

A DYING PROMISE

OR, THE MISSING
WILL

CHAPTER XLV.

It was not long before the door opened, and there entered, not the little Jessie of his remembrance, the pale child who clung so tearfully to him at the station when they parted, but a tall figure, slender almost to emaciation, yet of a perfect grace. The shining masses of her sunny hair were gathered back in a ribbon, she was clad in white floating draperies, there was a light in her deep violet eyes and a radiance in her flushed though thin face, together with a dignity in her bearing quite new to him. Yet Jessie was quivering inwardly, half-awed by the brown-faced, dark-eyed man who seemed so much older, graver, and more imposing than the half-wayward lad who cried so bitterly at their parents' death. The memory of the storm he had passed through seemed graven on his face. She remembered, when she looked at him, that he had won the Victoria Cross.

Each had much to forgive and be forgiven, they called to mind in that glance, but by the time the door had closed behind her, Jessie was once more the little sister he had loved and protected all his life, and Philip the strong kind brother she had looked up to and loved, and both felt the strength of the tie between them as one that neither time nor circumstances could ever break.

"Jessie, Jessie! my poor kitten!" Philip cried, taking the thin face in his hands, after they had been together for a little while, "why didn't you tell me all from the first? This should never have happened. If I had but known."

She did not reply. Her golden head drooped upon his shoulder, where she rested like a tired child, her eyes veiled by their downward drooping fringes, her features calm with an ineffable repose. The bright momentary flush had faded from her cheek, leaving it marble pale, and there were violet shadows about her beautiful mouth that told a terrible tale and caused an icy fear to creep about his heart.

"You were so far away," sighed Jessie, after some time, "and I could not make you understand."

A week after the finding of Jessie there was a marriage in a London church, in the presence of Sir Arthur Medway, and Jim, and Canon and Mrs. Medway. No eloquence could prevail upon Cousin Jane to appear at her ward's marriage. The proceedings, she averred, were not in accordance with Wood ways; her needful consent, with that of Mr. Cheeseman, was most reluctantly given. A tall, thickly-veiled lady saw the wedding from a gallery. As the ceremony went on the veil was incautiously raised, and the bridegroom, looking up at a very solemn moment, was startled to see in the passion-pale face the well-known features of the Marchioness of Barchester. When the names were being signed in the vestry, Jessie turned to Mr. Ingleby, drew his face down, and kissed him. "Good-by," she said, "you have been a good friend. I shall never forget your kindness, or Miss Ingleby's; please give my love to her."

"And the unkindness, Jessie?" he asked in a voice inaudible to others. "I remember none," she replied, smiling, "dear Miss Ingleby was always good to me. And if she ever showed displeasure, it was just, very just and right." On hearing which afterward Miss Ingleby burst into tears, to her brother's infinite surprise and satisfaction.

Philip stood on the church steps and watched the carriage which bore Claude and Jessie roll away; he was now alone in the world, and yet he was nearer to Jessie now than he had ever been before.

He went back to the Maynards, chiefly that he might have the opportunity of looking at a chalk drawing, which was a fair, though he thought, very unflattering and inadequate likeness of their niece, Ada. He was clever in leading up to references to "our niece, Ada," though he never mentioned her. This Mrs. Maynard thought singular, since anecdotes of every other member of the family, including the mongoose and the bear, were frequent. Perhaps it was a sense of justice that led Mrs. Maynard to supply this deficiency by many allusions to the neglected niece and continued dwelling upon her virtues and attractions, to which Philip listened with a polite forbearance that did him credit, and afforded some diversion to the kind-hearted lady.

Having written to Miss Maynard to tell her of his fruitless search for Jessie, and unexpected finding of a father in the course of that search, he considered that he ought now to inform her of the marriage, a duty that was all the more easy, if not more pleasant, because of the impassable barrier that fatal father of his had placed between them. The world seemed less empty when his conscience had warned him of this duty, and he had resolved to perform it, and he by no means slighted the dishes upon the Maynard's luncheon table, or failed to laugh at

the Canon's gentle jokes. He was thinking of some people sitting at tiffin under a punkah in a large Indian room, with windows and doors shut to keep out the blazing heat, and wondering if one of them was growing pale with the hot weather, and if she could muster appetite for anything more solid than a watermelon. That eligible civilian was not in the habit of dropping in for tiffin, he remembered with a certain pleasure.

"Oh, but I must go now, Mrs. Maynard," he said, more than an hour later, for about the fifth time, and using the name for pure love of its sound and associations. "I promised to meet Sir Arthur Medway on business at four."

This meeting was to take place at his father's chambers, whither he repaired quickly on leaving the Maynards'. On his way he drew a document from his pocket and read it carefully in the cab, taking notes as he read. It was no less an instrument than the last, the very last will and testament of Sir Claude Medway, Baronet, properly drawn up in legal phraseology and handwriting and duly signed, sealed, and witnessed by competent witnesses. The existence of the will had of course been known, but as it was not forthcoming after Sir Claude's death it was supposed to have been repented of and destroyed by him. But during the legal arrangements consequent on Claude's marriage, a great rummaging of documents had taken place, and the missing will had turned up in the secret spring drawer of a desk that Sir Arthur had used almost daily at Marwell. On leaving the church after the marriage Sir Arthur handed it to Philip to read and return to him in the afternoon.

Philip found his father very low and fretful; nothing pleased him, the toy soldiers were thrown at people's heads, the draught-board was flung aside with piteous howls, only the fruit he brought was tolerated. This was snatched and snarled over. Philip sat down and looked on at this unlovely spectacle with a curious mixture of pity and disgust. How could this creature be his father? He felt no kinship with him; might there, after all, be some mistake? He could not trace the family likeness in the face before him, wherein the animal had effaced the spiritual, whence all fine lines and noble curves had disappeared. What had this face been in youth, he wondered, contrasting it with that of Sir Arthur. The twin brothers were scarcely sixty, younger than Matthew Meade at his death, but what a difference! Matthew's mind and Martha's, too, had wandered at the last, but how nobler! Their last words were never to be forgotten, though Jessie had now convinced him that the words of betrothal in her father's last joining of their hands ought never to have been taken literally. Never could he be grateful enough for Matthew and Martha Meade in place of this terrible parent.

It was a strange spectacle, he thought, a convicted criminal, one of society's failures. Yet what could society do more for any man than it had done for this one, a member of the criminal classes, but a favorite of fortune, bred in a refined home. Trained in the best schools of the country, breathing an atmosphere of culture from the cradle—whence came the moral taint?

Presently Sir Arthur arrived and stood beside his miserable brother, who did not recognize him, and only acknowledged his entrance by covering the fruit before him with his hand. Sir Arthur, a typical English gentleman, carrying his sixty years with easy grace, handsome, dignified, serene, though bearing the record of heavy sorrows on his face, was a striking contrast to the degraded husk of humanity beside him, whose identity had once been confused with his. The last action of the old man revolted Philip and his uncle to such an extent that each turned simultaneously from the sorry sight, and Philip rose and leant against the chimney-piece, beneath which a fire was burning, hot as the weather was, in deference to the old man's whim.

"What about this will?" Philip asked abruptly, "is anyone but myself affected by it?"

Sir Arthur smiled pathetically. "The loss of Marwell Court and the lands pertaining to it in some slight measure affects myself and my children," he replied.

"I meant," Philip amended, "are the other provisions, legacies, annuities, and so on, the same as in the earlier will which has been acted upon?"

"Quite the same, your grandfather's intention in this will was to restore you to your original position of heir of Marwell Court, nothing more."

"Marwell Court! Marwell!" muttered Algernon; "that's mine, I say, mine!"

"Have you shown this will to your

lawyers?" Philip continued, not heeding the old man's babble.

"Not yet. I shall put it into their hands to-night. Claude has seen it, no one else, not even her ladyship!"

"And the executors are all dead, and the witnesses too?" continued, Philip, idly stirring the fire and making a great cavern in the heart of it.

"Yes, but there would be no difficulty in proving it. The lawyer who made it is still living. Give it into the hands of your own lawyers if you like."

"Who is the legal owner of a will?" he asked, enlarging his cavity in the fire.

"Upon my soul, Philip, that is a question that never occurred to me before," he replied. "I am no lawyer and cannot tell." He moved as he spoke and stood between Philip and his father, so that when Philip turned from the fire into which he had been gazing, he did not see the contortions of Algernon Medway's face in his vain attempts to speak.

"Possession is nine points of the law," he said, quickly drawing the paper from his pocket and plunging it into the burning cavity, where it was consumed almost immediately, being held down by the poker. "The will is therefore mine, Marwell Court yours in all justice. I was not bred to own property of this kind, and want it no more than I am fit for it. So that's done, we are as we were."

"How? What? Upon my honor!" exclaimed Sir Arthur. "Do you know what you have done?"

"Burnt the will," he replied, smiling at Sir Arthur's vain attempts to rescue the fluttering ash into which the paper had burnt.

"I think that you have committed a crime. I have some vague apprehension that this is felony," murmured his uncle, in a dazed way. "Marwell is yours by right. I always had some compunction about it, and now the will of heaven—"

"Has put an end to the doubt," returned Philip. "Uncle Arthur, I can claim no inheritance from him; it was as his son I was to have it. I will stand or fall on my own foundation." He was interrupted by a sound, half groan, half cry. Sir Arthur started, turned, to see his brother, who was propped in a chair, fall forward upon the table in front of him. The conversation, touching as it did early memories, which are the last to die when mind dissolves, had roused him to thought to which he was unequal. When Philip lifted the sunken head he saw that his father was dead, and in the sudden rush of pain and pity that overcame him at the sight he knew that the miserable creature had been dear to him.

"Thank God!" gasped Sir Arthur; but he was moved too, seeing the old likeness to himself steal over the features as the stained soul's impress felt them and they settled into the calm majesty of death.

"I am not superstitious," Claude said to Jessie, when he related the story afterward, "but I wish it had not happened on our wedding day!" They were in Suffolk, in a very quiet out-of-the-way spot on the coast. Perfect quiet had been prescribed for Jessie, whose health was severely shaken by the long months of privation and mental suffering, and perfect quiet soon brought the color back to her face, and happiness filled her eyes with a soft radiance. Then they went up the Rhine to Switzerland, and here it became evident that she must rest to recover her lost strength. But she was not ill, Claude maintained, with pathetic insistence, she did not even suffer pain; all the doctors pronounced her free from organic diseases, and suffering only from nervous exhaustion. Then she took a chill and was laid up with some lung trouble, from which she soon rallied. Still a warm climate was advised for the winter, and that gave a delightful opportunity of entering the Holy Land of art, the Italy for which Jessie longed, and which she could not enter till the autumn because of the storm of war then sweeping over it.

Even after Solferino Claude had not considered it safe to travel, but the peace of Zurich brought such a wake again later and purge Italy of foes and false friends, and set her up among the nations, that they went to the Riviera, meaning to go on to Africa in case of disquiet in Italy. So Jessie at last looked upon the Mediterranean, that beautiful sea whose waters are an inverted and intensified heaven, whose islands are paradises, whose shores are fragrant with the most precious associations of history and literature.

Here she might sit for long hours in the sunshine, breathing balmy air, sweet with flower scents, listening to the music of Claude's voice as he read or talked, or telling him the things she saw as she looked upon the tideless sea, gay with ruddy-brown lateen sails and crossed by great ships from many lands. She saw Phœnician traders and Roman galleys float upon the sunny sea westward, crusaders sailing eastward, rich merchant ships from Genoa and Venice, pirates and slavers from Africa, the bark wrecked upon the island of Melita, a strange and motley procession. She saw the heroes sailing to Troy, and Ulysses returning after many years to his island home, unhurt by sirens, sea monsters, sea perils, or barbarous outlandish peoples. Then she saw him finally sailing westward in the lull in the tempest that was to track of the sinking sun, away, away to the mystic, unknown, happy Islands. This vision had the greatest charm for her. Perhaps she lov-

ed those old Greek heroes so much because Claude had introduced them to her through well-chosen translations which he read aloud.

"Some day you might paint the last voyage of Ulysses," he said to her, but Jessie made no reply; she seemed too languid to paint, and only once roused herself to sketch the view from the windows, blue sea with a mountainous promontory running into it in the distance, a solemn olive-grove in the middle distance, a lofty stone pine in the foreground, its broad flat crest traced upon the dark blue sea.

There was much speculation in the neighborhood of Marwell as to whether Mrs. Medway would venture to appear at Marwell Court; if people would call upon her; how the awkwardness of the Redwoods connection would be got over, whether she would have the audacity to be presented next spring. Or rather, would Captain Medway be foolish enough to risk a refusal? For how could a runaway like Jessie be tolerated at an immaculate court? Thus the local mind was distracted by pleasing doubt.

But though Jessie had not been to Marwell, Lady Gertrude, with pious resignation to the inevitable, had visited her daughter-in-law, in whose face she had read something which in some measure consoled her for the irreparable disaster of the marriage, and the two ladies corresponded, and there was further some question of sending Ethel out to be near them for the winter.

But early in December, Jessie became very anxious for Philip to join them, and he accordingly got a month's leave and came.

The afternoon of his arrival was a very happy one. The sky was clear, the warm sunshine brought out the rich tints of the mountain wall which sheltered them from the winter winds, and Jessie, who was sitting in a sunny nook of the garden caught sight of him in the distance and came smiling down the vine-trellised walk to meet and welcome him. She moved with such grace, held herself so well, her color was so vivid, and her eyes so full of light, that Philip could not think of her as an invalid, and bantered her as a malingering. She laughed like a child as she led him to her sunny nook, where the three sat and chatted till the early winter sunset was imminent, and they went in to a welcome wood fire. There they spoke of death incidentally, and Philip said how intensely he hated it and how much he longed to live and act. But Jessie thought it would be pleasant to "cease upon the midnight with no pain." "Life was so very tiring," she added.

"Oh, Jessie!" Claude cried with sudden sharpness; "how cruel! How could you leave me?"

"She burst into tears. 'I cannot,' she replied, 'I cannot. That makes it so hard.'"

"Jessie is a little morbid, Philip," her husband said, apologetically; "she has had a tiring day, else she would not talk like this. It is only hysteria," he added, with a quiver in his voice which went to Philip's heart.

Next morning Jessie did not leave her room; she had had a bad night and was tired. It was nothing unusual, Claude added, cheerfully. Philip was very much disturbed by the intelligence, and set out happily for a long mountain walk, returning early in the afternoon to find her up and ready to talk to him.

They sat by the sunny open window in the salon and talked again, Jessie in an easy chair, languid but cheerful. Claude walked up and down in the flower-garden outside to have a cigar, and looked in upon them from time to time, and smiled to hear them talking of her father and mother, and recalling long-forgotten incidents of their childhood.

"I am so glad you came, Phil," Jessie said, with a sigh of intense happiness. "I could never fully enjoy anything without you."

Then Claude finished his cigar and joined them, and they laughed over Sarah's refusal of the income that had been offered her and Abraham. She couldn't do without a dairy, and was sure Abraham would go silly with nothing to do but look forward to dinner time, she averred; besides she knew that no one else could do properly for Mrs. Plummer, or put up with her tongue. Then they talked of the Italian crisis, of Garibaldi's attempts to stir up the cities, and of the great hopes that were throbbing at the nation's great heart. That led on to the war just ended, thence to the Mutiny and the Crimea, and war in the abstract, and finally to the hope of ultimate peace as the consummation to which all these tragic wars might be tending.

In the meantime the beautiful prospect with its accurate level line sharply dividing sky from sea, with its purple-shadowed mountain spur, its hoary olive and gleaming orange-gardens glowed in the warm light before them, dainty rose scents and heavier tuberose and narcissus perfumes stole in on the sunny air, bees hummed about the flowers stole in on the sunny air, the voices and laughter of the people passing in the road sounded pleasantly, the low murmur of the sea went on in hushed moments when silence fell upon the three, and the sun went down in great glory, in a splendor that filled them with awe. The dusk, lighted by the hearth-light, was pleasant too. Claude drew closer to Jessie, who gradually became silent. A full moon rose and threw its glory upon the peaceful waves, the two men talked on in low voices on large, lofty subjects, Jessie's head slip-

ped from the easy chair to Claude's shoulder; Philip saw it in the white moonlight. "She is asleep," he said, and stole softly away, noiselessly replenishing the sinking fire as he went.

He had just closed the door when a sharp quick cry from within called him back, to see Claude bending over Jessie's drooping head and pale sweet face, with blank despair written on his own.

"She is gone," he said, with the tragic solemnity of a grief beyond expression.

Philip stood by him in the white moonlight, half dazed, incredible. But there was no mistaking the helplessness of the lightly set head, or the unutterable peace of the beautiful face. The blue eyes would no more look tenderly in theirs, or the sweet lips smile upon them again.

One might have thought the clear moon was shining on a group of sculpture, the two men gazed so silently and immovably upon the figure that rested in such unbreaking repose before them.

(To be Continued.)

EMPRESS OF THE JAPS.

Has Had Much Influence Among Her Countrymen.

Although the Empress of Japan has no royal blood in her veins, she belongs to one of the noblest and oldest families in Japan, and can trace back her ancestry more than a thousand years. Her name, Haruko, means "springtime." Although she was brought up and educated in the old-fashioned way, and her family are among the most conservative of conservatives, she is very progressive, and has been one of the strongest influences in introducing modern ideas and customs at the court of Japan. She has worn foreign garments for more than eighteen years, and now never wears anything else, and takes an active interest in benevolent and educational movements. She frequently appears at ceremonial entertainments, corner stone laying and inaugurations of other public enterprises, and, although of diminutive stature, and very plain features, she conducts herself with the greatest dignity and grace. An interesting story is told of the first foreign garments that were made for her when she discarded the kimono of her race in 1886. A French dressmaker from Yokohama was summoned to the palace, but, as the etiquette of the court forbade her to touch the sacred person of the empress, the wife of Count Ito, then prime minister, who was about the same size and figure, served as a model for measuring and fitting her majesty's wardrobe.

The empress is supposed to speak English and French but never does, to strangers at least. When addressed in English by ladies who are admitted to an audience she smiles and bows, but never ventures a reply.

She still retains an active interest in the School for Peereses, which she founded fifteen years ago, and attended the commencement exercises this summer as usual. There has been a tremendous advance in the condition of women in Japan of late years, for which the empress is largely responsible.

RAILWAYS IN FAR EAST.

Something of the Lines Being Built and Extended.

Japan, which, fifty years ago, did not own even a jinrikisha, now has 4,237 miles of well managed railroads, while India is gridironed by 25,373 miles of steel rails, which carry 195,000,000 passengers annually. Railroads are paralleling the Siamese Menam as well as the Nile and the Congo, and one can ride on them from Bangkok north to Korat and westward to Petchaburee.

In Korea, the line from Chemulpo to Seoul is connected with lines under construction both southward and northward, so that within a few weeks the Japanese can transport men and munitions of war by rail from Fusan all the way to Wiju. As the former is but ten hours by sea from Japan, and as the latter is to be a junction with the Siberian Railway, a land journey in a sleeping car will soon be practicable from London and Paris to the capitals of China and Korea, and, save for the ferry across the Korean strait, to any part of the Mikado's empire.

We can already ride on a train along the banks of the Burmese Irrawadi to Bhamo and Mandalay. The locomotive runs noisily from Jaffa to Jerusalem, and from Beirut to Damascus, the oldest city in the world. A projected line will run from there to the Mohammedan Mecca.

Unique is the Anatolian Railway, which is to run through the heart of Asia Minor, traversing the Karamanian plateau, the Taurus Mountains, and the Cilician valleys to Haran, where Abraham tarried, and Ninevah, where Jonah preached, and Babylon, where Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, and Bagdad, where Haroun-al-Raschid ruled, to Koweit, on the Persian Gulf.

Mrs. Subbubs (indignantly) — "See here, sir; you claim that your soap wouldn't injure the most delicate fabric in the world, and yet it has simply ruined this cloth!" Bland Salesman—"But you see, ma'am, this is not the most delicate fabric in the world."