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LOVE'S COMMON SENSE
BY JOHN A. STEUART.

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SYNOPSIS.

Peter Clephane and Andrew Kilgour are cousins, students at Edinburgh University, between whom is a bitter feud. The former is the son of a rich city lawyer and his cousin is the heir of an estate in the Highlands that has almost passed into the hands of creditors. After a bitter fight with his cousin, Kilgour is on his way home when he falls in with company at the "Hound and Stag" inn at Perth. Arrived home his companion on the journey turns out to be his uncle, Peter Clephane's father. To retrieve his family's fortune Andrew is sent to India.

CHAPTER X (Continued.)

An mystery or mysteries, how came all those splendours to be above me, and how came I of all the millions on earth to look up at them from such an utter desolation? Did I need the lesson of human feebleness more than any one else? Was my pride so stubborn, my disobedience so great, that I had to be sent out here, a second and lonelier Ishmael, to be humbled and corrected? If the sins were many, truly the punishment was sore. Faint and quivering, I leaned against the side for support, and as I rubbed a clammy face there was wrung from my heart that piteous cry that went up from Calvary—the cry which vents the concentrated misery of a lost race, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

And immediately, as if by celestial impulse, my mind flew back to a heathery braeside, and I was nestling from threatening perils in arms that compassed me safely about—as one whom his mother comforteth. The wounded animal seeks its lair that it may die in peace; the wounded spirit turns home that it may be strengthened and soled, were it only by mere recollection. But for that Divine memory, that swift flight through space and time, I might have gone that instant and leaped from the bulwarks into the flood below. It was an impotent mood, the mood of a coward, if you like, but let those who have been similarly tried say if their hearts have never failed them. And let those who have never borne the stress of misfortune beware what fate has in store for them, and remember that "they jest at scars who never felt a wound."

I returned to bed by and by, falling asleep at length on a resolution to be up next morning with the sun. As it turned out, I was astray in advance of my time. Just as the first glimmer of dawn flickered on the sea I was startled by a noise of ropes upon the ship's sides, a scurrying of feet on the deck and a tumult of contending voices in shrill confusion all round. Quick as thought I tumbled out of bed, threw on my clothes, stuck a brace of revolvers in my belt, grasped my sword and bounded up the companionway. At the head there was an abrupt and uncomfortable stoppage, for no sooner did my foot touch deck than a score of gleaming scimitars were circling about my throat, preventing the slightest chance of defence.

A throng of swarthy, fierce-eyed, vociferating villains pressed and brandished their weapons so truculently that I could have sworn to a chilly sensation of steel in my windpipe, though as yet no one had actually touched me. Divining that the rascals were Arabs, I demanded in the Arab tongue, and in rather gasping accents, what this sudden invasion and hostile display meant. At this a familiar voice called out, "Enlarge thy turban, friend; a great is the bountifulness of fortune to her favourites!" There was a sardonic laugh from those whose blades were closest about my neck. Then one who seemed to be the leader, pushing a little forward, said, sternly:—"The ship is ours. If thou art in love with thy life, surrender; if thou art tired of it, resist. Speak quickly."

The logic of this laconic speech being perfectly irresistible, I immediately answered:—"Since I value my life notwithstanding the difficulty of preserving it, I surrender. Will my friends lower their swords, for, to say the truth, they cause me an uneasy itching."

"When thou hast given up thy weapons," said the spokesman, curtly.

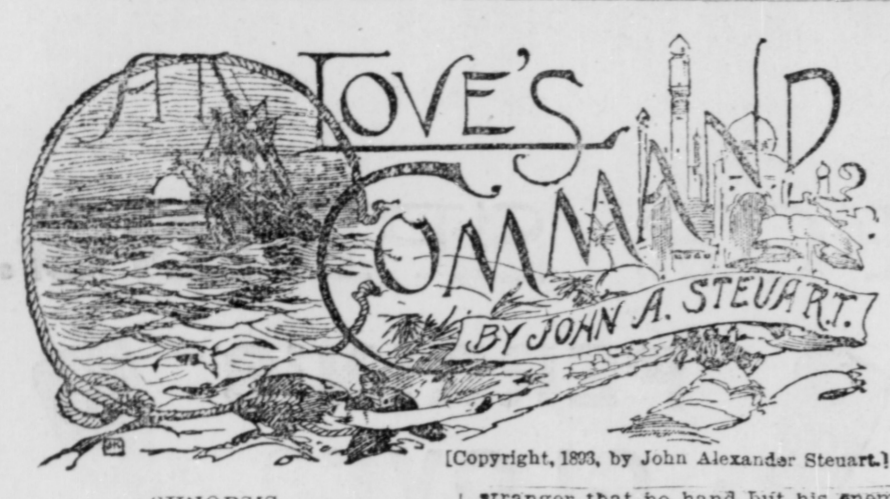
"They who do me the honour of this visit belong to a brave and chivalrous people," I rejoined, remembering Persian manners. "I know their history, and the songs of their poets, and the valour of their deeds. I am a stranger, alone and at your mercy. My arms are my sole possession. I pray you let me keep them."

"Nay, by Fatima's eyelash, arms in thy hands are as poison in the adder's tongue!" cried Abram ben Aden, coming forward so that I now caught sight of him. There was a diabolical fire in his black eyes, and his face bore an insolent leer of triumph. The look of him put all my fear to flight, and in its place kindled a sudden and savage desire to be revenged.

"That man," I said, pointing in scorn and anger at him and forgetting the fate that was so imminent; "that man has betrayed me. He has brought you here to plunder. Is it not so?"

Perhaps it was the unexpected audacity of my men and question that made them answer so promptly and frankly, but instantly a dozen of them called out, "It is so."

"I have taken this viper to my breast," I cried, "and he has stung me. It is a base thing that stings the hand that helps it. By your love of vengeance, I charge you to leave him to me. Let it be seen this day how treachery and ingratitude can be requited. We two have eaten salt together. I took him in, giving him of my best, and now he clamours for my life. It is his if he can take it. You will start the prayer of a forsaken



stranger that no hand but his enemy's be raised against him. I trust to your honour to see justice between man and man."

All this while the Arabs were swarming upon deck and pushing and crushing and crawling to see me and catch my words. Their looks encouraged me. "The ship is yours," I went on, still more boldly. "I yield it without a murmur; only let me put my life against the life of this son of a dog."

"Why do we waste time?" demanded Abram ben Aden, savagely. "Let his infidel throat feel the edge of a believer's sword. Who is he that he should bandy words with us? Off with his head, to the sharks with his carcass, and let us to the spoil!"

"Thy tongue is too fast for thy wit, Abram ben Aden," said the man whom I took to be leader. "He has yielded the ship to us. He is ready to put his life upon thy blade point if thou wilt grant him a like privilege in return. A fair bargain, by the memory of Silkan-dar-el-Rumal. Many a time hast thou boasted of thy skill with the sword; thou lovest revenge as well as any man. Here is thy opportunity to show thou possessest one and canst take the other. What think ye?" addressing his comrades. "Is it not as I say?"

"It is as thou sayest," came quickly in chorus from the two-score eager men.

Judging it best to take prompt advantage of this change of sentiment in my favour, I strode forward, and before he could raise a finger to prevent me caught Abram ben Aden firmly by the beard.

"Last night we ate salt together," I said. "It was the vow of friendship. To-day I spit in thy vile face. It is the vow of eternal enmity," and suiting the action to the word I spat full in his face. It is the greatest affront you can offer an Arab, or indeed to any man of the Moslem faith.

"Thou shalt rue it!" he shouted, stamping with rage, while he wiped his face. "By the holy prophet, thou shalt rue it! Mark me, son of an infidel dog, my sword will slake its thirst in thy blood. I will hew thee in pieces. I will scatter thee to the winds, so that no man can gather the fragments."

In an instant I was back, with my sword drawn ready for the attack.

"Thou hast there the sword I gave thee," I said. "Crown thy baseness and scatter me."

"Thou art a fall!" he hissed. "There are better things than letting the blood out of thy foul Christian body. I will take revenge for this defilement; yea, revenge that will not so much as leave thy name among men, but not now."

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(To be Continued.)

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Dated 26th March, 1895. D. F. MACWATT, Director for applicants