"BEATRICE."

A New and Fascinating Story.

BY H. RIDER HAGGARD.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FLAT NEAR THE EDGWARE ROAD.

"Then shall we join Lady Honoria?"

Geoffrey's journey in town was not altogether a cheerful one. To begin with, Effie wept copiously at parting with her beloved "auntie," as she called Beatrice, and would not be comforted. The prospect of rejoining her mother and the voluble Anne had no charms for Effie. They all three got on best apart. Geoffrey himself had also much to think about and found little satisfaction in the thinking. He threw his mind back over the events of the past few weeks. He remembered how he had first seen Beatrice's face through the thick mist on the Red Rocks, and how her beauty had struck him as no beauty ever had before. Then he thought of the adventure of their shipwreck and of the desperate courage with which she had saved his life, almost at the cost of her own. He thought, too, of the scene when on the following day he had entered the room where she was asleep, when the wandering ray of light had wavered from her breast to his own, when that strange presentiment of the ultimate intermingling of their lives had flashed upon him, and when she had awakened with an unearthly greeting on her lips. One by one, while Effie slowly sobbed herself to silence in the corner opposite to him, he recalled every phase and scene of their ever growing intimacy, till the review culminated in his mysterious experience of the past night and the memory of Beatrice's parting words.

They reached London at last, and as had been arranged, Anne, the French bonne, met them at the station to take Effie home. Geoffrey noticed that she looked smarter and less to his taste than ever. However, she embraced Effie with an enthusiasm which the child scarcely responded to, and at the same time carried on an ocular flirtation with a ticket collector. Although it was so early in the year for fogs, London was plunged in a dense gloom. It had been misty that morning at Bryngelly, and become more and more so as the day advanced; but, though it was not yet 4 o'clock, London was dark as night. Luckily, however, it is not far from Paddington to the the flat near the Edgware road, where Geoffrey lived, so having personally instructed the cabman, he left Anne to convey Effie and the luggage and went on to the Temple by Underground railway with an easy mind.

Shortly after Geoffrey reached his chambers in Pump Court the solicitor arrived as had been arranged, not his uncle—who was, he learned, very unwell—but a partner. To his delight he then found that Beatrice's ghost theory was perfectly accurate; the boy with the missing toe joint had been discovered who saw the whole horrible tragedy through a crack in the blind; moreover, the truth had been wrung from him and he would be produced at the trial—indeed, a proof of his evidence was already forthcoming. Also some specimens of the ex-lawyer's clerk's handwriting had been obtained and were declared by two experts to be identical with the writing on the will. One thing, however, disturbed him: neither the attorney general nor Mr. Candleton was yet in town, so no conference was possible that evening. However, both were expected that night—the attorney general from Devonshire and Mr. Candleton from the Continent; so—the case being first on the list—it was arranged that the conference should take place at 10 o'clock on the following morning.

On arriving home Geoffrey was informed that Lady Honoria was dressing, and had left a message saying he must be quick and do likewise, as a gentleman was coming to dinner. Accordingly he went to his own room—which was at the other end of the flat—and put on his dress clothes. Before going to the dining room, however, he said good night to Effie—who was in bed, but not asleep—and asked her what time she had reached home.

"At twenty minutes past 5, daddy," Effie said promptly.

"Twenty minutes past 5! Why, you don't mean to say that you were an hour coming that little way! Did you get blocked in the fog?"

"No, daddy, but"——

"But what, dear?"

"Anne did tell me not to say!"

"But I tell you to say, dear; never mind Anne!"

"Anne stopped and talked to the ticketman for a long, long time."

"Oh, did she?" he said.

At that moment the parlormaid came to say that Lady Honoria and the "gentleman" were waiting for dinner. Geoffrey asked her casually what time Miss Effie had reached home.

"About half-past five, sir. Anne said the cab was blocked in the fog."

"Very well. Tell her ladyship that I shall be down in a minute."

"Daddy," said the child, "I haven't said my prayers. Mother did not come, and Anne said it was all nonsense about prayers. Auntie did always hear me my prayers."

"Yes, dear, and so will I. There, kneel upon my lap and say them."

In the middle of the prayers—which Effie did not remember as well as she might have done—the parlormaid arrived again.

"Please, sir, her ladyship"——

"Tell her ladyship I am coming, and that if she is in a hurry she can go to dinner! Go on, love."

Then he kissed her and put her to bed again.

"Daddy," Effie said, as he was going, "shall I see Auntie Beatrice any more?"

"I hope so, dear."

"And shall you see her any more? You want to see her, don't you, daddy? She did love you very much!"

Geoffrey could bear it no longer. The truth is always sharper when it comes from the mouth of babes and sucklings. With a hurried good night he fled.

In the little drawing room he found Lady Honoria, very well dressed, and also her friend, whose name was Mr. Dunstan. Geoffrey knew him at once for an exceedingly wealthy man of small birth, and less breeding, but a burning and a shining light in the Garsington set. Mr. Dunstan was anxious to raise himself in society, and he thought that, notwithstanding her poverty, Lady Honoria might be useful to him in this respect. Hence his presence there to-night.

"How do you do, Geoffrey?" said his wife, advancing to greet him with a kiss of peace. "You look very well. But what an immense time you have been dressing. Poor Mr. Dunstan is starving. Let me see. You know Mr. Dunstan, I think. Dinner, Mary."

Geoffrey apologized for being late, and shook hands politely with Mr. Dunstan—Saint Dunstan he was generally called on account of his rather clerical appearance, and in sarcastic allusion to his somewhat shady reputation. Then they went into dinner.

"Sorry there is no lady for you, Geoffrey; but you must have had plenty of ladies' society lately. By the way, how is Miss—Miss Granger? Would you believe it, Mr. Dunstan, that shocking husband of mine has been passing the last month in the company of one of the loveliest girls I ever saw, who knows Latin and law and everything else under the sun. She began by saving his life—they were upset together out of a canoe, you know. Isn't it romantic?"

Saint Dunstan made some appropriate—or rather inappropriate—remark to the effect that he hoped Mr. Bingham had made the most of such unrivaled opportunities, adding, with a deep sigh, that no lovely young woman had ever saved his life, that he might live for her, etc.

Here Geoffrey broke in without much ceremony. To him it seemed a desecration to listen while this person was making his feeble jokes about Beatrice.

"Well, dear," he said, addressing his wife, "and what have you been doing with yourself all this time?"

"Mourning for you, Geoffrey, and enjoying myself exceedingly in the intervals. We have had a delightful time, have we not, Mr. Dunstan? Mr. Dunstan has also been staying at the Hall, you know."

"How could it be otherwise when you were there, Lady Honoria?" answered the Saint in that strain of compliment affected by such men, and which, to tell the truth, jarred on its object, who was, after all, a lady.

"You know, Geoffrey," she went on, "the Garsingtons have refurnished the large hall and their drawing room. It cost eighteen hundred pounds, but the result is lovely. The drawing room is done in hand painted white satin, walls and all, and the hall in old oak."

"Indeed!" he answered, reflecting the while that Lord Garsington might as well have paid some of his debts before he spent eighteen hundred pounds on his drawing room furniture.

Then the Saint and Lady Honoria drifted into a long and animated conversation about their fellow guests, which Geoffrey scarcely tried to follow. Indeed, the dinner was a dull one for him, and he added little or nothing to the stock of talk.

When his wife left the room, however, he had to say something, so they spoke of shooting. The Saint had a redeeming feature—he was somewhat of a sportsman, though a poor one, and he described to Geoffrey a new pair of hammerless guns, which he had bought for a trifling sum of 140 guineas, recommending the pattern to his notice.

"Yes," answered Geoffrey, "I daresay they are very nice; but, you see, they are beyond me. A poor man cannot afford so much for a pair of guns."

"Oh, if that is all," answered his guest, "I will sell you these; they are a little long in the stock for me, and you can pay me when you like. Or hang it all, I have plenty of guns, I'll be generous and give them to you. If I cannot afford to be generous, I don't know who can!"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Dunstan," answered Geoffrey, coldly; "but I am not in the habit of accepting such presents from my—acquaintances. Will you have a glass of sherry?—no. Then shall we join Lady Honoria?"

This speech quite crushed the vulgar but not ill meaning Saint, and Geoffrey was sorry for it a moment after he had made it. But he was weary and out of temper. Why did his wife bring such people to the house? Very shortly afterwards their guest took his leave, reflecting that Bingham was a conceited ass and altogether too much for him. "And I don't believe that he has got a thousand a year," he reflected to himself, "and that the title is his wife's. I suppose that is what he married her for. She's a much better sort than he is any way, though I don't quite make her out either—one can't go very far with her. But she is the daughter of a peer and worth cultivating, but not when Bingham is at home—not if I know it."

"What have you said to Mr. Dunstan to make him go away so soon, Geoffrey?" asked his wife.

"Said to him? Oh, I don't know. He offered to give me a pair of guns, and I told him that I did not accept presents from my acquaintances. Really, Honoria, I do not want to interfere with your way of life, but I do not understand how you can associate with such people as this Mr. Dunstan."

"Associate with him!" answered Lady Honoria. "Do you suppose I want to associate with him? Do you suppose that I don't know what the man is? But beggars cannot be choosers; he may be a cad, but he has thirty thousand a year, and we simply cannot afford to throw away an acquaintance with thirty thousand a year. It is too bad of you Geoffrey," she went on with rising temper, "when you know all that I must put up with in our miserable poverty stricken life, to take every opportunity of making yourself disagreeable to the people I think it wise to ask to come and see us. Here I return from comfort to this wretched place, and the first thing that you do is to make a fuss. Mr. Dunstan has got boxes at several of the best theatres, and he offered to let me have one of them whenever I liked, and now, of course, there is an end of it. It is to bad, I say."

"It is really curious, Honoria," said her husband, "to see what obligations you are ready to put yourself under in search of pleasure. It is not dignified of you to accept boxes at theatres from this gentleman."

"Nonsense. There is no obligation about it. If he gave us a box of course he would make it a point of looking in during the evening, and then telling his friends that it was Lady Honoria Bingham he was speaking to—that is the exchange. I want to go to the theatre; he wants to get into good society—there you have the thing in a nutshell. It is done every day. The fact of the matter is, Geoffrey," she went on, looking very much as though she were about to burst into a flood of angry tears, "as I said just now—beggars cannot be choosers—I cannot live like the wife of a banker's clerk. I must have some amusement and some comfort before I become an old woman. If you don't like it, why did you entrap me into this wretched marriage, before I was old enough to know better, or why do you not make enough money to keep me in a way suitable to my position?"

"We have argued that question before, Honoria," said Geoffrey, keeping his temper with difficulty, "and now there is another thing I wish to say to you. Do you know that detestable woman, Anne, stopped for more than half an hour at Paddington station this evening flirting with a ticket collector, instead of bringing Effie home at once, as I told her to do. I am very angry about it. She is not to be relied on; we shall have some accident with the child before we have done. Cannot you discharge her and get another nurse?"

"No, I cannot. She is the one comfort I have. Where am I going to find another woman who can make dresses like Anne—she saves me a hundred a year—I don't care if she flirted with fifty ticket collectors. I suppose you got this story from Effie; the child ought to be whipped for tale bearing, and I daresay that it is not true."

"Effie will certainly not be whipped," answered Geoffrey sternly. "I warn you that it will go very badly with anybody who lays a finger on her."

"Oh, very well, ruin the child. Go your own way, Geoffrey. At any rate, I am not going to stop here to listen to any more abuse. Good night," and she went.

Geoffrey sat down and lit a cigarette. "A pleasant home coming," he thought to himself. "Honoria shall have money as much as she can spend—if I kill myself to get it, she shall have it. What a life, what a life! I wonder if Beatrice would treat her husband like this—if she had one."

He laughed aloud at the absurdity of the idea, and then, with a gesture of impatience, threw his cigarette into the fire and went to his room to try and get some sleep, for he was thoroughly wearied.

CHAPTER XVII.

GEOFFREY WINS HIS CASE.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury, I do not think it necessary to carry my case any further."

Before 10 o'clock on the following morning, having already spent two hours over his brief, that he had now thoroughly mastered, Geoffrey was at his chambers, which he had some difficulty in reaching, owing to the thick fog that still hung over London, and indeed all England.

To his surprise nothing had been heard either of the attorney general or of Mr. Candleton. The solicitors were in despair; but he consoled them by saying that one or the other was sure to turn up in time, and that a few words would suffice to explain the additional light which had been thrown on the case. He occupied his half hour, however, in making a few rough notes to guide him in the altogether improbable event of his being called on to open, and then went into court. The case was first on the list, and there were a good many counsel engaged on the other side. Just as the judge took his seat the solicitor, with an expression of dismay, handed Geoffrey a telegram which had that moment arrived from Mr. Candleton. It was dated from Calais on the previous night, and ran: "Am unable to cross on account of thick fog. You had better get somebody else in Parsons and Douse."

"And we haven't got another brief prepared," said the agonized solicitor. "What is more, I can hear nothing of the attorney general, and his clerk does not seem to know where he is. You must ask for an adjournment, Mr. Bingham; you can't manage the case alone."

"Very well," said Geoffrey, and on the case being called he rose and stated the circumstances to the court. But the court was crusty. It had got the fog down its learned throat, and altogether it didn't seem to see it. Moreover the other side, marking its advantage, objected strongly. The witnesses, brought at great expense, were there; his lordship was there, the jury was there; if this case was not taken there was no other with which they could go on, etc., etc.

The court took the same view and lectured Geoffrey severely. Every counsel in a case, the court remembered when it was at the bar, used to be able to open that case at a moment's notice, and though things had, it implied, no doubt deteriorated to a considerable extent since those palmy days, every counsel ought still to be prepared to do so on emergency.

Of course, however, if he, Geoffrey, told the court that he was absolutely unprepared to go on with the case, it would have no option but to grant an adjournment.

"I am perfectly prepared to go on with it, my lord," Geoffrey interposed calmly.

"Very well," said the court in a mollified tone, "then go on: I have no doubt that the learned attorney general will arrive presently."

Then, as is not unusual in a probate suit, followed an argument as to who should open it, the plaintiff or the defendant. Geoffrey claimed that this right clearly lay with him, and the opposing counsel raised no great objection, thinking that they would do well to leave the opening in the hands of a rather inexperienced man, who would very likely work his side more harm than good. So, somewhat to the horror of the solicitors, who thought with longing of the eloquence of the attorney general and the unrivaled experience and finesse of Mr. Candleton, Geoffrey was called upon to open the case for the defendants, propounding the first will.

He rose without fear or hesitation, and with but one prayer in his heart, that no untimely attorney general would put in an appearance. He had got his chance, the chance for which many able men have to wait long years, and he knew it, and meant to make the most of it. Naturally a brilliant speaker, Geoffrey was not, as so many good speakers are, subject to fits of nervousness, and he was, moreover, thoroughly master of his case. In five minutes judge, jury and counsel were all listening to him with attention; in ten they were absorbed in the lucid and succinct statement of the facts which he was unfolding to them. His ghost theory was at first received with a smile, but presently counsel on the other side ceased to smile and began to look uneasy. If he could prove what he said, there was an end of their case. When he had been speaking for about forty minutes one of the opposing counsel interrupted him with some remark, and at that moment he noticed the attorney general's clerk was talking to the solicitor beneath him.

"Bother it, he is coming," thought Geoffrey.

But no, the solicitor bending forward informed him that the attorney general had been unavoidably detained by some important government matter, and had returned his brief.

"Well, we must get on as we can," Geoffrey said.

"If you continue like that we shall get on very well," whispered the solicitor, and then Geoffrey knew that he was doing well.

"Yes, Mr. Bingham," said his lordship.

Then Geoffrey went on with his statement.

At lunch time it was a question whether another leader should be briefed. Geoffrey said that so far as he was concerned he could get on alone. He knew every point in the case, and he had got a friend to "take a note" for him while he was speaking.

After some hesitation the solicitors decided not to brief fresh counsel at this stage of the cause, but to leave it entirely in his hands.

It would be useless to follow the details of this remarkable will suit, which lasted two days and attracted much attention. Geoffrey won it, and won it triumphantly. His address to the jury on the whole case was long remembered in the courts, rising as it did to a very high level of forensic eloquence. Few who saw it ever forgot the sight of his handsome face and commanding presence as he crushed the case of his opponents like an egg-shell, and then with calm and overwhelming force denounced the woman who with her lover had concocted the cruel plot that robbed her uncle of life and her cousins of their property, till at the last, pointing towards her with outstretched hand, he branded her to the jury as a murderess.

Few in that crowded court have forgotten the tragic scene that followed, when the trembling woman, worn out by the long anxiety of the trial and utterly unnerved by her accuser's brilliant invective, rose from her seat and cried:

"We did it—it is true that we did it to get the money, but we did not mean to frighten him to death," and then fell fainting to the ground—or Geoffrey Bingham's quiet words as he sat down:

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury, I do not think it necessary to carry my case any further."

There was no applause, the occasion was too dramatically solemn, but the impression made both upon the court and the outside public, to whom such a scene is peculiarly fitted to appeal, was deep and lasting.

Geoffrey himself was under little delusion about the matter. He had no conceit in his composition, but neither had he any false modesty. He merely accepted the situation as really powerful men do accept such events—with thankfulness, but without surprise. He had got his chance at last, and like any other able man, whatever his walk of life, he had risen to it. That was all. Most men get such chances in some shape or form, and are unable to avail themselves of them. Geoffrey was one of the exceptions; as Beatrice had said, he was born to succeed. As he sat down, he knew that he was a made man.

And yet while he walked home that night, his ears still full of the congratulations which had rained in on him from every quarter, he was conscious of a certain pride. He will have felt as Geoffrey felt that night whose lot it has been to fight long and strenuously against circumstances so adverse as to be almost overwhelming, knowing in his heart that he was born to lead and not to follow; and who at last by one mental effort, with no friendly hand to help, and no friendly voice to guide, has succeeded in bursting a road through the difficulties which hemmed him in, and has suddenly found himself, not above competition indeed, but still in a position to meet it. He will not have been too proud of that endeavor; it will have seemed but a little thing to him—a thing full of faults and imperfections, and falling far short of his ideal. He will not even have attached too great a weight to his success, because if he is a person of this caliber he must remember how small it is when all is said and done; that even in his day there are those who can beat him on his own ground, and also that all worldly success, like the most perfect flower, yet bears in it the elements of decay. But he will have reflected with humble satisfaction on those long years of patient striving which have at length lifted him to an eminence whence he can climb on and on, scarcely encumbered by the jostling crowd; till at length, worn out, the time comes for him to fall.

So Geoffrey thought and felt. The thing was to be done and he had done it. Honoria should have money now; she should no longer be able to twit him with their poverty. Yes, and a better thought still, Beatrice would be glad to hear of his little triumph.

He reached home rather late. Honoria was going out to dinner with a distinguished cousin, and was already dressing. Geoffrey had declined the invitation, which was a short one, because he did not think that he would be back from chambers in time to avail himself of it. In his enthusiasm, however, he went to his wife's room to tell her of the event.

"Well," she said, "what have you been doing? I think that you might have arranged to come out with me. It does not look well my going out so much by myself. Oh, I forgot; of course you are in that case."

"Yes—that is, I was. I have won the case. Here is a very fair report of it in The St. James' Gazette, if you care to read it."

"Good heavens, Geoffrey! How can you expect me to read all that stuff when I am dressing?"

"I don't expect you to, Honoria; only, as I say, I have won the case, and I shall get plenty of work now."

"Will you! I am glad to hear it. Perhaps we shall be able to escape from this horrid flat if you do. There, Anne! Je vous l'ai bien dit, cette robe ne me va pas bien."

"Mais, milady, la robe va parfaitement"——

"That is your opinion," grumbled Lady Honoria. "Well, it isn't mine. But it will have to do. Good night, Geoffrey. I dare say that you will have gone to bed when I get back," and she was gone.

Geoffrey picked up his St. James' Gazette with a sigh. He felt hurt and knew that he was a fool for his pains. Lady Honoria was not a sympathetic person. It was not fair to expect it from her. Still he felt hurt. He went upstairs and heard Effie her prayers.

"Where has you been, daddy?—to the Smoky Town?" The Temple was euphemistically known to Effie as the Smoky Town.

"Yes, dear."

"You go to the Smoky Town to make bread and butter, don't you, daddy?"

"Yes, dear, to make bread and butter."

"And did you make any, daddy?"

"Yes, Effie, a good deal today."

"Then, where is it? In your pocket?"

"No, love, not exactly. I won a big lawsuit today, and I shall get a great many pennies for it."

"Oh," answered Effie meditatively, "I am glad that you did win, daddy. You do like to win, doesn't you, daddy dear?"

"Yes, love."

"Then I will give you a kiss, daddy, because you did win," and she suited the action to the word."

Geoffrey went from the little room with a softened heart. He dressed and ate some dinner.

Then he sat down and wrote a long letter to Beatrice, telling her all about the trial, and not sparing her his reasons for adopting each particular tactic and line of argument which conduced to the great result.

And though his letter was four sheets in length, he knew that Beatrice would not be bored at having to read it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RISING STAR.

As might be expected, the memorable case of Parsons and Douse proved the turning point in Geoffrey's career, which was thenceforward one of brilliant and startling success. On the very next morning when he reached his chambers it was to find three heavy briefs awaiting him, and they proved to be but the heralds of an uninterrupted flow of lucrative business.

Of course, he was not a queen's counsel, but now that his great natural powers of advocacy had become generally known, solicitors frequently employed him alone, or gave him another junior, so that he might bring those powers to bear upon juries. Now it was, too, that Geoffrey reaped the fruits of the arduous legal studies which he had followed without cessation from the time when he found himself thrown upon his own resources, and which had made a sound lawyer of him as well as a brilliant and effective advocate. Soon, even with his great capacity for work, he had as much business as he could attend to. When fortune gives good gifts she generally does so with a lavish hand.

Thus it came to pass that, about three weeks after the trial of Parsons and Douse, Geoffrey's uncle, the solicitor, died, and to his surprise left him twenty thousand pounds, "believing," he said in his will, which was dated three days before the testator's death, "that this sum will assist him to rise to the head of his profession."

Now that it had dawned upon her that her husband really was a success, Honoria's manner towards him modified very considerably. She even became amiable, and once or twice almost affectionate. When Geoffrey told her of the twenty thousand pounds she was radiant.

"Why, we shall be able to go back to Bolton street now," she said, "and as luck will have it, our old house is to let. I saw a bill in the window yesterday."

"Yes," he said, "you can go back as soon as you like."

"And can we keep a carriage?"

"No, not yet; I am doing well, but not well enough for that. Next year, if I live, you will be able to have a carriage. Don't begin to grumble, Honoria. I have got £150 to spare, and if you care to come round to a jeweler's you can spend it on what you like."

"Oh, you delightful person!" said his wife.

So they went round to the jeweler's, and Lady Honoria bought ornaments to the value of £150, and carried them home and hung over them, as another class of woman might hang over first born child, admiring them with a tender ecstasy. Whenever he had a sum of money that he could afford to part with, Geoffrey would take her thus to a jeweler's or a dressmaker's and stand by coldly while she bought things to its value. Lady Honoria was delighted. It never entered into her mind that in a sense he was taking a revenge upon her, and that every fresh exhibition of her rejoicings over the good things thus provided added to his contempt for her.

Those were happy days for Lady Honoria. She rejoiced in this return of wealth like a schoolboy at the coming of the holidays or a half frozen wanderer at the rising of the sun. She had been miserable—as miserable as her nature admitted of—during all this night of poverty. Now she was happy again, as she understood happiness, for Lady Honoria, bred, educated, civilized—what you will—out of the more human passions, had replaced them by this idol worship of wealth, or, rather, of what wealth brings. It gave her a positive physical satisfaction. Her beauty, which had begun to fade, came back to her. She looked five years younger. And all the while Geoffrey watched her with an ever growing scorn.

Once it broke out. The Bolton street house had been furnished; he had given her fifteen hundred pounds to do it and with what things they already owned she managed very well on that. They moved into it and Honoria had set herself up with a sufficient supply of grand dresses and jewelry, suitable to her recovered position. One day, however, it occurred to her that Effie was a child of remarkable beauty, who, if properly dressed, would look very nice in the drawing room at tea time. So she ordered a lovely costume for her—this deponent is not able to describe it—but it consisted largely of velvet and lace.

Geoffrey heard nothing of this dress; but, coming home rather early one afternoon—it was on Saturday—he found the child being shown off to a room full of visitors and dressed in a strange and wonderful attire, with which, not unnaturally, she was vastly pleased. He said nothing at the time, but when at length the dropping fire of callers had ceased he asked who had put Effie into that dress.

"I did," said Lady Honoria, "and a pretty penny it has cost, I can tell you. But I can't have the child come down so poorly clothed; it does not look well."

"Then she can stay upstairs," said Geoffrey, frowning.

"What do you mean?" asked his wife.

"I mean that I will not have her decked out in those fine clothes. They are quite unsuitable to her age. There is plenty of time for her to take to vanity."

"I really don't understand you, Geoffrey. Why should not the child be handsomely dressed?"

"Why not! Great heaven, Honoria, do you suppose that I want to see Effie grow up like you, to lead a life of empty pleasure seeking idleness and make a god of luxury? I had rather see her"—he was going to add "dead first," but checked himself and said, "have to work for her living. Dress yourself up as much as you like, but leave the child alone."

Lady Honoria was furious, but she was also a little frightened. She had never heard her husband speak quite like this before, and there was something underneath his words that she did not quite understand.

Still less did she understand when on the Monday Geoffrey suddenly told her that he had £50 for her to spend as she liked; then accompanied her to a mantle shop, and stood patiently by smiling coldly while she invested it in lace and embroideries. Honoria thought that he was making reparation for his sharp words, and so he was, but to himself, and in another sense. Every time he gave her money in this fashion Geoffrey felt like a man who had paid off a debt of honor. She had taunted him again and again with her poverty—the poverty she said that he had brought on her; for every taunt he would heap upon her all those things in which her soul delighted. He would glut her with wealth as, in her hour of victory, Queen Tomyris glutted dead Cyrus with the blood of men.

CHAPTER XIX.

GEOFFREY HAS A VISITOR.

"You must not go to Mr. Davies, father."

And Beatrice—had she fared better during these long months? Alas! not at all. She had gone away from the Bryngelly Station on that autumn morning of farewell sick at heart, and sick at heart she had remained. Through all the long winter months sorrow and bitterness had been her portion, and now in the happiness of spring sorrow and bitterness were with her still. She loved him, she longed for his presence, and it was denied to her. She could not console herself as some women can, nor did her deep passion wear away; on the contrary, it seemed to grow and gather with every passing week. Neither did she wish to lose it; she loved too well for that. It was better to be thus tormented by conscience and by hopelessness than to lose her cause of pain.

One consolation Beatrice had and one only; she knew that Geoffrey did not forget her. His letters told her this. These letters, indeed, were everything to her—a woman can get so much more comfort out of a letter than a man. Next to receiving them she loved to answer them. She was a good and even a brilliant letter writer, but often and often she would tear up what she had written and begin again. There was not much news in Bryngelly. It was difficult to make her letters amusing. Also the farcical nature of the whole proceeding seemed to paralyze her. It was ridiculous, having so much to say, to be able to say nothing. Not that Beatrice wished to indite love letters—such an idea never crossed her mind—but rather to write as they had talked. Yet when she tried to do so the results were not satisfactory to her; the words looked strange on paper—she could not send them.

In Geoffrey's meteor like advance to fame and fortune she took the keenest joy and interest—far more than he did, indeed. Though, like that of most other intelligent creatures, her soul turned with loathing from the dreary fustian of politics, she would religiously search the parliamentary columns from beginning to end on the chance of finding his name or the notice of a speech by him. The law reports also furnished her with a happy hunting ground in which she often found her game.

But they were miserable months. To rise in the morning, to go through the round of daily duty—thinking of Geoffrey; to come home wearied, and finally to seek refuge in sleep and dreams of him—this was the sum of them. There were other troubles. To begin with, things had gone from bad to worse at the vicarage. The tithes scarcely came in at all, and every day their poverty pinched them closer. Had it not been for Beatrice's salary it was difficult to see how the family could have continued to exist. She gave it almost all to her father now, only keeping back a very small sum for her necessary clothing and such sundries as stamps and writing paper. Even then, Elizabeth grumbled bitterly at her extravagance in continuing to buy a daily paper, asking what business she had to spend sixpence a week on such a needless luxury. But Beatrice could not make up her mind to dock the paper with its occasional mention of Geoffrey.

Again, Owen Davies was a perpetual anxiety to her. His infatuation for herself was becoming notorious; everybody saw it except her father. Mr. Granger's mind was so occupied with questions connected with tithe that fortunately for Beatrice little else could find an entry. Owen dogged her about; he would wait whole hours outside the school or by the vicarage gate merely to speak a few words to her. Sometimes, when at length she appeared, he seemed to be struck dumb, he could say nothing, but would gaze at her with his dull eyes in a fashion that filled her with vague alarm. He never ventured, indeed, to speak to her of love, but he looked it, which was almost as bad. Another thing was that he had grown jealous. The seed which Elizabeth had planted in his mind had brought forth abundantly, though, of course, Beatrice did not know that this was her sister's doing.

On the very morning that Geoffrey went away Mr. Davies had met her as she was walking back from the station and asked her if Mr. Bingham had gone. When she replied that this was so she had distinctly heard him murmur: "Thank God! Thank God!" Subsequently she discovered also that he bribed the old postman to keep count of the letters which she sent and received from Geoffrey.

These things filled Beatrice with alarm, but there was worse behind. Mr. Davies began to send her presents—first, such things as prize pigeons and fowls, then jewelry. The pigeons and fowls she could not well return without exciting remark, but the jewelry she sent back by one of the school children. First came a bracelet, then a locket with his photograph inside, and lastly, a case that when she opened it, which her curiosity led her to do, nearly blinded her with light. It was a diamond necklace, and she had never even seen such diamonds before; but from their size and luster she knew that each stone must be worth hundreds of pounds. Beatrice put it in her pocket and carried it until she met him, which she did in the course of that afternoon.

"Mr. Davies," she said, before he could speak, and handing him the package, "this has been sent to me by mistake. Will you kindly take it back?"

He took it, abashed.

"Mr. Davies," she said, looking him full in the eyes, "I hope that there will be no more such mistakes. Please understand that I cannot accept presents from you."

"If Mr. Bingham had sent it you would have accepted it," he muttered sulkily.

Beatrice turned and flashed such a look on him that he fell back and left her. But it was true, and she knew that it was true.

If Geoffrey had given her a sixpence with a hole in it she would have valued it more than all the diamonds on earth. Oh! what a position was hers. And it was wrong, too. She had no right to love the husband of another woman. But, right or wrong, the fact remained, she did love him.

And the worst of it was that, sooner or later, all this about Mr. Davies, as she well knew, must come to the ears of her father, and then what would happen? One thing was certain. In his present poverty stricken condition he would move heaven and earth to bring about her marriage to this rich man. Her father never had been very scrupulous where money was concerned, and the pinch of want was not likely to make him more so.

Nor, we may be sure, did all this escape the jealous eyes of Elizabeth. Things looked black for her, but she did not intend to throw up the cards on that account. Only it was time to lead trumps. In other words, Beatrice must be fatally compromised in the eyes of Owen Davies, if by any means this could be brought about. So far, things had gone well for her schemes. Beatrice and Geoffrey loved each other; of that Elizabeth was certain. But the existence of this secret, underhand affection would avail her naught unless it could be construed into acts. Everybody is free to indulge in secret predilections, but if once they give them way, if once a woman's character is compromised, then the world avails itself of its opportunities and destroys her. What man, thought Elizabeth, would marry a compromised woman? If Beatrice could be compromised Owen Davies would not take her to wife—therefore this must be brought about.

It sounds wicked and unnatural. "Impossible that sister should so treat sister," the reader of this history may say, thinking of her own, and of her affectionate and respectable surroundings. But it is not impossible. If you, who doubt, will study the law reports, and no worse occupation can be wished to you, you will find that such things are possible. Human nature can rise to strange heights, and it can also fall to depths beyond your fathoming. Because a thing is without parallel in your own small experience it in no way follows that it cannot be.

Elizabeth was a very remorseless person; she was more—she was a woman actuated by passion and by greed, the two strongest motives known to the human heart. But with her remorselessness she united a considerable degree of intelligence, or rather of intellect. Had she been a savage she might have removed her sister from her path by a more expeditious way; being what she was, she merely strove to effect the same end by a method not punishable by law—in short, by murdering her reputation. Would she be responsible if her sister went wrong, and was thus utterly discredited in the eyes of this man who wished to marry her and whom Elizabeth wished to marry? Of course not; that was Beatrice's affair. But she could give her every chance of falling into temptation, and this it was her fixed design to do.

Circumstances soon gave her an opportunity. The need of money became very pressing at the vicarage. They had literally no longer the wherewithal to live. The tithe payers absolutely refused to fulfill their obligations. As it happened, Jones, the man who had murdered the auctioneer, was never brought to trial. He died shortly after his arrest in a fit of delirium tremens and nervous prostration, brought on by the sudden cessation of a supply of stimulants, and an example was lost that, had he been duly hung, might have been made of the results of defying the law. Mr. Granger was now too poor to institute any further proceedings, which, in the state of public feeling in Wales, might or might not succeed; he could only submit, and submission meant beggary. Indeed, he was already a beggar. In this state of affairs he took counsel with Elizabeth, pointing out that they must either get money or starve. Now, the only possible way to get money was by borrowing it, and Mr. Granger's suggestion was that he should apply to Owen Davies, who had plenty. Indeed, he would have done so long ago, but that the squire had the reputation of being an exceedingly close fisted man.

But this proposition did not at all suit Elizabeth's book. Her great object had been to conceal Mr. Davies' desires as regards Beatrice from her father, and her daily dread was that he might become acquainted with them from some outside source. She knew very well that if her father went up to the Castle to borrow money it would be lent, or rather given, freely enough; but she also knew that the lender would almost certainly take the opportunity, the very favorable opportunity, to unfold his wishes as regards the borrower's daughter. The one thing would naturally lead to the other—the promise of her father's support of Owen's suit would be the consideration for the money received. How gladly that support would be given was also obvious to her, and with her father pushing Beatrice on the one side and Owen Davies pushing her on the other, how could Elizabeth be sure that she would not yield? Beatrice would be the very person to be carried away by an idea of duty. Their father would tell her that he had got the money on this understanding, and it was quite possible that her pride might bring her to fulfil the bond thus given, however distasteful the deed might be to her personally. No; her father must at all hazards be prevented from seeking assistance from Owen Davies. And yet the money must be had from somewhere or they would be ruined.

Ah, she had it—Geoffrey Bingham should lend the money! He could well afford it now, and she shrewdly guessed that he would not grudge the coat off his back if he thought that by giving it he might directly or indirectly help Beatrice. Her father must go up to town to see him, she would have no letter writing; one never knows how a letter may be read. He must see Mr. Bingham, and if possible bring him down to Bryngelly. In a moment every detail of the plot became clear to Elizabeth's mind, and then she spoke.

"You must not go to Mr. Davies, father," she said; "he is a hard man and would only refuse and put you in a false position; you must go to Mr. Bingham. Listen; he is rich now, and he is very fond of you and of Beatrice. He will lend you a hundred pounds at once. You must go to London by the early train to-morrow, and drive straight to his chambers and see him. It will cost two pounds to get there and back, but that cannot be helped; it is safer than writing, and I am sure that you will not go for nothing. And see here, father, bring Mr. Bingham back with you for a few days if you can. It will be a little return for his kindness, and I know that he is not well. Beatrice had a letter from him in which he said that he was so overworked that he thought he must take a little rest soon. Bring him back for Whitsunday."

Mr. Granger hesitated, demurred and finally yielded. The weak, querulous old farmer clergyman, worn out with many daily cares, and quite unsupported by mental resources, was but a tool in Elizabeth's able hands. He did not, indeed, feel any humiliation at the idea of trying to borrow the cash, for his nature was not finely strung, and money troubles had made him callous to the verge of unscrupulousness; but he did not like the idea of a journey to London, where he had not been for more than twenty years, and the expenditure that it entailed. Still he acted as Elizabeth bade him, even to keeping the expedition secret from Beatrice. Beatrice, as her sister explained to him, was proud as Lucifer and might raise objections if she knew that he was going to London to borrow money of Mr. Bingham. This, indeed, she would certainly have done.

On the following afternoon—it was the Friday before Whitsunday, and the last day of the Easter sittings—Geoffrey sat in his chambers, in the worse possible spirits, thoroughly stale and worn out with work. There was a consultation going on, and his client, a pig headed Norfolk farmer, who was bent upon proceeding to trial with some extraordinary action for trespass against his own landlord, was present with his solicitor. Geoffrey, in a few short, clear words, had explained the absurdity of the whole thing, and strongly advised him to settle, for the client had insisted on seeing him, refusing to be put off with a written opinion. But the farmer was not satisfied, and the solicitor was now endeavoring to let the pure light of law into the darkness of his injured soul.

Geoffrey threw himself back in his chair, pushed the dark hair from his brow and pretended to listen. But in a minute his mind was far away. Heavens, how tired he was! Well, there would be rest for a few days—till Tuesday, when he had a matter that must be attended to—the house had risen and so had the courts. What should he do with himself? Honoria wished to go and stay with her brother, Lord Garsington, and, for a wonder, to take Effie with her. He did not like it, but he supposed that he should have to consent. One thing, he would not go. He could not endure Garsington, Dunstan and all their set. Should he run down to Bryngelly? The temptation was very great; that would be happiness indeed, but his common sense prevailed against it. No, it was better that he should not go there. He would leave Bryngelly alone. If Beatrice wished him to come she would have said so, and she had never even hinted at such a thing, and if she had he did not think that he would have gone. But he lacked the heart to go anywhere else. He would stop in town, rest, and read a novel, for Geoffrey, when he found time, was not above this frivolous occupation. Possibly, under certain circumstances, he might even have been capable of writing one. At that moment his clerk entered, and handed him a slip of paper with something written on it. He opened it idly and read:

"Rev. Mr. Granger to see you. Told him you were engaged, but he said he would wait."

Geoffrey started violently, so violently that both the solicitor and the obstinate farmer looked up.

"Tell the gentleman I will see him in a minute," he said to the retreating clerk, and then, addressing the farmer, "Well, sir, I have said all that I have to say. I cannot advise you to continue this action. Indeed, if you wish to do so, you must really direct your solicitor to retain some other counsel, as I will not be a party to what can only mean a waste of money. Good afternoon," and he rose.

The farmer was conveyed out grumbling. In another moment Mr. Granger entered, dressed in a somewhat threadbare suit of black, and his thin white hair hanging as usual over his eyes. Geoffrey glanced at him with apprehension, and as he did so noticed that he had aged greatly during the last seven months. Had he come to tell him some ill news of Beatrice—that she was ill, or dead, or going to be married?

"How do you do, Mr. Granger?" he said, as he stretched out his hand, and controlling his voice as well as he could. "How are you? This is a most unexpected pleasure."

"How do you do, Mr. Bingham?" answered the old man, while he seated himself nervously in a chair, placing his hat with a trembling hand upon the floor beside him. "Yes, thank you, I am pretty well, not very grand—worn out with trouble as the sparks fly upward," he added, with a vague, automatic recollection of the scriptural quotation.

"I hope that Miss Elizabeth and Be—that your daughters are well also," said Geoffrey, unable to restrain his anxiety.

"Yes, yes, thank you, Mr. Bingham. Elizabeth isn't very grand, either; complains of a pain in her chest, a little bilious, perhaps—she always is bilious in the spring."

"And Miss Beatrice?"

"Oh, I think she's well—very quiet, you know, and a little pale perhaps; but she is always quiet—a strange woman, Beatrice, Mr. Bingham, a very strange woman, quite beyond me! I do not understand her, and don't try to. Not like other women at all; takes no pleasure in things seemingly: curious, with her good looks—very curious. But nobody understands Beatrice."

Geoffrey breathed a sigh of relief. "And how are tithes being paid, Mr. Granger? Not very grandly, I fear. I saw that scoundrel Jones died in prison."

Mr. Granger woke up at once. Before he had been talking almost at random; the subject of his daughters did not greatly interest him. What did interest him was this money question. Nor was it very wonderful; the poor, narrow minded old man had thought about money till he could scarcely find room for anything else; indeed nothing else really touched him closely. He broke into a long story of his wrongs, and, drawing a paper from his breast pocket, with shaking fingers pointed out to Geoffrey how his clerical income for the last six months had been at the rate of only forty pounds a year, upon which sum even a Welsh clergyman could not consider himself passing rich. Geoffrey listened and sympathized; then came a pause.

[This story was commenced in THE SUNDAY HERALD on June 15. Back numbers can be obtained at this office.]

[TO BE CONTINUED NEXT SUNDAY.]

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