

Expiation

**A novel of England and our
Canadian Dominion**

by Edward Phillips Oppenheim, 1866-1946

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„A man may have a fine wit and a vulgar soul; intelligence fit to illuminate our age and a spirit capable of disgracing it; this man, great by his mind, may be a wretch at heart.“

—LACORDAIRE

Chapter I

The Refugees.

A solitary cabin stood far away in the backwoods of Canada, outside all tracks of civilization, in a region which only the native Indians and a few daring trappers cared to penetrate. Rudely built of pine logs, it was ill-calculated to withstand the piercing cold and frost which, for nine months out of the twelve,

holds this region in an iron grip. Around it, a small clearing had been effected, but the ground was many feet thick in snow, which, save where in front of the door it had been cut away, surrounded the frail little building, and reached up to the rude window.

A wild and lonesome spot, in the very thick of an almost impenetrable forest, little wonder then that the two men who had built this dwelling-place lived undisturbed, and all but undreamt of.

The two inmates were seated within on pine log segments, crouching over a fast dying-out fire, its decaying embers casting a fitful glare around on the little there was to show. Bare, uneven walls, against one side of which stood a rough cupboard, the only apology for furniture, save the seats and a longer stump set up as a table. Some furs, flung together in separate heaps, were evidently their beds; two long rifles standing in a corner, and a few trifles scattered carelessly about; this was all the feeble glimmer could reveal.

The men's faces were strangely alike, and yet, in another sense, strangely dissimilar: their features might have been cast in the same mould, but the expression of each face was totally different. He who appeared to be rather the younger of the two—though their stature agreed, and it was not by that means one distinguished any variation—was leaning forward, supporting his face with his hands, and gazing with a look of settled despair, indicating thoughts of an unenviable past, into the feeble remains of the fire. Now and then his lips moved, and a feeble smile played upon them, soon to vanish, as if chased away by darker broodings, and to be succeeded by the former expression of hopelessness.

His companion appeared to be steadily watching him through half-closed eyes, in which shone a restless, anxious light, contrasting markedly with the other's almost sullen look. A nervousness beyond his control seemed to have taken complete possession of him, and showed itself by the frequent changes of position, and restless movements of limbs. The one act to which he remained constant was the watch upon his companion, and in whose slightest motion he betrayed a keen interest.

The hours passed slowly on; but, as if unheedful, or perhaps unconscious of the flight of time, the two men maintained their positions unmoved. The only disturbing sound outside was the dull roar of the icy wind as it shook the tops of the pine trees, and passed on through the forest. Within the hut perfect silence reigned, unless when the ashes dropped softly off from the log fast burning out on the hearth.

At last the younger man rose slowly from his seat, but only to sink down with a weary sigh upon one of the heaps of furs, and stretch himself out for sleep. His mate flung another log upon the embers, but continued his watch. After a short time, when its object showed all the signs of sleep, the other arose and, moving on tiptoe, approached the sleeper, over whom he bent to study him narrowly. Apparently satisfied by the closed eyes and regular breathing that the slumber was no feigned one, he resumed his seat. He drew from his pocket a newspaper, and after a cautious glance round, commenced to read. One article alone claimed his whole attention, and this he read with an air of eager interest three or four times. Thus it ran:

EXECUTION OF JAMES DALTON
EXTRAORDINARY CONFESSION OF THE CRIMINAL

This morning, at eight o'clock, James Dalton, under sentence of death for the murder of Robert Harrison, policeman, suffered the extreme penalty of the law at the borough gaol.

After giving details of the execution, the reporter proceeded to dilate upon the last confession of the criminal, as follows:

"About six o'clock, Dalton, who appeared calm and resigned, pleaded for an interview with the governor, alleging that he wished to make confession of a crime committed by himself, for which, he had reason to believe, some innocent person had been suspected. Immediately on the request being conveyed to the governor, he, in company with the chaplain, and attended by his shorthand clerk, proceeded to the prisoner's cell, and received this confession of the unhappy man, given verbatim.

"At eight o'clock," he said, "I shall pass into another world. I have lived a life of crime from my youth here. The chaplain tells me that even now, if I confess everything and repent, I may be forgiven. That's what I can't take whole; but it's neither here nor there on what's on my heart. I want to tell you this straight. As near as I can remember, what I am going to clear off happened some twenty odd year' ago in the month of November. I was then one of a gang of burglar, whose chief lay it was to mark empty houses, when the owners were away, you see. We weren't doing much in the more desperate line then, as this paid us better, especially in the swell parts. It was a dark night, and me and a pal had to go on to some plate left for one night only in a house in Upper Sleeke Street, off Park Lane, London. Two menservants were kep', but only one was to be left in the house, and it were him what blew the thing to us on promise of half the metal when melted. He was to leave the scullery window open, and when we had got in, we was to knock him about a bit and tie him up, to make the thing look square. Howsomever, when we gets to the corner of the street, we meets him skulking about for us, and we l'arnt that, during the day, the plate had been removed, and so there warn't no go. As we talked this bilk over, we heard the tramp of a policeman t'other side of the street, and my pal and the footman naterally cut their lucky. Being in the shadow, I knew he would not see me, so I stood bolt up against the wall, and he passed on, in course, without noticing o' me. While I waited for him to get a safe distance off, I saw a light in the second-floor window of the house exactly opposite me. What possessed me I don't know, but even after the copper were out of hearing, I stood watching that 'ere light. It struck me that there were something wrong up there; what for I don't know, for it warn't partic'lar late. I ain't superstitious as a rule, but a sort of a kind o' creepiness come over me that something would happen in that house, if I waited, and something did happen for true. I hadn't been there above five minutes, and was jist a making up o' my mind to step it, when I see a hand pull the window open, and I skipped back into the shadow and squeezed myself up against the wall. Soon I see a man put his head and shoulders cautiously out and look carefully up and down. There warn't a soul about but me, and not a sound to be heard, and presently he stepped out on to the little balcony, and listened again. I saw him plainly then, though he couldn't see me, and by the awful scared look on his face I could guess something was

queer. He looked jist wild-like; pale as a ghost, and an awful look in his big black eyes. He was dressed like a swell, but his collar was torn open, and his bit of white tie hanging down. After he had stood there listening for a minute or two, he stepped back into the room, leaving of the window open. I waited, holding my breath, and crouching down in the dark still. He was back in a moment, and another swell with him.

"I could not see this gentleman so well as him, as afore coming out again he had lowered the lamp, but I could see they was both of a height, and about the same build. They whispered together for a bit, then one climbed over the balcony and dropped into the flower-beds below. The rails wasn't high, and the ground was soft with rain, so it wasn't no hard job, and in a moment the other was down, too. They opened the gate and turned down the street, walking very fast; but as they passed under the street lamp opposite me, I could see them plain. Lord! how scared they looked, both as pale as whitewash, and one of them shaking so as if he couldn't scarcely walk. They was both much alike, tall and dark. The one as seemed least put about, took the other's arm, and hurried him round the corner, out of sight in a twinkling.

"While I were hesitating whether to follow them or not, I noticed as how they hadn't shut the window, and I see as how it was easy to get up, by stepping on the first-floor window ledge, and swinging up by the balcony rails. In a jiffy I had screwed up my thinker to get into that room; and I did. What I see, though I had expected summat of the sort, almost took my breath away. Stretched on the floor in the far corner was a man whom I took for corpsed, for he was lying quite still, and I could see a drop or two of dark red blood streaming down his temple, and staining his hair, which was a light colour. I had seen many a stiff-un afore, but coming on him so suddent-like, clean took my nerve away, and I had half a mind to cut out again quicker'n I'd come; but then I thought as how, as I'd run the risk, I might as well lay my hands on some goods or other, and, spying some silver hornyments on the chimbley piece, I stepped up to it and stuffed them into my pocket. The room was richly furnished, and as I heerd no sound in the house, I opened a cupboard, too, and 'found' a silver cigar-case, and some other knickery-knacks. After I'd helped myself to about as much as I could carry away convenient, I was turning to go, when I heerd a noise behind me, and, turning round, sees the man whom I took for dead, on his feet and looking round in a dazed sort of way, until his eyes rested on me, and then he stared at me frightened-like. Seeing him up on his feet so unexpected startled me, and my senses seemed clean to go, and instead of making myself scarce at once, I jist stood and stared back at him until at last he spoke."

"What are you doing here!" he said.

"The sound of his voice brung me to myself, and I leapt for the window, but he was in front of it and caught me in his arms, and in a moment we were wrestling together. I was rayther weak at that time, jist getting over the fever, and he were a big, strong man, so he was copping the best of it, and there was nothing for it but to use my life-preserver. I got it out all right, no fear, and as he snatched at it, I dodged him, and brought it full force on to his temple. He guyve one deep groan and he sunk back, and I knowed by the way he fell that he was done for this time, and no error. I snatched the things that I had took out of my pockets, and put them all back agin, reckoning they would say the swells had done the job if there

was nothing missing, and then I got through the window and on to the balcony. There was no one in the street, and in a moment I had swung myself down and had got clean off. As I never heard nothing more of it, and none of our lot was looked after for it, I suppose the police fixed it on them two swells. I don't think they were nabbed, though, or I should have heard of it, cos an' why we allers has a good read of the Sunday paper after bein' out on the job, and there was no mention that I come across. If them 'ere swells has had to go on the strict q.t., on the Continong, fr instance, why, like as not they may hear of this, and know they only stunned their friend, and that it was me who settled him. There's nowt else I think on, 'cept the letters on the cigar-case, I remember, was a H and a h'M. That be all, governor."

So far the word for word confession. The report concluded:

"There is no difficulty in connecting this revelation with a mysterious murder at Mr. Mornington's London house, No. 6, Upper Sleeke Street, on the 20th of November, twenty-two years ago. On that night, the proprietor and a friend, Mr. Cecil Braithwaite, left the house, and no intelligence of them ever came to hand. The evidence before the coroner's jury, which sat on a body found in the house, implicated one or both of the gentlemen so deeply that warrants were issued for their apprehension. Upon this burglar murderer's confession, the Home Secretary was communicated with, and its corroboration being easy and immediate, we believe that these warrants have been already cancelled, and every effort will be made by the families concerned, no doubt, to discover the fugitives and apprise them of the proof of their innocence."

This was the article which seemed so much to interest the man who read it by the light of the pine logs. It further inspired him with a decision, for, after he had put the paper back into his pocket, he crossed the room, and once more bent over the sleeping man. His deep, regular breathing, and other evidences of sleep, encouraged the viewer, for with a firm hand he drew a small key out of the loose waistcoat pocket of the sleeper, and crossing the hut with careful tread, and every now and then a stealthy glance behind, he fitted the key into a small black box in the furthest corner, and pushing the lid up, took out two or three bundles of papers, and with them crossed again to the light of the fire. Here he glanced rapidly through them, pausing in his task at intervals, to bestow an anxious gaze at his companion. His task did not occupy him long; in a few minutes he came to the end of the little pile, and carefully thrusting selected ones into his inner pocket, he replaced the others precisely as he had found them. Then he relocked the box, and carefully replaced the key in the sleeping man's pocket. He breathed more freely now, as if the most difficult part of his task were accomplished; but he never for one moment relaxed his wary watch on the slumberer. He dragged out a pair of snow shoes from a corner, and placed them in readiness for use by the door; wrapped some thick furs around him, and slung his rifle across his shoulder by its strap as if about to leave.

On the threshold, he deliberated for a moment, turned back, and tearing a leaf out of an old pocketbook, yellow with age, wrote these few words:

"Going into the back country for some months; expect me back when the frost gives."

He folded the paper up and put it where he knew his companion would find it when he awoke. Then with a last backward glance at the latter, in which shone bitterest malice, the while his dark, heavy eyebrows almost met in a frown of hatred, he left the hut. Crossing the open space in front, he shot along on the racquets into the blackest depths of the forest, as one whose ban was lifted, and to whom a new life had given wings.

Chapter II

The Welcoming Home.

Merrily pealed the church bells of the little village of Mornington. Loud rose the discordant strains of the local brass-band. Eagerly pressed the villagers one against the other to be the first to see, the first to welcome home their long-absent lord and master. For the squire of Mornington, whose return home this day was such an event for the sleepy little hamlet, not only owned every acre in the parish, but was the largest landowner in the county. Every man and boy in the place was either tenant or labourer on his estates; and yet twenty-three years had passed since Harold Mornington had visited his home. Little wonder, then, that his appearance should be such a source of excitement to the good folk; and that they should peal their joy-bells, turn out their band, don their Sunday clothes, and turn into a general holiday the day which marked so important an event.

Mornington is a small village, and not a particularly picturesque one, although there certainly are some points about it worthy of admiration.

For instance, its cottages are clean and well-thatched, and its lattice windows, when opened, disclose many cleanly and comfortable interiors. Peep into one of them—as an index of all—for fashions do not vary in Mornington. There is the oft-scrubbed floor of red tiles, rather uneven in some places, and with a crack or two here and there, but none the less pleasant to look upon; the high-backed chair drawn up to the fireplace for the oldest member of the family, very stiff and uncomfortable to look at, but considered by the occupants the very acme of luxurious ease. A few cheap prints and texts on the wall, and, for certain, the photograph on the mantelpiece of "my niece and her baby," or "my wife's brother in his uniform," wretchedly taken, but none the less prized. A plain white deal table in the middle of the room for meals, round the red-painted legs of which play chubby youngsters with still redder legs. A smaller table in the corner, on which are spread out to the best advantage a few cheaply yet gaily bound volumes, comprising, nearly always, "The Pilgrim's Progress," "Robinson Crusoe," or some such inevitable works, and invariably the prayer-book and hymn-book and family Bible, on the latter of which gleams the old man's spectacles. Perhaps, if the cupboard door be half open, you may get a glimpse of the neatly assorted crockery, the china spotlessly white, and the tin ware polished into a dazzling degree of shininess. On the top shelf the

best tea-service glitters, most likely an heir-loom, jealously guarded by the housewife, who suffers no one to dust it but herself; the occasional breakage of an article is her greatest trouble.

Outside is a little plot of flower garden which, small though it may be, is sure to be well stocked with homely, sweet-smelling flowers. The rector gives a prize every year to the best kept garden, and the rivalry provoked thereby is keen, some a very blaze of colour, perfuming the air around. There is generally room enough behind the cottage to grow a few vegetables and rear a brood of chickens or ducks, and very often a pig-stye, to show that the labourer is not ignorant of the means whereby to add to his weekly wage. Broad-shouldered sons of the plough are these honest, God-fearing men, with few ideas perhaps, but those few sound ones; who do their duty to their master during the week, and on Sunday never miss attending either the parish church, or the tiny red brick Bethel at the other end of the village. To this latter comes on the Sabbath an itinerant preacher who has perhaps walked six or eight miles through the dusty lanes. Some black sheep there are in Mornington—as in all places; but they are few in number and not very black. In the village of Mornington there is such a majority of righteous and honest men, that a black sheep would be quite crushed by the overwhelming odds against him of those who found no cause for admiration or respect in his drunken orgies, his boastful talk, or his other evil habits. And, seeing himself coldly treated, even despised, and being forced to acknowledge to himself that the righteous ones had the best of it as far as the good things of this world go, he would, most likely, reform if black through weak-mindedness, and in time become one of the respected and prosperous. Or if he were one steeped in vice and wedded to iniquity, whom nothing could influence to good, he would then depart from Mornington at the first opportunity and seek a congenial resort. "Behind the times" some people would no doubt call Mornington. Perhaps it is so; as it has not yet learnt to grumble at what it has, or covet something unreasonable and unattainable. In short, it is contented, and therein lies its offence in the eyes of those who thus malign it. Long may it be behind the times in this respect!

This was no ordinary home-coming to the little village. No man possessing so magnificent a home as Mornington Abbey, with estates whose rent-roll rose far into five figures, would of his own choice desert such attraction in his youth and bury himself in unknown obscurity in a far away country. And yet this was what Harold Mornington had done, or rather had been forced to do by circumstances. With the remembrance before them of his long exile and wasted youth, no wonder that tenants and labourers, and all who made up the population of the district, should unite to show their sympathy by giving their lord a hearty welcome home.

Clash went the bells, the band which had been playing in a desultory manner some popular airs, to the intense delight of the juveniles, broke off suddenly, and prepared to sound the first notes of "See the Conquering Hero comes." The villagers roused themselves to the highest pitch of expectancy, for the cry, "He is coming," had been raised. A moment later, indeed, the Mornington landau was seen rounding the corner, followed by a little troop of horsemen. "Hurrah for Squire! Hurrah for Muster Mornington!" Hats were waved, and throats became hoarse with cheering, whilst all eyes were fixed on the occupant of the front seat of the vehicle. He stood up to bow his thanks, and when they saw him rise, and recalled in his face and bearing the likeness of his father and all

the Mornington race—saw the old proud but kindly smile, and marked the ravages which privation and unhappiness had made in his looks—their enthusiasm knew no bounds. Willing hands undid the traces and unharnessed the horses, and when, a second later, the little procession proceeded, Mornington tenants drew their lord in triumph to his park gates. Here, there was another halt, and while the horses were being re-harnessed, the county gentlemen, who had followed on horseback, pressed forward to shake hands with their new neighbour, and he, unable to address individuals, arose and spoke a few words to all collectively:

"Gentlemen, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kind welcome," he said hesitatingly. "You will forgive my saying very few words to you now. I see," he continued, looking slowly around, "many familiar faces, which in my long exile had become almost as the shadows of another life; and they regain their pleasant brightness but slowly. Sir Miles Averill, my father's oldest friend, let me grasp your hand! What, you, Hamilton? I never hoped to see you again in this life. Gentlemen, all, I have come back after a long and weary exile, to spend the rest of my days among you. You all know my history, and the sad misfortune which has kept me away from my native country so long. But three short months ago, I never thought to see it again; and but for the good fortune of lighting on a home newspaper, I never should have done so. But fate has at last been kind to me, and I am enabled to spend my remaining years in the country and among the scenes which boyish associations endeared to me. Once more I thank you heartily for your welcome. We shall all, I trust, meet often in the future."

Harold Mornington with a sigh of relief, but with no other visible emotion, resumed his seat, and under a final cheer, the little cavalcade moved on. The carriage turned off the road into one of the finest deer parks which any English mansion can boast. There are few more beautiful sights than an old English house with picturesque surroundings; and few more perfect specimens than Mornington Abbey. The first approach to it is through stately avenues of oak trees which lead for more than a mile through scenes of wonderful beauty. A grand expanse of sward on either side terminating in slopes, richly wooded, and in the valley with deer browsing on them. Along the latter winds a trickling stream, which often crosses the smooth drive, and loses itself in the woods on either side, only to reappear and present tempting views of huge trout leaping to the surface, and leaving behind them long ripples on the stream. Then the carriage began to ascend the hill from the summit of which are charming views of wooded glades and fairy dells, untenanted save by myriads of rabbits and the stately denizens of the park, who bound away at the sound of the wheels. Farther still, are waving cornfields, bathed in the golden light of the setting sun; and fertile pasture land, in which the rarest cattle are grazing; old-fashioned farmhouses and prosperous-looking homesteads; and, fairest sight of all, each bend of the road brings more distinct peeps of the most glorious residence which English commoner can boast—Mornington Abbey.

Built for the purpose its name implies, in the reign of Henry VII., it was during his and the succeeding reign one of the largest and most important monasteries in the south of England. It was tenanted at first by the Dominican order of monks, noted for the severity of their principles, and the rigour of their discipline. Relics of the tortures, with which these monks were wont to chase unholy thoughts and worldly longings from their minds, are still preserved in

the narrow cells where they worked out their punishments. After the Reformation, the Abbey passed, in common with many other such buildings, into royal hands, until at last it was bestowed by Elizabeth on Sydney Mornington, the first of that name. He won, by the favour of a Queen's smile, that fortune which the gallant commander of men had sought for in vain. During the Civil Wars, Mornington Abbey was severely treated by the troops of the Commonwealth; but, on the Accession, it was restored and enlarged. From then until the present time, it had passed in an uninterrupted line with uneventful story. These Morningtons were a quiet race, and for generations had been content to play the rôle of country squire and county magnate, and had not sought to extend their influence by political means.

One Mornington, three generations before, had indeed sat in Parliament for a short time, during which he behaved in a most exemplary manner, never missing a division and never once opening his mouth. But after three years the Parliament was dissolved, and before the next election a death in the family had occurred, and the new possessor of the Mornington estates did not appeal for such honours. Little different in disposition from his ancestors was the present Harold Mornington's grandfather. He was the son of the sixth Lord of Mornington, and was the first to marry out of his own county. His wife was the only daughter of a Scotch laird, whose pedigree was as long as his purse was short. She died in giving birth to Harold's father, George Mornington, who inherited, however, his mother's ambitious temper rather than the contented disposition and almost singular inertness common to the Morningtons. He commenced his career by being expelled from a public school, and later on was "rusticated" at Oxford. He then studied for a short time at Heidelberg, but soon returned to England where his extravagance and wildness broke his father's heart. This appeared to sober him; and, when he inherited the estates, he settled down quietly, marrying a clergyman's daughter, and spending the rest of his years in seclusion. Their only child was Harold, whom his too affectionate mother completely spoiled. She died when he was fourteen, and her husband, whose latter years appeared to be embittered by the remembrance of his early follies, did not long survive her. At fifteen, then, Harold was an orphan, left to the guardianship of Sir Miles Averill, his father's oldest friend, and Mr. Woodruff, the family solicitor, for whom Mr. Mornington had always had a most profound respect and even esteem. This Harold it was, who, after a wasted youth, ruined by one rash act, had returned after an absence of three-and-twenty years to the home of his ancestors. The last summit is surmounted, and Harold Mornington can plainly see the majestic pile of which he is the owner.

It is a scene which might well awake interest, even enthusiasm, in a stranger, but he looked upon it unmoved. It stands in full view, with its queer old gables and lofty turrets, old-fashioned chimneys and irregular front, presenting, it is true, an incongruous aspect, but beautiful in its incongruity, and its irregularities harmonised and softened by age. The last rays of the sun are falling upon it, filling the windows with a wonderful fire, and softening the rugged aspect of the old grey stone. No wonder that Harold Mornington, as he gazed upon it, and then at the landscape beyond, knowing that, as far as the eye could reach, all was his, felt the indifference vanish which seemed so strongly his characteristic, and fervently blessed the chance which had brought him back to the enjoyment of a home so magnificent and possessions so ample. And yet, as he stood up in the carriage with folded arms gazing around and

below, no expression of unmixed delight was reflected from his countenance. Exultation there certainly was, but no settled glow of happiness, as might have been expected. No look of content, or peace, or thankfulness shone in his eyes, dull and expressionless mostly, and, at best, filled with an anxious troubled light, perhaps from the memory of bygone miseries.

Mr. Woodruff, his companion, as he narrowly watched his manner, decided within himself that Harold Mornington was still an unhappy and disappointed man; and caught himself more than once wondering what hidden griefs he could treasure so deep that they could not be banished, even at such moments as the present. An uninterrupted silence had reigned between the two men from the moment they entered the park gates; but, as Mr. Mornington resumed his seat, the lawyer broke the silence.

"It is very much to be regretted," he said, "that neither Miss Eva nor Mr. Godfrey should have been here to receive you."

"I am scarcely sorry," was the reply; "although had I not in the hurry of embarking completely forgotten it, I should certainly have 'cabled.' The wonder to me is that, considering I only arrived in England the night before last, any of the people here should have known of my return."

"News of such importance soon spreads," said the lawyer with a smile. "Half an hour after you called on me, I wired to your agent here, Mr. Cameron, and I suppose he soon spread the news."

Further conversation was here rendered impossible, as the carriage turned now into the final sweep, and drew up at the hall door. Mr. Woodruff, who had acted as guardian to Godfrey Mornington, had always kept up an establishment at the Abbey, so that, as the carriage drew up, Mr. Mornington found himself greeted by a formidable assemblage of servants, who stood on either side of the hall. From amongst them stepped out the grey-headed butler, fast becoming superannuated, the first to address his master as he walked up the steps with Mr. Woodruff by his side.

"Welcome home, Mr. Harold," said he, peering up anxiously into his face as he addressed him. "'Tis a glad day for us to have one of the old name master here again."

"I thank you, Burrows," said Mr. Mornington simply, extending his hand, which the old man pressed with warmth.

"A true Mornington," he muttered to himself as he retired; "like his father—very fine men all of them; yet how wonderful he have altered."

With a nod to the other servants, Mr. Mornington passed at once into the dining-room. Dining-room? Well, it might more aptly be called banqueting hall. The walls were oak panelled high up, and curiously ornamented, and the large chimney-piece was of black oak, carved and figured with exquisite designs. The front windows all opened out on the stone balcony, from which steps led down to the well-kept flower gardens. Fine paintings, many of them masterpieces, hung on the walls, but a small sketch placed exactly opposite the door, appeared to fascinate Mr. Mornington. Looking neither to the right nor to the left, he walked straight across and stood gazing up at it. As a work of art, it was inferior to any in the room, but though the execution was imperfect, and the style crude, the artist had succeeded in producing a striking picture. It was the likeness of a woman—and such a woman! As he gazed, Harold Mornington felt his thoughts go back through a long vista of years to the first time he had ever met her. She was one loved so passionately, that even now, at the mere sight of

her image, he felt his senses reel and his eyes grow dim. The woman whom it depicted wore a riding habit, the long skirts of which were held up in one hand, while the other, grasping a riding whip, fell gracefully by her side. Her figure was tall and perfectly moulded; her hair fair, though her eyes and brows were dark; her expression was somewhat spoilt by reason of intense hauteur. And yet, he who gazed upon those pictured eyes, could remember when they had shone, though not on him, with a tender love-light which altered the whole aspect, and supplied the one thing wanting to make the likeness perfect. There are some women whose beauty no painter can adequately portray, for the reason that their principal charm is an ever-varying expression, changing in a single moment from love to anger, or from happiness to grief, but beautiful in each and all. The painter can reproduce in his picture but one of these. And though he may choose the one in which his subject looks loveliest, still there is a peculiar charm in a fleeting expression, beyond his art to show.

An apologetic cough from the prosaic lawyer, who wanted his dinner, and thought that his companion had spent quite long enough gazing at his wife's portrait, at last recalled Mr. Mornington from his brown study, and the two gentlemen left the room.

Chapter III

The Sin of Omission.

Dinner was over, Mr. Mornington and his solicitor had moved their easy chairs upon the balcony outside the dining-room, and the former, reclining to the utmost extent, and with a cigar in his mouth, seemed enjoying to the full the luxurious ease. Conversation between the two had not flourished, the remarks which Mr. Woodruff ventured upon either falling to the ground unnoticed, or provoking merely the most commonplace rejoinders. Perceiving, therefore, that his companion was in no mood for conversation, and contented enough in the degustation of the fine old Lafitte, and the flavour of his Havannah, Mr. Woodruff relapsed into silence, which was at last broken by the host.

"My daughter will not be here until eleven, you say?" He looked up inquiringly.

"She cannot reach here before, and it may probably be later—say half-past."

Mr. Mornington took out his watch and consulted it. "Half-past eight. Well, Mr. Woodruff, there has been much in my past life, and especially the events which led to my leaving England so suddenly, which must appear inexplicable to you; and, with your permission, I will devote a portion of the time to explaining matters. You will then be better able to understand the course of events which culminated in such unhappiness to me."

The lawyer bowed, and, drawing his chair up a little closer, assumed a listening air.

"First of all," went on Mr. Mornington, "before I begin, let me ask about my children. Is Eva like her mother?"

"She is considered remarkably so," answered Mr. Woodruff, who, although he could not see his companion's face, could tell by the silence which ensued, and

the slight tremor in his tone when he spoke again, that the reply had affected him.

"And my son?"

"Oh, he is the image of all the Mornington men," was the reply; "exactly what you were twenty-five years ago, and would be now, if living abroad had not altered you so much. A fine young fellow too," he continued admiringly, for Godfrey Mornington was a favourite of the lawyer's.

After another short silence, Mr. Mornington commenced his tale.

"As you know, I was an orphan at sixteen, and my life, until I went to college, was uneventful enough. I had been at Oxford about six months when I met Cecil Braithwaite, and in a very short time there sprung up between us a strong friendship. Who he was, and where he came from, I knew not then, and I know not now; perhaps it was the mystery seeming to surround him which first excited my fancy, and unconsciously attracted me to him. However that may be, we speedily became inseparable, and, being in the same college, we spent all our time together. One day we received an invitation from an old 'coach' of mine—a Mr. Wakefield—to spend a Sunday with him at his house down the river. You will excuse my passing over this part as quickly as possible, as it is exceedingly painful to me."

Mr. Woodruff bowed sympathetically.

"We accepted, and arranged to row down on the Saturday afternoon. How well I remember that row. It was the middle of summer, just before 'the Long,' one of the hottest days of the year. Luckily for us, the current was in our favour, and with very little exertion we glided along, every little while taking long rests, and letting our boat drift among the willows, while we refreshed ourselves with a smoke and claret cup. It was too hot to talk much, and our friendship had long ago reached that point which renders it unnecessary for two fellows to talk for the sake of talking; and we passed time in idly speculating as to what sort of place our friend had, and whether we should be obliged to go to church next day. The hours fled by—too quickly for us—for we reached our destination about six o'clock. It was one of those charming little cottages with lawn sloping down to the river, the dwelling itself half-hidden among trees, and covered with ivy. The moment we saw it we went into raptures. Our host was on the look-out, and we, having tied up our boat, went with him into the house, and were shown into our rooms to doff our flannels and dress for dinner. When we descended to the drawing-room, our host met us at the door, and we all entered together. To my surprise—for I had always thought Mr. Wakefield a bachelor—a girl was in the room, and we were introduced to her as his daughter. Love at first sight is, generally, I believe, supposed to be a mere captivation of the senses which seldom forms the foundation for a deep and lasting passion. However that may be, before dinner was over I had made up my mind that earth held but one woman for me, and life but one object, to call Eva Wakefield mine. After dinner we all took our coffee on the lawn, and smoked and talked, till, after a while, Miss Wakefield went into the drawing-room, and, opening the French windows, sang to us. How that scene comes back to me even now! We three—Wakefield, Cecil, and I—on low garden chairs on the lawn, with the full moon shining upon the river flowing within a few yards of us, and the faint odour of roses and mignonette which reached us from the side of the walk. Above all, that rich, clear, musical voice, singing some old German love song, the tune of which haunts me still.

Then she—Eva—came forth to join us again, and we all chatted in low tones, as if fearing to break the charm of the scene by loudness or jarring laughter. Last of all, when Cecil and old Wakefield were deep in some question of ancient Egyptian history, Eva and I rose, and strolled the garden together. What our conversation was; what I said to her, I could never recall. I only know that my senses seemed intoxicated, and in every word of mine, and with every glance, I betrayed my sudden passion. She seemed startled at first, as well she might be, and looked at me with those wondrous eyes filled with a half-mocking, half-tender, light, till I almost went wild, and several times I nearly burst out with my tale of passionate love, and nothing but the fear of the deserved rebuke for so abrupt a wooing restrained me. At last came the time for Cecil and me to retire to our rooms. There was no sleep for me that night. I threw open the little latticed window, and sat for hours gazing at the stars and moon, and down at the silvery river flowing beneath, and when I turned at last to my bed, it was still not to sleep, but to build up dreams of a future, in all of which Eva was the central figure.

"The next day came and passed, all too swiftly for me; but before it was over I had hinted of my love to Eva, and she had confessed that she might, in time, return it.

"We went back early on Monday morning, but I had made arrangements to see Eva often, and felt wildly, rapturously happy. Every day I rowed down to her home, and she met me in the meadows, and, fastening up my boat, I used to spend hours with her, roaming about, indulging in all the usual lovers' rhapsodies, and uttering all the lovers' platitudes. Well, no doubt the matter would have ended in the stereotyped way; when I came of age we should have been married, but her father suddenly died of heart disease. A tearful note summoned me early one morning to her house, where I found her in a paroxysm of grief over his dead body. I took up my quarters at the village inn, and never left her until the funeral was over. Then we spoke about the future, and she told me that, beside myself, she had scarcely a friend or relation in the world. I proposed marrying her, of course; but this she would not hear of. Would to God I had insisted on it!"

The lawyer looked up with a quick glance of surprise, which changed into one of earnest interest as Mr. Mornington continued.

"I have no excuse for what followed," he said slowly. "The very devil must have tempted me, for I swear that never once had the thought entered into my head of treating her in any other way than as my affianced wife. I was young and inexperienced, it is true, but I can plead neither youth nor ignorance as my excuse for what followed. I loved her fondly, and we were alone in the world together, and alas! I forgot all else but the loving her. In mere thoughtlessness I committed the one blackguardly action of my life. Well," he continued with a sigh, "repentance now is useless. One thing, however, I repeat. I always meant to marry her; and but for the subsequent horrible events I would have done it.

"We went to London and took a house in Upper Sleave Street, and there I met Cecil Braithwaite again. We became constant companions. I often had to run down here to see about matters connected with the estate. One evening, when I had intended coming, and had left word with Eva that I should not be home, I missed the train, and, meeting Cecil, dropped into the club with him. 'By-the-bye,' he said, as we were chatting in the smoke-room, 'you never told me that your wife had a brother.' 'Never, for the good reason, old fellow, that she has

none,' I answered, hiding my surprise with mirthfulness; 'she was an only child.' He looked at me rather curiously for a moment or two, smoking on in silence. 'What do you mean?' I said. He made some evasive reply, and immediately afterwards muttered an excuse about an appointment, which I knew to be false, and rose to go. But I would not let him leave me until he had explained his question, and with an ill grace he resumed his seat. For some time he would tell me nothing, but my earnestness at last prevailed, and he told me with great reluctance that which drove me almost frantic to hear.

"It seemed that he had friends in Upper Sleeke Street, living almost opposite to me, whom he often visited, and on two occasions, when I was away, he had seen a man enter my house whom my wife always admitted herself, and who stopped there several hours. Once, when the blinds had been left up, he had seen this man and my wife in amiable, not to say affectionate conversation, and—but I cannot tell you all I learnt! This was enough for me. I asked him at what time this took place, and he told me about twelve, after the servants were abed. While we were talking, the hall-porter brought me a letter from the rack. The handwriting was strange, so I tore it open mechanically. It was an anonymous letter, and one of the most cruel I ever read. As far as I can remember, these words were scrawled in a disguised hand on half a sheet of paper:

"Has Harold Mornington lost all sense of honour, or is he a coward, that he stops away from home to allow his wife the opportunity of entertaining her lover?"

There was no signature to this laconic epistle. It made my head swim, although I believe that, outwardly, I kept quite cool. What followed seems to me more like a terrible dream, but one of which the slightest feature has become branded into my memory as if with fire. I remember calling for some brandy, and drinking it off without waiting for the water. Then I looked at my watch; it was still early. I resumed my seat and took up an evening paper, and I remember reading, with interest, of a horrible murder in the East-end, the details of which I read several times. Then I laid the paper down and listened to a political argument occupying the attention of a group close to me, and soon I entered into it with interest and I remember being complimented by one or two for the calm and logical remarks I made. The time passed on, until at a few minutes past eleven I made preparations for leaving. As I stood on the steps, Braithwaite joined me.

"You had better not come," I said. "You can do no good." But he insisted. "I know all," he said. "There can be no concealment from me. I will not leave you."

"Be it so," I replied. We walked away together. When we reached upper Sleeke Street, we took up our post observation in the deep doorway of an old-fashioned house nearly over against mine. We waited. In about half an hour—an age to me!—I saw all the lights in my house extinguished, save in my wife's sitting-room. Soon afterwards the hall-door slowly opened, and Eva herself with a cloak over her head came out, traversed a bit of a garden which some of the houses had in those days before them, opened the iron gate and walked slowly down the street. Every now and then she cast anxious glances behind. When I saw her all my calmness deserted me and I strove to break loose from Braithwaite's restraining arm, and accost and upbraid her. But though all the

infernal passions blazed within me, Cecil's grasp was like a vice on my arm, and I could not move.

"In a moment or two she was joined by a tall man, muffled up, and with his hat over his eyes. After talking earnestly for a few moments, they entered the house together. At this sight my calmness returned, and with it my presence of mind. I remembered having heard something of a former lover of Eva's who had gone to India, and doubted not that this was the man. Like a flash there came to my mind, too, the interest with which she had questioned Colonel Davenport—a friend of ours—about Indian military affairs; and this confirmed my idea. At that moment I rejoiced that Eva was yet my wife in name only. On the very next day I had made arrangements for marrying her privately.

"I stepped cautiously across the road, followed by Cecil, and while wondering how we should gain access to the house, saw that the front door latch had not caught, and it stood ajar. We both entered noiselessly, and in a few moments I stood on the landing on which were my wife's room and the sitting-room. Both doors were wide open, and looking into the former I saw her standing with her back to me, unlocking her desk, and presently taking out some papers which I recognised as bank-notes. I looked into the other room. A tall, fair man, was seated in my easy chair drawn up to the fire; and now that his muffler and hat were removed, I could see that he was very handsome, though poorly enough dressed. I did not dare to dwell looking at him for a second, but turned again to my wife's room. She was half-way across when I entered it, with a bundle of notes in her hand. Never shall I forget the start and look of horrified surprise she gave when she encountered this tiger in her path. The notes dropped from her hand, and she opened her lips to speak, but something in my face froze her words, and though they moved, no sound did issue. She simply stood gazing at me with horror.

"'You need not trouble yourself to offer any explanation,' I said. 'I know all.' She watched me without speaking, while I took the key from the inside of the lock ere leaving with it in my hand. Then she staggered towards me, and flung her arms around my neck sobbing, 'Forgive me, Harold! Would to God I had never deceived you!' Goaded with rage, I hurled her from me, and she sank on the floor in a dead faint. I left her, and with Cecil Braithwaite at my side, entered the sitting-room. The man, aroused by the sound of my wife's fall, and our footsteps, was on his feet when we entered. My calmness all fled, I rushed towards him, and with an oath, closed with him, commencing a desperate struggle. He was a strong man, so was I, and although he was the taller, my frenzy lent me unwonted strength which made me fully his equal. All round the room we flung one another about in what seemed a death-grapple. Methought he would have mastered me, yet I would have succumbed rather than have Cecil's impending aid. Luckily, as we passed one corner, I snatched at a heavily-loaded riding-whip, and, securing it, dealt him a terrible blow on the temple. Down he went, without a groan. Quivering with rage and excitement, I stood, grasping the whip by the butt-end, waiting for him to rise. But he lay quite still. Presently Braithwaite, with a look of apprehension, strode to his side and bent over him. When he looked up, his face was blanched with terror, and his voice sounded harsh and unnatural. 'You have killed him,' he faltered, rising. At that moment I was a murderer in spirit, if not in deed, for I was glad when I heard the verdict, and laughed, actually laughed at the look of horror in Cecil's face. Gradually his self-possession came back, and he spoke again

rapidly. 'We must leave this,' he said. 'Quick! by the balcony;' he opened the window and stepped out. He was back in a moment saying, 'Right! We can get out this way. Listen! Do you hear anything?' But all was as still as death.

"We kept only two servants then, beside a coachman, who did not sleep in the house, and of these two, one, had, I remember, asked that morning for two days' holiday, and was probably away; while the other was deaf. 'Have you any cash?' Cecil whispered. I took out a long black case in which I carried valuable papers and had a large sum of money, and stuffed it into my breast pocket. Then we turned down the gas, and I followed Cecil out on the balcony, from which we easily swung ourselves down to the ground. We walked rapidly along, until we came across a stray hansom, and then drove to Waterloo station, where we just caught the special train to Southampton, meeting the steamship for New York. On this we embarked, having procured a hasty outfit at a ready-made-clothes shop at the port.

"There is nothing that I need tell you of our adventures in the United States, or in Canada. The last few years we spent in the most unexplored part of Alaska, where Cecil Braithwaite died. By the merest accident, when I had wandered as far as the nearest settlement, an English newspaper fell into my hands, and I read the confession of a burglar named James Dalton, and learnt that the warrant against me was cancelled. My money was almost gone, and it was months before I reached Quebec. Here I called on an English clergyman, who lent me the passage-money. You know the rest."

Mr. Mornington, with the air of one who has completed a disagreeable necessity, leant back in his chair, and proceeded to re-light his dead cigar. There was a troubled look in the lawyer's face when the story ceased, and it was several moments before he spoke.

"No one can help feeling for you," he said, "for your life must have been a miserable one, crushed with such a heavy weight of remorse, and with the ever present fear of detection before you. When did you first hear that the murdered man was truly your wife's brother?"

"I was then in Quebec," answered the other; "an English newspaper gave full particulars of the whole affair. I had never dreamt of the existence of any other member of her family; in fact, she gave me to understand that she was an only child. In that paper I read his history. How he had run away from home after a desperate quarrel with his father, enlisted as a private soldier and been drafted to India; finally deserting, he worked his passage back to England, for which, of course, he was liable to punishment. And how he was skulking about London when he met his sister Eva, who in fear of my handing him over to justice, never trusted me with her secret, but resorted to such ill-advised ways of meeting him. I remember now, her asking me one morning at breakfast, what I should think of a man who had deserted his flag; and I answered her that if my own brother were to desert, having once joined the army of his own free will, I would surrender him over to the law without hesitation. She shuddered, but I thought her pity proceeded from some case that she was reading in the paper; and asked no questions."

Breaking the long silence, Mr. Mornington spoke again. "How long did my wife live after Godfrey and Eva were born?"

"Miss Eva and Mr. Godfrey were born on the 23rd of December, exactly a month after you left England," he replied; "and Mrs. Mornington died about six

months afterwards, towards the end of June. She died asking for you," he added; but Mr. Mornington displayed no token of feeling.

"Did she ever mention my friend's name, Cecil Braithwaite's?" he asked finally.

"Never to my knowledge," was the reply; the lawyer wondering at the interest his host evinced. Another silence; this time broken by the legal gentleman. There was a troubled look on his face, and agitation in his tone.

"You must forgive me, sir, if I don't appear very sympathising," he said. "The fact is I can think of nothing else just now but the consequences of what you have told me upon Miss Eva and Mr. Godfrey. Bad enough for the young lady; it will kill Mr. Godfrey outright. He has always been so proud of his name and descent—a thorough Mornington. For him to learn that he has no right to the name he bears and loves so well, to find that in the eyes of men and of the law, he is nameless—oh! 'twill be a cruel blow, sir." He broke off almost in anger. "Who will tell them this," he added; "and when?"

Mr. Mornington was gazing idly aloof, with a faraway look. No traces of the emotion which animated the lawyer were evident in his manner, but then he was a man, if of deep passions, of a wonderful restraint too; and Mr. Woodruff knowing this to be one of the Mornington traits did not wonder.

"Mr. Woodruff," he said at last, "I propose our adjourning into the library. The air is getting chilly, and it is already past the time at which you told me Eva would arrive. Let us postpone this conversation. I shall not mention this unfortunate circumstance to either of my children unless occasion demands, and I trust that it may never do so."

The two men passed through the French windows into the dining-room, and across the hall into the library.

"And my daughter has been living in Warwickshire?" asked Mr. Mornington, as the two men took seats.

"Yes; when she was only a year old, Mrs. Neville, your aunt, offered to give her a home, and she has lived with her ever since, I have seen her at times, and I can assure you that you will have every reason to be proud of her. But here she is," he added, as they heard the sound of wheels passing up the drive, to the hall door.

Mr. Mornington rose to his feet.

"Bring her in here, Mr. Woodruff," he said, quietly motioning him to leave the room, with something more akin to agitation in his manner than had escaped him since his return home.

Chapter IV

The Climbing Rose around the Figure of Stone.

No sooner had Mr. Woodruff explained matters to the newcomer, a young lady whom he assisted to alight from the carriage, than she broke away, and, opening the library door, found herself face to face with its solitary occupant. She advanced no further for a moment, but stood as if spell-bound, gazing with a mingled expression of hope and timorousness into his face. She saw in the man before her all that she had taught herself to expect in her father. A man of

upright and even majestic presence, with dark brows, resolute features, and iron grey hair, whose pale face, together with a restless look, appealed powerfully to her sympathy. There was nothing there to excite her apprehensions; much that appealed for her love. She remembered that, at last, the one great wish of her heart had come to her, that she was face to face with her father, and furthermore there rushed upon her remembrances of his unhappiness, a story as often heard from Mrs. Neville. Her heart throbbed violently. As the spellbound feeling slowly died away, leaving her free to move and speak, she crossed the groom towards her father, and stood by his side, with one hand tremulously laid upon his shoulder, gazing up into his stern face appealingly, waiting—waiting for some responsive action, before she dared put her arms around his neck, and claim from him a father's love. But, as if unconscious of her gentle touch, or even of her presence, he stood with half-averted face until gradually the tears came into her eyes, and a pained look chased the smile from her face.

Was this the meeting which she had so often pictured to herself? Was it thus she was to find the father of her dreams? He would not speak to her, not even look at her, but kept his eyes averted as if the sight of her was painful. Her hand slipped from his shoulder, and she receded a step.

"Will you not speak to me, father?" she pleaded, with a sob escaping at the last word.

Slowly he turned his face towards her, and he opened his lips as if about to speak, but there was no need for words now, for her first glance had shown her that this silence was from no indifference, or embarrassment. It was purely the cloak of an emotion too deep for utterance. In the next moment, with a glad cry, she was in his arms, strained to his heart in a passionate embrace, and he now was sobbing.

After a time he disengaged himself and led her gently across the room, placing her in the armchair, drawn up to the fire, whilst he, still holding one of her hands, stood on the rug eyeing her.

"You are wonderfully like your mother, child," he said at last, in a low tone.

His mournful gaze and the tremor in his voice brought the tears again to Eva's eyes, and she could scarcely answer him.

"I am glad," she whispered. "I never saw her, you know, that is to remember her, but I have her picture, and people tell me that it is like me."

There fell a long silence: Eva feared to speak, since she could see that her father was strongly agitated, and so she sat still, leaving her hand in his, and waiting for him to recover. On his part, he was scarcely conscious of her presence, for memories of the woman whom he had loved so fervidly, revived by this fair daughter, had seized him, and carried him many years back into other scenes, amongst other people. Again he was standing on the lawn before that ivy-covered cottage on Thames banks, drinking in the intoxication of one who had been the single sweet dream of a wasted life. He almost fancied that he could hear again Mr. Wakefield's cheery voice, and the merry ripple of the river flowing a few yards off; the night breeze, too, gently disturbing the leaves. The faint perfume of mignonette and roses seemed wafted again towards him. He thought of his beloved as seen then, in her light summer dress floating about with careless grace, and flashing upon him glances from those unrivalled eyes of which the reflected glories even now made his heart beat fast. But next there came a frown upon his face, and its lines grew harder, until the watching Eva

could see that unpleasant reminiscences were stirring him. Growing full of fear, she tightened her grasp upon his arm, and drew him towards her. With a start he recovered himself, and the frown cleared off.

"Forgive me, child, forgetting you for a moment."

He smiled down on her so lovingly, that she forgave him freely. After all it was something to remind him so sharply of her mother. That alone, she felt, would in time gain her his love.

The door opened, and Mrs. Neville and the lawyer entered. The interview between father and daughter was over. Mrs. Neville was looking forward with pleasure to meeting her nephew again, whom she had not seen since his seventh year, hence her greeting was a cordial one. He saluted her courteously, but did not respond in the slightest degree to the warmth of her welcome. She would have been disappointed but for the kindness, even the heartiness, with which he thanked her for her care of Eva.

They talked pleasantly enough for a time, before the two ladies retired, Eva taking leave of her father with an affection which, to her distress, seemed almost to cause him embarrassment.

Mrs. Neville, whom it would be impolite to allow thus cavalierly to be dismissed by us, was the younger daughter of the country clergyman whose elder daughter had married Harold Mornington's father. She had been sought and won by a well-to-do country gentleman in Warwickshire, whose early death had left her a childless widow with an ample fortune. She it was who volunteered to receive Eva as her child upon her mother's death. She was an ordinary person enough, with a good-humoured face, of weak will but sound heart, no uncommon combination. Under her care, Eva's life had been a singularly monotonous one. She had spent six years at a good, not fashionable, boarding-school in London, which she had left about two years since. During the interim, she lived with Mrs. Neville at a small villa, outside one of the large towns of Warwickshire, to which Mrs. Neville had removed for a time, in order that her charge might have the advantage of masters, to complete her education; an impossibility had they not quitted Mrs. Neville's quiet country home. She had been kind to Eva, and tried hard to make the motherless child happy, and in a certain measure she had succeeded. But she had never obtained from Eva that love which a mother or father could alone have gained. For Eva had a vein of romance in her character, deeper than the ordinary run of school-girl sentiment, and her best and truest affections were all engaged in a passionate pity and adoration for the homeless wanderer whom she knew her father to be. His sad tale, however toned down by her aunt, she was never tired of hearing, and his wanderings in foreign lands she often pictured to herself. Her brother she frequently saw, and although they were of exactly opposite temperament, and shared no two views alike, she loved him well enough in a placid way, quite sufficient, however, for Godfrey Mornington. To him effusive affection of any sort would have been affliction. When, therefore, the news arrived, in that short telegram from Mr. Woodruff, announcing the return home of her father, Eva was filled with hope that henceforth the void in her life would be filled, and that she would be able to lavish her affections on a living parent, rather than upon a shadowy ideal. Her one thought and anxiety, which showed themselves constantly during the journey to Mornington, was whether the father, on whom she was eager to bestow so much stored-up fondness, would reciprocate it, and appreciate her devotion. Her excitement on the way had been

almost painful to so even-tempered a woman as Mrs. Neville; but her reproofs fell upon deaf ears, and all Eva could think of or discuss, was whether her father would really be one to her, and love her as fondly as she was prepared to love him, and did, for that matter. He was all she had pictured him, a noble looking man, with the stamp of good birth indelibly impressed upon him. Her womanly sympathies had been farther aroused by the intense sadness in his bearing and countenance. She had found him in all respects equal, in many superior, to the ideal she had worshipped, and yet, strange to say, at the bottom of her heart disappointment rankled. He had been agitated on seeing her; he had embraced her with warmth, and yet there was a latent sentiment, undefinable, yet none the less existent, in his greeting; his manner had cast a chill upon her impulsive nature.

Long after her maid had left her, Eva sat in her dressing-gown, leaning back, and gazing mournfully into the fire, deep in thought. She was trying, all in vain, to transfer the affection lavished on her cherished ideal, to its incarnation; her substantial father who at last was found.

"What do I expect more?" she mused. "He met me with kind words and ardent greetings. What more can I expect? I was wrong, nay, unreasonable to imagine that at one meeting all the love I treasured up so long could leave me. It will in time, I know it will! When he grows to love me more for my own sake and less for my mother's, he cannot help but win it. How he must have loved her," she continued dreamily. "When he looked up as I entered the room, I felt, even then, that the glow in his eyes was for the memory I recalled, and not for me. Even when he was kissing me, and that strange absent look glazed his eyes, I knew he was trying to imagine that mine were her lips. Well, be it so," with a little sigh—"I must be content to be loved as my mother's counterpart until he shall grow to love me for myself. He will some day," she concluded, "and then I shall love him with all my heart." Tired out with her journey, she fell asleep with this consolation.

In the meantime, the two gentlemen sat up for only a short time longer, Mr. Mornington responding to the lawyer's questions in monosyllables, and making no attempt to renew the conversation begun on the balcony. As soon as he correctly appreciated his companion's mood, Mr. Woodruff bade him good-night, and soon afterwards the host followed his example.

When he gained his chamber he did not immediately make preparations for sleep. He had passed through a day which, now it was over, seemed more like a long dream, though every particular was engraven deeply in his memory; and he was not sorry it was ended, to judge by the sigh of relief he gave, as, closing the door, he found himself alone at last. He opened the window to gaze on to the gardens beneath, glorious now in the silver light of the harvest moon.

Upon the rugged grey stone of the balcony beneath its carvings standing out in bold relief against the darker shades on the turf, and down the steps, to the smooth lawns and flower beds of curious shapes, filled with rare plants, and blooms of brilliant hue, all now blurred together in an uncertain medley by the twilight. Here and there, dotted about the gardens, rose scantily draped statues of the same material wherewith the house was built, holding up marble basins, round which ivy had wound itself, and with the moon's rays falling upon them—to cover up their ruggedness and imperfections, they looked like living creatures, or at least like the shades of another age—spectres of former

generations of Morningsons, risen from their graves to confront the latest of their line leaning out of the window.

And then, a little farther, rows of tall yew trees bordered the gardens, like a gigantic black palisade of defence for the fair scene which they enclosed; while through them, shining like glass with the moon's reflection, were streaks of the lake extending along the southern boundary.

Pleasant thoughts passed through Harold Morningson's mind as he revelled in the delightful spectacle. Visions of happiness arose. He reckoned the many years he still might live, and determined to enjoy to the utmost, now that he had every facility. He thrust from him regrets of the past which sought to vex him. Eva's face was mixed up with all his prospects; with that appealing look of affection, which had touched him most intimately, surcharged as it was with a reminder of the past. He looked above at the cloudless sky glittering with stars, an every-night sight though it be which few can contemplate without emotion. It brings to the lovers sentiment, to the enthusiast awe, and on the scoffer imposes reflection. On Harold Morningson it showered rays of ambition. The shooting stars seemed by their luminous paths to link him with highmost things. Projects, long torpid in a heart numbed by the purgatory of misery and remorse. Proud imaginings filled his brain, and he pictured himself as a statesman, honoured and revered. He remembered his triumphs at college debating societies; and convictions of success, based on his great wealth and the influence of his name, took the place of fancies. Glancing below, as his eyes rested upon the statues, a strange thought came upon him. Life was on a sudden breathed into them, and they slowly dilated into majestic proportions, each in dress of bygone years, but all with the Morningson features; with one same dark frown and a threatening finger pointed to him. As if with one voice came a low whisper from all, borne to his ears with horrible distinctness:

"Thou wert thy brother's keeper. Where is the man?"

Three times, he was assured, the fingers were raised, and the dread whisper uttered; thereupon they returned to their former shapes, and all the vision faded away. Still he leant forward spell-bound, shuddering; involuntarily his thoughts went back to scenes less fair: the lonely cabin in the desolate north, upon which indeed the stars shone even more brightly in a clearer air, but, as he had seen it last in midwinter, no picturesque landscape. Snow everywhere; lofty pines and cedars laden with icicles, through which the Arctic gale pealed demoniac chimes. The hut was transparent to his searching gaze, so that he beheld himself—in exact similitude—crouching over a dying fire and beside a comrade whom he had readily abandoned at the cry of Fortune for him to come out of exile and enjoy tens of thousands. But that hunger-bitten, despairing visage—was that ever his? He shrank from it and dashed down the blind to shut out the English view which had dissolved into so ghastly a delusion. All night through, his sleep was perturbed and his brain busy with an interminable train of imaginings which ghostly whispers suggested.

Chapter V

The Son's Judgment.

The next morning dawned, a truly autumnal one; a heavy mist spreading over the country and brooding in the valleys, which, however, the sun, shining through it at first like a ball of fire, soon gained the force to disperse. Mr. Mornington, despite his restless night, was down early, but was soon joined by Eva, and as Mr. Woodruff had had breakfast and gone out an hour before, and Mrs. Neville always took hers in her room, the two were alone. Notwithstanding her over-night's determination, Eva was nervous, and her greeting was shy, although affectionate. She was urged when she encountered her father's steady gaze, and received his somewhat stiff salute, to rush upstairs to her room, and give way to the tears which she had difficulty in repressing. She was successful, however, in overcoming the impulse, and sat through the meal in quietude.

Mr. Mornington did not speak until it was nearly over, when he laid down the newspaper and said with a short laugh: "This is all Greek to me for the present; I have been away so long. Oh, your brother is coming to-day. You are very fond of him, I suppose?"

Eva laughed slightly.

"Of course; but, considering we are twins, I have seen very little of him. It is two years since the last time."

"Humph! Well, I have not had time, it's clear, to ask you many questions, Eva; but from what Mr. Woodruff tells me, you have been happy with. Mrs. Neville, eh?"

"Very," said Eva; "but I hope to be happier since you have come home, that is if you will love me, father," she added timidly, and half-frightened at her plain speech, as she peeped tearfully over at the dark, stern face. It relaxed a little as he answered her, not unkindly:

"Naturally, I shall love you, Eva; you need have no fear of that. Perhaps you think that I am not very effusive," he added, after a pause; "but you must remember that I am not as other men are." He smiled somewhat sadly. "I have spent the best years of my life in a circle of gloom; and there has crept over my feelings, my affections principally, a blight which I cannot at once dispel. I wish—you will remember this, my child—to say but little of my past life. During all the long years of absence I have existed, never lived; and there has come upon me an apathy not easily thrown aside just yet. You must not mistake this for coldness, my child; for, believe me, it is not that. It is my misfortune"—he sighed deeply—"that life for me seems to have become merely a mechanical existence. I cannot help it, I seem powerless to break through bonds which long-continued habits of restraint and self-control have woven. Scenes which in former days would have roused my enthusiasm and my admiration—forms and faces like yours, my dear, which would have quickened my love—ay, even caresses and endearments which would have refreshed my heart—these seem mere trifles to me now. It is as if I had lost the power to appreciate even love, and until change of scene and condition removes and expels the apathy and restores to me my former self, you must forgive me, Eva, if I seem cold to you."

An odd apology, but withal a strangely affecting one. When he had finished speaking, his hearer could scarce again keep the tears from her eyes; for there was a softened ring of sadness in his tones which could not fail to pain her; and, indeed, his quietly spoken words had gone straight to her heart. She did not make him any reply; none, indeed, was needed; but she came round to his side, and took his hand in hers, pressing it gently, and smiling up at him through the dewy mist in her eyes. "That horrid feeling will soon leave you,

father," she murmured. "Remember that the dark preface of your life is over, and that the major part of the volume will be unfolded here, at home among your friends, and with your children," she emphatically added, "whose love must banish your mournful memories, and make you happy."

"Happy!" he repeated dreamily. "Yes, I suppose I ought to be happy." He left her side, and went to the window to look out for a few minutes, so she could not see his face. When he turned it towards her again, any traces of emotion had vanished and he spoke in matter-of-fact tones.

"Mr. Woodruff and Cameron are coming up the drive; that reminds me that I promised to ride round some part of the estate this morning. If you ride, you may as well come with us."

"I should like it very much; I won't be five minutes getting ready."

Eva hurried away to don her habit.

The ride was a delightful one to her.

True, her father was occupied most of the time talking to Mr. Cameron, but he frequently turned to her with hints on the arrangement of her reins, or as to her seat, which, showing his consideration, gratifies her. Mr. Mornington himself was a perfect rider, and Eva was never tired of admiring his graceful seat, and the easy skill with which he managed his rather spirited horse. Their ride was a long one, and when home again, it was considerably past the luncheon hour. Mr. Mornington assisted his daughter to alight, lingering himself to leave some instructions with the groom. When he followed her, and saw her standing on the verandah waiting for him, the likeness between her and the picture in the dining-room was so striking, that he could not repress a start of surprise, or check a low groan which arose to his lips. It was the same pose very nearly. She was leaning against the rail with the skirt of her habit gathered up in one hand, while with the other she was idly cutting leaves from the ivy with her toy riding whip. The colour brought to her cheeks by the ride, and the happy light in her eyes, enhanced to the fullest extent the beauty of her face, and her slender but bewitchingly formed figure looked to the best advantage in her close-fitting attire. And yet, to look on her was painful to Mr. Mornington, because she revived his first love. He hurried up to her, so that they entered the house together, his abruptness perplexing her. Luncheon passed without a word, except from Mrs. Neville, who, however, was quite content to do all the talking, and immediately afterwards Mr. Mornington and Mr. Woodruff went into the library, and remained there until close upon dinner time.

Nothing occurred to interrupt them, as Godfrey's train was late, and it was nearly seven when the roll of wheels up the drive indicated his arrival. Mr. Mornington was alone in the library when the dogcart passed by the window, Mr. Woodruff not having descended from his room for dinner. One would scarcely have thought that he was expecting to meet, for the first time, his son and heir, to judge by his dark and moody countenance. He was faultlessly dressed in evening clothes, for the fashionable tailor to whom he had repaired on landing in England, had proved equal to the task, and there was nothing in his appearance to indicate an absence from civilized regions for so long a time. He was standing on the hearthrug, with his back to the fire, but at the sound of the wheels he left this truly national position, and walked down the hall to receive his son on the steps.

Godfrey Mornington was barely twenty-three, but habits of self-dependence, forced upon him by the peculiarity of his position, had made him older than his years; hence his appearance and manners were those of a man of riper age. He was tall, rather slight, with an upright, athletic frame, fair hair and blue eyes, in which was an air of complete nonchalance and indifference; indeed, a leading and constant characteristic of his, seldom vanishing even for a moment. It piqued women, who could make nothing of this good-looking imperturbable young fellow, only too à la mode; but it excited the envy of men, although they accepted it as proof of good breeding, and general "good form." Some with whom he was brought into contact were irritated by it, and put it down to pride; and, certainly in some measure, Godfrey was proud of his name and position. Howbeit, this shortcoming was far less apparent when amongst his inferiors than with his equals. At any rate, he was altogether free from that vulgar pride or snobism which springs generally from the recent acquisition of money or lands. A few called him indolent, but they judged wrongly, for indolent in its proper sense Godfrey certainly was not. At the private school where his guardian had placed him he was the recognised leader in all the sports, and now at Oxford he was stroke of his college eight, and a member of the University eleven. He was popular there, on the whole, and deservedly; for he was both generous and good-natured, and the few who knew him intimately would maintain that there was no better fellow in England than Godfrey Mornington. He had not many friends there, however, partly from his own choice, partly because he would attach himself to neither the fast set nor the studious, but preferred striking out for himself a line between the two—a difficult task at his college. Those of his friends who, knowing his worth and appreciating his friendship, endeavoured to follow his lead, were generally beguiled after a week or so into one or the other of the two recognised sets. This troubled him little, for he was most self-reliant. Lord Dereham was, perhaps, his only friend, and he saw very little of him, as the young heir to an earldom was distinctly a member of the fast set, whose orgies Godfrey seldom cared to join.

When Mr. Woodruff's telegram reached Godfrey, he was in Scotland, shooting, but immediately he caught the first train south, and now, his journey at an end, he could not restrain nervous apprehensions as to the sire whom he had never seen. They flitted, however, as soon as he caught sight of the man who stood on the steps waiting for him, and whose identity he understood at once. He was somewhat surprised at first. Somehow, he had got the impression, not a very unreasonable one, that he should see a haggard-looking man, with long dishevelled beard, and evidences of neglect in his clothing, and perhaps with hard hands and awkward manners. He thought that over a score years spent, presumably in poverty, in a far-off land, would to a certain extent have taken away the outward appearance of good birth. And yet, the person who waited to greet him, by his bearing and the fit of his clothes, might have lived all his life in clubdom. It must be confessed that this was a great relief to Godfrey. He had not inherited Eva's romantic disposition, nor her warm heart, and he did not profess to entertain overwhelming affection for a father whom he had never seen. He was prepared, whatever sort of a man his father might be, to become a dutiful son to him. This behaviour would not have been in the slightest degree less respectful, if, instead of the well-dressed gentleman, here had been a man whom misfortune had ruined, and who had, forgetting his

birth, adopted the manners and speech, even appearance, of the very lowest classes with whom he might have been compelled to mix. Yet, none the less, the impression of this possibility was almost a nightmare, so utterly conventional was his disposition, and there was relief as well as welcome in his smile as he held out his hand. Again he was agreeably surprised, for his father received him, though kindly, without the slightest "gush," and as they strolled down the hall towards the library, he felt that he should be able to get on with this Chesterfield⁽⁵⁻¹⁾ better than he anticipated. Arrived in the library, Mr. Mornington seated himself in an easy chair, and motioned his son to one opposite him.

"You are not like your mother, Godfrey," he said, regarding him intently, "and not like me, but you have the Mornington features all the same. I am glad to see that you, like me, are not expansive; but I am delighted to see you, and I haven't the slightest doubt we shall get on together capitally. Of course, I don't expect you to feel any great amount of affection for me, whom you see now for the first time, nor do I even desire it. I shall try to be a good father to you, and you shall not find my return making any difference in your position. That is all I need say at present, I think. You had better go and change your things at once, as we have waited dinner for you."

Few people possessed a greater horror of what are termed "scenes" than Godfrey, and ever since he had received Mr. Woodruff's telegram, he had been looking forward with a nervous dread to this meeting which he feared must result in one. But now he realized that his fears had been groundless, and that his pet aversion was shared, in an equal degree by his father. This pleased him, and he answered in tones which for him were unusually warm.

"I'm quite sure that we shall get on all right; and to tell you the truth, I'm very much relieved to find that you don't expect me—er—to make a long speech—er—to express my—er—gratification at your return, and—er—sympathy with your troubles. I can see that you understand me, and will believe that I am glad to see you home, and all that, without my making a— a fuss about it. So I'll take your advice, and change, for I'm desperately hungry."

With a nod, he left the room, and the grand meeting between father and son was over, greatly to the relief of both.

The dinner was, in great contrast to the luncheon, a most animated repast. Godfrey, who was in high spirits, allowed them for once to carry him away, and never permitted the conversation to slacken for a moment. Mr. Woodruff also exerted himself, and, finally, Mr. Mornington seemed to forget for a time his reserve, and talked well and amusingly. Long after Mrs. Neville and Eva had left the table, the three men sat over their wine talking mirthfully; Godfrey told quaint anecdotes of college life, which appeared to interest his father especially, who frequently capped them with similar reminiscences of his own. Then the conversation turned to hunting, fishing, and shooting, all of which Mr. Mornington appeared to understand thoroughly, and plans were discussed, and made, for repeating the feats. To his son, Mr. Mornington imparted his intention of participating freely in the out-door pastimes of the county, and even hinted at the possibility of his entering Parliament. Godfrey upheld him in all his resolutions and approved of all his intentions, and when, at last, after the third summons, they returned into the drawing-room for tea, they carried their animation with them, and seldom had the room contained a merrier party. It was late when they retired. Eva and Godfrey met on the landing.

"What do you think of him?" was of course the first question which rose to Eva's lips, as she looked up anxiously into her brother's face.

"Think of him?" repeated Godfrey; "he's just the sort of father I should have chosen if I'd been consulted."

"Yes, but don't you think he looks unhappy at times? I have noticed there comes such a dark look into his face as if he had something terrible on his mind, not to be forgotten. It quite frightens me."

"All fancy," said Godfrey. "I haven't noticed it myself. I thought he seemed pretty lively, considering. Good night; don't look so seriously out of those big eyes of yours, or you will have wrinkles in no time," with which physiological advice and a kind nod, Godfrey went his way to the Land of Nod.

Chapter VI

A Night's Dark Work.

"Here comes the first of the callers," said Mr. Mornington to Eva as they stood side by side at the breakfast-room window the next morning. "Sir Miles Averill. I thought so; and is that gawky youth with him his son?"

"Yes; that is Harry Averill. How early they are calling."

"Old Averill meant to be the first of the county people to welcome you evidently," observed Mr. Woodruff, who had strolled up to the pair. "You were a great favourite of his, as you, no doubt, remember."

Mr. Mornington nodded and left the room to receive his visitors, who had been shown into the library. Sir Miles advanced at once to greet him, with outstretched hand and bluff heartiness, trying in vain to hide the nervousness which the necessity of saying something out of the common had aroused. For Sir Miles was a type of the country squire now rapidly dying out; a better hand at drawing a cover than at making a set speech; one of his greatest troubles indeed being the necessity of making some sort of a one at the annual dinner to his tenants. They, however, knew his weakness and took compassion on him, so that the moment he rose to his feet, there commenced a perfect babel of cheers and "hear, hears," under shelter of which his few disjointed sentences passed unheard by a single person, and he would resume his seat with the pleasing reflection that his speech had been a complete success. For all his shortcomings in the way of oratory, however, no one could deny the heartiness of Sir Miles's welcome, and though the set harangue did break down ignominiously, he did not attempt to patch it up, but simply grasped Mr. Mornington's hand and added: "Never mind the rest of that. I'll just tell you I'm glad, wonderfully glad, to see you home again, and have you for a neighbour. I've often thought it a shame that so fine a place as this should have no other master than a lawyer—begging Mr. Woodruff's pardon—and I am glad to see one of the old name here again. I've taken the liberty of calling so early to be the first to say so, and to see the right man in the right place."

Quite out of breath after the longest speech he had ever made in his life, and astonished at his own eloquence, Sir Miles ceased and took his seat. Mr. Mornington replied courteously, but in few words, and adroitly brought the conversation from the past to the present; while Sir Miles, thanking heaven that

the ordeal was over, presented his son, who acknowledged Mr. Mornington's salutation in a sheepish way, and became again absorbed in the contemplation of his boots. From this inspection he was aroused only by the entrance of Eva.

She had known the Averills all her life, and during one of her brief visits to Mornington had stopped with them; but she had seen none of them for several years, and neither father nor son were prepared to find her become so beautiful. Sir Miles ventured upon a few homely but well-meant compliments, which Eva laughingly accepted with a good grace. The effect of her entrance on the younger Averill was such as to divert his gaze from his boots to Eva's face, from which he never once removed it during the rest of their stay, staring with such astonishment and open-mouthed admiration, that Eva was fain to give vent to her laughter by pretending it was for Sir Miles' frequent but pointless jokes. When they rose to go the youth became so painfully embarrassed between his desire to address Eva and his fear of ridicule (for, like all shy people, he was fully conscious of his defect) that the lady took pity on him. Walking down the hall, and repressing her strong inclination to laugh, she spoke to him.

"I like your horse."

"Do you? Now, you must be a judge. You ride beautifully."

"When have you seen me?"

"You passed us yesterday." He was nearly adding that it was owing to seeing her that he had called with his father.

"You are fond of riding, I suppose?" said Eva.

"Very," was the reply; "at least, sometimes. I should like it better if—I mean I don't like it so much riding alone."

"You prefer riding with your father?" said Eva, rather puzzled.

"Well, no, yes; that is, I like riding with a companion—a lady."

"Any lady? I see. I have heard of a preference for riding mistresses; it forms a horseman better."

"No, no; I say I should find the greatest pleasure in it if my companion were you."

"Pretty well! You do not use the curb on your tongue, I see!" but she was not vexed, and let him press her hand, the while he reddened deeply.

He and his father were, however, hardly more than out of earshot before Eva, unable any longer to conceal her amusement, burst into a merry peal of laughter, in which she was joined, to a more moderate degree, by Mr. Mornington, who had been a witness of the little episode.

The laugh was still echoing when Godfrey arrived with a proposition that they should elude another avalanche of congratulators by spending an hour at the covers. His father placidly assented, and bidding good-bye to Mr. Woodruff, who was leaving by the afternoon train, father and son strolled down to the keeper's lodge. Mr. Cameron, who joined them there, was a good shot, and Godfrey still a better; but both were eclipsed by Mr. Mornington, who never missed a bird with either barrel, and whose performance was a source of amazement to the keepers, as well as to Godfrey and Mr. Cameron. His school of musketry had been that in the wild region where Bruin and hostile Indians, to say nothing of the costliness of ammunition, forced a marksman to shoot but once, and that with no miss, lest the enemy were upon him.

The sport was capital, the birds, if wild, being plentiful, and they became so interested that, at Mr. Cameron's suggestion, they had a slight lunch at his

cottage, and stayed out during the whole afternoon, only returning home when it was getting dark. Mr. Mornington declared that he had seldom spent so pleasant a day, and Godfrey was almost inclined to echo his opinion.

The next day being Sunday, all Mornington was early at church to catch a glimpse at the new squire. Even the pale, tremulous curate was more nervous than usual, and had taken special pains with his sermon, which, as a sort of compliment to the great man, was from Job, the Man of Tribulation.

But the congregation had hurried and the curate exerted himself in vain, for Eva and Mrs. Neville were the sole occupants of the squire's pew. Eva had expected her father would accompany them, but, on her suggesting it, he had, to her great disappointment, politely but firmly declined, and, to her increased distress, the few words in which he had excused himself, seemed indicative of a resolve never to do so. Godfrey was out of the question, as he was no churchgoer. Indeed, he was seldom down before half-past eleven, unless there was something special doing: on such rare occasions, however when cub-hunting or the exigencies of travelling required it, he would stroll down, even if it were five o'clock, faultlessly dressed as usual, and without the least sign of unwonted exertion. In fact, Godfrey was one of those to whom nothing appears a trouble, and nobody could ever remember him engaging in any enterprise, or attempting any part in which he was not perfectly successful. Hence, it was inevitable that Eva and her chaperon were the only occupants of the squire's pew, greatly to the disappointment of all, if we except Harry Averill, to whom the absence of Mr. Mornington was an unfeigned relief. After the service he was sufficiently emboldened to accost Eva, and considered himself fully repaid for his five-mile walk by permission, unspoken though it was, to accompany the two ladies across the field to the private gate of the grounds. A few very commonplace observations, chiefly originating from Mrs. Neville, and assented to by Harry Averill and Eva; a comment from the former that the length, of the sermon made it one severe infliction which had not been imposed on the patriarch, and a general laugh at the eccentricities of the curate's style; this was the conversation. Then a courteous invitation from Eva, hesitatingly refused, a shaking of hands, a bright smile, and Harry Averill passed from a paradise of the present to one of retrospection, which latter was sufficient to make his walk home pass like magic. Poor fellow! victim of a complaint most boys experience, at that stage, when passing from school to college—a little more respect from inferiors, a "Mr." instead of "Master," and faint indications of a moustache; these imbue them with the idea that they have in a single day leaped from boyhood to manhood. Cultivate your grande passion and your moustaches by all means, Harry Averill; the latter may come to something, the former is hopeless, but it will do you no harm! A few sighs and soft reveries, a little despair, some rash resolves soon abandoned; ay, even a tear or two will merely help to steel your heart against time to come, when your wooing will be more serious.

That, evening Mr. Mornington announced his intention of running up to London on the following day.

"I find," he deigned to explain, "that several matters on which Mr. Woodruff requires my instructions, can be more satisfactorily attended to in London. I shall there be able to consult documents not possible to bring down."

"Going away so soon?" queried Eva, reproachfully. "I thought we were to have another ride to-morrow."

"I shall be away for only a very short time, my dear," answered Mr. Mornington, "and, you need not be disappointed as far as a ride, for I daresay Godfrey will go out with you. There are reasons why I am not sorry to have an opportunity of being in London, although I expect I shall find myself quite a stranger there."

Godfrey threw over a whale to catch the sprat of accompanying his father, but the latter only shook his head.

"There is no necessity for that, as I shall be back on Wednesday, at the latest; good-night to all! I have ordered the dog-cart to catch the early train, so I am to bed in good time."

Very surprised were the solitary porter and the unique stationmaster at the little terminus when the dog-cart from the Abbey deposited Mr. Mornington at the station at eight, a.m., with a small hand-bag and travelling rug as his scanty luggage; very officious they were in dusting and cleaning up the one first-class carriage seldom used, but their obsequiousness met with little response save a curt nod, and their preparations for his comfort but brief thanks. It was not that Mr. Mornington was grudging, but the frown and the absent manner betrayed, perchance, more important business on hand than a mere consultation and examination of deeds with his solicitor.

At the junction on the main line the express was late, but the traveller scarcely noticed the delay, pacing the long platform with regular strides and downcast head, deeply engaged in thought, and furnishing abundant cause for gossip between the guard and engine-driver of the local train.

"My! he be a lucky gen'leman, and no mistake," remarked the latter, watching the magnate's every motion with interest. "That's as it may be," replied the other, sententiously. "To my mind, he looks more like a man who'd got a heap of trouble on his mind, than anything else. If he's as unhappy as he looks, I would not change berths with him, not for all his fine lands and his power o' money."

Right, guard! you are a philosopher. If your mate knew that enviable man's history, as we relate it, he would sooner go and sweep a crossing than change places with him.

The express came and went, and deposited Mr. Mornington in London not many minutes after the appointed time; sarcasm unintended, as regular travellers know. He took a hansom, and only calling on the way at a cutler's shop, where he made a purchase, he was driven rapidly to the Great Western Terminus. Here he booked for Oxford. On arrival there, he did not leave the station, but took another ticket for a by-station, a few miles further on. In about an hour's time, the slow train deposited him, the sole passenger, on the narrow platform at Redford. He left his rug and bag in care of the porter, and proceeded on foot towards the village.

Halfway there, he turned off the road, and followed a footpath through some fields which led him to the banks of a river. He followed its course for a short distance, until he reached a privet hedge. A small wicket gate was easily unfastened, and admitted him to the lawn of a private house, half-cottage, half-villa, evidently unoccupied. The gravel paths were thick with weeds, the grass was long and sprinkled with daisies, the hedges were untrimmed, and the flower-beds empty, whilst a staring placard in the front window announced that "This Desirable Residence was to be Let or Sold."

Mornington stood on the path, in the centre of this desolation, now looking around to mark its spread; now up at the house, as if trying to reconcile the cheerless scene with dim memories of its appearance under different auspices. The endeavour involved thought—so deep that he became absorbed, leaning against the gate with folded arms and closed eyes. Pleasant thoughts there might have been, at first, passing through his mind, to judge from his softened expression, and the slight smile. Soon came a change, and gradually the smile died away and the hard lines came back to his face, which grew darker and darker, until there settled there so vindictive an expression, so fierce that a bystander (had there been one), would have easily surmised that the main recollections here inspired were anything but pleasant ones. On quitting his position, he walked down to the water's edge, and, standing on the brink, viewed the river's course for several minutes. Seeing a boat coming, he shrank away towards the house, peering through the windows into the empty rooms, and trying the doors which, however, were all locked. Then, with a last lingering glance around, as if he found some fascination in the view, and as if it caused him equal pain to leave the place as he had found in its suggestions, he opened the gate and walked rapidly towards the village. At the inn, he ordered lunch, and asked to see the landlord, who came bustling in, a pleasant-looking man, disposed to make much of a customer who ordered the best lunch and wines the house could afford. But something in the look of his patron warned him to check at once the flow of tittle-tattle which he was commencing, and answer simply his guest's questions.

"You are the landlord here, I believe?" asked Mr. Mornington, looking up as he entered.

"At your service, sir."

"Can you tell me the name of the parish clerk here?"

"Surely, I can, sir; although he is a new man. Mr. Carvel, who was clerk here some thirty years, died week afore last, and the new man's name is Hassop."

"And does this Mr. Hassop live near here?" was the next question.

"Very nigh, indeed, a'most next door."

"Ah!" said Mr. Mornington, reflectively, "perhaps you would not mind sending in to him for me?"

"Certainly not. What message, sir?"

"Say that a gentleman here would like particularly to speak to him for a moment, if he wouldn't object."

The landlord bowed and left the room, returning in a few minutes, to usher in a short fat man with red face and abrupt manner, who bowed inquiringly to Mr. Mornington, whilst Boniface beat a retreat with a magnificent assumption of not being inquisitive.

"Want to speak to me, sir?" he said; "my name being Hassop."

"How do you do, Mr. Hassop?" said Mr. Mornington, graciously. "I must apologise for troubling you. You are, I understand, clerk to the parish?"

The other nodded assent.

"I wish to consult your register with regard to the date of a marriage which took place here many years ago."

"That's easy enough," replied the other; "you'll only have to come up to the church with me, and I'll show you the book."

"It couldn't be brought down here?" remarked Mr. Mornington, suggestively.

"Quite imp—" Mr. Hassop halted here with eyes fixed upon the bank-note which the other had drawn out of his pocket-book.

"The fact is," took up Mr. Mornington, "I'm very tired and I have just ordered lunch, and I don't care to trudge up to the church. Enough to bring on an attack of my old enemy;" here he smoothed out the bank-note on his knee as if it were an infallible plaister against the gout.

"Truly aristocratic gentleman this—habituated to the gout, and not one to be enticed into the damp muniment-room," thought Mr. Hassop.

"Of course, I don't expect a parish official to oblige me for nothing. Bring the register down here," he continued, still smoothing out the note, so obstinate were the creases; a not unpleasant though aggravating crackling from it titillating Mr. Hassop's fibres.

"And, ahem I may I request—and I will ask you to accept this as a feeble recompense for the trouble I am causing you." He held up the five-pound note.

"Really, sir," stammered poor Hassop with eyes ever fixed eagerly on the note, "it's against rules and a great risk, but to oblige a real gentleman—well, in short, ahem! I'll do it. If you wait here for half an hour," he went on more briskly, the Rubicon being past, "I will be here again with the book," and out he hurried. Lunch was brought in to the tempter; but he scarcely touched it, drinking a quantity of wine, however, an unusual thing for him. Before the half-hour was up, Mr. Hassop reappeared breathless, bringing with him the book. Mr. Mornington took it, and after turning over the leaves for a few moments, ostentatiously copied an entry dated a few years back, of a marriage between one Robert Gray, bachelor, and Annie Wood, spinster. Then pushing the book carelessly from him, he nodded to the clerk and handed him the note.

"I am much obliged to you," he said, "for saving me the walk. May I offer you a glass of wine?"

"Thank you, sir," replied Mr. Hassop, as he folded the note up and put it carefully into his waistcoat-pocket.

"What will you have? This is claret," pointing to the bottle at his side; "but I cannot recommend it."

"They have some fine port here," suggested Mr. Hassop, who might be a new-comer, but he had been charged with his predecessor's local knowledge. "Excellent genuine port, sir."

"The better the wine, the more hope of the toast being verified—just touch the—eh?—'pon my word, there's no bell—you are so very obliging—perhaps you would be good enough to step down and see that our host sends us some of the right sort. I dare say your parochial influence, you know, may induce him to bring up a bottle of his very best; and, I say," he proceeded deliberately, "you might also see that he doesn't shake it bringing it up. You are from town, I believe? I thought so! Well, you know how careless these country fellows are."

"Never fear, sir," said the clerk; "I'll see to it myself. I know the landlord here well, and I can promise you a bottle of rare excellence. We get a number of gents down here boating and fishing, so he is obliged to keep something out of the common." He hastened out of the room on his welcome mission.

Left alone, Mr. Mornington snatched the register hastily towards him, and began turning over the leaves rapidly near the commencement of the book, where he had not previously looked, suddenly he stopped, and a peculiar smile appeared as he read the entry before him. Turning the leaf down, he walked to the door and, opening it, listened. No one was about, and the only sound was

the footsteps of the landlord and Mr. Hassop as they descended together into the cellar. Rapidly the gentleman regained his place, and opening the book at the entry he had marked, laid the carving-knife blade underneath the leaf. Then, taking out a pocket-knife, with a single sweep he cut the page clean out close to the binding, leaving no sign. He folded it up and put it away in his pocket-book, replacing the book exactly in its former position. When Mr. Hassop reappeared in triumph with a dusty old bottle carefully reclining in a wine basket, Mr. Mornington was standing near the door, regarding with every appearance of interest a yellowed print on the wall.

"You will find this superior, sir," Mr. Hassop exclaimed. "Hard work I had to get over old Harris to fetch it up, for he is very proud of his port, and I do believe lessens the small hoard with more and more sorrow every time. Well may he be chary of it," he continued, as he uncorked the bottle with a reverent hand and poured out two glassesful with a tenderness Mr. Harris himself could not have surpassed.

Mr. Mornington tasted and approved, and Hassop sipped and sipped as if he were enjoying, like Tantalus in a brief cessation of his punishment, a veritable nectar. In half an hour Mr. Mornington left him to finish the bottle, the conveyance being ready to take him to the station.

He had not long to wait for the train back to Oxford, and had just ensconced himself comfortably in the corner of a first-class carriage, when the down train came in on the other side. Glancing idly into the windows of the carriages as the train slackened speed, Mr. Mornington suddenly started violently, and a look of amazement, not unmixed with alarm, appeared on his face. For the carriage which stopped side by side with his had for its solitary occupant Mr. Woodruff. "A close shave," he muttered, as he pulled down the blind. "An hour later, and I should have been checkmated, first move. You may spare yourself the trouble," he added, as he watched Mr. Woodruff pass through the station and walk along the dusty lane towards the village; "the entry you seek is not there—now."

As if the idea pleased him, he gave a short unpleasant laugh. As the train moved out of the station, he relapsed into his persistent occupation: deep thought. Arrived at Paddington, he drove straight to a Strand restaurant, where he dined, and wrote a few lines to Eva, and then he proceeded to King's Cross Station. Here he took an express ticket for a small town in a north-eastern county. Again he was alone in the compartment, but although his journey would take him the whole of the night, he did not make any preparations for sleep. In strange contrast to his ordinary state, a very demon of restlessness possessed him. He lit a cigar, but threw it out of window almost at once. He opened the evening paper and tried by the uncertain lamp-light to read, but in a few moments the paper had fallen from his hands, and with knitted brow, and frequent changes of position, he kept staring out into the blackness of the night. He opened the window then, and leant out; the rush of cold air seemed to bring him relief, for, closing it a few minutes after, and wrapping his rug around his knees, he settled down into a fit of steady thought. So engrossed did he become, that his fresh cigar went out, and slipped from his fingers on to the floor without his appearing to notice it. For hour after hour he sat with eyes fixed downwards, undisturbed by the flash of lights, the shrill whistle and the increased oscillation of the train, as with ever-accelerated speed, it dashed through way stations without stopping. But each time the train slackened

speed, he took out his watch, immediately to replace it with an impatient gesture.

If that vacant seat opposite him could have been occupied by a painter or by a physiognomist, either would have been interested in their companion. The former would probably have made a thumbnail sketch of the hard mouth, dark expression, knitted brows, and haunted, mournful expression of the eyes, and probably if he were to picture an unhappy man, these traits would have reappeared; and, if correctly reproduced, would have been recognised as a correct embodiment of profound misery.

The physiognomist would have studied with more sympathy perhaps,—the sympathy which a sincere student of human nature always bestows upon his subject; but he would, nevertheless, arrive at the same conclusion as the artist. The study would have been an interesting one, for he would not be slow to detect great force of character, as well as intellect, in those firm, well-cut features and lowering forehead. And he would, no doubt, wonder what curse was blighting and embittering the life beneath that mask, wearing such traces of grief. He would have observed that these were not the traces of such sorrow as the death of a relation, however dear, could impose. They presented evidences of a living grief, some terrible secret, some stinging remorse ever present, and not a sorrow that graves can enclose. These watchers would, no doubt, entertain no little curiosity whether they were travelling with a criminal or with a victim of peculiarly adverse circumstances. But they would feel that, even had they been the greatest friends of the vis-à-vis who interested them, they would have but little chance of learning his history; it was clearly part of the nature of this man to crave for no sympathy or friendship, to suffer in silence, and to carry to the end unrevealed, the melancholy secret which super-saturated his life.

For the last time, Mr. Mornington took out his watch, and observing by the lights stretching far on either side, and by the slackening of the train, that they were approaching a large town, made preparations to alight. When he stepped upon the platform he inquired at once for the means of reaching King's Morton, a small town on a branch line. There was no train until late in the morning, which had already commenced to dawn, and vexedly he suffered himself to be directed to the hotel, where he slept from sheer weariness for a few hours. In the morning his restlessness returned, amounting to a feverish anxiety to be moving; and he was on the platform of the station waiting for the local train, half an hour before it was timed to depart. Once in the train, however, and commencing the final stage of his journey, the fretfulness apparently passed off, unless its only remaining evidences were his trembling hands and eager eyes. In three-quarters of an hour "King's Morton!" was the cry, and our traveller alighted. As he had left his luggage at the hotel where he had slept, he walked undelayed through the station, and, with the air of one to whom the place was familiar, turned down the road towards the little town.

Chapter VII

„Died Of A Broken Heart“.

King's Morton was one of those old-fashioned village-towns, now still more and more scarce, but a few still exist in England, where the feverish excitement of larger towns is altogether unfelt. The railroad which connected it with the main line had only recently been opened, and it seemed as if the irresistible arm of Progress had passed over, touching it lightly, and leaving its old institutions and manners still flourishing and uninfluenced with the spirit of enterprise and the money-fever, transforming so many of these erst picturesque old villages, into smoky manufacturing towns.

Here son succeeded father in seldom interrupted line, and most of the inhabitants could trace back to forefathers who had held the posts now their own. At first sight you would probably deem King's Morton a sleepy, do-nothing sort of a place; but no! the people thrived well in their occupations, having no undue and disproportionate competition. Poverty was, indeed, a rare thing amongst them, as also was wealth. There was no craving for the latter, which, perhaps, is sufficient to account, in a measure, for the absence of the former. The people are strictly Conservative, and averse to strangers, and they looked curiously after Mr. Mornington, marvelling what could bring so distinguished-looking a visitor to their little town. And yet, he did not appear to be altogether a stranger. He looked in at the blacksmith's shed, as if he half expected to see some gentleman there, awaiting the replacement of a cast shoe; he glanced up at the old town clock which ruled the hours, with the air of one accustomed to govern his comings and goings by its somewhat erratic course; and he nodded involuntarily to the old watchmaker who stood outside his shop. His hesitating response and puzzled mien, betrayed no previous acquaintance. Besides, he cast frequent glances around him, not as one who sees a place for the first time and wishes to impress it upon his memory, but far more as one who revisits a spot of which every stone in every building are acquaintances.

If this were so, Mr. Mornington did not delay to revive his reminiscences. But passing straight along the main street he came to the outskirts, where, on the right, about a quarter of a mile, stood the old church, whose steeple, once a landmark, was knocked off by the cannons of Oliver Cromwell. On the left, at intervals, were a few old-fashioned residences of the well-to-do class. It was upon the last of these that he bent his gaze and before it finally stopped. It was about the least pretentious-looking, and was really little more than a cottage. A notice board, on a stake in the little lawn, announced that "Fernside Villa" was to be Let or Sold, and advised the intending purchaser to apply to "Messrs. Sharp and Wells, land agents, King's Morton, for further particulars," but added that the key could be obtained, with permission to view, at the adjoining house, which was the residence of Mr. Wells. The notice did not appear to cause Mr. Mornington any emotion unless relief, as he leant over the low wall and read, it. After silent contemplation of the bare windows and neglected grounds, he roused himself, and entering the garden of the adjoining house, rang the bell and asked the trim maid who answered it, for leave to view the empty house. She fetched the key, and together they pushed open the rusty gate and walked down the garden path. She unlocked the front door; pushing it back awakened strange echoes in the narrow hall, where Mr. Mornington paused.

"You can leave me now," he said to the usher; "I will bring you the key when I have done with it." He slipped a half-sovereign into her hand, which, coupled with his authoritative manner, quite quelled the half-uttered remonstrances of the servant girl, as well as her voluble dilation on the convenient arrangements

of the kitchens, the quantity of cupboards, and the many other advantages which the lucky purchaser of Fernside Villa would gain. She went without a murmur, and Mr. Mornington was left alone.

He wandered from room to room, casting lingering glances around as if he half expected that the visions of the past would arise in reality, and that he would see again in the familiar places the form of her whose memory was the attraction luring him here. Longest of all, he lingered in the little front parlour, his face greatly softened; though the bare walls, from which the once bright paper was hanging down loosely, were faded and discoloured, and the floors were thick with dust. He saw none of these evidences of the decayed appearance of the room: for him there was a cheerful fire in the rusty grate, a carpet thicker than the dust on the floor, pictures and well-filled book-cases on the ragged walls.

That firelight of fancy illumined the room, and was reflected from the sweet, loving face of the phantom tenant of the chair by the fireplace. Again she smiled up at him as none ever smiled since on him; again she looked and again she spoke as never woman had spoken and looked on him. Over the smiling face a cloud of unhappiness abruptly gathered; suffering, too, was there—and fierce hatred flashed anew—as once, and once only he saw it—out of the most often mournful eyes. Burning indignation fired those lips, too prematurely pale, as they pealed a curse on the name he bore—a curse that had clung to him undetachably.

The blending of evanescent joy and undying grief pervaded him and bound him there until the minutes grew into hours, and at length the servant who had left him the key grew anxious, and came in to see why he stayed so long. At the sound of her steps he recovered himself, and tore himself away to follow her out.

"Do you think it will suit you, sir?" she asked at the gate.

"I scarcely know; I think not," was the reply.

Without another word he took the road and began ascending the hill, at the top of which stood the church. After examining the churchyard, he opened the wide gate and walked slowly up the gravel path, examining the head-stones. His search for the dead was not a long one, there being but few graves, and the one he sought conspicuous by its simplicity. A plain tablet bearing only the initials "E. M." at the head of the mound, was its only ornament.

For a space this cold, reserved man swayed with weakness before the lowly memorial; this once he lost in the battle for self-control, and casting himself down on the ground, with a choking sob, he knelt by the side of the grave and wept.

A strong man's tears are always terrible; but when the man is a man of iron nerve and resolution, such outcome of grief is doubly painful, and the sight one never to be forgotten. Few there are who would not have pitied Harold Mornington as his proud face was distorted with passionate weeping, and his haughty head bowed in misery. Twenty years of hardship and poverty had not lowered it thus one jot.

Men of his stamp appear to the outside world to have but few affections, and to possess but sparingly the capacity, above all, for loving. The world is mistaken, as the world very often is. The prouder and colder a man's outward temperament is, the greater his power of loving—the deeper his love if it be once enkindled. The difficulty is to raise a spark; but, once alight, it burns with a

steadiness and constancy which neither time can lessen nor adversity extinguish. The outward appearance—nay, even the manners of the man, are in very many cases no true index to his temperament. What is often put down as nervousness and coldness is frequently pure sensitiveness, whose only defence against the hard blow of an exposed life, is to envelop itself in an unnatural reserve, which speedily becomes a shell. It is not that the power to love, or that the love itself is absent. It is rather that, through sensitiveness of disposition, it would be painful for them to show it; but it exists none the less, and to an extent which ordinary men seldom, if ever, show. This sensitiveness is not very rare; reserve and stiffness is not its only mask. A wife fancying herself neglected by her husband; a child thinking itself slighted by its parents. These are common cases. Then, again, some one who has some flaw in appearance, or walk, or speech, fancies himself or herself an object of ridicule—for such as these generally magnify their defect until it becomes a very nightmare to them. And there are many who, wounded by the—perhaps merely imagined—neglect of husband or parent, or by the ridicule or excessive compassion of friends, seize upon the readiest and most easily assumed mode of concealing their feelings, taking on them the mask, either of reserve or stupidity (the latter is frequent enough); these render themselves in time invulnerable, but at the expense of misconception on the part of congeners, and then frequently go down to their graves with their noblest feelings and natural instincts unknown and unappreciated, either completely stifled or partly smothered under a veil become impenetrable.

However this might have applied to Mornington in former years, when he rose again from kneeling beside the grave his mask was dropped. To people in general he appeared as a man by nature stern and reserved, but nevertheless agreeable enough, since his sternness was not severity, and his reserve not impenetrable. He could, and often did, talk freely and pleasantly; and although he never became a "popular man," yet he was not disliked nor feared, and was ever pointed out as a man of character, whose rigid morals made life a praiseworthy one, and assured him success. If closer observers ever noticed a restlessness and dissatisfaction about him at times, they put it down to ambition, which frequently produces such symptoms. But when alone, secure from interruption, that unsatisfied look would change into one of alarm, as if his conscience was reminding him of hell-hounds on his track. From those dark eyes would pour glances of fiery hatred, and savage blasphemy would burst from frothing lips, or such a smile play as the torturer might lavish upon his victim on the rack. This, we say, is the Harold Mornington when he resumes the mask with which to outface the world and confront the social masks all wear. But now no disguise upon him, as he stands unwitnessed in the home of death, with tear-stained face and distraught aspect. At length he rose to leave the place. Thereupon the tenderness and love fled from his face, as if falling with scorched pinions into the grave which had drunk his tears; as if in those few minutes he had expended the accumulated emotions and feelings of a lifetime.

His briefly lightened face grew heavy with evil passion and hatred, and a malignant fire shone in his eyes, as with quick and determined steps he stalked down the path.

"Died of a broken-heart," he muttered, with a sardonic laugh, looking back for a moment into the little enclosure, upon which the shades of evening were

rapidly descending, and vaporous wreaths arising like the phantoms which the clowns pretend them to be.

"Alone, uncared for, unloved; left thus to die by the villain who blighted your life; but not to rest unavenged," he hissed between his teeth; "not unavenged!"

So saying, he sped down the little hill into the town. He just caught the last train to L—n, where he had slept the previous night, and on the next morning early started to London.

His former self seemed to have disappeared; for he who had heretofore shunned company, now courted it.

He travelled in the same carriage with the editor of a provincial newspaper, and a country clergyman with his wife and family, and he, of all men, chatted affably. He talked politics with the editor, and having run him into a corner, discussed with the clergyman theology with equal aptitude. Finally, he won the heart of the reverend gentleman's wife by his praises of her rosy-cheeked boys. "A man of the world," thought the editor as he quitted the carriage; "a clever man too, but unscrupulous." "A most agreeable companion," decided the clergyman and his wife, as left alone in the carriage they collected their belongings; "and entirely of my views as to that disputed reading in St. Mark."

"And didn't he admire Johnny's legs," interrupted the fond mother, as she gazed admiringly on her youngest boy, lately glorified with knickerbockers. Difficult for either men to believe that their agreeable man of the world had, only a few short hours before, dedicated his life to a vengeful purpose, which the one would have regarded with horror as immoral, and the other with contempt as insane.

Arrived in town, Mr. Mornington called first at Mr. Woodruff's offices in Lincoln's Inn, but finding him out, went down to Mornington by the afternoon train. He had telegraphed, and found his daughter at the station, looking her best and driving a very handsome pair of bay cobs in a phaeton. She certainly had no grounds to complain on this occasion of taciturnity, on the part of her father, for he laughed and chatted with her all the way to the Abbey, complimenting her on her driving, as on her appearance, and apparently taking a lively interest in the local intelligence with which she supplied him, and the account of home doings during his brief absence. Eva questioned herself when home and alone in her dressing-room, What new spirit had come over her father? Strange to say, though his former gloom and coldness had seemed so oppressive to her, his new mood did not gratify her. With the man who carried the traces of grief and sorrow in his face, even though he was cold and distant, Eva felt disposed to sympathise—and sympathy, we all know, in a woman, is but the stepping-stone to love. Yet, now this novel phase of her father's character appeared—much as she had longed for it before—she was repelled, not won, and her shyness revived beyond ability to overcome. It seemed now, that as reserve fell from him, it fell upon her, so that their characters were reversed. It was he now who sought endearments, whilst she withheld them. This revulsion continued, and would in time change the impulsive girl, imperceptibly into a sedate and self-subdued woman. The change, probably, was not for the worse. To play her part properly, no matter how easy a woman's lot, or uneventful, she should always possess an amount of control over feelings, which control Eva gained at the expense of stiffness and constraint which involuntarily reigned over her when alone with her father.

It is a great pity that in the better classes so few women show us their natural selves. The changes which years bring with them, are not always changes for the better. The English girl whom our great-grandfathers sought and won, was of a very different stamp from the girls from whose ranks men of this age are called upon to select their wives. Modesty, simplicity, bashfulness, these are attributes which appear to have vanished from the earth as far as girls are concerned; and how far the loss is supplied by "cheek," arts of flirting of which our grandmothers knew nothing, and a knowledge of the world equal to a man's, is a matter which must be left of course to individual opinion. It is not the girls themselves with whom the fault lies, but in their tutors. Most unfortunately for them custom and society together demand that, when a girl is of an age to be brought into contact with the opposite sex, her conversation must be shaped from some recognised model, her feelings governed not by her heart but by her head; for there are fixed, though unwritten laws, to transgress which is a sin against society. That tyrant declares at what things, and at what times, a girl may laugh, frown, or give way to any emotion. Nothing is left to impulse—that truest of guides; but expressions of sympathy or amusement, pity or interest, must only take place when the precedent of fashion permits. No wonder, then, that a girl's real and natural feelings, not having had time to mature, dwindle away altogether; that her best and noblest impulses weaken, and that she who might have become a genuine and lovable woman, becomes by her training, a merely stereotyped pattern of the woman of the world.

Eva Mornington was an exception; but then her position was an exceptional one. Had she been introduced early into society under the auspices of an orthodox chaperon, there is little doubt but that she would have conformed in the same way. But, left to herself until her mind had become shaped, and planted upon a firm basis, with no worldly governess or matchmaking mother to pervert her young ideas, or to hurry her into premature womanhood, and brought up under the calm influence of a quiet country life, and under the rather quaint, but rigidly correct teaching of Mrs. Neville, she had grown into a true-hearted, natural English girl, as far apart from her compeers in the world of fashion, as light is from dark. Generous she was and warmhearted, with strong impulses to which she was not afraid to trust. Active in mind as in body, for her education had gone far beyond the routine of school studies, and yet while, in her quiet country home, she had found time and opportunity to indulge her liking for muscular exercise, and her love for study, she had carried neither to excess, and was clever without pedantry, and a proficient in all outdoor exercises, without being in the least degree masculine. No thoughts of lovers or lovemaking had troubled her young brain, save perhaps, when she sat entranced for hours (for Eva was romantic, we have said, though not sentimental) as she often did, reading "Marmion," or Lancelot, or old German poems in the original. Then she would close her eyes, and ask whether men so good and noble as the ideal disclosed to her, really existed, and whether she should ever meet such a one. Dreams of this like do no girl harm, for they appeal to the heart, while the young ladies' present-day novels appeal oftener to the senses. On the contrary, this musing does good, tending to elevate tastes and the standard of perfection, and to those few who read between the lines, who understand the meaning of what they read, it may teach the great lesson which all girls should learn: to distinguish between the real man and the sham gentleman.

Chapter VIII

Two Heads are better than One.

The dressing-bell had rung twice before Eva could arouse herself from her uneasy reflections, and even then she was not able to banish them altogether, but remained throughout the evening silent and absorbed. The dinner was not a cheerful one, and she was glad when she could leave her father and brother to continue their conversation over their wine. This lasted a while, Mr. Mornington asking many questions about local matters and the people who lived around them, while Godfrey seemed quite content to lounge back, and leisurely answer, never at very great length and frequently without removing his cigarette from between his teeth. As a Mornington of an earlier era toyed with a scented headed cane at his lips, so the Mornington of our day was faithful to the three puffs of smoke in a roll of tissue paper. Godfrey and his cigarette seemed inseparable as Arthur and Escalibur.

The subject apparently interesting Mr. Mornington most, was a probable vacancy in the representation of the county which might occur any day, as the member, Sir Herbert Bothwell, was reported to be dying.

"They say, do they not," asked Mr. Mornington, "that Mr. Rushden has been asked to contest, should the vacancy occur?"

"Scarcely that. Bothwell is given up, safe enough; but, of course, while he yet lives, no offer, formal or informal, could be made to any one."

"Still I believe it to be an understood thing that Mr. Rushden will be invited to stand. And, of course, he would accept."

"I think the contrary. You must know young Rushden was at Christchurch with me, and once, talking about the county, he told me something of that former affair when Rushden was passed over rather unceremoniously in favour of Sir Herbert. Rushden never showed any annoyance, and people do not imagine he feels any; but Tom told me that he was deucedly cut up, and I should myself imagine, knowing his peculiar disposition, that the deputation who offer him the seat, will get a cool reception and a curt 'No.'"

Mr. Mornington mused for a minute or two. "Do you think," he said, "that if he really wishes to enter Parliament, he will allow the memory of a past slight to spoil his present chance?"

"I do," rejoined Godfrey; "but there's something else in it. Rushden is a devilish clever fellow, and would very much rather represent a manufacturing town. À propos, Tom told me only the other morning, in confidence, which I presume may be extended to you" (Mr. Mornington bowed) "that his governor had received a letter from H——d asking him to receive a deputation, with the object to induce him to stand for their town at the next general election—about two years, I suppose. Well, I believe," continued Godfrey, filling his glass and passing the decanter to his father, "that he will prefer to wait till then."

"I see," said the senior; "and failing him, there is no one."

"Failing him," said Godfrey, "the seat is lost. I know of no one else in the county who would come forward, and it is quite certain that a stranger would have no chance against Mr. Davenport."

This ended the conversation, as Mr. Mornington asked no more questions, and Godfrey then quitted the room for the drawing-room. To his surprise, Eva had a companion whose appearance at once interested him. There was something familiar in the curve of the neck and voice, but it was not until he stood opposite her, and had already cast a questioning glance at his sister, as if expecting an introduction, that he recognised her.

"Really, Miss Langton," he said, with a smile as they shook hands, "you can scarcely expect me to apologise for not recognising you at first. When a romping school girl, as you were, you know, whose torn frocks and stained pinafores were her nurses' constant trouble, changes in so short a time into so demure and sedate a young lady as yourself, and adds also some six inches to her stature, she cannot wonder at her friends of old failing to recognise her."

"A very pretty apology," replied the young lady, with a smile on her side. "I am afraid, though, that the soiled pinafores and torn frocks were frequently owing to your misconduct. I remember that to be with you then, was a sure sign of coming mischief."

Godfrey laughed.

"Pleasant days!" he said, "and I am glad that Miss Langton has not yet forgotten little Maudie's enjoyment of them."

"No, indeed. Although I have become a demure and sedate young lady. Very happy ones they were," with a sigh, which Godfrey noticed.

"Surely your latter ones have not been less so?" But his eyes falling on the black crape which hung from her dress and catching a warning glance from Eva, he recalled Mr. Langton's recent death, and he could have bitten his tongue out for his forgetfulness.

"Won't you sing something, Eva," asked Mrs. Neville, looking up from her knitting and coming to the rescue. Eva complied understandingly at once.

"You will pardon me for my thoughtless speech," said Godfrey in a low tone while the song was proceeding.

"Certainly," but the word cost Miss Langton an effort, for she could scarcely keep tears from pouring down her cheeks.

Godfrey could not forgive himself so readily, but slipped away as soon as possible, and nothing more was seen of him by the ladies up to the hour of ten when the old butler from the rectory appeared to take Miss Langton home. More or less, strange as it might appear, whom should they meet in the avenue but Godfrey, having consoled himself for his blunder with cigarettes, no doubt, all the interval.

Directly he caught sight of the pair, he threw his cigarette into the shrubbery, and hastily joined them.

"You will allow me to escort you home, Miss Langton?" he asked, and she assented, although not very graciously.

"It really is not necessary," she answered, "as Parkins is sufficient protection, and I am sorry that you have thrown away your cigar."

But he joined her nevertheless, while the old butler fell discreetly into the rear, quite content to moon alone; the party passing down the side walk as a short cut to the rectory. For once in his life Godfrey was at a loss how to open the conversation, for it was a new sensation to him to be treated with indifference; and, certainly, Maud Langton had displayed anything but pleasure at his appearance, and now seemed almost oblivious of it. He made some remark about the new moon and the fineness of the night, to which his

companion replied in monosyllables, still, it was after what seemed to him an incredibly short space of time, they stood before the gate and Miss Langton was holding out her hand to wish him good-night.

"I hope that I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again," said he, detaining it for a moment, "before I return to college."

"It is very likely," she answered unconcernedly, and, withdrawing her hand, she passed through the gate and disappeared.

Godfrey walked home with eyes bent on the ground; in the avenue he broke out into a slight laugh.

"What a fool she must have thought me," he said half aloud, as he lit a fresh cigarette. "Well, I was certainly not entertaining," he admitted ruefully. "Who would have thought that little Maud would have grown up so beautiful?" For the first time in his life he found his thoughts wholly centred by a woman's face.

The next day was an important one for Mr. Mornington. There was a dinner party at Averill Park, at which he was to make his first appearance amongst the county grandees, and he was looking forward to it with interest. To Miss Mornington it was also an interesting event, as it was her first formal dinner party. And Godfrey was looking forward to it as well, for he expected to meet Miss Langton. At breakfast he announced his intention of shooting during the morning, while his father retired to the library to confer with Mr. Cameron.

It was a well-known fact to the keepers, as to Godfrey himself, that the covers on the east side of the mansion were the worst supplied with game; yet, notwithstanding his lack of sport, he thoroughly disgusted the keepers accompanying him by insisting on remaining here, and as a consequence had the pleasure of returning homewards at luncheon time with an empty bag and disappointed face. Of course, it was merely a chance that the little tumble-down rectory, which was Mrs. Langton's home, was situated on that gameless side, and through pure thoughtlessness that he missed out the best cover in returning, in order to pass within sight of the windows.

Maud, perchance, thought so, as she looked out of the dining-room windows, and heartily laughed at the young gentleman, with an empty bag and rueful face, casting furtive glances at the window, behind the curtains of which she took all pains to remain concealed.

"My dear Maud," said Mrs. Langton, looking up surprised from her easy chair, "whatever are you laughing at?"

"I couldn't help it, mother—at young Mr. Mornington's disconsolate face. He evidently has not had very good sport. Can't think why he tried this side," she added guilelessly, "when the covers on the south are swarming with game."

Mrs. Langton keenly eyed the speaker before she said:

"I quite forget Godfrey Mornington, my dear; what is he like?"

Maud resumed her seat opposite her mother, retaking up her work.

"Oh, he wouldn't be so bad, I daresay, come to know him. I only saw him for a few minutes last night, and it is six years since I met him before. He was rather nice then, but college spoils all fellows, I think. He is shy enough at times," she added, with a smile. "He actually couldn't say one word to me coming home last night."

"He walked home with you, did he?" said her mother, with interest, laying down her knitting. Maud coloured and looked vexed.

"I met him in the shrubbery, and, merely out of politeness, he walked to the gate with me," she said. "Poor fellow, I could see that he regretted his cigar."

"Did you ask him to call, Maud?"

"Of course, not; why should I?"

"I used to know him," her mother replied, "and should like to meet him again. Will he be at Averill's to-night?"

"I really don't know," responded Maud in utter indifference, and came pretty near to saying, "and certainly I don't care."

"If you should happen to meet him, I should be glad if you will ask him to call and see me," said Mrs. Langton. "I wish to renew our acquaintance."

Maud promised compliance with so little good grace that the conversation languished for a few minutes.

"What are you going to wear this evening, Maud?" her mother asked.

"What a question!" she replied, with a slight laugh. "You must know that unless I go in the dress I have on," she looked down at it quizzically, "I have nothing but my black grenadine. It is not so very shabby," she added consolingly, "and the Averills would quite miss it, if I didn't wear it, they are so used to it."

Mrs. Langton sighed.

"I wish I could afford you dresses like other girls. Anyhow, whether we can afford it or not," she went on with sudden decision, "you must have another of some sort."

"Quite a mistake the 'must,' mother," said Maud, jumping up and kissing her. "I want none, and I won't have one! I'm not going to have you denying yourself and scraping away to get new dresses for me. What do I care about dress?" she said contemptuously. "If people don't like me because I wear shabby things, their liking is not worth having."

"What a mass of 'don'ts' and 'won'ts!'" said Mrs. Langton, half reproachfully, half amusedly. "But, seriously, Maud, there are other things to be considered. You know my great wish is to see you suitably married, and unless you can dress, at any rate, decently—"

"Now, mother, pray don't," interrupted Maud, with the colour rising, and an angry light springing into her eyes. "You know quite well this is the one subject on which we cannot agree. Please don't enter on it again. I have told you before, and let me repeat it once for all. I will work for you, slave for you, willingly, but this one thing will I not do, purchase luxury for you and myself, by marrying a rich man, especially if I do not love him, and I don't expect that I shall ever care about any man. If I do I am quite sure of one thing, he will be a poor man who can work and does work. A man whom I could love for himself alone, and whom I could help with my affection and influence, ay, even with my hands. I could never even esteem, much more love, any of these eligible young men for whom you press me to angle. I won't do it." She stamped her foot. "Pampered, effeminate beings all of them," she continued scornfully, "who have nothing better to do than make ducks and drakes of their father's money, and mar the ducks and drakes of his farmers; cannot even think for themselves, though their paltry career need not want much thinking about, goodness knows. The man whom I could love," concluded the voice growing softer, "must be one with the power to fight the battle of life for himself, and not come up on the field in his father's footsteps. A man of intellect and strong will alone could I esteem,

and such a one alone would I marry." She stopped, somewhat ashamed of her vehemence.

Mrs. Langton was the widow and Maud the only child of the late Rector of Mornington, who had died about eighteen months since, leaving them scantily provided for. At that time the new rectory was almost completed, and it was easily arranged that Mrs. Langton and her daughter should stay on at the old place, at a merely nominal rent. She and Maud lived quietly enough together, and only on one subject did they disagree—that of marriage. Mrs. Langton had once been rich, and hers was a nature fully to appreciate the luxuries of wealth. Its loss had been a great affliction, and her single hope was that her daughter might, by a rich marriage, remove them both from the poverty which she felt so keenly. Yet she could not help inwardly acknowledging that her dreams might never be realised, on account of her daughter's intractable disposition, proof of which has appeared in her speech above.

Godfrey Mornington was especially a "catch," and Mrs. Langton, when she heard of his presence at the Abbey, was eager for Maud to avail herself of Eva's offer of friendship. Highflown though she knew Maud to be, she could not believe that she would be so insane as to refuse Godfrey, could he be brought to her feet.

Maud was not, we grant, strictly beautiful, but there were few men who would deny that she could, if she chose, be charming. She had a small, but perfectly-formed head, slender, incomparably graceful figure, pale face with large grey eyes, unspeakably soft and touching at times, but generally full of pride and exclusiveness which, being in accordance with her manner, became her well, though not winning her admirers. She was occasionally, for she was capricious, a brilliant talker, and could dazzle her listeners with such sparkling wit and vivacity that, as an old courtier had once said of her, "You might close your eyes and fancy yourself back in the reception-room of Madame de Stael, since whose time no woman has possessed the art of conversation." But the rector's child was oftenmost quiet and self-secluded, and hence not popular among the girls of her acquaintance. No wonder! what had the daughters of country squires, whose lives were bounded by the recognised limits of feminine occupations, to do with one who quoted Horace and Xenophon, and was equally versed in Schiller as in the laws of political economy. Even the youth of the county, although very many of them admired Miss Langton, were rather afraid of a bluestocking, and she was only really popular with a few old pedants and young scholars, with whom she could converse on subjects far beyond the general comprehension. Miss Mornington had been her childhood's companion when the former spent the summer with Mrs. Neville at the Abbey, and now that she had returned to live there, she was only too delighted to renew her early friendship. Maud had at first scarcely reciprocated Eva's delight at their opportunity for doing so, but her frigidity was not proof against the other's fervour, and gradually the two became firm friends, and Maud a constant visitor at the Morningtons.

Chapter IX

A County Dinner Party.

The Averill dinner-parties were cited as the dullest of the dull. The same heavy squires, accompanied by their wives and daughters came to spend the evenings in the same manner; and the dinners themselves were uniformly plain and massive. The same deep silence always reigned during the banquet, the same topics were always discussed by the same men over a selfsame wine, and the same mutual confidences were exchanged, and criticisms passed by the ladies when upstairs. The gentlemen always marched into the drawing-room together, and dispersed themselves in the same way, and resumed repeating the same things. The same young ladies always exhibited an equal amount of bashfulness and confusion when asked to sing, and always sang the same old songs in the same feelingless manner.

But to-night all was different.

There was quite a buzz of animated conversation up to a few minutes of the announcement of dinner, and expectation lighted their stolid faces. Two events were there to discuss, either of which would have been sufficient to enliven them. The first was the news of the sudden death of their county member, and the second the expected presentation amongst them of Mr. Mornington. Of the two, perhaps the latter was uppermost in their minds, and the expectation grew into scarcely suppressed excitement when the footman announced the expected one in a pompous voice. Perhaps all were a shade disappointed just at first, although their interest was not lessened, for nothing at all unusual signalled the gentleman quietly saluting his host and hostess. Simply a distinguished looking man, in whose outward appearance there was not the slightest trace of an extraordinary and chequered career. Perhaps of the two Eva created the most sensation, for her appearance raised almost a too audible murmur of admiration amongst the younger male guests, and carried dismay into the hearts of fond mothers, whose daughters they saw completely eclipsed.

Dinner was announced almost immediately. Godfrey had not time to get across the room to speak to Miss Langton, who had come with Lady Halton, but, to his unqualified distaste, had to escort a second debutante, the Averills' youngest daughter, whose undeveloped shoulders and uneven countenance were in striking contrast to his idol's form and features.

The dinner was much more lively than usual, and Godfrey had the pleasure, at least, of seeing Maud sustain a most animated dialogue with Arthur Halton, exactly opposite; a pleasure so delightful that during the first courses, he was savagely champing his mustaches and mentally anathematising all dinner parties, and this one in particular, until, noticing that Maud glanced across at him once or twice rather curiously, he changed his tactics and devoted himself most assiduously to his companion. This with such success that she went away enraptured with her first dinner-party, and with her head no little turned through having been the object of so much attention from the best-looking young man in the room.

Mr. Mornington sat next his hostess, and without appearing to exert himself, kept up a continual flow of conversation around him, which went a long way towards thawing the gloom which generally hung over the head of these banquets. When the ladies had retired and the gentlemen had filled up the vacant places and their glasses, the noisier talk turned naturally enough on the subject of the vacancy in the county. The rumour ran that Mr. Rushden would not consent to stand, and this created much consternation, for, although none

of them aspired to parliamentary honours, they were all good, sound Conservatives, and did not wish any other partisan to represent them.

"Now that it is certain that Rushden will refuse," observed Sir Henry Hutchinson solemnly (one of the under-sheriffs and a great man in the county), "for my part, I shall not form one of any deputation to ask him."

"Nor I," cried several others.

There was a momentary silence.

"The only thing to do," ventured young Halton, from the foot of the table, "is to get a fresh candidate."

"Easier said than done," returned Godfrey, as the general opinion.

There was a gloomy silence.

"The problem is not so unsolvable after all," said Sir Miles, in an important manner from the head of the table. "I have in my mind's eye now a gentleman who, I believe, would undertake to contest the seat, and who has every qualification, not excepting local influence." Here Sir Miles looked round with a triumphant smile on the astonished and inquiring faces of his guests.

"Name, name!" was cried from several quarters.

"Fill your glasses, gentlemen," said Sir Miles, "and drink the health of our future member: Mr. Harold Mornington!"

Everyone was relieved and content. Mr. Mornington had created a favourable impression, and spite of the little they had seen of him, it was wonderful how convinced they were that he was the man above all others who ought to represent them. Mr. Mornington was therefore quite overwhelmed by the numerous questions and congratulations showered upon him. "Really, Sir Miles and gentlemen," he said, "you are all exceedingly kind. I must confess that it is my ambition to enter Parliament, and I feel sure that I shall be able to get over the disadvantage of my long absence, by judicious study and application. When the time comes, you will find me prepared for the honour and proud to verify the wisdom of your choice."

The room shook with the Kentish fire, so that the butler was not heard till his third essay at announcing the eagerness of the ladies to learn what unusual rejoicing was this.

Fortune favoured Godfrey as much in the drawing-room as his sire at tine banquet,

The first person whom he saw was Miss Langton, alone in a recess, carelessly turning over the leaves of a book of engravings. He walked straight up to her, heedless that more than one skirt was moved to give him room, if he chose to seat himself by its owner, and that more than one pair of bright eyes looked up with a smile of invitation. When he stood by her side the rector's daughter looked quickly up, and Godfrey caught a gleam of pleasure, which disappeared, however, immediately.

"We have been a long time downstairs," he remarked.

"Indeed! I never noticed it," was the reply, given in all gravity.

"Flattering! May I see what has proved so enthralling as to occupy your attention?" He stretched out his hand for the book, which was handed him.

"The engravings are horrid, and I haven't even looked beyond the first page. You are mistaken in supposing that I need anything very enthralling to reconcile me to solitude."

Godfrey bit his lip; he had half an idea that Miss Quiet would be more than a match if he provoked a battle of words: so he changed the conversation and told

her the reason of their long absence. She was interested at once and sympathetic.

"Let me tell you, I admire your father," she said. "There is an air of resolution about him which takes my fancy; and I like the idea of his being anxious to enter Parliament instead of settling down to vegetate in the commonplace way."

"He would have had some excuse," said Godfrey dryly, "had he decided to 'vegetate,' as you term the life of a country gentleman, considering his long absence; hence, I must say, that I for one am surprised at his sudden decision."

"Now, I admire him for that very thing!" was the warm reply. "I suppose you would have had him take root here, and compress his intellect into stagnation; the best years of his life to be wasted in discussing the growth of turnips and the breed of his cattle; blooming out in the end a model farmer, or something equally ridiculous. Is that your idea?"

Godfrey was annoyed, and took little pains to hide this annoyance, for there was increased acerbity in his tone.

"I am afraid that Miss Langton has developed radical propensities since I had the pleasure of seeing her last. Supposing I say that a country gentleman's life, which apparently you so much despise, will be my lot when I leave college."

"I scarcely see how that will affect my views, Mr. Mornington; but I don't think you fully mean what you say," she subjoined, in a kindlier way. "I should imagine that a college education would give you tastes and aspirations above farming and draining."

Godfrey laughed.

"You are severe upon agricultural pursuits, Miss Langton," he said; "but do you not really think that a man may do much good on his own estate, and lead a life there at all events as much to benefit himself and his fellow-creatures as pursuing the phantom of indefinable ambition, which, as you follow, flies?"

"Certainly, if the ambition be indefinable." There was just the slightest possible note of contempt in her speech.

"May I know," he pursued, "what would be your ambition, if you were a man!"

"I can scarcely tell," Miss Langton answered thoughtfully, as if the idea interested her; "it would depend so much upon my position. I would prefer to be a poor man, and then the ambition would not be long in coming. But were I rich, like you, I hardly know; I suppose it would be politics. Anyhow, I would commence by doing something more at college than develop my muscles."

With this parting shot, she left him, going over to sing at Lady Averill's request. After that performance she remained by the side of her hostess, so that Godfrey, good-naturedly, had to attach himself to his dinner-companion, whose shyness was soon wafted away before his airy sentences. At half-past ten precisely, symptoms arose of a move; the carriage from the Abbey was one of the first to arrive. It had been arranged, greatly to Godfrey's satisfaction, that Maud should return with his party, as this saved Lady Halton's driving round by the rectory a detour of several miles.

During the drive home Godfrey, who sat on the box to have his cigarette, took himself seriously to task. If anyone had suggested to him a week before that in so short a time he would have fallen in love with his former playfellow, it would scarcely be going far enough to say that he would have flatly denied the possibility of such an event. His was not the nature for such sudden caprices, and he would have regarded it not only as impossible, but as ridiculous. But the fact remained, that although he had only met Maud Langton twice since his

return home, she had already obtained so great a place in his thoughts for it to amount almost to a monopoly of them. It irritated him, and yet it soothed him, as there are balsam trees whose juice cures the stab of their thorns. He was mortified that she should have gained such influence over his thoughts, and yet he felt deep delight in thinking of her. On how the matter would end and how progress, he studiously avoided conjecture. Clear-headed and long-sighted though he was in most matters, he refused to attempt to follow this line to a conclusion. He was satisfied to consider the present only, and he did not seek pleasure by building up visions of a future in which she should figure. Whether her speedily-acquired sway was merely a captivation of the fancy, or a profounder feeling, was another question he took marked care to evade, and he made no effort to analyse his feelings. For the moment he lazily consumed his cigarettes, with ample occupation for his thoughts in recapitulating his recent interchange of words with Maud, and in recalling all her words and repicturing her aspect. When the carriage stopped at the Rectory gate, he jumped down to assist Miss Langton to alight.

"I shall walk the rest of the way," he said, "I—I want to finish my smoke."

The carriage drove on immediately.

"This will be good-bye, I suppose, Miss Langton," he said as they stood together at the gate. "I go back to Oxford to-morrow afternoon."

"It looks like it, then," she replied carelessly, as she held out her hand. "So, good-bye!"

He detained it for a moment.

"Don't hurry away," he said. "Spare me one moment. I want to ask your advice."

"My advice?" she repeated in an uneasy tone, moving slightly nearer the gate; "what about?"

He still hesitated.

"Not exactly advice, perhaps; but I want to ask you a question. We are old friends, you know, so you will pardon it being rather a personal one."

As he paused again, she waited impatiently for him to proceed.

"Do you think," he went on at last, and slowly, "that you would like me a little better,—that is, not dislike me quite so much, if you did not think me very idle? We used to be very good friends once; but since I have met you again, we don't seem to get on altogether so well. I don't think that it is my fault; it is you who have changed a good deal, Miss Langton."

She smiled at his earnestness, but it was forced.

"I do not see what difference my liking or disliking you can make, Mr. Mornington," was her cold rejoinder; "but since you have asked me, I will admit that you are apparently neglecting your opportunities. I do not suppose you will be ready to go in for your degree for two or three years yet?"

It was his turn to smile now.

"You judge me hardly, I think. It is true, I have devoted a great deal of time at Oxford to boating and cricket, but I have scarcely been so idle otherwise as you seem to imagine. If the examination were tomorrow, I could go in for it, and be sure of passing."

She looked surprised at this, and flushed richly.

"Then, I have misjudged you, and must ask your pardon. I had an idea that, because you were so prominent at athletics, you must have neglected reading altogether, and I may as well add, that I did think that foolish, sir. But you have

had your moment, most misunderstood of collegians, and I must not give you one more. Good night!" and she sought to snatch away her hand, covering her evidence of discovering that he had imprisoned it so long with a smile genial enough for any one less grasping than a lover.

It is an old saying, that men were born to blunder where women are concerned. Instead of being satisfied with this finale to his interview, as he ought to have been, Godfrey still detained her hand, and, despite an impatient tug, bent over it and raised it to his lips. This time she plucked it away with an angry exclamation. Totally disregarding the hurried apology, she darted thence and into the house.

"Hang it!" he muttered savagely, "what a brute I was!"

In an absent, mechanical way, he fished out his cigarette case, found one with a sigh of relief, as if it were the single blessing in the Pandora's box, and, lighting it without the glow finding a smile on his provoked face, took his course homeward.

Rector's daughter and squire's heir; would the sermon outvie the rent-roll?

Chapter X

If Man Could and Woman Would.

"Maud is late," remarked Miss Mornington, as she looked out of the window. "She promised to be here nearly an hour ago."

Whilst she resumed some needlework, her brother sprawled in the unfettered style peculiar to our young men when in the bosom of their family, upon an absurdly low chair. He pretended to be deeply absorbed in a book, but the pretence was flimsy, for he jumped up immediately after the unheeded remark, tossed the book on the vacated seat, and strolled towards the egress. "Just going to see that Jones packs my things all right," he deigned to explain as he quitted the room. But the Mornington Jones needed none of his supervision, as he was well aware, neither was he accustomed to pack his master's portmanteau in the side walk to the rectory, where Godfrey in less than five minutes found himself. He had not long to wait. Hardly had he arrived in sight of the garden before the gate opened, and Miss. Langton came leisurely out and up the path towards him. Contrary to her custom she was walking with eyes fixed upon the ground, and so did not notice Godfrey until close to him. Then she started and looked annoyed, and but for his obstructing the whole of the narrow foot-path, would have to all appearance passed him with only a slight recognition.

"I won't detain you for any time," Godfrey hastened to falter in a tone for him almost humble, "but I have been seeking you on purpose to ask pardon for my indiscretion last night. May I hope to obtain it?" He looked so wistfully that despite herself, she felt her colour rise. But she answered coldly, "Certainly; and since to obtain it was your reason for taking up the whole of the path, perhaps you will leave it free now, as I am already late." She made a quick step forward, but he did not move, and she had to come to a stop. She glared at him still ladylike, but it was a glare, in her irritation.

"You will pardon my detaining you, Miss Langton, but I have something else to say."

This he spoke so resolutely that her intended protest was nipped in the start, and she dropped her eyes and was glad to divest her restlessness into patting the head of one of Godfrey's dogs, which had followed him out and began jumping up to her.

But he remained silent so long that she hazarded a glance at him without drawing him. She tossed her head, pushed away the dog, and tried again to advance, saying rapidly:

"Then, I fear that it must wait until some other time; for I really cannot stop now."

"One moment! You are forcing me to be precipitate, Miss Langton—Maud!"

At this she started; drew herself up and flashed her eyes with indignant surprise.

"Mr. Mornington, how dare you address me by my Christian name? Have you forgotten that we are children no longer, and what was permissible once is an insult now. An insult!" she repeated angrily, since he did not seem abashed.

"I forget everything except that I love you, Maud," he said bluntly. Gaining confidence as the colour enriched her cheeks and the angry light died out under her quieted brows, he continued, with passion suddenly thrilling his voice: "Don't tell me that there is no hope. We loved one another when we were younger, and, I think, I must have loved you ever since. Tell me that you have not quite forgotten those loving days? Maud, dearest, don't you care for me, even just a little?" he caught at her hand which hung at her side.

But it was snatched away as she raised her lowered eyes to his. He confidently searched them, but in the grey depths he could discover no hope for him. In keeping with that lack-lustre was her emotionless voice.

"What you ask, Mr. Mornington, is quite impossible. Never revive—never refer to it again, I beg of you; it is totally out of the question."

But he still played the lion in the path.

"I think that I have a right to ask why it is impossible," he said, subdued, but stubborn; "tell me that and I will let you pass."

"I do not know how you have acquired the right to know my reasons for my course, Mr. Mornington," was her lofty reply; "but I will give you one. I would never marry you, because you are rich and I poor—and proud, perhaps," she added bitterly. "Nay, do not hinder me," she continued, as he held his place with hope returning. "That is not the only reason; though, if it were, it would be a sufficient one. I could never marry a rich man, I say. I should be miserable every day to think that I owed everything to my husband. Besides, we are altogether different. Our dispositions are most incompatible. You are slow, lethargic, and unambitious, as no doubt you have every excuse for being. I am the very reverse. It is utterly impossible," she repeated decidedly.

"You have not proved it so," he retorted, "unless you have another and a stronger reason, there is still hope for me."

"There is none, Mr. Mornington, for—for I do not love you."

This emphatic sentence silenced him. At last he remembered himself, drew on one side, begged her pardon formally, and even waved her to proceed. It was she who halted this time.

"It is of no consequence," she said softly, as if the tone palliated the rebuff. "Good-bye, Mr. Mornington. I am sorry."

She extended her hand to support her expression of regret. He took it, but only held it for a brief space, and let it drop with a sigh and no pressure.

"Good morning, Miss Langton."

Gravely raising his hat he took a footpath which branched off into the shrubbery, and was out of sight almost at once.

The young lady did not go up to the Abbey, as intended, She waited and watched the rejected swain striding away from her, at each gap in the foliage, till, finally disappearing, she leant against a tree and suddenly burst out crying. When recovered, she picked up a little basket, which had slipped from her hand, and turned back towards the rectory. She had overcome her agitation, but was pale and thoughtful, and when indoors, went straight to her room. Throwing herself down on the nearest chair, and forcing back the tears almost overcoming her again, she began for the first time to reflect seriously on what had passed. Surely she had done right? This man who had asked her for her love, and hand in marriage, was in every important detail different to the ideal she had formed, and upon whom alone she had determined to bestow her affections. Had she not made up her mind, if she married, to marry one as poor, or even poorer than herself; one who would bring her nothing but his love; one to whom her influence and affection would be hope and encouragement? If he, by the exercise of his talents, by strength of will and hard work, could win position and wealth for them both, then, and then only would she care to enjoy them, happy in the reflection that, side by side, they had fought the battle, and as she had shared the strife, so would she have an equal right to share the spoil.

But the hour of trial had come, and the reverse of her pictured mate had asked her in wedlock. She had, of course, refused him, and without hesitation; she had not stopped to ask herself whether she cared for him or not. How could she when he was so different from her ideal? And yet she could not dismiss a heavy depression, the sense of making the life before her a blank. Her pet arguments, her favourite reasonings were powerless to explain away this unaccountable sinking of spirits, a feeling of misery closing in around her. What worried her most was that she could not shut out from her thoughts the man whom, in obedience to her preconceived ideas, she had refused to marry.

And yet all this was all simple enough. Like many other women, she had made a mistake, and, like many other men, Godfrey had thrown away his chance of success through too much precipitation. Her mistake, while not uncommon, was a very serious one for a woman to make. It is not possible for us weak mortals to control our affections as Maud had wished to do. We cannot fix upon one person to comprise certain gifts, and say to ourselves that that person only will we love; that those traits alone shall win our affections. Preconceived ideals such as Maud's waste like smoke at the hour of trial. Love is capricious and all-powerful, stronger than logic and arguments, far stronger than our own will. We may resist for a time, but sooner or later we must give way and acknowledge that however we may control our will we cannot control our affections, least of all love, that most powerful and dangerous of our passions, mocking at our dictation, and acting only at the bidding of that other mighty more indefinable master, Chance.

The realization of this had not yet come to Maud. Perhaps, if Godfrey had been a less impatient lover, it might soon enough have come for him to have received a different answer. But men were born to blunder, and women to

suffer by reason of their blunders. Hence, a few hours later, Godfrey nursed his heavy heart in the express speeding away to London, whilst Maud, with leaden eyes and pale cheeks, was reaping the fruit of their joint blunder with a heart as much weighed down.

Chapter XI

‘Twixt Peer and Parson.

Very nearly two years have passed since Harold Mornington's return to England, and the interest which his romantic history had excited was dying away. Not, however, because his name was seldom heard, for the space had been one of importance and success to him. The result of the election was never for a moment doubtful, and when Parliament reassembled after the Christmas recess, Harold Mornington, M.P., had taken a mansion in Lowndes Square, and was prepared to devote himself entirely to politics.

His party were in opposition, though their minority was not considerable, and the times being none too peaceful, far-seeing men predicted that before very long an appeal to the country or a resignation would reverse the positions. There was nothing remarkable about the speeches which Mr. Mornington delivered at different times when still a candidate, nor in his address, although the latter was full of strong common sense, with an independent ring in it, which made some of the old and most prejudiced Tories rather uneasy. And yet before Mr. Mornington had sat a session in the house, his name was mentioned as a coming man in the party, and sure of figuring in the Cabinet.

His first speech was a great success, and his daughter, who was in "the bird-cage," felt her heart swell with pride, for the father to whom as yet she had been unable to give her love.

It was towards the end of a stormy debate, when a member of the Government, encouraged by the enthusiasm of his supporters, went rather too far in ridiculing a question asked by one of the Opposition, and passing on from the question to the asker, uttered some flagrant personalities which, while they drew the applause of his party, provoked immeasurably the leaders of the Opposition. The member in whose name the question had originally stood (it referred to some Canadian disturbances) was absent, and no one else knowing anything about the matter, it seemed as if the insolent speech would pass unchallenged. But Mr. Mornington rose slowly from his seat, and, amid the encouraging cries of "new member," proceeded to address the House. In a moment or two, the uproar ceased, and every one's interest was centred upon him, for there were few who did not recognise at once that that pale, stern-looking man possessed the gift of oratory. Disdaining to appeal to the indulgence of the House, he launched straightway into a general support of the object of the question, and grew eloquent over the wrongs of the Canadian settlers, with whom and whose cause he showed a perfect acquaintance. He proved the question important and unanswered, but bound to be answered; and then, amidst the louder and louder cheers of his party, passed on to refute the personalities which had been spun over the knotty point. So vigorous was his speech, and so withering his sarcasm, that in a very short time the unlucky

mouthpiece of the Government who had provoked the retaliation, was covered with confusion. When Mr. Mornington resumed his seat, after a peroration of such force and brilliancy as compelled the continuous cheering of his friends, and the scarcely-subdued applause of some on the hostile benches, the tables were completely turned and the Government in a quandary. They could do nothing but ask for notice of the question to be repeated. The leader of the Opposition hastened to congratulate Mr. Mornington on his effective speech. From that time he became a frequent speaker in the House, more noted as a clever and shrewd debater than as an orator, it is true, but on grand occasions showing a fire and fluency which carried away his supporters, and never failed to pour dismay into the opposite ranks. These grew to be afraid of that quiet, subdued mannerism, which at times would break out into a fire of fierce sarcasm, though usually streaming in a steady earnest speech, powerful with argument and careful reasonings. They eyed him in these calmer moods as the vineyard labourer on the slope of Vesuvius eyes the cold crust beneath which he remembers an irresistible ocean of flame and molten lava is seething, always seeking for an outlet by which to issue and scathe and sweep away. In fact, at the end of eighteen months, Mr. Mornington was feared by the opposite side of the House, and looked up to by his own party, every one predicting that when the Government fell, no Cabinet would be formed without including him.

Success is man's most dangerous and insidious enemy, but it did not in the least alter or affect Harold Mornington, He was still the same courteous exemplification of that reserved force which the satirical press hollow-heartedly derided. His sole interest appeared to be in parliamentary affairs, and his social successes, although he generally followed them up, did not appear to afford the slightest satisfaction.

Eva had given up, long ago, her fond dreams of lavishing upon this man what affections she had generously at her command. To the outside world their conduct appeared to be perfect, but they themselves knew that when alone there was a curious embarrassment always present. She had quelled her passionate wish to exhibit filial love, and yet, sometimes when they were alone, she was thankful to surprise her father's eyes surreptitiously bent upon her, full of a yearning tenderness, to which she reproached herself in vain with inability to respond. She knew full well that the power had gone beyond return. In vain she argued that for his past history he deserved her pity; that his present career deserved her approbation, and that his attentions deserved her love. And yet, while she yielded him without effort the two former sentiments, the latter was wanting, and it was a source of infinite pain that she felt herself growing colder and yet colder to him, at the very period when her advances would have made him melt.

She did not go often into society, but she was spared from solitude by Maud's companionship.

Two months after the incident with Godfrey by the rectory, Mrs. Langton had suddenly died, and Maud was left a whole orphan. When the will was opened, it was found that Mr. Mornington was appointed executor of what little money there was, and it seemed a very natural arrangement for Maud to come to live for a time with Eva.

The two, though dissimilar in disposition became firmer friends than ever, and it was tacitly agreed that nothing, except the marriage of one, should break up the companionship.

Godfrey had not been seen by Maud, since her refusal. He had gone back to college where he worked hard for a time, till, having obtained his degree, he left it and England on a long yachting cruise. He was expected home, however, this very evening when we resume our story, it being his twenty-fifth birthday, fixed as his coming of age.

It is a Thursday, and Lady Stowell's reception evening. Her long drawing-room is full of guests, amongst whom are Eva and Maud chaperoned by old Lady Averill, who is in town for a short time. Kindhearted Lady Stowell is one of Eva's favourites and she seldom misses these Thursday evenings. By her side, "as usual," gossips had begun to whisper, is Lord Dereham; but she does not appear to be listening attentively to his chit-chat. On the contrary, she frequently glances toward the door, as if expecting an arrival.

Lord Dereham, as any one in society will tell you, is one of the greatest of "catches." He was an orphan at eight years old, heir to an earldom and a vast rent-roll which, however, he has been trying hard during the last four years to lessen and not without some success. He left college immediately on his coming of age and soon was the talk of the town. He was reported to have lost twenty thousand pounds on the Derby before he was twenty-two; to be an habitui at the green-rooms of such London theatres as are ruled in a free and easy manner; to have drunk hard, gambled furiously, and essayed every form of dissipation. And yet he was none the less, perchance all the more, angled for by match-making peeresses, and welcome in any London drawing-room. The higher the rank the thicker the wall of private life.

Suddenly there came a check to his career. The Dereham race-horses were advertised for sale, his bijou establishment in Paris given up, and all his boon companions were left bemoaning the loss of their most reckless leader. Without any apparent cause, the young lord, tired of the life, and turning over a fresh leaf, commenced to live as a law-abiding, scrupulous member of society. The sharpest on racecourses in Paris, or behind the scenes at the Pastime, could not divine what had so abruptly pulled him up at the very first turn in so mad a gallop. A few observers noted that his reform coincided with his first acquaintance with Miss Mornington; but as he was seldom seen near her, and the months passed on without bringing any news of his engagement to her or any other parti, the riddle was left unsolved.

Look at him now as he leans against the wall by the side of Miss Mornington's chair, dissipation appears little to have injured him, and he is admittedly an uncommonly good-looking fellow. A thorough Saxon: six foot two and well proportioned, with fair hair, light blue eyes, full of vivacity and dancing with merriment as he talks. His features are regular, and clearly cut, and the resolute mouth tells of strength of will, which may account for the suddenness and completeness with which he changed his course of living. The story which he told his dialoguist came to an end, but, as if it continued to amuse him, he kept smiling, whilst she eyed the door as fresh arrivals were announced.

"May I ask, are you expecting any one particular this evening, Miss Mornington? You seem to watch the doorway rather anxiously," he said, catching one of her glances.

"Was I?" she queried, faintly blushing. "I was not aware of it; but you had become so taken up in reminiscences of your droll college exploits that I had nothing better to occupy me."

"I beg your pardon," he said, without noticing the evasion in her reply; "I don't think my thoughts were quite so far away, though," looking down at her.

"I suppose you mean me to understand that you were thinking of me," she said with a light laugh. "Well, I would prefer your talking to me while I am here."

"Assuredly I will remember in future your wish for me to talk to you while present and think of you when absent."

"Don't be foolish, Lord Dereham. Talking of foolishness, how did you manage to do so badly at the Oval this afternoon?"

His lordship made a wry face.

"Well," he said, "when I pressed you to drive there to see us play those I. Zingari fellows I did not hope to distinguish myself by being bowled first ball. I must have had something in this distracted sphere, I think."

She laughed again.

"Something on your mind, eh? Has one of your team gone lame, or have you bad news from Cowes? I can't imagine your having anymore serious trouble."

"Perhaps I have none, as yet." Here he bent over her a little closer. "May I tell you that sometimes I think that if ever trouble comes, it will come from—from whom, do you think, Miss Mornington?"

"How should I know?" she replied testily. "Who did win this interesting cricket match after all? A draw in your favour, was it? and what does 'a draw in your favour' mean?"

Lord Dereham proceeded to explain, but before he had finished, another guest was announced, whose arrival appeared to interest the lady so much that the latter part of his elaborate technical explanation fell upon deaf ears.

It was the Rev. George Hastings.

He was by far Eva's most intimate acquaintance among the other sex. They had met, in the same house, rather more than a year ago—since which time they had seen much of each other, for Lady Stowell was Hastings' aunt. In fact, Miss Mornington's friendship with him had grown to such an extent that there were not wanting those who would declare "that it was a toss-up between the peer and the parson."

George Hastings was a clergyman of no ordinary type.

He had taken orders young, being only three-and-twenty when he accepted his first curacy in the East End of London. For three years he had toiled there, as probably none had ever worked before, with an unflagging zeal, and energy and a devotedness of purpose which astonished his colleagues, and won the admiration of those few interested in, and watching his career. Then came the natural consequences of such excessive exertion on a delicate frame and imperfect constitution. A dangerous fever attacked him, and for many months he lay between life and death. When at last he recovered some strength, and was longing to recommence his former labours, he was met by the doctor's stern prohibition. He told him frankly that to do so was certain death, and that nothing but comparative rest would prolong the life so hardly won back. None but himself could tell how great a trial this inaction was for Hastings, but, without a murmur, he accepted the decision, and when he was again able to get about, he took a living in a more fashionable part of London.

The parish was a large one, but before his coming the huge church had been but sparsely occupied. In one little month, things were very different: there was not a sitting to be had, and the free seats were crowded to overflowing long

before the commencement of each service. That tall, wasted form, those sunken eyes, which could flash with fire, or fill with genuine tears, according to his subject, those deep, sustained, and at times vibrating tones, and his fervency, soon became the theme of London churchgoers; poor and rich alike flocked to St. Andrew's, attracted not less by his personal "attachements" than by his daring doctrines and surpassing eloquence. What was known of his character, too, increased the interest of his large congregation. It was whispered that he was sworn to celibacy, and that he had leanings towards the Romish Church. Truth to say, his sermons never published, or gave the slightest encouragement to Romish views, but then he seldom if ever preached doctrinal sermons, so that was little to judge upon. The austerity of his life, the almost monkish seclusion, the seldom associating even with his brother clergymen, suggested sympathy with a sterner code of laws than those of our Church, but beyond these indices there was no proof to show that he had the slightest tenderness towards Roman Catholicism.

His popularity as a preacher was not owing to pandering to the tastes and prejudices of his rich congregation. Success as pulpit orator he had never desired, and, having won it, it did not afford him the slightest gratification, and the more the multitude flocked to hear him, and the more his fame as a preacher increased, so in proportion did his sermons increase in severity, and teem the thicker with rebuke.

Fashionable ladies came to hear him, whose rich dresses and gay apparel formed a strange contrast to the undecorated walls, the rough stone pillars, and awkward, narrow seats. They came that they might boast of having "heard Hastings at St. Andrew's" in the same breath as they boasted hearing Signora Cantabile at the Italian Opera. Fine gentlemen escorted them, who paid manifestly no attention at all to the service; but when Hastings ascended the pulpit stairs, they would screw their eyeglasses into their eyes, and favour him with a prolonged stare, before settling down into a comfortable lounging position, in much the same manner, only with not so much interest, as they would stare at a new caperer in the dance at the Frivolity, or some natural curiosity which it behoved them as men of fashion to have seen and then ignore. But these had rather an uneasy time of it during "the performance" which they had come to criticize. There is something in sincere eloquence which commands attention, and, against their own petty wills, they were compelled to receive truths, homely enough, but so forcibly expressed, that their ears would tingle with the memory of them long afterwards, like the hunter pierced with Indian arrows, the heads of which cannot be extracted but must be cut off and left to work through the body at the risk of traversing some vital part.

The first Sunday that the church was crowded with these society stars and their satellites, George Hastings told them that it had always been his desire to work among the poor of London, but that, since he had been obliged to relinquish his labours there, and to contemplate the moral position of the upper circles, it had dawned upon him that there was as great, if not greater, need for work amongst them than amongst the miserable inhabitants of Whitechapel. There was, he said, the same carelessness with regard to religious observances in both of them, and he reminded them that this was far more culpable on the part of those who had not the excuse of ignorance. He pointed out their perilous position; he contrasted their refined vices, their levity in pleasure-seeking, with

the grosser vices of the poorer classes, and he drew comparisons which showed that he considered one at least as culpable as the other.

"Knowledge is a dangerous thing," he said, looking over his pulpit ledge upon the well-dressed crowd, as one in a boat in a stormy sea, who would live only a brief time longer than the swimmers in the breakers around him. "You, who are well-educated men and women, have no excuse to offer if you fail to pass through life circumspectly. You can expect no consideration, and you will deserve none; you will receive none. If you sin, you do it with your eyes open, deliberately, fully alive to the consequences and the nature of your offence. Education not only has taught you to distinguish promptly between right and wrong, but it has given you quicker perceptibilities and keener reasoning powers than those can be expected to possess who are your inferiors in advantages. Remember that a sin committed thus inexcusably and defiantly is hardest to pardon."

Such preaching could scarcely be expected to make the preacher popular amongst the class to whom it was addressed; but the blasi and the relish these moral bitters, and they came to be flagellated even after the novelty wore off. The middle-class came because their patterns attended, and the residuum because they like to hear their superiors "catching it hot." To all there was the fascination of plain-spokenness which attracted while it displeased.

Among the regular attendants were the Morningtons, and Eva was exceptionally charmed.

Lady Stowell's was the only house which Mr. Hastings was ever known to visit, but meeting here often, there sprang up between him and Eva a friendship, which commenced on her part with unbounded admiration of a man of brilliant intellectual powers and sinless life; and on his with admiration also of a woman so sincere, and whose practical aid in furthering his philanthropical schemes was freely given and useful. Thoughts of love-making or tender speeches seemed out of the range of his ideas; and Eva did not dream of associating such with him. During the whole of their acquaintance, never by look or word had he exhibited the slightest appreciation of her personal charms, nor did he once address her on any other topics than benevolent schemes, which they worked out in alliance.

This Saint George of Belgravia, as he stood talking with Lady Stowell at the extreme end of the room, elicited remarks on the extreme delicacy of his appearance. The hectic flush on his otherwise pale cheeks, the sunken eyes, painfully bright with a restless, anxious expression, the wasted form—these were all signs of a decline, and many were forced to say that George Hastings was not long for this world. He was listening with a subdued smile to his aunt's grave inquiries as to his health—for she loved her nephew better than any one in the world—unconsciously playing with a gold cross charm on his chain with long white fingers, his glances straying the while to where Miss Mornington was sitting.

Lord Dereham intercepted these glances more than once, and, full of pity for the man imagined not long to be his rival, his chivalrous nature prompted him to leave his partner with some excuse, and go and talk to Lady Stowell himself, thus releasing Hastings. After a moment's hesitation, the latter approached Miss Mornington, and took the vacant place next her. She welcomed him with a smile, and they talked earnestly together the best part of the evening,—not

polite of either, but there was nobody dared or cared to give them a hint of the unsociable monopoly, and they were unaware of it in their enthralled state.

Miss Mornington knew, with womanly perception, that the clergyman sought to win her interest for his charitable plans and to accept her advice on subjects which her sex can best understand. Admiring his character, she was proud that he should do so, and she was always pleased to give him any amount of her time and sympathy. He left fairly early, seldom staying long; but Eva always fancied, and perhaps was right, that he looked happier after one of their long confabulations. This so pleased her, that when he had gone and Lord Dereham took his place, she was unwontedly amiable to him, and he felt more than repaid for his sacrifice.

"You must be sure to come and see Godfrey tomorrow," the lady said, as he handed her and Maud into the carriage soon afterwards. "I know he will be glad."

"I will call to-morrow afternoon."

The carriage drove away, leaving Lord Dereham bareheaded on the pavement gazing after it till it was out of sight.

"Like to know whether she really cares for that preaching fellow or not?" he said to himself, as he strolled towards his club.

Chapter XII

A Suppressed Page of the Family History.

The day of Lady Stowell's reception was also, as we have stated, Godfrey Mornington's twenty-fifth birthday. In obedience to a short, but imperative summons from his father, received just as he arrived at Paris, he was now on his way home, the solitary occupant of a first-class carriage, of course smoking, in the London, Chatham and Dover express. He had flooded the carriage with periodicals and newspapers, reading none of them; passing away the time by staring idly out of the window, and puzzling over what his father might have to say of such importance that he would not write it. And wondering also not a little, whether he should see Maud Langton and find her changed. Time and travel had done very little towards lessening his love, and the present knowledge that this very night he might meet her under the same roof, had a deeply disturbing effect.

"Victoria" at last, whence a hansom soon deposited him in Lowndes Square. The servant who opened to him repeated his father's word that he would see him in an hour's time; the young ladies were out. Godfrey dined alone to kill the hour, and went into the library. He was surprised to find it in partial darkness. No gas was lit, and the only light was from a shaded lamp on the writing-table before which his father sat as if engaged in correspondence. He looked up as Godfrey entered, and nodded but did not offer to shake hands.

"Shut the door," he said in a low tone.

Godfrey, as he obeyed, was filled with amazement at this abrupt greeting, which changed into a vague apprehension of coming evil as he watched the strange expression on his pale and almost haggard face. He came across the room towards his father with outstretched hand, but, in obedience to a gesture,

paused on the other side of the table, and his hand fell to his side at no responsive motion or smile of welcome. His surprise at so extraordinary a reception was fast giving way to indignation, and during the interval before his father again addressed him, he drew himself proudly up, disdainingly to ask for explanation. In the silence, the only sound was the quick ticking of the ebony clock, till his father spoke in tones harsh and unnatural.

"I sent for you," he began, leaning slightly towards his son with fixed eyes, "because there are certain circumstances connected with yourself which it is necessary for you now to know. I have put it off as long as possible, because what I have to tell you will be very unpleasant to hear, as also for me to say. But as you are of age, it must be put off no longer." He watched his son's face very narrowly, but the lamp's rays did not reach it sufficiently for him to read its expression.

"I will thank you to listen to me attentively, and to reserve any observations until I have finished." Godfrey bowed assent, and his father clearing his throat, proceeded as coldly as before.

"In order to make matters quite clear to you, it will be necessary to tell you a little of my early history and of your mother's. I met her before I left college, long before I was your age. She was the daughter of my old tutor, whom I often visited, and from the first time I saw her at his house I loved her truly, dearly deeply."

His voice trembled, and a strange bitterness had crept into it when he resumed.

"Fool that I was in my boyish infatuation, I thought she returned my love; but I found afterwards that I had been deceived, and that my position and wealth were all she cared for. She lived alone with her father in a cottage at Redford, not far from my University town, where one day he was found dead in his bed. Heart disease, I think. She was left alone in the world without money and without friends. I wanted to marry her at once, but she shrank from the idea. I ought to have insisted upon it, but I was so madly in love that I never dreamt of disputing her slightest wish. She asked to leave Redford, and besought me to take her away, and so I went with her to London. We lived in Upper Sleet Street there, for some time, intending daily to get married, but always putting it off until she should grow stronger."

A vague suspicion of what his father was about to reveal dawned upon Godfrey, and he started to his feet as if to interrupt. With an effort he restrained himself, but stood leaning a little over the table, pale and quivering. His father, too, rose from his chair and watched the agitation in his hearer's face, with what looked very like a smile faintly playing upon his lips.

"Allow me to finish," he proceeded. "Certain symptoms—you can guess what they were—induced us finally to decide upon the wedding day. I made all the necessary arrangements, but, on the eve, vague rumours reached my ears, and I returned home unexpectedly. You, no doubt, have heard what followed, with one exceptional detail, however. The man with whom I found your mother was not Arthur Wakefield, as people believed, but a former lover of hers who had left England with her brother, and had served in the same regiment. Curiously enough he was not unlike him. Arthur Wakefield died in India; this man deserted and returned home to meet my beloved, who had always loved him. It was he with whom I found her, and whom I left for dead." There was a long

pause, each waiting for the other to speak, but there came neither word nor sign from the proud figure in front of Mr. Mornington.

"I have deliberated with myself seriously," he went on, "whether I should not be justified in ignoring the unfortunate circumstances of your birth, and treating you in all respects as if you were truly entitled to the position of my supposed heir. But I have come to the conclusion that this must not be. It would not be right that a child-of-love should be allowed to become the head of our family, by an accidental false position. In fact," the peculiar inhuman smile, breaking into a brutal laugh, "I do not even know that you are my son, however little the doubt about it. I blame myself exceedingly for not having told you this before; as, of course, your education and subsequent style of life have been a mistake. I shall continue to make you an allowance of some sort, but nothing nearly approaching what you have been drawing to the present. There is one consolation which I can offer you, I shall not marry again. So, until my death, at all events, none need know of this contre-temps. Not even your sister, for unless she marries I see no reason why she should be told. You can let it be understood, in explanation of your altered circumstances, that we have quarrelled. I propose this secrecy to you for your sister's sake, and if you value her happiness you had better assent, I—I think."

For a few moments, Godfrey could not trust himself to speak. There was a choking in his throat and a thick mist before his eyes, so that the only object he was conscious of seeing was his father's stern, forbidding face, wearing that repulsive smile. Every word had come to him with horrible distinctness, and he had listened as if under a spell, unable to move. The voice having ceased, he felt his senses coming back to him, but slowly, and with them his power of speech. He let go the edge of the table which he had been clutching with nervous force, and faced his father free of support.

"I don't believe a word of it," he said; "it's all a lie."

Mr. Mornington shrugged his shoulders.

"I solemnly swear that I never married your mother," he said. "But it is easily proved," he added lightly, "and although the proof is a negative one, it is none the less conclusive. If I had married her, the register would show it, and there is no parish register in England, sir, or in the world which records such a marriage."

"I don't care what proof or want of proof there is—it's a lie," repeated Godfrey forcibly. "If you talk forever, you will not persuade me that my mother was your mistress. I accept your cutting me adrift willingly; from now we are strangers; ay, more than strangers, enemies! for you have spoken words which I will never forgive, not so much for my own sake, as for hers whose memory you have tried to blacken. You say you loved her," he continued with bitter scorn, "and yet tell me that you held back your hand in wedlock? It's a lie, and you know it! Now, man, listen to the last words I will ever willingly speak to you. I leave this house with one purpose before me as the seed of all my hopes and efforts: to prove the falseness of your foul charge against her, to vindicate her honour and my name; and when I have done this, since succeed I will, I shall discover your motive, and then it will be the day of reckoning between us."

Before Mr. Mornington could make any reply, he was left alone. When Godfrey reached the door, a carriage drove up. His was not the mood in which to meet anybody, and he was relieved at the morning-room door being ajar; into it he leaped just as the hall was entered by his sister and Miss Langton. The

meeting with Maud would now have been more than embarrassing, in fact painful; and yet he would have liked one glimpse of her, to see whether she had altered much, and looked happy.

He was secure from interruption, he thought, the room being only half lighted, and one seldom used; so he took a low chair, covering his face with his hands, to reflect seriously on the import of his father's terrible words. That this story was true, he refused even for a moment to believe, but none the less his father's words would change his whole future, for he determined with himself that his hasty reply was just what it ought to have been, and that until he could unravel the mystery and prove the truth or untruth of this strange statement, he would hold no communication with his father. And if untrue, what motive could his father possibly have for wronging and deceiving him, and how was he to set about his self-imposed task of disproof? It seemed a dreary prospect, and now that the whirl of excitement was passing away and leaving him free for untroubled reflection, he began to realize thoroughly what a thorny position his was. His first thought was of Maud, and his most painful one the necessity of abandoning all hopes of winning her. Never, so far, had he realized what her remembrance had been to him during his absence, and how much his prospect of future happiness had been based upon the hope of inducing her to alter her decision and become his wife.

It is true that never do we value anything properly until it is taken from us, and so Godfrey never realized what his love for Maud had been until he felt himself bound to acknowledge that she could never be his. While he was musing upon her, the door opened, and springing to his feet, he saw the object of all his care standing before him.

"Maud!—you here!"

His tone and the look told her that his fancy had been no passing one, but a lasting love. Notwithstanding her having refused it and told him that she did not return it, she, womanlike, was rejoiced.

They stood confronted, unable to speak at first.

"I had no idea that you were here, Mr. Mornington. The servant said that you had gone out. I will tell Eva."

"Don't!" He motioned her to stop.

"Why not?" she asked, wonderingly.

He hesitated. What was he to say to her? What excuse could he make to cover his departure unnoticed. He could think of none.

In this bewilderment, there came to him, as to the strongest of us at times, a deep craving for sympathy, a longing to impart his terrible trouble to his beloved, and at least to win her pity, even though her love was denied. It was an unmanly impulse to which he yielded. Almost before he could realize his act, he had told her the whole story in brief. When he finished, her eyes were moist, and her look softer than ever before for him.

"You may well question my claim to put this burden upon you, Miss Langton," he said, "but I have two reasons: first, because you can help me in keeping the secret from poor Eva, and also because—because I love you still, and forever. I have no right to tell you so now, I know, but you ought to know it. 'Tis done! I must be off! You will do as I ask about keeping this matter from Eva? Good-bye!"

She took the hand he offered, and he caught a look through her tears, which made his heart beat wildly, and increased the pain of quitting the home no

more a home. He sprang to the door, but as his hand grasped the knob, he heard his name pronounced. "Mr. Mornington," she said, timidly. He turned and started to find she had approached and was already by his side. The temptation rose strong to enfold her in his arms, but he bethought him of his dubious position, the uncertainty of his future, and he shut his eyes that they might not meet hers. Repelling the temptation, he burst away, beginning to find this ordeal no less painful than the one in the library. But she followed him and her hand fell on his arm, to detain him.

"Pray, stay!" she pleaded, and he yielded, blaming himself to be so little a man as not to leave her at once.

Neither could speak. She let her eyes wander to him, as if to have him read the secret that since their parting her feelings had undergone a revolution. He feared another sentiment was shown in her eyes, and averted his face. Suddenly he heard a murmur: "Godfrey, you are cruel! why will you force me to own that I love you?"

He had borne much, but he could bear no more. He forgot his high resolutions, his anomalous position, everything else in the world except that the love was mutual, and with a sob of joy, he clutched her in his arms and their quivering lips calmed themselves in a kiss. He could but be perfectly happy; no doubt so was she, but to him rushed reflection, and quickly turning grave, as he pushed her gently away:

"This must not be Maud," he remonstrated hoarsely. "You must not, shall not, bind yourself to me under this cloud on my future. Don't tempt me, Maud, for heaven's sake; but let me go!"

After two years, were they thus to part?

"No, Godfrey! I have told you of my love; what difference can it make that you are poor to my being bound to you. I shall never care for any soul beside."

His protestation availed nothing. He had to consent to the interchange of pledges, be they poor or rich, in health or idleness.

"It is clear, then, if I am successful, Maud, my darling, you are to be my prize."

"Whether you are successful or not, I am ever and entirely yours, Godfrey."

It was a strange farewell, but she hid her tears under so joyful a mien that he, who had expected to leave the house intolerably burdened, bounded away with the careless step of a happy man.

Mr. Mornington, in the library, heard him go; pushing back the curtains, he watched him fleetly stride across the square, and plunge in the darkness.

"He bears it well!" he muttered disappointed. "Proud as ever!" Letting the curtain fall, he resumed his seat at the writing table and gave entire attention to a letter from the leader of his party, marked "Strictly private." The Canadian outbreak, the discussion of which had led to Mr. Mornington's first great speech, had assumed serious proportions, and as the matter was to be again brought forward during the next session, Lord — suggested that Mr. Mornington should cross over to Canada the better to investigate the matter with his own eyes. It went on to say that the writer had reason to believe that the present Government was doomed, and expressed a hope that, in the event of his (the writer's) being asked to form a ministry, he might count upon Mr. Mornington's assistance. It was, moreover, hinted that his services at the Foreign Office would be appreciated, and that, therefore, an intimate acquaintance with the grievances of the Canadians would be useful, as, if

settled promptly by the new Government, it would add to their popularity. This was the substance of the letter, causing much consideration on Mr. Mornington's part.

Late into the night he sat digesting it; till, drawing a paper towards him, he wrote, accepting the proposal and alluding, business-like but gracefully, to the promises of office. He sealed it, and left it ready to be forwarded early on the morrow.

"I'll chance it," he muttered as he arranged his papers ere leaving the room. "A risk, but one worth the trying." There flitted across his face that haunted expression which had puzzled Eva on his first return.

Chapter XIII

Two Heads are better than One.

When Godfrey left Lowndes Square he soon recovered composure, and although the terrible scene in the library was perpetually recurring to him it held the underplace to the sudden discovery that Maud loved him. He was young and sanguine, and deeply in love, Little wonder then that the joy of having won his dear one, drove away for the time all gloomy reflections and left him, though serious, perfectly happy. As he walked rapidly along, he decided upon his plans for the present. He would first of all consult Mr. Woodruff, whom he knew to be his friend, and be guided by his advice in prosecuting his search.

He stopped for the night at an hotel near Lincoln's Inn, and there wrote his letters. One was to Eva, whom he merely told that a difference had arisen between him and his father, which he trusted would be only temporary; but that she must not be surprised if she saw but very little of him for a period. He added that he particularly wished her not to interfere in the matter. The second letter was a few lines to Maud, the nature of which we need not conjecture; there was lastly, a note to his servant left at Paris instructing him to bring his appurtenances to England at once, and giving him a month's notice. Then he went to bed, and much to his own surprise slept soundly.

Immediately after breakfast he called on Dr. Woodruff.

That gentleman was not wholly unprepared to see him, as he was the trustee of some small property which Mrs. Neville had left on her demise during Godfrey's absence, and he concluded that his visit had reference to this. After shaking hands warmly he was commencing some sort of congratulations, but the expression on Godfrey's face stopped him. He guessed the purport of his visit instantly, and listened with grave attention to Godfrey's story. He told it tersely, Mr. Woodruff showing no surprise whatever, but was apparently plunged in thought.

"You believe," he said, "that your father married Eva Wakefield before they went to London? May I ask your reason for supposing this?"

"I have none beyond my own convictions," was the reply.

The lawyer seemed disappointed.

"Personal convictions are not much to work upon," he said. "What is your idea of the first step to be taken? Have you formed any yet?"

"Certainly," replied Godfrey confidently. "The first thing to do, beyond doubt, is to run down to Redford and examine the register."

"You may spare yourself the trouble," said the lawyer quietly; "the entry is not there."

Godfrey was confounded.

"Not there!" he cried. "How do you know, surely you have not been to see?"

"I have though." The lawyer rose, and unlocking an iron safe, began examining some papers in one of the drawers, until finding what he wanted, resumed his seat, and, clearing his throat, sat back in his chair and thus addressed his client. "I am going to be very frank with you, Mr. Godfrey, and talk to you, if you will allow me, not only as a lawyer but as a friend. First of all I will tell you everything that I know about this matter, and then give you my advice. On the night that I went down to Mornington with your father, he told me exactly what he has now told you. There was something in his manner then which I did not understand, and, acting merely on an indefinable suspicion, I cut short my visit and returned to town on the Saturday afternoon, intending to run down to Redford and examine the register for myself. Unfortunately, as it happened, when I reached town I found business which required my immediate attention, and I could not go before mid-day on Monday. I had turned the matter over, and had decided that if the marriage had ever been solemnized, it was before the couple left Oxford. I reasoned thus: if your mother sent for your father on her father's death, if she let him pay the funeral expenses, and, above all, consented to accompany him to London, it was because she had the right of a wife to demand those services. Therefore I pinned my faith on the marriage altogether, to the supposition that it had taken place at Redford, and I decided, that if I could find no trace of it there that it never had taken place."

"And you found no trace?" interrupted Godfrey, gloomily.

"Wait a bit," replied the other testily. "I found no trace, as you say, but something happened there which aroused my suspicions. When my train stopped at Redford, and I was preparing to alight, the up train was just leaving on the other side; and in one of the carriages I saw—whom do you think?"

"My father!" cried Godfrey, excitedly; his interest in the lawyer's tale suddenly increasing.

"Precisely. Well, I went to the village, saw the clerk and with him examined the register. He started when I asked if any one else had examined the records lately, but denied the fact. I knew he was telling a lie; he had probably been bribed. As I expected, there was no trace of the marriage there But I discovered something."

"Yes, yes?" said Godfrey, breathlessly.

"There was a note on the first leaf of the book, giving the stationer's name from whom the register was bought, and on it was a number, a date, and the information that books of exactly similar patterns could be supplied by merely quoting the number and the date. I made a note of these items and the stationer's name, and then counted the leaves. There were 233. I returned the book, fee'd the clerk and came back to town. I went straight to the stationer and ordered one of exactly similar pattern. Here it is," he continued, holding a book up in his hand and passing it over the table. "You need not trouble to count the leaves for I have done so several times. There are 234, and further, here is a letter from the firm of stationers who say that they can easily prove, if

required, that the parish register supplied to the church at Redford in 18—, contained the same number."

"Then this proves beyond a doubt," said Godfrey, springing to his feet, "that my father cut out the entry which recorded his marriage with Eva Wakefield from the register."

"Sit down, please," said the lawyer, quietly. "I am sorry to damp your hopes, but it proves nothing of the sort."

Godfrey looked incredulous and disappointed.

"I can assure you," continued Mr. Woodruff, "that I have this matter at heart almost as much as you yourself; but it will require very careful handling. I shall have to ask you to put yourself altogether in my hands, if I am to help you, and to do nothing without my approval. Do you consent?"

"Most heartily," said Godfrey.

"Let me explain to you the position," Mr. Woodruff pursued. "First of all, you must get out of your head any idea of succeeding by openly accusing Mr. Mornington of tampering with the register at Redford. Legally, we should not have a leg to stand on, and we should fail at the outset if we attempted anything of the sort. This knowledge is useful to us, however, in two ways. Firstly, it brings to us conviction, and therefore encouragement. Secondly, it will save our wasting no end of valuable time in searching for the marriage elsewhere."

"Just so," agreed Godfrey; "but what then are we to do?"

"I am coming to that now," replied the other. "Of course, as you must see, there is something downright inexplicable in this affair; to wit, why does your father seek to withhold the proof of his marriage, and why does he bring against you this charge of illegitimacy?" Godfrey winced at the word, but the other continued apparently without taking any notice. "Upon the answering of these two questions, which we may consider as one, hangs the whole issue of the future for you. Briefly, our one chance is to discover your father's motives. You follow me?"

"Perfectly," replied Godfrey; "but the affair appears to me impenetrable."

"It is the most utter mystery I ever attempted to solve," said the lawyer, "but it is not the slightest use our being frightened at that. A slight clue might make all things clear."

"But how are we to act?" asked Godfrey. "What must be our first move?"

"There is only one possible," replied the lawyer. "We want to know more of your father's earlier history, and there is only one man who can help us."

"And he is?"

"The man called Cecil Braithwaite, who fled from England with your father."

"But he is dead," said Godfrey.

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't believe it. When your father told me so there was that in his manner which convinced me he was for some purpose or other not telling me the truth. It puzzled me then, but I think I can understand it now. I believe that this man Cecil Braithwaite knows a little too much of your father's earlier history, about which there must have been something queer to render him welcome in England. Therefore I believe that he was left behind in Canada. Canada, a severe, rough country; dreadful winter's, ferocious animals, savage Indians, and all that. But this Braithwaite is hard and tough—he must have survived these little Canadian detriments."

"I see," said Godfrey; "we must find him" He half rose as if eager to commence the search.

"Yes," said the lawyer, waving him down again; "but you must have assistance; you could do nothing by yourself. Fortunately enough, there is one man who knows this Braithwaite by sight, and I fancy that we shall be able to secure his services."

"Who is he?"

"One Mr. Dane, about the cleverest detective I ever met—just the man we want."

"Where has he seen this Cecil Braithwaite?"

"It was some twenty-six years ago. I will tell you all about it. This man Braithwaite puzzles me I must confess," continued the lawyer. "He appears to be a sphinx, for in all my inquiries about him I have been foiled. Where he came from, and from what family, I have been totally unable to discover. This only we know, that he was at college with your father, and his constant companion; that he visited at Mornington with him frequently, and that when your father left college and went to London he went there also, and lived at an hotel not far from Upper Sleaf Street. Curiously enough, in this last fact lies our only chance. Dane, then employed in Scotland Yard, once attempted, single-handed, to arrest a noted criminal in the coffee-room at this same hotel at the time when Cecil Braithwaite was stopping there. Dane was having the worst of it, and the man would have got off had not this Braithwaite entered the room, and with his assistance Dane easily secured his prisoner. They were only together for a few minutes, but Braithwaite gave him his card in case he should be called upon, and Dane assures me that he should know him again. He has been noted all through the force for his wonderful memory for faces, so I quite believe him."

"And you think we can engage him?" asked Godfrey.

"Why, yes," returned the lawyer. "I met him one morning last week, and he asked me if I could find him something to do. I took his address and promised to let him know. So we can count upon him."

"Shall I go and see him?" asked Godfrey. The lawyer shook his head.

"No; that's not regular. I will go myself. You will have to be idle for a month," he added, "for though, of course, it is possible that Braithwaite is still, if alive, in Canada, it is also just possible that he may be in England. I shall get Dane to 'work' London first, and if he is unsuccessful at the end of a month you had better both go to Canada."

Godfrey assented rather disappointedly.

"Call here every morning," continued Mr. Woodruff, "and—let me see; we are well supplied with funds, which I suppose you will authorise me to use as I think fit."

"Freely," said Godfrey. "What is the amount of this legacy? A singularly fortunate one, as it happens."

"It is about four thousand five hundred pounds—rather more, perhaps—so you may draw upon me if you want money."

"Much obliged. I shall look in to-morrow, then." Godfrey shook hands with the lawyer, and the interview was at an end.

That same morning Miss Mornington received her brother's letter; and, disregarding its final clause, she immediately took it to her father. He guessed

what was coming when he saw her tearful in the library with the open letter in her hand, and his frown grew deeper as he waited for her to speak.

"Forgive my interrupting you, papa; but I have just had this strange letter from Godfrey, and I have come to ask you what it means." She handed him the writing and watched him anxiously while he glanced it through. He offered no comment, but folded it up and handed it back.

"What your brother says is true," he said. "We have quarrelled, as he puts it, and for some time at least he will not come here."

"But he only came home last night. What could you have quarrelled about so soon?" asked she, bewildered.

"That is between him and me alone. It must suffice for you that, for the present Godfrey will not come here, and, let me add that, if you meet him or see him anywhere else, as he suggests in that letter, it is against my wishes."

"Will you not tell me what he has done?" asked she, drying her tears.

"No."

She did not speak immediately, although she could see that he was watching her anxiously. The more she thought about the matter the more indignant she became. It was treating her like a child. She had been looking forward for months to seeing her brother again, and now, at the very moment of his return, she was told that because there had been a quarrel between him and her father, of the nature of which she was ignorant, that therefore he would not be seen at home, and she must not see him elsewhere. It was unfair and unreasonable, she decided inwardly, and she had seldom felt harder towards her father than she did at that moment. "Am I to understand?" she inquired, "that you forbid me to speak to Godfrey at all? because if so, you can scarcely refuse to tell me the cause of such an extreme prohibition."

"I do not forbid anything, Eva," was her father's answer. "I have simply expressed my wishes, my strong wishes. It is for your own good that I do not tell you more."

"Then I had better tell you at once," said Eva, in unusually decided tones, "that I cannot comply with your wishes."

"Very well; that ends the matter," and Mr. Mornington, taking up his pen, recommenced writing steadily.

"I do not think you ought to ask me this," protested Eva, as she prepared to go. "You forget that he is my brother, the only relation I had for twenty years, and he has always been very good to me. I could not do as you wish."

"Very well, Eva, that is settled, I repeat."

"I am sorry," she was resuming—but he cut her short with his curt:

"It does not matter!"

He sighed; but she was going.

"Stay! come here, Eva; I have something to show you."

He unlocked the secret drawer of his cabinet, and took out a small packet. Slowly, and with jealous care he undid paper after paper of the outside covering, until at last Eva at his side saw smiling up at her the photograph of a woman which she knew by its likeness to the picture in the dining-room at Mornington Abbey, to be her mother's.

"Do you know who this is?" he questioned, placing it in her hands. She bowed her head and together they gazed at it in silence. He took it from her, and wrapping it up, replaced it carefully in the drawer.

"Be seated, Eva." She obeyed, awed by his grave manner. "I loved your mother, child, loved her as man seldom loves woman. When that terrible affair happened, and I was forced to flee from England, wronged though I believed myself to be, I loved her still. When the news reached me of her death, and of your birth, it almost killed me. But I bore up from one great consolation, the hope and longing,—to return some day, and find out my—her daughter."

He raised his eyes from the ground, where they had dwelt, and fixed them upon her, and she felt her colour come and go, and her heart beating as she forefelt what was coming.

"After many years of weary waiting, my dream was realized just as I was on the point of despair, and I flew back to England and found my daughter. But alas! though I had waited in anguish so long for this recompense, it has never been mine. She does not love me."

Eva was sobbing bitterly, for these words were inexpressibly touching, and she felt almost as though she must fling herself on her knees before him; and, while she pleaded for forgiveness, cry that the love had come at last. But, though she would have given her very life for the ability to do so, she dared not say the words he longed for, for conscience whispered they would be false.

Receiving no response, he went on—

"As for me, I loved her for her mother's sake, before I saw her, and soon I grew to love her for her own. But all in vain! Oh, Eva," he burst out unconstrainedly at last, "what have I done that I should fail to win your love? I have studied your every wish; never once have I thwarted you. You have been my one prospect in exile, my one thought now in prosperity. Yet, day by day, we are drifting farther apart, and you are growing colder to me. Tell me, child, for your mother's sake, if not for your own or mine, on that memory we both cherish, for her sake, I say, cannot her daughter give me some little of her love?"

Standing by her side, bending over her chair, all his everyday coldness and rigour banished from his face, he watched her eagerly, as if upon her answer was really staked his future happiness. Miserable though the thought made her, she found that his ardency had not kindled one spark. Sympathy, reverence, obedience; these she could have given him freely. Had he pressed, at that moment she would have yielded to his wishes concerning Godfrey. But answer him as he sought to be answered, she could not. Gradually since she did not speak, or even lift her eyes, he realized that his appeal had been fruitless, and evidence of a dreadful disappointment impressed his face. With a groan, which he only half suppressed, he fell into a chair, buried his face in his arms, leaning forward upon his writing-table, and battled with his feelings in a silence which caused her more suffering than any expression of grief. Eva's pity was great, and so her shame that her father should have pleaded to her for his natural dues all in vain. She sprang towards him, with what purpose she scarcely knew; but he heard her, and, raising his head sharply, gestured her to go. His white face and look of agony were serious reproaches to her, and made her hesitate.

"Go!" he said, sternly, pointing to the door. "I do not want your pity, since I may not have your love. Leave me, I say!" He watched her depart and the door close, with the air of a gambler who sees his last coin raked away. Not until this hour had he comprehended what she really was in his heart, and how deep there was rooted the desire for her love. For her mother, his had been the sole

inspiration; and, unquenched and unweakened, but purified, it burned still for her daughter. And this woman loved him not. His final appeal had failed, and he was forced to acknowledge that henceforth he must abandon for ever his dreams and hopes. For he had hoped against hope during the last eighteen months, notwithstanding the fact that they had been less familiar each day. Scraping together all his ragged hopes and broken delusions, he had staked them all, we repeat, on the one die; he had cast it, and he had lost.

Chapter XIV

La Partie Carré.

Mr. Mornington made no further attempt to induce Eva to obey his wishes with regard to seeing Godfrey. Hence, during the three weeks which he was compelled to spend in London, she with Maud saw him frequently. The cause of his quarrel with his father Eva took no pains to ascertain; and as both Godfrey and Maud alluded to it, before her, as a very light matter, she, in her ignorance of their conspiracy, grew to consider it as such. The trio, Eva, Maud, and Godfrey met nearly every morning or afternoon; on which occasions Eva felt herself slightly *de trop*, of course, although her presence was, equally of course, indispensable.

One day they ran up against Lord Dereham just as they were entering a Bond Street picture gallery. He asked leave to accompany them. After this, somehow, it became no uncommon occurrence for him to arrive with Godfrey to meet the lady pair, and his presence lent life to the little party with whose secret tie he was, of course, unacquainted.

Eva always received him with evident pleasure, on account of her being by his companionship able to let Godfrey and Maud pair off. They were fast dropping into the ways of engaged lovers. Miss Mornington was unconscious that her pleasure in seeing Lord Dereham might reasonably be misconstrued. However that might be, the young noble soon began to look forward to these meetings with at least as much pleasure as any of the others. He simply knew that Godfrey had broken with his father, and did not care to visit him. In his heart, he hoped fervently that the breach would be wider yet before it was made up.

Sometimes the party of four strolled leisurely through the parks, sometimes through art-galleries; once or twice Lord Dereham drove them down to Richmond, and they succeeded in enjoying themselves, hackneyed as was the sight-seeing to those who had always little other views in their round of life.

One Sunday, not as part of the amusement though, they all went to hear George Hastings preach in St. Andrew's.

It was one of those rare occasions when he was preaching a sermon not so much of exhortation as of instruction on the times, and toward its close the interest in his subject carried him over the set lines.

"No one will deny," he said, in those deep rich tones which added so much to the attractiveness of his discourses, "that the present age of feverish progression, which, God grant, may not lead to destruction, is one of grave import to us,—to all Christians. The spirit of inquiry and research, which grows

with the march of years and the advance of civilization, has already overturned many great institutions, and thereby cleared the ground for greatly improved structures. Many abuses have fled before its influence, and, let us hope, lasting reforms have been effected. But from it we, the Church of God, have a huge danger to contend with, a decisive battle to fight. Already its most unscrupulous devotees have turned with a critical and, I fear, inimical eye, to that greatest of all earthly institutions, our religion. Scepticism and Atheism, the weeds of over-education in unhealthy minds, are leagued against us, and it is vain folly for us to deny that these are doughty foes. We appear to have reached at last the very highest point of civilization. For more than eighteen hundred years we have been going steadily upward, and during all these ages our Church, I mean the Church of God, has held its own, triumphant, against numerous attacks of its enemies. But at no time in its growth, at no epoch in history, have we stood in so much peril as to-day.

"Over-civilization is not less to be dreaded than barbarity. The grandest nation the world ever groaned beneath crumbled to pieces, hopelessly and completely ruined by the luxury and carelessness which are the fruits of this over-civilization. Nor were the Romans the only nation. Carthage might still have been the richest mart of merchandise, Greece might still have been the home of the gods of art, had they not also succumbed to the peculiar temptations of success. Let us remember, with their awful warning before us, that we now have reached this same pitch, and hence stand in the same peril. Let us remember that the first tokens of these coming evils will be, mark my words! an attack upon our religion; but if we resist that, as, please God! we may do—if the Church of God remains intact amongst us, it is by its influence that we shall repel this persistent danger, and remain the greatest nation in the world.

"Our enemies have many and strong weapons, and in one of the mocking cries they bring against us, they have, I am compelled to admit it, a great show of reason. Disunion is rife amongst us, and such a sapper and miner is far more likely to bring down the whole fabric, than any open assailant. Compare for a moment our state as a Christian people, with that of Christ's earliest followers. They worshipped their God in difficulty, ay, in danger, for they had enemies to fear, and opposition to contend with, far beyond anything we have to dread; and yet this small band of men conquered, and diffused through every land the Word of God, and founded the Church of Christ.

"The one cause of their success was the absence of this great evil of our modern Church, disunion. 'Union is the soul of our Church,' cried St. Paul on the hill of Mars, when thousands flocked to hear this strange new doctrine, and those words of his were the mystic bond which held together this little band of apostles. 'Together in Christ' was their greeting and watchword, and all who called themselves His followers, were united in one holy bond of sympathy, then, as it should be now, the most beautiful feature of our creed. And yet, at the present time, after eighteen hundred years of what we are taught to believe has been progress, we are more narrow-minded than these simple men, and wrap ourselves up in sects and divisions, and worship our one same God in innumerably different fashions. Not only that, but the spirit of toleration is not amongst us; there is no recognition of one of these sects by the others. A Wesleyan minister would stare aghast if asked to preach in a Baptist Chapel, and a Roman Catholic would deem me mad to ask him to preach within these

walls. This is the curse of our age. This is the insidious enemy which may in some near future time shake to the very foundation, if it does not utterly destroy the whole Christian religion. A house divided amongst itself cannot stand—you will not deny that. Can you deny that Roman Catholics, we Churchmen, and Nonconformists of all classes, form part of the Church of God? What conclusion can you then draw? Oh, it is a cruel `shame, a blighting misfortune, this disunion which holds apart one from another the members of the Church of Christ. We are giving the battle over to Atheists, and sceptics; our shameful disunion forms the great argument with which they assail the stability of our doctrines. Remember this, that the differences which exist amongst us are differences only in the manner of worshipping; in many cases merely arise from the doctrinal quibbles of a disputative age. Remember that the distance between the most extreme of these sects is no more in the sight of God than is the space between two waves on the multitudinous waves of ocean. We all worship Him, we all read and believe His Scriptures, and all who do these things, are brethren together in the great faith, and as such should worship side by side, sinking all minor differences, and uniting together to uphold our joint religion. Not until this has come to pass, not until sectarian differences and doctrinal disputes are sunk and forgotten, in the remembrance of the mighty fact that the God of one is the God of all, shall we be able to fear no longer the sneers of Atheists, and the discerning spirit of the times. Remember this—that, in the life to come, Roman Catholics, Churchmen, Dissenters, all will worship together and alike. Is it not then supreme presumption on our own part to remain apart and worship apart while on earth?"

The preacher ceased, and the strains of the organ filled the church. The people filed down the aisles, already remarking in whispers, on the daring sermon. Many admired the beauty of the preacher's views; but amongst the whispers of enthusiasts and dreamers, not a few predicted that so extraordinary a sermon would, if reported to the Bishop, certainly gain his censure.

Godfrey was particularly impressed by the eloquence of his old college acquaintance, and at his suggestion the little party waited at the vestry door for Mr. Hastings. After the preliminary congratulations they moved on, and somehow Mr. Hastings found himself falling behind to be alone with Miss Mornington. He was exhausted, and little inclined for conversation, and Eva spoke first.

"I liked that sermon, Mr. Hastings," she said.

"I am glad of it, Miss Mornington," with a faint smile. "I do not think that everyone will say the same."

"I do not see why they should not. I never heard you more eloquent."

His smile left him.

"I fear you confuse eloquence with earnestness," he said; "nevertheless, I am glad you liked it"; there was sincerity in his tones to prove that he valued her praise. He never told her so in words; he never owned that he liked to be with her; but eyes and voice betrayed as much. She saw it, though women are not as blind as love, and it encouraged her to bestow her companionship and her smiles on the man whose character she so much admired. She never dreamt of any danger to either, women never do! She looked upon him as something so different from other men, that she had no compunction in parading her high

opinion. She never dreamt either, that her admiration could ever ripen into a warmer feeling, or that his quiet liking for her could deepen into a stronger feeling.

At the corner of Lowndes Square the five separated; Godfrey and Lord Dereham went to lunch at the latter's chambers, and the Rev. Mr. Hastings to dine in loneliness, and then hurry off to a distant mission-room.

Thus the three weeks passed away without Dane, the detective, being successful in his search for Mr. Cecil Braithwaite. It was settled, in consequence, that Godfrey and he should sail for Canada on the next Thursday, and on Wednesday afternoon, indeed, Godfrey paid his farewell visit to Mr. Woodruff. He was in capital spirits, glad at last to be taking an active part in the search, and sanguine as to its ultimate success. Mr. Woodruff gave him such hints as he thought might be useful, purposely saying nothing to discourage him, although he himself could not but feel extremely doubtful as to the result. Then came the leave-taking with Eva and Maud. During the last week Godfrey had spent almost all his time with them, Mr. Mornington having left for Canada. Eva was quite satisfied with her brother's excuse of a shooting expedition, and had no idea that he had any other motive for leaving England. The variance between her father and brother was still a trouble to her, but she did not imagine that it would last much longer, especially as her father had made no attempt to keep her from seeing Godfrey, although she often mentioned her brother's name before him, and made no secret of their meetings. Besides, with a young lady's restricted geographical knowledge, she imagined Canada to be but a small place where the two Morningtons were sure to meet, and in all probability they would be more apt to be reconciled abroad than at home. It would end well, she believed, and so the leave-taking was not a sad one. It was not to be for long, and Godfrey's regret at leaving Maud was balanced by his pleasure at being actively engaged.

Maud was not vexed, on her part. If her lover were successful, all would be smooth; and if not, she would still have the satisfaction, such as it was, of marrying a poor man. Of the little party, Lord Dereham was by far the most miserable, as he would be deprived of the opportunity of those tête-à-têtes with Miss Mornington, become so precious to him. He was, moreover, tormented by doubts which amounted to certainties, that the friendship which she entertained for him, would never become greater. He did not try to deny that he loved her, and for her had so suddenly altered his whole course of life. And yet, notwithstanding his numberless opportunities, he had never dared to breathe this secret to her; for he felt assured that she did not reciprocate the passion. The marks of her favour were too openly bestowed to give him any satisfaction, for although no deep student of human nature, he knew that when such a girl as Eva openly expressed her pleasure at his company, had only a bewildered stare for his tender speeches, an open laugh for his compliments, and exhibited not the slightest nervousness at being left alone with him, that he might as well accept his adverse fate in silence. Love never exists under such signs as these. So he reasoned, against his wishes, and with a heavy heart, travelled down to Melton to inspect his stud, with a view to the season's hunting, on the day after Godfrey had left England.

Chapter XV

In our American Dominion again.

Godfrey and his companion reached Quebec safely, and having taken rooms at the principal hotel, they seriously discussed their chances and decided upon a plan.

Detective Dane was a tall, well-built man, with grey whiskers and fresh-coloured complexion, rather bald and paternal-looking, with quiet and unobtrusive manners—in most respects the very opposite to one's preconceived notions of a detective, but none the less, as Mr. Woodruff knew, one of the ablest men the force had ever produced.

The modern criminal investigator has not become such an adept in disguises as his Parisian counterpart, but he has understood that there was no success awaiting him if he remained of the Inspector Bucket type.

Mr. Dane liked "working" such a case, and he talked hopefully of it, though he did not ignore its many difficulties.

"The first thing to do is very clear," he said, as the two sat together on the night of their landing. "We must trace your father's steps backward from this place. It was here he embarked for England, I believe. What we must do is to find out at what hotel he stopped, and then work back to his last previous residence, and so on."

Godfrey nodded.

"You should leave this part to me," the inquiry agent continued. "I must tell you that if this course does not bring us on the track, it will be out-and-out the toughest job I ever tackled; but we'll pull it off," he went on cheerfully as he saw Godfrey look anxious. "We'll succeed, never fear. If this Cecil Braithwaite be in Canada, we'll unearth him or my name isn't John Dane." Their preliminary conference came thus to an end.

"A tough job" this search did turn out to be. They spent days before they traced Mr. Mornington further back than the hotel in Quebec where he had stopped. When they hit upon a clue, it led them away into the interior where the search only fairly began. Weeks, and even months, passed on and their course was always the same. It seemed as if the clue they were following would take them across the Continent from east to west. At last they reached Lake Town, a settlement almost on the borders of Alaska, and before them lay vast tracks of black forests and bleak prairie regions, imperfectly known even to the native Indians, far outside the reach of civilized Canada.

Both adventurers had suffered intensely from the cold, but had lost not one whit of interest in their search. In fact, the greater the difficulties and the dangers which beset them, the more their spirit increased.

At this frontier place they spent more than a week in vain search and fruitless inquiries, until at last they lit upon an old trapper, just arrived from the forests beyond with his stock of furs. They questioned him at first as a mere matter of routine, but soon with eagerness, for he afforded the clue they sought.

He remembered distinctly, as such borderers do, bringing with him, about two and a half years before, from the interior, an Englishman, who had lived for many years in a lonely hut with a single companion, a hundred miles back. He believed that the hut was still occupied, and he supposed by the original

companion of the returned hermit; but this he could not say positively. Both inquirers felt certain that they were on the point of success, and they immediately began to make preparations for their perilous journey. The old trapper, whose only name appeared to be "Joe," was quite willing to act as their guide as far as the tiny station of Fort George, from which he said the hut was not far distant. Accordingly, under his directions, they exchanged the sledge in which they had been travelling for a stronger one, and laid in an additional stock of furs and other necessaries. They also took plenty of provisions, for game was scarce in the deep snows.

But for Joe's advice, they would have gone without half the things which proved indispensable.

They started, with the trapper guide and one other man engaged to drive their sledge.

Joe had his own, drawn by one shaggy old pony, but he kept ahead nevertheless, and pointed out the dangerous places.

The early days led them through vast tracts, now open, now thickly wooded, but mostly presenting, as far as the eye could reach, a boundless expanse of frozen snow; what vegetation there was being covered, and the whole scene oppressive to the senses, and dazzling to the eyes, in its universal whiteness.

As darkness was coming on, they reached, by the side of the trail, a tumble-down shanty, said to have been the dwelling-place of two Indians expelled from their tribe; now it was used as a shelter. It was welcome as some protection from the piercing cold. Having secured their animals in one part of the ruinous building, they lit a huge fire in the other, and after a meal of dried meat, and cocoa warmed in a tin, they wrapped themselves up in their furs and sank off to sleep. Early in the morning they were astir, Godfrey and Dane, especially, feeling stiff. The fire was soon relit, and, after a hurried breakfast, they put the animals to the sledge, and started off again.

An hour's travelling, the monotony of which was successfully broken by numerous bumps and even upsets, brought them to the confines of the mighty forest tracts they had to traverse, and their progress became even more slow and difficult. In many places the trail had never penetrated the forest, and only skirted its side, thus taking them many miles out of the direct way. Mounds of snow frequently blocked the path, and every hour the cold seemed to increase in intensity. Still, until night came on, both the Englishmen kept up well, although, notwithstanding their furs, they were numbed from head to foot.

The short day was soon over, and when the dusk settled upon them, and added still denser obscurity to the almost impenetrable gloom of the woods, their advance became so difficult that they were often brought to a standstill. It was a task to try the strongest nerves, and even Godfrey could not shake off awe, if not fear, altogether. The only sounds were the melancholy sighing of the wind, which never ceased rushing through the tops of the pines and cedars. This groaning was blended every little while with a still more disheartening sound, the yelling of wolves, which seemed to their excited fancy to come nearer at every repetition.

Now and then they reached openings, where a clearing had been begun and abandoned by pioneers, where the piney giants lay, lopped of branches, in all directions. At one such break they halted, and made a fire. The wolves had scented them and their animals, and their watch had to be kept strictly and the fire replenished regularly to scare away the bloodthirsty beasts. They were glad

when the aurora drove them to their day haunts and left the solitude clear for their pushing on to the fort. Towards afternoon, however, it began to snow. The space between the trees was soon covered and its course hid from sight, so that often, with a violent lurch, they would find themselves sprawling in the snow, under their sledge. When the shades came on again they reckoned to be many a mile yet from Fort George. The clearings became fewer and fewer, and at every step appeared to grow more and more impassable, and the forest denser and denser. With the approach of night came again a repetition of the horrors of the preceding one. The yelling of the wolves became more and more distinct, and Godfrey, standing up in the sledge, almost expected to see the glare of their eyes in the dark sides of the track.

Towards dawn the riot became so continuous, and appeared so near, that even old Joe began to show uneasiness and whispered quickly to the driver of Godfrey's sledge some sentence which caused him to whip up his animals to greater speed, whilst he tried by all the words of menace and endearment in the vocabulary of the Canadian driver to induce them to maintain.

All of a sudden, as the pace was becoming furious, one of the animals attached to Godfrey's sledge staggered, stumbled and pitched over dead. They cut the traces in haste and pushed onward. They heard a rustling in the underwood on both sides, and, straining their eyes in gazing back into the gloom, they could just discern the still warm horse being torn to pieces by numberless dark forms, which came rushing from all parts to get their share. The voyageurs' danger was now greater than ever, since the wolves, having once tasted blood, become insatiable, and lose that cowardice which renders them at ordinary times comparatively harmless. On they dashed with all the speed they could, casting frequent anxious glances behind, and listening intently, with faces blanched, to their howls of delight, as they rent the carcass to shreds. Then fell a moment's silence, and they knew that the last pieces had been gulped down the ravenous throats. They listened with beating hearts, but all sound ceased but the dull wailing wind as it passed overhead. All at once, Dane, with a violent start, pointed to the top of a bare ridge on their left, where, racing along level with them, they saw several dark forms, whose yellow, burning eyes, turned to leer at them, shone like stars in a fog.

Godfrey mechanically raised his rifle, but it was almost snatched from his hand by the old trapper.

"Don't be a fool," was his rebuke in a hoarse whisper; "if you drop one the rest'll eat him, and with the smell of fresh meat, thar won't be no holdin' of 'em back from swarmin' down upon us like a thousan' o' bees."

Godfrey put down his rifle muzzle, though clutching it as if to drive his fingers into the stock. The moments passed like hours as, side by side, the two sledges flew along, old Joe viewing the darkness at the tops.

"If day does not 'up' in five minutes," he muttered, "we are goners, parbleu! The whole pack are behind in full scent; you'll hear them open mighty quick when they round the corner and catch sight of us."

Sure enough, scarcely had the words left his lips, when, close at their rear, burst forth that curdling yell from maws dry and famished, thirsting for blood. The hearts of the hearers stood for a moment still, then beat all the more wildly. Godfrey and Dane knelt on the back of their sledge prepared to fire, and sell their lives as dearly as possible when the onslaught should come. Joe and the other driver were furiously lashing their animals, who, as fully sensible of the

danger as their masters, with snorting nostrils, and trembling ears, tore onwards at the maddest pace while nearer and nearer rose the horrid cry, till abruptly through the night broke upon their sight scores of long black forms with red, outstretched tongues and gleaming white fangs, with eyes aglare with a fierce glow of expectation. A low exclamation burst forth from the lips of the two men as they saw the horrible army, and, indeed, it was awful enough to make the bravest man quail.

Dane, with a gasp, let his rifle fall, and covered his face with his hands, shaking from head to foot. It was pardonable in a hunter of human game in the prairies of Trafalgar Square and the jungle of Tiger Bay.

On the other hand, having faced boar and stag, the other Englishman was less daunted, and marked his game steadily, though his face was pale. His rifle at his shoulder was ready to fire as soon as the charge should come. For one second, Maud's image appeared before him, and the vision fortified him to await this certain death.

The supreme moment came.

Two of the foremost wolves gained on the rest, and were soon within a few yards of the sledge. With studied aim, Godfrey fired two barrels in rapid succession, and both brutes fell over, one wounded and yelling, the other dead. The whole pack stopped for a moment to devour the victims, while the sledges made the most of the start. Joe suddenly shouted at this juncture, unable to suppress his emotion for once, and waving his rifle—"We are saved!"

Through the tree tops they could see the false dawn reflected.

"Saved, 'tell 'ee, boys!" repeated the old hunter. "'Tain't in wolf to foller folks in the daylight. But let 'em have it hard and fast, the pison varmin! Blaze away down their hides!"

All the guns available were fired, and the wolves, checked already by the smell of the rising sun, clustered in bustling files on the dying and dead mates, and gave up the pursuit.

It was high time.

When the true dawn grew sufficiently distinct for them to see one another's faces, the adventurers were shocked to see the effect the acute suspense had caused. Dane's face, in particular, was perfectly bloodless, even at the lips, and seemed drawn down as if by stress of pain; deep lines furrowed his forehead, which had never appeared there before. Godfrey was greatly alarmed at his appearance, but the colour gradually came back, and he soon appeared himself again.

They lit a fire and made a pretence of breakfasting. It was in silence, for their thankfulness at their narrow escape had absorbed all their feelings, and they did everything mechanically, and spoke like men in a dream.

Early in the afternoon, they reached Fort George—a little place consisting only of a large two-storied building, the abode of the governor, and three or four huts, where lived his dependents. They were received hospitably, and, indeed, Mr. Burke, the governor, was not sorry to see some one with whom he could converse about the outside world; he was also not a little curious as to the object of their visiting so untempting a region. They enlightened him in some degree.

He had often heard from hunters of the solitary who lived in the hut near Lonely Creek. He believed that there had once been two men there; but one was gone, that was certain, though he knew not whither. And so it was this man

whom they wished to visit? Of course they were welcome to stop over night with him, and accept such fare as he could offer, and he would give them all the assistance possible.

They thanked him heartily, and sat up with him till late, listening to his startling tales of border exploits and adventures, and filling him in return with such news of the world beyond his as he cared to hear.

"You must have an awfully lonely life of it here," said Dane, shuddering, as he glanced around at the bare whitewashed walls and uncarpeted floor of the big room.

"It suits me," was the governor's reply. This contented tone and sad expression told an old tale of the disappointments and trials, perhaps follies of youth, followed by a middle age of repentance and regrets. Both Godfrey and Dane felt compassion for him. But he did not invite sympathy by his confidence, and soon afterwards the three men separated for their rest.

Early on the morrow, the Englishmen were prepared to start on their fresh journey. Mr. Burke had his own sledge brought out, and drove them several miles as far as the road was passable. The rest of the journey, by the governor's computation about eighteen miles, would have to be undertaken on foot, and accordingly they buckled on the snowshoes which Mr. Burke had left them, and, wishing him a cordial good-bye, glided off. They found walking in snowshoes extremely painful, but they got used to it by degrees, and soon began even to enjoy it, blissfully ignorant that the "racquet fever" does not set in with the first fatigue and strain on the unaccustomed muscles, but after a lull, which seems the end of the novice's troubles.

Godfrey, at any rate, relished snow-shoeing very much better than sitting in the sledge, as the exercise brought warmth; and Dane, although his movements were certainly not graceful, shared his opinion. It is certain that on the snow crust they could not have gotten forward at all in ordinary footgear.

Old Joe was kept in perpetual merriment by the mishaps of the new hands, and at any other time Godfrey would have joined in his laughs at the extraordinary antics and tumbles of Dane. But now he was too full of anxious expectations as to the result of their visit to this hermit, whom he scarcely doubted to be Cecil Braithwaite. Their course was a circuitous one, now having to make a lung circuit of impassable forest land, then to traverse broken ground, where all their vigilance was necessary to escape unfathomable snowdrifts. They frequently found themselves waist-deep in the treacherous soft snow, on which they had ventured, imagining the crust to be firm. But no serious mishaps occurred, thanks to the carefulness of their guide.

About "nooning" they had to climb a butte, or hillock, and looking around them and listening, Godfrey and his companion realized what absolute silence really is. As far as the eye could reach, nothing but dazzling white, relieved only by the dead black of the piney woods, even these feather-capped with clinging snow, and long icicles hung from the boughs. Over all mantled a silence awful in majesty, as if the cruel frost had placed its blighting hand upon all vegetable and animal life. It seemed to Godfrey as if they had stumbled upon a corner of the world which man had never before perceived, so uninterrupted was the loneliness. The unknown is always fascinating, and this place possessed a melancholy, weird grandeur which impressed Godfrey's imagination, so that when, in after years, he passed through the crowded streets of the European capitals, his mind suddenly repictured this landscape of desolation.

Their guide warned them that it was unwise to delay in ponderings incomprehensible to him, so on they shot anew. As the hours passed, Dane began to drop a little behind the others, and complained of intense weariness, ankle pain, and drowsiness. Joe looked put out, and insisted that they should not stop to rest even for a single moment; and his earnestness was contagious to Godfrey. They went on a mile or two further, when Dane suddenly stopped with a weary exclamation.

"I must rest for a minute or two," he sighed. "Can't move a step further," and he closed his eyes as if he would fall asleep where he stood.

"We must tote him along," said Joe to Godfrey, bluntly. "To sleep in his state is to die." They each took an arm of the exhausted man, and, notwithstanding his entreaties for a little repose, half-assisted, half-dragged him along. Their march was necessarily extremely slow, and Godfrey hastened to ask how far they were from their destination.

"Thank heaven," replied the guide, "we are e'en a'most on to it. The cabin is right inside yander belt of woods. Half an hour will do it."

Darkness was coming on fast when they reached the borders of the forest toward which Joe had pointed. Here they took an opening cut straight through it; on either side the pine-trees so close together as to resemble a black stockade. Every now and then Joe stopped, as if to refresh his memory, until at last he caught sight of a single tree felled across the track.

"Got her down fine now," he said, with joy. "Now we have to turn to the left. I must go first to show you. You had better keep him on the move in front of you," pointing to Dane, "and if you can't manage him, call me."

Godfrey nodded, and Joe turned into the forest with Godfrey and his charge behind. So thick grew the trees, and all were so much alike that no gain seemed made at any step. Besides, the openings between deviated so that, although the hut was, as they afterwards discovered, only a hundred yards from them at first, in a straight line; they had to cover a mile of ground to reach it. At last they stepped into a small clearing, in the centre of which stood the pine cabin we saw at the beginning of our story, amid the felled trees, stripped of their branches and scattered in all directions. No sign was there of a human tenant, save a thin blue smoke, which curled upwards from an opening in the roof; but when the trapper halloed, the call brought to the door a man, who looked with astonishment on the little group.

Chapter XVI

The Wrong Man.

The settler's eyes no sooner fell upon Dane, whom Godfrey was still supporting, than his look of amaze changed to one of compassion.

"You had better bring him in sharp," he said, moving aside from the door to allow them room. Godfrey started at the first sound of the voice, for he fancied it not unfamiliar, but was too troubled about Dane to delay for a second glance at the pioneer, who had come forward to assist them bringing in the insensible man. He pointed to a bed of furs in the extreme corner, and there they deposited him. Opening a cupboard, the host brought out a flask of brandy,

and rubbed the temples and lips of the fainting man; while the others looked on in silence. After some time the faint colour came back to Dane's cheeks, and he recovered. He opened his eyes and gazed round the hut bewildered, till he realized where he was. Then he raised himself on his elbow and fixed his earnest gaze on the man who stood watching him with folded arms. Godfrey's heart stood still for a moment; then sunk within him as Dane slowly shook his head.

"That is not him," he said firmly: ere falling back he closed his eyes and fell off asleep.

The settler started as he heard Dane's words, and, turning on Godfrey, demanded savagely:

"What the devil does this man mean, and who are you who come intruding upon my solitude?"

"It means, sir," answered Godfrey, "that from the description we had of you, we imagined you a friend of this gentleman's," pointing to Dane, "and, therefore, we sought you out. We have made a mistake; but I fear we shall have to crave your hospitality for the night."

The other's manner changed at once.

"You are welcome, sir," he said, "to everything I have, and the more pity it's very little. It's our way out here." He shrugged his shoulders.

"We want very little," went on Godfrey, "except permission to sleep by your fire. As for the rest perhaps we may be permitted to contribute." Their knapsacks were well filled, and in obedience to Godfrey's sign, Joe silently spread their contents upon the stump segment which did service as a table, and busied himself getting hot water for making tea.

"You will join us, sir?" asked Godfrey.

The other assented, and the three men sat down to the meal. As the owner of the cabin stepped from the shadows to take his place, Godfrey looked him full in the face for the first time, and could scarcely repress surprise. In that erect form and proud bearing, those deep brown eyes filled with a saddened light, in the low mournful tones in which he usually spoke, and in the imperious gesture with which he had summoned them into the hut, there were familiar signs to him, certainly altogether out of keeping with this man's rude dress and scanty surroundings. Godfrey knew that his host was a gentleman by birth and early breeding and, indeed, every little act betrayed it. It was evidently entirely out of courtesy that he had joined them, for he did not eat a morsel, having, as he told them, only just concluded his own meal when they disturbed him. Godfrey commenced another apology when they were seated together, but his host stopped him.

"Say no more about it, I entreat you."

At the sound of his sad yet musical tones, Godfrey again started, and a vague uneasiness filled him. He gazed searchingly at their host, but was soon obliged to confess to himself that he had never set eyes on him before, although he reminded him powerfully of some one whom he could not call to mind.

The repast was soon over, for men eat heartily and quickly in such conditions. Godfrey drew out his constant companion, a cigarette case, and as he did so, caught an eager glance from his companion directed towards it.

"You smoke, of course?" he said, offering it, and the other accepted with evident pleasure, and with almost boyish delight lit the tender roll, and lovingly watched the smoke ascend in light blue rings.

"You must find it very lonely here," remarked Godfrey, anxious to open a conversation.

"Very—but it is my choice," The dry tones warned him that if he wished to prolong the dialogue, he must alter his tactics.

"Do any trapping?" he asked, looking round the hut at the furs heaped up in the corner.

"Very little; shooting is more in my line," with a slightly contemptuous glance at Joe the Trapper, "and as a sport I'm rather tired of that," he added with a sigh.

"You are from the old country?" asked Godfrey.

"I once lived there," was the reply.

"It has altered much within the last ten or twenty years."

That is a sufficient time to alter any country."

"It wouldn't alter this part of the world much," observed Godfrey.

The other smiled, but did not speak. He appeared little disposed that way, and to all Godfrey's remarks and questions he answered merely in monosyllables, or not at all, until at last our young friend gave it up, and, yawning perforce, declared himself inclined for repose.

"All I have to offer you in the way of bed," said his host, rising and arranging some furs in a corner near the fire; "but you will find them comfortable, I think."

"I have no doubt of it." Godfrey kicked off his boots, and in a few moments had forgotten his great disappointment, and the strangeness of the surroundings, in a sound sleep.

When he awoke, it was broad daylight, and he and Dane were the only occupants of the cabin. A rifle-shot close at hand denoted where the others were, and how engaged. Dane was awake and apparently quite recovered.

"Better, old man?" asked Godfrey anxiously.

"I'm all right," he replied.

"And so our long journey out here has been wasted time?" sighed Godfrey, rising from his couch and looking round despondently.

"It has that. But never despair," he added cheerfully. "It won't do to be dashed at the first failure. We'll find our man yet, don't you fear." The door was pushed open, and the old trapper and their host entered. The latter bid them "good-morning" curtly, and expressed a hope that Dane was recovered.

"Thanks to you, yes," replied he.

"You owe me no thanks. I could scarcely have done less than I did," he said, not unkindly. "Suppose we have breakfast."

Tea was soon made, and some dry caribou flesh brought out from the cupboard to supplement the broiled snowbirds they had shot, and the five sat down together at the stump and made a hearty meal. Immediately it was over the travellers began preparations for a start, and soon were equipped for the return.

"Good-bye, sir," said Godfrey, extending his hand to their host. "We owe you much for your hospitality."

The other merely bowed, gravely but deprecatingly, and courteously escorted them to the door. Godfrey was last to leave and a sudden thought occurred to him, which he remembered afterwards with pleasure.

"Perhaps at some time, sir," he said, "I may be able to return your hospitality. My card is in here," and he pushed his well-filled cigarette case into the other's

hand, and hurried away. The man stood for a long time where Godfrey had left him, leaning against the doorpost and watching his retreating figure, until he was out of sight. Then throwing the cigar case on the furs, he caught up his rifle, and left the hut, making his way deeply into the forest, undoubtedly to forget in communion with Nature, the rare interruption to such daily occupation by these fellow-countrymen. When he returned, late at night, his eyes fell upon the cigar case, and he took it with him to his seat by the fire. There was a pocket on one side, in which were a few cards, and he drew one out and bending down, so that the light from the fire shone upon it, he glanced at the name. The look of idle curiosity changed into one of utter bewilderment, and he started to his feet as if about to rush out of the hut. "Godfrey Mornington!" he cried. "Who is a Godfrey of the Morningtons? Some chance similar name, I suppose," and he threw the card into the fire as if it had awakened painful recollections which he wished to consume. All that night, however, he never moved from his seat in front of the fire, leaning forward and gazing into it, wrapped up in the painful remembrances which the name had awakened. At intervals, in a perplexed tone, he repeated the name.

Chapter XVII

The Morningtons Meet.

Godfrey and Dane reached Fort George without any adventure, and found to their inexpressible relief, that a somewhat large party of trappers had just come in and were leaving for Lake Town early on the morrow, and with them they arranged to travel. They had dinner with Mr. Burke, who inquired curiously about the man whom they had visited. He learnt little beyond the fact that he was not the man of whom they were in search, and he parted with the travellers on the following morning, no wiser. The journey back to Lake Town was an uneventful one, and Godfrey had ample leisure to brood about the man whom they had left behind in the lone cabin, and for whom he felt a strange compassion, and an interest unaccountable. They saw a few wolves, it is true, but they were too large a party to run any danger of being attacked, and though their hungry howlings made Godfrey and Dane shudder as they remembered their narrow escape, they were this time without any real apprehension. When they reached Lake Town they secured a room only with difficulty, and noticed an unusual stir and bustle about the little inn.

"Von your grand men here," said the little French landlord, of whom they inquired the cause. "Von Monsieur—bah, I have forgot me ze name, but zere is t'ree of zem; zey have come from your government-survey." At the sound of a bell, the landlord rushed away frantically toward the long low room dignified by the name of "Salon de diner."

Godfrey took little interest in the news, and strolled upstairs to his room, leaving Dane talking to the landlady. He had settled himself down in an armchair, when the door was burst open, and Dane rushed in breathless.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked Godfrey, springing to his feet and letting his cigar fall upon the carpet. "Are you ill again, Dane?" for the detective had sunk down in a chair, and was gasping for breath.

After a moment or two he recovered himself a little. "I'm better now," he ejaculated with difficulty, and then laying his hand on Godfrey's arm, said, while his eyes sparkled with excitement: "Our search is over; he's here, in this inn—I've seen him downstairs."

Godfrey took a quick stride towards the door. "Whom do you mean?" he cried in a voice of thunder—"speak!"

"Cecil Braithwaite," whispered Dane. "Here,—he was in the hall, just entering the dining-room. Go down and keep your eye on him, quick; and send me up some brandy!"

In a moment Godfrey was out of the room. He met a servant on the stairs.

"Take some brandy into No. 6 at once," he ordered; "there is a gentleman ill there." Apparently quite composed, he walked down the stairs, and opened the door of the dining-room. Two men were dining at the long table, and a third was standing with his back to the fire reading an English newspaper. As the door opened, the last looked up and the paper fell from his hand. The eyes of father and son met in equal astonishment. Mr. Mornington started violently, and then stooped mechanically to pick up his paper, while Godfrey stood with his hand still on the handle of the door, gazing in astonishment. Before either had spoken, and while the two men at the table were staring from one to the other in opened-mouthed amazement, there was a sudden commotion outside, a violent ringing of bells, and the noise of persons dashing up and down the stairs. Filled with a vague uneasiness, Godfrey stepped back into the hall, and ran quickly up the stairs to the room where he had left Dane. There was a little crowd outside the door, and as Godfrey appeared, with alarmed expression, there was murmur, "Let him in—it is his friend." They stepped aside to allow him passage, looking curiously at him as he burst through them, and into the room with horror-struck face.

"What has happened?" he cried breathlessly, as he saw a group around the bed. One was a doctor who pointed to Dane's lifeless form. "Heart disease," he said briefly. "He is quite dead."

The room swam around to Godfrey, and there was a buzzing in his head. He grasped at the nearest chair and himself fainted dead away. When he came to his senses again, he was alone with the doctor. A few words from him soon explained the sad incident.

The servant who, in obedience to Godfrey's orders, took up the brandy, was frightened at the awful pallor of Dane's face, and running downstairs again, sent up the landlord, while she started for a doctor.

"Luckily I was passing the door and came in at once," he continued; "but I saw at a glance that the unfortunate man was beyond my skill. He was quite dead."

Godfrey thanked the doctor, who went away refusing the fee which he mechanically offered, and which was so refused as being from a non-resident; and leaving Godfrey with a heavy heart. He felt that for the present he must abandon the search for Cecil Braithwaite, and return at once to England to acquaint Dane's friends with all particulars of the sad event. He had grown to like the man who had devoted himself so thoroughly to the mutual search. As he stood by the bedside, gazing upon the dead man's face, his last words came back to him. "He must have been under some hallucination," he thought; but, nevertheless, he rang the bell and asked to see the landlord, who soon appeared.

"Has Mr. Mornington gone?" he asked.

"About half an hour ago," was the reply, "and ze two gentlemen who were with him."

"Have you anyone else stopping in the house?"

The landlord shook his head.

"Besides yourself sair, no person"

Godfrey mused for a moment.

"Can you describe the two men who were with Mr. Mornington?" he asked, though the next moment he laughed at the inutility of his question, for he would not be able to recognize the description even if one of these two men actually was Cecil Braithwaite.

"Mais, oui," replied the landlord, rather surprised. "I tink so. One was a very young man—very young, scarcely twenty-two years. Ze ozer, he was stout, and dark, very disagreeable-looking man."

"No one else has been in the house?" asked Godfrey.

"Oh, but I said not so," replied the landlord. "Zere were t'ree, four, five trappairs, but they were not stopping here. I tink nevair! zis is a hotel for the gentlemans of family; and zese trappairs haf no families but zeir dogs and zeir carabines. Ze trappairs come in to my bar only, and zere zey trink—zen zey quit—ten minutes having passed."

Godfrey thanked him, and the little man departed with a smile and a bow. "My best chance is gone," reflected the Englishman with bitterness. "The only man who knew Cecil Braithwaite by sight is dead."

After the funeral had taken place, he set out empty-handed on his return journey.

Chapter XVIII

The Elder Mornington's More Profitable Quest.

When Godfrey left the dining-room, called thence by the confusion consequent on Dane's death, Mr. Mornington the elder soon regained his composure, and as he volunteered no explanation to his companions of the incident they had witnessed, and his gloomy reserve did not invite questions, it was soon forgotten by them. The news of the sudden death in the house drove everything else from their minds, and yet the two diners could not help noticing with surprise, that it appeared to be somewhat of a relief to Mr. Mornington.

Half an-hour afterwards, however, the three were on the road to Fort George with a sufficient escort to protect them against the wolves, who had killed Dane by the fright, and the intense cold soon dulled their brains. Their journey, unlike Godfrey's, passed without any adventure, and they reached Fort George on the evening of the second day. Their arrival was unexpected, but Mr. Burke, although taken by surprise, was equal to the emergency, and gave all the reception in his power in honour of his guests. They dined in the state room, a desolate-looking apartment, whose only pretence to its title appeared to be its size and feeble attempts at carpeting the floor. The former scarcely adding to its comfort, as many a chink in the wooden planks, let in the cold, biting draughts,

which filled the room; and, although the four men literally crouched over the huge fire, the new-comers felt their backs numbed with cold.

The conversation naturally turned upon the disturbances between the settlers and the authorities, to give which his close attention was Mr. Mornington's object in revisiting Canada. The governor could not conceal the surprise he felt, that his lonely and unpeopled district should have been one of those which Mr. Mornington elected to visit.

"I have always had a great desire," explained his distinguished guest, "to penetrate as far as possible into the unknown parts of this great continent, and judge for myself of their capacities and resources. Unfortunately, my visit being in the middle of winter, I can scarcely form a correct estimate; but my own idea is—and, mark! I intend to visit here again in the summer to confirm it—that this part of the continent is considerably underrated, and might with a little enterprise become a grand field for emigrants."

The governor agreed with him: the illimitable natural resources were admirable, he thought; and the vast tracts of prairie eminently suitable for cultivation.

"We must talk of this again before I leave," said Mr. Mornington; "for the present I have another matter concerning which I require your help."

The two men were alone, the others (the first, an ex-government surveyor; the second, Mr. Mornington's secretary) having retired, Mr. Burke nerved himself to hear some gigantic confidential declaration from the Home Government. Looking up out of the fire, where he had seemed to be drawing encouragement, Mr. Mornington continued:

"There is no need to bore you with a long explanation, sir, and I am sure, as I have the pleasure of speaking to a gentleman" (Mr. Burke bowed) "that you will not exhibit any curiosity as to the rather extraordinary request I have to make. It will be sufficient if I tell you that I once had a very dear friend, upon whom fell a terrible misfortune. He fled from Europe, and the world, and buried himself in solitude, leading the life of a hermit; and only since I have been in this country have I ascertained his whereabouts."

The governor's interest, somewhat damped, took fire anew.

I am told that he lives in a cabin, only twenty miles from here, near a place called Lonely Creek. Do you know it?"

"A man certainly does live in such a place as you describe," replied Mr. Burke, all in a whirl, "and the extraordinary part of it is that, only a few days ago, two Englishmen went from here to visit him with something of the same object."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Mornington.

"Yes; their object was, I think, to ascertain whether this man was one Cecil—Cecil—"

"Braithwaite?" suggested the other.

"That is the name," replied Mr. Burke; "but they came back unsuccessful. Yet, you say that is his name."

"Oh, no, I suggested that name because I happen to know of whom they were in search. The man of whom I speak is not called Braithwaite." There was a peculiar smile on Mr. Mornington's face. "But to come to the point. I want your assistance in reaching this place, and further, I want it to remain a secret from this pair of gossips who are with me."

"That will be rather difficult," mused the governor.

"By no means. Let me start early to-morrow morning, and you can tell them that I have joined a party of hunters on a short excursion to—to—ahem! to learn from what water-shed this Lonely Creek takes its source."

Mr. Burke looked rather uneasy. There was something in this transformation of the hermit's cabin into a reception-room of English tourists which he did not understand.

"I appreciate your hesitation," said Mr. Mornington. "I see you do not care to diverge from the truth; but, see here"—he wrote a few lines hastily on the back of a card—"give them this. It will do quite as well, and you need say nothing. Now, with regard to the trip."

"That will, perhaps, be less difficult than you imagine," said Mr. Burke. "The last few nights' frost will have hardened the snow, and if only no more falls during the night, you can do pretty nearly the whole journey in a traineau."

"At what time will you have one ready for me?" asked Mr. Mornington.

"At eight."

"That will do."

The two rose, Mr. Mornington extending his hand affably to the governor.

"Good-night, sir, and many thanks."

Preceded by Mr. Burke, who held a lantern over his head to light his guest up the cranky staircase and through the narrow door into his own room, Mr. Mornington got into his bedroom.

On the morrow, at the appointed time, enveloped from head to foot in buffalo robes, the great representative of "the Great Mother" took his seat in the sledge and started. Scarcely had they proceeded a couple of miles before snow began to fall heavily, and soon completely obscured the landscape; they could not see more than a few feet in front. The driver would have turned back, but Mr. Mornington sternly forbade him, at the same time promising a reward which made the man stare at him in amaze, and then devote the whole of his energies to the successful continuation of their journey. Towards mid-day matters improved. The snow ceased, and the air suddenly grew wonderfully clear, but with it the cold increased, and the wind, which blew in their teeth, made even the seasoned driver shiver from amongst his furs. But nothing in the discomforts of the journey—not the piercing cold nor the blinding snow—appeared to affect in the slightest degree Mr. Mornington. True, at first start, he was the prey of restlessness, foreign to his disposition, but no fear of the journey had called that forth, and it soon left him. Now he reclined in the sledge, unmoved, unshrinking, with an expectancy shining in his eyes sufficiently engrossing to bring him forgetfulness of all personal discomforts.

The driver was disposed to be garrulous, as is the nature of your Franco-Canadian; but the short, stern replies he received to the tentative phrases he hazarded, warned him that his companion did not share his mood, and he relapsed into sullen silence, which remained for long unbroken. They had plenty of provisions in the sledge; but Mr. Mornington partook of them but sparingly. Beneath that cold exterior, passions long restrained were raging madly, and needing all his iron will to restrain them, and, more, subdue. No trace there was of them outwardly, save in his eyes, flashing at times as he gazed steadfastly before him, with an eager, cruel light, and changing swiftly as if by dictation of the thoughts within him into fierce hatred.

Once the driver, turning towards him, with some trifling observation, caught that evil look and the observation died away upon his lips, and he half shivered

to himself and proceeded to thrash his animals, nor did he again attempt to address his patron.

The short day wore away and the shades of night stealthily began to fall, but not before their journey was at an end and the sledge had found the narrow run, from the side of which branched off the path to the hut. At the fallen tree they halted, and Mr Mornington, after whispering a few words to the driver, who nodded, turned and looked around him, reviving the traits in memory of the scene once familiar. Then he plunged boldly into the forest, and followed the narrow intricate path, out into the clearing where stood the cabin. He stood before the door for a space to collect his thoughts. Then lifting the wooden latch, he entered noiselessly.

The tenant was crouched before the fire, on the furs, with his head resting on his hand. At first sight he appeared to be deep in thought, but as he neither spoke nor moved, the new-comer concluded rightly that he had fallen asleep. With ever noiseless tread, Mr. Mornington walked across the hut, and bending down, gazed upon a long black case which stood in the extreme corner. The dust was thick upon it, as though it had lain undisturbed for years. Smiling softly to himself, he returned beside the sleeping man, removed his rifle and hovered over him with deepening frown. And yet the sight was one which was sufficiently sad to have awakened compassion instead of hatred, for the face was a living memorial, an unmistakable record, of a whole life of unhappiness and discontent. The latter had passed its fretful stage and had combined with the former to stamp upon the wasted countenance and delicately chiselled features a look of ineffable sadness. It was a face which, notwithstanding the ravages which time and trouble had wrought in it, was still very handsome. The features were all regular and perfect in their proportion, though the unkempt beard detracted from their pleasing effect. On one of his long white fingers shone a ring, at the sight of which the frown, better to say scowl, on the watcher's face deepened until his thick eyebrows met. His eyes flashed with implacable hatred, as they had never done since he stood in that little rustic graveyard and formed that inhuman vow.

The restless look had worn away at last or merged into the fiercer one which now marred his features. The mask which he had donned so long was thrown aside and the secret of his life revealed: undying hatred of the slumberer at his feet. After some time he snatched away this gaze and, walking towards the door of the cabin, slammed it violently. The sleeper started to his feet and clutched at where his gun was placed overnight; but then he was transfixed as he stared at the intruder, who shrank in the dark corner where were deeper shadows than the flickering light of the dying fire could illumine.

"Speak! who is there?" cried the awakened man, peering into the darkness, and instinctively stretching out his hand for the absent rifle. "Great God," he added, as the intruder advanced slowly towards him "Cecil, is that you at last?"

The other smiled strangely as he answered in a subdued voice: "It is I. Did you take me for a ghost?"

The two grasped hands, the awakened man wringing the other's as if he would never let go, and laughing a half hysterical laugh.

"I thought you were never coming back," he said in a choking tone. "Where have you been to all this time, and what have you been doing?"

The other laughed.

"Give a friend something to eat and I will tell you, honest Indian. I have a very long yarn for you."

The contents of the cupboard were emptied out and placed upon the rude table, the man who brought them forth scarcely taking his eyes off his visitor for a moment, and trembling violently with excitement.

"You must be starved," he said; "though, by Jove, you appear to have met fat buffalo."

The rich dress of European make and stuff, the priceless furs and the heavy gold chain surprised him.

"Rigged out rather different from when you left me for a little month's trip. I've a thousand questions to ask you, but pitch into this grub first, and then we'll pow-wow together." He pointed to the dry caribou flesh on the trunk. The meal was soon over, and then the hermit went to the cupboard again.

"Here's your old pipe," he said, holding it out and laughing almost with the joy of a child; "never been used since you went,—but, ah, I forgot—try one of these, being more your style, it seems." He produced Godfrey's cigar case.

"You wonder how I came by this, I suppose? I also have a story to tell you."

The visitor took a cigarette and lit it.

"Not nearly so wonderful as mine will be," he replied.

"Listen, anyhow;" he moved his seat a little back from the fire, now heaped up with pine logs, for the solitary had recklessly thrown on the whole of his indoor pile in welcome of his partner.

"You want to know of course, where I have been and what I have been doing; a long tale, but not uninteresting."

"Talk for ever," was the reply. "Have you forgotten what it is to exist here day after day, week after week, month after month, without hearing a human voice, each day a repetition of the last, no change, and yet no hope," he concluded with a sigh, "Well, fire away." He stretched himself out and assumed a listening attitude.

"I want just to touch upon the past to make you fully understand all I have to tell you."

The other looked up surprised, but nodded easily.

"We met, as you know, at College. I was Cecil Braithwaite, unknown and of no position; you were Harold Mornington, heir to vast estates and a fine old name."

The other frowned. "No need to dwell upon that," he muttered; but his companion did not appear to notice the protest.

"Singularly enough, a friendship sprung up between us,—at least so it appeared; so you thought, so thought the world; but the world and you were mistaken."

The listener let his cigarette fall, and gave the speaker a look of profound astonishment, and then, as he caught the cruel, menacing look which shone in the speaker's eyes, his astonishment deepened, and he listened as if cowed.

"Yes," said the speaker, rising slowly to tower over the other, with eyes filled with undisguised hatred; the restraint of a lifetime hurled away at last, and sudden bitterness in his ringing tones. "Yes, you were my friend then, you noticed me and sought me whom everyone else either shunned or ignored; you took me down to your splendid home, and we praised it and admired it together; and yet the friendship you entertained for me was returned by my secret hate! Long before I ever saw you, as soon as I could understand the

words I uttered, I had learnt to curse the name of Mornington, and hate, undyingly, all who bore it. Ay, when you sought my friendship, I was glad, for the sole reason that it gave me the opportunity of wreaking upon you the vengeance I had sworn to bring upon any or all of you Morningtons."

"Soon my plot thickened. Together, we met Eva Wakefield; and to me of all men you confided your passion for her. Blind fool that you were, not to discover my secret! it was I who loved Eva Wakefield most madly, as you, with your cold, sluggish nature never could have done. And I would have won her, too, but for the charm of your riches and wide possessions, which destroyed my chances. Curse you! Your rank and wealth won for you what my devoted love failed in. But," he spoke on, savagely, the words coming hissing hot from his grinding teeth, "but you had better have hung a millstone about your neck, better have thrown your riches to the winds, and given your possessions in charity, than thus have bought away from me the woman I loved. Idiot that you were not to discover my secret! You would talk to me for hours about the charms of your fair enchantress, and your plans for the future, undreaming that every word was making my heart writhe in agony; was sounding the death-knell to my fondest hopes, and, withal, adding fresh fuel to the fire which burned within me, and almost poured from my lips to blast you where you sang the love-lay that might have been your death-song. I was determined to snatch from you that bright future which you depicted so prodigally with colours—to bring upon you a swift and terrible vengeance. You had won from me the woman I adored by means of the very name and position which should have been mine own. You start—you look incredulous! hear me to the end. Accident favoured me, and success beyond my utmost expectations crowned my efforts. Your wife had a brother—a private soldier—who deserted. I knew that she had never dared to tell you this. I was in her confidence deeper than you, her lover, and I filled her with false alarms as to your anger, should you discover it."

The listener was on his feet now, white as death and with a wild look in his eyes.

"Hold your peace till I have finished," sternly continued the other. "I arranged a meeting between your wife and her brother, I say, which was to be late at night, because he dared not be seen in the daytime. Then I wrote you anonymous letters to the club, so that, one evening—you remember it well—I poisoned you with false tales!"

"You devilish villain!" burst from the listener's lips as he sprang at the speaker with sudden fury, but in a moment he was lying on his back amongst the furs, the other standing over him with threatening gestures.

"Keep still," he said hoarsely. "You know all that followed. Together we fled from England, hiding from justice; at last we came here and built this cabin. Three days before I left you I came upon a batch of old home newspapers, which the governor at the fort had given me to read. In one I found blessed news for us. The man whom we had left for dead was only stunned, and a noted criminal, upon the scaffold, confessed to entering that house and murdering him, after we had left. Then I knew that our hiding was unnecessary, and that we were free to return to England. There shone upon me a glorious idea which, while it gave me name and wealth, would crush you to the earth. In the dead of night, I stole your papers and letters, from the casket there, and returned home as Harold Mornington. Boldly and well I have played my part. There is more to tell you, much more."

The unhappy man, who had been stretched upon the furs, made faint attempts to rise, but he might as well have tried to have lifted the roof off the hut, as to weaken the grasp which held him. The victor smiled sarcastically.

"You had better listen quietly," he said, "there is plenty more entertainment for you. Your wife died six months after we quitted England. She left you two children, a girl and a boy. The girl I have spared, because she is like the woman I loved; the boy's life I have blighted. 'From the father to the children, and to the children's children'—you know that stern command? And upon your son have I completed my vengeance. I tore from the register at Redford the only evidence of your marriage with Eva Wakefield, and when he came of age, scarce six months ago, a proud, handsome young Englishman he is, I admit, I told him that upon his name was the bar of illegitimacy—I told him that he was a bastard, and thrust him from my doors. This, Harold Mornington, has been my revenge upon you.

"Now for its cause. Far away from here, in a little French village, there dwelt many years ago a happy family; there was a father, mother, a son and a daughter. They were poor as the simple peasants they lived amongst, but their birth was noble, and they were full of hopes that some day would see their restoration to their confiscated lands and dear old home. The daughter was beautiful as an angel." For the first time the speaker's voice grew soft. "To this village came—God's curse upon him—an Englishman who, under the guise of a gentleman, was a blackguard and false scoundrel. He won the heart of the simple French girl by his pretended love and false vows, and, tempted and beguiled by him, Estelle Mercier was betrayed into a mock marriage and deceived. Her brother followed them when they fled, and died, shot through the heart in a duel by this coward. The sister's shame, and the brother's murder, broke the hearts of the mother and father, and both died within a few weeks of one another. Estelle Mercier was my mother, her cowardly betrayer your father. We lived together in England, but my mother died when I was only three years old, leaving me to the guardianship of a lawyer, who told me my mother's history and my disgrace, when I grew older. With the little money left me, I elected to go to College, chiefly because I hoped that there I might meet you. And I did meet you; and my boyish dreams of vengeance upon your race, only grew more intensified as I grew to be a man. Even now, I am scarcely satisfied." He scornfully released the man whom he had been holding down, and standing a little way off, watched him with folded arms and grim smile, as an entomologist might a savage insect whose might was infinitesimal to his own. The true Mornington staggered to his feet, but leant against the wall glaring at Cecil Braithwaite. It was one of those moments when a variety of conflicting emotions takes away all senses, even the power of speech, and for several moments he could not collect his thoughts sufficiently to frame them into words. His veins were standing out on his forehead like grey whipcord, and his eyes were fearful in their fixedness, while his breath came short and quick, cutting in twain the words he might have spoken.

"You have taken my name"; the words came hoarse but at length distinct. "You—you—, I shall go back at once, and denounce you as an impostor."

The other laughed mockingly, as if he found real amusement in the words.

"Do it," he said. "Do it, I shall have the pleasure of seeing you end your days in a felon's cell. You aren't in a fit state to reason, evidently. Let me reason it for you. First, you must remember that I am a Mornington and have their features;

and when I returned to England there was not a man nor servant on your estate, previously knowing you, who did not straightway recognise me. I knew, thanks to your former hospitality, most of the county people and they also recognised me. I have all the papers in my possession. I know every minute fact about you from your birth to the time you left England, and have acted accordingly. You, on the other hand, have not a single line of evidence. What do you imagine would be your end if you came to England without a copper and without friends? Over and above this, I, look you! am a Member of Parliament, and this same visit here was made at the suggestion of one who will soon be Prime Minister. Go to England, and ask any lawyer to take up your case, and within a week you will find yourself in a lunatic asylum. Go to any magistrate and apply for a warrant against me, a Member of Parliament—almost a Cabinet Minister, mark that, without one tittle of evidence to support you, and in less time still you will find yourself in a prison cell. You are powerless, absolutely powerless, man!"

The truth of the other's words dawned upon the unfortunate listener. The tumult of indignation and anger which had been raging within him boiled away. He had not the physical strength to argue and upbraid, and as the sense of his utter impotency grew upon him, he sank down before the fire and covered his face with his hands to shut out all view of this monster. No wordy appeal for pity could have been so eloquent as was this silent one, but the victor stood with folded arms, and watched him unmoved.

Once he who was so overwhelmed lifted his head, and, without glancing at his torturer, said: "My daughter, is she called after her mother—is she like her mother?"

"Your daughter's name is Eva, and she is very like her mother," was the reply.

At length the true Harold Mornington arose. In low and subdued tones which gathered strength as he proceeded, he said:

"You have no right to revenge upon me a wrong done by my father; and the offence which you say I have committed against you was an unconscious one. If I won from you the woman you loved, it was done fairly and openly. You must be a coward to harbour malice against me for that. Have you no feeling at all or cannot you appreciate what my life has been—what I have suffered? Forced, through you, to flee from my country in the very heyday of life when enjoyment is keenest; to wander about in foreign lands in misery and poverty—you know what that is—you shared it with me, to bury myself here in this wretched hole with the curse of Cain ringing in my ears night and day! Oh, yours has been a terrible vengeance," he continued, in agitation.

"Many a night have I laid on my bed yonder, courting sleep in vain, while horrible nightmares have nearly driven me mad, and always before me that ghastly face and glaring eyes, and the blood on the light hair of that man as he fell back from my blow, murdered, as I thought. And the sound of those groans has dwelt in my ears unceasingly all this weary while. Many a time have I started up bathed in sweat, and trembling in every limb, fancying I saw him by my side, with that horrible fixed stare, pointing at me and muttering, 'Murderer!' and then I would fancy that I heard a knock at the door. The officers had found me at last! they had come to arrest me! and I would shriek aloud and rush out into the darkness, and spend the night trying to lose myself among

the trees, listening to their moaning till I almost fancied they too were uttering that same awful word."

He walked up and down, stopped abruptly by the side of the other, and laid his hand boldly upon his shoulder.

"Cecil," he said, earnestly, "for the love of God, have mercy on me; see I, Harold Mornington, kneel to you and beseech you to let me leave this place with you and go back home. Oh, remember, that if we are of the same blood, you should have pity. I will forgive you all, all; ay, you may keep my lands, even my name, but give me my daughter. I want not my wealth or my estates, the time has gone by for me to enjoy them; but not to love. See, my hair is turning grey, my strength is deserting me, or you would be seeing to me now; my eyes are dimmed; I am growing old before my time, and my heart beats but slowly. Oh, I would give all the rest of my life for one short week in dear old England."

His voice had become imploring.

"To visit once more my ancient home! to see the green fields and the flowery lanes round Mornington! to feel the warm breeze steal across my face, bringing the scent of English flowers and the sound of English voices—the summer sun's warmth once more! to get away from this Arctic frost, this wild man's existence! Oh! you shall not refuse me;" his claw-like hand tightened on the other's shoulder.

"Let me see my daughter, Eva!" he pronounced the name lingeringly; "let me feel her arms around me but once, and then I am content to die."

He gazed entreatingly at the hard, unmoved face, but seeing no pity there, covered his face again with his hand, and was turning away. He who had called himself Harold Mornington stood deep in thought, but when he spoke, the first words killed the look of hope in the other.

"You plead in vain, Harold Mornington," he said, in cold measured tones. "My oath is sacred to the dead, and it was to relax not one jot of my vengeance against you, and you accursed Morningtons. Your daughter is the only one I will spare, and I have spared her because of her likeness to the woman I loved." If his voice trembled for a moment, it continued as sternly as before: "One boon I am disposed to grant you. On certain conditions, you may see your daughter."

"Quick! name them!" With hope again in his face, Harold Mornington approached the speaker.

"I know you well, and I know that your word once given will not be broken. Now, listen. Give me your word of honour to return with me to England as a chance acquaintance, to reveal yourself to no single person, to go nowhere without my permission, to return here after seven days, and you may come with me to see your daughter."

The other's face fell as he answered in despairing tones: "These are cruel terms. You would have me look upon my daughter and meet her as a stranger. It would be torture; oh, have pity!" he besought. "You say that in the eyes of God you are my brother. As such, spare me."

The other's eyes flashed and his nostrils quivered. "Remind me not of that," he cried, passionately, "or I may withdraw my offer. You appeal more to my hatred than to my pity, when you remind me of the father whose sole legacy to me was a mother's broken heart, and the ban of illegitimacy. Do you accede to my terms or not?"

"I accept your offer," cried the other, after a moment's silent thought. "Come what may, I will go with you to England and look for once into my daughter's face before I die."

Chapter XIX

The Stranger Guest.

Back to England, to the drawing-room at Lowndes Square, where, half an hour before dinner-time, Maud Langton sat alone reading a letter from her lover. It was not a cheerful one, for it was written soon after Dane's death, and announced that fact, together with the writer's intention of returning immediately. But the latter news was almost sufficient to compensate for its cheerless tone. She read it through two or three times, and then with a sigh put it away. She had scarcely done so before Miss Mornington entered.

"Why, Maud! I had no idea that you were dressed and down already. Jane said that you had a headache, and were lying down in your room."

"So I had, but it has gone off."

"Is there anything wrong about me that you are staring so," asked Miss Mornington, laughing; "or, perhaps, you do not like my new dress?"

"On the contrary, I was thinking how particularly nice you looked," replied Maud, admiringly. Eva was dressed in black, with scarcely any ornament except one red camellia in her corsage; but perhaps nothing else that she could have chosen would have suited her so well. There was an unusual glow in her cheeks and a sparkle in her eyes, brought on, no doubt, by a canter in the Park. Gossips might have said, however, that her few minutes' interview with a certain person whom she had met riding home, might have had something to do with this, and they might have been in some measure right. But the certain person was not Lord Dereham.

She laughed at Maud's compliment.

"Thanks. I am glad to hear it; for I have made up my mind to captivate this mysterious Mr. Viccars, or whatever his name is, whom papa has brought home with him. Have you seen him yet?"

There was no time for an answer, as the door opened, and Mr. Mornington entered, followed by a stranger. It was a tall, slight man, middle-aged, whose countenance was partly concealed by an enormous pair of green goggles.

Mr. Mornington saluted his daughter with more affection than usual, and shook hands with Maud, and then presented his companion.

"Mr. Viccars, this is my daughter Eva. Mr. Viccars is an old friend of mine, Eva, and I am glad for you to know him." More formally introducing Maud, he stood aloof to talk with her for a few minutes, watching his guest furtively with keen glances all the time.

Miss Mornington had offered her hand with a smile to the guest. As their fingers touched, she noticed that he was regarding her with such peculiar earnestness that the conventional phrase she had formed, died away on her lips, and she felt confused. His hand, was trembling violently, and she could not help but see that the trembling had passed, like an electric shock, through

all his frame. She made some commonplace observation, to which he answered in a low tone.

The lines on his forehead were deep and plentiful, and the bowed head and subdued manner were suggestions of some great grief. It was pity for him, no doubt, which caused her heart suddenly to leap, and her pulse to quicken, and a trembling, slighter but similar to that vibrating him, overran her. When he spoke again it was in clearer tones, although still quietly.

"I am happy to meet you, Miss Mornington," he said. "Your father has often talked to me about you in Canada."

"Indeed?" said Eva, with a momentary surprise. The colossal footman threw open the door, and planting himself by its side, announced dinner was on the table. Being such a small party, what conversation there was was necessarily general; and it soon became apparent, from the few remarks of Mr. Viccars, that he had been absent for many years; and, farther, that his latter ones had not been spent among his equals—to judge, at least, from numerous petty omissions and errors in the etiquette of the table. That he was a gentleman, though, both by birth and education, Miss Mornington did not for a moment doubt. There are many little tricks and mannerisms, the complete knowledge of which is, by some people, accepted as a proof of gentlemanly breeding. But, although Mr. Viccars drank his sherry out of a port glass, and seemed for a moment ignorant of the use of a finger-glass; although his hands were rough and hardened, as if with manual labour—there was that in his bearing, and the half-unconscious rectification of these mistakes, which stamped him at once to a keen observer as a patrician. Eva's curiosity concerning her father's guest did not lessen during the dinner-time, and she was actually looking forward to seeing her father alone, that she might question him as to his history. A sad one she felt it instinctively to be, and her compassion was already his before she had heard it. Strange that, as she sat in the drawing-room alone with Maud, thinking about him, there came to her an unaccountable longing to play the part of comforter; to whisper sympathy, and to soften those stern features. Then, as reflection came, she laughed at the idea as ridiculous; but, try as she would, she could not banish it. After a very short interim the two men came to them in the drawing-room, whereupon Mr. Mornington, turning to his guest, said, "I know that you will excuse me if I leave my daughter to entertain you for an hour or two. I have some important letters to write, and other matters call me."

Mr. Viccars assented with a grave bow, and in response to a smile of invitation from the young hostess, took an easy chair by her side. They chatted for a few minutes on very indifferent subjects—our ancient enemy the weather, and Eva's work—whilst Miss Langton went to the piano and began to play softly. The opportunity Miss Mornington had longed for had come now, for she was virtually alone with this mysterious visitor; but her courage had deserted her, and they sat in silence—pretending to listen to the music. The tea-tray coming in, Eva felt relieved of the oppressive silence; all the more so, as she felt Mr. Viccars was studying her all the time with no ordinary enthrallment.

"Let me give you some tea, Mr. Viccars." He accepted it, still in silence.

"Maud," but Miss Langton had left the room on some trifling pretext, really to write to Godfrey.

"Do you return to Canada?" asked Miss Mornington, stirring her tea, "or have you come back to England for good?"

Was it her fancy, or did she catch a smothered moan from him as he answered:

"I return this day week."

"So soon?" exclaimed she, taking no pains to conceal a regret she really felt. "I am sorry."

"You are very kind," he responded, with a sad smile. "Mine is not a long visit certainly."

"You must be very fond of Canada, I see. Have you lived there all your life?"

"Scarcely so long as that," he replied. "I was born in England; but circumstances induced me to settle in Canada when quite a young man; and I have no other home now," he concluded with a sigh.

"It was in Canada you met my father?" asked Eva.

"I met your father in Canada," he replied, proceeding, after a moment's pause, to say as he bent toward her: "Yours was a strange history, Miss Mornington; to grow from childhood into womanhood, practically as an orphan, and then to have a father restored to you whom you had never seen. How joyful you must have been when he returned, and how you must love him now." The young lady felt that her questioner was waiting almost with agitation for her reply. Despite her efforts, tears welled up, for these words brought back to her memory her greatest trouble. For one instant there rushed into her head to answer this stranger truly, and frankly confide in him, but she dismissed the idea as preposterous ere wholly formed, and answered evasively:

"Yes, it was a great surprise to me."

She hastened to adjust a fire-screen, ostensibly to keep back the glow, but really to hide the tears moistening her eyes. She felt no surprise or anger at thus being questioned. It was the result she was assured of a deep interest in her, and not that of idle curiosity. If he had pressed her then she might have told him the truth, but he did not pursue the strain, but kept gazing absently into the fire until at last she had to break the silence.

"Tell me something about your home in Canada, Mr. Viccars. Do you live in a town, or have you farms there?"

He smiled bitterly, as well the poor exile might.

"There is nothing concerning my home that you would care to hear about," he said. "I live in the wild country, alone. I would rather talk about England."

But Eva did not heed him.

"Alone? Are you not married, then?" she asked timidly.

"I am a widower," he answered, almost as if he resented the question; but the lady would not be warned.

"Have you no children, at least?" she continued.

The china ornament which Mr. Viccars was handling fell with a crash to the floor, and a terrible spasm of agony passed across his face, leaving it whiter than ever, and behind those hideous goggles she even fancied she could see tears sparkle.

"Oh, forgive me," she said gently; "I ought not to have been so thoughtless."

"It was not your fault," he said; "your words stirred up memories, to think of which is very painful. I had two children; they are dead—to me," he muttered in a tone which did not reach her.

"My daughter was not unlike you," he went on dreamily; "she would have been just your age." Eva's eyes were swimming with sympathetic tears, but fortunately Miss Langton entered. With an effort, both the weepers concealed

their agitation, and talked on more quietly, Mr. Viccars telling the ladies anecdotes of Canadian life, quaintly expressed, to which they listened with gusto, till Mr. Mornington joined them. The evening was soon over.

The next day Miss Mornington saw little of the newcomer. They met, indeed, at breakfast, but immediately after, Mr. Mornington and his guest left the house together, and did not return until dinner-time. Immediately that was over, Mr. Mornington had to go to the House of Commons, whither Mr. Viccars accompanied him, and had the pleasure of listening to one of Mr. Mornington's most successful speeches. Those who followed it closely, remarked to one another on the first symptoms of nervousness which they had ever detected in Mr. Mornington, and speculated as to the cause of it. Closer observers still might have noticed that these symptoms dated from the moment that the speaker, having concluded his opening sentence (which was remarkably well received), cast a rapid glance up to the distinguished strangers' gallery: His eyes met those of Mr. Viccars, who had for a moment withdrawn his spectacles, and, something in the set white face, its eyes riveted upon him, discomposed him, for he hesitated. During the rest of his speech, successful though it was, there were occasional nervous interludes, from which as a rule, he was singularly free. When the debate was over, Mr. Viccars met him in the vestibule, but he did not congratulate him on his speech, passing out with him in silence.

The two men were stepping into the brougham together, when Mr. Viccars, as if a sudden thought had struck him, drew back.

"If you will excuse me," he said, "I should prefer to walk home."

Mr. Mornington consented, and the carriage rolled away with the master home, whilst Mr. Viccars followed in the same direction on foot.

He walked slowly, casting many curious glances around him as if doubtful as to his whereabouts, and suddenly stopped and slowly retraced his steps until he stood on Westminster Bridge. Half-way across he paused, and, entering one of the recesses, leant over the parapet, gazing into the black muddy river below, and watching the long reflections from the riverside lamps shining on the water.

"Back in England again," he murmured. "How strange it all seems—more like a wild dream than reality. Sometimes I fancy it must be one, and that I shall wake up and find myself in my cabin alone. What a fiend that man is!" He shuddered. "Even this visit to England is only a climax of torture. How he flaunts his wealth, his position, his successes before me! He might enjoy them all, though," he continued, sighing bitterly, "if he had only left me my children." He listened to the dull splash of the water beating against the parapets. "He is a fiendish torturer; to sit in the same room as my daughter, to see those gentle eyes shining with pity, which at one word from me would change to love. Although my heart is bursting with a passionate longing, it must be bound by that sacred oath, as well as by every consideration of expediency, not to reveal me as her father. And then in six short days to leave her for ever and go back to my lonely life, with that sweet face a souvenir before me." With a choking sob his head sank upon his arms, which he had folded on the stone ledge.

Great statesmen have lingered on that bridge early in the morning; flushed with triumphs and excitements, or goaded with failures and difficulties, they have poured forth their silent thoughts to those muddy black waters. For there is a charm about the solitude of night in a place which from daybreak to sunset is thronged with eager hurrying crowds, and strings of vehicles, which appeals strangely to the senses and tempts one to linger. A soft rain had commenced to

fall, and the policeman, who had watched the lonely figure with curiosity each time he had passed, on his beat, was beginning to have suspicions about him. Just as he had made up his mind to bid him move on, however, he saw that another man was talking to him, and he pursued his beat without interfering.

As Mr. Viccars was standing there, wrapped in his sad thoughts, another person indeed accosted him. This man was walking rapidly over the bridge. He was young and wore a long ulster buttoned up to his throat; he was carrying an unopened umbrella, and smoking a cigarette, serenely unconscious of the soaking rain. As he would have passed the man leaning over the wall, he looked at him in surprise, paused, and, after a moment's deliberation, diverted his steps and touched Mr. Viccars lightly on the arm.

"Pardon me, sir," said he in pleasant tones, as, with a violent start, Mr. Viccars faced him; "but it struck me that possibly you, like myself, were addicted to brown studies, and had overlooked the fact that it is raining. Indeed, you are quite wet," he continued, touching the other's coat. "If you are going my way, perhaps you will share my umbrella?"

Mr. Viccars was scanning the stranger with a half puzzled, half agitated expression.

"You are very kind," he said; "I certainly had not noticed the change in the weather."

He looked up at the black sky and at the lamps already veiled.

"If you are going in the direction of Lowndes Square, I shall be glad to accept your offer."

"That is not far out of my way." The two walked off together.

"Do you smoke?" asked the younger one.

Mr. Viccars accepted the cigarette offered him. As he leaned forward to light it from the end of his companions, the latter started.

"Halloa! surely I have seen you before somewhere!" he cried. "I seem to recognise your face."

"It is not at all likely," replied the older man. As if farther to protect himself from the rain, he buttoned up his coat collar to his chin.

"I must be mistaken, I suppose," said the young man slowly, with a puzzled look at the green spectacles.

"Evidently."

There was a silence which Mr. Viccars broke.

"You say you also are addicted to brown studies? Surely one so young as you are has no great trouble to absorb his thoughts." He looked keenly through his glasses at his companion, whose knitted brow and downcast look told a different tale.

"We all have troubles, young and old," he said at last with a sigh. "I daresay I am not without my share."

"Might one venture to inquire the nature of your particular trouble?" asked the elder, awaiting the answer with some eagerness.

His companion looked surprised at this, and drew himself up proudly. "You can scarcely expect me to discuss my affairs with a perfect stranger, sir," accompanying the words with a look which showed that he considered the question intrusive.

"I beg your pardon," said the other, sincerely; it was merely upon impulse that I asked the question, and from no idle curiosity—an impulse I regret having yielded to."

"Say no more about it," replied the younger man, mollified; "but here is your turning, and I must wish you good night."

"May I ask," said Mr. Viccars, "to whom I am indebted for my escape from a wetting?"

The other laughed. "Really it is not worth while, sir. Good-night;" but Mr. Viccars detained him.

"Will you—I ask it as a particular favour—give me your card?" The other stared.

"Oh, with pleasure!" Drawing out a case from his pocket, he handed a card over. Mr. Viccars read the name without any sign of interest; taking a pencil from his pocket he moved under the gas lamp and rapidly wrote a few lines upon the back of it. Then he returned to the younger man, who was watching him with considerable surprise.

"I fancy that I may be able in some degree to requite the service you have rendered me this evening, sir. But first promise me, if I give you back this card, you will not look at the words which I have written until ten minutes have elapsed."

"I promise," the young man replied.

"Then here is the card—and good-night."

Mr. Viccars was soon out of sight.

Godfrey Mornington—for it was he—looked after him before retracing his steps; bursting into a short laugh, and he said, staring at the card which he held in his hand, although he did not attempt to read the words, "A regular adventure."

He took out his watch; it was twenty minutes past twelve.

"It must be some quiz; but yet I can't help thinking I've seen that man's face before. Where, I can't imagine." He spent the next ten minutes in vainly trying to recollect of whom his chance acquaintance reminded him. Then the half-hour chimed from a neighbouring church, and comparing the chime with his watch, he found that the time had more than elapsed. Stepping underneath a gas-lamp, he drew the card from his pocket and read these few pencil words scribbled across it:

"Your trouble is imaginary if you can prove it so. You are legitimate. One who knows, but who can give you no proof. Never seek him, for he is powerless to help you."

"I knew it," he cried triumphantly, half aloud, as he strode along towards his lodgings, flourishing the card. "But who in the name of wonder can this man be who knew me and knows my history?"

The more he wondered the more he grew confused; for, try as he would, recollection would not come to him. So fully occupied in his thoughts was he that he had quite forgotten again about the rain, and when he reached his lodgings was wet through. Instead of going at once to sleep he sat on the bed, thinking of the events of the evening, until a violent shivering seized him and then he got under cover. When he awoke the next morning, after a restless night, he was in a high fever, and the doctor hastily summoned looked grave as he marked the symptoms. Well he might, for it was months before Godfrey left that little room.

Chapter XX

The Voice of Nature.

It was the last evening of Mr. Viccar's stay.

His host had been indefatigable in taking him everywhere to see the lions, and in introducing him to all the great men, but Mr. Viccars appeared to take but little interest in anything. As she watched his manner, Miss Mornington wondered more and more what connection there was between her father and his guest to render the former so anxious to entertain him. That it was not friendship she felt assured, for Mr. Viccars seldom addressed his host unless obliged, and then only in cold formal tones, little akin to those of friendship. Mr. Mornington, too, seemed to shrink from solitary intercourse with his guest, and furthermore to be possessed of a very fever to show off his wealth and importance, altogether foreign to his nature. This also surprised Eva in no little degree. Who this mysterious Mr. Viccars was, and how came her father to be interlinked with him, were questions she was never tired of asking herself; not out of pure curiosity, but genuine interest, for Mr. Viccars, although not familiar, seemed suggestive with memories, and she caught herself often wondering how he would look without those disfiguring glasses. His iciness had not been extended to her, and on those few occasions, when they were together, they had had long talks. Her interest in him was by no means lessened when he let fall one day that he had known her mother, and by his agitation Eva decided that he must have loved her. Perhaps, she thought, this was the secret of his inclination to her, an idea not altogether pleasing her. Her feelings for him had grown rapidly, and were enhanced by the vague sense of his being no stranger. His haughtiness and reserve attracted her fancy, perhaps the more so because to her alone did he unbend and talk kindly, even affectionately, of her mother. At such moments her sympathy all but forced her to speak her inmost thoughts, but to a stranger, and one who had come but to go away in a week—absurd!

The last night of his visit had come.

There was to be a grand dinner-party, got up hastily for his delectation. Miss Mornington sorely regretted that her chances of a final tête-à-tête with the mysterious guest were slight. Fortune favoured her, though, for when she descended into the drawing-room fully an hour before any guests would arrive, Mr. Viccars was already there.

"You are early," she said, with a smile. They sat near the fire.

"I am glad to have the opportunity of saying good-bye to you, Miss Mornington," he said.

"Then you are really going to-morrow? Can you not spare us a day or two longer?"

His face darkened.

"You are very good," he replied, "but it is not possible. I must go. I shall never see England again. Miss Mornington"—his cold tone became earnest—"this last week has seemed strangely unreal to me." He fixed his eyes upon her. "And you are Harold Mornington's daughter?" There was again a peculiar inflection in his

tones, half of tenderness, half of sarcasm: "Fortunate man to have such a daughter!"

His hearer felt that she was being keenly watched through those green glasses.

"How he must love you." He paused as if he expected an answer.

She forced a laugh.

"Of course he does. English fathers generally do love their daughters."

"All fathers do," almost groaned Mr. Viccars with peculiar emphasis. "And how you must love him!—alone in the world all those years, and then to find a father to love you. No wonder you love him so devotedly." His feverish expectation bewildered her.

"Mr. Viccars, why are you saying such strange things to me?" she said, almost crying. "It is not kind of you. Of course my father loves me, and I love him" She brought out the last assertion boldly, but after a hesitation.

"Tell me, Eva," he said suddenly, "in your girlish days, when they told you that you had a father, a wanderer in a strange land, did you not conjure up to yourself some idea as to what he would be like if he ever returned to you?"

She nodded reluctantly.

"And did you not love him, or rather his image, passionately? and were you not prepared when he returned to you, to lavish upon him all the affection which you had stored up sacred for him during your girlhood?"

Again Eva half-fearfully assented.

"Tell me, child, when he came back to you"—he caught hold of her hand and held it firmly, that he might keep her facing him—"when he came back, did he fulfil your dreams? Tell me."

The grasp on her hand tightened until she nearly screamed with pain.

"Have you given him all that love that you had treasured? Tell me, have you done this?"

All his coldness was gone as he awaited for her answer. The words of reproof which Eva intended to speak perished on her pale lips, and she felt a choking in her throat, and the tears rushing to her eyes. Try as she would the words would not come, although she felt that every moment she delayed was giving colour to the denial which apparently he wished to gain: It was only tears in lieu of words, as she flung herself back on the sofa with her handkerchief to her eyes, sobbing bitterly. Her distress was a sufficient answer to the question Mr. Viccars forced upon her, and he pursued the subject no longer.

"Forgive me," he said gently, in his former quiet tone. "I fear I alarmed you by my vehemence. Come, come, dry your eyes, I want to ask you a favour before your guests arrive."

She sat up, trying to be indignant and failing completely.

"I told you that I had a daughter once—like you," he said. "I have no likeness of her—will you give me one of yours that I may think of her and you at the same time when I look at it?"

"I will give you one," said Eva, going to take one out of the album, which she gave him. He put it in his pocket and thanked her.

"Are you never coming to England again, Mr. Viccars?" she asked.

"Never," he said, with anguish in his face.

"May I ask you something, Mr. Viccars?" He assented, though uneasily.

"I suppose it must be my fancy, but somehow you seem familiar to me. Have I ever seen you before, anywhere, say, when I was a little girl?"

"We met for the first time under your father's roof," was the grave reply. "I had looked forward to seeing you—in fact, I longed to do so," he added, "for her sake and now I have seen you, and I shall think of you often and love you too," he added in a subdued tone, "for your own sake."

There came the sound of a carriage arriving, followed quickly by another, and another. Eva moved toward the door. As she passed Mr. Viccars, she was irresistibly moved, and, bending down, she kissed him on the forehead. "For her sake," she whispered in his last words.

"God bless you, my child!" The next moment he was listening, quite coldly, to Mr. Mornington's apology for his late appearance.

The dinner went off remarkably well. Perhaps on no previous occasion had Mr. Mornington combined so successfully the parts of a brilliant talker and attentive host. The conversation never languished, and if for a moment it flagged, some trenchant remark or original witticism from the host's end of the table soon revived it.

"Wonderful man, our host," said Mr. Viccar's neighbour to him after the ladies had retired. "One of the lucky ones, too. Scarcely been in the House two years, and yet safe of a post in the next Cabinet." The speaker sank into momentary gloom, repining for his many years of public life still unrewarded.

"Old friend of yours, is he not?" he continued.

Mr. Viccars affected not to hear, and to be completely occupied in extracting the core of a pear with his dessert-knife. His neighbour, however, repeated the question.

"I have known Mr. Mornington some time," he answered coldly; but Parliamentarians are questioners indefatigable.

"Might have a peerage, if he liked," he remarked confidentially, as he commenced cracking some nuts.

"I trust that he will never accept it," said Mr. Viccars hastily, and regretted his speech as soon as uttered.

"Eh? why?" asked his neighbour, suspending his operations with the nutcrackers and gazing with astonishment at Mr. Viccars.

"Because he appears so useful in the Lower House," was the answer, readily given, but which did not appear to satisfy the destroyer of Barcelonas.

"Hum!" he ejaculated; "with a peerage his social position would be wonderfully improved."

"I think not," said Mr. Viccars quietly. "Were I Mornington I would not change my name for any brand-new peerage."

He rose and moved several places up the table, apparently to address Lord Dereham, whom he had met before and liked.

"Queer sort!" ruminated the evaded Parliamentary acquaintance of Mr. Mornington, as he filled a consolatory glass; "wonder who he is?"

When the gentlemen adjourned to the drawing-room Mr. Viccars saw that it would be impossible for him to exchange another private word with Miss Mornington, so he settled himself down in obscurity in a recess, where Mr. Mornington, having presented him to a few of his principal guests, seemed quite content to let him remain. A foreign ambassador, whose breast glittered with orders, and a Cabinet minister were standing at Eva's chair, while Mr. Mornington was listening with polite sympathy to a duchess's tales of dear Gus' adventures at Eton, and "Alec's misfortune at being plucked" at Sandhurst, "through no fault of his own, dear boy." Lord Dereham had been captured

victim by a vivacious little French woman, who was boring him beyond endurance, but who chatted away sublimely unconscious or indifferent to the fact that her good-looking companion was savagely biting the ends of his moustachios and casting furtive glances toward the quarter where Eva was installed.

Soon a famous singer was announced, and the buzz of conversation lulled for a moment as the first chords of the accompaniment were struck. She who sang was one whose name was a household word, and all listened as if entranced, and when the song was over were loud in their congratulations. All except Mr. Viccars, who knew not of the magic of her name, and heard in her voice, the glory of which had long passed away, nothing but a luckily unusual combination of power and discord. Then there were other songs, from noble and distinguished amateurs who had no power and much discord; and, towards the close of the evening, when most of the notables had made their bow and departed to show at some reception or look in at a dance, Miss Mornington rose to sing at Lady Stowell's particular request. There was a difficulty; Miss Langton was absent indisposed, and she always played Eva's accompaniments.

"Could any one else oblige?"

There was no response, and to the universal regret the expected pleasure seemed likely to fall through, when Mr. Viccars came out from his corner and modestly volunteered. The singer looked surprised, but handed him the song, an Italian air with an exceedingly difficult accompaniment. He performed it almost faultlessly.

"Will you sing one for me?" he asked in an undertone when the mingling of plaudits and "thanks so much" had subsided. Eva handed him her portfolio.

"You may choose one," she said.

He looked them through, rapidly throwing them aside carelessly one after another, until he came nearly to the end.

"Sing this one, please!" He placed it on the stand and struck the chords of the accompaniment. It was a simple German ballad called »Der Herumstreicher«, a very sweet but very melancholy Wanderer.

Long before it was concluded, Eva felt a lump rising in her throat, and the notes coming with difficulty as she unconsciously applied the words she sang to the player of the accompaniment. As they reached the last verse, where the Wanderer returns to look upon his early home and dies before he can reach the village up in the mountains from which he can see the old familiar scenes, she ventured for the first time to look down at him. Standing behind him, she could see tears between his eyes and the green spectacles, and his lips quivering with emotion. Her nerves were already overwrought, and she brought the song to an abrupt conclusion, turning from the piano with some half-uttered excuse which suddenly died away from her lips. She sank upon a chair and gave way to a fit of hysterical weeping, to the utter bewilderment and concern of the remaining guests.

Her maid was hastily summoned, and Mr. Mornington, with a heavy frown on his face, helped to apply the usual remedies. No one noticed that during the confusion Mr. Viccars had slipped quietly from the room. The first signs of Eva's recovering consciousness—for she had fainted—was the signal for the dispersal of the guests.

"I thought you were above such weakness as this, Eva," said her father, sternly. "I trust that it will not occur again!" With a cold salute, he turned away and left her to her maid, who helped her to her room.

Chapter XXI

The First Stroke.

Another two years have elapsed since Mr. Viccar's very brief visit to England. He who was still known as Harold Mornington sat alone in his splendid library, reading with interest the evening papers just delivered. On the preceding day there had been an important division on some question of foreign policy; a vote of censure had been proposed, and perhaps the most powerful speech in its favour, and certainly the most applauded, was Mr. Mornington's. Contrary to expectation, the vote had been carried, and by a majority, too, which left no other course open to the Premier than to tender his resignation. There was no doubt as to its being accepted; for the Government, by blunders abroad and inertia in home affairs, had become unpopular. Mr. Mornington felt, as he eagerly scanned the papers, that the time had at last come when her Majesty's Government would include him in the Cabinet.

There was little exultation in his face despite this fact; if anything, the hard lines were a little harder than usual, and his brow a little more furrowed. For it was known, and commented upon, that neither parliamentary successes nor social triumphs afforded him one particle of evident pleasure. His acquaintances—he had no friends—would look dubious when Harold Mornington's name was mentioned, and acknowledge among themselves that he was an enigma, the key to which none of them possessed. Whether his many years of exile—presumably unhappy ones, for he never mentioned them—had warped his feelings and stunted his affections, or whether his seeming indifference was merely a natural peculiarity, was a matter for diverse opinions. But all agreed that he was apparently a man of iron, whose control over his feelings, if he possessed any, was so perfect that neither success nor failure could elate or depress him, and also that he was a man of great ability and deep intellect, for whom there was a great future in the political world. To his family, and those with whom he was brought into every-day contact, he was not less a mystery than to the outside world.

Eva alone knew that it lay within her power to make him unbend, to win smiles from his dark countenance, and loving glances from his cold eyes; but it was a power she could not use. Affection to be genuine must be altogether spontaneous, and Eva felt that to love her father would be an impossibility, although she strove by every means in her power to please and obey him. It was no small trial to her that the love which she would have wished to bestow upon her father she could not command. She prayed for it, hoped that it would come in time, but at the bottom of her heart lay the firm conviction that no amount of praying or longing would awaken what lay dormant. She had no confidant in her trouble save Maud Langton; and she, hating the man as she did for his wrongs to Godfrey, spared no pains to convince Eva that the love which did not come of itself should not be offered, a forced and unnatural offering. Gradually

Eva had become of her opinion, and had ceased to discuss with her father any but the most general subjects; she trembled when alone with him.

The secret of Godfrey's supposed quarrel with him had never been revealed to her; indeed, excepting Maud and Mr. Woodruff, no other person knew of it. She wondered at its long continuance, but felt herself powerless to interfere, as her father refused to discuss the matter with her, and Godfrey she saw but seldom. Perhaps, had she known the truth, her remorse would have been less.

To the pseudo-Mornington, weary of his lonely life and loveless surroundings, Eva's love would have been a priceless boon. Every throb of his heart not absorbed in a fierce remembrance of his family's wrongs, and his terrible vengeance, was full of a passionate affection for her, who was the image of the woman he had loved and lost in the days of his youth. He saw too plainly that his feeling was not returned, but all the same he did not give up all hopes of winning it in the future. Logical as he was in all things, he argued that their constant association as father and daughter would some day kindle the spark of an affection which time and his kindness should fan into a blaze. But a woman's heart is the one thing that logic does not rule. She loves because she loves, and no attendant circumstances, no constant associations can ever win from her what is not freely and spontaneously given. A man can undertake no more hopeless task than to win the heart of a woman when it is withheld by seeming caprice, or perhaps by unreasonable dislike.

"Why should she not love me?" is a question that it profits little to ask; for although you may be a Rothschild in wealth, and an Adonis in appearance, you may yet fail to win the heart of the simplest country maiden. For she, if she be a true woman, will love you not for your wealth or appearance, not even for your good qualities, but simply because there is between you and her some affinity indefinable and inexplicable, which constitutes the bond called love.

Harold Mornington was busy with his thoughts to-night. Not often did he suffer them to lead him back to the past, but they were at this moment beyond his control, and the newspaper slipped from his hands as he leant back in his easy chair and gave himself up to meditation. He thought of his earliest childhood's days, in that quiet little country town—the only days of happiness he had ever known—before the sad history of his mother's wrongs and his own disgrace had been revealed to him. He recalled the dim memories of his mother, with her sweet but unhappy face; unhappiness which he was at that time too young to understand. And then he thought of that awful day when the little house was invaded by men dressed in black, and he was told that he would never see his mother again. And then of his boyhood days, under the care of the old bachelor lawyer, long since dead and forgotten, and of that memorable day, on which his wrongs had been told him. Then they went back further still, when his mother was still alive, to one day when he had seen her with a fierce look in her gentle eyes, and heard her bitter curse on the name of Mornington.

And he thought of his oath to revenge his mother's wrongs and his own; how he had insisted upon the whole of his little fortune being devoted to keeping him at college; and how, with that dread purpose at his heart, he met Harold Mornington and sought his friendship; and how his dark ideas had been blended and focussed together to form the purpose of his life; and how well that purpose had been effected; and how skilfully he had moulded circumstances to obtain his end. And then he thought with pitilessness of that Canadian log cabin with its scanty furniture and dreary surroundings, where lived the man

who had become the victim of his revenge. Almost he fancied to himself as he sat before his cheerful fire that he could see his miserable victim crouching over the feeble blaze, shuddering, and trying vainly to escape from the cruel cold; almost that he could see before him that white pinched face with the sad, haunting look; that once proud, erect form now bent and debilitated by privation; almost that he could hear the icy wind moaning through the tree-tops as they together so often had heard it.

Then he thought of Eva, and his face softened. He planned new devices for winning her love, and repeated to himself all the well-worn arguments to convince him that some day it would be his.

Godfrey's face eclipsed the girl's, and in that darkness his face became shaded and stern again, and the old pitiless expression returned as he thought of this other victim of his revenge;—thought of the young man wandering in foreign countries, robbed of his position, and separated from the girl he loved, living a vague, purposeless life, blighted by the stigma which he could not disprove. He laughed.

At this point his meditations were disturbed by an important, insolent ringing of the bell, and immediately afterwards his servant handed him an official-looking letter just delivered by special messenger. He broke the seal hastily and read. It was from his chief, and contained great news. The Premier had offered his resignation to the Queen, and it had been immediately accepted; and, further, the communication went on to say that he, the writer, had that hour received an Imperial summons to attend her Majesty at Windsor—one which could bear but one interpretation.

"In the event of my being able to form an Administration, I trust that I may reckon upon your services in the Cabinet; in what capacity will be a matter for future consideration. I shall be glad to hear from you at once, as to whether you will be free to accept office."

This was the concluding paragraph. A deep flush suffused Mr. Mornington's face, and the letter dropped from his hand—a flash of triumph, and yet of regret.

"What I have won," he muttered to himself, "by means of his name and his position. Would to God it were mine in reality."

He stooped to pick up the important epistle, but as he drew himself upright again a sudden dizziness came over him, and he stumbled. He struck the gong blindly, which stood on his writing-table. When his servants rushed in, it was to find their master doubled up in a heap upon the floor, struck down by paralysis.

Confusion for a few minutes reigned supreme. Bells were rung, and servants ran hither and thither in bewilderment. In less time than could have been supposed possible, a doctor's brougham dashed up to the door, and the first physician in London was bending over the prostrate form. Hour after hour passed away, and ever the stricken man's life hung by a thread. Trembling with excitement, but calm with a potent fear, Eva stood by the sofa, watching the lifeless form with a bitter regret, and glancing at the physician's inscrutable face for encouragement.

Night fled before morning, and the dull grey light shone gloomily through the chinks of the venetian blinds into the darkened room, but in the street the

usual early morning cries commenced. Then, for the first time, there came a slight change, and the physician whispered softly to Eva that there was hope. They carried him up to his rooms, and other physicians were hastily summoned to a consultation, carried on in whispers in the ante-chamber.

All through the long day they scarcely left his side, for life ebbed and flowed until it seemed as if a breath might turn it. Toward evening again came signs of another change, and the physicians gathered round his bedside with anxious faces, for the next few seconds would decide for life or for death. He opened his eyes, and cast a restless glance around, until they fell upon Eva; thereupon he smiled faintly and parted his lips.

They beckoned her to draw near to the bedside. She did so, and seizing his hand, which hung over the coverlet, pressed it fondly. He opened his eyes once more, and gazed at her with a loving, satisfied smile, and in a few minutes later had fallen asleep.

"He will do now," whispered Dr. Northern, one of the physicians.

Soon afterwards the others withdrew, leaving him alone with his patient and Eva. In obedience to a gesture, she followed him into the ante-chamber.

"We may congratulate ourselves, Miss Mornington," said the doctor, kindly, "that all immediate danger is over; the crisis which we were dreading is safely passed, and the natural sleep into which he has fallen will save his life."

"Thank God!" breathed the lady, earnestly.

"Now, as to the nursing. I fear the illness may be a long one, and his recovery very slow. I had better send you two nurses from the hospital at once. In fact, you had better let one of your servants take a note while I wait here." He scribbled a few lines on a leaf torn out of his pocket-book.

"I should like to nurse him myself," said Eva.

The doctor smiled dissent.

"That is quite impossible," he said. "It will be necessary to have trained nurses, and you are inexperienced. Still, of course, you can help," he added as he saw how disappointed she looked, "and sit with him as long as you like, by all means. He naturally would like you to be near. Let me send this note round." He rang the bell.

"I really must insist upon your taking some rest at once." He opened the door for her to pass out, and, having given his note in charge of a servant, returned into the sick room.

The next day Eva entered upon her self-imposed task of head nurse, and she soon became indispensable in the sick room, for Mr. Mornington would take nothing except from her hands, and when she was absent he was restless. This soon became apparent to Dr. Northern, and he encouraged Eva in her desire to be the sick man's constant companion. She, for her part, welcomed with avidity the idea of rendering service to one whom she imagined she had deeply wronged by withholding her love. She therefore applied herself heart and mind to the dull routine of sick nurse. Maud Langton helped her occasionally, though in her heart she could not stifle the enmity she felt for the man who had ruined her own and Godfrey's happiness.

These last two years, by the way, Eva had spent very quietly, nearly all the time in town, for her father appeared to have taken an unexplained dislike to Mornington, and he had revisited it but once since they moved to London.

One event had happened which had caused her much pain.

Lord Dereham had proposed, and been refused. He did not press her for her reasons, but accepting his fate he left her with composure. She heard of him as being in far-away countries; shooting in the Rocky Mountains was the last story, and she knew that it was not love of sport which kept him away from his country. Other offers Eva had had, but they gave her little pain in declining, which she did in so decisive a manner that the whisper ran that Miss Mornington, although beautiful, was farouche.

George Hastings "the ferocious lady" still saw and often, although of late his visits had become rarer, as if he were avoiding her, and he had been embarrassed when they met. She felt this seeming neglect keenly, for Hastings was a man whom any one would trust, and he had been her confidant in her great trouble concerning her father. That he should slight her friendship, when by her confidence she had given him such proofs of it, pained her, and on the few occasions on which she saw him her manner also was cold and restrained.

The two years had brought but little change to him.

He worked a little harder, if anything, and was vigorously taking up the cause of the condition of his favourite subjects—the poor of London. His name began to be noised abroad as a zealous working philanthropist, and was seen on many a committee whose duties were no sinecure; and, under initials, headed many a subscription list.

His sermons were more carefully primed than formerly, but none the less appreciated by a certain class of church-goers. He was much more orthodox, and therefore not so popular; at least his popularity was as an earnest and devout preacher of God's word, and no longer that of a daring and eloquent enthusiast spurning the bonds of orthodoxy, and he could not but acknowledge to himself that the present popularity was that best worth having.

His friends had recently noticed with anxiety that a change had come over him. It was as if he had suddenly experienced a great blow, robbing him of animation and happiness, and leaving him inert and wretched; and they, noticing and commenting upon his dejected appearance, suggested medical advice, although the far-seeing ones well knew that the symptoms were those of a mental, and not bodily ailment. He made light of his ailing looks when questioned, and returned careless answers, but friends shook their heads gravely, and sorrowed for his pale face and listless manner. None noticed and regretted the change more than Miss Mornington, although in the face of his altered manner to her she could do no more than remark casually upon it. Secretly she longed to hear his trouble and sympathise with him, but she was proud, and felt that she herself couldn't break down the barrier between them, which his coldness had created, although she marvelled at and lamented its presence.

Formerly her encouragement and sympathy had seemed everything to him, and he had eagerly availed himself of her practical aid in his charitable schemes; but now, when they met, he took obvious pains never to depart from the routine of every-day conversation—why, she could not imagine—and it wounded her more deeply than she herself perhaps altogether realised. Still she accepted his altered manner in silence, and hers was always a perfect counterpart of his.

About a week after the commencement of Mr. Mornington's illness, the Rev. Mr. Hastings called, and as it was just at the time when Eva could best be spared from the patient's room, she saw him. The door of the morning-room,

where he had been shown was half open, and Eva, being in slippers, was almost upon him before he knew that she had entered. Seeing him for a moment without the mask of cheerfulness which he tried hard to assume, she was shocked, almost horrified, at his appearance. He had always been delicate, but he looked now the victim of some irreparable nightmare, some horrible secret, eating the very life out of him. His cheeks were sunken, and ghastly in their pallor, and his large brown eyes, sunken deep into his head, were full of hopeless misery. He had grown thinner, too, and his clothes were falling about him loosely. In short, his whole appearance was that of a man whose days in this world were but few.

Eva could not repress a slight exclamation, and he turned round rapidly to meet her pitying gaze. He rose rapidly, a hectic colour rushing into his cheeks as their hands met, and then slowly died away, leaving them if possible paler than before.

He asked after Mr. Mornington and made inquiries on the nature of his illness, and then scarcely waiting for an answer, went on hurriedly to explain the object of his visit almost as if he feared it might be considered an intrusion.

Eva sighed and listened to his tale of the misery in the house of a sick woman whom she had often visited. She promised at once to comply with the dying woman's wish and go see her. Upon that, his mission over, Hastings would have gone. As Eva saw him, a physical wreck, with the marks of unendurable fretting about his countenance, and called to mind the difference between his former self, fired with life and hope, and this broken-down man, she felt her compassion so strong that it conquered her pride.

"Sit down for a few minutes longer, Mr. Hastings, I want to talk to you."

He hesitated, as if seeking to frame some excuse, but her firmness conquered him and he obeyed.

"It is some time since I saw you last, Mr Hastings," she resumed.

He bowed and looked at the door as if longing to escape.

"I have been much occupied," he murmured.

She was piqued, but determined.

"Your occupation does not appear to have brought you any happiness," she said, gravely. "You look very ill."

He laughed, a faint hollow laugh.

"Fancy, Miss Mornington. I am as well as usual."

"It is not fancy, Mr. Hastings, and you are not so well as usual. You look as if—as if you were in some unusual trouble. We used once to be friends," she continued feelingly, "and it grieves me that you have chosen to ignore our friendship. Have I offended you, or how is it?"

He did not answer for a moment or two, and when he did his voice was measured as if he feared to trust it.

"I have not forgotten our friendship, Miss Mornington; and it is no small regret to me that it cannot be continued," he added desperately.

"But why not?" asked Eva, surprised. "Surely there can be no obstacle?"

"There is one," he said in a hollow voice. "For pity's sake, Miss Mornington, question me no further, but let me go."

"Mr. Hastings," she said, determinedly. "I have made up my mind that you do not leave this room until you tell me what I have done that our friendship should be at an end. It may be unwomanly, you may think it bold of me thus to press you; but none the less, you do not go until you tell me."

A kind of a groan escaped him, and then he glanced up suddenly with the look of a hunted stag in his eyes.

"Tempt me not beyond endurance, Miss Mornington; for your own sake, spare me, and let me go, I say.

"For your own sake," she repeated. "I do not understand you. But you shall tell me, now that I have found courage to question you thus far, what I have done." She was almost as pale as he, and her heart was beating fast, though she was playing the hector.

"You have done nothing," he said wildly—nothing—it is I who am to blame. I will tell you all some other time; or stay, I will write you."

"You shall tell me now, or not at all, Mr. Hastings," she replied, steadily enough, although she was strangely agitated, without knowledge why.

He stopped in desperation; into his eyes flew the fire of resolution.

"You have conquered," he cried, with anguish in his tones. "Blame me not if what I say offends you, for remember, you have forced it from me!" Collecting his thoughts whilst Eva sat still, with her eyes raised to his, he began to speak calmly.

"Twelve years ago, when I left Eton for college, my father asked me to choose my future vocation. Unhesitatingly I decided for the Church—a choice that pleased him." Risen from his chair, he was pacing up and down the room.

"Say what you will," he went on, "about the glories of manhood, youth is the time when the purest ambitions and loftiest aspirations glow within us, untainted and unsullied by worldly thoughts. When I commenced to study at college for my ordination, I vowed that if I entered the Church, it would be not as others entered it, as a career, but pledged to give my whole life, my every thought, to the service of God as rigidly as ever friar or hermit of old. I vowed that no dreams of earthly advancement or temporary welfare should cause me to swerve from the rigorous course I had marked out for myself. Above all, Miss Mornington," he cried, returning to comfort her, "I devoted myself to celibacy, that no woman's face should ever for one single moment come between me and my work. For ten long years I kept my vow, and each succeeding year I grew more secure in my strength of purpose, and sterner and more severe to my less unworldly fellow-workers. For ten years I can truly say that not once have I sought the slightest relaxation, not once did I tamper with the oath I had sworn. My sole happiness has been in following the ideal life I had marked out for myself, and which even my enemies acknowledge to have been a pure one. I had grown to imagine myself invulnerable, utterly beyond the reach of temptation. Judge, then, Miss Mornington, of my present misery, when I tell you that temptation has combated me, and conquered—that I, George Hastings, the servant of God, vowed to single life, and who has never even desired happiness from earthly ties—that I have suddenly fallen, poor presumptuous being that I am, fallen to love a woman."

Eva's cheeks were aflame, and her heart beat wildly. She would have fled, but he caught hold of her wrist.

"You shall hear me out, Miss Mornington," he said, "for you forced me to begin. When I first met you I looked upon you as an earnest fellow-worker, something above the ordinary woman. Danger from your companionship I never dreaded. Fool that I was," he cried bitterly. "I had grown to consider myself secure from all temptation, but gradually there have crept upon me fears and doubts until at last I realised the cruel fact that I loved you, oh, passionately,

absorbingly—with all the devotion I had hitherto given to heaven alone! By every means in my power have I sought to crush out this mania. By prayer, by absence from you, by repeating my vow; all in vain, for wherever I go, or in whatever work I am engaged, your image is always with me, and when I should be working for my fellow-creatures I find myself idly dreaming of you."

A heart-breaking sob escaped him. Eva never spoke, never gave him one glance of sympathy; her head was turned away.

"Misunderstand me not, Miss Mornington," he went on. "I have not told you this story of my weakness to win your pity. You have a strange and fatal influence over me which I suppose is what the world calls love; and when you bid me speak, I speak."

Eva continued not to look at him, and he raised his voice again.

"I have not yet lost all hope, Miss Mornington. With the help of God, I will quench this fatal passion. I will summon all my resolution, I will pray day and night for strength to love you no longer, and if I fail—"

"And if you fail?" repeated Eva, still without looking at him.

"There are two courses open," he said. "I shall either enter the Roman Catholic Church, or go to the other end of the world as a missionary. God grant," he added fervently, "that I may not have to spend the rest of my life in unceasing remorse, and flee from temptation. God keep you, Eva Mornington," he said abruptly. She held out her hand. He took it and detained it for a moment, and then she looked up at him. Only a single glance she gave; there was that in it which brought the hot colour to his cheeks, and made his heart beat wildly. The sympathy even of the woman one loves is a dangerous thing, and George Hastings, although no student in woman's looks, could see tender pity, at least, shining in those clear blue eyes. Letting go her hand with an effort, he left the room without one backward glance. Into his head there did not enter the thought that she might return his passionate love. And yet it was so, and his words, although they had momentarily filled her with joy, left her no less miserable than himself.

Chapter XXII

A Tragedy of the Rivals.

Six weeks passed slowly away. Mr. Mornington was recovering his strength. He could sit up in his room and talk, when he cared to do so, but that was seldom, for over him came a change which awed Eva. There is always a solemn effect in the sudden weakness of a strong proud man, especially when it extends to his mental as well as physical powers. Before his illness Mr. Mornington had appeared to Eva, and indeed to every one, as a man of bronze, incapable of any weakness. It was a strange sight when Eva looked up from her book one day, to find his eyes moist, and his voice choked with sobs. Yet this often happened, and Eva felt sure that when her father resumed his every-day life it would be as a man of very changed appearance and manners. One Sunday she was sitting with him alone in the twilight, her thoughts none too happy, when he called her over to his bedside, and, raising himself on his elbow, looked at her intently.

"Eva," he said impressively, "you have some burden on your mind. What is it?" She coloured, looked down and made no reply.

"I think I can guess," he pursued. "Tell me, child, would you not be happier if you could love your father?"

The suddenness of the question—she had been expecting so different a one—completely took her by surprise, and she could not at once think of words wherewith to circumvent it.

"You need not answer, child. I know you are tender-hearted, and I will spare you the pain of replying. You do not love me, I know you don't. You have little cause, Heaven knows," he muttered to himself with a sigh.

"Don't say that," cried Eva; "you have been very kind to me." She stopped, at a loss how to proceed, and burst into tears.

He said no more, but a look of quiet resolve took the place of the restless light which had shone in his eyes so often during the progress to recovery. The next day he asked the doctor anxiously:

"How long do you think it will be before I can take a journey?"

The doctor looked grave.

"That depends," he said. "If we go on smoothly, and don't worry ourselves, I should think that we might manage to get down to Bournemouth, for example, in about ten days or a fortnight."

The invalid did not reply, but from that day began to mend far more rapidly than before.

"He's a wonderful man," said the doctor, talking over the case with a brother; "a complete example of the power of will over the workings of the human system. He wants to get well quick for some reason or other, and I'll be Pasteurized if he isn't doing it in spite of me!"

As Mr. Mornington increased in strength Eva had more time to herself, and was able to take the exercise she much needed. Her pale cheeks and listless manner did not quit her, perhaps, because they arose from other causes than confinement in the sick room. There was no one to notice it, for Maud was away visiting friends in Yorkshire, and Godfrey was in Austria, following up, fruitlessly, another false clue in his search for Cecil Braithwaite.

The first news Eva heard when she visited Lady Stowell's was, that the Rev. Mr. Hastings had accepted missionary service in China, and would be sailing in three weeks' time.

"What has driven him to do it, I can't imagine."

Lady Stowell glanced inquiringly at Eva, but the latter's face was impenetrable, and she answered at hazard.

It was only in the brougham driving home that the hot tears chased one another down her cheeks, and her heart sank within her when she thought that she had in all probability seen the clergyman for the last time.

"How could he?" she murmured to herself; "and yet how noble he is."

"And yet how selfish;" scarcely that, truth to say, for it had never entered his head that Miss Mornington might return his love. He had not tried to win it, or hinted, even before that memorable afternoon in the library, at his passion. He had never played the lover by word or by deed; and since he had known her had not uttered tender speech or fervid compliment. But she loved him, and the heart which she had refused to the handsome young peer and her other suitors had been given freely and unreservedly to this ascetic—some would have said fanatical—clergyman, who only owned his passion for her in the same breath

that he declared that no woman's love should tempt him from a career and purpose sublime, indeed, in its aspirations, but impossible in its realisation; for the life which George Hastings had vowed in boyish enthusiasm to lead was the life of a demi-god and not of a mortal.

To man is not given the qualities which alone could have guided him unscathed through the temptations he thought himself able to overcome. Yet who does not admire him who vows to accomplish a purpose so high that no human being is gifted with a sufficiency of virtue to accomplish it? Who blames the man who sets before him an ideal so lofty as to be unattainable? and who will not pity him when he recognises at last the impossibility of success, and sees the fond dreams of his ambition fall to the ground?

Admiration, reverence, pity—these deepened Eva's love, and she acknowledged to herself that if George Hastings kept his word and went to China, her happiness would go with him. Yet what was there to prevent him? Nothing Her woman's pride would not suffer her personally to remonstrate with him, although she knew that, unless something unforeseen happened, his intentions would be carried out. As day after day passed on without her seeing him, and the date of his departure drew near, Eva became more fretful and unhappy, and her pale cheeks and miserable looks began to give her friends grave anxiety.

One afternoon, only a week before the date fixed for George Hastings' departure, Eva was sitting alone in the drawing-room, when a caller was announced. It was Lord Dereham.

It was the first time they had met since her rejection, and e saw with sorrow that he was much altered. The happy careless look had died out of his eyes, and the elasticity had vanished from his frame. His face was pale, and graver than formerly. There came back the remembrance of his careless words to her at Lady Stowell's—that if ever any great sorrow happened to him it would be from her.

She cordially welcomed him, although her manner was not altogether free from embarrassment. On the other hand, he seemed to be calm as one filled by a purpose; it was a different one to that she imagined.

He talked carelessly about commonplace matters with an ease which she could not reciprocate, for she regretted he should see hers was also an altered appearance. In time Dereham, being no diplomatist, plunged through the ice and brought up the object of his visit.

"I have just come from Lady Stowell's," he said.

"Indeed? I hope she is well?"

"She is considerably upset by the sudden determination of her favourite nephew to join a missionary expedition to China. Did you know of it?"

The young lady's eyes were fixed on the ground as she answered: "I had heard that Mr. Hastings intended leaving England."

"Miss Mornington, don't be afraid that I am going to recur to what has passed between us. I know that there is no hope for me, but I want you to forget for a moment that I ever asked you to be my wife. I think you will believe me when I tell you that your happiness is very dear to me. May I, then, speak to you as a friend?"

She could do nothing but assent, although she dreaded what was coming.

"I only returned to England last week. The first news I hear is that George Hastings is leaving England—they tell me, for love of you; and then I come to

see you and find you also unhappy. May I take the liberty of the friendship which you have granted me, and ask you what this double event means?"

Miss Mornington could not say that George Hastings' departure was nothing to her, that she was not unhappy, and she could not find it in her heart to resent his kindness, so she wisely said nothing.

"It seems to me that there is some great misunderstanding between you two which ought to be and could be removed. Is that not so?"

She could think of no words with which to answer him, and so, despite herself, he won from her by degrees the whole truth.

For some time he sat in silence; then, without another word, rose to go. As he stood with outstretched hand ready to leave her, with a look of pain in his face reflecting the misery in hers, unselfish and loyal as he was he forgot for the time his own unhappiness and, thought only of the grief of the woman he loved.

Looking into his frank honest face she could not help thinking that it was something to have have a friend so loving and true, and was glad that she had shown her appreciation of her friendship by confiding in him. He went out, filled with a passionate indignation against that "fool of a parson," as he styled him, who had dared to win even unconsciously the love of such a woman as Eva only to make her the victim of his absurd scruples. He did not understand it—Was not likely that he would understand—George Hastings' dreams and his rash vow. He looked upon him as a fanatic, whose whims were the torture of the woman who loved him, and for the moment my lord felt a profound hatred for his rival, at the same that he determined that for her sake Hastings should not leave England.

He jumped into a hansom at the corner of the square, and drove straight to Hastings' lodgings in Camberwell. The cab was pulled up at one of a long row of dingy-looking houses, which presented that peculiarly cheerless and uninviting aspect of suburban residences of a certain class. At first contemplation Lord Dereham thought that he must have made a mistake, but this certainly was the address that Lady Stowell had given him, so he walked up the narrow pathway and rang the bell. A dirty looking "slavey" answered it, and in response to his question, "Is Mr. Hastings in?" expressed her ignorance on that subject by an emphatic but certainly not euphonious "dunno."

"Go and see," he said, slipping something into her hand. "Tell him that a gentleman wishes to see him."

She clattered away, and returned almost immediately.

"Please to walk upstairs; it's the fust door on the right, on the fust landing." She stood at the bottom of the staircase watching him ascend with immense wonderment.

"My heyes! what a reg'ler swell!" she ejaculated. "Half a bull too!—'Coming, missis!" and she beat a hasty retreat to the lower regions.

Dereham having reached the door to which he had been directed, knocked, and entered in answer to a hasty "Come in." He found himself in a small room, devoid of any attempts at decoration, and furnished in the barest and most unostentatious fashion. The chairs were old and rickety, and the cabinet, at which George Hastings was seated writing, was worn put and cracked, while the carpet, which only partially covered the floor, was threadbare and worn through.

Mr. Hastings rose to greet his guest with surprise, for, although they had met at Lady Stowell's, their knowledge of each other had never passed the merest

acquaintanceship. He had noticed too, and with displeasure, his visitor's evident admiration of Eva, and although at the time he was trying to persuade himself that his fondness for her was merely a brother's, yet the thought of any one else aspiring to be more than a brother had been extremely distasteful to him. This alone ought to have revealed his infatuation earlier; but none are so blind as those who will not see, and Hastings had tried to persuade himself that his dislike to Lord Dereham was merely on account of his "fast" reputation.

Therefore it was with surprise, not unmixed with annoyance, that Hastings received his visitor, and so coolly that his lordship felt that he had a truly difficult task before him.

"You are leaving us, I am sorry to hear," he said, as he took the chair to which Hastings pointed.

"It is so," was the quiet reply. "Perhaps you have heard that I have decided to accept missionary service in China; and, as we start next week, you will scarcely wonder if I tell you that I am very busy indeed," glancing at the papers open upon his cabinet. "May I ask, Lord Dereham, as my time is valuable, to what I am indebted for the honour of this visit?"

There was a brief silence, and Lord Dereham seemed somewhat undecided how to commence; with heightened colour and uncertain earnestness in his voice, which made the other look up with surprise, he spoke:

"Mr. Hastings, I am aware that we have never been very good friends, and you may perhaps think the object of my visit here a great impertinence; but I am of the opinion that you will at least give me credit for being a gentleman, and, as such, will credit my purpose in seeking you with being an altogether disinterested one, and that it is merely from consideration for yourself, and the happiness of another, that I have ventured upon a course which you may possibly deem officious."

Hastings looked mystified, but then his visitor's earnest tone and open manner carried conviction as to the sincerity of his words, and he begged him to proceed rather more graciously.

"Pardon me," Lord Dereham continued, "if for a moment I introduce my own affairs. It is necessary for me to fully explain myself. I believe that it is no secret to you that I admire Miss Mornington." He hesitated over the name; but, as if ashamed of his momentary weakness, he continued rapidly, "And I must also tell you that my suit has failed, that Miss Mornington has unhesitatingly refused me."

For his life's sake, George Hastings could not keep down the joy which seized him at these words; but there were no signs of it in his face, for the moment Eva's name passed Lord Dereham's lips his air of polite attention changed into one of haughty surprise, and his long white fingers, trembling as they played nervously with his watch-chain, were the only tokens that his altered aspect was merely the cloak for feelings of greater force.

"I am at a loss to understand, my lord, how Miss Mornington's rejection of your offer of marriage in any way concerns me."

"You should not be so," said the other. "Miss Mornington has told me that she could never give me her love, because it was already bestowed; and the happy manner in which she confessed it was a proof to me that it was either bestowed unworthily or not returned. I know that the former is not the case, as the fortunate man who has won her love is worthy of her, far more than I. Nor do I believe the latter possible."

"Who is this man?" asked Hastings, quickly, trying in vain to conceal his interest in the answer.

"You, of all men, should least ask that question," was the quiet reply.

"What do you mean?" Hastings started violently, trying no longer to conceal his agitation.

"What should I mean, except that you are the man whom Eva Mornington loves." A shade of bitterness could not be kept out of his tones.

"I-I? Oh, impossible!" There was agony in his tone, and then, as came swiftly to his mind certain recollections carrying confirmation of his visitor's words, spoken so decidedly and with such evidences of truth, he sank into his chair bewildered by the unexpected realisation of his desire.

"Nevertheless, it is true; and if you go to China next week you will leave the woman, whose happiness is my only thought, miserable. If her happiness could have been obtained by my means," he went on with a sigh, "it would have made me happy too; but since that cannot be, I must still try to secure hers. For that purpose I am here. What is there, Mr. Hastings, I entreat you to tell me, between you and Eva Mornington, that, loving one another as you do, you should wish to leave her?"

During this Hastings sat with bowed head and distressed mien, and when he looked up it was with a weary sigh.

"Lord Dereham, I must ask your pardon for having ever misjudged you. You have proved yourself both noble and unselfish; but what you hint at can never be. I am bound by an oath, the keeping of which my conscience demands, never to marry. I cannot divide my life, and I have given it altogether to my religion. I will not deny," he added, sorrowingly, "that I love Eva Mornington. I discovered it too late, and that is why I am leaving England. She will soon forget me. You may yourself yet win her."

His rival's face darkened and his eyes flashed with sudden anger.

"Mr. Hastings, you may be acting as you think your conscience dictates; you may be striving to do the right thing towards yourself, but you will pardon me if I tell you to your face that the course you intend to pursue is an abominably selfish one. You may not like it, but I repeat it, abominably selfish! What right have you to break a woman's heart for the sake of keeping a fanatical vow; for the gratification of your own ascetic vanity? What! Is Eva Mornington's heart so light a thing as to be sacrificed for your unmanly scruples and unnatural illusions?—for no other name can I find for your doctrine of celibacy. Where is your precedent for it among real men? You have none; and dare you tell me that you would be less earnest a Christian with a woman like—like that angel by your side? or is it that you are afraid that her image and association with her would drive all else from your mind? If so, why, you must be a coward, and your oath is merely a protection that you have assumed against temptation for fear it should be too strong for you. Look at all our great Churchmen," continued Lord Dereham, his anger rising and his indignation all the hotter as he felt he was not fortified for a theological discussion, "many of whom I have heard you speak of with admiration—they are all, with few exceptions, married—and many of them have wives with names only second to their husbands, in the record of those good works and social reforms in which you yourself have joined. Do you dare, then, to despise woman as a helpmate, and especially such a woman as that one, when you, by your own experience, must

know that half the good done in this country is done by woman's charity, woman's kindness, and all that?"

Hastings had been stung into pacing the room with twitching face while listening intently to every word.

"Oh, Hastings, forgive me if I am speaking brutally," said Lord Dereham, laying his hand on the other's thin shoulder; "but remember that I am pleading for the happiness of the woman I love. Mark my words. Your oath is a grand mistake; a presumption, a fanatical impulse—call it what you like—but believe me there will be more sorrow and repentance to you if you keep it than if you break it."

Dereham could see that his words had a great effect upon Hastings, who had moved away from his side and was again pacing up and down the little room, deep in thought.

"Lord Dereham, I cannot but admit that what you say may be true. I may have been mistaken"—here a deep sigh—"but reflection is now too late. I have pledged my word to sail in the *HESTER* this day week, and go I must—unless I can find a substitute," he added, snapping at a vague hope.

"And can none be found?" asked Lord Dereham, eagerly as he.

"I know of none. I did write to an old college mate of mine, Owen Hallet, as during the last day or two I have been thinking myself that it would be wiser for me to postpone leaving England until I am a little stronger, but he has not answered my letter. So I suppose he has no wish to go."

"What are the qualifications?" asked Lord Dereham. "Must the substitute be an ordained clergyman?"

"By no means; any earnest Christian possessing activity of mind and body would be accepted. But few would care for such an expedition," he proceeded, with a bitter laugh, "for it is one of much peril."

Lord Dereham studied the case awhile. "Mr. Hastings," he said, "will you make a bargain with me? If I can find you a substitute will you abandon that rash vow of yours and marry Eva Mornington?"

"Only too gladly," was the reply.

Lord Dereham took down particulars in his pocketbook as to the date of the sailing of the *HESTER*, the address of the agent, and what more seemed necessary.

Hastings held out his hand frankly.

"Lord Dereham, I never yet met a man whom I honoured as I do you. If we may be truly friends, I shall be doubly happy."

His hand was clasped firmly, and Dereham smiled faintly as he answered:

"I could not have acted otherwise, for my one great wish in life is to see Miss Mornington happy. Yes. I should be glad to be friends with you, but I don't think that we shall sail in the same boat after you are married to Eva. I have been hit hard, and the wound will keep open to the grave, though the smart may go off. I shall leave England for ever when I have seen you married."

In a business-like tone he subjoined: "You will be hearing from me during the week about the substitute, but have no fear. Good-bye."

"Goodbye, and God bless you, Lord Dereham. You are a better Christian than I." Hastings wrung his new friend's hand, turning away to hide the joy which beamed from his face lest it should pain the other.

Two hours afterwards he received the following note:

DEAR HASTINGS—

I have arranged for the substitute. He wishes to keep his departure secret until the last moment, but I will introduce you to him before the HESTER sails. Remember your promise, and fulfil your part of the bargain.

—Yours faithfully, DEREHAM."

Chapter XXIII

O Grave, Where Is Thy Sting?

For some little time past Mr. Mornington had been steadily advancing towards recovery, and on the day before Lord Dereham's visit to Miss Mornington, Dr. Northern had pronounced him fit to travel. The doctor suggested Brighton or Bournemouth, but Mr. Mornington remained undecided. For the last two or three days he had been busy writing, the outcome of much meditation.

On the afternoon after Lord Dereham's departure, Eva received word from her father that he wished to see her in the library, and there she found him equipped for a journey, although the only luggage lying about appeared to be a small travelling-bag.

"Are you going away, papa? Surely this is not wise?"

"Yes, I am going," Mr. Mornington replied, disregarding the latter part of the sentence. "I am tired of playing the invalid here, and am longing for a change. So, on the impulse of the moment I have put a few things together and am running down to Brighton or Bournemouth—I am not certain which. When I have arrived somewhere I shall write for more things."

"Does Dr. Northern know that you are going?" asked Eva, astonished at the suddenness of her father's determination.

"I don't need a doctor to tell me that I am strong enough to travel," said Mr. Mornington, impatiently. "I may be away for a long time," he said, more calmly. "Perhaps—we never know what may happen—I may never return, child. Will you think of me a little when I am away; not altogether forget me. I know that I have not been very lovable," he went on with a sigh, "but I have loved you, Eva, and always I shall love you. You won't quite forget me, will you?"

"What do you mean?" she cried, distressed. "You must feel that you are not well enough to travel, or you would not talk like this. Let me go with you. Do!"

He smiled sadly.

"That is impossible, although it is kind of you to offer yourself." In a matter-of-fact tone, he said: "In case I should not return in, say, three weeks, I want you to open this letter, addressed to you, and send the other one to Mr. Woodruff's offices. Can you remember this?"

Eva took the two letters. Her father held out his hand timidly, as though he dared not offer to embrace her, although longing to do so; but she, moved to compassion by his mournful looks and tender words, did what she had never done before—held up her face to be kissed. In an instant she felt herself seized and kissed passionately on the lips and on the forehead; before she had time to return the salute he was gone.

Mr. Mornington walked slowly down the square—for he was still weak, until he reached the cab-stand, and there took a four-wheeler for King's Cross. He was quite unconscious that a man, leaning against the railing of his house, and talking to one of the maid-servants, was following him in a hansom, so as to reach the same railway station a minute before him. This was a short, stout man, with a red face and rough tweed suit, carrying a short stick and having the appearance of a grazier or petty farmer. When Mr. Mornington took his ticket and a seat in a carriage in the Northern express, this man did the same, and ensconced himself in the nearest third-class compartment to Mr. Mornington's. It was late when they reached L—n. As on his previous journey in this direction, Mr. Mornington proceeded to the hotel. The coffee room had, as sole occupant, his uninvited travelling companion, apparently dozing in an easy chair before the fire, as if he had spent the greater part of the evening there.

The next day Mr. Mornington seemed in no hurry to continue his journey. The exertion of travelling had tired him, and he did not patronise the coffee-room until nearly one o'clock. Seated at the table, having some lunch, was our grazier; but the gentleman did not take the slightest notice of him. He had a trifle to eat, and called for writing materials. He only wrote one letter, though, and having sealed and addressed it, rang the boots up to post it. His companion slipped out of the room; and as the boots turned down the hall, with the letter in his hand, he was accosted by the stranger who stood in his way.

"I want a word with you, my man," he said, pushing open the door of the commercial-room and beckoning the servant to follow him.

"You have a letter there to post for the gentleman in the coffee-room."

Boots nodded. The stranger closed the door carefully before continuing.

"Hark'ee! I am a detective from Scotland Yard, and I am following that gentleman who gave you the letter to post. I must see it; so hand it over." He slipped a coin into the man's hand instead of showing his card. The servant was beginning to formulate objections, but the sight of the gold settled the question, and he gave up the letter unresistingly.

"It won't get me into no trouble, will it, master?" he said, apprehensively.

"Certainly not; only keep your mouth shut," whereupon the man withdrew, clutching the sovereign.

Left alone, the detective—for such he really was—glanced at the direction, and as he did so a low whistle escaped him; he tore open the envelope. It was addressed to the booking-office of the Dominion Line of steamships, and contained only these words and a bank-note. *"Please reserve a saloon-berth on the AJAX for Charles Handley. Amount enclosed."*

A smile shone on the ruddy face of the reader as he scanned these lines. Then he rang the bell and called for pens and paper. In a few minutes Mr. Mornington's letter was re-addressed, and stamped again for posting. With it went another letter, however, addressed to the same place:

*Reserve two saloon berths on board the AJAX for John Marston and friend.
Amount enclosed.*

There were two bank notes in this letter.

The detective—John Marston by name—put the letter in his pocket and strolled into the coffee-room. Mr. Mornington had not stirred from his place.

"What the deuce is he up to?" muttered Marston, as he closed the door and walked away towards the post office. "Licks me, this does." He posted the letters, registered Mornington's, and went into the telegraph office, where he quickly wrote out three telegrams.

The first was to his employer, Mr. Woodruff, and ran thus: "A clue, M. here, leaves for Canada by *AJAX*. Have written for berths for G. and self."

The second was to "M. Godfrey Mornington, Hotel Londres, Paris," and was thus phrased: "Come to London, prepared to leave for Canada by *AJAX*; berth booked."

The third, to which he prepaid reply, was to the booking office of Dominion Line of Steamers: "When does the *AJAX* sail?" with his address at the hotel.

This accomplished, he strolled back, and entered the coffee-room, where Mr. Mornington was paying his bill, evidently about to leave. Half an hour later, indeed, the hotel 'bus took them both to the station, the detective sitting on the box, reading a telegram which had been handed to him at the last moment.

"*AJAX* sails Thursday." This was Tuesday.

"Sharp work," muttered Marston.

When, an hour later, the train came in at King's Morton, Mr. Mornington and the detective were the only ones to alight. For the first time the former seemed to have a suspicion that he was being followed, and he eyed the detective closely as they stood together, waiting till they might cross the line. Marston grinned and touched his hat with a clownish gesture.

"No offence, master; but we ha' stikken together closish like, ha, ha!" he remarked. "Mont 'un mak' so boald as to ask, be yow anything in the cattle line?"

Mr Mornington shook his head.

"Then I begs your pardon. We doant get many straange foalk down King's Morton. 'Low un to tell'ee you'll find good quarters at the Lion's Head. Good e'en, master." He backed away, leaving Mr. Morton smiling at his faint suspicion.

The detective was also smiling.

"That local bit came in pat about the Lion's Head," he soliloquised. "Just saw the corner of the 'busses with the name on."

Straight through the town Mr. Mornington walked till he reached the little villa, empty when he had last visited the place. Here he stopped for a look. The house was let now, and he could see into the little dining-room, the blinds being up, although the gas was lit. It was a pretty scene enough, and no uncommon one, merely a display of the evening pursuits of thousands of English families of the middle classes.

The father, in the easy chair drawn near the fire, his slippers feet resting upon the fender, was half watching the smoke curl upwards from his pipe, and half watching the antics of the two younger children playing with one another and the demure-looking cat, and now and then glancing up with a smile to the mother, who sat opposite him mending some small garments, but not slow in her responsive smile as she met his eyes. There were others in the room, elder sons and daughters. The latter working, and one of the former engaged at fretwork; the other bending over a book. Yet none were so deeply occupied but that they would occasionally look up with a bright smile to make some general observation, or join in the merriment which the capers of the younger branches were provoking. Nothing at all extraordinary about this scene. Simply a happy

family circle; yet the contemplation deeply moved the viewer. A smothered groan burst from his lips; he covered his face with his hands as if to shut out the happy scene, and sobbed. "What would I give for a home like that!" he murmured, "For daughters to love me, for a wife to comfort me in distress, companion me in happiness—too late now!"

His meditations were only ended at the churchyard. Here he halted, and pushing open the gate, walked up the narrow path, glancing from side to side.

There were no carved monuments or stone memorials in this simple enclosure, but nearly every mound was bedecked with spring flowers, planted with tender care and speaking far more eloquently of loving remembrance than could ponderous stones, and as he beheld them again, the bitter light came into his eyes. "Hers will be the one neglected—uncared for!"

He strode on with head erect as if the sight of the flowers was painful to him, until at last he reached the grave. He started back with surprise, and the tears—actually tears—chased the bitter look from his eyes. For, carefully planted on the top, was a bed of snowdrops as fair as any in the churchyard, and no stately marble cross could have so fittingly adorned the humble grave as did those pure, simple flowers.

"May God bless the hand who planted them," he murmured through the streaming tears, as he knelt on the grass, carefully to pluck two or three of the blooms, and place them in his pocket-book. He stood up then, a tender look in his eyes, bareheaded, gazing up at the sky now alight with stars.

"Mother," was his speech, "I stand by your grave to recall the oath of vengeance made here. You have suffered, ay, you died from the wrong that also blighted my life, but I feel now that you would not have me carry my vengeance farther. You were gentleness itself, and you forgave him. I call God to witness," he cried, stretching his arms out heavenward, "I also forgave him!" With one last fond look, he turned and walked slowly down the gravel path.

The bitter light had vanished from his eyes, and a nobler, freer look shone there, and round his lips there played a smile of quiet happiness.

He shut the gate, giving one glance back at the green mounds beautiful with flowers, and at the little church standing out a black mass as background to the picture, but all softened and harmonised by the gentle moon which began to look down upon the peaceful scene.

Then he walked rapidly down the lane.

"Here's a rum go!" muttered John Marston, as he roused himself from a recumbent position by the side of the porch. "If he and I don't have the darndest rheumatism in the morning, my name ain't what it is." Stiff from his cramped posture, he hobbled down the lane after Mr. Mornington.

Chapter XXIV

One was Called and another Taken.

It was the afternoon of the day before the *HESTER* sailed for China, and Eva had given up all hope of seeing again the man she loved.

When, therefore, without any preliminary announcement, George Hastings quietly walked into the room where she was sitting, the sudden shock deprived

her of her self-possession. He saw the rush of colour to her cheeks, and the glad light in her eyes—proofs that Lord Dereham had told him the truth.

He walked up to her side without any conventional greeting and said bluntly:

"Miss Mornington, Eva, I have come to ask your forgiveness, to tell you that I have made a great mistake." He took her hand as if by right. "I have—been a fool," he cried. "Eva, I love you, and I fear no longer to ask you for your love in return. Thank God, conviction came to me before it was too late, and I know now that I shall be a better man, a none the less sincere Christian, with you by my side. Eva, answer me."

He had asked no question, and there was no answer needed. Her eyes were lifted shyly to his, and he could see there a love no less than his own.

"My darling!" and, unbidden, his arm ran round her waist, and his lips pressed her forehead.

For her part, the sudden revulsion from complete despair to such joy was too much to bear, and great sobs of relief shook her frame. But Hastings could play the part of comforter as well as wooer, and soon the smiles were chasing the tears from her face.

They did not talk at length. People in their condition seldom do, say the experienced; but the twilight came on and grew into darkness before Hastings said, "I must go. Good-bye, my dearest, for to-day." She walked with him to the street door and let him out herself.

"But you are not going to China?" she said mischievously.

He laughed.

"Not now. But I'm just going to be introduced to my substitute. I shall call to-morrow." Turning back more than once to wave his hand to the fair figure watching him with smiles from the steps, he set out for Lord Dereham's rooms in Mayfair.

"Lord Dereham was very busy making preparations for a journey," his man believed, but he had given orders that Mr. Hastings was to be shown into his study on his arrival. He had not long to wait, for almost instantly Lord Dereham joined him, looking rather pale and harassed, but withal very composed.

The two shook hands, and, in response to the other's questioning glance, Hastings said briefly:

"I have called at Lowndes Square, and I have seen Eva."

He did not say more, for he could not ignore that his joy was the other's misery; but it was quite enough, for Lord Dereham knew by it that all had turned out well.

"And now for my substitute. Has he not arrived?"

Lord Dereham did not immediately reply, seeming embarrassed.

"He has not disappointed you?" asked Hastings, turning pale with a sudden fear.

"Oh no," replied Lord Dereham, lighting a cigar to give him countenance. "He will be ready. Let me remind you for one moment of our bargain, Hastings. I was to procure you a substitute whose qualifications were to be that he was an earnest Christian, and active in body and mind; these are about the terms, I think"

His companion nodded in some perplexity.

"There was no other condition?" continued Lord Dereham.

"None," assented the other.

"Well, in return for this you were to stop at home and marry the lady."

"That was the bargain—a noble, generous one on your part," said the clergyman.

"Well, I have fulfilled my part," continued Lord Dereham, "for my substitute is ready, and waiting."

"Do I know him, then?—and when shall I see him?" asked Hastings, anxiously.

"You see him now; it is I who goes to China," said the noble.

In the ensuing silence Lord Dereham smoked leisurely, while his companion watched him thunderstruck.

"You go to China as my substitute?" at last burst from his lips. "Never!—it must not be thought of—I will not permit it."

"But, my dear fellow, you can't stop it," said Lord Dereham, with a smile.

"I can and will!" Hastings strode towards the door.

"Where are you off to now?"

"To Mr. Fanshaw, the secretary, to re-enter my name: and then—and then"—with a half-sob—"to Eva."

Lord Dereham turned round in his chair toward him.

"Sit down, man, and don't be an ass!" he said, with such authority in his tones as to impose on the other.

Throwing away his cigar as if it were his last luxury cast off, the peer stood up.

"Look here, Hastings," he said firmly. "We made a compact, the other day, and I insist upon your keeping to your part of it like a man of honour. If I choose to go to China, why should I not go? I have no ties here; I have been everywhere else; nothing to keep me; and for the next ten years or so all places will be alike to me. You, on the other hand, if you went, would leave behind you brokenhearted the woman who loves you. Ask yourself, now, as a sensible fellow, which of us can best afford to go? We both love the same woman, and her happiness should be our first thought. If I go, it matters nothing to her. If you go, it breaks her heart. There lies the knot, and, to cut it, my mind is made up—I go to China!"

Nothing that Hastings could urge moved him from his point, and indeed, he had the best of the argument. After nearly two hours of fruitless talking, Hastings rose to go.

"I want a walk," said Lord Dereham, carelessly. "I'll stroll home with you."

The fact was he feared lest Hastings might still carry out his intention of seeing Mr. Fanshaw, so he determined not to let him out of his sight, and all the way back to Camberwell he listened again imperturbably to his companion's arguments, talking about his voyage to China as if it were merely a holiday trip.

"Come in with me for a few moments," said Hastings as they reached his lodgings; Dereham followed him. The hall was full of luggage. They passed up to Hastings' room, and there, sitting in the easy-chair with his feet up upon another, and smoking an enormous pipe, was a tall, powerful-looking man who started to his feet as they entered.

"Hallo, Hastings, old chap, how are you? Got your letter just in time, you see, and quite forgot to answer it. I suppose you took it for granted I should come, though?"

"You, Hallett!" gasped Hastings; then as the truth dawned upon him he turned with sudden joy to Lord Dereham, still wringing his older friend's hand.

"Good night, Hastings.—I had better go home and have them unpack my things," with a kind nod he shook the hands of both and departed, blowing a renewed cloud of incense to his idol "I would have gone willingly," he mused. "But it is much better this Hallett fellow turned up. There is nothing to kill in China; they all say it is a country shockingly over-built and over-populated."

The next morning he went down into the country to arrange the agency of one of his estates before leaving England. For he had decided not to wait for Eva's marriage, but to start at once for anywhere. It was three days before he returned to town, and on the afternoon of the fourth he called at Lowndes Square. These last four days had been days of perturbation to Miss Mornington, for since George Hastings had asked her to be his wife she had neither seen nor heard from him. She did not know his address, or she would have written to him, and Lady Stowell, the only person likely to know it, was out of town; hence, while she was full of vague apprehensions, she could do nothing but wait.

When, therefore, Lord Dereham was announced, he found her in a fever of suspense, and her first words were to ask him if he knew his rival's address.

"I have just left him," he said quietly, "and I am sorry to be the bearer of bad news."

She asked eagerly—"Of him?"

"Yes. You may not know that lately he and I have become friends. I have been out of town for a few days, and only returned last night. Early this morning I called at his lodgings, and I am sorry to say I find him seriously ill. Don't be alarmed," he added, as Eva turned pale and her hands trembled. "I don't think that it is anything mortal, and he is being well taken care of. I found the doctor with him, and as the room where he was is close and stuffy, we moved him to my apartments, where he will have every attention and be looked after much better."

"And what is the matter?" asked Eva, anxiously.

Dereham hesitated. He dared not say consumption.

"He has had a bad cough," he said, "and it has affected his lungs slightly. It would be nothing if his constitution was strong, but as it is, he needs careful watching. We shall pull him through all right though," he added more cheerfully. "I will let you know every day how he is."

"I must write him a note," said Eva. Dereham waited, although he knew Hastings would not be able to read it. He left her, bidding her keep up her spirits, and returned to the bedside of his rival.

Four more days passed away and the afternoon sun was shining upon the streets and, parks, where crowds of the well-dressed went backwards and forwards, exchanging smiles and cordial phrases; shining into the dirty narrow streets of St. Giles' on the disgusted passers-by, as they hurried on from the abodes of poverty and vice; shining into Eva Mornington's boudoir where, with tearless eyes, filled with a feverish light, she sits waiting for news of her lover; shining alike on rich and poor, happy and miserable, good and bad, teaching us thereby a grand moral lesson too little understood. It looked in at the windows of Lord Dereham's luxurious rooms, where George Hastings lay dying. By the side of the dying man stood Dereham with a pained and anxious look, for the doctor had just uttered those melancholy words which carry despair to so many thousands:

"There is positively no hope."

Lord Dereham had devoted every minute of his time to watching at the bedside of the man who had taken from him the woman he loved. He had lavished his money on every conceivable delicacy; he had brought hither the most renowned specialists; he had nursed him as jealously and watched over him as carefully as if the man had been his dearest brother. All in vain; for no nursing, no arts of the physician could save the life flowing away. He was conscious at last, and knew that the end was near. He beckoned his friend to stoop down to him while he whispered. One word—that was all; but the hearer nodded, and calling the nurse from the ante-chamber, he left the house. His brougham waited at the door, and he was driven rapidly to Lowndes Square. He pushed back the servant and hurried into the young mistress's sitting-room, where she, trembling in every limb, turned upon him an agonised look to read the mournful news. She did not faint nor call out; she did not move, in fact; but the dumb misery in her eyes nearly womanised her visitor.

"Come!" he said.

She flung a dolman around her, and passed silently by his side out of the house into the carriage. Neither spoke all the way to his rooms, where he hurried her upstairs into the chamber of death. He watched her totter to the bedside, where, sinking on her knees, she clasped the dying man's hand. Then he receded into the ante-chamber, which thick curtains concealed from the larger room. A faint smile irradiated the wasted face of the dying man as he saw who had come, and he raised himself with a great effort on one side and waved the nurse to withdraw. The lovers were alone together.

"Thank God, you have come, my darling," he said, in a low broken voice, and the hand which clasped his felt a slight pressure. "There is something to say to you before I die."

She could not answer him save with her eyes; if she had tried to speak, she must have burst into passionate weeping. But she let go one of his hands, and passed her arm around his emaciated form to support him, and held her white stricken face even closer to his.

"Are you listening?"

She bowed. Listening! every word he uttered she treasured until her dying day.

"If I had lived, Eva," he said with difficulty, "we should have owed all our happiness to one man, to him in whose house we are. Lord Dereham it was who showed me the errors of my vow, who forced it on me that I had the right to ask you for your love. Not only that, but when I told him that I could not seek you because I had pledged my word to go to China, he would have gone in my place. He would have given his life, you see, that we might have been happy."

He was interrupted by a violent fit of coughing, and the nurse came from the ante-chamber and gave him some medicine. When he was able to proceed it was in a still lower voice:

"No woman, not even you, my darling, could have tended me like he has done. Night and day he has been at my side. I have awaked in the middle of the night, seized with this frightful cough, and in a moment have felt his strong arms around me and heard his soothing, strengthening voice. Oh, Eva darling, if I had lived I could scarcely have been happy, with our happiness the misery of such a man. I shall die happier if I may think that some day—not too soon, perhaps—but some day you will try and reward him."

She was forced to bow her head unto this last request.

"I shall never love anybody else but you," she sobbed, folding her arms closer around him and pressing him to her, as if she imagined she could protect him from death.

"My darling, it is God's will, and I am content. Somehow, I don't fancy that I was born for happiness on earth. The first time I have ever stretched out my hand towards it, Heaven has taken me away. Don't weep, darling," he said, passing his thin hand caressingly down her face; "I am not afraid to die."

After a moment's silence there came a change. His eyes, which had glittered so restlessly, filled with a softer, happier look, and half-uttered words died away on his lips as he sank back on the pillows. Eva uttered a cry which brought Dereham and the doctor into the room.

The clergyman motioned the noble to kneel by Eva's side, and then lifting his thin, shaking hand from the coverlet, he seized that of Eva, and with an appealing glance to her, placed it in the man's.

He was past speech, but looked at them with a gratified smile. He turned away; his lips moved as if in prayer; gradually, none of them knowing the exact moment, he departed from the world, with the smile indelibly impressed upon his marble lips.

Dereham led the sobbing woman from the room and into the carriage. He accompanied her home, where without a word he left her, and returned to his rooms, to make preparations for the funeral and his own absence from England.

Chapter XXV

The Third Stroke.

The last two years and a half had brought little change to the hermit in Lonely Creek cabin. The lines on his forehead were a little deeper, certainly, his hair a little greyer, than when he had spent a week in England, but in other respects he had altered little. He sits in his old attitude, crouching over his wood fire; but for the moment the dullness has left his eyes, the listlessness his manner, while he holds towards the flickering light and reads with more than interest a letter taken out from the black case opposite him.

It is easy to tell from his expression that he is not occupying himself with reading letters concerning the past. He has more probably discovered a writing hitherto unseen, with contents of grave importance to him. For more than an hour he pored over the three sheets of crested paper, yellow with age, and covered with closely-written characters in a man's hand, but tremulous and uncertain. He picks up another packet, sealed and addressed in the same tremulous hand, but not to him, as the former was. He studies it for a while and he replaces it unopened, with the read letter in a corner of the black case. In a dazed state he sits till, after a few minutes, he draws from his pocket a photograph. Again his expression changes, the lines on his face grow less hard, his stern mouth relaxes into a smile, and there comes a wistful look as he thus dwells on his daughter's likeness. He half closes his eyes and the smile clings to his lips, as he gives the rein to his imagination, knowing full well where it will take him.

Back to Lowndes Square—back to the dimly-lit drawing-room where he had sat alone with his daughter on the night before he left England. The bald surroundings of his cabin expand, and he sees a luxurious room furnished to perfection, with dainty vases on the tables and brackets and costly knickknacks at every turn arranged with exquisite taste. Soft curtains of harmonious colours shut out the twilight, and thick carpets made footsteps noiseless. There came to him also the faint sweet smell of hyacinths, and stephanotis, which were in her corsage as she sat beside him. Her eyes sparkle again with sympathy before him.

"What was that!"

He leaped to his feet and held his breath, listening intently. It must have been fancy, for there is no sound but the dull moaning of the eternal wind.

He sinks into his seat again and composes himself anew for meditation; but scarcely a minute elapsed before he was once more alert.

A human voice! There was no doubt about it this time. A wail as of one in distress sounding clear and distinct above the sighing of the wind as it jammed the pine cones together with a grating sound.

Harold Mornington lit the huge lantern from the corner, and, opening the door, made his way out into the darkness.

It was snowing. Huge flakes were madly chasing one another down and beating against the face of the listening man, blinding him, and dazzling him with their whiteness as he stood perplexed, looking around him. He can see nothing save the black trunks of the trees, everything else was covered with a thick mantle of white. Under the angry howl of the blizzard pealed that cry, fainter this time; he took a hurried step forward, holding his light up and gazing earnestly at the long streaks of yellow light which parted the darkness.

"What is that?"

A black form half covered with snow, still moving slowly. Another step forward showed him it was a man, supporting himself on his hands, as if trying to drag himself along although his feet had failed him. In a moment Harold Mornington's strong arms were around the fainting man, who sank into his arms with a cry of relief and the lantern displayed the face of Cecil Braithwaite.

"Great Father!" the discoverer murmured, as he let go and started back, so that the palsied body sank again into the snow.

But his hesitation was gone in a moment. He wrapped his arms around him once more, and, exerting all his strength, after numerous rests and stumbles drew him at last into the shelter and shut the door.

He dragged the inanimate one before the hearth, and heaped on fresh fuel, until the flames, hissing and crackling round the green logs, curled from under them and ascended half-way to the roof.

Then he stripped the body, and rubbed it with all his strength, never pausing, except to rise once and fetch brandy, which he forced between the white colourless lips at intervals.

Slowly life came back and the colour into Cecil Braithwaite's cheeks, and he opened his eyes feebly and looked around.

He seemed scarcely to understand his whereabouts. Before closing them again, his regular breathing was a token of sleep. The other lifted the furs off his bed and took his coat off, wrapping them all around the sleeper, and then, to watch his slumber, moved away to his own seat.

Singular that, after so long a period, the same scene should present the same pair, but with their positions interchanged.

One sleeping, the other thinking, and more than once casting anxious glances at his companion as if he dreaded his awaking, morning found them. With an effort the watcher began preparations for his simple breakfast. When the rescued man awoke he raised himself on his arm and glanced around bewildered, till, his eyes falling upon the other, he violently beat his brow.

"How came I here?" he muttered. "Surely I must be dreaming."

"I found you last night lying in the snow, half-perished, and carried you here," was the reply. "Five minutes more and the nor'-wester would have buried you till the spring thaw."

Memory seemed to dawn upon his half paralysed brain. He moved his limbs cautiously as if in fear they might not answer the impulse.

"Oh, I remember," he said. "I left my sledge in the hollow at Lonely Creek and came on here by myself; and just as I caught sight of the old cabin, drowsiness and weariness overpowered me, and I think I went to sleep. Yes, yes. I see how it happened now," he gasped, as if speaking was almost too much of an effort for his enchained tongue.

The rescuer replied nothing, but handed him tea and food.

"You had better eat something or you will go off again."

"He lifted the tin mug to his lips, and took a few mouthfuls of the pemmican. When he spoke again his voice seemed a little stronger.

"You have not altered much," was what he said.

"If you have come to torture me again, Cecil Braithwaite, stay your purpose. Remember that I have saved your life, and spare me."

Braithwaite scarcely appeared to have heard the words, for he staggered up on his feet, gazing into vacancy. After a long time, wheeled he slowly around, and fixing his eyes upon Harold Mornington, said:

"What would you give to go back to England for good? No answer, eh? You don't believe me? Well, I have not come back to mock you, Harold, but to set you free. You may go home at once; everything is prepared for that, for I have left letters explaining and confessing everything. Repentance comes even to the worst of us, and I have come to beg your forgiveness. I have buried the memory of my wrongs, and my hatred for you has gone under with them. Love for a woman whom you won was one of the causes for that hatred; love for another, her daughter, has set you free. Go back to her." The voice was sad and low. "Her love is yours for the asking; mine it never could have been."

The recluse was in terrible indecision; his mind the battlefield for a fierce conflict between right and wrong. Passionate eagerness had flashed forth when his daughter was mentioned, but this died away and his head sank upon his breast.

"Don't you understand me, Harold Mornington? you are free to return to your daughter—to your home."

Slowly, Mornington crossed the floor, and stooping down drew from the black case, the folded letter and the sealed packet.

"Listen to a strange tale, man, and leave me. My father died, as you know, when I was fifteen. A telegram summoned me from Eton, in time to see him for a moment before the end. With his dying breath he whispered that he had left a sealed letter for me which I was not to open until I reached my twenty-fifth birthday; and he pressed it into my hand with this packet which you see. I

promised obedience, and kept the letter in this case; and when we fled from England, I brought it with me, as you know, for in it was all our money. When my twenty-fifth birthday came, we were flying in disguise from New York, and with all my thoughts engrossed by our danger, no wonder that I forgot about the letter. When we settled here, I remembered it, and searched for it, but as I did not come across it, I concluded that it had been left at home with other papers; anyhow, it could concern me little, I thought. Last night, for the first time for over two years, I opened this case, and it struck me that there was something hard inside the lining. I examined it carefully and found that there was a pocket in the lining; I drew out this packet and this letter. Read the letter, it concerns you, and take the packet, it is for you, and then begone!"

The other opened the letter, and read:

"MY DEAR BOY:—

„I have communed with myself often during these last days of my illness, whether or no I should make amends for a great wrong I did in my younger days. The only thing which deters me is the knowledge that, while it would no doubt be an act of justice to others, it would be a cruel wrong to you. After due meditation, I say, I have decided, like a coward, to shift on you the decision, and hence I wish you to become acquainted with the following facts when you are fully of an age to form a right judgment as to their importance, and then act as you think fit. One autumn, nineteen years ago, I started alone for a walking tour through Normandy, and, losing my way one night, begged for a lodging at a small farm-house. It was granted, and I stopped there that night and many others afterwards. The name of the people was Mercier, and their daughter Estelle was beautiful. I fell in love with her, she with me, and, to be as brief as possible, we eloped together. Her brother followed us, and I was compelled, against my wish, to fight him. He missed me the first shot, while I fired in the air; but when he insisted on a second exchange of fire, I had no mind to be made a target of, and shot him through the heart. He fell in fair fight, it was hushed up, and I hurried Estelle off to England ere she knew the cause of my haste. In less than a week, I was tired of her, and her love, which continued as passionate as ever, burdened me. I took her to a quiet country town, though she was indignant, and demanded to be taken to my home—for, alas! I had married her. Stung by her reproaches, I laughed brutally when she reminded me that she was my wife, and told her a lie; that our marriage was a mock one. My protest convinced her, for she never doubted my word, and she prayed that she might never set her eyes upon me again. I left her, and indeed, never saw her again. Although I placed a large sum of money to her credit at the local bank, it was untouched, and I heard that she had money sent her from France, from an uncle, I think, who had left her his little fortune. Her mother and father died soon after we fled together. We had one son, but, when he was quite young, she died, and immediately afterwards I married your mother. Now you know all. I know not what has become of her boy, who is my heir, which you are not. This packet contains all the necessary documents and particulars to prove my marriage with Estelle Mercier. If your conscience tells you to seek this son out, if he be still alive, do so, and give him the packet. It is not for me to blame you, however, if you destroy it. I have wronged you, my son, cruelly, and it has made me very unhappy; but

remember that I am dead, and think as lightly of me as possible,—may I add, try moreover to forgive.

*"Your ever affectionate father,
"GEORGE MORNINGTON."*

He who had called himself "Cecil Braithwaite" read this letter through twice, carefully, and with changing countenance he gave a keen, searching glance at the other, who was watching him half defiantly but with trembling lips. Holding the packet still unopened in his hand, he said: "So I am Cecil Mornington." The elation in his tone sounded painful to the broken-hearted man, who had thrown away his chance of happiness.

"Nameless no longer," he continued, "but rightful owner to the position I thought I had stolen. Can you guess what I shall do now?" he said with sparkling eyes.

"For God's sake only leave me!" groaned the other. "Why should you linger to taunt me?"

"No, Harold, I will not leave you yet. See," he cast the packet into the flames and guarded it until it was consumed.

The other straightened himself with a wild look of hope.

"I have been your evil genius," he pursued, facing his half-brother: "I have heaped miseries and wrongs innumerable upon your head, and yet you, in return, have just saved my life, when, for the second time, a paralytic stroke laid me low whilst I rejoiced in my strength of mind and body. Now, too, you gave me the chance to maintain my grip of your property and the station I won with your place and purse as steppingstones, throwing away, as you thought, your chances of happiness; you have removed the curse from me. There is your reward;" he pointed to the black mass which had been the packet. "Go back to England, I say, and let this story," he pointed to the letter, "be buried between ourselves. You need not hesitate. Never under any circumstances would I set foot there again. If you will accept this deed as expiation of my wrongs to you, if you will forget before you leave me all else save that we are brothers, then give me your hand and your forgiveness, and you will leave me content."

"So be it," said Harold, extending his hand readily which the other clasped. "Let it be as you say. I forgive you all, for all is wiped out by your generous act to day. I will go back to England." His eyes sparkled with joy. "But come back with me, Cecil. The past shall be forgotten and you most welcome."

Cecil shook his head. "Tempt me not," he said. "I have sworn never to set foot on English soil again, and I shall keep my oath. I live here for a time, but you shall hear from me," he added. "I don't think it will be for long. Your pleading is of no avail. I have made up my mind as to the future. Take my things for your voyage, my money and my passage tickets. Let me accompany you to the port, before this storm makes our movements impossible. There we will say farewell, and I will take the back track for the old log cabin, where we might have been jolly together, for all its defects, had I not been harbouring treachery to my partner. Come along, old pal," he pursued, with forced hilarity. "I'll send you a moosehead for the hall and an Arctic foxskin for Eva's opera cloak. Come on!"

He hustled the recluse about and they hurried to the door.

Another hand opened it, and that drew back.

Two strangers, enveloped in furs and covered with snow, stepped in at the doorway. One of them took off his cap and revealed the face of Godfrey Mornington.

"My mooning friend of Westminster Bridge!" he cried, whilst flashed upon him the conviction that the man whom his father had sought, and come all this way to visit, was the same man who had written those few words across his card on the night before his illness. That there was mystery here he knew; but how solve it? It was the supreme moment for him. If he failed now, success might never come. He glanced from one to the other of the two men as if to read the secret in their faces.

Cecil Mornington (for such he must now be called) smiled as he recognised the two men, Marston, the agent, and Godfrey.

"So you have followed me?" he said. "That is fortunate, young sir; you will be able to take your father home with you to England."

Godfrey darted a scornful look upon him.

"No father this of mine, sir. I told you long ago that your lying words dissolved that tie between us. I have followed you here for a very different purpose. I have come to hear what this man"—he pointed at Harold Mornington—"can tell me about your past history."

"That man, sir, is your father," was the reply, "and I an impostor. Now you know the whole secret. You need go no further; for by this time Mr. Woodruff holds all the proofs of your father's marriage with Eva Wakefield."

Utter bewilderment filled Godfrey's mind and was reflected in his face. The man whom he had just been told to receive as father, stepped forward and grasped him by the hand.

"I am indeed your father, my dear Godfrey," said Harold Mornington, in a trembling voice. "Believe me before I tell you all."

If any doubt remained, his pity and sympathy with the grey-headed sufferer momentarily overpowered it. Recalling the impression Mr. Viccars had made upon him, he found that it was the portrait of George Mornington in the Abbey Gallery which he resembled. In the height of his emotion, a sudden wrath swept all before it, and he pointed threateningly at his long-received father, who was looking on the pair with gratification.

"Who, then, is this?" he queried.

"Let him be, Godfrey," said his father, firmly; "he has sinned less than he has been sinned against. May Heaven forgive him as completely as I do, and as you will do when you know all. For the present, let us leave this, for I am going back with you to England, and on the way I will tell you the whole strange history."

Godfrey was forced to be content, but Marston did not conceal his disappointment, that nobody was to be taken into custody.

"Very irregular," grumbled he.

But nobody would charge another, and the bulldog disgustedly stood outside in the snow.

"Good-bye, and God bless you, Cecil," was all Mr. Mornington's parting greeting to the man they left behind; the hands of the half-brothers met in a long, fervent grasp.

"If you should ever change your mind and come home, you will be welcome, mind!"

"Good-bye, Harold, and God bless you for your forgiveness!" The little party left him in the cabin door.

When they reached the verge of the clearing, Mr. Mornington turned back to look, for the last time, upon the scene of his exile. A wall of snow rose between. As he was turning away with a sigh, there came a smothered shriek distinctly to their ears. All rushed back, Mr. Mornington being the first to burst into the hut. Doubled up on the ground, with a terrible paralytic stroke, lay Cecil. It was the third stroke.

They bore him carefully to the sledge and took him with them to Fort George, where he was lodged in the hospital. Here they left him at the doctor's commands, for, in his lapses into consciousness, Cecil motioned them away from him so earnestly that they could do nothing but comply. They left money with the governor for him, and he promised to let them have news. Then they struck reluctantly across the Continent for the sea and England.

Chapter XXVI

Pairing Off.

Eve, dressed in deepest black, was sitting in the morning-room at Lowndes Square, reading the confession of the man whom she had believed to be her father. Her amazement was turned to pity as she reached the concluding lines.

"I scarcely dare ask you to forgive me, Eva. The wrong I have done you and your father is past forgiveness. Yet you may, if you will, remember that for your sake I have abandoned the purpose of my life; that it is love for you which has drawn me to make this tardy reparation; and I hope your womanly heart will not be steeled against him who dedicates the remaining years of his life to the expiation of the wrong which he implores you to forget. Remember, too, that all the time I have usurped your father's place, not one single moment of happiness have I had. I undertook a parliamentary career only that my vengeance might be the more galling, and I have lived from month to month, from year to year, merely a passionless existence, reaping neither happiness from my success nor satisfaction from my wealth, and every success I met with, every honour I have won, afforded me not the slightest pleasure, for they were to me burning censures on what might have been. Remember, Eva, that great as the crime is, so must the repentance be. Remember that I have now only to end my years, filled with a bitter regret for a deed which never gained me aught, and the repentance of which is very little more painful than the committal. Remember, Eva, my life has been a wreck, and my future is blank. Remember my love for you, and if in years to come, when time has softened down your indignation, and you are happy in your real father's love; and when you yourself are, perhaps, a mother, then, Eva, I implore you, when on your knees you teach your children to whisper, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us,' to remember yourself in that prayer he who writes these lines."

Her pity thus excited was nearer to love than any feeling he had previously obtained.

She called Maud Langton, and told her all the story, to her full of unmixed satisfaction. After the first wonderment and surprise, both were silent, the one

looking forward with deep delight to the return of her lover; the other, for the second time, filled with gladness at the prospect of her father's return.

They were still together when Mr. Woodruff called, full of wondering exclamations also, and many regrets that he had been so easily duped. He reflected with no little annoyance on the banter to which he would be subjected for being so completely fooled, around the Inns and the Courts.

"The thing must be kept as quiet as possible," he said to the two, "until we get him safely down at Mornington, and then, I suppose, it is bound to come out, and a nine days' wonder it will be. Good news for you, young lady," he continued, turning abruptly to Miss Langton, who blushed flamingly at the abruptness of the remark. He left them, promising to bring the earliest news of the travellers.

The two ladies lived in suspense for weeks, till one morning a cablegram arrived from Quebec. It was from Godfrey, and told them that he and his father were sailing on board the *AQUILA*, and would arrive in about a fortnight. Their expectancy deepened, banishing for the time from Eva's heart her recent loss.

She and Lord Dereham had been the only mourners at George Hastings' funeral, for Lady Stowell was still away, and he had no other relatives. Lord Dereham had spoken a few words to her as they returned from the churchyard, but had not touched upon the death-bed request. He merely told her that he was leaving England next day, and asked permission to write to her, which she accorded compulsorily when she thought of his chivalrous generosity to the dead.

At last the sixteenth day came, and early in the morning a telegram was received from Liverpool. The steamer had arrived and the travellers would be in London that afternoon.

Miss Langton was overjoyed; and her friend, though her gladness at meeting her father was tempered by her great grief, was still ardently awaiting his arrival.

"They have come!" said Maud, as the carriage stopped at the door. Excited voices were heard in the hall, and then the door was thrown open and Godfrey and his father rushed in.

There are moments in life when time seems to stand still—when instants become minutes, and minutes hours. For barely five seconds did Eva stand before her father, yet in that brief time there were concentrated a lifetime's emotions. This was the Mr. Viccars who had gained such an ascendancy. He was her true father; his eyes spoke of a new kind of love as he stretched out his arms towards her, and with one mighty gush came the filial love, suppressed so long; and that which Cecil Mornington had plotted for in vain, was given, unasked, to its rightful claimant.

Godfrey and Maud had already left them together, purely out of consideration for them; and for hours Eva listened to her father's revelation and the story of his wanderings and seclusion, ere she sobbed out that of her own great grief.

"We will comfort one another, darling," he said, "and live for the future, for we both leave trials behind us." They planned together a quiet life at Mornington Abbey, whither sorrows would not follow them. When Godfrey and Maud entered hand-in-hand, it appeared they also had been planning. The first important event which happened when the little party settled down at the Abbey was their marriage.

The great house in Lowndes-square had been for two years to be sold or let—for Eva and her father are both too completely contented in their country home to need a change.

The wonderful Mornington Personation Case had been talked to death, and is now almost forgotten, save, perhaps, in the immediate neighbourhood of the abbey, where it has had the effect of adding to the popularity which Mr. Mornington had no difficulty in winning for himself.

These two years after George Hastings' death had diminished Eva's grief, and her father's love had done much to chase the very remembrance away. She was a little more subdued in manner, perhaps, but no less beautiful; for sometimes sadness only enhances feminine beauty, and so it was with Eva's.

She has just finished reading a letter, and, opening the windows, has strolled out upon the balcony with it in her hands. Apparently it is no uninteresting one. It was dated from the Travellers' Club:

*"DEAR MISS MORNINGTON—I received your last letter in Paris, and I was glad to hear that your father continues strong, and that you yourself are well. I have delayed writing you as I half intended to come down to Mornington; and this I should have done, but reflected that, under certain circumstances, our meeting might have been very painful to both of us. You no doubt know what I wish to say to you. Travelling and long absence have not changed my love for you—as, indeed, nothing ever can. I do not ask you for such love as you gave to him who is no more—that I know is buried with him. But if you think that you can care for me enough to carry out his dying wish, then you will amply repay me for the years I have wasted. If you cannot, I shall leave in about a month's time for India; and it is not likely, in that case, that I shall ever return to England. Will you write me at once, and tell me what my fate is to be?—Yours truly,
"LIONEL DEREHAM."*

The answer could not have been a harsh one, for on the next afternoon, as Eva sat alone at the end of the terrace, she heard quick steps behind her, and felt herself unceremoniously clasped in a pair of strong arms.

"I have come for my answer, darling," he said, "for your letter did not give it me."

"I said, Come," she whispered shyly; "was that not enough?"

"Say, I love you," he said, bending over her so closely that he could not fail to catch even so low a whisper as hers.

When, an hour later, Mr. Mornington came out on the terrace, looking a little stouter than when we saw him last, but many years younger and happier; he saw his daughter reclining in a most lover-like attitude, with a gentleman who was a perfect stranger to him, in little less nonchalant pose.

"This is Lord Dereham, father," said Eva, not blushing a quarter as much as she feared she ought; whilst my lord, no whit abashed, held out his hand frankly, and said with a happy laugh:

"This is our first meeting, Mr. Mornington, but I trust it will not be our last; for some day I hope to call myself your son,"

Mr. Mornington glanced from one to the other with a twinkle.

"Only on one condition, father," faltered Eva, "that he does not take me away from you."

He stooped down and kissed her.

"Surely it is recompense enough for all my troubles," he said, "to have found such a prize."

Lord Dereham agreed with him, in a slightly altered sense.

Epilogue

A year afterwards a christening was taking place at Mornington Abbey, and when they asked Eva what her boy should be called she answered, "Cecil George," and when her husband, surprised, inquired the meaning of the first name, she told him more fully than he had ever heard it before the history of Cecil Mornington.

"And is he dead?" he asked.

"He died about twelve months ago. See"—she handed him a letter to read.

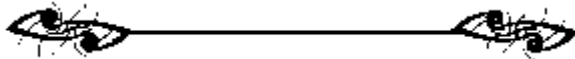
It was from the governor of Fort George, and referred to the man Mr. Mornington had left there.

"He died (wrote the governor), to use his own words, 'completely happy,' and murmuring the name of 'Eva.' In his hands, clasped to his breast, was the enclosed letter and the two snowdrops."

The flowers had long ago crumbled to pieces; but the letter remained, and Lord Dereham read in his wife's handwriting these few words:

"My father has forgiven you; so how can I do less? I think of you and pity you.—EVA."

The living proof of her forgiveness was that her eldest son was christened "Cecil George Dereham."



⁽⁵⁻¹⁾ sic. Presumably an allusion to the relationship between Lord Chesterfield and his son. Lord Chesterfield wrote the popular *Letters to His Son* (published posthumously in 1774), a manual on acquiring social graces and succeeding in society that stressed the importance of appearances.