

THE STORY OF TRILBY.

By ROBERT B. PEATTIE.

She washed fine linen for the students of the Latin Quarter, did Trilby, and she posed for the foot, and the arm and the "altogether." Her father was an Irish officer, and her mother but why speak of her mother? After she was an orphan, Trilby went cheerfully to work. One has to live. Incidentally, one has to love. Trilby took such love as was offered. It was only a poor substitute if the truth were known. And it didn't satisfy very well. Trilby would have starved for want of sympathy if she had had nothing else but this chaff. But she was elate with the joy of living. She helped the artists with their little suppers. She devised innocent gaieties. She shouted and sang in mere excess of animalism.

Svengali used to hear her calling "Milk Below" in a voice whose resonance filled the building—Svengali, who had come out of the mysterious east, and who played as never man played before, and who cured the neuralgia in Trilby's head, and whom Trilby hated.

She used to meet him up where the three Englishmen were—the three kindly Englishmen who painted together. One painted all the ugly things he saw, another the beautiful things of which he dreamed, and the third, Little Billee, touched truth with the hand of genius, selected it with the eye of genius, and painted it with the brush of genius. And Little Billee, who was a very well brought-up young Englishman of the upper middle class, and Trilby, who was only a model for the figure, a washer-woman, and heaven knows what else beside, loved each other with a love that was born to last them all their lives, and to be the best thing that came into those lives. But Trilby knew, because of those foolish old loves she had experimented with in the lonesome days of her deserted youth, that she was not a fit wife for Little Billee. And even if she had not known it herself she would have learned it from Mrs. Bagot, Little Billee's mother, who came over from England to tell her so and save her dear son from the clutches of an adventuress.

So Trilby, who had the most beautiful feet and the truest heart in all the world—at least in the world of the Latin Quarter, vanished, taking her little brother with her, and Little Billee saw her no more. But out of his suffering he won for himself a mighty power and earnestness, so that he painted better than any young man of his nation. And fame and money came to him, and the love of many women. But it was as witches' gold in his hand, and turned to ashes, and not even the friendship of his chosen companions could compensate him. He yawned in the face of life. And he was not above wishing that an earthquake would swallow up those who approached him, and that he might be left alone to dream of Trilby, and to put on his canvas the pictures which were the reflex of his passion for her.

And in the midst of all his success, when Paris and London offered him the best they had, and had not succeeded in satisfying him, Svengalia appeared once more. But he was only as the shadow, apparently of his companion La Svengalia, his wife—Trilby of old—Trilby with vacant eyes, and a painted face, and jewels, and a voice! The casement of the soul seemed seared and jammed. The soul itself seemed resolved into a voice. She did not recognize her old friends. She moved like a woman galvanized from premature death. But she sang like an angel—an angel of the Latin Quarter, who knew old French street songs, and who could sing them so as to make heroes of the men who heard her, and tender lovely women even of the coarsest jades. Moreover, she could open her painted lips, and let the notes of Chopin's perfect "Impromptu" break from her throat as the notes of a nightingale split the air of an English June. She could do it as not even the violin could do it. She became a musical instrument with a range, a magnetism, a melody and a volume that no musical

instrument ever had. That was Trilby. That was the poor little girl who wept when she found that Little Billee was shocked that she should sit for the alto. That was the Trilby who suffered endless remorse because she once went to a picnic and left her little brother behind. That was the Trilby who used to lay her head on the shoulder of the Laird of Cockpen and confide her little troubles to him. La Svengali! The singer at whose feet the whole world knelt! Svengali, for whose favors royalty sued! Svengali, who could not wear the jewels the kings of Europe had given her.

But one night, it came to pass, that Svengali, himself, the manager of this nightingale, fell ill, and from illness he went to a fatal anger, and died of apoplexy in his box at the concert, while Trilby stood on the stage. And Trilby ceased suddenly to be La Svengali, and was only Trilby O'Farrell, who could sing nothing but "Ben Bolt" and that very much out of tune. And she had to leave the stage amid the hissings of an English audience—an audience that filled the great Albert Hall. Of course she went to Little Billee's house—where she ought to have been long years ago. And there, amid the love of her three Englishmen, and Little Billee's mother and sister, and many of those she had known in the old days, she faded away, cursed with some mysterious curse, and pinning as if a vampire sucked her breath. And though she remembered everything about the old days in Paris, and remembered above all things that she loved Little Billee with a love that was her whole life, yet not a bit did she remember of listening audiences, or the "impromptu" of Chopin or how to sing anything—not even the song of Marlborough who went to his death.

(Ah, Miraton, miraton, mirataine!)

And so she died. And Little Billee died too. Why not? Perhaps he and Trilby could talk together quietly after the embarrassment and hindrance of life was out of the way. And Taffy, who was Billee's dear friend, married Billee's sister. And they all came to have a better hope of heaven and a lighter judgment of men from having known Trilby O'Farrell, who was a model for the figure, and a washerwoman, and heaven knows what else beside. And then it came out years after, how Trilby had been the creature of Svengali, and how he had broken her will to his, and made her his own in body and in mind, so that she lent to his genius her great vocal power, and he sang through her; complementing his lack with her voice—supplementing her ignorance with his knowledge.

That is the tale—the tale of woman brought to her death through men who were selfish and vain, and through women who are too good to see any goodness not of their own sort. There was only one who might have saved Trilby with her great heart. And that was Little Billee. Yet he saw her die murmuring "Svengali! Svengali! Svengali!" And it broke his heart.

And of fragments like that is the mosaic of life made.

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