

HELEN LAFONE

OR
THE FOES OF A HOUSEHOLD.

A TALE OF ENGLISH LIFE.
CHAPTER I.

Two men were walking slowly along the quiet country road. It was a perfect July evening, and they had dined—two good reasons for not being in a hurry. They were as different in age as in personal appearance; perhaps the only point of likeness lay in the fact that both held cigars between their lips. One was a man who, though in actual years perhaps not much past middle life, looked already old. His hair was perfectly grey, and his figure slightly bent. Probably he had never called himself handsome; but his face was more pleasing than many a merely handsome one, for if the features were rather sharp and the expression almost stern, there was such an air of kindly geniality in his whole appearance that one could not but feel attracted by him. He looked the kind of man to whom one would apply—injustly, and not in vain—in times of doubt and difficulty. He strode on, his eyes fixed neither upon the ground nor his companion's face, but straight in front of him; and the stick which he held upright against his back in a manner which did not fail to produce smiles of amusement when the doctor was amongst strangers.

His companion was a man far younger both in years and appearance. If Dr. Hazlitt looked older than he really was, Percival Moore enjoyed the distinction, rare enough in these days, of looking rather young. It was a distinction for which Dr. Hazlitt had already told him several times in the short two months of their acquaintance he could never be sufficiently thankful; it was also a distinction of which Moore himself was unconscious. He was really not aware that though just thirty he looked no more than six or seven and twenty, neither had he ever given any consideration to the fact that this look of youth came probably from a healthy and unprejudicial point of view, taking things very much as he found them, and yielding neither to undue elation nor depression according as his luck went up or down.

His face was an exceedingly pleasant one, though not distinguished by any striking beauty of feature. He was very much tanned, and this particular complexion seemed to harmonize with the thoughtful expression of his face. His eyes were dark grey, and, like his face, thoughtful and pleasant; his hair was dark brown, and closely cut, after the fashion of today. In figure he was unusually tall, well made, and spare; there was the unconscious grace of perfect health and strength in every one of his movements.

He was the only child of a retired manufacturer, and had been brought up and educated with a view to taking his father's place in the commercial world, and adding to the already colossal fortune which his father had built up for himself. With this end in view he had been placed at an ordinary middle-class school, withdrawn from his studies when he was just beginning to understand the value of them, and put into "the business." Here he had passed through every branch, beginning as the very humblest half-timer, and accomplishing his rise and progress until he knew all the ins and outs of the business by heart.

At this point, when he had just attained his majority and was about to be received into the commercial world as his father's representative, the elder Moore had died, leaving his son sole master of himself and his enormous wealth.

Perhaps it was well for Mr Moore, senior, of mind that he died when he did, before knowing the deep and growing affection which had been growing up between him and his son. As heart Percival was not a business, that is commercial, man. He had done his father's will in choosing his career in life, partly because he had a curiosity to know how a large business like that was carried on, and partly because he was prepared to give up a part of his life to please his father; but he had never intended to make business the pursuit of his whole life. He had always meant to give it up upon his father's death, and as soon as possible after that event he would up his affairs, because he had former haunts, and began life anew, and more in accordance with his own tastes. He travelled, studied and observed, and the result was that after eight years of unsettled existence he had bought an estate in the neighborhood of Osmotherly, and resolved henceforth to live on his own land, and study for the life some of the problems which were pushing themselves to the fore in this world of speculation.

On first coming to Osmotherly he had met Mr Lafone, one of the magnates of the place, who had taken a fancy to him, and at whose house he had been, and still was staying, until his own place had been put into proper repair. The very day he went to Mr Lafone's house Percival met Dr Hazlitt there, and in spite of the disparity in their years and positions the two men had at once struck a sympathetic vein, and for days passed without a meeting between them. This evening Moore had been dining with the doctor, and they had strolled out after dinner to taste the freshness of the evening, and, perhaps, though neither mentioned it, to see the pomp of the sunset over the golden sands of the bay.

They had hardly spoken since leaving the doctor's pretty, creeper-covered house, and it was Moore who, in the tone of a man continuing an interrupted conversation, broke the silence by saying: "Then you really do think Miss Lafone has some reason for the warlike attitude she maintains towards her family."

The doctor did not withdraw his eyes from space as he replied with a half smile.

the track of light left upon the water by the setting sun was unbroken by any breath of wind. Turning the gaze inland, the eye rested upon a waste of hills some bare and rocky as their own point of view, others thickly wooded; and suggesting the rich pastures and rustling corn fields nesting in the valleys. Down in a hollow, some two or three miles distant, lay a little village. The smoke from the chimneys soared straight into the still air, the red tilled roofs seemed to glow in the sunlight, and in the middle of the village rose the church, a venerable and majestic pile, round which clustered many historical recollections, and toward which the eyes turned involuntarily, it was so much the centre feature of the landscape.

Moore, as he looked at this, heard a low, unconscious sigh, and thought, not for the first time, that it had been well for him that his father died when he did. He (Percival) would have found it more and more impossible every year to live the life his father had chalked out for him. Yet what drift of fortune had he had if, indeed, he had ever succeeded in persuading his father that the life which was all interest and excitement to him was "flat, stale, and unprofitable" to his son. What scenes there would have been! what battles to assert his own right to his own life, what bitterness of spirit when the victory had been gained! The thought of strife and battle brought back Helen Lafone into his mind, and he turned to Dr Hazlitt to claim the fulfilment of his promise. The doctor was looking in the direction of the setting sun, and shading his eyes with his right hand, pointed to where in the midst of a patch of trees, a large and irregularly built house stood upon a sloping, braced by green lawns and flower beds.

"Dr Hazlitt looks well from here," he said, glancing at his companion. "I like the view, and the house is a fine one. But you were going to tell me about Miss Lafone."

"Ay, ay, don't fear I shall forget. I now see the necessity of your knowing all about her, and you shall know."

He puffed at his cigar for a minute, as though mentally arranging his story, in order that it might be told in the most favorable manner. "Lafone is to me the same age, and we have known each other ever since we were lads. We never had much in common, though there was always perfect friendliness in our dealings with one another. One thing, perhaps, which helped to keep us apart was the fact that I have the monopoly of killing and curing here, no one having ever thought it worth his while to out me from my humble position."

"Twenty-one years ago he married. He brought his bride from a distance. She did not belong to this part of the country. She was a sweet creature, and when I saw a sweet creature I don't mean a woman who went about with a face like a professional martyr and a perpetual smile on her lips, as though to say 'See what kind angelic patience I bear my lot in life.' I have seen women like that, and I have heard people call them sweet creatures. I didn't. Mrs Lafone was very beautiful, with the brightest eyes I almost spiced face I ever saw. She filled the house with sunshine; she filled the whole village with sunshine. Don't suppose she was very lively, woman with nothing but high spirits to recommend her. She was also one of the clearest women I ever knew. What an intelligence she had! When I think of it I am tempted to rebel against the seeming waste of nature which could allow an intelligence like hers to perish before it had time to show itself in all its fullness, and just when that happened which would have done it. It was deplorable, deplorable."

He paused, lost in thought, and it almost appeared as if he would not continue his story. Moore recalled him to himself with affected cynicism. "Oh, the old story, I suppose—a misunderstanding, a wife pinning away, and an early grave for want of the excitement of being appreciated."

"Ah," said the doctor, raising his hand, "don't say that. Those things may be truly said of other women, perhaps, I can't tell; but nothing could be more erroneous as regards Mrs Lafone. Her husband adored her. He had the intelligence to understand her rare merit, and he thought all the world of her. Still, he went on, falling back into his meditative tone, "I can't tell what made her marry him. I have heard she was an only child, and her mother in narrow circumstances, but I cannot believe such a reason would have any weight with her. She could not have loved him. She must have seen he was inferior to her, and a woman cannot love a man who is her inferior; it is impossible. However, it did not last long. For one year she was in the house like a radiant creature, and from another—there are certain things that never come back in this—then it came to an end—the died!"

Though the spirit of this final catastrophe had breathed through the whole of the doctor's story, Moore was hardly prepared for it when it did come. He experienced a kind of shock from the very abruptness of the announcement, and repeated almost helplessly—"She died?"

"A fortnight after Helen was born; she had been going on so well, and then all at once the turn came, and she was dead in a few hours. It seemed impossible. Lafone was away; only I was with her, and I pray I may never be present when she is dead again."

"She did not want to die?" said Moore, more to break the silence which had followed the doctor's last words than because he felt that any words were necessary. "Want?" echoed Dr Hazlitt almost sharply. "No, no, no. She had been almost beside herself with joy when the child was born, and she was so glad it was a girl. It seemed as though the very force of her love for it must have kept her alive; and she died—died in the middle of a magnificent summer day, alone, but for servants and myself. Her mother had gone home, supposing she was no longer wanted; her husband was away on business. There was another pause, which this time Percival did not break. "She must have known her husband's character so very well, she was so anxious to see him, so anxious to give the child into his keeping, and to make some

arrangement for its future. She must have guessed that a man of his disposition would marry again, and she would have saved her child from a waste of a stepmother. That was the bitterest thought, that her child should be given to a stranger. But he did not come; though he was sent for at once. She had been dead an hour when he got home."

"Again he was silent, and Percival respected his silence. Probably this was the first time he had spoken of these things, and now when at last he opened his lips he spoke out of the fullness of his heart. Percival now began to understand the peculiar tenderness with which his friend regarded the girl whose story he was telling, and he felt the interest he already took in her growing and deepening. The sudden death of the mother, the fact that her fears had been realized—Mr Lafone had married again, a woman to whom none of the qualities which the doctor had so freely dealt out to her predecessor could be attributed—seemed to foreshadow a life of trouble and difficulty for the child left behind. He felt his own heart a little of the enthusiasm with the absence of which the doctor had twitted him just now, and an impulse to espouse Helen's cause without stopping to inquire if it were a worthy one.

Dr Hazlitt interrupted his meditations by saying, with one of his queer half smiles, "You will say I am not telling you Helen's story at all, but her mother's. A little patience. At the time of which I speak she was a very tiny creature, of small importance to anybody, and least of all, I think, to her father, who, of course, had wanted a heir. He was inconceivable at first—you know the style, would see no one, speak to no one; he quarrelled with his mother-in-law, on the ground that she had not left her daughter so soon her life would have been spared, and behaved altogether in a rather unkind fashion. At the first end of three months he had been persuaded to come out of his seclusion and to travel. At the end of a year he wrote to have the house made ready for himself and his new bride."

"He had never been able to bear the sight of the child after his wife's death, and I verily believe that in his wanderings abroad he had forgotten her; for I shall never forget his face when he saw her again. I was present at the time. One thing I am certain of—he had either forgotten her, or some other feeling never mentioned her to his wife; and from what you have seen of that lady's character, I don't think her acquaintance you may judge for yourself if she was pleased either at this omission or her discovery. I dare say the child was the cause of many a private scene; but, in fact, she may have made very little difference to them, for they hardly ever saw her. She was not until their absence from home, when she was up to Helen came prominently into notice, and became the object of her stepmother's jealousy and ill-will. She is one of those women whose maternal instincts never develop unless they become mothers themselves, and then their affection is so strong that they will do anything to save their own children. She has also an immense amount of family pride and lofty ideas concerning the position of the eldest of a family. She could never forgive Helen for having been before her own children in coming into the world. It was as much a matter of fact of her being the first, as if it were a matter of feeling. She was much inspired her dislike. She tried to ignore her, and could not. The servants are all fond of Helen; her nurse was an admirable woman, chosen by her mother, and very tenacious of the child's rights. When her mistress spoke of 'Miss Lafone,' meaning evidently her own daughter, nurse would coddle her in the quietest, most respectful, and at the same time most unequivocal manner. I have heard her do it again and again. As the children grew older the position became more complicated. What Alice was permitted to do, Helen was not permitted to do. If she was seventeen she was sufficiently instructed to leave the schoolroom, it would from their point of view have been ridiculous to keep Helen there, who was two years older and had ten times the intelligence of the other girl. Then all their friends would come in, distinguishing between 'Miss Lafone' and 'Miss Alice'; it was very painful. There was never any sympathy between Helen and her stepmother—that you must have seen at once. There is no need to go further into detail; you know the people and must see for yourself how a hundred times a day causes of disagreement would arise."

"Of course," replied Percival, reflectively. Then after a pause he went on. "All that you have said is comprehensible enough as regards Mrs Lafone, but it does not account to me for Mrs Lafone's indifference to her own child, the daughter of a woman whom you say she adored."

"The very reason. He knows as well as I do that he failed in his duty to the child from the very beginning. He knows that his first wife was to his security as gold to his copper. He feels that he ought to have been true to her memory, and he had not the strength to resist this woman's attractions. He knows he has fallen, and he would like to forget that he ever stood higher. Helen is a continual reminder, don't you understand, if you have any knowledge of human nature you can supply abundant reasons; to which you may add this other one—What does a man now-a-days in Lafone's position know of the character of his daughter?"

"True," said Percival, and was then silent. The thoughts arising from all he had heard, but he was as yet rather chaotic, but he felt that when he had arranged them, and should be able to follow the course suggested by the doctor, he would be in possession of the most interesting occupation.

"Then your theory is," he said presently, "that the whole difficulty arises from an inability on each side to read the character of the other?"

"Partly only; I think Helen reads the others pretty well; but they have not the most elementary comprehension of character. If you were to go to them for information, they would tell you no one could get on with Helen, she is 'so queer and crochety.'"

"And is she?"

"Look and see. She has crochets, of course. Who that is worth anything to bed. I put on my hat and came up here."

"The doctor did not speak for a moment then he said—
"See what a bad girl you are. Upon my word I think I shall have to abandon you."
She said nothing, but looked over the bay, where the tide was now high; and the little rowing boats were rocking lightly from side to side. As she looked a smile came into her eyes and curled the corner of her mouth. She said half aloud—
"Thirty-one."
"Thirty-one what?"
"Thirty-one times you have told me you would abandon me, and you never do it. That is, counting from the time I can remember. I don't know how often you said it when I was a baby."
"But my poor, dear child, don't you see how difficult you make things for yourself? Why must you answer them at all? You are not going to marry this man, and they cannot make you do it. So why not let them talk on? Of course Mrs Lafone says disagreeable things, so does a snake bite whenever it can; but you know all the disagreeable things in the world don't alter the truth that you were right and they wrong; that their ideal is a miserably low one, and yours so high above them as they cannot see it, and eventually deny its existence. Try for my sake, Helen, to govern your impulses, and to be content with the consciousness of right."
"If I could do anything it would be for you," she replied, in the low subdued tone in which she had spoken all along. "But you cannot tell how hard it is to be silent when she says these things, and I get so tired of being always on the defensive, always fighting."
She had quite forgotten Moore's presence. All she was conscious of was her one friend threatened to abandon her. Her voice shook and she was perilously near tears.

"Now, Helen, that is not fair. You know as well as I do that I was only in fun."
"Yes, I know; but everything seems of so much more importance than it ever did before."
"It is the weather; it has been very hot, and you are tired and upset. Bear up through this evening, and I promise you things will look brighter in the morning."
He took her hand in his and held it tightly as though to give her courage. Apparently he succeeded, for she returned the pressure, and said word bravely—
"Yes, that is true. I am very glad I met you. I only behaved so foolishly, I expect, because I had not seen you for so many days. Don't let it be so long again, doctor."
"I have been very busy—too busy even to call at the Thwaite. But this evening I am at liberty, except for Moore, and he must go home with you. I will walk home with you, and I think we will go now, for, in spite of the protecting warmth of which you spoke just now, I am afraid you run a risk of catching cold. The wind is now quite cool."
"Very well, we will go now," said Helen, raising herself from the fence against which she had been leaning.
"Moore," said Dr Hazlitt, "come on; we are going."
"Going where?" asked the young man, rousing himself from his meditations.
"Back to the Thwaite. When we set out we intended, I believe, to return to my cottage, but Helen points out to me that I have allowed an unduly long time to elapse since I last showed myself at home, so I am going to repair my fault now."
"Good gracious!" ejaculated Moore. "You were there three days ago, I know it for a fact."
"Helen says three days is too long, and at any rate I am going to take her home now. You can come or not as you like."
"Oh, I am ready," turning to follow them as he spoke, for the doctor, still holding Helen's hand in his, had already begun to take the homeward way.
(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Crisp News
Want the
mastic
The edit
land recent
the cause of
live in accord
pleas advoc
every kind
and as each
of for peopl
the result w
was fatal.

The Anst
of Chicago
to build in
beer at the
this day w
declined to
Subsequent
of their ma
was sober,
them by ing
fifty ac bar.

We discov
Commercial
largest hotel
each head
barbers we
the stairway
to jump fro
clothes to a
proprietor.
Subsequent
and third and
are comple
will have t
body of Clu
ruins. He
and afterwa

We ought
courage un
doubtful in
of a centur
has been i
through th
nounced th
that disas
of testimon
per bottle.

It is stat
Col., is a
Humphrey
there stain
the town by
to gather in
press them
rey collect
to give the
town, put t
them to H
to Milwau
these collec
ed them. M
Mount Hor
and sent th
finish out
further ord
caused the
prairie. He
playing an
orchestra

Serofano
and Catarri
Ayer's Sar
medicine it
know, if it
eradiate
Fowler, M

The high
have been
and sharpe
matic delit
engaging t
tions are b
ner of star
consequences
utterances
from the v
We can
result will
table both
seems fit
speaking p
the noble
their soult
victories.

because al
love her.
former his
dull lasai
change. A
was suffer
fiar to her
lives drift
cruel! I
write Pr
restored
my lady's
affliction
curing th
will give
by drugg
from the
ed. See

The cler
son, and
secure i
who hav
Decker,
Thayer,
met, fir
Eckley f
er and I

That ment
o health
blood fi
the bes

but if y
headac
of blor
or any
at once
"Pleas
efficient
reoting
and bo
able to
ing.

Want of Sleep

Is sending thousands annually to the insane asylum; and the doctors say this trouble is alarmingly on the increase. The usual remedies, while they may give temporary relief, are likely to do more harm than good. What is needed is an Alternative and Blood-purifier. Ayer's Sarsaparilla is incomparably the best. It corrects those disturbances in the circulation which cause sleeplessness, gives increased vitality, and restores the nervous system to a healthy condition.

Rev. T. G. A. Coit, agent of the Mass. Home Missionary Society, writes that his stomach was out of order, his sleep very often disturbed, and some impurity of the blood manifest; but that a perfect cure was obtained by the use of Ayer's Sarsaparilla.

Frederick V. Pratt, 424 Washington street, Boston, writes: "My daughter was prostrated with nervous debility. Ayer's Sarsaparilla restored her to health."
William F. Bowker, Erie, Pa., was cured of nervousness and sleeplessness by taking Ayer's Sarsaparilla for about two months, during which time his weight increased over twenty pounds.

Ayer's Sarsaparilla,
PREPARED BY
Dr. J. C. Ayer & Co., Lowell, Mass.
Sold by all Druggists. Price 25¢; six bottles, \$1.