

## AT WAR WITH HERSELF.

The Story of a Woman's Atonement  
by Charlotte M. Braeme.

### CHAPTER XLV.

Six months had passed since Leonie Rayner placed the will of Lord Charnleigh in Paul Fleming's hands. They had not brought much happiness to him. True, he was an earl now, man of high rank and great resources, a man of distinguished position, with unbounded wealth and every luxury; but he was not so happy as when he was a poor soldier blessed only with Leonie's love. He did not care for the earldom; he did not value money; he wanted her, and nothing in the world besides.

Yet he knew that she would never be his; she had told him so, frankly and honestly. She did not love him; she loved some one else. He knew that, live as long as he might, his life would never be crowned or blessed by Leonie's love.

He did not love her less because of her grievous sin. In his eyes the ample reparation she had made atoned for it. He said to himself that she was the bravest, the noblest and best of women; but she was not for him.

The world, so ready to worship Mammon, received him with open arms. He was sought after by half the fashionable mothers in London. But for Paul there was no peace, no happiness, while Leonie was not. It would take him long years to learn to think less of his love.

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Six months had brought back health and strength to Leonie Rayner. She was still at Reims, with the General and Ethel.

She had visited the friends of her fair young mother; she had done her best to forget all that was painful and to regain her lost health. Surrounded by friends, she was somewhat herself again; her face had lost its radiance, but over those most beautiful features there was an expression of perfect rest, and a faint color had returned to the lovely face, and the beautiful lips had reacquired their former smile.

One morning Ethel, with a bundle of papers under her arm, entered the room where Leonie sat.

"I told you," she said, "that you should hear what the world thought of you, Leonie. Read these."

Leonie opened one of the principal morning papers first. "It is a terrible thing, after all, to be in print."

Ethel silently pointed out the following paragraph to her:

"Romance in High Life.—Some time since we announced to our readers the succession of a young lady to the estates of Crown Charnleigh and the title of Countess Charnleigh. The particulars of that succession will be remembered as interesting and novel. Lady Charnleigh, by her brilliant beauty, her gracious manners, and queenly generosity, made herself one of the most popular of the fashionable world. She has recently met with a reverse of fortune quite as sudden as her unexpected elevation. It may be remembered that she succeeded to the Crown Charnleigh's estates as next of kin in consequence of the late earl's having died, as it was supposed, without a will. Lady Charnleigh was the nearest of kin, and the only one in full possession of the title and the estates. After enjoying them for two years, she accidentally discovered the will of the late earl, by which he left all that he had to Captain Paul Fleming. The lady, with a noble sense of honor and loyalty—unfortunately but too rare—immediately placed the will in the hands of the true heir, and then retired from the brilliant scenes of which she had been so great an ornament. Miss Rayner may never again possess a patent of nobility such as the world confers, but she has one much higher, which no one can take from her—she is a noble, generous, loyal lady—a title which no earthly distinction can give. The new Lord Charnleigh has taken possession of Crown Charnleigh, and has also taken his seat in the House of Lords."

"You wondered what the world said of you, Leonie. Now you know. Could any praise be higher than that?"

"I did not deserve it," sobbed the girl. "Let me tell you all the truth, Ethel."

But Miss Dacre kissed the sweet face, and refused to hear another word.

"If there is any secret," she said, "it rests between Paul and yourself. There is no need for you to tell it, as he has not done so."

For Paul had kept her secret most loyally. When she had left him with the will in his hands, he went at once to Mr. Clements, the lawyer, and told him that Lady Charnleigh had discovered it. He never uttered a word about the terrible temptation, the deadly crime, and the most sincere remorse. The story was never known. Every one believed that the will was given to him in the same hour that it was found.

The paragraph above was copied into all the papers; many of them added remarks of their own, being in praise of her who was no longer Lady Charnleigh. The scrap of news went, as many startling scraps do, the round of the world, and it was read by Sir Bertram Gordon in the Holy Land.

He had gone thither, vowed that never while he lived would he return to England. He did not care how his life was spent—how it passed; he was utterly reckless and despairing. He went to the Holy Land. There, he thought to himself, it would not be likely that he should ever meet people who knew him.

He had been there for some time, leading a most hopeless and miserable life, when, in one of a numerous batch of papers sent to him from England, he read this paragraph, telling of Leonie's change of fortune; and in another he read that Miss Rayner was staying with General Sir Huntley Dacre and his daughter at Reims, in France. A third repeated some of it as to the probable marriage of the Earl of Charnleigh with the daughter of a Scotch peer.

Then Sir Bertram Gordon, with a low cry, started to his feet. If it were true, the engagement with Leonie must have been broken. Perhaps she had repented of her cruelty to him; perhaps she wanted him back, and yet did not know what address to write. He would not lose an hour in going to her—he would start at once.

He was tortured on that homeward journey none knew, but himself. One minute all was hope, another all despair; one minute he was thinking that there must be some chance for him, and the next that he was on a wild-goose chase.

He people understood what restless spirit possessed this haughty nobleman, this man with the face and head of a Saxon king. He now appeared to rest, he seemed unable to sit or drink as ordinary beings did. The drink or tea, or rail, or road, was—

"How long will it be before the journey is accomplished?"

Periods of hope came over him, when he would say to himself that she loved him, and that his dismissal was but a caprice; and then he would picture to himself a long happy life blessed with

Leonie's love. Again a period of despair would succeed, when he would feel sure that his errand must prove fruitless. Were such the result, he decided he would go and lose himself in the depths of an African desert.

Time passed, until one day, in the early spring-time, he reached the picturesque old city of Reims, in the fair land of France.

The sun was shining, the birds were

beginning to sing, pale blossoms were peeping, summer buds growing green on the trees. Leonie Rayner, feeling strong and almost well, sat in the pretty salon of the little villa alone.

Sir Huntley, who was a most devoted "squire of dames," had sent a magnificent bouquet of pale hyacinths and violets, and many other fragrant flowers, that brought such sweet, sad memories to her mind. As she sat there admiring them, Ethel entered the salon, her face full of expression of sudden stirred joy. She went up to Leonie and took some of the flowers in her hand.

"I ought to be jealous," she whispered, "papa has sent me no bouquet."

"Perhaps he thought you did not deserve one," remarked Leonie, with a little laugh.

"Leonie," said Ethel, suddenly bending over her, "could you bear a great joy?"

"I might try," replied the girl, with a sad smile. "I do not think life holds many more joys for me."

"Some one is here, and waiting to see you."

"Is it Lord Charnleigh?" asked Leonie, with a sudden shrinking of pain.

"No, it is not Paul," replied Ethel. "Guess again. It is someone you liked better than you have ever liked Paul."

The beautiful eyes grew white, the violet eyes opened wide—fear, hope, expectation, sorrow, all appeared in that wistful glance.

"Is it Sir Bertram?" she whispered, and the faint whisper died on her lips.

"Yes, it is Sir Bertram. Hero he is to speak for himself," and Ethel turned away, while Sir Bertram clasped her in his arms.

"My darling," he cried, "you will not send me from you again."

She tried to resist, to cry out to him that she was not worthy of his love; but he would not listen to her. The might of his love swept away all obstacles, as the whirl of the stream sweeps away dead leaves.

Lady Farnshawe was made happy at last. She could not live away from Leonie, and Sir Bertram asked her to live with them at Glen Brae.

"I feel quite nervous," she said. "It is a terrible thing, after all, to be in print."

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Time passed, until one day, in the early spring-time, he reached the picturesque old city of Reims, in the fair land of France.

"My darling," he whispered, "nothing shall part us."

"Not even my past dishonor, Bertram?" she whispered, clinging to him with happy tears.

"My darling," he said, "the very fact of your having made this confession to me proves you to be the noblest of women. You need not have told me your faults, yet you have done so; and I say that you are now nobler in your repentance, in your voluntary humiliation, than are thousands of women who have never known temptation, and so have never fallen. If that is the only barrier between us, my darling, let it exist no longer."

"Very well, my little man, do as you like," and Pierre was sent away with his chubby face smiling.

"What do you say, mamma?" he asked next day, "when you give a present?"

"I write on a card so," said Mrs. Rosy, smiling.

"Nothing, mama, if I may give just what I please."

"What, not even a penny?" asked Pierre.

"No," said Pierre; "it is not to buy what I wish."

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