"Old House"

Or, Dulcie's Confession

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued).

"Please let me go!" she cried, and struggled so violently that he released her. "You must be mad! I have never said I loved you! How can I when I am engaged to Mr. Belturbet?"

Heriott looked at her with surprise.

"Do you mean to tell me," he asked, "that you love Belturbet?"

"Of course I do," replied Dulcie defiantly.

"You poor little thing," said Heriott slowly.

"I don't know what you mean," she retorted, flushing.

"Oh, yes you do," averred her companion with an unpleasant smile. "You understand that I know you don't care a button for Belturbet. It is his house and money that appeal to you. Well, you can have them; but I will tell you this—you will never have his love. I may be penniless, but at least I love you, although I know you are not worth it. But I have done with you now. Take Belturbet and his money, but don't forget that I have had this."

He caught her in his arms and kissed her on the lips.

"He never kissed you like that," he said with a sneer, "and never will!"

Then he turned and left her alone in the dusk of the woods.

Dulcie ran quickly home. She locked herself in her room, and endeavored to calm herself. But it was not easy to shake off the recollection of Jim's kisses; the memory of them still moved her and brought the color to her cheeks. Poor Jim, she thought, how fond he was of her! Quite different from Arthur! Yet what could she do? Give up Arthur for penniless Jim? No. Some girls might do it, but not Dulcie Carwardine, who meant to be something more than the household drudge of a poor man. Still, it was pleasant to dwell on the recollection of Jim's love; it was flattering to think she could inspire such feelings.

She longed to meet him again and tell him how sorry she was that circumstances would not allow her to return his affection—for she did like him, much better than Arthur. She understood him and could always talk freely to him, and he enjoyed his merry jokes and gibes. Poor Jim—yes, and poor Dulcie, too! She liked to have his arms round her, and to have his kisses. It was very hard to be obliged to marry Arthur Belturbet!

Dulcie began to be influenced by thoughts and feelings to which she had hitherto been a stranger. It might be all very well, she decided, to flirt lightly with a man; but to discover that he was in earnest, and that she had to discourage him because she was engaged to some one for whom she did not care in the least, was a serious matter. Before long, her feelings towards Jim underwent a change. It was several days, however, before she realized the real meaning of the alteration.

She did not visit their private letter-box, and spent her afternoons in dreary solitude, wondering how on earth she could get through the coming winter if her only relaxation from the tedium and quietness of the house was to be a morning walk with Arthur Belturbet.

On the fourth day after Heriott's declaration, Dulcie conquered her pride sufficiently to visit the letter-box. It contained nothing. She experienced a great sinking at heart, and before she reached Blue Posts felt that the only thing that mattered was another meeting with Heriott. A thought struck her. Suppose he had left Old House? But if he had, surely Belturbet would have mentioned it. She must see Jim somehow and put things right with him.

She was feverishly anxious by this time, and visited the letter-box very freely during the next few days, but without result. One morning she put a sheet of notepaper between the stones and wrote on it the words: "Stone Gap. Six-thirty to-night."

"If he doesn't go to our 'pillar-box,' he won't know I have written to him," she told herself, "and if he does go, he will come to Stone Gap."

He was there when Dulcie arrived a few minutes late.

"I thought I should never get here," she said breathlessly. "Martha has watched me like a cat watches a mouse."

She smiled at her lover, but no answering smile met her gaze. Jim regarded her with hard eyes.

"What do you want to see me for?" he asked brusquely.

Dulcie, who had expected a very different greeting, felt a shock of surprise.

"For many reasons," she said in an aggrieved tone.

"Well, be as quick as you can," was the cool retort, "because I have only a few minutes to spare."

"You are forgetting your manners," said Dulcie, crimsoning with mortification.

"I am not going to forget again that you are engaged to Arthur Belturbet," was the significant reply. "And since you are, it will be better in future for us to see very little of each other. You made a fool of me once, but I don't propose to give you the opportunity of doing so a second time."

"You are exceedingly rude!" cried Dulcie hotly.

"We need not discuss my manners," replied Jim. "You wished to see me, and I am here."

He looked at her unmoved. Dulcie struggled with her disappointment. Instead of the tender words and glances she had expected, and, indeed, hoped for, she encountered only this frigid demeanour!

"I think you are very unkind," she said in an injured tone, which, however, appeared to have no effect on the man who stood looking at her. "Very unkind indeed. I am sure it was not my fault that you fell in love with me; you knew I was engaged to Arthur. I suppose it was wrong of me to meet you here; but I don't see why you need be horrid or unkind now."

She looked pathetically at him with wistful blue eyes.

"Dulcie," he replied sternly, "I am not going to argue with you—but I want you to understand that I have come to my senses. I have been a cad to make love to you in Belturbet's absence, and worse than a cad to behave as I did when we last met; but as you are going to marry Belturbet, I have determined to put you out of my mind. Philippa and I are returning to London next week, and when we meet again you will be Belturbet's wife, and we shall have both forgotten the folly of this summer."

His calm voice and the finality of his words angered Dulcie beyond control.

"I congratulate you on the wisdom of your decision," she said. "It must be a relief to you to find the wound that you pretended was so deep, is only a superficial scratch!"

"It is, as you surmise, a great consolation to me," he answered, "and it must also be a relief to you to know that you have inflicted no permanent injury."

Dulcie laughed lightly.

"Of course, I am bound to believe you," she said. "The suddenness of the cure is almost as remarkable as the quickness with which you caught the complaint. Good-bye. Give my kind regards to your sister."

With a little nod she left him and returned to her room full of anger and something very much like dismay.

Heriott, whom she thought she could twist around her little finger, had unexpectedly become a very different person. The ardent lover had turned into the cool critic who admitted that he had behaved dishonorably, but was determined to do so no more.

Such a discovery was extremely unflattering, and Dulcie, whose regard for Jim had been growing warmer, felt chilled with disappointment at the repulse she had received. One insistent thought would not leave her. Jim would have nothing more to do with her. It was incredible, intolerable, unpermissible! Why should she, Dulcie, be separated from the only man she had ever loved! For she knew now that she did care for Jim.

"As for Arthur Belturbet, I simply hate him!" she broke out suddenly. "He bores me to exhaustion. We have not a single taste in common, and I would rather die than marry him."

After this ebullition she felt better, although a little ashamed.

"How was I to know?" she asked herself helplessly. "that Arthur and I should not get on together? It wasn't my fault that Jim fell in love with me, or that I prefer him to Arthur. How could I tell what was going to happen? And now Jim pretends he doesn't care for me."

At this point she began to cry, and to pity herself greatly. Here was Dulcie Carwardine who a few weeks ago had made up her mind to marry for money and position, in love with penniless Jim Heriott, who declared that she was a mercenary, and that he did not intend to have anything more to do with her! Oh, why had she not been rich that she could have married whom she liked? If she had ever such a little money she need not marry Arthur Belturbet, and by rights, she and Primrose ought to have the money which had belonged to their mother.

Dulcie cried with renewed vigor as she remembered what Primrose had said about their father's determination to leave them only a pittance.

Then she suddenly stopped crying and held her breath between quivering sobs.

"If there were no Will, the money would be mine and Primrose's," she whispered.

Her sobs ceased, and for a long time she stared with wide eyes into the darkness. Before she fell asleep, she had formulated a plan, which, if it succeeded, would, she believed, bring her what she had desired more than anything else—marriage with Jim Heriott.

CHAPTER VII.

For several days Dulcie meditated whether to tell Arthur Belturbet at once that she only loved him as a brother—or in plain English, to end her engagement to him—or to wait until she was assured of a definite position. That was how she preferred to describe the situation in which she would find herself after the termination of her father's illness.

John Carwardine was undoubtedly dying. Martha's grim features wore, if possible, a harder look, and Primrose's pale and pathetic face, her deeply shadowed gray eyes, filled Arthur Belturbet with the keenest distress whenever he saw her. It was not very often, for he seldom called at Blue Posts, and Dulcie had reduced her walks with him to one every other day, on the plea that she was needed in the invalid's room, but in reality because she feared she might betray herself when she was alone with him. Belturbet was relieved, but politely expressed his regret at seeing her so little.

"Everything seems different now father is ill," Dulcie said to him vaguely, one day. "I don't seem to know what to do or think."

Belturbet remarked that illness was very unsettling. He felt that he was unsympathetic, but his engagement with Dulcie was so unnatural that he was unable to attempt to console or comfort her as a lover should have done. He saw that Primrose was far more in need of help than Dulcie, and it was for Primrose that his heart ached. Dulcie, he knew intuitively, merely regarded her father's illness, now the first shock was over, as an irksome and unpleasant business which could terminate in only one way.

He supposed that when Dulcie was fatherless, he would have to marry her as soon as decorum permitted; it would naturally be expected of him. He blamed himself repeatedly for his folly in being beguiled by forget-me-not blue eyes and red lips. If Philippa could have read his thoughts she would have been able to say with truth: "I could have told you so, only you would not have believed me."

A hundred times, he wished himself back in his chambers, a briefless barrister, poor, it is true, but happy and unfettered, bound by honor to no woman, and at liberty to woo where he chose. He had been far happier, he told himself bitterly, a year ago. There was no doubt about it, he was a fool! He confessed it many times, yet he was prepared to abide by the consequences of his folly.

It never occurred to him for a moment that Dulcie might give him his freedom. She seemed so entirely satisfied with his perfunctory attentions that he took it for granted that his extremely cool wooing suited her mood.

Many plans were maturing in Dulcie's pretty head, but she feared to break with Belturbet, lest the precautions she had taken to prevent herself and Primrose being left practically penniless on her father's death should prove unsuccessful.

The Heriotts had left Old House and returned to their flat in London, both in bad tempers owing to the failure of their plans. Jim worked furiously in his little workshop, haunted by exceedingly unpleasant recollections. He had made love to the girl his best friend was engaged to, and ended by quarrelling with her—in fact, he had behaved like a cad all the way round. He knew that Dulcie was a pretty, mercenary little creature, but since he happened to be in love with her, he regarded her failings and peccadilloes with a very lenient eye. She might be selfish and untruthful and a host of other things, but she was bewitching little Dulcie Carwardine, and he loved her, and—there it was! So he shut himself up in his workshop and spoilt a large quantity of good materials in a savage endeavor to invent something that would—to use his own words—make the engineering world "sit up."

While Dulcie was trying to make up her mind to regain her freedom, Belturbet struggling to reconcile himself to the unenviable state of being engaged to a girl he did not love, Primrose striving to understand why everything had gone wrong in her little world, and old Martha trying her best to conceal the triumph she felt in having achieved the object for which she had schemed during the last ten years, John Carwardine died.

The day that followed was to Primrose and Dulcie a waking nightmare. Belturbet called and saw two white-faced girls with eyes swimming in tears. To Primrose her father's death was pitiful in its loneliness, and she sorrowed honestly for him. Dulcie wept in sympathy and because her tears came easily.

They had few friends, and Belturbet was almost their only visitor. Martha possessed herself of the keys of the house, and Primrose felt too ill to request them to be handed over to her.

"You are too yielding, Primrose!" said Dulcie. "But never mind, perhaps Martha is not quite as clever as she believes herself to be. There is such a thing as counting your chickens before they are hatched."

Primrose looked blankly at Dulcie, who, in spite of the shadow that lay on the house, did not seem particularly dispirited.

"Mr. Norton, the lawyer, will be here to-morrow," she said. "Then I suppose we shall know the worst."

"Don't worry, Prim," replied Dulcie consolingly. "I dare say things won't be so very bad after all. I can't believe that father meant it when he told you that he had only left us fifty pounds a year each."

"He spoke as if he did."

"Ah, well," said Dulcie, "it is always darkest just before the dawn."

Then she changed the subject.

John Carwardine was buried in the little churchyard; his two daughters, Arthur Belturbet, Doctor Crewe, Mr. Norton, and Martha, were his only mourners. Martha Craddock—for this was her name—with a new and very unbecoming black bonnet, and a rusty black dress, followed Primrose and Dulcie and the lawyer into the room that had been Mr. Carwardine's study, when they returned from the funeral.

Richard Norton was a pleasant, middle-aged man, who made himself very agreeable to the daughters of his late client, whose monetary affairs he had managed for many years. When Martha followed them into the study, he looked inquiringly at her.

"I am here, because I believe the master left me a legacy," she said with a toss of her head. "He told me more than once he was going to do so."

"That is very possible," said Mr. Norton genially, looking at John Carwardine's daughters, but neither made any remark.

Primrose was anxious to know the worst, and she felt too tired and unnerved to say anything; Dulcie's feelings were very different.

"Mr. Carwardine made a Will when your mother died ten years ago," said Mr. Norton, "under which he divided his money between his two daughters."

"It was our mother's money, you know, Mr. Norton," said Dulcie distinctly. "My father had not a penny of his own when my mother married him, so naturally our mother's money will come to us."

"Quite so," said Richard Norton pleasantly, "and I have here the Will that leaves the money to you and your sister."

As he drew a legal-looking envelope from his pocket, Martha Craddock rose from the chair on which she had seated herself and spoke brusquely.

"Mr. Carwardine made another Will some weeks ago—he told me so," she announced.

"Indeed," said Richard Norton, raising his eyebrows. "Who drew up the Will and witnessed it?"

"The master asked Doctor Crewe to write it for him, and the doctor witnessed it, and James the gardener," replied Martha shortly.

"Indeed," remarked Mr. Norton again. "Do you know where the Will is?"

"I heard the master ask the doctor to put it in one of the drawers of his writing-desk here,"—she looked toward the desk in question which stood in a recess in the room. "And I believe the doctor did so, and locked the drawer and returned the key to the master."

"We had better see if we can find this document," said Mr. Norton drily. "I doubt, however, whether Mr. Carwardine's medical adviser could draw up a Will which would be legal. Nevertheless, we will have a look at it. Have you the key of your father's desk, Miss Carwardine?"

"Martha took all the keys immediately our father died," said Dulcie. "By what right I have not the slightest idea, because I cannot believe she is entitled to do so."

"The keys, of course, should be in Miss Carwardine's possession," replied Mr. Norton.

Martha shot a venomous glance at the two girls, thrust a hand into a capacious pocket, drew out a heavy bunch of keys and flung them on the writing table.

"There they are!" she said rudely.

Mr. Norton picked them up and handed them to Primrose.

"Do you know which is the key of the writing-table?" he asked.

There were a good many drawers to be opened and a quantity of papers to be searched through, but Mr. Norton found no trace of a Will.

"There does not seem to be any such document," he said, turning to Martha.

"It must be somewhere," she asserted doggedly; "I remember the master telling Doctor Crewe to put it in his desk."

"Shall we help you to look through the papers?" asked Dulcie sweetly. "Perhaps Martha can find it."

Thereupon they all began to search the drawers of the desk, Martha with feverish haste, Dulcie without much sign of anxiety, and Primrose with careful thoroughness. But they could discover nothing like a Will.

"Suppose we send for Doctor Crewe and question him," suggested Mr. Norton.

Martha went off hurriedly to fetch him, and when she had gone Mr. Norton looked at the two girls with a slightly puzzled air.

"It is rather odd," he said, "that if your father intended to make another Will he did not send for me."

"I think it most peculiar," agreed Dulcie. "I don't understand it at all, do you, Primrose?"

"No," answered Primrose quietly, "because if our father made a Will, it ought to be here."

"Well, let us have tea, and when Doctor Crewe comes, perhaps he can throw some light on the matter," said Dulcie.

It was nearly an hour before Martha returned with the doctor.

"Here they are!" cried Dulcie as she saw them coming up the drive.

"I should like to speak to Doctor Crewe first, with your permission," said Mr. Norton.

"Please do everything that ought to be done in the circumstances," replied Primrose.

(To be continued.)

GERMAN DEAD MERE LADS.

French and Germans of Every Class Lose Flower of Youth.

A Belgian despatch recently called attention to the youth of the German soldiers as if this were a surprising thing. But the German, like the French, standing army is, of course, composed of boys between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four. Each year a third of the army goes back to civilian life and a new third is recruited. None of these are, of course, married; hence there are few widows being made by the German fighting round Liege, if this is any compensation for the loss of the flower of the country's youth.

It is only when the French and German reservists join the first line that married and older men are in action. This is, by the way, quite unlike the record of our own volunteer regiments in which so many of the men were married. As for the French and German non-commissioned officers, they are, of course, in large part professional soldiers and family men, like their officers. But their soldiers are too often mere boys just out of school, without the faintest appreciation, perhaps, of what the war is all about.

In a sense these armies are democratic, because the sons of rich and poor alike serve; the educated for a year only, and perhaps in crack regiments; but there is no class in France or Germany that will not pay a terrible price in young men for the inhumanity that is going on to-day.

The Real Test.

"Success brings out a man's friends."

"Yes, but if you want to know your real friends count the few who support you when you don't seem to have a chance to win."

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THE DEFENCES OF PARIS

STRONGEST FORTIFICATIONS IN THE WORLD.

Half a Million Men Necessary to Invest the French Capital.

While details of the defences of Paris are guarded with strict secrecy by the French military authorities, yet their general character and formidable strength are well known to military experts, who recognize them as among the strongest fortifications in the world.

The fortifications consist of three distinct circles sweeping around the city—first, the solid wall of masonry 18 feet high, extending for 22 miles around the old sections of Paris; second, the system of 17 detached forts arranged at intervals, two miles beyond the wall, and making a circuit of the city 34 miles long, and, third, an outer girdle of forts 75 miles long on the heights commanding the valley of the Seine.

Each of these circles of masonry and steel is a complete defence in itself, the forts being linked together with redoubts, with bastion and glacis, which permits a cross fire against approaches from any direction. The magnitude of the system is shown by its area, which extends 400 square miles.

Third Line is Modern.

The wall around Paris and the 17 detached forts two miles beyond the walls were built by Louis Phillippe. They sustained the German siege of 1870-1871, and the outer forts have since been greatly strengthened. The third line of forts, on the hills of St. Germain, Cormilles and Villiers, are of modern construction, with the latest types of batteries and heavy guns.

The inner wall about Paris surrounds the best known and most important sections of the city, including the business sections along the grand boulevards, the residence sections to the north and west of the city and the Latin quarter and other sections of the left bank of the Seine. Outside of the wall a circle of suburbs extends for many miles, including Neuilly, Argenteuil, Versailles, Vincennes and many others. The forts of the second and third line of defence are dotted among these suburbs, protecting them and the approaches to the capital. The wall contains 93 bastions and 67 gates. Some of these have been abandoned owing to the pressure of modern construction and trade. But recent advices received here from Paris state that all the gates still existing are now closed at 8 o'clock at night, with rigid regulations against movements from within or without.

The second line of forts includes the famous fortress of Montvalerian, which was the centre of attack in the German siege of 1870. It is strengthened by two groups of works—Pautes Bruyeres and the Chatillon fort and batteries. South of the city is the row of forts at Ivry, Bictre, Mont Rouge, Vanves and Issy. North and east of the city are three great forts around St. Denis, and two others at Fort Aubervillers and Fort Charenton, commanding the approaches from the great wood of Bondy.

Defences Require 170,000 Men.

The outer circle of forts, which are of the most modern type, have from 24 to 60 heavy guns, and 600 to 1,200 men. In all the three lines of defences require 170,000 men to operate them, not counting troops assembled within the city. According to military experts it would require a force of 500,000 men to invest these defences.

General Count von Moltke, field marshal of the German forces at the time of the siege of Paris of 1870-71, stated in a report on that siege that the French artillery armament consisted of more than 2,600 pieces, including 200 of the largest calibre of naval ordnance. There were 500 rounds for each gun, and a reserve of 3,000,000 kilograms of powder. Count von Moltke emphasized that the bombardment of a fortified place in the heart of an enemy's country was difficult, if not impossible, unless the invader was master of the railways or waterways by which heavy siege artillery could be brought up in full quantity. He explains the failure to bombard Paris at the outset of the siege by saying it would have required 300 heavy guns with 500 rounds for each gun. The movement forward of these heavy guns would have required 4,500 four-wheeled wagons and 10,000 horses, which were not available.

At a later stage the Germans brought up their big siege guns attacking the enciente and ports, and dropping 300 to 400 15-centimetre shells into the heart of the city. Notwithstanding the fury of the German attacks, Paris withstood the siege for 132 days. Since then the entirely new and outer third line of defence has been erected, and military experts say the fortifications as a whole are far more formidable than those which resisted the siege of 1870-71.

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WHY KAISER DECLARED WAR.

Did Not Want to be Called "William the Coward" Again.

There is no longer any doubt that, from a very early date after the news of Serajevo murder reached the Emperor at Kiel, his Majesty had determined "to see the thing through"—to see it through against Russia, so says the Berlin correspondent of the London Times. In his speech from the throne to the Reichstag the Emperor said that the Serajevo murders "opened up an abyss." At any rate they caused his Majesty to lose his head. He hastened back to Berlin—only to involve himself in a quarrel with Vienna about the State funeral, which after all for imaginery reasons of ill-health he did not attend. His Majesty then went on his northern cruise, but returned to Berlin suddenly on July 26, to the open regret of the Foreign Office, as the British Charge d'Affaires, Sir Horace Rumbold, telegraphed to London.

As soon as the crisis became acute I made some inquiries about the Emperor's earlier frame of mind, and was told on excellent authority that for the first time he had abandoned the part of "keeper of the peace." There were in fact to be no more German newspaper articles in the press such as appeared during the Morocco crisis under the heading "Guillaume le Poltron." I do not mean that the Emperor was determined upon war, but he had removed his restraining hand, and Germany drifted slowly but surely through the cross-currents to the Russian ultimatum and to war. The more sincere the efforts made for peace, the more futile they were. Instead of drawing back from the "abyss," Germany tumbled into it.

The only justification, if it is a justification, that can be offered of the Emperor's attitude is that he was deeply moved by the Serajevo murders and believed that their iniquity would unite Western Europe even at the cost of the obligations and interests of the Western powers—other than Germany. He could, as a matter of fact, have achieved very different results by almost any other course than that which he actually followed, a course which led straight to a repetition of the effort made successfully in 1909 to humiliate Russia, and led straight to an unnecessary and immoral war with France and England. Against France Germany has no shadow of a case, and has merely unmasked her contemptuous covetousness.

FAMOUS IRON CROSS.

German Kaiser Revives Coveted Insignia Bestowed for Valor.

Shortly after the opening of hostilities the German Kaiser, following the precedent established by William I., reinstituted the famous Order of the Iron Cross. The New York Staats-Zeitung furnishes an interesting history of this coveted mark of distinction which is awarded solely for the performance of deeds of the highest valor on the field of battle.

King Frederick William III. of Prussia founded the order on March 10, 1813, as a reward for services rendered to the Fatherland in the Napoleonic wars. The plainness of the iron insignia was intended to remind its wearers of the hard times that had brought it into being. It was a small iron Maltese cross inlaid with a narrow silver band just inside the bevelled edge. The only other marks upon it were three oak leaves in the centre, the royal initials, F.W., surmounted by a small crown, and the date 1813. As is customary in the case of royal orders, there were two clasps and a grand cross, the later twice the regular size. In 1841 a permanent endowment was added paying fixed annual sums to the wearers of the decoration.

On July 19, 1870, the day that France again declared war on Prussia, the order was revived by King William I. on the same conditions as originally instituted. At that time the three oak leaves were dropped, and the letter W, the crown, and the date 1870 were substituted for the original marks, but the three leaves were restored by an order of the Imperial Council in 1895. The decoration as revised in 1870 has been bestowed on 48,574 German warriors of all classes, including those coming from German States outside of Prussia.

The Grand Cross is conferred only on commanding officers who have won a decisive battle followed by the forced retirement of an enemy, for the capture of an important fort, or for successfully defending a fort against the enemy's capture. In addition to the soldiers who have won the cross for individual acts of distinguished valor, it has been granted to all members of regiments that have performed especially meritorious service. There is no decoration for a German military man that carries with it a greater glory than the Iron Cross, and it is significant that the thousands of veterans who possess this priceless decoration have always been looked upon with the most profound respect by the entire German public.

War Refugees—Pitiable Sights on the Road Between Malines and Brussels—A Continual Stream of Refugees on Foot and in All Kinds of Vehicles.