The Canadian Champion

AND COUNTY OF HALTON INTELLIGENCER.

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1	Milton	Wm. Panton	28	25	27	15	30	25	10 a.m.
2	Oakville	R. Balmer	12	9	4	13	7	2	10 a.m.
3	Georgetown	L. Grant	18	15	10	18	15	8	9.30 a.m
4	Acton	J. Matthews	20	17	12	"	15	10	10 a.m.
5	Campbellville	S. R. Lister	14	11	6	"	9	4	9.30 "
6	Burlington	G. C. Bastedo	11	8	3	"	6	1	11 "

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DORA THORNE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"HER MOTHER'S SIN."

It was a sad story, and bitter sorrow came from it. Word by word it cannot be written, but when the heir of Earlescourt saw Dora again her artless delight, her pretty joy and sorrow mingled, her fear and dislike of Ralph; her love for himself, drove all thought of duty and honour from his mind. He prayed her to become his wife secretly. He said that when once they were married his father would forgive them, and all would be well. He believed what he said; Dora had no will but his. She forgot all Lady Earle's warnings; she remembered only Ronald and his love. So they were married in the quiet parish church of Helsmeer, twenty miles from Eastham, and no human being either knew or guessed their secret.

There was no excuse, no palliation for an act that was undutiful, dishonourable, and deceitful—there was nothing to plead for him, save that he was young, and had never known a wish refused.

They were married. Dora Thorne became Dora Earle. Ronald parted from his wife immediately. He arranged all his plans with what he considered consummate wisdom. He was to return home, and by every argument in his power to soften his father and win his consent. If he still refused, then time would show him the best course. Come what might, Dora was his; nothing on earth could part them. He cared for very little else. Even if the very worst came, and his father sent him from home, it would only be for a time, and there was Dora to comfort him.

He returned to Earlescourt, and, though his eyes were never raised in clear, true honesty to his father's face, Lord Earle saw that his son looked happy, and believed the cloud had passed away.

Dora was to remain at Eastham until she heard from him. He could not write to her, nor could she send one line to him; but he promised and believed that very soon he should take her in all honour to Earlescourt.

CHAPTER VI.

It was a beautiful morning toward the end of August; the balmy sweetness of spring had given way to the glowing radiance of summer. The golden corn waved in the fields, the hedgerows were filled with wild flowers, the fruit hung ripe in the orchards. Nature wore her brightest smile. The breakfast-room at Earlescourt was a pretty apartment; it opened on to a flower garden, and through the long French windows came the sweet perfume of rose-blossoms.

It was a pretty scene—the sunbeams fell upon the rich silver, the delicate china, the vases of sweet flowers. Lord Earle sat at the head of the table, busily engaged with his letters. Lady Earle, in the daintiest of morning toilets, was smiling over pretty pink notes, full of fashionable gossip. Her delicate patrician face looked clear and pure in the fresh morning light. But there was no smile on Ronald's face. He was wondering, for the hundredth time, how he was to tell his father what he had done. He longed to be with his pretty Dora, and yet there was a severe storm to encounter before he could hope to bring her home.

"Ah," said Lady Earle suddenly, "here is good news—Lady Charteris is positively coming, Rupert. Sir Hugh will join her in a few days. She will be here with Valentine to-morrow."

"I am very glad," said Lord Earle, looking up with pleasure and surprise. "We must ask Lady Laurence to meet them."

Ronald sighed; his parents busily discussed the hospitalities and pleasures to be offered to their guests. A grand dinner-party was planned, and a ball to which half the country-side were to be invited.

"Valentine loves gayety," said Lady Earle, "and we must give her plenty of it."

"I shall have all this to go through," sighed Ronald—"grand parties, dinners, and balls, while my heart longs to be with my darling; and, in the midst of it all, how shall I find time to talk to my father? I will begin this very day."

When dinner was over, Ronald proposed to Lord Earle that they should go out on to the terrace and smoke a cigar there. Then took place the conversation with which our story opened, when the master of Earlescourt declared his final resolve.

Ronald was more disturbed than he cared to own even to himself. Once the words hovered upon his lips that he had married Dora. Had Lord Earle been angry or contemptuous, he would have uttered them; but in the presence of his father's calm, dignified wisdom, he was abashed and uncertain. For the first time he felt the truth of all his father said. Not that he loved Dora less, or repented of his rash private marriage; but Lord Earle's appeal to his sense of the "fitness of things" touched him.

There was little time for reflection. Lady Charteris and her daughter were coming on the morrow. Again Lady Earle entered the field as a diplomatist, and came off victorious.

"Ronald," said his mother, as they parted that evening, "I know that, as a rule, young men at your age do not care for the society of elderly ladies. I must ask you to make an exception in favour of Lady Charteris. They showed me great kindness at Greenoke, and you must help me to return it. I shall consider every attention shown to the lady and her daughter as shown to myself."

Ronald smiled at his mother's words, and told her he would never fail in her service."

"If he sees much of Valentine," thought his mother, "he cannot help loving her. Then all will be well."

Ronald was not in the house when the guests arrived; they came rather before the appointed time. His mother and Lady Charteris had gone to the library together, leaving Valentine in the drawing-room alone. Ronald found her there. Opening the door, he saw the sleeve of a white dress; believing Lady Earle was there, he went carelessly into the room, then started in astonishment at the vision before him. Once in a century, perhaps, one sees a woman like Valentine Charteris, of the purest and loveliest Greek type, a calm, grand, magnificent blonde, with clear, straight brows, fair hair that shone like satin, and lay in thick folds around her queenly head—tall and stately, with a finished ease and grace of manner that could only result from long and careful training. She rose when Ronald entered the room; and her beautiful eyes were lifted calmly to his face. Suddenly a rush of colour dyed the white brow. Valentine remembered what Lady Earle had said of her son. She knew that both his mother and hers wished that she should be Ronald's wife.

"I beg your pardon," he said, hastily; "I thought Lady Earle was here."

"She is in the library," said Valentine, with a smile that dazzled him.

He bowed and withdrew. This, then, was Valentine Charteris, the fine lady whose coming he had dreaded. She was very beautiful—he had never seen a face like hers. No thought of love, or of comparing this magnificent woman with simple, pretty Dora, ever entered his mind. But Ronald was a true artist and one of no mean skill. He thought of that pure Grecian face as he would have thought of a beautiful picture or an exquisite statue. He never thought of the loving, sensitive woman's heart hidden under it.

It was not difficult, when dinner was over, to open the grand piano for Valentine, to fetch her music, and listen while she talked of operas he had never heard. It was pleasant to watch her, as she sat in the evening gloaming, her superb beauty enhanced by the delicate evening dress of fine white lace; the shapely shoulders were polished and white, the exquisite arms rounded and clasped by a bracelet of pearls. She wore a rose in the bodice of her dress, and, as Ronald bent over the music she was showing him, the sweet, subtle perfume came to him like a message from Dora.

Valentine Charteris had one charm even greater than her beauty. She talked well and gracefully—the play of her features, the movement of her lips, were something not to be forgotten; and her smile seemed to break like a sunbeam over her whole face—it was irresistible.

Poor Ronald stood by her, watching the expression that seemed to change with every word; listening to pretty polished language that was in itself a charm. The two mothers, looking on, smiled at each other; and Lord Earle felt himself relieved from a heavy weight of care. Then Lady Earle asked Valentine to sing. She was quite free from all affectation.

"What kind of music do you prefer?" she asked, looking at Ronald.

"Simple old ballads," he replied, thinking of Dora, and how prettily she would sing them.

He started when the first notes of Valentine's magnificent voice rang clear and sweet in the quiet gloaming. She sang some quaint old story of a knight who loved a maiden—loved and rode away, returning after long years to find a green grave. Ronald sat thinking of Dora. Ah, perhaps had he forsaken her, the pretty, dimpled face would have faded away! He felt pleased that he had been true. Then the music ceased.

"Is that what you like?" asked Valentine Charteris; it is of the strongly sentimental school."

Simple, honest Ronald wondered if sentiment was a sin against etiquette, or why fashionable ladies generally spoke of it with a sneer.

"Do you laugh at sentiment?" he asked; and Valentine opened her fine eyes in wonder at the question. Lady Earle half overheard it, and smiled in great satisfaction. Matters must be going on well, she thought, if Ronald had already begun to speak of sentiment. She never thought that his heart and mind were with Dora while he spoke—pretty Dora, who cried over his poetry and devoutly believed in the language of flowers.

This evening passed rapidly, and Ronald felt something like regret when there was a pause in the music. Lady Earle was too wise to make any comments; she never asked her son if he liked Valentine, or what he thought of her.

"I am afraid you are tired," she said with a charming smile; "thank you for helping to amuse my friends."

When Ronald thought over what he had done, his share seemed very small; still his mother was pleased, and he went to rest resolved that on the morrow he would be doubly attentive to Miss Charteris.

Three days passed, and Ronald had grown quite at his ease with Valentine. They read and disputed over the same books. Ronald brought out his large folio of drawings, and Valentine wondered at their skill. He bent over her, explaining the sketches, laughing and talking gayly, as though there was no dark background to his life.

"You are an accomplished artist," said Miss Charteris; "you must have given much time to study."

"I am fond of it," said Ronald; "if fate had not made me an only son, I should have chosen painting as my profession."

"In a few years those words came back to them like a sad prophecy.

Ronald liked Miss Charteris. Apart from her grand beauty, she had a charm, too, of a kindly heart and affectionate nature. He saw how much Lady Earle loved her, and he resolved to tell Valentine all about Dora, and ask her to try to influence his mother. With that end and aim in view, he talked continually to the young lady; he accompanied her in all her walks and drives, and they sang and sketched together. Ronald, knowing himself so safely bound to Dora, forgot in what light his conduct must appear to others. Lady Earle had forgotten her fears; she believed that her son was learning to love Valentine, and her husband shared her belief.

All things just then were *couleur de rose* at Earlescourt. Ronald looked and felt happy—he had great faith in Valentine's persuasive powers.

Days passed by rapidly; the time for the grand ball was drawing near. Lady Earle half wondered when her son would speak of Miss Charteris, and Valentine wondered why he lingered near her, why oftentimes he was on the point of speaking, and then drew back. She quite believed he cared for her, and she liked him in return, as much as she was capable of liking any one. She was no tragedy queen, but a loving, affectionate girl, unable to reach the height of passionate love, to sounding the depth of despair. She was well-disposed toward Ronald—Lady Earle spoke so much of him as Greenoke. She knew, too, that a marriage with him would delight her mother.

Valentine's favourable impression of Ronald was deepened when she saw him. Despite the one great act of duplicity which shadowed his whole life, Ronald was true and honourable. Valentine admired his clear Saxon face and firm lips; she admired his bright deep eyes darkened with every passing emotion; she liked his gentle chivalrous manner, his earnest words, his deferential attention to herself, his affectionate devotion to Lady Earle.

There was not a braver or more gallant man in England than this young heir of Earlescourt. He inherited the personal beauty and courage of his race. He gave promise of a splendid manhood; and no one knew how proudly Lord Earle had rejoiced in that promise.

In her calm, stately way, Valentine liked him; she even loved him, and would have been happy as his wife. She enjoyed his keen intellectual powers and his originality of thought. Even the "dreadful politics," that scared and shocked his father, amused her.

Ronald, whose heart was full of the pretty little wife he dared neither see nor write to, gave no heed to Valentine's manner; it never occurred to him what construction could be put upon his friendly liking for her.

CHAPTER VII.

The day came for the grand ball, and during breakfast the ladies discussed the important question of bouquets; from that the conversation turned to flowers. "There are so many of them," said Valentine, "and they are all so beautiful, I am always at a loss which to choose."

"I should never hesitate a moment," said Ronald, laughingly; "you will accuse me perhaps of being sentimental, but I must give the preference to the white lily bells. Lilies of the valley are the fairest flowers that grow."

Lady Earle overheard the remark; no one else appeared to notice it, and she was not much surprised when Valentine entered the ballroom to see white lilies in her fair hair, and a bouquet of the same flowers half-shrouded by green leaves in her hand.

Many eyes turned admiringly upon the calm stately beauty, and her white flowers. Ronald saw them. He could not help remarking the exquisite toilet, marred by no obtrusive colors, the pretty lily-wreath and fragrant bouquet. It never occurred to him that Valentine had chosen those delicate blossoms out of compliment to him. He thought he had never seen a fairer picture than this magnificent blonde; then she faded from his eyes as he pictured his shy graceful wife. Some day she, too, would walk through these gorgeous rooms, and then all would admire the wisdom of his choice. So the heir of Earlescourt dreamed, as he watched the brilliant crowd that began to fill the ballroom; but his reverie was abruptly broken by a summons from Lady Earle.

"Ronald," said she, looking slightly impatient, "have you forgotten that it is your place to open the ball? You must ask Miss Charteris to dance with you."

"That will be no hardship," he replied, smiling at his mother's earnest manner. "I would rather dance with Miss Charteris than any one else."

Lady Earle wisely kept silence; her son went up to Valentine, and made his request. He danced with her again and again—not, as Lady Earle fondly hoped, from any unusual preference, but because it gave him less trouble than seeking partners among strange young ladies. Valentine understood him; they talked easily, and without restraint. He paid her no compliments, and she did not seem to expect any. With other ladies, Ronald was always thinking, "What would they say if they knew of that fair young wife at Eastham?" With Valentine no such idea haunted him—he had an instinctive belief in her true and firm friendship.

Lady Earle overheard a few whispered words of praise, and they filled her heart with delight. Old friends whispered to her that "it would be a splendid match for her son," and "how happy she would be with such a daughter-in-law as Miss Charteris, so beautiful and dignified;" and all this because Ronald wanted to secure Valentine's friendship, so that she might intercede for Dora!

When, for the fourth time, Ronald asked Miss Charteris "for the next dance," she looked up at him with a smile.

"Do you know how often we have danced together this evening?" she asked.

"What does it matter?" he replied, wondering at the flush that crimsoned her face. "Forgive me, Miss Charteris, if I say you realize my idea of the poetry of motion."

"Is that why ask me so frequently?" she said, archly.

"Yes," replied honest Ronald; "it is a great pleasure; for one good dancer there are fifty bad ones."

He did not quite understand the pretty, piqued expression of her face.

"You have not told me," said Valentine, "whether you like my flowers."

"They are very beautiful," he replied; but the compliment of her selection were all lost upon him.

Miss Charteris did not know whether he was simply indifferent or timid.

"You told me these lilies were your favourite flowers," she said.

"Yes," replied Ronald; "but they are not the flowers that resemble you." He was thinking how much simple, loving Dora was like the pretty, delicate blossoms. "You are like the tall queenly lilies."

He paused, for Valentine was looking at him with a wondering smile.

"Do you know you have paid me two compliments in less than five minutes?" she said. "And yesterday we agreed that between true friends they were quite unnecessary."

"I—I did not intend to pay idle compliments," he replied. "I merely said what I thought. You are like a tall, grand, white lily, Miss Charteris. I have often thought so. If you will not dance with me again, will you walk through the rooms?"

Many admiring glances followed them as a handsomer pair were seldom seen. They passed through the long suite of rooms and to the conservatory, where lamps gleamed like stars between the green plants and rare exotics.

"Will you rest here?" said Ronald. "The ballroom is so crowded, one cannot speak there."

"Ah," thought Miss Charteris, "then he really has something to say to me!"

Despite her calm dignity and serene manner, Valentine's heart beat high. She loved the gallant young heir—his honest, kindly nature had a great charm for her. She saw that the handsome face bending over the flowers was agitated and pale. Miss Charteris looked down at the lilies in her hand. He came nearer to her, and looked anxiously at her beautiful face.

"I am not eloquent," said Ronald—"I have no great gift of speech; but, Miss Charteris, I should like to find some words that would reach your heart and dwell there."

He wanted to tell her of Dora, to describe her sweet face with its dimples and blushes, her graceful manner, her timid, sensitive disposition. He wanted to make her love Dora, to help him to soften his mother's prejudices and his father's anger: no wonder his lips quivered and his voice faltered.

"For some days past I have been longing to speak to you," continued Ronald; "now my courage almost fails me. Miss Charteris, say something that will give me confidence."

She looked up at him, and any other man would have read the love in her face.

"The simplest words you can use will always interest me," she said gently.

His face cleared, and he began: "You are kind and generous——"

Then came an interruption—Sir Harry Laurence, with a lady, entered the conservatory.

"This is refreshing," he said to Ronald. "I have been ten minutes trying to get here, the rooms are so full."

Miss Charteris smiled in reply, wishing Sir Harry had waited ten minutes longer.

"Promise me," said Ronald, detaining her, as Sir Harry passed on, "that you will give me one-half hour to-morrow."

"I will do so," she replied.

"And you will listen to me, Miss Charteris?" he continued. "You will hear all I have to say?"

Valentine made no reply; several other people came, some to admire the alcove filled with ferns which drooped from the wall by which she was standing, others to breathe the fragrant air. She could not speak without being overheard; but, with a charming smile, she took a beautiful lily from her bouquet and held it out to him. They then went back to the ballroom.

"He loves me," thought Valentine; and, as her calm, serene nature was capable of passionate delight, she felt it.

"She will befriend me," thought Ronald; "but why did she give me this flower?"

The most remote suspicion that Valentine had mistaken him—that she loved him—never crossed the mind of Ronald Earle. He was singularly free from vanity. Perhaps, if he had had a little more confidence in himself; the story of the Earles might have been different.

Lady Charteris looked at her daughter's calm, proud face. She had noticed the little interview in the conservatory, and drew her own conclusions from it. Valentine's face confirmed them—there was a delicate flush upon it, and a new light shone in her lustrous eyes.

"You like Earlescourt?" said Lady Charteris to her daughter that evening, as they sat in her dressing-room alone.

"Yes, mamma, I like it very much," said Valentine.

"And, from what I see," continued the elder lady, "I think it is likely to be your home."

"Yes, I believe so," said Valentine, bending over her mother, and kissing her. "Ronald has asked me to give him one half-hour to-morrow, and I am very happy, mamma."

For one so calm and stately, it was admission enough. Lady Charteris knew, from the tone of her daughter's voice, that she loved Ronald Earle.

Ronald slept calmly, half hoping that the end of his troubles was drawing nigh. Valentine, whom his mother loved so well, would intercede for Dora. Lord Earle would be sure to relent; then he could bring Dora home, and all would be well. If ever and anon a cold fear crept into his heart that simple, pretty Dora would be sadly out of place in that magnificent home, he dashed it from him.

Miss Charteris slept calmly, too, but her dreams were different from Ronald's. She thought of the time when she should be mistress of that fair domain, and the wife of its brave young lord. She loved him well. No one had ever pleased her as he had—no one would ever charm her again. Valentine had made the grand mistake of her life.

The morrow so eagerly looked for was a fair, bright day. The sun shone warm and bright, the air was soft and fragrant, the sky blue and cloudless. Lady Charteris did not leave her room for breakfast and Valentine remained with her mother.

When breakfast was ended, Ronald lingered about, hoping to see Valentine. He had not waited long before he saw the glimmer of her white dress and blue ribbons. He met her in the hall.

"Will you come out into the garden, Miss Charteris?" he asked eagerly. "The morning is so beautiful, and you promised me one-half hour. Do not take that book with you. I shall want all your attention, for I have a story to tell you."

He walked by her side through the pleasure-gardens, where the lake gleamed in the sunshine, the water-lilies sleeping on its quiet bosom; through the fragrant flower-beds, where the bees hummed and the butterflies made love to the fairest blossoms.

"Let us go on to the park," said Valentine; "the sun is too warm here."

"I know a little spot just fitted for a fairy's bower," said Ronald. "Let me show it to you. I can tell my story better there."

They went through the broad gates of the park, across which the checkered sunbeams fell, where the deer browsed, and kingcups and tall foxgloves grew—on the brookside, where Dora had rested so short a time since to think of her now-found happiness.

The pale primroses had all died away, the violets were gone; but in their place the deep green bank was covered with other flowers of bright and sunny hue. The shade of tall trees covered the bank, the little brook sang merrily, and birds chimed in with the rippling waters, the summer air was filled with the faint sweet summer music.

"It is a pretty spot," said Miss Charteris.

The green grass seemed to dance in the breeze, and Ronald made something like a throne amidst it.

"You shall be queen, and I your suppliant," he said. "You promised to listen; I will tell you my story."

They sat a few minutes in deep silence, broken only by the singing brook and the music of the birds; a solemn hush seemed to have fallen on them, while the leaves rustled in the wind.

"If Ronald Earle's heart and mind had not been filled with another and very different image, he must have seen how fair Valentine looked; the sun glinting through the dense green foliage, fell upon her face, while the white dress and blue ribbons, the fair, floating hair, against the dark background of the bank and the trees, made a charming picture; but Ronald never saw it. After long years the memory of it came back to him, and he wondered at his own blindness. He never saw the trembling of the white fingers that played carelessly with sprays of purple foxglove; he never saw the faint flush upon her face, the quiver of her proud, beautiful lips, or the love-light in her eyes. He only saw and thought of Dora.

"I told you, Miss Charteris, last evening, that I was not eloquent," began Ronald. "When anything lies deep in my heart, I find great difficulty in telling it in words."

"All sacred and deep feeling is quiet," said Valentine; "a torrent of words does not always show an earnest nature. I have many thoughts that I could never express."

"If I could only be sure that you would understand me, Miss Charteris," said Ronald—"that you would see and comprehend motives that I can hardly explain myself! Sitting here in the summer sunshine, I can scarcely realise how dark the cloud is that hangs over me. You are so kind and patient, I will tell you my story in my own way."

She gathered a rich cluster of bluebells, and bent over them, pulling the pretty flowers into pieces, and throwing leaf after leaf into the stream.

"Three months since," continued Ronald, "I came home to Earlescourt. Lord and Lady Earle were both at Greenoke; I, tired and not quite myself, preferred remaining here alone and quiet. One morning I went out into the garden, listless for want of something to do. I saw there—ah, now I want words, Miss Charteris!—the fairest girl the sun ever shone upon.

He saw the flowers fall from Valentine's grasp; she put her hand to her brow, as though to shield her face.

"Does the light annoy you?" he asked.

"No," she replied, steadily; "go on with your story."

"A clever man," said Ronald, "might paint for you the pretty face, all smiles and dimples, the dark shining rings of hair that fell upon a white brow, the sweet shy eyes fringed by long lashes, seldom raised, but full of wonderful light when once you could look into their depths. I can only tell you how in a few days I grew to love the fair young face, and how Dora Thorne—that was her name, Miss Charteris—loved me."

Valentine never moved nor spoke; Ronald could not see the bright flush die away, and the proud lips quiver.

"I must tell you all quickly," said Ronald. "She is not what people call a lady, this beautiful wild flower of mine. Her father lives at the lodge; he is Lord Earle's lodge-keeper, and she knows nothing of the world or its ways. She is never been taught or trained, though her voice is like sweet music, and her laugh like the chime of silver bells. She is like a bright April day, smiles and tears, sunshine and rain—so near together that I never know whether I love her best weeping or laughing."

He paused, but Valentine did not speak; her hand still shaded her face.

"I loved her very much," said Ronald, "and I told her so. I asked her to be my wife, and she promised. When my father came home from Greenoke I asked his consent, and he laughed at me. He would not believe me serious. I need not tell you the details? They sent my pretty Dora away, and some one who loved her—who wanted to make her his wife—came, and quarrelled with me. He—my rival—swore that Dora should be his. In his passion he betrayed the secret so well kept from me. He told me where she was, and I went to see her."

There was no movement in the quiet figure, no words passed the white lips.

"I went to see her," he continued; "she was so unhappy, so pretty in her sorrow and love, so innocent, so fond of me, that I forgot all I should have remembered, and married her."

Valentine started then, and uttered a low cry.

"You are shocked," said Ronald; "but oh, Miss Charteris, think of her so young and gentle! They would have forced her to marry the farmer, and she disliked him. What else could I do to save her?

Even then, in the midst of that sharp sorrow, Valentine could not help admiring Ronald's brave simplicity, his chivalry, his honour.

"I married her," he said, "and I mean to be true to her. I thought my father would relent and forgive us, but I fear I was too sanguine. Since my marriage my father has told me that if I do not give up Dora he will never see me again. Every day I resolve to tell him what I have done, but something interferes to prevent it. I have never seen my wife since our wedding-day. She is still at Eastham. Now, Miss Charteris, be my friend, and help me."

Bravely enough Valentine put away her sorrow—another time she would look it in the face; all her thoughts must now be for him.

"I will do anything to serve you," she said gently. "What can I do?"

"My mother loves you very much," said Ronald; "she will listen to you. When I have told her, will you, in your sweet, persuasive way, interfere for Dora? Lady Earle will be influenced by what you say."

A quiver of pain passed over the proud, calm face of Valentine Charteris.

"If you think it wise for a stranger to interfere in so delicate a matter, I will do so cheerfully," she said; "but let me counsel one thing. Tell Lord and Lady Earle at once. Do not delay; every hour is of consequence."

"What do you think of my story?" asked Ronald, anxiously. "Have I done right or wrong?"

"Do not ask me," replied Valentine.

"Yes," he urged, "I will ask again; you are my friend. Tell me, have I done right or wrong?"

"I can speak nothing but truth," replied Valentine, "and I think you have done wrong. Do not be angry. Honour is everything; it ranks before life or love. In some degree you have tarnished yours by an underhand proceeding, a private marriage, one forbidden by your parents, and most distasteful to them."

Ronald's face fell as her words came to him slowly and clearly.

"I thought," said he, "I was doing a brave deed in marrying Dora. She had no one to take her part but me."

"It was a brave deed in one sense," said Valentine. "You have proved yourself generous and disinterested. Heaven grant you may be happy!"

"Other flowers of young and impressionable," said Ronald; "I can easily mold her to my way of thinking. You look very grave, Miss Charteris."

"I am thinking of you," she said, gently; "it seems to me a grave matter. Pardon me—but did you reflect well—were you quite convinced that the whole happiness of your life was at stake? If so, I need say no more. It is an unequal marriage, one not at all in the fitting order of things."

TO BE CONTINUED.

Pearl fishers are the number of 550 perished in a storm on the coast of Western Australia.