

UP AND DOWN THE LADDER.

By WILLIAM GILBERT,

AUTHOR OF "DR PROFUNDUS," "DR. AUSTIN'S GUESTS," etc

CHAPTER XII.

(Continued.)

By mere chance Mr. Braham, accompanied by his clerk came to the door at the same moment as the doctor, with whom he was acquainted. As soon as they were ushered into the parlor, Mr. Braham said,

"Possibly I may want your services, doctor, to witness the old lady's will; as it is just as well on occasions of this kind that some one should witness it besides the solicitor's clerk."

"I do not think she has made her will a bit too soon" said the doctor, "for I very much suspect a very few days will terminate her existence."

The doctor, with the solicitor and his clerk, were now ushered into the old lady's bedroom, who was propped up in the bed to receive them. She seemed in a lethargic state, and hardly to be aware of their presence.

"I have brought that document for you to sign, ma'am," said Mr. Braham. "Perhaps you would have no objection to the doctor witnessing it?"

She made no reply to his question, but looked inquiringly into his face, and followed his movements with her eyes, as he made preparations for placing the will before her, after reading it over to her. He now dipped a pen in the ink and placed it in her hand. In a moment all her intelligence seemed to return to her, and turning to him she said, "Where do I sign it?"

"There, ma'am," said Mr. Braham, pointing to the place.

The old lady's mind again seemed for the moment to fail her, but recovering herself, she began to write. After completing a few letters, her mental powers again sank, and the pen fell from her hand. The doctor and the solicitor glanced at the will, and found that, instead of attempting to sign her name, she had commenced the words—"Guy's Hospital."

"I cannot witness that will," said the doctor.

"Nor will I ask you to do so," said the lawyer; "it is too late."

Symptoms of fainting, from the trifling exertion she had made, seemed to be coming on, and the servant and the doctor again replaced her in her original position in the bed. Mr. Braham now made preparations for leaving the house with his clerk. On quitting the room, the doctor followed him into the passage.

"That old woman will never be able to sign the will," said the latter to Mr. Braham. "Her mind is completely gone, and she will not recover it. Here is another instance how necessary it is for people to attend to affairs of that kind while they are in health."

"As a general rule, I am of your opinion," said Mr. Braham; "but this is not altogether a case in point."

"How so?" inquired the doctor.

"Because she made a will when she was in health, and which is still in existence; much more just, perhaps, than the one I to-day brought her to sign. After all it has been a most fortunate affair, as it is, for that young lady who acts as her companion; but these are professional matters, and possibly ought not to be talked about."

The lawyer now left, taking with him the unsigned will, and the doctor returned to the sick-room. He found his patient in a state of total insensibility—the vital powers acting slowly and almost imperceptibly.

"If she wakes," he said to the servant, "give her some of that jelly with wine. There is no use teasing her with any more medicine. A few days, and perhaps hours, will now terminate her life, and all we can do is to keep her alive as long as we can, and make her death as easy as possible. I will call and see her again in the evening."

When Maria returned home, she found that a terrible change had taken place in the old lady's appearance during her absence. There was no mistaking the fact that her death was rapidly approaching. When the doctor called, he told her that she must not be alarmed if it occurred during the night. The old woman, however, lingered on in the same comatose state until the following day, when her respiration, which had been gradually subsiding, suddenly ceased, and she had gone to her long account.

CHAPTER XIII.

ROBERT MARRIED AND SETTLED.

The doctor and the lawyer were the only persons (for it would be absurd to call them mourners) who attended the funeral of Mrs. Gibbons. It was anything but what is usually called a sad funeral, yet to those who think more deeply than the mere looker-on, such funerals are in truth the saddest of all. The ceremony was, in the strictest sense of the word, performed. The regrets of no human being followed her to the grave, nor were any pretended. The doctor and lawyer conversed about the ordinary affairs of the day on their road to the cemetery. The clergyman seemed to perform the service in the most mechanical manner, and when all was over, and the carriage left the cemetery to conduct the doctor and lawyer back to the house, they continued the conversation in which they had been previously engaged. On entering the house, Miss Maria Smith received them, and conducted them into the sitting-room, where lunch was prepared, and after having partaken of some refreshment, the lawyer requested Maria to take the old lady's keys and open her writing-desk, as in it she would find her will. Maria did as she was directed, and placed the will in the lawyer's hand, who, immediately breaking the seal, commenced reading it. It was short and explicit in the extreme. She left two legacies, of one hundred pounds each, to the lawyer and to a doctor who had formerly attended her, five hundred pounds to a Mr. Mc-

Intyre, whom she nominated as her executor, and the residue of her property to him, in trust for her niece, Maria Smith, which was to be settled upon her apart from the control of any husband, and which, in case she were married, was to descend to her children.

Mr. Braham by no means hurried himself in bringing Mrs. Gibbons's affairs to a termination. He, of course, found several obscure points in the will, which, in themselves, to a non-professional eye, were as clear as noon-day; but on which, in the interest of the trustee, he found it necessary to ask the opinion of the court; and to this the trustee, being an exceedingly nervous man, offered no objection. The result was, that more than a twelve-month had elapsed before Mrs. Gibbons's affairs were completed, and then Maria found herself the possessor of the interest of fifteen thousand pounds, which was placed in government securities, in the name of her trustee.

The manner of Mrs. Gibbons's death of course caused great surprise, but no sorrow, to Mr. and Mrs. Murphy and Robert. Maria remained in the old lady's house till the goods had been disposed of by public auction; and it was a matter of some little difficulty where she would reside, etiquette somewhat objecting to the idea of living in the same house with her lover. Mrs. Macmurdo, with whose husband Robert was on terms of great intimacy, removed the difficulty by inviting Maria to take up her residence with her until a sufficient time had elapsed before the celebration of her marriage with Robert Evans. Maria willingly accepted the invitation, though somewhat to Robert's annoyance, as he much preferred her remaining at Mrs. Murphy's. However, Maria's abode in the house with Mrs. Macmurdo was not without its advantage. Robert was a daily visitor there, and of course thrown into continual communication with Mr. Macmurdo and his wife, and the result was, that the intimacy which had existed between them now became much greater.

Arrangements were now to be made for the wedding; the first of which was the choice of a residence. Mrs. Murphy no longer made any objection to Robert living apart from them, as she saw clearly, that not only was her own house too small to accommodate them, but that the position Robert was now taking in society necessitated his residing in a more fashionable locality. Even poor Murphy, who it was at first feared would be shocked at the idea of his adopted son living apart from him, assented to it; at the same time hoping they would not reside at such a distance as would preclude the possibility of his visiting the new married couple as often as he might wish. This was readily assented to by both Robert and Maria. They chose a handsome house in Harley Street, and were partly blessed in their choice from the fact that Murphy would be able to visit them as often as he pleased by the City Road omnibuses; as, from some inexplicable reason, the old man still held that cabs were an extravagance, and that it was useless to throw money away on them when you could go as quickly and far more cheaply by an omnibus.

The furnishing now commenced, and Maria Smith and Mrs. Macmurdo continued daily in a state of great excitement, and undergoing considerable fatigue as well. Robert left the whole labor of making purchases entirely in their hands, he being too much occupied with his business to enter into such matters. By degrees all got into order, and the house, which was large, commodious, and splendidly furnished, was at last declared fit to receive them, and the fixing of the wedding-day, and preparation of the wedding dresses, now alone remained to be accomplished before the ceremony should take place. Maria was somewhat puzzled in the choice of her bridesmaids. The only young people she knew, besides a niece of Mrs. Macmurdo's, who visited her aunt frequently, were the employees in the house of business in Bishopsgate Street, and, as she had not been on terms of intimacy with these since she had left the establishment, added to the fact of her now moving in a different circle of acquaintance, she did not choose to ask them to undertake a duty of the kind. Mrs. Macmurdo, however, relieved her from her embarrassment. She proposed inviting the daughter of Mr. Wilkinson to act with her own niece on the occasion. To this Maria only demurred from the fear that a request of the kind to almost a stranger might be considered as an act of indiscretion; but Mrs. Macmurdo promising to take the responsibility upon herself, she offered no further objection. Mrs. Macmurdo called the same day on Miss Wilkinson, and found, as she had anticipated, that not the slightest hesitation was made by either father or daughter. The fact of Miss Wilkinson becoming bridesmaid to Maria, and the frequent visits it necessitated, brought on a greater intimacy also between Robert Evans and Mr. Wilkinson than had hitherto existed.

The day fixed for the wedding had at length arrived, and splendid indeed were the preparations made for the occasion. The ladies, when dressed, were something magnificent. They looked remarkably well, and—seemed to know it. A considerable crowd had collected in the church, as is usual on occasions of the kind, and the ceremony passed off most satisfactorily, the bride shedding no tears, and the bridegroom appearing to be as happy a man as could be found in the world. The ceremony being over the party returned to the house in Wimpole Street, where a splendid *dejeuner* awaited them. The breakfast passed off much in the fashion of wedding-breakfasts in general. The same toasts were drunk, and nothing occurred particularly worthy of notice, with the exception of poor Murphy, who, when the health of the bridegroom's father and mother was proposed (for although the real connexion between them was perfectly well known, every one treated Murphy and his wife with the same respect as if they had been Robert's own parents), attempted to speak, but burst into tears instead, and was led from the room by his wife. When the bride left the room to change her dress for the one she was to wear on her journey (for the young people were to spend the honeymoon in Paris), Mrs. Murphy

requested that she and her husband might bid Robert and his wife good-bye without being seen by the others. To say the truth, the poor woman, now that the subject she had been under before the guests, and which had restrained her feelings during breakfast, was over, was scarcely less affected at the idea of parting with her dear boy, as she called him, than was poor Murphy himself. Maria promised that they should see them alone before leaving the house, and as soon as she was ready they went into the room to Murphy and his wife. The leave-taking was sad and painful, especially on the part of poor Murphy. "God bless you, my boy," he said, shaking him warmly by the hand; "if you never see me again, think of me sometimes when I am gone. You have been a dear, good child to me, and I love you very fondly." Robert and his wife now left them to take leave of the other guests, and then started for their journey, followed by the good wishes of all; the time-hallowed ceremony of throwing the slipper not being forgotten on the occasion.

If Murphy had feared he should never see Robert again, it was totally without reason, for he did so very often. When Robert and Maria had returned from their wedding trip, and taken up their residence in Harley Street, it was poor Murphy's daily employment (for he had entirely relinquished all business matters, his mind not being in a state to entertain them) to take the omnibus by the City Road to Harley Street, and there to remain till it was time for him to return to dinner. At first his frequent visits were somewhat irksome to Maria, who, though naturally very fond of the old man, had her domestic duties to attend to; and it was exceedingly difficult, if not fatiguing, to keep up a conversation with him, as he generally answered only in monosyllables to any remark she might make to him. At last the difficulty was overcome by the old man himself. One morning, when he appeared more lucid than usual, he said to her—"My dear, I am sure it must be a great inconvenience to you to be sitting here with me all the morning, when you have other affairs to attend to. Now, don't make a stranger of me; I am quite happy sitting here by myself, and seeing what you and my dear boy have come to. You leave me alone, and go about your own business—forget I am in the house if you can. All I ask you is, that I may see you and Robert every Saturday afternoon. I shall then be quite happy; and if anything happens that I am too ill to come and see you, you must come and see me instead."

"I have but one alteration to make to that agreement," said Maria, "and that is, instead of your coming here on Saturday afternoons, that Robert and I pay you a visit instead. Now, I won't have you say anything to the contrary. I shall do as you tell me in minding the affairs of the house and leaving you to yourself when I am busy, and you must obey me on the other point."

The old man seemed highly flattered at the proposition, and accepted it without further demur. He now daily continued his visits, and after Maria had seen him, she generally left him in the dining-room with a newspaper, going in occasionally during his stay. He thus became no impediment to the domestic arrangements of her house, and all went on smoothly and regularly. Every Saturday Robert and his wife visited Mr. and Mrs. Murphy, and not a little pleased were the old couple to receive this attention from them, Mrs. Murphy especially so, as her feminine pride was greatly flattered by the sight of Robert's handsome brotigham drawing up at her door, and causing considerable excitement amongst the neighbors, who counted in general but few carriage company in the list of their acquaintance.

Business transactions now went on with Robert in a most satisfactory manner, and their magnitude continued to increase. He had now taken an office in Great George Street, and was daily rising into importance. He had taken Mr. Walter Moss into his office as confidential clerk, and a very useful agent he found him, as he was perfectly conversant with the whole management of a house of business of the kind. Walter Moss had quitted Mr. Macmurdo's office without the slightest disagreement having arisen between them. It has before been stated that the appointment of Mr. Moss was but temporary, during the absence of the head clerk on some business on the Continent. This gentleman had now returned, and as the appointment of second clerk was hardly worth Mr. Moss's holding, he gave notice to Mr. Macmurdo that he was about to leave him. Mr. Macmurdo had, of course, no objections to offer, nay, he even admitted that Mr. Moss would be able to do much better; and suggested to him, if he had no other employment in view, to engage with Mr. Evans, who he knew was much in want of a clerk on whom he could depend, and who would be thoroughly up in the business. This was precisely what Mr. Walter Moss intended doing, although he did not mention the circumstance to Mr. Macmurdo, but thanked him for the kind suggestion, and said he would at once apply to Mr. Evans on the subject. He did so, and was immediately engaged by Robert as his head clerk; and as soon as his time had expired with Mr. Macmurdo he was duly installed in the office of Robert Evans, with two junior clerks under him.

(To be continued.)

There are two modes of establishing one's reputation: to be praised by honest men, and to be abused by rogues. It is best, however, to secure the former, because it will be invariably accompanied by the latter. His calumny is not only the greatest benefit a rogue can confer upon us, but it is also the only service that he will perform for nothing.

The Bell Telephone Company, it is said, has compromised with the London Postoffice, agreeing to pay from 12 to 20 per cent. royalty for the privilege of using the invention in London. It will probably increase the tolls to meet the tax.