

LIKE AND UNLIKE.

By M. E. BRADDON,

Author of "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "WILLARD'S WEIRD," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—LEAVES FROM LORD ST. ARSTELL'S JOURNAL.

Had a row with Beeching, who declared that I had undermined his influence with Leo, whom he adores, and that I have spoiled his chances without caring a rush for the result. There was a time when I had given many rushes for the lovely Leo, and would have gone a very long way for her sake, but a lovelier than Leo appeared—her star rose above my horizon, and I turned my back on the lovely Leo.

I did not tell Beeching this, but rather enjoyed his jealousy, and let him storm and rage as he liked. After he had raged like a stock exchange Othello, he began to talk about money matters, and to "throw out," as my valet calls it, about my obligations to him in regard to the stable. He had found most of the cash, and I had swagged and made money at his expense. This was intolerable, so I told him that I was heartily sick of the stud and still more so of him. There's not a thoroughbred on the whole lot," said I. He flared up at this, and we became exceedingly bitter.

The matter ended in a way that was eminently agreeable to me. We agreed to part company as joint proprietors of a racing stud, including Postcard, and I surrendered all interest in that distinguished animal and its stable companions for a consideration—said consideration being total release from all liabilities on behalf of the stud. A very good bargain for me. The gentle savage was in a rage. His hereditary instincts as the son and grandson of stock-jobbers should have warned him against transacting business while he was in a passion.

"Give me the man whose blood and judgment are so well commingled," &c. My blood and judgment are—for I have never yet allowed temper to make me blind to my own interest. I really made an excellent bargain with Beeching.

I hate quarrels, and it is always painful to me to cut a man with whom I have been very familiar, so when I met poor old Joe at Hurlingham on the following day—Saturday, and a capital Saturday—I clasped him on the shoulder and suggested that we ought to be the best possible friends now that our common relations were at an end.

I told him that I was out of health, lungs altogether unsatisfactory, and that my doctor warned me against wintering in Europe. The Riviera might do for most people, but it was not good enough for me. I must go to Algiers, Egypt or Ceylon.

This, by the way, is unvarnished truth, I seldom get through a winter in England without a bad attack, and I have been strongly advised to try the East.

Egypt I have done—to its last cataract, and its last mummy. I have seen the first rays of the morning sun shining upon Memnon's head, and have learned and cleopatra. Algiers I know as well as South Kensington. Ceylon remains—the land of spices and tea. To Ceylon I will go if—

If she will go with me.

Will she? That is the question.

I think she will. She has owned that she loves me; and when a woman once makes that confession all the rest is a question of patience and time. She is too lovely and womanlike to be false to the destiny of womanly loveliness, which is to reward a devoted lover. She is more to me than ever woman was before her, more to me, dearer to me, utterly beautiful and utterly beloved. I would make any sacrifice to win her, would accept life-long exile, and, what is much worse, life-long poverty for her sake. My affairs are in rather low water, and she has not a sixpence; but I think I have enough to rub along upon in Ceylon, where life is easier and society less exacting than in England. Stables and baccarat have absorbed more than two-thirds of my income, and away from the turf and the clubs I shall be comparatively rich. With her for my companion I shall be infinitely happy.

July 22nd. She has bolted. When I called at Wilkie Mansion, this afternoon, the door was opened by a maid without a cap, who smelt of rank tobacco—lifelike-guardian in the dining-room, I daresay—and who told me her mistress had gone to Devonshire. She left by the 11-45 from Paddington on a visit to Lady Belfield.

"Will she be away long?"

"The maid had no idea; no date had been mentioned for her mistress's return. Mrs. Baddely was out. No information on the other side of the staircase. My Helen has run away from her Paris instead of running away with him. We sat out three waltzes at Lady Montcrack's last night, and she gave me no hint of this departure. She was very melancholy. I saw tears in her eyes more than once while we were together, and thought them a good sign. They were a bad sign it seems, for to-day she bolts.

Does she think Devonshire, and the agis of a mother-in-law, can protect her from the pursuit of a lover? No more than the temple and the shrine could save Cassandra from Loxias. I shall not follow her immediately. I have a good many engagements and some business transactions to detain me in town. I will give her time enough to be miserable without me, to find the emptiness of life without me, to pine and mope in rustic monotony. My chances will be ever so much better for a judicious delay.

August 17. Here I am, without a servant, keeping dark at the inn where Beeching and I put up nearly three years ago. I thought of bringing my man, as he is a shrewd fellow and would be useful to me in the event of success—looking after a carriage to take us to the station, getting off luggage and so on—if I could rely on his discretion. But one can never rely on that class of man. The sharper he is the most certain to talk. A well-trained fool would be an invaluable servant, if one could have such a combination. Your smart fellow inevitably gives away his master. So I decided on coming alone, and here I am, ostensibly on the instant of salmon fishing in the Chad. I went so far as to bring some of my old Norwegian tackle, which is now adorning my sitting-room. This is a deadly dull neighborhood out of the hunting season, and the hours I cannot pass with her will be unutterably slow. To approach her will be difficult, as I don't want her mother-in-law to know I am here. They drove past the inn this

afternoon in a big barouche, she looking the image of sadness.

She is martyring herself—and for what? Is it conscience, duty, honour, chastity, fear of the world's opinion, or fear of me that weighs heaviest with her?

Her heart is mine; and she must know that she would be happier as my mistress than as a wife of a clown, who leaves her in a state of semi-desertion, and has so little knowledge of her value that he exposes her to the pursuit of every profligate in London.

With me she would be safe, guarded by an infinite love, sheltered from every harm.

19th. I have seen her. We met this afternoon in the cypress walk beside the river. I had been rowing easily up and down for an hour, when I saw her white gown gleaming between the tall dark trees, and in five minutes I had moored my boat to a great weeping willow, and I was by her side.

We were together for two hours walking up and down by the river, or sitting on a bench under the willow. Not a creature passed that way to my knowledge, except some men in a boat who had been netting salmon further down the stream. For two hours we had the world, and the sunlight, and the summer air all to ourselves; and during all that time I was pleading my cause, and she listening and agreeing and disagreeing, and contradicting herself, divinely inconsistent and illogical, after the manner of her sex.

But I know that she is won all the same. She went so far as to talk of our life in Ceylon, even the kind of clothes she would have to wear there. There is no situation in life, be it ever so solemn, in which a woman does not think of her clothes. "I do not believe I have a gown fit for the place," she said. How like a woman!

"Bring three or four white muslin dressing gowns," I said, "and leave all your smart frocks behind. You shall have a toilet of banyan leaves and orchids. You shall have cobweb muslins and silken robes that you could pull through a wedding ring, and Indian embroideries dazzling with jewels. You shall have a gown of peacock's feathers over a cloth of gold petticoat."

"Would not that be too warm for the tropics," she said, smiling at me through her ears. She is alternate sun and shower like an April day. "But you know I am only joking. You know I am not going with you?"

"I know that you are going with me, that you could not be so cruel as to break my heart. You know that for me the east means life, but that life without you would be death. So if you refuse to go, I shall stay in England and let the climate do its worst for me."

"You will stay and die," she said, with a scard look.

This little chronic cough of mine has always effect upon women, and it attacked me just at that moment. I believe I am consumptive, and I know I detest winter and old weather.

After this we shed a few sympathetic tears, her head upon my shoulder, under the willow. The westerling sun steeped us in golden light, the air breathed rustic perfume, mingled odours of June woods and wild flowers, the ripple of the river was like music. If life could have gone on forever thus, living on like the river in endless ecstasy, I could have been more than content. Heaven knows I am not a profligate. I have never loved a woman who was not a lady. Live without sentiment or poetry has ever been hateful to me. It is the union of soul with soul that I have sought, and in Helen have found my ideal, my Archetypal woman.

I told her my plan. She was to receive a telegram next morning between seven and eight, ostensibly from her husband, summoning her to London. She was to leave hurriedly by an early train, carrying her luggage with her.

She listed and promised to obey, and I believe she will keep her word. I have been up to date to Barnstable, and have telegraphed, my servant in London, instructing him how to telegraph to Mrs. Belfield, and Mr. Belfield's name, from South Kensington. She will be able to show her mother-in-law the message, and short of Lady Belfield offering to go to London with her, I run no risk of the dodge falling.

She will go away quietly by the 10.40 train, and I will start by an earlier one, so as to escape notice and to be ready to meet her at Exeter. Then we shall go on to London together, in a private room at the Grand, and leave Charing Cross by the Continental mail. There will be no time lost, and very little fear of pursuit, for I know that Belfield was at York the day before yesterday, and likely to be there till the end of this week.

CHAPTER XXIX.—AFTERWARDS.

It was summer still, yet Adrian shivered as he sat and watched the slow dawn, the dawn that was tinged with such an air of gladness for exulting men round about Chadford, starting up from their pillows briskly, with tights of trying new horses and new hounds rose the dewy moorland, or the heavy gra. Adrian felt as if his limbs were lead, and his forehead iron. He sat by the empty hearth in the library, with his book lying open on the carpet just where he had flung it in his agony of fear. He sat with the sun rose gloriously, shining with palcoloured light through the emblazoned windows, stepping the sombre old room brightness and splendour. He heard the ooc crowing triumphantly in the poultry yard the horses neighing as they were brought out of their stables for early exercise. I would was awake and astir again, earth dky were bright and blithe; and she lying face downward in that dreadful place where the great ravenion, pike mistero! She was lying there, murdered on the behalf of sin, unshriven and impenitent, throtiom of a most miserable marriage.

He thought of lying there—pictured her under the rust the lovely chair, dark, with threads of gold it, surging loosely to and fro with the movement of the water. He thought of water rats and the foul creatures that haunt the margin of a river; but worst of all was the thought of those shining, dky monsters which he

had so often watched, flashing silvery under the dull green water.

And then he remembered her as he had first beheld her in her girlish beauty, light-minded and gay, gentle, pliable, a creature to entwine herself about a man's heart, grow dearer to him by every folly, and more sacred to him by every touch of weakness.

So would she have been to him had she become his wife. It would have been the delight of his days to cherish and protect her, to strengthen that which was feeble in her character, to develop all that was good. Oh, if he could have recalled the past, and that fatal evening by the river, when he surrendered her to his brother. It was a base act so lightly to have renounced her, he thought, to-night, in his anguish. He ought to have saved her from herself. He ought to have claimed and held her against the world, anything rather than to have given her over to a scoundrel.

"My brother," he said to himself. "My own flesh and blood, so near and dear to me that I could not think him utterly bad, though I knew that he was selfish and self-willed. But I ought to have held her to her promise—she was mine, my very own, to protect and foster; and I let her go to another. I had not strength to stand against her folly. I should have understood better what was best for her happiness. I should have known that she was not to be trusted with her own guidance."

His mind, utterly unbinged by the horror of the night, wandered vaguely from the dreadful circumstances which he had to consider, dallied as it were idly with the memory of the past—lost itself in futilities.

What he had to think of was his brother, and his brother's position.

A murderer! He, Valentine Belfield, the beloved son of a tender-hearted mother—he was guilty of murder. He had committed that tremendous crime which stands alone among all other wrong-doing, and by which in one mad instant of ungovernable passion, a man may forfeit his life to the law. He may forge, steal, swindle, break hearts, betray friends, beggar the widow and the orphan, work ruin on the widest scale, and he may still possess that dastard life which to him means the universe. But for the shedder of blood, the law has no mercy; for him society has nothing but abhorrence.

Adrian looked up at those old armorial bearings, through which the sun was shining. How proud he had been of those historical quarrels—every one of which had its meaning for him. Had crime ever stained these shields before? Those oldest arms yonder, had been borne by his Norman ancestor, the Chevalier de Belchamp, crusader and hero. The family had divided afterwards into Beauchamp's and Belfield's. Yonder was the shield of the Champemnonnes, with whom the Belfields had intermarried, and there on a scutcheon of pretence, appeared the crest of the Prieux de Brunnes, marking a marriage with an heiress of that family.

Had any son of those good old families ever stained his name with the red brand of murder? Those men of the older times had lived in a violent age—when the sword was ready to the hand, and anger, hate, revenge, jealousy, were wont to recognise no higher law than impulse. Yes; doubtless there had been crimes committed, blood shed by men who bore those honoured names, and the Church had heard the murderer's confession, and had absolved the sinner. Had not the Church thriven and grown rich by such stories of crime? The very stones of old abbays and minsters might show dark stains of blood, could they but tell of the motives which had prompted the benefactions of their founders—the craven spirits whose gold had been poured out like water to win forgetfulness on earth and mercy beyond the grave.

But murder to-day—in this civilized, well-regulated world, bears a more hideous aspect. Murder to-day means the newspapers and the hangman; and perhaps the newspapers are the more appalling ordeal.

"What will he do?" thought Adrian. "Kill himself?"

There was a new horror. To Adrian it seemed only a natural consequence of last night's work that Valentine should put a pistol to his mouth and blow out his brains. It seemed the only obvious issue. He knew that religious scruples would not stop his brother's hand. After what he had done, his life must needs be hateful to him, and the most natural thing for him to do was to destroy that life.

It was of his mother he had thought, much more than he had thought of Valentine, during those long hours in which he had been sitting there, waiting helplessly for the morning; having no plan or thought as to what he should do, no capacity to think out the future, for himself or for his guilty brother. It was of her agony—her raised life—her broken heart, that he thought—and he would have given his own life gladly to save her.

Would it be better for her peace of mind if her son were to destroy himself, and thus end the horror of last night by a double tragedy?

However terrible the catastrophe, it might offer the only possible escape from a deeper horror—the shame and agony of seeing that beloved son in a criminal dock.

What was to be done with him if he lived, if he clung to the burden of existence with all its chances of infamy? He had chosen the secret path, which to Adrian's mind stamped him for ever as a deliberate assassin, he who had sinned almost unawares in a moment of passion, and who might have confessed his crime and held himself erect before his fellow-men, guilty, but not dishonoured. He had chosen the darker path; the way of lies and concealments. He had made his choice, and would have to abide by it. That murdered corpse lying in the quiet grave yonder, might rise up to bear witness against him, as other hidden forms had arisen out of strange, and unlikely places, to testify against other murderers.

After sunrise it seemed to Adrian as if the moments hurried past with inexorable speed. He so intensely dreaded the awakening of the household, the resumption of the ordinary course of events, and then the inevitable shock of Helen's disappearance, the fear, the wonder, the confusion, his mother's distress and perplexity. It was of her he thought always; to save her pain he would do anything, sacrifice even conscience and honor. He, who was the soul of truth, would stoop to lie, and would lend himself to the concealment of his brother's crime.

The first sound of a housemaid's footfall on the stairs, fell heavy on his heart. There came the opening of a shutter on the ground floor. The day had begun. The hour chimed from the stable clock—six! All the house would be stir before half-past seven.

Adrian went slowly up to his room to

steady his nerves by a cold bath, and to prepare himself to meet his mother. He shuddered as he caught sight of his haggard face in the glass.

"It is I who look like a murderer," he said to himself.

He remembered having passed an underfootman on the stairs, and how curiously the man had looked at him. He had been scarcely conscious of the fact at the moment, but he recalled it now at the sight of his own face. No wonder the man had stared at him.

He made his toilet slowly, deeply thoughtful, and with a strange incertitude as to the duration of time—thinking he had spent hours in his dressing room when he had been there less than an hour.

His valet knocked at the dressing-room door presently.

"Your shaving water, Sir Adrian. Is there anything wrong, sir?"

How the question startled him. Was every interogatory, every sound of a human voice to have the same power to shock and scare him henceforward, until the dreaded discovery was made, and all was over.

"Anything wrong," he answered quietly, opening his door as he spoke. "No. What should be wrong?"

"Nothing, sir. I beg your pardon, sir, only when I went into your room just now I saw your bed had not been slept in, and it frightened me a bit, sir."

"Oh, was that all? Yes, I daresay you were astonished. I was reading very late in the library last night, and I fell asleep over my book. And after I had slept in my chair till daylight, I did not feel inclined for bed."

The man assisted his master with the final details of his toilet, brushed invisible specks of dust off the neat grey lounge coat, handed Sir Adrian his watch and handkerchief, and glanced at him furtively now and then, wondering to see him so pale and weary looking, even after a comfortable night.

Eight o'clock. The prayer bell rang, and Sir Adrian went down to the breakfast room where the old servants and their newer subordinates were quietly slipping into their accustomed places in front of the sideboard. It was Lady Belfield's habit to read prayers at this hour, no matter who among her visitors came or stayed away. She expected no objection from her guests in this matter; but she deemed it her duty to her servants that she should be one with them in their devotions.

The prayers were not too long, nor the portion of Scripture too abstruse; and when they had all risen from their knees, Lady Belfield would enquire after the health of any one among them who was ailing, or would ask the last news of a sick parent, or would detain Mrs. Marrable for a few minutes' chat between prayers and breakfast, or take her into the garden to look at some small improvement, or a newly marked geranium, which the gardener had, as it were, evolved from his inner consciousness by scientific treatment of the parent plant.

The bond of love and duty was very strong between mistress and servants at Belfield Abbey.

Helen had rarely appeared at prayers during this last visit. Indifferent health was an excuse for late hours, and she was seldom downstairs until long after breakfast. If she did show herself at the breakfast table her presence there was merely an empty form, as she ate hardly anything. Lady Belfield made no remark therefore when prayers were finished and when breakfast began without her daughter-in-law.

"You are looking very pale this morning, Adrian," she said, as she began to pour out tea, with her son sitting opposite her in the morning light, "I hope there is nothing wrong?"

"Nothing wrong! It was just what his valet had said outside his door an hour ago."

"Nothing. Only I sat up later than usual last night—absorbed in a new book. In fact I was so foolish as to read on till I exhausted myself and fell asleep in my chair."

"That does not seem as if the book were very interesting."

"Oh, but it was interesting—a most engrossing book."

"What was it about, Adrian? I am always interested in your new books."

"That wasn't new," he said hastily, fearing further interogation. "It is a book of Muller's, and I was interested in tracing some of Darwin's ideas to their source in the older writer."

"And you fell asleep in the library, and you were very late going to bed, I suppose," interogated the mother anxiously.

"Very late. In point of fact, what is it, Andrew?"

"Can I speak with you, if you please, Sir Adrian?" said the footman, with a look that foreboded evil of some kind.

Adrian rose hastily, and went towards the door.

"Yes, of course."

"Stop, Andrew," exclaimed Lady Belfield. "What can you have to say to your master that you can't say before me? Has anything happened?"

The man looked from his master to his mistress, and then back again to his master, with a troubled aspect.

"It is about Mrs. Belfield, my lady. Mrs. Marrable felt a little uneasy at what Jane told her just now."

"What do you mean by all this mystery?—Jane told her—what? Is my daughter ill?" asked Lady Belfield, hurrying to the door.

"No, my lady—it's not that, my lady; only Mrs. Belfield is missing, and her bed has not been slept in, and her boxes are packed and strapped, my lady, as if she had prepared to go away, and Jane, whose room is on the floor above Mrs. Belfield's rooms, not exactly overhead, but very near—heard her moving about very late last night, and wondered she should be up so late."

"What can it mean, Adrian?" exclaimed Lady Belfield. "She had no idea of leaving us for months to come. Why should she have packed her trunks? Where can she be? In the grounds, perhaps, wandering about somewhere after having been up all night. Let us go and look for her, Adrian. There is nothing really amiss, perhaps," and then in a lower tone she added, "Servants are such alarmists."

"A telegram, my lady," said the butler, appearing with the well-known orange envelope on a salver.

"For Mrs. Belfield," said his mistress, looking at the address. Shall I open it, Adrian?"

"Yes, I think you had better," answered Adrian, trying to school himself to the falsehood which must needs govern his conduct henceforward in all things bearing upon the business of last night.

The message was from Valentine Belfield

to Mrs. Belfield, handed in at Kensington at thirty-five minutes past seven, received at Chadford at three minutes before eight.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Used Up.

Tramp—"Can you help a poor sick man?"
Lady—"Sick! What is the matter with you?"
Tramp—"Well, missus, it would take too long to name all my afflictions. I think I have every disease in the world but the gout."
Lady—"Well, I think you will get the gout here."

Employed The Wrong Man.

Dr. S.—You don't mean to tell me that old Sawbones charged you fifteen dollars for cutting off your arm?
Mr. P.—Yes, fifteen dollars.
Dr. S.—Now, why didn't you send for me? I would have cut both arms off for less money than that.

A Case of Real Distress.

Judge—"You are accused of having received stolen property. Didn't you know that you were receiving stolen property?"
Accused—"Shudge, if I had suspected dose goots vas stolen, do you perlieve dot I, ash a pishness man, would have paid terventy-five tollars? Not mooch. I would have chewed him down to two tollars and a half. I vash schwindled myseluf."

They Quit Even.

Dusenberry came lounging into the grocery.
"What a stock of beets, turnips and cabbages," he commented. "Why, you're quite a green grocer. Since I think of it, send me round ten pounds of coffee. I'll pay you next week."
"I may be a green grocer, but I am not green enough to trust you," the shopman said. "It's bad policy to trust."
Dusenberry rubbed his chin and gazed at the floor in a ruminating way.
"Yes, it's a bad policy," he assented.
"Still, there's a worse one."
"What one, pray?"
"One that's run out."
They shook hands and agreed that they had quit even.

Omitting Certain Services.

Just before the collection a country minister said:
"Dearly beloved brethren, owing to the extreme heat of the day I think it will be wise to omit certain portions of our morning service."
This seemed to please some of the members and they began covertly to return dimes and quarters to their pockets. Then the minister went on:
"The collection will now be taken up."

Willing to Risk It.

Store Clerk—"A hammock, miss? Certainly. Here is one warranted to sustain a weight of two hundred and ninety pounds."
Young Lady (s luss)—"Two ninety—let me see. John weighs 164 and I weigh 125—five and four's nine with nothing to carry; two and six is eight with nothing to carry; one and one is two; total, 259. (To the clerk.) Well, that's pretty near, but I guess it will do."

It Was Fast Color.

"I'm afraid that calico will fade," she observed as she looked at it in a doubtful way.
"Oh, no, ma'am."
"Ever tried it?"
"Yes'm. A woman who had a dress of this pattern fell into the river and her body was not fished out for a week. The color hadn't started in the least, I assure you."

A Wider Experience.

Dumley (who has given Featherly a cigar from his private box): I've smoked worse cigars than these, Featherly.
Featherly: Yes, ees, Dumley, I s'pose you have; but you must remember that you are an older man than I am.

A Fine Distinction.

The Court: How is this, Mr. Johnston? The last time you were here you consented to be sworn, and now you simply make a affirmation.
Mr. Johnston: Well, yo' Honah, de reason am dat I s'pects I ain't quite so suah 'bout de facts oh dis case as de oder.

Passes for a Joke.

"She signed a contract," grumbled the yarasimonious man, "to want only one sateen dress a year after we were married."
"Well, haven't you the contract?" inquired his friend.
"Y-e-s-s, but she spells it different in that, and it reads a-t-t-n."
"I'll tell you how to spoil that," said his friend. "Just tell her that every dress she has will be satin after she has worn it—ha! ha!"

Not as Bad as He Feared.

Office Boy (to editor)—A gent outside wants to see you.
Editor—Great Heavens! is it another poet?
Office Boy—No, sir; he says he wants to lick de editor.
Editor (relieved)—Show the gentleman in, James.

Charge For Paper.

Drummer (indignant at being charged with writing paper at a Hamilton hotel)—How did I come to be charged with writing paper? I never had any.
Waiter (desiring to mollify him)—May be not, sar. Hit's de paper de bill was made out on.

A Model Husband.

Homely Daughter—Mother, I spoke to John last night about his kissing me so rarely since we were married, and told him that you had commented on his apparent indifference.
Mother—Did you; and what did he have to say?
Daughter—He gave me a twenty-dollar bill. Mother, I think John is the kindest and best husband that ever lived!

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