THE BEGINNING OF THE END;

AN ENGLISH TALE.

BY A. A. CLEVELAND.

CHAPTER IX.

It will be remembered that Rose was again homeless, her husband and protector having sold at auction her household goods and other effects. Will Brownly had purchased a quantity of this urniture and had taken it to his own home. He had invited Rose, who sat mute and dazed as article after article was carried off, to come and stay awhile with his mother until she should get settled. He had even brought the good lady herself to second his request.

"Yes, come home with me, dear," said Mrs. Brownly. "Come away from this. It's too hard for you to bear."

And Rose and the old grandma and Bessie went to Will Brownly's home for shelter.

Will thought that, as Phil Hanson had decamped the first time he had robbed his poor wife of her all, he would do so again; and he intended, as soon as Phil had gone, to return to Rose the furniture he had bought. But he wished to find some way to give it to her, that her husband could never again seize it. For this purpose he had applied to the attorney, Mr. Goodman, for advice, and was in his private office with him when Phil Hanson sent in his request for an interview.

"Stay here, if you please, Mr. Brownly," the attorney had said. "Remain within hearing. This I know is a bad man. Pay attention to what is said, and if you find him about to commit any act of violence, please come to my assistance; for I am unfitted to cope with ruffians, except at the bar."

Thus it was that Will Brownly had overheard the conversation between the attorney and Phil Hanson, and was enabled to appear in the nick of time as he did. Will's stalwart frame trembled with emotion and anger during that interview. When Phil escaped, he exclaimed:

"Oh, Mr. Goodman, if I had only been quicker! I would have thrown him down the stairs. I intended to do it, but waited for you to give the signal."

"And probably would have killed him and been hanged for your pains," said the attorney, dryly. "No, no, Mr. Brownly. Let me deal with him in my own way. But, as I was telling you, don't deed or give to Mrs. Hanson a single penny's worth until she is free from that man. For he can seize everything that is given to her by her relations or friends."

"Well, it's a hard law, Mr. Goodman. It's unjust and cruel."

"You are right, Mr. Brownly. Still, it is the law, and we must abide by it. I have told you my plans in this case, and I depend on you to assist me to the best of your ability."

"I will do so, sir. You may depend upon it," said Will. "Now I will pay your fees for advice, and leave you."

"Fees? Oh, you are welcome to the advice, Mr. Brownly. Very welcome indeed. Help me to get that poor woman out of trouble, and I am well repaid," said the lawyer, his lips quivering. "I shall be amply repaid."

On leaving the attorney's office, Phil Hanson went to his room, and throwing himself upon his bed, gave vent to curses not loud but deep.

"The infernal fool I was! And so was Goodman a fool to refuse the money. Two thousand pounds—and a poor man, too! That infernal lawyer is crafty, and will win the suit for her. Can't I think of some plan to beat them?"

And rising from the bed, he paced the floor excitedly. For an hour or more he walked thus, feeling completely bewildered.

"I must go and see Mink, my lawyer!" he exclaimed, at last.

Taking his hat, he proceeded to that worthy's office, where he was closeted for some time in confidential conference.

"You are sure she did not join them, Mink?" said Phil, standing at the door of the office and preparing to leave.

"Yes, Mr. Hanson; I am pretty sure. But she is one, for all that."

"Then I've got her, Mink; I've got her!" And breaking into a sardonic laugh, he continued: "I've hit it at last! That will do it! I'll try the pious dodge, and Mrs. One-Eyed Hanson, I'll have you crawling at my feet before I have done with you, yet!"

"Don't be too confident, Mr. Hanson," said Mr. Mink. "I tell you plainly it's the only chance we have. But look out. Don't leave a sign, or Goodman will track you."

"That's a fact," said Phil; "and I have no time to spare. Yet I have plenty to do all that I wish."

And straightway going to his lodgings and packing his portmeanteau, he was soon seen leaving the village.

"I'll go to Manchester," he said. "The larger the city the easier to hide, and the better chance to work my plans."

There was a great religious revival in progress in Manchester at this time, and scores were converted through the preaching of the Rev. Mr. Stanley. Amongst the penitants one evening was a man who seemed deeply affected. His sighs and groans attracted the attention of the minister, who, while the choir was singing, approached him and said:

"Brother, do you fear for your immortal soul? Remember the Master saith, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. He that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as wool.' If the dying thief found mercy and forgiveness, there is hope for you.

"'While yet the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return.'

Come with me, brother."

The kind old man took him to the altar rail and knelt down beside him and prayed to Him who doeth all things well to melt the stony heart and let peace, sweet peace, dwell there. In a short time this man exclaimed, as did the woman of old:

"Lord, I believe! Help thou my unbelief!"

"Now, my dear brother in the Lord, join us. Join the church, that you may be kept in the right path; and may God be with you."

"Oh, sir," said Phil Hanson, for he it was, "I would like to talk to you. Can I see you to-morrow?"

"Come to my home, dear brother, at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, and I shall be pleased to see you."

The next morning Phil presented himself punctually at the home of the kind old minister, and was ushered into his study. After being seated a short time, Phil began:

"I wished last night to see you, sir. But now I am here, I don't know how to begin to tell you what I have to say."

"Tell it your own way, brother; and if I can help you, you can rely on me," said the minister, kindly.

"The fact is, sir, I am a married man, but wife and I have separated. I never was awakened to a sense of guilt until last night, when I listened to your burning words," said Phil, and the tears began to fall from his eyes. "I was always religiously inclined, but oh, sir," drawing closer to the old man, "my wife is an unbeliever—an infidel! If she could hear you preach, if you would only talk to her, I am sure you would convert her as you have me. I have money, and will pay you for your time, trouble and expense if you will go and see her."

"Don't, dear brother, talk of time and trouble. I will be pleased to go. But I have found it of little use to talk to infidels. They are the doubting Thomases. They have no faith in things that are not seen. And the Book says: 'The things that are seen are temporal, and the things that are not seen are eternal.' But give me her address."

"I will also give you some money," said Phil, drawing out his pure.

"The expenses of the journey you may disburse, for I am poor," said the minister.

"Let me warn you, sir," said Phil. "I speak, I hope, with Christian charity. She is a bad woman in some respects, although good in others. She tells lies about me to gain the sympathy of the neighbors. I have never contradicted these stories. So please don't mention me to her, or she will commence such a tirade against me that you will have no time to talk to her about her soul."

"That will be the better plan," said the minister. "But how shall I introduce myself to her?"

"Call as a visiting minister to inquire about her soul. And come back to me, sir—for God's sake come back and tell me she is converted, even as I am. You will make me so happy that I'll sing praises day and night."

"I will go in the morning," said the preacher. "You can call the day after. I hope to have good news for you."

"Now," said Phil to himself as he left the house, "if this plan hits, it's all right. If not, I have another ready. I must write to Mink."

The next day, as Rose was sitting on the porch of Will Brownly's house, thinking, thinking, her heart filled with bitterness toward the laws that allowed a man to thus rob a woman of her all, a visitor was announced who wished to see her.

"Show him out here. I'm not coming in to see any man. I begin to hate men," she said, bitterly.

The minister came toward her smiling.

"I have called to see you, my dear sister—if you will allow me to call you so—just to talk a little to you about God and his great mercy; who pities the oppressed——"

"About God?" said Rose, hysterically. "Do you believe in a God of mercy? What mercy have I had shown to me? What have I done that I should be visited in this manner? Is it because I have worked to keep two old people from the poor-house? Or because I have tried to honestly earn enough to clothe and educate my child? Don't tell me there is a God pitying the oppressed and down-trodden ones! I don't believe it! I have prayed and prayed to have my heavy load lifted, and as if in mockery it is made the heavier for me every day."

"Oh, madam! madam! Do you not believe in the wrath, the eternal wrath, of an offended God, which shall doom the wicked to eternal torment?"

"No, sir; I do not believe in anything of the sort. And I will tell you why."

"Oh, no! oh, no!" said the minister, stepping backward. "You are lost—lost! Not believe in an avenging God? Not believe in an eternal hell? Oh, horrible! God have mercy upon you, you poor miserable sinner! I will not argue with you!"

And taking his hat, and feeling almost overcome with emotion, he left the porch.

Rose did believe in a God—a God of mercy and loving kindness. But the state of her mind was such at the time of the minister's visit that she had for the moment lost faith in everything. After the good old man had gone—for he was a good old man—the words she had uttered came back to her, and retiring to her room, she wept and prayed for pardon to the God whom she had denied.

The Rev. Stanley returned to his home, and, according to agreement, Phil Hanson called to see him.

"Oh, sir!" he exclaimed, "you have returned, and I hope have brought me good news. Does my poor wife see the error of her ways? I feel sure she does. You make sin so hideous, she must be seeking mercy."

"My dear brother," said the minister, "Paul may plant and Apollus may water, but God alone can give the increase. I am sorry to tell you I left her unrepentant. She does not believe in anything, either in God or in eternal punishment. Poor soul! She is lost! Let us pray for her."

And kneeling down, he prayed fervently that she should be brought to know the truth.

Phil arose from his knees with an aspect of the profoundest grief, and after shaking hands with his pastor and wishing him good-night, the arch hypocrite retired to his lodgings.

Attorney Goodman had not been idle during this time. The day before the case came on, he sent for his client, Rose Hanson.

"Mrs. Hanson, I wish to tell you that every precaution has been taken. The simple facts are: You have applied for a divorce on the only ground the law allows you, that of adultery. The statute plainly defines what constitutes adultery. We can prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Mr. Hanson is guilty, according to the law laid down here," pointing to the law book. "Our witnesses cannot be impeached. They are too well known to entertain that idea for a single moment. Hanson is a gambler and a bad man, and if he does bring witnesses to prove himself otherwise, it will do no good against the overwhelming array of evidence against him. He will try to injure your character, no doubt. In fact, in his answer he says so. That is to get the child from you. He will no doubt attempt to prove you are not a fit and proper person to be entrusted with the training of a child. I tell you this that you may prepare for the worst."

"Oh, I defy him, Mr. Goodman," said Rose, raising her head proudly, "to prove aught against my character."

"I know it, Mrs. Hanson. Out of a dozen persons I have spoken to, not one could or would say a single word against you. If he hires witnesses to perjure themselves, as he once intimated to me, what kind of people will they be? As an offset to witnesses of that description, we shall bring, if necessary, men and women who have known you from childhood; neighbors among you have lived from infancy to the present time. I tell you plainly that never in my life have I felt surer of a case. I am bound to win it for you. Knowing I had a knave to deal with, it has been my study by day and by night to circumvent him. So cheer up, for right must conquer."

Rose went home and began to plan for the future. How she would commence anew her struggle for subsistence, was her next concern. She could, as she knew, obtain a little capital to start with. She would do so. But best of all, she would be free. Then, no man would dare to touch one penny of her earnings without being held, even in the eyes of the law, as a thief. And for the first time in many weeks she went to her bed with a light heart and a smiling face.

The next day dawned, and the first rosy-tipped arrow of light that struck the window-pane awakened her from her slumber. She arose, and with a sigh prepared for the coming struggle. Ah, what a struggle! A woman, poor and almost alone, defending herself against her protector! Can this be possible? The wildest of the Arab robbers, after he has tasted salt with you, would scorn to harm you. But an enlightened European will stand at the altar and swear to honor and protect the physically weaker one, and then—traitor-like, wolf-like—will lie in wait to pounce and spring, until she has to turn in self-defense, or else submit and drift downward, downward, until the finger of scorn is pointed at her, and all hope is dead.

Hanson vs. Hanson was called in Court, and the trial which was to decide whether Rose was to remain a wife or not was about to commence. Mr. Goodman rising, said:

"My Lud, I appear for the plaintiff."

"I appear for the defendant, my Lud," said Mr. Mink.

"In opening this case," said Mr. Goodman, "which your lordship is no doubt aware is a suit brought by plaintiff, Mrs. Rose Hanson, for the dissolution of the marriage bond between her and the defendant, Mr. Philip Hanson, and furthermore, that the custody of the child Bessie Hanson, born in wedlock, may be given into her sole charge, I will remark that I have been engaged in the practice of law for more than twenty years, and can assure your lordship that this case is without a parallel in my experience. Such glaring, outrageous conduct, such unheard-of cruelty, cannot be found recorded anywhere else on the civilized globe. We are aware that the laws allow a man to do many wicked things against a woman—his wife—with impunity, and these laws still remain upon our statutes. But I am sure your lordship will agree with me that they are the relics of an age of barbarism now happily passed away forever. We shall not take up your lordship's time with further remarks. But we are ready for the trial, ready to prove each and every allegation; and we trust your lordship will see fit to give us a verdict."

"My Lud," said Mr. Mink, rising, "the experiences of men are worth something. The laws, the 'relics of an age of barbarism,' are set down for our guidance, and we expect a verdict in accordance with these laws. We are ready for the trial."

"My Lud, the marriage is not denied in the answer," said Mr. Goodman. "Is it necessary to prove it?"

"We do not deny the marriage, my Lud," said Mr. Mink.

"In that case it is admitted, and it is unnecessary to prove it," said his lordship.

"Call Mrs. Rose Hanson."

After being sworn, Rose was questioned thus:

"You are the plaintiff in this case, I believe, Mrs. Hanson?"

"Yes, sir."

"State to the Court how your face became disfigured."

"We object, your lordship. This suit is for adultery—not assault and battery."

"Objection allowed," said his lordship. "Even if the injury was caused by her husband, it does not entitle her to a divorce. She has a remedy for acts of that description, namely, to bring a complaint before the police magistrate, and the man would be fined or imprisoned."

"Have you a child, Mrs. Hanson?"

"Yes, sir. A little girl, named Bessie."

"You ask for the sole charge and custody of that child, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you able to supply its wants?"

"Yes, sir. I can take care of her and abundantly provide for and educate her."

"How much has your husband furnished toward her support?"

"Nothing, sir. Not a penny."

"How much were you worth, or rather, how much had you saved, without assistance from your husband?"

"From six to ten thousand pounds, sir."

"How much have you to-day?"

"But five shillings in the world."

"How did you lose your money?"

"We object. A married woman's earnings do not belong to her, but to her husband," said Mr. Mink.

"My Lud, I wish this question answered, to show that this woman did not lose these earnings through extravagance or mismanagement on her part, and to prove that she is abundantly able to take care of her child when she is free from this man," said Mr. Goodman.

"You may answer the question, merely to satisfy the Court, in case a verdict is rendered in your favor," said his lordship. "How did you make this money?"

"I was engaged in the manufacture of straw goods."

"Now, my Lud, we certainly object," said Mr. Mink.

"Answer the question, witness. How did you lose your money?"

"My husband took the money from the bank where I had deposited it, and sold my secret for preparing straw, and my household furniture, and left me without a bed to lie on."

"Did you tell your husband you had saved money?"

"Yes, sir. And I gave him five hundred pounds of it."

"That is all," said Mr. Goodman. "Take the witness."

[To be continued.]