VARIOUS

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A MARVEL OF ARTISTIC GENIUS

Coggeshall in Essex is a small market-town, which, in days past was of some slight importance as a busy little manufacturing place, but which of later years has been drained of population, like many another place, to supply material for the great 'centres.' It now has little to boast of but its fine church, one of the three finest in the county, and some most interesting ruins, well known to antiquaries; it takes, however, a great pride in owning the parentage of the subject of this notice.

John Carter was the only son of a respectable labourer in Coggeshall, but was himself brought up to silk-weaving, that being the staple trade of the town. He was educated in the usual way at the national school; but at the age of thirteen was transferred to Sir R. Hitcham's grammar-school, where he continued about two years. During this period he was chiefly remarkable for his aptitude for getting into mischief; and the only sign given of the latent talent which was afterwards so strangely developed in him was in drawing horses and dogs of questionable beauty on his slates and copy-books; the walls of his cottage also were frequently put under requisition for the same purpose; a mark of talent which his mother in those days could have readily dispensed with, as not tending to improve the look of her humble apartment, which she always kept most scrupulously neat and clean. He was a bright intelligent boy, and this and his high spirits made him a general favourite, but proved also a great snare to him. He became acquainted with a set of wild young men, and soon, naturally enough, became the ringleader in all sorts of daring enterprise.

When Carter was about twenty he married; but though his wife was a quiet and respectable young woman, his marriage does not appear to have steadied him. He and his wild companions used to meet at one of the public-houses and there talk over and arrange their operations. One of the projects which these choice spirits agreed upon was a rooking expedition, the young rooks being then in season. It was in the month of May 1836. The place agreed on was Holfield Grange, there being there a fine old avenue of elms, in which the rooks from time immemorial had comfortably settled. The avenue was disused; and as it was some little way from the house and away from the road and preserves, there was little chance of their being interrupted by watchmen or gamekeepers. They arranged to meet in a field outside the town with a given signal, by which they might know friend from foe; this was to avoid leaving the town in a body, which might have suggested suspicions of mischief, and induced a little watching. Midnight found them all at the rendezvous, and little more than half an hour's walking brought them to the chosen spot. Carter, foremost as usual, was the first to climb one of the tall trees, and was soon busy enough securing the young birds. The trees in the avenue are very old, and stand somewhat close together, their gnarled and massive boughs frequently interlacing, making it quite possible for an expert climber to pass from one tree to another. In attempting to perform this, Carter deceived either in the distance or strength of a bough, missed his hold and fell to the ground, a distance of about forty feet. He had fallen apparently on his head, for it was crushed forwards on to his chest. For a time he lay perfectly senseless, and the dismay of his wretched companions may be imagined. Their position was an unenviable one, to say the least. What were they to do? A mile and a half from the town, in the dead of night, in the midst of their depredations, which must now inevitably become known, and with one of their party dying or dead, they knew not which. After a time, Carter seems to have recovered consciousness partially, and made them understand, though his speech was so much affected as to be almost unintelligible, that he wanted them to 'pull him out!' This rough

surgery they therefore tried, some taking his head and some his feet, and pulled till he could once more speak plainly; and having done that, seemed to think that there was nothing more they could do.

Would one or two more judicious tugs have fitted the dislocated bones together again, or would they have broken the spinal marrow? Who can tell? In either case the world would have lost one striking case of latent talent developed by a misfortune which seemed indeed only one remove from death; so we will not complain.

Finding that no further improvement took place in the poor fellow, and that he had lapsed into unconsciousness, his companions procured a hurdle, and laying him on it with all the skill and gentleness of which they were capable, retraced their steps to the town, and bore him to the home which he had left a few hours before in the full strength and health of early manhood. They laid him on his bed and then slunk away, glad to shut out from their sight the terrible result of their headlong folly, one only remaining to tell to the poor wife the sad story of the disaster. The doctor was sent for; and the result of his examination was the terrible verdict that Carter had not in all probability many days or even hours to live; in any case, whether he lived or not, he was paralysed without hope of recovery.

He did not recover consciousness entirely till the following night; and we who have the full enjoyment of our limbs and health can hardly realise what that poor fellow must have suffered in learning that, even if life were granted to him at all, it was under such terrible conditions as at first to seem to him less a boon than a burden. He would never again be able to move hand or foot, the only power of movement remaining to him being in the neck, which just enabled him to raise or turn round his head; that was *all*– there was not even feeling in the rest of his body. What a dreary blank in the future! What wonder if the undisciplined soul cried out aloud with repining, like a wild bird beating against the bars of a cage; what wonder if in the bitterness of his heart he cried: 'Of what good is my life to me! Better that I had never been born, since all that makes life sweet is taken from me.'

Anguish unknown, terrors too great for words, must that poor soul have met and overcome, ere he had learned the great lesson of sorrow, that life, true life, does not consist in mere physical capabilities and enjoyments, but that there is a far higher, nobler life, the life of the soul and mind, which is as infinitely above the other as heaven is above earth. His mind being now no longer overridden by his superabundant physical nature, began to work and put forth its powers and energies; but it was long ere he found any object on which to expend those powers; not till he had, through several long and heavy years of suffering, learned the great and most difficult lesson of patience – patience, without which he would never have accomplished the wonderful work which we will now proceed to describe.

Having read one day of some young woman who, deprived of the use of her hands, had learned to draw little things with her *mouth*, he was seized with a desire to try the same thing, and was not content till he had made his first attempt. Deprived of the use of his hands, why not try his mouth! A butterfly that had fluttered into the cottage was caught and transfixed; a rough desk extemporised, and with such materials as a sixpenny box of paints afforded, he made a sketch of the insect. Delighted with his success, he determined to persevere. A light deal desk was made after his own directions, on which to fix his paper; the picture he was about to copy being fastened above, or if large, hung from the top of the bed by tapes; he always drew in bed, his head being slightly raised by pillows. A pencil about six inches long and bound round with thread was put in his mouth, and with this he sketched his subject. A saucer of Indian ink was prepared, and a fine camel-hair brush was dipped and placed in his mouth by the attendant; these brushes were sometimes not more than four inches long. In this way he produced the most exquisite drawings, equal to fine line engravings, which were sold for him by his friends and patrons, some of them finding their way into the highest quarters; and thus he was enabled to experience the delight of feeling that paralysed as he was, he was not a mere burden, but was able to contribute to his own support.

Several of the most beautiful of his works are now in America, and we believe we are right in saying that as much as twenty-five and fifty pounds apiece have been given for them. Another very

fine work, a copy of 'St John and the Angel,' about eighteen inches by twelve, is in the possession of Robert Hanbury, Esq., of Poles Ware, Hertfordshire, and is wonderful in its power and delicacy. In the copies from Rembrandt, Carter has so completely caught the peculiar touch and style of the great master, that even a connoisseur would have some difficulty in distinguishing them from the original.

Carter tried various styles – water-colour, chalks, mezzotint, and line drawing; but it was the last in which he succeeded best, and which best displayed his great delicacy of touch. The chalks required too great pressure, and fatigued him so much that he was only able to finish two or three pictures in this style, a masterly head of St Peter being one; but the grand sweep of the unbroken lines in these shews, we think, his talent more than any of his works.

He found many kind friends who interested themselves in his work, and supplied him with subjects to copy; notably amongst these, Miss Hanbury of Holfield Grange, now wife of the Dean of Winchester. Mr Richmond the artist also came to see him on several occasions, and speaks of him thus in a letter: 'The first time I saw him [Carter] I was taken to his cottage by the Rev. Charles Forster, vicar of Stisted, Essex; and the impression of that visit I shall never lose, for the contrast of the utterly helpless body of the man with the bright and beaming expression of his face, which only a peaceful and clear spirit could raise, was a sight to do one good. It was as it were "the face of an angel," and I always think of him in connection with that passage.' This latter remark is no exaggeration, for Carter was more than ordinarily handsome, of that old Roman type so common amongst the agricultural labourers in Essex, which ill-health and suffering had only improved by adding refinement to his well-cut features; and the expression of deep humility and patience was most touching in its earnestness. Richmond, speaking elsewhere of his works, says: 'His power of imitation was extraordinary – I mean it would have been extraordinary in one possessing hands to execute his thought with; but to see him with his short pencil between his lips executing with the greatest precision and skill intricate forms and describing difficult curves, filled me with wonder and admiration.'[1]

Carter lived for fourteen years in this helpless condition, during which time he was a constant attendant at the church. A light frame and mattress, on which he lay perfectly prostrate, was lifted on to a sort of little wheel-carriage, and thus he was carried into the church, and lay during the service. Useful for locomotion, this carriage, sad to relate, was the cause of his death. One day, the lad who was wheeling him about, lost his hold at the top of a hill; the carriage ran back with violence against a wall, and upset the poor fellow into the road. From that day he sank rapidly, and died on the 2d of June 1850.

There was a post-mortem examination; and the injured portion of the spine was removed, and presented by Professor Hilton to the Museum of the College of Surgeons, London, 'where it remains,' as he said in lecturing on the case at the College, 'a typical specimen almost unique in interest.'

[The sight of the drawing of the 'Virgin and Child,' by Carter, which has been submitted to our inspection, is eminently suggestive of what may be done in the most adverse circumstances, and also rouses sentiments of profound regret at the sudden and unforeseen death of a being so highly gifted with the light of genius. – Ed.]

[1] See *Memoir of Carter*, with Illustrations, by Rev. W. J. Dampier. Simpkin and Marshall. 1876.

THE LAST OF THE HADDONS

CHAPTER XIX. – MRS CHICHESTER'S ARRANGEMENT

When an hour later, I re-entered the drawing-room to make my adieu to Miss Farrar, I found that the aspect of affairs had altogether changed. She was lounging in her favourite attitude of negligent ease, in a low chair, playing with the appendages to her watch-chain; and opposite to her sat Mrs Chichester.

Marian did not give me time to speak, hurriedly commencing, with haughty graciousness, the moment I entered the room.

'Oh, it is Miss Haddon. – Come in, Miss Haddon. I am sorry to disappoint you; but I have been thinking the matter over since I spoke to you, and have come to the conclusion that I shall not require your services. The truth is I could not feel quite sure that you would suit me, and therefore I have made another arrangement – a much more satisfactory one.'

For a moment I did not quite comprehend the state of affairs, asking myself if she could have so far misinterpreted my words as to suppose that I had expressed a wish to remain with her. Then the truth flashed upon me, and I calmly replied: 'It is quite possible I might not have suited you, Miss Farrar. If, as I suppose, you have made an arrangement for Mrs Chichester to reside with you, I believe you will find her much more amenable and easy to get on with than I might prove to be.'

Marian looked at me doubtfully, not quite sure whether to interpret my words favourably or not. Mrs Chichester's lips closed tightly for a moment, then she said with her accustomed gentleness and suavity: 'The arrangement between Miss Farrar and myself is so essentially different from ordinary engagements, Miss Haddon; simply a friendly one.'

'Yes, indeed,' said Marian, with a grand air. 'Accepting an occasional little offering' (here I knew she was quoting) 'is quite different from receiving a salary, you know.'

I cheerfully agreed that it was different; and was mischievous enough to congratulate 'Miss Farrar' upon having found so disinterested a friend in the time of need.

With heightened colour, Mrs Chichester explained that she had only done what any moderately good-natured person would do, in offering to stay with one who had been deserted by those who ought not to have deserted her.

'Yes; that's what I call it!' said Marian eagerly catching at the word. 'I've been deserted by those who ought not to have deserted me! And here's Caroline, that I never cared for, and who I thought never cared for me, turns out my best friend. Caroline had taken a great fancy to me from the beginning, only she was afraid of shewing it, in case Lilian should be jealous. But since my sister has chosen to desert me as she has, she can't complain about my choosing a fresh friend. As you know, I have done all I could to make things pleasant for Lilian. No one in the world could act more generously than I have done to her. Any one might tell that, by the heaps and heaps of things which have been taken out of the house, without my saying a word. And then the piano, when it was found that it would have to be sold on account of being too large for the cottage, I paid the price it cost two years ago. Two hundred and fifty pounds for a second-hand piano, Caroline! I shouldn't mind if I'd been treated accordingly. But to go away like this, without so much as saying thank you. As Caroline says, it is treating one too bad; it really is!'

I glanced smilingly at Caroline's flushed face, and then wished them good afternoon.

'I hear that you are going to stay at the cottage, Miss Haddon?'

'For three or four months I am, Mrs Chichester.'

'Until you find another engagement, I presume?' she asked, eyeing me curiously.

'Until I make another engagement,' I smilingly replied.

But the 'three or four months' had aroused her suspicions, though I did not perceive in what way.

'You have made the best of your sojourn at Fairview, Miss Haddon' – softly.

'The very best, Mrs Chichester,' was my cheerful response; although I did not see the whole of her meaning, as I was to see it later. I knew enough to be sure the drift of it was not very friendly. One thing was very palpable – I made no advance in Mrs Chichester's good graces.

They followed me to the hall with messages for Lilian.

'I can't forget that she's Pa's daughter, you know,' said Marian, once more striving to be generous. 'Give my love to her, and tell her not to hesitate about sending for anything she may require from the garden or what not; she will miss things so at first, you know. And I don't see why she shouldn't have milk; cook said we have more than she can use just now. If we go on keeping two cows she shall always have it. And say that the very first time we drive out I will call at the cottage.'

Saunders, who opened the door for me, drew his hand across his eyes as he strove to stammer out a message to the 'dear young mistress.'

'Of course you will come to see her; she will be desirous to hear how you are getting on, Saunders,' I replied, beginning to find some difficulty in keeping up my own courage. But there was more to try me yet. Before I could make my escape, every servant employed in or about the house had crowded into the hall, down to Tom the garden-boy.

'Tell the dear young mistress our hearts ache for her.' 'Tell her there isn't one here as wouldn't go barefoot to serve her. God bless her!' 'Tell her her kindness to mother will never be forgotten as long as I live.' 'Why didn't she let us say good-bye, Miss Haddon?' 'Why didn't she shake hands with us before she went, Miss?' – they asked one after the other.

The wisdom of our getting her away as we did was manifest enough. 'It would have been more than she could have borne,' I replied, in a broken voice. 'But it will do her good to hear of your shewing so much kindly feeling, though she never doubted your attachment to her. And of course she expects that you will all go to see her.'

'Ay, that we will!'

Then I got my own share of parting good-wishes, as we shook hands all round, not at all disturbed in the process by the sudden slamming of the drawing-room door and the violent ringing of a bell.

Satisfactory as it all was from one point of view, I congratulated myself upon having contrived to spare Lilian this scene, as well as the final good-bye to the home that ought to have been her own.

I turned from the main road and walked slowly down across the fields at the back of Fairview until I reached the stile at the end of the lane. Then seating myself upon the cross step, I yielded to a little sentiment, telling myself that there must be no such indulgence at the cottage for some time to come. We needed our full share of common-sense to keep the atmosphere healthy. It was all very well trying to assume philosophic airs about wealth; it did very well in my own case, for instance; but I really could not see that it was better for Lilian to lose her large fortune – and so lose it. Into what different channels would the money have passed from her hands, how different a class of people would have been benefited from those who would now be the recipients of it. Granted that Lilian herself might be as happy in the future as though she possessed a large income, how many would be the worse for her not possessing it. The other was already developing a mean nature, and would grudge expenditure upon anything which did not immediately minister to her own gratification. And so forth and so forth I complained to myself in the short-sighted way with which many of us are apt to judge when looking at a question from one point of view only. I did not even take into consideration the fact that the loss of fortune had already brought about one good effect – that of making Arthur Trafford appear in his true colours, and so sparing Lilian from much misery in the future.

'How did she bear it, Miss Haddon?'

I looked up to find Robert Wentworth standing on the other side the stile. I rose, shook hands, and replied: 'As you might expect she would. But we contrived to spare her a final parting scene;' going on to tell him how we had managed it.

'A good idea. And Mrs Chichester has stepped in, has she?' he added musingly. 'Well, I suppose that might have been expected too. Trafford will have a useful ally.'

I told him of the offer I had received, smiling a little over the recital.

'Fortunately you are not like other women; you can smile at that sort of thing. And you will not, I trust, be again subjected to anything of the kind. You will remain at the cottage as long as you need a home now?'

'Yes,' I replied in a low voice, feeling the hot colour cover my face in my confusion at hearing such an allusion from him; wondering not a little how he had come to know what I had been so reticent, even to those I loved best, about. His tone and look seemed, I thought, so plainly to imply that he did know.

'But I suppose that is forbidden ground just at present?' he went on, as I imagined answering my very thoughts.

'Yes,' I whispered stupidly; shy of talking about my love affair to him, yet a little ashamed of my shyness, as more befitting a young romantic girl than myself.

'I will obey' – glancing down at me with grave pleasantness – 'if you will consent that some limit shall be put to the restraint. Shall we say three months?'

I smiled assent. He really did know then; even to the time Philip was expected. I did not like to ask him how he had gained the knowledge, as that might lead to more talk upon the subject than I cared to enter into. In fact I was completely taken by surprise, and not quite equal to the occasion.

But I soon contrived to account for his knowledge of my secret. My engagement was well known to Philip's brother and the latter's friends; and it was quite possible that Robert Wentworth might know some of them. But however he had found it out, I was quite content that he should have done so. It would be all the easier to pave the way towards a friendship between Philip and him, by-and-by. For the present I quietly returned to the subject which I believed to be most interesting to him, and we talked over Lilian's prospects hopefully if a little gravely, as we walked slowly on down the lane.

'You think there are really some grounds for hoping that she may forget him?' he asked anxiously. 'I should not judge hers to be a changeable mind.'

'Changeable! No; if she had really loved Arthur Trafford, as she fancied she did, there would be indeed no hope.'

'Fancied?'

'Yes; I firmly believe it *was* fancy. She never loved the real Arthur Trafford; she is only just beginning to know him as he is.'

'Well, I suppose it is all right, so far as she is concerned; and yet – constancy in love and friendship is part of my religion. One does not like to have that faith disturbed?' – with what I fancied was a questioning look.

'You forget that Lilian was almost a child when the acquaintance commenced; barely sixteen. Though I hold that she will be constant to her love, in even ceasing to care for Arthur Trafford. Do not you see that she has never known the real man until now – that in fact she has been in love with an ideal?' I replied, under the impression that he was putting the questions which he wished to be combated, and willing to indulge him so far.

'It must be rather hard upon a man to discover, after a long engagement, that he does not accord with his lady-love's ideal – all the harder if the discovery *does* not happen to be made until after marriage,' he said; '*and* I think you will have to acknowledge that the ideal you talk about ought to preserve a woman from falling in love with the counterfeit, rather than lead her to it.'

'You are talking about a woman, and I a girl.'

'You must not forget that she was old enough to engage herself to him. How if she had continued in her blindness until too late – how if she had become his wife?'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.