

Choice Literature.

A LITERARY VENTURE.

BY ALBERT FLEMING.

Continued

One day at breakfast Mrs. Lovell said:

"Here is an appreciative review of the book in the leading society paper: that makes the seventeenth flattering notice I have had."

Of course "the book" was her book, there being only one book in the world to her then. Her husband did not answer, for he was absorbed in a letter; she knew by the way he stirred his tea as he read it that he was not pleased.

"My dear," he said, "I am afraid you and your book have got me into a scrape, here is the bishop writing, he seems exceedingly angry."

She took the letter and read it.

The bishop evidently was exceedingly wroth. The letter was to the effect that Mrs. Lovell's book had been forwarded to him, and his attention drawn to the character of the dean; it was beyond all question that the character was intended for himself; he then spoke of the bad taste and want of courtesy shown. Towards the end of the letter the bishop gave himself rein, and wrote of it all as a gross breach of ecclesiastical etiquette; he then pointed out the necessity of an apology and the withdrawal of the book, and even remotely hinted at proceedings being taken.

As she read the letter Mrs. Lovell's heart sank within her; her husband had the baseness to say he had warned her that she had taken a great liberty with the bishop.

"It is true," she said, harking back to the old excuse, "that I have used a few of his peculiarities, but I have changed the names and wrapped it all up."

"Nonsense! wrapped it up! why, there isn't a parson in all England but would know him in a moment. And now, what do you propose to do, Nellie?"

Nellie had nothing to propose except that her husband should write a letter to the bishop, half a disclaimer and half an apology; as to withdrawing her book, that she would not—no, not for the whole bench of bishops.

The rector found it very embarrassing, but he wrote and tried to smooth the bishop down. The next day at breakfast Mrs. Lovell received a copy of *Social Notes*. There was a marked copy to the effect that the new novel, "A Midsummer Madness," was likely to create some little sensation.

Some of the characters had been drawn from life with a too marked fidelity, and it was said that the originals of the dean and Lady Holloway and those diverting old maids, the Misses Sloper, had determined to take steps against the brilliant authoress. Of course it was delightful to appear in *Social Notes*, and still more delightful to be called a brilliant authoress, but Mrs. Lovell's heart again sank within her at those terrible words "taking steps." She had the very vaguest ideas as to what "steps" might mean; for aught she knew they might refer to a Chancery suit, Premunire, or proceedings at the Old Bailey; it might mean all or any of these frightful measures. All this took place at breakfast; she did not dare to tell her husband, but at lunch he had seen *Social Notes* and read it for himself. It took a great deal to rouse the rector, but undoubtedly he was roused now—he said dreadful things to his wife. Lunch was a most uncomfortable meal. Mrs. Lovell sank as low as woman could sink; she ended by settling in her heart that she would probably be torn from her home and flung into prison. She anathematized the unlucky day on which she first determined to be famous, and she doomed the bishop, who had first fired her ambition, to nethermost Hades.

At four o'clock the front-door bell rang, and the maid brought in Mrs. Marchmont's card; the card was followed by that lady herself, almost before the maid had closed the door. She addressed Mrs. Lovell in a markedly hostile manner, beginning by saying, "Perhaps you would have known me better if I had sent in my name as Lady Holloway?" Mrs. Lovell, in describing that call afterwards, always said it turned her hair grey in a single hour. Mrs. Marchmont was not a lady-like person at her best, but when roused she had a fluent vocabulary at her command, and she poured it out on Mrs. Lovell. That poor lady felt the cup of her bitterness was full. To sit in your own drawing-room and be abused was more than human nature could bear; to be told by a loudly dressed, red-faced virago that you were no better than a mean, contemptible serpent, crawling into the bosoms of confiding families and betraying them, was exceedingly trying to all the Christian virtues; once or twice she moved as if towards the bell, but Mrs. Marchmont checked her at once by saying, "I don't leave this room until I've had my say."

Village gossip said afterwards that Mrs. Marchmont threatened to horsewhip her; but Mrs. Lovell denied that, and said she never went beyond shaking her fist in her face. To end it all, not content with frightening the poor lady almost into a fit, she wound up with, "And don't you fancy you're done with me, for I'll have the law on you, and you'll hear from my lawyer before the week is out," and with that she banged the door and departed.

That was Tuesday; on Wednesday two ladies drove up to the rectory; peeping through the drawing-room curtains Mrs. Lovell descried the two Misses Stoneham. She heard amuffled conversation with the maid, ending with an emphatic statement by the elder Miss Stoneham. "Thank you, we decline to see Mrs. Lovell; we wish to see her husband"—hearing which Mrs. Lovell sank on a sofa and felt her latter end had come, and the sooner it was over the better. For half an hour she remained on that sofa whilst the Misses Stoneham interviewed her husband; then they departed, and she heard his step crossing the hall. As he came towards the drawing-room, she says she felt like the trapped thing which hears the hunter coming down the path. Speech failed the rector at first: he wrung his hands and vaguely uttered a wish to emigrate or die; he then made pathetic reference to those two Christian ladies, held up to a scoffing public by a scurrilous scribbling woman. The Misses Stoneham were the virtuous women, and she the scurrilous libeller. He went on in this strain for half an hour, until excess of misery brought its own relief, and suddenly Mrs. Lovell jumped up from the sofa, and swore she didn't care for all the bishops on the bench, nor all the vulgar widows or crabby old maids in Christendom, she'd written a book and she'd stick to it, and that was her ultimatum. It is very difficult to say "ultimatum" when

you're on the verge of hysterics, but she said it, and then tore up to her room and had a good cry.

Next day came a letter from her publishers. These ghastly people rejoiced over the hideous publicity of the book—it was making quite a ferment in society, there was an excellent article on "Literary Cut-throats" in the *Saturday*, and they heard there were rumors of two actions about to be commenced against Mrs. Lovell; from a commercial standpoint they thought nothing could be more promising, and they were printing a second edition in all haste.

The next day a quiet, semi-clerical gentleman called at the vicarage and asked to see Mrs. Lovell; the maid said she fancied he was from a Missionary Society. Mrs. Lovell received him in the drawing-room, and found him pleasant and fair-spoken, until he handed her an official-looking document, and explained that it was a writ "ex Marchmont v. Lovell." A mist swam before the unhappy lady's eyes; she heard him as in a dream apologizing for having to serve her with the writ in person, and not through the ordinary channel of her solicitor, but he regretted to say his client had a good deal of personal feeling in the matter, and had insisted, much to his regret, on personal service.

When the rector returned from some parochial visits he found Mrs. Lovell and her official document lying side by side on the bed; when he grasped the situation anger against her was swallowed up in real pity for her and no less real alarm for himself. Before he knew where he was he was plunged into litigation. His ideas moved slowly, and it was a good twelve hours before he realized the real position of matters. The bishop had cut him dead in the streets of Crowborough; as he walked about his own parish he could not but perceive there was a marked feeling against him; the two Miss Stonehams had declined to attend his church any longer, and cancelled all their subscriptions; Mrs. Marchmont had stirred up the local press, and there were dreadful articles and letters; and now here, to wind up all, was an action commenced and damages to the tune of 1,000*l.* claimed. He instructed his family solicitor to enter an appearance, and then waited results.

Mrs. Lovell said for many weeks after this existence became a nightmare, she dreaded every post and every knock at the door. Then, to add to her troubles, two cousins wrote and declared that, not content with vilifying outsiders, they found she had not even respected the ties of natural affection, and had actually brought her own flesh and blood into her book. Cousin Selina suffered from indigestion, and had occasionally a red nose; but that was no reason why she and her slight constitutional infirmity should be made the subject of Mrs. Lovell's reckless pen. Cousin Barbara was nervous, looked under her bed at night, and lived in the perpetual fear of burglars; but she objected to have her little weakness advertised far and near. But Mrs. Lovell had as it were fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, in the shape of the bishop and Mrs. Marchmont, and she felt equal to cope with such small game as the cousins. She took pen in hand and demonstrated to Selina and Barbara that there were hundreds of ladies in England suffering from red noses and timorous views on burglars, and if they elected to put on the cap they might.

When the family solicitor came and questioned Mrs. Lovell if she would swear that Lady Holloway was not meant for Mrs. Marchmont, or if the character were not drawn from her, she refused point-blank.

"I can't and won't, for it was," she answered in despair. Picture the position: there was the bis op glowering in his palace; Mrs. Marchmont romping about the neighbourhood in her pony-carriage, her face redder and her hair yellower than ever; then if Mrs. Lovell ventured into the village she was sure to meet the Misses Stoneham, and they always crossed the street and treated her as if she had the plague. Things came to such a pitch that her sister at Hunstanton, in sheer pity, asked her to go there for a month for change and peace.

Before she left home she gave her husband *arte blanche* to do as he liked, "only let us once more get peace and quiet." Goaded and roused into activity, the rector rushed to London, and stopped the book just as the third edition was being issued; he had a great battle with the publishers, but the book was suppressed and withdrawn. He then went on to his lawyers and told them to compromise and end the actions. "I will manage the bishop," he said, "if you'll see to that awful Mrs. Marchmont." The lawyer protested, just as the publishers had protested; it was literally nipping in the bud an action that might have developed into a *cause celebre*.

Meanwhile Mrs. Lovell was sitting in sackcloth and ashes at Hunstanton, and her sister took this occasion to give her much religious advice as to her worldly ambition and greed. The poor thing was really brought very low, and wanted building up instead of abasing. But fate had yet one more blow in store for her. One day the rector wrote to her, and inclosed a formal written apology to all the aggrieved parties. It was drawn up by the lawyers, and she was to sign it, and it would be inserted in the London and local papers.

"Why should I be trodden into the dirt like this?" she cried to her sister at breakfast; "it's too shameful!"

"I admit the tone of the apology is humble, perhaps one might say abject, but it's right your feelings should suffer. I consider your treatment of those excellent Misses Stoneham in the highest degree cruel."

It was signed and witnessed, and returned.

Then it was printed in all the local papers and repeated thrice. Mrs. Lovell declared each insertion added five years to her age. It was weeks and weeks before Mrs. Lovell ventured to return home. It was some comfort that the Misses Stoneham had written to her very kindly, and had promised to let bygones be bygones. Mrs. Marchmont was relentless still, but Mrs. Lovell felt hardened towards her. Luckily, some six months later, the bishop died, and his successor was an old college chum of the rector's. One of his first acts was to offer him a living on quite the other side of the diocese, and Mrs. Lovell declared that never had she packed up her goods and chattels with such joy as she did on leaving her old home.

For some two years the novel was a sore subject in the family circle; then Mrs. Lovell began to exercise her inventive powers, and, plucking up heart, often told the story of her literary venture. Her husband said he could recognize the salient features at first, but after many repetitions even these became blurred in outline, and the blame was shifted to the poor bishop's shoulder, and all the glory and honor were somehow transferred to Mrs. Lovell. She always ended with, "I think, without vanity, my dears, I may say that if I had persevered in my literary career I should have achieved a position second only to George Eliot herself."

FROM A CAR WINDOW AT MIDNIGHT.

Cloudless the heavens; from myriad far-set stars
Soft radiance flickers through the midnight gloom:
The moon's low sickle hovers far behind
The fleeting train, while ever at our side
In endless race the dim, swift shadow flies.
Far to the right, even now receding slow,
A darker wave against the dusky sky
Marks the cool covert of thick, leafy boughs,
Where the first touch of rosy-fingered Dawn
Will rouse a hundred downy, drowsy heads
To chirpings, warblings, and loud burst of song.
White-cradled 'mid the darkly rolling folds
Of fallow fields the weary village rests,
Each house with closed door and shutters fast,
Bearing upon its hushed and moonlit walls
Some trace of who the sleeper is within.
Hard by the track a lonely cottage stands
Unsheltered; from beneath the low-browed eave
Forth gleams a tiny beacon through the night:
Perchance a sufferer there may move and moan,
Rudely recalled to sense of throbbing pain,
Or one whose heart is sick with hope deferred,
Will wring her hands and wail to hear us pass,
Brooding o'er days long gone when we did bear
Away from home one who returns no more.
Now with a deepening thunder we have passed
The unseen bridge, and still, dark-gleaming pool,
And on the farther side we greet and leave
The dreamless peace of graves that almost seem
Forsaken, could we not discern beyond
The dim, sweet shadow of the watching Crown.

VALENTINE.

SAVONAROLA.

Such was his first vision, and the message which he soon preached for the first time among the Siennese hills, in San Gimignano, was its necessary sequel to a prophetic soul. "His war-cry and the standard of his whole life" was: "First, that the church will be scourged; secondly, that it will be speedily regenerated; thirdly, that all this will come to pass quickly." The impression made by such a dreamer of dreams of a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells unto perfection will, of course, vary indefinitely with the spiritual state of those to whom he comes with his message of unworldly wisdom. The living prophet's burning word sweeps away the doubts of the doubters and the denials of the sceptics, and his fiery purpose constrains the city or the nation to follow in his wake, as he steers by the eternal stars in God's heaven above him, leaving behind the shallows and the miseries to which creeping along the coast binds timid souls. His triumph may not last long; Savonarola's soon perished. Yet Florentine history soon vindicated the wisdom of the prophet-stateman, and the Reformation came in a far more thorough fashion than he had announced. But four hundred years later it is easier to criticise the prophet than to believe in him, if one is only the child of his own nineteenth century, and cannot go back in sympathy to the Duomo of Florence and realize the truth as well as the error in those which Savonarola actually set upon his prophecies and visions. Did he himself believe all these, or was he carried too far by the popular demand for signs and portents and fiery denunciations, so that he consciously went beyond the limits of his own superstitions and took advantage of the grosser appetite of the people? Prof. Villari is not a defender of the reality of Savonarola's visions as revelations of divine purpose for man, but he considers them the natural outcome of the fervid temperament of a great preacher of righteousness to a corrupt and licentious generation. In 1484, he was deeply stirred by the indifference of the Florentines to the simple but severe truth of the Gospel. "In this strangely excited state of mind, further increased by prolonged watching and abstinence, it is not surprising that Savonarola should have seen many visions. On one occasion, while conversing with a nun, he suddenly, as he thought, beheld the heavens open; all the future calamities of the church passed before his eyes, and he heard a voice charging him to announce them to the people. From that moment he was convinced of his divine mission, held it to be the main duty of his life, and thought of nothing but how best to fulfil it. . . The visions of the Old Testament and the Apocalypse stood arrayed in his fancy as living realities, representing the calamities of Italy and the church, and symbolical of their future.—*The Literary World*."

IDEALS OF CHILDHOOD AND OLD AGE.

Wordsworth saw "Intimations of Immortality in the Recollections of Early Childhood." To the child, he says, earth and the things of earth are surrounded and filled with a glory and a joy which are not their own; and this glory and joy are tokens and proofs that the child has a life above that of nature—a life from God, and therefore like the life of God, immortal. But to those who look for them there are "intimations of immortality" in the experiences of old age no less—nay, much more—than in "the recollections of early childhood." It would be a mistake to suppose that old age always is, and must be, unhappy if not cheered by the hope of another life. Death, even without that hope, is accepted as a welcome deliverance to many, perhaps to most, of those to whom nature has been as hard and cruel and hateful in the time of old age as in all other times; and among those to whom she is