THE LAPSE OF ENOCH WENTWORTH

By ISABEL GORDON CURTIS,

Author of "The Woman from Wolvertons"

CHAPTER X.—(Cont'd).

"She had. She came in, after drifting through the provinces in small parts, and chance threw in her way one of the most destantly female parts ever put on the stage. She made it so real that, blase old theater goer as I am, I longed to throttle her. One night I happened to meet her socially. Zilla Paget assured me that in one case at least my theory was right. She was everything she portrayed on the stage, and beyond this, she was absolutely drunken with vanity."

"Are you sure she is so bad?" Enoch spoke coldly. "She is one of the most beautiful women I ever saw in my life."

"That makes her more dangerous. I have actually doubted whether I did right when I brought her to a new country and put her among decent people.'

"Have you anything against the woman except—theories?"

"Merely scraps of her history, which are authentic. She came from the lowest stratum of factory life in Leeds and married above her. The young husband was devoted to her. A baby came, a little boy who was blind. To that sort of woman neither child nor husband is a tie. She broke loose, a year or two after her marriage, and lost any self-respect she had ever had. The husband shot himself, she abandoned the child and left London. Then she went on the stage.

"There was nothing then actually chiminal in her career?" asked Wentworth. He was conscious of a certain absurd irritation.

Oswald hesitated. "Not actually criminal, I suppose. The law has not made so fine a point as to indict a woman when she driven a man to suicide."

"What do you think of changing in her part?" asked Wentworth brusquely.

"I was going to suggest you make 'Mrs. Esterbrook' coarser, more flamboyant, more heartless. Do not give her a solitary trait of motherhood. She is the very opposite of 'Cordelia,' with her love and tenderness or a broken father."

"How do you account for a woman of that sort having such a child?"

"Really now, Wentworth, that's up to you; both of them are your creation!"

"Yes certainly," Enoch laughed grimly. "Still it is an anomaly you don't often see in real life."

"It is," assented Oswald. "Here's Miss Paget—watch her in the scene I've mentioned.'

The eyes of both men followed the woman as she moved slowly across the stage. She dropped into a chair and waited for her cue. She did not look the traditional adventuress. She had a curiously pale, transparent skin, into which, during excited moments, the blood flushed rosily. Masses of yellow silky hair were brushed back in simple waves from her forehead. She used little make-up or artifice o any-sort. Her eyes were intensely blue. There was a lovely cleft dimple in her chin. Although well along in the thirties she retained her girlish face and figure.

Wentworth turned to Oswald with a flush of irritation. "It doesn't seem fair to make a degenerate of such a woman; she doesn't look it."

"That's where the mischief lies," answered Oswald quietly.

The rehearsal went on. Miss Paget took her cue. Both men watched her critically. Wentworth drew a long breath when the scene with "Cordelia" in the second act was over. The woman certainly could act!

"She'll do," said Enoch heartily. "Only," he added after a moment's hesitation, "how does Dorcas strike you? Is she strong enough? It doesn't seem to me as if she saw all the possibilities of 'Cordelia.' "

'Wentworth, your sister is going to surprise you. Take my word for it. She is nervous now, but—"

"It's a devil of a risk. 'Cordelia's' such a big part and Dorcas has had no training."

"She's does not need training—the conventional training you have in mind."

"If she ails it puts me in a nasty light with the public—producing a play simply to exploit my sister." Enoch's tone was curt.

"She won't fail." Oswald spoke with quiet assurance. "Think over my suggestion about 'Mrs. Esterbrook's' part. It is there where 'Cordelia' leaves her—the mother knows the daughter well enough to realize it is good-by forever—that you want to cut out every spark of motherly feeling. Once or twice she almost pulls on the audience for sympathy. When 'Cordelia' shows her contempt for the mother and shatters her every ambition, there could not be a solitary throb of pity, remorse or love—it is not in her."

Oswald dropped the subject. Wentworth began to twist his hands nervously, a habit he had when disturbed.

The Englishman sat back in silence, watching the rehearsal intently. Merry stood leaning against a stucco pillar. In this act he did not appear, but occasionally against the sharp commands of the stage manager, his voice rang out in brief, concise suggestions.

"What a remarkable conception Merry has of every character," whispered Oswald. Enoch did not speak. "Gilbert resents my orders—in a fashion," continued the Englishman. "I told him to act on any suggestion that Merry offered. Gilbert would not say a word if you went back and threw in an idea here and there; a stage manager expects that from the author. I should think you would do it occasionally.'

"It isn't in my line." Wentworth spoke sullenly. "Every move is put into the manuscript as plain as a pike-staff."

"Yes, but—" Oswald glanced at his companion curiously, then he dropped the subject. "It strikes me Merry has changed. The night I spoke to him on the L he was like a boy with some grand secret up his sleeve. Today he takes nothing but a half-languid interest in the whole thing. He is going to give a remarkable portrayal of 'John Esterbrook,' but when he is not acting he seems to have no interest in life. What do you lay it to?"

"Don't ask me," murmured Wentworth. "He's a man of moods, I gave up trying to understand him years ago."

"Even when it came to the question of salary he didn't show any interest He wouldn't set a figure. I don't know yet if he thinks the price I named was right. He closed with my first offer, signed the contract, then walked out."

"It's the biggest wad he ever drew."

"He'll prove himself worth every ha'penny of it."

Wentworth rose and pulled his hat from under the seat.

"Don't you want to see the rehearsal out?" asked Oswald suddenly.

"No, I'm going home. I may put your suggestion into shape while it is fresh in my mind."

Enoch paused in the theatre to light a cigar. A newspaper man, who was an old friend, approached, full of eager inquiry about the progress of the play. Wentworth brushed him aside quickly and strode out to the street. A moment later he felt a twinge of remorse. The man's congratulations had been heartfelt. He could not shake off the memory of a startled astonishment that came into his face at the brusque reception. He was a good fellow, there had been pleasant companionship with him in the old days. The old days seemed ages ago, further back then the gaiety of childhood.

He left Broadway, walking with quick, nervous strides until he found himself far over on the East side, wandering aimlessly through wretched streets, populated by the drift from nations. The sidewalks were thronged with children. Occasionally Enoch swore beneath his breath as he escaped tumbling over them during his hurried, headlong progress. When he turned a corner he found his way blockade by a huge safe that was being hoisted into a warehouse. He glanced at the street, it was ankle deep inslush. Suddenly the odor of hot bread was wafted to him from a little restaurant cavern below the sidewalk. He remembered he had eaten no breakfast, and it aroused a sudden sense of hunger. He ran quickly down the steps. The small dining room was remarkably clean. He sat down with a sense of satisfaction which seemed alien to such a place.

"Bring me coffee and a steak, a first-class steak done rare," he ordered. "Cook it carefully."

He was alone in the small room. It was quiet except for the shrill voices of children on the sidewalk. He had not known a moment of peace or solitude for months. All his life he had scoffer at nerves as a delusion He wondered if he had been wrong whether nerves might not be a stern reality. If they were, he had them. His mind went flashing over the events of the past fortnight, since the night, when, weary, harassed, and hopeless, he returned from Montreal to be met by Dorcas with the news that Merry had returned and was ready to begin rehearsals. It still exasperated him when he remembered how stubbornly she had refused details of Andrew's home-coming. All he learned was that the actor had seen Oswald and was rehearsing from morning till night.

A few days later in the foyer of the Gotham, when he came face to face with Merry, the plan of their future intercourse was determined instantly. Wentworth had been in a mood to welcome reconciliation and friendship; Andrew was cold, courteous, and singularly unapproachable. Enoch's warmth was chilled and his pride aroused. He plunged fiercely into work, scarcely snatching time to eat or sleep. More than once Oswald had remonstrated; he could see that the man was working beyond the limit of human capacity. Work was the only thing that would whip retrospection from his mind. Drink had never been a temptation to Wentworth—it was nothing but a side issue to sociability—so he did not take to it now. He realized he was losing old friends; he had tossed one of them aside to-day.

The intuition which is bred by a guilty conscience began to play strange pranks with him. He felt as if Oswald had guessed his secret and was driving him into a corner by the suggestion that he remodel the play. He saw Dorcas each day grow colder and more suspicious. Merry at one glance had thrust him outside the pale of acquaintanceship. Within ten days "The House of Esterbrook" would have its first production.

Enoch shivered with apprehension as he thought of it. A queer thing had loomed up in his mind during the past few days. A decade ago a club friend with a fad for palmistry had insisted on reading his hand. The man prophesied a physical and moral downfall in the course of 12 years. Wentworth laughed at the idea, forgot it completely, then one night the memory of it came to him like a shot. He would have given all he possessed to return to the morning when Merry burst in upon him full of gaiety and hope. He could not go back; it was like unsnarling a tangle of string when one found no visible end where the task could be commenced.

He was aroused by a clatter of dishes. The waiter set the breakfast before him. As he ate he laid a morning paper on the table and began to read; there had been no chance earlier in the day to glance at it. The first thing his eye fell upon was a column about "The House of Esterbrook." The public seemed to await the production with unusual anticipation. Merry had the enthusiastic following which is so often bestowed upon an erratic, lovable genius. Wentworth's fame as a journalist was of long standing, and Oswald, Englishman as he was, had already won friends among newspaper men. Wentworth read it quickly, then he turned to the news of the day. Nothing interested him—the sparkle had gone out of life as the bead dies on champagne. He drank a second, then a third cup of strong coffee, which acted upon him as whiskey does on some men.

(To be continued).

ON THE FARM

After-Harvest Cultivation.

By the time the last cultivation has been given the corn and root fields there is usually one of more fields on the farm from which the season's harvest has been gathered. The aim on many farms is to give such fields, as are not seeded down, some form of tillage during the early fall. This used to be the general practice, but of late years it appears to be going out of vogue. Scarcity of labor is one reason why the amount of early fall cultivation is decreasing. The acreage devoted to corn has increased greatly of recent years, and the harvesting of this important crop commences soon after the grain crop is garnered and encroaches somewhat on the time previously used in stirring the surface soil.

Cultivation at the right time is one of the most effective means of keeping noxious weeds in check and when the surface soil is loosened the evaporation of moisture is reduced to a minimum. By capillary action of the soil, moisture is being continually drawn from the great reservoir to the surface for the use of growing crops. The plants shade the ground and there is very little moisture lost by direct evaporation, but so soon as the crop is harvested there is nothing to check the escape of water from the soil unless a dust mulch is made by some means of cultivation. It may seem absurd to commence in August to save moisture for the following season's crops. However, in the average season it is necessary, as only about one-half the amount of moisture required to grow and mature a crop falls during the growing season. The fall, winter and spring rains must be depended upon to fill the soil with moisture to furnish the crop with a drink when it most requires it. The soil should be looked upon as a great reservoir, that not only contains plant food, but also holds vast quantities of water. Without water the plant food does not become readily available and the plant soon wilts. It is the duty of the tiller of the soil to make conditions right for the filling of this reservoir with water as well as plant food, and late summer or early fall is not too soon to commence. A hard, compact surface soil does not absorb the rains that come as readily as a soil with good tilth. Of course, a soil covered with a luxurian growth of clover or other growing crop, that completely covers the surface, is in a condition to make the best use of the water that falls. The bare stuble field requires to be gone over with plow, cultivator or disk.

Then, there is the weed problem. Many annual weeds ripen their seeds before the grain is harvested. These seeds fall to the ground, and if the soil is stirred many will germinate and then be destroyed with later cultivation. There are also varieties of weeds that appear to grow up and produce seed after the crop is harvested. Ragweed is a representative of this class. Many of the perennial weeds as twitch grass, sow thistle and bladder campion can be materially checked in their growth if not entirely eradicated by thorough after-harvest cultivation. Usually there are several weeks of dry, hot weather at this season which soon destroys any roots exposed to the surface. More fall cultivation would aid in lessening the numbers of weeds and with many soils would tend to increase the crop yields.

Time to Cultivate.

It is important that the work be done as soon as possible after the crop is removed from the field. On some farms this phase of the season's work is considered to be so important that the binder is followed with the disc or cultivator. This is not practicable on most farms owing to the lack of sufficient horse power and men. However, the work should be done soon after the crop is removed from the field. It is not uncommon, especially in a catchy season, to see the cultivator or plow being used between the rows of stooks. The sooner the work is done the greater the opportunity of conserving soil moisture and of destroying weeds.

Methods of Cultivation Followed.

The gang plow is the implement most generally used. It can be set to cut and turn a shallow furrow. If carefully handled every weed will be cut and turned under, thus exposing the roots to the hot rays of the sun. This is an advantage when it is desirious of destroying weeds with running root stocks. The plowed land should be harrowed a couple of times to form a mulch. Where weeds are bad, a broad-share cultivator can be effectively used. If time will permit, a cultivation every week should be given a weed infested field that has been gang-plowed. Careless plowing and failure to cultivate will not tend to eradicate weeds.

Where it is not thought advisable to use the plow, two or three times over the field with a sharp disk will pulverize the soil and put it in a condition so that moisture will be absorbed and retained and weeds will commence growth. The spring or stiff-toothed cultivator has also been used to good advantage on the bare stubble field. If a month or more elapses between breaking the crust and deep fall plowing there will likely be a crop growing which will indicate the number of weed seeds which have started growth only to be destroyed before they have an opportunity of reproducing themselves. Without cultivation many of these seeds would never have germinated until the following spring where, under shelter of the growing crop they would have a better opportunity to complete their life cycle. Fields not in clover, grass or other crop are benefitted by fall cultivation.

Invariably the fields that have been cultivated plow easier in the fall, especially when the weather sets in dry. True, it may be a slight disadvantage in a wet season as it is possible for a field to be too wet to plow, but this is the exception, not the rule. Too few plowmen use a "jointer" or "skimmer" on their plow when giving a field its final plowing for the season. By its use all growth is turned under and not only does the furrow have a better appearance, but weeds and grass are completely buried. Without the light few plants survive long. A more general use of this small attachment to the plow would aid in keeping the fields freer from plants, which may be termed soil-robbers.

In some sections, after-harvest cultivation consists in plowing deep, and following up with surface cultivation until winter sets in. Sod, as well as stubble fields, are treated this way. As soon as time will permit after the hay or grain is removed the fields to be broken up in the fall are plowed the usual depth, varying from five to seven or eight inches, depending on the nature of subsoil. It is essential that a skimmer be used on the plow. These fields are gone over with the cultivator or disc and harrows several times during the fall. No growth is allowed to get a start and many weeds are destroyed. This method has proved quite effective in dealing with sow thistle.

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