Printed by Special Arrangement—Copyrighted 1888.

"CRESSY."

BY BRET HARTE.

AUTHOR OF "THE LUCK OF ROARING CAMP," "TALES OF THE ARGONAUTS," "IN THE CARQUINEZ WOODS," "MARUJA," ETC.

CHAPTER IX.

The religious attitude which Mrs. McKinstry had assumed toward her husband's weak civilized tendencies was not entirely free from human rancor. That strong loyal nature which had unsexed itself in the one idea of duty, now that duty seemed to be no longer appreciated took refuge in her forgotten womanhood, and in the infinitesimally small arguments, resources and manœuvres at its command. She had conceived a singular jealousy of this daughter who had changed her husband's nature and who had supplanted the traditions of the household life; she had acquired an exaggerated depreciation of those feminine charms which had never been a factor in her own domestic happiness. She saw in her husband's desire to mitigate the savage austerities of their habits only a weak concession to the powers of beauty and adornment—degrading vanities she had never known in their life-long struggle for frontier supremacy—that had never brought them victorious out of that struggle. "Frizzles," "furbiows," and "fancy fixins" had never helped them in their exodus across the plains, had never taken the place of swift eyes, quick ears, strong hands and endurance; had never nursed the sick nor bandaged the wounded. When envy or jealousy invade the female heart after forty it is apt to bring a bitterness which knows no attenuating compensation in that coquetry, emulation, passionate appeal or innocent tenderness which makes tolerable the jealous caprices of the younger woman. The struggle for rivalry is felt to be hopeless, the power of imitation is gone. Of her forgotten womanhood Mrs. McKinstry revived only a capacity to suffer meanly and inflict mean suffering upon others. In the ruined castle of her youth, and the falling in of banqueting hall and bower, the dungeon and torture chamber appeared to have been left, or to use her own metaphor, she had querulously complained to the parson that "Accordin' to some folks, she mout hev bin the barren fig-tree elected to bear persimmums."

Her methods were not entirely different from those employed by her suffering sisterhood in like emergencies. The unlucky Hiram, "worrited by stock," was hardly placated or consoled by learning from her that it was only the result of his own weakness, acting upon the cussedness of the stock-dispersing Harrisons; the perplexity into which he was thrown by the news of the new legal claim to his land, was not soothed by the suggestion that it was a trick of that Yankee civilization to which he was meanly succumbing. She who had always been a rough but devoted nurse in sickness was now herself overtaken by vague irregular disorders which involved the greatest care and the absence of all exciting causes. The attendance of McKinstry and Cressy at a "crazy-quilting party" had brought on "blind chills;" the importation of a melodeon for Cressy to play on had superinduced an "innerd rash," and a threatened attack of "palsy creep" had only been warded off by the timely postponement of an evening party suggested by her daughter. The old nomadic instinct, morbidly excited by her discontent, caused her to lay artful plans for a further emigration; she knew she had the germs of "mash fever" caught from the adjacent river; she related mysterious information gathered in "class meeting" of the superior facilities for stock-raising on the higher foot-hills. She resuscitated her dead and gone Missouri relations in her daily speech, to a manifest invidious comparison with the living; she revived even the incidents of her early married life with the same baleful intent. The acquisition of a few "biled shirts" by Hiram for festive appearances with Cressy, painfully reminded her that he had married her in "hickory;" she further accented the change by herself appearing in her oldest clothes, on the hypothesis that it was necessary for some one to keep up the traditions of the past.

Her attitude toward Cressy would have been more decided had she ever possessed the slightest influence over her, or had even understood her with the intuitive sympathies of the maternal relations. Yet she went so far as to even openly regret the breaking off of the match with Seth Davis, whose family at least still retained the habits and traditions she revered; but she was promptly silenced by her husband informing her that words "that had to be kept back" had already passed between him and Seth's father, and that, according to those same traditions, blood was more likely to be spilled than mingled. Whether she was withheld from attempting a reconciliation herself through lack of tact and opportunity remains to be seen. For the present she encouraged Master's attentions under a new and vague idea that a flirtation which distracted Cressy from her studies was displeasing to McKinstry and inimical to his plans. Blindly ignorant of Mr. Ford's possible relations to her daughter, and suspecting nothing, she felt towards him only a dull aversion as being the senseless pivot of her troubles. Seeing no one and habitually closing her ears to any family allusion to Cressy's social triumphs, she was unaware of even the popular admiration their memorable waltz had excited.

On the morning of the day that Uncle Ben had confided to the master his ingenious plan for settling the boundary disputes, the barking of McKinstry's yellow dog announced the approach of a stranger to the ranch. It proved to be Mr. Stacey—not only as dazzlingly arrayed as when he first rose above Johnny Filgee's horizon, but wearing, in addition to his jaunty business air, a look of complacent expectation of the pretty girl whom he had met at the ball. He had not seen her for a month. It was a happy inspiration of his own that enabled him to present himself that morning in the twin functions of a victorious Mercury and Apollo.

McKinstry had to be summoned from an adjacent meadow, while Cressy, in the meantime, undertook to entertain the gallant stranger. This was easily done. It was part of her fascinations, that, disdaining the ordinary real or assumed ignorance of the ingenue of her class, she generally exhibited to her admirers (with perhaps the single exception of the master) a laughing consciousness of the state of mind into which her charms had thrown them. She understood their passion if she could not accept it. This to a bashful, rustic community was helpful, but in the main unsatisfactory; with advances so promptly unmasked the most strategic retreat was apt to become an utter rout. Leaning against the lintel of the door, her curved hand shading the sparkling depths of her eyes, and the sunlight striking down upon the pretty curves of her languid figure, she awaited the attack.

"I haven't seen you, Miss Cressy, since we danced together—a month ago."

"That was mighty rough papers," said Cressy, who was purposely dialectical to strangers, "considering that you trapsed up and down the lane, past the house, twice yesterday."

"Then you saw me!" said the young man, with a slightly discomfited laugh.

"I did. And so did the hound, and so, I reckon, did Joe Masters and the hired man. And when you pranced back on the home stretch, there was the hound, Masters, the hired man and Maw all on your trail, and Paw bringin' up the rear with a shotgun. There was about a half-a-mile of you altogether." She removed her hand from her eyes to indicate with a lazily graceful sweep this somewhat imaginative procession, and laughed.

"You are certainly well guarded," said Stacey, hesitatingly, "and looking at you, Miss Cressy," he added boldly, "I don't wonder at it."

"Well, it is reckoned that next to Paw's boundaries I'm pretty well protected from squatters and jumpers."

Forceful and quaint as her language was, the lazy sweetness of her intonation, and the delicate refinement of her face more than atoned for it. It was unconventional and picturesque as her gestures. So, at least, thought Mr. Stacey, and it emboldened him to further gallantry.

"Well, Miss Cressy, as my business with your father to-day was to try to effect a compromise of his boundary claims, perhaps you might accept my services in your own behalf."

"Which means," responded the young lady partly, "the same thing to me as to Paw. No trespassers but yourself. Thank you, sir." She twirled lightly on her heel and dropped him that exaggerated courtesy known to the school-children as a "cheese." It permitted in its progress the glimpse of a pretty little slipper, which completed his subjugation.

"Well, if it's only a fair compromise," he began laughingly.

"Compromise means somebody giving up. Who is it?" she asked.

The infatuated Stacey had reached the point of thinking this repartee if possible more killing than his own.

"Ha! That's for Miss Cressy to say."

But the young lady leaning back against the lintel with the comfortable ease of being irresponsibly diverted, sagely pointed out that that was the function of the arbitrator.

"Ah well, suppose we begin by giving up Seth Davis, eh? You see that I'm pretty well posted, Miss Cressy."

"You alarm me," said Cressy sweetly. "But I reckon he had given up."

"He was in the running that night at the ball. Looked half savage while I was dancing with you. Wanted to eat me."

"Poor Seth! And he used to be so particular in his food," said the witty Cressy.

Mr. Stacey was convulsed. "And there's Mr. Dabney—Uncle Ben," he continued, "eh! Very quiet but very sly. A dark horse, eh! Pretends to take lessons for the sake of being near some one, eh! Would he were a boy again because somebody else is a girl!"

"I should be frightened of you if you lived here always," returned Cressy with invincible naivete; "but perhaps then you wouldn't know so much."

Stacey simply accepted this as a compliment. "And there's Masters," he said insinuatingly.

"Not Joe!" said Cressy with a low laugh, turning her eyes to the door.

"Yes," said Stacey with a quick uneasy smile. Ah! I see we musn't drop him. Is he out there?" he added trying to follow the direction of her eyes.

But the young girl kept her face studiously averted. "Is that all?" she asked after a pause.

"Well—there's that solemn schoolmaster," who cut me out of the waltz with you—that Mr. Ford."

Had he been a perfectly cool and impartial observer he would have seen the slight tremor cross Cressy's soft eyelids even in profile, followed by that momentary arrest of her whole face, mouth, dimples and eyes, which had overtaken it the night the master entered the ballroom. But he was neither, and it passed quickly and unnoticed. Her usual lithe but languid play of expression and color came back, and she turned her head lazily toward the speaker. "There's Paw coming. I suppose you wouldn't mind giving me a sample of your style of arbitrating with him, before you try it on me?"

"Certainly not," said Stacey, by no means displeased at the prospect of having so pretty and intelligent a witness in the daughter, of what he believed would form an attractive display of his diplomatic skill and graciousness to the father. "Don't go away. I've got nothing to say Miss Cressy could not understand and answer."

The jingling of spurs, and the shadow of McKinstry and his shotgun falling at this moment between the speaker and Cressy, spared her the necessity of a reply. McKinstry cast an uneasy glance around the apartment, and not seeing Mrs. McKinstry, looked relieved, and even the deep traces of the loss of a valuable steer that morning partly faded from his Indian-red complexion. He placed his shotgun carefully in the corner, took his soft felt hat from his head, folded it and put it in one of the capacious pockets of his jacket, turned to his daughter, and laying his maimed hand familiarly on her shoulder, said gravely, without looking at Stacey:

"What might the stranger be wantin', Cress?"

"Perhaps I'd better answer that myself," said Stacey briskly. "I'm acting for Benham & Co., of San Francisco, who have bought the Spanish title to part of this property. I—"

"Stop there!" said McKinstry, in a voice dull but distinct. He took his hat from his pocket, put it on, walked to the corner and took up his gun, looked at Stacey, for the first time, with narcotic eyes that seemed to drowsily absorb his slight figure, then put the gun back, half contemptuously, and, with a wave of his hand toward the door, said: "We'll settle this yer outside. Cress, you stop in here. There's man's talk goin' on."

"But, Paw," said Cressy, laying her hand languidly on her father's sleeve, without the least change of color or amused expression, "this gentleman has come over here on a compromise."

"On a—which?" said McKinstry, glancing scornfully out of the door for some rare species of mustang vaguely suggested to him in that unfamiliar word.

"To see if we couldn't come to some fair settlement," said Stacey. "I've no objection to going outside with you, but I think we can discuss this matter here just as well." His fine feathers had not made him a coward, although his heart had beaten a little faster at this sudden recollection of the dangerous reputation of his host.

"Go on," said McKinstry.

"The plain facts of the case are these," continued Stacey, with more confidence. "We have sold a strip of this property covering the land in dispute between you and Harrison. We are bound to put our purchaser in peaceable possession. Now to save time we are willing to buy that possession of any man who can give it. We are told that you can."

"Well, considern' that for the last four years I've been fightin' night and day agin them low down Harrisons for it, I reckon you've been lied to," said McKinstry deliberately. "Why—except the clearing on the north side, whar I put up a barn, thar ain't an acre of it as hasn't been shifted first this side and then that as fast ez I druv boundary stakes and fences, and the Harrisons pulled 'em up again. Thar ain't more than fifty acres ez I've had a clear hold on, and I wouldn't hev had that ef it hadn't bin for the barn, the raisin alone o' which cost me a man, two horses, and this yer little finger."

"Put us in possession of even that fifty acres, and we'll undertake to hold the rest and eject those Harrisons from it," returned Stacey complacently. "You understand that the moment we've made a peaceable entrance to even a foothold on your side the Harrisons are only trespassers, and with the title to back us we can call on the whole sheriff's posse to put them off. That's the law."

"That ar the law?" repeated McKinstry meditatively.

"Yes," said Stacey. "So," he continued, with a self-satisfied smile to Cressy, "far from being hard on you, Mr. McKinstry, we're rather inclined to put you on velvet. We offer you a fair price for the only thing you can give us—actual possession; and we help you with your old grudge against the Harrisons. We not only clear them out, but we pay you for even the part they held adversely to you."

Mr. McKinstry passed his three whole fingers over his forehead and eyes as if troubled by a drowsy aching. "Then you don't reckon to hev anythin' to say to them Harrisons?"

"We don't propose to recognize them in the matter at all," returned Stacey.

"Nor allow 'em anythin'?"

"Not a cent! So you see, Mr. McKinstry," he continued magnanimously, yet with a mischievous smile to Cressy, "there is nothing in this amicable discussion that requires to be settled outside."

"Ain't there?" said McKinstry, in a dull, deliberate voice, raising his eyes for the second time to Stacey. They were bloodshot, with a heavy, hanging furtiveness, not unlike one of his own hunted steers. "But I ain't kam enuff in yer." He moved to the door with a beckoning of his fateful hand. "Outside a minit—ef you please."

Stacey started, shrugged his shoulders, and half-defiantly stepped beyond the threshold. Cressy, unchanged in color or expression, lazily followed to the door.

"Wot," said McKinstry, slowly facing Stacey; "wot ef I refoose? Wot ef I say I don't allow any man, or any bank, or any compromise, to take up my quo'rills? Wot ef I say that low down and mean as them Harrisons is, they don't begin to be ez mean, ez low down, ez underhanded, ez sneakin' ez that yer compromise? Wot ef I say that ef that's the kind o' hogwash that law and snivelization offers me for peace and quietness, I'll take the fightin', and the law-breakin', and the sheriff, and all h—ll for his posse instead? Wot ef I say that?"

"It will only be my duty to repeat it," said Stacey, with an affected carelessness which, however, did not conceal his surprise and his discomfiture. "It's no affair of mine."

"Unless," said Cressy, assuming her old position against the lintel of the door, and smoothing the worn bear skin that served as a mat with the toe of her slipper, "unless you've mixed it up with your other arbitration, you know."

"Wot other arbitration?" asked McKinstry suddenly, with murky eyes.

Stacey cast a rapid half-indignant glance at the young girl, who received it with her hands tucked behind her back, her lovely head bent submissively forward, and a prolonged little laugh.

"Oh nothing, Paw," she said, "only a little private foolishness betwixt me and the gentleman. You'd admire to hear him talk, Paw—about other things than business. He's just that chipper and gay."

Nevertheless as with a muttered "Good morning" the young fellow turned away, she quietly brushed past her father, and followed him—with her hands still penitently behind her, and the rosy palms turned upward—as far as the gate. Her single long Marguerite braid of hair trailing down her back nearly to the hem of her skirt, appeared to accent her demure reserve. At the gate she shaded her eyes with her hand, and glanced upward.

"It don't seem to be a good day for arbitrating. A trifle early in the serson, ain't it?"

"Good morning, Miss McKinstry."

She held out her hand. He took it with an affected ease, but cautiously, as if it had been the velvet paw of a young panther who had scratched him. After all, what was she but the cub of the untamed beast, McKinstry. He was wall out of it! He was not revengeful—but business was business, and he had given them the first chance.

As his figure disappeared behind the buckeyes of the lane, Cressy cast a glance at the declining sun. She re-entered the house, and went directly to her room. As she passed the window she could see her father already remounted galloping toward the tules, as if in search of that riparian "kam" his late interview had disturbed. A few straggling bits of color in the sloping meadows were the children coming home from school. She hastily tied a girlish sun-bonnet under her chin, and slipping out of the back door, swept like a lissom shadow along the line of fence until she seemed to melt into the umbrage of the woods that fringed the distant north boundary.

CHAPTER X.

Meanwhile, unaware of her husband's sudden relapse to her old border principles and of the visit that had induced it, Mrs. McKinstry was slowly returning from a lugubrious recital of her moods and feelings at the parson's. As she crossed the barren flat and reached the wooded upland midway between the school-house and the ranche, she saw before her the old familiar figure of Seth Davis lounging on the trail. In her habitual loyalty to her husband's feuds she would probably have stalked defiantly past him, notwithstanding her late regrets at the broken engagement, but Seth began to advance awkwardly toward her. In fact, he had noticed the tall, gaunt, plaid-shawled and holland-bonneted figure approaching and had waited for it.

As he seemed intent upon getting in her way she stopped and raised her right hand warningly before her. In spite of the shawl and sun-bonnet, suffering had implanted a rude runic dignity to her attitude. "Words that hev to be took back, Seth Davis," she said hastily, "hev passed between you and my man. Out of my way, then, that I may pass too."

"Not much betwixt you and me, Aunt Rachel," he said with slouching deprecation, using the old household title by which he had familiarly known her. "I've nothin' agin you—and I kin prove it by wot I'm yer to say. And I ain't trucklin' to yer for myself, for ez far ez me and your'n ez concerned," he continued, with a malevolent glance, "thar ain't gold enough in Caleforny to make the weddin' ring that could hitch me and Cress together. I want to tell you that you're bein' played; that you're being fooled and bamboozled and honeyfogled. That while you're groanin' at class-meeting and Hiram's quo'llin' with Dad, and Joe Masters waitin' round to pick up any bone that's thrown him, that sneakin', hypocritical Yankee schoolmaster is draggin' your daughter to h—l with him on the sly."

"Quit that, Seth Davis," said Mrs. McKinstry sternly, "or be man enough to tell it to a man. That's Hiram's business to know."

"And what if he knows it well enough and winks at it? What if he's willin' enough to truckle to it, to curry favour with them sneakin' Yanks?" said Seth malignantly.

A spasm of savage conviction seized Mrs. McKinstry. But it was more from her jealous fears of her husband's disloyalty than concern for her daughter's transgression. Nevertheless, she said desperately:

"It's a lie. Where are your proofs?"

"Proofs?" returned Seth. "Who is it sneaks around the school-house to have private talks with the school-master, and edges him on with Cressy afore folks? Your husband. Who goes sneakin' off every arternoon with that same cantin' hound of a schoolmaster? Your daughter. Who's been carryin' on together, and hidin' thick enough to be ridden out on a rail together? Your daughter and the schoolmaster. Proofs? —ask anybody. Ask the children. Look yar—you Johnny—come here."

He had suddenly directed his voice to a blackberry bush near the trail, from which the curly head of Johnny Filgee had just appeared. That home-returning infant painfully disengaged himself, his slate, his books, and his small dinner-pail half-filled with fruit as immature as himself, and came toward them sideways.

"Yer's a dime, Johnny, to get some candy," said Seth, endeavoring to distort his passion-set face into a smile.

Johnny Filgree's small, berry-stained palm promptly closed over the coin.

"Now, don't lie.—Where's Cressy?"

"Kithin' her bo."

"Good boy. What bean?"

Johnny hesitated. He had once seen the schoolmaster and Cressy together; he had heard it whispered by the other children that they loved each other. But looking at Seth and Mrs. McKinstry he felt that something more tremendous than this stupid fact was required of him for grown-up people, and being honest and imaginative he determined that it should be worth the money.

"Speak up, Johnny, don't be afeard to tell."

Johnny was not "afeard"—he was only thinking. He had it! He remembered that he had just seen his paragon—the brilliant Stacey coming from the boundary woods. What more poetical and startlingly effective than to connect him with Cressy. He replied promptly:

"Mihther Thtathy. He gived her a watch and ring of truly gold. Goin' to be married at Thacramento."

"You lyin' limb," said Seth, seizing him roughly. But Mrs. McKinstry interposed.

"Let that brat go," she said, with gleaming eyes, "I want to talk to you." Seth released Johnny. "It's a trick," he said," he's bin put up to it by that Ford."

But Johnny, after securing a safe vantage behind the blackberry bush, determined to give them another trial—with facts.

"I know more'n that," he called out.

"Git—you measly pup," said Seth savagely.

"I know Theriff Briggth, he rid over the boundary with a lot o' men and horthes," said Johnny, with that hurried delivery with which he was able to estop interruption. "Theed 'em go by. Maur Harrithon theth his dad's goin' to chuck out ole McKinthtry. Hooray."

Mrs. McKinstry turned her dark face sharply on Seth. "What's that he sez?"

"Nothin' but children's gassin'" he answered, meeting her eyes with an evil consciousness half loutish, half defiant, "and ef it war true, it would only serve Hiram McKinstry right."

She laid her hand upon his shoulder with swift suspicion. "Out o' my way, Seth Davis," she said suddenly, pushing him aside. "Ef this ez any underhanded work of yours, you'll pay for it."

She strode past him in the direction of Johnny, but at the approach of the tall woman with the angry eyes, the boy flew. She hesitated a moment, turned again with a threatening wave of the hand to Seth, and started off rapidly in the direction of the boundary.

She had not placed so much faith in the boy's story as in the vague revelation of evil in Davis's manner. If there was any "cussedness" afoot, Seth, convinced of Cressy's unfaithfulness, and with no further hope of any mediation from the parents, would know it. Unless Hiram had been warned, he was still lulled in his fatuous dream of civilization. At that time he and his men were in the tules with the stock; to be satisfied, she herself must go to the boundary.

She reached the ridge of the cottonwoods and sycamores, and a few hundred yards further brought her to the edge of that gentle southern slope which at last sank into the broad meadow of the debatable ground. In spite of Stacey's invidious criticism of its intrinsic value, this theater of savage dissension, violence and bloodshed was by some irony of nature a pastoral landscape of singular and peaceful repose. The soft glacis stretching before her was in spring cerulean with lupins, and later starred with mariposas. The meadow was transversely crossed by a curving line of alders that indicated a rare watercourse, of which in the dry season only a single pool remained to flash back the unvarying sky. There had been no attempt at cultivation of this broad expanse; wild oats, mustard and rank grasses left it a tossing sea of turbulent and variegated color, whose tossing waves rode high enough to engulf horse and rider in their choking depths. Even the traces of human struggle, the uprooted stakes, scattered fence rails and empty post-holes were forever hidden under these billows of verdure. Midway of the field and near the watercourse arose McKinstry's barn—the solitary human structure whose rude, misshapen, bulging sides and swallow-haunted eaves bursting with hay from the neighboring pasture, seemed however only an extravagant growth of the prolific soil. Mrs. McKinstry gazed at it anxiously. There was no sign of life or movement near or around it; it stood as it had always stood, deserted and solitary, but turning her eyes to the right, beyond the watercourse, she could see a slight regular undulation of the grassy sea and what appeared to be the drifting on its surface of half a dozen slouched hats in the direction of the alders. There was no longer any doubt; a party from the other side was approaching the border.

A shout and the quick galloping of hoofs behind her sent a thrill of relief to her heart. She had barely time to draw aside as her husband and his followers swept past her down the slope. But it needed not his furious cry, "The Harrisons hev sold us out," to tell her that the crisis had come.

She held her breath as the cavalcade diverged, and in open order furiously approached the watercourse, and she could see a sudden check and hesitation in the movement in the meadow at that unlooked-for onset. Then she thought of the barn. It would be a rallying point for them if driven back—a tower of defense if besieged. There were arms secreted beneath the hay for such an emergency. She would run there, swing to its open doors, and get ready to barricade them.

She ran crouchingly, seeking the higher grasses and brambles of the ridges to escape observation from the meadow until she could descend upon the barn from the rear. She threw aside her impeding shawl; her brown holland sun-bonnet torn off her head and hanging by its strings from her shoulders, let her coarse silver-threaded hair stream like a mane over her back; her face and hands were bleeding from thorns and whitened by dust. But she struggled on fiercely like some hunted animal until she reached the descending trail, when, letting herself go blindly, only withheld by the long grasses she clutched at wildly on either side, she half fell, half stumbled down the slope and emerged beside the barn, breathless and exhausted.

But what a contrast was there! For an instant she could scarcely believe that she had left the ridge with her husband's savage outcry in her ears, and in her eyes the swift vision of his furious cavalcade. The boundary meadow was hidden by the soft lines of graceful willows in whose dim recesses the figures of the passionate horsemen seemed to have melted forever. There was nothing now to interrupt the long vista of peaceful beauty that stretched before her through this lonely hollow to the distant sleeping hills. The bursting barn in the foreground, heaped with grain that fringed its eaves and bristled from its windows and doors until its unlovely bulk was hidden in trailing feathery outlines; the gentle flutter of wings and soothing twitter of swallows and jays around its open rafters, and the drifting shadows of a few circling crows above it; the drowsy song of bees on the wild mustard that half hid its walls with yellow bloom; the sound of faintly-trickling water in one of those old Indian-hunted springs that had given its name to the locality; all these for an instant touched the senses of this hard, fierce woman as she had not been touched since she was a girl. For one brief moment the joys of peace and that matured repose that never had been hers, flashed upon her; but with it came the savage consciousness that even now it was being wrested away, and the thought fired her blood again. She listened eagerly for a second in the direction of the meadow; there was no report of firearms—there wes yet time to prepare the barn for defense. She ran to the front of the building and seized the latch of the half-closed door. A little feminine cry that was half a laugh came from within, with the rapid rustle of a skirt, and as the door swung open a light figure vanished through the rear window. The slanting sunlight falling in the shadowed interior disclosed only the single, erect figure of the schoolmaster —John Ford.

The first confusion and embarrassment of an interrupted rendezvous that had colored Ford's cheeks, gave way to a look of alarm as he caught sight of the bleeding face and disheveled figure of Mrs. McKinstry. She saw it. To her distorted fancy it seemed only a proof of deeper guilt. Without a word she closed the heavy door behind her and swung the huge cross-bar unaided to its place. She then turned and confronted him, wiping the dust from her face and arms with her torn and dangling sun-bonnet in a way that recalled her attitude on the first day he had met her.

"That was Cress with ye?" she said.

He hesitated, still gazing at her in wonder.

"Don't lie."

He started. "I don't propose to," he retorted indignantly. "It was—"

"I don't ask ye how long this yer's bin goin on," she said, pointing to Cressy's sun-bonnet, a few books and a scattered nosegay of wild flowers lying on the hay, "and I don't want to know. In five minutes either her father will be here or them hell-hounds of Harrison's, who've sold him out, will swarm round this barn to git possesshun. Ef this yer"—she again pointed contemptuously to the objects just indicated—"means that you're cast your lot with us and kalkilate to take our bitter with our sweet, ye'll lift up that stack of hay and bring out a gun to help defend it. Ef you're meanin' anythin' else, Ford, you'll hide yourself in that hay till Hiram comes and has time enough to attend to ye."

"And if I choose to do neither?" he said haughtily.

She looked at him in unutterable scorn. "There's the winder—take it while there's time, afore I bar it. Ef you see Hiram, tell him ye left an old woman behind ye to defend the place whar you uster hide with her darter."

Before he could reply there was a distant report, followed almost directly by another. With a movement of irritation he walked to the window, turned and looked at her—bolted it and came back.

"Where's that gun?" he said almost rudely.

"I reckon'd that would fetch ye," she said dragging away the hay and disclosing a long trough-like box covered with tarpaulin. It proved to contain powder, shot and two guns. He took one.

"I suppose I may know what I am fighting for?" he said dryly.

"Ye might say 'Cress' ef they"—indicating the direction of the reports—"happen to ask ye," she returned with equal sobriety. "Jess now ye kin take your stand up thar in the loft, and see what's comin'."

He did not linger, but climbed to the place assigned him, glad to escape the company of the woman whom, at that moment, he almost hated. In his unreflecting passion for Cressy, he had always evaded the thought of this relationship or propinquity; the mother had recalled it to him in a way that imperiled even his passion for the daughter; his mind was wholly preoccupied with the idiotic, exasperating and utterly hopeless position that had been forced upon him. In the bitterness of his spirit his sense of personal danger was so far absorbed that he speculated on the chance bullet in the melee that might end his folly and relieve him of responsibility. Shut up in a barn with a furious woman, in a lawless defense of questionable rights—with the added consciousness that an equally questionable passion had drawn him into it, and that she knew it—death seemed to offer the only escape from the explanation he could never give. If another sting could have been added it was the absurd conviction that Cressy would not appreciate his sacrifice, but was perhaps even at that moment calmly congratulating herself on the felicitousness of the complication in which she had left him.

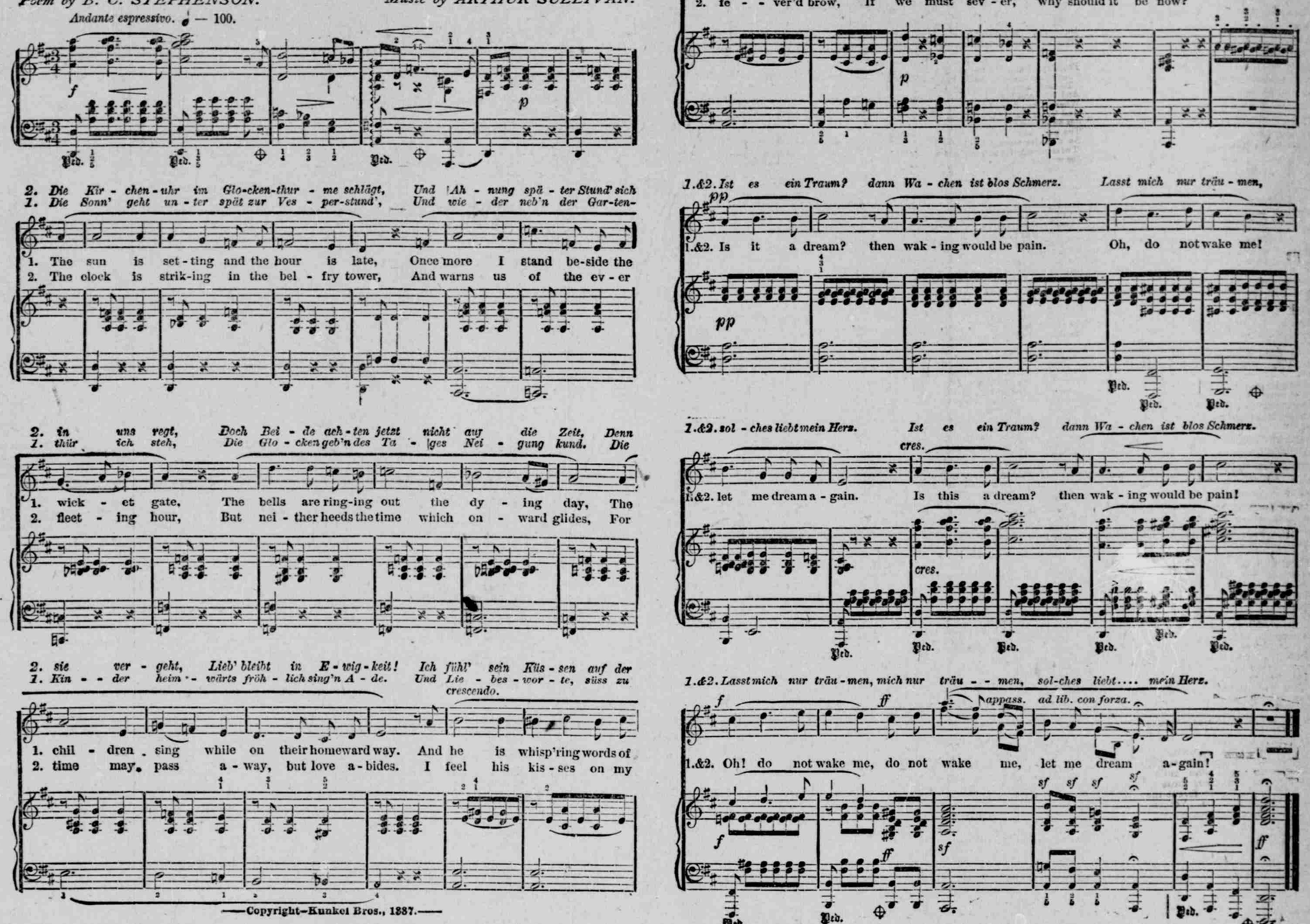
[TO BE CONTINUED.]

LET ME DREAM AGAIN.

SOLCH TRÆUMEN LIEBT MEIN HERZ.

Poem by B. C. STEPHENSON. *Music by ARTHUR SULLIVAN.*

Andante espressivo. ♩ = 100.



—Copyright—Kunkel Bros., 1887.—

A Man to Be Afraid Of.

New York Sun.

Brown (to friend from out of town)—Let us cross over, Jack; there's a tailor on the next block whom I don't want to see.

Friend—Like all you New Yorkers—afraid to meet your tailor.

Brown—Great Scott, man! I don't wear a hundred dollars' worth of clothes a year. It's my wife's tailor; he's the only man in New York I'm afraid of.

AN OLD CONTROVERSY.

The Bible in the Schools, and the Demand of Catholics for Public Funds.

Brooklyn Standard-Union.

Only the overshadowing influence of the Presidential election has prevented general public attention from being centered on a controversy which commenced in Boston some time ago, and is being eagerly taken up all over the country. The subject discussed is not new, and, moreover, the chief question involved has been settled long ago. An attack on the public schools by any sect or party would have about as much chance of success as an attack on the Constitution of the United States. That is not to say, however, that any of the eternal vigilance which is the price of our religious as well as of our civil liberty, should be abated, or that the first beginnings of any attempt to undermine the public school system or to join church and State should not be crushed out. But within the line of absolute non-sectarianism in the public schools there is room for an honest difference of opinion as to whether the Bible should or should not be read, and as to whether certain text-books touching on religious practices should or should not be used in teaching the pupils. It was such a difference of opinion in Boston over Swinton's history that revived the subject of the relations of our Catholic fellow-citizens to the public schools, and started a controversy which, though old and the cause of much rancorous discussion and ill feeling in the past, will, if temperately carried on, result in great good. The objection of the Catholics to Swinton's history was that it contained facts, or alleged facts, going to show that in times past the Catholic Church sold indulgences for money. The Catholic Church has always strenously denied this charge, and having another explanation to offer of the reasons for which indulgences were granted, naturally objected to Catholic children being compelled to use a book which cast discredit on their church. It was well enough to throw out the sectarian text-book, and perhaps to punish in some form the teacher who used it again after the book had been forbidden by the school board. But the matter was not allowed to rest at that point. The women interfered, and as the gentler sex are always allowed to vote for school commissioners in Boston, the Catholic and Protestant women took sides, and each side is now engaged in an attempt to get possession of the school board. It is a most unfortunate contest, that will serve its only good purpose if it helps to emphasize the fact that even the suspicion of sectarianism must be excluded from the public schools.

The Boston struggle has attracted wide attention, and, as usual, the extremists on both sides are more vigorous than helpful in the discussion of the subject. Bishop Corrigan, a few days ago, at a meeting of Catholics in New York, made a speech in which he demanded that $9,000,000 of the public money be given to the Catholic parochial schools. Archbishop Corrigan was present and appeared heartily to approve of this absurd demand. To that extent he may be said to favor a war on the public schools, because it would not be logical to ask $9,000,000 or any other sum of public money for parochial schools if he did not claim that the public schools were deficient in some important respects. He does make such a claim, because he insists that no schools fulfill the end for which schools are established unless religion is taught in them. It is doubtful, however, if his opposition to the public schools goes any further. To give public money to a sectarian school would be to make a sectarian public school; to permit sectarianism to enter the public schools would be to destroy the public school system, and the veriest tyro can tell that the only way the public-school system can be broken up in America is by breaking up first the American Republic.

Prince Bismarck, D. D.

Boston Globe.

One of the most refreshing jokes of the season is the conferring of the degree of doctor of divinity upon Bismarck by the University of Giessen. It is no wonder that it scandalizes the pietistic element of Germany grievously, but the average wordly-minded German all over the world is indulging in a broad grin at the peculiarly humorous satire involved in the latest feat of this man of unbounded resources and infinite audacity. It is said that Bismarck is very seldom seen in the Imperial Lutheran Church in Berlin, which the royal family attend, the balcony of which has pillars labeled with the designation of each home and foreign minister resident in Berlin. He has on a few occasions publicly excused himself for never "going to meetin'" by saying that he was piously engaged in the private devotions of his closet, while others found it more agreeable to worship publicly. More than once has Berlin "giggled" aloud at this imitation of the chapel scene in Richard III. In the appearance of Prince Bismarck, D. D., diplomacy has surely scored the greatest triumph of the nineteenth century, though it wears the complexion of something strongly akin to blasphemy among Germans of serious religious feeling.