

THE OLD MAN DREAMS.

BY O. W. HOLMES.

O for an hour of youthful joy!
Give back my twentieth spring!
I'd rather laugh a bright-haired boy
Than reign a gray-beard king.

Off with the spots of wrinkled age!
Away with learning's crown!
Tear out life's wisdom-written page,
And dash its trophies down.

One moment let my life bloom stream
From boyhood's fount of flame:
Give me one giddy, raving dream
Of life, all love and fame.

My listening angel heard the prayer,
And calmly smiling, said:
"If I but touch thy silvered hair,
Thy hasty wish has sped.

"But is there nothing in thy track
To bid thee fondly stay,
While the swift seasons hurry back
To find the wished-for day?

"Ah, truest soul of woman kind!
Without thee what were life?
One bliss I cannot leave behind:
I'll take—my precious wife!"

The angel took a sapphire pen
And wrote in rainbow dew:
The man would be a boy again,
And be a husband, too.

"And is there nothing yet unsaid
Before the change appears?
Remember all their ills have fled
With those dissolving years."

"Why, yes," for memory would recall
My fond parental joys;
"I could not bear to leave them all—
I'll take my girls and boys."

The smiling angel dropped his pen,
"Why, this will never do;
The man would be a boy again
And be a father, too."

And so I laughed; my laughter woke
The household with its noise;
I wrote my dream when morning broke
To please the gray-haired boys.

MISS CHURCHILL'S SUITORS.

A Romance of Beechwood Chase.

CHAPTER I.

Beechwood Chase was well named. The house was nothing but roomy and comfortable—"a substantial stone mansion without architectural pretension," the county guide-book called it—but the trees around it were the wonder and delight of the neighborhood and the pride of Lord Darley's heart. They were nearly all beeches, those fairest of forest trees, beside which oaks are clumsy and elms are stiff. The great smooth boles reached to magnificent girth; the drooping branches, all broadened with half-ripened nuts that glowed like beads of amber in the sun, spread themselves far and wide, and made great stretches of shadow on the soft grass below. Here deer couched, and squirrels ran about the laden boughs rejoicing, and shy, timorous birds, that shunned the haunts of men, built their nests in peace. The park was large, with a slope to a little stream that ran noisily over its pebbles, and mingled its babble brawling with the rustle of the trees, and the cry of the wood-pigeon, and the song of linnet and thrush.

It was seldom that the solitude was broken by anything but the tread of a gamekeeper or wood-reeve, except in the shooting season, but this year Lady Darley had been recommended country air and quiet, and had brought with her a train of distinguished guests, at whose appearance in the park the squirrels hid themselves, and the rabbits disappeared in their holes, and the browsing deer lifted startled heads, and scuttled away into sylvan retreats, where no stray feet would either follow or find them.

With Lady Darley had come, as a matter of course, her special friend, Delia Churchill, sole daughter and heiress of the late Sir John Churchill, banker and financier and reputed millionaire, and more young men than are prone to bury themselves in the country in June. "But where Miss Churchill is, there will the gallants be gathered together," said Coventry Smith, who wrote for society papers, and affected wit of a more or less degraded quality. Delia looked at him with the cold scorn her admirers knew so well.

"I don't think parades like that are quite reverent," she said, and then returned to the book from which her dark eyes had been for just a moment raised.

"Don't crush him quiet, Delia," said Lady Darley, languidly. But Mr. Smith did not look crushed. He smiled jauntily and kissed his hand as he disappeared through the open window.

"Crushed? A mangle wouldn't do it!" said Delia. "I do dislike that man, self-sufficient, conceited coxcomb he is!"

"I wonder if you will ever see any one you will like, my dear! It will not be for want of aspirants."

"No," said Delia, bitterly, and there was so much pain in her voice that Lady Darley looked at her inquiringly. "Do you think I do not know why?" cried Delia, with sparkling eyes. They were quite alone now, and she got up and began to walk about with an excitement that would have astonished those who only knew the proud and resented Miss Churchill in society. "Ah!" she cried, "you cannot understand it, Bella—you, who were poor, who were loved for yourself! Ah! how I loathe these creatures who fawn and flatter and cringe, like that abject thing that crawled away just now!"

"Delia, do you know, I think you are a little unjust, even to Coventry Smith?"

"Unjust! Very likely," said Miss Churchill. "What chance have I of being just? How can men do themselves justice when they are seeking not love but gold?"

"It is not fair to class them all together," said Lady Darley, who had her favorites among the aspirants, as she called them. "There is young Horner, for instance. He does not

care about your money; or, at least, no more than is reasonable."

"No; it is a good little boy, and has an honest fit of calf-love, I believe," said Delia, smiling with a gentleness that quite changed the expression of her face; "but, all the same, I am not the 'plum' he will pull out of life's pie."

"You may well say a plum—I begin to think your heart is nothing better than a stone," said Lady Darley, laughing.

"Here is Darley," said Miss Churchill, who was standing by the window.

"And Maurice Arnold with him! There is another man, Delia, that I am sure you must acquit of fortune-hunting. He couldn't pay you less attention if you were as poor as a church mouse."

"No," agreed Delia.

"I couldn't imagine what brought him down here, but it seems he has some old aunt who lives in the village."

"Oh!"

"So that must be it," said Lady Darley comfortably. "You know that little old lady who goes about with all those dogs?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is she—little Miss Macksey, you know. I believe she is getting a little childish, for she can't be less than eighty. She must be Mr. Arnold's great-aunt, I should think—shouldn't you?"

"Really, I don't think I should think about it," said Miss Churchill. She moved away from the window as she spoke, and the next moment the two men passed it and came into the room.

Lord Darley was short and dark and stout, and his companion was tall and slim and fair. Both were about thirty, but Mr. Arnold looked a little younger. He had a clever face, with a dash of sarcasm about the mouth, and gray eyes that expressed just as much or as little as their owner pleased.

They were pleased to express very little just now. He did not see Miss Churchill, who had moved into the shadow of the curtain, and Lady Darley was not a favorite of his.

"I'll go and hunt up that book about the German mines, Darley," he observed. "It's somewhere in the library, I dare say."

"Well, if you must have it, I think you will find it on the third block on the right, bottom row," said Lord Darley; "but won't you come and make one at pool?"

"Not this morning, thanks."

He went away, and Darley burst into a laugh almost before the door had closed.

CHAPTER II.

"You'll never guess what we've been doing this morning," said Lord Darley, when Arnold had gone. "We've been to a dog's funeral—we have, upon my honor! You never saw such sight in all your life. Miss Macksey has lost one of those pugs of hers, and she took it into her head to have it buried in the park. Of course I said she might, for she's as fond of the little brutes as if they were children."

"I know," said his wife; "and calls them by such ridiculous names. That big mastiff that walks behind her chair is Sir Galahad, and all the pugs and poodles are Sir This or Lady That. One is Lady Clara Vere de Vere, I know."

"Well, there they all were, and every dog of 'em had got a bit of crape round his left fore-paw. I declare I could have laughed my head off, except that the poor little woman was in such a way. One of the keepers had dug a hole down in the copse by the brook, and Arnold put the poor little beggar in, as grave as a judge, and then he walked Miss Macksey off home, and all those ridiculous dogs trotted at our heels. I was in fits, but Arnold never as much as smiled. I dare say he knew better—the old lady's got a pretty bit of money, and can leave it as she likes."

"Lord Darley!" cried Delia, in a tone of trenchant scorn. She came forward from her shadowed corner, and the light fell on her face, and showed it curiously disturbed; her mouth trembled, her eyes flashed indignant fire.

"Eh? what's all this about?" cried the unconscious little peer, facing this angry apparition with innocent wonder. "Lord Darley, indeed! What next?"

"Darley," said Delia, more gently, "I think you ought to unsay that. There are plenty of men who would restrain their laughter or their tears, who would purify themselves in any way you please for gold, but you know—*you know!*—that Maurice Arnold is not one."

Lord Darley did not answer, and something in his face made Delia turn sharply round. One glance sufficed. In the doorway stood Maurice Arnold, looking almost as confused as herself. He had come back to ask something further about his book, and stood arrested at the sound of his own name.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, but Delia fled through the window, scarlet and abashed, and Darley exclaimed, with a laugh:

"You didn't know you had such a doughty champion, did you? We shall have you proposing to the heiress next, old man!"

"I am much indebted to Miss Churchill," said Arnold stiffly; "but I think that would hardly be the way to justify her good opinion."

He went away with his question unasked, and indeed forgotten. The sight of Delia, flushed and moved in his defense, had been sweeter to him than he cared to own. Why, oh! why was she so rich, and he so poor, that to woo her would be to lose his self-respect? His only defense against the passion that had so often nearly mastered him, had been the assumption of indifference,

that was all the easier because he believed her equally indifferent to himself. But indifference does not plead for the absent as Delia had pleaded for him, or fly shame-stricken at discovery as Delia had just fled. Could it be that she divined his unspoken love, and returned it? There was delirium in the thought, and visions of impossible happiness seemed to mock him as he dwelt upon it; but as the sweet summer days crept on the happiness began to seem less and less impossible. If he did not woo her, at least he did not avoid her, and the change in his manner thawed the coldness and reserve that had been, perhaps, as artificial as his own.

Delia was very happy in those bright June days that seem the natural setting for love's young dream. Each day was beautiful, for each day held the sunshine of Maurice Arnold's smile, the meeting that was all the world to two people, the parting that was only a tender postponement of joy. And yet no word was spoken.

"One daren't and the other's afraid," said Lord Darley to his wife; and in a sense that observation was true. Delia could not speak, and so long as Arnold kept silence, pride constrained her to deny him even the faint intangible signs that are as words to women; and Maurice Arnold was a suitor who shrank from the faintest semblance of repulse. He must be sure, beyond the security of other men, this man who was going to bend his proud neck to well-dowered Delia's yoke. Could she not understand that she was as a princess, set aside from other women by the burden of her wealth, and that the first signs of favor must come from herself? Only her own hand could open her lover's lips, if he were to escape the ignominy of seeming to seek "not love, but gold."

If he could have looked into Delia's heart he would have known how groundless was the fear. He was not a woman who loved or trusted by halves, and even before there had been any question of love between them she had defended him from the imputation of mercenary motives. He went down daily to see Miss Macksey now, but Delia did not think he went for sordid reasons, any more than she believed Coventry Smith when he laughed and hinted that there must be something more attractive than an old aunt in the village to account for the young man's visits. Delia listened with her coldest and most scornful smile, and went out into the park, where the sun was setting and the shadows were lying on the grass, and where Maurice—she had begun to call him Maurice to her own heart now—would be coming on his way from Miss Macksey's.

At last she saw the gray coat she had learned to know so well moving among the trees, and stopped and looked with innocent surprise. He was down by the brook, which was not the way from the village, and it struck her that there was something unusual in his attitude and occupation. She stepped silently on the soft, yielding grass, and saw that he was cutting something on one of the great beeches. Her name—of course it was her name! and she laughed at the thought. Perhaps it was a boyish and foolish thing to do, but no woman very deeply censures a folly that is committed for her sake.

She would not reveal herself, and wandered idly among the trees, gathering boughs for Lady Darley's beau-pots till he had gone, and then she walked straight to the tree he had just left. There was a name upon it, but it was not hers, and she stood as if turned to stone. The name he loved, the name he had cared to carve even when she was waiting for him, was not Delia—it was Elaine!

"And I thought he loved me for myself," said Delia, bitterly—"I have learnt the truth in time."

CHAPTER III.

It is six years afterward, and Delia is still Churchill. It had not needed much to make so proud a man as Maurice Arnold withdraw a suit he had scarcely yet ventured to urge. A disdainful smile or two, a few bitter words, and he had left the Chase, and Delia was left to her sorrow and her pride.

The first pain is over now. The healing years have touched the wound, and perhaps only Delia herself remembers that it is there. Are there not some such scars in most lives—scars that are scarcely seen even by the nearest eyes, but that start and throb with a dull pain that will only cease at the touch of a greater healer than even time? Miss Churchill bears hers bravely enough, fronting the world with smiles, and a she had left the Chase, and Delia was left to her sorrow and her pride.

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said to a literary friend, "and they haven't it in the library."

"What is it called?" was the not unnatural question; but Delia was dumb. She had not realized how impossible it would be to name a book so unlikely for a young lady's reading without arousing curiosity as to her interest in it.

"Try the British Museum," suggested the man of letters, as willing as every one else to oblige the wealthy Miss Churchill.

Having obtained a ticket for the reading-room, Delia went one morning with a curious feeling of agitation, such as one might feel at meeting with a long-lost friend. It would be like meeting Maurice again, to read the words that were the offspring of his brain, and her hand shook nervously as she showed her ticket and went into the great reading-room that is so well known to literary people. Miss Churchill was not literary, and it was all new and strange to her, but she made her way to the clerks at the central counter, without wasting time in observation. She was quite unreasonably agitated, and made her request in a fluttered whisper.

"Report on Mines?" said the clerk, with a distinctness that sounded almost brutal. "If you will go and sit down at that table, it will be brought to you."

She filled up the paper given her, and made her way to an unoccupied seat, and in the stillness of the place she managed to recover herself enough to look about her. Nearly all the readers were men, and quaint-looking people many of them were. There were a few women, chiefly with short hair, and bad complexions, and shabby gowns, and they looked at Delia's velvet and fur as working bees might look at a gorgeous butterfly that had strayed into their hives.

"Which Report is it—'83 or '84?" asked a clerk with two volumes in his hand.

And Delia, scarlet and ashamed, had to say, "I don't know—it is Mr. Arnold's that I want."

A man at the next desk lifted his head curiously, but Delia did not see him. It seemed to her that she had gone through a great deal to secure the doubtful pleasure of seeing Maurice Arnold's book, but the sight of his name on the blue cover moved her as few things had done of late years. She took it with a little eager cry, and sat down to read it.

If Miss Churchill expected a literary treat, she did not find it. It would never be in Maurice Arnold's power to make any one "glorious by his pen." But she found what was perhaps dearer to her—little turns of expression that recalled the man she had loved, and amid the technicalities that might have deterred a less earnest reader, evidences of care for the poor creatures he had to report on, and a simple intention of fulfilling his duty, that seemed to show a loyal and upright soul.

"How could he have lied to me so at Beechwood?" thought Delia, and her eyes filled with tears.

Talking is not allowed in the Reading-room, but a hand was laid on hers, and the man who had looked up when she uttered Maurice Arnold's name whispered:

"Miss Churchill! may I speak to you outside?" Of course it was Arnold himself, who, by one of those providences we call a lucky chance, had been at the next table, and to whom the tears that had fallen on his not very moving book had been a revelation.

Delia did not refuse, and under the cold eyes of the statues in the "Grecian Room" the tale was told that had so nearly been told under the beeches of Beechwood Chase. Maurice Arnold was not a poor man now, for Miss Macksey was dead, and after providing for her pugs and poodles, had left him residuary legatee. He was not afraid of being called a fortune-hunter now, and Delia could hardly rise from that honest, well-meaning book, and doubt the love its author offered her.

"But who was 'Elaine'?" she asked, when all was happily settled. And then, as he only stored—"I mean the 'Elaine' whose name you carved on the beech-tree at Beechwood Chase."

"That?" said Maurice, with a shout that almost made the statues wink. "Do you really care to know, Delia? It was the pug of Miss Macksey's that was buried under the tree. I promised to put up an inscription for it, but I never got any further than 'Elaine'."