



"ECHOES of the Past;"

OR,
The Recompense of Love!"

CHAPTER XX.

"Father has just sent to say that he has been detained by important business—politics, of course! We eat and drink and sleep politics—he suggests that we should go by train later. But it isn't at all the thing we planned, is it? Who wants to go in a stuffy train? I want to drive behind the new gees."

Her disappointment was evidently so keen that Clive said almost unthinkingly:

"Why shouldn't I drive you down and Lord Chesterleigh join us by train?"

"Why, how clever of you!" she cried her face lighting up. "That will be splendid! We sha'n't lose our drive, after all. I'll write a note to father." She stopped and the color rose to her face, for she had suddenly remembered that it was scarcely the conventional thing for her to be driving about the country alone with Clive. And yet how delightful it would be! After all, they could take the groom, which they had not intended doing. And even if it were a sin against society's unwritten code, would it not be worth while to commit it?"

"Yes; I'll write to father!"

"The nearest station is called Ferry," remarked Clive, who had been looking at the Bradshaw and had not noticed her hesitation and her blush.

She scribbled a note and placed it on the table which her father used for writing, and they went out to the carriage. It was, as she had said, a splendid phaeton and the cobs were all that could be desired. She was in good spirits when Clive and she started; they rose still higher as they left London behind and drive through the lanes, softly glowing in their spring green.

Clive was glad to get away from London and the eternal round of work, and he felt happier, at any rate more at peace, than he had been since the fatal day Mina had cast him off; indeed, it would have been rather difficult to be unhappy in such perfect weather and with so beautiful and bright a companion.

They halted half-way, to rest the horses and get some tea for themselves, and, in defiance of conventionality, they drank it at the rustic table outside the little inn. When they started again, she asked Clive to let her drive.

"Do you think you can manage them?" he said. "They are young, and fresh still."

"Oh, yes," she replied. "Besides, I can't come to any harm while you are sitting beside me."

He told the groom to take up a ring in the curb and he sat and watched her closely as she drove, and with a

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certain admiration, for she managed the high-fetted horses very well. After a while Clive turned to the groom to ask if they had got the horses too tightly curbed; the man touched his hat and bent forward as if he did not hear the question, and Lady Edith said in an undertone:

"You must speak a little louder. William is rather deaf at times, and this is one of his bad days. He is much older than he looks," she remarked, after Clive had repeated the question and had received a satisfactory reply; "but nearly all our servants are old; we scarcely ever discharge them for anything short of murder, and I think that some of them are really attached to us."

"Your old ayah, Sara, for instance," said Clive; "she seems very devoted."

Lady Edith nodded and laughed. "Oh, she is quite silly," she said. "I mean in that devotion of hers. She would let any of us jump on her. She belongs to a very hot and passionate race, and is unwavering in her love and hate. Sometimes she reminds me of one of the cats, the big wild-cats, in her own jungles; softly purring one moment, all claws and fury the next. By the way, you are a great favorite of hers; I hope you feel flattered." She laughed as she glanced at him.

"I do," said Clive; "but I am rather surprised. I thought she regarded me rather unfavorably."

"Oh, that was sometime ago, perhaps, when she first knew you; they always regard strangers with a certain amount of suspicion; it is their nature, too, as Doctor Watts says."

"Well, I'm glad I'm in her good books now, at any rate," said Clive. "What a pretty bit of country we are going through."

"Isn't it lovely!" she responded. "I don't know when I have seen anything so beautiful, or when I have enjoyed anything so much as this drive. What nonsense it is to say that there is no happiness in this world."

She turned her face to him again; it was radiant; her eyes, blue as the sky, shone with the happiness of which she had spoken, her delicately cut lips were half parted with a smile of unalloyed pleasure.

Clive checked a sigh. "I am glad," he said.

They reached Palmer's Green, and their arrival created no little stir at the tiny, out-of-the-way inn. It was a charming little place, half-covered by ivy and alight with spring flowers. The "parlor" was scrupulously clean and, for a wonder, had an odor of lavender instead of damp.

Clive found that chops were above the capacity of the establishment, but he ordered ham and eggs and a high tea. The landlady, quite one of the old type, took Lady Edith upstairs, but bustled back to Clive to assure him that she would make them as comfortable as she possibly could.

"Perhaps you and your good lady would like to go and see the church while the meal's being prepared, sir?" she said. "It's considered to be a very fine old building, and there's some rare ancient monuments and carving."

Clive looked up sharply at the "your good lady," and was about to correct the woman, but he checked himself; it was scarcely worth while to take any notice of the mistake. He proposed the church to Lady Edith when she came down, and she assented promptly, and they strolled to it. It really was a fine old church; they got the key from the sexton's cottage and examined the monuments, the carved oak and the brasses. There was a suggestion of intimacy in the way they sauntered about alone together of which Clive was vaguely conscious and which Lady Edith keenly felt; certainly her happiness was not yet waning.

"I wonder whether Lord Chesterleigh will be here in time for tea," he said.

"I don't know," replied Lady Edith, easily. "He may not come until it is just time to start for home. It will be bright moonlight to-night and he will enjoy the drive. I know I shall."

They wandered about the lanes for half an hour, sometimes silent, sometimes talking in the leisurely, rambling way born of the occasion and their surroundings; then they got hungry and made their way back to the inn to find a nondescript but enticing meal awaiting them. Lady Edith en-

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joyed it immensely and declared that she would often have just such a meal at Grosvenor Square.

"But I am afraid it would be different there," she said, with a little sigh.

She presided over the tea at one end of the table, and Clive sat behind the ham and eggs at the other, and they certainly looked so very much like a recently married couple that there was some excuse for the landlady, who waited, beaming on them benevolently, after the manner of her kind all the world over when they are regarding a bride and bridegroom.

"I really cannot eat any more,"

Lady Edith declared, with a laugh, as she refused a further supply from the huge dish. "I have enjoyed it so much."

"They certainly have done very well," admitted Clive. "I'll go and look after the horses."

"That means that you want to smoke," said Lady Edith, smiling up at him. "Pray do so here, when you come back, if you want to. I like it."

Clive found the horses all right and talked them over with the aged John. "You don't know how far it is from the station, I suppose?" he asked.

"Lord Chesterleigh is coming down by train."

John touched his hat and replied in the negative, and Clive, as he sauntered off, said:

"You can loosen those curbs going back."

"At once, sir?" asked John.

"Eh? Oh, yes, if you like," said Clive absently.

Meanwhile, Lady Edith had wandered into the old-fashioned garden.

"What beautiful flowers you have," she said to the landlady. "I did not know that there were so many blooming so early in the year."

"It's my son's hobby, ma'am," said the landlady beamingly. "I hope you'll please to pick any that takes your fancy and make a bowkay for your good gentleman."

Lady Edith's face flamed and, like Clive, she was about to correct the woman, but she, too, checked herself, thinking, as he had thought, that it did not matter. But the simple words rang in her ears and made her heart beat quickly, and she stooped over some fragrant stocks to hide her blushing face. Clive found her picking the flowers. "I've full permission," she said. "Aren't they lovely?"

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Smell!" She held the bunch to his face with a novel air of abandonment, of simple gaiety, which would have charmed any man. "You shall have one for your coat. What shall it be, a pink?"

She selected one and he fumbled with it at his buttonhole, but men are notoriously clumsy in such matters, and she, with a little gesture of impatience and womanly scorn at his efforts, put it in its place, found a pin and fixed it. She was necessarily very close to him, and as he looked down at her—he had not to look far, for she was tall—he could not fail to notice the loveliness of the upturned face in its frame of golden hair, blown a little loose by the soft breeze. She glanced up to scan her work and met his gaze; her eyes fell suddenly, a faint blush rose to her face, and she turned her head away.

Clive was only human and, like most men who are worth anything at all, admired beauty of any kind. If there had been no Mina, he would have been stirred to the depths by the proximity of this extremely beautiful woman; even as it was he was not insensible to her charms. He moved restlessly.

"Shall we walk toward the station on the chance of meeting Lord Chesterleigh?" he said.

Lady Edith stifled a sigh, but, of course, assented promptly. Having received minute instructions as to the way, they started, and, of course, lost it. However, they reached the station at last, inquiring when the next London train came in, were informed by an aged porter that it was due in about an hour's time. Clive tipped him and, describing Lord Chesterleigh to the porter to direct a gentleman answering that description to the inn.

They went back slowly; the moon had risen from a low bank of clouds and the pretty "gentle" country seemed lapped in peace; it was a night for lovers, and the music of a thrush singing softly in an elm was echoed by Lady Edith's heart. If only these wonderful, happy hours could last!

If she could hold the assurance that they two should spend many such hours together alone! She glanced at him now and again, but though Clive was too well-mannered to be absent or preoccupied, she had a painful sense that his feelings were not in harmony with hers; if they were, how could he refrain from speaking the words of love for which her soul thirsted?

The night grew slightly chilly; the landlady, with kindly forethought, had lit a fire, and though the room was not cold, the blaze, reflected in the old paneling, made the room cheerful. Lady Edith drew a low chair up to the fire and leaned forward with her hands clasped round her knees, making another graceful picture; it was as if rank and fashion were playing at country simplicity; she appeared in a new character tonight, thought Clive, as he leaned against the mantelshelf above her and smoked a cigarette. Her voice, when she spoke—there were long intervals of silence broken only by the sputtering and the cracking of the fire of great logs—was soft and low and almost dreamy.

(To be Continued.)

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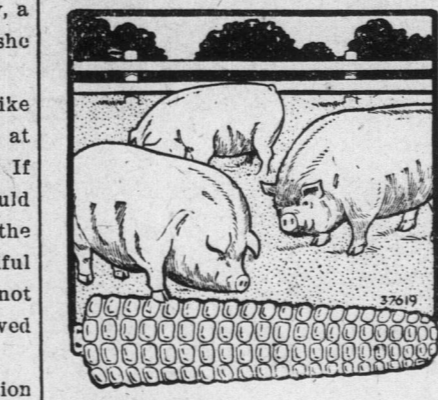
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