

A DYING PROMISE

OR, THE MISSING
WILL

CHAPTER 9.

By the time the days were beginning to lengthen again in 1857 people had almost ceased to think of the Crimea and all its terrible lessons to the nation, no one dreamed of the more dreadful storm now lowering on the far East, and in part occasioned by eastern misconception of England's strength in the Crimea. Even in India, where the first low mutterings of thunder had already been heard, some strange madness lulled the English to a perilous sense of security and blinded them to the handwriting blazing on the wall before them.

At home people went on their usual comfortable half-hearted way, thinking, in spite of their recent rude awakening from dreams of universal peace, that the mad race for wealth was not again to be interrupted, but that every man was to sit in the shadow of his own shop-front and eat the fruit of pale factory-hands' drudgery, untroubled. People grumbled impartially at everything over their breakfast newspapers, reconstructing or destroying the British Constitution or propping up the venerable fabric according to the several mandates of their several journals, but not dreaming of more war.

One night at the end of January, Philip Randal, now a fine, well-set up lad, with bright, keen eyes and a healthy brown face, found himself, very smart in his ball uniform, at a large military ball, trying very hard to look bored, but in reality full of enjoyment. He liked dancing and ladies' society, and was fresh to gayeties of this kind. He wished the deficiency in ladies had been on the other side, but then, as so many of those gold laced, stalwart warriors lounging languidly against walls were too vain, too lazy, or too clumsy to dance, it did not matter much, since no lady is ever too tired, too bored, or too vain to dance, so he might have his share of partners, ineligible as he was.

He thought of his little sister at home, when he saw so many fresh girl-faces in the brilliant whirl of dancers, bright as rolling sunset-clouds turning before him to the accompaniment of love-laden waltz music on a fine string band.

There are people who despise waltz-music; have they ever been young? ever danced? ever flung themselves like swimmers upon those bright waves of melody, and stayed only by the pressure of one young hand upon another young waist, floated far away into ideal regions, rising and falling in spirit with the ebb and flow of the music? Besides that poetry of motion which quivers so strongly through waltz music that it is pain to sit still at its sound, it has all the tenderness, the sadness, the infinite unconscious longing, the ethereal exaltation of youthful love. Young people listen to waltz music with yearning, looking into the vague rich future; old people listen with yearning and recall the golden past.

"I am never merry when I hear sweet music," might be said of Strauss's or Gungl's waltzes. But the sadness seems pleasanter than mirth.

Philip listened, a pensive light irradiating and refining his features, which inclined to a square solidity, and, leaning against his door-jamb, imagined Jessie one of that bright crowd of flower-decked, bejewelled ladies, whose filmy draperies floated mistily about them and merged into one broad mass of color with gold-laced scarlet and blue officers, with the varied facings and decoration distinguishing hussars and lancers, artillery and engineers, cavalry and infantry, the brilliance toned down here and there by the black-blot of a civilian dress. What a different blending of color some of those present had seen at Balaclava, when the heavy brigade wedged themselves through the gray mass of Russian troops! Some of the dancers present had been stared the Russian gray with English scarlet.

Philip had left a two-days' old letter on his mantelpiece.

"Dear old Ippie," it began, "do write oftener. Four of Miss Blushfords are still in love with you, five with the new curate (not a quarter as nice as Mr. Ingleby), and two with the drawing-master. They are such sillies, they steal his pencil-chips, and even his pencils, for keepsakes. He is always pleased with my drawings, so I mean to be a famous painter. What geese those officers must be! How glad I am that you pretended to think the donkey they put in your cot was Captain Hare, and took possession of his room instead. Father and mother are quite well; so is Sebastopol. I leave school this half. Your affectionate sister,

"Jessie Meade."

"They want me to be confirmed this spring, but I don't want to be good yet. I should like some fun first."

What a baby the sweet child was! Yet she would soon be a woman, though always a tender, slight creature, a thing to be protected. And what was to become of her socially?

The more he thought of it the more impossible her position seemed. How could that dainty blossom-like creature dance with such rough fellows as her cousin, Roger Plummer, even if dancing were in vogue in that set? and by what possible door could she be admitted to more refined circles? It had been better, he sometimes thought, if the child had been taught dairy and housework in place of Mangnall's Questions, French, and piano-playing; her hands would in that case have been rougher, her susceptibilities blunter, her face not less sweet, and her heart as pure; Roger Plummer and young editions of Mr. Cheeseman would not then have jarred upon her, she would then have no more thought of quarrelling with her place in life than a flower does.

"A violet by a mossy stone half hidden from the eye."

She would have blossomed sweetly, and as sweetly faded, untroubled and unnoticed, in her place. It never struck him that Jessie's exquisite grace and refinement were as native to her as the perfume to the violet, and widely different from Miss Blushford's thin and spurious veneer of history and arithmetic, her feeble pencil drawings, piano-strummings, and petty proprieties of speech and manner. When he took stock of the pretty young faces present and observed the ways of their owners, he felt that Jessie would do herself no discredit among them, he was not sure that many could surpass her.

That one of those young faces surpassed not only Jessie's but every other in the room, he was perfectly sure. He watched the slight young figure belonging to that flower-face, as it glided through the mazes of the waltz, with a deepening glow in his dark gray eyes, and a strange new fearful joy thrilled him when her soft floating drapery swept him in a sudden surge of the dance. A friend spoke to him, unheard, smiled at his absorbed earnest gaze, and passed on.

"How are you, Randal?" said a hussar captain, sauntering up to him later on, but Philip continued to gaze at the surging tide of waltzers, grave, rapt, unconscious, until the question was repeated, and the hussar, languidly smiling, laid a hand on the lad's shoulder.

"Eh? oh? How are you, Medway?" he exclaimed, starting and flushing. "I didn't hear you come up."

"Or sto me, too hard hit," he returned, his beautiful blue eyes full of mirth. "What is her name?"

"Legion," he returned quickly. "Look, Medway, there's not a really plain or ill-dressed woman in the room to-night."

Captain Medway smiled benevolently and lifted his eyebrows. "Youthful enthusiasm, fine thing, refreshing," he said. "Awfully hot to-night, frightful crush, eh? Don't you dance?"

"Rather."

"Want a partner? Know my cousin, Miss Maynard? Girl in white over there?"

Philip tried to look indifferent and not blush; "I—ah think I have met Miss Maynard," he stammered, "I darsay she's forgotten; besides—ah—her card will be full by this time."

"Oh, come along, look, she's sitting down, introduce you again," replied Captain Medway, amused at the subdued eagerness on the lad's honest brown face.

"Oh! Mr. Randal is an old acquaintance," said the pretty dark-eyed girl, in a low voice with a subdued warble in it, on his introduction. "I am so sorry," she added with genuine regret, "not one dance left. Unless—" she paused, looking at her cousin.

"Unless for once I'm magnanimous and give up. No—let me see," taking her card. "I'm down for eleven, shall I substitute Mr. Randal's name, Ada?"

"Thank you." Two gray eyes and two dark ones rested gratefully upon Claude Medway's face, Ada Maynard floated away with her partner, and Medway's well-built, well-carried figure passed slowly on with a certain princely grace, leaving Philip full of young gratitude and admiration.

When the band struck up the first plaintive chords of No. 11, Philip was already at Miss Maynard's side, eager to claim her promise at the first moment possible.

Two gliding steps and a turn, and they were off, borne away and away far from the prose of life, lost upon the fairy sea of that enchanted music, rising and falling upon the bright waves of its yearning melody, unconscious of physical being and motion, because of their very intensity and perfection, isolated in a common beauty, they two alone, each revolving round the other as a sole centre and source of motion, as two stars cast into space free of any solar system, might do. At last, as if by common consent, they paused breathless, flushed, radiant, and Philip guided his partner to a seat beneath a trophy of arms and flags, into which she sank smiling, while

he leant against a Union Jack above her, and, opening her fan, used it gently on her behalf.

"I sometimes wonder if there will be dancing in Heaven," sighed Miss Maynard, who was still in her teens.

"You dance so well, no wonder that you enjoy it," he replied, wondering at the glory of the rich dark eyes, and the curled mazes of the deep black hair and sweet curving of the warm red lips, "I suppose you dance a great deal?"

"Oh! no. I am only just out. This is only my second ball. And it will be the last, I am afraid."

"Surely not. Why should it be so?"

"My last at home, I mean. We go out to India, mother and I, next week," she sighed.

Philip sighed too. "I am sorry," he said after a pause, "no more chance for me of another dance with you." He left off using the fan and looked dreamily at the bright moving crowd with a sudden disenchantment. "Poor little butterfly," he thought, "you will be snapped up the moment you land." Then she would be a flower-hovering butterfly no more; but a gentle little hearth cricket, guarded and sheltered by some strong man. Cherished or crushed, he wondered, with a sudden fear, as he turned and looked at the slight fragile form and delicate face. Could sorrow or suffering touch a thing so fair and tender? The thought was as preposterous as painful. Why, she would fade at the first touch of pain as a rose-leaf shrivels at the first breath of frost. Sunshine and soft airs should be hers through life.

The waltz music was still rising and falling in golden wavelets, Philip and his charming partner were resting after another turn in a palm-shaded alcove talking the light nothings to which young voices and mutually charmed eyes lend enchanted meaning, when a dark shadow fell upon them from an approaching figure, and the repeated utterance of his name at last aroused Philip's attention. He took a paper handed to him by a mysterious figure which glided swiftly away and was lost in the crowd. Miss Maynard turned her head, seeing his attention was thus claimed and looked at the brilliant figures fitfully seen dancing between the palm-leaves for a long space.

When at length she turned her face toward Philip, his head was resting against the draped flags, his face had a bluish tint and his eyes the amazed stare of a wounded animal.

"You are ill!" she exclaimed; "what can I do?"

"No, no," he said, recollecting himself, at the sound of her voice. "But it should have come before, hours before. Too late now, too late."

She read on the paper he showed her, "Your mother is dying. Come." "And I cannot go till to-morrow!" he said.

"You can go at once. A mail train passes through at two. It is not much past one now. If you are quick you can get leave and catch it. My brother has often caught it."

He started up at once and pushed through the whirling crowd. The music was all discords now, the people seemed spectres, bright eyes mocking phantoms, the flowers poisonous, the lights burned blue and baleful. He had been dancing and fooling while his mother lay dying.

His partner gazed after his retreating figure until it was lost in a maze of floating draperies and brilliant colors, and the tears gradually filled her eyes. "Poor fellow!" she murmured, "poor boy! Has he a sister? or any one to care for him? I wish he had just said good-night."

Philip was able to obtain leave at once, and before long he had torn off his gay ball uniform, put on plain clothes, sprung into the mail train and was rushing swiftly through the darkness, a dreadful terror tearing at his heart.

The train moved too slowly for him, flying past fields and woods, mansions, all covered up and hidden farms and hamlets, and park-girdled beneath the mirk as the future is hidden beneath the shadows of uncertainty, the throb-throb of the engine beating time in his brain to the melody of that last waltz.

It was a cold night, he was glad to draw his coat-collar round his ears, and shivered in spite of his thick rug. It was not so pleasant to look out into the blank depths of surrounding night as into Ada Maynard's eyes.

"All the spirit deeply dawning in the dark of hazel eyes."

was the line that came to his memory and sung itself to the dance music.

And amid all the thoughts crowding upon him at this first shock of becalm, in the thousand memories, tender, happy, and sad, he still saw the bright face uplifted and heard the clear voice speaking, saw the white muslin and blush-roses, the rounded arms, rich dark hair, and hazel eyes lit up by the dawning spirit, and was glad in a way, though his heart bled and his conscious reproached him, as he thought of things he had done and left undone, and wondered why he had not been more tender and dutiful to her who had been more than mother to him and had never been harsh even in reproof.

It was too late now; it always is too late when we think of these things with vain regret sharpened by the keen-edged pain of loss.

The engine throbbed on to the melody of that last love-burdened waltz, stars passed in solemn shining procession over the heavens, un-

til the gray wintry dawn paled them and the chill earth showed ghostly and desolate in the cold light.

The sun had dispersed the mists and was shining with cold radiance like a smile which conceals a sorrow, and the forenoon was well advanced when he reached Cleeve, and took a fly in his haste to reach the Mill. It looked peaceful and pleasant when he drove up, the mill-wheel was turning with its familiar sound, scattering the diamond spray over the still sun-lit pool, the pigeons were wheeling about with clanging wings and iridescent breasts, the dogs barked cheerfully, a hen loudly announced that she had laid an egg, snow-drops gleamed white in the garden-borders, the window-panes sparkled in the sunshine, and Philip's heart gave a joyful leap; for the blinds were not down; his mother lived.

In a moment he was in the parlor, where Jessie was dozing by the fire after a long night of watching. She sprang up with a stifled cry to meet him, her eyes and mouth marked with purple shadows and her face pale as the snow-drops in the garden.

"My kitten! My poor kitten!" cried Philip, using his pet name for her. Then he sat down, drawing her on to his knee and rocking her softly to and fro as if she were again the baby he had so often hushed to sleep, and Jessie cried as any baby might have done.

Cousin Jane had opened the door softly and shut it again. "Poor things!" she said, "let them have their cry out, 'twill do them a power of good."

"But you must go to her. She has been wanting you all night," said Jessie, suddenly starting up.

Then Dr. Maule and Cousin Jane came in, the latter with red eyes and haggard face, the former vigorously taking snuff and swearing beneath his breath.

"Is there no hope, doctor?" Philip asked; "can nothing be done?"

"Nothing, nothing, I tell you," he replied, testily, "keep quiet and don't make a row. Not that anything matters to her, poor soul. Confound you, Philip," he added, "I ain't a man of science, though I know more than you think; but all the doctors in the world can't help her now!"

At this Mrs. Plummer began to cry again and unnecessarily besought Philip and Jessie to calm themselves though they were both unmoved in their crushing sorrow.

"Now ma'am, stop that!" growled the doctor, who was himself shedding copious tears, "and take care of that girl. Let her cry, but make her eat." And he bustled off, promising to look in again. "As if there weren't plenty of tiresome old women to spare in the town, without taking Mrs. Meade," he grumbled as he went.

"She slipped on an apple-paring on the stone steps and hurt her spine, poor dear," explained Mrs. Plummer, when he was gone. "I said to her only last Tuesday week, 'Martha, I said, that untidy hussy 'll be the death of you some day.' And so she was," she added with a satisfied air. "But her mind is clear, my dear. And she wants you. Keep up before her, there's a good lad, do."

When Philip reached his mother's room, there was no more need to admonish him to be calm, for the sight before him effectually quieted him, and the memory of that day always lived in his mind as a solemn, sweet time of rest and peace.

The spring sunshine poured itself unhindered into the room; Jessie had placed a bunch of snow-drops, "fair maids of February," she called them, in her mother's sight; Sebastopol winked comfortably with her only eye before the fire; and Mrs. Meade herself, the centre of all the sorrow, smiled peacefully from her pillow.

It was so strange, so solemn to Philip to find his mother idle; it seemed impossible that the household wheels could run without her aid. But for this unnatural stillness, she did not differ from her usual self, and talked calmly of many things she wished done when she should have started on her long journey.

She was content and thankful to be spared a long illness. "Where there's sickness," she said, "it upsets a house. And all's ready. My wedding sheets, Jane, you can lay a hand on. One for me and one to be kept against Meade's burying. You've been a good husband, Matt," she added later; "we've seen trouble together and we've had mercies. I've been over sharp at times, my dear; I set too much on having things clean and tidy about me and men do make such a litter in a house. But you was always careful for a man, my dear, and shut doors after ye, and I wish my tongue had been softer."

At the close of the short sunny day she fell asleep, and when she woke, wandered a little.

"Mansions, many mansions," she murmured, "but I could do with the littlest house, so I could keep it clean and fresh for the angels to go in and out of and the four we lost." Then she slept again, and Philip with gentle violence drew Jessie from the room.

(To be Continued.)

FRENCH COAL SUPPLY.

The coal mines of France, located in the northern part of that country, do not supply the needs of the French people, who have to import 28,000,000 tons, against an average of 21,000,000 tons raised at home.

FAIR COAST OF SUSSEX

INTERESTING HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS.

When the last bathing machine has been drawn up high and dry, when the niggers have departed, and the Punch and Judy man has passed around his shell for the last time, and the summer visitors have left the beaches to the fret and fume of the winter seas; then Brighton shakes itself and takes on a new lease of life, says a writer in the Christian World.

The winter season trends closely on the heels of autumn. Shops display the latest novelties; carriages and motor-cars enliven the fine sea front; hotels and boarding-houses are crowded again with visitors.

If George IV., revisiting the glimpses of the moon, could put up once more at that curious Moorish palace which still attracts the eye of the inquiring visitor, what a change he would see in the Brightelmstone of his day!

FEW PEOPLE LIVING.

There can be very few people now living who, as children, saw the lights of the "first gentleman of Europe's" carriage flash past as he travelled through the night to his seaside pavilion, though I have heard an old lady describe a stage coach journey she took to Brighton, what time Farmer George, mad and old and blind, was strumming hymns at Windsor, while his graceless son played his mad pranks with his courtier in the little Sussex town.

Those days are still recent enough to make one wonder at the magnificent palaces which have sprung up since the Regency, and transformed little Brightelmstone into the Brighton of this twentieth century.

ANOTHER MONARCH.

Another monarch of unsavory memory, Charles II., is associated with Brighton, for it was from this part of the coast, after Worcester fight, that he made his escape from England. The old skipper who aided his escape lies buried in a local churchyard.

It is said that at the restoration the King, more liberal, like most of the Stuarts, in promises than performances, overlooked the services of the old mariner, who sailed his battered craft up the Thames as a reminder, and was rewarded at last with a generous pension.

Great preachers, such as Rorterson and Campbell, and the Free Church conferences which have been held there, have given Brighton a more worthy reputation than the two monarchs who are associated with its history.

POPULAR EXCURSION.

Perhaps the most popular excursion from Brighton is to Rottingdean the home, until recently, of Rudyard Kipling. The most pleasant way of going is by the electric railway which runs along the sea shore as far as Black Rock, and thence on foot along the cliffs.

Few villages have more interesting associations than Rottingdean. The Duke of Wellington had at school here. In the picturesque old church, which boasts the most ancient lynch-gate in England, are three fine stained glass windows, representing the Archangels Gabriel, Michael and Raphael, by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, whose cremated remains lie here—a small memorial tablet on the outer wall of the church recording the fact.

ALSO BURIED HERE.

William Black is also buried at Rottingdean. A little white slab inscribed "William Black, Author," and bearing the dates of his birth and death—he died in 1898, the same year as Burne-Jones—marks the site of his resting-place. The grave, according to the season, is a mass of heather or ivy, or pansies, or other flowers; once, among the heart's-case, I saw a brightly-hued butterfly hovering, reminding one of a pretty legend of the soul.

A pleasant resting-place this, within sound of the sea, and with the green Sussex downs rising against the neighboring sky-line.

LOVED THE DOWNS.

Black loved these downs; and one can understand the breeziness of his books when one remembers that he worked, while living here, on alternate days; giving up every other day to a tramp of 20 miles or so across those hills where

Through the strong unhampered days The tinkling silence thrills.

In that northern country of mountain and lake and heather, which he also loved so dearly, his memory is kept green by a lighthouse that, year in and out, flashes its warning through the sea-mists.

Kipling's high-walled house opposite the church is an object of interest to visitors.

USED TO ROAM.

He used to roam about the village and sea-shore in the most unconventional attire, making friends with the inhabitants, but dodging into shops or other hiding-places to get out of view of too curious visitors from Brighton. "To see Kipling standing on the cliffs, or turning back every now and then to look at the village," said someone who stayed there when he was living in the place, "gave one an idea how much he loved it. He drank in the surroundings as if he had never clapped eyes on Rottingdean before. Again and again when walking on the cliffs, he would turn round to gaze at the old church tower and the rambling bungalow.