

Lady Sylvia, shall I take you back to the Hall?

She put one hand lightly on his arm.

'I am afraid,' she said; and he could but scarcely hear the low and trembling words. 'How can I be to you—what you described? It is so much—I have never thought of it—and if I should fail to be all that you expect?'

He took her in his arms and kissed her forehead.

'I have no fear. Will you try?'

'Yes,' she answered; and now she looked up into his face, with her wet eyes full of love and hope and generous self-surrender. 'I will try to be to you all that you could wish me to be.'

'Sylvia, my wife,' was all he said in reply; and indeed there was not much need for further speech between these two. The silence of the beautiful night was eloquence enough. And then from time to time they had the clear, sweet singing of the nightingale and the stirring of the night wind among the trees.

By-and-by they went back to the Hall; they walked arm in arm, with a great peace and joy in their hearts; and they re-entered the dining-room. Lord Willowby started up in his easy-chair and rubbed his eyes.

'Bless me!' said he, with one of his violent smiles, 'I have been asleep.'

His lordship was a peer of the realm, and his word must be taken. The fact was, however, that he had not been asleep at all.

CHAPTER VII.

A CONFESSION OF FAITH.

LORD WILLOWBY guessed pretty accurately what had occurred. For a second or two his daughter sat down at the table, pale a little, silent, and nervously engaged in pulling a rose to pieces. Then she got up and proposed they should go into the drawing-room to have some tea. She led the way; but just as she had gone through, Balfour put his hand on Lord Willowby's arm and detained him.

At this juncture a properly minded young man would have been meek and apologetic; would have sworn eternal gratitude in return for the priceless gift he was going to demand; would have made endless protes-

what he chose to call a pernicious lie.

tations as to the care with which he would guard that great treasure. But this Hugh Balfour was not very good at sentiment. Added to the cool judgment of a man of the world, he had a certain forbidding reserve about him which was, perhaps, derived from his Scotch descent; and he knew a great deal more about his future father-in-law than that astute person imagined.

'Lord Willowby,' said he, 'a word before we go in. You must have noticed my regard for your daughter; and you may have guessed what it might lead to. I presume it was not quite displeasing to you, or you would not have been so kind as to invite me here from time to time. Well, I owe you an apology for having spoken sooner than I intended to Lady Sylvia—I ought to have mentioned the matter to you first—'

'My dear fellow,' said Lord Willowby, seizing his hand, while all the features of his face were suddenly contorted into what he doubtless meant as an expression of rapturous joy, 'not another word! Of course she accepted you—her feelings for you have long been known to me, and my child's happiness I put before all other considerations. Balfour, you have got a good girl to be your wife; take care of her.'

'I think you may trust me for that,' was the simple answer.

They went into the room. Not a word was said; but Lord Willowby went over to his daughter and patted her on the back and kissed her; then she knew. A servant brought in some tea.

It was a memorable evening. The joy within the young man's heart had to find some outlet; and he talked then as no one had ever heard him talk before—not even his most intimate friend at Exeter, when they used to sit discoursing into the small hours of the morning. Lord Willowby could not readily understand a man's being earnest or eloquent except under the influence of wine; but Balfour scarcely ever drank wine. Why should he be so vehement? He was not much of an orator in the House; in society he was ordinarily cold and silent. Now, however, he had grown indignant over a single phrase they had stumbled against—'You can't make men moral by act of Parliament'—and the gray eyes under the heavy eyebrows had an intense earnestness in them as he denounced