

## Family Reading.

RAYMOND.

CHAPTER XIV.

The pony-carriage duly conveyed Estelle to Carlton Hall in time for dinner that same day, and as she drove up to the door, Kathleen herself came flying down the steps to greet her. What a lovely picture she made, as she stood on the marble stair in front of her magnificent home, with the full glory of the sun-set shining on her bright head and fairy figure! Her hair was held back by a simple snood of blue ribbon, and her dress of the same delicate hue, enhancing the transparent clearness of her fair complexion. Estelle was a great contrast to her as they entered the drawing-room side by side. She was much taller, and her dress, of some white material, soft and ample, was unrelieved by a tinge of colour, excepting the deep crimson of a rose she had fastened at her breast; her dark hair was folded round her head in a fashion as could best dispose of its luxuriant masses, and she did not wear a single ornament, whereas Kathleen's neck and arms were decked with pearls of priceless value. There could be no doubt that the wealthy merchant's beautiful daughter was far the more brilliant figure of the two, and few would so much as glanced at Estelle while Kathleen was present.

Yet there was one whose gaze was to fall upon Estelle Lingard for the first time that night, who soon came to feel that the world contained, at least for him no fairer and no dearer sight than her pure spiritual face with its refined clear-cut features and shadowy eyes.

Mrs. Carlton came forward at once to receive Estelle, and gave her a most cordial welcome. She was a faded, feeble-looking, elderly woman, whom it was easy to see at a glance was a gentlewoman though her long association with Mr. Carlton's tastes had induced her to attire herself somewhat more gorgeously than is customary with persons of real refinement. Her accent, while so slight as to be rather pretty than otherwise, betrayed her Irish origin, and so did her deep blue eyes, which her daughter had inherited, with still greater brilliancy than hers possessed. She had the warm impulsive manner so common amongst the upper classes in her country, and was very generally liked by all who knew her. Yet she was essentially a worldly woman, and she could not have married Mr. Carlton had she been otherwise in spite of his wealth, and the luxury with which it surrounded her. The strongest motive power in her life now was her passionate love for Kathleen, her only child; and the genuine desire she felt for the happiness of this precious daughter had induced her to give up her most cherished schemes when she consented to her marriage with Raymond; for Mrs. Carlton's ambition, like her husband's had been to see her Kathleen a titled lady; and Raymond, though his ancestors had been noble, belonged to a younger branch of his family, and had not even a prospective chance of being able to raise his wife to any such position. Mr. Carlton's welcome to Estelle was quite as gracious as that of the lady of the house, for he boasted of dispensing a lavish hospitality to all who cared to claim it, provided their presence as his guests could confer a certain amount of distinction on himself, and in this instance, the fact that he could introduce Estelle to his friends as the niece of the celebrated Dr. Lingard, who was a member of half the learned societies in Europe, was quite sufficient to make him receive her very gladly into his house. He was rather a fine looking man and although no one could doubt that he was not a gentleman by birth, yet he had gained in the society to which his wealth had introduced him, enough of outward polish to enable him to pass muster fairly well in his present position. Certainly, he had spared no pains in making his as splendid and luxurious as it could possibly be: and the drawing-room into which Estelle had been ushered was magnificent enough in its proportions and fittings to have been a reception-hall of a palace. The guests were not very numerous—two or three of the nearest neighbours, the Vicar of the parish, Mr. Derwent, and Tracy Harcourt. As this last was presented by Mr. Carlton to Miss Lingard, a smiling glance passed between Ray-

mond and Kathleen, of course he knew of nothing that could connect her in their minds with her new acquaintance, and simply thought as she glanced up at him to acknowledge the introduction that this tall aristocratic-looking man was undoubtedly handsome, but that he had an expression of countenance which struck her unpleasantly. Mr. Derwent, a reserved, silent man, was then brought forward to make acquaintance with his new parishioner; and when all these ceremonies had been concluded, Raymond made his way through the group of gentlemen, to give Estelle a warm grasp of the hand, and to whisper his delight at seeing her under the roof of Kathleen's father. Presently a solemn butler, looking imposing enough to be the majordomo of a prince, appeared at the door, and slowly advancing to Mr. Carlton, requesting to know whether the dinner was to be kept waiting for Mr. Hugh.

"Hugh?—what, late again, as usual!" said Mr. Carlton; are you sure he is not in his room Jenkins?"

"Quite sure, sir; I sent one of the footmen to ascertain the fact."

"Do you know where your cousin is, Kathleen?" asked her father.

"He went out fishing this afternoon, I believe, and if he is amused, I have no doubt he has forgotten all about dinner."

"But he should have remembered our guests," said Mr. Carlton; "however, don't wait any longer for him, Jenkins." And so, in the course of a few minutes, Estelle found herself seated, between Mr. Derwent and Raymond, at a banquet of so sumptuous a description, and in so splendid a dining-hall, that it made her think, with some amusement, of the difference between her surroundings at that moment and those to which she had been accustomed when she lived with her father in the Australian bush.

Meantime, while one vacant chair at Mr. Carlton's luxurious table testified to the absence of an expected guest a young man was leisurely sauntering along the banks of a mountain stream, at least five or six miles distant from the place he had been intended to fill. He carried a fishing-rod over his shoulder, and a basket, well filled with trout, was slung at his back; and if he was now turning his steps homeward, it was not in the smallest degree from any consideration for his uncle, or his uncle's visitors, but simply because it was growing dark, and the fish were duller, or more wary, so that he had for the last half hour been unsuccessful in catching any; and Hugh Carlton was not the man to continue any occupation one moment longer than was precisely agreeable to himself. He was about five-and-twenty years of age, tall and strongly built, with fair hair, and rather deep-set grey eyes, regular features, of a cast that denoted a very determined disposition, and a look of decided talent; he was the only child of Mr. Carlton's brother, and his father, like his uncle, had married a lady of birth and position superior to his own, and who, moreover, was possessed of a considerable fortune, so that at this time, when both his parents were dead, Hugh was in possession of ample means, and quite independent of his relations. He had, however, made his home almost entirely with his uncle's family since the death of his mother, which had taken place a few years previously. Mr. Carlton was much attached to him, for he was the son of the only relation he had ever known, and Hugh was perfectly free from the fashionable vices which too often characterise young men of fortune in the present day; he was neither dissipated nor extravagant, and cared very little for London society in the abstract, though he enjoyed the opportunities of hearing good music, and meeting intellectual people, which the season in town afforded him, when he went with the Carltons to their house in Belgravia. He had been given the best education money could procure, and had been very willing to profit by it; and after his college life was over, as it was not necessary that he should adopt any profession, he had devoted himself very much to the cultivation of the poetic talent, which he decidedly possessed. Happily, he was superior to the vanity which is so apt to make a poet of moderate genius a great weariness to his friends; and in ordinary society Hugh could be a very pleasant companion if it happened to be agreeable to himself that he

should appear in that light. It will be seen, therefore, that the stalwart young man who was now walking home just three hours later than he ought to have been was possessed of many good qualities; but he had one deeply rooted fault of character, which was certain to mar them all when the time came for him to bear his part in the battle of life, on which as yet he had hardly entered. This was an indomitable selfishness, which ruled every thought and action, and had caused him, from the first moment of consciousness to that in which we see him, a man in full maturity, to erect his own will as the one god which alone he would worship, for good or for evil. This intense and systematic self-love had been greatly fostered by the circumstances of his life; his father had died when he was an infant, and his mother, who was by no means a wise woman, left alone in the world with him as her only child had simply idolized him, and indulged him in every wish it might please him to express—as if nothing could be so impossible as that he should ever be thwarted in the smallest degree. Many boys would have been more openly ruined by such a system than Hugh appeared to be; but it may be doubted whether any evil that might have resulted from it in a different disposition could be so fatal as the manner in which Hugh's natural selfishness became crystallized under it to an invulnerable hardness which nothing could penetrate. The same deliberate indulgence of every whim pursued him in his uncle's house, when he came, by Mr. Carlton's wish, to make his home there after his mother's death. It had become a fixed habit with all his relations, that Hugh's will and pleasure were to be paramount, and as they were much attached to him, they found it very easy to comply with the rule, the more as the style in which they all alike lived was so pleasant and luxurious as to give very little occasion for Hugh's fancies to clash with those of other persons. As yet the power and the passion which lay hid in the depths of this man's character had never been roused by any strong attachment, but when the day came, as come it would, that the fiery heart within him was awakened in its strength, then would it be seen how this root of selfishness could blight the whole fair promise of good in his soul.

CHAPTER XV.

Hugh Carlton walked steadily onward through the cool evening air, towards his home; and when the recollection crossed his mind that there was a dinner-party at the Hall, where he was expected to appear, it gained no other consideration from him than the reflection that he had much the best of it in being where he was, rather than in the position of his uncle's guests—and so he certainly had, as far as mere physical enjoyment was concerned. The meretricious splendours of the vast dining-hall would only have seemed utterly distasteful in comparison with the exquisite beauty and the purity of the scene that was around him; for a beautiful sunset glow still lingered on the horizon on one side, while the soft glory of the full moon was seen to rise over the mountains on the other; and soon it mounted up higher and higher into the clear blue vault, till it flooded all the earth and sky with silvery radiance, and touched the woods round Carlton Hall with a mystic loveliness, which made the whole fair picture more like the ideal of a heavenly paradise than the reality of an earthly landscape. Hugh's poetic nature could thoroughly appreciate such a sight, and he enjoyed it in a placid and self-satisfied manner till he reached Carlton Hall. The private path by which he had entered the grounds led him to a terrace which skirted one side of the house, and passed immediately under the drawing-room windows. They were cut down to the ground, like glass doors, and were now standing open; and as Hugh came close to them he heard the sweet tones of a woman's voice, singing softly within the room, to the accompaniment of a harp. Music of any kind would always have attracted Hugh's keen interest, but something there was in the low pathetic voice, which was even then floating out on the evening air like the sighing of a spirit, that seemed to thrill through his whole being with a strange power, which completely overthrew his composure as he listened. It was essentially what the