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A FIGHT WITH FORTUNE.

BY

MORTIMER COLLINS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1876.

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LONDON :
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL,
BLENHEIM HOUSE.

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A FIGHT WITH FORTUNE.

CHAPTER I.

A CRUSHED SPIDER.

“To crush a villain is no trivial victory.”

NO difficult matter was it for Inspector Fox to put his hand on the Parson and the Slippery One; and, though they were carefully warned, as is the very proper custom of the police, not to criminate themselves, they were not forbidden to criminate anyone else. Fox soon saw that now was

the time to fix Crake, whom for a long time he had suspected of mingling with the business of Beyfus and Calisher that of Jonathan Wild—the honester, perchance, of the two. Fox was delighted at this proof of his intuition. He got authority to act at once.

I like spiders. Not as the Marquis de Laplace liked them, the great mathematician, who for a dainty dish preferred them to oysters. But I like the marvellous lacework of their webs, the delicate gossamer they throw from tree to tree and all over the vernal grass, the admirable way in which they keep down wasps and flies. I admire the splendid spiders of Hampton Court, with bodies the size of a half-crown, and long hairy legs, into whom they say the soul of Cardinal Wolsey has passed, by

some marvellous metempsychosis. I like the pretty little spider, who at this midnight moment is letting himself down by the lightest line in the world from the ceiling to my writing-table, and who will in a second or two be exploring my manuscript with as much curiosity as Livingstone's when he explored Africa. I like the crafty long-legged spider, who makes no web, but waits on a wall till a fly comes near him, and then catches him sharp. So, when I mentioned that Crake was commonly called Spider Crake, I felt it was no compliment to my friends the descendants of Arachne. I do not like the human spider. Indeed, I think the people who nick-named Crake "Spider Crake" were unjust to the spider race.

Crake's two doors had been well watched

while Inspector Fox was collecting information. A series of men in various habiliments had lounged up and down the court and the street in a careless way, sometimes taking a drink at the nearest public-house. Crake did not imagine himself watched. He went on with what may be called (by courtesy) the respectable half of his business. People came to him to get out of their difficulties, or to borrow money at a high figure, with great regularity. That Inspector Fox's bull's eye was upon him, he did not for an instant imagine.

Now Fox had learnt, from his two previous prisoners, of the access from Spider Crake's rascally establishment to the Water Rat. And he knew, by long experience, that to trap a human spider in his web is not easy. So, an adept at dis-

guises, dressing himself as a young swell, with new kid gloves, oiled and scented hair, a gardenia in the buttonhole of a blue coat by Poole which he kept for aristocratic adventure, he knocked at Crake's door, and was admitted by the junior partner. He had a man watching each entrance of the house, and a couple of strong fellows drinking their pot of stout slowly at the Water Rat, where a rescue might perchance be attempted.

“Can I see Mr. Crake?” he said, resuming his cigar so soon as he had asked the question.

“I will ask, sir,” said the quiet manservant. He was completely taken in. Fox acted the part of Lord Dundreary to perfection.

The fellow returned to say that Mr. Crake could be seen. Though the weather

was warm, the old usurer was sitting in front of a fire, warming his ugly short-fingered hands. He looked in a rather supercilious way at the new arrival. Your lender always treats your borrower with contempt. Moral: never borrow. It is a hard moral. True friendship thinks nothing of money: but how few people are able to be true friends!

“I have been told, Mr. Crake, that you occasionally lend money,” said Fox.

“On good security,” said Crake.

“I have but poor security,” said Fox.

“But do you buy diamonds? I have one here that I believe is valuable.”

He extended his left hand, on the little finger of which was a diamond worth about five hundred pounds, which he had borrowed for the purpose from Mr. Amethyst, of Bond Street.

Crake woke up. It occurred to him that this apparent swell might be an aristocratic thief. Such clients, male or female, were profitable. It was a great branch of his business to receive unconsidered trifles from those who snapped them up on the outskirts of society. He played the part of Jonathan Wild to a legion of this class. He found the "ladies" the cleverest—especially those who went in for being courteous companions to elderly aristocrats. By Jove, couldn't they pilfer?

"Where did you get that?" said Crake. "It is a fine stone. I could give you fifty pounds for it—if it is safe."

"Where I got it is nothing to you," said Fox, feeling like a terrier that is tired of playing with a rat. "Here is something

will suit you better," producing warrant and the handcuffs. "You are arrested on the charge of being concerned in the robbery of jewels at Englehurst Hall. There are several other charges against you."

Crake had often thought, often dreamt, of this supreme and awful moment. He jumped from his seat, took a revolver from his breast pocket, and fired straight at Fox. The bullet passed through his left arm; but he scarcely felt it in the excitement of the moment. He caught hold of Crake, threw the pistol into a corner, and had handcuffed the wretch before the men outside, who had heard the report, had forced their way in.

"Take him to Bow Street," Fox said. "I will just get this wound dressed, and

follow you. Wait though—that won't do. I'll stay here till you send some men to make a thorough inspection of the premises. I believe they are full of stolen goods."

"You'll get faint, Mr. Fox," said one of the men.

"Not I. I am only bleeding a little. Send in the first man you meet, and I'll give him his orders."

They went. Crake's people also had all suddenly departed, for all were confederates. When a policeman of the A division, whom the others had met, came up to where the Inspector sat, feeling a trifle faint, not a creature was in the house.

"You look rather bad, sir," said the new-comer.

“Only a shot in the arm,” said Fox. “Just see if this scoundrel has anything in those cupboards. There are his keys. I did not give him time to take them away.”

The policeman found some Cognac, and therewith revived the Inspector. Presently came a detachment from Bow Street, and the divisional surgeon, who soon set Inspector Fox's trivial wound all right.

There was a thorough search instituted through Crake's den. Curious discoveries were the result, some of which never have been made public, and probably never will. The old spider was depositary of many foul secrets which, if published, would have ruffled the serene surface of society. Among the documents unearthed by Inspector Fox, his left arm in a sling, but

his brain so eager for discovery that he felt no pain, was Crake's private ledger, written throughout in cypher. Fox took this home and pored over it. He was rewarded. He found the names and doings of a good many persons "moving in society," whom society had not suspected of anything so terribly wicked. Of course they were all people who, in course of time, grew known as "shady." But the depth of their rascality was only sounded by themselves and Crake. Fox found this ledger a treasure, and afterwards made good use of it.

Its contents were amazing. There was a scion of the peerage receiving a regular income from Crake for bringing him men willing to pay sixty per cent. There was another gentleman of the same level in life, famous

for flirtations, whose name was never absent from the *Morning Post*, bringing him week after week valuable jewels. Let us hope their fair owners gave them to him; but even then the transactions were not highly honourable. Love gifts, even when the love on one side is false, are not things to be sold. I fear, however, that in many cases he played the part of an aristocratic Autolycus; that, to quote an ancient poet,

“ He would have snatched
The jewel from Helen’s girdle, and forgot
The beauty of her eyelids, and the curve
Miraculous of Zeus-begotten breasts.”

Women, too. One was an aged chaperon, who took in hand the daughters of middle-aged millionaires. She pillaged her *protégées* ruthlessly, as was clear from Crake’s ledger, and brought him all sorts of floating property—from a diamond necklace to a

new prayer-book. All was fish that came to her net, and to his also. Yet was that venerable lady, as Fox well knew, in great request at routs and garden parties—a most successful introducer of parvenu L.S.D. to patrician Impecuniosity, and a regular patroniser of that highest of High Churches, Saint Britius, in Chasuble Lane, where all the most exclusive people go to hear dear Mr. Barytone Boanerges intone the prayers and anathemaranathatize all his persecutors through his sermon. There you may see the wicked old woman, her tremulous head vibrating to Barytone's strong sentences, with a pretty hybrid girl by her side, whose money she has to exchange for position. A capital income does this unmarried old lady, daughter of an Irish peer, make in her vocation—to say

nothing of what she made by Crake.

It would be impossible to exhaust Crake's ledger, which took Inspector Fox weeks to decipher. Only one more of his clients I am tempted to indicate. She was a kind of feminine "tame cat." She had just got into the limits of society, and was invited (as a kindness) to country houses, and was sometime entertained during the shooting season by gentlemen so old that she might have been their granddaughter, to look after their household. She was a good manager for them, and also for herself. If she paid a bill, somehow a trifle adhered to her fair fingers. Valuable (but unluckily portable) property was quite at her mercy at some of these places where she held household command; much of it vanished, and nobody but Crake could

trace it. She was never accused of any impropriety except giving dinners to young gentlemen (decidedly her juniors) with other people's money; for, though she would carry a flirtation to the very verge of impropriety, she was too cautious to permit a dangerous liberty, too chilly by nature to be betrayed by passion. Passion she could not feel.

I had just jotted down a very few of the notes which Crake had made about his clients, and which Inspector Fox deciphered. It was quite a treat for the Inspector, while his wound was being healed. How he gloated over each discovery! Now he had a new list of thieves—and of thieves moving in aristocratic society. It was a delightful revelation. He should be able to watch these people, put his hand upon

them when they passed the limits of the law, and bring up Crake's records against them. Tremble, jackal of the bill discounter—beware, thieving Don Juan! Be cautious, Mistress Gobetween: shiver with dread, Miss Becky Filch! Crake's ledger is under the inspection of no common Inspector. What will happen in consequence to you and a good many others of your sect is a doubtful matter. Crake and the Slippery One and the Parson were tried at Oakshire Assizes; of course found guilty; of course sentenced to long terms of punishment. They drop out of our story. I hate to describe such people; but they will exist, confound them! In Crake's den, besides the famous ledger, delight of Inspector Fox, was found an immense amount of valuable but unsaleable

property, which he had accumulated in the course of his rascally career.

Two people were particularly glad of Crake's fate—Lord Bellasys and Mr. Laing. Mr. Laing hoped that his I O U for that five hundred had never been out of Crake's possession, and that therefore he would not be sued upon it. Bellasys, who was as daring as the devil himself, simply stopped his cheque on Drummond's, and waited to see what the holders would do—feeling sure that he should be a gainer by the complication. He knew of course that Crake must have got so large a sum of money from several different sources—a kind of thief-syndicate, in fact—and he resolved to let them show their cards. He had fought through a good many strong struggles in his time, more for the personal

delight of a good fight than anything else ; and now he wanted to see what would happen should he decline to pay 120 per cent. for £50,000. He desired to discover who could lawfully claim either principal or interest. A man not easily surprised, he was amazed beyond measure by Crake's sudden collapse. That a man who could so easily find a larger sum of money than half the usurers of London ever saw should be in a conspiracy with burglars, seemed to him incomprehensible. Who were his opulent associates ? Were they also robbers ? Were Jonathan Wild, Dick Turpin, Jack Sheppard, and Co., the leaders of money men ?

Bellasys asked Clarence Vere what it meant. They were in the smoking-room of the Matutine Club, whose object is well

indicated by its name: It is always open. There is a splendid staff of accomplished night-waiters, some of whom are reported never to have seen the sun—like one of Shelley's heroes. There is a capital Turkish (or, to speak accurately, Roman) bath connected with it: so if you sit up till six or seven, and feel that to go to bed would be an absurdity, you can recuperate with a good shampoo and a devilled breakfast. Strange to say, the Matutine has a good many old fogies among its members—"honourable old men of letters" and the like. They are its *habitués* by day, attracted by the excellent breakfasts and luncheons which the unequalled Club produces—also by an admirable library, where presides the ablest Club librarian (bar one) in London.

Clarence Vere, who avoided all strong liquids because his brain would not stand them, was sipping hock and seltzer to moisten his cigar. Bellasys, whose brain nothing had touched yet (though there is no knowing how suddenly the strongest constitution may snap with the strain of a fierce dissipation), was drinking Kirschenwasser. The fiery fluid of the Black Forest stood in a small decanter by his side. He did not often smoke; he, like Lord Palmerston, deemed it a foolish waste of vital power.

“Well,” said Vere, “Crake has been doing a lot of shady things. I have heard of a few, but I said nothing about them, for it was no business of mine. I just knew him as a money-lender. But since he came to grief a lot of stories have been

current; and they say people in society were in his pay, and stole jewels and things, which they brought to him, and all sorts of horrid things. Women too."

"Why, you're safe nowhere," said Bellasys, with a strong shudder. "I should like to investigate this matter. It's not pleasant to suspect a thief in the friend you smoke with, or the girl you dance with. I wonder who will come down upon me for the money I borrowed of him?"

"Was it much?" asked Vere, innocently, though he had received a commission on the amount.

"A trifle," said Bellasys. "I don't mean to pay without a full understanding. I will say this for the scoundrel—he was prompt."

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by a waiter's coming in with a card on a salver, whereon was inscribed—

The Rev. Dr. Courtenay,

Exeter.

“The gentleman begs pardon, my lord,” said the waiter, “but he has to leave London by an early train, and he has something he wants your lordship to know first. That's how he put it, so far as I could make him out.”

“Queer!” said Bellasys. “Fancy a parson turning up at the Matutine at three in the morning! By Jove! it's nearer four,” he added, lazily striking his repeater. “Young or old, waiter?”

“O, a werry venerable gentleman, my lord, and wears knee-breeches.”

“Show him up, and bring a pint of my special port. This is a lark, Vere.”

“Uncommon,” said Clarence. “The parsons don’t generally take kindly to you and me.”

“Of course they don’t. We are both scamps, and we know it as well as they do. Now, don’t shock the reverend gentleman.”

The Rev. Dr. Courtenay entered—a divine of the old school evidently, who marked himself a member of the Church Militant by all that he wore, from his wig to his buckled shoes. His eyes lay behind the fence of gold-rimmed spectacles; but you could see by his arched mouth that he was humorous, yet keen. He almost looked a modern Latimer.

“I must apologise to you, Lord Bell-

asys," he said, "for what must seem to you an impertinent intrusion. I have an important communication to make to you of a private nature, which I prefer to make orally; and as I must go down to my parish to-night" [it was a Saturday, by the way], "I desired to do it at once. I had some difficulty in finding you, as you may suppose, but a friend told me you occasionally came here, and I thought I would call on the chance."

"You are very good, Doctor," said Bellasys. "Take a glass or two of this port, which I know to be good. I'm on the Wine Committee here, and I insisted on its being bought at a devil—I beg pardon—a deuce of a price. Nobody else drinks it, I am glad to say, so I think there's enough laid down to last my time."

The venerable clergyman leaned back in his chair, and, with a keen glance, examined the beeswing in that glass of port. Then, with a benevolent smile on his face, he drank it slowly, thus obtaining bouquet as well as flavour.

“It is superb,” he said.

Not till he had finished that pint of port did the reverend gentleman say aught more on business. Bellasys admired him therefor. But when he had finished, he said,

“What I want to tell you is really important to you and others. Your friend Mr. Vere is, I see, fast asleep; but I do not wish to say what I have to say in the presence of a third person. Do you mind leaving him just as he is? I have a hansom waiting. We can go either to your residence or mine.”

“O, let him sleep,” said Bellasys.
“Come to my little place in Park Lane.”

They drove off. Lord Bellasys had what truly was a “little place” in Park Lane—a cosy and elegant bachelor residence. Lights were burning, for Bellasys hated darkness, and kept a sufficient staff of servants to have meals served at any hour of the day or night. A tall valet, taller at least than his master, threw open the door to a charming room, with rare pictures on panel, in the centre whereof stood a table ready laid. In a short time, with no orders given, there came a grill, and anchovy toast, and cold birds, and champagne—and a dozen other things not to be mentioned here. When all the servants had left, Dr. Courtenay said :

“There is no one in hearing, my lord ?”

“No one.”

“I ask what you may think an insolent question, but it is important, therefore pray pardon me. Do you owe any money to a villain named Crake, just convicted of felony?”

“I owe him sixty thousand pounds,” said Bellasys carelessly. “Ask me any questions you like, and I’ll forgive you. Come, have some more champagne.”

“Crake is in prison,” said the Doctor. “I have personal reasons for desiring to discover who were the people who found him the money which he lent. You will not of course pay without very clear authorisation, my lord?”

“I had made up my mind on that before I saw you, Dr. Courtenay. It struck me that the possible loss of such a sum might

make some of the scoundrels betray themselves. I am absolutely afraid of nothing, so I am ready for any publicity."

"I am glad to hear it," said the Doctor. "Now look at this. Here is a list, which can be authenticated, of persons moving in society, who were in Crake's pay for certain purposes. Read it carefully."

"By heavens!" cried Bellasys, "can this be true? Do you mean that Clarence Vere did his dirty work?"

"He got a heavy commission on that loan of yours, and has on many others."

"And this girl, that I used to meet at old Lord Montresor's, who paid his bills for him, and fed the wild fowls he is so fond of; do you mean to say she is of the same clique, an accomplice in theft?"

"Ask Lord Montresor," said the Doctor.

“Hang it!” exclaimed Bellasys, throwing the list down on the table, “I shall begin to lose faith in human nature. I thought myself a bad lot rather, but I am virtuous to these people. Doctor, shall I betake me to a nunnery?”

“Hardly safe,” said the Doctor, with a laugh. “But now for business. Will you absolutely decline to pay this money, my lord? As I am informed, you gave a check on Drummond’s.”

“It is stopped.”

“Nothing could be better. When anything comes of the affair, when anyone calls or writes, please let me know at this address.” He handed a second card to Lord Bellasys, whereon was inscribed:

Inspector Fox,
Scotland Yard.

“Why, do you mean to say you’re not a parson after all? and I’ve been treating you with so much veneration.”

“No, my lord, I’m not a parson, I’m thankful to say. The fact is a lady, whom I need not mention, has a daughter who is mad about a very ritualistic curate indeed. There was a midnight mission at his church to-night, and the poor lady, who is a dreadful invalid, could not keep the girl from going. She’ll have about as much as Crake lent you, and is a pretty little thing without much brain, and there was reason to believe this curate, who had been confessing her and all that sort of thing, meant to tempt her away to-night. Her mother had sense enough to send to the Colonel: I heard all about it, and turned into Dr. Courtenay, and went and took part in

these precious services. There were all manner of roundabout arrangements and processions; and the stink of the incense was so vile that I was glad to clear my brain with your lordship's good wine. The girl, who has grown too fast, and is scrofulous—you know the sort, my lord—was just slinking away with the curate—who had eyes afraid to look into yours, and a wide slit of mouth, with teeth polished carefully, and a smirking grin, and two left legs, when I walked up to him, and gave him my card, and said:—

“ ‘ I am Dr. Courtenay, of Exeter Cathedral, and am commissioned by this young lady's mother to see her safely home.’

“ He went off, knowing he was found out. I delivered the stupid little girl safely to her mother, wishing the old lady

had energy enough to whip some of the silliness out of her. Then it suddenly occurred to me that the hour was not too late for me to find your lordship, to put you up to some of the rascalities of which you have been a victim, and to ask you to resolutely refuse to pay a farthing on Crake's account without consulting me."

"I certainly will not," said Bellasys. "You are the cleverest fellow I ever knew, and about the honestest."

CHAPTER II

THE ASSASSIN.

RAPHAEL: Friend, have I, save yourself, my tried Astrologos?

Give me the glory of an honest enemy

Rather than these false friends, false courtiers,
servitors.

The Comedy of Dreams.

WHEN, in the little known poem in iambic trimeter, from which I have taken many mottoes, Prince Raphael made the above remark, in which most people will sympathise with him, he was sitting indolently in an easy-chair, having just supped after a hard day's hunting, and his Astrolo-

ger, looking every inch a seer of the stars, was holding counsel with him. The great oak logs were ablaze; on the table at his hand were choice fruit on golden plates; on a golden salver the beautiful Alouette, daughter of Astrologos, brought him a draught in a flagon of the noble metal carved by the greatest of all gold sculptors and liars, Benvenuto Cellini. Prince Raphael was gay. He had defied astrology. That day his star-gazing friend had warned him against going out, with as much solemnity as Julius Cæsar was warned against the Ides of March. "It would be dangerous, if not deadly."

It turned out both dangerous and deadly. A fierce old boar showed fight; the Prince rode straight at him; his horse was killed. But, falling on his feet, he struck

the brute through the spine at the neck with his long Toledo knife. He had outstripped all the hunt; weary, almost faint with exertion, he lay on the virgin forest turf, under a tree, mourning the fate of his good horse. He fell into a kind of trance, amid the fragrant fern, and dreamt of Merlin, lying for love's sake under the immemorial oaks of Broceliande. He was awakened by the stroke of a dagger on his left breast, cunningly planted to reach the heart, happily rendered harmless by his shirt of chain mail. His favourite boar hound gave a tremendous roar; and he arose to see the noble creature holding by the throat the prostrate form of the man he trusted most absolutely, who professed to play Horatio to his Hamlet.

His suite came up.

“Come away, Rupert,” he said to the dog. “Hang that fellow Emilius to that pine tree, and there let him rot”—to his followers—“Waste no time.” He mounted a led horse and rode slowly home, wondering why the man whom he had trusted, ay, and loved, should have turned conspirator against him. He had no fear, Prince Raphael, but he had much superstition. He rode home with a horror in his heart. Could there be no honour in the world?

But when he reached his palace he was outwardly calm, and dined that day in solitary state, and then had his dessert sent to the rooms of the astrologer. That wise old questioner of the stars had many such friendly visits from the Prince. Looking at his grave face, and at the merry

eyes of his little daughter, Alouette, and at the great boar-hound that had followed him home, he began to think he might have some friends left still. So he ate a grape or two, and drank a noble draught of Montepulciano from the gold flagon, and indolently patted Rupert's head.

“Your prediction,” he said to Astrologos, laughing, “was precisely fulfilled. It was dangerous to me. It was deadly to a wild boar, and my bay horse Bruno—and one other.”

The Marquis de Castelcicala, awakened in the dead of night to find his bedfellow bleeding from the breast, but holding the assassin with supernatural strength, might well have echoed Raphael's saying, for the man who had stabbed Cotton was none other than his valet, Redi, whom, till of

late, he had absolutely trusted. And he felt sure that the dagger of his valet had been designed for him—not for the mere working man, who happened by an accident to be sharing his bed. He had doubted Redi ever since the night of the burglary, though the man had for years served him well, and had been the trusted agent of his political schemes for the perfect freedom of Italy. The servile mind is seldom loyal. It can withstand temptation only up to a certain point. When those burglars who had been so securely tied left cut ropes behind them, and took the Squire's choice jewels from their special safe—opened without violence,—the Marquis came to the conclusion that no one except Redi would have the daring or the skill to carry out the scheme. He made no doubt

that the Squire had at some time or other carelessly left his keys about, and that Redi had taken an impression of them in wax, and obtained duplicates. That was his theory.

Moreover, it may be remembered that a housemaid named Julia Pinnell was the first discoverer of the robbery, and the person who declared Charles Cotton was seen leaving the Squire's bed-chamber, where, of course, he had no conceivable business. But Castalcicala remembered what he thought at the time only a curious aberration of Redi's. This Julia was a buxom wench, whom you would scarcely imagine a man like Redi would look at twice; but one day, when sweeping the scene from his window with a field-glass, to bring out the beautiful details,

the Marquis perceived the two in a quiet woodland nook, a sofa-like pile of recently-sawn logs, looking ecstatic. Redi lay lazily on the wood, his back against a tree, while ruddy Julia lighted a cigarette for him. They indulged in other . . . coquetries. Little dreamt Redi that his master's eye was on him, and that he could see his every action as if he were six feet only away. Your good Dollond hath great virtue.

Castelcicala watched this servile flirtation with much amusement; more amused than ever when inexorable Time forced them to part, the girl going one way to her afternoon duties, while Redi went off another. The Marquis's glass traced his valet to the Pheasant Inn, a famous resort for poachers and the like, and he wondered

that a man like Redi, with access to the choicest drinks in the world, should care for the salted ale of the neighbourhood. He kept on the watch. Presently Redi came out with a companion. They talked for a few minutes earnestly; grasped hands; went off different ways.

“Who is that bull-headed bull-necked fellow? Leoni, surely. And Redi is bribed!”

Thus pondered the Marquis, but when Redi came to him for orders he treated him as always before. The valet had apparently no suspicion.

Another point to be remembered is that one day, meeting the postboy from Scrutton station, the Marquis found three letters addressed to him, that he let them go on, and that only two of them were placed on

the breakfast table. In this case he had laid a trap. With his fellow-plotters he corresponded in cypher. Redi knew many of his cyphers. He had now asked his most important correspondent, whose writing the valet well knew, to send him a letter that should look like cypher, but have no meaning. This was done. Redi stole that letter, and almost tore his hair over his utter inability to make head or tail of it.

That letter's disappearance showed the Marquis he was right; but he played a waiting game, for he knew how astute were his opponents. This midnight attack brought things to a crisis. The Marquis, suddenly awakened by what seemed a hideous nightmare, saw what had happened—there was Charles Cotton drenched

in blood, holding the slippery Italian with a grip like a smith's vice. The Marquis sprang from the bed and caught Redi by the throat.

“Traitor and assassin!” he cried. “You have sold your soul to the devil and your body to the hangman. You would have killed me, would you?”

Castelcicala hardly knew what to do. The house had been so often alarmed that another alarm seemed ridiculous. Of course he thought of Cis Englehurst, whose maiden sleep he fain would have undisturbed. But he was lucky. A light came traversing the long corridors very slowly. It was borne by the Abbé Lancel, who had just made up his mind that he should not that night be able to work out his new explanation of the square root of

a negative quantity. He had it quite pat, but it would not come. Amazed indeed was the worthy librarian to see the Marquis in his *chemise de nuit*, grasping Redi with resolve.

“This fellow is a murderer,” said the Marquis. “Wake some of the footmen, Abbé. Quick as you can. Poor Cotton is wounded.”

The Abbé was prompt. In five minutes Redi was in charge of the servants, and the two hurried to see what was Cotton’s condition. He was bleeding profusely.

“Wake the housekeeper, Marquis,” said the Abbé, who at once assumed the direction of affairs. “She must get lint, and bandages, and warm water. I will do what I can with the sheets. And let a man ride off at once for Dr. Trnater.”

Cotton was insensible. The Abbé, with hand as gentle a woman's, did the best he could for the wound. He also got his unconscious patient to sip a little wine. He felt faith in Tranter, a country doctor, but a man who studied medical chymistry; and he longed for his arrival.

He came in less than half an hour. A stout man, with a keen eye and an abrupt manner. He looked at the wound: "A clean cut," he said. "A strong chest, or 'twould have gone too deep. Where's the scoundrel's knife?"

The dagger lay on the floor, hitherto unnoticed. He picked it up; rubbed his finger along it: then said—

"Pure steel. No rust to harm him. The boy will be well in a day or two."

And then he deftly dressed and strapped

the wound, using those very latest appliances of chymical science which modern physicians and surgeons are often too lazy or too lucky in their practice to care about.

Redi having been placed in confinement more safe than that from which he had liberated the Slippery One and the Parson, the Marquis, after having seen that Cotton was in good hands, went to look through the contents of his valet's room. Redi must have read Edgar Poe. Carelessly placed on the mantelpiece in his bed-room was a little bit of dirty newspaper, which might be a bundle of snuff or of salt. By an odd instinct Castalcicala opened it, and found therein that unique stone which Crake had pined for--the famous blue diamond with a star of gold light at its core.

Set in massive antique gold, which was carved with rare skill, having on one side the figure of an eagle, on the other of a lion, this ring might have been worn by an emperor.

So said the Marquis, as he brought it to Squire Englehurst in the library. The Squire, delighted at the recovery of this most precious gem, held it straight in the sunlight which streamed through that very pane of glass placed in the window by Charles Cotton, on a day which he never could forget. The blue of the diamond grew deeper, its gold core brighter, as the sunlight shot through it.

“There is a tradition that it has been worn by an Emperor, Frederic Barbarossa,” said the Squire.

“More than a tradition—a certainty,”

said the Abbé. “Just at the time when your jewels were stolen I had discovered in the muniment room”—which was at the top of a quaint tower, the shape of a scalened triangle—“an illuminated manuscript, evidently of the early part of the 13th century. It is in Norman verse, and I have been doing my best to translate it. I would not mention it to you then, for it adds so enormously to the value and interest of the ring that I knew you would feel its loss more deeply. But here is the manuscript.”

The Abbé produced it: a roll of vellum, containing about eight hundred lines in court hand, with superb marginal illuminations, that seemed to retain their primal colours. A lion *passant gardant* and an eagle *volant* wrought in the title; and other

illuminations, rare works of art, showed Barbarossa in a boar fight, Barbarossa marrying Rinaldo's daughter, Barbarossa holding Pope Adrian's stirrups, Barbarossa cursed by Pope Alexander, Barbarossa's son Henry, with his wife, Constance, going to the marvellous cathedral of Milan, with its innumerable external statues of saints and angels. Last of all, Barbarossa, at the age of 70, sinking in the wild waters of the river Calycadnus, in Cilicia.

"A beautiful manuscript," said the Squire; "but what has it to do with my ring?"

"I will read you my bald translation of the few lines which refer to it.

" ' Knight imperial, 'mid the first
Was Frederic de Englehurst;
Where the imperial eagle flew,
English lion fought there too;

When upon the Lombard plain
Frederic was well-nigh slain,
Then the English Frederic's sword
Smote full sore the traitor horde.

“ ‘ From his hand the knightly King
Took a wondrous diamond ring,
Gift of one who, from the East,
Came to him, a stranger priest.
Diamond blue, with heart of gold,
No such stone was ever sold !
Barbarossa could not know
That it helped him slay his foe ;
That while worn upon his finger,
Empire would within him linger ;
That who holds it fast and near,
Lives a life of simple cheer,
Cannot lose or love or land,
Ah ! he might not understand !
So he met of dooms the worst
Through his gift to Englehurst.’ ”

“ Wear that ring always, Englehurst,”
said Castelcicala, enthusiastically. “ I’m a
thorough believer in those old legends. It
was an angelic messenger who gave that

ring to Barbarossa, whose red beard was an oriflamme."

The Squire laughed. At that moment Cecilia entered, looking pale and frightened, for she had just heard of the attempt at assassination. They had tried to keep it from her, but servants will whisper. And so she had got at the truth somehow; and—somehow—it increased her interest in Charles Cotton.

"O papa," she began; but the Squire said, taking her in his arms—

"So you have heard, child. The young fellow is not much hurt. And see, the famous diamond has come back. That dreadful scoundrel had stolen it. See, Cecilia!"

The Squire was delighted. Castalcicala's superstitious enthusiasm, whether

real or simulated, had communicated itself to him, and he felt that Barbarossa's ring was a ring of power, and that its unexpected recovery meant good fortune. Cis Englehurst saw the marvellous old manuscript, and the Abbé read his translation over to her again, and she grew cheerful.

“But,” said she, “it seems a shame that the House of Englehurst should profit by the misfortunes of the great Emperor.”

“It was the will of God,” said the Abbé. “God sent him that ring of fortune and power, and he used his fortune and power unwisely; then God caused him to give the ring away to one who would use it more wisely. He was a noble Knight, Frederic de Englehurst; he founded the fortunes of the house, and was a generous benefactor to the Church.”

“And it is some six hundred years ago,” said the Marquis, laughing; “so it is impossible to return the ring to the Emperor. Keep it, Squire, and ensure love and land.”

“Unless Frederic with the Red Beard comes in person to claim it, this ring will I wear,” said Mr. Englehurst. “But now as to business. This being a serious matter, and occurring in my own house, I sent express to my nearest magistrate, Admiral Thornton, and to Varley, our clerk; and I expect them here every minute. We can commit the fellow for trial on your evidence alone, Marquis—poor Cotton need not be troubled; and I am sure you will be as glad as I to get him out of the house.”

The formalities in reference to Redi's

committal need not be described here, as the police reports too sadly familiarise one with the monotonous process. The only eccentric element introduced was by Admiral Thornton, an original old salt, who had fought under Nelson and Collingwood, and who now lived an old bachelor life at Thornton Chase, amusing himself by building models of the ships he used to command, and of the ships of the future. There was a pretty lakelet, once a monastic fishpond, in front of the terrace of Thornton Chase; there he tried experiments with these model ships of his. He had accidentally picked up a youngster of about seventeen, with a talent for such work; and that youngster lived in clover at Thornton Chase by fooling the Admiral to the top of his bent. It was amusing on a

summer day to see the old Admiral, who had heard and controlled the thunder of a myriad broadsides, sailing toy ships with a boy.

Well, Thornton seemed to think that the attempt at assassination must have been the result of a conspiracy to murder all the inhabitants of Englehurst Hall, and wanted everybody strictly examined. Whoever has attended a naval Court-martial must have been amazed (amused would be the word, if the issues were not so grave) by the perfectly illogical way in which it is conducted. The truth is that there is something radically wrong in the management of the English navy, and it is quite time the Admiralty was reconstructed. The *Captain* would never have been built to capsize in a night of terror, useless ships

like the *Vanguard* and the *Iron Duke* would never have been sent afloat, if the Admiralty were a department of the Ministry like all others. It has become a home of daring crotchets, yet contemptible timidity—a department in which the vastest expense is combined with the meanest inefficiency. If an ironclad that costs a million can just keep afloat, the Admiralty is happy and proud. The idea of its steaming as fast as the Queen's yacht, or of its weathering a gale, is absurd. As to its fighting, *that* nobody expects. Enough to carry those enormous guns, without attempting to use them. When the *Iron Duke* tried to drown itself the other day, there was utter confusion. Fancy a large ship like that having to signal "Sinking!" Fancy the men on board not knowing what

they had to do! The Admiralty wants a single responsible Minister, without any junior lords; the navy wants able seamen. And we want fewer crotchets in construction. New experiments are all very well, but they are too often gigantic jobs; and any ship will do good service that has a gallant commander and a fighting crew. Find these, and put them in the right sort of vessel. That's the key to the mastery of the sea. Scientific invention won't do it. The heaviest ironclad in the world, with guns of as many tons as you please, would be the easy prey of a flotilla of gunboats—if there were men on board, and not the dregs of the people.

I digress; but the stupidity of our naval management makes me angry. The system that has existed since the Duke of

Clarence was Lord High Admiral produced such men as Admiral Thornton. He was a very amiable old woman. To imagine him in a sea fight was like imagining a meek ritualistic curate in a prize fight, surplice and all. But he had all the red-tape absurdity which has its origin at the Admiralty, and spreads through the service. Positively we were better off in the old days of the press-gang—good strong scoundrels were caught, and flogged into able seamen. Now it is all rosewater. The midshipmen talk about Swinburne and Trollope; and the *Times'* report of the accident to the Iron Duke seemed rather to commiserate the crew because they were at dinner, and the interruption was inconvenient. Had they all gone down at dinner, how many able seamen would have been lost?

The Admiral was overruled, not to say, shut up; he took it with good humour. He had only of late years caught the old-womanish infection of the Admiralty. He had been a gallant officer in his day, and had cared more for fighting his ship than constructing it. But, to use a very hackneyed line—

“*Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.*”

When there is a good stern war going on Admirals think of how to get good fighting men; when there is a long peace they take to devising new forms of ships, new ways of using guns, and other secondary matters.

Redi was committed. The Admiral stayed to dinner. The Squire asked Mr. Varley, clerk to the magistrates, and a country lawyer of high standing, but he

could not accept. So it was a *parti carré*, for the Abbé almost always preferred to dine in his own room, often in ascetic fashion. Buried in his various abstruse studies, he ate little, he drank little. He lived by intellect—the derived, not the originative intellect. The originator must feed his body with meat and wine, his brain with converse with other men; but he who works at secondhand may starve if he will, and give you essence of books, much like unto Liebig's abominable essence of meat. Go to the reading-room of the British Museum, and you shall see a whole crew of such manufacturers hard at work. Those who know the difference between what is fresh and what is stale can spot them anywhere.

Before dinner, Squire Englehurst and

the Marquis visited Cotton, and found him in a deep healthy sleep—that strong perspiring sleep wherewith a powerful body throws off outside harm.

“He will do,” said the Squire.

“Faith, I think so,” answered the Marquis. “I like that boy. I can hardly understand a young fellow in his state of life being so gentlemanly.”

“Old blood come to the front again,” said the Squire. “I have seen it many a time and often. I guess he belongs to the old Cotton family that wrote books, and collected books to give to the nation, and led cavalry charges. I like the boy, and am curious to see how he will get on with my help.”

Cotton was left sleeping.

And the dinner-party consisted of the

Squire, and the Marquis, and the Admiral, and Cis. And the Admiral, a dry oaken old bachelor, thought Cis, in her white attire, with a red rose in her bosom, enough to make an Admiral of seventy want to wed. She poured an unconscious broadside into his flagship.

“By the memory of Nelson!” he thought, “if I were forty years younger, any other fellow would have to sheer off.”

The Marquis de Castelcicala noticed that evening a certain delicate soft tone in Miss Englehurst, which seemed to mean something. She was less joyous, but more delicious. Something had touched her to a softer mood. The Marquis, a connoisseur of women, guessed. Yes, he thought, she fancied she liked Charles Cotton a little; and he was lying wounded.

“What a transparent child she is!” thought Castelcicala; “and how her transparency will turn to brilliancy when the diamond within glows with the light of love!”

The dinner-party was rather slow. Admiral Thornton went in for nautical stories; they were either old or stupid, but generally both. That sort of thing bored the Squire, who was a quiet man, no talker, but an excellent good listener, when to listen was worth while. He was bored; Cis saw it and fidgeted; but Castelcicala consoled her with epigrammatic whispers. More than ever was he interested in her now that he found that there was an attraction between her and Cotton. He liked Cecilia. He liked Cotton. He was the sort of man to give a lady her free

choice; if refused to help her with his rival, and be her friend always hereafter. He had gradually come to perceive that her young heart was a little drawn towards this young fellow. But what would the proud Squire say? he thought—for Englehurst had a depth of passionate pride beneath his quietude. The detection of an undeveloped liking for Cotton in Cis Englehurst made the Marquis less eager as to himself. He admired Cis immensely, but he was . . . the Castalcicala. No man or woman should trouble his serenity. The old motto of the house was—

“SUM.”

“I am,” and nothing more. A daring boast; but in times of cowardice, honour is due to the men who dare. They are few.

Uncertain as to what pretty Cis really meant to do, the Marquis's behaviour to her was an almost caressing courtesy. He wooed her to cheerfulness and music at last, and she sang him a rondeau in her gayest style, to the infinite delight of the dear old Squire. Thus it ran—I don't know either author or composer:—

O love that dreams beneath the woodland shady,
 Where the spring bluebells grow!
 Happy are we, a lover with his lady,
 Far from the dull world's woe.
 But ah, too magical delight it seems,
 O love that dreams!

O love that lives amid the world's wild passion,
 The madness of the time,
 The effervescent folly grown to fashion,
 The agony of crime!
 Thou hast the constant sweetness that forgives,
 O love that lives!

After that rondeau, for which the Marquis kissed her pretty little hand in thanks, he went to his room very much in love.

CHAPTER III.

CONVALESCENCE.

If there be a regal solitude, it is a sick-bed.

Elia.

COTTON was in clover at Englehurst Hall. He was removed to the pleasantest of southern rooms, with two wide bay windows overlooking the great trees of the park—now a smouldering fire of autumn—and that tiny snakelet of silver, the Engle, where Cotton had caught many a tawny trout. Tranter, a cheery, sanguine fellow—as all doctors ought to be,—soon got him from the bed to the sofa, cosily

niched in one of the windows, so that he could see the dreamy landscape below—well suited to the dreamy humour of a man recovering from illness, and slowly gathering strength. Redi's dagger, glancing from a bone, had touched no vital part; only the loss of blood, and the effort of nature to heal the wound, were sources of strange languor—doubly strange to Cotton, who was full of vigour and life. He was in a dreamy state. The pleasant room, with its choice water-colour paintings of the Hall and the park, seemed to him a corner of dreamland; the wide stretch of scenery below was a vision of delight—but was it a vision, and no more? Had it suddenly vanished, and left no more trace behind than the ærial castles built in the sunset—the white cloud islands that swim

in a sea of serene sapphire,—Cotton would not have been astonished. He was looking through “a magic casement” on a scene of wonder. Languidly gazing on the lovely scene, it was to Cotton as a fantasy from Fairyland; had the fairies fluttered forth—Oberon and Titania, and all the giddy crew—singing gay songs caught from sphere-music, it would not have astonished Cotton. He would have taken it as a natural accompaniment to his fragment of the dream-world.

He did not want to read or talk or think. The forces of a fine constitution were gradually bringing him round. All that the spiritual tenant of the injured body needed was—rest. This both the doctor and the Marquis saw, and it was wisely enacted that no one should disturb

him till his natural strength began to return. So he passed his life between the bed and the sofa, carefully tended and supplied with nutritious food, dreaming the indolent hours away.

But one morning, when the sunshine was streaming brightly into the room, Cotton awoke to the old feeling of healthful vigour. He entered the world again, as if from some far region beyond the limits of life. On the carved mantelpiece—a masterpiece of Grinling Gibbons, with pheasants and partridges in wood that looked as if ready to fly—there stood an ancient Italian clock, crowned with a group in gold (thought to be Cellini's work) of Michael the Archangel slaying Satan. The pitiless beauty of the archangel, with left hand on the rebel's throat, and the stern

sword in the resolute right—the hideous cowardice and spite of the disarmed fiend—showed the work of a great master. It was one of the Squire's heirlooms, brought over from Italy by an adventurous ancestor.

As Charles Cotton came from the realm of sleep to his natural state, and saw a few faint streaks of sunrise slanting across the sky, the clock struck six upon its silver bell. He lay still for a while—meditating. The atmosphere of this new life was strange to him, and yet he felt a natural fitness for it. An orphan early, he had no relative save his old uncle Richard, who had stiffened into Plymouth Brotherhood, and who would probably denounce that fiery prince of the family, Lord Combermere, as an ungodly man. Yet after all

was not there a touch of his blood in Castelcicala, to whom he had been drawn so closely? Admiral Cotton was a tradition in the family; they had a likeness of him somewhere; and the Marquis's grandfather had married the Admiral's daughter. Cotton felt *in utraque fortuna paratus* as he saw the sunshine and thought of all that was happening around him; and he got out of bed, and had a cold bath, and was out in the grounds by seven o'clock. Harold joined him. The wise dog knew whom his master liked, and missed Charles Cotton, and received him with enthusiasm.

Somebody else saw him. Yes; Cis Englehurst was at her window, as he came out upon the terrace and was greeted by Harold. She was braiding her long brown

hair, and singing as she did it. She hated lady's maids. Her own special attendant was a quiet young person, who did not chatter; but Cis cared not to be touched by servile hands—she just let Dorothy lace her boots. Some folks might have called Cis a prude, for she did not quite like waltzing. It brought her too near to a man for whom probably she cared nothing. The merry whirl of the dance was a great delight, and yet she thought she should like to sift her partners a little. There was no mock modesty about her—only an invincible reluctance to have her waist encircled by the arm of some man whom she saw to be unendurable. Now she was singing gaily, as she tugged her great wreaths of hair into shape around her comely compact head—

“ I braid my hair, but, ah ! for whom ?
That's a secret I don't know.
Who shall touch my cheek's peach-bloom,
Make my heart to glow ?
River of 'Time, swift onward flow,
That I may know, that I may know.

“ 'Mid the many do I love one ?
That's a secret I don't know.
We have our poesy, frolic, fun,
And it endeth so.
Is there one who for me to death would go ?
I long to know ! I long to know ! ”

As she ended her song of silly sooth, she gave a sudden start, seeing Charles Cotton.

“ How wrong of him,” she thought, “ to be out already ! I am sure Doctor Tranter cannot have given him leave. He will be worse than ever again.”

Cis was dressing early, with intent to enjoy the crisp autumn air, and the long lights and shadows of morning. She wanted nobody to call her, this gay girl. Sunrise lifted her eyelids ; she was always ready

for her dips in the cool lymph, and her merry run into the joyous air. Born at Englehurst, she could hardly conceive a permanent life elsewhere ; all the old trees were her friends, and although she was much too decorous a young lady to climb one, she had been smitten with envy about two years before, when a midshipman cousin on a flying visit got to the very top of a stupendous oak that stood alone in a paddock, and had for years been known as King Saul. Martin Englehurst was just about Cis's age, and he had been all round the world in a man of war, and talked coolly of the day when he should be an Admiral, and lick the Germans. He told her the most enormous yarns, some second-hand, but the wildest original. She believed every word, for he told his stories with an

air of complete faith in them. So, when he went away, and he stayed less than a week, she had a whole treasury of indisputable facts about sea-serpents, mermaids, giants in Patagonia, Amazons in South America, caves of treasure guarded by lions, cities under the sea, men with tails, women with wings, and the like. The young seaman's daring feats were such as she had never dreamt of ; and so the child gave credit to his stories. He rode an unbroken colt without saddle or bridle, and took him safely over a five-bar. He climbed to the summit of King Saul, and brought down the tree-monarch's topmost acorn. Cis shuddered and shut her eyes as he came hand under hand down through the mighty branches, only now and then condescending to plant a foot anywhere.

And from the lowest branches of all, thirty feet from the ground, the lad let himself down by the hands, and dropped.

“O Martin!” she cried, “I thought you would be killed.”

“Anybody that’s been up in the shrouds in a storm, cutting away canvas for dear life, isn’t likely to be in much danger in a quiet old oak tree. Why King Saul is as easy to climb as your front staircase. Come, Cis, I must record this adventure on King Saul’s bark.”

So he took out his clasp-knife—every young sailor’s constant comrade—and worked away with a will, managing to cut these lines on the tough bark:—

“Who climbed King Saul,
That oak-tree tall?
I was the first—
Martin Englehurst.”

Under this an anchor, of course ; and then a true lover's knot ; and then the letters, "M. E., C. E."

Girls, at Cis Englehurst's age, grow a good deal in two years ; and her clear young brain had been developed by Castelicala, who had passed a great deal of his time at the Squire's, and had taken pleasure in opening the secrets of life to this fresh girl-flower. Still there were few fine days when she did not go the round of her pet spots in garden and park—King Saul being one ; and with her little penknife she was wont to cut out the letters of the midshipman's rough rhyme, when the bark began to overgrow them.

Ay, and every inch of the Englehurst demesne was sacred to her. There were tender recollections of her dead mother in

her favourite seat on the south side of the house, as she decayed slowly from sheer lack of strength, courageous to the last. There was a small walled garden, which had come to be called My Lady's Garden, as Mr. and Mrs. Englehurst had taken a fancy to it, and liked to walk there in the sunshine, or to sit when tired (and she would not let her husband know *how* tired) where a round niche in the old red wall had been deftly turned into a delightful sunny arbour. Here, one solemn summer, when there was an unusual calm upon sea and land, when the winds were gathered into their places, when each noon seemed more royal, each sunset more radiant, than the one which went before, Mrs. Englehurst gradually faded away. The Squire did not see what was coming. She told him, day

after day, that she felt better and stronger, and he believed her. The doctor knew better; but dared not tell him. As to Cissy, a mere baby then—how is a child that “feels its life in every limb” to form the least idea of death? Cis couldn't. When it was all over—when the solemn funeral had darkened the green arcades; when in Englehurst Church there rose a fair monument in white marble by a poetic sculptor—little Cis was still incredulous. She still used to hope to see mamma in some of her accustomed haunts—coming down the corridor from her boudoir, or sitting in that garden niche.

However, Cis had long since outgrown all this; had apprehended the terrible certainties of life. She was just on that tremulous point of maidenhood which

Longfellow has vainly attempted to describe. The American poet had the idea, but its subtle delicacy eluded him. There is just a time in a young girl's growth when childhood recedes and womanhood approaches—when the seriousness of life dawns slowly upon the maiden mind—when there seems a pause before the inevitable plunge into the stormy sea of existence. At this very point stood Cecilia Englehurst. As she looked at Charles Cotton that morning, the idea seemed to flash upon her that she must begin to think for herself. There was such a thing as marriage, and she, probably, must marry. What did it mean? Her father and mother were married, and were intensely happy. Yes, but she could not conceive them apart, till death severed them. Her

father could not possibly marry again, as some people did ; it was absolutely inconceivable that he should ever care—even a little—for any other lady. So reasoned Cecilia ; and she was right.

And then she thought of herself. Her eyes seemed suddenly opened. It was that step forward which must be taken some time, maiden fair ; delay as long as you can, for childhood's magic world is a happy region. Who would not be a child again ? Well, we shall all be children again some day, in God's great nursery of the invisible world.

As Cecilia pondered, looking out upon the fresh fragrant lawn, and suspending her toilet manipulations, there came to her this thought : “ Suppose, ah, only suppose I were to marry the wrong man, not the

man who was meant for me! What a death in life! How can I tell? O, the horror of the thought!"

She ran to her bedside and knelt, and prayed silently, with tears in her eyes. The moment of self-revelation had come. She saw now clearly that both Castalcicala and Cotton would gladly marry her. Did she love either? Was either the one or the other the very man who ought to be her husband? Of rank and money she thought nothing: she longed for her true husband, given her by destiny from the beginning of things. She remembered the absolute oneness that there was between her father and mother. She rose from her knees, calm: for it seemed to her as if her Father in Heaven had told her to take her trouble to her father on earth.

“The girl of the period,” if there be such a person, would probably laugh contemptuously at such an idea. The mere minx, whom I have once or twice attempted to pin down scientifically, as a keeper nails a stoat to a barn door, would naturally consider her father the last person of whom to ask counsel. She would far rather confess to a Ritualist curate, especially if he were good-looking. Cis Englehurst was not of any such vulgar type; she had grown up amid quiet beauty, under wise and loving control; it was a silken rein by which her father held her, but it was strong as steel. Now that a crisis in her career had come, she felt at once that she could go to her father, and talk to him freely.

So that day she went, but not till after

breakfast, at which Charles Cotton appeared, receiving a severe lecture from the Squire for having ventured to come down without the doctor's orders.

“ I think he is well enough,” said Castelicala. “ We are sometimes wiser than our doctors. I got a pistol shot in Milan ten years ago ; it went right through me. Our Italian doctors know nothing. Luckily there was an English surgeon staying at my hotel. His name was Ormerod. He took me in hand, and I soon felt as well as ever ; but he *would* keep me in bed. Luckily some of his relations came to Milan, and he had to leave me for a few days to lionize them. I seized the opportunity ; took the first train to Rome ; telegraphed a self-gratulatory line to the doctor. I have never seen Ormerod since,

but I believe he would cut me dead for venturing to get well without his leave."

"I think I am quite well," said Cotton, "with or without Dr. Tranter's leave. And as I am anxious to begin the world, and show myself not quite unworthy of Mr. Englehurst's great kindness, I must not stay too long in a delightful Castle of Indolence."

"You're quite right," said the Squire. "If you feel well again, and mean work, don't let the grass grow under your feet. Do what you think best; I leave you free; but the Marquis and the Abbé will both give you any advice you want. Between them, they know both this world and the other."

The conversation turned into another channel. Cis Englehurst, having the busi-

ness of breakfast. to attend to, hardly followed the conversation, yet gathered from it that Charles Cotton was likely to go away. She did not want him to go. Had it been the Marquis de Castelcicala she would not have wanted him to go either. Lady fair, you may have heard of people who don't know their own mind. Cis, just now, was one of these.

Breakfast over, Cis attached herself to her father, who generally loitered about the grounds, and looked at his dogs and birds and choice cattle. He liked to have all manner of creatures around him. He liked to stroke a tame bison ; to feed his golden pheasants from his own hands. His gamecocks were the staunchest in the county ; his cochin cocks had the finest legs to devil ; his carrier pigeons flew faster and

farther than any other man's. The carp in his fish ponds came to him for food ; so did the swans upon the Engle, which glittered through the park. The Hall roof was alive with white pigeons ; and in the pigeon-loft had lived for years a pair of venerable brown owls, that never touched the young birds, but blinked drowsily in the sunshine all day, and at night went out in search of "rats and mice and such small deer." A peregrine falcon lodged in one of the stables, and was wont to perch on his master's shoulder or wrist, though no one else dare touch the fiery bird. Once he had been away for a whole year, seeking a mate in Norway, probably, but he came back again. The only animals which Squire Englehurst could not tolerate were cats ; he declined to have any on the pre-

mises. Still, as the owls were pretty keen after mice and rats, there was not much need for them.

When the Squire did his matutine loitering he liked no companion so well as his daughter. Cis knew all his pets and all his ways, and enjoyed these morning lounges intensely. In Robert Browning's powerful but painfully morbid drama, *A Blot on the 'Scutcheon*, the unhappy heroine, Mildred, is made to say :—

“ I had
No mother—God forgot me—so I fell !”

Herein I think Mr. Browning, who is a distinctly realistic poet, is rather hard upon fathers. The world's experience seems to show that fathers usually are most interested in their daughters, and mothers in their sons. And it is natural. A father

thinks he sees in his daughter a changed and softened reflex of himself, whereas he is prone to think that his son can never be so fine a fellow as he is. So also the mother regards her daughter as a weak image of her own perfection in her prime; while in her son she sees a picture of what she herself might have been had the Fates made her of the nobler sex. Besides, a father who does his duty by his children—that's the phrase, you know, but I say a father who loves his children—will not let his daughter think that God has forgotten her. True that in Browning's tragedy the girl is an orphan, but then she has a very wise elder brother, who shows his wisdom by killing the man she was engaged to marry, and repenting immediately after, and poisoning himself. This is one of the many

poems of Browning which make one wish he would not employ enormous power of insight and expression on themes so intensely unpleasant.

When the Squire and his daughter had gone the customary rounds, they strolled down to a seat by the river side, under a gigantic weeping ash, from which there was a view down a long valley on the other side of the stream. This, also, was a part of the park, and was where the red deer were kept. A great herd of them, feeding quietly among the tall ferns, just raised their heads to look at the new comers, and then went on with their natural business. Beech wood covered one slope of the valley, but the other was bare.

“We haven’t looked for mushrooms on the top of Ranscomb for a long time,”

said the Squire. "Shall we try it, Cis?"

She assented. The farther she was away from everybody else, the more easily could she tell her father what troubled her. A boat was moored closely by: the Squire unfastened it, and his daughter pulled across. It was an old friend, that boat. Many a summer day had she lounged in it, letting it drift with the current, while she read some pleasant poem or amusing novel. Now she felt she could not read. Was she not a heroine of romance herself? What was Madeline in *The Eve of St. Agnes* to her? The course of true love ran smooth enough for her, since she had but one lover, and he was quite prepared to run away with her. If she could have waited till mid-January, she might have tried Made-

line's experiment; but she could not wait.

They crossed the Engle, and climbed the steep side of Ranscomb Down, and could see Englehurst Hall lying below them. A lovely corner of the world! An ambitious damsel would have thought of the coming day when she should be its owner; but Cecilia could not separate the old place from her father, and felt as if she could never leave either him or it. Perhaps it was her intense love for the Squire which prevented her from "falling in love," to use a homely phrase. Certes, she was not in love, though she liked both the Marquis and the glazier sufficiently to be doubtful which she preferred.

Climbing to the top of Ranscomb was tough work. Both the Squire and his daughter had done it many a time; but

they were not sorry to reach the summit, and to sit in the shadow of Ranscomb Cop—a group of about a dozen trees, surrounded by a grass-grown trench, which evidently indicated an ancient British camp. There they sat down and looked upon the pleasant scene—the Hall, basking in sunshine; the winding Engle, freighted with swans; the straggling hamlet of Englehurst; the wide downs beyond.

“Tired, Cis?” said the Squire—for she was looking around dreamily, wondering how she should begin.

“No, papa: I’m only puzzled.”

“Puzzled, child? What about?”

“I suppose I shall have to marry somebody some day, papa?”

Now this was a matter that at intervals bothered the Squire. He knew Cis would

have to marry; the gay creature, with love in her eyes, and song on her lips, and a heart fluttering under her white breast like a bird longing for the sky, was not meant for an old maid. Besides, he wanted a grandson, to represent, as of old, the house of Englehurst, which never for centuries had had a woman as its chief.

“Of course you will, Cis: what then?”

“Why, papa, there are two people who would ask me to marry them—I can see it in their eyes—if I gave them an opportunity: and one’s the Marquis, and one’s Mr. Cotton. There, papa! I’ve got it out at last; I’ve been wanting to for ever, ever, ever so long. Now I’ll run and look for mushrooms, and when I come back you shall tell me what to do. I don’t love

either of them a bit, you know : I only love you, papa."

Away she scampered towards the patch of white in the distance ; it might be mushrooms, or it might be chalk. The gay south wind raced with her, and toyed with her. Meanwhile the Squire thought clearly, the child must marry some time, but he did not want to lose her—he hated the thought of a dull solitary life amid the splendid comfort of Englehurst. This man had loved his wife with that love too rare, which can be satisfied with no substitute ; and but for his daughter he would have found life intolerable. He occupied himself as much as might be with his park, his plantations, his animals, his birds, his books, his friends. Ah ! but there would always arise the vision of his

dear wife fading away in the quiet alcove in My Lady's Garden, and at night that dreaming of the past came between him and slumber, and he would pace his room for hours in a great anguish.

“'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.”

It is an immortal truth, but when the loss is burnt into a loving heart, like red-hot iron in the flesh, the torture of the wound can never cease.

Cecilia's revelation made him reflect. Of course the child must marry; he wanted her to marry; he wanted an heir to Englehurst. But he was not quite satisfied with either of the men whom she, with subtle girl-instinct, had perceived to be thinking about her. If she married the Marquis, her future home would be Italy, where

Castelcicala had vast possessions: her eldest son would be, not Englehurst of Englehurst, but a Castelcicala. This did not please him. He liked the Marquis immensely as a friend: he did not desire him for a son-in-law.

Then as to Cotton. He liked the boy; thought him clever and courageous; believed that he came of a good race. But what would all the world say if Cecilia Englehurst were to marry a working glazier? His dear Margaret, whom he had loved so well, would never have sanctioned such an idea. He tried to turn to the vanished spirit of his early and only love for consolation and counsel: and it seemed to him that a negative reply thrilled through the pure air of Ranscomb Down. Love is always superstitious. The Squire

firmly believed that from some infinitely remote Eden, where happy souls dwell, there had flashed through the air a message from his wife. It determined him.

Back ran Cis, as merrily as if she had not a heart, with a lapful of mushrooms white as snow.

“There, papa,” she cried; “what a lovely little dish cook will make for you this evening. I should like to do it myself, but cook gets cross, and says young ladies are out of their place in the kitchen. Aren’t they beauties, papa?”

Cis was thinking much more of mushrooms than of lovers, at that moment.

“Capital,” said the Squire. “We’ll have them dressed in the choicest fashion. Now about what you have just told me, Cis. Your little heart does not beat very

strongly for either the Marquis or Cotton.”

“I don’t think so, papa. I am puzzled sometimes, because I very much like them both. I’m sure I’m not in love, you know, like the girls one reads about in novels. I love you, papa, and my home: I think of nothing else.”

“Well, Cis dear, if you ever love a man, you shall have my leave to marry him, unless he is altogether a bad fellow. If now you were to marry the Marquis, he would take you to Italy, and I should see but little of you during the rest of my life.”

“O papa, I could not bear that.”

“If you were to marry Cotton,” he continued, “whom I admit to be a fine young fellow, all the world would talk about it. I have never cared much for the world’s talk, but this is just a case in which un-

generous things would be said. I cannot explain to you, Cis, but I will advise you. Give neither Castelcicala nor Cotton the slightest opportunity of saying anything serious. Laugh at their love songs. Keep them off in a humorous way. If either of them does come to the point simply refer him to me. Don't allow yourself to be magnetised by an arm round your waist, and passionate eyes looking into yours. Say to yourself: 'I am Cecilia Englehurst. I will not throw myself away in haste.'

"Yes, papa," she said. "Now I know; I don't want to marry one whom I can't love as dear mamma loved you."

The Squire was silent. He thought of the day long ago when under a sombre sky, with thunder clouds lowering over the

tortured sea, he had told his Margaret how much he loved her. The hot tears of heaven fell upon them as she returned his kiss; and they had to race home across the yellow sands to escape a drenching. Boy and girl only; but their love was true, and endured; and the Squire's one hope was to meet his Margaret again.

“When you see the man whom you can love like that, Cis, you shall marry him. But don't think about marriage just now. You are a mere child. The Marquis will not say a word to you, I feel sure, unless you encourage him too much. As to Cotton, I mean to send him off, now that he is well. So dismiss all thoughts of marrying and giving in marriage, and remember only that you are your old father's

dear little daughter. There is plenty of time yet, Cis."

Cis was much comforted by the fatherly advice, and the fatherly kiss which followed it. She was a home-loving child; she saw that if she married Castelcicala she would be like some tree on the Englehurst lawns, dragged up by the roots, to be transplanted elsewhere. She also saw that to marry Cotton would be a daring act, since society strongly objects to such marriages. She was much troubled, for she liked both the Marquis and the glazier, and did not want to give pain to either.

"Come along, Cis," said the Squire, who had packed the mushrooms into the pocket of his shooting-jacket. "Let your love-troubles be blown away by this wind. Play with your enemies, as a cat plays with

mice. Be a little coquette, just for once. And if there is any serious proposal, refer to me."

Cis Englehurst, her mind much relieved, went gaily down the slope of Ranscomb Down, rowed her papa across the Engle, and raced into the house like an Atalanta. She was overjoyed at her father's advice; we all of us like advice extremely when it tallies with our own previous ideas.

When they reached the Hall, the first news was that old Richard Cotton was dying, and that Charles Cotton was staying to take care of him.

"He won't trouble me to-night," thought Cecilia.

CHAPTER IV.

WALKER'S DICTIONARY.

“All men think all men mortal but themselves.”

I do not agree with the pious epigrammatic poet : perhaps because he was a pessimist, and I am an optimist. I hold with Wordsworth that “our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting”—whence, logically, it follows that our death is even the same. I hold with Coleridge that there is no “other world,” the world being one and indivisible. Men who live aright are as much in heaven now as they ever will be :

only what we call death is the way to a higher development of the mental and physical power, to clearer vision and loftier forms of duty. Still Young's line has a definite truth in reference to a great number of men who have never thought out what death really means, and who, confident in their own power to live long, feel a certain pride as their friends and acquaintances drop into the grave one by one.

Of this type was old Richard Cotton, to whose death-bed his nephew was summoned. Tough as oak-tanned leather, temperate from avarice rather than necessity, the old boy went on like a machine that seemed to have no friction. But he broke down at last, without any disease the doctor could understand, and then he longed to

see his nephew, who had always been kind to him; so he was sent for in haste.

Charles Cotton found his uncle surrounded by a good many Plymouth Brethren and sisters, who were shedding tears and praying much. Old Richard did not seem to like it. On a death-bed early fancies often return: Richard, who had been one of the best cricketers in the county, “babbled o’ green fields”—but they were cricket fields. As he lay there, in utter weakness, he saw the shining white tents of his youth, the well-rolled wicket, the well-placed eleven. His languid old right arm delivered a ball which took the opposition champion’s middle stump; and his brain thrilled as the whole field shouted, “Well bowled, Dick Cot-

ton !” Little dreamt his pious attendants of the nature of his thoughts, or I fear they would have predicted for him a most sad hereafter.

Charles Cotton, arriving, and finding his uncle mobbed by these well-meaning sectaries, requested them to leave the room. They saw he meant it, and went. Their departure seemed to relieve an oppression which rendered the old man strangely weak ; he stretched out his right hand to his nephew, and said—

“ A drop of brandy and water, Charlie. I want to talk to you.”

The brandy and water seemed to revive him. He said—

“ Charlie, that long-faced preacher wants to find out if I've got any money to leave to his chapel. I've got nothing to leave. All

I've got's an old silver tea-pot that was mother's; and it's for you, my boy, for you've been as kind as if you were my own son—better than a many. My keys are under my pillow. Take 'em now; I shall never turn a key again. I'm pretty well done. And just now I dreamed I was playing cricket, and bowled out poor Jack Halfacre, who was drowned at sea before you were born. It seems only yesterday."

Charles Cotton thought weak brandy and water could not harm the old man in his feeble state, so he gave him occasional doses. By-and-by he slept a little, and seemed somewhat stronger when he awoke.

"There's one thing more, Charlie. Bring that dictionary. Look through the leaves for a scrap of paper with figures on it.

Yes; that's it. Leave it in the same place, and ask somebody that has learning about it. I lent the old book to Jenkins, and he kept it ever so long; and when it came back there was that paper in it. I feel sure it's got a bad meaning, for he's a bad man—a wicked profligate adulterous man.”

Charles Cotton gave him a drop more brandy and water, and the old man fell asleep never to wake again. In a strange dream he passed once more through the cricket-field. Play was over; the tents empty; the stumps gone. But at the bottom of the field was a wide river, and there the cricketers were entering a ferry boat, to cross to where a stately palace stood in a great park, all its windows blazing in the gold of sunset. And he

seemed to run towards the ferry-boat, crying, "Wait for me!" And then the boat moved onwards.

When the old man had indeed departed, which was rather late in the evening, Cotton sent home the little maid who waited on his uncle, knowing how children are affected by the presence of death, and settled down for the night. He had just found himself some supper of a very quiet sort, cold bacon and table beer, when Dr. Corfe arrived—doctor by courtesy, though actually a surgeon, and a very able one.

"The old man died peaceably, I see, Cotton," said the doctor. "Peace to his soul!"

"Amen," said Cotton. "He did little harm in the world, but lived honestly and quietly among his neighbours. I suppose

you are not going to the Hall to-night, Dr. Corfe?"

"Indeed I am. Miss Englehurst's maid has pricked her finger with a needle, or something of the sort, and will be in hysterics till she sees the doctor. If it weren't for the servants the Squire might as well live in another parish, so far as I am concerned, for neither he nor his daughter ever has anything the matter with them. What can I do for you at the Hall?"

"Only tell the Squire of my uncle's death, and say I will pay my respects to him in the morning."

The doctor gone, Cotton sat down to his bacon and small beer, but did not find it fascinating. There is a chilly feeling, even if you are not superstitious, in being alone at night in the house with a dead body.

Cotton was really glad to hear a knock at the door, and still more glad to admit the Marquis.

“Ha,” he said, “the doctor said you were all alone, so I left the pleasantest company in the world to come and see you.”

“You are too good, Marquis.”

“Ah, but the pleasantest company in the world gave me orders; and you know I never disobey a lady. And, as we both divined that you would be starving yourself on bacon and beer, we made a foray, and here’s the result.”

The Marquis produced a cold fowl, ham in delicate slices, a white manchet of bread, a bottle of champagne and another of claret, a bunch or two of muscat grapes, a flask of cognac.

“Let us sup together,” said the Marquis. “I came down from London too late for dinner, having taken only a flying luncheon, and I must go up again to-morrow on important business. So, when I heard what had happened to you, I resolved to sup here instead of at the Hall. We shall neither of us have less appetite because Miss Englehurst packed the basket.”

“You are very kind, Marquis,” said Cotton, trying not to blush.

So they supped, with such dainty food and wine as poor Richard Cotton would have thought it a sin to consume. And the Marquis during supper listened to Cotton's account of his uncle's last words.

“Do you think he saved much?” asked the Marquis.

“I don't think he could,” said Cotton.

“He spent as little as possible; and for some years past I have helped largely in the household expenses. Perhaps the old teapot may contain twenty pounds.”

“I’m interested in both that and the dictionary. Shall we fetch them, and look at them here by the fire? I should like to see the old man in his last sleep.”

Very peaceful he looked, with that smile of death upon his face which is given as a physical indication of immortality. The teapot, an amazing structure of antique silver, was brought down stairs, as also the dictionary.

“Suppose we take the dictionary first,” said Castelcicala.

It was the infallible Walker, who ignored etymology, stole (and spoilt) Johnson’s definitions, and went in for fashionable

pronunciation — teaching that cucumber should be called *cowcumber*, and asparagus *sparrowgrass*. The Marquis turned over the leaves, and came to the dirty crumpled scrap of paper. On it was written a series of numbers—“8, 116, 17,42, 1,425, &c.”—which need not be repeated here, since we, who are in the secret, have already seen Spike write them down in the bar of the Five Horseshoes, and send them off to the Slippery One. On the other side of the memorandum, in an illiterate hand—“Fifty from Jenkins if this takes.”

“This is a curious document, Cotton,” said the Marquis, “and may be a useful one. It is in a cypher—a difficult one if the books used are rare, but easy enough if Walker’s Dictionary is the basis. It so

happens that this musty scrap of paper is in page 174 of the dictionary, and right in the middle of the cypher I find '26. s. 174.' So I count 26 words down the page, and arrive at the word *diamond*: and the crafty blockhead has had put in an *s*, to show his correspondent, a duller fellow than himself, that the word was plural."

"I don't quite understand," said Cotton.

"Perhaps I am too fast," said the Marquis. "Your uncle's dictionary was borrowed because some of these fellows had one just like it; then, by putting page and number of words together, they could communicate with each other. For example, look for the word *Pig*."

Cotton did as he was told.

"What page is it on?"

“ 459.”

“ What number of words from the top of the page ?”

“ 8.”

“ Very well ; ‘ 8, 459 ’ would stand for *pig* in such an arrangement as this. In the same way, ‘ 26, 174 ’ stands for *diamonds*. Don’t you see the result ? This scrap of paper, with the damning memorandum at the back, connects Jenkins of the Five Horseshoes with the robbery at Englehurst Hall.”

“ How rapidly you work such things out !” said Cotton. “ I could never have thought of it.”

“ You are an Englishman, dweller in a free country ; I in my time have had to be a conspirator for the sake of Italy. The dagger which only just grazed your strong

chest was meant to reach my heart. The fact that you were struck instead of me has won my game, for I can make my antagonist the laughing-stock of Europe if he does not give way. And he will give way."

"Who is your antagonist?"

"Ask no indiscreet questions, Charles Cotton," said the Marquis. "His name is one to conjure with. To fight him is like fighting the devil. Be content with this: never was the freedom of the world more advanced by a dagger stroke than when Redi's poniard was blunted by your stout English chest."

Cotton was mystified. The reader, if he knows anything of foreign politics, will doubtless connect the incident with a very momentous diplomatic arrangement. But

few Englishmen take intelligent interest in European politics : the few who do will comprehend ; the many who do not will not care to be enlightened.

“The tea-pot next,” said the Marquis.

It was a splendid structure in silver—as much above the meagre production of the modern silversmith as the Tower of Babel above the Duke of Westminster's new buildings in Grosvenor Place. It was fretted and carved with quaint designs ; but time had battered it, and the old fantastic beauty was not easily decypherable.

“Open it, Cotton,” said the Marquis. “Thrust in your hand, and see what you can find.”

Cotton obeyed. Out came rolls of bank-notes, tied up with worsted. At the bottom were seventy-six spade guineas.

How dusty were those bank-notes! They were mostly of the Bank of England, in which the miserly old boy believed; but he also believed in some country banks, and the Marquis was much amused to find a roll of about £35, notes of a bank which had ceased to exist before Charles Cotton was born, and now were mere waste paper. Poor old Richard Cotton probably never dreamt that these notes were valueless.

They counted the money. Seven hundred and seventy pounds in notes, and seventy-six spade guineas.

“A small fortune!” said the Marquis. “What will you do with it?”

Cotton detected a touch of ironic scorn in Castalcicala’s voice, and knew that he had no chance against that quick Italian intellect. He simply said—

“I shall put it aside, and think no more about it. It is neither one thing nor the other. The middle way is the best, I have heard. I say the middle way is worst. If I cannot be a gentleman, I will be a workman.”

“You can be both,” said Castelcicala. “But the Squire’s generosity renders this unimportant. Seven hundred pounds would only be of use to you in trade, which I know you hate. My advice to you is, put the money in a bank, to be invested. There is no knowing what may happen; youth like yours has innumerable possibilities. Just now you have to bury your uncle; that will take up all your time. So come up to the Hall to-morrow, and bring these notes, and the Squire will send them on to his bankers in your name.”

It was daybreak when the Marquis left the cottage; for, liking Charles Cotton, he did not care to leave him alone in so unpleasant a situation. At daybreak Cotton, tired with excitement, lay down on an old-fashioned sofa, and gradually fell asleep. The Marquis was slightly anxious about the safety of the bank-notes, in case anyone entered; but Cotton had shoved them under the sofa-pillow, and Castalcicala knew he could take his own part. So he let himself out of the cottage quietly, with the dictionary under his arm. He wanted to be in London that day, to see Lady de Rootz; but he wanted first to talk to the Squire about Walker's Dictionary. It was an important discovery. It gave the Squire power to get rid of the troublesome fellow who had been for so long a time an an-

noyance to him, and an injury and evil example to the neighbourhood. The Marquis saw that, though there might be some difficulty about legal proceedings, the dull knave of the Five Horseshoes might be frightened into submission.

Castelcicala got a short sleep and a bath, and by nine o'clock was loitering in the garden, thinking he might meet Miss Englehurst. It was one of those crisp keen autumn mornings, when the turn of cold falls just a degree short of frost. The sun threw long lights across the lawns; the robins carolled gaily; blackbirds and thrushes hunted for worms; the rooks of Englehurst Hall flew cawing away on some distant adventure. What merry maiden void of care would lie lazily in bed on such a morning as this? Not Cis Englehurst.

She was not like Tennyson's Queen of the May, a lump of indolence and conceit, who expected her mother to call her early. What village girl that was to be May Queen would dream of snoring (I'll swear the creature snored) till her mother (poor worried old woman) turned out to call her? From the conceit at the beginning to the cant at the end that young person is abominable; if the Laureate will slightly alter the title, and call his poem the "May Quean," I will forgive him.

Cis was among the late roses, a pretty rose herself. The Marquis soon found her.

"I was rewarded for my banishment," he said. "Cotton, poor fellow, was all alone, looking disconsolately at some cold bacon and beer. When he saw your dainty

basket his appetite revived. We had supper and a talk, till daylight indeed, when I thought some of the villagers would soon come to cheer him."

"I am so glad you went," she said. "Now here is a rose for a reward. It is out of the greenhouse; I don't know the sort. Chapman tries all he can to grow me plenty of pretty roses, because he knows how I love them."

It was a curious long-budded rose, of greenish white, which Cis fastened into Castelcicala's coat.

The Marquis, looking down upon her beautiful frank face, felt a strange longing to tell her what he earnestly desired. He did not think he should affright the child. But he said—

"Thanks, Miss Englehurst. Now I

wear the rose as your cavalier. What says an ancient rhymer?—

“A rose flung o’er a castle wall
Hath been love-token fair :
A rose whose leaves were let to fall
Meant sorrow and despair.

“Ah, sweetest saddest flower that blows !
For love, the wicked elf,
Says—She will often give a rose,
Who will not give herself.”

“It’s my firm opinion, Marquis,” said Cis Englehurst, with a merry laugh, “that whenever you quote an old ballad you make it up as you go along. It always comes so very appropriate. And as to giving one’s self, well, I suppose that requires rather more thought than giving a rose : and, O dear me !” she said, mischievously demure, “what well brought-up young lady would think of giving herself before she was asked ?”

Two voices sounded in Castalcicala's ear. One said, "Ask her now! Ask her now!" The other cried, "Not yet! Not yet!" The Marquis, superstitious as are all Italians, from the Pope downward, wondered which voice belonged to his good genius, which to his evil genius. Whichever it was, he would that very moment have spoken, but the strong voice of the Squire was suddenly heard, saying,

"Hallo, Cis! Hallo, Marquis! Ready for breakfast, hey? I am, by Jove. Come along."

"Old Cotton is dead, I hear," said the Squire, after looking at his letters. "A queer old fellow, I fancy. Went to that ridiculous chapel. If he had any money I suppose he left it to those canting people."

"I am glad to say, no. All the money

he had was in an old teapot, and he handed it over to young Cotton before he died. There is about eight hundred pounds. I have taken the liberty of telling Cotton that you will send it to your bankers for him till he decides what to do with it."

"Of course I will," said the Squire. "We'll invest it to accumulate, and it will come in useful when my annuity ends. What does he propose to do with himself?"

"I hardly know," said the Marquis. "He is proud of being a good workman; but he doesn't care for trade. It is hard to know how to advise a young fellow of that sort. He'd make a splendid soldier; but these are days when you can't buy a commission."

"Worst thing for the army of England

that ever happened," said the Squire.

"Very true," replied Castelcicala. "Then he's got ideas about literature. He thinks he could get a living by writing. But he has not the armour for the warfare of letters, and would sink into a museum hack, or a descriptive reporter for the penny papers—one of those fellows of whom an epigrammatist wrote :

"While by their books we know their creed,
That men who write should never read ;
Their faces show they think it bosh
That men who write should ever wash."

"Capital !" said the Squire. "Hallo, where's Cis ? Found all this dull, I suppose ?"

"So much the better just now. I have something important to show you in the library, Englehurst. You will be pleased."

Thither they went, and Castelcicala ex-

plained to the Squire his discovery in the dictionary. It took Mr. Englehurst, not given to such subtleties, some time to apprehend it. When he did, he said,

“That fellow shall go out at once.” He rang the bell impetuously, and said to the servant, “I want Mr. Henderson here immediately.”

Henderson, a solicitor much trusted by the country gentry, lived in a very elegant house of his own close by, and was a frequent visitor at the Hall. He soon arrived—a tall thin man, with white whiskers, a brown wig, and a gold-rimmed eye-glass.

“Show Henderson what it all means, Marquis,” said the Squire, impetuously.

The lawyer soon understood.

“What do you wish to do, Mr. Engle-

hurst? I fear the evidence, though quite conclusive to me, would not satisfy a jury."

"No," said the Squire. "But won't it enable us to frighten Jenkins into giving up his lease? I want to turn him out, bag and baggage. What do you think?"

Henderson pondered awhile, the Squire and the Marquis rather impatient.

"Yes," he said. "I think it can be done. Shall we go down to the inn at once? And will you leave me to do all the talking, unless I appeal to you?"

"Yes, to both questions," said the Squire. "Off we go."

So, in about ten minutes, the Squire and his lawyer and his guest walked down the village street. To the amazement of the rather affected female who called herself

Mrs. Jenkins, who was feeding her pigeons in front of the place, and of a younger *quasi*-Jenkins, who was growing as toadlike as his father, they walked into the Five Horseshoes. In the bar they saw only the hoary humbug Spike, with a pipe in one hand and a crutch in the other.

“Where is Jenkins?” said the Squire.

“Here I am, sir,” said the surly landlord, coming from a back room. “What can I do for you?”

“Just come with us into your parlour,” said Mr. Henderson; “and I should like Mr. Spike to come too. It is a matter of business which need not take ten minutes.”

They went into the parlour where Jenkins, who was a carrier as well as a farmer, had got himself painted by some wander-

ing signboard artist, driving his own furniture van. In an elegant little bureau in the corner, with a plate-glass door for choice books, which probably he had picked up at a sale, he exhibited his teapots and coffeepots of Britannia metal and German silver.

“Well, gentlemen,” he began, when they were within the dingy little room, “what is the business?”

“This,” said Mr. Henderson, “your lease is for four years more. Mr. Englehurst wishes you to leave within a week.”

“He can't make me,” said Jenkins, with an insolent laugh, “I holds to my rights.”

“That's it,” said old Spike.

“Very well,” remarked Mr. Henderson; “now be good enough, Jenkins and Spike, to listen attentively. You borrowed a dic-

tionary from Richard Cotton, who died yesterday.”

“I did, and I returned it,” said Jenkins. “And what’s that a-doing with it?”

“You returned more than was lent, my man. In that book was found the copy of a telegram sent to one John Clark, now in prison, asking him to come down and steal diamonds from Englehurst Hall, and a memorandum, in Spike’s handwriting, to the effect that he was to receive fifty pounds from you for arranging the robbery. If I take this case into court, you and Spike will both be imprisoned for some years ; but the Squire desires to be merciful to a tenant, and is willing, if you surrender your lease and clear out at once, to leave you to the punishment of your own conscience.”

Mr. Henderson, knowing the strange stolidity of men like Jenkins, had said all this very slowly. Castalcicala could hardly prevent the impetuous Squire from breaking in with a fiery torrent of words; which would have been unintelligible to the heavy Jenkins. That worthy seemed to collapse gradually under the weight of the lawyer's words; he grew paler and paler—seemed even to grow smaller and smaller. As to Spike, he looked like a grey old rat that had been caught in a trap, and knows his fate.

“What am I to do, Mr. Henderson?” said Jenkins.

“Bring your lease here.”

“Fetch it, Spike,” said Jenkins. “You know where it is.”

The lease was brought, and Mr. Hen-

derson endorsed upon it a form of immediate surrender, which was signed by Jenkins, and witnessed by Castelcicala and Spike.

“Now,” said the lawyer, “you have a week to leave the place. If you do not keep your agreement we shall not keep ours, and you will very soon find yourself inside a prison.”

The affected female was still in front, no longer feeding her pigeons, but gossiping with a young farmer on horseback, who was drinking what Jenkins sold as gin. She did not dream of what had occurred within. Suddenly she heard a tremendous noise, and rushed indoors; there in the parlour was Jenkins attempting to murder Spike for his stupidity, while the old cripple wielded his crutch so well that the

landlord got several uncomfortable strokes. In rushed the supposititious Mrs. Jenkins, and went into hysterics with commendable energy. Let us draw a veil over the remainder of the scene.

Meanwhile, to tread pleasanter ground, Charles Cotton had come up to Englehurst Hall to pay his respects to the Squire. He was not greatly saddened by the fact that the Squire was away somewhere, which he learnt from Miss Englehurst's own lips, as he entered the grounds through a side gate. Cis quite expected him. She did not quite understand her feelings towards him. He interested her. She had the true pride of place, and felt by no means inclined to lower herself by an inferior marriage, and she saw quite clearly that with just one look she could make Castel-

cicala speak the irrevocable word. Then she thought of her father, to whom she hated the idea of giving pain. Kind as he was to a young fellow like Cotton, Cis clearly saw that he might not care to have him as his successor at Englehurst Hall. She was fretted, puzzled, perplexed; her little love-worry made her sweeter than ever, both to Castelcicala and Cotton; and when the glazier, who would remember one pane of glass for ever, met her that day, he thought no goddess could be half so lovely.

“Papa is out, Mr. Cotton,” she said. “And so is the Marquis. And, O, I am so sorry, I hear your uncle is dead.”

“Yes, Miss Englehurst, he is gone. He was a good quiet miserly old boy. I shall miss him now, though I found him

very troublesome when he was alive."

"You should not talk like that," said Cis.

"I suppose not. I liked Uncle Richard, with all his fancies, and he liked me, for he hoarded up money for me—not much in the eyes of Miss Englehurst, but a large sum for poor old Richard Cotton. Among his hoard there were seventy-six spade guineas. I have picked out the best, and bored a little hole in it. May I put it on your chain, among your other charms? Perhaps it will call me to your mind now and then, when I am far away from Englehurst."

She took the guinea, a very fine specimen, and said:

"So you are going away somewhere?"

"I don't know—I am altogether un-

settled. When I have buried my uncle I shall ask advice from the Marquis, who is always excessively kind to me."

"Yes, isn't he good?" said Cis. "I think he is the most unselfish man I ever knew. He will do anything for anyone whom he thinks worthy of help. But now, won't you come in and wait for papa? He is sure to want you to stay for luncheon; he always says that helps business immensely. Come, I will sing you a song if you like, to cheer you up and give you an appetite."

She ran in before him and sat down at the piano, and sang an old Elizabethan madrigal—

Thou sayest, love, which shall I choose?
So hard 'tis either to refuse,
 Seeing that both right noble be;
One writeth sonnets, myrrh and musk,
And one hath kissed me in the dusk,
 And how know I which loveth me?

I have divined a thousand ways,
But what girl thinks, that echo says ;
 Alack, my fate I cannot see.
So come there weal or come there woe,
By one sure sign my love I know—
 I choose the man who chooseth me.

I do not know what might have happened at the end of that quaint song had not the Squire's voice been heard in the next room. The party were approaching. Cotton felt almost a relief, for he was on the point of pouring out his passionate love, with a desperate feeling that it was useless. He had no right to love her. That was Cotton's feeling. Castalcicala felt that he could easily win her, but that it would be unfair to do it in a hurry. Was he too conceited, or too chivalrous ?

CHAPTER V.

THE THIEF SYNDICATE.

"In the Nineteenth Age, if a thief you'd indicate,
 Say he is member of a syndicate ;
 Say in the City he tries to sell
 Deposit of sea-birds, not out of the shell ;
 Say that, though viler than many felons,
 His wines are divine, and his pines and melons,
 And his wife's ablaze with diamonds radiant,
 And he'll dazzle the world, till down the gradient
 Inexorable that for scoundrels made is,
 He finds himself white-hot in Hades."

The Prophecy of Broceliande.

FOX, astute Inspector, thought a good
 deal over what would happen next
 in regard to Lord Bellasys, and his £60,000

due to Crake. The scoundrel's ledger gave very full information about his aristocratic touts, but not a word as to where he got the money which he seemed to be able to produce quite easily. The wary Inspector saw clearly enough the state of affairs. Crake represented a set of avaricious persons who liked to get an immense percentage for their money, and who cared little for the morality of an investment, if only it was profitable. They placed their money in Crake's hands, asking no questions. When Bellasys came to him for £50,000, offering £10,000 as interest for two months, he, knowing that there was no danger in the investment, felt that he could persuade his syndicate to accept. The thing was done. Then suddenly Crake broke the eleventh commandment,

and was found out; and his constituents, in a state of abject apprehension, knew not what to do. Crake had handed over Lord Bellasys' cheque to the chief person in this syndicate—a stockbroker. He called his colleagues together: they were only four, all told.

“What can we do about this?” he asked, in a deep bass voice that told of many sir-loins consumed, with Sandeman to follow. “I am not going to present this cheque. There will be a row, and they will try to prove our complicity with that villain Crake. How could we know what he was doing?”

“How, indeed?” said Izzard, who kept a rather questionable hotel. He was a meagre plausible man. “We have nothing to do with Crake. There is the cheque: present it.”

“Of course,” said Colonel Fuller D. Franklin, who edited a London newspaper which no one has ever been known to read, but which exists somehow—or rather used to exist. “Of course; we can’t afford to lose £60,000.”

“I don’t know,” said Wolf Isaac, a diamond merchant—whatever that may mean. “It is dangerous to be too hasty. I don’t want to lose my share of that £60,000; but also I don’t want to put my neck in a noose. You said it came out what Crake had been doing. We were terrible fools to trust him so much. He had been very lucky for a long time, I know; and when he got hold of Bellasys I thought it was a grand thing. But this break-up is awkward. None of us want to be known in connection with Crake. It would ruin

Izzard's hotel. As to you, Colonel, it doesn't much matter, for an American gentleman is always true grit; but I think we had better wait awhile, and see what happens, before we present that cheque. Suppose Bellasys has stopped it. Nothing likelier."

"I can't afford to lose £15,000," said Colonel Franklin. "It's a twister."

"We shall have to lose something, I fear," said Wolf Isaac, "and it is best to get back some of our money as soon as possible. Now, if you like, I will go and see Lord Bellasys, and make him understand the position of affairs, without compromising ourselves."

This was agreed upon: the next day Wolf Isaac, got up in his grandest style, called on Lord Bellasys. That nobleman was at home.

“What can I do for you?” said the burly peer to the evil-smelling little Hebrew.

“I hold your cheque for £60,000, my Lord, payable to Silas Crake. Are you agreeable that I should present it?”

“How comes Silas Crake’s cheque into your hands?” said Bellasys, in a voice of thunder. “Did you get it honestly?”

“It came to me in the course of business, my Lord,” said Wolf Isaac.

“In the course of business! Do you often get a cheque for £60,000 in the course of business?”

“I have very large transactions, my Lord,” said Wolf Isaac. “There’s a gentleman in Boot Alley that buys diamonds of me at the rate of twenty or thirty thousand pounds’ worth at a time. He’s a literary gent. I suppose he speculates in ’em.

I know he's very speculative. He speculates in young women, who write stories for him; and when he manages to make a hundred pounds he gives them ten. He's a clever old fellow."

"I don't want to hear all this damned nonsense," said Bellasys. "You say you have my cheque for £60,000. You do not tell me how you got that cheque. I am not going to disown my own signature; but I am not going to let money pass into the wrong hands. That cheque is stopped."

"You have had the money," said Wolf Isaac, almost fiercely.

"True," said Bellasys; "I have done the Jews for once. Yes, Wolf Isaac! *done*, DONE, absolutely DONE! I owe Crake £60,000: the money is ready, O Hebrew of the Hebrews; and as Crake is a convict-

ed felon, I shall pay that money into the Treasury! Go and tell thy partners in villany that Edgar Bellasys is not quite such a fool as they thought him."

Mr. Wolf Isaac departed, looking not altogether happy. He did not expect that the news he had to bring would be pleasant to the swell hotel-keeper, or the Yankee journalist. Bellasys had frightened him. When he told his partners in the affair what had happened, they all turned whiter than the paper on which I am writing. Poor devils! How should you feel, dear reader, if you had the chance of losing a fourth of £60,000? Verily I hope you have that sum to lose, if you like the idea.

"But this won't do, you know," said Izzard, white as a ghost. "Look here, Isaac, I'm not a millionaire, like you. I

can't afford to lose £15,000, and I won't. You must make it up to me, between you, or I'll bring the whole affair before the public."

Colonel Fuller D. Franklin looked as if that unexplained D. in his name meant "D——n!" Wolf Isaac whistled.

There was silence for awhile. It seemed as if nobody knew precisely what to say. As might be expected, the Hebrew was the first man who found utterance.

"This is serious," he said. "Let us dine at your place, Izzard, to-night. Good ideas come after dinner, and we'll try if we can't checkmate Bellasys."

Izzard looked a little happier. Being practically insolvent, he did rather shady business, and £15,000 which he had contributed to Lord Bellasys' loan, with intent

to obtain a profit of £2,500, had been got hold of in a queer fashion. He was, indeed, afraid of exposure. Ho felt relieved when the diamond merchant thus spoke. As to Colonel Fuller D. Franklin, he felt that nothing was easier than to bolt, and turn up with another name and title in another hemisphere. The Yankee colonel is a bird of the same species as the peregrine falcon.

“Get dinner at eight,” said Franklin, who liked a good dinner, and divined that Wolf Isaac had an idea of some sort.”

“Very well,” said Izzard. “It’s a busy night with me. There’s a fancy ball at my place, and I’m not at all certain Bellasys won’t be there, for I know he was asked. But that is not till eleven.”

After, the Syndicate dined, and a very

good dinner they made. Izzard had some excellent wine, and some most atrocious. He gave his partners in villany very fair Saint Péray. Who does not remember the lines?—

“ If to any saint I pray,
It shall be to Saint Péray ;
He alone, of all the brood,
Ever did me any good :
Many have I known that are
Humbugs in the Kalendar.”

There are probably humbugs in the Kalendar, as we know there are humbugs in the pulpit ; but Izzard’s wine that night was good. He saw a chance of losing £15,000, and he wanted to stimulate the brains of his rascally allies.

“ I’ve been thinking over this thing,” said Wolf Isaac, “ and I fear we shall have to make some sort of compromise with Bellasys. When he talked of hand-

ing the money over to Government, of course he meant he should keep it himself. He wouldn't throw money away in that wild fashion. Suppose we decide to let him have £10,000 of it, and drop the interest as well. It's a loss that I don't like; but on that basis we might manage him."

"It *is* a loss," said Izzard, in a most lugubrious tone.

"Yes, but I think Isaac is right," said Franklin. "If Bellasys makes £10,000 he'll be happy, and we must balance our loss against one or two profitable speculations we've had together. What do you say, Izzard? I like this Saint Péray of yours."

Well, it was agreed that Bellasys should be tempted with £10,000, and soon Izzard

had to see after the preparations for his masked ball. Wolf Isaac and the Colonel stayed, the former thinking that he might catch Lord Bellasys in an amiable and confiding moment.

Izzard's masked balls were not of a highly reputable character. They were profess- edly private; not the hotel-keeper's affair at all; given by gentlemen and ladies who were staying at his distinguished cara- vanserai. The costumes were not always highly decorous, nor was the company very select. Mrs. Cornely's masquerades, the fashion a hundred years ago, were in far better style. In refined society a masque is pleasant; and I suppose we can all tolerate the pure gaiety of a Rosalind or a Portia. Even at the theatres, when a woman plays young male parts without

vulgarity, only a Puritan would object. But the disguises at Izzard's were too thin; the intention was too obvious; the after-supper amusements turned into orgies with Bacchante nymphs whom Bacchus would have smitten on the displayed shoulder with indignant thyrsus. There is a great difference between victorious young Dionysus and sottish Silenus.

Bellasy's, as it chanced, did go to this ball, not because it was much to his taste, but because of certain information he had received. This hotel-keeping adventurer was trying very hard to become a notoriety. He laid himself out for vagrant Americans, for impecunious journalists who would puff him, for young fellows unlucky enough to inherit money before they have learnt the use of money. Izzard

was particularly fond of playing Mentor to this last class; and, having a plausible manner, a knowledge of life's shady side, a wife who could flirt, a cottage in Hertfordshire where he took his ease on Sundays, and invited any promising young customer whom a London Sunday seemed to bore, he managed to do a profitable business. Of course he did not press for his bill, in the case of an infant with expectations. Of course he knew a friend in Tavistock Street who sold diamonds, and who (on *his* recommendation) might lend a cool hundred to a man of honour not yet of age. He played into Wolf Isaac's hands, and the usurer into his; but, as his wife was extravagant, and he was speculative—believing in Peruvians and Turks and

“straight tips” from racing touts, he was never quite solvent.

Lord Bellasys turned into the ball-room about midnight. This room is in the centre of Izzard's hotel, and gets its light by day entirely from a skylight. There was a capital band, led by a conductor whose very baton seems to madden the waltzers. There were amazing costumes. Bellasys, who wore only a domino, and whom anyone would know in any disguise who once had seen him, soon had opportunities for intrigues and flirtation thrown on his hands. He was not much in the humour. He had been trying all day to decide whether he should carry out his threat, and pay the money owing to Crake into the Treasury. He came to a conclusion at about four o'clock, and had

acted upon it in his own vigorous way. To do Bellasys justice, when once he had made up his mind, he did not defer resolute action.

Lord Bellasys, one of the best known men in London, found himself pestered by no end of masques. The Emperor Nicholas of Russia, who (see Sala, *passini*) was fond of going to a masque as the Devil, hit on a happy method of punishing adventurous young ladies who would not respect his incognito. He would dance with them, chat with them, listen when they sympathised with the Poles, take them to supper with Imperial courtesy: but the next day there was a visit from a police officer, and the fair *intrigante* received the kind of punishment which in England is customarily reserved for boys who make

false quantities. This, unluckily, is a free country, where such wise tribulation does not overtake the forward minx.

“Well, Lord Bellasys, how are you?” said a young person dressed as a midshipman, in blue serge jacket with gold buttons and nankeen tights. She was about five feet high, and looked a mere boy. Bellasys did not like this hermaphrodite minx in the least, but he gave in to the humour of the hour, and ordered some champagne for her, and took good care to drink none himself.

She was not to be shaken off. She followed him everywhere, and quarrelled with anyone else who spoke to him. He was just preparing to leave, feeling awfully bored, when there came up to him Colonel Fuller D. Franklin, who said in a harsh voice, with a nasal twang,

“You bloated aristocrat, what are you doing with my wife?”

Bellasys at once suspected a “plant.”

“Your wife, eh?” he said, derisively. “A lamb in wolf’s clothing. Take her away, for I am devilish tired of the little wretch.”

“This won’t do,” cried the Yankee, pointing a revolver at Bellasys.

“By Jove, no!” cried the peer. He struck up the Colonel’s arm with such force that he broke the fellow’s wrist. Two barrels of the revolver crashed through Izzard’s skylight. Then Bellasys took the Colonel by the collar of his coat and the hinder part of his trousers, and threw him right across a refreshment counter, amid the shrieks of frightened barmaids. He came to the ground on a

heap of soda water bottles, which exploded around him like a small park of artillery.

Having got rid of this impudent fellow, Bellasys walked quietly down stairs, and in the radiant corridor was accosted by Izzard and Wolf Isaac, the former of whom expressed his intense regret that his Lordship should have been insulted. And, indeed, both scoundrels were honestly sorry; for this was the Yankee's own device, and he fancied he could frighten Bellasys. Rather a mistake.

"You may get me a glass of good champagne, Izzard, if you have anything of the kind," said Bellasys. "You have been poisoning the cads to-night."

Izzard brought something choice, and Bellasys sipped it quietly. As he grew gayer, Wolf Isaac brightened up, thinking

he might get a chance to make a bargain with him. Another bottle followed, and some anchovy toast and devilled oysters, and Hebrew and innkeeper both were delighted with the burly Baron's affability. It is so pleasant to talk to a man with a handle to his name.

The night grew late. Carriages and cabs crowded Izzard's door. Gay birds descended the tiled staircase with ruffled plumage, for the fun at last had grown "fast and furious," and the romps were of a robustious sort. The wary Jew had not yet found a chance of opening the question which lay nearest his heart; but, judging Bellasys by himself, he felt certain that he could not refuse a compromise. He led up to the subject delicately, but Bellasys, who had by this time reached his fourth

bottle, was not in the humour for anything except plain speaking.

“I understand,” he said, “that you and two others found £50,000 for Crake to lend me, and that you were to receive £15,000 each.”

“That is so, my Lord,” said the Hebrew.

“I also understand that on my paying you £40,000 you will release me from all further responsibility.”

“Certainly, my Lord,” said the Hebrew.

“Good. Come and breakfast with me, and I’ll soon settle it. I wonder if my man is here. Send some one to see, Izzard.”

Hebrew and hotel-keeper exchanged delighted glances. Clearly Bellasys was tempted by that £10,000. They hoped for the best, and looked forward to a merry

breakfast in Park Lane, whose adyta were yet unknown to them. Ah, but they were by no means fated to breakfast there. Bellasys was not the man to allow cads of so pronounced a kind to cross his portals.

It was seven o'clock by the time the house was cleared, and the fifth bottle of Saint Péray had been followed by some curaçao. As trim a tiger as Tom Ingoldsby's Tiger Tim,—

“Tallest of boys or shortest of men,”

was holding a pair of splendid chestnuts in an open waggonette.

“In with you,” cried the Baron. “Give them their heads, Julian.”

Away they clattered down the stony Strand—up the wide, wicked, but gradually improving Haymarket, into Piccadilly—

past where once Palmerston lived, now the home of the pleasantest club in London—past the happy resort, the quiet garden, of Lady Blessington and Count D'Orsay—past the naughty enclosures that mock the Bishop of London's Palace at Fulham—across the hideous perilous old bridge, and up the steep street to Putney Heath—then by Wimbledon Common and Richmond Park (amazing the deer by such an early visit) . . . to the Star and Garter at Richmond.

“Julian,” said Bellasys to his page, “get me some rough towels. I shall have a dip. While we are away, see that a good breakfast is ready. You will like a dip in the Thames, gentlemen.”

Izzard's idea of a dip was a warm bath in his own hotel, and Wolf Isaac had evidently

not been washed since his mother scrubbed him energetically in his childhood; but they gave way to the imperious Baron, and were soon in a punt on the Thames, shivering horribly, to the great delight of the old waterman, who looked well-pleased when Bellasys exposed to the morning air a form like that of Heracles, and took a reckless header into the laughing lymph. He kept under the water for no small time, having grand lungs of his own, and reappeared the colour of a lobster just boiled. Isaac and Izzard merely ventured over the side of the boat, and looked as blue thereafter as a lobster that had not yet had his requisite plunge into hot water. It was an amusing contrast, and greatly arrided the ancient boatman—Bellasys with his rough towel, looking regretfully at Thames as if he

loved it—the unwashed Jew and the skimpy hotel-keeper shuddering at the cold embrace of the hateful river.

“Nothing like a cold bath after being up all night,” Bellasys shouted gleefully, rubbing his big muscular shoulders till they were as ruddy as a crimson July rose. “Gad, gentlemen, I call this enjoyable. Now we’ll have the best breakfast the Star and Garter can give us, and we’ll quite forget we have had no sleep. After all, sleep is a thing should be taken in small quantities. The man who sleeps too much is a fool. Give me four hours of the twenty-four, and I am satisfied.”

Both Izzard and Isaac would gladly have thrown Bellasys overboard, had they dared ; but even if they had possessed pluck and strength enough, they did not want to

drown forty thousand pounds. So they shivered civilly, while he quietly enjoyed their misery.

However, breakfast was a reward to the two victims of the Baron's caprice. Julian, as clever a page as ever lived, knew just what his master liked, and how he liked it. He had organised a breakfast in which the necessary bacon, the commonplace Assam and Mocha, the puritanic eggs and toast and crumpets, were pleasantly blended with the exhilarant prawns, the effervescent hock, the hot lobster, the kidneys in champagne, the legs of turkey *à la Satan*, the delicious finale only known to the King of Bohemia and the members of his Privy Council. Isaac and Izzard grew happier at this glorious prandium, passed through course after course. It was like breakfast-

ing on Olympus, with nectar of a vintage year, and Apollo in his wittiest form. And the superb way in which they were treated made them sanguine that Lord Bellasys would listen to their proposal, and let them and their co-partners off pretty easily by pocketing ten thousand pounds. Who would refuse that nice round sum of gold?

When breakfast was over—and it was a long ceremony—they lounged out on the terrace, and looked over the stone parapet on the beautiful river, there perhaps at its ripest and supremest moment of beauty. Izzard and Isaac accepted the cigars which Julian brought them. Bellasys never smoked.

Presently he said:

“As to this proposal you make to me,

gentlemen. As I understand it, you will take my cheque for forty thousand, and give me a receipt in full."

"Certainly, my Lord," said Wolf Isaac.

"Now, with whom am I dealing? Just make a memorandum of your syndicate, as I believe it is the fashion to call it. I dare say the fellows who use the expressive word haven't Greek enough to trace its meaning—which is, 'you tell a lie, and we'll stick to it.'"

Wolf Isaac wrote down :

"Mr. Izzard, Islington Hotel, Strand.

"Colonel Fuller D. Franklin, newspaper proprietor, Langham Hotel, and Monster Mansion, Tennessee.

"Mr. Wolf Isaac, diamond merchant, Tavistock Street, and South Africa."

The fourth was Silas Crake—the stock-

broker being kept in the background.

“Mr. Izzard, of course my visit to your hotel yesterday showed me that you were thoroughly responsible. Of Mr. Isaac I have the highest opinion; a man who deals in diamonds must be a millionaire. But you will excuse me for saying that the American Colonel, who would have shot me last night, if my eye had not been quicker than his and my arm stronger, does not appear the sort of person I should like to trust. I wonder you do not see that by putting such a manifest blackguard into your syndicate you are making fools of yourselves. Mind you, gentlemen, I am not going to say that the Yankee blackguard is less respectable than either of you, as it is a point on which I have no definite information. O, here is Julian

with the *Times*. I want particularly to see it this morning."

He quietly unfolded the damp sheet, and looked into the neighbourhood of the leading articles. Izzard and Isaac were very angry, but they had a forlorn hope that Bellasys would take the ten thousand pounds. Of course he dared not hold the fifty thousand for fear of exposure, and a bribe of ten thousand ought to settle matters amicably.

Thus they were thinking when Bellasys pushed over to them that morning's *Times*, pointing to this paragraph :—

"The Chancellor of the Exchequer acknowledges the receipt of fifty thousand pounds from B., being money which belonged to one Silas Crake, a felon, whose property is forfeited to the Crown."

CHAPTER VI.

BUT !

ALOUETTE.—Papa, Prince Raphael tells me I am beautiful.

ASTROLOGOS.—Stand up, you little chit, and let me look at
you.

Well, yes, your figure's lithe, curves not too prominent,
Your eyes sea-water colour, when a breeze is out,
Your shoulders are not villanously angular,
Your waist is not too narrow.

Walk ! Ah, excellent :

A woman's walk is perfect test of ladyhood.

But . . . Princes surely should not call you beautiful.

The Comedy of Dreams.

THERE was idyl, there was also comedy,
let us hope there will not also be
tragedy, at Englehurst Hall. Cis Engle-

hurst was a trifle perplexed. The heart of an English lady is not a thing that every key can unlock. She had asked and taken her father's advice; but after all there are difficult moments when a girl must think for herself—when even the counsel of the kindest and wisest father is not all-sufficient. Down in the depths of the girl's heart lies the inflexible conviction that the man she is to love, honour, and obey, in life on earth, and in the life to come, is not so much required to satisfy her sagacious father, her loving mother, her patronising rich relations, as to give her the one thought—*love*. Let me not be suspected of the heresy that well-trained fashionable young ladies, or even lady-helps, annex any meaning to that evil word of four letters; but Cis was not a young lady, or a

lady-help—she was simply a girl. A pure poetic patrician, to whom a vile thought was impossible, to whom love was necessary. Such was my pretty Cis, and now she was in a fix, and I wish I were her father or kind elder brother, to tell her what to do.

But . . .

How often it does not occur to the father or elder brother of a lovely lady that for her to marry some imbecile millionaire who admires her would be to inflict on her death in life! A man of genius is a tree; a common man, whether duke or labourer, is a shrub; a true lady is a flower. Let us say nothing of the weeds—homely flowers out of place. A woman of the higher class has often to lose her floral beauty and purity, because

compelled to grow under the shadow of some scrubby shrub. Not pleasant. I would rather see a daughter of mine dead than married to some opulent soulless scoundrel. The greatest vice of the aristocracy is the money contagion, which makes them become guinea-pigs themselves, and sell their daughters for guineas. Better far be a poor peer of this realm than the millionaire patentee of a quack medicine, or the millionaire promoter of rotten companies.

But——

Ah ! you see what the world is. “ Money makes the mare to go,” saith an adage of antiquity unfathomable. And what saith a certain noble Roman, much quoted by Parliamentary gentlemen who keep private secretaries with a smattering of the classics ?—

“Scilicet uxorem cum dote, fidemque et amicos,
Et genus, et formam, regina pecunia donat.”

Yes, Queen Money, to use the Venusian's strong phrase, can do many things. She can give you a wife opulent also, unlimited credit, troops of friends, good blood (certified by the Herald's College), and a magnificent personal appearance. Horace, however, being wise in his generation, did not say she could give you health, or happiness, or wit, or wisdom, or the love of a true woman. Queen Money is omnipotent within her own limits—the boundary of an aureate Alsatia, where everyone must bow down and worship the fiend-god, Mammon. Never does the poet, never the philosopher, never the gentleman, enter there. There is no idyl or lyric in the precinct dedicated to the modern metallic

Trinity *£ s. d.* How often have I seen a brilliant young fellow drawn into the City whirlpool, and losing all his youthful poetry, and becoming merely a money-making machine, with a taste for idiotic ostentation! It is very painful. Perchance the greatest of the sayings of Christ is: "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." The moment money becomes the chief idea in a man's mind, chivalry and poetry and religion perish out of him.

Unhappily, in this highly complex life of ours, the greatest event of life, marriage, is almost invariably connected with money considerations. We live no longer in Arcadia. Boy and girl cannot gaily interchange their first love-kiss beneath a mighty tree where susurrus of leaves and murmur of bees and song of birds make up

a music lovelier than any possible "music of the future." When Adam and Eve were first placed in Paradise they had a grand career before them, if they could only have seen it; but their first blunder has set us all wrong, and we all start in life with a burden to bear. We are handicapped, in fact.

Now take Cis Englehurst. If you could imagine her in Longfellow's "forest primeval," where, when you begin to clear away the pines, bad hexameters grow in their place, you might think her the heroine of an idyl. Not a bit of it. The Last of the Mohicans would to her have appeared a very nude savage. The idyllic period ended when our ancestors left Eden, though Homer and Theocritus have tried to revive it. It is clean gone; and

any young lady who desires to marry wisely, had better forget she has a heart, and study finance.

Cis Englehurst, poor little fool, could not forget she had a heart. It throbbed a little now and then, but she was puzzled to make any accurate estimate of its pulsations.

“He jests at scars who never felt a wound,”

says the great authority on the science of Erotics and most other things. Now Cecilia was not old enough to have any scars; she had not indeed felt a wound, but what had she felt? A pin's prick on each breast perchance, and she knew not whether the right or the left were the true one. She liked the inimitably graceful Italian noble, with his matchless ease and readiness. She also liked the stalwart

Englishman of good blood, not ashamed of being a tradesman.

But !

Well, thus she felt. She did not know her own mind, this pretty gay delicious thing, with a fair future before her if only she acted wisely. At such a time as this, when a girl is like a ripening peach, the man whose hand first touches the bough is likely to be victor. Castelcicala held back out of chivalry, Cotton out of diffidence. So there was this child, quite ready to love, but with no one asking her to love her. Sad state of things ! Do you think it, O lady fair, quite right for our Ceeilia to be left thus doubtful, when a touch of the strong love-passion would settle matters at once ? I should like the question tried by a jury of maidens.

The Marquis looked at the question in a dilettante way. He was not so much in love. He liked her; very few English girls could rival her; he could make her life happy. Cotton loved her, but he had not quite courage enough to say so, though he thought he made his feeling intelligible. He did not know that a pure shy child is likely to disregard vague overtures from a person her inferior in rank, even though she may deem it possible to love him. Women are like fruit; you must pluck them if you want them.

However, to Cis Englehurst it mattered little. She enjoyed life, only feeling a trivial trouble from the thought that there were these love-complexities about. She was a mere baby, puzzled by the electric feeling in the air. One afternoon, she had

been singing a duet with Castelcicala, Cotton looking on moodily, because he was outside the musical pale. It ran thus:—

HE.

Shall I love you, Lady, say ?

SHE.

Not to-day, O not to-day.

HE.

How about to-morrow, then ?

SHE.

O I could not tell you when.

HE.

When are you in a mood more gay ?

SHE.

When you know what's sweet to say.

HE.

O be kinder, for Love's sake.

SHE.

Wherefore ask, when you can take ?

“What a naughty duet you have chosen, Marquis!” said Cis. “I am afraid that young person was rather a minx. But the air is pretty.”

“ Shall we have another song ? ” he said.

“ No : some magnetism draws me out of doors. Do you know the feeling ? I fancy I *must* move.” She threw open the window and tripped away over the lawn, and was soon lost in a dense shrubbery which bounded it. A great yew hedge, with arches cut in it, fenced the lawn from what the Squire called the Wilderness—a lovely wild knoll, with great trees of ancient growth scattered about it. Thither ran Cis, rather bored. The Marquis’s elegant method of love-making grew monotonous. Cotton did not come to the front, and she was not the girl to encourage him. No. She meant to be fancy-free till some one came with strength of will sufficient to fetter her fancy.

She sat beneath a great oak, on a felled tree that the wind had ruined, and pondered over her position. Really, thought Cis, why should she dream about marriage? If she married ten years hence it would be time enough. Both her suitors, or possiblesuitors, had their dubious points; neither an Italian Marquis nor an English glazier seemed a perfectly suitable spouse to the daughter of an English squire. Thus was she reflecting; the fact being that Cis Englehurst did not at all like being placed in the position of the famous ass between two bundles of hay. She wouldn't choose—that she wouldn't. She wanted somebody to choose her.

As she sat, thus meditating, there came a crash through the underwood, and a couple of Landseer Newfoundland dogs

scampered around her. They were followed pretty quickly by their master, lithe, dark of hue, keen of eye, quick of movement Martin Englehurst, in fact. The sailor had grown in power. The sea is a mighty teacher.

“Why, Cis,” he said, “how glad I am to find you here! I left my cab, or fly, or what they call it, at Chalkpit Corner, and came right down across country with the dogs I’ve brought for you. Aren’t they beauties? Bless my soul, Cis, how lovely you’ve grown!”

I don’t know the precise limits of the privilege of cousinship; but that seaman took Cis in his arms and kissed her on her lips and eyelids as if he fain would devour her, and little Cis felt her pretty rosebud of a heart opening into a flower, and mur-

mured to herself—"Martin loves me."

"I say, Cis, you know," he said presently. He was sitting on the log, and she by his side, quite comfortable, and the two white and black dogs with mild brown eyes trying to understand the situation. "I say, Cis, what will the Squire say? I've gone ahead rather fast. I'm captain of the *Thunderbolt*, a confounded old beast of an ironclad, all valves and guns, and about as big as the Isle of Wight. If I ever have to fight her I shall just walk over the enemy's fleet, and they'll go to the bottom. She'll do anything except swim."

"What nonsense you talk, Martin," she said, tugging at his moustache till he made a fierce face at her. They had been boy and girl together; still, very proper people might have thought she was taking undue

liberties. "Papa long ago said I might marry whom I loved. There are two gentlemen at present considering the question."

"Considering the question! I'll twist their necks. How dare anybody consider the question? They ought both to shoot me at once. Now do you think, Cis, the Squire will take things easily?"

"My dear Martin, I am sure. Papa has always told me to choose for myself. Come, let us go up to the Hall and find him. He will be in the library, just now, finishing his letters."

He kissed her, and called the dogs, Prince and Princess, brother and sister of the same litter. They went up to the Hall. The curtains had not yet been drawn, and from the long line of rooms

issued a cheerful light. I like to see country houses with plentiful light in their windows when the winter nights come on ; but most people shut themselves in, afraid of the improbable burglar, and their houses look as dark as pitch.

Englehurst Hall looked bright athwart its terraces. Through the lofty entrance hall tripped its heiress, with her cousin and the dogs, and walked into the library. The Squire was alone, finishing a letter or two. He looked up as they entered.

“ I have brought you my husband that is to be,” said Cecilia.

“ The devil !” said the Squire.

“ I hope not,” said Captain Englehurst.

CHAPTER VII.

A TRIO.

ALOUETTE.—You really mean it, Prince?

RAPHAEL.—Of course I mean it, love.

Soon shall you hear the bridal prothalamion
That hints sweet marvels of the happy marriage-bed,
And you will blush amid the maids, a ruddy rose,
Hearing the soft lute whisper wondrous witchery.

ASTROLOGOS.—Why should she blush, my prince? The
light of Hesper,
Sad passionate Sappho's star, brings nought more life-
giving
Than love.

ALOUETTE.—Ay me! as if I had not life enough.

I want no star of eve to cheer me, Raphael:
I only want a lover, gay and chivalrous,
Who will shed starsheen on the dullest eventide.

RAPHAEL.—You have him, beauty. What care we for
Hesperus?

The Comedy of Dreams.

THE Squire, though one of the coolest of
men, was really a little taken aback on
this occasion. He liked Martin Englehurst

very much indeed ; but the idea of that adventurous seaman's thinking of marrying Cis had never crossed his mind. He had made up his mind that she should marry just whom she pleased, that being his theory (and a very good one) of the way in which daughters should be treated. It is easier for fathers to do it than mothers. Mothers want their girls to marry on their own principle. You may divide the marrying mater into two classes : those who want their daughters to marry men as like their fathers as possible, and those who want them to marry men just the other way. Which are the larger class I leave without concern to the mothers of England, and to the *Saturday Review*, as the representative of English old maids. The inextinguishable lamp of the Virgins of

Vesta burns still in Southampton Street.

“Martin,” said the Squire, “I had no idea of this. Are you both serious, or is it a mere piece of drawing-room comedy?”

If Alouette blushed not, Cis Englehurst did. Her pretty heart had been caught suddenly on the rebound. Such things happen very often. A woman’s heart, you see, is a light thing in one sense, a heavy thing in another; joy turns it into a balloon, and grief into a diving-bell. Cis liked Castalcicala, she liked Cotton—if either had come forward with a will, pretty Cecilia’s fate would have been sealed before that wild sea-captain came back, as impetuous as half a gale of wind in the Bay of Biscay. What the deuce is a girl to do against such a man? He just takes her by storm. Cis felt, when her cousin caught

her in his arms, as if her mind were made up for her, and there was no escape.

“I am very much in earnest,” said Captain Englehurst. “Of course Cecilia is rich enough and lovely enough to marry a duke with a dozen castles ; but I swear I think nothing of her riches, though I think very much of her loveliness.”

“Well, Cis, what say you to this impetuous gentleman ?” asked the Squire.

“Send him away, papa,” she replied, “then I’ll tell you.”

Martin Englehurst needed no sending. He went out upon the terrace, wondering a little, but full of hope. Cis knelt down before her father, and buried her pretty face in his lap, and had a little cry, while he softly stroked her curls.

“I can’t make it out, papa,” she said.

“I have been wondering—you know—what I must do? and waiting for Mr. Cotton, and waiting for the Marquis, and now Cousin Martin has come and seems to have taken me. I feel to belong to him already. Is it very, very, very wrong, papa?”

She looked up with tear-showered eyes.

“I suspect Cousin Martin will think it very, very, very right,” said the Squire. “What Castalcicala and Cotton will think is quite another thing. It doesn’t matter much. I am of opinion they will consider the game of shilly-shally a poor one to play. You must take the young fellow, I suspect, Cis.”

“It is so sudden,” she said, plaintively. “I really thought I might like somebody else, papa, though I did not know whom.

What a silly little girl I am! Don't you think you ought to send me to school, or something? I feel quite ashamed of myself."

"You foolish child, listen to me, and obey my command. You had a liking for the Marquis, which might have ripened into love; you had the same sort of liking for young Cotton. That is true, is it not?"

"Yes, papa."

"Whichever of them had asked you first you would have said yes."

"I am not sure, papa."

"Well, that leaves a feather weight on either side; and it scarcely matters, since Master Martin has asked the question, and you have said yes. You can't go back if you wished, and you don't wish. Martin is

a fine fellow. When he declined to go to college, and *would* enter the Navy, we were all annoyed with him. The fact is he had been a perfect nuisance at Shrewsbury, where we sent him, under the impression that he would learn Greek; he learnt Greek, not a doubt of it, for he started a school newspaper in that language, which contained the most cutting remarks on the stupidity of the masters. He got well flogged; but he went on with this Greek journal; and, as the expenditure in birch rods made a serious hole in the school finances, the head master politely asked his guardians (I was one) to remove him. Now his father had wished him to go to Oxford and take orders. Englehurst living is about two thousand a year, and it is pleasant to have a Rector of

one's own family. He would not hear of it. Well as he knew his Greek, he was young enough to be a midshipman, and to sea he would go. I thought it best he should. He went. He has done two or three daring things. He has saved a comrade from drowning, and shot a mutineer. He is now in command of a big ship, when he's hardly more than a boy. You would not think there was so much in him, would you, Cis?"

"Oh, papa, wouldn't I? Do you think I'd care anything for him if I did not see how noble a fellow he is? I am sure he has done more things than you have heard of."

"Little enthusiast! No doubt he has. One of the very earliest Englehursts was a pirate, and the love of the brine runs in our

blood. I wanted to go to sea myself when I was a boy, but my mother cried about it, and so I stayed at home. As to Martin, he's a good fellow Cis; and his mother was your godmother, Cecilia Fane, a lovely creature all through her life; and on her deathbed she whispered to me :

“ ‘Take care of Martin. If he wants to marry your little Cis, do let him.’ ”

Cis was in an April mood, half tears, half sunshine.

“ I shall do what you tell me, papa,” she said, “ but I really am very unhappy about the Marquis and Mr. Cotton. They are both so kind to me.”

“ Well, Cis, you can't marry three gentlemen, you know, and you must not flatter yourself that either of them will break his heart. The masculine heart is made of flint.”

“Is it, papa? Well, the feminine heart is made of diamond, and that’s harder, and if a name is once written upon it, there it stays.”

“And so Martin’s name is written on your heart, my little Cis. I am not sorry. You will still be Cis Englehurst. I shall have you all the longer. Castelcicala would have wanted to run away with you at once to Italy, to show those swarthy creatures what a dainty English maiden is. Now Martin is married to his ship, and ought not to ask for you till he is an admiral, so I shall have a few years of you yet, Cis. Besides, he’ll come and live here, of course, and we’ll have a merry time of it.”

“Poor Mr. Cotton!” said Cis.

“He’ll come to no harm, my child. After all, I suspect that he would have found it

a mistake to marry you. He is a young fellow of a good family, of great ability, of excellent manners; but he would have had many difficulties at first. The obstinate county people would never have been able to forget that he had once been a glazier. Although I'm a country Squire myself, Cis, I am not fond of the majority of country squires. They are generally too poor for their position. A country gentleman with five thousand a year is poorer than a City clerk with three hundred. He must have carriages, horses, servants in livery; he must give dinners and balls, subscribe to charities, preserve his game, and so he has to squeeze the highest possible rent out of his farmers, and to let his labourers live in most miserable cottages. When a man has got an adequate income, there is nothing

pleasanter than being a country gentleman; but I should not care to do it under twenty thousand a year. But now, Cis, shall we call in Martin?"

"I'll go and fetch him, papa." And away she ran to where the stalwart sunburnt seaman walked thoughtfully up and down the terrace.

He looked up with a gay smile as she approached, running along gaily, with a couple of terriers barking at her heels, and setting a hundred white pigeons careering in the radiant air.

"All right!" she cried.

"All right, always," said Martin Englehurst, looking at her with delighted eyes of love.

She was a picture all in white; and her tame white pigeons, that the dogs had sent

high into air, soon came fluttering to her feet, making a pretty framework for the picture. Martin Englehurst was happy. He had dreamt of her, far away at sea, with a hope in his heart that he scarcely dared to cherish. He felt almost certain that he should come too late—that so lovely a fruit must be plucked before he could return. It was a divine surprise for him, and he was happy; and, wanting words to tell her so, told her some other way.

They went back to the Squire.

“So you must have your will, Martin,” he said. “This wayward girl thinks she loves you. But you must wait awhile, my boy; she’s a mere girl. I won’t say she doesn’t know her own mind, because I think she does: but she is too young to marry. So are you. You are just be-

ginning a fine career; stick to it for awhile. See if you can't do something brilliant. Sing

‘The lass I left behind me,’

and let her idea impel you to daring deeds.”

“The worst of it is, there’s no fighting, Squire. I wish there was. There doesn’t seem pluck in Europe to get up a quarrel. Nothing I should like better than to get that precious *Thunderbolt* into the midst of an enemy’s fleet, and see what would happen. I think she’d go to the bottom—engine and turrets and monster guns and all; but I think a good many of the enemy would go with her. It would be fine fun. We want a lesson in sea fights.”

“How dreadfully you talk, Martin!”

said Cis. "You can't care for me a bit, I declare. I'll alter my mind, I will."

The Squire laughed.

"Why, you don't suppose I should go down with the *Thunderbolt*?" said Captain Englehurst. "Not I. I should save everybody—that's the proper thing to do,—and swim ashore on that fellow Webb's principle. The enemy's fleet would be sunk, so that nobody could interrupt me. I should at once telegraph home :

" '*Thunderbolt* met hostile squadron in so-and-so bay. Sunk them in fifty fathoms. Sunk on the top of them. Enemy all drowned. English crew swam ashore to a man, captain being last.'

"Then they'd hold a court-martial upon me, and make me a Rear Admiral, and build a ship on the precise model of the

Thunderbolt, with greater alacrity in sinking."

"Martin can't be in love, papa," said Cis, "he talks such nonsense."

"That's the very reason," Martin replied. "Love and nonsense were born twins. Now look at those two gentlemen coming up towards the terrace steps, and talking as gravely as if they were stockbrokers. Neither of them is in love, I'll swear."

They were Casteleicala and Cotton.

CHAPTER VIII.

TOO LATE !

ASTROLOGOS.—There is a tide in the affairs of man, my
Prince,

Which, taken at the flood, may lead——

RAPHAEL.—To Jericho !

Why do you murder the immortal Englishman ?

Hear this : there is a moment when a woman's heart

Beats to the tune of love, but beats inaudibly

To the poor fools not meant to win and marry her.

The Comedy of Dreams.

YES, the Marquis and the glazier, unconscious comrades in misfortune.

The Marquis, a man of wide but not strong sympathies, continued to like this young

English artisan. There was a Macchiavel-
lian touch about Castelcicala ; he preferred
being the cause of action to being an actor.
The course of life's comedy amused him
more than its *dénoûment*. He looked at
the rivalry between Cotton and himself for
Cis Englehurst as if he were a spectator.
He liked to dally with his romance ; he
was willing to write Cœcilia as many sonnets
as Petrarch wrote to Laura, without
actually coming to the point. English
damsels like a man a little more in earnest.
Charles Cotton was in earnest, very fiercely
in earnest, but he dreaded the thought of
speaking to Miss Englehurst ; he felt the
difference in their positions ; he hated the
idea of appearing a fortune-hunter, a mere
sordid adventurer, in the eyes of the
world ; he was loth to do anything which

might bring trouble to the Squire, to whom he felt profound gratitude.

So both were *too late*—a phrase whose deep meaning the man who has not known is fortunate. As they came up the terrace steps, Castelcicala was talking to Cotton of the imperishable greatness of Italy, and waxing eloquent concerning the poetic and artistic glories of Florence and Venice. On such a theme the Marquis's speech was a song, even when fettered by English idioms: and Cotton, having the apprehensive faculty, listened with real intelligence. It was this desire to obtain knowledge which fascinated Castelcicala, who had a passion for communicating it.

Not long after Martin Englehurst had made his declaration that neither of the two could be in love, they entered the

apartment, and were introduced by the Squire to Captain Englehurst. The Marquis had never met him before ; but he had met many English seamen, and saw that here was a fine specimen of a fine class. He saw much more than this, at a glance, the keen-eyed Marquis. He saw that he was “ dished,” as our grandfathers used to say. For he noted—being, like all Italians of culture, an acute physiognomist—a certain air of reserved triumph in the Captain’s eyes, a certain tremour, half joy, half regret, on Miss Englehurst’s lips, which were quite enough for him. However, he maintained his usual tone ; he saw that Cotton was perfectly blind to the situation ; and he felt more amusement than regret at the unexpected turn of events.

“ Shall you get a long holiday just now, Captain Englehurst ?” he said.

“ A month, I hope. My ship is being overhauled and refitted, and I don't know what else. I must go and see her two or three times ; but I shall not be much the wiser. The fact is, Marquis, they're overdoing science just now in all the navies of the world ; and these big ironclads will never be manageable until we have a recognised class of engineers, men of science, with captain's pay and rank. Then you'd have a fighting captain and a navigating captain.”

“ Excellent idea,” said the Marquis. “ Like our old Roman Consulate, the finest form of government ever constructed. One staid at home to look after Rome, while the other was ready for war when it came. *Divide et impera.*”

“I think it is clear,” said the Squire, “that the man who can understand every wheel and valve and hinge of an immense iron steam locomotive, has not the same kind of power as the man who, if that machine-monster is managed for him, will drive it into action and sink his enemy. To combine the capacity of Horatio Nelson and James Watt in one human brain is a deed which even our impeccable Board of Admiralty could not do at short notice, although they think themselves omnipotent. We shall never have a good fleet till the Admiralty is abolished, and a Secretary of State for the navy appointed.”

“You’re right, sir,” said Captain Englehurst. “That old office is a menagerie of muffs. People seem to think very little of

the loss of the *Captain* and the *Vanguard*; but neither could have happened if the Admiralty were not utterly disorganised, and overrun by mercenary inventors. We feel it, sir, in the Fleet, I can tell you. We see millions wasted on big guns and armour plates—childish affairs if there are not men to wield them—and we have not got the men. All these devices which the naval nations are building up against each other mean cowardice. Give me a good hot tackle, yard to yard, boarders swarming over the side cutlass in hand, and a hundred Englishmen proved equal to two hundred German or French. Now I'm in command of a big tea-kettle. I dare say 'tis a clever contrivance, if I only had the fellow who made it on board to manage it. It's very like Colney Hatch Asylum afloat, with the

certainly that if you turn one screw wrong you'll go to the bottom, and if you turn another wrong you'll blow up sky high. You must all come to Portsmouth and go over it with me, and then you'll see I don't exaggerate."

"I think the idea of a fighting captain and an engineer captain admirable," said the Marquis. "It would, if properly carried out, secure the supremacy of the English navy, for you English are the foremost fighters and most brilliant engineers in the world."

The colloquy ceased. Cis thought it rather dry, but could not be other than amused at Captain Englehurst's cool way of taking the dangers of the deep. She did not half believe him. Besides, she had wholly resolved to make him leave the

service, so soon as the eventful day was fixed. Nor was she far wrong. Had there been a hot war, love would have had to wait, with Tom Englehurst. He'd have loved honour more. But in dull days of peace, with nothing to do but navigate a lumbering iron apparatus of huge bulk, the chief points being to keep it from capsizing or running down something else, where is a career for the old daring briny blood that filled the heroic veins of Nelson, Collingwood, Sidney Smith?

The Squire went to his library for a doze over the day's *Times*. Captain Englehurst and Cis went—heaven knows whither. Castelcicala asked Cotton to come to his sitting-room, and when they were comfortably ensconced in two arm-chairs, in a great bay-window whence the

view could be seen, he deftly rolled a cigarette, and offered it to Cotton, who accepted it. Then having made another for himself, as the smoke clouds sailed through the open window and dissolved into the sunny air like a boy's resolves or a girl's dreams, he said :

“ Well, Cotton, you see what has happened.”

Charles Cotton looked astonished.

“ What do you think of Captain Englehurst ?”

“ A very fine fellow,” said Cotton, “ I should think. Infatuated about the Navy.”

“ That is not his only infatuation,” said Castalcicala. “ He is also infatuated with Miss Englehurst—and she with him.”

“ What !” said Cotton, putting the wrong end of his cigarette into his mouth, with

that fantastic blundering which too often spoils romantic moments.

“Could you not see it? Look here, Cotton: I knew you loved that pretty creature. I also love her. I would not step between her and you. I thought it would be a fine thing for you, a young Englishman of another class, to win the Squire’s delicious daughter.”

“You could not have been much in love with her, Marquis.”

“You English do not understand Italian love. With you it is the possession of the lady that you crave: with us it is the happiness of the lady. Could I have been sure that she would have been happier with me than with you, I would have spoken the supreme word long ago, and she would have answered, ‘Yes.’”

“Are you so sure?”

“Well, no. Who can be sure of a lady’s thoughts? It is like questioning a radiant cloud of gold what colour it will turn next. But I think she would have said *Yes* to me, and I think she would have said *Yes* to you, and now I can see full well that she has said *Yes* to some one else.”

“Captain Englehurst?”

“Yes, and he is better fitted for her than either you or I. He will settle down here, and be another Squire Englehurst. I should have taken her to Italy. You would have taken the name and estates of Englehurst with an uneasy feeling of unfitness.”

“I suppose that is true,” said Cotton; “but I love her.”

“I comfort you, as Job was comforted.

You should have told her you loved her. Had you spoken in time you would have succeeded. I held back for you. I love her, as I have said, with the love of Italy—the desire to see your best-beloved happy, even though it be another who makes her happy. I am satisfied that her cousin, the Captain, will make her happier than either you or I could make her; and this being so, I accept my destiny, and am only sorry for you, who are not quite so philosophic.”

“I will be true to my motto,” said Cotton. “*In utraque fortuna paratus.*”

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARQUIS ON HIS TRAVELS.

“ Let rogues be fixed, who have no habitation ;
A gentleman may wander.”

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

CASTELCICALA, though he bore his disappointment so lightly, was none the less disappointed. He had idealized Cecilia Englehurst into a heroine of the marvellous Italian type, with passion unrestrainable, and power that could not be quelled, whereas she was an English girl of the higher type, whose passion would never break loose, by reason of the reserve

of power beyond. It was just the difference between a quiet English river and an Alpine torrent. The Marquis began to perceive that he had not quite mastered the English character. He said to himself, after he had done his best to console Cotton,

“These English are a puzzle. I have been among them so long that I thought I understood them. I don’t, clearly. That pretty child seemed to like my love-songs—seemed also to like young Cotton; and now she falls at the touch of her cousin, the Captain. Well, he’s a fine young fellow, and I hope they will get on well together.”

Thus he soliloquised; meanwhile a thought was slowly forming in his brain—“like a pearl in an oyster,” as Arthur

Clough has it—of getting back to Italy, and doing something there. He had about as many palaces as that King of Bohemia whose story Corporal Trim could never finish, had castles. And he was quite as *unfortunate* as Sterne's famous King of Bohemia, for he hated living in any one of his palaces *alone*, and he had never been able to find the lady who could help him to bear the splendour of state, which he loved well enough when not lonely. He had very seriously thought of Cis Englehurst, but he had delayed too long, and wooed in too dilettante a fashion. The Captain's bluff method suited Cis best, though she liked the Marquis's gay love-songs, that might mean either something or nothing. There was no doubt Tom Englehurst meant something; and that energetic certainty is

the great fact in love-making, depend upon it. A whole ream of the most delicately-tuned love sonnets shall be light in the dainty balance of a maiden's brain against one true lover's kiss.

Leaving Cotton to his fate, and the Captain to his pleasant wooing, Castalcicala started off to loiter through England one way and another. He told the Squire he was away on an excursion; and the Squire, who knew his irregular habits, asked no questions. Very old acquaintance, they had, and indeed could have, slight knowledge of each other; and the Squire quite pitied the Marquis for being, as he fancied, "hard hit" by Cis, and anxious to seek refuge in solitude. He did not understand that it was impossible for the Marquis to be hard hit by anybody.

“I am off for a ramble,” Castelcicala said to Cotton. “What are you going to do?”

“I mean to stay in my uncle Richard’s cottage for a time, and think a little about it.”

“With the Squire’s money you have a choice of any career,” said the Marquis.

“I shall not accept the Squire’s generous offer. What my uncle left behind him will start me well enough. I prefer to work my own way with what is fairly my own. Good-bye, Marquis. I have been in a fool’s paradise for a time, the victim of a magic pane of glass. My eyes are open now, and I mean to do my own work in my own way.”

“You are right,” said Castelcicala. “If either you or I had won Cecilia, it would have been a mistake.”

Therewith they parted. The Marquis, wanting to see some part of England he never yet had seen, made his way to London, got into the limited mail at Euston with a ticket for Edinburgh or Glasgow—I forget which,—and found himself with twenty minutes for dinner in what looked like a mediæval hall, but was really a refreshment-room. William of Deloraine would have seemed more in character there than the gentlemen in Ulster coats who were the principal figures at the long oak table under the raftered roof. Much amused was the Marquis—so much amused, indeed, that he took no note of the bell ringing for departure, and the general rush of Ulsters with men carefully hidden inside them, and suddenly found himself, like Brougham in the Bon

Gualtier ballad, "alone within the room." He was in a reverie, pondering as to these Englishmen, all in the same coats, all rushing north on the same errand, without the least idea that people might occasionally think for themselves. He was in a state of subdued cynicism, the Marquis, as he sipped a cup of unmistakable Mocha, with a *chasse* of old cognac.

He had been marked down as a swell by the waiters, and Breffry, landlord of the County Hotel, presently ventured to accost him.

"Do you stay here to-night, sir?" he said. "We have first-class accommodation."

And there he stood bowing, a white-headed Boniface, who had for many a long

year given good dinners, and charged for them.

The Marquis was aroused from his reverie.

“I am going to Edinburgh, or Glasgow—which is it? O, here’s my ticket. Edinburgh.”

“Train’s gone,” said an officious waiter.

“And my luggage with it, no doubt. Landlord, can you telegraph for it?—and I’ll stay here. Telegraph at once.”

He gave the waiter a sovereign for telegraph purposes, and therewith his card, which, with its coronet (a foreign custom), greatly impressed Breffry and the waiters. Still I *have* met a swindler with a coronet on his card: and I think he was too successful in Vienna a few years ago. The Marquis, ushered by Boniface Breffry,

found himself in very comfortable quarters ; a pleasant fire burnt in a room which many travellers had used before, and which therefore was not in its first freshness, but which had not become sordid. He dismissed the bowing landlord, and returned to his reverie.

O reverie ! O day-dream ! What a delight thou art ! And, bringing ideal revelations (are they from Olympus or Parnassus ?), thou bringest also power to defy the grosser world by the apocalypse of a finer world within the soul of man. Do I grow Bulwer-Lyttonish ? Forgive me, gentle reader. Let me say, without apostrophe, that reverie is a delicious and pregnant mood of thought. Poet, and politician, and philosopher often think most when they are thinking about nothing.

Had you asked the Marquis what he thought about, next morning, you would have found him with very little to say on the subject. The delight of pure reverie is that it crystallises; and, when you are thinking of one thing, you are preparing the brain to work on another. Had I two right hands, I could write two stories at a time. No thought that crosses the mind—as a bird suddenly crosses a garden—is useless. And the deep dim pondering over things unknowable—over the blunders of the past and the mysteries of the future—have all their worth, though they may seem at the time devoid of significance.

When the Marquis aroused himself from his reverie, it was growing late. The clock on the mantelpiece said twelve; his

own watch said half an hour later. He took a candle, walked out into the corridor, turned to the left to his bedroom.

Whether a man turns to the right or the left may oftentimes change the whole current of his life. The Marquis understood the waiter to say,

“Bedroom to the left, my lord.”

Whether the Marquis’s hearing or the waiter’s articulation was in fault, will never be known ; but when Casteleicala having turned to the left, opened the door, he beheld a lady with splendid bare shoulders and a wealth of golden hair, calmly combing that hair in front of a mirror. She probably expected her maid, for she looked round quietly ; but when she saw a gentleman, she rose and said,

“ You mistake, sir.”

Castelcicala stood still a moment. Then he exclaimed—

“Why, Juanita! No! Is it?”

The beautiful woman fell on her knees before him, and caught his hands in hers, and kissed them with kisses of fire.

“O Raphael,” she cried, “it is thou, it is thou! Never did I think to see thee again. O Raphael, next after God to me!”

“Be calm, Juanita,” he said, “I only did for you what was the duty of a gentleman. Forget it, child. How beautiful you have grown in these four years! Are you married yet?”

“Married!” she cried, indignantly. “There is but one man in the whole world I would marry, and for him I am not good enough.”

“And what brings you here, Juanita?” he asked, with delicate modulation of her musical name.

“Well, I came to see England; but the Fates brought me to see *you*. O Raphael! To have seen you again! I could die this instant.”

“Better to live this instant, Juanita, and as many more instants as we can manage to live happily. Your maid is, I suppose, discreetly keeping in the background. The intense respectability of an English inn would, I fear, be much shocked by our having this chat after midnight. Now suppose I catechise you, Juanita. Will you answer true?”

“Every word.”

“Whom do you love?”

“Raphael.”

“Why?”

“Because I love him.”

“No other reason?”

“Because he is the best of men.”

“Rather vague, child. No other?”

“Because he killed a man for my sake, without knowing me.”

“Well, Juanita,” said the Marquis, “of that I am rather proud. Not of killing the man, for the villain was not a man, and it ought to have been the executioner’s business. But what a glorious summer day it was! I rode along that wide green glade between the great chestnuts, drinking in the delight of an intoxicating summer. There was a drowsy heat. Suddenly, amid the soft whispers of noon, I heard a suppressed scream. I put the mare into a gallop, and saw *you* struggling

with a scoundrel. One touch on the temple with the heavy end of my whip sent him into the next world—if for such wretches there is a next world. And then we found out we were very—very distant relations, Juanita. Do you remember?”

“Do I remember? Raphael, I have dreamt of you, day and night, ever since. Go away, please, go away; but just let me once kiss you again.”

“I will never go away, Juanita. I give you a kiss that lasts for ever.”

CHAPTER X.

JUANITA.

ASTROLOGOS.—You want to know your maddest friend—
ask Sirius;

Your wickedest—a Pleiad ran away with him.

Your strongest—take a calm half-hour with Jupiter.

ALOUETTE.—The one who loves you best?

ASTROLOGOS.—Ask Venus, little one.

The Comedy of Dreams.

CASTELCICALA, sacrificing to that decorum which is the highest virtue of our English race—for there is not such a proper and demure race anywhere, and we all subscribe to the Society for the Suppression of Vice—left Juanita's chamber and

found his way to his own. A pleasant fire burnt there ; he threw himself into an easy chair, and reflected upon his position. Odd, that he should accidentally, at an English railway hotel, meet the girl (his second cousin, or something of that sort) whom accidentally he had saved from insult about four years ago. She was a mere girl then. She had bright hair of unalloyed gold, and eyes like sapphires, and a sweet soft form whose curves were yet to come. Now, she was a glorious woman. The Marquis felt no remorse that in an Italian woodland he had killed a cur who insulted her. He would have killed any number of curs with the like provocation. He reflected in quiet fashion, with the fire smouldering in front of him.

“ Juanita !” he thought. “ She is here.

She is lovelier than ever. She is full of fire and life. There's a sunset in her hair and a sunrise in her eyes. Only, unluckily, she's too easy ; that's the nuisance, confound it ! If she'd only say *No* and give a little trouble, I should call her the most loveable little thing that ever wore a smock. Confound it ! I'll go to bed, and see what to-morrow brings forth."

And Juanita. Her maid came presently. She sat with tired eyelids while the girl carefully combed her great wealth of golden hair. She was very weary ; but the sudden surprise of meeting the Marquis had astonished and awakened her. Never had she expected to see him any more. That dread day in the Italian woodland well she remembered, and the careless contemptuous strength with which the Marquis had struck

down the ruffian who insulted her. He had the force and grace of Apollo. He rode beneath the great chestnuts, calm and self-centred as a god. He struck the villain to the earth with a divine certainty. He raised her, poor ruffled struggling creature, from the green turf where she lay amid crushed cyclamen, with the reverence of a true gentleman. As he took her into Florence, and talked of matters that might soothe her, and discovered (to her delight) that there was remote relationship between them, she threw her heart at his feet, saying no word. She had seen, as she deemed, the noblest and bravest of men. She determined, with the true passion of Italy, to love no other, to marry no other.

Providence, that vague committee whose *quorum* we cannot know, which modern

pious polytheists have invented as a kind of Cabinet Council for governing the world, brought Juanita to Breffry's Hotel, in that northern city. She had surrendered all hope of seeing the Marquis again. She did not know he was in England. She was travelling for distraction. That miraculous moment in the chestnut wood, when Castelcicala killed a man for her rescue, dwelt deeply in her memory ; but she had neither seen nor heard of him in the interval of time, and this sudden meeting took her by surprise.

When her maid left her, Juanita sat by the fire and reflected. She was not at all a clever woman. Much as I like clever women, I cannot deny that women who are not at all clever are often very charming. Of this class was Juanita. She was igno-

rant as a bird. She enjoyed life with a birdlike capacity, and had even a birdlike faculty of song. But religion (save as pure faith and worship) and philosophy, and the various matters which the strong-minded sex of these advanced times approve, were to her as nothing. She was just a wonderfully lovely woman; no more, no less. The Hebrews tell us that the Seraphim *love*, the Cherubim *know*. Juanita was a feminine Seraph. She did not want to know anything at all, but she did want to love, and in Raphael, Marquis de Castelcicala, she had seen the man she longed to love. And here they were, by what strange accident! under the same roof, in an hotel in northern England.

Juanita! What are we to say of you? How are we to analyse such a very naughty

girl, whose sole idea was to marry for love. It is so wrong. Daughters of England! (as Mrs. Ellis would say, if she still lives to write nonsense) discourage the awful idea. Marry for rank, and be Countesses. Marry for money, and spend fifty thousand a year. Marry for anything but love, which is a trivial and useless affair, only recommended by those untrustworthy teachers, the poets.

I fear that Juanita had a restless sleep that night. She dreamt all manner of ridiculous dreams. She imagined herself Ganymede, caught up and whirled through the air by the Olympian Eagle. When she awoke in the morning it was with a feeling of strange doubt. What the Marquis had said to her made her believe that he really loved her; but her life had been strangely and sadly troubled, and she hardly thought

herself worthy to be his wife. For she idolized him. She remembered the day, in the free forest, when, with a stern contempt, he struck to the earth the boor who insulted her. She remembered his godlike ease, his utter fearlessness. There was a fear in her heart that, with a lofty chivalry, he might profess to love her out of sheer pity. She did not understand him, nor did he understand her.

For the Marquis was not a man to love passionately; he was a man to love poetically. If a lady loved him, well: he would be her knight and her poet as well as her husband; would use sword and pen in her service to the utmost. But if she loved not, he would turn away. Let some other pluck the flower which for me has no fragrance. That was Castelcicala's idea.

How should Juanita know that by showing her intense love for him she had done the very thing to delight that capricious mind, that eclectic intellect? She came down to her room, after dressing very slowly, in a tremulous state. The commonplace breakfast of an English country hotel was on the table. Imagine rashers of bacon and buttered toast and coffee or tea, when your brain is in a whirl, when you have had a night dream—haunted with a morning of crisis before you! This was Juanita's fate. She could have cried; but her maid and a very white-neck-tied waiter were in attendance. So she crushed back her tears, and dallied with her bacon, and longed for courage enough to order a glass of cognac or a pint of champagne.

I care about money. I don't—I wish I had

“When things are at the worst, they mend.” In this adage I quite believe, but venture to say (from experience) that it is hard to determine when things *are* at the worst. I have had a good many “worsts;” and, as I defy the evil destinies, I commonly fight through them somehow or other.

Whether things were at the worst with Juanita I cannot say, but they suddenly mended. A tap at the door. Enter the Marquis de Castelcicala. Much abasement on the part of stiff head waiter, who, being a regular attendant at the Cathedral, doubted whether the young woman was quite exactly what she ought to be, but collapsed into plusquam-decanal humility when he saw the Marquis, whose falcon eye was enough to quell a fool.

“Ah, *cugina mia*,” he said, “you look

weary this morning. You want just a delicate stimulus. If this hotel contains a glass of dry champagne, bring it at once, waiter."

"I am taking tea," said Juanita.

"An original remark," he said. "Tea is the ruin of the middle-class English. No patrician should ever touch it, even at kettledrum. It destroys the nerves. If I had an enemy, it is what I should give him to drink. What is your maid's name?"

"Fifine."

"Euphonious Fifine, intercept that stick of a waiter, and bring in the champagne, and open it yourself. You can open champagne, I suppose?"

"O, oui, M'sieu."

"Very well. When you have opened the champagne you can go. Your lady and I have some private affairs to settle. Remain

in the corridor, and allow no one to come to the door."

"What a tyrant you are!" said Juanita, as Fifine obeyed him without a word. "I am expecting my old chaperon to come down stairs, though this is rather early for her. What will she say?"

He poured her out a glass of champagne.

"Freshen yourself, my child. I am a tyrant, yes; though I hate it; but in no other way can you get through the world without bother. I treat servants with less respect than I treat dogs. There is something in domestic service, the laziness of it, I expect, which makes them irretrievably bad. We have a few good old family servants in Italy, and doubtless there are some elsewhere, but the general run are terrible. Does the champagne refresh you, Juanita?"

“I think it does,” she said, with tearful eyes.

“What charming little fools you girls are!” said Castelcicala, laughing. “Now I know precisely what is in that hare-brained little head of yours. Does Raphael mean it? you think. He does mean it. He never said a thing he did not mean. He loves his delicious little Juanita, and means to marry her, whether she will or not. After which, Juanita may box his ears if she likes.”

“You are very good, Raphael,” she said, with tearful eyes.

“Good! Why? Because I love the most divinely loveable creature I ever saw in my life! You’ve got a nonsensical idea into your pretty little golden head. Because I happen to have a lot of money, you think

less. When I think of you as my wife, I think also that you will help me to spend that money for the good of the people. Come, Juanita, you shall do as you like, and we'll try to be happy when among the people about us, and happier in the sweet secrecy of home."

"I believe all you say," she replied. "I never imagined such happiness. I fear it is wrong to say I loved you from the first instant I saw you, but it is true. And why may I not say what is true?"

"Why, indeed, my darling?" he replied, kissing her red lips with delight. "Now we have plenty of time for love if the years flow calmly, and there are soft summers of lyric rhyme, and warm winters of pleasant gathering. We will try to make life last. I am yours, Juanita."

CHAPTER XI.

JENNY.

* "Some women marry for the sake of tyranny."

I MUST give a chapter to Jenny Vincent, the daughter of the news shop—the gay and fearless adventuress. She brought Amelia home. She took in the situation at a glance; saw what manner of man Laing was, felt much amusement, and a slight notion of a speculative character. The most plausible of men, he was intensely civil to her, and had not the remotest idea that she saw through him quite clearly.

“What had I better do with poor Amelia, Miss Vincent?” he said one day.

“I think she should return to Miss Grimes,” she replied. “She is very happy there, and the education is excellent. I can imagine no pleasanter or wiser management for young ladies.”

“You talk rather like an advertisement,” said Laing, cynically.

“I don’t care to advertise,” said Jenny, with a gay laugh. “The fewer the girls the less the trouble. I hate teaching, but I like girls, so I get on very well. And the girls like me, for I am half a boy, I think, and I can tell them things that may open their eyes.”

“Nothing improper, I hope,” said Mr. Laing, in his most dignified manner.

“Improper, now? Why, sir, what is

improper? Haven't we all eaten of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge? As for Amelia, she's as innocent a creature as ever breathed, and if any man dared say a word against her I'd horsewhip him."

Mr. Laing much admired this young lady's high courage, and in due time sent Amelia back with her to Mrs. Grimes's seminary, where Susanna and Jemima were disgusted to find their real mistress return again. But it was vain to fight against Jenny Vincent. If she made up her mind she would conquer or die. She won over Mrs. Grimes by relieving her of her daughters' dulness, and now she was absolute mistress of the situation. Susanna and Jemima crouched before her.

However, Jenny had no idea of remaining a tutoress all her life. The visit to Scuda-

more Lodge had given her an idea. Why should she not marry Laing, and reform him, and make something of Amelia? Jenny liked power. She had seen the situation as regards Laing. He evidently was a man who wanted to be made, by well-managed curtain-lecturing, to live within his income. Great confidence in her own tongue had Jenny, not, perhaps, without reason. Great belief also had she in her own capacity to manage a man. She thought she knew the golden mean between too much kindness and too much sharpness. All men are manageable, the ladies think: perhaps they are right; I am not going to argue with them in this chapter. The *argumentum ad feminam* is the only reply, and that has never yet been properly worked out in treatises on logic. Indeed,

from Aristotle and Aldrich to Whately and Mill, I think the feminine forms of logic have been ignorantly neglected, and a perfect definition of "a woman's reason" is yet wanting.

It was "a woman's reason" which induced Jenny Vincent, when the holidays came, to accept Mr. Laing's invitation to spend them at Scudamore Lodge with his daughter Amelia. Laing's speculations had been more successful lately. He had had a few "straight tips" that really were straight. He had never even been asked for that five hundred he got from Crake; the Bellasys affair had been too much for the thief syndicate. He talked vaguely of his schemes to Jenny Vincent, who came down in her holidays with Amelia—by that young lady's special request,—and was surprised

to find that she knew quite as much as he did—perhaps a little more. She, to his surprise, knew all the dodges of the Stock Exchange, having heard her father talk wisely with his customers.

“Egyptians down again,” he would say.
“Strange, after the Suez loan.”

“Not at all strange, sir,” said the bright-eyed sallow girl. “Bears in the market. They are getting them low for the rise that *must* come. If I had a few thousands, instead of a few farthings, I’d buy Khedives.”

“What a devilish clever girl!” mused Mr. Laing to himself. “I believe she’d be a useful sort of wife. And, by Jove! if she isn’t pretty, she’s stylish. She’d go anywhere. She’d put my affairs in order like a bird. I’ll sleep upon it.”

Thus he thought, and Jenny saw those

thoughts of his arising in his brain as clearly as if he had articulated them. She knew her man. Jenny had long since resigned the idea of a chivalrous poetic lover ; clever girl and good girl though she was, this was too high a flight for her. In settling down on an elderly gentleman who might have been her father, poor Jenny will doubtless be sharply criticised by the romantic young ladies (I hope they are numerous, multitudinous, uncountable) who read my novels. Now I like romantic young ladies : and if I were accused of committing an offence in the High Court of Love and Chivalry, I should wish to be tried by a jury of that soft sweet material. But I hope they will forgive Jenny. She wasn't pretty. She wanted a career. She liked Amelia, and thought she could make

something of her. So she decided that she would be Mrs. Laing—long before the idea had completely formed itself in Mr. Laing's head.

Indeed, she had, before making her approaches, slightly startled Amelia by a sudden query.

“How should you like to have to call me mamma?”

Poor Amelia, who idolised her, was putting her hair into nocturnal order. She dropped brush and comb suddenly. Jenny, who was lazily lounging in a low chair before her bedroom fire, burst into a merry laugh, and said,

“You seem frightened, Amelia. Suppose I were to marry your papa. Should you be sorry? Think. If you should, I will not.”

“Has he really asked you?”

“No, he has not asked me; but I know he will. Now think, Amelia; don't hurry. Should you be more or less happy? It is hard to decide. Take a week if you like.”

“I don't want a minute,” said Amelia, promptly. “I shall be a world happier; and I'll call you mamma at once. There.”

The girl's loyalty delighted Jenny, who was thoroughly loyal in her own way, and would instantly have surrendered her scheme if it would have made Amelia unhappy. No great sacrifice to Jenny; she regarded Mr. Laing as an improvable man, whom she could take in hand and make something of. She, keen-sighted little woman, saw herself clearly enough; estimated aright her own cleverness, her own personal appearance. She had long since given up all idea of a

marriage for love ; no man whom she could tolerate had come near her, none who could appreciate a style that was better than mere beauty, a tact that was almost genius. So Jenny felt herself marked out by Fate for some sort of "scratch" marriage, and Mr. Laing offered an available opportunity.

"Go away to bed, Amelia," she said, "and say and think no more about it. If your papa asks me, and I say yes, you will very soon know. Good night."

Amelia went away with a hearty hope that it might prove true, for Jenny had obtained an influence over her which had done her a world of good, rousing her from the natural lethargy which isolation had increased. As to Jenny Vincent, she sat before the fire and pondered. Scudamore Lodge was a pleasant place enough, and

Mr. Laing was only a slightly objectionable "incumbrance." She had her way at Mrs. Grimes's, and there was fun in tyrannizing over Susanna and Jemima; but teaching was rather a bore, and she would, at any rate, be a somebody as Mrs. Laing, whereas now she was a nobody. She went to bed with the virtuous resolve to be a somebody.

Next morning she came downstairs radiant and vivacious, looking almost pretty, with a colour on her usually pale cheeks from the cold air. She was muffled up in a plain stuff, yet deftly made to fit her trim little figure—for Jenny knew that her figure was her strong point (after her eyes) and she was always her own dressmaker. Mr. Laing was delighted—she seemed to make the bacon crisper and the coffee more fragrant. As for Amelia, she was quite

tremulous with the desire that what Jenny had said might come true.

“Miss Vincent,” said Laing, who during breakfast had been looking through his usual vast pile of letters, “would you mind coming to my study for an hour, and helping me a little? I daresay Amelia can find occupation meanwhile.”

“With pleasure,” she said. “I will give Amelia some occupation. It is just as well not to waste the holidays entirely. You will find a copy of *La Bruyère* on my table upstairs, Amelia. Translate a few pages, and write out the translation carefully, in your best English. And be sure you punctuate it well.”

Amelia signified obedience with a curtsy, almost saying “Yes, mamma!” but happily pausing in time. Mr. Laing led the way to

his study (unstudying men always have a study), thinking to himself,

“How capitally she manages that tiresome girl! What a wife she would make!”

He threw his letters on the study table, and sat down, pre-occupied, while Jenny stood with her hands crossed in front of her, as if awaiting orders. A whirl of ideas went through his mind. He did not see that she was standing there, a female statue of Patience, elegantly posed on a study carpet, smiling at male Perplexity. How long it was before he awoke to the situation Jenny knew not, but she was willing to wait. When he did see the state of affairs, he said—

“O, Miss Vincent, do take a chair. I am so absent when I have business to attend to. Please pardon me.”

“You should take a secretary, Mr. Laing,” she said, sitting at his request.

“Secretaries are dull fellows. I have tried them. They write badly and spell badly. They are sly fellows too. They get at your secrets, and make use of them. No secretaries for me, Miss Vincent, thank you.”

“Why not try to make Amelia useful, Mr. Laing? She is wonderfully improved.”

“Amelia! Yes, I know she is improved, so long as you are with her. If she were left alone again she would subside into her normal stagnation. Now tell me, Miss Vincent, if I wanted to get the population of a town, or its distance from London, or the politics of its representatives, from books of reference, do you think Amelia could tell me? Do you think she could

give me a short account of the *Times* money article, so as to save my reading it?"

"Don't you expect too much from a mere woman?" asked Jenny, with a laugh.

"I know one woman who could do that, and very much more."

"I should very much like to know her also," quoth Jenny.

"You ought to know her, for I mean you," said Laing, warming to his work.

"And now, Miss Vincent, if you will be my secretary I shall be eternally obliged to you—but you must also be my wife."

She rose from her seat and stood before him.

"I am a nobody, Mr. Laing. I am a small shopkeeper's daughter. That is one thing for you to consider, which concerns you."

“I have considered it,” he said. “I think nothing of it.”

“Very well. There is another thing which concerns me. If I am to be your wife and secretary I must also be your partner. I must know all your affairs. I don't mean your love affairs, you know, for I am a poor homely little thing, and beauty or wit may tempt you to be naughty. I mean your business affairs. You must let me help you in all things, and to do this I must know everything. What do you say?”

“That you are the cleverest woman in the world, and that I agree.”

“One thing more. As to Amelia. She is a good girl, but wants careful treatment. Leave her entirely to me, and I'll marry her well.”

“I shall be only too glad to leave her to you. I never could manage her.”

“Thank you,” she said. And then Jenny began to cry a little: the strongest women must have their tears, the absinthe of the eyes.

“Excuse me,” she said, as she dried her eyes (hazel and bright) with a kerchief rose-scented; “this is a very, very business-like courtship, but I cannot help thinking that I am giving you my life. I think I should like to try to love you.”

There was manhood even in Laing. He could not resist this. He felt an electric force in the girl that called on something latent within himself. He was more a man that moment than since he entered the world. May his manliness last. It will not be his wife's fault if it does not, for she has

(to anticipate) taken him well in hand, and knows his affairs to the uttermost farthing, and leads him very easily with the silken strings of a higher capacity. He is beginning indeed to fancy he loves her. Perhaps he will in time. I should be sorry to imagine mortal man or woman without the rudimentary capacity to love.

Amelia is not married ; but that she will be, and well married too, is it not certain, since Jenny Vincent hath said it ? Meanwhile she is growing much cleverer than she used to be, and is a passionate adorer of "Mamma."

CHAPTER XII.

AT BEDFONT AGAIN.

“Ah, Perdita the lost! How doubly Perdita!”

THE blind gardener at Bedfont was sitting in the sunshine, when he heard a step that he knew. The glorious compensations of human misfortune ought to be continually in our thoughts. God never takes away without a gift in return. Had not Milton lost his bodily sight, would his eagle vision have pierced the dazzling heights of Heaven, the lurid, sulphurous depths of Pandæmonium? I think not;

even as I also think that there was but one Homer, and that, as tradition tells us, he was blind, and that he could not have seen Zeus on Olympus, or Circe in her magic island, with mere corporal vision. Happily, the Homeric critics read no modern stories, so my "humble opinion" will probably remain uncastigated by the erudite folk who know more of Homer than knew Homer himself.

Mr. Ringwood's senses were singularly sharpened by his loss of vision. So acute now was his sense of smell that he could tell one rose from another by it; and, having always been a great grower of new varieties, he had become more successful than ever, through the marvellous development of his faculty of touch. Only the human finger, the most delicate instrument

God has deigned to create, can wed two roses, so that a baby rose may be born with the glory of its sire and the beauty of its mother. The blind gardener had greater success herein after than before his blindness. It was likewise with other senses. His hearing became so exquisite that he recognised everyone by the tread. His taste enabled him to grow fruit with greater success, and eat dinner with greater delight. So much for the five physical senses; whether the two metaphysical senses, which complete the seven, grew with the loss of eyesight, must be left to the gardener himself.

The step which the gardener heard was Charles Cotton's. Mr. Ringwood was sitting, as was his constant habit, in the sunshine outside his door, absorbing the health-

ful shafts of Helios. He turned his sightless eyes towards the new-comer, and stretched out his hand.

“Welcome, friend,” he said. “I know by your step that you have met with what men call disappointment. So have I. The French are not often happy in their proverbs, but they have one great saying: *L’homme propose, Dieu dispose*. To me disappointment is a trifle, for I have to meet the angel Azrael by appointment soon; but you are young, and of course your trouble is love.”

“I was a dreamer,” said Cotton. “You have guessed right. It was ‘the love of the moth for the star.’”

“Pity that insects so easily singed should take to astrology. When first you came this way, thrown into my garden by curious

chance, I prophesied that you would either turn out a devilish good fellow or go straight downhill to the devil. You have not taken that *facilis descensus*, I know."

"I hope not," said Cotton. "I have made a mistake, that is all. I suppose it happens to most of us at the beginning of life."

"And very often at the end," said the old gardener, quietly. "I am alone here now—except for my three girls. Perdita is gone. Have you heard?"

"Not a word," said Cotton. "I had hoped to see her here and ask her advice. What has happened?"

"She has gone. She is now Lady Belasys. I thought the Marquis might have told you."

"Well," quoth Cotton, "the Marquis and

I have both met with the same defeat, I fancy. We both loved the same lady . . . and she loved somebody else."

"What a very old story!" said Mr. Ringwood. "So you make a fresh start. And you come down for my poor Perdita's advice. Ah, she is a fashionable lady now, and has more important duties. But you can tell your troubles to Hyacinth, or Ixia, or Anemone, if you like; boys like you are fond of telling their troubles to girls."

Cotton laughed.

"True enough, sir," he said. "One might parody the Irishman's reply to a Chartist lecturer, who asked, 'Isn't one man as good as another?' 'Better too,' said Paddy. And when you've found out that the girl you loved didn't think very much of you, the same sort of question and answer is natural."

“Natural, perhaps, but not noble,” said the gardener. “A real love-wound leaves a scar that cannot heal. But I give you the benefit of the doubt, and assume that you were not really in love, but only fascinated—that it was just a fresh revelation of beauty that touched you—that you have yet to wait for the only possible she. And now give me your arm, friend Cotton, and we will have some fruit and wine and discourse.”

He blew a silver whistle which hung at his button-hole, and the three girls came racing from different parts of the garden, and were overjoyed to see Charles Cotton. Soon their dainty hands had put on the table the kind of entertainment which the gardener loved. Cotton was delighted. The three children seemed to have grown more charming since he saw them last; their

lips had a happier curve, their ankles were finer. They were still children.

“You mean to remain here?” said Cotton, in the course of conversation.

“I hardly know,” said the gardener. “When I agreed with Bellasys that Perdita might leave me if she liked, he suggested that I should sell this freehold of mine, and retire. I don’t much care to do it. I like life in the open air, and the girls enjoy it, and I’m in no hurry to stop work. However, he said he’d send me an honest lawyer, and I told him he might, for it was one of the few animals I’d never yet seen, or something of the sort. Well, Mr. Cotton, the honest lawyer came. An unpleasant smell reached me as he passed the garden gate. It vanquished the fragrance of the flowers. It was a mixture of that

scoundrel attorney's natural smell and some cheap scent which he used to disguise it. I, whose nostrils have been educated by the garden-odours of God, smelt the Old Jewry or Lincoln's Inn at once. Had he been an honest lawyer, as Bellasys fondly imagined, he could not thus have smelt; but, even were that an unhappy possibility, no honest man would disguise his natural ill flavour by a nasty mixture of the perfumer's. So, when I came to hear his proposals, I was not at all surprised to find that he thought he should get a good deal out of me. He talked of a mysterious client, who had many thousands to invest; this client was liberal and prompt in payment, but liked fair interest on his capital; and he mentioned a price per acre on the land, about a third of what I should get if I sold it by

auction. I said but little to the lawyer, except that I had not yet made up my mind ; and when he was gone, to fumigate the place, I smoked a quiet cigar, a luxury I seldom need, and decided that, though Lord Bellasys may be a judge of pretty women, he is not the man to discover an honest lawyer."

The girls laughed, a merry chorus.

" Yes," said Hyacinth, " that lawyer was delightful. He had such a shiny hat, such glossy clothes, such a small silk umbrella, but his shirt was grey flannel, and he wore a paper collar that looked a week old. His hair was all pomatum, and his hands all dirt, and his pockets were bursting with blue papers. We were so glad when he went away ; and you know, Mr. Cotton, we don't a bit want to go away from here."

Perhaps the children seemed a trifle gayer than under Perdita's kind yet despotic rule. They had very much their own way, but they did their several duties, and never let their father be dull. The early-to-bed system had been stretched into a pleasant laxity, for the gardener now found his evenings lonely, and was glad to have his children around him. And he had recalled for their benefit and his own amusement a forgotten art. In his younger days he had intensely loved instrumental music, and it seemed to him suddenly that music might solace his blindness as it had solaced Milton, who, if no gardener, was the Poet of our first Garden. While his sight was unhurt, he had thought more of work than amusement; while Perdita was with him, her pleasant converse sufficed for him; but now

he thought of his boyish fancies, which had been dormant in the brain.

“Hyacinth,” he said one evening, “in the large closet in my bed-room there is an oak chest with two locks and brass binding. You and your sisters try and bring it down here—very carefully, for its contents are precious. It is not heavy.”

The girls brought it down, and set it on the floor where their father could touch it. He felt for the locks, drew out his bunch of keys, and unlocked them.

“Now, Hyacinth,” he said, “take out what you see. There are several trays; lift one at a time very carefully, and tell me what each contains.”

Hyacinth obeyed. The other two girls looked on with wondering eyes. Fitted into the first tray were instruments they had never seen.

“What can they be?” was the cry.

“Hand me one,” said the gardener.

He brought the ivory tube to his lips, and discoursed some quaint gay melody. They were flageolets.

“Now the next,” he said.

A row of flutes—gold, silver, and ebony. He tried the gold one, and found he had not lost his ancient cunning. The girls were mad with delight. They had melody in their souls, inherited from him, and they thirsted for music as the hart for the water brooks—as the lover for his lady’s lips.

There came next a violin and a viola; then a tambourine; then some castanets.

“May we play them, papa?” cried little Anemone. “O, how delightful!”

An instinct seemed to teach her how to use the castanets, and she danced about the

room as gaily, if not as skilfully, as Virgil's Syrian hostess.

The result of that evening's discovery was that the girls tried every one of these instruments. They got on very well with the flageolet, but not with the flute. Hyacinth took madly to the violin, and Ixia to the viola; while little Anemone, who was growing taller and more agile than her sisters, outdid them both with the tambourine and the castanets. They learned entirely by ear, of course. The gardener played tunes that dwelt in his memory on each instrument in turn, and it was not long before they were able to repay him with a gay, though not quite classic, evening concert.

When Hyacinth observed that they did not want to go away from the Bedfont Garden, Cotton replied—

“I should think not. Eve wanted to get out of Eden, but she had more excuse.”

“You seem to like this corner, Mr. Cotton,” quoth the gardener. “Stay to-night, at any rate. You shall have a simple supper, some music, and then to bed. What say you?”

“I say yes, knowing you would not ask me if I were in the way.”

So that evening there was the simple supper—light meats, cream cheese, fresh fruit, the wines of apple and pear; and then the music. Cotton was delighted with the rural concert, which was like the chorus of those old-world nymphs who lived

“When Ariadne was a vintager.”

Royal music could the gardener give from flute of gold; Hyacinth and Ixia played

violin and viola in true consonance; but the fun of the whole thing was when the gardener played a wild Neapolitan air on the flageolet, while the three girls danced, one with the tambourine, and the others with the castanets. It was madcap music.

Charles Cotton, lying wakeful in bed in a long low room, through which a full moon poured its marvellous light, half fancied the whole was a dream, so strange did it seem that such unstudied and spontaneous enjoyment of life could exist in England. Most men resolve to enjoy life, but no man yet enjoyed life who had so resolved.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW CAREER.

“ God was first gardener and Cain first citizen :”

So says an English poet, a forgotten one.

The Comedy of Dreams.

CHARLES COTTON awoke early the next morning. Music and romance had mingled with his dreams. The fantastic airs played on violin and viola, on the tambourine and flageolet, had haunted him through a long corridor of discontinuous vision. He could scarcely believe himself in this sober England, the home of the Stock Exchange and steam, of piety and the

police: was he not in some realm of fairy fable? Had he not climbed Jack's miraculous beanstalk, or worn without knowing it the ring of Aladdin? To meet anything that resembles romance in a market garden not far from London seems almost incredible. But Charles Cotton, of a naturally imaginative temperament, suddenly thrown amid people so different from any he had met before, gave Pegasus his head, and indulged in dreams innumerable. He was in a state of reaction. There was no longer any hope of realizing the dream that had come upon him as he watched beautiful Cis Englehurst through an immemorial pane of glass. He saw how vast a mistake he had made. The girl loved him, he thought, or at least could have loved him; but there came between him and her one of her own race, a gentle-

man by profession, and his chance was gone. Thus Charles Cotton thought of it, during a sleepless night; but he fell into a deep sleep in the morning, from which he was awakened by little Anemone's pulling his hair, and giving him a bunch of grapes.

"Eat some grapes," said the merry child. "We always begin the day with grapes. And when you have eaten them, get up, you lazy fellow. It is almost five o'clock."

"Early hours here," thought Cotton, as he ate his grapes with satisfaction. Fruit in the time of dawn is delicious; and no fruit can touch the grape when in perfection. Unlike Brillat Savarin, I like my wine in pills. Figs in the morning are superb; so are nectarines, so are mulberries. But I think the grape beats them all in the long run.

Aroused by merry young Anemone, and having eaten his grapes, and taken his cold bath, Charles Cotton went down stairs. Breakfast was on the way. Hyacinth was making coffee in a French double globe of glass; Ixia was making an omelet; Anemone was toasting rashers of bacon into delicious crispness. The gardener, in his arm-chair, knew all that was going on, and enjoyed his *prandium* in imaginative anticipation. He welcomed Cotton pleasantly.

“You have slept well, I hope,” he said.

“Delightfully. But I have dreamt all night. This is a palace of dreams.”

“I like people who dream,” said Mr. Ringwood, “and I think people who do not dream must want some faculty of the brain.”

“Coleridge said that of Hazlitt,” replied

Cotton. "I confess I am always dreaming, by day as well as by night."

"It is a fortunate faculty," replied the gardener. "You live two lives, and the higher life is more beneath your command."

"Curious paradox," said Cotton. "By the higher life do you mean the dream-life? Surely that is less under your command than ordinary life."

"The dream-life is the higher life. It is more under the soul's command, because it exists without interruption from the senses. You are in a chamber deaf to sound and blind to light, as Sir Philip Sidney writes; none of the gross external delights or disgusts of humanity come near you—it is absolute isolation."

"Unless you are married," said Cotton.

"Married men are not of much use for

scientific purposes," said the gardener. "You must see the course of my argument. I put it simply thus. Dreams proceed either from God or indigestion. The men who get them from indigestion—the vast majority, I fear—deserve their nightmares. They have eaten too much—a worse crime than drinking too much. But there are those who, in the divine silence of the night, when no raving of inferior humanity can deaden the music of the spheres, or the still small voice of God, hear and see what is wholly beyond the material ear, the material eye."

"And in that revelation you believe?" said Cotton, questioningly.

"In that revelation I believe. The man who has once dreamt a true dream will never doubt the happy inspirations of midnight. I dreamt of you last night."

“You did! And what was the dream?”

“I saw you, with a lovely lady, in an antique room, full of books and pictures. And through a window of that room you could see the ocean, with many ships upon it. And, while you held her hand in yours, she was gazing through that window which overlooked the sea with an intense gaze; but what she longed to see the vision did not betray. Can you not tell me?”

“Another lover, I suppose,” said Cotton, laughing.

“Probably: you cannot cross-examine a dream, or I might have ascertained who the lady and the lover were. Now, Mr. Cotton, I want to ask you a damned impertinent question—at least I believe that is the fashionable phrase—what are you going to do next?”

Charles Cotton could use well a good many workman's tools, and he began to think he might in time use with effect that greatest of all workman's tools, the pen. But what he should do next had not occurred to him. He could afford to wait.

"Whatever comes ready to my hand," said Cotton, remembering the great motto of his house. "I have been through the furnace lately, but I hope there is a little gold left in me."

"We all get our fierce test of fire," said the gardener. "It purifies and strengthens. I never knew a strong man who had not passed through abundant trouble. Samson and Hercules get the hard work, and there is not a giant of them all without his Dalilah or his Omphale."

"No giant am I," replied Cotton, "but I

mean to keep true to myself both in adversity and prosperity. I am well off, for a young fellow starting in life, and a generous offer which I have declined would make me very much better off in most people's judgment. I think otherwise. I know one trade well, and have a smattering of some others, and I have a weak fancy that, having read a little and tried to reflect on what I read, I might use ink as well as putty, the pen as well as the glazier's diamond."

Mr. Ringwood was amused.

"I like your temper, youngster. The world is your oyster, which with diamond or goosequill you will open. Well, I have an offer to make you. Stay here awhile. Look into the science of horticulture, which is the loveliest of all sciences, being, indeed, the first of all. Since Perdita left me—

dear creature ! I hope she may be happy— I have been somewhat troubled. My foreman, Henderson, is as honest as the day, I believe, but he does not look after his subordinates properly, and I can see that I am robbed. If you would take him in hand, simply, you know, as a friend of mine, and look into matters on my authority, you would probably stop this place from going to ruin. I have made money here, and could sell the place for a large sum of money ; but I like my retreat, and shall only give it up if I find it runs to ruin. Why not turn gardener for a time ? My experience, my books, and the best organised nursery garden in England, are at your service, and I'll give you a third of the profits with pleasure."

"I am not worth any such sum, Mr.

Ringwood, and the money question had better be reserved. But I like the idea of living as a gardener, and I will try your work for a time. Only you must not talk about money until you see me of some use."

"We will not *talk* about it," said the gardener, with a humorous smile. "Now, there is something more I want you to do for me."

He hesitated for a few minutes, smiling all the while.

"It is too much to ask, but I'll ask it. Will you keep those three girls in order? They have been thorough hoydens since Perdita left. And will you make them learn something? I don't know what girls ought to learn; but I daresay you know, or, if not, you might ask somebody."

“ I hardly know which seems the more attractive,” said Cotton, “ the garden or the girls. If I can make myself a gardener, I shall certainly feel that I have risen far above the rank of a mere glazier ; for a garden is a poem. As to your daughters, Mr. Ringwood, I don’t think there is much difficulty about keeping them in order. Their love of well-ordered music shows that. I will try to make them learn. I don’t know anything but what I have taught myself, and I have probably taught myself many things wrong. You have many choice old books, and if I have your authority to tell them that they must read certain books, and bring you an account of them, I think that might be of use.”

“ A good idea,” said the gardener. “ But I think girls ought to learn a little mathe-

metics. Couldn't you try Hyacinth with some Euclid and algebra?"

"A hyacinth bulb is not a square root," said Cotton. "If Miss Hyacinth will take a few lessons from me, I hope she will not be greatly bored. Is she not very like her name, very apt to do as she likes, very prompt to rebel? You must not expect me to be a harsh task-master."

"She will be glad enough to learn," said Mr. Ringwood. "Try *her* first. Make it a privilege. The younger girls will be wanting to get their share of learning. Put them off. Say they must wait. Send them to ask me. The contrariness of humanity is so great—especially on the female side—that they will be mad until they are allowed to learn something."

So Charles Cotton found himself installed

as responsible manager of the Bedfont Gardens, and tutor to Miss Hyacinth Ringwood, with Ixia and Anemone in reversion. He was rather amused with his position. Now that the Destinies had checkmated him in his passion for Cis Englehurst, he held closer than ever to the motto of his race. So he went in with all his energy to manage the Bedfont Garden and educate the Bedfont girls. As may be supposed from immemorial precedent (beginning with Eve), the girls gave more trouble than the garden.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CAPTAIN'S FATE.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY.—Prince, we want millions for a myriad ironclads.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER.—Prince, over-taxing much disgusts the Liberals.

RAPHAEL.—What shall I say to all these fiends, Astrologos?

ASTROLOGOS.—Say, *do your business*. Build your ships to swim and fight;

Take tax with fairness of the toiling populace;

Resign your offices, if quite incapable.

RAPHAEL.—They *won't* resign.

ASTROLOGOS.—Because they *are* incapable.

The Comedy of Dreams.

WHILE Martin Englehurst was on a flying visit to the Squire, there reached him a telegram stating that he was

wanted instantly on board the *Thunderbolt*, at that time undergoing some repairs at Plymouth. Getting from Cis a dainty kiss, off he went by the very first train, and found to his dismay that the ship was condemned. It had been built on a new principle by that Association for cultivating Inventors and destroying the Navy, the Board of Admiralty, and it was now simply a speculation for dealers in marine stores. Martin Englehurst, a descendant of Vikings, who loved his ship, and loved to fight a hurricane or an enemy, had tears in his eyes when he saw what had happened.

“I shall send in my papers,” he said to the Port Admiral. “The service is going to the devil. If there’s a war, I’ll go before the mast in the wretchedest tea-kettle they like to build ; but I can’t stand

the service while things are in this state. If the *Thunderbolt* had been caught in a gale as the *Captain* was, not a soul would have lived to tell of it."

The Port Admiral, a sagacious gentleman who never uttered a word to disparage the Board of Admiralty, invited Captain Englehurst to dinner, at which his wife and two daughters were extremely agreeable. There was a general belief in Plymouth that Martin Englehurst was the Squire's heir. Martin, simple-hearted, had no idea that was the reason why he got so many invitations. Not the sole reason, for never was there any man more easily courteous, more fluent and facile in ladies' society. It has been noted of great seamen, and I may mention as examples Sir Francis Drake and Nelson, that they had in them something

feminine. This is apparent in their portraits.

Captain Englehurst dined with the Port Admiral, took a last look at the *Thunderbolt*, a vile hulk of iron foisted on the Admiralty by some plausible inventor, and then went to London and resigned his commission. He had a very comfortable income without marrying our pretty Cis; and he hated the thought of leaving the sea; but he detested the meddle and muddle which seem inalienable from Whitehall, and which cause the fleet to be always inefficient. Before he left town he happened to meet the First Lord, rather a heavy gentleman, at some evening entertainment.

“I have just heard that you have resigned your commission, Mr. Englehurst,” he said, as they were crushed together on a

crowded staircase. "Really, I am very sorry."

So enveloped were they by the snowy trains of ascending Oreads that nothing, save their busts, was discernible. Delicious situation! Englehurst said:

"When there's a war, I'm ready. Give me a staunch ship and a sound crew, and I'll do anything. But, as I stand in the way of other men, who may perhaps like to see these experiments tried, I decide to retire just now. If there is a naval war, I'll fight before the mast—supposing there are any masts in the ship of the future."

Cis was delighted when Martin returned with the tidings that he was no longer captain of the *Thunderbolt*, nor at the call of those impotent potentates, the Lords of the Admiralty.

When *will* that Augæan stable be cleared out, and a Secretary of State for the Navy appointed?

But Cis was a little disgusted because Martin did not seem as happy as he certainly ought to be. Hitherto, this gallant sailor had loved his ship, a crank failure of iron; and a regret for this miserable *Thunderbolt* seemed to oppress him when in happy colloquy with his cousin, a creature not at all a failure, and made of that divine flesh and blood which is God's noblest material.

"You are always thinking about that wretched old ship of yours," said Cis, one day, pulling his hair, as they sat beneath a shade of limes, with something cool close at hand, a dainty result of Cecilia's deft fingers. She passed him a glass of the mixture.

“Too much pine-apple,” he said, “and not quite enough curaçao. Very nice, though, Cousin Cis. Now I wonder—how I wonder,” he said, stretching himself lazily on the soft turf, and looking at her with eyes overbrimmed with love, “whether you ought to love me. You are such a little goddess, you know, and I am only an able seaman. Those other fellows that were after you were much cleverer than I am.”

“What! with a ship in a storm?”

“By Jove, no! I should lick them there.”

“Yes, and your little goddess would help you, if she had the chance. I’ve never known fear, Martin, and I should like a good fight. I think I could command a man-of-war myself.”

“You shall command this man-of-war,”

said Martin, smiting his manly breast. "The worst of it is, Cis, I love you so much."

"I don't object," said Cecilia.

"Don't you? Well, I do. I love you so that I could quarrel with the wind for kissing your pretty cheek, or ruffling your petticoat to find your dainty ancles. I love you so that I would have no man to look on you, except those I knew to be gentlemen. I think of you, dear Cis, as a pure fair saint, a star among women, a lovely light in the calm sky remote; a perfect wife in the sweet time to come."

"And I think of you as a dear old poetical sentimental duffer," said Cis. "You may look shocked if you like. I'm mistress, talk as much blank verse as you please. If you and I marry, Martin,——"

“*If!*” he said.

“Don’t be tragical, dear boy ; there are no ifs between you and me. Let’s say, *When we marry.*”

“We are married at heart now, my beauty,” he said.

There was joyaunce at Englehurst Hall when the marriage between these two youngsters was an affair settled. Squire Englehurst had wished it. It solved a family difficulty. There was a question, which might have cost many thousands had it come before Chancery, as to whether the estates could descend in the female line. The marriage of pretty Cis with the heir presumptive would settle this matter. Not that Martin Englehurst would have troubled the lawyers on such a business.

I do not think anything would have

induced Martin Englehurst to employ an attorney.

I am sure that no power could have made him take action against a lady.

Martin Englehurst is a knightly sort of fellow, you see ; he stamps on the skunk of rascality, and kisses the white hand of beauty. He is, above all things, a man, of the manliest sort. The Greek hero, the Latin vir, the Teuton Herr, describe this class of man—one who may be quite unable to write a poem, or paint a picture, or make a speech, but who is always ready to fight an enemy or love a lady. These are the men who make the poetry of the world. Homer was great, but was not Achilles greater? One did what the other sang. Which was the nobler career? Would you rather be Sir Launcelot of the Lake or Mr.

Alfred Tennyson? Satan, or Mr. John Milton? Harry of Monmouth, or Mr. William Shakespeare? If you want this question worked out with the supersubtle touch of a great poetic analyst, read Mr. Browning's *Cleon*.

The happy hours move forward only too tardily for Martin and Cecilia. The gallant young sailor had taken lovely Cis by storm, and she was happy. She did not give a single sigh either to the Marquis or the glazier. The strong manhood of Martin Englehurst, the power and completeness of the man, seemed to enforce her love. She had never heretofore had her caprices quelled. She was a spoilt child—spoilt by her father, spoilt by her lovers. Martin neither spoilt her nor scolded her; he simply assumed that what he liked she also must like, in a happy unconscious irresistible way.

So Cis had not to change her name. The grandeur of the wedding may be imagined, but shall not here be described. Castelcicala was groomsman, looking the while as cool as if he had never had the least fancy for the lovely bride—nor had he, except artistically. There was no passion about the Marquis. The mellilunatic month was not to be spent in wearisome seclusion; the Squire went off with his children, and they had a pleasant yacht-cruise in the Mediterranean, and saw some of Italy's fairest cities, Venice among the rest. Martin, determined to be captain of something, had bought a schooner, comfortable, but a great flyer, and had christened her the *Cecilia*. As they gaily furrowed the immortal sea, crushing its smooth sapphire into a diamond foam, they felt as if they lived in the ab-

solute youth of the world. And did they not? The love which burnt then burns now. The passion and the power of life are here. We drink the wine of adventure as strong as that of Odysseus—the wine of love as strong as that which maddened Paris.

Let us take leave of Cecilia. They were off Ajaccio, meaning to pass next day an hour or two in the town where the Buonapartes were hatched, to perplex and worry the world. The Squire had turned in. Martin and Cis were pacing the deck. The stars were radiant in a solemn sky. Not a wind stirred. Not a sound arose. The light of the funnel was dim beside the glory of the stars.

“Cis,” said Martin, “a good deal of this would make me poetical—first step to

Colney Hatch. Those stars are more intoxicating than whisky punch. The soft murmur of the sea beneath your namesake's keel is almost as delightful as the gurgle of champagne from the flask. As I do not wish to become a poet, shall we go below and have some supper."

"What a mad boy you are!" said Cis, trying unsuccessfully to pinch him, for he was as hard as nails all over, and might have been used as a projectile without serious injury to anyone but the person he encountered.

The steward, who knew his master's habits, had been ready with a light refectation. Corsican fish are famous, and there was a muraena in vinegar that would have drawn Apicius from his tomb. Cold kid stuffed with chestnuts, and wonderful store of

grapes and figs, completed the supper.

“This is jolly,” said Martin. “May I smoke, Cis?”

“Yes, dear. I’ll light your cigar. What a dear old unpoetical epicure you are!”

“Unpoetical! You graceless minx! When I married you, the most poetical little beauty in the world!”

A kiss. Q. E. D.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END AND . . . THE BEGINNING.

“L’homme propose ; Dieu dispose.”

CHARLES COTTON found gardening and tuition very pleasant. He felt as if he were in Arcadia. Of course there was trouble with the men employed about the place, but he soon got over that, and made them understand that he was practically the master. His marvellous capacity for turning his hand to anything, helped him in this. Working men always respect a man who can do their own work well.

This was a fine faculty of Cotton's, who liked hard work, and did it with an artist's hand.

So he managed the Bedford Gardens well, and the blind gardener was as happy as when Perdita dwelt with him—happier, perhaps, since the caprices of a woman often more than balance her utilities. And the evenings were idyllic; music and chat and easy indolence. However, Cotton did his duty as a tutor. He began with Hyacinth, and made her learn Latin and Euclid. She took to both easily enough. She passed from the flower garden of Virgil's *Bucolics* to the more difficult paths of his *Georgics*. She liked to learn. So did Ixia and Anemone. Listening to his lessons, they wanted to have some for themselves. What with attending to the garden, chatting to the gardeners, and teaching these three

tiresome children, Charles Cotton found his hands pretty full.

He enjoyed it. He forgot his old life, and took to this new idyllic existence with delight. He entirely ignored the past, and regarded Cis Englehurst as a hazy dream. He was in a new world, and the old world might pass away like a setting sun or a vanishing vision. He looked philosophically on the question. The past was done with; the future was beyond calculation; but the present was enjoyable, and he would adhere to it and delight in it.

Hyacinth grew to be something more than his pupil. There was a stir in her young blood, like the stir in the rising sap when spring comes to the front, and she thought——. Well, what did she think? Reader, have you been in love? If not,

throw down the story, and go to the devil. Had she been a scientific little girl, she would doubtless have desired "The Marriage of Completion;" as it was, she only wished for somebody to love. Somebody to love—lawfully, you know, of course—is what few men or women can do without. I should feel a very poor creature if there were not a pleasant group of friends (of both sexes, mind you, for I believe in female friendships) who would not be loyal to me as I to them. But the One to love! That is the light of life.

Hyacinth loved Charles Cotton naturally. Naturally, as she loved him, she grew more like him. She grew taller. She was like a plant freshly tended. She had a softer complexion, as if the sunshine and rain had been more delicate. She was twenty times

as pretty a girl as when Charles Cotton saw her first.

He saw it. He also saw her absolute obedience to his will. It flatters a man greatly when a woman regards him as infallible. Few methods of subjugating a man are equal to subjugating yourself to him. Let it not be thought that Hyacinth did this kind of thing in an artistic way; the pretty child was in love with her tutor, and thought from his cool conduct that he had no love to give her in return. And unluckily she had never learnt the lessons of coquetry.

One day, as Cotton was crossing the garden, the Marquis accosted him.

“Good morning,” he said. “Of course you know the little lady is married.”

“I knew she soon would be,” said Cotton. “I wish her infinite happiness. She is a

lovely creature, and I believe her husband is well worthy of her."

"Well said. He is a fine fellow, of the real old English blood. If there was what you call a row, I should like the Captain with me. But you, my friend; I find you settled here. Have you consoled yourself?"

"I'm happy enough without any definite consolation," said Charles Cotton. "Come and drink some of our perry, and see the old gardener. He loves a visitor."

They went down to the house. Only Anemone was there to do service. The gardener was delighted to talk again with Castelcicala. He always loved a visitor, as Cotton had said. News from the outer world are sweet to sightless eyes.

And they had a pleasant chat, in the midst whereof Castelcicala quietly remarked,

“We have had our grand marriage down at Englehurst—Captain Englehurst to his cousin Cecilia. Quite the right thing, except that the marriage of cousins sometimes has injurious results.”

“Not this time, I hope,” said Cotton.

“The marriage of cousins is a great evil,” said the gardener. “I have written an essay, proving that nearly all the evils of the world, from adultery to petty larceny, result from the marriage of first cousins. I regret to say that essay has never been published, or it might have prevented the sad occurrence of which you have informed me.”

The gardener said more than this, which, for my reader's sake (wise though it was), I shall not record. Castalcicala listened with inimitable courtesy. Cotton had slipped away—on business, of course.

Yes; on business. It took him to the still-room, where Hyacinth was daintily obtaining fresh fragrance from dead flowers. He opened the door. The room was full of stifling steam. There was a strange mixture of odours in it, and Hyacinth was enveloped in the steam of the still, so that she looked extremely moist and diabolically pretty.

Charles Cotton had made up his mind. He said to Hyacinth, in the quietest way in the world :

“Little pupil of mine, do you think you could manage to love your master?”

And she said :

“I might love somebody or other, but I don't mean to have a master, thank you, sir.”

I believe it was in some such easy fashion

that Charlie and Hyacinth settled their affairs. I believe they did wisely. Had he married Cis Englehurst he would have been like a fish out of water. Martin Englehurst, who had commanded a man-of-war, could do anything; but Cotton had not the training to manage a great estate. Well for him that he married Hyacinth.

The Marquis and the Marchioness (Juanita) often came to the famous gardens of Bedford. They shared the gardener's elegant luncheon, cream-cheese and fruit and sparkling perry, with much enjoyment. It was after one of these visits that Charles Cotton said to Hyacinth:

“Child, when shall it be? I know you love me a little.”

“No, I don't,” said Hyacinth. “The idea of loving you a little! I love you as

you love me—a little more—or a little less, I don't quite know. If I only loved you a little, I should not think you worth loving at all. Now ask me, Charlie; ask how much I love you."

"How much? Do you think you are going to measure the infinite? I can tell you how much you love me, darling. Just as much as suits you at the moment. You are as changeful as the sky. But if you can love me enough to say, 'Charlie, I am yours,' all is well, and I am happy."

"Charlie, I am yours," she said, and . . . ah, where is the poet who shall finish that divine sentence?—that diamond dropped from lips of love?

THE END.

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