A Fair Invalid

Her pale face glowed as I praised him, her dark eyes shone with a beautiful light. "He told me," I remarked, "that he had committed a folly in his youth, and that he had been expiating it ever since."

"A folly! Nay, folly is a light word. I call it a crime."

"I cannot believe Lord Wynton capable of a crime," I said.

"It was a crime," she insisted, gravely. "I like you for defending him, Mrs. Neville; but it was a crime."

"I may never see him again," I returned, warmly, "and I know but little of him, yet I would stake much that he has never committed a crime; he may have made a mistake."

She looked at me with wondering eyes, and repeated, dreamily: "A mistake! How could that be? I never thought of that."

"I am ignorant of the circumstances; but I feel sure that what you hold to have been a crime was simply a mistake—nothing more, and the time will come, I venture to assert, when you will find it so."

"What faith you have in him," she said; and with that the conversation ended. I went home some days after that, and then matters fell into their old routine. The only change was in Miss Vane herself. She grew more human; her one great act of forgiveness seemed to have changed her whole character. There was only one thing she would not do—she would not mix with the world. She took up a lily one day when talking, and from the deep white cup pulled a petal. "Can anything restore that petal or make the lily whole?" she asked.

"No," I replied.

"It is the same with my life," she said. "A page was torn abruptly from it—a page on which sweetest hopes were written—and nothing can restore it. I could not take up my old duties, resume my old pleasures, mix freely in the world of men and women, talk, laugh, and enjoy myself with them—I could not bear it. I can only live as I am now, unknown and unknowing, forgotten—waiting for the signal of release. You will not urge me again, will you?"

"No, I will not," I replied.

"I am happier than I ever hoped to be, because I have forgiven Lord Wynton, and the blank desolation has gone out of my life."

Instinctively I kept two secrets from her. I never told her that Lord Wynton had promised to come to see me, or that he intended to call upon her. So the year passed, spring came round again, and in May I read this announcement: "Died, on the 3rd of May, at Nice, Isabelle, Lady Wynton. She was interred in the cemetery at Nice on the 5th."

A leading fashionable journal devoted a small paragraph to the event, and said that Lady Wynton, after suffering severely for some months, had died suddenly at Nice. I took the papers to the River House and showed them to Huldah Vane. She grew very pale as she read—her eyes filled with tears; and then she turned to me and said: "I am very sorry for him. Poor Clive!"

The remainder of the story I tell as I heard it some time afterward, when the mystery was explained to me, and all was clear.

CHAPTER XII.

When it was known in London that Gerald Asheton, the younger son of a poor but noble family, had returned after thirty years' service in India, a millionaire, society decided upon opening its arms to him. A millionaire! Such exceptional distinction society decreed ought to be recognized—must be recognized, in fact—and Gerald Asheton was received with open arms. He did his duty as became a millionaire. He purchased one of the most magnificent mansions in Belgravia, and furnished it regardless of cost; then Lord Bathern's family estate, Silverwell Priory, came into the market, and he bought it and had it refurnished with the utmost splendor. Afterward, hearing of a pretty little villa in the Isle of Wight, he purchased it, also. With three houses, each one rivalling the other in beauty, he began to consider who was to inhabit them.

His friends advised him to marry; but for that he did not care. His brother had married, and his wedded life, like his life generally, had not been a success. He had married a gentle, accomplished girl, who had no fortune except her fair face and her noble mind. She survived her husband six years, during which time she was supported entirely by the bounty of Gerald Asheton, who allowed her an income quite sufficient for her wants. At her death, he ordered his agents to place her only child, Huldah, in one of the best schools.

He was so deeply engrossed on his return to England by the settlement of his affairs that he almost forgot the existence of his niece. It was not until he began to wonder how he was to dispose of his vast fortune that he remembered her, and then he went down to Brighton to see her.

He found to his intense surprise a tall, lovely girl, with a graceful figure and a beautiful face. His delight was great. Huldah Asheton was at once taken from school, installed as mistress at Silverwell, and everything that money could procure was lavished upon her. Gerald Asheton idolized his beautiful niece; he never tired of looking at her, of listening to her, he formally adopted her as his heiress, and did not rest until he had made his will, leaving her mistress of his vast fortune.

It spoke well for Huldah Asheton that her head was not completely turned by this change in her position. She had been happy and contented at school, feeling sure that her education and accomplishments were to be her fortune, and that she would have to earn her livelihood as a governess. The result was that she had acquired a certain independence of character, feeling that her success in life would depend on her own efforts.

At seventeen she found herself one of the most beautiful, wealthy and admired girls in London. She could have married just as she would; but, young as she was, Huldah Asheton had formed a resolution to marry only for love. Before she had been a month at Silverwell she proved that she was fitted for her responsible post. A girl of seventeen, as stately as a duchess, as beautiful as a poet's dream, gifted and intellectual, looking upon wealth as an accident, a stepping-stone—pure in heart as a little child—full of beautiful thoughts, her mother's only legacy—wondering with a grave, solemn, child-like wonder what was to be her ultimate fate, what grand destiny awaited her—a girl of the rarest type, noble in soul, but proud to a degree—not vain of her beauty or her wealth, but proud in the highest, broadest, noblest sense—such was Huldah Asheton.

Gerald Asheton loved her. He delighted in hearing his beautiful niece called "The Queen of the Season;" he had foretold that she would be that. Society welcomed him because he was uncle of the beautiful Miss Asheton.

She was very happy. She enjoyed the magnificence, the wealth that surrounded her; she enjoyed the homage laid at her feet; she enjoyed the admiration that seemed to be a tribute to her beauty. But she enjoyed the vague, dreamy happiness of her inner life better than all. Standing where womanhood and girlhood met, her heart and soul thrilled with the vague, sweet poetry of life.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Countess of Ivrington had a beautiful villa on the banks of the Thames. She delighted in spending part of her time there, surrounded by the very flower of London society. She had invited "The Queen of the Season," without whom no assemblage was complete.

On the morning after her arrival, Miss Asheton, tempted by the beauty of the grounds, rose early and went out. Life held many fair mornings for her, but none like that. Her white morning dress, knotted here and there with rose-colored ribbons, fell in graceful folds round the tall, slender figure; a wealth of shining, waving hair rippled over her shoulders, the morning breeze had brought the daintiest bloom to her face, her large, dark eyes shone with light; the beautiful lips were parted in keen enjoyment.

She stood watching a pretty miniature water-fall. She held her hand in the water, and watched the spray running over her white fingers; then she thought she would cross a little rustic bridge which spanned the stream, and was about to do when a rich, deep voice said: "I should advise you not to trust yourself to that little bridge; it is under repair and is not quite safe."

She looked round, and saw a gentleman come across the lawn. He raised his hat and bowed, "Pray, pardon me," he said; "but I know that bridge is very shaky. I am Lord Wynton, Lady Evrington's brother. You, I know, are her guest, Miss Asheton."

Huldah bowed; not for worlds would she have spoken just then.

"I am afraid I have startled you, Miss Asheton," continued the musical voice; "if so, I am very sorry."

"No, you have not startled me," she said.

He came nearer to her and she looked at his face: it was handsome, noble, with eyes and lips that could sweeten and soften like a woman's. Her heart went out to him—she could not tell why, except that he was the hero of her dreams, the ideal come at last.

Lord Wynton was visiting his sister. She had tempted him by telling him that the beautiful Miss Asheton was to be her guest. He had laughed at first, telling her beauties were always more or less failures. He came, however, to please his sister. But on the morning that he saw Huldah Ashton, in all the sweet simplicity of her beauty, he was amazed; and, from that moment he loved her with a love that was his doom.

It was a case of love at first sight, and everyone guessed it. From the moment that she first saw Lord Wynton until the day she died, he was the one love of her heart and soul: she knew no other; no other man ever had the power to charm her. Her ideal was realized; beyond that realization she never went.

The time came—it was the gloaming of a beautiful June night—when Lord Wynton told her the story of his love. She raised her beautiful face—not to him, but to the evening skies and thanked Heaven for its goodness.

"Huldah, my darling," he cried, passionately, "I am not worthy of you, I know. The love of a pure, innocent heart like yours is a treasure above price."

She would not hear it. He went on, holding her hands in his strong clasp. "When I was young, Huldah—quite young—I committed a great folly. I must tell you what it was."

"No," she objected, "I will not hear it—or, if you will tell me at all, it shall not be until after I am your wife. My faith, Clive, like my love, is boundless. If, when you were young, some fair face caught your fancy, it was but your fancy—your love is all for me."

"As Heaven is my witness," he declared, "all for you! I have had no other love, and never shall have."

So while the nightingale sang they plighted their troth to each other. Gerald Asheton was delighted. His darling would be Lady Wynton; and, besides that, she would be one of the richest women in the country. With his consent the wedding was arranged to take place in September, and there did not seem to be even the smallest cloud in Lord Wynton and Miss Asheton's sky.

CHAPTER XIV.

All went happily until July, and then came a terrible shock. Gerald Asheton died suddenly of old-standing heart disease, and Huldah was left heiress and sole mistress of his immense fortune. She was then only eighteen. Silverwell was hers, the villa at Ryde was hers, and the Belgravian mansion; hers also were the plate, the furniture, the accumulation of money in the funds, the jewels. She had been the rage before; she became doubly the rage now.

Owing to the death of Gerald Asheton, the wedding was, of course, postponed—it was arranged to take place in the following April. Huldah spent the autumn at Ryde, where the Countess of Evrington reigned queen. Lord Wynton was visiting his sister, so that he and Miss Asheton met every day.

Huldah had expressed a wish about her marriage. "Let me be married in quietness and peace," she said; "the ceremony is for us, not for a crowd of idle lookers-on. There can be no prettier church than that one at Silverton—let us be married there, Clive. I do not want a great house full of company—only your sister—no one else."

It was well that Lord Wynton acceded to her request. The preparations all went on. Lyndmere Park was made ready for the reception of the bride, and the wedding-day was to be the 10th of April. Lord Wynton was to spend the night at the hotel in Silverton, and to meet his beautiful young bride in church. Huldah had her wish. There was no large party of guests; no one was invited to Silverwell except Lord Wynton's sister and her husband.

The 10th of April dawned. It was a fair spring day. Huldah Asheton rose early; she was too happy to sleep. The sky might well look so fair, the sun shine so brightly; it was her wedding-day. She went out for a few minutes to take a last look for a time at her fair domain of Silverwell, and then she withdrew to her apartments to dress. It was characteristic of her that on this, her wedding-day, she should ask her faithful old nurse and servant to dress her.

She—the proud beauty, "The Queen of the Season," Gerald Asheton's heiress—clasped her arms round her nurse's neck. "I have no mother," she said, laying her beautiful face on the nurse's shoulder, "to kiss and bless me. Wish me godspeed in my life, Lewis."

And Jane Lewis blessed her with loving words, foretelling such happiness for her as made the girl's heart beat and her face glow.

"Now come, Lewis," she said, "and see all my wedding-attire; it lies ready in my dressing-room."

Lewis followed her. The wedding-dress, the wedding-veil, the wreath of orange blossoms, the white gloves, the white satin shoes, the white fan with the jewelled handle, the bracelet of magnificent pearls, all lay ready, just as for years afterward they lay in the closed-up room of the River House.

"You shall dress me, Lewis," said the beautiful bride; "no other hands but yours because yours have been the kindest hands in the world to me."

She wore a wrapper of white silk, and just as she was unfastening the band of it, saying, "See how the sun smiles on my wedding morn," a knock came at the door. Susanne, the Parisian maid, came in. "There is a lady in the hall, Miss Asheton, who insists upon seeing you."

"A lady? I cannot see anyone. Say that I am particularly engaged. I have spent so much time out of doors, Lewis, I shall be late."

Another rap came. "Lady Evrington begs me to say the carriages are ready."

"I shall not be long," said the young heiress. "Susanne, tell the lady I cannot see her; whatever message she has must be sent by you."

Susanne went away, but returned in a few minutes. "The lady insists upon seeing you; she bade me give you this."

Huldah took a note from the girl's hands and read:

"If you wish to spare yourself untold shame, anguish and remorse, see me at once. If you refuse to do so, I shall follow you to the church. When you have seen me, you will understand that to-day's ceremony would be a wretched farce."

Huldah Asheton looked up at the servant who had brought the note. "The person who wrote this must be mad," she said.

"I do not think so, miss; she looks sane enough."

"What kind of person is she?"

"Tall, elegantly dressed and pretty-looking, miss. She heard something about the carriages being ready, and she laughed. 'You had better wait until I have seen your mistress,' she said."

A sudden presentment of evil came to the young heiress. "I will see her, Susanne," she said; "bring her here."

"Into your dressing room?" questioned the maid, wonderingly.

"Yes, I have no time to go anywhere else."

Susanne went away quickly. Miss Asheton read the letter again. What could it mean—dear heaven, what could it mean? Her beautiful face grew pale. "Is it bad news, my dear?" asked the old nurse.

"I do not know," replied Huldah. Before she had time for another word the door opened, and a tall, elegantly dressed woman entered. Her veil was thrown back, showing a pretty but somewhat insipid face, and a quantity of false hair. The visitor was elegant rather than graceful. With a mocking smile she looked round the magnificent dressing room. "I am sorry to intrude, Miss Asheton, but my business is imperative—it admits of no delay. I hear you are to marry Lord Wynton to-day."

"I do not see that the matter concerns you," was the haughty reply. "Pardon me, I am the best judge of that."

"I see your wedding dress is all ready—the veil and the wreath and the bridal bouquet, sent by such loving hands. The minister stands ready robed at the altar, the ringers are ready to ring the wedding bells, the carirages stand at the door, the servants all wear white favors, the bridegroom is counting the moments. But listen to me—oh, hour of triumph, for which I have waited and longed and prayed—there will be no wedding, there can be no wedding, for I am Lord Wynton's wife!"

(To be continued.)

MALE STREET WALKERS.

(Montreal Witness).

In order to deal more effectively with the evils to which women and girls are exposed, the cities of Portland and Seattle, on the Pacific Coast, have appointed policewomen, with the same status as policemen, and who also act as detectives. So valuable have their services proved that it has been proposed to employ more of them. They perform their duties in ordinary costume, and have done a great deal to correct social wrong in individual cases, besides striking terror into a certain class of young men who never know who may be watching them until they are summoned to appear in the Police Court to answer for their conduct. These are put on the same footing as street walkers of the other sex, and liable to like punishment.

ROUNDUP OF BEARS.

Necessary in Colorado, Cattlemen Say, Because Bruin is Killing Stock.

The annual roundup of bears is on in Routt county. Albert Whitney, Steve Elkins and several other bear hunters of note have undertaken to rid the cattle ranges of Routt county of the bears which are killing the colts and calves in large numbers. Eight bears have been taken so far during the hunt.

The headquarters of the hunters is at Phippsburg and from that point they throw out a circle, beating the timber in the vicinity of the places where dead calves and colts are found. The party of hunters has about fifty bear dogs, the pack being mostly from the kennels of Elkins, of Mancos, Col., and of Whitney, of Phippsburg.

The stockmen say that they are losing at least $1,000 a week by allowing the bears to live off their colts and calves, which are so small at this time of the year that bears easily pull them down. Two skins sent in from the hunters' camp are the finest furs that have been seen in Denver for many years. One is off a brown bear and the other off a black. Each is a glossy pelt, full furred and in perfect condition. At this season a bear's skin is in prime condition, as he does not shed until July.—Denver Post.

Most Famous of Comets.

Halley's comet, which is approaching the earth at a constantly increasing speed, and to catch the first traces of which photographic plates are being exposed at observatories all over the world, will not be so striking an object as Donati's comet, which in 1858 spread scimitar-like over a great part of the heavens. Yet two points in its history make it the most famous of all comets—its long sequence of appearances at intervals of about seventy-five years, which have been traced back to 240 B. C., and the circumstances under which it became associated with the name of Edmund Halley.

Newton's theory of gravitation suggested that comets might belong to the solar system, moving about the sun in long ellipses and parabolas. Halley, on his appointment as Savilian professor of geometry at Oxford, in 1704, followed up the work of his beloved master by computing the orbits for twenty-four comets from 1337 to 1698.

As an accidental outcome of this he discovered that the orbits of three of them—those of 1531, 1607 and 1682—were so nearly alike as to suggest the identity of the comets. The period of their appearances varied between seventy-four and seventy-six years, but this could be accounted for by the pull of the planets, and hence Halley decided that they were really reappearances of one comet.

Before his death, in 1742, he reflected that although he could not hope to see the comet's return, if it did appear, "about the year 1758," posterity would remember that it was an Englishman who first predicted it.

The comet returned in 1759, as Halley predicted, the slight delay being also foreseen as due to planetary attraction. It has appeared once since then, and we are now watching for its third calculated appearance.—London Mail.

The Rivals.

An airship soared in the upper sky,
An eagle watched it with careful eye.
"A wonderful bird," he cried, "we'll see
If it is going to fight like me."

A dove sat watching it skim the blue,
As over the farms and homes it flew.
"A beautiful bird," she cried, "'twill be
If it is a symbol of peace like me."

An owl perceived it at fall of night,
As over the trees it took its flight.
"Quite scientific," he cried, "we'll try
If it is as wise a bird as I."

A hen looked up with a jealous glance
To see it rise in the clear expanse.
"Although it can fly," she said, "I beg
To state the critter can't lay an egg."
—Washington Post.

A man may be puffed with pride, but that doesn't cause him to rise in the world.

THE GLUTTONOUS GOAT.

Ability to Eat Many Things Makes Him Dear to Uncle Sam's Rangers.

The goat has never been a social favorite. In days gone by it was presented with the assorted sins of the community and assisted to hit the long trail. More recently the cans have been its titbits and the joke column its hall of fame.

At last, however, it is being taken seriously. On the western national forests the goat has been set to eating wide swaths through trackless thickets, which munched off paths are to act as roads and fire breaks. Farther east the capacity of the goat to eat is being utilized for the clearing of brush land. In each case, says the World To-day, the despised creature is doing better work in its line than can man with all his ingenuity.

A goat will eat with the sole idea of consuming quantity and with an indifference that is absolute as to what manner of thing it devours. From clover to sagebrush and from parsnips to tree tops it is all one with the goat.

Armed with this capacity to eat a flock of 3,000 goats may be huddled together and led through a chaparral thicket such as skirts the forests. The men in charge hold back the flock as it advances that it may have time to make its task complete. Its errant appetite wanders from dry leaves on the ground to the rank weeds growing in moist places and the dense branches of the chaparral.

As the abundance is exhausted the sweep is made cleaner. The leaves and the larger limbs of the chaparral are attacked. The goat stands on its hind legs and reaches for its food, it gets astride the branches and rides them down, eating as it goes.

Finally it falls on the bark of the larger bushes and eats their bodies bare. There is no vestige of life left in its track. The firebreak is as clean as a ballroom floor.

The usefulness of the goat as a co-laborer with man by no means stops here. There are millions of acres of land in many of the States that are overrun with brush. The tendency is always to revert to that condition even after the clearing is once made.

Rank weeds, sunflowers, cockleburs, and such have spoiled for cultivation millions of acres elsewhere. The chaparral is smothering out all other vegetation in such sections as west Texas, where orginally prairies unwound themselves for hundreds of miles and were kept clear by oft-recurring prairie fires.

For all such the goat is found to be the savior. These lands would require from $12 to $20 to clear were men to do the work. The goat will do it for nothing. In fact it will perform the task and in the meantime yield up abundant fleece, procuce palatable goat "venison" and furnish a grade of milk that entirely outranks that of the cow.

The goat is to-day actually harnessed to the task of eating up oak brush fields in Iowa, broom sedge wastes in Virginia, cocklebur patches in Louisiana, sunflowers in Kansas, sagebrush in Nevada, lantana in Hawaii, chaparral and an unlimited miscellany everywhere.

It is the Angora goat, the aristocrat of all the tribe, that is doing the work. This because of the existence of great herds maintained for their wool before the new duties were laid down, and because there are more profitable by-products in these than in other varieties.

These great herds are in the west, particularly in New Mexico. They are becoming migratory under the call of their new usefulness. As they go about seeking what they may devour they will continue to give up the fleece that makes such dress goods as mohair, such commercially valuable material as the plush that covers the seats in all railway trains and such quainty amusing articles as the wigs with which the members of the theatrical profession are wont to make sport.

ORIGIN OF POKER.

Was It First Played in New Orleans? —The Persian Game.

John B. Barber, of New Orleans, speaking about the game of poker, said that while most men will testify to the fact that few know very much about the great American game of poker, even the experts will admit they are ignorant of the origin of the game.

"All the evidence about poker which has come to light, however, points to its origin in New Orleans," continued Mr. Barber. "The question is where did New Orleans get it from or is it an improvement on some game known to the population of that city, who, it must be remembered were French and used French terms in any games that they played?

"There is no French game played with only twenty cards, as poker was played at New Orleans in 1832, but there are several French games in which all the poker hands are to be found except four of a kind. Ambigu, Brelan and many others will at once suggest themselves. But all these French games are played with three cards only in the hand of each player. Where could the with five cards in each hand and the pack inventor of poker have found a game played consisting of twenty cards only?

"The standard pack of cards in Europe from the earliest days has been what is now called the piquet pack, which is the same as our American euchre pack, thirty-two cards. There is only one country in the world where poker has always been played with five cards in the hand of each player and that is Persia.

"But the game is not called poker. It is called nas. If they brought it to New Orleans from Persia or if some resident of that city was familiar with the Persian game and thought it an improvement on the French game of ambigu and brelan, the introducer was probably French and more familiar with French games and French terms than with Persian—Washington Herald.

A REGULAR FAN.

(Chicago Record-Herald.)

"Is your husband interested in baseball?"

"No."

"How strange. I thought all the men were."

"No, John isn't interested. That isn't the name for his trouble. He is baseball crazy."

Which Was the Head of the House?

Willie's grandmother had come to visit them.

"Are you mamma's mother?" asked Willie, by way of conversation.

"No, dear. I'm your grandmother on your father's side."

"Well," said Willie, decidedly (he was an observing little fellow), "all I got to say is you're on the wrong side."—Everybody's Magazine.

HIS TROUBLE.

(Human Life.)

Kind Old Lady (talking to a tramp)—"Have you ever made an effort to get work?"

Tramp—Yes, ma'am. Last month I got work for two members of my family but neither of them would take it.

And Window Displays.

Customer—How do you manage to keep your trade this holiday season with so many counter attractions?

Retail Merchant—By counter attractions.—Boston Transcript.

Unique Happiness.

Distraught Mother—And what with these heducation bills an' all, miss, I sometimes says to myself, "'Appy are the parents what never 'ad any children,' I says."—The Bystander.

Unmerited honors never wear well—French.