

A DYING PROMISE

OR, THE MISSING
WILL

CHAPTER XI.

"Are you sure?" asked the newcomer, turning to Jessie with the blank gaze of civil indifference, "that you don't mind my smoking?"

He scarcely waited for an answer, letting himself down on one elbow on the grass in the immediate foreground, whence he could look up in Miss Lonsdale's face, before he took out and lighted a fresh cigar.

"Pray smoke, pray don't hesitate," Jessie stammered with a rising color.

He turned with a sudden surprised look at her, and threw the cigar cleverly over his shoulder into the water, to the surprise and almost indignation of his cousin.

"What nonsense, Claude!" she exclaimed, "when you have twice been told you may smoke. Why, Jessie," she added, with asperity, "you must surely be thoroughly used to tobacco by this time. Don't all your men smoke every evening?"

They certainly did, though that did not lessen Jessie's dislike of tobacco, but she made no reply, because Captain Medway immediately said that it was a sin to spoil the primrose scents with smoke. "Fact is, one smokes when one is alone from force of habit," he added. "I couldn't find you, Clara, and instinctively turned to a weed for comfort, like the Goth I am."

Jessie's color deepened to the deepest wild-rose tint, she bent over her painting in distressed embarrassment, hurt by Clara's unwonted tone of her own awkwardness in betraying her dislike, but grateful for a courtesy to which she was little accustomed, and which she therefore more keenly appreciated. This gratitude was not lost on Captain Medway, unobservant as he appeared in his languid posture on the grass, his whole attention claimed by Miss Lonsdale, with whom he was soon deep in a conversation that did not include Jessie.

"This then," she thought, with a thrill of enthusiasm, "was Claude Medway, the hitherto unknown hero of so many martial adventures, the central figure of so many romantic speculations." From the day when the handsome boy helped pull her out of the pond, he had occupied a large space in her imagination. Philip had depicted him under various aspects and in glowing colors, until his very name diffused an atmosphere of chivalrous romance. Accustomed as she was to the dangers and vicissitudes of war through the medium of Philip, who was even now on most active service, the fact that this beautiful and princely looking man lying on the grass before her, and displaying a courtesy foreign to her experience, had actually taken part in what is perhaps the most chivalrous if not most brilliant episode in modern war, made her heart beat with a glorious thrill. Philip had often been in great danger, he must often have performed a heroic deed; but that famous charge had fired her imagination as no other incident could. Philip, who had actually seen as much of it as was possible to a soldier in the ranks on that field, and who had heard it described in detail and discussed by other eye-witnesses, and studied the whole battle scientifically afterward, had narrated it over and over again to her, not forgetting Medway's special heroism in plunging back under hot fire to rescue a wounded man. She had only to close her eyes and the charge of the Six Hundred passed with vivid accuracy before her, the knightly form of Claude, wearing the picturesque hussar uniform in which she had once seen him, being the central figure of the picture.

Instead of looking at Marwell Court, towering stately in the sunshine the deer in the foreground, she more than once diverted her gaze to the recumbent figure in the immediate foreground, a deep and reverent admiration expressed in every feature of her pure, sweet face. Thus innocent Jessie did inward homage to this brave soldier, not knowing that she was herself fated to begin a warfare infinitely more perilous and requiring courage of an infinitely higher order. Perhaps it was some shadow of oncoming Fate that made her say, ten minutes before, that she would never again be so happy.

So strongly impressed was she by this knightly figure, so deeply touched by the charm of the mellow voice, that she forgot herself and the incongruity of her own silent presence at this intimate conversation between the cousins, until some request from Clara, concerning her sketch woke her from her dreamy fantasy and recalled her to herself. Then she began to be ill at ease and to find herself in her own way; she doubted if she ought to remain where she was so evidently superfluous.

The cousins talked of people she did not know, and places she had never seen; till some reference to Clara's sketch set them upon art and artists. They spoke of famous

pictures, talked of Italy, of "Modern Painters," of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, skimmed recent literature, drifted on to the mutiny and Lucknow, glanced thence to lighter themes, operas, theatres, declined finally to social celebrities, gossip. Their conversation opened a new and interesting world to Jessie, who had never listened to cultured talk before. She did not know that much they said was commonplace, much second hand, little original and nothing profound; she had not enough social experience to question the good-breeding of totally ignoring her presence, though it revolted her fine instincts and made her wretchedly uncomfortable; but she listened with absorbed interest and could have listened longer.

Claude's Medway's appearance had illuminated Clara's face and changed her whole bearing; she became animated, smiling, gracious. To Jessie's admiring gaze she was really beautiful under this inspiring influence. Was it strange that she should totally forget her dearest Jessie in the presence of this fascinating man, the simple child wondered? and then it suddenly struck sharply through her how well matched the two were, and how absorbed in each other. A strange feeling frightened the muscles of her throat. Was she sorry? Surely not.

"Well, Claude," said Clara, when the painting materials had been gathered together and the sketches had gone their several ways, "what do you think of my little friend? Could you imagine anything so dainty in these Boeotian wastes?"

"Little? I thought her a fair-sized girl," he returned, indifferently. "So this is the newest pet, Clara, eh? Some village girl, some female genius you have unearthed?"

"But isn't she pretty, now, and charming and refined?" she persisted.

"I dare say she is well enough," he returned, "but I never cared much for that blonde, pink and white innocence. Bad taste? Well, you know, men are supposed to have bad taste in these matters."

"Fair or dark, she has distinction and beauty such as would be remarkable in any rank," continued Clara; "this is no mere pretty girl whose 'beaute du diable' will fade in a few years. Then her manner, her accent, her refinement of thought—"

"Say a paragon at once, Clara. You see I have not your opportunity of studying the young person's character. And men are not expected to gush."

"Gush! Really, Claude, you are quite rude. The odious affectation of admiring nothing, constantly puts you out of sympathy with other people. One is perpetually jarred by want of appreciation, one is tempted to exclude you altogether from one's interests."

"Now, my dear Clara," he replied observant of a tearful quiver of the usually proud lip, "this is cruelly unjust. Don't I try to share your enthusiasms? Didn't I admire the Persian cat? Didn't I stick to the crippled tailor with a genius for metaphysics long after you had forgotten him?"

"Forgotten? You know how ungratefully he behaved."

"Then the poetess, Eliza—"

"It is not kind of you to name that treacherous woman."

"I must say you have frightful luck with your proteges. But that makes it awfully hard lines on a fellow, a plain and practical chap like me, to be expected to begin a fresh schwarmerei once a month, especially at second hand."

"I wonder that you see any point in a sarcasm so banal, so very second-hand, Claude, Jest as you will, this sweet child and her innocent affection make a deep and lasting interest in my life."

"Well, Clara, you weren't over civil to your friend. I thought she must be a sort of maid from the way in which you ignored her."

"Oh! a girl in her position! There was no alternative. I must have sent you off if I had not ignored her."

"I bow to superior wisdom. Thank goodness there's the luncheon bell. Arcadian bliss makes one so hungry."

Marwell Court was not sketched in one day. Many trysts were made at that pleasant spot between the oaks and the water, and it became usual for Claude Medway to be in attendance on his cousin, carrying her easel and camp-stool, and criticising and watching the progress of the painting.

One morning, while that lovely spring weather lasted, Jessie repaired to the appointed spot a little before the appointed hour, and setting up her easel and getting out her color-tubes, began to compare her sketch with the prospect before her, looking at it from this point and that with an artist's dissatisfaction. At last, laying her palette aside in disgust, she seated herself on her camp-stool beneath an oak and gave herself up to a silent ab-

sorption of the pure and harmonious flooring of the April day.

Her shawl had slipped from her shoulders and hung gracefully about her, enhancing the slender grace of her figure, the lovely lines of which were well shown by the simple close-fitting black gown she wore, her small, neat bonnet set off the glory of her hair, sunbeams treading through the budding oak-boughs played softly over the slim, white hands loosely clasped in her lap, her pensive face, so delicate in coloring and feature, and her bright rich hair. The garbled branches and sturdy gray trunk of the oak made a good setting for this tender beauty, the primroses clustering at her feet were in harmony with her, and the bunch of delicate anemones, the sole ornament she wore, akin to her.

Of what was Jessie dreaming, in that rapt, thoughtful posture, her deep eyes shadowed by the long, dark lashes which made such a contrast to her fair hair and rose-leaf complexion? Did the clear eyes see more than the fair prospect spread before her in the April lights? What would she have thought had she been conscious of the keen, intent gaze even now bent upon her from the thick covert of the dim silvery oak coppice? Oh! the charm of the mystery and the mystery of the charm to that intent gazer! "After all," he thought, "she is but a woman, simple, untutored, ignorant of the world, and ah! how innocent! And Gretchen was innocent," he added, and smiled. That smile was to his face as the appearance of a snake in some paradise of fresh herbage and bright flowers; it made him unconsciously avert his gaze from the pensive young face on which no one could look while thus smiling.

Then he pushing through the brushwood, the crackling of which broke into Jessie's dream and made her turn to see the handsome face beneath the soft felt hat which had now become so familiar to her.

"Good-morning," he said, with an air of faint surprise at meeting her. "Sketching again, Miss Meade? How very industrious you are."

"I fear not," she replied, in her literal simplicity. "It is such a slow business, a morning's work seems nothing."

He went to the easel and stood for some time discussing and commending the picture, while the pale rose deepened in Jessie's face and her eyes kindled. "Your atmosphere is so good," he said. "I envy you your facility. We've all tried our hands on the dear old place, my brothers and sisters as well as Miss Lonsdale. It defies us all. Redwoods was another good subject for a sketch," he suggested; "wasn't it to be Jessie's home? Was not his friend, Captain Randal of the 190th, some connection of hers? Her adopted brother? Then she must be the little girl he once helped pull out of the mill-pond. Did she really remember it? He was highly honored, indeed."

So they chatted, Jessie never reflecting that his manner, which had hitherto been one of civil indifference, had now changed to a mingled deference and friendliness. She was quite unconscious of a charm that as yet no one had discovered in her, consisting of a certain guileless transparency of diction and thought that made her speech flow like some pure, cool stream, limpid, refreshing, only the more musical for some slight interruption; an unmet, uncomprehended desire for self-expression giving a childlike unreservedness that was most pathetic.

"You must be very lonely," he said, abruptly, looking thoughtfully down on her from his higher elevation as he leant against an oak-trunk.

Jessie's lip quivered and her eyes filled; she turned and looked away over the shining prospect, the blue water and green woodland, eloquently silent.

"Poor child," he added, in a low, full voice, rich to her ear with the manifold music of repressed feeling. From his position he could see, unnoticed himself, the changing, struggling emotions passing over her face like cloud shadows over woodland and sea. Both features and color were subtly responsive to the slightest feeling; it was a deeply interesting study, fraught with a fresh and stimulating charm even to one versed in the study of women's faces.

After a while Jessie swallowed something down with an effort and turned her head slightly. "Oh, it is only for a time," she said cheerfully. "India will soon be quiet, and then I shall go out to Philip."

"To Randal?" he exclaimed. "But he is not really your brother?" he added.

"Oh, no," she replied, with her accustomed simplicity, "but we are engaged."

"Engaged! brother and sister!" he cried in tones of surprise. "Pardon me," he added, "I—ah! the relationship is unusual and confusing, that's all."

A sudden, complicated pain dyed Jessie's face with crimson, which quickly gave place to deathly paleness. She said nothing, but the situation was revealed to her in a flash. Philip was her brother, though not of her blood.

"Randal is a lucky fellow all round," he added, with a range of voice. "What would most of us give to be in his place at Lucknow? He gets all the innings."

"But you had your innings at Balacava," she replied, quickly. "One of the Six Hundred!"

The tone in which she spoke contained the sum and quintessence of

all that ever had been or could be expressed to the honor of the Six Hundred. Medway's cheek flushed, he was carried out of himself, and before long was answering Jessie's eager questions touching that famous charge like any boy. Did he think when they changed that any of them would return? Was he sorry when the order was received?

"Sorry? Oh, Miss Meade, soldiers can never be sorry in an engagement. Why, the first burst when the hounds give tongue is nothing to it. The very sounds, the firing, the noise of hoofs, the rattle of steel and iron stir one up and make one feel all alive; nothing like a sharp action to steady the nerves. Of course I thought I was in for it. You don't know what a lot one thinks in a minute at such times. I saw the old place there, with sunshine on it like now, and thought—well, Marwell will be Hugh's, so much the better for the old fellow, and wondered if my people would care—especially my sister—you know how she is afflicted, poor child. And I—well, I wished I had been a better fellow. And, do you know, it was a queer feeling that we should never know what they said of it in England. Then one couldn't help feeling glad of getting such an innings, and making such a finish. And, by Jove, Miss Meade, you must really practice witchcraft, you turn a fellow inside out! One never talks of these things, you know," he concluded.

"That is unkind," said Jessie, "when people are dying to know and have so much pleasure in hearing."

"One would do a great deal to please some people."

Jessie could not see the look that accompanied this, but the voice was almost as expressive as one full-charged glance. She trembled, she knew not why.

"Women can only hear things, they may never do them," she said, sighingly.

"That hearing would make it worth while to do anything."

"How sweet are looks that ladies bend,

he quoted with the same low-voiced fervor.

"For them I battle to the end, To save from shame and thrall,"

added Jessie, with deep feeling. "Ah! Sir Galahads are not needed in these happier days, except in spirit, are they?"

He shrank from the innocent gaze of the blue eyes uplifted to his as if it had stung him; he turned away and took a careful aim with his stick at a white butterfly hovering about a bush. Neither of them perceived the deep significance of the action, or remembered that the butterfly symbolizes the soul, but Jessie was strangely jarred, she was glad when the winged creature fluttered lightly away unharmed into azure freedom.

"Yet it must be so hard to die and leave this lovely, lovely world!" she added, "even for God and the right, England's motto, to ride like that, straight to death, to fall into darkness and wake, where? Brave men might well tremble before the hereafter. Were you so sure of heaven, Captain Medway?"

He looked at her with dilating eyes, for the moment taking the sarcasm as intentional.

"Oh!" he returned in a tone of relief, "I never thought much of those things, you know. Men don't at least men of the world. Of course one had a sort of a feeling that one couldn't expect to go to the good place; but finking was no good. 'Take your licking and don't squeal' we used to say at Eton. Besides, many better fellows had to go there, for we were all in for it together."

"I don't think," continued Jessie with sudden warmth "that I should care to go to a heaven you were shut out of, I mean," she added with glowing confusion in her swiftly flushing face, "a man who did that—turned back, wounded, bleeding, weak, into that fire to save another more helpless than himself. That is real religion—saving others."

At these burning words a deep emotion seized the young man, or rather a tumult of mingled emotions; his heart beat with deep and strong pulsations, his eyes fell, he looked at the flower-sprinkled grass at his feet, silent, though the word "darling" formed itself with inaudible intensity on his lips. He raised his eyes, glanced once at Jessie with a look that caressed her from head to foot; then looked down again. Jessie's heart beat too, with fiery rapidity, her confused gaze also sought the ground, she was troubled, wondering into what quicksand her enthusiasm had betrayed her, wondering, but scarcely fearing; she possessed the amazing audacity of perfect innocence, besides she trusted the living impediment of chivalry at her side as she would have trusted the warrior archangel himself, the beautiful young Michael with his burning suit of bright armor. The moment was impressive, the silence seemed to quiver with intensity.

"I am afraid," faltered Jessie at last, "that my tongue runs away with me. I don't often talk to people."

"So much the worse for people," he returned, drawing in his breath with an air of relief, while Jessie bent forward and made some most unlucky additions to her picture.

"Do you know, Miss Meade, it is very refreshing to talk to a lady who has not been spoiled by the world."

He left his station by the oak-

trunk and came forward, insensibly changing his position in the endeavor to change the current of his thoughts, and pressing the flowers beneath his step he strolled forward and let himself down, as of old, full length on the grass, in front of her, reclining on one arm and looking up and facing her while he made some trivial observation.

But Jessie did not heed what he was saying, her eyes dilated with sudden terror, her cheek paled. "Don't move," she cried, "don't stir an inch," and as she spoke, she darted toward him, snatched something from the grass and hurled it away.

Quite close to the spot on which he reclined she had seen a thing like the long, brown, leather lash of a cart-whip stretched on the turf, and when his arm touched the ground the thick end of the lash suddenly erected itself, showing a long, flat head with two small, glittering eyes, and a forked tongue darting itself viciously at his unprotected face, which it would have struck in another instant. He sprang to his feet, saw what had happened, caught the thing a blow on the head with his stick, and then flung the limp dead body into the water.

"A viper, and a large one. Thank you," he said, turning tranquilly again to Jessie, who was sitting with her face hid in her hands, sobbing bitterly.

(To be Continued.)

PERSONAL POINTERS.

Notes of Interest About Some Prominent People.

Signor Mascagni, the famous Italian composer, is one of the most superstitious of men, and always carries in one of his pockets a remarkable collection of talismans to avert misfortune. Among them may be mentioned tiny figures of St. George in ivory and mother-of-pearl, and small horns of coral.

One of the most studious Queens in Europe is the German Empress, who cares very little indeed for pomp and ceremony. Her Majesty's favorite study is medicine, and she has instructed herself so well in the art of healing that she is regarded as quite an efficient adviser in cases of ordinary illness.

At Kemble, in Wiltshire, England, Lord Biddulph owns one of the most interesting estates in England, for within its boundaries are to be seen a well-preserved Druidical temple, the remains of a Roman villa, the site of an Anglo-Saxon village mentioned in Domesday Book, and the source of the River Thames.

King Edward was never a book-worm, but he has always been fond of history, and has quite a fine collection of volumes at Sandringham dealing with the Crimean expedition and the campaigns of Nelson and Wellington. Books on farming, sport and other pursuits also appealed to him before the cares of State wholly monopolized his time. When he was Prince of Wales he was a considerable novel reader.

The mannerisms of great men are always a subject of intense interest. Mr. Chamberlain seems to have acquired a new one during his tour through Great Britain. It consists in puffing out his cheeks slightly when he is interrupted. He has only one other trick of gesture—drawing a forefinger rapidly across his nose when he has made a telling point. There is no doubt as to the source whence he acquired this mannerism; it was the only peculiarity of gesticulation which Mr. Gladstone permitted himself.

The Right Hon. A. Graham Murray, the Secretary for Scotland, is one of the most athletic of all legislators. As a Harrow boy he was unrivalled as a racket player, and he is one of the best amateur golfers north of the Tweed; while few men can handle a gun with more deadly effect. He is a great cyclist, too, and thinks as little of riding home all the way to Scotland when the Parliamentary Session is at an end as of cycling from his London chambers to the House of Commons.

The resignation of Vice-Chancellor Chatterton from the Irish Bench leaves Lord Young, of the Court of Sessions at Edinburgh, the oldest working judge in the United Kingdom. Both judges were born in 1819, but the resigning Vice-Chancellor has the advantage of length of years on the Bench. Lord Young, although in his eighty-fifth year, attends daily at the Court of Session with almost unimpaired vigor, and it is a noted wit. He remembers many of Bura's personal friends, and knew intimately "Bonnie Jean," the widow of the poet.

The world does not hear a great deal of Miss Helen Gould, who is believed to be the wealthiest spinster in existence, beyond a general rumor that she eschews society and is devoted to good works. She is a very practical woman, and has been much impressed by the very rudimentary knowledge of cooking among the poor so she has started a cookery institution in New York, where the poorest may attend lectures and demonstrations without payment of any fee. She not only provides it with first-rate teachers, but superintends many details herself, and is almost always present in neat cotton dress and apron, joining the classes and sharing every kind of instruction given to those who attend.