

* A DAUGHTER OF JUDAS. *

By the Author of "Sir Lionel's Wife," "The Great Moreland Tragedy," Etc.

CONTINUED. CHAPTER LXIII.

MR. TIPTAIT WRITES A LETTER.

It must be admitted that poor Mr. Tiptait was not getting much help or encouragement from his fellow-victims—as he regarded Harry Rolleston and Sir Granville.

As he walked in the rectory garden, the day after the news had become generally known, he was meditating. Very mournfully, on a piece of intelligence which had been given him, an hour ago, by Lady Ruth, namely that both young Rolleston and Sir Granville had determined to stand by their engagements.

'It only they would have draw back it, would have been so much easier for me,' he murmured, sadly. 'Really, I think a man was never placed in a more awkward position in his life.'

He was commiserating with himself on his misfortunes, and thinking, not a little resentfully, of poor Marie Muggleton, when the sound of quickly advancing wheels made him look towards the road and immediately his countenance was lightened by a smile, for the wheels belonged to the pony-carriage of Mrs. Darling, and Mrs. Darling herself held the reins.

Mr. Tiptait looked at the handsome widow, and thought of her eighty thousand pounds.

And, as he looked, and as he thought, he cursed the Fate which, in an evil hour, had fettered him to Marie Muggleton.

Mrs. Darling stopped her phaeton at the rectory-gate, at sight of the rector in his garden; and he went out into the road to speak to her.

She was a very handsome woman, with a brilliant colour, and fine, sparkling eyes. She, of course, knew all about Mr. Muggleton's reverse of fortune, and began to speak of it immediately.

'It will make a great difference!' she observed.

And as she looked into his face with a look that said, as plainly as words, that if he had a mind to be off with the old love, there was nothing to prevent him from being on with the new.

That look haunted Mr. Tiptait.

After the widow had driven off, he walked up and down the garden, thinking of it, and of the pleasant possibilities it opened up to him.

If only he could get rid of Marie Muggleton!

That was the cry, the yearning, the almost agonized longing, of this good man's heart.

And at last he determined he would get rid of her.

At any rate, he would make a dash for freedom.

Anything was better than to be sacrificed without a struggle.

He walked into the house, locked his study-door behind him, and, seating himself before his writing-table, commenced to write.

For fully a couple of hours he was thus engaged, for he made draft after draft before he could satisfy himself that the letter was as good a one as could be penned.

'If only I had not so often protested I would rather marry her without a penny of fortune!' he thought disconsolately.

'Whatever made me say that so often?' He went hot and cold by turns, as he wrote; and it anyone could have peered into that locked study, they would have been amazed to see how mean, and flabby and poor a creature the usually dignified rector of Little Cleeve could look.

At length, however, his task was completed.

He folded up the letter, addressed and sealed it, then sneaked out, and posted it with his own hands.

Later in the day, the entire Muggleton family were sitting, in solemn conclave, in Mr. Muggleton's private room.

He, pale and grave, was explaining to his wife and daughters, just what means was left to them.

'I shall not come into the Bankruptcy Court. No one shall ever say they lost a penny by Samuel Muggleton,' he was saying, with a certain melancholy pride.

'There will be enough to pay every debt, and a little over. I dare say I may even be able to squeeze a matter of five or six thousand apiece, for you girls. As for you and me, old lady!—and he took his wife very affectionately by the hand—'we? We loved each other before this money came, and I don't think we shall cease to love each other because it's gone.'

'No, indeed, Samuel!' said Mrs. Muggleton weeping—'no, indeed! You've always been a good husband to me, dear, and I should be a bad, ungrateful woman if I didn't stick to you all the closer now that trouble's come.'

Mr. Muggleton's voice was a trifle husky as he said—

'Well, then, my dear, it seems we've all made up our minds to make the best of it. This I will say—no man who's been unfortunate in business, has ever had a better wife, or better children, than I've got. Never a word of reproach from any one of you. I've noticed it—I've noticed it, my dears!'

Of course, all his girls clung round him, and kissed him at this.

He regarded them with a gravely affectionate look for a moment or two, then said with a little sigh—

'I wish I could have done better by you, my dearies; but a man can do no more than he can, and you'll

have to take the will for the deed. This trouble's done one thing, at any rate. It's shown you that the men you're going to marry have got real grit in them. And that reminds me, Polle, dear,' he added, turning very gently to his eldest daughter, 'has Mr. Tiptait been to see you yet?'

'No, father,' said poor Marie, colouring painfully. 'But you know we heard he was confined to the house with an attack of neuralgia.'

'Well, then, if he can't come, surely he ought to write.'

'He will write, father—oh, I am sure he will.'

Marie spoke with almost feverish energy. All through that day, and during a part of yesterday, she had been looking eagerly for a letter or a visit from her reverend suitor, and only her own heart knew how keen and heavy the disappointment had been.

But never for one moment had she doubted him.

If Harry Rolleston and the rather dissipated and worldly-minded Sir Granville showed themselves ready to stand by their engagements, what might not she expect from that good and virtuous man who had wooed her under such exceptional circumstances, and who had solemnly declared to her, not once, nor twice, but many times, that the one wish of his heart was, that she might lose her fortune, in order that he might prove his disinterestedness to all the world?

Scarcely had she said she knew he would write, when a servant entered with a letter, which had just come from Little Cleeve, by the afternoon post.

It was for her.

She recognized her lover's neat, clear hand, and a wave of colour swept over her face, as she tore open the envelope, and prepared to read his tender assurances that his heart clave to her more lovingly in her poverty than even it had done in her time of wealth.

That was the manner of letter poor Marie Muggleton expected from the Reverend Mr. Tiptait.

And the epistle she really received was something very different, as we shall see.

Mr. Tiptait's letter to Miss Muggleton was worded as follows—

'My Dear Miss Muggleton—My heart yearns to address you as 'my dear Marie,' as it has been my happy privilege to do in the days that are fled. But I feel that that right can be no longer mine. Tenderly as I admire and esteem you, I feel it is my duty to withdraw all pretension to your hand.'

'The change in your father's fortune has come upon me as an overwhelming blow. Indeed, it is not too much to say, it has seriously affected my health. I am, at the present moment, suffering from acute neuralgic pains, caused entirely by anxiety of mind.'

'My disinterestedness is, I venture to think, well known to you. Were I a rich man, nothing would more thoroughly rejoice my heart than to share my wealth with you, as you would generously have shared yours with me.'

'But you know my unfortunate position. I am a poor man, and you, I feel assured, will, with your beauty and graces, be able to aspire to a far higher position, even without a penny of fortune, than I could ever hope to give you. I, therefore, feel it incumbent on me to release you from your engagement.'

'You are well aware that my one thought in regard to money, is to devote it to good works. From any other point of view it is mere worldly drags. I feel, however, it would be a cruelty to ask you to share my humble home.'

'You are fitted to adorn a far higher sphere. That that sphere may continue to be yours, and that you may find in it every happiness this world can give, is the sincere, though humble, hope of

Your devoted admirer,
AUGUSTUS TIPTAIT.

Marie read this precious piece of humbug with a wildly-beating heart.

She turned very pale, and her hand trembled.

'Well, my girl, what does he say?' asked her father.

'He says—'

The poor girl could proceed no further. Her emotions choked her.

She burst into tears.

Her father took the letter from her unresisting hand, and read it through to himself.

'Just as I thought!' he said, grimly. Then, between his teeth, he muttered: 'The infernal scoundrel!' and, as he spoke, he clenched his hand, as though he longed to bring it into contact with that smooth, smug face of Mr. Tiptait's.

Her mother and sisters crowded round Marie, anxious to sympathize with her in her trouble; but she was not to be comforted.

Her grief was too keen to admit of consolation just yet.

It was not that she loved Mr. Tiptait. She did not love him.

The only man she had ever loved was a blue-eyed Irishman, with a scarred brow and a lame foot.

But the rector of Little Cleeve had been her promised husband, and she had been dazzled by his shining virtues, and had believed, most strongly, that he loved her with no common love.

It is possible to wound a woman through her pride almost as cruelly as through her

heart, and this was the sort of wound Mr. Tiptait had dealt poor Marie Muggleton. No wonder she refused to be comforted.

'Never mind, my lassie,' said her father, taking her in his arms, and kissing her with a sort of remorseful tenderness. 'He wasn't worthy of you. I said it from the first. It's a good riddance of bed rubbish. You're spared for a better man than him. But let him keep out of my way, or—'

And again Mr. Muggleton doubled up his hand in a way which would have greatly disturbed the peace of mind of Mr. Tiptait, if he had seen it.

CHAPTER LXIV. OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

A blue Italian sky, shining over the vineyards of the Campagna; a couple of young men, stretched at full length at the foot of a hill-side, within the shadow of a grove of orange trees.

The heat was almost tropical, and one of the young men, who had an appearance of great delicacy, seemed almost overcome by it.

His breath was coming in quick, short gasps, and his face was deathly pale.

His companion was supporting his head, very tenderly, with his arm, casting an anxious glance about meanwhile, as though in search of something or someone.

A pedestrian, passing along the white dusty road at the foot of the hill turned aside to ask, in a deep, musical voice, with a very pleasant touch of Irish brogue about it—

'Is there anything the matter? Can I be of any use?'

The man who was supporting the head of his companion accepted the offer, frankly.

'Thanks ever so much,' he said, in a very grateful tone, 'if you wouldn't mind going as far as the image of the Virgin, and telling the man you'll see there to bring the carriage on at once. My brother thought he could manage a walk this morning, but he isn't very strong, and it's quite knocked him up. I'd go for the carriage myself, but you see he's a bit faint and I don't like to leave him.'

'I'll go for you with all the pleasure in life,' said the stranger.

And away he went, at a tremendous pace, though it it could be seen he was slightly lame in one foot.

In less than ten minutes he returned with the carriage, remarking—

'I came back with it. I thought I might, perhaps, be able to help in some way.'

'Thanks. It was very good of you,' said Dr. Thomas Browne for the younger of the two men was none other than the medico who had been called to attend Kate Lisle in that mysterious attack of blood-poisoning, and his companion was, of course, his invalid brother Jem.

The invalid was got into the carriage very comfortably, and began to revive from his faintness.

'You'll drive to the village with us?' said Dr. Browne, turning to the obliging stranger, whose sunburnt face and deep-blue eyes took his fancy greatly.

'Thanks!' was the reply, given with unhesitating frankness. 'I should like to know how your brother gets on. Where are you staying?'

'At the Golden Head Hotel.'

'Why I am staying there, too. At least I'm going to stay there,' he corrected himself, laughing. 'I only tramped in with my knapsack this afternoon.'

'I am English,' said Dr. Browne. 'Will you accept my card?'

'I needn't tell you the name of my country,' said the other, with a sly laugh; 'but here's my name.'

And he handed Dr. Browne a card, inscribed 'Sir Patrick Donovan.'

'I have heard of you,' said Dr. Browne, with a look made up of surprise and half of pleasure. 'You were down in Hampshire, last year, I think—at Vivian Court, weren't you?'

Sir Patrick nodded, a little flush rising to his honest, sun-browned face.

'Do you know Hampshire?' he questioned, eagerly.

'I was there as a locum tenens for a medical friend, Doctor Baker. Perhaps you know him. He lived near the Court.'

'Yes, I think I know who you mean. I know a good many people thereabouts.'

Early in the afternoon he found himself eight or nine miles from the village they were putting up at; and looking about him for some place of refreshment, he realized that he had wandered away from the ordinary haunts of civilization.

He tramped on for another couple of miles, and no hostelry—not even a farmhouse or a peasant's cottage—met his eye.

He seemed to have got into the heart of a range of lonely hills.

He had just made up his mind to turn back, not knowing whether the path would lead him, when some rings of smoke, curling lazily in the hot summer air, assured him some human habitation was at hand; and, pressing onward, he saw, to his surprise, not a peasant's cottage—as he expected—but an elegant villa, covered with passion flowers, and situated in the midst of a big garden, most beautifully kept.

In this garden, just within the pretty rustic gate, a girl was standing, looking down the road with a dreamily wistful expression in her large grey eyes.

She wore a blue gown, and was slender and graceful, and her hands were loosely clasped on the topmost bar of the gate.

Sir Patrick, while he was still at some distance from her, felt certain she was English.

Advancing nearer, he could scarcely repress an exclamation of pleasure, and he crossed the road with eagerly outstretched hands, saying—

'My dear Miss Lisle, is it really you?'

The girl fixed her dreamily wistful eyes upon his face, but there was no recognition in them.

'I—I think you are mistaken,' she said, in a sweet gentle voice.

But Sir Patrick was sure he wasn't mistaken.

He simply thought Kate Lisle had a short memory, and had forgotten him.

There were the Muggletons—very rich people, who lived at a place called the Towers.'

'Yes. It was a friend of theirs I was called in to attend—a Miss Lisle, who was staying with them, and was taken seriously ill.'

'Ah, yes, I remember her!' said Sir Patrick, warmly. 'A pretty girl! with very sweet pleasant manners.' And he paused a little, then added, slowly: 'and there was a Mr. Tiptait—rector of Little Cleeve. Did you know him?'

'By sight. That was about all. He was engaged to the eldest Miss Muggleton. A splendid match for him, of course. The old gentleman was very much opposed to it, according to current report.'

'No doubt the young lady herself was deeply attached,' said Sir Patrick, stooping to flick some dust from off his shoes.

'Oh, I don't know! I should say he was simply a smooth sort of a humbug, who'd got round the girl by professing to be extra religious. I've seen her out with him two or three times, and it never seemed to me that she was over enraptured with him. But that class of man gets all the luck. They're always plenty of cheek, you know. If they want a thing, they don't mind asking for it.'

Sir Patrick seemed to ponder a good deal on this view of things, but he said no more on the subject.

Instead, he turned to poor invalid Jem, and busied himself in making him extra comfortable.

The two Brownes, in deference to the rank of their newly-made acquaintance, would not have intruded themselves on him, on arriving at the hotel, but he seemed really desirous of encouraging an intimacy.

'Let's dine together to-night,' he said. 'That is, if you are well enough to stand our noise,' he said, turning to Jem with as kindly solicitous a glance as any woman could have given.

But Jem was much better, and declared there was nothing he should like so much, or that would do him as much good, as an hour or two of Sir Patrick's society.

And so the three dined together, and Sir Patrick, with his really Irish wit and irresistible bonhomie, so charmed poor Jem Browne that he told his brother, at bedtime, he verily believed he shouldn't be able to feel a single ache or pain so long as the gay Irishman was with him.

Sir Patrick, on his part, was quite as well pleased with his new acquaintances as they were with him.

Jem's affliction appealed to his tenderest sympathies; and the younger brother's devotion to the invalid was a beautiful sight in the eyes of the tender-hearted Irishman, who had loved his own young brother with so deep a love in the happy years gone by.

Before a week was over, the three men were so intimate together that they rarely spent an hour of the day apart.

The Brownes were in Italy for the health of the elder brother, and Sir Patrick, with characteristic Irish frankness, had not known them two days before he told them the exact reason of his being there.

He was a poor man, he said, and had been to Johannesburg, with a view of making a fortune there, such as might enable him to live in ease and peace at Castle Donovan in his old age.

But he had been recalled from South Africa by a letter from an ancient god-mother of his, who, finding herself dying in Italy, had suddenly longed to see the gay, blue-eyed Pat Donovan, whom she had known as a child, and as a young lad, in 'old country' at home.

He arrived in Italy just in time to soothe her last hours, and after her death, found she had bequeathed him in the whole of a snug little fortune of twenty thousand pounds.

'I shall go back to Ireland in time for the hay-making,' he remarked to the Brownes. 'But this place is wonderfully pleasant just now. I think I may as well stay a bit.'

One day, when Jem was prostrated with a nervous headache, and Dr. Browne was in his room with him, ministering to his wants as tenderly as a woman could have done, Sir Patrick set out for a walk, alone.

Early in the afternoon he found himself eight or nine miles from the village they were putting up at; and looking about him for some place of refreshment, he realized that he had wandered away from the ordinary haunts of civilization.

He tramped on for another couple of miles, and no hostelry—not even a farmhouse or a peasant's cottage—met his eye.

He seemed to have got into the heart of a range of lonely hills.

He had just made up his mind to turn back, not knowing whether the path would lead him, when some rings of smoke, curling lazily in the hot summer air, assured him some human habitation was at hand; and, pressing onward, he saw, to his surprise, not a peasant's cottage—as he expected—but an elegant villa, covered with passion flowers, and situated in the midst of a big garden, most beautifully kept.

In this garden, just within the pretty rustic gate, a girl was standing, looking down the road with a dreamily wistful expression in her large grey eyes.

She wore a blue gown, and was slender and graceful, and her hands were loosely clasped on the topmost bar of the gate.

Sir Patrick, while he was still at some distance from her, felt certain she was English.

Advancing nearer, he could scarcely repress an exclamation of pleasure, and he crossed the road with eagerly outstretched hands, saying—

'My dear Miss Lisle, is it really you?'

The girl fixed her dreamily wistful eyes upon his face, but there was no recognition in them.

'I—I think you are mistaken,' she said, in a sweet gentle voice.

But Sir Patrick was sure he wasn't mistaken.

He simply thought Kate Lisle had a short memory, and had forgotten him.

'Surely you remember me?' he said, with just a suspicion of reproach in his blue eyes.

'Sir Patrick Donovan, who was staying at Vivian Court, last autumn, when you were at the Towers.'

The girl passed her hand across her forehead with a puzzled look.

'I beg your pardon, but you are certainly mistaken,' she said, after a moment or two of silence. 'My name isn't Lisle at all. I am called Hilda Mostyn, and I haven't been in England for the last two years.'

Sir Patrick stood still, and looked at her. He was absolutely dumb with amazement.

Not Kate Lisle! He couldn't—he really couldn't—believe it.

He had known her so well only, seven or eight months ago; and she looked exactly as she had looked then, expecting that she had lost a little of her lovely color, and looked more pensive and thoughtful than ever she had been in Hampshire.

Could she be purposely deceiving him? he asked himself for one half moment; and then looking into the truthful grey eyes, he decided this could not be.

No! marvellous though it seemed, it was evidently a case of mistaken identity.

'Well, I've heard of wonderful likenesses, but I've never seen anything like this,' was his inward thought.

He was about to raise his hat and pass on, sorely puzzled, and not a little disappointed, when a lady appeared in the verandah of the house—a tall, stately woman as he could see even at a distance, with a pale, handsome face and exceedingly dark eyes.

She seemed to be giving hurried orders to someone near her, and the next moment a middle-aged woman, dressed like a superior servant, came down the pathway to the gate where she was standing.

Sir Patrick would probably have spoken to her and explained why he had taken the freedom of accosting the young lady, but the young lady herself forestalled him.

'Nanetta,' she said, eagerly, 'this gentleman thought my name was Kate Lisle. He was quite sure he met me in England last year. Oh! Nanetta,'—and her she dropped her voice in a low whisper—'isn't that very strange?'

'Not at all,' said the woman composedly. 'People are constantly fancying they see resemblances like that.'

Then she spoke to Sir Patrick.

'You thought you knew the young lady, sir?' she said, civilly.

'I did. She reminds me, most forcibly, of a Miss Kate Lisle, whom I used to know in England. I never saw such a remarkable resemblance in all my life before. Even now, I can hardly convince myself that this young lady is not my friend.'

'Well, Miss Mostyn, has not been out of Italy, for more than two years, so it certainly couldn't be she you saw in England,' said the woman, speaking very good English, although she was evidently either French or Italian. 'She has lived here, with her cousin, Madame Maintenou, and, as she is rather delicate, she doesn't go out much.'

In an undertone, she added—

'She lost her papa a year or two ago. It was a great blow, and she hasn't been well since.'

'Well, I'm sure I beg your pardon for intruding,' said Sir Patrick, in his frank, genial fashion. 'But the resemblance was so very marvellous, I really couldn't help being deceived by it.'

Then, raising his hat, he passed on; and it was a sign how deeply the rencontre had moved him, that, hungry and thirsty though he really was, he thought no more of either food or drink until, at sunset, he stood within the porch of The Golden Horn.

CHAPTER LXV. THE WATCHERS.

'Doctor, when you were down in Hampshire, last year, you knew Miss Lisle quite well, didn't you?'

It was Sir Patrick who asked this question, as he and Dr. Browne walked up and down the garden at the back of The Golden Horn, in the moonlight, while poor Jem worn out with his headache, was asleep in his own room.

'I should think I did! Hers was a very remarkable case, and I was keenly interested in it.'

'Should you know her again if you were to see her now?'

'O! certainly.'

'I'll tell you why I ask. I've had the oddest adventure this afternoon.'

And then Sir Patrick told his friend of his meeting with the girl whom he had believed to be Kate Lisle.

Dr. Browne listened with breathless attention.

'I should like to see that girl!' he said, eagerly, as Sir Patrick finished his story. 'You can't think it was Miss Lisle after all?'

'I don't know. I say frankly it was a case of great mystery. I only know I