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STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS BY M. E. BRADDON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

A NOVEL.

BY

M. E. BRADDON,

AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," ETC.

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS.

BOOK THE SECOND.

(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER V.

“Et je songeais comme la femme oublie,
Et je sentais un lambeau de ma vie
Qui se déchirait lentement.”

MR. FORDE had come up from Scotland on the tenth of July, intending to surprise Elizabeth by his unexpected appearance in Eaton-place. He had fancied her bright look of rapture as she came into the room and saw him, after having been told only that a gentleman from Hawleigh wished to see her—the look she had given him so many times during the brief happy fortnight that followed their betrothal; those happy days in which they had enjoyed for but too short a space the privileges of plighted lovers, had walked alone together on the dull March afternoon, when the Curate's labours allowed him such a blessed interval, and had talked of the future they were to share—a lowly destiny, but with the light of true love shining upon it.

Thus had he thought of his betrothed during the tedious journey from the North, tedious though he travelled express for the greater part of the way. He came fresh from the performance of a mournful duty, for only

two days ago he had read the funeral service above the remains of his father's brother, the bachelor uncle who had been almost a second father to him. He had not even written to tell Elizabeth of his uncle's death. It would be easier to tell her when they met. He had made all his plans. He meant to stay in London for a few days, while Elizabeth wound up her visit, and then to take her back to Devonshire with him. And then it would be time to think of their wedding-day. He was richer by some four hundred a year since his uncle's death, and he had lately received the offer of a very fair living in the north of England. Since he had surrendered his old heroic idea of his ministry, and had determined that his lines were to be cast in pleasant places, there was really nothing to hinder the realisation of his wishes.

Only when he was rattling along in a cab between Euston-square and Eaton-place did he bethink himself that Elizabeth would, in all probability, be out. It was nearly nine o'clock, and she went out so much, as her letters informed him. He could hardly hope to be so fortunate as to find her at home. And then he reproached himself for this childish foolishness of his in wishing to surprise her, instead of telegraphing the announcement of his advent, as a sensible man would have done.

"Do love and folly always go hand in hand?" he wondered.

His forebodings of disappointment were fully realised. "Not at home," said Mrs. Chevenix's single-handed indoor servant, a man whose pompous bearing might have impressed strangers with the idea that he had an under-butler and a staff of accomplished footmen for his vassals. "Not expected home till late this evening."