

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

TOO LATE.

By Evelyn Orchard.

He was fifty years of age and time had not dealt with him gently. He looked these years to the full. A figure that had once been alert and courageous had acquired a slight stoop, through long bending over a desk, while his face had all sorts of lines upon it, carved relentlessly by the harshness of his experience. He was what the world calls a successful man. The successful man in the ordinary sense, does not indulge much in ethical speculations, he deals with hard facts which he learns to regard as the most valuable assets. Hilton Westwater was no exception to that rule. He was fond of saying that heart and conscience being awkward barriers in the way, are best dispensed with by the man who makes worldly success his goal. He would also add, with a sort of grim smile as he uttered the words, that he had long dispensed with these superfluous and always troublesome appendages, and that he had profited thereby. He had profited beyond a doubt, up to a certain point, though in certain directions only. He had acquired wealth, and he lived after the manner of a rich man. He had also acquired power, purchased it perhaps, would be the correct phrase, since he was not naturally a leader of men. But money opens many doors, and some which would not in the ordinary course have been opened for Westwater, sprang back at sight of his purse. But purchased power, though it may have been paid for by large cheques, is always cheap. Westwater had just been made a member of Parliament, but he knew, even in the moment of his success, that he had reached the summit of his ambition now.

His face as he paced to and fro the spacious library of his house in Belgrave-square wore a deep tense look, as if some matter of extreme moment occupied his attention. He had come to a parting of the ways, and the temptation to take a foolish, in his own estimation, a disastrous step, had become clamant. At fifty, having kept women out side of his life altogether, Hilton Westwater had fallen in love. Yes, as foolishly, inconsequently, and disastrously, as far as his personal and social advancement was concerned, as any subaltern of twenty-two, whose family are united in deploring his folly. There was nobody to deplore Westwater's folly, except himself. But he did deplore it very honestly, and he had tried to fight against it. She was a country girl, the daughter of an obscure attorney in the burgh, who had acted as his election agent. He had been often at their house naturally; for three days he had been like one of the family. They had all been working for him, and he had shown them his very best side. On his part, his introduction to a happy English family, where there might be a struggle for existence and considerable anxiety for the future of the happy band of children, had been a great revelation. He had lost his heart, yes, lost his heart, that was the word, irrevocably to the eldest daughter, Cicely, the little house-mother to the whole family.

And to-day, after a brief and sharp struggle with himself, and all his old, age-worn, worldly wisdom, he had decided to marry her.

The desire for personal happiness, deeply implanted in every man's heart, though he may do his best to uproot it, is never quite eradicated. Westwater's long deprivation only made his starved heart more clamant now. He sat down at his desk, and began to write. He was surprised at

the eloquence which sought to flow from his pen. He did not write much, but that much was sincere and manly; in fact, he had never expressed himself better. Yet it did not satisfy him, it did not appear to convey to the sweet woman who had shown him the other possibilities of life, a tenth of his feelings towards her. And he was miserably conscious of the wide, and ever widening gulf of the years.

He had written and re-written, and was still contemplating his production with misgiving and dissatisfaction, when his secretary, Harold Brookfield was announced. Westwater hastily swept his portfolio into a drawer, closed it, and turned the key.

"I'm afraid I've disturbed you, sir," said the young man, in his clear, pleasant voice.

He was the nephew of a peer, the son of a dignitary of the Church, but he had his way to make, and Westwater had seemed to offer a way. He liked Westwater, too; the man so many people disliked, had been very decent to him. Westwater, fully conscious of the service rendered by the bright, lovable, clever secretary, had treated him throughout with conspicuous generosity, which had awakened the liveliest gratitude, not unmingled with surprise, in Brookfield's heart. He had already done something to help Westwater by explaining in circles where the information would be of use, that he was a man both maligned and misunderstood. And he came to him now with a personal matter of his own, as a man might come to another of whose friendship, sympathy and support he felt certain.

"I can go, if you're too busy," he explained. "But I wanted to ask your advice, to consult you, in fact about a personal matter of my own."

"I shall be very glad to listen, Harold," said Westwater, sincerely. In the intimacy of the campaign he had learned to call him Harold, in fact the understanding between them was complete and satisfactory.

"You'll laugh, perhaps, and yet I don't know. You've been to Harrowfield and seen her, and you must understand. I want to marry Cicely Deane."

Brookfield was making a cigarette as he spoke these words, sitting on the arm of a morocco-covered easy chair, with his legs dangling to the ground.

"I don't need to expatiate to you about her. The difficulty will be to convince my people," he went on, all unconscious of the feelings of the man to whom he was talking. "She's promised conditionally. I daresay you saw how things were going while we were at Harrowfield. I made an honest effort to keep out of it, for I knew what presumption it was, and what folly, when I haven't a red cent in the world. But I simply couldn't. You understand, don't you? You know what she is?"

"Oh, yes, I understand."

Never had Westwater been more completely master of himself. His face was as inscrutable as it had ever been in those moments of acute financial crisis, when a man has to have all his wits about him, and make no sign.

"My mother will be all right after she has seen Cicely. It's my Uncle Barcastle I'm nervous about. He told me last Saturday, speaking about my prospects, that my only chance was to marry money."

"Lord Barcastle was doubtless right, Harold, from his point of view."

"Oh, yes, but hang it all, a fellow can't live for money, or with it either, if there's nothing to gild the pill. I'll have to try the Colonies. Perhaps you'd speak a good word for me. You've immense influence in the Transvaal, in South America, the West Indies, in fact there isn't any place where you

don't have a pull. I thought perhaps, now you've seen Cicely, you'd give me a bit of advice. You know what I can do, and that at least I never want to shirk work."

"I know that, boy, and I'll help you all I can," said Westwater, with an unusual softness in his voice. At the same time there was a far-away expression in his eyes which puzzled Brookfield. He had expected a word of reproach, some shrewd advice, and perhaps a conditional promise of help. But he had not expected this.

"I'll be sorry to leave you, sir; we've had a good time together, haven't we?"

"Oh, yes; we've had a good time together," repeated Westwater, and in spite of himself his eyes persistently wandered to the drawer into which he had swept the effusions of his heart. He could have laughed aloud when he thought of them, of what Harold would say were he to open the drawer suddenly and give his secret away. But he had no such intention.

"I'm busy just now, Harold, but I'll give your affairs my best attention. I think of a way out this very moment, but I shall not tell you what it is. But I may tell you I'll make a point of seeing Lord Barcastle this very evening."

"Will you?" exclaimed the young man, his eyes moist with gratitude. "I don't know how to thank you. I told Cicely you'd be sure to help us."

"And what did Cicely say?" He asked the question quite calmly, not even faltering at the name.

"She didn't say much, now I remember, but she likes you very much."

"Well, you may tell her her confidence won't be misplaced. I owe you something, Harold, for your help in the campaign. It would have had a very different issue but for you. Now go, my boy. You may depend on my seeing Lord Barcastle to-day."

Brookfield reiterated his thanks and took himself away to write the good news to Cicely. Westwater locked the door after him, and walked back to the drawer where lay the pieces of paper on which he had essayed to write a new kind of letter. He lifted them out, and walking to the fire, put them in and watched the flame consume them. Then he walked back and wrote another letter to the woman he loved, telling her he would do his best for her lover. Cicely cried a little when she read that letter, though why, she could not have told. She was quite conscious of its undercurrent. Perhaps she, too, guessed that the awakening had come to Hilton Westwater too late.

Seeds are dispersed over the earth's surface by various methods, one of the most common being the instrumentality of animals. The wind is, perhaps, the most effective agent of dispersion instituted by Nature. Then there is the instrumentality of streams, rivers, and currents of the ocean, which play an important part in the dispersion of seeds and vegetables. Some seeds have wing-like appendages, by which they can travel many miles.

The King has seven ordinary degrees. The Prince of Wales has eleven or twelve. The Prince (says M.A.P.) amassed quite a number of honorary degrees during his Colonial tour—thus he is LL.D. of eight Colonial universities, and can array himself with scarlet cloth with these distinctions of lining namely, white for Melbourne and McGill, red silk lined with white and edged with black for the Cape University, dark blue silk lined with light blue for Adelaide, blue silk for Sydney, and pink for Toronto.