

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

IN DOUBLE HARNESS

By ANTHONY HOPE.

AUTHOR OF "DOLLY DIALOGUES," "PRISONER OF ZENDA," "RUPERT OF HENTZAN," ETC.

CHAPTER XXIII. A THING OF FBAR.

Grantley Imason had intended to go down to Milldean that same evening, but a summons from Tom Courtland reached him, couched in such terms that he could not hesitate to obey it. He sought Tom at his club the moment he received the message. Tom had been sent for to his own house in the morning, and had heard what had happened there. He had seen the wounded child and the other two terrified little creatures. Suzette Bligh gave him her account. The doctor told him that Sophy was no longer in danger, but that the matter was a grave one—a very serious shock and severe local injury; the child would recover with care and with quiet, but would always bear a mark of the wound, an ineffaceable scar. That was the conclusion, half good, half bad, reached after a night of doubt whether Sophy would not die from the violence and the shock.

"Did you see your wife?" Grantley asked.
"See her? I should kill her if I saw her," groaned Tom.
"But—but what's being done?"
"She's in her room—she's been there ever since it happened. Suzette's seen her—nobody else. Nobody else will go near her. Of course, while there was a doubt about Sophy—well, the doctor made it a condition that she should confine herself to her room till the thing took a definite turn. I hope she's frightened at last. I don't know what to do. The woman ought to be hanged, Grantley."

But wrath and horror at his wife were not the only feelings in Tom's mind; the way the thing had happened raised other thoughts. He was prostrate under the sense that the fury which had smitten poor little Sophy had been aimed at him; his acts had inspired and directed it. He had made his children's love for him a crime in their mother's eyes. All his excuses, both false and real, failed him now. His own share in the tragedy of his home was heavy and heinous in his eyes.

"I ought to have remembered the children," he kept repeating desperately. He ought to have stayed and fought the battle for and with them, however hard the battle was. But he had run away—to Mrs Bolton, and left them alone to endure the increased fury of Harriet's rage. "I've been a damned coward over it," he said, "and this is what comes of it, Grantley."

It was all true, Tom had not thought of the children. Even though he loved them, he had deserted them treacherously, because he had considered only his own wrongs, and had been wrapped up in his personal quarrel with his wife. What he had found unendurable himself he had left those helpless little creatures to endure. All the arguments which had seemed so strong to justify or to palliate his resort to the Bolton refuge sounded weak and mean to him now—and to Grantley, too, who had been used to rely on them, lightly accepting them with a man of the world's easy philosophy. His friends had almost encouraged Tom in his treacherous desertion of his children; they, too, had looked at nothing but the merits of his quarrel with Harriet, putting that by itself in a false isolation from the total life of the family, of which it was in truth an integral, indivisible part. So Grantley meditated as he listened to Tom's laments; and the meditation was not without meaning and light for him also.

Tom had a request to make of him

—that he would go round to the house and spend the evening there.

"I daren't trust myself near Harriet," he said, "and I'm uneasy with only the servants there. They're all afraid of her. She was cowed, Suzette says, while there was danger; but she may break out again—anything might start her again. If you could stay till she's safely in bed—"

"I'll stay all night, if necessary, old fellow," said Grantley, promptly.
"I'll take a weight off my mind—and I've got about enough to bear. I'm going to stay here, of course; so you'll know where to find me if I'm wanted, though I don't see what can happen now."

Terror brooded over the Courtlands' house. Grantley rejoiced to see how his coming did something to lift the cloud. The two children left Suzette's side (they loved her, but she seemed to them a defence all too frail), and came to him, standing on either side of his knee and putting their hands in his.

The listening, strained look passed out of their eyes as he talked to them. Presently little Vera climbed up and nestled on his knee, while Lucy leant against his shoulder, and he got them to prattle about happy things, old holidays and bygone treats, to which Tom had taken them. At last Lucy laughed merrily at some childish memory. The sound went straight to Grantley's heart; a great tenderness came upon him. As he kissed them his thoughts flew to his own little son—the child who had now begun to know love, to greet it and to ask for it. How these poor children prized even a decent kindness! Grantley seemed to himself to have done a fine day's work—as fine a day's work as he had ever done in his life—when he sent them off to bed with smiling lips and eyes relieved of dread.

"You won't go away to-night, will you?" Lucy whispered as she kissed him good-night.

"Of course, he's not going!" cried little Vera, bravely confident in the thought of her helplessness.

"No, I'll stay all night—all the whole night," Grantley promised.

He made his camp in the library on the ground floor, and there presently Suzette Bligh came to him. She gave a good account of the wounded child. Sophy slept; the capable, cheery woman who had come as nurse gave her courage to sleep.

"We must get her away to the seaside as soon as possible, and she'll get all right, I think, though there must be a mark always. And, of course, the permanent question remains. Isn't it all homeless, Mr Imason?"

"It's a terrible business for you to be involved in."

"Oh, I can only thank Heaven I was here! But for me I believe she'd have killed the child."

"What state is she in now?"

"I really don't know. She won't speak to me. She sits quite still, just staring at me. I try to stay with her, but it's too dreadful. I can't help hating her—and I think she knows it."

Grantley had had some experience of what it was like to come to know what people feel about you.

"I expect she does," he nodded.

"What will happen, Mr Imason?"

"I don't know—except that the children mustn't stay with her. Is she afraid of being prosecuted, do you think?"

"She hasn't said anything about it. No, she doesn't seem afraid; I don't think that her feeling. But—but her eyes look awful. When I had to tell her that the doctor had forbidden her to come near the children, and said he

would send the police into the house if she tried to go to them—well, I've never seen such an expression on any human face before. She looked like—like somebody in hell, Mr Imason!"

"Ah!" groaned Grantley, with a jerk of his head, as though he turned from a fearful spectacle.

"I've just been with her. I persuaded her to go to bed—she's not slept since it happened, I know—and got her to let me help her to undress. Her maid won't go to her; she's too frightened. I hope she'll go to sleep, or really I think she'll lose her senses." She paused and then asked: "Will this make any difference in—the proceedings?"

"Well, it gives Tom something to bargain with, doesn't it? But you can't tell with her. The ordinary motives may not appeal to her, any more than the natural feelings. I hope it may be possible to frighten her."

Anyhow, the children won't have to stay—you're sure of that?"

"We must try hard for that, anyhow," said Grantley.

But Tom had made even that more difficult, because he had considered only his own quarrel, and not thinking of the children, had run away to refuge with Mrs Bolton saving his own skin by treacherous flight.

Suzette bade Grantley good-night. She, too, must sleep, or her strength would fail.

"You'll keep the door open?" she asked. "And her room is just over this.

You'll hear if she moves, though I don't think she will. It is good of you, Mr Imason. We shall all sleep quietly tonight. Oh, but how tired you'll be!"

"Not I!" he smiled. "I've often sat up till daylight on less worthy occasions! You're the hero! You've come through this finely!"

Suzette's cheeks flushed at his praise. "I do love the poor children," she said, as Grantley pressed her hand.

He sat down to his vigil. The house became very still. Once or twice steps passed to and fro in the room above; then there was silence. In a quarter of an hour, perhaps, there were steps again; then another interval of quiet. This alternation of movement and rest went on for a long time. If Harriet Courtland slept, her sleep was broken. But presently Grantley ceased to mark the sound—ceased even to think of the Courtlands or of the house where he was. Led by the experiences of the day and by the feelings they had evoked, his thoughts took their way to Milldean, to his own home, to his wife and son. How nearly tragedy had come there, too! Nay, was it yet gone? Was not its shadow still over the house? And why? He looked back again at the Courtlands—at Harriet's unhalloved rage, at Tom's weakness and desertion, at the fate of the children—not thought of and forgotten by the one, ill-used and put in terror by the other. He recollected how once they used to joke about the Courtlands being at any

When All Run Down

Unfit for Work. Run Down in Health. Due to the Climate. A Tonic and Strengthenner. A Reliable Medicine.



Mrs. D. Barrow, Balmain, N.S. Wales, sends the photograph of herself and husband, and says:

"Both myself and husband have very great pleasure in testifying to the good we have derived from the use of Ayer's Sarsaparilla. I became run down in health, suffering from indigestion, and was wholly unfit for domestic duties. Hearing of the value of Ayer's Sarsaparilla, I tried it, and after using only four bottles I was completely myself again. Having such confidence in

it from personal use, I confidently recommend it as a tonic and strengthenner. We consider your medicines to be most reliable, especially in Australia, where the climate is so trying."

Do you suffer from indigestion? Tired all the time? Unfit for work? And easily discouraged? The trouble with you is you are being slowly poisoned. The impurities in your blood are getting the upper hand of you. Why not get rid of these poisons? You can easily do it with Ayer's Sarsaparilla. This splendid medicine purifies the blood, builds up the nervous, and enables you to throw off that terrible feeling of depression due to a warm climate.

Do not risk any dangerous experiments. Take the old reliable "Ayer's" Sarsaparilla, not some other kind. Look out for substitutes.

AYER'S Sarsaparilla

Enriches the Blood. Strengthens the Nerves.

Prepared by DR. J. C. AYER & CO., Lowell, Mass., U.S.A.