

CHAPTER LVII. APPROACHING THE END.

Alban reached London early enough in the afternoon to find the doctor at his luncheon. "Too late to see Mrs. Ellmother," he announced. "Sit down and have something to eat."

"Has she left any message for me?"

"A message, my good friend, that you won't like to hear. She is off with her mistress, this morning, on a visit to Mr. Mirabel's sister."

"Does he go with them?"

"No; he follows by a later train."

"Has Mrs. Ellmother mentioned the address?"

"There it is, in her own handwriting."

Alban read the address:--"Mrs. Delvin, The Clink, Belford, Northumberland."

"Turn to the back of that bit of paper," the doctor said. "Mrs. Ellmother has written something on it."

She had written these words: "No discoveries made by Mr. Mirabel, up to this time. Sir Jervis Redwood is dead. The Rooks are believed to be in Scotland; and Miss Emily, if need be, is to help the parson to find them. No news of Miss Jethro."

"Now you have got your information," Doctor Allday resumed, "let me have a look at you. You're not in a rage: that's a good sign to begin with."

"I am not the less determined," Alban answered.

"To bring Emily to her senses?" the doctor asked.

"To do what Mirabel has not done--and then to let her choose between us."

"Ay? ay? Your good opinion of her hasn't altered, though she has treated you so badly?"

"My good opinion makes allowance for the state of my poor darling's mind, after the shock that has fallen on her," Alban answered quietly. "She is not my Emily now. She will be my Emily yet. I told her I was convinced of it, in the old days at school--and my conviction is as strong as ever. Have you seen her, since I have been away at Netherwoods?"

"Yes; and she is as angry with me as she is with you."

"For the same reason?"

"No, no. I heard enough to warn me to hold my tongue. I refused to help her--that's all. You are a man, and you may run risks which no young girl ought to encounter. Do you remember when I asked you to drop all further inquiries into the murder, for Emily's sake? The circumstances have altered since that time. Can I be of any use?"

"Of the greatest use, if you can give me Miss Jethro's address."

"Oh! You mean to begin in that way, do you?"

"Yes. You know that Miss Jethro visited me at Netherwoods?"

"Go on."

"She showed me your answer to a letter which she had written to you. Have you got that letter?"

Doctor Allday produced it. The address was at a post-office, in a town on the south coast. Looking up when he had copied it, Alban saw the doctor's eyes fixed on him with an oddly-mingled expression: partly of sympathy, partly of hesitation.

"Have you anything to suggest?" he asked.

"You will get nothing out of Miss Jethro," the doctor answered, "unless--" there he stopped.

"Unless, what?"

"Unless you can frighten her."

"How am I to do that?"

After a little reflection, Doctor Allday returned, without any apparent reason, to the subject of his last visit to Emily.

"There was one thing she said, in the course of our talk," he continued, "which struck me as being sensible: possibly (for we are all more or less conceited), because I agreed with her myself. She suspects Miss Jethro of knowing more about that damnable murder than Miss Jethro is willing to acknowledge. If you want to produce the right effect on her--" he looked hard at Alban and checked himself once more.

"Well? what am I to do?"

"Tell her you have an idea of who the murderer is."

"But I have no idea."

"But I have."

"Good God! what do you mean?"

"Don't mistake me! An impression has been produced on my mind--that's all. Call it a freak or fancy; worth trying perhaps as a bold experiment, and worth nothing more. Come a little nearer. My housekeeper is an excellent woman, but I have once or twice caught her rather too near to that door. I think I'll whisper it."

He did whisper it. In breathless wonder, Alban heard of the doubt which had crossed Doctor Allday's mind, on the evening when Mirabel had called at his house.

"You look as if you didn't believe it," the doctor remarked.

"I'm thinking of Emily. For her sake I hope and trust you are wrong. Ought I to go to her at once? I don't know what to do!"

"Find out first, my good fellow, whether I am right or wrong. You can do it, if you will run the risk with Miss Jethro."

Alban recovered himself. His old friend's advice was clearly the right advice to follow. He examined his railway guide, and then looked at his watch. "If I can find Miss Jethro," he answered, "I'll risk it before the day is out."

The doctor accompanied him to the door. "You will write to me, won't you?"

"Without fail. Thank you--and good-by."