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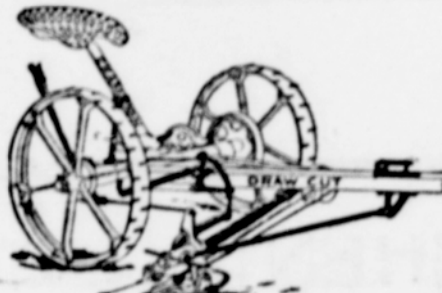
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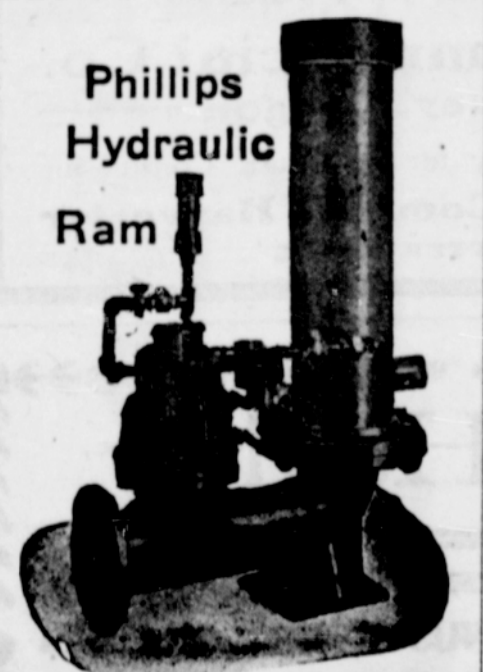
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CONSUMPTION

MASTER OF THE MINE

By Robert Buchanan.

CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

She paused a moment outside; then she hurried away—I, rather aimlessly, following her. She crossed the high road and took a narrow footpath which led by a short cut to the mine. Wondering what could be taking her that way, I continued to follow her. When she had got about half-way to the mine, she turned off again, and hastened along with increased speed toward Greystock Tower.

Greystock Tower was a ruin, consisting of three dilapidated ivy-covered walls and a buttress; it stood on an eminence a few hundred yards from the seashore, and by the superstitious inhabitants of the village was supposed to be haunted. I was astonished to see her going toward it, alone, on a dark night, and as if her very life depended upon her speed. Having reached the ruin, she paused, and stood as if listening. I crept up in the shadow of the ruin. Presently I heard a peculiar whistle. Annie said softly: "Yes—I am here." Then a figure, that of a man, emerged from the darkness and joined her.

My astonishment at all this was so great that for a time I was utterly unable to move. They stood close together, talking earnestly; but I could not catch a word of what they said. Presently they began to move away, and I deemed it time to interfere.

In two strides I was between them—Annie uttered a scream. The man stood his ground, and looked into my face. It was now my turn to utter an exclamation. It was young Redruth, the master of the mine.

"What are you doing here, Trelawney?" he asked, curtly.

"I am here to take my cousin home, sir," I replied.

"Indeed," he sneered; "I should have thought you were here to play the spy!"

"Even that would be better than playing the villain," I returned.

"Hugh, dear Hugh!" said Annie, plucking at my sleeve.

"Don't agitate yourself, Annie," said Redruth, coolly, while I was ready to knock him down. "And you, sir, stand out of the way; I have business with this young lady, and I request you to leave us."

"And if I refuse?"

He raised a small cane which he carried and struck me across the shoulders. In a moment I had wrenched it from his hand, and with one well-planted blow I would have made him measure his length upon the ground, but, with another scream Annie rushed forward and stood before us.

"You shall pay for this, you scoundrel!" said my master; and, without another word, he disappeared into the darkness.

Annie, still frightened and trembling, rushed forward to follow him, but in a moment I was beside her.

"You'll come with me, Annie," I said, taking her hand firmly in mine.

By this time she was crying bitterly.

"Oh, Hugh," she sobbed, "what have you done? You will ruin us all—yourself, father, and all of us!"

I kept my hold upon her, and led her back across the meadows to the cottage. During the walk, no word passed between us. I was silent, expecting she would give some explanation of the scene. When we reached the cottage gate, she paused, and spoke.

"Hugh," she said, "you won't tell mother or father—"

"No, no," I interrupted her. "Don't fear for me, but I mean to look after you in the future, Annie."

"Don't be hard on me, Hugh," she said, piteously. "I meant no harm. But it will be better for you and father if I speak to the young master sometimes."

"You'd best let us manage our own affairs, Annie, and keep yourself to the house; always remember that."

She dried her eyes and composed herself a bit, and we went in together. The old couple were astonished, but not ill pleased at seeing us in company. They noticed Annie's pallor, too, and exchanged looks, the meaning of which I now knew full well. I dreaded to be questioned; so when Annie had gone to her room, which she did pretty quickly, I explained that I had returned for certain little account books. Then I hurried back to the office to finish my night's work.

CHAPTER IX.

The next morning Annie attended at breakfast as usual. She looked a little pale, and now and again glanced uneasily and rather questioningly at me. When I rose to go, she put on her bonnet, saying:

"I am going a bit of the way with Hugh, mother; and then, somewhat to my surprise, she came along with me into the road. 'Hugh, dear Hugh, I have been out before this morning,' she said. 'You must not get angry—indeed, you must not. I did it for the best. I was afraid, after what happened last night, that he would dismiss you; and he would have done, but I have interceded.'"

"You have interceded for me?" I said.

"Then you were wrong, Annie; if he wishes to dismiss me, let him. I have other means of earning my bread."

For answer to this Annie employed a stronger medium than words—she cried. Now, tears always disarm me; all I could do was what I did; soothe my cousin, kiss her pretty cheek, call myself a brute, and avow that she was the dearest, sweetest little woman in the world. Under this process, Annie came round, and smiled sadly up at me through her tears.

"You promise," she said, "to go on just the same as usual, and to take no notice of what occurred last night?"

"I will promise," I said, "if you can show me the good of it."

"The good of it will depend upon whether or not you care anything about me!" she replied. "Just think, Hugh, if you two quarrel again, and you are dismissed, everybody will know why it all came about—and my mother and father, too. Ah, Hugh, dear Hugh, for my sake!"

She folded her little hands over my arm, and looked up into my face like a supplicating child.

"All right, Annie," I said; "don't worry yourself, little woman. I won't do a thing that will injure you."

For a couple of days or so the master kept away, and things went on at the works pretty much the same as usual; but on the fourth day he strolled down. He talked a good deal to Johnson, but never addressed one word to me. He looked at me, however, and the look he gave made me wonder what strange influence Annie possessed when she could induce him to keep in his employment one whom he so cordially hated.

One day my aunt, having a little shopping to do, determined to go to Falmouth. She started off in the morning in John Rudd's wagon, and left my cousin to keep house.

Now, it had seemed to me that Annie had looked particularly dull that morning; so, towards afternoon, I determined to take an hour and to hurry back to the cottage to see how she was getting on. As I drew near to the cottage door, I was astonished to hear voices—the one loud and angry, the other soft and pleading. When I entered the kitchen my amazement increased tenfold.

An elderly lady—none other, indeed, than old Mrs. Redruth, George Redruth's widowed mother—was standing in the middle of the room, while my cousin Annie, looking bitterly, was actually on her knees before her!

Mrs. Redruth had two characteristics, her confirmed ill health and her iron will. Her power in the village was great; but she was feared, rather than beloved. She was a tall, thin woman, with powerful aquiline features and a face of ghastly pallor.

"Your tears don't deceive me," she was saying. "I am not a man and a fool. I am a mother, and I know when danger threatens my child, and I say that you are doing your best to entangle my son. But take care, George Redruth shall not be sacrificed."

"Oh, my lady!" sobbed Annie, "will you listen?"

"No," she returned, "I will not! Listen to you—when every word you utter must be a lie! I have seen you with my son. Cense to follow him, or I will expose you before every soul in the village!"

She turned to leave the cottage, and came face to face with me. She paused abruptly, opened her lips, as if about to speak; then she changed her mind, and without uttering a word passed out.

As for myself, I had been too much stupefied to say a word, and I stood now, like a great bear, looking at my cousin, who, sobbing piteously, had sunk into a chair. I went up to her, raised her and folded her in my arms.

"Annie," I said, "Annie, my dear, let there be an end to this. Give me the right to protect you from all this trouble that has come upon you lately. Become my wife."

She stared and stared at me like a frightened child.

"Your wife, Hugh?" she said. "Your wife?"

"Yes, Annie," I answered. "My wife—that is, if you care for me enough, my dear!"

At this she fell to crying afresh, and clung to me tenderly.

"Ah, Hugh, dear Hugh!" she sobbed. "You are the kindest and best man in all the world, and it is your kindness which makes you ask me this now. No, Hugh; be what you have always been—my own dear brother."

I looked into her eyes, and I thought I read their meaning. Annie did not care for me; her heart was with another man, and that man far above her.

CHAPTER X.

After this I watched Annie a good deal, and I soon discovered she had a great and growing trouble on her mind. She was restless and ill at ease, and once or twice, while I observed her quietly, I saw tears suddenly start to her eyes.

Her mother and father noticed this, too; but they attributed the change to quite another cause. They were good, honest folk, who could only consider one project at a time; and as for several months past their minds had been occupied solely with the idea of a marriage between Annie and myself, they naturally assumed disagreements between us two to be the cause of their daughter's depression.

One afternoon I was standing at the mouth of the mine when I was startled by the sudden appearance of my aunt. She looked pale; rather alarmed; but ready to become very angry.

"Hugh!" she said, before I had time to open my lips, "where be Annie?"

Had I been able at that moment to produce my cousin, she would certainly have been rated very soundly; whereas, I shook my head and said: "I don't know!" the rising anger entirely disappeared, and her face grew paler. She broke down, and moaned between her sobs: "Oh, Hugh! she's gone, gone!"

I was fairly stunned, and all I could do just then was to comfort my aunt, who was weeping bitterly. When she was more composed I asked for an explanation. The facts were simple enough. After my uncle and I had left for the mine, my aunt rose, expecting to find the

kitchen fire alight as usual, and Annie busy. She called Annie, but got no answer; she searched the cottage, but failed to find her. Several hours passed away. She went down to the village and made several inquiries, but with no result. Annie had not been seen by anyone that day.

Having told her tale, my aunt looked at me, hoping that I might be able to say her fears for her child were unfounded. I could not; the utmost I could do was to counsel silence, and to try to buoy her up with hope. I persuaded her to return home. But the day was finished for me. I could do nothing but think of Annie; the worst fears struggled to take possession of me, but I diligently thrust them away. I would not believe ill of my cousin.

About five o'clock my uncle came up from the mine, and I proposed that we should knock off work for the day. He was in singularly good spirits. As we drew near to the cottage, my heart beat painfully, and when we went in I looked anxiously about me.

"What be the little woman?" asked my uncle, as we sat down to our meal.

I saw my aunt's face grow very pale, but she turned her head and answered as carelessly as possible.

"She be gawn out!"

When the meal was over my uncle, according to his usual custom, went to his seat beside the fire and lit his pipe. He had been smoking for an hour or more, when a knock came to the kitchen door; then the door was opened, and in came John Rudd. He had a parcel for my aunt, which he delivered; he chatted for a few minutes, then he prepared to go. His hand was on the latch of the door, when he paused and looked back.

"Say, missus," said he, "what be Miss Annie gawn to?"

My uncle looked up curiously; my aunt's cheeks grew as white as new-fallen snow.

"What be she gawn to?" she repeated, helplessly.

"Is?" continued Rudd, "I seen her this mornin' 't Falmouth, but she were in a hurry and didn't see me. She were down on the jatty, and she went aboard the steamer for Portsmouth."

Mr. Rudd paused, thunderstruck at the effect of his words. My aunt, thoroughly exhausted by the strain that had been put upon her that day, sank, sobbing and moaning, into a chair; my uncle, who had risen from his seat, stood glaring from one to another. Presently he spoke.

"What be all this about my Annie?" he cried. "Speak, some 'un. If there be aught wrong wi' my little woman," he cried, "tell me; I ain't a child to be petted, nor a fool to be kept i' the dark. Speak, tell me what 'tis all about!"

So we told him all we knew, and putting this and that together, he gathered at least one idea—that his child had, for some reason or other, voluntarily left her home. He stood like a man stupefied, scarcely gathering the sense of the situation, and dimly wondering why his wife received the news so violently. But when John Rudd was gone, and we were left to ourselves, I told them my suspicions of George Redruth. To my surprise they were received with blank amazement, then with indignation. My uncle averred that I had always disliked the young master. I determined to go up to Redruth's house and ascertain if he were from home.

The moment my uncle heard of my determination he resolved to accompany me. On asking for the master, we were shown into the library; five minutes later the young man himself walked into the room. He had just been dining, wore evening dress, and had never looked handsomer or more thoroughly at his ease in his life.

"Well!" he said, glancing at us pleasantly—he was evidently in an after-dinner mood—"is there anything I can do for either of you?"

"Master Jarge," said my uncle, earnestly, "we're in trouble, sir; in sore trouble. My daughter, my little Annie, she be run'd away!"

"What!" he exclaimed. "Run away from home, do you mean? But why come to me? What can I do?"

"Naught, you can't do naught at all," said my uncle, "that's just it."

"The fact is, sir," I said, "there is some villain at the bottom of it, and we want to find out who that villain is."

"And so you come to me! Really, I don't see the force of all this, and I have more important matters to detain me!"

He opened the door, and we, seeing that further conversation would be useless, left the room and the house. During the walk home my uncle never spoke. When we reached the cottage he sank down into a chair, and hid his face in his hands.

Nothing more could be done that night, so we all went to bed; but not to sleep. During the night I frequently heard my uncle walking with measured step up and down his room, and in the grey of the morning he came out to the kitchen to kindle a fire.

I looked at him and scarcely knew him; his face was white and lined like that of an old man. He was quite calm; but there was a sad look in his eyes which spoke of deep-set pain.

Several days after that sad night a letter came from Annie; it bore the London postmark, and ran as follows:

"My Dear Parents:

"Do not grieve about me, for I am quite well and in want of nothing. Do not attempt to find me, it would be useless; but I shall soon come back, with God's blessing, and then you will learn why I left without a word. I am sorry, so sorry, for any trouble I have given you, and hope you will forgive me, for the sake of the happy days that are gone away. Your loving daughter,

"ANNIE."

My aunt read the letter aloud; then my uncle took it from her, looked at it for a long time, and finally, without a word, placed it on the fire—watching it till it was consumed. After that, for a long time to come, he never spoke of Annie again; but he drooped daily, like a man under the weight of some mortal pain.

(To be continued.)

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Our Country's Growth.

No nation on earth can show so rapid a growth in population as the United States. The recent bulletin of the Census Bureau contains the estimates of population for 1901, 1902 and 1903 for all the cities having 10,000 or more inhabitants in 1900 and for States and Territories. According to the figures presented, the total estimated population of the United States, exclusive of Alaska and the insular possessions of the United States, is 79,900,398. This is an increase of 3,905,814 since the census of 1900. The population is estimated for 438 cities having 10,000 or more inhabitants in 1900.

According to these estimates, New York is now a city of 3,716,139 inhabitants; Chicago is rapidly approaching the two million mark, having 1,873,880 inhabitants; Philadelphia has 1,367,716; St. Louis has just passed and Boston has almost reached the 600,000 mark; Baltimore has 531,313; Cleveland is now a considerable distance ahead of Cincinnati, which cities have 414,950 and 332,234. Buffalo has also considerably increased its population, being credited with 381,403 inhabitants. San Francisco and Pittsburgh are also close competitors, the former having 355,919 and the latter 345,043. Detroit, Milwaukee and New Orleans have just passed 300,000 and Washington is close to that figure.

Heroic Treatment.

Mrs. Ebony—Doctah, my husban' he got the paralysis in the laigs, so he can't move his feet.

Doctor Dark—Is dat so, Mrs. Ebony? Well, I'll call right away.

Mrs. Ebony—Yes, doctah, an' be suah to bring youh banjo erlong. If dat doan start his laigs goin', nuthin' will.



A prominent club woman, Mrs. Danforth, of St. Joseph, Mich., tells how she was cured of falling of the womb and its accompanying pains and misery by Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

"DEAR MRS. PINKHAM:—Life looks dark indeed when a woman feels that her strength is fading away and she has no hopes of ever being restored. Such was my feeling a few months ago when I was advised that my poor health was caused by prolapsus or falling of the womb. The words sounded like a knell to me, I felt that my sun had set; but Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound came to me as an elixir of life; it restored the lost forces and built me up until my good health returned to me. For four months I took the medicine daily, and each dose added health and strength. I am so thankful for the help I obtained through its use."—MRS. FLORENCE DANFORTH, 1007 Miles Ave., St. Joseph, Mich.—\$5000 forfeit if original of above letter proving genuineness cannot be produced.

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