



***FERGUS  
HUME***

***WHOM GOD  
HATH JOINED:  
A QUESTION  
OF MARRIAGE***

**Fergus Hume**

# **Whom God Hath Joined: A Question of Marriage**

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Contact: [DigiCat@okpublishing.info](mailto:DigiCat@okpublishing.info)



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# **WHOM GOD HATH JOINED.**

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## **CHAPTER I.**

### **TWO FRIENDS.**

"Like doth not always draw to like--in truth Old age is ever worshipful of youth, Seeing in boyish dreams with daring rife, A reflex of the spring time of its life, When sword in hand with Hope's brave flag unfurled, It sallied forth to fight the blust'ring world."

It was about mid-day, and the train having emerged from the darkness of the St. Gothard tunnel, was now steaming rapidly on its winding line through the precipitous ravines of the Alps, under the hot glare of an August sun. On either side towered the mountains, their rugged sides of grey chaotic stone showing bare and bleak at intervals amid the dense masses of dark green foliage.

Sometimes a red-roofed chalet would appear clinging swallow-like to the steep hill-side--then the sudden flash of a waterfall tumbling in sheets of shattered foam from craggy heights: high above, fantastic peaks swathed in wreaths of

pale mist, and now and then the glimpse of a white Alpine summit, milky against the clear blue of the sky.

On sped the engine with its long train of carriages, as though anxious to leave the inhospitable mountain land for the fertile plains of Italy--now crawling fly-like round the giant flank of a hill--anon plunging into the cool gloom of a tunnel--once more panting into the feverish heat--sweeping across slender viaducts hanging perilously over foaming torrents--gliding like a snake under towering masses of rock--and running dangerously along the verge of dizzy precipices, while white-walled, red-roofed, green-shuttered villages, shapeless rocks, delicately green forests, snow-clad peaks, and thread-like waterfalls flashed past the tired eyes of the passengers in the train with the rapidity of a kaleidoscope.

And it was hot--the insufferable radiance of the southern sun, blazing down from a cloudless sky, beat pitilessly on the roofs of the railway carriages, until the occupants were quite worn out with the heat and glare from which they could not escape.

In one of the first-class carriages two men were endeavouring to alleviate the discomfort in some measure, and had succeeded in obtaining a partial twilight by drawing down the dark blue curtains, but the attempt was hardly successful, as through every chink and cranny left uncovered, shot the blinding white arrows of the sun-god, telling of the intolerable brilliance without.

One of the individuals in question was lying full length on the cushions, his head resting on a dressing-bag, and his eyes half closed, while the other was curled up in a corner

on the opposite side, with his hands in his pockets, his head thrown back, and a discontented look on his boyish face, as he stared upward. Both gentlemen had their coats off, their waistcoats unbuttoned and their collars loose, trying to make themselves as comfortable as possible in the sweltering heat.

On the seats and floor of the carriage a litter of books and papers showed how they had been striving to beguile the time, but human nature had given in at last, and they were now reduced to a state of exhaustion, to get through the next few hours as best they could until their arrival at Chiasso, where they intended to leave the train and drive over to their destination at Cernobbio, on Lake Como.

"Oh Jove!" groaned the lad in the corner, settling himself into a more comfortable position, "what a devil of a day."

"The first oath," murmured the recumbent man lazily, with his eyes still closed, "is apt, and smacks of classic culture suitable to the land of Italy, but the latter is English and barbaric."

"Oh, bother," retorted his friend impatiently, "I can't do the subject justice in the way of swearing."

"Then don't try; the tortures of Hades are bad enough without the language thereof."

"You seem comfortable at all events, Gartney," said the boy crossly.

"St. Lawrence," observed Mr. Gartney, opening his eyes, "had a bed of roses on his gridiron compared with this eider-down cushion on which I lie--the saint roasted, I simmer--I'll be quite done by the time we reach Chiasso."

"I'm done now," groaned his companion. "Do shut up, Gartney, and I'll try and get some sleep."

Gartney laughed softly at the resigned manner in which the other spoke, and once more closed his eyes while his friend, following his example, fell into an uneasy slumber interrupted by frequent sighs and groans.

He was a pleasant enough looking boy, but not what would be called handsome, with his merry grey eyes, his rather wide mouth, his well-cut nose with sensitive nostrils, and his wavy auburn hair suiting his fair freckled skin; all these taken individually were by no means faultless, yet altogether they made up a countenance which most people liked. Then he had a tall, well-knit figure, and as he dressed well, rode well, was an adept in all kinds of athletic sports, with exuberant animal spirits and a title, Angus Macjean, Master of Otterburn, was a general favourite with his own sex, and a particular favourite with the other.

What wit and humour the lad possessed came from his Irish mother, who died, poor soul, shortly after he was born, and was not sorry to leave the world either, seeing it was rendered so unpleasant by her stern Presbyterian husband. Why she married Lord Dunkeld when, as a Dublin belle, she could have done so much better, was a mystery to everyone, but at all events marry him she did with the aforesaid results, death for herself after a year of unhappy married life, and an heir to the Macjean title.

Lord Dunkeld was sincerely sorry in his own cold way when she died, never dreaming, narrow-minded bigot as he was, that life in the gloomy Border castle was unsuited to the brilliant, impulsive Irishwoman, and after placing her

remains in the family vault, he proceeded to apply to his son's life the same rules that finished Lady Dunkeld's existence. The boy, however, had Scotch grit in him as well as Celtic brilliance, and as he grew up under his father's eye, gave promise both intellectually and physically of future excellence, so that when he reached the age of nineteen, he was the pride of the old lord, and of the endless Macjean clan, who were very proud, very poor, and very numerous.

But whatever pride Dunkeld felt in the perfections of his heir he took care never to show it to the lad on the principle that it would make him vain, and vanity, according to Mr. Mactab, the minister who looked after the spiritual welfare of the family, "was a snare o' the auld enemy wha gaes roaring up an' doon the world." So Angus was never pandered to in that way, but led a studious, joyless existence, his only pleasures being shooting and fishing, while occasionally Dunkeld entertained a few of his friends who were of the same way of thinking as himself, and made merry in a decorous, dreary fashion.

At the age of nineteen, however, the lad rebelled against the dismal life to which his father condemned him, for as the princess in the brazen castle, despite all precautions, found out about the prince coming to release her, so Angus Macjean, from various sources, learned facts about a pleasant life in the outside world, which made him long to leave the cheerless castle and rainy northern skies for a place more congenial to the Irish side of his character. With such ideas, it is scarcely to be wondered at that he became more unmanageable every day, until Lord Dunkeld with



many misgivings sent him to Oxford to finish his education, but as a safeguard placed by his side as servant one Johnnie Armstrong, a middle-aged Scotchman of severe tendencies, who was supposed to be "strong in the spirit."

So to this seat of learning, Otterburn went, as his progenitors had gone before him, and falling in by some trick of Fate with a somewhat fast set, indulged his Irish love for pleasure to the utmost. Not that he did anything wrong, or behaved worse than the general run of young men, but his 'Varsity life was hardly one which would have been approved of by his severe parent or the upright minister who had nurtured his young intellect on the psalms of David.

Still Johnnie Armstrong!

Alas, for the frailty of human nature, Johnnie Armstrong, the strong in spirit, the guardian of morality, the prop of a wavering faith, yielded to the temptations of the world, and held only too readily that tongue which should have warned Otterburn against the snares of Belial, for, truth to tell, Johnnie made as complaisant a guardian as the most dissipated rake could have desired. The world, the flesh, and the devil was too strong a trinity for Johnnie to stand against, so he surrendered himself to the temptations of this life in the most pusillanimous manner, aiding and abetting his young master with misdirected zeal. Behold then, Angus Macjean and his leal henchman both fallen away from grace and having a good time of it at Oxford, so much so, indeed, that Otterburn was quite sorry when his father, after two years' absence, summoned him to Dunkeld Castle to grace the ceremony of his coming of age.

That coming of age was a severe trial to Angus, as the guests were mostly Free Kirk ministers and their spouses, the ministers in lengthy speeches, exhorting him to follow in the footsteps of his father, *i.e.*, support the Free Kirk, make large donations to the funds thereof, and entertain ministers of that following on all possible occasions. Otterburn having learnt considerable craft at Oxford, made suitable replies, promising all kinds of things which he had not the slightest idea of fulfilling, and altogether produced a favourable impression both by such guile and by a display of those educational graces with which Alma Mater had endowed him. It is needless to say that, aided by the faithful Johnnie Angus did not tell either his father or Mactab of his gay life at the University, and the result of this reticence was that the old lord, bestowing on him a small income out of the somewhat straitened finances of the Macjeans, bade him enjoy himself in London for a year, and then return to marry.

To marry! Poor Angus was horror-struck at such a prospect, the more so when his father introduced him to the lady selected to be his bride, a certain Miss Cranstoun who had a good income, but nothing else to recommend her to his fastidious taste.

However, being a somewhat philosophical youth, he accepted the inevitable, for he knew it would be easier to move Ben Nevis than his father, and trusting to the intervention of a kind Providence to avert his matrimonial fate, he went up to London with Johnnie to enjoy himself, which he did, but hardly in the way anticipated by Lord Dunkeld.

Thinking his marriage with the plain-looking Miss Cranstoun was unavoidable, he made up his mind to see as much of life as he could during his days of freedom, and proceeded to do so to his own detriment, morally, physically and pecuniarily, when he chanced to meet with Eustace Gartney.

Eustace Gartney, whimsical in his fancies, took a liking to the lonely lad, left to his own devices in such a dangerous place as London, and persuaded him to come to Italy hoping to acquire an influence over the young man and keep him on the right path until his return to Dunkeld Castle.

There was certainly a spice of selfishness in this arrangement, as Eustace was attracted by the exuberant animal spirits and Irish wit of the lad, which formed a contrast to the general run of young men of to-day, and to his own pessimistic views of life, so, much as he disliked putting himself out in any way, he determined to stand by the inexperienced youth, and save him from his impulsive good nature and love of pleasure.

Lord Dunkeld, deeming it wise that Angus should see something of Continental life, and having full confidence in the straightforwardness of Johnnie Armstrong, agreed to the journey, much to his son's surprise, and this was how The Hon. Angus Macjean, in company with Eustace Gartney, was in a railway train midway between St. Gothard and Chiasso.

And Eustace Gartney, poet, visionary, philosopher, pessimist--what of him? Well, it is rather difficult to say. His friends called him mad, but then one's friends always say that of anyone whose character they find it difficult to understand. He was eminently a child of the latter half of

this curious century, the outcome of an over-refined civilization, the last expression of an artificial existence, and a riddle hard and unguessable to himself and everyone around him.

For one thing, he always spoke the truth, and that in itself was sufficient to stamp him as an eccentric individual, who had no motive for existence in a society where the friendship of its members depends in a great measure on their dexterity in evading it. Again Gartney was iconoclastic in his tendencies, and loved to knock down, break up, and otherwise maltreat the idols which Society has set up in high places for the purposes of daily worship. The Goddess of Fashion, the Idol of Sport, the Deity of Conventionalism, all these and their kind were abominations to this disrespectful young man, who displayed a lack of reverence for such things which was truly appalling.

It was not as though he had emerged from that unseen world of the lower classes, of which the upper ten know nothing, to denounce the follies and fashions of the hour; no, indeed, Eustace Gartney had been born in the purple, inherited plenty of money, been brought up in a conventional manner, and the astonishing ideas he possessed, so destructive to the well-being of Society, were certainly not derived from his parents. Both his father and mother had been of the most orthodox type, and would doubtless have looked upon their son's eccentricities with dismay had they lived, but as they both finished with the things of this life shortly after he was born, they were mercifully spared the misery of reflecting that they had produced such a firebrand. Indeed they might have checked

his radical-iconoclastic-pessimistic follies at their birth had they lived, but Fate willed it otherwise, and in addition to robbing Eustace of his parents had given him careless guardians, who rarely troubled their heads about him, so that he grew up without discipline or guidance, and even at the age of thirty-eight years was still under the control of an extremely ill-regulated mind.

Tall, heavily-built, loose-limbed, with a massive head, leonine masses of dark hair, roughly-cut features, and keen grey eyes, he gave the casual observer an idea that he possessed a fund of latent strength, both intellectual and physical, but he rarely indulged the former, and never by any chance displayed the latter. Clean-shaven, with a peculiarly sensitive mouth, his smile--when he did smile, which was seldom--was wonderfully fascinating, and completely changed the somewhat sombre character of his face. He usually dressed in a careless, shabby fashion, though particular about the spotlessness of his linen, rolled in his gait as if he had been all his life at sea, looked generally half asleep, and, despite the little trouble he took with his outward appearance, was a very noticeable figure. When he chose, he could talk admirably, played the piano in the most brilliant fashion, wrote charming verses and fantastic essays, and altogether was very much liked in London Society, when he chose to put in an appearance at the few houses whose inmates did not bore him.

Without doubt a singularly loveable man; children adored him, animals fawned on him, and friends, ah--that was the rub, seeing that he denied the existence of such things, classing them in the category of rocs, sea-serpents,

hippogriffs, and such-like strange beasts. Therefore dismissing the word friends, which only applies to uncreated beings, and substituting the word acquaintances, which is good enough to ticket one's fellow creatures with, the acquaintances of Mr. Gartney liked him--or said they liked him--very much.

Absence in this case doubtless made their hearts grow fonder, as Eustace was rarely in England, preferring to travel in the most outlandish regions, his usual address being either Timbuctoo, the Mountains of the Moon, or the dominions of Prester John. He had explored most of this small planet of ours, and had written books in the Arabian Nights vein about things which people said never existed, and talked vaguely of yachting in the Polar seas, exploring the buried cities of Central America, or doing something equally original. At present, however, he had dismissed these whimsical projects for an indefinite period, as the marriage of his cousin Guy Errington and the friendship of Angus Macjean now occupied his attention.

Then again his last book of paradoxical essays had been a great success, as everybody of his acquaintance, both friends and foes, abused it--and read it. The critics, who know everything, had denounced the book as blasphemous, horrible, coarse, drivelling, with the pleasing result that it had an exceptionally large sale; and although most people, guided by the big dailies, said they were shocked at the publication of such a book, yet they secretly liked the brilliant incisive writing, and wanted to lionise the author, but Eustace getting wind of the idea promptly betook

himself to the Continent in order to escape such an infliction.

It was impossible that such a peculiar personage could be happy, and Eustace certainly was not, as his fame, his money and his prosperity were all so much Dead Sea fruit to his discontented mind. And why? Simply because he was one of those exacting men who demand from the world more than the world, which is selfish in the extreme, is prepared to give, and because he could not obtain the moon sulked like a naughty child at his failure to attain the impossible.

If he made a friend, he then and there demanded more than the most complaisant friend could give, so his friendship always ended in quarrels, and he would then inveigh against the heartlessness of human nature simply because he could not make his friend a slave to his whims and fancies.

He had been in love, or thought so, many times, but without any definite result, as he had a disagreeable habit of analysing womankind too closely; and as they never by any chance came up to the impossible standard of perfection he desired, the result was invariably the same, irritation on his side, pique on the woman's, and ultimate partings in mutual disgust. Then he would retire from the world for a time, nurse his disappointment in solitude, and emerge at length with a series of bitter poems or a volume of cynical essays, in which he summarised his opinions regarding his last failure in love or friendship. A bitter man, a discontented man, absurdly exacting, intolerant of all

things that were not to his liking, yet withal--strange contrast--a loveable character.

Angus Macjean therefore was his latest friend, but it was not altogether a selfish feeling, as he was genuinely anxious to save the friendless lad from the dangerous tendencies of an impulsive nature; nevertheless, his liking was not entirely disinterested, seeing that he enjoyed the bright boyish nature of Otterburn, with his impossible longings, and his enthusiastic hero-worship of himself. So this spoilt child, pleased with his new toy, saw the world and his fellow men in a more kindly light than usual, and, provided the mood lasted, there was a chance that the happy disposition of Macjean might ameliorate to some extent the gloom of his own temperament.

On his part, Angus was flattered by the friendship of such a clever man, and moreover secretly admired the cynicism of his companion, though, truth to tell, he did not always understand the vague utterances of his oracle, for Gartney was somewhat enigmatic at times. Still on the whole Angus liked him, and his enthusiastic nature led him to endow his idol with many perfections which it certainly did not possess.

Thus these two incongruous natures had come together, but how long such an amicable state of things would last was questionable. There was always the fatal rock of boredom ahead, upon which their friendship might be wrecked, and if Gartney grew weary of Otterburn or Otterburn of Gartney, the result would be--well the result was still to come.



## **CHAPTER II.**

### **AN INCOMPLETE MADONNA.**

"She is a maid  
Who hath a look prophetic in her eyes,  
A longing for--she knows not what herself; Yet if by chance  
when kneeling rapt in prayer, She raised her eyes to Mother  
Mary's face, Within her breast a thought--till then  
unguessed, Amazing all her dreamings virginal, Would show  
her, by that vision motherly, The something needed to  
complete her life."

"Then what is she?"

"She is an Incomplete Madonna."

They were near the end of their journey when Gartney made this reply, and having reduced the chaos of books and papers into something like order, they were both sitting up with their garments in a more presentable condition, smoking cigarettes, and talking about the Erringtons.

This family, consisting of two people, male and female, bride and bridegroom, were staying at the Villa Tagni on Lake Como, and Sir Guy Errington, being a cousin of Gartney's, had asked his eccentric relative to pay them a visit while in the vicinity, which he had consented to do. This

being the case, Otterburn, who, unacquainted with the happy pair, except as to their name and relationship to his friend, was cross-examining Eustace with a view to finding out as much as he could about them before being introduced.

Sir Guy, according to his cynical cousin, was a handsome young fellow, with three ideas of primitive simplicity in his head, namely, shooting, hunting, and dining. Quite of the orthodox English type, according to the Gallic "it's-a-fine-day-let-us-go-and-kill-something" idea, so Otterburn, having met many such heroes of sporting instincts, asked no more questions regarding the gentleman, but being moved by the inevitable curiosity of man concerning woman, put the three orthodox questions which form a social trinity of perfection in masculine eyes.

"Is she pretty?"

Silence on the part of Mr. Eustace Gartney.

"Is she young?"

Still silence, but the ghost of a smile on the thin lips.

"Is she rich?"

Oracle again mute, whereupon the exasperated worshipper queries more comprehensively:

"Then what is she?"

Vague, enigmatic answer of the oracle:

"She is an Incomplete Madonna."

Otterburn stared in puzzled surprise at this epigrammatic response to his boyish cross-examination, and after a bewildered pause burst out laughing.

"You're too deep for me, Gartney," he said at length, blowing a cloud of thin blue smoke. "I don't understand that

intellectual extract of beef wherein the qualities of one's friends are boiled down into a single witty phrase."

This reply pleased Eustace, especially as he was conscious of having said rather a neat thing, so glancing out into the brilliant world of sunshine to see how far they were from their destination, he lighted another cigarette and explained himself gravely:

"I am very fond of ticketing my friends in that way, as it saves such a lot of trouble in answering questions; if you asked me what I should like in my tea, I should not answer 'the sweet juice of cane crystallized into white grains.' No! I should simply say 'sugar,' which includes all the foregoing; therefore when you ask me to describe Lady Errington, I say she is an incomplete Madonna, which is an admirable description of her in two words."

"This," remarked Otterburn, somewhat annoyed, "is a lecture on the use and abuse of epigrams. I don't want to know about epigrams, but I do want to know about Lady Errington. Your two-word description is no doubt witty, but it doesn't answer any of my questions."

"Pardon me, it answers the whole three."

"I don't see it."

"Listen then, oh groper in Cimmerian gloom. You ask if Lady Errington is young--of course, the Madonna is always painted young. Is she pretty? The Madonna, as you will see in Italian pictures, is absolutely lovely. Is she rich? My dear lad, we well know Mary was the wife of a carpenter, and therefore poor in worldly wealth. Ergo, I have answered all your questions by the use of the phrase incomplete Madonna."

"A very whimsical explanation at best, besides, you have answered more than I asked by the use of the word incomplete--why is Lady Errington incomplete?"

"Because she is not yet a mother."

"Oh, confound your mystic utterances," cried the Master, comically, "do descend from your cloudy heights and tell me what you mean. I gather from your extremely hazy explanation that Lady Errington is young, pretty, and poor, also that she is not a mother. So far so good. Proceed, but for heaven's sake no more epigrams."

"I'm afraid the beauty of an epigram is lost on you Macjean?"

"Entirely! I am neither a poet nor a student, so don't waste your eloquence on me."

"Well, I won't," answered Gartney, smiling. "I'll have pity on your limited understanding and tell you all about Alizon Errington's marriage in plain English."

"Do, it will pass the time delightfully until we leave this infernal train."

"Lady Errington, my young friend," said Eustace leisurely, "is what you, with your sinful misuse of the Queen's English, would call 'a jolly pretty woman,' of the age of twenty-five, but I may as well say that she looks much older than that--this is no doubt the peculiar effect of the life she led before her marriage."

"On the racket," interposed Otterburn, scenting a scandal.

"Nothing of the sort," retorted Gartney, severely. "Lady Errington has led the life of a Saint Elizabeth."

"Never heard of her. The worthy Mactab didn't approve of saints, as they savoured too much of the Scarlet Woman."

"At present I will not enlighten your ignorance," said Eustace drily, "it would take too long and I might subvert the training of the excellent Mactab which has been such a signal success with you."

Otterburn grinned at this fine piece of irony, but offered no further interruption, so Eustace went on with his story.

"I knew Lady Errington first--by the way, in saying I know her, I don't mean personally. I have seen her, heard her speak and met her at the houses of friends, but I have never been introduced to her."

"Why not?"

"I don't know if I can give any particular explanation; she didn't attract me much as Alizon Mostyn, so I did not seek to know her, nor did she ever show any desire to make my acquaintance, so beyond knowing each other by sight we remained strangers, a trick of Fate, I suppose--that deity is fond of irony."

"You're becoming epigrammatic again," said Otterburn, warningly, "proceed with the narrative."

Eustace laughed, and took up the thread of his discourse without further preamble.

"Lady Errington is the daughter of the late Gabriel Mostyn, who was without doubt one of the biggest scoundrels who ever infested the earth, that is saying a great deal considering what I know of my friends, but I don't think it is exaggerated. He was a man of good family, and being a younger son, was, in conformity with that ridiculous law of English primogeniture, sent out into the world with a

younger son's portion to make his way, which he did, and a very black way it was. Why a man with a handsome exterior, a clever brain, and a consummate knowledge of human nature, should have devoted all those advantages to leading a bad life I don't know, but the wicked fairy who came to Gabriel Mostyn's cradle, had neutralised all the gifts of her sisters by the bestowal of an evil soul, for his career, from the time he left the family roof until the time he died under it, was one long infamy.

"He was a diplomatist first, and was getting on capitally, being attaché at the Embassy at Constantinople, when he was caught selling State secrets to the Russian Government somewhere about the time of the Crimean War, and as the affair was too glaring to be hushed up, he was kicked out in disgrace. After this disagreeable episode he led a desultory sort of existence, wandering about the Continent. He was well known at the gambling hells, and his compatriots generally gave him a pretty wide berth when they chanced to meet him. In Germany he married a charming woman, a daughter of a Baron Von Something, and settled down for a time. However, to keep his hand in, he worried his poor wife into her grave, and she died three years after the marriage, leaving him two children--a son and the present Lady Errington.

"Mrs. Mostyn had some property of her own, which she left to her son, and in the event of the son's death the husband was to inherit. It was a foolish will to make, knowing as she must have done her husband's disposition, and it was rather a heartless thing for the mother to leave her daughter out in the cold. No doubt, however, the astute

Gabriel had something to do with it. At all events he did not trouble much about his children, but leaving them to the care of their German relatives, went off to Spain, where he was mixed up in the Carlist war, much to the delight of everyone, for they thought he might be killed.

"The devil looks after his own, however, and Mostyn turned up at the conclusion of the war minus an arm, but as bad as ever. Then he went off to South America, taking his son with him."

"There was nothing very bad in that, at all events," said Otterburn, who was listening with keen interest.

"Shortly after he arrived at Lima the son disappeared."

"The devil!" interrupted Angus, sitting up quickly; "he surely didn't kill the boy?"

"That is the question," said Eustace grimly, "nobody knows what he did with him, but at all events the boy disappeared and was never heard of again. There was some of that eternal fighting going on between the South American Republics, and Mostyn said the lad had been shot, but if he was," pursued Gartney slowly, "I believe his father did it."

"Surely not--he had no reason."

"You forget," observed Eustace sardonically, "I told you the boy inherited his mother's money, that was, no doubt, the reason, for Mostyn came back to Europe alone, claimed the money, and after obtaining it with some difficulty, soon squandered it on his own vicious pleasures. Then, as a reward for such conduct, his elder brother died without issue, and Mr. Gabriel Mostyn, blackguard, Bohemian and suspected murderer, came in for the family estates."

"The wicked flourish like a green bay tree," observed Angus, remembering the worthy Mactab's biblical readings in a hazy kind of way, and misquoting Scripture.

"The wicked man didn't flourish in this case," retorted Eustace, promptly. "Nemesis was on his track although he little knew it. He took his daughter back with him to England, duly came into possession of the estate, and tried to white-wash his character with society. His reputation, however, was too unsavoury for anyone to have anything to do with him, so in a rage he returned to his old ways and outdid in infamy all his previous life. No one was cruel enough to enlighten his daughter, whom he had left in seclusion at the family seat, and she remained quite ignorant of her father's conduct, which was a good thing for her peace of mind.

"For some years Mostyn, defying God and man, pursued his evil career, but at length Nature, generous in lending but cruel in exacting, demanded back all she had lent, and he was struck down in the full tide of his evil prosperity by a stroke of paralysis."

"Served him jolly well right," observed Otterburn heartily.

"So everybody thought. Well, he was taken down to his country house, and there for four terrible years Alizon Mostyn devoted herself to nursing him. What that poor girl suffered during those four years no one knows nor ever will know, for despite the blow which had fallen on him, Gabriel Mostyn was as wicked as ever, and I believe his curses and blasphemy against his punishment were something awful. No one ever came to see him but the doctors, although I was told a clergyman did attempt to make some enquiries



after his soul, but retreated in dismay before the foul language used by the old reprobate. His daughter put up with all this, and in spite of the persuasions of her friends, who tried to take her away from that terrible bed-side, she attended him to the end with devoted affection. She saw him die, and from all accounts his death-bed was enough to have given her the horrors for the rest of her life, for only his lower extremities being paralysed, they said he tore the bedclothes to ribbons in his last paroxysm, cursing like a fiend the whole time."

"And did she stay through it all?"

"Yes! till the breath was out of his wicked old body. I believe his last breath was a curse, and just before he died it took two men to hold him down by main force in the bed."

"Great heavens! how awful," ejaculated Otterburn in a shocked tone; "what a terrible scene for that poor girl to witness--and afterwards?"

"Oh, afterwards she came up to London," replied Gartney, after a pause; "the old man had got rid of all the property, and even the Hall was so heavily mortgaged that it had to be sold. She stayed with some relatives, and there was some talk of her becoming a Sister of Mercy. I dare say she would have done so, her vocation evidently being in the Florence Nightingale line, had she not met with my cousin Errington, who fell in love with her, and three months ago married her."

"Curious history," commented Angus idly. "I don't wonder she looks older than she is, after coming through all that misery, but I hope she doesn't make her past life a text upon which to prose about religion."

"No, I don't think she does. I have been told she is somewhat serious, but a charming woman to talk to."

"Not the sort of woman likely to be attracted by a sporting blade like Errington."

Gartney held his peace at this remark and looked thoughtfully at his cigarette.

"Does she love him?" asked the Master, noticing the silence of his companion.

"Does she love him?" replied Gartney, meditatively. "I hardly know. Guy isn't a bad sort of fellow as men go, he's a straightforward, athletic, stupid young Englishman."

"Married to a saint."

"Oh, I assure you he admires and loves the saint immensely, judging from his enthusiastic letters to me about her perfections. She is fair to look on, she is a thoroughly pure, good woman, and will, without doubt, make an excellent mother. What more can a man desire?

"I'm afraid you'd desire a good deal more."

"Ah but then you see I'm not a man, but a combination of circumstances."

"I don't understand."

"No? It is rather difficult of comprehension, I admit. What I mean is, that the circumstances of my having been an orphan of my bringing up, my command of money, and above all the circumstances of the age I live in, have all made me the curious creature I am."

"Oh I you admit then that you are curious."

"So much so that I doubt if any woman in existence would satisfy me as a companion for more than a few days."

A fast woman irritates me, a clever woman enrages me, and a good one bores me."

"And Lady Errington?"

"Is happier with her stupid adoring husband than she would be with a bundle of contradictions like myself."

"Yet she does not love this stupid adoring husband."

"I never said that," observed Eustace hastily.

"Not in words, certainly, but you hinted----

"I hinted nothing, because I'm not sure--how can I be when I tell you I don't know Lady Errington?"

"You appear to have studied her pretty closely at all events."

"A mere whim on my part, I assure you; besides, Guy has written to me about his wife, and I--well I've gathered a lot of nonsensical ideas from his letters."

"Then there is a possibility that she does not love him," persisted Otterburn, a trifle maliciously.

"How annoying you are, Macjean," said Eustace in a vexed tone. "Of course there are always possibilities. In this case, however, I can only refer you to Heine, 'There is always one who loves and one who is loved.'"

Otterburn saw that Eustace was rather annoyed at his persistency, so did not press the point, but contented himself with observing:

"Well, I think I know Lady Errington's character pretty well by this time. She is a charming woman with a bad history, a serious face, and a wifely regard for an adoring husband. Am I right?"

"Well, yes--to a certain extent."

"Still, all this does not explain the whole of your incomplete Madonna phrase. Tell me exactly what you mean."

Eustace thought for a moment, and then began to speak in his slow languid voice.

"Last time I was in Italy," he said dreamily, "I one day strolled into a village church built on the side of a hill above the blue waters of a still lake. Outside it was a hot, brilliant day, something like this, but within all was coolness and dim twilight.

"At a side altar tall candles glimmered before a shrine of the Virgin, and cast their pale glow on a large picture of the Madonna which was hanging upon the wall of the chapel. I don't know the name of the artist who painted the figure, but it made a great impression upon me. I'm afraid I was impressionable in those days. We all lose our finer feelings as the years go by.

"Well, the painter had depicted the Mother standing alone, with sombre clouds beneath her white feet, her hands, long and pale, folded across her breast, and her face with a yearning expression lifted to a ray of light from the mystic dove of the Holy Ghost, which pierced the darkness of the sky. There was no infant Jesus in her arms, such as we generally see in altar-pieces, and I fancy the idea of the artist was to depict Mary as a pure solitary woman, before the announcement of the Conception. In her eyes, sad and deep, dwelt an expression of intense yearning, and on her beautiful face the look of a woman longing for the pleasures of maternity.

"I never forgot the hopeless craving of that gaze, the hungry longing for the fondling arms and inarticulate cries of a child. Only once have I seen such a look on a human countenance, and that was on Lady Errington's before her marriage; she had the same hungry look in her eyes which can only be appeased by the birth of a child, and which will give her that special love and affection needed to complete her life. Therefore I call her an incomplete Madonna, for when she becomes a mother that yearning gaze will pass away for ever, and be succeeded by the serene beatitude that painters give the face of the Virgin when she clasps the child Jesus to her breast, encircled by the adoring hosts of heaven."

"That is a very poetical interpretation of a picture," said Otterburn when Eustace had ended. "I doubt however if I should draw the same conclusions were I to see the picture."

"You will not see the picture I refer to but you will meet Lady Errington, then you can give me your opinion."

"I'm afraid it will not coincide with yours. But if all her love is thus centred on the coming of a child, when it is born she will love it passionately to the exclusion of her husband."

"Perhaps!" replied Eustace calmly. "However we shall see. It is a curious study of a woman's character, and I am anxious to see if my idea is a correct one. Of this, however, I am certain, that the day a child is born to Alizon Errington will be a sad day for her husband if he worships her over much, for he will have to be satisfied with the crumbs of love that fall from the child's table."

"Ah! that is one of those things yet to be proved," said Otterburn rising, as the train, approaching Chiasso, slowed gradually down. "But here we are at the end of our journey."

"For which the Lord be thanked," replied Eustace, and jumped out on to the platform.

### **CHAPTER III.**

#### **THE WANING OF THE HONEYMOON.**