

THE TRUE WITNESS FOR 1881.

The True Witness has within the past year made an immense stride in circulation, and the testimony of a large number of our subscribers is not too flattering if it may also claim a stride in general improvement.

This is the age of general improvement and the True Witness will advance with it. Newspapers are starting up around us on all sides with more or less pretensions to public favor, some of them die in their tender infancy, some of them die of disease of the heart after a few years, while others, though the fewest in number, grow stronger as they advance in years and root themselves all the more firmly in public esteem, which in fact is their life. However, we may criticize Darwin's theory as applied to the species there is no doubt it holds good in newspaper enterprises, it is the fittest which survives. The True Witness has survived a generation of men all but two years, and it is now what we may term an established fact.

But we want to extend its usefulness and its circulation still further, and we want its friends to assist us if they believe this journal to be worth \$1.50 a year, and we think they do. We would like to impress upon their memories that the True Witness is without exception the cheapest paper of its class on this continent.

It was formerly two dollars per annum in the country and two dollars and a half in the city, but the present proprietors having taken charge of it in the hardest of times, and knowing that to many poor people a reduction of twenty or twenty-five per cent would mean something and would not only enable the old subscribers to retain it but new ones to enroll themselves under the reduction, they have no reason to regret it. For what they lost one way they gained in another, and they assisted the introduction into Catholic families throughout Canada and the United States of a Catholic paper which would defend their religion and their rights.

The True Witness is too cheap to offer premiums or "chromos" as an inducement to subscribers, even if they believed in their efficacy. It goes simply on its merits as a journal, and it is for the people to judge whether they are right or wrong.

But as we have stated we want our circulation doubled in 1881, and all we can do to encourage our agents and the public generally is to promise them that, if our efforts are seconded by our friends, this paper will be still further enlarged and improved during the coming year.

On receipt of \$1.50, the subscriber will be entitled to receive the True Witness from the 1st December, 1880, to the 31st December 1881 (thirteen months), including the one back number.

Any one sending us the names of 5 new subscribers, at one time, with the cash, (\$1.00 each) will receive one copy free and \$1.00 cash; or 10 new names, with the cash, one copy free and \$2.50.

All the above subscriptions are for the term ending December 31st, 1881 (13 months).

Our readers will oblige by informing their friends of the above very liberal inducements to subscribe for the True Witness.

We want active intelligent agents throughout Canada and the Northern and Western States of the Union, who can, by serving our interests, serve their own as well and add materially to their income without interfering with their legitimate business.

The True Witness will be mailed to clergymen, school teachers and postmasters at \$1.00 per annum in advance.

Parties getting up clubs are not obliged to confine themselves to any particular locality, but can work up their quota from different towns or districts; nor is it necessary to send all the names at once. They will fulfil all the conditions by forwarding the names and amounts until the club is completed. We have observed that our paper is, if possible, more popular with the ladies than with the other sex, and we appeal to the ladies, therefore, to use the gentle but irresistible pressure of which they are mistresses in our behalf on their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons, though for the matter of that we will take subscriptions from themselves and their sisters and cousins as well.

In conclusion, we thank those of our friends who have responded so promptly and so cheerfully to our call for amounts due, and request those of them who have not, to follow their example at once.

"POST" PRINTING & PUBLISHING CO.

THE CHILTERN HUNDREDS.

This is a phrase very often to be heard and seen during the sessions of the British Parliament. But probably few understand the origin and nature of the phrase. Here is an explanation. In former times, when the beech forests which covered the Chiltern Hills, in Buckinghamshire, were infested with robbers, and in order to restrain them, and protect the peaceable inhabitants of the neighborhood of their forays, it was usual for the crown to appoint an officer, who was called the Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds. The office, which has long ceased to serve its primary, now serves a secondary purpose. A member of the House of Commons cannot resign his seat unless disqualified, either by the acceptance of a place of honor and profit under the crown, or by some other cause. Now, the stewardship of the Ch. H. is held to be such a place, and it is consequently applied for by, and granted, in the general case as a matter of course, to any member who wishes to resign. As soon as it is obtained, it is again resigned, and is thus generally vacant when required for the purpose in question. When the C. H. are not vacant, however, the same purpose is served by the stewardship of a manor of East Hendred, Northstead, and Hempholme. The practice of granting the Chiltern Hundreds began only about the year 1750, and its strict legality has been doubted, on the ground that the stewardship is not an office of the kind to vacant a seat. The gift of the Chiltern Hundreds lies with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and there is at least one instance of its being refused.

THE TUNISIAN DIFFICULTY.

Paris, April 19.—Events seem to be taking a serious turn in Tunis. The real antagonists of France are showing their hands. A telegram to the evening France announces that a detachment of Tunisian regulars has been ordered to the island of Tabarca to oppose any eventual attempt of the French to effect a landing in that neighborhood and to take the Kroumris in the rear.

GIVEN UP BY DOCTORS.

"Is it possible that Mr. Godfrey is up and at work, and cured by so simple a remedy?" "I assure you it is true that he is entirely cured, and with nothing but Hop Bitters; and only ten days ago his doctors gave him up and said he must die!"

"Well—a day! That is remarkable! I will go this day and get some for my poor George—I know hops are good."—*Salem Post.*

REDMOND O'DONNELL

LE CHASSEUR D'AFRIQUE.

PART II.

CHAPTER XXIII.—CONTINUED.

"But it has not been proven that it really was Miss Hecastle," O'Donnell said; "you all appear to have taken that for granted. She has not pleaded guilty, has she? and your evidence—conclusive though it may be, is purely circumstantial. She owns to nothing but having torn up the note."

"She owns to nothing certainly, but there is such a thing as moral certainty. It may not be evidence in a court of law, but it is quite sufficient to commit a culprit in the domestic tribunal. Miss Hecastle wore the knight's dress, and went to the ball, and has got Lady Dangerfield into a most infernal scrape. That is clear."

"Nothing is clear to me but that Lady Dangerfield has got herself into a scrape," O'Donnell answered with the stubborn justice that was part of his character. "Give the devil his due Lord Ruyland. Miss Hecastle made the dress for Lady Dangerfield, but Miss Hecastle could not compel her to wear it. Mrs. Everleigh's masquerade against Sir Peter's express commands. Miss Hecastle may have worn the major's dress and gone to the masquerade as Lara, but I doubt if seeing her there influenced Sir Peter one way or other. His wife disobeyed him—she went to Mrs. Everleigh's in male attire—defying his threats and the consequences. She is no child to be led by Miss Hecastle or any one else—she went with her eyes open, knowing her danger, and I must say—think what you please—that in Sir Peter's place I would do precisely what Sir Peter is doing."

"I don't doubt it," the earl responded dryly; "he good enough not to say so to Sir Peter, however, should you see him. He is sufficient bitter without aiding or abetting."

"I am hardly likely to see him. My sister leaves Scarborough to-morrow—Castledore the day after. I will take her to France and place her in charge of a friend of ours there. Of course it is impossible for her to remain here an hour longer than necessary. I am sorry for Lady Dangerfield—she has been most kind to Rose—most hospitable to me. I seriously trust this disagreeable affair may end amicably after all."

"Yes I hope so," the earl answered coolly; "but I doubt it. It is hard on Lady Dangerfield—she has may have faults and her follies—who has not? But with them all, Geneva was as jolly a little soul as ever lived. And it's a confounded bore now that everything is settled—and he stopped suddenly and looks askance at his companion."

"You allude to Cecil's engagement I presume," O'Donnell supplemented, quite calmly. "Rose has told me. My only surprise is, that it should be announced at this late date. I believe I am correct in thinking it a very old affair indeed—of six years standing or more."

Very few people ever had the good fortune to see Raoul, Earl of Ruyland, at a loss, but for one brief moment he was at a loss now. "Very old affair—oh, yes, very—ever since his father's death—in fact, it has been tacitly or—understood—nothing definite—aw—too young, of course, and all that sort of thing. It was the desire of the late Sir John, as well as myself, and—ah—the young people were by no means averse to carrying out our wishes. All is happily settled now—the wedding will take place without any unnecessary delay. Are you going to Castledore at once? I should like half an hour's conversation with you about it," he lowered his voice—"about Miss Hecastle; I have placed a detective on her track."

"My lord!" there was an unmistakable shock in the words. "A detective on her track," repeated the earl. "Take my word O'Donnell, that woman means mischief and will do it yet. I'll forestall her if I can—I'll find out who she is and what brought her here, before I am many weeks older. I have already discovered—He paused—the figure of a man was approaching them through the darkness. "Davis!" the earl said interrogatively, "is that you?"

"All right, my lord." The man pulled off his cap, halted, and looked keenly at O'Donnell.

"Go into the library, Davis—I'll follow and hear your report."

The man bowed obsequiously again, and went. Lord Ruyland turned to his companion. "That's my detective; past-master of his business, keen as a ferret. I must go and hear his report—it will not detain me long. Then I'll tell you all, and I think you'll acknowledge Miss Hecastle is worth the watching. Wait for me in the drawing-room—Cecil's there, and will amuse you."

He left him and hurried away. The chasseur stood irresolute for a moment—then, as if his determination was taken, turned and walked into the drawing-room.

He might have thought it deserted but for the low sound of singing that came forth. The lights were down—there was no one to be seen, but far in the recesses where a piano stood he caught a glimpse of a white dress and the gleam of a diamond star. Very softly, very sweetly she sang an old ballad that he had been wont to sing long ago in the little cottage parlor at Torryglenn whilst her white fingers struck the accompaniment. He crossed over and leaned with folded arms against the instrument. She looked upon him with a smile and sang on:

"Oh I loved in my youth a lady fair,
For her sweet eyes and her golden hair.
Oh, truly, oh, truly, I loved her then,
And oh shall I ever so love again.
Save my hawk, and my hounds, and my
red-roan steed,
For they never failed in my hour of need."

She stopped and glanced up at him again. His eyes were fixed upon her, a steady, thoughtful almost stern gaze. Again she smiled.

"How fierce the look this exile wears who's wont to be so gay. Captain O'Donnell, what is it?"

The dark gravity of his face broke into an answering smile, still a grave one. "The treasured wrongs of six years back are in my heart to-day," Lady Cecil, my sister and your father have told me all. To-morrow I leave Scarborough, the day after Castledore, in all likelihood forever. Before I go let me present my congratulations to the future Lady Cecil Tregeenna."

She turned suddenly away from him, her head drooped, a deep, painful, burning flush rose up to the very roots of her hair. As she sang the old song, as she stood beside her in

the old way, the old, glad days had come back, the golden days of her first youth. Sir Arthur Tregeenna and the present had faded for a moment as a dream, and Torryglenn and her love, the only love she had ever known, had come back. And the spell was broken—thus.

She could not speak; the keenest pain, the sharpest pang she had ever felt caught at her heart like a hand. For that first moment even her pride forsook her.

"And I can congratulate you," the grave, deep tones of the soldier of fortune went on. "No truer gentleman, no more loyal friend exists, nor, in the future, I believe no more devoted husband than Sir Arthur Tregeenna."

"Late—Miss Hecastle's slave and worshipper! Pray add that before you finish your panegyric, Captain O'Donnell."

She hated herself for the passionate words the moment they were spoken, for the bitterness of the tone, for the intolerable pain and jealousy that forced them from her. It was shameful enough, bitter enough, humiliating enough, surely, to know that she loved this man, as she never would love the man she was to marry had not enough without being forced to listen to praises of her betrothed from him. A deep, angry red had risen in either cheek, a deep, angry flame burned in either eye. His calm, friendly indifference, the cool gravity of his look and tone were more than she could bear.

"Miss Hecastle's slave," he repeated; "no Lady Cecil; never quite that, I think. Her admirer, perhaps, if you like. Miss Hecastle happens to be one of those remarkable women whom almost all men admire."

"We won't split hairs over it. Sir Arthur is, as you say, an honorable gentleman; and to that high sense of honor, no doubt, I am indebted for my present felicity. If he were free to choose, I fear you would hardly have any chances to win against those of Lady Dangerfield's late Governor. I thank you for your congratulations all the same, and accept them for exactly what they are worth."

She made a motion as though to end the subject, but the chasseur, still leaning against the piano, had no present idea of ending it. "Miss Hecastle," he resumed coolly, "is, as I have often said before, a very extraordinary woman, and to be judged by no rules. Without any pretension to personal beauty, beyond a stately figure, a graceful walk, and a low sweet voice that 'most excellent thing in woman'—she will yet fascinate where a mere beautiful woman may fail. She is one of those sorceresses whose fatal spell of fascination few may encounter and escape."

"And Captain O'Donnell is one of those fortunate few. But then, if Miss Hecastle is an extraordinary woman, Captain O'Donnell is a more extraordinary man—extraordinary for his hardness and coldness, and impenetrability for his nothing else. The spell of the enchantress has at least been powerless for him."

"Quite right, Lady Cecil. It has been powerless, perhaps, as you say, because I am naturally flinty, or because I have lain for years under another spell, equally fatal, and the one has counteracted the other."

She laughed satirically, and began playing a waltz.

"The beau chasseur under a spell! Impossible to imagine such a thing. Who is the sorceress? Some Diamond of the Desert?—some Pearl of the Plains?—some lovely Arab's daughter? Who?"

"Shall I really tell you, Lady Cecil?"

"Just as you please," the whole hands still played nimbly on. "Perhaps you had better not, though. Love stories are a trite subject—so old, so stupidly commonplace—they bore me to death, either in books or in real life. And I don't think it is in your nature to have the disease very badly. I hope you admire my waltz—it is of my own composing. I call it the Rose Waltz, and dedicate it to Miss Rose O'Donnell."

"I like it, but I like the song I heard you singing as I came in better—my song, Lady. Do you remember the last time I sang it standing beside you in the little parlor at Torryglenn, as I stand now? You playing, and your father asleep in his arm-chair—or was he only pretending sleep, and watching us? The last time, Lady Cecil, though I did not know it."

She made no reply. She still played on the Rose Waltz, but she struck the chords at random.

"I remember it so well. You were dressed in white as you are now. White is your fitting color, Lady Cecil. You had wild roses in your hair, and we sang together all evening and scarcely spoke a word. You have changed since then—grown taller, more womanly; more beautiful and yet—will you be offended, I think I like the 'Queenie' of Torryglenn better than the La Reine Blanche of Scarborough."

"Captain O'Donnell's memory is good," she answered, as he paused, not looking at him; "better than I ever gave him credit for. I remember the evening he alludes to very well—the last, though I did not know it either. And will be offended if I tell him I liked the Redmond O'Donnell who saved my life, who sang songs, and who was neither blasé nor cynical, better than the dashing Chasseur d'Afrique of six years later! I fear time improves neither of us; I have grown worldly, you are cynical. What will we be ten years hence, I wonder?"

"I think I can answer. You will be Lady Cecil Tregeenna, the fairest, the loveliest, the gentlest of England's stately matrons, the most loving of wives, the most tender of friends—a perfect woman nobly planned. I shall be—well, perhaps a Colonel of Chasseurs, the highest promotion I can hope for, with a complexion of burnt sienna—or—else occupying six feet of Algerian soil. In either event I am most unlikely ever to meet you again; and so to-night, before we say our final farewell, I think, in spite of your dislike to love stories, I must tell you one. Not my own; you think me too hard for any such tenderness, and perhaps you are right. Let us say a friend of mine—an Irishman too—now an Algerian soldier like myself. Will it bore you very much to listen, Lady Cecil?"

"Go on," she said, faintly.

"It was—well, a number of years ago—when my friend was little better than a bobbledoh of two or three—and twenty, with a head full of romance and chivalry, an inflammable heart and an empty purse. He had a long lineage, an old name, a ruined homestead, a suit of peasant's clothes, and nothing else. He lived alone—a dreamer's life, full of vague, splendid hopes for the future, and troubled with very little of that useful commodity—common sense."

"One stormy autumn evening the romance of his life began. An English peer and his only daughter came to his neighborhood to reside for a time, and it chanced that his good fortune enabled him to do the peer's daughter a service."

"They were very gracious, very grateful, and showed it in many kindly ways. They overlooked the peasant's dress, the stupid beauty of my young friend, and invited him to their house, to their table—he became the English girl's daily companion and friend. And his brain was turned. I told you he was a dreamer—he knew nothing of the world and its codes, was destitute of common sense, and he fell madly in love with the earl's daughter. I shall not tell you how lovely she was at sixteen—no lady they say does not care to hear

another praised. In those days I—my friend, I mean—was poetic, and two lines from one of his poems describes her:

"A lovely being, sweetly formed or molded,
A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded."

"A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded," a pretty idea and a correct one. He fell in love with her—I have said she was sweet and gracious, gentle and kind—as a fair young queen might be to a peasant who had done her a service—too great not to be grateful. And he—she was a fool—he mistook it—mistook her. Will you believe it, Lady Cecil, when I tell you this enthusiastic young Irishman believed his passion returned, and actually deemed that for love of a raw mountain lad, without a farthing in his purse, she would wait until he had won name, and fame, and fortune, and become his wife. He smiles and wonders at his own inconceivable imbecility when he thinks of it now."

"I have one thing to say in his favor—he didn't tell her. When this foolish passion of his grew too great for one heart to bear, he went to her father and made his confession to him. I can imagine how this worldly wise peer this ambitious English nobleman, laughed in his sleeve as he listened—it wasn't worth growing serious over, and in his way he rather liked the lad. He was wise enough not to laugh aloud however—if the young Irishman had been a duke he could not have entertained his mad proposal with more gravity and courtesy. His daughter had been engaged from her fourteenth year to a Cornish baronet of fabulous wealth, and was to marry him in a year or two at the most."

"Was it possible she had not told him? No, that was strange, certainly. However, her father could speak to her—if her heart inclined her to Irish love in a cottage instead of Cornish splendor, why—far be it from him to go between two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one," etc. He was to go to-night—to come to-morrow and receive his answer from herself. Only, in the meantime—this last evening, he was not to broach directly or indirectly, the tender subject to her, and to-morrow he was religiously to absent himself from their cottage all day. In short, the English peer dealt with a fool according to his folly."

"My friend has told me, as we lay and smoked, Lady Cecil, with the stars of Africa shining on our bivouac—that that evening stands out distinct from all other evenings in his life, and will, until his dying day. Every detail of the picture—the quiet, wax-lit room—the earl foregoing sleep, the better to watch them, in his chair—the candles burning on the piano and illuminating her fair Madonna face—the cold, autumnal moonlight sleeping on the brown banks of heather without—the white dress she wore—the roses in her hair, gathered by his hand—the songs she sang—the sweet, tremulous, tender light all over the lovely face. It will remain with him—haunt him until his heart ceases to beat. They have met since then, but never again like that—youth, fresh, trusting, and unspotted from the world."

"Next day came. They had parted without a word; he had passed a sleepless night, and at day break had ridden away true to his promise in spirit as in letter. Evening came and brought him—for the answer he hoped, he believed would be yes. He had worked himself up into a fever of loving and longing, he flew down the valley to the casket that held his pearl of price. What do you think he found? A deserted house, the birds flown. Two notes were placed in his hand by a servant, who sneered at him as he gave them, two brief, cold, hard notes of farewell—that struck him more brutally than blows, one from her, one from her father. It was the old hackneyed, stereotype form—she was sorry, did not dream that he cared for her, was engaged to another, it was better she should go, and she was always his friend, etc. etc. It was written in her handwriting and signed with her name, her father's indorsed it."

"It was only what he richly deserved, you and I can see that, for his presumption, his madness, the only answer that could be given; but Lady Cecil, men have gone mad or died for less. In one night, from an enthusiastic boy, trusting all men, he became what you call me, a hard, cold skeptic, with no trust in man, no faith in woman, a cynic and a scolder in a night. He learnt his lesson well; years have gone, they have cured him of his folly, but it is a folly that has never been repeated, and never will to his dying day. Only—when they meet in after days, do you think she of all the women on earth should be the first to reproach him with his hardness, his coldness, his unbelief? She taught him his first lesson—should she find fault if he is an apt pupil?"

He paused. His voice had not risen—in the low, grave tone she knew so well, he had told his story; an undertone of sadness and cynicism running through it. There was a half smile on his face as he looked at her and waited for her answer.

"My own, Lady Cecil! Yes; you hardly need ask the question, I think."

"Need I not? Yours! And what letter is this you talk of, written by my hand and signed with my name. I don't understand."

"You don't understand. A few minutes ago you accused me of a defective memory. But I suppose a matter of such trifling import could not be expected to remain in your memory. I mean the letter you wrote me, rejecting my presumptuous suit—telling me of your engagement to Sir Arthur Tregeenna, the night before you left Torryglenn."

"I never wrote any such letter."

"Lady Cecil!"

"I never wrote any such—"

She paused suddenly. Over her face there rose a flush, her hands clasped together—she looked at him, a sudden light breaking upon her.

"The note papa dictated, and which he made me write," she said in a sort of whisper. "Redmond, I see it all!"

The old name, the thrill his heart gave as he heard it. In the days that were gone it had been "Redmond" and "Queenie" always.

"It is my turn not to understand. Will you explain, Lady Cecil? I certainly read the note, written and signed by you."

"I know, I know." She sank back into her seat and shaded her eyes with her hand. "I see it all now. Papa deceived us both."

In a broken voice, in brief words, she told him the story of that note.

"Papa told me nothing—nothing. I did not know, I never dreamed it was for you. And he hurried away without a word of explanation or warning. I see it all now. And the hard things I have been thinking of you all these years, the hard things you must have thought of me! You who saved my life, Captain O'Donnell," with sudden passion, "what must you have thought of me?"

He smiled again.

"Ever bitter things in the past, Queenie—in the long past. Of late years, as I grow in wisdom and in grace, I began to see you, and your acted as most fathers would have acted, and acted right. I don't mean to defend the duplicity of part of it, but at least he avoided

a scene—no inconsiderable gain. All the wisdom of a Solomon and all the eloquence of a Demosthenes could not have made me see my folly in the proper light—the utter impossibility of my being ever any other than friend to Lord Ruyland's daughter. I would have persisted in falling at your feet in pouring forth the tale of my madness, and succeeding in distressing you beyond measure. Your father foresaw all that, and forestalled it—he could scarcely have acted otherwise than as he did."

"And Captain O'Donnell, who might have been taken at his word by a girl of sixteen, as silly as himself, is only too thankful for his hair-breadth escape. I understand, sir—you don't know what good reason you have to thank Lord Ruyland's common sense. I only wonder the matter having ended so well for you—you care to allude to the subject at all."

"Only too thankful for my hair-breadth escape!" he repeated. "Queenie, if I had spoken—if you had known!"

"But you did not," she interrupted, coldly, "so we will not discuss the question. You have escaped, that is enough for you. I am Sir Arthur Tregeenna's affianced wife, that is enough for me. I ask again, why have you spoken at all?"

"Because I could not—hard, cold, immovable as you think me—I could not part with you again—this time forever—without knowing whether or no you really wrote my death-warrant six years ago. It was so unlike you—it has rankled so bitterly all those years, and of late the truth began to dawn upon me. Perhaps because the old, sweet madness has never left me; and when we have parted—when you are a happy wife and I am back in Algeria—the happiness of knowing Queenie was all I thought of—my little love, my true friend, and not even at sixteen a coquette, a trifler with men's hearts—will repay me for all I have lost."

He stopped abruptly. She had covered her face with her hands, and he could see the tears that fell thick and fast.

"Sir Arthur Tregeenna is my friend," he said, his own voice broken. "Heaven knows, I have no wish to say one word he may not hear, but, Queenie, I must speak to-night for the first—the last time. I have loved you—I do love you—I will love you while life lasts. If fate had willed it otherwise—if rank and fortune had been mine years ago, they would have been laid at your feet, where my heart has been all these years. Free or plighted, I know well how utterly, wildly impossible it would be for you to listen to me. It may be a dastardly deed to speak at all, but I must. You pity me, at least. Ah! Queenie, I would not have the past changed, with all its suffering, its loss, its misery, if I could. The thought of you is the sweetest thought of my life. If I have distressed you by speaking, I am sorry. Forgive me, Queenie, for this and all the rest."

"Forgive! He asked no more. And in that instant, if he had said 'Come,' she would have left rank and wealth, father and friends, and gone with him to beggary. But not for the crown of the world would he have said it. He loved her—but honor more."

"Let this be our farewell," he said, gently; "let our real parting be now. When we say it again it will be before the world. We will both be happier, I hope, for understanding each other at last; you will think me no more a cynic and a scolder—I will know you no more for a heartless coquette. Good-by, Queenie, may God bless you and make you happy!"

He held out his hand; she laid hers in it—the other held her face. "Their hands clasped and the spirit kissed." "Good-by!" she heard him say again, holding her hand hard. Then he let it go, walked to the door, looked back once at the drooping figure, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CHAPTER OF WONDERS.

As he crossed the threshold of the drawing-room he encountered Soames, the tall footman.

"My lord's compliments, Captain O'Donnell," Mr. Soames said, bowing. "His lordship is in the library, Captain, and requests you to wait upon him there."

"O'Donnell nodded and walked forward to the library—his dark sombre face betraying no more what had just passed than a handsome mask of bronze."

"Come in O'Donnell," the earl said, in answer to his tap, and the chasseur entered the library, closed the door, and threw himself into a seat.

His lordship was alone—the lamps burned brightly, but even in their brilliance shadows lurked in the corners of the long, stately room. The curtains were drawn over the open windows, shutting out the dark, sultry summer night. On a table at the earl's elbow, wine-glasses and cigars stood.

"I suppose you're nearly out of patience by this time," his lordship began, "but Davis's report was unusually lengthy and interesting this evening; Davis's inclination for port wine was even more marked than usual."

"The lower order, as a rule, if you observe, have a weakness for port wine, it is a clever fellow, and a skilled detective, but no exception to this rule," O'Donnell, he leaned forward and asked the question with most striking abruptness, "what do you know of Miss Hecastle?"

But the sang froid of O'Donnell was equal to his own—if he thought to throw him off his guard and read the truth in his confusion, he was mistaken. Captain O'Donnell, lying at full length back in his chair, pulling his long trooper moustache, looked across at him; the conscious calm of innocence in his surprised blue eyes.

"What do I know of Miss Hecastle? Well, not a great deal, perhaps, but enough to convince me she is a very fine woman, a remarkably fine woman, indeed, both mentally and physically. A little too clever, perhaps, as Lady Dangerfield seems to have found out to her cost."

"You won't tell me then. Very well, Davis and I must find out for ourselves. Only it would simplify matters if you would, and I don't see why you should league yourself under Miss Hecastle's piratical black flag."

"Will your lordship think me very stupid if I say I really don't understand?"

"I would if I thought so, but I don't. O'Donnell, it's of no use your fencing me with the buttons on. You know more of Miss Hecastle than you choose to tell—I believe you met her before you met her here—in Algeria or in America. A man doesn't take midnight rambles, as a rule, with a lady who is a perfect stranger to him. Oh don't wear that unconscious look—it doesn't deceive me. I tell you I saw you escorting Miss Hecastle across the fields to this house between one and two in the morning."

"The deuce you did! And how came Lord Ruyland to be, like sister Anne, on the watch tower between one and two in the morning?"

"I was in my room. Have I told you before, I can never sleep well on bright moonlight nights. I was sitting at my open bedroom window. I saw you, sir. I even heard you. I heard you both."

"You did? May I ask—"

"I heard her ask you as you stopped if it were to be war to the knife between you, or words to that effect. You answered it should be as Miss Hecastle pleased. You left her as she stood, and she watched you out of sight almost—by gad! as if you had been her lover. And yet I hardly think you ever were that."

"Hardly. I played the lover once in my life, and received a lesson I am not likely to forget. Who should know that better than your lordship?"