

THE KING OF HONEY ISLAND

A NOVEL OF AMERICAN LIFE DURING THE WAR OF 1812.

BY MAURICE THOMPSON.

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CHAPTER XV. CONTINUED.

There is a great reserve in the Scotch physique as there is in the Scotch character. Mr. Burns was an extreme example, else how could he have lain there on the wet soil of the woods for three days and nights without so much as a sip of water and with nothing to stop the bleeding of his wound? He was but half conscious most of the time, and yet he heard a panther screaming all through one night, and once a wolf barked and howled close by. There was nothing in these sounds to frighten him; they came to him as in a dream, appealing to no particular sense, touching no particular chord of consciousness, simply echoing through him. Slowly he sank away, weaker and weaker, down into darkness. Every thought faded out but one—the thought of failure—the thought that he was dying without hope.

On the third day, in the afternoon, some great black birds, evil-looking, with bare, congested heads and hungry eyes, came sailing low round and round above him. He saw them, and thought: "They will eat me as soon as I am dead!" But there was no horror connected with the vision, which went farther and displayed his scattered and clean-picked bones. What could it matter to him, old, defeated, abandoned, dying, if vultures began their work at once? Could their beaks add one pang to his torture?

With singular minuteness, for his Zeisler was ample, he reviewed his religious life, seeking for some justification of the act of Divine Providence in thus casting him aside like a bit of old rubbish after all this wearying and fruitless effort—after all his trust and prayer.

And little Margaret—what of her? Beautiful, young, pure, with every bud of tender promise just showing the pink—why should she have been made the plaything of an enormous wrong, the helpless victim of an atrocious fate? He saw her as she was when she left him, fair, bright, loving, the idol of his widowed heart, and he followed her, step by step, through the cruel descent, till she lay in her coffin, murdered by that man.

By some mysterious cerebral action, he was able to note the correlation of his own experience with the girls', and to fix, as by a flash, the meaning of his prayers with the successive downward rushes of her miserable career.

At every point where he sought her with utmost confidence and besought heaven with greatest faith, there she had met with calamity or taken some desperate step in infamy. And whose was the fault? Surely she had not been born with the taint of evil in her blood.

And Kirk MacCollough! The name rang through the old man's fevered brain, and the tall, dark outlaw stalked across his vision like an actor across the stage of melodrama. What health, what strength, what immunity from the physical effects of moral recklessness! In the pursuit of this man, Burns had wasted himself, his fortune, his career, his prayers, his life, while not a drop of desire had been lost by the outlaw. It was bitter food for reflection for the aged preacher as he lay on the ground, his withered limbs outstretched and the weakness of death in his nerves. Slowly his mind worked its way down to that last scene and began to take up the details one by one, analyzing them with merciless exactness. Meanwhile, by that curious power of the brain which enables it when abnormally stimulated to follow two lines of thought at once, he was reviewing Kirk MacCollough's origin and accounting for his career by referring all his darker characteristics to inheritance from his father, Thomas MacCollough, who committed a great political crime and was transported therefor in the first prime of his manhood while Kirk was yet a mere boy. Burns had never seen Thomas MacCollough, nor had he known much of the family before Kirk began to pay attention to Margaret; but since then he had found out the history which now seemed to account fitly for the young man's unparalleled course of evil. From father to son had descended the curse of outlawry.

But it was natural that Burns's mind, even in the last extremity of despair, should turn with all its Scotch stubbornness and tenacity to take a religious survey, so to call it, of the situation. Perhaps it would be better to say that his thoughts were not driven at once, even by direct calamity, out of the groove in which they had been running since first he began to be a preacher. It had been his rule to measure everything by the standard disclosed to him in the Bible. "Thus saith the Word" had been his hobby, his guide, his comfort. Never during his long, absorbing chase after his child and her atrocious lover, had he forgotten the Sabbath or failed to keep it holy; never had he neglected the simple forms of worship and of prayer to which his austere conscience and the obligations of his church bound him. He had lived unspotted, and now death hovered over him in that lonely place, with none to lift his

head, speak a word of comfort to him or to touch his lips with water. Upon his soul the bitterness of all this settled, as his brain drew it in and analyzed it.

Suddenly there was a reversion, and it was as if the poles of his nature had been reversed on the instant. From some source he gathered strength to lift his head and shoulders; then, leaning on one arm, he gazed wildly around. There was a terrible look in his face. He almost bounded to his feet and stood swaying and trembling, his long legs far apart and one hand raised far above his disheveled head. A dying tiger might have glared as did he, and it was with a wild beast's voice that he cried aloud:

"I will not die—I will not die—I cannot die, Kirk MacCollough, while while you live!"

It was a grand theatre in which to make such a speech. The dusky trees and the lurking wild things were fitting audience. The realism of the acting was superhuman, and it was also superhumanly romantic. The stage accessories were in perfect harmony with it. Loneliness, grimness, solemnity brooded there, and the wide silence was fitting applause. Two of the evil birds took wing with loud flapping and sailed away from the dead bough on which they had been sitting so patiently. Burns was indirectly aware of them, as he rolled his blood-shot eyes and shook his head till the tangled hair fell over his forehead and temples.

His strength was but spasmodic. The next moment he tumbled down motionless.

Slowly the sun passed on to the western slope of the sky. The hideous vultures returned to circle round and round, lower and lower; but they did not dare make the attack. They might have done it soon, however, had they been left to their will.

Once more the old man roused himself and struggled to his feet. The pallor of death flared out of his face, the frenzy of death glittered in his eyes. There were fragments of dead leaves and clots of earth in his hair and beard. Again he flung his hand on high and stood swaying and trembling, while his voice broke forth with awful sonorosity:

"Vengeance! Vengeance is mine, and I will repay!"

This time the theatre held one human auditor, who stopped short in his walk and gazed with wide-open eyes at the towering actor in that wild scene. At first Burns looked almost twice his real stature, so dilated was the expression of his form as seen against the dusky spaces and gloomy trunks of the wood.

"Wall, take my hat for a soap-kettle!" exclaimed the observer, resting the butt of his long rifle on his foot.

"Wy, w'at's the matter, parson? W'at in all creation air ye a-doing yer?"

Burns started at the sound of the voice, and half turned to look. The effort lost him his balance, and down he fell again, his arm still outstretched.

"Hello! Hello!" shouted the man, running forward as rapidly as a crooked leg would permit, "air ye ailin' parson?"

He half recoiled at the sight of the blood on the Burns's clothes, and his rough face showed surprise and quick sympathy. He had been accustomed to open-air tragedies, had, indeed, been a star performer in not a few; but here was a mystery as well as a catastrophe. For lack of other vent to relieve his feelings withal he began to swear disapprovingly, intimating through his oaths that it would please him to hew limb from limb the man who hurt Parsons Burns.

"Parson, parson!" he exclaimed, stooping over him and touching his shoulder. "W'at's the matter of ye, parson?"

"Then, as he received no answer, he straightened himself up, leaned on his gun and scratched his head with an air of contemplative confusion. Just then, a horse gave forth one of those casual snorts characteristic of the genus. It was the animal that Burns had ridden. Not far away it was browsing dolefully, with a melancholy twist in its cadaverous neck and switching its tail this way and that more by force of habit than in response to the attack of one or two thristless flies which were content to worry a skin too tough for their tiny spears.

"Yer, yer, parson! W'at's this mean?" he went on, blustering a trifle and shaking the old man's shoulder. "Can't ye speak to a feller? Air ye bad hurt?"

Burns writhed about, turning his grimy face full upon his interrogator. The stare he gave the man fairly chilled him.

"Pierre Rameau—that's your name, eh?" he gurgled harshly. "Pierre Rameau, I will kill you—ki-ill you!"

He tried with desperate energy to gain his feet, but he faltered and fell.

"Kill! Kill!" he moaned. "I cannot—I will not die till I have killed you!"

The incomparable strangeness of his voice and the awful expression of his countenance cannot be indicated; nor can mere words give any adequate impression of the man, old, withered, ill-clad, groveling in the wet, sandy soil, soaked in blood and panting forth

intolerable passion. He looked scarcely human—more like a beast of prey, wounded to death, tearing madly, blindly at whatever he could feel. His words soon became indistinguishable and ran together into a harsh, guttural growl.

Dick Beckett (doubtless the reader has recognized him) was at first too much astonished to be at himself. As soon as he began to pull his wits together, however, the whole truth became more than a suspicion in his mind.

"Who hurt ye, Daddy Burns?" he demanded in his natural tone of voice.

"War it that air Pierre Rameau?" Perhaps hearing Burns repeat the great robber's name had suggested the thought to Dick Beckett, or it may have risen out of the prevalent habit of laying everything cruel and otherwise unaccountable at the feet of Rameau.

Dick knelt down beside the old man, and, still holding his gun in one hand, felt of the wound, after pulling away the rent clothes from around it. In vain he tried to arouse him.

"Well—well—tat, tut, tut!" he spluttered.

Being again to his feet and standing with most of his weight on his crooked leg, he contemplated the situation, while with the fingers of his left hand he worried the frowzy red hair that hung under the brim of his battered cap.

"Poor old daddy!" he exclaimed, after a while. "He do seem to be 'bout done for!"

Dick possessed executive ability of a sort, and when he got his faculties rightly put together there was no such a thing as his giving up to circumstances contrary to his wish. He examined Burns and found that he was not yet dying. The next thing was to save him. This looked like a forlorn hope, but he would try it at all events. So he caught the lingering horse and with its aid bore Burns through the wood to his cabin.

Here I insert a short paragraph from the "Honey Island Records." The reader will feel, in reading it, a waltz from the old reckless life of the frontier:

"Dick Beckett," it goes on to say, "found the preacher in a sad condition when he reached home with him, which it was after dark at the time, and he struck a light. The wound was a tear in the side dug by a pistol bullet that had been amazingly flattened on a silver watch afore doing it. 'I will save him!' said Dick Beckett, who was a good nurse besides a distracting fiddler; and, belike, he had original medicine—strange roots and such. Some do say he did possess a root of the man-plant which he salved the hurt with. Sure enough, any way he cured him betimes. What they do say, also, is that Dick Beckett did fiddle and play profane music unto the preacher what time he convalesced, even such tunes as 'Sagar in the Gourd' and 'Riding on a Rail.' No doubt, however, this matters not, seeing that the preacher survived and at last went on his way."

In the French version of the story there is a statement not to be found in the other accounts.

"It cannot be denied," runs this creole document, which appears to be a rough translation of some lost English writing—"It cannot be denied that Burns, the preacher, did swear vengeance on Pierre Rameau, the robber (forban is the French word used), and did express himself in language dreadful in its nature. Some think that this Dick Beckett had fiddled all the piety and tenderness of religion out of the old man's soul, for, after this, he is mightily changed in his temper and disposition, and some desperate acts are set down to his credit."

Dick Beckett himself, in his extreme old age, when his mind ran mostly on things long since done, was sometimes ready to talk about Burns; but even the garrulosity of nearly a century of years did not overcome a certain tantalizing discretion. The most that he would tell was to the effect that Burns seemed a little "unsettled in 'is upper story w'en 'e got well."

"Yes," he would remark, "I remember how 'e looked w'en 'e up 'an' tole me good-bye 'an' went off to search for Pierre Rameau. 'Twas ob a Thursday mornin' 'an' 'e said: 'Farewell Dick, I go unto Honey Island 'an' woe be upon that infernal darn rascal what stole my child!'"

Doubtless this seemed to the aged fiddler the exact language of Burns; but it does not sound like him. If we cannot wholly believe that there could have been a change so sudden and so radical in the character of one who had been for so many years a sincere and singularly humble-minded preacher, we must, at least, give due weight to the evidence tending to prove it.

One thing is pretty conclusively settled: Burns did penetrate to the innermost fastnesses of Honey Island, and not finding Pierre Rameau there, made his way, by what route is not known, to New Orleans, where for some time he attracted little attention, though he wandered about by night and by day, going into all sort of places, his eyes full of a half-smoldering fire and glancing keenly into the face of every person he met.

He had no money, and how he lived has never been found out, though after a time he met Vasseur, who thenceforward took such care of him as circumstances permitted.

He had but one thought and that thought was Pierre Rameau.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Electric Light a By-Product.

It is stated that the plate glass works at Elwood, Ind., which operates an up-to-date electric light station as part of its plant to supply its own light, intends to enter into competition with the local lighting company to supply the city with lights. This is a unique by-product of a glass manufacturing establishment.

THE HEN REARED KITTENS.

The Letter in Turn Adopted Traits of the Hen.

Some years ago my attention was called to a hen that had adopted a litter of kittens. When I first saw them they had got their eyes open. Every day I spent an hour or more watching the old hen and her strange family. The hen would let the cat suckle the kittens, but when they were through she would drive the cat away and hover over the family. The cat was a tramp that fed with several others on swill brought from the city for hens and hogs. As far as I could see, the cat was willing to let the hen rear her kittens. The whole affair seemed natural, and was as intelligently arranged as if it had happened to human beings. I carefully noted the actions of the old hen and kittens. The kittens soon learned the calls of the hen, and the hen certainly understood the calls of the kittens. The hen would wander into the bushes, scratching for insects, which she ate without offering them to her adopted family. When the kittens wanted rest and sleep they made a thin cry, and the hen would immediately hover them. If they wanted food their cries sounded to me like the call to hover, but the hen understood and she led them to the milk dish. If the dish was empty, she led them to the hen yard and looked for bits of meat or bread. If she failed to find food, she went to the house door and called until some one of the family brought out milk. Before the cat deserted her family, the hen would lead the kittens to a flat ledge, where the cats sunned themselves. The cat usually hunted up the hen in the early days for a relief from an overflow of milk. Several times I saw the hen hunt for the cat when the kittens were hungry. When the cat weaned the kittens, the hen seemed to understand that she must look to the family for food.

I noticed that the kittens as they became older failed to play like kittens taught by a mother cat, and their voices remained weak and thin. In many ways they showed a lack of cat teaching. On the other hand, they adopted some of the ways of the hen. They would scatter like chickens, and would scratch in imitation of the hen. I did not see them eat the insects which they found, excepting grasshoppers. Mr. Parsons was a practical man and wanted eggs, so he killed the kittens. If I had known what he intended to do I should have offered to buy the lot for further study. I remember that I sent Forest and Stream an account of this case—I think a clipping from a local paper. The intelligence of the cat, hen and kittens, under strange conditions, was so evident that a dull observer could not make a mistake. The cat reasoned that the hen would take good care of her family and she was contented, like some human mothers that give their babies away. The hen understood fully that the kittens would not eat the insects which she found and reasoned that she must look for food in another direction reasoning—Forest and Stream.

Why Mary Did Not Sing.

An able, but easily embarrassed and somewhat absent-minded young teacher was about to begin a singing lesson day when a knock at the schoolroom door interrupted proceedings. The teacher went to the door and ushered in a delegation from a prominent local woman's club. When the ladies were comfortably seated and each had assumed a critical, listening attitude the teacher resumed the singing lesson. It was one of her most stringent rules of action that when company was present everything should go on exactly as usual.

One of her pupils, Mary Holmes, a somewhat shy girl, had a good alto voice, and the teacher was anxious that she should display it to advantage.

"Now, Mary," she said encouragingly, "when I count four you be sure to sing. Attention, children!" raising her baton. "One, two, three—ready—sing!" The children sang lustily, but Mary's alto voice was missing.

"I didn't hear your voice that time, Mary. Remember, when I count four you are to sing. Next verse, children! One, two—" Mary watched the motion of the teacher's lips anxiously—"three! Ready—sing!" The children's shrill treble rang out unaided by Mary's strong alto.

"Don't you feel like singing, Mary? Try this verse, now—one, two, three. Well, what is it?"

Mary had risen and was shyly twisting her fingers. "Please, Miss Brooks," she said breathlessly, "you told me to sing when you counted four, and you only count just to three every time"—YOUTH'S COMPANION.

Music Heard in Moro.

Moro music is strangely unrhymical to European ears, says a writer in Everybody's Magazine. It consists mainly of a monotonous reiteration of sound, even a supposed change of air being almost imperceptible to an ear unaccustomed to the barbarous lack of tone. The Moro piano is a wooden frame shaped like the runners of a child's sled, on which small kettle-drums are balanced by means of cords and sticks laid horizontally. These rather resemble pots for the kitchen rather than musical instruments, but each is roughly tuned, forming the eight notes of the scale. Women crouching on the ground before this instrument beat out a wailing sound from it with shaped sticks, while from larger kettle-drums, hung by ropes from a wooden railing at one side, two men accompanied the piano, and one old woman in the background drummed out an independent air of her own on an empty tin pan.

Honesty.

Honesty doesn't really amount to much until it has been tried out.

A SWEET STORY.

OUR REGULAR SUNDAY SERMON.

The Beautiful Story of Esther Delineated in an Attractive Style By An Eloquent Preacher.

NEW YORK CITY.—Sunday morning the Rev. Cornelius Woolfkin, minister of the Greene Avenue Baptist Church, had for his subject "A Supreme Opportunity." He chose as his text Esther iv: 14: "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Mr. Woolfkin said:

The history of Esther is a fascinating romance. Every changing scene in the panorama is a graphic illustration of the providence of God. It traces the transition from obscurity to prominence; from weakness to power. The scene opens showing Esther an orphan girl belonging to a captive and despised race. Naturally, every door of influence would be closed to her. Alone in the world, dependent upon a cousin's bounty, the horizon of her life was limited. Her chief endowment was beauty, and that, as the world goes, is more likely to become a snare of evil than a benediction of good. Yet, behind this humble, modest life there is working the might, wisdom and love of God. The Queen's throne is empty. The royal crown is waiting some one who may please the mood of the King. Thousands of gentle blood-dreams of the Queen's plan of the accomplishment of her ambition. But the providence of Jehovah has reserved the place for Esther, the orphaned Jewish girl.

This same divine power seeks to mold every life. The circumstances and conditions that environ us may not seem promising. But what are these with God? His strength is made perfect in weakness. The vast majority of men and women who have made the molds of history were those whom God's providence brought from obscurity and lowly conditions. Your way is not hid from the Almighty. There is a place held vacant for your filling. That place is as honored and dignified as any royal throne, because it is divinely appointed. The steps leading thereto may seem to be contingencies, accidents, fortuitous chances, and through the moods of other persons. But if there be the spirit of faith to trust Him, diligence to discover His will and readiness to obey, He will bring to the place and open the most sure way for our eternal profit and glory. No one else may step into our place, until we, through unbelief and disobedience, have forfeited the privilege of its occupancy.

Every life has its own unique endowment. Success or failure depends upon the manner in which we hold these possessions. If we hold them selfishly to profit ourselves withal, they turn into corruption. But if they be held in trust as a sacred stewardship, used for the furtherance of His purposes and the bringing of the kingdom of God, they will turn into treasures. Our temptation is to discredit our possessions and opportunities. But we may not despise the day of small things.

Esther had only personal beauty to commend her at first. This is not a gift despised by Satan in his attempt to ruin a soul; then why should it be discredited as a means to good? The king's heart is in his hands and two fishes, but consecrated to His service, they fed the multitude and more. It all turns upon whether we are using our endowments in the interest of self and by the energy of self, or whether we are living and working in co-operation with Him and for His glory. The form of a life will vary. God does not duplicate and make all lives to conform to a like pattern. There was a vast difference between the captive maid that served in Naaman's home and the orphan that was counted Persian throne, but it was the same God who worked in each.

The orphan girl became the bounteous queen. She enjoys the honors and emoluments of royalty. Banquets are held in her honor and a retinue of servants minister to her continually. Can she support the dignity thus thrust upon her? Will adulation, flattery and vanity enervate her soul's ability, or will she grow strong and potent for good amid opportunities? Only an answer such queries, and that comes soon enough. From the outer world she hears the lamentation of her kindred people. Mordecai, her cousin, is in sack cloth and mourning and would not be comforted. All the captives are wailing with fear. What could it mean? If she had only been party to the conference between her royal husband and the prime minister prince she would have understood. It was the king's decree that the sentence of death which were being hurried throughout the empire she would have known. She seems to be exempt. Does she not dwell in the palace? But the blackness overshadows her even there. No circumstance or condition can shut it out. The court of Persia permitted no one wearing sack cloth, that symbol of sorrow and mourning, to enter the royal precincts. They would not be disturbed by painful reminders of life's sorrows. But even the royal purple cannot ignore the sentence of death which were being hurried throughout the empire she would have known. She seems to be exempt. Does she not dwell in the palace? But the blackness overshadows her even there. No circumstance or condition can shut it out. The court of Persia permitted no one wearing sack cloth, that symbol of sorrow and mourning, to enter the royal precincts. They would not be disturbed by painful reminders of life's sorrows. But even the royal purple cannot ignore the sentence of death which were being hurried throughout the empire she would have known. She seems to be exempt. Does she not dwell in the palace? But the blackness overshadows her even there. No circumstance or condition can shut it out. 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