself, and thus meet him on his own ground.

Sunbeam's head drooped. She threw out despairing hands.

"Oh, God!" she cried, sobs breaking her voice, "help me, for I am powerless!"

CHAPTER VI.

Duncan, coming home after a morning's hard work, brushed up against Sunbeam in the narrow passage. The misery in her eyes appalled him. Had she already discovered her father's unworthiness of such affection as she had showered on him in his absence?

He smiled kindly at her, and stopped her as she was about to run away.

"How's the puppy to-day?" he asked, noting how the color ebbed and flowed in her pale little face.

"As happy as though he had never known a day's trouble," she replied in a spiritless voice. "Would you like to see him? He is in the garden."

"Certainly!" exclaimed Duncan trying to meet her eyes, and following her through the kitchen as he spoke.

Hetty, busy at the table, glanced up at them and smiled. He noticed that she had been crying. Also that Bill was conspicuous by his absence.

His blood boiled. Had the rogue been bullying them? And yet he had sworn to flog whoever caused a shadow on Sunbeam's face. What could have happened?

Out in the neat back garden where the same love of vegetation showed itself as in the front, his wonder put itself into words. For he felt that his interest in the dog was nil, in Sunbeam intense, more intense than it ought to be.

"What is the matter with you, child?" he asked gently, taking the puppy from her as she picked it up.

"Nothing," she stammered, the color rushing to her face.

"Nothing," exclaimed Duncan, "and yet the light has gone out of your eyes, little Sunbeam. Your aunt also looks the picture of misery. Is it anything I can help you with?"

She shook her head.

"No, thank you. There is really nothing the matter," she replied in a low voice.

Duncan put the dog on the ground and followed it to the end of the little garden. A huge currant bush hid him from the house. He appeared absorbed in the animal's frilics, and stood silent until she had come up to him.

Then he faced her. Her eyes met his for the first time, and the look of dumb appeal in their velvety depths made him feel more than ever that there was something terribly wrong.

"Sunbeam, I wish you would let me help you. I wish you would see in me a friend," he pleaded in a hurried whisper, stooping over the dog as he spoke. For, from other gardens not far off, they might be observed, and for her sake he wished to be cautious. "Although you have not known me very long, a few days simply, can't you trust me? I would do anything to bring the smiles back to your face."

Sunbeam sighed. Her aunt's words crept into her mind, putting a curb on her somewhat willing tongue. Perhaps he was only a detective, like the lodger they had years ago. Any word against her father would be used by him. She dared not speak. And yet the blue eyes were so honest, the face so good. She longed for the comfort of telling her trouble. He was strong and would tell her what to do, whether duty to a parent demanded the sacrifice of honor and self-respect, whether it were better to obey, or accept the punishment awaiting her. She shuddered a little as she thought. The remembrance of Gentleman Dan, the tall black-eyed man she had seen so often in her childhood in her father's company, thrilled her with horror. How could she marry him? And yet how could she do that other thing?

For a moment she stood in silent conflict, her head drooped to hide the tears in her eyes. Through them the blurred vision of the gay garden, and the thoughtless restless puppy playing at her feet, made a picture that imprinted itself vividly on her memory. In later days, when after much tribulation she found peace again, the remembrance of it was agonizing. Her short life had been so sunny, so free from care, so fraught with love, that the shadow that had now fallen upon it overwhelmed her with its darkness. She had never imagined trouble so hard to bear. She had never felt so utterly alone.

Nevertheless she realized that she must suffer in secrecy, and not run the risk of jeopardizing her father's safety by confiding in this handsome stranger, with the kind voice and still kinder face.

So she swallowed her tears bravely, and, raising her head, said, in a tremulous voice:

"Really, it is nothing! I have had my own way so long that I find it difficult to obey. That is all. My father wished me to do something, and I refused."

"Undutiful child!" he exclaimed playfully, though an inkling of the truth flashed through his brain. "The obstinate Sunbeam refuses to pierce a cloud, and sheds darkness around her, naughty girl!"

She smiled. A tone of banter was certainly easier to put up with than one of sympathy, since sympathy was dangerous and awkward to evade.

"Is it wrong to disagree with a parent?" she asked, a touch of anxiety in her voice.

"You have learnt your Catechism and ask me that? Well, we are supposed to obey, but on some points one cannot help having one's own opinion, such as points of honor. A thing that appears right to a parent may seem wicked to his offspring. I cannot explain myself more freely, for I do not know what the thing is that you refused to do. But your father loves you. And love, as a rule, is neither a hard nor a cruel taskmaster."

"If two things are wrong, which is worse: to sacrifice oneself and one's likings or one's conscience?"

He spread out his hands expressively.

"One's conscience, one's honor, should be saved at all costs, little Sunbeam. But you raise my curiosity. This request must be a terrible one to cause such thoughts. As I said before, your father loves you. He will never give you such an enigma to solve, I am sure. In a way you must allow him to lead you; you are still an infant, therefore still under his control. Try to obey without outrage to your better feelings. I feel sure you will never do anything wrong."

"Ah, but you forget," she murmured, caution lessening. "My father's ideas of right and wrong would not be yours. You heard what those village children said. You know it's true. Therefore he might try to make me see things in his own light—he might, I say. And I——"

"And you would be true to yourself, my child," he interrupted in a low voice as the sound of an opening door fell on his ear. "I feel sure of it. Our souls are our own, to sink or raise. No parent can touch them."

He bent down and called the dog to him, as Hetty Green came hurrying down the path. She glanced quickly from one to the other. A suspicious look shot into her face.

"Sunbeam, I want you to go into the village," she said. "And, sir, your lunch is ready. What a silly child you are, Sunbeam, to be out in the sun with no hat on, and your head so bad! Besides, what does Mr. Sinclair care about that ugly beast?"

"Heaps, Miss Green; he's going to be a fine dog. And I'm most grateful to Sunbeam for looking after him."

She sniffed incredulously.

"You know you only bought it out of sheer extravagance, sir, or kindness, 'cos you saw this child fighting for its life. Nothing will make me believe that you like the little wretch, though Sunbeam always has took to such weakly things. Now, my child, fetch your hat, and make haste," she continued, as they re-entered the house. "The fact is, the child has a headache—excitement at having her dear father home; and I mean her to take a walk to get rid of it," she added in an aside to Sinclair.

He nodded sympathetically, meeting her inquiring eyes with an inscrutable smile. For he saw that she was half suspicious of him, and perhaps afraid that Sunbeam had poured out her grievance into his willing ear.

Had he heard the aunt's close catechizing when Sunbeam came downstairs, he would have seen that he was not far from the mark, for she was dreadfully afraid that the girl had told him of that morning's scene. Much as she liked him, she still had her doubts about him.

"For all we know, he may be a 'tec, a-masquerading as an artist," she muttered, as Sunbeam assured her that she had said nothing that could do any injury to their sinner. "An' then, if through you—his daughter—your father got caught, it would be terrible! Or Gentleman Dan," she added emphatically; "if he's nabbed, you may give up all hope for your father. Not but what as luck's against Bill; prison ain't the best place for him. At all events he's safe there! But he mustn't be put there through carelessness of his own flesh and blood. Remember that, Sunbeam. You may think him mighty hard, but look at all he's done for you, and hold your tongue. Now, there's the list of what I want, and try to walk back your smiles and to make up your mind to do what your dad wants. It'll be better than marrying Gentleman Dan, for all he's such a swell, and it'll be simple enough, you bet. You'll run no danger!"

She kissed the pale cheeks heartily. If only the girl were not so good. What harm was there in Bill's request? Where, indeed, would they be now if she herself had been so squeamish years ago? But the thought of marrying Sunbeam to the smart member of the gang Bill had belonged to so long filled her with misgivings. It was a terrible threat. Surely her brother could not mean it? Surely he would never carry it out.

As was her wont, she watched Sunbeam go down the dazzling road. But this time with an aching heart. For the girl did not turn back once, and she felt that she blamed her for her counsel. Had she not felt her shrink as she kissed her? Bill had killed the child's love and trust in them. With a choking sigh she went back to the kitchen and burst into tears.

Duncan from his window had witnessed Sunbeam's departure. He saw the older woman's saddened face fill with yearning and anguish, and all his doubts revived. There was something serious afoot, else why should both women look so wretched?

His certainty as to Hetty Green's distrust of him increased as the day lengthened. For she seemed continually in his way, and the many little meetings between Sunbeam and himself, that had brightened the past week and relieved the monotony of his present life, were marred by her presence. Only once had he a chance of speaking to the girl alone. And then was when, on starting out after an early tea, he found her stooping over a bed of nasturtiums, gathering the flowers to decorate his table.

"Sunbeam," he murmured, pausing by her side, "I want you to remember that if ever you are in need of help I will give it. I am your friend."

"Thank you," she breathed, raising grateful eyes to his flushed face, "I will remember."

And then he passed on up the path, way, his pulses beating wildly. The look in the hazel eyes had pierced to his soul. And, for no reason whatever, he felt himself ready to sacrifice his life and soul for the sweet-faced girl. But the sight of her father, grinning upon him from the doorway, gave him a shock. What a sentimental fool he was to allow a pretty face to gain such a hold on him!

"What would Eileen say?" he mused, smiling, as a vision of that young lady arose before his mental eyes.

(To be continued).

ON THE FARM

FRUIT TREE PRUNING.

For some time past several English horticultural journals have furnished interesting matter as to the respective merits of the pruning and non-pruning of fruit-trees. The evidence in some cases discloses strong proofs that the common custom of annual pruning, and that often of a severe nature, is altogether a mistake.

A contributor to the "Gardeners' Chronicle," a grower of fruit trees, especially apples of the best English, French and Russian varieties, states that long since he has arrived at the conclusion that if quantity combined with quality are the desired objects, regular pruning as practised by most gardeners is a mistake. He admits that thinning is necessary every few years, that long branches should be shortened, and that cross, awkward growths should be taken out, but the annual pruning that one sees in most gardens is wrong. Time spent in cleansing the trees from American blight, manuring, etc., is much more profitably employed. Many sorts have not failed to crop for at least twenty years, and some seasons very heavily.

Mr. J. Udale reports on experiments in pruning and non-pruning, the difference, he says, between pruned and unpruned plum trees being nearly 100 per cent. Williams' Bon Chretien pears also showed a great difference. Lane's Prince Albert apples showed the least difference, but still it was clearly defined. The trees of each kind of fruit only slightly pruned exhibited intermediate effects. These experiments annually increase in value and interest. Some details are as follows:

Eleven trees of apples, Prince Albert, are growing under equal conditions in all respects except in regard to pruning. Five trees in one row have been annually and carefully pruned. Three trees in the next row have been annually and badly (or roughly) pruned, and three trees in the same row have not been pruned. All the trees came from the same source, and from the same parcel of trees, and were planted on the same day. Each tree has produced more or less fruit every year since 1890 to 1906, inclusive, and the average weight per tree for the whole of that period is: Three badly-pruned trees yielded 199.0 pounds of fruit per tree; three non-pruned trees, 183.6 pounds of fruit per tree; five well-pruned trees, 105 pounds of fruit per tree.

In order that readers may understand the size and market value, as well as the economic value of the fruit, 28 pounds of the largest apples were selected from each stored sample, and the following, after careful counting, was the result: Seventy apples from the well-pruned trees weighed 28 pounds, 125 apples from the badly pruned trees weighed 28 pounds. When sold, the fruit from the well-pruned trees realized from $2.10 to $2.50 per cwt., that from the badly-pruned trees $1.45 per cwt., and fruit from non-pruned trees $1.20 per cwt.

It is thus shown that the non-pruned and badly-pruned trees have up-to-date produced nearly double the quantity of fruit produced by the well-pruned; it is also shown that the latter have produced fruit nearly twice the value of the former, which makes them about equal in value (commercially) up to the end of 1906. The future will prove which system of management is the best of the three; but to predict future events by the past is not very difficult, and, judging by the progress made by the well-pruned trees, the result in the near future is almost a foregone conclusion in favor of good pruning.

Much more may be said about this much-disputed question of the benefits arising from good pruning as against slight or non-pruning. The great bulk will agree that good pruning is the best; but there are also other fruit growers, who say that regular annual prunings are a mistake.

FORM WITHOUT PERFORMANCE IS HUMBUG.

In this shrewd business age, we insist on breeding dairy cows for milk. Color of hair and skin, graceful turn or horn, perfection of symmetrical contour, and the numerous other fancy considerations which, in the past, breeders have often sacrificed utility to attain, are all very well in their way, but they do not pay wages, interest or rent for the everyday commercial farmer, into whose hands the animals or their progeny must finally pass. Gradually the conviction has forced itself on unwilling minds that pure-bred dairy cattle, unless persistently selected and bred for constitution and performance, are bound to deteriorate to the point where their average usefulness will be no higher, and often actually lower than that of grades or scrubs. A higher level of utility, which is profitableness, can be developed and maintained only by constant rational selection and breeding to that end.

Moreover, every wide-awake dairyman now knows that appearance, or so-called outward evidences, of dairy usefulness, though perhaps of some significance in a general way, are often as deceiving as sin. Good judges of dairy cattle may pick out some good cows, but the best of them cannot be depended on to discern all the best cows of a herd, much less to rate their selections in order of proportionate value. This can be done only by careful, conscientious testing with the milk scales and Babcock test, applied for several successive milking periods; and until breed associations commence official testing on this thorough and exhaustive basis, we shall never be able to breed dairy cattle so intelligently as we should. But while this is the case, much good has been done by testing for shorter periods. Even a week's or a month's test is better than none, although very liable to exalt one's estimation of the cow that milks well when fresh and then drops off, as contrasted with the steady, persistent milker. Much can be done to guard against such injustice by retesting eight months after freshening, and taking the two tests in conjunction. Best of all, however, and by far the simplest method, is the careful keeping of a milk record throughout the year, and year after year, with occasional unannounced visits from an official inspector, who will watch several milkings, and compare the weights of milk with those recorded for previous days, to see whether they correspond, and will then take samples for Babcock tests, to determine the average percentage of fat. It is such work as this that the Dominion Department of Agriculture is carrying on, free of charge, for the Canadian dairy-breed associations, and no better line of effort was ever undertaken by a Department of Agriculture. It will now be up to dairymen to acquaint themselves with the Records of Performance of the breeds in which they are individually interested, and, when buying heifer calves or young bulls, to insist on knowing the official milk and butter-fat records of their dams and grandams. Fortunately, there will soon be plenty of breeders of blooded stock ready and anxious to supply them. Form in dairy cows is all right, so far as it goes, but without performance it is a humbug.

PHOENIX PARK HOME.

Beautiful Irish Home of Lord and Lady Aberdeen.

While there are two residences for the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Dublin Castle and Phoenix Park Lodge, the Aberdeens prefer the home in Phoenix Park, and only live at the Castle during the six weeks' social season preceding St. Patrick's Day. The view from the windows of Lady Aberdeen's study is superb, for it overlooks the valley in which Dublin lies, with a glimpse of the lovely hills on the other side, writes a correspondent.

It was at the lodge that Queen Victoria made her visit in 1900. I was shown into the small drawing rooms at the end of the suite of the reception rooms which the late Queen used as her private dining room. Opening off this room is a large drawing-room with Irish marble in old design, over one of two wide fireplaces of exquisite white which hangs a life-size painting of the late Queen, and over the other one of her consort, Prince Albert.

The most interesting room of all is Lady Aberdeen's boudoir. It is surely the room that a woman whose happiness consists in work would possess. There are great desks filled with letters and papers and book cases full of reports and books dealing with the movements in which she is interested. The general color tone of the room is green, with carpets and hangings in that restful color. There are no pictures on the walls, but a shelf runs about above a white dado on which are numerous water color drawings, mostly all of which have been bought at Irish exhibitions by the Viceriene. One of the few exceptions is a sketch of Cromar, the Aberdeen's Scottish retreat in Deeside, done by the Countess' niece, Miss Grace Ridley, whom I also met and who is a delightful young girl who has made her home with the Countess since the death of her parents.