MASTER OF THE MINE

By Robert Buchanan.

CHAPTER XXI.

Yes; it was Annie, though for a time I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own eyes. She was so white and thin, so poorly clad, and living in such a den. Truly her sun had set and, as I predicted, she was wending her way home. She cried out at sight of me, and, instead of giving me a welcome, she hid her face and moaned. I felt no animosity toward her now; whatever she had done, she had been bitterly punished. I took her in my arms and tried to comfort her.

"Annie," I said, "my poor Annie, tell me what has happened to you, that I find you like this?"

We soon discovered the cause of her weakness—it was hunger. The poor thing had spent her last shilling, and had not eaten a crust since the morning; and, had we not found her, she would have spent that night starving in the streets. It was the work of a few moments for John Rudd to run out and return with food. When she came wholly to herself again, she looked at me, dreading lest I should question her again; and I thought it better to let my questions rest.

"Annie," I said, "do you feel strong enough to go now? I must take you with me to my rooms. I can't leave you here!"

She was too ill to offer much resistance; so, after I had paid the few shillings that she was owing, we left that miserable den together—Annie, still faint and very weak, leaning heavily upon me. John Rudd had quietly kept in the background, thinking that his presence might serve to further upset Annie. He now as unobtrusively took his departure, after having whispered in my ear that he would call for us in the morning. I took his hint, and determined to act upon it.

The night was very cold, and as we left the houses and passed down the street, facing the chilly wind, I felt Annie tremble violently, so I hurried her along and we soon reached the house where I had taken my rooms. Had I not crept into such good odor through my acquaintance with honest John Rudd, I should have been almost afraid to take Annie into the house; as it was, I expected a cold greeting; but to my amazement we were received with open arms. I afterward discovered that John Rudd had been before us, and had prepared the way for our coming. So when the door was opened the landlady, who was a good kind soul, came forward and almost took poor Annie in her arms, and led her, half-fainting, up to the little sitting room.

I gave her my bed room that night, and, rolling myself in a rug, lay down on the sofa in my little sitting room and tried to sleep; but it was impossible, and after a while I got up and began to walk about the room. Annie's room adjoined mine; so I could hear that she, too, was awake and crying bitterly. In the morning matters were considerably worse; poor Annie was delirious. Her pale face was flushed, her eyes vacant, and she cried pitifully on someone to come to her.

At 10 o'clock, John Rudd's wagon stopped at the door; a few moments later honest John himself was before me. I took him to the bedside and showed him my poor cousin, and his eyes filled with tears as he looked at her. Then we both went back to the other room.

"Measter Hugh," said John, "what do 'ee mean to daw, sir?"

"I shall wait here till Annie gets better," I said; "then I shall persuade her to come home. You will be back again on Thursday, won't you?"

"Yes; and mayhap she'll be well enough by then to come. We'll make her a bed i' the awid wagon and take her careful, Measter Hugh!"

Never in my life had I thought so much of the honest-hearted carrier as now, when I saw him shedding tears for my poor cousin.

When John Rudd came on the Thursday, he found her sitting up in bed, able to recognize him and talk to him, but still too weak to walk into the adjoining room. Nothing was said about going away that day; but I judged that she would be able to make the attempt on the following Monday, the day of the carrier's return.

On the Sunday morning, therefore, when she had left her bed room, and sat in the arm chair by the sitting room fire, I took her poor thin hand in mine, and said:

"Annie, my dear, do you feel strong enough to take a journey? John Rudd will be here to-morrow, and I want to take you home."

It was pitiful to see her face. "Oh, Hugh! I can't go!" she cried. "I can't face father, it would kill me! You go, and leave me—try to forget you have seen me, and they will never know."

"Annie," I said, "the time has come when you must tell me the whole truth. When we met in London, you said you were a married woman. Was that true, or false?"

"When I told you, I thought it was true. He said I was his wife. We went before a sort of lawyer together in Plymouth, and though I prayed more to be wed in church, he said it was the same thing. Afterwards, when we quarreled, he told me that the man was in his pay, and that it was no marriage at all. That was why I left him, and went out into the streets to starve."

"Now, answer me," I cried, "who is the man? If he is living, he shall make amends!"

"Too late, too late!" she cried.

"Is he dead?"

"No, Hugh; he is living!"

"His name? Tell me his name!"

"Hugh, dear, I cannot—at least not yet. But I trusted him, and he deceived me. He made me swear to keep his secret for a time, saying that if folk knew of our marriage it would be his ruin. At last, when I could bear suspense no longer, he told me the truth. With the aid of him that's dead, he had deceived me. What shall I do?"

My head whirled; I had a sore struggle to collect my furious thoughts. At last I mastered myself, and cried:

"You must come home with me. You must tell the truth to those that love you."

I shall never forget that journey. As we drew nearer and nearer to St. Gurlott's, her agitation increased terribly; and when at last John pulled up within a hundred yards of the cottage gate, she began to cry pitifully, and beg to be taken away. I soothed her as well as I could, and, having left her in the van, I walked on to the cottage to prepare the way for her reception. I entered the gate, went softly up to the cottage, and looked in at the kitchen window. It was quite dark outside; but inside the kitchen lights were burning, and a fire was blazing on the hearth. Before the fire, seated in his arm chair, was my uncle. His face looked whiter than ever, his hair was like snow; on his knees he held the big family Bible, which he was reading, tracing the lines with the forefinger of his right hand. I looked around the kitchen for another figure—that of my aunt. She was not there. I hastened back to the wagon, lifted out Annie, more dead than alive, poor child; and half led, half carried her to the kitchen door.

"Go in, Annie," I whispered, "your father is there!" Then I opened the door, and, leaving her on the threshold, returned to my post of observation at the window to see what took place.

For a moment, Annie swerved and half turned, as if about to fly, then she laid her hand upon the door and sobbed, "Father!"

I saw my uncle start nervously and drop the book upon his knee; then he rose, and, with a piercing cry of joy, held forth his arms.

What followed I don't know. I rushed to the kitchen door, and when I reached it I saw poor Annie lying half fainting upon her father's breast.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was a sight to bring tears to the eyes of a strong man. The poor old father—white-haired, haggard, trembling like a leaf, and feverishly clasping the child who had been the darling of his days. He looked into her face—he smoothed back her hair with his wrinkled hand—he murmured her name—while, sobbing and moaning, she clung to him and entreated his forgiveness. I stood looking on, almost terrified. As I did so, my aunt brushed past me, and, entering the kitchen, uttered a cry of surprise.

"Annie!"

The tone of her voice was harsh and cold, and her face was stern indeed. Releasing herself from her father's embrace, my cousin turned to her mother with outstretched arms.

"Yes, mother! I have come back!"

But my aunt, with the same stern expression, repulsed her, and the poor girl fell back with a pitiful moan.

"Bide a bit! Wha brought 'ee? Did you coom back alone?"

"We came home together," I said, stepping forward.

"Let me look at 'ee!" cried my aunt, suddenly approaching her daughter, who hid her face and sobbed. "What, can't 'ee look your mother in the face? Naw? Then away wi' 'ee, for you'm na daughter o' mine!"

My uncle, who had sunk trembling into a chair, looked up, amazed, as she continued:

"Look at your father! Look at the shame and trouble you'm brought upon him! A year ago he was a happy man, and I were a happy woman; but now—look at us both now! Better to be dead and buried than to coom back yar, bringing sorrow on folk that once held their heads up wi' the best!"

I was lost in amazement at my aunt's severity; for never for a moment had I anticipated such a reception. Hitherto, indeed, my uncle had semed to take the affair most to heart, and it was his attitude toward Annie that I had most dreaded.

"Come, come, aunt," I said. "You must not talk to Annie so. There has been trouble, no doubt; but it is all over now, and everything can be explained."

"Whar has she been all this while, tell me that? She left o' her awn free will, and she comes back o' her awn free will; but till I know what she ha' done, I'll ne'er sit down or break bread wi' her again."

"I told you how it would be!" cried Annie, addressing her words to me, but still hiding her face. "Let me go! I wish I had never come!"

And she made a hurried movement toward the door, as if to fly. Seeing this, my aunt relented a little; though her manner was still harsh enough. At this moment, my uncle rose.

"Annie," he said, "dawn't heed mother. She dawn't mean it, my lass—she dawn't mean it! Whate'er you'm done, this is your home, and you are my child—our little lass." Then, turning to his wife, he added, "Speak to her, wife! speak kindly to her! Maybe she'll tell 'ee all her trouble."

His broken tones, so pleading and pitiful, melted the mother's heart. With a wild cry she sank into a chair, the tears streaming down her face.

"Oh! Annie, Annie! may the Lord forgive 'ee for what you ha' done!"

Suddenly mastering herself, my cousin uncovered her face and loked at her mother. Then, drying her tears, and speaking with tremulous determination, she said:

"I know I have been wicked. I know I should never have gone away. But if you have suffered, so have I. I never meant to bring trouble upon you or father; I loved you both too well for that. But if you can't forgive me, if your heart is still bitter against me, I had better go away. I don't want to be a trouble or a burden. I have made my bed, I know, and I must lie upon it; and if I had not met my cousin Hugh I should never have come home."

"Tell me the truth, Annie Pendragon," said my aunt. "Wha took thee from home? Was it him as is lying, dead and murdered, in his grave?"

Annie opened her eyes in wonder. My uncle started, and then, curious to say, averted his face, but stood listening.

"I have already asked her that question," I said; "and she denies it."

I saw my uncle start again. He was still eagerly listening.

"No, mother," said Annie firmly.

"Naw? Ye were seen together i' Falmouth; all the folk think the overseer took 'ee away fro' home."

"Then it is not true."

My uncle turned; his face, which had been troubled before, now ghastly beyond measure.

"Annie, Annie, my lass!" he cried. "Dawn't deny it! Speak the truth, and we'll forgive 'ee! It were Measter Johnson—say it were, Annie, say it were!

His voice was pleading and full of entreaty. I alone of all there, guessed why. But Annie shook her head sadly, as she replied:

"No, father. Him you speak of was nothing to me.

My uncle had turned away, like a man mortally wounded, and, leaning against the lintel of the window, was looking wildly out.

"Dawn't speak to me!" he said; "dawn't, my lass! I can't bear it!"

I thought it time to interfere; so, gently taking Annie by the hand, I led her to my aunt, and made them shake hands and kiss each other. Thus some sort of reconcilement was established, and presently the two women, mother and daughter, went upstairs together. Directly we were alone, my uncle turned and faced me. I saw that he was still greatly agitated, and fancied that I guessed the cause.

"Hugh, my lad," he said, "I knaw I can trust 'ee. Ever sin you was a little lad, you'm been a'most a son to me."

With the tears standing in my eyes, I wrung his hand. I pitied him, with my whole heart and soul; for indeed I loved him like a son.

"Hearken, then, Hugh, my lad. Did you hear what poor Annie said about hersen and the overseer? Be it truth, think 'ee?"

"I think so—nay, I am certain."

He drew his hand across his brow, where the perspiration stood in beaded drops.

"I think you'm right, lad; I dawn't think my Annie would lie. But it has allays been on my mind, d'ye see, that Johnson were to blame; and only last night abed, dreaming like again, I thought I had my fingers at his throat * * * and tried to take un's life! I might ha' done it, I might ha' done it."

As he spoke, he raised his voice to a cry, and a strange mad light, such as I had never seen there before, began to gather in his eyes.

Terrified at his words, I moved to the kitchen door, and closed it quickly.

"Hush! For heaven's sake, don't speak so loud! Some one may hear you!"

He was quiet in a moment. Subdued and gentle, he let me lead him to a chair. Then our eyes met, and though we exchanged no word, he saw that I guessed his secret, and groaning painfully, he buried his face in his two hands, and called on God to forgive him for his sins.

(To be continued.)

The Country Town.

It's common to sneer at the country town,
With its quiet streets and its peaceful air,
Where the little river meanders down
To be lost in the broad, blue sea somewhere
As we who think we are wise are lost
In the roaring city that, like the sea,
Has its ebb and flow, with its millions tossed
As bubbles robbed of identity.

There's fellowship in the country town,
With its empty streets and its spreading trees,
Where the country song birds warble down
At maids as fair as man ever sees;
Where the wind blows sweet from the fields nearby,
Where men know the names which their neighbors bear,
Where a man is missed when he's gone to lie
With the peaceful ones who have ceased to care.

There are joys out there in the country town
That we of the city may never learn
In the rush for money and for renown,
Confronting strangers where'er we turn!
Oh, wasn't God's world serene and fair
In the country town ere we came away?
And won't it be sweet to sleep out there,
Far from the city's roar, some day?
—Chicago Record-Herald.

Fortress at a High Altitude.

The Italian government has just erected a fortress on the great Chaberton summit, opposite Brincan, for the defense of the Simplon tunnel. This fort is 10,600 feet high and is believed to be the most elevated fortified point in the world.

The largest national debt in the world is that of France, which is nearly six billion dollars, or nine times the annual revenue of the government.

Science and Invention

The distinct compounds from coal tar have increased from 454 in 1894 to 695, not less than three hundred of the present products being dyes.

The sound-deadening arrangements tried on the Berlin elevated railway include felt under and at the sides of the rails, wood-filled car wheels, steel and wood ties resting on sand and cork-lined floor planks. Low rails on deep wooden stringers proved the most effective.

A new camera of great importance, photographing for the first time the interior or back of the eye, is the production of Dr. Walther Thorner, of Berlin. A telescope-like focusing glass gives accurate focus under the mild illumination of a kerosene lamp, and a flashlight ignited by an electric spark impresses the image upon the plate. The pictures show the variations of the eye in health and disease, making it possible now to follow the progress of disease step by step.

With the special purpose of securing more accurate records at automobile races than can be obtained with a stop-watch, the Mors Company in Paris has constructed an electric apparatus, which is said to give excellent results. Two small boxes, electrically connected by wire, are placed one at the starting and the other at the finishing point. At the start the wheels of the racers touching a wire stretched across the track cause a needle to form a dot on a band of paper driven at uniform speed by a chronometer. At the finish the wheels, in a similar manner, cause another dot to be made on the same paper. By measuring the distance between the dots the time elapsed is ascertained.

About a dozen years ago, M. Richter showed that the mysterious fires in benzine-cleaning establishments are due to electricity, which produces sparks as pieces of wool are drawn from the combustible fluid on cool or dry days, and he found that the sparks could be prevented by adding magnesium oleate—even as little as 0.02 per cent—to the benzine. The reason of this remarkable effect of the oleate has not been understood. It has now been investigated by G. Just at Karlsruhe, and he finds that the conductivity of the benzine is very slightly increased, this change being sufficient to prevent the accumulation of dangerous electric charges. In pure benzine an electrode kept its charge for minutes, while in the diluted oleate solution it refused to take any charge.

An interesting instance of the manner in which insects sometimes assist the growth of plants without any intention to do so, and while attending strictly to their own business, is furnished by the history of a climbing plant which grows in the Philippines, and which has recently been described by Professor J. W. Harshberger of the University of Pennsylvania. At an early stage in its career the plant, which, like other plants, begins to grow at the ground, severs its connection with the soil, and thenceforward lives with its roots attached to dead bamboo canes. It develops, in addition to other leaves, certain pitcher-shaped leaves, into the cups of which it sends a second set of roots. A species of small black ant frequents the pitchers, and incidentally carries into them minute fragments of decaying wood and leaf mold, from which the roots just mentioned derive a constant supply of food for the support of the plant.

No Relation of His.

A thin, nervous looking man stepped up to the pastor as the latter came down from the pulpit.

"You have had a good deal to say this morning," he observed, "about a feller that killed a man named Abel."

"Certainly," replied the pastor. "'The Sin of Cain' was the subject of my discourse."

"I wish you'd do me the favor next Sunday," said the thin man, in some excitement, "to tell the folks that the man you were talking about this morning ain't no relation to the Kane that keeps a livery stable down by the mill. I don't want none of my friends to think that I had a hand in that killin'. That's all. Good day!"

A Plausible Excuse.

Russell Sage was talking the other day about a dishonest but plausible broker.

"I have caught this man," he said, "in a dozen shady transactions, though he has been ready to excuse himself."

Mr. Sage smiled. Then he resumed: "He reminds me of a chap who broke a plate glass window one day. As soon as he had broken the window he hurried off as fast as he could go. But the shopkeeper had seen him. The shopkeeper came after him and grabbed him by the collar.

"'Aha, you broke my window, didn't you, eh?' he said.

"'Yes, and didn't you see me running home for the money to pay for it?' said the other."

All in the Pen.

She—What is the term applied to one who signs another person's name to a check?

He—Five or ten years usually, I believe.

Each in His Trade.

The violinist had beene invited to a "family dinner," but it proved that several relatives of his host were present, and their demands for music were most persistent.

The violinist played three times, and then, when the applause after his third solo had died away, he turned to his host.

"And now, mousieur," he said, eagerly, "now it is that you will show us how you sell ze flour in ze wheat pit. Can I help roll ze barrel in, mousieur?"

Gentle Hint.

They were playing tennis on the old lawn.

"Dear me," remarked the young man, with a far-away look in his eyes, "we never hear of old-fashioned kissing games any more. They have gone out of style."

"I don't agree with you," replied the pretty girl, "any game is a kissing game if you supply the kisses."

First Lieut. Rudolph E. Sniper, Fourteenth cavalry, U. S. A., is the youngest officer in the army; Lieut. Ernest D. Peek is the tallest, being 6 feet 4 inches.

A Trustless Trust.

Lightly—My landlady evidently belongs to a boarding house combine.

Simson—Why do you think so?

Lightly—She doesn't attempt to supply the wants of the customer.