

large sum of thirty thousand pounds and upwards, thus rendering her, in addition to her other attractions, one of the very best matches—in a money sense—the county of Somerset could boast. Just after this, Agnes Merivale had the good fortune, whilst on a visit to her sister, Lady Willoughby, in London, to attract and fix the admiration of Mr. Irving, a young, well-charactered, and wealthy M.P. for one of the Midland boroughs. The wedding, it was arranged, should take place a week or so previous to the end of the season, then about two months distant. Amongst the friends whom Mr. Irving introduced to the Willoughbys was a Captain Salford, of the — Guards—a fashionable gentleman, of handsome exterior, insinuating manners, and, it was whispered by his particular friends, of utterly ruined fortunes. The charms, personal and pecuniary, of Clara Merivale made a profound impression upon this gallant individual's susceptible heart; and she was instantly assailed by all the specious arts,—the refined homage,—the unobtrusive, but eager deference which practised men of the world can so easily simulate, and which, alas! tell so potently upon the vanity of the wariest-minded maiden. It was not, however, long before Captain Salford discovered that, flattered and pleased as Clara Merivale might be with his attentions, a serious overture, should he venture to hazard one, would be instantly and unhesitatingly rejected. What the secret obstacle was that unexpectedly barred his progress he was not long in discovering—thanks probably to Lady Willoughby, who appears to have entertained a much higher opinion of him than he at all deserved. And eagerly did his plotting brain revolve scheme after scheme for sundering the strong, if almost impalpable link which bound the separated lovers to each other. One mode of action seemed to promise an almost certain success. Captain Salford had met Francis Herbert frequently abroad, and thoroughly as he conceived, appreciated the proud and sensitive young man's character. He was also especially intimate with some of the Paris set with whom Herbert chiefly associated. Could he be induced to believe that Clara Merivale thought of him with indifference—or still better, that she was on the high road to matrimony with another, Captain Salford had little doubt that he would at once silently resign his pretensions to the favor of the fickle beauty—the more certainly and promptly that she was now a wealthy heiress—and leave the field free to less scrupulous aspirants,—in which eventuality Captain Salford's excellent opinion of himself suggested that success would be certain. Thus reasoning, the astute man of the world persisted in his attentions to the frank, unsuspecting girl, at the same time taking care that the excellent terms on which he stood with her should reach Herbert's ear in as exaggerated a form as possible, through several and apparently trustworthy sources. This scheme his Paris friends soon intimated was working successfully, and he crowned it with a master-stroke.

At the time previously settled upon, the marriage of Agnes Merivale with Mr. Irving was celebrated with all proper *éclat*, and the wedded pair left town for the bridegroom's residence in Norfolk. On the same day the Merivales and Willoughbys departed for Somersetshire; ac-

companied by Captain Salford and several others, invited to pass a few weeks at "The Grange." Imagine the astonishment of all these, with the exception of the contriver of the mischief,—and he indeed appeared the most surprised and indignant of all—for the lady's sake, of course,—upon finding, on the arrival of the newspapers, the announcement of two weddings in their Fashionable Intelligence columns—one that of Agnes, second daughter of Archibald Merivale, Esquire, of Oak Hall, Somersetshire, to Charles Irving, Esq., M.P.; the other that of Clara, youngest daughter of Archibald Merivale, Esq., to Captain Salford, of His Majesty's — Guards! This blunder, it was concluded, had been caused by the reports of the likelihood of such an occurrence which had frequently appeared amongst the *on dits* of the Sunday papers, confirmed apparently by Captain Salford having accompanied the wedding party to church. Captain Salford volunteered to write a contradiction of the paragraph, and the matter was thought no more of. Indeed, there is no doubt that, with the exception of Clara herself, there was no one present that would not have hailed, with more or less satisfaction, the event thus, prematurely at all events, announced; even Mr. Merivale's boasted keenness and sagacity having failed to detect the heartless worldling beneath the polished exterior and plausible bearing of the aristocratic guardsman.

The lying paragraph effected its author's purpose, and that right speedily. The visit of Captain Salford had extended to about a fortnight, when he received some papers and letters from Paris which appeared to a good deal excite him. Almost immediately afterwards he informed Lady Willoughby that he was under the necessity of leaving for London that very afternoon. Polite regrets were of course expressed; and it was afterwards remembered, to his advantage, that his manner, the tone of his voice, when taking leave of Clara, were marked by a deep, respectful, almost compassionate tenderness, and Lady Willoughby positively averred that the practised actor's eyes were suffused with irrepressible emotion as he turned to leave her sister's presence. The next post explained, as they believed, the cause of the gallant captain's unusual agitation. It brought a number of *Galignani's* Paris newspaper, directed in his handwriting, in which they found the following marked paragraph:—"Married, on Tuesday last, at the chapel of the British embassy, the Honorable Caroline Wishart to Francis Herbert, Esquire, of Swan House, near Bath, Somersetshire. Immediately after the conclusion of the ceremony the happy pair left Paris for Italy."

Something more than four months after this, Captain Salford dined with three or four of his intimates at the *Rocher Cancale*, Paris. The party were in exuberant spirits, and the exhilarating wine which followed the excellent dinner so loosened their tongues and raised their voices that a gentleman enveloped in a large cloak, though sitting at some distance, with his back towards them, and apparently intent upon the newspapers, had no difficulty in following and thoroughly comprehending their conversation, notwithstanding that no names were mentioned.

"Poor fellow!" one of them remarked, in a