

to a bill, fully intending, on my honour, to chalk up before it became due."

"Ah!" groaned Mary half aloud, "he has forged Sir Frederic Samperton's name; what shall we do—what shall we do?"

"Luck has, however, been inexorable," continued the elegant letter, "and I could as soon pay the national debt as the fifty pounds I drew for. I have reason to believe that Samperton has the bill. Now Loo must find me the money; I'll repay her, on my word! Let her tell Chutney she has a milliner's bill, or something, to pay. Then she must see Samperton and give him the money—women can do these things so well! Above all, do not let proceedings be undertaken against me, which would be utter ruin. I swear, if you both help me now, I'll reform; if not, I'll cut my throat, and you'll all be disgraced by a coroner's inquest. Your affectionate cousin,

"TOM BOUSFIELD.

"P.S.—Look sharp! No time to be lost! Write to Y. Z., Post-office, Radcliffe-highway."

"No time to be lost," thought Mary, sinking down on the sofa in bewildered despair, and striving to think, "What shall I do? Torment my poor dear Loo? No! she shall not know a word of it. She has stood by me many a time—many a weary hour she has comforted me—and I am the strongest, too. Where, where shall I turn? Aunt Barbara is out of the question. Perhaps Sir Frederic Samperton would give him time. But who will ask him? I might go myself and entreat him. Why should I fear? Sir Frederic has some humanity about him. Fifty pounds! what a deal of money! Oh, what an odious, selfish, weak creature a 'gay young man' is—a 'good fellow,' as his companions call him."

IN FIVE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER IV.

The day but one after the events last recorded, Sir Frederic Samperton, M.P., had prepared himself for his morning ride, and was seated at his new davenport, making one or two entries in his note-book, and issuing directions to a smooth valet who stood respectfully beside him.

Sir Frederic's chambers were not only luxuriously furnished, but in excellent taste. The pictures were few; busts and statuettes abounded, and if some of the latter would have appeared unsuitable in a lady's boudoir, their classical grace redeemed them from being too suggestive. There were books, and looking-glasses, and a few pieces of rare china. On the whole, a slightly feminine tone pervaded the apartment, which yet contrasted strongly with the owner's appearance.

Sir Frederic Samperton was a tall, large man, eminently English and aristocratic, with small hands and feet. No moustaches, but long tawny whiskers, and keen grey eyes. He was a healthy, well-tempered man, with large credit as a "good fellow." He never offended any one; never was known to have lost anything by feelings displayed in any particular direction. He was peculiarly alive to beauty in every form, and a little eager in the pursuit of a new whim. As a public man, he adopted a business aspect and common-sense tone; which, like most of his adaptations, answered very well.

"This is a much more convenient davenport than the first they sent me—there was no room in it for anything," he said. "This one looks better too. Don't you think so, Bowles?"

"Much better, Sir Frederic."

"Let me know if the horses are at the door." The valet left the room, and Samperton continued to open and examine various drawers with a thoughtful air. "It's very odd," he murmured at last. "I can't find that promissory note. Where the deuce can I have put it?" pulling his whiskers meditatively. "What an infernal young scamp to let me in for fifty pounds, and I haven't met him three times. Forgery too! Men ought not to ask these unknown fellows to meet gentlemen, because they sing a good song, or—"

The valet re-entered holding a salver on which lay a note. "Lady waiting for an answer, sir."

"Lady," said Sir Frederic, startled. "Young?"

"Well, sir, a youngish lady. Black dress, thick veil, speaks nervous-like."

"She may go," said Sir Frederic. "I will send an answer—or, stop! I may as well see what she says." And, opening the note, he read:

"Though I have not the honour of knowing you, I venture to ask for a few minutes of your valuable time. I am a connexion of Colonel Chutney, and trust you will receive me for his sake."

"What has old Chutney been up to?" asked the baronet of himself. "Show the lady in."

The servant left the room, and returned, ushering in Mary Holden. As she threw back her veil, and her eyes met those of the baronet, she started as if inclined to run away, and then exclaimed only half aloud: "Sir Frederic Samperton? I am so surprised. So sorry!"

"Sorry?" said Sir Frederic, insinuatingly, "for the fulfilment of my most ardent hopes."

"Because," returned Mary, strong in her purpose, and recovering herself, "I spoke to you heedlessly and giddily the other day; and, now that I come to you with an anxious heart, you will not perhaps treat me with"—she paused, blushed, and hesitated—"with the gravity which—"

"What the deuce is she at?" thought Samperton, while he interrupted her with much deference of manner. "Whatever you do me the honour of communicating, will receive my serious and respectful attention."

"Thank you, thank you!" said Mary, much relieved, her bright frank smile lighting up eye and brow; "you put me at my ease." The baronet, suppressing all signs of admiration, handed her a chair, and taking one himself, waited for her to speak.

"I hardly know how to begin," said Mary; "but Mrs. Chutney is my first cousin;" Sir Frederic bowed; "and more—a very dear friend." An embarrassed pause. "Mrs. Chutney's name was Bousfield. Observe, Bousfield."

"Ah!" said Sir Frederic. "I see," continued Mary; "yes—the—the wretched boy who forged your name to that terrible bill is my cousin, Louisa's only brother."

"No, really! What an unpleasant relative! But I presume Chutney will pay up. I will direct my lawyer to communicate with the colonel before proceedings are commenced."

"Proceedings!" repeated Mary, half rising in an agony of eagerness. "Oh, Sir Frederic! Colonel Chutney must know nothing whatever about it. Promise me this, on your honour."

"Really," replied Samperton, smiling, "I should be sorry to disoblige you, but—"

"I do not ask you to lose the money," said Mary, eagerly. "I only ask for time, and it shall be repaid."

"I must say that seems extremely problematical. What security have I? You will excuse this business-like question. What security can your cousin offer?"

Mary anxiously exclaimed, "Mine! I may take a long time to pay it. I have been calculating. I could manage to pay you fifteen pounds a year, and," hanging her head rather sadly, "that would take more than three years."

"And your worthless cousin would get off scot free," said Sir Frederic, gazing at her with admiration.

"Oh! I think he would help me. At any rate, it would be better than to let his sister suffer. She has borne so much; and now, when she is just beginning to learn how to manage the colonel, it would be sad to have her thrown back; she does so want to make her husband love her."

"What a remarkable woman!" observed the baronet.

"Yes," returned Mary, with sincerity. "I tell her she is very foolish; for the more you want a man to do anything, the more he won't do it."

"I see you are a keen observer."

"Oh! Sir Frederic, this may be play to you, it will be death to me. Promise me a year's time, at any rate," putting forward her hand imploringly.

Samperton clasped it in both of his, exclaiming, "I can refuse you nothing. Let us trouble ourselves no more about this worthless young scamp. We'll have a little dinner at Richmond together, talk the matter over, and take a stroll in the

park afterwards! Richmond park looks lovely these May evenings. It does, I assure you!"

Mary disengaged her hand, and went on without deigning to notice Sir Frederic's invitation: "Surely you are chivalrous enough to yield time for paying this money, to save a timid woman from blushing before her husband for her next of kin!"

She had scarcely uttered the words, when Sir Frederic's servant entered hastily.

"Colonel Chutney and Captain Peake coming up, sir!" he said.

"By Jove, how awkward! My dear girl, you had better go into the inner room; they will not stay long, and you can escape after they are gone."

Mary turned very pale. "No, no," she said; "I had best be brave. Concealment looks like guilt." She involuntarily drew back as Chutney and his friend came in.

"Brought a friend of mine to ask your parliamentary interest, Sir Frederic," began the colonel. He suddenly stopped short as if choked, and exclaimed: "Bless my soul! Mary Holden? Why, what brings you here, Mary?"

"Urgent private affairs," returned Mary, trying to assume a tone of badinage, while she coloured to the roots of her hair. "And now I have to thank you, Sir Frederic, for your courtesy to a total stranger, and shall intrude no longer." She tried to pass Colonel Chutney as she spoke, but he stopped her.

"Come, come," he said, sternly, "I have a right to demand an explanation of your presence here. I am not going to allow my wife's nearest female relative to peril her fair fame without knowing the reason why."

"Sir!" returned Mary, indignant, frightened, yet striving gallantly for self-possession. "Has your friend, Sir Frederic Samperton, fallen so low in your estimation that a lady cannot seek a business interview with him without suspicion?"

"Don't talk nonsense to me," retorted the colonel, now in one of his passions. "I'll have the whole truth out. I'll lock you up. I'll hand you over to your aunt."

"Pray, Colonel Chutney, exercise a little self-control," said Samperton, mildly; "but, above all, as this young lady justly observes, do not asperse my character."

Peake also suggested that the affair was, he felt sure, perfectly explicable.

"I do not believe a word of it," shouted Chutney, now scarlet with rage. Turning to Mary, he added: "And you—I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I do not care what you think," returned Mary; "I know I have nothing to be ashamed of. I shall not break my heart if no one believes me." And she burst into tears.

"I believe you, Miss Holden," said Captain Peake, soothingly, coming to her side; he would have said more if he had known what to say, but he didn't.

"Let me go away," wept Mary. "I will explain nothing."

"Yes, I'll take you away, and see you safe home," cried the colonel, seizing her. "Peake, you must tell your story about your seamen and their prize money to Samperton yourself. As for you, Sir Frederic, I'll see you to-morrow."

Colonel Chutney then departed, vindictively leading out the culprit.

WHAT NEXT? The latest fashion which is reported to be gaining ground is the adoption by ladies of stockings of two different colours—the one leg of pink, for instance, and the other of blue. It is a Parisian freak, and apparently so senseless that it is not likely to find favour with our fair countrywomen.

A PROMISE.—A promise should be given with caution, and kept with care. A promise should be made with the heart, and remembered by the head. A promise is the offspring of the intention, and should be nurtured by recollection. A promise and its performance should, like a true balance, always present a mutual adjustment. A promise delayed is justice deferred. A promise neglected is an untruth told. A promise attended to is a debt settled.