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## From Chamber's Edinburgh Journal. Stepmothers.

The world seems to have agreed to consider stepmothers, particularly and generally, only in connection with all that is harsh and cruel. The word has indeed become proverbial, to mark an association in which the one party is the victim of the other. Chivalrous as the attempt may appear, we are disposed to put in a word against this sweeping condemnation of a class which most comprehend many estimable persons. It appears to us that there is no small absurdity in presuming a necessary character in every person who enters into a particular relation in life. A young lady may be in the bloom of womanhood, possessed of every grace which can adorn her sex; she may have lived for years the most loving and beloved member of a domestic circle, cementing the ties of kindred with a thousand proofs of tenderness and affection; but so soon as she is consented to become the wife of one who has children by a former spouse, than the eye of suspicion is cast upon her, and these sweet attributes seem to fall from her, like the trappings of a conqueror. She may be gentle, kind, generous, and agreeable, in all the test of the world; but it is supposed to be utterly impossible that she can entertain a spark of regard or affection for these usually helpless and unoffending beings who, from their position, appeal as usually most strongly to her sympathies, and whom it is both her duty and interest to cherish.

It is quite true that when the hallowed tie of mother and child is severed by the cold hand of death, no second bond of affection can be quite so strong and pure; but surely for this reason it is folly to reject that which most in the nearest degree replace it. A little reflection on the position of man—the more especially supporting him an active man of business—bereaved of his partner while yet on the sunny side of middle age, will assuredly prove that the wisest plan he can adopt is almost always that of giving his children a stepmother. Let us grant that her care is less watchful, her affection less deep, her department less fond, than those of her who cannot be restored; but, instead of looking back with vain complaining, let us rather compare her behaviour with that of the hired guardian, who, from the fallibility of human nature, must necessarily be far more deficient in those impulses and actions, the failure of which are so constantly regretted. Governesses, teachers, and nurses, are all human beings, and they must indeed be unfortunate mortals if they have not human ties and affections far warmer and deeper than any they can form for the children committed to their care, however conscientiously they may fulfil the duties they had undertaken. Let us suppose the children are confined to some female relative; if she be single and inexperienced, a mere theorist, she is very seldom a fit guardian or guide; if she be married, the chances are very great that she has interests infinitely more clashing than those of the stepmother. From our own observation, we do firmly believe, that in the dissensions and dissensions that sometimes occur after second marriages, the aggressors are almost always the first children or their relatives. Indeed we could cite many facts in corroboration of this assertion, but refrain from doing so, lest the feelings of individuals should be wounded; but we will select one narrative, because those whose feelings it is due to spare, are alike beyond the reach of prying curiosity, sympathy, or commiseration; and because the relation of it may illustrate more forcibly the point we have in view, than a string of disjointed observations could do.

Mr. Charles Barham was about eight and thirty, and had been a widower three or four years, when he thought proper to fall in love with Mary Villiers, the orphan and almost penniless daughter of an officer in the navy. He met her first at the house of her married sister, with whom she resided; and her graceful person, her winning manners, and intelligent conversation, very soon completed her conquest.

Perhaps he did not regard her the less because he perceived how affectionately attached to her were her little nephews and nieces, and he certainly very much respected those feelings which had induced her to linger in a home necessarily not the most independent in the world, until six and twenty, simply, as from good authority he soon found out, because, though she had received two or three advantageous offers, she did not intend to marry without being in love. It seemed a heart won by the winning; and when at last he discovered that

children she left him. At the period of his second marriage, his son was ten years old, and the little Ellen eight.

It was in the country he met Mary Villiers; in the country he married her, and not till he brought her to his home in London his wife, and she seen his children. But she had heard of their beauty and talents from their fond father. And happy in the present, as well as in her anticipations of the future; they were naturally included in all her castle building. For feeling hearts (and the stepmother had a very feeling one) are always grateful for love and tenderness, however rich they may deserve both, and are ever on the watch to repay as it were, the debt that seems due; or, in simpler phrase, it is only a pleasure to please those who love, when we can do so with ease, but it is a pleasure to make sacrifices for them. Not that there was any sacrifice in the case with regard to Mrs. Barham and her husband's children. Unknown, unseen, she felt that she would and must love them, even from the impulse of her own kindly nature; but her cooler judgment, it she consulted it at all, must have told her, that to breathe all their hearts into one knot of happiness and affection would be the surest means by which to bind her husband's love yet more dearly to her. It was night when they arrived in London; and though the children were in bed, Mrs. Barham could not wait till morning for an introduction. The nurse, an old servant of the family, preceded them, with a single taper, as Mr. Barham led his impatient bride to the chamber of his son. The boy was sobbing in his slumber; he had evidently cried himself to sleep. The nurse scolded, and though there was an overstrained civility in her manner, she looked at her master from time to time, as if he had done something of which she felt heartily ashamed. They could get no clear account from her of why the child had been fretting; but, when Mrs. Barham stopped to kiss his cheek, the child awoke, and turning his head quickly on the pillow, refused the proffered caress.

"We have frightened him—oh! I am sorry," exclaimed Mrs. Barham.

"We did not mean to wake you, Charley," said his father; "but now that you are awake, kiss your mamma."

The boy's lips fell; but by a strong effort of the will, he restrained the tears, and suffered her to touch his cheek. He still restrained them, though with more difficulty, when his father embraced him; and Mr. Barham, turning to the nurse, exclaimed almost sharply, "Warren, what is the matter with the boy? I insist upon knowing."

Warren sighed, and looked down, and very leisurely snuffed the candle, from which Mrs. Barham had just lighted another; and had hastened on to little Ellen's chamber. The stepmother trod softly, suaded the candle with her hand, and would not, even by a touch, awaken the slumberer, who lay, her doll clasped tightly in her arms, in one of those untoward attitudes of childhood which are always graceful. As motionless as the sleeping child, did Mrs. Barham remain for many minutes; and who can tell the thoughts that passed rapidly through her mind? Perhaps she wondered if the mother had been as beautiful as the daughter, and had she been less, or as well, or better loved than herself? Or did she seek to pierce anxiously or hopefully the future? Or was she content to dwell upon the present? Whatever her thoughts were they could not be evil. Oh! no; for the faithful glance and affectionate gesture with which she beckoned her husband to approach softly, were never dictated by a selfish or unkind thought. He, however, was ruffled, for he had insisted on an answer from the nurse, who to the question of what ailed the child, had replied, with some reluctance, that Mrs. Pearson, their aunt, had been there that day, and "had talked to Master Charley about his own mamma and made him very unhappy."

The sorrows of children, however, are seldom very long-lived, and Master Charley came down to breakfast the next morning without any traces of the last night's tears. Yet it might have been observed that he very studiously avoided addressing Mrs. Barham by the endearing name which her husband always used when speaking of her to his children. As for little Ellen, she looked timidly up in her face, and not till quite the middle of the day did she gain courage to utter more than monosyllables in the presence of the stepmother, although Mrs. Barham strove, by a thousand gentle stratagems, to gain the confidence of the children. It was very evident that Master Charley's heart was steeled against her; and if, by kindness and indulgence, he seemed for a few hours a little subdued, the mildest remonstrance (and remonstrances were necessary, for he was a spoiled child) brought the flush to his cheek, and he dropped his head more impressively than ever.

ing some suggestions as to the improvement of its costume with vast delight, when the lady asked, gently, a question which had long hovered on her lips—"Why, Ellen, do you always call me 'mamma'?" The child colored to her temples, shuddered as they were by her soft curling hair, but did not answer.

"Why do you not call me 'mamma'?" continued Mrs. Barham, pressing the little hand that rested upon her knee.

The child turned her head away as she murmured—"because Charley told me not to, and said he would not love me, and aunt would not love me if I did."

The heart of the stepmother was too full to answer; her husband found her in tears; and—and it was impossible positively to refuse his young wife so simple a request, and he had promised that the children should be allowed to address her only by the term their own feelings should dictate. Little Ellen soon began to call her "mamma," and called her so for years; Master Charley did the same at intervals, when more than usually good-tempered, or just after some indulgence she had been the means of procuring for him.

One other scene of this period, and we will pass on for years. Miss Pearson and other relatives had been introduced to Mrs. Barham, and had paid the formal wedding visit. At their first meeting the merits of the bride were of course discussed.

"The idea of calling her pretty!" said one.

"To pretend she is only six and twenty!" exclaimed another; "she'll never see thirty again."

"No money, I believe!" asserted the first, in the form of interrogation.

"Only about twelve hundred pounds," replied some body very well informed on the subject; "but Charles has made it up five thousand, and settled the whole upon her, continued the lady, in a crescendo tone of voice.

"More than ever he did for my poor sister," observed Miss Pearson, with a sigh; "though she had money." (Most true, Miss Pearson; but Charles Barham, twelve years ago, did not possess five thousand pounds in the world.)

"The poor children!"

"Frightened to death of her!"

"I could not believe he would have married again," chimed in Miss Pearson, in a tone of just indignation at the iniquity of mankind.

"Charles is a fine boy; he can recollect his mother, and has a spirit of his own!" continued the speaker of interrogatives.

"Yes, but they talk of sending him to school," said the "well informed" lady.

"I told you so!" exclaimed the aunt, proud of her wonderful gift of prophecy.

"Her doing, of course."

And they all sighed, and shook their heads, and joined in a sort of chorus, to the effect that second marriages were "dreadful."

"Alas!" for the poor stepmother! Can there be any question that her office was a most thankless one!—without the authority of a mother, yet with a mother's responsibility—not with her husband alone to please, but a whole family to console, and that family predisposed to condemn all her actions. But as the dropping of water will wear away a stone, so Mrs. Barham's correct judgment and invariable sweetness of disposition, did a little smooth down the asperities with which she had been met, when at the end of two years, the prospect of herself becoming a mother, was looked upon as a new and most aggravated offence. Her infant died; and instead of sympathy or compassion for the mother's anguish at the loss of her first-born, there were women who looked—almost acknowledge—their rejoicing.

Yes, women, who called themselves feminine and tenderhearted, and have turned away, probably, rather than have seen an insect crushed!

Another year sped on, and again Mrs. Barham was a mother; but this time she was more blessed—her infant lived. It proved, however, a delicate boy; and the additional care and tenderness which this circumstance naturally drew from its parents, were looked on almost as injuries to the elder and healthier children. It seemed even conjectured that poor Mrs. Barham must have used some undue influence over her husband—some sort of domestic witchcraft, to make him so strangely anxious about the well-being of a sickly, troublesome infant. Meanwhile, Charley and Ellen were growing up—the former a shrewd clever boy, the latter a very beautiful girl. But the time, however, that Charley was about seven, Mrs. Barham, whose connexions were with the mercantile world, had met with several severe losses, and, without his finances being reduced to such a state that it was absolutely necessary for him to curtail his expenses and general mode of living, it would assuredly have been proper for him to have done so. On the other hand, he had his temptations. His beloved children were just entering life, and he appreciated, perhaps too highly, the advantages of a certain station and steady appearance to them. He con-

sidered the safer policy of trenchment, a certain delicacy of mind made her very cautious of throwing any weight into the scale which should be balanced against the interest of the elder children. Almost against her better judgment, she yielded therefore to her husband's plans, and seconded him in them by many an act of self-denial, of which the world little dreamed. No other human being had an idea of real state of the case, consequently dear friends and relatives found a great deal to censure in some instances of economy which their prying curiosity discovered. It was all "wretched weakness—hoarding for the sake of herself and her miserable little pony brat. Why, indeed, was not Charley to have his own horse, as he had been promised years ago? And so well as Ellen played, it was shameful they did not give her a new Broadwood, instead of the old thing she had had these seven years!" But with all their commiseration for the poor ill-used children—whom they contrasted, both by open remark and more dangerous insinuations, to make thoroughly discontented, neither grandmother, aunt, nor cousins, ever thought of making these costly presents themselves.

Of course the subtle poison worked, and most of all upon the peace of mind and health of the stepmother. She had sufficient cause for real anxiety in the state of her husband's pecuniary affairs and the delicate constitution of her child; but the outbreaks of temper and petty annoyances—annoyances verging closely on insults, though scarcely palatable enough to be resented as such—rendered her life a very unenviable one. From Mr. Barham she usually concealed these annoyances as much as possible; for sad experience had proved to her, that his interference, though always exerted in her behalf, made matters to the long run rather worse than better. Still, as she had completely devoted, so had she always retained, his entire confidence and affection; and this consciousness did at times give a light to her eyes, and a smile to her face, which else she must long since have ceased to wear. But alas! these occasional gleams of happiness were noticed and remembered, to be brought forward afterwards as proofs of her unfeeling disposition.

Charley was being educated for the bar, to which profession his talents seemed especially to lead. He was a handsome young man, clever and agreeable in society, generally liked and courted and just the sort of person whom most parents would be very proud; and the stepmother would scarcely have been human, if she had not looked on him with something like envy, while contrasting his position and probable fortunes with those of her own poor, weakly child. And it chanced that circumstances should place their interests in opposition to one another.

The little boy, instead of gaining strength had grown yet weaker, and at six years old, consumption was apprehended. Determined to have their minds relieved and the worst known, the anxious parents consulted separately three physicians. Two were of opinion, that with care and watching, the danger might be avoided, but the third, who was indeed less eminent, but had some years before attended several members of Mr. Barham's family, declared stoutly, that as far as his knowledge and experience, or human foresight could divine, the child's life could only be spared by removal for the next year or two to Madeira or the South of Europe. For some hours Mr. and Mrs. Barham remained with minds undecided which plan to adopt— one moment leaning with sanguine hope, to the brighter side of the case; the next proposing at any sacrifice, to remove their darling child to a warmer climate.

After a while, Mrs. Barham felt that the casting vote remained with herself, but, though her heart yearned for the wished-for decision, the very consciousness that it was in her own power made her hesitate. At most, the hesitation would have been but that of a few hours; yet, during so short an interval, Mr. Barham received a letter, which at such a moment, was of vital importance, from his elder son, Charley was at that time diligently engaged at Oxford; and he wrote to his father, with all the earnestness of sincerity, beseeching his permission to commence a course of studies, and keep certain terms, which, though not absolutely necessary before he could be called to the bar, would be, he felt assured, an insupportable advantage to him. The poor stepmother watched her husband's countenance; she saw the inward struggle; she knew how fondly he clung to the hope of his first-born's advancement; she understood that one project or the other must be abandoned; and she felt that in the scale, which before had been so evenly poised, a heavy weight was thrown. Certainly it was with a trembling hand, and anxious countenance, that Mr. Barham gave her the letter, but he dwelt very strongly on the higher authority of the physicians who dreaded the least, though he left the final decision to herself. At so to appeal to the generosity of the generous, is the surest way to vanquish

them. After many bitter tears, and a few hours of self-communing, the stepmother made one more sacrifice—the greatest she felt it to be, that fate had yet demanded. She reasoned for once as it is hard for the warm-hearted to do, by putting feeling out of the question; and since she decided at last from principle, she might groan, but she did not repent. The delicate child was nursed carefully and anxiously for the succeeding months in London, and young Barham remained at Oxford, his ardent wishes gratified.

But death, that does indeed come like "a thief in the night," was near, and the fond father was not permitted to realize the day dream he had indulged in his son's success. Mr. Barham died suddenly, leaving his widow in some measure provided for by her marriage settlement; but on the winding up his affairs, it was discovered that only a mere pittance remained for the elder children—not more than a few hundred pounds each. Mrs. Barham's settlement was secured after her, on any children she might leave; for being a very rich man when he had married a second time, Mr. H. felt that it was in his power to equivoque by will his children's fortunes. His reserves had changed the state of the case; but still he acted as justly as it was in his power to do, by bequeathing the little he did possess to his elder children. The relatives, however, could see no justice in the affair; and one of them being executor, and judging the poor stepmother's disposition by their own ill feelings to herself, he removed Ellen Barham from her care and took the management of the young people, as well as of the property, upon himself.

Meanwhile, the younger son, the poor sick child, had grown worse and worse, and the bereaved and afflicted widow was in the very depths of misery & desolation. He was, indeed, beyond the reach of human aid; and five months after her husband's death, the widow's cup of anguish overflowed, and a small grey coffin was placed in the silent vault, upon that of Mr. Barham. Not till the first stunning blow was over—not till she had time to feel her desolation, and reflect, did the devoted stepmother know that her own days were numbered. The insidious disease which had slumbered in her blood through the bright seasons of youth and early womanhood, had destroyed her child, and strengthened in herself, most probably by affliction, and had begun its ravages. She believed her own case to be hopeless, and felt indeed, that death could scarcely claim one who would meet him with less reluctance. She had little inclination or spirit to join again her own relations, from whom years and distance had in a great measure estranged her, and she determined to remain in London among a few tried friends she had made there. Her husband's children resided at some distance from the quiet dwelling Mrs. Barham had chosen, but they certainly visited her frequently. Naturally, Ellen was of tenest her guest and instead of relaxing in her attentions, they gradually increased, till at the time of the poor child's death, she was seldom a day absent. It was a few weeks after this event that Mrs. Barham first observed a marked change in Ellen's manner, to her a most blissful one— a tenderness and affection she had never experienced before. Most the truth be owned? Yes, for it was owned at last to her they had so much wronged; their altered circumstances and new home had taught the stepchildren to appreciate the kindness, indulgence, and protection, they had so little valued. They had discovered that relations, who as guests of their father, or hosts at home, had only caressed and petted them, could be, when "dressed in a little brief authority," exacting, or tyrannical, or capricious.

The young had almost always kindly feelings and impulses, unless these gentle seeds are choked by evil culture; and it was a moment when the heart raved, that Ellen Barham with streaming eyes, threw herself upon the stepmother's neck, and implored permission to remain with her, to be her nurse, her companion. She addressed her by the endearing name she had used in childhood, and called to mind those tedious illnesses through which she had been so tenderly watched. It was a trying scene, and yet the widow felt it as a bright gleam of happiness, the use welcome that it had been unexpected. Ellen's petition was granted, for her own relations had become too indifferent, to oppose what was evidently her own wish. In the affectionate confidence which henceforth subsisted between them, Ellen often spoke of her brother, his trials and disappointments; wanting yet a year of his majority, he could not touch a farthing of the little property he would inherit, and his guardian differing from him in his views, refused to advance the money he required to complete that course of study for which already one sacrifice had been made.

It was after a conversation of this kind, that Mrs. Barham, who was now by success confined to the sofa, and so weak that to raise he felt almost an exertion—wrote, though with much emotion and fatigue, a long letter to Charles Barham, the contents of which the reader may

as well know at once. It settled a point about which "the relations" had been rather undecided, namely, that Mrs. Barham had the power of willing away her five thousand pounds. She told her stepson that she had bequeathed it between herself and sister; and that, for his own sake, as well as from its having been the ardent wish of his father, she was anxious that he should complete his legal studies. She regretted that the settlement disabled her from touching the principal, but she told him what she knew, that she should not live many months; and she offered, even if this delay would be injurious, to cover into any legal arrangement; he could devolve, by which the money could be raised on this expectation.

We will do Charles Barham justice; his heart had smote him before the arrival of such a letter, but it kindled at once all the better feelings of his nature. Never did he think more lightly of the legacy; he had looked on as doubtful, than now that he had learnt it would be his; but he could not rest till he had sought forgiveness of the past, from her, whom his heart told him to be all goodness and affection. (Only three hours after the letter had been despatched, he entered, unannounced, the little drawing room, where, stretched upon a couch, and worn by suffering and illness to a mere shadow, lay Mrs. Barham. Ellen was near reading in a low voice from the sacred volume. The student high spirited, self-willed man was subdued, and bursting into tears he clasped the emaciated hand which was extended to him, sank upon his knees beside the couch, and almost burying his head in the thick shawl which covered her, exclaimed, "Mother, forgive me!" There was a long and tremulous embrace, and the stepmother broke the silence by murmuring, "I am not childless now."

Charles Barham took no thought of raising money on his "expectations," but persisted in sharing his sister's anxious watch, first by the couch, and then by the peaceful death-bed of the long neglected STEPMOTHER.

A TETOTALER'S SIGN.—As a newly pledged Washingtonian was passing the streets, a few weeks since, he was thus hailed by an old Roman companion: "I say Tom, they tell me you've become a teetotaler."

"Yes," was the reply, and I'm proud of it, and wish you would be one, too. I have been a drunkard, a loafer, and almost every thing else, for the last three years; and thank God, it has made me a man again!"

The companion hardly knew what to say to this; at length, he added in a regular manner, "Well Tom, they say you teetotalers have a sign, to know each other by—won't you tell an old croucher what it is?"

"Certainly; we have a most excellent sign," added Tom, pulling out a double handful of half dollars, and shaking them in the face of his former companion, and said, "This is the teetotaler's sign!"

This proved a knock down argument, and the other promised to sign at the next meeting, for he liked their sign.

Incognito.—There is in the Hospital of the Charleston (Mass.) State Prison, a convict on the eve of dissolution from consumption. There is a mystery about this man, which has never been fathomed. He gave his name as John Smith, but stated that was not his real name, and he intended it should never be known, lest it should reach the ears of his parents and break their hearts to know of the disgrace he had entailed on them. He was engaged among the Canadian patriots during the late revolution, and endured many hardships and much suffering. He appears to be perfectly aware of his situation, saying he is prepared to go, and expresses much gratitude to the warden for his kindness.

Exploring Expedition.—The United States ship Vincennes was at St. Francisco, Upper California, on the 31st October, with the Porpoise, Flying Fish, and brig Oregon. They were to sail the next day for the United States, via Manila, Singapore, and Cape of Good Hope. The squadron will probably arrive in the United States in June next.

Whig Retrenchment.—It appears from the official minutes of the Custom House in Boston, that during the period of three quarters of a year since the appointment of Lee J. Lincoln as Collector at that Port, a clear saving has been effected in the expenses of the Office, amounting to more than fifteen thousand dollars; notwithstanding the business of the Office has greatly increased, both in the number of arrivals and the value of importations.

Both of the handsome Schooners built for the Mexicans, in New York, have been disposed of. One was wrecked, and the other, it is stated in the Picayune, was captured by the Texans, under the very guns of the Castle of San Juan d'Ulloa.

Never repine at that for which there is no possible remedy.

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