

THE MAIL

A PAPER FOR THE PEOPLE.

GUILD'S SIGNAL.

BY BRET HARTE.

Two low whistles, faint and clear,
That was the signal the engineer—
Gave to his wife at Providence,
As through the sleeping town, and thence,
Out in the night,
On to the light,
Down past the farms, lying white, he sped!

As a husband's greeting, scant no doubt,
Yet to the woman looking out,
Watching and waiting noisier,
Love song or midnight roundelay
Said what that whistle seemed to say:
"To my trust true
So love to you
Working or waiting, Good night!" It said.

Brisk young bachelors, tourists fine,
Old commuters along the line,
Brakemen and porters glanced ahead,
Smiled as the signal, sharp, intense,
Pierced through the shadows of Providence.

No smiling smile
Nothing!—it is
Only Guild calling his wife," they said.

Summer and Winter, the old refrain
Rang o'er the billows of ripening grain,
Pierced through the budding boughs o'er
head
Flew down the track when the red leaves
burned
Like living coals from the engine spurned;
"To my trust true
First of all Duty—Good night!" It said.

And then, one night, it was heard no more,
From Stonington over Rhode Island
shore,
And the folks in Providence smiled and
said,
As they turned in their beds, "The En-
gineer
Has once forgotten his midnight cheer."
No only knew
To his trust true
Guild lay under his engine dead.

DID SHE DIE?

CHAPTER IX.

HEIR TO BARONETCY.

When Sir Marcus re-appeared at Leabanks, bringing with him his half-repentant nephew, a disappointment awaited him; for instead of the gay party he expected to find, Rupert was out of spirits, attributing as he did in some measure the accident of the morning to his own heedlessness. An uneasy expression sat on Mr. Errington's brow; and the young lady the baronet had brought Wilfred who had been advised by Miss Raymond to remain in her own room till the morning.

Though Katie declared that she felt almost recovered, she was too docile not to yield to the wishes of her friend. It was only Maude who rebelled at the idea of going alone, and who, when they were left together, indulged in a little grumbling about it.

"I don't like this arrangement at all," she declared. "If you stay up stairs to-night, I think I ought to do so too."

"Indeed, I will not let you," said Katie, gratefully. "You need not fear that I shall be dull; for Rupert has sent up a new book that I much wish to read."

"Oh! I did not mean to infer that my companionship would be any advantage to an invalid," Maude explained. "I should either talk you into a fever, or fidget you into nervous mania. It's the injustice of the thing I'm considering."

"The what? I really do not understand you."

"Goose! Do you forget that we are to be honored this evening with the presence of Mr. Wilfred Hayle—that remarkable youth, whose praises poor dear Sir Marcus and Rupert Errington are never tired of sounding."

"Well?" queried Katie. "Are you afraid to encounter such a learned gentleman, that you talk of secluding yourself with me?"

"Afraid! Why should I be?" and Maude smiled scornfully at herself in the glass before which she was standing. "He is only a man; one of those weak and irresolute creatures, as Mr. Pope calls them, who were born to—to well, to be made fools of by pretty women. I am pretty, kittens, and I may speak the truth and say so, as there is no one here to be shocked by you."

Katie laughed.

"Vain thing that you are! Don't you think that amongst so many other accomplishments, Mr. Hayle has learned how to avoid the wiles of a coquette?"

"I wish you would not call me by that odious name," pouted Maude. "It's a very ungrateful return for my sisterly affection. Have I not just declared that I would not do you the injustice of dazzling him with my charms till you are well enough to go down too, and enable him to decide between brown eyes and blue ones?"

"Is that your meaning? Pooh! I have no desire to make conquests; the field is all your own," and Katie settled herself in a more comfortable position, and opened her book.

"Think twice, rash girl, before you speak so positively," retorted Maude, with mock solemnity. "With your literary and artistic tastes, how can you be insensible to the fascinations of a man who has Greek and Latin, mathematics and algebra, oozing from his finger-ends, and all theologies compactly crammed away in the caverns of his brain? Aren't you all eagerness to behold him?"

"No, indeed; nor am I charmed by the picture you are drawing. I am afraid I should feel smothered in the society of such a living dictionary of the arts and sciences."

"So should I, if I had not assured myself that there are relieving points about our clever friend. Rupert says he is very good-looking; and when Sir Marcus dies—long may he live! the dear, funny, little man—one can't forget that he will be a wealthy baronet."

"Is Rupert a good judge of the human face?" queried Katie, carelessly, as she turned over a leaf.

"Hem! Yes; he judges mine."

"Cannot you be content with his admiration, that you are so eager to win Mr. Hayle's?" Oh, Maude!

"The young lady addressed gave herself a little pettish shake.

"My dear child, you ought to return thanks to my godfathers and godmothers every time you utter my name; for there isn't one in the vocabulary that would answer so well for the solemn mouthful you have just made of it. Oh, Maude! indeed! Who says I am eager for Mr. Hayle's good opinion?"

"You are putting on one of your prettiest dresses; you have taken more pains than usual with your hair."

"To do honor to my guardian's visitors—that's all. Would you have had me make a gey of myself, or go downstairs in a polka-dot and papillotes?"

"Certainly not! But if I thought I had won the love of such a young man as Rupert Errington—"

"Halt! Halt!" exclaimed Maude, with a military gesture. "Did I ever confess to thinking of such a thing?"

"I said yes," Katie reminded her.

"Ah! then you may go on. I like to be quite clear on such subjects; and with such a little stickler for the precise truth as you, one mustn't admit too much. If, then, I have designs (you



MAUDE HAD FASTENED SOME FLOWERS IN HER BOSOM.

CHAPTER X.

TRIALS OF PATIENCE.

Contrary to every one's expectations, Mr. Durrant rallied, and in the course of a few days declared that he should soon be well enough to join the family in the drawing-room for an hour or two at a dinner.

During those days of gradual improvement he had not become less peevish or exacting, as every one who came in contact with him had reason to know. Wilson gave warning more than once, and had to be bribed into staying; only by the strongest representations could Milly prevent Mr. Errington's insulted wife from throwing up her situation; and Milly herself was obliged to exert all her tact, and treat the ill-tempered guest with a chilling politeness that kept in check in spite of himself, or her own sweet temper would have given way; so hard to endure were the unfeeling sarcasms he leveled at every one and everything at Leabanks.

Mr. Errington's position was still more intolerable, for both humanity and courtesy led him to pay every attention to his guest that he could devise; and yet he could not perform the simplest act of kindness without enduring the mortification of hearing his motives questioned.

"I should feel quite grieved to be such a trouble to you," Mr. Durrant would observe, "if I did not know that you have your reasons for being so good-natured to me. Don't be angry, my dear Errington; you are naturally anxious that your son should be my heir. Even you precise men, who set yourselves up as examples to the rest of us, do cherish worldly considerations. Why deny them? Aren't we both very well aware that if I were a poor relation, you would not have been so eager to bring me to Leabanks?"

"Did I bring you?" was all the notice Mr. Errington took of this speech outwardly; but how much he chafed inwardly over such insults, and how often he wished in his heart that he had never obeyed the summons that first led him to the "Blue Boar" at West Wynnton, no one was permitted to know.

Sometimes, when in a more conciliatory mood, Mr. Durrant would detain his host beside his bed and talk to him about Rupert, in whom he feigned to feel a deep interest; and on such occasions he would send Mr. Errington away flattered and pleased by the way he eulogized the young man, and hinted that he—Rupert—would nobly sustain the credit of the family. Yet the next time Mr. Errington went near him, he would ask for the name of some respectable lawyer, who could be trusted to draw up a will by which property could be so securely devised to charitable institutions that no efforts made by designing relatives to set it aside were likely to be successful.

It was a relief to his harassed host to quit his own roof for a few hours; and when it was suggested that he should join the young people in their long-deferred excursion to Grayby Abbey, he cheerfully consented.

He drove Milly, who was no horsewoman, in the pretty phaeton sent down from town for the use of his wards; Maude and Katie riding with Rupert and Wilfred Hayle, who had consented to join the party after all, and did not seem at all annoyed at the icy manner in which Maude acknowledged his bow.

It was a fine, frosty day, clear and sharp, without being disagreeably cold, and the roads were in excellent condition. Sir Marcus would have rubbed his hands gleefully if he had seen how quickly Wilfred attached himself to Katie, whose sweet smile and unpretending manner he met with as soon as he was introduced to her. Mr. Errington, too, looked pleased and relieved as he watched them riding steadily onward, talking too earnestly to be disturbed by the wild doings of Rupert and Maude, who at one time would be galloping around them in Indian fashion, or darting ahead at a pace that made Milly Raymond nervous; and then, when Wilfred Hayle's face, and seeing that it was quite an eager, animated expression, felt grateful, and could no longer repress a desire to annoy him. Riding up to her sister's side, she began pitying her.

"Poor child! how tired you must be. Have a little mercy on her, Mr. Hayle. She has a tolerably strong head, but I don't think it will stand too strong a dose of antiquarian lore."

"But Maude dear," remonstrated Katie, who was vexed at her manner, "you are quite mistaken. Mr. Hayle and I were talking about Madeira. He has been there, and we were comparing our recollections of the island."

"Very kind of Mr. Hayle, I am sure, to choose such a nice, simple subject, and let himself down to the level of the feminine intellect," said Maude in a half-whisper, which, however, she took care that Wilfred should hear.

But it was Rupert who commented upon what she had said.

"What has made you suddenly take such a modest interest in your sex's endowments, ma'am?"

"Be silent, sir! Am I not always notorious for my humility? You will not let me thank your friend for his polite consideration. But do you not find it very fatiguing, Mr. Hayle, adapting your conversation, I mean, to such topics as my sister and I are able to comprehend?"

"I have not gauged the depths of Miss Katie Lesden's mind," he answered,

quietly. "I have found her an intelligent companion; and we have, I believe, talked on whatever subject came uppermost."

"Ah! yes; anything amuses women," said Maude, with a mock regret. "A new bonnet, or the wedding of an acquaintance, supplies us with food for conversation for hours together; but then our inferiority is so universally acknowledged, that what else can be expected?"

"Nothing, if your sex is satisfied with the results of such mental food," said Wilfred.

"I am," she retorted, recklessly. "I think millinery and the art of dressing well much more interesting subjects than any doggy you can mention. And I vote that, instead of poring at the mouldy stones of yonder old abbey, we ride on another mile, and ask leave to inspect Lord St. David's winter-garden."

"I should like to see both the ruins and the flowers," Katie naively admitted; "but that would be impossible this afternoon. So, as we came to view the former, and asked Mr. Hayle to join us for that purpose, pray let us keep to our original intentions."

But this well-meant speech only rendered Maude more obstinately bent on carrying her own point. Wilfred Hayle was silent till the rest had given way, and then he quietly bade them farewell for the present, and pursued the route to Grayby alone.

Every one looked and felt uncomfortable, except Maude, who commented upon the occurrence as they wandered through Lord St. David's magnificent conservatories.

"How very rude it was of Mr. Hayle to behave so churlishly! It is a pity that he is not more gentlemanly in his deportment."

"Will he be churl?" cried Rupert, always ready to take up the cudgels in defence of his friend. "He is a brave, upright, honorable man."

"And yet he has stalked off sulkily in a contrary direction to the rest of us. You cannot call that the polished behavior of a gentleman!"

"Perhaps he has not been accustomed to give way to all the caprices of a whimsical girl," said Katie, with a sly glance at her sister, who tossed her head, and retorted that it was evident that Mr. Hayle's education had been sadly neglected.

"What has he done to offend your capricious ladyship?" queried Rupert. "I wanted you and Will to like each other; and here you are at loggerheads already!"

"Ridiculous! I do not quarrel with Mr. Hayle; I merely comment, as any one else would, on his want of deference to the expressed wishes of a lady."

"My dear, you are doing our friend injustice," said Mr. Errington, who now comprehended what they were discussing. "Wilfred has engaged to write for one of the scientific magazines a description of the coins that were dug up lately at the abbey; he was, therefore, obliged to go and view them to-day."

"He might have ridden over again to-morrow," persisted Maude. "I am sure he never can have too much of his antiquarian researches; and the more trouble they cost him, the more he must value his discoveries."

"But Will is not such a zealous antiquarian as you are depicting him," Rupert told her. "His tastes lie in quite another direction. He is—"

But here Maude playfully threatened the speaker with her riding-whip.

"Mr. Rupert Errington, if you persist in recounting the learned achievements of this wonderful young man, I shall banish you—not to Coventry—but to the more appropriate country of Spain; so be warned in time."

"May I ask you Spain would be the fittest place of exile for your humble servant?"

"Because there, however much the palate of the stranger may revolt against it, garlic is served in every dish; and just as much as un lucky travelers nauseate that herb, do I abhor having your clever friend's perfections forced upon me."

"And you, Katie—do you dislike poor Will in this unreasonable manner?" asked Rupert, rather anxiously.

Katie shook her head; but before she could say how much she had enjoyed conversing with him, the impetuous Maude broke in again:

"Are we to have no enjoyment of these beautiful flowers? Of course Katie likes Mr. Hayle. Doesn't she make pets of all the queer creatures that no one else will have anything to do with?"

"Come and help me find the gardener, that I may coax him to give me a cutting from this lovely pelargonium."

Wilfred Hayle joined them on the homeward ride, smiling and composed as if he enjoyed his solitary hours amongst the ruins quite as much as they their saunter through the winter-garden.

"Are you fond of flowers, Mr. Hayle?" asked Maude, with sudden graciousness; and she held to her rosy lips the lovely exotics her smiles had induced the gardener to give her, and bestowed upon him one of her most bewitching glances. But no gallant compliment was extorted from Will, who, in his driest tones, made answer:

"I like to see them growing in a garden, or wild in the hedgerows; but I never go into ecstasies over them."

"Perhaps you prefer more useful roots—cauliflowers, for instance; or the never-to-be-sufficiently-praised potato?"

"Do, sometimes," and with this curt and not over-civil answer, Wilfred turned from her to ride closer to the phaeton, and chat with Mr. Errington and Milly.

"How well your friend talks!" Maude ironically observed to the vexed Rupert. "What an adept he is at saying so nothing!"

"Is that why you find fault with him?" the young man demanded. "Oh, covetous Maude! I cannot be so satisfied unless you bewilder the senses and turn the head of every poor fellow who comes near you? Be content to know that Sir Marcus swears by you, and let Wilfred keep his peace of mind a little longer."

"I am content," said Maude, demurely, though with mischief in her downcast eyes. "I like Sir Marcus so very well, that, if my friends advised the step, I'm not sure that I should refuse an offer from him. He would make a most devoted husband."

"Is he in earnest?" asked Rupert in dismay, as she rode on, leaning with Katie. If his uncle married again, Will's prospects would be ruined!

But Katie's merry laugh reassured him.

"Can you fancy my fastidious sister wedding a stout, elderly bachelor, like Sir Marcus? Maude has such a horror of making herself ridiculous, that nothing would induce her to make such a match. She is but plugging you out of sheer wilfulness."

And now Maude, wearying of the highway, paused to point out how, by leaping a gate, a short cut might be taken across a green field; and, finding she was bent on pursuing it, Rupert dismounted to try whether the gate could be unfastened.

The phaeton, and Wilfred with it, had been a little in advance; but the latter, glancing back, saw the pause, and returned to ascertain the reason.

"Don't attempt it!" he said, as soon as he learned what they proposed doing. "The centre of that field is a swamp, deep enough at some times of the year to be dangerous."

"I cannot see any signs of the danger you speak of," Maude exclaimed, rebelling against the decided manner in which he spoke; "and the turf is so richly, darkly green, that it looks very tempting!"

Wilfred raised his eyebrows a little, but made no reply.

"Not tempting enough to induce us to risk being lost in a bog," said Katie, turning away from the gate. "Come, Maude dear, we are losing time. Mr. Errington will wonder what has become of us."

Accordingly she touched her horse with her whip, and, accompanied by Rupert, rode on at a quicker pace down the hill, at the top of which they had halted; and a bend of the road soon hid them from the couple whom they supposed to be following them.

But still Maude sat tapping her saddle with a restless hand, while her eyes were fixed on the emerald sward that looked so inviting.

"If I take that short cut, Mr. Hayle, I shall reach the cross-roads before the rest of our friends, shall I not?"

"Would you really attempt it, after what I told you?" he asked, in a tone that nettled her.

"Why not? Woman though I am, I do not like to give away. Are you certain that there would be any danger in crossing that field?"

"Not certain," he answered; "but I should not advise any one to run the risk—especially a lady."

"Nevertheless, I am very much inclined to run it!" and she glanced up at him from beneath her riding-hat, with a look so arch and daring that he might have found it difficult to resist smiling back in the pretty wilful face; but persistence had not appeared to him worse than childish.

There was another pause: Wilfred Hayle sat before her, stiff and unbending as a statue; while she wavered between her womanly fear of really encountering any mishap, and an almost irresistible longing to show this discourteous young man that she paid heed to the advice he had been impertinent enough to tender unasked.

At last she tightened her grasp on the reins.

"I shall make the venture. Will you open the gate for me, Mr. Hayle?"

"No, Miss Lesden, I will not."

"Sir!" and her look of haughty surprise swept over him from head to foot. "You will not? Then oblige me by riding on; you are in my way."

He obeyed, and backing her horse, she touched him with the whip, and flew like a bird over the new obstacle, never looking back to see how Wilfred acted on finding her so determined, until the fleet bounds of the animal were bearing her rapidly toward the spot where the dark-emerald hue of the sward denoted the treacherous nature of the soil beneath.

It was now that she turned in her saddle, to smile defiance at him, though in her secret heart intending, if he urged it with proper earnestness, to suffer herself to be led back. But Wilfred had not followed her. She was alone; and scarcely had she comprehended this, when the fore-feet of her horse sunk into a marshy place, and she had much difficulty in saving herself from being flung over his head. Then, with an access of terror she could not control, she tried to back him from the dangerous spot; for, to her horror, the almost equally frightened creature was sinking deeper and deeper.

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