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Volumes—Volume III, by Frank Frankfort Moore**

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A GRAY EYE OR SO

By Frank Frankfort Moore

In Three Volumes—Volume III

Sixth Edition

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A GRAY EYE OR SO

BY

FRANK FRANKFORT MOORE

AUTHOR OF

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

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A GRAY EYE OR SO.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—ON A KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD.

SHORTLY after noon he was with her. He had left his rooms without touching a morsel of breakfast, and it was plain that such sleep as he had had could not have been of a soothing nature. He was pale and haggard; and she seemed surprised—not frightened, however, for her love was that which casteth out fear—at the way he came to her—with outstretched hands which caught her own, as he said, “My beloved—my beloved, I have a strange word for you—a strange proposal to make. Dearest, can you trust me? Will you marry me—to-morrow—to-day?”

She scarcely gave a start. He was only conscious of her hands tightening upon his own. She kept her eyes fixed upon his. The silence was long. It was made the more impressive by the distinctness with which the jocularity of the fishmonger’s hoy with the cook at the area railings, was heard in the room.

“Harold,” she said, in a voice that had no trace of distrust, “Harold, you are part of my life—all my life! When I said that I loved you, I had given myself to you. I will marry you any time you please—to-morrow—to-day—this moment!”

She was in his arms, sobbing.

His “God bless you, my darling!” sounded like a sob also.

In a few moments she was laughing through her tears.

He was not laughing.

“Now, tell me what you mean, my beloved,” said she, with a hand on each of his shoulders.

“Tell me what you mean by coming to frighten me like this. What has happened?”

“Nothing has happened, only I want to feel that you are my own—my own beyond the possibility of being separated from me by any power on earth. I do not want to take you away from your father’s house—I cannot offer you any home. It may be years before we can live together as those who love one another as we love, may live with the good will of heaven. I only want you to become my wife in name, dearest. Our marriage must be kept a secret.”

“But my own love,” said she, “why should you wish to go through this ceremony? Are we not united by the true bond of love? Can we be more closely united than we are now? The strength of the marriage bond is only strong in proportion as the love which is the foundation of marriage is strong. Now, why should you wish for the marriage rite before we are prepared to live for ever under the same roof?”

“Why, why?” he cried passionately, as he looked into the depths of her eyes.

He left her and went across the room to one of the windows and looked out. (It was the greengrocer’s boy who was now jocular with the cook at the area railings.)

“My Beatrice—” Harold had returned to her from his scrutiny of the pavement. “My Beatrice, you have not seen all that I have seen in the world. You do not know—you do not know me as I know myself. Why should there come to me sometimes an unworthy thought—no, not a doubt—oh, I have seen so much of the world, Beatrice, I feel that if anything should come between us it would kill me. I must—I must feel that we are made one—that there is a bond binding us together that nothing can sever.”

“But, my Harold—no, I will not interpose any buts. You would not ask me to do this if you had not some good reason. You say that you know the world. I admit that I do not know it. I only know you, and knowing you and loving you with all my heart—with all my soul—I trust you implicitly—without a question—without the shadow of a doubt.”

“God bless you, my love, my love! You will never have reason to regret loving me—trusting me.”

"It is my life—it is my life, Harold."

Once again he was standing at the window. This time he remained longer with his eyes fixed upon the railings of the square enclosure.

"It must be to-morrow," he said, returning to her. "I shall come here at noon. A few words spoken in this room and nothing can part us. You will still call yourself by your own name, dearest, God hasten the day when you can come to me as my wife in the sight of all the world and call yourself by my name."

"I shall be here at noon to-morrow," said she.

"Unless," said he, returning to her after he had kissed her forehead and had gone to the door. "Unless"—he framed her face with his hands, and looked down into the depths of her eyes.—"Unless, when you have thought over the whole matter, you feel that you cannot trust me."

She laughed.

"Ah, my love, my love, you do not know the world," said he.

He knew the world.

Another man who knew the world was Pontius Pilate.

This was why he asked "What is Truth?"

Harold Wynne was in Archie Brown's room in Piccadilly within half an hour.

Archie was at the Legitimate Theatre, Mr. Playdell said—Mr. Playdell was seated at the dining-room table surrounded by papers. A trifling difference of opinion had arisen between Mrs. Mowbray and her manager, he added, and (with a smile) Archie had hurried to the theatre to set matters right.

"It is kind of you to call, Mr. Wynne," continued Mr. Playdell. "But I hope it is not to tell me that you regret the suggestion that you made yesterday—that you do not see your way to write to your sister to invite Archie to her place."

"I wrote to her the moment you left me," said Harold. "Archie will get his invitation this evening. It is not about him that I came here to-day, Mr. Playdell. I came to see you. You asked me yesterday to give you an opportunity of doing something for me. I can give you that opportunity."

"And I promise you that I shall embrace it with gladness, Mr. Wynne," said Playdell, rising from the table. "Tell me how I can serve you and you will find how ready I am."

"You still hold to your original principles regarding marriage, Mr. Playdell?"

"How could I do otherwise than hold to them, Mr. Wynne? They are the result of thought; they are not merely a fad to gain notoriety. Let me prove the position that I take up on this matter."

"You need not, Mr. Playdell. I heard all your case when it was published. I confess that I now think differently respecting you from what I thought at that time. Will you perform the ceremony of marriage between a lady who has promised to marry me and myself?"

"There is only one condition that I make, Mr. Wynne. You must take an oath that you consider the rite, as I perform it, to be binding upon you, and that you will never recognize a divorce."

"I will take that oath willingly, Mr. Playdell. I have promised my *fiancée* that we shall be with her at noon to-morrow. She will be prepared for us. By the way, do you require a ring for the ceremony as performed by you?"

Mr. Playdell looked grave—almost scandalized.

"Mr. Wynne," said he, "that question suggests to me a certain disbelief on your part in the validity in the sight of heaven of the rite of marriage as performed by a man with a full sense of his high office, even though unfrocked by a Church that has always shown too great a readiness to submit to secular guidance—secular restrictions in matters that were originally, like marriage, purely spiritual. The Church has not only submitted to civil restrictions in the matter of the celebration of the holy rite of matrimony, but, while declaring at the altar that God has joined them whom the Church has joined, and while denying the authority of man to put them asunder, she recognizes the validity of divorce. She will marry a man who has been divorced from his wife, when he has duly paid the Archbishop a sum of money for sanctioning what in the sight of God is adultery."

"My dear Mr. Playdell," said Harold, "I recollect very clearly the able manner in which you defended your—your—principles, when they were called in question. I do not desire to call them in question now. I believe in your sincerity in this matter and in other matters. I shall drive here for you at half past eleven o'clock to-morrow. I need scarcely say that I mean my marriage to be kept a secret."

"You may depend upon my good faith in that respect," said Mr. Playdell. "Mr. Wynne," he added, impressively, "this land of ours will never be a moral one so long as the Church is content to accept a Parliamentary definition of morality. The Church ought certainly to know her own business."

"There I quite agree with you," said Harold.

He refrained from asking Mr. Playdell if the Church, in dispensing with his services as one of her priests, had not made an honest attempt to vindicate her claims to know her own business. He merely said, "Half past eleven to-morrow," after shaking hands with Mr. Playdell, who opened the door for him.

CHAPTER XXXIX.—ON CONSCIENCE AND THE RING.

HAROLD WYNNE shut himself up in his rooms without even lunching. He drew a chair in front of the fire and seated himself with the sigh of relief that is given by a man who has taken a definite step in some matter upon which he has been thinking deeply for some time. He sat there all the day, gazing into the fire.

Yes, he had taken the step that had suggested itself to him the previous night. He had made up his mind to take advantage of the opportunity that was afforded him of binding Beatrice to him by a bond which she at least would believe incapable of rupture. The accident of his meeting with the man whose views on the question of marriage had caused him to be thrust out of the Church, and whose practices left him open to a criminal prosecution, had suggested to him the means for binding to him the girl whose truth he had no reason to doubt.

He meant to perpetrate a fraud upon her. He had known of men entrapping innocent girls by means of a mock marriage, and he had always regarded such men as the most unscrupulous of scoundrels. He almost succeeded, after a time, in quieting the whisperings by his conscience of the word "fraud"—its irritating repetitions of this ugly word—by giving prominence to the excellence of his intentions in the transaction which he was contemplating. It was not a mock marriage—no, it was not, as ordinary mock marriages, to be gone through in order to give a man possession of the body of a woman, and to admit of his getting rid of her when it would suit his convenience to do so. It was, he assured his conscience, no mock marriage, since he was seeking it for no gross purpose, but simply to banish the feeling of cold distrust which he had now and again experienced. Had he not offered to free the girl from the promise which she had given to him? Was that like the course which would be adopted by a man endeavouring to take advantage of a girl by means of a mock marriage? Was there anything on earth that he desired more strongly than a real marriage with that same girl? There was nothing. But it was, unfortunately, the case that a real marriage would mean ruin to him; for he knew that his father would keep his word—when it suited his own purpose—and refuse him his allowance upon the day that he refused to sign a declaration to the effect that he was unmarried.

The rite which Mr. Playdell had promised to perform between him and Beatrice would enable him to sign the declaration with—well, with a clear conscience.

But in the meantime this same conscience continued gibing him upon his defence of his conduct; asking him with an irritating sneer, if he would mind explaining his position to the girl's father?—if he was not simply taking advantage of the peculiar circumstances of the girl's life—of the remarkable independence which she enjoyed, apparently with the sanction of her father, to perpetrate a fraud upon her?

For bad taste, for indelicacy, for vulgarity, for disregard of sound argument—that is, argument that sounds well—and for general obstinacy, there is nothing to compare with a conscience that remains in moderately good working order.

After all his straightforward reasoning during the space of two hours, he sprang from his seat crying, "I'll not do it—I'll not do it!"

He walked about his room for an hour, repeating every now and again the words, "I'll not do it—I'll not do it!"

In the course of another hour, he turned on his electric lamp, and wrote a note of half a dozen lines to Mr Playdell, telling him that, on second thoughts, he would not trouble him the next day. Then he wrote an equally short note to Beatrice, telling her that he thought it would be advisable to have a further talk with her before carrying out the plan which he had suggested to her for the next day. He put each note into its cover; but when about to affix stamps to them, he found that his stamp-drawer was empty. This was not a serious matter; he was going to his club to dine, and he knew that he could get stamps from the hall-porter.

He felt very much lighter at heart leaving his rooms than he had felt on entering some hours before. He felt that he had been engaged in a severe conflict, and that he had got the better of his adversary.

At the door of the club he found Mr. Durdan standing somewhat vacantly. He brightened up at the appearance of Harold.

"I've just been trying to catch some companionable fellow to dine with me," he cried.

"I'm sorry that I can't congratulate you upon finding one," said Harold.

"Then I congratulate myself," said Mr. Durdan, brightly. "You're the most companionable man that I know in town at present."

"Ah, then you're not aware of the fact that Edmund Airey is here just now," said Harold with a shrewd laugh.

"Edmund Airey? Edmund Airey?" said Mr. Durdan. "Let me tell you that your friend Edmund Airey is——"

"Don't say it in the open air," said Harold.

"Come inside and make the revelation to me."

"Then you will dine with me? Good! My dear fellow, my medical man has warned me times without number of the evil of dining alone, or with a newspaper—even the *Telegraph*. It's the beginning of dyspepsia, he says; so I wait at the door any time I am dining here until I get hold of the right man."

"If I can play the part of a priest and exorcise the demon that you're afraid of, you may reckon upon my services," said Harold. "But to tell you the truth, I'm a bit down myself to-night."

"What's the matter with you—nothing serious?" said Mr. Durdan.

"I've been working out some matters," said Harold.

"I know what's the matter with you," said the other. "That friend of yours has been trying to secure you for the Government, and you were too straightforward to be entrapped? Airey is a clever man—I don't deny his cleverness for a moment. Oh, yes; Mr. Airey is a very clever man." It seemed that he was now levelling an accusation against Mr. Airey that his best friends would find difficulty in repudiating. "Yes, but you and I, Wynne, are not to be caught by a phrase. The moment he fancied that I was attracted to her—I say, fancied, mind—and that he fancied—it may have been the merest fancy—that she was not altogether indifferent to me,

he forced himself forward, and I have good reason to believe that he is now in town solely on her account. I give you my word, Wynne, I never spoke a sentence to Miss Avon that all the world mightn't hear. Oh, there's nothing so contemptible as a man like Airey—a fellow who is attracted to a girl only when he sees that she is attracting other men. Yes, I met a man yesterday who told me that Airey was in town. 'Why should he be in town now?' I inquired. 'There's nothing going on in town.' He winked and said, '*cherchez la femme*'—he did upon my word. Oh, the days of the Government are numbered. Will you try Chablis or Sauterne?"

Harold said that he rather thought that he would try Chablis.

For another hour-and-a-half he was forced to listen to Mr. Durdan's prosing about the blunders of the Administration, and the designs of Edmund Airey. He left the club without asking the hall-porter for any stamps.

He had made up his mind that he would not need any stamps that night.

Before he reached his rooms he took out of the pocket of his overcoat the two letters which he had written, and he tore them both into small pieces.

With the chatter of Mr. Durdan there had come back to him that feeling of distrust.

Yes, he would make sure of her.

He unlocked one of the drawers in his writing-table and brought out a small *boule* case. When he had found—not without a good deal of searching—the right key for the box, he opened it. It contained an ivory miniature of his mother, in a Venetian mounting, a few jewels, and two small rings. One of them was set with a fine chrysoprase cameo of Eros, and surrounded by rubies. The other was an old *in memoriam* ring.

He picked up the cameo and scrutinized it attentively for some time, slipping it down to the first joint of his little finger. He kept turning it over for half an hour before he laid it on the desk and relocked the box and the drawer.

"It will be hers," he said. "Would I use my mother's ring for this ceremony if I meant it to be a fraud—if I meant to take advantage of it to do an injury to my beloved one? As I deal with her, so may God deal with me when my hour comes." It was a ring that had been left to him with a few other trinkets by his mother, and he had now chosen it for the ceremony which was to be performed the next day.

Curiously enough, the fact of his choosing this ring did more to silence the whispering jeers of his conscience than all his phrases of argument had done.

The next day he called for Mr. Playdell in a hansom, and shortly after noon, the words of the marriage service of the Church of England had been repeated in the Bloomsbury drawing-room by the man who had once been a priest and who still wore the garb of a priest. He, at any rate, did not consider the rite a mockery.

Harold could not shake off the feeling that he was acting a part in a dream. When it was all over he dropped into a chair, and his head fell forward until his face was buried in his hands.

It was left for Beatrice to comfort this sufferer in his hour of trial.

Her hand—his mother's ring was upon the third finger—was upon his head, and he heard her low sympathetic voice saying, "My husband—my husband—I shall be a true wife to you for ever and ever. We shall live trusting one another for ever, my beloved!"

They were alone in the room. He did not raise his face from his hands for a long time. She knelt beside where he was sitting and put her head against his.

In an instant he had clasped her passionately. He held her close to him, looking into her eyes.

"Oh, my love, my love," he cried. "What am I that you should have given to me that divine gift of your love? What am I that I should have asked you to do this for my sake? Was there ever such love as yours, Beatrice? Was there ever such baseness as mine? Will you forgive me, Beatrice?"

"Only once," said she, "I felt that—I scarcely know what I felt, dear—I think it was that your hurrying on our marriage showed—was it a want of trust?"

"I was a fool—a fool!" he said bitterly. "The temptation to bind you to me was too great to be resisted. But now—oh, Beatrice, I will give up my life to make you happy!"

CHAPTER XL.—ON SOCIETY AND THE SEAL.

THE next afternoon when Harold called upon Beatrice, he found her with two letters in her hand. The first was a very brief one from her father, letting her know that he would have to remain in Dublin for at least a fortnight longer; the second was from Mrs. Lampson—she had paid Beatrice a ten minutes' visit the previous day—inviting her to stay for a week at Abbeylands, from the following Tuesday.

"What am I to do in the matter, my husband—you see how quickly I have come to recognize your authority?" she cried, while he glanced at his sister's invitation.

"My dearest, you had better recognize the duty of a wife in this and other matters, by pleasing yourself," said he.

"No," said she. "I will only do what you advise me. That, you should see as a husband—I see it clearly as a wife—will give me a capital chance of throwing the blame on you in case of any disappointment. Oh, yes, you may be certain that if I go anywhere on your recommendation and fail to enjoy myself, all the blame will be laid at your door. That's the way with wives, is it not?"

"I can't say," said he. "I've never had one from whom to get any hints that would enable me to form an opinion."

"Then what did you mean by suggesting to me that it was wife-like to please myself?" said she, with an affectation of shrewdness that was extremely charming.

"I've seen other men's wives now and again," said he. "It was a great privilege."

"And they pleased themselves?"

"They did not please me, at any rate. I don't see why you shouldn't go down to my sister's place next week. You should enjoy yourself."

"You will be there?"

He shook his head.

"I was to have been there," said he; "but when I promised to go I had not met you. When I found that you were to be in town, I told Ella, my sister, that it was impossible for me to join her party."

"Of course that decides the matter," said she. "I must remain here, unless you change your mind and go to Abbeylands."

He remained thoughtful for a few moments, and then he turned to where she was opening the old mahogany escritoire.

"I particularly want you to go to my sister's," he said. "A reason has just occurred to me—a very strong reason, why you should accept the invitation, especially as I shall not be there."

"Oh, no," said she, "I could not go without you."

"My dear Beatrice, where is that wifely obedience of which you mean to be so graceful an exponent?" said he, standing behind her with a hand on each of her shoulders. "The fact is, dearest, that far more than you can imagine depends on your taking this step. It is necessary to throw people—my relations in particular—off the notion that something came of our meeting at Castle Innisfail. Now, if you were to go to Abbeylands while it was known that I had excused myself, you can understand what the effect would be."

"The effect, so far as I'm concerned, would be that I should be miserable, all the time I was away from you."

"The effect would be, that those people who may have been joining our names together, would feel that they have been a little too precipitate in their conclusions."

"That seems a very small result for so much self-sacrifice on our part, Harold."

"It's not so small as it may seem to you. I see now how important it would be to me—to both of us—if you were to go for a week to Abbeylands while I remain in town."

"Then of course I'll go. Yes, dear; I told you that I would trust you for ever. I placed all my trust in you yesterday. How many people would condemn me for marrying you in such indecent haste—that is what they would call it—and without a word of consultation with my father either? When I showed my trust in you at that time—the most important in my life—you may, I think, have confidence that I will trust you in everything. Yes, I'll go."

He had turned away from her. How could he face her when she was talking in this way about her trust in him?

"There has never been trust like yours, my beloved," said he, after a pause. "You will never regret it for a moment, my love—never, never!"

"I know it—I know it," said she.

"The fact is, Beatrice," said he, after another pause, "my relatives think that if I were to marry Helen Craven I should be doing a remarkably good stroke of business. They were right: it would be a good stroke—of business."

"How odd," cried Beatrice. She had become thoroughly interested. "I never thought of such a possibility at Castle Innisfail. She is nice, I think; only she does not know how to dress."

In an instant there came to his memory Mrs. Mowbray's cynical words regarding the extent of a woman's forgiveness.

"The question of being nice or of dressing well does not make any difference so far as my friends are concerned," said he. "All that is certain is that Helen Craven has several thousands of pounds a year, and they think that I should be satisfied with that."

"And so you should," she cried, with the light of triumph in her eyes. "I wonder if Mr. Airey knew what the wishes of your relatives were in this matter. I should like to know that, because I now recollect that he suggested something in that way when we talked together about you one evening at the Castle."

"Edmund Airey gave me the strongest possible advice on the subject," said Harold. "Yes, he advised me to ask Helen Craven to be my wife. More than that—I only learnt it a few days ago—so soon as you appeared at the Castle, and he saw—he sees things very quickly—that I was in love with you, he thought that if he were to interest you greatly, and that if you found out that he was wealthy and distinguished, you might possibly decline to fall in love with me, and so—"

"And so fall in love with him?" she cried, starting up from her chair at the desk. "I see now all that he meant. He meant that I should be interested in him—I was, too, greatly interested in him—and that I should be attracted to him, and away from you. But all the time he had no intention of allowing himself to be attracted by me to the point of ever asking me to marry him. In short, he was amusing himself at my expense. Oh, I see it all now. I must confess that, now and again, I wondered what Mr. Airey meant by placing himself so frequently by my side. I felt flattered—I admit that I felt flattered. Can you imagine anything so cruel as the purpose that he set himself to accomplish?"

Her face had become pale. This only gave emphasis to the flashing of her eyes. She was in a passion of indignation.

"Edmund Airey and his tricks were defeated," said Harold in a low voice. "Yes, we have got the better of

him, Beatrice, so much is certain."

"But the cruelty of it—the cruelty—oh, what does it matter now?" she cried. Then her paleness vanished into a delicate roseate flush, as she gave a laugh, and said, "After all, I believe that my indignation is due only to my wounded vanity. Yes, all girls are alike, Harold. Our vanity is our dominant quality."

"It is not so with you, Beatrice," he said. "I know you truly, my dear. I know that you would be as indignant if you heard of the same trickery being carried on in respect of another girl."

"I would—I know I would," she cried. "But what does it matter? As you say, I—we—have defeated this Mr. Airey, so that my vanity at least can find sweet consolation in reflecting that we have been cleverer than he was. I don't suppose that he could imagine anyone existing cleverer than himself."

"Yes, I think that we have got the better of him," said Harold. He was a little surprised to find that she felt so strongly on the subject of Edmund's attitude in regard to herself. He did not think it wise to tell her that that attitude was due to the timely suggestion of Helen. He could not bring himself to do so. He felt that his doing so would be to place himself on a level with the man who gives his wife during the first year of their married life, a circumstantial account of the many wealthy and beautiful young women who were anxious—to a point of distraction—to marry him.

He felt that there was no need for him to say anything about Helen—he almost wished that he had said nothing about Edmund.

"We got the better of him," he said a second time. "Never mind Edmund Airey. You must go to Abbeylands and amuse yourself. You will most likely meet with Archie Brown there. Archie is the plainest looking and probably the richest man of his age in England. He is to be made the subject of an experiment at Abbeylands."

"Is he to be vivisected?" said she. She was now neither pale nor roseate. She was herself once more.

"There's no need to vivisect poor Archie," said he. "Everyone knows that there's nothing particular about Archie. No; we are merely trying a new cure for him. He has not been in a very healthy state lately."

"If he is delicate, I suppose he will be thrown a good deal with us—the females, the incapables—while the pheasant-shooting is going on."

"You will see how matters are managed at Abbeylands," said Harold. "If you find that Archie is attracted toward any girl who is distinctly nice, you might—how does a girl assist her weaker sister to make up her mind to look with friendly eyes upon such a one as Archie?"

"Let me see," said she. "Wouldn't the best way be for girl number one to look with friendly eyes on him herself?"

Harold lay back on his chair and laughed at first; then he gazed at her in wonder.

"You are cleverer than Edmund Airey and Helen Craven when they combine their wisdom," said he. "Your woman's instinct is worth more than their experience."

"I never knew what the instincts of a woman were before this morning," said she. "I never felt that I had any need to exercise the instinct of defence. I suppose the young seal, though it has never been in the water, jumps in by instinct should it be attacked. Oh, yes, I dare say I could swim as well as most girls of my age."

It was only when he had returned to his rooms that he fully comprehended the force of her parable of the young seal.

CHAPTER XLI.—ON DRY CHAMPAGNE AND A CRISIS.

THE next morning Archie drove one of his many machines round to Harold's rooms and broke in upon him before he had finished his breakfast.

"Hallo, my tarty chip," cried Archie; "what's the meaning of this?"

He threw on the table an envelope addressed to him in the handwriting of Mrs. Lampson.

"What's the meaning of what?" said Harold. "Have you got beyond the restraint of Mr. Playdell alcoholically, that you ask me what's the meaning of that envelope?"

"I mean what does the inside mean?" said Archie.

"I'm sure you know better than I do, if you've read what's inside it."

"Oh, you're like one of the tarty chips in the courts that cross-examine other tarty chips until their faces are blue," said Archie. "There's no show for that sort of thing here. So just open the envelope and see what's inside."

"How can I do that and eat my kidneys?" said Harold. "I wish to heavens you wouldn't come here bothering me when I'm trying to get through a tough kidney and a tougher leading article. What's the matter with the letter, Archie, my lad?"

"It's all right," said Archie. "It's an invite from your sister for a big shoot at Abbeylands. What does it mean—that's what I'd like to know? Does it mean that decent people are going to make me the apple of their eye, after all?"

"I don't think it goes quite so far as that," said Harold. "I expect it means that my sister has come to the end of her discoveries and she's forced to fall back on you."

"Oh, is that all?" Archie looked disappointed. "All? Isn't it enough?" said Harold. "Why, you're in luck if you let her discover you. I knew that her atheists couldn't hold out. She used them up too quickly. One should be economical of one's genuine atheists nowadays."

"Great Godfrey! does she take me for an atheist?" shouted Archie.

"Did you ever hear of an atheist shooting pheasants?" said Harold. "Not likely. An atheist is a man that does nothing except talk, and talks about nothing except himself. Now, you're asked to the shoot, aren't you?"

"That's in the invite anyway."

"Of course. And that shows that you're not taken for an atheist."

"I'm glad of that. I draw the line at atheism," Archie replied with a smile.

"I hope you'll have a good time among the pheasants."

"Do you suppose that I'll go?"

"I'm sure you will. I may have thought you a bit of a fool before I came to know you, Archie—"

"And since you heard that I had taken the Legitimate."

"Well, yes, even after that masterpiece of astuteness. But I would never think that you'd be fool enough to throw away this chance."

"Chance—chance of what?"

"Of getting among decent people. I told you that my sister has nothing but decent people when there's a shoot—there's no Coming Man in anything among the house-party. Yes, it's sure to be comfortable. It's the very thing for you."

"Is it? I'm not so certain about it. The people there are pretty sure to allude in a friendly spirit to my red hair."

"Well, yes, I think you may depend upon that. That means that you'll get on so well among them that they will take an interest in your personality. If you get on particularly well with them they may even allude to the simplicity of your mug. If they do that, you may be certain that you are a great social success."

Archie mused.

It was in this musing spirit that he took in a contemplative way a lump of sugar out of the sugar bowl, turned it over between his fingers as though it was something altogether new to him. Then he threw the lump up to the ceiling, his face became one mouth, and the sugar disappeared.

"I think I'll go," he said, as he crunched the lump. "Yes, I'll be hanged if I don't go."

"That's more than probable," said Harold.

"Yes, I'd like to clear off for a bit from this kennel."

"What kennel?"

"This kennel—London. Do you go the length of denying that London's a kennel?"

"I don't do anything of the sort."

"You'd best not. I was thinking if a run to Australia, or California, or Timbuctoo would not be healthy just now."

"Oh."

"Yes, I made up my mind yesterday, that if I don't have better hands soon, I'll chuck up the whole game. That's the sort of new potatoes that I am."

"The Legitimate?"

"The Legitimate be frizzled! Am I to continue paying for the suppers that other tarty chips eat? That's what I want you to tell me. You know what a square deal is, Wynne, as well as most people."

"I believe I do."

"Well, then, you can tell me if I'm to pay for dry champagne for her guests."

"Whose guests?"

"Great Godfrey! haven't I been telling you? Mrs. Mowbray's guests. Who else's would they be? Do you mean to tell me that, in addition to giving people free boxes at the Legitimate every night to see W. S. late of Stratford upon Avon, it's my business to supply dry champagne all round after the performance?"

"Well," said Harold, "to speak candidly to you, I've always been of the opinion that the ideal proprietor of a theatre is one who supplies really comfortable stalls free, and has really sound champagne handed round at intervals during the performance. I also frankly admit that I haven't yet met with any manager who quite realized my ideas in this matter. Archie, my lad, the sooner you get down to Abbeylands the better it will be for yourself."

"I'll go. Mind you, I don't cry off when I know the chaps that she asks to supper—I'll flutter the dimes for anyone I know; but I'm hanged if I do it for the chaps that chip in on her invite. They'll not draw cards from my pack, Wynne. No, I'll see them in the port of Hull first. That's the sort of new potatoes that I am."

"Give me your hand, Archie," cried Harold. "I always thought you nothing better than a millionaire, but I find that you're a man after all."

"I'll make things hum at the Legitimate yet," said Archie—his voice was fast approaching the shouting stage. "I'll send them waltzing round. I thought once upon a time that, when she laid her hand upon my head and said, 'Poor old Archie,' I could go on for ever—that to see the decimals fluttering about her would be the loveliest sight on earth for the rest of my life. But I'm tired of that show now, Wynne. Great Godfrey! I can get my hair smoothed down at a barber's for sixpence, and yet I believe that she charged me a thousand pounds for every time she patted my head. A decimal for a pat—a pat!"

"You could buy the whole Irish nation for less money, according to some people's ideas—but they're wrong," said Harold.

"Wynne," said Archie, solemnly. "I've been going it blind for some time. Shakespeare's a fraud. I'll shoot

those pheasants.”

He had picked up his hat, and in another minute Harold saw him sending his pair of chestnuts down the street at a pace that showed a creditable amount of self-restraint on the part of Archie.

Three days afterwards Harold got a letter from Mrs. Lampson, giving him a number of commissions to execute for her—delicate matters that could not be intrusted to any one except a confidential agent. The postscript mentioned that Archie Brown had arrived a few days before and had charmed every one with his shyness. On this account she could scarcely believe, she said, that he was a millionaire. She added that Lady Innisfail and her daughter had just arrived at Abbeylands, that the Miss Avon about whom she had inquired, had accepted her invitation and was coming to Abbeylands on the next day; and finally, Mrs. Lampson said that her father was dull enough to make people believe that he was really reformed. He was inquiring when Miss Avon was coming, and he shared the fate of all men (and women) who were unfortunate enough to be reformed: he had become deadly dull. Lady Innisfail had assured her, however, that it was very rarely that a Hardened Reprobate permanently reformed—even with the incentive of acute rheumatism—before he was sixty-five, so that it would be unwise to be despondent about Lord Fotheringay. If this was so—and Lady Innisfail was surely an authority—Mrs. Lampson said that she looked forward to such a lapse on the part of her father as would restore him to the position of interest which he had always occupied in the eyes of the world.

Harold lay back in his chair and laughed heartily at the reference made by his sister to the shyness of Archie, and also to the fact of Norah Innisfail’s sitting at the table with the Young Reprobate as well as the Old. He wondered if the conversation had yet turned upon the management of the Legitimate Theatre.

It was after he had lunched on the next Tuesday that Harold received this letter—written by his sister the previous day. He had passed an hour with Beatrice, who was to start by the four-twenty train for Abbeylands station. He had said goodbye to her for a week, and already he was feeling so lonely that he was soon pacing his room calling himself a fool for having elected to remain in town while she was to go.

He thought how they might have had countless strolls through the fine park at Abbeylands—through the picturesque ruins of the old Abbey—on the banks of the little trout stream. Instead of being by her side among those interesting scenes, he would have to remain—he had been foolish enough to make the choice—in the neighbourhood of nothing more joyous than St. James’s Palace.

This was bad enough; but not merely would he be away from the landscapes at Abbeylands, the elements of life in those landscapes would be represented by Beatrice and Another.

Yes; she would certainly appear with someone at her side—in the place he might have occupied if he had not been such a fool.

An hour had passed before he had got the better of his impulse to call a hansom and drive to the railway terminus and take a seat beside her in the train. When the clock had struck four, and it was therefore too late for him to entertain the idea of going with her, he became more inclined to take a reasonable view of the situation.

“I was right.” he said, as he seated himself in front of the fire, and stared into the smouldering coals. “Yes, I was right. No one must suspect that we are—bound to one another”—the words were susceptible of a sufficiently liberal interpretation. “The penetration of Edmund Airey will be at fault for the first time, and the others who had so many suspicions at Castle Innisfail, will find themselves completely at fault.”

He began to think how, though he had been cruelly dealt with by Fate in some respects—in respect of his own father, for instance, and also in respect of his own poverty—he had still much to be thankful for.

He was beloved by the loveliest woman whom he had ever seen—the only woman for whom he had ever felt a passion. And the peculiar position which she occupied, had enabled him to see her every day and to kiss her exquisite face—there was none to make him afraid. Such obstacles in the way of a lover’s freedom as the Average Father, the Vigilant Mother and the Athletic Brother he had never encountered. And then a curious circumstance—the thought of Beatrice as a part of the landscapes around Abbeylands caused him to lay special emphasis upon this—had enabled him to bind the girl to him with a bond which in her eyes at least—yes, in his eyes too, by heaven, he felt—was not susceptible of being loosened.

Yes, the ways of Providence were wonderful, he felt. If he had not met Mr. Playdell.... and so forth.

But now Beatrice was his own. She might stray through the autumn woods by the side of Edmund Airey or any man whom she might meet at Abbeylands; she would feel upon her finger the ring that he had placed there—the ring that—

He sprang to his feet with a sudden cry.

“Good God! the Ring! the Ring!”

He looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. It pointed to four-seventeen.

He pulled out his watch. It pointed to four-twenty-two.

He rushed to the sofa where an overcoat was lying. He had it on him in a moment. He snatched up a railway guide and stuffed it into his pocket.

In another minute he was in a hansom, driving as fast as the hansom thought consistent with public safety—a trifle over that which the police authorities thought consistent with public safety—in the direction of the Northern Railway terminus.

CHAPTER XLII.—ON THE RING AND THE LOOK.

HE tried, while in the hansom, to unravel the mysteries of the system by which passengers were supposed to reach Brackenshire. He found the four-twenty train from London indicated in its proper order. This was the train by which he had invariably travelled to Abbeylands—it was the last train in the day that carried passengers to Abbeylands Station, for the station was on a short branch line, the junction being Mowern.

On reaching the terminus he lost no time in finding a responsible official—one whose chastely-braided uniform looked repressful of tips.

“I want to get to Mowern Junction before the four-twenty train from here goes on to Abbeylands. Can I do it?” said Harold.

“Next train to the Junction five-thirty-two, sir,” said the official.

“That’s too late for me,” said Harold. “The train leaves the Junction for Abbeylands a quarter of an hour after arriving at Mowern. Is there no local train that I might manage to catch that would bring me to the Junction?”

“None that would serve your purpose, sir.”

Harold clearly saw how it was that this company could never get their dividend over four per cent.

“Why is there so long a wait at Mowern?” he asked.

“Waits for Ditchford Mail, sir.”

“And at what time does a train start for Ditch-ford?”

“Can’t tell, sir. Ditchford is on the Nethershire system—they have running powers over our line to Mowern.”

Harold whipped out his guide, and found Ditch-ford in the index. By an inspiration he turned at once to the page devoted to the Nethershire service of trains. He found that, by an exquisite system of timing the trains, it was possible to reach a station a mile from Ditchford on the one line, just six minutes after the departure of the last local train to Ditchford on the other line. It took a little ingenuity, no doubt, on the part of the Directors of both lines to accomplish this, but still they managed to do it.

“I beg pardon, sir,” said an official wearing a uniform that suggested tolerance of views in the matter of tips—the more important official had moved away. “I beg pardon, sir. Why not take the four-fifty-five to Mindon, and change into the Ditchford local train—that’ll reach the junction four minutes before the express? I know it, sir. I was stationed at change into the Ditchford local train—that’ll reach the junction four minutes before the express? I know it, sir. I was stationed at that part of the system.”

To glance at the clock, and to perceive that he had time enough to drive to the Nethershire terminus, and to transfer a coin to the unconscious but not reluctant hand of the official of the liberal views, occupied Harold but a moment. At four-fifty-five he was in the Nethershire train on his way to Mindon.

He had not waited to verify the man’s statement as to the trains, but in the railway carriage he did so, and he found that the beautiful complications of the two systems were at least susceptible of the interpretation put on them.

For the next two hours Harold felt that he could devote himself, if he had the mind, to the problem of the ring that had been so suddenly suggested to him.

It did not require him to spend more than the merest fraction of this time in order to convince him that the impulse upon which he had acted, was one that he would have been a fool to repress.

The ring which he had put on her finger, and which she had worn since, and would most certainly wear—he had imagined her doing so—at Abbeylands, could not fail to be recognized both by his father and his sister. It had belonged to his mother, and it was unique. It had flashed upon him suddenly that, unless he was content that his father and sister should learn that he had given her that ring, it would be necessary for him to prevent Beatrice from wearing it even for an hour at Abbeylands.

Apart altogether from the question of the circumstances under which he had put the ring upon her finger—circumstances which he had good reason for desiring to conceal—the fact that he had given to her the object which he valued most highly in the world, and which his father and sister knew that he so valued, would suggest to both these persons as much as would ruin him.

His father would, he knew, be extremely glad to discover some pretext to cut off the last penny of his allowance; and assuredly he would regard this gift of the ring as an ample pretext for adopting such a course of action. Indeed, Lord Fotheringay had never been at a loss for a pretext for reducing his son’s allowance; and now that he was posing—with but indifferent success, as Harold had learned from Mrs. Lampson’s postscript—as a Reformed Sinner, he would, his son knew, think that, in cutting off his son’s allowance, he was only acting consistently with the traditions of Reformed Sinners.

The Reformed Sinner is usually a sinner whose capacity to enjoy the pleasures of sin has become dulled, and thus he is intolerant of the sins of others, and particularly intolerant of the capacity of others to enjoy sin. This is why he reduces the allowances of his children. Like the man who advances to the position of teetotal lecturer, after having served for some time as the teetotal lecturer’s Example, he knows all about the evil which he means to combat—to be more exact, which he means his children to combat.

All this Harold knew perfectly well. He knew that the only difference that the reform of his father would make to him, was that, while his father had formerly cut down his allowance with a courteously worded apology, he would now stop it altogether without an apology.

How could he have failed to remember, when he put that ring upon her finger, how great were the chances that it would be seen there by his father or his sister?

This was the question which occupied his thoughts for the first hour of his journey. He lay back looking out

on the gray October landscapes through which the train rushed—the wood glowing in crimson and brown like a mighty smouldering furnace—the groups of children picking blackberries on the embankments—the canal boat moving slowly along the gray waterway—and he asked himself how he had been such a fool as to overlook the likelihood of the ring being seen on her hand by his father or his sister.

The truth was, that he had at that time not considered the possibility of her going to Abbeylands. He knew that Mrs. Lampson intended inviting her; but he felt certain that, when she heard that he was not going, she would not accept the invitation. She would not have accepted it, if it had not suddenly occurred to him that the fact of her going while he remained in town would be to his advantage.

Would he be in time to prevent the disaster which he foresaw would occur if she appeared in the drawing-room at Abbeylands wearing the ring?

He looked at his watch. The train was three minutes late in reaching several of the stations on its route, and it was delayed for another three minutes when there was only a single line of rails. How would it be possible for the train to make up so great a loss during the remainder of the journey?

He reminded the guard at one of many intolerable stoppages, that the train was long behind its time. The guard could not agree with him, it was only about seven minutes late, he assured Harold.

On it went, and it seemed as if the engine-driver had a clearer sense of his responsibilities than the guard, for during the next thirty miles, he managed to save over two minutes. All this Harold noticed with more interest than he had ever taken in the details of any railway journey.

When at last Mindon was reached, and he left the train to change into the one which was to carry him on to the Junction, he found that this train had not yet come up. Here was another point to be considered. Would the train come up in time?

He was not left for long in suspense. The long row of lighted carriages ran up to the platform before he had been waiting for two minutes, and in another two minutes the train was steaming away with him.

He looked at his watch once more, and then he was able to give himself a rest, for he saw that unless some accident were to happen, he would be at Mowern Junction before the train should leave for Abbeylands Station on the branch line.

In running into the Junction, the train went past the platform of the branch line. A number of carriages were there, and at the side glass of one compartment he saw the profile of Beatrice.

The little cry that she gave, when he opened the door of the compartment and spoke her name, had something of terror as well as delight in it.

"Harold! How on earth—" she began.

"I have a rather important message for you," he said. "Will you take a turn with me on the platform? There is plenty of time. The train does not start for six minutes."

She was out of the carriage in a moment. "Mr. Wynne has a message for me—it is probably from Mrs. Lampson," she said to her maid, who was in the same compartment.

CHAPTER XLIII.—ON THE SON OF APHRODITE.

WHAT can be the matter? How did you manage to come here? You must have travelled by the same train as we came by. Oh, Harold, my husband, I am so glad to see you. You have changed your mind—you are coming on with me? Oh, I see it all now. You meant all along to give me this delightful surprise."

The words came from her in a torrent as she put her hand on his arm—he could feel the ring on her finger.

"No, no," said he; "everything remains as it was this morning. I only wish that I were going on with you. Providentially something occurred to me when I was sitting alone after lunch. That is why I came. I managed to catch a train that brought me here just now—the train I was in ran past this platform and I saw your face."

"What can have occurred to you that you could not tell me in a letter?" she asked, her face still bearing the look of glad surprise that had come to it when she had heard the sound of his voice.

"We shall have to go into a waiting-room, or—better still—an empty carriage," said he. "I see several men whom I know, and—worse luck! women—they are on their way to Abbeylands, and if they saw us together in this confidential way, they would never cease chattering when they arrived. We shall get into a compartment—there is one that still remains unlighted, it will be the best for our purpose; there will be no chance of a prying face appearing at the window."

"Shall we have time?" she asked.

"Plenty of time. By getting into the carriage you will run no chance of being left behind—the worst that can happen is that I may be carried on with you."

"The worst? Oh, that is the best—the best." They had strolled to the end of the platform where it was dimly lighted, and in an instant, apparently unobserved by anyone, they had got into an unlighted compartment at the rear of the train, and Harold shut the door quietly, so as not to attract the attention of the three or four men in knickerbockers who were stretching their legs on the platform until the train was ready to start.

"We are fortunate," said he. "Those men outside will be your fellow-guests for the week. None of them will

think of glancing into a dark carriage; but if one of them does so, he will be nothing the wiser."

"And now—and now," she cried.

"And now, my dearest, you remember the ring that I put upon your finger?"

"This ring? Do you think it likely that I have forgotten it already?" she whispered.

"No, no, dearest; it was I who forgot it," he said. "It was I who forgot that my father and my sister are perfectly certain to recognize that ring if you wear it at Abbeylands: they will be certain to see it on your finger, and they will question you as to how it came into your possession."

"Of course they will," she said, after a pause. "You told me that it was a ring that belonged to your mother. There can only be one such ring in the world. Oh, they could not fail to recognize it. The little chubby wicked Eros surrounded by the rubies—I have looked at the design every day—every night—sometimes the firelight gleaming upon the circle of rubies has made them seem to me a band of blood. Was that the idea of the artist who made the design, I wonder—a circle of blood with the god Eros in the centre."

She had taken off her glove, and had laid the hand with the ring in one of his hands.

He had never felt her hand so soft and warm before. His hand became hot through holding hers. His heart was beating as it had never beaten before.

The force of his grasp pressed the sharply cut cameo into his flesh. The image of that wicked little god, the son of Aphrodite, was stamped upon him. It seemed as if some of his blood would mingle with the blood that sparkled and beat within the heart of the rubies.

He had forgotten the object of his mission to her. Still holding her hand with the ring, he put his arm under the sealskin coat that reached to her feet, and held her close to him while he kissed her as he had never before kissed her.

Suddenly he seemed to recollect why he was with her. He had not hastened down from London for the sake of the kiss.

"My beloved, my beloved!" he murmured—each word sounded like a sob—"I should like to remain with you for ever."

She did not say a word. She did not need to say a word. He could feel the tumult of her heart, and she knew it.

"For God's sake, Beatrice, let me speak to you," he said.

It was a strange entreaty. His arm was about her, his hand was holding one of hers, she was simply passive by his side; and yet he implored of her to let him speak to her.

It was some moments before she could laugh, however; which was also strange, for the humour of the matter which called for that laugh, was surely capable of being appreciated by her immediately.

She gave a laugh and then a sigh.

The carriage was dark, but a stray gleam of light from a side platform now and again came upon her face, and her features were brought into relief with the clearness and the whiteness of a lily in a jungle.

As she gave that laugh—or was it a sigh?—he started, perceiving that the expression of her features was precisely that which the artist in the antique had imparted to the features of the little chrysoprase Eros in the centre of that blood-red circle of the ring.

"Why do you laugh, Beatrice?" said he.

"Did I laugh, Harold?" said she. "No—no—I think—yes, I think it was a sigh—or was it you who sighed, my love?"

"God knows," said he. "Oh, the ring—the ring!"

"It feels like a band of burning metal," she said.

"It is almost a pain for me to wear it. Have you not heard of the curious charms possessed by rings, Harold—the strange spells which they carry with them? The ring is a mystery—a mystic symbol. It means what has neither beginning nor ending—it means perfection—completeness—it means love—love's completeness."

"That is what your ring must mean to us, my beloved," said he. "Whether you take it from your finger or let it remain there, it will still mean the completeness of such love as is ours."

"And I am to take it off, Harold?"

"Only so long as you stay at Abbeylands, Beatrice. What does it matter for one week? You will see, dearest, how my plans—my hopes—must certainly be destroyed if that ring is seen on your finger by my father or my sister. It is not for the sake of my plans only that I wish you to refrain from wearing it for a week; it is for your sake as well."

"Would they fancy that I had stolen it, dear?" she asked, looking up to his face with a smile.

"They might fancy worse things than that, Beatrice," said he. "Do not ask me. You may be sure that I am advising you aright—that the consequences of that ring being recognized on your finger would be more serious than you could understand."

"Did I not say something to you a few days ago about the completeness of my trust in you, Harold?" she whispered. "Well, the ring is the symbol of this completeness also. I trust you implicitly in everything. I have given myself up to you. I will do whatever you may tell me. I will not take the ring off until I reach Abbeylands, but I shall take it off then, and only replace it on my finger every night."

"My darling, my darling! Such love as you have given to me is God's best gift to the world."

He had committed himself to an opinion practically to the same effect upon more than one previous occasion.

And now, as then, the expression of that opinion was followed by a long silence, as their faces came together.

"Beatrice," he said, in a tremulous voice.

"Harold."

"I shall go on with you to Abbeylands. Come what may, we shall not now be separated."

But they were separated that very instant. The carriage was flooded with light—the chastened flood that comes from an oil lamp inserted in a hollow in the roof—and they were no longer in each others arms. They heard the sound of the porter's feet on the roof of the next carriage.

"It is so good of you to come," said she.

There was now perhaps three inches of a space separating them.

"Good?" said he. "I'm afraid that's not the word. We shall be under one roof."

"Yes," she said slowly, "under one roof."

"Tickets for Ashmead," intoned a voice at the carriage window.

"We are for Abbeylands Station," said Harold.

"Abb'l'ns," said the guard. "Why, sir, you know the Abb'l'ns train started six minutes ago."

CHAPTER XLIV.—ON THE SHORTCOMINGS OF A SYSTEM.

HAROLD was out of the compartment in a moment. Did the guard mean that the train had actually left for Abbeylands? It had left six minutes before, the guard explained, and the station-master added his guarantee to the statement.

Harold looked around—from platform to platform—as if he fancied that there was a conspiracy between the officials to conceal the train.

How could the train leave without taking all its carriages with it?

It did nothing of the kind, the station-master said, firmly but respectfully.

The guard went on with his business of cutting neat triangles out of the tickets of the passengers in the carriages that were alongside the platform—passengers bound for Ashmead.

"But I—we—my—my wife and I got into one of the carriages of the Abbeylands train," said Harold, becoming indignant, after the fashion of his countrymen, when they have made a mistake either on a home or foreign railway. "What sort of management is it that allows one portion of a train to go in one direction and another part in another direction?"

"It's our system, sir," said the official. "You see, sir, there're never many passengers for either the Abbeyl'n's"—being a station-master he did not do an unreasonable amount of clipping in regard to the names—"or the Ashm'd branch, so the Staplehurst train is divided—only we don't light the lamps in the Ashm'd portion until we're ready to start it. Did you get into a carriage that had a lamp, sir?"

"I've seen some bungling at railway stations before now," said Harold, "but bang me if I ever met the equal of this."

"This isn't properly speaking a station, sir, it's a junction," said the official, mildly, but with the force of a man who has said the last word.

"That simply means that greater bungling may be found at a junction than at a station," said Harold. "Is it not customary to give some notice of the departure of a train at a junction as well as a station, my good man?"

The official became reasonably irritated at being called a good man.

"The train left for Abbeyl'n's according to reg'lation, sir," said he. "If you got into a compartment that had no lamp——"

"Oh, I've no time for trifling," said Harold. "When does the next train leave for Abbeylands?"

"At eight-sixteen in the morning," said the official.

"Great heavens! You mean to say that there's no train to-night?"

"You see, if a carriage isn't lighted, sir, we——"

The man perceived the weakness of Harold's case—from the standpoint of a railway official—and seemed determined not to lose sight of it. "Contributory negligence" he knew to be the most valuable phrase that a railway official could have at hand upon any occasion.

"And how do you expect us to go on to Abbeylands to-night?" asked Harold.

"There's a very respectable hotel a mile from the junction, sir," said the man. "Ruins of the Priory, sir—dates back to King John, page 84 *Tourist's Guide to Brackenshire*."

"Oh," said Harold, "this is quite preposterous." He went to where Beatrice was seated watching, with only a moderate amount of interest, the departure of five passengers for Ashmead.

"Well, dear?" said she, as Harold came up.

"For straightforward, pig-headed stupidity I'll back a railway company against any institution in the world," said he. "The last train has left for Abbeylands. Did you ever know of such stupidity? And yet the shareholders look for six per cent, out of such a system."

"Perhaps," said she timidly—"perhaps we were in some degree to blame."

He laughed. It was so like a woman to suggest the possibility of some blame attaching to the passengers when a railway company could be indicted. To the average man such an idea is as absurd as beginning to argue with a person at whom one is at liberty to swear.

"It seems that there is a sort of hotel a mile away," said he. "We cannot be starved, at any rate."

"And I—you—we shall have to stay there?" said she.

He gave a sort of shrug—an Englishman's shrug—about as like the real thing as an Englishman's bow, or a Chinaman's cheer.

"What can we do?" said he. "When a railway company such as this—oh, come along, Beatrice. I am hungry—hungry—hungry!"

He caught her by the arm.

"Yes, Harold—husband," said she.

He started.

"Husband! Husband!" he said. "I never thought of that. Oh, my beloved—my beloved!"

He stood irresolute for a moment.

Then he gave a curious laugh, and she felt his hand tighten upon her arm for a moment.

"Yes," he whispered. "You heard the words that—that man said while our hands were together? 'Whom God hath joined'—God—that is Love. Love is the bond that binds us together. Every union founded on Love is sacred—and none other is sacred—in the sight of heaven."

"And you do not doubt my love," she said.

"Doubt it? oh, my Beatrice, I never knew what it was before now." They left the station together, after he had written and despatched in her name a telegram to her maid, directing her to explain to Mrs. Lampson that her mistress had unfortunately missed the train, but meant to go by the first one in the morning.

By chance a conveyance was found outside, and in it they drove to the Priory Hotel which, they were amazed to find, promised comfort as well as picturesqueness.

It was a long ivy-covered house, and bore every token of being a portion of the ancient Priory among the ruins of which it was standing. Great elms were in front of the house, and on one side there were apple trees, and at the other there was a garden reaching almost to where a ruined arch was held together by its own ivy.

As they were in the act of entering the porch, a ray of moonlight gleamed upon the ruins, and showed the trimmed grass plots and neat gravel walks among the cloisters.

Harold pointed out the picturesque effect to Beatrice, and they stood for some moments before entering the house.

The old waiter, whose moderately white shirt front constituted a very distinctive element of the hall with its polished panels of old oak, did not bustle forward when he saw them admiring the ruins.

"Upon my word," said Harold, entering, "this is a place worth seeing. That touch of moonlight was very effective."

"Yes, sir," said the waiter; "I'm glad you're pleased with it. We try to do our best in this way for our patrons. Mrs. Mark will be glad to know that you thought highly of our moonlight, sir."

The man was only a waiter, but he was as solemn as a butler, as he opened the door of a room that seemed ready to do duty as a coffee-room. It had a low groined ceiling, and long narrow windows.

An elderly maid was lighting candles in sconces round the walls.

"Really," said Harold, "we may be glad that the bungling at the junction brought us here."

"Yes, sir," said the man with waiter-like acquiescence; "they do bungle things sometimes at that junction."

"We were on our way to Abbeylands," said Harold, "but those idiots on the platform allowed us to get into the wrong carriages—the carriages that were going to Ashmead. We shall stay here for the night. The station-master recommended us to go here, and I'm much obliged to him. It's the only sensible—"

"Yes, sir: he's a brother to Mrs. Mark—Mrs. Mark is our proprietor," said the waiter.

"Mrs. Mark," said Harold.

"Yes, sir: she's our proprietor."

Harold thought that, perhaps, when the owner of an hotel was a woman, she might reasonably be called the proprietor.

"Oh, well, perhaps a maid might show my—my wife to a room, while I see what we can get for dinner—supper, I suppose we should call it."

The middle-aged woman who was lighting the candles came forward smiling, as she adroitly extinguished the wax taper by the application of her finger and thumb. With her Beatrice disappeared.

Harold quite expected that he was about to come upon the weak element in the management of this picturesque inn. But when he found that a cold pheasant as well as some hot fish was available for supper, he admitted that the place was perfect. There was no wine card, but the old waiter promised a Champagne for which, he said, Mr. Lampson, of Abbeylands, had once made an offer.

"That will do for us very well," said Harold. "Mr. Lampson would not make an offer for anything—wine least of all—of which he was uncertain."

The waiter went off in the leisurely style that was only consistent with the management of an establishment that dated back to King John; and in a few minutes Beatrice appeared, having laid aside her sealskin coat, and her hat.

How exquisite she seemed as she stood for an instant in the subdued light at the door!

And she was his.

CHAPTER XLV.—ON MOONLIGHT AND MORALS.

|SHE was his.

He felt the joy of it as she stood at the door in her beautifully fitting travelling dress.

The thought sent an exultant glow through his veins, as he looked at her from where he was standing at the hearth. (There was no "cosy corner" abomination.)

She was his.

He went forward to meet her, and put out both his hands to her.

She placed a hand in each of his.

"How delightfully warm you are," she said. "You were standing at the fire."

"Yes," he said. "I was at the fire; in addition, I was also thinking that you are mine."

"Altogether yours now," she said looking at him with that trustful smile which should have sent him down on his knees before her, but which did not do more than cause his eyes to look at her throat instead of gazing straight into her eyes.

They seated themselves on one of the old window-seats, and talked face to face, listlessly watching the old waiter lay a white cloth on a portion of the black oak table.

When they had eaten their fish and pheasant—Harold wondered if the latter had come from the Abbeylands' preserves, and if Archie Brown had shot it—they returned to the window-seat, and there they remained for an hour.

He had thrown all reserve to the winds. He had thrown all forethought to the winds. He had thrown all fear of God and man to the winds.

She was his.

The old waiter re-entered the room and laid on the table a flat bedroom candlestick with a box of matches.

"Can I get you anything before I go to bed, sir?" he inquired.

"I require nothing, thank you," said Harold.

"Very good, sir," said the waiter. "The candles in the sconces will burn for another hour. If that will not be long enough—"

"It will be quite long enough. You have made us extremely comfortable, and I wish you goodnight," said Harold.

"Good-night, sir. Good-night, madam."

This model servitor disappeared. They heard the sound of his shoes upon the stairs.

"At last—at last!" whispered Harold, as he put an arm on the deep embrasure of the window behind her.

She let her shapely head fall back until it rested on his shoulder. Then she looked up to his face.

"Who could have thought it?" she cried. "Who could have predicted that evening when I stood on the cliffs and sent my voice out in that wild way across the lough, that we should be sitting here to-night?"

"I knew it when I got down to the boat and drew your hands into mine by that fishing-line," said he. "When the moon showed me your face, I knew that I had seen the face for which I had been searching all my life. I had caught glimpses of that face many times in my life. I remember seeing it for a moment when a great musician was performing an incomparable work—a work the pure beauty of which made all who listened to it weep. I can hear that music now when I look upon your face. It conveys to me all that was conveyed to me by the music. I saw it again when, one exquisite dawn, I went into a garden while the dew was glistening over everything. There came to me the faint scent of violets. I thought that nothing could be lovelier; but in another moment, the glorious perfume of roses came upon me like a torrent. The odour of the roses and the scent of the violets mingled, and before my eyes floated your face. When the moonlight showed me your face on that night beside the Irish lough I felt myself wondering if it would vanish."

"It has come to stay," she whispered, in a way that gave the sweetest significance to the phrase that has become vulgarized.

"It came to stay with me for ever," he said. "I knew it, and I felt myself saying, 'Here by God's grace is the one maid for me.'"

He did not falter as he looked down upon her face—he said the words "God's grace" without the least hesitancy.

The moonlight that had been glistening on the ivy of the broken arches of the ancient Priory, was now shining through the diamond panes of the window at which they were sitting. As her head lay back it was illuminated by the moon. Her hair seemed delicate threads of spun glass through which the light was shining.

One of the candles flared up for a moment in its socket, then dwindled away to a single spark and then expired.

"You remember?" she whispered.

"The seal-cave," he said. "I have often wondered how I dared to tell you that I loved you."

"But you told me the truth."

"The truth. No, no; I did not love you then as I regard loving now. Oh, my Beatrice, you have taught me

what 'tis to love. There is nothing in the world but love, it is life—it is life!"

"And there are none in the world who love as you and I do."

His face shut out the moonlight from hers. There was a long silence before she said, "It was only when you had parted from me every day that I knew what you were to me, Harold. Ah, those bitter moments! Those sad Good-byes—sad Good-nights out of the moonlight from hers. There was a long silence before she said, "It was only when you had parted from me every day that I knew what you were to me, Harold. Ah, those bitter moments! Those sad Good-byes—sad Good-nights!"

"They are over, they are over!" he cried. The lover's triumph rang through his words. "They are over. We have come to the night when no more Good-nights shall be spoken. What do I say? No more Good-nights? You know what a poet's heart sang—a poet over whose head the waters of passion had closed? I know the song that came from his heart—beloved, the pulses of his heart beat in every line:"=

"Good-night! ah, no, the hour is ill

That severs those it should unite:

Let us remain together still,

Then it will be good night.=

"How can I call the lone night good,

Though thy sweet wishes wing its flight?

Be it not said—thought—understood;

Then it will be good night.=

"To hearts that near each other move

From evening close to morning light,

The night is good because, oh, Love,

They never say Good-night."=

His whispering of the last lines was very tremulous. Her eyes were closed and her lips were parted with the passing of a sigh—a sigh that had something of a sob about it. Then both her arms were flung round his neck, and he felt her face against his. Then.... he was alone.

How had she gone?

Whither had she gone?

How long had he been alone?

He got upon his feet, and looked in a dazed way around the room.

Had it all been a dream? Was it only in fancy that she had been in his arms? Had he been repeating Shelley's poem in the hearing of no one?

He opened a glass door by which access was had to the grounds of the old Priory, and stood, surprised by the moonlight, beside the ruined arch where an oriel window had once been. He turned and looked at the house. It was black against the clear sky that overflowed with light, but one window above the room where he had been sitting was illuminated.

It had no drapery—he could see through it half way into the room beyond.

Just above where a silver sconce with three lighted candles hung from the wall, he could see that the black panel bore in high relief a carved Head of the Virgin, surrounded with lilies.

He kept his eyes fixed upon that carving until—until....

There came before his eyes in that room the Temptation of Saint Anthony.

His eyes became dim looking at her loveliness, shining with dazzling whiteness beneath the light of the candles.

He put his hands before his eyes and staggered to the door through which he had passed. There he stood, his breath coming in sobs, with his hand on the handle of the door.

There was not a sound in the night. Heaven and earth were breathlessly watching the struggle.

It was the struggle between Heaven and Hell for a human soul.

The man's fingers fell from the handle of the door. He clasped his hands across the ivy of the wall and bowed his head upon them.

Only for a few moments, however. Then, with a cry of agony, he started up, and with his clasped hands over his eyes, fled—madly—blindly—away from the house.

Before he had gone far, he tripped and fell over a stone—he only fell upon his knees, but his hands were clutching at the ground.

When he recovered himself, he found that he was on his knees at the foot of an ancient prostrate Cross.

He stared at it, and some time had passed before there came from his parched lips the cry, "Christ have mercy upon me!"

He bowed his head to the Cross, and his lips touched the cold, damp stone.

This was not the kiss to which he had been looking forward.

He sprang to his feet and fled into the distance.

She was saved!

And he—he had saved his soul alive!

CHAPTER XLVI.—ON A BED OF LOGS.

ONWARD he fled, he knew not whither; he only knew that he was flying for the safety of his soul.

He passed far beyond the limits of the Priory grounds, but he did not reach the high road. He crossed a meadow and came upon a trout stream. He walked beside it for an hour. At the end of that time there was no moonlight to glitter upon its surface. Clouds had come over the sky and drops of rain were beginning to fall.

He crossed the stream by a little bridge, and reached the border of a wood. It was now long past midnight. He had been walking for two hours, but he had no consciousness of weariness. It was not until the rain was streaming off his hair that he recollected that he had no hat. But on still he went through the darkness and the rain, as though he were being pursued, and that every step he took was a step toward safety.

He came upon a track that seemed to lead through the wood, and upon this track he went for several miles. The ground was soft, and at some places the rain had turned it into a morass. The autumn leaves lay in drifts, sodden and rotting. Into more than one of these he stumbled, and when he got upon his feet again, the damp leaves and the mire were clinging to him.

For three more hours he went on by the winding track through the wood. In the darkness he strayed from it frequently, but invariably found it again and struggled on, until he had passed right through the wood and reached a high road that ran beside it.

As though he had been all the night wandering in search for this road, so soon as he saw it he cried, "Thank God, thank God!"

But something else may have been in his mind beyond the satisfaction of coming upon the road.

At the border of the wood where the track broadened out, there was a woodcutter's rough shed. It was piled up with logs of various sizes, and with trimmed boughs awaiting the carts to come along the road to carry them away. He entered the shed, and, overpowered with weariness, sank down upon a heap of boughs; his head found a resting place in a forked branch and in a moment he was sound asleep.

His head was resting upon the damp bark of the trimmed branch, when it might have been close to that whiteness which he had seen through the window.

True; but his soul was saved.

He awoke, hearing the sound of voices around him.

The cold light of a gray, damp day was struggling with the light that came from a fire of faggots just outside, and the shed was filled with the smoke of the burning wood. The sound of the crackling of the small branches came to his ears with the sound of the voices.

He raised his head, and looked around him in a dazed way. He did not realize for some time the strange position in which he found himself. Suddenly he seemed to recall all that had occurred, and once more he said, "Thank God, thank God!"

Three men were standing in the shed before him. Two of them held bill-hooks in a responsible way; the third had the truncheon of a constable. He also wore the helmet of a constable.

The men with the bill-hooks seemed preparing to repel a charge. They stood shoulder to shoulder with their implements breast high.

The man with the truncheon seemed willing to trust a great deal to them, whether in regard to attack or defence.

"Well, you're awake, my gentleman," said the man with the truncheon.

The speech seemed a poor enough accompaniment to such a show of strength, aggressive or defensive, as was the result of the muster in the shed.

"Yes, I believe I'm awake," said Harold. "Is the morning far advanced?"

"That's as may be," said the truncheon-holder, shrewdly, and after a pause of considerable duration.

"You're not the man to compromise yourself by a hasty statement," said Harold.

"No," said the man, after another pause.

"May I ask what is the meaning of this rather imposing demonstration?" said Harold.

"Ay, you may, maybe," replied the man. "But it's my business to tell you that—" here he paused and inflated his lungs and person generally— "that all you say now will be used as evidence against you."

"That's very official," said Harold. "Does it mean that you're a constable?"

"That it do; and that you're in my charge now. Close up, bill-hooks, and stand firm," the man added to his companions.

"Don't trumle for we," said one of the billhook-holders.

"You see there's no use broadening vi'lent-like," said the truncheon-holder.

"That's clear enough," said Harold. "Would it be imprudent for me to inquire what's the charge against me?"

"You know," said the policeman.

"Come, my man," said Harold; "I'm not disposed to stand this farce any longer. Can't you see that I'm no vagrant—that I haven't any of your logs concealed about me. What part of the country is this? Where's the nearest telegraph office?"

"No matter what's the part," said the constable; "I've arrested you before witnesses of full age, and I've cautioned you according to the Ack o' Parliament."

"And the charge?"

"The charge is the murder."

"Murder—what murder?"

"You know—the murder of the Right Honourable Lord Fotheringay."

"What!" shouted Harold. "Lord—oh, you're mad! Lord Fotheringay is my father, and he's staying at Abbeylands. What do you mean, you idiot, by coming to me with such a story?" The policeman winked in by no means a subtle way at the two men with the bill-hooks; he then looked at Harold from head to foot, and gave a guffaw.

"The son of his lordship—the murdered man—you heard that, friends, after I gave the caution according to the Ack o' Parliament?" he said.

"Ay, ay, we heard—leastways to that effect," replied one of the men.

"Then down it goes again him," said the constable. "He's a gentleman-Jack tramp—and that's the worst sort—without hat or head gear, and down it goes that he said he was his lordship's son."

"For God's sake tell me what you mean by talking of the murder of Lord Fotheringay," said Harold. "There can be no truth in what you said. Oh, why do I wait here talking to this idiot?" He took a few steps toward one end of the shed. The men raised their bill-hooks, and the constable made an aggressive demonstration with his truncheon.

Against Stupidity the gods fight in vain, but now and again a man with good muscles can prevail against it. Harold simply dealt a kick upon the heavy handle of the bill-hook nearest to him, and it swung round and caught in the stomach the second man, who immediately dropped his implement. He needed both hands to press against his injured person.

The constable ran to the other end of the shed and blew his whistle.

Harold went out in the opposite direction and got upon the high road; but before he had quite made up his mind which way to go, he heard the clatter of a horse galloping. He saw that a mounted constable was coming up, and he also noticed with a certain amount of interest, that he was drawing a revolver.

Harold stood in the centre of the road and held up his hand.

One of the few occasions when a man of well developed muscles, if he is wise, thinks himself no better than the gods, is when Stupidity is in the act of drawing a revolver.

"Are you the sergeant of constabulary?" Harold inquired, when the man had reined in. He still kept his revolver handy.

"Yes, I'm the sergeant of constabulary. Who are you, and what are you doing here?" said the man.

"He's the gentleman-Jack tramp that the lads found asleep in the shed, sergeant," said the constable, who had hurried forward with the naked truncheon. "The lads came on him hiding here, when they were setting about their day's work. They ran for me, and that's why I sent for you. I've arrested him and cautioned him. He was nigh clearing off just now, but I never took an eye off him. Is there a reward yet, sergeant?"

"Officer," said Harold. "I am Lord Fotheringay's son. For God's sake tell me if what this man says is true—is Lord Fotheringay dead—murdered?"

"He's dead. You seem to know a lot about it, my gentleman," said the sergeant. "You're charged with his murder. If you make any attempt at resistance, I'll shoot you down like a dog."

The man had now his revolver in his right hand. Harold looked first at him, and then at the foolish man with the truncheon. He was amazed. What could the men mean? How was it that they did not touch their helmets to him? He had never yet been addressed by a policeman or a railway porter without such a token of respect. What was the meaning of the change?

This was really his first thought.

His mind was not in a condition to do more than speculate upon this point. It was not capable of grasping the horrible thing suggested by the men.

He stood there in the middle of the road, dazed and speechless. It was not until he had casually looked down and had seen the condition of his feet and legs and clothes that, passing from the amazed thought of the insolence of the constables, into the amazement produced by his raggedness—he was apparently covered with mire from head to foot—the reason of his treatment flashed upon him; and in another instant every thought had left him except the thought that his father was dead. His head fell forward on his chest. He felt his limbs give way under him. He staggered to the low hank at the side of the road and managed to seat himself. He supported his head on his hands, his elbows resting on his knees.

There he remained, the four men watching him; for the interest which attaches to a distinguished criminal in the eyes of ignorant rustics, is almost as great as that which he excites among the leaders of society, who scrutinize him in the dock through opera glasses, and eat *pâté de foie gras* sandwiches beside the judge.

CHAPTER XLVII.—ON THE PLEASURES OF MEMORY.

SOME minutes had passed before Harold had sufficiently recovered to be able to get upon his feet. He could now account for everything that had happened. His father must have been found dead under suspicious circumstances the previous day, and information had been conveyed to the county

constabulary. The instinct of the constabulary being to connect all crime with tramps, and his own appearance, after his night of wandering, as well as the conditions under which he had been found, suggesting the tramp, he had naturally been arrested.

He knew that he could only suffer some inconvenience for an hour or so. But what would be the sufferings of Beatrice?

"The circumstances under which I am found are suspicious enough to justify my arrest," he said to the mounted man. "I am Lord Fotheringay's son."

"Gammon! but it'll be took down," said the constable with the truncheon.

"Hold your tongue, you fool!" cried the sergeant to his subordinate.

"I can, of course, account for every movement of mine, yesterday and the day before," said Harold. "What hour is the crime supposed to have taken place? It must have been after four o'clock, or I should have received a telegram from my sister, Mrs. Lampson. I left London shortly before five last evening."

"If you can prove that, you're all right," said the sergeant. "But you'll have to give us your right name."

"You'll find it on the inside of my watch," said Harold.

He slipped the watch from the swivel clasp and handed it to the sergeant.

"You're a fool!" said the sergeant, looking at the back of the watch. "This is a watch that belonged to the murdered man. It has a crown over a crest, and arms with supporters."

"Of course," said Harold. "I forgot that it was my father's watch before he gave it to me." The sergeant smiled. The constable and the two bill-hook men guffawed.

"Give me the watch," said Harold.

The sergeant slipped it into his own pocket.

"You've put a rope round your neck this minute," said he. "Handcuffs, Jonas."

The constable opened the small leathern pouch on his belt. Harold's hands instinctively clenched. The sergeant once more whipped his revolver out of its case.

"It has never occurred before this minute," said the constable.

"What do you mean? Where's the handcuffs?" cried the sergeant.

"Never before," said the constable, "I took them out to clean them with sandpaper, sergeant—emery and oil's recommended, but give me sandpaper—not too fine but just fine enough. Is there any man in the county that can show as bright a pair of handcuffs as myself, sergeant? You know."

"Show them now," said the sergeant.

"You'll have to come to the house with me, for there they be to be," replied the constable. "Ay, but I've my truncheon."

"Which way am I to go with you?" said Harold. "You don't think that I'm such a fool as to make the attempt to resist you? I can't remain here all day. Every moment is precious."

"You'll be off soon enough, my good man," said the sergeant. "Keep alongside my horse, and if you try any game on with me, I'll be equal to you." He wheeled his horse and walked it in the direction whence he had come. Harold kept up with it, thinking his thoughts. The man with the truncheon and the two men who had wielded the billhooks marched in file beside him. Marching in file had something official about it.

It was a strange procession that appeared on the shining wet road, with the dripping autumn trees on each side, and the gray sodden clouds crawling up in the distance.

How was he to communicate with her? How was he to let Beatrice know that she was to return to London immediately?

That was the question which occupied all his thoughts as he walked with bowed head along the road. The thought of the position which he occupied—the thought of the tragic incident which had aroused the vigilance of the constable—the desire to learn the details of the terrible thing that had occurred—every thought was lost in that question:

"How am I to prevent her from going on to Abbeylands?"

Was it possible that she might learn at the hotel early in the morning, that Lord Fotheringay had been murdered? When the news of the murder had spread round the country—and it seemed to have done so from the course that the woodcutters had adopted on coming upon him asleep—it would certainly be known at the hotel. If so, what would Beatrice do?

Surely she would take the earliest train back to London.

But if she did not hear anything of the matter, would she then remain at the hotel awaiting his return?

What would she think of him? What would she think of his desertion of her at that supreme moment?

Can a woman ever forgive such an act of desertion? Could Beatrice ever forgive his turning away from her love?

Was he beginning to regret that he had fled away from the loveliest vision that had ever come before his eyes?

Did Saint Anthony ever wish that he had had another chance?

If for a single moment Harold Wynne had an unworthy thought, assuredly it did not last longer than a single moment.

"Whatever may happen now—whether she forgives me or forsakes me—thank God—thank God!"

This was what his heart was crying out all the time that he walked along the road with bowed head. He felt that he had been strong enough to save her—to save himself.

The procession had scarcely passed over more than a quarter of a mile of the road, when a vehicle appeared some distance ahead.

"Steady," said the sergeant. "It's the Major in his trap. I sent a mounted man for him. You'll be in trouble

about the handcuffs, Jonas, my man."

"Maybe the murderer would keep his hands together to oblige us," suggested the constable.

"I'll not be a party to deception," said his superior. "Halt!"

Harold looked up and saw a dog-cart just at hand. It was driven by a middle-aged gentleman, and a groom was seated behind. Harold had an impression that he had seen the driver previously, though he could not remember when or where he had done so. He rather thought he was an officer whom he had met at some place abroad.

The dog-cart was pulled up, and the officials saluted in their own way, as the gentleman gave the reins to his groom and dismounted.

"An arrest, sir," said the sergeant. "The two woodcutters came upon him hiding in their shed at dawn, and sent for the constable. Jonas, very properly, sent for me, and I despatched a man for you, sir. When arrested, he made up a cock-and-bull story, and a watch, supposed to be his murdered lordship's, was found concealed about his person. It's now in my possession."

"Good," said the stranger. Then he subjected Harold to a close scrutiny.

"I know now where I met you," said Harold. "You are Major Wilson, the Chief Constable of the County, and you lunched with us at Abbeylands two years ago."

"What! Mr. Wynne!" cried the man. "What on earth can be the meaning of this? Your poor father—"

"That is what I want to learn," said Harold eagerly. "Is it more than a report—that terrible thing?"

"A report? He was found at six o'clock last evening by a keeper on the outskirts of one of the preserves."

"A bullet—an accident? he may have been out shooting," said Harold.

"A knife—a dagger."

Harold turned away.

"Remain where you are, sergeant," said Major Wilson. "Let me have a word with you, Mr. Wynne," he added to Harold.

"Certainly," said Harold. His voice was shaky. "I wonder if you chance to have a flask of brandy in your cart. You can understand that I'm not quite—"

"I'm sorry that I have no brandy," said Major Wilson. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind sitting on the bank with me while you explain—if you wish—I do not suggest that you should—I suppose the constables cautioned you."

"Amplify," said Harold. "I find that I can stand. I don't suppose that any blame attaches to them for arresting me. I am, I fear, very disreputable looking. The fact is that I was stupid enough to miss the train from Mowern junction last night, and I went to the Priory Hotel. I came out when the night was fine, without my hat, and I— had reasons of my own for not wishing to return to the hotel. I got into the wood and wandered for several hours along a track I found. I got drenched, and taking shelter in the woodcutters' shed, I fell asleep. That is all I have to say. I have not the least idea what part of the country this is: I must have walked at least twenty miles through the night."

"You are not a mile from the Priory Hotel," said Major Wilson.

"That is impossible," cried Harold. "I walked pretty hard for five hours."

"Through the wood?"

"I practically never left the track."

"You walked close upon twenty miles, but you walked round the wood instead of through it. That track goes pretty nearly round Garstone Woods. Mr. Wynne, this is the most unfortunate occurrence I ever heard of or saw in my life."

"Pray do not fancy for a moment that, so far as I am concerned, I shall be inconvenienced for long," said Harold. "It is a shocking thing for a son to be suspected even for a moment of the murder of his own father; but sometimes a curious combination of circumstances—"

"Of course—of course, that is just it. Do not blame me, I beg of you. Did you leave London yesterday?"

"Yes, by the four-fifty-five train."

"Have you a portion of your ticket to Abbeylands?"

"I took a return ticket to Mowern. I gave one portion of it to the collector, the return portion is in my pocket."

He produced the half of his ticket. Major Wilson examined the date, and took a memorandum of the number stamped upon it.

"Did you speak to anyone at the junction on your arrival?" he then inquired.

"I'm afraid that I abused the station-master for allowing the train to go to Abbeylands without me," said Harold. "That was at ten minutes past seven o'clock. Oh, you need not fear for me. I made elaborate inquiries from the railway officials in London between half past four and the hour of the train's starting. I also spoke to the station-master at Mindon, asking him if he was certain that the train would arrive at the junction in time." Major Wilson's face brightened. Before it had been somewhat overcast.

"A telegram, as a matter of form, will be sufficient to clear up everything," said Major Wilson. "Yes, everything except—wasn't that midnight walk of yours a very odd thing, Mr. Wynne?"

"Yes," said Harold, after a pause. "It was extremely odd. So odd that I know that you will pardon my attempting to explain it—at least just now. You will, I think, be satisfied if you have evidence that I was in London yesterday afternoon. I am anxious to go to my sister without delay. Surely some clue must be forthcoming as to the ruffian who did the deed."

"The only clue—if it could be termed a clue—is the sheath of the dagger," replied Major Wilson. "It is the sheath of an ordinary belt dagger, such as is commonly worn by the peasantry in Southern Italy and Sicily. Lord Fotheringay lived a good deal abroad. Do you happen to know if he became involved in any quarrel in

Italy—if there was any reason to think that his life had been threatened?”

Harold shook his head.

“My poor father returned from abroad a couple of months ago, and joined Lady Innisfail’s party in Ireland. I have only seen him once in London since then. He must have been followed by some one who fancied that—that—”

“That he had been injured by your father?”

“That is what I fear. But my father never confided his suspicions—if he had any on this matter—to me.”

They had walked some little way up the road. They now returned slowly and silently.

A one-horse-fly appeared in the distance. When it came near, Harold recognized it as the one in which he had driven with Beatrice from the station to the hotel.

“If you will allow me,” said Harold to Major Wilson, “I will send to the hotel for my overcoat and hat.”

“Do so by all means,” said Major Wilson. “There is a decent little inn some distance on the road, where you will be able to get a brush down—you certainly need one. I’ll give my sergeant instructions to send some telegrams at the junction.”

“Perhaps you will kindly ask him to return to me my watch,” said Harold. “I don’t suppose that he will need it now.”

Harold stopped the fly, and wrote upon a card of his own the following words, “*A shocking thing has happened that keeps me from you. My poor father is dead. Return to town by first train.*”

He instructed the driver to go to the Priory Hotel and deliver the card into the hand of the lady whom he had driven there the previous evening, and then to pay Harold’s bill, drive the lady to the junction, and return with the overcoat and hat to the inn on the road.

Harold gave the man a couple of sovereigns, and the driver said that he would be able easily to convey the lady to the junction in time for the first train.

While the sergeant went away to send the Chief Constable’s telegrams, Major Wilson and Harold drove off together in the dog-cart—the man with the truncheon and the men who had carried the bill-hooks respectfully saluted as the vehicle passed.

In the course of another half hour, Harold was in the centre of a cloud of dust, produced by the vigorous action of an athlete at the little inn, who had been engaged to brush him down. When he caught sight of himself in a looking-glass on entering the inn, Harold was as much amazed as he had been when he heard from the Chief Constable that he had been wandering round the wood all night. He felt that he could not blame the woodcutters for taking him for a tramp.

He managed to eat some breakfast, and then he fly came up with his overcoat and hat. He spoke only one sentence to the driver.

“You brought her to the train?”

“Yes, sir. She only waited to write a line. Here it is, sir.”

He handed Harold an envelope.

Inside was a sheet of paper.

“*Dearest—dearest—You have all my sympathy—all my love. Come to me soon.*”

These were the words that he read in the handwriting of Beatrice.

He was in a bedroom when he read them. He sat down on the side of the bed and burst into tears.

It was ten years since he had wept.

Then he buried his face in his hands and said a prayer.

It was ten years since he had prayed.

CHAPTER XLVIII—ON MURDER AS A SOCIAL INCIDENT.

THIS is not the story of a murder. However profitable as well as entertaining it would be to trace through various mysteries, false alarms, and intricacies the following up of a clue by the subtle intelligence of a detective, until the rope is around the neck of the criminal, such profit and entertainment must be absent from this story of a man’s conquest of the Devil within himself. Regarding the incident of the murder of Lord Fotheringay much need not be said.

The sergeant appeared at the inn with replies to the telegrams that he had been instructed to send to the railway officials, and they were found to corroborate all the statements made by Harold. A ticket of the number of that upon the one which Harold still retained, had been issued previous to the departure of the four-fifty-five train from London.

“Of course, I knew what the replies would be,” said Major Wilson. “But you can understand my position.”

“Certainly I can,” said Harold. “It needs no apology.”

They drove to the junction together to catch the train to Abbeylands station. An astute officer from Scotland Yard had been telegraphed for, to augment the intelligence of the County Constabulary Force in the endeavour to follow up the only clue that was available, and Major Wilson was to travel with the London

officer to the scene of the crime.

In a few minutes the London train came up, and the passengers for the Abbeylands line crossed to the side platform. Among them Harold perceived his own servant. The man was dressed in black, and carried a portmanteau and hat-box. He did not see his master until he had reached the platform. Then he walked up to Harold, laid down the portmanteau and endeavoured—by no means unsuccessfully—to impart some emotion—respectful emotion, and very respectful sympathy, into the act of touching his hat.

“I heard the sad news, my lord,” said the man, “and I took the liberty of packing your lordship’s portmanteau and taking the first train to Abbeylands. I took it for granted that you would be there, my lord.”

“You acted wisely, Martin,” said Harold. “I will ask you not to make any change in addressing me for some days, at least.”

“Very good, my lord—I mean, sir,” said the man.

He had not acquired for more than a minute the new mode of address, and yet he had difficulty in relinquishing it.

Abbeylands was empty of the guests who, up to the previous evening, had been within its walls. From the mouth of the gamekeeper, who had found the body of Lord Fotheringay, Harold learned a few more particulars regarding his ghastly discovery, but they were of no importance, though the astute Scotland Yard officer considered them—or pretended to consider them—to be extremely valuable.

For a week the detectives were very active, and the newspapers announced daily that they had discovered a clue, and that an arrest might be looked for almost immediately.

No arrest took place, however; the detectives returned to their head-quarters, and the mild sensation produced by the heading of a newspaper column, “The Murder of Lord Fotheringay” was completely obliterated by the toothsome scandal produced by the appearance of a music-hall artist as the co-respondent in a Duchess’s divorce case. It was eminently a case for sandwiches and plovers’ eggs; and the costumes which the eaters of these portable comestibles wore, were described in detail by those newspapers which everyone abuses and—reads. The middle-aged rheumatic butterfly was dead and buried; and though many theories were started—not by Scotland Yard, however—to account for his death, no arrests were made. Whoever the murderer was, he remained undetected. (A couple of years had passed before Harold heard a highly circumstantial story about the appearance of a foreign gentleman with extremely dark eyes and hair, in the neighbourhood of Castle Innisfail, inquiring for Lord Fotheringay a few days after Lord Fotheringay had left the Castle).

Mrs. Lampson, the only daughter of the deceased peer, had received so severe a shock through the tragic circumstances of her father’s death, that she found it necessary to take a long voyage. She started for Samoa with her husband in his steam yacht. It may be mentioned incidentally, however, that, as the surface of the Bay of Biscay was somewhat ruffled when the yacht was going southward, it was thought advisable to change the cruise to one in the Mediterranean. Mrs. Lampson turned up on the Riviera in the spring, and, after entertaining freely there for some time, an article appeared above her signature in a leading magazine deploring the low tone of society at Monte Carlo and on the Riviera generally.

It was in the railway carriage on their way to London from Abbeylands—the exact time was when Harold was in the act of repeating the stanzas from Shelley—that Helen Craven and Edmund Airey conversed together, sitting side by side for the purpose.

“He is Lord Fotheringay now,” remarked Miss Craven, thoughtfully.

Edmund looked at her with something of admiration in his eyes. The young woman who, an hour or two after being shocked at the news of a tragedy enacted at the very door of the house where she had been a guest, could begin to discuss its social bearing, was certainly a young woman to be wondered at—that is, to be admired.

“Yes,” said Edmund, “he is now Lord Fotheringay, whatever that means.”

“It means a title and an income, does it not?” said she.

“Yes, a sort of title and, yes, a sort of income,” said he.

“Either would be quite enough to marry and live on,” said Helen.

“He contrived to live without either up to the present.”

“Yes, poorly.”

“Not palatially, certainly, but still pleasantly.”

“Will he ask her to marry him now, do you think?”

“Her?”

“Yes, you know—Beatrice Avon.”

“Oh—I think that—that I should like to know what you think about it.”

“I think he will ask her.”

“And that she will accept him?”

She did not know how much thought he had been giving to this question during some hours—how eagerly he was waiting her reply.

“No,” she said; “I believe that she will not accept him, because she means to accept you—if you give her a chance.”

The start that he gave was very well simulated. Scarcely so admirable from a standpoint of art was the opening of his eyes accompanied by a little exclamation of astonishment.

“Why are you surprised?” she said, as if she was surprised at his surprise—so subtly can a clever young woman flatter the cleverest of men.

He shook his head.

“I am surprised because I have just heard the most surprising sentence that ever came upon my ears. That

is saying a good deal—yes, considering how much we have talked together.”

“Why should it be surprising?” she said. “Did you not call upon her in town?”

“Yes, I called upon her,” he replied, wondering how she had come to know it. (She had merely guessed it.)

“That would give her hope.”

“Hope?”

“Hope. And it was this hope that induced her to accept Mrs. Lampson’s invitation, although she must have known that Mrs. Lampson’s brother was not to be of the party. I have often wondered if it was you or Lord Fotheringay who asked Mrs. Lampson to invite her?”

“It was I,” said Edmund.

Her eyes brightened—so far as it was possible for them to brighten.

“I wonder if she came to know that,” said Helen musingly. “It would be something of a pity if she did not know it.”

“For that matter, nearly everything that happens is a pity,” said he.

“Not everything,” said she. “But it is certainly a pity that the person who had the bad taste to stab poor Lord Fotheringay did not postpone his crime for at least one day. You would in that case have had a chance of returning by the side of Beatrice Avon instead of by the side of some one else.”

“Who is infinitely cleverer,” said Edmund.

At this point their conversation ended—at least so far as Harold and Beatrice were concerned.

Helen felt, however, that even that brief exchange of opinions had been profitable. Her first thought on hearing of the ghastly discovery of the gamekeeper, was that all her striving to win Harold had been in vain—that all her contriving, by the help of Edmund Airey, had been to no purpose. Harold would now be free to marry Beatrice Avon—or to ask her to marry him; which she believed was much the same thing.

But in the course of a short time she did not feel so hopeless. She believed that Edmund Airey only needed a little further flattery to induce him to resume his old attitude in regard to Beatrice; and the result of her little chat with him in the train showed her not merely that, in regard to flattery, he was pretty much as other men, only, of course, he required it to be subtly administered—but also that he had no intention of allowing his compact in regard to Beatrice to expire with their departure from Castle Innisfail. He admitted having called upon her in London, and this showed Helen very plainly that his attitude in respect of Beatrice was the result of a rather stronger impulse than the desire to be of service to her, Helen, in accordance with the suggestions which she had ventured to make during her first frank interview with him.

She made up her mind that he would not require in future to be frequently reminded of that frank interview. She knew that there exists a more powerful motive for some men’s actions than a desire to forward the happiness of their fellow-men.

This was her reflection at the precise moment that Harold’s face was bent down to the face of Beatrice, while he whispered the words that thrilled her.

As for Edmund Airey, he, too, had his thoughts, and, like Helen, he considered himself quite capable of estimating the amount of importance to be attached to such an incident as the murder of Lord Fotheringay, as a factor in the solution of any problem that might suggest itself. A murder is, of course, susceptible of being regarded from a social standpoint. The murder of Lord Fotheringay, for instance, had broken up what promised to be an exceedingly interesting party at Abbeylands. A murder is very provoking sometimes; and when Edmund Airey heard Lady Innisfail complain to Archie Brown—Archie had become a great friend of hers—of the irritating features of that incident—when he heard an uncharitable man declare that it was most thoughtless of Lord Fotheringay to get a knife stuck into his ribs just when the pheasants were at their best, he could not but feel that his own reflections were very plainly expressed.

He had not been certain of himself during the previous two months. For the first time in his life he did not see his way clearly. It was in order to improve his vision that he had begged Mrs. Lampson—with infinite tact, she admitted to her brother—to invite Beatrice to Abbeylands. He rather thought that, before the visit of Beatrice should terminate, he would be able to see his way clearly in certain directions.

But now, owing to the annoying incident that had occurred, the opportunity was denied him of improving his vision in accordance with the prescription which he had prepared to effect this purpose; therefore—

He had reached this point in his reflections when the special train, which Mr. Lampson had chartered to take his guests back to town, ran alongside the platform at the London terminus.

This was just the moment when Harold looked up to the window from the Priory grounds and saw that vision of white glowing beauty.

CHAPTER XLIX.—ON THE ADVANTAGES OF CONFESSION.

HE stood silent, without taking a step into the room, when the door had been closed behind him.

With a cry she sprang from her seat in front of the fire and put out her hands to him.

Still he did not move a step toward her. He remained at the door.

Something of fear was upon her face as she stood looking at him. He was pale and haggard and ghostlike.

She could not but perceive how strongly the likeness to his father, who had been buried the previous day, appeared upon his face now that it was so worn and haggard—much more so than she had ever seen his father's face.

"Harold—Harold—my beloved!" she cried, and there was something of fear in her voice. "Harold—husband—"

"For God's sake, do not say that, Beatrice!"

His voice was hoarse and quite unlike the voice that had whispered the lines of Shelley, with his face within the halo of moonlight that had clung about her hair.

She was more frightened still. Her hands were clasped over her heart—the lamplight gleamed upon the blood-red circle of rubies on the one ring that she wore—it had never left her finger.

He came into the room. She only retreated one step.

"For God's sake, Beatrice, do not call me husband! I am not your husband!"

She came toward him; and now the look of fear that she had worn, became one of sympathy. Her eyes were full of tears as she said, "My poor Harold, you have all the sympathy—the compassion—the love of my heart. You know it."

"Yes," he said, "I know it. I know what is in your heart. I know its purity—its truth—its sweetness—that is why I should never have come here, knowing also that I am unworthy to stand in your presence."

"You are worthy of all—all—that I can give you."

"Worthy of contempt—contempt—worthy of that for which there is no forgiveness. Beatrice, we have not been married. The form through which we went in this room was a mockery. The man whom I brought here was not a priest. He was guilty of a crime in coming here. I was guilty of a crime in bringing him."

She looked at him for a few moments, and then turned away from him.

She went without faltering in the least toward the chair that still remained in front of the fire. But before she had taken more than a few steps toward it, she looked back at him—only for a second or two, however; then she reached the chair and seated herself in it with her back to him. She looked into the fire.

There was a long silence before he spoke again.

"I think I must have been mad," he said. "Mad to distrust you. It was only when I was away from you that madness came upon me. The utter hopelessness of ever being able to call you mine took possession of me, body and soul, and I felt that I must bind you to me by some means. An accident suggested the means to me. God knows, Beatrice, that I meant never to take advantage of your belief that we were married. But when I felt myself by your side in the train—when I felt your heart beating against mine that night—I found myself powerless to resist. I was overcome. I had cast honour, and truth, yes, and love—the love that exists for ever without hope of reward—to the winds. Thank God—thank God that I awoke from my madness. The sight which should have made me even more powerless to resist, awoke me to a true sense of the life which I had been living for some hours, and by God's grace I was strong enough to fly."

Again there was a long silence. He could see her finely-cut profile as she sat upright, looking into the fire. He saw that her features had undergone no change whatever while he was speaking. It seemed as if his recital had in no respect interested her.

The silence was appalling.

She put out her hand and took from a small table beside her, the book which apparently she had been reading when he had entered. She turned over the leaves as if searching for the place at which she had been interrupted.

He came beside her.

"Have you no word for me—no word of pity—of forgiveness—of farewell?" he said.

She had apparently found her place. She seemed to be reading.

"Beatrice, Beatrice, I implore of you—one word—one word—any word!"

He had clutched her arm as he fell on his knees passionately beside her. The book dropped to the floor. She was on her feet at the same instant.

"Oh God—oh God, what have I done that I should be the victim of these men?" she cried, not in a strident voice, but in a low tone, tremulous with passion. "One man thinks it a good thing to amuse himself by pretending that I interest him, and another whom I trusted as I would have trusted my God, endeavours to ruin my life—and he has done it—he has done it! My life is ruined!"

She had never looked at him while he was speaking to her. She had not been able for some time to comprehend the full force of the revelation he had made to her; but so soon as she had felt his hand upon her arm, she seemed in a moment to understand all.

Now she looked at him as he knelt at her feet with his head bowed down to the arm of the chair in which she had been sitting—she looked down upon him; and then with a cry as of physical pain, she flung herself wildly upon a sofa, sobbing hysterically.

He was beside her in a moment.

"Oh, Beatrice, my love, my love, tell me what reparation I can make," he cried. "Beatrice, have pity upon me! Do not say that I have ruined your life. It was only because I could not bear the thought that there was a chance of losing you, that I did what I did. I could not face that, Beatrice!"

She still lay there, shaken with sobs. He dared not put his hand upon her. He dared not touch one of her hands with his. He could only stand there by her side. Every sob that she gave was like a dagger's thrust to him. He suffered more during those moments than his father had done while the hand of the assassin was upon him.

The long silence was broken only by her sobs.

"Beatrice—Beatrice, you will say one word to me—one word, Beatrice, for God's sake!"

Some moments had passed while she struggled hard to control herself.

It was long before she was successful.

“Go—go—go!” she cried, without raising her head from the satin cushion of the sofa. “Oh, Harold, Harold, go!”

“I will go,” he said, after another long pause. “I will go. But I leave here all that I love in the world—all that I shall ever love. I was false to myself once—only once; I shall never be so again. I shall never cease loving you while I live, Beatrice. I never loved you as I do now.”

She made no sign.

Even when she heard the door of the room open and close, she did not rise.

And the fire burnt itself out, and the lamp burnt itself out, but still she lay there in her tears.

CHAPTER L.—ON CONSOLATION AS A FINE ART.

HIS worst forebodings had come to pass. That was the one feeling which Harold had on leaving her.

He had scarcely ventured to entertain a hope that the result of his interview with her and of his confession to her would be different.

He knew her.

That was why he had gone to her without hope. He knew that her nature was such as made it impossible for her to understand how he could have practised a fraud upon her; and he knew that understanding is the first step toward forgiving.

Still, there ever pervades the masculine mind an idea that there is no limit to a woman's forgiveness.

The masculine mind has the best of reasons for holding fast to this idea. It is the result of many centuries of experience of woman—of many centuries of testing the limits of woman's forgiveness. The belief that there is nothing that a woman will not forgive in a man whom she loves, is the heritage of man—just as the heritage of woman is to believe that nothing that is done by a man whom she loves, stands in need of forgiveness.

Thus it is that men and women make (occasionally) excellent companions for one another, and live together (frequently) in harmony.

Thus it was that, in spite of the fact that his reason and his knowledge of the nature of Beatrice assured him that his confession of the fraud in which he had participated against her would not be forgiven by her, there still remained in the mind of Harold Wynne a shadowy hope that she might yet be as other women, who, understanding much, forgive much.

He left her presence, feeling that she was no as other women are.

That was the only grain of comfort that remained with him. He loved her more than he had ever done before, because she was not as other women are.

She could not understand how that cold distrust had taken possession of him.

She knew nothing of that world in which he had lived all his life—a world quite full of worldliness—and therefore she could not understand how it was that he had sought to bind her to him beyond the possibility (as he meant her to think) of ever being separated from him. She had laid all her trust in him. She had not even claimed from him the privilege of consulting with someone—her father or someone with whom she might be on more confidential terms—regarding the proposition which he had made to her. No, she had trusted him implicitly, and yet he had persevered in regarding her as belonging to the worldly ones among whom he had lived all his life.

He had lost her.

He had lost her, and he deserved to lose her. This was his thought as he walked westward. He had not the satisfaction of feeling that he was badly treated.

The feeling on the part of a man that he has been badly treated by a woman, usually gives him much greater satisfaction than would result from his being extremely well treated by the same, or, indeed, by any other woman.

But this blessed consciousness of being badly treated was denied to Harold Wynne. He had been the ill-treater, not the ill-treated. He reflected how he had taken advantage of the peculiar circumstances of the girl's life—upon the absence of her father—upon her own trustful innocence—to carry out the fraud which he had perpetrated upon her. Under ordinary circumstances and with a girl of an ordinary stamp, such a fraud would have been impossible. He was well aware that a girl living under the conditions to which most girls are subjected, would have laughed in his face had he suggested the advisability of marrying him privately.

Yes, he had taken a cruel advantage of her and of the freedom which she enjoyed, to betray her; and the feeling that he had lost her did not cause him more bitterness than deserved to fall to his lot.

One bitterness of reflection was, however, spared to him, and this was why he cried again, as he threw himself into a chair, “Thank God—thank God!”

He had not been seated for long, before his servant entered with a card.

“I told the lady that you were not seeing any one, my lord,” said Martin.

"The lady?"

Not for a single instant did it occur to his mind that Beatrice had come to him.

"Yes, my lord; Miss Craven," said Martin, handing him the card. "But she said that perhaps you would see her."

"*Only for a minute*," were the words written in pencil on Miss Craven's card.

"Yes, I will certainly see Miss Craven," said Harold.

"Very good, my lord."

She stood at the door. The light outside was very low; so was the light in the room.

Between two dim lights was where Helen looked her best. A fact of which she was well aware.

She seemed almost pretty as she stood there.

She had made up pale, which she considered appropriately sympathetic on her part. And, indeed, there can scarcely be a difference of opinion on this point.

In delicate matters of taste like this she rarely-made a mistake.

"It was so good of you to come," said he, taking her hand.

"I could not help it, Harold," said she.

"Mamma is in the brougham; she desired me to convey to you her deepest sympathy."

"I am indeed touched by her thoughtfulness," said Harold. "You will tell her so."

"Mamma is not very strong," said Helen. "She would not come in with me. She, too, has suffered deeply. But I felt that I must tell you face to face how terribly shocked we were—how I feel for you with all my heart. We have always been good friends—the best of friends, Harold—at least, I do not know where I should look in the world for another such friend as you."

"Yes, we were always good friends, Helen," said he; "and I hope that we shall always remain so."

"We shall—I feel that we shall, Harold," said she.

Her eyes were overflowing with tears, as she put out a hand to him—a hand which he took and held between both his own, but without speaking a word. "I felt that I must go to you if only for a moment—if only to say to you as I do now, 'I feel for you with all my heart. You have all my sympathy.' That is all I have to say. I knew you would allow me to see you, and to give you my message. Good-bye."

"You are so good—so kind—so thoughtful," said he. "I shall always feel that you are my friend—my best friend, Helen."

"And you may always trust in my friendship—my—my—friendship," said she. "You will come and see us soon—mamma and me. We should be so glad. Lady Innisfail wanted me to go with her to Netherford Hall—several of your sister's party are going with Lady Innisfail; but of course I could not think of going. I shall go nowhere for some time—a long time, I think. We shall be at home whenever you call, Harold."

"And you may be certain that I shall call soon," said he. "Pray tell Mrs. Craven how deeply touched—how deeply grateful I am for her kindness. And you—you know that I shall never forget your thoughtfulness, Helen."

Her eyes were still glistening as he took her hand and pressed it. She looked at him through her tears; her lips moved, but no words came. She turned and went down the stairs. He followed her for a few steps, and then Martin met her, opened the hall-door, and saw her put into the brougham by her footman.

"Well," said her mother, when the brougham got upon the wood pavement. "Well, did you find the poor orphan in tears and comfort him?" Mrs. Craven was not devoid of an appreciation of humour of a certain form. She had lived in Birmingham for several years of her life.

"Dear mamma," said Helen, "I think you may always trust to me to know what is right to do upon all occasions. My visit was a success. I knew that it would be a success. I know Harold Wynne."

"I know one thing," said Mrs. Craven, "and that is, that he will never marry you. Whatever Harold Wynne might have done, Lord Fotheringay will never marry you, my dear. Make up your mind to that."

Her daughter laughed in the way that a daughter laughs at a prophetic mother clad in sables, with a suspicion of black velvet and beads underneath.

CHAPTER LI.—ON THE WAYS OF PROVIDENCE AND OTHERS.

DURING the next few days Harold had numerous visitors. A man cannot have his father murdered without attracting a considerable amount of attention to himself. Cards "*With deepest sympathy*" were left upon him by the hundred, and the majority of those sympathizers drove away to say to their friends at their clubs what a benefactor to society was the person who had run that knife into the ribs of Lord Fotheringay. Some suggested that a presentation should be got up for that man; and when someone asked what the police meant by taking so much trouble to find the man, another ventured to formulate the very plausible theory that they were doing so in order to force him to give sittings to an eminent sculptor for a statue of himself with the knife in his hand, to be erected by public subscription outside the House of Lords.

"Yes; *pour encourager les autres!*" said one of the sympathizers.

Another of the sympathizers inquired where were the Atheists now?

It was generally admitted that, as an incentive to orthodoxy, the tragic end of Lord Fotheringay could scarcely be over-estimated.

It threw a flood of light upon the Ways of Providence.

The Scotland Yard people at first regarded the incident from such a standpoint.

They assumed that Providence had decreed a violent death to Lord Fotheringay, in order to give the detective force an opportunity of displaying their ingenuity.

They had many interviews with Harold, and they asked him a number of questions regarding the life of his father, his associates, and his tastes.

They wondered if he had an enemy.

They feared that the deed was the work of an enemy; and they started the daring theory that if they only had a clue to this supposititious enemy they would be on the track of the assassin.

After about a week of suchlike theorizing, they were not quite so sure of Providence.

Some newspapers interested in the Ways of Providence, declared through the medium of leading articles, that Lord Fotheringay had been murdered in order that the world might be made aware of the utter incapacity of Scotland Yard, and the necessity for the reorganization of the detective force.

Other newspapers—they were mostly the organs of the Opposition—sneered at the Home Secretary.

Mr. Durdan was heard to affirm in the solitude of the smoking-room of his club, that the days of the Government were numbered.

Then Harold had also to receive daily visits from the family lawyers; and as family lawyers take more interest in the affairs of the family than any of its members, he found these visits very tiresome; only he was determined to find out what was his exact position financially, and to do so involved the examination of the contents of several tin boxes, as well as the columns of some bank books. On the whole, however, the result of his researches under the guidance of the lawyers was worth the trouble that they entailed.

He found that he would be compelled to live on an income of twelve thousand pounds a year, if he really wished—as he said he did—to make provision for the paying off of certain incumbrances, and of keeping in repair a certain mansion on the borders of a Welsh county.

Having lived for several years upon an allowance of something under twelve hundred pounds a year, he felt that he could manage to subsist on twelve thousand. This was the thought that came to him automatically, so soon as he had discovered his financial position. His next thought was that, by his own folly, he had rendered himself incapable of enjoying this sudden increase in revenue.

If he had only been patient—if he had only been trustful for one week longer!

He felt very bitterly on the subject of his folly—his cruelty—his fraud; the fact being that he entertained some preposterous theory of individual responsibility.

He had never had inculcated on him the principles of heredity, otherwise he would have understood fully that he could no more have avoided carrying out a plan of deception upon a woman, than the pointer puppy—where would the Evolutionists be without their pointer puppy?—can avoid pointing.

Whether the adoption of the scientific explanation of what he had done would have alleviated his bitterness or not, is quite another question. The philosophy that accounts for suffering does not go the length of relieving suffering. The science that gives the gout a name that few persons can pronounce, does not prevent an ordinary gouty subject from swearing; which seems rather a pity.

Among the visitors whom Harold saw in these days was Edmund Airey. Mr. Airey did not think it necessary to go through the form of expressing his sympathy for his friend's bereavement. His only allusion to the bereavement was to be found in a sneer at Scotland Yard.

Could he do anything for Harold, he wondered. If he could do anything, Harold might depend on his doing it.

Harold said, "Thank you, old chap, I don't think I can reasonably ask you to work out for me, in tabulated form, the net value of leases that have yet to run from ten to sixty years."

"Therein the patient must minister to himself," said Edmund. "I suppose it is, after all, only a question of administration. If you want any advice—well, you have asked my advice before now. You have even gone the length of taking my advice—yes, sometimes. That's more than the majority of people do—unless my advice bears out their own views. Advice, my dear Harold, is the opinion asked by one man of another when he has made up his mind what course to adopt."

"I have always found your counsel good," said Harold. "You know men and their motives. I have often wondered if you knew anything about women."

Mr. Airey smiled. It was rather ridiculous that anyone so well acquainted with him as Harold was, should make use of a phrase that suggested a doubt of his capacity.

"Women—and their motives?" said he.

"Quite so," said Harold. "Their motives. You once assured me that there was no such thing as woman in the abstract. Perhaps, assuming that that is your standpoint, you may say that it is ridiculous to talk of the motives of woman; though it would be reasonable—at least as reasonable as most talk of women—to speak of the motives of a woman."

"What woman do you speak of?" said Edmund, quickly.

"I speak as a fool—broadly," said Harold. "I feel myself to be a fool, when I reflect upon the wisdom of those stories told to us by Brian the boatman. The first was about a man who defrauded the revenue of the country, the other was about a cow that got jammed in the doorway of an Irish cabin. There was some practical philosophy in both those stories, and they put all questions of women and their motives out of our heads while Brian was telling them."

"There's no doubt about that," said Edmund.

"By the way, didn't you ask me for my advice on some point during one of those days on the Irish lough?"

"If I did, I'm certain that I received good counsel from you," said Harold.

"You did. But you didn't take it," said Edmund, with a laugh.

"I told you once that you hadn't given me time. I tell you so again," said Harold.

"Has she been to see you within the past few days?" asked Edmund.

"You understand women—and their motives," said Harold. "Yes, Miss Craven was here. By the way, talking of motives, I have often wondered why you suggested to my sister that Miss Avon would make an agreeable addition to the party at Abbeylands."

Not for a second did Edmund Airey change colour—not for a second did his eyes fall before the searching glance of his friend.

"The fact was," said he—and he smiled as he spoke—"I was under the impression that your father—ah, well, if he hadn't that mechanical rectitude of movement which appertains chiefly to the walking doll and other automata, he had still many good points. He told me upon one occasion that it was his intention to marry Miss Avon. I was amused."

"And you wanted to be amused again? I see. I think that I, too, am beginning to understand something of men—and their motives," remarked Harold.

"If you make any progress in that direction, you might try and fathom the object of the Opposition in getting up this agitation about Siberia. They are going to arouse the country by descriptions of the horrors of exile in Siberia. They want to make the Government responsible for what goes on there. And the worst of it is that they'll do it, too. Do you remember Bulgaria?"

"Perfectly. The country is a fool. The Government will need a strong programme to counteract the effects of the Siberian platform."

"I'm trying to think out something at the present moment. Well, good-bye. Don't fail to let me know if I can do anything for you."

He had been gone some time before Harold smiled—not the smile of a man who has been amused at something that has come under his notice, but the sad smile of a man who has found that his sagacity has not been at fault when he has thought the worst about one of his friends.

There are times when a certain imperturbability of demeanour on the part of a man who has been asked a sudden searching question, conveys as much to the questioner as his complete collapse would do. The perfect composure with which Edmund had replied to his sudden question regarding his motive in suggesting to Mrs. Lampson—with infinite tact—that Beatrice Avon might be invited to Abbeylands, told Harold all that he had an interest to know.

Edmund Airey's acquaintance with men—and women—had led him to feel sure that Mrs. Lampson would tell her brother of the suggestion made by him, Edmund; and also that her brother would ask him if he had any particular reason for making that suggestion. This was perfectly plain to Harold; and he knew that his friend had been walking about for some time with that answer ready for the question which had just been put to him.

"He is on his way to Beatrice at the present moment," said Harold, while that bitter smile was still upon his features.

And he was right.

CHAPTER LII.—ON THE FLUSH, THE FOOL, AND FATE.

MR. AIREY had called on Beatrice since his return from that melancholy entertainment at Abbeylands, but he had not been fortunate enough to find her at home. Now, however, he was more lucky. She had already two visitors with her in the big drawing-room, when Mr. Airey was announced.

He could not fail to notice the little flush upon her face as he entered. He noticed it, and it was extremely gratifying to him to do so; only he hoped that her visitors were not such close observers as he knew himself to be. He would not have liked them—whoever they were—to leave the house with the impression that he was a lover. If they were close observers and inclined to gossip, they might, he felt, consider themselves justified in putting so liberal an interpretation upon her quick flush as he entered.

He did not blush: he had been a Member of Parliament for several years.

Yes, she was clearly pleased to see him, and her manifestation of pleasure made him assured that he had never seen a lovelier girl. It was so good of him not to forget her, she declared. He feared that her flush would increase, and suggest the peony rather than the peach. But he quickly perceived that she had recovered from the excitement of his sudden appearance, and that, as a matter of fact, she was becoming pale rather than roseate.

He noticed this when her visitors—they were feeble folk, the head of a department in the Museum and his sister—had left the house.

"It is delightful to be face to face with you once more," he said. "I seem to hear the organ-music of the

Atlantic now that I am beside you again."

She gave a little laugh—did he detect something of scorn in its ring?—as she said, "Oh, no; it is the sound of the greater ocean that we have about us here. It is the tide of the affairs of men that flows around us."

No, her laugh could have had nothing of scorn about it.

"I cannot think of you as borne about on this full tide," said he. "I see you with your feet among the purple heather—I wonder if there was a sprig of white about it—along the shores of the Irish lough. I see you in the midst of a flood of sunset-light flowing from the west, making the green one red."

She saw that sunset. He was describing the sunset that had been witnessed from the deck of the yacht returning from the seal-hunt beyond the headlands. Did he know why she got up suddenly from her seat and pretended to snuff one of the candles on the mantelshelf? Did he know how close the tears were to her eyes as she gave another little laugh?

"So long as you do not associate me with Mr. Durdan's views on the Irish question, I shall be quite satisfied," said she. "Poor Mr. Durdan! How he saw a bearing upon the Irish question in all the phenomena of Nature! The sunset—the sea—the clouds—all had more or less to do with the Irish question."

"And he was not altogether wrong," said Edmund. "Mr. Durdan is a man of scrupulous inaccuracy, as a rule, but he sometimes stumbles across a truth. The sea and sky are eternal, and the Irish question——"

"Is the rock upon which the Government is to be wrecked, I believe," said she. "Oh, yes; Mr. Durdan confided in me that the days of the Government are numbered."

"He became confidential on that topic to a considerable number of persons," said Edmund.

"And we are confidential on Mr. Durdan as a topic," said she.

"We have talked confidentially on more profitable topics, have we not?" said he.

"We have talked confidently at least."

"And confidently, I hope. I told you all my aspirations, Miss Avon."

"All?"

"Well, perhaps, I made some reservations."

"Oh."

"Perhaps I shall tell you confidentially of some other aspirations of mine—some day."

He spoke slowly and with an emphasis and suggestiveness that could not be overlooked.

"And you will speak confidently on that subject, I am sure."

She was lying back in her chair, with the firelight fluttering over her. The firelight was flinging rose leaves about her face.

That was what the effect suggested to him.

He noticed also how beautiful was the effect of the light shining through her hair. That was an effect which had been noticed before.

She turned her eyes suddenly upon him, when he did not reply to her word, "confidently."

He repeated the word.

"Confidently—confidently;" then he shook his head. "Alas! no. A man who speaks confidently on the subject of his aspirations—on the subject of a supreme aspiration—is a fool."

"And yet I remember that you assured me upon one occasion that man was master of his fate," said she.

"Did I?" said he. "That must have been when you first appeared among us at Castle Innisfail. I have learned a great deal since then."

"For example?" said she.

"Modesty in making broad statements where Fate is concerned," he replied, with scarcely a pause.

She withdrew her eyes from his face, and gave a third laugh, closely resembling in its tone her first—that one which caused him to wonder if there was a touch of scorn in its ripple.

He looked at her very narrowly. She was certainly the loveliest thing that he had ever seen. Could it be possible that she was leading him on?

She had certainly never left herself open to the suspicion of leading him on when at Castle Innisfail—among the purple heather or the crimson sunsets about which he had been talking—and yet he had been led on. He had a suspicion now that he was in peril. He had so fine an understanding of woman and her motives, that he became apprehensive of the slightest change. He was, in respect of woman, what a thermometer is when aboard a ship that is approaching an iceberg. He was appreciative of every change—of every motive.

"I was looking forward to another pleasant week near you," said he, and his remark somehow seemed to have a connection with what he had been saying—had he not been announcing an acquirement of modesty?—"Yes, if you had been with us at Abbeylands you might have become associated in my mind with the glory of the colour of an autumn woodland. But it was, of course, fortunate for you that you got the terrible news in time to prevent your leaving town."

He felt that she had become suddenly excited. There was no ignoring the rising and falling of the lace points that lay upon the bosom of her gown. The question was: did her excitement proceed from what he had said, or from what she fancied he was about to say?

It was a nice question.

But he bore out his statement regarding his gain in modesty, by assuming that she had been deeply affected by the story of the tragic end of Lord Fotheringay, so that she could not now hear a reference to it without emotion.

"I wonder if you care for German Opera," said he. There could scarcely be even the most subtle connection between this and his last remark. She looked at him with something like surprise in her eyes when he had spoken. Only to some minds does a connection between criminality and German Opera become apparent.

"German Opera, Mr. Airey?"

"Yes. The fact is that I have a box for the winter season at the Opera House, and my cousin, Mrs. Carroll, means to go to every performance, I believe; she is an enthusiast on the subject of German Opera—she has even sat out a performance of 'Parsifal'—and I know that she is eager to make converts. She would be delighted to call upon you when she returns from Brighton."

"It is so kind of you to think of me. I should love to go. You will be there—I mean, you will be able to come also, occasionally?"

He looked at her. He had risen from his seat, being about to take leave of her. She had also risen, but her eyes drooped as she exclaimed, "You will be there?"

She did not fail to perceive the compromising sequence of her phrases, "I should love to go. You will be there?" She was looking critically at the toe of her shoe, turning it about so that she could make a thorough examination of it from every standpoint. Her hands, too, were busy tying knots on the girdle of her gown.

He felt that it would be cruel to let her see too plainly that he was conscious of that undue frankness of hers; so he broke the awkward silence by saying—not quite casually, of course, but still in not too pointed a way, "Yes, I shall be there, occasionally. Not that my devotion will be for German Opera, however." The words were well chosen, he felt. They were spoken as the legitimate sequence to those words that she had uttered in that girlish enthusiasm, which was so charming. Only, of course, being a man, he could choose his words. They were artificial—the result of a choice; whereas it was plain that she could not choose but utter the phrases that had come from her. She was a girl, and so spoke impulsively and from her heart.

"Meantime," said she—she had now herself almost under control again, and was looking at him with a smile upon her face as she put out her hand to meet his. "Meantime, you will come again to see me? My father is greatly occupied with his history, otherwise he also would, I know, be very pleased to see you."

"I hope that you will be pleased," said he. "If so, I will call—occasionally—frequently."

"Frequently," said she, and once again—but only for a moment this time—she scrutinized her foot.

"Frequently," said he, in a low tone. Being a man he could choose his tones as well as his words.

He went away with a deep satisfaction dwelling within him—the satisfaction of the clever man who feels that he has not only spoken cleverly, but acted cleverly—which is quite a different thing.

Later on he felt that he need not have been in such a hurry calling upon her. He had gone to her directly after visiting Harold. He had been under the impression that he would do well to see her and make his proposal to her regarding the German Opera season without delay. The moment that he had heard of Lord Fotheringay's death, it had occurred to him that he would do well to lose no time in paying her a visit. After due consideration, he had thought it advisable to call upon Harold in the first instance. He had done so, and the result of his call was to make him feel that he should not any longer delay his visit to Beatrice.

Now, as has been said, he felt that he need not have been in such a hurry.

"I should love to go—you will be there."

Yes, those were the words that had sprung from her heart. The sequence of the phrases had not been the result of art or thought.

He had clearly under-estimated the effect of his own personality upon an impressionable girl who had a great historian for a father. The days that he had passed by her side—carrying out the compact which he had made with Helen Craven—had produced an impression upon her far more powerful than he had believed it possible to produce within so short a space of time.

In short, she was his.

That is what he felt within an hour of parting from her; and all his resources of modesty and humility were unequal to the task of changing his views on this point.

Was he in love with her?

He believed her to be the most beautiful woman whom he had ever seen.

CHAPTER LIII.—ON A SUPREME ASPIRATION.

IT was commonly reported that Mr. Durdan had stated with some degree of publicity that the days of the Government were numbered.

There were a good many persons who were ready to agree with him before the month of December had passed; for the agitation on the subject of Siberia was spreading through the length and breadth of the land. The active and observant Leader of the Opposition knew the people of England, Scotland, and perhaps—so far as they allowed themselves to be understood—of Wales, thoroughly. Of course Ireland was out of the question altogether.

Knowing the people so well, he only waited for a sharp frost to open his campaign. He was well aware that it would be ridiculous to commence an agitation on the subject of Siberia unless in a sharp frost. To try to move the constituencies while the water-pipes in their dwellings remained intact, would be a waste of time. It is when his pipes are burst that the British householder will join in any agitation that may be started. The British farmer invariably turns out the Government after a bad harvest; and there can be but little doubt that

a succession of wet summers would make England republican.

It was because all the water-pipes in England were burst, that the atrocities in Bulgaria stirred the great sympathetic heart of this England of ours, and the strongest Government that had existed for years became the most unpopular. A strong Government may survive a year of great commercial depression; but the strongest totters after a wet summer, and none has ever been known to survive a frost that bursts the household water-pipes.

The campaign commenced when the thermometer fell to thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit. That was the time to be up and doing. In every quarter the agitation made itself felt.

"The sympathetic pulse of the nation was not yet stilled," we were told. "Six years of inefficient Government had failed to crush down the manhood of England," we were assured. "The Heart was still there—it was beating still; and wherever the Heart of an Englishman beats there was found a foe—a determined, resolute foe—nay, an irresistible foe, to tyranny, and what tyranny had the world ever known that was equal to that which sent thousands and tens of thousands of noble men and women—women—women—to a living death among the snows of Siberia? Could any one present form an idea of the horrors of a Siberian winter?" (Cries of "Yes, yes," from householders whose water-pipes had burst.) "Well, in the name of our common humanity—in the name of our common sympathies—in the name of England (cheers)—England, mind you, with her fleet, that in spite of six years of gross mismanagement on the part of the Government, was still the mistress of the main—(loud cheers) England, mind you, whose armies had survived the shocking incapacity of a Government that had refused a seven-hours day to the artisans at Woolwich and Aldershot—(tremendous cheers) in the name of this grand old England of ours let those who were responsible for Siberia—that blot upon the map of Europe"—(the agitator is superior to geography)—"let them be told that their day is over. Let the Government that can look with callous eyes upon such horrors as are enacted among the frosts and snows of Siberia be told that its day is over (cheers). Did anyone wish to know something of these horrors?" ("Yes, yes!") "Well, here was a book written by a correspondent to a New York journal, and which, consequently, was entitled to every respect".... and so forth.

That was the way the opponents of the Government talked at every meeting. And in the course of a short time they had successfully mixed up the labour question, the army and navy retrenchment question, the agricultural question, and several other questions, with the stories of Siberian horrors, and the aggregate of evil was laid to the charge of the Government.

The friends of the Government were at their wits' end to know how to reply to this agitation. Some foolish ones endeavoured to make out that England was not responsible for what was done in Siberia. But this sophistry was too shallow for the people whose water-pipes were burst, and those who were responsible for it were hooted on every platform.

It was at this critical time that the Prime Minister announced at a Dinner at which he was entertained, that, while the Government was fully sensible of the claims of Siberia, he felt certain that he was only carrying out the desire of the people of England, in postponing consideration of this vast question until a still greater question had been settled. After long and careful deliberation, Her Majesty's Ministers had resolved to submit to the country a programme the first item of which was the Conversion of the Jews.

The building where this announcement was made rang with cheers. The friends of the Government no longer looked gloomy. In a few days they knew that the Nonconformist Conscience would be awake, and as a political factor, the Nonconformist Conscience cannot be ignored. A Government that had for its policy the Conversion of the Jews would be supported by England—this great Christian England of ours.

"My Lords and Gentlemen," said the Prime Minister, "the contest on which we are about to enter is very limited in its range. It is a contest of England and Religion against the Continent and Atheism. My Lords and Gentlemen, come what may, Her Majesty's Ministers will be on the side of Religion."

It was felt that this timely utterance had saved the Government.

It was not to be expected that, when these tremendous issues were broadening out, Mr. Edmund Airey should have much time at his disposal for making afternoon calls; still he managed to visit Beatrice Avon pretty frequently—much more frequently than he had ever visited anyone in all his life. The season of German Opera was a brilliant one, and upon several occasions Beatrice appeared in Mr. Airey's box by the side of the enthusiastic lady, who was pointed out in society as having remained in her stall from the beginning to the end of "Parsifal." Mr. Airey never missed a performance at which Beatrice was present. He missed all the others.

Only once did he venture to introduce Harold's name in her drawing-room. He mentioned having seen him casually in the street, and then he watched her narrowly as he said, "By the way, I have never come upon him here. Does he not call upon you?"

There was only a little brightening of her eyes—was it scorn?—as she replied: "Is it not natural that Lord Fotheringay should be a very different person from Mr. Harold Wynne? Oh, no, he never calls now."

"I have heard several people say that they had found him greatly changed, poor fellow!" said Edmund.

"Greatly changed—not ill?" she said.

He wondered if the tone in which she spoke suggested anxiety—or was it merely womanly curiosity?

"Oh, no; he seems all right; but it is clear that his father's death and the circumstances attending it affected him deeply."

"It gave him a title at any rate."

The suspicion of scorn was once more about her voice. Its tone no longer suggested anxiety for the health of Lord Fotheringay.

"You are too hard on him, Beatrice," said Edmund. She had come to be Beatrice to him for more than a week—a week in which he had been twice in her drawing-room, and in which she had been twice in his opera box.

"Too hard on him?" said she. "How is it possible for you to judge what is hard or the opposite on such a

point?"

"I have always liked Harold," said he; "that is why I must stand up for him."

"Ah, that is your own kindness of heart," said she. "I remember how you used to stand up for him at Castle Innisfail. I remember that when you told me how wretchedly poor he was, you were very bitter against the destiny that made so good a fellow poor, while so many others, not nearly so good, were wealthy."

"I believe I did say something like that. At any rate I felt that. Oh, yes, I always felt that I must stand up for him; so even now I insist on your not being too hard on him."

He laughed, and so did she—yes, after a little pause.

"Come again—soon," she said, as she gave him her hand, which he retained for some moments while he looked into her eyes—they were more than usually lustrous—and said,

"Oh, yes, I will come again soon. Don't you remember what I said to you in this room—it seems long ago, we have come to be such close friends since—what I said about my aspirations—my supreme aspiration?"

"I remember it," said she—her voice was very low.

"I have still to reveal it to you, Beatrice," said he.

Then he dropped her hand and was gone.

He made another call the same afternoon. He drove westward to the residence of Helen Craven and her mother, and in the drawing-room he found about a dozen people drinking tea, for Mrs. Craven had a large circle.

It took him some time to get beside Helen; but a very small amount of manoeuvring on her part was sufficient to secure comparative privacy for him and herself in a dimly-lighted part of the great room—an alcove that made a moderately valid excuse for a Moorish arch and hangings.

"The advice that I gave to you was good," said he.

"Your advice was that I should make no move whatever," said she. "That could not be hard advice to take, if he were disposed to make any move in my direction. But, as I told you, he only called once, and then we were out. Have you learned anything?"

"I have learned that whomsoever she marries, she will never marry Harold Wynne," said Edmund.

"Great heavens! You have found this out? Are you certain? Men are so apt to rush at conclusions."

"Yes; some men are. I have always preferred the crawling process, though it is the slower."

"That is a confession—crawling! But how have you found out that she will not marry him?"

"He has treated her very badly."

"That has got nothing whatever to do with the question. Heavens! If women declined to marry the men that treat them badly, the statistics of spinsterhood would be far more alarming than they are at present."

"She will not marry him."

"Will she marry you?"

Miss Craven had sprung to her feet. She was in a nervous condition, and it was intensified by his irritating reiteration of the one statement.

"Will she marry you?" she cried, in a voice that had a strident ring about it. "Will she marry you?"

"I think it highly probable," said he.

She looked at him in silence for a long time.

"Let us return to the room," said she.

They went through the Moorish arch back to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER LIV.—ON THE DECAY OF THE PAT AS A POWER.

IT was a few days after Edmund Airey had made his revelation—if it was a revelation—to Helen Craven, that Harold received a visitor in the person of Archie Brown. The second week in January had now come. The season of German Opera was over, and Parliament was about to assemble; but neither of these matters was engrossing the attention of Archie. That he was in a state of excitement anyone could see, and before he had even asked after Harold's health, he cried, "I've fired out the lot of them, Harry; that's the sort of new potatoes I am."

"The lot of what?" asked Harold.

"Don't you know? Why, the lot of Legitimists," said Archie.

"The Legitimists? My dear Archie, you don't surely expect me to believe that you possess sufficient political power to influence the fortunes of a French dynasty."

"French dynasty be grilled. I said the Legitimists—the actors, the carpenters, the gasmen, the firemen, the check-takers, Shakespeare, and Mrs. Mowbray of the Legitimate Theatre. I've fired out the lot of them, and be hanged to them!"

"Oh, I see; you've fired out Shakespeare?"

"He's eternally fired out, so far as I'm concerned. Why should I end my days in a workhouse because a chap

wrote plays a couple of hundred years ago—may be more?”

“Why, indeed? And so you fired him out?”

“I’ve made things hum at the Legitimate this morning”—Archie had once spent three months in the United States—“and now I’ve made the lot of them git. I’ve made W. S. git.”

“And Mrs. Mowbray?”

“She gits too.”

“She’ll do it gracefully. Archie, my man, you’re not wanting in courage.”

“What courage was there needed for that?”—Archie had picked up a quill pen and was trying, but with indifferent success, to balance it on the toe of his boot, as he leant back in a chair. “What courage is needed to tell a chap that’s got hold of your watch chain that the time has come for him to drop it? Great Godfrey! wasn’t I the master of the lot of them? Do you fancy that the manager was my master? Do you fancy that Mrs. Mowbray was my—I mean, do you think that I’m quite an ass?”

“Well, no,” said Harold—“not quite.”

“Do you suppose that my good old dad had any Scruples about firing out a crowd of navvies when he found that they didn’t pay? Not he. And do you suppose that I haven’t inherited some of his good qualities?”

“And when does the Legitimate close its doors?”

“This day week. Those doors have been open too long already. Seventy-five pounds for the Widow’s champagne for the Christmas week—think of that, Harry. Mrs. Mowbray’s friends drink nothing but Clicquot. She expects me to pay for her entertainments, and calls it Shakespeare. If you grabbed a chap picking your pocket, and he explained to the tarty chips at Bow Street that his initials were W. S. would he get off? Don’t you believe it, Harry.”

“Nothing shall induce me.”

“The manager’s only claim to have earned his salary is that he has been at every theatre in London, and has so got the biggest list of people to send orders to, so as to fill the house nightly. It seems that the most valuable manager is the one who has the longest list of people who will accept orders. That’s theatrical enterprise nowadays. They say it’s the bicycle that has brought it about.”

“Anyhow you’ve quarrelled with Mrs. Mowbray? Give me your hand; Archie. You’re a man.”

“Quarrelled with Mrs. Mowbray? It was about time. She went to pat my head again to-day, when there was a buzz in the manager’s office. She didn’t pat my head, Harry—the day is past for pats, and so I told her. The day is past when she could butter me with her pats. She gave me a look when I said that—if she could give such looks on the stage she’d crowd the house—and then she cried, ‘Nothing on earth shall induce me ever to speak to you again.’ ‘I ask nothing better,’ said I. After that she skipped. I promised Norah that I’d do it, and I have done it.”

“You promised whom?”

“Norah. Great Godfrey! you don’t mean to say that you haven’t heard that Norah Innisfail and I are to be married?”

“Norah—Innisfail—and—you—you?”

Harold lay back in his chair and laughed. The idea of the straightlaced Miss Innisfail marrying Archie Brown seemed very comical to him.

“What are you laughing about?” said Archie. “You shouldn’t laugh, considering that it was you that brought it about.”

“I? I wish that I had no more to reproach myself with; but I can’t for the life of me see how—”

“Didn’t you get Mrs. Lampson to invite me to Abbeylands, and didn’t I meet Norah there, bless her! At first, do you know, I fancied that I was getting fond of her mother?”

“Oh, yes; I can understand that,” said Harold, who was fully acquainted with the systems which Lady Innisfail worked with such success.

“But, bless your heart! it was all motherly kindness on Lady Innisfail’s part—so she explained when—ah—later on. Then I went with her to Lord Innisfail’s place at Netherford and—well, there’s no explaining these things. Norah is the girl for me! I’ve felt a better man for knowing her, Harry. It’s not every girl that a chap can say that of—mostly the other way. Lord Innisfail heard something about the Legitimate business, and he said that it was about time I gave it up; I agreed with him, and I’ve given it up.”

“Archie,” said Harold, “you’ve done a good morning’s work. I was going to advise you never to see Mrs. Mowbray again—never to grant her an interview—she’s an edged tool—but after what you’ve done, I feel that it would be a great piece of presumption on my part to offer you any advice.”

“Do you know what it is?” said Archie, in a low and very confidential voice: “I’m not quite so sure of her character as I used to be. I know you always stood up for her.”

“I still believe that she never had more than one lover at a time,” said Harold.

“Was that seventy-five pound’s worth of the Widow swallowed by one lover in a week?” asked Archie. “Oh, I’m sick of the whole concern. Don’t you mention Shakespeare to me again.”

“I won’t,” said Harold. “But it strikes me that Shakespeare is like Madame Roland’s Liberty.”

“Whose Liberty?”

“Madame Roland’s.”

“Oh, she’s a dressmaker of Bond Street, I suppose. They’re all Madames there. I dare say I’ve got a bill from her to pay with the rest of them. Mrs. Mowbray has dealt with them all. Now I’m off. I thought I’d drop in and tell you all that happened, as you’re accountable for my meeting Norah.”

“You will give her my best regards and warmest congratulations,” said Harold. “Accept the same yourself.”

“You had a good time at their Irish place yourself, hadn’t you?” said Archie. “How was it that you didn’t fall in love with Norah when you were there? That’s what has puzzled me. How is it that every tarty chip didn’t

want to marry her? Oh, I forgot that you—well, wasn't there a girl with lovely eyes in Ireland?"

"You have heard of Irish girls and their eyes," said Harold.

"She had wonderful gray eyes," said Archie. Harold became grave. "Oh, yes, Norah has a pair of eyes too, and she keeps them wide open. She told me a good deal about their party in Ireland. She took it for granted that you—"

"Archie," said Harold, "like a good chap don't you ever talk about that to me again."

"All right, I'll not," said Archie. "Only, you see, I thought that you wouldn't mind now, as everyone says that she's going to marry Airey, the M.P. for some place or other. I knew that you'd be glad to hear that I'd fired out the Legitimate."

"So I am—very glad."

Archie was off, having abandoned as futile his well-meant attempts to balance the quill on the toe first of one boot, then of the other.

He was off, and Harold was standing at the window, watching him gathering up his reins and sending his horses at a pretty fair pace into the square.

It had fallen—the blow had fallen. She was going to marry Edmund Airey.

Could he blame her?

He felt that he had treated her with a baseness that deserved the severest punishment—such punishment as was now in her power to inflict. She had trusted him with all her heart—all her soul. She had given herself up to him freely, and he had made her the victim of a fraud. That was how he had repaid her for her trustfulness.

He did not stir from the window for hours. He thought of her without any bitterness—all his bitterness was divided between the thoughts of his own cruelty and the thoughts of Edmund Airey's cleverness. He did not know which was the more contemptible; but the conclusion to which he came, after devoting some time to the consideration of the question of the relative contemptibility of the two, was that, on the whole, Edmund Airey's cleverness was the more abhorrent.

But Archie Brown, after leaving St. James's, drove with his customary rapidity to Connaught Square, to tell of his achievement to Norah.

Miss Innisfail, while fully recognizing the personal obligations of Archie to the Shakesperian drama, had agreed with her father that this devotion should not be an absorbing one. She had had a hint or two that it absorbed a good deal of money, and though she had been assured by Archie that no one could say a word against Mrs. Mowbray's character, yet, like Harold—perhaps even better than Harold—she knew that Mrs. Mowbray was an extremely well-dressed woman. She listened with interest to Archie's account of how he had accomplished that process of "firing out" in regard to the Legitimate artists; and when he had told her all, she could not help wondering if Mrs. Mowbray would be quite as well dressed in the future as she had been in the past.

Archie then went on to tell her how he had called upon Harold, and how Harold had congratulated him.

"You didn't forget to tell him that people are saying that Mr. Airey is going to marry Miss Avon?" said Norah.

"Have I ever forgotten to carry out one of your commissions?" he asked.

"Good gracious! You didn't suggest that you were commissioned by me to tell him that?"

"Not likely. That's not the sort of new potatoes I am. I was on the cautious side, and I didn't even mention the name of the girl." He did not think it necessary to say that the reason for his adoption of this prudent course was that he had forgotten the name of the girl. "No, but when I told him that Airey was going to marry her, he gave me a look."

"A look? What sort of a look?"

"I don't know. The sort of a look a chap would give to a surgeon who had just snipped off his leg. Poor old Harry looked a bit cut up. Then he turned to me and said as gravely as a parson—a bit graver than some parsons—that he'd feel obliged to me if I'd never mention her name again."

"But you hadn't mentioned her name, you said."

"Neither I had. He didn't mention it either. I can only give you an idea of what he said, I won't take my oath about the exact words. But I'll take my oath that he was more knocked down than any chap I ever came across."

"I knew it," said Norah. "He's in love with her still. Mamma says he's not; but I know perfectly well that he is. She doesn't care a scrap for Mr. Airey."

"How do you know that?"

"I know it."

"Oh."

CHAPTER LV.—ON SHAKESPEARE AND ARCHIE BROWN.

IT was early on the same afternoon that Beatrice Avon received intimation of a visitor—a lady, the butler said, who gave the name of Mrs. Mowbray.

“I do not know any Mrs. Mowbray, but, of course, I’ll see her,” was the reply that Beatrice gave to the inquiry if she were at home.

“Was it possible,” she thought, “that her visitor was the Mrs. Mowbray whose portraits in the character of Cymbeline were in all the illustrated papers?”

Before Beatrice, under the impulse of this thought, had glanced at herself in a mirror—for a girl does not like to appear before a woman of the highest reputation (for beauty) with hair more awry than is consistent with tradition—her mind was set at rest. There may have been many Mrs. Mowbrays in London, but there was only one woman with such a figure, and such a face.

She looked at Beatrice with undisguised interest, but without speaking for some moments. Equally frank was the interest that was apparent on the face of Beatrice, as she went forward to meet and to greet her visitor.

She had heard that Mrs. Mowbray’s set of sables had cost someone—perhaps even Mrs. Mowbray herself—seven hundred guineas.

“Thank you, I will not sit down,” said Mrs. Mowbray. “I feel that I must apologize for this call.”

“Oh, no,” said Beatrice.

“Oh, yes; I should,” said Mrs. Mowbray. “I will do better, however, for I will make my visit a short one. The fact is, Miss Avon, I have heard so much about you during the past few months from—from—several people, I could not help being interested in you—greatly interested indeed.”

“That was very kind of you,” said Beatrice, wondering what further revelation was coming.

“I was so interested in you that I felt I must call upon you. I used to know Lady Innisfail long ago.”

“Was it Lady Innisfail who caused you to be interested in me?” asked Beatrice.

“Well, not exactly,” said Mrs. Mowbray; “but it was some of Lady Innisfail’s guests—some who were entertained at the Irish Castle. I used also to know Mrs. Lampson—Lord Fotheringay’s daughter. How terrible the blow of his death must have been to her and her brother.”

“I have not seen Mrs. Lampson since,” said Beatrice, “but—”

“You have seen the present Lord Fotheringay? Will you let me say that I hope you have seen him—that you still see him? Do not think me a gossiping, prying old woman—I suppose I am old enough to be your mother—for expressing the hope that you will see him, Miss Avon. He is the best man on earth.”

Beatrice had flushed the first moment that her visitor had alluded to Harold. Her flush had not decreased.

“I must decline to speak with you on the subject of Lord Fotheringay, Mrs. Mowbray,” said Beatrice, somewhat unequally.

“Do not say that,” said Mrs. Mowbray, in the most musical of pleading tones. “Do not say that. You would make me feel how very gross has been my effrontery in coming to you.”

“No, no; please do not think that,” cried Beatrice, yielding, as every human being could not but yield, to the lovely voice and the gracious manner of Mrs. Mowbray. What would be resented as a gross piece of insolence on the part of anyone else, seemed delicately gracious coming from Mrs. Mowbray. Her insolence was more acceptable than another woman’s compliment. She knew to what extent she could draw upon her resources, both as regards men and women. It was only in the case of a young cub such as Archie that she now and again overrated her powers of fascination. She knew that she would never pat Archie’s red head again.

“Yes, you will let me speak to you, or I shall feel that you regard my visit as an insolent intrusion.”

Beatrice felt for the first time in her life that she could fully appreciate the fable of the Sirens. She felt herself hypnotized by that mellifluous voice—by the steady sympathetic gaze of the lovely eyes that were resting upon her face.

“He is so fond of you,” Mrs. Mowbray went on. “There is no lover’s quarrel that will not vanish if looked at straight in the face. Let me look at yours, my dear child, and I will show you how that demon of distrust can be exorcised.” Beatrice had become pale. The word *distrust* had broken the spell of the Siren.

“Mrs. Mowbray,” said she, “I must tell you again that on no consideration—on no pretence whatever shall I discuss Lord Fotheringay with you.”

“Why not with me, my child?” said Mrs. Mowbray. “Because I distrust you—no I don’t mean that. I only mean that—that you have given me no reason to trust you. Why have you come to me in this way, may I ask you? It is not possible that you came here on the suggestion of Lord Fotheringay.”

“No; I only came to see what sort of girl it is that Mr. Airey is going to marry,” said Mrs. Mowbray, with a wicked little smile.

Beatrice was no longer pale. She stood with clenched hands before Mrs. Mowbray, with her eyes fixed upon her face.

Then she took a step toward the bell rope. “One moment,” said Mrs. Mowbray. “Do you expect to marry Edmund Airey?”

Beatrice turned, and looked again at her visitor. If the girl had been less feminine she would have gone on to the bell rope, and have pulled it gently. She did nothing of the sort. She gave a laugh, and said, “I shall marry him if I please.”

She was feminine.

So was Mrs. Mowbray.

“Will you?” she said. “Do you fancy for a moment—are you so infatuated that you can actually fancy that I—I—Gwendoline Mowbray, will allow you—you—to take Edmund Airey away from me? Oh, the child is mad—mad!”

"Do you mean to tell me," said Beatrice, coming close to her, "that Edmund Airey is—is—a lover of yours?"

"Ah," said Mrs. Mowbray, smiling, "you do not live in our world, my child."

"No, I do not," said Beatrice. "I now see why you have come to me to-day."

"I told you why."

"Yes; you told me. Edmund Airey has been your lover."

"*Has been?* My child, it is only when I please that a lover of mine becomes associated with a past tense. I have not yet allowed Edmund Airey to associate with my 'have beens.' It was from him that I learned all about you. He alluded to you in his letters to me from Ireland merely as 'a gray eye or so.' You still mean to marry him?"

"I still mean to do what I please," said Beatrice. She had now reached the bell rope and she pulled it very gently.

"You are an extremely beautiful young person," said Mrs. Mowbray. "But you have not been able to keep close to you a man like Harold Wynne—a man with a perfect genius for fidelity. And yet you expect—"

Here the door was opened by the butler. Mrs. Mowbray allowed her sentence to dwindle away into the conventionalities of leave-taking with a stranger.

Beatrice found herself standing with flushed cheeks and throbbing heart at the door through which her visitor had passed.

It was somewhat remarkable that the most vivid impression which she retained of the rather exciting series of scenes in which she had participated, was that Mrs. Mowbray's sables were incomparably the finest that she had ever seen.

Mrs. Mowbray could scarcely have driven round the great square before the butler inquired if Miss Avon was at home to Miss Innisfail. In another minute Norah Innisfail was embracing her with the warmth of a true-hearted girl who comes to tell another of her engagement to marry an eligible man, or a handsome man, let him be eligible or otherwise.

"I want to be the first to give you the news, my dearest Beatrice," said Norah. "That is why I came alone. I know you have not heard the news."

"I hear no news, except about things that do not interest me in the least," said Beatrice.

"My news concerns myself," said Norah.

"Then it's sure to interest me," cried Beatrice.

"It's so funny! But yet it's very serious," said Norah. "The fact is that I'm going to marry Archie Brown."

"Archie Brown?" said Beatrice. "I hope he is the best man in the world—he should be, to deserve you, my dear Norah."

"I thought perhaps you might have known him," said Norah. "I find that there are a good many people still who do not know Archie Brown, in spite of the Legitimate Theatre and all that he has done for Shakespeare."

"The Legitimate Theatre. Is that where Mrs. Mowbray acts?"

"Only for another week. Oh, yes, Archie takes a great interest in Shakespeare. He meant the Legitimate Theatre to be a monument to the interest he takes in Shakespeare, and so it would have been, if the people had only attended properly, as they should have done. Archie is very much disappointed, of course; but he says, very rightly, that the Lord Chamberlain isn't nearly particular enough in the plays that he allows to be represented, and so the public have lost confidence in the theatres—they are never sure that something objectionable will not be played—and go to the Music Halls, which can always be trusted. Archie says he'll turn the Legitimate into a Music Hall—that is, if he can't sell the lease."

"Whether he does so or not, I congratulate you with all my heart, my dearest Norah."

"If you had come down to Abbeylands in time—before that awful thing happened—you would have met Archie. We met him there. Mamma took a great fancy to him at once, and I think that I must have done the same. At any rate I did when he came to stay with us. He's such a good fellow, with red hair—not the sort that the old Venetian painters liked, but another sort. Strictly speaking some of his features—his mouth, for instance—are too large, but if you look at him in one position, when he has his face turned away from you, he's quite—quite—ah—quite curious—almost nice. You'll like him, I know."

"I'm sure of it," said Beatrice.

"Yes; and he's such a friend of Harold Wynne's," continued the artful Norah. "Why, what's the matter with you, Beatrice? You are as pale—dearest Beatrice, you and I were always good friends. You know that I always liked Harold."

"Do not talk about him, Norah."

"Why should I not talk about him? Tell me that."

"He is gone—gone away."

"Not he. He's too wretched to go away anywhere. Archie was with him to-day, and when he heard that—well, the way some people are talking about you and Mr. Airey, he had not a word to throw to a dog—Archie told me so."

"Oh, do not talk of him, Norah."

"Why should I not?"

"Because—ah, because he's the only one worth talking about, and now he's gone from me, and I'll never see him again—never, never again!" Before she had come to the end of her sentence, Beatrice was lying sobbing on the unsympathetic cushion of the sofa—the same cushion that had absorbed her tears when she had told Harold to leave her.

"My dearest Beatrice," whispered Norah, kneeling beside her, with her face also down a spare corner of the cushion, "I have known how you were moping here alone. I've come to take you away. You'll come down with us to our place at Netherford. There's a lake with ice on it, and there's Archie, and many other pretty things.

Oh, yes, you'll come, and we'll all be happy."

"Norah," cried Beatrice, starting up almost wildly, "Mr. Airey will be here in half an hour to ask me to marry him. He wrote to say that he would be here, and I know what he means." Mr. Airey did call in half an hour, and he found Beatrice—as he felt certain she should—waiting to receive him, wearing a frock that he admired, and lace that he approved of.

But in the meantime Beatrice and Norah had had a few words together beyond those just recorded.

CHAPTER LVI.—ON THE BITTER CRY.

EDMUND AIREY drank his cup of tea which Beatrice poured out for him, and while doing so, he told her of the progress that was being made by the agitation of the Opposition and the counter agitation of the Government. There was no disguising the fact that the country—like the fool that it was—had been caught by the bitter cry from Siberia. There was nothing like a bitter cry, Edmund said, for catching hold of the country. If any cry was only bitter enough it would succeed. Fortunately, however, the Government, in its appeal against the Atheism of the Continent, had also struck a chord that vibrated through the length and breadth of England and Scotland. The Government orators were nightly explaining that no really sincere national effort had ever been made to convert the Jews. To be sure, some endeavours had been made from time to time to effect this great object—in the days of Isaac of York the gridiron and forceps had been the auxiliaries of the Church to bring about the conversion of the Hebrew race; and, more recently, the potent agency of drawing-room meetings and a house-to-house collection had been resorted to; but the results had been disappointing. Statistics were forthcoming—nothing impresses the people of Great Britain more than a long array of figures, Edmund Airey explained—to show that, whereas, on any part of the West coast of Africa where rum was not prohibited, for one pound sterling 348 negroes could be converted—the rate was 0.01 where rum was prohibited—yet for a subscription of five pounds, one could only depend on 0.31 of the Jewish race—something less than half an adult Hebrew—being converted. The Government orators were asking how long so scandalous a condition of affairs was to be allowed to continue, and so forth.

Oh, yes, he explained, things were going on merrily. In three days Parliament would meet, and the Opposition had drafted their Amendment to the Address, "That in the opinion of this House no programme of legislation can be considered satisfactory that does not include a protest against the horrors daily enacted in Siberia."

If this Amendment were carried it would, of course, be equivalent to a Vote of Censure upon the Government, and the Ministers would be compelled to resign, Edmund explained to Beatrice.

She was very attentive, and when he had completed a clever account of the political machinery by which the operations of the Nonconformist Conscience are controlled, she said quietly, "My sympathies are certainly with Siberia. I hope you will vote for that Amendment."

He laughed in his superior way.

"That is so like a girl," said he. "You are carried away by your sympathies of the moment. You do not wait to reason out any question."

"I dare say you are right," said she, smiling. "Our conscience is not susceptible of those political influences to which you referred just now."

"They are dangerous guides—the feelings'," said he, "at least from a standpoint of politics."

"But there are, thank God, other standpoints in the world from which humanity may be viewed," said she.

"There are," said he. "And I also join with you in saying, 'thank God!' Do you fancy that I am here to-day—that I have been here so frequently during the past two months, from a political motive, Beatrice?"

"I cannot tell," she replied. "Have you not just said that the feelings are dangerous guides?"

"They lead one into danger," said he. "There can be no doubt about that."

"Have you ever allowed them to lead you?" she asked, with another smile.

"Only once, and that is now," said he. "With you I have thrown away every guide but my feelings. A few months ago I could not have believed it possible that I should do so. But with God and Woman all things are possible. That is why I am here to-day to ask you if you think it possible that you could marry me."

She had risen to her feet, not by a sudden impulse, but slowly. She was not looking at him. Her eyes were fixed upon some imaginary point beyond him. She was plainly under the influence of some very strong feeling. A full minute had passed before she said, "You should not have come to me with that request, Mr. Airey."

"Why should I not? Do you think that I am here through any other impulse than that of my feelings?"

"How can I tell?" she said, and now she was looking at him. "How can I tell which you hold dearer—political advancement, or my love?"

"How can you doubt me for a moment, Beatrice?" he said reproachfully—almost mournfully. "Why am I waiting anxiously for your acceptance of my offer, if I do not hold your love more precious than all other considerations in the world?"

"Do you so hold it?"

"Indeed I do."

"Then I have told you that my sympathies are altogether with Siberia. Vote for the Amendment of the

Opposition."

"What can you mean, Beatrice?"

"I mean that if you vote for the Amendment, you will have shown me that you are capable of rising above mere party considerations. I don't make this the price of my love, remember. I don't make any compact to marry you if you adopt the course that I suggest. I only say that you will have proved to me that your words are true—that you hold something higher than political expediency."

She looked at him.

He looked at her.

There was a long pause.

"You are unreasonable. I cannot do it," he said.

"Good-bye," said she.

He looked at the hand which she had thrust out to him, but he did not take it.

"You really mean me to vote against my party?" said he.

"What other way can you prove to me that you are superior to party considerations?" said she.

"It would mean self-effacement politically," said he. "Oh, you do not appreciate the gravity of the thing."

He turned abruptly away from her and strode across the room.

She remained silent where he had left her.

"I did not think you capable of so cruel a caprice as this," he continued, from the fireplace. "You do not understand the consequences of my voting against my party."

"Perhaps I do not," said she. "But I have given you to understand the consequences of not doing so."

"Then we must part," said he, approaching her. "Good-bye," said she, once more.

He took her hand this time. He held it for a moment irresolutely, then he dropped it.

"Are you really in earnest, Beatrice?" said he. "Do you really mean to put me to this test?"

"I never was more in earnest in my life," said she. "Think over the matter—let me entreat of you to think over it," he said, earnestly.

"And you will think over it also?"

"Yes, I will think over it. Oh, Beatrice, do not allow yourself to be carried away by this caprice. It is unworthy of you."

"Do not be too hard on me, I am only a woman," said she, very meekly.

She was only a woman. He felt that very strongly as he walked away.

And yet he had told Harold that he had great hope of Woman, by reason of her femininity.

And yet he had told Harold that he understood Woman and her motives.

"Papa," said Beatrice, from the door of the historian's study. "Papa, Mr. Edmund Airey has just been here to ask me to marry him."

"That's right, my dear," said the great historian. "Marry him, or anyone else you please, only run away and play with your dolls now. I'm very busy."

This was precisely the answer that Beatrice expected. It was precisely the answer that anyone might have expected from a man who permitted such a *mÃ©nage* as that which prevailed under his roof.

CHAPTER LVII.—ON THE REJECTED ADDRESSES.

THE next day Beatrice went with Norah Innisfail and her mother to their home in Nethershire. Two days afterwards the Legitimate Theatre closed its doors, and Parliament opened its doors. The Queen's Speech was read, and a member of the Opposition moved the Amendment relating to Siberia. The Debate on the Address began.

On the second night of the debate Edmund Airey called at the historian's house and, on asking for Miss Avon, learned that she was visiting Lady Innisfail in Nethershire. On the evening of the fourth day of the debate—the Division on the Amendment was to be taken that night—he drove in great haste to the same house, and learned that Miss Avon was still in Nethershire, but that she was expected home on the following day.

He partook of a hasty dinner at his club, and, writing out a telegram, gave it to a hall-porter to send to the nearest telegraph office.

The form was addressed to Miss Avon, in care of Lord Innisfail, Netherford Hall, Netherford, Nethershire, and it contained the following words, "*I will do it. Edmund.*"

He did it.

He made a brief speech amid the cheers of the Opposition and the howls of the Government party, acknowledging his deep sympathy with the unhappy wretches who were undergoing the unspeakable horrors of a Siberian exile, and thus, he said he felt compelled, on conscientious grounds (ironical cheers from the Government) to vote for the Amendment.

He went into the lobby with the Opposition.

It was an Irish member who yelled out "Judas!"

The Government was defeated by a majority of one vote, and there was a "scene" in the House.

Some time ago an enterprising person took up his abode in the midst of an African jungle, in order to study the methods by which baboons express themselves. He might have spared himself that trouble, if he had been present upon the occasion of a "scene" in the House of Commons. He would, from a commanding position in the Strangers' Gallery, have learned all that he had set his heart upon acquiring—and more.

It was while the "scene" was being enacted that Edmund Airey had put into his hand the telegraph form written out by himself in his club.

"*Telegraph Office at Netherford closes at 6 p.m.*," were the words that the hall-porter had written on the back of the form.

The next day he drove to the historian's, and inquired if Miss Avon had returned.

She was in the drawing-room, the butler said.

With triumph—a sort of triumph—in his heart, and on his face, he ascended the staircase.

He thought that he had never before seen her look so beautiful. Surely there was triumph on her face as well! It was glowing, and her eyes were more lustrous even than usual. She had plainly just returned, for she had on a travelling dress.

"Beatrice, you saw the newspapers? You saw that I have done it?" he cried, exultantly.

"Done what?" she inquired. "I have seen no newspaper to-day."

"What? Is it possible that you have not heard that I voted last night for the Amendment?" he cried.

"I heard nothing," she replied.

"I wrote a telegram last evening, telling you that I meant to do it, but it appears that the office at Netherford closes at six, so it could not be sent. I did not know how much you were to me until yesterday, Beatrice."

"Stop," she said. "I was married to Harold Wynne an hour ago."

He looked at her for some moments, and then dropped into a chair.

"You have made a fool of me," he said.

"No," she said. "I could not do that. If I had got your telegram in time last evening I would have replied to it, telling you that, whatever step you took, it would not bring you any nearer to me. Harold Wynne, you see, came to me again. I had promised to marry him when we were together at that seal-hunt, but—well, something came between us."

"And you revenged yourself upon me? You made a fool of me!"

"If I had tried to do so, would it have been remarkable, Mr. Airey? Supposing that I had been made a fool of by the compact into which you entered with Miss Craven, who would have been to blame? Was there ever a more shameful compact entered into by a clever man and a clever woman to make a victim of a girl who believed that the world was overflowing with sincerity? I was made acquainted with the nature of that compact of yours, Mr. Airey, but I cannot say that I have yet learned what are the terms of your compact—or is it a contract?—with Mrs. Mowbray. Still, I know something. And yet you complain that I have made a fool of you."

He had completely recovered himself before she had got to the end of her little speech. He had wondered how on earth she had become acquainted with the terms of his compact with Helen. When, however, she referred to Mrs. Mowbray, he felt sure that it was Mrs. Mowbray who had betrayed him.

He was beginning to learn something of women and their motives.

"Nothing is likely to be gained by this sort of recrimination," said he, rising. "You have ruined my career."

She laughed, not bitterly but merrily, he knew all along that she had never fully appreciated the gravity of the step which she had compelled him—that was how he put it—to take. She had not even had the interest to glance at a newspaper to see how he had voted. But then she had not read the leading articles in the Government organs which were plentifully besprinkled with his name printed in small capitals. That was his one comforting thought.

She laughed.

"Oh, no, Mr. Airey," said she. "Your career is not ruined. Clever men are not so easily crushed, and you are a very clever man—so clever as to be able to make me clever, if that were possible."

"You have crushed me," he said. "Good-bye."

"If I wished to crush you I should have married you," said she. "No woman can crush a man unless she is married to him. Good-bye."

The butler opened the door. "Is my husband in yet?" she asked of the man.

"His lordship has not yet returned, my lady," said the butler, who had once lived in the best families—far removed from literature—and who was, consequently, able to roll off the titles with proper effect.

"Then you will not have an opportunity of seeing him, I'm afraid," she said, turning to Mr. Airey.

"I think I already said good-bye, Lady Fotheringay."

"I do believe that you did. If I did not, however, I say it now. Good-bye, Mr. Airey."

He got into a hansom and drove straight to Helen Craven's house. It was the most dismal drive he had ever had. He could almost fancy that the message boys in the streets were, in their accustomed high spirits, pointing to him with ridicule as the man who had turned his party out of office.

Helen Craven was in her boudoir. She liked receiving people in that apartment. She understood its lights.

He found that she had read the newspapers.

She stared at him as he entered, and gave him a limp hand.

"What on earth did you mean by voting—" she began.

"You may well ask," said he. "I was a fool. I was made a fool of by that girl. She made me vote against my party."

"And she refuses to marry you now?"

"She married Harold Wynne an hour ago."

Helen Craven did not fling herself about when she heard this piece of news. She only sat very rigid on her little sofa.

"Yes," resumed Edmund. "She is ill-treated by one man, but she marries him, and revenges herself upon another! Isn't that like a woman? She has ruined my career."

Then it was that Helen Craven burst into a long, loud, and very unmusical laugh—a laugh that had a suspicion of a shrill shriek about some of its tones. When she recovered, her eyes were full of the tears which that paroxysm of laughter had caused.

"You are a fool, indeed!" said she. "You are a fool if you cannot see that your career is just beginning. People are talking of you to-day as the Conscientious One—the One Man with a Conscience. Isn't the reputation for a Conscience the beginning of success in England?"

"Helen," he cried, "will you marry me? With our combined money we can make ourselves necessary to any party. Will you marry me?"

"I will," she said. "I will marry you with pleasure—now. I will marry anyone—now."

"Give me your hand, Helen," he cried. "We understand one another—that is enough to start with. And as for that other—oh, she is nothing but a woman after all!"

He never spoke truer words.

But sometimes when he is alone he thinks that she treated him badly.

Did she?

THE END.

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

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