

A FAMILY AFFAIR.

BY HUGH CONWAY.

(CONTINUED.)

"Will any sum of money—"

"Oh, no, miss. Although Rawlings has neglected business dreadfully for the last two years, and his brother is grumbling, we are fairly well-to-do people with a tidy bit saved. Oh, no, my man is single-eyed. He only wanted his boy."

"How was your child lost?" asked Beatrice. Mrs. Rawlings looked rather confused. "I can't help believing, miss, that the poor little fellow was drowned and never found. But Rawlings he won't have it so. He says he was stolen and we shall find him some day."

"After this Miss Clouston thanked her hostess with grave dignity. Then she dropped her veil and attended by Mrs. Rawlings went back to the cab and Sylvanus. She had gained her end, but at a price only known to herself. What had cost her to reveal the secret of her life to that strange woman can scarcely be over-estimated. Such was her scornful degradation that she almost wished that her uncle had been in the room when yesterday she went with the child in her hand to tell them what she had to-day told Mrs. Rawlings. "And after all," she murmured with a bitter smile on her face, "it is not so bad as it seems. I shall be able to stay out of the crash which must come sooner or later. My dear, quick ear caught the sound. "Nothing unpleasant happened, I hope?" he asked.

"My business was not of the pleasantest nature," replied Beatrice. "I said no more. By her desire she was set down at one of the principal shops in Blacktown, an emporium of articles of feminine need into which Mordle could not venture to accompany her. She thanked him for his services, and he knew that those thanks were a dismissal. He strode back to Oakbury looking very thoughtful; indeed it was not until he was well into his own parish that he remembered the necessity of resuming his usual cheerful air. "It must have been charitable," he muttered. "But why the secrecy? Why the 'Cat and Compassee'?"

Saturday came. All that morning, the best of the week, Horace and Herbert were fidgety and uncomfortable. Long before the hour fixed by Messrs. Blackett & Wigwags for the appearance of their clients the carriage brothers were glancing down the drive. Miss Clouston, however, appeared calm and at her ease. Her woman's instincts told her that all danger from the claimants was at an end. About 2 o'clock Horace turned to her. "My dear," he said, "has Mr. Miller made any preparation for the child's departure?"

"None whatever. He will not be sent for. It was but an idle threat."

Horace and Herbert exchanged glances. They knew it was no idle threat, but they little knew how the fulfillment had been averted. Three o'clock came—four—five o'clock. No carriage, no Rawlings, no Blackett, no Wigwags. Sunday, Monday and Tuesday passed without any sign or manifestation of hostility. The Palmers were then bound to confess that their niece had judged aright. "Beatrice appears to be remarkably clear-sighted," said Horace.

"Remarkably so," answered Herbert. But had Sylvanus Mordle, who spent the evening with them, committed a breach of faith and mentioned his excursion with Miss Clouston, the brothers might have suspected that he had credited their niece with a quality to which she had no title.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SWEETS OF LIBERTY.

"O Liberty! thou goddess heavenly bright! Promise of bliss and pregnant with delight! Every bard has sung the joys of Liberty; every writer has said his say upon her glories. Patriots have died for her, and statesmen—modern ones especially—have made her a convenient stalking horse. The subject being such a stock one, and apt quotations so plentiful, there is no need to dilate upon the frame of mind in which Mrs. Miller's acquaintance, Mr. Maurice Hervey, late No. 1080, found himself, when Portland prison at length discontinued its ungrudging and machine-like hospitality and restored him to the outer world, a free man save for the formality of once a month reporting himself to the police, and that general suspicious surveillance which is so irksome to the really modest and retiring nature of a single-eyed man."

The "goddess heavenly bright" showed her face, the first time for some years, to Maurice Hervey on the very day when Miss Clouston and Sylvanus Mordle went to Blacktown. Mrs. Miller, who had manifested so keen an interest in the felon's endowment, remained in complete ignorance of the happy event. This was due to no omission on her part. She had written twice to the governor of Portland, begging that the date of the convict's release might be made known to her. The letters were dated not from Oakbury but from some place in London. The date was duly acknowledged, and the information vouchsafed that the date could not be exactly fixed. To the second letter she received no reply. The reason for such apparent discourtesy was this:

The day of the man's emancipation was drawing very near, so he was told that his friend had written, and he was asked if he wished to be sent to London to meet her. He cast down his eyes and in a respectful way stated that he was sorry to say that he distributed his present shameful position to certain evil counsel which the writer had given him, and which he had followed. He said that he would be sent to London, but would rather avoid this woman than seek her. After this approval Mrs. Miller's letter remained unanswered.

He was an educated villain, who had been sentenced to five years' penal servitude for uttering forged bills. Like most such men, who are sent into seclusion for the good of the community, Maurice Hervey was able to reason, without such severe treatment as was needed to convince the Apostle Paul, that kicking against pricks is foolishness. He had been ordered to pay a certain debt. Mischance meant that the debt would be exacted to the uttermost farthing; whereas good conduct would in time lighten the obligation and induce his creditor to accept a handsome composition. So he did to the best of his ability such work as was allotted to him. He was too clever to attempt the elbow-worn trick of interesting the chaplain by a pretended conversion. He easily reflected that chaplains busy by this time have grown wide awake. But he wore a contented, inoffensive look, spoke civilly to his fellows, complained of nothing, and gave no trouble. It was only in the seclusion of his cell, inscribed cell of corrugated iron that No. 1080 scowled, grated his teeth and clenched his hands. It was only there that his lips noisily framed bitter curses and words of vengeance.

So it is that if upon his return to freedom Hervey had given his experiences of penal servitude to the daily papers, his description of the punishment of imprisonment, of the dark cells, and that brilliant picture with the crack-knives as it were

ing the air" would have had no first-hand value. Before leaving Portland he was told that the "Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society" would do nothing for him. He expressed his gratitude for the information, but added that unless from disuse his right hand had lost its cunning, he could earn an honest—He emphasized the word—livelihood without difficulty. He had been an artist, and could again pursue that craft under a given name. During his detention he had given his janitors proof of his graphic abilities by the graving of sundry plates with complicated and inartistic designs. These works of art are still shown to visitors to the prison as curiosities.

So, practically a free man, Maurice Hervey stood in the streets of London at 4 o'clock on the second day of the new year. There was little about him to attract attention. By a merciful and sensible dispensation, during the three months prior to his emancipation a convict's hair is left to nature, so that in these days of military crops Mr. Hervey's head, which no longer resembled a Fitzroy stormdrum, was not a signal of danger. The suit of clothes which replaced the durable prison dress was rough and ill-fitting, but not such as to create remark. In London that night there must have been hundreds of thousands of respectable men who looked neither better nor worse than Maurice Hervey.

Free at last! Free to turn where he liked, and within the limits of the law, do as he liked; in splendid health; in the prime of manhood. Free to redeem or cancel the past by honest work, or by dishonesty still lower and lower in the future. In his pocket the sum of five pounds seventeen shillings and sixpence, the result of years of self-enforced good conduct and unavoidable hard labor. The fingering of this money gave him a new, or at least a novel, sensation. It was more than four years since his hands had touched a coin of the realm. Think of that and realize what penal servitude means!

The first act he made of his liberty and money was characteristic, and I fear may awaken indulgent sympathy in the minds of the majority of men (not women) kind. He went into a tobacconist's and bought a ninepenny cigar. He lit it, sat down upon a chair in the shop and for some minutes smoked in blissful contented silence. The shopkeeper eyed his customer narrowly. His general appearance, especially the look of his hands, did not seem compatible with what the tradesman called a "ninepenny smoke gent." Hervey caught the man's eyes fixed on his hands. He himself glanced at them with a look of disgust and a muttered curse. Years of turf-carrying and digging and delving for Portland stone play havoc with a gentleman's hands. Hervey's nails were broken, blunted and stained; his fingers were thickened and hardened. Altogether his hands were such as a person solicitous as to the refinement of his personal appearance would prefer to keep in his pockets.

There were other actions which showed the ticket-of-leave man to be possessed of a fastidious nature. The first enthralling solemnity of the refund enjoyment of good tobacco having passed off, he left the shop and went in search of a ready-made clothing establishment. Here he bought a shirt and collar, a pair of shining boots, a hat, gloves, and a cheap suit which for a few days would hang together and present an appearance almost fashionable. He asked permission to change his apparel on the premises. Then having had a brown paper parcel made of the suit presented to him by a generous gentleman he went his way, no doubt much relieved by the amelioration of his external condition.

After a few more purchases needed by a gentleman for his toilet, he found his money had dwindled down to very little. He had, however, enough left to buy a shiny black bag. Into this he tumbled his parcels, and having a hansom paid his last shilling to be conveyed to the door of a well-known hotel. A luxurious dog this convict!

He engaged a bedroom. He ordered a dinner of which even Horace and Herbert might have approved. He rang for hot water, and spent half an hour soaking his hardened and disfigured hands. He scowled as he realized the painful fact that hundreds of gallons of hot water and months of time must be expended before these badly-used members in any way resumed their original appearance. Then, without a shilling in his pocket, he went to his dinner, with which he

drank a bottle of champagne. It is clear that Mr. Hervey, late No. 1080, had liberal views as to the treatment due to himself. He had, moreover, a lot of leeway to make up. He spent the evening smoking the hotel cigars and drinking the hotel whisky and water. Pleasant as these occupations were, he retired to rest early. While he had been soaking his hands he had cast longing eyes upon the beauties of the white-covered bed, and had mentally contrasted its soft charms with the asperities of the strip of sackcloth which had for so long been his resting-place. Sweet, truly sweet, are the uses of adversity when they teach a man to enjoy the simple comforts of life as Maurice Hervey that night enjoyed his bed. He revealed in the clean white sheets, he nestled on the soft mattress and yet softer pillows. The profusion of blankets filled his soul with a rapturous warmth. And as he fully realized the contrast between the innocent luxury he was enjoying and the discomforts of an iron cell and eight feet by four, he vowed a very proper vow: that no ill-advised conduct of his own should force him to renew his acquaintance with prison fare and discipline. The love of luxury has saved many a man from going wrong.

"Besides," he murmured, as he sank off to sleep, "there is no need for foolery of that kind. I am master of the situation. I can eat, drink and be merry for the rest of my life." There are many men who would lead the sounder had they such a thought to rock them.

In the morning, after breakfast, it occurred to Hervey that a moneyless man staying at a hotel is in a rather precarious position. Pleasant as his newly-found liberty, there was work to be done before he could sleep with a clear conscience. "Oh, no!" he called forth, brushed through a number of streets, and he had reached a quiet backstreet and a half-dozen of whisky sent in. The sight of the bottles, the number of which suggested well for a long stay, gladdened the landlady's heart. By the side of the whisky,

CHAPTER XIX. "IT WAS COME."

At Blacktown Maurice Hervey did not favor a hotel with his custom. Perhaps he mistrusted the capabilities possessed by the Blacktown hotels for furnishing him with luxuries such as, after so protracted and enforced an abstinence, he felt to be rightly his due. Perhaps he sighed for the quietude and repose with which one usually associates a private house. After a short search he found a bedroom and a sitting-room, well furnished and commanding extensive views. They were in one of a row of substantial houses which by some freak of fortune had fallen from the high estate of fashionable residences to the lower level of respectable lodging houses. The landlady's quotation, which, after the manner of such quotations, had attached to it a string of extras like the tail to a kite, having been accepted, Mr. Hervey requested that some dinner might be prepared for him. This of course meant shops—no street-fronted lodging-house dinner—travelling men's shops. Having particularly requested that his chops should be broiled, not fried, Mr. Hervey, whilst the cooking was going on, went out, found a wine merchant's and ordered half-a-dozen of whisky sent in. The sight of the bottles, the number of which suggested well for a long stay, gladdened the landlady's heart. By the side of the whisky,

lv. years ago. Miss Martin, he was informed, had never so long left without giving an address. Hervey's heart grew sick. In his haste to open more costly luxuries of life he had been too precipitate. He knew that unless he could find the person he wanted it would have been better for him to have kept his good conduct money intact. The woman of the house, who noticed his dismay, added that the shop at the corner might know what had become of Miss Martin's dog, but she was now Mrs. Humphreys. As he heard this supplement, a piece of news the man laughed so curiously that the shopwoman eyed him askance.

He walked to the new address, that of another little house in another quiet street. He knocked. A good-looking, respectable young woman, carrying a baby, and followed by a toddling child, opened the door. She gave a low cry, and staggered back against the wall. Hervey raised his hat with mock grace, and without invitation entered the house. The woman called to some one, who came and relieved her of her children. She then opened the door of her sitting-room, into which she followed her visitor. Hervey threw himself on a chair, and looked at the woman with a satirical smile. As yet not a word had passed between them. The man was the first to break silence. "Well, Fanny," he said mockingly, "so you are married, and have forgotten me?" "No; I am trying to forget you." She spoke bitterly. "And you can't. That's a complaint, considering the years of separation."

The woman looked at him in the face. "Maurice," she said, "I am married. I married a kind, true man, who loves me, and works for me and for our children. He has a great deal, not all about my past, yet he took me and trusts me. You will never when I tell you I am trying to be a good woman and a good wife. You always sneered at anything good. But, Maurice, of the sake of what we were once to each other, spare me now. Let me live in peace, and see you no more."

He entered the inn—men of his stamp, when in the country, make entering inns a point of honor. He called for hot brandy and water, and was supplied with a tumbler of that deep brown liquor, dear to rustic palates on account of its presumed strength. Hervey sipped it, lit a cigar and entered into a cheerful conversation with the Red Lion and

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a little of hot water, sugar, and cigars the now lodger spent a comfortable, if not an intellectual or improving evening. In the morning he called forth. Like every visitor to the old city who has time to spare he seemed bent upon seeing the natural beauties of the suburbs of Blacktown. His landlady, who thought him a nice, pleasant, free-spoken gentleman, gave him an oral list of the stock fights in the vicinity; but as soon as he was out of doors Mrs. Hervey inquired the way to Oakbury, and learned that an easy walk of about two miles would take him to that highly favored spot. The weather, although fine, was cold, so he decided to walk to his destination. He soon left the rows of houses and shops behind him, struck along a broad white road which cut its way through a level greensward, and in about three-quarters of an hour found himself in front of the Red Lion Inn, Oakbury.

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