

### **CHAPTER XXX.**

The complimentary allusion to Ovid, which Benjulia had not been able to understand, was contained in a letter from Mr. Morphew, and was expressed in these words:--"Let me sincerely thank you for making us acquainted with Mr. Ovid Vere. Now that he has left us, we really feel as if we had said good-bye to an old friend. I don't know when I have met with such a perfectly unselfish man--and I say this, speaking from experience of him. In my unavoidable absence, he volunteered to attend a serious case of illness, accompanied by shocking circumstances--and this at a time when, as you know, his own broken health forbids him to undertake any professional duty. While he could preserve the patient's life--and he did wonders, in this way--he was every day at the bedside, taxing his strength in the service of a perfect stranger. I fancy I see you (with your impatience of letter-writing at any length) looking to the end. Don't be alarmed. I am writing to your brother Lemuel by this mail, and I have little time to spare."

Was this "serious case of illness"--described as being "accompanied by shocking circumstances"--a case of disease of the brain?

There was the question, proposed by Benjulia's inveterate suspicion of Ovid! The bare doubt cost him the loss of a day's work. He reviled poor Mr. Morphew as "a born idiot" for not having plainly stated what the patient's malady was, instead of wasting paper on smooth sentences, encumbered by long words. If Ovid had alluded to his Canadian patient in his letters to his mother, his customary preciseness of language might be trusted to relieve Benjulia's suspense. With that purpose in view, the doctor had written to Mrs. Gallilee.

Before he laid down his pen, he looked once more at Mr. Morphew's letter, and paused thoughtfully over one line: "I am writing to your brother Lemuel by this mail."

The information of which he was in search might be in that letter. If Mrs. Gallilee's correspondence with her son failed to enlighten him, here was another chance of making the desired discovery. Surely the wise course to take would be to write to Lemuel as well.

His one motive for hesitating was dislike of his younger brother--dislike so inveterate that he even recoiled from communicating with Lemuel through the post.

There had never been any sympathy between them; but indifference had only matured into downright enmity, on the doctor's part, a year since. Accident (the result of his own absence of mind, while he was perplexed by an unsuccessful experiment) had placed Lemuel in possession of his hideous secret. The one person in the world who knew how he was really occupied in the laboratory, was his brother.

Here was the true motive of the bitterly contemptuous tone in which Benjulia had spoken to Ovid of his nearest relation. Lemuel's character was certainly deserving of severe judgment, in some of its aspects. In his hours of employment (as clerk in the office of a London publisher) he steadily and punctually performed the duties entrusted to him. In his hours of freedom, his sensual instincts got the better of him; and his jealous wife had her reasons for complaint. Among his friends, he was the subject of a wide diversity of opinion. Some of them agreed with his brother in thinking him little better than a fool. Others suspected him of possessing natural abilities, but of being too lazy, perhaps too cunning, to exert them. In the office he allowed himself to be called "a mere machine"--and escaped the overwork which fell to the share of quicker men. When his wife and her relations declared him to be a mere animal, he never contradicted them--and so gained the reputation of a person on whom reprimand was thrown away. Under the protection of this unenviable character, he sometimes said severe things with an air of perfect simplicity. When the furious doctor discovered him in the laboratory, and said, "I'll be the death of you, if you tell any living creature what I am doing!"--Lemuel answered, with a stare of stupid astonishment, "Make your mind easy; I should be ashamed to mention it."

Further reflection decided Benjulia on writing. Even when he had a favour to ask, he was unable to address Lemuel with common politeness.

"I hear that Morpheus has written to you by the last mail. I want to see the letter." So much he wrote, and no more. What was barely enough for the purpose, was enough for the doctor, when he addressed his brother.