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FRANK SINCLAIR'S WIFE,

AND OTHER STORIES.

BY

MRS. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF

'GEORGE GEITH,' 'TOO MUCH ALONE,' 'HOME, SWEET HOME,'
'THE EARL'S PROMISE,' ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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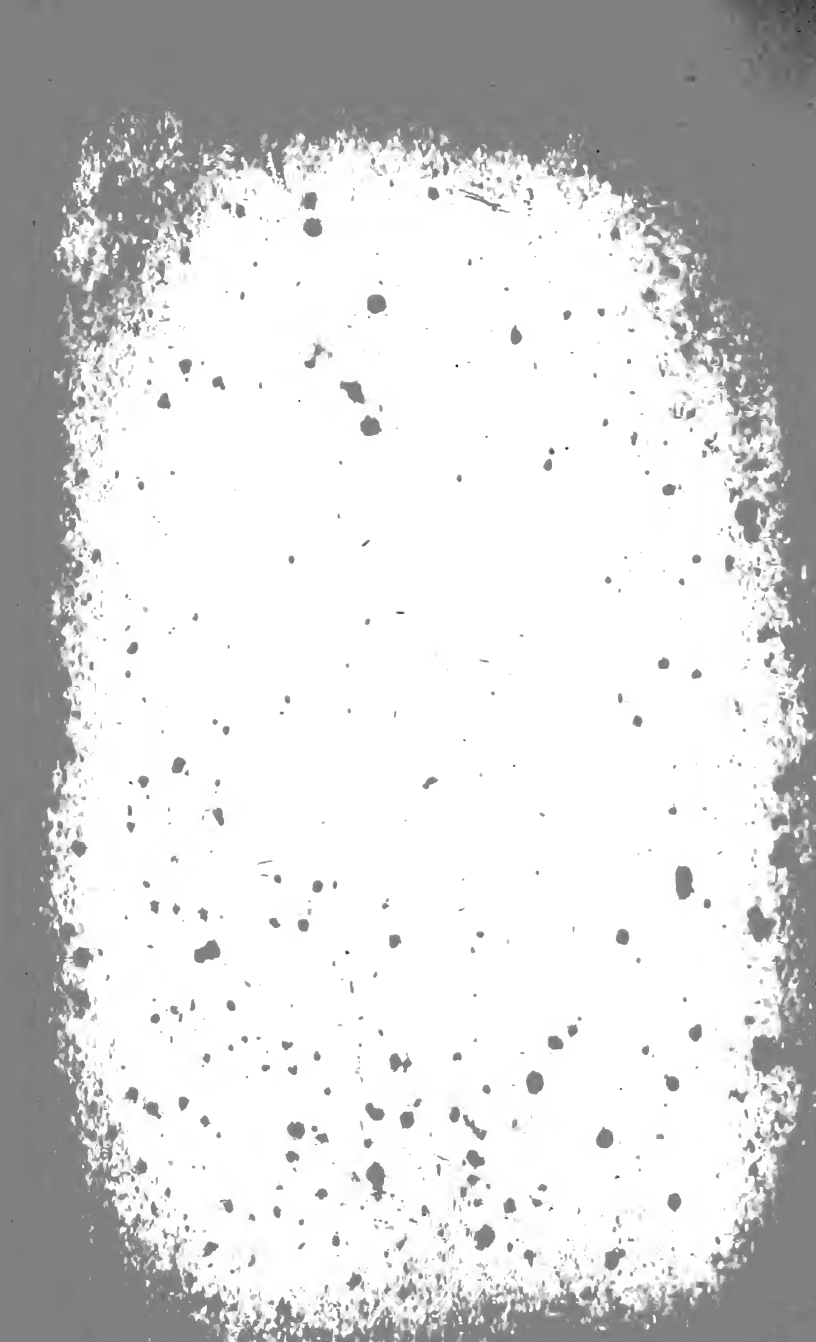
THE THIRD VOLUME.

MY LAST LOVE.

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MY LAST LOVE,

A SEQUEL TO

MY FIRST LOVE.



MY LAST LOVE.



CHAPTER I.

AFTER HER MARRIAGE.

THROUGHOUT the whole of my professional career it has been a comfort to me to remember that when the great case of 'Aylesbury *v.* Montfort' was lost, as lost it was, I had no share in the disaster.

To this hour I cannot understand why Aylesbury was beaten, more particularly as when he ultimately carried his cause to the House of Lords, he gained the day.

Trifles, as people regard them, influence verdicts. The state of the foreman's liver—

the fact of some pig-headed juror having dined too late and too well the evening preceding—the temper in which another entered his matutinal omnibus, said temper being influenced by the lateness of breakfast, or a request for cash from his wife—these things, and things such as these, are sufficient occasionally to rule the fortunes of Cæsar, whilst the outer world considers the fault lies either with Cæsar or Cæsar's friends, and censures and chides both accordingly.

Wherefore, the fates having ruled I was to achieve no success in love, I felt glad—when I was capable of feeling glad about anything—that the jade Fortune had not served me the sorry trick of taking not only Rose, but the chances of fame and wealth also.

After all, if a man must wear the willow, it is as well he should wear it in a decent hat.

I think there is a good deal of truth in

that well-worn adage concerning love and cards. For my own part I cannot now recall an instance of a man who proved a winner in both. The world of course talks largely about handsome wives, and lovely children, and a princely income, as it talks largely about most things appertaining to its favourite sons and daughters; but I, who have listened to as many confidences as most, know quite well that to the majority of human beings there comes an hour when the devil or luck says, "How will you take it—gold or affection? It is impossible to grasp both—which shall it be?"

Whilst some poor wretches handing the whole of their future into the hands of fate, get nothing back in exchange—for every rule has its exceptions—and there will always be some men and some women with whom nothing shall prosper till the end of this world's volume.

As I was remarking, it has ever been a comfort to me that I had nothing to do with

the great case of 'Aylesbury v. Montfort.' When it came on, and an intelligent jury decided Montfort should retain possession of a property to which he had no more right than myself, I was lying in Staple's Inn ill unto death, with my mother and Joan tending me. Everyone of course said it was the shock of seeing Rose another man's wife which brought on the fever, for there is a great deal of that sort of folly believed, but when I grew better I knew differently. It is never so much the shock we receive, as what we do after the shock, that stretches us on a sick bed. Dick takes to brandy probably, and Harry either to starving or dissipation; I, Tom, walked for hours and hours through the snow, which was beginning to thaw, got thoroughly soaked, and then sat in my wet clothes while the night express bore me back to town.

Arrived in town, I thought to avert all chance of illness by a glass of something hot and strong—but the remedy either came

too late or was not of the right kind, for after that night there ensues a blank in my memory which has never been thoroughly filled up, even by those obliging friends who subsequently informed me I was delirious for several days, and talked a great deal of nonsense; a feat often performed, I have since had occasion to remark, by people in the enjoyment of thoroughly sound health.

The first evidence of having recovered my senses which I gave was trying to rise and dress, in order to assist in the discomfiture of Montfort; but as I fainted in this endeavour, and as, moreover, the jury were deliberating on their verdict at that very time, I made no subsequent attempt to appear in the case.

By slow degrees I realized that weeks had gone by whilst I lay unconscious of their passage, that Rose's honeymoon must be over, that as things rush on now-a-days, my trouble was an old one, that my former life with its hopes, its fantasies, its fears, its

struggles, was at an end, and that if I were to do any good for myself or others in the future life, which I could not help living, I must try to forget everything connected with that past existence—even the sound of the busy mill wheel and the still beauty of the woods through which, when the white flowers of the wild anemone carpeted them, Rose and I had wandered hand-in-hand together.

My mistress was gone—and I knew that if I searched the wide world through I should never find another love, that could be my love, just as she had been—but after all I whispered to myself, when at length I felt strong enough to take courage and look out over the days that were still to be gone through, “Love is not all—it is not everything.”

And so far I was right—but ah! friends, I know now love is a great deal. Nevertheless, whether the day be cheered by sunshine or darkened by clouds, it has to be got

through, and it is as well to accept whatever sort of weather God send with decent propriety.

My day had opened with the loss of Rose—and what a loss that was I may never hope to tell; but once I was strong enough, to consider the position, I determined not to let my sorrow master me.

There were various ways in which I could have shown my regret and evinced the grief I experienced. For example, I might have enlisted; for some inscrutable reason men have been known ere now to adopt this mode of comfort; I could have cut my throat, and so contributed many paragraphs to the newspaper literature of the country—further, it was competent for me to try whether strong waters might not produce the same effect as those of Lethe; or to shut myself up like persons I had then read of, and whose duplicates I have since known; or to plunge into what people vaguely term a vortex of dissipation; or to indulge in unlimited tobacco,

accompanied by unlimited beer—the means required for obtaining such consolations not being excessive. But as neither enlisting, nor suicide, nor intemperance, nor eccentricity, was likely to give me back Rose, and further I had parents to assist, and brothers and sisters to push on in the world, I thought it best to continue in the course I had begun, and to proceed along the road I was previously travelling—only without Rose.

Only ! well—well—in every life there is its “but,” and its “if,” and its “only.”

It was in the cottage near Southgate I fully regained my strength, for when once I could bear the jolting, my mother and Joan moved me there. Never shall I forget the delicious languor—the luxurious idleness of the days and weeks which followed. Although at first I could scarcely endure to look upon the face of Nature, by reason of the memories she recalled, yet when she came to me as she did, after a time, beauti-

ful as ever, dressed in her robes of richest green, with flowers in her hands, and buds in her hair, with the lovely tints of spring on her face, and smiles playing in her eyes, I yielded myself to the seductions of old, and lay on the green sward, blessing the bright May time, while the wandering breezes scented with hawthorn, and the delicate fragrance of the wild dog roses kissed my forehead and caressed my cheek.

I got well there—slowly but surely I stole back to health, and then in the glad summer weather what walks Joan and the children and I had together !

There is not an inch of all that neighbourhood I could not traverse blindfold at this moment, unless indeed it might be the country near Colney Hatch and Wood Green, where I am told a town has sprung up ; where, in place of blackberries, there are plantations of bricks and mortar, and instead of wide common lands little suburban houses with a patch of garden in front, protected from

the tread of profane feet, by iron railings, all of one pattern, and all painted one colour.

But those winding lanes, those unexpected fields paths, shall I ever forget their peaceful beauty? I am old now, and the past may return to me no more; but yet as I write there comes back a not unpleasant memory, nothing more, alas! of the strength I possessed when we used to pace under the arching trees of a certain lane leading off to Berry Street, or when in a borrowed phaeton I was wont to drive Joan around by Chingford church, the old church I mean, and along to the Forest, by roads, the very thought of which touches something in my heart, the exact nature of which I shall never be able to define, unless in another world we are as capable of describing our feelings as we are of realizing them in this.

It was during that long holiday, also, that I first fully comprehended the treasure God had given us all in Joan. If the little

cottage were a very bower of prettiness, it was to Joan it owed its beauty. Under her the younger fry worked with a will. It was very funny to hear Joan talk to them as though they had all emigrated to Australia, and were really in a strange land, settlers to whom nothing they had to do ought to come amiss. Two of the boys were already in situations, and after their morals and comforts the old lady in Queen Anne Street was supposed to look with anxious attention for six days out of the seven; but once the seventh day came, or rather the evening of the seventh, it might have made an old man young again to hear the voices of those lads as they went about the cottage and the farm, shouting to the smaller fry and whistling to the dogs, and halloaing with all the mighty power of their strong lungs.

I thought with Rose the whole happiness of my life had evaporated, leaving behind it nothing save what was stale, flat, and unprofitable; but I know now that though my

love was gone, my capability for enjoyment was left, and that, although I had my moods and tenses of deep depression and profound melancholy, still I enjoyed that summer very fairly.

For one thing I had not yet quite realized, what all the days of my life without Rose meant; for another, though I beheld her Walter Surry's wife, I had not entirely grasped the fact that I could never again have either part or lot in her. There is nothing so difficult to believe in as a certainty, till we have lived long enough to feel it is a certainty, and not a delusion.

For example, who that has lost any loved object by means of death, ever, even in the first agony of grief, grasps just what it all means then, all it must mean in the future? Say, a child has passed to the eternal shores, do you suppose father or mother quite understands the void that will be left? The tiny hands are still, the pattering feet quiet, the prattling tongue mute, the place it occu-

pied empty; but the knowledge of all this comes happily by degrees, just as when a man's wife dies he scarcely at first comprehends how keenly he may subsequently feel her loss—say, for instance, in the matter of buttons.

•And in those days when I walked round Enfield Chase, and mooned about Winchmore Hill, when I became acquainted with grassy lanes, where the convolvulus climbed and the brambles trailed, when I crossed every ford, and knew every field path, thorough knowledge had not come to me of how desolate a thing life—even a successful life—might prove without Rose.

Vaguely, I imagine, there had sprung up a hope in my heart, that if I worked hard and made a name, Rose might still be mine. As it is a simple impossibility ever to persuade a disinherited man that a dozen lives will not fall in, and the coveted property ultimately revert to him, so I was wont to picture plague, pestilence, and famine let loose, in

order that Walter Surry might be removed from the earth, and I get mine own again.

He hunts, I thought, and men have often been killed by taking an awkward leap with an awkward horse; he shoots, it may be he will meet his end in one of his own preserves: he has a yacht, it may go to the bottom: he drives fast and furiously, some day perchance his fiery steeds may carry him to his death. Ideas such as these floated through my mind, whilst it never occurred to me that death might develope a fancy for me, or fall in love to more purpose than I had done with Rose—my Rose no longer.

It was not right, I knew, to picture Walter Surry dead, his wife a widow; and yet I imagine thoughts of the possibilities I have hinted at, broke the force of my fall. I was not cast out of the seventh heaven of my fool's paradise with never a straw to grasp at, and when I did reach the earth paradise was so far away, and the realities

of existence so urgently claiming attention, that I was fain to regard the story of 'My First Love,' which has been already told, as a sort of fairy tale that could never have had any tangible connection with my prosaic life.

She was gone. As one wakes in the morning, to find the fairest dream vanish with the first touch of light, so I awoke by degrees to a comprehension that Rose and I were parted for ever—that she could no more be my love than the dream could be dreamt over again, or the vision beheld a second time.

It seems to me only yesterday that I first saw her driving in the Park with her husband,—looking lovely, of course, and happy also.

I drew back behind a tree, so that her eyes might not rest on me, and when their carriage had passed, I walked off in an opposite direction, feeling as though I had received a stab, and were bleeding internally.

But time went by, and I grew accustomed to that spectacle; aye, even when I saw her fondling her boy—*his* son, I can honestly say my heart held a blessing for mother and child, though at the moment the waters of my life seemed bitter to me as those of Marah.

But I anticipate, and this is a fault in story-telling, critics say—which is probably true, since it would be expecting too much to suppose they should ever read a tale with sufficient attention to discriminate between the actual present and the indicated future.

CHAPTER II.

I PROPOSE.

So I went back to my chambers, my law books, and, after a time, to my writing. For a while it pleased me to put my thoughts on paper, to the end that Rose might read them; but soon—recollecting what a little goose she had always been, and how she required some one beside her to explain the meaning of the simplest ideas, to translate as it might be the hard words of a foreign tongue into commonplace English, to convert the guineas of great minds into the more familiar shillings and pence of ordinary exchange,—I gave up walking

on stilts, well knowing that Rose would only wonder what I could be doing up there, and finally began to write for that for which, sooner or later, all men and all women do write,—namely, money.

I needed money both personally and for the sake of my family. What my father had saved out of the wreck of his fortunes was almost exhausted, and though it is a hard thing for a man to contemplate supporting father and mother, brothers and sisters, still it was just then the work lying to my hand, and I took it accordingly.

The taste which first leaves a parent chargeable to the parish, and then refuses to pay the parish for keeping him, has never seemed to me exactly good; and, although I am aware there are diversities of opinion on this point, and that I have been often called a fool for my pains even by the wife of my bosom, still I venture diffidently to state, that I do not think I am in any way the poorer now because, to the best of my

limited ability, I helped to keep a roof over the heads of my father and mother, and to enable the younger children to provide for themselves. Some of the latter have done well and some ill, as must always be the case in large families. We have ne'er-dowells amongst our girls' husbands, and wasters amongst our boys, but there is no grave—for we have our dead—which I need avoid passing by reason of remembered neglect or coldness.

The worst trial we had amongst them all was Stephen, but he died with his head on Joan's shoulder, and his hand clasping mine. I did my best for them all, and though sometimes I think that best might have been better, had I either not married at all or married differently—still I cannot be quite sure—and as I did marry my wife there can be no earthly use in speculating upon the question.

The way I came to marry her was, that it seemed to be expected of me. People

may say this is no valid reason for taking a wife—but thousands of men marry for no other. There is a great deal of talk about love at the present time—more than there used to be in the days when youths and maidens had better opportunities of seeing one another, and grew fonder accordingly ; but looking round on my acquaintances and observing men's wives, I can come to no other conclusion than that partners for life are selected much after the fashion in which a house is taken.

For some reason or other a wife is desired, and if a man cannot just find what he wants or what suits him, or that somebody else steps in and takes it over his head, he puts up with what he can get. And perhaps in time the wife, being his own, he comes to like her—or, perhaps, being his own, he grows to dislike her—anyhow, the choice has been made and the woman taken, and then there being no help for it, when we see a poor wretch trying vainly to make

the best of a bad bargain, we insist with a bitter irony that he married for love.

I did not at any rate—and yet society has always been good enough to suppose so—to think me such a fool, in fact, as to imagine had I married for love I should not have married something very different. There are people who even now admire Mrs. Luttrell—vastly—she is younger than I, and has worn considerably better. Some ten years ago her portrait appeared on the Academy walls, and she really looked handsomer then than I had ever thought her before, which might certainly be owing to the artist's kindness. That portrait now hangs in a recess on one side of our dining-room mantelpiece, and always seems looking round into the other in search of another portrait, which shall never be painted, that of your humble servant; and I will say it is a tolerably faithful likeness of a lady most men might be proud of calling wife.

She is what is generally known as a "fine

woman " (I wonder men will use the phrase or women tolerate it), large, with a certain stateliness of carriage and *empressement* of manner. Girls, looking at her with a certain awe, think her, nevertheless, delightful ; but boys, amongst whom the bump of reverence is not so largely developed as is the case with their sisters, never seem to feel quite at ease in her presence.

During the whole of our married life her prudence and discretion have been beyond all praise. Admired, she has yet not flirted, and I have never lost five minutes of my natural rest owing to any jealous misgivings concerning her. Further, she has borne me sons and daughters—two of the former and three of the latter—and has ruled my household, if not—well, shall we say economically—at least with a due regard to what the world expected from people in our position. Perhaps, indeed, with an over regard ; but it would be ungenerous to carp at trifles, or to blame a lady for keeping up

with the pace of the times in which her lot has been cast.

With one exception also, we have never quarrelled. We have been admirably polite and discreetly fond; all things, therefore, considered, as marriages go, I did not marry amiss, but it would be folly to say it was a love match.

No. I considered Miss Sherlock a good, handsome, young lady, who made herself immensely agreeable to me, and whose father, mother, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, friends, acquaintances, and self, thought I ought to propose for her. Which after much delay and consideration, and many doubts as to my own prudence, I did.

We will pause here for a moment if you please, dear reader, and argue this matter a little out. We can do so with perfect impunity, since my wife is not aware I am the author of this true tale, and if she were she would not read it. Years ago, indeed, she

used to devour every line I wrote, but that was in the days when she had an object to gain by such unwonted mental exercise, and having gained her object, she is little likely to retrace the means used to compass it.

I had doubts as to my prudence, if you remember; those doubts are now certainties. Better have waited—better have murmured no word of love till something like the old feeling stirred within me again. It may be—God knows I have never seen her—that somewhere on the world's wide surface I might have met another Rose, whom I could have gathered and won.

I have a fancy that a man's first chance is not necessarily his last, and this idea, though unwarranted by my own experience, has yet received considerable confirmation from the experience of others.

Women tell me that they were first wooed because they recalled some long ago memory. Men say they chose because there was a tone, a look, a gesture, a smile which

reminded them of the dream-love departed. If I went wooing again—which Heaven forbid—I do not think I should mention to Grace the charm I find in her golden tresses is their resemblance to those which a quarter of a century ago constituted the chief beauty of Maud; yet such confidences are vouchsafed to the beloved objects, and as a rule during courtship they do not resent it; the words uttered and the remarks made in the Hades of Matrimony, it is impossible to conjecture, for from that bourne no traveller returns; the secrets of that Afterwards are never revealed save in the Divorce Court—and there but imperfectly.

My impression, however, is, that if the man be wise, he consigns Maud's memory to oblivion when he weds Grace—but of course I cannot tell.

All I do know is, that even had Miss Sherlock resembled Rose, I should have maintained a discreet silence on the subject. But she did not resemble her in the least.

And this it seems to me now was just my mistake. Given that I married at all, I should have married some one like Rose, whom I could have loved, first for the old love's sake, and afterwards drawn closer and closer to my heart for her own. A man's first love is his ideal love, and the real should always come as near the ideal as may be.

Sometimes—mine has been a lonely life, mentally I mean most part of it—sometimes when I am walking along the streets, or sitting here in my chambers, or indulging—slippers on my feet and the 'Times' ready to my hand—in that mild cigar against which Mrs. Luttrell inveighs as is the fashion of ladies after marriage, I wonder whether there be not in some remote district, or wasting her sweetness in the populous solitude of a London street, a second Rose whose life might have been all the happier had we met and married, whose fragrance would have been precious to me, whom I could have

tended with loving care, who would have proved the blessing of my life, who could have supplied just that something my existence has always lacked, who would have seemed the dear house angel, for whose fluttering dress and soft clinging arms and gentle caresses my soul has longed in the house of her earthly bondage.

And this feeling does not arise from any sort of conceit, or over-weening idea of my own capacity for making a woman happy. It is just that I think there must be some place—a heart now broken, possibly, that would have understood the workings of mine—a woman who might under different circumstances have glided to my vacant hearth, and kindled there a fire which should not have been extinguished till my pulses were stilled for ever; whilst I in my turn could have filled a void in her life, shielded her, sheltered her, kept her safe within my arms from sorrow and sin, from trouble and regret.

She may have, or may not have had an

existence, this second Rose, but it has never fallen to my lot to behold her; thank God.

Being married, I say this out of the depth of my gratitude, for had we met, there would then have begun one of those struggles from which let a man flee never so soon, never so far, he is sure to come forth worsted. As it is, I can truthfully declare I know no woman I like in the least degree better than my wife. Save once she never had any reason to complain of any one stepping between us and stealing away my affections, and on that occasion she mistook the position as ladies unblest by a real grievance are often apt to do.

“I have been the best of husbands,” so Mrs. Sherlock always kindly informs me, when her nature is softened and her heart opened by that Christmas cheer—which fortunately for her digestion comes but once a year,—“I cannot tell you how grateful I feel to God for having been so good to—”

Whereat I step back guiltily, feeling that from my point of view, I have not been a

good husband, and that God, Whose blessing the old lady invokes as usual when we part after the festive meeting, which always takes place at Mr. Sherlock's house on the 25th of December—knows it.

They think I have done my best—done more, perhaps, than most—but conscience fails for a few hours to be quieted, nevertheless. I strive to think I have given my wife all she wanted, all she cared for, or could understand; but knowing with what a capacity for domestic happiness Heaven gifted me, spite of the cold cheerless, unsatisfactory life I have led, I turn away from my own sophistry appalled at the bare idea of a flower which never longed for the sunbeams to fall on it; of a human being who should be quite content to pass through this world without craving for that fulness of bliss that can be contained only in one sentence—“I love—I am beloved.”

It is quite in vain I tell myself she knows no better, for at all events I should have

tried to teach her—I, whose wooing was of the calmest description, and who had won her consent long before I thought it worth my while to ask for it.

How she, or any woman, could ever have been satisfied with such love-making by such a lover baffles my comprehension, but then Catharine Sherlock had no knowledge of that sweet folly in which Rose and I indulged when we strolled through fields yellow with buttercups, or stood idly by the rippling river. First a London nursery, then a school-room presided over by a strict governess, kept duly up to the mark by a still stricter mother; then a finishing seminary, then London parties, London acquaintances, London amusements—the usual sort of life led by girls of her rank, and also of a much higher rank in London—that was her experience; never a child—never a girl—she, I will be bound had always from her babyhood upwards behaved herself as a “young lady” should.

She would have delighted the heart of Lady Surry, and yet I am much mistaken if when her own mother looked upon the work of her hands, she felt quite satisfied with it.

Mrs. Sherlock's work never satisfied me ; so, perhaps, I may be considered slightly prejudiced in the matter.

Speaking from experience, I should say, there is no house which a man about to marry, or likely ever to be in a position to marry, should shun like that inhabited by Paterfamilias blessed with a family of handsome grown and growing up daughters. With one daughter the net is spread in sight of the bird, but with several he is lured on with successive crumbs, until lo ! a constraining hand is felt, and he understands the moment of his capture has arrived.

I walked into the snare with my eyes wide open. I said to myself no woman should ever hear a word of love from me again, and feeling myself so utterly heart-whole, or rather utterly heart-wrecked, I

gradually dropped into my old relations with the Sherlock family; dined with them on Sundays occasionally, dropped in frequently, "when passing," in the evenings; escorted the "girls" and their mamma to flower-shows; got boxes for the opera, and duly appeared there once more dancing attendance on the Sherlocks. I cannot, looking back upon the whole business, now imagine what possessed me to be so foolish. I cannot conceive why I went to the Sherlocks, unless, indeed, it might be that having all my life been accustomed to female society, I welcomed their sort of companionship when a better was beyond my reach.

There is something charming to a particular class of mind about the mere chatter of a lot of women; something in the grace and refinement of calm home life irresistible to men of a certain nature.

After my hard work—for I did work hard even in those days, though not with that persistent labour which success has

since necessitated—the sight of the girls in their pretty muslin dresses; the perfume of the flowers in the drawing-room, and the sound of their grand piano, on which Julia, the youngest, was no mean performer; the talk about trifles; about the little odds and ends that make up the sum and substance of a fortunate woman's life; all those things, I say, were pleasant to me; they were the vague reflex of a home I had left; the dim realization of an ideal home I was never destined to possess; and, as we love the sound of a familiar air, even though it be sung by an indifferent performer, so this similitude, unsatisfactory as it might be, of an imaginary Paradise, lured me on, lured me from my dull chambers to the abode of Mr. Sherlock, where, sooth to say, my welcome was ever of the most cordial description.

As has been previously intimated, Mr. Sherlock formed a high estimate of my chances of success at a very early period of our acquaintance, and assuredly it was not

his fault that I failed to command fortune at an earlier period of this story.

A shrewd individual, and blessed with so many daughters that he could afford to bestow them without sorrow on likely husbands more easily than dower them with sufficient wealth to ensure their being able possessed of a good competence to roam through life in maiden meditation, fancy free, he looked on every man he met with a sort of double interest.

The new-comer might be a possible lover or a probable client. Supposing him unlikely to become the last, Mr. Sherlock was willing to take into consideration his means of sustaining the first character; and, given that he could not be the first, Mr. Sherlock had no objection to entertaining him well, in faith that after many days his bread should be found again.

If a new acquaintance seemed able and willing to play both characters, then, of course, Mr. Sherlock opened his arms to

him all the more readily ; but prizes of this description are not frequently landed on the matrimonial shore, and none of the Misses Sherlock married quite as in my opinion they ought to have done, considering the numerous "advantages," social, educational, and moral, which they had enjoyed.

In other words, calculating the amount of capital sunk in them, I think the young ladies did not return a fair amount of interest ; but, after all, there is three per cent. certain, and an hundred per cent. risky ; wherefore, perhaps, Mr. Sherlock's daughters were just as safe on their comparatively limited incomes as they might have been had they shot up matrimonially like rockets, only to the end that they might come down again like sticks.

All this long digression is intended to explain how it happened that Mr. and Mrs. Sherlock took kindly to me, and made no sort of objection when in due time, Miss Sherlock took more kindly still. Neither

were they, after the fashion of the parents mentioned in Alan-a-Dale, steel and stone when, after much exercise of spirit, I asked them to make me the happiest man in England.

They never "lifted the latch, and bade me begone." They only said they gave dear Catharine to me in the fullest confidence. I have often wished since their faith had been less, or my good qualities not so apparent.

Not unwarned, either, did I walk into the noose matrimonial; on the contrary, my mother frequently trusted that I would not marry or engage myself precipitately. She did not approve of early marriages unless suitable in *every* respect; she thought a rising man should wait until he attained a certain position before choosing, and so forth; while Joan openly hoped I never would make that odious Miss Sherlock her sister-in-law.

As for the old lady in Queen Anne Street, she rather encouraged the idea. Now her

money was gone, she felt thankful for such slight attentions as the Sherlocks considerably showed her; further, other acquaintances having cooled and dropped off, she delighted in the Sherlocks' visits, which broke the monotony of her life, and brought to her very arm-chair news and gossip which she could by no other manner of means have contrived to hear.

"It will be a very good match for you indeed," Mrs. Graham was wont to remark, and when I replied—

"I have no intention of marrying at all," she shook her head gravely, and said "she trusted I did not mean to wear the willow all my life for the sake of a girl who evidently had not cared twopence about me." Further, she expressed her belief that if I did not marry Miss Sherlock, I ought to marry her; and that if I had not proposed for her, or did not propose soon, those consequences which were sure to ensue would be fully deserved by me.

To what consequences Mrs. Graham referred I have not to this moment an idea; but still, these vague hints of something fearful looming in the future filled me with a terrible alarm—all the greater, perhaps, by reason of its very vagueness.

Fact is, I had long been drifting down that river which falls into the matrimonial sea—drifting too, without excuse, merely because I was too cowardly and too irresolute to take oar and pull back against the stream.

When I thought of Mrs. Sherlock's black looks, and the "explanation" on which Mr. Sherlock would naturally insist—when I considered the time Miss Sherlock had wasted upon my unworthy self, and reflected concerning the strictures of her friends, who would be sure to say, and justly, that I had used her shamefully—retreat seemed impossible.

I was not afraid of a "breach of promise" action. Even had such cases been as common

then as they are now, Mr. Sherlock was much too wise a man and considerate a father to risk damaging his daughters' future by any proceedings of that nature; but I was afraid I had so far committed myself, that nothing remained save for me to proceed further, and commit myself yet more.

That the Sherlocks expected me to propose, was patent to the meanest comprehension. Often her sisters—evidently instructed so to do—left us alone together, and there are no more fearful memories in my life than that of those half-hours when Catharine and I talked on indifferent subjects—she momentarily anticipating the coming of my request, and I knowing she was waiting for it.

Those sisters—once more, young man, strong in your youth and your vanity, avoid a house where there are daughters—were as so many nails in my coffin. Whenever one seemed loose, they struck it on the head, and drove it home. Without their help,

Catharine Sherlock had never become my wife—with it, I am her most devoted husband.

At last I did it ; I felt happier after, for the deed was accomplished—the matter off my mind. And the time and the manner was as follows :—

Finding their house in Upper Malcolm Street too small, ostensibly for their family—but, really, too small for the enlarging views of that family—Mr. Sherlock took a house in Huntingdon Square. Perhaps, reader, you may chance to know it, but, for the benefit of those who do not, I will state that it lies in what is now the North Western District of London—very West of North indeed ; that it is out of the way of every place ; that even at this present hour it is fairly fashionable, and altogether, and in all respects, it was eminently unsuitable for a professional man blessed with a very certain number of girls, whose fortunes were entirely dependent on his exertions.

However, Mr. Sherlock took the house, and Mrs. Sherlock gave a large party in honour of their entering into possession, to which I was duly bidden.

Never had Catharine looked to such advantage. Amongst a number of pretty girls, she was the prettiest—decidedly the *belle* of the room. So I heard people observing as we whirled round to the music of one of Schubert's waltzes.

“What a handsome couple!” “Engaged.” “When is it to be?” These sentences were spoken in loud whispers, and, after I had led Miss Sherlock to a seat, one gentleman, an old attorney, whose goodwill I was anxious to conciliate, seized me by the hand, and asked if he might congratulate me?

“Not yet,” I answered; “but I hope some day.” And then I determined to make the plunge that night, and, as every one expected me to propose, fulfil those natural anticipations.

But for the ball-dress, and the lights, and the music, and the dancing, and the—champagne—I do not think I could have done it after all; but she looked so soft and graceful, and feminine, in her skirts, and puffings, and ribbons, and flowers, that for the time the other figure, which rarely left me, vanished away, and I saw nothing but a beautiful woman, who loved me as much as she could love anything, and who, in answer to my whispered “Catharine,” blushed crimson, but never withdrew her hand.

We were standing at the moment in a conservatory, the plants in which formed a sort of screen between us and the ball-room.

I can see it all now—Catharine, for the first time, timid, and a little shrinking—the dancers going as fast as their legs could carry them, whilst the band played “The Spirit of the Ball.” I see the aloes and the orange-trees, through the branches of which there peeps for a moment the half-angry

face of a girl, between whom and myself there have been certain small flirtations on occasions like the present. I loosen Catharine's hand, and lay mine on my heart to induce the girl to think I had been only playing at love-making; then the face vanishes, and I draw near again, and say, "We were watched, Catharine—I may call you so, may I not?"

She says nothing, for this is not a proposal, and the young lady has been well trained, so I proceed to extremities, and ask if some day she will let me call her "wife?" which being definite enough in all conscience, she murmurs "yes," and "papa."

And thus I became engaged, for it is needless to remark that "papa," whose consent I asked before leaving the house, was more than willing, while mamma and the girls—not including Catharine—kissed me at parting; but the next day I went into the park, and stood in a retired place till I saw Walter Surry's carriage pass.

Then I said to myself, "Good-bye, dear love—good-bye, bright dream," and turned me to the new life, into which I swore no thought of Rose Surry should enter.

CHAPTER III.

THE "HAPPIEST DAY OF MY LIFE."

WE were not married so soon as I could have wished, for Mr. Sherlock thought I had better get a little "before the world" ere taking unto myself a wife, and it is only a just testimony to the admirable prudence and wisdom of my *fiancée*, to add that she thought so too.

Now, being "before the world" meant, in Mr. Sherlock's dictionary, a certain sum of money so invested as to be easily got at if need arose, say at profitable interest in the three per cents.; a policy of assurance, and a well-furnished house, freehold if pos-

sible, if not leasehold at a nominal rent ; but in consideration of the fact that I had still my way to push, and had every prospect of pushing it to some purpose, he consented to waive the three per cents. and freehold business, and only stipulated that I should insure my life in some sound office, approved by him, and provide a comfortable home for Catharine before I married her.

When a man chances to be the over-worked father of many daughters, it is natural that he should dread any one of them coming home empty-handed in the event of widowhood ; and had Catharine been called upon in the early days of our married life to weep beside my death-bed, as I doubt not she would have done most decorously, I can fancy comfort mingling with her grief at thought of that three thousand pounds, on which the poor dear fellow had only paid one premium.

Whether, before the day of his marriage, it is exactly pleasant that a man shall be

compelled to contemplate as an imminent possibility the day of his death, is a question on which I do not now propose to enter. For my own part, I have always believed that fathers-in-law elect receive a commission from the insurance companies, and that in this way, inverting Shakespeare, the prospective funeral meats furnish forth the present bridal feast; but then as my wife says, I am peculiar, which may well be, though Heaven knows I do not think I am one half so peculiar as the men and the women amongst whom my lot is cast.

Further, she says I was always peculiar, which also may well be, seeing I insured my life in the interests of—furnished a house to please the tastes of—and finally married—a woman for whom I can honestly declare I cared no more, or rather less, than I do for the lady who may read this paragraph, since the latter does me the honour to scan what I have written, while my wife decidedly prefers the works of those popular authors whom she knows only by repute.

No man, somebody says, is a hero to his *valet de chambre*. I am sure no writer is to his home circle, save by virtue of the pounds, shillings and pence his writings produce.

“How much are you to have for that, dear?” says Fond Affection, sitting by the hearth; and when you inform her, she replies, evidently liking the sum, but considering it beyond your deserts—

“I wish I could write;” implying thereby that if she merely possessed your foolish knack of authorship, she could produce something worth buying.

“I wish you could,” says the unfortunate hack in answer, thinking at the same time if she were able to indite anything besides an ungrammatical letter, she would understand what weary work it all is, what tiring, unsatisfactory, never-ending, always beginning work it seems, once the glamour is removed, and the illusory mist of distance dispelled, and a man comes to understand the exact meaning of the word author, as

learnt from long and close personal experience with it.

But I wander away from the Life Policy, which—after making various statements about my father and mother, and brothers and sisters, and being kneaded and pounded all over by a terrible man with knuckles like the pebbles wherewith David slew Goliath, who wormed the secret of my engagement out of me, and then grew maddeningly facetious over it—was duly effected.

For over twenty years I have paid that premium, and grumbled about doing it.

"But then you might have died," says the secretary, with whom I have the honour of being acquainted.

"But I haven't," I suggest.

"Are you sorry?" he asks.

"Well, upon the whole, 'yes.' I think I should like to have had my innings out of something, even an insurance office."

“ Ah ! Mr. Luttrell, just the same as ever,” he remarks.

“ Just the same,” I agree, and walk out of the office, muttering to myself, however, “ Just the same Luttrell circumstances made me, but not the Luttrell I should have been, taking Rose to wife without any of these accursed preliminaries.”

That is the difference, you perceive, between marrying one’s first love, and forming a matrimonial alliance with one’s second.

The first is apple blossom and moonshine—murmuring streams and the sweetest ballad in the world, as it seemed then, as it seems still to memory. The second is a carpet warehouse—wholesale if possible—one of Collard’s pianos, procured through a professional friend at ostensibly trade prices; a house Lord So-and-So would have taken had there only been sufficient accommodation for his domestics, and the means of giving one party at least every season so

thronged, that numbers were unable to ascend the staircase. All this Catharine has compassed, and I can only hope she is satisfied with it. I am not quite; but then, as the treasure of my heart remarks, she does not know what would satisfy me.

Nor do I—though, perhaps, looking back I have a fancy what might have once—but then, who can tell?

Better, possibly, for me and my darling that we separated while the dew still trembled on the flowers. I might not have made her so happy as I would. And sometimes, sitting here alone, I think that if the sorrow I can remember stamped upon her face, the tears I have seen her shed, had been caused by any act of mine, I could not bear the curse of life, but just end it with as little unnecessary pain to my family and myself as might be.

But I was to forget Rose, or at least to cease dreaming about, and speaking of her; both of which feats I might have performed

more easily, had Mr. Sherlock permitted me to marry earlier and with less fuss concerning ways and means. As it chanced, the contrast between the things Catharine considered essentials, and the modest contentment of Sir Humphrey Surry's daughter, kept the old sore open. I felt, by reason of the amount of outfit required, that I was about taking a journey into a very strange and inhospitable land, the ways of which were not my ways, the inhabitants of which believed not in such matters as love and pure simplicity, but worshipped rather society and Mrs. Grundy, and were incredulous concerning happiness that rented a house at a lower sum than the social trade union had fixed on as the smallest a gentleman might pay.

Nevertheless, I never swerved in my fidelity to Miss Sherlock. Never once did a thought of selling off my poor worldly effects, paying my few debts, taking my passage to America, and placing the At-

lantic between me and my charmer, cross my mind.

I meant to marry, and to push my way up, for the sake of myself and my family. I had not then drunk my drop of the cup of worldly prosperity, and the draught seemed desirable. Unable to compass love and fame, I resolved at least to grasp the latter.

Those who had a right to be most interested in my future happiness were satisfied with my choice.

"It was a good thing on the whole," my mother said at last; while my father remarked—"Perhaps it was as well, Tom, Rosie did marry her cousin. She would never have made a wife for a poor man."

"It is the most sensible piece of work you ever did," declared Mrs. Graham, "and I am proud of you, Tom Luttrell." Whilst nothing could exceed the affectionate demonstrations of Mrs. Sherlock and the girls, or the kind interest Mr. Sherlock took in me and my affairs.

Joan only did not like it.

“You are certain, Tom, you have not been in too great a hurry,” she asked, as we walked together up and down the little plot of garden ground which the Southgate-Cottage boasted.

Then I replied, a little sharply—

“Joan, I have asked Miss Sherlock to be my wife, and that is the same as if she were already my wife; so you must never say anything like that again. Do you understand?”

Whereupon Joan sighed, and answered softly—

“Yes, I think I understand better even than you.”

“I want to be settled,” I said reading her thought and resenting it. “I shall be glad when Mr. Sherlock gives his consent to my immediate marriage.”

But Joan did not answer this time. She only remained aggravatingly silent, offering up, I imagine, a solemn petition that Mr.

Sherlock might never give his consent, and that I might never marry Miss Sherlock.

But the petition was not granted. In due time I had made enough to furnish a house, which Mrs. Sherlock approved, from garret to cellar, even in matters which it then seemed to my bachelor ignorance premature to consider; but she was wise in her generation, and I am bound to say her foresight in the matter of our accommodation was justified by results.

I had found a house then, built, so it seemed, to meet every exigency of our possible future. Catharine selected the furniture—I should advise any man about to marry to insist on the young lady doing so, as she cannot in that case well find fault with it afterwards—and I think she and her mamma bought everything, down to a dozen skewers, which could be needed in an establishment. The life insurance, as hath been already stated, was duly effected. I had held some good briefs, and there appeared

every prospect of more following; in fact, I was at length, even from Mr. Sherlock's amended point of view, in a position to marry, and accordingly the day was fixed, and Catharine's wedding-dress made.

It was of white satin, and did not become her. It requires a peculiar woman to stand white satin. Even Rose would have found it a trial, but then I should have chosen her dress, or influenced it no doubt, whilst Miss Sherlock, influenced solely by herself, selected hers without the slightest reference to anybody.

Perhaps, as a professional advertisement—perhaps, because he was overjoyed to remember that a man had at length been found to marry one of his daughters—perhaps, because, having that three thousand pounds always in his memory, he knew it was about the last thing he would ever be called on to do for her, Mr. Sherlock resolved that the nuptials of my Catharine should be

on a scale of magnificence undreamed of hitherto in Huntingdon Square.

To describe the preparations which were made in Mr. Sherlock's house, at Mr. Sherlock's expense, in anticipation of the wedding, would be utterly beyond my ability. The whole of the inhabitants of the Square were indeed kept on the *qui vive* for some weeks previous to the ceremony. Now it was the florist come in a light van to take his orders, now the confectioner, now the individual who was to find rout seats for the evening ball, further, large handboxes, and young women of the millinery persuasion being followers of fashion and latest bonnet novelty, prevailed in the hall, whilst in the drawing-room I heard of nothing save tulle and tarletan, silks and laces.

My adored one was accompanied to the altar by twelve bridesmaids, six of whom were arrayed in pink and white, and six in blue and white, a device of Joan's, who thereby secured to herself by some means

the privilege—not hard to wrest—of paying for the attire of herself and sisters. Since those days, I have some reason to believe their flowing robes were paid for also by Mr. Sherlock; but as Mrs. Sherlock never found the matrimonial purse-strings too much relaxed for her benefit, we may forgive her this slight deception, which did not do much harm to Joan, or to Mr. Sherlock, seeing neither was acquainted with it, but which did furnish forth a new dress or two for the next aspirant to matrimonial honours.

How Joan ever managed to pay for those dresses puzzles me to this hour. She did not come to me for a cheque, and further, she and my father and mother, and the younger fry, severally presented Miss Sherlock with appropriate if not expensive gifts, which were duly laid out, with other tokens of affection, on the drawing-room table, and elicited a considerable amount of admiration.

It was like a dream to me—more like a dream than any experience of my life, when I stood before the altar-rails vowing to take Catharine—to have and to hold her. People, I understand, did not consider my self-possession perfect on the memorable occasion; but then, men are sometimes not so calm in the presence of danger as the softer sex, and whatever may have been my shortcomings in the matter of confidence, they were amply redeemed by the admirable bearing of the bride. Then, as since, on the occasions of christenings, dinner-parties, death-beds, and so forth, Catharine behaved herself to perfection.

Her voice was neither too loud nor too low; and when, the ceremony over, we repaired to the vestry, the manner in which she kissed her mother and friends without disarranging the folds of her veil, or the lace on her dress, was worthy of all commendation.

For the last time she signed in a neat

ladylike hand her name, Catharine Sherlock; and then, a little impatient perhaps of the kissing and congratulations, I asserted my newly-acquired rights, and drawing her hand within my arm, walked off with *my wife* to the carriage that awaited our appearance.

The other carriages rapidly followed, and after an interval employed by the ladies in admiring the presents, and by the men, as I have cause to believe, in "doing sherry and seltzer," we all went solemnly and slowly downstairs to breakfast.

I wish I had sufficient ability to reproduce before the reader's imagination that wedding-breakfast as it is photographed on my memory; for the absurdity of the whole affair impressed me vastly, though Heaven knows I never felt in a less laughing humour than when it became necessary for me to return thanks for the beautiful, graceful, and accomplished bride, and myself.

True I went to the altar a willing sacri-

fice, but still it did not seem to me exactly a fitting occasion for merry-making. I might have felt differently had Rose been my bride, but then Rose was not my bride, which made all the difference. The match could not be regarded other than remarkably suitable in every respect save one, and I knew this. Nevertheless though the grand mansion in Tyburnia, furnished throughout by the best London upholsterers, and decorated with that pure taste for which Englishmen are so remarkable, may be, in the world's opinion and your own, a most desirable residence, it cannot quite come up to the beauty of the air-palace you built, lying under the beech-trees on that summer afternoon long ago.

And this was just my case. I felt Miss Sherlock was my reality, and Rose my illusion; but while acknowledging the great blessing Providence had given me, I did not feel inclined to sing a psalm of thanksgiving over the razing of my dream-castle to the ground.

Nevertheless, as I have said, the absurdity of the whole affair struck me forcibly, as anything ridiculous always does strike one most forcibly at the most solemn seasons. That so many people should have been invited to witness our launch filled my soul, when I beheld them seated round Mr. Sherlock's table, with surprise not unmingled with awe. I could not tell what the day seemed like. It was not like a Sunday, nor yet a week-day; it had not the ghastly cheerfulness of Christmas, nor the brightness of Easter. Rather, it appeared to me a cross between Good Friday and a morning performance at Drury Lane. I had a sense of being out for the occasion unlawfully, and I kept wondering what all those people would do after we left them; how they would occupy the time till they returned to the grand ball wherewith Mr. and Mrs. Sherlock meant to celebrate the event of a new member being added to the family circle.

There were men and women present who had long outlived the illusions of youth, if their youth ever held any ; there were husbands who had made their wives' hearts ache, and wives who, after twenty years of matrimony, still lacked information on that useful branch of knowledge—how to make home happy ; and yet these people, utterly ignorant as to whether our venture might not turn out as badly as their own, sat at that marriage feast, and smiled and ate, as though there were no such things as unhappiness and indigestion on earth.

They were "drest in all their best," in order to see me take my Sally abroad, and I should think much money must have changed hands in order to effect such gorgeous results ; so that in our small way we benefited trade, and I feel no doubt but that the confectioner who provided the breakfast, and the hired waiters who ministered to the wants of exhausted humanity, rose up and called me blessed for having married Miss Sherlock.

Amongst the guests were two authors, one of whom, with that reverence for the sanctity of private life that distinguishes some votaries of literature, reproduced the scene in one of his clever novels, only changing our names, our rank, and the place of our abode. In his hands Mr. Sherlock became Sir Joseph Shylock, who, having made his money by discounting bills at two hundred per cent., stood for some borough far distant from the scene of his early struggles, was duly returned, made himself necessary to the then government, and earned for his reward the honours of knighthood.

Too great a man ostensibly to continue the bill-discounting business, he nevertheless, *sub rosa*, lent money to those younger and elder sons, who had either money in expectation, or friends in the background.

Sir Joseph never appeared in any of these transactions himself, but employed as jackal a man in his confidence, in comparison to

whom the knight was honesty and simplicity itself.

This man, Carew by name, young in years but old in wickedness, in consideration of the hold he possessed over Sir Joseph, was promised one of the daughters in marriage—a beautiful creature, secretly enamoured of a marvellously clever poet. How the story proceeded space will not permit me to relate in detail, only the end of it all was, that Shylock and Carew came to grief owing to a little accident in connection with the signature of a noble Marquis, and that the clever poet who possessed a knowledge of business and law—vague possibly, but yet remarkable withal in one of so dreamy and romantic a nature—put such a pressure upon lover and father, that the hand of the beautiful Rachel was bestowed upon him, together with an infinite number of fat money-bags.

I have read that novel quite through, not without interest.

“Jenkins always draws his characters from the life,” say the critics, “and therein lies the principal charm of his rare genius.” Having sat unconsciously for one of his characters, I can only add I hope his people are not considered like life.

As for his rare genius—well, perhaps I had better pass that on without asking you, reader, to swallow as much of it as Mr. Sherlock’s guests did of champagne.

For me I drank but little, and yet when I rose to return thanks for Catharine and myself the room seemed to be spinning round and the people with it. Accustomed I was to public speaking, but this private speaking across the skeletons of fowls and the *débris* of salad, over cut-glass and the best electro-plate, tried my equanimity.

How I got through that speech I do not know. I held on to the table with both hands, so that if it went away I might go also. I told a great many untruths. I uttered a vast number of truisms. There

were cheers, there was laughter; people said, "Capital," and it may have been capital for aught I know; all I can now remember is that I wound up by declaring it was the happiest day of my life, at which statement Mrs. Sherlock looked at me with an expression of approbation, and wiped away a tear.

Then even more toasts were given and more champagne was drunk. After a time the table became quite steady, and I was able ultimately to face the fact that Catharine had slipped away to change her dress, and that the moment when we two were together to start in reality on our travels through the world, was at hand.

The trunks were already beside the coachman; the young ladies were already in the balcony armed with white slippers; already a crowd had formed itself on each side of the hall-door, to witness the bride's exit from her father's home; and I stood waiting for her appearance.

I could not tell you, reader, how my heart sank at the sound of the rustle of her dress. If I never knew it before, I knew then the whole affair was a mistake—a lamentable mistake for one of us, if not for both; and I screwed up my courage to go out with her for life, as many a man has done to go out in the chill winter's morning with Mr. Calcraft and the chaplain.

God forgive me, I felt at that moment like one who has committed some great and irretrievable sin.

I went forward to meet her. They thought I was eager, whereas I was only desperate. There was some kissing—much kissing indeed. Catharine wept on the ample maternal bosom, and took the starch out of her father's elaborate shirt-frill.

I liked her better than I had ever done. After all, it required some confidence for a girl to put her whole future in a man's hand, and I vowed to myself I would try and be good to her.

It was a break, and she felt it. She was leaving the old familiar life and the tried friends and the loving parents.

"Good-bye, Luttrell, and be sure to write." That was my father-in-law.

"Good-bye, Thomas. I am quite happy about my child." That was Mrs. Sherlock, with the tears trickling down her plump cheeks. And "good-bye, and good-bye, and good-bye," echoed round, whilst between a line composed of the very rank and file of London life, I led my weeping bride from the house where she had pursued her maiden meditations on the all-absorbing maiden theme—"How to get married, and to whom."

Swish came down a shower of white slippers, and a chorus of young voices called out, "Good-bye," and "God speed." The coachman touched his horses, and we were off on the journey of life together.

"Compartment?—Yes, sir,—quite right, sir,—luggage,—I will see to that, sir."

Thus spoke the guard, locking us up safely together in a carriage, from which there was no escape.

“How could he know?” I asked Catharine; “and what are the porters grinning at?”

“One of the slippers lodged on the top of my imperial. Did you not see it? I did.” And Catharine proceeded, quite systematically, to see that her belongings were all safe, and that nothing had been left behind.

“My shepherd’s-plaid shawl!” she exclaimed, “they have forgotten to put that in.” And then, I confess, the whole affair began to assume a commonplace aspect.

We were off; and I sat thinking. Shall I make a full and free confession to this woman, whom I have sworn to love till the day of my death? Shall I establish a link between us—tell her, with God’s help I mean to try and love her more than I ever loved that other? Shall I venture on the

dangerous ground of being frank with a wife and that on our wedding-day ?

"I do hope," Catharine broke in at this juncture, while the express tore along, "I do hope they have not forgotten anything else. It will be so inconvenient not having that shawl."

"We can buy another," I answered, taking her hand, but she had dispelled all thought of a confession, which had never since been made till now.

And it was quite as well. I understand perfectly my Catharine could neither have comprehended its import, nor borne its repetition.

We learn many things as we grow old, and amongst them the value and virtue of reticence even towards the wife of our bosom, concerning the things which lie next our heart.

CHAPTER IV.

MARRIAGE.

SOME people say that those blissful days which it is usual to spend as far from home and a man's ordinary occupation as possible, are the most trying of married life, and this may well be so, seeing that it is a serious experiment to make, that of passing an entire month alone with anybody—more especially a new wife—but I did not find my honeymoon wearisome; on the contrary, I think it enabled me to grow more gradually accustomed to the singular fact of being married, and consequently independent no longer, than would have been possible had I stepped

with Mrs. Luttrell at once into the house already referred to, whereof my Catharine had selected the furniture.

It is a great change to any man to get married, and one requires some little time to become quite reconciled to great changes, whether they be desirable or the reverse. Therefore, as the thirty days we spent on the continent were a sort of ante-room where I was permitted to loiter before entering into that full state of domestic felicity which awaited me in England, I shall ever retain a grateful recollection of the opportunity thus afforded of coming slowly to a knowledge of the happiness I might reckon upon in the life I had—voluntarily, shall I say?—chosen.

During the honeymoon Catharine proved herself to be just what she has continued ever since—a woman admirably adapted to sustain and even advance her husband's social position—a woman who liked to go and see places, to the end that she might talk about

them afterwards, but who took no interest in anything, whether in art or nature, for pure love of art or love of nature. In itself I am quite confident she considered moonlight then what she considers moonlight now—an infinitely poorer invention than gas-light; that in her heart she greatly preferred the Parisian shops to any cathedral or picture-gallery we visited; that she liked much better going to the theatre than contemplating the beauties of the Rhine; and that the new bonnet she took back with her to England, afforded her much more unqualified pleasure than the memory of any landscape on which her eyes had rested.

And was I disappointed? On the contrary. Here was a wife just fitted for me; one whose sensibilities required no delicate handling, no anxious consideration, who although she loved me as much as she knew how, was not likely to prove exacting and ask for or even to understand that passionate, all-absorbing love which having poured out upon one

woman I believed I could never give to another.

The love Rose awoke would only have amazed and wearied Catharine. Whilst a man was being brought skilfully on to proposing point, and from that point up to the culminating point of matrimony, it might be well enough to humour his sentimental fancy for quiet walks and talks; but that a man and wife should care to be alone, that they should live out of society, and affect the company of one another to the exclusion of desirable acquaintances, were ideas utterly foreign to the admirably regulated mind of Catharine Luttrell, *née* Sherlock, and as sooth to say I was not now particularly desirous of spending a *tête-à-tête* existence, we suited each other capitally. She wrote home that Thomas was the best and most generous husband in the world; to which Mrs. Sherlock replied, that she had always felt I would make her treasure happy. Have I done so?

There is one black memory that I recall while tracing these lines, one act of my life I would give everything I ever possessed or am ever likely to possess to be able to undo. We never talk about it, not even Joan and I, but it has left a dark track across my heart, and whatever it may have proved to Catharine, it has been to me the bitterest and most unsoothed trouble of a not particularly untroubled existence.

Had I spoken to her out of the fulness of my heart on our wedding-day, as I once purposed, would that sorrow lie heavy on my conscience now? Perhaps not, but the forgotten shawl stopped my intended confession, and thinking of that shawl I sometimes imagine that not merely the penitence but also the grief is mine alone; that I did not wound her so vitally as I feared, and that I have fretted myself needlessly over a matter which possibly never first nor last cost her a night's sleep.

But this comes later in my story. We

could foresee no storm or sign of a storm at the point I have now reached—our return to England. Rather everything there betokened and rightly a long continuance of fair weather. Catharine liked her house, and, being the mistress of it, she liked welcoming her mother and sisters in her drawing-room, and she welcomed them frequently without remonstrance or hindrance from me; she liked having plenty of money, and I gave her all I could spare and worked hard to get more for her; she liked being married to a man whose relations did not trouble her much and yet remained on perfectly friendly terms. If bitterness mingled with her cup, it was because a portion of my income went to maintain the modest establishment at Southgate. It was folly for me ever to have told her anything concerning that, but people entertain some ridiculous ideas about being quite frank before marriage, which is the more extraordinary since nobody is frank after, and

not having had the benefit of any previous connubial experience I made the usual mistake and consequently have since, on various occasions, repented my communications.

That is, I used to repent, for there is no one for me to support or for her to grumble about now. They are dead, or pushing their own ways in the world, or far beyond any help of mine; but even if this were not the case Catharine would not complain.

A passage of arms occurred between us once, when, though I was severely wounded, she got the worst shock of the encounter. Since then Catharine has been more submissive, and I—more considerate.

I wonder if she be really happy now? I wonder if she ever think ours might have been a better life—made a better thing out of, somehow?

If I could even form an idea of what she might answer, I would ask her one evening

in the twilight, or when the fire is burning low, to tell me all she thinks about it, but I dread being requested at the supreme moment to light the gas, or to give her that work-basket containing those slippers, still unfinished, of which mention was honourably made in the first pages of 'My First Love.'

We have never been accustomed to talk. Somebody says, or rather, indeed, a great many persons say, talking is not conversing as eating is not dining, which is just one of those one-sided statements that makes a man who is not likely to be misled by a neatly turned sentence, angry, more especially when he knows by bitter experience that conversing may be as far removed from talking as dining from eating.

We never talked at any rate. We always conversed. This habit commenced in our honeymoon, and it grew stronger with years. If I were in the most terrible trouble I could only give my wife the barest outline of facts.

To fill in the details would be a simple impossibility—to expatiate on how it affected me a feat beyond my power. Joan says I do not even talk to my children, but then she does not quite understand that if I did talk to them they would not appreciate the attention.

Yes, taking it altogether mine has been a lonely life, though I have lived always amongst people—and a spoiled one, though I have made money as well as a fair reputation. It is a strange thing to consider how desolate one mischance may in reality leave a man, even while apparently he have made a very good thing for himself of existence. If the fates decree that one is to be for fifty years out of the three score and ten wholly and solely a denizen of the world as the world obtains here in London, it might be as well to have no memories of murmuring rivulets and quiet woods associated with the first twenty.

Sentiment, for example, will never em-

bitter the future happiness of my young people, who I earnestly hope will marry other young people as purely worldly and superficial as themselves. One of my sons has developed a certain talent for literature, and will, I doubt not, in time favour the world with various three-volume novels (if three volumes obtain so long), treating of that semi-fashionable society which he knows, and that entirely fashionable society which he is never likely to know, and in due time probably I shall appear in print as a respectable but unapproachable father.

Well, so be it. Children it is said take after their mother. It is eminently flattering to my vanity to be quite satisfied none of mine take after me.

To return, however, to the days when children were not in my home—neither the puling infant nor the young gentleman in knickerbockers—a style of costume that, despite Mr. Thackeray's dictum and Messrs. Nicoll's advertisement, I detest with a

detestation worthy of a better cause—what can I recollect of those days? All through my rambling talk I have been trying to remember.

Any memory of home comfort? Perhaps so: if home comfort mean simply hot and cold water in one's dressing-room, linen left out by my wife's maid, for I kept no valet, dinner fairly cooked and reasonably hot, a tolerably good glass of wine with and after it, breakfast to a moment in the morning, I had home comforts. And the days were gone when a vision of a sweet face uplifted to mine, of the loving clasp of a soft hand, of a dear voice welcoming me after my labour, was the sum and total of the only home comfort I ever wished or hoped to realize. People take to luxury and physical ease when they find the "better part" of existence cannot be possessed by them; so, failing my dream habitation, which might have been up three pair of stairs or in Buckingham Palace for any local habitation

I cared to give it, I was well enough content to go back evening after evening to a house where the stairs were covered with the best and newest Brussels carpeting ; where I hung up my hat on a highly veneered stand, resplendent with a most unnecessary looking-glass ; where passing the dining-room door I could see the table set out in the best style by our youthful buttons ; where I could generally hear the tones of Catharine's grand piano, and where as I entered the drawing-room, I was usually greeted not only by my wife, but also by a couple of her sisters, and sometimes by Mrs. Sherlock herself.

And it did not then strike me as anything very dreadful that this was all the sort of home I was ever likely to know. When a man takes possession of Mrs. Parkins' first floor (sitting-room with bed-room at the back and attendance), he does not fully realize what life in that lady's desirable lodgings is certain to prove when weeks

have passed into months and months into years ; and in like manner when people first marry they scarcely grasp the fact that it is for the whole of existence—that they have made a choice which can never be rescinded till they stand remorseful beside the death-bed of that him or her who chances to be husband or wife, and by the time they have made this discovery they have “got used to it,” for great is the force of habit and the lulling effect of time.

I got used to it. I am used to it. Were Catharine to die, she would not have a sincerer mourner than myself ; but there is not, I am happy to say, the slightest chance, speaking humanly, of my survivorship. My wife has a capital constitution, and takes good care of it. She eats well, drinks well, sleeps well, and refrains from all undue mental excitement. In the future I mentally behold her a large, handsome, well-preserved widow, taking an interest in all the affairs of this world, and keeping up a

sort of visiting acquaintance with those of the next; ruling her household to the last judiciously and serenely; regretting the late Mr L.—she speaks of me as Mr. L. now, and though privately objecting strongly to the title, I am morally too great a coward to object publicly to any form of address she may be pleased to select.

Time went by, and truly and duly I was a father and Mrs. Sherlock a grandmother. Great ceremonies attended the arrival and christening of that first-born. We were all perhaps a little unduly excited over the event, and considered it a stranger incident than might from the Registrar-General's returns have been supposed. Catharine was one of those women who think it the correct thing to have a certain number of children (the more the better), just as they think it proper to have a large number of desirable acquaintances on their visiting list. I do not believe she was particularly fond of children, but she liked to be a

mother. She liked the fuss which is always made on these occasions when women are well off and have plenty of female relations, —the bustle of preparation, and the excuse it gave for shopping and spending money, pleased her inexpressibly; and when at length the little one came—a boy, well, well, it is not for me to throw stones or to attempt too keenly to analyse what her feelings may have been, for I know when I went to my chambers that day, I dreamed another dream even more illusory than my last, about a son who should be to me what I had striven to be to my father; to whom I could in the after-time talk, as the old man talked, thank God, to me; who should be, if “odd,” faithful,—if “peculiar,” intelligible, to my understanding: who should lack nothing my labour and my love might give him: who should resemble in his strength and his devotion and his tenderness Joan who had sat with me and Rose on the grass by the river-side, and pelted the birds.

with cherry-stones, and wandered wild through the woods and fields, and grown up finally into the noblest woman I ever knew.

Dreams, friends,—air-castles ; dreams from which I have since awakened,—air-castles I have beheld melt gradually away. I love my children, I hope, but I cannot help seeing what they are. Never an one of them has “strained back” to unselfishness and a high ideal of the duties which the very fact of being placed in this world devolves upon all men and all women.

They are amiable enough as times go, and to a certain extent companionable also ; but they have had everything they wanted, from their youth up, and I am not sure that it is a good thing for youth to have everything it wants, and to regard middle and old age as an anomaly, which is permitted to exist merely because it has a certain power of work in it, and can provide the wherewithal for girls to go to balls, and boys to spend money recklessly at college.

In the next generation it may be, there will be born to one of my children—for these things are inscrutable—a gipsy-faced little maiden who shall comfort the weary heart of some world-tired father, whom the heat and burden of his day has almost overpowered, and be as strong to help as she is powerful to console.

Shall I live to see this dream-baby? Shall I, when feeble and white-haired, look with dimmed vision into eyes that may remind me of that dream-sister now almost as far removed from me as though the valley of the shadow lay between? Shall saucy tongue prattle to me with the daring *abandon* of the reckless Joan of old? Shall a brown-skinned romp ever fling her arms about me, and kiss my furrowed face, as I have seen Joan kiss Rose? Forgive me, friends, for I seem to be growing childish already, and it needs one fierce, wicked memory to convince me that I am not yet in my dotage.

But a twelvemonth since Joan said to me—

“My second boy is so like you, Tom, that I wish you would let me bring him to see you.”

And then I blazed out—

“At your peril, Joan. I want to see no child of yours for ever.” In answer to which came no harsh words, though mothers are usually vicious towards those who turn aside from their offspring.

She only said, “My poor Tom;” and I could gather from her tone, though my glance was averted, that there were tears in those dark eyes (still beautiful), drawn from their fountain by pity for me.

After all, why should I receive such pity? Rose was only a weak woman, and she married another, leaving me lonely—as better and holier and truer men have been left lonely by women since the beginning of time, and will be left till eternity.

It is a misfortune to have a heart. Happily my children—over whom I lament to have sung so greivous a Jeremiad—are not

much troubled with so delicate an organ.

I mean mentally, of course. Physically I believe they are quite sound, tried by the best stethoscope.

CHAPTER V.

MY VISITOR.

TIME meanwhile went by in a quiet, orderly sort of way: he did not linger, he did not travel by express. There cannot be either much lingering or much express work in the life of a plodder, and that I soon became.

It was needful to provide so many guineas a week for the household expenses deemed by my beloved, necessaries; it was essential for me also to consider rent and taxes, insurance—fire and life—the demands of tailor, milliner, and draper, and last and least (in point of expense) the modest sum required

to keep poverty from the little farm at Southgate.

Taken in detail, the items might not be great, but taken in the aggregate and looking back dispassionately on the events of my life as though they had happened to another man, I think it was more than any one person ought to have been called upon to furnish out of his own brains.

Ladies, of course, will call me a "brute" for such a remark, but that is merely because as yet ladies are not men. When Messrs. Mill and Bright transform them into the baser sex—and with masculine privileges force masculine responsibilities upon them, as I hope the champions of women's rights may—the dear creatures will better understand what I mean, and wonder, perchance, "How men endured it so long." Endured,—that is, the social humbug which makes it necessary for a man, no matter what his ways and means may be, to live in a given style: to allow his wife so much a

week ; to take a house at so much a year, and as a rule choose the alternative of bankruptcy or softening of the brain.

The present writer has experienced neither disease, and yet he dare affirm more husbands by ten thousands die of the causes which produce both results, than any registrar-general is ever likely to guess.

Men's lives are, as a rule, spent in keeping roofs over other people's heads,—in maintaining a household from which they derive no benefit,—in paying tradesmen's bills for food they never eat,—in seeing that rent for places they never behold save late at night and early in the morning, falls into no arrear.

Most wonderful is this London existence. Marvellous even to those who are pilgrims through it, as well as to the mere lookers-on.

But I digress ; and yet, no—for this everlasting wear and tear, this mental and physical strain which tried my strength and taxed my energies to their utmost in the

days when I was but a struggling barrister, and an author little known, have made me, I think, as much as Rose's desertion, the man people say I am.

At the recollection of the earlier years of my married life, I shudder. Ease of mind I never knew, rest of body I never had. It was all very well for Catharine—a woman possessed of a power of enjoying unbroken slumbers, I believe to be unequalled—to talk of my morning's sleep, and my Sunday afternoon nap; she did not know that the former was earned by a night devoted to the next chapter in my novel, or the consideration of ways and means; and that the latter was a mere excuse for getting rid of the chit-chat of her visitors.

First or last I never told my wife our commencement was a mistake,—that we began just about where we should have left off; and that so far as I am personally concerned, until within the last few years, life has been a mere fight—to keep the wolf from this door and from that.

Before my books were hatched in my brain, the poor chickens—lean and meagre enough—were sold, and the proceeds paid away; before I held my briefs, the guineas they brought in were condemned. I have been what the world calls a prosperous man, and yet I can honestly declare I have envied my clerk and my errand boy; and believing Catharine's "Buttons" to be pecuniarily solvent, I have often envied him too.

For it is true, Mesdames and Demoiselles, though you may not believe me, that life in the nineteenth century is not all play, and that the man who sets out determined to maintain a certain position, has rather more work before him than he might exactly relish, could he, looking forward, foresee all his head and his hands must find to do.

I found it to do, and did it—and for so much am thankful—but had I to begin the battle over again, not all the mothers-in-law in England would persuade me to commence life in that unexceptionable home, provided

with good (and expensive) servants, furnished with the best furniture from garret to kitchen, and stamping us as "persons bound to keep up a certain appearance."

We have kept that appearance up, and society and my wife are satisfied. Why then should I be dissatisfied?—I, who have been the humble means of pleasing the ruling powers? When the good time comes—and the clergyman treads swift on the heels of the doctor, and the undertaker walks lightly and rapidly after both, to take the last measurement my body will ever require—no one can say I have not, as a Briton, done my duty.

I have married, and children have been born to me. I have paid rent for a period which seems illimitable and taxes with a resignation that might touch the heart of Mr. Lowe himself. I have fed servants whom I never wanted; entertained visitors I never desired to see; made money for the benefit of West End tradespeople, and

being in Rome, failed in no respect, according to my light, to do as Rome desired.

And yet I think I was a fool for my pains. Better a "genteel six-roomed residence," than this ceaseless money-getting and money-paying. Better, ah! heaven, a hundred times the dinner of herbs procured for cash than the stalled ox purchased on credit, or purchased at least thus far on credit, that the money for our Sunday's joint and trimmings was never in my pocket on the Saturday night preceding.

Well, it was to be, I suppose,—at all events it was,—and time and I and work went on together, and the pecuniary treadmill became a familiar flight of steps.

Supposing a man to be successful in business, he can employ clerks, and superintend their doings; he can turn his thousands by paying thousands. But suppose a barrister, or an author, salary his ten heads or twenty pair of hands, can he indite the life history of Smith by instruct-

ing Jones to bring him in so many folios closely written, or can he defend the cause of Brown by telling Robinson to notice all the nicest points in the case ?

Decidedly not ; and therefore, oh ! millionaire, when you hold up your hands for the future at the price paid for his book to some poor devil whom you honour by occasionally asking to dinner, or grudge Mr. Sarjeant the hundred-guinea fee that is his due,—just please to take these small matters into consideration. The capital of each is in his head, and if you could only imagine how often authors and barristers have a quarrel with that banker in order to get him to honour their drafts, you would think law and literature none such pleasant professions after all.

But, pshaw !—why should I preach ? my day has been profitable, and if I have worked, what then ? It is the lot of man, and work has been more blessed to me than any leisure I can imagine. Yea, truly.

Nevertheless, I worked, and hard, for which reason I often remained late at my chambers, instead of seeking that relaxation in the bosom of a steadily increasing family, which I am given to understand is good alike for the soul and body of man.

Catharine, fortunately, was not of a suspicious disposition, or what she might have thought of my constant professional absorption, who can say?

Many wives do not credit the narratives men tell concerning important business engagements, and work pursued far into the night, away from home, and in many cases there is reason for this unbelief; but so far as I am concerned, had the partner of my joy, and the liberal disburser of my earnings, done me the honour of making a friendly call in Pump Court at almost any hour in the evening, she would have found me busy with brief or manuscript, guiltless of any act or thought or project disloyal to her.

But Catharine never did me the honour of calling, and in all candour I may say I did not want her to do so. Having to work, it was best for me to labour on without even the pleasing distraction of a visit from my wife. Very few people came in a "friendly way" to my chambers, where briefs now arrived rapidly as could be desired. I had not many male acquaintances, and as for women I was scarcely on more than speaking terms with any save those of my own household.

Day after day I wended my way through the Temple—(before my marriage I had left Staples Inn, for more legally aristocratic quarters),—until every stone in the place grew familiar as the fields and woods of my boyhood had been. Day after day I repaired to court, and sometimes won the suit and sometimes lost it. Most frequently, however, fortune was with me. Night after night I worked late and hard, allowing myself little relaxation, except an occasional

half-hour's walk under the winter stars, or in the summer's evening's twilight through the deserted nooks and corners of the Temple.

How many dinners I ate in those years at the 'George,' I should be afraid to reckon. How many cigars I smoked pacing slowly round the church of the old Knights Templar, or walking by Goldsmith's grave, or (more rarely) sauntering through the gardens, it would be impossible to count. Essentially I had become a lonely man, caring but little for anything save my profession and the money it brought me, valuing literary success merely just so far as it contributed towards the support of a rising family, and attaching importance to adverse criticism only to the extent it reduced the amount of the next cheque sent by my publishers.

Occasionally Catharine and I went to parties together; sometimes even we repaired in each other's company to the

theatre and the opera, but as a rule she accompanied her father and mother, or matronized her sisters to those festive gatherings which were in our sphere considered amusing and proper.

I had not, in a general way, time to spend on what my wife called "keeping up our connection," so she sedulously devoted herself to that pleasing duty, and at this moment were any one to inquire of Mrs. Luttrell as to the special causes which have contributed to such worldly success as we can boast, she would, I doubt not, answer, "Well, you know, I did not, like many women, relinquish society when I married; I was always careful to make and retain desirable acquaintances."

And to do her justice she was; but were the debit and credit column added up, and a strict account made out of profit and loss, the result of Catharine's tactics would not, I think, prove to have been gain. However, she believes she has fulfilled the

duty of existence, and no doubt she is right, since every one says how desirable a thing it is for a professional man to possess so admirable a wife.

I wish some one would tell me why—and inform me at the same time what possible advantage it can be to a man for a woman to dress herself out, evening after evening, like Solomon in all his glory, for the mere sake of making the eighteenth at a dinner-party, or the two hundred and first at one of those popular entertainments ironically called an “At Home.”

From all of which the attentive reader will readily understand that we soon became a very fashionable couple, interfering little one with the other, meeting only at breakfast on week-days, and having but little in common to talk over when Sunday came, and with the day of rest orthodox church-going, early dinner, and an afternoon devoted to the claims of society and the pleasure of seeing many callers.

Occasionally, indeed, we had dinner parties, and then I reached our house in time to see to the wines and receive my wife's instructions as to whom I was to take down; while once at least in every season Catharine issued cards for an "At Home" more crowded, more uncomfortable, and more hot than any she herself had attended, on which occasion it was *de rigueur* that I should be in attendance, though I am sure nobody wanted me, and I did not want myself.

My real "At Home," however, was in Pump Court, when, with curtains drawn and blazing fire, I settled myself down for an evening's thorough work. Even now I can recall the peace of those quiet hours! I can look back with satisfaction on the amount of willing labour I got through in the days, and months, and years between the first romance of my life and my last—between the first sorrow of my existence, which I got over, and that last which is present with me even now.

Anxieties I had, it is true, and the eternal pressure of providing for a style of living far beyond my actual position in life. As my brothers grew older, also my responsibilities seemed to increase. They were always getting into scrapes; one, indeed, got into something worse than a scrape, and it needed much money and, what was even more important, much time to extricate him, and of course the whole burden of trouble and expense and anxiety fell on me.

But my shoulders were broad, and the burden was not more than I could carry, and I did, or thought I did, my duty, and the old love lay buried under the apple-blossoms, and the soft green turf, and the dead autumnal leaves of the long ago time.

For years I had never beheld Rose Surry—never heard tidings of her.

Sometimes, indeed, I saw the names of Sir Walter and Lady Surry mentioned amongst those of other fashionable persons who had “graced with their presence,” or

“been honoured with invitations,” but this was all.

I had learnt only through the columns of the *Times* that Sir Humphrey Surry was dead and that Sir Walter the new king reigned in his stead, but my way lay so far apart from theirs, it was hard to understand how the threads of our lives could ever have crossed even for a moment, and sometimes I looked back upon the whole love story but as an unsubstantial dream.

The present baronet was a different individual, indeed, from the late Sir Humphrey, and at his grand town house there were assemblies, and balls, and dinner parties innumerable, whilst when the season was over I read about the great people who were “partaking of the hospitalities of Grayborough.” That was the way I think the gentleman who wrote the passage worded it.

Once, indeed, meeting Dick Tullett in the street (hearing I was at one time slightly Bohemian he had eschewed all intimate ac-

quaintance with me, and I had not cared to renew it even when the "elegances and refinements of life" were, thanks to Mrs. Luttrell's good management, inmates of my home, though my wife and family now visit his), he told me he was going down to Grayborough, where I found subsequently he had formed one of a distinguished circle invited thither as guests of Sir Walter and Lady Surry.

He did not add he was going in order to paint her portrait. The man was ashamed of his trade and did not care to mention it, but I found out his errand to Grayborough, when next year I saw in the newspapers a criticism on Lady Surry's portrait in the Academy, painted by Richard Tullett, Esq., R.A.

I did not go to the Academy that season.

She was too greatly removed, we were too far separated by rank and circumstances for even a pulse to beat the quicker at sight of her name, nevertheless, being married

myself and she married, I thought it best to stay away. The disillusion also might have been too bitter. It was the child Rose—the darling I met by the river now flowing on solitary—the sweet child-girl of a later growth whom I could remember so distinctly without bitterness, and I had no wish to see the woman, even on canvas, who was now far from me as the heaven from the earth.

So I did not go, and Lady Surry hung in a good light on the Academy walls, and Mr. Tullett's fortune was made. Had Rose been my wife, her portrait should not have been stared at by thousands in a public building; but then she was Lady Surry, a celebrated beauty, and I only a commoner with strong ideas concerning the sacredness of a woman's loveliness.

Had she been my wife I should have kept that portrait within my holy of holies, but then she was not my wife, and of course no one came to consult me on the subject. At

a later period Mrs. Luttrell's portrait, to which allusion has already been made, also graced the Academy walls, but this publicity was entirely of her own choosing; and as I never could have forced a full comprehension on her of my intense dislike to such exhibitions, the subject was not mooted between us.

She got the portrait painted at a very reasonable rate on the stipulation that it was to be exhibited, and when she told me a Mr. Snooks, who dined frequently at our house, and was a very good judge of the quality of our wines, had offered to perpetuate her charms on canvas, and purposed giving that portion of the British public who discourse about effect and delight in art an opportunity of beholding them, I said never a word in deprecation of her design. I did not even ask how much it was to cost, for fortune had smiled on me, and a few pounds more or less was not of such paramount importance as had once been the case.

So Mrs. Luttrell was duly done in oils, and Snooks got several good orders in consequence.

But as I was saying, had Rose been my wife that portrait should not have appeared in the catalogue.

I have had a copy of it made since, or rather a copy of it was made for me, but it gives me very little idea of Rose.

Of course after a thing of this sort has been copied, that copy photographed, the photograph re-drawn, and coloured, the likeness to the original sitter cannot be considered admirable, and yet I think the face I turn and gaze at now is not wholly unlike that which Tullett, R.A., painted, though it does not in the slightest degree resemble Rose—at least not to my mind. Other people thought the original painting admirable, but in this, as in many things more or less important, other people and I joined issue.

I never believed Dick Tullett, whether boy or man, could paint a woman, and I see no reason to alter my opinion—he has been dexterous in the treatment of her necklace and drapery, but he was less fortunate in his portrait of Lady Surry than of the child Rose, which he sketched in chalk one summer evening long ago—oh! so long.

It was many a day after that portrait was painted ere I saw Rose again, and I am told there was a period in her life when the sweetness vanished out of her face, and there lay a sorrowful, almost sullen look in those eyes that had been so pure and innocent.

Fashionable hours, a perpetual round of visiting, whirling here and whirling there, being admired, flattered, yielded to, did not, I am told, improve her temper or her nature, and this may be so; but all I know is that when we met again she was gentle and tender as of old, and that to whomsoever

else she may have seemed arrogant and perverse, the only memory of her my heart holds is the recollection of a woman sweet and clinging, weak and lovable and loving; the Rose of the murmuring rivulet; the Rose who stood out with me under the moonlight when the apple-blossoms carpeted the ground, grown to womanhood unchanged in heart, unspoiled in nature.

But you want to know, at least I hope you do, when and how we met again after a lapse of time which had aged me considerably and made me a very different looking fellow to the Tom Luttrell who picked my first love's reticule out of the stream and sat on the brink with Joan and Rose, eating cherries and watching the trout gleaming in and out amongst the alders.

Marriage ages a working man everywhere when once the first illusion is over, and he comes practically to understand the meaning of "little bills," and to know that a house, and wife, and a family cannot be maintained

on air; that baker, butcher, tailor, shoemaker, and milliner are tangible beings, oftentimes terrible realities; but in London the pace being faster and the expenses greater, and the time for mental and physical repose more limited, husbands age more rapidly than elsewhere.

I did at all events. While Lady Surry was still beautiful and still young, I had settled down into a grave, thoughtful man. Lines were traced across my forehead; grey hairs had cropped up from time to time; when I looked in the glass it was a face changed and worn that gazed back at me steadily and steadfastly, with grave thoughtful eyes. My youth was gone, and my elasticity with it. Already the life insurance seemed a good and desirable property, for I had left my dreams behind me, and understood thoroughly that the end of all our dreams is the last sound sleep, which none of the voices, whether sweet or harsh, that

have disturbed and distracted us here shall be able to break.

I was sitting alone in my chambers one winter's night, just as I am doing now, only at this moment I chance to be writing a story, and then I was reading one, the plot whereof turned on a will over which two brothers were disputing, and the *dénoement* of which was still uncertain—my man, I ought to say, lost, though I believe he lost righteously—when there came a ring at the hall door, closed long previously, and a moment afterwards the small boy who stole my stamps, smoked my cigars, read my letters, forgot to deliver messages, and who, in addition to his other sins, chanced to be a son of the elderly female who professed to keep my chambers clean and failed to do so, came head-first into the room, full of the astounding intelligence—

“Please, sir, a lady wants to see you, sir.”

“What lady?” I asked, for the cave of

St. Kevin or the isle of St. Senanus was not more innocent of female presence than those chambers in Pump Court. "What lady?" and then, looking up, I sat like one bewildered because of the apparition I beheld.

"Lady Surry!" I gasped.

She came across to the table against which I now stood unable to move, unable almost to believe the evidence of my senses. She laid her hand on my arm, and said just one word, "Tom."

That was all, and yet in a moment the mist of the years, with their misery and trouble, their labour and their anguish, seemed lifted like a veil, and I was young again, and life was still before me, and I was wandering, happy and unheeding, through the Elysian fields of yore.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY SURRY.

THERE are stories told of persons who, sleeping for only two minutes, have yet managed to dream dreams the actions and events of which were carried on through years—and I believe those stories, for although I was then wide awake, I dreamed a dream, in the space of about a single second of time, which extended over the happiest part of my life.

Then my vision ended, before she took her hand away it was over, and we both stood—parted—she a wife, I a husband, and yet not husband and wife; she a mother, I a father, and yet neither a drop's blood to

the children of each other—parted as utterly as man and woman could be parted—we who had once been so much, she to me and I to her. So much! had we not been all in all?

“I am afraid I surprised—startled you,” she began, “but I had not another friend in the world to whom I could come but yourself.”

I pulled my own especial chair round to the fire for her, and seated myself at a little distance before I could quite steady my voice to answer. Then I said—

“What is the matter—what is wrong?”

“Everything,” she answered, “and I want you to put it right.” And then she looked at the fire for a second or so, and I could see that her face was worn and pale, and that her eyes—those dear, sweet, honest, childish eyes I remembered so well—were full of tears. “You are not angry with me for coming here, Tom, are you?” she asked at length.

“Angry, Lady Surry!” I repeated.

“Call me Rose,” she said. “It will sound like the old times, and we have never been other than friends, have we ?”

“No, indeed !” I answered.

Yet for the life of me I could not help remembering how much more than friends we had once been, and I wondered how she could forget or ignore it ; but then women are mysteries (woman is the real enigma of existence), and the extent to which they can forget and ignore, even while recalling, is marvellous to the present writer.

“All these years I have watched your success, I have read your books, I have been proud of and jealous for you as Joan might be. I heard of you—of you all. Though I never wrote, I never forgot Joan nor any of you.”

Not knowing what reply to make to this, I held my peace.

“I thought of writing to you often,” she

went on, "to say how glad I was to hear of your success, and to ask after Joan, and the rest ; but then I decided I would not. You did not think me unkind, did you ?"

I should have thought it a most marvelous thing had she written, though such letters are sent daily, I believe, in London ; and yet I was pleased to know the tender little heart had felt impelled to send some token of remembrance, though it fluttered back again without fulfilling its purpose.

"No," I said, "I could never think you unkind."

"Thank you," she said. "And I knew that although you had become a great author" (Heaven help her innocence !) "and been so successful in every way" (I felt as if my soul must have uttered a cry at hearing this, as if I must tell her what a wretched unsatisfactory life it had all been), "you would not quite forget old times, but help me if you could."

I got up from my chair and paced the room once, twice, thrice. I verily believed if she went on much longer she would drive me mad.

I thought of the Egyptian bondage into which I had sold myself—and there sat she, the only thing I had ever desired or hoped to possess, congratulating me on having partaken of the leeks and cucumbers of that accursed land.

Why could she not have left me alone? Why had she ever come there?

“Rose”—I spoke her name quite distinctly, and without a tremour in my voice; it was the first time since her marriage it had ever to my knowledge passed my lips; when delirious, no doubt I spoke it often enough. “Rose, if you want my help, I am ready to give it, if I can serve you—with all the veins of my heart I will do so—but for God’s sake let the dead past lie buried—do not talk of old times to me.”

Then she turned away, and I knew it was to hide her tears.

These women, oh, these women! they turn down a page in a man's life's book, and go away and attend to a thousand things; they marry, they bear children, they make a hundred fresh friends, they have a score of admirers, and then, after years, they return and open the old book, and expect that the tale can be proceeded with, or the former story recalled innocently or half indifferently as once they read it: whilst the man——

Well, I had set Rose crying—not a difficult operation to perform—poor Rose.

“I did not mean to wound you,” I began, when I could endure the sight of her grief no longer.

“I know you did not,” she answered, “but I am so miserable and so stupid.”

“What is the matter?” I asked.

“Walter will not let me live with him any longer, and he has taken my children away.”

“And you——”

“I have done nothing wrong—oh! Tom,” she cried passionately, “if nobody else believes in me, won’t you? He has been so cruel and so hard; and then to take away my children.” She never said “our children.” She never, first or last, through that interview wept or made lamentation for him.

“Have you left Grayborough, then,” I inquired.

“No, but he has, and taken my children too, and I could not stay there alone. He calculated on that—and I have come up here to ask you to help me. I do not want money—or anything from him—if he will only give me my children.”

That was the refrain. Poor little desolate heart, she could not remain alone—she could not live separated from those she loved. Through a mist I saw the child I had first beheld sobbing by the stream, little caring in her babyish grief what the future might

have to hold for her beside her mother's anger at the drenched reticule. And the years had come, and the years had gone, and behold this was what they had brought—a loveless marriage—a distrustful husband—a desolate home, and a frantic flight to the only human being who could, she said, help her.

I had thought much and often about Lady Surry during the course of my married life, but I had never dreamed of anything like this—never seen her, even in the wildest of fancy's night-mares, sitting thus in my chambers—a despised wife—a weeping mother—a lonely, broken-hearted woman.

“It can soon be set right though,” I said at length, speaking rather as the sequence of a long train of thought than in answer to her last remark; but Rose shook her head—

“Walter was always jealous,” she explained, “he never quite trusted me. He knew—” at this point she stopped and

hesitated, and I did not encourage her to proceed—we both understood the finish of the unspoken sentence too well.

“If I am to be of any service to you,” I began after a short pause, “you must be frank with me; tell me the whole story from beginning to end, so far as it concerns this matter.”

“I will try,” she said, bearing and leaning back in the chair, she began at the commencement of her trouble, and told me all about it right through without a break.

There was not much in it, nothing but the usual tale of a man’s jealousy and a woman’s folly. Rose had always been a little simpleton, and furthermore, a naughty, perverse child, going where she was told not to go, and doing the things she had been bidden to leave alone.

Sitting there, listening to her confession, I remembered how having been ordered not to go to the river she went—alas! for me.

Well, the whole of her married life had

been on a piece with that. If Walter Surry desired her not to waltz, the first thing he beheld was Rose whirling round to the music of the then most fashionable *trois temps*. If he told her he wished such and such persons treated with only distant courtesy, he was certain to find the obnoxious individuals in her box at the opera, beside her carriage in the Row, close at hand in the next ball-room.

I could have led her with a silken thread, or I fancy I could, which comes to much about the same thing; but knowing the persistent obstinacy with which she disregarded her mother's commands, I arrived at the conclusion, that on the whole, Walter Surry's life with his wife had not been one of unmixed happiness; that, with his temperament, the blessing of such a wife as Rose could not have proved entirely unmixed; and at first, I confess my sympathies were with him, but when she went on to tell me how he intercepted her letters, and held her answerable for the impertinent

folly of a man who thought she meant to give him encouragement, when she was only in her folly trying to pass the hours pleasantly with a pleasant companion, whom she had once assured me she "hated"—when she recited her tears and prayers—her frantic assurance of innocence, her entreaties that he would not part her from her children—the pity of old stirred within my heart, and for one moment—one wild, mad, passionate moment—I reflected had I been but free, and that this chance had offered, I would, in spite of fifty husbands, have taken her to myself, and kept her—so far as it lay in the power of man to do it—free from harm and sorrow for ever.

And then, thank God, that feeling passed away, for I remembered what she was, and what I, and that there lay between us that which no honest man, no virtuous woman, may ever cross.

To me she might be Rose—but she was also Lady Surry; to her I might be Tom,

the lover of her girlhood—but I was also Tom, the husband of another woman—the father of many children—who could never be aught to her in the future save friend or brother.

He had tried to tire her out—to compel her to leave and return to her mother; but here again Rose's persistency stood her in good stead.

“I have done nothing wrong,” she contended, “and I shall not go.”

Then he went himself, and had the children conveyed away likewise.

“That was this morning,” Rose explained, “and to-night I am here. I arrived in town about six o'clock, and went to an hotel and got a Directory, and found out where your chambers were. I did not wish to go to your house if I could avoid doing so.”

What a goose she was! I, with my evil knowledge of the world—learned in a school where the world always turns its worst side

out—stood aghast at her lack of the most ordinary prudence.

Knowing her husband to be jealous—knowing there were a thousand tongues ready to make a nine days' tattle about her, waiting only the signal for attack to tear her fair fame to pieces, she left the secure shelter of her home, travelled to London without even a maid, drove to a grand West End Hotel, and came out at the latest time in the evening she could well select—to see me, it was true—but, so far as society was concerned, or knew, to see anybody.

Thinking all this over, I said—

“You must go back by the first train to-morrow morning.”

“No,” she replied, “I will never enter Walter Surry's house again.”

“Folly!” I exclaimed, and then she burst out crying.

“He had taken everything from her she cared to have—all she wanted now was peace and her children.”

“Then,” I remarked, “you must come to my house; if I am to interfere in this matter at all, you must follow my advice; and I will have nothing to do with the business if you persist in staying alone at a London hotel, at the mercy of Dick, Tom, and Harry’s good-natured inferences. In fact, you ought not to have come to London at all. A letter would have brought me to Grayborough by the first train.

“Would it?” she answered faintly—“I was afraid it might not.”

Might not—ah! Rose.

She still sat leaning back in her chair, with the fire-light playing over her face, and I could not help remarking how wan and changed she looked—how changed from the Rose Surry I had seen driving in the Park!

“Are you quite well?” I asked at length, meeting her questioning glance. “I mean, do you feel strong, and in quite good health,

excepting the fatigue consequent on your journey?"

"Yes, quite," she answered; and then added, hurriedly—"Oh! you will get me back my children, or I shall die!"

"And you will return to Grayborough."

"No, the solitariness would drive me mad."

"Will you come home with me?"

"Yes, anywhere not to be alone."

"We had better go at once, then," I remarked, "and I will think over the best plan to pursue between this and to-morrow morning."

She rose at my words like a child, and saying simply, "Thank you, Tom—I leave it all in your hands now," moved towards the door. On her way, however, she stopped, and, turning to me, asked nervously—

"But your wife,—will she not object?"

"It is that you may have the protection of my wife I propose your coming to our

house; only pray do not mention you have had any quarrel with your husband; you can say you have come to town on business, and I thought it must be uncomfortable for you to stop at your great town establishment alone.”

She opened her eyes in astonishment at my advising her to even insinuate a falsehood, but said she would do whatever I told her, though she did not much like it.

And you were right, my dear, and I wrong, for the truth—no matter how inexpedient it may seem at first—is always best in the long run. I might have learned this in the course of my practice, but I had not, and behold the use I made of my worldly knowledge conned since the days when we walked together by stream, o’er lea, through copse, was to teach my darling in her extremity to be false—false with intention, spite of her cowardice, I verily believe, for the first time in all her life.

When we went out into pump Court, the rain was pouring in torrents, and she clung to me whilst I tried to shelter her with my umbrella. We walked together over the dripping pavement I had paced so many a hundred times alone, beneath the porch of the Temple Church, and so into Fleet Street. Then I left her in the shelter of a doorway for a minute, whilst I secured a cab.

My darling, I have often wondered since what you thought of during those few seconds when you stood all alone in an unfamiliar London street—all alone in the world, indeed except for me!

As we drove to my home, I called at the hotel where she had left her luggage, and desired the waiter to inform Sir Walter Surry when he arrived in town, that Lady Surry had gone to stay with her friends at the address I gave him.

The man knew me by reputation. I had risen high enough in my profession for that,

and I felt thankful at having put the affair right so far. How Mrs. Luttrell might take Lady Surry's introduction to our domestic hearth at such a time of night, was quite another question, but one which had to be faced. My own opinion was, she would put Lady Surry's rank on the credit side of her mind, against the natural prejudice existing on the debit.

She had known of my attachment to Rose. She was well aware I had loved the young lady very dearly, and it is never a pleasant thing for a woman to reflect she has caught a man's heart on the rebound—supposing she fancies she has caught it at all—for which reasons I did not think she would approve of Lady Surry's visit; but then on the other hand she *was* Lady Surry, and I heard in imagination my Catharine discoursing to future callers concerning her visitor; I could see her mentally planning a journey to Grayborough in expectation of the invitation which must surely come; and I could

prophetically listen to her telling me in the dead of night what a nice connection it would prove in future days for the children.

I thought of all this as we drove wearily along in the cab. Ah! days long past, it was not in such prosaic musings I occupied myself when a boy I carried my future love home in my arms to the Hall; or when a man I whispered my love to her in the spring twilight!

It all turned out as I expected: Mrs. Luttrell did not quite like the intrusion, yet was she gracious and hospitable; but I could see Rose did not take much to my wife. She shrank a little, it seemed to me, from the apparent warmth of Catharine's welcome, and she looked at me pitifully from time to time in a way which I should have interpreted to mean, even had she not afterwards translated it into words during my wife's momentary absence from the room—

“Oh! Tom, if she knew how it all⁵ was, she would not wish me to be here.”

“We must put it right then,” I answered cheerfully, and the poor little soul went to bed happier, I think.

CHAPTER VII.

ALL WRONG.

THE first hours of that night which ought to have been devoted to slumber, were spent by Catharine in questioning and cross-questioning me concerning Lady Surry; and considering the practice I had gone through in that sort of thing—cross-questioning other people—I cannot say I came out of the ordeal well.

During the course of that conversation I told her a great many things which would have inevitably resulted in a prosecution for perjury had they been stated on oath. She wanted to know so much, too much. She

asked me how I knew Lady Surry was in London,—if she had sent for me,—how it happened that the servants were not at the town house,—above all, how it chanced Lady Surry had not brought her maid.

“Good gracious,” I answered, “I never imagined you wanted the maid. Shall I send for her in the morning?”

“No! oh, no!” Catharine said, adding next moment, however, regretfully, “but the servants may wonder, you know.”

“So they may, with all my heart,” I replied; “still, if you want the maid, have her by all means. My notion is, however, she will only make our people discontented.”

“Indeed, that is very true,” Mrs. Luttrell kindly agreed, and there ensued a silence, which was broken by my wife saying, a minute or so afterwards—

“Do you not think we might manage to give a party whilst Lady Surry is with us?”

“Certainly; but had we not one a fortnight ago?”

“ Yes,—only—”

“ Oh, if you want to give another, I have no objection ; however, I do not think it can be whilst Lady Surry is here, as I know she wishes to stay in town as short a time as possible.”

“ I did not think of that,” murmured Catharine, and I fondly hoped she was going to sleep ; but no, she commenced in a second or two again, fresher than ever, trying to pump from me what business it was on which Rose had come to London.

Now, in a general way, this was a proceeding to which I should have put an immediate stop, for I never had spoken to my wife about my clients, and I did not allow her to speak concerning them to me, but on this occasion I proved a coward—I think men always are cowards when speaking to women about women—and put her off, or tried to do so, until she fairly compelled me to make up a falsehood for her special benefit, and tell her a long story about a relation of Sir

Walter's who had been entrapped into a low match, and got into trouble, and that Rose had thought of me, and offered to come up to London to see what could be done.

The story was true enough in one respect, though not with respect to Rose. My own brother Stephen had got into just a similar scrape, and the narrative consequently flowed on easily and smoothly enough. Catharine believed it implicitly, all the more readily, perhaps, because I cautioned her on no account to mention the matter to Lady Surry.

“She is in great trouble, and does not look at all well,” I finished; “and I should not like her to think I had spoken about her and Sir Walter's concerns to any one. While she is here I wish you would write a line to Joan, and ask her to spend a day with us. She and Lady Surry used to be great friends.”

“And so were you and she,” remarked Catharine. By the change in her tone I had made a mistake in saying anything

about Joan. "You were very much in love with her once, were you not?"

"I was," I answered, "when I was a boy—a long time ago—but that was before I ever saw you, Catharine."

I tried to say this tenderly, but I failed. The memory of my first love was very present with me at that moment—my first love, who, in those blessed, far-away days, had been to me like child, wife, sister, friend—all in one.

That night I dreamed a very strange dream. I was on the bank of that well-remembered river once more, Joan and Rose stood on the little promontory of gravel, with hands outstretched towards the bag, which floated rapidly away. I tried to arrest its progress, but, failing to do so, stepped from the stones into the water, and pursued it down the stream. Suddenly the water deepened, and at the same moment I saw it was Rose herself who was being carried away by the current.

Desperately I struck out in pursuit, for I was already out of my depth. Panting and gasping, I swam on, never able, however, to get near enough to catch her dress, which I still beheld gleaming white and limp on the bosom of the waters.

We were in a great river by this time, but there was not a boat on its surface, not a creature on its banks. I looked if there were no one I could shout to—no one who would give me help—and then, seeing there was none to save, I dashed forward with fresh energy.

Even now—after many, many years—I can recall every circumstance of that dream; I can feel the water licking my lips—the strain of my muscles as my arms clave the water; I can see the peaceful greenness of the banks growing more and more distant every moment; I can follow the light figure floating on more and more rapidly. I remember the mad, passionate despair that rent my very heart—the impotent agony of

my soul. I make once again a final struggle, and through the waters seize my darling's dress; then there comes a great darkness before my eyes, as there came in that vision—some one unseen before, interposes between us, tears Rose's gown from my grasp, and bears me with painful strength to the bank, where I recognise my wife!

It does me harm to write about all this. As my memory portrays once more that scene, I lay down my pen, and pace the room. Oh! Rose—my love! my life!

And yet what folly all this is! I recollect thinking just the same thing, thinking it was all senseless folly, when, after awakening, trembling and afraid, I lay through the hours of that weary night talking to my own soul.

The woman was nothing to me. She had elected to marry another husband, and quarrel with him. There was no Rose Surry for Tom Luttrell now, only Lady Surry—Sir Walter's wife—my client.

That this should be so, I resolved—resolved with all the strength of my mind—viz., whilst Lady Surry stayed with us, my house should see less of me even than usual. There were certain things it was needful for me to do in her interest—certain letters to write, certain interviews to seek—above all, I had to find Sir Walter Surry; but there existed no necessity for me to remain long at home or to return there early, and consequently for two days Lady Surry and I never met.

Then she took the extremer step of coming again to my chambers; but this time with Joan—dear, loving Joan, to whom she had told everything, and who proved in this time of need as staunch a friend as she had been a true daughter. It was on this occasion Rose explained how she came to marry Sir Walter, as if that mattered to me now or could make the present better, the future happier. Afterwards we talked about her position.

“I will let Joan know the moment there is news of any kind,” I said; but, as they were leaving, I held my sister back, and added—“For mercy’s sake, keep her from me. I cannot bear it. And I cannot make her understand.”

“Dear Tom,” Joan answered softly, and the tears were in her eyes as she spoke the words.

What did they find to talk about, my wife and Lady Surry? Doubtless of their children; and I used often to fancy Rose drawing mine to her, and fondling and petting them, both because she was a mother herself, and because she remembered—and then I was wont to grow hard and angry in a moment when this softening picture was turned and the canvas reversed—when I saw her in imagination looking for something in my children which they lacked—searching their mother’s face for qualities she instinctively desired to find, but could not, and then turning for comfort to Joan—the tender, brave, impulsive self-reliant Joan of old.

When a man has made a mistake in the building of his life's house, he is never so disappointed with his own want of skill as with the house itself.

That was my case in those few short days, which seemed to lengthen themselves out into years. Heaven pardon me!

But what else did those two women talk about? I have since ascertained that Catharine devoted some portion of that abundant leisure with which Providence had blessed her to cross-examining Rose, as she cross-examined me, but with much greater success.

Rose was but a poor dissembler, and ere long my Catharine knew she had never been to the great town house at all, and that she had come to my chambers on that winter's night, when I was supposed to have been ceremoniously invited to an interview—all of which incongruities Mrs. Luttrell kept sacredly and secretly within her own breast, as within a storehouse, wherefrom, when

the evil days came, coals of fire were to be heaped on the head of an offending husband.

No human being would believe the trouble I had to ascertain Sir Walter Surry's whereabouts.

Subsequently I have reason to know this was attributed to me as a sin, Mrs. Luttrell arguing, with the usual logical accuracy of her sex, that if I had wanted to find him I could have done so; but this was not the case. For some time he had led so wandering a life, that not even his most intimate friends could indicate his whereabouts with certainty, and it was therefore necessary for me to track him down step by step, which at length I did.

Even then, however, I could not immediately start in pursuit, for I had been retained on an important case, and even for Rose I could not throw up my brief and desert a cause I had made my own, and which I ultimately won.

Women say a man never truly loves

them unless he be willing to do anything for their dear sakes—and I fancy the women are right. That individual who observed—

“I could not love, thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more,”

never certainly had fallen over head and ears.

In the days when Rose was still *my* possible Rose, I should like to have seen the retainer that could have kept me from her side; but now, alas! Rose was not even possibly my Rose, and rent and tradespeople and her Majesty's tax-collector, had to be satisfied as well as my client's interest served.

Heavens! what a life this would be if it could always be only apple-blossoms and Rose; but then, alas! both Rose and apple-blossoms are expensive—the one involves an establishment, and the other a gardener.

Why—oh! why did Adam and Eve leave Eden? Was it that Eve wanted to see the latest fashion-book, and that Adam disliked

the trouble of gathering peas for dinner, and fruit for dessert?

If only there could be a second garden of Eden planted, say in the Thames Valley, or on the top of Richmond Hill, I think I might promise to refrain from any dozen trees the owner of that freehold desired to keep intact.

There is an observation, however, I desire to add.

Should any one reading these lines be tempted to present me with the like, I should prefer Paradise, without any Eve who could now be brought to me.

Alas! that we should outlive our illusions. I think as little of women at this present moment as I dare say most women who understand the world think of men—that is to say, we may get on comfortably enough without the grand passions, the profound despair, the mad agony, the rapturous joy we once thought necessary to make up the whole romance of life.

For, behold, life is not a romance, but

a reality—full of such stern sorrows, and such bitter tragedies, as might make the ringlets of romance itself fall out of curl.

But all this time Rose and her affairs are waiting.

The moment I had finished my speech in the case to which allusion has already been made, without waiting even to hear the verdict, I left the court, repaired to my chambers, divested myself of wig and gown, put on a thick overcoat, directed my clerk to telegraph result of the trial to me, took a cab to Euston Square, and was soon on my way to Crommingford.

I ascertained Sir Walter had returned to Grayborough almost directly after his wife left, and knowing of how little use letters are in explaining away, or smoothing down conjugal differences, it was my intention to seek a face to face interview, and beard the lion in his den.

Since the time when I went down to claim my bride, and found her married,

I had never been in that part of the country at all, and as I strode along the remembered roads it seemed impossible to realise the free, happy life I once led, wandering by the mill stream, and parting the hedges to find out the blue-bonnet's nest.

It seemed to me still more strange to recollect that people like the Surrys had then appeared almost too great and grand to approach—that the then Lady Surry, now a dowager, had been able to snub me very effectually, and that even their butler, sedate and white neck-clothed, inspired me with a very sufficient awe.

As for Grayborough, time was when I should have entered its gates with fear and trembling, and scarcely dared to ask for an interview with its owner, but now so assured and confident were my manners, that the old woman at the lodge dropped me a respectful curtsy, and the footman who graciously received my card was almost deferential in his reception.

In those remote regions it could not be that any one knew aught concerning me, but I knew myself that I had made a certain mark in law and in letters, and this was sufficient both for myself and for other people.

How Sir Walter might take my visit was of course quite another matter. If he refused to see me, I intended to return to mine inn, and send him thence an explanatory epistle ; if he refused to read that, I resolved upon adopting another course. But the baronet saved me the trouble of resorting to either plan by walking, high and mighty, proud and conscious, stately and unbending, into the library where I sat.

I rose as he entered, and we bowed—we two stiffly bowed to each other—then he motioned me to resume my seat, and throwing himself into an easy-chair, inquired,

“To what fortunate circumstances am I to attribute the honour of this visit, Mr. Luttrell ?”

He laid such a stress on the last two words, that I knew in a moment that he had neither forgotten nor forgiven me.

“I come here on behalf of your wife, Sir Walter,” I replied calmly.

“I suspected as much,” he said, and his face flushed, and his eyes sparkled. “I can hear nothing on, I can brook no interference in, the matter.”

“Pardon me, Sir Walter, but you must,” I answered. “I am here as Lady Surry’s next friend—not as her legal adviser—I am here as her father might be were he living, or as her brother, if she possessed one, to try to put a wrong right between you.”

“It is impossible,” he answered. “Nothing can ever be right between us again; she has left her home of her own accord, and she shall never enter these doors more!”

“You are quite sure of that?” I said.

“As sure as that I am standing here,” he replied.

He had risen in his excitement, and was

standing beside the library table, with his clenched hand resting upon it.

“Pray do not agitate yourself—sit down,” I suggested. It was a cool thing to say to a man in his own house, but he did as I bade him, and resumed his seat. “I have no wish to proceed to extreme measures at present,” I went on. “I have come down from London to talk the matter over with you quietly, man to man.”

“I have told you already I will not discuss it,” he said.

“And I have told you that I mean you to hear me. Of course,” I went on hurriedly, “I have only listened to one side of the story—that related by Lady Surry—but so far as I understood, there cannot be a question of her entire innocence.”

“The question of her guilt or innocence is one which shall never be entered upon privately or publicly by me,” he answered. “She has left her home, she has virtually ceased to be my wife, and she can never in

the future be more to me than she is at this moment."

"You think it then fair to condemn a woman upon mere suspicion?"

"Suspicion, sir! have I not ample proof?"

"I think not," was my answer. "You have not a tittle of evidence which you could take before any judge or jury in the land."

"I never intend to take it before judge or jury," he exclaimed.

"Possibly not, but she may, and it is to avert so terrible a calamity that I am now here."

I said this very slowly and deliberately, and I could see it produced its impression. Sir Walter had looked at the matter hitherto entirely from one point of view—his own—the idea of Rose taking any action had evidently never occurred to him, and he sat thinking over my words, whilst I went on.

"You have condemned an innocent and helpless woman on mere suspicion, you have

separated her from her children without a shadow of real proof against her, you have doné what you never dare have done had she owned a single male relative——”

“Stop!” exclaimed the baronet. “I cannot allow assertions such as these to pass uncontradicted. I had ample reason for the course I adopted. Even her own mother says I have not been unduly harsh.”

“Sir Walter Surry,” I replied, “before you ever beheld your wife’s mother, I was well acquainted with her, and considering the extent of our mutual knowledge, you are not, I presume, going to take shelter behind her petticoats. She never cared for her daughter, she never gave her love or tenderness, and she sides with you now not only because you are the stronger power, but because she is, and has always been, jealous of her daughter, and desired to secure for herself the man who has been the cause of all this unhappiness between yourself and your wife.”

“Your authority for this?” he inquired.

“Nay, your authority rather for vile and wicked calumnies against your wife, who has never wronged you in thought or word or deed, but whom you drove from your home, to seek the advice of the only true friend she possessed in all the earth.”

“It is perhaps as well to be accurate,” retorted Sir Walter, with an angry sneer.

“It does not appear to me that you have exactly described your position.”

“I do not know what system of morals may obtain in your rank,” I replied, hotly, for his tone was as insulting as his meaning was offensive, “but in mine, when a man marries it is thought only decent that if ever he have been the lover of another woman, he should try to forget the fact. My feeling towards Lady Surry now is as pure as it was when I carried her home a child to her father’s house. What the loss of her proved to me, neither you nor any other human being can ever imagine—how it changed me and my

life no one may ever know—but I did not come here to talk about myself. I have come to say you have committed a great wrong, which you must and shall set right.”

He did not take this speech angrily, as might have been expected; he sat silent for a minute, and then, careful not to lose my advantage, I went on. I told him how I had seen the man the cause of all this unhappiness riding years before with Rose, how she had left him to come and speak to me, how I had since questioned her about the events of that time, and elicited that he had then proposed for her and been rejected. I afterwards proceeded to relate how I had sought him in London, and entreated him to explain the reason which could possibly have emboldened him to address the letters to Lady Surry which had excited her husband's anger. I prayed of him if he had preserved any of her notes to let me see them.

“I have every line in my pocket, Sir Walter, she ever wrote to him,” I finished.

“No human being could extract consciousness of guilt out of them. She was foolish and frightened, and even imprudent, I admit, but remember it was your own neglect which laid her open to his importunities. Even had Lady Surry gone off with him, there is no one who, knowing all the circumstances, could say otherwise than that the fault lay with you. Will you read those letters?”

“I will not,” he said. “My mind is quite made up about the matter. You have probably meant well in coming here, but you might have saved yourself the trouble. My wife shall never return here.”

“Is that your final answer?” I asked.

“It is my final answer,” he repeated. “I will never live with a woman who has been even talked about. Had she ever cared for me, ever loved me, ever married me for anything but wealth and position, this thing could not have happened. No man would have dared to insult her with the mention of his love.”

“I will leave these letters with you,” I said, more shaken by his words and manner than I should then have cared to acknowledge. “Whether you read or not, I trust to your honour to return them. I procured them with infinite difficulty, and it was not till I made Mr. Lovell Allen understand I intended Lady Surry should for the future be protected from him, and that she should be put right with the world, if not with you, that he gave way. I had another indirect hold over him, too, or perhaps he might not have proved so docile; but at all events there are her letters, and if you take my advice you will read them carefully.”

“Keep them and your advice also, sir,” he answered.

“You positively refuse then to do justice to Lady Surry?” I said, rising.

“I have done her full and sufficient justice,” he replied.

“If that be your belief,” I remarked, “it will then become my duty to counsel Lady

Surry to seek the advice of some respectable solicitor, and to take whatever steps he may recommend for the purpose of re-establishing her position.”

“You intend then to constitute yourself the champion of a married woman,” he said with a sneer, which proved my last threat had taken effect. “It is a thankless and a dangerous office. As you have given me so much valuable advice gratuitously, let me return the compliment by saying I should recommend you not to meddle in affairs that in no way concern you.”

I turned to leave the room sick at heart—I had done my best, and my best had failed—I thought of the sweet, pitiful yearning face. I marvelled how I was ever to tell her, how merciless and stony he had proved. There did not seem another word of argument at my disposal; I could only say to him just what I felt, and I said it.

“God help any married woman whose husband turns against her—for she is more

lonely than a widow. I marvel, Sir Walter, how you dared marry a mere child like that, meaning to take no better care of her than you have done. Hers has been a wretched lot—mother and husband alike cruel and neglectful. When I think of her as I first saw her, a lonely delicate little creature, in terror of a harsh mother, and when I think of her as I saw her in my chambers in London, a still more desolate woman, weeping over your cruel injustice, I feel a pity for her I could not speak, and an indignation against you I could not express.”

And with that confession of faith, as there was nothing more to be gained by civility or diplomacy, I left the room, Sir Walter ceremoniously opening the door for me to pass out, and bowing haughtily in answer to my curt leave-taking.

The footman preceded me through the hall, and with a ceremony equal to that of his master, opened the front door to afford me egress. I walked down the avenue, I passed

through the entrance gates, where the lodge-keeper curtsied to me as before. I walked straight back to the inn, where I hastily swallowed some cold meat and bread whilst a gig was being got ready to take me to the station; then buttoning up my coat and wrapping my rug about me, I drove off, the well-remembered landscape stretching away in the distance, sweet and peaceful as of old, with as sad a heart as I had carried in my breast for many and many a long day.

When I arrived at the station, the first person I saw was Sir Walter Surry, mounted on a magnificent black horse that stood pawing with its feet and champing at the bit, anxious apparently to be off again, though it was evident he had been ridden to the station at no gentle pace.

“One word with you, Mr. Luttrell, if you please,” said Sir Walter, and as I jumped from the gig he alighted from his steed.

“You may as well leave me those letters you spoke of; you shall receive them back again quite safely,”

I could have uttered a shout of joy at hearing this, for I knew he was relenting, but I was careful not to betray my feelings; so without a word I handed him the packet, raised my hat, and hurried on to the platform just in time to secure a comfortable seat with my back to the engine, a matter about which I am very particular.

It is marvellous how careful we become of our bodies, when all the hope and love and freshness that made existence so bright to us has departed just like "Life's young dream."

CHAPTER VIII.

RECONCILED.

I TRAVELLED back to town a very happy man. I was not afraid now of meeting Rose, for though there was no positive good news to report, at least the tidings I could now bear were hopeful. It all, however, went to prove that a man's deliberate words may often avail very little, that it is generally the arrow shot at a venture which hits the mark, after a careful aim has failed. It was the chance sentence I had spoken in my pain and my anger which pierced Walter Surry's coat of mail, which penetrated his vanity and his pride, and made him remember

that, after all, there might be another side to the question at which it was his duty to look. She was the mother of his children, the wife of his choice, and I felt satisfied that, although he might not relent at once, he would relent in time, and taking Rose back, make her a more careful, tender, loving husband than had ever been the case before.

On my return to town, I intended also to have a serious conversation with Rose herself, to point out the mistakes she had made, to induce her to strive in the future better to comprehend her husband's nature. I doubted the chances of my success, but I thought if she would listen to advice from any one she would from me, and strive to follow it; at all events, I meant to try. So I spent most part of the journey considering what I wanted to say and how I had best say it—most of all how I could induce her to write such a letter to Sir Walter as might touch his heart and induce him to believe she was not so entirely indifferent

to her husband as she was devoted to her children.

By the time I reached Euston Square it was late, and the streets as I drove through them to my chambers looked cheerless and sloppy. A drizzling rain was falling; the few people who were abroad hurried along with umbrellas up, the air was misty and heavy and dull, and a depression for which I could in no way account, seeing that busy men are not usually much affected by external influences, took possession of me.

I tried to cheer myself by thinking of the comparatively good news I should be able to communicate. I pictured the sweet smile that would thank me, the grateful eyes lifted for a moment to mine, and then I understood what was the matter with me, that the jade Memory was at her tricks again, and that it behoved me to be very, very careful of my own soul, lest for one moment I should forget Rose was Lady Surry and I Catharine Luttrell's husband.

Oh! my dear, I loved you first and I loved you last with a passion no one but myself can even imagine; but I thank God now to remember that through all that time, which was a time of struggle and anguish to me, when you trusted your future, your fair fame, and yourself in my care, I never held your hand, or looked into your changed face with a thought I should have minded the angels recording in the Eternal Books.

It would soon be over, however, I hoped—the ordeal; the weary self-restraint; the continual temptation to forget, to believe the time of our enforced separation a dream, and that we might still be more to one another than we had been in the happy years gone by.

Honestly I had served her, in all honour I had held aloof from her. She came to me as to her only friend, and as a friend I worked for her.

What if I could not quite forget? if I felt

it needful to keep out of her way? ah! my reader, I was only flesh and blood, and I had loved this woman once with a love which I knew now could never die.

When I got out of the cab the rain was still falling, so I bade the man wait for me, as I merely intended calling at my chambers to inquire what letters there might be lying there ere hurrying home.

Since Lady Surry came to me I had worked later than ever in Pump Court, but I meant to reach home on this particular night before she retired to her room, so as to tell her the result of my journey.

Full of this design, I hurried into Pump Court, and so up some stone steps to the door of the house where were my chambers.

It was wide open, and, to my amazement, I saw Joan standing in the hall talking to the housekeeper.

“Oh, here is Mr. Luttrell!” exclaimed the latter, who stood facing the court, and consequently beheld my entrance.

“Tom, I am so *thankful* you have come back,” Joan said, laying an emphasis on the thankful, which filled me with an indescribable alarm.

“What is it?” I asked—“my father——”

“No, there is no one dead,” she said, answering my unfinished sentence and my unspoken thought. “Let us go upstairs for a moment, and I will tell you why I am here,” and she led the way to my room, where a fire was burning, and the lamp already lighted.

Joan closed the door, and then came close beside me. There was a look in her face that made me tremble, though I could not have told what I dreaded.

“Before I say a word,” she began, “you must promise not to be angry.”

“Do not be foolish, Joan,” I answered; “tell me in one word what is wrong.”

“Promise me,” she insisted.

“Well, I will promise—go on.”

“The fact is, Tom,” she hesitated, and

then proceeded—"somehow Catharine has ascertained that matters are not all right between Sir Walter and Rose. Some kind friend has been making her believe there is going to be a divorce, and all sorts of things—and——"

"Finish, Joan," I said.

"Not whilst you look like that," Joan retorted.

"Look like what?" I answered guiltily, and, making a desperate effort, I hid the demon that I *knew* was glaring out of my face.

"Well, you know it was natural," Joan resumed, "Catharine thought we had all been deceiving her, and she could not quite forget how fond you used to be of Rose—and some one must have been advising her badly—for——"

"If you do not finish, Joan, you will send me insane," I said. "What has Catharine said or done that should bring you here at this time of the night?"

“Oh! Tom, you must not be angry—but she said Rose and she could not stay in the same house any longer, and so Rose and I have left.”

“And where is Rose?”

“She is waiting for me in a cab in Essex Street; it was too late to come down Middle Lane.”

“Come along, Joan,” I cried, turning towards the door, and my voice sounded to myself hoarse and changed as I spoke.

“What do you mean to do?” Joan asked.

“See whether Mrs. Luttrell will refuse to receive *any* person I choose to take to my house. Rose shall stay there, by——”

But Joan covered my mouth with her hand.

“Tom,” she began, hanging on my arm, and hindering my progress from the room, “listen to me. If you take Rose back there you will kill her—do you understand me?”

—kill her! She is not strong enough to endure a scene; she is quite exhausted now with driving for so many hours. The best thing we can do is to take her to some hotel for the night, and get quiet lodgings to-morrow. We have been going about all the evening trying to get apartments, for I knew you did not want her to go to an hotel; but I could not find a suitable place where they would take us in on the instant. Oh! Tom, do not be angry, but think what is best for Rose; do not think of anybody but her; if you do, you will only be making bad worse. Where had we better take her? she is perfectly worn out. Your house-keeper has been telling me about some lodgings in Norfolk Street, but she does not know whether they are vacant.”

“Let us go back to Rose, and I will see what can be done,” I answered, and Joan, wrapping her shawl closely about her, ran down the stairs and out into the drizzling rain.

I felt like one crazed as I followed her. To think of Rose being driven forth like this—driven forth with contumely—driven forth from *my* house by *my* wife! I do not know what I said in my despair—I only remember Joan bidding me hush—I only remember staggering through the night, through the courts and passages of the Temple, like one drunk, and reaching the door of the cab, where *she* sat huddled up in one corner, crying like a child.

“Why did you not take her to Southgate?” I asked Joan, savagely.

“Because she would not go,” Joan answered, and Rose moaned out that she could not take herself and her troubles into any person’s house again.

I went and secured the lodgings mentioned by my housekeeper, and then brought Rose and Joan to them. When I assisted the former to alight, however, she fainted away in my arms, and I carried her up to the dreary sitting-room, where the maid-of-all-work was striving to kindle a fire.

I never beheld anything in all my life which impressed me with such a sense of utter desolation and misery as that scene—the cold, cheerless room, the untidy servant, the dim light provided by a couple of composite candles, the dark bed-chamber revealed through folding-doors that stood partly open, Joan and the landlady trying to bring Rose—what the latter called “to.” Oh! merciful Providence! will the events of that night ever fade from my recollection? shall I ever forget the devil which stirred within me at that sight.

“Tom,” Joan said at last, “you had better go for a doctor.”

And I went.

By the time I returned—it was a long time, for not a medical man I called upon was at home—they had undressed Rose, and got her into bed; and whilst I sat in the front room, the doctor went in to see her, and I waited in an agony of terror till he should return and give me his report.

“I do not think you need be uneasy, sir,” he said, when he had creaked slowly and solemnly back to where I stood. “Your good lady is very delicate—very.”

How I hated the man, even whilst I mentally blessed him.

“The lady is not my wife, doctor,” I interrupted; “but I have known her since she was a child, and my sister will remain with her here till she is strong enough to be removed.”

I said all this quite steadily, for I was determined there should be no misconception on the part of anybody as to the relation in which we stood.

“But she is married?” the doctor questioned.

“Yes — but her husband is not in London at present. Should you, however, consider her case at all serious, I will telegraph for him.”

“There is no immediate danger,” he answered, thoughtfully; “she is certainly

very delicate, but still, with care and nourishment—I can tell better in the morning,” he hurried on—“I will write a prescription now, if you favour me with pen and ink. Pray what is the name of my patient?”

For one second I hesitated, then said, distinctly—

“Lady Surry.”

“I beg your pardon,” he remarked politely,

“Lady Surry,” I repeated still more distinctly; then, perceiving he could not quite understand me, I added—“Wife to Sir Walter Surry, of Grayborough.”

He did not make a remark after this, he only wrote out his prescription, pocketed his fee, and departed. Clearly a discreet man, who, though he comprehended there was a mystery, did not think it his duty to inquire further into it.

After he was gone, Joan came to me. Rose was, she said, better. I need not be unhappy. Had I any news?

“Yes,” I answered; “I had seen Sir Walter, and thought he would ultimately relent.”

“That will be a tonic for her in itself,” Joan exclaimed; “and now, dear Tom, I want to say one single word to you before you go home.”

“I am not going home to-night,” I answered. “I will get this prescription made up, leave it here, and then return to Pump Court. I shall be round early in the morning to know how Rose has rested.”

“But, Tom, what does this mean?”

“That I am going to stay for the night in Pump Court—and that reminds me the cab which brought me from the station has been waiting for a couple of hours in Fleet Street. I must go and dismiss it.”

“Tom,” she put a hand on each shoulder, and looked steadily into my face.

“Yes, Joan.”

“You are not going to quarrel with your wife?”

“You should never interfere between man and wife, Joan; what I choose to do, or leave undone, that I shall do, or not do, you may depend upon it,”

“On the whole it is perhaps as well you should not return home to-night.”

“I am surely the best judge of that.”

“Ah! Tom, for the sake of dear old times do not talk in that cold, short, cynical way. It will not make things a bit better, and it makes you—oh! ever so much worse.”

And then she fell to crying, and I kissed and bade her hold her peace.

Next morning the report was that Rose had rested tolerably; but the doctor said she had caught cold, and must be kept very quiet; and so she went on for some days, sometimes staying in her bed, sometimes lying on the sofa, but always remaining very delicate and weakly, and still there came no letter from Sir Walter Surry, although she at my earnest entreaty had written to him.

At the end of that time Joan sent for further advice, which came in a natty brougham, and assumed the shape of a portly gentleman, who carried an immense watch, and treated Doctor Snelling with exaggerated respect, insisting on his going first, and listening to all he had to say with an air of intensest interest.

When they had consulted together, and seen the patient once more, and the great man had written out his prescription and pocketed *his* fee, I waylaid him on the way to his brougham, and asked his real opinion of Rose.

“For if there be any actual danger,” I suggested, “I must telegraph for her husband.”

The portly gentleman stood still on the pavement, and looked at me from head to foot, as though there were something singular about my organization which it would please him to anatomize; then he said—

“*If* there be any actual danger—my dear sir, the lady’s life is not worth a month’s purchase. She is dying at this moment as fast as she knows how. God bless the man—why what are you to her?”

I do not remember much about that day. I telegraphed to Sir Walter Surry—I went into court; but I cannot recollect what I said; it was all right, though, I suppose, as no complaint of carelessness ever reached my ears. I went back to my chambers after Court, and found Sir Walter Surry there before me.

When he asked about her, I inquired what it signified to him. He had been doubtful, I felt, as to whether the whole thing were not a *ruse*; but when he beheld me standing looking at the fire—which I could not see clearly—he understood there was no deception—that *my* Rose—mine through all—was gliding swiftly away.

“What is the matter, what was the cause of it?” he asked at length.

“Do not ask me,” I said, “my heart is broken.” And I verily believe it did break when that portly gentleman told me in the sullen gloom of a winter’s morning that she was dying as fast as she knew how.

For I could not disguise from myself the fact that my wife had killed her—that the fragile plant, which might have been tended and fostered back to health, was unable to bear the exposure and fatigue of that weary winter’s evening. I ought never to have taken her to my home—never told Catharine falsehoods about her—never put it in the power of a cold, merciless woman to speak to Rose as I knew she had been spoken to—never left her to be thrust out from warmth and shelter into the drizzling rain and the gathering night, as though she had been the vilest of her sex.

Heaven forgive me!—I hated my wife then, and I made a vow that the same roof

should never cover the twain of us again for any longer period than it would require to make the final arrangements I intended.

After a short time we—Sir Walter and I—went round into Norfolk Street, where Rose, wrapped in shawls, was lying on a sofa drawn close up to the fire.

He did not wish her to be told of his arrival, or prepared for his appearance, so we walked straight up together into the drawing-room, where the servant said we should find her.

He never asked if she were better or worse, and the only sign of anxiety I could trace in his manner was an involuntary pause ere he turned the handle of the door. For a moment he seemed half afraid of entering, then, collecting his courage, he crossed the threshold.

As he did so, Rose languidly raised her head, then almost shrieking out “Walter,” stretched her arms towards him.

That was enough ; the past with its fear

and its suspicion fled away on the instant, and they were once again all they had ever been to one another, that, and perhaps a little more ; he was kneeling by her side in an instant, kissing her, and sobbing out—

“ Oh ! Rose, my poor darling ! ”

Then Joan and I retreated from the apartment, and left the husband and wife alone together.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

It was the most natural thing in the world that Sir Walter should desire Lady Surry's immediate removal to her own home ; and it pleased me to see that, whereas a week previously he had declared she should never return to his house, he was now almost mad with anxiety to get her there—not indeed to Grayborough, for that was impossible—but back to his town mansion.

At first I urged him not to attempt taking her away until the morning, but Joan advanced so many reasons why it would be better for the removal to occur in the evening

than at noon, that we at length despatched a messenger to the housekeeper, bidding her have all things in readiness, whilst I went out and hired the most comfortable brougham I could find to convey her to her husband's house.

When everything was ready, Joan enveloped Rose in wraps, and I stood aside for Sir Walter to carry her downstairs; but, to my astonishment, he drew back.

“Luttrell,” he said, laying his hand on my arm, “I seem to have no strength left, I cannot do it. Will you?”

I did not answer. I only took up the light burden, and bore it to the carriage, where my sister placed pillows under her head, and placed her feet on the opposite seat, and folded the shawls and rugs over her tenderly.

After this Joan and I stepped aside, feeling our part was done,—that we had given up Rose to the only person who held a rightful claim upon her; but Sir Walter, turning to me and my sister, said—

“You will come with us—oh! Miss Luttrell, do not leave her yet!”

“If you wish it,” I answered, “we will come, but not with you.”

So Joan and I walked up together into the Strand, where I hailed a cab, and bade the man drive as fast as he could to Sir Walter Surry’s house.

We arrived there some minutes before the brougham, and Joan, telling the housekeeper who she was, went up to see that Lady Surry’s room had been prepared for her, whilst I remained in the dining-room waiting their arrival.

There had been a time when I never thought to stand in Walter Surry’s house with his or my own goodwill, but with the shadow of death stealing on towards that stately mansion it was no time to revive old feuds, to cherish mortal hatred. He had taken her from me, but there was one mightier than man coming to take her from him, and my soul was so full of pity for the

grief and remorse I beheld written on his face that it could not remember my own desolate life, or the heart which his theft had left empty for ever.

When the carriage arrived, without asking him whether I should or should not, I lifted Rose out as gently and tenderly as I could, and merely begging him to show me the way, carried her up the wide staircase and along a corridor, where my feet sank noiselessly into the thick soft carpet, to her room.

She had fainted again, and I laid her down upon a couch, whilst the doctor, who had been already summoned, bustled up to her side and commenced applying restoratives. My part was done, the need for me existed no longer, so I walked to the doorway, and then paused and looked back. They had thrown aside the light shawl which enveloped her head, and her long hair rippled over her shoulders and fell in waves of silken softness almost to the ground. Her face was white as that of a corpse, and the blue-veined

eyelids were closed upon the sweet pleading eyes. One thin hand drooped over the side of the couch. There was death in every line of her face, in the very outline of her figure, and unable to help myself I strode back to where she lay, and taking her hand, pressed it to my lips, and heart, while she remained unconscious of me or my madness.

Then I left the room and her—it was the last time, living or dead, I ever beheld the face of Rose Surry.

Down the staircase Sir Walter followed me. Pausing at the dining-room door I asked him to favour me with a moment's private conversation, and when he entered the apartment I said,

“Do you wish my sister to remain here, or can she return with me now?”

“If she could remain,” he answered, “oh! if only she could remain?”

“She shall do so if you desire it,” I replied; “but if she stay I must stay until the arrival of Lady Surry's mother.”

“Her mother may see Rose if she wish,” answered Sir Walter, “but she shall never remain here.”

“Then it will be impossible for my sister to do so,” I said. “We are not low enough in rank for her to stay here exactly as a servant, and we are not high enough to stand above the world’s opinion.”

“Luttrell, do not be hard upon me,” he answered, and I then knew I had been a little bitter in my humility; “do not leave me alone in my trouble, there is no man living I should so earnestly desire to call friend as yourself, and as for Rose, I know there is no woman she would so much desire to have with her as your sister.”

“In that case,” I said, “I will, with your permission, send for my mother, and she can remain here till—”

There was no need for me to finish that sentence; we both knew there could but be one possible ending to it.

Next day my mother arrived, and I went back to my chambers and my work.

With regard to Catharine, I had not yet seen her. I did not mean to see her till all was over, and though Mr. Sherlock came and Mrs. Sherlock wrote, persuading me to go home, I gave both but one stereotyped answer, "Not yet."

I could not forgive her ; I meant never to forgive her. I did not tell Mr. Sherlock Rose was dying, and reconciled to her husband—that her children had been given back to her to hold till death claimed her. I only remained obstinately firm. "Not yet," I said, and Mr. Sherlock went away marvelling exceedingly.

Before that month expired she was dead. One morning Sir Walter entered my chambers, and I knew by his face what had happened.

"Should you like to see her?" he asked. During her illness he had often asked me the same question, and I had always answered him "No." I answered him "No" now.

“You will come to the funeral, though,” he said ; but I shook my head.

“Is there never to be peace between us ?” he asked.

“I trust there will never be war,” I answered, and there never has been.

That night I went into my own house, and found Catharine dressed out for a party. She received me as a criminal, heaping reproaches on my head, exhausting her feminine vocabulary for phrases suitable to describe the enormity of my crimes. I had brought the good-for-nothing woman there simply to have opportunities of making love to her ; I had laid out a deliberate scheme of wickedness and villany.

“Your sister, whom I always disliked and distrusted,” continued Catharine, “aided and abetted your deception. I suppose you thought because she was Lady Surry I should bear it. Lady, indeed ! Had I my will I know what I should do with her and such as her ; and as for you, sir, I wonder

at your daring to return home in this manner to me, after the weeks in which you have no doubt been living with that wretch."

"Have you quite finished your instructive discourse?" I inquired when at length she paused, literally because, I think, she had not another word to say, "for if you have there is one question I should like to ask you."

"What is it?"

"You hated Lady Surry very much, you were very jealous of her, were you not?"

"And with reason," she retorted, "with good and sufficient reason."

"You will be glad, then, to know that she is dead,—that she died at half-past eight this morning,—that her husband, who is almost distracted, brought me this news,—and that I have come here to-night merely to say your senseless jealousy, your pitiless cruelty, killed her."

With that I rose to leave the room, but Catharine rushed after me. "It is not

true ; it cannot be true," she almost shrieked. "She was delicate, but not——"

"She is dead," I repeated, "you killed her, and I will never forgive you—never ; I renounce you this night. From this hour I have no wife and you no husband."

She caught my arm, but I shook her off ; she seized my coat, but I pulled it out of her grasp. It was hard for her, I see it all now, but I had not a thought then save for Rose thrust out from my house with bitter words and bitterer innuendos. I had not even a corner in my heart for the wife who, fancying herself wronged, had cast forth the intruder, reckless—as all such women are—of consequences, forgetful of mercy, oblivious to justice.

After that there comes a time in my life, the memory of which I should like to blot out—a time when I lived utterly alone, working hard it is true, and maintaining my wife and family, but leading a godless,

hopeless, desperate sort of existence, uncheered by a single ray of light.

I made money for the only time in my recollection faster than I wanted it—I had to send away briefs—I had to turn a deaf ear to the solicitations of publishers. Fame came to me also; I climbed high in my profession; I wrote works which were eagerly sought after—outsiders, I doubt not, envied me my success, ay, and perhaps grudged it too, but they need not have done so. If the fruit were fair, there was rottenness at the core; go where I would, do what I might, I could never get that night out of my mind when I found the poor child sitting in a common street cab, sobbing because she had been so evilly treated by the woman it was my misfortune to call wife.

I took the matter to heart as I have never taken anything since, as I never shall anything again. I brooded over it—I mourned about it—I had such an impotent yearning agony in my soul at times, that it

seemed to me I could not live, remembering why Rose had died. And then I used to think "Oh! if I had only gone to see her again even in her coffin," but I could not have done it. After that hour, when I saw her lying senseless in her husband's house, I do not think wild horses could have drawn me up those stairs to look at his wife once more.

To this day, however, I could not describe the precise sort of feeling I entertained for Rose during that last part of our acquaintanceship. It was one I should certainly have been neither afraid nor ashamed to analyse for the benefit of any one, had analysis been possible, and yet it darkened my life more certainly than even the tender passion of my boyhood.

In the twilight she seemed to come back to me with her soft gentle ways, her sweet loveliness, her tender grace of manner, tone, and movement, and I felt at times as if I should certainly go mad, when I remembered

that she walked the earth no more; that let time bring what it would, it could never bear back upon its cruel waves that which it had taken from me—the child—the girl—the woman Rose.

But this is folly, and I must finish. At what precise period a doubt as to the justice and rectitude of my own conduct entered my mind, I cannot exactly tell, but I think it was one evening as I walked slowly through the Temple, thinking about Walter Surry's harshness, and Walter Surry's remorse, that it occurred to me, whether the course I had adopted was the right one, or whether I had in my way not erred almost as much as my wife herself in hers.

I had married the woman—I had vowed to love, protect, cherish her, and behold for the sake of another, who could never even had she lived been aught to me, I cast her off, her and the children, which were mine also.

I did not in the least believe what Joan

said, namely, that it was Catharine's love for me which made her pitiless towards Rose, but slowly by sure and almost imperceptible degrees I came to see that, no matter what my wife might have been or might have done, I had not been right, and so after a long time I went back at last and told her if she were willing to forgive and to forget I was willing to do likewise.

“I did not make sufficient allowance for you,” I finished, and Catharine never contradicted me. She had talked the matter over with her female friends till the memory of Rose ailing and weakly driven out to die, faded away, and no image remained on the canvas of recollection save the fact that I had been a great deal too fond of another woman, and left my home and family because she died.

But for all that, Catharine was very glad indeed to welcome me back, to condone my misdeeds, and to forget her own. We celebrated our reconciliation I remember with

a dinner party, and Catharine wore a violet-coloured velvet dress, with which I presented her, and looked very handsome indeed, for the colour became her admirably.

After that we had a series of entertainments, and the world at length thoroughly understanding I had seen the folly of my ways and the wickedness of my devices, felt satisfied and received me back into its bosom.

And so the old existence was resumed as though nothing had ever occurred to break its monotony, and but for the visits which Sir Walter Surry frequently paid to the cottage at Southgate I might sometimes have been tempted to fancy the whole episode a dream—a fantastic vision of my otherwise prosaic life.

Meeting, however, that tall handsome man every time I went to see my parents, I could not think the past a dream or the present quite satisfactory.

“He is coming after you, Joan, I sup-

pose," was my somewhat irritable remark one afternoon when he and I had crossed each other's path once again, and though Joan said "Nonsense, Tom," I knew quite well it was so, and that some day I should lose my sister and see her married to the man for whose sake she had refused many an eligible offer.

He should have married her at first. Joan was really the wife Sir Walter Surry wanted, and I know now he is far happier with her than he ever was with the ewe lamb he took from me, merely because, as it sometimes seems to my imagination, I was so poor that F had only one thing in all the earth which appeared valuable in my eyes.

It came to marrying of course ultimately. He proposed, and Joan accepted, and when the wedding took place I attended it in lieu of my father, then growing old and infirm, and gave the bride away.

But we have never visited each other much—never been intimate in our acquaint-

anceship—Joan is now, as I have said, a very great lady, and her way and mine do not lie together. She says this divergence is my fault and of my seeking, but I do not quite agree with this.

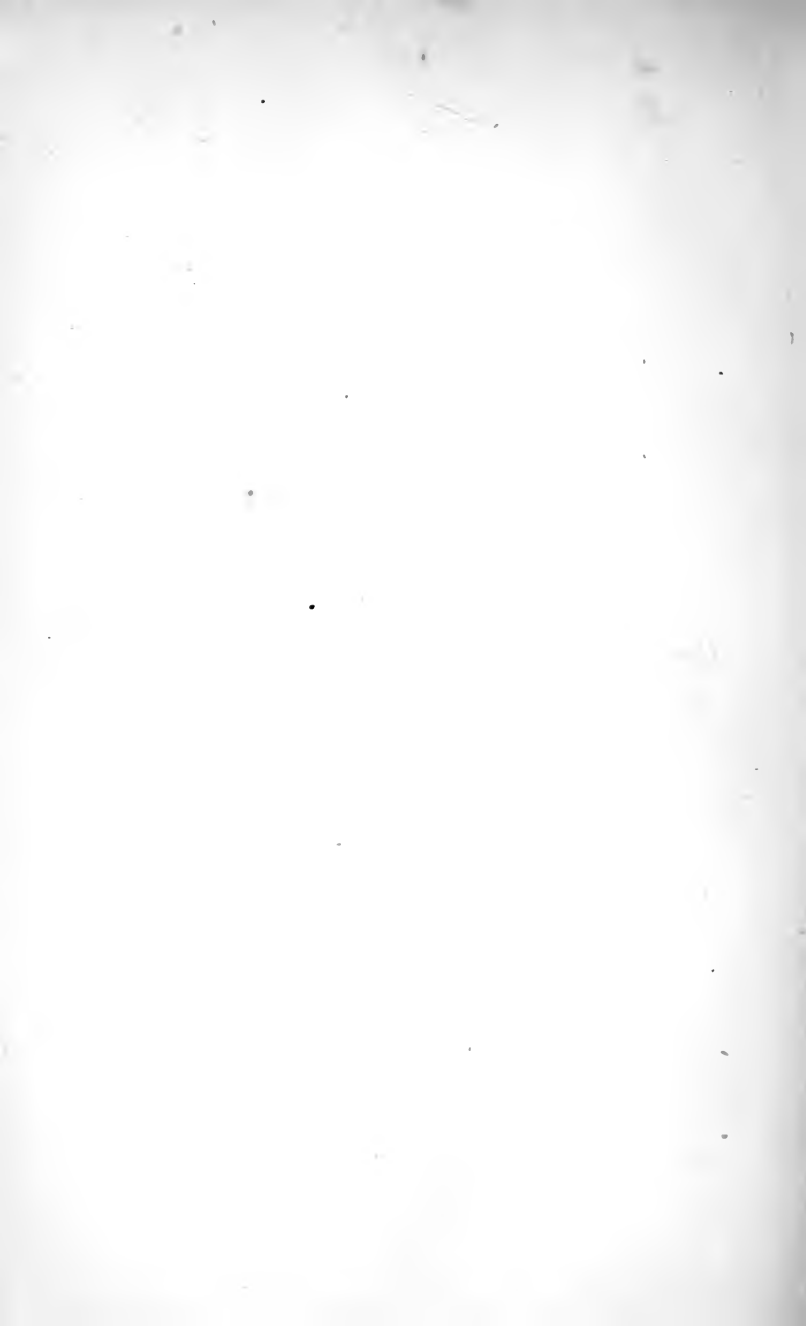
I think my path began to diverge from that of most people when my life was thrown out of gear the morning I saw Rose walk out of church Walter Surry's wife.

And this is all my story which I began to tell so long ago, and am only after months and months able to finish to-night. There is not much in it. For a moment I drop my pen and recall the few incidents it contains: a child standing by the water's edge, a girl listening to a love tale, apple blossoms strewing the grass her dear feet press, two most happy wandering together side by side, two most wretched cast out of their paradise, two meeting once more after years of separation, two parted till Eternity. Here lies the miniature of my first love; there hangs the portrait of my last, and yet

they are both the likenesses of one and the same person, for I never have had but one love in all my life, and I never shall have another till the skeleton rider comes to fetch me from brief and book.



FOREWARNED, FOREARMED.



FOREWARNED, FOREARMED.



THE story which I am about to tell is not a chapter out of my own life. The incidents which go to furnish it were enacted years before I was born; the performers in it died forty years ago, and have left nor son nor heir to inherit the memory.

I question whether the man live (the woman may, seeing women are more enduring than men) who could identify the names of the persons concerning whom I shall have hereafter to speak, but the facts happened, nevertheless.

Many a time I have heard them rehearsed, many a night I have sat on the hearthrug fascinated, listening to how Mr. Dwarris

dreamt a dream, and many a night I have passed through the folding-doors that led from the outer to the lesser hall, and walked to bed along the corridors thinking tremblingly of the face which continually re-appeared—of the journey in the coach and the post-chaise—all the particulars of which I purpose in due time to recount. Further, it is in my memory, that I was wont to place a pillow against my back in the night season, lest some vague enemy should enter my room and strike me under the fifth rib; and I went through much anguish when the Storm King was abroad, fancying I heard stealthy footsteps in the long gallery, and the sound of another person's breathing in the room beside my own.

But in spite of this, Mr. Dwarris' dream was one of the awful delights of my childhood; and when strangers gathered around the social hearth, and the conversation turned upon supernatural appearances, as it often did in those remote days in lonely

country houses, it was always with a thrill of pleasure that I greeted the opening passages of this, the only inexplicable yet true story we possessed.

It was the fact of this possession, perhaps, which made the tale dear to me—other stories belonged to other people; it was their friends or their relatives who had seen ghosts, and been honoured with warnings, but Mr. Dwarris' dream was our property.

We owned it as we owned the old ash tree that grew on the lawn. Though Mr. Dwarris was dead and gone, though at the age of threescore years and ten he had departed from a world which had used him very kindly, and which he had enjoyed thoroughly, to another world that he only knew anything of by hearsay, that in fact he only believed in after the vague gentlemanly sceptical fashion which was considered the correct thing about the beginning of this century, still he had been a friend of our quiet and non-illustrious family.

In our primitive society he had been considered a man of fashion, a person whose opinions might safely be repeated, whose decisions were not to be lightly contradicted. He was kind enough in the days when postage was very high (would those days could come back again) to write long letters to his good friends who lived far away from Court, and craved for political and fashionable gossip—long letters filled with scraps of news and morsels of scandal, which furnished topics of conversation for many days and weeks, and made pleasant little breaks in the monotony of that country existence.

By my parents, and by the chosen friends who were invited to dinner when he honoured our poor house with his presence, he was looked up to as a learned and travelled man of the world.

He had read everthing at a time when people did not read so much as is the case at present. He had not merely made the grand tour, but he had wintered frequently abroad,

and the names of princesses, duchesses, and counts flowed as glibly off his tongue as those of the vicar and family doctor from the lips of less fortunate mortals.

The best china was produced, and the children kept well out of the way while he remained in the house.

The accessories of his toilette table were a fearful mystery to our servants, and the plan he had of leaving his vails under his bolster or the soap dish, a more inscrutable mystery still.

He did not smoke, and though that was a time when the reputation of hard drinking carried with it no stigma—quite the reverse indeed—he was temperate to a degree. While not utterly insensible to the charms of female beauty, he regarded the sex rather as a critical than a devoted admirer, and he was wont to consider any unusually handsome woman as practically thrown away on our society.

He used to talk much of the ‘West End,’

and, to sum up the matter, he spoke as one having authority.

Looking back at his pretensions from a point of observation which has not been attained without a considerable amount of acquaintance, pleasant and otherwise, with men of the same rank in life and standing in society, I am inclined to think that Mr. Dwarris was, to a certain extent, a humbug; that he was not such a great man as our neighbours imagined, and that the style in which he lived at home was much less luxurious than that in which my parents considered it necessary to indulge when he honoured us with a visit.

Further, I believe the time he spent with us, instead of proving irksome and uncongenial to his superior mind, were periods of the most thorough enjoyment. Looking over his letters—which still remain duly labelled and tied up—I can see the natural man breaking through the conventional. I can perceive how happy a change it was for him to leave a life passed amongst people,

richer, better born, cleverer, more fashionable than himself, in order to stay with friends who looked up to him, and believed in their simplicity ; it was an honour to receive so great a man.

I understand that he had no genius, that he had little talent, that he loved the world and the high places thereof, that he had no passion for anything whether in nature or art, but that he had acquired a superficial knowledge of most subjects, and that he affected a fondness for painting, music, sculpture, literature, because he considered such fondness the mark of a refined mind, and because the men and the women with whom he associated were content to think so too.

But when he recalls with words of pleasure the journey he and my father made through the wilds of Connemara, when he speaks with tenderest affection of his old friend Woodville — (my maternal grandfather's name was Woodville) — when he sends a

word of kindly remembrance to each of the servants, who have been always happy to see, and wait upon him, I feel that the gloss and the pretension of learning were but superficial, that the man had really a heart, which, under happier auspices, would have rendered him a more useful and beloved member of society, instead of an individual in whose acquaintance we merely felt a pride, who was, as I have before said, one of our cherished possessions.

He was never married; he had no near relatives so far as we ever knew, and he lived all alone in a large house in a large English town, which, for sufficient reasons, I shall call Callersfield.

In his early youth he had been engaged in business, but the death of a distant relative leaving him independent of his own exertions, he severed all connexion with trade, and went abroad to study whatever may be, in foreign parts, analogous to 'Shakespeare and the musical glasses' in England.

To the end of his life—long after travelling became a much easier and safer matter than it was towards the close of the last century—he retained his fondness for continental wanderings, and my mother's cabinets and my father's hot-houses bore ample testimony to the length of his journeys and the strength of his friendship. Seeds of rare plants, and bulbs from almost every country in Europe, found their way to our remote home, whilst curiosities of all kinds were sent with the best wishes of 'an old friend,' to swell that useless olio of oddities that were at once the wonder and admiration of my juvenile imagination.

But at length all these good gifts came to an end. No more lava snuff-boxes and Pompeian vases ; no more corals, or fans, or cameos, or inlaid boxes ; no more gorgeous lilies or rare exotics ; for news arrived one morning that the donor had started on his last journey, and gone to that land whence no presents can be delivered by coach, rail-

way, or parcels company, to assuage the grief of bereaved relatives. He was dead, and in due time there arrived at our house two of the most singular articles (as the matter appears to me now), that were ever forwarded without accessories of any kind to set them off, to people who had really been on terms of closest intimacy with the deceased.

One was a plaster bust of Mr. Dwarris, the other a lithograph likeness of the same gentleman.

The intrinsic value of the two might in those days have been five shillings, but then, as his heirs delicately put it, they knew my parents would value these mementoes of their lamented friend far beyond any actual worth which they might possess.

Where, when the old home was broken up, and the household gods scattered, that bust vanished I can form no idea, but the lithograph is still in my possession; and as I look at it I feel my mother's statement to

have been utterly true, namely, that Mr. Dwarris was not a man either to be deluded by his imagination, or to tell a falsehood wittingly.

Perhaps in the next world some explanation may have been vouchsafed to him about his dream, but on this side the grave he always professed himself unable to give the slightest solution of it.

“I am not a man,” he was wont to declare, “inclined to believe in the supernatural;” and indeed he was not, whether in nature or religion.

To be sure he was secretly disposed to credit that great superstition which many persons now openly profess—of an universe without a Creator, of a future without a Redeemer—but still this form of credulity proceeds rather from an imperfect development of the reason than from a disordered state of the imagination.

In the ordinary acceptation of the word he was not superstitious. He was hard

headed and he was cold-blooded—essentially a man to be trusted implicitly when he said such and such a thing had happened within his own experience.

“I never could account for it in any way,” he declared—“and if it had chanced to another person, I should have believed he had made some mistake in the matter. For this reason, I have always felt shy of repeating my dream—but I do not mind telling it to you to-night.”

And then he proceeded to relate the story which thenceforth became our property—the most enduring gift he ever gave us.

This is the tale he told while the wind was howling outside, and the snow falling upon the earth, and the woodfire crackling and leaping as a fit accompaniment.

I did not hear him recite his adventures—but I have often sat and listened while the story was rehearsed to fresh auditors—almost in his own words.

“The first time that I went abroad,” he

began, "I made acquaintance with Sir Harry Hareleigh. How our acquaintance commenced is of no consequence—but it soon ripened into a close friendship, which was only broken by his death. His father and my father had been early friends also—but worldly reverses had long separated our family from that of the Hareleighs, and it was only by the merest chance I resumed my connection with it. Sir Harry was the youngest son—but his brothers having all died before their father, he came into his title early—though he did not at the same time succeed to any very great amount of property.

"A large but unentailed estate, owned by a bachelor Ralph Hareleigh, would, people imagined, ultimately come into his hands—but Sir Harry himself considered this doubtful—for there was a cousin of his own who longed for the broad acres, and spent much of his time at Dulling Court, which was the name of Mr. Ralph Hareleigh's seat.

“‘No one,’ Sir Harry declared, ‘should ever be able to say he sat watching for dead men’s shoes;’ and so he spent all his time abroad—visiting picture galleries and studios, and mixing much among artists and patrons and lovers of art.

“It seemed to me in those days that he was wasting his existence, and that a man of his rank and abilities ought to have remained more in his own country, and associated more with those of his own standing in society—but whenever I ventured to hint this to him, he only answered that—

“‘England had been a cruel stepdame to him, and that of his own free-will he would never spend a day in his native country again.’

“He had a villa near Florence, where he resided when he was not wandering over the earth; and there I spent many happy weeks in his society—before returning, as it was needful and expedient for me to do, to Callersfield.

“We had been separated for some years—during the whole of which time we corresponded regularly, when one night I dreamt a dream which is as vivid to me now as it was a quarter of a century ago.

“I know I was well in health at the time—that I was undisturbed in my mind—that especially my thoughts had not been straying after Sir Harry Hareleigh. I had heard from him about a month previously, and he said in his letter that he purposed wintering in Vienna, where it would be a great pleasure if I could join him. I had replied that I could not join him at Vienna, but that it was not impossible we might meet the following spring if he felt disposed to spend a couple of months with me in Spain, a country which I then desired to visit.

“I was, therefore, not expecting to see him for half a year, at all events—and had certainly no thought of his arrival in England, and yet when I went to bed on the night in question, this was what happened to me.

“I dreamt that towards the close of an autumn day I was sitting reading by the window of my library—you remember how my house is situated at the corner of two streets, and that there is a slight hill from the town up to it—you may recollect, also, perhaps, that the windows of my library face on this ascent, while the hall door opens into King Charles Street. Well, I was sitting reading as I have said, with the light growing dimmer and dimmer, and the printed characters getting more and more indistinct, when all at once my attention was aroused by the appearance of a hackney coach driven furiously up Martyr Hill.

“The man was flogging his horses unmercifully, and they cantered up the ascent at a wonderful pace. I rose and watched the vehicle turn the corner of King Charles Street, when of course it disappeared from my observation. I remained, however, standing at the window looking out on the gathering twilight, and but little curious

concerning a loud double knock which resounded through the house. Next moment, however, the library door opened, and in walked Sir Harry Hareleigh.

“ ‘I want you to do me a favour, Dwarris,’ were almost his first words. ‘Can you—will you—come with me on a journey? Your man will just have time to pack a few clothes up for you, and then we shall be able to catch the coach that leaves ‘The Maypole’ at seven. I have this moment arrived from Italy, and will explain everything as we go along. Can you give me a crust of bread and a glass of wine?’

“I rang the bell and ordered in refreshments. While he was hastily swallowing his food, Sir Harry told me that Ralph Hareleigh was dead and had left him every acre of land he owned and every guinea of money he possessed. ‘He heard,’ it appears, added Sir Harry, ‘that my cousin George had raised large sums of money on the strength of certainly being his heir, so he

cut him out and left the whole to me, saddled with only one condition, namely, that I should marry within six months from the date of his death.'

“ ‘And when do the six months expire?’ I inquired.

“ ‘There’s the pull!’ he answered. ‘By some accident my lawyer’s first letter never reached me; and if by good fortune it had not occurred to him to send one of his clerks with a second epistle, I should have been done out of my inheritance. There is only a bare month left for me to make all my arrangements.’

“ ‘And where are you going now?’ I asked.

“ ‘To Dulling Court,’ he returned, ‘and we have not a moment to lose if we are to catch the mail.’

“ ‘Those were the days in which gentlemen travelled with their pistols ready for use, and you may be sure I did not forget mine. My *valise* was carried out to the hackney

carriage; Sir Harry and I stepped in to the vehicle, and before I had time to wonder at my friend's sudden appearance, we were at the 'Maypole,' and taking our places as inside passengers to Warweald, from whence our route lay across country to Dulling.

"When we had settled ourselves comfortably, put on our travelling-caps, and buttoned our great coats up to our throats, I looked out to see whether any other passengers were coming.

"As I did so, my eye fell on a man who stood back a little from the crowd that always surrounds a coach at starting time, and there was something about him which riveted my attention, though I could not have told why.

"He was an evil-looking man, dressed in decent but very common clothes, and he stood leaning up against the wall of the 'Maypole,' and, as it chanced, directly under the light of an oil-lamp.

"It was this circumstance which enabled

me to get so good a view of his face, of his black hair and reddish whiskers, of his restless brown eyes, and dark complexion.

“The contrast between his complexion and his whiskers I remember struck me forcibly, as did also a certain discrepancy between his dress and his appearance.

“He did not stand exactly as a man of his apparent class would stand, and I noticed that he bit his nails nervously, a luxury I never observed an ordinary working man indulge in.

“Further, he stared not at what was going on, but persistently at the coach window until he discovered my scrutiny, when he turned on his heel and walked away down the street.

“Somehow I seemed to breathe more freely when once he was gone; but as the coach soon started I forgot all about him, until two or three stages after, happening to get out of the coach for a glass of brandy, I beheld the same man standing at a little distance and watching the coach as before.

“ My first impulse was to go up and speak to him, but a moment’s reflection showed me that I should only place myself in a ridiculous position by doing so. No doubt the man was merely a passenger like ourselves, and if he chose to lean up against the wall of the inn while the horses were being changed, it was clearly no business of mine.

“ At the next stage, however, when I looked out for him he was nowhere to be seen, and I thought no more of the matter till on arriving at Warweald I chanced to put my head out of the window furthest from the inn, when by the light of one of the coach lamps I saw my gentleman drop down from the roof and walk away into the darkness. We went into the inn parlour whilst post horses were put to, and then I told Sir Harry what I had witnessed.

“ ‘ Very likely a Bow Street runner,’ he said, ‘ keeping some poor wretch well in sight. I should not wonder if the old

gentleman who snored so persistently for the last twenty miles, be a hardened criminal on whom your friend will clap handcuffs, the moment he gets the warrant to arrest him.'

"The explanation seemed so reasonable that I marvelled it had not occurred to me before, and then I suppose I went off into deeper sleep, for I have only a vague recollection of dreaming afterwards, how we travelled miles and miles in a post chaise, how we ploughed through heavy country lanes, how we passed through dark plantations, and how we stopped at last in front of an old-fashioned way-side house.

"It was a fine night when we arrived there, but the wind was high and drifted black clouds over the moon's face. We alighted at this point and I remember how the place was engraved on my memory.

"It was an old inn, with a large deep door-way, two high gables, and small latticed windows. There were tall trees in front of

it, and from one of these the sign '*A Bleeding Heart*,' depended, rocking moanfully to and fro in the breeze. There were only a few leaves left on the branches, but the wind caught up those which lay scattered on the ground, and whirled them through the air. Not a soul appeared as our chaise drove up to the door. The postilion, however, applied the butt end of his whip with such vigour to the door that a head was soon thrust from one of the windows, and a gruff voice demanded, 'what the devil we wanted.'

"Just as he was about to answer, moved by some sudden impulse, I turned suddenly round and beheld stealing away in the shadow, my friend with the dark complexion and the red whiskers.

"At this juncture I awoke—always at this juncture I awoke, for I dreamt the same dream over and over again, till I really grew afraid of going to bed at night.

"I used to wake up bathed in perspiration with a horror on me such as I have

never felt in my waking moments. I could not get the man's face out of my mind—waking I was constantly thinking of it, sleeping I reproduced it in my dreams—and at length I became so nervous that I had determined to seek relief either in medical advice or change of scene—when one evening in the late autumn as I sat, reading in my library—the identical coach I had beheld in my dream drove up Martyr Hill, and next moment Sir Harry and I grasped hands.

“Though I had the dream in my mind all the while, something withheld me from mentioning it to him. We had always laughed at warnings and such things as old woman's tales, and so I let him talk on just as he had talked to me in my dream, and he ate and drank, and we went down together to the Maypole and took our seats in the coach.

“You may be sure I looked well up the street, and down the street, to see if there were any sign of my friend with the whis-

kers, but not a trace of him could I discern. Somewhat relieved by this I leaned back in my corner, and really in the interest of seeing and talking to my old companion again, I forgot all about my dream, until the arrival of another passenger caused me to shift my position a little, when I glanced out again, and there standing under the lamp—with his restless brown eyes, his dark complexion and his red whiskers—stood the person whom I had never before seen in the flesh, biting his nails industriously.

“ ‘Just look out for a moment Hareleigh,’ I said drawing back from the window, ‘there is a man standing under the lamp I want you to notice.’

“ ‘I see no man,’ answered Sir Harry, and when I looked out again neither did I.

“ As in my dream, however, I had beheld the stranger at different stages of our journey, so I beheld him at different stages with my waking eyes.

“Standing at the hotel at Warweald, I spoke seriously to my companion concerning the mysterious passenger, when to my amazement he repeated the same words I had heard in my dream.

“‘Now, Hareleigh,’ I said, ‘this is getting past a joke. You know I am not superstitious, or given to take fancies, and yet I tell you I have had a warning about that man and I feel confident he means mischief,’ and then I told Sir Harry my dream, and described to him the inn upon our arrival at which I had invariably awakened.

“‘There is no such inn anywhere on the road between here and Dulling,’ he answered after a moment’s silence, and then he turned towards the fire again and knit his brow, and there ensued a disagreeable pause.

“‘If I have offended you,’ I remarked at last.

“‘My dear friend,’ he replied in an earnest voice, ‘I am not offended, I am only

alarmed. When I left the continent I hoped that I had put the sea between myself and my enemy; but what you say makes me fear that I am being dogged to my death. I have narrowly escaped assassination twice within the last three months, and I know every movement of mine has been watched, that there have been spies upon me. Even on board the vessel, by which I returned to England I was nearly pitched overboard; at the time I regarded it as an accident, but if your dream be true, that was, as this is, the result of a premeditated plan.'

“ ‘Then let us remain here for the night,’ I urged.

“ ‘Impossible,’ he answered. ‘I must reach Dulling before to-morrow morning, or otherwise the only woman I ever wanted to marry or ever shall marry will have dropped out of my life a second time.’

“ ‘And she,’ I suggested.

“ ‘Is the widow of Lord Warweald, and

she leaves for India to-morrow with her brother the Honourable John Moffat.'

" 'Then,' said I, 'you can have no difficulty in fulfilling the conditions of Mr. Ralph Hareleigh's will.'"

" 'Not if she agree to marry me,' he answered.

" At that moment the chaise was announced, and we took our places in it.

" Over the country roads, along lonely lanes, we drove almost in silence.

" Somehow Sir Harry's statement and the memory of my own dream made me feel anxious and nervous. Who could this unknown enemy be? had my friend played fast and loose with some lovely Italian, and was this her nearest of kin dogging him to his death?

" Most certainly the man who stood under the lamp at Callersfield had no foreign blood in his veins; spite of his complexion, he was English, in figure, habit, and appearance.

" Could there be any dark secret in Sir

Harry's life? I then asked myself. His reluctance to visit England, his reserve about the earlier part of his existence, almost inclined me to this belief; and I was just about settling in my own mind what this secret might probably be when the postilion suddenly pulled up, and after an examination of his horses' feet, informed us that one of them had cast a shoe, and that it was impossible the creature could travel the nine miles which still intervened between us and the next stage.

“‘There is an inn, however,’ added the boy, ‘about a mile from here on the road to Rindon; and if you could make shift to stop there for the night, I will undertake to have you at Dulling Court by nine o'clock in the morning.’

“Hearing this, I looked in the moonlight at my friend, and Sir Harry looked hard at me.

“‘It is to happen so,’ he said, and flinging himself back in the chaise, fell into a fit of moody musing.

“Meanwhile, as the horses proceeded slowly along, I looked out of the window, and once I could have sworn I saw the shadow of a man flung across the road.

“When I opened the door, however, and jumped out, I could see nothing except the dark trees almost meeting overhead, and the denser undergrowth lying to right and left.

“It was a fine night when we arrived at our destination, just such a night as I had dreamed was to come—moonlight, but with heavy black clouds drifting across the sky.

“There was the inn, there swung the sign, the dead leaves swirled about us as we stood waiting while the post boy hammered for admittance.

“It all came about as I had dreamt, save that I did *not* see waking as I had done in my sleep a stealing figure creeping away in the shadow of the house.

“I saw the figure afterwards, but not then.

“We ate in the house, but we did not

drink—we made a feint of doing so ; but we really poured away the liquor upon the hot ashes that lay underneath the hastily replenished fire, though I believe this caution to have been unnecessary.

“ We selected our bed chambers, Sir Harry choosing one which looked out on what our host called the Wilderness, and I selecting another that commanded a view of the garden.

“ There were no locks or bolts to the doors, but we determined to pull up such furniture as the rooms afforded, and erect barricades for our protection.

“ I wanted to remain in the same apartment with my friend, but he would not hear of such an arrangement.

“ ‘ We shall only delay the end,’ he said stubbornly, in answer to my entreaties, ‘ and I have an ounce of lead ready for any one who tries to meddle with me.’ So we bade each other good night, and separated.

“ I had not the slightest intention of

going to bed, so I sat and read my favourite poet till, overpowered by fatigue, I dropped asleep in my chair.

“When I awoke it was with a start; the candle had burnt out, and the moonlight was streaming through the white blind into room.

“Was it fancy, or did I hear some one actually try my door? I held my breath, and then I knew it was no fancy, for the latch snicked in the lock, then stealthy footsteps crept along the passage and down the stairs.

“In a moment my resolution was taken. Opening my window, I crept on to the sill, and closing the casement after me, dropped into the garden.

“Keeping close against the wall, I crept to the corner of the house, where I concealed myself behind an *arbor vitæ*.

“A minute afterwards the man I was watching for came round the opposite corner, and stood for a second looking at the win-

dow of Sir Harry's room. There was a pear tree trained against the wall on this side of the house, and up it he climbed with more agility than I should have expected from his appearance.

“I had my pistol in my hand, and felt inclined to wing him while he was fighting with the crazy fastening, and trying to open the window without noise, but I refrained. I wanted to see the play out; I desired to see his game, and so the moment he was in the room I climbed the pear tree also, and raising my eyes just above the sill, and lifting the blind about an inch, looked in.

“Like myself, Hareleigh had not undressed, but he lay stretched on the bed with his right hand under his head, and his left flung across his body.

“He was fast asleep, his pistols lay on a chair beside him, and I could see he had so far followed my advice as to have dragged an ancient secretaire across the door.

“By the moonlight I got a good view now of the individual who had for so long a time troubled my dreams. As he stealthily moved the pistols he turned his profile a little towards the window, and then I knew what I already suspected, viz., that the man who had travelled with us from Callersfield was identical with the man who now stood beside Sir Harry meaning to murder him.

“It was the dream in that hour which seemed the reality, and the reality the dream.

“For an instant he stooped over my friend, and then I saw him raise his hand to strike, but the same moment I took deliberate aim, and before the blow could fall, fired and shot him in the right shoulder.

“There was a shriek and an imprecation, a rush to the window, where we met, he trying to get out, I striving to get in.

“I grappled with him, but having no secure foothold the impetus of his body was too much for me, and we both fell to the

ground together. The force of the fall stunned me, I suppose, for I remember nothing of what followed till I found myself lying on a sofa in the inn, with Hareleigh sitting beside me.

“ ‘Don’t talk ! for God’s sake don’t talk !’ he entreated. ‘ We shall be out of this in five minutes’ time if you think you can bear the shaking. I have made the landlord lend us another horse, and we shall be at Dulling in two hours’ time. There you shall tell me all about it.’

“ But there I never told him all about it. Before we reached our next stage I was far too ill to travel further, and for weeks I lay between life and death at the Green Man and Still, Aldney.

“ When I was strong enough to sit up with him, Harry and Lady Hareleigh came over from Dulling to see me, but it was months before I could bear to speak of the events of that night, and though I never dreamed my dream again, it left its traces on me for life.

“Till the day of his death, however, Sir Harry always regarded me as his preserver, and the warmest welcome to Dulling Court was given by his wife to one whom she honoured by calling her dearest friend.

“When Sir Harry died, he left me joint guardian with Lady Hareleigh of his children. So carefully worded a will, I never read—in the event of the death of his children without issue, he bequeathed Dulling Court to various charitable institutions.

“‘A most singular disposition of his property,’ I remarked to his lawyer.

“‘Depend upon it, my dear sir, he had his reasons,’ that individual replied.

“‘And those——’ I suggested.

“‘I must regard as strictly private and confidential.’

“The most singular part of my narrative has yet to come,” Mr. Dwarris continued after a pause.

“Many years after Sir Harry’s death, it

chanced I arrived at a friend's house on the evening before the nomination day of an election, which it was expected would be hotly contested.

“ ‘ Mr. Blair's wealth of course gives him a great advantage,’ sighed my hostess, ‘ and we all do dislike him so cordially—I would give anything to see him lose.’

“ Accustomed to such thoroughly feminine and logical sentiments, I attached little importance to the lady's remarks, and with only a very slight feeling of interest in the matter, next morning accompanied my friend to the county town where the nomination was to take place.

“ We were rather late in starting, and before our arrival Mr. Blair had commenced his harangue to the crowd.

“ He was talking loudly and gesticulating violently with his *left* hand when I first caught sight of him. He was telling the free and independent electors that they knew who he was, what he was, and why he

supported such and such 'a political party.

“At intervals he was interrupted by ‘cheers and hisses,’ but at the end of one of his most brilliant perorations, I who had been elbowing my way through the crowd, shouted out at the top of my voice—

“‘How about the man you tried to murder at ‘The Bleeding Heart?’”

“For a moment there was a dead silence, then the mob took up my cry—

“‘How about the man you tried to murder at ‘The Bleeding Heart?’”

“I saw him look round as if a ghost had spoken, then he fell suddenly back, and his friends carried him off the platform.

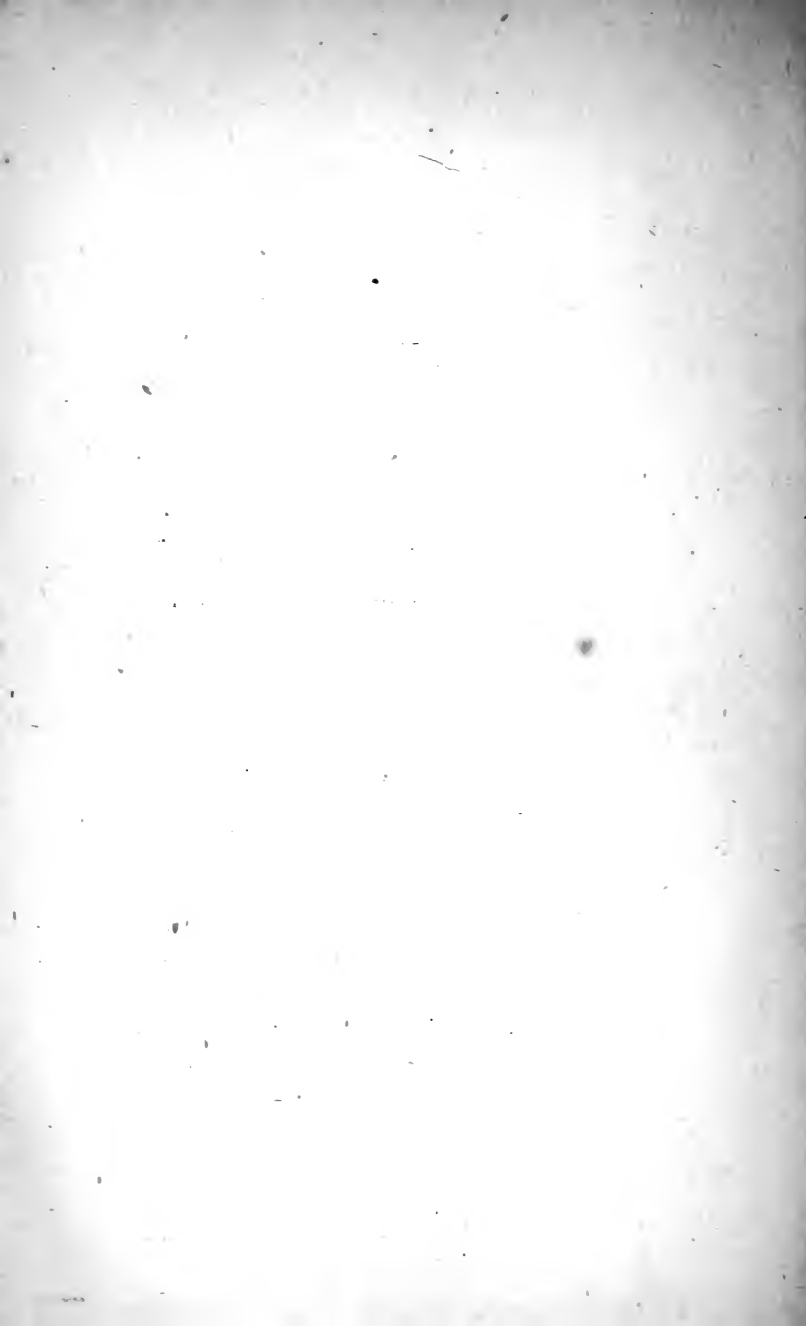
“My hostess had her wish, for his opponent walked over the course, and a few weeks afterwards I read in the papers—

“‘Died—At Hollingford Hall, in his forty-sixth year, George Hareleigh Blair, Esq., nephew of the late Ralph Hareleigh, Esq., of Dulling Court.’

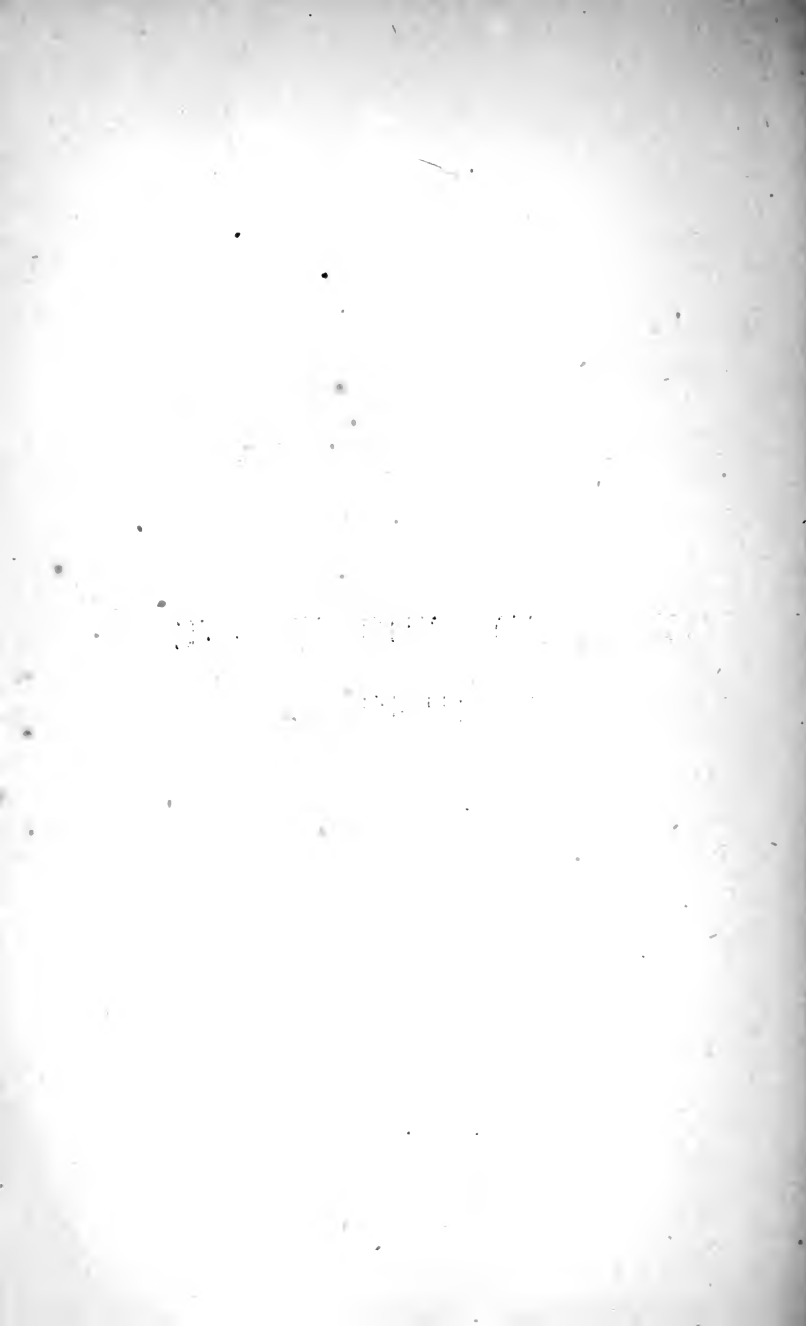
“ ‘He married a Miss Blair, I presume,’
I said to my host.

“ ‘Yes, for her money,’ was the reply, ‘she
had two hundred thousand pounds.’

“ ‘So the mystery of the ‘*Bleeding Heart*’
was cleared up at last; but on this side the
grave I do not expect to understand how I
chanced to dream of a man I had never seen
—of places I had never visited—of events of
which I was not then cognizant—of conver-
sations which had then still to take place.’”



**HERTFORD O'DONNELL'S
WARNING.**



HERTFORD O'DONNELL'S WARNING.*

MANY a year ago, before chloroform was thought of, there lived in an old, rambling house, in Gerard Street, Soho, a young Irishman called Hertford O'Donnell.

After Hertford O'Donnell he was entitled to write M.R.C.S., for he had studied hard to gain this distinction, and the older surgeons at Guy's (his hospital) considered him, in their secret hearts, one of the most rising operators of the day.

Having said chloroform was unknown at the time this story opens, it will strike my

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readers that, if Hertford O'Donnell were a rising and successful operator in those days, of necessity he combined within himself a larger number of striking qualities than are by any means necessary to form a successful operator in these.

There was more than mere hand skill, more than even thorough knowledge of his profession, needful for the man who, dealing with conscious subjects, essayed to rid them of some of the diseases to which flesh is heir. There was greater courage required in the manipulator of old than is at present altogether essential. Then, as now, a thorough mastery of his instruments—a steady hand—a keen eye—a quick dexterity were indispensable to a good operator; but, added to all these things, there formerly required a pulse which knew no quickening—a mental strength which never faltered—a ready power of adaptation in unexpected circumstances—fertility of resource in difficult cases, and a brave front under all emergencies.

If I refrain from adding that a hard as well as a courageous heart was an important item in the programme, it is only out of deference to general opinion, which amongst other delusions, clings to the belief that courage and hardness are antagonistic qualities.

Hertford O'Donnell, however, was hard as steel. He understood his work, and he did it thoroughly; but he cared no more for quivering nerves and contracting muscles, for screams of agony, for faces white with pain, and teeth clenched in the extremity of anguish, than he did for the stony countenances of the dead which sometimes in the dissecting-room appalled younger and less experienced men.

He had no sentiment, and he had no sympathy. The human body was to him an ingenious piece of mechanism, which it was at once a pleasure and a profit to understand. Precisely as Brunel loved the Thames Tunnel, or any other singular engineering feat,

so O'Donnell loved a patient on whom he operated successfully, more especially if the ailment possessed by the patient were of a rare and difficult character.

And for this reason he was much liked by all who came under his hands, for patients are apt to mistake a surgeon's interest in their cases for interest in themselves; and it was gratifying to John Dicks, plasterer, and Timothy Regan, labourer, to be the happy possessors of remarkable diseases, which produced a cordial understanding between themselves and the handsome Irishman.

If he were hard and cool at the moment of hewing them to pieces, that was all forgotten, or remembered only as a virtue, when, after being discharged from hospital like soldiers who have served in a severe campaign, they met Mr. O'Donnell in the street, and were accosted by that rising individual, just as though he considered himself nobody.

He had a royal memory, this stranger in

a strange land, both for faces and cases; and like the rest of his countrymen he never felt it beneath his dignity to talk cordially to corduroy and fustian.

In London, as at Calgillan, he never held back his tongue from speaking a cheery or a kindly word. His manners were pliable enough if his heart were not; and the porters, and the patients, and the nurses, and the students at Guy's all were pleased to see Hertford O'Donnell.

Rain, hail, sunshine, it was all the same; there was a life and a brightness about the man which communicated itself to those with whom he came in contact. Let the mud in the streets be a foot deep, or the London fog thick as pea-soup, Mr. O'Donnell never lost his temper, never muttered a surly reply to the gate-keeper's salutation, but spoke out blithely and cheerfully to his pupils and his patients, to the sick and to the well, to those below and to those above him.

And yet, spite of all these good qualities—spite of his handsome face, his fine figure, his easy address, and his unquestionable skill as an operator, the dons, who acknowledged his talent, shook their heads gravely when two or three of them in private and solemn conclave talked confidentially of their younger brother.

If there were many things in his favour, there were more in his disfavour. He was Irish—not merely by the accident of birth, which might have been forgiven, since a man cannot be held accountable for such caprices of Nature, but by every other accident and design which is objectionable to the orthodox and respectable and representative English mind.

In speech, appearance, manner, habits, modes of expression, habits of life, Hertford O'Donnell was Irish. To the core of his heart he loved his native land which he, nevertheless, declared he never meant to revisit; and amongst the English he moved to all

intents and purposes a foreigner, who was resolved, so said the great prophets at Guy's, to go to destruction as fast as he could, and let no man hinder him.

“He means to go the whole length of his tether,” observed one of the ancient wise-acres to another; which speech implied a conviction that Hertford O'Donnell, having sold himself to the Evil One, had determined to dive the full length of his rope into wickedness before being pulled to the shore where even wickedness is negative—where there are no mad carouses, no wild, sinful excitement, nothing but impotent wailing and useless gnashing of teeth.

A reckless, graceless, clever, wicked devil—going to his natural home as fast as in London a man can possibly progress thither: this was the opinion his superiors held of the man who lived all alone with a housekeeper and her husband (who acted as butler) in his big house near Soho.

Gerard Street was not then an utterly

shady and forgotten locality : carriage patients found their way to the rising surgeon—some great personages thought it not beneath them to fee an individual whose consulting rooms were situated on what was even then the wrong side of Regent Street. He was making money, and he was spending it : he was over head and ears in debt—useless, vulgar debt—senselessly contracted, never bravely faced. He had lived at an awful pace ever since he came to London, at a pace which only a man who hopes and expects to die young can ever travel.

Life, what good was it? death, was he a child, or a woman, or a coward, to be afraid of death's "afterwards?" God knew all about the trifle which had upset his coach better than the dons at Guy's; and he did not dread facing his Maker, and giving an account to Him even of the disreputable existence he had led since he came to London.

Hertford O'Donnell knew the world pretty

well, and the ways thereof were to him as roads often traversed; therefore, when he said that at the day of judgment he felt certain he should come off better than many of those who censured him, it may be assumed that, although his views of *post-mortem* punishment were vague, unsatisfactory, and infidel, still his information as to the peccadilloes of his neighbours was such as consoled himself.

And yet, living all alone in the old house near Soho Square, grave thoughts would intrude frequently into the surgeon's mind—thoughts which were, so to say, italicized by peremptory letters, and still more peremptory visits from people who wanted money.

Although he had many acquaintances he had no single friend, and accordingly these thoughts were received and brooded over in solitude, in those hours when, after returning from dinner or supper, or congenial carouse, he sat in his dreary rooms smoking

his pipe and considering means and ways, chances and certainties.

In good truth he had started in London with some vague idea that as his life in it would not be of long continuance, the pace at which he elected to travel could be of little consequence; but the years since his first entry into the metropolis were now piled one on the top of another, his youth was behind him, his chances of longevity, spite of the way he had striven to injure his constitution, quite as good as ever. He had come to that time in existence, to that narrow strip of tableland whence the ascent of youth and the descent of age are equally discernible—when, simply because he has lived for so many years, it strikes a man as possible he may have to live for just as many more, with the ability for hard work gone, with the boon companions scattered abroad, with the capacity for enjoying convivial meetings a mere memory, with small means perhaps, with no bright hopes, with the pomp and

the equipage, and the fairy carriages, and the glamour which youth flings over earthly objects faded away like the pageant of yesterday, while the dreary ceremony of living has to be gone through to-day and to-morrow and the morrow after, as though the gay cavalcade and the martial music, and the glittering helmets and the prancing steeds were still accompanying the wayfarer to his journey's end.

Ah! my friends, there comes a moment when we must all leave the coach, with its four bright bays, its pleasant outside freight, its cheery company, its guard who blows the horn so merrily through villages and along lonely country roads.

Long before we reach that final stage, where the black business claims us for its own especial property, we have to bid good-bye to all easy, thoughtless journeying, and betake ourselves with what zest we will, to traversing the common of Reality. There is no royal road across it that ever I heard

of. From the king on his throne to the labourer who vaguely imagines what manner of being a king is, we have all to tramp across that desert at one period of our lives, at all events; and that period usually is when, as I have said, a man starts to find the hopes, and the strength, and the buoyancy of youth left behind, while years and years of coming life lie stretching out before him.

The coach he has travelled by drops him here. There is no appeal, there is no help; therefore let him take off his hat and wish the new passengers good speed, without either envy or repining.

Behold, he has had his turn, and let whosoever will, mount on the box-seat of life again, and tip the coachman and handle the ribbons, he shall take that pleasant journey no more—no more for ever.

Even supposing a man's spring time to have been a cold and ungenial one, with bitter easterly winds and nipping frosts, biting the buds and retarding the blossoms,

still it was spring for all that—spring with the young green leaves sprouting eagerly, with the flowers unfolding tenderly, with the songs of birds and the rush of waters, with the summer before and the autumn afar off, and winter remote as death and eternity; but when once the trees have donned their summer foliage, when the pure white blossoms have disappeared, and a gorgeous red and orange and purple blaze of many-coloured flowers fills the gardens, then if there come a wet, dreary day, the idea of autumn and winter is not so difficult to realise. When once twelve o'clock is reached, the evening and night become facts, not possibilities; and it was of the afternoon, and the evening and the night, Hertford O'Donnell sat thinking on the Christmas Eve when I crave permission to introduce him to my readers.

A good-looking man ladies considered him. A tall, dark-complexioned, black-haired, straight-limbed, deeply, divinely

blue-eyed fellow, with a soft voice, with a pleasant brogue, who had ridden like a Centaur over the loose stone walls in Connemara, who had danced all night at the Dublin balls, who had walked over the Bennebeola mountains, gun in hand, day after day without weariness, who had fished in every one of the hundred lakes you can behold from the top of that mountain near the Recess Hotel, who had led a mad, wild life in Trinity College, and a wilder, perhaps, while 'studying for a doctor'—as the Irish phrase goes—in Dublin, and who, after the death of his eldest brother left him free to return to Calgillan and pursue the usual utterly useless, utterly purposeless, utterly pleasant life of an Irish gentleman possessed of health, birth, and expectations, suddenly kicked over the paternal traces, bade adieu to Calgillan Castle and the blandishments of a certain beautiful Miss Clifden, beloved of his mother, and laid out to be his wife, walked down the avenue without even so

much company as a gossoon to carry his carpet bag, shook the dust from his feet at the lodge-gates, and took his seat on the coach, never once looking back at Calgillan, where his favourite mare was standing in the stable, his greyhounds chasing one another round the home paddock, his gun at half-cock in his dressing-room, and his fishing-tackle all in order and ready for use.

He had not kissed his mother or asked for his father's blessing ; he left Miss Clifden arrayed in her bran-new riding-habit without a word of affection or regret ; he had spoken no syllable of farewell to any servant about the place ; only when the old woman at the lodge bade him good morning and God-blessed his handsome face, he recommended her bitterly to "look well at it, for she would never see it more."

Twelve years and a half had passed since then without either Nancy Blake or any other one of the Calgillan people having set eyes on Master Hertford's handsome face.

He had kept his vow made to himself; he had not written home; he had not been indebted to mother or father for even a tenpenny-piece during the whole of that time; he had lived without friends, and he had lived without God—so far as God ever lets a man live without him—and his own private conviction was that he could get on very well without either. One thing only he felt to be needful—money, money to keep him when the evil days of sickness, or age, or loss of practice came upon him. Though a spendthrift, he was not a simpleton. Around him he saw men who, having started with fairer prospects than his own, were nevertheless reduced to indigence; and he knew that what had happened to others might happen to himself.

An unlucky cut, slipping on a bit of orange-peel in the street, the merest accident imaginable, is sufficient to change opulence to beggary in the life's programme of an individual whose income depends on eye, on

nerve, on hand ; and besides the consciousness of this fact, Hertford O'Donnell knew that beyond a certain point in his profession progress was not easy.

It did not depend quite on the strength of his own bow or shield whether he counted his earnings by hundreds or thousands. Work may achieve competence ; but mere work cannot, in a profession at all events, compass wealth.

He looked around him, and he perceived that the majority of great men—great and wealthy—had been indebted for their elevation more to the accidents of birth, patronage, connection, or marriage, than to personal ability.

Personal ability, no doubt, they possessed ; but then, little Jones, who lived in Frith Street, and who could barely keep himself and his wife and family, had ability, too, only he lacked the concomitants of success.

He wanted something or some one to puff

him into notoriety—a brother at court—a lord's leg to mend—a rich wife to give him prestige into society; and, lacking this something or some one, he had grown grey-haired and faint-hearted in the service of that world which utterly despises its most obsequious servants.

“Clatter along the streets with a pair of hired horses, snub the middle classes, and drive over the commonalty—that is the way to compass wealth and popularity in England,” said Hertford O'Donnell, bitterly; and, as the man desired wealth and popularity, he sat before his fire, with a foot on each hob, and a short pipe in his mouth, considering how he might best obtain the means to clatter along the streets in his carriage, and splash plebeians with mud from his wheels like the best.

In Dublin he could, by reason of his name and connection, have done well; but then he was not in Dublin, neither did he want to be. The bitterest memories of his life

were inseparable from the name of the Green Island, and he had no desire to return to it.

Besides, in Dublin, heiresses are not quite so plentiful as in London; and an heiress Hertford O'Donnell had decided would do more for him than years of steady work.

A rich wife could clear him of debt, introduce him to fashionable practice, afford him that measure of social respectability which a medical bachelor invariably lacks, deliver him from the loneliness of Gerard Street, and the domination of Mr. and Mrs. Coles.

To most men, deliberately bartering away their independence for money seems so prosaic a business that they strive to gloss it over even to themselves, and to assign every reason for their choice, save that which is really the influencing one.

Not so, however, with Hertford O'Donnell. He sat beside the fire scoffing over his proposed bargain—thinking of the lady's age—her money-bags—her desirable house in

town—her seat in the country—her snobbishness—her folly.

“It would be a fitting ending,” he sneered; “and why I did not settle the matter to-night passes my comprehension. I am not a coward, to be frightened with old women’s tales; and yet I must have turned white. I felt I did, and she asked me whether I was ill. And then to think of my being such an idiot as to ask her if she had heard anything like a cry, as though she would be likely to hear *that*—she, with her poor *parvenu* blood, which, I often imagine, must have been mixed with some of her father’s pickling vinegar. What the deuce could I have been dreaming about? I wonder what it really was;” and Hertford O’Donnell pushed his hair back from his forehead, and took another draught from the too familiar tumbler, which was placed conveniently on the chimneypiece.

“After expressly making up my mind to propose, too!” he mentally continued.

“ Could it have been conscience—that myth, which somebody, who knew nothing of the matter, said, ‘ makes cowards of us all ? ’ I don’t believe in conscience ; and even if there be such a thing capable of being developed by sentiment and cultivation, why should it trouble me ? I have no intention of wronging Miss Janet Price Ingot—not the least. Honestly and fairly I shall marry her ; honestly and fairly I shall act by her. An old wife is not exactly an ornamental article of furniture in a man’s house ; and I do not know that the fact of her being well gilded makes her look any more ornamental. But she shall have no cause for complaint ; and I will go and dine with her to-morrow, and settle the matter.”

Having arrived at which resolution, Mr. O'Donnell arose, kicked down the fire—burning hollow—with the heel of his boot, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, emptied his tumbler, and bethought him it was time to go to bed. He was not in the habit of

taking his rest so early as quarter to twelve o'clock; but he felt unusually weary—tired mentally and bodily—and lonely beyond all power of expression.

“The fair Janet would be better than this,” he said, half aloud; and then with a start and a shiver, and a blanched face, he turned sharply round, whilst a low, sobbing, wailing cry echoed mournfully through the room. No form of words could give an idea of the sound. The plaintiveness of the Eolian harp—that plaintiveness which so soon affects and lowers the highest spirits—would have seemed wildly gay in comparison to the sadness of the cry which seemed floating in the air. As the summer wind comes and goes amongst the trees, so that mournful wail came and went—came and went. It came in a rush of sound, like a gradual crescendo managed by a skilful musician, and it died away like a lingering note, so that the listener could scarcely tell the exact moment when it faded away into silence.

I say faded away, for it disappeared as the coast line disappears in the twilight, and there was utter stillness in the apartment.

Then, for the first time, Hertford O'Donnell looked at his dog, and beholding the creature crouched into a corner beside the fireplace, called upon him to come out.

His voice sounded strange even to himself, and apparently the dog thought so too, for he made no effort to obey the summons.

“Come out, sir,” his master repeated, and then the animal came crawling reluctantly forward, with his hair on end, his eyes almost starting from his head, trembling violently, as the surgeon, who caressed him, felt.

“So you heard it, Brian?” he said to the dog. “And so your ears are sharper than hers, old fellow? It's a mighty queer thing to think of, being favoured with a visit from a banshee in Gerard Street; and as the lady

has travelled so far, I only wish I knew whether there is any sort of refreshment she would like to take after her long journey."

He spoke loudly, and with a certain mocking defiance, seeming to think the phantom he addressed would reply; but when he stopped at the end of his sentence, no sound came through the stillness. There was utter silence in the room—silence broken only by the falling of the cinders on the hearth and the breathing of his dog.

"If my visitor would tell me," he proceeded, "for whom this lamentation is being made, whether for myself, or for some other member of my illustrious family, I should feel immensely obliged. It seems too much honour for a poor surgeon to have such attention paid him. Good heavens! What is that?" he exclaimed, as a ring, loud and peremptory, woke all the echoes in the house, and brought his housekeeper in a state of distressing dishabille, "out of her warm bed," so she subsequently stated, to the head of the staircase.

Across the hall Hertford O'Donnell strode, relieved at the prospect of speaking to any living being. He took no precaution of putting up the chain, but flung the door wide. A dozen burglars would have proved welcome in comparison to that ghostly intruder; and, as I have said, he threw the door open, admitting a rush of wet, cold air, which made poor Mrs. Coles' few remaining teeth chatter in her head.

"Who is there?—what do you want?" asked the surgeon, seeing no person, and hearing no voice. "Who is there?—why the devil can't you speak?"

But when even this polite exhortation failed to elicit an answer, he passed out into the night and looked up the street, and down the street, to see nothing but the driving rain and the blinking lights.

"If this goes on much longer I shall soon think I must be either mad or drunk," he muttered, as he re-entered the house, and locked and bolted the door once more.

“Lord’s sake ! what is the matter, sir ?” asked Mrs. Coles, from the upper flight, careful only to reveal the borders of her nightcap to Mr. O’Donnell’s admiring gaze. “Is anybody killed ?—have you to go out, sir ?”

“It was only a runaway ring,” he answered, trying to reassure himself with an explanation he did not in his heart believe.

“Runaway !—I’d runaway them,” murmured Mrs. Coles, as she retired to the conjugal couch, where Coles was, to quote her own expression, “snoring like a pig through it all.” Almost immediately afterwards she heard her master ascend the stairs and close his bedroom-door.

“Madam will surely be too much of a gentlewoman to intrude here,” thought the surgeon, scoffing even at his own fears ; but when he lay down he did not put out his light, and he made Brian leap up and crouch on the coverlet beside him.

The man was fairly frightened, and would

have thought it no discredit to his manhood to acknowledge as much. He was not afraid of death, he was not afraid of trouble, he was not afraid of danger ; but he was afraid of the banshee ; and as he lay with his hand on the dog's head, he thought over all the stories he had ever heard about this family retainer in the days of his youth. He had not thought about her for years and years. Never before had he heard her voice himself. When his brother died, she had not thought it necessary to travel up to Dublin and give him notice of the impending catastrophe. "If she had, I would have gone down to Calgillan, and perhaps saved his life," considered the surgeon. "I wonder who this is for ! If for me, that will settle my debts and my marriage. If I could be quite certain it was either of the old people, I would start for Ireland to-morrow." And then vaguely his mind wandered on to think of every banshee story he had ever heard in his life—about the beautiful lady with the

wreath of flowers, who sat on the rocks below Red Castle, in the County Antrim, lamenting till one of the sons died for love of her ; about the Round Chamber at Dunluce, which was swept clean by the banshee every night ; about the bed in a certain great house in Ireland, which was slept in constantly, although no human being ever passed in or out after dark ; about that general officer who the night before Waterloo, said to a friend, " I have heard the banshee, and shall not come off the field alive to-morrow ; break the news gently to poor Carry ; " and who, nevertheless, coming safe off the field, had subsequently news about poor Carry broken tenderly and pitifully to him ; about the lad who, aloft in the rigging, hearing through the night a sobbing and wailing coming over the waters, went down to the captain and told him he was afraid they were somehow out of their reckoning, just in time to save the ship, which, when morning broke, they found but for his warning would have been

on the rocks. It was blowing great guns, and the sea was all in a fret and turmoil, and they could sometimes see in the trough of the waves, as down a valley, the cruel black reefs they had escaped.

On deck the captain stood speaking to the boy who had saved them, and asking how he knew of their danger; and when the lad told him, the captain laughed, and said her ladyship had been outwitted that time.

But the boy answered, with a grave shake of his head, that the warning was either for him or his, and that if he got safe to port there would be bad tidings waiting for him from home; whereupon the captain bade him go below, and get some brandy and lie down.

He got the brandy, and he lay down, but he never rose again; and when the storm abated—when a great calm succeeded to the previous tempest—there was a very solemn funeral at sea; and on their arrival at Liverpool the captain took a journey to Ireland to

tell a widowed mother how her only son died, and to bear his few effects to the poor desolate soul.

And Hertford O'Donnell thought again about his own father riding full-chase across country, and hearing, as he galloped by a clump of plantation, something like a sobbing and wailing. The hounds were in full cry; but he still felt, as he afterwards expressed it, that there was something among those trees he could not pass; and so he jumped off his horse, and hung the reins over the branch of a fir, and beat the cover well, but not a thing could be find in it.

Then, for the first time in his life, Miles O'Donnell turned his horse's head *from* the hunt, and, within a mile of Calgillan, met a man running to tell him Mr. Martin's gun had burst, and hurt him badly.

And he remembered the story also, of how Mary O'Donnell, his great aunt, being married to a young Englishman, heard the banshee as she sat one evening waiting for

his return; and of how she, thinking the bridge by which he often came home unsafe for horse and man, went out, in a great panic, to meet and entreat him to go round by the main road for her sake. Sir Everard was riding along in the moonlight, making straight for the bridge, when he beheld a figure dressed all in white upon it. Then there was a crash, and the figure disappeared.

The lady was rescued and brought back to the hall; but next morning there were two dead bodies within its walls—those of Lady Eyreton and her still-born son.

Quicker than I write them, these memories chased one another through Hertford O'Donnell's brain; and there was one more terrible memory than any which would recur to him, concerning an Irish nobleman who, seated alone in his great town-house in London, heard the banshee, and rushed out to get rid of the phantom, which wailed in his ear, nevertheless, as he strode down Picca-

dilly. And then the surgeon remembered how he went with a friend to the Opera, feeling sure that there no banshee, unless she had a box, could find admittance, until suddenly he heard her singing up amongst the highest part of the scenery, with a terrible mournfulness, with a pathos which made the prima donna's tenderest notes seem harsh by comparison.

As he came out, some quarrel arose between him and a famous fire-eater, against whom he stumbled ; and the result was that the next afternoon there was a new Lord —, *vice* Lord —, killed in a duel with Captain Bravo.

Memories like these are not the most enlivening possible ; they are apt to make a man fanciful, and nervous, and wakeful ; but as time ran on, Hertford O'Donnell fell asleep, with his candle still burning, and Brian's cold nose pressed against his hand.

He dreamt of his mother's family—the Hertfords, of Artingbury, Yorkshire, far-off

relatives of Lord Hertford—so far off that even Mrs. O'Donnell held no clue to the genealogical maze.

He thought he was at Artingbury, fishing ; that it was a misty summer's morning, and the fish rising beautifully. In his dream he hooked one after another, and the boy who was with him threw them into the basket.

At last there was one more difficult to land than the others ; and the boy, in his eagerness to watch the sport, drew nearer and nearer to the brink, while the fisher, intent on his prey, failed to notice his companion's danger.

Suddenly there was a cry, a splash, and the boy disappeared from sight.

Next instant he rose again, however, and then, for the first time, Hertford O'Donnell saw his face.

It was one he knew well.

In a moment he plunged into the water, and struck out for the lad. He had him by

the hair, he was turning to bring him back to land, when the stream suddenly changed into a wide, wild, shoreless sea, where the billows were chasing one another with a mad demoniac mirth.

For awhile O'Donnell kept the lad and himself afloat. They were swept under the waves, and came forth again, only to see larger waves rushing towards them; but through all the surgeon never loosened his hold until a tremendous billow engulfing them both, tore the boy from him.

With the horror of that he awoke, to hear a voice saying quite distinctly.

“Go to the hospital!—go at once!”

The surgeon started up in bed, rubbed his eyes, and looked about him. The candle was flickering faintly in its socket. Brian, with his ears pricked forward, had raised his head at his master's sudden jump.

Everything was quiet, but still those words were ringing in his ear—

“Go to the hospital!—go at once!”

The tremendous peal of the bell overnight, and this sentence, seemed to be simultaneous.

That he was wanted at Guy's—wanted imperatively—came to O'Donnell like an inspiration.

Neither sense nor reason had anything to do with the conviction that roused him out of bed, and made him dress as speedily as possible, and grope his way down the staircase, Brian following.

He opened the front door, and passed out into the darkness. The rain was over, and the stars were shining as he pursued his way down Newport Market, and thence, winding in and out in a south-east direction, through Lincoln's Inn Fields and Old Square to Chancery Lane, whence he proceeded to St. Paul's.

Along the deserted streets he resolutely continued his walk. He did not know what he was going to Guy's for. Some instinct was urging him on, and he neither strove

to combat nor control it. Only once had the thought of turning back occurred, and that was at the archway leading into Old Square. There he had paused for a moment, asking himself whether he were not gone stark, staring mad; but Guy's seemed preferable to the haunted house in Gerard Street, and he walked resolutely on, determining to say, if any surprise were expressed at his appearance, that he had been sent for.

Sent for?—yea, truly; but by whom?

On through Cannon Street; on over London Bridge, where the lights flickered in the river, and the sullen plash of the water flowing beneath the arches, washing the stone piers, could be heard, now the human din was hushed and lulled to sleep. On, thinking of many things; of the days of his youth; of his dead brother; of his father's heavily encumbered estate; of the fortune his mother had vowed she would leave to some charity rather than to him, if he refused to marry according to her choice; of

his wild life in London ; of the terrible cry he had heard overnight—that terrible wail which he could not drive away from his memory even as he entered Guy's, and confronted the porter, who said—

“ You have just been sent for, sir ; did you meet the messenger ” ?

Like one in a dream, Hertford O'Donnell heard him ; like one in a dream, also, he asked what was the matter.

“ Bad accident, sir ; fire : balcony gave way—unsafe—old building. Mother and child—a son ; boy with compound fracture of thigh.” This, the joint information of porter and house-surgeon, mingled together, and made a roar in Mr. O'Donnell's ears like the sound of the sea breaking on a shingly shore.

Only one sentence he understood perfectly—“ Immediate amputation necessary.” At this point he grew cool ; he was the careful, cautious, successful surgeon in a moment.

“The boy, you say?” he answered; “let me see him.”

The Guy's Hospital of to-day may be different to the Guy's Hertford O'Donnell knew so well. Railways have, I believe, swept away the old operating room; railways may have changed the position of the old accident ward, to reach which, in the days of which I am writing, the two surgeons had to pass a staircase leading to the upper stories.

On the lower step of this staircase, partially in shadow, Hertford O'Donnell beheld, as he came forward, an old woman seated.

An old woman with streaming grey hair, with attenuated arms, with head bowed forward, with scanty clothing, with bare feet; who never looked up at their approach, but sat unnoticing, shaking her head and wringing her hands in an extremity of grief.

“Who is that?” asked Mr. O'Donnell, almost involuntarily.

“Who is what?” demanded his companion.

“That—that woman,” was the reply.

“What woman?”

“There—are you blind?—seated on the bottom step of the staircase. What is she doing?” persisted Mr. O'Donnell.

“There is no woman near us,” his companion answered, looking at the rising surgeon very much as though he suspected him of seeing double.

“No woman!” scoffed Hertford. “Do you expect me to disbelieve the evidence of my own eyes?” and he walked up to the figure, meaning to touch it.

But as he essayed to do so, the woman seemed to rise in the air and float away, with her arms stretched high up over her head, uttering such a wail of pain, and agony, and distress, as caused the Irishman's blood to curdle.

“My God! Did you hear that?” he said to his companion.

“What?” was the reply.

Then, although he knew the sound had fallen on deaf ears, he answered—

“The wail of the banshee! Some of my people are doomed!”

“I trust not,” answered the house-surgeon, who had an idea, nevertheless, that Hertford O'Donnell's banshee lived in a whisky-bottle, and that she would some day make an end of that rising and clever operator.

With nerves utterly shaken, Mr. O'Donnell walked forward to the accident ward. There, with his face shaded from the light, lay his patient—a young boy, with a compound fracture of the thigh.

In that ward, in the face of actual pain or danger capable of relief, the surgeon had never known faltering nor fear; and now he carefully examined the injury, felt the pulse, inquired as to the treatment pursued, and ordered the sufferer to be carried to the operating room.

While he was looking out his instruments he heard the boy lying on the table murmur faintly—

“Tell her not to cry so—tell her not to cry.”

“What is he talking about?” Hertford O'Donnell inquired.

“The nurse says he has been speaking about some woman crying ever since he came in—his mother, most likely,” answered one of the attendants.

“He is delirious, then?” observed the surgeon.

“No, sir,” pleaded the boy, excitedly. “No; it is that woman—that woman with the grey hair. I saw her looking from the upper window before the balcony gave way. She has never left me since, and she won't be quiet, wringing her hands and crying.”

“Can you see her now?” Hertford O'Donnell inquired, stepping to the side of the table. “Point out where she stands.”

Then the lad stretched forth a feeble finger in the direction of the door, where clearly, as he had seen her seated on the stairs, the surgeon saw a woman standing—a woman with grey hair and scanty clothing, and upstretched arms and bare feet.

“A word with you, sir,” O'Donnell said to the house-surgeon, drawing him back from the table. “I cannot perform this operation; send for some other person. I am ill: I am incapable.”

“But,” pleaded the other, “there is no time to get any one else. We sent for Mr. —— before we troubled you, but he was out of town, and all the rest of the surgeons live so far away. Mortification may set in at any moment, and——”

“Do you think you require to teach me my business?” was the reply. “I know the boy's life hangs on a thread, and that is the very reason I cannot operate. I am not fit for it. I tell you I have seen to-night that which unnerves me for anything. My hand is not steady. Send for some one else without delay. Say I am ill—dead!—what you please. Heavens! there she is again, right over the boy! Do you hear her?” and Hertford O'Donnell fell fainting on the floor.

He lay in that death-like swoon for hours ; and when he returned to consciousness, the principal physician of Guy's was standing beside him in the cold grey light of the Christmas morning.

"The boy?" murmured O'Donnell, faintly.

"Now, my dear fellow, keep yourself quiet," was the reply.

"The boy?" he repeated, irritably.

"Who operated?"

"No one," Dr. —— answered. "It would have been useless cruelty. Mortification had set in, and——"

Hertford O'Donnell turned his face to the wall, and his friend could not see it.

"Do not distress yourself," went on the physician, kindly. "Allington says he could not have survived the operation in any case. He was quite delirious from the first, raving about a woman with grey hair, and——"

"Yes, I know," Hertford O'Donnell inter-

rupted; "and the boy had a mother, they told me, or I dreamt it."

"Yes, bruised and shaken, but not seriously injured."

"Has she blue eyes and fair hair—fair hair all rippling and wavy? Is she white as a lily, with just a faint flush of colour in her cheek? Is she young, and trusting, and innocent? No; I am wandering. She must be nearly thirty, now. Go, for God's sake, and tell me if you can find a woman that you could imagine having been as a girl such as I describe."

"Irish?" asked the doctor; and O'Donnell made a gesture of assent.

"It is she, then," was the reply; "a woman with the face of an angel."

"A woman who should have been my wife," the surgeon answered; "whose child was my son."

"Lord help you!" ejaculated the doctor. Then Hertford O'Donnell raised himself from the sofa where they had laid him, and

told his companion the story of his life—how there had been bitter feud between his people and her people—how they were divided by old animosities and by difference of religion—how they had met by stealth, and exchanged rings and vows, all for nought—how his family had insulted hers, so that her father, wishful for her to marry a kinsman of his own, bore her off to a far-away land, and made her write him a letter of eternal farewell—how his own parents had kept all knowledge of the quarrel from him till she was utterly beyond his reach—how they had vowed to discard him unless he agreed to marry according to their wishes—how he left his home, and came to London, and pushed his fortune. All this Hertford O'Donnell repeated ; and when he had finished, the bells were ringing for morning service—ringing loudly—ringing joyfully. “Peace on earth, good will towards men.”

But there was little peace that morning for Hertford O'Donnell. He had to look on

the face of his dead son, wherein he beheld, as though reflected, the face of the boy in his dream.

Stealthily he followed his friend, and beheld, with her eyes closed, her cheeks pale and pinched, her hair thinner, but still falling like a veil over her, the love of his youth, the only woman he had ever loved devotedly and unselfishly.

There is little space left here, to tell of how the two met at last—of how the stone of the years seemed suddenly rolled away from the tomb of their past, and their youth arose and returned to them even amid their tears.

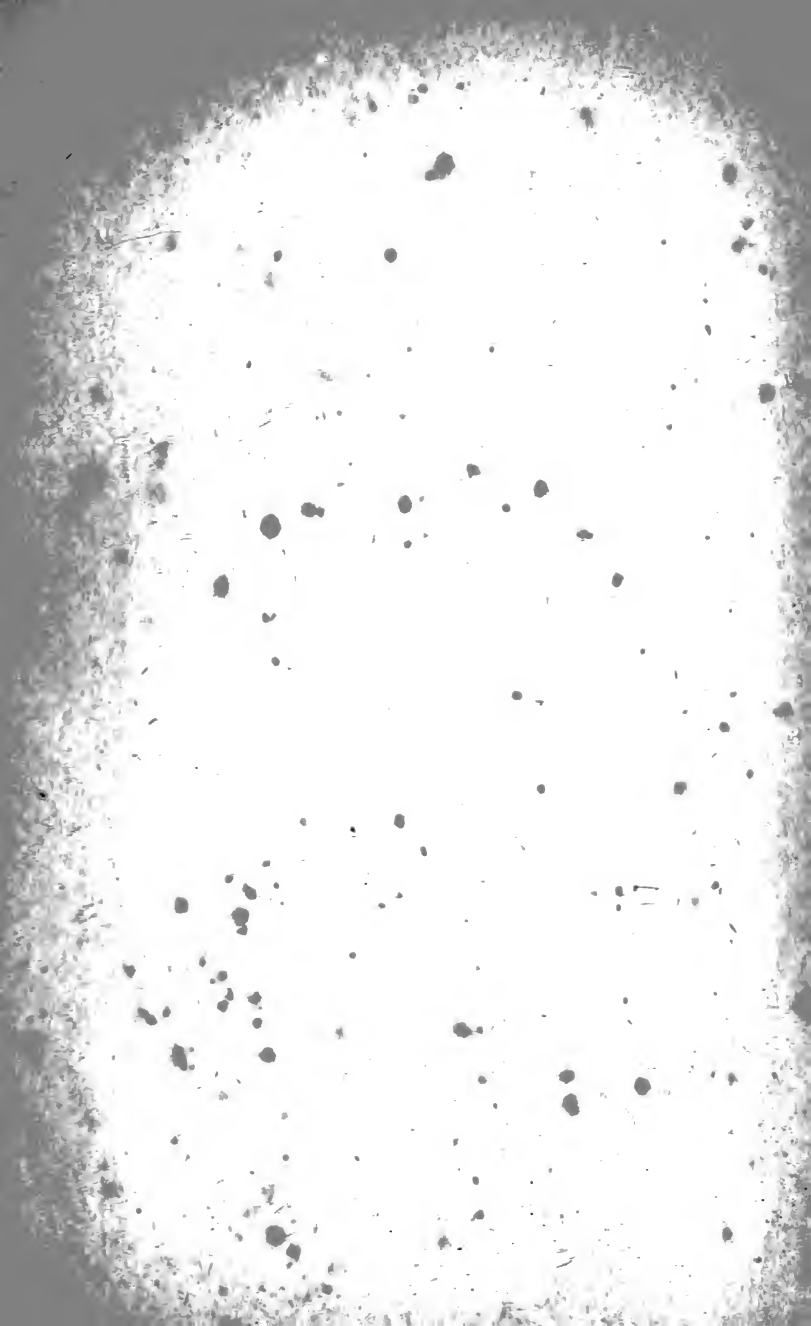
She had been true to him, through persecution, through contumely, through kindness, which was more trying; through shame, and grief, and poverty, she had been loyal to the lover of her youth; and before the new year dawned there came a letter from Calgillan, saying that the banshee had been heard there, and praying Hertford, if

he were still alive, to let bygones be bygones, in consideration of the long years of estrangement—the anguish and remorse of his afflicted parents.

More than that. Hertford O'Donnell, if a reckless man, was an honourable; and so, on the Christmas Day when he was to have proposed for Miss Ingot, he went to that lady, and told her how he had wooed and won in the years of his youth one who after many days was miraculously restored to him; and from the hour in which he took her into his confidence he never thought her either vulgar or foolish, but rather he paid homage to the woman who, when she had heard the whole tale repeated, said, simply, “Ask her to come to me till you claim her—and God bless you both!”

THE END.





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