

CHAPTER V - BERNARD WINTERFIELD'S CORRESPONDENCE.

I.

From Mrs. Romaine to Mr. Winterfield.

HAS my letter failed to reach you? I directed it (as I direct this) to Beaupark, not knowing your London address.

Yesterday, Father Benwell called at Ten Acres Lodge. He first saw my mother and myself and he contrived to mention your name. It was done with his usual adroitness, and I might perhaps have passed it over if he had not looked at me. I hope and pray it may be only my fancy--but I thought I saw, in his eyes, that he was conscious of having me in his power, and that he might betray me to my husband at any moment.

I have no sort of claim on you. And, Heaven knows, I have little reason to trust you. But I thought you meant fairly by me when we spoke together at this house. In that belief, I entreat you to tell me if Father Benwell has intruded himself into your confidence--or even if you have hinted anything to him which gives him a hold over me.

II.

From Mr. Winterfield to Mrs. Romaine.

Both your letters have reached me.

I have good reason for believing that you are entirely mistaken in your estimate of Father Benwell's character. But I know, by sad experience, how you hold to your opinions when they are once formed; and I am eager to relieve you of all anxiety, so far as I am concerned. I have not said one word--I have not even let slip the slightest hint--which could inform Father Benwell of that past event in our lives to which your letter alludes. Your secret is a sacred secret to me; and it has been, and shall be, sacredly kept.

There is a sentence in your letter which has given me great pain. You reiterate the cruel language of the bygone time. You say, "Heaven knows I have little reason to trust you."

I have reasons, on my side, for not justifying myself--except under certain conditions. I mean under conditions which might place me in a position to serve and advise you as a friend or brother. In that case, I undertake to prove, even to you, that it was a cruel injustice ever to have doubted me, and that there is no man living whom you can more implicitly trust than myself.

My address, when I am in London, is at the head of this page.

III.

From Dr. Wybrow to Mr. Winterfield.

Dear Sir--I have received your letter, mentioning that you wish to accompany me, at my next visit to the asylum, to see the French boy, so strangely associated with the papers delivered to you by Father Benwell.

Your proposal reaches me too late. The poor creature's troubled life has come to an end. He never rallied from the exhausting effect of the fever. To the last he was attended by his mother.

I write with true sympathy for that excellent lady--but I cannot conceal from you or from myself that this death is not to be regretted. In a case of the same extraordinary kind, recorded in print, the patient recovered from the fever, and his insanity returned with his returning health.

Faithfully yours, JOSEPH WYBROW.