

MISS MILNE AND I.

CHAPTER I.—Continued.

Miss Milne here paused for several seconds, and I, unable from conflicting emotions to speak, allowed the silence to assert itself. Presently she looked up, and taking one glance at the sick child, continued: "One afternoon, to me a very terrible afternoon, my husband was away on duty and I had dressed for a walk, when a ring came at the bell and the servant told me a lady wanted to see me. I asked that she might be shown up. In a few moments a woman of middle age and cast-iron features, followed by three young children, was shown into the room. When the door was closed, she turned to me, and in a fearful voice that I can never forget, asked: "Who do you call yourself?" I stared at her blankly for a moment, and then thinking perhaps she was tipsy, I said as kindly as I could, "I am Mrs. Carlsson; can I do anything for you?" "Yes," she said with a awful sneer, "you can clear out as sharp as ye like. I am Mrs. Carlsson, that man's wife" (pointing to a photograph), "and these 'ere are his children. Ah," she continued, "I see you are a bit flustered, so I'll leave ye to clear out, but I'll be back in an hour and 'ope to find ye gone; then looking round the room as though taking stock: "I'll be better to live 'ere than nowhere, even with 'im; now then children, out ye go. Ye needn't sleep in the park tonight, any'ow. As she left the room she looked round the door and at me, adding, as a parting thrust, "Pious chap, ain't he?"

"When I heard the hall door bang I rose to my feet and automatically packed my box; I say automatically because as I have read somewhere that a wife may make so hot that it will pass through living tissue without giving pain, so I know that some troubles are too great to be appreciated, too heavy to be felt. Into my box I put everything of value that it would hold. It was wrong, very wrong, perhaps, but I had no money, and was led by the instincts of self-preservation, and—here she glanced at the sleeping child—"coming responsibility. From that day to this I have lived as best I could. My father, whose anger can never be appeased set me up in this little shop on condition that I never applied or spoke to him or any member of the family again.

"There," she said, with a sigh of relief, as she finished her sad story, "I have told you my history, that would have ended long ago but for my child there. I ought not to have troubled you with it, but I do want some one to know how I have suffered and struggled, and you have been so kind to me."

"My child, you have indeed suffered," was all I could say. "How glad I am that I ever knew you!" I added. "If I can ever be of any service to you, I will to the very utmost." I took one more glance at the child and started on my walk home.

As I strolled along the now deserted pavements, I felt as if one who had had a great burden lifted from off his shoulders.

Sad, terribly said, as her story was, it might have been worse. There was not, at all events as far as she was concerned, any tincture of sin in it and after all she might be very happy yet, and should be, if I could compass it.

CHAPTER II.

The three months following Miss Milne's confession were, as far as our intercourse was concerned, uneventful in the extreme. Her business prospered, her child became strong, and partly as a result of these circumstances, partly from the comfort of having shared her secret with some one sympathetic, she gathered and strength and lost her look of despondency.

One day I came home from my rounds tired and weary; I had done less work than usual, and yet I was more tired than I had ever been before. My bones ached, my limbs were heavy, and over all there was a feeling of lassitude and prostration difficult to account for and difficult to describe. Although the evening was warm, I ordered a fire, and sat over it, shivering and longing for bedtime. When bedtime came I longed for morning; for although the old lady warmed my bed and made me "something hot," sleep was out of the question. Hour after hour I tossed from side to side, terribly awake, and awake to the fact that some serious illness was upon me, and that this was the opening chapter. Morning came at last and found me in the first stage of typhoid fever.

It would add neither to the interest nor to the necessities of this story to go through the details of my illness. On the third day I was delirious, and continued so without intermission for nearly a week. It was at the end of the ninth day that consciousness returned and of its return I have a very vivid recollection.

I had (so I afterward learned) fallen into a sound, peaceful slumber about midday, and during this slumber, which lasted nearly ten hours, chaos became order, discord became harmony. My troubled brain, with all its innumerable factors, which had been like a city warring against itself, sank into rest. The order went forth. "Peace, be still," and in the place of riot there came the passive ecstasy of dreamless sleep.

At length I came back to life and reason. I awoke and stared vacantly at the faces of the watchers at my bedside, and to the old familiar furniture about the room, struggling hard the while to understand it all. Very soon the effort tired me. I closed my eyes and sank back upon the pillow with an indescribable sensation of contentment and a half-conscious feeling that everything was alright and rather jolly.

A movement in the room aroused me again, and this time I looked up to

see the good old friend who had not only done all my work for me but pulled me back from the jaws of death; and on the other side of the bed the tear-dewed face of my dear old factotum, who each day and during the first three nights had never left me but to make food for me in the kitchen or wrestle with the Lord for me at her bedside. And just behind her I saw the luminous, meaningful eyes of Miss Milne. She, I afterward learned, had taken the whole of the night nursing since the third day of my illness.

"Thank God, he is out of the wood," I heard the doctor say, and he added: "Don't bother him with food or speak to him; if he wishes to sleep again, as he probably will let him. I'll be back in two hours."

He was right; I did sleep again—a long, health-giving sleep that lasted far into the night, and then I awoke; and this time I was awake—awake to the fact that I was alive and that I had lived before in the apparently very distant past, and awoke to the fact that the room was very dimly lit with a candle placed behind the curtain of my bed, and that the light of it fell upon the face of Miss Milne, or rather upon her eyes, for they, by their intensity, belittled all the other features.

I had not moved, and she was not aware that I was awake, so I lay there silently for some minutes and watched her. The book she had been reading had fallen upon her lap, her hands were clasped over it, and she was staring at the candle with the far-away look of one thinking very anxiously. Then she muttered audibly: "It can never be," and then slowly, with a nod of her head at each word, "never, never, never!"

I was too ill then to attach any meaning to the words, but in days to come I remembered them and learned their meaning. Then I moved my hand and in a moment she was all eager attention on her feet and leaning over me; when she saw my eyes open she leaned over the bed and in a low, soft whisper asked: "Are you better now?"

"Yes; have I been very ill—long ill?"

"Yes, very, but not long, not very long."

"Have you nursed me?"

"Yes, during the night."

"How good of you!"

The movement of Miss Milne's feet evidently aroused my old factotum in the room below, for in a moment she was at my side. Wearily I gave her my hand, and her warm, eloquent grasp of it told a story of faithfulness impossible to misunderstand.

Another fortnight in bed saw the end of the acute stage of my illness, and then followed a convalescence that was rapid and uninterrupted. During the fortnight Miss Milne continued her night nursing, and as I slept much during the days, I was often wakeful during the nights, and then she would sit and in low tones talk or read to me.

During the next month I continued to gather strength, and as I needed but little night nursing I saw much less of Miss Milne. She would run in sometimes during the evening, but not to stay, and often brought with her some luxury, such as fruit, a new paper, or some very mild cigarettes, and during her short stays I could but notice a most marked alteration in her manner; she was much quieter, and I would constantly catch her looking at me with an expression of anxiety and deep thoughtfulness.

One evening I had been talking of what I intended to do when I was well and also what I would do for her by way of recompense for all her kindness in nursing me. To my astonishment the subject appeared to be full of pain to her.

"But of course you will allow me to reward you?"

"I don't want to be rewarded; there is nothing to reward me for. I have done nothing that was not a pleasure to me."

"But think, Miss Milne, how uncomfortable I shall be in years to come if I am to be forever in your debt!"

"If it comes to that, Doctor Rigby, 'tis I who ought to be made uncomfortable by your kindness to me. But do you think it is wise to treat these matters on a purely commercial basis?" Then, looking down slowly and very sadly, she added: "When I think of all you have done for me it seems that great kindness form a kind of chain that—that ties people together, and anything in the way of return spoils without cutting it. But I have said too much—more than I meant to. Good-night, I must go." And she walked across to me and out her hand without looking up. Before taking it I said:

"You misunderstand me. I had no thought of either cutting or spoiling your golden chain, I only wanted to—"

"You can't take any step in the way of recompense that won't do one or the other. Good-night, Doctor Rigby." And she was gone out into the night, taking her sadness and her secret with her.

The morning following this interview brought a letter from some friends at Chiselhurst, who had heard of my illness, and who were most anxious that I should spend a few days or weeks with them by way of entire change, and as this suggestion fell in with the wishes of my medical friends, I wrote and accepted, promising to be with them in a fortnight. I was within three days of starting when I saw the last of Miss Milne as I had known her hitherto. Another and a very different Miss Milne I saw a good deal of.

She entered the dining room very quietly. I was sitting in an armchair at the fireside, and she, walking over to me said: "I hear you are going away for a change."

"Yes; who told you?"

"Ann."

"Oh, yes, I was coming to tell you

to-morrow; but how tired and ill you look! Aren't you well?"

"Yes; thank you," she replied, with a look of terrible weariness, the simple sadness of which cut me to the heart.

"But I am sure you are not. I remember your saying during our last interview that you were to some extent indebted to me. I don't admit this, you know, but if you think so you might confer a favor on me."

"What favor?"

"Tell me what influences have been at work to drag you down to your present state of weariness and prostration—I can't use any other word."

"None, none, Dr. Rigby; most certainly none that you could remedy." Then, as if anxious to change the conversation, none that you could remedy.

"Thank you; I shall be much happier when I come back if I find you looking stronger and happier."

Suddenly looking up at me with much apparent earnestness, she asked: "Supposing you did not find me here at all, would you be very sorry?"

"Why do you ask such a question? What do you mean, Miss Milne; you are not thinking of—"

"I am not thinking of anything, but only wondering if the little usefulness of my life justified all the weariness of it."

"You, who have overcome so much, fought so nobly against circumstances, ought to be the last to talk like that."

"Perhaps; but you'll admit that there is such a thing as losing one's pluck in the face of new trials coming."

"Not unless those coming trials are very real and very great."

"Supposing they are the greatest woman can suffer; what then?"

"Well, then—but what is the use of asking of such? You have none of that depth to dread."

"Perhaps not," with a deep sigh. "I was only wondering what would be the consequence if they did come."

"You ought never to forget your lovely boy, Arthur."

"Bah!" she exclaimed, with her first symptom of anger and the shadow of a momentary flush dyeing her face.

"Bah!" I have no patience with such half notious as that. A child, indeed! As though one only wants a child to live for! There are many loves stronger than the love of children—the love of alcohol, for instance. I could tell you plainly more if I liked."

Her manner while delivering this sentence was quite different to anything I had previously seen in her or though her capable of. It set me thinking deeply as to the cause of it all, the influences at work; that there were influences at work; that there, and that these influences were very powerful ones was equally obvious. What were they? Had it been any other girl should have concluded at once that she was in love, desperately in love; but from the cynical words on this subject that I heard, I concluded that she was above being influenced powerfully by that passion.

She did not interrupt my wondering by any remark, and we were both of us silent for some seconds. I was the first to speak.

"I am certain," I said, "you are not talking like this from any sufficient cause; at the same time, I am equally certain that you have some trouble on your mind. Now, once you gave me your confidence without asking, and you said, I remember, afterward, what a comfort it was to you to have confided your sorrows to some one sympathetic. This time I ask you for your confidence, and withal I have a right to it, after all your kindness to me."

"Well, Dr. Rigby, I'll give you my confidence," she said, slowly and lowly, without moving her face from the hollow of her hands, "on condition that you ask no questions."

(To be continued.)

Things That May Interest You.

Although 125 years old, a watch owned by a gentleman in Gloucestershire, still keeps excellent time. It was worn at Trafalgar, during the Peninsular war, at Waterloo, through the China war in 1840, and finally in the Indian mutiny.

Jonathan Littlefield, of Biddeford, Me., is one of the most persistent souvenir hunters in the United States. When Prince Henry was here he secured his autograph, which was written directly under that of President McKinley in his collection, and he has also splinters of the floor where the president stood when he was shot.

No one looking at Lord Charles Boroferd today would imagine that in 1860, when he first went to sea, he was a delicate lad and was in fact put on board the warship Marlborough for his health. When he first set foot on board he heard a sailor say "Poor little chap, he ain't long for this world." Lord "Charlie" has seen many lively times since then, and is still lively and vigorous.

Secretary Shaw was one of the pioneers in the development of the rice growing industry in western Louisiana and eastern Texas. The governor and his associates purchased large tracts of land in the vicinity of Beaumont, where he still owns a half interest in a rice plantation of 3,000 acres, and when the oil boom came, a year ago, the land values increased by leaps and bounds. It is said that the boom has already brought Secretary Shaw a fortune of more than \$800,000.

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