

are on the subject. What man of the world would blame very deeply, a youthful *liaison* between a college freshman and a pretty barmaid? But this was no passing frailty of mine. I met this girl, formed an attachment for her, brought her up to London, married her privately in the old church of St. Sepulchre, and settled her at Fretterley, whence she—she—left me."

And Mulraven, leaning back against the mantelpiece, sets his teeth at that remembrance, and looks sternly down upon the heart-rug, although it all happened so many years ago.

"She left you—yes," cries Joel, "but not before you had near broke her poor 'art with your unkindness, sir. And she came back, poor lamb, to her own people and her own 'ouse, and died there, like a dog in a ditch."

"She left the house I had provided for her with—with—some one else," says Mulraven, frowning.

"She left it with me, sir, her own cousin, who wouldn't have hurt a hair of her 'ead. I searched for her long, and I found her un'appy and wretched, and I persuaded of her to come back 'ome with me; thinking as you had wronged her, for she never said a word of her being married, poor lass, from that day to the day of her death."

"She had sworn to me she would not, knowing how fatal the consequences might be of such a confession. Now, Moxon, you know all. Had my wife remained with me, I might perhaps have summoned up courage before now to tell my father the truth; but she left me—as I thought to disgrace herself—and though I searched for her in every direction, I was unable to obtain any clue to her destination. Then I went abroad—you remember the time—and hoped to forget it all, but the memory has clung to me like a curse ever since, until I met this fellow to-day in the Docks. Else I might have gone on to all eternity, considering myself still fettered by this early *mésalliance*. And the child died too, you say?" turning again to Joel. "Was it a boy?"

"The child ain't dead no more than you are," replies Joel gruffly, for he has been cheated out of his revenge, and no one seems the better for it. "He's a strong chap of four year old, all alive and kicking, and if you're the gentleman you pretend to be you'll provide for him as a gentleman should."

"Alive! Good heavens! and four years old! How this complicates matters! Moxon, that child is my legitimate heir."

"Of course he is, if you were married. But where is he? that's the next thing to ascertain. With your family, eh?" turning to Joel.

"No, he ain't bin along of 'em since his mother's death, for there was a lady at Priestley—the only creature as was good to my poor lass when she lay dyin'—and she was real kind, God bless 'er; and the poor gal, she died on her bosom, as they tell me; and afterwards Mrs. Mordaunt—that was the lady—she took Tommy along with her up to the Court and—"

"Tommy! The Court! Good God! do you mean to tell me that the boy you speak of, Myra Cray's child, was adopted by Mrs. Mordaunt of Fen Court, the wife of Colonel Mordaunt, of—"

"In course, the Colonel's lady; and she makes a deal of him, too, so they say. But still, if he's yours, sir, you're the proper person to look after him, and I shan't call it justice if you don't."

"Stratford, you know the box of toys we went after to-day?"

"That you kicked up such a shindy about? Yes."

"It is for that child that I brought them home."

"Did you know of this then?"

"Not a word; but I have stayed with the Mordaunts, and seen him. And to think he should be my own. How extraordinary!"

"Deuce! inconvenient, I should say. What do you mean to do next?"

"Go down to Priestley at the earliest opportunity. You'll come with me, Hal?"

"Better take Moxon, he may be of use. I'm none."

Then Moxon agrees to go; and they talk excitedly together for a few minutes, and almost forget poor Joel, who is anxiously awaiting the upshot of it all.

"Well, are you satisfied, or do you still wish to fight me?" says Mulraven to him presently.

"I suppose I've no call to fight you, sir, if you really married her; but I must say I should like to see the lines."

"You shall see them, Cray, for her sake as well as mine. And, meanwhile, what can I do for you?"

"I want nothing now, sir, but to go home again and look after mother and the little 'uns."

"I cannot talk more to you at present, but you may be sure I shall see that none of her relations want. Here is my address—giving a card—any one will tell you where it is. Come to me there to-morrow evening, and we will consult what I can do to best prove my friendship to you." Upon which Mulraven puts out his hand and grasps Joel's rough palm, and the poor, honest, blundering soul, feeling anything but victorious, and yet with a load lifted off his bosom turns to grope his way downstairs.

"Don't you lose that card," says Stratford, who steps outside the door to show him where to go; "for I am sure his Lordship will prove a good friend to you, if you will let him be so."

"His Lordship!" repeats Joel, wonderingly; "which be a Lord? the little 'un?"

"No, no, the gentleman whom you call Hamilton. His real name is Lord Mulraven; you must not forget that."

"A Lord—a real Lord—and he was married to my poor lass! No wonder it killed her! And that child, Tommy, a Lord's son. Darn it, how little difference there is between 'em when they're covered with dirt." And the first chuckle that has left Joel's lips for many a long month, breaks from them as he steps carefully down the steep staircase, and ponders on the wonderful truth he has been told. "A Lord's son," he repeats, as he gains the street, and proceeds to shuffle back to the Docks again. "That brat a Lord's son! Now, I wonder if my poor lass knew it all along; or, if not, if it makes her heel a bit easier to know it now."

"Mulraven and Moxon have a long conversation together as they travel down to Glottonbury."

"I conclude this early marriage of yours was what people call a love-match, eh?" remarks the latter inquisitively.

Mulraven colors.

"Well, yes, I suppose so; but love appears to us in such a different light, you know, when we come to a maturer age."

"Never having had any experience in that respect, can't say I do know."

"You are lucky," with a sigh. "What I mean to say is, that at the time I certainly thought I loved her. She was just the style of woman to inflame a boy's first passion—pretty features, perfect shape, and a certain air of abandon about her. And then she was several years older than myself!"

"Ah! I understand."

"I was not 'hooked,' if you mean that," says Mulraven quickly.

"I never knew a fellow yet, my dear boy, who acknowledged that he had been. But when a gentleman, under age—"

"I was two and twenty."

"Never mind. You were as green as a school-boy. When a man, in your station of life, I repeat, is drawn into marriage with a woman from a class inferior to his own, and older than himself, you may call it what you choose, but the world in general will call it 'hooking.'"

"Well, don't let us talk of it at all, then," says Mulraven.

"All right; we'll change the subject. How beastly cold it is."

Yet, do what they will, the conversation keeps veering round to the forbidden topic till Mulraven has made a clean breast of it to his friend. Arrived at Glottonbury they make round about inquiries concerning Priestley and the Mordaunts, and there our hero learns, for the first time, of the Colonel's death and the subsequent departure of his widow. So that it is no surprise to Moxon and himself to be received by Oliver only when they present themselves at Fen Court.

Of course the natural astonishment excited by the assertion that Tommy is Lord Mulraven's lawful heir has to be allayed by the explanation given above. And then Oliver, who has received the golden key to the mystery that has puzzled them, and knows much more about it than Saville Moxon, becomes quite friendly and intimate with Mulraven and wants him to stay at the Court, and when his invitation is declined on the score of his visitor's anxiety to find Mrs. Mordaunt and the boy, shakes hands with him warmly, applauding his zeal, and wishing him all success in his undertaking, with an enthusiasm that awakens the barrister's suspicions.

"What the deuce was that fellow so friendly about?" he inquires, as they journey back to town. "Why is he so anxious you should neither eat, drink, nor sleep till you get on the track of old Mordaunt's widow?"

"Why, you know perfectly well she has the boy."

"What is that? she won't eat him, I suppose; and what difference can a day, more or less, make to you before you see him?"

"You have evidently not much idea of paternal affection," says Mulraven, as he strikes a fuscine on the heel of his boot.

"Well, where the father has never seen his child, and didn't even know he had got one—I can't say I have."

"I have already told you that I have seen him."

"And liked him?"

"Very much! He is a charming little child!"

"Indeed! How curious! Now, I wonder if your liking for him arose from a natural instinct, or from any extraneous circumstances that may have surrounded him. That question would form rather a neat psychological study."

"I don't follow you, Moxon."

"No? By the way, Mulraven, what became of that girl—now, what was her name?—Miss—Miss—St. John, wasn't it?—whom you were so keen after, a few seasons ago?"

"Keen after! How you do exaggerate, Moxon. Why she—she is Mrs. Mordaunt. I thought you knew that!"

"Oh!" says Moxon quietly.

"Pray have you anything more to say on this subject?" remarks his friend presently, with some degree of pique.

"Nothing whatever, my dear fellow—nothing whatever. Only pray let us do all in our power to get on the track of that charming child as soon as possible."

"Moxon, I hate you!" says Mulraven shortly.

ish; and even that lady's state of flutter in receiving one of the aristocracy in her tiny drawing-room, cannot prevent her treating them to a burst of indignation at the conduct of her niece.

"So wrong,—so very wrong!"—she affirms, with just a sufficient chance of breaking down to render it necessary to hold her cambric handkerchief in her hand—"so unusual—so peculiar—so strange of Mrs. Mordaunt to leave us without the slightest clue to her place of residence. And she might die, you know, my Lord, or anything else, and not a soul near her. I'm sure I feel quite ashamed if any one asks after her. And there was not the least occasion for concealment; though, as I always say, we can expect no one to believe it."

"Mrs. Mordaunt has probably her own reasons for acting as she does."

"Oh, you are very good, to make excuses for her, my Lord. But she was always wilfully inclined. And the Colonel, whom we thought so much of, has behaved so badly to her, leaving all his money away to his nephew; and then, to make matters worse, Irene will continue to keep a dirty little boy whom she picked up in the village, although—"

"That dirty little boy is my son, Mrs. Cavendish."

Mrs. Cavendish turns pale—starts, and puts up her handkerchief to her eyes. It cannot be true; and, if it is, that he should stand there and confess it! What are the aristocracy coming to?

Saville Moxon is so afraid the lady is about to faint, that he rushes to the rescue, giving her the whole story in about two words. Upon which she revives, and becomes as enthusiastic as Oliver was.

"Oh, my Lord, I beg a thousand pardons! I used the word 'dirty' most unadvisedly. Of course she has kept him scrupulously clean, and has treated him just like her own child. And I always said—it was the remark of every one—that an aristocratic-looking boy he was. How surprised—how charmed she will be! Oh, you must find her; I am sure it cannot be so difficult. And I believe she's in England, though that horrid old Walmsley will rot tell."

"You think he knows her address, then?"

"I am sure of it; but it's no use asking him. I've begged and implored of him to tell me, but the most he will do is to forward my letters; and there's an end of it."

"And she is well?" demands Mulraven anxiously.

"Oh, the dear child's quite well, my Lord," replies Mrs. Cavendish, mistaking the pronoun; "you need have no fear of that. Her letters are full of nothing but Tommy. She little thinks whom she has got the charge of. She will be proud, I am sure."

"I am afraid we must leave you now," says her visitor, rising, "as we must try and see Mr. Walmsley to-day."

"Oh, can't you stay a few minutes longer—just ten? No! Well, then, good-bye, my Lord, and I hope you will let me know as soon as you have traced my niece."

And Mrs. Cavendish, much to her chagrin, is left alone; for Mary, who has been upstairs all this time changing her dress, descends to the drawing-room in her new blue merino, all ready to captivate his Lordship, just as his Lordship's tall figure disappears outside the garden gate.

"Just a minute too late! What a pity!" thinks Mrs. Cavendish, as she puts up her eyeglass to watch the departure of the two young men.

"Well, he certainly is a fine-looking man. And fancy his being a widower! Not but what I think my Mary would be too sensible to object to that. And if the child were in the way, why, I daresay Irene wouldn't mind continuing the charge, as she seems so fond of it. Well, all I hope is, he'll come again, and I'll take good care next time that Mary is ready dressed to receive him. Such a chance to throw away! If he'd only seen her as she looks now, the girl's fortune would have been made."

Old Walmsley, the solicitor, is a tougher customer to deal with than either of them anticipated and even Saville Moxon finds it beyond his skill to worm out anything from him that he doesn't choose to tell.

"It's all very well, gentlemen," he says, in answer to their combined entreaties, "but you're asking me to betray the confidence of one of my clients, which is a thing I've never done during a practice of five and thirty years, and which I don't intend to begin doing now."

"But, look here, Mr. Walmsley," says Mulraven, "surely, under the circumstances, I have a right to demand Mrs. Mordaunt's address: she is detaining my child from me."

"Then you can write and demand the child, my Lord, and the letter shall be duly forwarded to her."

"But she may not answer it."

"I think that very unlikely."

"But I want to see the child."

"I am sure my client will not detain it an hour longer than it is her due."

"But I want to see her," he bursts out impatiently.

Old Walmsley looks at him over his spectacles.

"I think you were the Honorable Eric Kell, my Lord?"

"What of it?"

"I was in the late Mrs. St. John's entire confidence," Mulraven reddens.

"Well, if you were, you know the reason why I disappointed her. I have just told it you. I was a married man—I am a widower!"

"And Mrs. Mordaunt is a widow!"

"Exactly so. Moxon, for heaven's sake, can't you find something more interesting to stare at than myself? Now, will you give me her address, Mr. Walmsley?"

"I see no further reason for it, my Lord. You can still write."

"This is too hard," cries Mulraven impetuously, as he jumps up from his seat, and commences striding up and down the solicitor's office. "My tongue has been tied for years. I have banished myself from her presence; I have even left home in order to avoid the temptation of speaking to her; and now that the opportunity presents itself—now that at last I am able—to—"

"Go on Mulraven," says Moxon encouragingly, "to claim my charming child."

"You shan't go down with me, wherever it is, for one," replies Mulraven, flushing up to the roots of his hair, as he tries to turn off his rhapsody with an uneasy laugh. "Mr. Walmsley, is there no hope for me?"

"None that I shall betray Mrs. Mordaunt's confidence, my Lord."

Mulraven sighs.

"Well, I suppose I must content myself with writing, then."

"But if," continues the old lawyer, sily—"if you were to set yourselves to guess the place where my client has hidden herself, why—why—"

"What then?" eagerly.

"I should be very much annoyed, my Lord—exceedingly annoyed; indeed," with a low chuckle, "were you to guess right, I think I should—I should—"

"What should you do?"

"Get up and leave the room, and slam the door behind me."

"Come on, Moxon," says Mulraven gleefully, as he draws a chair to the table again. "Let's begin and guess all the places in England alphabetically, till we come to the right one."

"But I don't know any of them. I've forgotten all about my geography," replies Moxon.

"Oh, nonsense! It's as easy as can be. Now for A: Aldersgate (oh, no! that's in London), Aylesbury, Aberdeen, A—A—A. Bother it! which are the places that begin with A?"

"Ammersmith," suggests Moxon; at which old Walmsley laughs.

"If you're going to play the fool, I give it up," says Mulraven sulkily.

"All right, dear old fellow! I thought it did begin with A. Arundel, Aberystwith, Axminster. There are three proper ones for you instead."

"Alnwinck, Alresford, Andover," continues his friend; and then, after a long pause, "There are no more A's. Let's go on to B. Bristol, Brighton, Birmingham, Balmoral, Baltimore—"

"Stay; that's in America, old boy! Basingstoke, Bath, Beaminster. Doesn't it remind one of 'I love my love with a B, because she is Beautiful. I hate her with a B, because she is Bumptious.'"

"Can't you be sane for five minutes together, Moxon? If this matter is sport to you, remember it's death to me."

"Better give it up, Mulraven, and write instead. You can't expect to go on at this rate and keep your senses. To go through all the towns in the United Kingdom, alphabetically, would ruin the finest mental constitution. Perhaps, Mr. Walmsley could oblige us with a Gazetteer."

"I don't keep such a thing at my office, sir."

"Let's try C, at all events, Moxon, and then I will think about writing the letter. Cambridge, Canterbury, Carlisle, Cardiff, Cheltenham, Chester, Chatham—"

"Canton, Caribee Islands," interposes Moxon.

"Chichester, Cornwall, Clifton," goes on Mulraven, with silent contempt; "Croydon, Cocklebury—Holloa! Moxon (starting), what's that?" as a loud slam of the office door interrupts his dreamy catalogue.

"Only that Walmsley has rushed out of the room as if the old gentleman were after him."

"But what did I say?"

"Nothing that I know of. You were jabbering over your towns beginning with C."

"But the word—the word—was it Croydon or Cocklebury? Don't you understand? I have hit the right one at last! By Jove! what luck!" He is beaming all over, as he speaks, with love and expectation.

"I suppose you must have; but I'm whipped if I know which it can be."

"It's Cocklebury. I'm sure it's Cocklebury. It can't be Croydon. No one who wanted to hide would go to Croydon. It must be Cocklebury!"

"And where the deuce is Cocklebury?"

"Down in Hampshire, the most out-of-the-way place in the world. I was there once for a few days fishing; but how the name came into my head beats me altogether. It was Providence or inspiration that put it there. But it's all right now. I don't care for anything else. I shall go down to Cocklebury to-night." And leaping up from his chair, Mulraven commences to button his great-coat and draw on his gloves again preparatory to a start.

"Hum!" says Moxon. "You promised to see that man Cray to-night."

"You can see him for me. You can tell him all I should have done. There is no personal feeling in the matter."

"Cocklespittbury, or whatever its name is, being an obscure fishing hamlet, there is probably not another train to it to-day."

"Oh, nonsense! there is a train—there must be a train—there shall be a train!"