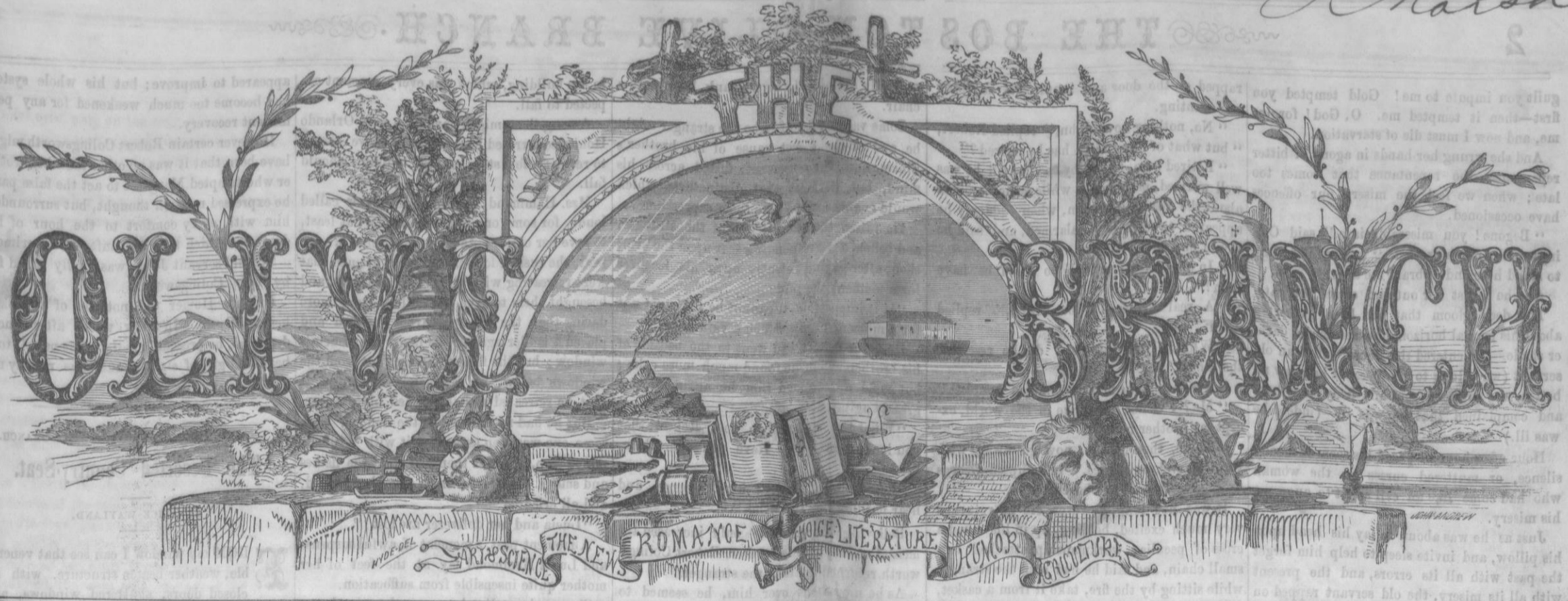


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A Fine Original Story.

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WRITTEN FOR THE OLIVE BRANCH.

TRUE LOVE; OR THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.

BY E. H. GOULD.

A vessel is seen lying in the harbor near London. She is ready to sail; the wind is fair, yet still she remains rocking gently to and fro hour after hour. The passengers on board begin to feel impatient to start upon their journey across the Atlantic. The Captain is pacing the deck, and seems watching and waiting anxiously. At length a speck is seen, far down the river, then the plashing of oars is heard, nearer and nearer, till a boat comes along the side of the vessel, and a woman with a child is taken on board. The order is immediately given, and the vessel bounds away upon the bosom of the Thames. The boat glides on and is soon lost in the distance. The two boatmen, at length leaving it, walk on hurriedly till they reach a cottage, a few miles out from the city, where they are met at the garden gate by a pale and affrighted female.

"It is all right; we have done our part," said the foremost of the boatmen. "How is that, boy?" inquired the other boatman.

The female shuddered, and a more deadly paleness overspread her countenance, as she replied: "He has been dead an hour."

"Now for the burial," said the boatmen; "for in these times, when pestilence is in every abode, the dead must not wait for a burial."

"No," replied the other; "Death shows no respect to rank nor wealth now, and their carcasses shouldn't be suffered to breed pestilence for us, poor dogs."

"But my master, dreaming of the safety of his boy; how will he bear this? How will Robert Colingsworth learn the fate of his boy?" said the female.

"Why your voice trembles as if you felt the rope about your neck, with which you were to be hung," said one of the boatmen.

"She deserves it, no doubt," added the other, interrupting him.

"It is no use to be frightened now," said the former. "Your master will believe God has taken his boy to himself, and do you fear that he will for a moment think you could retain him?"

"And if the devil has had a hand in it, you were perhaps equally unable to resist him," added the other.

"Hark! hark! I hear the tramp of horses, I believe," said the female.

"Yes, yes, you do; they are coming round for the dead early this morning. Let us hoist a flag, that they may call here, and then be off."

Robert Colingsworth was the oldest of three brothers, and succeeded to the estates of his father. He had long been wedded to a lady of great worth, and almost despaired of ever having an heir, when his heart was gladdened by the birth of a son. Nothing could exceed his joy, which was expressed in every conceivable manner. His brothers also, seemed to forget their disappointment at this event, and, whatever of jealousy they might have felt toward the little stranger, mingled their expressions of joy with his.

In the midst of their rejoicing a shadow fell across the hearthstone of Robert Colingsworth. He was indeed a father, but the wife and mother was no more.

He watched the infant hours of his little son with great pleasure; and was happy to see him at three years of age, a healthy, lovely, and most promising child.

About this time, a pestilence began its ravages in London, and the fears of Robert Colingsworth were fully aroused, therefore the child and its nurse, Margaret, were immediately sent to Riverside cottage, to remain till the pestilence should have swept by. But the father was still anxious lest the pestilence should pursue and overtake his little treasure even there.

On the morning we have mentioned, he had risen more than an hour earlier than usual, and might have been seen pacing his room in the greatest excitement and anxiety.

"O, such a dream," he muttered. "If aught should befall that boy, then all is lost!" and he wrung his hands in his agony. "Still it's but a dream," he added, half to himself. "I'll ride out to Riverside this morning;" at the same time ringing a bell and ordering a servant to bring his horse to the door.

Ere the servant returned, chancing to look out of the window, he perceived Margaret standing near the gate weeping.

"O, God! that was not a dream," he exclaimed; "I've waked to find it reality."

"Where is my treasure, Margaret, that you should be here at this time in the morning?" he inquired, in an excited tone.

"O, sir, the pestilence came to Riverside—" "And he is dead!" interrupted Colingsworth.

"Yes," replied Margaret, weeping violently. "But where is he? I must see him!"

"O, sir, it grieves me to say—" "Not that he has been carried away with the common herd, without coffin or shroud?"

"Even so," replied Margaret.

"O, God! it is all over then, and I am childless," said Robert Colingsworth, sinking into a chair.

In vain were words of consolation whispered to him; he heard them not.

"Ye cannot comfort me," he would often say, "inasmuch as ye cannot give me back my boy."

Several years after the events transpired, which we have recorded, a great sensation was created throughout the town, when it was known that Hon. Josiah Homer, a man of immense wealth, and great political influence, had really determined to take up his residence at Alton.

He had a son who had just returned from a tour in Europe, which increased the effect greatly in some circles. Lucia Hammond appeared to be the only person not affected in some way by these new comers. Yet very soon Orlando Homer fancied his heart was overflowing with love for her, and having declared the fact to her father and found him well pleased, he proceeded to inform Lucia, not doubting she would be quite ready to accept the golden opportunity of being his wife.

Squire Hammond had granted his consent to this, but left his daughter to decide it as her feelings might dictate; hoping, however, it might be in the affirmative as it would afford him great satisfaction to be connected to Hon. Josiah Homer in such happy relations. The subject had not been mentioned between the Squire and his daughter, till one evening, observing Lucia appeared more thoughtful than usual, and recollecting she had appeared somewhat the same, since the day Orlando Homer sought her hand, he called her to his library, and inquired the cause.

Lucia's heart fluttered, as she replied with some reluctance—

"The cause of my sadness, father, (though

I had hoped no one saw it,) is a struggle in my heart, between duty and inclination."

"Explain, Lucia," said the Squire, quite surprised.

"I heard you say, father, but a short time ago, proceeded Lucia, that if something did not occur in your favor soon, you would be a ruined man, a bankrupt; and for that reason, I've felt as a duty to you, who have lavished love and wealth upon me, I ought to accept the proposals of Orlando Homer."

"Not as a duty to me," replied Squire Hammond, with evident emotion; "but do it that you may save yourself from becoming a bankrupt's daughter."

"No, father; if I consulted my own feelings alone, I would rather be the daughter of the poorest man in town," replied Lucia.

"Hush, hush, Lucia; this sounds very romantic to talk, to live it would be the test."

"I could do it," persisted Lucia.

"But pray tell me what are your objections to Orlando Homer?"

"He is wanting in energy, and everything I consider noble in a young man," replied Lucia.

"That is all fancy with you," said Squire Hammond. "I am sorry you regard this matter in such a light. If wedded to Orlando Homer you would have wealth at your command, could take a position with the first in the country, go to Washington to spend your winters, and altogether you would live a gay life."

"Permit me to finish the picture," said Lucia. "I should be wedded to a man I never could love, compelled to spend my days with a person, whose society I cannot endure for an hour. The glitter of gold could never hide his stupidity from me, nor does it from others," continued Lucia, "they bow to his wealth and his father's honors, not to him." As callers were now announced, the subject was dropped for the evening.

A few mornings after Squire Hammond felt quite sure he had found the key to Lucia's prejudice, as he rose an hour earlier than usual, and looking out of his window, observed Lucia gathering fresh bouquets for the vases, and a young gentleman by her side, assisting her.

His face burned with rage. He hit his lips, and when he saw them separate, he turned and paced his room.

"Is it possible," he muttered, "that he, whom I've loaded with favors, raised in my office from a mere boy, granting him every privilege, even to live with his mother in my cottage, at the foot of my garden, should now try to steal the heart of my daughter in return? The scamp!" and he stamped upon the floor in his rage.

He had scarce forgotten these unhappy feelings, and seated himself comfortably in his office, with the morning paper in his hand, when his protegee, Robert Donaldson, placed an unsealed note in his hand.

Squire Hammond read it through, his face burning with indignation, then regarding Donaldson for a moment, he said, in a contemptuous tone.

"You love my daughter! What presumption!"

"Yes, I love your daughter," replied Donaldson, firmly.

"And you ask me to sanction it! Such audacity!" said Squire Hammond, rising and pacing the room.

"By whose authority do you come to me in this manner?"

"Lucia Hammond's."

"Don't tell me that," said the Squire in a rage, "don't tell me my daughter would bestow her heart upon a penniless book-worm, the son of a mad gipsy."

for thus referring to my mother," said Donaldson. "I know I have neither birth nor wealth, but I have a spotless character."

"You are guilty of ingratitude at least in this case," said Squire Hammond, changing his tones somewhat.

"No, never," replied Donaldson; "without your entire consent, this matter shall go no farther."

"That can never be granted," said the Squire, firmly.

"Then I go, and seek my fortune elsewhere; and you may find one who will love your daughter more than I do, who will be willing to sacrifice more for her happiness," replied Donaldson.

Squire Hammond had felt proud of his protegee, had sounded his praises everywhere, and predicted for him the reward due to such energy and perseverance, as he possessed, combined with such remarkable abilities. But that he would ever make love to his daughter, was a thing he had not dreamed; he was indignant.

As Robert Donaldson walked along in the direction of his humble abode, he felt a double resolution to struggle with fate, till he should arise at that point, when no man should dare refer to his birth. He was startled from this train of thought, by hearing his name in familiar tones, and turning, he observed Lucia leaning over the garden gate.

"Why are you looking so sad?" she inquired as he approached her.

"I'm sad because I look upon these hills, and each familiar object for the last time."

"And why? What has happened?"

"I must go, Lucia, and win fortune and fame."

"But my father!" whispered Lucia, blushing.

"He is indignant."

"And why, pray?"

"Alas! Lucia, I'm but a threadbare student, without fortune or birth."

"But you have talents and nobleness of character for your birthright," pleaded Lucia. "and virtue and truth, which are better than riches."

"Thank you, Lucia," said Donaldson. "I thank you for all your kindness to me; but you must forget me now."

"Forget you, Robert, never," said Lucia, with deep emotion; "you may as well command the sun to forget to shine upon yonder hills. But you must not leave us. I will plead with my father."

"No, Lucia, it would be useless; he is inexorable. Still his objections are such as we may hope to remove at some future time, and the sweet assurance you have given me, that your love shall remain unchanged, gives me fresh courage to battle with life. But my mother!"

"I will not forsake her," said Lucia.

"Bless you, Lucia, bless you; but I must say farewell, and leave you; your father might be angry did he know that I detained you one moment after what has been said."

"Farewell."

"Farewell," was now whispered by trembling lips.

Donaldson sat in thoughtful silence for a time after he entered the house, then said,—

"Mother, I feel I ought to go away and try my fortune elsewhere, and yet I can't leave you here unprotected."

"What do you mean, Robert? I thought now, since you had become a lawyer, you would remain with Squire Hammond."

The speaker hesitated and trembled till her whole frame shook.

"No, mother, I will not leave you. You watched over me in my tender years,—now you are old, and feeble, I'll not forsake you."

"Oh, Robert, forgive me! I've wronged you, and yet you have been the only comfort of my life. I never knew a happy hour till you clung about my neck. But go from me now, I can bear it no longer; your presence is a reproach to me."

"O, don't talk so strangely, mother, you alarm me. Tell me all about your past life, and if the person can be found who has wronged you, I'll be revenged on him. Tell me of my father, how he lived, and when he died."

"Your father, Robert!" the speaker turned pale and gasped for breath.

"No, mother, no," said Robert, seeing her agitation. "I'm sorry I mentioned this subject which always seems so painful to you."

"Never mind, Robert. Commence at once to make preparations to leave, and I will assist you all I can."

He was very busy during the day, though he said little about leaving home; indeed he could scarcely determine what course to pursue.

As he sat watching the dying embers late into the hours of night, and endeavoring to penetrate the future, he fancied he heard a strange sound proceeding from the little apartment of Mary Donaldson. He listened breathlessly, for he suddenly recollected that her manner had been strangely determined during the day. Again he heard the strange sound, and proceeding to her bedside he found her in extreme agony.

"What is the matter! what is the matter!" he exclaimed as he saw her deathlike appearance. "Let me call a physician."

"It is too late, Robert, this pain will soon be ended;" and she motioned him to bend his head to her lips, and she whispered in broken sentences—then fell back insensible. A physician was immediately called, but it was beyond the power of human effort to save the dying woman; she had taken a powerful poison.

Robert sat beside her lifeless form for hours like one bewildered. He could scarce believe the strange tale he had heard even from dying lips. The events of the last twenty-four hours seemed but a dream to him. At length he opened the secret drawer as he had been told, and there found the exact amount of gold, and the several articles as described.

Why should he longer doubt? If he followed the directions given, he would find the remainder of the strange tale true also.

George Colingsworth, now the only remaining brother of Robert, was one evening walking in his garden, in no very pleasant mood. He was prematurely old and enfeebled, a childless widower and at the time suffering from financial embarrassment. All his troubles and misfortunes seemed crowding upon him at once.

At length he was startled from some most unpleasant reverie, by the efforts of some one to open the garden gate; as it was fastened on the inside he unbolted it, and a female the most miserably wretched, entered, uninvited, and asked alms, rather in an insolent commanding, then beseeching tone. He commanded her to be gone at once, when she turned upon him a fierce glance, which made him shrink back and tremble.

"Do you know me, George Colingsworth, and refuse me aid when I'm perishing?" said the intruder.

"Begone! begone, imp of darkness, your visit is ill-timed. I'll not listen to your prattling," replied Colingsworth.

She turned upon him a still fiercer glance and said,—

"Upon you, George Colingsworth, be the













