

# OVER THE BORDER.

By WALTER BESANT.

For want of the master's presence, for lack of pushing and encouragement, the yearly returns of the shop grew less and less. No one knew this except my mother. It was useless to tell my father. If she begged his attention to the fact, he only said that business was, in the nature of things, fluctuating, that a bad year would be succeeded by a good year; that large profits had recently been made by traders to Calcutt and Surinam, where he had designs of employing his own capital, and that ventures to Canton had of late proved extremely successful. Alas, poor man! he had no capital left, for now all was gone—capital, credit and custom. Yet he still continued to believe that his shop, the shop which came to him with his wife, was bringing to him, every year, a great and steady return, and that he was amassing a fortune.

One day—it was a Saturday evening in May—in the year 1770, six years after the flight of Ralph Embleton, when I was in

my seventeenth year, and almost grown to my full height, I saw coming slowly along the narrow road which leads from the high way to Warkworth a country cart, and in it two persons, the driver walking at the horse's head, I stood at the garden gate watching this cart idly, and the setting sun behind it, without so much as wondering who these persons might be until presently it came slowly down the road which here slopes gently to the river and the bridge, and pulled up in front of our gate. When the cart stopped a lady got quickly down and seized my hands.

"You are my Drusilla!" she asked, and without waiting for a reply, because she was my mother and knew I could be no other than her own daughter, she fell upon my neck in a passion of weeping and sobbing, saying that she knew I was her daughter dear, and that she was my most



She knew I was her daughter dear.

unhappy ruined mother. It was my father who descended after her. He advanced with dignified step and the carriage of one in authority. I observed that his linen and the lace of his ruffles were of the very finest, and his coat, though dusty, of the finest broadcloth. He seemed not to perceive my mother's sobs; he kissed me and gave me his blessing. He bade the cart, with majestic air, lead the "recoad,"—he called the country cart a coach—and take great care of the horse, which he said was worth forty guineas if a bay, but the horse was a 10-year-old sa. worth at most four guineas, as I knew very well, because I knew the carrier.

Amazed at this extraordinary behavior I led my parents to my grandmother, and then we presently learned the truth. My father, if you please, was ruined, he was a bankrupt, his schemes of greatness had come to nothing, his vast fortune lay in his imagination only; he had lost his wife's money and his own. He had returned to his native county, his old friends having clubbed together and made a little purse for him, and his creditors having consented to accept what they could get, and to give him a quitance in full, because he was known to be a man of integrity, otherwise he might have been lodged in jail, where many an unfortunate, yet honest, man lieth in misery.

The disaster was more than my father's brain could bear. First, as soon as he fairly understood what had happened, he fell into a lethargy, sitting in a chair all day in silence, and desiring nothing but to be left alone. After a while the lethargy changed into a restlessness, and he must needs be up and doing something—it mattered not what. Then the restlessness disappeared and he became again his old self, as cheerful, as sanguine, as confident, with no other change than a more settled dignity of bearing, caused by the belief, the complete delusion, that now his fortune was indeed made, that he possessed boundless wealth, and that he was going to leave London and to retire into the country, as many great merchants used to do, in order to enjoy it.

He was fully possessed with the idea that he was wealthy as he ever desired to be. His poor brain was turned, indeed, on this point, and after a while I thought little of it, because we became accustomed to it, and because it seemed a harmless craze. Yet it was not harmless, as you will hear. Indeed, even an innocent babe in arms may be made the instrument of mischief in the hands of a wicked man.

Our first visitor was Mathew Humble. He came first, he said, to pay his respects to my father. Then he began to come with great regularity. But I perceived soon, for I was no longer a child, but already a woman, that he had quite another object in view, for he cast his eyes upon me in such a way as no woman can mistake. Even to look upon those eyes of his made me turn sick with loathing. Why, if this man had been another Apollo for beauty I would not have re-

garded him, and so far was he from an Apollo that a fat and loathsome satyr more nearly resembled him.

He was already three or four and thirty which I, being 17, regarded as a very great age indeed, and most Northumbrian folk are certainly married and the fathers of children already tall before that time.

He was a man who made no friends, and lived alone with his sister Barbara. No girl at all, so far as I know, could boast of having received any attentions from him, he was supposed to care for nothing except money and strong drink. Every evening he sat by himself in the room which overlooks the river, with account books before him, and drank usquebaugh. But he loved brandy as well, or Holland's gin, or indeed anything which was strong. And being naturally short of stature he was grown fat and gross with red hanging cheeks, which made his small eyes look smaller and more pig like, a double chin, and a nose which already told a tale of deep potations, so red and swollen was it. What girl of 17 could regard with favor—even if there were no image of a brave and comely boy already impressed upon her heart—such a man as this, a mere tosspot and a drinker? And worst of all, a secret and solitary drinker—a gloomy drinker.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE LETTER AT LAST.

It was strange that, about the time when Ralph's disappearance was first heard of, rumors ran about the town that perhaps the mill would turn out, after all, to be the property of Mathew Humble, that these rumors were revived at the approach of Ralph's 21st birthday, and that again, when Mathew first began his approaches to me, the rumor was again circulated. By the help of the fugleman I traced these rumors to the barber, and

still, with his help—because every man must be shaved and while being shaved, must talk—I traced these to none other than Mathew himself. He had, then, some object to gain. I knew not what at the time. Later on I discovered that his design was to make it appear—should Ralph ever return—that I had taken him for a husband when I thought he was the actual master and owner of all I believed he allowed himself no doubt as to the result of his offers. Both it did not seem as if the uglier the older, the less attractive a man as whether in person or in mind the more certain he becomes of conquering a woman's heart?

The rumor on this occasion was more certain and distinct than before. It was now stated that Mr Embleton was discovered to have made a later will, which had been proved, and was ready to be produced if necessary that in this will the testator, after deploring the badness of heart manifested by his nephew Ralph, devised the whole of his property to his nephew Mathew. The barber, for his part had no doubt of the truth of this report, but those who asked Mathew whether it was true received mysterious answers as that time would show, that in this world no one should be certain of anything that many is the slip between cup and lip, that should an occasion arise, such oracles as incline the hearers to believe that has been said—and more Barbara, his sister for her own part, showed great willingness to answer any questions which might be put to her. But she knew little her brother she said, was a close man, who sat much alone and spoke little.

And then the fugleman told me a very strange story indeed, and one which seemed to lead me to no end of my life. By this time I so regarded Mathew that I could not believe he could do or design anything but evil. This was wrong, but he was most certainly a man of very evil designs.

His own private business, the fugleman told me—this was nothing in the world, as I very well knew, but the snaring of rabbits, hares, partridges and other game on the banks of the river—had him some times past Morscock Mill in the evening, or late at night. There was a room in the mill the same room in which Mathew was vanquished and beaten—the window of which looked out upon the river, & here a broad and shallow brook. The bank rises steep on the other side, and is dotted with thick hanging woods in which no one ever walked except the fugleman, and he for those purposes I have just mentioned always alone and after sun down. Now his eyes were like unto the eyes of a hawk, they knew not distance, they could see quite far off, little things, and the fugleman saw night after night, that Mathew Humble was sitting locked up in his room engaged in writing or copying something. I believe that if the fugleman had known how to read, he would have read the writing even across the river. Unhappily he had never learned that art. Mathew was making a copy the fugleman said of some other document. But what that document was he could not tell. It was something on large sheets of paper, and in big hand-writing. He wrote very slowly comparing word for word with the papers which he seemed copying. Once when there was a noise as of some one at the door, he huddled all the papers together, and bundled them away in a corner quickly and with an affrighted air. He was therefore doing something secret, which means something wicked. What could it be?

"Little he thinks," said the fugleman, "but Master Ralph is sure to come home and confound his knavish tricks, and trip up his heels for him. Ah, I think I see him now in lace and ruffles and good broadcloth walking up the street with a fine city maid on his arm."

I should have been very well contented with the nice ruffles and good broadcloth—indeed I wanted nothing better—but I wanted no fine city maid at the mill.

Later on I learned what this thing was which he took so long to copy, and which gave him so much anxiety. But it was like a fire-ship driven back by the wind among the vessels of those who sent it forth.

One morning when I was busy in the kitchen with household work, and my mother was engaged upon the family sewing, Mathew came and begged to have some conversation with her. He said that, rest of all, he was fully acquainted with our circumstances, and the unhappy outlook before her, when my grandmother should die and leave us all without any income at all, that being of a compassionate heart, he was strongly minded to help them, and that the best way, as well as he could judge, would be to make her daughter Drusilla his wife. This done, he would then see that their later years would be attended with comfort and the relief of all anxiety.

At first my mother did not reply. She had no reason to love Mathew, whose unkindness to his ward was well known to all. Again she had still some remains of family pride left—you do not destroy a woman's pride by taking away her money, she thought, being the daughter of a well-to-do London citizen, that her child should look higher than a man who had nothing in the world of his own but thirty acres of land, although he lived at the mill and pretended to be its owner. And she very truly thought that the man was not in person likely to attract so young a girl as myself. But she spoke him fair. She told him that I was young as yet, too young to know my own mind, and that perhaps he had better wait. He replied that he was not young for his own part, and that he would not wait. Then she told him that she should not certainly force the inclinations of her daughter, but that she would speak to me about him.

She opened the subject to me in the evening. No sooner did I understand that Mathew had spoken for me than I threw myself upon my knees to my mother, and implored her with many tears and protestations not to urge me to accept his suit. I declared with vehemence that if there were no other man in the world, I could not accept Mathew Humble. I reminded her of his behavior toward Ralph. I assured her that I believed him to be one who sat drinking by himself, and a plotter of evil, a man with a hardened heart and a dead conscience.

Well, my mother, shed tears with me, and said that I should not be married against my will, that Mathew was not a good man, and that she would bid him not uncourteously go look elsewhere. This she did, thanking him for the honor he had proposed.

For some reason, perhaps because he did not really wish to marry me, perhaps because he had not thoroughly laid out the scheme of marrying me to revenge himself upon Ralph, Mathew gave me a respite for the time, though I went in great terror, lest he might pester my mother or myself. Perhaps, which I think more likely, he trusted to the influence of poverty and privation, and was contented to wait till these should make me submissive to his will.

However that may be, he said nothing more concerning love, and continued his visits to my father, in whose conversation he took so great a pleasure. Oh villain! Things were in this posture, I being in the greatest anxiety and fear that something terrible was going before long to happen to us, when a most joyful and unexpected event happened.

It was in the month of May, seven years since Ralph's flight—like the followers of Mohammed, I reckoned the years from the flight—that this event happened.

The event was this, that the fugleman had a letter sent to him—the first letter he ever received in his life.

I saw the post boy riding down the road early in the afternoon, he passed by the house of Mr Carnaby, where he some times stopped, past our cottage, where he never stopped because there was nobody who wrote letters to us, and over the bridge, his horse's hoofs clattering under the old gateway. I thought he was going to the vicarage, but he left that on his right and rode straight up the street, blowing his horn as he went. I wondered, but had no time to waste in wonder, who was going to get a letter in that part of the town. The letter, in fact, was for no other than the fugleman.

Half an hour later the fugleman, who had been at work in the garden all the morning came down the town again and asked me—with respect to her ladyship my mother—if I would give him five minutes talk. With him was Sailor Nan, cause the thing was altogether so strange that he could not avoid telling her about it, and she came with him, curious as a woman, though bold and brave as becomes an old salt.

"'Tis a strange thing," said the fugleman turning the unopened letter over and over in his hand, "'tis a strange thing, here is a letter which tells me I know not what—comes from I know not where, I have paid three shillings and eight pence for it. A great sum I doubt I was a fool. It may mean money, and it may mean loss."

"Burn it, and ha' done," said Sailor Nan. "'Tis from some land shark. Burn the letter."

"I am 60, or mayhap 70 years of age, Sixty I must be. Yes, sure and certain, Go, yet never a letter in all my day before."

Now, which is very singular, not the least suspicion in our minds as to the writer of the letter.

"Is it?" I asked, "from a cousin or a



Here is a letter.

brother?" "Cousin?" he repeated with the shadow of a smile across his stiff lips. Why I never had a father or a mother to say nothing of a brother or a cousin. When I first remember anything I was running in the streets with other boys. We stole our breakfast, we stole our dinner, and we stole our supper. Where are they all now those little rogues and pickpockets my companions? Hanged, I doubt not. What but hanging can have come to them? But as for me, by the blessing of the Lord, I was enlisted in the Fourteenth Line, and after a few hundreds taken mostly by three dozen doses, which now are neither here nor there and are the making of a lad, I was bogged into a good soldier, and so rose as was due to merit. A hearty three dozen, now and then, laid on with a will in the cool of the morning, works miracles. Not such a regiment in the service as the Fourteenth. And why? Because the colonel knew his duty and did it without fear or favor, and the men were properly trained. Good comrades all, and brave boys. And where are they? Dead, I take it, beggars, some, fallen in action, some, broke, some in comfortable berths like me, some in all were living, who would there be to send me a letter, seeing there wasn't a man in all the regiment who could write?"

Strange that not one of us even then guessed the truth. It was a great letter, thick and carefully sealed, addressed to "Fugleman Fur long at his room in the Castle of Warkworth, Northumberland, England." It came from foreign parts and the paper was not only stained, but had a curious fragrance.

I broke the seal and tore open the covering of the letter. Within was another packet. Oh heavens! It was addressed to "Drusilla Hetherington care of the fugleman, to be forwarded without delay. Haste—post haste!"

And then I knew without waiting to open the letter that it would be from none other than Ralph. It must be from Ralph. After all these years, we were to hear once more from Ralph. I stood pale and trembling, nor could I for some moments even speak. At last I said:

"Fugleman—Nan—this letter is addressed to me. It is, I verily believe, from Ralph Embleton. Wait a little, while I read it."

"Read it—read it!" cried the old man. "Could I—ah! merciful heaven—could I ever forget the rapture, the satisfied yearning, the blissful content, the gratitude with which I read that sweet and precious letter? They waited patiently even the rude and coarse old woman refrained from speech while I read page after page. They said nothing though they saw the tears falling down my face, because they knew that they were tears of happiness."

After seven long years my Ralph was talking to me as he used to talk. I knew his voice, I recognized his old imperious way I saw that he had not changed. As if he would ever change!

When I had finished and dried my tears they begged me to read his letter to them.

"MY DEAR DEAR GIRL," I told them that I could not indeed read all, but that I would read them what I could, and this was the beautiful beginning in order that I should know at the outset, so thoughtful he was, and for fear of my being anxious on the point that he loved me still, and had never forgotten me. "My dear dear girl—it is now six years since I bade you farewell at your garden gate and started upon my journey to London. Your father has doubtless told you how I presented myself and with what kindness he received me. I am very sure that you have not forgotten me, and I hope that you will rejoice to hear of my good fortune. Hope indeed! Could he not be sure? I have no doubt, also, that he hath informed you of the strange good fortune which befell me after he left me at the East India company's house of which I told him by letter and special messenger, to whom I gave to insure speedy and safe delivery one shilling. But it would appear that this messenger broke his word, and took the shilling, but did nothing for it—a common thief, who deserved to be hanged like many another no more wicked than himself. Oh, what punishment too great for this breach of trust, such as it seemed! See, now what a world of trouble was caused by that little theft. It was truly by special providence that, while Mr Silvertop talked with me, the great captain who won the Battle of Plassey should have been standing near and should have overheard what passed. When I was bidden go my ways for a foolish boy (because I did not wish to be a writer), and waste his time no longer, I was much cast down, for now I began to fear that I must, like the

most of mankind, take what was assigned to me by providence rather than what I should like. And I could plainly see that there remained only one choice for me, namely, I must return to the hated rule of my cousin who would keep me as a plowboy as long as he could, or I must be taken to the task of sweeping out and serving a shop. And yet, what shop? But who would employ me? Therefore I hung my head and stood irresolute without the company's house. Now presently the gentleman whom I had seen within came forth with another officer, brave in scarlet. He saw me standing sadly beside the posts, and inspired by that noble generosity which has always distinguished this great man, he clapped his hand upon my shoulder.

"So, he said, you are the lad who loves a sword better than a pen?"

"If it please your honor, I replied.

"A sword means peril to life and limb," he said sternly, "he who goes a fighting in India must expect hard fate, rough sleeping, rude knocks. He must be ever on the watch against treachery. He must meet duplicity with equal cunning. He must obey blindly, he must never ask why; if he is sent to die like a rat in a hole, he must go without murmur or question. What! you think—do you?—that to carry a sword is to flaunt a scarlet coat before the ladies of St. James?"

"Nay, sir, with respect I have read the lives of soldiers. I would willingly take the danger for the sake of the honor. But alas! I must stay at home and sweep a shop."

"What is thy birth, boy?"

"I told him that, and satisfied him on other points, including the reason of my fight, in which I trust that I was no more than truthful. Then he said:

"I am Lord Clive, and paused as if to know whether I had heard of him.

"You may be sure I was astonished, but I quickly doffed my hat and made him my best country bred bow.

"My lord," I said, "we have heard, even in Northumberland, of Plassey."

"Good! I went to India as a writer—a miserable quill driving writer. Think of that. What one man has done another may do. Now, boy, I sail this day for India. There will be more fighting, a great deal more fighting. If you please you shall go as a cadet with me. But there is no time to hesitate. I sail this day. Choose between the shop sweeping and the musket. You will fight in the ranks at first, but if you behave well the sword will come after. Choose—peace and money scraping at home like these smug faced fat citizens, he swept his hand with lordly contempt, or fighting and poverty, and perhaps death abroad. Choose."

"I humbly thank your lordship," I said, "I will follow you if you will condescend to take me."

"Then he bade me go straight to Limehouse Pool, where I should find the ship at anchor. I was to take a note to the purser, who would give me an outfit.

"Thus, my dear Drusilla, did I find my fortune and sail to foreign parts under as brave and great a captain as this country will ever see.

"Our voyage lasted eleven months. There were 300 raw recruits on board, mostly kidnaped or inveigled under false pretences by crimps and the scoundrels of Wapping. When they were first paraded they were as beggarly looking a lot as you would wish to see—ragged, dirty, mutinous and foul mouthed. Yet in a couple of months, by daily drill, by good food and sea air, by moderate rations of rum, by sound flogging, by the continual discipline of the boatswain's rope's end and the sergeant's cattan, the regimental supplejack and the ship's cut-o'-nine-tails,

they became as promising soldiers as one would wish. As for me, I stood with them in the drill and did my best. Of course I could not expect his lordship to notice so humble a cadet as myself, but one evening when we were near the end of our voyage he sent for me and gave me a glass of wine, and kindly bade me be patient and of good cheer, because, he said, young gentlemen of merit and courage would be sure to find opportunities for distinction."

Ralph then went on to describe the life of a soldier in India, and to tell me—but this I leave out for fear of being tedious—how he received his commission and how he got promotion. It is sufficient to say that at the time he wrote, after six years of service, he held the commission of a captain. Nor was that all. He had been able to render such signal service to a certain rajah, that this prince, who was not ungrateful, and hoped, besides, for more such services, took him one day into his treasure house and bade him help himself to all if he pleased.

The Water and Electric Light Company, recently organized at Independence, Or., whose capital is \$40,000, has elected the following officers: President, A. J. Goodman; Vice-President, J. Dornise; Secretary, H. H. Jaspersen; Treasurer, H. Hirschberg.

The late Mrs. Beesly, the wife of Professor E. S. Beesly, whose death was announced by cable a few days ago, was an ardent supporter of the Irish Nationalists, and was the authoress of the much-sung English version of "The Wearing of the Green."

The United States squadron of evolution, Admiral Walker commanding, has arrived at Toulon. The influenza on the vessels of the fleet has abated. The new cruisers worked well under steam and sail. As specimens of American ship-building and forerunners of the new navy of the United States they are regarded with curiosity by naval experts.