

Emily H— . A Sad Story
by Andrew Forrester, Jr.

A few years ago I was instructed by an eminent solicitor, the partner in a large house at the West-end of London, to penetrate the mysteries of one of the most cruel frauds that ever came under the range of my professional observation; and the principal facts of this sad case are embodied in the following narrative.

Mr. H— was the senior partner in one of the largest cotton manufactories in the North of England. His mills in the town of W— gave employment to, I believe, nearly 3,000 persons, men, women, and children. He was reputed, and was, beyond all doubt, a millionaire. The fabrics woven by his looms were famed throughout Great Britain, and all over the world—a distinction yet, I am told, enjoyed by his partners and successors. He was a proud and vulgar man, who in his person and manners realized one of the descriptions of Mrs. Trollope. Popular rumor in the neighborhood of his residence and factory, charged him with all manner of meanness, petty and sensual vice. But let that pass. It is only important to say that several years before he died, he became a sleeping partner in the business he had created; and that vinous or spiritual indulgence sent him to his grave much earlier than in all human probability he would otherwise have gone there. When he expired, no one lamented his death. The operatives lost an employer, but as the steam engine only ceased its panting one day, and the looms and spindles only stopped during this brief period, after which all went on as before; and as nobody lost anything worth mentioning by the fact, and nobody cared anything about a selfish old man, he dropped into his grave without the honour of a monument, or the homage of a tear.

The old cotton manufacturer left behind him a widow, two daughters, an ample fortune, and a carefully drawn will. This will deserves mention. It was a rather peculiar sort of instrument. It was compounded of the old man's mind, and that of his best friends—if he can be said to have had any—put, as he used to say “ship-shape” by Mr. B—, his lawyer, who, in fact, employed a skillful Chancery barrister to perform this work.

The widow and the daughters were each provided with a considerable sum, which each was at liberty to do as she pleased with. Annuities were left to each of them—a comparatively liberal allowance to the widow, and a comparatively small sum to each of the daughters. These annuities were so fenced about that no husband with whom either lady should intermarry would have control over her income, nor would it become liable to his debts or obligations; nor could the annual allowance (paid quarterly) be mortgaged or anticipated. Beyond this, a considerable sum, part of the residuary estate, was vested in trustees for the benefit of the young ladies.

The widest latitude was given as to the allocation of these bequests in the will that was proved by the executors, but I was told that letters, or secret testamentary papers of some kind, expressing the views of the testator, were given to the trustees. In general terms, I may state, I was informed that if either young lady married “an unworthy object,” the trustees were requested to give the bulk of her share in this residuary estate to her sister; to settle what they did grant or give to the young lady so marrying as carefully as they could, in the form of an annuity for her sole benefit, beyond the reach of her spouse; or, indeed, do very nearly as in the exercise of their discretion seemed best.

The old man was decently interred. The will was proved. The executors took possession of the property and realised the estate; the trustees entered upon the initial exercise of their functions. The will had been duly published, and the young ladies had been given to understand the extent to which they were in the power of their trustees.

Not very long after the old cotton-spinner had gone to his final account, his widow and her daughters were heard to bemoan his loss in lachrymose periods. They could not endure the painful associations they encountered on every hand, at every turn, in the town of W—; and, as they alleged, in order to escape the mental ordeal of their native place, they resolved, under—they also declared—the advice of very dear friends, to take up their abode in the great metropolis.

Some ill-natured people declared that it was pride which drove them from the town in which their fortunes had been made; that they wanted to run riot, in a respectable sort of way, in the giddy pleasures of a London season; and that mamma was privy to a design by the young ladies to catch husbands in a more genteel sphere than the North of England.

I am bound to say that my investigations did not lead me upon any evidence of the truth of these assertions to the disadvantage of the heroines. It is, however, a fact that within a few months after the old man had been buried, the family he left behind him removed to London, and took an elegantly furnished residence at Kensington. The house-agent who let it them, styled the cottage a *bijou*; and the change of scene did exercise a visible and beneficial influence upon the health and spirits of the mother and daughters.

The new arrival caused “a sensation” in Kensington. Tradesmen were on the alert, solicited custom, and bribed servants for patronage. Of this there was no lack, and it is needless to add, that everything consumed or ordered was duly paid for.

The servants who were lucky enough to get situations with this family, declared they were the best mistresses in the world; and as it is not easy to satisfy the inmates of kitchens and pantries, I take it for granted that the domestics were well cared for. Not, however, to weary the reader, I may say that the H— family lived in brilliant style, although on rather a small scale; that their reputation, I mean the fame of their wealth, was a constant theme of speculation and commentary.

Some persons who attended their sumptuous little parties believed all that rumour assigned to the family; other persons, who were not of these parties, affected to disbelieve the reports about the wealth of the Misses H—; and even ladies and gentlemen of the latter set have been heard to throw such epithets as “stuck up,” “snobs,” &c. The *élite* of Belgravia and of Tyburnia held aloof distrustfully. The likes Misses H— were not of the *ton*, and their mother was excessively vulgar in the eyes of these persons. Yet there was no lack of people, deserving to be considered highly genteel, who found what pleased them on the table of the cotton-spinner’s widow.

Among the favoured guests at the widow’s residence was a certain gentleman about twenty-five years of age. He was rather tall, slenderly built, of dark complexion, hair approaching to jet

black. His countenance was more than intelligent. It indicated mental activity and strength. There was an expression in the eye which I, who saw him a few months after his first visit to the residence of Mrs. H—, did not much like; and there was also an expression on the face and mouth which betrayed a latent villany of character.

I said this when a miniature of the rascal was first put into my hands; and when I made the acquaintance of the original, my first impressions were only confirmed or justified.

People who had met him in company were nearly agreed that he was a pleasant and agreeable companion. Few persons had, however, met him at Mrs. H—'s. Important engagements usually prevented his accepting invitations to the parties. He was almost always obliged to apologise for an absence on these occasions, which, of course, caused him much annoyance. He, however, compensated for his absence from the parties by his frequent attendance at the house when nobody else but the family was there. Many afternoons were thus spent, to the hearty satisfaction of mother and daughters, especially Miss Emily H—, the youngest, who had privately agreed to become the wife of this man within a month of the date of her first interview with him.

Emily H— was a pretty little young woman, twenty-one years of age, just two years younger than her sister. She was a rather pert and simpering girl, whose character exhibited many of the best traits of the stock from which she came, spoiled by the flimsy education or boarding schools. There she learned a false morality, a dangerous sentimentalism, and a habit of intrigue which, as this sad story shows, proved her utter destruction.

When this suitor, whom I shall now call Charley Edwards (although he went at Kensington by another name), proposed a clandestine courtship, she did not refuse. She knew that, according to the regulations of polite society, her sister ought to be disposed of in marriage before her turn came; and she knew that such was the order of mamma's programme. This fact was artfully pleaded by the villain of this true story as the pretext and excuse for secrecy. When so much of his plan had succeeded, the rest he saw was easy. He knew enough of female human nature to know that a silly girl, if once tempted to break one regulation of social life, will be restrained by no sense of prudence afterwards, unless it be on the threshold of sin, and it was no part of this knave's project to outrage the young lady, or do her wrong, until he had made her his wife. The correspondence went on for a short time between them as lovers before it was detected, and as I am telling the truth, I may as well state that there was a quarrel, or perhaps half a dozen scenes, in the bijou of Mrs. H—, as violent and as rude as ever occurred in the lowly walks of life.

The mother raved and wept, the elder daughter vented her rage in a variety of modes easier imagined than described. Miss Emily retorted in kind, and would not be convinced of the error of her conduct. On one point she was firm; she was her own mistress. She would incur all risks. She would marry the man she loved whenever she liked. Her mother and her sister need not trouble themselves about her fate or fortune. Marry him she would at once, if he would have her. A drawn battle ended the dispute.

Meanwhile the lovers, who had prepared for such a contingency as this, corresponded and met. Miss Emily's maid contrived the trysts. A week after the discovery, Emily H— became Mrs.—. She did not then know her husband's name, and the reader must never know it. A secret marriage was the termination of a clandestine correspondence.

All went on pleasantly enough for a short time. The bride had some ready money, and so had the bridegroom. The mother and sister affected an indifference they did not feel, and Mrs. Edwards was too charmed with her new situation and her husband's friends to care about the relatives in Kensington.

"Dear Charley's friends" she said in a letter to a country cousin, "are the divinest fellows I ever met with in my life;" and agreeable companions enough were those she was permitted to see, although it may be here mentioned, that he had another set, or series of sets, whose demeanour and language would have shocked even her notions of propriety, which were not of the most superlative or keen description. They chatted on topics neither above nor below the comprehension of a lady of the stamp of my heroine, smoked the choicest cigars in her presence, and voted her round compliments because she permitted this liberty. They drank, but not too deeply, and played freely, "like gentlemen," she declared.

When the immediate stock of funds had been exhausted, Charley found it not difficult to raise more on his note of hand, and some kind of security or pledge of his wife's estate.

The three first weeks were spent at Scarborough. On their return the week after, which rolled on for about three months in the way I have described, during all of which time Kensington had not come to Notting Hill, Notting Hill had not been Kensington. Each party was playing a waiting game, and the old lady might have been reconciled to her daughter, if dear Charley hadn't so very obstinately refused to make, or let his wife make, the first advance in that direction. It was plain to some people that he didn't want, and would perhaps rather not have the friendship of his wife's kindred. It might indeed have embarrassed his plans, and he had good reasons for preferring to be free from their good offices.

One morning Charley was in a dressing-gown, yawning over his coffee, and was listlessly puffing at a meerschaum, as he professed to read the paper, much as a bachelor with a competent independence might do. His darling Emily was trying to kill time with a crochet needle, or working at some "mania," I forget which. A visitor was announced. It was one of the rattling, jovial, and apparently generous fellows whose praises she had so lauded in her familiar epistle, whose name I will call Robinson.

"What! Charley, my boy, how is this? What was up last night? Eh! Mrs. Edwards,—I beg your ten thousand persons—almost forgot you, I declare." Thus rattled on the intruder.

"Oh, nothing was up last night, I assure you," returned Charley, "but," he added, "it's confoundedly dull in London just now, and I and Em were just taking out our married bliss quietly, you know, not expecting Rattlebrain here yet for a few hours."

"Oh, you see I know that I am always welcome, am I not, Mrs. Edwards? and I shall always come when I like; but I say, old fellow, if you find London dull, why don't you come to Paris with me and Jack Nolan?"

"Are you going to Paris? When?"

“Oh, I don’t how, we haven’t exactly named the day, as the old maid said about her wedding, but in about a week, I suppose. Will you come? Oh don’t pout, Mrs. Edwards; make the wretch take you with him, I say.”

“Well, what do you say about it Em?”

Em was silent. It was that sort of silence which may always be safely defined as consent, and so Charley interpreted her meaning.

“I see Em would like to go, only she’s a little thoughtful about the pocket of her hub. A good wife’s a treasure, young Rattlebrain. When are you really going to get married?”

“Oh, cut that. When shall we go to Paris?”

“Oh, say next Monday.”

“Monday—no, Tuesday—I’ve got an appointment with the governor on Monday.”

“The governor, eh?” And Charley laughed as if he thought that assertion such a very good joke that he might laugh at it without fear.

Fear of what? the reader asks.

Well, of anything like falsehood or guile, my dear reader.

Mrs. Edwards thought it time to say and do something, so, after the manner oftentimes rehearsed, when a girl at what is appropriately called “a finishing establishment,” she pulled “dear Charley’s” whiskers, kissed him, and asked, “When shall we go?”

“Tuesday, if you please; let it be Tuesday—any day you please. It’s all the same to me.”

This point being settled, the conversation was changed to some insipid topic which this precious set of human creatures appeared to enjoy. Mrs. Edwards seemed at last, about one o’clock, to reflect that her appearance was not exactly becoming a deceased millionaire’s daughter, or the wife of such a fine gentleman as Charley, so she adjourned to her room upstairs, and left the two men alone.

The conversation now took a more subdued tone and serious air. Rattlebrain was quiet and attentive. Charles was earnest and demonstrative. The reader will be pleased to accept as a reason why I do not relate this discussion, the one so often met with in newspaper reports of debates in Parliament, speeches at political meetings—the speakers’ voices, dear reader, if you please, were not audible to me—for I was not there at the time. Is this explanation unsatisfactory? Wait awhile, and the substance of the discussion, or the plan agreed upon, will appear in this story.

On Tuesday the party left London for Paris, and arrived in due course at the Hotel A— B—, a leading “English house,” in the Rue C— D—, (The reader must pardon my care to avoid disclosing anything which might fix the identity of innocent persons.)

Ten days or so were passed in the gay capital, before the main incident I am about to describe occurred. Mr. and Mrs. Edwards, Robinson, and Nolan, were conspicuous in every place of public entertainment within certain grades. I do not learn that they obtained admission into circles of *ton*, but I ascertained that they visited during the memorable ten days almost all places described in guide books.

My party were favorites. Edwards’ pleasant manners, Robinson’s frolicsome talk, Nolan’s sparkling wit, and Mrs. Edwards’ modesty—for she was, as she said, or tried to say in French, like a fish out of water—made them agreeable company at the *table d’hôte*; and as they lacked not money, host and servants were pleased with their guests. One spinster lady, an Englishwoman, about thirty-five years old, somewhat prone to be censorious, declared that Em’s manners were too free. This person afterwards asserted that she had seen Robinson kiss her several times “on the sly.” Of course I don’t believe there was a shadow of truth in this specific charge, although I am bound to admit that she did not exhibit as much circumspection as I think she ought to have done. On the other hand, it may be asked, was she not introduced to Robinson and Nolan by her husband—were they not his friends—had he not thrown her in their way, and almost instructed her to make free with them? The reader will accept for what it is worth my own solemn declaration, that neither in deed or thought was Emily unfaithful to her husband.

An anonymous letter, delivered by post, was received by Edwards, charging his wife with this offence against the proprieties of married life. That letter, I am at liberty to say, was written by the spinster, then residing in the hotel A— B—. He read it unmoved; no change in his manner was visible. He put the letter carefully away in a coat pocket.

Somewhere about the ninth day of their residence in Paris, Em and Charley formed themselves into what is called in Parliament a committee of ways and means. Her purse was nearly empty, so was his. What should they do? Ask Robinson for a loan? No! Ask Nolan? No! That would be so humiliating. He must return to London, and get another bill done. She must remain in pledge at the hotel until he could redeem her. Three days at most would suffice. She cried or whimpered over her first separation from “dear Charley.” He comforted her by the assurance that he would not be absent from her side more than three or four days. So it was arranged that he should depart at once, that is, within a few hours, and make all possible haste back.

At parting, she asked, “You will write to me every night, won’t you, dear Charley?”

“Sweet Em, that’s hardly possible when I shall be in the railway or on the steamboat all the time I am away, except a few hours.

An interview took place between the other gentlemen and Edwards, when he informed them of his intended departure for London upon urgent private business, which would detain him, however, only a few days. In the meantime, he left his charming little wife under their care. A similar announcement of the fact, and its cause, was made to the guests at the *table d’hôte*, and

Mr. Edwards took a night train on the Chemin de Fer du Nord. He did not, however, travel so far as London. Did he, on the way, get his purse replenished? did he ascertain that he should do without money, like little Becky Sharp of “Vanity Fair?” or did he discover a reserve of good banknotes in his watch-fob or pocketbook? I lean to the last theory. At any rate, he went no farther than Boulogne, and remained there one entire day.

Next evening, when the night train started from Boulogne to Paris, Mr. Charles Edwards took a ticket, and returned to the French capital. He arrived in Paris about midnight, and went straight to his hotel.

During her husband’s absence, poor Emily had been chaperoned by Robinson, and that evening he and Nolan had invited themselves to pass an hour or two in her sitting room. She made no objection to the license her husband’s friends thus granted themselves. She did not see any impropriety in the reception of them, and did her best to make them as comfortable as she could. The evening passed much as other evenings did, when the friends remained indoors, and before twelve o’clock the little party broke up.

The portress let Mr. Edwards into the hotel, without asking questions, and he went to his bedroom. Immediately afterwards, he closed the door violently, turning the key on the outside, and began shouting like a maniac. His place was filled by Robinson, whose name he shouted, while that villain and Emily slumbered side by side! This noise, at such a time, raised half the inmates, guests, and servants of the house; and when the key was again turned, more than a score of persons saw poor Mrs. Edwards, awakened by the noise, rubbing her eyes, half unconscious, and totally bewildered. Robinson was awakened by a strong punch administered by a bucolic gentleman, whose name will be found in Burke’s “Landed Gentry,” but must not be inserted here. Here was a situation more distressing than that of Bellini’s Amina—more horrible than anything the reader had, I hope, known in *his* experience.

The patent evidences of Emily’s guilt could be sworn to by a score of the most respectable witnesses who ever gave their testimony before any tribunal in the world. There appeared to the spectators no explanation at all consistent with her innocence. The spinster, who was a witness of this scene, said it was just as she expected things would turn out. She was not at all surprised. She only wondered how poor Mr. Edwards could have been blinded so long to what everybody else could see, and much more of the same kind. Everybody present did remember, now they came to think of it—or said so—that there had been many undue familiarities between Robinson and Emily. Yes! they now perfectly recollected furtive glances between the criminals at the *table d’hôte*. Hundreds of their illicit love stratagems were recounted across the table at the hotel A— B— during the next two or three weeks.

Emily broke out in a violent paroxysm of grief. She was hysterical; but the one idea of her alleged crime haunted her. She talked of nothing else during the time she remained at the hotel. The ladies staying there of course left her in disgust, and a kind-hearted Frenchwoman, obtained from somewhere by the host, had charge of her until the proud mother arrived from Kensington. She was then almost immediately removed to England by her mother. The old lady was as stubborn as the rest for a time. She read Emily a host of lectures, showing how one crime leads on to another, and tracing the connection between the clandestine marriage and adultery like

inevitable cause and effect; but so keen was the anguish of the unfortunate daughter, and so intense her protestations of innocence, that at last her mother's faith was stirred, and she arrived at a new twofold conclusion—Robinson was a villain, and Edwards was, after all, to be pitied, although he had not acted as a gentleman should when he ran away with her child.

Robinson skulked off as well as he could after the *dénouement*, and I am told he was dexterous enough to escape that night to his own apartment, where nobody thought of following him, with only a bruise and a scratch or two, as tokens of the genteel indignation at his crime. Next morning he paid his bill, and went off to Brussels. The landlord was glad to be rid of him without further uproar, so he got away quietly. Scandal would have injured the character of the hostelry, so that "mine host" would have been pleased if the guests had been silent in the public room about the affair. He had, however, at his service, a French proverb, which corresponds to the English saying, "that what can't be cured must be endured." As he could not make them keep their mouths shut, and as they were his "kind patrons," he put up with this unpleasant conversation while it lasted, and kept his own counsel on the subject. One notion consoled him for any actual loss or inconvenience; he knew the names and usual addresses of every guest in his house. The injured husband would want this information, would need a variety of services in getting up evidence against his wife and her paramour. This he should have, but he must pay for it, and liberally, too, like an English gentleman.

Of Mr. Charley Edwards, for the present let me only say that he, too, left the hotel next day, apparently in dreadful grief. He took no leave of his wife. He told the hostess that such a meeting would be too much for him. He begged her to look kindly after Emily until her mother had arrived. He wrote a letter, full of manly pathos, to Kensington. He arrived in London by a train from Folkestone on the evening of the day he left Paris.

Exceedingly soon after the last painful incidents had happened, I was sent for by the solicitor to whom I have referred. He was at his wits' ends. That a monstrous and cruel hoax and fraud had been committed was, he thought, most probable, and yet the apparent want of motive for destroying the character of the young wife almost led him to conclude she must be guilty. It had been pretty distinctly stated to him by the solicitor for the husband that money would have to be secured to him, if he could be induced to abstain from bringing scandal upon her family and connexions. Yet, as my solicitor observed, the man would have had quite as much, or indeed much more money than he can now get, and a young, pretty, and eminently respectable wife to boot, if this affair had not happened or been brought about. I was also puzzled.

My first difficulty was in getting a clue to Mr. Edwards' position or antecedents. He was said to be then on the Continent, and a direct application to his solicitor was by me not thought prudent, for it might have put him on guard. Mrs. H—, Emily's mother, knew nothing about him. His acquaintance had been made at a flower-show, and he gave his address at an hotel, alleging that he had not long returned from France, where he had resided several years. I could not identify him by a portrait or miniature. Inquiry at the hotel where he lived, while paying his addresses to his wife, could not trace him beyond the day he arrived there, but whence he came nobody knew.

At length I got upon the track, and in a month had so baited my own trap that one of the real criminals, Nolan, walked in. When there, he began, as villains always do, to tremble for his own safety; and as he was the least guilty, I went so far as to promise him a reward if he could satisfy me that he had told everything about the case. If not, I said I should hand him over at once to the police, and gently hinted that I had reason to believe he was wanted for another affair. He told me what I believe was the whole story. I let him off with a note to the solicitor who employed me, in which I suggested that ten pounds should be given him at once, with a pledge to pay him forty pounds more, if his story could be verified in other particulars.

Without betraying Nolan, I learned all about Robinson and Mr. Charley Edwards, and the atrocious scheme from first to last.

The conspiracy was briefly this. The arrival of the family at Kensington had been observed by Robinson. Stock had been taken of the mother and daughters. It was calculated that either of the girls, not knowing the upper ten thousand of the metropolis, would embrace the first offer of marriage by one who was thought to be “a real gentleman.” Edwards was selected by his companions to play the part of lover. He was the only one at all capable of sustaining it. What they desired was ready money. Neither of them would have felt happy as the husband of Emily. Each of them had his “attachment,” which he did not care to break, and neither of them could escape from the thralldom of the compact of crime into which he had entered.

The will had been examined before the plot was matured, and after perusing it they came to the conclusion that more ready money could be obtained by the steps they took than in any other mode. If a disgrace could be attached to the family, all its members would concur in any monied arrangement for hushing up the scandal. From first to last everything described in this narrative happened as planned by Edwards, Robinson, and Nolan, except, perhaps, the spinster’s letter, which formed a valuable link in the chain of evidence.

Whether this amiable lady was a member of the confederacy, or an unconscious ally, I did not ascertain from Nolan. I also found out, by enquiry, that Edwards had cohabited with a female for many years, and that she was then the mother of several of his children. This woman had been a consenting party to the immolation of Emily H—. She knew and acted her negative part in the plot by resigning her lover to play his part—that of the bridegroom of a wife he intended to destroy.

All this we could, if necessary, have proved by the oath of Nolan, which would have been confirmed in a variety of material points. How far it would have got over the strong *primâ facie* case of the independent witnesses at Paris, it is not for me to say, nor do I care to offer an opinion upon the value of the other features of the case that weighed upon the minds and hearts of the unfortunate wife’s family. If we succeeded in preventing the divorce for which it was intended to apply, the effect of our skill would be to invest the scoundrel who had so outraged her with a husband’s rights over her income through her person as long as she lived, unless Providence should release her by first removing him from this world, and then she must drag this odious matrimonial chain until he died.

If, in order to effect her release, we consented to his prayer for a divorce—supposing him willing, in that case, to prosecute it—we then allowed him to brand her, innocent as she was, with the odious title of adulteress. This was felt to be an awkward dilemma. Or, supposing that the crime of the three villains were brought within the scope of the criminal law, the horrible scandal would be revealed. To avoid either unpleasantness it was, after many consultations between the solicitor and counsel of the H— family—conferences between Emily’s mother, her trustees, and the solicitor—meetings between the two solicitors of the parties, and much anxious thought by the victim and her friends, that it would be sound policy to get the husband bound under a deed of separation and a bond, the penalties of which should overtake him if he ever broke his engagement, not to molest his deeply injured wife. To obtain the execution of these legal instruments, the trustees and family paid Mr. Charley Edwards the sum of £3,000 sterling.

It is consoling to know that the fiends did not long enjoy their ill-gotten money. All of them fell into the hands of justice at different times. Edwards was transported beyond the seas, and having broken his parole in Australia, turned bushman. While attacking with some companions, a gold escort from the diggings at Ballarat to Melbourne, he was shot in the heart. Robinson and Nolan are, I believe, alive, and doing penance as convicts. Emily, who finds comfort in charitable deeds, is living under an assumed name in a continental city, where no person is acquainted with her melancholy story.

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