

LOVE GONE ASTRAY



ALBERT ROSS

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LOVE GONE ASTRAY.

BY ALBERT ROSS.

AUTHOR OF

'OUT OF WEDLOCK," "AN ORIGINAL SINNER,"
"THOU SHALT NOT," "WHY I'M SINGLE,"
"YOUNG FAWCETT'S MABEL," ETC.



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TO MY READERS.

AFTER a year of travel in Europe, Africa and Asia, I am again at home, happy to breathe the air of my native land and to greet friends steadfast and true.

The only *new* criticism that has come to me during the past six months—for most are mere repetitions—is because nearly all my novels treat of sex. Let us see about that.

“Speaking of Ellen” and “Young Fawcett’s Mabel,” are not based principally on the question of sex. “Moulding a Maiden” is only secondarily so. Most of the others are. What is the reason?

My original success was with “Thou Shalt Not.” There was the question of sex, pure and simple. If I had written first a romance of history, or of murder, and attracted such attention from the reading public, probably I should have taken a hint that my forte was in that field.

“Let each do what he can do best.”

There is great dramatic action in the sex issue. It appeals to every man and woman with intelligence of brain and pulses that move. It is creeping into

the novels of nearly every author of note. I think I will keep on awhile longer with it.

I have, however, written a story of mystery, based on an assassination, that will appear some time, I do not know when. If I rival the masters in that line I shall certainly take the hint.

In the meantime you will find sex the ruling *motif* in "Love Gone Astray," and I hope it will not prove uninteresting.

ALBERT ROSS.

Cambridge, Mass., 1896.

INTRODUCTION,

PLOT FOR A NOVEL.

"If a young girl 'goes astray' ——" began my friend.

"Well?" said I.

"And if some man, knowing that fact, himself being innocent of her fall, marries her ——"

"Yes."

"And in due time she bears a child, the result of her indiscretion ——"

"I am listening."

"Can happiness possibly result from the union?"

It was certainly a grave question. And I said to my friend, as we sat at our coffee in the breakfast-room of the Hotel Continental at Cairo, that I would not like to answer it without further information.

"In the first place," I added, "men are not apt to covet marriages made on the basis which you have assumed. I should say it would be practically impossible to obtain a *respectable* husband for a girl who had committed such a fault, were the consequences what you intimate."

My friend smiled.

"Supposing," he said, "the man was very poor and the girl's father very rich?"

I admitted that this might alter the case somewhat; people nowadays did almost anything for money. If this was the make-weight in the hypothetical instance, I could answer with considerable certainty that happiness would *not* follow such a marriage.

"I can imagine that a certain type of man might go through a wedding ceremony with such a girl," I said, "if he was sufficiently well paid for it. Such a fellow would hardly be above retaining the position he had taken, either, if his continued compensation depended thereon. But the infant, when it was born, would be a standing reminder of his shame, as well as hers. Unless the secret was jealously guarded, the public would know of what had transpired, and its seal of disapproval would make the conditions well nigh unbearable."

My friend bowed.

"I refer to a case where the secret was kept in a very narrow circle," he replied.

"Do you mean to say that you know, personally, of a couple married in the way you suggest?"

"Precisely."

"What was the result?"

"If you have time to listen I will give you the entire story," he said. "It may form the basis of a future novel, and prove quite as interesting as one of your own invention."

I had the time to listen, of course. One has time for anything and everything agreeable in Cairo. The

best place to hear the tale was in a victoria, and with my good dragoman, Hassan Mohammed, on the box with the coachman, we set out at once on a drive to the Pyramids. As the recital was only half through when we reached the Mena House, we postponed the remainder while we stopped there for an excellent lunch. On the way back to Cairo my friend continued and finished the story.

It was indeed quite suitable for use, and I told my friend, with thanks, that I should at once put it in shape for my readers. I said I should make a few alterations in it, for the sake of dramatic interest, but in the main would follow the lines he had given me.

It would spoil my romance were I to answer on this page the question that must be uppermost in the reader's mind. I have already revealed almost too much of the plot. For the rest I must refer you, without more ado, to the chapters that follow.

LOVE GONE ASTRAY.

CHAPTER I.

IN A VENETIAN GONDOLA.

IT was very early in the morning, and the Venetian gondolier responded sleepily to the call of the young American on the Piazzetta. The boatman rowed leisurely to the bank, for the gentry to which he belongs does not easily get excited, and helped his fare into the gondola with a grace inherited from generations of polite ancestors.

"Where?" he asked, in his Italian patois; and the young man, who hardly knew a word of the language, had no difficulty in divining the meaning of the question.

"Anywhere," he answered, with a wave of his hand, as easily understood as the term used by the other.

He wanted an early row among the oddities of Venice, and as he had been in the Silent City

but a short time, one direction was as agreeable to him as another.

The gondolier took his long oar and began to propel his craft by those strange, sweeping motions that so interest and puzzle one unused to this style of rowing. Standing well back toward the stern, he sent the beautiful creature of which he seemed a part as gracefully through the water as any swan.

He rowed slowly, both from preference and because it was evident that haste was not desired by his passenger. He rowed picturesquely, because there is no other mode known to the gondolier of Venice, from the uniformed attendant of a nabob to the humblest freight boatman who brings a load of firewood from the mainland or of vegetables from the islands where the market gardens are located.

For a while the course of the boat lay along the Grand Canal. It passed under the venerable Rialto, as solid as London Bridge, in effect one massive stone, that will be intact, as far as human judgment can foresee, until the earth is in its final throes. On either side of the Canal long lines of palaces shone in the early light, their occupants, for the most part, yet invisible.

Venice was still asleep. Lovely as she is at all times, this stately creature is never so pretty as when in repose. A glide along her watery streets just before sunrise is like moving silently through a garden where nymphs lie in slumber.

In Venice there is no wheeled carriage of any description. Not a horse, mule, ox, goat, sheep, puts his foot upon her pavements. The station at which you arrive by train is at an extreme corner of the

city, and even its necessary noise is tempered by the surroundings. The only vehicles of passenger or goods service are the boats, which make hardly more disturbance for the ear than a fish passing over the same route.

Every sound—and when the city awakes she is capable of many sounds—proceeds from the voices of individuals, or the whirr of the sacred doves that are fed by thousands at all hours in the Piazza of St. Mark. The seller of various wares seems to feel that it is incumbent upon him to mock the echoes of the winding labyrinths over which one may stroll dryshod.

The boatmen themselves, when there is a possible occasion; cry out to each other in weird tones, especially at narrow intersections of the side canals, to prevent collision with craft approaching silently from beyond the stone and brick of a corner. Besides, in protest of the natural stillness of their city, they quarrel for hours in front of the principal hotels, with as much effect as a parcel of highly-plumed birds in an African forest. But for these things Venice would be as quiet as the schoolroom in which the proverbial pin is about to drop, or as a graveyard in a superstitious neighborhood.

At the morning hour when young Gilbert Gray rode in his gondola under the Rialto these noises had only faintly begun, and the delight he felt in his excursion was correspondingly great.

He wanted the effect of solitude. With the gondolier hidden from sight by his rearward position, the boat seemed propelled by a sail or the force of a tide. Until men have mastered the currents of the

upper air, and can voyage whither they please in the ether, there will be no effect so nearly like it as to float on the bosom of a Venetian canal.

The drift adown the current of a river does not give the same impression, for there is a tiresome row in prospect before the starting point can be regained. No boat propelled by machinery, even the tidy little naphtha launch, equals it, for the noise of the wheels cannot entirely be deadened and the smell of the chemicals waft themselves in spite of all precaution to the nostrils. The trimmest yacht may give more excitement as she skims bird-like across the waters of the sea, but she does not lull the senses and transport the dreamer into another world, from which he may return at pleasure.

Only the gondola does this.

Why did Gilbert Gray wish for solitude? He was twenty years of age, and in the possession of perfect health. Most youths like him would have irked the stillness of the canals and welcomed joyfully the first signs of that noisier awakening that would come with the sunrise.

Gilbert was sentimental. The strangeness of the situation gave him a real delight. He lay back in the comfortable seat, stretched his legs and gave himself up to reverie. His brain dwelt on the poetic quality of this peculiar place. Its history, of which he had read much, passed slowly through his mind. He wished he had lived some centuries earlier to have seen these islands when the argosies of the whole world came there with treasures of distant lands, and when St. Mark's environs held a gorgeous pageant from one year's end to another's.

To enjoy Venice thoroughly one must precipitate himself into that dead and buried past, for to-day only the shadow of the mighty substance is left.

The young man had watched the litter of lazzaroni leaning from stately balconies. He saw that decay had fastened upon the vitals of this glorious creature, on whose breast he had been permitted, too late, to rest his head. To appreciate Venice he must forget the present.

The morning hour, just before the sun comes out of the Adriatic, is the best time for this.

The Grand Canal is some hundreds of feet in width during the major part of its course. The intersecting "streets" are seldom more than twenty. When an hour had passed, and the sun was peeping over the rosy tints of the east, the passenger lifted a hand without turning in his seat and intimated that he would vary his course by entering one of the side streams. He nodded, still without turning, when the boatman said "Piccola?" in an interrogative tone. They understood each other very well, and with a sweep of the long oar, that bore no apparent relation to the effect it gave, the Italian turned his prow in the direction indicated, and with another sent his barque between the high ranges of buildings that bordered the "rio."

The light encroaching on the outer world had little effect, as yet, on these secluded passages. The undisturbed quality of the voyage was, if anything, improved by the change. So little prospect was there of another gondola approaching from the opposite direction that Gilbert's boatman forgot to utter his usual cry at the doubtful corners.

The intersecting canals, that seemed to offer a succession of impossible turns for the long craft, proved equal to its passage in the skillful manipulation of the rower, whose art was little less than marvellous. He found plenty of room where none was visible, not even grazing the walls with either end of his boat, and all without the least apparent effort.

If anything was needed to make the young American certain he had passed from earth to Fairyland the magic perfection of these difficult passages sufficed. Under numerous little arched bridges he floated, and when at last he emerged upon the Grand Canal he uttered the word he had heard—"Piccola,"—and was immediately rowed again into a succession of the minor ones.

Finally the march of the early morning began to have its effect in various ways. Through windows women could be seen preparing breakfasts. Other gondoliers came, rowing sleepily toward the centres from which passengers might be expected. Market boats, loaded high with the brightest tomatoes, cabbages, potatoes and fruit appeared. Young people were seen, as the public squares were passed, going to labor. Beggars thought it not too early to ply their trade—the most flourishing and perhaps the most lucrative in Venice. Shutters were taken down from dingy shops, and goods arranged to beguile the expected customer. Services in the churches, of which the city boasts more than a hundred, attracted those who had the time and inclination for them.

The city was awakening. Gilbert Gray's beautiful dream was being spoiled. He roused himself with impatience, for he would have preferred that

the reverie had gone on for some hours longer. The morning had been slightly chilly, for the date was late in October, but the warmly dressed youth had experienced no discomfort. The mercury was now mounting, slowly but surely, and the less fortunate Venetians, who had no means to purchase fuel, were crawling out into the sunshine like a species of lizard. There were months before them of colder nights than these, and they had not yet begun to grumble. The very poor are your true fatalists, and the more ignorant of these people knew, though they might not have been able to put it into words, that "what must be must be."

Somewhat sulkily Gray signaled to his boatman that he would return to the waters of the Grand Canal. If Venice was indeed awake, she would look better, he thought, from that point. The main street of the city repaid him for the change, in the glowing colors reflected from her palace walls, as the glints of the sun came in contact with the shades that art and time have combined to render lovely.

Other foreigners were out now, as well as himself, taking what they thought a very early view of the city. He marked the various types of tourists and looked rather longer than was quite polite at a party of young girls, chaperoned by a sour-faced and elderly female. That they were English he made sure by the glowing color of their cheeks, as well as by the peculiar fashion of their hair and the demureness of their demeanor.

Then his attention was attracted by an Italian girl, hardly more than fifteen years of age, who wielded the forward oar in a boat that transported

baskets of coal from one of the steamers to the shore. The girl was strikingly pretty, with the dark hair and eyes of her race; and there was a freedom in the way she moved her arms that would have given pleasure to a painter. She apparently boasted but one garment, a calico printed gown that came only to her knees and was loosely fastened at the breast. The lower portion of her brown legs was entirely uncovered and the skirt blew in perfect freedom about the upper parts. She wore no hat, and her hair hung in a careless braid to the level of her waist.

The girl returned Gilbert's interested look, finding him quite as well worth noting as he found her, and they were apparently trying to decide which should outstare the other when a short, crisp word from the master of her boat called her attention to her work. With a farewell glance that expressed regret as plainly as any formed sentence, the child bent her young energies with redoubled strength to the oar and did not look again in Gray's direction.

"How pretty these Italian girls always are!" he murmured to himself. "And why is it that they grow so soon into ugly, wrinkled, sallow-faced old hags? Does Nature punish them for having taken more than their share in infancy? To think this sprite will look, thirty years from now, like that crone who waits on the riva, ready to swindle a soldo from me if I carry out my purpose of landing on her piratical territory!"

At the risk of paying the tribute, however, the American motioned to his gondolier that he wished to reach the shore, and a few moments later he stood

upon the marble steps that face the Pillars. After settling in a more than liberal way with the boatman, and seeing the unfailing shrug of dissatisfaction that cabbies of all nations are wont to use, no matter what they are paid, he put a silver piece of small value into the woman's outstretched hand and turned to see if the pretty child in the coal boat had disappeared from view. There she was, pushing with all her strength at her oar, her face turned from him, the print gown blowing about her shapely legs, having forgotten already, no doubt, that such a young man as he existed.

Slightly piqued he took a few steps up the walk, turned to look at her again and then dismissed her from his mind. Though there was at least five years difference in their ages, it would have been a pleasure had he found her stealing a covert glance in his direction. Such are the sentiments of a young fellow of twenty, more often than one might think, and there was nothing in this hero of ours to take him out of the common in this particular.

The three hours that he had been out of bed, made Gray quite ready for a cup of coffee and a roll, even though so much of the time had been spent in dreaming. As he walked briskly toward the Piazza, he saw that a pall of murky clouds hung over the city, broken here and there by the rising sun, as if the elements were masquerading in clothes for which they had no use.

All at once young Gray's eyes encountered an object that took his attention from the firmament and brought it solidly to the earth at his feet. Lying at the base of the column that bears upon its summit

the bearded lion of St. Mark, was a man of but little more than his own age, dressed in garments that showed him to be no native of Venice, and that also indicated the unlikelihood of his being in the habit of selecting the pavement for his bed. The figure was in a very deep slumber, and the face so covered by one of the arms, the other being used as a head-rest, that the features could not be distinguished.

Gilbert paused and gazed for some minutes at the recumbent form, not willing to leave it there, and yet uncertain whether he had either the right or the inclination to disturb a sleep that, whatever else might be said of it, was apparently refreshing and grateful to its owner.

Several passers paused to join the onlooker, and then went their ways with a laugh. A cloud of pigeons flew over from the Piazza and alighted near him, in expectation of a handful of corn, to be had of itinerant venders at three cents a package. Half absently Gray bought some grain and took up the time in scattering it on the ground. It gave him an excuse for staying in the neighborhood.

The story of the Samaritan came into his head, and he was neither a priest nor a Levite. If the man on the stones needed any little help he would be glad to give it to him. It was not likely he had selected that hard bed from choice. Still Gilbert had a hesitation about interfering with the business of other people. Perhaps he would be not only unthanked but insulted if he took this sleeper by the arm and shook him into wakefulness.

An idea occurred as the outgrowth of what he was doing. He could let the pigeons awake the slum-

berer, and it would then be easy to see whether anything further was advisable.

Scattering the maize slowly, Gray saw the birds devour it as hungrily as if they and their ancestors had not been fed hourly for more than a thousand years within a hundred feet of that spot. Stray grains that he threw lit upon the coat and then upon the hat of the sleeper, bringing the pigeons without delay to the same localities, with the fearlessness that centuries have bred in these pets of Venice.

Presently a dozen of the feathered things were perched upon the figure of the prostrate man, pecking greedily for every grain that could be found ; and still he slept on. It was only when one of the birds flying from above, lit on the rim of the soft hat, and came with a great flapping of wings into his very face, that the sleeper turned and made an involuntary motion to brush away the disturber. The removal of the protecting arm allowed the sunlight to fall upon his eyelids, and the awakening that had taken so long was accomplished.

"A-h-h!" he muttered, rousing himself into a sitting posture, and stretching his stiff limbs.

After making which remark he sat up, and with his back against the column of St. Mark, looked around.

The Palace of the Doges, the Church of San Marco, and the rows of shops opposite, impressed themselves upon his vision. Then the doves, and last of all, young Mr. Gray.

"A-h-h!" he said again.

He reached his hand toward a pocket of his vest, and finding neither watch nor chain there he said

“ Ah !” for the third time and began to get upon his feet.

“ What time is it ?” he asked, yawning, and Gray, delighted that the conversation had thus begun, responded that it was between seven and eight o'clock.

The man spoke English, and was apparently a native of the British Isles.

“ Eight o'clock !” he replied, incredulously. “ Why, it was after ten when ——” He paused and contracted his eyebrows. “ Confound it ! I believe I've slept here all night !”

This looked so probable that the person to whom it was addressed only answered with a smiling nod. He had “ sized up ” the sleeper rapidly during the last minute. The movement toward the watch that had disappeared told its own story. Hard luck of some kind had caused the owner of the timepiece to part with it.

The clothes of the sleeper were of good cut, and they had not suffered seriously from contact with a dry and reasonably clean pavement. He brushed off the dust with care and then stretched himself again.

“ If you will excuse the liberty in a stranger,” said Gray, “ I was just going to get some coffee ; would you like to accompany me ?”

The Englishman cast a quick look of suspicion at the speaker, and then tried to conceal his action.

“ I suppose I am a curiosity to you,” said he bluntly, “ and such I must, at least for the present, remain. It would be folly to pretend that I selected this place for my nap on account of its comfort. It

was merely a matter of eligibility. I did not have a centesimo in my pocket. I could not pawn my watch or chain, or diamond pin, or rings, because I had none. My very linen is held as security for rent I cannot pay. With these statements I leave you to say whether you still wish my company, or whether you would rather hand me a lira, as you would to any other mendicant, and let me go."

All the generosity in Gilbert Gray's heart forbade the acceptance of the latter proposition. The man had told him nothing but what he already suspected. He replied quickly that his invitation still held good, and that he trusted all disagreeable subjects would be banished from the slight refreshment of which they were to partake.

"Very well," was the reply, as they walked along toward Florian's. "I will go with pleasure, all the greater as it is twenty-four hours since I tasted food."

To the exclamation which greeted this announcement the stranger added, "Oh, that is nothing. If I were at liberty to tell you—let me say only this: I have been robbed. My enemies have outwitted me, and as you see they have left me in a rather disagreeable plight; but my courage is still good, and when my turn comes I shall pay them back with interest."

"What may I call you?" asked Gilbert, handing his new acquaintance his card, as they seated themselves at one of the tables.

"I shall have to refuse you my true name for the present," was the reply. "I am traveling incog. But, for the purpose of conversation, you may call me—Mr. Neiling—Mr. William Neiling."

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE MR. NEILING.

MR. WILLIAM NEILING shamed the pigeons in the square by the avidity with which he devoured the light meal that was soon before him. He was finishing the second cup of coffee he had poured from the generous pot, and commencing on his third roll when an idea occurred to Mr. Gray.

"Would you mind," he said, "if I ordered some eggs for you along with my own? I am not yet used to continental breakfasts and find need of something rather more substantial between morning and noon."

Mr. Neiling laughed.

"I should certainly like the eggs," he answered, "and for the sake of them will pardon the disingenuousness of your invitation. Ask the waiter to make it three, if you please. Eating once a day has its drawbacks, but it certainly conduces to a healthy appetite."

The manner in which the stranger received his new friend's advances made it easy to get on comfortable terms with him, and the stiffness that had crept into Gilbert's manner rapidly disappeared.

"You are an early riser, it seems," commented Neiling, when there came a suitable point into which to throw the remark.

"I was in a gondola at four o'clock," replied Gray, with a blush, partly of pride.

"Indeed! And what did you want at that unearthly hour?"

"Only to see Venice in her greatest quiet."

And then he went on, somewhat lamely, to give the impressions he had formed before the sun rose, and warming as he proceeded, detailed the sights and sounds of that half-nocturnal journey.

It was clear that this was a chord to which Mr. Neiling could not respond. He laughed a little, from time to time, and shook his head as if to say he saw no pleasure in that kind of a trip; quite good-naturedly, but with no attempt to sacrifice truth to politeness.

"You are evidently a sentimentalist," he said. "I suppose you read Byron and Shelley, and that sort of thing."

"I adore them!" was the enthusiastic reply.

"And do you write verses yourself?" asked Neiling, quizzically.

"No. It almost seems as if I could, though. I feel all a poet's ardor, without confidence enough to express it. I think there is no place so poetic as these watery streets, anywhere on the globe."

"Mr. Neiling responded that he had found the streets of Venice very wet, and the gondola a slow and unsatisfactory vehicle. Even when he had money in his purse he said it took an unconscionable time to get anywhere in one of those silly contrivances. When he had not a soldo and his course led up and down over the flights of stairs called bridges, an hour's walk was as tiresome as three in a sensible English town.

"But the skies!" remarked Gray with enthusiasm.

“Have you ever seen such beauty in the blending of sea and air as there is at sunset? I thought, before I came here, that the painters had drawn on their imaginations, but they do not depict half the reality. And in the evening, when the singing parties go out on the water, what a soul-stirring effect they produce! I had rather hear one of these boatloads of vocalists, accompanied by their mandolins and zithers, than the best opera in one of our home theatres, with a hundred picked musicians in the orchestra.”

“Would you, really!” asked Mr. Neiling, who seemed to find the statement most astonishing. He said he had heard some of the singing, from a distance, and had not taken the trouble to go nearer. As for the sky, he had not even noticed it, except to speculate on the probability of rain.

“But what do you find worth seeing and hearing in Venice, then?” demanded Gray, pointedly.

“Nothing whatever,” was the calm reply. “I assure you I did not come here for any of the poetic reasons you mention, nor shall I remain a day longer than is necessary. I was lured to Venice by a business affair, which has turned out, as you may guess, very badly. I must remain, as far as I can see, till funds arrive—unless some trusting individual wants to let me have a hundred francs with which to reach Rome.”

The suggestion was sufficiently pointed, and Gray was glad it had been reached in that direct manner. He wanted to aid this distressed young gentleman, and he had not known how to press a loan upon him without danger of giving offense. When he heard the sum of one hundred francs mentioned, he bright-

ened immediately and said it would please him to lend the amount himself, or twice as much, if equally agreeable.

“We shall not quarrel even over the latter proposition,” smiled Neiling. “If you can spare the money it is liable to come in conveniently before I hear from my people. To get to Rome to-morrow will be of great value to the business I have in hand, and a few francs extra in the pocket is not a bad thing when one is hundreds of miles from his natural base of supplies.”

Mr. Gray promptly placed two notes for a hundred francs—or rather lire—each on the table, and suggested that as a train started toward Rome within an hour, he would not detain his acquaintance over any formalities.

“But,” laughed Neiling, folding up the notes, “I can’t go till to-morrow, for a very good reason. All my linen requires laundering, and even the quick laundries will need twenty-four hours’ time. To go to Rome with soiled collars and cuffs is not to be thought of. We are such slaves to these foolish customs! No gentleman is strong enough to brave the edict which ordains that he must wear a starched shirt. I will leave you, as you suggest, but only for the sake of putting my underclothing in communication with a laundress. Being now able to satisfy the insatiate claims of my landlord, I shall be allowed, I presume, to remain in my room to-night, instead of resting at the foot of St. Mark’s statue. And to-morrow, in all the glory of a clean collar and polished boots I will make a descent upon Rome, which

I hope will be as effective, if not as terrorizing, as that of the more ancient barbarians."

Gray was sorry to have the important business that evidently awaited Mr. Neiling, postponed so long, but he saw no way to evade the points raised, and after going with him as far as the Piazzetta, he bade him farewell.

It is certainly more blessed to give than to receive. Mr. Gray felt all the happiness of one who has relieved distress at no real cost to his own comfort. It was as easy for him to lend those two hundred lire, as to feed the pigeons in the Piazza with the little packages of corn that cost three cents, American money, each. And the result was so pleasant! He wondered, as he strolled back to his hotel on the Grand Canal, why such a fuss was made over charity, and why the least undeserved suffering was allowed to exist.

That evening he walked for some time in the Piazza. The arcaded marble palaces that form three sides of the square were filled with a brilliant throng, moving to and fro, or sitting in front of the restaurants attending to the wants of the inner man. From the coffee rooms bright faces beamed upon the spectacle. Over St. Mark's Church the remnant of a broken moon hung in glory in the deep azure, surrounded by a queenly train of stars, faintly distinguishable. To the right the Palace of Doges, eternally beautiful in its unparalleled grace, took on the tints of the numerous lights; while the giant Campanile, always a blot upon the symmetry of the surroundings, rose coarse and powerful, to dwarf all other structures near.

A hundred gondolas were moored beyond the Pillars, each one casting a shadow as black as itself upon the ineffable blue on which it rode. Throngs of strollers passed, wearing the variegated costumes one always finds in this minor gateway of the East.

No one was still, for a moment. Out of the Merceria the crowds came and into it other crowds returned. Movement, movement! It was all so adapted to time and place! A touch more of light would have ruined everything. Gilbert Gray knew that he stood in the human centre of all that's rhythmic to the ear and eye.

When the crowd finally dispersed, Gray did not find himself inclined to go indoors. He went to look at the Bay again, and finally engaged a gondolier to row him out toward the Lagoon.

As the boatman was engaged by the hour it made no difference to him that his passenger had no particular destination. Indeed, it was rather pleasing to find in the course of time that the American was fast asleep on the comfortable seat. The last thing Gilbert had seen was the beautiful city under the deep blue of a sky lit by the stars alone, the broken moon having gone to rest below the horizon. When the beauty of morning came again he experienced anew the pleasure of finding Venice asleep and witnessing her awakening.

A little earlier than on the previous day he dismissed his gondola and went to Florian's for his coffee. Something to his surprise he found his English friend already there, partaking of as substantial a meal as the house could furnish.

"I found I could catch the first train," explained

Neiling, who looked far less like a man who had had a good night's sleep than the other. "So I'm off. By-the-way," he added, with a kind of arrogance in his manner, "I had the luck to get part of my money back, and you can have those two hundred lire if you want them."

He took out a substantial fistful of paper bills as he spoke, and held them up to view. It was easy to see that there were several thousand francs in the pile, and Gray stared very hard in his surprise.

"Two hundred lire doesn't look much in such company as that, does it?" said Neiling, almost fiercely. "If I had had this yesterday I wouldn't have asked a crust of bread from a stranger, would I?"

He crushed the mass of paper into one of his pockets as he spoke, and swallowed the remaining coffee in his cup at a draft.

"I told you I had been robbed," added the Englishman, wiping his mouth on his napkin with a brusque movement. "Well, last night, after I left you, I got on the track of the robbers. This," tapping his pocket, "is the result. When I get at them again there will be a still better story to tell!"

Gray gazed at the speaker helplessly.

"But I don't understand why you should leave Venice, now," he said. "You ought to stay, I should think, and fight them here. If you know where they are, the police could help you. How can you do anything by going to Rome?"

A silent laugh played around the Englishman's mouth.

"They have affiliations in Rome, too," said he.

"And in Florence. And in Naples. And in every large city of Europe."

He gathered up a strap that held a handbag, and rested the weight on one shoulder, prepared to start toward the station.

"Your—watch—and—and chain," stammered Gray. "Have you recovered them, too?"

"I know where they are!" replied Neiling, with another of his strange smiles. "But I must take one of those cursed gondolas and be off. Good-bye."

The Englishman disappeared with this abrupt salutation; and it was half an hour later when it occurred to young Mr. Gray that the loan of two hundred lire had not been returned, and that neither he nor Neiling possessed the other's postoffice address.



CHAPTER III.

"I COULD LEND YOU FIFTY THOUSAND."

THE reader must have come to the conclusion by this time that Mr. William Neiling was a very peculiar gentleman, and the author does not indite this paragraph for the purpose of disputing that fact. An English solicitor, named Darius Yates, who was spending a brief vacation at the Grand Hotel and who made Gray's acquaintance across the table, said when he heard the outline of the story, that it was

certainly remarkable. Gray happened to tell it to him on the evening following Neiling's departure, and Yates showed the deepest interest in the transaction.

"Neiling, did you say?" he repeated, as if trying to remember where, if ever, he had heard the name.

"Yes," said Gray. "But I understood distinctly that it was a title assumed for the occasion."

"Very likely," nodded the solicitor. "What sort of looking man was he, now?"

"Rather thick-set, broad-shouldered, not quite as tall as I." Mr. Gray stood something like five feet nine in his stockings. He was twenty-five years old, perhaps, had sandy hair, with a small moustache, and was well dressed."

To each of these points Mr. Yates gave an answering nod. He did not act, however, as if they awoke any memory.

"The main point is that your two hundred francs are gone," he said, smiling.

Mr. Yates had a smile that was most agreeable. It was this smile that had attracted Gray to him when he first saw him on the other side of the table.

"Oh, that is nothing," was the reply. "He evidently forgot to give it to me, for he had it in his hand, along with many times as much, when he was hurrying to get his train. I shall run across him somewhere, and if I don't it won't matter. It is only forty dollars in American money, you know."

Mr. Yates smiled again.

"That's a distinctly American way of putting it," said he. "Now, to an Englishman, forty dollars—let's see, that's eight pounds—is a matter for decided

interest, on all occasions. I have a client, or I might say a friend, from your country, who is spending a good deal of time in Europe, largely on account of his daughter. I understand he started life without a penny, and now he's as rich as you please. The contempt with which he talks of pounds, shillings and pence, is enough to make one's blood run cold. I've seen him hand a half-sovereign to a blind beggar. He told me once he wouldn't take change from a newsboy, if he had nothing to give him for a *Times* but a five-pound note!"

"Oh, but I'm not like that," answered Gilbert. "I haven't the money to do it with, in the first place. My father left a very moderate fortune, and I've only received enough for my education and ordinary expenses. Mr. Blair—that's my guardian—is doing Europe with me, on account of his health, which is very bad. He's at Florence now, and I've run over here alone for a few days because the doctors don't think it best for him to come to the shore. *He's* quite a different man from the one you speak of. *He* counts all his pennies, I assure you, and he's made a handsome pile doing it. I don't think he'd at all approve of my lending forty dollars to a stranger, but what's mine's my own, as the saying is."

From that Gilbert went on, in the open way that was a part of his nature, to talk about his affairs. He had been an orphan from his thirteenth year. Abel Blair had taken the place of a parent to him, and when the doctors ordered the foreign trip Gilbert had been asked to join, partly for his own good and partly because the invalid needed some one with him in his feeble condition. They had been abroad

now for over six months, and expected to remain at least another year, if Mr. Blair lived so long. The best physicians had said to Gilbert, in confidence, that to go back to America would be to hasten the end. It was only by a succession of new scenes that Mr. Blair could hope to survive a twelvemonth.

This they did not intimate to the sick man, but gave him the hopes with which it is thought right to delude the dying. When he was not absolutely on his back he thought he was improving, and plans for entering his counting-room on his return home were constantly in his mind.

Mr. Yates was one of those pleasant fellows that a good talker always rejoices to meet; one of those men who have acquired the admirable art of listening to any story as if they found it of all things the most delightful. In truth, he was glad to meet this young chap in a hotel where every one was a stranger to him, and to while away an occasional hour by listening to his conversation. When a telegram came from Florence, a few days later, asking Gray to come there as soon as was convenient, the solicitor parted from him with real regret, and mutual hopes were expressed that the chances of life would throw them together at some future date.

Little did either imagine how close would be the relations of which this accidental meeting was a prelude.

Mr. Blair, who had had an ill turn, was already better when Gilbert arrived, and propped up in his bed, listened with eagerness to descriptions of the lovely "Bride of the Adriatic," from which his young friend had come. He smiled at the thought that the

following spring would open these delectable visions to his own eyes. As the weather grew colder he meant to go to Rome and Naples—perhaps to Messina and Malta—and take in Venice when the balmy airs of April revisited her shores.

"And by autumn I ought to resume business again," was the way the invalid always ended a recital of his schemes.

The medicine of expectation did its work once more, and in a few days Gilbert could be spared from constant attendance at the bedside. He was glad to breathe the outer air again, for the confinement told on his health and spirits. He climbed the hills around Florence, both on foot and horseback, and wandered anew through the country that lay beyond. He visited the Pitti and Uffizzi palaces, to which he had previously devoted some weeks, never tiring of the art treasures there displayed. In short, he drank in Florence with a pleasure second only to that with which he had imbibed Venice, and was in no haste for the day when the state of his guardian's health would compel him to leave.

About the middle of December, however, a change to Rome was decided upon, and Mr. Blair, now quite able to walk about, was full of expectancy over the sights that were soon to be his. There is something in the very name of that great Capital which affects most travellers, whether their chief interest centres in ancient or modern splendors.

After arriving Mr. Blair took his daily ride to objects of interest and astonished his young friend at the strength and endurance he displayed. Gilbert began to think the idea of a full recovery might not

be a fiction, after all ; but he cautioned the sick man against too great exertion, and succeeded in keeping him within reasonable bounds.

"I feel able to walk a mile," was the expression with which the merchant alighted from his carriage on each return to his hotel, after a stroll through the churches and museums.

In the evening, being wholly free, Mr. Gray used to wander out among the ruins of the old city, taking especial delight in visiting the Colosseum and viewing it in the splendor of the full moon's rays. Creeping among its arches he carried his mind back to the dead past, when this gigantic pleasure house of pain was filled with multitudes of people, hanging breathless over the terrible scenes enacted at their feet. And here one night he met, for the third time, the man he had rescued in Venice. The surprise was mutual.

"Still fond of night prowling, I see?" said Neil-
ing, quizzically.

"You cannot criticise me for what you are your-
self doing," was the good-natured reply.

"Oh, but I only came because I find it difficult to
sleep, and thought I should be quite alone here."

"Do you never think of the contests between men
and animals that have gone on in that arena!" ex-
claimed Gilbert, waving his hand toward it.

"Never."

"Nor of the Christian martyrs who have met death
there!"

"Certainly not. I have no time to think of such
sublime idiocy, and I don't believe more than half
that is written about those ancient days. All

so-called history is filled with wild improbabilities. Of course I suppose they had some fights here and some Christians eaten, but not a hundredth part as many as you probably imagine. At any rate, whatever took place was for the mutual pleasure and satisfaction of all concerned, and there is no reason to find fault with it at this late date."

With the horrors he had dreamed of still ringing in his head, Mr. Gray demanded an explanation of these assertions.

"Why," said Neiling, "the gladiators, so-called, were criminals whose death was decided upon in some form. They had been guilty, usually, of making war against a superior force, and, according to the old custom, would have been butchered without mercy, perhaps with preliminary torture, if they had not been sent here. With a sword in his hand one of these men died a thousand times as happily as if delivered to the shambles in another way. While his blood was hot in his veins he hardly felt the stroke that ended his misery. They gave him the privilege of dying like a man, instead of like a brute, and at the same time the populace were taught a valuable lesson of the power of government to punish its enemies. As for the lions and leopards and that sort of thing, I don't suppose you need a homily on the advantage of getting *them* out of the way."

The listener looked incredulous. He had heard one of those arguments that do not convince, however strong the logic may appear to be.

"But the martyrs?" he asked.

"The most perfectly contented people imaginable," was the cool reply. "According to their

doctrine they were going straight to eternal bliss the moment the animals got fairly to dining. You or I would seize their chance this minute if we were sure the bargain would be carried out. They were satisfied. The spectators were pleased. There was really no one in the whole affair who had the slightest right to complain."

It was a strange statement, and somehow Gray did not believe his companion meant it to be taken in earnest.

"I hope you found that business of yours all right—the matter you mentioned at Venice," said Gray, tentatively, as they passed along the streets.

"I should say so!" was the warm reply. "Not only did I recover all I had lost, but a great deal more. I could lend you fifty thousand lire to-night, on good security, and not incommode myself in the least."

As Gray had no wish to borrow he did not accept the opportunity. It occurred to him that Mr. Neiling might propose to refund the old loan, but it seemed preposterous to suggest such a thing to a gentleman who boasted such present possessions. As he walked along he also noticed several rings of no small value on his companion's fingers, and when the clocks began to strike, Mr. Neiling drew out an elegant gold watch, with the remark that it was well to have an accurate timepiece in a place where no two of those on the churches agreed with each other.

"I don't suppose I shall be likely to meet you again," said Mr. Gray, politely, when they came to a point where their paths diverged.

"I don't know as to that," said Neiling, with an

abruptness that seemed habitual to him. "I am going away in a day or two, but you may see me somewhere, if you stay in Europe. I shall dance attendance in these parts, at one place and another, the rest of the winter, I suppose."

"My home address is on the card I gave you at Venice—if you still have it," said Gray.

"Oh, yes, I still have it," replied Neiling.

"And," added Gilbert, into whose mind there kept coming, in spite of him, the two hundred lire, "you are not ready to tell me yet, I presume, your real name."

Mr. Neiling reflected a moment.

"Not quite yet, he said presently. "My reasons for preserving an incognito still exist. In a few months I hope they will have disappeared. Good-night."

Upon arriving at his hotel Gray was met by the watchman with a very grave face. Mr Blair had died suddenly, they told him, about an hour before.

CHAPTER IV.

BECOMING A PAUPER.

DEATH is something for which, no matter how long we may have looked upon it as imminent, we are never prepared. The dead Mr. Blair was like a new acquaintance, and entirely different from the living Mr. Blair, whom Mr. Gray had come to know very well.

All the young man could do was to carry out for the dead Blair the wishes that had been expressed by the living one, though he was not certain that the latter had any right to dispose of the former without his consent. It did not seem as if any man, dead or alive, would desire to be bundled into a metallic coffin and have the cover screwed down over his face while he took a long sea voyage, and afterwards elect to be put five feet deep in a trench, there to remain forever.

Yet these were the directions the living man had given long before, when he had talked of the possibilities which he did not believe would—but which now had—occurred. And Mr. Gray saw no way but to obey the behests of the voice that had spoken, since the tongue could utter nothing more.

Although it was well into the winter the friends—living and dead—took passage for the United States. The interment was made in the corner of a cemetery where other generations of Blairs had long since lain. This matter disposed of, Mr. Gray was ready to listen

to the statements of his guardian's executor, now become by virtue of that position a person of peculiar importance to him.

This executor was a lawyer named Israel Dibbs, one of those methodical men who are selected out of a community to manage the affairs of deceased persons, under the impression that the Grim Messenger will never lay his bony hand on them, and that they will continue to collect rents and foreclose mortgages for a thousand years or so after the testator is in his tomb. Mr. Dibbs sent for Gray at an early date, with the information that there was a provision for him in Mr. Blair's will.

"A provision—for me!" exclaimed Gilbert. "Why, I never thought of such a thing!"

Mr. Dibbs waited till this outburst was over, with all the dignity of a wooden image, and then returned to his text.

"Mr. Blair, now deceased, has made a provision for you, sir," he reiterated. "By the terms of his will his property is divided into two equal parts. One half goes to various societies of a charitable nature, which are enumerated. The other half is to be held in trust for his nephew, Julius Margrave, if he be living."

Having recourse to easy mental arithmetic Mr. Gray was led to remark that the portion of Mr. Blair's estate that was to come to himself, after the disposition of two equal halves of it, must be rather small. He said this with a smile, rather relieved than otherwise.

"There is another provision of this will," said Mr. Dibbs, waiting not only until his companion was

silent, but some twenty or thirty seconds longer, a course of procedure calculated to impress the beholder more than any form of words, "which is the one directly affecting you. In the event that this nephew, Julius Margrave, is not found within five years, or is believed or known to be dead before that time, the half of the estate that was to have gone to him reverts to Mr. Gilbert Gray."

So this was the explanation! Gilbert sat silent now, a flood of sensations creeping over him. The bequest—which he did not imagine would ever become his, under this condition—showed a regard for him in the heart of his guardian of a deeper nature than he had ever suspected.

"What can you tell me about this Mr.—Mr. ——" he began.

"Margrave," uttered the precise voice of the lawyer. "Almost nothing. A sister of Mr. Blair married many years ago a man of that name, and dying left a child—this Julius. Between the husband and Mr. Blair there existed little good feeling, and there was no occasion to trouble himself about him after the sister passed away. But when it came to making a will, the trend of his mind led him to putting his property—or a goodly part of it—where the law of descent would naturally dictate. He had no other relations, and he compromised with his feelings by dividing the estate between these societies, in which he has long taken an interest, and this nephew he had never seen."

Gray nodded abstractedly.

"You will, of course, use every effort to find him," he said.

"I shall take the usual means of doing so," replied the lawyer. "But I may say frankly that I do not feel it my duty to send detectives to the four quarters of the globe. Mr. Abel Blair was a gentleman fairly well known in the commercial world. His death abroad was telegraphed by the news agencies to the principal papers. The public legacies he has made have been mentioned in denominational organs far and wide. His portrait, with a sketch of his career, has already been arranged for in an illustrated magazine. The Board of Trade and a score of corporations in which he was interested have passed resolutions on the subject of his decease, which have been printed in the press. In addition to this I shall insert advertisements in two principal journals, one abroad and one here, every three months during the years I am directed to wait. At the end of that time, if nothing is heard, half of Mr. Blair's property will belong to Gilbert Gray."

It was clear that the lawyer saw before him the probable legatee, and that he had little expectation of ever meeting the nephew mentioned in the will.

"I hope you may be wrong," said Gilbert, decidedly, feeling that he was in a sense robbing this Mr. Margrave of his just dues, even by discussing a contingency like the one suggested. "Mr. Blair evidently meant to give this property to his sister's son, and his wish must be considered sacred. As for myself, with what I now have and what I shall be able to earn, I see no need of this alternative bequest with which my ever kind guardian has honored me."

Mr. Dibbs cleared his throat and adjusted his spectacles, in a manner that implied much.

"Do you know exactly what is your present financial standing?" he asked, pointedly.

"No," replied Gray, "but I presume you, who have Mr. Blair's accounts in your hands, can tell me."

The lawyer bowed slowly, two or three times.

"I am afraid there is less than you think," he said. "Your father's investments were not all of the first order. He had debts which neither Mr. Blair—nor I, for I did the legal business—knew about till some time after his death. In short, he was a poor man when the balance was drawn."

A line of paleness grew, in spite of him, around the lips of the listener. He roused himself and, in a set tone, demanded the figures.

"It is disagreeable to tell you this," said Mr. Dibbs, "and that is why I prefaced it with information about the contingent inheritance of your guardian's large estate. There is no need of your going on short commons, for with the probability that you will, at the end of five years, come into possession ——"

The young man interrupted the speaker with a rap of his hand on the table.

"Enough of that!" he cried. "How much is there of my own property?"

The lawyer opened a memorandum book and read off the figures slowly.

"Two hundred and seventy-eight dollars and sixty-three cents."

There was a moment of angry pause, and then Mr. Gray demanded, "What are you talking about? Do you mean to tell me that is *all* I have?"

"That is all," said Mr. Dibbs, imperturbably.

"And where is the rest?" exclaimed Gilbert, hotly. "My father had bonds, stocks, real estate! Do you mean to say I have used up everything? Why, my expenses, even in Europe, were only three hundred dollars a month! I shall insist on an account, sir, before I accept such figures as these!"

Not at all excited by the outburst, which he had in fact expected, Mr. Dibbs proceeded to say that the full account of every receipt and expense connected with the estate of the late Mr. Gray was ready for examination, and, he added, pointedly, it was all in Mr. Blair's handwriting.

"As for the stocks and bonds," he continued, "if you know anything about market values, I would like to have you examine them at once. Here," drawing out a tin box, "are shares in the Golden Crown Lead Company, the Staten Island Tunnel, the ——"

"Never mind the list," interrupted Gray, for he found his temper rising instead of abating, as is apt to be the case with those proved in the wrong. "If the account of my estate is in Mr. Blair's writing—mind, *in his own hand*—I shall be satisfied, and will look no further. There is another thing I do not understand, and that is why he has allowed me to spend almost my last penny in idleness abroad instead of telling me the worst and letting me get started in some method of earning my living."

The reply which the lawyer gave to this only exasperated the young man further. The sum he had mentioned was the entire estate of the elder Gray, and every dollar that Gilbert had received since his father's death had come out of Mr. Blair's pocket.

"He thought," explained Mr. Dibbs, "that as your inheritance was too small to be of any use in starting a business career it was as well for you to take some months of foreign travel. As he had the benefit of your society he was glad to defray the joint expense. It was also, as I know, his intention, when he returned (as he never lost faith he should do) to get you into some good house where, by industry and perseverance, you could make your own way."

For a moment the anger of the youth was turned against his dead friend. That person had no right to swindle him with false hopes which were sure to be dashed to the ground. Then he turned again to the lawyer.

"How soon can you have those accounts ready for me to see?" he asked, sharply.

"They are ready now."

"I don't want to examine them to-day. I will come to-morrow. And whatever there is belonging to me—whether it be two hundred dollars or ten cents—I shall want to take with me."

"There will be a few legal preliminaries necessary," explained Mr. Dibbs, "as I am acting upon the trust of another. It may require a month or two—I cannot tell exactly—but in the meantime you can have any reasonable sum you wish. It's not best to be too hot-headed, young man. There is no harm in borrowing money on which you are to pay interest, and you might as well get it of me as of another."

Too disturbed to argue the matter at that time, Gilbert could only ejaculate "To-morrow," and rid himself as rapidly as possible of the hateful presence. He walked down the wintry street with his brow

burning with fever. He was a pauper! The knowledge was very bitter. He had not expected to be rich—he had always supposed he would have to work—but he had never imagined that his patrimony could shrink to these proportions. Mr. Blair had not intimated anything that savored of such beggary. And he had spent his guardian's money with a free hand, believing it his own, and supposing that plenty more lay in the vaults of the bank behind it.

As loudly as he had demanded to "see the account!" he had not doubted the correctness of Mr. Dibbs' statements, for an instant.

"Two hundred dollars! That meant a garret and bread and cheese—with an immediate application to some counting-room for a desk at low wages, if indeed he were lucky enough to obtain one!

After a miserable night Gray went back to the lawyer's office and listened in a kind of daze while the books that Mr. Blair had carefully kept were explained to him. The senior Gray had been one of those men of optimistic mind, who purchase the lowest priced stocks in the market, and fan their belief that mills will turn to dollars some day, as has happened in the case of shares they are always fond of instancing. The real estate he owned was heavily mortgaged at the time of his death, and the equities were absolutely worthless. The debts he left had to be paid with the most available assets. All that was left amounted, at their present value, to the pitiful sum that the lawyer had mentioned yesterday.

"As the trust which Mr. Blair assumed, and which I inherit, cannot be given up at once," suggested Mr. Dibbs for the second time, "I must again advise

you to accept a loan of what you need. To put it in plain words, if you want two thousand five hundred dollars a year, for the next five years, on your expectations, at twelve per cent., I will advance it to you with pleasure."

But Gilbert shook his head with decision.

"I want nothing of the sort," said he. "I will not be put in a position where my interests are going to clash with the rightful inheritor of this property. And I don't think it would be honest for me to put your personal estate at risk in such a way that it would cause you loss if Mr. Margrave turns up."

"Oh, as for that," said the lawyer, reddening slightly, "I can afford to run my chances, and I think my probity sufficiently established to place me above the suspicion of jobbery. Even if I loaned you this sum, and Mr. Margrave appeared, he should step into possession of his own, as freely as if I were not twelve thousand five hundred dollars out of pocket. But I feel so certain that he never will come—in fact, that he is long since dead—that I want you to begin as soon as possible to reap the benefits Mr. Blair intended for you."

To this Gilbert refused to listen, though he began to think he had been unnecessarily rude to the man of the law. He persisted that if Mr. Blair had intended him to have two thousand five hundred dollars a year, or any sum from his estate, he would have made his will in that manner, instead of specifying that he should wait five years and then depend upon a contingency. He would have been glad now had the will read differently. He did not like to be left face to face with poverty. But his honor was in-

tact, and he had not yet experienced that sharp contact with the world which blunts it.

"I will take nothing but what is legitimately mine," he said, in response to every argument; "but I owe you an apology for my manner of receiving the unpleasant news you broke to me yesterday, and I make it freely. And now can you think of any situation which I could fill, for I want to begin without delay to earn my bread."

Mr. Dibbs, after casting about in his mind a few moments, said he could think of nothing at present, but would make some inquiries. In the meantime, Gray would do well to look about for himself. With this understanding they parted.

At the end of a month though he had "looked about" with diligence, Gilbert had found absolutely nothing that he could do, and his distress increased as he went from place to place and saw his unfitness for the positions offered. He went to Mr. Dibbs' office again, in a much humbler frame of mind than before, and told that gentleman frankly what had occurred.

"This leads me to make you an offer on my own account," said the lawyer, gravely, "which I should otherwise have hesitated to do. I am a very busy man and have now, with Mr. Blair's estate and others that are in my charge, more than I can attend to just at present. I think you could, if you chose, be of some assistance in caring for my trust property, collecting rents, seeing to repairs, etc., as well as making journeys to various places and looking into matters that require attention. For this work I am not able to offer you a large compensation, but

it might keep you occupied until something better turns up."

"I will take it gladly," was the quick reply, the prospect of earning anything whatever seeming too good to be lost. "You are very kind to make the proposition."

But to this Mr. Dibbs demurred, saying it was wholly a business matter with him, and he wanted it treated as such. He was willing to pay fifteen dollars a week, with necessary expense of travel, etc., and possibly the salary might be raised to twenty later. Gray seized upon the offer without more ado, and it was arranged that he should begin his duties the very next morning.

Never having had the slightest business experience it is doubtful if the young man ever really earned the meagre salary which he began to receive, but he brought to the work an honesty of purpose and a probity of conduct. If Mr. Dibbs had been wholly disingenuous in employing him the connection might have gone on much longer than it did, to the mutual advantage of both. The fact was, however, that the engagement was only a scheme on the lawyer's part for bringing Gray to the agreement he had first suggested. Mr. Dibbs believed thoroughly that this was the only sensible thing for him to do, and felt that the obstinacy with which he held out deserved to be overcome. If he could reduce the youth to actual want, and then give him no other alternative than to accept his offer he believed he would be doing him a real kindness.

But Gray proved a mulish subject to handle. He lived, after a fashion, on the fifteen dollars a

week that was paid him, and repelled all offers to take the first penny from his prospective inheritance. Then Dibbs, who knew that Mr. Blair had never believed his nephew alive, and had only intended to give this young man a little experience of the value of money, determined to force matters. He therefore announced to Gray, one day, that he should not need his services after the following week.

Somewhat disheartened, but not at all ready to give up, Gilbert looked about for another situation, and soon heard of one at a fair salary in Amsterdam, where a concern wanted just the sort of man he conceived himself to be, one acquainted with America and able to talk a certain line of goods into Americans travelling abroad. Correspondence passed, and he was advised to come to Holland at once. Arriving there he was given the position, and held it just three weeks, by which time both he and his employers were satisfied that he was wholly unfitted for its duties. The termination of the engagement that naturally followed did not include a payment of a return fare across the ocean, and he walked out of the office in a very low frame of mind.

At his lodging was a letter from Dibbs, renewing the offer to loan him whatever money he needed, in case he ever should get short of funds. He tore it up in a violent rage and stamped on it with his feet.

"I will live on a crust a day and finally die of inanition in a garret," he exclaimed, "before I will accept of a dollar from that man!"

And he began to carry out his program. He went to London, where he hired the poorest lodging he

could find, and dined in his room on the cheapest food, while he followed all possible clues that seemed to offer a chance to earn a living, however poor.

At last he almost made up his mind to take a steerage passage home, the only one he could raise the money for, and search among his distant relations for some one to help him out of his dilemma. But this course of procedure he postponed in very shame, and wandered, a most disconsolate figure, up and down the streets, hoping against hope that something would put him on his feet again.

One day, while strolling in Hyde Park, he saw a familiar figure, riding a spirited horse up and down the road, so well dressed and wearing such an air of importance that he hesitated a long time before he could summon courage enough to make himself known. But at last he stepped up to the path and, when the rider returned, called him by name.

“Mr. Neiling!”

The cavalier stopped his horse with a jerk and looked in astonishment, not to say alarm, at the speaker.

“The devil! It’s Gray!” he exclaimed. Then in a lower voice, “You must not call to me like that in a public place. What do you want? Speak quickly!”

Stupefied by this strange manner Gilbert could hardly open his mouth.

“I want the two hundred francs you borrowed of me a year ago!” he managed to ejaculate, in an injured tone.

The rider touched one of his spurs to his horse

and made him spring backward, with a handsome movement.

“That’s a nice way to dun a gentleman, isn’t it?” he said sarcastically. “Coming up like a highwayman with a ‘Stand and deliver’ on a public road.”

“It’s not a question of ways,” replied Gray, huskily. “I need the money, badly. I don’t know where else to find you, and I want you to pay me now.”

“But I haven’t got it with me!” was the testy answer. “I don’t go lined with ducats. And I can’t be seen here talking with you either.” He reflected a moment. “You know where Ludgate circus is, I suppose. Be there to-night, at the corner of New Bridge street. Two hundred francs! Eight pounds English! A pretty sum to make such a fuss about!”

And before the American could say any more on the subject, the handsome horse had given another bound and was off like an arrow in the direction of the Gate.

CHAPTER V.

DARIUS YATES, SOLICITOR.

YOUNG Mr. Gray was so indignant at this manner of being received that he started to leave the Park in a state of unusual temper. Had the case been reversed he was certain he would have given his benefactor double the amount borrowed, besides a thousand expressions of gratitude. He was so full of his wrongs that he did not hear a gentleman who was

hastening after him and had called his name twice, until one of the passers drew his attention to him.

Turning, he saw Mr. Darius Yates, the solicitor he had met in Venice the previous year, and the next moment he was grasped warmly by the hand.

"Delighted to see you!" were the words with which he was greeted. "When did you come to London, and why have you not called on me?"

Now, although reduced to short commons in the matter of food and lodging, Gilbert had managed to keep up his personal appearance, and there was nothing to indicate the straits through which he had passed. But with the honesty that was a part of his inmost nature, he at once told Mr. Yates the entire truth, as fast as he could make the explanation. The latter listened to the recital of Mr. Blair's death, of the disappearance of the expected patrimony, of the various attempts to earn a living, and their successive failures. And he did not interrupt once during the narrative.

"You have been unfortunate," he said, when Gray finished, "but that sort of hard luck can't last forever. It's no reason why you should neglect your friends because you're not for the moment at the top of the heap."

"But I lost your address," stammered Gray, who had really forgotten that such a person lived in London, and wanted to get out of the dilemma as easy as he could.

"Well, you shall have it again," smiled the solicitor, "for you must go to my office and get it well fixed in your mind. There should be an opening for a bright young fellow like you somewhere in this city,

and I intend, with your permission, to find it. Let me ask, however, before I forget it, who was that horseman that I saw you talking with a moment ago. It seems to me that his face is one I have met before."

He had taken Gray's acceptance of the invitation to go to his office quite as a matter of course, and was walking with him in that direction. As he asked this question, the countenance of the younger man, which had lightened a little, clouded again.

"I don't know why I shouldn't tell you," he said, "though in ordinary circumstances I should hesitate. Do you recall a story I related in Venice of lending money to a fellow I found sleeping on the stones of St. Mark's!"

Mr. Yates indicated that he recalled it very well.

"That is the man!" said Gray, bitterly. "Yes," he repeated, as his companion met the statement with an incredulous look, "that's the chap I fed when he had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours, and to whom I gave money enough to enable him to go to Rome, where he succeeded in recovering the property he had lost. And when I meet him here, and ask politely for what is my own, telling him I absolutely need the amount, he treats me like a beggar!"

The solicitor said he could not express his surprise.

"I do not wonder you say so," answered Gilbert. "This is the third time I have met him when he was in affluent circumstances, and he still has my money. He promises to give it to me this evening, if I will attend his convenience at a place he designates, and I suppose I've got to humble myself to do it."

Mr. Yates showed the greatest interest in the statement, much greater than one would expect to find in a casual acquaintance. Gray could not help feeling grateful to him, for, in his present condition, even a kind look was not to be despised. The solicitor also eyed his companion intently during the progress of his narration, and seemed to take a mental inventory of his physical attributes.

"He is the very man I want," he murmured to himself. "Good luck has thrown in my way the identical individual I have been searching for."

At a tall building he halted, and indicated to Gray that this was where his office was located. When the pair had ascended the stairs they entered a handsome room, furnished in much better taste than is ordinarily found among members of the bar. After exchanging a word or two with one of the clerks that were busy writing at an inner chamber, Yates closed the door between the rooms, and sat down beside his friend.

"What particular line do you think you would like to follow?" he asked, pleasantly.

To this the younger man responded, with a shake of his head, that he was in no position to make stipulations. His finances were at their lowest ebb, and unless something was soon done he would presently be at the end of his resources.

"Even counting the eight pounds you are to receive from your ungrateful acquaintance," smiled Mr. Yates.

"Yes," assented Gray, "even with that. And I feel by no means certain that he will keep his ap-

pointment. If I were not in such pressing need, I would decline to meet him."

The conversation continued for an hour, during which the solicitor learned everything he chose to ask of the history of his companion. A great deal of it had been told him in their talks at Venice, but he now had more reason than before to possess himself of the minutest details. He was evidently pleased with the frank answers he received to all his questions, and rubbed his palms together softly as each reply confirmed the opinion he had originally formed.

"Well, Mr. Gray," he said at last, "I have been thinking about your case, and if you will put yourself into my hands, I will see what can be done. No, don't thank me just yet. I am a rather selfish sort of fellow, and perhaps I have an axe of my own to grind. In the course of a few days I hope to be able to tell you something definite, but to-day I can only make a provisional offer. Attached to these offices is a suite of rooms, which I occupied for a long time, myself, in the days of my bachelorhood. They are rather cosy, and the man who used to attend to my wants is still within sound of the bell. You can move into those rooms at once, and consider yourself at home there. In addition, you may draw on me for five pounds a week in advance. If I find that I cannot make other arrangements for you, I agree to give you a fortnight's notice, or your salary for that time, whenever our engagement ends. What do you say?"

Quite dazed by what seemed a bit of impossibly

good fortune, Gilbert stammered an acceptance, and requested to know what his duties were to be.

"For the present—nothing," said Mr. Yates, gravely. "You have a fair wardrobe, I suppose. I see your watch and chain have not yet found their way to the pawnshop."

"No," was the blushing reply. "I have not reached that stage. In the way of clothing I need no more than I shall now be easily able to get. And I am to do—nothing?"

The solicitor bowed.

"Perhaps it would be more truthful to say that you are to *appear* to do nothing. I shall introduce you to my clerks—and to others—as a friend who is to spend some weeks with me. The character you are to assume is to be precisely your own—that of a young American gentleman of good family and education, who is looking for a chance to place himself suitably in life. You will not be expected—and I think you will not desire—to reveal the full extent of your previous ill fortune. As nothing else in your career is to be concealed, I do not give you a very difficult rôle to play. Of course there is no denying that I have a purpose in view in making these arrangements, but I promise you that your interests will be in no manner compromised."

The proposition was truly a strange one, and the young man wished for a moment that his duties were to consist of something more tangible, in which he could feel that he was really earning the wages received. However, he was in no condition to make terms, and he intimated again that he was wholly at the service of Mr. Yates.

"As I have some matters to attend to," said the solicitor, much pleased at the prompt agreement of his new friend, "let me show you your rooms and ask that you have your belongings sent here this afternoon. If you are obliged to pay in advance for your present quarters, on account of leaving so abruptly, I shall consider that an extra to be charged to me. Amuse yourself as you please until six o'clock, when I should like to find you in evening dress, ready to accompany me out to dinner. Reignley," he called, opening the interior door, "my friend, Mr. Gilbert Gray, who has come to stay some time with me, will occupy my old apartments here. If you want anything, Mr. Gray, you will call freely upon Reignley, and upon our domestic, in case I am out."

The clerk and Mr. Gray exchanged nods, and Mr. Yates proceeded to introduce the American to his new home, which he found cosily furnished and quite a contrast in every way, not only to the one he was to leave, but to most London lodgings.

"To get my trunks and get ready for dinner—that is all for to-day?" asked Gilbert, still feeling the duties assigned to be very strange ones.

"That is all, and to-morrow will be very much like it," smiled the solicitor.

"The dinner—is it to be at a private house?"

"No, Mr. Inquisitive; at a public restaurant."

The day was certainly the most agreeable that Gilbert had spent for months, as he said to himself, when he lay at last among his pillows. He had dined elegantly with several friends of Mr. Yates', who had treated him with the courtesy due a foreigner and

stranger, who comes with a good introduction. After the dinner all had gone, rather late, to one of the theatres, where Gilbert devoted less attention to the play than to a family in one of the opposite boxes, among whom was one of the most beautiful young girls he had ever seen, wearing an appearance of reserve that amounted almost to sadness, and which excited his utmost interest. He noted that Mr. Yates exchanged bows with an elderly lady in that party, who seemed to be the young lady's mother, but the solicitor appeared so well known, that salutations from the various boxes were the rule rather than the exception.

"An unusually pretty girl that," was all that Mr. Yates said about her, except to add, "and a com-patriot of yours, by-the-way."

CHAPTER VI.

"THEN THERE'S A FATHER, TOO?"

It was in the morning, as the clock was striking nine, that Gray awoke. He sprang out of bed with a feeling that he was neglecting his duties; and then recollecting that there were none to perform, he rang, and requested the domestic to ask Mr. Reignley if Mr. Yates had arrived, or if any message had been received from him. A negative reply was received and a light breakfast was served in his rooms, somewhat to his surprise, for nothing had been said

about that. When he had eaten and dressed he strolled out of doors to dissipate his ennui, and returned about eleven o’clock, to find the solicitor busy at his desk.

“ How are you this morning ? ” was the question that greeted him. “ Quite well, I am sure, judging from your appearance. I have a lot to do just now, and shall have to beg you to excuse me at lunch, but if you are here at four I shall be glad of your company for a drive. Nothing particular to say, I suppose ? ”

“ Nothing,” said Gray, for Reignley was present, and his character as a genuine friend of Mr. Yates’ was at stake.

“ I should advise you to lunch at the Piccadilly, to-day,” continued Mr. Yates, with his eyes on the papers he was examining. “ To-morrow I will put you up at my club, where things are much better. You found the morning newspapers in your room, I hope. I told the man to have them for you when you awoke.”

It was a strange kind of employment, dining with a party of gentlemen, being taken to the theatre, given an elegant suite of rooms to live in, and a drive in the Park for the afternoon. The manner of Mr. Yates took away the feeling that might otherwise have marred the enjoyment of these things, and Gilbert strove to overcome his few remaining scruples. At present he saw no reason to refuse the change of life. He had been terribly tired of the narrow quarters he had occupied and the miserable meals he had been obliged to eat. If it transpired that the solicitor wished to be repaid for his kindness by the sac-

rifice of anything inconsistent with honor, Gilbert felt that he was fully able to meet the dilemma. He could not, however, reconcile a fear of this sort with the correct deportment and the position in society which his new friend gave unquestionable evidence of possessing.

"There was one matter that I forgot last evening," said Gray to the solicitor, when they were driving that afternoon, "and it did not occur to me till an hour ago. You may remember that I had an appointment with my debtor for the payment of two hundred francs."

"So you had," said Mr. Yates, with a laugh. "Well, all I can do is to credit it to your account. It was clearly my fault that you were unable to be there to get your money."

"Oh, no!" replied the young man, earnestly. "If I remain in London I shall be almost sure to meet him again, and the amount is not so vital to me as it was yesterday."

"Very well. But, if you meet him, and he asks questions, please don't say anything about our arrangements. In fact, if he is the kind of fellow he seems, it would be best to avoid all unnecessary talk with him. I am afraid he is a bad one."

"You need have no fear," said Gray. "He is not a man I would care to have anything to do with."

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the sudden appearance at a turn in the road of a carriage, in which were seated the young lady and her mother that Gilbert had noticed at the theatre the preceding night. As the vehicles passed closely to each other both gentlemen lifted their hats and

received a very agreeable bow from the elder lady, accompanied by a hardly perceptible one from her daughter.

“ A decidedly handsome young woman ! ” said Mr. Yates.

“ Rather cold, however, ” was Mr. Gray’s comment.

“ Appearances are not always to be relied upon in such matters, ” said his friend, wisely. “ I do not think that dignity detracts from the merit of a young woman in this age of frivolity. ”

There seemed something in this observation which Gilbert took as rather a rebuke, and he parried the thrust by asking if Mr. Yates knew the family well.

“ Very well indeed, ” was the reply. “ They are Americans of wealth and position. The father is really quite eminent, I understand. ”

“ Then there is a father, too ? ” said Gray.

“ Why, yes. Is that addition to a household so uncommon in your country ? He is a little out of health—has some special trouble just now that keeps him at his hotel. This daughter is his only child and will inherit everything. A lucky man he’ll be who gets her for his wife, eh ? ”

Gilbert nodded assent. The girl was certainly very fair, and the addition of a fortune to her charms was not one he was in a present position to under-rate. Mr. Yates talked a great deal about the family, and the young man listened with due deference to all that was said. Then other drivers were met with, about whom the solicitor also discoursed in the charming way he had, and the ride was brought to an end by another invitation to dinner, which proved as pleasant as that of yesterday.

The succeeding days passed in much the same manner, and Gray was becoming accustomed to his novel position. Among the things that his new friend insisted upon was that he should ride in the Row each morning, on a very spirited animal which he secured for that purpose. Having been a horseman from his early youth Gray made a fine figure as he galloped along the path on his handsome mount, and attracted the attention of other cavaliers, who asked with surprise whom the newcomer might be. The exercise brought the blood to his cheeks and secured for him the admiring glances of many of the fair sex who were, like him, taking their constitutionals in the favorite resort of London fashion. As Mr. Yates did not ride, Gray was left to his own devices, and came to regard the canter which he took between nine and eleven as the most enjoyable part of each day.

But, as might have been foreseen, one of the persons he met while engaged in this way was his old acquaintance, Neiling. Well as the latter appeared, he saw himself no match for Gray, and a very dark frown settled upon his countenance as he beheld the handsome rider. Gray saw him at the same time, but affected not to recognize him, and would have kept up the pretense to the end if Neiling had not finally reined his animal in front of him, so as to completely bar the way, at a point on the Row where the two were nearly alone.

"Oh, don't pretend not to know me!" he said, provokingly. "I only want to understand your game. Say, what are you up to?"

“I am attending to my own business,” was the sharp reply, “and I wish you to attend to yours.”

“*Naw!*” drawled the other, with a cunning leer. “Not quite so nearly a beggar as you were the other day, *are* you? There must have been a sudden turn in your affairs. You didn’t even come after the centimes you were so good as to dun me for.”

The wrath of the other was slowly rising. He could not trust himself to make any reply, lest his temper should get the better of him and provoke a scene not to be desired. So he whirled his animal about and galloped away without a single word. He felt that he should do that man a mischief if they kept getting thrown together, and for the next few days he took his rides in Regent’s Park, to escape a disagreeable meeting.

About a fortnight from the time when he first went to live at Mr. Yates’ apartments, Gray found seated with that gentleman one evening, at a rather late hour, an elderly man of disconsolate and dejected mien, who sat in the shadow of the very dimly-lighted room, and answered, when presented to the young man, in curt monosyllables. He was tall, and slightly bent, and his hair and beard were grizzled, but beyond this Gilbert could have testified nothing in regard to his appearance, had he been put on oath the next morning.

Mr. Yates requested Gray to sit down, and engaged him in a conversation that lasted half an hour or so, quite as if there were no third party in the room. They talked of a wide range of matters, mainly related to foreign travel, and Gray was led to speak of the places he had visited, Mr. Yates con-

tenting himself with questions. When he left to go to his rooms, for it was evident that the stranger had some further business to transact, the solicitor followed him to the door with an engaging smile, and said in a whisper that his client had a raging toothache and must be excused for his taciturnity; to which Gilbert made a courteous reply and bade them both good-night.

At first it seemed like imagination and then it became a certainty that the client with the toothache had thrown off his silence and was engaged in talking not only volubly, but loudly, to the barrister. Gray tried not to hear them. It was no affair of his if Mr. Yates, for any reason, had misrepresented the condition of his now ungovernable friend. But, in spite of him, expressions were wafted across the corridor and through the keyholes that showed a state of mind on the part of the gentleman not to be envied. Gray could hear the gentler expostulations of Mr. Yates, but it was a long time before he succeeded in calming his companion, who acted more like one demented than a sane human being.

"I hope you weren't disturbed," said the solicitor the next day, referring to the affair. "The old gentleman's tooth got worse after you left us and his groans were so loud I was afraid you would hear him."

"No, I went to sleep at once," said Gilbert, thinking that it was time he did his share of the lying.

And he looked so honest that Mr. Yates accepted the statement without reserve, and seemed correspondingly relieved.

CHAPTER VII.

“YOU’LL BE REQUIRED TO MARRY.”

WHEN three weeks had elapsed since Gilbert Gray became a resident of Mr. Yates’ chambers, the solicitor thought it time to divulge the reasons that had actuated him in his singular conduct. The young man had carried himself with ease and grace in his new position. At the club on whose books he had been temporarily inscribed he was regarded as a most desirable companion. The number of his new friends was only limited by the list of introductions received. Once or twice he had accompanied Mr. Yates to private houses, where he acquitted himself, as might have been expected, with full credit. The solicitor wanted a young gentleman of good appearance and education, who would do no discredit to any circle of life, and he congratulated himself that he had found him.

“You are doubtless still in a state of wonder as to what this all means,” he said, one night, when they were riding home from a brilliant party at one of the swellest London houses.

“Yes,” said Gilbert. “Are you going to tell me?”

The solicitor looked askance at his companion.

“Perhaps,” he replied, cautiously. “Let me, however, ask you in the first place if you are tired of the life you are leading.”

The young man shook his head decidedly.

"And you would, perhaps, prefer to have it continue indefinitely, rather than return to the one you were following when I met you in Hyde Park."

A ghastly shade came upon the young face at the mere suggestion.

"I thought so," said Mr. Yates, not waiting for a more definite reply. "Well, Mr. Gray, I have a proposal that only requires acceptance, and then as pleasant a life as you have passed with me—yes, a much pleasanter one—is yours for the rest of your days."

A dim recollection came to the younger man of a story he had read, in which the devil demanded the soul of a mortal in exchange for all earthly blessings. He wondered if beneath the dress coat of the solicitor a pronged tail was concealed, and if, within his patent leather boots, there were hoofs instead of feet.

"I am listening," he answered, catching his breath.

"To come at once to the point, then, you will be required to marry."

Gilbert caught his breath again.

"An antiquated, vinegar-faced old maid?" he asked, with a shiver.

"On the contrary, a young and very beautiful girl."

"With some terrible mental defect?"

"No, with a bright brain and an affable disposition."

The breathing grew easier. To marry such a girl and still enjoy life was a conceivable possibility.

"I am listening," he said, again.

"This young girl will inherit a fortune. Her hus-

band will be placed beyond want at the beginning of his married life. The family is highly respectable. Is—is there anything else that you wish to know?"

Mr. Gray was staring with all his might out of the carriage window.

"It is very mysterious," he remarked.

To this the solicitor assented with a bow.

"When must the wedding take place?"

"Immediately."

"This year?"

"To-morrow."

There was a gasp that savored of alarm, and then the youth relapsed into deep thought. What could it mean? Something had not yet been told him. There was some reason undivulged. To marry a pretty girl with a fortune was not a fate men usually struggled to avoid. Nor was it necessary to inveigle a man into society on semi-false pretenses, to find one who would accept the hand of such a lady.

But, to look at the other side of the question, what would result from declining this offer? Simply to be turned out into the street, with ten pounds "advance wages" in his pocket, and starvation to face again. It was clearly a case where a gift horse must not be looked too closely in the mouth.

And yet he felt how thoroughly this plan, if carried out, would affect all his future—that future for which, in happier days, he had built up a dreamland home by the side of some woman whose love he had won and whose hand he had gained in no such way as this. He began to talk to Mr. Yates of the ideallic marriage he had had in mind, of the sacredness of that association and its importance upon character.

And even as he talked the ridiculousness of the argument overcame him, when it was compared with the penniless situation in which he was placed, that situation into which he had been so unexpectedly plunged and which altered everything.

"Do you accept?" was the business-like question with which the smiling Mr. Yates met these vagaries when the speaker came to an end of them.

"Accept!" echoed Gilbert, with a start. "Perhaps, after all, I shall do so. If you would only give me a day or two—to think."

"Not an hour; it is impossible."

"Well, then," said Gray, breathing deeply, and after a long pause, "unless there is some reason—stronger than any you have advanced—why I should not, I—I—yes, I accept."

The gloved hand of the solicitor strayed over and clasped his with a motion that indicated eminent satisfaction.

"It would be idle for me to attempt to convince you," he said, "that the proposition I have made is exactly what it appears on its face. You have divined that there is a thorn with the rose, a fly in the soup, as the French say, that makes the matter a little more unpalatable than it yet looks. Heiresses with handsome faces and intelligent minds are not disposed of ordinarily in this manner. They are pursued, on the contrary, by a legion of admirers, from which it is difficult to choose the most eligible. A young man without a sou, with no friends to speak of, and with no better prospect in life than to secure, at the best, some petty clerkship, is not, to put it plainly, the sort of mate commonly selected for these

positions. It is necessary, at this stage, for me to speak plainly, and I trust you will not misunderstand my motives.”

Mr. Gray swallowed the bitter pill as best he might. He could not dispute that the portrait drawn fitted him exactly.

“I have taken a liking to you,” pursued the other, after a momentary pause, “and it will be a pleasure to me, in addition to any professional satisfaction, if I can put you into the comfortable circumstances for which your nature is so well adapted. There is no reason why you should fight your way in a cold and cruel world when ease and comfort may be yours. At the same time there is, as you must guess, a feature to this marriage that you might prefer did not exist. When you hear what it is, do not fly into a state of excitement, but deliberate on the matter calmly. The chance is one that will not be likely to occur again in your lifetime. It is yours to accept or reject—and the opportunity is for to-night only.”

Into the seething brain of the young man there came the most preposterous reasons, as possible ones in this strange affair; but nothing agreeing with Mr. Yates’ statements could be found that seemed in the least degree tenable.

“Go on,” he said, laconically, bracing himself for the revelation.

“It is this,” said Mr. Yates, slowly and distinctly: “The young lady, if she becomes your wife, will probably present you with an heir within a period somewhat less than that ordinarily expected in such cases.”

CHAPTER VIII.

A VERY BLUNT REFUSAL.

THE first impression of Mr. Gray was to strike the man who coolly uttered these words, which he felt contained a burning insult to himself. The next idea was to open the carriage door and spring to the ground, ridding himself of a companion capable of such an outrage. But before he could execute either of these things a faintness overcame him, and he lay back against the carriage cushions, helpless. It was as if he had been offered a drink of cool water and had found a bitter and nauseous draught when the cup was pressed to his lips.

This it was that stood between him and beggary !
This !

“I did not suppose it would be agreeable to you,” pursued the quiet voice of the solicitor. “In itself it bears a harsh front ; but as an alternative proposition it looks somewhat different. The young lady of whom I speak has made one slip, which may be kept from the knowledge of the world. With the exception of a moment of madness, for which even she cannot account, she has, I am sure, led a pure and creditable life. There were only two persons to whom she dared confide her grief, and the pain it would give to either of them I leave you to imagine. To her mother, already in delicate health, it might mean instant death. To her father, a man of the highest reputation, and as jealous of his honor as one

can conceive, it must be a blow compared to which there is no other conceivable. He has brought her up delicately, with the best of teachers, as free apparently from danger of this kind as an angel in Paradise. Her mother has been her most constant friend and the girl had never shown the least partiality for the opposite sex, so far as they knew. Nevertheless, the deed was done, and when she went in terror to this father and told him the truth, he came at once to me, I being his legal adviser. I have never seen a human being in such mental agony."

In spite of himself Mr. Gray was listening, and with the deepest interest, to this remarkable story. He began even to excuse the narrator for the part he had taken in beguiling him into this net, from which he would presently make good his escape.

"Aged ten years in one hour," continued Mr. Yates, "this old man told me, as men tell things to lawyers and to priests, of the curse that had fallen on his house. As was my duty, I tried to mitigate the effects of the injury by suggesting ways to lessen the force of the blow. I said we could take the guilty one in hand and make him right his wrong, as far as was possible, at the marriage altar. To this the father responded, in the most vehement manner, that he would rather see his child in her grave, and himself with her, than to own as a son-in-law a wretch who had perpetrated such a crime against them. He believed the fellow had proceeded deliberately, with this expectation in view, and had hoped to attain by chicanery to a position he could never reach in a straightforward and honest manner,

The father disposed of him in one torrent of vituperation, and I saw that further talk on that score was useless, even had I thought, from my own standpoint, after what I knew, that it was advisable."

The carriage was approaching Mr. Yates' home, and he called to the driver to make a detour, to prolong the journey. He then looked narrowly at young Gray, who lay quite still, to see if he was paying attention, and finding that he was, proceeded cautiously, as if addressing a jury on whose verdict his entire case depended :

"There was another proposition, at which I vaguely hinted, and which I was relieved to have rejected as quickly as the first. I found a good deal of determination in this old man, in spite of the hurt he had received. When we had discussed the matter for several hours he announced his ultimatum. Either his daughter should be taken to some secluded place and remain till the birth of her child, which he would amply provide for, or—and this alternative he came to but slowly and by my suggestion—she should marry some respectable man who had a full knowledge of her condition and accepted her accordingly. In the latter case there must be arranged a pretended marriage of an earlier date, while for the public must be prepared the tale of a romance with love at its base, something the world always forgives when the nine days' wondering is over. There was the mother to consider—a woman devoted to her child, and full of womanly instincts that would excuse any act that came within the pale of law and conduced to her daughter's happiness.

It was to be this, or nothing, and the father left me to see what I could do.

“In the language of the shop it seemed a difficult order to fill. My sympathy for my client and his unhappy child nerved me to make the strongest efforts in their behalf. I had an interview with the girl, and found her perfectly amenable to the paternal will—ready to do anything required, and only anxious that her mother should be kept at all costs from a knowledge of the trouble. She had evidently experienced her share of suffering—more on account of others, even, than for herself. I told her my plans, admitting that I might not be able to carry them out, and she acquiesced in their wisdom. Then I began to look about for the young man who should wed her, and I found it easier than I had imagined to arrange that part of the programme.”

The silent figure in the carriage raised its head, and the startled eyes interrogated those of the solicitor.

“I found,” explained Mr. Yates, “that there were plenty of young men in London, of good birth and education, and of empty pockets, who would jump at a chance to make a marriage of this sort. Several of them I tried, with a hypothetical recital of the case, and in every instance their answers convinced me that no time would be lost in case I settled upon either. With this knowledge I dispatched an assistant to a distant place, where he was able to secure, for a small bribe, the promise of a certificate that Mr. Blank and Miss Dash were married there in September last, whenever he should be able to send in the names. We shall thus save the reputation of the

husband and wife from assaults of the spiteful or the envious; and the facts in relation to the offspring will be known only to the family and to myself, for I have concealed and shall, until the latest moment, the names of the persons involved.

“Now, to be very candid with you, Mr. Gray, you are the only man I have in mind to whom I am wholly satisfied to give my fair young client and her future. I regard you as an honorable gentleman who would conduct yourself in a proper manner, and bring a true and loyal support to your plighted word. If you will reflect a little I think the situation will not seem wholly bad. To do what I suggest would be to bring sunshine into a blighted life, to temper the anguish of an unhappy father and perhaps to save from death a loving mother. It would assure you of a sufficient income, with ability to follow your tastes as to living in America or abroad, and in time, I truly believe, would make you a contented family man, no worse off in actual condition than if you had married a young widow. It is for you to say. As I told you, there is no longer time for temporizing. Your marriage must take place at once, if ever.”

The driver, thinking that the inmates of the carriage ought to have finished their conversation by this time, had resumed his way toward the residence of Mr. Yates and now paused before the door.

“Well,” asked the man of law, “is it yes or no?”

“It is *no!*” was the hoarse reply. “*No!* by all means, *no!* And I want to add that you will not find me at your rooms when you come in the morning. I shall pack up and leave at once.”

"I am disappointed," said Mr. Yates, and he looked it thoroughly. "Well, that settles it then," he added with a sigh. "Remember, there is two weeks' salary due you."

"I shall not take it," said Gray, coldly. "If it is ever in my power to return what you have advanced I shall do that. I wish I could express how mean and low I feel when I reflect on the time I have spent with you, and think what its object was. I shall go now to toil or to starvation with a lighter heart, when I think how much worse a fate might have been mine."

Mr. Yates alighted, and simply gave the right direction to the cabman, into whose hand he pressed a sum in excess of the fare. There was no use in talking to a man in that mood. Gray was driven to the home he had been occupying, and as he walked up the stairs he found himself staggering against the wainscot. He was cold. His hand trembled as he pushed the key into its aperture. His rooms were well heated, but he shivered still. There was a fire in a grate and he sat down close to it and tried to warm himself.

It did not take long to pack his effects, and when the trunk and bags were locked and strapped, and the other things laid conveniently for moving, Gray found himself not the least inclined for sleep. He therefore decided to walk for an hour or so, thinking that exercise might compose his perturbed brain.

Wrapped in a greatcoat he sallied into Oxford street, and strolled at random toward the City, paying little attention to the sights about him. The late stayers among the sisterhood that infests that locality after midnight gave him plenty of invitations to ac-

company them to warmer quarters, but he paid no heed. At another time they would have disgusted him, but to-night, when he had been on the brink of selling *himself*, he could not too deeply blame them for engaging in a like occupation.

With his collar turned up about his ears and his hat well drawn over his eyes he went on and on, until he had reached the vicinity of Newgate.

The snow began to fall, gently. From a small hotel he saw a couple emerge, and heard a hasty good-night exchanged as they separated at the doorway, to go in opposite directions. The man, who was elegantly dressed, whistled for a passing cab and was driven away, leaving his companion alone.

The woman walked slowly, looking about as if expecting some one, and presently a second man came out of the shadow of a building and walked up to her.

"How much?" he asked, laconically, holding out his hand.

"Four pounds," was the answer, in a disappointed voice.

"I told you to insist on five!" said the man, angrily.

"He would not give it. I did the best I could."

"Ugh! What an idiot you are!" was the ungracious response, as the speaker took the money. "Well, I've no time to lose. I'll see you in the morning."

He was turning away, apparently in great haste, when the woman spoke again:

"Am I to walk home? I haven't a shilling."

With an expression that sounded like a curse the man took a piece of silver from his pocket and

shoved it into her hand. The movement was so abrupt that the woman staggered with the force of it. Then he left her.

Gilbert Gray could not doubt the full significance of the proceeding he had witnessed. The man was one of those creatures who live on the illegal earnings of immoral women, and he had taken from his mistress the wage for which she had just sacrificed her womanliness and her honor. She had given it to him not unwillingly, only making a slight protest when he left her to walk through the streets at one o'clock at night for want of a cab fare. It was a proceeding Gray had heard of before, but of which he had always entertained some doubt. Stunned by the scene, he was walking on in a sort of daze, when the woman, who had no suspicion that her recent actions had been noticed by him, hastened on his track.

"It is a cold night, sir," she said.

He walked faster; but she caught up with him, and for nearly a minute dinned into his ears invitations that filled him with horror. At last he saw a policeman in the distance, and stopping short, threatened to give her into custody if she did not leave him at once.

The startled look of the woman when he uttered these words made him sorry that he had spoken so sharply. He drew out a half sovereign—though he had little enough to spare—and told her to take it. She reached for the money with an avidity that was astonishing, and only to be accounted for by hunger or some equally strong reason. Then, with a searching look at his face, she vanished up one of the side streets.

And Gilbert Gray went back to his temporary lodging, wondering if he could trust his eyes and his ears. For the man he had seen lying in wait for this poor creature, and taking her shameful earnings to the last penny, was none other than the one he had rescued in Venice and encountered again in Rome, the elegant rider he so recently met in the Park, his old acquaintance, Neiling.

CHAPTER IX.

“SHALL IT BE YOU—OR HE?”

NATURE had its way with him before he was aware of it, and he fell into a deep sleep. When he awoke it was past eight o'clock, and the room was brightly illuminated with the wintry sun.

He rubbed his eyes wonderingly, as he realized what must have occurred, and was about to go to the street to summon a cab, when he heard a familiar voice in the outer entry.

“How early do you expect Mr. Yates?” asked the voice.

“About half-past nine,” was the reply of the domestic addressed.

“I must see him sooner,” said the first voice. “Give me his house address.”

“He never transacts business at his house,” said the domestic, “and I have orders to give the address to no one.”

There was an angry and impatient exclamation at this.

“I shall find it, in some way,” said the stranger. “If I do not, I shall be here again within an hour.”

Would the gentleman leave his card?

No, the gentleman would not. The gentleman seemed in an ill temper, and in great haste, for he went out with a slam of the door that shook the building.

Mr. Gray had risen from the chair in which he slept, and stood staring in the direction from which these sounds proceeded. The voice he had heard was a familiar one. Good heaven! How could that man appear at every turn in his path!

It was tolerably clear. Neiling was one of those “eligible young gentlemen” whom Mr. Yates had selected as possible partners for his fair client. Such a fate for the poor girl was too horrible. Gray seized a sheet of note paper and wrote rapidly:

“DEAR MR. YATES:—See me, without fail, before you make any arrangement in the matter of which we were speaking. I shall wait in my room till you come. Do not fail to heed this.

“Yours,

G. G.”

“Take that as fast as you can ride to Mr. Yates,” he said, when the domestic answered his bell. “Put it into his hands yourself.”

It was only half an hour before the domestic returned, bringing the message that Mr. Yates would be at his office as soon as possible. Gilbert fumed

and fretted, however, as the time dragged on. He had come to feel that the prevention of a crime lay in his hands. The character of Neiling had presented itself to him so vilely that he could not endure the thought that a young girl of the sort the solicitor had described—repentant of her one fault—should be condemned to such a life partnership. It would be even better to endure the pangs of unwedded motherhood, to face the cruel world with her guilt exposed than to marry such a man as that. The hour before the solicitor came seemed interminable to the young man, and when he at last arrived there was no time lost in coming to the point.

“You are surprised to find me still here,” began Gray, when he had closed the door to shut out possible intruders. “That can be explained in a moment. After packing my effects with the intention of leaving at daylight, I fell asleep in that chair and did not awake until eight o’clock. When I opened my eyes the first sound that I heard was a voice in the corridor, talking to your servant. I recognized it as that of the man you saw me talking with in the Park the day you first met me, and I drew my own conclusions.”

He paused, nearly out of breath, and the solicitor’s pleasant face assumed an air of disappointment.

“What were your conclusions?” he asked, rather coldly.

“That this fellow was one of those you were considering as a husband to your client’s daughter,” said Gilbert, with directness. “And if that were true —”

Mr. Yates raised his hand in interruption.

“Wait a minute!” he said. “I think this is farther than you have a right to go.”

“In one sense, yes,” replied the young man, reddening. “Nor have I any wish to interfere in your business. But I appeal to you, as an honorable gentleman, which I have never doubted you to be, to consider the chances of happiness of a woman joined to a man so utterly destitute of principle!”

“Oh, there are worse men than he,” repeated the solicitor, thoughtfully. “You don’t know anything really criminal against him.”

Gray hesitated an instant; but too much was at stake now for trifles, and he told what he had seen the previous night.

A sarcastic smile crossed the solicitor’s face, as he listened, a smile of the kind that was not common here.

“You take remarkable interest in a girl you felt insulted by being mentioned with, a few hours ago,” said he.

“I may seem inconsistent,” was the answer, “but I hope I am not so. When you told me of her situation and asked me to share her shame I was, I admit, shocked. I felt that you had formed an opinion of me altogether too low, and that I had done nothing to merit the estimate. But, on the other hand, I had and still have the utmost sympathy and would do anything in my power to help her. If there are others, in this city of London, with a less fine sense of propriety, who are willing to sacrifice themselves in consideration of the emoluments to be gained, I have nothing to say against the plan

you are to carry out. I can conceive a form of mind and a temperament fitted to such a union, where good might in the end result to all concerned. But you must admit, sir, that it is not enough to discover a man who will give this girl his name. You must find one who will not make her life a hell, when by your aid he has been given the power to do so."

The sarcastic smile faded from the lips of the listener long before Mr. Gray finished. He was conceiving a new respect for this young man, as well, perhaps, as an enlarged notion of his own responsibilities.

"The trouble is," said he, "my time is getting short. I had counted so absolutely on you—pardon me—that my choice in other fields is reduced to a very limited one. Why had I placed so much reliance on you? Not, as you intimate, because I thought you lacking in any quality that makes the gentleman, but because I candidly believed the opportunity one you ought to embrace—ought, I say—both in duty to yourself and to this unfortunate young lady. She has made one slip, it is true, and what is worse, the consequences stare her in the face. An arrangement has been made by which concealment of this error will be secured and her life saved from ruin. She is in a frame of mind to give all her devotion to the man who saves her, and I prophesy for them a happy and peaceful existence. The fortune she will bring to the husband is not a thing to be ignored, either. This is not an age of the world in which money should be despised. You can give some pertinent testimony on that head. I

have promised her father to introduce him to the man I have selected. He is impatient and will not be put off. So, when you refused me so abruptly last night, my choice fell on—another man—who, to be candid, I would not have chosen had I been able to help it.”

Gray pounded the table restlessly with his clenched hand.

“And that choice is William Neiling, or what other name he may decide to give you!” he exclaimed.

The solicitor shrugged his shoulders by way of reply.

“Very well!” ejaculated Gray. “I have only this to say: I would not have your responsibility for all the wealth of London.”

The other man started in his chair.

“There is another whose responsibility is greater than mine,” he said, impressively.

“Another!” repeated Gilbert.

“Yours is by far the greater,” said Mr. Yates. “The opportunity to save this girl from a fate you so much deplore is in your hands; it is not in mine. You are single, eligible, a mate for her that the final jury—society—would declare perfectly suitable. I am not only ten years too old, but I am already married. I have done all I could to help her, much more, I assure you, from sympathy, than from any call of a business nature. But you, with this drowning child before your eyes, refuse to stretch out your hand.”

Gilbert Gray moved uneasily under this strong indictment.

“Do you mean to tell me—as an honest man—that you would marry her if you were single?” he demanded.

“If I were of your age, and of your circumstances, before God, yes!” said Mr. Yates.

“Ah!” cried Gilbert. “That is the point, after all—the money to be paid for the service.”

“Not wholly. This girl is as pretty a creature as lives at this moment in Europe. She is only eighteen years of age, amiable, educated, with every personal qualification. I am sure, if the case had been presented to me at your age, exactly as I present it to you, I would have accepted her without question.”

Gilbert shook his head slowly.

“Knowing that she had so far forgotten her honor——”

“Knowing everything. A child like her may give way to a moment of impulse, ignorant of results, unable to guide her passions. But a woman with that experience is safe forever. The man who gets her secures a pearl that he will not need to watch. He can rely on her gratitude, her affection, her fealty, as he could not on one with less incentive to love her husband. The man who marries this young girl——”

A knock at the door interrupted the speaker, and the domestic who entered presented a card to Mr. Yates.

“Ask him to wait a few minutes,” said the solicitor, in a low voice. Then, when they were again alone, he added to Mr. Gray, “This card is that of the person you so much object to.”

The young man rose and paced the room uneasily. His temples were burning. His nerves were unstrung.

“He has come for his answer, I presume,” he said, when he could control his voice.

Mr. Yates bowed silently.

“And what,” asked Gilbert, pausing before the solicitor’s chair, “what shall you tell him?”

“That is for you to say,” was the sharp reply.

“For me?” exclaimed the young man, recoiling.

“Precisely. It is to be one of you. Which?”

Gilbert drew a long breath of pain.

“The choice is not so limited as that,” he said. “You told me there were others that you had in mind.”

“They do not meet the requirements of eligibility,” said Mr. Yates. “No, it has resolved itself to you and him.” He rose and took out his watch. “I must give him his answer.”

The violence of Mr. Gray’s feelings were too strong for him. His dilemma pressed with an overpowering weight. He sat down and covered his eyes with his shaking hands.

“Come!” said the solicitor. “Is it to be you—or he?”

Delay was the first thing thought of. Delay, that always gives a chance for something to transpire.

“What is the very latest time you give me to answer?” asked Gray, without lifting his head.

“How long do you need?”

“Give me till to-morrow morning.”

“Absolutely impossible.”

“Till this evening.”

"It cannot be done. I will give you—it is now half-past nine—I will give you till ten."

Mr. Yates was proceeding to leave the room, when the young man interrupted him in his progress.

"What shall you tell him?"

"I shall ask him to return in half an hour."

The struggle in Gilbert Gray's brain was terrific, but he wanted one thing disposed of then and there.

"Tell him," he ejaculated, slowly, "that—*he—need NOT—return!*"

Mr. Yates leaned over his companion and took both his hands in his own.

"Then I am to understand ——" he began.

"Yes, yes! Anything but that he ——"

The smile that belonged on the solicitor's face came back to it. He pressed the hands he held with a vice-like grip, and vanished rapidly from the apartment.

CHAPTER X.

AN AMERICAN GIRL.

A FEW moments later the ears that had become dulled in some sort with the rest of Mr. Gray's senses heard angry and half-intelligible sounds proceeding from the office. Mr. Neiling evidently did not receive with pleasure the news that had been brought him. His voice, raised far above the usual height, penetrated the inner chambers. Occasionally the

lower but firm tones of the solicitor alternated with his.

Not wishing to act the part of an eavesdropper Gilbert went to one of the windows and threw it open, admitting enough of the noise of the street to drown the sounds within. The cold air blew gratefully on his heated forehead. He felt like one in a dream.

What had he agreed to do? He hardly knew. The violence of his feelings had driven him to something desperate. Well, there was such a thing as Fate! He had been buffeted by Fortune, until volition was no longer left. The tide must take him whither it listed, since he could not control the movements of his barque.

As he stood in the cooling breeze a kind of recklessness came in place of the old struggle. He had given his word, and there was nothing now but to act the role assigned him.

When Mr. Yates returned, Gilbert saw that he had passed through an unpleasant experience. He was flushed and heated. The perspiration dampened the roots of the hair that hung carelessly over his white forehead. His collar, usually the perfection of neatness, was rumpled and his necktie out of place.

"Well, that matter is disposed of!" he remarked, drawing a long breath, but not otherwise referring to the interview he had just closed. "Now for business. As so much time has been lost we shall have to proceed with celerity. You are a sensible fellow, and will, I am sure, put nothing in the way of finishing this affair as rapidly as possible."

"I am in your hands," said Gilbert, simply.

He was wondering what had happened in the office to so affect the man of law.

"In the first place," said Mr. Yates, wiping his brow, "you would like to know the name of your future—or I should say your already—wedded bride ; for, by the document which I shall soon have, you were married on September 14, by the Rev. August Voorhoe, at Amsterdam, to Gladys Eleanor, daughter of Colonel Henry Newcombe of Chicago, Illinois."

An American girl ! Gilbert was glad to hear that at least.

"But, do you tell me that a clergyman has consented to alter the date of his certificate ?" he asked, astounded.

"In the interest of a young girl's honorable future, and for the consideration of five hundred guilders, yes," smiled Mr. Yates. "It is a little jesuitical, but quite right, looked at from a broad standpoint. Now, you would like to see a photograph of the lady with whom your honeymoon is almost ended—and here you have it."

He produced a cabinet-sized picture from his pocket as he spoke, and Gray uttered a slight scream as his eyes fell upon it.

"The girl I saw at the theatre—and in the Park !" he cried.

"The same. Did I not tell you she was beautiful ? I took you to the Park and theatre to show to her, as I took others. It may flatter your pride when I add that it was she who made the selection, rather than I, though we agreed upon it perfectly."

The young man stared fixedly at the portrait.

"And she seemed so cold," he said. "So entirely

different from what one would imagine. I am dumb-founded at the idea that this can possibly be the picture of a girl who has passed through such experiences."

The solicitor was recovering his equanimity, so pleased was he at the final ripening of his long-cherished plans.

"You must remember," he replied, "that Miss Newcombe has had enough to dampen her spirits and give her the reserved look you mistook for coldness. During the past two months she has suffered intensely. It will be your pleasant duty to drive that cloud from her face. When the news of her secret wedding has been imparted to her mother, and that shock is ended, I think you will find the natural brightness of her disposition returning. Of course, much will depend upon the judgment with which you treat her, but the worst should be over in a week from to-day."

Mr. Gray asked, hesitatingly, and with a deep blush, when the birth of the child was expected to take place.

"The last of next June," was the answer. "At which time you must manage to be far from here. A northern climate is more favorable than Central or Southern Europe for such events. But this is too distant to need immediate discussion. It is your present task to obtain, with your bride, the forgiveness of her father and mother."

Gray asked, half dazed, when he should meet the father.

"Very soon. But you must see Mrs. Gray" (the young man winced) "this afternoon, and agree upon

the story you are to tell. It is necessary to have the Colonel pretend ignorance of everything, and he will carry out that rôle to the letter. When it is settled that you met Miss Newcombe by chance in Venice, or Rome, or Florence, last winter, where your love ripened into a declaration ; and that, fearing a rejection from the parents, you finally met surreptitiously in Holland and were united there, it will be for Miss Gladys to 'inform' her father of these 'facts' and beg his paternal pardon. Colonel Newcombe, knowing best how to break the news to his wife, will attend to that part of the affair. He will say to her that, while the error of their child is a grave one, it is best to overlook it with as few words as possible, as he has discovered that you are a very decent young fellow, who will not disgrace the family. Then Mrs. Newcombe will forgive her daughter and clasp her to her motherly breast ; and the next thing is for Gladys to bring her husband, who will plead his excuses and accept the reconciliation that awaits him."

The flippancy that frequently came into the manner of the solicitor did not please his hearer, but he could utter no complaint with good reason. He had laid himself open to this kind of thing by accepting his equivocal position. The deceptions he was asked to practice were distasteful, but he saw no way to escape them, and he bowed consent to each of the schemes unrolled. He realized that a strain was taken from the mind of Mr. Yates, and that the liveliness of his discussion was partly the result of the relief he felt.

Gilbert did not dare, in fact, to think too deeply

about anything, lest he should be tempted to break his word, the most dishonorable thing he could conceive of at this stage of the affair.

After considerable further talk the solicitor left him with the understanding that at three o'clock that afternoon a meeting was to take place with Miss Newcombe, at a private parlor in the hotel where she was at present residing.

Going out of doors it struck the young man that nothing would be more to his present mood than a gallop in the Park. He wanted something to stir his blood, that seemed stagnating in his veins. He felt fully justified in ordering saddled the horse which had been placed at his disposal by Mr. Yates, and which he had mentally resigned the night before with all his other elegancies. He therefore proceeded to the stable and mounted the beast, and as Hyde Park was nearer than Regent's he rode to the path there, without a thought of the reasons that had induced him for the past week to avoid it.

If he had forgotten for the moment the existence of Mr. William Neiling, he was soon to be brought back to a remembrance of it. He had ridden up the path but a few seconds when he saw coming toward him the object of his detestation, and evidently in a mood quite the reverse of amiable. The horse that Neiling rode was plunging fearfully, and on both sides the blood showed where the relentless spur had been pitilessly driven in. His bit was covered with foam and his nostrils were distended, while his eyes, as could be seen at a glance, were bloodshot. Neiling saw Gray at the same instant, and rode straight at him; a moment later the two animals collided

with terrific force, and lay with their riders, a tangled heap on the ground.

Some people who saw the occurrence, together with a policeman who was somehow found, hastened to the spot, and held the horses' heads while the riders were assisted to their feet. Gray, however, discovered that he could only stand with help, one of his ankles being sprained. The other, though considerably bruised, was able to remount his horse, and did so.

"It was this man's fault!" cried one of the spectators, pointing to Neiling.

"Yes," exclaimed another. "He rode straight into the other gentleman, like it was a-purpose."

Neiling sat his animal with a very red face, brushing the dirt from his clothes with a nonchalant air. He saw Gray dispatch one boy for a carriage, and give his beast to another, with directions where to lead it. He evidently was for the nonce *hors du combat*.

"Do you wish to enter a complaint, sir?" asked the policeman, taking out his note-book.

It was Gray's first intention so to do, but at that instant the pain in his ankle increased so much that he was near swooning on the spot.

"No," he said, "I only want to get to my rooms."

He whispered the direction to the officer, who gave it to the just arrived cabman. As he was helped into the vehicle he heard a taunting laugh from Neiling, who waited no longer, but galloped rapidly away.

CHAPTER XI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

MR. YATES was still in his office when a man came up the stairs to say that Mr. Gray had been injured and required assistance to bring him to his apartment. The solicitor hastened anxiously to the street, taking two of his clerks with him. For several seconds he had a terrible apprehension that an accident had upset all his carefully prepared plans. When he reached Gray's side and learned the full extent of the hurt to be a sprained limb, he breathed a sigh of relief. The young man was carried bodily up the stairway, for he could not now bear the least weight on one foot, and a physician, who was summoned, proceeded to swathe the affected part in bandages and liniment, stating that no attempt to walk should be made for some days.

Bad as this was, it might have been much worse. When Mr. Yates had time to learn the manner in which the injury was caused he thought Gray lucky to have escaped as lightly as he did. It was a nasty performance, he said, and one that might have resulted even fatally. As to Neiling's motive, he could not understand it. He had, no doubt, been working himself into a passion over his disappointment, and was ready to vent his spleen on any person who happened to get in his way. However, nothing would be gained by a prosecution, as the unenviable notoriety of the case would affect his victim also.

"Besides," added the solicitor, "he is going out of the country, I understand, within a day or two, to remain indefinitely. He told me as much," he explained, in response to Gray's inquiring glance. "I only hope it is true and that he will stay as long as he lives."

Gray eyed his companion intently from the place on the sofa where the doctor had left him.

"He does not know—you are sure—that *I* am to marry Miss Newcombe?"

"Not by any means," was the decided answer. "He has evidently conceived for you one of those hatreds that some minds learn to entertain for their benefactors. He is a disagreeable fellow, as I found before he left this morning, and the best thing to do is to dismiss him from our thoughts. Whether he leaves England or not, you and the Newcombes will go as soon as you are able to travel, and in the meantime you will not be about the streets where you can meet him. Let us talk of matters that more immediately concern us. Are you able to hold a short interview with your wife *here* this afternoon?"

"With my wife?" repeated Gilbert, absently.

"With the lady to whom you were united in marriage at Amsterdam in September last. You must get used to this fact, must familiarize your mind with these dates. When I send word to Mrs. Gray that her husband has been injured she will fly to your side. It even occurs to me that this accident may prove of benefit to our cause, as it will furnish a plausible excuse to reveal the truth—don't dispute my phrases—to her father. While her husband was well he could get along without her; being ill he re-

quires her care and attention. Every one sympathizes with a man who smells of arnica. We shall have her here—shall we not?—at three o'clock, for a preliminary rehearsal.”

As Gray had put himself so thoroughly in the hands of the man of law he made no objection to the proposal. There was a certain advantage in receiving his bride while in this semi-helpless state. She would not expect him, for instance, to offer any form of affection, which was a gain of no little moment. If he was paler than a man should be she would lay it wholly to the effects of his fall and sprain; and if the interview was brief the same reason could be assigned. So he told Mr. Yates to bring him Miss Newcombe—he begged pardon, M-r-s. G-r-a-y—at the hour mentioned, and he would prepare for the ordeal before him.

“That is arranged then,” said the solicitor, rubbing his hands together. “But bear in mind, please, that you are not the only one who has an ‘ordeal’ to go through. You will meet a very young girl who is obliged to confess to you, by implication, a fault which she would rather, ordinarily, sacrifice her life, almost, than admit to a husband. Her mind will be at an extreme nervous tension, which you must do your best to relieve. Your conversation should be kept to the largest degree upon matters that are purely business in their nature. No allusion or insinuation, for instance, must be thought of at this time, in reference to her condition.”

The young man started so suddenly at this that he wrenched his aching limb and uttered a cry of pain.

“You ought to know,” he complained, his face con-

vulsed with suffering from a double cause, "that such a warning is unnecessary. Not only to-day, but never, if there is any way to prevent it, shall I allude in the most remote degree to any peculiarity in that matter. I trust, though my present position may lead you to doubt it, that I have still in my veins the blood of a gentleman!"

The solicitor made haste to dispel the disagreeable effect of his suggestion, and when he had succeeded in so doing he went to write the note to Mrs. Gray, informing her of the reason why she must come to his office instead of to the parlor of the hotel which had formerly been designated for the meeting.

He smiled gravely as he began the epistle with the words, "My Dear Mrs. G.: I regret to inform you that your husband has met with a slight accident."

When he had placed the letter in an envelope he did not write any address on the outside, but gave it to his most faithful assistant, with orders to put it into no hands but those of Colonel Newcombe's daughter.

At the hour designated Gladys came to the office and was escorted into Gilbert Gray's presence. Mr. Yates remained only long enough to make his introductions, and then, with a fatherly smile, left them together.

It took but a glance to show Mr. Gray the genuine beauty of the young girl he had promised to take for his wife. Even the terrible suffering she had undergone could not blot out the loveliness of her features, which must have been surpassingly handsome three short months before. Her form was rounded, show-

ing an earlier than usual development, and she dressed with a quiet taste that spoke volumes for her judgment in such matters. Her eyes and hair were dark.

These observations were the easier made because the girl kept her gaze riveted to the carpet for some seconds after she entered the room. But before she spoke Gilbert revised one opinion that had formed itself unconsciously in his mind. There was nothing in her of the iciness he had supposed. If she was pale, she was not weak. Her veins were full of rich blood that only the strangeness of the occasion had driven from her cheeks.

And still she seemed withal the incarnation of modesty and womanliness. He could not understand—no, not in the least—how it could be true, what he had heard of her. And there was nothing yet to testify, at least to his inexperienced eyes, the cause of her presence in that chamber.

It was she who first broke the silence.

"I am sorry you have been hurt," she said, in a low but rich voice.

"You are kind to say so," he answered, and his own tones sounded strange to him, as if they were another's. A horse collided with mine, as I was riding this morning. The doctor says I shall be out in a week."

Then he paused, having reached the end of all he wanted to say on that point. He realized now, with eyes averted, that she was studying him as intently as he had been studying her. She had as much reason, perhaps. When a girl is to live with a man for

the rest of her days it is important to know what he is like.

Gladys saw that her future lord was not ugly in appearance, and that his bearing was agreeable, though naturally somewhat strained at this time. With a thought to the opinion of the world, which she had begun, a little late, to care for, she decided that he would satisfy conventionality as a suitable mate for her.

"I am glad it is no worse," she said, when the silence became painful.

She looked about the room, inspecting the pictures, while he stole another searching glance at her features. How, he asked himself again, could such a girl as that be won to indelicacy? It was inconceivable. She, who could hardly muster courage to talk there with him in a closed room, while he lay helpless on a sofa! This reflection was mirrored in his countenance, when, turning suddenly to speak again, she saw it there, and paused, with a crimson cheek.

"Oh, this is too hard!" she exclaimed, bursting into sobs. "Yes, it is too hard—for both of us! I did not think you would mind—not in the same way I do! I did not realize what it must mean to you!"

Much distressed, Gilbert Gray raised himself on an elbow, and besought her to be calm. All the chivalry in his nature was aroused. He pitied the girl from the bottom of his heart. Her unexpected flood of sensitiveness raised her immensely in his estimation.

"Everything is arranged now—everything is understood, he answered, soothingly. "Mr. Yates has

procured the certificate of—of—our marriage. Let me beg you not to repeat these outbursts.”

She arose, impulsively, and threw herself on the floor by the side of the sofa, laying her head on his bosom, while she wept softly. He was distressed as much by this move as the former one, but he had not the heart to forbid it. At least it led in the direction they would ultimately have to take.

“Listen,” he said, when she had grown a little quieter. “We must understand everything exactly alike. Let us see if we agree on all points, for as we have one story to tell there must be no flaws. Miss Newcombe—I mean Mrs. Gray—take your chair again and let us see if there is anything in which we differ.”

The girl rose and took the seat designated, fixing her gaze steadfastly on a figure in the carpet, and answering with that parrot-like accuracy which often accompanies preoccupation of mind. It was the best course he could have taken. It avoided for the present the shoals and quicksands of argument, for which neither of them were prepared.

“As I understand it,” he began, clearing his throat, “we met by accident for the first time, in Venice, over a year ago. Each was attracted by the other, although no word was then exchanged. The next time we met was at the ——”

“The Palace of the Uffizi,” she said, in a low voice, taking up the strain. “There we learned each other’s names, and that both were Americans. Next we were thrown together at a reception of the American minister in Rome ——”

Mr. Gray bowed in the affirmative.

"Where, in one of the ante-rooms," he said, "I begged permission to write to you, and you consented, giving me a name under which I could address my communications. From that time our love-making took new life. I returned to America, and not being able to live without you, returned, joining you at Amsterdam last September. Then, fearing a possible refusal from your parents, we decided to be married secretly."

Gladys looked up at last.

"What a miserable tissue of lies it is!" she exclaimed. "How can I consent to let an innocent man like you share the sin of those falsehoods with me!"

Gilbert placed a warning finger on his lips to indicate that such expressions must not be used.

"There is no point in our story at which we disagree," he said, "which is very good. The name of the clergyman who married us was August Voorhoe. We can be accused of injudiciousness, but of nothing more. To-night you will go through the form of telling your father——"

The girl gave a cry and pressed her hands over her face.

"Explaining that the accident—do not forget this—the accident that has befallen me compels you to reveal the truth and implore his forgiveness. He will find it best to take a sensible view of what cannot be helped, and will impart your confession, with such excuses as he can find, to your mother."

There was another cry from the listener—a spasmodic exclamation that testified how deep was the feeling the holy name inspired.

"Your mother," continued Gilbert, "will be guided

by your father's superior force of will, and as soon as I am able to walk they will receive us with forgiving arms."

Gladys began to sob again. The ingenious story that the solicitor had invented differed so widely from the cruel truth that it only accentuated and emphasized the latter. Whatever face her father might present to the world, whatever tale he might be willing to adopt, she knew her fault had struck him a blow from which his proud nature would never recover. As for the mother, while she, in her ignorance of the facts, would suffer less, there was something in deliberate deceit to that loving and indulgent relation that savored of the deepest villainy. And to this must now be added the subornation of another person to all this perjury.

"There!" said Gray, forcing a smile to his face in the hope that it might bring one to hers. "It is all settled, as far as you are concerned. The only thing left is the blame that should properly fall on me for securing the hand of an heiress when I have nothing to offset to her worldly wealth. This I am prepared to meet, but I prefer, if possible, that the exact truth should be colored a little, to match with the rest of these transactions. And as soon as possible I want to be put in a position where my services may be utilized. I have no desire to eat my wife's bread after an opportunity of earning my own can be obtained."

Gladys had tried several times to stop him while he was saying these things, but he persisted to the end. Then she chided him for his expressions and said she hoped he would never repeat them. Com-

pared to the immense load he had agreed to carry, these minor matters were not to be spoken of. Between her sentences there came waves of color and little gasps that testified to her agitated state of mind, and Mr. Gray forbore to pursue a subject that evidently so much distressed her. At the end of an hour they parted without special demonstration, and a few minutes later a knock at the door came from the solicitor, who inquired if he might enter.

"Well, you have been getting along nicely, I hope," was his greeting. "Everything arranged, I trust."

"Everything," answered Gilbert. "Mrs. Gray and I have no differences whatever."

In his delight at finding matters in such excellent shape, the solicitor was in great spirits.

"A truly remarkable couple," said he. "May this auspicious beginning find its parallel in long years of contented life together. Your parts have been rehearsed, then, and you are both ready for the more serious matter of playing them to the public. Let me predict a successful debut in your new characters. Seriously," he added, as he saw that his pleasantry was not very cordially received, "I believe both of you will look back upon this day as the happiest in your careers. Whatever clouds there are will vanish. You are sensible young people who will take care to deepen the esteem you have already conceived for each other. I learn from Mrs. Gray that you have done magnificently."

"Thank you," was the quiet reply. "And now will you let me ask—with no intention of being impolite—that you will restrain your comments for the future. I have acceded to all your requests. I

am now, I understand, the lawful husband of the lady that has just left here. There is nothing, so far as I know, that we cannot ourselves arrange in reference to our affairs. From this moment I wish no word to pass between you and me that alludes in the remotest way to what has happened. I have married a daughter of your client, if you please. The marriage is now three months old. You have but recently discovered it, and have set about the task of mediator between the young couple and the parents. You have succeeded—or will by to-morrow—in bringing about a satisfactory state of affairs. Now, is there any reason why you and I should have a different understanding than that possessed by the rest of mankind? Shall we not forget, absolutely, all that passed up to the hour when I came to your office and told you that, on the fifteenth day of last September, I was married at Amsterdam to Miss Gladys Newcombe?"

Though somewhat taken aback by the manner in which these suggestions were delivered, Mr. Yates was obliged to admit that there was wisdom in them. He therefore responded that he would accept the situation, and do his best to forget that any other had ever existed.

"Do you feel able," he asked, "to hold your interview with Colonel Newcombe this evening? He will be perfectly tractable and treat you with all respect."

"I should be very glad to have it over," said Mr. Gray.

"Very well, I shall ask him to come after dinner. You have seen him once, indistinctly, perhaps, in my

office. Do you remember the old gentleman who had the toothache? Ah! Here is the doctor, who wants to look at your ankle. Come right in, Dr. Sullivan. Well, and how do you find him?"

"A little heated, but doing nicely," replied the physician, after counting the pulse beat slowly.



CHAPTER XII.

"YOU MUST LET ME THANK YOU."

WHEN both the doctor and the solicitor had left the room, Gilbert Gray was plunged into a prolonged reverie. His situation was so incredible that he half believed all the events of the past month a dream, from which he must, sooner or later, awake. While he felt keenly the anomalous position into which he had permitted himself to be drawn, he accepted it as inevitable, and would hardly have escaped if, by one dash for freedom, he could have done so. The gentle demeanor of his bride impressed him strongly. It was something to have brought relief to that distracted mind. Placed by Fate in a condition where he was not the master of his own destiny, it was well that he had been used as an instrument of mercy to others. He resolved to make the best of his marriage, and win whatever of credit there might remain in a union entered upon so ingloriously.

The dinner that the domestic brought him was

fairly well treated, for the appetite of youth is hard to destroy, and the injury to his ankle did not affect his hunger. When the viands were cleared away he lay quietly awaiting the interview which had been arranged. It was like a surgical operation that could not be avoided, and the best way was to endure it with all possible equanimity.

As on the previous occasion, Mr. Yates only remained in the room long enough to make his introductions, and to say that he hoped the meeting would result agreeably to all parties concerned. When he had gone, Colonel Newcombe, whose face Gray now saw distinctly for the first time, seated himself in an armchair, a little way from the couch. He was an elderly man in years, and a decidedly old man in appearance; much older since the trouble in his family, Gilbert had no doubt. There was a tired look about his gray eyes, a feebleness in the movements of his hands that told its own tale. He had a large quantity of whitish hair that persistently fell across his forehead in a style that might at a former day have added to his good looks, but was now a pathetic reminder of the suffering he had undergone. He was tall, or had been, for the stoop of the broad shoulders lowered his stature considerably. His dress was careless, and his voice, naturally strong, trembled.

There was a moment during which neither of them spoke, and the clock at the other end of the room ticked so loudly that both were aware of its sound.

Then Gray, mustering courage, and thinking it the part of wisdom to set the conversation in the right direction at the beginning, addressed his companion.

“I want to say to you,” he began, “that I realize the feelings you must have towards me, and hope you will do as little as possible to emphasize that point. Your daughter Gladys and I have committed an indiscretion, no doubt. Both of us feel it now, altogether too plainly. But, at the time we decided to marry—in Amsterdam, last September—neither foresaw the injurious effect of that course. Nothing remains for me but to ask your forgiveness, and to live hereafter in such a manner that you will forget what has passed.”

These things Gilbert uttered, not without many pauses, and gropings for the right expressions. When he had finished, unable to say another word, he felt that he had acquitted himself very badly. Colonel Newcombe listened, at first, with a look of wonder on his distressed face, but gradually seemed to comprehend the metaphor which Gray had elected to use. When it became his turn to speak, however, he could not bring himself to take up the thread that was offered him. His sentiments were too deep for masquerading. All he could do was to confine himself to the future. He knew very well that this man was not responsible for his daughter's fall. He knew that the marriage between them was but a few hours old, and that the ante-dating of the documents was the barest fraud.

“I have come here,” he began, “to—assure you—that I shall make the best of—the situation, and treat you—sir—as far as I can—as if there was nothing peculiar—in this—affair. If I am tempted to speak of—of anything that I would have given my life to have had otherwise—I will try to suffer in silence.

You are represented to me—as a young man of good character, and—of a good family. Your appearance is decidedly—in your favor.”

To these kind remarks Gilbert returned a bow, which hid for a moment the blush they brought to his cheek. He felt that the worst was over, and that he had nothing to dread from this man. He therefore went on to speak of his former life, of his orphaned youth, of his travels with Mr. Blair, and of his surprise at learning that the fortune he had expected to inherit had vanished.

“I have not ten pounds that I can call my own,” he said, candidly. “But I have youth, sir, and courage, and perhaps a little ability ; and I hope you will soon help me to some employment that will relieve me from the shame of idleness.”

It was plain that these remarks were agreeable to Colonel Newcombe, and that their effect was to lift in some small degree the cloud that hung upon his face. He had begun already to like this young man.

“We will talk of that in good time,” he said. “When I return to America, which” (he paused a moment) “will not be for—for a year or so, something can be arranged. At present, however, it is not to be thought of, for you will have some—some traveling, and some—other—duties. I wish you to feel, Mr. Gray, that you are now my son, and that the greatest treasure” (he gasped), “that I own—yes, still the greatest treasure, except my wife—is in your hands. While you give her the care and attention she needs at present, I want you to think of nothing else. When the

right time comes—we will talk about it. Yes, we will—talk about it.”

The rest of the time that Colonel Newcombe remained was passed in a general discussion of the manner in which the year ensuing should be passed, and the two men found themselves in perfect accord.

“I want to take your hand,” said the Colonel, as he rose to depart. “I wish you to feel—that you have a friend who fully appreciates—who is glad that a ray of good fortune, that came with so much that was ill, threw you in his way. And I hope,” he added, “that you will soon be able to be about, and none the worse for the misadventure of this morning.”

The proffered grasp was taken and returned with interest, and the tall, bent form of the elder man passed through the doorway and disappeared.

Five minutes later Mr. Yates came in and looked a hundred questions from his business-like eyes.

“Everything is satisfactory,” said Gray, shortly, from his place on the sofa, and turned the conversation so abruptly into other fields that the solicitor took the plain hint and did not refer to the Newcombe family again that night.

On the succeeding afternoon, when Mrs. Gray came to see her husband, she brought tidings that the news had been broken to her mother, and that she had received it as well as could possibly have been hoped. Mrs. Newcombe worshiped her child, and when the case was presented with due artfulness by the Colonel, as one in which the heart had been too strong for the judgment, she found excuses for her child, and took her to her arms.

"She wants to see you, too," added the young wife, blushing, "at the earliest possible moment. That is the worst trial we shall have to go through with—at—present—and it seems to me the hardest. My dear mother has been so good, so indulgent, we have been such companions! It is terrible to deceive her, even for her own good."

Tears followed these remorseful expressions, but Mr. Gray interposed to stop them.

"I want to ask you, very earnestly," he said, "to say nothing more—now or at any time in the future—in reference to these matters. I plant myself on one statement—that you and I were married three months and more ago. In my conversation with your father nothing else was allowed to be intimated; nothing should be between you and me. We must accustom ourselves to that story, and forget that we ever believed otherwise. Your father has forgiven us for that marriage—in Amsterdam—made without his consent. Your mother is ready to give us her blessing, notwithstanding the same act of thoughtlessness on our part. We have the whole world to face, and unless the truth—the *truth*, understand—is very clear in our minds, we shall have a difficult task."

Slowly his plan dawned upon her mind, and when she fully understood it she came to his side and would have fallen at his feet again in her gratitude as she did the day before.

"No, not there!" he exclaimed. "You are forgetting the very alphabet of your lesson. Do you not comprehend? We married for love; we are devoted lovers! A prostrate wife at my feet would tell another tale. Accidents may happen. A door

that we think locked may admit a suspicious intruder. A crevice may carry a sound that will expose us, if we fail in consistency. You are my wife ; we are still in the stages of the honeymoon. We have passed a dangerous point of securing the favor of your parents. For us this day can bring nothing but joy. That troubled look on your face must give way to one of happiness. Think ! In a few days, as soon as I am able to be on my feet, we shall have to show our bliss to the public. Already a dispatch has been wired to America, informing all who know us of our marriage."

Dazed by the reiteration of these things, Gladys held her breath.

"A dispatch !" she echoed, faintly.

"Exactly. Shall I read it to you?" He took a paper from his pocket. Here it is, copied word for word :

" ' American society will be surprised to learn of an interesting event that has just transpired in London, after being kept a positive secret for more than three months. It is the marriage of Gladys Eleanor, only daughter of Colonel and Mrs. Henry Newcombe, of Chicago, to Mr. Gilbert Gray of New York. The young couple have made their peace with their elders and are said to be the happiest pair in England. They will remain abroad for some time longer, on account of Mrs. Newcombe's health, which continues delicate.' "

Gladys stared hard at her husband.

"And that has been sent to an American paper?" she repeated.

"To a hundred of them—to the Associated Press, which reaches all the great morning journals. *Who*

sent it? *I* did. It was one of the duties that fell to me. I had concealed my marriage from the world; it was time I admitted it. The quickest way was through the newspapers. So I sent it to the London agent, in my own handwriting.”

The young woman could only shake her head in bewilderment. She thought of her friends in Chicago and elsewhere, agog over the tidings. But it was one of the things that had to come, and this was, as Mr. Gray said, the easiest way to announce it.

“Now, Gladys ——” he began again, and paused as he saw her eyes open widely.

“What is the matter?” he asked. “At the end of *three months’ married life*, should I not call you by your Christian name when we are alone? You will understand, if you stop to think, how necessary all these little things may be to our success in the business we have undertaken. I cannot be your husband part of the day, and somebody else the rest. We cannot have met this week for the first time, and still have been married a hundred days. It is husband and wife with us—and an affectionate husband and wife—or we are irretrievably lost! I agreed (that day in Amsterdam) to love, honor, and cherish you as long as I should live. It is my duty to carry out to the full that obligation. And I am ready to do it. I should go upon the witness stand, if necessary, and raise my right hand to Heaven, to swear to that day and certificate. You are a part of me—as much so as my arms or my eyes. That is why, when I can hear nothing from others—against my wife I shall

also refuse to hear anything of the kind from *her*. All this must end, Gladys, here and now."

At the mention of her first name, Mrs. Gray started again. She was much impressed with the deep significance of what she had heard. But, as before, the immensity of the responsibilities she had placed upon this stranger rose before her like a section of the Alps. He had taken upon himself a load that might break him down. And for what? Was there anything on the other side of the bargain to compensate for the requirements he had conceived so fully and was so well prepared to execute? Again she wanted to fall on her knees to him. It seemed as if no other position was becoming to her in his presence.

"Mr. Gray," she stammered, when she could command her voice.

"I beg your pardon," he interrupted, very gently but also very firmly. "*That name will not do* when we are in private."

She reddened and with the greatest effort began again.

"G-i-l-b-e-r-t ——"

"Well, Gladys?"

"You will—you must—let me thank you, only this once, from the bottom of my heart!"

"I will let you do nothing of the kind," he smiled. Then, to change the subject, he added, "I want to leave these rooms as soon as I can. The doctor thinks I can bear moving by day after to-morrow. Shall you be ready for me then?"

She sprang from her chair with a frightened look. *Ready* for him! *Ready* for *him*! This man talked

of coming to *live* with her! This man whom she had never spoken to till yesterday!

"I—don't know," she ejaculated, a syllable at a time. "Are you not—comfortable—here?"

He understood what was passing in her mind, and for an instant he was angry.

"It is not that," he answered, "but these quarters are unsuitable for a lady, and a young husband and his wife cannot be separated without danger of criticism. To-morrow the dispatch printed this morning in the United States, will be reproduced in London, and the people who know you here will expect to find you where a wife belongs, by her husband's side."

It was true. There was no denying what was so plain. She was his wife, recorded as such on the register, announced as such to the world. He had a right to demand that she fulfill her contracts.

"I—I will talk with my father about it, and—make arrangements," she whispered.

But she had grown very pale.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONFESSING TO MAMMA.

THE sprain on Mr. Gray's limb was so far recovered from, on the fourth day after it occurred, that he could walk with the aid of a cane, and he took the opportunity of going in a carriage to the hotel where his wife and her family resided, to pay the visit to Mrs. Newcombe for which that lady was anxiously waiting. In the meantime he had had another interview with the Colonel, and two with Gladys, which served to make them all feel better acquainted.

The interesting character of a semi-invalid served him a good turn on his first meeting with his mother-in-law, acting as an excuse for shortening the conversation between them. Mrs. Newcombe met him with tact, bidding him welcome in discreet terms, and saying with great grace that her daughter's husband would always seem a son to her. She was far from strong, as could easily be seen, and Gilbert thought, in spite of his resolutions not to dwell on such things, that a knowledge of the truth would certainly have killed her outright.

The spectacle of the daughter hiding her face in her mother's bosom while the latter relieved the situation with her thoughtful words, was very affecting. Whatever Gladys Newcombe might have done, the attachment to her mother was too deep to be questioned. And, at last, when Mrs. Newcombe gently

forced her child to lift her eyes and receive a warm kiss, the tears that flowed down the young cheeks were tempered with a sad smile that could not have been simulated.

"I have wondered, for some weeks," said the sweet mother voice, "what made my little girl so absent-minded and why the laugh I was accustomed to hear had been stilled. I tried to have her consult a physician, but she declared that she was quite well, and only the victim of a melancholy that would soon pass off. She should have known her parents better than to conceal her marriage from them. However we might feel, she was sure of our pardon and our love. The young heart cannot always control its impulses, and a wise parent is the best friend. But," she added, "we are very glad that our daughter fixed her choice on so good a man, and one with whom we cannot doubt she will be happy."

To this Mr. Gray replied in a few words, impressing Mrs. Newcombe by his manner, which she found very agreeable. Colonel Newcombe did not open his lips once during the interview, but signified, when appealed to by his wife's eyes, that he fully agreed with her. The advice of Mr. Gray's physician that he undergo no unnecessary fatigue was quoted, and the very brief meeting with his new parents closed.

"I want you to go back to my rooms with me," said Gilbert to his wife, as they passed out of Mrs. Newcombe's parlor. "It is necessary," he explained. "The public eye is already upon us, my dear. A reporter of the *Telegraph* called this morning to ask about my marriage, and I had to explain why I was

living in those chambers instead of with you. On account of the accident which I sustained, he will inform his readers to-morrow, I feared to frighten you by being taken helpless into your presence. I therefore used the rooms to which I had gone for the doctor's examination, and have since been unable to leave them. You will come with me for that reason—and for another. I have had a talk with your father, and we have agreed upon some things which I want to discuss with you."

Much agitated at the prospect, Gladys saw no excuse for refusing, and went obediently to get ready for the ride. The carriage was a closed one, and she met no person on the way, so far as she knew, who recognized her. But there was a strange sensation in being shut in with this man—of whom she knew so little—that seemed to choke her.

She feared each moment that he would presume upon his proximity to make some move that she dreaded. It was very well for him to marry her—that was a most convenient act; but to claim the privileges that go with matrimony, she felt was a far different thing.

Gilbert, however, to her great joy, limited his remarks to the scenes through which they were passing, and they reached his rooms, including the climb of the stairs, without special incident. There was an entrance that could be used without passing through the office of Mr. Yates, and they availed themselves of it.

"Well, Gladys," said the husband, after locking the door, to the mute horror of the young lady, "here we are again."

He was undoubtedly her lord and master before the law and before the world, but she was very slow to recognize this fact in its full significance. She did not take a chair, as he waived his hand for her to do, but stood before him a picture of uneasiness.

"Why do you lock the door?" she asked. "You do not think I will run away, do you?"

"Not at all," he smiled. "I did it to keep others from entering, under any pretense, without being invited. Particularly," and here the smile left his face, "our good friend, the solicitor."

She looked at him searchingly.

"He would not enter unannounced," she replied. "I think Mr. Yates claims to be a gentleman."

"Does he?" inquired Gray, as if unprepared to admit so much. "Then I will give him no opportunity to prove he is not one. An accidental lifting of that latch, on the plea that he did not know we were here, is undesirable at this time. Consequently I have turned the key. Now, Gladys"—each time he used this name the young wife started—"this is not what I asked you here to talk about. There is a matter of much greater importance. I have taken you for my wife. The announcement of that fact is spread over two hemispheres. We are as solidly married, as far as the law goes, as we can ever be. But if I stay here and you at your hotel—are you listening?—doubts as to our condition will inevitably arise. We must live under one roof, we must act like married people if we expect the public to believe what we claim."

Do her best, Gladys could not conceal the agitation that she was experiencing. She opened and

closed her eyes, looked at her husband repeatedly, and away again, clenched and unclenched her hands. And he missed nothing of these evidences of what was passing in her mind.

"You might think, you might remember," she answered, tremblingly, after a long pause, "how little I know of you, how recently we have met. You should, you ought, you must, give me—time. It is not—you can see it is not—the same as if we had been married in the usual way, as if you had made love to me and I had accepted you, and—that sort of thing. And then—there is another reason," and she uttered a sob—"another reason—that I cannot talk about. I appreciate all you are doing for me—oh! don't doubt that!—but," she fell back faintly into the old form of expression—"you should think, you should remember!"

Her eyes opened and closed again, her hands clenched and unclenched, her lips were drawn in until they appeared as white as her forehead.

The husband did not interrupt her, for he knew it was best to let her say all she wished and in her own way.

"Excuse me for remarking," he answered, coldly, when he saw she had finished, "that the sentiments you impute to me are not complimentary. As far as words can be clear and distinct, I want you to understand my position. I desire nothing, I would accept nothing, but an opportunity to carry out the agreement I have made with you. I am not going to be put, nor will I allow you to be put, into any ridiculous position. We are married, and we must act as if so to all interested in that fact. Your father and I are

in perfect accord in this matter. We *must* live under one roof. The people who see us nearest, the friends who call, the servants who wait upon us, must have nothing to arouse their suspicions. We must—there is no other word, *we must*—occupy the same suite of apartments. But—understand me now, if you never do again—that suite shall always, when its outer door are closed, find you at one end and me at the other !”

There was an earnestness in the young man's tone that approached fierceness. Gladys was frightened as she felt how thoroughly he meant what he said, even while her heart gave a leap of delight. She did not want him to hate her—she wanted to be on good terms with him.

“You are speaking bitterly,” she said, with a slight touch of reproach in her voice.

“I am using the best words I can to convey my meaning,” he answered, sharply. “There are a thousand things I ought to say, but I cannot bring myself to say them. Suffice it that while the world calls me your husband, and must find no cause to doubt it, I shall be only your brother until—until a very long time has elapsed—if ever.”

She shivered at the ominous ending.

“You are not angry with me, I hope,” she said, gently

“Oh, no. It is only that I want you to comprehend my full intentions, that this conversation may answer once for all. You and I have made a bargain that most people would not think to our credit, if they understood it perfectly. My reward is to be paid in cash—there is no other way to put the

cold, bald fact, I shall take it in cash, according to the letter of the bond. In return I shall give you the protection of my name, which the world thinks unsullied, and my companionship—to whatever extent is needed to satisfy Mrs. Grundy. As to the rest, let us be candid. I do not love you ; neither do you love me ; and without love I would accept a caress from no living woman, unless it were in the honest, open market where such goods are sold without pretense. Gladys, if these things sound harshly, they have more kindness than any sneaking evasion.”

Was it the native discontent latent in woman's nature that made her dissatisfied at what she had most wished to hear ?

“ This being the case,” he proceeded, after waiting to see if she had any comment to make, “ I think it wise to leave England immediately and go to some place where we are not known, there to learn the habit of appearing before the world in our new capacity. Your father has consented, as far as he is concerned, that we should go to the south of France and stay until he joins us. Your mother will, I am sure, when he presents the matter to her in its right light, feel as he does. At the end of a month or so, or sooner if an emergency arises, they will come to us.”

There was no flaw in his reasoning, but Gladys felt her hands growing numb as she thought of leaving her mother, and in the sole company of this man, who was still to her almost a stranger. She could not doubt the sincerity of his statements, and yet she had a nameless fear of the untried life that lay before

her. Oh, it had so many hardships in it, this new relation she had been so eager to secure !

“Where do you think of going ?” she asked.

“To Cannes, or its vicinity.”

“I should certainly meet people there whom I know,” she said.

“But not as many as you would here. If you meet a few it can do no harm. They have got to see your husband, some time.”

A rosy hue spread over the fair cheek at the insinuation, and the wife ceased to argue. She saw the inconsistency of objecting. She did not wish to seem opposed to her husband's wishes when there was nothing vital at stake. The only trouble was that each step came so hard. She must shut her eyes and make the plunge, since it was necessary.

“Very well,” she said. “I will leave it entirely to you. It is the first time I have ever been so far from mamma, but I won't mind that any more than I can help. If we are going it might as well be at once, and, as you say, she can be sent for if necessary. And I don't want you to think,” she added, earnestly, “that I intend to oppose you in anything that is right. You realize how new all this is to me, how completely I have been under the care of my mother and father—you realize it all, I am sure, and you must have a great deal of patience till I get a little used to things.”

Gilbert Gray could control his tongue but not his thoughts ; and he wondered, more than ever, how this mother's girl, this father's pet, had strayed so far from maidenly reserve and duty as to have come

to her present pass. But he shook off these reflections with all the force he could muster.

He had not only to forgive—he must try also to forget!

CHAPTER XIV.

“GOOD-NIGHT, GLADYS.”

MRS. NEWCOMBE, thoroughly under the influence of her husband, agreed with but slight resistance to the departure of the young couple, “a little in advance of us,” as she put it, for the exact date she was to follow was not yet arranged. She troubled Mr. Gray, when he came for his good-byes, by covert allusions to the natural desire of young married people to be away from their elders, where they could enjoy with absolute freedom the society of each other. She had once been of their age, she told them, and her memory was good. Ah! they should make the most of their youth and their love, for years crept on and there would be an end to all things earthly. If only their affection grew brighter with the lapse of time, as hers and her husband’s had done, they could ask for nothing sweeter.

And to this play of words Gilbert and Gladys lent themselves with whatever was necessary to deceive, while the sober face of Colonel Newcombe, with its new lines of pain and care, chided even when it encouraged the deception.

At parting, Gilbert bent above the sweet countenance of his mother-in-law, and kissed her reverently on the forehead. At which she drew him down and pressed her lips to his cheek, declaring at the last moment that Gladys could not be in better hands than his, and that he had her entire confidence and love.

“Here is Gladys’ purse—and yours,” said Colonel Newcombe, pressing it into Gray’s hand, when they retired to be for a few minutes alone. “And here is a letter of credit that you will use at your discretion. Say nothing, I pray you, about this matter, but consider yourself, as I told you before, one of my family, and entitled to a full share of all I have. I also want you to know that I like you more than I ever dreamed I should, and that there has been a weight lifted from my heart since I have found to what a true man the happiness of my child is intrusted.”

Nothing was to be gained by any reply to this speech, except a simple “Thank you, Colonel,” and an hour later the Dover mail bore the wedded pair rapidly toward the Channel. Gray was not surprised because his wife curled herself into a corner of the compartment and wept softly during most of the journey. She had enough to weep for, God knew! and tears, he had often heard, were a blessing to women in trouble. The kindest thing was to arrange her wraps about her with a gentle hand, and leave her to herself.

At the steamer pier he assisted her to the ladies’ cabin, glad to remember that the rules prevent men and women occupying that part of the boat together, and gave special directions to the stewardess, accom-

panied with a good fee, to make madame as comfortable as possible. Then he went into the men's cabin, and lighting a cigar, passed the time before reaching France in contemplating his future in wreaths of smoke.

When he went for his wife, on the arrival of the steamer at Calais, he found that she had dried her tears for the nonce, in the experience of a new form of discomfort, for which they offered no relief. She had suffered from nausea, and presented a most disconsolate spectacle, as women are apt to do on such occasions. She clung closer to her husband as he took her to the train, and shivered as the wintry wind blew around the corners, with a suggestion of fine snow in the air. When the train started she began to talk, referring to her illness on the boat, and showing her feminine nature by remarks in relation to her appearance, to which he gave suitable replies.

The compartment was also occupied by another couple, a young man and woman whom no one could doubt were on the first day of their wedding trip. The young woman nestled close to her husband, and laughed when he "tucked" the couvertures about her feet, and felt occasionally to see if her gloved hands were as warm as they should be. Their conversation, which did not lag for an instant, was conducted in so low a tone that the man's lips almost—and once or twice quite—touched his companion's cheek. Happiness, the purest and sweetest that is given to the children of men, was theirs. And the couple who sat in the other corner felt the contrast in all its intensity.

This girl, thought Gladys, might also be leaving

her father and mother for the first time, but in the overpowering love for her wedded mate, she could feel her heart throb with joy even after that parting. In the new arms to which she was going, Nature would teach her to forget for the nonce those that had so long been her refuge. Against the breast of this lover she would find compensation for the one which had nursed her baby lips. With this champion to fight her battles, she could spare the father who had guarded her from every danger since her little feet took their first step.

“And I!” reflected Gladys. “I! What have I thrown away—what have I gained—in exchange for all this? If only the past could come again, and I could see these things as I see them now!”

Gilbert thought of it all, too. He saw, as in a mirror, what he might, under happier conditions, have enjoyed. But the beggar who watches an imperial progress does not think ill of the emperor; and while grinding his teeth together in an effort to forget, he had only good wishes for the ecstatic couple whose delight mocked his contrasted state.

It had been decided to remain over night in Paris, and three pleasant rooms at the Grand Hotel had been engaged by wire. A bright fire was burning in the grate of the sitting-room, where shortly after their arrival a pleasant repast was served. Gilbert asked his wife, when the dinner was cleared away, if she would like to take a ride or a walk, and she replied that the journey had tired her a little, and she believed she did not care to. She said, however, that he must feel quite free to go if he wished, and

he thanked her, saying he believed a stroll of an hour would do him good.

When he returned, not one hour but three later, he was surprised to find her still up.

"You should have gone to bed, my dear," he said, kindly.

"I—I will go now," she stammered. "I—I did not—know—which room—was mine."

He laughed, a little uneasily; she looked sadder than he liked to see her.

"The choice is for you to make," said he. "Let us go and inspect them."

But she remained by the open grate, and let him go alone.

"It is hard to choose," he said, when he returned, "but, on the whole, I think the further one is a little the best, and I suggest that you take that."

He was so honest, so sincere, that her confidence made a great leap.

"I don't see why I should have the best," she answered, looking hard at the fire. "It seems to me that it is you, Mr. Gray ——"

"Not Mr. Gray, but Gilbert," he interpolated.

"It seems to me" (she avoided any name at all) "that *you* ought to have the best. I owe so much to you. I hope you think me grateful ——"

He broke in upon her again.

"I cannot hear another word like that," he said, "now or at any time. Come, it is late. Good-night."

She bit her lip at the reproof, gathered up the wraps that lay about the room and turned to leave.

At the threshold she faced about, with her hand extended.

"Good-night, Mr.—I mean, Gilbert," she said, with a supreme effort.

"Good-night, Gladys," he answered, taking the hand and releasing it at once. "Sleep well, and as late as you like. Remember, we do not take the train till evening."

The door closed behind her, and for an instant Gilbert Gray's head fell into the palms of his hands, while a stifled groan issued from his lips. Then he roused himself and took a few steps up and down the room.

"If I had known how hard this would be, I never could have agreed to it," he muttered. "But one gets used to everything in time. Mrs. Gray—'Mrs. Gray,' ha, ha!—my wife—Gladys—what can it be but a nightmare from which I shall pass to a quieter sleep as I get used to my surroundings? The days will probably come when I am accustomed to her presence, and she has ceased to be annoyed at mine. And the price I bargained for will be paid with promptness, so much money in exchange for a name! I have a part of it here, in my pocket, honestly delivered by her father. He will fulfill his contracts and I must fulfill mine."

He stretched his arms above his head and closed his eyes with a prolonged sigh.

"I must not fail in one jot or tittle, no, not in one. She is my wife, and has been for more than a hundred days—I am prepared to swear it on all the Bibles in Christendom. Her child—when it is born—is my legitimate offspring. Her child ——"

The stretched arms fell slowly to the speaker's side, as another thought came. A thought that made his brain to whirl and his teeth to chatter, that pointed its bony finger at him and hissed defiance from its gumless teeth :

"The real father of that child is doubtless living, and you may yet find him standing across your path!"

CHAPTER XV.

LIFE ON THE RIVIERA.

THERE is almost nothing to which the human mind cannot grow accustomed. The wretch sentenced to twenty years in prison finds the first month harder than any six that follow it. Gladys Gray gradually became used to the presence of her husband, which at first gave her such vivid alarm. The thoughtfulness with which he treated her contributed much to this result. She grew to regard him without apprehension, to consider his proximity no menace to that tranquillity of mind she had so much need of regaining. He inflicted his company on her just as much as was expedient for the rôle he had to play, and never any more than that. To the world he presented the spectacle of a young and loving husband. When the curtains had shut out the eyes of mankind he was only the respectful friend, the obliging and unobtrusive attendant.

Gilbert, also, began to find his new position easier as time passed on. But for the spectre that had been raised—a possible appearance of the father of *his* child—he might have settled into a dull sort of contentment with his lot. That spectre, like others of its ilk, came and went, appearing sometimes in a guise that drove sleep from his eyelids, and then vanishing for days. When the ghost haunted him most severely he would vow to make inquiries at one of the sources from which information might be obtained, and learn something of the man who was responsible for the lapse in virtue of this lovely and till then innocent creature. He wanted to learn whether this fellow might not return to annoy the woman he had so greatly wronged; whether he really knew the extent of the harm he had done her; whether his low mind might not lead him, in the latter case, to attempt to gain some advantage through the fears he could excite.

Mr. Gray felt that he ought to know these things, in order to make preparation should any annoyance be inflicted upon his wife. He had heard of the extent to which blackmail has sometimes been carried. When he tried to think, however, of the best way to gain this knowledge, he was compelled to admit that his task was a difficult one.

He had expressly said to Mr. Yates, when in London, that he wanted no conversation with him in reference to that terrible page in his wife's history; that he wished it closed forever, and forgotten. To write for the information he desired, after this avowal, was likely to be attended with a corresponding reply, besides involving a sacrifice of personal

dignity from which he shrank. Besides, it would be suicidal to put on paper the questions he wished answered, which might fall by some mischance into other hands than those for which they were intended, and lead to infinite mischief.

When Colonel Newcombe came he might be asked, but there was no certainty that he would be willing to answer. At best the inquiry would arouse the most painful feelings in the breast of that old man, already broken in spirit and struggling to outlive the crushing blow he had received.

Nothing else was left but to appeal to Gladys directly, and of all the means proposed this seemed the most contemptible and cruel.

So the months passed, and the spectre that had been raised grew less and less impressive in his bearing. Colonel Newcombe and his wife were now at Cannes. Mrs. Newcombe had been made aware of her daughter's condition, and it was quite pathetic to note the joy with which she received the information. She congratulated Gladys upon the coming event, and dilated at great length upon the circumstances connected with the unique occasion when she herself had passed through a similar experience. She reproached her husband because he did not exhibit as much delight as she thought he ought, and beamed rapturously on Gilbert as she revealed to him the fact that she was possessed of the great secret.

"Nothing so unites a married pair as the presence of a child," she insisted. "Gladys is still very young, but she is in good health and nothing is to be apprehended. You must be a very happy man, Mr.

Gray. I am sure it is no sin to say you ought to be envied."

The expected event was a sufficient excuse to Gladys to decline the invitations to various society functions gotten up by the English, American and other residents, that poured in later in the season. It did not, however, prevent every woman she knew from calling upon her, more frequently than they would otherwise have done, and bringing, with suitable and often very lame apologies, all the friends of the same sex they chose.

Each of these women who had the pleasure of being presented to Mr. Gray pronounced him "too sweet to live," and went away convinced that a happier man did not exist on the continent. He was just dignified enough, they all declared, and so delightfully reserved in the presence of his wife and her friends. They were willing to forgive him for having a fortune smaller than that of his bride, which rumor had taken pains to announce, though the full extent of his poverty was never known. For a man like that, several of the wealthiest heiresses boldly averred, they would resign their single blessedness without hesitation.

In short, removed almost wholly from society, for the reasons stated, Mr. and Mrs. Gray were among the best liked residents of the Riviera, during the winter they remained there, and received countless smiles when they took their daily drive along the fashionable promenade.

To Gilbert's suggestions, made on various occasions to Colonel Newcombe, that he wanted something for his idle hands to do, the reply was always

the same—he must wait till another summer. At present he must not leave his wife. When the—the right time—came, they would all set sail for the United States, and if the young man wished to put his brain to work an opportunity would be furnished him in the exciting grain market of Chicago. The Colonel was in constant communication with London, by wire, and was arranging to take part, so Gilbert understood, in various deals that were under way. So long as his daughter was in her present state he would not leave Europe, although he had previously expected to take a run over to America for a couple of months.

In spite of the terrible suffering he had undergone, the father was still passionately devoted to Gladys, perhaps even more so than before. She was his only child. Beside her he had nothing but the delicate wife, who was fading slowly away before his eyes. He had consented to the scheme of hiding Gladys' fault by this marriage, and there was no business that could weigh in his mind with the importance of making that marriage a success.

The conduct of the young couple was so circumspect when others were present that even the father had no suspicion of the manner in which they avoided each other in private. He supposed that the youth of one and the beauty of the other had met their natural affinity, in spite of the disagreeable past. They strolled together up and down the verandas of the hotel and in the paths adjacent; they talked as freely at table as the circumstances would lead one to expect. They were a great deal alone in the special suite they occupied. How was the father to

know that Gilbert buried himself in his books and Gladys in her fancy work, without a single word passing between them for hours.

Like others who met them, Colonel Newcombe grew more and more impressed with his son-in-law. He would not have believed, until he had seen it, that such a thorough gentleman would accept that questionable place and fill it in such a perfect manner.

Gladys had never returned to the full gayety of her girlhood days, and her father had no reason to expect that she would. It must be a long time before she could outlive the memory of what she had passed through. Besides she was now a wife, and would soon be a mother. The change in her manner was not more than he felt the facts should lead him to anticipate.

The life of the Grays was singularly regular. One day was very nearly like another. Gilbert rose earliest and generally took a short walk before breakfast.

On returning he found Gladys in their mutual sitting-room, and ordered the coffee and rolls to be sent up. Across the table a few words were exchanged, referring to the weather, to something in the newspaper, or to slight matters connected with the life at Cannes. After the first week they were surprisingly at their ease during these repasts.

While no demonstration of affection was thought of by either, there was nothing like coldness. Friends who did not mean to get too intimate, this they were and no more. They kept out of each other's way, and yet took good care that they should not seem to do so. During the morning they met Mrs. New-

combe and the Colonel, for an hour or so, oftenest in the rooms occupied by the latter, on account of the invalid character of the mother. Here Gladys and Mrs. Newcombe talked about the thousand little things that interest women, while her father and Gilbert discussed such events as concern the business and political world.

The noon repast, as well as the dinner, was usually taken in common, also in the Colonel's apartments, on account of the state of his wife's health. In the afternoon the men went, frequently together, to the Casino, sometimes for a walk in the town. At five o'clock Gilbert took his wife regularly to drive, occasionally with her parents as companions, but usually alone. At a seasonable hour the Grays separated for the night, without effusion, with a simple word indicating that one or the other was about to retire. The suite they occupied had but one entrance, and not even the servants suspected how thoroughly their lives were lived apart.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE FAMILY SECRET.

THE only break in the regularity of the winter came with a visit of Mr. Yates, who took a brief vacation from the arduous duties of his profession, and made it the occasion for transacting a little business with Colonel Newcombe, as well as renewing his

acquaintance with Mr. Gray. The solicitor was entirely unannounced, as far as Gilbert knew, though it appeared afterwards that the Colonel had been expecting him for some time. His presence did not bring much pleasure to the younger man, who, however, endeavored to treat him with due politeness, and succeeded fairly well. It was distressing to sit at dinner, as he was several times compelled to do, with an outsider who could probe the depth of his degradation and accuse him in his thoughts of what he would not for untold wealth have had revealed. Colonel Newcombe seemed to have something of the kind in his own mind, also, and acted in a constrained manner during the repast.

It seemed to be the unintentional mission of Mr. Yates to remind them both, as well as the young lady herself, that he had invented and carried out the plan under which everything was working so harmoniously, and that they ought to be thankful to him for it. Naturally they did not like this, and the time when the solicitor must return to London was looked forward to without regret by both.

On the last day that Yates dined with them, Mrs. Gray was indisposed, and he expressed his regret in such warm terms that her husband felt a kind of personal affront. The remarks were met in perfect silence by the gentlemen, and it was left to Mrs. Newcombe to reply, in her innocent, courteous manner.

"I am going to-morrow morning, on an early train," said Mr. Yates to Gray, when he happened to meet him alone, later in the evening. "I have business at Avignon, and shall not see you again. So good-bye."

He put out his hand, and as he knew no reason under the skies why he should not accept it, Mr. Gray did so, coolly and silently.

The solicitor seemed surprised at such a leave-taking, and lingered, instead of ascending the stairs to his room, as he had made a movement to do.

"You're all very comfortable, I see," he remarked, with a motion of his head toward the other side of the hotel. "Everything as cosy as a cat in a rug, eh? Never been sorry, have you? Well, I told you you wouldn't. You ought to feel nicely toward me, for putting you into such a pleasant position."

These expressions grated fearfully on the sensibilities of the man to whom they were addressed, and he grew white about the lips.

"You seem to have forgotten what I once said to you," he answered. "There are things about which I never talk, and of which I try not even to think! Your part in them was ended long ago. I ask you once more never to allude to them in my presence."

Mr. Yates shrugged his shoulders, and drummed aggravatingly on the railing of the stairs by which he stood.

"There must be things you would like to know," he answered, with a spice of revenge in his tone. "There are questions which must enter your head that no one else you would wish to inquire of could answer."

It was the Spectre again! The familiar ghost of the only doubt that troubled the husband's mind. In the presence of this Horror he was silent.

"You have taken a dislike to me for some reason, I can't guess what," said Mr. Yates. "The only

explanation is the tendency of the human mind to hate those who show us the greatest kindness. You remember I alluded to that when your friend Neiling—he called himself Neiling, I believe—abused you after you had saved him from beggary. By-the-way, I saw him in London a few weeks ago, and he is thinking of coming this way soon.”

Mr. Gray clenched his hands and bit his nether lip. This man was getting a sweet revenge for the sharp words addressed to him once.

“You misapprehend, you misconstrue what I said,” replied Gray, stumbling in his words. “It is not a hatred for any special person, but an absolute necessity that dictates my course. I have done all I agreed to do. If permanent good is to follow, everything that has passed must be buried a thousand fathoms beneath the surface, never to be resurrected. Your allusions to them sting me like fire.”

The solicitor played with the seals of his watch-chain, and regarded the other with a furtive expression.

“And before the door of that Past is closed,” he asked, “is there nothing—are you sure there is nothing upon which you have a curiosity to gaze?”

It was a trying moment. The young husband was torn between anxiety to know the father of his wife’s unborn child, and his intense dislike to accept a favor from this man. He vacillated for several seconds, showing in every lineament the torture he was feeling.

“Tell me only this,” he said, at last. “Is there any likelihood that the person about whom I *might* inquire will ever attempt to trouble me—or her?”

Mr. Yates smiled at the inquiry.

"Only the gods can foresee the future," he said. "Let us certainly hope not. If he ever does, however, call on me to deal with him. Perhaps you would rather suffer his annoyances, though," he added, in a faint vein of irony.

The alternative was getting too strong for Mr. Gray.

"I think we will call the Door closed," he said, gravely, and with a firmer tone. "I have taken certain risks, and while I hope for the best I will not shrink from my fate. If I need you," he added, as a sort of sop at the end, "I can write."

The solicitor shook his head slowly, but Mr. Gray said good-bye to him and walked toward his own apartments. His wife had not arisen from the bed to which she had gone early in the afternoon, under the plea of a severe headache, and he paused at her door before going to his bedroom to ask in a low voice if there was anything he could do for her.

"Open the door a little," was the strange reply that greeted his ears.

He opened it, two or three inches, with a guilty feeling, as if it were the room of some woman toward whom he meditated a wrong.

"What time is it?" asked Gladys.

"Ten o'clock."

"Where have you been?"

She had never shown the least inquisitiveness before as to his movements, or the hours he kept, and he had stayed out much later.

"Only into the reading room. And just now I

have been talking a little with Mr. Yates, who is going in the morning."

"Open the door further so I can see you," said Gladys.

Conquering an inclination to fly the place, and still with a feeling resembling an amateur burglar's on his first housebreaking expedition, Gilbert Gray slowly pushed back the door. He saw his wife lying in her bed, her head enveloped in a white bandage, and sunken in the depths of the pillows. One of her arms, encased in a night dress, or what he took to be one, lay outside the white coverlet.

"Come in," she said, softly.

"I—I am going to bed," he answered, looking about the room from sheer curiosity. He saw the clothes she had worn, heaped in pretty disarrangement on the sofa and the chairs. A pair of white slippers lay by the side of the couch. The dainty things that women love to surround themselves with were to be discerned on every hand.

"I hope your headache is better," he added, after a moment.

"It is much better. Gilbert," he started at the word, uttered by that woman in dishabille, "are you angry with me for anything?"

"By no means," he replied. "Why should I be angry with you?"

She put the hand that lay outside the cover to her lips and bit nervously at her nails.

"Nothing," she said, gulping down a sob. "Nothing particular, only you look troubled. I'm sure (sob) I mean to be very good to you, and some time (another sob) I mean to be much better than I have

ever been. Just now, you know, I am not well (sob); and—and you'll forgive me if I act a little (sob) distant, won't you?"

He could not help feeling that the accusations she heaped upon herself were more applicable to him, but he wished of all things to avoid a debate. He answered hurriedly that she was nervous, and that she had best let him ring for her maid, who had a room in another part of the hotel. She replied that she did not want any one, and that she was recovering as rapidly as could be expected, and would be quite well the next morning. At which he congratulated her, and disappeared before she could find an excuse to prolong the conversation.

Within a day or two he began talking of leaving Cannes and going to Vienna. As he had no particular reason to give, Gladys demurred at first, for she did not wish to be separated any sooner than was necessary from her mother, and feared Mrs. Newcombe would be disinclined to travel. But when Gilbert recurred to the subject the second time she made no more objection. Luckily Mrs. Newcombe had also grown tired of Cannes, and was much pleased at the prospect of a change. Early in April, therefore, the Newcombes and the Grays were comfortably domiciled at one of the best Viennese hotels, and Gilbert breathed easier.

If William Neiling was coming to the Riviera it would be a blessing not to meet him; and Vienna was not a place at which Mr. Yates, solicitor, of London, was likely to be called by any of the exigencies of his profession.

CHAPTER XVII.

ARRIVAL OF THE BABY.

As the time grew nearer when Mrs. Gray was to become a mother her husband found his position growing more and more peculiar. Mrs. Newcombe never tired of talking to him of the impending event, endeavoring to impress upon him the immense gratitude due from a man to a woman who tenders him such "proofs of her affection." The gentle hints as to the duties of a coming father nearly drove him wild. He could only respond as politely as possible, and make his escape at the earliest opportunity. As for the Colonel, he behaved extremely well. Though full of anxiety he forebore to question or to advise. He showed his regard for Gilbert in a thousand agreeable ways, and strengthened the resolutions of his son-in-law to fulfill the obligation he had assumed at whatever sacrifice.

A month in Vienna was followed by a fortnight in Dresden, and then a proposition to go to Sweden for the accouchement was carried out. Two of the ablest physicians in Stockholm, with a retinue of nurses, were engaged by Mr. Gray, after a consultation with Gladys, and the date of the expected event communicated to them as nearly as might be. The husband was kindness itself, and the only times when he had to speak with an air of authority was when Gladys tried to thank or to compliment him. There

must be nothing of that sort, he said ; nothing whatever !

When they finally brought him a tiny morsel of humanity, swathed in flannels, Gilbert Gray's feelings were so intense that he had no need to simulate agitation. It was the first time he had ever been brought into contact with that great miracle, compared to which the changing of water to wine, and even the raising of the dead, sink into insignificance. He knew that the breath of God had been blown into these tender nostrils, unmindful of the fact that man's sin aided in working the wonder. They told him that the mother was "doing well," and that he could see her in a few hours ; but he kept out of the sick room till the third day, a proceeding which won him golden opinions from the blonde-haired nurses, who thought him a model of consideration.

When he did go in, and was left alone a few minutes with his wife, he could not speak. He was frightened to see her so pale, and there was something in the atmosphere of the room that stifled him.

Gladys, much the calmer of the twain at first, surveyed his face with deep interest. Like all young mothers, she felt herself a superior creature for what she had passed through ; and yet so much depended on the attitude of this man's mind !

"You do not say anything !" she remarked, wistfully.

"What can I say ?" he answered.

"You surely are glad I am doing nicely."

"Oh, yes !"

She closed her eyes with a gesture of despair.

"Ah!" she cried. "You are going to hate me forever!"

"No, no! I am only stunned a little, overwhelmed. I do not hate you, Gladys, and I never have."

She caught one of his hand and, in spite of him, covered it with kisses.

"And my little girl—you do not hate her, either?"

"I love your little girl already," he said, gravely.

A delighted expression came over her countenance.

"Then—perhaps—the time will come when you will even learn to like—*me*."

He took the hand from her gently, though she struggled to retain it, and told her she ought not to say such things—that she knew she ought not. He liked her very much. Nothing she had done—since her marriage—had lessened the regard he had for her. She must not continue to fill her head with wild imaginations.

"But that baby girl of mine—that child that is not yours—she will always stand between us," she answered, with a groan.

"Hush!" he replied, glancing fearfully around the room. "You shall not rave in this manner. *That child is mine!* Do you understand? I am its father as surely as you are its mother. Let any one say otherwise who dares!"

She tried to take his hand again, and would, had she possessed the strength, have crawled to his feet.

"There never was another man like you," she murmured, "never one so noble, so pure, so true! I have not been worthy of you, but I will make myself so. If you can forget, if you——"

But he stopped her with a gleam in his eyes that she

did not like to see, saying that she periled everything by those wild words, and that he would listen to no more of them. The interview had lasted as long as was consistent with the physician's advice. He was now going. If he heard that she talked nonsense to the attendants he would ascribe it to a wandering brain, the result of her illness. And he vanished from the room without permitting her to reply.

Mrs. Newcombe had been fostering an idea which was submitted to him on the following day. It was that he should get a number of tiny cards, to be placed in envelopes of the corresponding size, stating the fact of the birth of a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Gray, these cards to be mailed to several hundred of his and Gladys' friends on both continents. It was a custom she had found to prevail in some parts of Italy and she thought it very charming.

Gilbert gave his consent to the plan immediately, and the cards were duly mailed, he personally writing most of the addresses. He had begun to be ravenously anxious to establish his proprietorship in that pretty child, whose father he must appear. The congratulations that came back were nearly as numerous as the cards. Gladys was able to listen to most of them, in the presence of her mother and husband, to the infinite pleasure of the elder lady, who plumed herself immensely on having originated the notion of communicating the great event to her circle of friends in this manner.

"Mrs. Gray was able to do one thing on these occasions that gave her much satisfaction. As it was necessary to simulate a closeness of connection be-

tween herself and Gilbert in the presence of Mrs. Newcombe, she could take one of his hands and fondle it without danger that he would force it away from her. And when he left the room there was no escape from lightly touching his wife's forehead with his lips, an act that gave her the most exquisite bliss. It mattered not that she knew these things were actuated solely by the need of impressing her mother. Gladys received them eagerly, as a symbol of what she hoped might follow in due time, when she was restored to health and strength and the further lapse of weeks and days had done their work.

For the young wife, who had been growing fonder and fonder of her husband, had fallen violently in love with him while she lay on this bed of illness. She pictured to herself a wonderful hour when this paragon of men should feel a responsive sentiment in his own bosom. Time, time, would bring it about! He loved the baby, why should he not, at some distant day, love her also? She would wait for it to come, patiently. And when it arrived, the black shadow that had settled over her youth would fly away before the glorious morning of that new elysium!

This hope, that gave her something to live for, as well as the happiness that she felt in the ownership of her child—the delight with which Heaven compensates women for the pain they undergo—began to make Gladys a new creature. Her father's brow lightened as he saw his beloved one so much like what she used to be in the old days. She was no less beautiful in her young motherhood than in her artless innocence as a school girl. The plan he had con-

sented with so much trepidation to try, had worked wonders.

He began to talk of the entire party going to America in the autumn, and there was no objection on any side. Gilbert wanted to go, because he had tired of dependence and idleness ; Gladys wanted to go because her husband did. Mrs. Newcombe, who faded perceptibly, said she would like to see her Western home, and the Colonel had a dozen irons in the fire that needed his attention there.

As it was thought best for Mrs. Newcombe, as well as for the baby, to travel by easy stages, the party went to Amsterdam for a week or two, in September, on their way to England. It would be pleasant, Mrs. Newcombe said, for the Grays to revisit the city where they had been made one—naughty, sly young people that they were ! Gladys flushed crimson, for she had associations with Amsterdam that were less agreeable to remember, and Gilbert bit his lips, but the failing eyes of the elder lady noted nothing of this. She continued to chaff them in her indulgent, motherly way, until she was tired.

If there had been any valid excuse for avoiding Amsterdam, Gilbert would have availed himself of it, but as there was none he consented to the plan. But something occurred during his stay in the Dutch capital that made him wish he had gone to England by the way of the Cape of Good Hope rather than through Holland. In one of his rides with Gladys through the city, he saw the disagreeable face of William Neiling staring at them from the sidewalk.

Of course he pretended not to see Neiling ; and of course he knew very well that Neiling knew he did

see him, and purposely avoided him. From the one glance he had taken it struck Gray that his old acquaintance was not in the best of luck. He had that indefinable air of tightness in the purse that develops itself so rapidly on some persons. The spick and span look so becoming to the rider at Hyde Park was conspicuously absent. He had even less of prosperity in his appearance than when found asleep at the foot of St. Mark's column in Venice. Gilbert reflected that the contrast between him and the well-dressed gentleman in the carriage must be extremely galling, and he hoped their meeting would not occur again.

In this desire, however, Gray was bound to be disappointed. The face of Neiling haunted him wherever he went. He could not walk or drive without seeing that unwelcome countenance. Hardly could he glance across the street from the window of his room without beholding the figure he detested, on the opposite side. Once when he happened to be gazing from his closed shutters his wife came up behind him. As her eyes followed his, she uttered a little scream, and her husband, who turned suddenly upon her, saw that she was pale.

"What is the matter?" he asked, assisting her to a chair. "What has happened? It is that man across the street!" he added, his face clouding. "You have seen him before?"

She nodded a great many times before she could command her tongue. It would not do to trifle with Gilbert in his present mood.

"I saw him—in London," she stammered. "The

week before I met you. He was one of those—you understand—one of his—of Mr. Yates' people."

"But why does the sight of him frighten you?" he demanded. "Yates never showed you to *him*, of course!"

"No," she said, catching her breath. "But he recalls that awful time—that time I try to forget. And I thought—by the attitude you assumed—you must know."

It was plain enough, and the young man regretted his harsh manner. With a few direct words he related the particulars of his meetings with Neiling, and his reasons for disliking him. He also suggested that the presence of the fellow made a very good excuse for cutting their stay in Amsterdam short, and going to England on the following day; to all of which Gladys agreed, striving to calm herself as best she might.

It was the first time Gilbert had actually spoken in angry tones to her. But, on the other hand, it was something to think he had been jealous, if only for a moment, for jealousy argues affection. If he entertained the green-eyed monster on her account, he must care more for her than he was willing to admit. This was why Gladys went to her own room as quickly as she might, and cried and laughed there all by herself for the next two hours.

Mr. Gray was not to leave the city, however, without another disagreeable experience. After dinner that evening, the following letter was put into his hand:

"MY DEAR GRAY:—You may think it little short of impertinence for me to apply to you for another loan, remem-

bering that the first is still unpaid; but the fact is I am absolutely broke, and know no one so able as you to help me out of the mire.

"In this city of Amsterdam, where I understand you had the supreme felicity of marrying the charming lady with whom I have seen you driving, you should be able to forget small hatreds and act a noble, generous part to a fellow mortal in distress.

"I only want five hundred guilders—and I could possibly get along with four hundred. If you will send the amount by bearer it will be a great accommodation. If not I will see you at the railway when you depart—having no business to fetter my hands—and you can give it to me there.

"Yours ever,

"W. N."

"N. B. That affair with the horse in Hyde Park was pure accident. He was an unmanageable beast, and I sold him the next day."

If this letter had been a blackmailing one, pure and simple, Gilbert Gray would have thrown it in the waste paper basket and bade defiance to its author. There was just enough doubt on that point to make him give it a second, and then a third reading. Perhaps Neiling questioned that the marriage in Amsterdam was a genuine one, but there was nothing in his note that indicated this. The city had been mentioned in all the published notices of the wedding. The offer to come to the station in case it was more convenient to give him the money there had a sinister look, but it was too carefully veiled to be called a threat.

Supposing the money was refused, and Neiling came to the station, what could he do there? He

could only ask for it again. Whatever he suspected, he could give no new information to Mrs. Gray or to Colonel Newcombe. Yet there was Mrs. Newcombe—a disagreeable word might reach her ears and cause her annoyance. It was best to send the money, and settle the fellow. In a few weeks they would all be in the United States, and beyond his power to bother them.

Four hundred guilders—Gilbert thought it better to send the smaller sum—was therefore enclosed in an envelope and handed to the messenger. And the sender congratulated himself that he had disposed of the matter so cheaply.

The arrival in England was made without special event, and the hotel servants welcomed effusively the mother and child who had come in place of the young girl they had parted with less than a year ago. Everything seemed going finely when Mrs. Newcombe developed an alarming phase of her illness that compelled all thoughts of taking her on a journey to be abandoned.

Nothing could well have happened worse. Colonel Newcombe passed his hours between the bedside of his wife and his desk, where telegrams were sent and received without number. Although his family was still first in his thoughts, he had felt so sure of the date at which he would arrive in Chicago that he had launched into some business deals of magnitude that required his presence on the ground. As time passed, he confided the entire details of his sales and purchases to Gray, saying that if Mrs. Newcombe got no better it might be necessary for the young man to start for America without him, and

attend to some of the more pressing matters in his stead. Gilbert showed the greatest adaptability, and surprised the Colonel by the readiness with which he comprehended what was told him.

Mr. Yates called frequently, but beyond exchanging the compliments of the season had no conversation with Gray. The liking between them had not increased, but they seemed to find it best to let each other completely alone, since there was no cause for quarrel.

“At last an exigency came, late in November, when it was decided that Gray must depart for America. The very earliest boat in which a berth could be had was selected, giving him but a few hours to prepare for the trip. He was intrusted with the most important orders, on which hundreds of thousands of dollars depended. For once in his life he had been thought worthy of something above a clerkship. He went to his apartments and communicated the information to his wife, remarking that she would next see him, probably, on the other side of the ocean.

To his intense surprise, Gladys rose from her chair, pressed her hand to her side, tottered toward him, and fell in a swoon on the carpet.

He rang for her maid, who assisted him to lift Mrs. Gray upon the bed in her room, and for the next quarter hour they busied themselves to restore her. It must have been the suddenness of the announcement, he thought ; and since the birth of her baby she had been subject to palpitations.

That it was her grief at the idea of being separated from him never entered his mind.

As soon as she had sufficiently recovered Gilbert left her and went to pack his trunks for the voyage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“IT IS MY HUSBAND’S ROOM.”

WHEN Mr. Gray came home that evening, after attending to various matters connected with his impending journey, he went immediately to his own chamber, and began to write some letters. In passing through the little salon which formed the neutral ground of the apartment, he noticed that his wife was not there, and he had no doubt she had retired for the night on account of the indisposition manifested earlier in the day.

His mind was so filled with the importance of the errand on which he was about to embark that it had no room in it for anything else. The affairs of Colonel Newcombe on the Board in Chicago were in a perilous state. With immense interests that required a careful hand on the spot, the Colonel was held in London by the condition of his wife, and the telegraph proved a poor substitute for his personal presence. His son-in-law had been given a power of attorney to act in all respects as his agent, and the speed of the fastest ocean vessel was like the pace of a snail to both of them.

Until Gilbert should arrive in Chicago the Colonel

must continue to direct his campaign by wire, and while nearly every moment was passed at his wife's bedside—even his naps being taken in her room—the strain was sure to be tremendous on his already sapped vitality.

After his letters were written, and a few other things attended to, the young man sat silent for a long time, reviewing the past and speculating upon the future. If he proved his ability in this business the days of idleness would come to an end, and the active life for which his spirit craved would take its place. He had eaten the bread of mendicancy till his soul revolted against it. To be of use to the man who had treated him so nobly, to feel the pleasure of handling money he had actually earned—that would be glorious indeed! The emergency that called for his efforts was a painful one, but it meant freedom, the ability to walk erect, the right to look men in the face—all this, if he succeeded.

And he would succeed! If there was such a thing possible he would demonstrate his value to those who trusted him.

The door between his chamber and the private salon was not entirely closed, and Gray became aware after awhile that some one was moving about in the latter room. A long mirror on the opposite side reflected the form of the person, and he soon saw that it was a woman, clad only in the loose robes of night, walking up and down like one who finds no rest.

The reflection flashed upon him for a moment and then was lost again, over and over, as the walker passed in front of the glass. He knew it must be

Gladys, though she looked so strange in that costume that he hardly recognized her. And as he gazed, trying to catch a sufficient glimpse of her face to guess the meaning of this tireless walk, she stopped directly in front of the mirror and inspected herself in it.

She had been weeping, and, indeed, was weeping yet, for the large drops flowed one by one down her pale cheeks, touched her round shoulders and disappeared beneath the snowy vesture of her garments. The attitude which she assumed was sorrowful in the extreme. Her long hair, quite unbound, hung far below her waist. Her arms, feet and ankles were bare, and the transparent silk of her nightdress revealed completely the outlines of her handsome figure as she stood between the light and the reflector. She was beautiful beyond compare, and sad enough to stir the sympathy of a stone.

Gilbert Gray had never seen his wife in dishabille before, unless we except that evening when she lay in her bed, covered with blankets. The sight of that half-draped loveliness made him tremble. He did not want to look, and he had no power to turn away his eyes. What limbs she had ! What magnificence of bust, what perfection of contour !

As he watched, she stretched her arms above her head, shivering as if a wave from the icy North had blown upon her soft, pink flesh.

And the tears fell still, one after the other, as from a statue of Despair.

If there was any way he could comfort her, it was clearly his duty to do it, though he saw nothing distinctly in regard to the matter. He knew no reason

why she should have these terrible moments of misery. Was it the never-to-be-stilled Conscience, that roused the memories of the past? Was it sorrow for the mother whose days were now numbered? Was it regret for the pain she had given her father, who was bowed under a weight he could scarce bear? Whatever the reason, she must not be allowed to suffer without an attempt on his part to aid her.

"Gladys!" he called, softly. "Gladys!"

The form in front of the mirror shrank together in a listening attitude.

"Did you call?" it asked breathlessly.

"Yes. What are you doing up at this time of night? Have you your gown on? If not, dress and come here where I can talk to you?"

Instantly the round limbs strode across the carpet, and the door of Mr. Gray's bedroom was flung violently open. The pink statue in its robe of transparent silk stepped over his threshold.

"Have I my gown on!" cried Gladys to the astounded man. "Why *should* I have it on, in *your* presence? I am your wife! It is more than eight months since I began living with you. How long am I expected to appear before you in hat and cloak, with boots buttoned and collar pinned? I have a *right* to come into this room in any garb I please, of all rooms in the world! What is the matter with me? Am I not fair enough? Is my flesh too brown, my arms too slender? Am I old, emaciated, malformed, ugly? You never knew till this moment what I *was* like! It is time you saw me as I am, Gilbert Gray!"

Shocked beyond measure, the husband drew him-

self away from her, protesting that she had forgotten herself wholly and must come to her senses.

"I have *not* forgotten myself!" she answered, vehemently, though her lip shook. "It is *you* who forget. You are sowing seed that may ripen into a harvest you may not wish to gather. Look at me. I am not yet twenty, and all the warm blood of health flows in my veins. I am already a mother—to my shame if you wish it so—but a mother I am. Why was I led into that awful path? Was it from love of my child's father? I hated him at the moment I received his caresses. What, then? Why, the uncontrollable impulse to be kissed, to be fondled, to be told that I was beautiful and sweet. Do not interrupt me, I must have this out. It has burned in my heart too long!"

He could not speak for astonishment, and she continued :

"For that sin I suffered. The torments of hell cannot exceed those I passed through. And then I was told that a man had been found so generous, so noble, that he would forgive that error and take me for his wife as if it had never occurred. I had seen his face, and my heart, still virgin in its affections, went out to him. I knew it would require time to make him love me, and I wanted time as much as he. I anticipated a struggle with him, perhaps the need of prayers and exhortations that he would wait for proofs of my love until the first fault had been in some sense remedied. When he began to treat me like a brother, I blessed him in my heart for what I believed his magnanimous consideration, and I loved him more and more. But months have passed, and

what I took to be magnanimity I find was only a subtle cruelty, a refined torture to which he has compelled me to submit, and which I begin to think he means to carry out to the end. I warn you, Gilbert Gray, you are on dangerous ground. I cannot be driven too far !”

So rapidly were these sentences delivered, and with such vehemence of utterance, that the husband hardly understood their full purport. The avalanche had fallen upon him without warning. The most he realized was that this woman, whom he had esteemed for her modest bearing, had thrown decency to the winds and was delivering a tirade of abuse in a costume in which he had never imagined she would allow herself seen. On the other hand it was plain that Gladys would not have done these things unless driven forward by some extraordinary emotion. He had seen her silent weeping in the reflection of the mirror, and was ready to make what allowances he could.

“I am sorry for anything I have done to displease you,” he said, “and when we meet again I will talk it over with you and see wherein we differ. To-night, you must remember, is the last I spend near you for the present, and my head is too full of your father’s errands to think of anything else. So, if you will calm yourself, and go to bed ——”

She interrupted him fiercely.

“Then you intend to drive me away ! See, I am on my knees, begging for your love !” She fell at his feet as she spoke, to his consternation. “I am here, your wife, praying for the kisses, the caresses, that are mine by right. What ! do you repulse me,

when I lower myself like this? Will you not take me in your arms for one moment, will you not press your lips for the first time to mine?"

She had thrown those bare arms around his neck and was trying to drag his face down to hers, in the fury of desperation. It was all he could do to disengage her clasp, and when he succeeded, and rose, much disturbed, to his feet, she fell, a limp heap of loveliness, across his hearthrug.

"Gladys, I am astonished at you!" was all he could articulate.

But she did not answer, lying there in perfect carelessness as to her appearance, and giving vent to a flood of tears that he could for some time do nothing to arrest.

"This has gone on long enough," he said, at last, raising his voice. "If you do not cease I shall send for your father."

She sat up on the rug, and brushed her long hair back from her swollen eyes.

"Send for him," she said. "Send now. Let me tell him what kind of husband he gave me. Let me tell him that in eight months you have never offered me a caress except in the presence of my mother. Ask him if he thinks a girl like me should be contented with a man of ice and snow. He knows what I am, to his sorrow. Ask him if he believes you the man to trust my future with."

She was pretty! Dimpled, rosy, round, sweet and fair. Had she not been his wife he might have been unable to resist her, but her conduct had outraged his feelings of propriety—his sense of what "Mrs. Gray" should be—and he remained firm.

"You put me in an awkward dilemma," he answered. "If I send for your father I shall give pain I would prefer to spare him. On the other hand, it is very certain you cannot remain here all night."

"Why not?" she retorted, defiantly. "It is my husband's room. I have been a true and faithful wife in spite of his coldness and neglect. By what law can he drive me forth? Gilbert!" she cried, changing her defiant tones to pleading ones again. "Help me! There is no one else that can do it. I want love. I must have it—or die."

He strove to think of something that would influence her, and at last the baby entered his mind.

"If you continue to excite yourself," he said, "Marianne will suffer. She drains her life from yours and you will make her ill."

Another gush of tears followed this thrust.

"Ah! The poor darling!" said the mother. "Supposing I should treat her as you treat me! Supposing, when she opens her lips for the bread of life, I poured vinegar into her mouth! And yet she is not more dependent on me for her happiness than I am on you."

He said a few words that he thought would influence her, but they were of no avail.

"If you will go to your room and get your sleep," he added, desperately, "I will promise to see you very early in the morning. My train departs before noon."

She rocked herself to and fro on the carpet, clasping her knees with her arms as she swung.

"You have not said a word about *my* going," she

answered. "One would think you intended to leave me in England."

"That is a very foolish remark," said he, impatiently. "There are a thousand reasons why you cannot go. Your mother, as you must not forget, is very ill. Your father cannot be left alone. Then, if there were no other reason, there is not a vacant berth on the steamer. I happened to find the only one that had been given up, in a cabin with three other men, that was engaged a month ago. It will not be long before I return, or before you come to me. To talk of going with me to-morrow is merely madness."

She rose slowly, and stood, with the same carelessness of pose and dress, leaning heavily against his mantel.

"And to-night, when you have determined to cross the ocean without your wife, when weeks, possibly months, may elapse before you see her again, can you treat me as icily as this?" she said vehemently. "Has it not occurred to you that the day before such a parting should be devoted to fortifying a woman's distracted mind, to strengthening her trembling heart, to awakening every thread of her wifely affection, thus making her intact against temptation, in whatever form it may come. There is not another husband in this city of five million people who has not instinct enough to do the things you neglect. Not a waterman on the Thames, not a costermonger in Lambeth but could teach you the lesson you so much need to learn."

He began dimly to suspect what she meant him to understand.

“You are a mistress of invective,” said he, “and into that field I do not propose to follow you. As to the temptations at which you darkly hint, I do not believe you care to risk wrecking your life—again. Let me tell you in all kindness, Gladys, that you have adopted the worst possible method of winning my esteem. But if you insist on having these things discussed, listen to me a moment. Since I have lived under the same roof with you I have steadily learned to like you. That liking might in time have developed into love—and I do not say it may not yet do so—but such demonstrations as this postpone that hour to a distant future. Love cannot be taken by storm. You cannot walk into a man’s room in a state bordering on nudity and expect him to see in you the woman he wants for the mother of his children. What you have done to-night has made the closer union between us a matter for a far-off day. You asked me awhile ago if you were ugly, old, or misshapen. With all my heart I tell you that I never dreamed such beauty as yours dwelt outside of marble. If I had taken no vows and such a form had come to me I fear resistance would have fled to the winds. But marriage is either holy or it is blasphemous. I have contracted to live true to you—to keep myself from all others—and I want to find you mentally as well as physically perfect when I take you to my heart.”

A smile of derision sat upon the lips of the young woman as she listened.

“If things like this ‘must be discussed,’” she replied, mockingly, “let me suggest that you have recently adopted a very exalted plane. How long is

it since you sold your vows, as you call them, to the highest bidder, coupled even with a suspicion of perjury? My father bought you for me—with money. You have no more right, in honor, to evade the ordinary terms of your contract than you have to proclaim them up and down the public street. But," she added, wearily, "I am tired of argument. I have debased myself more to-night than I did when I gave my lips to my seducer. You have determined to humble me, and you are master of your own actions. All I ask is that you do not speak to me again except in the presence of others. Some day the knowledge of what you have done may come to haunt you. If it does, remember it was not without warning!"

As she turned from him and started for her own room, a wave of regret rolled across Gilbert Gray's brain. While she disputed with him and criticised his conduct he could be as argumentative as she. But now that she was going he wanted to part with her on a better basis. He was not sure but he was partly in the wrong.

"A minute," he called, and she paused at the door. "We have said a great many hateful things to each other, and I don't like to have you leave with their venom rankling. I don't know how it all started, and I'm sorry it happened. One thing led to another, I suppose. We've been very good friends, Gladys, and I don't want to remember any of this when I am on the sea and beyond it."

In some inexplicable way they were in each other's arms. He had forgotten for the instant his horror at her disrobed condition, and she had opened her heart to him directly he gave way a little.

"Hold me—like this—just one minute!" she stammered, overcome with the sudden joy. "*Hold me—like—this!*"

If it was a minute it was a very long one—the longest, perhaps, that old Time has ever had to record. For the morning sun came and found them there, in that room where they had quarreled. The one kiss the wife had craved had not been finished yet.

Thus Love, in spite of all his enemies, forever "finds a way." When we think him conquered and his army put to rout, he pours his legions through the walls and hoists his banner on the citadel. No general yet born could successfully combat him.

And when the victor has demolished the bulwarks that impede his progress, how he levels the embankments, planting flowers and shade trees where the noisy cannon stood; how he brings the little children romping at their games over the fields of strife, wreathing every grave with garlands!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CHICAGO WHEAT PIT.

DURING the week before he reached New York, Gilbert Gray was in a daze. He walked the deck of his steamer mechanically, ate his meals with only the slightest attention to his neighbors at table, and lay awake far into the night, thinking of his parting hours with Gladys. How had the sudden change come to pass? How had their relations altered in the twinkling of an eye, from those of ordinary friendship, mingled with a certain element of distrust, to the warmest and most endearing that can exist between a man and a woman?

He was in a whirl of doubt as to whether he ought to be proud of what had occurred, or very much ashamed. The unusual manner in which his marriage had taken place, the reasons that had naturally made him reserved in his wife's presence, the tacit acceptance on the part of both of them of the situation as it seemed to outline itself, all came back to him.

Then there was the tumultuous rush of blood to his head, the clasping of that warm and yielding figure to his heart, the forgetting of everything!

As he lay in his berth, night after night, he had but one wild, overpowering wish—that Gladys, and not uninteresting masculine passengers, occupied the cabin with him. He wanted *her*—that woman he had rejected so long with a severity he could not now

understand. Whatever she had been, whatever might be between them in the past, he wanted her now.

It was not reason; it was the mad impulse of youth. She was his wife, but that was not it. She might have been any other woman under the sun, and it would have been the same. He—*wanted—her!*

Upon landing he received several telegrams from Colonel Newcombe, and one—from Gladys. The first were of the utmost importance to the business he had crossed the ocean to accomplish. The latter was brief and contained only these words:

“Come back as soon as you can, to the woman you have made the happiest on earth.”

It was only with the greatest effort that he could turn from this message, which he perused a hundred times, and fix his mind on the others. He sent an answer, “Not happier, darling, than you have made me,” and then devoted himself, as well as he could, to the duties before him.

There had been a terrible time on the Board at Chicago. In a week fortunes are made and lost in speculation. The entire amount that Colonel Newcombe had at stake trembled in the balance. Tied to the bedside of his suffering wife he could only depend on this novice. The final telegrams merely told Mr. Gray to “use his judgment,” whatever that might be. He felt, as his mind grew stronger, that he *must* accomplish something to justify the kindness and confidence reposed in him by this man, who had acted toward him like a second—and most indulgent father.

But there are places where the human mind finds itself overpowered by circumstances. The slump that had taken place in the market could only be compared to an Alpine avalanche in its sweeping force. Strong hands were in the deal to lower prices, and the effort had succeeded to a startling degree when Gray arrived at Chicago. Colonel Newcombe's brokers were at their wits' end to keep him from being "called" on the floor of the Exchange.

Gilbert brought little to change the situation. He had authority to borrow money, if necessary, but, at a time when everybody knew the business of everybody else, that was not easy to get for a man who held the wrong side of the lever. A little was obtained in one place and a little in another, but it only eased matters a trifle, and the downward tendency continued to make all efforts seem useless.

When some days had passed and he had exhausted all his funds Gray heard of a new firm of brokers—Godkin & Lancaster—who were taking risks for those ready to pay exceptional figures. In despair of finding what he wanted elsewhere, he decided to pay the interest they were said to demand, if he could get them to loan enough on the security he could give.

He was ushered into an elegantly furnished office, and a boy in buttons took his card to the members of the firm, who were discreetly invisible to that part of the public with whom they had no dealings. In a few moments the boy returned with the statement that Mr. Lancaster would see the gentleman in his private office.

Nothing that had happened in the rush of events astonished Gray so much as to find himself confronted, in that private office, by Mr. William Neiling. He was half inclined to leave the place at once, but Neiling cut him short by asking in the cold, crisp tones of business, what he could do for him.

"I asked to see Mr. Lancaster," Gray managed to reply, with an air of asperity.

"That is my name," said the other, in set tones. "Will you be seated?"

Overcome by this announcement, Gray dropped into the nearest chair. He did not think anything could astound him after that.

"I know what you are going to say," pursued Neiling, or Lancaster, as it may now be better to call him. "You have an impression, from something that passes in your mind, that my name is *not* Lancaster. That impression is erroneous. I am Joseph Lancaster, junior partner in the firm of Godkin & Lancaster, and quite at your service."

Had the business on which he had called been merely his own, Gilbert would have said to Mr. Lancaster that, on reflection, he believed he had no business to transact with him. But he was acting for Colonel Newcombe. He had tried every other concern he could think of, and it was this chance or none. Clearly it would not do to be squeamish. Dismissing the wonder how Neiling could have transformed himself into a lender of money, when he had met him so recently in the guise of a beggar, and also the strangeness of his being at this end of the world, he proceeded to state his errand.

"I wish to borrow fifty thousand dollars for thirty

days," he said, "and I offer as security"—naming the stocks and certificates of deposit.

"Is this loan for yourself, in person?" asked Mr. Lancaster.

"No, it is for Colonel Henry Newcombe."

A peculiar gleam lit up the face of the broker.

"Ah!" he said, musingly. "Colonel Newcombe's note was good for a million three months ago, but I fear it is not the best that might be offered, in these times."

"It is reinforced by the collateral I mentioned," replied Gray, stoutly. "And I am prepared to pay a good rate."

Mr. Lancaster turned to a memorandum book at his side.

"The present margins on all the things you offer," he said, slowly, "hardly exceed the amount you wish to borrow. Aside from them, I think Colonel Newcombe is not possessed of much property."

It was true. The millionaire of a few months ago depended on the tide in the exchange for his pecuniary existence now.

"He has a fine residence on — street," faltered Gilbert.

"Which," answered Lancaster, again consulting his book, "belongs to his wife. Mrs. Newcombe, being very ill in London, is not in a condition to execute a mortgage, even if she desired to do so. The Colonel has an insurance" (again looking at the book) "of forty thousand dollars on his life, upon which something might be raised, but certainly not the sum you ask. He is in fair health, I presume,"

he added, with a coolness that chilled his hearer's blood.

"In short," Gray said, rising, "you do not care to make the loan."

"I don't see the way clear to do so," answered Lancaster. "And I am sorry, too, for we have a great deal of money on hand at present, and would like to place it. You would expect to pay something unusual, of course, ten per cent. a month or so."

The figure was not greater than has often been paid under similar conditions, and Gray, who had turned toward the door, faced the speaker.

"I would pay it," he said, "to get the money ; but if you will not lend, the rate makes little difference."

"You can have forty thousand on your security," was the slow reply, "with the understanding that we are to protect ourselves in case of another fall in the meantime. And—if you wish—ten thousand dollars additional on the life insurance, the latter at a double rate, being an exceptional kind of security. We cannot do better, and you know whether you are able to get as good terms elsewhere."

As the life insurance was not considered in any of the talks or telegrams of Colonel Newcombe, Gray did not feel authorized to pledge it. He therefore told the broker that he would send a wire to London, and report as soon as possible whether he could accept the proposition or not.

"That's all right," said Lancaster. "And now, before you go, allow me to return you the amounts of two small loans you were once so considerate as to make to a friend of mine on the other side of the sea. I believe it came altogether to about two hundred

dollars, which, with interest at five per cent. a year, we may call two hundred and ten. If you will sit down again for a moment I will give you a check."

Nonplussed at this offer, Gray hardly knew what course to take. Even in his nervous condition he had not failed to notice the difference in the rate of interest which Lancaster paid and that which he exacted. On the other hand he wanted to attend to his telegram as soon as possible and had no time to spare for smaller matters. So, instead of reseating himself, he remarked that the loan referred to could be repaid at a later time, and that he should not, in any case, accept interest. Edging toward the door he was on the point of saying good-bye, when the broker spoke again.

"I would rather," he said, pointedly, "that you did not mention to any one, at any time, the name under which you knew my friend who borrowed that money from you. Poor fellow, he is dead and gone now ; and I, his heir, do not care to have the days of his poverty recalled."

To this Mr. Gray responded with a bow, and was glad when he found himself in the street again. He heard the cries of the newsboys, indicating that a change for the better had taken place in the stock market, and his heart beat faster as he hurried to the office he had taken and found the news to be true. The improvement was but slight, but at least it was better than another fall. It put off for the moment the necessity of borrowing money, and gave him time to take breath.

He seized the opportunity to answer a letter he had that morning received from Gladys, full of r

love that seemed to surpass her ability to express. In her new-found bliss she was happy in spite of the clouds that hovered around her house. Her mother was still very low when she wrote, and the doctors gave no hope that there would be any permanent improvement. Her father was silent and haggard, never leaving the loved one's side except to take the briefest snatches of sleep, and to receive and send the necessary telegrams. Of the baby she said nothing, feeling that this subject did not lend itself to the kind of love-letter she was writing.

"And in spite of all the troubles that are about me," she wrote, "am I not wicked to be happy? Although my husband—mine at last in deed as well as name—is four thousand miles away; although I am told that out of this horrible crash we may emerge with half our fortune lost; although sickness and possibly death stands at the door—my heart sings a new tune of joy. For I have been *loved*, and I shall be loved *again!* Oh, when will it be, that blessed time that I am to feel your arms around me, your lips against my own! I can wait, for I am so sure of you now, so confident that nothing can steal away my love or my lover!"

CHAPTER XX.

COLONEL NEWCOMBE RUINED.

AMONG the people that Gray saw at Chicago, was Israel Dibbs, who happened to come to the same hotel in the course of one of his professional visits to that city. The lawyer looked precisely as of yore, and smiled with what affability he could summon as he held out his bony hand.

"I am not going to stand on ceremony," he said, "just because you treated me coolly when I tried to do you a favor. You'll have to come around and deal with me yet, for the five years we were to wait, by that will of Mr. Blair's, is passing away pretty fast. I suppose you won't refuse the property when all of the conditions have been fulfilled?"

Gilbert wished heartily that he could take it at that moment, with a good conscience, for he believed, in his soul, that with his knowledge of the market, and the low figures stocks had reached, he could rescue the whole of his father-in-law's estate had he a hundred thousand dollars to work with. He replied that he hoped he was not so idiotic as to decline to accept his own, and reiterated the reasons he had always given for refusing to touch the Blair funds before the time specified in his friend's testament. As soon as the legal space had elapsed, he assured the lawyer, he would put in his claim.

"In the meantime you are doing everything to discover Mr, Julius Margrave, I hope," he added.

"I am doing all I intend to do," was the civil reply. "I insert an advertisement regularly every three months in a London and a New York newspaper. If he is anywhere on earth that ought to reach him or some one who knows him. My opinion has never changed on the subject. I believe him to have died long ago. That's why I was willing to risk loaning you enough to live on until you could come into possession of what belonged to you. By-the-way, the story goes that this father-in-law of yours is in a pretty tight place over the drop in things. I hope he's provided well for his family. No man has a right to gamble with everything when there's people depending on him."

Feeling that he was one of those "depending on" Colonel Newcombe, Gray reddened at this statement, in which he could not help agreeing. He asked Mr. Dibbs his opinion as to the future of the market, and received the honest reply that he had not the least idea. As for himself, the lawyer said, he had never speculated to the extent of a penny and never would. He believed these gambling operations in breadstuffs and meats were the curse of the country and should be prohibited by law—not meaning, of course, to be personal. From what he had heard, however, he thought things would get another drop before they began to rise much. All of which, as may be imagined, was not very consoling to the anxious listener.

During the month that followed, the market was in a tantalizing state. It rose a few fractions, fell again, rose once more, went down to the old point, and disappointed all the predictions made for it.

When some of the biggest operators had got things fixed to suit them, the newspapers said, it would go one way or the other with a rush.

"If Colonel Henry Newcombe was able to take a hand in person," remarked the *Tribune* in its financial article, "things would become more interesting. A big deal without him on the ground is an anomaly."

At last there came the expected move in the prices of stocks, but to the horror of Gilbert Gray it came in the wrong direction for him. What looked like a landslide began, and one after another of the speculators who had held out gave way before the gigantic forces arrayed on the bear side. He telegraphed to England, and waited for weary hours with no answer. There was nothing left that he could throw into the scale, except the old stocks and the life insurance, and in this matter he had recently been instructed, as in everything else, to "use his judgment." It was a hard position to be placed in. By supporting the Colonel's investments for one day—for one hour, it might be—the fortune he had been all his life accumulating might possibly be saved. On the other hand, every cent thrown into the pit might merely be added to what had gone before it. But the emergency pressed. Gray had to choose, and he chose to make one more attempt to save his father-in-law from ruin.

There was no help for it, he must go to Godkin & Lancaster again. During the month that had passed much might have happened to influence the opinion of the new firm, but it was either there or nowhere.

"Well?" said the broker, when he had been summoned.

He was the personification of business coolness and sagacity.

"I should like that money we spoke about, the fifty thousand dollars."

"And the security?"

"The same as before, with the life insurance added."

Cats always love to play with the mice they intend to eat.

"That talk was a month ago, I think," said Mr. Lancaster, critically.

"Yes," stammered Gray. "But, as the market has been so easy, I could get along without the money till now."

"And when you cannot get along without it, you want us to take the risk for you?"

The other was silent. Was he to be refused, after all?

"Well," said Lancaster, "that is, in a certain sense, our particular line of business. All we ask is that the profits shall compensate for the dangers. Since I talked with you we have had large investments offered to us, and have taken up many of them. The amount we have handy is smaller, naturally, and we must have a larger rate."

A larger rate than one hundred and twenty per cent. a year!

"What rate do you ask?" said Gray. It was as well to come to the point at once.

"Double the one I gave you before. Now, mind, I am not asking you to deal with us. No firm calling itself conservative would lend you a dollar as things are, at any price. We are not conservative

and so far we have got along very well with our mode of doing business." He paused and stood like a man who had no time to waste. "It is for you to say."

"I will take it," replied Gray, promptly. He had heard nothing from London, and did not dare invite delay.

Mr. Lancaster glanced at some telegrams that lay on his desk, and then excused himself for a moment while he went into the next office to consult with his partner.

"Fifty thousand, you think, will be enough?" he asked, returning.

"I understood it was all you would loan."

"Yes, I did say so," was the thoughtful reply, "but Mr. Godkin says we can make it fifty-five, if you wish."

"By all means."

When the papers were drawn and signed, and the money delivered, Gray went upon the street to find that he was none too soon. Another hour's delay would have lowered his margins below the necessary point. He put up twenty-five thousand dollars, and before the day closed had to deposit another sum of the same amount. Still not a word came to him from London. The next morning dawned, and the sun, before it reached the zenith, saw a thousand ruined speculators pale with their losses, before the triumph of the great Pool that had ruined them. The last penny of the money Gray had borrowed went like the first, so much tinder in the flame. The name of Colonel Newcombe was called upon the floor of the building in which it had been for so long a tower of

strength, and the last of the fortune he had made there vanished from sight.

Gilbert felt that he had made all the fight possible, but it was with a very sad heart that he beheld the end of his efforts. He knew that nearly everything the Colonel possessed had perished in that affair. There was still the house he had lived in, and which he had given to his wife in happier days. This would have to be sold to provide even the ordinary necessaries of life to the invalid. As for the son-in-law and the daughter, what could be done with them, one about as useful to society as the other? It was a dreary prospect that presented itself, truly.

It is often said that there is no depth which has not a greater one beneath. A cablegram came that evening that sounded the deeper cavity :

"Mrs. Newcombe died yesterday. Colonel had shock, doubtful if he rallies. Mrs. Gray prostrated. I await directions.

"YATES."

CHAPTER XXI.

"JUST MY LUCK."

It was no new thing in Gilbert Gray's experience to be short of money ; but to find his pockets empty with a helpless family on his hands was much worse than the same circumstance when he had only himself to think of. After the first crushing moments

had spent themselves he began to calculate what it was best to do. In his purse he found a very small sum indeed. The very hotel in which he was staying had a bill against him, or rather against the Colonel, for it was upon his order that the entertainment had been furnished. Not only were there no funds to draw on, but the paper he had given Godkin & Lancaster stood as an indebtedness against the Newcombes.

And this condition of affairs confronted the young man when the telegram informed him that a prostrated wife, a stricken father-in-law and arrangements for a funeral awaited his directions on the other side of the Atlantic ocean !

With little sleep he passed the long night, a prey to the most dismal forebodings. In the morning he bethought himself of the two hundred dollars that Mr. Lancaster owed him, and went to that gentleman's office to get it, as something worth recovering out of the general wreck. He found Lancaster walking up and down, with his hands in his pockets, whistling a merry tune.

"Well, upon my word !" he exclaimed, when he heard Gray's errand. "Are you not a little inconsiderate in the time you select ? As near as I can understand, we are out forty thousand dollars by you already."

"By Colonel Newcombe," corrected Gilbert. "I acted specifically as his agent. The other matter was mine alone."

"I wish you had taken it when it was offered," said Lancaster. "The fact is, we are about as short now as we like to be. That devilish market broke us up

with the rest. We had a fine calculation, but it went awry. If it had succeeded we should have been among the best of them when the accounts were scored. Now we are practically ‘on our uppers,’ as the saying is, cleaned out of enough good cash to disgust a Vanderbilt.”

He smiled as he said this, and began again to whistle the tune he had left off.

“You do not act like a very dispirited man,” said Gray, wonderingly.

“Oh! What’s the use? It’s not the first time I’ve been through trouble, and I’ve got used to taking whatever comes my way. Spilt milk isn’t worth crying for.”

Gray turned toward the door.

“Then you can’t let me have it,” he said.

“Yes, I can; I’m not quite so badly fixed as that. Only it would have been easier when you came before, for then I was riding on the top of the wave, while now I’m nearer the bottom.” He sat down at a desk and wrote out a check. “Here, I’ve added ten dollars for interest. I don’t want to owe you anything.”

His last words were spoken with a tinge of the venom of old times, which Gilbert could not help noting, but before he could remark upon it, Lancaster had branched into another subject.

“What’s the latest news from Colonel Newcombe?”

“He’s had a paralytic shock,” said Gray, soberly.

“Of course I knew that—I wouldn’t have lent money on his life insurance if I hadn’t—but I mean,

what's the prospect? How long should you say he ought to live?"

Gray shrank from the cold-bloodedness of the question. So this man had been informed of that shock to the Colonel hours and hours before *he* knew it, and had loaned the lost money on that account. And at this moment he was figuring on the death that must ensue, with no other thought than to recover as soon as possible the amount he had at stake. There was something uncanny in the fellow, as Gray had long ago had occasion to feel. The less he had to do with him the better. He took up the check that had been made out in his name with an idea that it might crumble to pieces in his fingers.

"I hope Colonel Newcombe will live many, many years yet," he answered, with a firm voice. "Shocks are not always fatal, and I await news of his condition with great hope."

Mr. Lancaster laughed.

"It would be just my devilish luck if he *did* live," said he. "And, by George! I need that fifteen thousand dollars this minute. But I'm in good company. You must be as near strapped as any one. Going back to England, I suppose, as soon as you can get started. Perhaps we shall be passengers on the same boat, for that's exactly what I'm going to do myself."

Gray got out of the office with what grace he could, and went back to his hotel, where he found a line from his wife, to this effect :

"Have arranged for temporary interment; papa no worse; see to everything necessary before you come; I am much stronger.
GLADYS."

It was something. He pictured to himself the scene. The young mother bending over the body of her loved one, broken-hearted with her loss, taking upon herself for the first time responsibilities she knew so little how to sustain. Gladys had risen unexpectedly to the emergency, and would "hold the fort" till he could decide what to do.

Wandering about his hotel, puzzled with his dilemma, Gilbert ran across Israel Dibbs, and was delighted to see that homely face, belonging to one to whom he could at least unveil his troubles. Dibbs listened without a word till Gray had told the outlines of his story, and then began to take up the various threads.

"It amounts to just this, doesn't it?" said he, "The Newcombe millions have shrunk to the house and furniture in this city, and what is left of the life insurance."

Gray ruefully admitted that this was about the situation.

"And what is the Chicago property worth?"

Gray was obliged to say he did not know.

"I'll find out approximately," said Dibbs, rising and crossing the room, to hold a whispered conversation with a man whom he saw there, buried in the columns of the morning paper. "It's worth something like forty thousand dollars, if forced upon the market, fifty if time is allowed," was the verdict which he brought back. "Then you say there is twenty-five thousand dollars margin on the insurance, over and above what is pledged to the broker. Why, my boy, you are not paupers by any means."

The young man tried to see it in that light, but could not entirely agree with the lawyer.

"I don't like to count the insurance on a live man as part of his assets," he said, "and the house where my wife has lived and to which she has always expected to return is an unpleasant thing to part with. I am sure she will think so if the subject has to be broached to her."

"Bah!" said Dibbs. "You don't talk like a business man at all. You never did, for that matter. I offered you enough to live on, long ago ——"

But Gilbert interrupted, and said he did not want to discuss that.

"Very well, let it go. Now, what should I do, if I were in your case? Raise another ten thousand on that life insurance as quick as I could do it. Go to England, settle up things there, bring Mrs. Newcombe's body and what is left of her husband home. Go and live in the house here and watch a good chance to sell it for all it's worth, in case the Colonel continues to live. If he dies take the balance of his insurance money and live economically on it for three years more, until you come into the Blair estate, and then you won't need to think of the future, for there will be enough for all of you."

The programme was too complicated to be accepted as a whole without much consideration, but it was evident that ready money must be had, and the insurance scheme looked the best of any if it could be carried out.

"Do you think I could raise any more on the policies?" asked Gilbert, doubtfully.

“How old is Colonel Newcombe?” was the question of the lawyer.

“Sixty-seven.”

“And he has had a paralytic shock. Can you borrow any more? Why, I’ll lend you ten, myself. And if you wish I’ll pay these brokers off and take the whole. They’re charging you too much, twenty per cent. a month. I’ll take the whole thing for five.”

With this Mr. Dibbs opened the palms of his hands and spread them out in an unconsciously Hebraic way that brought a smile to Gilbert’s face, even in the midst of his distress. He knew no reason, however, why he should not accept this offer, and after a little further talk he closed with it.



CHAPTER XXII.

RETURNING TO LONDON.

WHEN the cash was in Gilbert’s hands he felt for the moment like a new man, and replied to his wife’s telegram, asking her to remain where she was till he could come, and adding a word or two of love, even at the price the cable companies charge for such communications. During the next week he settled all the affairs connected with the Newcombes, visited the residence they had occupied, which he found delightfully situated and elegantly furnished, and

made his way to New York, where he waited a couple of days for the steamer on which he was to sail.

Here he was destined once more to come in contact with Joseph Lancaster, a name by which that disagreeable individual had now become accustomed to be known in his mind. While taking a lunch in a restaurant, and occupied also in reading an English newspaper, Lancaster espied him and crossed the room.

"'Pon my word, a pleasant surprise!" was his first exclamation, and he had need to say no more before Gray discovered that liquor had somewhat thickened his tongue. "Nothing so delightful's meeting a friend, when one's in a strange country."

There were only two things to do—either to have a row with him, and tell him his society was not wanted, or to bear the infliction of his presence a little while. Gray did not want the former, and as he had not finished his lunch, the latter seemed the most advisable course.

"I'm going to England, Saturday," pursued Lancaster, seeming to take his welcome as a matter of course. "On the Umbria. Nice boat. Same I came over on. Funny things have happened since then, eh? 'Pon my word, when I landed in this blessed town, I hadn't a dollar to my name. Only for that fifteen thousand dollars on the old gentleman, that your friend Bibbs, or Dibbs, or whatever his name is, paid in, I'd have had to stay in Chicago or walked here. I was just shutting up the shop. When you're broke you're no broker, ha, ha! I took that fifteen thousand, and in two days ten of it was gone. When the Umbria sails it's two to one I go on

board with nothing but my ticket and three sovereigns for the stewards. What a cuss I am !”

To this remarkable statement Gray contented himself with occasional bows, though the recital, which he had no reason to doubt was a correct one, astonished him immensely.

“It was the damnedest thing, the way that market went !” pursued Lancaster, with only a pause for breath. “The first week after I took hold of it I made money like smoke. I sold everything short, and my profits were enormous. Then, says I to myself, you’d better haul in your lines, old boy, and embark as a money lender. I had what I thought a solid tip from the inside that wheat was going to sixty and stop there, and I was in, I thought, for all the chances when it got ready to turn. In the meantime I was to get big interest on my money. But, confound the thing ! I was bamboozled as well as the rest, by the big ring. My profits went out of the window faster than they came in. That insurance loan was positively the only thing I saved. Say, what will you have to drink ?”

A declination to drink anything beyond the bottle of beer he was already consuming, had no effect on the Englishman, who loudly ordered a waiter to bring two glasses of Scotch, very hot, one for himself and one for “the other gent.” Not waiting till the liquors arrived, he then launched out in a long tirade against the institutions of America, where nothing, it appeared, was to his liking, and the business men of which he considered the biggest rogues and cut-throats on the face of the earth.

“I ain’t including you, Gray, in what I’m saying,”

he added, when his listener showed signs of uneasiness that even his befuddled brain could not help seeing. "You are, on the whole, the squarest man I ever met—too much so, in fact, for your own interests. Understand," he continued, dropping his voice, "I know a good deal about you that isn't common property, and I think you've acted on the square where some wouldn't. In all that Newcombe business you've been what I call White. You've stuck to your agreements like a—like a Man. And if others ain't done as they should, or if they don't in the future, that ain't your fault. I've said it afore, and I'll say it anywhere, to anybody."

Gilbert Gray's knife and fork dropped to his plate, and his very heart stood still as he heard these ominous words. *In vino veritas!* The liquor in this fellow's head had set him to talking in a way he would probably have never done had he been sober. But what did he mean? what did he know? and how had he learned a secret that had been thought so well kept? There was a moment of hesitation what course to pursue; whether to listen longer to this wretch, perhaps even to ply him with questions, or to get away from him as soon as possible, and breathe an air untainted by his presence.

The latter course was the one adopted. Gray had never deviated from his early determination to stand through everything by the Pretenses he had assumed. To discuss any other contingency was to admit everything. He could only profess by his manner not to understand the mutterings of this half-intoxicated man, and to trust that whatever he knew or suspected would be divulged to no one else.

But what did he know, and what did he suspect? How should he know anything of that Secret hidden so closely!

"I shall have to leave you," said Gray, making a pretense of consulting his watch. "I have an engagement."

"Very well," said Lancaster, grasping his hand in spite of him. "Mum's the word, you know! Ta, ta! See you in London." Then he added, in a strangely different manner from the one he had before assumed, "No 'fence, I hope! No harm done! And you won't say I blabbed, for it's all on honor. Don't mention that I talked about anything—not to Darius Yates, or anybody. Eh!"

Gray shook his head rapidly and got out of the restaurant as quickly as he could. He did not like the looks of what he had heard. The use of Mr. Yates' name at the end struck him as particularly disagreeable. He could not believe the crafty solicitor had allowed a professional matter to slip from him, a piece of business in which he himself had played an unlawful part, and which would naturally be kept as secret as the inner workings of a lodge-room.

The unpleasant feelings engendered made him resolve to exchange, if possible, the ticket he had already purchased on the Umbria for one on another boat. He could not bear to think of making a week's voyage in the company of the man he had just left. To his joy the transfer was easily made, and though the boat he took was one day later in reaching the English coast, he was highly satisfied with the arrangement.

He wired to Gladys the name of his new steamer, but when it came to adding the usual expressions of affection he found himself unequal to the task. His mind was too much upset to form the right sentences. Of all the troubles he had had, those referring to his peculiar marriage were the hardest to bear. So much time had passed without hearing the faintest breath of suspicion directed against him that he had come to regard this, at least, as one of the things he need not dread. If the facts, or any part of them, were in the possession of so unscrupulous a fellow as Neiling, or Lancaster, or whatever else he might choose to be called, there would always be cause for anxiety. And at present he had enough else to bear.

He thought it all over on the steamer, as he traversed the ocean. The arrangement he had made with the Newcombes had not been all sunshine, but he had no right to complain. He had embraced its conditions at a time when he seemed drifting steadily to either starvation or suicide. He had taken Gladys "for better, for worse," to protect her name and that of her little one. It was silly to be frightened by the bark of a dog, that probably had too much cowardice to bite. Still, look at it as he might, it was not agreeable to feel that Lancaster had it in his power to say things that would excite doubt. The only consolation was that the strange Englishman was on his way to his own country, whence, if he was to be believed, he would never go to the United States again. Once settled in Chicago, Gilbert felt that he would be in little danger from that source.

When he reached the hotel at which the family

were staying, Gladys rushed weeping into his arms. She wore a haggard look, which her trials accounted for, and clung to her husband's breast for a long time without uttering any articulate word other than terms of endearment. Gilbert soothed her as best he could, though he did not respond very fully to her caresses. He was too anxious to learn the exact condition of affairs.

It appeared that there had been no great change. Colonel Newcombe was able to move about slowly, but his mental powers had received a severe wrench. He persisted in staying most of the time in the room where his wife had died, and appeared lost to all other subjects. Since his shock he had not once spoken of business matters. He was, in short, quite broken in mind, and the doctors said he would never be any better. The baby—Gladys spoke of Marianne only when asked about her, and then with a shy hesitation—was the only one in the family who seemed entirely well. For, she did not fail to remark, Gilbert himself looked like one who had just risen from a sick bed.

He told her the voyage had been rather rough, and went with her to see her father. It was a severe trial to meet the old gentleman, in his present state; worse, he thought, than to have found him in his coffin. The tall, bent form, the iron-gray hair, the dignified bearing were left, but the light in the dark eyes was not the familiar one. When asked if he knew Gilbert, the Colonel answered, "Why, certainly; it's ——" and the name had to be furnished him before he could pronounce it.

"I can't talk long to you," he added. "I have to

stay with *Her*. She needs me." And he pointed to the empty bed as he spoke.

That was the true marriage love, the love that follows its object beyond the bounds of earth, that does not separate at the grave. Mrs. Newcombe did, perhaps, need him, indeed! It may be, from the other side of the veil that hid her, she still called him to her side!

There were immense bills to pay—bills that quite astounded Gray when they were presented. For three months the hotel where they all lived had received nothing. The doctors were rapacious beyond belief. The undertaker was a man without conscience. The money Gilbert had brought home dwindled rapidly as he settled these accounts. He said nothing to Gladys about the condition of the estate, preferring to wait to the very last moment before going into that painful subject. It was decided that Colonel Newcombe could travel, and arrangements were made for going to America at the earliest practicable date.

One evening Joseph Lancaster waylaid Mr. Gray and asked, in the most craven tones, for the loan of forty pounds—just the same two hundred dollars he had repaid, he said, not mentioning the eight thousand pounds he had lost. If he could have it he promised to repay it on the following day. It was only a temporary expedient, and of the utmost importance to him.

Prudence asserted itself and the money was loaned. And what was strange, it was repaid punctually.

"Where does his money come from and where does it go?" asked Gray, vainly, as he put the forty pounds back in his pocket.

CHAPTER XXIII

"YOU'VE GOT THE PRETTIEST WIFE."

AMONG the bills which came in at the last moment was one of six hundred pounds from Mr. Darius Yates, for "legal services and expenses." No items were given, but Mr. Yates said in a note which he enclosed that the matter extended over a period of several years and that he had been considerate in the amount, owing to the troubles that had befallen the Newcombe family. This account worried Gilbert immensely, and he felt obliged to go to Gladys to ask if she knew anything about it.

"Did—did Mr. Yates send you this?" she asked, opening her eyes in wonder.

"Yes, just as you see it. If this sort of thing keeps on we shall all land in the poorhouse before we can get out of England."

"I guess it's not so bad as that," replied Gladys, smiling faintly. "But I am surprised at this bill. I always understood," she explained, "that it was a—matter of friendship—his dealings with father. I—I can't understand it in the least. Still," she paused to consider, "I would pay it without making any talk; that is the easiest way out of it."

Gilbert breathed a sigh of distress.

"My dear girl," he said, "you will have to know some time, and I may as well tell you now, that money to meet bills of this size is not as plenty with your father as it once was. This means three thou-

sand dollars, and to tell the truth, it will cramp me very much."

He saw that she did not comprehend the full meaning of what he said, and he had no heart to tell her the entire truth. She only repeated that it would be better to settle all bills and feel that there was nothing forthcoming to bother him.

"But, what could Yates have done to come to such a sum?" he demanded. He was not used to dealing with men of the law who rendered bills of that size.

"You know—some—of the things," stammered his wife. "We certainly don't want any dispute with him. You can see—it would not be wise."

Yes, he could see it, but he did not like the appearance of the bill any better for that. He thought it a distinctly excessive charge, and one that would not have been rendered if Colonel Newcombe had not been past giving evidence in the matter. Little as he liked to meet Mr. Yates, he felt it his duty to discuss the bill with him before he paid it in full, and he went to the solicitor's office for that purpose.

Mr. Yates was in, and rose with a subdued sort of cordiality to welcome his visitor, first closing the door that stood open in the rear of his desk.

"I got this bill from you to-day," was the short way in which Gray opened the conversation.

"Ah!" said Mr. Yates.

"And I was somewhat surprised at its amount."

"Ah!" said the solicitor, again.

"We have suffered losses, as you know," went on Gray, "and are doing the best we can to pull ourselves out of the mire. And things like this, of

which I had no previous warning, are not particularly agreeable.”

“Ah!” repeated Mr. Yates. Then, when the other waited for him to add something to this expression, he said, “I am not in the least haste for this money. I only sent the bill because my client was about to leave England.”

Gray was somewhat mollified.

“But still I am surprised that Colonel Newcombe should owe you so much,” he said. “Mrs. Gray—my wife—says she thought what you did—for the Colonel—was in the way of friendship—that it was not a legal matter at all.”

The solicitor opened his eyes wider.

“Did Mrs. Gray say that?” he asked. “Very well, then. Do you want me to *call* it ‘a matter of friendship?’”

“It is not a question of friendship for me, or for Mrs. Gray,” was the annoyed reply, “but for Colonel Newcombe. Of course you know what your relations with him were. If the bill is due—if there is nothing justly deductible from it—I shall see it paid. Only, to speak the exact truth, it looks to me rather large.”

There was a moment of waiting, the solicitor seeming to prefer that Gray should finish all he had to say before he made any suggestion. Then, when it was apparent that the latter had come to the only point he meant to advance for the present, the lawyer spoke again.

“I did a great deal for Colonel Newcombe,” said he, impressively. “Perhaps the fact that I liked him influenced me to go farther than I might have done

for an ordinary client, but that is no reason I should not be paid for my work and expenses. You know *one* of the things I did. You know it was not without some cost. Why, the very cash I paid to you, and for you, is included in that bill! I couldn't itemize things like those, but I see no reason why I should stand them out of my own pocket."

The recollections thus brought up staggered Gray, but he felt that his duty compelled him to say that those expenses—whatever they were—could have made but a small part of six hundred pounds.

"Oh, they were not all, by any means," was the ready answer. "I had to do other things, that Colonel Newcombe could not do for himself, and which, if you insist, I will give you in greater detail."

There was an air of mystery about this statement that contributed to Gray's nervousness and made him wish he were well out of the affair. Imagination took wild flights as to what these "other things" might have been. Perhaps dealing with the father of Gladys' child was one of them! Certainly they included the bribery at Amsterdam. The more he thought the less he was willing to have that chapter of his wife's life reopened.

"And you have had nothing on account?" he asked, desperately.

"Not a ha'penny. I knew the Colonel was rich and honorable. I was in no haste for the money, any more than I am now. Don't worry yourself about it, Mr. Gray. And as I said before, if you want me to pay those things myself—out of friendship for you—and for Mrs. Gray—you have only to say the word."

There was the aroma of an indefinable insult in this proposition, thus repeated, that stung the younger man to the quick. He replied with heat that he wished nothing of the sort, and that, if it should not be convenient for this bill to be settled before Colonel Newcome left England, he hoped interest would be added to it.

"That is the right spirit to show," said the solicitor, with a poor pretense of complimenting him. "You realize as well as I that most of these items are not collectible in a court of justice. They hang on the honor of one man in dealing with another. It would not do to bring to the gaze of a cold, unfeeling world certain matters that are so far the property of no one but you, your wife, her father and myself."

Gray shivered.

"Are you sure," he replied, thinking of Lancaster's insinuations, "that the secret is still within the narrow limit of which you speak?"

The solicitor sat more upright in his chair as he asked the object of the question.

"Because," explained Gray, "there is another person who has thrown out hints to me several times—hints that showed too plainly he knew something irregular had occurred."

Yates met the anxious look with a blank one, as if he could not, for the life of him, make out what his companion meant.

"Some one—has thrown out—hints?" he repeated. "Are you certain you have not been misled by your fears?"

"Quite certain. He made allusions the last time

that could not be mistaken. He was somewhat in drink and forgot his usual prudence."

At the mention of drink a look of intelligence came into the other's face.

"You don't mean that fellow—what did he call himself—Neiling?"

"And if I do?" asked Gray, sharply.

"Why, if you do," said Yates, "he doesn't amount to *that*!" He snapped his fingers to show the exact estimate at which he held the person alluded to. "And I'll tell you another thing—if he says a word I'll put him where he won't enjoy going, too!"

"I've not said it was he," replied Gray, disliking to have the matter go too far. "Indeed, the person who spoke to me bore quite a different name."

Mr. Yates shook his head.

"He bears names enough," he answered. "As many as he likes; but it was the same man—there couldn't be any other. Drunk or sober, he must hold his tongue, or it will be worse for him!"

The solicitor had lashed himself into quite a fury, and Gray was glad to put an end to the conversation.

"Well, about this bill, then," said he, rising; "I will pay it as soon as convenient, and you may—I would rather you did—add the interest."

The solicitor indicated that this was a matter of small moment.

"You had a deuce of a time over there at Chicago, I understand," he said. "I saw the Colonel every day and knew what was going on. Pity to see a nice fortune like his go up in smoke. It didn't cripple you entirely, I trust."

Mr. Gray replied, as briefly as he could, that there was still left enough to get along on. He also mentioned, with a little pride, that he would soon be in possession of an estate of his own and independent of everybody.

"Yes, I remember," said Yates, reminiscently. "So the other heir never turned up? If he doesn't come to light before the end of five years from the death of Mr.—Mr. ——"

"Blair."

"Mr. Blair, you get half the old gentleman left, eh? How much do you think that will be?"

"Over two hundred thousand dollars," replied Gray, glad to be able to name such a comfortable figure.

"Well, well! that's not so bad. A very decent windfall. It all comes back to me now, what you told me when we first met, about your refusing to take a cent of it till the full limit expired. Very honorable of you, certainly. And in the meantime you've had your ups and downs. Your fortune from the Newcombes has fled, but all is not lost. You've got a treasure in your wife that no man can take away."

At this unexpected reference to Gladys, Gilbert colored deeply. He resented the allusion, but it was made in polite terms and he could not show his sentiments without appearing silly. The most that he wanted now was to get away from this man, whose presence he had never learned to like, and who was liable to irritate him to the fullest degree without the least apparent intention of so doing. Gray put his hand on the doorknob, but was arrested by one other expression of the kind he detested.

“You’ve got the prettiest wife in the world, and, in spite of what is past, the best. The child, too, no one could help loving her. And I assure you once more, your secret is safe. You have nothing to do but to enjoy life to the full, as a man of your parts and circumstances ought to do. I don’t think you’ve ever been really sorry for the bargain I led you into.”

Gray could bear no more. He opened the office door, and descended the stairs at a good pace, preferring to seem impolite rather than endure another word on that subject.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PLUNGED INTO POVERTY.

RELIEVED for the time of the large bill, Gray arranged for the departure of his family. It was a solemn party that took the steamer at Southampton, with Gladys in deep black, Colonel Newcombe under the guidance of an attendant, and the body of Mrs. Newcombe in a leaden casket on board. The only one that showed the least enjoyment of the trip was Baby Marianne, whose laugh broke the stillness of her mother’s stateroom many times during the voyage. Gray devoted much of his leisure to his father-in-law, who proved very tractable, though he inquired every few minutes for his dead companion.

"Where is Mrs. Newcombe?" he would say, over and over.

"We are going to her," was the invariable reply.

Once he said, staring at the sea :

"This does not look like London."

And Gilbert answered :

"No, we are on our way to Chicago, to your old home," which seemed to satisfy the inquirer for the time.

He did not ask about Gladys, seeming to have forgotten her entirely. It was a pitiable sight. He ate the food that was brought him, and slept well. It was plain that he might live a long while yet.

At Chicago the Colonel seemed actually to improve. He recognized his old surroundings and went from room to room with an air of satisfaction. He could walk very well with a cane, and soon ceased to require any special attention. But when he had gone over the house for half an hour or so, he always came back with the old inquiry : Where was his wife ? and the servants were told to make the same reply, on all occasions :

"She has gone out for a little while."

One day he noticed the baby, who was playing on the floor, and asked whose it was. Being told, he nodded slowly, as if he recollected, and then immediately forgot again.

He continued to recognize Gilbert and to like to have him near, but even his name had to be repeated before he could pronounce it.

Gray now took the first occasion that he thought wise to tell his wife the full condition of her affairs. There was the house they were living in, now hers by

inheritance, with a right of occupancy on the part of her father. There was the encumbered insurance. Nothing more. Taxes had been paid, and the amount of available cash was running very low.

The young woman was shocked at the statement. She had known that her father had lost money, but she supposed him still a wealthy man. She shrank from selling the residence, saying that he needed it while he lived—that it would be a cruelty, when all else was gone, to deprive the poor old man of his home. Gilbert agreed with her, but asked what could be done. It was an expensive house to live in. He had been unable to obtain such a situation as she would be willing to have him accept. Things were coming to a crisis.

“If your own money were only available!” she said, with a sigh.

“But it is not,” he answered. “There will be more than two years yet before I shall get it, if ever.”

It was idiotic, staying in a house like that, keeping three servants, living at the rate of five thousand dollars a year, when the purse was empty. Then, when things seemed at their worst, several lawsuits were put upon the Colonel, and among other unpleasant things his interest in the residence they occupied was attached. They could not sell it, anyway, while thus encumbered, and they might as well live in it as to pay rent elsewhere. They reduced the number of servants by one and tried to economize at the table; but neither of them knew how to accomplish much in that direction, and the ship continued to drift toward the rocks.

Mr. Gray persevered without avail in his effort to

get something to do, and several journeys were made to other cities to talk with people who advertised what seemed available chances. On his return from one of these he found at his house no less a person than Mr. Darius Yates; and what was worse, he found him talking with his wife, whose eyes were red with weeping, and who showed much agitation when her husband entered.

It turned out that Yates, being in the country on other business, had come to say that his money would now be welcome, as he had been making investments which called for all the cash he could raise. It was this announcement, made in a moment of thoughtlessness to Mrs. Gray, that had caused her outburst of grief.

"You've come at a poor time," said Gray, thinking he might as well go on before his wife, now that she had heard the worst. "We're all tied up. Things have gone from bad to worse. Wait till I get possession of my estate, and I'll pay you, with twenty per cent. added, if you want it. But now, there's nothing to be had, for you or any one."

Mr. Yates did not appear satisfied.

"I want the money," he said, doggedly. "Considering what it is *for*, I've waited long enough."

Pale with rage at the allusion, Gray threw open the door that led to the front hall.

"Get out of here!" he said, threateningly.

The manner of the man in the presence of his wife was more than he could bear.

"You are making a mistake," replied Yates, gutturally. "See that you don't regret it."

With this sinister insinuation he departed, leaving the husband and wife alone.

Gladys was sobbing again—sobbing in that low key that indicates hopelessness.

“D——n him !” said Gilbert. “I ought to have kicked him down the steps !”

“Oh, no ! He only wanted his money. What do you suppose he will do ?”

“I don’t care what he does. He won’t get three thousand dollars out of me till I have it !”

The wife looked up, all of a shiver.

“You must find it for him, Gilbert,” she said, despairingly.

“Find it ? Where ? Rolling up hill ?”

“You must get it. He is capable of anything. We can’t have our—our secret—get out—now, when we have lost all else. The world thinks me an honest woman. If I am to die, let them think so when I am lowered into my grave !”

He wanted the bill settled as much as she, but he asked again, how was it to be done ?

“There is my last jewel,” she said, taking a diamond from her finger. “Yes, I did not tell you, I sold all the rest to pay the butcher and grocer. It is worth five hundred dollars. Sell it, sell the pictures, the furniture, my dresses—everything—but pay him !”

He made a mental inventory of the effects she classed together, and decided that the total would fall far short of the sum required. Things did not sell for what they cost, he told her. The sacrifices she was willing to make would be of no avail.

“ But he *must* be paid !” she kept repeating. “ He *must* be paid !”

That night Gray wrote to Mr. Dibbs, to see if he would lend anything more on the insurance. The reply stated that he could not, with justice to himself, as the invalid, having lived so long since his attack, might develop into one of those everlasting old men who pass into the nineties. There was a vein of discouragement in the letter that could not be suppressed. At the same time the lawyer reminded Mr. Gray that there was a source from which he *could* draw at any time—not that he wished to excite his anger again by mentioning it. If he would sign a note payable whenever he came into the Blair estate, he could have three thousand dollars, or ten thousand dollars, as soon as the mail could take it to him.

All the mulishness in the young man's nature came to the surface as he read this so often renewed proposition. He would let Yates expose him to the whole world—he would see his wife starve to death—before he would touch that money till he knew it was rightfully his. This he swore to himself, in round terms. Probably he would have relented rather than have had either of these dire contingencies come to pass, had not another opportunity presented itself.

In one of his walks about town he came face to face with Joseph Lancaster ! Lancaster, again in Chicago !

“ Half a minute,” said the man, as Gray tried to pass him. “ Don't cut me dead like that. I'm in a position to be of use to you.”

Stunned by the statement, Gray stood still in the street.

"You're short of money. I'm flush with it," said Lancaster, shortly. "I'd as lief lend to you as any one. Can't we do a little business?"

There was no time to wonder how this meteoric personage had become again a lender of money. There was no use in remembering that unpleasant things had happened between them. He was a metaphorical straw, and Gray grasped at him.

"I want five thousand dollars," he said, thinking it best to get enough to tide him over a few weeks in advance, if possible.

"On what security?"

"On my unindorsed note. There's nothing else to give just now, but it'll be paid. I want it for a year."

Mr. Lancaster reflected.

"Pretty risky," he said, "but I'll go you. When do you want it?"

"When?" echoed Gray. "I want it now."

"Now it is, then," said the newly reinstated broker, "and as the only office I have is the curbstone, we'll step into a hotel and fix it there."

In twenty minutes the money was in Gray's hands, and a note, witnessed by the hotel clerk, was in Lancaster's. Without making further talk, the latter excused himself, and disappeared as quietly as he had come upon the scene.

It was more like a dream than a real transaction, but the money was certainly there as tangible evidence that the transaction had occurred.

Gray did not even go home until he had sought Darius Yates and exchanged the sum due him for a receipted bill.

"Write all demands in full to date," said Gilbert, standing over him. "Now, let this be the last time I ever hear from you, on any subject whatever," he added, putting the receipt in his pocket.

The solicitor rose and put his hands coolly behind him.

"Pooh!" he answered, sneeringly. "You play a very silly game, considering the hand you hold."

"It is as good as yours!" was the hot rejoinder. "If you have it in your power to annoy me, I have it in mine to put you in jail!"

"That is a very foolish statement," said Mr. Yates, "and not borne out by the least shred of fact. I don't do my business in such a slipshod way. Now, I'm not going to predict anything, my rash young man, but watch and see how this comes out. You have insulted me twice. I shall hardly allow you to do it again."

There was so little to be gained by a discussion in this strain that Gray said the solicitor could go to the devil, so long as he kept out of his way, and with this remark left the hotel and went home to show the receipted bill to Gladys.

He did not tell her of whom he had borrowed the money, or she might not have smiled quite so brightly when she heard the news.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. JULIUS MARGRAVE.

It is an old proverb that when a ball is going down hill every one is willing to give it a kick. What was left of the Newcombe estate was now so tied up that nothing could be got out of it. The small sum that Mr. Gray had of Lancaster's loan, after paying Yates' bill with interest, went rapidly. It was impossible to keep up a decent standard of living. The servants were dismissed, all but one, who refused to go whether her wages was paid or not, so attached was she to the family of her mistress. The fires were reduced to that in the kitchen stove and an open grate in one of the sitting-rooms. The husband obtained work in a bank at a nominal salary and suffered the pangs of death as he saw the state to which Gladys and her old father were reduced. There was but one hope. If they could live till the end of Mr. Blair's five years—and if the lost heir did not turn up—plenty would again shine upon them.

For Mrs. Gray these days were not wholly without happiness. Whatever else had been lost to her, she had still the presence of her husband. She made not the least complaint, but met him with a bright face and put the best side of affairs before his weary eyes. It would all end before long, she was sure of it. In the meantime they had enough to eat, and the receiver appointed by the court assured them they would not be ordered out of the house. It was a

dismal kind of comfort, but if this girl, brought up in affluence, could bear it, Gilbert thought he ought to try.

Colonel Newcombe still survived, with little apparent change in his condition. He asked the old round of questions, and seemed contented with the same answers. Baby Marianne was growing to be a big child, and her health was perfect. She never knew that there had been any trouble from the loss of money. She played with her dolls, and ate her bread and milk, singing till her voice echoed through the lonely halls of the old house.

At the end of the year for which Joseph Lancaster had loaned his five thousand dollars—a year in which that strange individual had neither been seen nor head from—he appeared at Mr. Gray's door and inquired if it would be convenient to let him have the amount. With all the reasons that Gilbert had for disliking the man, he could not deny that he was this time an honest creditor, and after hesitating a moment he asked him into the parlor and told him frankly how things had gone.

“Well, that's not encouraging,” was the response, though Lancaster's manner was the reverse of down-hearted. “The fact is, that cash would come in mighty handy with me just now. I'm in one of my occasional states of dead-broke-edness.” He laughed as he coined the word. “Pretty good house you're living in,” he added looking around him.

At this Gray felt constrained to explain the state of affairs at some length. He told how the estate was encumbered; how even the furniture belonged to the creditors of Colonel Newcombe, and had more

attachments on it than it would bring. He was barely existing on the small salary he had been permitted to earn.

“I say !” cried Lancaster, interrupting him. “That sounds pretty tough. But look at me : With a matured note for five thousand dollars and a year’s interest in my pocket, I actually haven’t enough ready cash to buy a place to sleep in to-night. You think me a hard customer, don’t you ? Well, in some ways perhaps I am. I know what you’ve seen of me hasn’t been in my favor. I acted queer about that money you let me have in Venice, I’m not going to deny it ; but I had a lot of things on my mind. And when you came up to me that first time in Hyde Park I was in a deuce of a state—between the horns of a dilemma, as they say, and I couldn’t have treated the Prince of Wales decent. Then there was the matter of the horses, but I swear to you that was accidental. I thought you would get out of the way before I reached you. And at Amsterdam I suppose you got the idea I meant to annoy you, but I didn’t. I only wanted that money, and I had to have it from somewhere. I paid it to you again, didn’t I, with a handsome pile to boot, that went up in the water-spout. And the last time I got a few shekels I brought it back the next day, strictly according to promise. Now comes this loan. When I let you have it I was lined with the stuff ; and to-day it’s either to pawn my vest or sleep on the pavement, and the nights are rather too chilly for that.”

Mr. Lancaster laughed again, as if his situation was the most amusing one of which he could conceive.

"I can let you have a little," replied Gray with a blush, as he drew out his slender purse. "And you will get the whole of it if you wait a year or so longer. Will—will five dollars be of any use?" he asked, fiery red as he thought of the difference between that sum and the one he had borrowed.

"Five dollars!" exclaimed Lancaster. "Why, it's a fortune. Could you make it ten? Thank you, I must be going," he added, as if haste was now the most important thing. "I've just remembered a pressing engagement that I came near missing."

Hardly stopping long enough to say good-evening, the man was gone, and Mr. Gray saw him spring jauntily upon a rapidly moving car going toward the centre of the city.

In the morning, before Gilbert left the house, Lancaster was back again. He looked sleepless and haggard, and was prepared with a rambling story to the effect that he had been met by footpads and relieved of the sum Mr. Gray was so kind as to lend him. He was very tired and wanted above all things a chance to rest. In that big house was there not some room, no matter how high up or how poorly furnished, that he could occupy till noon?

Shrinking at first from the suggestion, Gray came at last to agree to it. One reason was that he had no time for a refusal, the bank being most particular as to the moment its employés arrived. He called the servant and bade her show the gentleman to a chamber on the second floor, at the same time whispering that she must on no account let Mrs. Gray know what she had done. Then he hastened away

to the scene of his labors, not at all pleased with the situation.

But it came to pass that Joseph Lancaster secured a regular tenancy of that chamber. Like the camel of Arab fable, he put first his ears, then his head, and finally his whole body into the tent. It remained to be seen whether, in imitation of the ship of the desert, he would kick the master out.

On the night of his arrival, Mr. Gray found that the Englishman had not yet taken his departure. He had been out part of the afternoon, the servant said, but had returned. While the family were at dinner he went out again, and did not come back until Gray had gone to the bank the next morning. The servant did not feel authorized to refuse him entrance, in the absence of instructions, and he slept away the second day on the bed he had previously occupied. The third day was Sunday, and when he came in, after spending the entire night out of the house, Gray asked for an explanation.

This was made with tact. Business of great importance had detained him, and he would be very glad, if Gray did not object, to use the room for the few days he intended to remain in the city. Every moment he expected a telegram summoning him away, and providing him with the necessary funds to go.

At the end of a week he was still there, and having now obtained a key from the servant, was quite at home. As he used a side entrance which had been closed for some time, he disturbed no one. The spring days were rather chilly, and he sent in wood and coal and built himself a fire. It would certainly

have been ungracious to disturb a lodger who conducted himself with such propriety, especially when he was a creditor of the other occupant of the mansion to such a large extent.

But the week passed, and a month, and three months, and still Lancaster did not go. His stories varied from time to time, and yet hung together with remarkable consistency. He had now money in his pocket, for he insisted upon repaying the ten dollars he had borrowed, and even offered to loan his benefactor a few hundred if he wanted it. He almost insisted upon a price being put upon the rent of the room, which he professed to like immensely, and which he said he would not exchange for the best suite in Potter Palmer's hotel. When this was refused he said he should make a handsome allowance for it in the interest on his note, whenever that was paid. He still kept the most unseasonable hours, spending a good part of each day in bed and most of his nights abroad; but as everything about him was peculiar, this did not particularly astonish his new landlord.

Sometimes he was gone for days, without giving the slightest notice of his intentions. When he returned it might be that his first act was to request the loan of enough to purchase a breakfast; or, on the other hand, he came more than once with his pockets loaded with wealth, certainly enough to flash a great roll of bank bills in the face of the servant who attended to his room, and to present that estimable lady with not less than twenty dollars at a time. When in this condition he always managed to meet Mr. Gray and renew his proposals to pay rent, or to

lend him a thousand or so, whichever he preferred. Gilbert declined all of these offers, however, and said as little to his strange acquaintance as possible.

Gladys naturally learned that Lancaster was in the house after awhile, and asked anxiously for an explanation. She remembered his face, she said, and did not like the memories it recalled. Gilbert told her as much as he chose of what had passed, referring to the money loaned by Godkin & Lancaster during the great wheat deals, and not in any way to the more recent transaction. While her father had had forty thousand dollars out of this man and his partner, it would not do to turn him out of doors, he said. And she agreed to this, doubtfully but in silence, as she agreed to everything her husband thought wisest.

Another year passed in much the same way. Gray's nose was at the grindstone. His house was supplied with nothing but the merest necessities. And then two events happened that certainly should not have come in conjunction. The bank decided to economize by dispensing with his services; that was one thing. The other was that Mrs. Gray became a mother for the second time.

There seems to be a fatality in nature that sends children into this world in an exactly inverse ratio to the preparations for receiving them. Let a laboring man fall and break a limb, let his three oldest children be taken down with scarlet fever, and his mother-in-law sprain her right arm by slipping on the ice—and you may set it down without the least danger of error that his wife will be confined within ten days. A prophet could have foretold that Mrs. Gray would add one, or more, to the number of her family,

as soon as he knew that the bank had discharged her husband.

But, in his deep trouble, Gilbert welcomed the little stranger with all his heart. At last he had a child that was really his own! And he said it without any disloyalty to little Marianne, who still had from him all a true father's care and love. There was a difference, though, between the other child and this tiny boy that he could not deny. Nature cried out to him that the bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh must hold a nearer place in his affections than one who could not claim—though she might never know it—that tender relation.

It costs money to be born—in Chicago, in the Nineteenth Century, as Gray soon found. There were fifty things needed—things that must be had if the mother and infant were to live in comfort. A list of them was made out and put into the hands of the young father. He stared at it, and turned white. His purse could stand no such drain.

After a brief interview with Gladys, he came out of her room with his soul on fire. Money he must have, whatever way it was got. He took a pen and wrote a telegram to Israel Dibbs:

“Send me at least a thousand dollars immediately, and charge it to my interest in the Blair estate according to your former proposals. I cannot do without it.”

He had given his conscience the severest wrench it had ever received, but the occasion called too loudly to be refused. He sent for this money exactly as he

would have broken the window of a baker if his dear ones had actually been starving. He did not for a moment try to persuade himself that it was right.

In two days a check arrived, with a letter from the lawyer congratulating him on his accession of common sense. There were now but six months remaining of the five years, he said, and the appearance of Julius Margrave was practically impossible. He hoped Gray would send for all he needed, and take what comfort he could during the interim.

The letter was read with a set face, and thrown into the grate. The check was the main thing. Gilbert could have kissed it, as he realized what it meant to Gladys and the boy.

Lancaster met him about that time, and said a few hundred was at his service, whenever he liked. He referred to the advent of the new baby, and said he had heard such things were very expensive. The offer was refused, now that another source had been found, though it would otherwise have been accepted, without doubt. And it did not surprise the husband to have this man send him a note, a week later, saying that fifty dollars would be of the utmost value to him; a sum, let it be recorded, that was sent to his room without an instant's delay.

Having broken the ice, Gilbert did not care how deeply he waded in the stream. As Gladys recovered he spent his money with a lavish hand, sending to Dibbs again and again for checks which were forwarded as fast as called for. He re-engaged the old number of servants; spread the table bountifully as of yore, opened the whole house, with the exception of the part that Lancaster—to Gray's re-

gret—continued to occupy. Every day a pair of horses and a liveried coachman—from a stable—came to take the mother and child to drive. The neighbors saw with wonder that a new mine had been tapped and that the family was coming out in remarkable form after its years of retirement.

A feeling of exultation filled the breast of the young man as these changes took place. He forgot the fault of which he had been guilty, and saw only the bright countenance of his happy wife as she resumed the life to which she had been accustomed. He thought what a fool he had been to wait so long for a phantom that had no existence. His fortune was coming to him so soon, now, and he might have enjoyed its benefits just as well as to take that awful dip into pauperdom.

A sight of Mr. Darius Yates in the streets of Chicago was the first thing that disturbed his new serenity. He wondered what the solicitor could be doing again in that part of the world. Mr. Yates did not see Gray, or if he did, gave no sign of the fact. It was quite as well. They could not meet with mutual goodwill, and it was best they escaped a collision. Yates had been nasty in relation to that bill of his. Gray wanted to forget that such an individual existed.

But a few evenings later there came a greater shock. As Gray was sitting in his library, the butler announced himself with an envelope in his hand.

“A messenger is at the door, sir,” he said. “who insists that this gentleman lives here. I’ve told him repeatedly that he is mistaken, but he says he has seen him come in often and that he knows him well.”

Gilbert Gray took the envelope in his hand and he thought the very blood had frozen in his veins when he read the name thereon :

MR. JULIUS MARGRAVE.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“ IS THIS THE LETTER ? ”

“ I TOLD him,” repeated the butler, as Gilbert remained silent, “ that there was no such person here, but he insists that he has seen him enter the house many times. He says he knows him perfectly.”

The man who lies down to pleasant dreams in a jungle and awakes to see the gleaming eyes of a tiger, feels as Gilbert Gray felt at that moment. The beast he had thought dead was upon him. One spring and all would be over.

“ Tell the messenger I wish to see him,” he said, in a hard voice. “ Show him into this room, and when you have done so, leave us.”

The butler, who had been but a short time in Mr. Gray's employ, strode on his errand with no good grace. He thought it an imputation upon himself to receive a man after he (the butler) had practically dismissed him.

The person who brought the letter for Mr. Margrave seemed a very ordinary sort. He was evidently unused to the interior of houses of this

description, for he stared at the furniture and ceiling with undisguised interest and astonishment. He had to be asked the first question twice before he recovered enough to answer.

"Who gave you this letter?" said Gray, icily.

"A friend of Mr. Margrave's, sir; nobody you'd know. He's sent me to him before, sir, but I've always met him in the street when he was coming out, sir."

Gilbert hesitated.

"Describe Mr. Margrave to me," he said, presently.

At this the man hemmed a good deal, and after declaring over and over that he "couldn't give no description," proceeded to draw a word picture that was easily recognizable as that of Mr. Joseph Lancaster. Not expecting anything else, Gray showed no surprise.

"Who told you—who first told you his name?" he asked next. "Be careful now and mind what you're about."

"Why," said the man, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, "I don't know who told me. He's been around here for a year or more, I should think, and I never heard him called anything but Margrave. I don't know nothing about him," the fellow broke forth, desperately. "I ain't no private detective, to get onto people's business. I waited in the street for more'n an hour, and then I thought there wouldn't be no harm in ringing for him. If you are the man what keeps this lodgin'-house, you know him, sir, as well as me, and if you'll kindly call him you'll oblige me very much."

Gray winced under the imputation that the New-

combe residence was a lodging-house, but he believed the man honest in what he said.

"There is no such person here," he answered. "I shall therefore keep this letter till Mr. Margrave calls for it. If you meet him, say that Mr. Gray will give it to him on application. Oh, it will be quite safe," he added, as the man started to open his mouth. "You needn't worry about it at all."

He rose, to indicate that the interview was ended, but the messenger lingered.

"I don't see why you say he don't live here," he protested.

"It is not necessary that you should see anything," said Gray. He rang a bell. "Show this 'gentleman' out," he said to the butler, who brightened at the order. "And if any one else calls to see me, let me know at once."

Left alone he sank into his chair, dizzily. Lancaster and Margrave! Had he been entertaining under his roof all this time the heir of whose existence he dreaded to hear?

If it was proven that they were the same person, there was but one thing to do—the honest thing. Nothing else.

Cost what it might, entail whatever sacrifices it would, the rightful claimant to Mr. Blair's estate should have it. Gray had done things that lowered him in his own sight, but he had never swindled any one intentionally out of a penny. He would not begin now. Starvation might come to him and his, he could not tell, there was nothing else in prospect. But in this plain matter of duty he would not shrink.

"Mr. Lancaster to see you, sir."

It was the butler returning.

“Ask him to come in here,” said Gray, in distinct tones. The emergency found him ready.

Neiling, Lancaster, Margrave—whatever his name was—paused at the library door, in evident perturbation. His eyes wandered anxiously over the desks and tables, in search of something.

“I heard there was a letter sent here for—for a friend of mine,” he stammered, acting as if he wanted to get away.

“Come in,” said Mr. Gray, “and sit down. I want to talk to you.”

The other stood doubtfully for a moment at the threshold, and started to say that he had no time to spare, but finally entered and took a seat on the edge of the nearest sofa, not at all at his ease, apparently.

“Is this the letter?” asked Gray, holding it up so that the superscription could be read.

It struck him strangely that he was calmer than his companion.

“Yes, that’s it,” said the other man, reaching out his hand.

“A minute. This letter was left here for a Mr. Margrave, to be delivered to him; and to no one else.”

The other man laughed, oddly.

“It’s the same thing, giving it to me,” he said. “We’re friends, partners, in fact. The letter is for either one of us. You see,” he explained, brightening as he went along, “I take Margrave’s letters and he takes mine.”

Again the hand was held out, but the letter remained in Mr. Gray's possession.

"The man this letter is intended for rooms in this house," he said, impressively. "The messenger informed me he had seen him enter and leave here often. Do you know any Mr. Margrave who *lives* here?"

"That fellow is a dunce," was the quick reply. "He's got us mixed up with each other. He probably thinks I'm Margrave, and"—he paused to make the story complete—"that Margrave is me."

"I do not wonder, for according to his description you might be twin brothers," said Gray, with a touch of sarcasm. "But a letter is an important matter, and I do not feel justified in giving this to any person but the one whose name is on the envelope. I might get myself into trouble. If you will see Mr. Margrave, and ask him to call, he can have it at once. I shall deliver it to no other person."

Lancaster began to grow angry, as this course was persisted in. He declared again that the letter was intended for himself, that he knew what it was and wanted it immediately. And he looked as if he intended to have it, too, before he left the house.

"I want to see Mr. Margrave for another and very pressing reason," said Gray, in reply. "Perhaps you can tell me some things in relation to him, as you know him so well. Was his father's name also Julius? Was his mother's name, before she was married, Cynthia Blair? Was ——"

But Lancaster had risen to his feet, and stood staring at the speaker.

"How did *you* know all that?" he exclaimed.

“ How did *you* know it, rather ? ” was the reply. — Why not tell me the truth ? You were first known to me as ‘ William Neiling,’ which you admitted to be a *nom de guerre*. Next you called yourself ‘ Joseph Lancaster,’ another pseudonym, I have no doubt. Why not admit, without further prevarication, that you are Julius Margrave ? ”

The other man sat down again and studied the face before him intently.

“ Well, I *am* Julius Margrave,” he said, at last. “ There are no witnesses to the admission, and if it pleases me I shall deny that I made it the next time I am asked. I am Julius Margrave, my father bore the same name, and my mother was Cynthia Blair, an American lady. What then ? ”

Gray grew paler when his fears were thus substantiated. He took a case from his pocket and drew forth one of the advertisements that had been inserted in the newspapers for nearly five years, regularly every quarter.

“ Only this,” he said, handing it to his companion, who read it slowly, out loud :

INFORMATION WANTED—Of Julius Margrave, son of Julius and Cynthia (née Blair) Margrave, born at New York, in the year 18—, but afterwards emigrating to foreign parts. Address ISRAEL DIBBS, ESQ., No. — Broadway, New York.

“ What does that mean ? ” he asked, looking up suspiciously.

“ It means,” said Gray, his lips twitching, “ that you are the heir of two hundred thousand dollars, left to you by Abel Blair, your mother’s brother.”

"The devil!" was the quick reply. "And at this minute I haven't the price of a ticket to New York in my clothes. Abel Blair, my 'Uncle Abel,' eh? Well, this is a startler! I never heard anything so strange in my life."

Then Gilbert told him the terms of the will, exactly as they are known to the reader, being interrupted frequently by exclamations.

"And if I hadn't been heard of for three months more, you'd have had everything!" cried Margrave, when the story was finished. "By Jove, you *are* a white one! Well, don't fret, I'll make it right. That note I've got of yours for five thousand dollars shall be handed back the minute I get possession. Two hundred thousand—that's forty thousand pounds, isn't it? Well, I should think that would last me for a month or two, with due economy!"

The laugh that Gilbert had heard in former days issued again from Margrave's lips as he contemplated the prospect.

"You've been falling into better luck, too," said the man, when he recovered his equanimity. "I've noticed that things seemed brighter with you lately."

"Yes," was the doleful reply, "with money borrowed from the executor of Mr. Blair's will, on account of my expectations."

And he proceeded to tell the story, showing that Mr. Dibbs had advanced him something like four thousand dollars, which he would now never be able to repay.

Margrave thought this was, on the whole, the funniest thing he had ever heard, and laughed over

it till the tears came into his eyes. The joke on the old lawyer was simply, he remarked, a "corker." He was only sorry that Gray had not borrowed twice as much, for he might just as well have had it as not. When he saw that his hilarity was not appreciated he sobered down, and took the address of Mr. Dibbs, with the statement that he would put himself in communication with him that very day.

"I don't suppose you appreciate the spirits this story has put me into," said Margrave when he was about to leave, "considering it knocks you out of the precise amount it gives me. But if you'd had my experiences you'd have got used to anything. You've seen me flush, and you've seen me broke, and you know I never whimpered. That's the only way to take things. There's silver linings to all the clouds, and to-morrow's better than to-day ever dared be. Your luck is off at the moment, but no one knows what's just around the corner. You may light on your feet yet."

Gray replied soberly that it was a very different thing, being penniless with a family and without one. A strange look came into the face of Margrave as this thought was uttered, and he answered that this did put a different face on the matter. However, he added, he wasn't quite the rascal he might be taken for, and he would not forget the man to whose honesty he would owe his fortune.

"I'll give you a lift, somehow, Gray," he said, with unusual freedom of manner, "if it's only on account of those helpless ones who've got to look to you for their support. If I don't do the right thing, call me a duffer."

He was so anxious to be gone that he almost forgot to take the letter which had been the cause of his coming into the house. When it was handed to him, however, he opened it where he stood, and uttered an astonished exclamation as he perused its contents.

The worst thing now before the young husband was to reveal the extent of his ill fortune to his wife. He felt a doubt whether she would approve of the course he had taken, when he might have kept back the knowledge and retained the money they so much needed. But Gladys surprised him by saying that he had done exactly right, and that in spite of the disagreeable consequences that must ensue, she thoroughly approved of his conduct.

"I could never have respected you had you done otherwise," she said, kissing his sad face. "We have been in hard straits, but, thank God! we have not stooped to dishonesty, and we never must. Whatever happens, I can look into my husband's eyes and feel proud of his noble life. What would I give if he could look back with equal pride on mine!"

It distressed him terribly to have her speak like this, and with his arms clasped about her he reiterated the declaration of his entire love and confidence. But for the things which she regretted, he reminded her, they might never have met, and certainly were unlikely to have married. And she lay against his breast, breathing deeply, happier in his caresses than any queen.

What they would do to provide for the helpless father and little ones neither could tell, but it was

something to know that the perfect union of their hearts and lives did not depend on poverty or riches.

Israel Dibbs made his appearance within a week. He would have come sooner, but for a case he was trying, which he had to finish. He was driven directly to Gray's residence, the moment he reached Chicago, and sat down to hear his detailed story with a very interested face.

"Well, it looks all right, so far," was the comment which he made when Gilbert finished. "But this man will have to prove his case before he gets anything out of me. It's well enough to go around the world bearing all the names one pleases, but when it comes to taking possession of two hundred thousand dollars, he's got to do something besides talk."

Gilbert smiled faintly.

"I feared it would be that way," said he. "I thought if you lent me money you would never believe I had lost the chance to repay it. That is why I refused it so long."

The old gentleman sat upright in his chair.

"That ain't fair," he answered, sharply. "If this estate belongs to that fellow he'll get it, every penny, no matter how I come out. If it don't, he won't. The money I've lent you don't influence me a particle. But, I tell you again, he's got to prove his identity. This Margrave family hasn't been heard of till now for a pretty long time. The mother died soon after the boy was born, and the father, who was of a roving disposition, went off somewhere and stayed out of the country, so far as Mr. Blair ever knew. If this is a son of his, he's got to bring something to show it. I'll give him the property when

he convinces me he's entitled to it, and not one d——d minute quicker!"

He seemed like the Scotchman who was willing to be convinced, but would like to find the man who could convince him; and Mr. Gray still felt that he was not in the right mood to do justice to the new claimant.

"There's another matter, though, of more importance," pursued Mr. Dibbs. "While this doubt remains I can't let you have anything, either. That wouldn't be business-like, would it? What you've had is gone, if this thing turns against you. By-the-way, the old Colonel still holds out, I see. I'm going to get stuck on that, too, if he lives much longer, with the premiums I have to pay and the interest that's creeping up. It's awful queer. He must have a constitution like a—like a rhinoceros."

To this Mr. Gray made answer that Colonel Newcombe had changed little during the past year, and yet that he feared he was slowly fading away.

"Fear!" echoed the lawyer. "I don't see why you should be sorry. He's past all enjoyment of life, and he might think of others who've banked on him."

"He is my wife's father," replied Gilbert, impressively.

"Yes, I suppose he is," admitted Dibbs. "And she wouldn't want him to die, if he hadn't an ounce of brain left nor a leg to stand on. If he was *my* father, and—and there was forty thousand insurance on him—I wouldn't care to see him in that frightful condition any longer than I could help. I should

ask the—the good Lord—to take him home—among—among the angels.”

And evidently feeling that there was a piety in the remark that took it out of the commonplace, Mr. Dibbs returned to the other subject.

“This Margrave,” he said, “what does he look like, as near as you can describe him?”

“Mr. Lancaster,” interrupted the butler, opening the door.

“Tell him to come right in,” replied Gray. “Now you can see for yourself,” he added, rising.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FAIR PROPOSITION.

WHEN informed that the gentleman closeted with Mr. Gray was none other than the executor of Abel Blair, Mr. Margrave expressed the greatest pleasure at meeting him. A pleasure, be it said, that the lawyer did not seem to wholly share. Proceeding to business without the least delay, Mr. Dibbs put the claimant through a most searching examination. He made him recount all the particulars of his life, from his earliest recollections—and even, using what he had been told, from a point anterior to them. And Mr. Dibbs had to admit that the man stood the ordeal remarkably well, and that there was no apparent flaw in his statements.

The first thing he remembered, he said, was living

in the town of Salisbury, New South Wales, with his father and a slightly older brother, their wants being attended to by a servant who acted as cook and housekeeper combined. The brother was a son of his father by a previous marriage, and was named Jonas. The father, who was of a roving disposition, came and went as he pleased, sometimes being absent from home for months at a time. The boys went to the schools of the place, and when, at the age of seventeen or eighteen, they were left entire orphans, they took what little money was theirs and went to England. Here Julius got employment in the office of a solicitor, and Jonas worked at various callings until a year or two later, when he disappeared, and had never been seen since.

At the mention of the word "solicitor," Mr. Dibbs began to question Margrave as to his knowledge of law, but he explained his lack of it by saying that he had been kept at copying and that sort of thing; and when at last he rebelled, and demanded a better opportunity to learn something of value, he was given his discharge, and had never set foot afterwards in an establishment of the kind. From that time he had travelled from place to place, perhaps at times engaging in things not entirely to his credit, as he said he might as well admit, without going into particulars. It was not necessary to give a detailed account of every act of his more recent life, in order to prove that he was the rightful heir to Mr. Blair's property, as the son of that gentleman's sister Cynthia.

"I will show you, as soon as it arrives," he added, "a certificate of my father's death and of my graduation from the elementary schools of Salisbury, for

which I have sent to New South Wales. I have forwarded a photograph of myself, and asked a judge of the town, who remembers me well, to certify that it represents my features. There is also a witness here in Chicago whom you may wish to see, the solicitor for whom I worked in London."

Gilbert Gray half rose from his chair, and his eyes opened wide.

"The solicitor," he said, nervously, "is named Darius Yates?"

"Well," was the answer, "I will make it simpler by admitting that at once. Mr. Gray is surprised that Mr. Yates, whom he knows and who has spoken to him about me, apparently, never mentioned that I had been a clerk in his office. Mr. Yates' reasons are entirely foreign to this inquiry. He will not give them to you if you ask him; but such evidence as really affects my case I know he will give with pleasure, for I have communicated with him very recently on the subject."

An hour more of cross-questioning produced no new effects. But when it was ended Mr. Dibbs announced that he should leave the whole matter to the courts.

"I don't express the least opinion," he said, in a judicial way. "I have an important trust to fulfill. If the judge says the money belongs to you, sir, I will turn it over as ordered, to the last cent. If the decision is against you, it goes to Mr. Gray. You must see an attorney, put in your claim, and have it adjudicated in the usual manner."

Before Margrave, whose face had darkened at this proposition, could reply, Gilbert spoke :

"As far as I am concerned, Mr. Dibbs, you will understand that I don't ask this. If Mr.—Mr. Margrave brings his depositions from New South Wales, showing him to be the son of Mrs. Blair's sister, I don't care to know any of the secrets he wishes buried. Indeed, you will meet my desires best by putting him to the least trouble possible."

"That is all very well," responded Mr. Dibbs, "but it's not the best way for me, as a trustee. If I give this estate to the wrong man I shall be personally liable. I want a judge's decision to back me up. No, I have decided that it must go to the court, and nothing can make me change my mind."

In the few moments that elapsed, Margrave had managed to pull himself together, and the cloud on his brow gave way to one of the sunny smiles for which he was at times noted.

"To the court let us go, then," he said, brightly. "As I know nothing of American laws I can only hope it won't take a hundred years to settle, as I would like to use a little of the money before I die. The meanest thing about it," he added, indicating Gray with a motion of his hand, "is that in getting what belongs to me I must displace so good a fellow as this, and one, besides, who stands quite as much in need of it."

This assertion affected Gilbert, who began to think Dibbs a very stubborn old curmudgeon to put the rightful heir to so much trouble over a point that seemed absolutely valueless. It was very clear that he (Gray) might as well give up all hopes, and he saw no benefit to be derived from annoyances of the kind contemplated. He knew, however, that the

statutes of the Medes and Persians were not more unalterable than the mind of Israel Dibbs, and he saw that worthy depart without adding another word in criticism of his course.

As there seemed less reason than ever to ask Margrave to vacate his room, he continued to live under the Newcombe roof, if such it had now any right to be called. In due time he brought to Gilbert a deposition signed by several prominent citizens of New South Wales, as well as by the photographer who took it, that a picture annexed was the portrait of Julius Margrave, son of Julius and Cynthia Margrave, deceased. Besides this he bore a deposition from Darius Yates, that the said Julius had been in his employ for nearly three years, and had during that time been known by no other name, with more matter to the same effect. These documents, after being inspected by Mr. Gray, were placed in the hands of an attorney, and all parties awaited the calling of the case in the court to which it had been assigned.

Mr. Dibbs was informed of the nature of the new proofs, and in fact served with copies of them, but his intention to fight the case was not in the least affected thereby. He wrote to Gray that the affair was out of his hands and that he would do nothing more about it. But, during the summer that followed, he did do something. At the joint request of Julius Margrave and Gilbert Gray, over their witnessed signatures, he released the Newcombe residence from the creditors of the Colonel, taking Gladys' note and mortgage for the amount advanced. This he could safely do, whoever the Blair

property was going to, for the mortgage was a perfectly safe investment, and the proceeding enabled the Grays, with the poor old man who was slowly descending to the tomb, to remain a little longer in their home.

Early in the autumn Colonel Newcombe succumbed to a second shock and passed away without regaining his mind in the least. He had, in effect, been dead for three years already, but his daughter wept for him as if her heart would break, and Gilbert, who liked him immensely, contributed his share to the mourning. Mr. Dibbs came to town as soon as the funeral was over and proceeded to arrange the matter of life insurance, paying over the balance that remained to Mrs. Gray, who accepted it dolefully and handed it to her husband without a word. In their present condition it was a godsend, for there were the interest and taxes on the house to be met, as well as other expenses that had been postponed as long as possible. And Gilbert also ordered a stone for the Colonel's grave that was perhaps extravagant, considering the dimness of the future.

The way the case dragged in the court—the case of *Margrave vs. Dibbs*—did not surprise any one used to the delays of the law, but the plaintiff expressed his dissatisfaction in no gentle terms as time went on. One day he came to Gray with a proposal.

“See here,” he said, “this thing is getting unbearable! My lawyer says Dibbs can fight me off for three years more, if he likes, and I'm sure he will take every minute allowed him. Now, I have an idea, and I want to see what you think of it. I'd

rather take part of a loaf before I die of starvation than a whole bakery after I'm dead and buried."

"What is your suggestion?" asked Gilbert, curiously.

"It's this, in brief: Supposing I withdraw all claim to the property?"

"*What!*"

"Wait a second. Of course that's not the whole of it. Supposing I withdraw, get out, quit professing to be myself and let you take the estate according to my uncle's will. Dibbs wouldn't fight *you*. He'd hand you over the whole thing, bag and baggage, the next morning, wouldn't he?"

Mr. Gray stared at the speaker with all his might.

"I think he would," said he, "but ——"

"Don't 'but' anything for another minute," responded Margrave. "Just fix your mind on my proposition. If I should do that and if you would sign an agreement to hand me over three-quarters of what you got, I'd be better off, wouldn't I, than to hang around here till I'm an octogenarian, waiting for the courts to let me in?"

The idea was so strange that it staggered Gray at first.

"You'd get fifty thousand dollars," said Margrave, trying to make it clearer. "I'd get the rest. Neither of us could complain, and, by George! I'll do it, if you say so!"

Fifty thousand dollars! It looked like a mountain of gold to the young man. He could move to some quiet home in the country and live with his dear ones on the income of that amount. But, on the

other hand, it looked dishonorable to take so great an advantage of another's necessities.

"What do you say?" cried Margrave. "Is it a bargain?"

"I—I would do it at once," stammered Gray, "but I don't think it would be fair—to you. It would be almost a kind of blackmail, to accept such a sum for merely helping you to your rights."

"That's my lookout," smiled the other. "I'm satisfied, and you ought to consider that sufficient. You've got a wife and family, too; you mustn't forget them."

Gray found himself leaning toward an acceptance of the proposal, though he still thought the share to be given him was disproportionate. Before they separated he had agreed to the plan, and within a week documents had been signed by which it could be carried out.

The relief which Gilbert felt as he contemplated the near approach of a competency for Gladys and the children carried him almost to the skies of happiness. He declared to himself that Margrave was more than a gentleman, and took back a hundred times a day all the ill-natured things he had ever said or thought about him.

He dared not tell his wife of the comfortable future that was dawning on the horizon, lest some slip should dash the cup from their lips. He waited with a fever of impatience till he could assure her beyond a doubt that their days of actual penury were over.

Israel Dibbs came to Chicago and had a talk with Gray when he was apprised of the new state of affairs.

"I thought he'd draw out, before he let it go to a jury," he remarked, sarcastically. "How much did you have to pay? Of course you gave him something, and I think that was the safest way out of it, but I hope it wasn't much."

"Still prejudiced by your own interests," replied Gray, with a smile. "I told you he'd never seem an honest man in your eyes while you had a personal claim that got into the balance."

Mr. Dibbs pooh-poohed at this, declaring it had nothing to do with the case. He said the latest action of Lancaster—he refused to call him Margrave—had proved how little confidence he had in winning a verdict.

"We'll have the whole thing settled now in a month or two," he said, in conclusion. "And, my word for it, you have escaped one of the prettiest attempts at swindling that ever came under my observation."

But Gray only laughed, knowing what a "set" man Mr. Dibbs was, and congratulated himself anew over the bargain he had made.

He went home and played with his two children—his, both of them, in love, at least. He kissed Gladys so warmly that she wondered what had happened, and looked at his beaming face under a momentary apprehension that he had lost his wits.

With fifty thousand dollars and these loved ones, he would forget he had ever expected to be richer.

Ah! Who *can* be richer than the man with a wife who adores him, and enough to keep her from the icy blasts that sweep around this bleak world.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"WOMEN ARE QUEER THINGS."

WITH the difficulties out of the way, in the matter of Abel Blair's estate, one would have thought that the only thing necessary to pass it over to Gilbert Gray was the arrival of the date mentioned in the will. But legal matters are notoriously slow in coming to a head, and this one was no exception to the rule. What made it matter less, however, was that Mr. Dibbs had again opened his private purse and was advancing as liberally as before to the legatee. The money thus obtained, Gilbert divided pretty equally with Margrave, who, however, fretted over the length of time required to get the balance, and declared every day that he was disgusted with the judges and lawyers, from one end of the case to the other.

Margrave, as the time of settlement grew nearer, made various excursions to points out of the city, sometimes being gone a fortnight at a stretch. He finally gave up his room at the Grays. Where he went Gilbert had no knowledge, and the matter had little interest for him. He meant to keep his word to the letter, and though he felt very grateful for what he called Margrave's "generosity," he was quite willing to be deprived of his companionship, that had of late grown rather too intimate to be wholly agreeable.

The only thing that annoyed Gray at this period,

was the fact that Mr. Yates still remained in the city and had been seen by him several times in the street. He realized that the solicitor had no good will toward him, and dreaded lest some move might be made on his side of a disagreeable nature. But as there was no law against a person's living in any part of the world that pleased him, he did not see what he could do about it, as long as he could trace no unpleasant consequences to the presence of this man.

The exact date that the five years elapsed from the death of Mr. Blair, was February 13th. Fully a month beyond that day passed, and Mr. Dibbs still made excuses. Margrave, who never visited Gray now, but wrote him frequent letters, intimated his belief that “the old cuss” had stolen part of the funds and was liable to “skip to Canada” with the balance, unless somebody had an eye on him. Of course Gilbert laughed at this notion, for he thought he knew Mr. Dibbs better than that. And yet he wondered as much as his new friend why such a long time was necessary.

One morning the lawyer came to Chicago and sought Mr. Gray at his residence. He had something of importance to communicate and asked his host to make certain that they were not disturbed.

“I don't want anybody coming in just now,” he said, looking warily around the library, “especially that man.”

“What—Margrave?” cried Gilbert, good-naturedly, after giving the necessary order. “I haven't set eyes on him for seven or eight weeks.”

“Haven't you?” was the reply. “You don't mean to say he's cleared out !”

"No. I had a letter from him yesterday. Cleared out! He's in no mood for clearing out, from the tenor of his note."

Mr. Dibbs hemmed softly and closed his eyelids slightly.

"Have you got that note here?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"Will you let me see it?"

Gilbert could not help laughing again.

"I'm afraid it wouldn't please you to read it in full," he said, "but I'll show you the date and the signature, if you want. You seem to doubt that he's here still. There you are, 'Chicago, March 21st,' and at the bottom, 'Believe me, as ever, Your Sincere Friend, Julius Margrave.' What will you have straighter than that?"

The lawyer scanned the letter eagerly.

"Nothing," he said sharply. "If you will cut off those lines for me—or agree to keep them until they are wanted—I shall be satisfied."

"I'll keep them," smiled Gray. "I don't like to mutilate the letters of my friends. I've had a good many from him during the past few months, and I've got them all."

At this the lawyer rubbed his hands softly together.

"All right so far," he responded. "Now, for another matter. In looking over the papers of Colonel Newcombe that you gave me with the insurance policies I have made one or two discoveries. Shall I tell you what they are?"

The lawyer's lips shut tightly together and his eyes dilated strikingly. His manner had changed

so suddenly that the younger man did not know what to think.

“Has it anything to do with—with this affair?” he asked, beginning to tremble.

“Possibly. Mr. Gray, I am an attorney-at-law, and a secret is as safe in my hands as if locked in your own brain.”

A secret! There was but one secret that Gilbert Gray cared about. Was it possible that one could have been found in the bundle of papers. He could not endure the suspense, and he told Mr. Dibbs to proceed.

“I was not *looking* for this secret, mind you!” explained the lawyer. “But I know the necessity of examining every scrap of writing that a dead man leaves before deciding that it is of no value. I was examining those papers of Colonel Newcombe’s when I found the one to which I shall first refer you.”

Mr. Gray took the paper that was handed him, and before he glanced at the page threw a searching glance into the sharp eyes before him. Then he read as follows :

“Enclosed you will find the complete confession of young Margrave, whose name your daughter could not be persuaded to give you. By this time he is well out of the country and I am sure you will never be troubled by him again. I advanced him sufficient for expenses, believing that the wisest course, but he is thoroughly frightened and only too anxious to get away. I am still confident that the best move will be a marriage with Mr. Gray, if I can

bring him to agree to it, and I think I can. Will try to see you to-morrow.

“Yours, etc.,

“DARIUS YATES.”

It was a very bitter draught that had to be swallowed, and the young man thought it would strangle him in its downward course. Bitter, because it reopened the horrible chapter he had tried so hard to close. Bitter, because his secret was exposed to this man, whose contempt he could already feel piercing through his vitals. Bitter because—because —

He stopped and caught his breath.

—Because Margrave had been for more than a year under Gladys Gray's roof, and she had assisted him in deceiving her husband by pretending they had never met before!

And if she was capable of that, of how much more might she not be! Margrave had been in the house from morning till night, nearly all the time, while the husband had been away at his work! All that was needed to make a perfect case was collusion on the part of a servant, or the mere shutting of an eye. And the domestic that cared for the lodger's room would have cut off her hand for her young mistress.

Gray's face was a combination of yellow and chalk as he faced Mr. Dibbs. But he was at first incapable of speech, and the other resumed:

“Then here is the letter to which the first one refers. I don't ask what it means—you can judge that for yourself. But before you give any large

slice of my friend Blair's money away you ought to have all the facts in the case at your disposal.”

Gilbert read the second letter and still he could not utter a word. To speak would be to plead guilty to a monstrous indictment.

“I've got some important business to do, and I must be going,” remarked the lawyer, rising. “If it's convenient I'll meet you again this afternoon. I'll have a few other things to say that you'll think strange, I guess. And now I've got one bit of advice to give—don't get excited. There's several turns in the road yet, and maybe, if you start off too rapid, you'll get on the wrong one.”

It was half an hour before Gilbert felt able to meet his wife, for he wanted to put the dreadful question to her and have it over with. If she could clear herself no one would be more pleased than he. If she could not, an immediate separation was the only thing for them, and after that he would pay his respects to the cause of his misery.

“Where is Mrs. Gray?” he asked of the butler, when he responded to his ring.

“She has gone out, sir.”

“Out! How long has she been out?”

“Nearly all the morning, sir. It's the usual time she takes her drive, sir.”

“When she returns, let me know.”

“I will, sir.”

Her usual time. Yes, he remembered it, now it was brought to his attention. And he was also sure that the mornings out that had become so common dated pretty nearly from the time when Julius Margrave ceased to live at their house. What a deep

game they had played on him, those two, and by what a simple accident it had been discovered!

When Mrs. Gray returned she came straight to the library where her husband still awaited her.

"Do you wish to see me, Gilbert?" she asked, pleasantly.

"Yes," he said, sharply, rising to shut the door that they might be alone. "*I want you to tell me WHO was the father of your first child?*"

The question was so terrible—so unexpected—so brutal, and the husband's manner so fierce, that Mrs. Gray lost her power of speech.

"Come, no nonsense!" he persisted, roughly. "Answer!"

"*I must not tell you!*" she stammered. "Oh, Gilbert, how can you put this shame on me after all the years I have been your true and faithful wife?"

A gush of tears followed the outburst, but they had no effect on him whatever.

"You 'must not tell'?" he echoed. "Thank God, I do not have to depend on your word! 'True and faithful?' How do you reconcile that with the fact that he has helped you to deceive a husband to whom you were already a sufficient disgrace?"

Too much agitated to reply, Gladys could only continue to weep, but when he added that they must part at once, and that he would never look her in the face again, she uttered a wild cry.

"No, no! You do not mean that! I have done nothing wrong—not since that first, that awful time, so many years ago! If I have met this man, it was for your sake, yes, for your sake, Gilbert! It was not for myself—I would starve by your side if need

be—it was always for you ! He told me—he assured me ——”

Violent sobs drowned the sentence, and when Mrs. Gray looked up again she was alone.

Not daring to trust himself longer in her presence, now that she had admitted so much, Mr. Gray had hastened from the room. Snatching his hat from the rack by the door he hurried into the street and started rapidly on foot toward the city. He did not know or care where he was going, he only wanted to get away from her.

So Margrave’s “generosity” was all on Gladys’ account ! And she had considered it the duty of a “faithful” wife to wheedle money out of a paramour, as long as she put it in a husband’s hands !

God Almighty, what a beast she must have thought him !

And still he felt with bitterness that *he* was to blame for the estimate. He had given his name to an abandoned creature, in exchange for pounds and shillings. He had known that, before she should have been out of boarding school, she had surrendered the dearest possession of an honest girl to some man beneath the consideration of her father from a matrimonial point of view. She had bought her husband for cash, and no doubt felt that he put money above all other values. Rather than be reduced to penury—of which she had seen quite enough during her married life—she had bargained with Margrave for a quarter part of his patrimony, and of course had paid the price.

If she had flown with her paramour, he could have borne it better. But to share her caresses between

them, to pretend such virtue while carrying on her illicit relations, this was the farthest depth of villainy.

How long had her affair been going on? Had it ever wholly ceased? Margrave was in London and in Amsterdam when she was there. He had been in Chicago, and under her roof a great deal of the time since she returned to America.

They were too cunning for him. He gnashed his teeth as the confirmatory evidence began to range itself in line.

Walking on and on, Gray came to Washington street in its busiest portion, and had nearly run over Israel Dibbs before that gentleman could stop him.

"What's up?" cried the lawyer. "You look like a crazy man!"

And, indeed, he did. He could not answer the question in words, and putting an arm through one of his, Dibbs drew him into a building near by, and into the private office of a friend, where he made him sit down.

"I thought, after I left to-day," said Dibbs, "that I had done wrong in not making some things a little clearer. It occurred to me that you might stumble on a wrong scent and do something rash, notwithstanding the last bit of advice I gave you. I had an engagement to keep, and as soon as it was over I went out to your house in a carriage, arriving too late to find you in. What has happened to make you look like an escaped lunatic?"

Finding that Gray was still unable to speak, the lawyer helped him.

"You've been having words with your wife?"

The answer was written on the countenance of the man questioned.

"And you've been accusing her of something recent," said Dibbs, slowly, "in connection with that man Margrave?"

There was no denial of this charge.

"Then let me tell you," pursued Dibbs, "that you are wholly wrong, and that the best thing you can do is to banish your suspicions at once from your mind."

Three times did Gilbert Gray open his mouth before he could utter an articulate sound. His lips were dry, and his tongue thick.

"She has confessed. It is all over," he muttered, at last.

"Confessed—what?"

"Everything."

"The devil!" said Dibbs.

Mr. Gray nodded. He did not like to talk about it any more than he could help, but he saw that this man would have to know, and that there never would be a better time than the present to tell him.

"Women are queer things!" was the lawyer's next statement. "Topsy isn't the only one that has been taken with such a desire to 'confess' that she's had to make up lies to do it. You've not forgot the Beecher scandal. The woman in that case used to make a new confession, in writing too, as often as any one asked her, and she never committed the alleged offense once, if I'm any judge of evidence. If your wife has admitted recent wrong-doing with Margrave, she's a proper subject for a physician's care. For I know all about this business—as you

will in a short time if you keep your wits about you—and nothing of the sort has occurred !”

It seemed a very flimsy straw—this mere assertion of the lawyer’s against the direct admissions of Mrs. Gray, but Gilbert caught at it with the frantic clutch of the man who is drowning.

“If you can prove that,” he said, in a hoarse whisper, “you will make me the happiest man on earth !”

“Then prepare to enter that blissful state,” smiled Dibbs, “for I take my oath that is exactly what I intend to do. But you will have to meet Margrave, and it will be necessary that you conceal in his presence the suspicions you have formed in regard to him.”

At the repeated use of that name, Gilbert colored.

“Have you gone so far as to acknowledge your mistake ?” he asked. “Thrice in the last three minutes you have called him ‘Margrave.’ Are you willing to admit that that is his name ?”

There was a wise look on the lawyer’s wrinkled countenance.

“Yes,” he answered, slowly, “I am obliged to admit it now.”

“Then you have been mistaken all along.”

Mr. Dibbs shook his head.

“His name *is* Margrave, and I have *not* been mistaken,” he repeated. “For that riddle a long explanation is necessary, and I think should be given by Mr. Margrave in person. Perhaps,” he paused and consulted his watch, “perhaps it will be best to send for him now, as things have taken such a turn, and have it over with.”

Gray stared at his companion.

“Then you know where he is ?” he asked.

“Precisely. He is in jail.”

“On what charge?”

“Attempting to swindle Gilbert Gray out of more than two hundred thousand dollars.”

Gilbert felt his brain growing light. First Dibbs had promised to save his wife to him, and now he talked of recovering his lost fortune! It surely was a dream. It could not be reality.

“I am going to send for Margrave at once,” continued Dibbs, “and have you listen to his story right where you are. It is not safe to let you go out of here with only a partial knowledge of the truth. In more than one case, ‘a little learning is a dangerous thing.’ Will you promise not to allude to anything in connection with your wife, while that man is in your presence? Because, without that promise, there is no use in bringing him.”

After a moment’s reflection, Gilbert agreed to the proposition, and the lawyer dispatched several notes by various messenger boys who responded to his call.

The first response was from a stenographer, who was to take a verbatim report of the conversation it was expected would ensue. And shortly afterwards two sheriffs appeared, leading a prisoner between them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A CROSS-EXAMINATION.

EXCEPT on the stage no man whose hands are manacled, and who is in the custody of officers of the law, looks comfortable. Margrave was not an exception to the rule, but when he saw Mr. Gray he put on an air of bravado, which he doubtless thought would conceal the agitation of his mind. He nodded recognition, and when his irons were removed, at Mr. Dibbs' request, rubbed his wrists with a comical grimace, and remarked that jewelry of that kind was not to his liking. Then, when the sheriffs had withdrawn into the outer office, and he was left alone with the lawyer, the stenographer and Mr. Gray, he settled himself easily in a chair, and asked whether there was anything he could do to make the occasion more agreeable to all parties.

"I have sent for you," replied the quiet voice of Mr. Dibbs, "in order that you may make whatever statement you think best, before this gentleman," indicating Gilbert, "as to your connection with the Blair estate. Your words will be taken down in shorthand, and drawn up in the form of an affidavit, to which, should you wish, you can make oath. I offer you no inducement for this. You are to leave the future entirely to me, as far as my action is concerned. But if you think best to tell the truth in relation to the matter, you now have an opportunity of doing so."

There is something in the pushing of a stenographer's pencil over the pages of a notebook deeply impressive to those who have occasion to know for the first time that their words are being photographed with absolute precision.

"I have already told you all there is to tell," was Margrave's answer, as he eyed the pencil.

"What I ask, then, is that you repeat the statement for the benefit of Mr. Gray, and in the hearing of this secretary. If you prefer to decline ——"

But to this Margrave demurred instantly. He was quite ready, he said, to answer all questions put to him.

"I thought you would be," said Dibbs, with a grim smile. "Now let me say one thing more. Let your answers refer wholly to the point at issue, and not by any inadvertence stray beyond it. If you have anything further to say—to Mr. Gray, or to any one—let it remain until the stenographer has gone."

Gray looked up gratefully as this suggestion was made, for he had feared that in the course of the examination something might be uttered which he would rather third parties did not hear. There was sufficient strain already upon his brain. He was trying to rest on the assurance of the lawyer that his wife had not been false to him with this man, though he could see no way to establish an innocence which he thought she had herself disclaimed. But, whatever the truth of that matter, the letter that Dibbs had found in the papers of Colonel Newcombe branded Margrave as the author of her original fall, which was enough to make his presence most hateful

to her husband. Gilbert buried his face in his hands and listened anxiously for the testimony to proceed.

"What is your true name?" was the first question Mr. Dibbs put to his witness.

"Margrave," was the ready answer.

"Christian name?"

"Jonas."

Gray looked up, astounded.

"Have you ever known any one by the name of *Julius Margrave*?"

"Yes, two; my father, and my brother by a second marriage."

The lawyer had maintained that this man was named Margrave, and yet that he was a fraud and a cheat. Already he had proved the truth of those assertions.

In answer to interrogatories, Margrave then went on to tell how his father had contracted marriage with Miss Cynthia Blair within a year of the death of his first wife, and how the lady had died shortly after giving birth to her son Julius. The father was a roving fellow, who left the boys in charge of a housekeeper, being absent for months at a time. The children attended school at their home in New South Wales, where they were taken in infancy, until their early manhood, when the death of Mr. Margrave, Sr., sent them adrift. With what little funds belonged to them they went to England, where their paths diverged.

"I fell in with a party of gamblers," said Jonas, coolly, "and found that my forte consisted of manipulating the cards and the dice-box. Julius went into the office of a solicitor named Darius Yates,

where he earned a scanty living for several years, under the impression that he would ultimately gain admission to the bar. He was never in very good health, and about five years ago he migrated suddenly, in search, as I understood, of a more congenial climate. Not long ago I received news of his death at Cape Town."

Cleared, if his story was true, of the charge of intimacy with Gladys in her youthful days, Margrave left one of his hearers still puzzled. How could his statement be reconciled with that of Mrs. Gray, that she had met the father of her child of late, and had striven to exact aid from him for her husband?

Must the onus of her fall be taken from both Jonas and his brother, and placed on still another's shoulders? And if so, on whose?

"Now, about the Blair estate," said Mr. Dibbs encouragingly.

"Well, that's rather a long story," replied Margrave, "but the essential point is that Yates had heard of the conditions of the will from Mr. Gray, in some of their conversations. He had reasons for wanting to keep Julius out of England, and thought the safest way was to hide the news from my brother, who was depending on a small allowance from him for his living, and might reappear if he should fall into a fortune of that size. But many a time did Yates hint to me that if I minded my business, and all went as he expected, I would be a rich man yet. All I must do was to leave everything to him. In the belief that there was something to the story I went on, doing his bidding like a negro slave."

Mr. Dibbs, who had been growing uneasy for several seconds, interposed a remark that these particulars were unnecessary at this time.

"When did you first announce your name to be that of Julius Margrave?" asked the lawyer.

"Nearly a year ago—to my friends in the 'profession.' Mr. Yates suggested it, and said he would give me his reasons in due time. We both knew that my brother was in consumption, and could not live much longer. Naturally, I thought the money Yates so often referred to must be some that belonged to Julius, but as he was so near the end I considered him quite as well off without it. After we heard of Julius' death, Yates began sending me letters in that name, to further establish my identity, I suppose, and one of them, that came by accident into Mr. Gray's hands, upset the plot and put me in possession of every card that my smart friend held."

Mr. Dibbs nodded, and looked at Gray, who was sitting with his right elbow resting on the arm of his chair, biting his nails nervously.

"That letter addressed to 'Julius Margrave,'" pursued the narrator, "was left with Mr. Gray. The man who brought it described me and said I had a room in the house, which was true. Mr. Gray promptly told me I was the heir to the fortune left by Mr. Blair, and I saw the whole play of Mr. Yates as clear as crystal."

The stenographer stopped to sharpen a pencil, and then the man proceeded.

"Of course I went to Yates, who was staying here in Chicago, waiting to see how the cat would jump, and told him I thought we had been partners long

enough. I said I was going in for my fortune, and he had better not get in my way unless he wanted to be hurt. He blustered and threatened, but he didn't scare me. I didn't believe he would dare raise my ante. So I sent to New South Wales for photographs and affidavits, and all sorts of proof, and put them into the case. And if it hadn't been for you," he snapped his fingers jocosely at Mr. Dibbs, "I would have divided the property before now with Mr. Gray, and more than likely have lost the whole of my share in some big plunge at the gaming table."

The lawyer bowed, as if he had no intention of disputing these assertions.

"In short," he said, "your name is Jonas instead of Julius Margrave; you have no claim whatever to any part of Abel Blair's property; and all the so-called 'proofs' you have furnished to the contrary are false and worthless."

"That's about it," said Margrave.

"And to this you are willing to make oath?"

"At your convenience."

Consulting first with the shorthand writer, the lawyer said he would call at the jail in two days' time with the document ready for the affidavit.

"Two days? Can't you call it one?" was the reply. "I'm not particularly struck with my lodgings, and my landlord is such an old curmudgeon that he won't even allow me a latchkey. I don't intend to stay there much longer than will enable me to accommodate you with these little matters."

"I shall need two days," said Mr. Dibbs. "As for the rest, remember, I have made no promises."

Margrave laughed.

"Of course. But the habeas corpus writ will be issued, just the same, and I shall sleep in a decent bed day after to-morrow night. I hope Mr. Gray won't forget," he added, "that he owes me five thousand dollars and interest, which will come in very handy in the present emergency. If I owed it to *him*, he'd dun me fast enough, as I have occasion to remember." This with another laugh. "I don't suppose," he continued, seeing the black cloud that was gathering on Gilbert's face, "that he's any too fond of me, seeing the trick I was trying to play; but, considering that he has all the stakes, and I haven't drawn a single pair, I don't think he ought to take it too much to heart."

Gray rose and stepped forward.

"If Mr. Dibbs is through with you," he said, his voice trembling with excitement, "I want you to answer a few questions to me alone!"

"No, no!" interposed the lawyer, hastily. "Not to-day. I have something of more importance to arrange with you. Mr. Margrave's address is well known, and we can see him later."

"Yes," smiled the prisoner, not much disconcerted by Gilbert's outburst, "you can call at any reasonable hour and be certain to find me in. And I assure you, Mr. Gray, I will answer every question you put to me, to the best of my ability. I'm a gambler and a rogue, but, as I think I told you once before, I consider you a White man, and the deal from now on will be square on my side."

Unwillingly, Gilbert saw the sheriffs enter, remove their man and take him away. He must rely on Dibbs now. The lawyer had saved him his for

tune, and had asserted his ability to save him his wife also. The only way was to be guided by his advice in everything.

"We'll go up to your house now," said Dibbs, when the room was cleared. "I want a little private conversation with Mrs. Gray."

To this Gilbert strenuously objected. Until his wife was cleared of the accusations she had made against herself, he did not wish to enter her door. Mr. Dibbs might go and welcome. All the arguments that could be brought to bear failed to shake him in this determination.

"Where shall I find you?" asked Dibbs, "when I return?"

"I will go to the Leland House and take a room there. You can ask the number at the office."

"Very well," was the unwilling reply. "But, for Heaven's sake, don't get into any foolishness while you are gone. We will have this thing settled to your entire satisfaction in a day or two, if you don't make trouble yourself. I think," continued the lawyer, musingly, "that the best thing is to send Hartwell along with you. He'll keep you out of mischief and entertain you at the same time with some of the things he has unearthed."

Gray asked who Hartwell was, for he did not like the idea of being put under surveillance, as if he were a child.

"Hartwell? Why, he's the detective who has worked up this whole affair. You'll find him as interesting as a new novel. He's been at work for months, and he has a nice little bill against you by

this time, too. Come, his office is only a few doors from here. Let us see if he is in."

This statement put a very different face on the proposition, and Mr. Gray assented eagerly to the proposal. Mr. Hartwell was found, and proved to be an undersized man, about forty years of age, and with the last face that would be thought by the uninitiated to belong to a "sleuthhound" of justice.

"We'll not be at the Leland, though," said Hartwell, as Dibbs was about to leave them. "We'll be at the Windsor. And when you go to the office, you needn't ask for Mr. Gray, but for me."

Gray glanced from one to the other of his companions, but made no reply. He felt that there must be a reason for the change, and that it would be made known to him later. He was anxious to put nothing in Mr. Dibbs' way. If he should return with the dreadful riddle solved—if he should show that Gladys was an honest wife—if he should prove their household intact—life would be worth living once more. Without those things the thousands Gilbert had so longed for would be an empty treasure in his hands.

Mr. Dibbs did not find Mrs. Gray at home. She had been gone but a few moments, the servant said, and had left a letter for her husband, asking that it be delivered to him when he came in. The lawyer stated that he was going directly to Mr. Gray and would hand him the note. He hastened to his cab, and directing the driver to go as fast as possible to the Windsor House, he tore open the envelope. It was no time to think of trifles.

This was the way the letter read :

"MY HUSBAND:—Notwithstanding the cruel words you used to me this morning, I shall make one more effort to save the fortune that should by right be yours. I have brought you nothing but shame and misery. Whatever happens you cannot regard me with greater horror than you already do.

"Unless I send you before to-morrow full proofs that you are entitled to the whole of Mr. Blair's estate, you will know that I have died in the meantime. You can draw your own conclusions. I cannot exist without your love, nor if anything happens to make me less worthy of it than I now am.

"Be good to the children; they at least are not to blame.

"Your heartbroken GLADYS."

The good lawyer cursed roundly to himself in the solitude of his cab, and then shouted from the window for the driver to quicken the pace of his horses. Arriving at the Windsor he hurried to Hartwell's room, and was received at the door by another detective, named Gardiner, with his finger on his lips.

"'Sh!" whispered the detective. "Step lightly, and don't dare even to breathe. I think we've flushed the bird!"

CHAPTER XXX.

GLADYS IN PERIL.

IN that same Windsor Hotel, on the third floor, a pale and much agitated man was pacing up and down his sitting-room, with nervous steps. Frequently he stopped at the window that looked upon the street and peered anxiously below, as if he hoped to see a familiar face in the mass that was visible amid the lights of the early evening. Anon he paused at the door that led from his room into the public hall, listening. The watch in his fob pocket was taken out and inspected every few moments, impatiently.

"Good God! Why doesn't she come!" he ejaculated, under his breath, again and again.

There were dark rings about his eyes. His sleep had evidently been irregular of late. There was something careless and slipshod in his attire. His hair, through which his thin fingers were passed over and over, was not in order. His temples were hot and his pulse feverish.

A low knock at the door roused him to sudden action. He sprang to admit the newcomer, a veiled lady in black, who stepped across the threshold as if she had a fear of being pursued. The portal was closed rapidly behind her and locked with a spasmodic motion. Then the man turned with a countenance beaming with joy and addressed his companion.

"Gladys, my darling!" he cried. "You have come at last. I knew you would not refuse, when you had thought of everything!"

Mrs. Gray, for it was she, drew back from the arms that threatened to enfold her, and put up both hands to avoid the embrace. Her veil, when thrown back from her face, showed that she was even paler than he had been, and that she also labored under an excitement which she was vainly trying to conceal.

"I have come," she answered, wearily, "but only to talk with you—to persuade you to do what is right. I have come because I believe there is virtue left in you still."

The man showed disappointment in every lineament.

"Then you have made a great mistake," he said. "I have no virtue, no conscience, that can stifle the mad love I feel for you—the love that has consumed me every hour for the past seven years! Gladys, I beg you not to enter on that strain, for it can have no effect. Sit down, compose yourself, and let us discuss the matter sensibly."

The lady, breathing heavily, complied with the suggestion to be seated, and the man took a chair near her.

"If you could realize the depth of the sentiment that thrills me," he continued, "you would know better how to forgive the means I take to bring it to fruition. The first minute I saw you that flame was aroused in my heart. I was nearly fifteen years your elder—I had a wife of my own—all this it is useless to deny. But when I gazed into your girlish

eyes, every fibre of my being was stirred into irresistible passion !”

The face opposite to his averted itself and there was no reply from the white lips.

“You know what happened,” he went on. “The third time we met you made a promise to come to my rooms—alone—a promise that you broke. But at our next meeting you promised again, and that time you kept your word. I meant nothing wrong by you ; I swear it ! I wanted you where I could bathe my soul in your loveliness, but I did not dream of bearing away the flower which had intoxicated me with its perfume. And that anything did occur that day beyond an exchange of civilities—perhaps an innocent kiss—was it altogether my fault, Gladys ?”

A groan escaped from the woman’s lips at the question.

“Ah !” she cried. “You were older—you were a man—you should have been too generous to accept such an advantage ; you should have repulsed me ! No, you cannot escape your guilt by reminding me that my brain was the first to take fire, unused to such a situation as that of an infant in its cradle !”

He bade her lower her voice, which had been raised to a key that might have been heard outside the apartment.

“You never give me the least credit,” he complained, “for the part I acted when the harm was done ; for the shrewd manner in which I saved your reputation to the world, by arranging your marriage. Who else, think you, would have secured that letter from young Margrave, and kept him out of the country until his death ? He never even knew to whom

it was sent, and in his consumptive condition the only thing that mattered to him was the monthly pension I provided. It took no small amount of labor, either, to bring Gray to the point. And, all that time, consider the agony I suffered in resigning you to the arms of another man, even though I believed in my inmost soul you would still have the gratitude to continue mine. I had to wear a smile when the canker was eating my heart. I was obliged to cajole that jackanapes when I would have preferred to cut his throat. You never remember these things, Gladys. You never think of what I endured because I was tied to another woman and could not wed you myself. I gave you up, I made you a wife, I took your repulses, I saw you fading out of my reach. I learned you had borne a second child, and that it belonged to him! Can there be a greater hell in the next world than has been mine during these years?"

Many times in the course of this outburst did Mrs. Gray try to interrupt the speaker, and at its close she addressed him piteously.

"But why," she asked, "when all this was past, when the good you tried to do me was accomplished, when I was living honorably with this man, must you seek to tear me from him? Why, when the clouds that you brought on my head had so nearly disappeared, must you come to plunge me again into darkness?"

He leaned toward her and spoke in a very low voice.

"Because the time has at last arrived when I can take you to my home, when I can give you my name.

For the past year I have been a widower. I want you, Gladys, more than ever, now that no other marriage stands in my way. Never for a second have I ceased to love you, and your repeated refusals, your reiterated repulses will be forgiven only when the law has separated you from him and made you mine forever !”

The hands of Mrs. Gray were clasped over her face, and her form rocked to and fro in pain.

“Whatever you may have had of love for me,” she answered, “I never felt the least affection in return. In spite of my conduct in those days when you threw your evil personality around me, I never cared for you ; no, never ! I used to leave your side in the bitterest contrition for my sins. I returned to you as the bird goes to the fangs of the snake it knows not how to resist. Even when giving all that is supposed to go with the deepest love, I hated you with my whole mind. More than once, with lips pressed to yours, I have wished that a knife lay near, that I might plunge it into your breast ! And when I remember the suffering you made me endure—the misery I brought to the best of fathers, the lies I told to the kindest of mothers, the shame I became to the most honorable of husbands, I wonder I do not find some weapon to kill you now, instead of supplicating for the mercy it is not in your iron heart to grant !”

The man winced under the lash, but he had no idea of giving up. He renewed his arguments, confident that in the end she would have to succumb to his wishes.

“You know what I can do, if you drive me to it,” he said, slowly. “I can send your husband proofs

that you have met me here repeatedly and been closeted with me for hours together. I ——”

“But he knows it already,” she interrupted, with a shiver.

“What do you mean?” he asked, glancing toward the door in alarm.

“I mean that he accused me of it to-day, and that I had not the courage to deny the charge. Yes,” she added, as she saw the effect her words produced, “he knows it now, all about Marianne and everything; he knows we have had secret meetings; and he told me”—she uttered a gasp—“that because of this he would never see or speak to me again. He left the house hours ago, and he has not returned.”

This was indeed unexpected news. Quick thoughts passed through the brain of the listener. What was Mr. Gray doing at the present moment? More than likely searching the city to find him, and if so, with no amicable intentions. However, inquiry at the hotel office would not reveal the correct name of the occupant of his rooms, for a pseudonym had always been used there. All the stronger reasons now prevailed for securing Gladys and making the quickest possible flight to Europe.

“If your husband has said this,” he told her, “you can never hope to regain his affection. A gulf is now established between you. Well, in exchange for his coldness, I offer the warmest love. His home will be closed to you, mine will be open. You shall bring both your children,” he went on, eagerly. “I will give them the care of a father without distinction. Gladys, my dearest, I do not wish to threaten you. I have only tried to use the surest means to

bring you to my way of thinking. If there is any other stipulation that you wish me to make, you have but to ask and you will see how willingly I will grant it. Only I *must* have you. I cannot *live* without you !”

She thought of the home that was ruined and her heart sank. Gilbert had cast her off. The fortune he had thought to gain by his marriage had vanished. If she could bring it back to him, perhaps—perhaps—he would forgive her.

“It would be so easy for you to help me out of my troubles,” she stammered. “You say you possess proofs that Mr. Margrave has no right to the property that Mr. Blair willed Gilbert. You admit that you have nothing personally to gain or lose in the transaction. Why, oh ! why, will you not give those proofs to me, and let me take them to my husband ? With that simple act you would make me the happiest woman on earth, and do much to blot from your soul the terrible record of sin that so disfigures it. You will do it ! I know you will !” she cried, sinking on the carpet at his feet. “You have only been trying me !”

He put his hands on her head and the touch seemed to harden rather than melt him.

“He took you once for money, and you think he would do so again !” he answered, bitterly. “Perhaps he would ; I do not think his estimate of you is much higher than that. But I assure you I shall not help him this time. No, I have the secret that can make him rich, and mine it remains unless you give your own sweet self in exchange. In this envelope is absolute evidence that the Blair estate is his.

Swear to go with me to Europe, and to marry me as soon as a divorce from him can be obtained, and I will give you that package. If you think you owe him anything more than he has already had, your debt will be richly paid with these papers. All you have to do is to send him this envelope by a messenger, with a note saying you will not see him again. The children are easily obtainable, and I will guarantee that on Saturday we and they will be on the ocean. If you decline you have simply lost him and he has lost his property. I will make no other terms."

The woman's eyes began to scintillate with strange fires. She seemed to realize her helplessness in the presence of this strong force.

"Let—me—see," she murmured. "Gilbert is to have two hundred thousand dollars in exchange for me. Do you think that will satisfy him?"

"He will call it a splendid bargain!"

"And I—what am I to get? Oh, yes; your *love* and *esteem*!"

"The truest ever given woman. Gladys, only come with me and I will never leave you one hour for repentance."

As if almost persuaded she hesitated a moment, and then burst into sobbing.

"Why do you want me?" she asked, wildly. "Look more carefully. I am not as young as I was. I have borne two children—and nursed them—since you used to know me. My beauty is badly faded. These are not the goods that attracted your eye when they were first placed on the counter. You say I may bring both my babies—his as well as yours?"

Are you certain you will never show a difference between them, as he has never done?"

With all the passion that filled his veins he met every question. He should love her, old or young, fresh or faded. His affection was one of a lifetime. Her child should be his. He saw that she was about to yield and he wanted to make his happiness certain, at whatever cost.

"Give me the envelope," she said, at last, resuming her seat in the chair. "Show me exactly what it contains. One must be very careful when one is asked to pay so dear a price."

"If these documents establish what I claim, then, have I your promise?" he demanded.

She bowed, reaching out her hand for them.

"You promise to be mine, as long as you live?"

"To be yours—as long—as I—live."

With a glad cry he tried to clasp her in his arms, but she held him off.

"Wait!" she said, imperiously. "The payment, first."

Convinced that she would keep her word, he opened the package, and spread the contents before her.

"You see," he explained, when she had perused them, "Julius Margrave died at Cape Town in August last. His half brother, who has impersonated him, will get, if he has his deserts, about ten years in the State prison. This leaves Mr. Gray heir to the whole property."

Yes, it was very plain. Gilbert would get the money as soon as it was shown that Margrave was a fraudulent claimant. Gladys' confused brain had

strength enough left to comprehend that. She sat down at a desk and addressed the envelope to her husband. Then she wrote a short note, saying that she had kept her word, and that he must not try to find her, as all was over between them. She moved the pen mechanically across the paper, and her companion, who leaned over her shoulder, expressed his satisfaction with the tenor of the communication.

"Now," said Mrs. Gray, rising, "I will go and take this to his house, giving it to the servant for him. It is very important that it gets into his hands safely."

The ruse was too transparent to succeed.

"Excuse me," was the answer. "I can hardly permit that. I will ring for a district messenger."

"But," she said, "supposing the boy should tell Mr. Gray where we are, and he should come here and find us."

"If I give him five dollars, he will agree to know nothing about it. No, my dear, we have been separated for the last time."

She was at the end of her excuses, and she saw the call-button pressed without further objection. When the messenger came, the envelope with the bribe for secrecy was put into his hand.

"You *don't know* where this came from, understand?"

"Yes," said the boy. "I understand perfectly."

And, although he was but fourteen years of age, he thought, as he looked from one of them to the other, that he did.

"Now," said the man, when the door was locked again, "you are mine!"

He moved toward her, but she stepped backward.

“A minute!” she cried. “A minute. You need not be in such haste, when you are to have me ‘as long—as I—live.’”

There was something in her manner that alarmed him. He thought uneasily of what she had said a short time before—of her declaration that if she did her duty she would kill him. He did not try to follow her closely, for he suspected that she meant him harm. And before he had the least idea of what she intended, she had sprung into his bed-room, and locked the door in his face.

CHAPTER XXXI.

“STAND BACK!”

IN engaging Mr. Hartwell to “work up” the Blair affair, Mr. Dibbs had hit upon exactly the right person. There is a pretense in some quarters of despising the art of the private detective, but when he is honest and capable he can be of the greatest service to the community. In dealing with scoundrels it is impossible that one should pursue means that are wholly above board. Rascality is not ordinarily perpetrated in the full light of day. He who would ferret it out needs to imitate the fox and the serpent, but his calling is honorable for all that.

Mr. Hartwell had known for some time that Mrs. Gray was holding private meetings with a gentleman who had a suite of rooms in the Windsor Hotel. It

became a part of his duty to know what transpired at those meetings, and he adopted the simple way of hiring the adjoining apartment. With sufficiently delicate tools he contrived to penetrate the connecting wall, without giving cause for suspicion, and not a meeting after that took place which he did not attend.

He deemed it wisest to keep his counsel for the present. He realized the temptations that were thrown around the young woman ; but he was also a witness to the sturdy manner in which she held to the path of virtue. Had any real danger presented itself he would have alarmed her by noises on the wall, and if necessary have gone, even, to the door and demanded admittance.

Although possessed of plenty of evidence by this time that Jonas Margrave was a fraud, the detective was not averse to having his proofs strengthened. He had heard the man in the adjoining room declare that he possessed an envelope containing proof that Gilbert Gray was the only heir to the Blair estate. It was Mr. Hartwell's full intention to get that envelope into his hand before he had done with this affair, and he missed none of the interviews, lest the precious documents should be disposed of at a time when he could not follow them. At the last previous meeting, Gladys had been promised that if she would return again the evidence claimed would be spread before her. Hartwell kept his assistant, Mr. Gardiner, on duty every moment, ready to notify him if the lady made her appearance. On the day when he went to the hotel with Gilbert, he was just in time

to anticipate his messenger, and to hear the entire conversation related in the preceding chapter.

When Mr. Dibbs came in he found Mr. Gray sitting dolefully with the second detective in the room farthest from that communicating with the one in which Gladys was staying. Gray had been told that his wife was in the house, and that her every action could be watched by Hartwell from the inner chamber. But he had also been assured that her conduct, strange as it might seem, was fully consistent with uprightness, and that if he would only summon the patience to remain quiet a short time it would be proved to his satisfaction. He nodded to Dibbs, but did not speak. The perspiration was standing on his forehead and he was as weak as an infant.

It must be admitted that his position was not an agreeable one. All he cared for in life hung on a thread that seemed of the slenderest texture. If he had known that Gardiner had orders to keep him there at any cost, even were it necessary to bind and gag him, he would have been more nervous still. Mr. Hartwell had no intention of having his brew spoiled at that critical moment, even by the man in whose interest he was at work.

It was a horrible hour that Gray waited, and he said afterwards that he would not have believed a human being could endure so much pain and live.

Suddenly Mr. Hartwell bounded into the room, and with a low cry of "Come, all of you!" burst out of the door that led into the hall. The arrangement of the floor was such that several sections had to be traversed before the other apartment was reached, which took time that could illy be spared. But in

twenty seconds the fist of the detective was knocking loudly on the door and his voice demanding fiercely for the man inside to open.

For a small person Mr. Hartwell had a good deal of strength. He could have broken a panel of the door unaided had he chosen. The wood began to creak threateningly. Several employés of the house came running to see what had caused the trouble.

“Stand back!” cried a voice on the inside. “I will blow a hole through the first man that enters!”

“Nonsense!” replied Hartwell. “Do you want the woman to die? I think she is committing suicide! It is for her sake, not yours, that I ask admittance.”

Evidently startled by the suggestion that Gladys was in danger, and having failed to elicit the least reply from her to the calls he had made before the others came, the man’s attitude changed at once.

“Wait, then,” he answered. “Don’t break the door; I will unlock it. But remember, I am armed, and no one shall touch me.”

At the opening of the portal half a dozen men tumbled into the room. The pistol that had been drawn was knocked from the man’s hand before he could form a thought, and Gardiner had him a prisoner.

“My God!” ejaculated Mr. Gray, as he looked at the ashen features. “Darius Yates!”

But the voice of Hartwell, calling to Mrs. Gray to open, as her husband and friends were there, nerved him to the greater duty of the moment. He saw that bracelets of iron were on the wrists of his enemy, and that he was not likely to get away from

his captor ; and a second later his shoulder was added to the others that were pressing on the door that led into the bedroom in which Gladys had sought refuge. The obstruction gave way before them. And at the farther end of the room, in an arm-chair, her head thrown back and her eyes closed, he saw the still form of his wife.

"Gladys !" he cried, grasping her limp hand. "Gladys ! Speak to me !"

He was kneeling on the floor, in an agony of fear, of love and of repentance. Mr. Hartwell, more practical, pushed up the eyelids with his fingers, and placing his nostrils at the mouth, drew in a long breath.

"She has taken opium in some form," he said. Then to one of the hotel boys, "Run for a doctor, as quick as you can ! Her life may depend on seconds !" To another he gave directions to bring with all haste some simple remedies that could be obtained in the kitchen ; and, calling to Mr. Dibbs to take charge of Yates, he summoned Gardiner into the room, as more experienced in cases of this kind.

It touched the heart of the husband to see the rough manner in which these men handled his darling—for she had never been so dear to him as she was now. Innocent or guilty she had been his wife ; she had lain in his arms ; and he loved her ! Hartwell took a pocket-knife and cut the corset strings and collar, that the breathing might be freer. Then between them the officers shook and tumbled the unfortunate lady about in a way that would on any other occasion have been most inconsiderate and impolite.

"She is living," exclaimed Hartwell. "She must be roused, or the doctor will find himself too late."

The hope of the detective—which was that Gladys had swallowed an overdose of laudanum—proved correct, and the wisdom of the treatment to which they subjected her was soon apparent. As this is not a medical treatise it may suffice to say that when the physician arrived he pronounced her out of danger, and that the stupor of impending dissolution was soon changed to the calm and peaceful sleep of safety.

"She will be all right in a few hours," said the doctor to the anxious husband, when he was ready to leave. "It is best for her and for you that you leave the room. The nurse that I have placed in charge will see to all her needs. When she awakes it will not do for her to get excited."

Gilbert, relieved more than words can express, walked with the two detectives out of the bedroom and into the parlor. A new door, taken from some other room, had been hung already in place of the broken one, and through the efforts of the management the neighborhood of the apartment had assumed its wonted quiet. One of the hall boys told them that "the other gentlemen" had gone into Mr. Hartwell's chambers, and they went in that direction. Wild thoughts began to come to Gray's heated brain, and he wanted to be face to face again with the would-be destroyer of his peace.

"Look here!" said Hartwell, pausing in the hallway. "You're not going to act nasty with that fellow, in this house, are you? Because, that won't do at all. I can swear there's been nothing wrong be-

tween them here. They've not been one second without my eyes on them. The woman has acted as true to you as steel. He told her he could prove Margrave a liar, and save you the estate, and in exchange for the papers she has offered you her life. It was a clear attempt at suicide. He was as scared as you please when she jumped into that bedroom and locked herself in. We'll decide what to do with him when we get there ; but don't you try to take the law on yourself, for I shall have to stop you, if you do."

Gray did not want a debate. He did not like to make promises. He wanted to see Yates as soon as possible, leaving his conduct to be considered later. He contented the detective with a nod, and they went on together. But on arriving at their destination, a surprise awaited them.

Mr. Dibbs was sitting at a window—alone, looking out upon the street.

"Where's Yates?" asked Hartwell and Gardiner in one breath.

"Gone," said Mr. Dibbs, imperturbably.

"Gone—where?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask him. I understood he had some private affairs to attend to."

The three men gazed at each other with open mouths.

"Do you mean to say you released him?" asked Gray, fiercely.

"That's just what I did."

"Why?" asked Hartwell. "Come, there's no use in this mystery. I left the man in your hands, and if you've let him go, I want the reason!"

"Yes!" echoed Gilbert. "And I want it, too!"

The lawyer rose and came easily toward the trio.

"Mr. Gray wants the reason, and he shall have it," said he. "You must be satisfied, gentlemen," he added to the others, "that I did what I thought on the whole the wisest thing for all concerned. You know me well enough not to think he scared or bribed me. I am acting for Mr. Gray, and I think I shall convince him that I made no mistake. Will you kindly let us have the room for a short time?"

The manner of the speaker was convincing, and after a brief consultation the detectives retired into the inner chamber and closed the door after them.

"Let us sit down," said Dibbs, when he and Gilbert were alone. "You've had excitement enough for one day. Now, why did I take the responsibility to let that scamp off on leg bail? Because I knew that he could not be convicted of any offense known to the laws of this State, and that it would bring nothing but additional distress on you and your family to take him before a jury."

Mr. Gray clenched his fists.

"I don't want any jury to deal with him!" he answered. "I can attend to that matter myself."

"Very likely," was the cool rejoinder. "But it was not a part of my business to hold a man here with handcuffs on while you came in and pummeled him. If you want to see him again—which, on reflection, I am sure you won't—you must take the chance of finding him. I only looked at the question of law. He might be indicted for conspiring with Jonas Margrave to swindle you out of two hundred thousand dollars, but the evidence would be Margrave's word alone, and we don't want to rest a case on such a flimsy

foundation as that. He persuaded your wife to meet him here, hoping to get her to consent to an elopement, and if he had succeeded he would have been open to prosecution ; but as he didn't, what shall we charge him with? She brought the laudanum with her, and Yates was as surprised as any one when she locked the door in his face and swallowed it. I'm not standing up for the man—I felt disgraced by having to stay in the same room with him for twenty minutes—but as to arresting him and taking him to court it would be the silliest thing imaginable. Hartwell won't fancy my interference, but I can't help that. He's a good detective, as good as there is, but he don't know law quite as well as I do."

The logic of this reasoning was too strong to be resisted, and Gray had to admit that Dibbs had taken the wisest course. Still he fully intended to get his own hands on the miscreant some day and give him his just deserts. His sense of justice urged that punishment was due such a gross attempt against the rights of a husband, such a damnable plot to bring ruin to a helpless and loving wife. When Hartwell and Gardiner came out he merely remarked that he agreed with Mr. Dibbs, and he left them to argue it out together, while he went on tip-toe to the chamber where Gladys lay and learned from the nurse that she was doing nicely and that he had no cause for fear.

Late that night, when half undressed, Mr. Dibbs was told that a gentleman had come to speak to him, and begged a word, notwithstanding the hour.

On being shown in he saw that his visitor was none other than Darius Yates.

"You need not sit down!" he said, sternly, as the solicitor essayed to take a chair. "State your business quickly and go."

Yates had hardly strength enough to stand, and he had to hold to a neighboring object for support.

"I want to know the latest news about—*her*," he stammered. "She—she is in no danger?"

"I presume you mean Mrs. Gray," was the cold reply. "What is her condition to you? You are out of the hands of the law."

The dark circles around the questioner's eyes grew darker.

"She—she will live?" he persisted. "She will recover? I will ask you nothing more; but, in the name of mercy, tell me that!"

"In the name of mercy!" echoed Dibbs. "What do *you* know of mercy—what mercy did *you* show? For all of you she might now be robed for her grave. No, she is in no danger. The doctor assures us there are years of happiness for her yet, with her children and her husband."

Yates winced at the latter words, but his relief at the good news was greater than all else.

"Thank you!" he said, with a gasp. Then he paused a moment and repeated, "Thank you!" with great earnestness.

"Let me advise you not to remain another day in Chicago," said Mr. Dibbs, as he saw his visitor about to depart. "The man you have so deeply injured may make it unpleasant if he finds you here."

Yates turned and eyed the lawyer strangely.

“It is *he* who has injured *me!*” he said, in a deep voice. “I had her before he did. Her oldest child is mine—that tells the story. And I love her as he is incapable of loving! Look in my face. Death has set his mark there within the past six hours. To have her again was to live; to lose her is to die. Let her husband kill me if he wishes. My misery cannot too soon find an end.”

He staggered down the stairway, and Israel Dibbs went to his bed horrified.

“Hartwell knew that, too,” he muttered to himself. “I must keep Gray from this man. However richly he deserves shooting they have a way of putting men in jail here for that kind of sport; and with his new fortune and his domestic bliss reopened Gray won’t want to see the inside of a prison just at present.”



CHAPTER XXXII.

THE HISTORY OF A CRIME.

A WEEK later, when Mrs. Gray had recovered from the effects of her attempt to end her life, she insisted that her husband should hear in detail the story she ought to have told him long before. He objected strenuously to having her excite herself, but she said she was able at last to speak calmly, now that she was certain of his affection and forgiveness, and that she would feel better when the ordeal was over. Pressing a kiss on her lips, and uttering a few words

of caution, Mr. Gray seated himself by her side and listened to her sad recital.

She told of meeting Mr. Yates, when she was but seventeen, at the hotel in London where she was living, and of the malific influence which he began at once to exercise upon her. It was something clearly of the hypnotic order, for until then she had never felt the slightest attraction toward the opposite sex, and knew almost nothing in relation to such matters. All the time she was responding to his requests for secret meetings she despised and hated him. On each occasion she assured him that she never would come again, but consented, at his next request, to come "just once more," and kept her word.

When the natural result followed, it was reasonable that she should still be guided by his advice. He told her if she obeyed him implicitly he would save her, and that there was no one else who could do so. He warned her that if she mentioned his name to her father there would be a collision, in which Colonel Newcombe would certainly receive his death wound. Thus she continued, as she had been so long, a pliant tool in the hands of the man who had ruined her.

Before many days he had perfected a plan. She was to inform her father that the cause of her fall was a young clerk in the employ of Mr. Yates. The solicitor brought her a written admission of the crime, signed by his clerk, and read it to her with glee. He had arranged with the young man to fly the country and remain away permanently, in consideration of a certain sum of money. In her trepidation, Gladys did not even recall the clerk's name.

When she revealed her condition to her father,

giving the cause as thus arranged, the Colonel was naturally on the verge of insanity. He hastened to the office of the solicitor, and "as men tell things to lawyers and to priests," demanded what could be done. The wily Yates produced the letter of his clerk, saying he had received it a few days before, and had been unable to tell, from its wild language, upon whom the outrage had been committed. No names, it seemed, were mentioned, in this so-called "confession," but its terms were sufficiently clear, in connection with Colonel Newcombe's statement, to locate the offender.

"What can be done?" asked the father, distracted. And the lawyer convinced him, in the course of the interview, that it was one of those crimes which can only be punished by inflicting much greater suffering on the innocent victim. Even if Margrave could be apprehended, in any part of the world to which he had fled, and brought to England for trial, Miss Newcombe would have to go into court and swear to his conduct. This was clearly out of the question. Yates also discovered, by adroit suggestions, that the father would have anything happen rather than give his child in marriage to a wretch of that description.

Then came the idea of finding a husband for her, of a suitable position in life, and its gradual adoption by the half-demented man, who was, in his distress, so much clay in the hands of the adroit plotter.

How the husband was found, Mr. Gray did not need to be told. Gladys Newcombe became Mrs. Gray, and what seemed like a new chance for happiness in her wrecked life was given her.

“But,” she said, her lips trembling, “I had not been married to you a week before that man’s hateful attentions were renewed. He managed to meet me when others were not present, and to pour his awful suggestions in my ears. We would be quite safe now, he told me. I had your name—think of that—to protect me. I felt the strong influence of the other days drawing at my brain, but the thought of you, and the confidence you had placed in me, nerved me to resist. And besides, there was the unborn life for which I must keep myself pure. He never ceased to persist. He came to Cannes; he sent me letters, which he knew I dared not show. He went to Vienna, hiding from you, and tried to make me see him. He was in Stockholm when Marianne was born!

“Yes, one of my nurses accepted his bribes. She brought me a bunch of roses from him, which I made her throw into the dustbin as soon as I saw his card. She told me he had walked up and down an adjacent street all night, and that she had sent messages to him every half hour, telling of my condition. No doubt he had paid her handsomely! I was helpless to stop his conduct. My tongue was tied. I had told one story and I dared not begin with a new one. We came back to London and you left me for that long stay in America.

“Do you remember—I think you will never forget—the night before you sailed? I had seen him that day, and he had said, with a smile of confidence, that after you were gone I could no longer refuse him. Up to that time you had treated me distantly, with only the ordinary kindness of a friend. I was

frightened to have you go, for I felt that without your love to guard me, his wicked influence would be more than I could resist. You came in to say, coolly, that you were about to get ready for your departure, and I fell fainting to the floor. That evening I heard you walking about your room, making your preparations. My blood mounted to my head. If you left me like that I knew what the result might be. At last I heard your voice, and I went into your room. You thought me a dreadful creature, one who ought to be ashamed of her actions, but I was desperate! Gilbert, you saved me from a fate that would have been worse than death! I parted from you the next morning, strong in the belief that no man could shake my fealty, and I was right.

“Your steamer could hardly have sailed from Southampton when my persecutor came. For the second time he began to try the efficacy of threats. He said my father’s investments in America were in danger, and that he had it in his power to make or unmake him. He had a representative in Chicago, who would obey his slightest suggestion, and if I still held out he intended to destroy our fortune. I did not believe he had the power to do this, but if I had it would have altered nothing in my behavior. I was only careful not to offend him unnecessarily, for I feared to provoke his anger. Whether he prayed or cursed, it was the same to me now. I would sooner have thrown myself into a den of wild beasts than into his arms. My husband held my entire love and esteem, and my heart went out to him in the first blooming of that passionate flower I had come so late to know.

“My mother’s death and my father’s paralysis did not move the pity of this madman. When I needed the greatest consideration he forgot everything but himself. He told me one day that he could save a million to us if I gave the word, by a mere signal over the cable. I did not even trust myself to answer him. When you returned he kept away for a short time, but soon after we came to Chicago he began to dog my steps here. He wrote me that he cared nothing for his reputation, his profession, his friends or his family; he wanted nothing in the world but *me!* Unless I submitted to him he would tell you all, coupled with accusations that were not even founded on fact. Then came letters alluding to your interest in the Blair property. He could stop your inheriting that if he were to tell what he knew. For the first time I began to feel alarmed at his power. He had proved that his predictions regarding my father’s fortune were correct ones. Were you to lose yours also?

“Mr. Margrave’s claim was put in, and then Mr. Yates wrote that, if I asked him to do so, he would prove that claim false. In a mad hope to move him by an appeal to his manhood, I made the visit he had long prayed for, to his hotel. I could have committed no greater error. Instead of changing his attitude in the least, he seemed rather to grow stronger in his purpose. He said he had ruined my father, and that he would certainly ruin you unless I became his mistress. He did not insist on my leaving you, though that was what he most wished for; but I must give him stolen meetings whenever he requested them. He gave as a new reason why

he would not resign me, that his wife had died a short time before, and that he was now free to give me his entire protection. Our meeting resulted in nothing of value and I resolved that it should be the last. However, his letters began to talk of a final interview, at which he would give me documentary evidence that Margrave was a pretender. I was weak enough to meet him once more, in my anxiety to learn if this might be true. I found that he had merely lured me there to renew his old proposals, and I left with the direst predictions ringing in my ears.

“Last week, when you accused me of having held meetings with my baby’s father, I believed, naturally, that you knew all. I had no reason to suppose that you had referred to Mr. Margrave, or why you associated his name with mine in that connection. I had now but one hope—to save your property. I made a new appointment, and before I went to keep it I purchased a bottle of laudanum. If I could not make my escape with the documents he was to give me I would send them to you by a messenger ; and rather than be polluted by a touch of his lips I would drain the poison. You know the rest. Mr. Hartwell, who watched every one of my actions, and heard every word uttered by either of us, knows them, too.”

This story was not told without a score of interjections on the part of the distressed listener, who did not doubt a single word of the narrative. He said, when it was finished, that Gladys should have come to him in confidence when the annoyances

began, and he would have found a way to put a stop to them.

“But, my dear husband,” she replied, “when they began—immediately after our marriage—you were almost a total stranger to me. It was nearly a year before I would have dared trust you with such a secret, and your love was then so new and so dear that I could not bear to throw anything of an unpleasant nature in its way. Since then you have had so much trouble financially that I thought it my duty to bear my cross alone. I kept hoping that you would come into your possessions, and that we could journey to some other corner of the earth, where our lives would be free from this cloud. For that I waited, and for that I still hope. As long as that man knows where I am, he will surely follow me.”

Gray bit his lips.

“Mr. Dibbs tells me he is dying,” he said. “Only for that I should have gone to settle my account with him before now.”

She shivered.

“And do you still love me, after all?” she asked, tenderly.

“More than ever. You were ready to give your life for me.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EVERYTHING EXPLAINED.

WHEN Jonas Margrave was released from jail on a habeas, the prosecution announcing that it would not push the case against him, he went with great promptness to Mr. Gray to collect the balance due on his loan of five thousand dollars and accrued interest.

"This is part of the agreement I made with Old Man Dibbs," he explained, in response to the peculiar look with which he was greeted. "It was my own money, you know, honestly earned at the gaming table, and I'm about as near broke as I ever was."

Gray opened a checkbook and filled in the details. It was true that he had borrowed this money, and that it had been a great help to him at the time. But he wondered greatly at the *sang froid* of this self-confessed scoundrel, in coming for it with no sign of shame in his face.

"Tell me one thing," said Gray, when he had handed over the check, "how was it you ever acquired such a hatred of me? Had I ever injured you?"

"Hatred!" echoed the other. "What do you mean? I never liked a man better, in the whole course of my existence."

"If you treat your friends as you have treated me,

I wonder what you would do to a person you did not fancy," remarked Gilbert.

Margrave protested against this form of accusation.

"You don't make any allowance," he answered, "for the difference there is in temperaments, nor for the fact that my profession makes unusual calls on one's disposition. The actions of a gambler and confidence man naturally varies in some respects from that of a Sunday-school superintendent. A fish is a fish if it comes to my net. It wouldn't do for me to explain in advance exactly how I deal the cards which are to transfer the cash on the table to my pocket. Considering everything, I feel, upon my word, that I have used you pretty handsomely."

The listener, with an incredulous look, asked if he might be honored with a fuller explanation of this seeming paradox.

"Certainly, as full as you like," said Margrave. "Let's rehearse the entire business. In Venice you lent me forty dollars, didn't you? I went out that night and met the crowd who had buncoed me out of my last sou the day before, and I got back all I had lost and more. I might have returned you the money, of course, but I knew it was like a sixpence to you, and I thought I had better hold on to it awhile. When I ran across you in Rome I had had big luck and was living like a prince. Two hundred francs seemed too small to think about. I didn't like to insult a gentleman by mentioning such a beggarly sum."

He paused, and Mr. Gray asked, with a sharp ac-

cent, if he would now change the location of his story to London.

"With pleasure," was the reply. "When you met me there I had lost all I had, and was trying to keep up appearances on wind. I had rather have seen the devil that day in Hyde Park than a man to whom I owed money. I was afraid of being watched, besides, and I got rid of you as soon as I could. But I waited an hour in New Bridge street that night, as I had promised, and you did not come."

"Go on," said Gray. "What about the next time we met?"

"Well," answered Margrave, slowly, "you may charge that to Mr. Yates. He knew something about me that would send me to prison if he gave the word, and I depended on him just then for the bread I ate. He told me to find you and get you in a positive rage toward me in some way. The manner didn't matter, and I had no explanation of his reasons. I didn't dare disobey him and I took the first way that presented itself. I rode down toward you with the idea of brushing my horse against yours and of starting an altercation. When the collision came it was so much harder than I had intended that I was alarmed, but the thing was done and I couldn't apologize without violating my instructions. I saw that you had sustained nothing worse than a sprain and that you were being taken care of, and I rode away.'

Strange as the story was, Gray believed it. He saw how Yates had used this man as a stool-pigeon to induce him to rescue Gladys from what looked like the danger of marrying him. It had been a

powerful makeweight at the critical moment, perhaps the final ounce that made the steel touch the beam. Yes, it was very clear.

"Do you know why Yates wanted you to insult me?" he asked, with an effort.

"I'm hanged if I do!" was the earnest reply. "He's given me hints since then that he could raise the Old Boy with you, but I never was able to find out his game. He's played a lone hand all the time, and put up big stakes, and as near as I can understand, he's been a loser. But what it was all about I don't know, and I don't suppose you are going to tell me."

There was no reply to this insinuation, but Gray breathed a sigh of relief that this fellow was ignorant of his family secret. It was still confined to Yates and Dibbs and Hartwell. The two latter were safe, and the former would hardly make trouble now, when on his deathbed.

"You were at Amsterdam," was the next thing he said to the gambler.

"Yes, and I wrote you a letter asking for a loan. I was hard up again, that's the entire story."

"And yet I saw you here in Chicago, a few months later, with thousands of dollars to lend."

Margrave laughed at the perplexity of his questioner.

"That's not hard to explain," said he. "I ran over from London to New York, and went, as usual, straight to a faro bank. By an extraordinary run of luck, which the fraternity in that city have not yet forgotten, I carried off seventy-five thousand dollars

in three days. With the proceeds I came here and found everybody talking wheat. I made a deal with a big concern, by which I was to put out a broker's sign, and take applications for money at high rates. All I had to do was to go into my inside office, and speak to my principals over a private wire. If they gave word to take the loan, I took it, paying out my own money, and ten minutes later they had it off my hands. My compensation was a handsome percentage. I did mighty well, but like a fool I had to put my fingers into the fire against their advice. The money I loaned you for Colonel Newcombe was my own, and you know what became of it. It was a risk that my principals declined, but I thought I knew more than they did. To tell the truth, Yates led me into that, for he kept wiring me from London and he said the sum was safe. I think now he meant I should lose it, so as to get me into his clutches again."

It was an odd story.

"Was it possible for Mr. Yates, at any time, to have prevented Colonel Newcombe's failure?" asked Gray, anxiously.

"Certainly not."

"And could he have done anything to hasten it?"

"Nothing whatever."

The solicitor had been playing on Gladys' fears, then, without any foundation, and had claimed to be the cause of events with which he had no connection.

"When I went back to England," continued Margrave, "I went to see Yates, and found him overjoyed to learn that Colonel Newcombe had lost about the

whole of his fortune. He didn't seem to be very sorry I had lost mine, either, and he lent me twenty pounds grudgingly. When I applied for more soon after, he threatened me with the police, and I kept out of his way for a long time. America seemed the best field for my efforts and I soon returned to this country. One day I ran across Yates here. He asked me how I would like to inherit a handsome fortune. Of course I told him I wouldn't object in the least. He said if I followed his directions carefully perhaps that sort of luck would come to me. I was to announce myself as Julius Margrave, and claim to be my brother.

“When I remarked that Julius, who had disappeared some years before, might turn up, Yates said he had heard from him, and that he was in a distant country, in the last stages of consumption. It was impossible that he could ever trouble me. I followed his directions, and finally he came with a letter showing that Julius was dead. He would not tell me the particulars of the windfall that was to be mine, but said I must leave everything to him. I had succeeded, by his advice, in getting a room at your house, and he used to ask me daily about the family. His spite against you seemed to grow more and more intense, but I did not see any way he could harm you. Then came the letter that you intercepted, and I understood everything. His only object in putting me in the way of getting rich was to deprive you of the money. I made up my mind that I would make a generous deal with you, if I got possession, and you remember I offered you a quarter of what I should

receive. Yates didn't know that, for when I found how nicely things were working my way I refused to have anything more to do with him."

There was no reason to doubt the history thus detailed. In his mad pursuit of Gladys, Yates had spared no one. To induce her to go to him he had played every card in the pack, careless of all other results.

"You lent me this five thousand dollars in a curious way," said Mr. Gray, after a pause.

"Yes, I had just made seven or eight thousand at play, and I was afraid I should lose it if I didn't put it somewhere. I thought it the safest investment to lend it to an honest man like you. And besides, I was out with Yates at the time and I wanted to keep him from driving you to the wall, as he had so often sworn to me he would do."

"You are a strange combination, Mr. Margrave. Are you going through the rest of your life as you have begun? You have narrowly escaped a long term in prison. Will it be a warning to you?"

"I don't know," was the cool reply. "I suppose it depends on my luck. It's late to teach the old dog many new tricks. However, I don't think I'll get into any more schemes as deep as the last one. It was really a little out of my regular line."

Well, that is about the end of the story. Mr. and Mrs. Gray took their children, as soon as business matters could be arranged, and went for a long stay

abroad, where they still are. I hear there's a third child now. So happiness has come to them, after their many misadventures ; but I don't believe Gray's experience would induce many men to follow in his steps. He took a pretty large risk.

"Yates died, of course?" the reader will ask.
Yes, Yates died.

THE END.

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