

TRIALS OF JOHN MARKHAM.

BY EARNSLIFFE.

JOHN MARKHAM sat alone in his dimly lighted chamber. He had come home from the routine and drudgery of the Counting-room, wearied, dispirited, and somewhat desponding, for after many years earnest labour in the pursuit of wealth, he found himself no farther on the road to competence, than many years before, when the business he was so industriously prosecuting, first engaged his attention. He was yet, quite a young man, possessed of good habits, and endowed with talents, which, if directed in another channel, beside that of trade, would have given him a title to positions of influence and trust. But his life had been too secluded, his manners too unobtrusive and reticent; whilst a feeling of timidity and reserve, which he could not wholly conquer, prevented him from taking any very active part in the affairs of society. It is true, as regards moral worth, he bore an excellent character—kind, generous and forgiving—ever ready to write his name on any charitable subscription list, or give his influence towards the prosecution of any good work. But, for all that, he was not regarded as a popular man. Society kept aloof from him, regarding him as a person who lived apparently so exclusive, as proud, selfish, and misanthropic. It may be, probably owing to this misconceived opinion, and a natural repugnance he felt to the wishes and claims of it, which prevented him, in some measure, from gaining the favour and assistance of many who could have advanced his interests in many of the complicated transactions of business. But John Markham possessed an independent spirit, and in all mercantile affairs traded low, rather than incur too weighty responsibilities, or place himself under distressing obligations to others. Alas! too often, the popular man of society is the one least respected, for he gains admittance into many circles and ingratiate himself into the esteem of many at the sacrifice only of many estimable virtues. In this age of sham, of cant and hypocrisy, how often is it to be observed, and also deplored, that pretenders and charlatans occupy positions in society, and hold offices of emolument and trust; while modest but conscious merit, backed by honesty and genuine sincerity, remain in the background. I do not know whether such reflections as these crossed John Markham's mind as he sat musing by the comfortable fire; but, I think what has been spoken of cannot have escaped the attention of any of my readers who have long observed the forms and conventionalities of society.

This night in particular, he had cause for despondency, and as he threw up his arms as he was wont to do when weary, one could not but observe the strength and massiveness of his form, and features that gave indication of affection, self-reliance and decision. A very honest face was his, and handsome withal, with its large, deep, thoughtful grey eyes, the eyes of a sentimentalist or poet, instead of those of a shrewd practical business man.

After reading the news, he sat for a long time with his head resting on his arm, apparently absorbed in thought; at last, turning round his eye glanced at the table, and noticing an envelope on it, he took it up and read the following note—written in a bold legible hand:

My DEAR MARKHAM,—I have heard of your loss and sincerely regret it. I shall be happy to render you any assistance in my power. I shall be at home to-morrow night, and shall be happy to have you call.

Yours truly,

WILLIAM GIBSON.

After reading the above, a smile illumined his pale, thoughtful features, and placing the note in the inside pocket of his coat, resumed his former position in the chair. "Well, this is joy indeed," he inwardly said; "there is hope yet that all will be well. My friend Gibson, how good, how true and how generous he is; I shall certainly visit him to-morrow: but how is it possible he could have heard of my loss?"

William Gibson, the gentleman here spoken of, was an old friend of Markham's father, who, after many years' unremitting toil in the city, retired from business for the purpose of spending the remainder of his days in learned leisure and studious employment. He occupied a pretty villa some distance from the city, at a small village called Norwich, which in the sunny season attracted tourists from all parts of the country, not only for the beauty of its scenery, but for the wealth and fashion that assembled there. A very beautiful place it was, too, with its pretty white cottages adorning the hill-side—the homes of refinement and wealth,—its long rows of lofty old elms, with groves of beech and poplar trees; while in front of the road which passed through the village, the eye wandered over a beautiful expanse of water to the opposite shore, with its forest-crowned hills and mountains, sharply defined against the summer sky.

It was to this village that Mr. Gibson came to reside with his only daughter, Venetia, a very beautiful lady at the time I write, but