There is great ability in knowing how to conceal one's ability.—La Rocefoucauld.

In warning there is strength.—Lew Wallace.

MY HALF SISTER

By ELTON HARRIS

CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

"That I cannot say," she returned hesitatingly. "I suppose they thought it wise not to inform you. As for how your stepfather died they can only conjecture, nor can any motive be given for the crime. He was found by the servants in the morning when they went to open the study, and was lying on the floor near the window—which was wide open. You know how bitterly cold it was last Easter? Well, it had been snowing hard all night, and it had drifted in and was lying thickly on his shoulders. Had any trace of his assailant been possible on the hard ground the snow had covered it, and this showed that the deed must have been done early in the night before it began. There were no signs of any struggle, nor was anything taken; and they fancy he must have been asleep in his chair, for death was caused by two terrific blows on the back of the head. Now, Mollie, I have told you all, and you must not let this depress you, or I shall feel more than ever to blame. Joyce will be delighted to have your companionship, and the White House is not so very far off, you know."

With a great effort Mollie shook off the vague feeling of coming evil that had fallen upon her, and she looked up at her friend with an attempt at a smile.

Mrs. Anstruther's face was rapidly getting familiar to her again; her voice seemed a pleasant echo from the past. Even the little way she had of shaking her head to emphasize her words was the same as of yore.

She and Mrs. L'Estrange had been left widows about the same time; but while one had made the rash marriage that had ruined her life, the other had devoted herself to her two children and their interests.

Mollie had seen little of them since she had been at school, for when she was at home for the holidays, they had been away; but she had happy recollections of a white-frocked little girl who was Joyce, and a tall boy who used to send them flying to and fro in a swing under some great trees.

"Thank you very much," she said, straightening herself and sitting up. "It is nice to think that I shall have kind friends near me. I—I—it feels rather lonely coming home like this, you see. And though I hated—that is, disliked Mr. Barlowe, still, it is a terrible thing to have happened, and there is my half-sister Kate—"

"Yes, yes, of course. Well, Mollie, your mother and I were true friends, though Mr. Barlowe prevented us seeing too much of each other in later years. Come to me whenever you like, my child."

"Oh, I will," responded Mollie more cheerfully. "Tell me, Mrs. Anstruther, shall I like Madame Dubois; do you know her?"

Mrs. Anstruther moved uneasily, and drew out her watch.

"We shall be at Reverton in a few minutes now," she exclaimed almost in a tone of relief. "Of course, not having been friendly with Mr. Barlowe, I do not know his sister well; but we are on speaking terms, and Henri Dubois comes over to play tennis with my young people when he is at home. Now, here we are, and don't forget that you are to come to us whenever you like."

With the uncomfortable impression that Mrs. Anstruther was trying to make the best of things, Mollie thanked her, and the next moment the train stopped at the dear old country station she remembered so well, and she was in Reverton once more!

There was only one person on the platform—a tall and remarkably handsome woman, with a dark, almost masculine face, and piercing black eyes under heavy brows, and these same eyes fell upon the unconscious Mollie as the train slowly glided into the station, and took in every detail of the sweet little face with a strange, quick intentness. She was most elegantly attired in half mourning, that showed off her splendidly powerful figure to the greatest advantage; and as Mollie sprang out and looked round she came up quickly with a smile on her wide, thin-lipped mouth.

"Miss L'Estrange, I think," she said, in a loud, deep voice. "I am your aunt, Madame Dubois, and I have been greatly looking forward to your arrival. Ah, Mrs. Anstruther, how are you?"

Her aunt! Leonard Barlowe's sister her aunt! Mollie's brain reeled at the notion, while her hand was shaken with a firm, nervous grip that almost made her scream out with pain.

Then she was conscious that Mrs. Anstruther had kissed her kindly at parting while responding very distantly to Madame Dubois' greeting, and then they were bowling through Reverton in a high mail phaeton behind a pair of fine horses, which madame drove with consummate skill.

In spite of her desire to look out for old landmarks, the girl was furtively studying the hard face by her side as they dashed along. Instinctively she distrusted it, somehow, though it would have been difficult to have put her thoughts into words; and her feelings were of the gloomiest as the chimneys of Chalfont came in sight.

It was a large, ugly, red-brick house, standing in well-kept grounds, and looked very much as she had remembered it all her life; but she could not repress a shudder as she thought of what had happened there, and in imagination saw her stepfather's tall form at the hall-door as they drew up before it.

"Where is my half-sister, Kate?" she inquired, as she followed madame, who was talking volubly, into the drawing-room.

"I will send for her. Poor child, she is not strong; she makes me very anxious," she returned, sweeping over to the table, and pouring out tea in the energetic manner that seemed habitual to her. "You will hardly know her again, or, indeed, the place. My brother made so many improvements."

"It did not want improving," exclaimed Molly, shortly. "What was good enough for my mother was certainly good enough for Mr. Barlowe."

Madame Dubois shrugged her shoulders. Though an Englishwoman she had many French gestures and expressions, and her black eyes swept over Colonel L'Estrange's young daughter with a lightning glance.

"You are impulsive, sweet child," she said, shortly. "But you will soon grow to like the changes, and be very happy with me and your sister."

"My half-sister," corrected Molly, quietly. "Whom I was never allowed to love as a child, of whom I know nothing. How did she bear her father's dreadful death?"

Madame Dubois dropped the sugar-tongs with a loud clatter, and suddenly her face changed to an ashen hue, her whole demeanor altered.

"How has she heard it?" she muttered between her teeth. Then, turning fiercely to Mollie, "Never mention anything belonging to it if you do not wish to drive me crazy! Is it not always before me day and night, day and night?" And she sank back in her chair, as if unable to sit up, while her eyes swept round the room in a strange, cowering manner.

Astonished at the effect of her words Molly sat blankly regarding her. Had she spoken in sorrow her tender heart would have melted toward her at once, even though she was Leonard Barlowe's sister, but there was only an odd, frightened passion in her voice and bearing, and something in her hard face repulsed and kept Mollie silent, while, before she could think of anything suitable to say, madame had recovered herself and had suggested that she take off her outdoor garments.

Like a girl in a dream she followed the tall, strong figure through hall and passages that were the same, yet different, and finally to a room that she did not recognize at all, where a housemaid was unstrapping her trunks. And this was her homecoming, this was the way she returned to her mother's house—a stranger among strangers, where everything was altered, where not even a servant who knew her remained. Dismissing the maid, she threw herself down by the bed, dark forebodings and dread weighing down her usually bright nature, and a dreary longing for the mother with whom every spot in Chalfont had been associated tearing at her heart-strings.

Poor little schoolgirl! She fought down the choking feeling in her throat with mingled pride and resolution. Colonel L'Estrange's daughter must not give way before strangers. But oh, it was hateful to think that she was in the charge of this Madame Dubois! Then she began to reflect that she must make the best of it, and certainly tears would not help her, so she buried her head in the white quilt and prayed for strength to forgive her enemies and think no evil.

"What are you doing?" demanded an imperious voice suddenly.

Mollie was so startled that she sprang up, and, turning round, beheld a little girl, dressed in the latest Parisian fashion for children, standing regarding her with curious eyes. She was not pretty, for her small, sharp-featured face was thin and witch-like, her expression old and cunning; but Mollie noticed with relief that she bore little resemblance to Mr. Barlowe, and masses of flaxen curls, so fair as to be almost white, softened the little face.

For a minute the sisters regarded each other gravely. Mollie's beautiful pink and white face had flushed brightly, her sweet gray eyes were fixed wistfully on the child, but the latter was quite composed; her thin lips were pressed together as she coolly surveyed her half-sister from her sunny brown head to her dainty foot.

"Well, Kate, do you remember me?" asked Mollie, gently.

"Hardly. What were you doing?"

"I was saying my prayers. Don't you say yours?"

"No," returned Kate, loftily. "I am a free thinker, like my Cousin Henry."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mollie, astounded. "I don't think, Kate, you knocked before you came in."

"Of course not," was the calm reply. "This house and everything here is mine."

Truly this was a promising beginning. The child evidently had been taught to believe herself a person of great importance, and during the half-hour she spent with Mollie she condescendingly repeated both her aunt's and the servant's injudicious flattery, and unconsciously revealed much of the inner life of the house—revelations by no means attractive—and Mollie would have ruthlessly put the young lady out of her room by the shoulders had she not exercised great self-command. Yet it was very disheartening. Who had she in the world to love but Kate. And she craved love as a flower needs the sun. It would have made things no better could she have heard Mrs. Anstruther's comment as she entered her carriage.

"I cannot bear to think of that poor child!" she declared, impatiently. "What business has a L'Estrange to be in the care of that unprincipled, underbred woman! She is already more disliked in Reverton than her brother was, and that is saying much. Oh, why was Amy so weak!"

CHAPTER III.

"It must be two days since Mollie came in to see us," said Joyce Anstruther one afternoon, looking up from a mass of tangled wool she was sorting. "I hope nothing is the matter?"

"Oh, no! I met her this afternoon," responded a deep masculine voice from the depths of a lounge-chair. "She was going to the woods to get moss for the church."

"Oh, the Easter decorations! Why didn't she come for me?"

Reggie got up and crossed the room. He was a great big fellow, in a rough shooting suit, with fair curly hair, blue eyes and the pleasantest face in the world; while at the present moment there was a comical smile on it that would somehow have explained why he was such a favorite in the regiment in which he had the honor to serve his queen and country; why all Reverton, besides his mother and sister, loved him.

"She did suggest it," he said, blandly. "In fact, she was coming here, but I said you were busy."

"Oh, Reggie!"

"Don't get excited. Seeing her face fall—for there is not much disguise about Mollie—I stepped into the breach and went myself."

"Then I hope you did not meet Madame Dubois!" exclaimed Joyce, laughing. "For I feel sure that she would strongly object to you as an escort."

"Why?" And Reggie leaned against the wide window-seat, and stroked his mother's great Persian cat, who was sunning himself in the corner.

"Why, you old stupid? Because she intends Mollie and her fortune for her adored son, Monsieur Henri Dubois, and no poaching will be allowed."

"That little toad?" he muttered in a curious tone. "Mollie said they were expecting him today. I say, Joyce, do you really think it?"

"Mother thinks so," she replied, glancing at his ruffled face with a suppressed smile. "And certainly madame has been most amiable to Mollie so far. She asked me the other day what Henri was like, for madame was always speaking of him, and Kate quoted him frequently."

"Oh, it is preposterous!" declared the young fellow. "However, wait until she sees him. I shall be very much astonished if she falls in with the arrangement then."

(To be Continued.)

Fatalism of Swiss Guides.

The point of view of the Swiss guides is a singularly complex one. The ordinary guide is as brave as a Boer and his bravery has many of the same peculiarities. He has little sense of sport; he is ever conscious of the desperate danger of his calling, and, while he is willing and anxious to meet any risk which comes in the necessary course of events, he has the greatest contempt for the man who seeks the bright eyes of dangers for their own sake. He is a bit of a fatalist. "See," said one, as some travelers brought down the body of a party who had died in a place as simple as a city street, "death can come as easily on a light mountain as a difficult one." And again, when the French guides bungled at their tasks: "Those Arolla men know nothing of accidents; for me, when a man is once dead I will carry him as soon as a sheep," and so saying he put one of the things on his head and strode down into the valley where the mules waited for their burden. A guide of experience will tell you there are only three dangers in mountaineering—falling stones, sudden bad weather and the tourist.

Superstition in Yucatan.

"Apropos of the wonderful ancient ruins in Yucatan," said a New Orleans college professor, "there is one very fortunate circumstance which has protected them almost entirely from spoliation by the Indians. It is currently believed by the natives all through that part of the country that the ruins are haunted and that devils will carry away anybody who attempts to molest them. This superstition has been encouraged by explorers, and is a better safeguard than a picket of soldiers."

The first real American hotel in England will be located adjoining the new Waterloo railway station, London. It will be entirely of steel construction.

A Young Sculptress' Fine Work.

Miss Edith Hope Ogden, the young sculptress, who won the competition for the bronze tablet to be presented to the steamship St. Paul, has finished that piece of work and it is now being cast in bronze at St. Paul, Minn. The tablet represents a finely executed design in low relief of the battleship off the coast of Porto Rico, beneath which is the legend of the ship's history, the whole being within a border decoration, significant of victory, in nautical designs both artistic and expres-

Advantage is a better soldier than raskness.—Shakespeare.

We may give advice, but we cannot give conduct.—Franklin.

Contempt is the proper punishment of affectation.—Johnson.

Let go the handle bars of love or a bicycle and it begins to wobble.

The sky is cheerful when it is the bluest, but it is different with a man.

The tailor made girl has no edge on the shirt waist man.

It's cheaper to take a tonic than to take a vacation.

The shot output of New Hampshire last year was $22,900,000.

It is said that irregular eyebrows are an indication of insanity.

Of the 3,700 Chinese in New Zealand only twenty-six are women.

Society is like a masked ball where nobody unmasks.

Our first school master is superstition.

Sociability is the pleasure of getting rid of self.

Elizabeth Hanneker, a 3-year-old Dayton, O., girl, ate a moth ball. She was seized with convulsion and died an hour later.

Pioneer in the Thousand Islands.

The Rev. R. H. Pullman, who died last Sunday, is said to have been the first man to buy an estate on the St. Lawrence, in the Thousand Islands. In 1864 he purchased Mother Island, now know nas Pullman island, for $40. He and his brother George camped on the island every summer for a number of years. Seven years after the purchase of the island, George Pullman built Castle Rest, one of the most beautiful houses on the island.

Quadrennial Voting Increase.

Since 1864 the total vote at each successive presidential election has shown an increase over the vote of the preceding contest. From 1864 to 1868 the gain was 1,700,000; from 1868 to 1872, 700,000; from 1872 to 1876, 2,000,000; from 1876 to 1880, 800,000; from 1880 to 1884, 80,000; from 1884 to 1888, 1,300,000, an abnormally large increase, not accounted for by the admission of new state; from 1888 to 1892, 700,000, and from 1892 to 1896, 1,900,000. This year the probable total popular vote is estimated at 16,000,000.

Generous Japanese Doctors.

Japanese doctors never accept fees from poverty-stricken patients. In Japan there is a proverb that "when the twin enemies, disease and poverty, invade a home, he who accepts money from its inmates is a robber."

Big Oyster Crop this Year.

"The oyster crop this year will be one of the biggest in the history of trade in the bivalve," said Mr. G. D. Redding of Baltimore, at Chamberlain's last night. "Special care has been taken at the oyster beds to prevent the destruction of young oysters, and those of more mature growth have been well fed, and the warm weather has helped them to attain an unusual size."

The coast line of the Chinese empire exceeds 2,000 miles.