

IN ONE SHORT YEAR!

If the Rector of Chelton could cut out, obliterate, forget one short year of the forty-five he has lived he might be a happy man; or as happy as a mortal may be, who recognizes the responsibilities and duties of life.

His living is a rich one. He has no domestic worries or aggrieved parishioners. He is of good family—so good that he takes his place among the county people as much by right as by courtesy. In spite of his grave, not to say austere, manners, he has won the love of his parishioners and friends; and if the world he rules spiritually is a little one, his writings have carried his name far beyond it. Certainly the Rev. Percival Blake is a successful man and could that one year be forgotten might be a happy one.

The story of the year he would consign to oblivion is this:

Ten years ago, at half-past six o'clock on the 31st of December, the stars were shining brightly; at eight o'clock the congregation coming out of Chelton Church found a heavy snow-storm raging. The wind had changed. An army of dark clouds had hurried up and was attacking the earth so furiously that already everything within range was white with snow.

The Rector's mother, a lady of stately presence, came down the aisle attended by her two daughters. She paused to address a few reproachful words to the sexton, respecting the low temperature inside the church; then passed into the porch, which was full of members of the congregation preparing to fight their way home through the unexpected snow-storm. Wishing all present a happy new year, the ladies wrapped their cloaks around them, and at a brisk pace went up the lane which led to the Rectory.

There was warmth and comfort. The reflection of a roaring fire danced on every polished oak panel of the dining-room. Mrs. Blake and her daughters gathered round the blaze like priestesses round an altar; and the bell was rung to show they were ready for tea.

It was a week day. The service had been held to mark the last day of the year. The rector, a sensible man, disapproved of midnight services. His flock were better in bed at such an hour. So he had given them the ordinary evening, and preached a short suitable sermon. His work over, he was expected home every moment.

The tea came, but not the rector. The cozys were put on the teapot, and the hot cakes placed inside the fender. The ladies sat toasting themselves and discussing who were and who were not at church.

Presently Selina, the youngest daughter, locked out of the window and reported that the lights of the church were extinguished. It was decided that Percival had gone on some errand of charity, so the ladies began tea without him. Mrs. Blake was filling the cups for the second time when the missing rector entered.

Percival Blake was above middle height, and strongly but not clumsily built. His face must be described by a word which would convey more than "handsome"—it was a fine face. If now, and when in repose, it wore an expression of contented indolence, it was nevertheless the face of a man from whom something out of the common might be expected.

The truth is, his life had been far too uneventful and easy. He possessed abilities which had never yet been fully called forth; he was capable of passion that had never yet been aroused. The sharp spur of ambition had not yet gored his flanks. This may be understood when one knows that at thirty he was Rector of Chelton—and even now, at thirty-five, he had not met the woman he could love.

Young as he was when the late rector, his father, died, his succession was a matter beyond question. The living of Chelton belongs to Lord Keynsham, and, as all the county knows, Percival's father was Lord Keynsham's first cousin. That the young clergyman was to stand in his father's shoes had been settled long ago. He had been brought up to do so as surely as a merchant's son is brought up to enter his business.

So the boy was apprenticed to the trade. There was no question as to his fitness for the sacred office. The fact of his being his father's son settled this. He himself accepted his position as a matter of course, and after a creditable career at Oxford, settled down to do duty as his father's curate.

He was a conscientious man, and did his work well. But his life had been made too simple, too easy for a man of his powers. It seemed all arranged: beginning, middle, and end.

His father died. He took his place, his mother and sisters living on at the rectory, and looking after the needs of the parish even as they did in his father's reign. At first they supposed Percival would marry; after a year or two they believed, perhaps, he would not; now they looked upon him as cut out for a bachelor, and felt pretty sure of their tenure.

"You are late, my dear," said Mrs. Blake, as the young rector took his seat. "Yes, and cold and hungry too."

They ministered to his creature comforts. He drank his tea and ate his muffins with gusto.

"Your sermon was very powerful," said Mrs. Blake. "At times I think you preach almost up to your poor father's level."

"Thank you," said Percival, suppressing a smile. Preaching had not been his predecessor's forte.

"Percival," said Maria, his eldest sister, "did you notice a lady in black? She sat in the south aisle."

The lady may be confiding, but a clergyman's mother and sisters know he is able, and often ready, to take stock of his congregation.

"Well?" asked Mrs. Blake, severely. "Jones went to the Red Lion for a cab, or some conveyance. I tried a little amateur surgery."

"Alone with her in the vestry?" "Her maid was there. A poor helpless creature, more hindrance than use."

Hilless or not, Mrs. Blake was relieved at hearing about the maid. "Was it a real sprain?" she asked suspiciously.

"The ankle was swollen to an enormous size. I was obliged to cut her boot off."

"Oh!" gasped Mrs. Blake. "And then?" "I ascertained that no bones were broken, bathed it with cold water, and bound it up in a most workmanlike way. Then Jones and the cab came. I saw my patient home, and here I am."

The Rector of Chelton bathing and binding up a young woman's ankle in the vestry was more than Mrs. Blake could stand. She rose from her seat and gave her son her ideas on the subject.

"All I can say is that carrying beautiful young women into vestries, attending to their ailments, and taking them home, is, in my opinion, an unclerical, if not a diabolical, proceeding."

The rector's cheeks flushed, but he checked the hot retort which rose to his lips; still his voice and manner showed there was a limit to maternal authority and his own patience.

"I did not say she was beautiful. I would have done the same for the oldest and ugliest of my congregation. Good-night. I am going to my study."

The ladies looked blank; the more so when the hours passed without his reappearing. It was their custom at the Rectory to watch the old year out, and exchange good wishes as the clock struck twelve. Mrs. Blake grew very fidgety as midnight drew near, and was trying to bring herself to go to her son and ask his pardon. But Percival spared her this by returning of his own accord.

"Mother," he said, "you're ke hastily. But it is the last night of the year; let us forget it."

Mrs. Blake melted. "Oh, Percival, it was only from anxiety on your account!"

He laughed. "I am old enough to look after myself. Yes, my dear. But, Percival, who is she?"

"I told you, Mrs. Russell, the lady just come to the Hollies."

"But who is she? No one knows anything about her. She may be an adventuress."

"Adventuresses are not likely to come to Chelton. Besides, we heard she bought the house, and I suppose has paid for it."

"Is she a lady?" asked Selina—"lady" bore a very high meaning with the Blakes.

"Undoubtedly. You can call and judge for yourselves."

Mrs. Blake made no objection to calling. Unless there was something known against her, the new arrival was entitled to a call from the Rectory folks. Besides, Mrs. Blake, still much troubled by the vestry episode, wanted to see Mrs. Russell and form her own opinions.

Twelve o'clock struck, and after the usual good wishes the family party separated.

"What will the new year bring?" said the rector, as he undressed himself. "Not much change so far as Chelton is concerned. That was a very beautiful woman," he added.

The next morning, in spite of the four inches of snow, Percival Blake felt bound to walk to the Hollies and inquire after his new parishioner. The Hollies, a medium-sized house, stood in about half an acre of garden on the outskirts of Chelton village. At the back were meadows and through the meadows ran the deep Chelton brook or river, as the inhabitants were pleased to call it. The Rectory was half a mile from the Hollies, and Percival, as he walked the distance, had time to wonder why a beautiful young woman like Mrs. Russell should choose Chelton as an abode. Not that society was wanting, provided one was duly accredited. But the country people are rigidly exclusive, and few enter the circle on their own merits. The impression Mrs. Russell had given the rector was that of a woman who would scarcely be contented with the society of the doctor's and lawyer's wives and daughters, much less with that of the respectable farmers' women-kind.

Mrs. Russell was better. She was up, and would be glad to see Mr. Blake. The rector hesitated—thinking of his snow-caked boots—but after some vigorous work with scraper and door-mat, decided to go; he might venture into a drawing-room, so he followed the servant to Mrs. Russell and his fate.

His first thought was that, high as he had ranked her beauty, he had underestimated it. But then he had seen her in the dimly-lighted vestry, and while she was suffering great pain. Now!

An artist should have painted her! A sculptor should have fixed that attitude immovably in marble! She lay on a couch with a scarer and door-mat, decided to go; he might venture into a drawing-room, so he followed the servant to Mrs. Russell and his fate.

Nevertheless, they called at the Hollies, and Mrs. Blake's heart sunk as she saw that Percival had not been led astray by the glamour of good looks when he declared that Mrs. Russell was a lady. Maria and Selina, the rector's sisters, two plain, middle-aged women, who had outlived envy of another's personal charms, rather inclined to the new-comer; but their mother was obtuse. She shook her head ominously.

"There is a mystery," she said. "There is something wrong with that woman; I have a presentiment."

Mrs. Blake's presentiments were not things to be trifled with. However, a kind of reserved friendship sprang up between the ladies. Mrs. Blake looked upon it as an *ad-motum*, under cover of which she could better protect her son from the allurements of this mysterious siren.

But unhappily that son began to manifest a strength of will and determination to walk his own way, and, moreover, walked that way so far and so openly that the folks about Chelton began to talk; but even that troubled the rector very little.

He had long left off deceiving himself. His fate had met him. He loved this woman with all the strength of his really strong nature, and was striving, in deadly earnest, to make her love him. His passion had swept away all domestic barriers. Mother, sisters, everything faded into insignificance beside it. Life without that one woman's life was worthless. The touch of her hand, the look of her dark eyes, the sound of her musical voice, thrilled him. The Rector of Chelton loved at last—loved as only one man out of a thousand can love. He was not the sparkling transient emotion of a boy—not the dotage of the septuagenarian—it was the ardent glowing passion of a man—the love of a lifetime!

He blamed himself bitterly for this compromise surrender to one dominant passion. He saw what dangers he might be led into, and yet he could not resist his fate. His unhealthy state of mind was clearly shown in his behavior. He was engaged in the performance of a peculiarly painful duty. A son of one of his parishioners had murdered his sweetheart. He was now lying in the sweethearth. Under sentence of death it was county jail under sentence of death and imprisonment. His father, with tears in his eyes, begged Percival Blake to visit his boy and beg his father to give him a respite. The criminal had once been the brightest of the village boys and a great favorite of Percival's. Perhaps his pleading might succeed where another's failed. The rector at once visited the jail, and tried all his powers of persuasion to bring the convict to a proper frame of mind. But his labor was vain. The young man was quiet and respectful. He regretted the necessity for the deed, but not the deed itself.

"I loved her," he said sullenly. "No other man should have her. I would do it again rather."

Percival prayed and reasoned without moving him an atom. But the murderer at last turned to him and said: "You've never loved a girl like I did, Mr. Blake, or you'd have done just the same."

Percival Blake turned pale. The thought struck him like a bullet—the man was speaking the truth. He—even he, the Rector of Chelton—would kill his love rather than another man should have her!

"God help me!" he groaned. "I must end this."

So one bright afternoon in April he walked over to the Hollies and told Philippa Russell he loved her. He spoke freely and earnestly, almost like one under compulsion. In fact, he all but commanded her to return his love, and perhaps she liked him more the less for his masterful bearing.

She looked particularly lovely that afternoon. Although living in solitude, she was always well dressed. Had she anticipated the visit and wished to hasten the avowal, she could not have attired herself more effectively. The man must be ultra fastidious who could find a single fault in her personal appearance—or so thought the rector as he waited her answer.

For a while she was silent. She stood with her white fingers interlaced. Her downcast eyes gave her woe no sign, but a wave of color crossed the healthy pallor of her cheek. Then she raised her eyes and her look set every pulse in his body throbbing. In another moment he would have thrown his arms around her.

But she checked him, although she still gazed at him. She spoke; her words were strange, but there was something in her voice which as yet he had never detected there.

"Tell me how much you love me!" she said.

"I cannot," he whispered. In truth, he dared not even tell himself.

"Tell me how much you love me!" she reiterated.

"Far above any being in the world."

A scornful smile made her look even more beautiful.

"Spare me the ordinary lover's protestations. But stay," she continued, with a marvelous change of voice and manner. "I am treating you unfairly. Percival, listen. I love you! I love you!"

She leaned a little way toward him. The action was unmistakable. His arms were round her; his lips on her lips. From that moment life held but one thing for the Rector of Chelton.

"Tell me; tell me now, Percival," whispered Philippa, as she lay passive in his arms.

Even then there flashed across him that scene in the jail. If he spoke the truth he need seek no further for a fitting simile. He bent his head, and whispered in a strange hoarse voice:

"I love you even as that young man just hanged loved. I would kill you rather than you should love another."

She laughed deliciously.

"Sweet, sweet love!" she cried. "I believe you! I love you!"

Then she laid her head on his shoulder and sobbed.

He adored her, yet he feared her. He was her master, yet her slave. She had wronged her own man which no man, certainly not a clergyman, should dare to say; but she had told him and shown him she loved him. He led her to a seat, and now that the victory was his, began to count the spoils.

"We will be married soon, dearest," he said.

She pressed her hands to her forehead. "I did not promise to marry you," she said.

The rector wondered if he heard aright. "Philippa, what do you mean?" he cried.

"You asked me if I loved you. I answered truly. For the rest, you took me by surprise. Come to-morrow or the next day."

"But why. What is your meaning? You love me, and of course you will marry me."

She clasped her hands, then once more pressed them to her brows.

"I am telling lies," she said. "It was no surprise to me. For weeks I have pictured this moment. Percival, there shall be no deceit between us."

"None on my part," he answered gravely.

"And none on mine. I said. 'Come to-morrow.' One day of pleasant dreaming—one day of your love—seemed worth having to-day and to-morrow are the same. Sweet love, I love you! Hold my hand—listen—and leave me."

He obeyed with a white face. She spoke for some minutes in a low voice. The gravity of her communication was shown by the change which the rector's face and bearing underwent. Save by one or two smothered exclamations, he did not interrupt her, and when she had finished speaking, sat silent and motionless. She drew her hand from his and laid it on her forehead. His eyes followed her, and at last, with dry lips, he whispered:

"This is the truth?" "This is the truth," she said, moving toward the door. "Farewell. I leave here to-morrow."

At the door she lingered and looked back. Her eyes met a shiver run through the man's strong frame. Then, like one who makes for good or ill, a sudden resolution he sprung to his feet.

"What do I care?" he cried. "I love you. I cannot live without you. Let it be all forgotten, or borne together."

Once more he embraced her. She made no resistance, no attempt to conceal the joy in her eyes. "But presently drawing a little away from him, she said:

"Percival, if you give me your love in spite of all, it must be forever. Nothing must part us."

"It is for ever. Nothing shall part us." An hour afterwards the rector walked home, and informed his mother that Philippa Russell had consented to be his wife.

(TO BE CONCLUDED.)

QUAINT AND CURIOUS.

WHY NEGROES ARE BLACK.

Surgeon Maj. N. Alcock has contributed to *Nature* an interesting communication as to why the tropical man is black, in which he suggests that, as the lowest animal pigment cells placed behind the animal nerve termination exert its vibration to the highest pitch, the reverse takes place when, as in the negro, the pigment-cells are placed in front of the nerve terminations, and that the black pigment in the skin serves to lessen the intensity of the vibrations that would be caused in a naked body by exposure to a tropical sun; that, in fact, the pigment plays the same part as a piece of smoked glass held between the sun and the eye.

THREE MILES ABOVE THE SEA.

A recent traveller in Asia, Mr. Webber, states that in the mountains of Thibet he has lived for months at the height of more than 15,000 feet above the ocean with the following results: His pulse, normally sixty-three beats per minute, seldom fell below 100 beats per minute during the time he lived at that altitude. His respirations were often twice as numerous as under ordinary circumstances: a run of 100 yards would quicken both pulse and respirations more than a run of 1,000 yards would at the sea-level.

NEWSPAPER LITERATURE.

Although there are few tongues that are not represented in newspaper literature, an enormous majority are published in four languages. As a matter of course, English heads the list, inasmuch as English-speaking races have peopled North America and Australasia. The German races rank second, the French third, the Spanish fourth. The proportion is as follows: English, 16,500 publications; German, 7,350; French, 3,850; Spanish, 1,650.

A WONDERFUL MACHINE.

An inventor writing to the "Scientific American" proposes to revolutionize the present system of cultivating the earth. He describes a machine that is rigged with a large windmill sails, has a tiller for steering, will travel up hill or down, and with the wind in any direction. A full-sized one of sixty-horse power may be depended upon to draw ten ploughs four miles an hour, with but one man in attendance. It will also harrow, and furnish the power to sow, reap, and mow, thrash, grind, or carry loads to market or irrigate lands. Will travel ten miles an hour in any direction and carry twenty passengers, provided there is a good breeze. The machines are not expensive to build.

The Hypocrisy of the Face.

An Italian author, Signor M. P. Mantegazza, professor of natural history at the Museum of Florence, has just contributed a very remarkable volume to the list of scientific works. Mantegazza's work is devoted to the subject of human physiognomy and the expression of the emotions; it deals very simply with one very interesting question—whether it is possible to mask one's feelings by force of will so completely as to deceive the keenest and most experienced observer. Civilized, and even uncivilized peoples, have been steadily training themselves to master all outward signs of emotions as far back as history records—the fashionable man of Paris, London or St. Petersburg tries to appear as impassive as a god; the American, less hypocritical, aims nevertheless to cultivate something of Indian gravity and stoicism. What are the results of the long continued effort of man to master feeling and to hide what Nature seeks to express under all circumstances? They are sometimes very wonderful; but M. Mantegazza does not believe they are ever wholly successful—notwithstanding that the capacity for self-conquest may have increased steadily through generations. Woman succeeds, indeed, better than man; and the uninitiated may be deceived by either, but the experienced physiologist can never be wholly duped by the immobility of a face or the tearlessness of an eye.

How to Increase the Pleasure of Eating.

In his essay on "The Pleasure of Eating," Count Ramford says: "The pleasure enjoyed in eating depends—first, on the agreeableness of the taste of the food; and, secondly, upon its power to effect the palate. Now, there are many substances extremely cheap, by which very agreeable tastes may be given to food, particularly when the basis or nutritive substance of the food is tasteless, and the effect of any kind of palatable solid food (of meat, for instance), upon the organs of taste, may be increased almost indefinitely by reducing the size of the particles of such food, and causing it to act upon the palate by a larger surface. And if means be used to prevent its being swallowed too soon, which may easily be done by mixing it with some hard and tasteless substance such as crumbs of bread rendered hard by toasting, or anything else of that kind, by which a long mastication is rendered necessary, the enjoyment of eating may be greatly increased and prolonged." He adds that "the idea of occupying a person a great while, and affording him much pleasure at the same time, in eating a small quantity of food, may perhaps appear ridiculous to some, but those who consider the matter attentively will perceive that it is very important."

The secret of the jumping Mexican bean is out. It was discovered on the Coast Range in Nevada. Each bean contains a worm which can uncoil itself with such sudden vehemence that the bean is made to jump. The Nevada newspaper which avers this also says that the worms are a provision of nature whereby the beans are distributed and become planted. Dropping from the trees which produce them, they jump about until they fall into crevices in the ground, where they are imprisoned and may take root.