

ENGAGED IN HASTE.

BY MISS M. E. BRADDON.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THEN BE WE, EACH AND ALL, FORGIVEN."

A week went by, a week of misery for every one at Darnel Park, and for at least one person outside the gates; a week which had brought no new tidings of any kind. Mr. Penverne had gone back to Scotland Yard a confessed failure, and Dora was scathing in her contempt for the detective force. He had eaten and drunk; he had gone upon expensive journeys to Liverpool and Plymouth and Cork; but he had failed to arrest the footsteps of Jaker, or even to discover what white wings had waited for him at his return westward.

Among the crowd of emigrants for that western paradise, the poacher, a marked man in the neighborhood of Darnel, had been but an insignificant unit, and he had left no trace behind him in the memory of dock laborers or quay-side loiterers. "The note changed by Jaker at the village shop had been identified by Sir Allan's bankers as one of the notes issued to him. This fact established Jaker's guilt in the mind of the detective. But it did not satisfy Dora Darnel. From the first she had made up her mind that her sister-in-law was in some way implicated in the guilt of the fatal night. She was not going lightly to surrender that belief. It was the fruition of her own evil thoughts, the culmination of her long-cherished dislike of her brother's wife. She was not going to relinquish her own convictions, the outcome of much intense thought, merely because the real criminal had been clever enough to pass some of his plunder to Jaker, no doubt with the express intention of putting justice on a false scent.

A week had gone by since that morning when Clare Darnel had entered her husband's room, full of love and hope, to be received with such crushing coldness. She had not seen him since that hour. She had waited meekly till he should summon her to his bedside. She was ready to bear the punishment of her sin against him, that one sin of concealment, ready to acknowledge that she had erred in withholding her confidence from the husband and friend to whom she owed all her allegiance.

During the week that was just ended, Sir Allan had made marked progress toward recovery. A powerful constitution and habits of exceptional temperance had made his restoration to health easy, when once the bullet had been successfully extracted. He had been gradually regaining strength of body and mind during that week of quiet and seclusion. He had seen his daughter once, his sister three times. Dora had urged her right to see him, and he had yielded to her wish, not without reluctance. She had sat with him for an hour on each occasion, and she had talked softly, in low and gentle accents, yet dropping such drops of venom as those lips of hers were wont to distill when her brother's wife was the subject of conversation. Whatever Sir Allan thought of her insinuations he had been inscrutable.

And now the day had come when he felt himself equal to an interview with his wife—that interview which he felt must needs be final. His house must no longer shelter a traitress, his daughter must no longer call an infamous woman mother. It was to Grace, his only child, his darling of peaceful days gone by, that he turned in this hour of dark despair. Amidst the shipwreck of his happiness she was the straw to which he clung. And now, to-day, when he had to pronounce judgment upon his guilty wife, he summoned Grace to stand at his side, to be, in some measure, judge between him and the woman they both had loved. Grace would incline to mercy. Grace would pity the sinner, even in the midst of indignation at the sin.

It was the first day upon which Sir Allan had been well enough to sit up for an hour or two. He looked the pale ghost of his old self, as he sat by the fire, wrapped in a long brocaded dressing-gown, bordered with sable, as picturesque as the robe of a Venetian senator in the sixteenth century. The gown had been planned and chosen by Lady Darnel, and made in secret, as a birthday gift for her husband. He remembered that fact when his valet handed him the garment, and would have avoided putting it on—but his only other dressing-gown had been stained with blood on the fatal night. He could not reject the obnoxious robe without too plainly indicating his antipathy, and he did not want to make his wife's disgrace common talk in the household.

He sent for his wife and daughter and they came to him, side by side. Grace flew to the hearth, where he sat in a spacious arm-chair. She flung herself upon her knees beside him and nestled her bright head in his lap. "Oh, father, what delight to be with you," she murmured. Clare stood a little way off, calm, erect, but very pale. If she stood before him thus as a criminal, conscious of that last worse crime of which a wife can be guilty, she was indeed the most audacious among women. But though her face expressed a proud tranquillity, and her eyes, grave, sorrowful, reproachful even, looked at him unshrinkingly, she was content to stand aloof, as one who knew there was an impassable gulf between herself and him. So Allan Darnel thought in his agony as he looked at the wife he had loved.

Had loved? Is there ever an end to such a love as this? Did Lucius Junius Brutus cease to love his sons when, as their judge, he condemned them to death?

Never had Allan Darnel loved yonder pale, beautiful woman more intensely than he loved her now, in this supreme hour of her renunciation. "Grace, I have sent for you because I have that to say to Lady Darnel which I wish you to hear," he began, gravely. "There are some fathers who would keep such a sorrow as mine forever secret from a daughter, who would nuss up a gross over facts, leave all things in darkness and mystery, a something to be wondered about forever afterward; but I have chosen to act otherwise. You are a woman, and it can do you no harm to know that there are wicked women in this world as well as good women. I give you my whole confidence, Grace, because you are wise as well as loving."

"Father," cried the girl, looking at him with horror, "what are you going to say? Not one word against my mother?" "Hush," exclaimed Sir Allan, putting his hand upon her lips. "You must never again call that woman by such a name. You look upon her to-day, I hope, for the last time. Grace, forever. There is no need for me to enter upon the reasons for that parting. She knows what those reasons are as well as I. There need be no public scandal, no disgrace for her—whom we have both loved. Lady Darnel is comfortably provided for under her settlement. She will do well to go abroad alleging any reason she may please, not dishonouring

blé to me, for our separation. I would spare her all the pain I can, although her infamy well might cost me my life. Although her midnight visitor did his best to murder me."

"Father, father," cried Grace, with a wild shriek of horror, "you are wrong—deluded—deceived—deceived by me, your wretched daughter. It was in the hope of seeing me that that man came to this house. He had been lurking about all day. He wanted to get an interview with me—to claim my promise—perhaps to ask me for money, since he was brought so low." "Grace, what are you raving about? You are mad," exclaimed Sir Allan, looking in his daughter to his wife in sheer bewilderment.

Clare had not said a word. She stood before him silent, imperturbable, waiting to hear his accusation in all its fullness. She wanted to hear him to the end—to learn the lowest depth to which she had sunk in his estimation, before she uttered one word in her own defense. And now Grace had come to the rescue; Grace, the generous and impulsive; and the whole story must needs be told.

"No, father, dearest, I am not mad; but I have been foolish, blamable, wicked even; for it was wicked to keep the secret of my folly from the best and kindest of fathers. I am deeply ashamed of myself. If that dreadful wound had been fatal I should have been the most miserable creature in the world. I could not have gone on living, knowing that my folly had been the cause of my father's death."

And then briefly, bravely, without disgraces or sophistications of any kind, Grace Darnel told the history of her engagement upon the Chicksand common when they were out cub-hunting in the morning, and how she had seen her scampish lover when he had seen no more of him. "You did not see him again at night, then?" questioned her father. "How do you know that it was he whom I saw in the next room—the man who fired the shot?"

"I do know it—as well as any one can know anything from circumstantial evidence, but it is a long story. Hark! there is a carriage," cried Grace, rushing to the window. "It must be the colonel. I had a letter from him this morning saying he would try to be back to-day. He knows everything. He can convince you that I am telling the truth."

"He knows," said Sir Allan. "You trusted him, then, when you dared not trust your father?" "Because I was not one little bit afraid of him, dear, indignant, old thing," cried Grace. "May he come up at once? I am dying to see him."

"Not yet, Grace; we must have the story out first. If—I have wronged your step-mother as deeply as your words imply—" "You have wronged her, deeply, cruelly, outrageously. There never was a more devoted wife. I know how she has suffered all through your illness, poor thing, and she stands there like a statue, accused of crimes of which I alone am guilty."

"Clare," cried Sir Allan, holding out his arms to his wife, trying to rise, but almost too weak to lift himself from the capacious depths of the low arm-chair. "Clare, can you forgive me?" "Allan, my beloved husband."

She flew to his arms. On her knees, with her head upon his breast, she sobbed out the fullness of her heart. "No, Allan, no," she gasped, when her passionate tears had exhausted themselves, "no, I am not without guilt. I, too have been weak and cowardly. Like this poor girl here, I have had my secret. I have kept one Bluebeard chamber in my life locked from you, the best and most generous of men. Grace is mistaken. Her unprincipled suitor, the unhappy young man who in Paris called himself Victor de Camillae, came to this house on that dreadful night to see me, to obtain money from me, from me whose purse had been emptied for him, time after time, since my marriage. You must have often wondered what I did with my money, Allan, how I contrived to get rid of that handsome income which your love had settled on me. You know now. It was not spent on private charities as you fancied. It was not from motives of benevolence that I stinted myself of those luxuries women love. It was my worthless son who drained my purse and squandered your money in gambling clubs and on race-courses."

"Your son?" "Yes, my son, Stuart Mackenzie's son, who, God help him, has inherited all Stuart Mackenzie's vices, including the capacity for murder. My son, who may before long be standing in the criminal dock to be tried for the crime of that fatal night, and to bring disgrace upon you through your wretched wife. He was not 'dropped' as we thought, in the 'Erl King.' He wrote to me from San Francisco within two months of my marriage. He had seen the announcement in an English paper, and he congratulated me on my good fortune and my power to help him. From that time to this his letters have been one long series of demands. I have complied, weakly, hopelessly, ready to grant anything rather than to let you know my trouble, rather than that you should feel ashamed of your wife's son. He is mine, you know, my very own, my flesh and blood. No dishonor can touch him that does not cast its shadow upon me. I could not bring myself to confess how low he has fallen. If I had told you anything I must have told you all. I preferred to keep my secret, and in this one matter to be a hypocrite."

"Poor Clare, poor misguided Clare. As if I should fail you, love. Why, if you had been stood by you and helped you if you had been the mother of half a dozen scampish sons."

"Ah, you are so good! But I wanted to spare you all trouble and worry."

"And so worried yourself out of health and spirits. All wrong, Clare," said Sir Allan, gently. "I tried, under these conditions, to do my duty to my wretched boy, tried to be his adviser and guide, to put him in an honorable way of life. I gave him the means of living like a gentleman; the leisure to cultivate the profession of his choice. I refused no request he made me. I lent a willing ear to his promises of amendment. All in vain. He was a drunkard and a gambler—his vices were ingrained in him a hideous hereditary taint—the leprosy of sin. When he stood before me that night, threadbare, down at the heel, haggard, degraded, I knew that he had fallen to the lowest depth of moral and physical ruin. His shaking hands and restless manner told me too plainly that he was a sufferer from his father's old disease, the brandy-drinker's fatal fever. He had so suffered before, as I knew. He hardly emerged from boyhood when he was first attacked by that horrible complaint. I knew all this; but I did not know that he could be mad enough or wicked enough to attempt murder. He told me of his courtship of Grace—admitted that he had passed him-Grace off as a Frenchman, was daring self off as a Frenchman, was daring enough to talk about claiming the fulfillment of her promise directly she came of age. He asked me, for a large sum of money, which I refused; and while I was

absent from the room, he opened the Japanese cabinet where you had put the notes—he must have seen you from the balcony—and was in the act of making off with them when you entered."

"I understand," muttered Sir Allan. "It was the money that made him desperate. I had forgotten all about that money." "Other people did not forget. Miss Darnel brought a detective from London, and he put the whole story together."

"Dora brought a detective here, and without my permission," exclaimed Sir Allan. "She brought the police into the house while I was lying unconscious here! That was rather a wide stretch of her authority as my sister."

"We were so anxious about you, dearest," murmured Grace. "I dare say it was Aunt Dora's anxiety which made her send for the detective."

"I don't think the whole of Scotland Yard could have done very much toward saving my life, Grace. It would have been more sisterly of your aunt to have postponed her inquiries till I was able to sanction them."

"She could not have guessed that the thief was my son and Grace's suitor," said Lady Darnel. "Happily for us, the man from Scotland Yard was beguiled by a false scent, and my wretched son is still at liberty. God only knows where he is, and what we may next hear of him."

"Nothing bad, I hope, mother," said Grace, "for the colonel has undertaken to look after him, and as I had a very cheery letter from the dear old man this morning, I have no doubt he has managed everything admirably. Would you mind his coming here now, father? I am dying to hear what he has done."

"Yes, Grace, you can send for him now." Grace went off to deliver her own message, and Allan Darnel and his wife were alone for a little while. Alone, and side by side, full of trust in each other, just as they had been before the crime which for a little while had wrapped their lives in a black cloud.

"Ah, Clare, what a besotted idiot—what a ruffian I have been to," said Sir Allan, lifting his wife's hand to his lips. "What shall I do to atone for my brutality?" "Get well and strong as fast as ever you can, dearest, and let us start upon that delicious journey to the Italian lakes. And—yes—there is one other favor I should like to ask you."

"There is nothing you can ask, love, which I will not grant."

"I think, Allan, when we come back to Darnel it would be better for your sister to find a home elsewhere. I do not believe that she and I can ever be quite happy and at ease under the same roof, for I have an idea that she detests me."

"And upon my honor, Clare, I believe you are right. She shall find another home. You and I will have nothing but sunshine in our domestic lives. You don't mind Grace, do you? Grace is devoted to you?"

"And I am devoted to Grace. I shall be very sorry when we are obliged to part with her. Ah, Allan, while we are still alone, tell me that you can forgive the trouble I have brought upon you through my unhappy son—poor Grace's entanglement—that terrible wound which has imperiled this dear life. If you had never known me these things might not have happened."

"If I had never known you I should have missed knowing true happiness. We must take the sour with the sweet, the thorns with the roses, dear love. Life is made so. As for Grace, she is a fine, impulsive creature, created to get into mischief of some kind in the flush of youth and folly, like a rose caught in a thicket. And she might have met your scampish son in the Louvre all the same had I never met you."

"Hardly, Allan, for it was your money that gave him the means of living in Paris."

"Here comes the colonel," said Sir Allan. Grace came gayly into the sick-room, bringing her Indian warrior, whose fine, benevolent countenance beamed with kindly feeling. "My dear Allan, this is a change for the better, Lady Darnel, I congratulate you," he said as he sunk into the chair which Grace wheeled forward to the hearth. "I was very sorry to leave Darnel while you were in such a critical state; but I had some particular business in town."

"You can speak before father and mother; they know everything about Monsieur de Camillae."

"I am very glad of that, Grace. First and foremost, then, there are your letters," said the colonel, handing her a sealed packet. "You can count them by and by, and see if they are all right. And there is a letter from the young man, whose name is no more Camillae than it is Stukely."

"Grace knows his real name now," said Clare. "The deuce she does!" cried the colonel. "It's more than I do, for I believe the fellow has half a dozen aliases. However, Grace knew the man as Camillae and as Camillae he writes to her, renouncing all claims upon her, acknowledging that he was altogether unworthy of her girlish confidence, and that he obtained her promise under false pretenses. The letter was written on board the Orizaba, bound for New Zealand, where I have dispatched our young friend under the care of a doctor who is going to settle in the colony and who will look after Mr. Camillae and set him on his legs when he gets there. If there is any capacity for reform in the man he will have a fair chance of redemption."

"God grant that he may take advantage of it," exclaimed Clare. "Oh, Colonel Stukely, how can I ever be grateful enough to you for this good work?"

"You?" said the colonel, looking puzzled. "Ah, you do not understand yet. You have not been told all. The service done for Grace is a tenfold boon to me. The man you have tried to rescue is my son, Valentine Stuart Mackenzie. If you have indeed saved him—"

"If he had had my own son I could not have done anything better for him."

"And you have taken all this trouble, you have spent a great deal of money," began Lady Darnel, but the colonel interrupted her. "Don't talk about the money. The whole business has cost very little more than a hundred so far. And that reminds me that I have some money of yours in my pocket-book, Allan, just half of the notes which Lady Darnel's son took in his mad fit. The other half fell into the clutches of Jaker and his brood, who robbed him while he was under the influence of delirium tremens. Don't be unhappy, Lady Darnel, the fit was over before we put him on board the Orizaba, and my friend the doctor will look after him throughout the voyage. The Orizaba is a sailing vessel. The passage will last long enough for me as I believe he will be. I put the case in his hands as an interesting experiment. Here is a young man organically sound, good looking, well made, well born, well bred, given over to the demon drink. I give him into your custody, out of reach of temptation, for the steward and captain will work with you for his welfare. You can have him all to yourself for the next

two months. If there is any virtue in your science you ought to be able to cure him." And Fernon declared that he would cure him."

Clare gave the colonel her hand. "You have brought me comfort and hope," she said fervently. "You are a noble-hearted man, Colonel Stukely, worthy to be my husband's friend."

"You can give me no higher praise than that."

Grace had opened the packet and looked over her letters. Yes, they were all there, the little school-girl notes, written in the most Britannic French, with much recourse to grammar and dictionary; the letters written later from Darnel, in a freer style, and a little more Gaelic, but abounding in wrong genders and impossible tenses. She glanced through the collection, blushing as she looked, and then knelt down on the hearthrug and threw them behind the burning logs. What a merry blaze they made. While the flames went roaring up the wide old chimney, she turned to her godfather, half in tears and half in mirthfulness.

"You have done something more for me than teach me my catechism and the ten commandments in the vulgar tongue," she said. "You have rescued me from a great difficulty."

"Perhaps if I had been in the way to teach you the ten commandments, laying particular stress upon the fifth, you might never have got into that difficulty, my poor Grace."

"No; if I had honored my father as I ought to have done, I should never have engaged myself to a French art student without his knowledge," said Grace, and then, with a touch of pretty rebelliousness, she added: "But then he ought never to have sent me to school. That was the beginning of the evil."

"That was Aunt Dora's doing," said Sir Allan. "The school was her advice."

"I hate people who are always giving advice," exclaimed Grace. "A thing that costs nothing, and which nobody wants."

"How happy they were, sitting round the cozy hearth in the spacious old room which when had planned for just such family uses. Four people sitting round the fire in the average modern bed-chamber would be a crowd; but here there was room enough for twenty. They sat round the fire talking for the next hour, and almost forgot that Sir Allan was still an invalid, till the family doctor came in and reproved them severely all round, including the patient."

"I saw you were to sit up for an hour or so, and you have been up at least four hours," he expostulated. "The other three hours went under the head of 'or so' replied Sir Allan. "It was a vague expression on your part which I took to have a liberal meaning. Don't be frightened, Danvers, I never felt better in my life, and I am going to eat one of these partridges which you have been pressing upon me as persistently as Louis XIV upon his confession. I am going to eat a partridge and drink a tumbler of Heidsieck 'to my supper,' as old-fashioned people say."

"Upon my soul, I believe you have been taking Heidsieck already," said the doctor, "for you are as merry as a grig—and you have been all in the doleful till to-day."

and visitings that necessarily drew Lady Darnel into county society. She stinted no splendors or hospitalities that besemed the marriage of her husband's daughter and heiress with a man of wealth in the neighborhood, and she bore herself at all these festivities with a quiet dignity which impressed even the doubters.

"Whatever she may have been in the past, she must always have been a lady," said that pleasant old Lady Scatterdash, who had lived every hour of her life in London and Paris, before she took to wearing poke bonnets and holding mothers' meetings in Wiltshire; "and that is the main point after all. We don't want to pry into people's past lives, but we can not receive ci-devant bar-maids or ballet girls."

Lady Darnel is so completely happy in her husband's love, and in the perfect confidence now established between them, that she can afford to be very indifferent to the opinions of the county. She has received cheering news from New Zealand, where Stuart Mackenzie has been behaving well and winning friends.

THE END.

J. B. PACE Consumers Beware !!

There are imitations of the celebrated and old reliable J. B. PACE TOBACCOES.

The Genuine has the FULL NAME, J. B. PACE, ON THE TIN TAG. Don't be deceived. You are imposed upon if the initials J. B. Are not on the Tin Tag.

J. B. PACE GEO. W. TAYLOR, Attorney-at-Law, GREAT FALLS - - - Montana.

ALBRECHT & KNIGHT, GREAT FALLS, MONTANA. Dealers in Furniture.

New Goods! Complete Stock! LOW PRICES!! We beg to announce that we shall always keep on hand a full line of goods up to the demand of the country, and ask you to give us a trial.

J. S. COLLINS & CO. MILES CITY, M. T. Branch of the Cheyenne Saddlery House. THE LARGEST STOCK OF Saddlery Goods - IN MONTANA. TENTS and TARPAULINS. Western Agents for Towers' Fish Brand Stickers.

INTERNATIONAL HOTEL, Helena, Mont. Centrally Located. Convenient to Business Part of the City. Superior Accommodations. Prices to Suit the Times. Large Rooms, Well Furnished. Liberaally Managed. SPECIAL RATES TO FAMILIES. M. LISSNER, Proprietor.

LINDSAY & CO., HELENA, MONT. Jobbers of Meats, Fish, Fruit, Produce, Poultry, Oysters and Game.

CHAS. K. WELLS, Bookseller - Stationer, HELENA - MONTANA. Dealer in Fancy Goods, Mirrors, Mountings, Notions, Toys, Wall Papers. Montana Agent for Steiway & Son's Pianos, Chickering & Son's Pianos, Chicago Cortage Organs, White Sewing Machines, Victor School Furniture, the Caligraph Writing Machine, Legal Text Books, Pioneer Press Line of Montans Legal Blanks.

EVERY COW-BOY SHOULD RIDE! BEN. R. ROBERTS & CO. SADDLE! Write to them for their New Illustrated Price List.

BEN. R. ROBERTS & CO., HELENA, MONTANA. OUR MOTTO: NOT HOW CHEAP, BUT HOW GOOD!! Sheep for Sale! I HAVE SHEEP FOR SALE, Of any kind, and in numbers to suit purchasers. Purchasers can select straight ewes, ewes and lambs, stock sheep, or wethers.

Address: GEO. D. PATTERSON, Fort Benton, M. T.