AN AVE MARIA.

Marmaduke Redfern took the cigar from his mouth and rose from the elaborately furnished upholstered chair in the billiard room of the mansion in Portland Place, and swore. It was just on the stroke of 11 on Christmas Eve, and he had been sitting alone for over an hour. "Hang her!" he said, as he reseated himself and leaned back in his chair. "Hang her! she deserved all she got. Hang all romance, say I."

Mr. George Meredith tells us that Diana of the Crossways said (very beautifully) of romance that "the young who avoid that region escape the title of Fool at the cost of a celestial crown." But there are some who not only avoid the region, but are ignorant of its whereabouts—nay, who call the divine garden "Romance," and thus deservedly win the title and lose the diadem.

And with these Marmaduke Redfern had been numbered from his youth upward. He was the eldest son of one of those types of the nineteenth century life who laid a magic hand upon a little shop and transfigured it into a vast manufactory. A man who suddenly raised his family from generations of the sordid indigence of unsuccessful buying and selling to the possession of hoards of wealth, which the very blood in his veins prevented him from knowing how to enjoy. Marmaduke had been born before the great evolution, and, after as much education as is to be obtained at a private school at Brighton of the class called "genteel" by the proprietor, had passed to his father's cash office with the firm of Redfern and Whitehill, in the parish of St. Ann's. He was then fifteen years old. But even then he loved to see the business swell and think how wealthy he would be one day.

The old man died when Marmaduke was barely twenty. But his share of the business was large enough to make it easy for the sucking merchant to insist upon being taken into partnership by the surviving member of the firm. His younger brothers went to public schools, and thence into the army or to the bar; and having severed their connection with the vile thing which had made them, they proceeded to cut their elder brother except upon such occasions as when they wanted to borrow money of him.

Marmaduke had never in his life felt a generous impulse, or been guilty of an action of uncalculating kindness. The pettiness and meanness of his original nature had thriven in the counting house. He was no stranger to the desire and enjoyment of the more animal indulgences of life. He was even sufficiently advanced in the scale to envy his brothers their better social chances. But in the midst of it all he counted the cost. He was a cautious youth.

He was little more than twenty-one when he developed a wish (for social reasons) to marry the school friend of one of his sisters, who was of better birth than he, and during their courtship he flashed his money about considerably, and his gifts to his intended bride and her family (which were really but ostentation and advertisement) were taken by them to be evidences of his generosity. Building on this, the poor girl's parents (with the lack of insight so common in parents) persuaded her to accept him for her husband. But he had no intention of carrying his free handedness too far. It was characteristic of the man that even at the time of his marriage he should have been shrewd enough in his petty way to avoid making a proper settlement upon his wife on the ground that her father was not in a position to give her a dowry.

The marriage turned out badly as a matter of course. Marmaduke had expected to be able to force himself into society on the skirts of his wife. He cultivated a slight tenor voice with the utmost care, in order to possess some accomplishment which might be of use in the drawing-room. His wife, poor Nellie, sang deliciously, and Marmaduke loved to join his reedy pipe to her rich mezzo-soprano in "Flow On, Thou Shining River," "All's Well," and the simple duets that were popular forty years ago. But he found that his manners and extraordinary lack of tact were an effectual bar to his hopes. In those days something was wanted to gain an entry into decent society besides accumulated hoards of bullion. Vain and selfish, he visited his failure upon his wife. She bore him one daughter, and then, finding the pleasure of maternity insufficient to make her wretched life worth living, she died when little Maude was just six years old.

As has been said, there was no settlement made upon the marriage. Little Maude's future was left entirely in the hands of her father—a man with no sense of responsibility, and with only the inclination toward his daughter as being his, part of his noble self, in place of true fatherly love.

But as the child grew up the sweetness of her temper and the beauty of her form and face had their effect even upon the formerly unresponsive nature of her father. Since his wife's death he had got into a certain sporting set who did not object to associate with any one who was willing to pay for the privilege of their acquaintance—a set, indeed, that was the forerunner of so many society cliques now. He became extremely satisfied with himself, and when he had lunched with a coursing lord of doubtful reputation (who was desirous of borrowing a few hundreds), he fancied that he had pierced his way into the very holy of holies of London life. But his new friends lived fast, and in Marmaduke's veins ran the blood of generations of middle class respectability. A steady course of champagne and liquors worked on his unaccustomed nerves. He had always been a fidgety, nervous man, with marionette-like movements, quick, perking gestures of the head, and a rapid current of petulent phrase for those to whom he did not cringe. The drink made him emotional.

Then it was that he developed an extraordinary feeling for his daughter. It was rather a maudlin pride than appreciative affection. But it made him as tender to and considerate of her as he knew how to be. He became more domestic. His sporting friends (having worked their fated influence upon his nerve) fleeced him of a few thousands, and he was shrewd enough to notice that, though they were "hail fellow well met" with him at Nicholls', Jimmy's or Verrey's, they never invited him to meet their womankind. His pride in his daughter ousted the hankering after tuft-hunting, and he devoted himself more and more to her.

Early in life the child had shown unusual talent for the violin. As she grew in years her technique grew with her. And when she was 14 years of age Marmaduke bought her a genuine Amati. He took singing lessons again, and furbished up his light tenor, now a little worse for champagne and wear.

He advertised for a housekeeper of good family and a decent pianist, and engaged a woman of forty possessing these attributes to sit at the end of his table and chaperon his little daughter, so that he could invite the few men who would bring their wives to his table for the sake of a good dinner. Maude always dined with them. Then, after a twenty-course dinner, with '74 champagne, '64 claret and '47 port, and cigars for the men which he was careful to tell them cost him 2s 6d each, he would give an exhibition in the drawing-room of Maude's prowess on the Amati, and his own vocalization in some air with violin obligato. Of all his repertoire, nothing appealed to him so much as Blumenthal's "Requital," and Gounod's "Ave Maria." He had got an incorrect translation of the Latin of the latter, and managed to put some meaning into words which were meaningless to him. His pride in the pure, rich tones of the violin and the effect of the music (for music will affect all kinds of natures, from highest to lowest) made a better man of him, as he reached from the high B flat in "nunc et in hora mortis nostrae" than he had ever been before.

It was a strange scene, the parasites who cared for nothing but the dinner, trying not to look bored; the pretentious housekeeper, flashing her rings in the Bach prelude, the accompaniment to Gounod's melody; the lovely child, with eyes turned heavenward and nerves and sinews taut with the pious passion of the beautiful obligato appeal which went wailing from her old violin, pure and true in tone, and instinct with the emotion vibrating at her finger tips, and the little sandy-haired, light-moustached man bending over the piano, complacent and gesticulatory, but growing better, better and nobler for the stirring in his heart, for the tears in his eyes.

Maude never knew the real nature of her father—or perhaps she did not know the real man, and I and the rest of us only the artificial. At any rate, she loved him with more than the ordinary love of a daughter for a father. To her he was ever kind. In her presence he would talk tenderly of his dead wife, and with self-deceptive pathos would sing "Waft her, angels, through the skies" till the tears ran down the cheeks of both widower and child as they thought of her whom the man had killed with neglect, till the housekeeper gave up all housekeeper's thoughts of ever supplanting the dead woman's memory.

But Maude grew up, and at a concert at which she was playing she met a young pianist—one of those ephemeral geniuses who take the town by storm for one season and then never play up to the same form again.

Marmaduke engaged him for two or three evenings to play with Maude (even fiction should have taught him better), and in the slow movement of "The Kreutzer" they told each other their love.

The tale is too old to give in detail. Maude's love for her father was great, but her love for her lover was greater. And yet Marmaduke might have got her to sacrifice her lover to her father if he had gone the right way to work. They told him their secret on Christmas Eve of 1887 (when the guests had left after a dinner) thinking that the season would make his heart kindly to their love—the season of peace and good-will. But the knowledge that his daughter loved another better than himself was enough to kill any tenderness that had been nursed into existence in Marmaduke. It cut his pride, his vanity, his absurd self-importance.

He stormed and blustered, and insulted both his daughter and the pianist, and finally turned them both out of his house into the night, daring either of them ever to cross his threshold again. As they went down the steps into the street they jostled against some carol singers. Latimer, the butler, let them out, and gazed sadly after them. All the servants loved Maude.

Lawrence Conifer, the pianist, was an honorable youth. He took the girl to his mother's house, whence he married her as soon as the necessary formalities could be got through.

And that was fourteen years ago.

Since then no word had come to the father of either his daughter or the man she married. He went back to his old selfish life, and, with the assistance of the housekeeper, who was now gray and whose hopes were dead, he tried to satisfy the sensations of something wanting by giving great entertainments.

For the last hour he had been sitting alone in the billiard room, that opened into the hall. He had been ill. The years and life were telling on him. His tow-colored hair was streaked with white. His features were more pinched and peevish than of old.

Was it ill-health that had brought thoughts of the old days back to him as he sat by the fire, puffing with quick, nervous puffs from a cigar that deserved better treatment?

"Hang her!" he said again, in spite of the curious softness he felt coming over him. 'Hang her! she deserved all she got! Hang all romance, anyway!"

He woke with a start. "Who's that?" he cried.

The fire was burning fiercely—the swan lights glowed through the room. He looked round nervously. There was no one there. His dead cigar lay on the hearth close beside him. The effervescence of his brandy and soda had bubbled out. He looked at his watch; he had not slept ten minutes. He got up, poured out a stiff dose of the old brandy into a clean glass, squirted into it from a siphon, drank, and lit another cigar.

Then he sat down again and took up a late edition of an evening paper.

Ah! there it was. That was what had brought the old days back again.

"Music lovers who will remember the brilliant pianoforte playing of Mr. Lawrence Conifer in the season of 1887 will regret to hear of his death which took place last Wednesday, in the Charing Cross Hospital. Mr. Conifer, like so many other musical performers, never achieved the same success again as that which attended him during his first season. We understand that he leaves a wife and two children, living in very poor circumstances."

"Serves her right," said Marmaduke again, with an oath. But his hand shook as he took his glass and drained it at a gulp.

Outside a gust of hail stormed down at the huge plate-glass windows, and rattled against the framework. Then silence came again.

A noise of nervous, uncertain footsteps. Was it in the hall or outside? Ah! Listen!

Then, scarce audible, a chord of vibrant strings quivered in the air. Again; then a faint, sweet child voice sang:

Loud raged the tempest,
Fast fell the sleet,
When a little child angel
Passed down the street
With trailing pinions
And weary feet.

For a moment Marmaduke was incapable of movement. He fell back helpless in his chair. His face blanched and his pale blue eyes became pathetically senile. "The Requital!" Ah! how often had his voice sung it while Maude's deft fingers improvised an obligato to the torrent and crash of the piano.

It was the same obligato; he would swear to that. But how could—Oh, of course, she and her husband had published it between them. Made money out of that! She can never have had any love for him.

He poured out another brandy and soda, and drank it eagerly. But still he heard the thin, faint obligato, the pure childish voice:

Having kissed the woman,
Having kissed the woman,
And left her—
And left her—
And left her dead.

The violin seemed to wail up on the high note. Surely it was fancy—his memory was playing tricks with him. No street children could play like that. No; he was sure of it.

"How fanciful I am to-night," said Marmaduke. "I keep thinking I hear all sorts of things, O God!" he shrieked, "not that!"

His voice leapt up to a scream as he staggered to his feet and pressed the button of the electric bell.

Outside a little clearer and firmer, the violin and voice were playing and singing "Ave Maria."

Marmaduke heard no more for a space. All he could hear or see was a scene, a sound, in the drawing-room of a dead day. But he pulled himself together, and again the voice and violin came to his ears—the voice and the violin of the present, not the past.

"Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventri tui Jesus. Sancta Maria, Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis, nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora, in hora mortis nostrae. Amen."

Marmaduke had sunk back in his chair. No one had answered the bell. The servants, butler and all, were outside in the area snow looking up at two wee shivering figures making angel music on the holy night.

The man shook in his chair—shook with rage and remorse, and, above all, with self-pity.

The servants' voices were loud below in the area. A child's voice quivered in the night air.

He reached out his hand and again primed himself. Then he went quickly and firmly to the bell and pressed his fingers furiously upon the button, keeping it there some seconds.

A door slammed below stairs, then at the top of the passage from the kitchen to the hall. A hurried step came on the tiles. The old butler stood in the billiard room.

Marmaduke stuttered with rage and some feeling which overpowered him and left him helpless, which was new to him, and which he fought against.

"G—go at once, Latimer," he said, "and send those noisy little beasts away. Why d—didn't you answer the bell before? G—go. Look sharp! Send 'em off! Do you hear me?" for Latimer stood looking at him queerly.

"Yessir," said Latimer. "Suttinly, sir."

As the butler turned to go the first bars of the "Ave Maria" again stole into the bright, warm billiard room. The front door opened, and the sound of the voice and violin came in clear, firm and beautiful. Whoever the performers were, they were true musicians.

The millionaire waited to hear the harsh words spoken—the harsh order given. And as the prayer thrilled and pulsed through the air, grown more chill in the draught of a bitter night rushing through the hall, a feeling of dull remorse came upon him. He called out, 'Wait a minute, Latimer, take this to them."

But Latimer neither answered nor returned. The voice and violin poured out their harmony.

Marmaduke Redfern rose from his chair and went into the hall. He found the old butler standing silent, gazing with staring eyes at the scene on the doorstep.

The great volume of electric light in the hall shone bright and clear on two small figures. One was that of a poorly clad boy of twelve, from whose mouth the Latin came with perfect intonation and enunciation. By his side stood a girl of thirteen. Her poor cotton frock barely reached below her knees, and her shabby cotton stockings hid their holes in bursting boots, thin-soled and penetrated with the snow. A coarse shawl was tied over her head, once round, so as not to be in the way of the cheap yellow violin which she held beneath her chin. Her eyes were raised upwards. Her cheeks were pale with want. Her lips were tremulous and blue with cold and anguish. But the bowing of the hand and arms were Maude's; the eyes were Maude's; the face was Maude's.

Then the man whom the old Maude knew, and no other knew, awoke. With a cry he tottered out on to the doorstep, fell on his knees and clasped his arms about the little violinist, who started back for a moment, afraid of his eagerness.

"Maude," the millionaire called, "Maude, my darling, come home; come back to me!"

The old butler gulped, kicked over a hall chair, and gave a feeble cheer. Marmaduke raised the girl in his arms. Latimer snatched up the boy, and, sobbing and gasping, the men bore the children to the warmth of the great fire in the billiard room.

As they put them down in the deep-seated chairs the clock on the marble mantelshelf struck 12, and the bells of the churches in Langham Place and all about the great city clanged out in peals of great joy. "Christ is born," they rang: "peace on earth to men of good-will."—James Blyth, in Black and White.

Archbishop Ryan of Philadelphia Advises Against Immigration.

Archbishop Ryan of Philadelphia, in Thurles, Ire., during the early part of August as the guest of the Most Rev. Archbishop Fennelly, visited the Christian Brothers' schools where, during his own boyhood, he had been a pupil. In response to an address from the Brothers and their pupils, Archbishop Ryan made this allusion to the immigration question:

The very walls here speak to me—not, indeed, this new building, because this is evidence of your progress since, with many other evidences. But I remember the old houses and the old schools, and the three Brothers, Mr. Foley, Mr. Ellis and Mr. Cahill, and I remember these associations. I hope, my dear boys, that whilst you have great admiration, as you ought to have, for the American Republic, which has done so much for the Irish people, where they have had employment, where their talents and physical endurance have raised them to high positions, I hope as you grow up you will not be too anxious to go there, because the old land cannot be abandoned. Things are doing better now, and you can help in advancing its interests. So, unless really forced by circumstances to do it in the future, it is better for Irish boys to stay at home in this beautiful land, which ought to be so prosperous, and which nature has done so much for to make prosperous. I hope you will love the old land, and remain here and endeavor to promote its prosperity. Ask Almighty God to bless the Brothers who are doing so much for you, for in the future you will remember your first impressions here, and you will remember the sound and practical instructions you received from the Brothers here, and if any boy has the misfortune to wander away from the right path of duty, let him recall his first impressions here.—Boston Pilot.

WELL-KNOWN JESUIT DEAD.

Rev. James Conway, S.J., a member of the staff of the Messenger, and well known in this country and Europe as a writer and authority on educational questions, died last Saturday, after a brief illness, at St. Francis's Hospital, New York. He was born in County Tyrone, Ireland, fifty-seven years ago. He studied on the continent and entered the Society of Jesus at the Novitiate at Gorheim. Coming to America, he was for ten years in Canisius College, Buffalo, N.Y. He became attached to St. Ignatius' Church in 1897. Four years ago, at the death of Father Cardella, he was appointed moderator of the theological conferences of the New York archdiocese and examiner of diocesan clergy. The last place he held prior to his appointment to the Messenger staff was that of professor of philosophy at Fordham College.—Catholic Universe.

PAYING JUST DEBTS.

A New Jersey priest says: "No Catholic can make a valid confession who culpably refuses to pay his loans and debts. If he cannot pay at once, he must pledge himself to save up and pay as soon as possible. This means that only on these conditions can the sinner be forgiven by God. That person is unworthy of absolution who neglects to keep his pledge to pay; who refuses to pay any because he cannot pay all; who decides to leave the burden of restitution to his heirs. It is better not to go to confession at all than to go with unworthy dispositions. God is not mocked. Our pledges to the priest are made to him as Christ's ambassador in the confessional, and are binding as if made to Christ Himself."

WHENCE CAME THE CELTS?

It is to be hoped, says the Dublin Freeman, that the forthcoming Celtic Congress n Brittany will throw some additional light on the history of the Celtic peoples in Europe. The Celt to-day is found in that country, in Ireland, in Scotland, Cornwall, Wales and the Isle of Man. But where did he come from? What is his history? The director of the excavations in the Roman Forum, Commendatore Boni, as our readers are already aware, has demonstrated that, five centuries before Romulus, the immediate vicinity of the Forum was inhabited by a race "which he considers to have belonged to the ancient race of the Celts." Commendatore Boni argues that this takes the Celt back 3157 years, and that the finds at Oxyrhyncus take him back to the Egypt of 4500 years ago.

A SERIOUS MATTER.

Mother—What's the matter, my dear? Why are you crying?

Harry (between sobs)—I left my taffy on that chair and the lady's sitting on it.

When little Annie went to the circus she saw a zebra for the first time, and what do you think she said:

"Look, mamma, and see the little horse with the striped sweater on."