

A PRECIOUS PEARL.

CHAPTER X.—Continued.

"Another note came from the captain, saying that he was to be found at Paris. Elodie's flight was a nine days' wonder, but then every one said they had always been quite sure that it would be so. Audrey my true, faithful, loyal, loving wife, now tell me if I did wrong to free myself from a woman so light of love, so false of heart."

She did not answer him at once. She laid her hand upon his head.

"My poor Roche," she said gently, "how you have suffered."

She forgot her own sorrows for the time in thinking of his.

"It is plain to you, Audrey, that I have suffered. You will not make me suffer more, will you, darling? You will not leave me? You will take pity on me? Answer me, Audrey—did I do wrong to free myself from the woman who had wronged me—who had taken my true, honest love and made a plaything of it—who had taken my heart and trampled on it—who took my name and stained it—stained it, Audrey?"

She saw great drops of agony standing on his forehead; she saw his hands clench and his lips quiver.

"Stained it," he repeated, "my sweet innocent Audrey. Do you know all that that means? Do you understand it? Do you wonder that I took her picture from the walls—it had stood next to my mother's—and burned it? I looked up the rooms where her face had shone, and I said to myself that no other face should tread them."

"I thought those were your mother's rooms," interposed Audrey.

"Yes, but they were hers, too, Audrey. Tell me, did I do wrong to free myself from the woman who had been so cruel to me?"

He looked up into the sweet, white face. He saw tears in the dark eyes, and he began to hope that he had prevailed.

"You were patient, Roche, but I think you might have been more patient. You were wise, but you might have been kinder. If you had seen your young wife in danger of death from burning, how quickly you would have snatched her from the flames. Danger for the soul is a thousand times worse than danger for the body. I cannot, therefore, hold you free from blame, even granting, Roche, that Elodie wronged you very cruelly. You might, perhaps have been justified in living apart, but I do not see how you can excuse yourself for having married while she lived."

"The law freed me from her," he answered, firmly.

"That is a point on which we shall never agree," she said. "I have formed my opinion from the teaching of my own conscience, and I must abide by it. I grant that in certain cases husband and wife ought to part; but no husband shall ever make me believe that either of them can marry again while the other lives. I hold such a ceremony null and void. No man, on oath of man, can part those whom God hath joined; and the oath taken is not to be kept until one or the other does wrong, but until death."

"You seem to forget that those who do wrong break their oaths of fidelity," he remarked.

"The breaking of one oath does not justify the breaking of another," she answered. "Roche, we lose time in talking; my conviction can never be altered. I do not know how to argue about it, but I have given you my belief. If I could even allow myself to remain here, I should be wretched, because I believe it to be wrong. I cannot remain, I must go away, and what is still more, every one must know why I go. If I have seemed to sanction that which I hold to be wrong. I must make my atonement as public as my fault."

Her eyes fell on the newspaper lying on the table. Suddenly she looked up at him.

"Damages five thousand pounds," were the words she had seen.

"Roche," she asked, "what does this mean. Damages, five thousand pounds?"

"It means that Archer Dighton had to pay me five thousand pounds," he replied.

She looked at him wonderingly.

"Pay you?" she said, slowly. "I do not understand. He took your wife away; but why did he pay you this money?"

He made no answer. The horror and amazement deepened on her face.

"What was the money for, Roche? explain; I do not understand. What did he give you the money for?"

"It was the fine that the law imposed on him," he said.

His face flushed hotly as he uttered the words.

"A fine for what?" she asked.

"For having broken the law," he answered.

"I have heard of fines for poaching, for fighting, for drunkenness; but I did not know there was a fine for stealing a man's wife. Who received the money?"

"I did," he replied.

She rose slowly from her seat. She stood erect and haughty. He never

forgot the lofty pride and contempt on her face.

"There are some things I cannot believe. This is one. Do you mean to tell me that you, Sir Roche Villiers, a man of honor, took knowingly five thousand pounds from the man who robbed you of your wife? Did you do it?"

"I did Audrey," he answered.

A low, bitter cry came from her lips. "Why did you take it? What had money to do with the case? Was that the price of your wife's love—of your own fair name? I cannot understand it. Was it given to console you? Ten hundred thousand pounds would not have consoled me. Why did you take his money? If he had to be fined, why should not the fine have gone to the poor—to some charity? Why should it have come to you? It is like blood money. I declare I should have respected you more had you followed him and shot him than I do after having taken his money."

"I never looked at it in that light," he answered.

"I would not have touched his money," she said with superb contempt. "It would have blistered my fingers. I should have said to him: 'I will not stoop to take money; I have not sold my wife.'"

"But every one, in all such cases, does it, Audrey."

"Every one," she repeated, her eyes opening wide; "every one! You do not mean to tell me that every husband who is unfortunate enough to lose his wife in this same unhappy fashion takes money of the man who has stolen her?"

"Most do," he answered.

Her face flushed, her dark eyes flashed.

"That only shows how false and wrong the whole thing is," she cried. "You appeal to the world—to the law. You confess to a broken heart—a ruined home—a blighted life; and they console you with the money of the man who had wronged you. Had I been in your place, Sir Roche, I would have cut off my hands rather than have touched Captain Dighton's money."

"I tell you, Audrey, it never occurred to me to look at it in that light."

"Tell me," she asked, suddenly, where is your wife living?"

"My wife is here," he said, touching her hand gently.

"Nay," she returned sadly. "I know not what name I bear before Heaven and in the sight of just men, but I am not your wife. Elodie is your lawful wife—no other. Death has not parted you. Tell me—where is she? What is she doing?"

"She lives in some little village on the seacoast—Rookdene, in Kent, I believe."

"And where is Captain Dighton?" he asked, not staying many weeks with her; they disagreed, and he left her. I am not so hard as you think, Audrey. I allow her sufficient to live upon; but I have never seen her since, and never shall."

"Till death do us part," she said gently.

"No, even in death I would not see her, Audrey, my true wife, my dear love, tell me what you mean to do."

She took both his hands in hers; and held them tightly clasped.

"I will tell you," she said, sadly, "and remember, all argument will be quite useless—nothing can change my decision, because it is founded on what my conscience tells me is right. I shall go back home to my father this very day. I do not reproach you. I have not one hard or bitter word to say to you. Your notions of right and wrong I consider mine. Nothing could make me consider myself your wife while your true wife is living. I shall go home to my father and stay with him."

"You will not be so cruel as to leave me?" he said.

"I am not cruel enough to remain," she answered slowly. "We will not talk of the sorrow; we must be brave and strong, and look the inevitable in the face. Roche," she pleaded, "there is one thing you must do—you must set me right with the world. If I had known the truth I would rather have died than have married you. Most people must think that I married you while cognizant of the truth. When you can defend me, you must do so. You must tell everyone that, when I discovered the truth I left you at once. Will you do me this justice?"

His voice was broken with sobs as he answered her, and her face was white as death.

"Will nothing induce or persuade you to alter your decision, Audrey?" he asked.

"No, nothing," she answered.

"Kiss me once—just once, dear," he sobbed.

She bent over him and kissed him. The hot tears fell from her eyes onto his cheek.

"Good-by," she said, gently; "good-by Roche."

Once again she touched his face with her lips, and then slowly—it seemed to him as a vision fades—she quitted the room and left him alone.

"Was he right, or was she? He only knew that the pure, sweet woman he loved so well had gone from him."

CHAPTER XI.

It was a fair spring day, and the sight of the newly-springing green leaves filled the rector's simple happy mind with delight. It was only the end of April, yet here in the old-fashioned rectory garden, in a warm, sheltered sunny spot, some lilies of the valley were already in blossom. He was so delighted that he could not rest until his wife had seen them. She looked at him with a smile.

"I wonder why it is," she said, "that lilies of all kinds make me think about Audrey—above all, the white ascension lilies! But they are not in blossom yet."

Dr. Brooke was glancing around him with a well-pleased smile, the golden sunlight on the delicate green leaves

"There is an abundant promise of fruit and flowers," he remarked to his wife; "the garden will look well this year. I wonder if Audrey will pay her long-promised visit home?"

Then Mrs. Brooke went on her round of visits and the rector went back to his library. He could not settle to his work so easily as usual; the spring sunshine tantalized him.

"I am worse than a boy," he said. "I shall have to shut out the sunshine altogether."

The words were still on his lips when the door opened, and, to his infinite surprise and wonder, he saw his daughter enter the room. He was too much astonished even for a word of greeting; but when she came up to him his surprise gave way to dismay. Her veil was thrown back, and he saw that her face was deadly pale, and that her eyes were dim with tears. She held out both her hands.

"Father," she said, "I have come home to you. I am in deep trouble and sore distress."

He took the trembling hands in his, and held them tightly clasped.

"My dearest child, no matter what has happened, you have done well to come home."

Then they were silent for some minutes, the rector waiting in sorrowful dismay for his daughter to speak, Audrey trying to collect her strength.

"I am in sore distress," she repeated. "Oh, father, my marriage was no marriage. The man I love is not my husband!"

"My darling child you tremble like a leaf. Sit down Audrey, and tell me all."

"It was no marriage, papa, although he thinks it was. He is not my husband; he has a wife living from whom he has been divorced."

The rector's face flushed angrily. "A wife living, yet he dares to marry you, Audrey! The man is a villain!"

Then she became so anxious to defend him as she had been to leave him. "You do not understand, papa. He is not a villain; he thought it was all right because he had obtained a divorce."

"I know nothing about divorces," said the rector. "I only understand the Christianity of the matter. No man can have two wives; that is plain enough."

"He does not think so, papa. He fancies that the law has freed him from his first marriage, and that he was quite at liberty to contract another. That is the belief of many people."

"It is not mine, and it is not yours," he said quickly. "How strange, Audrey, that I had always a presentiment about this marriage of yours. I had always a fear that I did not like to express."

He walked rapidly up and down the room.

"It is strange that I have heard nothing of this," he said. "I made every inquiry about Sir Roche, and every one gave him the highest of characters."

"He bears a high character," she rejoined, quietly. "I believe this is his only fault; but then, papa, I find that every one does not think as you and I think. There are men who honestly believe that a divorce frees from marriage ties, and leaves men and women free to marry again. Sir Roche believes it, and is honest in his belief. You know better, so do I."

"Tell me all about it, my darling," he said, looking at the white face from which the brilliant beauty seemed to have fled.

She told him of all that had happened—of her refusal to associate with a divorcee; of Lady Glenarvon's letter—she felt quite sure that it had come from her; of her journey into the city to find the copy of the Times; of Sir Roche's dismay and their farewell. Then she looked up at him.

"You must not think that because I tell you all this quietly, papa I have not suffered. My heart is broken; but I could not do wrong and live. You think I am right in my decision, papa?"

"I do, my darling," he said in a sorrowful voice.

"You think that I did right to leave him?" she asked.

"Yes, quite right, Audrey," he replied.

She drew nearer to him and he saw how she trembled.

"Papa, tell me what you think yourself. Am I Roche's wife—his lawful wife—before God and man?"

He groaned aloud as he answered her, still he would say nothing but the truth.

"No, my child, I do not think you are," he said.

She threw up her arms in distress.

"What am I before Heaven?" she cried—"what am I?"

"Innocent and guiltless," said the rector. "You have not sinned; you have been sinned against."

"I must never go back to him," she said. "Papa, you must tell mamma; I cannot; my heart is breaking."

There was a slight sound at the door. Turning, they saw Mrs. Brooke looking at them with wondering eyes.

"Audrey," she cried, and the girl rose to go to her, and then fell helplessly to the ground.

The rector raised her and laid her on her couch and then told his wife her story.

"If we wished her well," he said, "we should almost pray that she might never open her eyes again."

"My beautiful child!" sobbed the poor mother.

"What has she done, Fabian, that she should suffer like this?"

Then came days and nights of unutterable sorrow and distress for the saddened household, for Audrey lay sick unto death, and her parents felt that she would not recover. Sir Roche came down, but the rector would not allow him to see his daughter.

"I am a Christian, sir," he said, "and so am bound to forgive you; but your deceit has slain my child. You will see her no more."

Sir Roche pleaded and prayed; he was so humble, so earnest, so persistent in declaring the honesty of his belief that the rector was touched at last.

"Why did you not tell us?" he said,

"I cannot understand why you kept your first marriage a secret."

"I was afraid," he answered; "but my fear was not because I believed you would think my union with Audrey wrong. I thought you might be prejudiced against it."

A great deal of Dr. Brooke's anger faded away after this; he could not help feeling most profound pity for the man whose life had been so terribly blighted. They discussed the question in all its aspects, political, social and religious; but the rector kept his convictions, while those of Sir Roche were somewhat shaken.

The mother, too, forgave him, when she saw how very dearly he loved her child—when she saw how keenly and bitterly he suffered; but both parents were firm in one respect—they would not allow him to see Audrey.

"It will be of no use," Mrs. Brooke told him; "you will only pain her, and to no purpose. You will never change her opinion or ours. Leave her in peace."

There was nothing else for him but to go away, and, though they considered that he had deeply wronged their child, they could feel no anger against him, when they saw how ill and worn he looked.

Audrey had a hard fight for her life. The ascension lilies were in bloom before she was able to get up. She referred but little to her trouble, but at times she looked at her mother and said:

"You must not think that I do not feel the separation because I do not speak of it. Little sorrows find a voice; great ones are dumb."

She did feel it when the time came that she could be taken downstairs; when once more she was able to undertake the duties of life, they saw how sadly her sorrow had changed her. The doctor advised them to take her to the seaside.

One morning the rector went into her room with an open newspaper in his hand.

"I thought it would comfort you, Audrey," he said, "to read this."

It was a well-written paragraph on divorces, and as testimony to the fact how strongly some persons were opposed to them, the writer noted the story of Lady Villiers. He told briefly how she had married Sir Roche without knowing the history of his previous marriage and divorce, but that as soon as she had become acquainted with it she had left him. There was no comment upon the case. The plain story was told, and persons could think what they would about it.

"Is that what you meant—what you wished, Audrey?" asked the rector.

"Yes, papa," she answered, "that is the only amendment that could be made, and I am glad that it has been made."

Then they went away to a beautiful, breezy, seaside spot, where the sun brought a tinge of color to Audrey's face, and light to her eyes. When they had been there a month, Audrey said one day to her father:

"Papa, I have been thinking very much about the best thing I can do with my life."

"Tell me what you have thought, Audrey?" he requested.

"It is spoiled," she continued, "as far as the desirable things of this world are concerned; for me, there will never be husband, or home, or love. I have done no wrong, yet my fair name is tarnished. I have no position; I am neither wife nor widow. But a sweet thought has come to me—I have discovered an object to which I can devote my life. I cannot give it to Sir Roche, but I may spend it for Sir Roche's wife. I must not love him,—I may love her; and I am going to seek her, and try if I cannot place her by his side again."

"My dear child!" cried the rector, "My dear father, could I do a wiser, better, or more generous deed?" she asked.

"Perhaps not; but—"

She did not allow him to finish the objection—she kissed it away.

Advice and remonstrance were alike vain. Not that the rector really disapproved of his daughter's intention; it was quiteotic—it was quite unwelcome—it was even romantic, but it was to him a noble idea.

"Papa," she said, clinging to him, "I shall never forget it. If it had been traced on my mind by a streak of lightning it couldn't have made a more lasting impression! It happened one bright moonlight night in November. We were spinning over the rails at full speed across country, where there were few people passing at that time of night, when I looked out and saw the figure of a man lying across the track not 10 feet in front of the engine. I stopped as quick as possible, but too late, of course. We had run over him, and the lifeless body was under the wheels.

"We got out to look for him and found his hat, a piece of his coat sleeve and one of his shoes, but the rest seemed to be further back under the train. I backed up the engine and got out to look again. There lay the body. I nearly fainted when I saw its distorted form. I felt like a murderer.

Did I know the man? No, not personally. He was a scarecrow from a neighboring corn field."

Mrs. Brooke took it from her with tears. She locked it away; and, if Audrey thought of it, she never asked about it—the little ring in which so many hopes had centred. Another thing she was scrupulous about was her name. She would not allow any one to address her as "Lady Villiers."

"To listen to that name in silence is to own my complicity in a sin," she would say. "I am not Lady Villiers. By what name I am known before Heaven, I cannot tell, but it cannot be that. The world may say what it will of me—I am Miss Brooke."

(To Be Continued.)

SETHI EF TO CATCH THIEF.

How the President of Mexico is Ridding His Country of Bandits.

President Diaz, of Mexico, is credited with the invention of an ingenious method of ridding the country of bandits, including train robbers, which is working like a charm. A desperado of more than common intelligence was captured about two years ago, and the President interviewed him in prison several times. The bandit told him that want of occupation was at the root of the whole trouble. You shall be liberated and I will appoint you Chief of Police in your native district. You are to guard all trains and protect passengers at the way stations. You can appoint your own subordinates from your followers. You will be rewarded for maintaining good order in your district, and held responsible for all lawless acts by whomsoever committed.

There has not been a robbery in that district, which was formerly a dangerous one for tourists to pass through, since that appointment was made. The system has been extended, and now the solitary uniformed policeman on the platform of nearly every small station in Mexico is an ex-robber. He is known and respected as a superior person by the police and loafers who know that he will permit no petty thieving. He, in turn, knows that he is closely watched by a superior officer who is in the employ of the chief ex-bandit.

These facts are given upon the authority of a prominent gentleman, who recently returned from Mexico, where he had spent several months in investigating the industrial conditions of that country. We believe that the statement here made is true, and it is certainly a very curious and interesting solution of a serious problem.

A SERP'S FORETHOUGHT.

How He Obtained His Freedom by a Little Strategy.

Count Scheremetef, an immensely wealthy and powerful Russian noble who lived in the early part of this century, had among his serfs a man named Schalouchine, who had amassed an enormous fortune. He had offered as much as two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for his freedom, but in vain. One day Scheremetef gave a dinner-party, and to his disgust there were no oysters to begin the banquet with. "They were not to be had at any price," replied the steward. At that moment Schalouchine was ushered in among the guests, and Scheremetef bullied him as usual. "Your freedom," he yelled, "you cannot have it if you offered a million of rubles. A million, please! a few dozen oysters would be worth more than that to me at this moment." "Do I understand, then, my lord, that you would grant me my freedom if I procured them for you?" "Yes," was the answer. Schalouchine had brought a barrel of oysters, having heard of the dinner. The deed of freedom was immediately signed, Schalouchine took his place among the guests, and his descendants are not only the wealthiest bankers in Russia, but were ennobled about a quarter of a century ago.

A MOMENT OF AWFUL SUSPENSE.

The nervous strain on the engineer of a fast train is something enormous, said one of them the other day. Not only the lives of the passengers are at stake, but there is the constant fear of running over some one on the track. An accident, no matter how innocent the engineer, is always a kind of hoodoo.

"What was my worst accident? I shall never forget it. If it had been traced on my mind by a streak of lightning it couldn't have made a more lasting impression! It happened one bright moonlight night in November. We were spinning over the rails at full speed across country, where there were few people passing at that time of night, when I looked out and saw the figure of a man lying across the track not 10 feet in front of the engine. I stopped as quick as possible, but too late, of course. We had run over him, and the lifeless body was under the wheels.

"We got out to look for him and found his hat, a piece of his coat sleeve and one of his shoes, but the rest seemed to be further back under the train. I backed up the engine and got out to look again. There lay the body. I nearly fainted when I saw its distorted form. I felt like a murderer.

Did I know the man? No, not personally. He was a scarecrow from a neighboring corn field."

TOO MUCH OF A BAD THING.

You are regarded as one of the shrewdest confidence men in the country, said the court, and yet you are here.

Yes, I guess it was a case of over-confidence, your honor.