

## WEDDING BELLS.

Oh blithely ring, ye wedding bells,  
From out the upper air;  
Oh sweetly sing the song that tells  
Of a blushing bridal pair;  
On joyful wing, and echoing tell,  
From organ voice and lyre,  
The story of the dame's farewell,  
The blessing of the sire.  
  
Toll of the bride, with modest mien,  
The groom of bearing proud;  
Of trustingly clasped hands unseen,  
Of heads at the altar bowed;  
Of smiles and tears of hopes and fears,  
Of emblem troth and vow;  
Of prayers that all the coming years  
May be as bright as now.  
  
Oh, wedding bells, ring full and clear,  
In softened tones and low;  
Ring benedictions on the ear  
Of those who outward go;  
Ring comfort for the old home-nest,  
And for its roof-tree dear,  
Whether a cot or palace, blest  
With plain or goodly cheer.  
  
Ring, wedding bells, once and again,  
In melody subtle;  
Ring joyfully and in refrain  
Throughout all coming time;  
Oh, ring and sing of the happiness  
That to mankind is given  
In homely joys, in wedded bliss,  
Foretastes on earth of Heaven.  
—Clark W. Bryan, in *Good Housekeeping*.

## THE OLD MILL MYSTERY

By Arthur W. Marchmont, B. A.

Author of "Miser Hoedley's Secret," "Madeline Power," "By Whose Hand," "Isa," &c., &c.

Copyright, 1892, by the Author.

CHAPTER XII—CONTINUED.

Before she had finished her mother came in.

"Bless the girl, what's the matter?" cried Mrs. Ashworth.

"I'm going out. My Tom's in trouble, and I'm going to him. Some villains dare to say he's stolen some of their paltry money, and I'm going to see what it means. I'm going to him."

"You can't do that," said Savannah, quietly.

Mrs. Ashworth looked from one to the other of the girls in wonder.

"Who says that?" replied Mary, laughing scornfully. "Who'll stop me? Where my Tom is there I'll go."

"You can't go to him now where he is," said Savannah again.

"Why not?" said Mary, her face flushing.

"Where is he, then?" asked Mrs. Ashworth in the same breath.

"He's probably in gaol by this time," answered Savannah; and at the words Mary cried out, and would have fallen in her weakness if her mother had not caught her and half led, half carried her back to her chair.

Her weakness lasted only a minute, however, and then she sprang up and cried:

"I don't care where he is. Where my Tom is, there I mean to be," and with that she turned to leave the cottage.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### MARY'S SUSPICIONS.

"Stay, Mary; you had better hear all I have been told before you go."

Mary turned back, as though she thought the suggestion good.

"Yes; I should like to hear it. When did all this happen?"

"Not long before I came here," answered Savannah.

"Did Tom send you to tell me?"

"No. I came because I thought it would be better for you to hear it from me than from anyone else."

"Tom Roylance a thief and in prison," ejaculated Mrs. Ashworth, lifting up her hands in amazement.

"Silence, mother," cried Mary, angrily. "Tom is no thief, and those who have dared to put him in prison will have to pay for it. But now, Savannah, what is it these slanderers say against my Tom?"

"They say that a week or two back something in the accounts was noticed that puzzled them. They said nothing at the time, waiting to see what happened. Then they decided to make a sudden examination into the books, and to see whether the money was right. They came—at least, they went to the cottage."

"Were you there?" asked Mary, quickly, noticing the slip the other made in the use of the words.

"I was sitting with the old man, and had been reading to him," answered Savannah, flushing slightly as she spoke. "Well, they asked at once for the books and for the money, and went into the thing then and there. They were in the front room, and after a time Tom came back to where I was sitting with his father, and he looked very angry and agitated. He went to a drawer, unlocked it and took out a cash box."

"I heard him exclaim as he took it into his hands, and then he cried, suddenly:

"My God! I'm ruined! I've been robbed! My cash box has been broken open. I had all the money of the sick fund in it, and every shilling is gone! They'll think I've robbed them."

"At that moment one of the other men came to the door, and asked Tom if he would take the money into the next room so that they could count it and check it."

"Murstone—it was Murstone, the over-looker, you know him, Mary—Murstone. I've been robbed," said Tom. "The box is empty, and every shilling has been taken away!"

"Murstone smiled a hard, disbelieving, mocking smile, which drew down the corners of his mouth, whilst his eyebrows went up, and he shrugged his shoulders as he answered:

"That's unfortunate, in a tone that showed he didn't believe a word of what Tom said. 'But come, let us get back and tell the others of your misfortune.'

"Tom's eye blazed with rage at the other's tone and manner, and I thought he was going to strike him. But he kept his temper, and followed Murstone out of the room, holding the empty cash box dangling from his hand as he walked."

"Poor fellow. I pitied him."

"They did not come in again for some time, and his father lay back

wondering what it meant. When Tom came he was alone.

"I'm going out for a bit, father. I could read in the troubled look in his eyes that something very bad was the matter."

"What is the matter? I asked him, getting out of earshot of the old man.

"There's trouble and a strange mistake about the business of the sick fund money. These men think I've taken it and they say they must give me in charge. Of course, I can't stop them if they like to do so. But we shall probably go over at once to Presburn and see the head man there and have the thing threshed out straight away. If I don't come back to-night, try and prevent my father from worrying too much, and make some excuse. But I may be locked up. I can't tell yet."

"And with that he went out like one dazed and half stupefied."

"Did he send no message of any kind to me?" asked Mary, jealously.

"No. He said no more than I have told you," answered Savannah.

"Then I'll go down to his cottage and see whether he has come back yet. Are you coming?"

The two girls left the house together, and on the way to Tom's home Mary plied her companion with questions. When they reached the cottage Tom was not there. He had not been back.

"I'll wait," said Mary, quietly, and she took off her hat and jacket and sat down.

"You've no call to wait, Savannah," said Mary, somewhat ungraciously, after a time.

"Why are you angry with me, Mary?" asked Savannah, in her softest voice. "Tom asked me to stay with his father until his return, if he does return to-night. That is why I am here. But you and I must not quarrel at a time like this."

Mary turned to her companion and said readily:

"I was wrong, Savannah. Forgive me. But I am full of anxiety about this; it frightens me. There must be some conspiracy against Tom. He is so good-natured and open and trustful that anyone can impose upon him. I wish he would come."

After a time she rose and made some supper for the invalid, who spoke very little, but lay and watched her as she moved about the room. The old man turned to Savannah:

"Will you read to me, child? You will soothe me."

The girl went to the side of the bed and took up the book that was lying there—it was a copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress"—and as soon as Mary had finished her preparations began reading aloud from it.

Mary sat apart nearer the door, waiting and listening for Tom's coming. Presently, she crept gently from the room and went to the door of the cottage to wait there. This was about ten o'clock; she knew there was a train from Presburn about that time. After a little while she saw her lover's tall figure coming up the street. He was walking slowly, and his head was bent as though he was in deep thought.

She gave a sigh of relief when she saw him, for she had begun to fear that his not coming might mean the worst. She went to meet him. When she saw him he stopped and started.

"Mary, you here?"

The tears were in her voice as she put out her hands to take his, wanting to make him feel her sympathy.

"I heard there was some trouble, Tom. Savannah told me."

"Why did she speak of it? She said she would not."

"Not to me?" She was hurt to think he should wish to have a trouble kept secret from her and known to another.

"I did not want to trouble you while you were ill, Mary," said Tom, reading her meaning in her question.

"I would far rather know it at once," she answered. "It is only a cruel kindness to keep your troubles from me." Then she took his arm, and clung to him and wondered and grieved that he did not kiss her. If she had had a trouble, it would have been so sweet, she thought, to have been able to tell him and to kiss him for the ready wealth of sympathy which would be given to her. Such sympathy as her heart was bursting to pour forth.

"Let us go in," he said, after a moment's pause, in which he had felt embarrassed.

"Can you speak of this before your father and—Savannah?" asked Mary.

"You must not stay in the night air, lass; you'll get chilled. Oh! yes; I can say anything before them." Mary guessed what he had meant to say, even before he added, as if to explain away her thoughts: "Savannah knows everything already."

They went in, and Mary was relieved to see he was brighter than she had thought.

She half hoped that matters were not so bad as she had feared. But the first words he spoke killed her hope. They were addressed to Savannah in answer to the searching, anxious look that she directed upon him with the one-word question: "Well?"

"No, it is not well," he answered, playing on the word. "It is not so bad as it might be. But—" and he looked across to where his father lay.

"He is asleep," said Savannah, interpreting the look.

Then Tom drew the two girls across the room, and in a low voice told them the result of the journey to Presburn. They had not found the man whom they had gone over to see.

As soon as Tom began to speak of the matter, Mary read in his eyes and voice and manner how real and terrible was the trouble, and how deeply he was suffering, and she longed in her heart to have the task of comforting him. But Savannah's presence checked her.

"What is it they say against you, Tom?" she asked. "I mean, what is the actual charge they make?"

"That I have stolen the money of the fund, Mary. That I am a thief. You know I have to collect certain subscriptions, and they—well, it is Mur-

stone who is doing it—seem to have got hold of the idea that I have been making the accounts all wrong, and that I haven't accounted for some of the money."

"What a disgraceful shame!" she cried, angry and indignant at the mere accusation against him. "How much money is it that—"

"That I have stolen?" he said, when she hesitated for a moment to find a word to use.

"Tom! How can you even joke about such a thing?" she exclaimed. "I mean, how much do they say is missing?"

"The amount they speak of now is about twelve or thirteen pounds; but—but that is not all." He stopped and sighed heavily.

"What else is there?" asked Mary, laying her hand gently on his arm, while her heart bled at the sight of his troubled eyes.

"They dare to suggest that the books have been wrong for a long time, and that there is much more money than that altogether."

"Well, you can put the books into somebody's hands to-morrow, and show that's a lie," said Mary.

The two girls left the house together, and on the way to Tom's home Mary plied her companion with questions. When they reached the cottage Tom was not there. He had not been back.

"I'll wait," said Mary, quietly, and she took off her hat and jacket and sat down.

"You've no call to wait, Savannah," said Mary, somewhat ungraciously, after a time.

"They've taken them to-night."

"Tom, you surely never let them do that! Why, that's admitting that things are wrong."

"It was the only arrangement they'd consent to," he answered, as if feebly excusing his weakness.

"But about the money," she said, after a pause. "Did you give them that as well?"

"How could I do that?" he exclaimed, rather irritably. "Didn't Savannah tell you that it had been stolen out of the cash-box?"

"Well, you can put the books into somebody's hands to-morrow, and show that's a lie," said Mary.

"It is the fund money that was stolen?"

"Yes, Mary; of course it was," he answered, again speaking irritably. "Don't you understand? You know I put the money always in that cash-box just as I collected it, and kept it there until I paid it over to Lee when he came from Presburn. When I went to get it this evening, to show that it tallied with the accounts, it was gone. That's the whole thing in a nutshell."

The tone in which he spoke hurt the girl. It seemed as if he resented her questions.

"But if it was only twelve or thirteen pounds—you have more than that in the savings bank, Tom; and you can give them that, can't you? Surely they cannot punish you because some one has stolen the money from you. That, at the worst, would be your loss, not theirs. Bad enough, of course; but not nearly so bad as—as the other."

This seemed to disconcert him more than the former questions. He turned away his head, and Mary fancied she detected a quick glance flashed between Savannah and him.

"You don't understand it, Mary." His voice was a trifle more unsteady than it had been before. "I told them that the money was in the house and after the mill closed in order to tell her all that passed.

About five o'clock, however, Reuben Gorringe came to her with a look of concern and seriousness on his face, and asked her to come as soon as possible to the office, as he wished to see her particularly.

"What is it?" she asked. "Is anything the matter?"

"I can't tell you here; come to the office," answered Gorringe. "It is serious."

She stopped all her looms almost as soon as he had left, and followed him.

soon as the money could be got from the bank. Gorringe was only too glad for her to come to him—glad to let her feel the advantages of the possession of money.

"Ten pounds, Mary? Of course I will. Is that enough? Here, take back your book," he said, without having attempted to open it. "There need be no talk of such a thing between you and me. What I have will always be half yours. You have but to ask!" and he smiled as he handed the book out to her, with a bank note for ten pounds.

"I wish you to see, please, Mr. Gorringe, that there is money in the bank—more than enough to cover this; and if it can be done, I should like you to have security for the money. I am going to draw this sum out at once, and should like you to have it if that is possible."

"What a little business woman you are, to be sure," he said. "But I'll trust you for that amount if you don't want more, without trying to get into the secrets of your banking account, child," and he smiled again.

"There's over forty pounds there, Mr. Gorringe," said Mary, with quiet firmness.

"Very well," he said. "I know you are in earnest. You won't have me for a friend, I suppose, so I must be content to be your man of business. This will do." He had been writing while he spoke. "There you are, Mary. Sign that and all will be legal."

"Thank you," she said. "I will give it to you the moment it comes."

"You are very welcome; but of course you know that," he said.

He had acted very wisely in yielding to Mary's wish to give "security" for the money, and he had pleased her as much by his manner of doing the act as by the act itself.

She took the ten pounds, together with some which she had at home, and gave it to Tom, telling the latter to pay it at once to Murstone, or at all events to satisfy him that the amount shown to be due was ready to be paid over at any time; and when she had done this she felt lighter hearted than for some hours previously. The work hours passed rapidly in the pleasant anticipation of being with Tom, for the latter had promised to see her directly after the mill closed in order to tell her all that passed.

About five o'clock, however, Reuben Gorringe came to her with a look of concern and seriousness on his face, and asked her to come as soon as possible to the office, as he wished to see her particularly.

"What is it?" she asked. "Is anything the matter?"