

THE GREAT TEMPTATION.

By RAYMOND WRIGHT.

CHAPTER VI.

Rene and Mr. James Wilde had arrived at that stage of intimacy between man and woman when they are known by their Christian names, further than that Wilde had made love to her and they had exchanged kisses.

They had reached that point of familiarity when free discussion on any subject is tolerated and it was practically arranged that they should marry.

The company in which Rene and Wilde played were now appearing nightly in Manchester's foremost theatre and it was likely to remain there yet for some considerable time. The play was drawing-crowded houses nightly and everywhere it was discussed and talked over. The novel of the play was on sale at all the bookstalls and the press was continually applauding the merits and demerits of the piece. Its author was lionized in every quarter and his photograph appeared in nearly every publication.

Mr. James Wilde had never yet showed his true nature to Rene; he honestly felt that he had some feeling for her; but he had felt the same feeling for other women. Hitherto he had always been able to conquer all the women who crossed his path, but with Rene Oakleigh his mode of attack seemed useless. Her pristine purity seemed to hallow a thing for him to violate and in a way that excited his respect. He resolved, therefore, to marry her. He had always been a scapegrace and he thought that probably marriage would put him right. In his mind he was dubious as to the efficacy of this scheme but the possibility of reform asserted itself upon him with some force besides which he felt there was no better person whom he could marry than Rene.

Mr. Wilde's record was not a clean one. Two years at a public school then expulsion; after that a year at the Varsity which he was compelled to leave in disgrace. The next step was the Army in which he bade fair to rise, and would have done so had it not been for his ungovernable temper. He quarrelled with an officer, knocked him to the ground, was court-martialled and afterwards "drummed out" of his regiment.

The stage then appealed to him, and after one or two efforts he secured a minor part in one of the less popular productions. His dissolute tendencies retarded his progress until he joined the company of "Violet Desford," when by a lucky chance he was favoured with a passable part at a fairly good remuneration. In his stage career he had been the subject of much scandal and his "liasons" with women were well known, besides which, his friendships with the members of the weaker sex were not of the purely platonic order. The name he was known by—James Wilde—was an assumed one, although his identity had never been questioned.

Rene had never questioned him very closely with regard to his former days, but these enquiries she did make were always replied to with an air of absolute frankness.

At times she fancied she experienced a feeling of repulsion in his company, but she told herself that this was only imagination. Her general feeling when with him was of elation. She warmed to his touch and his ardent manner claimed her for his own.

They were now out together and the day was of that calm and agreeable order which is characteristic of late September. It was approaching the hour of four in the afternoon and they had just left the theatre after rehearsal.

Rene had suggested a car ride to Trafford Park and her companion had acquiesced with his usual grace.

After alighting from the car he led her to the most secluded spot he could find where they both seated themselves.

"And now Rene, perhaps you will give me your long delayed acceptance of my proposal—when are you going to make me the happiest man on earth?"

Rene hung her head and gripped his arm more tightly; she did not reply.

"You know, my darling," he continued, "that I have loved you ever since I set eyes upon you; you know that I have sought your company on every conceivable occasion and you must recognise the depth of feeling I have for you."

He paused. Rene still maintained silence, and her lover again resumed—

"I have made love to you from time to time, and you have not discouraged me; I have always longed to be with you and you are aware that I hold you in great tenderness. I realise the blackness of life without you and I ask you to marry me; I do not ask this in selfishness but because I love you, and I dare to hope that you have some love for me—am I right in supposing that you care for me?"

"Yes," came in a short breath from Rene.

"And will you marry me?" he added.

She repeated the same monosyllable, "Yes."

He took her in his arms and covered her face with kisses.

"And when, my darling?"

She murmured the name of an approaching month and again he held her amorously to his breast.

CHAPTER VII.

Marriage is usually the end of the novelist's story. The commencement of a romance generally begins at the meeting of two parties who grow to love each other, a rival is sometimes introduced who is villainous and designing, and after many exciting experiences, in which the villain almost succeeds, with diabolical cleverness, in capturing the heroine of the narrative, the hero is able to marry his beloved. Many entanglements take place and misconceptions separate the two parties, until in the end, a happy understanding enables them to give themselves to each other and a fitting finale is reached by the marriage of the hero and the heroine.

In real life, however, marriage is not the end of life's romance. It is more often the beginning. How few who enter into the state of matrimony, pause to consider what marriage means?

Often a mad infatuation will lead a couple of inefficient humans to the altar, who, after having "bound themselves together" live on only to discover how foolish they have both been. Sometimes it may be only the husband who repents—sometimes the wife, but very often both parties.

As most of us are brought up on a system of "hush" and are led to live a life of make-believe, it is only natural that many marriages should prove failures. Innocence and ignorance are things as widely apart as virtue and fear, but the bulk of people mistake the one for

the other. True morality cannot be seen by the average person, hence the number of wrecked lives which are sanctified and blessed at the commencement at the altar.

Rene's was a peculiar marriage. She and her lover, Mr. James Wilde, were made one "for better or for worse," one bright and sunny morning. To her at that time everything in the world was sweet and good to look upon. Alas that this bright and happy state, this fair and beautiful dream, should be only of short duration.

It was not long before her husband showed his real nature. He drank, swore, gambled and exposed to his wife some of the worst vices known to man. It came as a cruel blow to her.

The small house in which they lived soon began to assume that look of cheerlessness which manifests itself when either the wife or the husband has ceased to care—the barrenness of a home in consequence of the indifference of either one or both of its owners—the state which is described as "the skeleton in the cupboard"—and Rene awoke from her dream of imagination to a horrible sense of the reality—her husband did not love her! The dreadful truth had hinted its existence before, but she had banished it away. After a month's nuptial happiness in which life to her had seemed a paragon of bliss she noticed that her husband began to stay out late at nights, and as the time went by he got later and more negligent still, and now, at this time, her husband had plainly hinted that married life had begun to pall upon him. He had told her in a brutal manner that he "wished he had not been such a fool as to get married."

But there was yet worse to follow. One evening her husband stayed out until the small hours of the morning, and Rene, wishing to receive him, had stayed up to await his arrival. When he came home he was intoxicated. His breath smelt foully of spirits, and his gait was unsteady.

"What the devil are you doing up at this hour?" he said to her.

"I stayed up for you, James," she answered. "Well, go to bed, damn you," he returned—and Rene went and cried upon the bed until the pillow was damp with her tears.

And after this Rene learned that her husband spent most of his time with loose women. She knew that the stage offered many temptations, but as she herself had left it and had lived only for her husband's sake, her anguish was all the greater at this awful news. But worse was still to come. One night her husband brought a woman home with him; a woman whom Rene knew to be of the worst moral calibre, and James put Rene to shame in her own house.

She firmly made up her mind to leave him, but what could she do? The stage was no longer open to her and there were very few ways in which she could earn.

When the resolve came to her to leave her husband, he was absent on a drinking fit; she had not seen him for over two days, and she had heard it voiced that he had been dismissed from his company and that his part was now being played by a younger man. Her husband might return any time—he might stay away for days.

She searched the house for money. There was none to be found. She remembered she had spent her last coins on food.

She would pawn her jewellery—anything to get away from such evil surroundings. Oh! the horror of it all! She would not stay a day longer.

CHAPTER VIII.

Hard luck followed Rene. She could get no work. The stage had no use for her, and as she was not experienced in domestic work, she could find no place of service. Offices were closed to her for she had no clerical training. She had pawned some of her jewelry and was now living on the proceeds.

She had parted with a shilling or two here and there in Registry Offices in the hope that she would gain a situation thereby; daily she went to these offices where she had paid entrance fees, and time after time she was told that nothing had come in that would suit her. Once or twice her feeble hopes were fanned into a flame of expectancy by the news from the individuals in these offices that "a lady had been in who was looking for a person like herself"—and Rene was given a slip of pasteboard bearing the name and address of the said lady, whom Rene would trudge out to visit.

This experience happened to Rene on two occasions, and on the first of these she set out in high hopes to find the person whose name had been given to her. At the interview with her prospective employer she experienced a greater ignominy than had yet been her fate to undergo. The lady in question had told her that she "certainly did desire a servant for the house," but she was of the opinion that Rene was much too superior for the place. Her manner of speech and general deportment were hardly servile enough, and after a short interview she was dismissed with the explanation that she was too refined to undertake the duties.

The other prospective Mistress to whom Rene trudged "was afraid that Rene would be of no use to her as she wanted someone experienced."

And she walked through the streets of Manchester daily in search of employment. The dreary length of Piccadilly she went visiting here and there the larger shops and seeking the manager, only to be met with the usual reply—"they were not in want of anyone like herself." To the reading room she would go and there she would scan the advertisement columns of the papers. She would copy down the addresses of those firms who were advertising places which she thought might be suitable ones to apply for, and then she would seek out the advertisers.

In less than a week from the time she had left her husband she had been all over the busier parts of Manchester and had interviewed dozens of firms. She had gone out as far as Fallowfield, Old Trafford and Newton Heath. She had even visited the dingy and sordid localities of Ancoats, Strangeways and Salford, but a means of earning her living she could not find.

Sometimes she thought of returning to her home—the house in which she was born and the place where she had spent youth's sunny days—the house of her father with its countless charms, each one of which retained a place in her memory. But no, she could not return! Her father would anger against her and scorn her. He might even forbid her entry. She could not do such a thing as go to her father; her pride would not let her do it. Poor girl! she did not know of her father's death; the possibility of his decease had never struck her.

And then she thought of returning to her husband, of going back to the cruelty and shame that she had before endured. God No! She would not do that. She was not going back now; she preferred all the hardships and terrible possibilities of what might come rather than renew her acquaintance with the horrible life that was past.

She would go round to the shops again. She would try every possible place. She would accept any position—do any work, however ignominious, than go back to her husband or to her childhood's home.

(Another long instalment next week.)

PLEASE TELL US.

Who was the Sergeant that went into a restaurant in town the other night, and sat on a gentleman's bowler hat?

Who is the sister that hired a horse for a ride as far as the Cat and Fiddle, and who was seen returning leading it. Does Sister Popham know anything about it?

Who was the Private of the King's Liverpools who had five of the same Regiment digging to catch a dead rabbit?

And who was the Private who thought he had a bargain by buying same for 4d.?

Who is the Private who sings and expects a pint for every song?

Who is the Private who had all the swank until he faced the Medical Board and then he had a thousand excuses?

Who was it of the King's that killed a good woman's cat on guard?

Who was the Private of the King's that went courting down the Dale and fell off the foot-path?

Was that ten and a half pound baby a joke or a reality, Percy?

If true, how does it feel to be a daddy?

When will our readers realize that *hurtful personalities will not be indulged in in this column.*

Why was the ambulance following Crpl. Cummings when he started on his trip around Buxton?

Why the Associate Editor spends more enjoyable afternoons than mornings?

What noise annoys an oyster?

Is it a clam shell (clams yell)?

If Mrs. J. B. Ransome (our Heart Specialist and Advice to Lovelorn Editress) will be as successful knitting hearts as she is knitting garments?

How long would it take a patient with a toothpick to roll a monkey nut from Spring Gardens to the hospital?

What was contained in the brown paper parcel which ye editor was conveying with such care when he started out to see "her"?

Who is the patient who patrols South Avenue so assiduously; and why?

How Major Goodwill likes his collapsible table and why he draws pictures on the blotting paper?

Why Sergt. Martin reads his letters in private now?

How the nurses enjoyed their walk to Millers Dale?

Who had the first cup of tea from Bill Oatman's teapot?

If Jimmy Aitkenhead was really the best man?

Why Bobby (Sergt.) Leith would not tell the giddy philappers what he had in his hand?

How Crpl. Cummings enjoys the new Miss?

Why Ernie (Crpl.) Cook is so fond of chicken (the kind you eat) these days.

Who were the two soldiers who, while in Opera House, made funnels of their programmes to enable them to catch the chocolates which were thrown to them by the ladies?

Why do the quartette choose such sloppy songs?

Do they not know that the audience who enjoy their singing (which is very good) heartily disapprove of their choice of songs. Popular songs make a popular quartette.

What was Scottie Wells discussing so earnestly with our Heart Specialist on Saturday last?

Why so few of our soldiers go to Chapel-en-le-Frith. There are many beautiful slappers in 'yon fair village. Grab your opportunity!

Why Fitzpatrick takes up his stand so near to Newbold's when selling the "Red Cross Special"?

Is one of the pretty assistants who serve in that store, the attraction?

Is it a fact that one of the members of the audience became very seasick after hearing the quartette sing "When Billows are Rocking"?

Who is the infernal idiot who starts the gramophone at 6-30 every a.m.

Who was the soldier who tried to get a snapshot of the bridal pair at the Canadian wedding, but failed because of his good looks?

Does Blunt know who he is?

Who was the young lady who said she was too shy to walk out with a soldier in kilt? Why?

Who was the young lady who, unknown to her mistress, went out to get a "Red Cross Special," but, in some mysterious manner found herself at Lovers' Leap with a Sergeant?

What happened to her when she returned?

What Scottie thinks when he has to sweep the stairs?

What he says when he has finished them?

Who was the Canadian who asked an English girl the difference between a green field and a country lane?

Can Worthing tell us?

How many Scotties there are in this Hospital?

CANADIAN WAR LOAN TRIUMPH.

New Imperial Credits.

The Canadian War Loan of £20,000,000, which closed yesterday, was an extraordinary success. The total subscription already received amount to £33,800,000, and it is expected that when all applications are to hand the loan will be over-subscribed by £16,000,000. Ninety-five per cent. of the subscriptions are Canadian, the remainder being taken by Americans.

The Minister of Finance is so impressed with the result of the loan, showing the strength of the Canadian financial situation, that he will immediately take into consideration the question of establishing a further large dollar credit in Canada for the Imperial Government to purchase munitions and supplies. He states that it is of the utmost importance, from the standpoint of the successful prosecution of the war and of Canadian business, that Canada should lend the Imperial Government as much as possible towards meeting the huge expenditures which it is making here, amounting to over £200,000 a day on shells and other munitions.

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Little hugs and kisses
Make a little maiden
Change her name to Mrs.

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