

CHAPTER XLIV.

MAIMIE SAVED.

FROM Wilmington Crescent, Sydney Chevenix wandered on by himself, careless and aimless, off in the direction of Pimlico and Chelsea. He knew nothing, and cared nothing, of where his feet were spontaneously leading him: he simply walked straight onward, straight onward, and ever straight onward, through throngs and crowds of passing people, solitary, unknown, unnoticed, unnoticing. He walked as lonely through those populous streets as if he had been wandering all alone by himself in the very middle of desolate Sahara. He stood face to face with his own thoughts only; face to face, too, with the real, the genuine, the revealed Maimie.

He had known it all from the very beginning; known it and admitted it; known it, and shrunk from even acknowledging it; known how little he was to her, who to him was absolutely everything; known it, and yet pretended not to know it; worshipped at the shrine of the Maimie who was not, and who never had been; cherished tenderly his disillusioned ideal; nursed the flickering embers of his dead love; given way to the fixed idea which had taken possession of him; absorbed himself wholly in Maimie's happiness. And now he had done all that was possible for him, and his *role* in life was cut away clear from under him. To live a single day longer was to risk the discovery of his personation of Ben-yowski. He had only one duty left on earth, to remove himself—that useless obstacle—out of Maimie's path, and for Maimie's sake out of Adrian's. It was easy enough, indeed, to do; he had no hesitation or cowardice about it, but he wished he could have carried down to the grave with him a better last impression of darling Maimie. Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie! He was less than nothing, then, after all, to Maimie.

If only she had not asked him to kiss her!

"Sydney! Sydney! You're not going away for ever and ever without even so much as once kissing me!"

How little she knew the greatness of his sacrifice, the struggle he had gone through before he could resign her, the pangs with which he had watched so tenderly over her happiness with Adrian! And yet, even to himself, Sydney Chevenix would not pretend he had done anything in the least heroic; would not confess that Maimie could do wrong in anything, in anything, in anything.

"My angel!" he said to himself; "my darling! my beloved one! What does it matter to me whether she loves me, or whether she doesn't! Enough for me if I can make Maimie happy. I will make her happy!—I will make her happy! She shall keep her Adrian! She shall be properly married to him. No log of an obstacle shall stand in their way. The log shall float down stream