THE STRIKE AT SHANE'S.

By Permission of American Humane Society.

CHAPTER VII.

The days went by, and Tracy and Smith sent their teams, and the work went merrily on at the Shane farm, and it looked like the corn would be planted in pretty good time yet. Shane's horses were not improving in appearance any, and he had spent the price of a horse in fees to Hodges to treat them. He hoped to get them cured by the time the corn was ready for the cultivator, but the first thing was to get the corn planted.

The work went steadily on, and by the middle of the next week the last hill was in the ground, and Shane was astonished at the amount of work that could be done by two teams, when they were worked according to Tracy's and Smith's plans; for he had kept his promise to Tracy to treat the team well. He had given them proper rest during the day, proper care at night, and had worked them a reasonable number of hours. He remarked that "Smith an' Tracy had two mighty good teams. They just go right along and do what they are told to do without any fuss or trouble." Yet he could not understand that it was the kind treatment that these horses received that made them work so cheerfully.

"There's an awful sight o' grub-worms in this soil," said John Smith, as he and Shane were breaking up the ground for corn. "If them blackbirds that's a hangin' around in the woods would come down an' pick 'em up, it would be many a dollar in your pocket."

"I ain't got any use for blackbirds" said Shane. "The pesky things will be around when the corn's planted to pull it up. I'd rather take my chances agin the worms than the birds. If I had a gun, I'd start them black rascals out of there."

"They'll pick up a sight of worms if you'll let em," said John. "Father don't allow us to kill birds. He says they more than pay their way."

"Maybe they do for some people, but they don't for me," said Shane.

The birds were confining their work to the fields, and were not seen about the house. This was observed soonest by Edith, who was very fond of birds.

"How strange it is, mamma, that there are no birds this summer," said Edith.

"I have noticed it," said Mrs. Shane. "Perhaps they have not come yet."

"Oh! yes they have," said Edith, "there's just lots of them over at Tracy's, and lots of nests. I don't see why they don't build any nests here. It seems so lonesome here without them. I think papa and Tom are cruel to shoot and drive them away, and I told papa so."

"Don't worry your papa any more than you can help, Edie," said Mrs. Shane. "He has a great deal of trouble this spring."

"Well, mamma, don't you think he has brought a great deal of this trouble on himself?"

"Perhaps so, Edie; but pour papa has ideas about things that are different from ours. He looks at everything from a money point of view."

"I don't think that people who look at things only from a money point of view," said Edith, "get much happiness."

"Your papa is doing what he thinks is for the best, and is looking ahead to save up something for you and Tom."

"Well, I don't want him to make himself miserable all his life to save up money for me. I would rather be poor and be happy, and have people and animals and birds to love me. If papa would read the books I borrowed from Cora Tracy he would find out that birds are useful, and instead of trying to kill them and drive them away, he would be glad to have them come."

"Your papa has so many cares that he don't have time to read," said Mrs. Shane.

Edith sat for some time in silence, gazing out over the fields, and up in the blue sky.

"It seems to me like something dreadful is going to happen," she said. "Everything seems so gloomy around here; it doesn't seem like the same place."

"The bad luck your papa has had this spring makes us all feel downhearted. Perhaps it is all for the best, and we can only hope that it will come out all right."

"I don't think it will come out all right," said Edith. "I don't think papa is doing right to drive away the birds, and work the horses to death; and Mr. Tracy thinks the same thing, for Cora told me so, and I am going to have a t lk with papa about it."

"It is quite useless to anoy him about it," said Mrs. Shane. "His mind is made up, and he will not change it."

This reply did not settle the matter with Edith, for she was determined to talk with her father about the matter, but she did not expect the opportunity to come in the manner it did.

The days slipped by and the corn was coming up, but the difficulties on the Shane farm had not improved any. The horses were still unfit for use, and Hodges could not tell when they would be.

"I don't believe there's anything the matter with that Bay Dick," said Shane, "and I'm t ot going to fool with him any longer. He eats as hearty as ever, and I saw him down in the pasture trotting around as limber as any horse. I'm goin' to hitch him up and make him work or break his neck. Here's the corn comin' up an' some of the horses have got to go in the field pretty soon."

Having come to this conclusion, he said he would hitch Dick up to the cart and drive him to town, and see if he couldn't limber him up under the whip.

"Do be careful," said Mrs. Shane, "you know that horse has a bad temper."

"Oh! I guess Dick knows me by this time, and he knows I won't stand any nonsense. If he's as lame as he pretends to be, it won't be much trouble to handle him."

Accordingly the harness was put on Dick, and he was hitched to the cart. He stumbled around like a very lame horse, and made a very bad show of getting along. No one but Shane would have undertaken to drive him in the condition he appeared to be in.

"Poor Dick," said Edith, as Shane stopped at the house; "I don't think papa ought to drive him when he is so lame," and she patted his neck and smoothed out his long mane. "Don't drive him hard, papa," she continued, "and I'm sure he'll do the best he can."

Shane made no reply, but drove away toward town. The drive to town and return was a slow one, for even Shane's hard heart would not permit him to drive a lame horse out of a walk. Shane was rather proud of the fact that he had succeeded in driving Dick, and said that all the horse needed was exercise, and he would be at work in a few days. He thought, perhaps, a little exercise would do the rest of the horses good.

The next day Shane proceeded to hitch Dick up for the purpose of driving him.

"There's no use talkin'," he said to Mike, "I have got to put these horses to work."

"Bether go slow, "said Mike "for if ye put thim sick horses to work too soon ye may have dead ones."

"It is better to have dead horses than useless ones, just standin' round eatin'. A dead horse don't eat anything. It would be money in my pocket if they were all dead," and he gave Dick a sharp cut with the whip to start him. Dick laid back his ears and hobbled away; but his looks appeared to indicate that a very little of the whip would limber him up too much for the good of Shane's health. Edith being away there was no one to give the horse a kind word to put him in a better humor. Shane mounted the cart and clucked to the horse to start, but Dick stood still. He had, evidently, made up his mind that he did not want to work that day. Shane gave him a cut with the whip, but Dick laid back his ears and shook his head, as much as to say, "there is trouble coming for somebody."

"You won't go, eh?" said Shane, and he gave the horse blow after blow with the whip, almost cutting the hide open. Dick made a lunge forward, but Shane pulled with all his strength on the reins, and the hard bit cut the horse's mouth until it bled, and threw Dick back on his haunches. The sudden halt threw Shane forward, and the reins were slackened. This was Dick's opportunity, and he seized the bit in his teeth, a trick horses learn when they are abused, and which they practice to save themselves from punishment by the bit. Before Shane could recover himself, Dick had started down the road, forgetting all about his stiff legs. Shane pulled on the reins until his arms ached, but it was the strength of a man against the strength of a horse. It was the steel bit against the teeth of the horse, now, and the teeth won. Down the road they flew with the speed of the wind. They neared the bend in the road, and Shane knew that the end would come there, for he never could make the turn without upsetting the cart, but he was helpless. Straight at the fence went Dick, paying no attention to the turn of the road, and with a bound he went over, and the cart was smashed to splinters. Shane lay beside the road unconscious, and to all appearance dead.

Dick kicked himself free from the harness and sped across the field, thankful that he had the privilege to use his legs once more. Shane had spent his life among horses, but had never learned until now that he could not subdue a high-spirited horse by force.

Mrs. Shane had seen the horse start and feared the result. An elevation in the road had cut off her view, after the horse had passed down the road a few rods, and she knew nothing of the result. She called Mike and Tom from the barn, and told them what had occurred.

"Oh! that's all right, mother; I guess father can manage him, as lame as he is," said Tom. "He won't run very far before he will get tired."

"Begorra, I'm not so sure of that," said Mike; "its a fiery temper the horse has, an' whin his blood's up he's hard to manage."

"I would rather you would go after him and see if anything has happened," said Mrs. Shane.

"Why, how useless that would be, mother; there ain't a horse on the farm we could drive, an' we couldn't catch him on foot."

"I shall not rest until I know," said Mrs. Shane.

"Don't worry about that. Father knows too much about horses to let Dick get away from him that way," said Tom. "Come, Mike, let's go back to work."

Shane still lay by the road unconscious. He had tried to manage the horse by brute force, and here was the result—the horse prancing over the field, exulting in his freedom, and the man lying unconscious beside the road. The horse had not expended a tithe of his strength, and the man was as helpless as the dead.

At the time of the accident Edith was visiting Cora Tracy, and in the afternoon Mr. Tracy had occasion to hitch up his wagon and drive down the road on an errand to another farm, and as he was going by the Shane farm he told Edith she could ride with him. She gladly accepted his invitation, for it would save her a long walk.

"I always like to ride behind your horses," said Edith, as they drove along; "they look so happy and contented."

"That's the way I want them to be," said Mr. Tracy. "They deserve to be happy just as much as I do, or any of my family."

"Do you think animals know anything about happiness or unhappiness?" said Edith; "that is, I mean do they know when we love them, and can they love us in return?"

"That is a hard question to answer," said Tracy; "but I think their actions indicate that they appreciate love and kindness as much as a human being does; but whether they understand such things as we do or not, I cannot tell. I have always made it a rule to treat them as though they did. This is especially the case with horses and dogs. I find that I can get much better service out of them by treating them kindly; and then I feel better myself when I have treated all the brute creation fairly, and have dealt justly by them."

"I wish papa would look at things as you do, and would take more interest in the welfare of his dumb animals," said Edith.

"I should think a good little teacher like you could teach him something about such things," said Tracy.

"He won't listen to me," said Edith. "He says I am too young to know much about such things."

"Why, how is this?" exclaimed Tracy, as they passed along the road in the vicinity of the wreck, and saw Dick over in the field. "Here is a horse running loose with a bridle on and part of the harness. Why, it looks like"—he paused in his remark, for he recognized the horse as Mr. Shane's.

"It looks like Dick," said Edith, taking up the sentence and finishing it for him; "but it can't be, for Dick is lame and this horse is not."

"It looks like some one has been in trouble, but I don't see any indications of it on the road. That is one way that high-spirited horses have of retaliating for ill usage on the part of their masters," he continued, as they drove along the road. On nearing the turn of the road he saw evidences of the wreck made by Dick; but Edith's bright eyes had seen it before he did.

"Oh! Mr. Tracy, there has been a runaway, and there is a man lying beside the road. Oh! I know it must be papa. Do please drive faster and let us see."

Mr. Tracy needed no urging on this point, for he had already started his horses into a trot. As they neared the place the cause of the trouble was apparent. Edith leaped from the wagon and was at her father's side in a moment.

"Oh! dear, dear papa, speak to me," she sobbed, as she lifted his head in her arms. "Oh! Mr. Tracy, is he dead?" she asked between her sobs.

"He is not dead, my dear girl, but very badly injured, I am afraid," he answered. "Can you stay here with him until I go for assistance?"

"No, no, don't go away; I can help you to lift him in the wagon and we will take him home."

"Why, my dear girl, you have not strength to help me lift him."

"Oh! yes I have, Mr. Tracy; I am strong. Come, let me help."

"Well, if you insist, we will try it," he said; and they lifted him up and succeeded in getting him into the wagon, and drove as rapidly as possible to the Shane farm. When they arrived Edith hastened to the house and met her mother on the porch. Edith's swollen eyes told the whole story to Mrs. Shane, and she clasped her daughter in her arms and sobbed: "Is he dead, Edie? is he dead?"

"No, mamma; only," she replied, trying to keep up a stout heart.

Mrs. Shane hastened out to the wagon, and Edith hurried away in search of Tom and Mike, who came and carried Mr. Shane into the house. Mr. Tracy immediately went for the doctor.

"Now, Jerry and Tom, you'll have to trot," he said to his horses, as he touched them lightly with the whip.

"It's a case of life and death, old boys, so skip along." And the good horses skimmed over the ground in the best of humor, and soon returned with the doctor.

On examination Shane was found to have a broken leg, and a contusion on the head. He remained in a semi-unconscious condition for the rest of the day. On the following morning he rallied, but had no recollection of the accident until Mrs. Shane explained the matter to him. The bitterest pang to him now was the thought of the two long months of enforced idleness and suffering that were before him.

CHAPTER VIII.

The story of the accident was soon spread abroad over the farm, and was commented on by all the animals; but the general opinion seemed to be that there would be one person less to abuse them, for a while, anyhow.

"I'm sorry Tom wasn't fixed somehow so that he couldn't get out here to beat us," said the cow.

"I don't like that way of doing," said Dobbin to Dick. "You went too far in that matter. Of course everybody will know now that you were playing off, and they may see through the whole thing, and that will result in more violence."

"Well, what is done can't be undone," said Dick; my temper got away with me, and I was tired of shamming. If I had been really lame Shane would have driven me just the same. I was lame for all he knew to the contrary, and when he whipped me I started to run before I had time to think. I knew I might as well make a complete job of it while I was at it; for Shane would know I was shamming any how, and I would have to fight it out with him sometime. You see, I had put myself in a position where I had to fight or surrender, and I preferred to fight."

"It's a very bad piece of business," said Dobbin, "and may make trouble for all of us. You should have kept your temper."

"I tried to and failed, as you see," said Dick. "I have neither your age nor experience in such matters, and make bad breaks sometimes."

"We will have to take some other means of protecting ourselves when Shane gets about again;" said Dobbin; "but that won't be for a good many days, so Towser says."

"It's open war with me now," said Dick. "I don't intend that the harness shall go on my back again until this matter is settled. Towser was saying the other day that Shane said if ever we did get able to work he would make us pay dear for our vacation."

The days were long and tedious for Shane as he lay on his bed and brooded over his troubles. To his physical suffering was added the worry about the condition of things on the farm. Mrs. Shane and the children tried to keep all further trouble from him by putting the condition of things in their most favorable light, but he understood his business too thoroughly to be deceived.

"Tom, how long before that corn will be ready for the cultivator?" asked Shane, as Tom was passing through the room.

"I don't know," said Tom, "but when it is the neighbors will all come in and plow it over for you."

"Did the blackbirds take much of it?"

"I don't think they took any of it," said Tom.

"Is it a good stand?"

"It is good enough," repl ed Tom; "don't worry about that; it will come out all right."

"But I do worry about it. There is something wrong about it; I can tell it by your actions. Come, out with it. One more misfortune won't kill me after I've gone through with what I have."

"Well, if you must know," said Tom, "the corn is not a good stand."

"Not a good stand? What is the reason?"

"If you must know about it, I might as well tell you all about it. The corn crop is a failure. The worms have taken every stock of it, and it will have to be planted over. Now there isn't any use to worry over it, for Mr. Tracy said that the neighbors would come in and plow up the ground and replant it; but he was afraid you would not raise much corn there on account of the worms."

"Was Tracy's corn destroyed by the worms?"

"No."

"Nor Smith's?"

"No.

"Nor anybodys else?

"Nobodys around here.

"Then fate is agin me, and I give up the fight, said Shane.

"Mr. Tracy says there is something peculiar about your corn, an says he cant account for it unless it is because there aint no birds here to take the worms. Mother an Edie have been talkin about there bein no birds here but I never noticed it particular till Tracy spoke about it. But I dont believe that had anything to do with it.

"I dont go nothin on them foolish notions of his, said Shane; but it does look like theres a kind of a fate fellerin me this spring.

"Well, dont worry over it, and well plant it over again, an maybe it will come out all right in the end.

"Therell be nothin in it this year. If the worms took it once theyll take it again, an well get nothin out of the corn crop this year.

Tom left Shane more despondent than ever, and he spent the remainder of the day in a very bad mood. As the shades of the evening crept around him he felt the burden of his misfortunes more severely than ever. This, in connection with his broken limb, was more than he could bear, and caused him to groan aloud. The sound reached Edith, who sat in the adjoining room. She crept silently into his room and approached his bed.

"Poor papa, are you suffering much? she asked.

"Oh, yes, my girl; it seems like everything is going to ruin.

"Why papa, how you talk, and she knelt down by his bedside. "Haven't you a good home, and a loving family, an I kind neighbors?

"Yes, I know; but then therell be nothin made on the farm this year.

"What if there isnt; we will be just as happy.

"You dont understand, girl; you are not old enough to understand these things.

"Yes, but I do understand them, papa. Im seventeen, and I know that you have been wearing out your life trying to lay by money and buy more land. It isnt making us any happier, but instead it is making you and all of us unhappy; and pape you are not so kind as you used to be. You dont love us like you did when I was a little girl.

"Not love you' Edie? Why, of course I do. It is for you I am trying to save up money. What better proof do you want of my love?

"Why, I want a little of this kind of love, and she drew his arm around her neck and kiss d him for the first time in years.

This was a new experience for John Shane. The sunlight of such love had not penetrated the dusty recesses of his heart for years, and the dust would have to be cleared away before its genial warmth could reach his soul.

"You are a good daughter, Edie; but you do not understand how necessary it is to have money to get along in the world.

"Oh, yes I do, papa; but I know that money alone will not bring happiness. Let us be happy and not worry about money.

"But how can we live without money, child?

"Why, you dear old papa, I know you have money enough in the bank to live on for a year if we didnt raise any crops at all.

"And what would you do when that was gone?

"Why, then you will be well, and the horses will be well, and we will all go to work with willing hands and happy hearts. We will be kind and loving to everybody and everything, and we wont think so much about making money.

"It sounds good to hear you talk that way, Edie, but Im afraid it wont work. A man must look out an provide for his family, for if he dont nobody will.

"Yes, but if he allows his love for his family to be driven out by the love of money it seems to me he has made a bad bargain.

"Well, good night, daughter; you've cheered me for a while anyhow. My misfortunes worry me most on account of those who are dependent on me. I want to put them above want."

"There now, papa; no more about that. Let us encourage love and kindness toward one another and trust in God. Good night, papa," and she gave him another kiss and left him.

John Shane was restless; as the hours dragged their weary length along the loneliness of his situation pressed itself on him. The conversation with Edith had aroused the latent energies of his soul, and his heart yearned for human sympathy. He had lived a lonely life; his whole soul had been possessed by the one idea of making money. He did not think that anyone else was suffering while he was following this false light, but here was Edith, who had been yearning for her father's love and had been denied it. Her face haunted him; her voice was ringing in his ears. Her words were present in his memory. Her face and voice reminded him of one that he had known long ago—one that he had loved in the years gone by. Who could it be? Why, Mary, his wife, of course, whom he had almost forgotten that he ever loved, and when he married her she looked like Edith; why to be sure, and he had almost forgotten it. He felt an indescribable desire to tell her that he loved her yet, and called her to him. When she came and stood beside his bed the vision created by a sick man's fancy faded; for it was not Edith's bright and sunny face that bent over him, but his wife's, and the twenty years that she had toiled by his side had left their mark there. The youth and beauty had gone, and her hair was streaked with gray. It was Mary Shane that stood beside him, and not the vision of Mary Manott that Edith's face had recalled; and he was John Shane again with wrinkled face and stooping shoulders. The vision had faded and the words of affection that his lips should have uttered were left unsaid.

"Did you want something, John?

"Only a little assistance in changing my position, he replied.

That done, she started away. His conscience smote him and the vision came back. He recalled her and she returned to his bedside.

"What is it, John? she inquired.

"I am lonely to-night, he replied; "cant you sit with me a while?

"Why, yes; all night if you need me.

She sat down by him, and he told her how he was beginning to see that his life was not what it should be. That he had neglected his duty as a husband and father, and had lived too much alone, and that henceforth he wanted to take his family more into his confidence. He would have told her that he loved her as of yore, but it had been so long since he had spoken such words of affection to her that the words came but awkwardly to his lips, and he left them unspoken. She replied, with tears in her eyes, that she knew that their thoughts had been drifting apart, and that she hailed with joy the dawn of a brighter day, when their lives would flow in the same channel.

Soothed by these thoughts he soon fell asleep, and his tired and worn out wife retired to rest, hoping that the future might not dispel the bright hopes raised that night.

[To be continued.]

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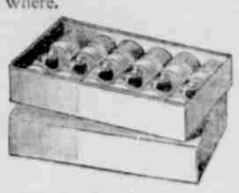

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