

THE ANTIDOTE

and before Walter had gone to Mahableshwar his hand had not been as steady as it should have been in the mornings! He had in fact gone the pace, as we say, and contracted some debts, and though under the purer atmosphere of his parents' and Eleanor's company he had made good resolutions, these had not been sufficient to pull him round after the rebuff he had received. So he fell back into his old ways when the old temptations were placed before him, which Leigh noticed with pain knowing (as he believed he knew) the unhappy future in store for her he loved better than his life, and he thereupon set himself to work to strive to awaken Walter to a sense of duty. At first he was repulsed with satire and even rudeness, but keeping in view what was—as he thought—at stake, he persevered with an unselfishness which did him credit, and finally touched Meredith.

"You are a good fellow Leigh and I really must turn over a new leaf, only this is such a beastly dull hole," Walter said after Leigh had tried to rouse that better self which is in all of us, if we only probe deep enough.

"It is dull no doubt," replied Leigh with that fellow feeling which makes us wondrous kind. "But think of your future and —"

"Oh cut that!" cried Meredith savagely, as his dirty behaviour to his friend, and his own defeat, came back upon him. "I can't draw out all at once you know, it would not be fair."

Fair; yes that was actually the term he used; he who had lately acted so unfairly seeing Leigh's face grave and sad again stifled his conscience and pursued his headlong course. Many a time Leigh grew wrath and was tempted to throw him over, but he struggled gamely on, and the reward came at last though a life paid the penalty.

The monsoon burst and the rain poured down in a perfect deluge making the atmosphere, before so hot and dry, chilly and damp.

Then one morning after a night at poker, when Meredith had lost and drank more heavily than usual, he awoke with racking pains and raging thirst. Leigh looking in found him downright ill, so he hurried off for the doctor, his friend Jack Stirling, and before night the latter declared that Meredith had a very bad attack of jungle fever. Leigh set himself to nurse him as well as he could under Stirling's directions. He did not pretend to be very fond of Walter, but he cared a good deal for somebody else, whom he thought he was serving by sitting up through the long weary nights. Meredith's mind wandered for some days and he fancied himself a boy again talking to his mother when he was still innocent. On coming to himself, and seeing Leigh be-

side him, a *spasm* shot through him, and he murmured in a low voice:

"I have been a d-d blackguard old man, but I hope it is not too late. Let me think —"

"Hush, you must not worry. Lie still," was the reply.

"Lie! Yes it was a lie," said Meredith catching at the word, "an awful lie, but I'll speak the truth now if you will only forgive me."

"Wait till you are well again, it will be time enough then," was Leigh's answer in a soothing tone.

"No, you shall know all and leave me for I do not deserve your kindness," and then slowly and painfully Walter Meredith related all his disgraceful deception, hiding his face in shame as he ended.

Leigh's countenance grew stern at the recital and he clenched his fist at the finish, but looking down at the wretched man, as he lay on his bed powerless as a child, he turned away his whole frame shaking with some internal struggle. This then was the man he had tried to save, and had nursed as a brother, the man who had done his best to rob him of all he held dear. It was a hard fight, but at last his ears seemed to catch the words "as we forgive them that trespass against us," and taking the sick man's hand within his own he said:

"Say no more Meredith, you have my pardon, perhaps I had no chance any way, so no harm may have been done."

"Don't despair Leigh, she refused me before I left Mahableshwar, and I honestly believe you were the reason," said Meredith, thus making his confession complete and entire.

Then there came a light into Leigh's eyes, such as had been missing for many a day, but the invalid at that moment claimed all his attention, utter exhaustion having succeeded the unwonted exertion. When Stirling paid his next visit a little later, he did not like the symptoms of the patient at all, and beckoning Leigh aside informed him that he was going to telegraph to the General who was then at Poona.

"So bad as that?" whispered Leigh.

"Yes, I doubt whether he will even last until his father arrives," was the answer.

"His constitution is so undermined that I fear a few days at the furthest will be all he can count on."

Meredith however rallied sufficiently to see his father, and ask his forgiveness for his past sins and follies.

"And father I leave you a better son than I have ever been or could be," said the young man humbly. "Leigh has been more than a brother to me, and if Eleanor will only have him I shall feel I have made reparation for the wrong I did him."

So with repentance in his heart Walter Meredith departed, and we may say that

"nothing in his life became him like the leaving it."

V.

I will pass over the next few months, the monsoon has gone and those in Bombay are enjoying the cool November weather; cool that is for India, the thermometer not rising much over 70 degrees at noon, and dropping down to 60 degrees or a little below after sunset.

We are again in the General's bungalow on the Esplanade, the hour half past five in the evening. Henry Leigh is waiting on the verandah evidently waiting for someone, and presently a carriage and pair is driven to the door, out of which the General springs with the agility of a man of half his years, handing out his wife first and next Eleanor Grayling. Henry Leigh's heart beats fast as he advances to meet them.

"What Leigh, how are you my dear boy?" cries the General heartily grasping the young man's hand, which is next taken kindly by Mrs. Meredith, who looks a trifle sad, for women feel certain things longer than men do. Eleanor comes forward more beautiful than ever, if that were possible thinks Leigh, for "absence makes the heart grow fonder."

They enter the drawing room talking of the weather and indifferent subjects, when strange to say the General goes off on some plea or other, and he has scarcely disappeared before his wife calls to him, and hastens after him leaving Leigh and Eleanor alone. Can you imagine what takes place? Leigh comes close up to his fair companion, and trembling all over says in a low voice:

"Miss Grayling I believe when we last met at Mahableshwar I made a mistake; you can correct me if I am wrong. I was beginning to hope that you cared for me just a little bit, and the thought made me happier than I can ever tell you. I had not much to offer, God knows, beyond an honest love which I can still do."

Eleanor is silent, but her eyes which were raised to his for a moment spoke more eloquently than words. She is in his strong arms folded to his heart.

"Then it was a mistake darling," he murmurs.

"A terrible mistake Harry," she replies nestling still closer. "I think—I think, I loved you all the time. How could you ever leave me?"

There, the prize is won at last, sorrow is over and joy reigns supreme. Has not the same story been told over and over again, and do we not always like to hear it? Heart beating against heart, love given for love "till death do them part."

What a pleasant dinner that was in the General's bungalow that evening, and depend upon it the host and hostess were happy in seeing the happiness of their adopted child and the man of her choice. It recalled the days of their own youth before their hairs were gray, when they too were courting.

The wedding took place without much delay, and though that is years ago there is still not a happier couple than Captain and Mrs. Henry Leigh.

The end.