



DRAWN BY W. H. OVEREND.

We were soon in the quiet garden in the neighbourhood of the schoolhouse.

THE MASTER OF THE MINE.

BY ROBERT BUCHANAN,

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The visions of the earth were gone and fled—
He saw the giant Sea above his head.—Keats' *Endymion*.

CHAPTER I.

A PROLOGUE, AND THE FIRST SCENE.

In a large wooden building not far from the seashore, a building attached as school-house to "Munster's Boarding Academy for Young Gentlemen," I, Hugh Trelawney, then scarcely ten years old, was moping alone. I had only arrived two days before from London, where I had parted from my father, a travelling lecturer in the cause of what was then known as the New Moral World. My mother had long been dead, and I had led a somewhat neglected life, sometimes accompanying my father on his wanderings, more often being left to the care, or carelessness, of strangers. At last I had been sent to Southampton to complete a very perfunctory education.

It was afternoon, and a half-holiday; my new schoolfellows were playing close by. For myself, I was too used to loneliness to be very miserable. I merely felt an outcast for the time being, and took no interest whatever in my new associations.

As I sat thus, I must have fallen into a brown study, from which a slight sound startled me.

Looking up, I met the flash of two dark eyes which were intently regarding me.

"Are you the new boy?" said a clear voice.

I nodded, and stared at my interrogator, a girl of about my own age, whose black eyebrows were knitted in a way very curious in so young a child as she seemed.

Her arms and neck were bare, and she was fondling a kitten, whose bright eyes and lissome movements seemed to have something in common with her own beauty. I noticed, too, that she wore earrings, and that they were very bright and glistening.

"What is your name?" she continued, in the same clear questioning tone, altogether with the manner of a superior who was not to be trifled with.

"Hugh."

"Hugh what?"

"Hugh Trelawney."

I felt somewhat overawed by the tone of the little lady, who, to my boyish eyes, seemed much more my senior than she was in reality.

She continued to regard me with the same keen scrutiny, and then said, looking at my attire,

"Who is dead?"

I still wore black for my mother, and, with a somewhat faltering voice, I told her so.

She did not seem surprised, and expressed no sympathy; but, walking to the school-room window, looked out, saying,

"Why don't you go out and play with the other boys?"

"I don't care about play. I am tired."

"Tired with what?" she questioned, quickly.

I made no reply, for I was not prepared for the question. I had meant to imply that I was low-spirited and dull, but had not cared to confess so much in so many words.

She understood me, however, and, although she seemed indifferent to my condition, troubled me with no more questions.

Glad to direct her attention from myself, for her bright eyes troubled me and made me feel ashamed, I stooped down and stroked the kitten, which she had placed upon the floor. Even as I did so, I could feel her eyes still fixed upon me; but when I looked up again with an annoyed expression, she turned her eyes away, and laughed.

This emboldened me, and I began to question in my turn.

"Are you the schoolmaster's daughter?"

At this she laughed the more—so brightly and pleasantly, with such a good-humoured sympathy with my blunder, that my first impression of her began to improve, and I saw that, besides being a rather imperious, she was a very pretty, young lady.

"Why do you laugh?" I remarked.

"At you," she replied; "because you take me for Mr. Munster's child. I am a stranger here, like yourself. My people live far away in South America, and are very rich. My mother is dead, and I don't remember her. My father has sent me here to be taught; but I shall soon go back to him. Have you a father?" she added, quickly.

I nodded.

"Is he kind to you, and was it he that sent you to school?" she asked.

But without waiting for my reply to her questions, she continued, "My father cried when I left him, though he is a great man, and when he gave me these earrings, he told me my mother had worn them before me, and he kissed them. We live far away from here, in a brighter place. Don't you hate England?"

This was rather a startling query, but being in a state of mind bordering on disgust for life in general, I readily assented. Her eyes gleamed.

"It is a dreary place," she cried; "dull and miserable, and it rains nearly every day. But it is different where I come from. It is always bright there, and there are flowers everywhere, and the trees are full of fruit; and there are bright insects, and beautiful snakes without stings, that can be taught to twine round your neck, and feed out of your hand."

As she spoke thus, indeed, it seemed that I was transported to the land of which she spoke: her eyes were so sparkling, her face so bright and sunny, her form so foreign in its slender

beauty,—and her earrings glistened, and her beautiful ivory teeth gleamed,—and I saw her walking in that land, a wonder among all wonders there, with fruits and flowers over her head, and brilliant insects floating round her, and luminous snakes gleaming harmless in her path, and dusky slaves waiting upon her and doing her courtesies. For it must be borne in mind that I had been a studious boy, fond of reading wild books of travel and adventure, and of picturing in my mind the wonders of foreign lands. Much that I had fancied of dwellers in distant regions was realised in the face I now beheld for the first time.

At what age is a beautiful human creature—and more particularly one belonging to the gentler sex—insensible to admiration? I am certain that my new friend perceived mine, and that it did not displease her. It was, at any rate, genuine homage, quietly expressed, almost against my will, in the pleased yet timid glances of my eyes.

When she next spoke, her clear impetuous tone was greatly changed and softened, and a kinder light dwelt on her face.

"If you will come with me," she said, "I will show you the place. There is not much to see but the garden, and that I like well enough. Will you come?"

I rose awkwardly, as if at a word of command; and, taking my cap from the peg where it hung, swung it in my hand as I followed her to the door.

Ashamed, yet pleased, to be chaperoned by a girl, I wondered what my schoolfellows would think of it.

Close to the school-room was the playground, or rather the capacious piece of lawn, dignified by that name.

My schoolfellows were playing cricket thereon. They paid no attention to me as I passed, but looked at my companion with a curious and not too friendly expression. She, for her part, passed along imperiously, without deigning to cast a single look in their direction; and I noticed that her look had changed again, and that her dark brows were knitted with the former unpleasant expression. She said nothing, however, for some minutes.

Our first visit was to the top of a high knoll behind the house, whence we could see the surrounding country, and, some miles to the southward, the distant sea, with a white frost of billows on the edge of liver-coloured sands.

It was a quiet, sunless day; but far away there were gleams of watery light on the white sails of ships passing by under full canvas.

The girl looked seaward at the passing sails with much the same peculiar expression she had worn on our first encounter.

How could I fathom her thoughts? I guessed she was thinking of her home, but I was wrong.