

Family Reading.

RAYMOND.

CHAPTER LII.

Who can describe the hours which followed for Raymond and Estelle Lingard, as they sat among the rocks on that fair sea-shore, with the soft sunshine falling round them, and the faithful dog Bruin stretched out at their feet in supreme contentment, under the consciousness that his former master was with him now, as well as the actual queen of his affections. Hand-in-hand they sat, as if they dreaded that some adverse fate might even yet divide them, while they poured out to each other, in fullest, happiest confidence, the secret history of all that they had felt and suffered for one another since first in the old cathedral city, they had met to part so often, and now at last to be reunited, as they hoped for ever. Estelle could no longer doubt for a moment that the deep love which in this supreme hour filled Raymond's heart for her was the only true and enduring affection he had ever known, or ever could know, in this world; for he told her with an impassioned fervour which it was impossible to mistake, that the sad period of their separation had taught him, not only how utterly he depended upon her and her sweet companionship for all the happiness his mortal life could give, but also how little his passing fancy for Kathleen had ever touched his deeper nature, or met the wants of his spiritual or intellectual nature. He had but to compare the sleepless yearning for Estelle's society, which had haunted him with unceasing anguish since he lost her with the complacent recollection of Kathleen's pretty face which used to come across him, in absence, like the remembrance of a lovely picture, in order to understand that Estelle was, in truth, his first, as she would be his last and only love.

He told her all this in words whose tender earnestness brought the sweetest peace and security to her sensitive heart; and then he said to her that never again would he consent to part from her on earth. They had been so often rent asunder by the storms of life, so tempest-tossed, and lonely, and despairing, that now at last, when the winds of heaven had borne them over every obstacle, and placed them side-by-side together on this tranquil shore, he was fully resolved that he would hazard no further separation, were it even for a day; but here, in this safe haven, seeing her constantly, he would remain for a little space which must intervene before they could be actually united; and when all formalities were accomplished as speedily as might be, then she must come to him without demur, without delay, to be his own dear wife, the star of his existence, and his joy forever! And while he thus spoke, the tight clinging of her hands to his told him she could not refuse; for, like himself, she had no more courage for any earthly partings.

He gave her the details of his reconciliation with Harcourt and Kathleen, and of the prospects of happiness which seemed now to be opening out before them, and showed her how this, too, had been due to her own action on the night of the fire, which had effected Tracy Harcourt's rescue, under circumstances that awakened him to higher and purer views of life than he had ever attained before; and although Raymond could not say that he had yet attained the moral elevation of a living faith and devotion, he could at least assure Estelle that Kathleen's husband had at least learned to desire a useful life, and a pure and peaceful home in the society of his gentle wife.

Of Hugh Carlton there was little need for him to speak, since the young man's own confession to Estelle had shown her how mercifully he had been dealt with—when, in the utter failure of all his earthly hopes and all his selfish schemes, he had been stricken to the earth with sharp remorse and sudden self-aborrence. And now when he was again able to look upon life and his future career, he had seen impending death going before him like a veiled angel leading the way to a land where all his poetic dreams and ardent longings could find their eternal satisfaction.

"Hugh has proved so unmistakably the depth and sincerity of his repentance by what he has done for us," said Raymond, "that I think we may be

perfectly happy about him, whether he lives or dies."

"Yes," said Estelle, softly; "I shall write and tell him I am sure he will have a great blessing because he has made us so blest."

How long those two would have sat in their deep happiness beneath that smiling sky it is hard to say, if they had not been recalled to the lapse of time by the second appearance of Mrs. Wood's little maid, who came running along with a somewhat scared expression till she saw Estelle, and then her face brightened into glee. Madame had sent her, she said, because she was afraid some evil had befallen Mademoiselle, as she was so late in returning home; but she would go back and say the dear lady was well and happy, and had found a friend.

"Yes, she has found a friend," said Raymond, smiling; but we will go and tell Mrs. Wood all about it ourselves."

So they went walking and talking together over the path where each had gone in loneliness so short a time before; and it was enough for Mrs. Wood, and her sleepy old husband, to perceive who Estelle's companion was to make the whole matter plain to them both, and their kind hearts rejoiced with the most unbounded joy in the prospect of their "sweet young lady" being at last made as happy as she deserved to be. Of course they were not long in understanding that so soon as Raymond could possibly acquire the right to do so, he would take away from them, her who had been the light of their home. But they would in any case have been too unselfish to have demurred at this; and, as it happened, Estelle's good offices had been employed in reconciling them with a niece, whose husband had been on bad terms with them, but who now, being left a widow, would be very thankful for the home they could offer her. So they had only to hasten her expected arrival, and then Estelle could feel satisfied that they would be well taken care of when her gentle hands could minister to them no more.

Raymond wrote to Hugh Carlton that same day, telling him of the blissful result of his generous letter, and enclosing a little note from Estelle full of touching and grateful words, which could hardly fail to be to him a true reward for his conquest over the self-will that had so nearly wrecked his soul for ever. By the next post there came an answer from Mrs. Carlton, written both to Raymond and Estelle, telling them how happy their letters had made poor Hugh, and begging very earnestly that their marriage might take place from her house. She said that her nephew was still so prostrate from the terrible night at sea that they could not move him to any distance, and therefore had taken a country place near Southampton, to which they had already conveyed him, and where she much wished the wedding to take place.

Both Raymond and Estelle shrank very much from this plan, however. It would, in the first place, involve a temporary separation, and neither of them had courage to lose sight of each other, after all the vicissitudes through which they had passed. Raymond declared that the distance between the hotel where he was located and Villa Fontaine, was far too great already, and that to see Estelle disappear inside the Carltons' country house, while he had to wait at Southampton, till she met him there at the church, was more than he could stand; besides, they both felt that many painful associations would be roused, by the presence of the Harcourts and Hugh Carlton at their wedding. They wrote, therefore, cordially thanking Mrs. Carlton, and promising to visit both her and Kathleen after their return to England, but stating that they meant to be married quietly in Jersey, where their good old friends the Woods, who had been so kind to Estelle, could be present at the ceremony, as they were both too infirm to go to England for that purpose.

And so it came to pass that, three weeks later, on a bright sunny morning, Estelle Lingard walked down in her fair white robes from Villa Fontaine to a pretty church close at hand, where she had prayed with all her heart for Raymond day by day for many a month, and the good old couple who loved her so well walked one on each side of her, while behind her came their niece and gentle Mrs. Willis, who had come over from England with her husband to see their friends made happy.

Freddie, too, was there, radiant in a new suit and a large rose in his button-hole.

At the church door stood Raymond, with Captain Willis at his side, and as his own Estelle passed into the porch, with her veiled head bowed under the weight of her solemn blissful thoughts, so that he scarce could see the sweet serious face and beautiful dark eyes, his hand closed over hers with a grasp which seemed to say that from that hour they should part no more; and then he led her on to where the old clergyman waited to perform his weighty office. Soon the words that bound them for ever heart to heart came sounding through the quiet aisles; and when all was over, and they knelt for a few minutes side by side, in the hush of their intense thanksgiving, a soft sunbeam shot suddenly through the south window, and fell like a glory on their heads, till it seemed to all present as if the visible smile of heaven did indeed rest upon them both.

One last glance we must give to those we have accompanied so long before they pass away from our sight forever.

Raymond and Estelle passed the first few weeks after their marriage in Guernsey. Then they returned to Villa Fontaine, to satisfy themselves that Mr. and Mrs. Wood were indeed quite comfortable under the care of their widowed niece, which they found to be happily the case.

They took their leave of the kind old couple finally then, and went to England, where their first visit was to the Carltons, in their new country home. They were most cordially received, and spent a very happy fortnight with them, both of them spending much of their time with Hugh.

He had become a confirmed invalid, as the shipwreck had sapped the little strength he then possessed, and inflicted some injury on the spine, which obliged him always to lie on his couch, and give up every active pursuit; but he was perfectly contented and happy. His poetic genius afforded him not only occupation, but a means of serving the Master, towards whom all the ardent love of his soul was now turned; and when Estelle bade him farewell for the last time, as she felt it would be, in this world, she carried away a bright and pleasant recollection of him, to which she often afterwards recurred with great thankfulness and peace.

Thence Raymond and his wife went to visit the Harcourts in their country home. They found Kathleen a joyous young mother, so entirely engrossed in her son that there seemed to be no longer anything lacking to her happiness, although both her friends felt that Tracy Harcourt, in spite of his improvement, was of too shallow a nature, ever to rise much above the level he had by degrees attained. He lived at home; he was kind to his wife, and proud of his infant heir; but he had not yet been touched with the Divine fire, which alone can make men truly noble, or fit them for the great destinies to which they are called in the eternal future.

It was far otherwise with Estelle Raymond and her husband. The one most earnest purpose of their married life was to continue together the work they had striven to perform alone. They would live first for God, and then in Him, for the service of their fellow-creatures; and soon a way was opened out to them for the accomplishment of their desire, with so marked a call that they obeyed at once.

They heard of a revolt among the negroes on Raymond's West India Estate, which was clearly due to the mismanagement of his agent, and had caused much suffering among his people. They determined, therefore, to go there at once themselves, and assume the care of the poor blacks who were dependent upon them, and to whom, as yet, the light of God's truth had never been brought.

As Raymond and Estelle stood on the deck of the vessel which was bearing them away from the fast-receding shores of England, feeling how happy they were to be so truly all in all to each other, wherever they might be, they felt, from the depth of their thankful hearts, that pure self-sacrifice, such as they both had practised, can give the promise of this life as well as of that which is to come.

THE END.

—Rich men and fortunate men have need of much prudence.

—A pilot is not chosen for his riches but his knowledge.