CHAPTER XX

LEN IN OUR PRAYERS

THE confidential agent, who did special work for the firm, was made to understand that the matter had to be cleared up; necessary, of course, the guilty party and only the guilty party should be traced and discovered, but it seemed likely he would save time by directing his special energies in one direction. No charge would follow; a full confession must, however, result in instant discharge. Tiller, the inquiry specialist, returned in twenty-four hours with a complete biography of young Farrington; it appeared he had recently married (unknown to his people, and a secret from us). Becoming more irritable with all this before me, I rang for the young man, told Tiller to go behind the screen, and entered upon a task of cross-examination conducted on my part with warmth; on the part of the youth with a coolness that aggravated my annoyance. At the end I found myself being cross-examined by young Farrington and compelled to admit that I suspected him and suspected no one else, upon which he offered to resign; I said this would not do at all. It was for him to prove innocence before taking leave of Queen Street. He answered, with respect, that the onus lay upon me; I retorted, with no respect at all, that there was small inclination to chop words with him; if he wished to prove his innocence, all he had to do was to produce the guilty party.

"Meanwhile," doggedly, "you must understand, Farrington, you are under suspicion, and it is only fair to warn you that you will be watched wherever you go."

Here he broke down, appealed to me across the table to do nothing of the kind; he was prepared to

admit anything and everything if I would but allow him to go.

"Return the blank cheque then."

"I can't, sir," he said.

"Now, my boy," good temper returning, with a paternal manner for companion, "I begin to feel very sorry for you. You were led, in a moment of temptation, to do something you now bitterly regret, and that is a situation which in various forms occurs to every one of us. Directly the act was done, you repented. Directly the act was done, you discovered how useless the results were. If you have not destroyed the cheque and the counterfoil, you will return both to me within the space of one week from this moment, and I am willing to agree you shall not be shadowed until that time is up."

"I'll do my best," he said, after a pause.

Tiller congratulated me very heartily on the skill exhibited, and although one knew him for a sycophant, I felt gratified to receive his compliments; they rounded off the descriptive report to be given to Milly. She, with a particular interest in the matter, seemed rather disappointed when I gave this; asked for further particulars concerning the youth and his girl wife; wondered what would become of him when he found himself with no occupation; I charged her with a softness of heart where any young couples were concerned, and she answered that this apparently could at any time be remedied by taking up some occupation in the City. We went off to see a musical comedy, the last nights of which were announced, wherein a chorus of the modern sort appeared, admirably costumed and prepared to accompany the principals faithfully, whether the principals decided to visit a hydropathic establishment on the occasion of a fancy-dress ball, or to proceed, for no obvious reason, to Pekin. The Wrefords very wisely declined to come with us, and I, sitting back, gave the interest others were extending to the play in the direction of my dear girl. It was wonderful the change a few years had effected. I could remember, on the occasions

when we used to go together to the amphitheatre or gallery, she always then practised a series of running comments, such as, "Oh here he comes again; wonder what he'll be up to this time!" or "Wouldn't believe anything a woman like that told me!" or "Well, he must be a silly to be taken in!" She did once during the evening hand me the opera-glasses and beg me to gaze at a good-looking young person in the chorus, and my answer gave gratification, without prompting the nudge of reproach that would have been given in earlier days.

"Being with you," I declared, fervently, as we came out, "induces me to feel on good terms with all the world." I asked the commissionaire to find a hansom; Milly suggested the night was sufficiently fine to enable us to walk. "Don't want to think I have a grievance against anybody; don't want to think anyone has a grievance against me."

"In that case," she said, "try to be very good to young Farrington."

A tall youth standing near the stage door turned swiftly; reddened on seeing me, and lifted his hat. The pretty girl whom Milly had noticed came through, and the two went off talking animatedly.

"That's the very man," I cried. "And I put it to you, dear, plainly; is it right for a clerk in the City earning a hundred and twenty-five pounds a year to be paying attentions to a young woman in the chorus?"

"You could easily pay him more, Henry."

I turned the conversation in despair of being able to induce her to take the reasonable, the common-sense view. To the remark that I greatly desired a meeting of reconciliation with her people, she showed no opposition; as we walked arm-in-arm with my hand touching a place near her palm that the glove did not cover, we arranged details.

"No!" she said, promptly, in reply to another proposal. "Not your brother. If he comes, everything may be spoiled."

"Will you never persuade yourself to see the good qualities in Len?"

"My eyesight is excellent," she remarked, "and when the good qualities become apparent, I feel certain I shall recognise them. Don't let us talk about him," she begged, earnestly. "You and I agree about everybody and everything else."

"When Len gets to the top of the tree," I declared, "all the world will be looking up to him, as I look up to him now."

We reached the steps of the small hotel and waited there.

"Meanwhile he comes first with me," I added.

Milly gazed forward at nothing with a good deal of attention.

"That's not quite according to the rules," she pointed out, gently. "I'm afraid mine is only what they call book knowledge——" I interrupted with an emphatic declaration of content at this assurance. "But the idea always is, I believe, that perfect love between a man and a woman means that each takes a foremost place in the other's esteem."

"My dear sweet," I cried, earnestly, "surely its enough for you to be certain that no other girl has any share in my affection. All the time you were away from me I never thought or dreamt of anyone but you. Do believe that, please. Its perfectly and absolutely true. And I'm so happy in the knowledge that you have come back to me." Milly corrected. "That I have come back to you," I amended readily, "that I could do anything, everything you wanted me to do. Within reason."

She laughed at the hedging words, and played with the links at my wrist. "Suggest something," I urged, "I want to do penance. Mention something extremely difficult, and let me have a try at it. Give me a chance of proving to you how deep and sincere my affection is."

"Do you know," she said, "this is the first time that you have really made love to me? When I was away down in

Devonshire, it was the hardest thought I had to endure, that you had never been down on your knees to me. Boy and girl love is all well enough, but what we all want is the dramatic situation. We want the man to come upon us like a hurricane, and sweep us off our feet in a wild gust, giving us no time to argue or deny. That's the convention, and books keep it up, and the result is that any woman who misses it feels she has been cheated, and——"

Milly declared, good-temperedly, that the place was not suited for experiments, and that the eyes of the hall porter were upon us.

"Now, look here, dear man," she said. "Let's talk quietly, and don't you assume again that I am giving you hints. We were speaking about Len, and there's something else I want to say about him. I don't ask you to do anything unbrotherly, and I don't ask you to do anything that isn't kind, but I see quite clearly that unless we keep ourselves at a distance from him, there's a good chance he may interfere again with our happiness."

"You are doing him an injustice."

"Just think for a moment," she went on, "what our happiness means. I've had a chance of realising facts lately, you must remember. I've had the opportunity of seeing what it means when happiness hurries past, and one can't catch it. You and I ought to have about thirty or forty years more of life; those are the figures on our current account. Now, supposing I am the first to exhaust the balance, and to pay in my last cheque."

I protested, almost tearfully, that such a possibility was too painful and too dreadful for contemplation; begged the dear girl to cheer up and not to take mournful views.

"I'm not in the least melancholy, boy; I only want to state the case clearly. What I wish to insure against is not death, or fire, or burglary, but remorse. I don't want

when we become old, that either of us shall look back and regret some blunder which could have easily been avoided. Some disasters will happen that could not be foreseen and we may regret these, but we shall not have to blame ourselves for them. Your brother Len represents one of the troubles which can be dodged. You have done enough for him: most people think you have done too much. Close the account now, and don't add anything more to the debit side. Pretend," she urged, "pretend there's no more room on the page. Do this, and I'll love you all my life."

I walked up to Jermyn Street and back before replying.

"You wouldn't like me to give you a promise and then break it, Milly?"

"You are not likely to do that."

"Then please, please, let matters remain as they are. You don't understand how I feel in regard to Len. I always worshipped him; I can't cancel my affection for him now. I must do all I can to help him, but, if you like, I'll guarantee to do nothing without consulting you."

"And having asked for my advice," said Milly, looking curiously into my eyes, "you will, of course, do just what you have already decided to do. Henry, you're a queer boy. You always were. I expect, after all, you're doing exactly what you think you ought to do."

"No," I cried, "I'm doing exactly what I'm bound to do."

We talked more quietly after this, and I told her all I had suffered during her absence, and Milly told me all that she had been called upon to put up with it in the same period. It was very pleasant, this exchange of retrospection, and I should not like to be called upon to say, with accuracy, how many times I broke off to assure her that she was the best and dearest girl in the whole, wide world, or how often Milly pointed out that she happened to be but one out of the two or three million members of her sex

living in London, and called upon me to explain why out of all this number I had chosen her. I answered that she alone was perfect, but Milly shook her head very decisively at this.

"Even you are not that," she contended. "But you're a good fellow, and some day you are going to be my own dear—" She whispered the last word at my ear, and ran in.

I found myself resuming a habit of whistling when at my dressing table in the mornings; men in the City said I looked better, saying it in a deeply aggrieved tone, as though demanding an explanation. The City is something of a forcing house, and it proves so common for men with special responsibilities to gain there an appearance in advance of their years that only the exception is considered worthy of comment; I have an idea Time is kindest in general to those who pursue anything but money. The artists of my acquaintance keep amazingly youthful; Ernest Fowler, rather scanty of hair on the top of his head, has at the present moment scarcely a line on his face; the few actors I know are precocious juveniles. In the City we acquire a harried, anxious look that comes of hunting and being hunted at the same time, and success rarely arrests greyness; you will see greater evidence of worry in first-class compartments of suburban lines than in the third. The reluctant compliments paid to me after the return of Milly encouraged a closer regard to personal appearance, and I gave up the services of a gentleman in Cornhill, who had been in the habit of clothing me as he pleased, and went to Maddox Street, West, where my anxiety to obtain a perfect fit caused the authorities to make inquiries, and this, in one way, proved unfortunate, for it enabled them to trace an outstanding account of some importance against Len.

"You wouldn't care to settle that, Mr Drew. You'll say, very properly, that it has nothing whatever——"

"On the contrary," I declared. "Easiest matter in the

world to send you a cheque, and I can obtain the amount when I next see him."

"Now," said the Maddox Street firm, with evident relief, "now we can get to business."

A woman said once that being admirably clothed gave a feeling of holy calm that religion had never afforded to her; my own sex is not altogether incapable of sharing this. I wore my best and newest whenever the opportunity came of seeing the lady who, when I once spoke of her as my fiancée, instructed me to substitute the word sweetheart. Warned by the risks already endured, I comported myself with such deference that the wonder is I did not become a permanent slave, and she a fixed, unrelenting despot; it was only at her urgent request, that I took up the custom of, now and again, expressing an opinion differing from that which she held. Even then, I could not resist the temptation to own myself, on the least excuse, in the wrong, so that discussion concerning a play we had seen, or a book we had read, always proved extremely brief.

"I see what you mean, dear girl, and I do believe you're right."

"Don't say that, Henry, unless you are perfectly sure."

"But I haven't the least doubt about it!"

"I don't profess to be always correct," she urged.

"You would be quite justified in doing so."

Milly re-organised the situation on safer lines. There was to be no disagreement in regard to our mutual affection, no question of this, but in regard to other matters, each to have a free mind and express thoughts and opinions freely. The new plan certainly gave a considerable increase of animation to our meetings, and I found I had to read up certain subjects, in order to meet my dear girl with something like credit, for the time in Devonshire and the time abroad had not been wasted, and I could scarcely help entertaining a deep regard for Mr Wreford's library. Apart from matters that presented themselves to different people in different ways, there was one in regard to which we felt

a deep and particular interest, namely, the arrangement and furnishing of the house. I suppose no establishment came so near to perfection in theory. In every house we visited, some good point was selected and taken away. Here, a parquet frame for a square carpet; there, a trap-door at the side of the dining-room for transit of plates; in another, ingenious arrangement of electric lights; we were scarcely out of the gates ere notes began to be compared.

"Did you notice, Henry——"

"I wonder, Milly, whether you happened to observe——"

A rare good game, and I doubt whether it equals anything in life, excepting the earlier joys that come with the present of a box of bricks. Sometimes, our plans resembled those of infant days in that a clumsy jerk, or an effort to build too high, caused a collapse; certain details proved impossible, and occasionally investigations concerning expense took away our breath.

We could scarcely avoid observing at this time how determinedly the world smiled at us. People nodded heads in a determinedly amiable manner; when we entered a room the cry of "Why, here they are!" informed us that we had been the immediate subject of conversation, and this proved less disconcerting than the sly efforts to ascertain what we really wanted as a wedding present; a casual reference to some article, and we could hear the "Ah!" of satisfaction, see the exchange of important glances between members of the family. Also, we found—or pretended to find—some perturbation in the horrid thought that perhaps, after all, we were not treading the primrose path.

"I want to ask you a very serious question," Milly would say, smoothing her muff, "and you must answer it quite frankly and truthfully." I protested that no other mode of replying was open to me. "Everything depends on this, and if you like, you can take your time about it; there's no necessity to tell me what I wish to know at this very moment. Think it over and give me the answer when

we meet next. It's much too important to be treated hastily."

I pointed out that the subject had not yet been stated.

"I want to ask you whether you think you really care for me well enough to justify our marriage."

On other occasions, it would be I who put this solemn and distracting point, and Milly who argued there were no grounds for my fears; reproved the want of faith. In either case, we succeeded in convincing by kisses, and it seems just possible the whole argument may have been started in order to give excuse for this admirable remedy. We did not speak now of Len, but every other subject under the sun was discussed, and I found it very delightful to share with Milly the anxiety created by a slight gathering at the back of my neck; to accept her profound sympathy, and listen to her recommendations concerning treatment; on my side, I gave her the benefit of advice concerning dress for the coming season, and communicated views with regard to the new shape in ladies' hats. In a properly constituted world, every young man and every young woman would be as happy as Milly and I were at that period.

The evening at my rooms when the treaty of peace was signed began in a certain atmosphere of awkwardness, and it was soon made clear that Milly's father and mother were not prepared to exhibit the graciousness over my return that had been shown by Mr Wreford. Milly and I worked hard and determinedly in the interests of good-will; it was not until the mother, as I conducted the party around the sitting-room, calling attention to some original black and white drawings on the wall, found her own photograph set in a silver frame, and ascertained by private inquiry from my landlady's servant who brought in coffee, that it had not been placed for this single occasion in a conspicuous corner, but always stood there—not until then did the mist clear away. Mr Fowler was thinking about taking his superannuation and, this arranged, meant to retire to the country—

"With the missis," he explained, humorously, "unless she'd rather be separated from me."

—To the country, where they could cultivate the garden in some village which boasted no ownership of a railway station. Mr Fowler did not greatly mind if he failed again to hear an engine whistle, and his wife agreed her appetite for London had been fully satisfied.

"There's the question of Milly," she remarked to me, aside. "Ernest, of course, is all right, and I think he's going to have the sense to remain a bachelor. But what to do with Milly is the thing that bothers me."

"I can settle that, Mrs Fowler."

After a moment she nodded. "Only you musn't make too sure of her, even now. There's a lot of attention still outstanding."

"The attention shall be paid," I declared.

Ernest, when he came, brought a copy of his new book as token of renewed friendliness, and in answer to my jumbled effort at explanation, protested that ancient history afforded him but little interest; he had been trying his pen at a romantic novel of the fifteenth century, and found himself forced to tear up the sheets owing to the difficulty of finding a sufficient number of ejaculations appropriate to the time, fitting to the period. Current years were good enough for him, said Ernest; he had no wish to make friends with the middle ages.

"And we needn't say any more about it, after this," he remarked, "but I assure you I'm honestly glad the trouble is all over. Take care it is not allowed to break out again, won't you? Your own life is a great deal too important. You understand what I mean?"

We were enjoying the evening placidly, and Milly was unlocking her violin case, when the maid announced that a lady wished to see me, a lady who declined to give her name; I could see Mrs Fowler's eyebrows rise, and it was impossible to misapprehend the meaning of her short cough. Below, in the hall, I found Mrs Len, and I had to beg and

pray of her to come up, in order that no shadow might affect my reputation in the exceptional circumstances; she smiled, in a tired way, and agreed if I would but tell her the truth. I assured her that to do this was, with me, by no means unusual.

"I want to ask you something," she said, "and here is where I require exact information. Can you tell me if my husband has been borrowing, or attempting to borrow? And has he any right to have in his possession—?" She gasped and stopped.

"Len has been trying to get money," I acknowledged. "The fact worries me a good deal because I know it means he has been worried. But I can tell you he has been able to get nothing out of any of my acquaintances, if that will reassure you in any way."

"And concerning yourself?"

"You needn't bother about that."

"He has paid it back then?"

"Mrs Len," imploringly, "every moment we are wasting down here means a decrease in my character upstairs. Do come along and be nice to my friends. They know your husband very well, but perhaps you needn't say much about him to them."

"The topic," she said, preceding me slowly up the stairs, "is not one of which I care to speak to strangers. Scarcely to friends."

I could see when the sitting-room was reached, how white she had become, thinner too; but for the voice I should not have believed her to be the woman who had taken, some time previously, the news of her money troubles with so much composure. Milly induced her to come to the fire, fetched a hassock, and there Mrs Len, taking off gloves, held out ringless hands to the fire as though the night were cold. She took a glass of claret, and the rest of us, retiring to the window, left them, until presently I heard her say to Milly something about never depending on anybody but oneself, and this seemed to me such a cynical

view to put into my dear girl's mind, that I rejoined them.

"Am I to go now?" she asked.

I wanted her to stay until she had rested completely, but the others announced that they were going (Mrs Fowler always mentioned the fact that she had to cross the river as one might speak concerning the Atlantic Ocean) and Milly whispered to me that someone ought to accompany Mr. Len. In Tottenham Court Road, the New Cross people stepped into a yellow omnibus, and it was good, in watching the hands that waved, to feel that perfect friendship had been restored. A touch from my companion aroused me.

"Something else I wanted to ask you about," she said, pressing fingers to eyes, "and I can't recall it."

"Probably nothing of importance. You may think of it in the cab."

"Do you mind—do you mind coming along with me?"

"Of course I will. You feel nervous of being alone."

"It is not that," she answered, falteringly. "But Len does not allow me to have any money. I had to borrow from one of the maids in order to come here this evening."

It occurred to me as I helped her into the hansom, that the lot of a husband who could not trust his wife in financial matters was scarcely an enviable one; the remark seemed to take the roof from the household, gave one an opportunity for peeping inside. The situation became clear to me; Len had a partner accustomed to spend money without thought, and because of her inability to practise habits of thrift, he was being compelled to make endeavour to raise money. I told myself as the hansom went along Goodge Street, there undoubtedly existed good reason for Len's conduct. It had been a mistake, this marriage, and one could understand it was not helped by the fact that June, in wedding October, had found her changing swiftly to November. When a lamp-post sent its light for the moment into the cab, I noticed

she was crying silently, and whilst sympathising with her to some extent, it was impossible to deny that this scarcely added to her attractiveness.

"You won't mind what I am going to say, Mrs Len," I remarked. "Somebody ought to say it to you, and perhaps I am the fittest person to do so. We haven't seen much of each other, but we are relatives by marriage."

"Seems impossible that you and he are brothers."

"Relatives by marriage, and I must talk to you as though you were my own sister. You are not helping Len as you ought to help him. What he wants just now is a cheerful, encouraging companion, one ready to see everything as he sees it, to side with him whatever happens."

"Is it possible," she said, turning to me sharply, "is it possible you would believe the truth if it were told to you?"

"I should believe nothing to the discredit of my brother." She gave a gesture of hopelessness. "And you would do well, believe me, to follow my example. When Len gets on in the world and becomes successful, you will have some bitter moments if you are unable to say that you helped him in every possible way, that you stood by him at times when others deserted. I shouldn't care to be you, Mrs Len, if that ever comes. I am a man of business and——"

"You have a clerk named Farrington in your office," she remarked, inconsequently. "I knew some of his people."

"He is under a cloud just now," I replied. "If you want to say anything in his favour, postpone it until he has cleared himself."

"I wonder," said Mrs Len, looking straight before her, and going as it seemed to a fresh topic, "I wonder if people who have been blind from their birth find any real satisfaction when they are enabled to see as others do. Or whether it may be that sometimes they would prefer to go on under the old conditions."

The maid who answered my ring accepted charge of

her, in a manner that suggested previous experience; it was a genuine relief to know that some woman was ready to take care of Mrs Len.

Young Farrington, at the end of the fixed time, made formal appeal for an interview, and I received him with a proper air of austerity. He seemed distressed; I ordered him to sit down at the opposite side of the table, and to take his time over the statement. A heavy post delivery came in, and he waited whilst I looked through some of the letters.

"Now!"

"Want to say first of all, sir," he began, "that there now exists no reason why you should not set some one to follow me, if you think it necessary. The fact is my wife and myself have been adding to our small income by singing in the chorus at a theatre—it only meant three pounds a week but that helped—and she was particularly anxious no one who knew us should become acquainted with the circumstance. In the new piece, a very good part has been given her, with two songs; two! And now she is willing, and I am willing that everyone shall know. She's an extraordinarily clever girl," he remarked, with pride. "Seems to be nothing she can't do. We have a small cooking-stove in our flat, and I assure you the meal on Sundays that she prepares——"

"There is the question about the missing cheque."

"I am coming to that," he answered, more soberly. "Hope you won't think I took too much upon myself in making inquiries, but it seemed a matter of serious importance to me. You thought I had taken it, and you argued, if you will remember, that it was for me to prove that you were wrong. That is my excuse for the steps I have taken."

He took a note-book from his pocket.

"You filled in," he went on, "you filled in a cheque just before half-past five, and the envelope containing it went off by that night's post. The cheque was 30 over B.011317;

the missing cheque, as you know, was numbered 011318. No one but myself came into this room to see you between that time and five minutes past six."

"It was just six when you were here, Farrington."

"At five minutes past six we were all gone, and the charwomen were here. I have seen them, and they tell me you had two callers after we left."

"One was my brother; the second the lady to whom I am engaged."

"So I find," he remarked. "I have not the honour of Miss Fowler's acquaintance, but I know your brother's wife. I went to Mrs Drew—she was Mrs Woodrow when my people knew her—and explained fully the extremely awkward corner in which I found myself. She went at once to a desk and produced the cheque with its counterfoil."

"How could she have gained possession of it?"

"Sorry to have to say," answered young Farrington, "that the desk was your brother's!"

"Of course!" I cried, slapping the table, after a moment's pause. "Farrington, it all comes back to me. Len wanted a blank cheque, and I, instead of tearing one from my own book, must have torn one from the other."

"Mrs Drew informed me that he banks at Risley's."

I sat back in the round chair, and clasping hands behind my head, blinked at the ceiling. Young Farrington snapped the elastic-band around his note-book, and waited.

"Shall I take these letters, sir?" he asked, respectfully.

"I must do something for you," I said, in a hesitating voice. "We will see if an increase can be managed before Mr Stemson returns."

"I can keep my mouth shut, without that."

"There's an explanation somewhere, but you see, don't you, how easily people might misunderstand an incident of the kind."

"You did yourself, sir."

"And after all, there's no harm done. A cheque of the kind is not negotiable."

"It looked to me," he said, "as though some clumsy attempt had been made to erase the crossing."

"We needn't discuss the matter any further," I decided. "Much obliged to you for the trouble you have taken. Just wait while I see if there's anything urgent in these other letters."

One in Len's handwriting was amongst the pile, and I threw the rest aside, standing up and reading the pencilled note it contained.

"Now look here, Farrington," I said, impressively. "Just look here and remember this incident all your life when you find yourself tempted to take harsh views. Here is a letter from my brother returning the crumpled cheque. He tells me that having no matches he wanted a spill with which to light his cigar from the gas jet on the way down the staircase; he discovered just in time he had made the stupid blunder of tearing a slip out of the cheque-book. 'I return it herewith' he writes, 'and I do hope the silly mistake has caused no inconvenience!' That clears the whole matter up satisfactorily," I concluded, triumphantly, "and it ought to be a warning to us not to decide hastily where other people are concerned. In this country, Farrington, a man is assumed to be innocent until he is proved to be guilty."

"That's what I thought, sir!"

I went through the remainder of the communication when Farrington left the room. Len said he had much pleasure in also enclosing a cheque for the sum due to me; he hoped I had not been inconvenienced by the delay, but several unexpected claims had prevented him from settling the amount. (By an oversight, he had made an alteration in the body of the cheque without initialling it, and I posted it back for this to be done; I never found out whether he received it.) He felt distressed about his dear wife, for she seemed to get the queerest notions into her head, notions which, the doctor said, were not unusual with a woman of her age, but were, all the same, perturbing to Len. Would I

please give his love to mother, and ask her to look out for great news in the evening paper?

I ran down to New Cross that night, taking with me a journal which announced that Mr Henry Drew had been selected as prospective candidate for a constituency (not the borough of which he had once spoken) where the member was seriously ill; I took with me a Whittaker's Almanac and, together, over the deal table in the kitchen, we traced the result at the general election when a handsome majority had been given to the representative. My mother, taking that gentleman to have been but an ordinary man, and knowing Len to be an extraordinary man, suggested this majority might well be doubled; I promised that no efforts on my part should be wanting. We talked of him affectionately as we had done in the old days. I did make some reference to Mrs Len, but my mother said some women did not know when they were well off, and she had little patience with them. Instead of being grateful, here she was, apparently, going about grumbling and complaining! My mother decided that when the time came for taking the house at Blackheath, much diplomacy would be required in so far as Mrs Len was concerned.

"Mr Leonard Drew, M.P.!" she cried, delightedly. "Henry, I look to you to see that he gets in. If he doesn't, I shall never forgive you, so there! And we must be prepared to spend our last penny, if needs be, so that Len realises his ambition. Blood is thicker than water, Henry."

"Some folk seem to think they are one and the same, mother. They don't recognise the difference."

"Everything comes right with Len, if they only give him a reasonable time."

She looked again through her spectacles at the short paragraph.

"I don't know," she remarked, hesitatingly, putting them back in the case, "whether you'll reckon me old fashioned, or religious, or silly, but do you consider, Henry, there would be any objection—say so if you think so; don't mind

my feelings—the young ladies being out and us all alone in the house, to we two going down here and asking for help to be given to Len in this. Understand, don't you? You kneel at your chair, and I'll kneel at mine. I should be doing it more often only for my rheumatism. Daresay though, He makes allowances!"

We prayed silently for Len's success.