

**DISAPPOINTED AMBITION; OR,
WEDDED AND SINGLE. BY THE
AUTHORESS OF "THE WORLD
AND
THE CLOISTER," ETC., ETC., ETC.**

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Disappointed Ambition; Or, Wedded and Single. By the Authoress Of "The World and the Cloister," Etc., Etc., Etc. by Anonymous

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DISAPPOINTED AMBITION ;

OR,

WEDDED AND SINGLE.

A Tale of the Day.

BY THE AUTHORESS OF "THE WORLD AND THE CLOISTER,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

"The hearts of old gave hands;
But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts."

OTHELLO.

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DISAPPOINTED AMBITION ;
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CHAPTER I.

It is a soft, warm morning, in the month of April, 183—, just such sweet mornings as, at that time of the year, are often known in the fair vales of Devon ; and in a pretty and well-furnished villa, in the pleasant village of Dawlish, a coterie of some five or six persons of the softer sex have assembled, to pay their morning calls to the mistress of the house.

But, surely, these ladies are discussing some matter of grave import ; for two or three of the younger of the party, who do not speak, out of deference to the elder ladies, are on the *qui vive*, and long for a break in the conversation of the ancient dames, so that they, too, may have something to say. They are quite ready, these young ladies, to cast a stone at fair Lucy Clifton, whose wedding they have just heard is shortly to take place. For, dear reader, this solemn conclave are sitting in judgment on Lucy ; but, to speak truth, had they her chance of becoming wives, so great is their fear of celibacy, that, with many young ladies of the present time,

these then youthful damsels of the year 183— would have taken the Dissenting husband, for better or worse, as the lapse of time should shew.

Yet, such a case as that of Lucy Clifton's was, after all, an unusual one. She, a girl educated in a Convent School, around whom Catholic influences had seemed to work together for good, for whom an excellent and worthy man in the naval service would have laid all he had at her feet, and lavished on her the whole wealth of the heart's affections could he have won her for his bride, had yet, in defiance of a widowed mother's tears, of the earnest warning of him who had baptised her, and who admonished her of the evils so generally the attendant on unions in which there was no congeniality of sentiment, adding, that her's was a case which, so far from being an exception to the rule, would probably prove more painful than usual in its effects on her future well-being, yet failed to shake her resolve. The *prestige* of a costly wedding, the bridal ring, an elegant mansion in that sweetest of all sweet spots, that gem of the west—far-famed Torquay, with a handsome equipage, and a splendid casket of jewels, glittered before the eyes of the bride-elect, and therefore she *would* not see evil lowering in the distance.

Reuben Ashley had told her she should be left free to the performance of her religious duties ; that her children, if she had any, should be brought up members of her own faith—at all events the girls. She was sure he loved her too well to thwart her wishes on such a point. She had *no* money ; *he* was so rich, the match was so good, she could not refuse ; and again, even if he should want to exert any undue power over her, she knew her duty well, and would follow her religion in spite of him. Such were the arguments with which Lucy strove to calm the apprehensions of her friends,

summing all up with the remark, "A brilliant offer is made me by a man of considerable wealth, and I do not see *why* I should sacrifice all my hopes in life to the foolish fears of my friends."

But return we to the Misses Harcourt and their visitors. The former ladies were styled old maids by many of those in the small circle in which they moved; but the giddy, scheming girls around them, all of whom became wives, were not worthy to minister to such women as those whom they derided; but concerning them we will speak later.

"Is the affair quite settled," asked the elder of the sisters, whose retirement had, to her unspeakable regret, been that morning broken in upon by the little bevy of ladies who were burning to communicate the news, no matter to whom, so that they even turned their steps to those sedate, reserved Misses Harcourt.

"I know but little of Lucy," she added, "except that she is a gay and exceedingly beautiful girl; but I have met her mother frequently at the house of a friend, and, if the marriage is really settled, I am sure she will feel it acutely."

"Yes, Miss Harcourt," exclaimed Bertie Alveston, "and the worst of all is, it will be worse than those matches generally are; for Mr. Ashley is a very strict Dissenter, and Deacon of the Independent Meeting which he attends. Mrs. Edwards, the housekeeper, told my maid that he carries things so far, that he will on no account walk out on a Sunday, or the Sabbath, as she termed it. Indeed," added Bertie, "I wonder, for my part, what glamour can have been cast over Lucy Clifton to make her refuse that good, worthy Captain Seymour for a plain-looking man, stiff and Puritanical in all his ways, like Deacon Ashley."

"Bertie, Bertie," said the younger of the Harcourts, while a tear gathered in her soft eye, "I fear it is the glamour of Reuben Ashley's wealth which is cast over our poor Lucy, and invests all the future with a golden tint, which time, alas! will quickly tarnish."

"And what says Miss Ashley to the approaching nuptials," said the elder Miss Harcourt, to another of the gossiping coterie who had that morning invaded her usually quiet home? "I should think it not at all improbable that a high-spirited girl of eighteen would be somewhat annoyed at the idea of her father marrying a young woman only six years older than herself."

"Oh," replied one of the ladies, "Esther is kept at school still, for the best of all possible reasons perhaps, though Mrs. Edwards says her papa has some idea of having her home for the wedding, and sending her back again, while he makes the bridal tour. Ah me," she added, with a sigh, "I pity poor Esther with all my heart. Her own mother died but a year since, and now she is to see a stranger in her place, but a little older than herself. Surely Ashley might have looked out for some lady with thirty or forty years over her head, whom his child might at least have regarded as more experienced than herself. This would, in some degree, have lightened the cross he means to put upon her."

"Yes," exclaimed Bertie, "and I can tell you Lucy may find her task rather difficult, too; for Esther is no apathetic, passionless girl, and she has been brought up in accordance with her father's most rigid views. Fire and water may about as soon assimilate as the dispositions of Esther and Lucy."

"And when, too late, Lucy will bewail her error," replied

Amelia Harcourt ; "for *such* marriages are rarely productive of anything but misery."

And the ladies, having thus relieved themselves of their budget of news, as for as the Misses Harcourt were concerned, they one after another dropped off, to carry their tidings elsewhere—Bertie congratulating herself that *she* was not in the place of Esther Ashley, whom she thought deserving of the greatest commiseration.

CHAPTER II.

It is evening at the Oaklands, just one week after the morning to which we have alluded. In one of the loveliest spots in Torquay was situated the villa residence of Mr. Ashley, the cliff on which it was built overhanging the sea ; a rosy sunset bathed all around in a flood of crimson light, tipping the blue waters of the ocean with the same rich tinge. Everything spoke of opulence and luxury, and the sweetest fragrance from a conservatory, filled with rare exotics, pervaded the apartment in which the wealthy Mr. Ashley reclined on a sumptuous couch, with wines from the choicest vintages placed before him. Something may be, perchance, gathered, as an insight into his character, for he expresses his thoughts half aloud, and murmurs as follows :—

"I have no doubt, my task will be a hard one ; but what then ?—the harder the work the greater the glory, and the Lord will help me to convert my beautiful Papist wife. To humour her, I must, perforce, enter the Mass house to be married ; but when once she is my wife, then—ah, *then*," he added, "won't I, as the head of the house, soon put an end

to her going to Mass and Confession, and, as St. Paul says, 'Wives be'—

"All very well in its way, friend Ashley," said a voice near him ; "but I tell you your home will be soon a home of discord and confusion. I warn you again not to marry this Lucy Clifton, whose fair face beguiles you, along with your anxious desire to make a proselyte. Break it all off, man, and take unto yourself another mate, and look around our meeting at the godly, prayerful, and well-disposed young persons, with faces little less fair than that of which you are so enamoured."

Thus spoke the minister, Jabez Hopley, who, gaining admittance to the grounds attached to the house by a little gate, had entered through the open French window, and crossed the room unnoticed by Ashley, so absorbed was he in profound speculation as to *how* he should manage Lucy, should she prove refractory after she became his wife. Ashley was somewhat excited, notwithstanding the deep respect in which he held Mr. Hopley. Therefore it was that he bit his lips, and tried to look composed, inwardly chafed that his cogitations, unwarily pronounced aloud, had been overheard ; and he replied, at the same time rising, handing a chair to his guest, and pushing the wine towards him—

"A foolish habit is that in which I indulge, of expressing my thoughts aloud, my friend ; but I have resolved, once for all, on marrying Miss Clifton ; and, furthermore, I have determined in my own mind, that, as the Holy Bible says, '*the husband is the head of the wife,*' so shall I be master over mine ; and, mark me, Mr. Hopley, not many months will Lucy be Mrs. Ashley ere you will see her very meekly accompany me to the Tabernacle. I was but quoting the words of St. Paul when you entered, who enjoins obedience to hus-