The Mystery of Agatha Webb.

By Anna Katharine Green.

Author of "The Leavenworth Case," "Lost Man's Lane," "Hand and Ring," Etc., Etc.

Copyright, 1900, by Anna Katharine Green.

CHAPTER VI.

RENUNCIATION.

Mr. Sutherland returned home. As he entered the broad hall he met his son Frederick. There was a look on the young man's face such as he had not seen there in years.

"Father," faltered the youth, "may I have a few words with you?"

The father nodded kindly, though it is likely he would have much preferred his breakfast, and the young man led him into a little sitting room littered with the faded garlands and other tokens of the preceding night's festivities.

"I have an apology to make," Frederick began, "or rather I have your forgiveness to ask. For years," he went on, stumbling over his words, though he gave no evidence of a wish to restrain them, "for years I have gone contrariwise to your wishes and caused my mother's heart to ache and you to wish I had never been born to be a curse to you and her."

He had emphasized the word mother and spoke altogether with force and deep intensity. Mr. Sutherland stood petrified. He had long ago given up this lad as lost.

"I—I wish to change. I wish to be as great a pride to you as I have been a shame and a dishonor. I may not succeed at once, but I am in earnest, and if you will give me your hand"—

The old man's arms were around the young man's shoulders at once.

"Frederick!" he cried, "my Frederick!"

"Do not make me too much ashamed," murmured the youth, very pale and strangely discomposed. "With no excuse for my past, I suffer intolerable apprehension in regard to my future, lest my good intentions should fail or my self control not hold out. But the knowledge that you are acquainted with my resolve and regard it with an undeserved sympathy may suffice to sustain me, and I should certainly be a base poltroon if I should disappoint you or her twice."

He paused, drew himself from his father's arms and glanced almost solemnly out of the window. "I swear that I will henceforth act as if she were still alive and watching me."

There was strange intensity in his manner. Mr. Sutherland regarded him with amazement. He had seen him in every mood natural to a reckless man, but never in so serious a one, never with a look of awe or purpose in his face. It gave him quite a new idea of Frederick.

"Yes," the young man went on, raising his right hand, but not removing his eyes from the distant prospect on which they were fixed: "I swear that I will henceforth do nothing to discredit her memory. Outwardly and inwardly I will act as though her eye was still upon me and she could again suffer grief at my failure or thrill at my success."

A portrait of Mrs. Sutherland painted when Frederick was a lad of 10 hung within a few feet of him as he spoke. He did not glance at it, but Mr. Sutherland did and with a look as if he expected to behold a responsive light beam from those pathetic features.

"She loved you very dearly," was the slow and earnest comment. "We have both loved you much more deeply than you have ever seemed to realize, Frederick."

"I believe it," responded the young man, turning with an expression of calm resolve to meet his father's eye. "As proof that I am no longer insensible to your affection I have made up my mind to forego for your sake one of the dearest wishes of my heart. Father"—he hesitated before he spoke the word, but spoke it firmly at last—"am I right in thinking you would not like Miss Page for a daughter?"

"Like my housekeeper's niece to take the place in this house once occupied by Marietta Sutherland? Frederick, I have always thought too well of you to believe you would carry your forgetfulness of me so far as that, even when I saw that you were influenced by her attractions."

"You did not do justice to my selfishness, father. I did mean to marry her, but I have given up living solely for myself, and she could never help me to live for others. Father, Amabel Page must not remain in this house to cause division between you and me."

"I have already intimated to her the advisability of her quitting a home where she is no longer respected," the old gentleman declared. "She leaves on the 10:45 train. Her conduct this morning at the house of Mrs. Webb—who, perhaps, you do not know was most cruelly and foully murdered last night—was such as to cause comment and make her an undesirable adjunct to any gentleman's family."

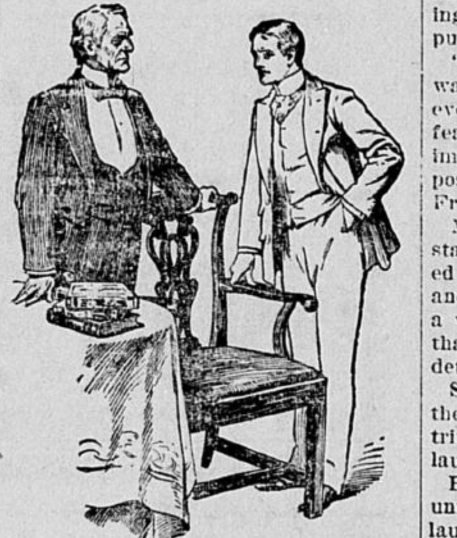
Frederick paled. Something in these words had caused him a great shock. Mr. Sutherland was fond enough to believe that it was the news of this extraordinary woman's death. But his son's words, as soon as he could find any, showed that his mind was running on Amabel, whom he perhaps had found it difficult to connect even in the remotest way with crime.

"She at this place of death? How could that be? Who would take a young girl there?"

The father, experiencing perhaps more compassion for this soon to be disillusionized lover than he thought it incumbent upon him to show, answered shortly, but without any compromise of the unhappy truth:

"She went. She was not taken. No one, not even myself, could keep her back after she had heard that a murder had been committed in the town. She even intruded into the house and when ordered out of the room of death took up her stand in the yard in front, where she remained until she had the opportunity of pointing out to us a stain of blood on the grass which might otherwise have escaped our attention."

"Impossible!" Frederick's eye was staring. He looked like a man struck dumb by surprise or fear. "Amabel



"Impossible! Amabel do this? You are mocking me, sir."

do this? You are mocking me, sir, or I may be dreaming, which may the good God grant."

His father, who had not looked for so much emotion, eyed his son in surprise, which rapidly changed to alarm as the young man faltered and fell back against the wall.

"You are ill, Frederick. You are really ill. Let me call down Mrs. Harcourt. But no, I cannot summon her. She is this girl's aunt."

Frederick made an effort and stood up.

"Do not call anybody," he entreated. "I expect to suffer some in casting this fascinating girl out of my heart. But I will conquer the weakness ultimately. Indeed I will. As for her interest in Mrs. Webb's death"—how low his voice sank, and how he trembled—"she may have been better friends with her than we had any reason to suppose. I can think of no other motive for her conduct. Admiration for Mrs. Webb and horror"—

"Breakfast is served, gentlemen," cried a thrilling voice behind them. Amabel Page stood smiling in the doorway.

CHAPTER VII.

A CHOICE BETWEEN WEDLOCK AND THE GALLOWS.

"Wait a moment. I must speak to you."

It was Amabel who was holding Frederick back. She had caught him by the arm as he was about leaving the room with his father, and he felt himself obliged to stop and listen.

"I start for Springfield today," she announced. "I have another relative there living at the —— house. When shall I have the pleasure of seeing you in my new home?"

"Never." It was said regretfully and yet with a certain brusqueness occasioned perhaps by overexcited feeling. "Hard as it is for me to say it, Amabel, it is but just for me to tell you that after our parting here today we will meet only as strangers. Friendship between us would be mockery, and any closer relationship has become impossible."

It had cost him an immense effort to say these words, and he expected, fondly expected, I must admit, to see her color change and her head droop. But instead of this she looked at him steadily for a moment, then slipped her hand down his arm till she reached his palm, which she pressed with sudden warmth, drawing him into the room as she did so and shutting the door behind them. He was speechless, for she never had looked so handsome or so glowing. Instead of showing depression or humiliation even she confronted him with a smile more dangerous than any display of grief could have been, for it contained what it had hitherto lacked, positive and irresistible admiration. Her words were equally dangerous.

"I kiss your hand, as the Spaniards say." And she almost did so, with a bend of her head which just allowed him to catch a glimpse of two startling dimples.

He was astounded. He thought he knew this woman well, but at this moment she was as incomprehensible to him as if he had never made a study of her caprices and ever shifting expressions.

"I am sensible of the honor," said he, "but hardly understand how I have earned it."

Still that incomprehensible look of admiration continued to illumine her face.

"I did not know I could ever think so well of you," she declared. "If you do not take care, I shall end by loving you some day."

"Ah," he ejaculated, his face contracting with sudden pain, "your love, then, is but a potentiality! Very well, Amabel, keep it so and you will be spared much misery. As for me, who have not been as wise as you"—

"Frederick!" She had come so near he did not have the strength to finish. Her face, with its indefinable charm, was raised to his, as she dropped these words one by one from her lips in lingering cadence. "Frederick—do you love me, then, so very much?"

He was angry; possibly because he felt his resolution failing him. "You know!" he hotly began, stepping back. Then with a sudden burst of feeling that was almost like prayer he resumed: "Do not tempt me, Amabel. I have trouble enough without lamenting the failure of my first steadfast purpose."

"Ah," she said, stopping where she was, but drawing him toward her by every witchery of which her mobile features were capable, "your generous impulse has strengthened into a purpose, has it? Well, I'm not worth it, Frederick."

More and more astounded, understanding her less than ever, but charmed by looks that would have moved an anchorite, he turned his head away in a vain attempt to escape an influence that was so rapidly undermining his determination.

She saw the movement, recognized the weakness it bespoke, and in the triumph of her heart allowed a low laugh to escape her.

Her voice, as I have before said, was unmusical though effective, but her laugh was deliciously sweet, especially when it was restrained to a mere ripple, as now.

"You will come to Springfield soon," she avowed, slipping from before him so as to leave the way to the door open.

"Amabel!" His voice was strangely husky, and the involuntary opening and shutting of his hands revealed the emotion under which he was laboring. "Do you love me? You have acknowledged it now and then, but always as if you did not mean it. Now you acknowledge that you may some day and this time as if you did mean it. What is the truth? Tell me without coquetry or dissembling, for I am in dead earnest, and"— He paused, choked and turned toward the window, where but a few minutes before he had taken that solemn oath. The remembrance of it seemed to come back with the movement. Flushing with a new agitation, he wheeled upon her sharply. "No, no," he prayed; "say nothing. If you swore you did not love me, I should not believe it, and if you swore that you did I should only find it harder to repeat what must again be said, that a union between us can never take place. I have given my solemn promise to"—

"Well, well! Why do you stop? Am I so hard to talk to that the words will not leave your lips?"

"I have promised my father I will never marry you. He feels that he has grounds of complaint against you, and as I owe him everything"—

He stopped, amazed. She was looking at him intently, that same low laugh still on her lips.

"Tell the truth," she whispered. "I know to what extent you consider your father's wishes. You think you ought not to marry after what took place last night. Frederick, I like you for this evidence of consideration on your part, but do not struggle too relentlessly with your conscience. I can forgive much more in you than you think, and if you really love me"—

"Stop! Let us understand each other." He had turned mortally pale and met her eyes with something akin to alarm. "What do you allude to in speaking of last night? I did not know there was anything said by us in our talk together"—

"I do not allude to our talk."

"Or—or in the one dance we had"—

"Frederick, a dance is innocent."

The word seemed to strike him with the force of a blow.

"Innocent," he repeated, "innocent," becoming paler still as the full weight of her meaning broke gradually upon him.

"I followed you into town," she whispered, coming closer and breathing the words into his ear. "But what I saw you do there will not keep me from obeying you if you say: 'Follow me wherever I go, Amabel. Henceforth our lives are one.'"

"My God!"

It was all he said, but it seemed to create a gulf between them. In the silence that followed the evil spirit latent beneath her beauty began to make itself evident even in the smile which no longer called into view the dimples which belong to guileless mirth, while upon his face after the first paralyzing effect of her words had passed there appeared an expression of manly resistance that betrayed a virtue which as yet had never appeared in his selfish and altogether reckless life.

That this was more than a passing impulse he presently made evident by lifting his hand and pushing her slowly back.

"I do not know what you saw me do," said he, "but whatever it was it can make no difference in our relations."

Her whisper, which had been but a breath before, became scarcely audible.

"I did not pause at the gate you entered," she said. "I went in after you."

A gasp of irresistible feeling escaped him, but he did not take his eyes from her face.

"It was a long time before you came out," she went on, "but before that time the shade of a certain window was thrust aside and"—

"Hush!" he commanded, in uncontrollable passion, pressing his hand with impulsive energy against her mouth. "Not another word of that or I shall forget you are a woman or that I have ever loved you."

Her eyes, which were all she had remaining to plead with, took on a peculiar look of quiet satisfaction and power. Seeing it, he let his hand fall and for the first time began to regard her with anything but a lover's eyes.

"I was the only person in sight at that time," she continued. "You have nothing to fear from the world at large."

"Fear?"

The word made its own echo. She had no need to emphasize it even by a smile. But she watched him as it sunk into his consciousness with an intentness it took all his strength to sustain. Suddenly her bearing and expression changed. The few remains of sweetness in her face vanished, and even the allurement which often lasts when the sweetness is gone disappeared in the energy which now took possession of her whole threatening and inflexible personality.

"Marry me," she cried, "or I will proclaim you to be the murderer of Agatha Webb!"

She had seen the death of love in his eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOLLOW TREE.

Frederick Sutherland was a man of finer mental balance than he himself perhaps had ever realized. After the first few moments of stupefaction following the astounding alternative which had been given him he broke out with the last sentence she probably expected to hear.

"What do you hope from a marriage with me that to attain your wishes you thus sacrifice every womanly instinct?"

She met him on his own ground.

"What do I hope?" She actually glowed with the force of her secret desire. "Can you ask a poor girl like me, born in a tenement house, but with tastes and ambitions such as are usually only given to those who can gratify them? I want to be the rich Mr. Sutherland's daughter, acknowledged or unacknowledged the wife of one who can enter any house in Boston as an equal. With a position like that I can rise to anything. I feel that I have the natural power and aptitude. I have felt it since I was a small child."

"And for that"— he began.

"And for that," she broke in, "I am quite willing to overlook any dark spot on your record. Confident that you will never repeat the risk of last night, I am ready to share the burden of your secret through life. If you treat me well, I am sure I can make it light for you."

With a quick flush, an increase of self assertion she had probably not anticipated, he faced her with a desperate resolution that showed how handsome he could be if his soul once got control of his body.

"Woman," he cried, "they were right. You are little less than a devil."

Did she regard it as a compliment? Her smile would seem to say so.

"A devil that understands men," she answered with that slow dip of her dimples that made her smile so dangerous. "You will not hesitate long over this matter; a week perhaps."

"I shall not hesitate at all. Seeing you as you are makes my course easy. You will never share any burden with me as my wife."

Still she was not abashed.

"It is a pity," she whispered. "It would have saved you such unnecessary struggle. But a week is not long to wait. I am certain of you then. This day week at 12 o'clock, Frederick."

He seized her by the arm and, lost to everything but his rage, shook her with a desperate hand.

"Do you mean it?" he cried, a sudden horror showing itself in his face, notwithstanding his efforts to conceal it.

"I mean it so much," she assured him, "that before I came home just now I paid a visit to the copse over the way. A certain hollow tree where

"Woman, they were right; you are little less than a devil."

you and I have held more than one tryst conceals within its depths a package containing over $1,000. Frederick, I hold your life in my hands."

The grasp with which he held her relaxed. A mortal despair settled upon his features, and recognizing the impossibility of further concealing the effect of her words upon him, he sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands. She viewed him with an air of triumph, which brought back some of her beauty. When she spoke, it was to say:

"If you wish to join me in Springfield before the time I have set, well and good. I am willing that the time of our separation should be shortened, but it must not be lengthened by so much as a day. Now, if you will excuse me, I will go and pack my trunks."

He shuddered. Her voice seemed to cut through him like a knife.

Drawing herself up, she looked down on him with a strange mixture of passion and elation.

"You need fear no indiscretion on my part so long as our armistice lasts," said she. "No one can drag the truth from me while any hope remains of your doing your duty by me in the way I have suggested."

And still he did not move.

"Frederick."

Was it her voice that was thus murmuring his name? Can the tiger snarl one moment and coo the next?

"Frederick, I have a final word to say, a last farewell. Up to this hour I have endured your attentions, or, let us say, accepted them, for I always found you handsome and agreeable, if not the master of my heart. But now, now it is love that I feel, love. And love with me is no fancy, but a passion. Do you hear? A passion which will make life a heaven or hell for the man who has inspired it. You should have thought of this when you opposed me."

And with a look in which was blended something of the light and darkness of the two alternatives she had promised him she bent and imprinted a kiss upon his forehead. The next moment she was gone.

Or so he thought. But when, after an interval of nameless recoil, he rose and attempted to stagger from the place, he discovered that she had been detained in the hall by two or three men who had just come in by the front door.

"Is this Miss Page?" they were asking.

"Yes, I am Miss Page—Amabel Page," she replied, with suave politeness. "If you have any business with me, state it quickly, for I am about to leave town."

"That is what we wish to prevent," declared a tall, thin young man who seemed to take the lead. "Until the inquest has been held over the remains of Mrs. Webb, Coroner Talbot wishes you to regard yourself as a possible witness."

"Me?" she cried, with an admirable gesture of surprise and a wide opening of her brown eyes, that made her look like an astonished child. "What have I got to do with it?"

"You pointed out a certain spot of blood on the grass, and—well, the coroner's orders have to be obeyed, miss. You cannot leave the town without running the risk of arrest."

"Then I will stay in it," she smiled. "I have no liking for arrests," and the glint of her eye rested for a moment on Frederick. "Mr. Sutherland," she continued as that gentleman appeared at the dining room door, "I shall have to impose upon your hospitality for a few days longer. These men here inform me that my innocent interest in pointing out to you that spot of blood on Mrs. Webb's lawn has awakened some curiosity and that I am wanted as a witness by the coroner."

Mr. Sutherland with a quick stride lessened the distance between himself and these unwelcome intruders. "The coroner's wishes are paramount just now," said he, but the look he gave his son was not soon forgotten by the spectators.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Belaying His Jaws.

Shark stories, with some reason, are commonly received with incredulity. A well authenticated anecdote, however, is told of Dr. Frederic Hill, an English surgeon of distinction.

A man fell overboard in the Indian ocean and almost into a shark's mouth. Hill, who was standing close to the rail, grabbed a belaying pin and without hesitation jumped to save the sailor.

The great brute was just turning on his back to bite, when Hill drove the belaying pin right through both jaws. Both men were got on board again unharmed.

"Perhaps that fellow won't want another toothpick. Has any one got a clean shirt to lend? This was my last," were the only words of the rescuer.

The Oyster.

The oyster is as fixed and sedentary as the potato, and its cultivation is just as easy. In Europe its propagation has been reduced to a scien[tific] basis, but in this country only a [be]ginning has been made.

An oyster is ready for m[arket] in about five years. The bival[ves] have so much to contend with th[at] perhaps only one in 2,000,000 lives [to] grow up and be eaten by human [bei]ngs.—Chicago Times-Herald.

Not to Be Enc[our]aged.

"What do you thin[k of] a man who regularly carries h[is b]usiness home with him?"

"Well, that depends. Now, if a man's business is to [s]ell liq[uo]r, for instance, it isn't just t[h]e thing [f]or him to take a great deal of it hom[e] with him every night."—Boston Transcript.

No Reciprocity.

"Annie Nibbins i[s] the meanes[t kind] of a gossip."

"What variety is [t]hat?"

"She's the kind [t]hat doesn't [tell any]thing herself, bu[t] gets you [to], you know."—Chicago Record.

A Candid Opini[on].

An old ser[va]nt was aske[d by an art]ist what sh[e] thought of [his] portrait, wh[ic]h he was p[...]

She looked at it critica[lly ...] have made [h]im a trifle [...] may be, b[u]t if ye ha[...] it."—Pick-Me-Up.

FORTUNES

Are made through simple ideas. Write us. We help develop the idea, secure the invention and assist in selling the patent. No attorney's fees are required until the patent is granted.

Inventors are put to no expense as to the preparation or prosecution of their case outside the cost of the Patent office drawings.

FREE. Any person may obtain our card in the form of a neat, serviceable wallet free; large enough to hold bills in a flat condition. Write to

SUES & CO. PATENT LAWYERS, BEE BUILDING, OMAHA, NEBR. LONG DISTANCE TEL. 1623.

DENISON BRICK WORKS

High grade building brick Repressed brick on hand. The use of improved machinery makes our brick of the best durable quality. For our prices address

C. GREEN, Prop. DENISON, IOWA.

ANNOUNCEMENTS ILLINOIS CENTRAL R. R.

Mardi Gras AT NEW ORLEANS

for the present year will be held on February 19, for which occasion tickets will be sold to New Orleans from stations on the Illinois Central at very low rates on February 11 to 17, with final return limit to March 7, 1901.

HOT SPRINGS ARKANSAS, VIA MEMPHIS

without change. The Illinois Central runs a through Pullman sleeping car daily between Chicago and Hot Springs, Ark., on its "Limited" leaving Chicago the evening, arriving Hot Springs the next noon.

CALIFORNIA

Through Pullman excursion sleeping cars; leave Chicago every Wednesday for Los Angeles and San Francisco via New Orleans and the southern route; leave Chicago every Friday for Los Angeles and San Francisco via Omaha and the scenic route.

FLORIDA

Through sleeping cars from Chicago, and from St. Louis, Nashville, Chattanooga, Atlanta, Jacksonville. These Jacksonville cars run over the well known Dixie Flyer Scenic Route via Lookout mountain, and leave Chicago and St. Louis every evening on the Central's fast "limited" vestibule trains for the south, and arrive at Nashville the next morning, at Chattanooga the next afternoon, at Atlanta early the next evening and at Jacksonville the next morning after departure. Connection made by Illinois Central train out of Peoria with the car from Chicago.

LOW RATE EXCURSIONS SOUTH AND WEST.

Twice each month on specific dates, the Illinois Central will at greatly reduced rates from points on its lines north of Cairo, round trip Homeseekers' Excursion tickets south to certain points reached by its lines in Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama. Also to certain points west and southwest in Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and Indian Territory. Particulars of your Illinois Central agents.

For a free copy of Homeseekers' Guide describing the advantages and resources of the south, address J. F. Merry, A. G. P. A. I. C. R. R., Dubuque, Ia. For information regarding lands in the famous Yazoo Valley of Mississippi, address E. P. Skene, Land Commissioner, Y. & M. V. R. R., Chicago.

HAMMOND, LA.

The [...]r department of the Illinois Central Company has just issued a new [...] "Hammond, La., as a Winter [...]" beautiful illustrated folder showing Resources of [...] winter attractions in and about [...] a few [...] which will be mailed free on [...] J. F. Merry, A. G. P. A. Ill. Ce[ntral ...] Dubuque, Iowa.

Particulars concerning all of the above can be had of agents [of the Illinois Cen]tral, or by addressing J. F. [Mer]ry, A. G. [P. A.,] Dubuque, Iowa.

Pen[n M]ual Life Insurance [...] ESTABLISHED 1847. [...] OF LIFE INSURANCE. [...] E. RUMSEY, Gen. Agts. Des Moines, Iowa. [...]man, - Local Agent, Denison.

[...] W. BAKER, [...Keros]ene and Gasolene [Deliv]ered at your homes at convenience. Always prompt and reliable. [...]NS FOR SALE!

[...]DING BARBER SHOP H. D. Lorentzen, Prop. Under First National Bank [...] Chairs All Work First-Class

CASH for acceptable ideas. State if patented. THE PATENT RECORD, Baltimore, Md. Subscription price of the PATENT RECORD $1.00 per annum. Samples free.