

## THE BEGINNING OF THE END; AN ENGLISH TALE.

By A. A. CLEVELAND.

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### CHAPTER XIV.

It will be remembered that Bedford & Co. had taken possession of the straw factory. Soon after the trial, the agent, Mr. Richardson, wrote to his employers, informing them of the fact of Rose's having obtained a divorce, and also of the effect the loss of her child had upon her mind. Mr. Bedford received this letter, and on going to the office mentioned the fact to his partners.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he said. "I have just received this letter from Richardson, our agent at the factory. It appears from this that Mrs. Hanson has obtained a divorce from her husband, but that the Court decreed the care of the child to the husband. Of course he sold the factory and the secret for preparing straw without her knowledge or consent."

"Without her knowledge and consent?" said one of the partners. "What did she have to do with it?"

"Well, he left her some years ago, and during his absence she scraped together some money—of course, as her husband was away, we will not inquire too closely how—and started this business and discovered this process herself. Her husband came home and sold the establishment to us, as I said before, without her knowledge or consent, and—"

"Then he is an infernal scoundrel!" said the partner, Mr. Smith. "If she earned the money during his absence, it was hers, to save or spend or throw to the dogs if she wanted to. And any man that would rob a woman like that ought to be horsewhipped."

"Don't you know, Mr. Smith, that a married woman cannot hold property?—It is not hers. It is her husband's."

"That, I know, is law; but it is not justice. And—Bedford, I am ashamed of you; I really am. To hint that she obtained her start in an improper manner, is brutish. I can tell you that women with brains get their start in life honestly. This class of women are too scarce for the good of the world. If she needed it, I'd start her again tomorrow."

"No doubt you would, Smith; especially if she was tolerably good-looking. Ha! ha! ha!" said another partner.

"I have no objection to being laughed at, gentlemen; not the least," said Mr. Smith. "But I want you to understand that I am rather touchy upon some points, and this is one of them. And I will tell you why."

"Now, Smith, would you not prefer that the recipient of your bounty should be good-looking?"

Without answering this question, Mr. Smith continued:

"I am, I suppose, what the world would call a rich man. At all events, I am very well off. But it's no credit to me, gentlemen. My mother was deserted by my father, and had to battle with the world both before and after I was born. She sent me to school—to the best in the land for commoners, you understand."

"All honor to your mother, Mr. Smith, say I," said one gentleman; "all honor to her, sir."

"Thank you," said Mr. Smith. "She taught me not only how to toll, but also how to save."

Suddenly rising to his feet, while his features worked convulsively, he continued:

"And the man that would hint that we must not inquire too closely how my mother got her start, before God, is an insinuating, low-lived blackguard! And if he made that remark to me, or I overheard him make it," bringing his fist down on the table with terrible force, "I would kill him! Excuse me, gentlemen. I will see you this afternoon."

And unable to smother his emotion, he left the room.

"Well, I declare!" said Mr. Bedford, after they had somewhat recovered from their astonishment. "I am thunderstruck! Who would have believed that from friend Smith? Why, he is like gunpowder, to go off like that! But then, a man ought to stand up for his mother or sister. He's a regular woman's rights man; he is, by Jove!"

"Yes, indeed," said another; "and he is a shrewd business man. But the strangest thing is, a number of the best men in the country are joining in this movement. It's only the rag-tag sort that are hooting at it now."

"I'm not rag-tag, and I hoot at it," said Mr. Bedford, "and always will. You can't convince me. I can't be convinced. Let a woman keep her place—keep house and look after her babies—and men will respect her. I am losing all respect for women. I mean, of course, the kind that want to vote, and all that nonsense."

"Well, Mr. Bedford," said his partner, "you will soon be in the minority; that's certain. But business, gentlemen; business. We bought this secret from this man Hanson. Now, what is to prevent him from selling it to some other firm? We are doing well with this secret, very well. But if we have competition, our profits will grow small by degrees and beautifully less. Something must be done, gentlemen? What shall it be? No doubt you have a plan, Mr. Bedford. Let us hear it!"

"Yes; I have a plan, gentlemen. But you are

all so tinctor with the woman question that I shall not advance it."

"Come, come, Bedford," said one; "your plan! We will leave the woman question out of our business. We want to make money. Tell us the plan."

"No; I will not. But if you will agree to leave it with me, I will hold a monopoly of this secret for us all," said Mr. Bedford.

"Enough said. We will leave the matter entirely in your hands," was the reply of one, in which they all concurred.

While these events were transpiring, Rose Hanson was still the same. She was perfectly harmless; but her face grew thinner and paler, and many thought that the end was not far off. At length a very eminent physician was consulted, who gave it as his opinion that if she could see her child there might be some hope; but unless she could, he feared that there was none.

"She has had cruel treatment, poor thing!" he remarked to Will Brownly. "The shock to her brain at the time she lost her eye was terrible. Had it not been for that shock, she would have triumphed over that man in the end; for she would have risen again, and would have been rich and respected, while there is no doubt that he will die like a dog."

Will repeated the doctor's report to his mother, and then continued:

"I love that woman, and you know it. I am going to try to find her child for her. I don't suppose she could keep possession of it even if I brought it to her; but the sight of Bessie might restore to her her reason."

"I sympathize with you, my son," replied Mrs. Brownly, "and will try to help you in this, as in everything else. I would like to see her in her right mind, and I think I shall live to see that day. I have no hope in man, but I feel that God will not allow evil-doers to triumph forever."

"I try to feel that all is for the best, mother; but my heart is sad, very sad," said Will.

"I am a happy woman," his mother said, placing her hand lightly upon his curly head; "happy to have a son who can feel for the misfortunes of one of my own sex. Your father was a kind man, and we loved each other dearly, Will. But, now that he is gone, oh! how thankful I am that you are left to me, my son, comforter!"

The good lady was interrupted by a knock at the door. Opening it, a portly, smiling gentleman stood before her.

"Excuse me, madam," he said. "I am seeking Mrs. Rose Hanson. Can you tell me where to find her?"

"She lives close by, sir," said Will, stepping forward. "Perhaps you had better come in. Are you acquainted with Mrs. Hanson?"

"I cannot say that I have the pleasure of her personal acquaintance. Some years ago we endeavored to do business with the lady, but found she had engaged her goods at that time to other parties," said the gentleman.

"Maybe you are not aware of her affliction?" said Mrs. Brownly.

"Yes, I heard from our agent, Mr. Richardson, that Mrs. Hanson is badly afflicted. My name is Bedford, of Bedford & Co. I am at present on a visit to this place, and out of respect to so enterprising a woman I thought I would call and see her; and if I can be of any assistance to her, I shall be very happy."

"Come with me, sir," said Will. "I will take you to her home."

On entering the cottage in which Rose and the old grandma now lived, Will said:

"Rose, this is Mr. Bedford. He has called to see you on business."

"Mr. Bedford?" said Rose, absently; and rising from her seat she went to him and asked, "Have you seen my little Bessie? She is such a long, long time coming to-day. Have you seen her? Have you seen my child?"

"I think she will be along presently, Mrs. Hanson," said Mr. Bedford.

"Then I will watch at the door," she cried, eagerly. "Oh, Bessie, my Bessie, how I long to see you!"

Mr. Bedford sat some time listening to the old grandma, who with streaming eyes recounted the whole story to him. Rising from his seat, he said:

"I will talk this over with Mr. Brownly, and will make a proposition to him if he will kindly call at the office to-morrow. This is a case in which every one is, or should be, interested; that is, every one who has any feeling. Cheer up, grandma. Perhaps everything will turn out all right. Good-day."

And bowing to Rose, who still stood at the door watching for her child, Mr. Bedford, accompanied by Will, left the cottage.

"He said to cheer up," said the old lady. "I wish I could cheer up. I feel that the end is not far off for me, and who will take care of Rose when I am gone? Sometimes in the night I awake suffocating, and my heart beats so that I know it won't be long. Only the other night I dreamed that father came to me and told me he was waiting—only waiting. Ah, old husband, you'll not have long to wait for mother now. I often wonder if I'll know him over there. Will he meet me when I reach the other shore? In God's own good time He will send for me. Let me be ready—ready."

The next morning Will called at the office now owned and occupied by Bedford & Co.

"Ah, Mr. Brownly, you are here. I am glad to see you. Now we will talk business. In regard to Mrs. Hanson, there is no use in disguising or

denying the fact, however much we may regret it, that she is insane."

Will shook his head mournfully.

"When she conducted the business, we entertained a very high regard for her. In fact, she was the only rival the firm of Bedford & Co. could not successfully cope with. Her method of preparing straw was what gave her the advantage."

"Yes, her business was, I am told, in a very flourishing condition," said Will; "and had it not been—"

"Ah, Mr. Brownly," said Mr. Bedford, interrupting him, "it grieved me terribly to think that a woman could outgeneral the old firm of Bedford & Co. It was so for a time. But now," and he rubbed his hands together softly, smiling complacently the while, "things are very different. How did she obtain this method of preparing straw?"

"Mrs. Hanson has worked in the straw business all her life, and was always a great hand at experimenting. She experimented on straw and was successful."

"You astonish me, Mr. Brownly," said Mr. Bedford.

"It is only a short time since she made a valuable suggestion to our engineer about the cage the miners are raised and lowered in going to and from their work," said Will. "The engineer acted upon her suggestion, and a short time afterward obtained a patent on an invention called the 'Wilcox Safety Cage.'"

"What is there peculiar about this cage?" asked Mr. Bedford.

"It is so constructed that should the rope or chain break, the men inside by simply lifting a lever can hold it from falling to the bottom and killing every man in it. If Mrs. Hanson had her just dues, this cage would be called the Hanson or Horner improvement," said Will, with emphasis.

"I am filled with amazement," said Mr. Bedford. "I never thought there could be brains enough in a woman to accomplish all this."

"It seems, even by your own account, that you found brains enough in this woman to cause the great firm of Bedford & Co. much uneasiness," said Will, laughingly.

"Yes; that is a fact. But you understand, Mr. Brownly, I mentioned this to you in confidence. We could not, for the sake of our business prestige, make such a statement publicly. It would never do to own that we were nearly cornered by a woman. But now for my proposition."

"I shall be pleased to hear it," said Will, "if it is for her good, poor woman!"

"I am acquainted with a physician who keeps a private asylum. He has been, and is still, very successful in the treatment of these cases. I will send or rather take Mrs. Hanson to him and place her under his care for a year, if she should need his treatment for that length of time, of course becoming responsible for his bill. I do this out of respect to her and out of pity for her misfortunes."

"Mr. Bedford," said Will, rising from his chair,

"Wait, if you please, Mr. Brownly," interrupted Mr. Bedford, smiling at Will's earnestness. "I have had some experience with persons afflicted as Mrs. Hanson is, and I am sure she will recover. Is not the idea a good one? But I must annex one condition. You must tell no one who pays the bill."

"You are a noble, generous man to do all this for a stranger; you are indeed. If it were not for the fact that one sees once in a great while a man kind and disinterested like yourself, I should long ago have lost all faith in humanity," said Will, earnestly.

"Oh, come, Mr. Brownly, don't put it in that way. Of course we must help one another. This man's charges are high, very high; but I never do things by halves. His terms are two guineas a week. Quite expensive, you see," he continued, with a patronizing smile. "But I can very well afford it; very well indeed."

"I should like to make a proposition," said Will. "I should like to bear half the expense. I should take it as a great favor. I am not rich, having only what I earn to live on. In fact, we have been saving—mother and I—in the hope of sometime putting Rose under skillful treatment. We can very well spare a guinea a week to help a woman and a neighbor in distress."

Mr. Richardson, who had been writing at his desk, too much occupied apparently to notice this conversation, stopped his pen, and turning on his stool looked in Will's face as he made the proposition.

"Give me your hand, Mr. Brownly," said Mr. Bedford. "I'm proud to take it. We will divide the expense between us. And mind you, not a word to a living soul."

"I will not mention it to anyone except my mother," said Will. "I give you my word on that."

"Then the thing is settled. Get her ready, and we will take her in my carriage to-morrow. Bring your good mother with you, Mr. Brownly, as company for Mrs. Hanson. And now excuse me. Good-morning."

As Will left the office, Mr. Richardson rose from his desk and followed him, and standing at the door, watched him as he slowly walked homeward, apparently in deep thought. On returning to his desk, he soliloquized thus:

"Can you afford, Will Brownly, to give twenty-one shillings a week out of thirty to do an act of kindness to a woman? Do you know what it means to you, Will? Your mother's dress will

become faded and your coat threadbare. You must give up your accident insurance policy. Your table will see no luxuries. Can you afford it, Will? Yes; you can afford it. For bread-cast upon the waters will return after many days."

"Mr. Richardson," said Mr. Bedford, arousing the accountant with a start, "that's what I call business. Doctor Haseltine will charge just one guinea a week for Mrs. Hanson's treatment and board. That soft-head will pay it all, and I'll get the credit; and the joke is, I told him not to tell anyone. Just as if the people would not know all about it when they see me take her away in my carriage."

But Will Brownly knew nothing of this as he walked toward his home, and he was saying to himself:

"It will leave me nine shillings a week. To be sure, it's not much. But then, if mother is willing, I can pinch a little to make it easier for her. It was kind, very kind, in Mr. Bedford to allow me to share the expense. He is a rich man, but he understands my feelings."

The dear old mother consented to the plan. She had not a word of self, not a thought except to pinch herself a little more to do good to others. And with a kindly smile she began to prepare to accompany Rose on her journey to her new home. Mother and son went to the cottage together and told Grandma Hutton of the arrangement. The old lady's tears fell at first; but she was consoled with the thought that Rose might be restored to her health and reason again, and consented for her to be taken away.

"Grandma," said Will, "don't talk about being alone. You must come and live with us. You will be company for mother, and such a help to her, too. I am away all day, you know, and mother is alone. So dry up your tears, old friend. 'Tis always darkest just before the dawn."

The next morning Mr. Bedford called to take Rose for a ride in his carriage, which was drawn by a pair of beautiful grays driven by a servant dressed in a livery of scarlet and gold, and Mrs. Brownly, who was ready to accompany Rose, was not left behind.

As Mr. Bedford had predicted, the news ran like wildfire. The villagers were all excited over the fact that a rich gentleman, a Mr. Bedford, had called and taken Rose in his carriage to a private asylum.

The institution was not far away. England does not boast magnificent distances, as does America, and Rose was soon placed under the care of Dr. Haseltine, where we will leave her for the present in kindly hands.

"Mother," said Will, after they had left Rose, "you please go home and take care of grandma. I am going to find Bessie if I can. I am going to London. In two or three days I will return home."

"Come as soon as you can, Will," said the mother; "and may God prosper you in your mission of mercy!"

Will went to London, and turning his steps toward Scotland Yard, was soon in conversation with the chief of the detective force. On leaving him, Will said:

"Do the best you can, sir. I intend spending a day or two myself in the city, and if I hear anything about the child, I will return here with the information."

He had scarcely left the office before another visitor was announced, who, on being shown in, said:

"I wish to secure the services of an expert detective. I want a man shadowed. Here is my card."

And he handed a card to the chief with the name of Thomas Thorn engraved upon it.

After looking at the name, the chief said: "You say you want a man shadowed? Is it to get evidence against him, or merely from curiosity? I ask so as to be guided in my choice of a man for the duty. Does your man frequent the East or the West End?"

"The East End generally, I think. The man is a gambler."

"We'll set a rogue to catch a rogue," said the chief. "We have a man connected with the force that will answer your purpose, for he has the *entree* to all these gambling halls. To tell you the truth, we have not much confidence in him; still, he answers our purpose sometimes. If you pay him enough, he will be true to you. If not—"

The chief shrugged his shoulders in a very significant manner.

"He cannot do any harm, at all events," said Tom. "Send for him, if you please."

The chief touched a bell.

"Send Andrews to me," he said to the attendant. A man entered the room and took off his hat with a respectful bow. He cast one quick glance at Thorn, and then dropped his eyes to the floor.

"Here is your man, Mr. Thorn," said the chief. "Go into that room and talk the matter over."

On entering the room, Tom said:

"Look here, Mr. Detective. There is a man whose name is Phil Hanson, who has just obtained possession in a legal manner of a child; in fact, he is her father. I have reason to suspect that he hates the child, and I want to find out what he has done with her. If you will follow me, I will try and point him out to you during the day."

"I know him, sir. He is a gambler."

"I am glad you know him," said Tom; "it saves trouble. If you will find out for me where that child is, I will give you twenty pounds, and I will engage you by the month to watch her for me, and will pay you liberally."

"Any further orders, sir?" asked the detective. "Not at present. Here is my card. Bring me the earliest information. When do you think you can find him?"

"I will find him to-night, sir."

He was as good as his word; for that evening, as Phil Hanson was sitting at the gambling table, the detective stood beside him.

[To be continued.]