TRISTRAM of BLENT.

Being an Episode in the Story of an Ancient House

By Anthony Hope

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Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

Adelaide, wife of Sir Randolph Edge of Blent Hall, eloped with Captain Fitzhubert. Sir Randolph dies in Russia, presumably in time for Lady Edge and Fitzhubert to marry and make their son Harry legitimate. They learn later, however, that the date of Sir Randolph's death has been given incorrectly and that Harry is not the rightful heir. They keep the matter secret, and eventually Mrs. Fitzhubert succeeds to the Barony of Tristram of Blent and resides with Harry at Blent Hall. Unknown to Lady Tristram, Madam Zabriska and Mr. Jenkinson Neeld are also in possession of the secret, and Madam Zabriska, with her uncle, Major Duplay, come to reside at Merrion Lodge, near Blent Hall. Harry learns from his mother that he is not the rightful heir and they determine to hold the title for him at any cost. To further his cause, he decides to marry Janie Iver, heiress to Fairholme, but finds two rivals in Bob Broadley and Major Duplay. The latter learns of his unfortunate birth from Mina Zabriska. He informs Harry that he intends to tell Iver and they quarrel. Harry winning in a brisk tussle. Neeld becomes the guest of Iver at Fairholme. Mina Zabriska meets Neeld and they form a compact to protect Harry's interests and maintain secrecy. Lady Tristram dies, after extracting from her son a promise that Cecily Gainsborough, the rightful heiress to Blent, shall be invited to the funeral. Cecily and her father come to Blent, but Harry fails to receive them. Later he comes suddenly upon Cecily in the garden and realizes that she is a Tristram, the image of his mother. The engagement of Harry and Janie Iver is announced and Duplay declares his determination to expose the false position of his future son-in-law to Iver. Harry unconsciously falls in love with Cecily, and, without telling her this, acknowledges that he is not the legal heir, but she is Lady Tristram of Blent. Then he steals away from Blent by night, stopping to advise Bob Broadley to woo and win Janie Iver, who loves him. He goes to London, where political friends of his mother interest themselves in his case. Cecily, unhappy in her new possessions, follows him to beg him to take back Blent. Harry joins Sloyd in a real estate deal and becomes a competitor of Iver. Cecily asks Harry to marry her, so that he may return to Blent. He refuses and then suddenly realizes that he loves her. Harry beats Iver in a business deal and is offered a viscounty by political friends. He scorns the idea of accepting a viscounty. Cecily returns to Blent, determined to begin life over and forget Harry. Harry is offered a foreign secretaryship, and is informed by Col. Wilmot Edge that through the scheming of a woman the real date of Sir Robert Edge's death had been suppressed, so that Lady Tristram and Harry's father were married in time to legalize his birth.

"There are a good many applications in this matter, Col. Edge. I've had my life upset once before, and, I assure you, it's rather troublesome work. I have work on hand—plans and so forth. And, as you say, of course, there's the lady, too." He laughed as he ended by borrowing Neeld's phrase.

"I can understand all that, Lord Tristram."

"Do you mind saying Mr. Tristram? Saying Mr. Tristram to me and to everybody for the present? It won't be for long; a week, perhaps."

"You mean keep the change in the position a secret?" Edge seemed rather startled.

"You've kept the secret for many years, colonel. Shall we say a week more? And you, too, Mr. Neeld? Nothing at all to the people at Blentmouth?"

"You mean to choose your opportunity with—with your cousin?" Neeld asked.

"Yes, exactly—to choose my opportunity. You see the difficult character of the situation? I ask your absolute silence for a week."

"Really I—" Old Neeld hesitated a little. "These concealments lead to such complications," he complained. He was thinking, no doubt, of the Iver engagement and the predicament in which it had landed him.

"I don't ask it on my own account. There's my cousin."

"Yes, yes, Neeld; there's the lady, too."

"Well, Edge, if you're satisfied I can't stand out. For a week, then—silence."

"Absolute!" said Harry. "Without a look or a word?"

"You have my promise," said Wilmot Edge.

"And mine. But—but I shall feel very awkward," sighed poor Mr. Neeld. He might have added that he did feel a sudden and poignant pang of disappointment. Lived there the man who would not have liked to carry that bit of news in his portmanteau when he went out of town? At least that man was not Mr. Jenkinson Neeld.

"I'll choose my time, and I won't keep you long," said Harry.

With that they left him. But they had a word together before Edge caught his 'bus in Piccadilly.

"Cool young chap," said he. "Took it quietly enough."

"Yes, considering the enormous difference it makes," agreed Neeld. His use of that particular phrase was perhaps an unconscious reminiscence of the words in the Journal, the words that Addie used when she burst into Madame de Kries' room at Heidelberg.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A Business Call.

"My dear, isn't there something odd about Mr. Neeld?" Mrs. Iver put the question, her anxious charity struggling with a natural inquisitiveness.

"About Neeld? I don't know. Is there?" He did not so much as look up from his paper. "He's coming with us to Blent tonight, I suppose?"

"Yes. And he seems quite excited about that. And he was positively rude to Miss Swinkerton at lunch when she told him that Lady Tristram meant to give a ball next winter. I expect his nerves are out of order."

"Small wonder if they were, surely!"

From the moment of his arrival Mr. Neeld had been plunged into the Tristram affair, and surrounded by people who were connected with it. But it must be admitted that he had it on his brain, and saw it everywhere.

He had met Gainsborough, essaying a furtive entry into Blentmouth, and heading toward the curiosity shop—with a good excuse this time. It was Cecily's birthday, and the occasion, which was to be celebrated by a dinner party, must be marked by a present also. Neeld went with the little gentleman, and they bought a bit of old Chelsea (which looked very young for its age).

"It's positively worthy of a place at Blent—in the long gallery," panted Gainsborough, hugging his brown paper-covered prize. "You'll be interested to see the changes we're making, Mr. Neeld. Cecily has begun to take an enormous interest in the house, and I—I'm settling down."

"You don't regret London ever?"

"I shall run up now and then. My duty is to my daughter. Of course, her life is changed. He sighed as he added: "We're getting quite used to that."

"She has come to love the place, I dare-say?"

"Yes, yes. Shes' in very good spirits and quite happy in her position now, I think. Good bye. So glad we shall see you tonight."

Janie was very happy. She at least thought no more of that bygone episode. She asked no questions about Harry Tristram. He had dropped out of her life.

Harry was mentioned only once—in connection with his letter to Iver about the arbitration. Iver was not inclined to let him go.

"He has great business ability. It's a pity to waste his time. He can make money, Neeld."

"Disney's a good friend to have," Neeld suggested.

"If he sticks in, yes. But this thing won't be popular."

Neeld could maintain no interest in the conversation. It had to proceed all along on a baseless presumption, to deal with a state of things which did not exist. What might be wise for Harry—Harry Nothing-at-all—might be unwise for Tristram of Blent, and conversely.

"I must leave it to him," Iver concluded. "But I shall tell him that I hope he won't go. He's got his way in the world to make first. He can try politics later on if he likes."

"No doubt you're right," murmured old Neeld, both uneasy and uninterested. He was feeling something of what he had experienced once before; he knew the truth, and he had to keep his friend in the dark. In those earlier days he had one confidant, one accomplice, in Mina Zabriska. The heavy secret was all his own to carry now.

As a consequence of his preoccupation Janie Iver found him rather unsympathetic and with her usual candor she told him so.

"You don't really appreciate Bob," said she. "Nobody quite knows him except me. I didn't use to, but now I know what a strong character he has."

Unwontedly cynical thoughts rose in old Mr. Neeld. Had he come down to Fairholme to listen to the platitudes of virtuous love?

"And it's such a comfort to have a man one can lean upon," Janie pursued, looking, however, admirably capable of standing without extraneous support.

There it was again! She'd be calling him her "master' next—as the heroine does in the third act, to unfailing applause. What was all this to ears that listened for a whisper of Harry Tristram?

"The most delightful thing is," Janie pursued, "that our marriage is to make no change at all in his way of life. We're going to live at Mingham just as he has lived all his life—a real country life on a farm!" There was no hint that other ideals of existence had ever possessed an alluring charm; the high life with Harry, the broad and cosmopolitan life with the major—where were they? "I've insisted on it, the one thing I've had my own way in."

Bob was being transmogrified into a man of iron, if not of blood. Vainly Mr. Neeld consulted his memories.

"And Mingham's so bound up with it all. I used to go there with Mina Zabriska." She smiled in retrospect; it would have been pardonable if Neeld had smiled, too. "I haven't seen her for ever so long," Janie added, "but she'll be at Blent tonight." Ah, if he might give just the barest hint to Mina now!

"Bob isn't particularly fond of her, you see, so we don't meet much now. He thinks she's rather spiteful."

"Not at all," said Neeld, almost sharply, "She's a very intelligent woman."

"Oh, yes, intelligent." She said no more. If people did not agree with Bob—well, there it was.

The evening came—Neeld had been impatient for it—and they drove over to Blent, where Bob was to meet them.

"It's a fine place for a girl to have," said Iver, stirred to a sudden sense of the beauty of the old house as it came into view.

They were all silent for a moment. Such a place to have, such a place to lose! Neeld heard Mrs. Iver sighing in her good-natured, motherly fashion. But still Harry was not mentioned.

"And if they had a business man—with his head on his shoulders—to manage the estate, it'd be worth half as much again." This time it was Iver who sighed; the idea of anything not having all the money made out of it that could be made offended his instincts.

"She'll have a husband, dear," his wife reminded him.

"I wonder if Bob'll get there before we do," said Janie, with the air of starting a subject of real interest in lieu of continuing idle talk.

The evening was hot, and the hall door of Blent stood open. Cecily was sitting in the hall, and came out to greet them. She seemed to Neeld to complete the picture as she stood there in her young fairness, graciously welcoming her guests. She was pale, but wore a gay air, and did the honors with natural dignity. No sign of strangeness to the place, and no embarrassment were visible.

"Oh, my dear, how you remind me of Lady Tristram!" good Mrs. Iver broke out.

Neeld pressed the girl's hand with a grip that she noticed; she looked at him in a sort of question, and for a moment flushed a little.

"It's very kind of you to come," she said to him, softly.

"How are you, Mr. Neeld?" The Imp had suddenly darted out from somewhere and was offering her hand. "I'm staying here, you know." And in a whisper she added, "That young man of Janie's has been here a quarter of an hour, and Cecily wasn't dressed, and I've had to talk to him. Oh, dear!" She had her hand on his arm and drew him apart. "Any news of Harry Tristram?" she whispered.

"Er—no—none."

Her quick eye looked at him in suspicion; he had hesitated a little.

"You've seen him?" she asked.

"Just casually, Mme. Zabriska."

She turned away with a peevish little pout. "Then you're not very interesting," she seemed to say. But Neeld forgave her; she had asked him about Harry. He could forgive more easily because he had deluded her.

Addie Tristram's picture was at one end of the dining room now, and Cecily's place was under it.

"My first dinner party! Although it's a small one," she said to Iver as she sat down.

"The first at Blent!"

"The first anywhere—actually!" she laughed, and then grew thoughtful for a moment, glancing out into the dark and listening to the flap of a bat's wings against the window.

"You'll have plenty now," said he, as he watched her admiringly. He forgot, man that he was, that girls do not find permanent happiness in dinner parties.

It was evident that Neeld ought never to have come to Blent that evening. For the talk was of futures, and, out of deference to the young hostess even more of hers than of the engaged couple's. Cecily opened more topics and she herself was willing and seemed even eager to discuss them. She fell in with Mrs. Iver's suggestion that she ought to be a center of good works in the district., and in pursuance of this idea should accept the position of patron to Miss Swinkerton's complicated scheme of benevolence. She agreed with Iver that the affairs of the estate probably wanted overhauling, and that a capable man should be engaged for the task, even at some expense. She was, in a word, very much the proprietor. It was difficult for Neeld to sit and hear all this. And opposite to him sat Mina Zabriska, rather silent and demure, but losing no chance of reminding him by a stealthy glance that this ordinary talk covered a remarkable situation—as indeed, it did, but not of precise nature that Mina supposed.

When dessert was on the table Iver, true to his habits and traditions, felt that it was the occasion for a few friendly informal words; the birthday and the majority of young Lady Tristram demanded so much recognition. Admirably concise and simple in ordinary conversation, he became, like so many of his countrymen, rather heavy and pompous when he got on his legs. Yet he made what everybody except Mina Zabriska considered a very appropriate little speech. Gainsborough grew quite enthusiastic over it, and Neeld thought it was wonderfully good (if it had not happened, of course, to be, by force of circumstances, an absurdity from beginning to end). Cecily was content to say "Thank you," but her father could not refuse himself the privilege of reply; the reply was on her behalf, but it was mainly about himself—also a not uncommon characteristic of after-dinner oratory. Then Neeld had a turn over the engagement (a subject dull, but safe), and the proceedings were stopped only by Bob Broadley's headlong flight when the question of his response arose.

"Thank goodness, that's over!" said Mina, snappishly, as she stepped out into the garden, followed by Mr. Neeld. The rest went off to see the treasures of the long gallery. Mina turned to him with a quick question. "You saw Mr. Tristram? How is he?"

"Harry Tristram is quite well and in very good spirits. I never saw a man better in my life."

Mina was silent for a moment. Then she broke out:

"I call it disgusting. He's in good spirits, and she's in good spirits, and—and there's an end of it, I suppose! The next thing will be—"

"It's not the end, if there's a next thing," Neeld suggested, timidly.

"Oh, don't be tiresome. The next thing'll be some stupid girl for him and some idiot of a man for her. How I wish I'd never come to Merrion!"

"Don't despair. Things may turn out better than you think."

"They can't," she declared, fretfully. "I shall go away."

"What a pity, Miss Gainsborough—Lady Tristram, I mean—will miss you so much."

"Let her," said the Imp, ungraciously. "I've put myself out enough about the Tristrams."

Neeld forebore to remind her of the entirely voluntary nature of her sacrifices. After all, he was not the man to throw stones on that account.

"Wait a few days anyhow," he urged her. In a few days something must happen.

"A few days Oh, yes!" As a matter of fact, she meant to stay all winter. "She's started," she went on with an irritated jerk of her head toward the long gallery, "putting all the things in different places and rearranging everything.

"I should imagine that Mr. Gainsborough's enjoying himself then?"

"She doesn't let him touch a thing," replied Mina with a fleeting smile. "He just stands about with a duster. That contents him well enough, though. Oh, yes, I shall go. The Broadleys won't care about me, and Cecily won't want me long."

"I'M HERE BECAUSE I COULDN'T KEEP AWAY."

Neeld could give real comfort only at the price of indiscretion.

"We must wait and see how it all turns out," said he.

"I hate people who say that," grumbled Mina disconsolately. "And I do think that the Ivers have grown extraordinarily stupid—caught it from Bob Broadley, I suppose."

When injustice springs not from judgment, but from temper, it is not worth arguing against. Neeld held his tongue and they sat silent on the seat by the river looking across to Merrion, and hearing the voices of their friends through the open windows of the long gallery.

Presently there came to them through the stillness of the night the sound of wheels, not on the Blenmouth side, but up the valley, on the Mingham and Fillingford road. The sound ceased without the appearance of any vehicle, but it had reminded Neeld of the progress of time.

"It must be getting late," he said, rising. "I'll go and see if they think of starting home. Did you hear wheels on the road—toward the Pool?"

"Bob Broadley's cart coming for him, I suppose."

"No; I don't think so. He's going back to Fairholme with us. I heard him say so."

Mina was languidly indifferent, and Mr. Neeld trotted off into the house. Mina sat on, frowning at the idea that in a few minutes she would have to go in and say goodby; for the voices came no more from the long gallery, and she heard the guests laughing and chattering in the hall, as they prepared for departure. Suddenly she discerned the figure of a man coming into sight across the river. He walked slowly, as it seemed stealthily, till he came to the end of the footbridge. Then he halted and looked up at the house. It was gayly lighted. After waiting a moment the man turned back and disappeared up the road in the direction of Mingham. Mina rose and strolled to the bridge. She crossed it and looked up the road. She could make out dimly the stranger's retreating form.

She heard Cecily calling to her, and ran back to the house. A wonderful idea had come into her head, born of a vague familiar aspect that the bearing of the man on the road had for her, but she laughed at it, telling herself that it was all nonsense, and as she joined in the talk and farewells it grew faint and was almost forgotten. Yet she whispered to old Neeld with a laugh:

"I saw a man on the road just now, who looked rather like Harry. I couldn't see him properly, you know."

Neeld started and looked at her with obvious excitement. She repaid his stare with one of equal intensity.

"Why, you don't think——?" she began in amazement.

"Come, Neeld, we're waiting for you," cried Iver from the wagonette, while Bob, in irrepressible spirits, burst into song as he gathered up the reins. He had deposed the coachman and had Janie with him on the box.

They drove off, waving their hands and shouting good night. Mina ran a little way after them and saw Neeld turning his head this way and that, as though he thought there might be something to see. When she returned she found Gainsborough saying good night to his daughter; at the same moment the lights in the long gallery were put out. Cecily slipped her arm through hers and they walked out again into the garden. An absolute stillness came as the noise of the wheels died away.

"I've got through that all right," said Cecily, with a laugh, drawing her friend with her toward the bridge. "I suppose I shall be quite accustomed to it soon."

They went on to the bridge and halted in the middle of it, by a common impulse, it seemed.

"The sound of a river always says to me that it all doesn't matter much," Cecily went on, leaning on the parapet. "I believe that's been expressed more poetically."

"It's great nonsense, however it's expressed," observed Mina, scornfully.

"I sometimes feel as if it was true." Probably Cecily thought that nobody—no girl—no girl in love—had ever had the feeling before. A delusive appearance of novelty is one of the most dangerous weapons of Cupid. But Mina was an experienced woman—had been married, too!

"Don't talk stuff, my dear," she cried crossly. "And why are we standing on this horrid little bridge?"

She turned round; Cecily still gazed in melancholy abstraction into the stream. Cecily then faced down the valley. Mina looked up it; and at the moment the moon showed a quarter of her face and illuminated a streak of the Fillingford road.

The man was there. He was there again. The moonlight fell on his face. He smiled at Mina, pointed a hand toward Blentmouth and smiled again. He seemed to mock the ignorance of the vanished wagonette. Mina made no sign. He laid his finger on his lips and nodded slightly toward Cecily. The clouds covered the moon again, and there was no more on the Fillingford road than a black blotch on the deep gray of the night; even this vanished a moment after. And still Cecily gazed down into the Blent.

Presently she turned around. "I suppose we must go in," she said grudgingly. "It's getting rather chilly. They were both in low-cut frocks and had come out without any wraps. With the intuition of a born schemer Mina seized on the chance.

"Oh, it's so lovely!" she cried, with an apparently overwhelming enthusiasm for nature. "Too perfectly lovely! I'll run in and get some cloaks. Wait here till I come back, Cecily."

"Well, don't be long," said Cecily, crossing her bare arms with a little shiver.

Off the Imp ran, and vanished into the house. But she made no search for wraps. After a moment's hesitation in the hall, the deceitful creature ran into the library. All was dark there; a window was open and showed the bridge, with Cecily's figure on it making a white blur in the darkness. Mina crouched on the window sill and waited. The absolute unpardonableness of her conduct occurred to her; with a smile she dismissed the consideration.

Harry was humbled! That was the conclusion which shot through her mind. What else could his coming mean? "Poor old Neeld!" she murmured once. It was hard on him to miss this. At the moment Neeld was smiling over the ignorance in which he had been bound to keep her.

She started violently and turned round. The butler was there, candle in hand.

"Is her ladyship still out, ma'am?" he asked, advancing. "I was going to lock up." He was hardly surprised to find her—they knew she was odd—and would not have shown it if he had been.

"Oh, go to bed," she cried in a low voice. "We'll lock up. We don't want anything, anything at all."

"Very good. Good-night, ma'am."

What an escape! Suppose Cecily had seen her at the window! But Cecily was not looking at the window. She moved to the far end of the bridge and stood gazing up toward Merrion, where one light twinkled in an upper room. Mina saw her stretch out her arms for a moment toward the sky. What had happened? It was impossible that he had gone away! Mina craned her head out of the window, looking and listening.

He came; Mina saw his figure on the road, at first dimly, then with a sudden distinctness as a gleam of moonlight shone out. He stood a little way up the road to Cecily's right. She did not see him yet, for she looked up to Merrion. He took a step forward, his tread sounding loud on the road. There was a sudden turn of Cecily's head. A moment's silence followed. He came up to her, holding out his hand. She drew back, shrinking from it. Laying her hands on the gate of the bridge she seemed to set it as a fence between them. Her voice reached Mina's ears, low, yet as distinct as though she had been by her side, and full of a terrified alarm and a bitter reproach.

"You here! Oh, you promised, you promised!"

With a bound Mina's conscience awoke. She had heard what no ears save his had any right to hear. What if she were found? The conscience was not above asking that, but it was not below feeling an intolerable shame even without the discovery that it suggested as her punishment. Blushing red there in the dark she slipped from the window seat and groped her way to a chair. Here she flung herself down with a sob of excitement and emotion. He had promised. And the promise was broken in his coming.

Now she heard their steps on the path outside; they were walking toward the house. Telling herself that it was impossible for her to move now, for fear she should encounter them, she sank lower in her arm chair.

"Well, where shall we go?" she heard Cecily ask in cold, stiff tones.

"To the long gallery," said Harry.

The next moment old Mason, the butler, was in the room again, this time in great excitement.

"There's some one in the garden with her ladyship, ma'am," he cried. "I think—I think it's my lord!"

"Who?" asked Mina, sitting up, feigning to be calm and sleepy.

"Mr. Harry, I mean, ma'am."

"Oh, well, then, go and see."

The old man turned and went out into the hall.

"How are you, Mason?" she heard Harry say. "Her ladyship and I have some business to talk about. May I have a sandwich afterward?"

There he was, spoiling the drama, in Mina's humble opinion. Who should think of sandwiches now?

"Do what Mr. Tristram says, Mason," said Cecily.

She heard them begin to mount the stairs. Jumping up, she ran softly to the door and out into the hall. Mason stood there with his candle, staring up after Cecily and Harry. He turned to Mina with a quizzical smile wrinkling his good-natured face.

"You'd think it a funny time for business, wouldn't you, ma'am?" he asked. He paused a moment, stroking his chin. "Unless you've happened to be in service twenty years with her late ladyship. Well, I'm glad to see him again, anyhow."

"What shall we do?" whispered Mina. "Are you going to bed, Mason?"

"Not me, ma'am. Why, I don't know what mayn't happen before the morning." He shook his head in humorous commentary on those he had served. "But there's no call for you to sit up, ma'am."

"I'll thank you to mind your own business, Mason," said the Imp, indignantly. "It would be most—most improper if I didn't sit up. Why, it's nearly midnight!"

"They won't think of that up there," said he

The sound of a door slammed came from upstairs. Mina's eyes met Mason's for a moment by an involuntary impulse, then hastily turned away. It is an excellent thing to be out of the reach of temptation. The door was shut!

"Give me a candle here in the library," said Mina, with all her dignity. And there in the library she sat down to wonder and to wait.

Mason went off after the sandwiches, smiling still. There was really nothing odd in it, once you were accustomed to the family ways.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Before Translation.

Harry Tristram had come back to Blent in the mood which belonged there as of old—the mood that claimed as his right what had become his by love; that knew no scruples, if only he could gain and keep it; that was ready to play a bold game and take a great chance. He did not argue about what he was going to do. He did not justify it, and perhaps could not. Yet to him what he purposed was so clearly the best thing that Cecily must be forced into it. She could not be forced by force; if he told her the truth he would meet at the outset a resistance that he could not quell. He might encounter that, after all, later on, in spite of a present success. That was the great risk he was determined to run. At the most there would be something gained; if she were and would be nothing else, she should and must at least be mistress of Blent. His imagination had set her in that place; his pride, no less than his love, demanded it for her. He had gone away once that she might have it. If need be, again he would go away. That stood for decision later.

She walked slowly to the end of the long gallery and sat down in the great armchair; it held its own position in spite of the changes which Harry noted with quick eyes and a suppressed smile as he followed her and set his candle on a table near. He lit two more from it and then turned to her. She was pale and defiant.

"Well," she said, "why are you here?"

She asked, and he gave no excuse for the untimely hour of his visit and no explanation of it.

"I'm here because I couldn't keep away," he answered, gravely, standing before her.

"You promised to keep away. Can't you keep promises?"

"No; not such promises as that."

"And so you make my life impossible. You see this room; you see how I've changed it? I've been changing everything I could. Why? To forget you, to blot you out, to be rid of you. I've been bringing myself to take my place. Tonight I seemed at last to be winning my way to it. Now you come. You gave me all this; why do you make it impossible to me?" A bright color came to her cheeks now as she grew vehement in her reproaches, and her voice was intense, though low.

A luxury of joy swept over him as he listened. Every taunt witnessed to his power, every reproach to her love. He played a trick, indeed, and a part, but there was no trick and no acting, in so far as he was her lover. If that truth could not redeem his deception, it stifled all sense of guilt.

"And you were forgetting? You were getting rid of me?" he asked, smiling and fixing his eyes on her.

"Perhaps. And now—!" She made a gesture of despair. "Tell me—why have you come?" Her tone changed to entreaty.

"I've come because I must be where you are, because I was mad to send you away before, mad not to come to you before, to think I could live without you, not to see that we two must be together; because you're everything to me." He had come nearer to her now and stood by her. "Ever since I went away I have seen you in this room, in that chair, I think it was your ghost only that came to town." He laughed a moment. "I wouldn't have the ghost. I didn't know why. Now I know. I wanted the you that was here—the real you—as you had been on the night I went away. So I've come back to you. We're ourselves here, Cecily. We Tristrams are ourselves at Blent."

She had listened silently, her eyes on his. She seemed bewildered by the sudden rush of his passion and the enraptured eagerness of his words that made her own vehemence sound to her poor and thin. Pride had its share in her protest, love was the sole spring of his intensity. Yet she was puzzled by the victorious light in his eyes. What he said, what he came to do was such a surrender as she had never hoped for him, and he triumphant in surrendering.

The thought flashed through her mind, troubling her and for the time hindering her joy in his confession. She did not trust him yet.

"I've had an offer made to me," he resumed, regaining his composure. "A sort of political post. If I accept it I shall have to leave England for a considerable time almost immediately. That brought the thing to a point." Again he laughed. "It's important to you, too, because if you say no to me tonight you'll be rid of me for ever so long. Your life won't be made impossible. I shouldn't come to Blent again."

"A post that would take you away?" she murmured.

"Yes. You'd be left here in peace. I've not come to blackmail you into loving me, Cecily. Yes, you shall be left in peace to move the furniture about." Glancing toward the table, he saw Mr. Gainsborough's birthday gift. He took it up, looked at it for a moment, and then replaced it. His manner was involuntarily expressive. Even if she brought that sort of a thing to Blent——! He turned back at the sound of a little laugh from Cecily and found her eyes sparkling.

"Father's birthday present, Harry," said she.

Delighted with her mirth, he came to her, holding out his hands. She shook her head and leaned back, looking at him.

"Sit as my mother did. You know. Yes, like that," he cried.

She had obeyed him with a smile. Not to be denied now, he seized the hand that lay in her lap.

"A birthday! yes, of course, you're twenty-one! Really mistress of it all now! And you don't know what to do with it, except spoil the arrangement of the furniture?"

She laughed low and luxuriously. "What am I to do with it?" she asked.

"Well, won't you give it all to me?" As he spoke he laughed and kissed her hand. "I've come to ask you for it. Here I am. I've come fortune hunting tonight."

"It's all mine now, you say? Harry, take it without me."

"If I did I'd burn it to the ground that it mightn't remind me of you."

"Yes, yes, that's what I've wanted to do," she exclaimed, drawing her hand out of his and raising her arms a moment in the air. Addie Tristram's pose was gone, but Harry did not miss it now.

"Take it without you, indeed! It's all for you and because of you."

"Really, really?" She grew grave. "Harry, dear, for pity's sake tell me if you love me!"

"Haven't I told you?" he cried gayly. "Where are the poets? Oh, for some good quotations! I'm infernally unpoetical, I know. Is this it—that you're always before my eyes, always in my head, that you're terribly in the way, that when I've got anything worth thinking I think it to you, anything worth doing I do it for you, anything good to say I say it to you? Is this it—that I curse myself and curse you? Is this it, that I know myself only as your lover and that if I'm not that, then I seem nothing at all. I've never been in love before, but all that sounds rather like it.

"And you'll take Blent from me?"

"Yes, as the climax of all, I'll take Blent from you."

She rose suddenly and began to walk to and fro across the end of the room, while he stood by the table, watching her.

"Well, isn't it time you said something to me?" he suggested with a smile.

"Give me time, Harry; give me time. The world's all changed tonight. You—yes, you came suddenly out of the darkness of the night——" She waved her hand toward the window—"and changed the world for me. How am I to believe it? And if I can believe it, what can I say? Let me alone for a minute, Harry, dear."

He was well content to wait and watch. All time seemed before them, and how better could he fill it? He seemed himself to suffer in this hour a joyful transformation; to know better why men lived and loved to live, to reach out to the full strength and the full function of his being. The world changed for him as he changed it for her.

(To be continued.)

HUMAN FINGER PRINTS.

Possible Drawbacks to Their Value in Identification.

From Knowledge.

The constancy of human finger prints has chiefly been discussed in connection with the identification of criminals. Assuming that the evidence of finger prints is to be admissible in criminal proceedings, it will be not only necessary to prove that in the case of the same man the finger prints remain unaltered, but that no two persons have identical finger prints. Where is the evidence of this?

There are probably 1,500,000,000 men and women on the earth. Can we suppose that no two of these have identical finger prints? Nor indeed is this all. We may be comparing the finger prints of a living man with those of one who has been dead for years past, and the doctrine of heredity might lead us to expect to find similar finger prints in the case of parents and children, and of different children of the same parents. It is, at all events, certain that if this finger print system were once introduced into our courts of justice there would be any amount of wrangling as to whether they were identical or only similar—experts contradicting each other and involving the whole subject in confusion.

Moreover, professional criminals would probably soon find some mode of altering their finger prints. No doubt if the person who committed a crime—a murder, for example—has left the imprint of his fingers on anything it may prove an important clue; but the same thing may be said of the imprint of his boots or shoes. But a clue is one thing and a proof is another thing.

Let me point out another difficulty. In a country where there are a large number of criminals whose finger prints are collected, the number of these will soon be very large. How long would it take to examine this collection in order to find out whether any of them corresponded accurately with the finger prints of the man who is now accused? The task would, I think, be a hopeless one.

That finger prints may be important in the detection of crime whenever the criminal has left the print of his fingers behind him I do not dispute, but without much stronger evidence than we now possess that no two persons have undistinguishable finger prints such evidence ought never to be permitted to outweigh what appeared to be a tolerably satisfactory alibi.

In a Flourishing Condition.

From the Chicago Tribune.

Old-Fashioned Pastor—"You observe no falling off in spirituality in your congregation, I hope?"

Popular Young Clergyman—"I think our congregation has never been as active in church work as now. The ladies' ice cream socials are excellently attended, and our last rummage sale realized nearly $375 for the organ fund."

ANIMAL GHOSTS

Very Scarce, According to Physic Research Records.

A FEW STRIKING CASES, HOWEVER

Phantasm of Dying Dog Visits Mistress at a Distance.

SOME OTHER BRUTE SPOOKS

Written for The Evening Star.

Animal ghosts are very rare. During the present revival of the "Do-animals have-souls?" problem the alleged fact that the shades of departed beasts do not return to earth has been offered by a few partisans on the negative side of the question.

The Society for Psychical Research has succeeded in finding but two or three phantasms in forms lower than that of man. This is the most striking case:

"I was at Mentone, having left at home with the gardener a very favorite black and tan terrier, 'Judy,'" reports Mrs. Bagot of The Palace, Hampton Court, England. "I was sitting at the table d'hote with my daughter and husband and suddenly saw Judy run across the room, and I suddenly exclaimed, 'Why, there is Judy!'

"There was no dog in the room or hotel. But I distinctly saw her, and when I went upstairs told my other daughter, Mrs. Wodehouse, what I had seen. The next letter from home told me that Judy had gone out in the morning well and had apparently picked up some poison, as she was taken ill and died in half an hour. She was almost a human dog, so wonderfully intelligent and devoted to me."

The diary of Mrs. Wodehouse, the daughter of Mrs. Bagot, whom she mentions, was resurrected by the psychic researchers. It reads:

"Easter eve. Mentone. Drove with A. and picked anemones. Lovely, bright day. But my head ached too much to enjoy it. Went to bed after tea and read Hettner's "Renaissance." Mama saw Judy's ghost at table d'hote!

"March 28. Wednesday. Monte Carlo. Mama and A. came over for the day. Judy dead, poor old dear."

The only animal spooks, of which there is any apparently definite record in psychic literature are those of dogs. To those who really believe in "materializations" of the dead, this fact may be significant. It has been said that if the soul is to be sought in any bestial body it must be looked for, first, in the dog, which, of all animals, lives nearest to man.

Spook of Dog in Distress.

Here is the ghost of a living dog. Phantasms of living men in distress are common. "Last night Megatherium, a small Indian dog, was sleeping in my daughter's room," reports Mrs. Beauchamp of Hunt Lodge, Twyford, England. "I awoke, hearing him run round my bed room. I know his step so well. My husband awoke, too. I said, 'listen.' He said, 'It is Meg.' We lighted a candle, looked well, there was nothing and the door was shut. Then I had a feeling that something was wrong with the dog. It came into my head that he had died at this minute, and I looked at my watch to see the time, and then I thought I must go up and see about him. It was so cold and it seemed so silly, and while I was thinking I fell asleep. It must have been some little time afterward when some one knocked at the door, and it was my daughter in agony.

"'Oh, mamma, Meg is dying!' she cried. We flew upstairs. He was lying on his side like dead—his legs stretched straight out like a dead thing's. Then we found he had nearly strangled himself—got the strap of his coat somehow from under his stomach and 'round his neck. He soon revived and recovered when we got it off. I shall always in the future go and see, if I have such a distinct feeling about any one. There was no other dog in the house that night, and I could not possibly have heard Meg from the room where he was, on another floor and at another end of our large, rambling house."

Andrew Lang, in all of his ghost hunting, appears to have found but one animal spook. The circumstances were these: A lieutenant of one of the British gunboats was visiting a friend in the country. Around a smoking room fire sat several men and a fox terrier. The heavy, shambling footsteps of an old dog and the jingling of his collar were heard coming upstairs. "Here's old Peter," said the lieutenant. "Old Peter's dead," said the host. The same sounds were heard to enter the room through the closed door. The invisible dog shook itself upon the hearth rug, jingled its collar vigorously and lay down before the fire, as had been "old Peter's" custom. The fox terrier bristled, growled and followed the sounds of the specter across the carpet.

Dogs Can See Ghosts.

That dogs see ghosts may be indicated also by this case reported to the Society for Psychical Research: Ayecroft Hall is celebrated in England as a haunted house. In it abides the gaunt phantasm of a woman, sometimes white, sometimes black. It disappears through doors and performs other surprising feats.

"The appearance of this ghost has been followed by a death in either my husband's family or my own in every case," testifies Mrs. Dauntesey, who dwells in this weird abode. "I had a favorite fox terrier, who used to sleep in my dressing room. She always went up with me, and as a rule made herself comfortable at once. But once or twice she showed a perfect horror of the room, and looked fixedly in one corner of it, trembling violently all the time. On these occasions I always took her away to another room, where she settled down at once."

A terrible dog spook is frequently seen throughout England. It is large, shaggy and black, with long ears and tail. It is looked upon as a bad spirit haunting scenes of evil deeds or future calamities. Its steps sound like those of a person walking in heavy shoes through a miry, sloppy road. It utters an indescribable screech. If followed, it retreats, facing its pursuer, and either sinks into the ground or suddely dissolves itself into a mist. Weapons pass through it, as if it were a shadow. It frequently appears in Lancanshire, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. It is often seen in a dreary lane in the parish of Overstrand. Spots where it appears are often found scorched and smelling of brimstone.

The Welsh peasants are deathly afraid of the Gwallgi or "dog of darkness," which haunts their country roads. This terrible specter has the form of a mastiff, and blazing red eyes.

Dog Haunts This Castle.

Peel Castle, Isle of Man, is haunted by a shaggy spaniel, known as the "mauthe doog." In olden times its favorite haunt was the guard room of the castle, where it was commonly seen lying by the fireside. The guards of the old edifice went from this chamber through the chapel when delivering the keys to their captain. Fearing the phantom dog, they customarily made this trip in pairs. It was their superstition that something dreadful would befall him who ventured upon this errand alone. One dark night, according to tradition, one of them, very drunk, made it a brag that he would brave the "dog of darkness" without companionship. Soon afterward a terrifying noise alarmed the soldiers. They sought the daring guard, and found him dying "with distorted features, in violent agony."

It was an ancient English custom to bury animals alive in the churchyards for the purpose of scaring away the sacrilegious. The ghosts of pigs, dogs, horses and other beasts so treated are said to still haunt the ancient cemeteries of the mother country.

Lamb Ghosts in Churches.

The early founders of Christian churches in Sweden burned a lamb under the altar of each new church. In many parts of Sweden today it is said that when one enters a church out of service time he is apt to see the ghost of a little white lamb spring across the choir loft and vanish. One of these, seen in a graveyard, betokens the death of a child.

The ghost of a pig, buried alive in Kroskjoberg, frequently reappears as a harbinger of death or calamity.

Near Leeds, England, the ghost of a small donkey, with shaggy hair and eyes as large as saucers, frequently traverses the country roads to the terror of the populace.

The doorstep of a certain ancient house in Washington is said by many to be haunted by a cat's ghost. Guest after guest stumbles over this shade, as he enters, and yet no live cat is ever seen fleeing from the spot after these experiences.

Mr. Isadore de Solla, Harrington square, London, reports to the Society for Psychic Research the following experience, in which a dog figures:

"I sat opposite my daughter, who was reading a book at the fireside. Presently I exclaimed, 'Good gracious!' my daughter saying, 'What is it?' I replied, 'I could have sworn I saw a dog enter the