

### **Tenth Extract.**

London, 2d May, 1864.--Mrs. Eyrecourt's telegram reached me just after Doctor Wybrow had paid his first professional visit to Penrose, at the hotel. I had hardly time to feel relieved by the opinion of the case which he expressed, before my mind was upset by Mrs. Eyrecourt. Leaving Penrose under the charge of our excellent landlady, I hurried away to Lord Loring.

It was still early in the day: his lordship was at home. He maddened me with impatience by apologizing at full length for "the inexcusable manner in which he had misinterpreted my conduct on the deplorable occasion of the marriage ceremony at Brussels." I stopped his flow of words (very earnestly spoken, it is only right to add), and entreated him to tell me, in the first place, what Stella was doing in Paris.

"Stella is with her husband," Lord Loring replied.

My head turned giddy, my heart beat furiously. Lord Loring looked at me--ran to the luncheon table in the next room--and returned with a glass of wine. I really don't know whether I drank the wine or not. I know I stammered out another inquiry in one word.

"Reconciled?" I said.

"Yes, Mr. Winterfield--reconciled, before he dies."

We were both silent for a while.

What was he thinking of? I don't know. What was I thinking of? I daren't write it down.

Lord Loring resumed by expressing some anxiety on the subject of my health. I made the best excuse for myself that I could, and told him of the rescue of Penrose. He had heard of my object in leaving England, and heartily congratulated me. "This will be welcome news indeed," he said, "to Father Benwell."

Even the name of Father Benwell now excites my distrust. "Is he in Paris too?" I inquired.

"He left Paris last night," Lord Loring answered; "and he is now in London, on important business (as I understand) connected with Romaine's affairs."

I instantly thought of the boy.

"Is Romaine in possession of his faculties?" I asked.

"In complete possession."

"While justice is in his power, has he done justice to his son?"

Lord Loring looked a little confused. "I have not heard," was all he said in reply.

I was far from satisfied. "You are one of Romaine's oldest friends," I persisted. "Have you not seen him yourself?"

"I have seen him more than once. But he has never referred to his affairs." Having said this he hastily changed the subject. "Is there any other information that I can give you?" he suggested.

I had still to learn under what circumstances Romaine had left Italy for France, and how the event of his illness in Paris had been communicated to his wife. Lord Loring had only to draw on his own recollections to enlighten me.

"Lady Loring and I passed the last winter in Rome," he said. "And, there, we saw Romaine. You look surprised. Perhaps you are aware that we had offended him, by advice which we thought it our duty to offer to Stella before her marriage?"

I was certainly thinking of what Stella had said of the Loring on the memorable day when she visited me at the hotel.

"Romaine would probably have refused to receive us," Lord Loring resumed, "but for the gratifying circumstance of my having been admitted to an interview with the Pope. The Holy Father spoke of him with the most condescending kindness; and, hearing that I had not yet seen him, gave instructions, commanding Romaine to present himself. Under these circumstances it was impossible for him to refuse to receive Lady Loring and myself on a later occasion. I cannot tell you how distressed we were at the sad change for the worse in his personal appearance. The Italian physician, whom he occasionally consulted, told me that there was a weakness in the action of his heart, produced, in the first instance, by excessive study and the excitement of preaching, and aggravated by the further drain on his strength due to insufficient nourishment. He would eat and drink just enough to keep him alive, and

no more; and he persistently refused to try the good influence of rest and change of scene. My wife, at a later interview with him, when they were alone, induced him to throw aside the reserve which he had maintained with me, and discovered another cause for the deterioration in his health. I don't refer to the return of a nervous misery, from which he has suffered at intervals for years past; I speak of the effect produced on his mind by the announcement--made no doubt with best intentions by Doctor Wybrow--of the birth of his child. This disclosure (he was entirely ignorant of his wife's situation when he left her) appears to have affected him far more seriously than the English doctor supposed. Lady Loring was so shocked at what he said to her on the subject, that she has only repeated it to me with a certain reserve. 'If I could believe I did wrong,' he said, 'in dedicating myself to the service of the Church, after the overthrow of my domestic happiness, I should also believe that the birth of this child was the retributive punishment of my sin, and the warning of my approaching death. I dare not take this view. And yet I have it not in me, after the solemn vows by which I am bound, to place any more consoling interpretation on an event which, as a priest, it disturbs and humiliates me even to think of.' That one revelation of his tone of thought will tell you what is the mental state of this unhappy man. He gave us little encouragement to continue our friendly intercourse with him. It was only when we were thinking of our return to England that we heard of his appointment to the vacant place of first attache to the Embassy at Paris. The Pope's paternal anxiety on the subject of Romaine's health had chosen this wise and generous method of obliging him to try a salutary change of air as well as a relaxation from his incessant employments in Rome. On the occasion of his departure we met again. He looked like a worn-out old man. We could now only remember his double claim on us--as a priest of our religion, and as a once dear friend--and we arranged to travel with him. The weather at the time was mild; our progress was made by easy stages. We left him at Paris, apparently the better for his journey."

I asked if they had seen Stella on that occasion.

"No," said Lord Loring. "We had reason to doubt whether Stella would be pleased to see us, and we felt reluctant to meddle, unasked, with a

matter of extreme delicacy. I arranged with the Nuncio (whom I have the honor to know) that we should receive written information of Romaine's state of health, and on that understanding we returned to England. A week since, our news from the Embassy was so alarming that Lady Loring at once returned to Paris. Her first letter informed me that she had felt it her duty to tell Stella of the critical condition of Romaine's health. She expressed her sense of my wife's kindness most gratefully and feelingly and at once removed to Paris, to be on the spot if her husband expressed a wish to see her. The two ladies are now staying at the same hotel. I have thus far been detained in London by family affairs. But, unless I hear of a change for the better before evening, I follow Lady Loring to Paris by the mail train."

It was needless to trespass further on Lord Loring's time. I thanked him, and returned to Penrose. He was sleeping when I got to the hotel.

On the table in the sitting-room I found a telegram waiting for me. It had been sent by Stella, and it contained these lines:

"I have just returned from his bedside, after telling him of the rescue of Penrose. He desires to see you. There is no positive suffering--he is sinking under a complete prostration of the forces of life. That is what the doctors tell me. They said, when I spoke of writing to you, 'Send a telegram; there is no time to lose.'"

Toward evening Penrose awoke. I showed him the telegram. Throughout our voyage, the prospect of seeing Romaine again had been the uppermost subject in his thoughts. In the extremity of his distress, he declared that he would accompany me to Paris by the night train. Remembering how severely he had felt the fatigue of the short railway journey from Portsmouth, I entreated him to let me go alone. His devotion to Romaine was not to be reasoned with. While we were still vainly trying to convince each other, Doctor Wybrow came in.

To my amazement he sided with Penrose.

"Oh, get up by all means," he said; "we will help you to dress." We took him out of bed and put on his dressing-gown. He thanked us; and saying he would complete his toilet by himself, sat down in an easy chair. In another moment he was asleep again, so soundly asleep that we put him back in his bed without waking him. Doctor Wybrow had foreseen this result: he looked at the poor fellow's pale peaceful face with a kindly smile.

"There is the treatment," he said, "that will set our patient on his legs again. Sleeping, eating, and drinking--let that be his life for some weeks to come, and he will be as good a man as ever. If your homeward journey had been by land, Penrose would have died on the way. I will take care of him while you are in Paris."

At the station I met Lord Loring. He understood that I too had received bad news, and gave me a place in the coupe carriage which had been reserved for him. We had hardly taken our seats when we saw Father Benwell among the travelers on the platform, accompanied by a gray-haired gentleman who was a stranger to both of us. Lord Loring dislikes strangers. Otherwise, I might have found myself traveling to Paris with that detestable Jesuit for a companion.

Paris, May 3.--On our arrival at the hotel I was informed that no message had yet been received from the Embassy.

We found Lady Loring alone at the breakfast-table, when we had rested after our night journey.

"Romaine still lives," she said. "But his voice has sunk to a whisper, and he is unable to breathe if he tries to rest in bed. Stella has gone to the Embassy; she hopes to see him to-day for the second time."

"Only for the second time!" I exclaimed.

"You forget, Mr. Winterfield, that Romaine is a priest. He was only consecrated on the customary condition of an absolute separation from his wife. On her side--never let her know that I told you this--Stella signed a formal document, sent from Rome, asserting that she consented of her own free will to the separation. She was relieved from the performance of another formality (which I need not mention more particularly) by a special dispensation. Under these circumstances--communicated to me while Stella and I have been together in this house--the wife's presence at the bedside of her dying husband is regarded by the other priests at the Embassy as a scandal and a profanation. The kind-hearted Nuncio is blamed for having exceeded his powers in yielding (even under protest) to the last wishes of a dying man. He is now in communication with Rome, waiting for the final instructions which are to guide him."

"Has Romaine seen his child?" I asked.

"Stella has taken the child with her to-day. It is doubtful in the last degree whether the poor little boy will be allowed to enter his father's room. That complication is even more serious than the other. The dying Romaine persists in his resolution to see the child. So completely has his way of thinking been altered by the approach of death, and by the closing of the brilliant prospect which was before him, that he even threatens to recant, with his last breath, if his wishes are not complied with. How it will end I cannot even venture to guess."

"Unless the merciful course taken by the Nuncio is confirmed," said Lord Loring, "it may end in a revival of the protest of the Catholic priests in Germany against the prohibition of marriage to the clergy. The movement began in Silesia in 1826, and was followed by unions (or Leagues, as we should call them now) in Baden, Wurtemberg, Bavaria, and Rhenish Prussia. Later still, the agitation spread to France and Austria. It was only checked by a papal bull issued in 1847, reiterating the final decision of the famous Council of Trent in favor of the celibacy of the priesthood. Few people are aware that this rule has been an institution of slow growth among the clergy of the Church of Rome. Even as late as the twelfth century, there were still priests who set the prohibition of marriage at defiance."

I listened, as one of the many ignorant persons alluded to by Lord Loring. It was with difficulty that I fixed my attention on what he was saying. My thoughts wandered to Stella and to the dying man. I looked at the clock.

Lady Loring evidently shared the feeling of suspense that had got possession of me. She rose and walked to the window.

"Here is the message!" she said, recognizing her traveling servant as he entered the hotel door.

The man appeared, with a line written on a card. I was requested to present the card at the Embassy, without delay.

May 4.--I am only now able to continue my record of the events of yesterday.

A silent servant received me at the Embassy, looked at the card, and led the way to an upper floor of the house. Arrived at the end of a long passage, he opened a door, and retired.



As I crossed the threshold Stella met me. She took both my hands in hers and looked at me in silence. All that was true and good and noble expressed itself in that look.

The interval passed, and she spoke--very sadly, very quietly.

"One more work of mercy, Bernard. Help him to die with a heart at rest."

She drew back--and I approached him.

He reclined, propped up with pillows, in a large easy-chair; it was the one position in which he could still breathe with freedom. The ashy shades of death were on his wasted face. In the eyes alone, as they slowly turned on me, there still glimmered the waning light of life. One of his arms hung down over the chair; the other was clasped round his child, sitting on his knee. The boy looked at me wonderingly, as I stood by his father. Romaine signed to me to stoop, so that I might hear him.

"Penrose?" he asked, faintly whispering. "Dear Arthur! Not dying, like me?"

I quieted that anxiety. For a moment there was even the shadow of a smile on his face, as I told him of the effort that Penrose had vainly made to be the companion of my journey. He asked me, by another gesture, to bend my ear to him once more.

"My last grateful blessing to Penrose. And to you. May I not say it? You have saved Arthur"--his eyes turned toward Stella--"you have been her best friend." He paused to recover his feeble breath; looking round the

large room, without a creature in it but ourselves. Once more the melancholy shadow of a smile passed over his face--and vanished. I listened, nearer to him still.

"Christ took a child on His knee. The priests call themselves ministers of Christ. They have left me, because of this child, here on my knee. Wrong, wrong, wrong. Winterfield, Death is a great teacher. I know how I have erred--what I have lost. Wife and child. How poor and barren all the rest of it looks now!"

He was silent for a while. Was he thinking? No: he seemed to be listening--and yet there was no sound in the room. Stella, anxiously watching him, saw the listening expression as I did. Her face showed anxiety, but no surprise.

"Does it torture you still?" she asked.

"No," he said; "I have never heard it plainly, since I left Rome. It has grown fainter and fainter from that time. It is not a Voice now. It is hardly a whisper: my repentance is accepted, my release is coming.-- Where is Winterfield?"

She pointed to me.

"I spoke of Rome just now. What did Rome remind me of?" He slowly recovered the lost recollection. "Tell Winterfield," he whispered to Stella, "what the Nuncio said when he knew that I was going to die. The great man reckoned up the dignities that might have been mine if I had lived. From my place here in the Embassy--"

"Let me say it," she gently interposed, "and spare your strength for better things. From your place in the Embassy you would have mounted a step higher to the office of Vice-Legate. Those duties wisely performed, another rise to the Auditorship of the Apostolic Chamber. That office filled, a last step upward to the highest rank left, the rank of a Prince of the Church."

"All vanity!" said the dying Romaine. He looked at his wife and his child. "The true happiness was waiting for me here. And I only know it now. Too late. Too late."

He laid his head back on the pillow and closed his weary eyes. We thought he was composing himself to sleep. Stella tried to relieve him of the boy. "No," he whispered; "I am only resting my eyes to look at him again." We waited. The child stared at me, in infantine curiosity. His mother knelt at his side, and whispered in his ear. A bright smile irradiated his face; his clear brown eyes sparkled; he repeated the forgotten lesson of the bygone time, and called me once more, "Uncle Ber'."

Romaine heard it. His heavy eyelids opened again. "No," he said. "Not uncle. Something better and dearer. Stella, give me your hand."

Still kneeling, she obeyed him. He slowly raised himself on the chair. "Take her hand," he said to me. I too knelt. Her hand lay cold in mine. After a long interval he spoke to me. "Bernard Winterfield," he said, "love them, and help them, when I am gone." He laid his weak hand on our hands, clasped together. "May God protect you! may God bless you!" he murmured. "Kiss me, Stella."

I remember no more. As a man, I ought to have set a better example; I ought to have preserved my self-control. It was not to be done. I turned away from them--and burst out crying.

The minutes passed. Many minutes or few minutes, I don't know which.

A soft knock at the door aroused me. I dashed away the useless tears. Stella had retired to the further end of the room. She was sitting by the fireside, with the child in her arms. I withdrew to the same part of the room, keeping far enough away not to disturb them.

Two strangers came in and placed themselves on either side of Romaine's chair. He seemed to recognize them unwillingly. From the manner in which they examined him, I inferred that they were medical men. After a consultation in low tones, one of them went out.

He returned again almost immediately, followed by the gray-headed gentleman whom I had noticed on the journey to Paris--and by Father Benwell.

The Jesuit's vigilant eyes discovered us instantly, in our place near the fireside. I thought I saw suspicion as well as surprise in his face. But he recovered himself so rapidly that I could not feel sure. He bowed to Stella. She made no return; she looked as if she had not even seen him.

One of the doctors was an Englishman. He said to Father Benwell: "Whatever your business may be with Mr. Romaine, we advise you to enter on it without delay. Shall we leave the room?"

"Certainly not," Father Benwell answered. "The more witnesses are present, the more relieved I shall feel." He turned to his traveling companion. "Let Mr. Romaine's lawyer," he resumed, "state what our business is."

The gray-headed gentleman stepped forward.

"Are you able to attend to me, sir?" he asked.

Romayne, reclining in his chair, apparently lost to all interest in what was going on, heard and answered. The weak tones of his voice failed to reach my ear at the other end of the room. The lawyer, seeming to be satisfied so far, put a formal question to the doctors next. He inquired if Mr. Romayne was in full possession of his faculties.

Both the physicians answered without hesitation in the affirmative. Father Benwell added his attestation. "Throughout Mr. Romayne's illness," he said firmly, "his mind has been as clear as mine is."

While this was going on, the child had slipped off his mother's lap, with the natural restlessness of his age. He walked to the fireplace and stopped--fascinated by the bright red glow of the embers of burning wood. In one corner of the low fender lay a loose little bundle of sticks, left there in case the fire might need relighting. The boy, noticing the bundle, took out one of the sticks and threw it experimentally into the grate. The flash of flame, as the stick caught fire, delighted him. He went on burning stick after stick. The new game kept him quiet: his mother was content to be on the watch, to see that no harm was done.

In the meantime, the lawyer briefly stated his case.

"You remember, Mr. Romayne, that your will was placed, for safe keeping, in our office," he began. "Father Benwell called upon us, and presented an order, signed by yourself, authorizing him to convey the will from London to Paris. The object was to obtain your signature to a codicil, which had been considered a necessary addition to secure the validity of the will.--Are you favoring me with your attention, sir?"

Romayne answered by a slight bending of his head. His eyes were fixed on the boy--still absorbed in throwing his sticks, one by one, into the fire.

"At the time when your will was executed," the lawyer went on, "Father Benwell obtained your permission to take a copy of it. Hearing of your illness, he submitted the copy to a high legal authority. The written opinion of this competent person declares the clause, bequeathing the Vange estate to Father Benwell, to be so imperfectly expressed, that the will might be made a subject of litigation after the testator's death. He has accordingly appended a form of codicil amending the defect, and we have added it to the will. I thought it my duty, as one of your legal advisers, to accompany Father Benwell on his return to Paris in charge of the will--in case you might feel disposed to make any alteration." He looked toward Stella and the child as he completed that sentence. The Jesuit's keen eyes took the same direction. "Shall I read the will, sir?" the lawyer resumed; "or would you prefer to look at it yourself?"

Romayne held out his hand for the will, in silence. He was still watching his son. There were but few more sticks now left to be thrown in the fire.

Father Benwell interfered, for the first time.

"One word, Mr. Romayne, before you examine that document," he said. "The Church receives back from you (through me) the property which was once its own. Beyond that it authorizes and even desires you to make any changes which you or your trusted legal adviser may think right. I refer to the clauses of the will which relate to the property you have inherited from the late Lady Berrick--and I beg the persons present to bear in memory the few plain words that I have now spoken."

He bowed with dignity and drew back. Even the lawyer was favorably impressed. The doctors looked at each other with silent approval. For the

first time, the sad repose of Stella's face was disturbed--I could see that it cost her an effort to repress her indignation. The one unmoved person was Romaine. The sheet of paper on which the will was written lay unregarded upon his lap; his eyes were still riveted on the little figure at the fireplace.

The child had thrown his last stick into the glowing red embers. He looked about him for a fresh supply, and found nothing. His fresh young voice rose high through the silence of the room.

"More!" he cried. "More!"

His mother held up a warning finger. "Hush!" she whispered. He shrank away from her as she tried to take him on her knee, and looked across the room at his father. "More!" he burst out louder than ever. Romaine beckoned to me, and pointed to the boy.

I led him across the room. He was quite willing to go with me--he reiterated his petition, standing at his father's knees.

"Lift him to me," said Romaine.

I could barely hear the words: even his strength to whisper seemed to be fast leaving him. He kissed his son--with a panting fatigue under that trifling exertion, pitiable to see. As I placed the boy on his feet again, he looked up at his dying father, with the one idea still in his mind.

"More, papa! More!"

Romaine put the will into his hand.

The child's eyes sparkled. "Burn?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes!"

Father Benwell sprang forward with outstretched hands. I stopped him. He struggled with me. I forgot the privilege of the black robe. I took him by the throat.

The boy threw the will into the fire. "Oh!" he shouted, in high delight, and clapped his chubby hands as the bright little blaze flew up the chimney. I released the priest.

In a frenzy of rage and despair, he looked round at the persons in the room. "I take you all to witness," he cried; "this is an act of madness!"

"You yourself declared just now," said the lawyer, "that Mr. Romaine was in perfect possession of his faculties."

The baffled Jesuit turned furiously on the dying man. They looked at each other.

For one awful moment Romaine's eyes brightened, Romaine's voice rallied its power, as if life was returning to him. Frowning darkly, the priest put his question.

"What did you do it for?"



Quietly and firmly the answer came:

"Wife and child."

The last long-drawn sigh rose and fell. With those sacred words on his lips, Romaine died.

London, 6th May.--At Stella's request, I have returned to Penrose--with but one fellow-traveler. My dear old companion, the dog, is coiled up, fast asleep at my feet, while I write these lines. Penrose has gained strength enough to keep me company in the sitting-room. In a few days more he will see Stella again.

What instructions reached the Embassy from Rome--whether Romaine received the last sacrament at the earlier period of his illness--we never heard. No objection was made, when Lord Loring proposed to remove the body to England, to be buried in the family vault at Vange Abbey.

I had undertaken to give the necessary directions for the funeral, on my arrival in London. Returning to the hotel, I met Father Benwell in the street. I tried to pass on. He deliberately stopped me.

"How is Mrs. Romaine?" he asked, with that infernal suavity which he seems always to have at command. "Fairly well I hope? And the boy? Ah, he little thought how he was changing his prospects for the better, when he made that blaze in the fire! Pardon me, Mr. Winterfield, you don't seem to be quite so cordial as usual. Perhaps you are thinking of your inconsiderate assault on my throat? Let us forgive and forget. Or, perhaps, you object to my having converted poor Romaine, and to my being ready to accept from him the restoration of the property of the Church. In both cases I only did my duty as a priest. You are a liberal-minded man. Surely I deserve a favorable construction of my conduct?"

I really could not endure this. "I have my own opinion of what you deserve," I answered. "Don't provoke me to mention it."

He eyed me with a sinister smile.

"I am not so old as I look," he said; "I may live another twenty years!"

"Well?" I asked.

"Well," he answered, "much may happen in twenty years!"

With that he left me. If he means any further mischief, I can tell him this--he will find Me in his way.

To turn to a more pleasant subject. Reflecting on all that had passed at my memorable interview with Romaine, I felt some surprise that one of the persons present had made no effort to prevent the burning of the will. It was not to be expected of Stella--or of the doctors, who had no interest in the matter--but I was unable to understand the passive position maintained by the lawyer. He enlightened my ignorance in two words.

"The Vange property and the Berrick property were both absolutely at the disposal of Mr. Romaine," he said. "If he died without leaving a will, he knew enough of the law to foresee that houses, lands, and money would go to his 'nearest of kin.' In plainer words, his widow and his son."

When Penrose can travel, he accompanies me to Beaupark. Stella and her little son and Mrs. Eyrecourt will be the only other guests in my

house. Time must pass, and the boy will be older, before I may remind Stella of Romaine's last wishes on that sad morning when we two knelt on either side of him. In the meanwhile, it is almost happiness enough for me to look forward to the day--

NOTE.--The next leaf of the Diary is missing. By some accident, a manuscript page has got into its place, bearing a later date, and containing elaborate instructions for executing a design for a wedding dress. The handwriting has since been acknowledged as her own, by no less a person than--Mrs. Eyrecourt.

[www.freeclassicebooks.com](http://www.freeclassicebooks.com)