

A week later Standish was upon the high seas; and it was only when the solitudes of the sea gave him time to think, and he found himself pacing the dark deck alone at night that temptation first came upon him. He knew how slender were the means of communication between the husband and wife, how it was he, and he alone, through whom those two now communicated, and how easy it would be to separate them past all finding of each other.

Stronger and stronger grew the temptation, at first vague and robbed of acute shame by remoteness, then clearer and clearer, until one evening as he leaned over the side of the ship and watched at last the faint, small lights on the English shore grow upon the dark his honesty gave way, and the cruel resolution was taken.

He landed and made an appointment to meet Margaret the afternoon after his arrival, and now that hour had come. Walking slowly down to the humble quarter of the town where she lodged, the man could not help noticing the poverty, even while he was conning a hundred alternative ways of putting his tale before her, and thus meditating, almost before he had decided how the tragedy was to come about, Standish found himself at the door of the house in which Margaret lived.

He had not long to wait. Almost before the echo of his knock had died away there came the patter of feet on the passage within, the door was opened and before him stood Margaret herself.

She drew him into the house, and breathless with impatience, the joy of being face to face with someone who only a few weeks ago was face to face with the man who had her whole heart in his keeping, strangely mixed even then with an intangible fear, she led him into the little dingy parlour, its quaint stuffiness so different from the great gray stone country witchen where he had last sat with her, and there upon the table was her little brown teapot, and two cups and half a loaf, but that modest meal was meaningless to both of them. It was news of Barton Margaret thirsted for; she was so eager after the first few moments were over, she could not understand the slow return he gave to impatient questions, and still more impatient eyes, "How was John?" the longing wife gasped out, and Ralph's courage was not yet ripe, his heart not hard enough in the presence of that sweet girl, and he dared no more for the moment than to drop his eyes and mutter, "Oh, well enough maybe!" then again, "presently—presently we will come to him, let us talk of ourselves for a minute."

Again and again she tried, and as many times the traitor would not meet the bewildered enquiry of her clear eyes but, talking of commonplaces, put it off still a little longer, being cowardly no less than traitor. And gradually a kind of torpor fell upon Margaret, she ceased listening and sat there with the colour slowly fading from her face until it was as white as the cloth under her nervous hands. Had Standish looked at her he would have known she was guessing—the lie was prospering—but he dared not glance that way. For a minute or two his voice was the only sound in the room—then, all of a sudden, Margaret Barton's hand was clenched tight upon his arm, her white face to his—and as he started guiltily and turned full upon her for the first time, she said with terrible calmness,

"He is not dead, is he?"
And Standish in the extreme moment of his temptation still hesitated. But the lie was too easy, the prize too great, too near, he could not resist, and very slowly and deliberately he answered, "Yes!"

If luckless Margaret wanted details she had them now! That clever rogue who knew everything against the nothing that the girl was aware of, worked himself up to a fine excellence of pathos and sympathy. He sketched his life and Barton's—how they had fought and struggled, and all but won, and then, dropping his voice, told the tearless wife, of that last illness which had never happened, how he had nursed that friend in losing whom, he said, he had lost one half of his life, how at last Barton had died, his head upon his shoulder, and with his last words begging Standish to befriend the helpless girl in England. It was a melting tale. Standish as he told it marvelled at its honest sound while Margaret punctuated every sentence with bitter sobs; now it was done there she was—fallen forward upon the table, her tangled hair loose upon her white hands, and giving way to such grief as Ralph

had never seen before. He guessed how hopeless it would be to stem that tide, and after waiting a time rose, and gently bending over the girl, "Good-bye, Margaret," he said, "your grief, I know, will bear no sharing, mine brooked none for many days,—good-bye, and to-morrow I will come again if you wish it—"

"Oh, yes," said Margaret, "go, for to-day my sorrow is too new to talk about—I hardly understand it even now," and then, as he was silently leaving the room, seeming to honour her tears like the crafty actor that he was, she went after him. "And yet," she said, "you must not go until I have thanked you. Oh, thank you," she sobbed, "thank you a thousand times for what you did for him—my husband; 'tis the single bright thought in my mind that John had such a one as you beside him when he—when he died. Thank you from my heart for your goodness to him—" and then as speech failed and the rebellious tears flooded her eyes again, she lifted the hand of the betrayer to her lips, and kissing it twice, let him go!

Fate, Standish felt that night as he walked back to his lodging, was fighting on his side, and a new sense of strength nerved him to the next step. He did not like that step, he scowled a little to think of it, yet it had to be taken for to falter now would bring disaster on him. Therefore as soon as he was locked into his room he took pen and paper, and wrote six sheets of sympathy to John Barton, waiting for his bride out in the Australian bush, telling him how he had landed, had gone directly to the house where Margaret lodged, and there had heard to his infinite sorrow that the unhappy wife had died, and had been buried three weeks before!

In fact Standish had won, the fatal trustfulness of those two whom he had defrauded of their happiness, could not stand against his villainy. In a month he asked Margaret to be his wife, and was not down-cast when she said that it was impossible; "love and life seemed dead within her, she who had been friendless all her time save for the life-long love of that one honest man, wished now to live friendless but for the companionship of his memory." That was no more than Standish had expected. He waited three days then came again telling her gently "no" was no answer for him. He made her see how everything countenanced his wish, how their mutual love for the dead man told towards it, her poverty, too; ay, and he told her what her woman instinct had almost guessed, how he had come to ask her as a wife that evening they met in the hazel garden long ago. And thereat that lady's heart was softened, "Oh, poor, poor Ralph!" she said, "looking ruefully at him with kind sad eyes, "I am so sorry,—how you must have suffered!"

What could that unhappy woman do? Standish was bound to win, and in a week Barton's faithful and steadfast wife had married him! She cried for the man she thought dead, upon the altar steps, and she cried piteously for him again over the girl baby that came a year later. Then she settled down into a dull monotony of existence, an episode of vacant resignation with but one pleasure in it, the little liping maid, who grew fairer and taller, and more like her mother every month, and but one sorrow, the memory of that dead man, who lived and mourned for her in turn! For seventeen years that went on, until when Margaret was a comely woman still, with just a touch of white in her brown hair, like the shine of the hoar frost amongst the yellow chestnut leaves in September, Standish died suddenly, silent, unrepentant, and in the full contentment of his villainy to the end.

But the old first love would not die. It was stronger than ever when one day Margaret came home, and found an envelope lying face downwards upon the table in her sitting-room. It did not attract her for a moment, no doubt, she thought, it contained some light matter of neighbourliness such as one who knew even so few friends as she might now and again receive, yet there was something strange about it! It was a thin grey envelope, like none she had seen for many years, the betrayed woman noticed with a start—the exact fashion and counterpart of half a dozen such that lay tied up with ribbon in her workbox. And there were two writings on it—one that of Standish's solicitor who had sent it on to her, the other crabbled and angular, scrawled across the paper in poor ink; oh, why did her heart give such a start to see those rough letters—it must be some new madness, some new chimeras, she gasped

OVERCOAT DAYS.

When the cold days come on you will need an overcoat. Why not get the best?

Chief Brand Clothing.

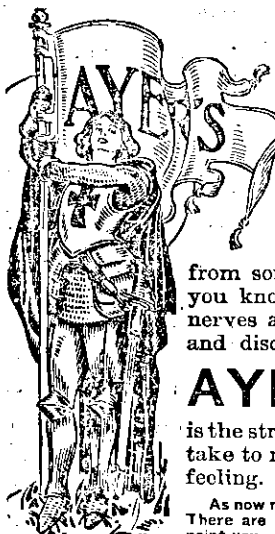
Overcoats of this make are faithfully made under ideal conditions, in New Zealand. The fabrics are durable goods of high quality and finish. The coats are cut by men who are masters of their craft. There is not a stitch scamped in the making.

Chief Brand Clothing.

These Overcoats wear better than any others, and look better. Having regard to their exceptional quality, they are the cheapest coats in the market.

For Comfort with Elegance—

"CHIEF BRAND."



The Leader of Them All!

That is, Ayer's Sarsaparilla; not some other kind, but "AYER'S." This grand old family medicine has stood the test for over sixty years. That's the kind you should take. You cannot afford to experiment, your health is too precious.

You may not now be really ill from some well-defined disease, and yet you know you are all run down, your nerves are unstrung, and you feel weak and discouraged.

AYER'S Sarsaparilla

is the strongest and best medicine you can take to remove this tired and exhausted feeling. It brings cheer, hope, courage.

As now made, Ayer's Sarsaparilla contains no alcohol. There are many imitation Sarsaparillas that will disappoint you. Be sure that you get "AYER'S."

Prepared by Dr. J. C. Ayer & Co., Lowell, Mass., U. S. A.

When you ask for

BOVRIL

do not take a cheap imitation. BOVRIL is all beef and is a standardised strength-giving food.

Always have BOVRIL handy.

By Royal Warrant to



His Majesty the King.