

## The Letter and the Lie.

As he hurried from his brougham through the smother hall to his study, leaving his secretary far in the rear, he had already composed the first sentence of his address to the united Chambers of Commerce of the Five Towns; his mind was full of it; he sat down at once to his vast desk, impatient to begin dictating. Then it was that he perceived the letter, lodged prominently against the gold and onyx inkstand given to him on his marriage by the Prince and Princess of Wales. The envelope was imperfectly fastened, or not fastened at all, and the flap came apart as he fingered it nervously.

"Dear Cloud—This is to say good-by, finally—"

He stopped. Fear took him at the heart, as though he had been suddenly told by a physician that he must submit to an operation endangering his life. And he skipped feverishly over the four pages to the signature, "Yours sincerely, Gertrude."

The secretary entered.

"I must write one or two private letters first," he said to the secretary. "Leave me. I'll ring."

"Yes, sir. Shall I take your overcoat?"

"No, no."

A discreet closing of the door—

"Finally. I can't stand it any longer. Cloud, I'm gone to Italy. I shall use the villa at Florence, and trust you to leave me alone. You must tell our friends. You can start with the Bargraves to-night. I'm sure they'll agree with me. It's for the best."

It seemed to him that this letter was very like the sort of letter that gets read in the divorce court, and printed in the papers afterward; and he felt sick.

"—for the best. Everybody will know in a day or two, and then in another day or two the affair will be forgotten. It's difficult to write naturally under the circumstances, so all I'll say is that we aren't suited to each other. Cloud, ten years of marriage has amply proved that, though I know it six—seven—years ago. You haven't guessed that you've been killing me all these years; but it is so—"

Killing her! He flushed with anger, with indignation, with innocence, with guilt—with heaven knew what!

"It is so. You've been living your life. But what about me? In five more years I shall be old, and I haven't begun to live. I can't stand it any longer. I can't stand this awful Five Towns district—"

Had he not urged her many a time to run to South Audley street for a change, and leave him to continue his work? Nobody wanted her to be always in Staffordshire!

"And I can't stand you. That's the brutal truth. You've got on my nerves, my poor boy, with your hurry, and your philanthropy, and your commerce, and your seriousness. My poor nerves! And you've been too busy to notice it. You fancied I should be content if you made love to me absent-mindedly, en passant, between a political dinner and a bishop's breakfast."

He finished. She had stung him.

"I sting you—"

No! And he straightened himself biting his lips!

"I sting you! I'm rude! I'm inexcusable! People don't say these things, not even hysterical wives to impeccable husbands, eh? I admit it. But I was bound to tell you. You're a serious person, Cloud, and I'm not. Still, we were both born as we are, and I've just as much right to be unserious as you have to be serious. That's what you've never realized. You aren't better than me, you're only different from me. It is unfortunate that there are some aspects of the truth that you are incapable of grasping. However, after this morning's scene—"

Scene? What scene? He remembered no scene, except that he had asked her not to interrupt him while he was reading his letters, had asked her quite politely, and she had left the breakfast table. He thought she had left because she had finished. He hadn't a notion—What nonsense!

"—this morning's scene, I decided not to interrupt you any more—"

Yes. There was the word he had used—how childish she was!

—any more in the contemplation of those aspects of the truth which you are capable of grasping. Good-by! You're an honest man, and a straight man, and very conscientious, and very clever, and I expect you're doing a lot of good in the world. But your responsibilities are too much for you. I relieve you of one, quite a minor one—your wife. You don't want a wife. What you want is a doll you can wind up once a fortnight to say, 'Good morning, dear,' and 'Good night, dear.' I think I can manage without a husband for a very long time. I'm not so bitter as you might guess from this letter, Cloud. But I want you thoroughly to comprehend that it's settled between us. You can do what you like. People can say what they like. I've had enough. I'll pay any price for freedom. Good luck, dear. I would write this letter to you if I thought I could do a better one—Yours sincerely, Gertrude."

He dropped the letter, picked it up, and read it again, and then folded it in his accustomed manner, replaced it in the envelope. He rose, and pressed the letter

against the inkstand and stared at the address in her careless hand: "The Right Honorable Sir Cloud Malpas, Baronet." She had written the address in full like that as a last stroke of sarcasm. And she had not even put "Private."

He was dizzy, nearly stunned; his head rang.

Then he rose and went to the window. The high hill on which stood Malpas Manor—the famous Rat Edge—fell away gradually to the south, and in the distance below him, miles off, the black smoke of the Five Towns loomed above the yellow fumes of blast-furnaces. He was the demigod of the district, a greater landowner than even the Earl of Chell, a model landlord, a model employer of four thousand men, a model proprietor of seven pits, and two iron foundries, a philanthropist, a religionist, the ornamental mayor of Knype, chairman of a Board of Guardians, governor of hospitals, president of a Football Association—in short, Sir Cloud son of Sir Cloud and grandson of Sir Cloud.

He stared dreamily at his dominion. Scandal, then, was to touch him with her smirching finger, him the spotless! Gertrude had fled! Had he ruined Gertrude's life? Had he, with his heavy and severe conscientiousness he asked himself whether he was to blame in her regard. Yes, he thought he was to blame. It stood to reason that he was to blame. Women, especially such as Gertrude, proud, passionate, reserved, don't do these things for nothing.

With a sigh he passed into his dressing room, and dropped on to a sofa.

She would be inflexible—he knew her. His mind dwelt on the beautiful first days of their marriage, the tenderness and the dream! And now! He heard footsteps in the study; the door was open! It was Gertrude! He could see her in the dusk. She had returned! Why? She tripped to the desk, leaned forward, and snatched at the letter. Evidently she did not know that he was in the house and had read it.

The tension was too painful. A sigh broke from him, as it were of physical torture.

"Who's there?" she cried, in a startled voice. "Is that you, Cloud?"

"Yes," he breathed.

"But you're home very early!" Her voice shook.

"I'm not well, Gertrude," he replied. "I'm tired. I came in here to lie down. Can't you do something for my head? I must have a holiday."

He heard her crunch up the letter, and then she hastened to him in the dressing room.

"My poor Cloud!" she said, bending over him in the mature elegance of her thirty years. He noticed her travelling costume. "Some eau de Cologne!"

He nodded weakly. "We'll go away for a holiday," he said, later, as she bathed his forehead. The touch of her hands on his temples reminded him of forgotten caresses. And he did really feel as though within a quarter of an hour he had been through a long and dreadful illness and was now convalescent.

"Then you think that after starting she thought better of it?" said Lord Bargrave, after dinner that night. "And came back?"

Lord Bargrave was Gertrude's cousin, and he and his wife sometimes came over from Shropshire for a week-end. He sat with Sir Cloud in the smoking room; a man with graying hair, and a youngish, equitable face.

"Yes, Harry, that was it. You see, I'd just happened to put the letter exactly where I found it. She's no notion that I've seen it."

"She's a thundering good actress!" observed Lord Bargrave sipping some whiskey. "I knew something was up at dinner, but I didn't know it from her; I knew it from you."

Sir Cloud smiled sadly.

"Well, you see, I'm supposed to be ill—at least to be not well."

"You'd best take her away at once," said Lord Bargrave. "And don't do it clumsily. Say you'll go away for a few days, and then gradually lengthen it out. She mentioned Italy, you say. Well, let it be Italy."

"But my work here?"

"Don't your work here!" said Lord Bargrave. "Do you suppose you're indispensable here? Do you suppose the Five Towns can't manage without you? Our caste is decayed, my boy, and silly fools like you try to lengthen out the miserable last days of its importance by giving yourself airs in industrial districts! Your conscience tells you that what the demagogues say is true—we are rotters on the face of the earth, we are medieval, and you try to drown your conscience in the noise of philanthropic speeches. There isn't a sensible working in the Five Towns who doesn't at the bottom of his heart assess you at your true value—as nothing but a man with a hobby, and plenty of time and money to ride it."

"I do not agree with you," Sir Cloud said stiffly.

"Yes, you do," said Lord Bargrave. "At the same time I admire you, Cloud. I'm not built the same way myself, but I admire you—except in the matter of Gertrude. There you've been wrong—of course, from the highest motives; which makes it all the worse. A man oughtn't to put hobbies above the wife of his bosom. And, besides, she's one of us. So take her away and stay away and make love to her."

"Suppose I do! Suppose I try! I acted as he to her this afternoon. He said that he stood between us

It would not be right." Lord Bargrave sprang up.

"Cloud," he cried. "For heaven's sake, don't be an infernal ass. Here you've escaped a domestic catastrophe of the first magnitude by a miracle. You've made a sort of peace with Gertrude. She's come to her senses. And now you want to mess up the whole show by the act of an idiot! What if you did act as he to her this afternoon? A very good thing! The most sensible thing you've done for years! Let the lie stand between you. Look at it carefully every morning when you wake. It will help to avoid repeating in the future the high-minded errors of the past. See?"

III

And in Lady Bargrave's dressing room that night Gertrude was confiding in Lady Bargrave. "Yes," she said, "Cloud must have come in within five minutes of my leaving, two hours earlier than he was expected. Fortunately, he went straight to his dressing room. Or was it unfortunately? I was half-way to the station when it occurred to me that I hadn't fastened the envelope! You see I was naturally in an awfully nervous state, Minnie. So I told Collins to turn back. Fugs, our new butler, is of an extremely curious disposition, and I couldn't bear the idea of him prying about, and perhaps reading that letter before Cloud got it. And just as I was picking up the letter to fasten it I heard Cloud in the next room. Oh! I never felt so queer in all my life! The poor boy was quite unwell. I screwed up the letter and went to him. What else could I do? And really he was so tired and white—well, it moved me! It moved me. And when he spoke about going away, I suddenly thought: 'Why not try to make a new start with him?' After all . . ."

There was a pause.

"What did you say in the letter?" Lady Bargrave demanded. "How did you put it?"

"I'll read it to you," said Gertrude, and she took the letter from her corset and began to read it. She got as far as, "I can't stand this awful Five Towns district," and then she stopped.

"Well, go on," Lady Bargrave encouraged her.

"No," said Gertrude, and she put the letter in the fire. "The fact is," she said, going to Lady Bargrave's chair, "it was too cruel. I hadn't realized. . . I must have been very worked up. One does work one's self up. Things seem a little different now." She glanced at her companion.

"Why, Gertrude, you're crying, dearest!"

"What a chance it was!" murmured Gertrude, in her tears. "What a chance! Because, you know, if I had once read it I would never have gone back on it. I'm that sort of a woman. But as it is, there's a sort of a hope of a sort of happiness, isn't there?"

"Gertrude!" it was Sir Cloud's voice, gentle and tender, outside the door.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Lady Bargrave. "It's half-past one. Bargrave will have been asleep long since."

Gertrude kissed her in silence opened the door, and left her.—By-stander.

A Coffin as a Boat.

There is a queer story of a Dutch castaway. In the days when the island of St. Helena was an unpeopled waste, long before the coming of the great exile who made its name famous, a Dutch vessel returning from the West Indies, cast anchor off its coast. In a short while a boat was lowered.

The occupants, besides the crew, were a dead officer in a coffin and a downcast seaman in irons. This seaman for some offense against discipline had been condemned to death by the captain, but in consequence of an appeal for mercy signed by the messmates he was ordered to be marooned on this desolate island instead of being hung up to the yard-arm.

It is probable that even this grace would have been denied him but for the dead officer, for whose burial the ship put into harbor. The grave was dug, the officer buried. The crew departed and the ship weighed anchor. The Dutchman, on his side, lost no time. He opened the new-made grave, dragged out the coffin, tumbled his dead superior out of it, carried it down to the shore, where, having launched his extemporized boat, he jumped in a trice, and, using the lid as a paddle, quickly—thanks to a calm—overtook the departing ship. He was taken on board and pardoned in consideration of his pluck.

RUSSIAN DANGER SIGNALS.

Bells Tell of Trouble on Railroads in Czar's Empire.

At every distance of one verst, or two-thirds of a mile, along every Russian railway, there is a bell, which is connected with the others by an electric wire. These bells, or gongs, were put up for the purpose of giving two signals of distress in winter; one signal was that of "snowed up," and the other was "help," "help!" During the summer this signaling apparatus has not been used much, and now they are to give only one signal, namely, "burglars." When this signal is given, owing to the many attacks being made on Russian railways and railway stations, the nearest telegraph office has to give the alarm to the two nearest stations, so that for a distance of a few miles the entire neighborhood can be surrounded by troops and local policemen.

## The Awakening of Herries.

BY PHILIP TRUFUSIS.

His was a face among faces, impressing by its strong personality, as a cliff might among hills; and here, in the wind raked night, where disorder and ruin jostled elbows, and the air was full of rain and the plaint of people, his power made itself felt, and gained him a hearing from officials who were over anxious and travelers who were over impetuous.

"The sooner we are out of this the better, I suppose," he said to the guard who made his way deaf eared through the clamorous knots at the doors of the carriages. "The water is rising fast, of course?"

"As fast as it can, sir," the other rejoined, giving audience almost unconsciously to the single speaker who had succeeded in detaining him. "Two feet here means four in the Tregenna cutting; and, as the lines won't stand this volume much longer, the chances are ten to one against our getting further tonight."

"Damp quarters, that will in all likelihood be damper. Is there any accommodation to be had within five miles, think you?"

"Nearer than that, Polwherra lies, but an odd mile away; her inn is older than the coaching days."

"Good news, which you might as well hand on. I, for one, shall make use of it, as there is no mortal service I can do my fellows by staying."

"None, sir. You can't miss the road so long as you keep the steeple of Polwherra in sight. Good-night to you."

"Good-night," said Oswald Herries.

He paused to gather together his slight paraphernalia—a rug and a small portmanteau—and then he and the old Anglo-Indian who had traveled down by the express via the rails, and till then exchanged no further words than the average Briton considers necessary under such propinquity, set out across country, wading knee deep in the lower land encircling the railroad, and arriving at last, wind blown and wet to the skin, on the crest of ground topped by the Ring of Bells.

The landlord, a hale fellow of seventy, had acted with business like precision on the news coming up from the valley, and aired beds, blazing fires and the appetizing scent of unseasoned dainties welcomed those who essayed the stormy midnight walk.

There were but an odd half dozen of them, and Herries, with a spirit of wakefulness on him, was the last to quit the great kitchen, where his host, a man brimful of mirth and anecdote, was happy in the rare enjoyment of an excellent listener.

As the clock struck one the old man rose and lighted his guest's candle, and while the glow was full on his mottled ruddiness a quick knock fell on the stillness.

Then the door opened. There was a soft swish of woman's garments, and against the outside blackness stood a girl, with eyes that caught one's glance and riveted it, and hair, dusker than the night.

"John," she said, coming hastily forward, oblivious of any one but the old man, "I want your help. The water is rising by feet; our cottage—you know where it is—and nurse has been ill for a week with rheumatism."

"Bless you, Miss Jean, as bad as that! We mustn't have her drowned in bed," he cried solicitously; and on the instant—changed from the garrulous narrator to the practical friend—he set down the candle, sent a mighty voice up the adjoining stair, and appended (bringing his visitor as he spoke to the general base). "There! we'll have Dick Trovay's boat in no time; once awake there's no brisker lad than Samuel."

John Trufusis crossed the room and drew aside the blind; the sight was not reassuring to one who had kith and kin down there among the wildness, for the turbid stream hurried relentlessly onward, and the unruddied thunder of its waters came up to them above the strilly caprice of a god send west wind.

"I would he may be quick!" she said. "If I could but do something till he comes."

"Let us go on," said Herries.

"At once," she acquiesced; and he opened the door and they passed out together, leaving Trufusis to follow at an older leisure.

Presently she halted; between them and the cottage, their goal, rolled a level tide that had crept to the very windows; its breadth was crossed by a trembling light from the upper story, and the single quivering beam seemed to accentuate the surrounding gloom.

"We are too late; it is impossible to ford it now."

He cast his eyes over the sullen flood.

"The channel is narrower higher up; a ladder would span it there."

"You think so? Then I can do something else than wait," and so speaking she was away into the shadows, from which she emerged again scarcely ten minutes later, accompanied by a boy carrying a ladder. As they flung it over the stream, where it ran fiercer and narrower at the hill's foot, she put her hand suddenly on Herries' arm.

"I am asking too much—of a stranger and the strongest swimmer would be powerless in that current."

"The risk is no greater than her danger, have no fear for me," and the

next moment he was treading the ruge, step by step, while she strained her eyes in the darkness to watch the perilous passage, and was thankful when the tension of her mood was relieved by the arrival of Samuel, a lad and the boat, which they launched at once, and presently brought, by dint of hard pulling, beneath one of the windows just as Herries, with the old woman in his arms, appeared within.

Then the girl ran away up the hill, and made ready the blankets and gruel piping hot against the arrival of the drenched group.

Herries and his burden were the first to enter, and a momentary wonder crossed his mind as he saw the eager look flash out in a brief ecstasy of reunion from the shadowy eyes of the younger woman in greeting her servant.

Later, when they had got the shivering old creature into the snugst quarter offered by the Ring of Bells, the girl came back again.

She came straight on to the fireplace, a subdued intensity in her manner, her eyes wide.

"It is you who must be thanked for this, my happiness, and the life of one dearer than the world can guess."

Communication was re-established, the Anglo-Indian gone his way; gone, too, the floods and the extra half dozen at the Ring of Bells, but Herries stayed; to ask daily after Nurse Lavender with a severe chill upon her, to suggest improvements in the low lying house, to give his help in re-establishing the pair there, and to ponder on a woman. His business in Truro could wait, as it did.

In the unconventional remoteness of this Cornish hamlet, it did not strike him as anything unusual that he should look in upon the couple day by day; Lavender was always to the fore, watchful, alert, garrulous, from her sofa in the corner of the low celled room; and when she was about again, with feeble gait and uncertain humors, seldom absent from her mistress.

Only Trufusis seemed to resent the intimacy; yet when he might have done that which would have snapped it, shied from the single question Herries put to him, testily, and waxed on a sudden morose.

When they met on the weedy shore, the cliffs, or in the village street, it was of her Jean Morant spoke. And the subject of an old and unknown woman's strait did not weary Herries—because he loved.

The end came with a suddenness that shook the girl's serenity to the core.

February's days were creeping in the memory of this devotion it is a close when the last page of a faithful life was shut; and the shock of that turning struck the one left dumb. In the twilight, Herries—gun on shoulder—had met her; and she had paused with a light in her eyes, saying in reply to his question: "She is better, so much better; the doctor thinks that with the spring she may be well again."

But only the spring of a day was Lavender's; she passed away when dawn was sending bright points of light up the chilly East, and in the loneliness of the young hours her mistress took up the burden of that loss.

Every one was good to her; every one spared her to the best of their powers; for the old nurse's figure had been a pleasant and familiar one for ten years past in the place where the younger woman had endeared herself to the humble people by unostentatious kindness. Moreover Trufusis was Lavender's brother, and Trufusis was not one to lament quietly, so that all Polwherra was cognizant of and moved by the loss. They buried her in the evening under the church on the hill; and then Jean Morant came back to an emphasized loneliness; and took up pen and paper to communicate the tidings to one whom she kept posted in her doings at stated—generally half-yearly—periods.

The pen was in her hand and dreariness in her eyes when the door opened.

She looked up to see Herries standing there. And something in his gaze sent the blood in a rush to her heart, leaving her sick, and faint in a new knowledge.

"Jean!" he said.

Every one called her "Miss Jean," because Lavender had done so; but now the familiar monosyllable, without prefix, struck terror to her heart. She met his glance with the look of a hunted creature, and drew her fingers from his grasp. He sat down beside her, and asked what she was doing. Then her eyes—those grave, serene, gray eyes—opened wide. She laughed—a laugh that stirred the shadows discordantly.

"I am writing to my husband."

For a full minute there was silence in the room.

Outside the voice of a girl on her way uphill with clinking milk pails shrilled. "For all the lads they love me well, and what the waur am I!" within the stillness seemed icebound.

When the sound of the song had died, he put the hand that had held hers a moment ago in his pocket, looked at her and walked to the window.

"No—no! Not that, not that from you," she cried, with a brief access of passion, and, running to him, laid soft compelling fingers on his arm.

"Listen," she said, "before you despise me—listen to a very lonely and a very friendless girl's story."

Something in her clear gaze fascinated him against his will. Unconsciously he drew the hands lying on his arm, and took them into a close hold; but he looked away from her, down the gray shore where the

waves thundered and the seabirds the foam, and her voice came to him as if in a dream.

"I was a lonely child, but not a poor one, except as one may be poor in love—in that I was very, very poor. But of money! People, I dare say, envied me. God knows with how little reason, for I was as unhappy as I was unruly. I suppose my guardian must have been not only very selfish, but a very unscrupulous man. It was natural he should be glad to part with what gave him so much trouble and inconvenience, but it wasn't natural that he should eagerly thrust his trust into the hands of the first who came to seek me, not for myself." She laughed a little bitter laugh. "In myself, an unkept, turbulent slip of a child, there could have been nothing attractive at sixteen. He told me," her voice had almost faltered in it, "that there was; and—I believed him. Lest! No one could live as Rolleston Moore. And yet I loved him; he was so handsome, so daring, and I, poor, foolish, I hadn't met any such masculine that was not old or feeble, or selfish, or unkind, and was eager to think him all that he appeared."

She paused, drawing in her breath sharply.

"It was a mistake—he was utterly worthless, utterly vicious, and my guardian had known it, thinking in his cold worldliness that an ancient pedigree was sufficient atonement for moral blot, and that we should jog along as half the world jogs on—at any rate away from his immediate neighborhood. We were married—two thousand pounds a year makes a man with a tottering fortune impatient. And if I was unhappy before—no, I can't talk of it to you. But I knew on my wedding day that all question of love on his part had been a pretence; he laughed at the mere idea. And with that laugh of his my love fell dead. One night he turned me out of the house, and afterward Lavender and I went away together; at eighteen I was alone, and because, God forgive me, I hated him, I tried to drop the memory of those twelve months, and came to Polwherra, and Lavender told people I was a widow, and together we grew to feel happy and safe at last. At last, and for this! But, oh, it is for this, for this, you must forgive me, Oswald! Because the pain of your pain hurts me more than all past grief!"

She laid her hands on his breast, and looked up into his face; and under her eyes his bitterness died.

He caught her to his arms.

"Jean, Jean, must such as this part us! It shall not!—it ought not! We are each other's heart and soul. Look into my eyes with your clear eyes, and tell me you don't love me—then, and only then, will I leave you. Yet—neither then!"

There was a concentrated passion in his manner that for a half second shook her; she recovered herself, and after the brief struggle drew nearer to him with a sweet seriousness in her voice that calmed his stormy mood.

"Oswald, it is because I love you that it would kill me to draw you down to anything lower than you now are—good, great generous. Because I care, you, too, must care—care to make the world the better for your gifts, to be strong for those who are not strong, that our suffering may be not only to our blessing, but other people's."

"You ask an impossibility," he said.

Then she lifted her face and laid her lips on his; there was the solemnity of a farewell in her kiss, and he knew it.

So for a few seconds they stood; then she caught herself from his embrace and left him standing alone.

Home of the Peanut.

Botanists have placed the home of the peanut in Africa, but some authorities think it native to Brazil. Louisiana finds the Spanish variety—a small, but fine nut—best adapted to the climate of that State. The "goober grabbers" of Georgia and South Carolina like the small white and red peanut of Tennessee, and each year shows an increasing cultivation in those states of that variety.

Florida's Pestiferous Ants.

Anyone who is acquainted with the insect life of Florida will remember the ubiquitous ant; and now comes the alarm sounded in the Entomological News that several varieties of tropical ants have been discovered in Florida and Alabama, being recent introductions. One of these, which is an especially destructive pest, feeds on either vegetable or animal substances.

Japanese "Incense Parties."

"Incense parties" were a common feature of old Japan. Each of the guests had a little furnace, a small wooden box, packed with sand. On the top of this a small charcoal fire. Each woman in turn burned some incense and the others had to guess what it was. After every burning the windows were thrown open the room was cleared for the next experiment.

Saving a Coal Bill.

Paris pays to foreign countries \$25,000,000 a year for coal. There is a project on foot of saving at least \$4,000,000 of this by conveying electric power for light, heat and motor purposes from the River Rhone, by damming it near the falls of Bellegrade, and thus securing a fall 65 meters high, which would mean 100,000 horse power.