

"A Sorrow's Crown of Sorrows."

CHAPTER XVI, Continued.

To carry out this intent, Dr. Marsden had gone direct to his lawyer's office on his return to Oldford on the following morning. Lola's telegram lay on the table; Lola herself was in London, more than fifty miles away; but of all this the Doctor knew nothing as he sat in his lawyer's office, altering his will in favour of the creature he loved best in the world, until, with hardly any warning, that shadowy companion he had known of so long moved silently forward, and with a touch that chilled his blood closed the Doctor's lips and stilled his limbs for ever.

The sleepy town of Oldford woke to surprise and horror and chattering sympathy. The Doctor had died of paralysis, of heart disease, of apoplexy; he was worth ten, twenty, five-and-twenty thousand pounds. Then, gradually spreading from the office of the lawyer, came the eddying rumour that Dr. Marsden had never really had any children at all, and that, as he had died intestate, and came of a very large family, various rich old brothers and sisters and their families, unknown in Oldford and spread over the world, would inherit his property.

Mr. Bryce was anxious to contest this, with Miss Lola for a client; but, alas! no one could tell him where Miss Lola was to be found. The telegram with the dead man's name on the outside was opened in the presence of Aubrey, but there was no address within it.

"Do not be anxious about me," so Lola's message ran; "I am safe and well, and among friends. I could not stay in Oldford, but will see you soon."

With regard to Andrew's whereabouts the same ignorance prevailed. Searching through the Doctor's papers, Mr. Bryce failed to find any letter from Andrew, or any indication of his town address. The whole house was absorbed in gloom and confusion as the still figure of its master was carried in; and Aubrey de Vaux's sensitive nature was moved to the deepest sorrow and remorse at the share he had had in hastening the catastrophe.

Late in the afternoon he drove back to Montague Lodge, his heart heavy with grief, and with something of the hushed awe inspired by the presence of the dead still clinging to him. All news travels apace, and Madame de Vaux had already learned from the servants the tidings her son had come to tell. With the knowledge of them a temptation crept into her heart, insidious and strong.

That same morning three persons known to Aubrey possessed his family secret. Of those three, death had taken one. Victor Mercier was in Spain; Dr. Marsden had given his word that he would never divulge that terrible story; it had cost her so much to disclose, and Madame de Vaux knew that he would have kept his word, and that whatever arguments he had made use of with Lola to induce her to send back her engagement ring, the girl was still in utter ignorance of his real reason for opposing the match.

"It is true Lola loved Mr. Laidlaw, or fancied that she did," so Aubrey's mother reasoned within herself. "But since she grew to know my boy she must have loved him better still. And if his mind depends upon his happiness, why am I to separate him from the woman who alone can make him happy when God Himself has removed the obstacle I had placed between them? Let Him decide; I have done my utmost, and will neither assent nor oppose any more."

"Lola is in London, mother—penniless, friendless, fatherless, and all through me! I am her worst enemy; I who love her so! For me she was tormented into fleeing from her home, and now, by my thoughtless haste and violence, she has been made an orphan. A lifetime of devotion will not atone for the sorrow I am bringing upon her. You, who are so wise, tell me what I can do to find her and console her."

So Aubrey lamented to his mother. He himself was sorely in need of consolation, but he could listen to no words which did not bear upon Lola. He was quite determined to proceed that same evening to London in search of her, and Madame de Vaux, finding her remonstrances unavailing, brought her keener wits to his aid in planning schemes for Lola's recovery.

"She knows no one in London but my daughter and her own brother. I will telegraph to Ethel to ascertain whether Lola has taken shelter with her, and if not, her brother will be our only resource."

Within two hours Lady Mordaunt's answer came; she had seen and heard nothing of Miss Marsden. Another visit to Oldford having shown Andrew's address to be still missing and no word received from Lola, Aubrey was ready to start on a wild goose chase in search of her through London when his mother recalled the fact that Andrew and Bruce Laidlaw were acquaintances, and that the latter might possibly know young Marsden's address.

Bruce's letter had been mislaid. Aubrey remembered the name of the street but not the number, and after much time spent in useless searching for the lost letter, he started for London, and arrived there at half-past eleven on a snowy night, cold, weary, and oppressed by a sense of failure and disappointment.

The delay had been inevitable; yet none the less did its results affect three lives which had Aubrey arrived in London some six hours earlier, would have flowed in far different channels.

The address of Bruce's which had headed his letter being in Notting Hill, Aubrey did not arrive in that neighbourhood until close on midnight. It was then obviously impracticable to ring every bell throughout the length of Morland street, so Aubrey was forced to seek shelter for the night in an adjacent hotel, whence he issued early the next day eager for the search. It was protracted and wearisome. Morland street was very long and sacred to apartments; and servants and landladies were only reluctantly made to understand that the young gentleman whom they watched with interest from the windows in his course up and down the street was not a victim in search of that El Dorado of the homeless—cheap, clean, and comfortable London apartments—but a young man

who wanted to waste their time by asking silly questions about former lodgers. At length a stout and aggressive Frenchwoman admitted the fact that "M. Leloir was once here. I've got rid of 'im and his tempere. I've told me monsieur, zat my 'ouse was too noisy—'tignes vous, noisy! I've 'ad a clairgymen 'ere, and ladies of ze most 'igh respectability, and—"

"Have you Mr. Laidlaw's present address, madame?" said Aubrey, interrupting her.

"I cannot remember it, monsieur. My 'ouse was not good enough for zis M. Leloir. Why, I've 'ad ze daughter of a bishop, and—"

"As my business is of the greatest importance, madame, I will give a sovereign to the servants if they can remember Mr. Laidlaw's address."

The old woman's eyes grew keen. She instantly retired, declaring that she would question the servants herself, and if they could enlighten her, monsieur would do well to place the sovereign for them in her keeping, and she returned shortly with a bundle of very dusty and unopened letters addressed to Mr. Laidlaw, and mostly marked "important," "to be forwarded at once," etc., in one hand, and in the other a sheet of paper, on which was clearly written in Bruce's hand an address in the neighbourhood of Russell Square.

It was close on twelve o'clock as Aubrey sprang from his cab before the door of the vast, dreary-looking mansion indicated in the address. Another hansom stood at the entrance, and the servant who admitted him informed him that Mr. Bruce Laidlaw was indeed upstairs in his rooms, but that he was packing for a journey, and would start in a few minutes' time. In answer to a scribbled note on Aubrey's card, begging for a few words, Bruce sent down word that he was very sorry, but could not possibly see anyone just now.

Aubrey took out another card, and scribbled on the back that he had only come for Mr. Andrew Marsden's address. Could Mr. Laidlaw give it? It was a matter of the most vital importance.

This time the maid returned with the order to show Mr. de Vaux up at once, and proceeded to conduct Aubrey to Bruce's rooms on the first floor—large, dusty apartments, inconspicuously filled with cheap lodging-house furniture, and with costly and extravagant articles of Bruce's own purchasing.

The room was in the most hopeless confusion. Half-packed travelling-bags and portmanteaus lay about the floor, and between the half-open folding-doors Aubrey caught a glimpse of a still more untidy bedroom. Bruce was evidently packing in a hurry and without any method.

He entered almost immediately from the inner apartment with a dress-suit over one arm and a bundle of manuscripts and a hat-brush under the other. He looked unusually happy and radiantly handsome, and he greeted Aubrey with warm cordiality.

"Excuse me if I go on with my packing," he said. "Trains can't wait. I'm not good at packing," he explained, turning a dressing-bag upside down as he spoke in search of something he wanted, and detaching the floor with silver-tipped bottles and razors. "I really couldn't spare the time to see you, but I thought if you are going to Andrew Marsden you might take him a message from me. I didn't even know you knew him."

"It is the slightest acquaintance," said Aubrey. "I have only met him twice. To tell you the truth, Laidlaw, it is not Marsden I want, but his sister; and it is of vital importance that I should find her at once."

Bruce Laidlaw had been stooping over his dressing-bag, replacing the scattered articles. Now he rose and stared his visitor in the face with sudden seriousness.

"You look surprised," said Aubrey. "But, of course, you do not know what has been happening at Oldford since you left. You do not know that, as Miss Marsden has left her home, it is I who have the undoubted right to bring her back, since her presence there is required."

"No," returned Bruce quietly. "I certainly did not know that. I doubt if I clearly understand it now."

"I can easily make it clear to you," Aubrey went on, puzzled and pained by something in the other man's manner. "I love Miss Marsden with all my heart, and she has promised to be my wife."

CHAPTER XVII. An entire alteration came over Bruce's manner at this announcement. From surprised incredulity it changed to sudden hardness. He seemed to have forgotten his hurry for the train, for he left off packing, and placing a chair in such a position as to immediately face Aubrey, he leaned back in it, and said, in cold deliberate tones: "All this is very interesting, and quite new to me. Please tell me the whole story."

"but I must warn you he can tell you nothing. I have seen him myself quite lately, and he is in complete ignorance of Lola's present address."

Bruce used the girl's Christian name purposely, and noted the start Aubrey gave at the word.

"But perhaps I can help you," Bruce went on; "and I will certainly do so if you will have the patience to answer a few more questions. They are of more importance than any train; which, moreover," he added, glancing at his watch, "I have already lost. Please tell me how it is, since you are engaged to Miss Marsden, you do not know her address in town, and come to me to find it?"

Aubrey flushed and hesitated. "I would much prefer not to discuss my private affairs with you, Mr. Laidlaw," he said rather haughtily. "And as I cannot see how you can assist me to find Miss Marsden, I shall be greatly obliged if you will give me her brother's address, and let me take my leave."

"As you please," rejoined Bruce, shrugging his shoulders and speaking in his hardest voice. "But I think you are making a mistake, as I am certainly the only man in London who can help you to find Lola."

"You?" exclaimed Aubrey, making an angry movement towards him. "I," returned Bruce, rising and facing him.

Something in the steadfast gaze of Bruce's eyes, which shone as with a cold light behind them, quelled Aubrey's momentary rage. Mastering himself by a great effort, he addressed the young author in tones of studied constraint.

"I don't understand you," he said. "I will explain myself when you have answered my questions."

"Well, then," Aubrey went on, having convinced himself by another glance at his companion that Bruce's determination and obstinacy far surpassed his own, "the facts are these. My mother was away in France when Miss Marsden and I became engaged, and when she returned, being piqued and jealous because the thing had been settled in her absence, she made the excuse of objecting to the marriage on account of some silly story about Miss Marsden's birth. She quarrelled with the Doctor, and hurt his pride so that he objected, too. Between them they teased and tormented Miss Marsden until she put her engagement ring back into the Doctor's hands. I have it here."

Aubrey continued, taking the ring from his pocket as he spoke. "All this happened the day before yesterday. My mother soon recented, seeing clearly how wrong she had been; but by the time I went back to Oldford to make all things right, Lola, who had been forbidden to see me by her father, had run away in despair to London, and the Doctor had gone to Oxford. On his return he went straight to his lawyers, and there, Aubrey said, growing suddenly pale, and faltering at the remembrance, "a very slight shock, coming after the excitement of the day before, had a fatal effect upon him. Although his friends did not know it, he had suffered for years from heart disease. It happened in an instant. He suffered no pain, but he is dead."

"Dead!" repeated Bruce, in a shocked undertone. "Her father, and she does not know!"

"Now you know how necessary it is for me to find her, and break the news to her gently," said Aubrey eagerly. "I have here a letter from my mother, in which she begs Lola to come and be her daughter, since she has lost a father. Of course she must be with her brother Andrew; he is the only person she knows in London. And after searching everywhere among the Doctor's papers for Andrew Marsden's address, I could not find it. Then my mother recalled the fact that you knew him, and I came up last night to find you. The woman at your old lodgings gave me your present address, and this packet of letters for you. And now, Mr. Laidlaw, I have told you all you ask, and if you can give me the slightest assistance in finding my dear girl I shall be deeply grateful to you, although some months ago I was foolish enough to hate you as a rival."

He spoke with his usual gentle courtesy. He looked flushed and eager as he fixed his eyes with keen anticipation upon Bruce's face. Mr. Laidlaw was moved by many conflicting feelings. Indignation against Lola predominated. Her heartlessness and duplicity appeared altogether inexcusable to him, and even the thought of her loss, and the bitter grief it would cause her, failed to soften the harshness of the judgment he mentally passed upon her. A deep pity for Aubrey shut out all pity for her; probably because it was he, Bruce Laidlaw, she had fooled and lied to, and because this other victim of her unwomanly coquetry had never done him the slightest harm in word or deed; so, when he next spoke to Aubrey, it was in a very gentle and kindly tone.

"I am more sorry for you than I can say, De Vaux," he said. "Believe me, all that you tell me is utterly new to me, and I think you have been most shamefully treated."

Aubrey's sensitive face flushed deeply. "By whom?" he asked coldly.

"By Miss Marsden."

"You have no right to judge Miss Marsden's actions!" said Aubrey hotly. "All that she does is right to me. I am only wasting valuable time here. You said you could help me to find her. I don't want any pity, and I will not listen to a word against my future wife; but if you can assist me in finding her, I shall be more than grateful to you. If not, I must leave this house at once."

"Miss Marsden you will never find," said Bruce, "for she no longer exists."

Aubrey grew deadly pale, and fell back a step.

"For Heaven's sake don't tell me she is dead!" he said, almost in a whisper. "No; she is alive and well. I saw her only a short time ago."

"You saw her? Where is she? Take me to her at once!" "It would be useless. You have come too late. She was married this morning."

SHORT SERMONS.

How Drunkards are Made.

What a terrific amount of indifference there is among us with regard to drunkenness! A little intoxication is looked upon as a simple thing—a mere weakness; while habitual drunkenness is a terrible thing to be sure, but we all say, "We are certainly safe from that." That low, brutal, red-faced sot, that breaks his wife's heart, or destroys his home—"we never will degrade ourselves as low as that." There are plenty such within a stone's throw of this church. We know it well. How did they become such? No man ever becomes a drunkard intentionally. No man ever takes the glass in his hand and says to himself: "I have a good reputation now, I have good health, a loving wife, children who climb on my knee and but their loving arms around my neck, but this glass will be the first step to ruin and blast all this happiness. This glass I know will lead to another, and in the end my wife will become a broken-hearted woman, my children will walk the streets in rags and filth, my health and reputation will be gone; but no matter, here it goes." No man intends it.

Drunkenness and the whole host of evils that follow in its train come on a family gradually.

Warn a man who is drinking a little; tell him what is before him. He will say: "Do you take me for a fool?" The worst drunkard lying in the slime of bestial degradation said that. No, it is not the fools that become drunkards. They know a little too much.

A man says: "I know myself. I can take it or leave it." The poor drunkard of to-day who said that long ago, unfortunately in every case wound up by taking it. Many a time the man who said: "He could let it alone when he had a mind to, after a while had a mind to, but, alas! did not have the power." "Father," said a man the other day, "I'd give my right hand if I could quit it, but I can't." "I can give it up," is the cry of the young man as he enters the outer circle of the whirlpool, but "I won't." "I would," is the cry of the despairing wretch in the vortex, "but I can't." If by sitting in a draught five persons out of ten caught cold and it developed into pneumonia we would avoid a draught. So if by drinking habitually five out of every ten become drunkards why not avoid the drinking habit? The practice of total abstinence is the surest barrier against drunkenness. Touch not, taste not, is the safest rule.—*Pastor, Calvary.*

Consoling—Miss Gray (the evening before her wedding). "Suppose the clergyman should want to kiss me after the ceremony, dear, what shall I do?" Her dear friend: "He won't want to."

Epitaph on a Dead Letter. It died at its post.

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Consoling—Miss Gray (the evening before her wedding). "Suppose the clergyman should want to kiss me after the ceremony, dear, what shall I do?" Her dear friend: "He won't want to."

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DRAWINGS IN NOVEMBER:—November 4 and 18.

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MR. FOSTER'S VIEWS. On Reciprocity with the U. S. as Affected by the State Elections.

In a published "interview," the Hon. George E. Foster, Minister of Finance, is reported as follows respecting the reciprocity outlook:—"It is a difficult matter to read national results from three or four important State elections. In Iowa, Ohio, New York and Massachusetts local or other issues rather than the tariff one seem to have had great prominence. In Ohio, with McKinley as Republican candidate, the tariff issue was not made all-powerful. The combat there appears to have been fought largely on the silver question, the Democrats having to stand as the sponsors for a free coinage policy, which I do not think is the policy of the Democratic party as a whole. From this it appears impossible to conclude what may be the result of the Presidential election a year hence, or upon the tariff question or as regards the standing of the two parties. There is no doubt that last year the McKinley bill stood at a great disadvantage, the election taking place almost immediately after its enactment, whilst its objectionable features were still fresh in the minds of the people, and could not be compensated by any experimental benefits. On the whole I should gather that the McKinley bill stands a fair chance to remain law for several years to come, and in that bill I have no doubt the agricultural classes will be fully maintained. This, I think, precludes any one from concluding that a change to the advantage of our agricultural products and their admission to the United States will be brought about by Congressional legislation. It does not, however, change the status of the reciprocity question. The United States Cabinet and Congress may retain their present tariff intact, and yet may be quite willing and able to make an agreement with Canada, whereby, for mutual advantage, the tariff on certain commodities may be reduced, or entirely abolished. All depends upon the willingness of the United States to enter into negotiations with that end in view and the probability of these resulting in an arrangement which could be accepted with honor and advantage."

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SAFETY FROM LIGHTNING. Many thunder-storms have proved the truth of the old saying that it is dangerous to stand under trees during lightning. Isolated trees are more apt to be struck than a clump, and especially if they are near water. An oak tree by a pond is considered by electricians as offering a particularly unsafe position. In fact, water and damp ground are to be avoided as well as trees. It would be safer to lie flat on the ground than to stand upright if the storm is immediately overhead, which can be ascertained by noting that the flashes and reports are simultaneous. Indeed, it is dangerous to sit too near metal objects, such as railroads, pictures, frames and wire bell pulls, but particularly near the fire, because the metal grate, the soot and the column of heated gases in the chimney are likely to "draw" the discharge. A safe place is believed to be the middle of the room, especially a room in the middle story of the house; but, according to many scientists, the safest of all places is an iron for metal bedstead. Lying on this, one is in a kind of metal cage, which acts as a lightning screen; and if struck the electric fluid would pass by the iron rather than the human frame, the metal being the best conductor.

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