TO THE BITTER END.

A Tale of Two Lives.

BOOK II.—CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGE CONVERSATION.

Situated as our cottage was, at a considerable distance from any thoroughfare, our blinds were always left undrawn, and our windows wide open in order to enjoy as much as possible the faint but fragrant night breeze. And so from the edge of the shrubbery fringing the lawn, where I had taken up my station, I could see with ease into the room where my father and his guests were.

At the further end Mr. Brown and my father were examining together a little pile of musty volumes, which I recognized as part of my father's choicest stock of rare books and first editions. Both seemed entirely engrossed in their occupation, and my father was evidently holding forth concerning his favorites to Mr. Brown with considerable warmth. It is strange how his appearance changes at times. Then, with his lips parted in a slight smile, and a bright, keen light in his eyes, he seemed transformed. Although his face was aged and his brow furrowed, their disfigurement appeared more like the becoming traces of a studious life than the indelible marks of a deep sorrow and an ever-torturing anxiety. His upright mein, too, gave him a greater air of dignity than was usual. It was evident that in the keen enjoyment of conversation with a sympathizer in his literary tastes he had forgotten for a while that other portion of his life which at times laid hold of him so powerfully, and which seemed to oppress him like a nightmare. I could not keep back a sigh of regret as I looked at him. If only he would be always like this! If only that other self, so mysterious, so depressing, would fall away! Life would be a very different thing for me if only this could come to pass. . . .

A little way apart from my father and Mr. Brown, and nearer the window, Mr. Carlyon and Lord Alceston were talking together in a low tone. I could not overhear what they were saying, nor did I try to do so. But it seemed to me that their conversation was no very inportant one, and I noticed that every now and then Lord Alceston cast a furtive yet impatient glance toward my father, as though anxious to speak with him.

Presently a servant brought in a tray with some tea and other refreshments, and in the slight stir which followed, the relative positions of the occupants of the room were changed.

While every one's attention was thus momentarily absorbed I saw Lord Alceston cross the room and whisper something in my father's ear. My father started, and I saw a strange look flash into his eyes and across his face. He hesitated only for a minute, however, then rising to his feet he followed Lord Alceston to the window. They stood talking there for a minute or two in a low tone, during which my father was chiefly the listener, and presently they moved forward together as though by common consent into the garden, only just giving me time to get behind a shrub before they were close upon me.

"Now, my lord, we are secure from listeners," my father said in a low, suppressed tone, "perhaps you can explain yourself here."

"As well here as anywhere," Lord Alceston answered. "I have very little explanation to give, though. I simply want to ask you a question."

"If it is one which I can answer I shall be glad to do so," my father declared quietly.

"There is no doubt about you being able to, Monsieur de Feurget," Lord Alceston said earnestly, "and a great deal to me depends upon your answer. It has reference partly to somethng which happened a very long time ago."

My father bowed his head without remark, and Lord Alceston proceeded.

"It is a strange thing, Monrieur de Feurget, that you and I should meet here. If what I am told is true, there was a tragedy played out upon that lawn, more than twenty years ago, in which my father was one who figured most unhappily, and there was a Monsieur de Feurget there too! Are you he?"

"Yes! It was I."

My father's voice was calm and expressionless, yet I, who was watching him closely, could see in the clear moonlight the gray pallor creep into his face and the old look of trouble into his eyes.

"You were the Count d'Augerville's second, then?"

"I was. Not because I had any faith or sympathy in the justice of his cause, but because there was none else at hand; and besides, he had claims upon me."

"You were a friend of the household, Monsieur de Feurget? You knew his daughters?"

"Naturally. I was engaged to marry one of them."

"And you did marry her?"

"I did!"

"It was Marie, was it not?"

"Yes. The other, Cecile, was married to your father."

Lord Alceston paused for a minute, but I knew that the conversation was not yet at an end—that it had not yet, indeed reached its climax. It seemed to me that he was nerving himself to ask a question the answer to which he dreaded. At last it came, and I knew that I was right. For his voice had lost the quiet, easy ring, and the words came hastily, almost indistinctly, from tremulous lips.

"Monsieur de Feurget, can you tell me this? When did she—Cecile—my father's wife, die?"

It seemed to me that my father shrank from answering, almost as much as Lord Alcestion had from asking this question. A ghastly shade passed over his face, and he turned his head away.

"Lord Alceston, you had better not ask that question—of me. It will be better for you not to know," he said slowly. "It will, indeed."

"Monsieur de Feurget, I must know," was the grave answer. "It is necessary. Let me put it to you in this way. On that awful night when my father was murdered, there was a brutal crime committed in the East End. A woman, an unknown woman, was murdered in a most mysterious manner by a man whom it was proved had deliberately sought her out with that intention. You remember this?"

"Perfectly," my father answered. "I have reason to."

"Just so. You have reason to," Lord Alceston repeated. "You yourself, for some cause or another, were interested in this affair. At the inquest, you presented yourself and attempted to identify the dead woman. In this you were so far successful that on the ground of having met her once abroad, or some other equally insufficient pretext, you were allowed to undertake the expense of her funeral, and not only did you attend it yourself, but you did so in company with your daughter, Mademoiselle de Feurget."

My father's manner was changing rapidly. The unnatural calm had gone, and he looked anxious—even fearful. The tone of his answer, too, was sharp and suspicious.

"How did you know that?" he asked quickly. "My name did not appear in the paper."

"No; because you gave a false one" Lord Alceston answered, "But I know you may have had very good reasons for doing so! I am not your judge with regard to them. Only I know. And now Monsieur de Feurget," he continued, laying his hand upon my father's shoulder, "tell me this, and for God,s sake tell me quickly! Who was that woman?"

There was a short silence—short, but so intense that, while I crouched there with my eyes fixed upon the two men, I could hear the quick hurried beating of my heart. At last, to my unutterable relief, my father broke the deep silence. Had it lasted but a few moments longer, I must have shrieked for the tension upon my already overwrought nerves was nearly too much for me.

"You ask that question, Lord Alceston," he said, "with great confidence—almost as though you had some right to ask it. Yet, for your own sake, I would advise you not to press for an answer."

"An answer I will have," Lord Alceston said, his voice trembling with emotion. "I am told, Monsieur de Feurget, that that woman was Cecile d'Augerville, my father's wife. Was this so? You knew her, and you saw the dead body. Was this so?"

"It was."

There was a brief but awful silence. Lord Alceston stood with his face covered in his hands for a full minute. I would have given, oh, I would have given the world to have been able to go to him and try to comfort him. But I dared not, though the tears were in my eyes.

"Why did you not identify her?" Lord Alceston asked presently.

My father shrugged his shoulders gravely.

"Who would have been the gainer? I knew that your father had been deceived, and that he had married again. To have published the identity of the murdered woman would have been to bring disgrace upon you and profited no one. So I kept the secret."

"And, Monsieur de Feurget, how was it that you had any idea at all that the murdered woman in an East End lodging-house was your sister-in-law?"

"I will tell you. Just before my wife died she discovered that her sister was still living, and she made me promise to do my best to prevent her from declaring herself, and not to let her come to England if I could help it. I discovered that she had left for London and followed her. I had almost traced her out when I read of this murder in the vicinity where I knew she was. An impulse prompted me to go and look at the body. It was a terrible shock to me when I recognized her."

There was a question which Lord Alceston tried more than once to ask, but seemed to lack the courage. At last he asked it in a low, nervous tone.

"Have you any idea—any theory—as to the murderer?"

The question seemed to agitate my father almost as much as Lord Alceston. He was white to the very lips, and for several moments failed to answer it.

"We had better not discuss that, I think," he said hoarsely. "We may have our ideas. Let up keep them to ourselves. It is not a thing to be whispered about."

Again there was a brief silence, which my father broke, speaking in a somewhat lighter tone.

"Come, let us go inside. I have neglected my guests long enough."

Lord Alceston remained for a moment without moving. Then my father went and laid his hand upon his arm.

"Pray come in, my lord," he said earnestly. "Remember that we two alone know of this thing, and with me it is buried."

Lord Alceston roused himself, as though with an effort. "Thank you, Monsieur de Feurget. Yes, I will come in with you. But just one word on another subject. Monsieur d'Aubron was a guest of yours this evening?"

"Yes, he was; but neither a frequent nor a welcome one. In fact, it was his first and last visit."

"I am glad of it. I heard at the hotel that my cousin had been seen playing with him.

"I saw them playing together at the casino," my father answered, "and heard Mr. Carlyon promise to go to his rooms tonight. I knew that that would be a dangerous visit for your cousin, and he seems a nice boy; so I got them to come here instead, and have had the pleasure of balking Monsieur d'Aubron's little game."

I felt a great sense of relief at my father's words, for I saw that Lord Alceston was satisfied. The two men moved slowly away, and disappeared through the open window. Then I rose up, cramped and stiff, and softly crossing the lawn made my way to my room.

CHAPTER VII.

A VAIN APPEAL.

I slept badly that night, and remained in my room till late on the following morning. When I descended, just before lunch-time, I found my father out on the balcony alone, lolling in a low basket-chair and lazily rolling a cigarette. I went out to him at once, full of the purpose which was in my mind.

He nodded a brief good-morning to me, and went on with his task. I watched him for a few moments in silence. Then I drew a chair out to his side and sat down.

"I hope you are not going out this morning, *mon pere*," I said. "I want to talk to you."

He looked at me searchingly from out of his half-closed eyes, as though trying to read what was in my thoughts. But I had nerved myself to my task, and my eyes met his steadily.

"No, I am not going out yet," he answered. "My time is at your disposal. What do you want to say to me, child? Is it a new dress, or a hat from Madame Faveur's, or a bracelet, or what?"

"I shook my head a little sadly.

"It is none of these things, mon pere," I said. "I have plenty of all of them."

"Then what is it?"

I took his hands in mine and stroked them.

"Mon pere," I cried softly, "I am not happy."

"Not happy!" He repeated the words lingeringly, as though he found some sort of mockery in them. Then he looked steadily at me.

"Will you explain?"

"I will try," I answered, with a sigh, for his manner was not encouraging. "Do you suppose, mon pere, that a girl of my age can be happy without a single companion or relation and living somehow under a cloud? No, I am not happy. I am miserable."

"I am sorry for it," he said, a little coldly. "I have done my best for you."

"I think you have, mon pere, and I am grateful to you—very grateful. But, all the same, I am not happy," I confessed sadly.

"Will you try and explain yourself further?" he said.

"I will if I can," I answered. "Let me try and put my life before you."

I was silent for a few minutes, collecting my thoughts. When I was ready to commence his face did not please me. Its expression was hard and cold, and there was no promise of sympathy in it. But my mind was firmly made up, and no words or looks of his would have stopped me.

"I don't think I remember anything before the convent," I began. "I must have gone there when I was very young indeed."

"You were five years old," my father interrupted.

"Ah! I could not have been older. From the very first there seemed to be something strange about me. The other girls had all of them their fathers and mothers and brothers to talk about—had, many of them, the same circle of friends—and were always looking forward to holidays and *fete* days when they went home or their friends came to see them. With me it was all very different. I alone had neither relations nor friends nor home."

"You had me," my father interrupted.

"Yes, I had you. But how often did you come to see me, and how long did you stop when you did come?"

"I was hard at work earning money to keep you at the convent. Madame Duqueville's charges were not low, and I was poor then."

"I am not grumbling, *mon pere*, far from it. I only want you to see how lonely I was there, and how strange my position was. I had no idea even as to what my father's position was, or to what rank of life he belonged. Nor did I know anything of my mother. Sometimes, when I tried very hard to remember a little about my earlier childhood, I had dim—very dim—visions."

I paused, and let my eyes wander thoughtfully away, over the pleasant gardens and the bending pine trees to the long streak of blue sea far away in the distance. My father started a little at my last words, and letting fall his cigarette, leaning forward toward me with a half-questioning, half-startled light in his dark eyes.

"Visions? Memories? Bah! you can remember nothing!" he exclaimed.

"No, that is true," I answered with a sigh. "There is only one thing I want to remember: my mother's face—and that I cannot. Will you not tell me something about her, mon pere?"

He stood over me with flashing eyes and trembling lips.

"Marie! Did I not forbid you ever to mention her name? She is dead I tell you, and that is enough. She died when you were a baby."

"You will tell me nothing about her you keep me ignorant of everything," I cried sadly. "Oh, *mon pere*, I will complain no longer at our lonely life, I will worry you for nothing. I will content myself if only you will give me one thing—your trust, your confidence. I hear you walk restlessly up and down your room all night long; I see you shun all society and live alone, that you may hug the closer some secret sorrow; I see the lines and scars of a great grief written intc your face, and I know nothing of it. I can offer you no sympathy, no comfort. I must live on, friendless and lonely, miserable in the shadow of your trouble. Only let me really share it and I will be brave—I will complain no more."

He turned away from me, and shook his head sadly.

I cannot, child. It is impossible. The weight of it would crush you."

"Try me," I cried eagerly.

"I cannot."

"Then for God's sake, let me go back to the convent again!" I cried passionately. "Let me go somewhere—away from here."

"Back to the convent! No, child, you must stop here. What could you do there at your age?"

"I could teach—teach music, and singing, and English enough for the little ones. At any rate, I should be no longer a trouble to you," I cried bitterly.

My father was very pale, and the hand which held his long cigarette shook. At first I thought that it was anger; since I have thought that it may have been some other emotion.

"I am sorry that you are so unhappy," he said slowly. "I did not know it. It is a new idea to me. I must think it all over, and we must talk again. I will see whether we cannot make some change."

And with these words he left me.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Pat's Arithmetic.

Two clever-witted Yankees espying a simple-looking Irishman, who had just arrived in the land of the Stars and Stripes, thus accosted him with a view of testing his calculating powers.

"Say, Paddy, could you reckon how many of us are here?"

Paddy, abruptly: "100."

One of the two Yankees, who were laughing heartily at Pat's ignorance, asked him how he made that out.

"Wisha and begor," says Pat, "that's aisy, for I'm the one and ye are the two noughts."

ULSTER.

A Beautiful and a Prosperous Country.

I wonder if the day will ever come when this beautiful country, Ireland, will attract the British tourist. To a tourist with an eye for the picturesque Ireland can give his money's worth. No country in Europe can show within an equal space so many scenic beauties as present themselves during a trip, say, from Dublin, through Wicklow, by Cork, and down to Queenstown and along the southwestern coast. Glengariff, at the head of Bantry Bay, is one of the loveliest spots in the world; Dublin Bay, with its background of mountains, its gleaming sea, its woody shores, dotted with villages and country residences, reminding one of a summer day in Italy. The route from Dublin to Belfast is not so beautiful as that from Dublin through Wicklow, but it is exceedingly pretty all the same; sufficiently attractive to lead the attention captive from one's batch of newspapers. Dark green woods, bright green meadows, stream, hill and sea are the constant and changing elements in most of the kaleidoscopic railway route of 110 miles between the two cities. Nearly the whole way to Dundalk skirts the seashore. Skerries, with its wide expanse of sea, is a pretty spot. So is Balbriggan and the country about Laytown; but Drogheda is without doubt the place which, both on account of its beauty and historical associations, will most interest the traveller. "Boyne Regetta," printed in large letters on a large poster, were the first words which caught one's eye as the train stopped at Drogheda Station. Down below—a long way below the railway bridge—lay historic Drogheda, with its gray streets piled up on the steep wooded slopes of the Boyne. Town, quays, river, were as silent as if the day were a Sabbath of the Cromwellian saints. A Belfast man would have said that the place was pretty to look at, but bad for business. They are hard grit, those Belfast folk. They fortify themselves with the reflection that their capital of Ulster can buy up most towns in Ireland. Drogheda town, quays and the placid Boyne, with her steamers and sailing ships lying one behind the other, in Indian file, are, or seem to be, as dead commercially as the Shannon at Limerick.

Beyond Drogheda the sea-view recedes until nothing of it is left but the sky line that flashes out at intervals over the treetops, or between gaps in the landscape, like the edge of a sword. At Dundalk the sea-view expands again, and the distant ships look like fixed spots on the horizon. Soon the train dashes into a hilly country, which reminds one of a hundred localities in Southern and Western Ireland. There are the low walls or "dykes" of gray stone enclosing tiny patches of sloppy bog, the diminutive huts like dog kennels, the heaps of peat, the outcrop of gray rock, the scattered boulders, which are such familiar objects in Clare and Galway and Kerry and Limerick and Mayo. But the character of the soil and the cultivation change before Bessbrook is reached. Then beyond Portadown comes a change really startling in its magnitude and suddenness. Factory chimneys, tall, built of red brick, stand out against the fresh green of the country. In the meadows appear streaks and heaps of what appears to be snow, The meadows are the bleaching fields, and those great buildings are the linen factories. We have rushed all at once into a new country altogether unlike the Celtic and Catholic Ireland we have left behind, and among the strenuous, restless, hard-headed, pragmatic, "door," pushing, matter-of-fact, precise people—totally unlike the careless, happy-go-lucky, untidy, genial, humorous race of the South. Here we are almost before we know it in the roar and smoke of Belfast.

The geography of the Belfast region is one thing; its ethnology another. From the heights which surround Belfast Lough the Belfast man may on a clearish day gaze straight across the sea into the home of the strenuous, hard-headed, yet curiously sentimental, matter-of-fact, yet curiously romantic, obstinate, indomitable people from whom he is sprung. This energetic town of Belfast is, as it were, placed on the bottom of a plate, the rim of which is composed of the Holywood Hills, Castlereagh Hills, the Divis range and the Cave Hill. Its streets of workmen's houses are, without a doubt, far superior to any localities of the same class in Great Britain. Belfast has been and is advancing by leaps and bounds, while every other town in Ireland is stationary or decaying. In respect of its rapid growth Belfast more closely resembles an American than a British town. Ten years ago the Royal-ave. of Belfast, a stately, prosperous street, which together with Donegal Place forms the principal business quarter of the town, was nothing but a collection of mean little shops and houses that were all hovels. Walking through Belfast streets, when the factory hands are coming out or going in, one might imagine himself in a great manufacturing town of England or of Scotland. No longer does Belfast depend upon the linen trade alone for her prosperity. Shipbuilding is already one of her greatest industries. The is town extending in all directions. Nor in this wonderfully rapid extension are sanitary and architectural considerations disregarded; on the contrary, the newer streets are wide and well built. Belfast also possesses five parks, one or two of which as pretty as any in Scotland or England.

It is more profitable to advertise before season than after season. Frequently before season is worth more than during season.

As early as January or February folks are beginning to think of what they will buy in the spring.

The English and Irish coast has been repeatedly declared by English newspapers, the London Times among them, to be insufficiently lighted, buoyed and patrolled. Now that the Eider has gone ashore on entering Southampton, and the City of Chicago, close to the entrance of Queenstown, both on ledges known to be dangerous, it may strike the Elder Brethren of Trinity to follow the advice which their papers are lavishing, and protect approaching steamers by more frequent buoys and lights. Both disasters, however, it is well to remember, are due to the pressure on every steamship captain to make time. This eads him to shave the shelving English coast as near as possible to save a few miles and moments. When this is done on a coast with most irregular soundings approached by dead reckoning in a fog, some steamer's bottom is certain to make land from time to time a little sooner than her look-out.

Women Politicians.

There were three of the candidates for the British Parliament whose wives made themselves very prominent as speechmakers in their interest—Henry M. Stanley, the Hon. Richard Chamberlain, and Col. Cornwallis West, all members of the Liberal Union party. All of these candidates have been defeated notwithstanding the eloquence and enthusiasm of their wives. Mrs. Stanley's speeches on the hustings were far better than her husband's and her courage in confronting the disorderly mobs was far greater than his; yet Stanley was "beaten awfully" by the electors. Mrs. Richard Chamberlain is the beautiful and brilliant young wife of a man who won a seat in Parliament before he married her, yet who has just been defeated as a candidate for reelection, though he enjoyed the powerful assistance of her oratory. She not only made speeches for him, but she went around among the working men, pleaded with them personally, and exercised her blandishments to secure their votes. They marched to the polls and voted against her husband for whose election she had striven so vehemently. Next we come to the case of Colonel Cornwallis West, whose brave wife fought for him as he himself never fought for Queen Victoria. When the riotous mob would not let him speak she rushed to the front and raised her voice in his behalf; On one occasion her life was in danger, but she stood her ground. "I am an Irish woman!" she exclaimed, "and not till now have I ever found men capable of refusing to hear a woman plead her cause." Her hearers yelled, hissed, and stormed until she was forced to stop speaking. Then she pushed her way through the mob to another platform that was held by her husband's enemy and cried out that she was ready to argue the matter with him. Was he really an Englishman or was he an African savage? Why, he shook his fist in her face, and there was a general scrimmage all around her until the meeting was broken up. Thus it was that Mrs. Cornwallis West labored for her Liberal Union husband, who, however, was defeated by the electors. Truly, there are some brave women in England, and yet three of the bravest of them all, Mrs. Stanley, Mrs. Chamberlain, and Mrs. West, have been confounded in their attempts to get their husbands elected to Parliament. How in the mischief is this to be accounted for?

Free Education in England and Wales.

The effect of the Free Education Act upon the schools of England and Wales has been unexpectedly gratifying. Out of a tota of 19,000 schools affected by the act it is estimated that between 15,000 and 16,000 are now absolutely free, and the attendance has largely increased, especially among younger children. Under the former system of requiring the payment of a weekly fee by each child, it often happened that on Monday the parents had not the requisite pence, and when a child was detained at home on that day it stayed away all the week. There is now no more reason for absence upon Monday than upon any other day, and attendance is much more regular. The great argument in favor of the payment of fees was the demoralizing effect of providing free schooling, but, curiously enough, some striking evidence in refutation of this argument has appeared from the returns of the Post-office. This office took measures, in co-operation with the Department of Education, to enable school-children to lay up their treasures either in penny banks or by means of the stamp-deposit system. Taking a period of equal length, before and after the passage of the Free Education Act, it seems that prior to the act 230 new banks were started, while after it was passed the number rose to 2,806. The number of depositors rose from 151,500 to 610,-050, and a like increase took place in the number of those using the stamp-deposit system. Indeed, the extension of this system alone indicates the deposit of pence to the extent of £60,000 this year an amount equal to 5 per cent. of the total amount granted by the Government in lieu of fees. At the same time it does not appear that the abolition of fees has materially injured the private schools, as we should call them, although they receive some aid from the Government. Whatever may be thought of the policy of furnishing schooling free, it was evident from the beginning that the penny-a-week system of payment would not work, for the same reason that toll-gates have generally been abolished. Theoretically those who use a road ought to pay for it, but making them stop and pay whenever they use it becomes an unbearable vexation. Very much the same is true of schools, the difficulty of collecting fees from children being a greater evil than any imagined encouragement of their parents in improvidence by transferring the charge to the general revenue.

Fighting the Cholera.

The Russian Government is displaying much energy in its efforts to prevent the spread of the Asiatic cholera, which has reached Russia from Persia. The Sanitary Commission, which is a Government institution, is exercising its full authority, in co-operation with the provincial and municipal functionaries of the region lying between the Caspian Sea and the Black. Agents have been sent out in all directions upon special duty, funds are supplied for the necessary service, a rigid quarantine is enforced at all points of danger, disinfectants are distributed wherever needed, travel and traffic have been suspended in some localities, and sanitary measures of various kinds are applied, as far as they can be applied, upon short notice under difficult circumstances. We do not remember that the Russian Government and its functionaries have ever before displayed as much energy in presence of the dreaded plague, or in striving to keep it out of the country, or in adopting scientific means of preventing its ravages. Russia has been far behind all the countries of western Europe in the enforcement of sanitary laws, and the news of the present action of the Czar's Government is serious evidence of progress. It is of grave importance to mankind. The great object at this time is to prevent the plague from crossing the Caucasus Mountains to the northward. It is at Baku on the Caspian and at Tiflis, both of which places are south of the mountains, and there has been a report of its appearance in the Crimea, but this report is not sustained by the latest despatches. We must hope that the Russian Government will be successful in confining it to the narrow region in which it now exists.