

CORRODING GOLD

"I suppose we may offer congratulations as well as condolences?" murmured Mrs. Craddock as she took her gloves from her reticule and began to pull them on her thin, work-worn hands. "Thirty years is a long time to be away, and Australia is a very distant country. It is hardly possible in these circumstances that grief can be so very acute!"

"You are wrong, Eliza. The ties of blood cannot be weakened either by lapse of time or greatness of distance," observed Mr. Rodney reprovingly.

"Well, all I hope is that it won't make any difference to us all, and that we shall not lose you from Denmark Hill or from the chapel," said Mrs. Atherley. "I, for one, shall go home and fervently pray," she added piously, "that this accession of fortune will just provide increased channels for your generous activity."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Rodney graciously. "I have bestowed my confidence on you because you are all such old and valued friends, but, of course, I do not wish this talked about, especially in the chapel. I assure you it will make no difference to me personally. I hope I have too much common sense and proper feeling to be uplifted even for a moment by the deceitfulness of riches."

It was rather a fine peroration, and Mrs. Rodney continued to hold forth spasmodically in this high strain until the door had closed behind the last of the band of visitors.

Then she simply flopped into the chair nearest the hall fireplace and called feebly for Estelle.

"Oh, these women! They were nearly the death of me! But didn't you think I carried it off rather well on the whole?"

"It was like somebody acting on the stage, mother," answered Estelle with her usual uncompromising blunt-