Time Heals Most Wounds

A Tale of Love and Disappointment

CHAPTER I.

The late Prime Minister could have chosen no one more competent than the Right Hon. Felix Shelby to be his literary executor. A great friendship had existed between them that had never been marred by those political disagreements which are so apt to be fierce, and estrange the closest relationships. But the task, a difficult and responsible one, was proving a great consumer of time to a busy man; for Mr. Shelby was a member of the present Cabinet. He, too, was an eminent man of letters, and it was felt by the public that Providence had designated him as the only possible person who could fitly write the biography for which the world was waiting impatiently.

In front of him lay three open deed boxes, which were filled with letters and documents. Now and again he would take up a paper—glance through it—and throw it back with the others.

"An endless task," he muttered to himself, "I must have some assistance."

He threw himself back into an arm-chair—crossed his legs, and his head seemed to sink into his shoulders; a pose that had been immortalized by Punch.

He was interrupted by the entrance of a servant.

"A Mr. Ackroyd to see you sir," he said in that sauve, smooth voice so affected by the well-trained servant.

"Ackroyd—Ackroyd," Mr. Selby repeated to himself. Recollection appeared to come to him, for he rose briskly from his chair.

"Ask him in, James."

The door opened, and there appeared a tall, clean-shaven man of quiet appearance. He was well groomed, and his clothes were neatly pressed, but there was a telltale shabbiness at the seams that betokened much wear.

"How do you do, Ackroyd? It is a long time since I have seen you."

"Yes, Mr. Shelby, but I haven't cared to worry you with my troubles."

"Troubles? I am sorry to hear that. Let me see—you are writing, are you not?"

"Yes, and I have not found it very profitable. But your time is valuable, I know, so I will at once come to the object of my visit. Can you find me a billet of any kind? To be frank, I am 'broke.' I thought perhaps in memory of our "Varsity" days, you might——"

"Quite right, Ackroyd; I am glad you came to me. In fact you are the very man for whom I am seeking, and you will really be doing me a favor by taking some work off my hands."

"It is very good of you to put it in that way—if you only knew what it means to me at the present time," said Ackroyd.

"We all have our 'ups and downs.' But I am surprised that you are not at the top of the tree. We all prophesied a great future—for you were the man of promise of our year."

A bitter smile appeared on Ackroyd's face, but only for a moment, and he turned to the other with a forced cheerfulness.

"A promise that was not to fructify, as happens in so many cases," he said quietly. "But what can I do for you?"

"I am the literary executor of the late Prime Minister. Those three boxes contain a quantity of miscellaneous correspondence. I want them to be carefully read, and the important ones set on one side. You will understand that it is somewhat delicate, as the private correspondence is included, but of course I trust you, Ackroyd."

"Thank you. When do you wish me to begin?"

"The sooner the better. As for the financial part of it—perhaps we had better settle that when the work is finished."

He sat down at his desk and filled in a cheque.

"This will do to go along with, eh?" he remarked with a smile, as he handed him the slip of paper.

"You are more than generous."

"Nonsense, nonsense. Come along with me. There is a room that I can place at your disposal, and you can commence as soon as you like."

Julian Ackroyd was alone with the papers. There was no smile of gratification on his face, although this employment had come to him at the moment that he had reached the end of his resources. But it was not the first time that he had faced starvation.

A man of consummate ability, but from the outset he had been cursed with the propensity of spending more money than he earned. Had he been content to live quietly upon the fair income that he derived from his writing, he would doubtless have made his mark. The need of money drove him to the City, where he engaged in "wild-cat" financial schemes. Upon occasions there had been every prospect of success and wealth, but some imp of bad luck had pursued him through life, and he was forced back to literature for a bare living. He had set out in life with a character of average morality, but contact with people of shady principles had gradually debased him, until he had resolved to make money in any way possible, whether honest or otherwise.

He listlessly began to turn over the papers. The work was not congenial, for he had no admiration for the late Prime Minister, but soon his interest was arousel.

"Rather indiscreet, some of these letters," he muttered to himself. "I wonder Shelby trusted me with them."

At last he came to a bundle consisting of half a dozen letters.

"Written in cipher. This ought to be something important. Some Foreign Office business, I expect," he said to himself.

The deciphering of codes was a hobby of Ackroyd's, and it was not long ere he discovered the key, which was a simple one. He read two or three lines, and drew a deep breath. A rapid glance at the door, and he hurriedly placed the letters in his breast pocket. He once more began his work, and kept steadily on until Mr. Shelby made his appearance.

"Rather tedious, isn't it?" he remarked kindly.

"Yes, there is a tremendous lot of twaddle here, but I think there is a good deal of material for your book."

"That is excellent. But I think you have done enough to-day. Needless to say the work is not very pressing, and so you may take your own time for it. This room is always at your disposal."

"Thanks once more, Shelby. I am very grateful to you."

"Nonsense. It's the other way about. Good-bye for the present."

Ackroyd's first move was to go to the bank to cash the cheque which he had received, and the jingle of gold in his pockets immediately raised his spirits. Then he took a cab to the Temple where he shared residential chambers with a barrister friend.

He at once started work to decipher the letters, and his expression brightened as he mastered the contents.

"A gold mine," he muttered hoarsely. "Let me recapitulate the facts, and I shall know what cards I hold.

"Some thirty years ago the Earl of Wolverholme was sent to St. Petersburg by the British Government to negotiate a private treaty with Russia. He enjoyed the absolute confidence of that Prime Minister and was given plenary powers. It appears that the worthy Earl was contemplating marriage, but that his affairs were heavily involved. The negotiations were concluded, and very successfully — from the Russian point of view. As a reward for his complacency, and for the sale of his country's interests, the Earl received a heavy bribe. And here's the evidence of it," Ackroyd cried triumphantly.

He gathered from the papers that the receipt of this bribe had come to the knowledge of the Prime Minister. A scandal would have been very inadvisable, so the affair had been hushed up, and the Earl had been permitted to retire. And now every one that knew of his treachery was dead, and these letters contained the only evidence of his perfidy.

The Earl enjoyed universal respect, and was amongst the gayest, the wittiest, and most popular of the social leaders of the world. Here in the hands of an unscrupulous man rested a weapon that could hurl him from his proud position.

Ackroyd went to a small club of which he was a member, and busied himself with works of reference. He found that the Earl had long been a widower, and that there was issue of the marriage, namely one son, Lord Harecastle, who was approaching his thirtieth birthday.

At the time that Ackroyd was gathering this information the Earl was at his club, impatiently awaiting his son's arrival. Tall, of robust figure, he carried lightly his seventy odd years, but his face did not wear its customary genial smile. At last he rose and went to the dining room, but he had only just taken his seat at a table, when he was joined by his son.

"Good evening—father, an unexpected visit."

"Yes, Cyril, and an unpleasant one. But sit down. We will dine. I have not much time to spare, for I am going to the Castle to-night."

"To-night?" Harecastle repeated in surprise.

"Yes. The house is full, you know. And why aren't you down there?" he asked irritably.

"I have been rather busy," Harecastle replied with a slight flush.

"Rubbish! You had better come down to-night."

"Sorry, but I cannot. To-morrow, if you like. Who is there at the Castle?"

"Josephs and his daughter. And the sister, Mrs. Goldberg. Lady Hesty, and two or three others."

"Why did not you let me know earlier that you were coming to town?"

"My decision was sudden. I have been to see Lockyer."

"Sir Simeon Lockyer, the specialist? Surely there's nothing the matter with you, father?"

Cyril leaned over the table and looked anxiously at him.

"I am sorry to say there is, but I want you to keep it quiet. He describes it as temporary heart failure. I have had one or two bouts lately, and I was getting nervous."

"Is it serious?"

The Earl smiled whimsically.

"He does not say that I am going to die at once, but I must take care. Lead a quiet kind of life and all that kind of thing. It will be a wretched existence."

"I am deeply sorry, father, but you will take care of yourself?"

"Yes. I still find life pleasant, and worth the living. I don't want you to worry about it, Cyril, but I thought it better that you should know."

"I am very glad that you told me," Cyril replied with a look of affection.

"I will drive you to the station," he continued. "I have the car here."

They reached the station in good time, and he stood at the window of the carriage till the train moved off.

"I will be down to-morrow afternoon, certain. I may have some news for you. Good-bye, and take care of yourself," he called after his father.

He returned to his car, and directed the driver to go to an address in Eaton Square. He was on his way to the house of Ethel Fetherston, to whom he had been engaged for the last three days. The engagement had not been announced, and it had been his intention to tell his father at the club, but the news of his illness upset him, and he thought it better to defer the telling until the morrow.

Much against his will, Lord Harecastle had led a life of idleness. It had been his wish to enter the Diplomatic Service, but for some reason which he could not understand, the wish had met with stout opposition from his father. There was deep affection between them, and he had forgone his desire. He was not one to easily make friendships, and his life had been a lonely one. A cold aloof manner covered great shyness, as is so often the case. His life had been untouched by love until he met Ethel Fetherston, but in her he met his heart's desire. Many found fault with her pride, but to him it was attraction, for he had no sympathy for the gush and lack of reserve which is so characteristic of the woman of the present day.

He was convinced that she loved him deeply, and it pleased him to think that in her his father would find a daughter after his own heart.

She met him quietly and calmly, but her face flushed hotly as he pressed her lips to his.

"I've brought you this," he said simply, as he produced a ring from his pocket, and slipped it on to her finger.

"How sweet!" she answered with a smile of quiet happiness.

"I can hardly realize my good luck, dearest. What is there in me to command your love?" he asked softly.

"Do you really wish me to tell you, or are you asking for a complimentary speech?"

"Tell me," he said eranestly. "I know very little of your sex. My life has been lived very much alone. What do you women love in men?"

"That depends upon the woman. But for myself—honor, clean living; a man who keeps his word; one upon whom we can rely, not for a moment, but for a lifetime. And I believe I have found one," she said softly.

"My darling," he replied passionately. "You may trust me with your life. I cannot put my feelings into words, but I love you, worship you. Your beauty, your purity, the perfect you, has won my heart."

Her pale face flushed, and she placed her hand in his.

"I think you would be very unforgiving," he said reflectively.

"Not unforgiving, but I could be relentless, if I found that my trust was misplaced; but I have no fear."

He smiled gravely.

"I am trying to understand you, Ethel. You must teach me."

An affectionate smile was her reply.

"I am going to Wolverholme Castle in the morning. I want to tell the Earl the news. He was in town to-day, but was rather upset, so I thought it better to wait until to-morrow. He will be delighted at my choice. Have you told any one of our engagement?"

"Only Cicely Stanton. We are such old friends, you know. You don't mind, do you?"

(To be Continued.)

ON THE FARM

MISTAKE OF CLOSE FALL PASTURING.

On many farms pastures are overstocked all summer long. Stock are necessary for the conserving of soil fertility, but when pastures are eaten bare by the end of July, as in too many cases they are, and for the rest of the season grass is kept nipped down to the roots, and flesh and milk fail steadily, that is having too much of a good thing.

But many who have roughage enough in the fields until the first of October make a similar mistake by pasturing too late in the fall. During October there is usually very little growth of grass. Stock generally thrive well, but they are cleaning up what is left of the growth of previous months. By the end of the month there is little left. But for one reason or another, because work presses, and there is little time, and less inclination, to begin winter chores so early, or to save feed, or from simple lack of thought, the housing and morning and evening feeding of stock are delayed. Meanwhile, the animals roam the fields, poaching the newly-seeded fields, if wet weather prevails, appetite impelling them to bite still shorter the few remaining blades of grass, and almost dig for their living. Now and again there is a snowstorm, which quickens appetite, without adding to the comfort. The condition of things by the end of November, or, as in too many cases, well on into December, is, unhappily, too well known — pasture and meadow fields bare, and the flesh necessary to thrift and growth of the stock wasted, its absence being hidden, to some extent, as cattle-buyers well know, by extra growth of hair.

Such a course works loss in two directions. The vigor of a grass field for the following season is ordinarily in direct proportion to the amount of roughage left on it in the fall. If a field is to be plowed up in the spring, close pasturing does no special harm, except to reduce the amount of vegetable matter, to be turned under; but, except in such a case, it is a great mistake. It is penny wise and pound foolish. It is saving feed now, at the expense of a much greater amount in grass-growth later. This is especially true of fields newly seeded. The little bit of forage such fields afford is taken at the expense of a third or more of the following hay crop. In an article on this subject, some years ago, the writer said it was like taking off a barn door to stop a knot-hole.

But even if no account be taken of the effect on grass fields, late pasturing of stock on short grass is mistaken policy, because it is much cheaper to keep an animal in thrifty condition than to restore the flesh and vigor once they are lost. Our best stock and dairy men understand this, but it is a lesson that the average farmer is slow to learn. We are not removed far enough from the days of the pioneers and the forests, when cows marched regularly to the woods with their masters, and kept fat and sleek on the twigs of the trees that were felled. Browse, they called it. And it is hard for us to get over the idea that stock should get the most of their living by browsing or grazing. Conditions are changing faster than we are. We are slow to learn that forage is scarcer than of yore, in proportion to the number of animals kept, and that we should either keep less stock per acre or arable land, or do more stable feeding.—Farmer's Advocate.

DAIRYING CIVILIZES.

Professor Oscar Erf in commenting upon the agricultural conditions as he found them in his recent trip to Europe, says: "In the countries where the most milk is used, there is the most civilization. In Spain, Italy and Roumania and other countries where dairy cows are scarce, I found that land was extremely cheap and civilization not very far advanced while in Holland, Denmark, Switzerland and the island of Jersey, where dairying is the principal occupation, land was often worth several hundred dollars per acre and in some cases $2,000 per acre. Upon inquiry, the people told me the dairy cows were responsible and I find the same thing to be true in this country."

THE COST OF A CALF.

In an experiment to ascertain the cost of raising a calf, Professor Shaw, of Michigan Station, took a dairy calf and kept an accurate account of the expenses of feeding for one year from its birth. The amount of feeds used in that time were 381 pounds of whole milk, 2,568 pounds of skim-milk, 1,262 pounds of silage, 219 pounds of beet pulp, 1,254 pounds of hay, 1,247 pounds of grain, 147 pounds of roots, 14 pounds of alfalfa meal and 50 pounds of green corn. The grain ration consisted of three parts each of corn and oats and one part of bran and oil meal. At the end of the year the calf weighed 800 pounds at a cost of $28.55 for feed. The calf was a Holstein.

GERMANY NEEDS MORE ROOM.

Extended Colonial Possessions Absolutely Necessary.

Herr Rohrbach, the well known writer on political questions, has just published a book on Germany's position in the world, which is the occasion of a remarkable article in Die Post.

According to the Post, Germany at the present moment is in the same state of ferment which characterized her in the years from 1882 to 1884, those years, namely, when she acquired her extensive colonial possessions. From the German nation rises a voice that the people are not satisfied with things as they are. This voice says that Germans are too many on a too limited area, and cries out for opportunities of expansion; more elbow room.

Germany is different from other European powers, says this article. It is not satisfied to take up a secondary position like Italy and Austria-Hungary; it is not rotten financially like Russia; its population does not remain dangerously stationary like that of France.

"The sun of the future smiles on the three great Germanic nations, Great Britain, the United States and Germany; but to secure our promising position we must have a strong fleet. As Germany's fleet is only in the building, and will require ten years before it is of use, it is, of course, only prudent to avoid every conflict with other powers. It would almost appear as though in recent years Germany had become a sort of Cinderella among the other nations, or, like Schiller's poet, had arrived too late on the scene."

The Post states that, according to Dr. Rohrbach, Germany's African possessions will only be able to support a white population of 100,000, but Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Southern America still offer numerous possibilities. Something must be done if Germany's population, which will shortly reach 80,000,000 is to be adequately cared for.

Let us, however, be patient, advises the Post. Who thought of Schleswig-Holstein and Alsace-Lorraine in 1860; who of African possessions embracing over 2,000,000 square kilometres in 1884? A nation with a history of 2,000 years, with an upward tendency, can wait until the ripe grapes fall at her feet. Everything is ready. It is only necessary that German leaders keep their eyes open and miss no opportunity of seizing the chance when the time comes.

PLAYED SAFE.

Mrs. Naggs—"Oh, I'm not afraid of your leaving me. Even if you do, like Enoch Arden, you'll come back."

Naggs—"And, like Enoch, I'd probably wait till I was sure you had married again before I showed up."

The population of Norway, over which King Haakon rules, is roughly 2,300,000.