

THE MORTLAKE PEERAGE.

(From Chambers's Journal.)

CHAPTER III.

In this narrative, as in real life, there must be times when nothing of importance occurs. It was so for some time after the events which I have narrated. In the meantime, my young protégé was making rapid advance in his education. I never came across a more amiable or intelligent lad. As soon as I had rubbed off what I may call his nautical rust, and had coached him a little in mathematics and the classics, I sent him to reside with a clergyman who took private pupils; and I was gratified with the reports I had received of his character and progress.

Months had elapsed, but I had received no answer from Lord Mortlake. At length there came a communication from his bankers. It stated that the last that was known of the missing Earl was that he succeeded in crossing the Rocky Mountains, and had entered California; but after this there were no traces of him, and it was supposed that he had been murdered by the Anahuac Indians. My letters had therefore never reached him; and after a time, believing him to be dead, Lord Mortlake's agents forwarded them, with the rest of his effects, to this country.

It was generally believed—and I must confess that I shared the belief—that Lord Mortlake was dead. There was no reason, if he was alive, for his keeping out of the way. At this juncture, the next of kin, one of the Stanhopes of Leicestershire, assumed the title, and was about to take possession of the estates, when I at once instructed my solicitors to put in a claim on the part of my protégé. The case caused a great deal of excitement in the fashionable world; for the boy's identity, as well as his legitimacy, was hotly contested by Mr. Stanhope. The fact that the register at Knutsfield had been tampered with, and that a child had died and been buried as the offspring of Mrs. Stanhope, together with many other incidents which I thought were only known to myself, had somehow got to the knowledge of his solicitors—how, I could not imagine.

A case like this soon got into the newspapers, and the principal facts were freely commented on. One editor, more bold than the rest, said that doubts were entertained if the ceremony said to have been performed at Knutsfield had any existence except in the excited brain of a rather susceptible clergyman, and in the hallucinations of a woman predisposed to melancholic depressions, and a pronounced somnambulist!

I must confess that all this caused me a great deal of anxiety. I was quite convinced that the lad was the legitimate son of the Earl of Mortlake; I was quite satisfied with the evidence of Mrs. Minter and Mrs. Moody; but I could not help seeing that there were so many elements of romance and apparent improbability in the case, that I could not expect a judge and jury to look at it in the same light as I did. I knew that there were enormous difficulties in the way of the prosecution of this suit; but nevertheless there was to me a certain amount of fascination about it that led me on; and I felt that whatever might be the obstacles in the way, or whatever might be the costs of the suit, I should eventually prove my protégé to be the rightful inheritor of the Earldom of Mortlake.

It was at this epoch that one morning a lady was announced. I say a lady, because she gave no name: the servant was instructed to say that a lady wished to see me. I bade the man usher her into my study.

The lady who entered was tall and finely formed; but she was too closely veiled for me to distinguish her features. As soon as the servant had closed the door, she raised her veil. It was the Countess of Mortlake.

"You are surprised to see me here," she said. "I am equally surprised to find myself in your presence. I have been taught, and I believed, that you were my enemy—that you had destroyed the evidence of my marriage, and denied that it had ever been performed. I now know that all this is false, and I come to ask you to be my friend. I believe that you are an honest man and a gentleman, and I place myself entirely in your hands."

I replied that she might do so with perfect safety—that I greatly sympathized with her, and that my only wish was to serve her and her son.

"My son!" she exclaimed with great emotion—"my dear boy, from whom I have been so long separated. Tell me, where is he?"

"He is with a clergyman, who lives near to Whitehaven. He is well and happy, and you shall shortly see him."

She thanked me warmly; and after I stated to her some of the circumstances under which I found the boy, as these have been already made known to the reader, I naturally expressed a wish to know something of her own fortunes since the day on which I married her to George Stanhope in the church at Knutsfield.

"Mine," she replied, "is a sad story; but I will make it as short as possible."

"My father," she said, "was a stern, unrelenting man; and my mother was just the opposite. She was very kind to me; and it is hard to speak ill of the dead; but in truth she was a weak woman, and did not influence my mind for any good. At the same time, though my father was a stern, proud man, he was very indulgent to me. I was an only child, and consequently a spoiled one. In a moment of weakness, I contracted, as you know, a marriage without my parents' knowledge or consent. It was not my husband's fault; it was all my own stupidity and folly. He entreated me to let him write to my father, and ask his consent; and even when we were married, he wanted me to write and tell him, and beg his forgiveness. After my

mother's death, I was more than ever afraid of my father, and I felt that I dare not acquaint him with it. In due time I informed the Misses Onslow of my situation. They refused to believe my story. I had no certificate of my marriage, and they treated me with great severity; so cruelly indeed, that I was about to risk all and run away, when they discovered my plan, and frustrated it. After that, they treated me better. At this point, I wanted to send for my husband; and intended that he and I should go over to Florence to my father and ask his forgiveness. But this the Misses Onslow would not listen to; it would ruin the reputation of their school, they said; and they so acted on my fears, that I consented to keep the marriage a secret till I returned to my father. Up to this time, I had been corresponding with my husband, through the agency of one of the servants, and had been receiving letters from him by the same means. By-and-by however, his letters became less frequent, and at length ceased.

The lady was here much affected; she buried her face in her handkerchief and sobbed audibly. After a little while, she mastered her emotion, and went on with her narrative. "I then wrote a long and pathetic letter to my husband; but he never answered it, and at last went to India, and deserted me."

"Were you really made to believe that he had deserted you?" I asked.

"I was," she replied. "But why do you ask such a question?"

"Because you were made to believe a lie; because you were both tricked and deceived.—Read that!" and taking from my desk the bundle of old letters which Miss Onslow had placed in my hands, I handed one of them to her. It was the last one Mr. Stanhope had written to his wife before his departure for India.

As she read it, she became dreadfully excited; her bosom heaved, her eyes filled with tears, and broken sobs burst from her. When she had finished, she kissed the letter passionately, exclaiming: "Thank God! thank God!"

She paced the room rapidly, uttering broken exclamations of thankfulness. Then she turned upon me suddenly, and cried: "And this letter was kept from me! Oh! this is the very perfection of cruelty! That letter would have saved me years of agony. I knew that those women were base and cruel; but this exceeds my worst opinion of them!"

For a time she was too deeply affected to go on with her narrative. When she had succeeded somewhat in subduing her emotion, she continued:

"After the birth of my child, which, spite of the threats and entreaties of those two horrid women, I had properly christened and named after his father, I was taken very ill, and did not recover for many months. During that time, I believe I was insane. I was never told so; but I am convinced that such was the fact; and during this period the youngest Miss Onslow constituted herself my nurse. When I recovered, I found that my child was dead; or rather, as I now know, I was by a fraud tricked into believing so. Doubts were also thrown upon the validity of my marriage. It was said that the register at Knutsfield had been examined, and that there was no entry of a marriage having been solemnised. I could get no tidings of my husband, nor would they speak with me about him. At length I was considered well enough to return to my father, and accompanied by Miss Onslow, I went to Florence. My father was a proud man, and very anxious that I should make a good marriage; and Miss Onslow knowing this, was always telling me that if my marriage with Stanhope was discovered, he would disown and disinherit me. Miss Onslow still resided with me, nominally as a companion, but in reality as mistress of the establishment. By her arts she gained a great ascendancy over my father, and I believe if he had lived, he would actually have married her."

(To be Continued.)

RUNNING A POST OFFICE.

The post-office at Iron Rod, Montana, has been discontinued, and the explanation is thus given by an officer of the Department:—A post-office agent, while officially visiting various offices in Montana Territory for the purpose of correcting any irregularities of postmasters, stopped at Iron Rod. Going into the post-office he found the room divided into three sections—first a saloon, next the post-office, and last a faro bank. The mail-bag was brought in, a rough-looking customer opened it, and emptied the contents on the floor. The entire crowd at once got down on their hands and commenced overhauling the letters, among which several were registered, and selected such as they wanted. After they were through the remaining letters were shovelled into a candle-box and placed on the bar. The special agent, thinking the office needed a little regulating, asked the barkeeper, who had received and distributed the mail, if he was the postmaster. He answered, "No." "Are you the assistant postmaster?" "No." "Where is the postmaster?" "Out mining." "Where is the assistant postmaster?" "Gone to Hell's Canon!" and by thunder Bill Jones has got to run this office next week; it's his turn." The Government official then stated who he was, and demanded the keys of the office. The bartender coolly took the candle-box from the bar, placed it on the floor and gave it a kick, sending it out of the door, saying, "There's your post-office, and now git." The agent says:—"Knowing the custom of the country, I lost no time in following the advice, and got." This is why the post-office at Iron Rod was discontinued.

SETTLING DOWN.—"There is nothing like settling down," said the retired merchant confidentially to his neighbor. "When I gave up business I settled down and found I had quite a comfortable fortune. If I settled up I should not have had a cent."

INSURANCE CASE.

IN Toronto, during the past week, the case of *The Canada Farmers' Mutual Insurance Co. vs. FUGGLE* was one of much interest to the insurance world. On the 12th September, 1881, the plaintiffs insured the property of the defendant, who is a mill-owner in Essex Centre, for \$3,000, taking a premium note for \$270. Shortly after effecting the insurance the Company became insolvent, and the present action was instituted in order to realize the amount of the premium note, claiming, in accordance with the principle of mutual insurance companies, that the insured becomes liable, to the extent of the premium notes for any losses that may be sustained. The defendant resisted, claiming that the Company being defunct, and no longer able to afford him the relief in case of loss which they had guaranteed to do, and in consideration of which the premium note was given, that he ought not to be compelled to pay the note without any equivalent, and at any rate not *pro rata* beyond the time the Company was able to make good a loss if such had occurred. In the progress of the trial it was disclosed that the premium notes of the Company had been transferred to a bank to secure advances, while an assignment had been made to an officer of the Company, both of whom, it was claimed, ought to be added as parties. The Judge sustained this contention, but they declined to be added, and judgment was forthwith entered for defendant with costs of suit.

THE LAKE FLEET OF THE C. P. R.

A description of the vessels to be used will be of interest to the public. They will be built according to plans furnished. They are to be of steel, swift enough to make the run of 366 miles from Algoma Mills to Prince Arthur's Landing in 24 hours, and powerful enough to face any gale which may blow on the lakes. In construction they will closely resemble ocean steamers, the bulwarks, of the vessels forming the railings of the cabin deck, sitting low in the water, with two or perhaps three masts; and without the high pilot-house and Texas of the usual lake pattern. They will be constructed especially with reference to passenger traffic; but each will have capacity for about 1,000 tons of freight on a draft of 13 feet. The intention is to construct them so that they shall run like Atlantic steamers, by time table, regardless of the weather, and a boat will be despatched each way per day, making a daily line east and west between the places named. It has not yet been decided whether the new vessels can be constructed in Canada, or must be built on the Clyde, or whether they shall be larger than or within the new Welland Canal limits of 270 feet in length. The probabilities are, however, that they will be built on the Clyde and shipped through the St. Lawrence canals in sections. The cost of the vessels have not been estimated, but the instructions are to stop short of no expense to secure speed, safety, and comfort. The Canada Pacific, by this means will be perfectly independent of the American railway system. The line will be in operation by the opening of the season of 1884, when it is expected it will be utilized for the transport of the tide of immigrants which will have set in.

A WOMAN RESCUES A BOY IN MID-OCEAN.

A short time ago Mrs. G. A. D. McArthur Campbell, formerly a resident of Coonamble, distinguished herself by a deed of admirable bravery. Mrs. Campbell was a passenger in a steamer from Hong Kong to one of the northern ports of Queensland, and one day a little boy, about four years of age, to whom the lady was much attached, fell overboard, the accident occurring through a sudden lurch of the vessel. With the exception of Mrs. Campbell and the man at the wheel all the passengers and crew were at dinner. Without waiting for a life buoy, or divesting herself of any clothing, and simply saying to the man at the wheel, "Don't tell the child's mother," Mrs. Campbell plunged into the water, swam to the boy and held him up till both were rescued, the steamer having been promptly stopped and a boat lowered. Neither the lady nor the boy was much the worse for the immersion.—*Sydney Morning Herald*.

FRANCE IN AFRICA.—Eighty Frenchmen, engineers, guides, foremen, and navvies, with 600 Morocco navvies enlisted in Algeria, 600 Senegal negroes, and 200 or 300 Krotmen, are about to commence the construction of the railway destined eventually to connect Senegal with the Niger. Their operations will be protected by a column under Colonel Desbordes, which will victual the posts, plant the French flag on the Niger, and erect two forts on that river. The French staff and materials have just been despatched. A second railway, from St. Louis to Dakar, is also about to be commenced, and a cable will before long be laid between France and Senegal.—*London Times*.