TO THE BITTER END.

A Tale of Two Lives.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE CHAMBER OF DEATH!

A careless servant had turned the venetian blinds the wrong way, and a struggling moonbeam had forced its way into the stately bedchamber. Across the dark crimson carpet it cast long, trembling bars of light, and shone on the stiff, cold sheets of the canopied bed and on the ghastly face of the man who lay there. But it was a great room, and the poor little moonbeam could do no more than feebly illuminate one very small corner of it. The rest was wrapped in a veil of thick darkness.

Silent as the dead! Silent as death! Common phrases enough, but peculiarly expressive. There was death in this room, death and a deep breathless silence. For it was the face of a corpse round which that moonbeam was playing. Skilful hands had bandaged his throat and had laid out his stiff, lifeless limbs, and Lord Alceston, Earl of Harrowdean, lay in state, waiting for the morrow, when his body would go to its last resting-place.

Hark! A sound at last, breaking in upon the solemn stillness! A strange sound, too—the low rustling of a woman's skirts along the broad corridor. At last it ceased just outside the door; then was the stealthy turning of a handle, and a tall black form softly entered. The door was closed again. Again there was silence.

She moved toward the bedside, but slowly. Long before her dark form had emerged from the shadows the sound of her quick, anxious breathing betrayed her whereabouts. At last she glided out of the darkness and stood between the window and the bedside, in the focus of the moonlight. The quivering beams played upon a face set and rigid as marble, ghastly and colorless, yet desperate. It was the face of the Countess of Harrowdean.

She was close to the bedside now, close to the mass of odorous, sweet-scented flowers, whose delicate perfume hung heavily about the confined atmosphere—close to that white rigid form, colorless as the damask sheets—most awesome, most fear-inspiring of all human sights—the corpse from which the last breath has parted, the last spark of life died out. Once those lips, now cold as clay, had burned against hers. Once those eyes, now closed and dim, had looked fondly into hers, now filled with a soft, gentle love-light, now full of passion and fire, and she had loved him! God! how she had loved him!

Three times stooping down, until her breath fell hot upon his face, she stretched out her hand, and three times she withdrew it again. She turned away with a little moan of despair, like the last cry of a hunted animal. It seemed to her that her task was an impossible one. She could not touch him. It was sacrilege, desecration. It stirred into revolt all her emotions; she shrank from it as from some deed of shame, and yet—yet it must be done, and now. To-morrow the opportunity would have gone forever. To-morrow would be too late.

Her hand descended again, and rested upon his arm. Ah! it was there. The hand which she had been holding dropped heavily from her nerveless fingers and fell upon the sheets with a little thud. She staggered back against the wall and leaned there, crouching back against it with her hands clasping her throbbing head and her eyes riveted upon the sheets. Her white lips moved slowly in a half-uttered prayer. Oh for strength, a little strength, just to keep her from going mad!

When she moved again her limbs were stiff and her movements mechanical. Without hesitation she took up again his arm and turned the shirt-sleeve up above the elbow. The long white arm with its blue veins lay exposed to the moonlight, and high up something was glistening and shining in the flood of silvery light. Her fingers closed around it, hiding it from view. For a moment her whole frame shook with excitement, and then a little sob of relief burst from the trembling lips. She withdrew her hand and slipped something into the pocket of her dressing-gown. The long white arm lay there still upon its bed of flowers and perfumed linen. But something had gone—something which had been there when that arm had flourished a dripping sword and waved an eager regiment on to victory—something which had been there when that arm had trembled with the fierce gesticulations of the orator who was compelling the wild tumultuous applause of an excited senate house—something which had been there when the arm which it had encircled had been pressed by royal fingers. Dangers and sickness, triumphs and glory, it had seen, and when the last breath had quitted the body, and his life had gone out like a suddenly-quenched lamp, it had remained. But severance had come at last.

Another sound breaking the hushed silence of the sleeping house! Slight though it was, she heard it, and the blood in her veins ran cold as ice from head to foot. She trembled, and her shaking knees almost gave way beneath her. A footstep in the corridor! A light, firm footstep, drawing nearer and nearer. It stopped, and her heart gave a great throb. She clutched at the wall for support, shrinking back against it with reeling senses and with dilated eyes fixed upon the door. The handle was softly turned, a tall figure entered. She with the quivering moonlight shining upon her ghostly face convulsed with terror, he barely visible, stepping out from the deep shadows. Mother and son stood face to face.

CHAPTER XI.

GHOSTS.

At first it seemed to her as though she must yield to the deadly faintness which was already clouding her senses. Surely flower[illegible] must be some hideous dream—the moonlight, the [illegible] cold and ghastly in the pale questioning face, s[illegible] arm, and her son's [illegible]ing out of the black shadows—[illegible] dream, and he a ghost? Alas! no, for [illegible] lips were slowly parted, and the death-li[illegible] stillness [illegible] broken by his quick, agitated words:

"Mother! [illegible] happened? What have you [illegible]—What has [illegible]

"I could not rest. I came [illegible] him—once more." She faltered.

He pointed to the disarranged white garments, to the bare arm of the figure on the bed. He asked no questions; he simply pointed, and looked at her. What did it mean?

Nothing which she had imagined to herself had been so awful as this. That she should stand face to face with him, of all people in the world, and have to answer that look of almost fierce inquiry. What should she do? What should she do?

"I will tell you—presently," she gasped. "Ask me nothing now. I am faint. This has upset me."

With trembling fingers she re-covered his arm and smoothed down the draperies on the bed. Then she turned half-fearfully round. He was standing quite still, waiting for her, with a white set look on his face that made her heart sink. He was her son, but he would be a hard inquisitor. What was she to tell him? Anything—anything but the truth!

"I cannot stop—here," she said. "Take me back to my room."

He stretched out his arm, and she leaned heavily upon it. Slowly they moved across the darkened room and gained the door. Outside, in the dimly-lit corridor, she seemed to breathe more freely.

"It was foolish of me to come," she said in a whisper.

He looked down at her.

"You had a purpose?" Ay, a purpose! Had she not a purpose? And he was seeking to know it; he would try to wrest it from her. He—calm, strong, and self-reliant, against her—weak, shaken, and fearful. How was she to resist him—how to evade his questions? The thought of it made her shudder.

They had reached the door of her room, and she had paused, hoping that he might go. But he only waited until she had passed in and then he followed her, closing the door after him. She sank wearily into her low chair and buried her face in her hands. He drew himself up before her and spoke.

"Mother," he said, "am I asking you a hard, an unreasonable thing, when I ask you to tell me what motive you had in going—there to-night, and what you had been doing? I think not. Why should there be secrets between us? Am I not your son, and was he not my father as well as your husband? I will never rest—never—until I have discovered the secret of his death. I have sworn it! Don't you feel like that, too? You must! Let us help one another in this! Our object is the same!

He ceased, and waited for an answer. None came. She kept her face hidden from him, buried in her hands; and he thought at first that she was weeping. But when she looked up he saw that the dry, burning eyes were tearless.

"Mother," he went on, speaking more rapidly, "it has been a new idea to me altogether that there should have been any mystery or secret cloud in connection with—him. Yet something of the sort there must have been, and—forgive me—but it seems to me that you must have known—must know—a little of it. What does it all mean? Neillson's flight, your strange manner, and your visit to his room alone, and at this hour? If you know anything at all—and you must know a good deal—why not tell me and help me to gain a clue? Surely you cannot wish his murderer to escape? God forbid!"

"It may be better so," she murmured. "Can you doubt but that God will punish?"

"That is what you said before, mother,' he answered, "and I tell you again that God's punishment would be too slow for me. I cannot rest while this thing remains undiscovered."

She shook her head.

"Has it never occurred to you that this secret may be one which it were best the world did not know?" she said softly.

"In telling me you are not telling the world," he answered. "Whatever it was, I am his son and I have a right to know it. I am his avenger, and I will know it."

She looked at him calmly. Sooner or later this must be faced. Better now perhaps, than at any other time.

"Never from me," she said, in a low firm tone.

He looked at her astonished.

"Do you mean this, mother?" he exclaimed.

"I do."

"You mean that you will tell me nothing? You mean that though what you know might bring his murderer to justice, you will still keep it yourself?"

"I do, Bernard. If at this moment I could see before me your father's murderer I would let him go in peace. I would not touch him. If he were alive, I am sure that he would rather that it should be so."

His lips quivered with disappointment, and a little, too, with anger. His mother's words only irritated him. Weak, feminine folly! What else was it? A milk-and-water doctrine of forgiveness that found no favor in this man's heart. His purpose was not shaken a jot.

"Will you tell me what you were doing in his room to-night?" he asked. "At least I ought to know this, as I found you there."

"No. I cannot."

He turned his back upon her and walked to the door. She followed him with her eyes softened now and full of sad, wistful light. He was her son, her only son, and she loved him. Surely he would not leave her thus!

"Bernard," she cried, "you are not going away without even wishing me good-night!"

He paused with his hand on the door-knob.

"I wish you good-night, mother," he said, coldly, without turning round; and he left her.

The tears which had so long been denied to her came at last. She threw herself upon the bed in a passionate fit of weeping, and her whole frame was shaken by tumultuous sobs. When daylight streamed into the room and fell upon her haggard, grief-stained face, she was then still, exhausted, sleeping a troubled sleep.

The early morning sounds in the street [illegible] her, and she rose and com[illegible] Every now and [illegible]stlessly about the room, [illegible]ed her hands to her bu[illegible]pped and pressed [illegible] over woman to bear up against [illegible]ed. Had [illegible]ery as hers? she wondered. Surely n[illegible] [illegible]ly not! To the agony of her great los[illegible] [illegible] now an overwhelming hideou[illegible] dread. Slowly, but with a ghastly distinctness, the last night's scene in the death-chamber passed before her reeling brain! He had discovered her! He had asked her that question—that one question which she would never dare to answer. He had left her in anger, in anger none the less terrible because it was so cold, so self-contained. He suspected her, perhaps—of what, she dared not think. Was it not for his sake as well as hers that she was fighting this battle? And she could not show him why! She could not show him why it were better—a thousand times better—to let his father's murder go unavenged—to let the whole terrible tragedy sink into the still waters of oblivion! She had lost her husband, and now she was to lose her son! What had she done or left undone—wherein had she sinned, that Fate should deal with her so cruelly?

The morning stole on and the distant sounds of the awakening household reached her ears. For the first time she realized that night had come and gone and as yet her bed had been unslept in. Soon her maid would be coming with her tea and would notice it—would talk and gossip about it below—the one thing which it was most necessaay to avoid. Wearily she stood up, disrobed herself and crept within the sheets. She had no hope of sleep, nor did it come to her. How was it possible with so sore a heart and burning a brain as hers?

When Marie, her ladyship's French maid, softly entered the room about half an hour later and brought the dainty tea equipage to the side of the bed, she was shocked beyond measure to see the feverish light in her mistress' wide-open eyes and the terrible ravages which a single night had made on her face. With her little hands stretched out, and her shoulders almost on a level with her ears, she was not slow to express her consternation.

"Ah! but your ladyship is ill," she exclaimed, volubly. "*Tres malade.* Miladi has had no sleep! Ah! *quel dommage, quel dommage!*" she added, in a tone of deep commiseration.

Lady Harrowdean took her tea and made no reply.

"Not that any of us have had much sleep," Marie continued in a hushed whisper, with a half fearful, altogether mysterious glance around. "*Moi meme*—as for myself, my eyes have been not once closed. It was not possible. Did your ladyship hear anything—anything strange in the night?"

Lady Alceston set her cup down and shook her head. Her hand was trembling so much that she could hold it no longer.

"No, I heard—no sound. Nothing."

"There were some strange, oh, such strange noises," Marie continued in an awed tone, and with approproiate gestures. "Several of us heard them. Myself, I was so frightened that I did draw the bedclothes close around my ears and did very nearly shriek. Ah, but it was horrible!" and she wound up with an effective little shiver, as though the memory of her fright were still oppressing her. Her ladyship turned her face upon her pillow and closed her eyes.

"Draw the curtains around the bed, Marie," she directed. "I shall try to sleep for an hour or two."

"It would be well for miladi," Marie murmured, as she obeyed. The bed was a French one, and Lady Alceston was now invisible—out of sight of the tell-tale rays of sunlight and the black, questioning eyes of her maid.

"One moment, Marie," she said, as her maid was gliding softly from the room. "What sort of noises were those that you heard, and in what part of the house? I hope that no thieves have been about."

Marie paused and advanced again toward the bedside, glad to have an opportunity of resuming the subject.

"Footsteps and muffled voices, your ladyship," she said impressively, "and in the long corridor too, near—near—the room where his lordship is. Thomas has searched in every place, *ce matin*, but there are no signs of any one having entered the house, and nothing is missing. We all thought that your ladyship must have heard them too, and we dreaded every moment that we should hear your ladyship's bell."

There was no sound from the bed for a few moments. Then her ladyship answered in a slow, deliberate tone:

"Foolish girls! you imagined it all. I was awake all night, and I heard no noises of any sort. There could have been nothing to cause them."

Marie was perfectly unconvinced, but dared express her dissent in no other way than by a shrug of her shapely shoulders and a most suggestive silence. Her ladyship, who was watching her through a chink in the curtains, frowned.

"If I hear anything more of this, Marie," she said quietly, "you or anyone else who mentions it will leave my service at once. Do you understand?"

Marie arched her black eyebrows. She was surprised, but she was too well trained a servant to show it. Miladi's wishes should be obeyed, she murmured. The subject should not be mentioned again by her, or by any one else if she could help it. At what hour would miladi please to rise?

Miladi made no reply. Her thoughts were otherwise engaged. A certain act of imprudence had just occurred to her.

"Marie," she said abruptly, "there is a newspaper in my rocking-chair. I want it."

Marie searched and shook her head. There was no newspaper there.

"Well, then, in the pocket of my dressing-gown," the mistress ordered sharply.

Marie took up the garment, shook out the folds, and felt in the pockets. They were empty.

"Then it must be on the floor by the side of the chair," her ladyship said anxiously.

Marie went down on her hands and knees and looked about in all directions. Again her search was unsuccessful. There was no paper anywhere about. She rose with flushed face, and with her coquettish little white apron all crumpled, and made her report.

"Bring me my dressing-gown at once," ordered her mistress, in a strange, sharp tone.

Marie obeyed, wondering, but in silence. She saw with surprise that her mistress hands were trembling, and that she seemed deeply agitated. They searched about together for a few minutes but in vain. The paper was gone.

Lady Harrowdean was the first to abandon the search. Marie followed her example at once with a sigh of relief. She stood before the glass for a moment to straighten her [illegible] and hair. Behind her own face [illegible] that of her mistress, and its ghastly expression frightened her.

"Miladi is ill," she exclaimed, turning quickly round.

"I am a little faint, Maria," was the answer. "Help me into bed."

Marie did so, keeping up at the same time a running fire of half-admonitory, half-consolatory chatter. Miladi had overtaxed her strength. She must have quiet and rest or she would not be able to attend the funeral. It was foolish to have got out of bed and upset herself about a newspaper. Thomas should go out and get another one. Would miladi say what newspaper it was and what date she required?

Lady Alceston made no reply. She seemed not to have heard—certainly she did not heed her maid's sympathizing remarks. When she had finished she said simply:

"Tell Thomas to go to Lord Bernard's room, and ask him to come to my dressing-room for a minute. I wish to speak to him."

Marie withdrew with her head in the air, a little offended. Miladi was making a great fuss about a paltry newspaper; and fancy sending for Lord Bernard at this hour in the morning! It was too ridiculous.

She descended into the servants' hall, and delivered her message to Thomas. Instead of obeying her orders he shook his head.

"'Tain't no use, my dear," he said patronizingly. "Lord Bernard is hout."

Marie stamped her little foot impetuously.

"Nonsense! Gone out at this time of the morning! You are too lazy to go and see, you—you—*gross bete!*"

Thomas grinned and sat down to his breakfast.

"Go it, mademoiselle," he said. "Call me all the names in your heathen calender, if you like. It don't hurt me. I rather like it."

Marie tossed her head, and looked at him with flashing eyes.

"Are you going to obey miladi, and deliver her message to Lord Bernard?" she asked threateningly.

"No, my dear, I am not," Thomas answered, crossing his legs and sipping his coffee slowly.

"And why not?"

"Because I don't know where to find him."

"He is in his room. He never rises before nine."

"Well, he has done so this morning, at any rate," Thomas remarked. "As I said before, he has gone out. I ought to know, for I let him out myself."

"Out at this time in the morning! Why didn't you tell me so before, thon you stupid?"

She stamped her foot at him and whisked out of the room, Thomas leaned back in his chair and looked after her admiringly.

"What a little spitfire she is," he soliloquized. "Wonder what her ladyship wants Lord Bernard for so early. Seems queer! And his going out, too, and them noises in the night. Dashed if it don't seem very queer!"

And he would have thought it queerer still if he could have heard the low muffled cry which broke from Lady Alceston's white lips, after Marie had delivered her message and departed.

"He has seen it!" she moaned. "He has gone there. Oh! if he should—if he should——"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The Farmer in Every-Day Life.

That time of the year is fast coming when the farmer becomes more than ever the typical natural man. Like the story of Greek mythology in which Antæus is represented as regaining his strength for conflict by simply touching the earth, all humanity in the summer days is possessed with an irresistible desire to get into close contact with untamed nature The artificial life of the city becomes irksome and unbearable, and men gladly get away to whatever of rurality their purse will purchase for them. Many turn amateur farmers thus showing the innate tendency in that direction; and others satisfy the same appetite by "summer boarding" at a farm house. These holiday-makers, of course, bear none of the heavier burdens of the farmer's life, and in contending that the farmer is very near the God-intended type of mankind, we do not pretend that the burdens of his lot are providential or light. On the contrary, they are man-made and heavy, and their presence is banishing from this continent the leisurely class of farmers who once tilled its soil and made up the back-bone of the commonwealth.

Still, though hard-worked and troubled about the financial outcome of his season's labor, the farmer is for all that happier at bottom in the very act of labor than his city cousin. He is not constantly filled with a nervous, restless longing for something else. The soft air and bright sun do not disturb him at his work with a hint to his inner self thas he naturally should be living more in their midst. The farmer is in unison with the season, doing just the work that everything about him suggests should be done—doing too much of it often, but nevertheless keeping in tune with nature. As he grows wiser politically and understands that the ballot was given him not to help beat some fellow farmer of another party, but to get for himself the best conditions in which to labor, he will not be compelled to wear himself thin and hard with toil and will be able to enjoy the advantage he possesses over the rest of humanity. During the winter he is perhaps, at a disadvantage. That is the natural time for the race to do its buying and selling and the intricate modern developments of these fundamental acts; but with spring the era of production comes again and the farmer is right in the line of nature.

All over the world he is slowly learning that really all power lies in his hands. He stands at the fountain and can work his will with the stream that flows past his feet and of which all the people of the earth must drink. Nothing serious would happen to the general run of folks if the law courts were to take a year's vacation, but the centres of commerce tremble when the farmers of Russia have a poor crop. The gap is filled by the farmers of Canada, United States and other wheat growing countries; but what would happen if the failure of the crop in Russia were artificial—like the closing of a cotton mill by a "combine"—and all other farmers banded together to take advantage of the scarcity? A combine of farmers—were such a thing possible—would hold the world in its grip as the brazen-palmed Moloch held his victims. It is in the interests of liberty that no such "combine" is possible, but the very conception of it will show the farmers what they could do if they got nearer together and studied their own interests.

HIS HOME AND HIS HAUNTS.

The Experience of a Bold Mariner in the Grasp of A Frightened Beast.

Up to 1852 the sea-elephant was found in great numbers along the shores of Southern California and Mexican Islands, a herd of between 100 and 200 being seen in that year; but so valued were they for their oil that their extermination is nearly as complete as that of rytina—an animal attaining a length of thirty feet and a weight of many tons.

That the ancient inhabitants of these islands captured the sea-elephant there is little doubt, as parts of its remains, as well as implements made of bones, have been found in the graves. The animals came ashore at the most inaccessible points and crawled up the rocks, often many feet above the ocean.

"How the Indians caught them," said an old sea-elephant hunter, "I don't know, but I can tell you how we managed it, and how I was nearly killed by one years ago.

"In the fifties we had a big oil fishery on the Pacific coast, and sea elephants constituted almost one-third of the catch. We had schooners that looked something like the Grand Banks vessels, but heavier; these had outfits for seal, sea lion, sea elephant and sea otter, and we did the business up so slick that you can't find an otter or sea elephant for love or money to-day—at least without a big hunt.

"When the season commenced, we set sail from San Francisco, and spent the time at Cedros, Catalina, Clemente, San Nicholas and other islands on the coast. The otter we found off the kelp beds, but the lions and elephants in the rookeries of their choice. On the south side of Catalina was a famous spot for them. Hundreds of barrels of oil we took from here.

"On the trip in question," continued the old hunter, "we intended bagging an entire herd, and had sent a man down to the island of Cedros to watch the elephants and study their ways, if possible, so that, when we got there, there would be no time lost; and it proved to be a good scheme. We sighted the island late one afternoon, and before dark our man came off in his dingey, and told us that in a little cove, bordered by rocks, was a big herd of elephants, and that by taking them at a certain time every one could be killed. This was good news, as you may imagine, and that night we fixed up a plan of attack. Our man was to go ashore and signal when every thing was all right, and we were to go around in boats and go in with a rush, driving them inland.

"At 6 the next morning we saw the signal—a white flag or cloth—on the rocks, and quietly getting into the boats, with guns, clubs, and other toggery, we pulled away. It was not far, and as we made the point of rocks we had a glimpse of a mass of black forms resting on the sand. The only way to get up to them was to run along the rocks, creeping from one to another, stopping every now and then to see if they were still there. As luck would have it, there was a big point of rocks near the cove, and we got behind that without alarming the elephants, and at the word we made a rush, three men making along the beach on foot, the other hand coming from the opposite side, while the boats came in the middle.

"The animals couldn't get out without running over us, and for a moment they didn't seem to realize what was up; in fact the men on the left got right on to them and shot a big bull before they began to stampede. They first started for the water. Some tried to break through and were shot, but the bulk of them started inland in a body, we after them, firing into them on all sides and laying them out with clubs. We had gone about fifty yards, I think, when, the leader stopped, and, with a snort, turned; all followed suit, and down they came, pell-mell. It was so sudden, that before I knew it, I was knocked down and rolled over, a big cow fairly hauled herself over me. Then I pulled up, and seeing I was in the crowd and going to be jammed I ran with them and used the stock of my musket to knock them on either side. This worked for a few minutes; then the stock broke, and the next thing I knew I was in the air and being shaken like a rat. I soon lost consciousness, and when I came to I was lying on the beach propped up against a sea-elephant, the men swabbing me with cold water. It seems that a big bull had grabbed me, as they will when fighting, lifting me into the air, and shaken the senses out of me, then dropped me among the rocks. It happened that I fell between them in such a position that the rest of the animals slid over me. It was the narrowest escape I ever had in my life. We took over fifty of the elephants, about a third getting away."

The sea-elephant is almost, if not quite extinct on the California coast. The writer visited the old rookery on Santa Catalina Island in the summer of 1889, and not one was seen.

The former haunt for them is a rock connected to the land during the low tides, but at other times is almost constantly swept by heavy seas, so that in storms the seals and sea lions now living there are forced to the extreme upper portion, where the sea often makes a clean break over them. A single skull was recently found on the island bearing a bullet-hole, perhaps literally the last of the sea-elephants.

This sea-elephant is probably the same species as found in the South Pacific, and being exterminated by the sealers on such desolate islands as Inaccessible, and others. In former, thousands of these animals are still found, but usually on the beach, where there are heavy breakers, making it impossible for boats to land. The sealers here keep gangs of men upon the beach, who patrol it with long whips, beating the animals off shore, so that they will land where they can be made available.

Some years ago some crews who did not understand the condition of affairs killed a large number of sea elephants here and tried out the oil, storing it in barrels, only then finding that they could not get them away; so a torch was applied and a magnificent bon-fire blazed up.

The sea-elephant is a fine looking animal, especially the male, which is often three times the size of the female, attaining a length of twenty-two feet. The female has no proboscis, the nostril extending a little over the mouth. The proboscis in the male extends from opposite the angle of the mouth forward from ten to fifteen inches, depending upon the size of the animal. When the animal is not excited it proboscis makes but little show, but in excitement it becomes inflamed, calling to mind the proboscis of the elephant; hence the name.

The axioms to men innocent, have become the problems of men fallen.—[Vina.