A Fair Invalid

CHAPTER I.

I who tell this story am Constance Neville, of Neville's Cross. My husband died when I was twenty-seven, leaving the whole of his vast fortune to me, without restraint or restriction, to enjoy as I would, to bequeath according to my own will and pleasure. He was not "of blue blood," m yhusband. His father had been one of the richest merchant princes in England, and he, at his death, transmitted his fortune to my husband, Richard Neville.

It happened by a strange coincidence that the ancient mansion and estate of Neville's Cross soon came afterward, through the death of the heir, into the market. My husband decided upon buying it. "I shall be Richard Neville, of Neville's Cross, then," he said, "and my highest ambition will be gratified."

I fancy he had some vague idea that, in buying the estate, he would become at once a country gentleman of ancient pedigree and long descent. How many thousands of pounds he spent in putting the grand old place into order I should not like to say; but, when all arrangements had been made, it was one of the most magnificent houses in England. Every country had been placed under requisition. The most superb pictures and statues, wonders of ancient and modern art, the choicest flowers, the richest hangings, the most costly furniture, seemed to have been gathered from all parts of the world.

We lived there happily enough for some years, going to London for the season and abroad for the winter, but spending the early spring and part of the autumn for the shooting at Neville's Cross.

At twenty-seven the whole of my husband's vast fortune, and his large estate, with its innumerable responsibilities, became mine. I had no children, no relatives, few with whom I could claim kith or kin, and I was at a loss how to act. I had loved my husband so well that the idea of a second marriage was hateful to me. What, then, was I to do with my money and my life? I desolved upon living at Neville's Cross, and being as happy as possible under the circumstances. So years glided away.

One fine day in June I was sitting alone when my steward, James Payne, a shrewd, clever business man, came in to see me. He had news, I felt sure, from the expression of his face. After his usual bow and some preliminary remarks, he said:

"You will be pleased to hear that we have a tenant at last for the River House." "An eligible tenant?" I interposed.

"That is a point I must ask you to decide, madame," was the cautious reply. "I cannot undertake to settle it. I will lay the whole matter before you —the decision, of course, rests with you."

I bowed. My man of business continued:

"I was in my office yesterday—my office in Daintree—when one of my clerks came to say that a lady wished to see me. There came into the office a respectable-looking woman, dressed in black silk and a Paisley shawl. I am pretty quick at coming to conclusions, but I could not for the world tell at first whether she wanted the house for herself—whether she was a lady's maid or companion, or what. She spoke well, and seemed to have a good head for business."

"'I understand, Mr. Payne,' she began, 'that you have the letting of the house known as the River House. I should like to know the rent, terms of letting, and other particulars.'

"Briefly enough I gave them to her. Perhaps, madam, in one respect I have done wrong. She seemed so like one who would bargain, and make the best possible terms for herself, that I asked twenty pounds per annum more than you decided on asking, quietly expecting that she would want me to take it off; but, to my surprise, she made no complaint at all about the rent."

"You are a good man of busines," I put in, "but we must not take more for the house, Mr. Payne, than it is honestly worth. Yes must manage so that the twenty pounds per annum are made up to her." My agent bowed.

"I am not sure, madame," he said, "that you will find the tenant an eligible one. My visitor, whose name I afterwards found to be Mrs. Jane Lewis, continued:

"'My mistress has been for some weeks looking for a very quiet and retired house. It struck her at once, when she read your advertisement, that she would like the River House. It is, I suppose, quite out of the public way—quite solitary?'

"I said 'Yes,' and that our chief difficulty in letting the house had always been its isolated situation. Her face beamed with satisfaction, madame, when she heard that.

"'I am sure it will do,' she said. 'You hear no sounds but the rushing of the river, the songs of the birds and the murmur of the trees?'

"'You hear no other sounds,' I replied.

"'The voices of the men, and the laughter of children at play, the distant murmur of traffic, the roll of carriage-wheels, the steps of passers-by, are all absent?'

"'All absent,' I answered. 'When the leaves are on the trees, the house is shut in completely.'

"'It is the very thing,' she remarked, 'that my mistress wants.'

"'And then I remembered, madame, your chief motive in letting the house, and I said to her:

"'I should tell you, Mrs. Lewis, that the River House belongs to Mrs. Neville, of Neville's Cross. It has been used in by-gone times as a dower-house. Mrs. Neville lets it in order that she may find an agreeable friend in the tenant. The neighborhood is lonely, and it makes a great difference to her not to be able to visit at the River House.'

"Mrs. Lewis looked embarrassed.

"'Then the owner, whom you call Mrs. Neville, would expect to be on what is called visiting terms with the tenant of the River House?'

"'Certainly,' I replied; 'that is her chief object in letting it. The neighborhood is a dull one, and she likes society.'

"'In that case,' said Mrs. Lewis, 'I may give up all thought of it; it will not do for my mistress. She wishes to be quite alone—quite solitary. She would not care to take it on those terms.'

"You may imagine my embarrassment, madame," continued Mr. Payne. "I took the liberty of saying that Mrs. Neville was highly accomplished and eagerly sought after, but she stopped me quite abruptly.

"'That does not matter at all,' she said. 'You had better consult Mrs. Neville. Say that my mistress, Miss Vane, is looking for a house where she can live in complete solitude and retirement, that she cannot receive visitors, and that she does not go into society. If, knowing this, Mr. Neville consents to receive her as a tenant, the rent will be paid punctually, the house kept in excellent repair, and she will have no trouble.'

"'It seems strange,' I remarked. 'I suppose, Mrs. Lewis,, your mistress can give satisfactory references?'

"Her face clouded with a look almost of indignation.

"'References,' she repeated. 'Certainly not! I have told you that my lady's object is complete isolation—entire solitude. She would not wish that solitude to be broken even by a letter. If she gave you references, that would make her address known. You can tell Mrs. Neville all these things, and let us know her decision. My mistress is not exactly an invalid, but she objects to society of every kind; she wishes to live in retirement and seclusion. I will call to-morrow for Mrs. Neville's answer.'"

"And now, madame," concluded my agent, "it is for you to decide. I have an impression that Miss Vane has plenty of money, and that she will not care what her object costs her, if she can but attain it." I felt puzzled—at a loss how to decide.

"What should you imagine to be the reason of her wish for solitude, Mr. Payne?" My agent again looked disconcerted.

"There may be several reasons, madame. Possibly the lady is old and dislikes society; or she may be an invalid and not care to see anyone; or she may be troubled with some kind of mania; or she may have had some terrible trouble. Any of these reasons will account for it."

"Let her have the house," I directed. "Say that I undertake to respect her solitude, if that is all she requires."

Many people were puzzled to know why the River House had ever been built. It was so remote that even the chiming of the church bells did not reach it; no other habitation was near, and no one ever approached it except on business. In the annals of Neville's Cross there was a tradition to the effect that the house had been erected by one of the Ladies Neville, who, having suddenly lost her husband, built for herself such a retreat, vowing that she would never look upon the face of man again. Whether she kept her vow tradition did not say.

Well, I had a tenant at last, but certainly one who was of the stamp of the Dame Neville who so long ago had built the house as a place of refuge from all mankind—one I was neither to see nor hear. Nevertheless, I must plead guilty to the truly feminine sin of curiosity, for I resolved by some means or other, at some time or other, to see what she was like.

I arranged to meet Mrs. Lewis at Mr. Payne's office. I found her a comely, shrewd, homely woman, but, like my agent, I was puzzled to know whether she was lady's maid, or what. She seemed to be a well-spoken, well-educated woman, frank in every way except where her mistress was concerned, and then she was very reserved. "Any documents," she said, "that want signing I will take with me to my mistress."

She was most civil and deferential to me, at the same time insisting on her demands. She looked at me fixedly with her large, bright eyes.

"You will pardon my mentioning it again, Mrs. Neville," she said, "but is it clearly and distinctly understood that my mistress will have perfect freedom from all intrusion?"

"It is quite understood, Mrs. Lewis," I replied.

"That no visitor need call under any pretext whatever? She has no wish that the clergyman of the parish even should wait upon her."

"I am sure that her wishes will be respected," I returned, again wondering more and more what it was that caused this singular desire for solitude. "I hope that your mistress does not suffer from ill-health?" I added, impulsively.

"No," she answered, slowly. "If you will pardon me, Mrs. Neville, I should prefer not to speak of my mistress; she does ont wish it, I know."

I felt rebuked. Some people might have disliked the blunt honesty of such speech; I liked the woman the better for it. She told us that if all was satisfactory her mistress would like to take possession of the house on the week following. And then, as we parted, I said to her that I respected her attention and devotion to her mistress' orders, but that, if ever she found herself dull or lonely, I hoped she would visit my housekeeper at Neville's Cross.

She thanked me without saying whether she would accept the invitation. She took the needful documents away with her, and in a few days they were returned. The lease was signed "Huldah Vane."

I have a business-like method of carefully reading my papers, and this signature struck me very much. "Huldah Vane"—the name was an uncommon one to begin with, the writing strange and peculiar; it was the writing either of one who was old or of a person whose force of character was all repressed—which of the two it was I could not tell.

I heard during the week that followed of the arrival of the stranger at River House. Dr. Rawson was the first who mentioned it.

"I am so delighted, my dear madame, he said, "to know that we have neighbors at last. I hear that your new tenants have arrived."

"Yes," I returned, "but I fear they will not prove to be of much advantage. The lady—Miss Vane—objects to society."

"What a strange thing!" he said. "Objects to society—why, madame?"

"I know of no other reason save she does not care for it."

"Not care for it! But, Mrs. Neville, she will receive me."

"I think not," was my answer.

"I shall most certainly wait upon her. I intended doing so. She may be perhaps a sensible lady, of middle age, and who cares little for the frivolities of life; she will surely not refuse to receive me. She must understand that my duty compels me to see every person under my charge, rich or poor."

"Try it, doctor," I said, laughingly, picturing to myself the face of Mrs. Lewis. And then I remembered suddenly that I had pledged my word no one should intrude upon my tenant. Full of contrition, I turned hastily to him.

"Doctor Rawson," I said, "I had quite forgotten, but I promised when this lady took the house, that her wishes should be respected, and that no one should call upon her."

"My dear Mrs. Neville," he said, smiling blandly, "you are exceedingly kind, but permit me to say that this is a matter about which you could not possibly make any promise—you could not, indeed. This lady is now one of my flock, under my charge. Indeed, the more you say, the more certain am I that I am needed there. Sin and sorrow must be gently dealt with."

"Perhaps there is neither, doctor—nothing but disinclination for society."

"We shall see," was the concise reply. And we did see.

I met the doctor a week afterward there was in them a certain —— at Lady Glendon's, and I am glad that as his eyes met mine there was in them a decidedly abashed expression. "Did you call at the River House?" I asked.

His face flushed, and something stronger than clerical indignation quivered round his lips.

"I called, madame," he replied, "but I did not see your tenant."

It would not have been generous to cry out, "I told you so," but I felt your reception was at least courteous," strongly inclined to do so. "I hope that I ventured to observe.

"Moderately so. I drove over to River House three days ago, and requested to see Miss Vane. I was somewhat startled by the aspect of the house, which is Oriental in its magnificence. I was shown into the library—the room that looks over the river on the west. I cannot tell you what strange fancies came into my mind as I sat there waiting. Presently the sound of footsteps startled me. I do not know what I expected to see, or what my idea of Miss Vane was, but when the door opened I felt a thrill of disappointment. There entered a stout, comely, shrewd woman, with keen, bright eyes—eyes that seemed to look me through. I bowed and murmured something about Miss Vane.

"'I am not Miss Vane,' she said, quietly. 'I am her maid.'

"'I look for the pleasure of seeing Miss Vane,' I observed.

"'It is impossible, sir,' she said. 'My mistress receives no visitors.'

"'My good woman I do not come as a visitor, but as one intrusted with the souls of all under his charge. Go back to Miss Vane and tell her from me that it is not as a visitor, but as the rector of the parish in which she resides that I wish to see her.'

"'I will go,' she said, doubtfully, 'but I tell you candidly, sir, I do not think it will be of the least use.'

"I looked very stern, and she hastened away, only to return in a few minutes looking brighter and more determined than ever.

"My mistress, sir, wishes me to say that if she could break through her rule for anyone she would do it for you—but she cannot. She regrets that you have had the trouble of coming, and regrets also that Mrs. Neville's agent did not make her wishes on the matter known."

"So I came away without seeing your tenant, Mrs. Neville. I felt annoyed, but I managed to say that if Miss Vane ever found herself ill or in distress I was at her service."

"That was very good of you, doctor. She is a strange person."

"I only hope, madame, that it may be all right, and that you may not repent of having taken such a tenant."

CHAPTER II.

Three years had passed since my silent and mysterious tenant had taken up her abode at the River House, and during that time the silence that surrounded her had not been disturbed. At first she had proved a marvel in the neighborhood.

As there was generally round Daintree a dearth of topics for gossip, this one gave new life to our social meetings. Who was the lady? Why did she choose to live in that peculiar way? What was the mystery surrounding her? These problems continued to be discussed until time showed the utter futility of doing so. All inquirieos and curiosity were baffled.

Every week the confidential maid, Jane Lewis, went over to Daintree and gave her orders. They were such liberal ones as to prove that, whatever else might be deficient at the River House, there was plenty of money there. From the tradesmen who executed these orders, it was gleaned that besides Jane Lewis, or rather under her, there were two other servants, and there was a gray-headed butler.

From the servants no information could be gained—they knew nothing, except that their mistress was an invalid and declined all society. The servants appeared at church, the mistress never—indeed, Miss Vane herself might have been a myth.

Time modified opinion. Lady Glendon said there was no doubt the poor lady suffered from spinal complaint, and was unable to leave her room. Mrs. Conyers was inclined to think it a case of melancholia—she had known a few such. Miss Hurst had a theory of her own, and it was that the strange tenant of the River House was a political refugee. But as time passed on, and new sources of interest arose in the neighborhood, the curiosity about my strange tenant died away. I myself never ceased to think of her—the very name, "Huldah Vane," had a charm for me.

One morning I was shopping in Daintree when I met Jane Lewis, and I stopped immediately to inquire about her mistress. The comely face was clouded and anxious; it seemed to me that she was even relieved by my addressing her. She did not this time refuse to answer my question, but told me frankly that Miss Vane was not at all well. "Has she long been ill?" I asked.

"No; she is not exactly ill, but seems to be fading slowly away."

She looked at me with wistful eyes, and then seemed to regret her candor. 'Can I do anything to help you?" I asked, aburptly. She sighed deeply. "No; there is no help possible."

"I can do one thing, Mrs. Lewis," I said. "The summer is a very hot and exhausting one; at Neville's Cross we have some exquisite fruit—grapes, peaches and apricots. I will send some —Miss Vane will find them refreshing."

She shook her head doubtfully.

"You need not tell her that they have come from me," I said. "She will think you have provided them."

"It is not that, Mrs. Neville—my mistress never notices what is set before her. I was only wondering if she would take the trouble to eat them."

"I am quite sure she will when she sees how fine they are. I shall send them, and you can try."

Later o nthat same morning, having business at Daintree railway station, I was surprised to see Jane Lewis coming out of the telegraph office. She looked so dismayed for the moment that I pretended not to have seen her. Afterward I heard that the eminent London physician, Sir John Emmett, had passed through Daintree, and I felt a certain conviction that he had been hastily summoned to the River House.

(To be continued.)

A Sermonette.

(Fadette in Chicago Tribune.)

Jesus said, "Consider the illies, how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin. Yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

Jesus thus indicated the effortlessness of the lilies.

These lovely flowers burst through the huge weight of earth pressing heavily over them.

They spring up from below the ground.

They put forth green shoots and tall, swaying stem.

They bloom with immaculate efflorescence, ravishingly perfumed.

And all silently.

Tranquilly.

Easily.

The falling dews fill their uplifted bowls with refreshing nectar.

The sunbeams bathe stalk and petals with the light of heaven.

The air distills its pure vitality into the gossamer pores and veins.

The lilies simply stand still in their places.

They simply awake to the beauty which envelopes them.

They merely receive the overflowing wealth of life and light and power that pours lavishly upon them.

They merely allow the sweet surrounding influences to play over them, to filter through them, to mould them.

Why should they hurry for a living?

Why be ambitious?

Or concerned

Why give a thought for the morrow

Every thing is done for them.

They need only to let it be done.

And thereby they furnish fables for souls.

Didn't Wear 'Em.

Jimmy giggled when the teacher read the story of the Roman who swam across the Tiber three times before breakfast.

"You do not doubt a trained swimmer could do that, do you, James?"

"No, sir," answered Jimmie, "but I wondered why he didn't make it four and get back to the side his clothes were on."—Success Magazine.

Billy Patterson.

"Who struck Billy Patterson?" is a question that has gone into history. It is asked frequently by persons who have no idea who Billy Patterson was, for it has become a stock expression signifying a mystery.

But now comes T. M. Lake, formerly of Fauquier county, Va., and now a retired merchant of this city, who says he knows all about the striking of Patterson. Mr. Lake was a young friend of the man who struck the blow. Billy Patterson, according to Mr. Lake, was the bully of Richmond, Va., almost 75 years ago. He was a big man who loved fighting almost as well as he loved whiskey and preferred the two together.

The day Patterson was struck the blow which thrust his name into immortality, he had obtained liquor, but was finding it difficult to get a fight. He had taken up a position in the centre of a much-travelled sidewalk and was making all passers take to the street. He was particularly insulting to a crowd of medical students who passed on their way to a nearby students' hotel.

Among those students was Albyn Payne, a young man from Fauquier county, a relative of Admiral Raphael Semmes, and a man of fighting blood. When the group of students submitted to the indignities offered by Patterson, his fighting blood was aroused.

"Let me at the bovine," he said, as he walked up to Patterson. Perhaps Patterson was too much surprised to defend himself, for only one blow was struck, and Billy Patterson went down with a thud. It was believed at first that Patterson was killed, and the students fled to their hotel, where a hasty conference was held and they vowed not to tell who struck the blow.

Hardly had Payne been taken out a side way to another students' lodging-house when the police arrived, demanding the man "who struck Billy Patterson." All the students were questioned, but each denied tht he had struck Patterson. Though it soon became apparent that Patterson was not dangerously injured, the students kept their vow, Payne preferring to avoid notoriety. Payne afterward became widely known as a physician in Virginia, and attained some note as a magazine writer under the nom de plume of Nicholas Spicer.—Chicago Record.

A GREATER INVENTOR.

Compared With Whom Even Edison is a Mere Also Ran.

A list of some of the mechanical devices which nature introduced in the human body and which man has been centuries in finding out was printed in the Sun not long ago. Here are a few more examples of the genius of nature. It looks as if the old party had Edison even with his 700—or is it 7,000—inventions, beaten to a f——inish.

The action of the valves of the heart was the original of the idea now in use in valves everywhere, from those of a pump to those of a steam engine. Their purpose is to regulate the flow of fluids or vapors in particular directions and to prevent back flow or regurgitation.

The valve in the box of a pump prevents the water we have drawn up from returning to the well so that the next movement of the pump handle will send it out of the spout. In the case of the heart we have two sets of valves, whose object it is to prevent blood, pumped out from each side of the heart, from returning into the heart's cavities.

There are certain beautiful flap valves which fall back to let blood enter but which float upon the blood, meet in the middle and form a perfect temporary partition, preventing reflux. These flaps are provided with cords which allow of their meeting together, and these cords, attached to the wall of the heart, pull down against the force of the blood which would, cause them to float up too far, and so the fluid must pass away by the proper channel.

Again we have pocket-like valves, placed around the great blood vessels into which blood passes from the heart. Imagine three pockets set in a circle round the entrance to the vessel. The mouths of the pocket open away from the heart. They allow blood easily to pass from them, but when the tendency to back flow occurs the pockets fill tensely and their edges meet, and so again there is found a temporary barrier against regurgitation.

The field here is very wide, for animals and plants have learned by experience and by outward conditions acting on them to adopt their structure to meet the exigencies of their lives. It was said that Brunel adoted the plan of the teredo or ship worm in his mode of constructing the original Thames tunnel.

The teredo is a boring shellfish, which borrows into wood by means of the two shells which envelop the head extremity. It lines its burrow with a limpy secretion, and it was this practice which is said to have given Brunel the idea of protecting it as he worked.

The tools of mankind have been over and over again foreshadowed and anticipated by animals. Saws, files and lancets are common among the insect species, and the gizzard of certain insects and of grain-eating birds recalls the grinding action of a mill, as indeed does the duty of our own molars or back teeth.

The case of "little wanton boys that swim on bladders" is represented by certain members of the Jellyfish class. The Physalia or Portuguese man-of-wear floats on the sea by aid of a large bladder-like structure, to the under side of which the little animal colony is attached. Near by is the Volilla, which hoists a veritable sail on its fair disc and is blown over the sea by the aid of the contrivance.

Seizing the Opportunity.

In a certain Ontario local option town is a citizen, who despite the legal precaution for his salvation, persists in his adherence to the cup that cheers. He is a thorn of vexation in the sides of his virtuous fellows. Especially, does old John Smith, the cobbler, feel sore distressed at heart at the habits of the convivial one. Recently, old John came to the conclusion that extreme measures for reformation must be taken.

One night he saw the wayward soul steering a weird gait down a side street. Suddenly, to his consternation, he saw him plunge to the left, and, in his wild career, through the white gate of the little village cemetery. John Smith went home. He would teach this desecrator a lesson.

Ten minutes later he, too, entered the cemetery. But he came through another gate, and he sneaked along with something white under his arm. He stepped behind a huge tombstone. In a moment, when he reappeared, the old cobbler was garbed in folds of white—a sheet.

He stood still, raised himself to his full height, and gazed about him. His eye lit upon the figure of the drunkard lying there upon the ground in the pale light of the moon, old John Smith began to speak:

"Behold, I am the Apostle Paul."

No reply. Down in the village, the town bell struck the hour of twelve.

Again the deep, sepulchral voice:

"Behold, I am the Apostle Paul."

Then a voice drawled out with a bored air:

"Oh you be, be you? Well—well. Say, did you ever get an answer to that long letter you wrote to the Ephesians?"

And the wraith vanished into the night.—Canadian Courier.

What We Have to Learn From German Schools.

Dr. George Parton Haney, director of art and manual training in the New York public schools, who made a study of European educational institutions during a foreign trip, says that one of the chief things we have to learn from Europe is to teach workers how to improve their work.

"Definite means will soon be devised," he says, "for educating the best equipped pupils in drawing in the public schools in higher drawing classes or schools by means of scholarships. This is a system used in the English schools, the pupils who show the greatest proficiency being advanced to the art school at the great South Kensington museum. I found many fine things in the German industrial schools. There are three 'continuation schools' in Munich, each with a score of rooms devoted to various industries. In the daytime they give instruction in theory to those who are at work in a trade, each apprentice being required to attend for one day a week, from 7 in the morning till 6 at night, failure to do so being punishable with a fine for his employer. The evening and Sunday classes are devoted to instruction for advanced workers. In the third year they go into the workshops.

"There are cooking schools, where gas stoves are used. Often there is a kitchen garden, to be cared for by the pupils. Advanced classes in domestic science for girls are also popular. Printing is another branch that receives much attention."

Family Discipline.

"So you are going to send your youngest boy to college?"

"Yes," answered Farmer Corntossel. "He's too big for me to handle in the woodshed, and I guess I'll have to have him hazed."—Washington Star.