THE RARE GOOD FORTUNE OF BOOBY BAINES.

BY ANTHONY HOPE.

(Copyright, 1896, by Anthony Hope Hawkins.)

PART I.

Shallow people are apt to think that mere recreation and amusement are the principal ends of social meetings and social intercourse, and that when a man goes to a party he goes in the hope of enjoying himself, without ulterior objects. To have penetrated beneath this superficial judgment constituted, in a philosophical view, the chief distinction of Booby Baines. He perceived—or at least acted as if he perceived—that society was, when properly treated, at once the fairest and the most fruitful field for a young man's activity. Other men worked from 10 to 6 and played from 6 to midnight or so much later as seemed good to them. Baines dallied with the hours of daylight, the scene of his dalliance being the offices of the board of trade, and toiled strenuously from dinner time till returning dawn. The hours were long, but the work was congenial, and it was done in the spirit of an enthusiast. To Baines an invitation to dinner was the voice of conscience, and a card for a reception the finger of duty. The flesh might be weary and desire might fail, but he went still to his long "at homes," and the dances followed after.

Such devotion did not go without its reward. If you stroke the most scornful cat with patience, in time the cat will purr. Baines stroked society, and in due course society purred. Thus it fell out that the Joe Baines of the little vicarage in Herefordshire, the Booby Baines of Rugby and Cambridge—for Rugby originated, and Cambridge, to its disgrace, adopted the ribald name—blossomed forth into the Mr. J. Addington Baines, a young man of infinite and graceful culture, highly regarded in drawing rooms and possessed of an honored place in houses of high repute. Those who had not watched the process might be pardoned if they marveled at the result. The means were so simple, the product so magnificent. Mr. Baines' success illustrated to perfection the principle of the parsimony of nature.

As every evening, so this evening, he stood before his dressing table tying his white tie, and resolving, as Homer says, many things in his heart. The thoughts came at random; first he admired the "sit" of his shirt, then the arch of his nose, then the curve of his chin; next he hummed a verse of French poetry and smiled at the recollection of M. Coquelin in his latest part; for Booby was a great Frenchman. In the middle of his amusement he caught sight of his money on the table, and was suddenly reminded that he was very hard up. He groaned against his dura noverca, the board of trade; gloves and coats, cabs and stalls mount up; his country underpaid Booby Baines; he could hardly live on what he got. But his face brightened again; it was a pleasant house to which he was going. Mrs. Swayne perhaps hardly understood him, but one can be admired without being understood, and Addie Swayne, at all events, was a most attractive girl, full of esprit and espieglerie and many other charming importations. That was a thing to be considered. For Addie liked him very much, and he liked Addie very much, indeed, and Addie had eight hundred pounds a year.

Now it chanced—for the luck of Mr. Baines was constant—that he could not have chosen a happier moment for paying his attention to Miss Swayne. For that rude old savant, Prof. Martin, had told her before dinner that Mr. Baines was no genius—he had put it even more bluntly—and that he was surprised at a girl of her good sense liking to talk to him. Accordingly, after dinner, Miss Swayne, moved half by pique, half by uneasiness, made room beside her on the sofa and began to question Mr. Baines, skillfully and delicately, pinting great admiration for him; and at last she said:

"Oh, you were at Rugby, were you? Mr. Caxton was there, too, wasn't he?"

"Mr. Caxton was there," answered Booby Baines.

"I suppose you got all the prizes at school, didn't you?" she asked.

"Well, no, I don't think I did," smiled Baines.

"Did Mr. Caxton get any?"

"Oh, yes. Caxton was the sort of fellow who would get prizes."

"Why didn't you, Mr. Baines?" pursued Addie, still smarting under the professor's outrageous observation.

"Well," said he, reflectively—because it was a thing which needed explanation—"I wouldn't restrict myself to the school subjects. I took a wider range."

Addie's face brightened. She shot a triumphant glance at the unconscious professor.

"You couldn't drudge, I expect," she said, almost fondly.

"I suppose not. I went in for literature and so on."

"And were there no prizes for that sort of thing?"

"I—I don't remember, Miss Swayne. And then I think I developed rather late."

"Oh, yes, of course," she exclaimed, cheerfully. "When you went to Cambridge, you mean?"

"Yes—at least during the time there I formed my mind."

"And carried everything before you?"

"Oh, there were no examinations in my favorite subjects."

"How unfair!" cried Addie, indignantly.

"So I didn't do great things in the schools."

"I almost wish, Mr. Baines, that you could have cared about something they did examine in—just to show them what you could do, you know. But it was all right when you came to London?"

"When I came to London?"

"Yes; at the—what is it?—the civil service, you know."

"Oh, yes; I managed that, Miss Swayne. Last shot, though."

"Did you fail before then?" she asked.

"Oh, yes; twice. It was the stupidest sort of examination."

"Didn't they have any of your subjects there, either?"

"Hardly likely," laughed Mr. Baines, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Addie Swayne glanced at the professor, and then back at Mr. Baines' handsome profile.

"Well," said she after this second glance, "I call it most awfully clever of you to get in in spite of having everything against you. But I should like everybody to know how clever you are."

"I'm afraid you're partial, Miss Swayne."

"Oh, no, I'm not. They will know some day, won't they?"

"Perhaps," smiled Baines, mysteriously.

"When it comes out," said she, with a bright glance.

"Hush! that's a secret."

"Have you got far in it?"

"Oh, no; nothing but just the idea."

"Won't you tell me what it's about?"

"I couldn't, indeed, unless——" Mr. Baines stopped. Addie blushed. There was a long pause. Then Addie observed, with some apparent irrelevance:

"I think Professor Martin is a perfectly horrid old man."

"Why, you said you liked him on Tuesday," exclaimed honest Baines.

"Oh, no; you must have mistaken me, Mr. Baines! I really—no, I really do not believe that he has a bath regularly."

Addington Baines laughed; but we may be allowed to regret this proof of the power of prejudice. For Professer Martin not only had a bath, but painfully shampooed himself with an electric brush every morning of his life. It is very dangerous to offend young ladies; they so often say what they would like to be true, preferring a harmony of conception to a basis of fact.

It will be perceived that Baines and Addie Swayne were already on terms of some intimacy, inasmuch as she had been trusted with his great secret. To one other person only had this honor been accorded—the aforesaid Tom Caxton. But Tom knew more than Miss Swayne. He knew what it was to be called, and he had tried to understand what it was to be about. He had also in his heart prayed that it might never come into being at all, and had, most hypocritically, supported Baines' scruples concerning its publication. These scruples were due, not to a doubt whether the work would be good enough for the public, but to a fear lest it should be too good. Publication seemed almost to stain the virgin innocence of Baines' genius, and he talked longingly of the superior delight of a private circulation among choice spirits. Caxton eagerly seconded the opinion, thinking that the choice spirits would be such as Baines himself, and might possibly admire the work. But Miss Swayne's influence grew stronger; needs must when beauty drives. Baines' scruples were overcome. He started on the composition of the great work, he grew sensible of the charms of authorship, he dropped hints to an admiring and expectant world. Yet a pleasant mystery hung over his labors, and the title, when revealed, was not very enlightening to the uninitiated. The book, when written, was to be called "Stress and Striving," and it was understood that it would claim attention by reason of its style no less than of its matter. Therefore, rapid progress could not be expected; every facet of the diamond must be polished. Besides, poor Baines was in such request. And then the horrid board of trade consumed so much of his time!

At this point the engagement of Miss Swayne and Mr. Addington Baines was announced urbi et orbi.

* * * * * * * *

In the marriage service no mention occurred of "Stress and Striving." Yet the writing of it was as certain a part of the contract as anything else. Baines knew that, Addie knew it, by now the world knew it. Yet months had passed and "Stress and Striving" made very little way. Addie won-

Miss Swayne Made Room for Him.

dered why, and her wonder could find but one answer. "The board of trade!" she cried, in concentrated scorn and hatred. Who could write a great book when his time was consumed and his genius debased by the board of trade? Baines' patient toleration inflamed her anger. He admitted that he could hardly do anything at the book; his days went at that unendurable place, his evenings were given to Addie; society claimed its share. Tom Caxton, being by, smiled covertly. Addie raised her large admiring eyes to her husband's face. A sudden gleeful smile broke out on her lips.

"Addington," said she, "hasn't enough confidence in himself. Well, I believe in him, anyhow."

Caxton's smile vanished. He detected something dangerous in the speech.

"What do you want him to do now, Mrs. Baines?" he asked, with an uneasy laugh.

"Wait a little while and you'll see. Oh, I'm quite sure it's the right thing. Yes, I'm sure."

It was soon too late to ask whether it was the right thing or not, for it was past done. Baines' protests were weak, his resistance short. To his own perfect contentment, to his wife's great joy, to Tom Caxton's illimitable dismay, a month later he walked out of the offices of the board of trade a free man, free to devote his life to the book, the master of his time and his brain.

"Phew!" muttered Tom Caxton over his newspaper article.

PART II.

Now, Addington Baines was an honest and right-thinking man; therefore, so soon as he was released from bondage, he did what he had never done before—he set himself resolutely and manfully to his task. He ceased trifling with his subject; he bought a stock of paper and began to write. Addie used to equip him with pens and books of reference, and then steal silently away on tiptoe, her smile bright with exultant hope, her last kiss having given benediction to the noble work of the day. And Addington Baines was left alone, alone to tackle "Stress and Striving." Cheerfully he started, doggedly he went on. A strange, terrible thing began to happen. He found that he composed very slowly and with great difficulty. An insidious doubt made its way into his brain, and undermined his self-confidence. In conversation he had seemed to himself very original; when he came to set down his thoughts and to read up his books, he found that much which he had held to be legally his own was his only by lawless appropriation. In a word, he began to wonder whether he had anything to say. This suspicion would seize him cruelly in moments of fatigue or depression; then he despairingly threw down his pen, and, laying his tired head between his hands, went so far as to wish himself back at the board of trade. At any rate, one was not expected to be an original genius at the board of trade. Then Addie's light step would come tripping along the passage; the pen was seized again, and, when she came in, he feigned to have paused only for a moment (that was necessary because the ink was dry) in order to crystallize his thoughts into an aphorism, or his attack into an epigram. And she would ask to hear the last written chapter over again. To her it was all original and, for his sake, all brilliant. Her ready homage reinstated him in his good opinion of himself. He was happy again till she left him face to face with the remorseless pen and paper, the pen that seemed to cry mockingly: "Use me," and the paper that jeered him with its "fill me if you can."

Now, when a pretty girl with eight hundred pounds a year—a most aggravating circumstance—has married a man more on the strength of his brains than of anything else, and when he, yielding readily to her persuasions, has abandoned his means of making any addition to the said income in order to give his genius full scope and opportunity, it needs some moral courage in the husband to go to the wife and tell her that the basis of their respective actions was altogether unsound and fallacious, that he is not a genius, that no amount of scope is of avail when there is nothing to enjoy it, that, in fact, the sooner he gets back to some honest work and leaves his paper staining the better. Yet this uninviting task seemed to lie before Booby Baines at the moments when his despondency got the better of him and he was tempted to throw up the cards. But he would not despair yet, he told himself,

"Addington," said she, "hasn't enough confidence in himself."

seeking comfort, that his was only the self-distrust, the nervousness, which, as he had so often heard, accompanied and indicated real power. He would be sure of success, or he would not publish. Tom Caxton should read the book; he would trust Tom Caxton's judgment in anything. But it was too soon to despair, and he dared not face Addie. So he toiled away at his oars, pulling his boat through the rough sea and keeping up a cheerful air of confidence before his wife. There were commendable points in the behavior of Booby Baines at this time; for he was very far indeed from being a happy man. Tom Caxton saw that, but he could not help. The only moral which his reflective mind found itself able to draw was that if a man is comfortably assured of his own ability, still more if his friends are kind enough to indorse his opinion, it is but doubtful wisdom to put the matter to the proof; it is too much like selling consols in order to invest in a gold mine.

Poor Tom Caxton was not a happy man either when he heard that he was to read the book and pronounce the authoritative verdict which must decide whether it should be given to the world or not. And when, in the fullness of time, the manuscript arrived at his lodgings, he flung it impatiently on the table. It made a bulky roll of fair white paper, covered with Addie's large, clear handwriting, and neatly tied with green ribbon.

"What's that?" asked Prof. Martin, who had looked in to smoke a pipe.

"Baines' book," answered Tom, curtly. "I've got to read it and give an opinion on it."

"It is quite sure," observed the professor, in a tone of dispassionate certainty, "to be an uncommonly bad book. What's it about?"

"He says," growled Tom, "that it's a reasoned protest against the unrest of modern life."

"The man might as well protest against the law of gravitation," declared the professor. "If I were you I wouldn't read it."

"I must. He relies on my opinion."

"You mean he'll follow it?"

"Yes; if I tell him to, he'll suppress it."

"How very unusual! He must be modest at bottom."

"Poor old Booby, I'm afraid he's rather nervous about it."

"I was very nervous," said the professor, "when I published my book on 'The Phantasm of Individuality.'"

"I've never read it," said Tom.

"You have read it. You're only trying to annoy me, because you're annoyed with Baines."

"Well, then, I have read it. I say, professor, there's going to be a baby at the Baines'!"

"If he never did anything worse than that!" murmured the professor.

"And Booby says that a favorable verdict from me will quiet dear Addie's mind and—and conduce, you know."

"Good heavens! And if it's unfavorable?"

Caxton shuffled his feet uncomfortably.

"Make it favorable, anyhow," suggested the professor, in unscrupulous benevolence.

"I couldn't. The old chap trusts me."

"Then what do you propose to do, Mr. Caxton?"

"If it's unfavorable, I think we must wait till dear Addie's state of mind is not such a vital matter."

The professor made his exit with a shrug. Caxton sat down to the bulky roll of manuscript.

"At least it's legible," said he with a sigh of relief; and he lit his pipe. It was very legible, for much love had gone to the copying of it, and love breeds care. Alas, that it cannot give brains.

Yes, it was legible. That said, all was said. No other commendation was in honesty possible. The book contained poor Booby's views on life, and art in relation to life, and both of them in relation to heaven knows what besides. At its rare best, it was tolerably sensible commonplace; at its worst, it was bedizened with silly conceits and given over to the unutterable weariness of missfire paradox. As a whole, it was rambling, forceless, devoid of vitality. On that day and the next Caxton read it honestly through and through, hoping that there might be found one brand—a few pages, enough, maybe, for an article in a minor monthly—which he could conscientiously snatch from the burning. There was

And Then Steal Silently Away on Tiptoe.

nothing. He communicated the result to the professor, who had the curiosity to call and ask how things were going on.

"Of course there isn't," said the professor, placidly.

"So I must massacre the innocent!"

"You'll tell him not to publish?"

"Oh, he mustn't at any price, even if he could."

"And Mrs. Baines?" asked the professor.

"He must tell her himself. That's not my affair."

At this moment a servant entered and handed Caxton a telegram. It was from Baines, and said: "Addie very ill. Can you come and bring book?"

Caxton threw it across to the professor and put on his hat.

"The event going wrong, I suppose," guessed the professor.

"I suppose so. Now, why can't a good chap like old Booby be allowed a quiet life?"

"I haven't the answer to that about me," said the professor.

* * * * * * * *

The houses of Vanessa terrace, where Mr. and Mrs. Baines lived, are not large, but they are new and fresh, and their architecture shows at least a craving after beauty; they suggest to the passer-by cultivated tastes, a couple of neat maidservants, and an income short of four figures. The rooms inside No. 12 were pretty and dainty, full of curiously chosen trumpery, and decked with the last conceits of artistic upholstery. A room is right to hint the views and fancies of its occupants; it is a mistake when it crams their dogmas down a visitor's throat. Perhaps the Baines' rooms were open to criticism on this ground, but neither wife nor husband knew it; the rooms were simply the only possible sort of rooms—so said Addie, quoting Addington.

It Was From Baines.

But today the little house, to which Caxton drove in a fast hansom, was out of humor with itself. The hush and fearful hurry of sudden sickness were upon it, seeming things too real and heavy for its toylike nattiness. Somehow Caxton felt sorry for the little house, as well as for the owners of it. But he hoped that the greater trouble might rob his own bit of bad news of some of its sting. A man had no business to think of his book at such a time. True, but what if his wife insisted on thinking of it for him? Ruefully shaking his head, Tom Caxton rang the bell softly. He was conducted upstairs, and led into a small sitting room. It was fantastic and over-bedecked, like the rest; it looked as if it might be Addie's boudoir, and from the subdued sounds which reached his ear Caxton thought that it must be next door to the room where the poor little sick woman lay. He sat down, concealing "Stress and Striving" under his coat as if it were the body of an infant he had murdered.

In a minute or two Addington Baines came in. There were tears in his eyes, and he held his handkerchief, crushed to a ball, in his left hand. Caxton went to him holding out his hand, the roll of manuscript clutched in the other under his coat.

"My dear boy," said he; "I hope to God—"

"Thanks, Tom. Yes, we hope now."

"Was it—?"

"Premature—yes. Poor darling, she's terribly weak!"

"And the child?" asked Caxton.

"We hope it will live—a boy, Tom."

There was a pause. A vague, awkward embarrassment trammeled Caxton. He did not know whether he ought to say more about mother and child—or, if he ought, what more—or whether he was expected to bring forward the subject of the book. At last Baines relieved him. Passing a hand across his eyes he said:

"I asked you to come, old fellow, because the book's on Addie's mind. By Jove, she seems to think more about that than anything else."

"What, now—about the book now?"

"Yes. You see she thinks she's dying," exclaimed Baines, with a choke in his voice.

"God forbid!"

"And she says she'd be happier if you just told her that the book was good. She believes in your opinion just as much I do, you know."

"Is there immediate danger?" asked Caxton.

"No, I think not, if she could rest. But she's fretting, and we must—we should like, I mean—to stop that if—if you can, you know, old fellow."

Then the unscrupulous counsel of the professor came with strong temptation before Tom Caxton's mind. The course it urged was easy; it would at least postpone the task that had become so terribly difficult. But Booby Baines' eyes caught his friend's in appealing confidence, and Caxton determined that he would not lie. He took the manuscript from its hiding place under his coat and laid it on the table. Baines, perhaps, read something in his face, for he came up to him and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Come, out with it, old fellow," said he. "Let me have it straight."

PART III.

"I think it's hardly in your line," said Caxton, with eyes on the ground and hands thrust obstinately into his trousers pockets. Baines drew back a step. A curious sound, a sort of moan, broke low from his lips, and he spoke in a whisper.

"I knew it. I knew it. With every line I wrote I knew it better. It—it won't do at all, old fellow?"

"No, it won't do." Caxton spoke now in his usual curt and rather hard tones. It was well to have the thing over now and as soon as possible. His words should be sharp and decisive. "It won't do at all," he said. "You mustn't think of publishing it. Nobody would publish it for you. You'd have to waste your own money, and look a fool at the end."

Baines sat down at the table and began to fumble with the knot of green ribbon that tied the neatly copied sheets together. The sound of a low voice and the soft tread of a careful foot came through the wall from the next room.

"Can nothing be done with it?" asked Baines, his nervous fingers still at work.

Caxton's manner grew gruffer with every fresh assault on his pity.

"It's hopeless, quite hopeless," he said brusquely.

Baines buried his face in his hands for a moment, moaning.

"How shall I tell her? How shall I tell her I'm a fool? She believed in me so."

"A man isn't a fool because he can't write a book," said Caxton; but his tone expressed no conviction that Baines was not a fool.

"I'm a fool," said Booby, savagely. Then he wailed again: "And, God help me, Addie will know it now."

"Look here, don't talk about it to her till she's all right again."

As he spoke there was a knock at the door, and a servant came in.

"Please, sir, Mrs. Baines has heard Mr. Caxton's voice and wants him to come in at once."

"To come in?" cried Baines, jumping up. "Wait a minute," he added to Caxton, and passed quickly into the next room. Caxton was left alone with the body of his victim. He walked to the window and stood looking out, a frown on his brow. "I wish the devil I was out of this," he muttered to himself.

In a moment Baines was back, his face full of alarm. He stood by the door and beckoned.

"Come along," he said. "The doctor thinks you'd better come," and he turned again to go to the bed room.

"But what shall I say?" whispered Caxton, in helpless anger, as he followed.

They were by the bedside, Baines having made no answer to the whispered appeal; indeed, he seemed dazed, and looked at Caxton with a vacant stare. Addie lay on the bed, very pale, breathing quickly, and her eyes were alight with excitement; on the other side of the bed stood the doctor.

"Have you read it?" she asked, moving her hands toward Caxton and fixing her eyes on him.

"Yes," he answered, bending over her. "I've read it, Mrs. Baines."

"And what—what?" she said, faintly.

Caxton pressed her hand. The doctor's eyes were upon him, but he could not be sure what they meant to tell him. Baines had fallen on his knees by the bedside and his face was hidden in the coverlet.

The interval that passed before Caxton heard his own voice seemed very long, and when it came it said something that it had hardly meant to say.

"Splendid!" he said, pressing Addie's hand again and smiling.

"Splendid?" she echoed. "Splendid?"

Baines suddenly raised his head from the coverlet; he put out his hand to catch hold of Caxton, and his lips opened to speak. Caxton leant heavily on his shoulder and kept him down where he was, on

"And what—what?" she said, faintly.

his knees by the bed; and, looking across at the doctor, who made no sign or gesture, he said again:

"Splendid, Mrs. Baines, simply splendid! It will make him famous and you must make haste and get well and see the fun."

"Ah!" murmured Addie, in a long, luxurious sigh of utter relief, as she sank back and loosed her hold on Caxton's hand. "Thanks, Mr. Caxton; oh, thanks! Addington, dear Addington!"

Caxton drew back. The impassive doctor was motionless. Baines rose to his feet and bent over his wife, taking her arms and putting them round his neck. He kissed her, and the men heard her whisper: "My clever darling, oh, my clever darling!" Her husband kissed her again and disengaged her arms from about him.

"Now, I think you two had better leave us," said the doctor. Caxton was rejoiced to obey. The doctor came with him to the door; he did not look at Caxton, nor Caxton at him, and no remark was made until the door of the bed room was closed and Baines and Caxton were outside together. Then Caxton said:

"She'll do all right now, I hope, old fellow."

Baines walked into the little boudoir without replying, and sat down again by the table where "Stress and Striving" lay. Caxton stood on the hearthrug gazing drearily about the room and through the window at the opposite house. But he could not endure the silence; an impulse to justify himself came upon him, yet it was to himself rather than to Booby Baines that his excuses were addressed.

"It would have killed her to tell her now," he said.

Baines made no answer; he was looking at the manuscript.

"When she's strong again it won't matter, will it? She'll make nothing of it then, will she?"

Still Baines was silent, and Caxton turned to him, asking, half angrily:

"Well, I was right, wasn't I?"

"Yes, you were right," said Baines. "I couldn't have done it."

Then, suddenly, in a fit of weak peevish passion, he caught up the fairly written roll. Caxton, starting, took one hasty step toward him, but then he arrested his motion, and stood looking. Their eyes met for an instant; then Baines, putting all his strength into his hands, tore the roll full across the middle, and flung it from him into the grate, where a bright fire burnt.

"Is that right?" he asked, savagely, rudely, as though Caxton were to blame for all the trouble.

Caxton nodded, and, taking his hat, prepared to go. The fire, which had leaped up in a brighter blaze to welcome "Stress and Striving," was growing dull as the sheets blackened and lay in inky flakes on the top of the coals.

"She'll die, too," cried Baines, in a sudden whisper. "She'll die, too!"

"No, no. She'll be all right now; you'll see she'll be all right now. Good-bye, old fellow, and good luck. A wife's more than a book, you know."

Baines sat looking into the fire, which was well-nigh choked by layer on layer of black flaky stuff, on which the written characters could still be traced. Suddenly he sprang up and seized a poker. Stirring the fire, he raised a blaze that charred what of white had remained, while the black fluttered up the chimney or out into the fender. The room smelt strong of burnt paper. Caxton edged uncomfortably toward the door. Baines returned to his seat and sat down, resting his head on his arm. Presently he put up the other arm also, and Caxton saw that he was crying softly. He passed through the doorway, and shut the door gently behind him.

* * * * * * * *

Humanly speaking, as the old phrase runs, there could be little doubt that the lie told by Tom Caxton and allowed by Addington Baines had something to do with saving Mrs. Baines' life. The doctor admitted to having considered her condition so critical that the least thing might be decisive one way or the other, and was inclined to be of opinion—the doctor was a cautious man and did not love positive assertions—that the scale had just been turned the right way by what he called the reassuring news about Mr. Baines' work. He did not, of course, know how entirely fictitious the good tidings had been; he suspected that Caxton's enthusiasm had been somewhat strengthened by the circumstances under which the verdict had to be given; but he supposed that it was only a question of emphasizing a genuine conviction. Neither had he noticed a smell of burnt paper; so that to this day he is rather puzzled at the nonappearance of "Stress and Striving" in the rare moments when he finds time to think about other people's business.

The recovery was long and slow. For more than two months the possibility of relapses forbade any sense of security, and made a return to the path of truth a dangerous cruelty. Caxton kept away from the house; he had done his part, and he left the rest to Baines. And Baines, a beginning having been made for him, did not shrink from following it up. He invented the background necessary for every successful falsehood, and, having accepted the principal, was not so foolish as to haggle over accessories. So he let his wife talk about the dead book, and, on occasion, seconded her talk with his own. Moreover, his overwhelming joy at Addie's recovery, and at the progress made by the baby, enabled him to perform his duty with a fair show of cheerfulness, and almost to put on one side the thought of the inevitable disclosure that waited for him in the future. For a time it seemed as though this same healthy joy would be strong enough to heal the sore wound of humiliation and the sad certainty of self-knowledge for which the ill-fated book was responsible.

But delay could not last forever. Addie was convalescent, indeed, nearly well; she was to go out soon, and as soon as she went out and met her friends she would most certainly talk about "Stress and Striving." She had already begun to ask what was being done with the book, and to fret over the blindness or dilatoriness of imaginary publishers. It was time to open her eyes to the true fate of the unlucky work, and Baines, finding her sitting before the very grate that had been its tomb, nerved himself for the task.

PART IV.

"Feeling pretty strong, Addie, dear?" he asked, taking a chair near hers.

"Oh, I'm really quite well now. I shall go out tomorrow."

"Equal to a talk on—on business?"

"Of course, dear. But is anything the matter?"

"No; it's about that book of mine, the one Caxton—"

"Oh, Addington, is it out? Will it be out soon? Oh, I shall love to see it in print!"

"No, dear, it's not out. I—I don't think it will ever come out." He spoke and held his breath.

"Not come out!" she cried. "Surely they aren't as stupid as that? Do they want you to pay? Well, we will pay."

"It's not that, Addie. I haven't asked

Baines Sat Looking Into the Fire.

anybody to publish it. Do you remember what Caxton said when you were ill?"

"Why, yes, darling. It was so nice of Mr. Caxton. You know how I always liked him, and it made me so proud and happy."

Poor Booby Baines groaned, but he stuck to his task.

"I want to tell you," he said, "that it wasn't quite true."

"What, not true that your book was good? Oh, Addington, what a modest young man!" And she laughed merrily.

"I'm quite serious, dear, I'm sorry to say. The book was really not—"

"I'd rather have Mr. Caxton's opinion," interrupted Addie, with a confident smile. "He's a better judge than you are, sir."

"I'm trying to tell you Caxton's opinion, Addie," said Baines, in mild, but honest persistence.

"But he told me himself. He said the book was splendid."

"Yes, my dear, but you were very ill, and he thought, and I thought, too, that it was better—"

"Well?" said Addie, sitting up straight in her chair.

"To tell you what you wanted to hear, even if it wasn't true," he went on, his eyes on the fire.

"Oh, Addington," she whispered, with a sudden gasp of apprehension.

"Now, dear, wouldn't you have fretted terribly if you'd been told that the book was—wasn't so good as you hoped? I was afraid, Addie—I mean Caxton was afraid."

"So you told Mr. Caxton to—to put it strongly?"

"Well, he did it himself. I let him do it. I thought it was right, Addie."

"Oh, dear, I'm sorry. No, I won't be angry! But did he think it was not so good as—as it ought to be?"

"Addie, he thought it was very bad—very bad."

"Equal to a talk on business?"

"And he told me what wasn't true?"

"He—we meant it well, dear," pleaded Baines.

"I think it was a liberty," she said, with dignity. "In him, I mean—not in you, dear. What didn't he like in it?"

"Oh, he didn't like anything. He said that it was utterly hopeless and that I mustn't publish it; he said nobody would have it."

The truth was now out. Baines had turned his eyes away from his wife's face and sat waiting for the blow. But a long pause followed, and then Addie said:

"How does he know? I never liked his dogmatic way of talking."

"I'm afraid he's a pretty good judge," murmured Baines, disconsolately.

"So, you haven't tried to get it published yet?"

"No, dear. In fact—"

"Mr. Caxton isn't everybody, Addington. I'm sure it's awfully good. Don't be discouraged, my dear. You are just a little bit easily discouraged, you know. You must take somebody else's opinion. Yes; you must. Now do. Don't shake your head like that."

"I can't," said Baines.

"Why not?"

Another long pause followed. Then Booby Baines whispered:

"The book's destroyed."

"Destroyed!" she cried, in sudden horror. "Do you mean to say——"

"Burnt, dear. He—we thought it best."

"Do you mean," repeated Addie, incredulously, "that that man took upon himself to burn your book?"

"No; I burnt it," said Baines; he was determined to be honest.

"On his advice?"

"Well——"

"On his advice, Addington?"

"He did advise it."

"And it all burnt—all of it, dear?"

"Yes, Addie. Don't cry, Addie! It's no great loss."

"What a shame! What a shame! To come when you were in trouble about—me, and tell you to burn it! Oh, how shameful!"

"Really, Addie, you're wronging Caxton, indeed you are. I sent for him, you know, and quite agreed with him."

Addie put out her arm to him and made him draw his chair closer to hers.

"Poor dear!" she said. "You weren't yourself that day; he took a cruel advantage of you."

"My darling, he had nothing to gain by——"

"Well, at any rate, he was most reckless—and thoughtless—and conceited. What a value he must put on his own opinion!"

"Addie, dearest!"

"Now, tell me, Addington, do you really ask me to believe that there was no good in the book? Remember how we liked it when we read it together!"

Baines said nothing. He remembered it; it came back to him somehow.

"Am I—I who know how clever you are—to believe that? Why, it was a beautiful book!"

"No, no; it wasn't up to much," protested Baines; but now he smiled timidly at his wife.

"Ah, you may say so, but I shan't believe my clever boy is—a stupid. Was there nothing you liked yourself? Now, think!"

He began to yield to the sweet, loving flattery.

"Of course," he said, "although it was bad as a whole, it may have had a good thing here and there."

"Of course, it had—here, there and everywhere! Oh, I wonder how he dared! I shall let him know what I think about it!"

"My darling, he acted with my full approval. In fact, I burnt it myself."

"Your approval! I suppose you were thinking more about me and baby than the book, weren't you?"

Baines could not say no to this question, and she went on, triumphantly:

"Of course you were. I see it all! Oh, the conceit of some men! Now, Addington,

"The book would have done nothing but harm."

just think about the chapter on 'The New Light!'"

Alas for the eternal resurrections of self-approval!

"Perhaps that wasn't as bad as the rest," said Booby Baines.

"So bad! It was beautiful! And that one about—what was it? Oh, yes—'Zest in Rest.'"

"There was an idea in that, but the working out—"

"Oh, bother the working out!" cried Mrs. Baines. "Now, aren't you sorry?"

Baines had begun to be a little sorry.

"I thought it best not to risk a failure, dear," he pleaded.

"You thought! Mr. Caxton was kind enough to think!"

"Anyhow, Addie, you mustn't be angry with Caxton. He meant it most kindly."

"Oh, that's what officious people always say!"

"He did, indeed. He may have been hasty—"

"May have been! Now, don't you think he was? Now, wasn't he?"

"Well, dear, I could hardly consider the matter calmly then."

"I should think not, with me lying half dead! Aren't you sorry now?"

There was no escaping it. His wife's trust revived his own confidence; memory painted the dull-hued book in bright colors. Neither to her, nor to himself, could he persist in his ascetic denial of merit to his work.

"I—I am half sorry," he said. "But we must be just to Caxton."

"I am just," declared Addie, "and it's all his fault. And I love you more than ever, dear Addington. You must write it again!"

"I couldn't; indeed, I couldn't," he cried, in swift terror; for the vision of those barren, torturing hours before his desk rose to his eyes.

"Oh, of course, you feel that now," said she, soothingly. "But some day you'll feel different. Some day, won't you, dear?"

And Addington Baines said: "Well, perhaps, some day."

* * * * * * * *

When Addie put it like that the professor could not deny that possibly she might be right.

"My dear young lady, nobody is infallible except professors," said he. "Caxton's got a sound judgment, though."

"You never did justice to my husband's abilities," said she, reproachfully.

"Now, that's too bad! My pursuits are so different from his that—"

"Well, and what does Mr. Caxton know about those things Addington writes on? Now, professor, would you burn another man's book?"

"Not without his consent," said the professor.

"And would you ask his consent when his wife was almost dying, and he was utterly upset?"

"There, I'm not going to get into trouble by defending the fellow. He's big enough to look after himself."

"In your heart you think he was wrong?"

"In my heart, my dear lady, I know nothing about it."

"I asked him to come here today. I'm going to tell him what I think about it."

The professor pulled out his watch with burlesque anxiety.

"I think I'll be going," said he. "I've an appointment."

The professor went, and presently Tom Caxton came. He greeted Addie with the excessive and unnatural urbanity of a man who knows that he is going to be scolded; it is like a dog's cringing wag of the tail when the whip comes in sight. Addie plunged into the subject at once, and without giving him an opportunity of speaking indulged in an eloquent rebuke of his hastiness, thoughtlessness, levity and self-assurance.

"Well, Mr. Caxton," she asked, at last, "have you nothing to say?"

PART V.

"I am incorrigible, Mrs. Baines," he answered. "I still think I was right."

She raised her hands in a gesture of despairing astonishment.

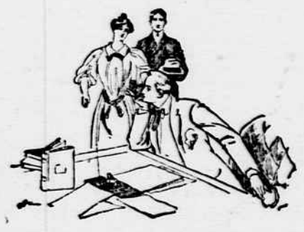
"The book," he went on, "would have done nothing but harm to your husband's reputation.

"But I read it, and it was splendid."

"Well, you know, my opinion was asked, not offered—and I could only give it. His talents are not in that direction."

"You think he has no talents at all, I suppose?" she asked, bitterly.

"It's no use arguing about it. If Adding-



Baines Was in His Arm Chair at the Table.

ton himself can't convince you, I can't."

"Addington? Why, he agrees with me!"

"Agrees with you?" cried Caxton, incredulously.

"Yes. He bitterly regrets yielding to your opinion in a moment of—well, when he wasn't himself."

"Impossible! He fully acquiesced in my opinion—he said he had anticipated it. Is he in, Mrs. Baines?"

Addington's presence was secured. When he heard why he was wanted, he laid his hand gently on Addie's shoulder.

"She's too zealous for me, Caxton," said he.

"It's a charming fault in a wife," said Caxton, with a grim smile, "but in bare justice to myself I had to cite you as a witness."

Baines glanced uneasily at his wife and said nothing.

"You quite agreed in what I said and advised," urged Caxton.

"Oh, yes, I did. Certainly I agreed. Yes, Addie, I agreed."

"And your own judgment went with it?" added Caxton.

"Yes, yes. At the time, at least. I thought—I still think—that the book was—had faults."

"They could have been remedied," declared Addie, decisively.

"Perhaps, dear," said Booby Baines, "perhaps not. Caxton did his best for me."

"You seem to have changed your views rather," remarked Caxton.

Baines threw a glance at him—it seemed a confidential glance—a glance of private appeal.

"Well," he said, "I was a bit down then, old chap. Addie was ill and—and all that, you know."

"Just as I said," interpolated Addie, drumming a neat foot on the floor.

"I daresay you were right, Caxton," Baines went on; "but perhaps we were just a little bit hasty."

Caxton smiled and, turning to Addie, said: "My witness is not very satisfactory, Mrs. Baines."

"It all shows," said Addie, "how careful we ought to be in assuming responsibility."

"Yes," said Caxton, "and, perhaps, in asking other people to assume it."

Neither husband nor wife seemed to discern the point of his remark. They were standing together now. Addie's left hand rested on Baines' arm, and she held out her right to Caxton.

"We won't quarrel about it," she said charitably. "But I thought I ought to tell you, in case you should ever do the same sort of thing again."

"I think you may feel easy about that," said Caxton. "I've had my lesson."

"Yes," said she, in simple acquiescence. "And," she added, "he's going to write it again."

Caxton shot a swift glance at Baines. An answer seemed to come—a dismayed, helpless protest, and Baines said:

"If—if I can find time, you know, old fellow."

"Why, Addington, you've all your time now, since you got rid of that horrid board of trade."

Booby Baines made no answer. Caxton, forgetting his own wrongs in pity for the unlucky man, began to apologize for him.

"It needs a lot of grit and resolution to sit down and write a thing like that over a second time," said he.

"Well, and Addington's got them, though you think he hasn't," she flashed out, angrily. "And when it is done again and comes out, we shall see who was right, Mr. Caxton."

"I'm sure I hope I shall be proved wrong," said he, as he exchanged a very cold shake of the hand with Mrs. Baines. Then he bade Booby farewell; the hunted look was still in Booby's eyes. He had all his time now, he had left the board of trade (was it really so horrid?) and he could set to work at once to rewrite "Stress and