

THE
CANADIAN MONTHLY
AND NATIONAL REVIEW.

VOL. II.]

MAY, 1877.

[No. 5.

GREEN PASTURES AND PICCADILLY.*

BY WILLIAM BLACK,

Author of "A Princess of Thule," "Daughter of Heth," "Three Feathers," "Strange Adventures of a Phaeton," etc.

CHAPTER VI.

A LIFE-PLEDGE.

LORD WILLOWBY had fallen asleep. Through the white curtains of the window they could see him lying back in an easy chair, a newspaper dropped on his knee. Why should they go in to wake him?

The wan light was dying away from the bosom of the lake down there, and there was less of a glow in the northern skies; but the stars were burning more clearly now—white and throbbing over the black foliage of the elms. The nightingale sang from time to time, and the woods were silent to hear. Now and again a cool breeze came through the bushes, bringing with it a scent of lilacs and sweet-briar. They were in no hurry to re-enter the house.

Balfour was talking a little more honestly and earnestly now; for he had begun to speak of his work, his aims, his hopes, his difficulties. It was not a romantic tale he had to tell on this beautiful night, but his

companion conferred romance upon it. He was talking as an eager, busy, practical politician; she believed she was listening to a great statesman, to a leader of the future, to her country's one and only saviour. It was of no use that he insisted on the prosaic and commonplace nature of the actual work he had to do.

'You see, Lady Sylvia,' he said, 'I am only an apprentice as yet. I am only learning how to use my tools. And the fact is, there is not one man in fifty in the House who fancies that any tools are necessary. Look how on the most familiar subjects—those nearest to their own doors—they are content to take all their information from the newspapers. They never think of enquiring, of seeing, for themselves. They work out legislation as a mere theorem; they have no idea how it is practically applied. They pass Adulteration Acts, Sanitary Acts, Lodging-house Acts; they consider Gas Bills, Water Bills, and what not; but it is all done in the air. They don't know. Now I have been trying to cram on some of these things, but I have avoided official reports. I know the

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