

have brought it here, but I carry it about with me for company like, because it's the only company I've got now."

There was a world of reproach in his voice, a world of pathos in the simple sentence, to which he added no word, but ground his gun upon the floor, and clasping his strong brown hands over the muzzle, stood looking into the girl's face silently.

"Mother and Jessie are gone a-milking," Nellie said, forcing herself to say something, and looking down at a teacup she held in her fingers, rather than into the eyes fixed on her across the brown hands clasped upon the gun.

"I just came to have a word with you, Nellie," Wilton said, not noticing her remark about her mother and Jessie. "And if you don't mind listening to me a minute, I'd like to say it here."

She made no answer, and Mark, lifting his large hands away from the muzzle of the gun, laid it in the corner of the kitchen.

There was not much romance about Mark Wilton, nor any show of sentiment; yet what he had to say to Nellie he wished to say there, in the crimson glow of the firelight, where he had told her of his love nearly a year ago.

"Where it began, let it end," he said to himself. Then he crossed the kitchen, and standing before Nellie on the hearth, he spoke.

"They be talking down the village about your marrying Will Drayton, and I just came up to hear the truth of it, Nellie, from your own lips."

But with scarlet cheek, and drooping eye, Nellie stood still without answering him.

"Silence is the same as words sometimes," Mark proceeded after a moment; "and all I have to say now, Nell, my lass, is, that if you are going to marry Will Drayton, and want the promise you made me back, I'm here to give it to you."

"There's no hurry about it, Mark, Nellie said nervously, "and—and—I'd rather you'd speak to mother."

"Your mother has never come between us two yet, and she won't now," Mark answered with quiet decision. "But Nell, my girl, if so be you want your promise, take it to-night, for maybe when the time comes when you do want it, I mightn't be here to give it."

Nellie felt startled although she made no sign, but stood with her head drooped, and her eyes wandering from the scattered tea-things on the table to the flitting gleams of the fire.

"You see I thought there was no use staying in these parts any longer," he went on. "I got to dislike the place when I stopped coming up here, so I gave my lord notice a month ago, and as a brother of mine has a farm in Gloucestershire, and I mean to turn farmer too, I thought I might as well shift for good, and I'm going down there to-morrow, to see if I can find a farm near his."

"You've been so far away from us this month back, Gloucestershire won't be much farther," Nellie answered, with a coolness which struck Mark sorely; but he only said,

"I thought if you wanted me any nearer, you'd have sent for me, Nellie."

"The man who goes away of himself is not worth sending for," Nellie retorted, taking, with a woman's ready tact, the part of the injured and deserted.

"Nellie, it's not fair to say words like them, when you know I went because I didn't want to stand in the way of a man you liked better nor you liked me. And I thought to myself, if it's only a girl's fancy and pride she has out of him, as Jessie says it is, why she'll tell me to come back; but I never had a word, nor a look, so I made up my mind to go clear away; and as you were only a child, Nell, when you gave me your word first, I thought I'd ask you before I went, if you'd wish it back again."

But the half-stilled passion, or the deep pathos of Wilton's words, struck no answering chord in Nellie. She was waxing angry now, angry with herself, while she thought she was angry with Mark.

"You say right when you tell me I was a child a year ago, when I said I would be your wife," she cried, a light flashing into her usually mellow eyes; "but I'm a woman to-night, and I'll take my promise back."

"Nell, my lass, don't let our last words be words of anger," he said. "I'm not like to see you any more after to-night, for I'd never wish to look upon your face when you were another man's wife. But you might just let me kiss you once before I go; once, for sake of the time that can come no more."

He came nearer to her while he spoke, nearer yet, and the ruddy gleams of the fire were lighting up the two figures standing on the hearth, when Nellie, bowed a little, and softened, turned her face to his—her cheek, but not her lips—and then, without spoken word, she slid away from the kitchen, and along her passage to her room, as though she kiss itself was the seal of their farewell.

It was close upon eight o'clock when Wilton left the Oak farm kitchen that night, where he had sat alone after Nellie left him, waiting to say farewell to Jessie and Mrs. Drayton, when they came in from milking, and to give them a last hand-shake before he went to where their lives and his should lie apart for ever.

As he passed from the house porch, he paused a moment to take a last, lingering look at Nellie's window, wondering to himself if she watched his going; or was she sitting up yonder waiting for Will Drayton to come back from Calthorpe? when from the shadow of the porch a hand stole out and touched his shoulder timidly.

The touch made him turn, and as he turned he saw looking upwards at him, out of the shadowy darkness of the night, the small winsome face of Nellie Drayton.

"Mark, would you stay in Calthorpe if I asked you?" she said with a quivering lip, and tears trembling in her mellow eyes.

He answered no word, but for all answer took her to him and kissed her, while her clinging arms wound themselves round his neck.

"And if you will," she whispered, "I'll give back the promise I took away to-night; for Jess was right, Mark and the old love is stronger than the new."

LOVE'S EXCHANGE.

"O give me your heart, dearest Nelly," said I, As we strolled by the smooth-flowing river—
"O give me your heart, or I'm sure I shall die, And remorse will possess you for ever!

"Not a bird on the tree but a partner hath found;
Ev'ry rose hath a bee to caress her;
Not a 'she' that can walk, creep, or crawl on the ground,
But hath some fellow-being to bless her.

"Then why should you pine in the world all alone,
And despise the fond teachings of Nature?
O give me your heart, and for once let it own
True Love for its guide, friend, and teacher!"

"Dear me!" said the maid, 'twixt a smile and a tear,
"I would be ruthless to slay such a lover.
Take my heart, then; but pray let the bargain be clear—
It is yours—in exchange for another!"

ALTON COURT;

A STORY OF AN OLD ENGLISH MANOR HOUSE.

[The main features of the following story are facts, which, several years ago, came within the knowledge of the writer, who, however, has changed names, and altered the real narrative in one or two unimportant particulars, so as to avoid a pointed identification with the locality and family in which the tragic occurrence, here truly related, took place.]

"I am very glad, I was not on the inquest," said my father; "but it is no business of mine, and perhaps, I had better keep my misgivings to myself."

My father was a prudent man, and so far independent that if his duty came in his way, he would do it; but would not go out of his way to look for it; and he rather congratulated himself on being out of the way when the coroner empanelled his jury; for had he been one of the twelve, it is probable he would not have fallen in so readily as the others with the verdict of "justifiable homicide" returned by the direction of the coroner, on the occasion of the death of the young artist, Collins, who met with his sad end, as it was alleged, by a fall down the back staircase of Alton Court the night previous.

It was a strange, queer, suspicious story, this of the poor artist's death.

Alton Court was the old residence of an old family in Gloucestershire, some miles from Bristol. The Elangs had inhabited it almost from the time of the latter Tudors. The ancient race was represented at the time of the story which I am about to relate, by four members—the Elangs, father and mother, and a son and daughter. It was a great old rambling house on the bend of a river, with heavily-wooded banks. The son was some three or four and twenty years of age when the catastrophe occurred—a dark, proud, overbearing young man. For his sister, who was some years his junior, a governess, a highly accomplished young lady, and of elegant prepossessing manners, had been engaged, and was an inmate of the family more than eighteen months at the time of the so-called accident. There could be little doubt that the son, Reginald, was by no means indifferent to the governess, Miss Walton, but whether it was that his overtures were of a nature she could not listen to, or that her heart was already engaged, she rejected his advances, and listened with more interest to the suit of a handsome young artist, who visited Alton Court twice a week, to give her young pupil lessons in drawing. The old people were, perhaps, not entirely ignorant of the little affair between the governess and young Collins, and did not discourage it, since they probably believed it a safeguard against what, in their family pride, they would have considered a mesalliance. Young Elang, however, did not easily bear this interference with his passion, and the artist never crossed his path without receiving some mark of cruel insolence. It would have been well if the young aristocrat had confined himself to these passing signs of dislike, but his jealousy prompted him to keep a closer eye upon the actions of the lovers than either was aware of. In the winter, Miss Walton got leave to visit some friends in Bristol, where the artist resided, and whence he came twice a week to Alton Court. On a dark dull morning, a little wedding party, consisting of four persons, entered one of its many churches, the bride and bridegroom being the artist and the governess, who had made up their

minds to open a school at the close of Miss Walton's engagement at Alton Court, but until the period of her leaving was at hand, they thought it better that the Elangs should not be informed of their union. This, however, like other indiscreet secrets, was the source of sorrow. Reginald Elang, as he said to himself, had kept his eye upon them, and he so contrived to become acquainted with their movements, that when the young people thought there were none but their two friends near them to witness their humble bridal on the dull winter morning in the dingy city church, a figure nearly concealed behind the organ watched the ceremony from the gallery.

Miss Walton returned to Alton Court, and Collins, after Christmas, resumed his professional visits, for the purpose of giving lessons in drawing to her pupil. One wild stormy night, when all but the governess (and as it appeared, Reginald Elang), thought the artist had returned home, a stealthy step moved along the old corridor of Alton Court, and Percy Collins was met by Miss Walton, or rather his own wife, who noiselessly conducted him into a little sitting-room, which was appropriated to her use. Poor young couple! Little did they dream that a malignant eye watched them from the deep shadow at the other end of the corridor. Reginald Elang, with a fell jealousy in his heart, was the witness of this midnight meeting, and he remained on the watch until Collins again came forth into the corridor, and was making his way to a back staircase, from which, by the connivance of one of the servants, who was in their secret, he hoped to have got noiselessly and unobserved away from the house; but passing rapidly through a couple of rooms, Reginald Elang was at the head of the staircase before him, and, as the poor young man approached the spot his treacherous enemy threw himself upon him, and flung him with a savage violence down the stairs. A heavy fall and two or three deep moans, were followed by a cry of "Robbers, robbers!" which Reginald raised the moment he had accomplished his purpose. Whether it was that the servant who was to let the young artist out, had overslept herself, or hearing the scuffle, thought it most prudent not to be in the way, but the only person who appeared on the first alarm was the governess. Her hair streaming on her shoulders, she rushed from her room, and seeing at a glance what had occurred, she threw herself on the insensible body of the artist which lay, his neck broken with the fall, at the bottom of the stairs, and, raised a cry so wild and piercing, that it not only filled the rooms and rambling passages of the old Court, but startled the birds in the rookery outside, and sent them fluttering with wild and unwonted alarm from their nests.

"I crave your pardon Miss Walton," said Reginald, with a staid expression of countenance, horribly revealed by the dim staircase lamp, "I crave your pardon, I thought it was a robber, but it is only your paramour."

"My husband! fiend and murderer," shrieked the poor young woman, whose bitter outcries had brought the whole household to the spot, amongst them old Elang and his wife. Reginald was ready with his story, and it seemed plausible enough. "Hearing footsteps," he said, "I came from my room, and seeing a man pass stealthily along the corridor in the dead of the night, rushed upon him, and in our struggle he fell down stairs, without discovering who it was until the mischief was done."

"You lie," screamed the distracted wife, "and you know you lie; you dogged him like a murderer, and you murdered him in the hellish jealousy of your heart;" and in her grief and rage the poor thing became frantic and was with difficulty restrained from doing herself and others harm. Old Elang was a magistrate, and sending for the police the matter was placed in their hands till morning, when the coroner, who was a friend of the family, held an inquest, and twelve men were found who had no difficulty in appearing to credit the plausible story of Reginald Elang. "It was a sad business," said the coroner in his charge, "but nothing was more likely than that a gentleman, on hearing footsteps in his father's house at night, after the family had long retired to rest, and seeing a man pass along the corridor should conclude that it was a robber, and act upon the impulse of the moment, as young Mr. Elang had done. It was a sad, sad mistake, but could not be helped, and if the jury viewed the matter in the light that he (the coroner) did, they could come to no other decision than that it was a case of "justifiable homicide."

The jury readily took the hint and gave their verdict accordingly. Nevertheless, whispers went abroad in the neighborhood that there was foul play in the business; and those who knew the sullen and overbearing disposition of Reginald Elang were ready enough to credit the frantic accusation of the poor governess, which the servants, who had overheard them, secretly talked about. It was in allusion to these rumors that my father congratulated himself on being out of the way when the jury was empanelled, as, while he did not wish to make an enemy of the family, he felt he should not have been contented without a more strict investigation than the coroner was willing to encourage. The remains of the unfortunate artist were interred in the burying-ground of the church in which he was married, and his wife was removed, a raging lunatic, to a neighboring asylum, where almost night and day she shrieked out her frenzied maledictions on the head of him whom she declared was the murderer of her husband.

The wealth and influence of a powerful family were sufficient in those days to prevent any

open agitation in such a matter; still people talked in whispers about the foul business, as they termed it, and soon, one by one, the servants at Alton Court left; for noises, they said, were heard at night in the corridor near the back staircase, and on the staircase itself sounds as of a heavy body falling down it. Other servants came and went, scared by the noises, whether fancied or real. It was even said that these midnight sounds were not inaudible to the family themselves, for after remaining a couple of months, as if to give the lie to the floating rumors, they left Alton Court for a while, remaining abroad, in France, until the following winter, the house being in the meantime closed, inhabited during the day by a servant or two, who at night locked it up, and went to sleep at the gate lodge.

However, by the time the Elangs had come back again, public gossip had pretty well tired of the matter, and it was nearly forgotten when fox-hunting commenced. Reginald Elang was a bold and keen rider to hounds, and was amongst the large field of horsemen on the first hunting day of the season. He himself had only returned to the Court the day before, and it was afterwards remembered that the old noises had never been heard with such awful distinctness as during the whole night after his arrival; while the keeper of the lunatic asylum stated that, by some strange and mysterious influence, the poor frenzied governess seemed to have somehow become aware of the return of the author of her husband's death, for all night long she raged most fearfully, and, from the wild words she uttered, appeared to be conscious that Alton Court once more held the object of her maniacal hate.

I remember myself the evening or late afternoon of the following day. About a mile from Alton Court, I saw a chaise approaching from the direction in which the hounds had met in the morning. It was going at a rapid pace, but on coming to the steep hill down which I was riding, the postillon, owing to the abruptness of the ascent, was obliged to walk his horse. This enabled me to look into the chaise as it passed, and I shall not soon forget the spectacle which was presented to my sight. Apparently seated in the carriage and partly supported by a young man who appeared to be a groom, was Reginald Elang, in his red hunting coat, buckskin breeches, and top boots, but his face was the face of a corpse, with a slight scar on the forehead from which the blood had oozed over one ashy cheek. At a glance I could see there was no life in that rigid form and those fixed white features; and there was something fearful in the appearance of the dead man sitting there all immovable, bolt upright, as one would say, in his hunting apparel. The postillon turned on his saddle, shook his head, and muttered, "Heaven has paid him off at last;" then, cracking his whip, as he reached the top of the hill, he put his horse once more into a quick trot, and never slackened his pace until he got to the gates of Alton Court, which were thrown open and the chaise drove up the winding avenue to the front door, when the old butler, coming out to see who the carriage visitor was, beheld with horror the red-coated and booted corpse of his young master, who had broken his neck by a fall from his horse during the day's hunt. The body was placed in a large unused room near the back staircase, and that night was heard, for the last time in Alton Court, the strange sounds which had so often appalled its inmates. The gossip of the neighborhood said the manes of the murdered artist were now appeased.

But perhaps the strangest part of the story remains to be told: the same afternoon, the very same hour, when Reginald Elang met his death in the hunting-field, the poor lunatic governess, whose terrible paroxysms had been incessant since the night that she cast herself on the dead body of her husband became suddenly calm and reasonable, and recovered her senses so rapidly that, ere another week, she was released from confinement, and went to a distant part of the kingdom, from which she had been originally brought to Alton Court by Mrs. Elang. The gossip accounted for this critical change upon the same grounds that they did the cessation of the ghostly sounds on the rear staircase of Alton Court, which, not long afterwards, was entirely deserted by the family, and when I last saw it it was no longer used as a private residence.

LOST LAMBS.

BY E. LYNN LINTON.

In the spring of 1865 a lady,* living at Leytonstone, N.E., took to heart certain dimly-understood and less-discussed miseries of the lowest class of little waifs—children under six, who "had been grievously dragged into such terrible sins, that they could no longer be kept in Village Schools or Orphan Homes intended for the training of comparatively pure children." She began her little Home of six wretched inmates on scraps and gifts of all sorts. A grocer sent her sugar and treacle; a baker gave her flour; some one lent her a few mattresses; some one else sent a ton or so of coals; here came in a bag of rice; there a parcel

* When she first began her work this lady suppressed her name in her reports and letters, &c.; now I have her permission to give it in full. She is Miss Agnes Cotton, daughter of the late William Cotton, Esq., of the Bank of England.