



CHAPTER XXVIII.

The whole of that next year I spent in exploring South America. From time to time I still received letters. The lawyer, the governess, Mrs. Gray, were my correspondents. It was in the autumn of that second year that the accounts of Joan began to improve. She had grown much stronger—she began to notice places and persons—to ask questions—to interest herself once more in things that were passing around her. One day I received a letter from Darby herself. The large, strangely formed words had an odd look. She said:

"Dear Sir Ralph—This is the first letter I have ever written, and I write it to give you good news. Joan is so much better. Soon, I think, she will be quite well. I have a fancy, dear Sir Ralph, that one thing would make her that, and very soon. It is you. I talk to her about you often and often, and she says: 'I know him. He was very good. I think he was the best man in the world.' So, you see, she must remember you. We are at Nice again, and—is it not funny?—papa got the very same house for us that we had before, when you and Jo were married. I think she remembers it. Every day she asks more questions, and seems thinking out things for herself. Oh, I wish you would come! You have been away such a long, long time, and I miss you very much. Papa is not a bit like you. He is always writing. Do please come. Your loving little

"DARBY."

As I read those simple words the hard crust about my heart seemed to be broken up. I looked back on those two years with a sense of wonder. How lonely they had been! How devoid of anything like love, or comfort, or sympathy! Yet even now, if I obeyed this summons, and went back to my wife's side, what would that life be like henceforward? However well I might hide the fox, its teeth would gnaw at my heart beneath the cloak of indifference.

I told no one I was coming. I resolved to take them by surprise. It was close on sunset when I arrived at Nice, and leaving my baggage at the station, I drove at once to the villa in its sheltered nook of the Bay of Villafranca.

Keeping behind the sheltering laurels and arbutus, I made my way slowly to the house. The door stood open. I met not a single soul; I passed in. On the right of the hall a door stood ajar. From the room within came the sound of voices. I listened. Only too well I knew them. The child's sweet plaintive tones, and those of my wife. I crept up to the door and looked in. The room was half dusk. There was a couch drawn up by the fire, and lying on it a little shadowy figure—the child's figure. Joan sat beside her on a low chair.

"I am sure he will come," Darby was saying. "You will be glad, dear, will you not?"

"Very glad," came the answer in quiet, even tones—the tones I remembered of yore.

"Because he will take care of you, and be good to you," the child went on. "Only, Joan, you must promise to tell him everything. He will not be angry. He is too kind and good for that."

"He was always good," said Joan softly. "And you! What should I have done without you all these years? You held me back from sin and from despair. You gave me strength when I was weakest, and hope when I was hopeless, and patience when I was well-nigh desperate, and love when all other love failed. Oh, my child—my blessing! It is heaven's mercy that gave you to me! I see that every day I live."

The next moment I entered the room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

For a moment we looked at each other in silence. I had thought of her, prayed for her, pleaded for her a hundred times in hours of solitude and pain. I heard her low cry, and saw the warm blood flush her cheeks. I lost sight of all the sorrowful and torturing past, and for a moment remembered only that she was my wife.

A sort of constraint came over me. The fond words that had longed for utterance were frozen on my lips. Darby came to the rescue with a torrent of questions and remarks, and a few moments afterwards Mr. Templeton entered.

We all sat down then, and the conversation became general. They would not hear of my going to the hotel; so my luggage was sent for, and I did my best to return the cordiality of my welcome, and to seem at home and content once more.

Joan was very quiet. Each time I looked at the slight figure in its soft gray dress, or the pretty head with its clustering curls, a strange feeling came over me. A woman, no doubt, would have found relief in tears. I—man-like—was only conscious of a pain that tugged at my heart-strings and sometimes choked the words in my throat. She looked so fair, and sweet, and fragile. There was such a delicate, tender womanliness about her that I seemed to lose sight of that awful time of doubt, and the torturing years that had followed.

When she went away with Darby and Roger Templeton had left, I fell into deep thought. My eyes rested on the burning logs, but I don't think they saw much of them, for my heart was heavy. A soft, rustling noise roused me at last. Joan had come in, and was standing close beside me.

"I hope," she said gently, "that you are not sorry you came back?"

"Why should you think so?" I asked abruptly.

For a moment she was silent. Then a sort of desperate appeal came into her face and voice

said, "you and Joan. She is very sad, and you do not understand even how she loves you, but I do! And this," pointing to the book, "this will tell you. I used to make her read it to me sometimes, and I thought often, oh, if you only knew!"

"But what is it?" I asked in growing bewilderment.

"It is Joan's journal," she said, and vanished.

"Heaven forgive me," I said, "if I have misjudged her!"

I took up with trembling hands the journal that the child had brought to me. The record of those years of anguish lay there, yet I feared to read it. It seemed to me dishonorable to pry into the secrets of a woman's heart—to take advantage of her helplessness, and tear ruthlessly the veil from her simple confidences, meant as they were but for her own eyes. I had respected Yorkie's—how much the more, then, should I respect those of my wife—my other self? The girl who had held my heart, and shared my life, whom still I loved and fain would have believed.

As I thought of these things I reluctantly put the book away.

I knew very little of women; but I thought that no woman would respect the man who wrung from her ignorance and helplessness the secrets of her past, whether the past were innocent or guilty.

"She told me she has always been a good girl," I said; "I will not fail her." My confidence is to unite us again it will be a voluntary gift from her heart to mine—not a rifled treasure, stolen in the dark, as if my hands were those of a thief."

(To be continued.)

POSTMASTER WAS IGNORANT.

Ought to Have Known that Blackbird and Oiseau Noir Were the Same

In the mining camps in Upper Michigan people of every nationality under the sun are employed, and the mail that arrives at the nearest point of delivery is as incongruous as a crazy patchwork. That is what an amateur postmaster thought as he looked it over in the candle box in the rear of the board shanty which served as a grocery store and postoffice combined. He was looking for a letter for a half-breed, who sat on a soap box and waited.

"There never was such a name in the world," said the postmaster in a grumpy voice. "Who ever heard of Blackbird for a name?"

"Dat eez so—dat my name-me," said the man who wanted the letter. He spoke with a strong French accent. "Peter Blackbird, my fadder, he make it, too."

"And I tell you Blackbird ain't no kind of a name—heathen or otherwise. Say, Frenchy, what you done to pick up a name like that? Howsomever, if the letter was here it would be plain reading. Mebbe it'll come next week. Who dy'e expect it from, ennyhow?"

"Me fader—an' it zee money got—dat I len' him-me."

"Well, get out now with your jargon. If it comes I'll save it for you. Come again when you can't stay so long," and the letters were packed away for the next corner.

In a week the half-breed was back as before looking for a letter for "Peter Blackbird." And, as before, the letter awaited him.

"Can you read writing?" asked the postmaster, angrily, as he flipped the letters on the rough counter.

"Whaffor I hev lettore come eef I no read?" asked the half-breed in return.

"Then you look here and see that there isn't anything for "Peter Blackbird."

The woodsman took each letter in his grimy hands and with infinite pains and difficulty spelled out the hard names to which the one had given seemed an easy one. At last he seized one with a yell of delight, and began tearing it open when the postmaster insisted on seeing it.

"Hello!" he said, "this ain't your letter!"

"Yum, yum, yum, dat my lettore—I tell you dat name in Eenglisch—for you not speaka de French—dat my fader hanwritte—dat my naim."

He held it up and the puzzled postmaster looked at the inscription and read this legend:

* * * * *
"Pierre L'Oiseau Noir,"
Camp Alger, Mich.
* * * * *

* * * * *
"Well, what the — has that got to do with you?" asked the postmaster.

"Dat Peter Blackbird in French all right. What for you zat ign'rant," was the half-breed's answer, as, seizing his precious letter, he faded away.

"You!" she interrupted, and looked at me with eloquent eyes; "you selfish! Ah, no! you never were that!"

"Yes," I said, "I was; and I have much to reproach myself with; but there is still a future for us, and we must make it as happy as we can."

"One can't call back trust," she said sorrowfully. "If it goes, it goes forever. And even if you loved me—"

"I do love you," I said earnestly, touched to the heart by the piteous sorrow in her eyes.

She looked at me for a moment as if in doubt.

"Until you love and trust me, too," she said very low, "we shall never be happy. Between us, like a cold ghost, there is always that something—"

I turned aside, sick at heart, but recognizing only too plainly the truth of her words.

I went to my room, but I was too restless for sleep. I was racked with doubts and fears, and all the sorrowful events that had freshly come to my knowledge.

For long hours I sat there buried in deep thought, when a slight noise aroused me. The door opened softly, and on the threshold stood a little white figure, with something clasped to her breast. She looked so unearthly in that dim light that for a moment my heart stood still with fear. Then suddenly she glided forward, and went straight up to my bed, and laid on it the book she held. The action gave me speech and courage again. I sprang to my feet.

"Darby!" I cried.

She turned her startled face to mine.

"Do not be angry," she said beseechingly. "I thought you would be asleep, and I wanted—oh, so much!—to bring you this."

"What is it?" I said, coming forward, and taking up the volume from the bed. "It is to make you happy again," she derived.

Granite.

Granite is the lowest rock in the earth's crust; it is the bedrock of the world. It shows no evidence of animal or vegetable life. It is from two to ten times as thick as the united thickness of all other rocks. It is the parent rock from which all the other rocks have been directly or indirectly derived.

CHAPMAN IS CHOSEN.

HEADS THE DEMOCRATIC STATE TICKET OF OHIO.

Temporary Chairman Sloane Attacks Policy of the Republicans—Silver Sentiment Controls the Convention—The Ticket and Platform.

Silver Their Stagn.

For Governor, Horace L. Chapman. For Lieutenant Governor, Melville D. Shaw. For Supreme Judge, J. P. Spriggs. For General, W. H. Dore. For State Treasurer, James F. Wilson. For Board of Public Works, Peter H. Dugan. For School Commissioner, Byron H. Burd.

The Ohio Democratic State convention held in Columbus was the most largely attended of any such occasion since the civil war. The new Columbus auditorium, with a seating capacity of 6,000, had just been completed for the convention, and its capacity was not equal to

platform, which merely repeats the financial plank of the Chicago platform. A plank denouncing trusts, which had been agreed upon in committee with the understanding that it was to be submitted as a supplementary report, was unanimously adopted by the convention. Another report, recognizing the belligerence of Cuba, was heard with much applause and made a part of the platform without a dissenting vote. The anti-trust plank reads:

"We declare all trusts and monopolies hostile and dangerous to the people's interests and a standing menace to the perpetuity of our free institutions, and we demand the vigorous enforcement of all anti-trust laws and such additional legislation as is necessary for their immediate and final suppression."

Candidates Presented.

The various candidates for Governor were placed in nomination as follows: Paul J. Sorg, by Allen Andrews of Hamilton, who vouches for his candidate's allegiance to silver; Judge Allen V. Smalley of Wyandot County, by Gen. E. B. Finley of Bucyrus; Allen W. Thurman of Franklin, by Benton Childers; D. D. Donavin of Henry County, by Dr. Garrett; Robert T. Hough of Highland, by Jesse M. Lewis; H. L. Chaney of Jackson, by William E. Fink of Somersett; Judge Samuel M. Hunter of Licking; John McSweeney of Wooster; Judge John M. Vanmeter of Ross, by S. F. Garrett; Judge A. W. Patrick of Tuscarawas, by Judge Mitchell; John C. Welty of Stark was withdrawn by the Hon. John E. Monnet when his county was called. Delegate Reed of Columbiana County took the platform after the roll of counties had been completed and placed the name of Mayor James A. Rice of Canton before the convention. Jesse Lewis withdrew Hough before the ballot proceeded.

There were 950 votes in the convention; necessary to a choice, 480. The first ballot resulted: Sorg, 118; Smalley, 128; Thurman, 78; Donavin, 100; Chapman, 241; Hunter, 61; Vanmeter, 29; Patrick, 60; Rice, 113; Congressman John J. Lentz of Columbus, 9; Gen. A. J. Warner of Marietta, 3; John G. Reeves of Lancaster, 17.

The second ballot resulted: Smalley, 40; Thurman, 45; Donavin, 55; Rice, 142; Hunter, 13; Patrick, 4; Sloane, 1; Lentz, 18; Chapman, 59. On motion of Judge Smalley the nomination of Chapman was made unanimous.

Ex-State Senator M. D. Shaw was placed in nomination for Lieutenant Governor by ex-Congressman F. C. Layton of Wapakoneta, but pending the call of counties about the walls, but that of President Cleveland was not in the collection.

When the convention was called to order at 10 a. m. by Chairman Durbin he

congratulated the party on the signs of the times and the enthusiastic condition of the party. He made a speech for free silver. Prayer was offered by Rev. E. L. Rexford, pastor of the Universalist Church, and then Hon. Ulric Sloane was introduced as the temporary chairman

the demand for admission. The new auditorium was beautifully decorated with bunting and plants. There was a profusion of portraits of Democratic leaders about the walls, but that of President Cleveland was not in the collection.

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