

A GREAT SECRET,

OR,
SHALL IT BE DONE.

CHAPTER XXII.

As soon as Gerald got back to Mrs. Walton's house, after his visit to Lord Kingscliffe, he wrote a long letter to Madame de Lancy, telling her all about it, and asking her what he should do next.

The two following days, during which he could hear nothing and do nothing, were a time of torture to the young fellow; for solitary brooding over the matter brought him to the conclusion that there was something more than an accidental resemblance between the snappish old Earl and Mr. Beresford. Lord Kingscliffe was much older than Mr. Beresford, and in spite of the paralysis of the latter, weaker and more infirm; his face was thinner, more sunken, and his voice feebler and less under control; but there was such a strong undefinable likeness between the two men in speech and manner, that, with a sudden hot flush, Gerald felt the question darting into his mind, "Could Mr. Beresford be the relation Lord Kingscliffe meant?" He felt horribly ashamed of himself the next moment for allowing such a suggestion to take shape; but, in spite of himself, it would come back again and again, each time strengthened by the suspicious and prejudices of Mr. Shaw, Peggy, and Madame de Lancy. But if so, if Mr. Beresford were really the never-does-weel connection of the Earl's, who had taken the ring thirteen years ago, why, what of that? He had repented of the wild ways of his youth—by the bye, he couldn't have been so very young thirteen years ago—well, at any rate, he had settled down respectably long since; and if he did drop a stone out of his ring in the railway-carriage on the night of the robbery, that did not prove—Gerald did not shape the thought further. But again Mr. Shaw's conviction that the stone was a valuable clue to the robber came into his mind to torture him with new and alarming fancies.

Peggy was still ill, so he was spared the pain of evading the questions she would have been sure to ask. He had been so much preoccupied by thoughts of her, and anxiety about the business he had in hand, that the small persecutions and insults of his fellow-boarder, Mr. Hicks, had for the last few days entirely failed of their effect; and when, on the third Sunday after his own and Peggy's arrival in London, he was told that his tormentor had gone away for his yearly holiday, the intelligence afforded him much less relief than it would have done a fortnight before. Mr. Hicks, however, never forgot to pay off a grudge, such as he considered he owed Peggy for snubbing him, and Gerald for supplanting him in the estimation of all the women in the house by the very simple means of practising ordinary courtesy toward them.

On this particular Sunday, Gerald was surprised at luncheon-time, when the ladies had returned from church, to find that there was a flutter of curiosity, surprise, and amusement among them, of which apparently he was the object. As soon as they saw that he noticed this, he was assailed by a fire of nods and smiles, half nervous, half malicious, of congratulations, of innuendoes, of "You might have told me!" and "When is it coming off?" which made him look from one to the other in a amazement. Only Miss Simpson remained silent; and this fact awoke his suspicions that some trick had been played upon him.

"What does all this mean, Miss Simpson—can you tell me?" he asked quietly. "Only that, at the suggestion of Mr. Hicks, who told us we should hear something worth listening to, we all went to the parish church this morning, and heard the banns between you and Miss Beresford published for the third time." "No one could have told, from the manner in which Gerald received this announcement, that he heard it for the first time. He had been so well prepared, by the expression of vulgar malice on her face, for some disagreeable news, that he was able to look straight at her and laugh quite naturally. "I thought it would surprise you," he said simply.

And every face at the table underwent a sudden change. Miss Simpson, who had spread the report that he knew nothing about the publication of the banns, and had told them all to watch his face when he heard of it, was aghast; Mrs. Walton, who had only just got wind of the affair, looked unutterably relieved; while the sympathies of most of the rest turned at once in the right direction, the laugh raised was at the expense of Mr. Hicks and Miss Simpson; and, with the heartiness of reaction, real congratulations were showered upon Gerald instead of the mocking sham felicitations of a few minutes before. He received them with perfect self-possession, and did not even hurry away from the luncheon-table; but he was much relieved when the party broke up and dispersed in search of nap or novel, and he was free to snatch up his hat and dash out of doors for a little steady thought.

His anger against the perpetrator of the impudent trick soon spent itself; the fellow was out of reach, and there was an end to that side of the matter. But Peggy, what would she say if the story were to come to her ears? He could only hope that she would not be so deeply hurt and offended that she would break off her old affectionate intercourse with him, and either refuse to speak to him again at all or be so stiff and prim as to make him wish she had done so. Gerald did not know much about girls, but he understood that they were wilful creatures, who never saw any matter by the man's light of common sense, and he thought it very likely that Peggy might refuse to believe that he had no hand in the matter, and quite improbable that she should treat him as a fellow-victim.

He had spent some time in Regent's Park, and was making his way through the throng of young men and maidens with the unmistakable impress of Sunday on their unbecoming clothes, when it occurred to him that he had been very foolish not to take the good-natured Mrs. Walton into his confidence, and beg her to help him in keeping the affair a secret from Peggy until she should get well. The fever was over now, and there was nothing the matter with her but extreme weakness, which kept her in her room still. Gerald hoped that by the time she came down-stairs he might summon enough courage to tell her the story as a joke, and at the same time he thought he was subtle enough to tell, by the way

she received it, how she would be likely to listen to a suggestion that she should become his wife if he should ever be in position to make it. She would never marry Victor, that was certain; then why not marry him, in that dim future of all penurious young men, in which money is to be had for the mere trouble of drawing a cheque? Why not, indeed, when he loved her as nobody else ever would, as the fairest woman only gets one man to love her? The first irregular impulses of his passion had now been fanned into the steady fire of utter devotion, fed by her innocent caresses, by the sisterly kisses he received, but scarcely dared to return. If she had only been some other man's daughter, and not Mr. Beresford's, he felt that he, inexperienced in woman's ways as he was, would have a better chance than any other man with this girl, who, petulant and wayward as she knew her to be, would always be a fairy princess to him.

He hurried back to Mrs. Walton's hoping that it might not be too late to warn her. But as soon as the door was opened by the servant he saw the landlady herself fluttering down the stairs, with a bunch of long ribbons, which she wore on the left shoulder of her Sunday dress, floating behind her; she stopped excitedly and beckoned to Gerald, who came up the stairs three at a time, delighted at having found his opportunity so soon. But no sooner had he come nearer, and had time to whisper to her, "Mrs. Walton, I want to speak to you particularly," than she turned and tripped upward like a will-o'-the-wisp, nodding to him encouragingly as he followed her.

On the first floor she paused, panting, and hissing out, "It's all right. Mr. and Mrs. Nesbitt are out, so you can go in here," she opened the door of the drawing-room, half-ushered, half pushed him in, and then, instead of following, shut the door and ran down-stairs. Gerald could have sunk into the earth: leaning back on the sofa, supported by pillows, was Peggy. He could only see the top of her head over the cushions, and, as she did not move, he, after a moment's pause, turned to the door to escape. But he was not clever enough to do so unheeded; as his fingers touched the handle she called feebly, "Gerald!" and he had to turn back again with a crimson face.

She was holding out her hand to him, so he came forward as boldly as he could, and stood in front of her, without at first daring to meet her eyes. "I'm very glad you are so much better. We didn't expect to see you down so soon," said he, in a stifled, constrained voice. "Aren't you glad to see me down, then, Gerald? I hoped you would be."

It was all right, then; she had not heard of the trick. Gerald's head went up with an expression of great relief, and he knelt down beside the sofa and looked at her for the first time. Her face was very thin and very white; but her eyes were so bright, and the smile about her mouth was such a happy one, that Gerald thought he had never seen her so pretty or so sweet before. As, kneeling he bent his head to look more closely at her, she stretched out her arms and put them lovingly around his neck. He was astonished, but very much pleased, by this tenderness; and, with his heart beating so violently that he was afraid of his throbbing would frighten her and make her draw her arms away, he kept very still under her caress, and for the first moment dared not even lift his eyes to hers. When he did look at her again, she dropped her head gently upon his arm with a low sigh of utter content.

"What makes you so happy to-day, Peggy?" he asked softly. "She moved her head so that she could look up into his face, and said rather shyly, "I—I don't know." Then, suddenly raising herself, and burying her face on his shoulder with an impulse of irrepressible passionate affection, she whispered, "Mrs. Walton has told me." "Told you—what?" "You know—what she heard in church this morning."

"And you are not angry? I was afraid you would be so angry," said Gerald, much relieved, but still more puzzled. "Angry? No; I was astonished—I was almost frightened. It came upon me so suddenly, you know—so very suddenly. For I had never thought you—you loved me—like that. I had fancied, when I began to think about it at all, that—you liked me, because you were kind, and because I was lonely, but not because—not because I was myself; I didn't think I was nice enough. And so—and so, of course, I was very much surprised this morning, and very, very happy."

"Happy! You like me well enough to—" Gerald stopped short. He saw now how the story had been repeated to her—saw that she loved him so well that even the unheard-of liberty of taking her consent for granted seemed no great offence in her eyes; and, in the burst of joy which succeeded to his bewilderment, he took her in his arms and kissed her over and over again. But presently came her inevitable demand for an explanation.

"Why didn't you tell me you wanted to marry me, Gerald? You might have known—"

She did not finish her sentence. But the simple-minded absence of any trace of coquetry from her voice and manner made her meaning clear. Gerald hesitated. "What did you think when you first heard of it?" he asked. "Well, at first I didn't know what to think. Then it came into my head that you might be going away somewhere—to emigrate perhaps—and that you didn't like to—leave me all alone by myself, and that you hadn't yet found courage to tell me so—you know you're rather shy with me sometimes; and yet there was no time to lose. So you—so you got everything ready; and, of course, when I was ill you couldn't tell me, and you had to wait until—until now. That's what I thought, Gerald. Was I right?"

"You are always right, my darling," said he tenderly, but rather vaguely. He was utterly bewildered by the position—did not confess to her that it was a false one—and was battling with a great longing to take advantage of it. So he evaded the question, and yielded to the delight of being with her, and holding her little hands, listening to the almost childish prattle she

poured into his ears in the pleasure of talking to him again.

And so the afternoon slipped away into evening, and Mrs. Walton brought tea up to them with her own hands, and overwhelmed them both with a flood of congratulations which Gerald did not dare to try to stem. And at seven o'clock, Peggy being very tired, kind-hearted Mrs. Walton insisted on taking her up to bed; and Gerald, as he received the girl's loving good-night kiss and pressed her in his arms, felt that confession was growing every moment more impossible.

He passed the night in a fever, which prevented his taking any rest. As he stood at the little window of his room in the early morning, watching the first rays of the sun shining on the glass panes of a studio opposite, and wishing to goodness that a sudden eclipse would let him go to sleep, he came to the conclusion that the only course open to him was to go boldly to Mr. Beresford as soon as his errand for Madame de Lancy was accomplished, and to ask him to let him take another situation, with a view to getting a position which would enable him to become a suitor for Peggy's hand. Having made up his mind to this course, he felt madly anxious to get his business in London over; and when, soon after breakfast, Peggy came down-stairs into Mrs. Walton's sitting-room, she found him restlessly wandering about the room with his hat in his hand, not liking to leave the house without having seen her, and yet eager to start on his daily journey to the Charing Cross Hotel.

"Why does Madame de Lancy want you to see Mr. Smith, Gerald?" asked Peggy when they were sitting by the fire together. "I have to give him a letter from her, as I told you."

"Why couldn't she send it by post? She must have some other reason, Gerald."

After the discoveries he had lately made about the confidential clerk, Gerald thought this very probable. He wished to keep his suspicions to himself, however, but Peggy saw that something was being kept from her, and she coaxed, and teased, and guessed, and suggested, until at last Gerald was forced to confess that he held something stronger than mere suspicion that Smith was an accomplice in the robbery, if not in the murder.

"Stronger than suspicion! Oh Gerald, do you mean proof?"

"Yes; and I have proof of more than that."

"Of what? Gerald, Gerald, you can trust me."

"I have in my possession the clue to the murder that poor Mr. Shaw told us about the night he slept at 'Les Bouleaux.'" He said these words very slowly, very distinctly, in a low voice, with his eyes fixed upon her white quivering face and his hand laid impressively upon hers. Both remained for a few seconds very quiet, very still, breathing heavily, and reading in each other's eyes the full measure of importance which each attached to the startling announcement. Then both started violently at the same moment, and turned their heads sharply to the screen before the door. Gerald got up and looked round it, but nobody was there.

"I thought I heard somebody come softly into the room," said he.

"I'm sure I did," said Peggy.

"You don't mind my leaving you for a minute, Peggy?"

She said "No," and he went out into the hall. There, talking to the servant, and glancing about him all the time with his sharp little black eyes, was Mr. Smith. Gerald was so much startled that he allowed the clerk to wring his hand heartily, without at first having a word to say in greeting.

"I got to town late last night, and went to the Charing Cross Hotel, where they gave me your card, and said you had been calling incessantly for the last fortnight. So I came straight up here this morning to find out what you wanted with me."

"I have a letter to give you," said Gerald. And he took it out of his pocket and handed it to Smith, who changed color at sight of the hand-writing, and tore the envelope with clumsy fingers. It contained nothing but a blank sheet of paper.

Both men were equally surprised by this discovery, and they glanced suspiciously at each other, trying to learn the meaning of the trick from each other's face.

"Who is this interesting miscreant from?" asked Smith lightly.

"From Madame de Lancy," answered Gerald. "If you are going back to the hotel now, you might let me walk a little way with you."

He was anxious to go to the telegraph-office, anxious to get Smith out of the house without his having seen Peggy, if indeed it was not too late already.

The two men walked part of the way down Portland Place together, and Gerald left the other near the Langham Hotel, on the plea that he wanted to get some stamps. He then went into the post office, and telegraphed the news of Smith's arrival to Madame de Lancy. When he came out the other had disappeared. Gerald hurried back to Mrs. Walton's, only to find that the artful clerk had got back before him. When the young fellow entered the sitting-room, Smith was walking up and down, talking volubly, and with much excitement, while Peggy was sitting crouched in the armchair by the fire, in floods of tears.

"He says I must go back, Gerald; he says I must go back," she burst out. "Is it true? Must I go?"

"I don't see how there can be any question about it, under the circumstances," said Smith, wagging his head sympathetically. "Her father is ill, and has sent for her—scrawled this note to her with his own hand. How could any daughter refuse to go?"

And he gave Gerald a piece of paper, upon which, in Mr. Beresford's well-known left-handed scrawl, were written a few words, imploring his daughter to come to him.

"Gerald, you know that, ill or well, he never wants me," said Peggy piteously. "Must I go?"

"I'm afraid you must, dear. You can't refuse to go to your father when he's ill," answered he gravely.

Smith looked much relieved by this decision, and, having fulfilled his purpose, he left the house, telling them he would call again in the evening. Some other inmates of the house came into the room as he went out, and Gerald and Peggy had no further opportunity of talking together until after dinner, when a telegram was brought to the former. He read it, glanced involuntarily with a troubled expression at Peggy, and left the room. She sprang up and followed him into the hall.

"What is it, Gerald? It is from Madame de Lancy, I know. What does it say?"

"I must go to Paris at once, and take the ring stone with me," whispered he.

"O Gerald, and I have to go to that terrible house, 'Les Bouleaux,' without you! They will marry me to Victor, I know they will!"

Gerald started, and his face grew hot and crimson as he caught her in his arms.

"Gerald! Gerald!" she whispered, clinging to him. "You can save me from that; you will, won't you? Marry me before I go."

He pressed his lips to hers as she twined her arms lovingly, entreatingly about him. Her touch, her voice intoxicated him; no reason, no duty could stand against the charm she had for him.

"My darling, my darling! I will—I swear I will!" he whispered huskily.

As she leaned back her head on his shoulder in the ill-lighted little hall, a shudder passed over him from head to foot; for, by some odd effect of light and shadow, the face of the girl he loved, and to whom he had just pledged his faith, brought back to his mind the clear-cut features of the face that had bent over his in the darkness of the carriage on the night of the murder. As she looked up, feeling him shiver, the odd resemblance was gone.

But Gerald was still cold from the shock, as he led Peggy, who was beaming with excitement and happiness, back to the sitting-room.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

NOTES ON CURRENT TOPICS.

Hotels are utilized as homes by the people of the United States to a far greater extent than by any other people. This fact and the rapid growth of the population of the country explain the wonderful increase in the number of hotels. It is estimated that on an average forty hotels are destroyed by fire every month in the United States, and yet the whole number does not decrease because the average of new ones erected every month is sixty-five. It is no wonder that the hotel clerk across the lines feels that he is a power in the land.

The London correspondent of the New York Times cables to that paper as follows: "If the English press comments on the fisheries treaty have been cabod to America it ought to be explained that they represent nothing beyond a general and natural satisfaction that some sort of result has been reached. So far as I have seen, there is not an editor in England who understands the subject well enough to know whether the treaty is favourable to Canada or not. Certainly nobody can be discovered who cares a continental. The solitary desire here all along has been to have the dispute closed, no matter how, so long as there is an end to it. Nothing could be more mistaken than the idea that England was anxious to get the better of America in this matter. There would never have been a voice raised in opposition in the Commons if the whole Canadian case had been abandoned. As it is, Mr. Chamberlain is felt to have got through a delicate job very cleverly and successfully, and, I should say, he will return to England with a distinct increase in his political prestige."

The relationships existing among the members of the various royal families of Europe would puzzle the most expert genealogist, and must be somewhat confusing even to the royalties themselves. As the process of intermarriage goes on the degrees of kinship become more and more mixed and it will not be surprising if, at no distant date, a European king should be able to boast that he is his own grandfather. It is reported that Prince Albert Victor of Wales is betrothed to his first cousin, the Princess Alexandra of Greece, while the Princess Victoria is betrothed to her first cousin, the Crown Prince of Greece. There is a good deal of truth in the remark of a contemporary that the next generation of European monarchs will be mainly brothers and sisters and first cousins. It is to be hoped that the usual consequences will not follow this close intermarriage.

Those who ate not possessed of much riches may console themselves in the contemplation of the unhappy state of mind of "Bonanza" Flood. Although two or three years ago he was worth \$40,000,000, he is now oppressed with the fear that he will die a pauper. Last summer he and "Bonanza" Mackey lost between them something like \$12,000,000 on the disastrous California wheat deal, and since then they have had a falling out. In a huff Flood determined to withdraw from business and invest the remainder of his fortune in such a way that it would not be liable to further shrinkage. He accordingly dumped all his local stocks, bonds and other quick assets on the San Francisco stock market, with the result that the market became demoralized, and Mr. Mackey bought up such of the securities as he wanted on his own terms, and the rest, as the Chicago Mail puts it, "went knocking about like loose barrels of pork in the hold of a storm-tossed ship, liable any minute to punch holes through the bottom." The result is that Mr. Flood is losing his sleep o' nights through dread that he will die a pauper, and is said to be in a pitiable state of mind. The old moral can be extracted from these facts.

A New Method of Steam Heating on the Erie.

The Motive Department of the Erie railway has invented a new system of steam heating, which does not infringe on any patent, has given great promise of success, and will doubtless be universally adopted by that company. The new system consists in direct heating by steam from the locomotive, which passes through a rubber hose coupling, running from car to car, each of which is filled with radiating pipes placed along the sides and under the seats. The heat in each car is controlled independently by a regulating valve. The coupling is carried from car to car in a similar manner to that which has been used successfully in Sardin for many years. The cars can be easily coupled and when disconnected the coupling disconnects and closes off the steam automatically. No difficulty has been experienced in keeping the cars at an equable temperature in cold or mild weather. A number of cars are already equipped and in service, and others are being fitted up as rapidly as possible.

There is nothing like dressing your local items in rhetorical finery even if you have to come to plain English at the end. A Dakota paper describes a fire by saying that "the red flames danced in the heavens and flung their fiery arms about like a black funeral pall, until Sam Jones got upon the roof and dashed them out with a few pails of water."

Russia's War Preparations.

A military contributor to the Cologne Gazette writes: "The whole of the Russian cavalry and artillery are on the war footing. The plan of an invasion of Prussia is cleverly conceived and more threatening than has hitherto been believed. All the important Russian garrisons are located at railroad depots, which greatly facilitates a mobilization. Three Russian army corps, fully mobilized, are at present faced by only a part of the first German army corps, which cannot receive reinforcements but by way of the bridges of Thorn, Grandenz and Dirschau. The possibility of defending Eastern Prussia depends entirely upon these three bridges. On the eastern side of the Vistula there are only two railroads running through as far as the frontier to Instenberg. It is clear, no doubt, that with so small a force Germany is not able to make an aggressive movement; what, then, is the end of the concentration of troops on the part of Russia? What of the enlargement of the fortifications of Koonos, Bialystok and Lomsha? They can have no other aim but that of accelerating the advance of troops to the German frontier as much as possible. The whole of the military proceedings of Russia bear the looks of a plan of invasion."

A Secret

of good health is found in the regular movement of the bowels and perfect action of the Liver. These organs were intended by nature to remove from the system all impurities. If you are constipated, you offer a "standing invitation" to a whole family of diseases and irregularities which will surely be "accepted," and you will have guests unwelcome and determined. All these unhappy conditions may be averted by the timely use of Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Purgative Pellets. Powerful for the effectual regulation of the bowels and Liver, establishing a healthy action of the entire wonderful organism with which we are created.

The London Lancet tells "how to lie when asleep." If it will teach some people how to keep from lying when awake it will do a public service.

Honey-moon.

"Say, Perkins, old boy, why don't we see you at the club any more? Has your mother-in-law shut down on you?" "No, Brown; the fact of the matter is, my home is so happy now that there is no inducement for me to leave it. You look incredulous, but it's a positive fact. You see, my wife used to suffer so much from functional derangements common to her sex, that her spirits and her temper were greatly affected. It was not her fault, of course, but it made home unpleasant all the same. But now, since she has begun to take Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription, she has been so well and so happy that we are having our honey-moon all over again."

It is said that a small hand indicates refinement, and yet we have seen "small hands," and held them, too, that brought out language anything but refined.

Use the surest remedy for catarrh—Dr. Sage's.

For a man to undertake to drown his sorrow in the flowing bowl, is like trying to drown a cork in the ocean. You can get it under water all right, but as soon as you let go, it bobs up serenely again.

Consumption Surely Cured.

To the Editor:—Please inform your readers that I have a positive remedy for the above named disease. By its timely use thousands of hopeless cases have been permanently cured. I shall be glad to send two bottles of my remedy free to any of your readers who have consumption if they will send me their Express and P. O. address. Respectfully, Dr. T. A. SCOTT, 37 Yonge St., Toronto, Ont.

A young lady recently presented her lover with an elaborately constructed penwiper, and was astonished the following Sunday to see him come to church wearing it as a coravat.

Whenever your Stomach or Bowels get out of order, causing Bloating, Dyspepsia, or Indigestion, and their attendant evils, take at once a dose of Dr. Larson's Stomach Bitters. Best family medicine, All Druggists, 60 cents.

Wife (looking up from her book)—"You know a great many things, John. Now, what do you think should be done in a case of drowning?" Husband—"Have a funeral, of course."

Coff No More.

Watson's cough drops are the best in the world for the throat and chest, for the voice unequalled. See that the letters R. & T.W. are stamped on each drop.

"Bob, you say that you believe most diseases are contagious. How long have you entertained such notions?" "Ever since I sat alongside of a blue-eyed girl and caught the palpitation of the heart."

A Cure for Drunkenness. The opium habit, depomania, the morphine habit, nervous prostration caused by the use of tobacco, wakefulness, mental depression, softening of the brain, etc., premature old age, loss of vitality caused by over-exertion of the brain, and loss of natural strength, from any cause whatever. Men—young, old or middle-aged—who are broken down from any of the above causes, or any cause not mentioned above, send your address and 10 cents in stamps for Lubon's Treatise, in book form, of Diseases of Men. Books sent sealed and secure from observation. Address M. V. LUBON 47 Wellington Street East, Toronto Ont.

One consequence of the institution of the parcel post between the United States and Canada will be that a good deal of the American seed business will be done from Canada. The parcel postage from here will be four cents a pound, which is less than the American postage rate. The supposition is that the American seedmen will send their seeds in bulk into this country, pack them here and mail them, paying the 20 per cent. duty.

I CURE FITS!

When I say CURE I do not mean merely to stop them for a time, and then have them return again. I MEAN A RADICAL CURE. I have made the disease of

FITS, EPILEPSY or FALLING SICKNESS,

A life long study. I WARRANT my remedy to cure the worst cases. Because others have failed, I have no reason for not now receiving a cure. Send at once for a treatise and a FREE BOTTLE of my INFALLIBLE REMEDY. Give Express and Post Office. It costs you nothing for a trial, and it will cure you. Address Dr. H. G. ROOT, 37 Yonge St., Toronto, Ont.