Canadian Champion

AND COUNTY OF HALTON INTELLIGENCER.

VOLUME 25. MILTON, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 1885. NO. 23.

Travellers' Guide.

NORTHERN & NORTH-WESTERN.

GOING NORTH. 7.45 A.M. 5.05 P.M. — GOING SOUTH. 10.35 A.M. 8.30 P.M.

CREDIT VALLEY RAILWAY.

GOING WEST. 9.45 A.M. 2.37 P.M. 5.50 P.M. — GOING EAST. 7.31 A.M. 3.3 P.M. 7.04 P.M.

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Sunday Train C.V.R., go. East 7.31 a.m. West 2 27p.m

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A YOUNG GIRL'S WOOING.

BY E. P. ROE,

Author of "His Sombre Rivals," "From Jest to Earnest," &c., &c.

Suddenly she stopped, and tears of sorrow filled her eyes. Here I am, laughing at our absurd talk," she said, "when I have just left the side of a poor girl, no older than myself, who is ghostly indeed in her flickering life. Is it heartless to seem to forget so soon? O Graydon, you don't know what trouble is! You have only had vexations thus far. Let me tell you what happened last night, if only to make you grateful for your strong, prosperous life."

"Tell me anything you wish. I always have better thoughts and impulses after being with you."

"Please don't regard me as egotistical, or offend me by thinking I am trying to be better than others. Why shouldn't I help that poor girl? We often dance all night for fun; why can't we watch occasionally for pity? And in simple truth it will be a long time before the poor creature will go out of my heart. It came very close home, Graydon—very close. It brought to mind another girl, who was once scarcely stronger or better than Tilly Wendall is to-day, but God was kind. Tilly also has great black eyes, and they do look large and pathetic in the wan little face! At first they did not notice me much. I was only another of the watchers who had come to aid her mother. It's astonishing how kind these plain country people are to one another in trouble, and many a housewife in this region has toiled all day and then sat up with the poor child the livelong night.

"For the first few hours I could do little more than help her move in her restlessness, and give remedies to relieve her incessant cough. The poor girl seemed neither more nor less than a victim of disease, that with a cruelty almost malign had tortured her. I can't explain how this awful impression grew upon me. It was as if relentless, fatal hands had racked the emaciated form until intelligence was gone, and then, not content, would continue their destructive work while breath remained in the body. As my watch was prolonged this impression grew into a nightmare of horror. The still house, the quiet, white, beautiful world without, and that frail young girl tortured hour after hour under my eyes by fever and the convulsive, incessant, remorseless cough."

She buried her face in her hands, and for a moment or two her voice was choked with sobs.

"O Madge," cried Graydon, almost fiercely, "you anger me! I would strangle a man who harmed a hair of such a child's head. How can I worship a God who sends or permits such a thing? You are braver than I. I could use a man shot, but I couldn't look upon what you have described. Yet the picture brings back the moment when I started,—when you struggled feebly in my arms with a premonition of your almost mortal weakness, and then sunk back white and deathlike. If you had not made so wise and brave an effort you might have lingered on in torture like this poor girl. You stood in just that peril, did you not?"

"I suppose I did."

"Oh, what a clod I was! I used to hear you cough night after night, and I would mutter, 'Poor Madge!' and go to sleep. To think that you might have suffered as this girl is suffering! I never realized it before, yet I thought I did. I can't tell you how my whole nature rebels at it all, and pious talk about resignation in the presence of such scenes fairly makes me grind my teeth; and his brow blackened like night in his mental revolt, and his eyes were sternly fixed in honest, indignant arraignment of the Power he did not scruple to defy, though so impotent to resist.

Madge brushed away her tears, and watched him earnestly for a moment. In that confused instant she exulted in the strong, generous, kindly manhood that would not cringe even to omnipotence when apparently cruel. She said, gently, "Graydon, you are condemning God."

"I can't help it," he began, impetuously, "that is, such a God—"

She put her hand over his mouth.

"I like you better for your words," she continued, "but please don't talk so any more. Let what you have said apply to such a God—" I know what you mean, but there is no such being in existence. Let me finish my story. We have had too many interruptions, and this secluded road has an end. I won't try to explain my faith. What happened may make it clearer to you. Well, Tilly gradually grew quieter, and at last slept. The tired mother was sleeping too, and I sat at the window just as you suggest, my thoughts sad and questioning, to say the least. At last I saw that Tilly was awake, and looking at me with something like interest and curiosity. I went to her and asked if I could do anything.

"She said, in her slow, feeble way, 'I thought I knew every one about here, but I don't remember to have seen you before.'

"Then I told her who I was, and that her mother was in the next room.

"'You are very kind, she said. 'And you are from the hotel. Isn't it a little strange?'

"'I should not be,' I replied, and explained how I came to stay, adding, 'Don't talk any more. You are not strong enough.'

"With a quiet smile that astonished me she said, 'It won't make any difference, Miss Alden; I shall never be any better, or, rather, I shall soon be well. My mind seems growing clearer, and I'd like to talk a little. It is strange to see a young girl here. Are you strong and well?'

"'Yes, very strong, and very glad to help your mother take care of you. I look once almost as ill as you are, yet I'm well. Cheer up, and let us nurse you back to health.'

"She shook her head. 'No, that's as impossible. You come and cheer poor mother and father, Mr. Alden. I am more than cheerful, I am happy.'"

"I made her call me Madge, and said: 'Tell me then in a few words how you can be happy. My heart has just been aching for you ever since I came.'

"Perhaps she saw tears in my eyes, for she said, 'Sit down by me.' Then she took my hand, leaned her cheek upon it, and looked at me with such a strong sympathy in her beautiful dark eyes,' she said, 'I see you're young and strong, and you probably have wealth and many friends; still I think I am better off than you are. I am almost home, and you may have long, weary journeying before you yet. You ask me why I am happy. I'll just give you the negative reasons; think how much they mean to me.—And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.' All these may be taken from my life any hour. Think of what will be added to it. You believe all this, Madge?'"

"Yes."

"'Then you must know why I am happy, and why I may be better off than you are. It will be very hard for father and mother,—there will be more pain for them here in consequence,—but soon it will all end forever; in a little while we shall be together again. So you know nearly all about poor little me,' she said, with another of her smiles which were the sweetest, yet most unearthly things I ever saw. 'And now tell me about yourself. I'm not able to talk much more for the present. I'd like to know something about the friend who helped me through the last few steps of my journey. I can think about you in heaven you know,' she said, with the sweetest little laugh. 'Don't look so sad, Madge. They'll tell you I'm gone soon.'

"'Gone where?' ask yourself, and never grieve a moment.'"

"O Graydon, she made it all seem so real, talking there alone in the night! And it is just as she says or it isn't anything. When you said, 'Such a God,' you had in mind a theological phantom, and I don't wonder you felt as you did; but this girl believes in a God who so loved the world,—who so loved her,—and I do also. Her pain, her thwarted young life, I don't understand any more than I do other phases of evil, but I can give my allegiance to One who came to take away the evil of the world. That's about all the religion I have, and you mustn't ever say a word against it."

"Well, there is but little more to tell. Tilly spoke in quiet, broken sentences as her cough permitted, and I told her a little about myself and sung to her some hymns that mother sung to me when I was a child. With the dawn her mother came in, and was frightened at having slept so long, but Tilly laughed and said it was just splendid.

"She was evidently a very intelligent girl, and must have been a pretty one, too. She certainly has read a great deal, and has taught in public schools. There didn't seem to be a trace of morbidness in her mind or feeling. She was simply trying to make the best of everything, and her best certainly is the best. She has helped and comforted me more than I could her."

"Comforted you, Madge?"

"Oh, well," was the somewhat confused reply. "I've had trouble, and shall have again. Who is without it long in this world?"

"It's almost hard to see how serious trouble can reach you hereafter, you are so strong, so fortified. No, Madge; I'll never say a word against your faith or that of your new friend! Would to Heaven I had it myself! I wouldn't have missed this talk with you for the world, and you can't know how I appreciate the friendship which has led you to speak to me frankly of what is so sacred. All the whirl and pressure of coming life and business shall never blot from my memory the words you have spoken this morning or the scenes you have made so real."

If this were true, how infinitely deeper would have been his impression if he could have seen the beautiful girl, now smiling into his eyes, bowed in agony at that sick-bed, while she acknowledged with stifled sobs that the dying girl was better off,—far happier than she who had to face almost the certainty of lifelong disappointment. Poor Madge had not told Graydon all her story. She would have died rather than have her secret known on earth, but she had not feared to breathe it to one on the threshold of heaven.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DISPASSIONATE LOVERS.

During the last moments of their drive Madge and Graydon were comparatively silent. Each had abundant food for thought, while even Graydon now believed that he so truly understood Madge, and had so much in common with her, that words were no longer needed for companionship.

As they approached the piazza, they saw that Arnault was still Miss Wildmere's devoted attendant. His presence meant hope for Madge, and Graydon was slightly surprised at his own indifference. He felt that the girl to whom he regarded himself as bound belonged to a different world, a lower plane not that her beauty had gone with the glamour of the night, but he had been breathing a different and purer atmosphere. Madge had been revealing what to him seemed ideal womanhood.

In regard to Stella his illusion had so far passed that he thought consciously, "Even at her best she is presenting Wildmere traits; her very self-sacrifice takes on a Wildmere form, and there is a flavor of Wall street in it all."

But he still believed that he loved her, and that, if she was equal to such great though mistaken self-sacrifice for her father, she would, under, his influence, throw off certain imperfections and gain a better tone.

That such thoughts were passing through his mind was a bad omen for the continuance of Miss Wildmere's power, and yet the opportunity of her life was still there. She had simply to put her hand into his with a look of trust, and abide by the act. To secure a loyalty that would [illegible] have tried to promote her best interests. That she was strongly tempted to do this was proved by her manner, in spite of the fact that she had promised Arnault not to decide against him before Saturday.

It was a moment of indecision. His strong assurance that he was abundantly able to take care of her, that Mr. Muir was wealthy and free from financial embarrassment, almost turned the scale. She felt that both Arnault and her father were deceiving her for their own purposes, and she had little hesitation in acting for herself without regard to them. Graydon's suggestion that her action was not high-toned, although delicately made, touched her pride to the quick, and she was compelled to feel during this interview, as never before, the superiority of the man who addressed her. She longed to force Henry Muir to acknowledge the daughter of the man he shunned in business; and not the least among her incentives was the thought of triumphing over Madge as a possible rival.

"At any rate," she had thought, "if I become engaged to Graydon he will have to be very much less fraternal. As to his not aiding papa," she concluded, "I can't help that. When once married I could make him do all he could afford, and papa and mamma have no right to expect anything more."

To the potency of all these considerations was added a sentiment for the man who awaited her answer, and who chafed inwardly that it was so long in coming.

"Truly," he thought, "this is strange wooing. Henry himself could not more carefully weigh the *pros* and *cons* than does she apparently, nor am I in feverish suspense. I had hoped for something different in my mating."

A glimmering perception that her manner was not calculated to inspire a lover at last dawned on Miss Wildmere, and with it came a faltering purpose to decide in favor of Graydon at once; but as she turned toward him, to speak with what was meant to be a bewildering smile of joy, a messenger from the office said, "A telegram, miss."

Graydon frowned, and then laughed outright. She stopped in the very act of tearing open the envelope, and looked at him inquiringly.

"Oh, nothing," he said, lightly. "The opportuneness of that fellow's coming was phenomenal. How much longer am I to wait your decision, Stella? Were the world in our secret, I should be known as St. Graydon the patient."

She flushed, but adopted his apparently light mood as the least embarrassing. "My memory is good, and I shall know how to reward you," she smilingly replied. "Please let me satisfy my mind about papa, for I'm sure it's from him."

"Oh, satisfy your mind fully about everything, Miss Wildmere."

She tore open the envelope with a strong gesture of impatience, and read, with a suddenly paling cheek, "Unless you choose the immediate certainty of absolute loss, wait till I see you. Will come soon. Wildmere."

She crushed the telegram in her hand, and turned away with a half-tragic air which at the moment struck Graydon as a little "stagy," and then he condemned himself for the thought. As she did not speak for a moment, he said, sympathetically, "Your tidings are bad?"

She tried to think, but was confused, and felt that she was in a cruel dilemma. Could Graydon be deceiving her? or was he as ignorant as he seemed of his brother's peril? Was her father in league with Arnault after all? and were they uniting to separate her from Graydon? She could not tell. She must gain more time. She would see her father, charge him with duplicity, and wring the truth from him.

When she turned to Graydon her eyes were full of tears again, and she faltered: "You may despise me if you will, but my father has made an appeal to me, and is coming to see me. I must hear what he has to say. I must tell him that I can't endure—that I can't go on this way any longer. I would gladly help him, save him, but after what you have said it's impossible to—Oh, was ever a girl placed in such wretched straits! Graydon, can you be patient a little longer?"

"There is nothing else for me to do, Stella. I only stipulate that your decision be made speedily, and that Arnault be given to understand what my rights are. I shall have no difficulty in enforcing them."

"I shall decide speedily. It is not right that I should be placed in such a torturing, humiliating position."

"Now I agree with you perfectly. When does your father come?"

"He says soon."

"Very well; I will return on Saturday."

"I wish you wouldn't go away now," she entreated.

"I think it is best," replied Graydon, decisively, yet kindly. "I have said all that is possible to an honorable man. By remaining I am placed in an anomalous position which my self-respect does not permit any longer."

"I suppose," she sighed, "that I should not ask too much. Well, so be it, then." They walked back to the house in silence. At the door of a side entrance she turned to him, her face flushing at the admission, and said, hastily, "I waited a long time for you, Graydon," and then fled to her room.

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