

Geraldine



CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

The night was as good a one as need have been, and though better had occasionally been known, there was on the present occasion, no call for complaint. Jerry, in particular, was fortunate, and the little girl's spirits would have risen under the inspiring influence, if it had produced a like effect upon her companion. But although Belenden assisted both in taking the fish of the hooks, and in baiting them again, and although he was always ready with his congratulatory, "Another, Jerry! You are lucky to-night," she felt that the spirit was absent, and that the passing scene had only a faint, inadequate hold on his attention. His very smile was grave.

But after a while, and that at a movement of her own, he looked round quickly. She had shivered as the air grew colder, and a slight breeze had sprung up.

"You are cold," said Belenden, at once laying down his hand-line, "let me put this over your shoulders," and he drew a rough, warm, weatherbeaten plaid around her. "Don't you go and catch cold to-night, and then be ill after I am gone, little one."

"It won't matter if I do."

The words escaped under her breath, but they reached his ear nevertheless, and he could not but make some response.

"You think your chances of getting out of the moor and the loch will depart with me? Is that it? Is Cecil no good?"

"I shall not care to go with Cecil."

"You cared to go by yourself before I came."

She was silent. It seemed to her that she would not care even to go by herself any more.

But Belenden's tone grew more and more so, and gentle. It moved him infinitely. In his present subdued and pensive mood, to think now much of her actions this open-hearted, innocent-minded child had given him in one short fortnight. It gratified his vanity and something better than his vanity, his benevolence. He was glad to think he had made anyone the happier, particularly anyone so sweet, and natural, and lovable as Geraldine. He put his arm around her, and drew her to his side.

"You must not forget me, Jerry," he said.

"She had stopped fishing to listen."

"I may come and see you again some day—may I not?"

"Oh, yes."

"And you are going to be a good girl, and earn a great deal, and have a great deal to tell me when I do come, and you will go on with our collection, and read up about them, and have them all in nice order?"

"Oh, yes."

"I shall tell your cousins about you if I come across them."

"Shall you come across them?"

"Very likely I may. I'll meet Lord and Lady Raymond. I shall ask to see Ethel and Alicia, and tell them all about their little cousin in the north."

"Do you think they would care about me?"

"I shall make them care about you."

"You would say that I am very—very?"

"Very what?"

"You know what. You know how you found me that first fishing day. But indeed, I am not such a bad as that, and I am never going to be rebuffed again. I have promised granny that I shall not. Aunt Charlotte, and Ethel, and Alicia would have thought it dreadful. I don't want them to think me dreadful."

"I promise that they shan't."

"Well, they won't if you stand up for me," and Jerry smiled confidently round.

"Because I am grown up, I suppose."

"Oh, yes, and a man, and all that. They would think a great deal of what you say, and if you say that I am—"

Here she stopped.

"Go on. That you are—"

"No! I am silly."

"Not silly at all. I want to hear. Go on, there's a good child. You are quite safe with me," and his arm pressed her a little closer.

"I was only going to say that if you would say I was rather nice—that is, if you could say it," said poor Jerry humbly, "they would tell Aunt Charlotte, and she would perhaps believe it, and that would please granny. You see Aunt Charlotte does not like me very much now, and that vexes dear granny, who loves me so dreadfully, and I thought—I thought it might just—no one else could do any good," she concluded. There was something so truthful and confiding in the limpid, childish eyes, and so artless in the childish confession, that Belenden could not smile at it.

"I will certainly do what I can," he said, "and—where you were quite right to tell me all about it, Jerry dear. Now, you see, I know what I am about. And if a chance offers, why, of course, I shall embrace it at once." And to himself he added, "Is there any hope that she will always remain like this? Will she, can she expect to be always as true and honest. Or will she be like all the rest in a few short years? And even the man of the world sighed. For he little knew, he little dreamed, that even then he had not seen to the depths of the heart he called a child's."

Just before the boat touched the shore, he stooped over Jerry for a moment.

"Farewell to Loch Maree," he said.

"Farewell to all the kind hearts here. Farewell, Geraldine. Good-bye, dear child—may 'Good-bye' for I shall be up and away long before you are awake in the morning. I am to breakfast in my own room, so you must not get up."

as on the shooting days. So—say 'Good-bye' then, while we may, and on her cold rosy cheek she suddenly felt his warm breath, and then the pressure of his lips in a kiss.

Her heart seemed to stand still—the pulses in her throat to choke her. Cecil, raising at the other end of the boat, seemed like a shadow in a dream, his voice calling to her, an echo from some far away distant spot.

Mechanically she rose to obey the summons, touched the different hands held out to guide her, sprang ashore, and stumbled along over the dark, wet weeds, blind and deaf to all outer sights and sounds.

The other two were behind, having stayed to help up the boat, but she waited or no one. And she never spoke to Belenden again, nor turned her back to look for him, but hurried forward along through the dim mazes of the woodland path, and in through the broad stairs, straight to her own chamber, to be seen of no one any more at all that night.

For she was not required to come down again. There was to be no supper, only what the gentlemen chose to send for, while a tray was dispatched to her elf; and so the farewell to the water was really what it had been given out to be, the parting between the two for many and many a day.

It had not been exactly so intended by Belenden.

The kiss had been given on the impulse of the moment, and there had been no intention of producing such an effect as he could perceive had been wrought thereby.

"Was she angry, I wonder?" he had thought, half amazed, and half chagrined, but after all such a thing was hardly likely. It had really been nothing to make anyone angry. It had been nothing to think twice about.

A dear little girl. A sudden parting. A tender good-bye. Everything provocative and excusable. Jerry could not have thought any harm. After all, what is a kiss at 13?

Within twenty-four hours that kiss was in the giver's memory as though it had never been.

During his rapid journey south, and while he had performed many long hours for meditation as the swiftest express trains bore him on from one far distant stopping place to another, Belenden did indeed—having no companion to talk to, and nothing to divert his attention, bestow a considerable share of his ruminations upon his late sojourn in the old Highland castle. It was a relief to turn to it as a memory when almost spent with conjectures and speculations in the only other direction, which at such a time could command his attention, and the repose of his monotonous life, and the charm of his inter course, at once simple and refined, soothed and hushed his spirit when disposed to be chafed and impatient by uncertainty and anxiety as to what now awaited him.

But once arrived within the landmarks of his home, once assured that he was, as he had divined he would be, too late, the necessity for action, the cessation of mere passive endurance, the release from suspense, even the presence and voices of others, put an end at once and altogether to the visions of the past. The future must now be everything.

The new experience began at once: new, and yet foreseen and anticipated. There was a hush, the solemnity, the mournfulness, the whispers, the death-like pause of expectancy. The old butler bowing his white head, the underlings subsiding with profound respect into the background, the shadows of the women sitting dimly in the distance, all wanting to look upon him, unseen themselves all desirous of seeing him yet none daring to intrude. And then he had to meet his mother, his brothers, his uncles, to interview the steward and the coachman, to give his sanction to projected arrangements, to hear what had already been done, to write letters.

It was now twelve hours since the spirit had departed, and twelve hours at such a time seem long.

Lady Belenden had so far recovered from the first shock and impression, that she had seen her children and consulted with her maid.

The young men had had a furtive stroll round the premises, and peeped by stealth into the paddocks and kennels. The stablemen and boys had known to keep out of the way and at first not to see, as the poor young fellows wandered aimlessly about, feeling they knew not exactly what, wondering what they should do next, and how much would be considered lawful under the circumstances. One and all had waited for the arrival of the elder brother. To learn from him what would follow this sudden overturn of all the past, what the new regime was likely to prove, and how it would affect each one of them, was now their very natural desire. Frederick had always been a good fellow, and they hoped the best—hoped he would not change with his altered circumstances, and appear, as others have been known to do, a different man under different auspices. But who was to say?

Thus Frederick's arrival had been the thing most earnestly desired and anticipated both above and below stairs.

It was late ere it took place, but no one wished to retire to rest first.

For himself, he was too much confused and excited to feel fatigue. He had been traveling since 5 o'clock that morning, and he had not slept till long after midnight the night before; but he had not closed an eye all day. Even presently, even after all calls and claims on his attention had ceased on the part of the household, and one by one the domestics departed for the night, and the doors had been locked, and silence within and without had settled down still more deeply than before upon the house of mourning, even then the traveler seemed unwilling to be again alone.

The brothers sat up with him. They talked together in quiet, subdued tones of the old days, the old boyish exploits, the quaint experiences, omissions or grievances, of the past. Childish jests were slipped out; little trifling tales rose once again to the lip, but for such an hour had been buried utterly.

The old home seemed dearer to one and all than it had been supposed to be. Each had gone back to his own little

room. Each went to it that night happier than on the previous one. Their table, was indeed gone, all was over, they were very sorry; but Frederick was all right, and their hearts were comforted.

And Frederick himself? He also was now quieted down. He knew the ground whereon he stood, and might be said to be already almost at home upon it. From sheer exhaustion of mind and body, long and heavy slumber at length visited his weary frame, and the sun was high in the heavens ere he was aroused from his pillow on the following morning.

But with consciousness awoke every new thought and reflection on the instant. A busy day—many busy days lay before him. He must be up and doing; no more lassitude, no more uncertainty; a whole crowd of things to be looked after, and instructions to be given, and people to be seen awaiting his appearance. All was solemn activity, and decorous supervision. Inchmaree Castle was like the pale, spectral spectre on its own misty heath, if ever the faintest recollection of it flitted across his memory.

And even that recollection was presently effaced.

New claims new responsibilities new hopes and fears, a new arena in life altogether had to be entered upon and with surprising rapidity Sir Frederick Belenden accommodated himself to the change.

By-and-by he gave up his commission in the army, and settled down at his country seat. Next came standing for his division of the county in Parliament, with the excitement of a contested election. Then the loss of the election, and the consolations of sport, hunting in the winter especially. There was yachting at Cowes moreover, grouse and partridge and pheasant shooting as autumn came on again, and even a run to Scotland and still never a thought of Geraldine.

He had not come across the 'Maymours' in the interim, and somehow he had omitted to look up young Raymond. When in town, as he had meant to do, and he had never sent the little heiress her present for he had forgotten about it till too late. And altogether, the thought of Inchmaree was not quite so pleasant as it had been at first, after his conscience told him he had not behaved so handsomely as he might have done; and again he resolved to make up for it, should occasion offer, and again no occasion did offer; and so things went on for three full years, and then—what happened then calls for a new stage, and a fresh rising of the curtain.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BUTTERFLY TAKES HER FIRST FLIGHT.

In London I never knew what I'd be at. I'm wild with the sense of variety of plan. And life seems a blessing to happy men."

All was bustle and joyful alacrity in a smart little house in Mayfair.

It was a bright, fresh spring morning, and though it was yet very early in May, the mildness of the season had brought on leaf and blossom, to such an extent that the parks, one and all, showed a blaze of rhododendrons and azaleas, glories, and the pink almond worn out and faded, was shedding itself in showers on every side. London was full and busy, and a brilliant season was prognosticated.

Mrs. Campbell had been lucky in finding a little house to suit her, and she had now been in town for more than a fortnight, during which every day had been fully occupied in preparations for the important time now at hand. For Geraldine was 18, and was to make her appearance in the world.

As a preliminary, she was of course to make her courtesy, and kiss the hand of our most gracious Queen, and it is on the eventful morning of her so doing that we catch our next glimpse of the wild little witch of Inchmaree.

Any greater contrast than this to our first peep at her under the weather-stained yellow oilskin and sailor cap cannot well be imagined, and the outer difference does but shadow forth the still greater one within.

Three years had done its work, and done it well for Geraldine.

The governess had been a great success; if a governess had been searched for the whole world through to suit the place, the pupil, and her surroundings, a better could not have been found than the quiet, earnest, sympathetic and large-hearted woman who presently found for herself so warm a corner of the little girl's heart. Very quickly she had fathomed the depths and allows of the soil to be worked, and had gauged its value. There had been no rude measures, no hasty reforms such as we have revolved Jerry's very soul, but, instead, there had been much kindly appreciation, a fair mood of praise where praise was due, and above all, and it was this which had finally won the pupil's entire affection—a candid ignorance on many topics as to which Jerry herself was well qualified to instruct. To be asked to teach when she had only expected to learn! All the generosity and nobility of the child's nature had been aroused by the supplication, and no cause had Miss Cornelia ever had to repent it.

Once begun under such auspices the pursuit of knowledge had thriven apace.

Geraldine had actually exulted during the brief, dull, winter days, when she had been little to tempt her from her tasks, in the thought that the hours which she had been wont to while away in unproductive trivialities or doleful complaints had been now hardly long enough for all she had had to do. What with one thing and another the weeks had seemed to fly, for her eager spirit had set no bounds to its desires, until even her delighted and almost equally enthusiastic preceptor had demurred. She had hardly known how to be moderate in the race.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

A MAN who can eat buckwheat cakes and sausage, and digest them, need not worry about death.

A MAN is more disagreeable to the man who has told her he loved her than to any other man.

THERE are so many humiliations in life, that a new one is encountered nearly every day.

You seldom admire a man you see a great deal of.

A WINTER NIGHT ON THE FARM.

Is there aught in life we prize
Like the light of home that lies
Over us when winter shakes
From the north his frosty flakes,
When the chill winds at the pane
Beat their icy wings in vain?

Is there any joy on earth
Like to that which findeth birth
By the fire-light, snug and warm,
Of the old home on the farm?
Undisturbed and far from town,
Our ambitions narrow down
To a nest of small desires,
Bounded by the evening's fires;
All the passions of the year
Pass away in laughter here.

Where the saucy kettle sings
And the sturdy back-log flings
The defiance of its glance
To the winds, as they advance.
Here the magic pop-corn snaps
Into little snowy caps.

For the chubby hands that ache
In their rapture to partake;
Here the pippins, plump and sleek,
Piled up in the pantry speak,
Plain as any mortal may,
Of the summer passed away.

Of the summer passed away,
Bringing back to nights like these,
Bird-songs and the hum of bees,
Hickory nuts and walnuts, too,
Break their hearts for me and you,
Yield their very souls to make
Pleasures for the children's sake;

And the elder's kindly cup
Offers its keen spirit up
On the altar of good cheer,
On this wild night of the year—
In this night when love and mirth
Hold their court around the hearth.

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waiting for the word to sweep up our broken divisions like a drop of water. The field-piece might give us another chance.

"Jim White," said Bill, his eyes kinder shinin' out bright from his powder-blackened face, "I refuse to obey!"

That was all he said. Nothin' much to tell, but it saved us. Jim White an' all. Bill was just so stubborn that after the battle he pulled the chevrons off his arm.

So it nettles me to hear Martha say, "Didn't I tell you?"

It was summer when Elsie came to tell, which was the savin' of Bill. He got softer and softer and tenderer

and tenderer, so that by the time the fall huskin' was over that little tot with her big blue eyes could twist him round her finger as easy as nothin'.

Father used to joke Bill, and ask him if he was trainin' for the ministry. If he had of him let alone, and he could have forgotten his dog-goned stubbornness, I think he would have gone to Sunday school off an' on with Elsie, and that would have shut folks' mouths after his death.

Along 'bout Christmas I could see Bill was gettin' uneasy like in his mind. Elsie and my Patience did nothin' but talk 'bout Santa Claus and a saw-dust doll with a real china head in Uncle Wick's store-window at the Corners.

Of course, Bill was willin' to give Elsie a squad of dolls, and I heard him ask Uncle Wicks myself how much it would cost to send to Boston for a regular one that could talk and roll its eyes.

Then Bill's danged stubbornness would rise up and whisper, "How could a man that didn't believe in God celebrate God's birthday?"

That's what Bill asked me one morning, as he was puttin' a new pole in his bobs. I knew Bill was gettin' unsettled, and that when Elsie got up in his lap and whispered in his ear, "I des Santa Claus is doin' to bring Uncle Bill a new pair of wristlets," it was more than a barrel of words from me.

Martha helped knit those wristlets, first a green yarn and then a red one, with a frill of brown at the end. Bill caught them at it once when Elsie came over to spend the evening. He rushed out to the barn to look after his 4-year-old, and when he came back he complained that the saber cut he got at Lookout Mountain was troublin' him some.

I ran over to Bill's Christmas night, to ask Bill and Elsie over to eat popcorn, hickory nuts, and such like, and found Bill puttin' Elsie to bed. There was a hard look in his face, and I knew that it was no use askin'.

I stood still for a moment, and took off my muffler to change the wet spot from my mouth. Elsie didn't notice, and knelt down by the side of her crib in her white nightgown, and prayed, "Now I lay me—"

Just as Jane Foster taught her. When she got through she stopped a minute, and then added a little one of her own. I remember it just as well as though I heard it all over again to-night. She knelt down at Bill's knee and said:

"O God, I want to say a little prayer for your Uncle Bill. I des he forgets to pray sometimes. Uncle is a dood man. Dood. He loves me, and set the leg of my little chicken, Bright. Now it is all well, Dood. Of course you don't know Uncle Bill, Dood, as well as Elsie, so I want to tell you, so Santa Claus won't forget him. Dood night."

Then she kissed her Uncle Bill, and snuggled in between the sheets.

I guess that finished Bill Coomb's stubbornness. Martha said the next day, when Elsie rushed into the house with her arms full of presents, that Bill would spoil the child; but I knew that could Bill have got over to Boston that night and back in time, Elsie would have had that doll with the rollin' eyes and talkin' mouth. Bill was always that way—he never did things by halves.

Bill was ailing all the winter. We hoped he would pick up in the spring. Martha used to send him bone-set tea, and twice he had the doctor, but it didn't seem to do him much good. He

liked best to sit up by the arch, and watch Elsie and my little Patience play 'keepin' house,' or take Elsie in his arms and listen to her prattle.

He didn't go to church, but he used to talk with Martha off and on, an' he seemed to remember a powerful number of things Elder Preswick said down there in Virginia. I never gave Bill much credit for memory before.

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