

LOVE AND LABOR.

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE world may well be grateful to Chryssippus the Stoic, who seems to have been the first to recognize an occult wisdom beneath the apparently monstrous fables of the poets. Who shall say that certain of the more modern among the *genus irritabile vatum*, who have, in the judgment of their contemporaries, seemed to despise rhyme and reason, have not,—loftily contemning alike this utilitarian age and its mercenary vitiligators,—derived their inspiration from the conviction that future ages will see sweetness and light where to-day even American Browning-societies are wandering in Egyptian darkness? It is surely re-assuring to know on high authority that on the subject of love there was, among the ancient fabulists, a "confusion of persons," something like that which obtained among theologians prior to the Council of Nice, when the salvation of mankind was, as Gibbon puts it, dependent on a single diphthong. The Eros, offspring of the egg deposited on Chaos, must be carefully distinguished from Cupid the Venus-born, a saucy imp whose malice toward mankind but too often leads to chaos or something worse. It was the latter who, blindly and heedless of consequences, shot the keenest bolt in his quiver into the bosom of Dorothy Teulon, to the lasting perturbation of the maiden's heart. Something inclined to waywardness from her childhood Dorothy, under this new influence, was at times even wilful in her moods and,—fatal symptom this,—became a lover of solitude. Like her father, who took pride in one or two good hunters and whose known wealth was a sufficient passport to the best county society, Dorothy rode well, an accomplishment which during the winter threw her much into the society of Gilbert and other Nimrods of the district. On the other hand, her sister seldom ventured on horseback, so that it frequently came to pass that, while Eliza Teulon and Amy Varcoe were spending many hours together over books and music, Dorothy, her dark cheek and eyes aglow with health and excitement, was galloping over ploughed land, fallow, and common to the music of "Stole Away!" Being an undeniably good match,—for the whole county knew that the doctor had added to rather than diminished the large fortune he had inherited,—and of a family which, to say the least, was quite equal to that of the ordinary East Anglian squire, Dorothy was by no means without beaux, and being a trifle coquettish she generally, at halls and elsewhere, had half-a-dozen or more victims dangling in her train. Nay, more than this, Sir George Croyland, a Lincolnshire baronet a year or so younger than her own father, was known to have made a formal proposal during a late visit at Drayton Hall, and, on being rejected, to have

made an exile of himself somewhere among the Norway fjords.

Generally speaking, the home life at the Priory was very quiet; but of course there were times when Gilbert Arderne was compelled to exercise the hospitality due from a person in his position. On all such occasions Mrs. Arderne insisted that Amy should share in the gaieties and amusements provided for the guests, and when Amy herself would have,—modestly conscious that she was being lifted out of her native sphere,—protested her protectress invariably chided her.

"I did not take you from Cornwall, my dear," she would say, "to be my dependent, or to have you occupy some such equivocal position as that of a poor governess in a house of parvenus. Among my son's guests you will never, I am sure, meet with any superciliousness or arrogant assumption of superiority. I will say this much for them, country-bred though many of them are, that Gilbert's friends are all gentlemen. Now and then, my dear, you may perhaps find some of our own sex to envy your beauty and, I will add, your accomplishments, but even then your modesty and retiring nature will disarm them."

Thus encouraged, Amy rapidly conformed herself to the new life, her progress being facilitated by her friendship with Eliza Teulon. When at length it was determined that the family should move to town Amy, who knew nothing of London and its attractions, heard the news with regret, mainly because she saw in it a prospect of some months' separation from her friend. At their next meeting she could not help expressing this, and she was delighted when Eliza said:

"We are going to London too, Amy; Dorothy has persuaded papa to do so: it will be the first time for, I think, five years. Your people have a fine house in Eaton Square, we shall be content with humbler lodging in Wimpole Street. Dorothy is already in anticipation enjoying herself in the way she likes best,—I believe Mr. Arderne owns what they call a house-boat somewhere up the Thames where there is to be much junketting; I have thought that you and I might manage to escape this part of the affair and take our own quieter pleasure together."

"That would be delightful," said Amy, "we could then spend whole days in the Abbey, the Tower, the British Museum, and—"

"And the wax-works, my dear," interrupted Eliza with a laugh, "in the Chamber of Horrors, where all the rustics go, I am told. Yes, I told Mrs. Arderne the other day that we two, you and I, must be allowed to 'do' London,—I think that is the proper phrase,—after our own manner, and she consented at once, stipulating that now and then she must be allowed to ac-

company us. From something she said I have an idea she is somewhat interested in this new fad called Theosophy, and as there are certain priests and priestesses of occultism in town she will probably put herself into communication with them. Who knows? she may possibly take us to some of their meetings? Fancy yourself learning how to transcend the limits of material nature to which, in our present state, we are in some sort bond slaves!"

"Such studies have been regarded as unlawful in the past," replied Amy, "and nothing would induce me to take part in them. Surely, Eliza, that which in ancient times was known as magic is inconsistent with the Christian religion?"

"Really I do not know," said Eliza, "Mrs. Arderne is a good Christian, as even Mr. Summerford allows, but I remember that, soon after her son's return, she had quite a discussion with the rector in this very room on the subject of reconciling the doctrine of re-incarnation with Catholic faith, and, do you know, I think she almost had the best of it? However, Amy, you and I need not fear being led astray into the wilderness of the esoteric philosophy; you being too good a church-woman, and I being too practical, as pa says."

One afternoon about the middle of April Amy was returning to the Priory from a visit to Eliza, the last before leaving for London. The day was unusually warm for so early a season, and Amy, having been kept at home by nearly a week of almost incessant rain, made up her mind to go by way of the Copse, as the wood that lay south of the Priory park was called. This would make her journey at least twice as long, but the prospect of a good walk tempted her to leave the high road just as she reached the foot of the hill by the lych gate of the old churchyard. Across the road a sort of swing-gate, known in Withington as the Kissing Gate, led into the plantation. She had just passed through when Abel Pilgrim came down the hill and made a respectful salutation. This in some respects churlish man was always polite and goodnatured to Amy, being always ready and even eager to render her any little service in his power. Shortly after passing the lych gate Pilgrim encountered his master, also on his way home from Withington.

"Abel," said Gilbert, "was not that Miss Varcoe who went up the hill just now? did you meet her?"

"Miss Varcoe has been to the doctor's, Master Gilbert," replied Pilgrim; "she has not gone up the hill but through the woods. The young lady is a good walker, sir, but you may soon overtake her. The black mare you rode to the meet on Monday has barked her knee, Master Gilbert, and Hobbs came up from the stable to ask for some liniment. I told him that five oils was the best thing in life for it; but he says no, that the master was to order some doctor stuff at the chemist's."

"You will find it there, Abel," said Gilbert, "some bottles of embrocation. Bring