



THEY SAW THE TWO OLD MEN ON THE VERANDA. P. 193.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOME AGAIN.

From Calcutta our two young friends took passage for Cape Town, where they arrived about a month after leaving their island home, and immediately set out for Kimberly.

On arriving at Kimberly, they learned that their parents had regained possession of Cliffside and were then living there; so they set out across the country, and following the path from the spring where Harry had first met little Tom, they passed down through the meadow toward the house.

It was a lovely evening, and as they drew near they saw the two old men sitting upon the veranda watching their approach.

Aunt Jane, who had come down to live with them, had just appeared at the door, and a moment later Lucy appeared also.

"Lord-a-massy!" exclaimed Aunt Jane, holding up her hands in surprise and wonder. "Lord-a-massy!" and she sunk into a chair, gasping: "It's Tom and Harry!"

"Did you ever!" cried Lucy in shocked surprise at the appearance of little Tom dressed in boys clothes and appearing so easy and unconcerned in the presence of the young man by her side, as if perfectly unconscious of his presence or blissfully ignorant of her unlady-like costume.

They were coming up the walk now, and a moment

(193)

more little Tom sprang upon the veranda and with a cry joy clasped her trembling father in her arms.

"O papa, papa!" she cried, "don't you know me? It is I, little Tom—your own little Tom!"

* * * * *

The happy meeting was over and the long story of their adventures, their hardships and suffering was told by our little heroine; and then she told of their life upon the island, their marriage and their final escape and return home.

"It was only the next morning after we were married, that we saw a sail heading directly toward the island. She came down within a half mile and then sent a boat ashore. You can imagine they were surprised to find the island inhabited."

"They took us aboard and we set out for the Cape, but were run down by a Malay Pirate, and but for an English cruiser that happened to hear the firing and came down to see what was the matter, they would have sent us to the bottom of the Indian ocean instead of Cape Town. The cruiser was on her way to Calcutta, and so took us there. But we are here at last; and O papa! I am so glad to be home again. And now, I want you to tell me everything that has happened since I left home—everything that has happened since I have been gone."

"I will leave that to Lucy. She can tell you all that has happened or is likely to happen," replied the overjoyed father.

"What do you think, father," asked Harry, "are you satisfied with the marriage, or would you rather that we should be married over again?"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Aunt Jane, "I don't see what good it would do."

"What do you say, father?" asked Tom of the old hermit.

"It might satisfy other people; for that reason I would advise you to get married over again. There are always a plenty of people that can find fault and would, perhaps, say things that you would not like."

Then we will have a double wedding," declared Aunt Jane.

"O Lucy!" cried Tom, throwing her arms about her sister's neck and kissing her fondly, "what is it? Ah, I know, I know—that blush tells the tale. It's Frank Kimball, I suppose—but when is it to be?"

"Day after to-morrow," said Aunt Jane.

So it was arranged, and on the following Wednesday a double wedding was celebrated at Cliffside.

Lucy went to her new home in town, as her husband was a prosperous merchant of Kimberly; and little Tom and Harry were left with the old people at the homestead.

Now, that Tom and Harry had returned, the wild and altogether exaggerated stories which were reported about the finding of rich diamond fields by Tom and Harry, and the story of 'The Star of Kimberly' were brought up afresh in the minds of the people. But, of course, these exaggerated stories were soon dispelled by the facts concerning the finding of the stone. A stone which was known to have been discovered at Kimberly and lost there in the mountains some twenty-five years before.

There is a long and bloody tale connected with this

stone and there is also a tale of blood and suffering connected with little Tom, and the two are so connected and interwoven as to make them inseparable.

"The Star of Kimberly"—what is it?

Those who have followed me through this bit of personal history—no, not altogether imaginary, for it is founded upon facts—will be divided in their opinion, no doubt, as to which is really the "The Star of Kimberly." Some will say that it is little Tom, others will say that it is the great diamond.

To those who are satisfied with calling little Tom "The Star of Kimberly," nothing more need be said. Her troubles are ended, or at least are so small that they occasion her more pleasure than otherwise—her cup of happiness is full. She has passed down that broad and winding road that so many have traveled; she has passed through the beautiful meadows where grows the wheat and corn; she has crossed the babbling brook upon whose flowery banks the lovers ramble; she has passed on beyond all these, when she might have paused or turned back. She has climbed the mountains with a steady and unfaltering step—the mountains where the thunders roll and the lightnings clash; where the chasms yawn, in whose dark and unfathomable depths lie buried the wreck of human hearts; she has passed all these, and now unscathed, triumphant, glorified, she stands upon the mountain peaks of love from whence, in her vision of happiness untarnished, she beholds the gates of the Golden City which, standing ajar, allows her a glimpse of heaven—allows her to drink from the cup of the consummation of all earthly bliss. Below her the avalanche

sweeps, the torrents rush, the lightnings flash, the thunders roll, the chasms yawn and temptation lies writhing in the dust. She has soared on beyond and above them all and now, with unsullied wing, she rests in peace—her cup of happiness is full.

To those who, for motives of their own, prefer to place the diamond upon the throne, my story is unfinished.

I say, in all candor, let the friends of little Tom pause here, there is nothing more for them.

While to those that love the diamond—I glory in your spunk—I will devote yet another chapter or two.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ANOTHER CHAPTER.

The winter had passed and the warm days of summer had come. Strange may it seem to us here, but it was the first of January. A beautiful, bright summer morning, and all nature was clothed in gorgeous green and decked out in its myriads of variegated and beautiful flowers. The old homestead never seemed so bright and beautiful before; the birds sang their sweetest and most joyous songs and every one at Cliffside wore a happy smile.

Sometime during that beautiful, starlight night, a wee little creature, as if borne from heaven upon angel wings in search of a new home, paused in his weary flight and rested upon the fair, warm bosom of little Tom. One could hardly tell, as yet, whether it was of earth or of heaven—such a wee, little creature. But, O how happy was little Tom, as she felt for the first time its warm, sweet kiss.

The birds poured forth their glad, joyous songs of greeting; the soft, summer breeze, loaded down with sweet perfume stolen from flowery dells, stole softly through the half open window and, like the breath of whispering angels, toyed with the soft, golden curls of little Tom, and whispered: "Mother." The bright, warm sun slanted his welcoming rays through the cur-



TOM WAS SITTING WITH HER INFANT DAUGHTER IN HER LAP. P. 199.

tained window and kissed the sweet, red lips of mother and child; and again the sad sea-waves, as they beat upon the lonely shore of the deserted island home, moaned soft and low: "Happy, happy mother. Happy, happy little Tom."

* * * * *

Three months has passed since that bright, happy morning that little Tom awakened to find herself a mother—three months, and it was the sixth of April, one of those bright, beautiful, autumn days that one loves so well; and little Tom, sitting beneath the spreading branches of an old oak in front of her old home at Cliff-side with her little infant daughter in her lap, was watching her queer, little antics when Harry, coming in from the field, paused to look at the fair picture.

"Harry," said Tom, with a smile of welcome, "come and sit down with me a little. I want to talk to you. Do you know, Harry, we have been married just a year to-day; and then she said with a laugh, "Our Angie (Angel) is just three months old to-day. Aunt Jane says, and I guess other people think so too, that we have been remarkably industrious. But, O Harry! I thank God, I am so glad that our little baby came when she did. She comes to us as a pledge of vows we made that day—just a year ago to-day, Harry. Though I may live to grow old, the memory of that day will ever be fresh and young in my heart; though I may live to see her grow up and have children of her own, too, I will always, when I see her, remember the vows we made that day when, in our little home, God promised her to me."

"Yes, it was just one year ago to-day, Tom, and I am just—no, not just, but a thousand times more ready to renew my vows than I was to make them then. This little one only binds our hearts the closer, Tom. Yes, she has become to us as a pledge of our vows we made that day. She will always remind us of our promises to one another—ah, I wonder who that is?" asked Harry, as three men drove up to the gate and stopping, one of them stepped from the wagon and advanced toward them.

"They are strangers," said Tom, "I never saw them before."

The stranger, a tall, handsome young man, advancing to the happy group, raised his hat in courtesy to the young mother and child, then bowing to Harry, said:

"Mr. Lovell, I believe?"

"Yes," answered Harry, "and may I have the pleasure?"

"Lovell is my name," he answered, "a distant relative—Fred Lovell."

"Indeed, cousin Fred—if you will permit me to call you so—I am most happy to meet you. You came from New York, I believe?" said Harry.

"Yes, I came from New York and I would be most happy to claim cousinship with you, and—" turning an inquiring glance upon little Tom.

"It is my wife and baby," answered Harry.

"Ah," he said, taking her proffered hand, "and so this is the famous little Tom. Indeed, cousin Harry, I congratulate you, though it may be a little late, upon the possession of such a beautiful wife and baby."

"Thank you, cousin Fred, both for your congratulations and compliment of my treasure."

"Treasure! yes, indeed, if the story that I have heard is true—she is a treasure. But that word brings me back to the business part of my visit. Business first, they tell us, and pleasure afterwards. I am at the head of a company—fortune hunters, you will call us—organized to go to Australia. But hearing this story, while at the Cape, we came here to see what we could learn; and when I learned who it was, I knew that you must be one of Uncle Henry's family and a cousin of mine, so I came over to see you."

"I am glad that you came," said Harry. "My father will be glad to see you, too. He told me that he had a sister living in New York, but he had not heard from her for nearly twenty years."

"The first thing that I want is your advice as to what the prospect is for us here. We heard about the finding of a great diamond, and it is believed that there are more of them up there in the mountains where that one came from. But I didn't know, until I reached Kimberly, who it was that found it. Now, what do you say? Can you give us any encouragement, either in the direction of the discovery of new fields or the recovery of the lost treasure?" he asked.

"Well, the story of the finding of the stone, as generally told about here, is about true—we found it and lost it. As to the prospect of finding new mines, there is none. We found the stone in the dry bed of a mountain stream, and it may have been brought down from away up in the mountains."

"Then you think that there is no prospect in that direction?"

"No," replied Harry. "This same stone was found here at Kimberly, and was lost up there. There's a long tale of murder and bloodshed connected with this stone. My father and five other men found it, or rather it was shown to them by an old Kafir, who called it the 'Devil's Eye,' but father will tell you all about that part of it."

"There's a story of ~~stone~~ and suffering, I think, connected with nearly all large diamonds," said Fred.

"Yes," replied Harry, "they are too valuable to handle in a country like this."

"Do you think that there's any prospect of recovering the stone?"

"I don't know; I think that it's very doubtful."

"Then there is a little chance?" he asked eagerly.

"One chance, perhaps, in a thousand."

"And now, cousin Harry, what is that chance worth?" persisted Fred.

"What is it worth?"

"Yes, what is it worth? What will you take for your interest in the stone?"

"You will have to talk to Tom about that; it belongs to her, or did before she lost it."

"What do you ~~say~~, cousin Tom?" he asked.

"I won't have anything to do with it!" replied Tom.

"You are welcome to it if you can find it. I don't lay any claim to it now; we have lost it and that's the end of it. I wouldn't touch it again for anything in the world!"

"You don't value it very highly, it seems," he said.

"No. It has been a curse to us and to every one that has ever had anything to do with it, and will, I believe, continue to be to every one who has anything to do with it hereafter. No, no, I wouldn't touch it again—never! I threw it away when we left the ship. But, if you are tired of life and want to die, go find that cursed thing! From the moment your fingers touch it, you will be under a spell that will follow you as long as you are in possession of that bloody gem."

"That is not very encouraging, my little cousin," he said.

"I am afraid, though," said Harry, "that there's more truth in her words than we are willing to believe."

"If, then, you refuse to accept anything for your interest in the stone, can we arrange to get you to go with us and locate the place, as near as you can, where the ship lies?"

"O sir!" cried little Tom, pale and trembling.

"There can be no danger," urged Fred, "we will take you to the island; and you need have nothing to do with it; you will be just as safe there as here."

"Give us a little time to study over the matter," said Harry. "I will talk to Tom about it and if we can help you, we will let you know to-morrow just what we will do. But come, you will stay with us to-night, father will tell you something that may be of interest to you. Let us attend to your team and take your friends to the house."

"They will return to town. I will stay with you, for I want to see uncle Henry and hear the story of that diamond," he said.

And after introducing Harry to his two friends and seeing them off for town, he went to the house and was soon introduced to the family.