

BARING-GOULD SABINE

ARMINELL, VOL. 3

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Arminell, Vol. 3 / A Social Romance:

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A Social Romance

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

Giles Saltren caught an express and whirled down into the west. He had not taken a ticket for Orleigh Road Station, as he did not choose to get out there, but at the nearest town, and there he hired a light trap in which he was driven to within half a mile of Chillacot, where he dismissed the vehicle and walked on.

He had resolved what to do. He would pay a hasty visit to his mother and then go on to the village, and perhaps call at the Rectory. He must show himself as much as possible.

He had hardly left the trap, when, on turning a corner, he came on Samuel Ceely and Joan Melhuish walking together, arm in arm. The sight brought the blood into his pale face. He was behind the pair, and he was able to notice the shabbiness of the old man and the ungainliness of his walk. This man was his father. To him, the meanest in the parish – not to his lordship, the highest – must he look as the author of his being.

Joan Melhuish knew nothing of Samuel's love affair with Marianne Welsh. She looked up to and admired the cripple, seeing him in the light of her girlish fancy, as the handsome, reckless gamekeeper.

Giles's foot lagged, but he kept his eyes steadily on the man slouching along before him. A new duty had fallen on him. He must provide for the cripple, without allowing the secret of his relationship to become known, both for the sake of his mother and for that of the trusting Joan.

Samuel Ceely heard his step and turned his head, disengaged his arm from the woman, and extended the mutilated hand towards the young man.

"I say – I say!" began he, with his water-blue eyes fixed eagerly on Jingles. "I was promised a place; Miss Arminell herself said I should have work, two shillings a day, sweeping, and now they say she has gone away and left no directions about me. If you can put in a word with my lady, or with my lord, mind that I was promised it."

"How can you, Samuel, speak of my lord, when you know he is dead?"

"My lord is not dead," answered the old man sharply. "Master Giles is now my lord. I know what I am about."

"And Samuel would do the work wonderfully well," threw in Joan; "of all the beautifulest things that ever I see, is Samuel's sweeping. If they were to give prizes for that as they do for ploughing, Samuel would be rich."

“I should like,” said Giles, “to have some particulars about my lord’s death.”

“Tis a terrible job, sure enough,” answered the woman. “And folks tell strange tales about it, not half of ’em is true. They’ve sat on him this afternoon.”

“The inquest already?”

“Yes, to be sure. You see he died o’ Saturday, so he was crowned to-day. Couldn’t do it yesterday.”

“And what was the verdict? I have been to Huxham to-day – this was the nearest town.

“Samuel can tell you better than I, sir, I don’t understand these things. But it do seem a funny thing to crown a man when he is dead.”

“What was the verdict?” asked Giles of Samuel.

“Well,” said the old man, shaking his head. “It puzzled the jury a bit. Some said it was an accident, and some that it was murder; but the worst of it all is, that it will drive my sweeping at two shillings out of the heads of my lady and Miss Arminell. They’ll be so took up wi’ ordering of mourning that they’ll not think of me – which is a crying shame. If his lordship could but have lived another week till I was settled into my sweeping and victuals, he might have died and welcome, but to go interfering like between me and two shillings, is that provoking I could swear. Not that I say it was his lordship’s fault, and I lay no blame on him, but folks do say, that – ”

“There now, Samuel,” interrupted Joan. “This is young Mr.

Saltren you are speaking to and you are forgetting.”

“I’m not forgetting,” grumbled the old man; “don’t you be always of a flurrying me. Why, if I had had my situation as was promised me, we might have married and reared a family. I reckon one can do that on two shillings a day, and broken victuals from the kitchen. I might take the case into court and sue Captain Saltren for damages.”

“Hush Samuel,” interposed Joan nervously, looking at Giles.

“I aint a-going to be hushed like a baby,” said Samuel Ceely irritably; “I reckon if I don’t get my place, we can’t marry, and have a family, and where will my domestic happiness be? I tell you, them as chucked his lordship down the Cleave, chucked my family as was to be down with him, and if I can’t bring ’em into court for murdering his lordship, I can for murdering my family, of as healthy and red-cheeked children as might have been – all gone,” said the old man grimly. “All, head over heels down the Cleave, along of Lord Lamerton.”

“How can you talk so?” said Joan, reproachfully. “You know you have no children.”

“I might have had – a dozen of ’em – seven girls and five boys, and I’d got the names for them all in my head. I might have had if I’d got the sweeping and the broken victuals as I was promised. What’s the difference in wickedness, I’d like to know?” asked the old man sententiously, and figuring out his proposition on Saltren’s coat with his crooked fingers. “What’s the odds in wickedness, chucking over a horrible precipice a

dozen sweet and innocent children as is, or as is to be, my family was as certain as new potatoes in June, and now all gone, chucked down the Cleave. It is wickedness.”

“What is that you hinted about Captain Saltren?” asked Giles gravely.

“Oh, I say nothing,” answered old Samuel sourly. “I don’t talk – I leave that to the woman.”

“It does seem a pity,” said Joan. “Samuel would have been so useful. He might have gone about the park picking up the sandwich-papers and the corks and bottles, after the public.”

“But,” said the young man, “I really wish to know what the talk is about in which my father’s name is introduced.”

“Sir, sir! folk’s tongues go like the clappers in the fields to drive away the blackbirds. A very little wind makes ’em rattle wonderfully.”

“But what have they said?”

“Well” – Joan hesitated. She was a woman of delicate feeling. “Well, sir, you must not think there is anything in it. Tongues cannot rest, and what they say to-day they unsay to-morrow. Some think that as the captain was so bitter against his lordship, and denounced him as ordained to destruction, that he may have had a helping hand in his death. But, sir, the captain did not speak so strong as Mr. Welsh, and nobody says that Mr. Welsh laid a finger on him. Why should they try to fix it on your father and not on your uncle? But, sir, there is no call to fix it on any one. I might walk over the edge of the Cleave. If a man goes over the

brink, I reckon he needs no help to make him go to the bottom.”

“The jury couldn’t agree, Joan,” said Samuel. “Two of ’em wanted to bring in wilful murder against the captain.”

“So they did against his lordship in the case of Arkie Tubb. But that was nonsense. His lordship wasn’t there. And this is nonsense, just the same.”

“But the captain was nigh. Mr. Macduff saw him.”

“Well, and he might have seen me, and he did see me a little while afore, as I was coming from Court with some baccy money for you, Samuel. That don’t follow that I killed his lordship. Mr. Macduff see’d also Farmer Yole’s old grey mare. Be you a going accusing of that old mare of having had a hoof in his lordship’s death?”

“Where did Mr. Macduff see my father?” asked the young man.

“On the down. But he didn’t see him speak to his lordship, and he couldn’t tell to half an hour or three-quarters when it was. So the crowner discharged the jury, just as he did in the case of Arkie, and he got together another, and they found that his lordship had done it accidental.”

“For all that,” growled Samuel, “folks will always say that the captain helped him over, as he was so set against him.”

“Then,” said Joan, “it is a shame and a sin if they do. It is one thing to talk against a person, and another thing to lift a hand against him. I’ve said hard things of you, scores of times; I’ve said you never ought to have taken the game and sent it off by

the mail-cart when you was keeper, and that you couldn't have blown off your hand if you'd not gone poaching, nor put out your hip if you'd been sober – I've said them cruel things scores o' times, but never laid a finger on you to hurt you. I couldn't do it – as you know very well.”

She cast an affectionate glance at the cripple; then she went on, “Lord! I forgive and excuse all the frolics of your youth; and folks always says things rougher than they mean them.”

Instead of going on to Chillacot, as he had at first intended, Giles now resolved on following the road to the village, and returning home later. He must lose no time in showing himself. He trusted that in the excitement caused by the death of Lord Lamerton no questions would be raised about Arminell, and any little suspicions which might have been awakened by her sudden departure would be allayed.

He was not altogether easy about his father, nor satisfied with Joan's justification of him. That the jury had returned a verdict of accidental death was a relief to his mind, but it made him uncomfortable to think that suspicion against his father should be entertained. Giles had little or no knowledge of his father's new craze. He knew that the captain was a fanatic who went heart and soul with whatever commended itself to his reason or prejudice. At one time he took up hotly the subject of vegetarianism, then he became infatuated with Anglo-Israelism, then he believed vehemently in a quack syrup he saw advertised in a Christian paper, warranted to cure all disorder; after that

he became possessed with the teetotal mania, and attributed all the evils in the world, war, plagues, earthquakes, popery, and foot-and-mouth disease to the use of alcohol. Recently he had combined his religious vagaries with political theories, and had made a strange stir-about of both. His trouble at losing his situation as captain of the manganese mine, and his irritation against the railway company for wanting Chillacot had combined to work him into a condition of unusual excitability. Giles had heard that his father had seen a vision, but of what sort he had not inquired, because he was entirely out of sympathy with the spiritual exaltations and fancies of his father.

The village of Orleigh was not what is commonly termed a "church town," that is to say, it was not clustered about the church, which stood in the park, near the mansion of the Ingletts. In ancient days, when the population was sparse, the priest drew his largest congregation from the manor house, and therein he lived as chaplain and tutor; consequently in many places we find the parish church situated close to the manor house, and away from the village which had grown up later. It was so at Orleigh. The village consisted of a green, with an old tree in the midst, an ale-house, the Lamerton Arms, a combined general and grocery store, which was also post office, a blacksmith's forge, and half-a-dozen picturesque cottages white-washed, with red windows and thatched roofs. Most of these houses had flower gardens before their doors, encouraged thereto by an annual Floricultural Society which gave prizes to those villagers who had the neatest,

most cheerful and varied gardens.

Jingles found knots of men standing about the green, some were coming out of, others about to enter the public-house door; another knot clustered about the forge. Women were not wanting, to throw in words.

The dusk of evening had settled in, so that at first none noticed the approach of the young man. He came, not by the road, but across by the blacksmith's garden, where a short cut saved a round. Thus he was in the midst of the men before they were aware that he was near.

He could not catch all that was being said, but he heard that the death of Lord Lamerton occupied their minds and exercised their tongues. His father's name was also freely bandied about.

"I say," exclaimed the village tailor, in a voice like that of a corncrake, "I say that Cap'n Saltren did it. What do you consider the reason why the coroner discharged the jury and called another? I know, if you do not. You don't perhaps happen to know, but I do, that Marianne Saltren's aunt, old Betsy Welsh, washes for the coroner. Nothing more likely, were he to allow a verdict against the captain, than that his shirt-fronts would come home iron-moulded. Don't tell me there was no evidence. Evidence is always to be had if looked for. Evidence is like snail's horns, thrust forth or drawn in, according to circumstances. If the coroner had wanted evidence, he could have had it. But he was thinking of his shirt-front, and he, maybe, going out to a dinner-party. It is easy done, boil an old nail along with the clothes, and

pounds' worth of linen is spoiled. I don't blame him," concluded the tailor sententiously. "Human nature is human nature."

"And," shouted a miner, "facts is facts" – but he pronounced them *fax*.

"Lord Lamerton," said a second miner, "wanted to make a new road, and carry it to Chillacot. The cap'n didn't like it, he didn't want to have a station there. He was set against his lordship on that account, for his lordship was a director. If you can prove to me that his lordship wasn't a director, then I shall admit he may have come by his death naturally. I say naught against his lordship for not wanting to have his house undermined, but I do say that the cap'n acted unreasonably and wrongly in not letting the company have Chillacot for the station. If he'd have done that, his lordship would have found us work on the road."

"Ah, Gloyne," called the other miner, "that's it. Fax is fax."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE RISE OF THE TIDE

“Come here,” shouted the blacksmith, who was outside his shop, and still wore his apron, and the smut and rust on his hands and face. “Come here, Master Jingles. You’ve come into the midst of us, and we want to know something from you. Where is your father? We’ve seen nothing of him since Friday. If he has not been at mischief, why don’t he come forward like a man? Why don’t your father show his face? He ain’t a tortoise, privileged to draw it in, or a hedgehog, at liberty to coil it up. Where is he? He is not at home. If he is hiding, what is he hiding from unless he be guilty?”

“He may have gone after work,” said young Saltren.

“I heard him say,” said the shoemaker, “that his lordship was doomed to destruction.”

“I know he said it,” answered the blacksmith, “and I ask, is a man like to make a prophecy and not try to make what he said come to pass?”

“Human nature is human nature,” threw in the tailor.

“And fax is fax,” added the miner.

“Then,” pursued the blacksmith, “let us look at things as they affect us. His lordship has kept about twenty-three horses – hunters, cobs, ponies and carriage horses – and each has four

hoofs, and all wants shoeing once a month, and some every fortnight. That brings me in a good part of my living. Very well. I ask all who hear me, is his lordship like to keep such a stud now he is dead? Is he like to want hunters? I grant you, for the sake of argument, that the young lady and young gentleman will have their cobs and ponies, but will there be anything like as many horses kept as there have been? No, in reason there cannot be. So you may consider what a loss to me is the death of his lordship. My worst personal enemy couldn't have hit me harder than when he knocked Lord Lamerton over the Cleave. He as much as knocked a dozen or fourteen horses over with him, each with four hoofs at sixpence a shoe, and shod, let us say, eighteen times in the year."

"You are right," put in the tailor, "landed property is tied up, and his lordship's property is tied up – tied up and sealed like mail bags – till the young lord comes of age, which will not be for eleven years. So Blatchford," – addressing the blacksmith – "you must multiply your horses by eleven."

"That makes," said the smith, working out the sum in chalk on the shutter of the shop, "say fourteen horses eighteen times – two hundred and two – and by four – and again by eleven – and halved because of sixpences, that makes five hundred and fifty-four pounds; then there were odd jobs, but them I won't reckon. Whoever chucked Lord Lamerton down the Cleave chucked five hundred and fifty-four pounds of as honestly-earned money as ever was got, belonging to me, down along with him."

“Fax is fax,” said the miner.

“And human nature is human nature to feel it,” added the tailor.

“There’s another thing to be considered,” said a game-keeper. “In the proper sporting season, my lord had down scores of gentlemen to shoot his covers, and that brought me a good many sovereigns and half-sovs. Now, I’d like to know, with the family in mourning, and the young lord not able to handle a gun, will there be a house full of gentlemen? It wouldn’t be decent. And that means the loss of twenty pounds to me – if one penny.”

“Nor is that all,” said the tailor, “you’ll have Macduff to keep an eye on you, not my lord. There’ll be no more chucking of hampers into the goods train as it passes Copley Wood, I reckon.”

The keeper made no other reply than a growl, and drew back.

“There is my daughter Jane, scullery-maid at the Park,” said the shoe-maker, “learning to be a cook. If her ladyship shuts up the house, and leaves the place, what will become of Jane? It isn’t the place I grieve for, nor the loss of learning, for places ask to be filled now and any one will be taken as cook, if she can do no more than boil water – but it is the perquisites. My wife was uncommon fond of jellies and sweets of all sorts, and I don’t suppose these are to be picked off hedges, when the house is empty.”

“Here comes Farmer Labett,” exclaimed the tailor. “I say, Mr. Labett, did not his lordship let off five-and-twenty per cent. from his rents last fall?”

“That is no concern of yours,” replied the farmer.

“But it does concern you,” retorted the tailor, “for now that his lordship is dead, the property is tied up and put in the hands of trustees, and trustees can’t remit rents. If they were to do so, the young lord, when he comes of age, might be down on them and make them refund out of their own pockets. So that away over the rocks, down the Cleave, went twenty-five per cent. abatement when his lordship fell, or was helped over.”

“Ah!” groaned the shoemaker, “and all them jellies, and blanc-mange, and custards was chucked down along of him.”

“And now,” said another, “Macduff will have the rule. Afore, if we didn’t like what Macduff ordained, we could go direct to his lordship, but now there will be no one above Macduff but trustees, and trustees won’t meddle. That will be a pretty state of things, and his wife to ride in a victoria, too.”

Then a woman called Tregose pushed her way through the throng, and with loud voice expressed her views.

“I don’t see what occasion you men have to grumble. Don’t y’ see that the family will have to go into mourning, and so get rid of their colours, and we shall get them. There’s Miss Arminell’s terra-cotta I’ve had my eye on for my Louisa, but I never reckoned on having it so soon. There never was a wind blowed,” argued Mrs. Tregose, “that was an unmixed evil, and didn’t blow somebody good. If this here wind have blowed fourteen horses, and jellies and twenty-five per cent. and the keeper’s tips over the Cleave – it ha’ blowed a terra-cotta gown

on to my Louisa.”

“But,” argued the tailor in his strident voice, “supposing, in consequence of the death, that her ladyship and the young lady and the little lord give up living here, and go for education to London or abroad, where will you be, Mrs. Tregose, for their cast gowns? Your Louisa ain’t going to wear that terra-cotta for eleven years, I reckon.”

“There’s something in that,” assented the woman, and her mouth fell. “Yes,” she said, after a pause for consideration, “who can tell how many beautiful dresses and bonnets and mantles have gone over the Cleave along with the blanc-mange, and the horses and the five-and-twenty per cent.? I’m uncommon sorry now his lordship is dead.”

“I’ve been credibly informed,” said the tailor, “that his lordship laid claim to Chillacot, and said that because old Gaffer Saltren squatted there, that did not constitute a title. Does it give a rook a title to a Scotch fir because he builds a nest on it? Can the rook dispose of the timber? Can it refuse to allow the tree to be cut down and sawn up, for and because he have sat on the top of it? I’ve an old brood sow in my sty. Does the sty belong to the sow or to me?”

“Fax is fax,” assented the miner.

“And,” urged the blacksmith, “if his lordship wanted to get the land back, why not? If I lend my ladder to Farmer Eggins, haven’t I a right to reclaim it? His lordship asked for the land back, not because he wanted it for himself, but in the interest of

the public, to give us a station nigh at hand, instead of forcing us to walk three and a half or four miles, and sweat terrible on a summer's day. And his lordship intended to run a new road to Chillacot, where the station was to be, and so find work for hands out of employ, and he said it would cost him a thousand pounds. And now, there is the new road and all it would have cost as good as thrown over the Cleave along with his lordship."

"The captain – he did it," shouted the blacksmith.

"Fax speak – they are fax. Skin me alive, if they baint," said the miner.

Giles Inglett Saltren had heard enough. He raised his voice and said, "Mr. Blatchford, and the rest of you – some insinuate, others openly assert that my father has been guilty of an odious crime, that he has had a hand in the death of Lord Lamerton."

He was interrupted by shouts of "He has, he has! We know it!"

"How do you know it? You only suppose it. You have no grounds absolutely, no grounds for basing such a supposition. The coroner, as yourselves admit, refused to listen to the charge."

A voice: "He was afraid of having his shirt-fronts moulded."

"Here, again, you bring an accusation as unfounded as it is absurd, against an honourable man and a Crown official. If you had been able to produce a particle of evidence against my father, a particle of evidence to show that what you imagine is not as hollow as a dream, the coroner would have hearkened and acted. Are you aware that this bandying of accusations is an indictable offence? My father has not hurt you in any way."

This elicited a chorus of cries.

“He has spoiled my shoeing.” “He has prevented the making of the road.” “My wife will never have blanc-mange again.” And Samuel Ceely, now arrived on the scene, in whispering voice added, “All my beautiful darlings – twelve of them, as healthy as apples, and took their vaccination well – all gone down the Cleave.”

It really seemed as if the happiness, the hopes, the prosperity of all Orleigh, had gone over the edge of the cliff with his lordship.

“I repeat it,” exclaimed the young man, waxing warm; “I repeat it, my father never did you an injury. You are now charging him with hurting you, because you suffer through his lordship’s death, and you are eager to find some one on whom to cast blame. As for any real sorrow and sympathy, you have none; wrapped up in your petty and selfish ends.”

A voice: “Fax is fax – he did kill Lord Lamerton.”

The tailor: “Human nature is human nature, and nobody can deny he prophesied my lord’s death.”

“I dare you to charge my father with the crime,” cried young Saltren. “I warn you. I have laid by a little money, and I will spend it in prosecuting the man who does.”

“We all do. Prosecute the parish,” rose in a general shout.

“My father is incapable of the crime.”

“We have no quarrel with you, young Jingles,” roared a miner. “Our contention is with the captain. Mates, what do y’ say? Shall

we pay him a visit?"

"Aye – aye!" from all sides. "Let us show him our minds."

A boisterous voice exclaimed: "We'll serve him out for taking the bread out of our mouths. We'll tumble his house about his ears. He sha'n't stand in our light any more."

And another called, "If you want to prosecute us, we'll provide you with occasion."

Then a stone was flung, which struck Jingles on the head and knocked him down.

For a few minutes the young man was unconscious, or rather confused, he never quite lost his senses. The women clustered about him, and Mrs. Tregose threw water in his face.

He speedily gathered his faculties together, and stood up, rather angry than hurt, to see that nearly all the men had departed. The act of violence, instead of quelling the excitement, had stirred it to greater heat; and the body of the men, the miners, labourers, the blacksmith, tailor, and shoemaker, their sons and apprentices, went off in a shouting gesticulating rabble in the direction of the Cleave, not of Chillacot, but of the down overhanging it.

In a moment the latent savage, suppressed in those orderly men, was awake and asserting itself. Mr. Welsh had spoken the truth when he told Jingles that the destructive passion was to be found in all; it was aroused now. The blacksmith, the tailor, the shoemaker, the labourers, had in all their several ways been working constructively all their life, one to make shoes and

harrows, one to shape trousers and waistcoats, one to put together boots, others to build, and plant, and stack, and roof, and now, all at once, an appeal came to the suppressed barbarian in each, the chained madman in the asylum, and the destructive faculty was loose and rioting in its freedom.

Thomasine Kite stood before the young man. "Now then," she said half mockingly, "if you want to save your mother out of the house before the roof is broke in, you must make haste. Come along with me."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FLOW OF THE TIDE

Captain Saltren returned at night to sleep at Chillacot, but he wandered during the day in the woods, with his Bible in his pocket or in his hand, now reading how Gideon was raised up to deliver Israel from Midian, and Samson was set apart from his mother's womb to smite the Philistines, then sitting at the edge of the quarry brooding over his thoughts.

He was not able to fix his mind for long on anything, and he found that the Scripture only interested and arrested his attention so far as it touched on analogous trains of ideas. For the first time in his life a chilling sense of doubt, a cold suspicion of error stole over his heart. When this was the case he was for a moment in agony, his nerves tingled, his throat contracted, and a clammy sweat broke out over his face. The fit passed, and he was again confident, and in his confidence strong. He raised his voice and intoned a hymn, then became frightened at the sound, and stopped in the midst of a stanza.

Presently he recalled his wife's deceptions and how his heart had foamed and leaped at the thought of the wrong done her and himself, and how he had nourished a deadly hatred against Lord Lamerton on that account. Now he knew that there had been no occasion for this hatred. What had he done to his lordship? Had

he really with his hand thrust him over the precipice, or had the nobleman fallen in stepping back to avoid the blow. Either way the guilt, if guilt there were, rested on Saltren's head; but the captain would not listen to the ever welling-up suggestion that there was guilt. It was not he who had killed his lordship, it was the hand of God that had slain him, because the hand of human justice had failed to reach him. The captain entertained little or no personal fear – he was ready, if it were the will of heaven, to appear before magistrates and juries; before them he would testify as the apostles had testified. If it were the will of heaven that he should die on the gallows, he was ready to ascend the scaffold, sure of receiving the crown of glory; perhaps the world was not ripe to receive his mission.

When that wave of horror swept over him, no fear of the consequences of his act helped to chill the wave; his only horrible apprehension was lest he should have made a mistake. This it was that lowered his pulsation, turned his lips blue, and made a cloud come between him and the landscape. He fought against the doubt, battled with it as against a temptation of the Evil One, but as often as he overcame it, it returned. The discovery that he had been deceived by Marianne into believing that Lord Lamerton had injured him, was the little rift in his hitherto unbroken all-enveloping faith; but even now he had no doubt about the vision, but only as to its purport. That he had seen and heard all that he professed to have seen and heard – that he believed still, but he feared and quaked with apprehension lest he should have misread

his revelation.

It is not easy, rather is it impossible, for a man of education, surrounded as he has been from infancy by ten thousand influences to which the inferior classes are not subjected, to understand the self-delusion of such a man.

The critical, sceptical spirit is developed in this century among the cultured classes at an early age, and the child of the present day begins with a *Dubito* not with a *Credo*. Where there is no conviction there can be no enthusiasm, for enthusiasm is the flame that dances about the glowing coals of belief; and where no fire is, there can be no flame. We allow of any amount of professions, but not of conviction. Zeal is as much a mark of bad breeding as a hoarse guffaw.

Enthusiasms are only endurable when affectations, to be put on and put off at pleasure; to be trifled with, not to be possessed by. This is an age of toleration; we tolerate everything but what is earnest, and we lavish our adulation on the pretence, not the reality of sincerity. For we know that a genuine enthusiasm is unsuitable for social intercourse; he who is carried away by it is carried beyond the limits of that toleration which allows a little of everything, but exclusiveness to none. He who harbours a belief is not suffered to obtrude it; if he be a teetotaler he must hide his blue ribbon; if a Home Ruler, must joke over his shamrock; if a Quaker; must dress in colours; if a Catholic, eat meat on Good Friday. The apostle expressed his desire to be all things to all men; we have made universal what was then a possibility

only to one, we are all things to all men, only sincere neither to ourselves nor to any one. We are like children's penny watches that mark any hour the wearers desire, not chronometers that fix the time for all. How can we be chronometers when we have no main springs, or if we had them, wilfully break them.

We regard all enthusiasms as forms of fever, and quarantine those infected by them; we watch ourselves against them, we are uneasy when the symptoms appear among our children. At the least quickening of the pulse and kindling of the eye we fly to our medicine chests for a spiritual narcotic or a sceptical lowering draught.

The new method of dealing with fevers is to plunge the patient in cold water, the reverse of the old method, which was to bring out the heat; and we apply this improved system to our spiritual fevers, to all these mental attacks bred of convictions. We subdue them with the douche and ice, and the wet blanket. When the priests of Baal invoked their god on Mount Carmel, they leaped upon the altar, and cut themselves with knives; but Elijah looked on with a supercilious smile, and invited those who followed him to pour buckets of water over his sacrifice; and with what pity, what contempt we regard all such as are possessed with the divine fury, and are ready to suffer and make themselves ridiculous for their god; how we water our oblations, and make sure that the sticks on our altar are green and incombustible; how, if a little spark appears, or a spiral of smoke arises, we turn on hydrants, and our friends rush to our aid with the buckets, and we do not

breathe freely till spark and smoke are subdued.

But then, because altars are erected for burnt sacrifices, and a burnt sacrifice is unsavoury, expensive, and unfashionable, we thrust a little coloured tin-foil in among the wet sticks, and protest how natural, how like real fire it looks, and we prostrate ourselves before it in mock homage.

No dread of enthusiasm, no shrinking from conviction, is found among the uneducated, and the semi-educated. Among them enthusiasm is the token of the divine afflatus, as madness is regarded among savages. They respect it, they bring fuel to feed it, they allow it to burst into extravagance, to riot over reason, and to consume every particle of common sense. The corrective, judicial faculty, the balance wheel is deficient; the strength, not the quality of a conviction gives it its command to the respect and adhesion of the many. If I were to break out of Bedlam with the one fixed idea in me that I had eyes at the ends of my ten toes, wherewith I saw everything that went on in the world, and with my big toes saw what was to be in the future; and if I went up and down England preaching this and declaring what I saw with my toes, and continued preaching it with the fire of perfect sincerity for a twelvemonth, I would shake the hold of the Established Church on the hearts of the people, and make the work of the Liberation Society easy. Half England would form the Church of the seeing toes, but in that Church I would not number any of the cultured.

As for us, we get over our enthusiasms early, as we cut our

teeth, and we lose them as rapidly. Primeval man wore his teeth till he died, so do savages of the present day; but the very milk teeth of our infants decay. We are so familiar with the fact that we assume that all good sets of teeth are false, that if we keep here and there a fang in our jaws, it is carious, and only preserved as a peg to which to wire our sham molars and front teeth. It is so unusual to find any one with a real set, that we look on such a person with suspicion as having in him a stain of barbarous blood.

It is obvious that this defect of real teeth in our jaws has its advantages. It allows us to change our teeth when we find those we have hitherto worn inconvenient or out of fashion.

It is the same with our convictions, we lose them early, all the inside disappears, leaving but the exterior enamel, and that breaks away finally.

But then, we do not open our mouths to our friends and in society, exposing our deficiencies. We replace what is lost by what looks well, and hold them in position by the fragments of early belief that still project; and when these artificial articles prove irksome we change them. This is how it is that, for instance, in politics, a man may profess to day one thing, and something quite different to-morrow. No one is shocked, every one understands that this exhibition to-day is unreal, and that to-morrow also unreal.

But, together with the advantage afforded by this power of altering our sets, there is a disadvantage which must not be left

unnoticed, which is that the biting and holding power in them is not equal to that possessed by the natural articles.

Patience Kite came upon the captain as he stood in a dream, Bible in hand, but not reading, meditating, and looking far away, yet seeing nothing. She roused him with a hand on his shoulder.

“Do you know what they are about?”

“They! Who?”

“All the parish – the men; the miners out of work, the day-labourers, the tradesmen, all.”

Saltren shook his head; he desired to be left alone to his thoughts, his prayers, his Bible reading.

“They are destroying your house,” said Patience, shaking him, to rouse him, as she would have shaken a sleeper.

“My house? Chillacot?”

“Yes, they are; they are breaking up the rock on the Cleave; and throwing it down on your roof, and smashing it in.”

“My house! Chillacot?” He was still absent in mind. He could not at once withdraw his thoughts from where they had strayed to matters so closely concerning himself.

“It is true; Tamsine came running to me to tell me about it. Your son managed to get into the house and bring his mother out, and Marianne is like one in a fit, she cannot speak —*that*, if you wish it, is a miracle. The men have set picks and crowbars to work to tumble the stones down on your house and garden, and bury them. Slates and windows are smashed already, and the shrubs broken down in your garden.”

“My house! – why?”

“Why? Because you won’t let the railway come along there, and the parish is angry, and thinks the station will be set further from the village. The fellows say you, with your obstinacy, are standing in the way of improvement, and driving trade and money out of the place.”

Stephen Saltren looked at Mrs. Kite with dazed eyes. He could not receive all she said, but he allowed her to lead him through the woods in the direction of Chillacot. He came out with her at the spot where he had stood before and looked on whilst the body of Lord Lamerton was removed from the place where it had fallen.

He stood there now, and looked again, and saw the destruction of the house he loved. A crowd of men and boys were on the down, shouting, laughing, some working, others encouraging them. Those who had crowbars drove them into the turf, and worked through to the rock that came up close to the surface; then they levered the stones through clefts and faults, out of place, and sent them plunging over the edge of the precipice, accompanied by clouds of dust, and avalanches of rubble. As each piece went leaping and rolling down it was saluted with a cheer, and the men leaned over the edge of the cliff to see where it fell, and what amount of damage was done by it.

The roof of Chillacot was broken through in several places; the slates at the top of the chimney, set on edge to divert the draught from blowing down it, were knocked off. One huge block

had overleaped the house, torn a track through the flower-bed in front, had beat down the entrance gate and there halted, seated on the shattered gate.

Saltren stood looking on with apparent indifference, because he was still unable to realise what was being done; but the full importance of the fact that his home was being wrecked came on him with a sudden rush, the blood flew into his face, he uttered a shout of rage, plunged through the bushes, down the hill-side, dashed through the stream below in the valley, ran up to his cottage, and for a moment stood shaking his fist in inarticulate wrath at the men who looked down on him, laughing and jeering from the cliff.

He had forgotten everything now except what was before him, and his anger made him blind and speechless. This was his house, built by his father; this his garden, tilled by his own hands. Who had a right to touch his property?

The blacksmith from above shouted to him to stand off, another mass of rock was dislodged and would fall. Saltren could see what menaced. On the piece of rock grew a thorn-tree, and the thorn was swaying against the sky with the exertions of the men leaning on their levers, snapping the ligatures of root-fibre, and opening the joints in the stone. But Saltren had no fear for himself in his fury at the outrage being done him. Regardless of the warning cries addressed to him, he strode over the broken gate, and entered his partially ruined house.

The blacksmith, alarmed, shouted to the miners engaged on

the levers to desist from their work, as Saltren was in the house below; but they replied that the stone was moving, the crack widening between it and the rock, and that to arrest it was now impossible.

The men held their breath, and were for the moment afraid of the consequence of what they had done. But they breathed freely a moment later, as they saw the captain emerge from his house and cross the garden, and take up a place out of the reach of danger. What they did not notice, or disregarded, was that he had brought out his gun with him. Stephen stood where he could command those on the cliff, and levelled and cocked his gun. His strong jaws were set; his dark eyebrows drawn over his flashing eyes; there was not a tremor in his muscles. He watched the swaying thorn; he saw that in another moment it would come down along with the mass of rock on which it stood, and which it grappled with its claw-like roots.

“What are you about, cap’n?” asked Mrs. Kite, coming up hastily.

He turned his head, smiled bitterly, and touched the barrel of his gun.

“When that rock comes down,” he said, “one of those above shall follow it.”

At that moment the block parted from the parent rock, and whirled beneath, followed by a train of dust. It struck the corner of the chimney, sent the stones of which it was built flying in all directions, and crashed through the roof, but left the thorn-bush

athwart the gap it had torn.

Before Saltren could discharge his gun, Mrs. Kite struck it up, and he fired it into the air.

“You fool!” she said, and then burst into a harsh laugh. “You find fault with others for doing that you approve yourself. You would undermine Orleigh, and object to Chillacot being overthrown.”

CHAPTER XL.

THE END OF A DELUSION

Captain Saltren remained motionless, with his gun raised, as it had been struck up by Patience Kite, for several minutes; then he slowly lowered it, and turned his face to her. The troubled expression which of late had passed over it at intervals returned. The jaw was no longer set, and the red spots of anger had faded from his cheeks. The momentary character of decision his face had assumed was gone, and now the lips trembled feebly.

“What was that you said?” he asked.

Patience laughed, and pointed to the crag.

“See,” she exclaimed, “the gun has frightened the men; and there comes the policeman with your son over the down!” She laughed again. “How the fellows run! After all, men are cowards.”

“What was that you said when I was about to fire?” asked the captain again.

“Said? – why, what is true. You wanted to rattle down his lordship’s house, and killed him because he refused to allow it to be done; and now you object to having your own shaken down. But there, that is the way of men.”

Saltren remained brooding in thought, with his eyes on the ground, and the end of the gun resting where his eyes fell.

Mrs. Kite taunted him.

“You kill the man who won’t let you pull down his house, and you would kill the man who throws down yours. What are you going to do now? Prosecute them for the mischief, and make them patch up again what they have broken? or will you give up the point, and let them have their own way, and the railway to run here, with a station to Chillacot?”

He did not answer. He was considering Mrs. Kite’s reproach, not her question. Presently he threw the gun away, and turned from his wrecked house.

“It is true,” he said. “Our ways are unequal; it is very true.” He put his hand over his face, and passed it before his eyes; his hand was shaking. “I will go back to the Owl’s Nest,” he said in a low tone.

“What! leave your house? Do you not want to secure what has not been broken?”

“I do not care about my house. I do not care about anything in it.”

“But will you not go and see Marianne – your wife? You do not know where she is, into what place your son took her, and whether she is ill?”

He looked at her with a mazed expression, almost as if he were out of his senses, and said slowly —

“I do not care about her any more.” Then, dimly seeing that this calmness needed justification, he added, “I have condemned in others what I allow in myself. I have measured to one in this

way, and to myself in that.”

He turned away, and went slowly along the brook to the point at which he had crossed it with Patience Kite after the death of Lord Lamerton, when she led him into the covert of the woods. Mrs. Kite accompanied him now.

They ascended the further hillside together, passing through the coppice, and he remained silent, mechanically thrusting the oak-boughs apart. He seemed to see, to feel nothing, so occupied was he with his own thoughts.

Presently he came out on the open patch where he had stood twice before, once to watch the removal of his victim, next to see the destruction of his house. There now he halted, and brushed his arms down, first the left, then the right with his hands, then passed them over his shoulders as though he were sweeping off him something that clung to and encumbered him.

“They are all gone,” said Mrs. Kite pointing to the headland, “and Jingles is bringing the policeman down to see the mischief that has been done.”

Captain Saltren stood and looked across the valley, but not at his house; he seemed to have forgotten about it, or lost all concern in it; he looked away from it, higher up, to the spot whence Lord Lamerton had fallen. Mrs. Kite was puzzled at the expression in his face, and at his peculiar manner. She had never thought highly of him, now she supposed he was losing his head. Every now and then he put up his hand over his mouth to conceal the contraction and quivering of the lips; and once she heard him utter a sound

which might have been a laugh, but was more like a sob, not in his throat, but in his breast.

That dread of having been a prey to delusions, which had passed over him before, had gained consistency, and burdened him insupportably. Opposite him was the headland whence he had precipitated Lord Lamerton, and now he asked himself why he had done it. Because he believed his lordship had hurt him in his family relations? In that he was mistaken. Because his lordship stopped the mine and threw him out of work rather than have his house imperilled? He himself was as resolute in resisting an attack on his own property, an interference with his own house. Because his lordship had occasioned the death of Arkie Tubb? Now as the veils of prejudice fell, one after another, he saw that no guilt attached to his lordship on that account. The boy had gone in to save Mrs. Kite. It was her fault that he was crushed. She had allowed her daughter, Arkie, all who looked on to believe she was endangered, when she had placed herself in a position of security. The only way in which he could allay the unrest in his mind was to repeat again and again to himself, "It was ordained. The Lord revealed it. There were reasons which I did not know."

There is a moment, we are told by those who have ascended in a balloon, when the cord is cut, and the solid earth is seen to begin to drift below, the trees to dance, and the towers to slide away, that an all but over-powering sense of fear and inclination comes on one to leap from the car at the risk of being dashed to pieces.

It is said that the panic produced by an earthquake exceeds every other terror. When a ship is storm-tossed, escape is possible in a boat, when a house is on fire there are feather-beds into which we can leap; but when the earth is insecure, then we have nowhere to which we can flee, nothing to which we can look.

With Captain Saltren, his religious convictions were what was most stable. Everything else glided before him as a dream, but he kept his feet on those things that belonged to the spiritual world, as if they were adamantine foundations. And now he was being, like an aeronaut, caught away, and these shifted under his eyes; like one in an earthquake, he felt the strong bases rock beneath him. The sense of terror that passed over him was akin to despair; but the last cord was not snapped, and that was the firmest of all – his visions and revelations.

“Of all queer folks,” said Mrs. Kite, “I reckon you are the queerest, captain. I thought so from the time I first saw you come and pray on your raft in the pond, and when I heard what a tale you had made out of Miss Arminell throwing a book at you, then I did begin to believe you were not right in your mind; now I’m sure of it.”

Captain Saltren looked dreamily at her; but in that dreamy look was pain.

“That was, to be sure, a wonderful tale,” pursued Mrs. Kite, losing patience with him. “An angel from Heaven cast the Everlasting Gospel down to you, was that it?”

He nodded, but said nothing.

“And I see’d Miss Arminell do it.”

His eyes opened wide with alarm.

“What the name of the book was, I do not mind; indeed, I do not know, because I cannot read; but I have got the book, and can show it you, and you who are a scholar can read it through from the first word to the last.”

“You have the book?”

“I have; when it fell it went under your raft, but it did not sink, it came up after on the other side, and when you were gone I fished it out, and I have it now.”

“It was red as blood.”

“Aye, and the paint came off on my fingers, but I dried it in the sun; and I have the book now, not in the Owl’s Nest, but in a cupboard of the back kitchen o’ my old house.”

“His likeness was on it.”

“That I can’t say. There is a head of a man.”

“The head of Lord Lamerton.”

“It don’t look like it; the man has black hair and a beard, and his lordship had no beard, and his hair was light brown.”

A shudder came over the captain. Was his last, his firmest anchor to break?

Again, as he had done several times already, he passed his hands over his arms and shoulders and sides, as if peeling off what adhered to him.

“Let me see the book,” he said faintly. “Lead on.”

“I ought to have returned it to Miss Arminell,” said Mrs. Kite;

“but I didn’t, because my Tamsine saw it, and said she’d like to read it. She’s mighty fond of what they call a sensational novel.”

“It was the book of the Everlasting Gospel,” said Saltren with a burst of desperation. “Nothing will ever make me believe otherwise.”

“Or that Miss Arminell, who stood in the mouth of the Owl’s Nest, was an angel flying?”

He made no reply, but lowered his head, and pushed forwards.

When they reached the ruined hovel, Mrs. Kite went into that part which had not been dismantled, and brought forth the crimson-covered book from the oven, where it had been hidden, and gave it to her companion.

“It is ‘The Gilded Clique,’” was all he said, and fixed his eyes on it with terror in them.

He dared not look Mrs. Kite in the face; he stood with lowered head before her, and his hands shook as he held the book, so that he could not study it.

“Tell me all that you heard and saw,” he said; then with sudden eagerness, “It was not on the Sabbath?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Kite, “it was on a Sunday that I saw you.” Then she told him all the circumstances as they had really happened.

Wondrous are the phantasmagoric pictures conjured up by the sun in the desert; the traveller looks on and sees blue water, flying sails, palm groves, palaces, and all is so real that he believes he even hears the muezzin’s call to prayer from the minarets, and

the lap of the water on the sands, and the chant of mariners in the vessels. Then up springs a cold air, and in a moment the picture is dissolved and exposes arid waste strewn with bones and utterly herbless. And the words of the woman produced some such an effect on the mind of Saltren. In a minute all the imaginations that had spun themselves out of the little bare fact, and overspread and disguised it, were riven and swept aside.

Captain Saltren stood turning the book about, and looking at the likeness of M. Emile Gaboriau on the cover; it bore not the faintest resemblance to the late Lord Lamerton. The book was headed "Gaboriau's Sensational novels, the Favourite Reading of Prince Bismarck, one shilling." And beneath the medallion was "The Gilded Clique." Sick at heart, with giddy head, Captain Saltren opened the book stained with water, and read, hardly knowing what he did, an advertisement that occupied the fly leaf – an advertisement of "Asiatic Berordnung," for the production of "whiskers, moustaches, and hair, and for the cure of baldness, and the renovation of ladies' scanty partings."

Was this the revelation which had been communicated to him? Was it this which had drawn him on into an ecstasy of fanatical faith which led him to the commission of an unprovoked crime?

Still half-stunned by his fear he read on. "Eminent authorities have expressed their entire approval of the valuable yet perfectly harmless nature of our discovery. In an age like this, when a youthful appearance is so against a young man, those without

beard or moustache being designated boys, and scanty hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes, so unproductive of admiration in the fair sex, the Asiatic Berordnung should be universally adopted. Price 1s. 6d.; full sized bottles 3s. 6d. each.”

Captain Saltren’s face was in colour like that of a corpse, he raised his eyes for a moment to Mrs. Kite, and saw the mocking laugh on her lips. He dropped them again, and said in a low voice; “Leave me alone, I cannot think upon what you have said till you are gone.”

“I will return to Chillacot and see the ruin,” she said.

“The ruin?” he repeated, “the ruin?” He had forgotten about his house, he was looking on a greater ruin than that, the desolation of a broken-down faith, and of prostrate self-confidence.

“Mind you do not risk going to the Owl’s Nest,” said Mrs. Kite; “you are not in condition for that, your knees scarce support you. Abide here and read your book, and see what comfort you can get out of it; a firm head and a steady foot is needed for that path.”

He made a sign to the woman to go; he shook as with the palsy; he put his hand to his head. A band as of iron was tightening about his temples. He could not endure to have Mrs. Kite there any longer. He would go mad unless left alone.

She hesitated for a moment, repeated her injunctions to him to stay where he was till her return, and then left.

He looked after her till she had disappeared, and for some

little while after she was gone he looked at the bushes that had closed behind her, fearing lest she should return; then he sank down on a heap of stones, put the book from him with a shudder, and buried his head in his hands.

The mirage was past, the dry and hideous reality remained, but Saltren had not as yet quite recovered from the impression of reality that mirage had produced on his mind. We cannot on waking from certain dreams drive them entirely from us, so that they in no way affect our conduct and influence our opinions. I know that sometimes I wake after having dreamed of some amiable and innocent person in an odious light, and though I fight against the impression all day, I cannot view that person without repugnance. Captain Saltren was aware that he had dreamed, that he had believed in the reality of the mirage conjured up by his fancy, had regarded that crimson-covered book as the revelation of the Everlasting Gospel, and though his mind assented to the fact that he had been deceived, he was unable to drive away the glamour of the delusion that clung to him.

I, who write this, know full well that I shall find readers, and encounter critics who will pronounce the case of Captain Saltren impossible; because in the London clubs and in country houses no such delusions are found. What! are we not all engaged in blowing soap-bubbles, in painting mirages, in spinning cobwebs? But then our soap-bubbles, our mirages, our cobwebs, in which we, unlike spiders, entangle ourselves, are not theological, but social and political. Do we not weave out of our own bowels

vast webs, and hang them up in the sight of all as substantial realities? And are we not surprised with paralysing amazement when we discover that the bubbles we have blown are not new created worlds, and our cobwebs are dissolved by a touch? I have seen in Innsbruck pictures painted on cobwebs of close texture, with infinite dexterity and patient toil. We not only spin our cobwebs, but paint on them, though I allow we do not picture on them sacred images. Why, my own path is strewn with these gossamer webs of my own weaving that never caught any other midge than my own insignificant self; me they entangled, they choked my windpipe, they filled my eyes, they clogged my ears. Look back, critical reader, at your own course, and see if it be not encumbered with such torn and trampled cobwebs. There is a great German book of nine volumes, each of over a thousand pages, and it is entitled "The History of Human Folly." Alas, it is not complete! It gives but the record of the inconceivable follies of a few most salient characters. But in our own towns, in our villages, in our immediate families, what histories of human folly there are unwritten, but well known, I go closer home – in our own lives there is a volume for every year recording our delusions and our inconsequences.

In our Latin grammars we learned "Nemo omnibus horis sapit," but that may be better rendered, "Quis non omnibus horis delirat?"

The anthropologist and antiquary delight in exploring the kitchen middens of a lost race, heaps of bones, and shells, and

broken potsherds rejected by a population that lived in pre-historic times. But, oh, what kitchen middens are about our own selves, at our own doors, of empty shells and dismarrowed bones of old convictions, old superstitions, old conceits, old ambitions, old hopes! Where is the meat? Where the nutriment? Nowhere, gone past recall; only the dead husks, and shells, and bones, and potsherds remain. Open your desk, pull out the secret drawer, and what are revealed? A dry flower – the refuse scrap of an old passion; a worthless voucher of a bad investment; a MS. poem which was refused by every magazine; a mother's Bible, monument of a dead belief. Go, turn over your own kitchen middens, and then come and argue with me that such a delusion as that of Captain Saltren is impossible. I tell you it is paralleled every year.

And now, sitting on the heap of stones, full of doubt, and yet not altogether a prey to despair, Captain Saltren took the red book again, and began to read it, first at the beginning, then turning to the middle, then looking to the end. Then he put it from him once more, and, with the cold sweat streaming over his face, he walked to the edge of the quarry, and there knelt down to pray. Had he been deceived? Was he not now subjected to a fiery trial of his faith – a last assault of the Evil One? This was indeed a possibility, and it was a possibility to which he clung desperately.

A little while ago we saw Giles Saltren humiliated and crushed, passing through the flame of disappointment and

disenchantment, the purgatorial flame that in this life tries every man. In that fire the young man's self-esteem and self-reliance had shrivelled up and been reduced to ash. And now his reputed father entered the same furnace.

He prayed and wrestled in spirit, wringing his hands, and with sweat and tears commingled streaming down his cheeks. He prayed that he might be given a token. He could not, he would not, accept the humiliation. He fought against it with all the powers of his soul and mind.

Then he stood up. He was resolved what to do. He would walk along the ledge of rock to the Owl's Nest, holding the red book in his hand instead of clinging to the ivy bands. If that book stayed him up and sustained him in equilibrium till he reached the Cave, then he would still believe in his mission, and the revelations that attended it. But if he had erred, why then —

Holding the book he began the perilous walk. He took three steps forward, and then the judgment was pronounced.

CHAPTER XLI.

SOCIAL SUICIDE

When Giles Saltren had left town to return to Orleigh his uncle remained with Arminell. The girl asked Mr. Welsh to leave her for half an hour to collect her thoughts and resolve on what she would do; and he went off to the British Museum to look at the marbles till he considered she had been allowed sufficient time to decide her course, and then he returned to the inn. She was ready for him, composed, seated on the sofa, pale, and dark under the eyes.

“Well, Miss Inglett,” said Welsh, “I’ve been studying the busts of the Roman Emperors and their wives, and imagining them dressed in our nineteenth-century costume; and, upon my word, I believe they would pass for ordinary English men and women. I believe dress has much to do with the determination of character. Conceive of Domitian in a light, modern summer suit – in that he could not be bloodthirsty and a tyrant. Imagine me in a toga, and you may imagine me committing any monstrosity. Dress does it. How about your affairs? Are you going to Aunt Hermione?”

“To Lady Hermione Woodhead?” corrected Arminell, with a touch of haughtiness. “No.”

“Then what will you do? I’ll take the liberty of a chair.” He seated himself. “I can’t get their busts out of my head – however,

go on.”

“Mr. Welsh, I wish to state to you exactly what I have done, and let you see how I am circumstanced. I have formed my own opinion as to what I must do, and I shall be glad afterwards to hear what you think of my determination. You have shown me kindness in coming here, and offering your help, and I am not so ungracious as to refuse to accept, to some extent, the help so readily offered.”

“I shall be proud, young lady.”

“Let me then proceed to tell you how stands the case, and then you will comprehend why I have taken my resolution. I ran away from home with your nephew, moved by a vague romantic dream, which, when I try to recall, partly escapes me, and appears to me now altogether absurd.”

“You were not dressed for the part,” threw in Welsh. “You could no more be the heroine in modern vest and the now fashionable hat, than I could commit the crimes of Cæsar in this suit.”

“In the first place,” pursued Arminell, disregarding the interruption, “I was filled with the spirit of unrest and discontent, which made me undervalue everything I had, and crave for and over-estimate everything I had not. With my mind ill at ease, I was ready to catch at whatever chance offered of escape from the vulgar round of daily life, and plunge into a new, heroic and exciting career. The chance came. Your nephew believed that he was my half-brother.”

“Young Jack-an-apes!” intercalated Welsh.

“That he was my dear father’s son by a former fictitious marriage with your sister Mrs. Saltren, I believed, as firmly as your nephew believed it; and I was extremely indignant with my poor father for what I thought was his dishonourable conduct in the matter, and for the hypocrisy of his after life. I thought that, if I ran away with your nephew, I would force him – I mean my lord – to acknowledge the tie, and so do an act of tardy justice to his son. Then, in the next place, I was filled with exalted ideas of what we ought to do in this world, that we were to be social knights errant, rambling about at our own free will, redressing wrongs, and I despised the sober virtues of my father, and the ordinary social duties, with the execution of which my step-mother filled up her life. I thought that a brilliant career was open to your nephew, and that I might take a share in it, that we would make ourselves names, and effect great things for the social regeneration of the age. It was all nonsense and moonshine. I see that clearly enough now. My wonder is that I did not see it before. But the step has been taken and cannot be recalled. I have broken with my family and with my class, I cannot ask to have links rewelded which I wilfully snapped, to be reinstalled in a place I deliberately vacated. Nemesis has overtaken me, and even the gods bow to Nemesis.”

“You are exaggerating,” interrupted Welsh; “you have, I admit, acted like a donkey – excuse the expression, no other is as forcible and as true – but I find no such irretrievable mischief

done as you suppose. Fortunately the mistake has been corrected at once. If you will go home, or to Lady Woodhead – ”

“Lady Hermione Woodhead,” corrected Arminell.

“Or to Lady Hermione Woodhead – all will be well. What might have been a catastrophe is averted.”

“No,” answered Arminell, “all will not be well. Excuse me if I flatly contradict you. There is something else you have not reckoned on, but which I must take into my calculations. I shall never forget what I have done, never forgive myself for having embittered the last moments of my dear father’s life, never for having thought unworthily of him, and let him see that he had lost my esteem. If I were to return home, now or later from my aunt’s house, I could not shake off the sense of self-reproach, of self-loathing which I now feel. There is one way, and one way only, in which I can recover my self-respect and peace of mind.”

“And that is – ?”

“By not going home.”

“Well – go to your aunt’s.”

“I should be there for a month, and after that must return to Orleigh. No – that is not possible. Do you not see that several reasons conspire against my taking that course?”

“Pray let me know them.”

“In the first place, it is certain to have leaked out that I ran away from home. My conduct will be talked about and commented on in Orleigh, in the county. It will become part of the scandal published in the society papers, and be read and

laughed over by the clerks and shop-girls who take in these papers, whose diet it is. Everywhere, in all classes, the story will be told how the Honourable Arminell Inglett, only daughter of Giles, tenth Baron Lamerton of Orleigh, and his first wife, the Lady Lucy Hele, daughter of the Earl of Anstey, had eloped with the son of a mining captain, the tutor to her half-brother, and how that they were discovered together in a little inn in Bloomsbury.”

“No,” said Welsh, impatiently. “If you will act as Jingles has suggested, this will never be known. He is back at Orleigh, or will be there this afternoon, and you will be at Portland Place, where your maid will find you. What more natural than that you should return to-morrow home, on account of your father’s death? As for the society papers – if they get an inkling of the real facts – I am connected with the press. I can snuff the light out. There are ways and means. Leave that to me.”

“But, Mr. Welsh, suppose that suspicion has been roused at Orleigh – Mrs. Cribbage has to be considered. That woman will not leave a stone unturned till she has routed out everything. I used to say that was why the finger ends were always out of her gloves. I would have to equivocate, and perhaps to lie, when asked point-blank questions which if answered would betray the truth. I would be putting my dear step-mother to the same inconvenience and humiliation.”

“Trust her wit and knowledge of the world to evade Mrs. Cribbage.”

“But I cannot. I have not the wit.”

Mr. Welsh was vexed, he stamped impatiently.

“I can’t follow you in this,” he said.

“Well, Mr. Welsh, then perhaps you may in what I give you as my next reason. I feel bound morally to take the consequences of my act. When a wretched girl flings herself over London Bridge, perhaps she feels a spasm of regret for the life she is throwing away, as the water closes over her, but she drowns all the same.”

“Not at all, when there are boats put forth to the rescue, and hands extended to haul her in.”

“To rescue her for what? – To be brought before a magistrate, and to have her miserable story published in the daily penny papers. Why, Mr. Welsh, her friends regret that her body was not rolled down into the deep sea, or smothered under a bed of Thames mud; that were better than the publication of her infamy.”

“What will you have?”

“I have made the plunge; I must go down.”

“Not if I can pull you out.”

“You cannot pull me out. I made my leap out of my social order. What I have done has been to commit social suicide. There is no recovery for me save at a cost which I refuse to pay. I have heard that those who have been half drowned suffer infinite agonies on the return of vitality. I shrink from these pains. I know what it would be were I fished up and thrown on my own shore again. I would tingle and smart in every fibre of my consciousness, and cry out to be cast in again. No, Mr.

Welsh, through youthful impetuosity and wrong-headedness I have jumped out of my social world, and I must abide by the consequences. As the Honourable Arminell Inglett I have ceased to exist. I die out of the peerage, die out of my order, die out of the recognition, though not the memory of my relatives. But I live on as plain Miss Inglett, one of the countless members of the great Middle Class.”

James Welsh looked at the girl with puzzlement in his face. Spots of flame had come into her pale cheeks, and to the temples, as she spoke, and she moved her slender fingers on her lap in her eagerness to make herself explicit and her difficulties intelligible.

“I don’t understand you, Miss Inglett. That is, I do not see what is your intention.”

“I mean that I have committed social suicide, and I do not wish to be saved either for my friends’ sake or for my own. I ask you kindly to get my death inserted in the *Times* and the other daily papers.”

“Your actual death?”

“A statement that on such a day died the Honourable Arminell Inglett, only daughter of the late Lord Lamerton. That will suffice; it proclaims to society that I have ceased to belong to it. Of course my dear step-mother and my aunt and the family solicitors shall know the truth. I have money that comes to me from my mother. A statement of my death in the *Times* will not constitute legal death, but it will suffice to establish my social death.”

“You are taking an extraordinary and unwarrantable course.”

“Extraordinary it may be, but not unwarranted. I have the justification within, in my conscience. When one has done that which is wrong, one is called to suffer for it, and the conscience is never cleansed and restored without expiating pains. If I were to return to Orleigh I would die morally, of that I am sure, because it would be a shirking of the consequences which my foolish act has brought down on me.”

“There may be something in that,” said Welsh.

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