THE RECTOR'S SECRET

LOVE CONQUERS ALL.

A STUDY FROM LIFE.

She supported herself with her right hand resting on the marble center-table,

CHAPTER XVII .- Continued.

and, in a low, mournful voice, began : "My maiden name was Mabel Osgood. I was early left an orphan by the death of both my parents, and until my nineteenth year gained a respectable though meager livelihood as a dressmaker. At that time I lived and had my sign out in University place in New York City. I occupied the front room on the second story of the corner house right opposite the University. Sitting at the window sewing, I could gaze across the street into the classroom of the college and see the students at their recitations. One young man particularly attracted my attention, by reason of his glancing over at me more frequently than at his books. Well, we began a flirtation in that way."

"Which led?" asked Walter, as she paused with drooping head.

"To meetings in Washington Square park in front of the university building. We soon came to love each other madly devotedly. He told me his name was George Curtis, and that he was about to graduate from the classical department and take up the study of the law. His father was an eminent physician, he said, and would frown upon their intimacy. In a year he would be of age, and in two years he would be able to establish himself as a lawyer, independent of his father. In the meantime he proposed a secret marriage. I was very young, Mr. Wainwright," she piteously exclaimed, "and I loved him, oh so much. I-I consented."

"It was perhaps unwise, precigitate," said Walter sympathetically, "but since you were actually married-"

"Ah," she interrupted with a pained expression on her face, "I did not knownot until my child was born-that he had deceived me; that he had married me under a false name; that his father found some flaw, I know not what, in the ceremony, which made it null and void. All this was written to me by his father in a letter wherein I was accused of being an adventuress. Oh, the horror of that let-

She sank into the easy-chair, overcome with emotion.

"Villains, father and son both," muttered Walter through his clenched teeth. "Of course, you upbraided them, you demanded reparation-"

"Of whom? I did not even know their right names and addresses. The letter was unsigned I am even to-day ignorant of the real name of the man who so bitterly wronged me But had I known it, of what avail would it have been? I was stunned, crushed, overwhelmed. My life was blasted. I could not meet the bitter, contemptuous scorn of the world. Death was my only refuge. I sought it in the watery depths of the North River."

"And yet you are alive to-day, my lady," said Walter, after a pause. "A kind Providence frustrated your rash design and preserved your life for a brighter, happier future. You are the Dowager Countess Buford; your husband was a true nobleman in all that the word implies; you are wealthy, honored, respected; you have a daughter who loves you and whom you love. Surely you have every reason to be thankful that your life was not brought to an abrupt close."

"When I opened my eyes again after had taken the fatal plunge," she continued, "I found myself lying on an elegant couch in a small but exquisitely furnished room, being rocked to and fro with a gentle motion such as I had not experienced since I was a babe in my to be my father stood at my couch-a kindly old man, whose benevolence beamed from his clear blue eyes and | words. Blood is thicker than water. formed a halo of glory over his silvery | Nature had spoken; and mother and son, grav hair. It was the late Lord Buford." separated from the latter's infancy, were "Who afterward became your hus-

band?" "Yes. He told me that I was on board an outward bound steamer which had the day before cleared port. That, standing on deck, he had heard the sound of a person plunging into the water. He had induced the captain to let down the lifeboat, and he himself had entered it with the sailors. It was he who drew my unconscious form from the watery wasteto him I owed my life. He pressed me for the reasons why I had attempted suicide, but all through the voyage guarded me with a tender, fatherly care. When we landed in England I, of my own accord, revealed to him the whole of my sad story. He listened to me patiently and when I was through he said: 'My poor child. I have suspected most of what you have told me. Yours is not the first case of man's treachery that I have met with in my long experience of life. Remember, I am old enough almost to be your grandfather. Since I have saved now it had come to him over night, like your life, since I have flattered myself as if an angel from heaven had disclosed that you belong to me, I have carefully herself to him bringing peace and joy, Lord."

BY J. R. ABARBANELL.

watched and observed you. You are lady fitting to adorn any station in life. Your first marriage, you say, is null and void, not through any tault of yours. That leaves you free to bestow your hand to whomsoever you please. The world, and mankind in particular, owes you reparation for the wrong inflicted on you. I am willing to be the instrument of that reparation. All my life I have been a bachelor, and old age is creeping on me now. I feel the need of a gentle presence around me. I have, perhaps, no right to speak of love. You, perhaps, have none to give me. But if you will make an old man happy, if you will soothe, comfort and bless his few remaining days on earth, I will make you my wife. As Lady Buford the tongue of calumny can never reach you.",

"Noble, generous old man," exclaimed Walter, with enthusiasm,

"Could I refuse such an appeal as that?" continued the countess, rising to her feet. "I consented; I became his wife. We were married in St. George's Chapel. Though his marriage so late in life to one entirely unknown in English society created some comment, the rectitude of his life and his high rank stifled all criticism. away, we lived very happily together. Py. He blessed me with his last breath, as he peacefully passed away, leaving me the sole possessor of his vast fortune and the care of our child. Since then I have faithfully devoted myself to rear up Mabel as becomes Lord Buford's daughter, to remove the temptation to which her mother succumbed, to keep her in happy ignorance of her mother's sad past. Have I not done right, then, to shun all American society; have I not justified my conduct? Will you not undertake to so declare to all who may murmur at what they are pleased to call my British exclusiveness?"

"I will do so, my lady, with all my heart," replied Walter, "Now that I know your story I cheerfully repeat my vow of fealty. On one point alone if you will permit me, would I like to obtain some further information. You spoke of a child. Was he in your arms when you made your rash plunge? Was his young life sacrificed in the moment of your despair?"

"No," replied the countess, her lips trembling with agitation. "Though I was ready to kill myself, think you that I could murder my child? He lives to-day, I hope, happily ignorant of the stain upon his birth I deposited him in the crèche of the foundling asylum in Abingdon

"When-the date-give me the very hour!" gasped Walter, with a choking bliss," laughed Walter. sensation in his throat.

"It was the night of the first of December. The clock had just struck half-past from the window.

"The babe was dressed all in white, wasn't it? There was not the slightest clue on his person to indicate his parent-

"Ha, you know," exclaimed the countess, powerfully excited

Ethel my sister in face and form? Is not my resemblance to you very marked? Does not your heart speak; do you not know, can you not guess? Mother! My

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOVE'S FIRST VICTORY.

There was no need of further explanation. The resemblance already indicated-the impulse which had induced Lady mother's cradle. A gentleman old enough | Buford to confide her life history to an entire stranger-all these things spoke far more eloquently and convincingly than once more united in each other's arms.

> Oh, how fervently they embraced each other. On her part it was the sudden lifting from her heart of the load of secret remorse which she had carried all these years, at having abandoned her child. How many bitter tears had she shed at the thought of what had become of her babe, yet she dared not attempt to institute any inquiry as to his whereabouts. Now this tall, grown handsome man-this generous, noble soul-was her son, her rightful protector and champion. Tears welled from her eyes as she pillowed her head on his shoulder, but they were tears of joy.

> Walter, on his part, was in a state of equal bliss. His heart, sundered from Blanche could have no other happiness, wished for no other joy, than to be palpitating next to his mother's.

> He had been willing to spend years of unavailing search, to suffer all the pangs of hope deferred and illusions dispelled, to arrive at this supreme moment. And

balm and consolation to his wounded

When the first effusion of their happiness was over, and they could talk coherently about their new-found relationship, Lady Buford was more than ever profuse in the expression of her gratitude to the good rector to whom she owed the rearing and education of her son.

"It was an act of Divine providence," she exclaimed, "which led your foster father to adopt you from the foundling asylum. I shudder to think what would have become of you without him. Oh, that I could go on my knees to him and kiss his hand in token of my gratitude for what he has done for you "

"I will be your messenger in that be half, mother," said Walter. "Mother," he repeated, tenderly, "how my soul lingers on that word. I will tell him that your love for him is no less than mine, and he will then know how boundless it is. I will bring you his answer back."

"You will come back to me; you will sure of the hand. make your home with me?" she eagerly

"Permanently," he replied; adding, while a shade of sadness crossed his face, "I go to New York merely to settle up my affairs there, to bid farewell to my foster father, and his daughter, who has been like a sister to me. Then good-bye to America forever."

"You say it sadly, Walter. You have, like me, exiled yourself from your native into the house.

"I have, mother dear. I have loved and sustained a bitter disappointment. But why grieve you with my private sorrows now? At some other time I will tell you why I am a wanderer from home. Home! This is my home, mother, your For five years, until his peaceful passing roof is my shelter. Here I will be hap-

"You do not speak very hopefully, Walter. Ah, these sorrows of the heart. I know how terrible they are to bear. an I do ought to alleviate them?"

"No, mother, no," he replied, with a mournful smile; "but you can bring the sunshine of happiness to two young hearts who are at present languishing in the darkness of your supposed hatred for Americans."

He approached the window, which looked out upon the park below and added:

"Come here, mother dear, and tell me what you see."

His mother came to the window and looked out.

"You mean out in the arbor there?" she asked.

"I can barely get a glimpse inside of it but-yes I see now. Ethel is sitting on the rustic bench." "Alone?"

"I declare, there's a man sitting beside her. What presumption!"

"Don't become excited, mother dear. Ethel's good name is as dear to me as my own. She's my sister, you know."

her waist," interrupted Lady Buford; hibition must show their certificate of "now he's kissing her. I wonder whether they think that we cannot observe them." ly enforced in the past but the stockmen "They are in a perfect oblivion of themselves are now demanding that it

man?" asked she, as they moved away

"He is not so impudent as you imagine," said Walter. "Do you think that he could kiss Ethel if she did not want to be kissed? Who is he? My fellow actor in last night's comedy; my best of friends and former college chum; a man with a heart in the right spot; a gentleman in "Look at me," cried Walter. "Is not every sense of the word-Harold Han-

"Yes. Ever since the day he painted Ethel's picture his heart was lost to the dear or ginal. At the sitting he confessed his love to her. It was returned. That they have kept this a secret to you was on account of your aversion to Americans, for Harold is an American by birth. He it was who discovered the rascally marquis' plot. To him, more than to me, you owe your daughter's escape from the machinations of a villain. Nay, to him you owe my coming here, and the happy disclosure of our relationship. Mother, fail. it is the first favor I have to ask of you. Let Ethel follow the dictates of her heart. Let her make Harold happy with her

"I can refuse you nothing, Walter," replied the countess. "It shall be as you

"Thanks, dear, dear mother," joyfully exclaimed Walter. "And may I run down and tell the young lovers of your decis

ion? Believe me, they are waiting for it." "One moment," thoughtfully said Lady Buford. "Will it require a revelation of -of our secret?"

"I understand. No, mother. To all the world we are still strangers. Even my bosom friend, Harold, my dear sister, Ethel, must remain forever ignorant of the tie which binds us. It is only when we are alone, mother dear, that we can open our hearts to each other. One exception to the rule is all I crave. My foster father must know that I have found my mother. I owe him that obligation. But he will keep the knowledge a secret, as he has kept the truth, that I am not really his son, hidden from all the world. He will guard the confidence, both as a man of honor and a shepherd of the

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His mother thanked him with a pres

He left the room and found his way into the park. From the window of the room the countess watched him as he entered the arbor to deliver the glad tidings he was the bearer of. She saw Harold grasp his hand and vigorously shake it, and Ethel impulsively throw her arms around his neck and kiss him. Then she beheld all three issuing from the arbor and proceeding joyously along the walk

A moment later they entered the room. Harold was painfully embarrassed; while Ethel, blushing like a rose, clung to her lover.

"I have the honor, Lady Buford," said Walter, "to ask of you in behalf of my friend, Harold Henshawe, the hand of your daughter, Miss De Vere?"

"You have a good advocate, Mr. Henshawe." said the counters, smilingly. "You could not have a better one to plead your suit. But what does my daughter

"I love him, mamma, with all my heart and soul," said Ethel, shyly raising her eyes, which were beaming with happiness.

"Take her, Harold," said the countess, "She is the dearest treasure I possess. Heaven deal with you as you deal with

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Very Hard Indeed.

There are so many things that appear unnecessary, and which for the life of us we can see neither purpose nor end. It may be corns are just one of those thorns in the flesh the why and the wherefore of which we cannot see. Nevertheless they are of the kind that are easily removed. Putnam's Painless Corn Extractor makes short work of them. Try it and see how nicely it coaxes them out. Use none other than Putnam's Corn Extractor. Sold by druggists.

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