

been so stupid all day as not to hear what the world was saying? I haven't a doubt but that half Shingleby is by this time telling the other half that I have absconded with all Mrs. Brookes' money—and perhaps that they always thought me that sort of fellow!"

Tremblingly Stella put her hand upon his sleeve, and looking up in his face said, "Nonsense! They can't be so wicked as to accuse *you* of anything bad!"

For that trustful, indignant glance, that involuntary touch, in which he dared to read a love undiscovered even by itself, Guy Ryder would have risked and borne much more than already he had ventured and suffered.

Meanwhile Mrs. Brookes, after lying in a state of stupor for hours, at last regained a sort of consciousness, only to show that the shock had completely unsettled her reason, and that her memory was gone. Then both Guy and his friends understood that evil days were in store for him. She was the only person who was fully acquainted with the truth—always excepting the Countess Helen and Carol Clive, who could scarcely be expected to disclose it, and for whom, besides, all search had thus far proved fruitless. Whether or not Mrs. Brookes would ever recover her faculties was very doubtful.

As to the investigations with regard to the crime, these were carried on without intermission, but without bringing any discoveries to light. That no such mining company as that in which Mrs. Brookes had been induced to invest had ever been formed Mr. Keen had from the first been aware. And that the scrip which Clive had, with much adroitness, secured and carried off, must have been of a bogus description was equally certain. It also became a pretty well-assured fact that Mrs. Brookes' bank-book, together with both Clive's receipt and the letter of acknowledgment, which Guy declared that he had given to her, and had seen handed over by the infatuated woman to Clive, had also accompanied the brother and sister in their well-timed flight. That letter, in the existence of which, by the way, a good many people expressed a disbelief, might, if found, have gone far towards dispersing the dark cloud which hung over the clergyman. But it really seemed as if no stone had been left unturned to destroy all evidence which told against the real culprits, and in the curate's favour.

"Why should they have chosen you as the object of their spite?" Mr. Keen asked his client, in whom, happily, his own faith was unchanged, one day.

Guy coloured like a girl, and hesitated.

"They say one should have no secrets from one's lawyer," he answered at last; "but I must trust you to keep this one strictly to yourself. Caryl Clive professed to care for Stella, who wouldn't have anything to do with him. And he may have fancied——"

"Let us hope the fancy was correct," was the quiet reply.

But it was only in his unguarded moments that Guy now permitted himself to indulge in loving aspirations with regard to Stella. For how could he, a man with a ban upon him, and bearing a stained name, ever venture to think of marriage.

Already he had given up all exercise of his sacred office. Upon the Sunday after Mrs. Brookes' seizure indeed, when all the town was talking of the affair and bandying his name from lip to lip, and before he had himself really begun to realize the position, he had gone to St. Olave's, prepared to occupy the pulpit as had been announced, according to local custom, in the weekly papers. But that was the end, for in the vestry he had learned the truth.

"Do you think you had better attempt to preach, Mr. Ryder?" inquired Captain Seaton, one of the churchwardens, coming in suddenly, with an anxious, almost alarmed face. "The church is packed. There isn't standing-room. And as some of the very rough characters are present I almost think it would be prudent——"

Before he could finish the sentence the Vicar, a short, stout little man, with whom his eloquent curate was no favourite, bustled in, rather, it must be confessed, to Captain Seaton's relief. Mr. Dwight, who suffered from an inconvenient shortness of vision, passed Guy without noticing either himself or his agitation.

"What's all this about, Seaton? Such crowds and noise—quite unseemly! But alas! Of course one understands. Most perplexing it is! I can scarcely turn Ryder adrift until things have gone further. Yet how is one to allow a probable criminal to officiate? It would make a scandal in the Diocese! Mrs. Dwight says that I——"

With a look of indignation that no one present ever forgot Guy interrupted—