

The Doctor's Wife

BY MISS M. E. BRADDON

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued.)
"I told George every—almost every time I met Mr. Lansdell," she exclaimed; "and George knows that he lends me books; and he likes me to have books—nice, instructive," said Mrs. Gilbert, stifling her sobs as best she might; "and I never thought that anybody could be so wicked as to fancy there was any harm in my meeting him. I don't suppose any one ever said anything to Beatrice Portinari, though she was married, and Dante loved her very dearly; and I only want to see him now and then, and to hear him talk; and he has been very, very kind to me."

"Kind to you?" cried Gwendoline, scornfully. "Do you know the value of such kindness as his? Did you ever hear of any good coming of it? Are you so boggled enough to think that his new fancy for you is anything more than the caprice of an idle man of the world?"
"You do not know him. Ah, if you could only know how good he is, how noble, how generous! I know that he would never try to injure me by so much as a word or a thought. Why should I not love him; as we love the stars, that are so beautiful and so distant from us? Ah, you do not understand such love as mine!" added Isabel, looking at the general's daughter with an air of superiority that was superb in its simplicity.

"I only understand that you are a very foolish person," Gwendoline answered coldly; "and I have been extremely foolish to trouble myself about you. I considered it my duty to do what I have done, and I wash my hands henceforward of you and your affairs. Pray go your own way, and do not fear any further interference from me."

She hurled the cruel word at the doctor's wife, and departed with a sound of silken rustling in a narrow passage. Isabel heard the carriage drive away, and then flung herself down upon her knees, to sob and lament her cruel destiny. Those last words had stung her to the very heart, took all the poetry out of her life, brought before her, in its fullest significance, the sense of her position.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was 11 o'clock when Isabel woke; and it was 12 when she sat down to make some pretense of eating the egg and toast which Mrs. Jefferson set before her. The good woman regarded her young mistress with a grave countenance, and Mrs. Gilbert shrank nervously from that honest gaze.

She was not to meet him until 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and it was now only a little after 12; but she could not stay in the house. A terrible fever and restlessness had taken possession of her lately. Had not her life been altogether one long fever since Roland Lansdell's advent? She looked back, and remembered that she had lived once, and had been decently contented, in utter ignorance of this splendid being's existence.

She took out her watch every now and then, always to be disappointed at the slow progress of the time; but at last—at last—just as a sudden gleam of sunshine lighted the water fall and flickered upon the winding pathway, a distant church clock struck 3, and the master of Mordred Priory pushed open a little gate and came in and out among the moss-grown trunks of the bare elms. In the next minute he was on the bridge; in the next moment, as it seemed, he was seated by Isabel's side and had taken her passive hand in his.

Mrs. Gilbert looked up sadly and shrank at Roland's face, and saw that it was flushed and radiant. There was just the faintest expression of nervous hesitation about his mouth; but his dark eyes shone with a resolute glance, and seemed more definite in color than Isabel had ever seen them yet.

"My darling," he said, "I am very punctual, am I not? I did not think you would be here before me. You can never guess how much I have thought of our meeting to-day, Isabel—seriously, solemnly even. Izzie, I want you to answer a serious question to-day, and all the happiness of my future life depends upon your answer."

"Mr. Lansdell!"

She looked up at him—very much frightened by his manner, but with her hand still clasping his. The link must so soon be broken forever. Only for a little while longer might she retain that dear hand in hers. Half an hour more, and they would be parted forever and ever. The pain of that thought was strangely mingled with the delicious joy of being with him, of hearing from his lips that she was beloved. What did she care for Gwendoline now!—cruel, jealous Gwendoline, who had insulted her love.

"Isabel," Roland said, very gravely, bending his head to a level with hers, as he spoke, but looking at the ground rather than at her, "it is time that we ended this farce of duty and submission to the world. Mine is no light love; if it were, I would have done my duty, and stayed away from you forever. I have thought of your happiness as well as my own, darling; and I ask you now to trust me, and to leave this place forever."

Something like a cry of despair broke from Isabel's lips. "You ask me to go away with you?" she exclaimed, looking at Roland as if she could scarcely believe the testimony of her own ears. "You ask me to leave George. Oh, Gwendoline only spoke the truth, then. You don't understand—no one understands how I love you!"

She had risen as she spoke, and flung herself passionately against the balustrade of the bridge, sobbing bitterly, with her face hidden by her clasped hands.

"Oh, Roland! Roland! I have loved you so—and could you think that I—Oh, you despise me—you must despise me very much, and think me very wicked, or you would never—"

She couldn't say any more, but still leaned against the bridge, sobbing for her lost delusion.

Gwendoline had been right, after all—this is what Isabel thought—and there had been no Platonism, no poet-worship on Roland Lansdell's side; only the vulgar, every-day wish to run away with another man's wife.

"Is this acting, Mrs. Gilbert? Is this show of surprise and indignation a little comedy, which you play when you want to get rid of your lovers? Am I to accept my dismissal, and bid you good afternoon, and put up patiently with having been made the very best fool that ever crossed this bridge?"

"Oh, Roland!" cried Isabel, lifting her head and looking round piteously at him. "I loved you so—I loved you so!"

"You love me so, and prove your love by fooling me with tender looks and blushes, till I believe that I have met the one woman in all the world who is to make my life happy. Oh, Isabel, I have loved you because I thought you unlike other women. Am I to find that it is only the old story after all—falsehood, and trick, and delusion? It was a feather in your cap to have Mr. Lansdell, of the Priory, madly in love with you; and now that he grows troublesome, you send him about his business. I am to think this, I suppose. It has all been coquetry and falsehood from first to last."

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Mrs. Gilbert, despairingly. "I never thought that you would ask me to be more to you than I am now; I never thought it was wicked to come here and meet you. I have read of people who, by some fatality, could never marry, loving each other, and being true to each other for years and years—till death sometimes; and I fancied that you loved me like that; and the thought of your love made me so happy; and it was such happiness to see you sometimes, and to think of you afterward, remembering every word you had said, and seeing your face as plainly as I see it now. I thought, till yesterday, that this might go on forever, and never, never believed that you would think me like those wicked women who run away from their husbands."

"And yet you love me?"

"With all my heart."

Roland Lansdell watched her face in silence for some moments, and faintly comprehended the exaltation of spirit which lifted this foolish girl above him to-day. But he was a weak, vacillating young man, who was unfortunate enough not to believe in anything; and he was, in his own fashion, truly and honestly in love—too much in love to be just or reasonable—and he was very angry with Isabel. The tide of his feelings had gathered strength day by day, and had swept relentlessly above every impediment, to be breasted at last by a rocky wall; here, where he thought to meet only the free, boundless ocean, ready to receive and welcome him.

"Isabel," he said, at last, "have you ever thought what your life is to be, always, after this parting to-day? You are likely to live forty years, and even when you have got through them, you will not be an old woman. Have you ever contemplated these forty years, with three hundred and sixty-five days in every one of them, every day to be spent with a man you don't love—a man with whom you have not one common thought? Think of that, Isabel; and then, if you do love me, think of the life I offer you and choose between them."

"I can only make one choice," Mrs. Gilbert answered, in a low, sad voice. "I shall be very unhappy, I dare say, but I will do my duty to my husband, and—think of you."

"So be it!" exclaimed Mr. Lansdell, with a long-drawn sigh. "In that case, good-by." He held out his hand, and Isabel was startled by the coldness of its touch.

"You are not angry with me?" she asked, piteously.

"I have no right to be angry with any one but myself. I have nothing to say to you except good-by. For mercy's sake, go away and leave me to myself."

She had no pretense for remaining with him after this; so she went away, very slowly, frightened and sorrowful. But when she had gone a few yards along the pathway under the trees she felt all at once that she could not leave him thus. She must see his face once more; she must know for certain whether he was angry with her or not.

She crept slowly back to the spot where she had left him, and found him lying at full length upon the grass, with his face hidden on his folded arms. With a sudden instinct of grief and terror she knew that he was crying, and falling down upon her knees by his side, murmured, amidst her sobs:

"Oh, pray forgive me! Pray do not be angry with me! I love you so dearly and so truly! Only say that you forgive me!"

Roland Lansdell lifted his face and looked at her. Ah, what a reproachful look it was, and how long it lived in her memory and disturbed her peace!

"I will forgive you," he answered,

sternly, "when I learn to endure my life without you."

He dropped his head again upon his folded arms, and Isabel knelt by his side for some minutes watching him silently; but he never stirred; and she was too much frightened and surprised by his anger, and remorsefully impressed with a vague sense of her own wrong doing, to dare address him further. So at last she got up and went away. She began to feel that she had been, somehow or other, very wicked, and that her sin had brought misery upon the man whom she loved.

CHAPTER XX.

"He knows so much, and yet did not know that I was not a trifling woman," she thought, in simple wonder. She did not understand Roland's skeptical manner of looking at everything, which could perceive no palpable distinction between wrong and right. She could not comprehend that this man had believed himself justified in what he had done.

But she thought of him incessantly. The image of his pale reproachful face never left her mental vision. The sound of his voice bidding her leave him was perpetually in her ears. He had loved her and had wept because of her. There were times when she wanted to go to him and fall at his feet, crying out, "Oh, what am I, that should be counted against your sorrow?"

There were times when the thought of Roland Lansdell's sorrow overcame every other thought in Isabel Gilbert's mind. Until the day when he had thrown himself upon the ground in a sudden passion of grief, she had never realized the possibility of his being unhappy because of her.

The weeks went slowly by. To Roland the days were weary and the nights intolerable. He went up to the city several times, always leaving Mordred alone and at abnormal hours, and every time intending to remain away. But he could not; a sudden fever seized him as the distance grew wide. She would repent of her stern determination; she would write to him, avowing that she could not live without him. Ah, how long he had expected that letter! She would grow suddenly unable to endure her life perhaps, and would be rash and desperate enough to go to Mordred in the hope of seeing him.

Day after day he haunted the bridge under Thurston's oak; day after day he waited in the faint hope that the doctor's wife might wander thither. Oh, how cruel she was; how cruel! If she had ever loved him, she too would have haunted that spot. She would have come to the place associated with his memory. She would have come, as he came, in the hope of another meeting.

He sat by the water listening to the church bells as they rang out upon the tranquil atmosphere. The people were coming to church. Roland's heart throbbed heavily in his breast. Was she among them? At last all was quiet, and the only bell to be heard in the summer stillness was the distant tinkle of a sheep bell far away in the sunlit meadows. Mr. Lansdell got up as the clock struck 3 and walked at a leisurely pace to the church.

She was there; yes, she was there. She was alone, in a pew near the pulpit, on her knees, with her hands clasped and her eyes looking upward. The high, old-fashioned pew shut her in from the congregation about her, but Mr. Lansdell could look down upon her from his post of observation in the gallery. Her face was pale and worn, and her eyes looked larger and brighter than when he had seen her last. Was she in a consumption? Ah, no; it was only the eager, yearning soul which was always consuming itself; it was no physical illness, but the sharp pains of a purely mental struggle that had left those traces on her face.

Roland was seized with a sudden desire that Isabel should see him. He wanted to see the recognition of him in her face. Might he not learn the depth of her love, the strength of her regret, by that one look of recognition?

A green serge curtain hung before him. He pushed the folds aside; and the brazen rings made a little clanging noise as they slipped along the rod. The sound was loud enough to startle the woman whom Mr. Lansdell was watching so intently. She looked up and recognized him. He saw a white change flit across her face; he saw her slight muslin garments flutter by a faint shiver; and then in the next moment she was looking demurely downward at the book on her lap, something as she had looked on that morning when he first met her under Thurston's oak.

All through the service Roland Lansdell sat watching her. He made no pretense of joining in the devotions of the congregation; but he disturbed no one. He only sat, grim and somber-looking, staring down at that one pale face in the pew near the pulpit. A thousand warring thoughts and emotions surged in his breast.

Finally the service came to a close. Little by little the congregation melted out of the aisle. The charity boys from the neighborhood of the organ loft came clumping down the stairs. Still Mr. Lansdell stood watching and waiting the doctor's wife in the pew below. Still Isabel Gilbert kept her place, rigid and inflexible, until the church was quite empty.

Then Mr. Lansdell looked at her—only one look—but with a world of emotion concentrated in its dark fury. He looked at her, slowly folding his arms and drawing himself to his full height. He shrugged his shoulders with one brief, contemptuous movement, as if he flung some burden off him by the gesture, and then turned and left the pew. Mrs. Gilbert heard his firm tread upon the stairs, and she rose from her seat in time to see him pass out of the porch.

(To be continued.)

No man living can give the details of a wedding ceremony, but every woman present can tell what every other woman had on.

TOPICS OF THE TIMES.

A CHOICE SELECTION OF INTERESTING ITEMS.

Comments and Criticisms Based Upon the Happenings of the Day—Historical and News Notes.

There is a loud demand down East for cheaper hides. And also for cheaper Hydes.

Some day insurance policy holders may get together and insist on the right to have their votes counted.

Each of the Russian Grand Dukes receives a salary of \$1,000,000 a year. We believe their places could be well filled by cheaper men.

A cantankerous husband in Norfolk, Va., has been sentenced by a judge to kiss his wife twice a day. Look out for a biting story later on.

The girl who twisted her neck out of joint in a nightmare probably dreamed that she was examining the latest fashions during a street promenade.

Judging from the thousands of desertions each year, the army and navy must not be living up to the colored pictures in the recruiting stations.

Prince Louis of Battenburg says New York would be easy of capture by a hostile navy. We would advise Lou to be somewhat careful, however.

An old sailor objects to the term "jackies." He says jackies are monkeys. The point is well taken. It is wrong to make monkeys of our sailors.

E. Benjamin Andrews says football breeds kindness and restraint. Yet E. Benjamin probably wonders why the public often declines to take him seriously.

A Chicago woman burned \$15,000 in bills to spite her husband, who, she suspected, married her for her money. She must be one of those people who refer to it as "peif."

A great deal of inventive talent is wasted on flying machines that might be useful to mankind if turned in the direction of making the frog in the railway switch track less deadly.

When the appointments to consulships are given to men on account of their ability, and not as a reward for politicians out of a job, the service will be vastly improved without any new system.

A Cleveland justice of the peace has been sent to the workhouse for collecting illegal fees. This country will never be able to achieve real greatness until it does away entirely with its justices of the peace.

Secretary Bonaparte proposes to stop prize fighting at Annapolis. A cadet was killed in a prize fight at Annapolis not long ago, which shows that prize fighting is sometimes as dangerous as football. The secretary's decision is, therefore, to be commended.

Youth is an invitation to a masked ball, which we all accept. We mingle with the dancers until our fancy fixes upon a domino and a pair of tripping feet with which to tread a measure. We become weary of the dance and go out into the moonlight to "sit" it out. Then we unmask, and presto! the ball is over and youth is dead.

How should you like to go fishing with a net and catch a submarine monster that towed your boat and threatened to submerge it unless you cut the ropes? This is what the commander of a five-ton fishing vessel recently did off the British coast. He first thought that he had caught a monstrous whale, and was not deceived when its dark, shiny back became visible through the water. But when the hatches of a submarine vessel rose out of the sea he discovered that he had caught a warship which had been maneuvering in his neighborhood.

The prestige caused by our military successes in the war with Spain has been equaled if not exceeded by the respect gained from the no less renowned victory of peace through the intervention and persistent attention of President Roosevelt. While the feeling of the world toward America has been deepened in respect and intensified in cordiality, the attachment of our own citizens to our flag, universally recognized now as one of peace as well as of war, has been strengthened, and it is felt by Republicans and Democrats, by the East and the West, that what Theodore Roosevelt as the chief magistrate has done has drawn our own people as well as those of Japan and Russia more closely together.

The lovers of birds who denounce the wanton slaughter of these among the most beautiful of God's creatures too frequently confine themselves to the sentimental aspect of the case. The sentiment, indeed, which they invoke is powerful and wholesome

enough, but it by no means constitutes the whole of the argument on behalf of our feathered friends. Science comes forward to supplement that argument. It furnishes striking proof of the enormous debt that we owe to the birds. One investigator goes so far as to declare in a recent article on the damage that is committed by insect pests that if the destructive insects of the world were to increase tenfold in a year the human race would be deprived of existence. Among the most effective allies of man in his battle with these minute enemies are the birds.

The Rev. Myron Reed used to say that human life up to about forty years ago was not worth living—that only the inventions and institutions of the last half century have made life bearable. President Elliot of Harvard has just issued a reprint of a little book in which he argues that human happiness is neither harder nor easier to find to-day than at any other period. So the question is still an open one. Unfortunately, there is no way to gauge the degree of happiness of any period, or even to define definitely what happiness is. All we can know for certain is that the happiness of our own times is the best that is attainable to us, and lucky is he who gets his share of it. Happiness, like health, is known to us only through its opposite—health through disease and pain, and happiness through disappointment and misery. Man never knew he had such an organ as a stomach until indigestion developed, and he never would realize happiness if there were not others worse off than himself. The masses of mankind, until this century almost dumb, now make heard their sufferings and dissatisfaction. The woes of centuries are finding utterance in the free speech of our day. The wall may cause the unthinking to suppose that the sun of human happiness is suddenly obscured. But, to the contrary, the remedies following the better understanding of wrong conditions steadily improve the conditions under which happiness may become more general. The more we hear of wrongs the less wrongs we have. Philosophers may wrangle about it until doomsday—and no doubt they will—but the age which knows the least earthly misery and woe is the one that has been longest dead, and the generation that really knows what happiness is and can realize its possession is a long time off.

More and more our institutions of learning strive to find and maintain practical relations to the life of the nation and its citizens. They are not content to foster special thinking on special subjects, but try to cultivate and encourage good thinking on all subjects that concern men. This fact is made evident by the opening addresses of several college presidents, which were sermons on practical morality. President Butler, of Columbia, discussed the morals of business, and pleaded for conscience in the conduct of business as against mere "law-honesty," which consists in dodging or barely obeying the statutes. President Schurman, of Cornell, preached to his young men the doctrine, as old as the Bible, that a man's life consists not in the attainment of material property, but in the attainment of character. The recent criticisms of men eminent in the financial world will do no good, says President Schurman, unless the criticism reacts on ourselves, and gives us saner views as to the chief good of life and the way to walk to attain it. President Hadley, of Yale, and President Eliot, of Harvard, directed their preachings to the personal morality of young men. Said President Hadley: "Nine-tenths of the temptations of college life would be avoided if we called things by their right names. We should never call things fun here that are rowdiness at home. Compliance with customs, cheating and having a good time would be designated by big names that we should be ashamed even to think of at home." The gist of President Eliot's address on the man of honor is in one sentence, which young men everywhere might consider soberly: "It is a very safe protective rule to live to-day as if you were going to marry a pure woman within a month." Preaching usually sets higher standards than all the listeners can or will reach. But if the wisdom of these college presidents strikes into a few young hearts, American universities will become centers of more intense light.

Gobble! Gobble! Gobble!
"At the mere mention of his name I'm always reminded of a turkey cock."

"Nonsense! He's as modest and unassuming!"
"Personally, yes; but his name is 'W. W. Doubleday.'"—Catholic Standard and Times.

Not a stickler.
Willie—In what month were you born, Miss Runnaboute?
Miss Runnaboute—It makes no difference, dear boy—the appropriate stone is the diamond.—Puck.

Not one man in a hundred can quit while his reputation is good.