

GEORGE RAYMOND.**CHAPTER I.**

“Do you know those snug little rooms in the Temple? Well, it was in one of those we sat, on a January evening, drinking whisky toddy and smoking, some pipes, some cigars.”

“Who’s ‘we’?”

“Clarence Edgeware, Ned Gray, Gus Travers, a clerical, by name Browne, and your servant, George Raymond.”

“On what occasion?”

“Twelfth-Night, I think. But the gathering was fortuitous. We had severally dropped in upon Edgeware, who at the time was supposed to be reading very hard, and was in reality studying love-letter writing.”

“Studying?”

“Yes; do you suppose there is not something to study in the composition of a love-letter? Why, my dear fellow, you may allow yourself a slip in the wording of a business communication, but in matters of such weight as amatory epistles, beware of mistakes, even the slightest. The writing of a love-letter, of a bona-fide love-letter, I take to be one of the most difficult tasks ever allotted to man, and one which, when safely got over, he ought to look back upon ‘with the thankful heart of parting praise!’”

“George, you amaze me. I had always imagined that you were the most impassioned of men, and that in you the worship of the sex had reached, what shall I say? adoration, fanaticism.”

“Nearly did; long ago. But I got wiser, and at present I do not trespass beyond admiration. And even that is not easily excited.”

“Yet who more fervent than you in your love—true it is that it was as short as fervent—of the ‘most beautiful creature in the world.’ Happy world! Happier England! What a number of beautiful creatures there were in it during these four years.”

“Spare me. My wounds, scarce healed—you don’t believe it? Well, perhaps you are right;—pass the sherry then.—Absurdity