

MISS DULANE AND MY LORD.

Part I.

TWO REMONSTRATIONS.

I.

ONE afternoon old Miss Dulane entered her drawing-room; ready to receive visitors, dressed in splendor, and exhibiting every outward appearance of a defiant frame of mind.

Just as a saucy bronze nymph on the mantelpiece struck the quarter to three on an elegant clock under her arm, a visitor was announced--"Mrs. Newsham."

Miss Dulane wore her own undisguised gray hair, dressed in perfect harmony with her time of life. Without an attempt at concealment, she submitted to be too short and too stout. Her appearance (if it had only been made to speak) would have said, in effect: "I am an old woman, and I scorn to disguise it."

Mrs. Newsham, tall and elegant, painted and dyed, acted on the opposite principle in dressing, which confesses nothing. On exhibition before the world, this lady's disguise asserted that she had reached her thirtieth year on her last birthday. Her husband was discreetly silent, and Father Time was discreetly silent: they both knew that her last birthday had happened thirty years since.

"Shall we talk of the weather and the news, my dear? Or shall we come to the object of your visit at once?" So Miss Dulane opened the interview.

"Your tone and manner, my good friend, are no doubt provoked by the report in the newspaper of this morning. In justice to you, I refuse to believe the report." So Mrs. Newsham adopted her friend's suggestion.

"Your kindness is thrown away, Elizabeth. The report is true."

"Matilda, you shock me!"

"Why?"

"At your age!"

"If he doesn't object to my age, what does it matter to you?"

"Don't speak of that man!"

"Why not?"

"He is young enough to be your son; and he is marrying you--impudently, undisguisedly marrying you--for your money!"

"And I am marrying him--impudently, undisguisedly marrying him--for his rank."

"You needn't remind me, Matilda, that you are the daughter of a tailor."

"In a week or two more, Elizabeth, I shall remind you that I am the wife of a nobleman's son."

"A younger son; don't forget that."

"A younger son, as you say. He finds the social position, and I find the money--half a million at my own sole disposal. My future husband is a good fellow in his way, and his future wife is another good fellow in her way. To look at your grim face, one would suppose there were no such things in the world as marriages of convenience."

"Not at your time of life. I tell you plainly, your marriage will be a public scandal."

"That doesn't frighten us," Miss Dulane remarked. "We are resigned to every ill-natured thing that our friends can say of us. In course of time, the next nine days' wonder will claim public attention, and we shall be forgotten. I shall be none the less on that account Lady Howel Beaucourt. And my husband will be happy in the enjoyment of every expensive taste which a poor man can gratify, for the first time in his life. Have you any more objections to make? Don't hesitate to speak plainly."

"I have a question to ask, my dear."

"Charmed, I am sure, to answer it--if I can."

"Am I right in supposing that Lord Howel Beaucourt is about half your age?"

"Yes, dear; my future husband is as nearly as possible half as old as I am."

Mrs. Newsham's uneasy virtue shuddered. "What a profanation of marriage!" she exclaimed.

"Nothing of the sort," her friend pronounced positively. "Marriage, by the law of England (as my lawyer tells me), is nothing but a contract. Who ever heard of profaning a contract?"

"Call it what you please, Matilda. Do you expect to live a happy life, at your age, with a young man for your husband?"

"A happy life," Miss Dulane repeated, "because it will be an innocent life." She laid a certain emphasis on the last word but one.

Mrs. Newsham resented the emphasis, and rose to go. Her last words were the bitterest words that she had spoken yet.

"You have secured such a truly remarkable husband, my dear, that I am emboldened to ask a great favor. Will you give me his lordship's photograph?"

"No," said Miss Dulane, "I won't give you his lordship's photograph."

"What is your objection, Matilda?"

"A very serious objection, Elizabeth. You are not pure enough in mind to be worthy of my husband's photograph."

With that reply the first of the remonstrances assumed hostile proportions, and came to an untimely end.

II.

THE second remonstrance was reserved for a happier fate. It took its rise in a conversation between two men who were old and true friends. In other words, it led to no quarreling.

The elder man was one of those admirable human beings who are cordial, gentle, and good-tempered, without any conscious exercise of their own virtues. He was generally known in the world about him by a fond and familiar use of his Christian name. To call him "Sir Richard" in these pages (except in the character of one of his servants) would be simply ridiculous. When he lent his money, his horses, his house, and (sometimes, after unlucky friends had dropped to the lowest social depths) even his clothes, this general benefactor was known, in the best society and the worst society alike, as "Dick." He filled the hundred mouths of Rumor with his nickname, in the days when there was an opera in London, as the proprietor of the "Beauty-box." The ladies who occupied the box were all invited under the same circumstances. They enjoyed operatic music; but their husbands and fathers were not rich enough to be able to gratify that expensive taste. Dick's carriage called for them, and took them home again; and the beauties all agreed (if he ever married) that Mrs. Dick would be the most enviable woman on the face of the civilized earth. Even the false reports, which declared that he was privately married already, and on bad terms with his wife, slandered him cordially under the popular name. And his intimate companions, when they alluded among each other to a romance in his life which would remain a hidden romance to the end of his days, forgot that the occasion justified a serious and severe use of his surname, and blamed him affectionately as "poor dear Dick."

The hour was midnight; and the friends, whom the most hospitable of men delighted to assemble round his dinner-table, had taken their leave with the exception of one guest specially detained by the host, who led him back to the dining-room.

"You were angry with our friends," Dick began, "when they asked you about that report of your marriage. You won't be angry with Me. Are you really going to be the old maid's husband?"

This plain question received a plain reply: "Yes, I am."

Dick took the young lord's hand. Simply and seriously, he said: "Accept my

congratulations."

Howel Beaucourt started as if he had received a blow instead of a compliment.

"There isn't another man or woman in the whole circle of my acquaintance," he declared, "who would have congratulated me on marrying Miss Dulane. I believe you would make allowances for me if I had committed murder."

"I hope I should," Dick answered gravely. "When a man is my friend--murder or marriage--I take it for granted that he has a reason for what he does. Wait a minute. You mustn't give me more credit than I deserve. I don't agree with you. If I were a marrying man myself, I shouldn't pick an old maid--I should prefer a young one. That's a matter of taste. You are not like me. You always have a definite object in view. I may not know what the object is. Never mind! I wish you joy all the same."

Beaucourt was not unworthy of the friendship he had inspired. "I should be ungrateful indeed," he said, "if I didn't tell you what my object is. You know that I am poor?"

"The only poor friend of mine," Dick remarked, "who has never borrowed money of me."

Beaucourt went on without noticing this. "I have three expensive tastes," he said. "I want to get into Parliament; I want to have a yacht; I want to collect pictures. Add, if you like, the selfish luxury of helping poverty and wretchedness, and hearing my conscience tell me what an excellent man I am. I can't do all this on five hundred a year--but I can do it on forty times five hundred a year. Moral: marry Miss Dulane."

Listening attentively until the other had done, Dick showed a sardonic side to his character never yet discovered in Beaucourt's experience of him.

"I suppose you have made the necessary arrangements," he said. "When the old lady releases you, she will leave consolation behind her in her will."

"That's the first ill-natured thing I ever heard you say, Dick. When the old lady dies, my sense of honor takes fright, and turns its back on her will. It's a condition on my side, that every farthing of her money shall be left to her relations."

"Don't you call yourself one of them?"

"What a question! Am I her relation because the laws of society force a mock marriage on us? How can I make use of her money unless I am her husband? and how can she make use of my title unless she is my wife? As long as she lives I stand honestly by my side of the bargain. But when she dies the transaction is at an end, and the surviving partner returns to his five hundred a year."

Dick exhibited another surprising side to his character. The most compliant of men now became as obstinate as the proverbial mule.

"All very well," he said, "but it doesn't explain why--if you must sell yourself--you have sold yourself to an old lady. There are plenty of young ones and pretty ones with fortunes to tempt you. It seems odd that you haven't tried your luck with one of them."

"No, Dick. It would have been odd, and worse than odd, if I had tried my luck with a young woman."

"I don't see that."

"You shall see it directly. If I marry an old woman for her money, I have no occasion to be a hypocrite; we both know that our marriage is a mere matter of form. But if I make a young woman my wife because I want her money, and if that young woman happens to be worth a straw, I must deceive her and disgrace myself by shamming love. That, my boy, you may depend upon it, I will never do."

Dick's face suddenly brightened with a mingled expression of relief and triumph.

"Ha! my mercenary friend," he burst out, "there's something mixed up in this business which is worthier of you than anything I have heard yet. Stop! I'm going to be clever for the first time in my life. A man who talks of love as you do, must have felt love himself. Where is the young one and the pretty one? And what has she done, poor dear, to be deserted for an old woman? Good God! how you look at me! I have hurt your feelings--I have been a greater fool than ever--I am more ashamed of myself than words can say!"

Beaucourt stopped him there, gently and firmly.

"You have made a very natural mistake," he said. "There was a young lady. She has refused me--absolutely refused me. There is no more love in my life."

It's a dark life and an empty life for the rest of my days. I must see what money can do for me next. When I have thoroughly hardened my heart I may not feel my misfortune as I feel it now. Pity me or despise me. In either case let us say goodnight."

He went out into the hall and took his hat. Dick went out into the hall and took his hat.

"Have your own way," he answered, "I mean to have mine--I'll go home with you."

The man was simply irresistible. Beaucourt sat down resignedly on the nearest of the hall chairs. Dick asked him to return to the dining-room. "No," he said; "it's not worth while. What I can tell you may be told in two minutes." Dick submitted, and took the next of the hall chairs. In that inappropriate place the young lord's unpremeditated confession was forced out of him, by no more formidable exercise of power than the kindness of his friend.

"When you hear where I met with her," he began, "you will most likely not want to hear any more. I saw her, for the first time, on the stage of a music hall."

He looked at Dick. Perfectly quiet and perfectly impenetrable, Dick only said, "Go on." Beaucourt continued in these words:

"She was singing Arne's delicious setting of Ariel's song in the 'Tempest,' with a taste and feeling completely thrown away on the greater part of the audience. That she was beautiful--in my eyes at least--I needn't say. That she had descended to a sphere unworthy of her and new to her, nobody could doubt. Her modest dress, her refinement of manner, seemed rather to puzzle than to please most of the people present; they applauded her, but not very warmly, when she retired. I obtained an introduction through her music-master, who happened to be acquainted professionally with some relatives of mine. He told me that she was a young widow; and he assured me that the calamity through which her family had lost their place in the world had brought no sort of disgrace on them. If I wanted to know more, he referred me to the lady herself. I found her very reserved. A long time passed before I could win her confidence--and a longer time still before I ventured to confess the feeling with which she had inspired me. You know the rest."

"You mean, of course, that you offered her marriage?"

"Certainly."

"And she refused you on account of your position in life."

"No. I had foreseen that obstacle, and had followed the example of the adventurous nobleman in the old story. Like him, I assumed a name, and presented myself as belonging to her own respectable middle class of life. You are too old a friend to suspect me of vanity if I tell you that she had no objection to me, and no suspicion that I had approached her (personally speaking) under a disguise."

"What motive could she possibly have had for refusing you?" Dick asked.

"A motive associated with her dead husband," Beaucourt answered. "He had married her--mind, innocently married her--while his first wife was living. The woman was an inveterate drunkard; they had been separated for years. Her death had been publicly reported in the newspapers, among the persons killed in a railway accident abroad. When she claimed her unhappy husband he was in delicate health. The shock killed him. His widow--I can't, and won't, speak of her misfortune as if it was her fault--knew of no living friends who were in a position to help her. Not a great artist with a wonderful voice, she could still trust to her musical accomplishments to provide for the necessities of life. Plead as I might with her to forget the past, I always got the same reply: 'If I was base enough to let myself be tempted by the happy future that you offer, I should deserve the unmerited disgrace which has fallen on me. Marry a woman whose reputation will bear inquiry, and forget me.' I was mad enough to press my suit once too often. When I visited her on the next day she was gone. Every effort to trace her has failed. Lost, my friend--irretrievably lost to me!"

He offered his hand and said good-night. Dick held him back on the doorstep.

"Break off your mad engagement to Miss Dulane," he said. "Be a man, Howel; wait and hope! You are throwing away your life when happiness is within your reach, if you will only be patient. That poor young creature is worthy of you. Lost? Nonsense! In this narrow little world people are never hopelessly lost till they are dead and underground. Help me to recognize her by a description, and tell me her name. I'll find her; I'll persuade her to come back to you--and, mark my words, you will live to bless the day when you followed my advice."

This well-meant remonstrance was completely thrown away. Beaucourt's

despair was deaf to every entreaty that Dick had addressed to him. "Thank you with all my heart," he said. "You don't know her as I do. She is one of the very few women who mean No when they say No. Useless, Dick-- useless!"

Those were the last words he said to his friend in the character of a single man.

Part II

PLATONIC MARRIAGE.

III.

"SEVEN months have passed, my dear Dick, since my 'inhuman obstinacy' (those were the words you used) made you one of the witnesses at my marriage to Miss Dulane, sorely against your will. Do you remember your parting prophecy when you were out of the bride's hearing? 'A miserable life is before that woman's husband--and, by Jupiter, he has deserved it!'

"Never, my dear boy, attempt to forecast the future again. Viewed as a prophet you are a complete failure. I have nothing to complain of in my married life.

"But you must not mistake me. I am far from saying that I am a happy man; I only declare myself to be a contented man. My old wife is a marvel of good temper and good sense. She trusts me implicitly, and I have given her no reason to regret it. We have our time for being together, and our time for keeping apart. Within our inevitable limits we understand each other and respect each other, and have a truer feeling of regard on both sides than many people far better matched than we are in point of age. But you shall judge for yourself. Come and dine with us, when I return on Wednesday next from the trial trip of my new yacht. In the meantime I have a service to ask of you.

"My wife's niece has been her companion for years. She has left us to be married to an officer, who has taken her to India; and we are utterly at a loss how to fill her place. The good old lady doesn't want much. A nice-tempered refined girl, who can sing and play to her with some little taste and feeling, and read to her now and then when her eyes are weary--there is what we require; and there, it seems, is more than we can get, after advertising for a week past. Of all the 'companions' who have presented themselves, not one has turned out to be the sort of person whom Lady Howel wants.

"Can you help us? In any case, my wife sends you her kind remembrances;

and (true to the old times) I add my love."

On the day which followed the receipt of this letter, Dick paid a visit to Lady Howel Beaucourt.

"You seem to be excited," she said. "Has anything remarkable happened?"

"Pardon me if I ask a question first," Dick replied. "Do you object to a young widow?"

"That depends on the widow."

"Then I have found the very person you want. And, oddly enough, your husband has had something to do with it."

"Do you mean that my husband has recommended her?"

There was an undertone of jealousy in Lady Howel's voice---jealousy excited not altogether without a motive. She had left it to Beaucourt's sense of honor to own the truth, if there had been any love affair in his past life which ought to make him hesitate before he married. He had justified Miss Dulane's confidence in him; acknowledging an attachment to a young widow, and adding that she had positively refused him. "We have not met since," he said, "and we shall never meet again." Under those circumstances, Miss Dulane had considerably abstained from asking for any further details. She had not thought of the young widow again, until Dick's language had innocently inspired her first doubt. Fortunately for both of them, he was an outspoken man; and he reassured her unreservedly in these words: "Your husband knows nothing about it."

"Now," she said, "you may tell me how you came to hear of the lady."

"Through my uncle's library," Dick replied. "His will has left me his collection of books--in such a wretchedly neglected condition that I asked Beaucourt (not being a reading man myself) if he knew of any competent person who could advise me how to set things right. He introduced me to Farleigh & Halford, the well-known publishers. The second partner is a book collector himself, as well as a bookseller. He kindly looks in now and then, to see how his instructions for mending and binding are being carried out. When he called yesterday I thought of you, and I found he could help us to a young lady employed in his office at correcting proof sheets."

"What is the lady's name?"

"Mrs. Evelin."

"Why does she leave her employment?"

"To save her eyes, poor soul. When the senior partner, Mr. Farleigh, met with her, she was reduced by family misfortunes to earn her own living. The publishers would have been only too glad to keep her in their office, but for the oculist's report. He declared that she would run the risk of blindness, if she fatigued her weak eyes much longer. There is the only objection to this otherwise invaluable person--she will not be able to read to you."

"Can she sing and play?"

"Exquisitely. Mr. Farleigh answers for her music."

"And her character?"

"Mr. Halford answers for her character."

"And her manners?"

"A perfect lady. I have seen her and spoken to her; I answer for her manners, and I guarantee her personal appearance. Charming--charming!"

For a moment Lady Howel hesitated. After a little reflection, she decided that it was her duty to trust her excellent husband. "I will receive the charming widow," she said, "to-morrow at twelve o'clock; and, if she produces the right impression, I promise to overlook the weakness of her eyes."

IV.

BEAUCOURT had prolonged the period appointed for the trial trip of his yacht by a whole week. His apology when he returned delighted the kind-hearted old lady who had made him a present of the vessel.

"There isn't such another yacht in the whole world," he declared. "I really hadn't the heart to leave that beautiful vessel after only three days experience of her." He burst out with a torrent of technical praises of the yacht, to which his wife listened as attentively as if she really understood what he was talking about. When his breath and his eloquence were exhausted alike, she said, "Now, my dear, it's my turn. I can match your perfect vessel with my perfect lady."

"What! you have found a companion?"

"Yes."

"Did Dick find her for you?"

"He did indeed. You shall see for yourself how grateful I ought to be to your friend."

She opened a door which led into the next room. "Mary, my dear, come and be introduced to my husband."

Beaucourt started when he heard the name, and instantly recovered himself. He had forgotten how many Marys there are in the world.

Lady Howel returned, leading her favorite by the hand, and gayly introduced her the moment they entered the room.

"Mrs. Evelin; Lord--"

She looked at her husband. The utterance of his name was instantly suspended on her lips. Mrs. Evelin's hand, turning cold at the same moment in her hand, warned her to look round. The face of the woman more than reflected the inconceivable agitation in the face of the man.

The wife's first words, when she recovered herself, were addressed to them both.

"Which of you can I trust," she asked, "to tell me the truth?"

"You can trust both of us," her husband answered.

The firmness of his tone irritated her. "I will judge of that for myself," she said. "Go back to the next room," she added, turning to Mrs. Evelin; "I will hear you separately."

The companion, whose duty it was to obey--whose modesty and gentleness had won her mistress's heart--refused to retire.

"No," she said; "I have been deceived too. I have my right to hear what Lord Howel has to say for himself."

Beaucourt attempted to support the claim that she had advanced. His wife sternly signed to him to be silent. "What do you mean?" she said, addressing the question to Mrs. Evelin.

"I mean this. The person whom you speak of as a nobleman was presented to me as 'Mr. Vincent, an artist.' But for that deception I should never have set foot in your ladyship's house."

"Is this true, my lord?" Lady Howel asked, with a contemptuous emphasis on the title of nobility.

"Quite true," her husband answered. "I thought it possible that my rank might prove an obstacle in the way of my hopes. The blame rests on me, and on me alone. I ask Mrs. Evelin to pardon me for an act of deception which I deeply regret."

Lady Howel was a just woman. Under other circumstances she might have shown herself to be a generous woman. That brighter side of her character was incapable of revealing itself in the presence of Mrs. Evelin, young and beautiful, and in possession of her husband's heart. She could say, "I beg your pardon, madam; I have not treated you justly." But no self-control was strong enough to restrain the next bitter words from passing her lips. "At my age," she said, "Lord Howel will soon be free; you will not have long to wait for him."

The young widow looked at her sadly--answered her sadly.

"Oh, my lady, your better nature will surely regret having said that!"

For a moment her eyes rested on Beaucourt, dim with rising tears. She left the room--and left the house.

There was silence between the husband and wife. Beaucourt was the first to speak again.

"After what you have just heard, do you persist in your jealousy of that lady, and your jealousy of me?" he asked.

"I have behaved cruelly to her and to you. I am ashamed of myself," was all she said in reply. That expression of sorrow, so simple and so true, did not appeal in vain to the gentler side of Beaucourt's nature. He kissed his wife's hand; he tried to console her.

"You may forgive me," she answered. "I cannot forgive myself. That poor lady's last words have made my heart ache. What I said to her in anger I ought to have said generously. Why should she not wait for you? After your life with me--a life of kindness, a life of self-sacrifice--you deserve your reward. Promise me that you will marry the woman you love--after my death has released you."

"You distress me, and needlessly distress me," he said. "What you are thinking of, my dear, can never happen; no, not even if--" He left the rest unsaid.

"Not even if you were free?" she asked.

"Not even then."

She looked toward the next room. "Go in, Howel, and bring Mrs. Evelin back; I have something to say to her."

The discovery that she had left the house caused no fear that she had taken to flight with the purpose of concealing herself. There was a prospect before the poor lonely woman which might be trusted to preserve her from despair, to say the least of it.

During her brief residence in Beaucourt's house she had shown to Lady Howel a letter received from a relation, who had emigrated to New Zealand with her husband and her infant children some years since. They had steadily prospered; they were living in comfort, and they wanted for nothing but a trustworthy governess to teach their children. The mother had

accordingly written, asking if her relative in England could recommend a competent person, and offering a liberal salary. In showing the letter to Lady Howel, Mrs. Evelin had said: "If I had not been so happy as to attract your notice, I might have offered to be the governess myself."

Assuming that it had now occurred to her to act on this idea, Lady Howel felt assured that she would apply for advice either to the publishers who had recommended her, or to Lord Howel's old friend.

Beaucourt at once offered to make the inquiries which might satisfy his wife that she had not been mistaken. Readily accepting his proposal, she asked at the same time for a few minutes of delay.

"I want to say to you," she explained, "what I had in my mind to say to Mrs. Evelin. Do you object to tell me why she refused to marry you? I couldn't have done it in her place."

"You would have done it, my dear, as I think, if her misfortune had been your misfortune." With those prefatory words he told the miserable story of Mrs. Evelin's marriage.

Lady Howel's sympathies, strongly excited, appeared to have led her to a conclusion which she was not willing to communicate to her husband. She asked him, rather abruptly, if he would leave it to her to find Mrs. Evelin. "I promise," she added, "to tell you what I am thinking of, when I come back."

In two minutes more she was ready to go out, and had hurriedly left the house.

V.

AFTER a long absence Lady Howel returned, accompanied by Dick. His face and manner betrayed unusual agitation; Beaucourt noticed it.

"I may well be excited," Dick declared, "after what I have heard, and after what we have done. Lady Howel, yours is the brain that thinks to some purpose. Make our report--I wait for you."

But my lady preferred waiting for Dick. He consented to speak first, for the thoroughly characteristic reason that he could "get over it in no time."

"I shall try the old division," he said, "into First, Second, and Third. Don't be afraid; I am not going to preach--quite the contrary; I am going to be quick about it. First, then, Mrs. Evelin has decided, under sound advice, to go to New Zealand. Second, I have telegraphed to her relations at the other end of the world to tell them that she is coming. Third, and last, Farleigh & Halford have sent to the office, and secured a berth for her in the next ship that sails--date the day after to-morrow. Done in half a minute. Now, Lady Howel!"

"I will begin and end in half a minute too," she said, "if I can. First," she continued, turning to her husband, "I found Mrs. Evelin at your friend's house. She kindly let me say all that I could say for the relief of my poor heart. Secondly--"

She hesitated, smiled uneasily, and came to a full stop.

"I can't do it, Howel," she confessed; "I speak to you as usual, or I can never get on. Saying many things in few words--if the ladies who assert our rights will forgive me for confessing it--is an accomplishment in which we are completely beaten by the men. You must have thought me rude, my dear, for leaving you very abruptly, without a word of explanation. The truth is, I had an idea in my head, and I kept it to myself (old people are proverbially cautious, you know) till I had first found out whether it was worth mentioning. When you were speaking of the wretched creature who had claimed Mrs. Evelin's husband as her own, you said she was an inveterate drunkard. A woman in that state of degradation is capable, as I persist in thinking, of any wickedness. I suppose this put it into my head to doubt her--no; I mean, to wonder whether Mr. Evelin--do you know that she keeps her husband's name by his own entreaty addressed to her on his deathbed?--"

-oh, I am losing myself in a crowd of words of my own collecting! Say the rest of it for me, Sir Richard!"

"No, Lady Howel. Not unless you call me 'Dick.'"

"Then say it for me--Dick."

"No, not yet, on reflection. Dick is too short, say 'Dear Dick.'"

"Dear Dick--there!"

"Thank you, my lady. Now we had better remember that your husband is present." He turned to Beaucourt. "Lady Howel had the idea," he proceeded, "which ought to have presented itself to you and to me. It was a serious misfortune (as she thought) that Mr. Evelin's sufferings in his last illness, and his wife's anxiety while she was nursing him, had left them unfit to act in their own defense. They might otherwise not have submitted to the drunken wretch's claim, without first making sure that she had a right to advance it. Taking her character into due consideration, are we quite certain that she was herself free to marry, when Mr. Evelin unfortunately made her his wife? To that serious question we now mean to find an answer. With Mrs. Evelin's knowledge of the affair to help us, we have discovered the woman's address, to begin with. She keeps a small tobacconist's shop at the town of Grailey in the north of England. The rest is in the hands of my lawyer. If we make the discovery that we all hope for, we have your wife to thank for it." He paused, and looked at his watch. "I've got an appointment at the club. The committee will blackball the best fellow that ever lived if I don't go and stop them. Good-by."

The last day of Mrs. Evelin's sojourn in England was memorable in more ways than one.

On the first occasion in Beaucourt's experience of his married life, his wife wrote to him instead of speaking to him, although they were both in the house at the time. It was a little note only containing these words: "I thought you would like to say good-by to Mrs. Evelin. I have told her to expect you in the library, and I will take care that you are not disturbed."

Waiting at the window of her sitting-room, on the upper floor, Lady Howel perceived that the delicate generosity of her conduct had been gratefully felt. The interview in the library barely lasted for five minutes. She saw Mrs. Evelin leave the house with her veil down. Immediately afterward, Beaucourt ascended to his wife's room to thank her. Carefully as he had endeavored to

hide them, the traces of tears in his eyes told her how cruelly the parting scene had tried him. It was a bitter moment for his admirable wife. "Do you wish me dead?" she asked with sad self-possession. "Live," he said, "and live happily, if you wish to make me happy too." He drew her to him and kissed her forehead. Lady Howel had her reward.

Part III.

NEWS FROM THE COLONY.

VI.

FURNISHED with elaborate instructions to guide him, which included golden materials for bribery, a young Jew holding the place of third clerk in the office of Dick's lawyer was sent to the town of Grailey to make discoveries. In the matter of successfully instituting private inquiries, he was justly considered to be a match for any two Christians who might try to put obstacles in his way. His name was Moses Jackling.

Entering the cigar-shop, the Jew discovered that he had presented himself at a critical moment.

A girl and a man were standing behind the counter. The girl looked like a maid-of-all-work: she was rubbing the tears out of her eyes with a big red fist. The man, smart in manner and shabby in dress, received the stranger with a peremptory eagerness to do business. "Now, then! what for you?" Jackling bought the worst cigar he had ever smoked, in the course of an enormous experience of bad tobacco, and tried a few questions with this result. The girl had lost her place; the man was in "possession"; and the stock and furniture had been seized for debt. Jackling thereupon assumed the character of a creditor, and ask to speak with the mistress.

"She's too ill to see you, sir," the girl said.

"Tell the truth, you fool," cried the man in possession. He led the way to a door with a glass in the upper part of it, which opened into a parlor behind the shop. As soon as his back was turned, Jackling whispered to the maid, "When I go, slip out after me; I've got something for you." The man lifted the curtain over the glass. "Look through," he said, "and see what's the matter with her for yourself."

Jackling discovered the mistress flat on her back on the floor, helplessly drunk. That was enough for the clerk--so far. He took leave of the man in possession, with the one joke which never wears out in the estimation of

Englishmen; the joke that foresees the drinker's headache in the morning. In a minute or two more the girl showed herself, carrying an empty jug. She had been sent for the man's beer, and she was expected back directly. Jackling, having first overwhelmed her by a present of five shillings, proposed another appointment in the evening. The maid promised to be at the place of meeting; and in memory of the five shillings she kept her word.

"What wages do you get?" was the first question that astonished her.

"Three pounds a year, sir," the unfortunate creature replied.

"All paid?"

"Only one pound paid--and I say it's a crying shame."

"Say what you like, my dear, so long as you listen to me. I want to know everything that your mistress says and does--first when she's drunk, and then when she's sober. Wait a bit; I haven't done yet. If you tell me everything you can remember--mind everything--I'll pay the rest of your wages."

Madly excited by this golden prospect, the victim of domestic service answered inarticulately with a scream. Jackling's right hand and left hand entered his pockets, and appeared again holding two sovereigns separately between two fingers and thumbs. From that moment, he was at liberty to empty the maid-of-all-work's memory of every saying and doing that it contained.

The sober moments of the mistress yielded little or nothing to investigation. The report of her drunken moments produced something worth hearing. There were two men whom it was her habit to revile bitterly in her cups. One of them was Mr. Evelin, whom she abused--sometimes for the small allowance that he made to her; sometimes for dying before she could prosecute him for bigamy. Her drunken remembrances of the other man were associated with two names. She called him "Septimus"; she called him "Darts"; and she despised him occasionally for being a "common sailor." It was clearly demonstrated that he was one man, and not two. Whether he was "Septimus," or whether he was "Darts," he had always committed the same atrocities. He had taken her money away from her; he had called her by an atrocious name; and he had knocked her down on more than one occasion. Provided with this information, Jackling rewarded the girl, and paid a visit to her mistress the next day.

The miserable woman was exactly in the state of nervous prostration (after the excess of the previous evening) which offered to the clerk his best chance of gaining his end. He presented himself as the representative of friends, bent on helping her, whose modest benevolence had positively forbidden him to mention their names.

"What sum of money must you pay," he asked, "to get rid of the man in possession?"

Too completely bewildered to speak, her trembling hand offered to him a slip of paper on which the amount of the debt and the expenses was set forth: L51 12s. 10d.

With some difficulty the Jew preserved his gravity. "Very well," he resumed. "I will make it up to sixty pounds (to set you going again) on two conditions."

She suddenly recovered her power of speech. "Give me the money!" she cried, with greedy impatience of delay.

"First condition," he continued, without noticing the interruption: "you are not to suffer, either in purse or person, if you give us the information that we want."

She interrupted him again. "Tell me what it is, and be quick about it."

"Second condition," he went on as impenetrably as ever; "you take me to the place where I can find the certificate of your marriage to Septimus Darts."

Her eyes glared at him like the eyes of a wild animal. Furies, hysterics, faintings, denials, threats--Jackling endured them all by turns. It was enough for him that his desperate guess of the evening before, had hit the mark on the morning after. When she had completely exhausted herself he returned to the experiment which he had already tried with the maid. Well aware of the advantage of exhibiting gold instead of notes, when the object is to tempt poverty, he produced the promised bribe in sovereigns, pouring them playfully backward and forward from one big hand to the other.

The temptation was more than the woman could resist. In another half-hour the two were traveling together to a town in one of the midland counties.

The certificate was found in the church register, and duly copied.

It also appeared that one of the witnesses to the marriage was still living.

His name and address were duly noted in the clerk's pocketbook. Subsequent inquiry, at the office of the Customs Comptroller, discovered the name of Septimus Darts on the captain's official list of the crew of an outward bound merchant vessel. With this information, and with a photographic portrait to complete it, the man was discovered, alive and hearty, on the return of the ship to her port.

His wife's explanation of her conduct included the customary excuse that she had every reason to believe her husband to be dead, and was followed by a bold assertion that she had married Mr. Evelin for love. In Moses Jackling's opinion she lied when she said this, and lied again when she threatened to prosecute Mr. Evelin for bigamy. "Take my word for it," said this new representative of the unbelieving Jew, "she would have extorted money from him if he had lived." Delirium tremens left this question unsettled, and closed the cigar shop soon afterward, under the authority of death.

The good news, telegraphed to New Zealand, was followed by a letter containing details.

At a later date, a telegram arrived from Mrs. Evelin. She had reached her destination, and had received the dispatch which told her that she had been lawfully married. A letter to Lady Howel was promised by the next mail.

While the necessary term of delay was still unexpired, the newspapers received the intelligence of a volcanic eruption in the northern island of the New Zealand group. Later particulars, announcing a terrible destruction of life and property, included the homestead in which Mrs. Evelin was living. The farm had been overwhelmed, and every member of the household had perished.

Part IV.

THE NIGHT NURSE.

VII.

Indorsed as follows: "Reply from Sir Richard, addressed to Farleigh & Halford."

"Your courteous letter has been forwarded to my house in the country.

"I really regret that you should have thought it necessary to apologize for troubling me. Your past kindness to the unhappy Mrs. Evelin gives you a friendly claim on me which I gladly recognize--as you shall soon see.

"The extraordinary story,' as you very naturally call it, is nevertheless true. I am the only person now at your disposal who can speak as an eye-witness of the events.

"In the first place I must tell you that the dreadful intelligence, received from New Zealand, had an effect on Lord Howel Beaucourt which shocked his friends and inexpressibly distressed his admirable wife. I can only describe him, at that time, as a man struck down in mind and body alike.

"Lady Howel was unremitting in her efforts to console him. He was thankful and gentle. It was true that no complaint could be made of him. It was equally true that no change for the better rewarded the devotion of his wife.

"The state of feeling which this implied imbittered the disappointment that Lady Howel naturally felt. As some relief to her overburdened mind, she associated herself with the work of mercy, carried on under the superintendence of the rector of the parish. I thought he was wrong in permitting a woman, at her advanced time of life, to run the risk encountered in visiting the sick and suffering poor at their own dwelling-places. Circumstances, however, failed to justify my dread of the perilous influences of infection and foul air. The one untoward event that happened, seemed to be too trifling to afford any cause for anxiety. Lady Howel caught cold.

"Unhappily, she treated that apparently trivial accident with indifference. Her husband tried in vain to persuade her to remain at home. On one of her charitable visits she was overtaken by a heavy fall of rain; and a shivering fit seized her on returning to the house. At her age the results were serious. A bronchial attack followed. In a week more, the dearest and best of women had left us nothing to love but the memory of the dead.

"Her last words were faintly whispered to me in her husband's presence: 'Take care of him,' the dying woman said, 'when I am gone.'

"No effort of mine to be worthy of that sacred trust was left untried. How could I hope to succeed where she had failed? My house in London and my house in the country were both open to Beaucourt; I entreated him to live with me, or (if he preferred it) to be my guest for a short time only, or (if he wished to be alone) to choose the place of abode which he liked best for his solitary retreat. With sincere expressions of gratitude, his inflexible despair refused my proposals.

"In one of the ancient 'Inns,' built centuries since for the legal societies of London, he secluded himself from friends and acquaintances alike. One by one, they were driven from his dreary chambers by a reception which admitted them with patient resignation and held out little encouragement to return. After an interval of no great length, I was the last of his friends who intruded on his solitude.

"Poor Lady Howel's will (excepting some special legacies) had left her fortune to me in trust, on certain conditions with which it is needless to trouble you. Beaucourt's resolution not to touch a farthing of his dead wife's money laid a heavy responsibility on my shoulders; the burden being ere long increased by forebodings which alarmed me on the subject of his health.

"He devoted himself to the reading of old books, treating (as I was told) of that branch of useless knowledge generally described as 'occult science.' These unwholesome studies so absorbed him, that he remained shut up in his badly ventilated chambers for weeks together, without once breathing the outer air even for a few minutes. Such defiance of the ordinary laws of nature as this could end but in one way; his health steadily declined and feverish symptoms showed themselves. The doctor said plainly, 'There is no chance for him if he stays in this place.'

"Once more he refused to be removed to my London house. The development of the fever, he reminded me, might lead to consequences dangerous to me

and to my household. He had heard of one of the great London hospitals, which reserved certain rooms for the occupation of persons capable of paying for the medical care bestowed on them. If he were to be removed at all, to that hospital he would go. Many advantages, and no objections of importance, were presented by this course of proceeding. We conveyed him to the hospital without a moment's loss of time.

"When I think of the dreadful illness that followed, and when I recall the days of unrelieved suspense passed at the bedside, I have not courage enough to dwell on this part of my story. Besides, you know already that Beaucourt recovered--or, as I might more correctly describe it, that he was snatched back to life when the grasp of death was on him. Of this happier period of his illness I have something to say which may surprise and interest you.

"On one of the earlier days of his convalescence my visit to him was paid later than usual. A matter of importance, neglected while he was in danger, had obliged me to leave town for a few days, after there was nothing to be feared. Returning, I had missed the train which would have brought me to London in better time.

"My appearance evidently produced in Beaucourt a keen feeling of relief. He requested the day nurse, waiting in the room, to leave us by ourselves.

"I was afraid you might not have come to me to-day,' he said. 'My last moments would have been embittered, my friend, by your absence.'

"Are you anticipating your death,' I asked, 'at the very time when the doctors answer for your life?'

"The doctors have not seen her,' he said; 'I saw her last night.'

"Of whom are you speaking?'

"Of my lost angel, who perished miserably in New Zealand. Twice her spirit has appeared to me. I shall see her for the third time, tonight; I shall follow her to the better world.'

"Had the delirium of the worst time of the fever taken possession of him again? In unutterable dread of a relapse, I took his hand. The skin was cool. I laid my fingers on his pulse. It was beating calmly.

"You think I am wandering in my mind,' he broke out. 'Stay here tonight--I

command you, stay!--and see her as I have seen her.'

"I quieted him by promising to do what he had asked of me. He had still one more condition to insist on.

"I won't be laughed at,' he said. 'Promise that you will not repeat to any living creature what I have just told you.'

"My promise satisfied him. He wearily closed his eyes. In a few minutes more his poor weak body was in peaceful repose.

"The day-nurse returned, and remained with us later than usual. Twilight melted into darkness. The room was obscurely lit by a shaded lamp, placed behind a screen that kept the sun out of the sick man's eyes in the daytime.

"'Are we alone?' Beaucourt asked.

"'Yes.'

"'Watch the door.'

"'Why?'

"'You will see her on the threshold.'

"As he said those words the door slowly opened. In the dim light I could only discern at first the figure of a woman. She slowly advanced toward me. I saw the familiar face in shadow; the eyes were large and faintly luminous--the eyes of Mrs. Evelin.

"The wild words spoken to me by Beaucourt, the stillness and the obscurity in the room, had their effect, I suppose, on my imagination. You will think me a poor creature when I confess it. For the moment I did assuredly feel a thrill of superstitious terror.

"My delusion was dispelled by a change in her face. Its natural expression of surprise, when she saw me, set my mind free to feel the delight inspired by the discovery that she was a living woman. I should have spoken to her if she had not stopped me by a gesture.

"Beaucourt's voice broke the silence. 'Ministering Spirit!' he said, 'free me from the life of earth. Take me with you to the life eternal.'

"She made no attempt to enlighten him. 'Wait,' she answered calmly, 'wait and rest.'

"Silently obeying her, he turned his head on the pillow; we saw his face no more.

"I have related the circumstances exactly as they happened: the ghost story which report has carried to your ears has no other foundation than this.

"Mrs. Evelin led the way to that further end of the room in which the screen stood. Placing ourselves behind it, we could converse in whispers without being heard. Her first words told me that she had been warned by one of the hospital doctors to respect my friend's delusion for the present. His mind partook in some degree of the weakness of his body, and he was not strong enough yet to bear the shock of discovering the truth.

"She had been saved almost by a miracle.

"Released (in a state of insensibility) from the ruins of the house, she had been laid with her dead relatives awaiting burial. Happily for her, an English traveler visiting the island was among the first men who volunteered to render help. He had been in practice as a medical man, and he saved her from being buried alive. Nearly a month passed before she was strong enough to bear removal to Wellington (the capital city) and to be received into the hospital.

"I asked why she had not telegraphed or written to me.

"'When I was strong enough to write,' she said, 'I was strong enough to bear the sea-voyage to England. The expenses so nearly exhausted my small savings that I had no money to spare for the telegraph.'

"On her arrival in London, only a few days since, she had called on me at the time when I had left home on the business which I have already mentioned. She had not heard of Lady Howel's death, and had written ignorantly to prepare that good friend for seeing her. The messenger sent with the letter had found the house in the occupation of strangers, and had been referred to the agent employed in letting it. She went herself to this person, and so heard that Lord Howel Beaucourt had lost his wife, and was reported to be dying in one of the London hospitals.

"'If he had been in his usual state of health,' she said, 'it would have been indelicate on my part--I mean it would have seemed like taking a selfish

advantage of the poor lady's death--to have let him know that my life had been saved, in any other way than by writing to him. But when I heard he was dying, I forgot all customary considerations. His name was so well-known in London that I easily discovered at what hospital he had been received. There I heard that the report was false and that he was out of danger. I ought to have been satisfied with that--but oh, how could I be so near him and not long to see him? The old doctor with whom I had been speaking discovered, I suppose, that I was in trouble about something. He was so kind and fatherly, and he seemed to take such interest in me, that I confessed everything to him. After he had made me promise to be careful, he told the night-nurse to let me take her place for a little while, when the dim light in the room would not permit his patient to see me too plainly. He waited at the door when we tried the experiment. Neither he nor I foresaw that Lord Howel would put such a strange interpretation on my presence. The nurse doesn't approve of my coming back--even for a little while only--and taking her place again to-night. She is right. I have had my little glimpse of happiness, and with that little I must be content.'

"What I said in answer to this, and what I did as time advanced, it is surely needless to tell you. You have read the newspapers which announce their marriage, and their departure for Italy. What else is there left for me to say?

"There is, perhaps, a word more still wanting.

"Obstinate Lord Howel persisted in refusing to take the fortune that was waiting for him. In this difficulty, the conditions under which I was acting permitted me to appeal to the bride. When she too said No, I was not to be trifled with. I showed her poor Lady's Howel's will. After reading the terms in which my dear old friend alluded to her she burst out crying. I interpreted those grateful tears as an expression of repentance for the ill-considered reply which I had just received. As yet, I have not been told that I was wrong."