

ONLY A PICTURE.

A glance at best that cannot fade or alter,
A passing gleam that Genius seized and drew;
A hint of faith that cannot fall or falter,
A glimpse of love that cannot be untrue;
A gracious smile where twilight shadows gather
And morning sunbeams are so late to fall,
A living dream the daylight cannot shatter—
A picture only, hanging on the wall.

A look of pity for each weary failure,
A beam of hope for the weak hour of need;
A ray of cheer for every brave endeavour,
The patient purpose and the baffled deed;
One earthly tie no touch of change can sever,
One sweet, abiding presence over all;
One pure ideal that is pure forever—
One little picture hanging on the wall.

The precious gift no envious fate hath taken,
A friendship no suspicion e'er can soil;
A love that no satiety can weaken,
And fame no idle gossip can despoil;
One steadfast truth that never can be shaken,
One radiant joy that cannot pale or pall;
Sweet eyes no tear can dim, no frown can darken—
All beaming from a picture on the wall.

O tender eyes! will you but smile as brightly,
When I shall fall to see you through my tears,
And when I turn to leave you, stumbling faintly,
Bowed underneath the burden of the years?
O Father! when I wander, groping faintly,
Among the shades of death that round me fall,
Shall I yet see some angel smiling saintly,
As in this little picture on the wall?

JULIA M. HOLMES.

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TAKEN AT THE FLOOD.

A NEW NOVEL.

By the Author of "Lady Audley's Secret," "Strangers and Pilgrims," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XLVIII.—Continued.

"Would you like to go back, Edmund?"

He shuddered at the question.

"Honestly, no, mother. The old scenes would be hateful. But I don't want to be separated from you, and yet it seems a hard thing to ask such a home-loving mother as you to join my wanderings."

"I can have no home without you, Edmund. I am ready to go with you wherever you like. I am a sturdy old woman, you know, and shall not give you much trouble with ill health or vapours, or anything of that kind; and little as I have travelled I don't think I shall make a very bad traveller if I can only get accustomed to the sea," added Mrs. Standen with a wry face.

"You dear lion-hearted mother, I will take care that our wanderings are made easy for you. I did think of wintering in Algiers—a splendid climate, interesting scenery," Mrs. Standen shivered involuntarily. "But if you will be my companion I'll abandon all idea of Africa." Mrs. Standen breathed more freely. Africa to her mind meant wastes of torrid sand, and grim yelping blackamoors dancing round the helpless traveller, a circle of ferocious murderers. "What would you say to our wintering in Rome, or Florence?"

Mrs. Standen brightened visibly, and kissed her son's wasted hand.

"I think I should like Florence best, dear," she said, "I have heard there are plenty of nice English people there."

"Yes," answered Edmund, "and when English people travel their chief delight seems to be to meet with other English people. They would like the Continent extremely well if they could exterminate the natives and convert the more agreeable half of Europe into one large Brighton."

Edmund's convalescence was rapid, a fact which the doctor attributed to Mrs. Standen's nursing even more than to his own skill. As soon as he was strong enough to bear the journey mother and son went on to Nice. Thence, after a fortnight's sojourn, to Geneva, and thence, late in November, to Florence. That tranquil close of the declining year was a time of sorrowful thoughts for Edmund, but not of despair. All his old boyish love for his mother came back to him in their reunion. He was pleased with her delight in the scenes they beheld together; pleased by her keen interest in simple things, and all those glimpses of village life and unsophisticated nature which their travels afforded them. Neither spoke of the past, or speculated upon the future. For the mother the sweetness of the present was all sufficient. She had her son once more hers and hers only, and she was content to leave the future to Providence.

"I will never try to rule his life again," she thought; "I was too anxious that he should marry Esther, and see what came of it! Misery for both of them. It is enough for me to have him for my own once again, and to be sure of his affection. The happiness I desire for him will come sooner or later."

CHAPTER XLIX.

FIVE YEARS LATER.

Five years are gone since Edmund Standen and his mother wintered in Florence, and Sir Aubrey still reigns at Perriam, no longer the helpless, paralytic old man, who could only creep about between the sustaining arms of nurse and valet, but a hale old gentleman who rides a quiet cob, vice the spirited Splinter, round the home farm three or four days a week, while his chubby six-year-old son accompanies him on a fat Exmoor pony.

This wonderful restoration is more or less Shadrack Bain's achievement. It was Mr. Bain who heard of the mud-baths in Germany; Mr. Bain who accompanied Sir Aubrey to the place of those baths; Mr. Bain who was the moving spirit of Sir Aubrey's cure. German physicians, German mud, and German water were but secondary agents. Mr. Bain's energy was the motive power that set the machinery going.

Some trace of the old weakness on the left side still remains; but despite of this, in mind and body the baronet has become a new man. It is just possible that his delight in watching his son's growth from infancy to childhood, his deep pride in the thought that a son of his will inherit Perriam, and maintain the good old Tory traditions of the place, may have helped the German doctors to work their cure.

Perhaps Sir Aubrey Perriam, in this Indian summer of his age, enjoys as near an approach to perfect happiness as heaven ever grants to humanity. One bitter memory hangs like a distant thunder cloud above the horizon of his life, but he is wise enough to shut his eyes to that cloud for the most part, and it is not often the dark hour comes upon him—that gloomy hour when those who know him best know that he is thinking of his wicked wife.

His boy is the pride and pleasures of his days. Already he has engaged a tutor—an Oxford Master of Arts—to train that tender plant, so that its earliest shoots may be wisely directed. He cannot endure the thought of public schools, and football matches, and it is to be feared that the youthful St. John, brought up at Perriam Place in the care of a private tutor, will be deficient in that athleticism, which is the one virtue modern society copies from the Spartans.

The father watches his boy with almost maternal tenderness, and is miserable on those winter mornings when St. John trots away on his Exmoor pony to see the hounds throw off, under his tutor's wing. The tutor is anxious the boy should be manly, and the father approves the tutor's desire; yet would fain guard his treasure as carefully as a miser cherishes an unset diamond, a gem of liquid light, which may slip through his fingers unawares while he gloats over his treasure.

The county has never quite understood how the brother who was supposed to be dead has come to life again.

It is one of those dark pages of family history, which must for ever remain mysterious. But the county has not the slightest doubt as to the one fact that this is the real Sir Aubrey. Happily the Baronet has grown almost his old self since the renovating process of the German baths. He dresses as carefully as of old, and but for an elderly stoop in the shoulders, looks almost as young a man as the Sir Aubrey who honoured the Heddingham school feast with his illustrious presence seven years ago.

Mr. Bain basks in the sunlight of this master's favour, and grows more prosperous every year, always winding his way deeper and wider into the soil of Monkhampton, till half the houses in that prosperous town own Shadrack Bain as ground landlord. His elder daughters have married well—his sons are an honour to him; Dawker serves his father with zeal that knows not weariness, and the younger grammar-school boys bring home handsomely bound volumes as prizes—such novelties in literature as the poetic works of Milton, Cowper, and Thompson, to adorn the rosewood lloo table in the family drawing-room.

Altogether Mr. Bain is a man who seems to have profited more than his fellows by the blindness of fortune. Yet, sometimes, even in the midst of his prosperity, he thinks with a regretful sigh of that lordly pleasure-house which he once built for his soul—that airy edifice of his day dreams—which he had hoped to see realised in substantial brick and mortar. He remembers how near he had seemed to victory, and how utterly he failed; how his wisdom had been but foolishness beside a woman's cunning.

"Things turned out well for me, however, after all," he reflects, after that survey of the one failure that has disfigured his successful life—a failure only known to himself and the dead. "I am in a better position than I ever was in before with Sir Aubrey. My income increases every year. I don't see how any man can ask more than that from Providence. And if I cared to buy myself an estate, and call myself Squire, I'm rich enough to do it."

CHAPTER L.

THE PURPLE LIGHT OF LOVE.

While poor Sir Aubrey Perriam's existence drifts by in a repose almost as tranquil as that of the lotus eaters on their sunlit isle, life has serious duties and responsibilities for Mr. Standen, Conservative member for Monkhampton, a rising young politician of the new school.

Edmund Standen has not returned to the Bank. At his mother's request he has abandoned that commercial career which served to occupy a mind too active to endure idleness. He has found another and a higher vocation in the House of Commons, where he comes out sharply upon financial questions, and perplexes honourable gentlemen whose weak side is arithmetic, by searching questions and rapid calculations. He is great on taxation, and is ever ready to assert the wrongs of those shorn lambs of the legislature, those helpless sufferers from the burden of the income tax, whose greatest misfortune is to have half a million or so amenable to assessment.

Mr. Standen has a small house in one of the nice old-fashioned streets near Berkley-square, where his wife is at home every Thursday evening, to some of the pleasantest and cleverest people in London, and where Mr. Standen and two or three chosen friends sometimes seek relief after a dull evening in the House, at a bright little supper table in the cosy dining-room, and discuss the blunders and general idiocy of friends and foes over a lobster salad and a bottle of Madeira.

Yes, Edmund is happy. That union of which Mrs. Standen dreamed years ago, when her son was a schoolboy, has come to pass after all, and Edmund is as completely devoted to his true wife Esther, as if the fatal attachment which overshadowed his youth were no more than the memory of a dream. Two years of foreign travel, and much hard study in the tranquil pauses of his wanderings, served to lay the ghost of that buried love. He came back to England heart free, and brought with him a treatise on finance, which has won him some renown as a political economist, and helped him to acquire a position in the House of Commons.

During those two years of exile Edmund and Esther never met. Miss Rochdale remained at Dean House, the ruling spirit of order in that model household, quietly doing her duty visiting the sick, feeding the poor, educating Mrs. Sargent's children, who adore her, joining in the small festivities of the neighbourhood, and uttering no complaint against a life which must have been somewhat joyless and monotonous. Throughout that period of absence Edmund had rarely heard the name of Esther, so carefully did his mother avoid any allusion to her adopted daughter. Only when he ventured to inquire if Miss Rochdale were well and happy was the name spoken that had once been so familiar.

On his first visit to Dean House after his return from the Continent Mr. Standen looked round for Esther and missed her. He was told that she had gone to Wexmouth with the children; Mrs. Sargent having been afraid the sea air would be too strong for her.

"The sea always gives me my nervous headache, you know, Edmund," said Ellen apologetically. "So dear Essie was kind enough to take the children."

"She was always kind," replied Edmund moodily.

It vexed him to think that Esther had run away in order to avoid meeting him. That visit to Wexmouth could only have been a pretext. One week in September would do as well as another for the children's sea-side trip—and why choose the week of his return, unless she really wished to avoid him.

"Have I made myself so detestable to her that she cannot endure the sight of me, even after all I have suffered?" thought Mr. Standen. "She used to be so full of pity, especially for wrong-doers."

There was one question which he wanted to ask Esther—a question that had been in his mind, more or less, ever since his illness at Marseilles. A question which he could only ask when they two were face to face.

The thought of this question worried him a good deal the first day or two at Dean House. It took such a hold upon his mind that after three days of that tranquil home life—after having admired all Miss Rochdale's small improvements in poultry-yard, dairy, and greenhouses, the new fernery at the end of the shrubbery, and a dozen other evidences of taste and industry which testified to the care of the gentle home-goddess—Edmund's patience would endure no longer, and he startled his mother on the fourth morning by announcing that he was going to Wexmouth to see Esther and the children.

"Those scraps of humanity must have grown out of all knowledge in the last two years," he said, artfully insinuating thereby that his chief anxiety was to see his small nephew and nieces.

"Georgie is growing a fine boy, Edmund," said his sister, proudly, "and so like his dear papa. He has the Sargent nose."

"A fine prominent beak. Looks as if it was made on purpose for a barrister's wig," replied Mr. Standen irreverently.

He was off to Wexmouth by a little branch line from Monkhampton before noon, and arrived at that tranquil and retired watering-place at one o'clock. Wexmouth is not extensive, and instead of going to Miss Rochdale's lodgings on Light-house Hill, Edmund strolled along the beach, taking his chance of finding her among the idlers who were scattered in groups here and there, upon the strip of alternate sand and shingle between the blue water and the sea-wall. The tide was out, and the juvenile patrons of Wexmouth were having a good time with their pails and spades.

No one would stay in-doors on such a day as this, thought Edmund—the sky one cloudless blue, the sea a sunlit lake. He went on to the utmost limits of Wexmouth, feeling very sure that he should find Esther by and by.

Yes, there she was. A lonely little figure seated in the shadow of an old fishing boat, reading. He knew her ever so far away. The small graceful form; the pure white dress; the dark soft hair under the little sailor hat; the Esther of old times—the Esther he had once so narrowly escaped loving with all his heart. Too late to love her now; gentle and unselfish as she was, he could hardly ask her to accept a love which would seem at best remorse. The children were paddling and splashing, and making themselves gritty at the edge of the water, some distance from Esther. Instead of rushing straight to these small people to see if they had verily grown out of knowledge, and if Georgie really had the Sargent nose, this traitorous uncle never so much as looked at those amphibious revellers, but walked on to the boat, and quietly seated himself about half a yard from Esther. She did not even look up from her book. The shelter of the boat was public property. Yet it was uncomfortable to have a stranger seated so near her, and in a few minutes Esther had rose to join the children, whose sports were becoming more and more watery.

A hand gently detained her. The stranger had risen too, and had laid his hand upon her arm.

"Esther, why are you so determined to run away from me?" he asked quietly. She turned and confronted her false lover, very pale.

There was no anger in the sweet face, only a look of shocked surprise.

"Sit down again, Esther, and let us talk quietly for a few minutes." Friend—sister, will you refuse me so small a favour?"

That appeal touched her. She obeyed him without a word, and they seated themselves side by side under the shadow of the boat.

Edmund was slow to speak—so slow that the silence became a little awkward, and Esther felt herself obliged to say something.

"What brought you to Wexmouth?" she asked carelessly.

"I hope Ellen isn't anxious about the children."

"Ellen knows the children are safer in your keeping than in hers, Essie." The old pet name fluttered that steadfast heart a little. "I came here on my own account. Do you know that for the last two years I have been tormenting myself with one particular question?"

"Indeed. It ought to be a very important question."

"It is to me a question of life or death. When I was ill at Marseilles, Esther, I had two nurses. My mother was one. I knew her even at the worst. But the other! I used to fancy that her presence was but a dream. It was not a dream, was it, Essie? There was a second nurse, who watched me night and day, and wept many tears for my sake. Who was that faithful nurse, Esther? I want you to tell me. Dare I believe that the one noble-hearted woman I had most deeply wronged came to me—out of the benevolence of her heart—in my time of danger?"

"Not out of benevolence, Edmund," said Esther.

"It could not have been for love of me she came. Oh, Esther," cried Edmund Standen, seizing the girl's two hands, drawing her towards him, looking at her with eyes that shone with love and hope, "if you can but say that it was, you will make me happier than I ever dreamed I could be. Love, my love, truly loved at last, tell me that I have not outworn your patience, not quite exhausted your regard."

Tears were his only answer. An all-sufficient answer, it would seem, for in the silver moonlight of that September evening two happy lovers walked upon Wexmouth's shingly shore and talked of the future.

The future came, and did not belie their hopes. When Au-