

Old Blazer's Hero

By DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY.

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

Will had been determined to be found out early. In taking a wife he had not supposed to cripple himself. His friends called him "the married bachelor," and he was proud of the title. It bespoke the fact that he had surrendered nothing of his liberties; that the yoke which weighed on most men who married had bound no place upon his shoulders.

His wife was little to blame, therefore, if she discovered the fatal error into which she had fallen a little earlier than most women would have done. And now, before she had found time even to begin to reconcile herself to her situation, she and her husband were put to open shame.

The blow fell full at first, and it was an hour or two before she began to know what pain it carried. The maid came to tell her that dinner was ready, but she would not trouble even to make a pretense of eating. In a while a tear or two began to flow, and when once she had given way so far she had lost control of herself, and flying to her bedroom she locked the door and cast herself upon the bed in an abandonment of grief.

The weary, dreadful day crawled on, minute by minute and hour by hour, when this burst was over, and she paced her room to and fro as she looked at the future. More than once a gust of wrath passed over her spirit and stirred the sick waters of despair. But she would have none of that, and wrestled against herself with all her forces. She had no right to anger—no right to reproach; she had thrown those rights away.

All the while her heart cried out for her mother. Pride held her back, but gave way at last before the imperious call of nature. The friendly darkness had fallen, and no one would see her come and go. She was not certain that she was not a prisoner, and even that her own desires, for she wanted to test it and to know the worst, if there were a worse than had happened already. So she slipped on bonnet and shawl and left the house, no effort being made to restrain her. She sped swiftly homeward—the mother's roof had always covered home—since her marriage as before it, and as she went there was such a promise of the peace she longed for in her mother's arms that it impelled her to run.

Blank disappointment at the door. Mother and daughter had had but little intercourse of late, and the estrangement had grown so far already that Mrs. Howarth had gone away on a customary summer visit of a week to her sister with out letting her daughter know of it. Her father was indoors, said the domestic, and would be glad to see her. No, she must shift to answer, she would call again when her mother had returned. She dared not face her father with the news.

The night had grown black and tempestuous. She had had no leisure to notice this before, but she saw it as she turned, and the gloom and threatened storm added their quota to the weight which rested on her. She snuk upon a hillock beneath the tall overhanging hedge and burst into a new passion of tears. Only a minute later she heard between her own sobs the sound of a quick footstep on the path, and rose to her feet to find a somber figure bending over her.

"My poor creature," said a pitying and familiar voice, "what's the matter? Don't be afraid of me. I wouldn't hurt you for the world!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Perhaps, if Mrs. Hackett had had but time to think of it, there was nobody by whom she would rather have been found in a situation so painful and humiliating, since it was fated that she should be discovered at all. Ned Blane, to her mind, was wise, tender, discreet and brave—and that is not a combination of characteristics at all to be looked for in every young man who may by chance surprise a woman in distress; and she was an old friend into the bargain. She shrank from him, however, in a new distress so acute that for the instant the gain of it killed the old one, and she seemed almost to recover possession of herself.

"It is nothing," she said. "Go away, Mr. Blane. Leave me. Pray do. I am going home."

At the first sound of her voice he knew her, and the tone seemed to enter his heart like a knife. He discerned a tragedy at once.

"Nothing," he said in a voice of real anguish. "Oh, yes, dear, there is much the matter. Tell me can I help you?" In all her life she had never heard the voice of a heart in pain until that moment. She had heard the voice of little sorrows often enough, but here she was in touch with something terrible. The voice shook her from head to foot with an instant revelation.

"Nothing," she said, breathing unevenly and trembling. "I am not very well, and I am foolish. Oh, pray go away, Mr. Blane. Let me go home alone. I am better. It is all over now."

Let me see you home," he answered in a voice suddenly dry and commonplace. "I won't distress you by talking. Take my arm."

She yielded and walked by his side through the darkness, with a sob catching her breath now and again. There was enough in the encounter to fill both minds. As for the girl, she knew now what she had merely guessed before. The guess had never concerned her greatly. And suddenly she blushed hotly in the dark, and withdrew her hand from his arm so swiftly that the motion startled him. He had called her "dear." What right had he to speak to her in such a way? What right had she, a married woman, to take the arm of a man who addressed her in such terms?

"I will go home alone, if you please, Mr. Blane," she said.

"As you please," he said, so coldly as

he had spoken last. "Your wish is my law."

There was not a touch of gallantry in the tone. Nothing, indeed, could have been further away from it, but she disliked the words, and slipped away with a chill "good night," and a "thank you" murmured with half-turned head when she was a dozen paces from him. He stood stock still until her figure was just melting into the darkness, and then walked after her, accommodating his pace to hers, and merely keeping her in sight—a moving shadow. When they left the grassy path, and came upon the road of hard beaten cinder which marked the beginning of the town, she could hear his footsteps at a distance behind her, and knew that he was following. She was warm with indignation against him now, and the unlucky word wailed woundingly. Blane, for his part, was unconscious of having used it.

The man in possession was in the hall when she entered, walking up and down. She escaped upstairs.

It was beginning to grow late to her fancy—that is to say, it was nearing 10 o'clock—but she resigned herself to a further waiting of two or three hours for her husband's return. She heard his step on the path and his key at the latch with a heart which beat half in relief and half in fear. It was something to have him back so early; but the news with which she had to receive him seemed as shameful to tell as it had been to suffer.

"Mary," called the jolly, rollicking voice from the foot of the stairs, "where are you? Then there was an exclamation, and "Hillo! what do you do here?"

Her place was by her husband's side. If her sense of duty could not carry her so far now how had it led her to the altar? But she moved reluctantly, and came upon the pair pale as a ghost, and with eyes red and swollen with crying. Hackett was reading the document Abram had presented to him by the light of a lamp, and he had thrust his feet back on one side to clutch a disorderly handful of cards.

"Will!" she said, laying a hand upon his shoulder. He turned with a grimace intended to make light of the thing, and went back to his reading.

"Old Lowther, is it?" said he, half to himself. "He promised to wait, the villain. Well, who says with the Lowther should have a long spoon, and mine's of the shortest. I'm afraid he'll get the best of it. Look here!"—he addressed himself to Abram—"you keep dark. I've got two or three gentlemen coming to supper and to take a hand at cards. I don't want you in the way. You understand?"

"Right you are, governor," responded Abram. "I'm willing to make things agreeable. You can have the plate in if you like, so long as I see it come out again."

Hackett laughed at this, though rather uncomfortably.

"All right, my lad," he said. "You stick to the kitchen."

"Will," said his wife, when Abram had retired, "you won't have people here to-night?" She laid a timid hand upon his arm, and looked up at him appealingly.

"Why not?" he asked, staring at her in affected astonishment. "I must. They'll be here in five minutes, my dear, and you must get a bit of supper ready."

"There is nothing in the house," she answered miserably. "It is too late to send out, and I am ashamed to send to the tradespeople already."

He stood gnawing at his moustache for a minute, and bent his eyebrows as he stared gloomily at the floor.

"Oh, I'll put that all right," he said, recovering himself, and turning with his usual jaunty swagger. "I shouldn't be away more than ten minutes, and you'll tell the fellows to wait. I'm going down to the hotel, and I'll get the ladies to send something up."

"Will," she broke out sobbing, "where is all this to end? You entertain your friends when we haven't even bread to eat ourselves that we can pay for honestly."

"Look here, Polly," said Hackett, turning upon her with an expression which had first surprised her on her wedding day, and had since then grown familiar; "my business is my business. Leave me to it and mind your own. And don't take that tone with me, for I can't stand it, and I'm not going to try."

She dropped her hands with a gesture of despairing resignation, and turned away. Mr. Hackett was a great deal too desirous of his own good opinion to permit the discussion to close in this manner. When a man is indubitably in the right, and is profoundly conscious that there is nothing in his career for which he can blame himself, he naturally likes to say so.

"I won't have those airs," said he therefore, "any more than I'll have that tone." Miserable as she was, she found strength enough for a flash of disdain at this. The scorn in her eyes was weary and sad enough, but it was none the less real on that account. "And I won't be looked at in that way, either," he went on, in a tone more frankly wrathful than he had ever used before to her. "Don't you try that sort of air on me, my lady, or you'll find it won't pay, I can assure you. If you think I married in order to have a perpetual wet blanket in the house, you are very much mistaken. Let me tell you. And here's another thing. You've been pretty shy of my friends ever since we married; and lately, whenever one of them comes into the house, I notice that you go away and hide yourself. Now, I'm not going to stand that, either. You'll come in to-night and take your place at the head of the supper table, where you ought to be. Mind that, now."

She never changed the weary look of anger and disdain which had impelled him to tag this injunctive to his list of complaints, and, as growing restless under it, had turned away from her, and

opening the hall door, had delivered the greater part of his speech half in the house and half out of it. The young young gentleman not only wanted to stand well with himself, but had, perhaps, even a stronger desire to stand well with other people; and if he had suspected the presence of Ned Blane outside it is likely that he would have moderated his tone; for although it is undeniably a pleasant thing to bully the feeble, and to have one's way with full assurance of courage, where there is no danger, the most triumphant swaggerer would prefer to execute his paces in private.

CHAPTER IX.

Little as his presence was suspected, Ned Blane stood in the darkness, under the shadow of the hedge, and heard more than enough of his successful rival's speech and tone to make his blood boil and his heart ache anew.

By the time Hackett's diatribe was over, however, the boiling blood had all subsided strangely. He was bitter within until his heart loathed its own bitterness, but he was completely master of himself, and he knew it. The honestly laced husband slammed the door behind him at the "mind that, now," and so escaped without return, and at the same time gave force and point to his injunctions. He strode angrily down the little gravel path and fumbled for a moment at the gate. In his wrath he shook at it so noisily that he failed to hear Blane's footstep, and it was something of a shock to him to see the somber figure looming so closely on him in the dark.

"Hillo!" he said, starting back nervously.

"Good night, Will!" said Blane, passing an arm through one of his with singularly firm deliberateness. Ned's arm clung to his old companion's so firmly that Hackett felt as though he were in custody, and made a half-unconscious movement to extricate himself, but the arm which encircled his felt like a bar of iron.

"Don't you think, Will," said Blane, strenuously but quietly controlling Hackett's footsteps to the measure of his own, "that you'd better keep those little endearments private—eh?"

"Oh!" cried Hackett, glancing sidling on the chance this gave him, "you've been eavesdropping, have you, Ned? Come, now; that doesn't do you any special credit, does it?"

"Now I'll warn you," said Blane, with a serious earnestness and coolness of tone which very much chilled his involuntary companion, "there's nothing I should so dearly like at this minute as for you to give me a reasonable chance of quarreling with you on my own account. Will you take that back, if you please?"

"Well," said Hackett, who liked less and less the iron pressure on his arm, "I don't recognize your right, you know, to make any comment on what you happen to overhear between my wife and me."

"Will you take it back, if you please?" Blane asked again, as the other had not spoken.

"Haven't I taken it back?" Hackett demanded. "I said you happened to overhear, didn't I? I have taken it back."

"Very well. And now for my question again. Don't you think those little endearments between man and wife are best kept private? Tell me now."

"I don't see what it has to do with you at all, Ned. You need not be a meddling fellow. Let a man mind his own concerns, will you?"

"I don't see what it has to do with me, either," said Blane. The iron grip on Hackett's arm began to tremble perceptibly, and while the captive wondered what this might mean he found himself suddenly released, but confronted face to face. "I do see one or two things," Blane was saying. "I do see that you've married one of the best girls in the world, and that you're as worthy of her as I am to be an angel. I do see that you bully her and snarl at her, like the mongrel you are. Business of mine! You may thank your stars, my lad, that it's no business of mine, for if it were you'd suffer."

"Now, come, Ned," said Hackett in an almost genial and altogether allowing and friendly way; "you go too fast and too far. You do now, really. I'm in the most abominable heap of trouble. I've had shameful luck lately, and nothing seemed to go as it ought to go. And I've had news to-night that enough to put any fellow out of temper."

"Go your way," Blane answered, with something very like a groan. "I've done with you."

"I shan't bear any malice for what's passed between us, Ned," said Hackett. "Very well," said the other. "Least said soonest mended."

"Ned's queer," thought Hackett to himself as he went on his way. "He's very queer. He used to be proving a good deal about old Howarth's house himself. Is that it?"

So the one effect of Ned Blane's interference was that it gave Will Hackett a needle to prick his wife with, and he made up his mind to use it.

(To be continued.)

When England Will Be Coal Hungry.

England has just been informed by the royal commission on coal supply that she may expect a coal famine in the year 1945—which is not so far off when you come to think of it.

The coal in the "light little island" will not be by any means exhausted in 1945, but all of it which lies at a less depth than 2,000 feet will have been taken from the earth and burned up.

It is estimated that all of England's coal will have been transformed into heat and smoke by the end of a period of from 250 to 300 years. After that time, if coal is still to be used as fuel, it will have to be brought from the United States or China. Nobody knows how large the coal deposits of China really are, but they are known to be immense.

Awful Mistake.

Beryl—Oh, yes, indeed! Mrs. De Styles used to be very popular until she gave a progressive euchre party to the girls.

Ribby—Well? "She neglected to arrange prizes for everybody and fix it that all the girls would win."—Baltimore Herald.

Too many people only know by hearing that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

GETTING FATHER'S CONSENT.

Mr. Tenney smiled ironically. "And I suppose I'm only a punkin with no blood to speak of an' no heart at all!" he said, with the air of holding himself nobly in check. Mrs. Tenney refused to accept the challenge. "That's neither here nor there—you're bein' a punkin," she replied. "What I want to know, Amos, is what you've got against George Raymond? He don't drink; he smokes, I believe, but only a pipe, not them cigarettes. He's got a good education, an' still he's willing to work. An' he's just lost in love for Alice."

"Shouldn't wonder if he was," said Mr. Tenney, complacently. "Nothing strange about that, with me the best fixed man in the township."

"Why, Amos, I am surprised!" exclaimed Mrs. Tenney. "You know 's well you want to know that George would want Alice just the same if she came from—from the Dromedaries, down Tunkett way."

"Mebbe," said Mr. Tenney, discreetly.

"Do you mean that he cares for Alice because you're well-to-do?" flashed Mrs. Tenney.

"Not altogether," said Mr. Tenney, coolly. "But 'tis hardly likely that he's unswayed of the fact that Alice will have all I've got some day. You know he'll never have a penny from anybody."

"So you mean to give me to understand that he's scheming an' calculating on Alice's prospects—is that it?" demanded Mrs. Tenney.

"I ain't accusing him of anything," said Mr. Tenney, impartially. "I'm merely saying that George is a poor young man an' that Alice's prospects are good."

"You was poor yourself when I married you," said Mrs. Tenney, reflectively.

"I admit it," said Mr. Tenney, as impersonally as he was able. "But that's no reason why I should set still an' see Alice make the same blunder."

"Did pa's being-forthanded influence you any?" asked Mrs. Tenney.

Mr. Tenney perceived the narrowing circle of his wife's reasoning. "If you're going to be personal—" he began.

"Did it, Amos?" persisted Mrs. Tenney.

"No, it didn't, an' you know it," answered Mr. Tenney, stiffly.

"You fell in love with me—just me—didn't you?" Mrs. Tenney knew it without assurance, but she waited anxiously for her husband's answer.

"Ain't you getting kind o' mushy, Amos?" he asked, mildly.

"It was that way, wasn't it?" Mrs. Tenney continued, robustly.

Mr. Tenney picked up the paper he had been reading when the conversation began. "I've always explained it that way to myself," he replied.

Mrs. Tenney got up and began to move about the room. "I guess I'll be stringing," she said. "We expect George to supper an' to spend the evening. He an' Alice are engaged, Amos, and I told 'em I guessed to-night was good's any to ask your consent."

There was a spluttering exclamation behind the paper.

"What should you think we'd better give 'em—silver or money?" Mrs. Tenney answered, considerably.

"Just which you think best, Amos," answered Mr. Tenney, watching his wife out of the room.

"It's all right," Mrs. Tenney continued to Alice in the kitchen; "he didn't begin to go on as your grandpa did. When ma spoke to him about your pa an' me, it took the greatest part of the evening to bring him round."—Youth's Companion.

Mrs. Gilbert—Dean of the Stage.

Nowhere are gray hairs held in higher reverence than on the stage, especially when we ourselves have seen them some year after year, until the head that was once brown is streaked with silver; and Mrs. Gilbert has lived to teach a whole generation of young actresses something that they cannot learn from books or a dramatic school about the difficult and exquisite art of growing old gracefully. There has never been a time, indeed, when she could not teach her juniors a great deal about the art of listening on the stage, of keeping in the picture so as to retain the attention of an audience without clamoring for it and of playing even the least important scenes so as to give them their fullest significance and value.

Every honor that her profession can bring save the empty one of mere stardom, Mrs. Gilbert enjoys. She is sure of the heartiest kind of a reception on her first entrance, and the stage hands gather in the wings to watch her during her best scenes. Moreover, all New York knows her by sight and looks after her with kindly eyes as she passes.

"I'm sure I ought to be thankful to the Lord for all His mercies," she said to me once. "I never get into a crowded street car without findin' somebody who knows who I am and gives me a seat."

And this is a tribute that New York pays to no one else.—Leslie's Monthly.

A Skeptic.

"What do statistics show?" inquired the man who was warming up to his subject.

"As a rule," answered the man who is always doubtful, "they don't show much except patience and industry on the part of the man who collected them."—Washington Star.

Some rules work both ways and some others won't work either way.

SUPPOSE WE SMILE.

HUMOROUS PARAGRAPHS FROM THE COMIC PAPERS.

Pleasant Incidents Occurring the World Over—Sayings that are Cheerful to Old or Young—Funny Selections that Everybody Will Enjoy.

Mother—I don't hear the canary singing this morning, Oston. Is he in a good humor?

Oston—No, mamma, I think he's in a pet.

Mother—You do? Othen—Yes, the Persian cat swallowed him.

Then He Ran. "George, you don't love me any more."

"Oh, yes, I do."

"Then, George, you have been deceiving me. Last night you said it was impossible to love me any more than you did."

"Well, er—confound it, then I don't."

"Oh, George, how can you! Boo-boo!"

Getting On.

Well, Tommy, how are you getting on at school?

"First-rate. I ain't doing so well as some of the other boys, though. I can stand on my head, but I have to put my feet against the wall. I want to do it without the wall at all."—Punch.

Lesser Evil.

"Mr." wailed the small boy, "I've lost two teeth, a lock of hair, scraped my shins and tore all my clothes up."

"What have you been doing, sir?" demanded the angry woman. "Tell the truth."

"Fighting."

"Oh, well, it's not so bad. I thought you'd been playing football."

A Long-Felt Want.

Casey—Oh, see there's a bin another railroad wreck due to an open switch.

Cassidy—Ay, 'tis a pity some wan don't invent a switch that'll stay shut with its open.—Philadelphia Press.

More Proof.

Ernie—Some learned professor tells us that sunspots cause people to lose their tempers.

Ida—I don't doubt it. I saw several girls the other day who were mad as hornets because they had freckles.

One Drawback.

"'Tis love that makes the world go round," whispered the pretty girl as she nestled closer.

"Yes," sighed the young man as he glanced at the time, "and it seems to make the hands of the clock go around, too."

Platform Repartee.

"Did you ever see a chimney sweep?" asked the solemn man with the black cane.

"No," responded the conductor of the car, "but I've heard a college yell."

A Clear Conscience.

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Reverend.

"What is the difference between me and a prisoner on a pirate ship?" asked the man who was placing boards along the slippery stone walk.

"Give it up," responded the other suburbanite.

"Well, I have to plank the walk and he'd have to walk the plank."

Easily Explained.

Teacher—Where is your brother this morning, Tommy?

Tommy—He fell in a barrel of cider and hurt himself.

Teacher—How could cider hurt him? Tommy—It was hard cider, ma'am.

What the Homely Bachelor Says.

"Mamma," asked small Floramney, "what is 'single blessedness?'"

"Single blessedness, my dear," replied the knowing mother, is a "bouquet that a bachelor throws at himself when he wants to marry and can't."

A Bright Thought.

"Yes, ma'am," said the obsequious grocery clerk to Mrs. Bridget, who was ordering her first bill of supplies. "I've put down paper matches; what next?"

"Well—er—I suppose I ought to have some kitchen matches, too, oughtn't I?"

Nightly Occurrence.

Teacher—What is this word? Tommy—I don't know, ma'am.

Teacher—What does a gentleman remove when he enters a house? Tommy—Well, if ma is awake he removes his shoes.

Seething.

Angry Patron to waiter—Herd! Take away this lobster. Why, it's as old as I am.

Very Appropriate.

"Did you hear about Laver? Went fast to sleep while speeding in his automobile."

"Yes, and he slept like a top."

"How was that?"

"Spinning."

Dinner Repartee.

"All this spring chicken is a toothsome morsel," said the sweet singer.

"Excuse me," said the comical boarder, "but it cannot be toothsome."

"Why not?"

"Because chickens have no teeth."

An Unreasonable Request.

Wife (humbly)—An you can let me have a dollar, dear?

Husband (stiffly)—No, I can't. Haven't I just spent \$2,300 on an automobile?

There's Something in the Wind.

"How was that play, 'The Fall of Santiago?'"

"Great! The shells fell among the audience."

"You don't say?"

"Yes, the gallery boys were eating peanuts."

The Absent-Minded Beggar.