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Title: A Gray Eye or So. In Three Volumes—Volume II

Author: Frank Frankfort Moore

Release date: May 2, 2016 [EBook #51945]
Most recently updated: February 25, 2021

Language: English

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A GRAY EYE OR SO. IN THREE VOLUMES—VOLUME II ***

A GRAY EYE OR SO

By Frank Frankfort Moore

In Three Volumes—Volume II

Sixth Edition

London, Hutchinson & Co., 34 Paternoster Row

1893

A GRAY EYE OR SO

BY

FRANK FRANKFORT MOORE

AUTHOR OF

"I FORBID THE BANNS," "DAIREEN," "SOJOURNERS TOGETHER,"
"HIGHWAYS AND HIGH SEAS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. I

SIXTH EDITION

London 1893

HUTCHINSON & CO.

34 PATERNOSTER ROW

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A GRAY EYE OR SO.

CHAPTER XX.—ON AN OAK SETTEE.

HE was still pondering over the many aspects of the question which, to his mind, needed solution, when he returned to the Castle, to find Lord Fotheringay in a chair by the side of a gaunt old man who, at one period of his life, had probably been tall, but who was now stooped in a remarkable way. The stranger seemed very old, so that beside him Lord Fotheringay looked comparatively youthful. Of this fact no one was better aware than Lord Fotheringay.

Edmund Airey had seen portraits of the new guest, and did not require to be told that he was Julius Anthony Avon, the historian of certain periods.

The first thought that occurred to him when he saw the two men side by side, was that Lord Fotheringay would not appear ridiculous merely as the son-in-law of Mr. Avon. To the casual observer at any rate he might have posed as the son of Mr. Avon.

He himself seemed to be under the impression that he might pass as Mr. Avon’s grandson, for he was extremely sportive in his presence, attitudinizing on his settee in a way that Edmund knew must have been agonizing to his rheumatic joints. Edmund smiled. He felt that he was watching the beginning of a comedy.

He learned that Mr. Avon had yielded to the persuasion of Lady Innisfail and had consented to join his daughter at the Castle for a few days. He was not fond of going into society; but it so happened that Castle Innisfail had been the centre of an Irish conspiracy at the early part of the century, and this fact made the acceptance by him of Lady Innisfail’s invitation a matter of business.

Hearing the nature of the work at which he was engaged, Lord Fotheringay had lost no time in expounding to him, in that airy style which he had at his command, the various mistakes that had been made by several generations of statesmen in dealing with the Irish question. The fundamental error which they had all committed was taking the Irish and their rebellions and conspiracies too seriously.

This theory he expounded to the man who was writing a biographical dictionary of Irish informers, and was about to publish his seventh volume, concluding the letter B.

Mr. Avon listened, gaunt and grim, while Lord Fotheringay gracefully waved away statesman after statesman who had failed signally, by reason of taking Ireland and the Irish seriously.

There was something grim also in Edmund Airey’s smile as he glanced at this beginning of the comedy.

That night Miss Stafford added originality to the ordinary terrors of her recital. She explained that hitherto she had merely interpreted the verses of others: now, however, she would draw upon her store of original poems.

Of course, Edmund Airey was outside the drawingroom while this was going on. So were many of his fellow-guests, including Helen Craven. Edmund found her beside him in a secluded part of the hall. He was rather startled by her sudden appearance. He forgot to greet her with one of the clever things that he reserved for her and other appreciative young women—for he still found a few, as any man with a large income may, if he only keeps his eyes open. “What a fool you must think me,” were the words with which Miss Craven greeted him, so soon as he became aware of her presence.

Strange to say, he had a definite idea that she had said something clever—at any rate something that impressed him more strongly than ever with the idea that she was a clever girl.

And yet she had assumed that he must think her a fool.

“A fool?” said he, “To think you so would be to write myself down one, Miss Craven.”

“Mr Airey,” said she, “I am a woman. Long ago I was a girl. You will thus believe me when I tell you that I never was frank in all my life. I want to begin now.”

“Ah, now I know the drift of your remark,” said he. “A fool. Yes, you made a good beginning: but supposing that I were to be frank, where would you be then?”

“I want you to begin also, Mr Airey,” said she.

“To begin? Oh, I made my start years ago—when I entered Parliament,” said he. “I was perfectly frank with the Opposition when I pointed out their mistakes. I have never yet been frank with a friend, however. That is why I still have a few left.”

“You must be frank with me now; if you won’t it doesn’t matter: I’ll be so to you. I admit that I behaved like an idiot; but you were responsible for it—yes, largely.”

“That is a capital beginning. Now tell me what you have done or left undone—above all, tell me where my responsibility comes in.”

“You like Harold Wynne?”

“You suggest that a mere liking involves a certain responsibility?”

“I love him.”

“Great heavens!”

“Why should you be startled at the confession when you have been aware of the fact for some time?”

“I never met a frank woman before. It is very terrible. Perhaps I shall get used to it.”

“Why will you not drop that tone?” she said, almost piteously. “Cannot you see how serious the thing is to me?”

“It is quite as serious to me,” he replied. “Men have confided in me—mostly fools—a woman never. Pray do not continue in that strain.”

“Then find words for me—be frank.”

“I will. You mean to say, Miss Craven, that I think you a fool because, acting on the hint which I somewhat vaguely, but really in good faith, dropped, you tried to impersonate the figure of the legend at that ridiculous cave. Is not that what you would say if you had the courage to be thoroughly frank?”

“Thank you,” said she, in a still weaker voice. “It is not so easy being frank all in a moment.”

“No, not if one has accustomed oneself to—let us say good manners,” he added.

“When I started for the boats after you had all left for that nonsense at the village, I felt certain that you were my friend as well as Harold Wynne’s, and that you had good reason for believing that he would be about the cave shortly after our hour of dining. I’m not very romantic.”

“Pardon me,” said he. “You are not quite frank. If you were you would say that, while secretly romantic, you follow the example of most young women nowadays in ridiculing romance.”

“Quite right,” she said. “I admitted just now that I found it difficult to be frank all in a moment. Anyhow I believed that if I were to play the part of the Wraith of the Cave within sight of Harold Wynne, he might—oh, how could I have been such a fool? But you—you, I say, were largely responsible for it, Mr. Airey.” She was now speaking not merely reproachfully but fiercely. “Why should you drop those hints—they were much more than hints—about his being so deeply impressed with the romance—about his having gone to the cave on the previous evening, if you did not mean me to act upon them?”

“I did mean you to act upon them,” said he. “I meant that you and he should come together last night, and I know that if you had come together, he would have asked you to marry him. I meant all that, because I like him and I like you too—yes, in spite of your frankness.”

“Thank you,” said she, giving him her hand. “You forgive me for being angry just now?”

“The woman who is angry with a man without cause pays him the greatest compliment in her power,” he remarked. “Fate was against us.”

“You think that she is so very—very pretty?” said Miss Craven.

“She?—fate?—I’ll tell you what I think. I think that Harold Wynne has met with the greatest misfortune of his life.”

“If you believe that, I know that I have met with the greatest of my life.”

The corner of the hall was almost wholly in shadow. The settee upon which Mr. Airey and Miss Craven were sitting, was cut off from the rest of the place by the thigh hone of the great skeleton elk. Between the ribs of the creature, however, some rays of light passed from one of the lamps; and, as Mr. Airey looked sympathetically into the face of his companion, he saw the gleam of a tear upon her cheek.

He was deeply impressed—so deeply that some moments had passed before he found himself wondering what she would say next. For a moment he forgot to be on his guard, though if anyone had described the details of a similar scene to him, he would probably have smiled while remarking that when the lamplight gleams upon a tear upon the cheek of a young woman of large experience, is just when a man needs most to be on his guard, He felt in another moment, however, that something was coming.

He waited for it in silence.

It seemed to him in that pause that he was seated by the side of someone whom he had never met before. The girl who was beside him seemed to have nothing in common with Helen Craven. So greatly does a young woman change when she becomes frank.

This is why so many husbands declare—when they are also frank—that the young women whom they marry are in every respect different from the young women who promise to be their wives.

“What is going to happen?” Helen asked him in a steady voice.

“God knows,” said he.

“I saw them together just after they left you this morning,” said she. “I was at one of the windows of the Castle, they were far along the terrace; but I’m sure that he said something to her about her eyes.”

“I should not be surprised if he did,” said Edmund. “Her eyes invite comment.”

“I believe that in spite of her eyes she is much the same as any other girl.”

“Is that to the point?” he asked. He was a trifle disappointed in her last sentence. It seemed to show him that, whatever Beatrice might be, Helen was much the same as other girls.

“It is very much to the point,” said she. “If she is like other girls she will hesitate before marrying a penniless man.”

“I agree with you,” said he. “But if she is like other girls she will not hesitate to love a penniless man.”

“Possibly—if, like me, she can afford to do so. But I happen to know that she cannot afford it. This brings me up to what has been on my mind all day. You are, I know, my friend; you are Harold Wynne’s also. Now, if

you want to enable him to gratify his reasonable ambition—if you want to make him happy—to make me happy—you will prevent him from ever asking Beatrice Avon to marry him."

"And I am prepared to do so much for him—for you—for her. But how can I do it?"

"You can take her away from him. You know how such things are done. You know that if a distinguished man such as you are, with a large income such as you possess, gives a girl to understand that he is, let us say, greatly interested in her, she will soon cease to be interested in any undistinguished and penniless son of a reprobate peer who may be before her eyes."

"I have seen such a social phenomenon," said he. "Does your proposition suggest that I should marry the young woman with 'a gray eye or so'?"

"You may marry her if you please—that's entirely a matter for yourself. I don't see any need for you to go that length. Have I not kept my promise to be frank?"

"You have," said he.

She had risen from the settee. She laid her hand on one of his that rested on a projection of the old oak carving, and in another instant she was laughing in front of Norah Innisfail, who was rendered even more proper than usual through having become acquainted with Miss Stafford's notions of originality in verse-making.

CHAPTER XXI.—ON THE ELEMENTS OF PARTY POLITICS.

MR. AIREY was actually startled by the suggestion which Miss Craven had made with, on the whole, considerable tact as well as inconceivable frankness.

He had been considering all the afternoon the possibility of carrying out the idea which it seemed Helen Craven had on her mind as well; but it had never occurred to him that his purpose might be achieved through the means suggested by the young woman who had just gone from his side.

His first impression was that the proposal made to him was the cruellest that had ever come from one girl in respect of another girl. He had never previously had an idea that a girl could be so heartless as to make such a suggestion as that which had come from Helen Craven; but in the course of a short space of time, he found it expedient to revise his first judgment on this matter. Helen Craven meant to marry Harold—so much could scarcely be doubted—and her marrying him would be the best thing that could happen to him. She was anxious to prevent his marrying Miss Avon; and surely this was a laudable aim, considering that marrying Miss Avon would be the worst thing that could happen to him—and to Miss Avon as well.

It might possibly be regarded as cruel by some third censors for Miss Craven to suggest that he, Edmund, after leading the other girl to believe that he was desirous of marrying her—or at least to believe that she might have a chance of marrying him—might stop short. To be sure, Miss Craven had not, with all her frankness, said that her idea was that he should refrain from asking the other girl to marry him, but only that the question was one that concerned himself alone.

He thought over this point for some time, and the conclusion he came to was that, after all, whether or not the cynical indifference of the suggestion amounted to absolute cruelty, the question concerned himself alone. Even if he were not to ask her to marry him after leading her to suppose that he intended doing so, he would at any rate have prevented her from the misery of marrying Harold; and that was something for which she might be thankful to him. He would also have saved her from the degradation of receiving a proposal of marriage from Lord Fotheringay; and that was also something for which she might be thankful to him.

Being a strictly party politician, he regarded expediency as the greatest of all considerations. He was not devoid of certain scruples now and again; but he was capable of weighing the probable advantages of yielding to these scruples against the certain advantages of—well, of throwing them to the winds.

For some minutes after Helen Craven had left him he subjected his scruples to the balancing process, and the result was that he found they were as nothing compared with the expediency of proceeding as Helen had told him that it was advisable for him to proceed.

He made up his mind that he would save the girl—that was how he put it to himself—and he would take extremely good care that he saved himself as well. Marriage would not suit him. Of this he was certain. People around him were beginning to be certain of it also. The mothers in Philistia had practically come to regard him as a *quantité négligeable*. The young women did not trouble themselves about him, after a while. It would not suit him to marry a young woman with lustrous eyes, he said to himself as he left his settee; but it would suit him to defeat the machinations of Lord Fotheringay, and to induce his friend Harold Wynne to pursue a sensible course.

He found himself by the side of Beatrice Avon before five minutes had passed, and he kept her thoroughly amused for close upon an hour—he kept her altogether to himself also, though many chances of leaving his side were afforded the girl by considerate youths, and by one smiling person who had passed the first bloom of youth and had reached that which is applied by the cautious hare's foot in the hand of a valet.

Before the hour of brandy-and-sodas and resplendent smoking-jackets had come, the fact of his having kept Beatrice Avon so long entertained had attracted some attention.

It had attracted the attention of Miss Craven, who commented upon it with a confidential smile at Harold. It attracted the attention of Harold's father, who commented upon it with a leer and a sneer. It attracted the

attention of Lady Innisfail, who commented upon it with a smile that caused the dainty dimple in her chin to assume the shape of the dot in a well-made note of interrogation.

It also attracted the attention of quite a number of other persons, but they reserved their comments, which was a wise thing for them to do.

As she said good-night to him, she seemed, Edmund Airey thought, to be a trifle fascinated as well as fascinating. He felt that he had had a delightful hour—it was far more delightful than the half hour which he had passed on the settee at the rear of the skeleton elk.

His feeling in this matter simply meant that it was far more agreeable to him to see a young woman admiring his cleverness than it was to admire the cleverness of another young woman.

He enjoyed his smoke by the side of the judge; for when a man is absorbed in the thoughts of his own cleverness he can still get a considerable amount of passive enjoyment out of the story of How the Odds fell from Thirteen to Five to Six to Four against Porcupine for some prehistoric Grand National.

Harold Wynne now and again glanced across the hall at the man who professed to be his best friend. He could perceive without much trouble that Edmund Airey was particularly well pleased with himself.

This meant, he thought, that Edmund had been particularly well pleased with Beatrice Avon.

Lord Fotheringay was too deeply absorbed in giving point to a story, founded upon personal experience, which he was telling to his host, to give a moment's attention to Edmund Airey, or to make an attempt to interpret his aspect.

It was only when his valet was putting him carefully to bed—he required very careful handling—that he recollected the effective way in which Airey had snubbed him, when he had made an honest attempt to reach Miss Avon conversationally.

He now found time to wonder what Airey meant by preventing the girl from being entertained—Lord Fotheringay assumed, as a matter of course, that the girl had not been entertained—all the evening. He had no head, however, for considering such a question in all its aspects. He only resolved that in future he would take precious good care that when there was any snubbing in the air, he would be the dispenser of it, not the recipient.

Lord Fotheringay was not a man of genius, but upon occasions he could be quite as disagreeable as if he were. He had studied the art of administering snubs, and though he had never quite succeeded in snubbing a member of Parliament of the same standing as Mr. Airey, yet he felt quite equal to the duty, should he find it necessary to make an effort in this direction.

He was sleeping the sleep of the reprobate, long before his son had succeeded in sleeping the sleep of the virtuous. Harold had more to think about, as well as more capacity of thinking, than his father. He was puzzled at the attitude of his friend and counsellor, Edmund Airey. What on earth could he have meant by appropriating Beatrice Avon, Harold wondered. He assumed that Airey had some object in doing what he had done. He knew that his friend was not the man to do anything without having an object in view. Previously he had been discreet to an extraordinary degree in his attitude toward women. He had never even made love to those matrons to whom it is discreet to make love. If he had ever done so Harold knew that he would have heard of it; for there is no fascination in making love to other men's wives, unless it is well known in the world that you are doing so. The school-boy does not smoke his cigarette in private. The fascination of the sin lies in his committing it so that it gets talked about.

Yes, Airey had ever been discreet, Harold knew, and he quite failed to account for his lapse—assuming that it was indiscreet to appropriate Beatrice Avon for an hour, and to keep her amused all that time.

Harold himself had his own ideas of what was discreet in regard to young women, and he had acted up to them. He did not consider that, so far as the majority of young women were concerned, he should be accredited with much self-sacrifice for his discretion.

Had a great temperance movement been set on foot in Italy in the days of Cæsar Borgia, the total abstainers would not have earned commendation for their self-sacrifice. Harold Wynne had been discreet in regard to most women simply because he was afraid of them. He was afraid that he might some day be led to ask one of them to marry him—one of them whom he would regard as worse than a Borgia poison ever after.

The caution that he had displayed in respect of Helen Craven showed how discreet he had accustomed himself to be.

He reflected, however, that in respect of Beatrice Avon he had thrown discretion to the winds From the moment that he had drawn her hands to his by the fishing line, he had given himself up to her. He had been without the power to resist.

Might it not, then, be the same with Edmund Airey? Might not Edmund, who had invariably been so guarded as to be wholly free from reproach so far as women were concerned, have found it impossible to maintain that attitude in the presence of Beatrice?

And if this was so, what would be the result?

This was the thought which kept Harold Wynne awake and uncomfortable for several hours during that night.

CHAPTER XXII.—ON THE WISDOM OP THE MATRONS.

LADY INNISFAIL made a confession to one of her guests—a certain Mrs. Burgoyne—who was always delighted to play the *rôle* of receiver of confessions. The date at which Lady Innisfail's confession was made was three days after the arrival of Beatrice Avon at the Castle, and its subject was her own over-eagerness to secure a strange face for the entertainment of her guests.

"I thought that the romantic charm which would attach to that girl, who seemed to float up to us out of the mist—leaving her wonderful eyes out of the question altogether—would interest all my guests," said she.

"And so it did, if I may speak for the guests," said Mrs. Burgoyne. "Yes, we were all delighted for nearly an entire day."

"I am glad that my aims were not wholly frustrated," said Lady Innisfail. "But you see the condition we are all in at present."

"I cannot deny it," replied Mrs. Burgoyne, with a sigh. "My dear, a new face is almost as fascinating as a new religion."

"More so to some people—generally men," said Lady Innisfail. "But who could have imagined that a young thing like that—she has never been presented, she tells me—should turn us all topsy turvy?"

"She has a good deal in her favour," remarked Mrs. Burgoyne. "She is fresh, her face is strange, she neither plays, sings, nor recites, and she is a marvellously patient listener."

"That last comes through being the daughter of a literary man," said Lady Innisfail. "The wives and daughters of poets and historians and the like are compelled to be patient listeners. They are allowed to do nothing else."

"I dare say. Anyhow that girl has made the most of her time since she came among us."

"She has. The worst of it is that no one could call her a flirt."

"I suppose not. But what do you call a girl who is attractive to all men, and who makes all the men grumpy, except the one she is talking to?"

"I call her a—a clever girl," replied Lady Innisfail. "Don't we all aim at that sort of thing?"

"Perhaps we did—once," said Mrs. Burgoyne, who was a year or two younger than her hostess. "I should hope that our aims are different now. We are too old, are we not?—you and I—for any man to insult us by making love to us."

"A woman is never too old to be insulted, thank God," said Lady Innisfail; and Mrs. Burgoyne's laugh was not the laugh of a matron who is shocked.

"All the same," added Lady Innisfail, "our pleasant party threatens to become a fiasco, simply because I was over-anxious to annex a new face. I had set my heart upon bringing Harold Wynne and Helen Craven together; but now they have become hopelessly good friends."

"She is very kind to him."

"Yes, that's the worst of it; she is kind and he is indifferent—he treats her as if she were his favourite sister."

"Are matters so bad as that?"

"Quite. But when the other girl is listening to what another man is saying to her, Harold Wynne's face is a study. He is as clearly in love with the other girl as anything can be. That, old reprobate—his father—has his aims too—horrid old creature! Mr. Durdan has ceased to study the Irish question with a deep-sea cast of hooks in his hand: he spends some hours every morning devising plans for spending as many minutes by the side of Beatrice. I do believe that my dear husband would have fallen a victim too, if I did not keep dinning into his ears that Beatrice is the loveliest creature of our acquaintance. I lured him on to deny it, and now we quarrel about it every night."

"I believe Lord Innisfail rather dislikes her," said Mrs. Burgoyne.

"I'm convinced of it," said Lady Innisfail. "But what annoys me most is the attitude of Mr. Airey. He professed to be Harold's friend as well as Helen's, and yet he insists on being so much with Beatrice that Harold will certainly be led on to the love-making point—"

"If he has not passed it already," suggested Mrs. Burgoyne.

"If he has not passed it already; for I need scarcely tell you, my dear Phil, that a man does not make love to a girl for herself alone, but simply because other men make love to her."

"Of course."

"So that it is only natural that Harold should want to make love to Beatrice when he is led to believe that Edmund Airey wants to marry her."

"The young fool! Why could he not restrain his desire until Mr. Airey has married her? But do you really think that Mr. Airey does want to marry her?"

"I believe that Harold Wynne believes so—that is enough for the present. Oh, no. You'll not find me quite so anxious to annex a strange face another time."

From the report of this confidential duologue it may possibly be perceived, first, that Lady Innisfail was a much better judge of the motives and impulses of men than Miss Craven was; and, secondly, that the presence of Beatrice at the Castle had produced a marked impression upon the company beneath its roof.

It was on the evening of the day after the confidential duologue just reported that there was an entertainment in the hall of the Castle. It took the form of *tableaux* arranged after well-known pictures, and there was certainly no lack of actors and actresses for the figures.

Mary Queen of Scots was, of course, led to execution, and Marie Antoinette, equally as a matter of course, appeared in her prison. Then Miss Stafford did her best to realize the rapt young woman in Mr. Sant's "The Soul's Awaking"—Miss Stafford was very wide awake indeed, some scoffer suggested; and Miss Innisfail looked extremely pretty—a hostess's daughter invariably looks pretty—as "The Peacemaker" in Mr. Marcus Stone's picture.

Beatrice Avon took no part in the *tableaux*—the other girls had not absolutely insisted on her appearing beside them on the stage that had been fitted up; they had an+ informal council together, Miss Craven being stage-manager, and they had come to the conclusion that they could get along very nicely without her assistance.

Some of them said that Beatrice preferred flirting with the men. However this may have been, the fact remained that Harold, when he had washed the paint off his face—he had been the ill-tempered lover, Miss Craven being the young woman with whom he was supposed to have quarrelled, requiring the interposition of a sweet Peacemaker in the person of Miss Innisfail—went round by a corridor to the back of the hall, and stood for a few minutes behind a ‘portiere that took the place of a door at one of the entrances. The hall was, of course, dimly lighted to make the contrast with the stage the greater, so that he could not see the features of the man who was sitting on the chair at the end of the row nearest the *portiere*; but the applause that greeted a reproduction of the picture of a monk shaving himself, having previously used no other soap than was supplied by a particular maker, had scarcely died away before Harold heard the voice of Edmund Airey say, in a low and earnest tone, to someone who was seated beside him, “I do hope that before you go away, you will let me know where you will next pitch your tent. I don’t want to lose sight of you.”

“If you wish I shall let you know when I learn it from my father,” was the reply that Harold heard, clearly spoken in the voice of Beatrice Avon.

Harold went back into the billowy folds of the tapestry curtain, and then into the corridor. The words that he had overheard had startled him. Not merely were the words spoken by Edmund Airey the same as he himself had employed a few days before to Beatrice, but her reply was practically the same as the reply which she had made to him.

When the last of the figurantes had disappeared from the stage, and when the buzz of congratulations was sounding through the hall, now fully lighted, Harold was nowhere to be seen.

Only a few of the most earnest of the smokers were still in the hall when, long past midnight, he appeared at the door leading to the outer hall or porch. His shoes were muddy and his shirt front was pulpy, for the night was a wet one.

He explained to his astonished friends that it was invariably the case that putting paint and other auxiliaries to “making up” on his face, brought on a headache, which he had learned by experience could only be banished by a long walk in the open air.

Well, he had just had such a walk.

He did not expect that his explanation would carry any weight with it; and the way he was looked at by his friends made him aware of the fact that, in giving them credit for more sense than to believe him, he was doing them no more than the merest justice.

No one who was present on his return placed the smallest amount of credence in his story. What many of them did believe was of no consequence.

CHAPTER XXIII.—ON THE ATLANTIC.

THE boats were scattered like milestones—as was stated by Brian—through the sinuous length of Lough Suangorm. The cutter yacht *Acushla* was leading the fleet out to the Atlantic, with two reefs in her mainsail, and although she towed a large punt, and was by no means a fast boat, she had no difficulty in maintaining her place, the fact being that the half-dozen boats that lumbered after her were mainly fishing craft hailing from the village of Cairndhu, and, as all the world knows, these are not built for speed but endurance. They are half-decked and each carries a lug sail. One of the legends of the coast is that when a lug sail is new its colour is brown, and as a new sail is never seen at Cairndhu there are no means of finding out if the story is true or false. The sails, as they exist, are kaleidoscopic in their patchwork. It is understood that anything will serve as a patch for a lug sail. Sometimes the centre-piece of an old coat has been used for this purpose; but if so, it is only fair to state that it is on record that the centre-piece of an old sail has been shaped into a jacket for the ordinary wearing of a lad.

The lug sail may yet find its way into a drawing room in Belgravia and repose side by side with the workhouse sheeting which occupies an honoured place in that apartment.

On through the even waves that roll from between the headlands at the entrance, to the little strand of pebbles at the end of the lough, the boats lumbered. The sea and sky were equally gray, but now and again a sudden gleam of sunshine would come from some unsuspected rift in the motionless clouds, and fly along the crests of the waves, revealing a green transparency for an instant, and then, flashing upon the sails, make apparent every patch in their expanse, just as a flash of lightning on a dark night reveals for a second every feature of a broad landscape.

As the first vessel of the little fleet, pursuing an almost direct course in spite of the curving of the shores of the Irish fjord, approached one coast and then the other, the great rocks that appeared snow-white, with only a dab of black here and there, became suddenly all dark, and the air was filled with what seemed like snow flakes. The cries of the innumerable sea birds, that whirled about the disturbing boat before they settled and the rocks became gradually white once more, had a remarkable effect when heard against that monotonous background, so to speak, of rolling waves.

The narrow lough was a gigantic organ pipe through which the mighty bass of the Atlantic roared everlastingly.

But when the headlands at the entrance were reached, the company who sat on the weather side of the cutter *Acushla* became aware of a commingling of sounds. The organ voice of the lough only filled up the intervals between the tremendous roar of the lion-throated waves that sprang with an appalling force half way up the black faces of the sheer cliffs, and broke in mid-air. All day long and all night long those inexhaustible billows come rushing upon that coast; and watching them and listening to them one feels how mean are contemporary politics as well as other things.

"That's the Irish question," remarked Lord Innisfail, who was steering his own cutter.

He nodded in the direction of the waves that were clambering up the headlands. What he meant exactly he might have had difficulty in explaining.

"Very true, very true," said Mr. Durdan, sagaciously, hoping to provoke Mr. Airey to reply, and thinking it likely that he would learn from Mr. Airey's reply what was Lord Innisfail's meaning.

But Mr. Airey, who had long ago become acquainted with Mr. Durdan's political methods, did not feel it incumbent on him to make the attempt to grapple with the question—if it was a question—suggested by Lord Innisfail.

The metaphor of a host should not, he knew, be considered too curiously. Like the wit of a police-court magistrate, it should be accepted with effusion.

"Stand by that foresheet," said Lord Innisfail to one of the yacht's hands. "We'll heave to until the other craft come up."

In a few moments the cutter had all way off her, and was simply tumbling about among the waves in a way that made some of the ship's company hold their breath and think longingly of pale brandy.

The cruise of the *Acushla* and the appearance of the fleet of boats upon the lough were due to the untiring energy of Lady Innisfail and to the fact that at last Brian, the boatman, had, by the help of Father Conn, come to grasp something of the force of the phrase "local colour".

Lady Innisfail was anxious that her guests should carry away certain definite impressions of their sojourn at the Connaught castle beyond those that may be acquired at any country-house, which everyone knows may be comprised in a very few words. A big shoot, and an incipient scandal usually constitute the record of a country-house entertainment. Now, it was not that Lady Innisfail objected to a big shoot or an incipient scandal—she admitted that both were excellent in their own way—but she hoped to do a great deal better for her guests. She hoped to impart to their visit some local colour.

She had hung on to the wake and the eviction, as has already been told, with pertinacity. The *fête* which she believed was known to the Irish peasantry as the Cruiskeen, had certainly some distinctive features; though just as she fancied that the Banshee was within her grasp, it had vanished into something substantial—this was the way she described the scene on the cliffs. Although her guests said they were very well satisfied with what they had seen and heard, adding that they had come to the conclusion that if the Irish had only a touch of humour they would be true to the pictures that had been drawn of them, still Lady Innisfail was not satisfied.

Of course if Mr. Airey were to ask Miss Avon to marry him, her house-party would be talked about during the winter. But she knew that it is the marriages which do not come off that are talked about most; and, after all, there is no local colour in marrying or giving in marriage, and she yearned for local colour. Brian, after a time, came to understand something of her ladyship's yearnings. Like the priest and the other inhabitants, he did not at first know what she wanted.

It is difficult to impress upon Fuzzy-wuzzy that he would be regarded as a person of distinction in the Strand and as an idol in Belgravia. At his home in the Soudan he is a very commonplace sort of person. So in the region of Lough Suangorm, but a casual interest attaches to the caubeen, which in Piccadilly would be followed by admiring crowds, and would possibly be dealt with in Evening Editions.

But, as has just been said, Brian and his friends in due time came to perceive the spectacular value to her ladyship's guests of the most commonplace things of the country; and it was this fact that induced Brian to tell three stories of a very high colour to Mr. Airey and Mr. Wynne.

It was also his appreciation of her ladyship's wants that caused him to suggest to her the possibility of a seal-hunt constituting an element of attraction—these were not the exact words employed by the boatman—to some of her ladyship's guests.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Lady Innisfail was delighted with the suggestion. Some of her guests pretended that they also were delighted with it, though all that the majority wanted was to be let alone. Still, upon the afternoon appointed for the seal-hunt a considerable number of the Castle party went aboard the yacht. Beatrice was one of the few girls who were of the party. Helen would have dearly liked to go also; she would certainly have gone if she had not upon one—only one—previous occasion allowed herself to be persuaded to sail out to the headlands. She was wise enough not to imperil her prospects for the sake of being drenched with sea water.

She wondered—she did not exactly hope it—if it was possible for Beatrice Avon to become seasick.

This was how upon that gray afternoon, the fleet of boats sailed out to where the yacht was thumping about among the tremendous waves beyond the headlands that guard the entrance to Lough Suangorm.

CHAPTER XXIV.—ON THE CHANCE.

WHEN the fishing boats came within half a cable's length of the cutter, Lord Innisfail gave up the tiller to Brian, who was well qualified to be the organizer of the expedition, having the reputation of being familiar with the haunts and habits of the seals that may be found—by such as know as much about them as Brian—among the great caves that pierce for several miles the steep cliffs of the coast.

The responsibility of steering a boat under the headlands, either North or South, was not sought by Lord Innisfail. For perhaps three hundred and fifty days in every year it would be impossible to approach the cliffs in any craft; but as Brian took the tiller he gave a knowing glance around the coast and assured his lordship that it was a jewel of a day for a seal-hunt, and added that it was well that he had brought only the largest of the fishing boats, for anything smaller would sink with the weight of the catch of seals.

He took in the slack of the main sheet and sent the cutter flying direct to the Northern headland, the luggers following in her wake, though scarcely preserving stations or distances with that rigorous naval precision which occasionally sends an ironclad to the bottom.

The man-of-war may run upon a reef, and the country may be called on to pay half a million for the damage; but it can never be said that she fails to maintain her station prescribed by the etiquette of the Royal Navy in following the flagship, which shows that the British sailor, wearing epaulettes, is as true as the steel that his ship is made of, and a good deal truer than that of some of the guns which he is asked to fire.

In a short time the boats had cleared the headland, and it seemed to some of the cutter's company as if they were given an opportunity of looking along the whole west coast of Ireland in a moment. Northward and southward, like a study in perspective, the lines of indented cliffs stretched until they dwindled away into the gray sky. The foam line that was curved as it curled around the enormous rocks close at hand, was straightened out in the distance and never quite disappeared.

"Talk of the Great Wall of China," said Lord Innisfail, pointing proudly to the splendid chain of cliffs. "Talk of the Great Wall of China indeed! What is it compared with that?"

He spoke as proudly as if he owned everything within that line of cliffs, though he thanked heaven every night that he only owned a few thousand acres in Ireland.

"What indeed—what indeed?" said Mr. Durdan.

One of the men thought the moment opportune for airing a theory that he had to the effect that the Great Wall of China was not built by the Chinese to keep the surrounding nations out, but by the surrounding nations to keep the Chinese in.

It was a feasible theory, suggesting that the Chinese immigration question existed among the Thibetans some thousands of years ago, to quite as great an extent as it does in some other directions to-day. But it requires to be a very strong theory to stand the strain of the Atlantic waves and a practically unlimited view of the coast of Ireland. So no discussion arose.

Already upon some of the flat rocks at the entrance to the great caves the black head of a seal might be seen. It did not remain long in view, however. Brian had scarcely pointed it out with a whisper to such persons as were near him, when it disappeared.

"It's the wary boys they are, to be sure!" he remarked confidentially.

His boldness in steering among the rocks made some persons more than usually thoughtful. Fortunately the majority of those aboard the cutter knew nothing of his display of skill. They remained quite unaware of the jagged rocks that the boat just cleared; and when he brought the craft to the lee of a cliff, which formed a natural breakwater and a harbour of ripples, none of these people seemed surprised.

Lord Innisfail and a few yachtsmen who knew something of sailing, drew long breaths. They knew what they had escaped.

One of the hands got into the punt and took a line to the cliff to moor the yacht when the sails had been lowered, and by the time that the mooring was effected, the other boats had come into the natural harbour—it would have given protection—that is, natural protection, to a couple of ironclads—no power can protect them from their own commanders.

"Now, my lard," said Brian, who seemed at last to realize his responsibilities, "all we've got to do is to grab the craythurs; but that same's a caution. We'll be at least an hour-and-a-half in the caves, and as it will be cold work, and maybe wet work, maybe some of their honours wouldn't mind standing by the cutter."

The suggestion was heartily approved of by some of the yacht's company. Lady Innisfail said she was perfectly satisfied with such local colour as was available without leaving the yacht, and it was understood that Miss Avon would remain by her side. Mr. Airey said he thought he could face with cheerfulness a scheme of existence that did not include sitting with varying degrees of uneasiness in a small boat while other men speared an inoffensive seal.

"Such explanations are not for the Atlantic Ocean," said Harold, getting over the side of the yacht into the punt that Brian had hauled close—Lord Innisfail was already in the bow.

In a short time, by the skilful admiralship of Brian, the other boats, which were brought up from the luggers, were manned, and their stations were assigned to them, one being sent to explore a cave a short distance off, while another was to remain at the entrance to pick up any seals that might escape. The same plan was adopted in regard to the great cave, the entrance to which was close to where the yacht was moored. Brian arranged that his boat should enter the cave, while another, fully manned, should stand by the rocks to capture the refugees.

All the boats then started for their stations—all except the punt with Brian at the yoke lines, Harold and Mr. Durdan in the stern sheets, one of the hands at the paddles, and Lord Innisfail in the bows; for when this craft was about to push off, Brian gave an exclamation of discontent.

"What's the matter now?" asked Lord Innisfail.

"Plenty's the matter, my lard," said Brian. "The sorra a bit of luck we'll have this day if we leave the ladies behind us."

“Then we must put up with bad luck,” said Lord Innisfail. “Go down on your knees to her ladyship and ask her to come with us if you think that will do any good.”

“Oh, her ladyship would come without prayers if she meant to,” said Brian. “But it’s Miss Avon that’s open to entreaty. For the love of heaven and the encouragement of sport, step into the boat, Sheila, and you’ll have something to talk about for the rest of your life.”

Beatrice shook her head at the appeal, but that wouldn’t do for Brian. “Look, my lady, look at her eyes, aren’t they just jumping out of her head like young trout in a stream in May?” he cried to Lady Innisfail. “Isn’t she waiting for you to say the word to let her come, an’ not a word does any gentleman in the boat speak on her behalf.”

The gentlemen remained dumb, but Lady Innisfail declared that if Miss Avon was not afraid of a wetting and cared to go in the boat, there was no reason why she should not do so.

In another moment Beatrice had stepped into the punt and it had pushed off with a cheer from Brian. The men in the other boats, now in the distance, hearing the cheer, but without knowing why it arose, sent back an answer that aroused the thousand echoes of the cliffs and the ten thousand sea birds that arose in a cloud from every crevice of the rocks. Thus it was that the approach of the boat to the great cave did not take place in silence.

Harold had not uttered a word. He had not even looked at Edmund Airey’s face to see what expression it wore when Beatrice stepped into the boat.

“Did you ever hear anything like Airey’s roundabout phrase about a scheme of existence?” said Mr. Durdan.

“It is his way of putting a simple matter,” said Harold. “You heard of the man who, in order to soften down the fact that a girl had what are colloquially known as beetle-crushers, wrote that her feet tended to increase the mortality among coleoptera?”

“I’m afraid that the days of the present government are numbered,” said Mr. Durdan, who seemed to think that the remark was in logical sequence with Harold’s story.

Beatrice looked wonderingly at the speaker; it was some moments before she found an echo in the expression on Harold’s face to what she felt.

The man who could think of such things as the breaking up of a government, when floating in thirty fathoms of green sea, beneath the shadow of such cliffs as the boat was approaching, was a mystery to the girl, though she was the daughter of one of the nineteenth century historians, to whom nothing is a mystery.

The boat entered the great cave without a word being spoken by any one aboard, and in a few minutes it was being poled along in semi-darkness. The lapping of the swell from the entrance against the sides of the cave sounded on through the distance of the interior, and from those mysterious depths came strange sounds of splashing water, of dropping stalactites, and now and again a mighty sob of waves choked within a narrow vent.

Silently the boat was forced onward, and soon all light from the entrance was obscured. Through total darkness the little craft crept for nearly half a mile.

Suddenly a blaze of light shot up with startling effect in the bows of the boat. It only came from a candle that Brian had lit: but its gleam was reflected in millions of stalactites into what seemed an interminable distance—millions of stalactites on the roof and the walls, and millions of ripples beneath gave back the gleam, until the boat appeared to be the centre of a vast illumination.

The dark shadows of the men who were using the oars as poles, danced about the brilliant roof and floor of the cave, adding to the fantastic charm of the scene.

“Now,” said Brian, in a whisper, “these craythurs don’t understand anything that’s said to them unless by a human being, so we’ll need to be silent enough. We’ll be at the first ledge soon, and there maybe you’ll wait with the lady, Mr. Wynne—you’re heavier than Mr. Durdan, and every inch of water that the boat draws is worth thinking about. I’ll leave a candle with you, but not a word must you speak.”

“All right,” said Harold. “You’re the manager of the expedition; we must obey you; but I don’t exactly see where my share in the sport comes in.”

“I’d explain it all if I could trust myself to speak,” said Brian. “The craythurs has ears.” The ledge referred to by him was reached in silence. It was perhaps six inches above the water, and in an emergency it might have afforded standing room for three persons. So much Harold saw by the light of the candle that the boatman placed in a niche of rock four feet above the water.

At a sign from Brian, Harold got upon the ledge and helped Beatrice out of the boat.

The light of the candle that was in the bow of the boat gleamed upon the figure of a man naked from the waist up, and wearing a hard round hat with a candle fastened to the brim.

Harold knew that this was the costume of the seal-hunter of the Western caves, for he had had a talk with Brian on the subject, and had learned that only by swimming with a lighted candle on his forehead for a quarter of a mile, the hunter could reach the sealing ground at the termination of the cave.

Without a word being spoken, the boat went on, and its light soon glimmered mysteriously in the distance.

Harold and Beatrice stood side by side on the narrow ledge of rock and watched the dwindling of the light. The candle that was on the niche of rock almost beside them seemed dwindling also. It had become the merest spark. Harold saw that Brian had inadvertently placed it so that the dripping of the water from the roof sent flecks of damp upon the wick.

He stretched out his hand to shift it to another place, but before he could touch it, a large stalactite dropped upon it, and not only extinguished it, but sent it into the water with a splash.

The little cry that came from the girl as the blackness of darkness closed upon them, sounded to his ears as a reproach.

“I had not touched it,” said he. “Something dropped from the roof upon it. You don’t mind the darkness?”

“Oh, no—no,” said she, doubtfully. “But we were commanded to be dumb.”

“That command was given on the assumption that the candle would continue burning—now the conditions are changed,” said he, with a sophistry that would have done credit to a cabinet minister.

“Oh,” said she.

There was a considerable pause before she asked him how long he thought it would be before the boat would return.

He declined to bind himself to any expression of opinion on the subject.

Then there was another pause, filled up only by the splash of something falling from the roof—by the wash of the water against the smooth rock.

“I wonder how it has come about that I am given a chance of speaking to you at last?” said he.

“At last?” said she, repeating his words in the same tone of inquiry.

“I say at last, because I have been waiting for such an opportunity for some time, but it did not come. I don’t suppose I was clever enough to make my opportunity, but now it has come, thank God.”

Again there was silence. He seemed to think that he had said something requiring a reply from her, but she did not speak.

“I wonder if you would believe me when I say that I love you,” he remarked.

“Yes,” she replied, as naturally as though he had asked her what she thought of the weather. “Yes, I think I would believe you. If you did not love me—if I was not sure that you loved me, I should be the most miserable girl in all the world.”

“Great God!” he cried. “You do not mean to say that you love me, Beatrice?”

“If you could only see my face now, you would know it,” said she. “My eyes would tell you all—no, not all—that is in my heart.”

He caught her hands, after first grasping a few handfuls of clammy rock, for the hands of the truest lovers do not meet mechanically.

“I see them,” he whispered—“I see your eyes through the darkness. My love, my love!”

He did not kiss her. His soul revolted from the idea of the commonplace kiss in the friendly secrecy of the darkness.

There are opportunities and opportunities. He believed that if he had kissed her then she would never have forgiven him, and he was right. “What a fool I was!” he cried. “Two nights ago, when I overheard a man tell you, as I had told you long ago—so long ago—more than a week ago—that he did not want you to pass out of his sight—when I heard you make the same promise to him as you had made to me, I felt as if there was nothing left for me in the world. I went out into the darkness, and as I stood at the place when I first saw you, I thought that I should be doing well if I were to throw myself headlong down those rocks into the sea that the rain was beating upon. Beatrice, God only knows if it would be better or worse for you if I had thrown myself down—if I were to leave you standing alone here now.”

“Do not say those words—they are like the words I asked you before not to say. Even then your words meant everything to me. They mean everything to me still.”

He gave a little laugh. Triumph rang through it. He did not seem to think that his laughter might sound incongruous to her.

“This is my hour,” he said. “Whatever fate may have in store for me it cannot make me unlive this hour. And to think that I had got no idea that such an hour should ever come to me—that you should ever come to me, my beloved! But you came to me. You came to me when I had tried to bring myself to feel that there was something worth living for in the world apart from love.”

“And now?”

“And now—and now—now I know that there is nothing but love that is worth living for. What is your thought, Beatrice—tell me all that is in your heart?”

“All—all?” She now gave the same little laugh that he had given. She felt that her turn had come.

She gave just the same laugh when his feeling of triumph had given place to a very different feeling—when he had told her that he was a pauper—that he had no position in the world—that he was dependent upon his father for every penny that he had to spend, with the exception of a few hundred pounds a year, which he inherited from his mother—that it was an act of baseness on his part to tell her that he loved her.

He had plenty of time for telling her all this, and for explaining his position thoroughly, for nearly an hour had passed before a gleam of light and a hail from the furthest recesses of the cave, made them aware of the fact that other interests than theirs existed in the world.

And yet when he had told her all that he had to tell to his disadvantage, she gave that little laugh of triumph. He would have given a good deal to be able to see the expression which he knew was in those wonderful eyes of hers, as that laugh came from her.

Not being able to do so, however, he could only crush her hands against his lips and reply to the boat’s hail.

Brian, on hearing of the mishap to the candle, delivered a torrent of execration against himself. It took Harold some minutes to bring himself up to the point of Lord Innisfail’s enthusiasm on the subject of seal-fishing. Five excellent specimens were in the bottom of the boat, and the men who had swum after them were there also. A strong odour of whiskey was about them; and the general idea that prevailed was that they would not suffer from a chill, though they had been in the water for three quarters of an hour.

As the other boats only succeeded in capturing three seals among them all, Brian had statistics to bear out his contention that the presence of Beatrice had brought luck to his boat.

He pocketed two sovereigns which Harold handed him when the boats returned to the mooring-place, and he was more profuse than ever in his abuse of his own stupidity in placing the candle so as to be affected by the damp from the roof.

His eyes twinkled all the time in a way that made Harold’s cheeks red.

The judge found Miss Avon somewhat *distraite* after dinner that night. He became pensive in consequence. He wondered if she thought him elderly.

He did not mind in the least growing old, but the idea of being thought elderly was abhorrent to him.

The next day Beatrice and her father returned to their cottage at the other side of the lough.

CHAPTER XXV.—ON THE SOCIAL VALUE OF THE REPROBATE.

SOMETHING remarkable had occurred. Lord Fotheringay had been for a fortnight under one roof without disgracing himself.

The charitable people said he was reforming.

The others said he was aging rapidly.

The fact remained the same, however: he had been a fortnight at the Castle and he had not yet disgraced himself.

Mrs. Burgoyne congratulated Lady Innisfail upon this remarkable occurrence, and Lady Innisfail began to hope that it might get talked about. If her autumn party at Castle Innisfail were to be talked about in connection with the reform of Lord Fotheringay, much more interest would be attached to the party and the Castle than would be the result of the publication of the statistics of a gigantic shoot. Gigantic shoots did undoubtedly take place on the Innisfail Irish property, but they invariably took place before the arrival of Lord Innisfail and his guests, and the statistics were, for obvious reasons, not published. They only leaked out now and again.

The most commonplace people might enjoy the reputation attaching to the careful preservation and the indiscriminate slaughter of game; but Lady Innisfail knew that the distinction accruing from a connection with a social scandal of a really high order, or with a great social reform—either as regards a hardened reprobate or an afternoon toilet—was something much greater.

Of course, she understood perfectly well that in England the Divorce Court is the natural and legitimate medium for attaining distinction in the form of a Special Edition and a pen and ink portrait; but she had seen great things accomplished by the rumour of an unfair game of cards, as well as by a very daring skirt dance.

Next to a high-class scandal, the discovery of a new religion was a means of reaching eminence, she knew. With the exact social value attaching to the Reform of a Hardened Reprobate, she was as yet unacquainted, the fact being that she had never had any experience of such an incident—it was certainly very rare in the society in which she moved, so that it is not surprising that she was not prepared to say at a moment how much it would count in the estimation of the world.

But if the Reform of a Reprobate—especially a reprobate with a title—was so rare as to be uncatalogued, so to speak, surely it should be of exceptional value as a social incident. Should it not partake of the prestige which attaches to a rare occurrence?

This was the way that Mrs. Burgoyne put the matter to her friend and hostess, and her friend and hostess was clever enough to appreciate the force of her phrases. She began to perceive that although Lord Fotheringay had come to the Castle on the slenderest of invitations, and simply because it suited his purpose—although she had been greatly annoyed at his sudden appearance at the Castle, still good might come of it.

She did not venture to estimate from the standpoint of the moralist, the advantages accruing to the Reformed Reprobate himself from the incident of his reform, she merely looked at the matter from the standpoint of the woman of society—which is something quite different—desirous of attaining a certain social distinction.

Thus it was that Lady Innisfail took to herself the credit of the Reform of the Reprobate, and petted the reprobate accordingly, giving no attention whatever to the affairs of his son. These affairs, interesting though they had been to her some time before, now became insignificant compared with the Great Reform.

She even went the length of submitting to be confided in by Lord Fotheringay; and she heard, with genuine interest, from his own lips that he considered the world in general to be hollow. He had found it so. He had sounded the depths of its hollowness. He had found that in all grades of society there was much evil. The working classes—he had studied the question of the working man not as a parliamentary candidate, consequently honestly—drank too much beer. They sought happiness through the agency of beer; but all the beer produced by all the brewers in the House of Lords would not bring happiness to the working classes. As for the higher grades of society—the people who were guilty of partaking of unearned increment—well, they were wrong too. He thought it unnecessary to give the particulars of the avenues through which they sought happiness. But they were all wrong. The domestic life—there, and there only, might one find the elements of true happiness. He knew this because he had endeavoured to reach happiness by every other avenue and had failed in his endeavours. He now meant to supply his omission, and he regretted that it had never occurred to him to do so before. Yes, some poet or other had written something or other on the subject of the great charm of a life of domesticity, and Lord Fotheringay assured Lady Innisfail in confidence that that poet was right.

Lady Innisfail sighed and said that the Home—the English Home—with its simple pleasures and innocent mirth, was where the Heart—the English Heart—was born. What happiness was within the reach of all if they would only be content with the Home! Society might be all very well in its way. There were duties to be discharged—every rank in life carried its duties with it; but how sweet it was, after one had discharged one’s

social obligations, to find a solace in the retirement of Home.

Lord Fotheringay lifted up his hands and said “Ah—ah,” in different cadences.

Lady Innisfail folded her hands and shook her head with some degree of solemnity. She felt confident that if Lord Fotheringay was in earnest, her autumn party would be talked about with an enthusiasm surpassing that which would attach to the comments on any of the big shoots in Scotland, or in Yorkshire, or in Wales.

But when Lord Fotheringay had an opportunity of conversing alone with Mr. Airey, he did not think it necessary to dwell upon the delights which he had begun to perceive might be found in a life of pure domesticity. He took the liberty of reminding Mr. Airey of the conversation they had on the morning after Miss Avon’s arrival at the Castle.

“Had we a conversation then, Lord Fotheringay?” said Mr. Airey, in a tone that gave Lord Fotheringay to understand that if any contentious point was about to be discussed, it would rest with him to prove everything.

“Yes, we had a conversation,” said Lord Fotheringay. “I was foolish enough to make a confidant of you.”

“If you did so, you certainly were foolish,” said Edmund, quietly.

“I have been keeping my eyes open and my ears open as well, during the past ten days,” said Lord Fotheringay, with a leer that was meant to be significant. Edmund Airey, however, only took it to signify that Lord Fotheringay could easily be put into a very bad temper. He said nothing, but allowed Lord Fotheringay to continue. “Yes, let me tell you that when I keep both eyes and ears open not much escapes me. I have seen and heard a good deal. You are a clever sort of person, friend Airey; but you don’t know the world as I know it.”

“No, no—as you know it—ah, no,” remarked Mr. Airey.

Lord Fotheringay was a trifle put out by the irritating way in which the words were spoken. Still, the pause he made was not of long duration.

“You have your game to play, like other people, I suppose,” he resumed, after the little pause.

“You are at liberty to suppose anything you please, my dear Lord Fotheringay,” said Mr. Airey, with a smile.

“Come,” said Lord Fotheringay, adopting quite another tone. “Come, Airey, speaking as man to man, wasn’t it a confoundedly shabby trick for you to play upon me—getting me to tell you that I meant to marry that young thing—to save her from unhappiness, Airey?”

“Well?” said Airey.

“Well?” said Lord Fotheringay.

“You didn’t complete your sentence. Was the shabby trick accepting your confidence?”

“The shabby trick was trying to win the affection of the young woman after I had declared to you my intention.”

“That was the shabby trick, was it?”

“I have no hesitation in saying that it was.”

“Very well. I hope that you have nothing more to confide in me beside this—your confidences have so far been singularly uninteresting.”

Lord Fotheringay got really angry.

“Let me tell you—” he began, but he was stopped by Airey.

“No, I decline to let you tell me anything,” said he. “You accused me just now of being so foolish as to listen to your confidences. I, perhaps, deserved the reproach. But I should be a fool if I were to give you another chance of levelling the same accusation against me. You will have to force your confidences on someone else in future, unless such as concern your liver. You confided in me that your liver wasn’t quite the thing. How is it to-day?”

“I understand your tactics,” said Lord Fotheringay, with a snap. “And I’ll take good care to make others acquainted with them also,” he added. “Oh, no, Mr. Airey; I wasn’t born yesterday.”

“To that fact every Peerage in the kingdom bears testimony,” said Mr. Airey.

Lord Fotheringay had neglected his cigar. It had gone out. He now took three or four violent puffs at it; he snapped it from between his teeth, looked at the end, and then dropped it on the ground and stamped on it.

“It was your own fault,” said Airey. “Try one of mine, and don’t bother yourself with other matters.”

“I’ll bother myself with what I please,” said Lord Fotheringay with a snarl.

But he took Mr. Airey’s cigar, and smoked it to the end. He knew that Mr. Airey smoked Carolinas.

This little scene took place outside the Castle before lunch on the second day after the departure of Mr. Avon and his daughter; and, after lunch, Lord Fotheringay put on a yachting jacket and cap, and announced his intention of having a stroll along the cliffs. His doctor had long ago assured him, he said, that he did not take sufficient exercise nor did he breathe enough fresh air. He meant in future to put himself on a strict regimen in this respect, and would begin at once.

He was allowed to carry out his intention alone—indeed he did not hint that his medical adviser had suggested company as essential to the success of any scheme of open air exercise.

The day was a breezy one, and the full force of the wind was felt at the summit of the cliff coast; but like many other gentlemen who dread being thought elderly, he was glad to seize every opportunity of showing that he was as athletic as the best of the young fellows; so he strode along, gasping and blowing with quite as much fresh air in his face as the most exacting physician could possibly have prescribed for a single dose.

He made his way to the mooring-place of the boats, and he found Brian in the boat-house engaged in making everything snug.

He was very civil to Brian, and after a transfer of coin, inquired about the weather.

There was a bit of a draught of wind in the lough, Brian said, but it was a fine day for a sail. Would his

lardship have a mind for a bit of a sail? The *Acushla* was cruising, but the *Mavourneen*, a neat little craft that sailed like a swallow, was at his lardship's service.

After some little consideration, Lord Fotheringay said that though he had no idea of sailing when he left the Castle, yet he never could resist the temptation of a fine breeze—it was nothing stronger than a breeze that was blowing, was it?

"A draught—just a bit of a draught," said the man.

"In that case," said Lord Fotheringay, "I think I may venture. In fact, now that I come to think of it, I should like to visit the opposite shore. There is a Castle or something, is there not, on the opposite shore?"

"Is it a Castle?" said Brian. "Oh, there's a power of Castles scattered along the other shore, my lard. It's thrippin' over them your lardship will be after doin.'"

"Then we'll not lose a moment in starting," said Lord Fotheringay.

CHAPTER XXVI.—ON FRANKNESS AND FRIENDSHIP.

BRIAN took care that no moment was lost. In the course of a very few minutes Lord Fotheringay was seated on the windward thwarts of the boat, his hands grasping the gunwale to right and left, and his head bowed to mitigate in some measure the force of the shower of sea-water that flashed over the boat as her hows neatly clipped the crest off every wave.

Lord Fotheringay held on grimly. He hated the sea and all connected with it; though he hated the House of Lords to almost as great an extent, yet he had offered the promoter of the Channel Tunnel to attend in the House and lend the moral weight of his name to the support of the scheme. It was only the breadth and spontaneousness of Brian's assurance that the breeze was no more than a draught, that had induced him to carry out his cherished idea of crossing the lough.

"Didn't I tell your lardship that the boat could sail with the best of them?" said the man, as he hauled in the sheet a trifle, and brought the boat closer to the wind—a manouvre that did not tend to lessen the cascade that deluged his passenger.

Lord Fotheringay said not a word. He kept his head bowed to every flap of the waves beneath the bows. His attitude would have commended itself to any painter anxious to produce a type of Submission to the Will of Heaven.

He was aging quickly—so much Brian perceived, and dwelt upon—with excellent effect—in his subsequent narrative of the voyage to some of the servants at the Castle. The cosmetic that will withstand the constant application of sea-water has yet to be invented, so that in half an hour Lord Fotheringay would not have been recognized except by his valet. Brian had taken aboard a well-preserved gentleman with a rosy complexion and a moustache almost too black for nature. The person who disembarked at the opposite side of the lough was a stooped old man with lank streaky cheeks and a wisp of gray hair on each side of his upper lip.

"And it's a fine sailor your lardship is entirely," remarked the boatman, as he lent his tottering, dazed passenger a helping hand up the beach of pebbles. "And it's raal enjoyment your lardship will be after having among the Castles of the ould quality, after your lardship's sail."

Not a word did Lord Fotheringay utter. He felt utterly broken down in spirit, and it was not until he had got behind a rock and had taken out a pocket-comb and a pocket-glass, and had by these auxiliaries, and the application of a grain or two of roseate powder without which he never ventured a mile from his base of supplies, repaired some of the ravages of his voyage, that he ventured to make his way to the picturesque white cottage, which Miss Avon had once pointed out to him as the temporary residence of her father and herself.

It was a five-roomed cottage that had been built and furnished by an enthusiastic English fisherman for his accommodation during his annual residence in Ireland. One, more glance did Lord Fotheringay give to his pocket-mirror before knocking at the door.

He would have had time to renew his youth, had he had his pigments handy, before the door was opened by an old woman with a shawl over her shoulders and a cap, that had possibly once been white, on her straggling hairs.

She made the stage courtesy of an old woman in front of Lord Fotheringay, and explained that she was a little hard of hearing—she was even obliging enough to give a circumstantial account of the accident that was responsible for her infirmity.

"Miss Avon?" said the old woman, when Lord Fotheringay had repeated his original request in a louder tone. "Miss Avon? no, she's not here now—not even her father, who was a jewel of a gentleman, though a bit queer. God bless them both now that they have gone back to England, maybe never to return."

"Back to England. When?" shouted Lord Fotheringay.

"Why, since early in the morning. The Blessed Virgin keep the young lady from harm, for she's swater than honey, and the Saints preserve her father, for he was—"

Lord Fotheringay did not wait to hear the position of the historian defined by the old woman. He turned away from the door with such words as caused her infirmity to be a blessing in disguise.

When Brian greeted his return with a few well-chosen phrases bearing upon the architecture of the early

Celtic nobles, Lord Fotheringay swore at him; but the boatman, who did a little in that way himself when under extreme provocation, only smiled as Lord Fotheringay took his seat in the boat once more, and prepared for the ordeal of his passage.

There was a good deal in Brian’s smile.

The wind had changed most unaccountably, he explained, so that it would, he feared, be absolutely necessary to tack out almost to the entrance of the lough in order to reach the mooring-place. For the next hour he became the exponent of every system of sailing known to modern navigators. After something over an hour of this manoeuvring, he had compassion upon his victim, and ran the boat before the wind—he might have done so at first if Lord Fotheringay had not shown such a poor knowledge of men as to swear at him—to the mooring-place.

“If it’s not making too free with your lardship, I’d offer your lardship a hand up the track,” said Brian. “It’s myself that has to go up to the Castle anyway, with a letter to her ladyship from Miss Avon. Didn’t the young lady give it to me in the morning before she started with his honour her father on the car?”

“And you knew all this time that Miss Avon and her father had left the neighbourhood?” said Lord Fotheringay, through his store teeth.

“Tubbe sure I did,” said Brian. “But Miss Avon didn’t live in one of the Castles of the ould quality that your lardship was so particular ready to explore.”

Lord Fotheringay felt that his knowledge of the world and the dwellers therein had its limits.

It was at Lord Fotheringay’s bedside that Harold said his farewell to his father the next day. Lord Fotheringay’s incipient rheumatism had been acutely developed by his drenching of the previous afternoon, and he thought it prudent to remain in bed.

“You’re going, are you?” snarled the Father.

“Yes, I’m going,” replied the Son. “Lord and Lady Innisfail leave to-morrow.”

“Have you asked Miss Craven to marry you?” inquired the Father.

“No,” said Harold.

“Why not—tell me that?”

“I haven’t made up my mind on the subject of marrying.”

“Then the sooner you make it up the better it will be for yourself. I’ve been watching you pretty closely for some days—I did not fail to notice a certain jaunty indifference to what was going on around you on the night of your return from that tomfoolery in the boats—seal-hunting, I think they called it. I saw the way you looked at Helen Craven that night. Contempt, or something akin to contempt, was in every glance. Now you know that she is to be at Ella’s in October. You have thus six weeks to make up your mind to marry her. If you make up your mind to marry anyone else, you may make up your mind to live upon the three hundred a year that your mother left you. Not a penny you will get from me. I’ve stinted myself hitherto to secure you your allowance. By heavens, I’ll not do so any longer. You will only receive your allowance from me for another year, and then only by signing a declaration at my lawyer’s to the effect that you are not married. I’ve heard of secret marriages before now, but you needn’t think of that little game. That’s all I’ve to say to you.”

“And it is enough,” said Harold. “Good-bye.” He left the room and then he left the Castle, Lady Innisfail only shaking her head and whispering, “You have disappointed me,” as he made his adieux.

The next day all the guests had departed—all, with the exception of Lord Fotheringay, who was still too ill to move. In the course of some days, however, the doctor thought that he might without risk—except, of course, such as was incidental to the conveyance itself—face a drive on an outside car, to the nearest railway-station.

Before leaving him, as she was compelled to do owing to her own engagements, Lady Innisfail had another interesting conversation—it almost amounted to a consultation—with her friend Mrs. Burgoyne on the subject of the Reform of the Hardened Reprobate. And the result of their further consideration of the subject from every standpoint, was to induce them to believe that, with such a powerful incentive to the Higher Life as an acute rheumatic attack, Lord Fotheringay’s reform might safely be counted on. It might, at any rate, be freely discussed during the winter. If, subsequently, he should become a backslider, it would not matter. His reform would have gone the way of all topics.

Helen Craven and Edmund Airey had also a consultation together on the subject upon which they had previously talked more than once.

Each of them showed such an anxiety to give prominence to the circumstance that they were actuated solely for Harold’s benefit in putting into practice the plan which one of them had suggested, it was pretty clear that they had an uneasy feeling that they required some justification for the course which they had thought well to pursue.

Yes, they agreed that Harold should be placed beyond the power of his father. Mr. Airey said he had never met a more contemptible person than Lord Fotheringay, and for the sake of making Harold independent of such a father, he would, he declared, do again all that he had done during the week of Miss Avon’s sojourn at the Castle.

It was, indeed, sad, Miss Craven felt, that Harold should have such a father.

“Perhaps it was because I felt this so strongly that I—I—well, I began to ask myself if there might not be some way of escape for him,” said she, in a pensive tone that was quite different from the tone of the frank communication that she had made to Mr. Airey some time before.

“I can quite understand that,” said Edmund. “Well, though Harold hasn’t shown himself to be wise—that is —”

“We both know what that means,” said she, anticipating his definition of wisdom so far as Harold was concerned.

“We do,” said Edmund. “If he has not shown himself to be wise in this way, he has not shown himself to be

a fool in another way.”

“I suppose he has not,” said she, thoughtfully.

“Great heavens! you don’t mean to think that—”

“That he has told Beatrice Avon that he loves her? No, I don’t fancy that he has, still—”

“Still?”

“Well, I thought that, on their return from that awful seal-hunt, I saw a change in both of them. It seemed to me that—that—well, I don’t quite know how I should express it. Haven’t you seen a thirsty look on a man’s face?”

“A thirsty look? I believe I have seen it on a woman’s face.”

“It may be the same. Well, Harold Wynne’s face wore such an expression for days before the seal-hunt—I can’t say that I noticed it on Beatrice Avon’s face at the same time; but so soon as they returned from the boats on that evening, I noticed the change on Harold’s—perhaps it was only fancy.”

“I am inclined to believe that it was fancy. In my belief none of us was quite the same after that wild cruise. I was beside Miss Avon all the time that we were sailing out to the caves, and though she and Harold were in the boat together, yet Lord Innisfail and Durdan were in the same boat also. I can’t see how they could have had any time for an understanding while they were engaged in looking after the seals.”

Miss Craven shook her head doubtfully. It was clear that she was a believer in the making of opportunities in such matters as those which they were discussing.

“Anyhow, we have done all that we could reasonably be expected to do,” said she.

“And perhaps a trifle over,” said he. “If it were not that I like Harold so much—and you, too, my dear”—this seemed an afterthought—“I would not have done all that I have done. It is quite unlikely that Miss Avon and I shall be under the same roof again, but if we should be, I shall, you may be certain, find out from her whether or not an understanding exists between her and Harold. But what understanding could it be?”

Miss Craven smiled. Was this the man who had made such a reputation for cleverness, she asked herself—a man who placed a limit on the opportunities of lovers, and then inquired what possible understanding could be come to between a penniless man and a girl with “a gray eye or so.”

“What understanding?” said she. “Why, he may have unfolded to her a scheme for becoming Lord High Chancellor after two year’s hard work at the bar, with a garden-party now and again; or for being made a Bishop in the same time; and their understanding may be to wait for one another until the arrival of either event. Never mind. We have done our best for him.”

“For them,” said Edmund.

Yes, he tried to bring himself to believe that all that he had done was for the benefit of his friend Harold and for his friend Beatrice—to say nothing of his friend Helen as well. After a time he did almost force himself to believe that there was nothing that was not strictly honourable in the endeavour that he had made, at Helen’s suggestion, to induce Beatrice Avon to perceive the possibility of her obtaining a proposal of marriage from a rich and distinguished man, if she were only to decline to afford the impecunious son of a dissolute peer an opportunity of telling her that he loved her.

Now and again, however, he had an uneasy twinge, as the thought occurred to him that if some man, understanding the exact circumstances of the case, were to be as frank with him as Helen Craven had been (once), that man might perhaps be led to say that he had been making a fool of Beatrice for the sake of gratifying his own vanity.

It was just possible, and he knew it, that that frank friend—assuming that frankness and friendship may exist together—might be disposed to give prominence in this matter to the impulses of vanity, to the exclusion of the impulses of friendship, and a desire to set the crooked straight.

Even the fortnight which he spent in Norway with one of the heads of the Government party—a gentleman who would probably have shortly at his disposal an important Under-Secretaryship—failed quite to abate these little twinges that he had when he reflected upon the direction that might be taken by a frank friend, in considering the question of the responsibility involved in his attitude toward Miss Avon.

It was just a week after Lord Fotheringay had left Castle Innisfail that a stranger appeared in the neighbourhood—a strange gentleman with the darkest hair and the fiercest eyes ever seen, even in that region of dark hair and eyes. He inquired who were the guests at the Castle, and when he learned that the last of them—a distinguished peer named Lord Fotheringay—had gone some time, and that it was extremely unlikely that the Castle would be open for another ten months, his eyes became fiercer than ever. He made use of words in a strange tongue, which Brian declared, if not oaths, would do duty for oaths without anyone being the wiser.

The stranger departed as mysteriously as he had come.

CHAPTER XXVII.—ON CIRCUMVENTING A STAG.

IF Edmund Airey had a good deal to think about in Norway, Harold Wynne was certainly not without a subject for thought in Scotland.

It was with a feeling of exultation that he had sat in the bows of the cutter *Acushla* on her return to her moorings after that seal-hunt which everyone agreed had been an extraordinary success. Had this expression of exultation been noticed by Lady Innisfail, it would, naturally, have been attributed by her to the fact that he had been in the boat that had made the largest catch of seals. To be sure, Miss Craven, who had observed at least a change in the expression upon his face, did not attribute it to his gratification on having slaughtered some seals, but then Miss Craven was more acute than an ordinary observer.

He felt that he did well to be exultant, as he looked at Beatrice Avon standing by the side of Lord Innisfail at the tiller. The wind that filled the mainsail came upon her face and held her garments against her body, revealing every gracious curve of her shape, and suggesting to his eyes a fine piece of sculpture with flying drapery.

And she was his.

It seemed to him when he had begun to speak to her in the solemn darkness of the seal-cave, that it was impossible that he could receive any answer from her that would satisfy him. How was it possible that she could love him, he had asked himself at some agonizing moments during the week. He thought that she might possibly have come to love him in time, if she had not been with him in the boat during that night of mist, when the voice of Helen Craven had wailed round the cliffs. Her arrival at the Castle could not but have revealed to her the fact that she might obtain an offer of marriage from someone who was socially far above him; and thus he had almost lost all hope of her.

And yet she was his.

The course adopted by his friend Edmund Airey had astonished him. He could not believe that Airey had fallen in love with her. It was not consistent with Airey's nature to fall in love with anyone, he believed. But he knew that in the matter of falling in love, people do not always act consistently with their character; so that, after all, Airey might be only waiting an opportunity to tell her that he had fallen in love with her.

The words that he had overheard Airey speak to her upon the night of the *tableaux* in the hall—words that had driven him out into the night of rain and storm to walk madly along the cliffs, and to wonder if he were to throw himself into the waves beneath, would he be strong enough to let himself sink into their depths or weak enough to make a struggle for life—those words had cleared away whatever doubts he had entertained as to Edmund's intentions.

And yet she was his.

She had answered his question so simply and clearly—with such earnestness and tenderness as startled him. It seemed that they had come to love each other, as he had read of lovers doing, from the first moment that they had met. It seemed that her love had, like his, only increased through their being kept apart from each other—mainly by the clever device of Miss Craven and the co-operation of Edmund Airey, though, of course, Harold did not know this.

His reflections upon this marvel—the increase of their love, though they had few opportunities of being together and alone—would have been instructive even to persons so astute and so ready to undertake the general control of events as Mr. Airey and Miss Craven. Unfortunately, however, they were as ignorant of what had taken place to induce these reflections as he was of the conspiracy between them to keep him apart from Beatrice to secure his happiness and the happiness of Beatrice.

The fact that Beatrice loved him and had confessed her love for him, though they had had so few opportunities of being together, seemed to him the greatest of all the marvels that he had recently experienced.

As he gave a farewell glance at the lough and recollected how, a fortnight before, he had walked along the cliffs and had cast to the winds all his cherished ideas of love, he could not help feeling that he had been surrounded with marvels. He had had a narrow escape—he actually regarded a goodlooking young woman with several thousands of pounds of an income, as a narrow escape.

This was the last of the reflections that came to him with the sound of the green seas choked in the narrows of the lough.

The necessity of preserving himself from sudden death—the Irish outside car on which he was driving was the worst specimen he had yet seen—absorbed all his thoughts when he had passed through the village of Ballycruiskeen; and by the time he had got out of the train that carried him to the East Coast—a matter of six hours travelling—and aboard the steamer that bore him to Glasgow, the exultation that he had felt on leaving Castle Innisfail, and on reflecting upon the great happiness that had come to him, was considerably chastened.

He was due at two houses in Scotland. At the first he meant to do a little shooting. The place was not inaccessible. After a day's travelling he found himself at a railway station fifteen miles from his destination. He eventually reached the place, however, and he had some shooting, which, though indifferent, was far better than it was possible to obtain on Lord Innisfail's mountains—at least for Lord Innisfail's guests to obtain.

The second place was still further north—it was now and again alluded to as the North Pole by some visitors who had succeeded in finding their way to it, in spite of the directions given to them by the various authorities on the topography of the Highlands. Several theories existed as to the best way of reaching this place, and Harold, who knew sufficient Scotch to be able to take in the general meaning of the inhabitants without the aid of an interpreter, was made aware while at the shooting lodge, of these theories. Hearing, however, that some persons had actually been known to find the place, he felt certain that they had struck out an independent course for themselves. It was incredible to him that any of them had reached it by following the directions they had received on the subject. He determined to follow their example; and he had reached the place—eventually.

It was when he had been for three days following a stag, that he began to think of his own matters in a dispassioned way. Crawling on one's stomach along a mile or two of boggy land and then wriggling through narrow spaces among the rocks—sitting for five or six hours on gigantic sponges (damp) of heather, with one's chin on one's knees for strategical purposes, which the gillies pretend they understand, but which they keep a dead secret—shivering as the Scotch mist clothes one as with a wet blanket, then being told suddenly that there is a stag thirty yards to windward—getting a glimpse of it, missing it, and then hearing the gillies exchanging remarks in a perfectly intelligible Gaelic regarding one's capacity—these incidents constitute an environment that tends to make one look dispassionately upon such marvels as Harold had been considering in a very different spirit while the Irish lough was yet within hearing.

On the third day that he had been trying to circumvent the stag, Harold felt despondent—not about the stag, for he had long ago ceased to take any interest in the brute—but about his own future.

It is to be regretted (sometimes) that an exchange of sentiments on the subject of love between lovers does not bring with it a change of circumstances, making possible the realization of a scheme of life in which those sentiments shall play an active part—or at least as active a part as sentiments can play. This was Harold's great regret. Since he had found that he loved Beatrice and that Beatrice loved him, the world naturally appeared lovelier also. But it was with the loveliness of a picture that hangs in a public gallery, not as an individual possession.

His material circumstances, so far from having improved since he had confessed to Edmund Airey that it was necessary for him to marry a woman with money, had become worse; and yet he had given no thought to the young woman with the money, but a great many thoughts to the young woman who had, practically, none. He felt that no more unsatisfactory state of matters could be imagined. And yet he felt that it would be impossible to take any steps with a view of bringing about a change.

He had received several letters from Beatrice, and he had written several to her; but though in more than one he had told her in that plain strain which one adopts when one does not desire to be in any way convincing, that it was a most unfortunate day for her when she met him, still he did not suggest that their correspondence should cease.

What was to be the end of their love?

It was the constant attempt to answer this question that gave the stag his chance of life when, on the afternoon of the third day, Harold was commanded by his masters the gillies to fire into that thickening in the mist which he was given to understand by an unmistakable pantomime, was the stag.

While the gillies were exchanging their remarks in Gaelic, flavouring them with very smoky whiskey, he was thinking, not of the escape of the stag, but of what possible end there could be to the love that existed between Beatrice and himself.

It was the renewed thinking upon this question that brought about the death of that particular stag and two others before the next evening, for he had arrived at a point when he felt that he must shoot either a stag or himself. He had arrived at a condition of despair that made pretty severe demands upon him.

The slaughter of the stags saved him. When he saw their bodies stretched before him he felt exultant once more. He felt that he had overcome his fate; and it was the next morning before he realized the fact that he had done nothing of the sort—that the possibility of his ever being able to marry Beatrice Avon was as remote as it had been when he had fired blindly into the mist, and his masters, who had carried the guns, exhausted (he believed) the resources, of Gaelic sarcasm in comment.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—ON ENJOYING A RESPITE.

IT was the first week in October when Harold Wynne found himself in London. He had got a letter from Beatrice in which she told him that she and her father would return to London from Holland that week. Mr. Avon had conscientiously followed the track of an Irish informer in whom he was greatly interested, and who had, at the beginning of the century, found his way to Holland, where he was looked upon as a poor exile from Erin. He had betrayed about a dozen of his fellow-countrymen to their enemies, and had then returned to Ireland to live to an honoured old age on the proceeds of the bargain he had made for their heads.

The result of Harold's consideration of the position that he occupied in regard to Beatrice, was this visit to London. He made up his mind that he should see her and tell her that, like Mrs. Browning's hero, he loved her so well that he only could leave her.

He could bring himself to do it, he felt. He believed that he was equal to an act of heroic self-sacrifice for the sake of the girl—that was how he put the matter to himself when being soaked on the Scotch mountain. Yes, he would go to her and tell her that the conclusion to which he had come was that they must forget one another—that only unhappiness could result from the relationship that existed between them. He knew that there is no more unsatisfactory relationship between a man and a woman than that which has love for a basis, but with no prospect of marriage; and he knew that so long as his father lived and continued selfish—and only death could divide him from his selfishness—marriage with Beatrice was out of the question.

It was with this resolution upon him that he drove to the address in the neighbourhood of the British Museum, where Beatrice said she was to be found with her father.

It was one of those mansions which at some period in the early part of the century had been almost splendid; now it was simply large. It was not the house that Harold would have cared to occupy, even rent

free—and this was a consideration to him. But for a scholar who had a large library of his own, and who found it necessary to be frequently in the neighbourhood of the larger Library at the Museum, the house must undoubtedly have had its advantages.

She was not at home. The elderly butler said that Mr. Avon had found it necessary to visit Brussels for a few days, and he had thus been delayed on the Continent beyond the date he had appointed for his return. He would probably be in England by the end of the week—the day was Wednesday.

Harold left the gloom of Bloomsbury behind him, feeling a curious satisfaction at having failed to see Beatrice—the satisfaction of a respite. Some days must elapse before he could make known his resolution to her.

He strolled westward to a club of which he was a member—the Bedouin, and was about to order dinner, when someone came behind him and laid a hand, by no means gently, on his shoulder. Some of the Bedouins thought it *de rigueur* to play such pranks upon each other; and, to do them justice, it was only rarely that they dislocated a friend’s shoulder or gave a nervous friend a fit. People said one never knew what was coming from the moment they entered the Bedouin Club, and the prominent Bedouins accepted this statement as embodying one of the most agreeable of its many distinctive features.

Harold was always prepared for the worst in this place, so when the force of the blow swung him round and he saw an extremely plain arrangement of features, distorted by a smile of extraordinary breadth, beneath a closely-cropped crown of bright red hair, he merely said, “Hallo, Archie, you here? I thought you were in South Africa lion-hunting or something.”

The smile that had previously distorted the features of the young man, was of such fulness that it might reasonably have been taken for granted that it could not be increased; the possessor showed, however, that that smile was not the result of a supreme effort. So soon as Harold had spoken he gave a wink, and that wink seemed to release the mechanical system by which his features were contorted, for in an instant his face became one mouth. In plain words, this mouth of the young man had swallowed up his other features. All that could be seen of his face was that enormous mouth flanked by a pair of enormous ears, like plantain leaves growing on each side of the crater of a volcano.

Harold looked at him and laughed, then picked up a *menu* card and studied it until he calculated that the young man whom he had addressed as Archie should have thrown off so much of his smile as would enable him to speak.

He gave him plenty of time, and when he looked round he saw that some of the young man’s features had succeeded in struggling to the surface, as it were, beneath the circular mat of red hair that lay between his ears.

“No South Africa for me, tarty chip,” said Archie. (“Tarty chip” was the popular term of address that year among young men about town. Its philological significance was never discovered.)

“No South Africa for me; I went one better than that,” continued the young man.

“I doubt it,” said Harold. “I’ve had my eye on you until lately. You have usually gone one worse. Have you any money left—tell the truth?”

“Money? I asked the tarty chips that look after that sort of thing for me how I stood the other day,” said Archie, “and I’m ashamed to say that I’ve been spending less than my income—that is until a couple of months ago. I’ve still about three million. What does that mean?”

“That you’ve got rid of about a million inside two years,” said Harold.

“You’re going it blind,” said Archie. “It only means that I’ve spent fifty decimals in eighteen months. I can spare that, tarty chip.” (It may possibly be remembered that in the slang of the year a decimal signified a thousand pounds.) “That means that you’ve squandered a fortune, Archie,” said Harold, thinking what fifty thousand pounds would mean to him.

“There’s not much of a squander in the deal when I got value for it,” said Archie. “I got plenty of value. I’ve got to know all about this world.”

“And you’ll soon get to know all about the next, if you go on at this rate,” said Harold.

“Not me; I’ve got my money in sound places. You heard about my show.”

“Your show? I’ve heard about nothing for the past year but your shows. What’s the latest? I want something to eat.”

“Oh, come with me to my private trough,” cried the young man. “Don’t lay down a mosaic pavement in your inside in this hole. Come along, tarty chip; I’ve got a *chef* named Achille—he knows what suits us—also some ‘84 Heidsieck. Come along with me, and I’ll tell you all about the show. We’ll go there together later on. We’ll take supper with her.”

“Oh! with her?”

“To be sure. You don’t mean to say that you haven’t heard that I’ve taken the Legitimate Theatre for Mrs. Mowbray? Where on God’s footstool have you been for the past month?”

“Not further than the extreme North of Scotland. It was far enough. I saw a paragraph stating that Mrs. Mowbray, after being a failure in a number of places, had taken the Legitimate. What has that got to say to you?”

“Not much, but I’ve got a good deal to say to it. Oh, come along, and I’ll tell you all about it. I’m building a monument for myself. I’ve got the Legitimate and I mean to make Irving and the rest of them sit up.”

CHAPTER XXIX.—ON THE ADVANTAGES OF READY MONEY.

ARCHIE BROWN was the only son of Mr. John Brown, the eminent contractor. Mr. John Brown had been a man of simple habits and no tastes. When a working navvy he had acquired a liking for oatmeal porridge, and up to the day of his death, when he had some twenty thousand persons in his employment, each of them earning money for him, he never rose above this comestible. He lived a thoroughly happy life, taking no thought about money, and having no idea, beyond the building of drinking fountains in his native town, how to spend the profits realized on his enormous transactions.

Now, as the building of even the most complete system of drinking fountains, in a small town in Scotland, does not produce much impression upon the financial position of a man with some millions of pounds in cash, and making business profits to the extent of two hundred thousand a year, it was inevitable that, when a brick one afternoon fell on Mr. John Brown's head and fractured his skull so severely as to cause his death, his only son should be left very well provided for.

Archie Brown was left provided with some millions in cash, and with property that yielded him about one hundred pounds a day.

Up to the day of his father's death he had never had more than five hundred a year to spend as pocket-money—he had saved even out of this modest sum, for he had scarcely any more expensive tastes than his father, though he had ever regarded *sole à la Normande* as more palatable than oatmeal porridge as a breakfast dish.

He had never caused his father a moment's uneasiness; but as soon as he was given a bird's eye view, so to speak, of his income, he began to ask himself if there might not be something in the world more palatable even than *sole à la Normande*.

In the course of a year or two he had learned a good deal on the subject of what was palatable and what was not; for from the earliest records it is understood that the knowledge of good and the knowledge of evil may be found on the one tree.

He began to be talked about, and that is always worth paying money for—some excellent judges say that it is the only thing worth paying money for. Occasionally he paid a trifle over the market price for this commodity. But then he knew that he generally paid more than the market price for everything that he bought, from his collars, which were unusually high, down to his boots, which were of glazed kid, so that he did not complain.

He found that, after a while, the tradespeople, seeing that he paid them cash, treated him fairly, and that the person who supplied him with cigars was actually generous when he bought them by the thousand.

People who at first had fancied that Mr. Archibald Brown was a plunger—that is, a swindler whom they could swindle out of his thousands—had reason to modify their views on the subject after some time. For six months he had been imposed upon in many directions. But with all the other things which had to be paid for, the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil should, he knew, be included. Imported in a fresh condition this was, he knew, expensive; but he had a sufficient acquaintance with the elements of fruit-culture to be well aware of the fact that in this condition it is worth very much more than the canned article.

He bought his knowledge of good and evil fresh.

He was no fool, some people said, exultantly.

These were the people whose friends had tried to impose on him but had not succeeded.

He was no fool, some people said regretfully.

These were the people who had tried to impose on him but had not succeeded.

Harold had always liked Archie Brown, and he had offered him much advice—vegetarian banquets of the canned fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. The shrewd outbursts of confidence in which Archie indulged now and again, showed Harold that he was fast coming to understand his position in society—his friends and his enemies.

Harold, after some further persuasion, got into the hansom which Archie had hailed, and was soon driving down Piccadilly to the spacious rooms of the latter—rooms furnished in a wonderful fashion. As a panorama of styles the sitting-room, which was about thirty feet square, with a greenhouse in the rear, would have been worth much to a lecturer on the progress or decadence of art—any average lecturer could make the furniture bear out his views, whether they took one direction or the other.

Two cabinets which had belonged to Louis XV were the finest specimens known in the world. They contained Sèvres porcelain and briar-root pipes. A third cabinet was in the purest style of boarding house art. A small gilt sofa was covered with old French tapestry which would have brought five pounds the square inch at an auction. Beside it was the famous Four-guinea Tottenham Armchair in best Utrecht velvet—three-nine-six in cretonne, carriage paid to any railway-station in the United Kingdom.

A chair, the frame of which was wholly of ivory, carved in Italy, in the seventeenth century, by the greatest artist that ever lived, apparently had its uses in Archie Brown's *entourage*, for it sustained in an upright position a half-empty soda-water bottle—the bottle would not have stood upright but for the high relief in the carving of the flowing hair of the figure of Atalanta at one part of the frame. Near it was an interesting old oak chair that was for some time believed to have once belonged to King Henry VIII.

In achieving this striking contrast to the carved ivory, Mr. Brown thought that he had proved his capacity to appreciate an important element in artistic arrangement. He pointed it out to Harold without delay. He had pointed it out to every other person who had visited his rooms.

He also pointed out a picture by one Rembrandt which he had picked up at an auction for forty shillings. A dealer had subsequently assured him that if he wanted a companion picture by the same painter he would not guarantee to procure it for him at a lower figure than twenty-five guineas—perhaps it might even cost him as

high as thirty; therefore—the logic was Archie's—the Rembrandt had been a dead bargain.

Harold looked at this Burgomaster's Daughter in eighteenth century costume, and said that undoubtedly the painter knew what he was about.

"And so does Archie, tarty chip," said his host, leading him to one of the bedrooms.

"Now it's half past seven," said Archie, leaving him, "and dinner will be served at a quarter to eight. I've never been late but once, and Achille was so hurt that he gave me notice. I promised that it should never occur again, and it hasn't. He doesn't insist on my dressing for dinner, though he says he should like it."

"Make my apologies to Achille," said Harold.

"Oh, that won't be necessary," said Archie seriously—"at least I think it won't."

Harold had never been in these rooms before—he wondered how it had chanced that he came to them at all. But before he had partaken of more than one of the *hors d'ouvres*—there were four of them—he knew that he had done well to come. Achille was an artist, the Sauterne was Chateau Coutet of 1861, and the champagne was, as Archie had promised it should be, Heidsieck of 1884. The electric light was artfully toned down, and the middle-aged butler understood his business.

"This is the family trough," said Archie. "I say, Harry, isn't it one better than the oatmeal porridge of our dads—I mean of my dad; yours, I know, was always one of us; my dad wasn't, God bless him! If he had been we shouldn't be here now. He'd have died a pauper."

Harold so far forgot himself as to say, "Doesn't Carlyle remark somewhere that it's the fathers who work that the sons—ah, never mind."

"Carlyle? What Carlyle was that? Do I know him?" asked Archie.

"No," said Harold, shaking his head.

"He isn't a tarty chip, eh?"

"Tart, not tarty."

"Oh. Don't neglect this jelly. It's the best thing that Achille does. It's the only thing that he ever repeats himself in. He came to me boasting that he could give me three hundred and sixty-five different dinners in the year. 'That's all very well,' said I, 'but what about Leap Year?' I showed him there that his bluff wouldn't do. 'Pass' said I, and he passed. But we understand one another now. I will say that he has never repeated himself except in this jelly. I make him give it to me once a week."

"You're right," said Harold. "It is something to think about."

"Yes, while you're in front of it, but never after," said Archie. "That's what Achille says. 'The true dinner,' says he, 'is the one that makes you think while you're at it, but that never causes you a thought afterwards.'"

"Achille is more than an artist, he is a philosopher," said Harold. "What does he call this?" he glanced at the menu card. "'*Glace à la chagrin d'Achille*' What does he mean by that? 'The chagrin of Achilles'? Where does the chagrin come in?"

"Oh, he has some story about a namesake of his," said Archie. "He was cut up about something, and he wouldn't come out of the marquee."

"The tent," cried Harold. "Achilles sulked in his tent. Of course, that's the '*chagrin d'Achille*.'"

"Oh, you heard of it too? Then the story has managed to leak out somehow. They always do. There's nothing in it. Now I'll tell you all about the show. Try one of these figs."

Harold helped himself to a green fig, the elderly butler placed a decanter of claret on the table, and disappeared with the noiselessness of a shadow.

CHAPTER XXX.—ON THE LEGITIMATE IN ART.

WHEN the history of the drama in England during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century comes to be written, the episode of the management of the Legitimate Theatre by Mrs. Mowbray will doubtless be amply treated from the standpoint of art, and the historian will, it may be confidently expected, lament the want of appreciation on the part of the public for the Shakespearian drama, to which the closing of the Legitimate Theatre was due.

There were a considerable number of persons, however, who showed a readiness to assert that the management of the Legitimate by Mrs. Mowbray should be looked upon as a purely—only purely was not the word they used—social incident, having no basis whatever in art. It failed, they said, not because the people of England had ceased to love Shakespeare, but because Mr. Archie Brown had ceased to love Mrs. Mowbray.

However this may be, there were also people who said that the Legitimate Theatre under the management of Mrs. Mowbray could not have been so great a financial failure, after all; for Mrs. Mowbray, when her season came to an end, wore as expensive dresses as ever, and drove as expensive horses as ever; and as everyone who had been associated with the enterprise had been paid—some people said overpaid—the natural assumption was that Shakespeare on the stage was not so abhorrent to the people of England as was generally supposed.

The people who took this view of the matter were people who had never heard the name of Mr. Archie Brown—people who regarded Mrs. Mowbray as a self-sacrificing lady who had so enthusiastic a desire to

make the public acquainted with the beauties of Shakespeare, that she was quite content to spend her own fortune (wherever that came from) in producing “Cymbeline” and other masterpieces at the Legitimate.

There were other people who said that Archie Brown was a young ass.

There were others who said that Mrs. Mowbray was a harpy.

There were others still—they were mostly men—who said that Mrs. Mowbray was the handsomest woman in England.

The bitterest—they were mostly women—said that she was both handsome and a harpy.

The truth regarding the difficult question of the Legitimate Theatre was gathered by Harold Wynne, as he swallowed his claret and ate his olives at the dining table at Archie Birown’s rooms in Piccadilly.

He perceived from what Archie told him, that Archie had a genuine enthusiasm in the cause of Shakespeare. How he had acquired it, he might have had considerable difficulty in explaining. He also gathered that Mrs. Mowbray cared very little for Shakespeare except as a medium for impressing upon the public the fact—she believed it to be a fact—that Mrs. Mowbray was the most beautiful woman in England.

“Cymbeline” had, she considered, been written in the prophetic instinct, which the author so frequently manifested, that one day a woman with such shapely limbs as Mrs. Mowbray undoubtedly possessed, might desire to exhibit them to the public of this grand old England of Shakespeare’s and ours.

Mrs. Mowbray was probably the most expensive taste that any man in England could entertain.

All this Harold gathered from the account of the theatrical enterprise, as communicated to him by Archie after dinner.

And the best of it all was, Archie assured him, that no human being could say a word against the character of Mrs. Mowbray.

“I never heard a word against the character of her frocks,” said Harold.

“It’s a big thing, the management of the Legitimate,” said Archie, gravely.

“No doubt; even when it’s managed, shall we say, legitimately?” said Harold.

“I feel the responsibility, I can tell you,” said Archie. “Shakespeare has never been given a proper chance in England; and although she’s a year or two older than me, yet on the box seat of my coach she doesn’t look a day over twenty-two—just when a woman is at her best, Harry. What I want to know is, shall it be said of us that Shakespeare—the immortal Shakespeare, mind you—Stratford upon Avon, you know—”

“I believe I have his late address,” said Harold.

“That’s all right. But what I want to know is, shall it be said that we are willing to throw our Shakespeare overboard? In the scene in the front of the cave she is particularly fine.”

In an instant Harold’s thoughts were carried back to a certain scene in front of a cave on a moonlight night; and for him the roar of life through Piccadilly was changed to the roar of the Atlantic. His thoughts remained far away while Archie talked gravely of building himself a monument by his revival of “Cymbeline”, with which the Legitimate had been opened by Mrs. Mowbray. Of course, the thing hadn’t begun to pay yet, he explained. Everyone knew that the Bicycle had ruined theatrical business in London; but the Legitimate could fight even the Bicycle, and when the public had the beauty of Mrs. Mowbray properly impressed upon them, Shakespeare would certainly obtain that recognition which he deserves from England. Were Englishmen proud of Shakespeare, or were they not? that was what Archie wished very much to know. If the people of your so-called British Islands wish to throw Shakespeare overboard, just let them say so. But if they threw him over, the responsibility would rest with them; Mrs. Mowbray would still be the handsomest woman in England. At any rate, “Cymbeline” at the Legitimate would be a monument.

“As a lighthouse is a monument,” said Harold, coming back from the Irish lough to Piccadilly.

“I knew you’d agree with me,” said Archie. “You know that I’ve always had a great respect for your opinion, Harry. I don’t object so much as some tarty chips to your dad. I wish he’d see Mrs. Mowbray. There’s no vet. whose opinion I’d sooner take on the subject than his. He’d find her all right.”

Harold looked at the young man whose plain features—visible when he did not smile too broadly—displayed the enthusiasm that possessed him when he was fancying that his devotion to the beauty of Mrs. Mowbray was a true devotion to Shakespeare. Archie Brown, he was well aware, was very imperfectly educated.

He was not, however, much worse than the general run of people. Like them he knew only enough of Shakespeare to be able to misquote him now and again; and, like them, he believed that. Darwinism meant nothing more than that men had once been monkeys.

Harold looked at Archie, and felt that Mrs. Mowbray was a fortunate woman in having met with him. The monument was being raised, Harold felt; and he was right. The management of the Legitimate-Theatre was a memorial to Vanity working heart, and soul with Ignorance to the praise and glory of Shakespeare.

CHAPTER XXXI.—ON A BLACK SHEEP.

BEFORE Archie had completed his confidences, a visitor was announced.

“Oh, it’s only old Playdell,” said Archie. “You know old Playdell, of course.”

“I’m not so certain that I do,” said Harold.

“Oh, he’s a good old soul who was kicked out of the Church by the bishop for doing something or other.

He’s useful to me—keeps my correspondence in order—spots the chaps that write the begging letters, and sees that they don’t get anything out of me, while he takes care that all the genuine ones get all that they deserve. He’s an Oxford man.”

“Playdell—Playdell,” said Harold. “Surely he can’t be the fellow that got run out for marrying people without a licence?”

“That’s his speciality,” said Archie. “Come along, chippie Chaplain. Chip in, and have a glass of something.”

A middle-aged man, wearing the coat and the tie of a cleric, entered the room with a smile and a bow to Harold.

“You’ve heard of Mr. Wynne, Play?” said Archie. “The Honourable Harold Wynne. He’s heard of you—yes, you bet your hoofs on that.”

“I dare say you’ve heard of me, Mr. Wynne,” said the man. “It’s the black sheep in a flock that obtain notoriety; the colourless ones escape notice. I’m a black sheep.”

“You’re about as black as they make them, old Play,” remarked Archie, with a prompt and kindly acquiescence. “But your blackness doesn’t go deeper than the wool.”

“You say that because you are always disposed to be charitable, Archie,” said Mr. Playdell. “Even with you I’m afraid that another notorious character is not so black as he’s painted.”

“Neither he is,” said Archie. “You know as well as I do that the devil is not so black as he used to be—he’s turning gray in his old age.”

“They treated me worse than they treated the Fiend himself, Mr. Wynne,” said Playdell. “They turned me out of the Church, but the Church still retains the Prince of Darkness. He is still the most powerful auxiliary that the Church knows.”

“If you expressed that sentiment when in orders,” said Harold, “I can quite easily understand how you find yourself outside the Church.”

“I was quite orthodox when in the Church, Mr. Wynne. I couldn’t afford to be otherwise,” said Playdell. “I wasn’t even an Honest Doubter. I felt that if I had begun to doubt I might become a Dissenter before I knew what I was about. It is only since I left the Church that I’ve indulged in the luxury of being unorthodox.”

“Take a glass of wine for your stomach’s sake,” said Archie.

“That lad is the son of a Scotch Nonconformist,” said Mr. Playdell to Harold; “hence the text. Would it be unorthodox to say that an inscrutable Providence did not see fit to preserve the reply of Timothy to that advice? For my own part I cannot doubt for a moment that Timothy inquired for what other reason his correspondent fancied he might take the wine. I like my young patron’s La Rose. It must have been something very different from this that the person alluded to when he said ‘my love is better than wine.’ Yes, I’ve always thought that the truth of the statement was largely dependent on the wine.”

“I’ll take my oath that isn’t orthodox,” said Archie. “You’d better mind what you’re about, chippie Chaplain, or I’ll treat you as the bishop did. This is an orthodox household, let me tell you.”

“I feel like Balaam’s ass sometimes, Mr. Wynne, in this situation,” said Mr. Playdell. “In endeavouring to avoid the angel with the sword on one hand—that is the threatening orthodoxy of the Church—I make myself liable to a blow from the staff of the prophet—our young friend is the prophet.”

“I will say this for you, chippie Chaplain,” said Archie, “you’ve kept me straight. Not that I ever did take kindly to the flowing bowl; but we all know what temptations there are.” He looked into his glass and spoke solemnly, shaking his head. “Yes, Harry, I’ve never drunk a thimbleful more than I should since old Play here lectured me.”

“If I could only persuade you—‘’commenced Mr. Playdell.

“But I’m not such an ass,” cried Archie, interrupting him. Then he turned to Harold, saying, “The chippie Chaplain wants to marry me to some one whose name we never mention. That has always been his weakness—marrying tarty chips that he had no right to marry.”

“If I don’t mistake, Mr. Playdell, it was this little weakness that brought you to grief,” said Harold.

“It was the only point that the bishop could lay hold of, Mr. Wynne,” said Playdell. “I held, and I still hold, that the ceremony of marriage may be performed by any person who has been ordained—that the question of a licence is not one that should come forward upon any occasion. Those who hold other opinions are those who would degrade the ordinance into a mere civil act.”

“And you married without question every couple who came to you, I believe?” said Harold.

“I did, Mr. Wynne. And I will be happy to marry any other couples who come to me for that purpose now.”

“But, you are no longer in the Church, and such marriages would be no marriages in the eyes of the law.”

“Nothing can be more certain, Mr. Wynne. But I know that there are many persons in this country who hold, with me, that the ordinance is not one that should be made the subject of a licence bought from a bishop—who hold that the very act of purchase is a gross degradation of the ordinance of God.”

“I say, chippie Chaplain, haven’t we had enough of that?” said Archie. “You’ve pegged away at that marriage business with me for a good many months. Now, I say, pass the marriage business. Let us have a fresh deal.”

“Mr. Wynne, I merely wished to explain my position to you,” said Playdell. “I’m on the side of the angels in this question, as a great statesman but a poor scientist said of another question.”

“Pass the statesman as well,” cried Archie.

“What do tarty chips like us care for politics or other fads? He told me the other day, Harry, that instead of introducing a bill for the admission of ladies as members of Parliament, it would soon be necessary to introduce a bill for the admission of gentlemen as members—yes, you said that. You can’t deny it.”

“I don’t,” said Mr. Playdell. “The result of the last General Election—”

“Pass the General Election,” shouted Archie. “Mr. Wynne hates that sort of thing. Now give an account of

yourself. What have you done to earn your screw since morning?"

"This is what I have come to, Mr. Wynne," said Playdell. "Think of it; a clergyman and M.A. Oxon, forced to give an account of his stewardship to a young cub like that!" He laughed after a moment of seriousness.

"You don't seem to feel deeply the degradation," remarked Harold.

"It's nothing to the depths to which I have fallen," said Mr. Playdell. "I was never more than a curate, but in spite of the drawback of being privileged to preach the Gospel twice a week, the curacy was a comfortable one. I published two volumes of my sermons, Mr. Wynne. They sold poorly in England, but I believe that in America they made the fortune of the publishers that pirated them. It is perfectly well known that my sermons achieved a great and good purpose in the States. They were practical. I will say that for them. The leader of the corner in hogs who ran the prices up last autumn, sold out of the business, I understand, after reading my sermon on the text, 'The husks that the swine do eat.' Several judges also resigned, admitting that they were converted. It was freely stated that even a Congressman had been reformed by one sermon of mine, while another was known to have brought tears to the eyes of a reporter on the *New York Herald*. And yet, with all these gratifying results, I never got a penny out of the American edition. Just think what would happen on this side of the Atlantic if, let us say, a Royal Academician were to find grace through a sermon, or —to assume an extreme case—a member of the Stock Exchange? Why, the writer would be a made man. I had thoughts of going to America, Mr. Wynne. At any rate, I'm going to deal with the publishers there directly. A firm in Boston is at present about to boom a Bowdlerized edition of the Bible which I have prepared for family reading in the States—not a word in it that the purest-minded young woman in all Boston might not see. It should sell, Mr. Wynne. I'm also translating into English a volume of American humour."

"I'll give you a chance of going to America, before you sleep if you don't dry up about your sermons and suchlike skittles," said Archie. "The decanter's beside you. Fill your glass. Mr. Wynne is coming to my show to-night."

Mr. Playdell passed the decanter without filling his glass. "You know that I never take more than one glass of La Rose," said he. "I have found out all about your house painter who fell off the ladder and broke all his ribs—he is the same as your Clergyman's Orphan, and he lives in the same house as your Widow of a Naval Officer whose little all was invested in a fraudulent building society—he is also 'First Thessalonians seven and ten. P.O.O. or stamps'."

"Great Godfrey!" cried Archie; "and I had already written out a cheque for twenty pounds to send to that swindler! Do you mean to tell me, Play, that all those you've mentioned are impostors?"

"All? Why, there's only one impostor among the lot," said Mr. Playdell. "He is 'First Thessalonians,' and he has at least a dozen branch establishments."

"It's enough to make a tarty chip disgusted with God's footstool," said Archie. "Before old Play took me in hand I used to fling decimals about right and left, without inquiry."

"He was the sole support of several of the most notorious swindlers in the country," said Mr. Playdell. "I've managed to whittle them down considerably. Shakespeare is at present the only impostor that has defied my efforts," he added, in a whisper to Harold.

Harold laughed. He was beginning to feel some remorse at having previously looked on Archie Brown as a good-natured fool. He now felt that, in spite of Mrs. Mowbray, he would not wreck his life.

CHAPTER XXXII.—ON SHAKESPEARE AND SUPPER.

CARRIAGES by the score were waiting at the fine Corinthian entrance to the Legitimate, when Harold and Archie reached the theatre in their hansom. The *façade* of the Legitimate Theatre is so severely Corinthian that foreign visitors invariably ask what church it is.

It was probably the classical columns supporting the pediment of the entrance that caused Archie to abate his frivolous conversation with his friend in the hansom—Archie had been expressing the opinion that it was exhilarating—only exhilarating was not the word he used—to swear at a man who had once been a clergyman and who still wore the dress of a cleric. "A chap feels that his turn has come," he had said. "No matter how wrong they are you can't swear at them and tell them to come down out of that, when they're in their own pulpits—they'd have you up for brawling. That's why I like to take it out of old Playdell. He tells me, however, that there's no dean in the Church that gathers in the decimals as he does in my shop. But, bless you! he saves me his screw three times over."

But now that the classical front of the Legitimate came in view, Archie became solemn.

He possibly appreciated the feelings of a conscientious clergyman when about to enter his Church.

Shakespeare was a great responsibility.

So was Mrs. Mowbray.

The performance was not quite over; but before Archie had paid the hansomeer, the audience was streaming out from every door.

"Stand here and listen to what the people are saying." whispered Archie. "I often do it. It is only in this way that you can learn how much appreciation for Shakespeare still remains in England."

He took up his position with Harold at the foot of the splendid staircase of the theatre, where the people

chatted together while waiting for their carriages.

With scarcely an exception, the remarks had a hearing upon the performance of “Cymbeline.” Only two ladies confined their criticisms to their respective medical advisers.

Of the others, one man said that Mrs. Mowbray bore a striking resemblance to her photographs.

A second said that she was the most beautiful woman in England.

A third said that she knocked sparks out of Polly Floss in the same line of business. (Polly Floss was the leading exponent of burlesque).

One woman said that Mrs. Mowbray was most picturesquely dressed.

A second said that she was most picturesquely undressed.

A third wondered if Liberty had got the exact tint of the robe that Mrs. Mowbray had worn in the second act.

“And yet some people say that there’s no appreciation of Shakespeare in England!” said Archie, as he led Harold round the stalls, over which the attendants were spreading covers, and on to Mrs. Mowbray’s private rooms.

“From the crowds that went out by every door, I judge that the theatre is making money, at any rate; and I suppose that’s the most practical test of appreciation,” said Harold.

“Oh, they don’t all pay,” said Archie. “That’s a feature of theatrical management that it takes an outsider some time to understand. Mrs. Mowbray should understand it pretty well by this time, so should her business manager. I’m just getting to understand it.”

“You mean to say that the people are allowed to come in without paying?”

“It amounts to that in the long run—literally the long run—of the piece, I believe. Upon my soul, there are some people who fancy that a chap runs a show as a sort of free entertainment for the public. The dramatic critics seem to fancy that a chap produces a play, simply in order to give them an opportunity of showing off their own cleverness in slating it. It seems that a writer-chap can’t show his cleverness in praising a piece, but only in slanging it.”

“I think that I’d try and make people pay for their seats.”

“I used always to pay for mine in the old days—but then, I was always squandering my money.”

“I have always paid for mine.”

“The manager says that if you asked people to pay, they’d be mortally offended and never enter the theatre again, and where would you be then?”

“Where, indeed?” said Harold. “I expect your manager must know his business thoroughly.”

“He does. It requires tact to get people to come to see Shakespeare,” said Archie. “But a chap can’t build a monument for himself without paying for it.”

“It would be ridiculous to expect it,” said Harold.

Pushing aside a magnificent piece of heavy drapery, Archie brought his friend into a passage illuminated by the electric light; and knocking at a door at the farther end, he was admitted by Mrs. Mowbray’s maid, into a prettily-furnished sitting-room and into the presence of Mrs. Mowbray, who was sitting robed in something very exquisite and cloud-like—not exactly a peignoir but something that suggested a peignoir.

She was like a picture by Romney. If one could imagine all the charm of all the pictures of Emma Hamilton (*née* Lyon) which Romney painted, meeting harmoniously in another creature, one would come within reasonable distance of seeing Mrs. Mowbray, as Harold saw her when he entered the room.

Even with the disadvantage of the exaggerated colour and the over-emphasized eye-lashes necessary for the searching illumination of the footlights, she was very lovely, Harold acknowledged.

But all the loveliness of Mrs. Mowbray produced but a trifling effect compared to that produced by her charm of manner. She was the most natural woman ever known.

The position of the natural man has been defined by an eminent authority. But who shall define the position of the natural woman?

It was Mrs. Mowbray’s perfect simplicity, especially when talking to men—as a matter of fact she preferred talking to men rather than to women—that made her seem so lovely—nay, that made a man feel that it was good for him to be in her presence. She was devoid of the smallest trace of affectation. She seemed the embodiment of truth. She never smiled for the sake of conventionality. But when she did smile, just as Harold entered the room, her head turning round so that her face was looking over her shoulder, she had all the spiritual beauty of the loveliest picture ever painted by Greuze, consequently the loveliest picture ever painted by the hand of man.

And yet she was so very human.

An Algy and an Eddy were already in the room—the first was a Marquis, the second was the eldest son of a duke. Both were handsome lads, of quiet manners, and both were in the Household Cavalry. Mrs. Mowbray liked to be surrounded by the youngest of men.

Harold had been acquainted with her long before she had become an actress. He had not had an opportunity of meeting her since; but he found that she remembered him very well.

She had heard of his father, she said, looking at him in a way that did not in the least suggest a picture by Greuze.

When people referred to his father they did not usually assume a look of innocence. Most of them would have had difficulty in assuming such a look under any circumstances.

“My father is frequently heard of,” said Harold.

“And your father’s son also,” said Mrs. Mowbray. “What a freak of Lady Innisfail’s! She lured you all across to Ireland. I heard so much. And what came of it, after all?”

“Acute admiration for the allurements of Lady Innisfail in my case, and a touch of acute rheumatism in my

father’s case,” said Harold.

“Neither will be fatal to the sufferers,” said Mrs. Mowbray—“or to Lady Innisfail, for that matter,” she added.

“I should say not,” remarked Algy. “We all admire Lady Innisfail.”

“Few cases of acute admiration of Lady Innisfail have proved fatal, so far as I can hear, Lord Brackenthorpe,” said Mrs. Mowbray. “Young mem have suffered from it and have become exemplary husbands and parents.”

“And if they don’t live happy, that we may,” said Archie.

“That’s the end of the whole matter,” said. Harold.

“That’s the end of the orthodox fairy tale,” said Mrs. Mowbray. “Was your visit to Ireland a fairy story, Mr. Wynne?”

Harold wondered how much this woman knew of the details of his visit to Ireland. Before he-could think of an answer in the same strain, Mrs. Mowbray had risen from the little gilt sofa, and had taken a step or two toward her dressing-room. The look she tossed to Harold, when she turned round with her fingers on the handle of the door, was a marvellous one.

Had it been attempted by any other woman, it would have provoked derision on the part of the average man—certainly on the part of Harold Wynne. But, coming from Mrs. Mowbray, it conveyed—well, all that she meant it to convey. It was not merely fascinating, it was fascination itself.

It was such a look as this, he felt—but nearly a year had passed before he had thought of the parallel—that Venus had cast at Paris upon a momentous occasion. It was the glance of Venus Victrix. It made a man think—a year or so afterwards—of Ahola and Aholibah, of Ashtoreth, of Cleopatra, of Faustina, of Iseult, of Rosamond.

And yet the momentary expression of her features was as simple and as natural as that worn by one of Greuze’s girls.

“She’ll not be more than ten minutes,” said

Archie. “I don’t know how she manages to dress herself in the time.”

He did not exaggerate. Mrs. Mowbray returned in ten minutes, with no trace of paint upon her face, wearing a robe that seemed to surround her with fleecy clouds. The garment was not much more than an atmosphere—it was a good deal less substantial than the atmosphere of London in December or that of Sheffield in June.

“We shall have the pleasantest of suppers,” she said, “and the pleasantest of chats. I understand that Mr. Wynne has solved the Irish problem.”

“And what is the solution, Mrs. Mowbray?” said Lord Brackenthorpe.

“The solution—ah—‘a gray eye or so’,” said Mrs. Mowbray.

The little Mercutio swagger with which she gave point to the words, was better than anything she had done on the stage.

“And now, Mr. Wynne, you must lead the way with me to our little supper-room,” said she, before the laugh, in which everyone joined, at the pretty bit of comedy, had ceased.

Harold gave her his arm.

When at the point of entering the room—it was daintily furnished with old English oak and old English silver—Mrs. Mowbray said, in the most casual way possible, “I hope you will tell me all that may be told about that charming White Lady of the Cave. How amusing it must have been to watch the chagrin of Lord Fotheringay, when Mr. Airey gave him to understand that he meant to make love to that young person with the wonderful eyes.”

“It was intensely amusing, indeed,” said Harold, who had become prepared for anything that Mrs. Mowbray might say.

“Yes, you must have been amused; for, of course, you knew that Mr. Airey was not in earnest—that he had simply been told off by Miss Craven to amuse himself with the young person, in order to induce her to take her beautiful eyes off—off—someone else, and to turn them admiringly upon Mr. Airey.”

“That was the most amusing part of the comedy, of course,” said Harold.

“What fools some girls are!” laughed Mrs. Mowbray. It was well known that she disliked the society of women.

“It’s a wise provision of nature that the fools should be the girls.”

“Oh, I have known a fool or two among men,” said Mrs. Mowbray, with another laugh.

“Have known—did you say *have known?*” said Harold.

“Any girl who has lived in this world of ours for a quarter of a century, should have seen enough to make her aware of the fact that the best way to set about increasing the passion of, let us say, the average man—”

“No, the average man is passionless.”

“Well, the passion of whatever man you please—for a young woman whom he loves, or fancies he loves—it’s all the same in the end—is to induce him to believe that several other men are also in love with her.”

“That is one of the rudiments of a science of which you are the leading exponent,” said Harold.

“And yet Miss Craven was foolish enough to fancy that the man of whom she was thinking, would give himself up to think of her so soon as he believed that Mr. Airey was in love with her rival! Ah, here are our lentils and pulse. How good it is of you to imperil your digestions by taking supper with me, when only a few hours can have passed since you dined.”

“Digestion is not an immortal soul,” said Harold, “and I believe that immortal souls have been imperilled before now, for the sake of taking supper with the most beautiful woman in the world.”

“Have you ever heard a woman say that I am beautiful?” she asked.

“Never,” said Harold. “That is the one sin which a woman never pardons in another.”

“You do not know women—” with a little pitying smile. “A woman will forgive a woman for being more beautiful than herself—for being less virtuous than herself, but never for being better-dressed than herself.”

“For how many of the three sins do you ask forgiveness of woman—two or three?” said Harold, gently.

But instead of making an answer, Mrs. Mowbray said something about the necessity of cherishing a digestion. It was disgraceful, she said, that bread-and-butter and arithmetic should be forced upon a school boy—that such magnificent powers of digestion as he possessed should not be utilized ta the uttermost.

Lord Brackenthorpe said he knew a clever artist chap, who had drawn a sketch of about a thousand people crowding over one another, in an American hotel, in order to see a boy, who had been overheard asking his mother what was the meaning of the word dyspepsia.

Mrs. Mowbray wondered if the melancholy of Hamlet was due to a weak digestion.

Harold said he thought it should rather be accepted as evidence that there was a Schleswig-Holstein question even in Hamlet’s day.

Meantime, the pheasants and sparkling red Burgundy were affording compensation for the absence of any brilliant talk.

Then the young men lit their cigarettes. Mrs. Mowbray had never been known to risk her reputation (for femininity) by letting a cigarette between her lips; but her femininity was in no way jeopardized—rather was it accentuated—by her liking to be in the neighbourhood of where cigarettes were being smoked—that is, when the cigarettes were good and when the smokers were pleasant young men with titles, or even unpleasant young men with thousands.

After the lapse of an hour, a message came regarding Mrs. Mowbray’s brougham. Her guests rose and she looked about for her wrap.

While Harold Wynne was laying it on her lovely shoulders, she kept her eyes fixed upon his. Hers were full of intelligence. When he had carefully fastened the gold clasp just beneath the hollow of her throat—it required very careful handling—she poised her head to the extent of perhaps a quarter of an inch to one side, and laughed; then she moved away from him, but turned her head so that her face was once more over her shoulder, like the face of the Greuze girl from whom she had learnt the trick.

He knew that she wanted him to ask her from whom she had heard the stories regarding Castle Innisfail and its guests.

He also knew that the reason she wanted him to ask her this question, was in order that she might have the delight of refusing to answer him, while keeping him in the expectancy of receiving an answer.

Such a delight would, of course, be a malicious one. But he knew that it would be a thoroughly womanly one, and he knew that Mrs. Mowbray was a thorough woman.

Therefore he laughed back at her and did not ask her anything—not even to take his arm out to her brougham.

Archie Brown did, and she took his arm, still looking over her shoulder at Harold.

It only needed that the lovely, wicked look should vanish in a sentence.

And it did.

The full lips parted, and the poise of the head was increased by perhaps the eighth part of an inch.

“‘A gray eye or so,’” she murmured.

Her laughter rang down the corridor.

“And the best of it all is, that no one can say a word against her character,” said Archie.

This was the conclusion of his rhapsody in the hansom, in which he and Harold were driving down Piccadilly—a rhapsody upon the beauty, the genius, and the expensiveness of Mrs. Mowbray.

Harold was silent. The truth was that he was thinking about something far apart from Mrs. Mowbray, her beauty, her doubtful genius, and her undoubted power of spending money.

“What do you say?” said Archie. “Great Godfrey! you don’t mean to say that you’ve heard a word breathed against her character?”

“On the contrary,” said Harold, “I’ve always heard it asserted that Mrs. Mowbray is the best dressed woman in London.”

“Give me your hand, old chap; I knew that I could trust you to do her justice,” cried Archie.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—ON BLESSING OR DOOM.

EVEN before he slept, Harold Wynne found that he had a good many matters to think about, in addition to the exquisitely natural poises of Mrs. Mowbray’s shapely head.

It was apparent to him that Mrs. Mowbray had somehow obtained a circumstantial account of the appearance of Beatrice Avon at the Irish Castle, and of the effect that had been produced, in more than one direction, by her appearance.

But the most important information that he had derived from Mrs. Mowbray was that which had reference

to the attitude of Edmund Airey toward Beatrice.

Undoubtedly, Mrs. Mowbray had, by some means, come to be possessed of the truth regarding the apparent fascination which Beatrice had for Edmund Airey. It was a trick—it was the result of a conspiracy between Helen Craven and Edmund, in order that he, Harold, should be prevented from even telling Beatrice that he loved her. Helen had felt certain that Beatrice, when she fancied—poor girl!—that she had produced so extraordinary an impression upon the wealthy and distinguished man, would be likely to treat the poor and undistinguished man, whose name was Harold Wynne, in such a way as would prevent him from ever telling her that he loved her!

And Edmund had not hesitated to play the part which Helen had assigned to him! For more than a moment did Harold feel that his friend had behaved in a grossly dishonourable way. But he knew that his friend, if taxed with behaving dishonourably, would be ready to prove—if he thought it necessary—that, so far from acting dishonourably, he had shown himself to be Harold's best friend, by doing his best to prevent Harold from asking a penniless girl to be his wife. Oh, yes, Mr. Edmund Airey would have no trouble in showing, to the satisfaction of a considerable number of people—perhaps, even to his own satisfaction—that he was acting the part of a truly conscientious; and, perhaps, a self-sacrificing friend, by adopting Helen Craven's suggestion.

Harold felt very bitter toward his friend Edmund Airey; though it was unreasonable for him to do so; for had not he come to precisely the same conclusion as his friend in respect of Beatrice, this conclusion being, of course, that nothing but unhappiness could be the result of his loving Beatrice, and of his asking Beatrice to love him?

If Edmund Airey had succeeded in preventing him from carrying out his designs, Harold would be saved from the necessity of having with Beatrice that melancholy interview to which he was looking forward; therefore it was unreasonable for him to entertain any feeling of bitterness toward Edmund.

But for all that, he felt very bitterly toward Edmund—a fact which shows that, in some men as well as in all women, logic is subordinate to feeling.

It was also far from logical on his part to begin to think, only after he had accused his friend of dishonourable conduct, of the source whence the evidence upon which he had founded his accusation, was derived.

How had Mrs. Mowbray come to hear how Edmund Airey had plotted with Helen Craven, he asked himself. He began to wonder how she could have heard about the gray eyes of Beatrice, to which she had alluded more than once, with such excellent effect from the standpoint of art. From whom could she have heard so much?

She certainly did not hear it from Mr. Durdan, even if she was acquainted with him, which was doubtful; for Mr. Durdan was discreet. Besides, Mr. Durdan was rarely eloquent on any social subject. He was the sort of man who makes a tour on the Continent and returns to tell you of nothing except a flea at Bellaggio.

Was it possible that some of the fishing men had been taking notes unknown to any of their fellow guests, for the benefit of Mrs. Mowbray?

Harold did not think so.

After some time he ceased to trouble himself with these vain speculations. The fact—he believed it to be a fact—remained the same: someone who had been at Castle Innisfail had given Mrs. Mowbray a highly circumstantial account of certain occurrences in the neighbourhood of the Castle; and if Mrs. Mowbray had received such an account, why might not anyone else be equally favoured?

Thus it was that he strayed into new regions of speculation, where he could not possibly find any profit. What did it matter to him if everyone in London knew that Edmund Airey had plotted with Helen Craven, to prevent an impecunious man from marrying a penniless girl? All that remained for him to do was to go to the girl, and tell her that he had made a mistake—that he would be asking her to make too great a sacrifice, were he to hold her to her promise to love him and him only.

It was somewhat curious that his resolution in this matter should be strengthened by the fact of his having learned that Edmund Airey had not been in earnest, in what was generally regarded at Castle Innisfail as an attitude of serious, and not merely autumn, love-making, in respect of Beatrice.

He did not feel at all annoyed to learn that, if he were to withdraw from the side of Beatrice, his place would not be taken by that wealthy and distinguished man, Edmund Airey. When he had at first made up his mind to go to Beatrice and ask her to forget that he had ever told her that he loved her, he had had an uneasy feeling that his friend might show even a greater interest than he had done on the evening of the *tableaux* at the Castle, in the future movements of Beatrice.

At that time his resolution had not been overwhelming in its force. But now that Mrs. Mowbray had made that strange communication—it almost amounted to a revelation—to him, he felt almost impatient at the delay that he knew there must be before he could see the girl and make his confession to her.

He had two more days to think over his resolution, in addition to his sleepless night after receiving Mrs. Mowbray's confidences; and the result of keeping his thoughts in the one direction was, that at last he had almost convinced himself that he was glad that the opportunity had arrived for him to present himself to the girl, in order to tell her that he would no longer stand in the way of her loving someone else.

When he found himself in her presence, however, his convictions on this particular point were scarcely so strong as they might have been.

She was sitting in front of the fire in the great drawing-room that retained all the original decorations of the Brothers Adam, and she was wearing something beautifully simple—something creamy, with old lace. The furniture of the room also belonged to the period of the Adams, and on the walls were a number of coloured engravings by Bartolozzi after Cipriani and Angelica Kauffmann.

She was in his arms in a moment. She gave herself to him as naturally and as artlessly as though she were a child; and he held her close to him, looking down upon her face without uttering a word—kissing her mouth conscientiously, her shell-pink cheeks earnestly, her forehead scrupulously, and her chin playfully.

This was how he opened the interview which he had arranged to part them for ever.

Then they both drew a long breath simultaneously, and both laughed in unison.

Then he held her away from him for a few seconds, looking upon her exquisite face. Again he kissed her—but this time solemnly and with something of the father about the action.

"At last—at last," he said.

"At last," she murmured in reply.

"It seems to me that I have never seen you before," said he. "You seem to be a different person altogether. I do not remember anything of your face, except your eyes—no, by heavens! your eyes are different also."

"It was dark as midnight in the depths of that seal-cave," she whispered.

"You mean that—ah, yes, my beloved! If I could have seen your eyes at that moment I know I should have found them full of the light that I now see in their depths. You remember what I said to you on the morning after your arrival at the Castle? Your eyes meant everything to me then—I knew it—beatitude or doom."

"And you know now what they meant?"

He looked at her earnestly and passionately for some moments. Then his hands dropped suddenly as though they were the hands of a man who had died in a moment—his hands dropped, he turned away his face.

"God knows, God knows," he said, with what seemed like a moan.

"Yes," she said; "God knows, and you know as well as God that in my heart there is nothing that does not mean love for you. Does love mean blessing or doom?"

"God knows," said he again. "Your love should mean to me the most blessed thing on earth."

"And your love makes me most blessed among women," said she.

This exchange of thought could scarcely be said to make easier the task which he had set himself to do before nightfall.

He seemed to become aware of this, for he went to the high mantelpiece, and stood with his hands upon it, earnestly examining the carved marble frieze, cream-tinted with age, which was on a level with his face.

She knew, however, that he was not examining the carving from the standpoint of a critic; and she waited silently for whatever was coming.

It came when he ceased his scrutiny of the classical figures in high relief, that appeared upon the marble slab.

"Beatrice, my beloved," said he, and her face brightened. Nothing that commenced with the assumption that she was his beloved could be very bad. "I have been in great trouble—I am in great trouble still."

She was by his side in a moment, and had taken one of his hands in hers. She held it, looking up to his face with her eyes full of sympathy and concern.

"My dearest," he said, "you are all that is good and gracious. We must part, and for ever."

She laughed, still looking at his face. There really was something laughable in the sequence of his words. But her laugh did not make his task any easier.

"When I told you that I loved you, Beatrice, I told you the truth," said he. "If I were to tell you anything else now it would be a falsehood. But I had no right ever to speak to you of love. I am absolutely penniless."

"That is no confession," said she. "I knew all along that you were dependent upon your father for everything. I felt for you—so did Mr. Airey."

"Mr. Airey?" said he. "Mr. Airey mentioned to you that I was a beggar?"

"Oh, he didn't say that. He only said—what did he say?—something about the affairs of the world being very badly arranged, otherwise you should have thousands—oh, he said he felt for you with all his heart."

"'With all his appreciation of the value of an opportunity,' he should have said. Never mind Edmund Airey. You, yourself, can see, Beatrice, how impossible it would be for any man with the least sense of honour, situated as I am, to ask you to wait—to wait for something indefinite."

"You did not ask me to wait for anything. You did not ask me to wait for your love—you gave it to me at once. There is nothing indefinite in love."

"My Beatrice, you cannot think that I would ask you for your love without hoping to marry you?"

"Then let us be married to-morrow."

She did not laugh, speaking the words. He could see that she would not hesitate to marry him at any moment.

"Would to heaven that we could be, my dearest! But could there be anything more cruel than for a penniless man, such as I am, to ask a girl, such as you are, to marry him?"

"I cannot see where the cruelty would be. People have been very happy together before now, though they have had very little money between them."

"My dear Beatrice, you were not meant to pass your life in squalid lodgings, with none of the refinements of life around you; and I—well, I have known what roughing it means; I would face the worst alone; but I am not selfish enough to seek to drag you down to my level—to ask you to face hardship for my sake."

"But I——"

"Do not say anything, darling: anything that you may say will only make it the harder to part. I can do it, Beatrice; I am strong enough to say good-bye."

"Then say it, Harold."

She stood facing him, with her wonderful eyes looking steadily into his. The message that they conveyed to him was such as he could not fail to read aright. He knew that if he had said goodbye, he would never have a chance of looking into those eyes again.

And yet he made the attempt to speak—to say the word that she had challenged him to utter. His lips were parted for more than a moment. He suddenly dropped her hand—he had been holding it all the time—and

turned away from her with a passionate gesture.

“I cannot say it—God help me! I cannot say good-bye,” he cried.

He had flung himself into a sofa and had buried his face in his hands.

For a short time he had actually felt that he was desirous to part from her. For some minutes he had been quite sincere. The force of the words he had made use of to show Beatrice how absolutely necessary it was that they should part, had not been felt by her; those words had, however, affected him. He had felt—for the first time, in spite of his previous self-communing—that he must say good-bye to her, but he found that he was too weak to say it.

He felt a hand upon his shoulder. He could feel her gracious presence near to him, before her voice came.

“Harold,” she said, “if you had said it, I should never have had an hour’s happiness in my life. I would never have seen you again. I felt that all the happiness of my life was dependent upon your refraining from speaking those words. Cannot you see, my love, that the matter has passed out of our hands—that it is out of our power to part now? Harold, cannot you see that, let it be for good or evil—for heaven or doom—we must be together? Whatever is before us, we are not two but one—our lives are joined beyond the power of separation. I am yours; you are mine.”

He sprang to his feet. He saw that tears were in her eyes. “Let it be so,” he cried. “In God’s name let it be so. Whatever may happen, no suggestion of parting shall come from me. We stand together, and for ever, Beatrice.”

“For ever and ever,” she said.

That was how their interview came to a close.

Did he know when he had set out for her home that this would be the close of their interview—this clasping of the hands—this meeting of the lips?

Perhaps he did not. But one thing is certain: if it had not had this ending, he would have been greatly mortified.

His vanity would have received a great blow.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—ON THE MESSAGE OF THE LILY.

WALKING Westward to his rooms, he enjoyed once again the same feeling of exultation, which had been his on the evening of the return from the seal-hunt. He felt that she was wholly his.

He had done all that was in his power to show her how very much better it would be for her to part from him and never to see him again—how much better it would be for her to marry the wealthy and distinguished man who had, out of the goodness of his heart, expressed to her a deep sympathy for his, Harold’s, unfortunate condition of dependence upon a wicked father. But he had not been able to convince her that it would be to her advantage to adopt this course.

Yet, instead of feeling deeply humiliated by reason of the failure of his arguments, he felt exultant.

“She is mine—she is mine!” he cried, when he found himself alone in his room in St. James’s. “There is none like her, and she is mine!”

He reflected for a long time upon her beauty. He thought of Mrs. Mowbray, and he smiled, knowing that Beatrice was far lovelier, though her loveliness was not of the same impressive type. One did not seem to breathe near Beatrice that atmosphere heavy with the scent of roses, which Mrs. Mowbray carried with her for the intoxication of the nations. Still, the beauty of Beatrice was not a tame thing. It had stirred him, and it had stirred other men.

Yes, it had stirred Edmund Airey—he felt certain of it, although he did not doubt the truth of Mrs. Mowbray’s communication on this subject.

Even though Edmund Airey had been in a plot with Helen, still Harold felt that he had been stirred by the beauty of Beatrice.

He thought over this point for some time, and the conclusion that he came to was, that he could easily find out if Edmund meant to play no more important a *rôle* than that of partner in Helen Craven’s plot. It was perfectly clear, that if Edmund had merely acted as he had done at the suggestion of Helen, he would cease to take any further interest in Beatrice, unless it was his intention to devote his life to carrying out the plot.

In the course of some weeks, he would learn all that could be known on this point; but meantime his condition was a peculiar one.

He would have felt mortified had he been certain that Edmund Airey had not really been stirred by the charm of Beatrice; but he would have been somewhat uneasy had he felt certain that Edmund was deeply in love with her. He trusted her implicitly—he felt certain of himself in this respect. Had he not a right to trust her, after the way in which she had spoken to him—the way in which she had given herself up to him? But then he felt that he had made use of such definite arguments to her, in pointing out the advisability of their parting, as caused it to be quite possible that she might begin to perceive—after a year or two of waiting—that there was some value in those arguments of his, after all.

By the time that he had dined with some people, who had sent him a card on his return to London, and had

subjected himself to the mortifying influence of some unfamiliar *entrées*, and a conversation with a woman who was the survivor of the wreck of spiritualism in London, he was no longer in the exultant mood of the afternoon.

"A Fool's Paradise—a Fool's Paradise!" he murmured, as he sat in an easy-chair, and gazed into his flickering fire.

It had been very glorious to think that he was beloved by that exquisite girl—to think of the kisses of her mouth; but whither was the love leading him?

His father's words could not be forgotten—those words which he had spoken from beneath the eiderdown of his bed at Castle Innisfail; and Harold knew that, should he marry Beatrice, his father would certainly carry out his threat of cutting off his allowance.

Thus it was that he sat in his chair feeling that, even though Beatrice had refused to be separated from him, still they were as completely parted by circumstances as if she had immediately acknowledged the force of his arguments, and had accepted, his invitation to say good-bye for ever.

Thus it was that he cried, "A Fool's Paradise—a Fool's Paradise!" as he thought over the whole matter.

What were the exact elements of the Paradise in which his exclamation suggested that he was living, he might have had some difficulty in defining.

But then the site of the original Paradise is still a matter of speculation.

The next day he went to take lunch with her and her father—he had promised to do so before he had left her, when they had had their interview.

It so happened, however, that he only partook of lunch with Beatrice; for Mr. Avon had, he learned, been compelled to go to Dublin for some days, to satisfy himself regarding a document which was in a library in that city.

Harold did not grumble at the prospect of a long afternoon by her side; only he could not help feeling that the *ménage* of the Avon family was one of the most remarkable that he had ever known. The historical investigations of Mr. Avon did not seem to induce him to take a conventional view of his obligations, as the father of an extremely handsome girl—assuming that he was aware of the fact of her beauty—or a pessimistic view of modern society. He seemed to allow Beatrice to be in every way her own mistress—to receive whatever visitors she pleased; and to lay no narrow-minded prohibition upon such an incident as lunching *tête-à-tête* with a young man, or perhaps—but Harold had no knowledge of such a case—an old man.

He wondered if the historian had ever been remonstrated with on this subject, by such persons as had not had the advantage of scrutinizing humanity through the medium of state papers.

Harold thought that, on the whole, he had no reason to take exception to the liberality of Mr. Avon's system. He reflected that it was to this system he was indebted for what promised to be an extremely agreeable afternoon.

What he did not reflect upon, however, was, that he was indebted to Mr. Avon's peculiarities—some people would undoubtedly call the system a peculiar one—for a charmingly irresponsible relationship toward the historian's daughter. He did not reflect upon the fact, that if the girl had had the Average Father, or the Vigilant Mother, to say nothing of the Athletic Brother, he would not have been able, without some explanation, to visit her, and, on the strength of promising to love her, to kiss her, as he had now repeatedly done, on the mouth—or even on the forehead, which is somewhat less satisfying. Everyone knows that the Vigilant Mother would, by the application of a maternal thumb-screw which she always carries attached to her bunch of keys, have extorted from Beatrice a full confession as to the incidents of the seal-hunt—all except the hunting of the seals—and that this confession would have led to a visit to the study of the Average Father, in one corner of which reposes the rack, in working order, for the reception of the suitor. Everyone knows so much, and also that the alternative of the paternal rack, is the fist of the Athletic Brother.

But Mr. Harold Wynne did not seem to reflect upon these points, when he heard the lightly uttered excuses of Beatrice for her father's absence, as they seated themselves at the table in the large dining-room.

His practised eye made him aware of the fact that Beatrice understood what he considered to be the essentials of a *recherché* lunch: a lunch appeals to the eye; but wine appeals to other senses than the sense of seeing; and the result of his judgment was to convince him that, if Mr. Avon was as careless in the affairs of the cellar as he was in the affairs of the drawing-room, he was to be congratulated upon having about him someone who understood still hock at any rate.

In the drawing-room, she busied herself in arranging, in Wedgwood bowls, some flowers that he had brought her—trifles of sprawling orchids, Eucharis lilies, and a fairy tropical fern or two, all of which are quite easy to be procured in London in October for the expenditure of a few sovereigns. The picture that she made bending over her bowls was inexpressibly lovely. He sat silent, watching her, while she prattled away with the artless high spirits of a child. She was surely the loveliest thing yet made by God. He thought of what the pious old writer had said about a particular fruit, and he paraphrased it in his own mind, saying, that doubtless God could make a lovelier thing, but certainly He had never made it.

"I am delighted to have such sweet flowers now," she cried, as she observed, with critical eyes, the effect of a bit of flaming crimson—an orchid suggesting a flamingo in flight—over the turquoise edge of the bowl. "I am delighted, because I have a prospect of other visitors beside yourself, my lord."

"Other visitors?" said he. He wondered if he might venture to suggest to her the inadvisability of entertaining other visitors during her father's absence.

"Other visitors indeed," she replied. "I did not tell you yesterday all that I had to tell. I forget now what we talked about yesterday. How did we put in our time?"

She looked up with laughing eyes across the bowl of flowers, that she held up to her face.

"I don't forget—I shall never forget," said he, in a low voice.

"You must never forget," said she. "But to my visitors—who are they, do you fancy? Don't try to guess, for if you should succeed I should be too mortified to be able to tell you that you were right. I will tell you now.

Three days ago—while we were still on the Continent—Miss Craven called. She promised faithfully to do so at Castle Innisfail—indeed, she suggested doing so herself; and I found her card waiting for me on my return with a few words scrawled on it, to tell me that she would return in some days. I don't think that anything should be in the same bowl with a Eucharis lily—even the Venus-hair fern looks out of place beside it."

She had strayed from her firebrand orchids to the white lilies.

"You are quite right, indeed," said he. "A lily and you stand alone—you make everything else in the world seem tawdry."

"That is not the message of the lily," said she. "But supposing that Miss Craven should call upon me to-day—would you be glad of such a third person to our party?"

"I should kill her, if she were a thousand times Helen Craven," said he, with a laugh. "But she is only one visitor; who are the others?"

"Oh, there is only one other, and he is interesting to me only," she cried. "Yes, I found Mr. Airey's card also waiting for me, and on it were scrawled almost the very words that were on Miss Craven's card, so that he may be here at any moment." Harold did not say a word. He sat watching her as her hands mingled with their sister-lilies on the table. Something cold seemed to have clasped his heart—a cold doubt that made him dumb.

"Yes," she continued; "Mr. Airey asked me one night at Castle Innisfail to let him know where we should go after leaving Ireland."

"Yes," said he, in a slow way; "I heard him make that request of you."

"You heard him? But you were taking part in the *tableaux* in the hall."

"I had left the platform and had strayed round to one of the doors. You told him where you were going?"

"I told him that we should be in this house in October, and he said that he would make it a point to be in town early in October, though Parliament was not to sit until the middle of January. He has kept his word."

"Yes, he has kept his word."

Harold felt that cold hand tightening upon his heart. "I think that he was interested in me," continued the girl. "I know that I was interested in him. He knows so much about everything. He is a close friend of yours, is he not?"

"Yes," said Harold, without much enthusiasm. "Yes, he was a close friend of mine. You see, I had my heart set upon going into Parliament—upon so humble an object may one's aspirations be centred—and Edmund Airey was my adviser."

"And what did he advise you to do?" she asked.

"He advised me to—well, to go into Parliament." He could not bring himself to tell her what form exactly Edmund Airey's advice had assumed.

"I am sure that his advice was good," said she. "I think that I would go to him if I stood in need of advice."

"Would you, indeed, Beatrice?" said he. He was at the point of telling her all that he had learned from Mrs. Mowbray; he only restrained himself by an effort.

"I believe that he is both clever and wise."

"The two do not always go together, certainly."

"They do not. But Mr. Airey is, I think, both."

"He has been better than either. To be successful is better than to be either wise or clever. Mr. Airey has been successful. He will get an Under-Secretaryship if the Government survives the want of confidence of the Opposition."

"And you will go into Parliament, Harold?"

He shook his head.

"That aspiration is past," said he; "I have chosen the more excellent career. Now, tell me something of your aspirations, my beloved."

"To see you daily—to be near you—to—"

But the enumeration of the terms of her aspirations is unnecessary.

How was it that some hours after this, Harold Wynne left the house with that cold feeling still at his heart?

Was it a pang of doubt in regard to Beatrice, or a pang of jealousy in regard to Edmund Airey?

CHAPTER XXXV.—ON THE HOME.

HAROLD WYNNE remembered how he had made up his mind to judge whether or not Edmund Airey had been simply playing, in respect of Beatrice, the part which, according to Mrs. Mowbray's story, had been assigned to him by Helen Craven. He had made up his mind that unless Edmund Airey meant to go much further than—according to Mrs. Mowbray's communication—Helen Craven could reasonably ask him to go, he would not take the trouble to see Beatrice again.

Helen could scarcely expect him to give up his life to the furtherance of her interests with another man.

Well, he had found that Edmund, so far from showing any intention of abandoning the position—it has already been defined—which he had assumed toward Beatrice, had shown, in the plainest possible way, that

he did not mean to lose sight of her.

And for such a man as he was, to mean so much, meant a great deal, Harold was forced to acknowledge.

He spent the remainder of the day which had begun so auspiciously, wondering if his friend, Edmund Airey, meant to tell Beatrice some day that he loved her, and, what was very much more important, that he was anxious to marry her.

And then that unworthy doubt of which he had become conscious, returned to him.

If Edmund Airey, who, at first, had merely been attracted to Beatrice with a view of furthering what Helen Craven believed to be her interests, had come to regard her differently—as he, Harold, assumed that he had—might it not be possible, he asked himself, that Beatrice, who had just admitted that she had always had some sort of admiration for Edmund Airey, would———-

"Never, never, never!" he cried. "She is all that is good and true and faithful. She is mine—altogether mine!"

But his mind was in such a condition that the thought which he had tried to crush down, remained with him to torture him.

It should not have been a torturing thought, considering that, a few days before, he had made up his mind that it was his duty to relinquish Beatrice—to go to her and bid her good-bye for ever. To be sure, he had failed to realize this honourable intention of his; but what was honourable at one time was honourable at another, so that the thought of something occurring to bring about the separation for which he had professed to be so anxious, should not have been a great trouble to him—it should have been just the contrary.

The next day found him in the same condition. The thought occurred to him, "What if, at this very moment, Edmund Airey is with her, endeavouring to increase that admiration which he must know Beatrice entertains for him?" The thought was not a consoling one. Its effect was to make him think very severely of the laxity of Mr. Avon's *ménage*, which would make possible such an interview as he had just imagined. It was a terrible thing, he thought, for a father to show so utter a disregard for his responsibilities as to——-

But here he reflected upon something that had occurred to him in connection with *tête-à-tête* interviews, and he thought it better not to pursue his course of indignant denunciation of the eminent historian.

He put on an overcoat and went to pay a visit to his sister, who, he had heard the previous day, was in town for a short time. In another week she would be entertaining a large party for the pheasant-shooting at her country-house in Brackenshire, and Harold was to be her guest as well as Edmund Airey and Helen Craven. It was to this visit that Lord Fotheringay had alluded in the course of his chamber interview with his son at Castle Innisfail.

Harold had now made up his mind that he would not be able to join his sister's party, and he thought it better to tell her so than to write to her to this effect.

Mrs. Lampson was not at home, the servant said, when he had knocked at the door of the house in Eaton Square. A party was expected for lunch, however, so that she would probably return within half an hour.

Harold said he would wait for his sister, and went upstairs.

There was one person already in the drawingroom and that person was Lord Fotheringay.

Harold greeted him, and found that he was in an extremely good humour. He had never been in better health, he declared. He felt, he said, as young as the best of them—he prudently refrained from defining them—and he was still of the opinion that the Home—the dear old English Home—was where true and lasting happiness alone was to be found; and he meant to try the Principality of Monaco later on; for November was too awful in any part of Britain. Yes, he had seen the influence of the Home upon exiles in various parts of the world. Had he not seen strong men weep like children—like innocent children—at the sight of an English post-mark—the post-mark of a simple English village? Why had they wept, he asked his son, with the well-gloved forefinger of the professional moralist outstretched?

His son declined to hazard an answer.

They had wept those tears—those bitter tears—Lord Fotheringay said, with solemn emphasis, because their thoughts went back to that village home of theirs—the father, the mother, perhaps a sister—who could tell?

"Ah, my boy," he continued, "''Mid pleasures and palaces'—''mid pleasures and'—by the way, I looked in at the Rivoli Palace last night. I heard that there was a woman at that place who did a new dance. I saw it. A new dance! My dear boy, it wasn't new when I saw it first, and that's—ah, never mind—it's some years ago. I was greatly disappointed with it. There's nothing indecent in it—I will say that for it—but there's nothing enlivening. Ah, the old home of burlesque—the old home—that's what I was talking about—the Home—the sentiment of the Home—"

"Of burlesque?" suggested Harold.

"Of the devil, sir," said his father. "Don't try to be clever; it's nearly as bad as being insolent. What about that girl—Helen Craven, I mean? Have you seen her since you came to town? She's here. She'll be at Ella's next week. Perhaps it will be your last chance. Heavens above! To think that a pauper like you should need to be urged to marry such a girl! A girl with two hundred thousand pounds in cash—a girl belonging to one of the best families in all—in all Birmingham. Harold, don't be a fool! Such a chance doesn't come every day."

Just then Mrs Lampson entered the room and with her, her latest discovery, the Coming Dramatist.

Mrs Lampson was invariably making discoveries. But they were mostly discoveries of quartz; they contained a certain proportion of gold, to be sure; but when it came to the crushing, they did not yield enough of the precious metal to pay the incidental expenses of the plant for the working.

She had discovered poets and poetesses—the latter by the score. She had discovered at least one Genius in black and white—his genius being testified by his refusal to work; and she had discovered a pianoforte Genius—his genius being proved by the dishevelment of his hair. The man who had the reputation for being the Greatest Living Atheist was a welcome guest at her house, and the most ridiculous of living socialists boasted of having dined at her table.

She was foremost in every philanthropic movement, and wrote articles to the magazines, lamenting the low

tone of modern society in London.

She also sneered (in private) at Lady Innisfail. Her latest discovery, the Coming Dramatist, had had, he proudly declared, his plays returned to him by the best managers in London, and by the one conscientious manager in the United States—the last mentioned had not prepaid the postage, he lamented.

He was a fearful joy to cherish; but Mrs. Lampson listened to his egotism at lunch, and tried to prevent her other guests from listening to him.

They would not understand him, she thought, and she did not make a mistake in this matter.

She got rid of him as soon as possible, and once more breathed freely. He had not disgraced her—that was so much in his favour. The same could not always be said of her discoveries.

The Christian Dynamitard was, people said, the only gentleman who had ever been introduced ta society by Mrs. Lampson.

When Harold found his sister alone, he explained to her that it would be impossible for him to join her party at Abbeylands—Mr. Lampson's Bracken-shire place—and his sister laughed and said she supposed that he had something better on his hands. He assured her that he had nothing better, only—

"There, there," said she, "I don't want you to invent an excuse. You would only have met people whom you know."

"Of course," said Harold, "you're not foolish enough to ask your discoveries down to shoot pheasants. I should like to see some of them in a *battue* with my best enemies. Yes, I'd hire a window, with pleasure."

"Didn't he behave well—the Coming Dramatist?" said she, earnestly. "You cannot say he didn't behave well—at least for a Coming Person."

"He behaved—wonderfully," said Harold. "Good-bye."

She followed him to the door of the room—nay, outside.

"By the bye," said she, in a whisper; "do you know anything of a Miss Avon?"

"Miss Avon?" said Harold. "Miss Avon. Why, if she is the daughter of Julius Anthony Avon, the historian, we met her at Castle Innisfail. Why do you ask me, Ella?"

"It is so funny," said she. "Yesterday Mr. Airey called upon me, and before he left he begged of me to call upon her, and even hinted—he has got infinite tact—that she would make a charming addition to our party at Abbeylands."

"Ah," said Harold.

"And just now papa has been whispering to me about this same Miss Avon. He commanded me—papa has no tact—to invite her to join us for a week. I wonder what that means."

"What what means?"

"That—Mr. Airey and papa."

"Great Heaven! Ella, what should it mean, except that two men, for whom we have had a nominal respect, have gone over to the majority of fools?"

"Oh, is that all? I was afraid that—ah, good-bye."

"Good-bye."

CHAPTER XXXVI.—ON THE INFLUENCE OF A MAN OF THE WORLD.

It was true then—what he had surmised was true! Edmund Airey had shown himself to be actuated by a stronger impulse than a desire to assist Helen Craven to realize her hopes—so much appeared perfectly plain to Harold Wynne, as he strolled back to his rooms.

He was now convinced that Edmund Airey was serious in his attitude in respect of Beatrice. At Castle Innisfail he had been ready enough to play the game with counters, on his side at least, as stakes, but now he meant to play a serious game.

Harold recalled what proofs he had already received, to justify his arriving at this conclusion, and he felt that they were ample—he felt that this conclusion was the only one possible to be arrived at by anyone acquainted with all that had come under his notice.

He was quite astounded to hear from his sister that Edmund Airey had taken so extreme a step as to beg of her to call upon Beatrice, and invite her to join the Abbeylands party. Whether or not he had approached Mrs. Lampson in confidence on this matter, the fact of his having approached her was, in some degree, compromising to himself, and no one was better aware of this fact than Edmund Airey. He was not an eager boy to give way to a passion without counting the cost. There was no more subtle calculator of costs than Edmund Airey, and Harold knew it.

What, then, was left for Harold to infer?

Nothing, except what he had already inferred.

What then was left for him to do to checkmate the man who was menacing him?

He had lived so long in that world, the centre of which is situated somewhere about Park Lane, and he had come to believe so thoroughly that the leading characteristic of this world is worldliness, that he had lost the

capacity to trust anyone implicitly. He was unable to bring himself to risk everything upon the chance of Beatrice's loving him, in the face of the worst that might occur.

Thus it was that the little feeling of distrust which he experienced the previous day remained with him. It did not increase, but it was there. Now and again he could feel its cold finger upon his heart, and he knew that it was there.

He could not love with that blind, unreasoning, uncalculating love—that love which knows only heaven and hell, not earth. That perfect love, which casteth out distrust, was not the love of his world.

And thus it was that he walked to his rooms, thinking by what means he could bind that girl to him, so that she should be bound beyond the possibility of chance, or craft, or worldliness coming between them.

He had not arrived at any satisfactory conclusion on this subject when he reached his rooms.

He was surprised to find waiting for him Mr. Playdell, but he greeted the man cordially—he had acquired a liking for him, for he perceived that, with all his eccentricities—all his crude theories that he tried to vivify by calling them principles, he was still acting faithfully toward Archie Brown, and was preventing him from squandering hundreds of pounds where Archie might have squandered thousands.

"You are naturally surprised to see me, Mr. Wynne," said Playdell. "I dare say that most men would think that I had taken a liberty in making an uninvited call like this."

"I, at any rate, think nothing of the sort, Mr. Playdell," said Harold.

"I am certain that you do not," said Mr. Play-dell. "I am certain that you are capable of doing me justice—yes, on some points."

"I hope that I am, Mr. Playdell."

"I know that you are, Mr. Wynne. You are not one of those silly persons, wise in their own conceit, who wink at one another when my name is mentioned, and suggest that the unfrocked priest is making a very fair thing out of his young patron."

"I believe that your influence over him is wholly for good, Mr. Playdell. If he were to allow you the income of a Bishop instead of that of a Dean I believe that he would still save money—a great deal of money—by having you near him."

"And you are in no way astray, Mr. Wynne. I was prepared for what people would say when I accepted the situation that Archie offered me, but the only stipulation that I made was that my accounts were to be audited by a professional man, and monthly. Thus it is that I protect myself. Every penny that I receive is accounted for."

"That is a very wise plan, Mr. Playdell, but—"

"But it has nothing to do with my coming here to-day? That is what you are too polite to say. You are right, Mr. Wynne. I have not come here to talk about myself and my systems, but about our friend Archie. You have great influence over him."

"I'm afraid I haven't much. If I had, I wouldn't hesitate to tell him that he is making an ass of himself."

"You have come to the point at once, Mr. Wynne."

Mr. Playdell had risen from his chair and was walking up and down the room with his head bent. Now he stood opposite to Harold.

"The point?" said Harold.

"The point is that he is being robbed right and left through the medium of the Legitimate Theatre, and a stop must be put to it," said Playdell.

"And you think that I should make the attempt to put a stop to this foolishness of his? My dear Mr. Playdell, if I were to suggest to Archie that he is making an ass of himself over this particular matter, I should never have another chance of exercising my influence over him for good or bad. I have always known that Mrs. Mowbray is one of the most expensive tastes in England. But when the beauty of Mrs. Mowbray is to be exploited with the beauty of the poetry of Shakespeare, and when these gems are enclosed in so elaborate a setting as the Legitimate Theatre—well, I suppose Archie's millions will hold out. There's a deal of spending in three millions, Mr. Playdell."

"His millions will hold out," said Mr. Playdell. "And so will he," laughed Harold. "I have known Mrs. Mowbray for several years, and she has never ruined any man except her husband, and he is not worth talking about. She has always liked young men with wealth so enormous that even her powers of spending money can make no impression on it."

"Mr. Wynne, you can have no notion what that theatre has cost Archie—what it is daily costing him. Eight hundred pounds a week wouldn't cover the net loss of that ridiculous business—that trailing of Shakespeare in the mire, to gratify the vanity of a woman. I know what men are when they are very young. If I were to talk to Archie seriously on this subject, he would laugh at me; if he did not, he would throw something at me. The result would be *nil*."

"Unless he was a good shot with a casual missile."

"Mr. Wynne, he would not listen to me; but he would listen to you—I know that he would. You could talk to him with all the authority of a man of the world—a man in Society."

"Mr. Playdell," said Harold, shaking his head, "if there's no fool like the old fool, there's no ass like the young ass. Now, I can assure you, on the authority of a man of the world—you know what such an authority is worth—that to try and detach Archie from his theatre nonsense just now by means of a lecture, would be as impossible as to detach a limpet from a rock by a sermon on—let us say—the flexibility of the marriage bond."

"Alas! alas!" said Mr. Playdell.

"The only way that Archie can be induced to throw over Mrs. Mowbray and Shakespeare and suchlike follies, is by inducing him to form a stronger attachment elsewhere."

"The last state of that man might be worse than the first, Mr. Wynne."

“Might—yes, it might be, but that is no reason why it should be. The young ass takes to thistles, because it has never known the enjoyment of a legitimate pasture.”

“The legitimate pasture is some distance away from the Legitimate Theatre, Mr. Wynne.”

“I agree with you. Now, the thought has just occurred to me that I might get Archie brought among decent people, for the first time in his life. My sister, Mrs. Lampson, is having a party down at her husband’s place in Brackenshire, for the pheasant-shooting. Why shouldn’t Archie be one of the party? There are a number of decent men going, and decent women also. None of the men will try to get the better of him.”

“And the women will not try to make a fool of him?”

“I won’t promise that—the world can’t cease to revolve on its axis because Archie Brown has a tendency to giddiness.”

Mr. Playdell was grave. Then he said, thoughtfully, “Whatever the women may be, they can’t be of the stamp of Mrs. Mowbray.”

“You may trust my sister for that. You may also trust her to see that they are less beautiful than Mrs. Mowbray,” remarked Harold.

Mr. Playdell pondered.

“Pheasant-shooting is expensive in its way,” said he. “The preservation of grouse runs away with a good deal of money also, I am told. Race horses, it is generally understood, entail considerable outlay. Put them all together, and you only come within measurable distance of Mrs. Mowbray and Shakespeare as a pastime—with nothing to show for the money—absolutely nothing to show for the money.”

“Except Mrs. Mowbray and Shakespeare.”

“Mr. Wynne, I believe that your kind suggestion may be the saving of that lad,” said Playdell.

“Oh, it’s the merest chance,” said Harold. “He may grow sick of the whole business after the first *battue*.”

“He won’t. I’ve known men saved from destruction by scoring a century in a first-class cricket match: they gave themselves up to cricket, to the exclusion of other games less healthy. If Archie takes kindly to the pheasants, he may make up his mind to buy a place and preserve them. That will be a healthy occupation for him. You will give him to understand that it’s the proper thing to do, Mr. Wynne.”

“You may depend upon me. I’ll write to my sister to invite him. It’s only an experiment.”

“It will succeed, Mr. Wynne—it will succeed, I feel that it will. If you only knew, as I do, how he is being fooled, you would understand my earnestness—you have long ago forgiven my intrusion. Give me a chance of serving you in return, Mr. Wynne. That’s all I ask.”

CHAPTER XXXVII.—ON THE DEFECTIVE LINK.

HAROLD had a note written to Mrs. Lampson, begging her to invite his friend, Mr. Archie Brown, to join her party at Abbeylands, almost before Mr. Playdell had left the street. He knew that his sister would be very glad to have Archie. All the world had a general notion of Archie’s millions; and Abbeylands was one of those immense houses that can accommodate a practically unlimited number of guests. The property had been bought from a nobleman, who had been brought to the verge of bankruptcy by trying to maintain it. Mr. Lampson, a patriotic American, had come to his relief, and had taken the place off his hands.

That is what all truly patriotic Americans do when they have an opportunity.

The new-world democracy comes to the rescue of the old-world aristocracy, and thus a venerable institution is preserved from annihilation.

Harold posted his letter as he went out to dine with a man who was a member of the Carlton Club, and zealous in heating up recruits for the Conservative party. He thought that Harold might possibly be open to conviction, not, of course, on the question of the righteousness of certain principles, but on the question of the direction in which the cat was about to jump. The jumping cat is the dominant power in modern politics.

Harold ate his dinner, and listened patiently to the man whose acquaintance with the tendencies of every genus of the political *felis* was supposed to be extraordinary. He said little. Before he had gone to Castle Innisfail the subject would have interested him greatly, but now he thought that Archie Brown’s inanities were preferable to those of the politician.

He was just enough to acknowledge, however, that the cigar with which he left the Carlton was as good a one as he had ever smoked. So that there was some advantage in being a Conservative after all.

He walked round St. James’s Square, for the night was warm and fine. His mind was not conscious of having received anything during the previous two hours upon which it would be profitable to ponder. He thought over the question which he had put to himself previously—the question of how he could bind Beatrice to him—how he could make her certainly his own, and thus banish that cold distrust of which he now and again became aware—no, it was not exactly distrust, it was only a slightly defective link in the chain of complete trust.

She loved him and she promised to love him. He reflected upon this, and he asked himself what more could he want. What bond stronger than her word could he desire to have?

“Oh, I will trust her for ever—for ever,” he murmured. “If she is not true, then there never was truth on earth.”

He fancied that he had dismissed the matter from his mind with this exorcism.

And so he had.

But it so happens that some persons are so constituted that there is but the slenderest connection between their mind and their heart. Something that appeals very forcibly to their mind will not touch their heart in the least. They are Nature’s “sports.”

Harold Wynne was one of these people. He had made up his mind that, on the question of implicitly trusting Beatrice, nothing more remained to be said. There was still, however, that cold finger upon his heart.

But having made up his mind that nothing more remained to be said on the question, he was logical enough—for logic is also a mental attribute, though by no means universally distributed—to think of other matters.

He began to think about Mr. Playdell, and his zeal for the reform of Archie. Harold’s respect for Mr. Playdell had materially increased since the morning. At first he had been inclined to look with suspicion upon the man who had, by the machinery of the Church, been prohibited from discharging the functions of a priest of that Church, though, of course, he was free to exercise that unimportant function known as preaching. He could not preach within a church, however. If he wished to try and save souls by preaching, that was his own business. He would not do so with the sanction of the Church. He was anxious to save the soul of Archie Brown, at any rate. He assumed that Archie had a soul in embryo, ready to be hatched, and it was clear to Harold that Mr. Playdell was anxious to save it from being addled before it had pecked its way out of its shell. Therefore Harold had a considerable respect for Mr. Playdell, though he had been one of the unprofitable servants of the Church.

He thought of the earnest words of the man—of the earnest way in which he had begged to be given the chance of returning the service, which he believed was about to be done to him by Harold.

He had been greatly in earnest; but that fact only made his words the more ridiculous.

“What service could he possibly do me?” Harold thought, when he had had his laugh, recalling the outstretched hand of Mr. Playdell, and his eager eyes. “*What service could he possibly do me? What service?*”

He was rooted to the pavement. The driver of a passing hansom pulled up opposite him, taking the fact of his stopping so suddenly as an indication that he wanted a hansom.

He took no notice of the hansom, and it passed up the square. He remained so long lost in thought, that his cigar, so strongly impregnated with sound Conservative principles, went out like any Radical weed, or the penny Pickwick of the Labour Processionist.

He dropped the unsmoked end, and felt for his pocket-handkerchief. He raised his hat and wiped his forehead.

Then he took a stroll into Piccadilly and on to Knightsbridge. He went down Sloane Street, and into Chelsea, returning by the Embankment to Westminster—the clock was chiming the hour of 2 a.m. as he passed.

But the same clock had struck three before he got into bed, and five before he fell asleep.

END OF VOL. II.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A GRAY EYE OR SO. IN THREE VOLUMES—VOLUME II ***

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