

A MISTAKE.

By Hurkaru.

III.

What a happy fortnight that was in Mahableshwar! Looking back years after Leigh would say he had never spent a happier, though there is a lady who takes him to task for the observation, and wishes to know whether his life has since been very melancholy. "No my dear, certainly not," he responds clasping a hand in a manner more eloquent than any words, "but there was a time —." An yes, there is a little roughness in the course of all true love, and blessed is he who can recall the days of his courtship without bitterness, and kiss the face opposite him after years of union with a thankful heart.

Henry Leigh was at the General's bungalow morning, noon, and night, and literally basked in Eleanor Grayling's smiles, but there was one who was by no means satisfied with this state of affairs. Walter Meredith had also felt the charm of Eleanor's presence, and as according to his creed, everything was fair in love as well as war, he set his brains to work to see how he could foil Leigh.

One evening General Meredith and Walter were pacing up and down the compound of their bungalow in earnest conversation, when Henry Leigh—coming to dinner as usual—approached the pair. Walter saw him, but pretended to be quite unconscious of the advancing footsteps and raising his voice he remarked quickly:

"Then I have your sanction, father, and you will say nothing about the engagement for the present."

"As you please my boy," replied the General cheerfully, and then seeing Leigh he wished him good evening, and excusing himself on some small pretext, hurried into the bungalow leaving the two young men together.

Had Leigh heard the talk, which had preceded Walter's observation, the words would not have carried the dreadful import to his ears which they did, for they simply had reference to the liquidation of Walter Meredith's debts, at least a portion of them, as what son confesses all until he comes down to the husks? and for this Walter had engaged to drop gambling. But Leigh, like all lovers, had only one thought round which everything else revolved. I presume each of us can remember when the universe appeared to be made for one fair being; Leigh was in that condition just then, and could think of nothing that was not directly connected with a certain Miss Grayling, which Walter was quite wide enough awake to take advantage of.

"Hallo, old fellow, did you happen to hear what I was saying to the General?" asked Meredith in apparent surprise.

"Yes, I heard," was the reply in a hard dry tone.

"Well, kindly oblige me by not saying anything about it at present, as neither of us wish the engagement talked of until we both desire to make it public."

"You may depend upon me," replied Leigh with difficulty, for he had a curious parched feeling about his throat and lips. He had been suddenly hurled, as it were, from the seventh heaven down to the dull sodden earth.

The two went into dinner, and Leigh was so silent, so different to what he had been for the past fortnight, that the General could not help remarking that he seemed out of sorts.

"Well you see," he said with an effort. "my holiday is over, and I return to Indore to-morrow." Eleanor's color fled from her cheeks, but Leigh was not looking at her—he felt he could not—and merely added with a sickly smile, "they had treated him so kindly, that he found it harder than he thought to say good-bye."

"I shall not be long after you," observed Walter, trying to make light of the matter, "it will be blazing hot at Indore after this place, but the monsoon will burst before long, which is one comfort."

"I am so sorry you must go, Mr. Leigh; you have helped to make the time pass very pleasantly," said Mrs. Meredith.

"Yes, I am devoted sorry you are off," cried the General. "Cannot you stay another couple of days?"

"No, thanks," was the rejoinder in a stiff decided tone.

Not a word said Eleanor Grayling. She was a little hurt and greatly puzzled at Leigh's change of behaviour, and anyone but a blind lover could have seen that the man had thrown up the sponge at the moment of victory. Eleanor said farewell rather coldly and haughtily, as for the moment she began to fear that Leigh had been playing with her, but no sooner was she gone than she, with a woman's beautiful inconsistency, blamed herself, or rather endeavored to discover how she had offended him. He had been the light of her eyes for two brief weeks, and after his departure the world seemed to have become suddenly dark and dreary. Mahableshwar was no longer the beautiful resort it had hitherto been, the sun had become dim, and she could not take pleasure in riding when he was not by her side. It is very hard that a woman in such a situation can do literally nothing, but has to "grin and bear it" as the saying is. Here was Eleanor loving Leigh with all her heart, and she could not raise a finger to prevent his leaving her. How many silent tears did she weep in secret! I wonder? It was pitiful and I do not think I could have written this tale had not the sequel been so bright and happy.

"Oh Harry," said Mrs. Leigh to her

husband the other day, "what a great goose you were in those days at Mahableshwar! Was not Papa a great goose, baby?" she adds kissing her latest in maternal ecstasy.

And upon my word I consider Henry Leigh richly deserved the epithet applied to him, but "nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit," and we all know a lover is very apt to play the fool.

IV.

Harry Leigh was back again at Indore with the regiment of which I have omitted to mention he was the senior Captain. It was that grilling sultry weather which always precedes the burst of the monsoon, everything was baked up and dusty, and the punka-wallas had a hard time of it, as there was not a breath of air stirring. Leigh went about his duties mechanically, but he no longer frequented the cricket field or took interest in the "gymkhana," but walked listlessly round the barracks smoking his solitary pipe.

Three or four days after his return he was somewhat surprised at the arrival of Walter Meredith, for he had not expected him for a week at least, and he could not help observing that Meredith was not in the best of tempers, and very unlike a successful lover. He was however so miserable himself that he did not pay much attention to his friend, who for his part did not seem inclined to seek Leigh's society.

The fact is Walter had played a bold game and lost it. Is it not Dickens who stated that "there is a simplicity of cunning no less than a simplicity of innocence?" Walter Meredith had been simple enough to imagine that, having got rid of Leigh, he had only to push his suit with Eleanor, in order to win her, especially (so he argued) as she would be angry and annoyed with Leigh for his abrupt departure. But herein Walter had blinded himself with that "vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself," for on making his proposal he was met with a most decided, not to say, disdainful rejection. Indeed Eleanor had been almost indignant in her refusal, so that he could not help seeing that her decision was final, and that there was nothing else left him but to accept his defeat with the best grace he could. He was obliged to admit to himself that he had been beaten, and returned to Indore in a bad temper and cordially hating Henry Leigh. For a man always has a hatred towards one he has injured. Leigh and Meredith were never very intimate, for apart from their characters being so opposed, the former had always been fond of outdoor sports while the latter, to his cost, had been addicted to cards and billiards, and though even in India an extra bottle of Bass or a "peg" may not harm a man, who takes regular exercise, it is very different with one who loaf and sits at whist or poker;