A House of Mystery

OR, THE GIRL IN BLUE

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued).

Dimly I could distinguish his short, burly form between myself and the faint light of the half-opened blinds, but even though all was as yet misty and indistinct, I knew that what had been averred was the actual truth—the specialists had been mistaken. With care and continued treatment my sight would strengthen until I became like other men.

"I can see!' I cried excitedly. "I can see you, doctor—and the light—and the blinds!"

"Then you acknowledge that what I told you was the truth—that I did not lie to you when I told you that your case was not beyond recovery?"

"Certainly. You told me the truth," I said hastily. "At the time it seemed too improbable, but now that you have shown me proof, I must ask your pardon if any words of mine have given you offence.'

"You've not offended me in the slightest, my dear sir,' he answered pleasantly. "Persevere with the treatment, and continue for another few days in darkness, and then I feel confident that a perfectly satisfactory cure will have been effected. Of course, we must not expect a clear vision at once, but by degrees your sight will slowly become stronger."

And with those words he closed the blinds and drew the curtains close, so that the room was again darkened.

Imagine the thankfulness that filled my heart! It was no illusion. I had actually seen the narrow rays of sunlight between the half-opened blind and the dark silhouette of the short, stout, full-bearded man who was effecting such a marvellous cure.

I gripped his hand in the darkness, and thanked him.

"How can I sufficiently repay you?" I said. "This service you have rendered me has opened up to me an absolutely new life."

"I desire no repayment, Mr. Heaton," he answered in his deep, hearty voice. "That my treatment of malignant sclerotitis is successful, and that I have been the means of restoring sight to one of my fellow men is sufficient in itself.'

'But I have one question I wish to ask you,' I said. "The mode in wrich you were introduced to me is extremely puzzling. Do you know nothing of the lady named Edna?"

"I know her—that is all."

"Where does she live?"

"I regret that I am not able to answer your question."

"You are bound to secrecy regarding her?'

"I may as well admit the truth — I am.'

"It's extraordinary," I ejaculated. "Very extraordinary!"

"Not so extraordinary as the recovery of your vision,' he observed. "Remain perfectly quiet, and don't take upon yourself any mental problems. A great deal now depends upon your own calmness."

The fact that my sight was gradually returning to me seemed too astonishing to believe. This man Slade, whoever he was, had performed a feat in surgery which seemed to me miraculous.

Again and again I thanked him, but when he had gone and I told Parker, she only gave vent to a grunt of incredulity. Yet had I not actually seen the silhouette of Slade, and the streaks of sunlight beyond? Had I not already had ocular proof that a cure was being effected?

What would Dick, dear old Dick, say on his return when he found me cured? I laughed as I pictured to myself his amazement at finding me at the railway-station on his arrival—looking for him.

Through a whole month Slade came regularly each day at noon, and surely, by slow degrees, my vision became strengthened, until at length I found that, even though I wore smoke-darkened glasses, I could see almost as well as I had done in the days of my youth. The glasses destroyed all color, it was true, yet I could now go forth into the busy Strand, mingle with the bustling crowds, and revel in their life and movements. Indeed, in those first days of the recovery of my vision I went about London in cabs and omnibuses, hither and thither, with all the enthusiasm of a country cousin or a child on his first visit to the Metropolis. All was novel and interesting on my return to a knowledge of life.

Slade, I found, was a gentlemanly fellow with the air of a clever physician, but all my efforts to discover his abode proved unavailing, and, moreover, just as the cure was complete he one day failed to call as usual. Without word he relinquished me just as suddenly as he had come; but he had restored to me that precious sense which is one of God's chief gifts.

In those September days, when all the world seemed gay and bright, I went forth into the world with a new zest for life. I took short trips to Richmond and Hampton Court, so that I might again gaze upon the green trees, the winding river, and the fields that I loved so well; and I spent a day at Brighton, and stood for a full couple of hours watching the rolling sea beating upon the beach. Six weeks before I was a hopeless misanthrope whose life had been utterly sapped by the blighting affliction upon me. Now I was strong and healthy in mind and in body, prepared to do anything or to go anywhere.

When Parker was at last forced to admit that I was no longer blind, she declared that the man Slade was an emissary of the Evil One, and expressed a pious hope that he would never "darken my door" again.

It was a fancy of mine to go down to the home of my youth, Heaton Manor, a place well known to those acquainted with the district around Tewkesbury. The great old mansion, standing in the centre of a wide, well-wooded park that slopes down to the Severn close to the Haw Bridge, had been closed, and in the hands of the old servant Baxter and his wife. Indeed I had never lived there since, on my father's death, it had passed into my possession. The rooms were opened for my inspection, and as I wandered through them and down the long oak-pannelled gallery, from the walls of which rows of my time-dimmed ancestors, in their ruffles, velvets, and laces looked down solemnly, a flood of recollections of my sunny days of childhood crowded upon me.

Seven years had passed since my last visit there. The old ivy-covered manor was, indeed, dilapidated, and sadly out of repair. The furniture and hangings in many of the rooms seemed rotting with damp and neglect, and as I entered the nursery, and was shown my own toys, it seemed as though, like Rip Van Winkle ,I had returned again to life after a long absence.

Alone, I wandered in the park down the avenue of grand old elms. The wide view across the brimming river, with Hasfield Church, and the old Tithe Barn at Chaceley standing prominent in the landscape, I saw that it had in no way changed. I looked back upon the house—a grand old home it was, one that any man might have been proud of, yet of what use was it to me? Should I sell it? Or should I allow it to still rot and decay until my will became proved, and it passed into the hands of my heirs and assigns?

I felt loth to part with it, for the old place had been built soon after the fierce and historic battle had been fought at Tewkesbury, and ever since Richard Heaton had commanded one of the frigates which went forth to meet the Armada it had been the ancestral home of the Heatons. Indeed, the village of Water Heaton, now-a-days quite an ancient place, with its little squat square-spired church and quaint straggling street, had sprung up around the manor. To me the place was something of a white elephant, yet, as the last of a stalwart race who had ever rendered loyal service to their sovereign, and the sole descendant of an honorable family, it seemed incumbent upon me to retain it, and not allow it to go under the auctioneer's hammer. My personal needs were small, and I was not in want of money, therefore, ere I returned to Tewkesbury, and thence to London, I gave orders for certain necessary repairs to be done, and that a couple of rooms might be cleared and kept in readiness for my use whenever I might require them.

How strange it all was! At every turn I peered upon the world through my grey glass spectacles, and took as keen an interest in it as does a child. All seemed new to me; my brain, like a child's, became filled with new impressions and fresh ideas. After my dull, colorless existence of sound and touch, this bright life of movement filled me with a delight that pen cannot describe. Imagine, however, what joy it is to one who has been pronounced incurably blind to look upon the world again and taste of its pleasures. It was that joy which gave lightness to my heart.

Yet over all was one grim shadow—the remembrance of that fateful night with its grim tragedy. Who was Edna? Where was she? What was she?

Through her instrumentality I had regained my sight, but her identity and her whereabouts still remained hidden, as she had plainly told me they would be before we had parted.

Hither and thither I went, feted and feasted by my friends at the Savage, the Devonshire, and other clubs, yet my mind was ever troubled by the mystery of the woman who had, from motives that were entirely hidden, exerted herself on my behalf, first in saving my life from unscrupulous assassins, and, secondly, in restoring my vision.

I entertained a strong desire to meet her, to grasp her small hand, to thank her. I longed to see her.

CHAPTER X.

The man who abandons all hope is constantly haunted by fears. This is as strange as it is unjust, like much else in our everyday life. Even though there had returned to me all the joys of existence, yet I was still haunted by an ever-present dread—a terror lest some terrible mandate should suddenly be launched upon me by the unknown director of my actions.

My situation was, to say the least, a most extraordinary one. Valiantly I strove to rid myself of the obsession which constantly crept upon me whenever my attention was not actually distracted by the new existence that had so mysteriously been opened up to me. For a little while I would let my mind dwell upon the terrifying thought that I was entirely helpless in the hands of one who was, without doubt, unscrupulous. I had pledged my honor to keep secret that appalling midnight crime, and to act always as directed. Edna herself, the woman whose voice sounded so tender, whose hands were so small and soft to the touch, had forced me to this. To her alone was due this state of constant anxiety as to what might next be demanded of me. The thought would creep upon me, now pausing, now advancing, until at length it wrapped me round and round, and stifled out my breath, like a death-mask of cold clay. Then my heart would sink, my sight seemed to die, even sound would die until there seemed an awful void—the void of death for ever and for ever dumb, a dreadful, conquering silence.

A thousand times I regretted that I had in that moment of my utter helplessness given my promise to conceal the mysterious crime. Yet, when I recollected with what extraordinary ingenuity I had been deceived by the man whom I had believed to be a police-constable, the deep cunning which had been displayed in obtaining from my lips a statement of all the facts I knew, and the subsequent actions of the cool-headed Edna, my mind became confused. I could see no solution of the extraordinary problem, save that I believed her to be deeply implicated in some plot which had culminated in the murder of the young man, and that she herself had some strong personal motive in concealing the terrible truth.

I ought, I knew, to have gone to Scotland Yard and made a full and straightforward deposition of the whole matter Nevertheless, my story was a very strange one—stranger, perhaps, than of the many curious romances which are daily laid before the Director of Criminal Investigations. After all, it might not have been believed. I had no idea where the scene of the tragedy was situated, and, having been sightless at the time, had actually witnessed nothing. Theory upon theory I formed, but when I dug down to their roots I found that they merely drew their strength from my own fear or imagination, and were utterly worthless. Once or twice I contemplated disregarding my promise and making a full statement to the police; but on calm reflection I saw that such a course was now absolutely useless. Two months had elapsed since the fateful night, and the body—or bodies—had, without doubt, been disposed of long ago. Such ingenious evildoers would exert the utmost care in the disposition of the corpus dilecti, and would never run risk of detection. They feared me, I felt assured, and it was this thought which constantly harassed me for if such were actually the case, then they had every incentive to take my life on the well-established principle that dead men tell no tales.

With the return of my vision my sense of hearing had, curiously enough, become both weakened and distorted Sounds which I heard when blind presented quite a different impression now that I could see. The blind hear where those with eyesight can detect nothing The ears of the former train themselves to act as eyes also, yet the moment the vision is recovered the sharpened sense of hearing again assumes its normal capacity. Hence I found that I could not now distinguish voices and sounds so quickly as before; indeed, the voices of those about me sounded somehow different now that I had recovered my sight.

My friends, into whose circle they declared I had returned like one from the grave, welcomed me everywhere, and I confess that, notwithstanding the oppression constantly upon me, I enjoyed myself to the top of my bent. I still remained in my dingy, smoke-grimed rooms in Essex Street, really more for Parker's sake than for my own, and also, of course, in order to be near Dick when he returned, but nearly every evening I was out somewhere or other, going here and there about town.

I had long ago been a member of the Devonshire, and had now returned, and spent a good deal of time there, even though the main distinction of the club was the number of old fogies who affected it. But I found it a conveniently central place to dine and idle away any hours of the day that I had to spare.

In the middle of October, when most men I knew were away on the moors, I had a dinner engagement one evening with the Channings, in Cornwall Gardens. Colonel Channing, a retired officer of the Guards, was a man I had known during the greater part of my lifetime. His service had been mainly of a diplomatic character, for he had served as British military attache at Berlin and Vienna, and now lived with his wife and daughter in London, and seemed to divide his time mainly between the St. James's and the United Service Clubs. He was a merry old fellow, with white hair and moustache and a florid complexion, the dandified air of attache still clinging to him. His courtesy was distinctive, save when in the heat of argument upon European affairs—of which he prided himself on his extensive and peculiar knowledge—he would use strong and rather impolite epithets regarding those who disagreed with him.

As he sat at the head of his table, his habitual monocle in his eye, and the tiny green ribbon of the order of the Crown of Italy in the lappel of his dining-jacket, he looked a perfect type of the ex-attache. His wife, a rather spare woman of fifty, who seemed to exist externally in a toilette of black satin and lace, was pleasant, though just a trifle stiff, probably because of her long association with other diplomatists' wives; while Nellie Channing was a happy, fair-haired girl, who wore pretty blouses, cycled, golfed, flirted, and shopped in the High Street in the most approved manner of the average girl of South Kensington.

Nellie and I had always been good friends. She had been at school in England while her parents had been abroad, but on completing her education she had lived some five years or so in Vienna, and had thus acquired something of the cosmopolitan habit of her father. She looked charming in her pink blouse a trifle decollete, as she sat on my left at dinner, and congratulated me upon my recovery.

(To be Continued.)

SENTENCE SERMONS.

Faith easily dies without fellowship.

What is given in love never is lost.

Many mistake faultfinding for fidelity.

Envy is a confession of inner destitution.

Sound doctrine does not cure a diseased heart.

The pursuit of truth is the secret of eternal youth.

The richest gifts come out of the poorest pockets.

The life of service has few difficulties of conduct.

A man's title to glory does not depend on the glory of his title.

You never lose your own joy by lending an ear to another's woe.

It doesn't take much fortitude to bear another's misfortune.

Happy is he who is too rich in faith to worry over a fortune.

A square deal has something beside sharp edges and angles to it.

The cross is irksome only when we try to climb it as a pedestal.

The man who cannot find a god in the universe discovers one in a mirror.

Only the morally astigmatic see lying as the only refuge in time of trouble.

Some men are ready to forgive their enemies when their enemies have them down.

Too many giving the poor crusts on the street are stealing their bread in the alley.

When a man tells the truth about himself he is anxious for some one to call him a liar.

He who believes nothing until he understands it fully must have a limited range of knowledge.

Religion never makes a permanently powerful impression without steady practical expression.

When you hear a man decrying the good you may know he is discounting what he cannot acquire.

There would be little religious infidelity in this world but for our attempts to force the forms of one man's faith on other men.

GROWN UP WITH HIM.

An Irishman was in trouble about a gun found in his possession. The law, unfortunately for him, adopted the unkind suggestion that he had stolen it.

While awaiting his trial, he was visited by a friend, who urged him to steadfastly adhere to the statement that he had owned the gun for years. The friend, furthermore, cited how he himself, when in similar difficulty about a hen, had preserved both the hen and his character by swearing he had possessed the bird since it was a chicken.

The wisdom of this advice was not lost on Pat, and he henceforth regarded his trial with the settled serenity of, if not conscious innocence, sanguine anticipation.

On the day appointed, when conclusive evidence against him had been tendered, he was asked formally whether he had anything to say for himself. Pat throwing a glance of shrivelling contempt at the prosecutor, turned to the judge and said:

"The man's a perjured villain, yer honor. That gun's bin in my possission, yer honor, iver since it was a pistol."

THE DOOR TO OUR FEELINGS.

Every person's feelings have a front door and a side door by which they may be entered. The front door is on the street. Some keep it always open, some keep it latched, some locked, some bolted with a chain that will let you peep in but not get in, and some nail it up, so that nothing can pass its threshold. This front door leads into a passage which opens into an anteroom, and this into the interior apartments. The side door opens at once into the secret chamber. There is almost always one key to the side door This is carried for years hidden in a mother's bosom. Fathers, brothers, sisters, and friends, often, but by no means so universally, have duplicates of it. The wedding-ring conveys a right to one; alas, if none is given with it! Be very careful to whom you trust one of these keys of the side door.

ON THE FARM

TEST OF SEED CORN.

It is a mistake to buy seed corn shelled where it can be had on the ear, but inasmuch as the great bulk of ensilage seed corn which passes through the trade in Canada is shelled, it is largely a case of Hobson's choice. Ear corn is preferable for several reasons. In the first place, one can see what kind and variety of ears he is planting from, and reject inferior ones. The embryo will be somewhat less liable to have had its germinating qualities impaired by heating in storage or in transit. Most important of all, he can test his corn by the ear, thereby culling out those that show inferior germinating quality. There are almost sure to be a certain proportion of these which, if used for planting, would mean either blank spaces in the field, or, what is probably a more serious disadvantage in drilled corn, weak-growing, poorly-eared stalks. Far better in every way to buy an extra quantity of seed corn, plant the strong-germinating ears, and use the rest for feed. A tremendous loss occurs every year in America as a result of inferior seed corn, says the Farmer's Advocate.

For testing corn by the ear, several easy systems have been devised. They consist in numbering the ears, say, with a label on the butt, then selecting four or five representative kernels from each ear, and planting in a small box of sand or garden mould, divided off into squares corresponding to the numbered ears. By the promptness and vigor with which these representative kernels sprout, the advisability or otherwise of using each particular ear is determined. Butts and tips should be broken off and used for chicken or pig feed. A man is supposed, by this method, to be able to test from five to eight bushels of seed corn in a day, localing all weak or bad ears. As one writer has expressed it, there are dimes for minutes in this work.

Those who are obliged to buy shelled corn, as well as those who cannot be persuaded to take the slight trouble of testing their corn by the ear, should at least make a general germination test, in order to guard against the possibility of sowing seed so low in vitality that it will not produce a crop. This is particularly important in a cold, wet season, when only seed corn of the highest vitality may be depended on. This test should be made, if possible, before purchasing the seed, and certainly before sowing any of it in the field. In a little box of earth in the window, or between double folds of flannel or blotting paper, place one or two hundred average kernels. Keep the earth, cloth or paper moist, but not wet. If cloth or paper is used, it should be in the bottom of a plate or dish, with another plate inverted over it. The promptness, vigor and percentage of germination will indicate whether the corn is fit to sow or not, and, if sown, how much extra seed should be used to make up for defunct grains. A few non-viable ones in a sample are not of very serious consequence in ensilage corn, providing the proportion is known and allowed for, but any considerable number of weak, non-vigorous kernels may occasion much loss.

Seed corn should be tested every year, as a matter of course, but indications are that it will be particularly necessary this spring, as the unusually cold, wet season of 1907, in the corn-belt States, did not allow the corn to mature and dry out well before the season of frost.

CHURN CREAM SWEET AS POSSIBLE

I have come to the conclusion that the shorter the time elapses between the milking of the cow, and the manufacture of butter, the better will be the quality of the butter. What we call a ripened cream flavor of the butter is an acquired taste. The true butter flavor is that which is made from sweet cream, churned as soon as possible after the milk comes from the cow. This so-called ripened cream flavor, is something for which we have to develop an unnatural taste, and I put it in the same class as smoking cigars, drinking whiskey, and all those bad habits which the animal man has acquired. The butter which brings the highest price in the markets of Great Britain is made from cream with very little acid in it. I think it is wrong for the butter-maker to develop 5-6 of acid in the cream before churning. It would be better to churn the cream directly after separating, pasteurizing and cooling. I thing I am safe in saying that we have been making a mistake in our methods of manufacturing butter. The sooner we get it made into butter after the milk comes from the cow the better it will be. Many of the bad flavors in cream are caused by holding it too long before churning.—Prof. Dean.

PASSING OF THE PATENT.

Higgins—"What are you blacking these shoes for—aren't they patent leather?"

Wiggins—"They were, but the patent has expired."

SIMILAR BUT DIFFERENT.

"I reckon you ain't much like your ma," said the old-fashioned woman as they met on the street corner.

"Oh, yes I am," protested the over dressed young lady. "Ma's at home piecing a quilt and I'm out making a spread."