

THE MYSTERY OF MR. AND MRS. PEACOCKE.

Continued from 1st page. When Mr. Puddicombe came down from the church to the rectory, Lord Carstairs was walking home after the afternoon service with Miss Worlie. It was his custom to go to church with the family, whereas the school went there under the charge of one of the uelers and sat apart in a portion of the church...

not do for you in your trouble,—except that you may not both be here together till I shall have shaken hands with her as Mrs. Peacocke is very true. It was as usual. Mr. Peacocke should not go into the school, or should have gone to America and have some back. It was explained in the school by the Doctor early,—for the Doctor must now take the morning school himself,—that circumstances of very grave import necessitated that Mr. Peacocke should start at once for America. The tidings which had been published at the Lamb should reach the boys, was more or less a secret, which it is not certain it would of course reach all the boys' parents. There was no use in any secrecy. But in speaking to the school, the Doctor explained that he himself would take the morning school, and that Mr. Boss, the matroning master, would take charge of the school meals. Mr. Peacocke would look to the linen and the bedrooms. It was made plain that Mrs. Peacocke's services were not to be required; but he was not to mention it,—except that the Doctor, in order to let it be understood that she was not to be banished from the house, begged the boys as a favor that they would not interrupt Mrs. Peacocke's tranquility during Mr. Peacocke's absence.

On the Tuesday morning Mr. Peacocke started, remaining at Broughton which the Doctor saw him. Lefroy declared that he knew nothing about his brother,—whether he was alive or dead,—and he was not sure because he was always in trouble, and generally drunk. Robert, on the whole, thought it probable that he was dead, but could not be got to say so. For a thousand dollars he would go over to Missouri, and if necessary, to Texas, so as to find the truth. He would then come back and give under his evidence. While making this benevolent offer, he declared with tears in his eyes, that he had come over intending to be a true brother to his sister in law, and had simply been misled by prosecuting his good intentions by Peacocke's austerly. Then he swore a most solemn oath that if he knew any more about his brother, he would reveal it. The Doctor and Peacocke agreed together that the man's word was worth nothing, but that the man's services might be useful in ending them to track out the truth. They were both convinced, by words which fell from him, that he was not a true brother, and he was of no avail unless they could obtain absolute evidence. During these two days there were various conversations at Broughton between the Doctor, Mr. Peacocke, and Lefroy, in which a plan of action was at length arranged. Lefroy and the schoolmaster were to proceed to America together, and there obtain what evidence they could as to the life or death of the elder brother. When absolute evidence had been obtained of either a dishonesty or a death, to be handed to Robert Lefroy. But when this agreement was made, the man was given to understand that his own uncorroborated word would go for nothing. "Who is to say what is evidence, and what not?" asked the man, not unreasonably. "Mr. Peacocke must be the judge of that," said the Doctor. "I ain't going to agree to that," said the other. "The man who says he is dead, he might swear he hadn't, and not give a red cent. Why ain't I to be a judge as well as he?" "Because you can trust him and he cannot in the least trust you," said the Doctor. "You know well enough that if he were to see your brother alive, or to see him dead, you would get the money. At any rate, you have no other way of getting it but what we propose." To all this Robert Lefroy at last assented. The prospect before Mr. Peacocke for the next three months was certainly very gloomy. He was to travel from Broughton to St. Louis, and possibly from there down into the wilds of Texas. In company with this man, whom he thoroughly despised, nothing could be more abominable to him than such an expedition. But there was no other way in which the proposed plan could be carried out. He was to pay Lefroy's expenses back to his own country, and could only hope to keep the man true to his purpose by doing so from day to day. Were he to give the man money, the man would at once disappear. Here in England, and in their passage across the ocean, the man might, in some degree, be amenable and obedient. But there was no knowing to what he might have recourse when he should find himself near his country, and should feel that his companion was distant from his own. "I'll have to keep a close watch upon him," whispered the Doctor to his friend. "I should advise all this if I did not think you were a man of strong nerve."

CHAPTER XL THE BISHOP. Mrs. Peacocke had been quite right in saying that the secret would at once be known through the whole diocese. It certainly was so before he had been gone a week, and it certainly was so also, that the diocese generally did not approve of the Doctor's conduct. The woman ought not to have been left there. So said the diocese. It was of course the case that though the diocese knew this, it did not know all. It is impossible to keep such a secret in the diocese. It is quite impossible to make known, in all its details, the eyes of the diocese the woman was of course the chief sinner, and the chief sinner was allowed to remain at the school. When this assertion was made to him the Doctor became very angry, saying that Mrs. Peacocke did not remain at the school, but that she had been banished, and she had nothing to do with the school; that the house was his own, and that he might lend it to whom he pleased. Was it to an evil. The evil is, if it may say so, the two of you should be here together. You should be apart,—till some better day should come upon you. "What better day can ever come?" said the poor man through his tears. Then the Doctor declared his scheme. He told what he thought as to Ferdinand Lefroy, and his reason for believing that the man was dead. "I feel sure that from his manner that his brother is now dead in truth. Go to him and ask him boldly," he said. "But his wife would not suffice for another marriage ceremony." It was not to this the Doctor agreed. It was not his intention, he said, that they should proceed on evidence as slight as that. No; a step must be taken much more serious in its importance, and occupying a considerable time. He, Peacocke, must go again to Missouri and find out all the truth. The Doctor was of opinion that if this were resolved upon, and that if the whole truth were at once proclaimed, then Mr. Peacocke need not hesitate to pay Robert Lefroy for any information which might assist him in his quest. "I will be glad," continued the Doctor almost wildly, "to be bishops and Stantious and Puddicombe say what they may, shall remain here. To say that she will be happy is of course vain. There can be no happiness for her till this has been put right. But he will be safe, and here, at my hand, she will, I think, be free from insult. What better is there to be done?" There can be nothing better," said Peacocke, drawing his breath—as though a gleam of light had shone upon him in this till to-morrow. "I should not have spoken to you of this, but that Pritchett had been done to me. But the more I thought of it, the more sure I became that you could not both remain,—till something had been done; till something had been done."

"I was sure of it. It may be taken for granted at once that I would pay you to act just as though all the facts were known to the entire diocese. After this there was a pause during which the Doctor spoke for a few moments. The Doctor had not intended to declare any purpose of his on that occasion, but it seemed to him now as though he were about to do so. Then Mr. Peacocke seeing the difficulty at once relieved him from it. "I am quite prepared to leave Bowick," he said, "at once. I know that it must be so. I have thought about it, and have perceived that there is no possible alternative. I should like to consent to it, but as to whether I had better go. Where shall I take her?" "Leave her here," said the Doctor. "Here? Where?" "Where she is, in the schoolhouse. No one will come to fill your place for a while." "I should have thought," said Mr. Peacocke, very slowly, "that her presence,—would have been worse almost,—than my own." "To me," said the Doctor,—"to me she is as pure as the most unsullied matron in the country." Upon this Mr. Peacocke, jumping from his chair, seized the Doctor's hand, but could not speak for his tears. Then he seated himself again, turning his face towards the wall. "To no one could the presence of either of you be an evil. The evil is, if it may say so, the two of you should be here together. You should be apart,—till some better day should come upon you." "What better day can ever come?" said the poor man through his tears. Then the Doctor declared his scheme. He told what he thought as to Ferdinand Lefroy, and his reason for believing that the man was dead. "I feel sure that from his manner that his brother is now dead in truth. Go to him and ask him boldly," he said. "But his wife would not suffice for another marriage ceremony." It was not to this the Doctor agreed. It was not his intention, he said, that they should proceed on evidence as slight as that. No; a step must be taken much more serious in its importance, and occupying a considerable time. He, Peacocke, must go again to Missouri and find out all the truth. The Doctor was of opinion that if this were resolved upon, and that if the whole truth were at once proclaimed, then Mr. Peacocke need not hesitate to pay Robert Lefroy for any information which might assist him in his quest. "I will be glad," continued the Doctor almost wildly, "to be bishops and Stantious and Puddicombe say what they may, shall remain here. To say that she will be happy is of course vain. There can be no happiness for her till this has been put right. But he will be safe, and here, at my hand, she will, I think, be free from insult. What better is there to be done?" There can be nothing better," said Peacocke, drawing his breath—as though a gleam of light had shone upon him in this till to-morrow. "I should not have spoken to you of this, but that Pritchett had been done to me. But the more I thought of it, the more sure I became that you could not both remain,—till something had been done; till something had been done."

whole, been friends. There was, however, on the Bishop's part, something of a feeling that the Doctor was the bigger man; and it was possible that, without active malignity, he would take advantage of any change which might lower the Doctor a little, and bring him more within episcopal control. In this respect he was wronged by the Doctor's manliness. He listened with many smiles and with perfect courtesy to the story as it was told to him, and was much less severe on the unfortunates than Mr. Puddicombe had been. It was not the wickedness of the two people in living together, or their wickedness in keeping their secret, which offended him so much, as the evil which they were likely to do—and to have done. "No doubt," he said, "an ill-living man would be a great blessing to the world, but one that is a plus, God-fearing clergyman, whose intellect may be inferior though his morals are much better,—but coming from a high position, the better man will not carry a blessing with it." "At this the Doctor shook his head. "Bringing a blessing," was a phrase which the Doctor hated. He shook his head too, saying that he had not intended to trouble his lordship on so difficult a point in ecclesiastical matters. "I cannot but remain very deeply indebted to you for what has been said in your parish church, and the people will know that he has acted among them as a clergyman."

"I hope the people, my lord, may never have the gospel preached to them by a worse man." "I will not judge him; but I do think that it has been a misfortune. You, of course, were in ignorance. He should have been very much inclined to do the same." This was, in fact, not true, and was said simply in a spirit of contradiction. The Bishop shook his head, and smiled. "My school is a matter of more importance," said the Doctor. "Hardly, hardly, Dr. Wortle." "Of more importance, in what way, that my school may probably be injured, whereas neither the morals nor the faith of the parishioners will have been hurt." "He has gone,—but she remains." "What?" exclaimed the Bishop. "He has gone, but she remains." He repeated the words very slowly, and with a frown on his brow, as though to show that on that branch of the subject he intended to put up with no opposition—hardly even with an adversary. "She had, a certain change, as I understand,—as to the school." "But you said she remained." "I have not heard her since she left her husband's side." "Mr. Peacocke, you mean," said the Bishop. "Yes, my lord, I mean Mr. Peacocke." "Soon afterwards Dr. Wortle took his leave. The recent events were exceeding gratifying to the female portion of the diocese. Lady Margaret Monson, the wife of the Butcher court, made a point of calling upon Mrs. Wortle. After preliminary she inquired: "Is it true what they tell me that Mr. Peacocke has gone to America to look for his wife's husband? Good gracious, what a story!" "They think that he is—dead now." "I suppose they thought so before," said Lady Margaret. "Of course they did." "Though it does seem that no inquiry was made at all. Perhaps they did not care about those things, even if they were here. He couldn't have cared very much,—nor she."

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