POOR DOCUMENT

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A LOST LEADER

A FASCINATING STORY OF MODERN LIFE

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CHAPTER XXIV—(Continued.)

"I—I am not sure whether all that will be necessary," he said. "I can find a tenant for Blakeley, and I daresay I can manage another hundred a year or so. Only of course the large increase we had thought of will not be possible now."

"No ,I suppose not," she answered, tdly.

He moved in his chair uncomfortably. He found her wholly incomprehensible.

"What a beast I must have seemed to you always," she exclaimed, suddenly.

"Why?" he asked, pointlessly.

"I've sponged on you all my life, and you're not a rich man, are you, Lawrence? Then I dragged you back into politics to supply me with the means to spend more money. My claim on you was one of sentiment only, but—I've made you pay. No wonder you hate me!"

"Your claim on me, even to every penny I possess," Mannering answered, "was a perfectly just one. I have never denied it, and I have done my best. And as to hating you, you know quite well it is not true!"

"Ah!" She rose suddenly to her feet, and before he had realized her intention she was on her knees by his side. She caught at his hand and kept her face hidden from him.

"Lawrence," she cried. "I was mad the other day. It was all the pent-up bitterness of years which seemed to escape me so suddenly. I said so much that I did not mean to—I was mad, dear. Oh, Lawrence, I am so lonely!"

Then the fear in his heart became a live thing. He was dumb. He could not have spoken had he tried.

"It was your coldness all these years," she murmured. "You were different once. You know that! At first, when the horror of what happened was young, I understood. I thought, as it wore off, that you would be different. The horror has gone now, Lawrence. We know that it was an accident, it might as well have been another as you. But you have not changed. I have given up hoping. I have tried everything else, and I am a very miserable woman. Now I am going to pray to you, Lawrence. You do not care for me more. Pretend that you do! You cannot give me your love. Give me the best you can. Don't despise me too utterly, Lawrence! Pity me, if you will. Heaven knows I need it. And—you will be a little kind!"

Her hands were clasped about his neck. He disengaged himself gently.

"Blanche," he cried, hoarsely, "I love another woman!"

"Are you engaged to her?"

No! Not now!"

"Then what does it matter? What does it matter, anyhow? It is not the real thing I am asking you for, Lawrence—only the make-belief! Keep the rest for her, if you must, but give me lies, false looks, hollow caresses, anything! You see what depths I have fallen to."

He held her hands tightly. A great pity for her filled his heart—pity for her, and for himself.

"Blanche," he said, "there is one way only. It is for you to decide. Will you marry me? I will do my best to make you a good husband!"

"Marry you?" she gasped. "Lawrence, I dare not!"

"I cannot alter the past," he said, sadly. "It never seemed to me possible that you could care for me—after what happened. But—"

"Oh, it is not that," she interrupted. "There is—the other woman, and, Lawrence, I should be afraid. I am not good enough!"

"Whatever you are, Blanche," he said, gravely, "remember that it is I who am responsible for your having been left alone to face the world. Your follies belong to me. I am quite welcome to share their burden with you."

"But the other woman?" she faltered.

"I must love her always," he said, quietly, "but I cannot marry her."

"And you would kiss me sometimes, Lawrence?" she whispered.

He took her quietly into his arms and kissed her forehead.

"I will do my best, Blanche," he said, "I dare not promise any more."

CHAPTER XXV.

"How delightfully Continental!" Blanche exclaimed, as the head-waiter showed them to their table. "Hester, did you ever see anything more quaint?"

"It is perfect," the girl answered, leaning back in her chair, and looking around with quiet content.

Mannering took up the menu and ordered dinner. Then he lit a cigarette and looked around.

"It certainly is quaint," he said. "One dines out of doors often enough, especially over here, but I have never seen a courtyard made such excellent use of before. The place is really old too."

They had found their way to a small sea-side resort, in the north of France, which Mannering had heard highly praised by some casual acquaintance. The courtyard of the small hotel was set out with round dining tables, and the illumination was afforded by Japanese lanterns hung from every available spot. A small band played from a wooden balcony. Monsieur, the proprietor, walked anxiously from table to table, all smiles and bows. Through the roofed way, which led from the street, one caught a distant glimpse of the sea.

Mannering,to the surprise of his friends, and to his own secret amazement, had survived the crisis which had seemed at one time likely enough to wreck his life. Politically he was no longer a great power, for the party whose cause he had half-espoused had met with a distinct reverse, and he himself was without a seat in Parliament, but amongst the masses his was still a name to conjure with. Socially his marriage with Blanche Phillimore had scarcely proved the disaster which everyone had anticipated. Her old ways and manner of life lay in the background. She had aged a little perhaps and grown thinner, but she had shown from the first an almost pathetic desire to adapt her life to his, to assume an altogether unobtrusive position, and if she could not in any way influence his destiny, at least she did not hamper it. She had made no demands upon him which he was not able to grant. She had lived where he had suggested, she had never embarrassed him with too vehement an affection. As for Mannering himself, he had found solace in work. Defeated at the polls, he had declined a safe seat, and remained the chosen independent candidate of a great northern constituency. He addressed public meetings occasionally, and he contributed to the reviews. Without having ever finally committed himself to a definite scheme of tariff reform, he preached everywhere the doctrine of consideration. In a modified way he was reckoned now as one of its possible supporters.

They were almost half-way through their dinner when some commotion was heard in the narrow street outside. Then with much tooting of horns and the shrill shouting of directions from the by-standers, two heavily laden touring cars turned slowly into the cobbled courtyard and drew up within a few feet of the semicircular line of tables. Mannering's little party watched the arrivals with an interest shared by everyone in the place. Muffled up in cloaks and veils, they were at first unrecognisable. It was Mannering himself who first realized who they were.

"Clara!" he exclaimed to the young lady who was standing almost by his side. "Welcome to Bonestre!"

She turned towards him with a little start.

"Uncle!" she exclaimed. "How extraordinary! Why, how long have you been here?"

"We arrived this afternoon," he said. "You remember Hester, don't you? And this is Mrs. Mannering."

Clara shook hands with both. She declared afterwards that she was surprised into it, but she would certainly never have recognized in the quiet, rather weary-looking, woman who sat at her uncle's side the Blanche Phillimore whom she had more than once passionately declared that she would sooner die than speak to. She murmured a few mechanical words, and then, suddenly realizing the situation, she glanced a little anxiously over her shoulder.

"You know whom I am with, uncle?" she whispered.

But Mannering was already face to face with the Duchess.She held out her hand without hesitation. If she felt any emotion she concealed it perfectly. Her voice was steady and cordial, if her cheeks were pale. The dust lay thickly upon them all. Mannering, tall and grave in his plain dinner clothes and black tie, stood almost like a statue before her, until her extended hand invited his movement.

"What an extraordinary meeting," she said, quietly. "I am very glad to see you again, Mr. Mannering. We have had such a ride, all the way from Havre along roads an inch thick in dust. This is your wife, is it not? I am very glad to know you, Mrs. Mannering."

All that might have been embarrassing in the encounter seemed dissolved by the utterly conventional tone of her greeting. Sir Leslie Borrowdean came up and joined them and Lord and Lady Redford. Then the little party, escorted by the landlord, disappeared into the hotel. Mannering resumed his seat and continued his dinner. He leaned over and addressed his wife. His tone was kinder than usual.

"When we have had our coffee," he said, "I hope that you will feel like a walk. The moon is coming up over the sea."

She shook her head.

"Take Hester," she said. "She loves that sort of thing. I have a headache, and I should like to go upstairs as soon as possible."

So Hester walked with Mannering out to the rocks, where pools of water, left by the tide, shone like silver in the moonlight. They talked very little at first, but as they leaned over the rail and looked out seawards Hester broke the silence, and spoke of the things which they both had in their minds.

"I am sorry they came," she said. "I am afraid it will upset mother, and it is not pleasant for you, is it?"

"For me it is nothing, Hester," he answered, "and I hope that your mother will not worry about it. They all behaved very nicely, and we need not see much of them."

She passed her arm through his.

"Tell me how you feel about it," she begged. "It must seem to you like a glimpse of the life you left when—when you—married!"

"Hester," he said, earnestly, "don't make any mistake about this. Don't let your mother make any mistake. It was my political change of views which separated me from all my former friends—that entirely. To them I am an apostate, and a very bad sort of one. I deserted them just when they needed me. I did it from convictions which are stronger today than ever. But none the less I threw them over. I always said that they very much exaggerated my importance as a factor in the situation, and my words are proved. They carried the elections without any difficulty, and they have formed a strong government. They can afford to be magnanimous to me. If I had stayed with them I should have been in office. As it was I lost even my seat."

"You did what you thought was right," she said, softly. "No one can do any more!"

Mannering thought over her words as they walked homewards over the sand-dunes. Yes, he had done that! Was he satisfied with the result? He had become a minor power in politics. Men spoke of him as a weakling—as one who had shrunk from the burden of great responsibility,and left the friends who had trusted him in the lurch. And then—there was the other thing. He had paid a great price for this woman's salvation. Had he succeeded? She had given up all her old ways. She dressed, she lived, she carried herself through life even with a furtive, almost a pathetic, attempt to reach his standard. Often he caught her watching him as though fearful lest some word or action of hers had been displeasing to him. And yet—he wondered—was this what she had hoped for? Had he given her what she had the right to expect? Had he indeed received value for the price he had paid? He asked Hester a sudden question.

Hester, is your mother happy?"

Hester started a little.

"If she is not," she answered, gravely, "she must be a very ungrateful woman."

He left it at that, and together they retraced their steps to the hotel. Hester slipped up to her room by a side entrance, but Mannering was obliged to pass the table where the new arrivals were lingering over their coffee. Clara and Lord Redford both called to him

"Come and have a smoke with us, Mannering, and tell us all about this place," the latter exclaimed. "The Duchess and your niece are charmed with it, and they want to stay for a few days. Are there any golf links?"

"Come and sit next me, uncle," Clara cried, "and tell me how you like being guardian to an heiress. How I have blessed that dear departed aunt of mine every day of my life."

Mannering accepted a cigarette, and sat down.

"The golf links are excellent," he said. "As for your aunt, Clara, she was a very sensible woman. Her money was so well invested that I have practically nothing to do. I expect my duties will commence when the young men come!"

"Miss Mannering," Sir Leslie said, gravely, "is not at all attracted by young men. She prefers something more staid. I have serious hopes that before our little tour is over I shall have persuaded her to marry me!"

"You dear man!" Clara exclaimed. "I only wish you'd give me the chance."

"There's a brazen child to have to chaperon," the Duchess declared. "Positively asking for a proposal."

"And not in vain," Sir Leslie declared. "Walk down to the sea with me, Miss Clara, and I'll propose to you in my most approved fashion. I think you said that the investments were sound, Mannering?

"The investments are all right," Mannering answered, "but I shall have nothing to do with fortune-hunters."

"And I a Cabinet Minister!" Sir Leslie declared. "Miss Clara, let us have that walk."

"Tomorrow night," she promised. "When I get up it will be to go to bed. Even your love-making, Sir Leslie, could not keep me awake tonight."

The Duchess rose. The dust was gone, but she was pale, and looked tired.

"Let us leave these men to make plans for us," she said. "I hope we shall see something of you tomorrow, Mr. Mannering. Good night, everybody."

Mannering rose and bowed with the others. For a moment their eyes met. Not a muscle of her face changed, and yet Mannering was conscious of a sudden wave of emotion. He understood that she had not forgotten!

CHAPTER XXVI.

Berenice sat at one of the small round tables in the courtyard, finishing her morning coffee. Sir Leslie sat upon the steps by her side. It was one of those brilliant mornings in early September, when the sunlight seems to find its way everywhere. Even here, surrounded by the pile of worn grey stone buildings, which threw shadows everywhere it had penetrated. A long shaft of soft, warm light stretched across the cobbles to their feet. Berenice, slim and elegant, fresh as the morning itself, glanced up at her companion with a smile.

"Clara," she remarked, "does not like to be kept waiting."

"She is not down yet," he answered, "and there is something I want to say to you."

Her delicate eyebrows were a trifle uplifted.

"Do you think that you had better?" she asked.

"I am a man," he said, "and things are known to me which a woman would scarcely discover. Do you think that it is quite fair to send Lady Redford out motoring with Mrs. Mannering?"

"Why not?"

"Lady Redford is of course ignorant of Mrs. Mannering's antecedents. What you may do yourself concerns no one. You make your own social laws, and you have a right to. But I do not think that even you have a right to pass Blanche Phillimore on to your friends, even under the shelter of Mannering's name."

Berenice looked at him for several seconds without speaking. Borrowdean bit his lip.

"If we were not acquaintances of long standing, Sir Leslie," she said, calmly, "I should consider your remarks impertinent. As it is, I choose to look upon them as a regrettable mistake. The person, whoever she may be, whom the Duchess of Lenchester chooses to receive is usually acceptable to her friends. I beg that you will not refer to the subject again."

Sir Leslie bowed.

"I have no more to say," he declared. "Knowing naturally a good deal more than you concerning the lady in question I considered it my duty to say what I have said."

"It is the sort of duty," Berenice murmured, "which the whole world seems to accept always with a relish. One does not expect it so much from your sex. Mrs. Mannering was born one of us, and she has had an unhappy life. If she has been indiscreet she has her excuses. I choose to whitewash her. Do you understand? I pay dearly enough for my social position, and I certainly claim its privileges. I recognize Mrs. Mannering, and I require my friends to do so."

Sir Leslie rose up.

"You are, if you will forgive my saying so," he remarked, drily, "more generous than wise."

"That," she answered, "is my affair. Here comes Clara. Before you start find Mr. Mannering. He is in the hotel library writing letters; tell him that when he has finished I wish to speak to him."

Sir Leslie only bowed. He felt himself opposed by a will as strong as his own, and he was too seriously annoyed to trust himself to speech. Clara in her cool white linen dress, came strolling up.

"What have you been doing to Sir Leslie?" she asked, laughing. "He has just gone into the hotel with a face like a thundercloud."

"I have been giving him a lesson in Christian charity," Berenice answered. "He needs it."

Clara nodded. She understood.

"I think you are awfully kind," she said.

Berenice smiled.

"I hate all narrowness," she said, "and if there is a man on God's earth who deserves to have people kind to him it is your uncle."

Sir Leslie returned, and he and Clara departed for the golf links. Berenice was left alone in the little grey courtyard, fragrant with the perfume of scented shrubs and blossoming plants, filled too with the warm sunlight, which seemed to find its way into every corner. She sat at her little table, paler than a few moments ago, her teeth clenched, her white fingers clasped together. Underneath her muslin blouse her heart had suddenly commenced to beat fiercely—a sense of excitement, long absent, was stealing through her veins. The bonds which a year's studied self-repression had forged were snapped apart. She knew now what it meant, the great inexpressible thing, the one eternal emotion which has come throbbing down the world from the days when poets sung their first song and painters flung truth on to canvas. She was a woman like the others, and she loved. Her unique position in society, her carefully studied life, her lofty ambitions were like vain things crumbling into dust before her eyes. A year of cold misery seemed atoned for by the simple fact that within a few yards of her he sat writing, that within a few minutes he would be by her side. Of the future she scarcely thought. Hers was the woman's love, content with small things. Its passion was of the soul, and its song was self-sacrifice. But if she had known—if she had only known!

He came out to her soon. His manner was quiet and a little grave. Self control came easier to him because the truth had been with him longer. Nevertheless, he was not wholly at his ease.

"You know what has happened?" she asked, smiling. "The Redfords have taken Mrs. Mannering and her daughter motoring, and Sir Leslie and Clara have gone to the golf links. You and I are left to entertain one another."

"What would you like to do?" he asked, simply.

"I should like to walk," she answered, "down by the sea somewhere. I am ready now."

They made their way through the little town, along the promenade and on to the sands beyond. Then a climb, and they found themselves in a thick wood stretching back inland from the sea. She pointed to a fallen trunk.

"Let us sit down," she said. "There are so many things I want to ask you."

On the way they had spoken only of indifferent matters, yet from the first Mannering had felt the presence of a subtle something in her deportment towards him, for which he could find no explanation. He himself was feeling the tension of this meeting. He had expected to find her so different. Gracious perhaps, because she was a great lady, but certainly without any of these suggestions of something kept back which continually, without any sort of direct expression, made themselves felt. And when they sat down she said nothing. He had the feeling that it was because she dared not trust herself to speak. Surprise and agitation kept him too silent.

At last she spoke. Her voice was not very steady, and she avoided looking at him.

"I should like," she said, "to have you tell me about yourself—about your life—and your work."

"It is told in a few words," he answered. "Somewhere, somehow, I have failed! I could not adopt the Birmingham programme, I could not oppose it. You know what isolation means politically?—abuse from one side and contempt from the other. That is what I am experiencing. The working classes have some faith in me, I believe. My work, such as it is, is solely for them. I suppose the papers tell the truth when they say that mine is a ruined career—only, you see, I am trying to do the best I can with the pieces."

"Yes," she said, softly, "that is something. To do the best one can with the pieces. We all might try to do that."

He smiled.

"You, at least, have no need to consider such a thing," he said. "So far as any woman can be pre-eminent in politics you have succeeded in becoming so. I saw that a lady's paper a few weeks ago said that your influence outside the Cabinet was more powerful than any one man's within it."

"Yes," she said, calmly, "the papers talk like that. It gives their readers something to laugh at! I wonder what you would say, my friend, if I told you that I too am engaged in that same thankless task. I too am striving to do the best I can with the pieces."

"You are not serious!" he protested.

"I am very serious indeed," she declared. "Shall I tell you more? Shall I tell you when I made my mistake?"

"No!" he cried, hoarsely.

"But I shall," she continued, suddenly gripping his arm. "I meant to tell you. I brought you here to tell you. I made my mistake when I let Leslie Borrowdean take you back to Lord Redford just as we were entering the rose gardens at Bayleigh. Do you remember? I made my mistake when I was too proud to tell you that I loved you, and that nothing else in the world mattered. There! You tried me hard! You know that! But my mistake was none the less fatal. I ought to have held fast by you, and I let you go. And I shall suffer for it all my days."

"You cared like that?" he cried.

"Worse!" she answered, turning her flushed face towards him. "I care now. Kiss me, Lawrence!"

He held her in his arms. Time stood still until she stole away with an odd little laugh.

"There," she said, "I have vindicated myself. No one can ever call me a proud woman again. And you know the truth! I might have had you all to myself, and I let you go. Now I am going to do the best I can with the pieces. The half of you I want belongs to your wife. I must be content with the other half. I suppose I may have that?"

"But your friends—"

"Bosh! My friends and your wife must make the best of it. I shan't rob her again as I did just now. You can blot that out—antedate it. It belonged to the past. But I am not going through life like I have gone through this last year, longing for a sight of you, longing to hear you speak, and denying myself just because you are married. Live with your wife, Lawrence, and make her as happy as you can, but remember that you owe me a great deal too, and you must do your best to pay it. Don't look at me as though I were talking nonsense."

He held her hand. She placed it in his unresistingly. All the lines in his face seemed smoothed out. The fire of youth was in his eyes.

"Do you wonder that I am surprised?" he asked. "All this year you have made no sign. All the time I have been schooling myself to forget you."

"Don't dare to tell me that you have succeeded!" she exclaimed.

"Not an iota!" he answered. "It was the most miserable failure of my life."

She smiled upon him delightfully, and gently withdrew her hand.

"Lawrence," she said, "I am going to talk to you seriously for one minute. You are too conscientious for a politician. Don't let the same vice spoil our friendship! Certain things you owe to your wife. Mind, I admit that, though from some points of view even that might be disputed. But you also owe me certain things—and I mean to be paid. I won't be avoided, mind. I want to be treated as a very close and dear—companion—and —kiss me once more, Lawrence, and then we'll begin," she wound up, with a little sob in her throat.

An hour later the whole party had dejeuner together in the court-yard of the little hotel. The Duchess was noticeably kind to Mrs. Mannering, and she snubbed Sir Leslie. Clara looked on a little gravely. The situation contained many elements of interest.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The first cloud appeared towards the end of the third day at Bonestre. Blanche and Sir Leslie were left alone, and he hastened to improve the opportunity.

"The Duchess and your husband," he remarked, "appear very easily to have picked up again the threads of their old friendship."

"The Duchess," she answered, "is a very charming woman. I am sure that you find her so, don't you?"

"We are very old friends," he answered, "but I was never admitted to exactly the same privileges as your husband enjoys."

"The Duchess," she answered, calmly, "is a woman of taste!"

Sir Leslie muttered something under his breath. Blanche made a movement as though to take up again the book which she had been reading in a sheltered corner of the hotel garden.

"Don't you think," he said, "that we should make better friends than enemies?"

"I am not at all sure," she answered, clamly. "To tell you the truth, I don't fancy you particularly in either capacity."

He laughed unpleasantly.

"You are scarcely complimentary," he remarked.

"I did not mean to be," she answered. "Why should I?"

"You are content then to let your husband drift back into his old relations with the Duchess? I presume that you know what they were?"

"Whether I am or not," she answered, "what business is it of yours?"

"I will tell you, if you like," he answered. "In fact, I think it would be better. It has been the one desire of my life to marry the Duchess of Lenchester myself."

She smiled at him scornfully.

"Come," she said, "let me give you a little advice. Give up the idea. They say that lookers-on see most of the game, and so far as I am concerned I'm certainly the looker-on of this party. The Duchess doesn't care a row of pins about you!"

"There are other marriages, besides marriages of affection," Sir Leslie said, stiffly. "The Duchess is ambitious."

"But she is also a woman," Blanche declared. "And she is in love?"

"With whom?"

"With my husband! I presume that is clear enough to most people!"

Sir Leslie was a little staggered.

"You take it very coolly," he remarked.

"Why not? The Duchess is too proud a woman to give herself away, and my husband—belongs to me!"

"You haven't any idea of taking poison, or anything of that sort, I suppose, have you?" he inquired. "The other woman nearly always does that."

"Not in real life," Blanche answered, composedly. "Besides, I'm not the other woman—I'm the one. The Duchess is the other!"

"But your husband——"

"Do you know, I should prefer not to discuss my husband—with you," Blanche said, calmly, taking up her book. "He is not the sort of man you would be at all likely to understand. If you want a rich wife why don't you propose to Clara Mannering? I suppose you knew that some unheard of aunt had left her fifty thousand pounds?"

Sir Leslie rose to his feet.

"I don't fancy that you and I are very sympathetic this afternoon," he remarked. "I will go and see if any one has returned."

"Do," she answered. "I shall miss you, of course, but my book is positively absorbing, and I am dying to go on with it."

Sir Leslie left the garden without another word. Blanche held her book before her face until he had disappeared. Then it slipped from her fingers. She looked hard into a cluster of roses, and she saw only two figures—always the same figures. Her eyes were set, her face wan and old.

"The other woman!" she murmured to herself. "That is what I am. And I can't live up to it. I ought to take poison, or get run over or something, and I know very well I shan't. Bother the man! Why couldn't he leave he alone?"

After dinner that evening she accepted her husband's nightly invitation and walked with him for a little while. The others followed.

"How much longer can you stay away from England, Lawrence?" she asked him.

"Oh—a fortnight, I should think," he answered. "I am not tied to any particular date. You like it here, I hope?"

"Immensely! Are—our friends going to remain?"

"I haven't heard them say anything about moving on yet," he answered.

"Are you in love with the Duchess still, Lawrence?"

"Am I—Blanche!"

"Don't be angry! You made a mistake once, you know. Don't made another. I'm not a jealous woman, and I don't ask much from you, but I'm your wife. That's all!"

She turned and called to Hester. The little party re-arranged itself. Mannering found himself with Berenice.

"What was your wife saying to you?" she asked. He shrugged his shoulders.

"It was the beginning," he remarked.

Berenice sighed.

"It is a strange thing," she said, "but in this world no one can ever be happy except at some one else's expense. It is a most unnatural law of compensation. Shall we move on tomorrow?"

"The day after," he pleaded. "Tomorrow we are going to Berneval."

She nodded.

"We are queer people, I think," she said. "I have been perfectly satisfied this week simply to be with you. When it comes to an end I should like it to come suddenly."

He thought of her words an hour later, when on his return to the hotel they handed him a telegram. He passed it on at once to Lord Redford, and glanced at his watch.

"Poor Cunningham," he said, "it was a short triumph for him. I must go back tonight, or the first train tomorrow morning. The sitting member for my division of Leeds died suddenly last night,Blanche," he said to his wife. "I must be on the spot at once."

She rose to her feet.

"I will go and pack," she said.

Lady Redford followed her very soon. Clara and Sir Leslie had not yet returned from their stroll. Lord Redford remained alone with them.

"I scarcely know what sort of fortune to wish you, Mannering," he said. "Perhaps your first speech will tell us."

Berenice leaned back in her chair.

"I can't imagine you as a labor member in the least," she remarked.

"Doesn't this force your hand a little. Mannering?" Lord Redford said. "I am derstand that you were anxious to avoid a direct pronouncement upon the fiscal policy for the present."

Mannering nodded gravely.

"It is quite time I made up my mind," he said. "I shall do so now"

"May we find ourselves in the same lobby!" Lord Redford said. "I will go and find my man. He may as well take you to the station in the car."

Berenice smiled at him luminously through the shadowy lights.

"Dear friend," she said, "I am delighted that you are going. Our little time here has been delightful,but we had reached its limit.I like to think that you are going back into the thick of it. Don't be faint-hearted, Lawrence. Don't lose faith in yourself. You have chosen a terribly lonely path; if any man can find his way to the top you can. And don't dare to forget me, eir!"

He caught her cheerful tone.

"You are inspiring," he declared. "Thank heavens, I have a twelve hours' journey before me. I need time for thought, if ever a man did."

"Don't worry about it," she answered, lightly. "The truth is somewhere in your brain, I suppose, and when the time comes you will find it. Much better think about your sandwiches."

The car backed into the yard. Blanche reappeared, and behind her Mannering's bag.

"I do hope that Hester and I have packed everything," she said. "We could come over tomorrow, if there's anything you want us for. If not we shall stay here for another week. Good-bye!"

She calmly held up her lips, and Mannering kissed them after a moment's hesitation. She remained by his side even when he turned to say farewell to Berenice.

"I am sure you ought to be going," she said, calmly. "I will send on your letters if there are any tomorrow. Wire your address as soon as you arrive. Good luck!"

The car glided away. They all stood in a group to see him go, and waved indiscriminate farewells. Blanche moved a little apart as the car disappeared, and Berenice watched her curiously. She was rubbing her lips with her handkerchief.

"A sting!" she remarked, becoming suddenly aware of the other's scrutiny. "Nothing that hurts very much!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Mannering, in his sitting-room at last, locked the door and drew a long breath of relief. Upon his ear-drums there throbbed still the yells of his enthusiastic but noisy adherents—the truculent cries of those who had heard his great speech with satisfaction, of those who saw pass from amongst themselves to a newer school of thought one whom they had regarded as their natural leader. It was over at last. He had made his pronouncement. To some it might seem a compromise. To himself it was the only logical outcome of his long period of thought. He spoke for the working man. He demanded inquiry, consideration, experiment. He demanded them in a way of his own, at once novel and convincing. Many of the most brilliant articles which had ever come from his pen he abjured. He drew a sharp line between the province of the student and the duty of the politician.

An now he was alone at last, free to think and dream, free to think of Bonestre, to wonder what reports of his meeting would reach the little French watering-place, and how they would be received. He could see Berenice reading the morning paper in the little gray churchyard, with the pigeons flying above her head and the sunlight streaming across the flags. He could hear Borrowdean's sneer, could see Lord Redford's shrug of the shoulders. There is little sympathy in the world for the man who dares to change his mind.

There was a knock at the door, and his servant entered with a tray.

"I have brought the whiskey and soda, sandwiches and cigarettes, sir," he announced. "I am sorry to say that there is a person outside whom I cannot get rid of. His name is Fardell, and he insists upon it that his business is of importance."

Mannering smiled.

"You can show him up at once," he ordered, "now, and whenever he calls."

Fardell appeared almost directly. Mannering had seen him before during the day, but noticed at once a change in him. He was pale, and looked like a man who had received some sort of a shock.

"Come in, Fardell, and sit down," Mannering said. "You look tired. Have a drink."

Fardell walked straight to the tray and helped himself to some neat whiskey.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "I—I've had rather a knock-out blow."

He emptied the tumbler and set it down.

"Mr. Mannering, sir," he said, "I've just heard a man bet twenty to one in crisp five pound bank notes that you never sit for West Leeds."

"Was he drunk or sober?" Mannering asked.

"Sober as a judge!"

Mannering smiled.

"How often did you take him?" he asked.

"Not once! I didn't dare!"

Mannering, who had been in the act of helping himself to a whiskey and soda, looked around with the decanter in his hand.

"I don't understand you," he said, bewildered. "You know very well that the chances, so far as they can be reckoned up, are slightly in my favor."

"They were!" Fardell answered. "Heavens knows what they are now."

Mannering was a little annoyed. It seemed to him that Fardell must have been drinking.

"Do you mind explaining yourself?" he asked.

"I can do so," Fardell answered. "I must do so. But while I am about it I want you to put on your hat and come with me."

Mannering laughed shortly.

"What, tonight?" he exclaimed. "No, thank you. Be reasonable, Fardell. I've had my day's work, and I think, I've earned a little rest. To be frank with you, I don't like mysteries. If you've anything to say, out with it."

"Right!" Richard Fardell answered. "I am going to ask you a question, Mr. Mannering. Go back a good many years, as many years as you like. Is there anything in your life as a younger man, say when you first entered Parliament, which—if it were brought up against you now—might be—embarrassing?"

Mannering did not answer for several moments. He was already pale and tired, but he felt what little color remained leave his face. Least of all he had expected this. Even now—what could the man mean? What could be known?

"I am not sure that I understand you," he said. "There is nothing that could be known! I am sure of that."

"There is a person," Fardell said, slowly, "who has made extraordinary statements. Our opponents have got hold of him. The substance of them is this. He says that many years ago you were the lover of a married woman, that you sold her husband worthless shares and ruined him, and that finally—in a quarrel—he declares that he was an eye-witness of this—that you killed him."

Mannering slowly subsided into his chair. His cheeks were blanched. Richard Fardell watched him with feverish anxiety.

"It is a lie," Mannering declared. "There is no man living who can say this."

"The man says," Fardell continued, stonily, "that his name is Parkins, and that he was butler to Mr. Stephen Phillimore eleven years ago."

(To be continued.)

WARNS LIQUOR DEALERS TO MEND THEIR WAYS

New York, Jan. 10—Charges the anit-saloon league is supported by multi-millionaires who use the organization for political purposes, were made today at a meeting of New York wholesale liquor dealers, by T. H. Gilmore, editor of a liquor trade magazine. Mr. Gilmore said that to defeat the rising tide of prohibition, the saloon business must be purged of its evil aspects. The meeting was held to consider co-operation with the Model License Law movement begun in Louisville (Ky.) two months ago and since extended to Pittsburg, Baltimore and Philadelphia.

"The anti-saloon league is the strongest, best-officered, best-financed and best legally-advised political organization in the world," said Mr. Gilmore. "It now holds the balance of power in a number of states. The league is supported by millionaires and is banded together not for the purposes of bettering the people at large, but to give political power to those men who contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to its campaign funds. They secretly direct and manipulate the organization so that they are able not only to seat whom they please in the gubernatorial chair, but sometimes even dictate the selection of United States senators.

"In order to combat this league and forestall prohibition—which everyone knows does not really prohibit—we must try to rid the saloon business of its evil aspects. The present sentiment against the liquor traffic is caused by saloon-keepers who fail to obey the laws and by the public and public officers who fail to enforce them. The Model License Law provides that all licenses outstanding shall remain in force unless revoked by a majority vote of the people or by the failure of the holder to obey the saloon regulations. It limits the number of licenses to be granted and otherwise restricts the liquor traffic. The general adoption of such a law would do more toward a sane solution of the drink question than all the agitation of the anti-saloon league and Prohibitionists together."

WANT P. E. I. ACT IN THIS PROVINCE

Temperance Delegation Heard by Local Government in St. John

WILL BE CONSIDERED

Premier Says Matter May Go Before Government Supporters in House Before Final Decision—Looks Favorable, Says J. Willard Smith—Speakers Did Not All Agree at Hearing.

At a meeting of the local government here Friday afternoon a delegation from the New Brunswick Temperance Federation and others interested in temperance were heard. The delegation included J. Willard Smith, president of the federation; Edward C. Stockford, secretary of that body; Rev. Neil McLaughlin, Rev. H. D. Marr, W. C. Cross, J. N. Harvey, J. R. Woodburn, Charles A. Kee, W. F. Hatheway, L. P. D. Tilley, Mrs. J. Seymour, Mrs. Porter, G. H. Hutchings and Rev. C. W. Squires.

Premier Robinson said Friday night that Messrs Smith, Tilley, Hatheway, Harvey, Stockford, Woodburn, Rev. Messrs. Marr, and McLaughlin and Mrs. Seymour addressed the government. The delegation asked for a prohibitory law such as is in effect in P. E. Island, and that it be passed at the next session of the legislature. Mr. Tilley, the premier said, spoke in favor of a well enforced license law, and Mr. Smith at a later stage, replying to his observations, said that Mr. Tilley did not speak for the delegation in that matter.

The government promised to notify Mr. Smith of its decision after it has had sufficient time to look fully into the report of the recent temperance commission. It was added that it might be necessary that the question be considered by the government supporters in the house before a final decision is reached. The government members present were Premier Robinson and Hon. Messrs. LaBillois, Farris and Barnes.

Mr. Smith Tells of Interview.

J. Willard Smith, president of the New Brunswick Temperance Federation, in speaking Friday evening of the interview with the government, said that in the course of his remarks as president he explained that the federation was following up the request made last February for a prohibition law. He referred to the work done by the commission and drew attention to evidence which accompanied the report and which he claimed showed that the adoption of the act in P. E. Island had decreased the sale of liquor, abolished the open taverns and treating, and greatly reduced the number of cases of drunkenness and rowdyism.

In many respects, he said, it had proved superior to the Scott act or any other form of temperance legislation. He said that in the evidence now before the government the premier of the Island and the attorney general had spoken most emphatically in favor of the law and the mayor of Charlottetown,the superintendent of education, the police magistrate, the chief of police and the principal merchants testified to the value of prohibition and the improvements under its rule. On these grounds they renewed their demand for similar legislation at the coming session.

Mr. Smith mentioned that among others who addressed the government were J. R. Woodburn, J. N. Harvey, Rev. H. D. Marr, Rev. Neil McLaughlin, E. N. Stockford, W. Frank Hatheway and Mrs. Jos. Seymour, representing the W. C. T. U.

Asked with regard to the stand taken by Mr. Tilley, Mr. Smith said that Mr. Tilley had been invited to accompany the delegation on account of his efforts to enforce the present law on several occasions. He thought it was unfortunate that, in view of Mr. Tilley's remarks that he was in favor of the rigid enforcement of the present license law, he should have stated that he represented the Sons of Temperance.

Mr. Smith went on say that he subsequently called the attention of the government to the fact that prohibition was one of the cardinal points with that organization and his remarks had been endorsed by Mr. McKeown.

"Any one who could say," added Mr. Smith, "that we, as representing the federation, were not unanimous for prohibition, would state what is untrue. Mr. Tilley was there by courtesy as he is not a member."

With regard to the probable result of the interview Mr. Smith said in his judgment the feeling of the government was favorable to them. Careful consid ration and an early reply had been promised.

Bristol Residents Dead.

Bristol, N. B., Jan. 11.—Mrs. George H. Boyer died last evening after an illness of some months. She was 42 years of age and was a daughter of the late George L. Davis. She is survived by a husband,three brothers and two sisters.

Eugene Dyer, who has been ill for some time of consumption, died this morning, aged 19 years. He was a son of Charles Dyer, and besides his parents he leaves nine brothers.

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