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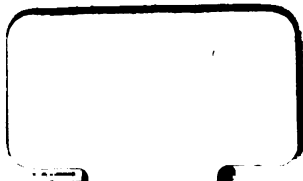
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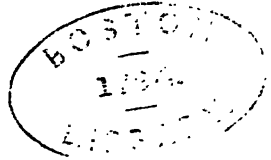
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KITTY.



BY

M. BETHAM EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF

“DOCTOR JACOB,”

“A WINTER WITH THE SWALLOWS,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON :

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
18, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1869.

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LONDON

PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL,
BLENHEIM HOUSE.

CONTENTS
OF
THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE FEAST ENDS	1
II. A THUNDERBOLT FALLS	16
III. "THE WRATH THAT WORKS LIKE MADNESS"	27
IV. PITFALLS	38
V. WHAT DEAD SEA APPLES TASTE OF	54
VI. AT FONTAINEBLEAU	65
VII. A REPRIEVE AND A SENTENCE	77
VIII. LAURA'S SLIPPERS	87
IX. IRE AMANTIUM, ETC.	98
X. PASTURES NEW	112
XI. THE WATERS OF OBLIVION	125
XII. CAUGHT IN A NET	138
XIII. KITTY AND HER PROTÉGÉ	150
XIV. A MYSTERIOUS MISSION	161
XV. PERRY'S PILGRIMAGE	171

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVI. PERRY'S PILGRIMAGE CONTINUED . . .	182
XVII. HOW SIR GEORGE FARED ON HIS ERRAND . . .	191
XVIII. WHAT DR. NORMAN SAID ON KITTY'S BEHALF	201
XIX. WHAT MRS. CORNFORD SAID ON KITTY'S BEHALF	211
XX. KITTY TAKES COUNSEL OF HERSELF . . .	225
XXI. WHAT KITTY SAID ON HER OWN BEHALF . . .	238
XXII. ANCHORED	250
XXIII. THE JOURNEY SOUTH	262
XXIV. "THAT CONFOUNDED FRENCHMAN!" . . .	275

K I T T Y.

CHAPTER I.

THE FEAST ENDS.

“AND now for Perry’s picture,” said Mrs. Cornford, when the merry feast had sped to its close. “I’m sorry you have made such a poor supper, Kitty, but I expected as much. Well, I hope fine clothes and spiced dishes will always agree with you. That’s all, my dear.”

Perry gave her his arm, and they led the way. It was a very dirty staircase they had to ascend, and a very dusty *mansarde* of a studio at the top. Perry led Kitty to a solitary chair which stood in front of his picture.

For some minutes there was a complimentary

silence. Then Kitty struck a key-note of criticism, Vittoria followed her example, and a succession of chords were played by the others. No one praised Perry's work after wholesale amateur fashion, but each criticised it in a vivacious, technical, picturesque way peculiar to themselves.

"Do *you* like the picture?" asked Perry of Kitty, who, for a moment, was absorbed in the act of criticism.

"You know I never quite like your pictures; so, what is the use of asking?" she said, smiling a little impatiently. "I admire them wonderfully, but they don't please me. They are such strange subjects for a meek thing like you to paint," and she laughed, forgetting everything in the pleasure of teasing Perry.

Her frank, familiar manner intoxicated him. He went on to ask,

"Shall I throw up this bit of foreground? Shall I deepen the shadows there, or whiten the lights there?" and a dozen questions, she answering each deliberately. Then he took up his palette and dashed in a little colour whilst she was speaking; and so absorbed were both in

the work, that they were left alone ere they were aware.

"It will be quite your best picture," Kitty said, after a time; "but I think I must go now. The carriage—I was to be sent for at eleven o'clock."

The enchantment was over like a dream. Perry's brush dropped from his hand, and he turned to her, quite speechless with the new full conviction of his misery.

"You said once that you would marry me as soon as I was better off," he began falteringly.

"Oh! Perry, what boys and girls do not make such promises? Forgive me for having made any to you!"

"Can you forgive me for being so unhappy now?" he said. "Doesn't the thought of it prevent your enjoyment sometimes? I don't think I should enjoy purple and fine linen much if I knew you to be starved and naked."

"You reproach me as if I were happy," Kitty said, passionately.

He looked at her searchingly and savagely.

"You women prevaricate so," he said; "you can never summon courage to blurt an ugly

truth. If you are happy, it would be better to confess it!" And he went on to say much more.

Kitty rocked herself to and fro in her chair, listening to his reproaches very meekly. She would have consoled him by tender expressions of friendship, but he stopped her with almost brutal abruptness. What mattered it to him whether she was glad or sorry, so long as they were to part for life? That was the only thing worth considering, and she did not seem to consider it at all, which proved her to be utterly insensible to his feelings. Every now and then she broke the thread of his angry words with a deprecatory word or gesture; once, she laid her hand on his arm,—he rejected the caress as he had done the words, and stood aloof from her.

Kitty felt turning cold as stone. Dr. Norman's calm reproaches had made her sorrowful and ashamed, but Perry's anger revealed to her fearful things. She felt that she had been wicked to him, and though she had blamed herself before, this sort of self-condemnation was new. She saw, as it were, the mustard seed of her own unfaithfulness to him grow up into a

tree before her eyes. She could almost have undone it all.

She began a Litany, having for its burden : " Oh, Perry, have mercy upon me, a miserable sinner ! " But he would have no mercy on her. He was young ; and youth is just, insisting on an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, always. She had robbed him of the sweetest thing in life—of peace. He might find everything else he wanted—money, fame, friends—but he knew that he should never find peace any more, and he was in duty bound to punish her.

Who could blame him ? Who could wonder at him ? He painted a terrible picture of himself, and made her look at it.

" You are young, you will care for somebody else," she ventured to say ; whereupon he smiled in a wild sort of way, caught her hand to his heart for a second, and then asked if they had better not go down—adding, " For I think I have grown a little mad of late, dearest, and don't wish to frighten you."

The child-like abandonment of his manner, coming, as it did, after such a storm of invective,

took Kitty entirely by surprise. She felt so sorely tempted to comfort him for the time. She looked up, her handsome eyes brimming over with pity, and said beseechingly :

“ Dear, dear, dearest Perry, if I cannot marry you, I marry no one else ; if I cannot love you, I love no one else. Let that comfort you.”

It did not comfort him, but such words were sweet to hear, and for the sake of hearing one or two more, he lingered and lingered. At last, Binnie’s voice was heard on the threshold.

“ A carriage—such a grand carriage for Kitty !” and at that sound Perry grew fierce and frigid again. They descended in silence.

“ Well, if you never condescend to cross this threshold any more, here’s my love, and good luck to you, Kitty !” said Mrs. Cornford. “ I hate your ways, but for the life of me I can’t help liking you.”

Kitty smiled, and embraced her warmly.

“ Oh, Polly, how you try to put me out of temper ! But I never am out of temper, you know, and so I shall kiss you and come again.”

“ Yes, that’s the way of you worldly-minded

people, you always kiss and come again. Kitty, I've no hope of you."

Kitty turned round to the little circle, giving a hand and a cordial word to each, and keeping a pitiful, penitent, sideways look for Perry always.

"Good-bye, dearest Vittoria. I will not forget to send you that new volume of art-criticism we talked of. Good-bye, M. Puig. I am enchanted to have met the author of *Les derniers Amours*. Adieu, Tommie and Mimi: adieu, dear Binnie; you shall get your promised doll in a day or two;" and then Perry wrapped her in her rich velvet cloak and led her downstairs.

They talked of ordinary things quite calmly. Had she seen Emile Augier's new piece? Had she read Feuillet's last novel commencing in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, and whom was the heroine going to marry? Did Kitty ever go into the studios? Did Perry ever hear the lectures at the Collège de France? And so on.

Then he put her into the carriage, carefully but coldly.

"Are you well wrapped up? the night is chilly," he said.

"Quite well, thank you."

"Then I may tell the man to drive on."

"Please."

"A la maison," he said, in a loud voice to the coachman, who shifted the reins and elevated his shoulder preparatorily. The horses had just begun to move, when Perry thrust his head in the carriage.

"Be merry, Kitty, after your own way," he said; "we can't help loving you better than anything else in the world, but we won't disturb your peace much."

There was a lamp close by, and she saw that whilst he spoke, his cheeks were moistened with tears. The concentrated expression of pain in his face and voice was more than Kitty could bear.

"Arrêtez!" she called to the man, and the horses were checked in a moment. She lowered her voice, and said:

"Do not be unhappy, dear Perry; I will try to be true to you yet. I will, indeed."

"Take your oath upon it," he said.

"I take my oath upon it. I will try to be true to you."

“My sweet!” he said, passionately, and leaned forward, their faces just touched for a second, then he moved back quietly, and the horses sprang forward, bearing her to her luxurious home and secret thoughts.

The worst of life is that it has secrets. What is not easy to bear in comparison with some miserable secret that concerns ourselves only? Thus thought Kitty as she leaned back on the soft cushions and enjoyed them. If she could only rid herself of the unspeakable responsibility of her own individual *ego*, she felt that life would not be hard. Being herself, she could but be true to herself, and this was to be false to others. She would have given worlds to confess, do penance, and go her ways clean and scot-free again; but not being a Romanist, she was fain to carry her sins about her, like Christian in Bunyan’s story, only, unlike Christian, she would let nobody know what was in her bundle. She leaned back on the soft cushions and enjoyed them, despite something that pricked her now and then. She tried to console herself with thinking that there were, doubtless, numbers of women whom characters and circumstances had

forced into much the same groove. Goethe says: "The history of a man is his character;" and so thought Kitty Silver. It was the text on which she preached little sermons to herself every day of her life: and whether they did good to her or no, she said Amen to them and felt better.

But somehow, to-night, she preached and said Amen, and felt just as uneasy as before. The thought of Perry's unhappiness, of Dr. Norman's unhappiness, disturbed her more and more. She had virtually taken leave of them; but what was such virtual leave-taking? Her weakness of disposition would be sure to lead her into assignations, and assignations could hardly be harmless things. She had been on the verge of committing herself into sentimental follies a dozen times that evening; she should not have better armour another time.

"Fool that I was; fool that I am; fool that I shall be!" she said to herself again and again, conjugating the agglutinized verb in all its tenses. But there must come an end alike to folly and delusion sooner or later, and she eagerly asked herself, "When, and how?"

When and how—how and when? Here Kitty's deliberations came to a stand-still. She would fain have divided her single self into three; giving one to Perry—the high-spirited, devoted, despairing Perry; one to Dr. Norman, the truest friend, the kindest lover, woman ever had; and keeping the third for the world she loved so well.

“Ah me!” she thought, “how women ever find time to be gay and pretty is a marvel, seeing how they have to think, and think, and think! Somebody said, ‘Men must work, and women must weep;’ but weeping is not the hardest part of it. I would rather cry for grief than have to choose between two things, pleasant and painful, any day. Does the arrangement of one's life trouble everybody as much as it does poor unhappy me?”

And she pitied herself, then Perry, then Dr. Norman, till at last she fairly cried, and wished that nothing was as it was.

If she could only forget them; if they would only forget her, how much better it would be! She felt that she had drawn the net closer round her by these meetings. Dr. Norman

might fairly expect his prodigal back, some time or other ; and had she not openly pledged herself to love and marry Perry, if she could ?

She dried her tears as the carriage drew near home, and met Myra on the landing with a beaming face. Myra was in dressing-gown and slippers, anxious for a long and entertaining story.

“ Well ! ” she said ; “ has it been pleasant among the Bohemians ? I have been dreadfully bored at the Bartelottes’ dinner. There was no one who could make other people talk, and nobody did anything ; ” and Myra yawned, adding : “ Were you very merry ? ”

“ Yes, we were very merry.”

“ And have you said good-bye all round ? ”

“ Oh ! did I say that I was going to do that ? ”

“ What good have you gained by going, then ? None that I can see.”

Kitty was silent.

“ What good have you gained ? ” repeated Myra.

“ A little, I think. At any rate, I have done

a right and kind thing in going to see my oldest friends.”

If Myra was in an amiable mood when Kitty moralized, she merely yawned and let her do it, feeling that they were made better somehow. To-night she was in an amiable mood, and accordingly Kitty had her say about one's duty to the world in general, and to one's lovers in particular. When she had done Myra began—

“Now tell me what the people said ; we were so dull that I had a great mind to come to you.”

Everybody had said good things over the queer little supper in the Rue de Trévisé, and Kitty had the art of making good things sound better ; *bon-mots* of very faint quality came out from her mint bright and clear as newsovereigns. She had the great art of always keeping the roundness of a story unbroken—not diverging to the right or to the left, but minding that every segment should be true to its radius. She found that people always listen eagerly if they are only required to listen for a little while.

Kitty almost forgot her sorrows as she laughed with Myra over Perry's puns, Vittoria's repartee, and Monsieur Puig's stories.

"I wish we could be witty and gay and respectable too," she sighed, on a sudden. "I think we should live longer for having a good hearty laugh now and then."

That night Kitty's sleep was troubled with dreams. She was being married to a dozen people against her will; she was locked up in Perry's studio and could not get out; she was on the tower of St. Jacques de la Boucherie with Dr. Norman, with Perry, and with poor forgotten Regy, her boy-lover; and they pushed her over and she went on falling, falling, falling, and when she had done falling she was in the Seine, and there was Mrs. Cornford paddling about, who shouted out, "The Emperor is drowned, we are all searching for his body!" And Kitty paddled, and Dr. Norman and Perry and Regy—who came there in some unexplained manner, and paddled too; but instead of the Emperor's body they found Papa Peter, who had got on a dress-suit of shining cloth, and

danced on the roof of the floating baths to the tune of "Where are you going, my pretty maid?"

CHAPTER II.

A THUNDERBOLT FALLS.

OF course Perry and Dr. Norman were in a seventh Heaven for a time. Had not Kitty—this new, sweet, wonderful goddess of theirs—wept for them, said tender things to them, held out far but not wholly impossible visions of Paradise before their longing eyes? Was she not, though a little led astray by her passion for the world, still their own leal loving Kitty, the one woman, to their thinking, the most beautiful of any, and as near perfection as daughters of Eve can be? So each lover began to hope again, with a zest that would have been laughable, had it not been pathetic.

Dr. Norman pondered and pondered as to the best means of altering his mode of life, so as to suit it to Kitty's tastes. She craved for a

many-coloured, many-phrased existence, which at Shelley House he could not give her. If she came back to him—how his honest heart leaped at the bare idea of such joy!—he resolved to sacrifice many things dear to him, in order to make her happy. He would lift himself out of the scholar and the student, and for her sake, become a citizen and a man of the world. He would think nothing puerile that she loved, nothing unnecessary that she longed for. If she willed it, they would let Shelley House, and travel for a year or two, leaving the boys at school, and taking Laura and Prissy with them. She had often expressed a wish to see Italy and the East, and what more feasible than such a tour?

Then there were means of making their home-life more varied. London was only an hour and a half removed from them by rail; and why should they not spend a little time in London every year, entering moderately into such gaieties as Kitty loved? The old house should be made brighter and blither; Kitty should find in himself a companion and a friend, for under such sweet influence he felt sure of growing

younger, and therefore more worthy of the woman he worshipped.

And what were Perry's dreams like? Curiously enough, the tables had turned, and, whilst the pre-eminently practical and sober-minded Dr. Norman was dreaming from morning till night, Perry, the dreamer, the votarist of enthusiasm, the idealist *par excellence*, was solely occupying himself with one great question—which was MONEY.

For the few days following Kitty's visit, he worked at his easel as if for dear life. One or two small pictures were turned off and paid for, and the large picture was dealt with carefully and religiously; was it not to buy the most sacred thing in the world to him—Kitty's love?

He became, for the time being, a miser, a teetotaller, an ascetic; abjuring cigarettes, absinthe, theatres, and anything that cost time or money. He worked in his ill-ventilated studio till he almost dropped down of exhaustion. He denied himself proper rest; forgot when the meal-times came round; forgot every thing in the world—but Kitty.

When Polly Cornford remonstrated, he either

flew at her like a raving lunatic, or doggedly defended himself with such arguments as these:

“I must win Kitty somehow, and there is no other way. I shall soon have a thousand pounds; that will be enough to furnish a house and start with; and if she won't listen to me then, she never will.”

“She never will, to my thinking. You're in a fever, my poor Perry, and the sooner you try to cure yourself the better will it be for you. Look facts in the face, like a man.”

“Do leave me in peace,” groaned Perry.

Mrs. Cornford, whose kind heart was sorely troubled about her darling son by adoption, finding that nothing was to be done for his mind, was fain to keep his body from starving. So she wheedled him into taking cups of broth or chocolate, and bore his ill-humour as patiently as mothers bear with their sick children.

And Perry painted on, believing in Kitty, and hating all the world because it doubted her.

But one day, the unnaturally brilliant atmosphere, which Dr. Norman and Perry were breathing, was disturbed by a thunderbolt fall-

ing at their feet. Kitty had left Paris, and gone, they knew not whither!

The thunderbolt had come wrapped in rose-leaves, but it was stunning nevertheless. Kitty broke the information of her departure from Paris,—departure for an unlimited time,—departure made without any reference to her lovers—in the most tender way. It seemed impossible that a little note, scented, worded like a poem, sealed with rose-coloured wax, should mean heartless treachery; and yet, if not that, what was Kitty's meaning?

The worst of it was, that she gave no address. "I hardly know what my kind friend's plans are yet," she wrote to Dr. Norman, "so that we can only write for letters when we make a halt. They talk of the Pyrenees, of Switzerland, even of the baths of the Austrian Tyrol, but, as yet, without any definite plans. Pray do not judge me harshly for leaving Paris without a word of farewell; but if you knew what those farewells cost me! If you knew how I hate myself for being what I am! and yet, being what I am, cannot act otherwise than as I do. If I could, I would be true and loyal and good

like you—I would, indeed ; but it seems as useless to try to change one's nature as to change one's complexion. It is not my fault, but Nature's, that 'I am a feather for each wind that blows!'—would that the next would blow me back into the quiet haven I left so recklessly !”

To Perry she wrote in a freer, friendlier strain though the substantial meaning of her letter was the same. She was gone, and she forbade him to follow her.

In the first bitterness of disappointment Perry lost self-control utterly, and acted like the distraught being he was. Kitty's letter was dashed against the wall, torn into a hundred bits, trampled under foot. Kitty's name seemed no longer the talisman it had always been, and he held it up to everybody's scorn. She was false, she was heartless, she was inhuman ; he hated this vile thing, loved this fallen angel to distraction, all in a breath. He was her enemy henceforth and for ever. He would slay her, if the devil ever gave him a chance. He would be torn to pieces with red-hot pincers for her with pleasure. She should be punished as she deserved. Every penny that he had been

saving for her, should be laid out upon absinthe, and, when dying, he would find her out and die in her presence; or, better still, would be carried to her in his coffin. Would she like that, think you?

His actions were, of course, of a piece with his words, for Perry was consistent. He set to work, and ruined one or two masterly sketches in no time. He was always going to cafés. He would take neither reproach nor consolation from anybody.

Whom did Kitty love, then? Whom would Kitty marry?

Dr. Norman tormented himself as much as Perry with this question.

They both knew that this sweet prodigal was unworthy of the supreme affection they had bestowed upon her; they knew that her "Yea" and her "Nay" meant less than the Yea and Nay of other people. And yet they loved her and longed for her, and would not be compensated.

There were other and more beautiful women in the world. They only cared for this one.

An old writer has said, "Beauty is not made by white or red, by black eyes and a round face, by a straight body and a smooth skin, but by a proportion to the fancy." And so it is always. We don't know why we should so love this man or this woman, so madly hunger and thirst to spend the best part of our lives with them ; but we do it, and no logic can make us desist from doing it.

Dr. Norman could not help wondering whom Kitty loved ; and the wonder made him restless, sleepless, spiritless. He, as well as Perry, grew supremely miserable in unmitigated envy of that happy person. Kitty's lover, the man Kitty should love, was the king of the universe in their eyes. What had she not most charming in a woman?—splendid eyes and a queenly carriage, beautiful white hands, a soft voice, and a feminine grace in saying or doing things of little moment. Kitty had everything, and Kitty wanted neither their friendship nor their love.

"I think we had better leave Paris soon and go on to Switzerland, as we intended to do—don't you, Laura?" asked Dr. Norman, a day or

two after Kitty's letter. "The weather is growing intolerably warm here."

"Oh papa! just when I am beginning to get on with my drawing," cried Laura, colouring.

"Do, dear papa, let us leave Paris; I hate Paris; I do so want to go," said Prissy.

"Laura gives a reason for staying, but you give no reason on your side of the question," Dr. Norman said; adding, "What is it?"

"I don't like Paris, and that's why I want to go."

"But why do you dislike it?"

"Because—because—I haven't seen a single Quaker in it, and I do love Quakers," cried Prissy, triumphant at having found a reason. "You remember"—for it seemed to the child that months and not weeks divided them from the life at Shelley House—"you remember, papa, don't you, dear kind old Mr. Wallis, who used to wear a broad-brimmed hat, and say 'thee' and 'thou,' and give me peppermints?"

"What nonsense, Prissy! as if that were a reason," said Laura.

"I know your reasons well enough," said

Prissy. "Laura doesn't care for anybody or anything now but Mrs. Cornford and Mrs. Cornford's painting. We shall never get her to go with us, papa."

Dr. Norman looked from one of his children to the other, feeling quite unable to disappoint either.

"The hot weather will soon make it impossible for you to continue your long walks to the Louvre and the Rue de Trévisé," he said to Laura.

"Oh papa! as if I could not take an omnibus," began Laura, with almost painful eagerness.

"Papa, we shall all have sunstrokes if we stay. My poor dolls are melting already from the heat," cried Prissy.

"Well," said Dr. Norman, "we will settle it to-morrow; anyhow, Laura, we must not stay here much longer."

"Is Kitty going with us, papa?" asked Miss Prissy, peremptorily. "That is what I want to know. Is she, or is she not? Because, if not, I must see to my poor dolls, who haven't a summer frock to their backs. Is she, papa?"

“Oh child! as if Kitty cared a straw for us or the dolls!” cried Dr. Norman bitterly, regretting the sarcasm ere it was fairly spoken.

CHAPTER III.

“THE WRATH THAT WORKS LIKE MADNESS.”

L AURA cried that day as she dressed herself to go to Mrs. Cornford's studio. The young girl had again become her pupil, and she would often leave her father and little sister to make their excursions alone, in order to be near her old teacher. Prissy, naturally, became much more of a companion to her father than Laura. She was passionately fond of him to begin with, and had a quick understanding, bright wit, and a singularly appreciative nature. Dr. Norman's one consolation under all his troubles was the love of his little girl; and, somehow, the child seemed to know it.

Laura went as much as she liked to Mrs. Cornford's, and she liked to go often. For the last few weeks she had been living in a new in-

toxicating world, where the lights were theatrically strong, and the music theatrically entralling.

What wonder that, to an impressible nature like Laura's, the free, enthusiastic, many-coloured existence of artistic Bohemia should appear enchantment? What wonder that, having once tasted such opium, she should crave for the sugared poison of it again?

Mrs. Cornford loved all young people who had winning ways; and Laura had winning ways in abundance. So Laura was always made welcome in the Rue de Trévise, or was allowed to sit by Mrs. Cornford's side in the Louvre; and Perry would never fail to join them for a few minutes.

Kitty soon became a bond of union between these two. Perry seized the first opportunity of telling Laura how he had loved Kitty, and how cruelly she had used him. Laura had loved Kitty too, better than any one in the world, she said, with tears in her eyes, and she could see that Kitty did not care so very much for her now. Then they talked of her beauty, her cleverness, her fascinations, and never grew tired. Perry was as much of a child as Laura in some things, and

being encouraged, he poured out his hopes and fears to her without reserve. It was very sweet to him to be soothed and encouraged by Laura's words, and very sweet to Laura to feel that her words had such soothing power.

Thus they had become comrades ; Mrs. Cornford, like the easy, reckless soul she was, making no effort to hinder the growth of this mushroom friendship. She knew well enough how most other women would have acted in her place, and she had occasional pricks of conscience ; but she excused herself by thinking that life was short, and that young people ought to enjoy it. When Laura and Perry were in the Louvre with her, she let them stroll up and down the galleries as often as they liked ; and they liked it very often. Perry would lead Laura up to a picture, and, after describing it to her in his wild, glowing way, was sure to lead the conversation to Kitty.

But there were other spells in Paris that held Laura captive. Those little breakfast parties in the Rue de Trévisé, with their accompaniments of sparkling talk, good music, and unvarying enthusiasm—how charming they

seemed to her! The little country girl felt that she was only now beginning to live and to enjoy life, and she dreaded to go back to the old ways more and more. She would have been content to sweep floors and scour water-pails all the days of her existence, if she might only stay among these generous, unconventional, gifted people. The destiny of some women is to adore, and this was Laura's destiny. Affection, in the ordinary sense of the word, gives no idea of the feeling entertained by her for any human being intellectually superior to herself. Her ardent little soul was always falling down before some Juggernaut; and if it were a cruel Juggernaut, trampling her underfoot, so much the more did she worship it. Kitty had proved a cruel Juggernaut, but Kitty's successors were infinitely more kind.

Mrs. Cornford's friends loved this sweet, blue-eyed thing, who was always looking and listening her heart away, and took pains to interpret their theories to her. Laura became a Fourierist, a Pre-Raphaelite, a Garibaldian, everything by turns, and was sometimes so many things at once that her brain grew cloudy. The sense of her

own nothingness troubled her terribly sometimes. She was fain to become a hospital nurse in Italy : to turn photographer like Vittoria ; or to join the first phalanstery she could hear of ; to do something, no matter what, so long as it employed her faculties. She was comforted by the assurance that humanity is naturally divided into two portions—one consisting of those who cultivate Beauty as their especial province, and the other those who gather and enjoy the fruits of it. Her kind patrons, moreover, found a little employment for her, which is the best sort of consolation ; Laura was quite happy to sit for hours mending Vittoria's sacred gloves, or M. Puig's no less sacred stockings. It was impossible for any circumstance connected with genius to be common, she thought ; and to remain as a working bee amongst so sublime a community seemed the greatest good fortune that could overtake her.

But would it be allowed to overtake her ? Laura and her father had never been wholly unreserved to each other, and of late they had not grown less so. If Prissy willed a thing she spoke out, and, whatever obstacle might be

thrown in the way, was sure to gain the victory. She had more demonstrativeness than Laura, and could discuss her inmost thoughts and feelings with subtle though candid metaphysical introspection. Had she been circumstanced as Laura was, she would have made out such a case for herself that Dr. Norman must have given way. There was no difficulty that Prissy could not solve as she best liked, no Gordian knot that she could not untie without assistance—Prissy being always fully impressed with the magnitude and worthiness of her own motives, than which there is nothing more necessary to success. Poor Laura never considered her own motives of much importance, and, though she brooded over a perplexity as persistently as a bird broods over its first eggs, nothing resulted from it.

Kitty's defection was to Laura what the lightning is to the mother whose child it has killed. Her supreme concern was for Perry. Whose sorrow was anything in comparison to his sorrow? Who deserved Kitty but he?—for Laura, like the little simple soul she was, had no idea of moral justice, and thought that

Perry had no right to suffer just because he was young and gifted and beautiful.

She saw something of the reckless despondency into which Kitty's conduct threw him, and her father's unaltered bearing struck her as being very cold in comparison. Perry did not mind weeping, or tearing his hair, or saying mad things before this sweet thing, who would put her little hands entreatingly on his arm, and beg him to be consoled, with big tears in her blue eyes.

If Perry said to her half fiercely :

"How can you bear to be with a madman? Do go away."

Or, in a humble, tender tone :

"Oh, Miss Norman, it is not good for you to be here, however much we may like it!"—Laura would go home half crazed with a new sense of delight.

If Perry played, as only Perry could play, mysterious snatches of the music he loved best, the child sat listening in a trance. Kitty and Perry seemed god and goddess to her; the two beings alone worthy of all worship and all good things. Who else could do what they

could do, or were so beautiful and winning?

Kitty having dropped like a star below the horizon, there arose this new, large, luminous orb in its place; and she could not choose but adore doubly. Day by day, hour by hour, she was ever trying to brace herself up for a great effort; she must hint to her father how her heart would break if he forced her from Paris. The thought of speaking seemed hardly less terrible to her than that of silence. If some one, if something would only help her. But she knew she should have no help, and she put her momentous request into every available shape, trying to find a happy one. To go straight to her father, as Prissy would have done, and say, "Papa, I like being in Paris best, don't go away," was simply impossible; and to throw herself in tears upon his breast, and declare that he was making her unhappy, no less so. Timidity begets something very like cunning in the purest minds, and Laura at length came to the decision that she must invent a sufficient excuse. So one day she went up to Dr. Norman, and said, very pleadingly :

“Papa, don’t you think it would be a good thing for me to draw so well, that I might earn my own living if I wanted?”

“Good heavens, Laura! who has put that notion into your head?”

Dr. Norman was an ultra-liberal in theory, advocating every kind of moral and intellectual improvement for both men and women, but in practice as arrant a conservative as any going.

“I have thought of it myself, papa. I have, indeed.”

“Then the sooner you get rid of the notion the better. It is all very well for some women to strike out independent careers for themselves; in a few cases it is admirable; but you are the last person fitted to do so.”

“Why, dear papa?” asked Laura, already on the verge of crying.

“There are a dozen Whys and Wherefores, my dear. You will make a dear little house-keeper, and that can be said of very few girls. Take my advice, and be contented for a time in your proper sphere.”

“And is that Prissy’s sphere?” said Laura, the corners of her mouth going down.

“Prissy is a mere baby at present; it is impossible to say what she will turn out; but as far as I can judge, she has much more of the peculiar sort of character requisite for battling with the world than you have.”

Laura, by a great effort, contested the point a little longer. She might have to battle with the world, she said, and it could not do any harm to be fitted for whatever might happen. Mrs. Cornford said she had a decided talent for drawing, and Mrs. Cornford was a first-rate judge. Dr. Norman heard her to the end, and, when she had done, looked up with a shrewd smile, saying,

“And I think I know whither all this high-flown utilitarianism is tending, Laura. You wish to stay in Paris, and go on taking lessons of Mrs. Cornford.”

Laura turned crimson, and had not a word to say.

Dr. Norman continued:

“If Mrs. Cornford were a different person altogether, I should not mind; but you are old enough to know the sort of objection we must have to her, I think.”

“She is not quite a lady, you mean, papa?”

“Exactly; with all her good qualities, she is quite without the habits of respectable society. I should not like you to catch her tone.”

A sort of despair took possession of the child, and she turned away to hide the tears that she knew she could restrain no longer. Dr. Norman thought it high time to end the discussion.

“Of course you must please yourself, my dear,” he said. “I should never dream of interfering with any decision you might deliberately make concerning your own career. Remember that.”

And then he left her to reflect upon the words.

CHAPTER IV.

PITFALLS.

DR. NORMAN finally fixed the day for leaving Paris, and Laura counted the hours as they passed with a terrible feeling of reluctance. Could she go? She said to herself a dozen times a day that she could not, and yet she was possessed of so little resisting power that she made no legitimate effort to stay. She took everybody in her confidence by turns—Mrs. Cornford, Vittoria, Tommie, even Monsieur Puig, and each gave her counsel, though not of available sort. Of Perry she could not, for some inexplicable reason, make a confidant; and the consciousness of having a secret from him made their conversations less sympathetic and less delightful to look back upon. Once or twice he had said to her :

“You look ill; you sit among Mrs. Cornford’s oils too much. You should not come to her in the hottest part of the day,” accompanying the words with an underlying concern which set the child’s heart beating almost wildly. It was quite a new thing to Laura to find her small individuality recognized to the full by another person. Kitty had done it, but Kitty was not a man, and Kitty was too much in the habit of recognizing individualities in general to render her recognition inestimable. Perry was so delightfully naïve in his approval of persons and things, and at the same time so full of reverence for everybody excepting himself, that one felt attracted to him as to a child. Even whilst he was praising her, Laura seemed to be protecting him; and the need to go on protecting him grew stronger within her day by day.

If he said, “Who will make me leave off work when my head aches?” or, “I shall have no one to talk over my troubles to, and no one to look after me and keep me out of scrapes, when you are gone, Miss Norman,” she repeated the words to herself again and again, smiling and crying. There had been all along so much

frankness in their intimacy, that regrets on both sides at the prospect of parting occasioned very little comment. Laura could freely tell Mrs. Cornford that she liked Perry very much, and that she should never forgive Kitty for her conduct to him. Perry could as freely talk of Laura's charming ways and blind admiration of everyone and everything connected with art.

"I wish I had never seen Kitty," he happened to say to Mrs. Cornford, "and then perhaps——" but there he halted.

"I wish you had never seen my little Laura," Mrs. Cornford answered. "I ought to have known better than to let her come to the house so often ; and as I didn't, you ought."

"As if men are expected to know better than women, under any circumstances," Perry said. "You must know, Polly, that you are alone responsible for any mischief that occurs under your roof."

Mrs. Cornford painted vehemently for a few minutes, and then said :

"If you have led on that sweet girl to fall in love with you, Perry, I'll never forgive you as long as I live."

“Good heavens!” Perry cried, turning suddenly pale; “it’s preposterous—it’s impossible—it’s ridiculous beyond measure! Why, Laura is a mere child, and—and I care for nobody but Kitty.”

“You have never hinted to Laura that you wish her to stay here?”

Perry became suddenly red.

“One might do that in all innocence,” he said, in a crestfallen manner; adding, “If words are such dangerous things, the dumb are to be envied.”

“You goose! There are different ways of saying many harmless things. A very little would turn Laura’s head.”

“Do you think it is turned?”

“Well, we’ll say on the verge of it, to pacify you; but take my advice, and mind your P’s and Q’s for the next three days. It is now Monday, and she goes on Thursday. I shall watch you like a sheep-dog till then.”

“I hope you will,” sighed Perry; “it’s just the ruin of a man being left to himself.” And then he went to his studio, resolving to keep away from Laura as much as possible.

Meantime Mrs. Cornford was trying to make up for her inconsiderate conduct by good advice. From morning till night she dosed Laura with prudential maxims, having no especial application. If Laura expressed a meek regret at the prospect of parting, she was answered by some such dictum as this :

“Well, every hen must lay it's own egg, you know, my dear, and it's as well to cackle and be pleased over it as not.”

Or if Laura said, sighing, “Oh, dear Mrs. Cornford, my life is so dull at home—you don't know how dull it is!” the rejoinder would be :

“Oh! for the matter of that, we all envy our neighbour's puddings, child; but then they have to eat uninteresting things sometimes as well as we.” And whatever Laura happened to talk of was capped with an improvised aphorism, after this fashion :

“‘Whistle and swallow no dust, or you'll never clean me,’ says the horse to the ostler; or, ‘My master is all very well,’ as the dog said to his neighbour, ‘but I do wish he'd a tail to wag when he's pleased,’” which was *à propos* of people's discontent in general, and of Laura's in

particular. Or, “‘My ears are as God made ’em, as the donkey said to the fool,’” which was *à propos* of nothing.

Laura listened patiently, quite at a loss to account for Mrs. Cornford’s change of manner. Mrs. Cornford had always been apt at proverb-making, but it was new for her to turn preacher, and she preached at poor little Laura with a vengeance. A dozen times a day she was told to honour her father and mother, that her days might be long in the land; to be a good girl, and do what everybody wiser than herself told her to do, &c., &c.

Laura’s gentle heart swelled with indignation under this treatment. Who had led her on to love art, and everything connected with it, more than Mrs. Cornford? Who had dwelt more strongly upon her taste for drawing? Who had given more prominence to the very sort of decision against which she was now warning her from morning till night? Mrs. Cornford was, in fact, too late repenting of a series of follies. She had seen how happy it made Laura to be among them, all the time having no heart to keep her away. She had seen how the little

thing was falling in love with them all, with Perry especially, day by day, and she had no heart to stop that either. It pleased and amused her to watch the moral and intellectual development of this sweet wild flower of a woman, and the wild flower blossomed ere she was aware. Mrs. Cornford saw no better way of undoing her work than to snatch the poor flower from its forced atmosphere, and place it in its native woods again.

“You know, chick,” she would say, “it breaks all our hearts to lose you, but we are vagabonds on the face of the world, and you are a little lady. We’re the best of friends, though we can’t assimilate, as the oil said to the vinegar.”

“But I shall see you sometimes?” Laura urged, in a frightened voice.

“Well, I suppose so; but if not, there is no earthly use of sentimentalizing over it. A little sentiment, like a little bay salt, goes a long way.”

“Oh! Mrs. Cornford,” Laura said beseechingly, “what have I done that you don’t want me to come among you again?”

“You goosey! who said that? You may come

again as much as you like; but you'll be in Switzerland, and we shall be we don't know where. Have you a pair of seven-leagued boots?"

"I wish I had," Laura answered.

"And so do I; but as you haven't, and I haven't, why, let us agree to cut each other with a good grace, whether we come again or not. I'm sorry enough to lose you, I'm sure! You have sat for me as Rosalind, as Undine, as Gretchen, and I could find half a dozen more characters for you. But papa takes you to Switzerland, and so all our pretty plans are done for."

Laura then turned to Vittoria, and from her found sympathy, which was comfort indeed. Though in love, Vittoria recognised an intellectual need as something solemn; and perhaps—for who so quick at reading women's secrets as the woman who has once had a secret of her own?—she recognised the other need that enchaind Laura to Paris.

"You are too young as yet," she said, "to take upon yourself the sacrifice of a direct for an indirect duty. If you were as old as I am,

it would be different"—Vittoria had reached the age of twenty-five—"but you are in the first enthusiasm for art, which does not always last," she said, sighing.

"It is not so much that," Laura began, eagerly: "I feel as if I owed more to you all than to anyone in the world, and as if I could only give forced affection to others. I was never happy till I came here."

"Duty is not always happiness," said Vittoria, gravely.

"But it must be easier to do one's duty when one is happy."

"Quite true; and we are right in seeking the best happiness for ourselves, provided it is also the best happiness of others."

"I don't think I add to anyone's happiness much at home," poor Laura said, humbly; "I am looked upon as such a helpless sort of thing—even by Prissy."

"But ever so little love of art, as long as it is genuine, widens one's sympathies, and therefore one's power of helping. You know, Laura, dear, about one woman in a thousand, and no more, is strong enough to stand alone in the

world; and these family ties and affections, that seem prison-walls now, will prove welcome defences by-and-by."

"Then I must go home, and see no more pictures and no more artists, never paint any more, and be contented?"

"You must go home and remember us always, and, when you are a little older, choose to take part and lot with us if you still feel as you do now. That is what I say," said Vittoria, kissing her, "and that is what my Victor says too, and he is wise."

Vittoria, like Mrs. Cornford, felt a little responsible on Laura's behalf. For the last few weeks they had been talking art to the child—art in season and art out of season—till it was no wonder that her head was fairly turned by it. She had been dragged from gallery to gallery, from studio to studio; had heard discussions on the works of Ingres, of Gerôme, of Meissonier, of Frère; had been deluged with artistic *argot* from morning till night. It was like giving strong meat to babes, and Laura naturally underwent the pains of mental indigestion. They had taught her that there was no-

thing worth having in life but art, and art she could not have! Vittoria's appealing faith in her, and the weight Vittoria gave to her inmost aspirations, afforded consolation, however. She was growing older—oh! happy thought!—and she prayed that the years might come and go quickly.

On the occasion of what was to be Laura's last visit to the Rue de Trévisé, no personalities were brought forward, and everybody laughed and talked, in order that the child might be cheered.

When it came to adieux, Monsieur Puig kissed her on each cheek after quite a paternal manner. Vittoria embraced her with tears, and the three children struggled for the last kiss. Mrs. Cornford said she would accompany her to the cabstand, and Perry proposed to go too, as there was a large unsavoury *bouquin* to carry, Monsieur Puig's parting gift. The three descended, Mrs. Cornford adjusting bonnet and shawl as she went away.

“When shall we three meet again?” she said, blithely. “If never, it won't be my fault. Oh! dear, there's that tiresome picture-framer, Gi-

raud, and I must turn back with him. Well, Perry, you will see her safely into the omnibus—if you don't get a fiacre—won't you? Good-bye, my dear. See all you can on your travels, and say nothing about them when you come back. That's the best advice I can give you."

Laura and Perry walked on with some vague sort of conviction that the walk was critical, and that the sooner it was over the more easy in mind they should feel. Laura had not realised till now how much more personality had contributed to make the last few weeks so turbulently sweet. All the passionate longings in Laura's heart—longings that even Vittoria had not quite understood—were tending to a climax, under the influence of Perry's sudden, mysterious shyness. "Oh! why are we together?" was the child's agonised thought, and both felt but too mistrustful of the issue that lay in their hands.

They crossed the Boulevard, and walked along the gay Rue Vivienne, seeing nothing with their eyes, hearing nothing with their ears. The burden of an unspoken romance kept repeating itself in their hearts, high above the ebb

and flow of Parisian street-life; and though Perry had heard such a burden before, it charmed and chastened him still.

Laura tried to be indifferent; but she could not prattle in the old way, and she wondered to herself if it would be very wrong to have out their trouble, like children, before saying good-bye. She was quite a child in some things, and she felt conscious of no sinfulness in this clinging grief at separation.

“If I had been like Prissy, I should have made a great fuss, and papa would have stayed,” she said, artlessly. “Prissy always gains her point.”

“Ah!” Perry answered, in a tone of reproach, “you would have gained your point, too, had you cared enough about it.”

She looked troubled and changed colour; the corners of the sweet mouth turned down, the long soft eyelashes grew moistened with tears.

“I did care about it,” she began; “it is very unkind of you to say that.”

The sight of her tears moved Perry to instantaneous penitence, and in his penitence he said a dozen unwise things. He said that if it

had not been for Laura he should have sunk within the last few weeks into an abyss of degradation; that it was she, and none other, who had saved him hitherto, and she was going to desert him now; that, having lost all hope in the world, her friendship was still dear and valuable to him, and he did not know how he should be able to live without it.

Then, seeing Laura's innocent face so moved by his words, he forgot the duty he owed to himself and to her, and went on, alternately raving, confiding, approving, till her senses were in a whirl.

In this stage of their infatuation they reached the distracting Bureau des Omnibus, in the Palais Royal. Perry took Laura's ticket, number thirty-two, and they sat down, hoping thirty-two would not be called yet. Perry drummed with his fingers on the hard cover of the *bouquin*; Laura looked steadily another way.

A French Bureau des Omnibus is a pandemonium, indeed—only that the devils are very harmless and rather melancholy-looking Frenchmen, in official costume. But how they torment and terrify the unfortunate public who travel

by omnibus! If in a hurry, you are as a mouse in the claws of two or three imperturbable cats; and if you are complacent, you are worried just the same.

Laura and Perry heard nothing but the beating of their own hearts, and the numbers as called out by the conductor.

The two omnibuses had filled, and the last number called had been twenty-nine. Surely Laura's turn would come very soon. They listened for the signal of parting—dreading it, longing for it, with a sort of self-preserving instinct.

A third omnibus drew up, and whilst an eager crowd pressed to the door, the conductor proclaimed two vacant places.

“Trente.”

Number thirty took his seat.

“Trente-un.”

Number thirty-one took his seat. The door was closed, the omnibus filed off, and Laura and Perry breathed again. When at last the signal was given—*Trente-deux*—Laura rose in extreme discomposure. “Give me my ticket; the place is for me,” she cried.

"You will come back to us before very long?" he asked, in the way of one who exacts a promise.

"Yes," she answered, flushing and faltering.

"A voiture, mademoiselle, s'il vous plait," cried the conductor, at the top of his voice, and Perry handed her in. As the heavy vehicle was driving off, he got a last look and a last word, and both of them told him what he felt he ought not to know.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT DEAD SEA APPLES TASTE OF.

IT was only natural that Laura's disturbed mood should be imputed to the coming separation from her friends, Mrs. Cornford and Vittoria, and Dr. Norman and Prissy did their very best to inspire her with cheerfulness. Prissy had never been to the Rue de Trévisé, and Dr. Norman only once or twice ; so that the probable share Perry might have in Laura's reluctance to leave Paris never once occurred to them. Laura, therefore, escaped the sarcasm that would have been hardest to bear.

For Prissy was a terrible little satirist, without any idea of moderation, where a possible witticism was concerned. She kept a sharp eye upon all poor Laura's weak points, and lashed

her severely when any of them led her into the committal of folly.

“Look at Laura’s queer old book, papa!” she cried, as Laura quietly deposited the *bouquin* of the hard hide upon the table. “Who gave it to you?”

“Monsieur Puig,” said Laura; “he is a very clever political writer, and is engaged to marry Vittoria Bianchi.”

Prissy took up a corner of her apron, and, thus armed, opened the *bouquin* gingerly.

“It’s a very dirty old thing,” she said. “Is Monsieur Pig——”

“Puig,” said Laura, impatiently.

“Is Monsieur Puig a little dirty too?”

Dr. Norman could not forbear a laugh at Laura’s expense.

“I am afraid we can’t answer for our friends in the Rue de Trévisé on that score, Laura. They love art better than soap and water.”

“Oh papa!”

“You can’t deny, my dear, that it’s not alone Monsieur Puig’s inky shirt, or Mademoiselle Vittoria’s wristbands, that bear out my statement. Mrs. Cornford, whom I respect from the bot-

tom of my heart, certainly likes water as little as a land-rat, and Mr. Perugino—well, Mr. Perugino—must I say it, Laura ?—Mr. Perugino won't be driven into marrying his laundress because her bill is too heavy to pay."

For a minute or two Laura was speechless from indignation.

"I would rather see people a little careless in those things than wrapped up in their own affairs, and living without ideas——"

"But does it follow that one cannot be clean and clever too? What a little casuist you are where your friends are concerned!"

"I'm sure if there are any mice in Mrs. Cornford's house, Laura loves them better than she does us two, papa," Prissy said, looking up from the *bouquin*, which contained some quaint woodcuts; adding, "Oh! what a queer book for Mr. Pig to give you, Laura; I have seen three pictures of the devil in it!"

"Why do you look at it, then?" Laura cried, in a fit of childish passion; "and you know it isn't true what you say about the mice, Prissy. Papa, it is very unkind of Prissy to talk in that way."

"We didn't mean to be uncivil, and we beg your pardon, my dear, don't we, Prissy?" said Dr. Norman, kindly.

Then Laura burst into tears. Dr. Norman hastened to his own room, and Prissy became penitent in a moment.

"It's a dear book—a sweet book," she said, hugging the *bouquin* in her arms, and kissing her sister. "And you might know I was in fun about the mice, Laura, dear."

The little squabble passed over; but, absent as Dr. Norman habitually was, he noticed all that day, Laura's pale looks and quick uneasy breaths. She turned red and white without any cause, started at the merest sound, and her eyes never for a moment lost a certain lustre that was new to them. When night came and they were alone, he could no longer keep his thoughts to himself.

"My dear Laura," he said, "it is childish of you to think that I shall let you go on with us now."

Laura stood aghast.

"I don't want to make you miserable, of course. At first sight, it seemed most likely

that you should be happier with your father and little sister than with any friends, but there is no deciding for others, and I have always desired you to decide for yourself. You can, therefore, stay."

"Papa," Laura began, with a sob, "I know you are vexed with me——"

"Never mind me," Dr. Norman said, a little impatiently; "I can't expect you to think as I do in everything, and you are not a baby. You must begin to decide for yourself. You decide to stay. Good; I accept your decision."

And with that he left her.

Poor Laura! She warred between two longings—the longing to make Perry's life happier, and the longing to be dutiful to her father. One minute she was saying to herself that she would only stay a little time in Paris, and not desert Dr. Norman after all; another, she was contriving all sorts of plans for Perry's comfort. Meantime, she saw her luggage separated from the rest; she heard the order given for a carriage next morning to drive Monsieur and Mademoiselle to the Rue de Trévisé; she watched her father's and Prissy's cloaks and umbrellas

put in the railway, with a vague feeling that she must be going too. But she was not going. From the time of interchanging that secret compact with Perry up till now she had never once doubted the sweet selfish creed of youthful passion to be a true one. She relied so uncompromisingly for the time upon any judgment stronger than her own, that, had she gone to a third oracle, she would have fallen down before it, and again surrender her opinion. Believing Perry to be wrong and her father to be right, what course was left open to her but to cleave to the one and forsake the other? Could she give up Perry? Could she give up her father—and Prissy?—for Prissy, being her sister, she felt that she ought to love her almost as well as those two. Laura did not sleep very well that night, and longed for the morning, which must put some sort of end to her miserable indecision. Once or twice she consoled herself by recalling Perry's looks and words, though shyly, and with the feeling that such self-indulgence was wrong. Who could have imagined that her dream would ever come true?—for Laura, like other young girls, had had her dreams. She

smiled to herself, thinking how sweet and good it was to be cared for by any one like Perry. The thought of his passion for Kitty bore no bitterness with it, for she felt childishly sure that she herself was something to him now. The first streak of light seemed to smite all happy and peaceful thoughts like a cold sword-blade. The poor child started up, and put her hair from her face, crying to herself, distractedly, "What shall I do—oh! what *shall* I do?"

Prissy, who slept in a little bed close by, was also awake early, for the journey to Frankfort, and from thence up the Rhine, had numberless excitements for her.

"Do let us get up, Laura," she said; "we are going to Germany, where the people eat pumpernickel. Oh! I am so glad!"

"What should we get up yet for?" Laura asked wearily. "There is nothing to do."

"You haven't three dolls' clothes to put away, and a tea-set, and I don't know what besides. It's all very well for you to lie in bed, Laura, but it won't do for me."

And thereupon Prissy jumped out of bed,

wrapped herself in a dressing-gown, and, opening the door an inch wide, called out,

“Garçon, de l'eau chaude, tout de suite, si'l vous plait.”

“How absurd!” said Laura. “Who do you think will be up at this hour?”

Then she turned her head on the pillow, and dozed a little; and when she awoke again the sun was shining brightly, and Prissy had gone away. She got through the business of her toilette after a very listless fashion; and when it was done, sat down, not having courage to join her father and Prissy downstairs. At last Prissy came running to say that breakfast was ready, and that they were waiting for her.

“And really, Laura, your unpunctuality is something dreadful,” she added, with a mock assumption of authority.

“Has Laura told you that you and I are to go on our travels alone?” asked Dr. Norman of Prissy, as they sat down to table.

“Papa!” cried Prissy, looking from one to the other with inexpressible dismay.

Dr. Norman went on with assumed cheerfulness,

“Of course it is a great disappointment, but disappointing things must be made the best of. Only remember that we shall expect to hear from you regularly, Laura.”

“I will not stay here if you think it wrong, papa——”

“My dear child, it is a little late to refer the question to me now. Having decided for yourself yesterday that you could not leave Paris, by all means act upon that decision——”

“But indeed—indeed I want to do what you wish,” began poor Laura.

“And indeed I want you to please yourself; so that we might go on all day begging the question. The simplest solution of the difficulty is to try your new friends, and come back to the old when you are tired of them.”

Prissy broke into passionate deprecations of Laura’s ingratitude, which Dr. Norman checked, and the little party finished breakfast as if nothing had happened.

Laura’s heart had given a great bound at the final assurance that her promise to Perry was to be kept; but after that first revulsion of feeling she could only think of her father, and of

the secret she was withholding from him.

Dr. Norman bade her say good-bye to Prissy, and hurried her off in his usual absent, preoccupied way, with a little, though very little, show of vexation.

Arrived at their destination, they found everybody in bed; and as Dr. Norman had to catch an early train, and had no particular desire to see Mrs. Cornford, he scribbled a hasty letter, commending Laura to her care and protection for the next four or five weeks. He enclosed in the letter a *billet de banque* for Laura's expenses during the time, and, after reiterating his request that she should write very often, he kissed her and went away.

By-and-by, Mrs. Cornford came out of her room to open the shutters and light the fire, in dressing-gown and slippers. She received Laura and Laura's explanation of herself with the sort of unmitigated surprise that is sure to imply reproach.

"That's exactly what I expected of you, you dear little fool!" she said. "Well, God made one as well as t'other, as the man said who had a wart on his nose. Where you'll sleep I haven't

the least idea, unless in the wood-cupboard ; but never mind ; you're here, and when we make a pudding ourselves, we ought to eat it without making faces. But I did give Dr. Norman credit for knowing better. Well, we'll see what he says for himself. Poor man ! who would be a widower with children growing up, I wonder ? And what a sum he sends for your bread and butter ! Why, child, he must think you have the appetite of the man who ate a leg of mutton at a meal ; but your papa is just the man to get imposed upon, and wants as much looking after as a baby. Why ever didn't——”

She broke off from her sentence, for, impudent though she was, she never linked the names of Kitty and Dr. Norman together in Laura's hearing.

Laura took off her bonnet and cloak with a very disconcerted air, feeling convicted of folly. But would not Perry say something kind and comforting ?

CHAPTER VI.

AT FONTAINEBLEAU.

WHILST Perry had been trying to ruin himself, body and mind, in which course sweet Laura's love seemed to stay him a little—whilst Dr. Norman went his quiet ways, sad and puzzled over many things—what was Kitty doing? Where was this goddess of theirs, whose favoured lover must be, as they thought, a king among common men?

Kitty was at Fontainebleau—no farther—enjoying to the full the delicious perfection of summer-time there, wanting no new lovers, troubled now and then for the old, troubled also about some other things, but not too troubled to be her gay, bewitching, animating self. It was astonishing how strongly she possessed the power of enjoying, and of imparting the same power,

though in a similar degree, to others. It is so with all forcible natures; idiosyncracies emanate from them as light from luminous bodies.

They had made up a little party, to which Kitty stood in much the some sort of relationship as a conductor to his orchestra, holding herself responsible for every discord. Of course she succeeded admirably. She got up the most perfect little picnics without apparent trouble. The morning would be brilliant, the men would put on alpaca coats, the ladies muslin dresses, and open carriages would drive up exactly when they were ready, and carry them to the beautiful woods, where they had strawberries and cakes and champagne, and enjoyed everything without reservation.

Then there were little dinners and breakfasts, musical parties, sketching parties, and a multitude of pleasant changes rung upon a pleasant tune.

Kitty had taken great care to bring no dull people away from Paris, disliking dull people more than she disliked liars and hypocrites, and the greatest sinners on the face of the earth.

“What right have the stupid to expect the clever to love them, and be civil?” she would say mercilessly; and she called dulness a disease which was as catching as measles, and avoided it accordingly.

Granted that this policy is selfish, does it not save one from all manner of polite hypocrisies? Our dear dull friends smack their lips over our cakes and ale, and proclaim to all the world how simple we are with all our wit, and how we love them, whilst all the time we have been, figuratively speaking, tearing our hair, wringing our hands, and crying, “Ye gods, deliver us!”

First and foremost of their party was a young English lady named Ella Bartelotte, and her father, a baronet and a widower.

Ella Bartelotte was one of those tiny, fragile, diaphanous-looking women who remain children all their lives—which are not often long—and fascinate people by their helplessness and angelic bearing of what may be described as a negative existence. Of an organisation so weak that the exercise of almost every sense carried pain with it, she yet continued to dabble in

music, books, travel, and talk, and enjoy them all. Her lungs were weak; her digestive powers of no better quality; her brain incapable of any lengthened stress; her eyes as soon tired as her slender little wrists. But she had a gentle face and sweet voice, and, though she only liked people here and there, counted her lovers and friends by dozens.

Sir George was an exceedingly moral but hard-natured man, whom nothing but an invalid daughter could have made at all human, and whose humanity was always assuming an apologetic attitude, as if a little ashamed of itself. But no one could be more useful in the capacity of a travelling companion than he, for he went into all the details of expenditure as if he were a courier, and got the best of everything for himself and his party without ever being cheated of a halfpenny. He was liberal, too, in providing pleasures for people his daughter liked, and she liked Kitty, she told him, almost better than any woman she knew.

“She has so much *chique* about her, papa,” she would say, “a thing hardly Englishwoman have. And she is so warm-hearted and kindly

—too much so for this cold world. I can't think where she learned all her amiability ; it is as perfect as a work of art."

Then there were some musical people ; a melancholy Italian gentleman and his wife, who were Myra's guests and protégés, of course, and who showed their appreciation of such good hostesses by playing and singing divinely whenever they were asked to do so.

There was also a Mr. Tyrell, one of those Englishmen whom one never fails to encounter abroad, who sketch a little, play a little, have a dozen foreign idioms at their tongue's end, are veritable enthusiasts where foreign art or climate or scenery are concerned, and turn up from year to year at Rome, on the Nile, in Norway, at the Swiss baths, no matter where—looking as young, as gay, and as much absorbed in their dilettantism as ever. . They don't write, they don't read, they don't care a straw about politics or social reform, but they enjoy life to perfection.

And there was a Captain Longley, who hated everything that was not English, and whose chief pleasure in foreign travel seemed to con-

sist in abusing it, who made up the party. It must be admitted that Captain Longley made himself very agreeable to everybody, and could by no means have been spared. He was exceedingly clever, too; knew exactly what was going on in England; had seen active service, and explored savage countries, all of which he could describe brilliantly; had read every French and English novel, good, bad, or indifferent, and was so good-natured that you were sure to find him looking after all the most uninteresting women, whether young or old, at a party. Besides these, there was a constant ebb and flow of visitors from Paris. No two days were alike. The amusements were always well-assorted and elegant. The temper of the party was harmonious. What wonder that at Fontainebleau Kitty began to forget? An atmosphere of roses dulls the senses alike to pain and duty, and she was living in an atmosphere of the sweetest.

About seven in the morning Françoise brought in a cup of tea, and, having opened the window, let in a puff of delicious air. Françoise prepared her bath, and laid out her clothes, with a white muslin morning-dress or something equally en-

ting ; then, after the dawdling delights of the toilette, and half-an-hour spent in plucking roses for the *salon*, there would come the *déjeuner*, and the long morning drive, and the tea in the forest, and the late dinner, and the talk and music in the beautiful summer twilight, with scents of flowers and twittering of birds coming through the open windows.

Kitty thought of her old life at Fulham with a shudder. How dreadful it would be to return to the squalor of it, the hand-to-mouth struggle of it, the vulgarity, not to say coarseness, of it! Shelley House had been an improvement upon Paradise Place, but she felt as if she should find it hardly more bearable now, what with the disorderliness and noise of the children, and the absence of anything like elegance there.

For life to Kitty was as one of the fine arts to an enthusiastic student, ever revealing some new faculty in herself, and a fair field for its exercise. She looked down loftily upon ordinary men and women, who are content to go in whatever narrow road Providence has placed them, with self-complacent pity, thinking, "Poor fools! poor fools! you act as if life were a lottery, instead of

a contest in which the strongest are sure to win"—feeling so secure herself in her sense of youth and wit and ability.

Sometimes her exquisite strategy would be worsted by the merest chance. When, for instance, Myra came to her one morning, all blushes and perplexity, saying :

"What do you think, Kitty ? I know Captain Longley wishes me to marry him."

"Oh dear !" Kitty said, forgetting to conceal her genuine dismay, "oh dear !"

Myra did not seem to think the matter so deplorable, and began to discuss it *au sérieux*.

"There are two sides to the question, I dare say. Captain Longley is poor—that is, compared to me—and a wee wee bit younger. Then he has female relations ; I hate a man's female relations. But, on the other hand, how clever he is, how good-natured, how amusing—not handsome, perhaps—but only fools need to be handsome : and he is so chivalrous, that I believe he would jump into the white bear's cage in the Zoological Gardens if ever so ugly a woman dropped her parasol in it. Oh, darling ! what is the matter ? you are crying !"

Kitty dashed away a tear or two, laughing self-derisively.

“What a superb idiot I am!” she cried, still laughing and crying. “I wonder whether other people are always making such discoveries about themselves? No; I’m worse than an idiot, Myra; I’m a selfish, self-absorbed, self-interested wretch, that’s what I am, and if I cry, is it any wonder?”

“What do you mean?” asked Myra, petting her.

“What do I mean?” cried Kitty, in a passion of grief and self-contempt. “Myra, you are as blindly unconscious of what is going on before your very eyes as a new-born baby! As if I could rejoice in the prospect of your marriage—I, who love you better than any one in all the world—I, whose very bread is the gift of your hands, whose life were worthless but for you! Don’t you see how it will be with us if you marry Captain Longley, or anybody? It will be happiness, a completed life to you. It will be death in life to me. But——” here her voice grew thick, and she slipped down to a low stool, and hid her face in Myra’s lap. “You must

marry him since you wish it, and I shall still be bound to you as long as I live."

It was only natural that Myra should cry a little too, and, after having wept with her friend, reassure her by every possible means. Why should a marriage divide them at all, or, at any rate, for a time? And why should not Kitty herself marry by-and-by? Nothing should induce her to prove ungrateful to her dearest friend—nothing in the whole world. Kitty must smile and look happy, since there was so little to be miserable about. Of course, Myra would keep a home for her; and Kitty was so attractive, so handsome, so universally worshipped, that it was quite preposterous to entertain any doubt regarding the future; and much more Myra said, with her arms round her friend's neck all the while.

Kitty heard to the end, passionately impatient. When Myra had done, she broke into a torrent of words, compared with which Myra's had been as the chirpings of a timid sparrow to the cries of an enraged eagle.

"Oh! yes, I am to smile and look happy!

But you spoiled children of fortune don't know what life is to us outcasts."

"My dear Kitty!" Myra interposed, quite shocked.

"Yes; outcasts, pariahs, scapegoats of society—those are the proper names for us," Kitty went on fiercely. "We women who have no home, no friends, no money, being born into the world without being consulted—we must live, and life becomes a game of chess. We don't like work, we don't like poverty, we don't like vice; but we like ease and wealth and good repute, and we win them somehow. How? Oh! the difference between an estate inherited and an estate thus pillaged! The one is as strong and steadfast as a mansion, the other ephemeral as the spider's web hanging to its porch. You are the lady of the manor, I am the parasitic spider which has fed upon your bounty. What can I expect, but to be swept away when the mansion is made ready for a wedding."

She seized Myra's hands and held them to her cheek, laughing and crying.

“The worst of it is that spiders have affections,” she cried. “As a sister, I love you, Myra, and do not sisters lose each other when they marry? Oh! lonely, miserable me!”

CHAPTER VII.

A REPRIEVE AND A SENTENCE.

“OH! lonely, miserable me!” cried Kitty, with the tears streaming down her beautiful face. How could an insignificant little sparrow find withal to comfort a grand eagle? Myra could only reiterate her first words of affectionate consolation, drop a little kiss on her friend’s hand, clasp her round the waist, and so on.

But she chanced to let fall the careless phrase which Kitty caught and clung to, as a drowning creature to a splinter (who ever caught at a straw?),

“And Captain Longley hasn’t really proposed yet!”—and Kitty so impressed Myra with the dignity and advantage of being a little dilatory in love matters, that she decided to keep her

admirer in suspense for the present. Having inserted the thin edge of the wedge, Kitty managed the whole affair beautifully. Captain Longley being made to see that, for some reasons or other, Myra wished to keep matters in a preliminary state a little longer, went back to Paris in a pet, and Kitty breathed again.

But she felt that her house was built on sand, and looked around for safer foundations. Her reprieve might be very short. She knew well enough that, when Myra married, everything must change for Myra's dependant, who was also her friend; and knowing this, was it little wonder that her cheeks grew thin, and that her nights were weary? Sometimes she felt ready to act the prodigal in good earnest; but then she had sinned against so many fathers, she knew not to which of them to go. The purple robe, the gold ring, and the fatted calf awaited her in either case, and in spirit she leaned towards them, though in the flesh she halted and hung back. Had she cared one shade more for Perry or for Dr. Norman, affection would have kicked the beam; she wished that she could care for some one, no matter for whom, and

lived only in her ambitions. Balzac says, "*La grande force sociale, c'est le caractère,*" and his words prove themselves true a hundred times a day. Had Kitty possessed a slipshod character, her life would have been a very ordinary story; as it is, she was so rich in will, in understanding, and in purpose, that without the personal advantages that made her richer, she could, under no circumstance, have remained insignificant. There are times, however, when even success in the battle of life becomes a weariness; and Kitty, who had been successful beyond her expectations, lost heart now and then. Wealth was pleasant, and she felt as if she could not live without it now; but she wished it were to be had for the asking. Rank was pleasant too, and that was much dearer than she had bargained for. Affection was her weak point; she could not bear a dog, no matter however ugly, to love other people better than herself; and affection, when coveted thus largely and unreasonably, costs more than anything else in the world. She would sit for hours in her pretty room during these perfect summer mornings, thinking of all these things, and trying to find a

way to be happier. Her friends were legion; which of them could help her now?

One of these reveries was disturbed in an unexpected fashion. She got a letter from Dr. Norman. The letter lay for some time unopened—not from any dread of what he might have written, but from vexation that he had written at all. Why could he not leave her in peace for a little while? She was always comparing her own conduct with that of her lovers, much to their disadvantage, forgetting that they cared for her with their whole hearts, which certainly made the case a little different.

There lay the letter. Her little maid came in with a pretty gift of flowers from one of her friends, and a message—“Miss Bartelotte was going to drive in the Bois at four o'clock; would mademoiselle go with her?”

Kitty nodded affirmatively; and, when Françoise had gone, took up the letter, turning pale at the thickness of it. She was walking up and down, lacking courage to break the seal, when Myra peeped in, all smiles and sunshine.

“Kitty, I am going to breakfast next door, but I didn't tell you, as you must keep quiet, so

as to be bright and entertaining at our little dinner to-night."

This speech did not make Kitty feel happier in mind.

"What a slave I am!" she said to herself, half aloud; and then she took the letter gently, feeling where her freedom lay.

Who so free in all the world as Dr. Norman's wife would be? Who so free, so honoured, so happy?

And with this thought in her mind, she summoned courage to put herself in communication with him.

The letter was dated Heidelberg, and ran as follows:

"MY DEAR KITTY,

"When we parted in the Rue de Trévisé some weeks ago, it was with no compact of silence on my part, and all the more, therefore, I excuse myself for disturbing you by a long and painful letter. It depends entirely upon your own wishes in the matter whether I ever write to you again. So, if this is to be my last letter, I will ask your kind forbearance; and,

if not, I know that you will pardon it for the sake of the motive with which it was written.

“Kitty, must I speak plainly to you? You have not deserved the reticence at my hands that my love for you would fain have made me show; but let me recall the events of the last few months, and leave you to judge for yourself. You came among us, the brightest thing we had: we tried to make you happy, and succeeded, as you said, and of us all it would be hard to say for a long time who loved you best. At length—there is no saying how these things happen—I longed to make you my wife, feeling sure that you would be happy so, and that, though much older than yourself and a widower, I could offer you an affection not altogether unworthy of your youth, your beauty, and your gifted nature. You said that you would marry me, because you loved me; and time wore on.

“Why you went to Mrs. Wingfield’s, why you broke your promise of returning to me, why you put me off with excuse after excuse, why you consented to spend the spring in Paris with your new friend, and why you are still with her instead of with me, are questions

only your own heart can answer. How has it answered them? How has it answered them?

“Oh Kitty! it was consideration for you, not coldness, that kept me silent and unreproachful during those unhappy months of alternate hope and fear.

“How could I press selfish claims upon you? How could I recall promises that must have convicted you of ill-faith towards myself? How could I spoil your peace? It seemed kindest to you and wisest for myself to wait.

“And what has waiting brought me? It has brought me no conviction of your affection for any one else—it has brought me no conviction of your indifference to myself. You say you cannot marry me—at least, you think you cannot; but you give no valid reason for thinking thus, and without a valid reason I have no right to give you up.

“Think of it, Kitty. You have made a promise to one who has never deceived you in anything; who is just as deserving of such a promise now as when first you made it. Will you be true and keep it, or will you not? It is not simply a question of marrying me; it is a question of

honour, and upon your manner of answering it depends the one faith without which life is contemptible—faith in oneself. I think it is not want of faith in myself that holds you back, for you have so often said you could trust me. And you know—perhaps too well—how much I care for you, so that I need not repeat that old story.

“Do not be angry with me, dear Kitty, but remember how hard it is for any man to bear such a disappointment, especially when he is not conscious of having deserved it. I am humble enough, Heaven knows, dear, when I compare the little I have to give and the all in all that I have to take at your hands; but then a man cannot do more than love with his whole heart; and if that does not suffice for a woman, nothing will. We shall be turning our faces homeward in about a month’s time, and I have decided to make another halt here on our way back from Switzerland. Address your letter plainly to Dr. Norman, of Shelley, care of Herr Bran, Hotel Adler; it will be quite safe in the hands of my old friend here; but do not let it arrive later than a month from this date. Your letter shall decide all.

“Prissy sends eleven kisses and her love to you. Laura seems happy in Paris. God bless you, dear Kitty!

“Yours most truly and affectionately,

“EDWARD NORMAN.”

And what did Kitty say to this letter? It did not put her in a passion. It did not make her wholly penitent. It did not draw her nearer to her lover, or repel her from him. It brought no tears.

But it set her thinking deeply. Had Dr. Norman written after Perry's strain, it would have been easy to console him with tender phrases and sweet words, that might mean anything or nothing. Had he been a shade less frank, a shade more reproachful, it would have been as easy to renounce him coldly, cruelly. As it was, his letter was so kind, so just, so manly, that she quailed before it, and felt it to be the summoning voice of a judge.

She read the letter for a second and a third time, and saw that there was no unreading its purport. It was a sort of “Stand and deliver!” from which the prisoner had no appeal. He

had done with sentimental skirmishing, with pleadings and promises, with everything but the naked truth, and that he would have from her at any cost. Kitty began to think that the naked truth would have been best from the beginning—if it were only a shade less ugly!

CHAPTER VIII.

LAURA'S SLIPPERS.

DR. NORMAN'S letter was, in fact, like the Japanese sentence upon a traitorous nobleman, which condemns him to commit suicide after his own fashion. He had not intended to be cruel; but poor Kitty looked tremblingly first at the cup of poison, then at the halter, then at the dagger, not knowing which punishment to choose. Meantime a month intervened between the sentence and its fulfilment, and each day of it seemed inexpressibly precious to her.

When not tormented by the thought that she must be her own fate, she felt so rich, so strong, so glad in her sense of youth and power! Life was a game that she played well: who can wonder that she enjoyed playing it? People were all interesting to her, less because her

humanity was superabundant than because her principle of *solidarité* was developed almost to the pitch of an extra sense. What were we sent on earth for, she reasoned, but to get what we haven't got, and to give others what they are in want of? And she preached this text to herself from day to day. The question was constantly arising—Who could give her what she most wanted? and it was uppermost in her mind now.

There was Dr. Norman ready to give her all he had—honour, affection, peace; but these did not seem enough for her. There was Perry flinging his life of love at her feet, and she could neither take it up nor wholly trample it underfoot. There was Myra, who adored her after the fashion of women who must adore something, and she felt that Myra might ere long find new idols.

To whom, then, must she look? She was rich in friends, in acquaintances, and she had one or two lovers; with whom of all these could she make her home—if she refused to marry Dr. Norman? I will make him happy—I can't make myself miserable—this was the alternate

burden of her thoughts for several days after receiving his letter.

She felt sometimes as if she should have been already married to Dr. Norman, but for his goodness. The idea of having to live up to his standard had frightened her, for she knew that she was worldly, paganish, Bohemian to the backbone, and he did not know her as she knew herself. She would most likely have been married to Perry before knowing Dr. Norman but for his indifference to poverty and her dread of it. It seems impossible to obtain exactly what we want in life, Kitty thought, with a sigh—I suppose one must content oneself with an approximation to it; and where is even that to be found?

They were to leave Fontainebleau in a few weeks' time for Germany or the Pyrenees, and Kitty longed to break up the pleasant little camp and bivouac afresh. Heine says somewhere:

“Im süßen Lied ist oft ein saurer Rheim,”

and Kitty often perceived harsh chords in the gay music of her daily life.

Myra, having lost the occupation of being in

love, and involuntarily blaming Kitty for her loss, grew irritable. It was all very well for women of Kitty's calibre to look down contemptuously upon love and marriage; Kitty had intellect, and found so many things interesting; she had none, and unless Kitty amused her, she went unamused. In the first stage of their friendship they had been all in all to each other, like school girls, but by infinitesimally gradual degrees, Kitty had waxed colder.

Myra saw it, and could not forgive. She had sacrificed her lover's feelings for Kitty's sake; she was ready to do what she willed, to go whither she might choose; she cared for Kitty more than she cared for her flossy little dog, more than she cared for any of her friends or relations, perhaps more than she cared for the man whom she was half-disposed to marry; but then neither her darling dog, nor her female friends, nor her admirer, had worshipped her and petted her as Kitty had once done. She never imagined that Kitty could get tired of worshipping, and thus was punishing her for short-comings rather than for actual faults, though it must be admitted that Kitty was

a great deal with her new friend Ella Bartelotte, and Myra often alone.

How could she remonstrate with her for showing kindness to a fragile little invalid hardly ever off the sofa? She petted and chafed secretly at losing so much of her friend's society, and wished she had not been persuaded into sending poor Captain Longley away. Kitty, too, regretted that prompt piece of Machiavelian policy, for new ambitions, with which Myra had nothing to do, were cropping up in her mind.

One day when she had gone to Ella to consult with her as to their autumn trip, the girl, seeing Kitty's look of beautiful health and capacity, flushed with a feeling half of enthusiasm, half of envy :

"You animated, animating thing!" she said. "When I see you I think the Spartans and Hindoos were right in leaving all the sickly babies to die. What use or ornament are we in the world?"

"There are far more beautiful things than health," Kitty said, hanging over the invalid with eyes brimful of sympathy; adding, with

charming frankness, "I am handsome, I know ; but you have the face of an angel."

"I hate flattery ; but I like to be admired by you," Ella answered. "I wonder why it is that people believe in the cant about women not admiring each other ? It is so untrue."

And then the two had a long discussion about the friendships of men for women, and of women for each other, which ended in Ella growing communicative. Ella complained of the world a good deal in that graceful spirit of eclecticism usual to invalids. Those of sound lungs and limbs say, "I don't like So and So ;" but to persons of finer organization it is more usual to deplore that So and So is not sympathetic, and that So and So does not possess a soul. And to how few acquaintances do eclectic ladies grant souls and sympathies ? Ella was the kindest, most tender-hearted little being in the world, who would spend an hour over the rescue of a fly drowning in cream ; but she was as bitter as Diogenes towards any one who had no eye for colour, no ear for Beethoven, or no critical appreciation of the poetry she loved. She was even harder upon what she called persons

conjugated in one mood—that is to say, people of no enthusiasms, and scant ideas; and this was not the first time that she had poured complaints into Kitty's ears of the unsympathetic or the one-mooded.

“I get so tired of living with people who have no more capacity of growing than brick walls,” she said. “How happy Mrs. Wingfield must be in having a friend like you! You grow more than any one I know. I believe there isn't a day but proves a revelation of some kind to you.”

Kitty's face beamed.

“I do enjoy life more than most people,” she said; “but the more one enjoys the more one criticises, that is the worst of it; and you cannot alter circumstances so easily as you can criticise them.”

“But you would hardly alter your circumstances?” asked Ella, wistfully. “Free, strong, bright, happy, who would not be you?”

“Oh!” Kitty cried, laughing, “one can never judge from the outside. Myra and I love each other dearly; but we were not born to live together, *voilà tout*.”

Ella would fain have learned more, but was too delicate to ask questions. She persisted in talking of Kitty and Kitty's affairs, however, till Sir George came in, who, seeing Ella quite changed from the drooping, weary thing he had left an hour ago, was ready to fall at her friend's feet. He liked Kitty, admired her splendid stature, her bright wit, her clear, asserting intellect; and Kitty had gone a little out of her way to please him, for no explicable reasons.

She cared for Ella and Ella's surroundings, and somehow never found Sir George too tiresome, though he would discourse for hours upon books of which she knew nothing. One can forgive much in a host who is lavish in providing pleasure. Sir George did not care how largely he spent money upon Ella's visitors, providing the daintiest musical fêtes, picnics, déjeûners, &c., and Kitty of all others had aided and abetted him in catering for the daily feast, and afterwards enjoying it. So Sir George liked Kitty, and admired her too, and knew well enough that he and Ella had no more fervent admirer anywhere. With Kitty it was always "What does Sir George

say?" or "What does darling Ella think?" or "Do you both think so—both?" looking from father to daughter appealingly.

The matter in hand was most satisfactorily settled for the time being, by Sir George promising to see one or two of Ella's physicians at once as to the quality of the baths at Ischl or at Arcachon. Kitty had discerned these places with safe enthusiasm, feeling sure that neither in the Austrian Tyrol nor in the Pyrenees, her sins, or rather her lovers, would find her out. The physician's opinion was to be conveyed to Kitty and Myra that night, and meantime they decided to leave Fontainebleau in three days. Kitty went to Paris next day to buy travelling dresses, pleased with the issue of events hitherto, and very thoughtful about the future. She had done her best to make new friends and allies from day to day, thus insuring herself against unlooked-for contingencies, and battled bravely with old affections and loves that would sometimes try for mastery. And she was certainly strengthening her outworks, and making her position stronger. Thinking of these things

as she passed along the crowded Rue St. Honoré, glancing in the gay shop-windows from time to time, she caught sight of two faces that she knew.

It was Laura and Perry, and Perry was evidently helping Laura to choose a pair of slippers. He held two shoes in his hands, one bright and new, the other old and worn, measuring them sole to sole, as carefully as he had measured shoes for Kitty in the old days, his boyish face solemnly eager, his gold-brown hair blown about more than ever. Laura stood by, watching him with the face of a happy child.

Kitty turned away from the pretty picture, feeling suddenly heart-sick, soul-sick. How beautiful he was, how true, how pure! Yet she could not love him.

She walked hastily on, troubled with the suggestions of the scene. Surely Laura was not falling in love with Perry? Surely Mrs. Cornford was not encouraging such a folly? She knew only too well that Perry was hers, heart and soul; but she could not answer for what he might do if driven to desperation. Laura and Dr. Norman must be saved at any

cost; and no sooner had she reached her hotel than she dispatched a letter to Laura, begging her to come to the hotel early next day, without saying a word to any living soul. This was the first time she had communicated with any of her old friends in the Rue de Trévis since the killing of the fatted calf; but she felt that it would be more than heartless to keep silent now. If she could not become Dr. Norman's wife, she would, at least, prove his friend. The thought was consolatory.

CHAPTER IX.

IRÆ AMANTIUM, ETC.

FOLLY is a fair supper, but a miserable breakfast. Laura and Perry met after her installation in the Rue de Trévisé with downcast eyes and sudden little blushes, looking like children who have stolen cherries and expect a whipping. Perry could not convict himself of having aided and abetted Laura's contrivances to come; and now that she was among them, he wished himself away. What good could he do her? What good could she do him? It was sweet to have her sympathy, as it is sweet to any man to have the sympathy of a gentle, loving child-woman, and Laura's influence had really stayed Perry on the road to ruin. What if the feeling on her side should grow into something else?

So where poor Laura had looked for wells of comfort she found thirsty deserts only, and her young heart swelled with the bitterness of indignation. She had done nothing to warrant Perry's coldness, nothing to deserve his neglect, and he seemed on the alert to be cold and neglectful. All his old tenderness of manner, half protective, half appealing, was wanting; and if by chance they were left alone together, which happened seldom, he would busy himself with a book, or talk in a constrained way about common things.

The very first opportunity that Perry could get of speaking privately to Mrs. Cornford he poured out his sins, craving absolution. He knew how wrong his conduct had been in making a confidante of Laura; he knew that he could never love any woman but Kitty; he knew that he had been drawn to Laura by her child-like love and pity for him. Laura was young and able to forget; he was weak, but able to make a great effort when occasion required, and occasion required a great effort now.

"And what do all these fine speeches tend to?" asked Mrs. Cornford, smiling. "You are

never to be less trusted, Perry, than when you have delivered yourself of some excellent resolution, for the first thing you do is to go and break it. I know your ways. If you came to me vowing and declaring that you were over head and ears in love with little Laura and Kitty both, and must marry Laura because Kitty won't marry you, I should have some hopes of you."

"Every one is wise once in their life," Perry answered, "and I am going to be wise now. It is a horrid punishment to me to make that sweet child hate me; but she shall do that rather than——"

"Tut—tut—tut!" cried Mrs. Cornford.

"Oh! you don't know how I love her," Perry said, with the utmost simplicity; then catching Mrs. Cornford's convicting look, he added, "I mean, how I love Kitty."

"Oh! what a man may do, and yet not think himself an ass! Perugino, I love thee like a mother, but do not ask me to listen when thou brayest."

And Mrs. Cornford drove him out of the room with her maulstick. When she heard the door of his study shut, in a loud and dignified man-

ner, she summoned Laura, and talked to her with the oddest possible mixture of motherly wisdom and ragamuffinly experience—the long and short of her sermon being, as far as Laura could gather it, that men were donkeys, that women were fools, and that Perry and Laura excelled the rest of their kind in folly.

Poor Laura! she found the Rue de Trévisé very far from the paradise she expected it to be, and heartily wished herself in Switzerland with her father and little Prissy. The weather was almost tropical, and she felt scarcely able to breathe in the stuffy little rooms, always smelling of oil-colour and onions. Sometimes the little girls took her for long walks into the Parc Monceux and the Bois; but there was no fresh air to be had anywhere, and she wearied of their boisterous ways. Perry was always painting, either in his studio or in the galleries, and they only met at the little untidy, savoury dinners that he swallowed so voraciously.

At length the clouds broke and Laura caught a glimpse of blue sky again. It happened quite unexpectedly; for Perry, in some sudden freak of imagined prosperity, took a box at the opera

for all the ladies, and Laura wanted new shoes fit to wear with a white frock.

“Oh! bother the shoes!” cried Mrs. Cornford, forgetting all her prudence in the excitement of anticipating an opera. “Well, the chicks are busy washing their muslin frocks, so Perry must take you, as your papa doesn’t permit you to go about alone.”

And then she called Perry down, and put Laura under his protection.

“How hot it is!” began Laura, petulantly. “Doesn’t the glare make you feel nearly blind? I do.”

“Take my arm, and I will hold up the umbrella over us both,” said Perry; and Laura obeyed, feeling ready to cry at the words, though they were hardly wonderful. They had not walked far before Perry felt impelled to make some foolish speech or other that made Laura’s round eyes fill, and the corners of her sweet mouth go down. “Oh!” thought Perry, “what can be so innocent as the sort of friendship existing between her and me?” And then he went on to console her, and to explain what he termed his “blackguardly behaviour” of the

last few days. "The fact is," he said, "I am such a dreadfully weak-minded creature, that I do exactly what people tell me to do, and Mrs. Cornford said that it was wrong for us two to be friends; she said that your papa would not like it."

"I know what Mrs. Cornford says," Laura began, tremulously; "but so long as we feel that a thing is not wrong in itself, I don't think it much matters whether other people approve or no—do you?"

"Of course not," Perry answered; "and Mrs. Cornford knows well enough what a consolation your friendship has been to me. Laura, you are too young and too good to be in the confidence of a wretch like me. I can't keep from drinking, from bad company, from the gambling-table—there, it is all out. I am headlong on the road to ruin, and neither God nor angels, good or bad, can save me. In a year's time I shall be dead, murdered by Kitty. I shan't leave a sou to bury me, and shall be flung into the pauper's *fosse* at Montmartre."

"Oh!" cried Laura, weeping; "if I—if anybody could do you good and make you happy!"

“You darling to say so! But no one, nothing can do me good. I am a hopeless, helpless fool, that’s what I am.”

“I wish I could hate her,” cried little Laura, vehemently; “she deserves it.”

“Hate her!” cried Perry. “If she ground one to powder, one’s dust would find a tongue to say, I love Kitty. That’s the worst of it. If I could hate her, I would do so this moment. It seems such a shame not to be happy at my age.”

Thus they prattled on like the children they were, and Laura thought that she would willingly quarrel again with Perry, since the recollection was so sweet. He helped her to choose a pretty pair of shoes, and then they returned home, both unconscious of Kitty’s passing recognition.

When Laura reached home, she found Kitty’s letter awaiting her. The address had been written by Françoise (who accompanied her mistress to Paris), and, to make secrecy doubly sure, Kitty had enclosed a milliner’s card, writing inside the envelope, “PRIVATE, K. S.”

Laura therefore pocketed the unsuspected

missive, and read it when she found herself alone.

Kitty in Paris! Kitty wishing to see her! and only her! She hardly knew how to keep the astounding surprise to herself, and was thinking of it all the evening. Perry, too, was filled with thoughts of Kitty.

What was Gounod's music? what was a Titians? what was all the world to these two compared with Kitty? Had the Emperor been assassinated then and there, they would have thought much more about her than about the headless French empire. They were in the Byronic period of their lives, when all of us act the part of Fakirs, doing penance and committing elaborate follies for some Fetish whom we find out later to be a very poor creature indeed, and not at all worth tormenting ourselves about.

Laura, having framed an errand, took a fiacre and went wondering whether she should be courageous enough to plead Perry's cause. After waiting nearly an hour, as all Kitty's slaves of the lamp had to do, in she came, this queen, this goddess, this Helen of two or three Troys, this

Cleopatra of so many Antonys. She was richly dressed after French fashion, and bore with her the indescribable atmosphere of a soft, elegant, pampered life. Her hands were so white, her hair so glossy, the little lace-bordered pocket-handkerchief stuck in her girdle so perfumed, her skirt so long and stately, that Laura felt humbled and abashed, and had not a word to say.

But she was in Kitty's arms, caught to Kitty's heart, kissed by Kitty's lips, ere any words were said; and when the greeting was over Kitty herself spoke :

"How good it is to see you again!" she said, caressing the child as a mother might have done a little daughter long lost sight of.

"Oh! how good it is to see you again! And you are more beautiful than ever," cried Laura, lost in childlike admiration of the costly clothes that seemed emanations of Kitty's self.

Kitty sighed and looked contemptuous.

"I liked the cheap blue stuff gown I used to wear at Shelley church much better," she said. "But I did not send for you to talk of my clothes; I want to talk of you." Then, looking into Laura's eyes with tender scrutiny, she

added: "I saw you with Mr. Neeve yesterday."

Laura became rosy-red in a moment.

"We only went to buy some shoes," she said.

"But what business had Mr. Neeve with your shoes?"

"Papa does not like me to walk about Paris alone, and everyone else was busy, and that is why Mr. Neeve went——"

"Is that all?" asked Kitty, still tenderly inquisitorial. "You must have no secrets from me, Laura."

Thus urged, Laura told her story—and a touching story it was, having for its theme and burden, the love of Perry and of herself for this cruel, kind, good, naughty, tender, pitiless creature called Kitty.

"We never talk of anything else," Laura said, with charming pathos, "and I think we could talk of you all day long. Oh! Kitty, he has painted such beautiful pictures lately! I am sure he will become a great artist like Murillo or Raffaëlle one day, and you know artists *do* make fortunes if they are clever."

Kitty understood very well what Laura

meant by this little speech, but looked as innocent as a baby.

“My dear child,” she said, “artists are the greatest dreamers on the face of the earth, and Mr. Neeve the greatest of all. But that does not matter now. I know I am always causing pain to those I love, though I do love you, Laura, and I do want to act the part of a friend towards you. Do not allow yourself to be drawn into a friendship with Perry Neeve. He has a sweet nature, and is the most gifted creature I know”—she coloured and stammered a little—“but—but there are reasons why you should not make a friend of him. You are too young and he is too young for that, and then there is your father to consider.”

Laura hung her head like a scolded child, and Kitty went on, alternately chiding and consoling. Laura must not listen to Perry’s confidences, because it was unwise and unmaidenly ; Laura must not be persuaded into any foolish compact of friendship with him, because Dr. Norman would not approve ; lastly, Laura must not dream of allying herself permanently

with Mrs. Cornford's set, because of *les convenances*, as Kitty put it.

"You see, my darling," Kitty said, "how ill unequal friendships have answered in my own case. Ambition, and," she added modestly, "I may say, the tastes inherited with gentle blood, first led me into bettering my condition in life; but at what a cost! Am I not a traitor in the eyes of every one who knows me, and an ungrateful wretch in my own? I cannot go back to Mrs. Cornford; and I hate myself for what I am and what I do; and yet, being what I am, I cannot help it. Oh, Laura, be warned by me—you must promise to be warned by me."

She wound her arms round the young girl's neck in a vehement passion of entreaty, that would have swayed a much stronger will than Laura's, and never left off coaxing or pressing till the word of promise was said. Laura consented to abjure Perry's friendship, to hear no more of his confidence, to return to her father as soon as opportunity offered, and to study his wishes in everything.

And when she had pledged herself to all this,

she received a goodly reward—such a reward as only Kitty can give; sweet special words of tenderness, lofty confidences, insinuating little bits of praise, and, lastly, a little ring from off her own finger.

“That is a pledge,” she said, “that my little Laura is not going to make all those belonging to her unhappy and herself too by doing imprudent things.”

And then she kissed her for the last time, and said she feared she must send her away.

“And when shall I see you again?” asked Laura, wistfully.

“How can I tell, dear? This is a flying visit to Paris, on my part, from our head-quarters, and we shall start for some far-off place of resort in a day or two, most likely at half an hour’s notice; at present it is quite uncertain whither we go. But I will write to you wherever I am—as if I should not! and, mind, no word of this meeting to anybody.”

Laura returned home with a dreary foreboding of Perry’s vexation in the future. What would Perry say, when she should reject his

friendship and not be able to tell him why?

This Kitty they all so loved made them very miserable.

CHAPTER X.

PASTURES NEW.

IT must be confessed that Kitty made the problem of life unnecessarily difficult. She was now entangling herself with the Bartelottes, although already entangled past extrication with all those whom she had known, and who had loved her up till now. By some singular and fatal quality of character, she seemed unable to lead a simple existence, but must complicate it by all sorts of unprovoked and irrevocable acts. For instance, no sooner was it settled that she and Myra should go with the Bartelottes to the Pyrenees, than she threw herself with such heart and soul into Ella's interests, that Myra grew savagely jealous. Kitty felt a warm liking for Ella, but after all they were

mere acquaintances, and there could be no reason for the voluntary slavery into which Kitty sold herself for her new idol. She did a hundred things a day that a less exacting nature than Myra's might have resented—giving Ella her morning leisure, her companionship, her sparkling wit, her bright spirits, all of which belonged to Myra by right of compact.

And why did Kitty do this ?

She could hardly have answered the question. Myra's ill-humour made her wretched, and she was put to every imaginable shift that her feelings might be spared when possible. Yet she went her ways with apparent recklessness, never putting "off with the old love before she put on with the new," sparing herself as little as she spared those who had once been the apple of her eye.

Why did she do it ?

She accumulated small troubles from day to day by every new friendship, she had a burden of unfulfilled pledges upon her conscience, she subjected her to reproach after reproach, and yet she went her ways unrepenting. Had she been arraigned before a mortal tribunal, she

might have made out for herself some such case as the following :

“It is not I who am to blame, but society. Does not society teach every nineteenth-century woman that old things have passed away, and all things are becoming new ? Does not society make refinement, the shibboleth of all those who would live and not merely exist ? Marriage can no longer be said to be the Alpha and Omega of a woman’s life ; and the era of convents has passed away. Therefore hundreds of thousands of us are thrown upon our own resources, and outsiders blame us because we are guilty of precedents. Some of us rush into the world’s market, ‘crying, ‘Man’s work, at any wages,’ and get it, whether they do it ill or well ; and thus obtain a little more freedom, a little more money, and a little more refinement. In former days, an unmarried woman of the middle or upper classes was content to hang, like a parasite, upon some branch of the family tree ; but now she finds that she can in every way improve her condition by earning wages. What am I doing that other women do not do ? Only, being uneducated, I have to make my way by

the simple force of character. I don't want to marry a poor man, and have to rear a large number of children; I am sure that I am intended for more ambitious things; and is not society teaching the intelligent of my sex that, as the number of women so exceed those of men, marriage is not to be depended upon by all as the *summum bonum* of life?"

Kitty did, in truth, say to herself that, being neither a domestic creature, nor a musician, nor an artist, nor a philanthropist, nor a student, she must just use such gifts as she possessed, which were, ready wit, immeasurable tact, and a supreme gift at reading and handling character. If these gifts led her into difficulties and delinquencies, it was little wonder, she thought, and little matter for self-condemnation. Being born a nineteenth-century woman, she must be a power somehow, and she made herself a power with a vengeance. But friendship is a dangerous thing when made a *métier* of, and so Kitty had found to her cost, from the time of leaving Paradise Place until now. Friendship is pleasant enough so long as it is put to legitimate use, and she had been happy in her

friendship of old days with the little violinist Petroffsky and the Fulham set. It was only within the last year that she had become a snob, catching the skirts of people standing on a higher step of the social ladder than herself, saying, "Lift me up!" And she was daily paying the penalty of her ambition.

For instance, here she was at Fontainebleau, in the glorious summer-tide, and she could not listen to the passionate cantatas of the thrush, or drowse with the noontide bee under fretted roofs of virginal green, without being troubled about worldly things.

What would become of her if, or rather when, Myra married?

Might not Ella be a powerful friend?—Ella, who was sole mistress of a wealthy house—Ella, who was so dependent upon those she loved, and who said that she loved her—Ella, who possessed wealth she could not use, servants for whom she could hardly find employment, luxuries she could only enjoy vicariously? Moreover, Ella's mode and condition of life were very unlikely to alter. Who so likely to value Kitty for Kitty's self as she?

And how pleasant it would be to spend the winters at Cannes or Nice, the springs in a mansion in Belgravia, the autumns in an ancestral country-seat, with an undulating deer-park around it, and enjoy all sorts of pomps and pleasures hitherto undreamed of! Myra had become rich by marrying a wealthy Anglo-Indian, and had no position anywhere beyond that which wealth and fair breeding give anybody; and then—Kitty tacked this proviso to every worldly-minded speculation as a salve to her conscience—Myra, by mooting marriage, has declared her intention of forsaking me, before I dreamed of forsaking her.

It was now arranged that they would go all together to Arcachon, and things might have gone smoothly enough but for Kitty's unfortunate propensity to run into extremes. Had she stood by Myra in everything, thus losing her hold on Ella's affection, and perhaps vexing Sir George a little, all might have gone well; but as it was she must try her old game of serving two masters, and live from time to time on the verge of a terrific crisis. The crisis was staved off till the eve of departure, when a most lucky

circumstance—for Kitty—occurred, and the Gordian knot was beautifully clipped on a sudden.

Myra was one of those fortunate persons to whom people were always leaving money, without any other rhyme or reason than relationship. She had more than enough for her needs already, and did nothing to deserve substantial remembrance at the hands of uncles, aunts, and cousins, and yet they could not make their wills without adding to her fortune. So Myra, just as she was going off to the Pyrenees to enjoy herself, must be sent for to England, because some horridly provoking relation had seen fit to leave her a handsome sum in the Consols, and family complications of a business nature made her presence necessary.

“It’s too bad,” she said, pouting and crying like a child, “that I should be dragged to London at this time of the year, and be disappointed of all my pleasure. No, Kitty, I won’t go.”

“Oh, what nonsense!” Kitty said, with a genuine laugh; “as if a legacy came every day.”

“How good of you to bear it so patiently,

when I am sure your heart is quite set upon Arcachon! But you shall have your reward."

Kitty looked grave.

"I don't quite see how we can both go," she said. "Think how entirely the Bartelottes have relied upon us, and Ella so helpless too! It would not be fair to them."

"If you go to Arcachon, I go," Myra said, decidedly.

"My dear Myra——"

"If you go to Arcachon, I go," reiterated the little lady.

"But just consider the way in which we have pledged ourselves," Kitty pleaded. "Ella would never have thought of Arcachon, or, indeed, of any other place, without some capable friends at hand, and for both of us to fail her in the eleventh hour, when there isn't an available soul left in Paris, would be too unkind. Your stay in England need be but short, and I would meet you at Bourdeaux, or at Tours, or even at Paris," she added, very sweetly.

"You propose, then, to sacrifice me in order that Ella may not pout a little while, or Sir

George be made cross for half an hour."

Kitty became pale and silent. For a time Myra was silent too. At length she said, with passionate tears and quivering lips,

"Of course, I don't want you to feel conventionally bound to me—I'm not so mean as that, but I did think that you cared for me a little, Kitty."

Kitty would fain have taken her hands and caressed her into a gentler mood, but Myra put her away, and refused to listen when she began speaking in self-justification.

She stamped her little foot and clenched her little hand in an anguish of mortification that was quite real, and gave vent, between her tears, to one or two speeches like the following:—

"How can women be such fools as to trust each other? I was only a school-girl when I made up my mind never to have friends, because I saw what friendship led to; but somehow you forced me into liking you, Kitty, and when I began, I could not leave off. It will end in my hating you, that is all. Perhaps you won't mind even that, when you have your new friends

all to yourself, and are leading a different sort of life. You won't think much about my loneliness either. Why should you, any more than you thought of Dr. Norman's, or of Mr. Perugino's?—and men always get better treated. But of what use for me to rant and rave? Hard words won't move you, and crying won't move you, and plain truth won't move you, or I might say what your conduct looks like, and is, in the eyes of every just person."

"You speak as if I had determined upon quitting you for ever," Kitty said, with a calm smile. "Dear Myra, your absence in England need not extend beyond a week, and you will then find me—not with the Bartelottes, but awaiting you in your own house. Nothing of the programme is to be changed, except that you join us a few days later; and if it were not for poor Ella's helplessness, I should not dream of going with them."

"Ella less helpless than I am!" Myra said, petulantly. "She has twice as much cleverness and twice as many servants! I am sure to be cheated or sent on to the wrong place by that

dear stupid Tom-Tom and the boy Walter."

"But, after all, we may be fighting with shadows. If the Bartelottes would only stay here a week longer, all the difficulties would vanish," Kitty said brightly; "and you must know that if I were to go with them, it would be solely as your representative, and putting other considerations out of the question utterly."

"All other considerations?" said Myra bitterly.

"Oh, you jealous, wayward thing!" cried Kitty, seating herself on a low stool at her friend's feet, and looking up into her face with an irresistibly, fond, though fault-finding smile. "You must not say such things, for you do not mean them, I know. As if I cared for Ella as much as I do for you, my more than sister, my benefactor, my patron——"

"But if you care for me so much, why do you dream for a moment of letting me go to England alone?"

"Dearest," began Kitty, "is not every one obliged sometimes to sacrifice feelings to *les convenances*?—but I am always preaching on this text, and the more I preach the less you

seem to listen. In plain English, we are pledged to Sir George and Ella."

And she went on with her casuistry till Myra consented that Kitty should go to Arcachon, and not only consented, but acknowledged the necessity of it.

Having obtained this concession, Kitty proceeded to instruct Myra's servants, Walter, Tom-Tom, and her maid, as to the care of their mistress on the journey, and to make all sorts of fanciful preparations for her comfort, cramming her pockets with bonbons, her bag with new novels, her trunk with all sorts of things that she persisted in considering necessary. It was arranged that Kitty should meet Myra at Tours on her return, and that they should write to each other at least twice a week. Kitty smiled and scoffed at the merest insinuation of her part of the compact being broken; and after a time Myra believed her, and presented her with a costly diamond and ruby ring, as a pledge of good faith and friendship.

Then came the hurried lunch, the drive to the station, the leave-taking, and, when the train was fairly on its way to Boulogne, Kitty

breathed a great sigh of relief. She was fond of Myra, and she wished to save her pain, but she felt very glad to have her away for a time.

One Gordian knot was at least untied. Who could tell what happy interventions might render the others as easy in the untying?

CHAPTER XI.

THE WATERS OF OBLIVION.

ARCACHON is the quaintest place in the world, with a little village of lodgings, built like pagodas, forests of little pine-trees, little walks and drives about a little lake, and a climate of such soporific quality as to produce a kind of mental torpor upon all tourists who go there. So soporific, indeed, is the pine-scented air, that one would be inclined to think an assassin might forget the murder on his conscience, a philanthropist his schemes, an author his critics, whilst breathing it. And Kitty Silver forgot the friends and lovers to whom she was bound.

She was enjoying a sense of freedom, as new as it was delightful. Sir George and

Ella treated her as if she were a duchess. It was always, "Would Miss Silver like this? Would Miss Silver object to that? Did Miss Silver wish to visit such and such a place?" Every arrangement seemed made with regard to her pleasure, and, beyond a little care of Ella, she was absolutely free from any responsibility whatever. All this kindness, this hospitality, this consideration, came spontaneously and unsought. She sat down to rich feasts, mental as well as material, every day, with the assurance of being a welcome and honoured guest, and she had never found herself under precisely the same circumstances.

Had she not purchased all the pleasant things of Shelley House with the coin of innumerable daily services? Had she not richly paid Myra for all the good things of her giving—acting by turns as housekeeper, secretary, butler, milliner? How often had she gone to bed sick and weary with the efforts of the day, commiserating herself and envying every one else in the world?

Here life was easy beyond her imagination. She had nothing to do but to enjoy herself all

day long, and she flourished on such liberal diet, looking so handsome in her pretty, country costume, that it was a pleasure to behold her.

She never seemed to remember that she was handsome, which made people more ready to praise her good looks. And, in fact, so busy was she with all sorts of plans and problems, that she had very little time to think about her personal appearance.

“How beautiful you are!” Ella was always saying. “How handsome and clever that girl is, by Jove!” was Sir George always thinking; and between the two Kitty got as much praise as was good for her. Praise is, no doubt, a great personal beautifier, so long as it is kept within legitimate bounds, just as undeserved blame makes people grow cross and ugly. Kitty could hardly help smiling and looking bright when she saw her smiles and bright looks reflected in other faces; and her new friends were most appreciative. They appreciated Kitty for her real self, finding her naïve way of looking at things in general, especially refreshing to persons like themselves, whose experiences were limited to one phase of society.

Kitty forgot sometimes that she was no longer the Kitty of Paradise Place, and would impulsively give way to piquant little witticisms that were hardly refined. She would blush a delicious rose-colour when the deed was done, and say very meekly :

“ What have I said ?—but that comes of living among authors and artists, you know. One can't help imbibing slang.”

Her Protean idiosyncrasy came out astoundingly. Sir George was a bibliomaniac ; and what, in Heaven's name, could Kitty know about old books ? But Kitty was not one of those who “ eyes have they and see not, ears have they and hear not.” She had lived in Bohemia, and Bohemia boasts of its bibliomaniacs too. She remembered how upon one occasion—it was in her childhood—there had been a struggle of many days between the universal bibliomania and—starvation. Perry's father possessed a rare Blackletter Bible, which he adored almost beyond his little curly-headed lad of nine years ; but the little curly-headed lad was in rags, and poor Polly Cornford had to bury her husband, and Kitty herself, a wild-eyed

gipsy of nine years, too, was lying sick with measles, and duns were at the door.

Poor old Perugino held out till the entreaties and reproaches of the women—not Polly Cornford, mind you—were too much for him, then, very meekly and sadly, carried off his beloved Blackletter, and brought home forty pounds in exchange; and Mr. Cornford was buried, and poor little Perry was fed and clothed, and Kitty was provided with wine, and every one rejoiced, except old Perugino.

Kitty remembered this, and racked her brains for other half-forgotten facts about books, in order that Sir George might find her conversant with his hobby. She told him of such and such a place in Paris, and such and such a place in London, where he would not fail to discover treasures; and discussed booksellers, editions, bindings, catalogues, till Sir George was in a seventh heaven, and thought Ella's friend by far the most superior-minded young lady of their acquaintance.

“It is so good of you to interest yourself about poor papa's book-mania,” Ella would say.

“You know it bores other people dreadfully, especially young people. I cannot think how it is that nothing in the world seems to bore you.”

“Could I find anything to bore me here, I should be a captious wretch, not fit to live,” Kitty answered, demurely.

“But tell me honestly, dear—do you like old books.”

“I do, indeed. You know, my childhood was spent among scholarly people, and I am interested in everything they liked.”

“How fortunate for papa—and for me!” Ella said, smiling archly, “for, with the best intentions in the world, we are dull company for each other sometimes,”—she added, with a sigh. “I often think papa must be an angel to bear being tied to a fretful invalid as he does. He is unpopular, generally speaking, and many domestic matters have helped to sour his temper; but you see how good and kind and unselfish he is at home.”

“Quite an angel,” Kitty said; “only angels haven’t handsome black beards.”

Ella laughed, and said that her father's beard was the only personal vanity he had; adding:

“Papa detests a handsome man as much as he admires a handsome woman. Those amusing men at Fontainebleau were not handsome, or he would never have tolerated them.”

And they talked away merrily, as was their wont to do, never finding the pine woods, or the pagodas, or the little lake monotonous, and growing more intimate every day.

It was a happy, oblivious time, and Kitty wished that it might last for ever. The sword of Damocles, in the shape of Dr. Norman's letter, was always hanging over her, but she persisted in not seeing it. She would not recognise the evil hour till it had come.

When she first arrived at Arcachon there remained exactly twenty-one days' respite, and twenty-one days pass quickly under pleasant circumstances. From the dewy, pine-scented, bird-singing morning, till the luminous, tranquil, southern night, there was nothing to do at Arcachon but to enjoy existence. They had

drives, they lounged over novels under the orange trees, they made delightfully easy little excursions, they were idle to the pitch of idiocy; and how delicious such idleness was! What indeed is so delicious as idleness in a foreign land with plenty of sunshine?

Kitty's twenty-one days passed like a dream, out of which she awoke one morning to find herself utterly dismayed. She had counted the time that must elapse between the sending of her letter and the arrival of it, and she knew that she must write to Dr. Norman within the next four-and-twenty hours. The early half of the time was not insupportable. It is so easy to forget at mid-day that one has to swallow an unpleasant potion at midnight; and Kitty drove out with Ella, sauntered about the garden with Sir George, enjoyed her noontide siesta, and dined as usual. But all these things came to an end, and she found herself at last shut up in her own room, pen in hand—Dr. Norman's letter lying before her, and her mind full of irresolution, penitence, and dismay. She sat down, and calmly reviewed the state of her affairs, moral and material.

One point was clear—she stood bound to Dr. Norman; and another was equally so—her friendship for Dr. Norman was the only safe investment she had hitherto made. Myra loved her; but Myra was ready to marry any day without considering her friend's welfare. Ella loved her; but Ella was not an easy person to know intimately; and beyond a delightful acquaintance, what was Ella to her? If Myra forsook her, if no one else took her up, should she not be fairly worsted in the battle of life?

It seemed to Kitty that duty and expediency ran here in parallel lines, and that if the former stood Dr. Norman in good stead, so much more did the latter. Compassion also inclined her to him. Some persons in Kitty's condition would have lost sight of all but Dr. Norman's salient grievances; but she had a mental visage of extraordinary clearness, and here, far away at Arcachon, could see how every detail of his good, earnest life would be influenced by her decision.

All the softness and ease and elegance of the life she had been leading of late, all the influence of Ella's refined nature, inclined her

more kindly towards Dr. Norman now. All the outlying troubles, that seemed gathering like a snowball, inclined her more kindly towards him. She never wanted less to go back to the humdrum country life that she knew would be her portion as his wife; but Ella was making her good, and she dreaded to do a wantonly wicked, unwomanly thing.

The clock of the little church struck eleven, twelve, one, and Kitty knew no more what the purport of her letter was to be than she had done in the morning. She dipped her pen in the ink, and, having dated the letter, began desperately:

“My dear Dr. Norman.”

But as soon as that was done, she rose in desperate indecision, and walked up and down the room, sighing to herself. Perhaps, had she felt morally certain that if she broke off with Dr. Norman then and there, she should be no more reminded of him, and no more brought into contact with anybody belonging to him, she could have sat down at once and ended the misery.

If only some one, if only something would

help me, she said to herself as she turned about the paper, unwilling to write the death-warrant of her best friend's happiness. Once she stopped, and wrote the following sentence to see how the truth looked on paper. "Oh! forgive me. I must be false to you. Forget the wretch that I am!" But no sooner were the words written than she held the paper to the candle, and destroyed the horrid symbols that they were. She cared for Dr. Norman's good opinions, for her own self-respect, too much to prove herself a liar; but then the cost of being true!—to go back to the humdrum village life; to take upon herself the charge of those wilful children; to respond to Dr. Norman's noble, honest, large-hearted life and love—Could she do all these at all, much less do them well?

And then there was Perry!

She threw herself on the bed in a paganish impatience with the Fates that had brought her into such straits, craving in her poor blind humanity a God to pray to, or a second self to give help and counsel.

As Kitty lay thus, wondering if this were the

kind of ordeal to make people become pinched, and old, and ugly, she glided from the stupor of despondency into the stupor of sleep, and dozed intermittently.

During that state of imperfect slumber she dreamed, or thought she dreamed, that she was drowsing on the old sofa in Paradise Place, sitting up to let in Perry and Mrs. Cornford, who had gone to the theatre. Kitty and Mrs. Cornford used to take by turns to go with him, when the ticket of admission was only a double one, and it was Perry's custom to signify their return by throwing a pebble against the case-ment, or singing a snatch of a song. How real Kitty's dream seemed to be! There was Perry outside singing :

“ Oh! had I a thousand a year, Gaffer Green:”

and then there came the impatient shower of gravel against the panes.

“ Oh! wait a minute,” she cried, starting up impatiently; but the action roused her, and she laid her head on the pillow almost wishing that the dream were true. And it was true, in a sense, for the singing and the shower did not

cease, though Kitty remained wakeful; and when she rose from her bed to peer out, there was a wild Quixotic figure, Perry's self, keeping watch beneath the window!

CHAPTER XII.

CAUGHT IN A NET.

THERE was no time for thinking. He had found her out. She must accord him an interview at any risk. Foolish, fond, never-to-be-forgiven Perry!

By a great effort she controlled the passion of terror and indignation that had taken possession of her, and opening the window, said, all in a breath:

“You must be mad to think we can recognize each other here. Am I not a woman? have I not a reputation? do you want me to hate you, that you persecute me thus? But I will meet you at Bourdeaux to-morrow, and hear all that you have to say, if you promise me three things.”

“A hundred, if you like,” came up Perry’s answer from the garden. “See you, I must and will.”

“You will promise never to come near this house again?”

“Well?”

“You will promise to enter into no communication, either by interview or by writing, with Sir George or Miss Bartelotte?”

“Good. And now for request number three?”

“You will promise to behave like a rational being to-morrow, and not refer at all to the engagement that once existed between us?”

“Kitty,” cried Perry, with mock solemnity, “what you ask of me is nothing in comparison to the sacrifices I am ready to make for you. Throw me down the Testament, or the Koran, or the Talmud, and I will swear to obey to the letter.”

“I will trust your word,” Kitty said; “and I will meet you at the Hôtel de la Paix to-morrow, exactly at eleven o’clock. Good night.”

“One word,” pleaded Perry, with pathetic passion in his voice; but Kitty shut the window

and fastened the shutters resolutely. When she felt once more alone, she could have cried with mortification and dismay; all her feelings of compassion for Dr. Norman had died out, and she sat down to write to him in a mood that was half retributive and half revengeful. What right had Dr. Norman—what right had Perry to make her so suffer? Was she not free to choose her own life, and select from all the affections held out to her the one she found sweetest and best? Why was she to be hunted down just because she happened to be brighter, wittier, more attractive than most other women, and goaded, netted, entangled, like any helpless dumb animal? Poor Kitty, it must be confessed, had no idea of any higher duty than inclination. Inclination was her religion, her law, her judge; and inclination no longer pleaded in behalf of Dr. Norman.

Perry's unexpected appearance had caused a reaction, but not a reaction favourable to her absent lover. In plain English, Kitty's sentimentalism went flying to the four winds, and a fit of genuine ill-temper took its place. She was eminently an amiable person when worldly

things went tolerably well with her; and she looked upon fits of ill-humour much as other people look upon fits of intoxication, kleptomania, or any other vice. She hated it, and yet could not fight it off.

So, visiting Perry's sins upon Dr. Norman's head, she sat down to write to him in a state of mind which could but argue ill both for the manner and matter of her letter. What she wrote, she could not precisely remember afterwards; she only knew that her meaning was worded as plainly as could be, and that it was the utter defeat of Dr. Norman's hopes. For once in her life she had written nothing but the naked, unvarnished truth; how he would receive it was an after and secondary thought. Then she sealed her letter savagely, and creeping downstairs, placed it beside the letter-bag, already locked in readiness for the early post.

Kitty had a power of voluntary forgetfulness, which is most enviable in these feverish, over-worked times. She could force herself to sentence one lover to a humiliating disappointment, and to make a dangerous assignation with another, without keeping awake after it. Her

mind was not yet made up as to the safest means of carrying her plan into effect; but she knew that to begin to think was to go on thinking, so she shut up the faculties of her mind, as one shuts up trinkets in a drawer, and slept soundly till dawn.

Over the process of dressing she determined upon the wisest conduct to pursue: she would feign to receive a letter from some old friend passing through Bourdeaux, or, if the letter-bag were opened before Sir George or Ella, and there were no letters for her at all, she would feign to have received some such letter a day or two since. To coax Sir George into keeping Ella company, to coax both into faith in her story, would not, she thought, be difficult. As luck would have it, a letter did come to her from Bourdeaux that day—a tradesman's letter merely—relating to some purchases she had made for Myra; but who was to know that? She let her tête-à-tête breakfast with Sir George draw to an end, and just as he began to talk of the day's plans, said:

“I am most annoyingly obliged to take the half-past nine o'clock train to Bourdeaux this

morning; if you will stay with Ella, perhaps, she will not mind."

"I have a great mind to go with you," Sir George said. "I want to see what the booksellers have there."

Kitty looked up with a sweet, deprecating smile.

"Much as I should like your escort, I will not accept it," she answered. "Without you, without me, for a livelong day, what would darling Ella do?"

"You are right—as you always are. People may come, and she may not be feeling well, or a dozen things may happen. And now I think of it, I asked Colonel Johnson and his fellow-traveller to drop in to lunch. Must you go to-day?"

"I am afraid so."

"Some important shopping on hand?" said Sir George, quizzically. He was profoundly inquisitive.

"No. I go to meet a friend there who is passing through Bourdeaux on his way—to Spain, I presume," Kitty answered, hypothetically; adding with a smile, "he is a poor young

artist—a protégé of mine, I might say” (oh! happy Kitty, to have hit upon that innocent word), “and if I refused to go and see him, he would feel greatly hurt.”

“Ask him to come here.”

“You are so good!” Kitty said; “but he might want to come again, and that would be troublesome; whereas if I go to Bourdeaux with Françoise, and have half-an-hour’s talk with him, the matter will be ended for once and for all.”

Sir George acquiesced, and, with a very faint show of well-bred surprise, Ella acquiesced also. Neither of them liked the idea of losing Kitty—the sun of their universe—for a whole day, and there was a little feeling of jealousy underlying the regret. Who was this all-important protégé, for whom she gave up a luncheon-party as rigidly as if she were a lawyer bound to Bourdeaux to make the will of a dying person. It seemed incredible that a poor wandering art-student—a mere boy, as they gleaned from Kitty’s reports—should exact such excessive considerations of punctuality from her. Could he not have waited? Could he not have come?

Whilst Kitty was making out her case, Sir George and Ella saw matters in the light that she wished them to do; so subtly could she force the reasoning powers of another into a focus of any compass she liked. She had said with the utmost simplicity, "I must go to Bourdeaux to see a poor young artist, a protégé of mine, and I must go to-day," and there seemed no possible objection to make to either statement. But no sooner was her personal persuasion withdrawn, than their faculties gradually sharpened, and they perceived that the circumstance was pregnant with suggestion, and—they could not conceal the thought from each other—suspicion also.

"Our dear Kitty is so generous, and so full of sympathy and affection, that I could never be quite sure into what imprudence she might not be led," said Ella; "and Mrs. Wingfield used to talk of her lovers as if they were legion."

"Of course, of course," said Sir George, a little testily, feeling envious of younger men in general, and of Kitty's lovers in particular. "A woman like Miss Silver has lovers whether she is rich or poor—the daughter of a peer or

of a sweep. What a figure she has! and what wit! She is superb!"

"Don't fall in love with Kitty yourself, papa," Ella added, joking; "for generous as she is, and sweet and loving as she is, she cannot marry all her lovers"—adding archly, "and I don't want a step-mamma—though I adore Kitty."

Sir George seemed somewhat shocked at Ella's levity.

"My dear," he said, "you forget that you and I have not a shilling to spare, and that I wouldn't spoil your comfort if Miss Silver had a million . . . and I were as much in love with her . . . as Tyrrell is in love with you."

Ella laughed sarcastically.

"I hope your passion would be to better purpose, though I doubt it," she said. "I believe Kitty might be led into follies and complications by exaggerated notions of kindness, but she is as far from falling in love as I am—and that is saying a great deal."

"You will never marry, Ella?"

"Papa, how preposterous is the very idea!"

And that brings us back to Kitty. A woman who renounces marriage, especially when such renunciation is caused by permanent weak health, must seek for compensation in friendship. I cannot tell you what it would be to me now to lose the friend I have found in Kitty Silver."

"There is no present danger of that kind that I see," Sir George said. "Miss Kitty Silver likes us, and likes our ways. She will not go yet."

"We have no kind of claim upon her time, remember, papa," Ella said; "but it is not the idea of losing Kitty for the present that makes me uneasy. It is the future I am thinking of. Supposing Kitty holds herself free to accept a home with us instead of returning to Mrs. Wingfield—of course, I do not know how matters stand with them, and speak hypothetically—would you offer any objection to such an arrangement?"

Sir George looked like a man who is suddenly asked to lend his dearest friend a large sum of money.

"She is a poor clergyman's daughter, or some-

thing of that sort, isn't she? and has been a governess. We should have to pay her at least a hundred a year."

"Poor papa!" cried Ella, laughing heartily at this display of her father's little weakness; "poor, victimised papa! it is too bad to come down upon you with such expensive whims; but if Kitty is to be had at any price, I must have her—always supposing Kitty to be all and no more than we take her to be."

"There is just a dash of artistic Bohemia about her," said Sir George, "that makes me feel a little uncertain whether 'Love me, love my friends,' would apply in her case;" and then he stopped short, and looked at Ella earnestly.

"Exactly," answered Ella; "but how are we ever to obtain certainty? Mrs. Wingfield is the only friend of Kitty's we know, and she is a gentlewoman, though sadly destitute of brains and education. We couldn't go to her for 'references' of her most intimate friend?"

"Will it not be better to leave matters as they are for the present?" asked her father, unwilling to spend an extra hundred a year, even

to secure the society of a young, handsome, and gifted woman.

And for the present the matter was allowed to rest.

CHAPTER XIII.

KITTY AND HER PROTÉGÉ.

NO sooner did Kitty find herself alone with Françoise, on her way to Bourdeaux, than a delicious, vagabondish sense of freedom took possession of her. It was a long time now since she had experienced the feeling, and though she was the slave of her own free will, and the chains that bound her were covered with velvet and down, they galled a little at times. To-day she cast them off, and she felt glad.

Perry might prove intractable, their interview might be bitter, the consequences of it might be unpleasant to herself; but she gave herself up to the hour with the *abandon* of a released bird. "What a bright day it is!" she thought, as the train sped on; "how blue the sky looks; how

sweet the air smells! I wonder why it is that I notice these things so seldom now?"

How should she have time to notice them, when occupied from morning till night with pleasing others?

"I am young," meditated Kitty, "I have faculty enough for a dozen people; I could slip into almost any little groove and enjoy existence, provided I had one thing—money. But as it is, I must let trifles go, however pleasant; I am like a person on a long journey, who cannot stop to pick up flowers, or chase butterflies, but I long to do it."

Then giving utterance to her thoughts, she said, "Francine, my child, are you happy?"

The girl opened her round blue eyes in surprise.

"Very happy, when mademoiselle is satisfied with me," she said.

"But have you nothing in life to make you happier than that—no sweetheart?"

"Pas encore, mademoiselle," answered Francine, blushing. "I have a good mistress, no cares for the morrow, and holidays on saints' days. I am quite contented."

“You poor little thing!” Kitty said, in a tone of magnificent compassion. She could not help pitying Francine for her contented mind. To her, to live meant to desire and to desire meant to obtain. After a little while she took a Napoleon out of her purse, rather abruptly, and said, holding it up before the girl’s eyes,

“Francine, if you see anything or hear any thing to-day that you feel sure I should not wish talked of, you are to hold your peace. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, mademoiselle.”

“Are you quite sure?”

“Yes, mademoiselle.”

“Then, here is your Napoleon. But if you are imprudent, if you tattle, if you allow other people to bother you into talking about me and my affairs, I should send you back to your home forthwith, though I like my little maid so much,” she added, with a subtle show of mixed severity and affection.

Francine took her Napoleon, cried a little out of gratitude at being so trusted, and then retired into a corner, like a submissive dog, who knows that for the present he is not wanted.

Kitty was silent till the train arrived at Bourdeaux, and stepped out on to the platform, calm, though pale.

She drew her veil over her face, saw at a glance that Perry was not there; then beckoning a coachman, ordered him to drive her to the Hôtel de la Paix.

There are some things in which one never grows older, and Kitty who grew, morally speaking, months every day, was as young as ever in this, that she could not meet Perry unmoved.

Other people were almost impersonal to her. Dr. Norman was a sad and lamentable circumstance in her life; Myra had been a fortunate circumstance; Sir George and Ella were delightful circumstances; Perry only seemed a really existent person,—flesh and spirit; and she could no more forget him than she could forget herself.

She wished him to keep out of sight; she would fain have forgotten him; she could be outwardly cruel to him—but he exercised the same spell over her that she exercised over other people, only in a different degree.

On this occasion her heart was beating fast all the time that she greeted him with apparent indifference; he did not see it, he did not divine it, but under that calm, beautifully-poised manner, burned a volcanic fire of conflicting passions.

They shook hands and talked of the weather till they were fairly installed in a little salon where Perry had provided a pretty breakfast, adorned with flowers, for Perry never forgot to fête Kitty under any circumstances. Then Kitty let Françoise take off her soft summer cloak of creamy white, and her modest straw bonnet with its one little rosebud, and motioning the young girl to a seat by the window, sat down at the head of Perry's table.

"What are we to have?" she said, with an affectation of the old childish gourmandise that Perry had delighted to indulge; "little fish, little birds? and, oh, there is some *nougât*! Give me a bit, this minute, please."

Perry chipped off a bit of the *nougât*, delighted, and Kitty crushed it with her strong, beautiful little teeth, and asked for more. She had overcome her agitation now, and determined to

be good and kind to her poor faithful protégé, and make him happy for an hour, if she could.

“And now, tell me,” she said, (“my little maid understands no English), from whence you came, and where you are going to? How is dear Polly and her chicks? What is she doing? And is Vittoria married? I want to hear everything about everybody.”

Perry began his catechism at the end. Vittoria was married; Polly Cornford and her chicks had gone home; her stay in Paris had turned out well, he thought, and so on.

“And what are you going to do with yourself this winter, dear Perry?” asked Kitty.

Perry was clumsily carving a little bird.

“I will tell you when I have achieved this performance,” he said; and when a delicate bit was finally conveyed to Kitty’s plate, added:

“I am going to Madrid to see the pictures of Velasquez, and from Madrid to Cadiz, and from Cadiz to Tunis, and, perhaps, on to Algiers. Algiers is a fine place for artists, some of our fellows say. If I like it, I shall stay and paint there.”

Perry said all this as circumspectly as if the plan had been digested for months, whereas it had only come into his mind during the last few minutes. Finding Kitty miles farther from him than before, reading in her very friendliness and ease, a sign that all question of love was over between them, he felt bound to go somewhere, and do something, just because so much was expected of him.

“What a delightful journey!” Kitty cried, enthusiastically, though in her inmost heart she felt offended at Perry’s sudden show of independence. “The change will be so good for your health, too.”

“And where will you be meanwhile?” Perry asked, very sullenly.

“It is quite uncertain as yet.”

“Don’t marry that miserly old beggar, Sir George Bartelotte,” Perry added.

Kitty crimsoned.

“Oh! Perry, Sir George Bartelotte would no more dream of marrying me than I should of——”

“Marrying me?”

“If you finish my sentences for me, you must

do it after your own fashion," Kitty said, laughing; "but you shouldn't ask a lady to a pretty breakfast, and then get out of temper with her, Perry; it is not good manners. You are going such a long way off, too, Heaven knows when we shall see each other again! do let us be friends."

Poor Perry battled hard with the pent-up passion of months, but for the life of him he could not conquer it and be pleasant. Kitty coaxed and caressed him with all sorts of kind looks and subtle words, turned over his sketches one by one in her old careful, critical way, made him present her with the prettiest, gave a trinket off her watch-chain in exchange, said he might write to her; in fine, patronized in a way that would have been delicious to any man—except a rejected lover.

Kitty was hardly more happy than Perry all this time; but how was Perry to know it? She laughed, smiled, talked without any apparent effort; "she addressed him as her "foolish boy," her "sad vagabond," her "poor, helpless Perry," as coolly and composedly as if she had been his mother. Perry could not perceive the tumult

raging in her heart of hearts, and she felt a secret contempt for him because of his blindness.

Thus they went on misunderstanding each other more and more.

Oh! alike in love or hate, how blind are we! Heart beats close to heart—as it seems—and by great, unspeakable, painful efforts, we try to bring ourselves in closest sympathy with our friend; or the truth is so simple that we think he must find it out; and it escapes him. We remain mysteries to each other, in spite of ourselves, till both go down to the grave. How often do our words, acts, and looks falsify us, when our souls are true as steel? Is it a cruel game of fate?—is it a necessary condition of human imperfection? We know nothing, and can only wait.

Perry did not know that this was a fateful moment for him; that now, if ever, Kitty might have listened and given way, had he made a show of mastery. That violent fit of ill-humour of the night before was reacting in his favour now; the glimpse of utter freedom she was enjoying with him, the sunshine, the little feast, the uncon-

cern the tone of their meeting, recalling, as it did, unregretted, but, nevertheless, happy days, were all in his favour. His following her was in his favour. Why was he gloomy, sullen, vindictive, just when a little strength and a little sweetness might have stood him in such good stead! Poor Perry had changed within the last few months. Disappointment, absinthe, evil company had done their work well; he seemed fast accomplishing the ruin upon which he had determined.

The old joyous habit of admiration even seemed wholly gone. If he praised Kitty's dress or looks, it was in a savagely jealous manner; and when she said do this or that, he obeyed apathetically and slavishly, more like a beaten dog than a lover.

So the hours wore on; and Kitty and Perry, as children who have started for a summer walk holding hands across a tiny brooklet, found the brooklet grow into a brook, and the brook into a rivulet, and the rivulet into a river—broad and deep. They spoke to each other, but their voices had a strange and hollow sound. They could not go back to the point from whence they had started, and the river grew wider and

wider. The sky was bright overhead, the world was bright around; but life seemed cold, and dark, and old to these two, as they lost sight of each other's faces and went their ways.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MYSTERIOUS MISSION.

THERE is a Spanish proverb which says, 'Every hair has its shadow,' but the maker of the proverb should have added, by way of moral, "Happy is he who sees it not."

The possessor of superabundant tact can scarcely be a happy person, and Kitty was such a person. She saw the shadow of every hair.

For instance, no sooner had she received Ella's kiss of welcome and Sir George's hand-shake—both were apparently as cordial as ever—than she knew that something was going wrong. Just a touch of apprehension, just a shade of mistrust, just an approximation of jealousy were evident to her, which would not have been evident to one person out of fifty thousand. Whilst she was making of her day at Bourdeaux as

pretty an idyll as could be ; whilst Ella listened, smiled, and asked none but answerable questions, for Ella had plenty of tact too ; whilst Sir George talked naturally of Perry's projected tour and the advantages likely to accrue from it, Kitty saw as clearly as ordinary people see that black is black and white is white, what mischief Perry had worked her. The harm was done, past cure. She must make the best of it.

She worked harder than ever for the next few days. She posed as an angel, and did it to perfection. Sir George could almost have forgiven ugliness in a woman who was so amiable, so lively, so capable as she. Kitty managed the house now, even marketed at times, and this economical proceeding enchanted Sir George beyond anything. Kitty suggested that the courier was unnecessary—a master-stroke ! The courier was dismissed, and Kitty had reached the pinnacle of Sir George's favour. If possible, she devoted herself more to Ella than ever. Ella concluded a dozen times a day that she could not possibly live without Kitty, but she wished. Kitty had no protégés, and hesitated before making her one of themselves.

But Ella had an attack of illness, and this brought matters to a crisis. Kitty sat up with her for several successive nights ; but for Kitty's care, the doctor said, Ella might have succumbed. It was Kitty only who could soothe her to sleep, Kitty who could devise a comfortable bed, Kitty who could think of something for her to eat. Sir George's gratitude was rapturous, and as soon as Ella became convalescent, revived her plan regarding Kitty's future.

"It is not a question of choice, it is a question of necessity," he said. "Kitty must come to us. She is just the sort of person we want ; we are just the people she wants. It really seems a dispensation of Providence—but I don't think, my dear, we need say anything about salary. What a home it is for her !"

"Papa !" cried Ella, quite shocked ; "I am so fond of Kitty that I hate giving her money at all. But two hundred pounds a year would be too little for any gentlewoman, under the circumstances——"

Sir George looked excessively nervous and uncomfortable.

“I don’t want to be shabby, Ella; she is a splendid girl, good as gold, and sharp as a Jew. She will save you the expense of a lady’s-maid, and work all sorts of reformatations among our extravagant pack of servants into the bargain. But——”

“Indeed, you misunderstand me, papa,” Ella answered, colouring painfully. “I want Kitty to be my friend, not my servant. I cannot and will not trade upon her goodness to me.”

“But, my dear child, she declares that nothing makes her so happy as doing things for people she likes. Why not let her be happy in her own way?” Sir George chuckled to himself, and added—“and save our pockets when we can?”

“Papa, you would not take that tone if you knew how I abhor it,” Ella said; “We are not deciding a question of money. We are thinking of Kitty’s happiness and our own.”

Sir George was terribly afraid of Ella’s anger, and said, very penitently:

“I can’t help thinking of money, how can I, when every acre I have goes to a man I hate, and your whole portion must be saved out of my

income? I should not be stingy if it were not for this."

Ella laid one of her fragile little hands on his arm.

"Poor, dear papa!" she said, "I am always forgetting the future. I suppose it is because I fancy I shall not live very long to want money at all."

"To return to Miss Silver," began Sir George, abruptly,—he could not bear to dwell for a moment on the probability of Ella's life being short,—“she is to live with us if she likes; that is understood, is it not?”

"On one or two conditions," Ella answered, brightly. "In the first place, you shall not be mulcted much, papa; my income is too large for an invalid, who cannot go to balls and make five toilettes a day——"

"I dare say Miss Silver would not be offended if you gave her a left-off gown now and then. Poor gentlewomen are used to that sort of thing."

"Papa, there are considerations far more important than my left-off gowns. Is Kitty free to accept our offer? Is her family such as to warrant us in making it?"

For some moments both were silent. Sir George was saying to himself:—What a pity Ella is so much too good and too conscientious for this world! If Miss Silver chooses to throw up an engagement with Mrs. Wingfield, what are Mrs. Wingfield's feelings to us? If Miss Silver can dress upon a hundred a-year, why put her out of her proper sphere by giving her more? Ella's delicacy is a real misfortune, and yet I would rather lose a hundred pounds than shock her, poor darling!

Ella's thoughts ran as follows:—How grossly egotistical and common and little are we with all our efforts at self-refining! Here am I living in a world of books and beautiful things; yet because Kitty is of inferior birth and breeding to myself, I cannot accept Kitty's affections without reluctance. She is bright, generous, self-sacrificing, sympathetic, intensely clear-headed, all that I want in a friend, but this petty, miserable prejudice of social position makes a hypocrite of me.

“I will tell you the best thing to do,” Sir George said at last. “I must go to London before long on business. Why should I not go at

once and ease your mind about Miss Silver's family and antecedents by obtaining all necessary information?"

"From whom?" asked Ella, doubtfully.

"From Mrs. Wingfield, in the first instance, and from the friends at whose house Mrs. Wingfield first made her acquaintance."

"Would not that be under-hand, and a little mean?" Ella said, still doubtful.

"Miss Silver need never know. Provided we do not tell her, there is no objection to the plan that I can discover. The plain truth of the matter is, Miss Silver has made herself necessary to you, and Miss Silver we must keep, at any cost. I do believe she almost saved your life in this last illness."

Ella's eyes filled.

"How can we ever repay such devotion?" she said.

"You forget that she is poor!" Sir George replied; "and that reminds me to ask you, my dear, what became of all the trinkets your aunt Francis left you? There was a pretty coral necklace, worth very little; why not give it to Miss Silver?"

“Oh, papa! as if Kitty would wear such trumpery! But I am going to give her something on her birthday which will make her look like a queen,” and Ella instructed Sir George to bring out a certain little case from her drawer, and take from it two or three strings of exquisite pearls.

“They—are—not—out—of—your—own—jewel-case?” gasped her father.

“I ought first to have told you that they were bought on purpose for Kitty,” answered Ella, “knowing your dislike to anything going out of the family. These were never in the family, papa. How lovely they are, and how Kitty will love them for my sake!” and for Kitty’s sake she kissed them before they were put away.

Sir George having decided to go to England, decided to go at once, and Kitty had to be told. Ella was a very bad actor. She felt perfectly guiltless of any treachery in her own heart towards her friend, but the mere fact of Sir George’s errand seemed mean and under-hand, and she hated herself for being the prime mover of such a step. In spite of all her efforts to the

contrary, she showed evident embarrassment of manner when the subject of her father's journey was brought forward, excusing the journey unnecessarily, apologizing to Kitty for it, and saying a hundred things that aroused Kitty's suspicions. Ella would fain have been doubly and trebly loving to Kitty just now ; for had she not watched by her bedside during nights of suffering, and tended her like a sister ? But she could not play the hypocrite ; she could not show a fondness and confidence in words that her deeds wholly wanted. So, poor Ella, after the way of very sensitive people, tormented herself and punished herself a thousand times more than occasion required.

Kitty had vague grounds for uneasiness. She saw plainly enough that there was some secret at the bottom of Sir George's sudden departure for England ; but how could such a secret affect her directly ? She could hardly believe herself to be of so much importance in Ella's or her father's eyes as to imagine that the journey was made on her account. And yet she felt instinctively that she had something to do with it.

Did they suspect any secret engagement ex-

isting between herself and a man of inferior station? Did they know of her engagement with Dr. Norman? Had Myra compromised her in their eyes? Kitty asked herself a hundred questions of this kind. She felt it just possible that Myra might have worked a little mischief. Myra had given up all idea of going to Arcachon now, and by every post entreated Kitty to return to her. But Ella was ill—and how could she go? Then Sir George was obliged to visit England, and how could she leave Ella alone? There was always a plausible reason for Kitty remaining where she was; and Myra's patience was on the verge of giving way, when a diversion came in the shape of her old lover, the ugly, the clever, the fascinating Captain Longley.

CHAPTER XV.

• PERRY'S PILGRIMAGE.

IT was Polly Cornford who had persuaded, nay, constrained, Perry to make a little tour, though at starting he had no more idea of meeting Kitty than he had of meeting any other person at all like her. What with Perry's liking for Laura, and Laura's liking for Perry, poor Mrs. Cornford had led an uneasy life of it for weeks past. All that was best and brightest in Perry's nature seemed to be consumed by his passion for Kitty, burnt up, shrivelled, destroyed as completely as shreds by fire. Who could recognise in the morose, quarrelsome, bitter Perry of to-day, his old, enthusiastic, genial, sweet-natured, sociable self?

Perhaps Laura was the only person who would not believe him changed; and to her, in

truth, he tried to be the same. His motive was a kind one, but the consequences of it were cruel. Laura looked upon all the world as unjust to poor Perry, and tried to make up for the injustice of the world by extra kindness on her part. Perry accepted her consolations in spite of himself.

But a day came when Perry's sense of danger, and Mrs. Cornford's exhortations, prevailed over every other consideration, and he went away. He did not want to ruin any one but himself. He thought that Laura would soon forget him.

"Whatever you do, don't write to her," Mrs. Cornford had said at parting. "Folly spoken, is as harmless as a dishonoured bill; folly written down, is an I O U that you must pay one day. Send her your love if you like, but don't come back to Paradise Place till you've recovered your senses, or married a black woman."

"Don't be so horribly afraid of my coming back, my good soul," Perry said, with unpardonable sourness. "You can let my studio to-morrow, if you like."

"Perugino, if I didn't love you as your own mother might do——"

"Might, but didn't," interrupted Mr. Perry with admirable satire. "You forget that she ran away from my father, and no more thought of me than if I had been a little rat in her cupboard."

"Oh! Perry, you make a bad hand at acting the brute; your heart is in the right place, as the ass said to the master who cudgelled him. But when you are thousands of miles away you will think of Polly Cornford, the veritablest ass that ever was, and wish you had not cudgelled her so often."

"Good-bye, and God bless you!" Perry said, kissing her in a boyish fit of penitence. "Why did you pick Kitty and me out of the gutter, to serve you thus?"

Then he pushed his way on to the platform of the Chemin de Fer de l'Ouest, and never looked back at poor Polly, who was crying in the third-class waiting-room.

She went back, after a time, consoled. If anything could effect Perry's cure, she felt that it was foreign travel. He loved travel as passionately as only artists can. In his prime days of enjoyment, and zealous, though intermittent

labour, a trip to Havre or Dieppe, effected at the least possible cost, had refreshed and invigorated him for months. A run down to Harwich by boat would be a tonic alike to mind and body; a day at Marlow would inspire him with rapture; for it is the enviable faculty of the born artist to renew his strength by briefest glimpses of the beautiful world of Nature, in which adverse circumstances do not permit him to spend his days. Mrs. Cornford had packed Perry's knapsack with her own hands, putting in all sorts of things he might want: drugs for the cure of ague and cholera, woollen vests, water-proof mocassins, and money. Having done this, she sent a blessing after him, and went home to paint laboriously for the support and education of her orphan nieces, and the benefit of her poor relations in general.

Perry set off on his travels, wilfully determined to see nothing, enjoy nothing, paint nothing. He traversed the lovely region of La Dordogne in perfect autumnal weather, without losing his evil temper, and reached Bourdeaux in as dull, morbid, unproductive state of mind as a man could well be. There he had unex-

pectedly come upon traces of Kitty. Turning over the pages of the Visitor's Guide, he saw this entry—*Sir George Bartelotte and party, en route to Arcachon*—and of course he must see Kitty at any cost.

When Kitty left him, almost savage with a new sense of disappointment, he was divided between two minds. He was no more to Kitty than the pebbles under his feet, but Laura loved him, and the little love he had to give would suffice to make her happy. Should he retrace his steps, and marry Laura, and earn a living by painting pictures as best he could? Or should he go on, caring for no one, letting no one care for him, and painting only when the fancy took him? He decided to choose between these two courses by tossing up three francs.

Heads were for going forwards, tails for returning home. Heads decided that he was to go on. So he went on.

He spent two or three days at Biarritz, and from thence—always travelling by third-class and sleeping in cheap little inns—journeyed across the Pyrenees into Spain. He passed the weird region of the Landes, which at other times

would have affected him with eerie, fanciful moods; and the demon still clung to him. The weather was one long pageant of golden sunshine,—Nature, like a coquette, seeming to make herself more beautiful than ever, in order to win back the heart of the poor, unhappy, forsaken young artist. Who, even in the Pyrenees, saw such skies, such mountains, such pine-woods, such stars as he? For Nature fêtes not the princes and possessors of the land, but her lovers, with the greatest of her noontide glories and sunset pomps; she puts a carpet of flowers under their feet, she sends wild, beautiful birds across their way, who sing to them. And Perry had glimpses and snatches of rapture in spite of himself. “It is of no use for me to paint anything,” he would say, but he painted, nevertheless.

“Oh! what a divine world were this,” he thought, “if Kitty or I had never been born! Were I not such a *pauvre diable* going to the bad,” he mused, “I would pick up Spanish—it is such an enchanting language from beginning to end.”

And he found the world divine in spite of

Kitty, and picked up Spanish, though a *pauvre diable* going to the bad.

It is quite wonderful in how many ways genius contrives to manifest itself. Perry had not been on Spanish soil a fortnight before he could talk in very pretty Castilian, thrum the guitar a little, dance a bolero, and sing half a hundred *coplas*. He did these things with such winning abandonment of manner, and was, moreover, so beautiful with his large blue eyes, clear, slightly sunburnt complexion, and dark gold-brown curls and beard, that he was always obliged to leave pleasant places because some pretty Pepa or Gregoria had fallen in love with him. What were Pepas or Gregorias to him? A delusion and a snare only, so he made good his escape before entangled past extrication. Poor Perry was as little inclined to turn gay Lothario now as when a mere boy he had courted his handsome, sulky, slatternly Kitty, in the happy past. Dissipation had no sort of temptation for him. He had tried dissipation in Paris, as we have seen, but his natural temperament kept him young, and made hope and other good things possible.

Poor Perry's diary in these days was touchingly wayward and simple. He sent from time to time such valuable pieces of information as this to Polly Cornford—Polly Cornford, who wept for him and prayed, in a fashion, for him with the tenderness of a mother.

“*Burgos, 12th October.*—Nothing to paint, so I came away.

“*Valladolid.*—Here I fell ill, of low fever. The landlord's daughter, Isidora, gave me disgusting drinks of herbs and pills. She was very pretty and very kind, but I could not forgive the pills.

“*Escorial.*—I got such a good dinner here, but felt just as miserable after it as before.

“*Madrid.*—Velasquez was a wonderful, superior kind of human being. If he had only had Kitty to paint!

“*Madrid, 2nd entry.*—Do you know anything about Goya, dear Polly? I don't, but his pictures are to be seen here. What a wretch I am not to enjoy these galleries!

“*Madrid, 3rd entry.*—I don't enjoy Madrid, so of what use to go on? And yet I go on. I

suppose it is every one's fate to go on, and not to like it."

And when he was fairly in Andalusia, "the sweetest morsel of the Peninsula," of which Polly Cornford would fain have had glowing suggestions, he tantalized her with the following letter :

"DEAR POLLY,

"I have often heard you say that 'an ass in Spain is sure to bray in Portugal,' and I never heard one of your proverbs that better applied to me. I am just as much of a fool concerning one particular person as ever ; and I hate myself for letting that sweet child, Laura Norman, think so well of me. Tell her I am the biggest scoundrel on the face of the earth, with my love, please.

"The women at Granada are very pretty. We had a jolly little dance last night. I do think I could make my fortune as a Spanish dancer in London. Little Isidora here would dance all over the world with me, I am sure.

"Yours affectionately,

"PERRY.

“P.S.—I paint very little; a few daubs, which I sell on the way, that is all.”

Perry had fallen in with a rich Englishman at Granada who loved art when he could get it cheap, and to him he had sold a dozen exquisite suggestions of the Alhambra, for about five pounds each. The pictures were carefully packed, insured, and sent to adorn a country house in England; the money was squandered ere it could fairly be called Perry's own.

He lingered in Granada, captivated, intoxicated, entranced by its gracious fanciful beauty. For a time the sense of the perfection surrounding him, both of nature and of art, held him spell-bound and happy. What were his insignificant life and love? what was anything in all the world beside the Alhambra? But this exalted mood passed away, leaving him again sad, and small, and self-encumbered.

Wherever he went he found rich, parsimonious English and American travellers who would buy his pictures, which were almost as cheap as photographs, and a hundred times as valuable. Thus he paid his expenses as he went along, and was always in the predicament

either of having his pockets full of money, or wanting a hundred reals to pay his landlord's bill.

So he travelled on. He went to Seville, to Cadiz, and from thence to Gibraltar, always seeing marvellous things with those unforgetting, artistic eyes of his, and always ungraciously longing to turn back.

At Gibraltar his indecision took a stronger form. One day he took a berth in a steamer going to Bourdeaux; the next, he half settled to sail for Liverpool; on the third, he really sailed for the shores of Africa.

- "Kitty is only a woman—I will forget her," he said; "and what will remind me of Kitty in Africa?"

CHAPTER XVI.

PERRY'S PILGRIMAGE CONTINUED.

PERRY landed at a little seaboard town, called Némours, on the borders of Morocco; and when he had climbed one or two fiery-coloured, sierra-shaped hills, and looked across the broad blue sea on one side, and the waving pale-gold desert on the other, he set off with a couple of French colonists who were making the inland journey on horseback. Perry had hardly felt so happy for years as he did to find himself on a plump little barb, with pistols at his side, which he was assured would prove of use. He had never ridden anything before better than a melancholy seaside hack, let out at a shilling an hour, and his sole knowledge of pistol-shooting consisted of target practice at Epsom races; but his companions, with inborn

ineffable French amiability, took pains to teach him what was necessary, and Perry came to no mischief. How the good little horse liked his rider is another matter.

The three travelled on in perfect harmony as far as Telemcen—that beautiful Granada of the West, of which so few travellers know. Perry was sadly disappointed at having fallen in with no Arab thieves or assassins on the way; he had hoped for one murder, at least, but the sublime vision of the ruined Moorish capitol, rising like a tower of pure gold against an amethyst sky, consoled him. Here he parted company with his pleasant friends, and stayed a week, exquisitely alive to the touching, tranquil, fairy-like loveliness of the place. It was like dreaming over the Arabian Nights. Dainty, dark-eyed children, in bright-coloured fez and pantaloons, played in the streets, every one a real, live little Prince Bedreddin. Veiled women glided among the dusky olive groves. The beautiful white mosques were crowded with worshippers at the summons of the muezzin. And when the many-coloured but tender daylight passed away, came the wondrous southern

night, with skies of purplish black, and large silvery stars like moons shining direct overhead.

Perry spent half his days in cutting Kitty's name on the ruins. On the base of a majestic monolith, that had been split in two by earthquake, he cut this legend very laboriously :

“KITTY IS FALSE.”

“It cannot harm her,” he mused, as he chiselled away in the twilight, with only a little Arab goat-herd watching by. “Who will ever come here who knows either Kitty or me? But what I have written will remain for hundreds of years, and it is some consolation to hand down her perfidy from generation to generation, even on the borders of the desert.”

He painted three or four charming, mystical twilight scenes; but here, fortunately for him, there were no buyers, so the sketches were saved and put aside. At Tlemcen he fell in with a grazier bound to the farthest French station in the interior to buy sheep, who invited him to share his gig. Perry saw a vision of Bedouin encampments, wild gazelles feeding by turbulent streams, caravans coming out of

yellow atmospheres, and the Great Desert beyond all, and went. It was hardly wonderful that he should go, but incredible that he should have come away. To live in the open air ; in a wide, fresh world, without cities or conventionalities, to breathe the sweet, fragrant atmosphere of the desert, to see savage life in its gayest, most genial aspect, to share the Bedouin's hospitality, all this fulfilled the dreams of Perry's boyhood. He grew broader, browner, and stronger than he had ever been in his life. He learned to saddle a horse, to shoot the jackal, to hunt the gazelle, to use his muscles in all sorts of ways. He could say a hundred things in the most astonishing Arabic, full of whistling aspirates and wonderful sibilations. He found himself forgetting to be unhappy ; yet he could not rest. The grazier said to him one day :

“ You are young, you like adventures, you want to see what this country is like. Be my partner. I daresay you have a few thousand francs—all you Englishmen are rich.”

“ I haven't a sou. I'm a painter,” Perry said.

“*Eh bien!* stay with me for a few months. You’re welcome to bed and board, if you will be a little handy now and then; a painter couldn’t be better placed.”

Perry shook his head.

“I should like it, but the truth is, I’ve been hardly used by a woman, and though she will no more marry me than she will marry you, I can’t rest so far away from her.”

So Perry forsook the life that he loved so well, and joined the first party to be heard of travelling to Oran. Oran is a stately, prosperous, half-Spanish city, two days’ journey from Gibraltar, from which one can sail to all parts of the world. Perry went down to the harbour as soon as he arrived, in search of some vessel that would carry him to any English port at a cheaper rate than the mail packet. He bargained with the master of a cattle-steamer, bound to Harwich in a day or two, and had paid his passage-money, and carried his chattels on board, when a marvellous thing happened.

Winter was over now, and the balmy, delicious, southern spring had appeared like a dream in the night. With the sunshine and the south wind

came beautiful, graceful pleasure-boats, like white-winged birds, which fluttered to the harbour, and there rested for awhile. Perry watched them with childish glee, as he loitered on the shore, sketch-book in hand, and hoped that in the next stage of existence he should be the owner of one of those pretty yachts, and not the poor artist drawing it from a distance with longing eyes.

One morning he lay at full length on the sands, watching a yacht come in; she was an elegant little craft, and scudded along in a fair wind at such a rate that one might have fancied a pirate-ship was at her heels. Perry saw a red flag hoisted in the harbour with a smile of contempt.

“Why on earth should they hoist colours?” he said, “they haven’t got Kitty on board!”

By the time he had made a little sketch of the yacht she was very near the harbour, and Perry put up his glass to see what kind of people were on board.

The party consisted of about nine ladies and gentlemen, all English, as Perry surmised, and of the stereotyped order of travellers. There

were one or two fashionable young ladies in straw hats and short serge frocks; one or two young men with long limbs, insipid faces—bearded immensely; the invariable amateur author or artist, with pockets crammed full of sketch-books and French novels; the invariable elderly papa, with the broad shoulders, and good-humoured, Philistine, purse-proud smile. Perry was about to put down his glass superciliously, when he caught sight of a face that made him grow pale and eager in a moment.

He thought he must be dreaming, and looked again and again.

He was not dreaming.

The yacht had been honoured for a good cause. She had got Kitty on board!

It was as true as the sun shining over his head, as the millions on millions of little waves that rippled at his feet. What woman in the wide world could be mistaken—even momentarily—for Kitty? Look, figure, tread, were as much her own as particular tones of her voice, and particular hues of her eye. The very turn of her shoulders would proclaim her among a thousand women.

Perry rushed from one sailor to the other, in frantic curiosity. To whom did the yacht belong? Whither was she bound? How long would she stay in port?—and so on.

No one knew anything, except that the yacht belonged to an Englishman in the diplomatic service at Gibraltar, which accounted for the colours being hoisted, and that she would most likely make for Algiers.

“The English always go to Algiers. It is such a gay place,” said one, and Perry could learn no more.

He skulked about the harbour all that day, determined to follow the yacht at any risk. Some of the party came on shore, but Kitty was not of the number, and Perry only saw her come on deck once or twice. Towards evening he contrived to have a little talk with the mate on his way to the town, and from him learned that the yacht would sail for Algiers next day, and would probably put in there for six weeks.

Perry of course tried to get back his passage-money, but the captain proving irascible he yielded the point loftily, and spent his last Napoleon in paying for a second-class fare by

mail-packet to Algiers. Unfortunately the steamer did not start for two days, during which Perry fretted as feverishly as if any important issue depended upon his arrival in Algiers. He knew well enough that nothing but disappointment would follow upon any intercourse he might have with Kitty. He could no more keep away from her than the moth can keep from the candle that burns its wings so cruelly.

The yacht had a fair wind, and reached Algiers ere the mail-packet was half way. For various good reasons she lay-to a few hours instead of weeks, and was scudding homewards before Perry put foot on shore.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW SIR GEORGE FARED ON HIS ERRAND.

SIR GEORGE set off in a state of excitement that bordered on elation. If one thing in the world was almost as dear to him as his daughter, it was ducats; and he felt that to secure Kitty as a member of his household would be an inestimable piece of economy. He was one of the few men who could mix up his admiration for a young and fascinating woman with the baldest mercenary consideration. Kitty was handsome, and he admired her; Kitty was clever, and he liked her company; Kitty was masterly in dealing with the common affairs of life; for that quality he adored her.

Poor Sir George's nature had been embittered by various causes. In the first place, he began

life by marrying a penniless girl for love, an act of self-sacrifice for which he could never quite forgive himself, especially as she had borne him no son. In the second, his name and estate would go to the man he disliked above all others in the world. Thirdly, he was comparatively poor, and could only provide for Ella's future by letting his house in Clarges Street, and his country seat, and living economically abroad.

He had one extravagance, namely, a passion for old rare books ; but that one bore the same relation to his numerous economies as the Corsair's "one virtue linked unto a thousand crimes." He travelled second-class when travelling alone ; dressed as shabbily as decency permitted ; drank *vin ordinaire* with water ; dined off a single dish, and answered people's letters on the blank leaf of their own. In fine, where ordinarily economical people spent a shilling, he spent about ninepence ; if fairly out of Ella's sight, sixpence. What the grosser pleasures of the world were to other men, the pleasures of saving were to him. To feel himself at liberty to be as economical as he pleased

was a little debauch of which he could not make enough. He grew gay, brisk, and affectionately disposed towards the world when thus inebriated; would be courteous to the pitch of geniality with the second or third-class passengers with whom he travelled; would be civil to French officials, whom he detested; would offer a cigar to anyone sitting next him.. When reckoning up the expenses of the day, he chuckled to himself, and praised himself as if he had achieved a grèat action, and would enjoy the profound sleep of a happy conscience.

As soon as the business that took him to London was fairly over, he presented himself at Mrs. Wingfield's lodgings in Green Street.

Myra received everybody cordially, and over a charming little tête-à-tête lunch, which Sir George did not disdain, as he only practised abstemiousness when it answered some end, they talked a great deal of Kitty and Kitty's affairs.

Simple as Myra was, she got Sir George to tell her all that she wanted to know before saying a word; and then, much too tickled at the

new turn affairs were taking to be angry, she burst into a hearty laugh, and said :

“My dear Sir George, what an odd notion to think of concerning yourself about Kitty’s antecedents or belongings ! Nobody in the world does that. Of course, Kitty has friends and lovers, and may have what you call antecedents, for aught I know ; but, so long as she contrives to keep them so beautifully in the background, what matters it to us ?”

She opened her large, sleepy, blue eyes, and fixing them on Sir George’s wizen, hairy face with an inexpressible mixture of childish *naïveté* and womanly shrewdness, added :

“You might, with perfect safety, marry Kitty, Sir George. She would take care that her family or family affairs never annoyed you.”

“I don’t want to marry Miss Silver,” Sir George said, pettishly. “I want to make your dear Ella happy—that is all.”

“Ella is a spoiled child crying for Kitty instead of the moon,” Myra rejoined ; “but the moon won’t come down, and Kitty will.”

“Ella is so excessively tender of conscience that she would not for worlds make any pro-

posals to Miss Silver till after I had seen you. We feel, indeed, that we stand in a delicate position with regard to yourself——”

“As if I should hold you responsible——”

“I do assure you that we have never once urged her to remain with us longer than her previous arrangements with you would enable her to do so,” Sir George continued, apologetically.

“Kitty is a free agent. I never held her bound except by her inclinations and affections,” Myra said, a little bitterly.

“I am thankful to hear you say so, Mrs. Wingfield. Dear Ella has been quite troubled lest we should appear to have acted an unfriendly part towards you.”

“Kitty left me because she liked it, and she will stay for the same reason,” Myra answered. “I hope she will not change her mind in a great hurry. That is all.”

“I don’t think she will change her mind, because she is so devotedly attached to Ella. They are like sisters,” Sir George said.

“Oh! that counts for nothing. She loved me like a sister a few months back.”

Sir George did not think any worse of Kitty for thus being spoken of by her dearest friend. On the contrary, he rather admired Kitty for showing so much sagacity in the selection of her patrons. Of course, Kitty knew well enough how immeasurably superior Ella's social position was to Myra's—the former a baronet's daughter, the latter a merchant's widow! Sir George laughed in his sleeve at Myra's insensibility to this view of the question; and as he liked the little lady, and had no particular motive for undeceiving her, he allowed her to go on deceiving herself. Kitty adored his darling Ella; but it seemed preposterous that Myra should even have expected adoration in equal degree. Excepting in Kitty's case—for Kitty was an exception to every rule—Sir George completely confounded personalities with circumstances. A person stood represented in his mind as the sum total of so much wealth, so much rank, and so many worldly advantages in general. Mere intellectual attainments, whether scientific, literary, social, or artistic, went for very little; amiabilities and moral qualities were altogether ignored.

He returned pertinaciously to the matter of Kitty's kith and kin.

"My dear Ella being so young and motherless, I feel it my duty to know something definite about this young lady's position in the world. She will not marry. A girl without a penny rarely marries out of her own sphere; and if she is to be Ella's companion for years to come, we want to feel that no poor or disreputable relations come down upon us."

"Ask Dr. Norman, then," Myra said, not caring to become responsible in the matter. "He wanted to marry Kitty, and if that does not look like putting trust in her, what does?"

Sir George thought this a good idea, and, after a little more talk, rose to go, Myra adding a word of advice on the threshold.

"If you are guided by me," she said at parting, "you will just give Kitty big lumps of sugar, and not trouble your head about anything else. What good are pedigrees to clever people?"

When her visitor had gone, Myra went to her room, and cried for an hour over Kitty's unkind behaviour. She was going back to India, the

wife of Captain Longley ; but was not his approaching marriage an extra reason for needing her friend ?

Myra was not romantic. She knew the world very well, and she entertained no sentimental notions about love and marriage. She had been married before, and she understood the necessity of husband and wife not boring each other, if they would be happy. But she was so terribly dependent on others, that she felt she must inevitably bore Captain Longley if she were shut up with him alone in some station up-country. If Kitty were but with her always, to to organize a little society, all would go smoothly. Myra really cared for Kitty, and she now declared to herself bitterly that she would never again trust a friend as she had trusted this false one.

Sir George went down to Shelley House next day, determined to fulfil his errand to the best of his ability, in spite of Myra's somewhat flip-pant deprecations.

It is just possible that there may have been a touch of jealousy at the bottom of this obstinacy. Sir George no more dreamed of marry-

ing Kitty than he dreamed of marrying Myra; but had she not smiled upon him and flattered him in a hundred ways, wearing the colours he liked best, singing his favourite songs, and reminding him from day to day that his admiration was worth the having?

Kitty had often talked of Shelley House, of her kind, admirable friend Dr. Norman, of his high-spirited, self-managed children, and all the love they bore her. She had, moreover, hinted at having been a sort of governess to the little girls; but beyond the period of her sojourn at Shelley House, Kitty's account of herself was as vague as the carboniferous epoch in geological history. Whilst Sir George and Ella remained abroad, moving from place to place, not fixing their abode anywhere, it little mattered whether Ella's friend and companion was the daughter of a clergyman—or a chimney-sweep; but if they came to England, or settled down at Rome, Brussels, or Paris, it would be quite another thing.

So Sir George determined to find out from the man who had wanted to marry Kitty whether she was a person fit to live with his

daughter; and as the question was a delicate one, he pondered on the best mode of putting it.

But he was doomed to a temporary disappointment. On inquiring for Shelley House at the railway station, he was informed that Dr. Norman had lately lost a considerable sum of money by a bank failure; that he had in consequence left the country for some time; that Shelley House had been put into proper order and let for a term of years, and that the owner was living in a very small house in London.

Sir George walked to the house that had been Kitty's home for so many ambitious months, and having obtained Dr. Norman's address from its new tenant, returned to London in a very bad temper indeed. He had spent exactly nineteen shillings and sixpence for no purpose. It was a vexatious thought.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT DR. NORMAN SAID ON KITTY'S BEHALF.

DR. NORMAN had hired a pretty cottage in the Addison Road, Kensington, boasting of a little flower garden in front, and a little croquet-lawn and shrubbery at the back; and though a mere doll's house compared to Shelley, was pleasant enough. The situation was, moreover, quiet, healthful, and convenient. Novelty delights the young; and Dr. Norman's children thought it a splendid thing that papa should have brought them to London within reach of the South Kensington Museum, the Crystal Palace, the Polytechnic, the Zoological Gardens, and so many bewitching places. Dr. Norman was not one of those men who do things by halves; and when he woke up one morning,

and found himself on the verge of poverty, he set to work to retrieve his fortune by every means in his power. It was the immediate loss of some thousands of pounds by the failure of a bank that had induced him to look into his affairs, and he was aghast at the inroads made upon a fair patrimony by the mismanagement and neglect of a few years. So he withdrew Regy from college, and sent him to a German university; put the younger boys to London University school instead of Eton and Harrow, let his land to a respectable farmer on a long lease, and his home to a wealthy friend, reduced his staff of servants to three maids, and resolved to turn the steady work of years to some account at last.

Prissy had not yet decided what sort of education would be best for herself and Laura, declaring that nothing could be thought of at present but the arrangement of the house. What with choosing chintzes, buying flowers for the little conservatory, hanging up pictures, and the like, the little maid was in her element; and when Sir George presented himself, who should open the door but Miss Prissy, a long

lilac apron tied over her short frock, her fair hair blown about wildly, looking the very impersonation of briskness and bustle.

"Oh, dear!" she said, when Sir George gave her his card, requesting to see her papa; "we didn't want visitors yet—and especially such grand ones. The hall is littered with books and things, and my doll's linen is hanging on the stairs to dry—"

"Prissy," put in Laura from the dining-room, "ask the gentleman in."

So Prissy held the door about a quarter of a yard open, and led the way to Dr. Norman's study, a quiet room at the top of the house, talking volubly all the way.

"It is such an undertaking to move," she said; "how many times have you moved? And how many little girls have you? Are they called *My lady*? I should like to be called *My lady*. This is our bath-room. Isn't it a nice one? We all have baths every day, and the dolls once a week. Have you got such a nice bath-room in your house?"—and so on.

Dr. Norman looked very fairly at home among his books, scientific appliances, and

cabinets of fossils, considering that they had only been unpacked within the last week or two. He bore the interruption with the suavity of the proverbially absent man, colouring a little when Sir George announced himself. What could have brought Kitty's new friend to him ?

“ Prissy, give Sir George Bartelotte a chair,” he said ; and finding that a matter of time, since all the chairs were full, added, “ you are our first visitor in our new house.”

Sir George apologised, as in duty bound to do, and then fidgeted a little, not knowing how to begin.

Dr. Norman relieved him of his embarrassment, by saying quite quietly :

“ I believe that a lady who was very dear to my children once is now under your roof. Is Miss Silver well and happy ?”

“ Remarkably well, and in the best possible spirits. Ahem—it is of Miss Silver I wish to speak to you.”

Sir George paused and fidgeted.

Dr. Norman made no sort of effort to help him.

“My daughter has become quite attached to Miss Silver,” said Sir George, pompously.

“Indeed?” was Dr. Norman's reply.

“Of course such an attachment affords matter for serious consideration.”

Dr. Norman was silent.

“Differences of social position—ahem—possibility of embarrassments in the future, deter Miss Bartelotte and myself from prematurely securing Miss Silver's valuable services in the future.”

Confound the fellow, thought Dr. Norman, he speaks of Kitty as if she were a lady's-maid!

“Whilst we feel that it is one of those occasions deserving of sacrifice on our parts,” Sir George went on loftily. “My daughter is an invalid, and requires about her a lady who would be at the same time a devoted friend and a conscientious adviser. This young lady seems in every way fitted for the post. She is a capital arithmetician, an indefatigable *menagère*, an incomparable economist, and Miss Bartelotte feels towards her as an equal. But we know nothing of Miss Silver's family, absolutely nothing.”

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Then he looked at Dr. Norman, and waited. Dr. Norman was as uncommunicative as a statue.

"We thought that perhaps you might be able to give us some information, Dr. Norman."

"Miss Silver stayed for some time in my house as a welcome and honoured guest, and only consented to prolong her stay indefinitely on the condition that she should help my little girls in managing the household," answered Dr. Norman. "We did not wish Miss Silver to go away. She went of her own accord."

"And Miss Silver came to you as a stranger?"

"As a guest," replied Dr. Norman; adding, with a smile, "One hardly expects of one's guests that they bring a reference, like servants, as to honesty and good behaviour."

This sarcasm nettled Sir George.

"But you will grant the case to be different with a young lady of my daughter's rank," he said. "We should be acting unfairly towards Miss Silver, if we placed her in a sphere to which she had no right, and from which she might be unpleasantly ejected by the merest trifle. We want to prevent any possible misunderstanding

or complication in the future, before it is finally settled that she remains with us. But, since you cannot give me any information, I will no longer trespass on your time."

"I know of only one person who could tell you whether Miss Silver is a proper person to enter upon the duties of Miss Bartelotte's friend and conscientious adviser," Dr. Norman said, "and that is the lady with whom she lived before coming to us. Here is her card. She is an admirable person, though very unconventional in her mode of life. By all means call upon her."

And he put Mrs. Cornford's card into Sir George's hand, and bowed him out with formal politeness.

Incomparable snob! thought the philosopher, Pedantic prig! thought the aristocrat, as the two men parted.

Dr. Norman returned to his work in a very impatient frame of mind. He was an exceedingly modest man, estimating himself and his social position at their lowest worth; but he could not help thinking that Kitty was about to sell herself into slavery, and that, as his wife,

she would have been free, honoured, and happy. He was of too frank and affectionate a nature to deem otherwise—always supposing that Kitty cared for him—since he would have cut off his right hand rather than accept a sacrifice from any woman. Well, she had chosen for herself, and he could only hope that her choice was a happy one. Their paths had diverged as entirely as the paths of travellers bound eastward and westward, and he trusted that they might never meet. Kitty had used him hardly, and his heart was very bitter towards her still. She was not only guilty of treachery, but she was guilty of slow, wilful, it almost seemed premeditated, treachery; and he was not yet trying to forgive her. He was trying hard not only to make the best of his life, but to make something good of it. His unfortunate passion for Kitty had worked healthfully, as all good men's passions do;—in the first instance, arousing him to a sense of fresher, more hopeful, younger life; in the last, spurring him on to seek satisfaction and happiness elsewhere.

Disappointment was teaching him to be just to himself. The one supreme grief of his life had palsied his energies for awhile; the smaller one had quickened them. He had been so badly used by one unworthy of him, that indignation became ambition.

“The world cannot use me so ill as Kitty has done,” he said, “and I will go in and strive with my fellow-men.”

To be properly estimated we must live among our equals; and Dr. Norman, who had passed with his country neighbours as a very poor creature indeed, soon found his level in London. He selected a choice circle of friends, threw himself heart and soul into some special line of scientific speculation, and lived a life of thoughtfulness and activity. The loss of his money affected him chiefly for his children's sake. He felt that it would only have happened to a man as careless and self-absorbed as himself, and determined that his boys and girls should not go unprovided for because of their father's fault. To fit the former for professions, and to give the latter the best education possible,

was an end for which he was ready to make any effort or sacrifice in his power. He resolved to work.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT MRS. CORNFORD SAID ON KITTY'S BEHALF.

NEVER had Paradise Place looked more unmitigatedly disreputable than on the occasion of Sir George Bartelotte's visit. It was now winter-time, when the London atmosphere sucks all the colour out of everything, and makes shabbiness—whether natural or artificial—doubly shabby, and poverty—whether cheerful or melancholy—doubly poverty-stricken. Upon the occasion in question a slight fall of snow had taken place, and Mrs. Cornford's nieces, with all the hilarity and nonchalance of youth, were sweeping the steps of the whole little colony, and snow-balling each other and the passers-by. The three girls had tucked up their petticoats, and were splashing their untidy

little legs and skirts, and brandishing their brooms like the happy gipsies they were. On seeing Sir George knock at aunty's door, Binnie refrained from sending a well-aimed snowball at his face, and rushed to open it, calling out at the top of her voice, "Aunty, here's a gentleman! It's so jolly, and we haven't near done sweeping yet!"

Then Miss Binnie slammed the door violently, leaving Sir George in the dark, dirty passage to await Mrs. Cornford's pleasure. The heart of the baronet sank within him as he took in at a glance all the rollicking, unvarnished, outspoken Bohemianism of the place. A dirty little lamp burned in the hall, a couple of liqueur glasses and a bottle of Hollands stood on a little bracket beside it; a heap of coals, evidently borrowed of some neighbour, lay in one corner; whilst overhead, hanging so low as to flap unpleasantly in the face of passers-by, were various articles of underclothing out to dry.

Sir George stood aghast. It seemed to him that Kitty's self, Kitty's devotion, and Kitty's economies, were lost to him and to Ella for ever.

As he waited thus, Mrs. Cornford's voice came down from one of the upper rooms.

"I hope you don't mind waiting?" she said. " 'Take things easy and you'll grow fat,' as the snail said to the grasshopper. If you were the King of the Cannibal Islands I could't come down till I have laid on my next coat of paint; but I'll do it before you can say the alphabet backwards, standing on your head, or tell me who was Nicodemus' grandmother."

In a few minutes she came down, the upper part of her portly person arrayed in a short blue cloth jacket like a pilot-coat, little the worse for wear, but greatly the worse for paint; her head wrapped up in an Indian scarf, that shone with the lustre of antiquity, and the pockets of her painting apron full of brushes, pencils, French novels, and walnut shells. Before greeting her visitor she stretched out one shapely arm and brought down all the linen at a blow, hurling it in a bundle to the upper landing-place; then, turning to Sir George with a good-natured smile, said,

"I've no faith in so much clean linen myself, but we must do as others do in this world."

She ushered him into the same little sitting-room where Laura had first seen Perry, nearly two years ago, and where Kitty had given Laura a drawing-lesson, with all sorts of visions floating before her mind all the time; and, motioning him to take one arm-chair, dropped into the other with a somewhat abrupt and catechetical—

“ Well ? ”

Sir George very pompously handed her his card, saying to himself, “ If that does not put a curb upon the woman’s impudence nothing will ; ” but it did not put a curb upon Mrs. Cornford’s impudence.

She gave an incomprable little “ whew ! ” of astonishment, and said very unceremoniously—

“ Oh ! you’re Sir George Bartelotte—are you ? Well, there’s no telling who turns up. I’m sure I should as soon have expected to see that artful little dodger, Miss Kitty herself.”

“ I believe you have known Miss Silver from her earliest years ? ”

“ I should just think I have. Don’t I know her, that’s all ! ‘ Blood is thicker than water, but you and I are related by other ties,’ said the

costermonger's dog to the costermonger's donkey, 'for the same stick beats us both.' And Kitty and I, though not related, have had our ups and downs together."

"Miss Silver speaks of her family as having greatly suffered from reduced circumstances."

"Stuff!" Mrs. Cornford answered, very impatiently. "I might as well say my circumstances are reduced, because I've had only one gown to my back all my life."

"It's quite astonishing that so accomplished a young lady should have had no more advantages," pursued Sir George.

"For my part," said Mrs. Cornford, putting on her H's with unusual recklessness, "I think she has done mighty little, living among artists and art-critics as she did, and having all sorts of opportunities. But there was never making an artist of Kitty Silver. A little money was more to her than all the arts and artists that ever were, as I always said to that foolish boy Perry, when head and ears in love with her."

Sir George trembled in his shoes at what would come next. It was all over with Ella's plan, he said to himself—Kitty must not stay

much longer with them ; beautiful, gifted as she was, she must go.

“What was Miss Silver’s father ?” he asked, in rather a crestfallen manner. For the first time during the interview the motive of Sir George’s coming dawned upon Mrs. Cornford’s mind. Now poor Polly Cornford had not a particle of malice in her composition, and had forgiven Kitty’s shortcomings towards herself long ago, but for the life of her she could not help playing Sir George a trick at Kitty’s expense. The pompous little monkey, she thought, I’ll teach him not to insult artists again !

“Oh ! you’ve come here for Kitty’s character, have you ?” she asked.

“I have come, madam,” replied Sir George, with the inimitable loftiness of little-minded men, “to inquire whether Miss Silver’s family is of such a stamp as would justify me in retaining her as the companion of my daughter.”

“There’s no deception about us. You see what we are,” said Mrs. Cornford, glancing round the room with a wave of the hand ; “that picture opposite to you is worth three hundred pounds, and was given me by the artist. C——

(naming a celebrated French artist), a sad unprincipled scapegrace, but such a colourist! 'Madame Cornford,' he said, 'I hope to see you R.A. before I die—I love you like a sister.' 'The nation is an ass, and you won't,' I said. We keep good company, I assure you. That sketch on the mantelpiece was given me by a man whose brains are worth thousands a year; he comes here when all the world is gaping at his pictures on the Academy walls, and smokes a cigarette with me as simple-hearted as possible. 'There are very few people who are such good company as you, Polly, my dear,' he says. 'I can return the compliment, Jemmy,' I reply; and when the cigarettes are done, we have a bottle of Sauterne and drink to the health of our critics. There's no sort of pretence about us, 'but don't eat us unless you like,' say the thistles to the donkey, and that is what I say to you. We're good-meaning people, who never object to oblige a neighbour by pawning our Sunday clothes for him, but we're not quite respectable—only a little respectable." Mrs. Cornford added briskly, "But have a little Hollands this cold day—do, now."

“I require no refreshment, I thank you, madam,” Sir George said, stiffly; “and, indeed, I think it hardly necessary to trespass on your time further,” and he rose as if to go.

“Hoity-toity, twiddle-dum-dee!” Mrs. Cornford cried; “you seem as flustered as the devil in a gale of wind. Having told you what we are, I will tell you what Kitty is; for she’s no more like us than a cuckoo is like a cucumber. I wish she were.”

Sir George sat down.

“If you think that Kitty’s old friends will ever come in her way, you are greatly mistaken,” Mrs. Cornford continued; “she loves us—oh! how she loves us—at a distance!”

“Miss Silver’s father was in the Church, I believe?” asked Sir George, thinking that the latter part of Mrs. Cornford’s speech augured well.

“I should think he was in the Church, if anybody ever was! He was a Presbyterian minister, and his name was the Reverend Nehemiah Silver, and he married the only daughter of the younger son of Sir Thomas Mistletoe, who hated

the match, and he (the parson) went out as a missionary to try and convert the Himalayan Mountains."

"I presume, madam, you mean some uncivilized tribes dwelling in the Himalayan regions?" said Sir George.

"Just as you please," Mrs. Cornford went on; "all I know is that he did not make many converts, and it so preyed upon his mind that he died of a broken heart; and if you ever go that way—his grave lies exactly half way between Astracan and Pekin—you will see written somewhere on the stone his name, age, and birth-place. Ah! poor Kitty, little you know what a father you lost in him!"—and Mrs. Cornford held her apron to her face to hide the laughter that she could not control.

It has been already hinted that Kitty's parentage was a hazy affair; but if we want our coat of arms made out, we go to the herald's office and get a fine crest in a twinkling: why should we be more scrupulous about other fictions? Kitty had called the one a clergyman and the other a daughter of the youngest son of a

baronet, whose title was now extinct, and no one had any ground for supposing the statements to be imaginary.

After weeping for some minutes, Mrs. Cornford started from her chair and seized Sir George by the arm with a convulsive grip.

"Whatever you do, don't harrow up poor Kitty's feelings by talking of this. She cannot bear to be reminded that she has lost a father—and such a father!"

"And has Miss Silver's youth been spent here?" asked Sir George, not dreaming that Mrs. Cornford was making fun of him.

"Oh! bless your soul, no. She was here in the flesh—but what's that? A swan is always a swan, though it condescends to feed with the ducks. And Miss Kitty condescended to feed with the ducks till something better turned up. You see, we are only a little respectable, and she was always the fine lady."

"And you think that—ahem—no inconvenience would arise to us in consequence of Miss Silver's early connections?"

"Inconvenience!" cried Mrs. Cornford, indignantly. "Kitty Silver would scorn to put

us to shame by the spectacle of her own grandeur; she would rather suffer death by slow fire than humiliate her old friends!"

"That sentiment does her honour," replied Sir George, brightening up,—“very great honour indeed.”

“Who says that it does not?” Mrs. Cornford said. “I can see through a brick as well as most people, but make no comments. Kitty’s old friends will no more trouble her than the mummies in Egypt; and she will no more trouble them than she will trouble—her father’s ghost at the foot of the Himalaya Mountain. ‘I love you dearly, but you’re really too good for this world,’ says the spider to the fly before gobbling him up; and that is how Kitty—I mean worldly people do. But, to change the subject, Kitty will never disgrace your daughter, rest assured of that. The beggar who has turned thief won’t look at his old friends any more than a duke would.”

“It seems to me that the proverb is hardly pertinent,” said Sir George.

“Well, we’re not beggars, certainly, and Kitty isn’t a thief, but it seemed to come in

handy just then. When proverbs come in so handy, they always offend people."

"Pardon me, I was not offended, madam," Sir George said; "but I have really trespassed too long on your valuable time, and will take my leave."

"You'll have a cup of coffee, won't you?" said Mrs. Cornford.

"Indeed, no, I thank you."

"Well, would you like to see a picture that is decently done—for a woman?" she asked.

As Sir George knew something about pictures, and always accepted gratuitous pleasures, he accepted that invitation.

Wonderful indeed is the spell of genius. Providence had rather scantily endowed the poor baronet with the fiery particle called soul: he loved money better than art, and appreciated worldly things beyond beauty. But when Mrs. Cornford led him up to her easel, and he saw before him a masterly subject, well conceived, splendidly coloured, and full of pure, healthful, manly sentiment, he forgot the rollicking vulgarity of the place, and the offensive familiarity of the woman, in sincere admiration.

"By George!" he said, "you ought to get a good price for such a picture as that."

"Will you give me two hundred pounds down for it?" cried Mrs. Cornford, holding out her hand.

"On my word, that is too little. Do you get no more than that?" asked the baronet.

"Oh! you forget that I'm a woman, and have no R.A. at the end of my name. So you won't buy it?" she added, smiling.

"I am no picture buyer, madam, but I have picture buying friends to whom I will name the matter."

"Send 'em here—send 'em all here," Polly said; "a picture to sell can't get too much praise—from the wise or the foolish."

And then Sir George very politely took his leave. He was determined to form no opinion on the matter of Mrs. Cornford's disclosures till they had been communicated to Ella.

"A most extraordinary person that," he mused, as he walked back to Sloane Street; "so unpleasantly familiar, and yet evidently intending no harm. It would not be a bad speculation to buy that picture; I'm sure it's worth double.

Who would think that such a woman could paint a signboard !”

“What a little prig, to be sure !—but I took him in gloriously about the Himalayan Mountains,” said Polly ; and she assembled all her friends to laugh with her over the story.

CHAPTER XX.

KITTY TAKES COUNSEL OF HERSELF.

IN spite of their affection for each other, in spite of Ella's well-bred self-possession and Kitty's innate tact, the two girls were ill at ease during Sir George's absence. Just a touch of reserve, just a shade of coldness crept into the daily intercourse that had hitherto been so unalloyed and sweet to both; and Arcachon seemed for the time a dreary, monotonous, unbeautiful place. Kitty made superhuman efforts to be merry, since she could not be cheerful. She would sing little serio-comic songs with all the *abandon* of a gipsy, would dance an operatic *pas seul*, would caricature anybody and everybody, for Ella's amusement. Poor Ella felt grateful, but could not be amused even by Kitty, so great was her suspense, and so painful the necessity

of reserve. "Kitty is nobler than we," was her hourly, almost momentarily thought, "and if I lose her, how blank, and unloved, and dreary my life will be!"

"If I lose Ella," thought Kitty, "what beggar in all the world will be so poor, so friendless, so forlorn as I? I am like the prodigal; I cannot work, and to beg I am ashamed."

She felt morally certain that Sir George's departure had something to do with herself. Was he determined to find out the nature of her past intercourse with Perry? Was he suspicious concerning her career from the beginning? What would he think, how would he act, if he knew all?

At that thought Kitty would walk up and down her room, in a passion of indignation against the Fates for having used her so hardly.

"I have nothing to be ashamed of but my poverty," she thought, with extreme bitterness; "nothing—nothing. Who can accuse me of ever forgetting that I was a woman? When did my pride in my good name for a single instant forsake me? When was I guilty of a light

word, or of an immodest action? Ella, who is pure as the angels, is not more pure than I; and yet, because I am poor, such reputation avails nothing. Oh! poverty, poverty! why do you not kill us outright, body and soul, rather than so torture us?"

But if Kitty's mind was in a ferment when she had only suspicion as a base for her uneasiness, what was her condition after reading the following letter from Mrs. Cornford?—

“Paradise Place, Nov. 10th.

“DEAR MISS GOOD-FOR-NOTHING,

“A little, youngish-oldish, Jack-in-the-box looking man, with as much hair on his face as would make two or three clothes-brushes, came here yesterday to inquire about you and your belongings. I gave the first thing in the way of a pedigree that came to my mind, and if he took it as true, he must blame himself for being a fool, and not me, for taking him in. ‘Treat a donkey like a donkey, or you’ll soon see where you are for your pains,’ that is my motto, Kitty; and a good one, as far as my experience of donkeys goes.

“ Well, I told the little wretch all this and much more, and praised you up as a shopman praises up damaged goods he wants to get rid of. I wasn't going to be the ruin of you, though you have been the ruin of my poor Perry; for blood may be thicker than water, but if a motherless child you've taken care of isn't your relation, who is? And you're my relation still, Kitty, and if ever you want what you never get except from the best of friends, namely, a little money and a little plain speaking, count upon Polly Cornford. Your father was an Irish divine, remember that, and went to India as a missionary, and died there, and is buried at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains; and your mother was the daughter of the younger son of Sir Thomas Mistletoe—remember that, too, and she was disinherited because she married a poor curate. Whatever you do, don't muddle the story.

“ Now, didn't I do my best for you? And I said, also, that you were no more like us than a pretty little blue and pink bean that has slipped into a bushel of grey field-pease, or something of the kind—which is true; whether the bean is the best of the lot is another question. But

write to us, my dear. 'Good luck divides the best of friends,' says the dog who has stolen a bone to his neighbour; but it shan't entirely divide us, and though we don't want your bone, we want to know how it tastes. Is it full of marrow? Is it the best of bones? How long will it last?

"You needn't grudge us this pleasure, for we're not envious, Kitty, only a little inquisitive, as old friends always are. I hope you'll be happy with the grand folks, that's all. Fine feathers, here and there, make a very fine bird, and you'll never let people find out that you are a jay instead of a peacock, I know. Are you quite comfortable in your borrowed finery? Does it really fit? And if it doesn't fit, how does it feel? Well, there's no accounting for tastes, as the devil said when he saw the Scotch people listening to sermons two hours long!

"Good-bye, little daughter of Mammon,

"Yours ever,

"POLLY C.

"P.S.—Oh, dear! I remember now that your father was an English parson; pray don't forget."

Think of what Kitty must have felt as she read this letter ; picture, if you can, her rage, her terror, her mortification. Nothing as yet had happened so adverse to her fortunes as this ; and as she held the letter in her hand, looking like a ghost, it seemed too horrible to be true.

For a short time the blow paralysed her. She knew not which way to move so as to prove a friend to herself ; if, indeed, any harmless, much less expedient course of action were possible. Sir George at Paradise Place ! Sir George Mrs. Cornford's confidant ! Sir George a witness to the vagabondish, disreputable, unmitigated Bohemia in which she had been reared ! As she realised the full import of Mrs. Cornford's letter, it seemed to her that the cup of her mortification was full to overflowing, and that her ruin was suddenly and irrevocably accomplished. When Ella came to know all, would she not feel contaminated by the mere touch of her finger-tips ? Would she not scorn her for having come to them under false colours ? Would she not part from her for once and for all ?

And if Ella cast her out now, who was there

to take her in ? She had wronged Dr. Norman past forgiveness ; she had wronged Perry past forgiveness ; she had felt so securely havened in Ella's affection that she had well-nigh wronged Myra past forgiveness. She could not dig, as she had said, and to beg she was ashamed. She sighed drearily as she glanced round her dainty little room, and said to herself, that whatever ills she could bear she could not bear poverty now. These soft cushions, these smooth-going carriages, these dainty meats and drinks, were as necessary to her as if she had been accustomed to them from infancy.

Poverty would soon kill me, I think, she said, and if it did not, it would make life more hateful to me than death itself. Oh ! what shall I do ?

She sat still and pondered ; but thought did not help her. She walked up and down the room and railed at fortune ; nor did that help her. At last she wept ; and when did tears not help a woman ?

Tears lightened her heart and cleared her vision. Having wept, she felt strong enough to make an effort on her own behalf, and to try

whether she could not baffle mischance, as she had often baffled it before. Was she not a host in herself? Was she not far-sighted beyond all the far-sighted people she knew?

When she had calmly considered the question in all its bearings, she came to the conclusion that if she could mend matters at once, she could only do so by one means. She must tell Ella the truth, and throw herself upon her generosity. Ella loved her dearly; a sister could hardly love her better; and she was of a most constant, clinging, loyal, fervent nature. Would Ella tolerate the idea of her friend, her darling, her counsellor, going out into the unkind world alone? Would not her affection for once conquer pride?

Kitty was not well versed enough in the hearts of other women to feel sure on this point. She knew how generous men could be when they love; but was the same spirit of sacrifice to be expected of a woman towards her friend? It is true that they were dearer than most friends, and had loved to style each other "sister;" their affection had been based on mutual esteem and admiration; their sympathies had

drawn them nearer from day to day. Yet Kitty—who judged all women by herself—doubted.

The day on which Mrs. Cornford's letter arrived was to be devoted to some acquaintances of Ella's, who were coming from Bourdeaux; and thus the critical hour was put off for the present. Kitty bestirred herself on behalf of Ella's guests, as usual arranged the breakfast-table, planned a charming excursion for the afternoon, helped Francine to pack cups and saucers for the picnic tea, and showed no sign of the form of anxiety burning within till all her work was done. Then she dropped into a chair and sighed a weary little sigh, and put her hand to her heart. Ella was not present, but a little later in the day she noticed her friend's pale looks; and, though she dared not ask the reason of them,—having received an unsatisfactory letter from her father by the same post that had brought Mrs. Cornford's, and naturally supposing that Kitty had heard from England also,—she contrived to manifest an extra tenderness. The party consisted of a widow lady and her four daughters: aristocratic, angular, amiable

young ladies, who had doubtless been plump and pretty once, but were verging on the sere and yellow, nay, we will not be so impolite, the greenish-yellow leaf. It was a sad spectacle; for these young ladies had been brought up merely to be ornamental, and though they were now trying to take kindly to the more serious side of things—to interest themselves in hospitals for the sick, scientific studies, and so on—one could see that this philanthropic and scientific alacrity was not spontaneous. And then, though their mamma was a baronet's widow, they were terribly poor, and if aristocratic poverty is not a harrowing thing,—what is? Their clothes were flimsy, and threadbare to the last degree; their shoes would not have withstood the first autumnal shower; their umbrellas were more fitted to keep their aristocratic heads cool than dry. It was a consoling thought that they were bound to the South, where people can go with the clothing that would suffice for statues, and take no harm.

“We intend to be so industrious in the Pyrenees,” said the mother, glancing at the daughter. “Madeleine has become quite a botanist,

and collects wherever she goes; Fanny paints in water-colours; Janet is the social economist of the family, and visits all the schools and orphanages by the way; and Constance and I are devoted to entomology. We found in Thun last summer the loveliest white snails you ever saw, as big as a mouse, and with the most knowing-looking horns."

"Indeed!" said Ella, "but I don't like snails at all. I could never call a snail lovely."

"Wait till you have a hobby, dear Ella, before you make fun of us," cried Constance. "Hobbies are the greatest boons the gods have provided as a compensation for all the ills to which flesh is heir to."

"As if Ella had no hobby," said lady Gardiner;—"who is without?"

"This is my hobby," answered Ella, laying her hand affectionately on Kitty's arm.

"And what is Miss Silver's hobby?" asked one of the ladies.

"Kitty's hobby," said Ella very quickly, "is to be good to everybody."

Kitty coloured a little. Was there any satire in Ella's remark? She could hardly believe it,

though it sounded more like satire than anything else; but then we know our own hearts so much better than our best friends know them! Kitty and Ella were the very best friends. It was *set fair* on Ella's weather-glass when Kitty was by; it was rain, storm, and *much rain* when she was away. Kitty loved in a half humble, half lofty, protective fashion, that made her affection a staff for the gentle, sensitive, suffering Ella to lean on.

And yet how little did these two women read each other's thoughts! How far were they from knowing each other's hearts! On this particular day, for instance, they sat face to face in the same carriage, ate at the same table, called each other by the same sisterly names of endearment, whilst each had her own painful secret, and still more painful suspicion.

"How much does she guess?" Ella asked herself again and again.

"How much does she know?" was the thought uppermost in Kitty's mind.

And the ladies in the greenish-yellowish leaf went into ladylike ecstasies over their several hobbies, and a merry tea was partaken of in the

sweet-scented pine-forest, and the somewhat lengthy dinner came to an end, and Ella and Kitty found themselves alone.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT KITTY SAID ON HER OWN BEHALF.

THE pine-scented air had never seemed half so sweet as it did that evening; soft breaths of flowers were blown from the garden, the twilight sky was the colour of lovely opals from east to west, and when they faded, great stars shone about the purple heavens. Kitty looked at the stars and said to her own heart, "Oh! what has my miserable secret to do with a night like this?"

These small domestic tragedies, which seem such trifles to write of, how hard are they to bear!

We hear of nation warring against nation, of awful catastrophes involving the sacrifice of hundreds of fellow-creatures, and set about our daily affairs as if nothing had happened; but if

anything has come between us and the person we love best in the world, what are we good for till all is made smooth again? We could almost hide ourselves in some distant country, so heart-sore, heart-sick, wretched are we! These sweet human affections, the best gifts Heaven has provided, must inevitably seem embittered and perplexing to us now and then; and we can no more see the good in such bitterness and perplexity than children can see the good in things created with stings and fangs. But the good will doubtless be revealed one day.

It is easier to talk of painful matters at twilight, and as Ella rested on her sofa, and Kitty sat in her easy-chair opposite, she began in a low voice:

“Ella, I have something to say to you that lies on my heart like a lump of lead. I must get rid of the lump whilst we are alone.”

“Yes, dear,” Ella said with plaintive resignation. She did not say, “Come close to me and say it, with your hand in mine,” as Kitty had hoped, but hardly expected.

“I take great blame to myself that I did not

“speak out long ago when we were first thrown together, but I have always been such a coward where my affections are concerned, and I soon grew to care for you more than for all my other friends,” Kitty went on very proudly and calmly; “and you were very fond of me,—were you not?”

“Oh! Kitty, how can you speak as if it were a thing past and done. I shall always care for you more than for any other friend.”

“I know that, and I knew it all along, and yet to speak out is to put a barrier of some sort between you and me. It is natural for people to like to be happy. I said I would be happy as long as I could, at any risk, and I have been as happy as I suppose few people ever are. That will be something to remember.”

Ella listened, trembling. What could she say? What could she do? She was beginning to suffer as much as Kitty. The hardest thing of all was that they could not have out the story as children have out their quarrels, cheek to cheek and arms entwined. Ella was a child still where her affections were concerned, and she loved to be kissed and petted as children

do; Kitty had loved and petted her hitherto, but Kitty seemed getting farther away from her with every word. Poor Ella!

“The difference between your rank and mine ought to have made me frank,” Kitty went on, “but we met on grounds of equality, and when two women love each other as sisters, what do they think of rank? I never dreamed in those early days that our friendship would become in time so sweet and enduring a thing. I did not know you. I did not think that a day would come when I should wish to be your hired servant rather than nothing to you, and it has come now with a vengeance. I would rather be your hired servant, Ella, than reign supreme in a palace; yet I must go—and you cannot, you must not hold me back.”

Ella listened and said not a word. She had never before realized how much Kitty was to her. She took in at a glance all the misery that the loss of such a friend would bring upon her; and yet she listened in silence.

“If I had acted fairly by you, when we first began to think of each other as dear friends, I should have made some such confession as the

one I am going to make now, leaving you to act upon it as you think proper," Kitty said, and forthwith began her confession:—

“Well, I am a social gipsy: born of them, bred among them, made love to by them. We lived like vagabonds on the face of the earth, taking no care for the morrow; feasting one day, starving the next; but we broke no laws except those of custom and comfort. The men were honest, the women were good, and a universal tie of kindness and charity bound them together. It was a merry life that we led in this Bohemia of ours, Ella, and as free from care as the life of the birds in the woods. If one of us wanted a shilling, a coat, or a loaf of bread, there were our neighbours', ready for us; and towards myself, the goodness was such as I should be wicked to forget. It was not a life of inward, if of outward, vulgarity. We adored pictures, and music, and beautiful things, and often went without food to get a taste of them. Yet as I grew to be a woman I hated the life. I longed for softness and refinement, as other women long for finery and admiration. Perhaps it was because I came of gentle blood

—so they told me—and the instinct of respectability was too strong for me. I felt like an alien, and I determined to elevate myself, some day or other, at any cost. I used to sit at home—a very Cinderella among the ashes—thinking, thinking; scheming, scheming. I had no gifts; that was the worst of it. I could act passably, but not well enough to go on the stage. I could sing and play a little, but had no musical instinct in me; I could not draw a line to save my life. My only natural gift seemed the art of acquiring popularity—I ought to say affection. People always liked me better than anybody else. It was as if wherever I went I exercised a magnetic influence; and this often without any volition of my own. If we were dunned by some hard-hearted grocer or butcher, I went to him and talked him into waiting for his money a little longer. There was a poor old Pole in our little colony, a teacher of languages, who would go without bread to buy me sweetmeats. If Mrs. Cornford's pupils brought little gifts of flowers or fruit, they were always presented to me. When one of them, Laura Norman, asked me to stay at her father's house in the country,

and I went, of course Dr. Norman, who was a widower of forty-five, fell in love with me; and his son, a youth of nineteen, fell in love with me too, and I had no more sought their love than I had sought the love of the others at home. In an ill-advised moment I consented to become Dr. Norman's wife, and if Myra had not offered me a home with her I should have married him; whether for good or evil I know not—I fancy for evil. You know how entirely Myra leaned upon me and looked up to me. I believe she would have given me the half of her fortune in her generous, impulsive affection; and we were as happy together as two women can be, when the only tie that binds them together is that of helplessness on one side and capability on the other. Myra is a mere child, as you know, and it was not likely that we should have much in common. Then I came to know you, and just when I have grown fonder of you than of all these lovers of mine,—I must go. To lose the others pained me chiefly on their account; but to lose you, who have been my companion, my teacher, my ideal, is like going into a strange land, where I should be of

no more account than thousands of forlorn emigrants. It is very hard," Kitty said, sorrowfully; "so hard that it leads me to doubt whether things are always ordered for the best," and she broke into a vehement, indignant sob.

Just then Françoise entered with a little lamp, and Kitty saw by the light of it that Ella was crying also. In a moment she was at her friend's side, holding her little hands, calling her by pet names, and begging her to be comforted in a dozen loving phrases.

"Oh! life is so short. It must not, must not be!" Ella said at last. "If I am dear to you, are you less dear to me? Stay with us, dear Kitty, at least whilst you are happy."

"How can I stay?" Kitty cried. "Are you not a high-born lady? Am not I a gipsy, a pariah? Ah! you do not yet know all," she added, without looking at her friend's face. "Sir George has seen these old protectors and companions of mine. He will not think I ought to sit down to table with you after that."

"Kitty," Ella said, "now it is my turn to make a confession; and you would never guess how ignoble it is. When I think of my own

capabilities of littleness, I hate myself. It was I who instigated papa to act as he has done; I did it with a good intention. I wanted to offer you a home with papa and me, as long as you might find it a happy one; and it seemed as if I had no right to make the offer unless I was quite sure that nothing stood in the way of your future happiness and comfort."

She leaned forward, so that her head rested on Kitty's shoulder, and added in a penitent, pathetic voice :

"Why can one's affections never be good and unselfish and unworldly,—oh! why!"

"You wish me to stay with you always?" Kitty asked, breathlessly.

"Could anything else so good have happened to us both?" Ella said, with a sad smile. "You don't know how different papa's life and mine have been since you came to us. We were often quite tired of each other's company before."

Kitty's heart beat fast, but she listened in silence. It was very sweet to her to be so praised by Ella.

"Rank does not naturally imply refinement,"

Ella went on in the same plaintive voice, "you must have seen that for yourself; and littleness of every kind has been the bugbear of my life ever since I was a child. But there is no littleness in you that I could discover, and it breaks my heart to act meanly towards the person I most love and admire—in all the world," she cried, throwing her arms around her friend's neck. "Oh! Kitty, why was I not also born a gipsy—as you call yourself?"

And she laughed and cried, and kissed Kitty as frantically as if that very moment they were going to be separated for ever and ever.

"Think what it would be for me to go back to a life without you! Women like me, who spend their days on the sofa, must live with women for the most part; and how dull they are! Oh! how dull they are! Fancy your poor Ella shut up with Constance Gardiner and her snails!"

The two girls laughed in the middle of their tears.

"Or with Madeleine and her dried plants," Ella went on, wiping her cheeks; "and they are exceptionally intelligent for the girls of my

set, I assure you. There isn't anything like originality amongst them, poor things! Kitty, having fared sumptuously, I can't content myself with the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. I can't go down from Kitty Silver to the Miss Gardiners."

"But, dear," Kitty said, very thoughtfully and gravely, "if you really care for me so much, there need be no question of pride between you and me. I was too proud to accept Dr. Norman's home, since I could not love him; I was too proud to eat of Myra's bread without paying back in such kind as I could; but I care more for you than for both of these, and I will not be proud now. Let me stay with you as your hired servant in the eyes of the world; let me eat at a separate table; let me play the dependant's part—I could do it easily—only let me stay. I *must* stay!"

Ella looked up, radiant with smiles and tears.

"As if I should accept such a sacrifice from you, you dear generous, high-souled thing!" she cried, fervently. "But now I will tell you what I think it will be wisest for us to do. Having relieved our minds, we can afford to be happy

again. Let us be happy for the present, and not take any trouble about the future. You understand what I mean," she said. "I'm determined that the happiness is to last, but I can do nothing till papa comes home. You are as free to act as the winds of Heaven, but a girl living with her father is as dependent upon him as a baby."

"It is easy enough for me to be happy, now that I know how much you care for me," Kitty answered. "There is, after all, some consolation in being a social gipsy; one is liked for one's own sake, and one naturally likes others for the same reason."

Then she rose from her station by the sofa, and began the usual evening amusement of reading aloud as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER XXII.

ANCHORED.

EVERYTHING went merry as a marriage-bell till Sir George's return, which event naturally changed the course of things. Ella was determined to keep Kitty, and Kitty was determined to stay; but Sir George must be umpire, and he was a very practical person; concerning himself—not as they did, with high feelings and noble sentiments, but with expediency and the material bearings of the question.

He and Ella had a great many talks without coming to any conclusion whatever. Sir George was shocked at Ella's want of prudence and common-sense; at her recklessness in money matters; at her wilful opposition to the line of

action he chalked out for her. Nothing could be more ladylike and sensible, he urged, than to show carefulness regarding the disposal of one's income; and Ella seemed determined to dispose of her income as carelessly as if she were a speculator.

"After all, my darling Ella," Sir George said, "I don't think you have adjusted the moral balance of the case as well as I have done. Every value in this world is a relative value, and let us be as fond of Miss Silver as we may, we are only justified in giving her what her gifts and accomplishments would gain for her elsewhere."

"Oh! papa, as if I could think of Kitty in that way."

"You have never studied political economy, my dear, or it would come naturally to you. Society is made up of exchange, and each member is only entitled to give the real value of the thing he obtains. Now, our dear Miss Silver is a noble creature—I don't know another woman like her—but it will be a disadvantage to her through life that she comes of—well—of what class shall I say?—of the people? And in offer-

ing her a home under our roof, we are bound to take that fact into consideration.”

Ella's heart was swelling with indignation, but she loved her father too well, and was too used to such displays of feeling on his part, to take offence.

She merely said, colouring painfully whilst she spoke :

“Dear papa, we are only concerned with Kitty herself.”

“Oh! my dear, you wouldn't feel so about it if you had seen what I have seen.”

And as Sir George recalled poor Polly Cornford's well-intended cordiality, he shrugged his shoulders. “That woman actually asked me to take a glass of Hollands!”

“But, dearest papa, we are not taking Mrs. Cornford to live with us. Kitty has of her own accord broken from such of her early connections as she deemed unsuitable; and though she would always help her old friends if in trouble—which only an ungrateful person could refuse to do—she belongs as little to them as you or I.”

“I admit that, my dear.”

“Then we are only arguing in a circle,” Ella continued, “and there is no more to be said.”

Sir George fidgeted a little, as he always did before venturing upon a heterodox sentiment in his daughter's hearing.

“There is only this to be said: that if we make Miss Silver's allowance such as you propose, she will be receiving more than half the curates and vicars of England.”

“If you think that I shall be behaving too generously to Kitty, she must go, papa, that is all,” Ella said, coldly and firmly. “I will not accept the sacrifice of her freedom, her time, and her interests, for such a miserable pittance as you would hardly offer a nursery governess.”

“Of course, you must do as you think proper, my dear.”

So the matter ended.

Ella was happy; Sir George grew reconciled to the loss of his money; Kitty felt anchored at last.

She said to herself that she had guided the little craft of her destiny well through stormy seas and adverse weather, and that she had cast anchor in a happy haven. Would she ever be

tempted to try another voyage? Would she weary of this pleasant port? She thought not. She hoped not. She was a little tired of sitting alone at the helm, and steering hither and thither in quest of good luck. Why could she not rest now?

Of the future she never thought. The life with Sir George and Ella seemed so agreeable and so suited to her that she settled down, for once seeking nothing better, for once hoping nothing beyond. Here she had the appliances of wealth, the society of cultivated people, plenty of money for her own uses, plenty of change, amusement, and admiration. Her spirits rose, her eyes grew brighter, her physical and mental powers developed themselves in this new atmosphere of prosperity. She felt as if she could not do enough for Sir George and Ella, for her old friends in Paradise Place, and for the whole world in general. She sent her poor old protégé, Papa Peter, who, she knew, was now infirm and almost wholly dependent upon Polly Cornford's bounty, a ten-pound note; she sent Mimi, Tommie, and Binnie each a necklace, and Polly a little gold brooch.

She would fain have showed some kindness to Dr. Norman, but knew no way; she did, however, send Christmas gifts to Laura and Prissy, thinking he would be pleased that his children should have a place in her memory still.

To a mind as active as Kitty's, it was infinitely preferable to find herself a member of the Bartelotte household, rather than a guest. Formerly the question had ever been—"Does Miss Silver like this?" Now the question was—"Does Kitty think this quite the best thing for us to do?"

Kitty's opinion, which was always given meekly, and rather as a tentative than as an opinion, generally led the way, and this supremacy could but be pleasant. Kitty, in fact, ruled the household. If the servants pleased Kitty they pleased everybody. If a plan found favour in Kitty's eyes, Sir George ceased to discuss it with Ella. If Sir George proved fractious in money matters, Kitty had but to talk the matter over with him, and he grew tractable as a lamb.

Kitty, in truth, had found her vocation. She had not to do now, as in Myra's case, with a

mind immeasurably inferior to her own, but with minds, if not her equals in some things, at least her superiors in others. She had not Ella's education as a lady; she had not Sir George's education as a man of the world; and to both Ella and Sir George she could look up by turns. They admired her for herself alone, and not as poor little Myra had done, for her versatility in things acquired.

It was not necessary for Kitty to shine here by the means of mushroom accomplishments. Mediocrity in ordinary feminine pursuits might well be permitted to one who was so lavishly gifted by nature; and though Ella encouraged her to pursue the study of music, it was for Kitty's sake, not her own, since she only cared for music of the very best kind. Kitty, therefore, could rest on her oars.

She found herself in the happy position of an ambitious woman, who is told that to improve herself any more were but gilding refined gold and painting the lily. "Good heavens!" she would say to herself, and smile, "had I married Dr. Norman he would have set me to the study of Greek and transcendental mathematics at least.

Had I staid with Myra, I must have gone on perfecting myself in all sorts of drawing-room accomplishments; had I staid in Paradise Place, as Perry's wife even, I must have learned how to cook the dinner and make a gown. From what miseries have I not escaped!"

She was good enough and clever enough for these new friends of hers. Why should they want her to be perfect? Sir George felt supreme contempt for any woman who openly set her judgment above his own, and the only weakness of Ella's sweet nature was that she loved to pose as a moral teacher. There was a fund of religious enthusiasm in her mind, nurtured on the works of German theologians and mystics, that could seldom find means of expression, much less sympathy. Sir George's religious notions consisted of going to church, which he always looked upon as a duty owed to society, and of avoiding subscriptions and other clerical claims on every occasion. The clergy ought to be paid, he used to say with relish, according to the Buddhist law: only the eloquent preachers getting clarified butter, honey, and sugar, and the dull and long-wind-

ed going off with a bare allowance of paddy. But he sat out the dreariest sermons with equanimity, regarding it as a sort of penance which would make up for short-comings in other respects. Had he been on his dying bed, he would have summoned a priest to administer the last communion, regarding the priest all the while as a very poor creature indeed, and laughing in his sleeve at the idea of having limited his burial fees by testament.

Poor Ella was, therefore, only casting her pearls before swine when quoting some beautiful thought of Frederick Robertson and Irving to her father. But even theological pearls were not wasted on Kitty. What a lesson on pearls and swine does such a person as Kitty read us! She was always on the lookout for pearls, and grew richer and plumper every day; whilst we, like the poor stupid swine, content ourselves with the acorns of the field.

As long as Ella would talk, Kitty would listen, till she knew so much about Miss Cobbe's Theory of Intuitions, and the points at issue between Strauss and Rénan, and the teachings

of the Coquerels and *Ecce Homo*, that she might have taken a first-class medal in an examination on modern theology and its teachers.

Examinations were far from Kitty's thoughts; though she liked to learn what Ella wished to teach her. Ella knew that she had no religion, and was sure to insist upon her having a religion one day; but that question was not mooted yet, and Kitty hoped that it might not be mooted for a very long time.

So long as Ella seemed satisfied with the progress of her theological education, it was enough. Ella was not really satisfied, and regarded Kitty as a lost sheep, that it was her felicitous destiny to gather to the fold of her orthodoxy at some time or other. For the present she could wait.

There were soon new ties of interest arising between the two girls. It was not like lying on a bed of roses to be the daughter of a man like Sir George Bartelotte, and Kitty was the first friend to whom Ella had confided her domestic discomforts. Hitherto there had ever been a delicate reserve on both sides regarding this matter. Ella would never make

comments, and Kitty would be blind and deaf whenever Sir George made himself unpleasant by interference in effeminate trifles. Now, the veil was dropped on both sides.

“Why should I mind telling you anything?” Ella said—“you are as devoted to papa as if you were his daughter, and cannot help seeing his little faults.”

“And do I keep any secrets from you?” Kitty made answer.

So no secrets were kept on either side, and Ella grew doubly patient with her father's whims, having some one always at hand to sympathise, to counsel, or to laugh and cry with her, as the case might be.

Of course it was Kitty's fate to be now and then *désillusionné*, as the French say. Her aspirations after refinement had been a little disappointed at Dr. Norman's house and Myra's also; but had not Ella's mother been the granddaughter of an Earl, and was not Ella's father the cousin of a peer of the realm? Surely here, if anywhere, the atmosphere would be composed of aristocratic hydrogen, oxygen, *pur et simple*, totally unalloyed by proletarian elements.

She confessed to herself that Sir George often uttered sentiments, the moral vulgarity of which would have shocked even Polly Cornford. He never violated the rules of grammar; he never used coarse expressions, but the mean little thought was none the less evident, the unmanly or illiberal opinion none the less repulsive.

Ella was perfectly refined; was she more so in thought or deed than the hard-working little photographers, Vittoria and her sister, or the unsophisticated Laura?

Time was teaching Kitty many things in which she had been hitherto childishly, egregiously ignorant. Amongst others, it was teaching her the pith of that excellent old maxim—"All is not gold that glitters."

But then so long as the glitter was there, Kitty did not much concern herself about the gold; the first was enough to make her happy.

At this period of her history, she was very happy; at least she thought so.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE JOURNEY SOUTH.

WITH the first touch of briskness in the air, Ella began to cough ; and the physician said she must go farther south. After some discussion Malaga was decided upon, partly because a friend of Sir George's had offered him the loan of a house there ; and partly, because Ella had never yet set foot on Spanish ground. So the preparations were made, and the journey was accomplished by means of Kitty's and Sir George's combined forces, with wonderful comfort and tolerable economy.

They travelled first-class, of course, and took with them a courier, a page, and two maids ; which fact inspired even the phlegmatic Spanish innkeepers with something like awe. Wherever

they went the best hotels were selected, Sir George settling the tariff of every expense on arrival. Compared to poor Perry's journey over the same ground a few weeks back, this was like a pompous progress of royal personages. Yet who would not rather have been Perry's companion, and seen with Perry's eyes?

Wherever cathedrals, or picture-galleries, or ruins were to be seen, Kitty went, escorted by Sir George and the courier. Sir George knew a great deal about architecture and antiquities, something also of pictures, and did his best to inform Kitty. But nothing could possibly have been duller, Kitty thought, though she very carefully concealed her sentiments. Sir George saw everything that was to be seen for his money, tired himself and his companion to death rather than let cicerones cheat him of a real, and had not the faintest notion that where he saw dry bones only, other people "made the dry bones to live."

When Kitty came home from these excursions she made the dry bones to live, indeed, for Ella's benefit. She had not the fine insight into the innermost soul of beautiful things that Perry,

the Bianchis, and even brusque, noisy, talking Polly possessed so largely; but she had a keen sense of outward harmony and perfection, and transcribed her experiences and impressions to Ella with marvellous vivacity and colouring.

Wherever they took up their residence for any time, they made use of letters of introduction; and these furnished a little diversion much more in Kitty's way than sight-seeing. Men and women interested her so much more than people and things; she could never see too much of such society as she could see intimately, no matter whether it was composed of the salt of the earth or not.

"How you read people's characters!" Ella would say, half in admiration, half in alarm. "I feel quite afraid of you! I am sure no one has a weakness that you do not discover."

Which was quite true; but the fact need not have rendered Kitty awful in anybody's eyes, since she took no weakness amiss.

At Malaga they settled down for several months, in a prettily situated villa outside the town. It happened that a great many English and other tourists had flocked thither that sea-

son, and Kitty and Ella might have been as gay as they pleased. Sir George always selected foreign society, on principles of economy; it cost a great deal less in the matter of eating and drinking. Ella selected it on æsthetic grounds, finding the ordinary run of foreign tourists more cultivated and polished than English ones. Their guests were mostly French, with a sprinkling of English and Americans, and, as is always the case in small societies abroad, people saw a great deal of each other. There is very little sight-seeing in Malaga; so that after the first week or two, visitors settled down to such routine as best suited their tastes and habits; in unison, according to the rules of social natural selection, with those acquaintances who best suited them.

Kitty's gift, *par excellence*, was that of organizing social life, and making it agreeable. No wonder she was so loved and courted, and adored in this weary work-a-day world, where, for the most part, poor every-day human existence is left to itself,—unbeautified and uncared for.

Perfected capacity, however, like genius, en-

tails responsibilities on the possessor, and Kitty soon found her excess of popularity becoming a burden. At Shelley House she had been the adoration of a simple-hearted family only; at Myra's house, the adoration of Myra, and of no one else; at Fontainebleau, the adoration of a very small circle indeed. Here the case was very different. The winter residents at Malaga numbered half a score of families, and though Kitty did not stand on an equal pinnacle of favour with all, she was universally acknowledged to be the leading spirit of the little society. The Gardeners were there, and the versatile Mr. Tyrrell, who had been at Fontainebleau, was there, enjoying life as much as ever.

Among new acquaintance a certain Baron de Fontanié must be mentioned. Kitty had never seen any one at all like the Baron de Fontanié before. He was not young, and certainly not handsome in the ordinary acceptation of the word; but he had what goes much farther in the world than good looks, namely, distinguished manners and the quality of worldly-wise amiability, in almost equal proportion with Kitty herself.

He possessed only the ordinary accomplishments of a gentleman, could neither sketch like Mr. Tyrrell, nor shoot and hunt like Captain Longley ; but he had held a diplomatic appointment at one of the polished courts of Europe, and combined a rare knowledge of the world, with what Emerson calls "the happiest way of doing things."

It was natural that a man like the Baron de Fontanié, who was rich, unmarried, and agreeable, should be sought after in a society of which several were young ladies, and ladies neither young or old, to whom the fact of his bachelor-hood was a pleasant subject to speculate upon. Kitty did not speculate upon it ; she was quite satisfied with her lot as she had chosen it just then, and did not want to make an exchange of certainties for uncertainties. The Baron found her the most charming woman, and the most attractive companion of any in the place ; so, without the least sentimentality on the one side, or coquetry on the other, sprang up a friendship, or rather comradeship, as new as it was delightful to both. This frank liking could not be set down as flirtation by

outsiders. Whenever an excursion was formed, the Baron contrived to place himself in the same carriage with Kitty, as her *vis-à-vis*. If a hill were climbed, he proffered his arm to her before any one else had time to do so. As much deference as society permits a man to show to any lady whose mere acquaintance he is, the Baron showed Kitty.

Ella, who was as unselfish as a woman can be, delighted to see her friend's life made pleasant by this new element in it. The two girls talked of the Baron and of his marked liking for Kitty, with a perfect frankness, and laughed at the foolish little world of Malaga for calling it by any other name.

"Oh! dear," Kitty said one day, "it makes one fit to laugh and cry in a breath to see how one's best friends misunderstand one! Actually, Sir George is angry with me now, and all because of the Baron."

"And the Gardiners are in a pet with us both—and all because of the Baron!" laughed Ella.

"And Mr. Tyrrell is not a bit like himself, and all because of the Baron!" echoed Kitty.

“And we shall have to cast our tents and be off away, and all because of the Baron!”

“Oh! Ella!”

Kitty looked so unmistakably aghast that Ella could not forbear smiling a roguish smile.

“Of course we won’t leave Malaga, my dear, if——”

She put her arm round her friend, and looked into her eyes, inquisitively, before finishing her sentence.

“If the Baron’s friendship for you is likely to become anything more serious, and you are his ally,” she said.

“Ella!” Kitty said, in her superior sort of way, “I am no more in love with the Baron than I was with Dr. Norman; and he is no more in love with me than he is with any one of the Gardiners.”

“Don’t be too sure of that.”

“But I am sure of it. As if a woman of sense couldn’t tell whether a man’s liking for her was a dangerous liking or no! Now, the Baron’s liking is a safe liking, and it is very meddling of people to concern themselves with it to

our mutual discomfort. I hate Bohemia and its ways; but the spirit of liberty that prevailed there had something really good about it, and moral too. It prevented pettiness."

And Miss Kitty held up her handsome head, and looked exceedingly dignified.

"Why should anything like friendship be quite impossible between men and women in respectable society?" she said. "Love is like eating Dead Sea apples; but friendship—a less enticing and far wholesomer fruit—should be freely permitted to all. How seldom one can taste it! There was Dr. Norman, whom, as a friend, I love with all my heart; why could he not let matters rest so? There is the Baron, whose acquaintance is very, very pleasant; why may I not have it?"

"Because he is sure to fall in love with you."

"Indeed, and indeed, he will do no such thing."

"Did not Mr. Perugino? Did not Dr. Norman's son? Did not Dr. Norman?"

"And these are but three out of the many men I have known intimately! You don't

know the world as I do, Ella. It will always be the shy, homely, helpless Dr. Normans, and the poor good-for-nothing Peruginos, who will want me to marry them to the end of the chapter, and not the rich, brilliant Tyrrells, or the polished, aristocratic Barons with a dozen decorations. Men of their stamp invariably prefer a different type of women—the angels, in fact; whilst the others fall on their knees before the first strongly-marked feminine character they meet.”

“There are exceptions to every rule; and certainly the Baron has showed himself very devoted to you.”

“Do let us go into the garden, and eat some custard apples, by way of a refreshment,” Kitty said, coaxingly; “I feel in such a very bad temper.”

And the two girls said no more about the Baron that day.

Finding Kitty so sore on the subject, Ella felt afraid to recur to it of her own accord, though sadly anxious to speak the thought of her mind.

What if Kitty’s indignant protest against

the gossip of society covered a deep feeling, which she would not bring herself to confess even to her dearest friend? What if Kitty's heart was really touched at last, and she loved the Baron ?

What if the Baron wished to make her his wife? An indescribable sense of fear took possession of Ella's mind, and there rested. Was this sweet new gift of Heaven to be short-lived as the joy of a butterfly's existence on a summer day ?

To this friendless, sisterless, motherless girl, Kitty's friendship had come as the return of health to the sick, as an accession of wealth to the poverty-stricken, as the unexpected advent of children to the childless. Kitty seemed to fill the place of friend, sister, mother, all in one ; and Ella had rested on her strong affection, thankful to Heaven for the boon, and asking no other.

She now realised on what frail tenure her lease of happiness was held. Kitty loved her like a sister, but Kitty was young, clever, beautiful ; who so likely to marry in all the world as she ?

Again, was not the advantage of this compact of friendship chiefly advantageous to her father and herself?

They gave Kitty the grosser necessaries of life, shelter, food, and the wherewithal to be clothed; she gave in return what money cannot purchase, what even affection cannot command, namely, rare gifts of a rare mind, and the wealth of the sweetest disposition in the world. Beautiful, winning, adorable Kitty! How should they bear to lose her? How should they pass their lives without her?

Ella pondered on this question during the silent hours of the night, and came to the conclusion that nothing should induce her to act a selfish part towards her friend in this emergency; that anything in the world should be sacrificed rather than Kitty's happiness.

If the Baron desired to marry Kitty, and Kitty desired to marry the Baron, she would dispose of part of her little property, rather than Kitty should go without some sort of dot. She would move Heaven and earth rather than put an obstacle in the way of the marriage.

Ella was one woman out of hundreds, for she could have a friend of her own sex and not be jealous.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“THAT CONFOUNDED FRENCHMAN!”

SIR GEORGE's temper was not improved by the spectacle of the Baron sitting at Kitty's feet. When everything went smoothly, his temper could hardly be called angelic; but the Baron's frank liking for Kitty, and Kitty's frank liking for the Baron, irritated him to a pitch that would seem in the highest degree unreasonable. If he did not wish himself to pay court to Kitty, what conceivable or, at any rate, admissible objection, could he have to any other man paying court to her? Did he consider the Baron too good for Kitty, or Kitty too good for the Baron? Was he only anxious on Ella's account, foreseeing the desolation that Kitty's marriage would inevitably bring upon her?

Was he only anxious on his own account, dreading to lose the society he so much liked and admired ?

If none of these motives lay at the bottom of Sir George's strange conduct, how was it to be accounted for ? Not an excursion, not a *dejeuner* not a picnic tea, but was spoiled by his captiousness in little things. The party was sure to be arranged too late in the day or too early ; or too many people had been invited ; or the wrong place had been fixed upon ; or the horses were wretched hacks, and he would not trust his neck to them.

Lady Gardiner, who was a Scotchwoman, used to say, *sotto voce*, to her daughters at the place of meeting—"Poor Sir George is as *camstrairy* as ever to-day ;"—one could tell if he were "camstrairy" or no in a moment, by the sound of his voice ; and the Baron would say to Kitty under cover of her parasol—

"I could pitch that fractious little animal out of the window with the greatest possible pleasure."

Whereupon Kitty looked greatly shocked. To think of the father of her friend being called

“ *petit animal* ” was too terrible ; and she scolded the Baron in a way that he found extremely delightful. Kitty, moreover, liked Sir George, and had done her utmost to slight him in no way, whilst receiving the pleasant attentions of a man so suited to her in every way as the Baron de Fontanié.

Sir George tried to keep his ill-humour from affecting Ella’s enjoyment, but of necessity she felt it more than anyone. She loved and respected her father, and to find him making himself ridiculous, grew so intolerable, that at last she spoke out.

“ Dear papa,” she said affectionately, “ if the worst comes to the worst, and we lose our Kitty of what use to fret ourselves to death about it ? She is not your daughter ; she is not my sister ; and if she were, we could not expect her to give up a happy marriage for our sakes. Being only our friend, we have no right to expect anything—except her friendship always—and her company as long as she will stay with us.”

“ You are putting much too fine a point upon it,” answered Sir George, with difficulty concealing his impatience. “ Miss Silver’s engage-

ment with us was made in a business-like way, and it ought so to be kept. It shall so be kept——”

“ Papa, dear——”

“ Yes, my dear, I know exactly what you will say. You will argue as if every one of us were made up of angelic affection like yourself; but we are not. Miss Silver is human—I am human—that confounded Frenchman is human——”

Ella burst out laughing.

“ The poor Baron! But what has he to do with any private arrangements Kitty may have made with us? In the eyes of the world, she is a member of our family.”

“ My darling, you speak of Kitty Silver as if she were an ordinary girl, made up of sugar and spice and all that’s nice, as children say; but you wholly lose sight of her extraordinary powers of mind, her insight into character, her judgment, her *finesse*. Now, do you suppose, for a moment, Ella, that, that—ahem—I beg your pardon—Frenchman is as blind as a bat?”

Utterly losing the clue of her father’s discourse, Ella let him go on, for the life of her unable to restrain a genuine laugh now and

then. What an odd figure he must have looked to a stranger, she thought, as she surveyed him from her sofa ! He never rested in the same attitude for a moment, and as he waxed more and more wrathful, his face seemed to grow smaller and more monkey-like, his eyes brighter and rounder, whilst his black hair was shaken like the mane of some enraged little animal.

Ella loved her father devotedly, but she wished sometimes in her secret heart that Providence had made him a little more dignified.

“ You don’t divine my meaning ? ” he asked, very brusquely.

“ Not in the least, papa.”

“ That Fontanié is a diplomatist, and has just returned from Berlin, where he has, doubtless, brewed mischief enough. Just think of what a wife like Miss Silver would be worth to him !—oh ! he’s as deep as Louis Napoleon himself—I know those Frenchmen.”

Ella listened with wide open eyes. What will-o’-the-wisp would her father think he had seen next ?

“ A man like that, my dear,” Sir George went on, “ doesn’t want a rich woman or a titled

woman for his wife. He may think himself deucedly lucky—wonderfully lucky, to get a clever woman like Miss Silver without so much as a halfpenny!—or with no more pretensions to a pedigree than an orange-seller picked out of the street.”

“Dear papa!”

“Don’t be shocked at the comparison. I mean nothing disrespectful towards Miss Silver. But you must see my meaning. Miss Silver with her brains and her wonderful art of reading character, and the power she involuntarily exercises over everybody with whom she comes in contact, would be worth a dukedom to a man like that—the cat’s-paw of some Bismarck or other, for all we know—the paid intriguer of some beggarly German court, the——”

“The poor Baron!” cried Ella, laughing in spite of herself. “Do you really think he deserves to be called such hard names, papa?”

“I don’t know what he deserves, or what he doesn’t deserve,” Sir George said, still very wrathful; “but he shall not marry Miss Silver. I tell you, Ella, he shall not. If I have to fight a duel with him, he shall not.”

“Perhaps the Baron does not wish to marry her, after all,” Ella said; “and Kitty is so fond of us and so unselfish, that I believe she would make any sacrifice rather than make us unhappy——”

- “She would be most ungrateful if she were not ready to make any sacrifice—most ungrateful—as women generally are.”

“Indeed, papa,” Ella went on, with a quiet current of displeasure underlying her gentle words. “I don’t in the least agree with you there. I should deeply grieve to lose Kitty, but I should rejoice to see her married to a man she really cared for. And to put any obstacle in the way of such a marriage, would be little short of wickedness.”

“Of course, I don’t want to do anything wicked,” Sir George said, doggedly. “I’ve never done anything wicked in my life hitherto that I know of, and I should be sorry to begin at my age. But if that confounded Frenchman goes and makes love to Miss Silver, nothing in the world should prevent me from kicking him out of the house.”

And, suiting the action to the words, Sir

George proceeded to kick, from one end of the room to the other, a very harmless-looking sofa-cushion that happened to lie on the floor; and when he had done the same thing twice over, he walked away, almost as much relieved as if the cushion had been the body of the Baron himself.

Ella hardly knew whether to laugh or cry at this new turn of affairs; she was too used to small exhibitions of temper on her father's part to think much of this one, excepting in so far as it related to Kitty.

What if the amount of admiration Kitty received should draw upon her Sir George's dislike?

What if Sir George should set himself wilfully to prevent Kitty's marriage with the Baron, provided the Baron and Kitty agreed upon marriage?

Ella was sorely puzzled how to act so as to prevent either catastrophe, or any unforeseen plan that might be brewing in her father's mind inimical to Kitty's happiness.

If only the Baron would speak out or go away!

She was Kitty's dearest friend ; could she speak to the Baron ? She decided that she could not.

Poor little Ella ! She was too young as yet—numbering only twenty summers—and too feeble to deal with these obstinate, perplexing circumstances. As she lay on her sofa, so pale, so blonde, so *mignonne*, as the French would say, she only wanted a golden harp and wings to look like an angel “dressed for heaven ;” and one instinctively felt that the harder business of life was very little fitted for her ; and that the position of being Sir George's daughter was not fitted for her at all.

But no matter what a woman may be—a seraph or a virago, a saint or a sinner—she is almost sure to possess the feminine quality of tact ; and Ella had managed to keep Sir George's undesirable idiosyncrasies wonderfully in the background hitherto. She could not feel sure of being able to do so now, and the thought was a distressing one. She could bear to lose Kitty, her newly-acquired, highly-cherished treasure—her pearl beyond all price ; but she could not bear to have anything cloud their most

sweet friendship; and would not Sir George's unpleasant conduct cloud it? If her father persisted in persecuting Kitty, she could be her defender, but she could hardly be her partizan.

As she lay thinking these sad thoughts, and sighing to herself, after the manner of women, that the sweetness of life should be so short-lived, in came the Apple of Discord—Kitty's bright, bewitching, indescribable self! Never were two women better contrasted: the one possessed of so magnificent a physique, of a character so elastic, so adapted to the exigencies of human life as it is, so full of nascent charms and capabilities; the other all delicacy and softness, and almost infantine loveliness and purity of look and temperament, and quite unfitted for intercourse with any but "the élite of humanity," though the leaven that leaveneth the lump of society is small.

"We have had such a pleasant drive," began Kitty, in a flow of spirits. "I hardly think you would have found it fatiguing. See, I have brought you home a pretty sketch, made on the spot for your album by Mr. Tyrrell and the Baron——"

The words were fairly on her lips as Sir George entered the room; but no sooner had he heard them, than he said, snappishly :

"Always that confounded Frenchman! When you have finished talking about him, Miss Silver, perhaps you will listen to what I have to say."

And with that he slammed the door to very violently, and went away.

"Oh, dear!" said Ella, as soon as he was fairly out of hearing. "What can we do to make poor papa more amiable?"

Kitty sympathised and suggested, but she did not say, "Let us leave Malaga," which step Ella felt in her secret heart to be the only panacea for the evil.

CHAPTER XXV.

GOOD NEWS.

IT is a question whether the noblest and bravest of us could long support the small vexations that will disturb even the best-ordered life without the stimulus of a pleasant surprise. Wise men and good women can doubtless do a great deal towards preventing sordid or unworthy elements from spoiling the harmony of daily existence ; but who can command those happy accidents upon which we are all so dependent ? We learn—ah, how bitterly !—the mirage-like nature of anticipated joy ; but happiness that comes to us as unexpectedly as treasure-trove, how good and reviving and blessed it is ! We may respect our preachers, but let those who like listen to the best sermon

that ever was preached, and give me for my soul's good a sudden piece of welcome news instead!

Whilst poor Ella was pondering upon the numerous vexations cropping up in her daily path in consequence of her father's intractable temper, an unseen force was at work that would for the time turn the lion into a lamb. A snarling terrier turned into a placid parlour cat would be a more fitting simile; but a baronet is a baronet, and must not be taken liberties with, even in jest.

It must be mentioned, then, that Sir George's temper had been of late years tried amongst other things by a law-suit. This law-suit was, as usual, an affair of very long standing; so long, indeed, that it had settled itself down in Sir George's life as a sort of chronic ailment or inconvenience to which one submits with a bad grace. He sometimes wished that the matter might never come to an end, so sorely did he dread the idea of defeat.

The question was one involving twenty thousand pounds, however; and when news came one morning that he was master of the

field, he hardly knew how to keep his exultation within decorous, much less dignified, bounds.

The two girls were sitting in their pretty summer-house, looking across the orange-trees at the beautiful purple mountains, and talking over their needlework, very likely of the Baron,—only Sir George had no ears just then,—when he rushed in, flourishing a letter over his head, his teeth chattering with excitement, his black hair blown about his eyes, which were like the bright little eyes of a terrier who smells pleasant prey.

“I’ve gained it!—I’ve gained it!” he cried, throwing the letter on the table, and taking it up the next moment, as if it was too precious to be out of his hands. “I’ve gained it!”

Then he laughed, almost a maniacal laugh, kissed Ella, and made towards Kitty as if he intended to kiss her too; upon which Miss Kitty blushed, and drew back with a ladylike amount of shyness, and Sir George shook hands with her instead. When the first preliminaries of congratulations were got through, Kitty, with her usual tact, left the father and daughter

alone. Sir George looked up, as much as to say—"Oh! what can it matter who hears about a law-suit that has put twenty thousand pounds in my pocket!"

Ella looked up as much as to say—"As if we had secrets from you." But Kitty's tact was never at fault. She was, in truth, an epicure where her friendships were concerned, never accepting immoderately of the good things her adorers offered her, never taking an ell if they offered several inches. Time cannot stale the infinite variety of a person so rich in gifts and graces, and so temperate in using the tribute paid to them.

So Kitty smiled and nodded to her friend; and, pretending that she wanted to write some letters that very minute, left them to their cheerful little tête-à-tête.

"Dear papa!" cried Ella; "what a weight off your mind! I am so glad!"

"But it makes such a difference in our income. In fact, it makes all the difference," Sir George went on, now grown quite calm and collected. "We need not keep away from England all the year round, as if we were dunned—

not that I like England, it's growing so abominably democratic; but you should be in London for a season now and then."

"Kitty would no doubt like it," Ella said, reflectively; "and I should like it, for some things."

"Or we might go down to Akenholme Park—I want very much to get my books re-catalogued. I shall put up a memorial window to your mother in the church now, Ella; and, oh! my darling, I could die with an easy mind any minute, for you will have enough to live upon!"

Sir George's eyes were actually full of tears just then, but the next moment he was laughing again exultingly.

"It's about the only piece of good luck that ever overtook me in my life," he went on; "isn't it? All my labourers' wives bore them sons, but no boy was ever born to me. Your dear mother died when we were both in the heyday of our youth. In the matter of property, how shamefully did my uncles and aunts treat me! In fact, without wishing to find fault with Providence, I must say I've been all along more

hardly used than my neighbours, though I'm a good churchman, and lead a proper sort of life."

"But now," said Ella, affectionately, for she was too used to her father's somewhat pompous show of orthodoxy to be shocked by it, "all will be well with us; and if we are not contented and pleasant, and charitable to our neighbours, there will be no excuse."

The last sentence was uttered very slyly, and, as may naturally be supposed, had reference to the Baron. The cap fitted.

"I should be charitable enough to people if they minded their own business," Sir George said; "but if that prig of a Frenchman comes dangling after Kitty, I'll pitch him out of the window without the least compunction."

This speech was, however, uttered more in jest than in earnest, and wholly wanted the acrimony of former speeches made to the same purpose.

"Papa, now you have got your cake, we shall expect you to be good, and not to get cross with anybody."

"Don't you think the best thing we can do

is to leave Malaga?" Sir George said, maliciously. "It would serve them both right."

"Both, papa? How can you utter anything half so unpardonable? Kitty has done nothing wrong."

"She hasn't done anything wrong; but the whole thing—the flirtation——"

"Oh! papa."

"Well, call it what you will; the whole thing has been carried quite far enough to spoil our enjoyment. If I want Miss Silver to write a letter for me—which she says she likes doing—where is she to be found? In the company of the Baron. If we plan a pleasant drive, who is favoured with her conversation? The Baron. She neglects even you for that confounded Frenchman, and I won't put up with it!"

But Ella went back to the subject of the twenty thousand pounds, and brought out all the salient points of it with so much discretion, that Sir George's heart softened towards the whole world in general, and poor Kitty in particular, and he promised to treat her more leniently in future.

For the few days following Sir George was

highly busy in consequence of his newly-acquired property, writing letters, making calculations as to investments, and so on. Ella advised him slyly to go to England. Kitty advised him to go too, in her business-like, superior sort of way; but he declared that nothing in the world should induce him to make the journey just then; and the two girls laughed over his motive in secret. It was plain enough that he preferred to stay in Malaga, and be, in vulgar phraseology, the plague of Kitty's life. But in all other particulars Sir George was, as we have said, suddenly turned into a lamb. He would chuckle to himself when alone, to think how much everybody wanted him to be gone, and how he did not choose to be gone; and he teased Kitty about her preference for the Baron, and he teased the Baron about his preference for Kitty, though in a good-tempered, gentlemanlike way, without any of his former acrimony. Under this new influence Malaga became for a time as pleasant as it had first been. When, indeed, did not twenty thousand pounds cause the wilderness to blossom as the rose?

Kitty was treated by her fiery little patron very much as a spoiled child at this epoch. If she was scolded and punished one moment, she was sure to receive sugar-plums the next. One day it was a pretty silk scarf Sir George gave her; another, a Spanish fan; neither of them costly gifts, certainly, but astounding as coming from him. He used to apologize for this new kind of spasmodic generosity to Ella by saying that he had never showed his appreciation of Kitty's devotion to her during her illness; and that it was high time to do so now.

One day, when he had been unusually provocative and unusually generous, having presented her with a pair of Malaga figures in coloured terra-cotta, of the value of twenty francs, Kitty made a show of deprecation.

"You are really too good, Sir George," she said. "I feel quite ashamed to take so many gifts from you."

"I am sure you deserve them," he answered, rather bluntly.

"Indeed I deserve nothing."

He looked up, with a curious mixture of suspicion, irritation, and dismay.

“There is nothing in the world I would not give you,” he said, in an eager undertone. “On my soul, nothing!”

Then, seeing that she blushed and dropped her eyelids, as much disconcerted by the manner as the matter of his speech, he added :

“And I tell you once and for all, that if you marry that confounded Frenchman, I shall be the most miserable beggar on the face of the earth.”

He looked at her sharply for a minute, as much as to say, “If that confession does not take you aback, nothing will,” and went away.

When she was alone, Kitty closed the door softly, and walked up and down the room, colouring, smiling, almost laughing to herself at this unexpected turn of affairs. So utterly astounded and amused was she, that she could not restrain one or two little ejaculations—ejaculations not perhaps self-congratulatory, but certainly not expressive of displeasure.

“What next?” she said, as she thought of Sir George being in love with her.

What next, indeed ?



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