

3974

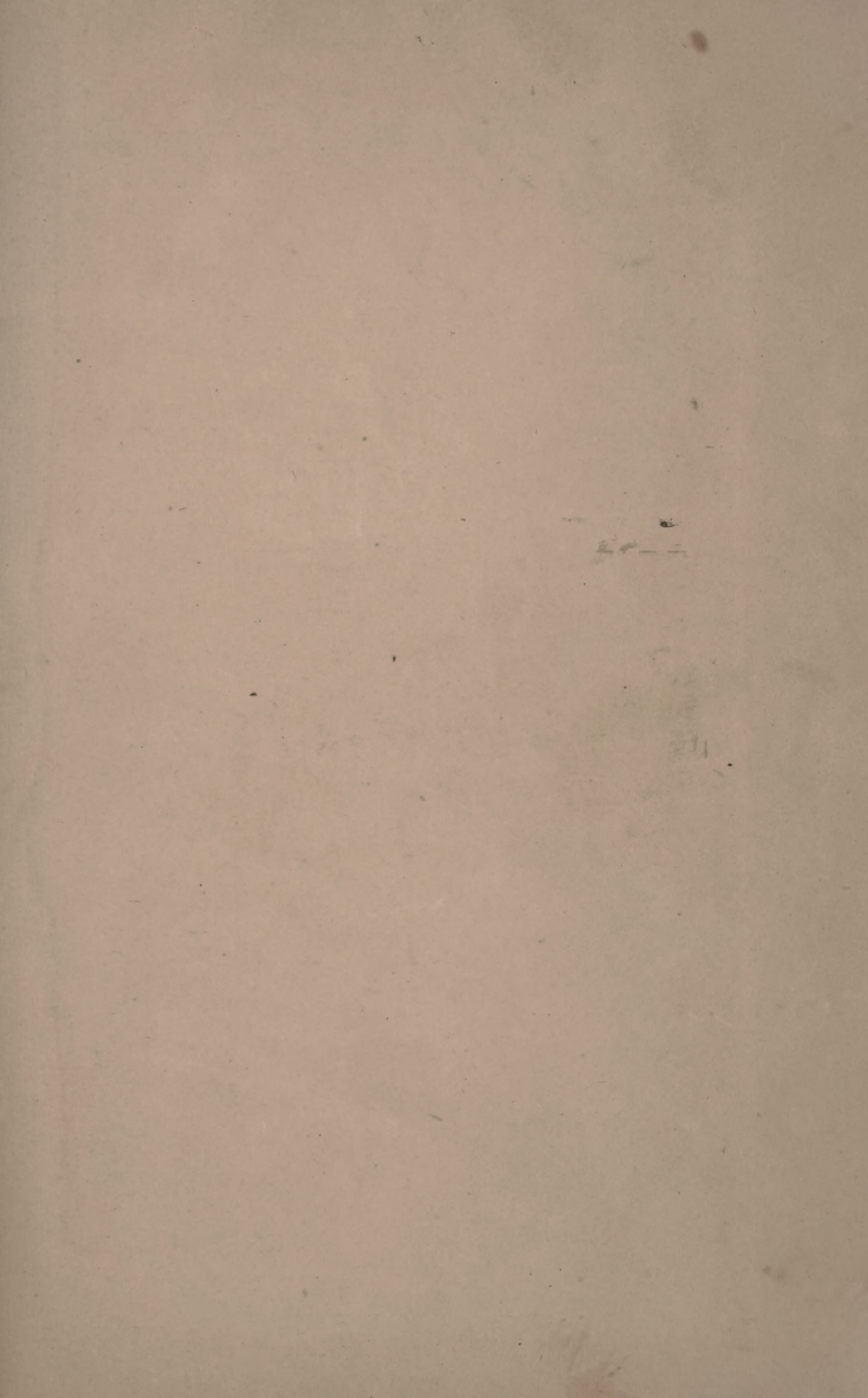
ei
E

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. PZ3

Shelf G66Pro

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



PROGRESS AND PHILANTHROPY

BY MRS. GORE

NEW YORK: PUBLISHED BY G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, 25 NASSAU ST. N. Y.

Copyright, 1892, by G. P. Putnam's Sons

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

PROGRESS AND PREJUDICE

BY MRS. GORE

ALPHABETICALLY, THE NAMES OF THE AUTHORS AND EDITORS
OF THE WORKS OF THE AUTHOR

THE
PUBLISHERS

DE WITT & DAVENPORT PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK
101 N. MANSION STREET

PROGRESS AND PREJUDICE.

Catherine Frances
BY MRS. GORE.

AUTHOR OF "THE BANKER'S DAUGHTER," "MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS,"
"PREFERMENT," ETC., ETC.

"Aloof, with hermit eye, I scan
The present deeds of present man."
COLERIDGE.

35



NEW YORK:
DE WITT & DAVENPORT, PUBLISHERS,
160 & 162 NASSAU STREET.

185-

π

PROGRESS AND PREJUDICE
PROGRESS AND PREJUDICE
666930
PZ3

PROGRESS AND PREJUDICE
BY W. W. GORDON
LONDON: THE BARNES PUBLISHING CO., 1898.

CHAPTER I

It was a long time ago that I first saw the
face of a man who had been through the
fire of the South African War. He was
old, and his eyes were dim, but there was
a certain look about him that made me
feel that he had seen something that I
had not. He was a man of a certain
type, a man who had been through the
fire of the South African War. He was
old, and his eyes were dim, but there was
a certain look about him that made me
feel that he had seen something that I
had not.

THE BARNES PUBLISHING CO.
LONDON: THE BARNES PUBLISHING CO., 1898.

PROGRESS AND PREJUDICE.

CHAPTER I.

It was a happy day at Meadows Court; a day long looked for, come at last; the seventeenth birthday of the only daughter—nay, the only child—of the house; who, from her earliest girlhood, had been promised that, on entering her eighteenth year, she should be emancipated from the trammels of the governess, and introduced into society; that is, as far as comported with the facilities of a neighbourhood, where society, according to fashionable interpretation, there was none.

There was, however, all that Amy Meadows desired. She had heard no description, and by indiscriminate reading acquired no suspicion of any species of social order more brilliant than was presented by their obscure parish; and what she chiefly ambitioned, in emerging from the school-room and getting rid of Miss Honeywood, was to devote herself exclusively to a dear, good mother, who had been prevented by prolonged ill-health from usurping the functions of the unpopular individual, in whose disappearance from Meadows Court, the preceding day, more than half of poor Amy's present delight originated.

So long as she could remember, Lady Meadows had been confined to a suite of rooms on the ground-floor of her old-fashioned home: so long as she could remember,—because the

delicacy of constitution which rendered her mother so close a prisoner, dated from the hour of her birth. But though a recluse, that kind mother was by no means a gloomy one. Incapable of physical exertion, she was fully equal to the management of their small household: and all that could be accomplished by pen and ink, by careful computation and careful regulation, was done to perfect economy of a moderate fortune, in connection with an honorable name and a residence of ancient repute in the county.

The baronets of England are in general a wealthy race, and predominate among our landed gentry. Unluckily, Sir Mark Meadows was an exception. His daughter Amy knew only that his income was limited; and that hence arose the scantiness of their household, and shabbiness of their household gear. Their neighbours, had she been permitted to gossip with them, could, however, have informed her that, on attaining his majority, the rent-roll of her father trebled its present amount. At that time, he was involved in a vortex of fashionable dissipation, dicing, drinking, and squandering, in rivalry or imitation of Fox, Sheridan, and the orgies of Carlton House; so that it was as wonderful as fortunate that even Meadows Court, and its eight hundred acres, remained for the support of the family. That they did so was generally ascribed to the influence of his wife. From the day of their marriage, Sir Mark had become an altered man; contenting himself with the homely, homestaying, happy life of a sporting country squire.

Many people asserted, on the other hand, that the old family mansion would have passed into the hands of usurers and Jews with the rest of the property, but for a strict entail upon his heirs male. This, however, could scarcely be the case. For when, after ten long years of expectation, little Amy made her appearance, so far from lamenting, as was generally expected, their disappointment of a son and heir, the parents welcomed their little girl as the greatest of blessings.

Nothing therefore was left for officious neighbours but to take it for granted that, though the old baronetcy, failing male issue to Sir Mark, would devolve upon a distant cousin, the estates must be heritable in the female line. And when it became

apparent, from the infirm health of Lady Meadows, that there was no likelihood of future olive-branches to exclude the sunshine dawning upon the little heiress, they eventually adopted her, as her parents had done from love at first sight, as their pet and darling.

From the period of her birth, the health of Lady Meadows never rallied. Though cheerful, and at times capable of carriage exercise she was chiefly confined to her sofa; and her husband lost in her that daily companion of his rides and walks, who had rendered his first ten years of married life an earthly paradise.

But from the moment Amy was able to manage a pony, or adapt her little steps to his own, she had been promoted by Sir Mark to the vacant place by his side; and soon progressed into just such an active, lithe-limbed being, as constant exercise, in all weathers, was likely to create.

To her mother, meanwhile, the cheerful, bright-eyed child was an invaluable companion. The pursuits of St. Mark, both as a sportsman and farmer, were of too engrossing a nature not to leave the invalid frequently alone; and the prattle of the little girl served to lighten her solitude, till that serious age arrived when the formation of her daughter's character afforded a still more interesting occupation. Willingly would Lady Meadows have monopolized the task, and wholly undertaken her education. But Dr. Burnaby, a neighbouring physician, whose authority at Meadows Court was secondary only to its master's, pronounced the task too trying for one so delicate; and a competent governess was found, who, for ten ensuing years, had experienced some difficulty in obtaining as much of her pupil's time and attention as would enable her to do what *she* considered credit to them both.

It was a hard matter to withdraw little Amy from the ailing mother, who wanted to be talked to, and read to, and fondled; and still harder, to convince the rough, outspoken Sir Mark, that a lesson of ancient history signified more than a wholesome gallop on the banks of the Severn; and it is questionable, on the whole, whether the parents or their child experienced most satisfaction, on seeing the carriage return empty after conveying Miss Honeywood, for the last time, to the neighbouring station.

They had parted, however, with mutual kindness, and mutual respect. The good woman, so large a portion of whose life had been devoted to inform the mind of the heiress of Meadowes Court, carried away with her the best proof of the gratitude of the family, in the shape of an annuity as liberal as comported with their moderate means; and there was consequently no drawback upon Amy's delightful consciousness of liberation.

Any body intent upon her movements might have fancied that Amy was viewing for the first time the beauties of Meadowes Court, on the sunny morning in June we have been describing. While the dew was yet on the grass, she had visited every nook in the shrubberies; every flowery parterre, glowing like an inserted gem amid the rich verdure of the western lawn. She had stood gazing, with her arms resting on the iron fence, upon the well-wooded paddock, which a more pretending man than Sir Mark would have dignified with the name of park; admiring the morning light that tinged with silver the glossy bolls of the ancient beech trees, forming not only the beautiful avenue, but, in scattered groups, the most picturesque ornament of the domain. The summer grass was high; noisy with insects, fragrant with clover, and enamelled with the blue blossoms of the wild veronica. All was gay, all was sweet; as if to do honor to the auspicious epoch of Amy's birthday.

By the time her parents were astir, and she had been embraced and congratulated, she was almost tired out by the varying emotions agitating her frame. The good-will of the faithful old servants, the noisy caresses of her father's favorite dogs, even the importunities of her pet mare, accustomed to be fed from her hand and thrust its nose in search of sugar into her apron pocket, seemed to demonstrate their sympathy in the grand event of the day; and when required to be grateful for a beautiful pearl necklace—a family treasure, bestowed by her father, and a charming writing-desk prepared and filled for her by the dearest of mothers, Amy had scarcely voice to be thankful. After taking part with both in the breakfast to which her hives furnished the honey-comb, and her dairy contributed the butter and cream, she felt as if Time could yield no second birthday equal to that which brought such tears of joy into the eyes of

her darling invalid—such smiles of exultation into the joyous face of Sir Mark.

As the day progressed from dewy morn into burning noon, and from burning noon into that gradual lengthening of the shadows which enabled the neighbouring families to afford their tribute of gratulation on a family event so long anticipated in their little circle, there arrived the clergyman of the parish of Radensford, old Mr. Henderson, with the young though widowed daughter, Mrs. Burton, who kept house for him; and soon after the pony-chaise and barouche of the Tremenheeres and Warnefords—the only two families within visiting distance of Meadowes Court; the former containing Admiral Tremenheere and his spinster neice; the latter, Lady Harriet Warneford and a batch of grandchildren. Amy had to be kissed again and again, and passed from hand to hand like a picture-book or a new toy. For the *cadeaux*, lavished upon her by these kind friends, she felt perhaps less grateful than she ought. The one great gift of liberty—the right of being allowed, henceforward, to think and feel for herself—to think and feel as a woman—superseded all other joys; and when she sat down quietly to dinner with her father and mother, after the departure of their guests, she could scarcely believe, the excitement of the day being over, that she had attained a new phase of her existence. Except that her cheeks were burning from too much talking and her ears confused by too much listening, she was obliged to admit that she felt very much as she had done the preceding day.

Her father, indeed, saw her in a different light; and on crowning his Amy's health, when the servants left the room, with a fond embrace, wondered he had never before noticed the exquisite beauty of the daughter who seemed suddenly to have started into life. Lady Meadowes, on the contrary, though she united her pious benediction with that of her husband, scarcely seemed to see that Amy was present. She *felt* it, however, to the innermost core of her heart.

Lady Harriet Warneford, who resided on a small estate, divided from that of Meadowes Court by a ragged strip of the royal forest of Burdans—a woman so advanced in life as to have survived her husband and eldest son, and to be presiding

over the education of the three orphans of the latter—could not help wondering, at times, at the indifference exhibited by Lady Meadows and her husband, to their daughter's establishment in life. For her own sad experience of the uncertainty of life suggested that the death of Amy's parents might leave this fair young girl alone in a world, where youth and beauty so rare as hers demand a double share of protection.

She had not yet ventured, however, to broach the subject to the invalid. The amiable, uncomplaining Lady Meadows was a person to whom her friends, nay, even her acquaintances, were careful to avoid risking a moment's pain. As to Sir Mark, you might as well have attempted to fling a black crape veil over the face of the sun as to pretend to darken *his* joyous impulses by a serious reflection. While Amy herself, whenever Lady Harriet came to pass a day with them, was so full of devices to amuse and please her little grandchildren, that it was impossible to hazard a word capable of overclouding her innocent heart.

It was really a happy and sociable neighbourhood; happy and sociable because limited in extent, and assimilated in rank and fortune. No disproportion, no envy, no jealousy. A country circle of this description is now rare to be found in wealthy, fussy, railroad-riven England.

Miss Tremenheere, a damsel on the peevish side of thirty, and much addicted to moral reflection, sometimes whispered primly to Mrs. Burton, who, though a widow and a mother, was several years her junior, that Amy Meadows's seventeenth birthday had done little to endow her with fixity of purpose; and that her parents were much to blame for not bringing her face to face with the stern realities of life. But the young widow, to whom that cheerful girl was endeared by a thousand acts of kindness towards herself and her sickly little girl, could see no fault in her. So long as Amy fulfilled her duties in life with care and love, it mattered little that she had always a song upon her lips; or that she ran forward to meet her friends, when a better-regulated young lady would have advanced with decent deliberation.

One of Amy's chief in-door pleasures was to read to her mother while she worked. Like the gentle lady wedded to the

Moor, and most women condemned to a sedentary life, Lady Meadows was "delicate with her needle;" and never had it moved with half so much alacrity as now that her daughter, with her silver voice and intuitive taste, was ever at hand to cheer her with the pages of some favourite work.

"How strange it seems, mamma," said Amy one day, when they had been surrounded for nearly an hour with the extensive family-group of one of Richardson's novels, "that not only am I an only child—no brother, no sister to keep me company—but that you and papa should also be in the same predicament!"

Lady Meadows worked on in silence. She did not appear in the humour for conversation. Perhaps the inmates of Uncle Selby's cedar parlour engrossed her attention more than they had done that of her daughter.

"It would have been so pleasant to have a cousin Lucy Selby or two, to come and stay with us here; or at least to supply friends and correspondents. Not to fall in love with and marry, however, dear mamma, as poor Lady Harriet Warneford did; who, Mary Tremenheere tells me, led a miserable life with her husband."

"Miss Tremenheere, Amy, is, I fear, a sad gossip!"

"How can she help answering me, mother, when I ask her questions?"

"Then never ask them, darling, about things which do not concern you."

Amy blushed at the reproof, and promised. It was, perhaps, in dread of a further lesson, that she resumed the chapter of kindred.

"It always seems such a relief to Lady Harriet when her sister, Lady Louisa Eustace, arrives at Radensford Manor. They have so many old stories to talk about; so many broken interests to revive!"

"They are, I believe, sincerely attached to each other," said Lady Meadows, coldly: and began to busy herself more actively in sorting the floss silks in her work-basket.

"And you, dearest mother—had you never any sisters?"

"None, Amy."

"And your father, you once told me, I remember, was a clergyman, and died when you were very young?"

"*Very* young."

"You lived then, till you married, alone with your mother? And was she as good and tender a one as mine?"

"My dearest Amy," said Lady Meadows, with an effort which brought a hectic color into her usually pale face, "there are some questions which it is so painful to answer, that they should never be asked. Be sure that, had I wished to talk to you about my family, I should have done so long ago."

"Forgive me, mother," cried Amy, starting up, so that the book she was carelessly holding, fell upon the floor, in her haste to seize and kiss Lady Meadows's delicate hand. "I will never speak to you about them again. But papa's: I *may* talk to you of *them*, without wounding your feelings; for you often explained to me, when I was a child, the family portraits in the China gallery——"

"The youngest among which, my dear child, dates from the reign of George the Second."

"Well, then, mother—the miniatures in the breakfast parlor! Among *them*, there are Plymers and Cosways; my grandfather, in his velvet coat and gold frogs; and grandmamma, the last Lady Meadows, in her fly-cap and powdered hair! But that young girl in the corner of the frame, in a beaver hat, with a riding-whip in her hand?"

"Your father's sister, Gertrude Meadows."

"She died unmarried, then, I suppose. Was papa much attached to her?"

"Judge for yourself. You know his affectionate disposition."

"Yet he never mentions her. He was, perhaps, too much affected by her death?"

"She is not dead, Amy. She married Lord Davenport, and is still alive."

"Still alive? I have really and truly a right-down living aunt?—How delightful!" cried Amy, as if she had chanced upon some wondrous hidden treasure.

"You are little likely to benefit by the possession. Your father and the Davenports have not met for many years. They are not upon speaking terms."

"On what account?"

“Had your father desired you to be acquainted with the circumstances, you would have heard them long ere this. Be satisfied, darling, that he, who is the best judge of his family affairs, would be hurt and seriously displeased if questioned concerning these relationships.”

“And are *you*, too, angry with me, mamma?”

“Not in the least: for you have erred inadvertently. Were you to renew the subject, I should be vexed, because it would be in direct opposition to my wishes.”

Again, Amy fondly kissed her mother's hand; assuring her she had nothing to fear. But the restraint thus imposed upon her—restraint how new to Amy—seemed to double the importance of the mystery. Relations whom she must never mention in her father's presence! Relations, so near, too, whom she was never to see or recognize! The interdiction was too tantalizing. For some days after this perplexing conversation, she could think only of Lord and Lady Davenport.

On one point, she did not think it unlawful to gratify her curiosity. By referring to a Debrett's Peerage, some ten years old, which graced the library table, she found that “Henry, fourth Baron Davenport, residing at Ilford Castle, Westmoreland, and in New Street, Spring Gardens, had married the only daughter of Sir John Meadows, Bart., of Meadows Court, by whom he had two sons, Hugh and Marcus, some years older than herself; and a daughter, Olivia, one year younger.” Three cousins! Here was a discovery! Three cousins, tolerably of her own age!

She dared not, however, again appeal to her mother for information. She had noticed that, on the evening of their last discussion, Lady Meadows was unusually feverish and harassed; and for worlds would she not have risked annoying her a second time. Amy was certain of obtaining information by applying to Mary Tremenheere, who fully justified Lady Meadows's accusation that she was “a sad gossip;” nor would even Lady Harriet Warneford have refused to enlighten her on any subject concerning which she was entitled to be inquisitive. But she had no right to seek from others information refused by the kindest of mothers; and was even more cautious than usual when she

found herself seated in the roomy chimney-corner of her father's old nurse, the wife of the parish sexton, Neighbour Savile (or Saveall, as he was called by the people of the village), an aged crone who had outlived everything but her veneration for the Meadowes family, and her skill in curing the huge fitches of bacon which hung blackening in her vast chimney. Till now, Amy had been untiring in questioning the old woman, concerning the births, deaths, and marriages of Meadowes Court; and the scrupulous care with which she had evaded all mention of a sister appertaining to her nursling—her own dear Sir Mark—sufficed to prove that she was cognizant of the family feud. Amy therefore restricted her inquiries to Neighbour Savile's rheumatics, and the old sexton's supply of tobacco: having decided that, henceforward, the pedigree of the House of Meadowes must rest in peace!

CHAPTER II.

THE spot where, next to Meadowes Court, the progress and prospects of Amy were watched with the fondest partiality, was the Rectory. Its venerable master loved her dearly: first, because he possessed a kindly-affectionate nature; next, because her parents had been friendly neighbours to him for the last thirty years; but more than all, because the child whom he had christened, the girl he had prepared for confirmation, was now a charming young woman, who made it one of her chief pleasures in life to lighten the cares of his daughter; whose life was saddened by solicitude for an only and ever-ailing child.

For this the gray-haired Rector felt as grateful to his young neighbour, as though she had been his superior in years and faculties. For Mrs. Burton, his tenderness was tinged with a degree of morbid sensibility and self-reproach. Rachel had been the only daughter of his widowed fireside: unusually lovely, unusually gifted: and he had not only spoiled her, but by weak and narrow-sighted indulgence, marred her prospects in life. Educated in a showy London school, Rachel Henderson had formed connections more gay and brilliant than comported

with her condition; and when eventually installed under the humble roof of Radensford Rectory, and her father saw her pining for brighter scenes, instead of endeavouring to instruct her in the happy art of home-keeping and home-adorning, he shrank from insisting on his claims to love and obedience. Ere the first stage of girlhood was overpast, when a pretendant to her hand presented himself, qualified, apparently, to place her in the gay worldly position she coveted, he accepted the proposals of Captain Burton, and even inconvenienced himself to produce a suitable dowry to facilitate the marriage, solely in the hope to brighten the listless countenance which he could scarcely recognise as that of his darling and once-cheerful child.

But in this, the weak father sinned grievously against his better judgment. He neglected those searching inquiries by means of which every parent ought to be enabled to justify his sanction of a daughter's choice: and the results were disastrous. The smiles he had been so eager to restore to poor Rachel's countenance beamed only for a time. Haggard, careworn looks succeeded. The handsome and seemingly gallant and honourable young soldier proved to be a gambler and a sot; and sad as it was to see his daughter reduced to despair by his untimely death, after less than three years' wedlock, leaving her the maintenance of an infirm infant, Mr. Henderson returned thanks to Heaven for the death of his son-in-law.

Many years had now elapsed since on her return from India, where Captain Burton's death had taken place, Mrs. Burton re-established herself at Radensford Rectory. She was now eight-and-twenty, and her daughter nine years of age; and she could consequently contemplate the *début* of her little favourite, Amy Meadows, with something of a maternal feeling.

"I can't help thinking with Mary Tremeneere, the Meadoweses a little to blame in keeping that dear girl so ignorant of the world and its ways," she observed to her father, while walking home with him one evening at dusk, from Meadows Court, they discussed together the increasing beauty and grace of Sir Mark's daughter.

"But why, my dear? Amy is never likely to see much of

society. Lady Meadowes's health is far from strengthened. Sir Mark grows more and more attached to the old place. Nothing in the world, not even to see his beloved girl admired and courted, would take him to London."

"I was not thinking of London."

"Sir Mark detests watering-places; and the idea of carrying his daughter to a marriage-market would revolt his fine old English spirit."

"And with reason. But as you say, Lady Meadowes's health is far from improved; and in the event of her death, Sir Mark might marry again for the sake of an heir to his property. On the other hand, if Sir Mark should die, his widow and daughter would be left in a sadly unprotected situation."

"You seem in a great hurry, my dear Rachel, to put an end to one or other of your friends," said Mr. Henderson, with a smile. "I, on the contrary, am inclined to assign a long life to both."

"May your good wishes prosper," rejoined his daughter. "Still, when I see poor Amy so satisfied that the best interests of this world lie comprised within a circle of five miles round Meadowes Court, I cannot help wishing that Miss Honeywood had a little enlarged her horizon."

"Time enough—time enough. Worldly knowledge comes upon us of itself, with every day we live: usually too soon, mostly too abundantly."

"Not too soon or too abundantly for those who are fated to an early struggle with the evils of life," added Mrs. Burton, in a low voice. "Amy's position is a peculiar one; and I really think her old enough to be forewarned of the slights she may hereafter have to undergo."

"Again I say, time enough. She may marry happily, and establish a position of her own."

"Marry?—At Meadowes Court?—Dearest father,—there is not a single man on this side the country!"

"They must come then from the other, and look after our Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," persisted the kindly old man. "I see how it is, my dear Rachel. You are longing for the sight of orange-blossoms and wedding favors. Meantime, let us do our

best in assisting to amuse little Amy: that the pretty bird may not beat its wings against the cage which you have not patience to see so solitary."

It was but a few days after this conversation that Miss Meadows, who had driven over to the Rectory in her pony-chaise with a provision of grapes for little Sophia Burton, was sitting with Sophia's mother in her school-room, projecting plans of winter charity for the poor of Radensford, of whom Mr. Henderson and Sir Mark were the chief benefactors. As they talked together, or rather as Mrs. Burton reasoned and Amy silently acquiesced, the leaves of a sketch-book which lay on Mrs. Burton's desk when surprised by her pretty visitor, were slowly turned by the latter; sometimes with an admiring exclamation, always with an air of interest.

The book contained a series of views and sketches of scenes in the Himalaya; wild, picturesque and shaggy; many of them strikingly vigorous and original. These, by the signature S. B. affixed to them, Amy concluded to be the production of the late Captain Burton, whose Christian name was Sylvester; and carefully abstained from more than passing praise. Others, somewhat tamer in execution, bearing the name of Sharland, were evidently the water-color drawings of a friend. At last she came to a bold and admirable sketch in sepia, at the foot of which was inscribed, "Hog-hunting at Fallonnah." And this clever group, the figures in which appeared to be portraits, was subscribed in quaint Oriental-looking characters, evidently traced by the artist's brush rather than his pen—"MARCUS."

"Marcus!" exclaimed Amy, whose fancy had been previously captivated by the masterly execution of the sketch. "Our family name! How strange! *What* Marcus, dear Mrs. Burton? Tell me the surname of your Indian Salvator Rosa?"

Mrs. Burton, who from the first appeared embarrassed and annoyed at seeing her album in the hands of Miss Meadows, replied, almost coldly: "That book, dear Amy, is one of the few memorials left of my married life. You have never seen it before, because I keep it carefully locked up. For me, it is replete with painful associations. I took it out this morning only to as-

certain a date, which I thought I might find annexed to one of the drawings."

Amy instantly closed the book, and replaced it on the table.

"Forgive my indiscretion," said she. "You should have checked me at once. I fancied it was only an album, intended, like my own, for general entertainment. "Still," she continued, after a pause, during which Mrs. Burton was occupied in replacing the book in an outer case furnished with a Bramah's lock, "though I would not for worlds dwell upon a painful subject, do satisfy my curiosity as to whether your Marcus has anything to do with our family? It is such an uncommon name!"

"Not *very* uncommon," replied Mrs. Burton, in a hesitating manner, as if uncertain whether to impart the information required.

"This clever Marcus, then—this man of genius, who puts us all to shame—is *not*, as I hoped, a relation?"

"Pardon me. The drawings were done by your cousin, Captain Davenport."

"You know him then, dearest Mrs. Burton. You can tell me all about him," said Amy, her face already in a glow of enthusiasm. "How delightful! What an unexpected pleasure!"

"My dear Amy," replied Mrs. Burton, evidently embarrassed, "if Lady Meadows and your father have abstained from talking to you about your cousins, depend on it they have good reasons for their silence. Ask yourself, my dear child, whether it would become me, distinguished as I have been by their kindness, to thwart their wishes for the mere sake of indulging you with a little idle gossip!"

"Not idle gossip," persisted Amy. "My interest in these unknown relatives in an impulse of natural affection."

"An impulse of mere girlish curiosity," persisted Mrs. Burton, more gravely than was her wont. "Had you not accidentally discovered their existence, your natural affection would have remained dormant. Believe me, Amy—believe one who has lived and suffered—that information obtained by unfair means unfailingly recoils on those who have outraged the rule of right in obtaining it."

Amy sat rebuked and silent; too little in the habit of opposition to venture on further rejoinder. But she did not feel the less interested concerning her mysterious cousins, from having discovered in one of them so proficient an artist.

“Well, well! One gets to the bottom of all secrets and mysteries in time,” said she, at length, rallying her spirits; “and the enigma rarely proves worth the time one has lost in puzzling over it. I find, dear Mrs. Burton, that papa has even initiated *you* into the greatest of all secrets—the history of our forthcoming improvements at Meadows Court.”

“Sir Mark acquainted me yesterday with the reason of Hurstley’s frequent visits of late to Radensford. But I must pause a little, Amy, ere I give the name of improvement to the change. Meadows Court is so perfect as a whole, that I cannot bear to think of the slightest change.”

“Not when you hear that the physicians declare the damp vapors of the moat to be most injurious to a person so delicate as poor mamma?”

“That point of view was never suggested. To *that* argument I bow. But how can it *be*, Amy? Though the old moat has existed for centuries, one never heard it talked of, or saw it written of, as unwholesome? I am afraid we are getting a little over-fastidious now-a-days about sanitary influences. We shall find at last that the whole habitable globe has scarcely a spot whose climate is perfectly salubrious.”

“But what would you have my father do? After witnessing such protracted sufferings as poor mamma’s, the moment a source of cure or even alleviation is suggested, he can only thankfully comply with the instructions of her medical attendants. Dr. Burnaby declares that half mamma’s illness arises from the miasma generated by the moat, and my father has consequently resolved to do what has been done in half the ancient mansions in the county—that is, to dry it up; fill in the fosse, and surround the house with a pretty flower-garden, instead of that horrible old nursery for toads and tadpoles.”

Mrs. Burton smiled. In former days, before the Meadows family dreamed of dispensing with this appendage to their ancient grange, she had always heard the moat described as a run-

ning stream, with a gravelly bottom, of which a few overgrown and superannuated carp were the sole inhabitants.

“And when are the works to commence?” she inquired.

“Next week. Papa signed the contract yesterday. It will cost little more than two hundred pounds; and by October the new ground is to be ready for planting and sowing.”

“But Lady Meadows, so sensitive as she is, will never be able to remain in the house while besieged by workmen?”

“Of course not. Forty or fifty men will be at work; and poor dear mamma would never stand the disturbance. Fortunately, Lady Harriet is going to visit the Eustaces, and has offered us the use of the Manor House during her absence.”

“Good news for *me*, Amy!” replied Mrs. Burton, kindly. “When only half a mile apart, we shall have no excuse for not meeting daily. And now, come in with me to luncheon, or poor Sophia will be wearying sadly for her dinner.”

CHAPTER III.

ENOUGH for the present of manor-houses and rectories—buttercups and daisies—

My soul, turn from *them*; turn we to survey
Where London's smoke obscures the orb of day;

more particularly in that narrow by-street in the parish of St. James—a hive of fashionable bachelors—where Marcus Davenport, the sketcher of Hog-hunting at Fallonnah, had, it can scarcely be said “set up his rest”—but sheltered his unquietness.

There was nothing striking in the exterior of the house. The passage was chilled by the usual covering of half-obliterated oil-cloth, the stairs rendered dreary by the ordinary Persian-patterned carpet worn at the protruding edges, common to London lodging-houses. But the moment you turned the handle of the back room on the second landing, which was Captain Davenport's peculiar domain, a different order of things prevailed. A cursory view of the room was like glancing over the first page

of a clever new book. Your attention was riveted in a moment.

Not, indeed, by the splendor of the furniture; which consisted of a couple of incomparable lounging chairs, and divans covered with bright chintz, fitted into the recesses on either side the fireplace. But the pale green walls were hung with pictures by the same masterly hand which had supplied the sketches to Mrs. Burton's portfolio, and might have entitled a professional artist to the equivocal honours of the R. A.; while a baized door leading to the adjoining bedroom was masked by a folding screen of tinted paper, adorned with *croquis* illustrating the works of Goethe, Hoffmann, and Jean Paul Richter, original, graphic, powerful; and though usually attributed by a stranger to the varied talents of several artists of genius, the fruit of the same inspiration which had furnished the walls with their more elaborate specimens of art.

Like many old-fashioned London houses, the room, overlooking a sooty garden, in which grew nothing but broken crockery and sparrows, was enlarged by a bow-window; in the centre of which, sidling on its stand, was a tame pink cockatoo, whose parts of speech had been far more cultivated than those of many of its fashionable fellow-parishioners; while on the hearth-rug lay a grey Skye terrier, far gone in years, apparently on such terms of amity with the rival pet, as to have overcome in its favour the instinctive antagonism between fur and feathers.

The adornments of Mark's domicile were of a suggestive order; a few clever statuettes on brackets, and one or two antiques collected on his travels. The only ornament on his table, besides a simple black marble inkstand and shabby old Russia-leather blotting book, much the worse for use, were a brasier for burning juniper berries, and a cracked old Flemish glass, containing a sickly sprig of rosemary.

But the atmosphere of the chamber was pleasant and well-regulated. In winter, a wood fire blazed brightly; in summer, thick green blinds excluded the sun. Many a fine gentleman issuing from the lofty mansions of May Fair was heard to exclaim, on sinking into one of Davenport's easy chairs, "By Jove! Mark,

you take good care of yourself. This is the most comfortable room in Europe."

What right, however, had he to be comfortable—that Paria of a younger brother! Cheerless chambers in one of the Inns of Court would have better fitted his position than all this Sybarite indulgence. A difference in age of less than a year rendered him the subaltern of a brother intitled to be nursed in the lap of luxury, and rejoice in marrow and fatness. But the barrier was as insurmountable as though a century, in place of eleven months, intervened between the events which gave an heir to Ilford Castle, and a second olive-branch to its owner.

To the parents, the mother being still young, with the milk of human kindness yet unsoured by the storms of life, the two babes, rolling upon the lawn in their white tunics, possessed an equal charm. If either, the younger was preferred; as more loving and more intelligent. The boys were commended, at five years old, to the care of the same nursery governess—at eight, to the birch of the same tutor; and at eleven, were despatched together to Eton, where the precocity of Marcus placed him in the upper school, side by side with his brother. Both were "Mr. Davenport." There was nothing in the senior and junior attached to their patronymic sufficing to denote that one was predestined to feed upon the corn, wine, and oil of this world—the other, upon its husks.

Hugh was reserved and gentle; Marcus wild and clever. But both were gentlemanly in mind and deportment; and as kindly disposed towards each other, as the struggle and uproar of a public school would allow them to exhibit. Each had his bosom friend who was the natural enemy of the other, and created feuds between them. But during their holidays, at Ilford Castle, their tempers and pursuits were as uniform as if they were fated to live in Arcadia, nurtured on the honey of Hymettus.

Not till the year of Hugh's emancipation from Eton did it seem to occur to Lord Davenport that the future destinies of the boys would be as dissimilar in quality as gold and lead. His lordship made the discovery, perhaps, because the outstanding schoolboy debts of the younger doubled those of the heir-apparent. Perhaps because, till within the last six months, the fortune of his

maiden sister, amounting to something above two thousand a-year, had been regarded in the family as the future inheritance of her godson, Mark. But Miss Davenport, always crotchety, had chosen at forty-five, to replace her pet marmozets and Blenheim spaniels by a two-legged darling—a sober widower, blest with a numerous brood, who speedily superseded her nephew in her unsettled affections and unsettled property. It was clear, therefore, that poor Marcus would have to provide for himself. Half his mother's fortune of twenty thousand pounds was all he had to depend upon; and that only at her decease.

Lord Davenport, who from the period of his marriage, had been gradually progressing, or shall we call it retrograding, from the poetry to the prose of life, was consequently forced to study the future interests of his progeny. Ten years before, he had been proudest of Hugh—fondest of Mark. Now, perhaps, he was fondest of Hugh, who in his nonage had given him least anxiety, and proudest of Mark; of whose abilities, even from the masters who denounced him as a scapegrace, he received the highest commendation. But his lordship was fortunately of too practical a nature not to perceive the fruitlessness of talent combined with moral shortcoming; and was as little inclined to foresee in his family a William Shakspeare, or even a Goldsmith or Sheridan, as if a shadowy view of the Fleet Prison loomed in the background. He accordingly favoured his younger born, previously to his departure for the University, with a didactic lecture as dry as sawdust; nearly as circumstantial as a Bridgewater Treatise, and not quite so edifying. Lord Davenport warned his son against Newmarket and tailors' bills, much as his own father, forty years before, had warned himself against infidelity and claret. Among his interdictions, however, there was less said about lounging and cigars than was altogether judicious: just as a man in fear of the plague would scorn to flee away before the measles.

In spite, however, of the omission, Marcus, for several terms, did himself the utmost credit. Wonders were predicted of him. He was recognised in the University, as the most brilliant ornament of the debating club, and booked for the highest honours. On the return of the two brothers to Ilford Castle for the long

vacation, Hugh boasted of Mark to his parents, like some fond father parading his only son. He even implored Lord Davenport to retain for his brother the seat in Parliament which was keeping warm for his less talented self. Nor were the Davenports, who had long perceived that this amiable eldest hope of theirs was as shy as a girl, altogether disinclined to listen to the suggestion.

But alas!

The third term, came a frost, a chilling frost.

The hare, lazy and self-confiding, had allowed itself to be overtaken by the tortoise. Partly because irritated by this unexpected check, and partly because, at twenty, Nature was working her way, Marcus Davenport now enlisted himself in a joyous band of University rebels, beyond all hope from secondary punishment; and in due time, Lord Davenport was respectfully apprised of the rustication of his second son.

The worldly-minded father was furious—thwarted in his projects—galled in his self-love. He had bragged too largely concerning the acquirements of the handsome scapegrace; and his lordship's vanity suffered still more keenly than his paternal affections. It was only by the prayers and entreaties of Hugh he was prevented from dealing so stern a measure of wrath upon the delinquent, as the pride of Marcus would scarcely ever have forgiven.

“Send me into the army, if you are so ashamed of me that you wish to lose sight of me,” was the young man's dutiful rejoinder to even a modified explosion of his lordship's ire, who eagerly profited by the hint, and despite the entreaties of the brother, and the tears of the mother, Marcus was speedily gazetted to an India Regiment, and before Mark Davenport had spent three months in the land of palanquins, his regiment was on active service in one of those periodical wars which, by an ample libation of British blood, propitiate the outraged genius of the soil.

Young Davenport, fortunate in a brave and able colonel, as well as in a commander-in-chief whose laurels are still verdant, was fortunate also in opportunities. In the course of the two

following years, his rapid promotion was justified by honorable mention in more than one despatch. Twice had his mother the comfort of a burst of tears in the arms of her elder son, when, after a severe action, Hugh Davenport was able to point out to her the name they loved, not in the list of casualties, but among the officers recommended to the notice of the Horse Guards.

Still, the reasons which justified Lord Davenport for having launched his son in an arduous profession, had not ceased to exist. Not only was the account of the young lieutenant at his agent's constantly overdrawn, but Marcus had found occasion to signify to the head of the family, through his brother, the necessity under which he found himself of anticipating his annual allowance. For a time, the kind-hearted Hugh contrived, with the assistance of his father's banker, to prevent the bills drawn upon Lord Davenport from reaching his hands and provoking his displeasure. But his means were limited; and a second claim for five hundred pounds brought down all the thunder of Jupiter Davenport on the heads of both his sons.

Searching inquiries brought to light that the budding hero on whom the Lord of Ilford Castle was beginning to waste a thousand chimeric hopes, was an extravagant profligate. Captain Burton, the wildest of his brother officers, had, it appeared, initiated him into the fatal mysteries of play: and when, at length, at the close of the war which was the means of securing for him the company left vacant by the death of that dangerous friend, Lord Davenport obtained from the commander-in-chief leave of absence for his son, it was rather with the view of breaking off the fatal connections he had formed in India, than of indulging the earnest desire of his wife and elder-born, to embrace the prodigal from whom they had now been six years estranged.

Mark's arrival was the signal for home-happiness and family festivity, now becoming rare at Ilford Castle. Lord Davenport was a theoretical agriculturist, and the improvement of his estates occupied his whole time, and absorbed all his money; till, at last, every hour and guinea seemed wasted that was not devoted to the interests of his landed property.

At no time of his life a pleasant companion, his lordship was

becoming so completely a clod of the valley, that Hugh Davenport would have seen as little of home as though he too were fighting in the Punjaub, but for the sake of the gentler and kinder parent so much in need of his society. Not that his mother had ever appealed to his sympathy. No amount of suffering would have wrung out of her heart one disrespectful word concerning the husband she had sworn to honour and obey.

Country neighbours and occasional guests at Ilford Castle were heard, indeed, to whisper that Lady Davenport was nearly as cold and silent as her husband; and scarcely a visitor ever issued from the gates, but felt relieved from a disagreeable constraint. For such casual observers were not likely to ascribe the frequent changes of colour of that mild pale face to repressed sensibility; and few surmised that the woman, whose rank and fortune appeared so enviable, had been through life a martyr to Duty.

Her brother—her only brother—having shortly after her own marriage taken to himself a wife in direct opposition to the will of his august brother-in-law, Lord Davenport had intimated to Sir Mark Meadows that, neither he nor Lady Meadows would be received at Ilford Castle, or allowed the smallest intercourse with his sister or her children; a threat to which he had adhered with a degree of vindictive obstinacy, such as the inconsistency of modern society rarely calls into play.

It is true that circumstances favoured their estrangement. They were never accidentally thrown in each other's way. The Meadowses lived in the strictest retirement; and but for the yearnings of Lady Davenport's tender heart after her only brother and his offspring, they might easily have been forgotten at Ilford Castle.

CHAPTER IV.

ONE half the twelvemonth's leave of absence accorded to Captain Davenport at the end of the campaign, on the usual plausible plea of ill-health, had just expired, when his brother Hugh

walked one morning into the bachelor domicile already described: it would be incorrect to say to breakfast—for, as regarded hours, and more especially meal-hours, Marcus was as little to be relied upon as if still a campaigner. But Mr. Davenport was fortunate in finding him seated before his steaming coffee and smoking pillau; and their colloquy was all the more sociable for the cover instantly laid for the unexpected guest by Captain Davenport's incomparable soldier servant.

Astonishing how much the exercise of the masticatory functions tends to forward despatch of small-talk! Hugh, who was fresh from Ilford Castle, where he had been spending the recess, announced that Marcus had grievously offended his father by keeping aloof from the family circle.

“I can't help it! His lordship must fume away his wrath,” said Captain Davenport, in reply to his brother's mild remonstrances. “It would have been gross hypocrisy on my part to go. I am bored out of all human patience at Ilford. At Ilford you dare not say your soul's your own. At least, I can answer for myself, that with my father's eye upon me, I never feel the lawful proprietor of either soul or body. On no subject do we think alike! He told me, the last time there was a flare-up between us, that I was no Davenport—that I was a Meadows at heart. I believe he said it chiefly to wound my poor mother's feelings. But, thank Heaven, she only looked the more fondly at me, and seemed gratified by the accusation.”

“But what had provoked him to such a remark?”

“What?—because when he twitted me with wasting in riot and excess what he was pleased to term the splendid abilities with which Nature has gifted me, I respectfully replied that so far from wasting them, I had every encouragement given me by my friends to obtain a handsome competence as an artist.”

“On which, alas! you parted in mutual displeasure, and have not met since! and here am I, come as ——”

“As an emissary from my father?”

“As a brother who loves you better than all your friends and toadies put together,” replied Hugh, warmly. “Marcus, you are not just.”

“Yes, I am, for I am ashamed of myself,” cried the younger

brother, extending his hand. "Wait a moment till I am cool again, and we will start fair."

And having rung for the table to be cleared, and dipped his hands in a finger-glass, Captain Davenport wheeled round his arm-chair towards the divan by the fireside, on which Hugh had already taken up his position.

"In one word then, Marcus," resumed his brother, "my mission here is to persuade you to accept a third of the allowance of six hundred a-year made me by my father; which, with the two hundred he gives you, will bring our income to a level—four hundred a-piece."

"For what do you take me, Hugh?"—cried Marcus, drawing up to his highest altitude.

"For a kind brother, if you accede to my proposal. Believe me, you will do nothing with my father."

"And you consider *that* a sufficient reason for me to rob you of your birthright?"

"With four hundred a-year, I shall have enough, and more than enough, for my needs. Were my father to allow me the thousand or fifteen hundred per annum which you and your friends sometimes say it is his duty to do, I should not know what to do with it. I might become a prodigal, or a miser."

"Neither the one nor the other. You would remain what you are:—an excellent fellow—considering everybody's comfort before your own."

But Marcus had no leisure just then for the continuation of his panegyric, for the room-door was burst open by what at first sight appeared to be a gentleman disguised as a Turk in a masquerade costume, who had grossly over-dressed his part. A vest and tunic of an extravagant shawl-pattern, were cinctured at the waist with a scarlet cord and tassels, over long, loose red trousers, and yellow morocco slippers, crowned by a richly-embroidered fez; from which escaped long auburn locks, intermingled with most Saracenic whiskers meeting below the chin of the wearer.

Holding a cherry-stick pipe in one hand, and the *Times* newspaper in the other, this unceremonious visitor threw himself on one of the divans near the fireplace; and, having tossed out of

his eyes the dishevelled locks blown into them by the rapidity of his ascent in mounting the stairs, he nodded familiarly to Hugh Davenport, and saluted the younger brother by the name of "old fellow;" a mode of address whose comprehensive tenderness is equivalent to the "*mon cher*" of a French *élégant*.

Hamilton Drewe, the intruder who, from his domicile on the first floor, had thus unceremoniously invaded his neighbour's territories, would, however, have scorned the name of "*élégant*." Though so extravagantly accoutred, he flattered himself he had a soul above buttons—even though they were of cinquecento fashion or wrought by Froment Meurice. Rich in personal gifts, and tolerably clever, this young gentleman might have formed a valuable member of society, had he not emerged into the London crowd at a moment when the white-cravated Brummel school which succeeded to the white-coated Sir John Lade school, had just abdicated in favour of the eccentric man of genius, copied after the pattern of Vivian Grey.

Hamilton Drewe was early an orphan, and born to the enjoyment of an estate of nearly five thousand a-year in the sturdy county of Northumberland; his guardianship had been unluckily consigned to the hands of a distant relative, an old bachelor, wedded by a morganatic marriage to the whole Nine Muses at once; who looked upon literary renown as the highest attainable distinction. Instead of bringing up his ward to be a useful man in his generation, qualified to reconcentrate a property injured by neglect and a long minority, Wroughton Drewe, Esq., F.R.S., F.A.S., F.L.S. and all the rest of it—had taught him to despise provincial life; to denounce country gentlemen as clods of the valley; and to prefer public scholarship and an assumed sympathy in the opening of barrows and collecting of scarabæi, to the legislation of his county, or his country, and the "better regulation" of himself and his estates.

Instead, therefore, of sending his young relative to one of our public schools, Mr. Drewe fancied he was doing better for his intellects and morals, by placing him under the care of a forty-donkey-power pedagogue of a private tutor. At sixteen, he was removed from the narrow village circle to which he had been an

object of adulation, to a German university, to be rendered muzzy with Hegelian philosophy, beer, tobacco, and æsthetics: nor was it wonderful that, at twenty, he should return to the hands of his cousin Wroughton, with a smattering of universal knowledge, and in his portmanteau a thin quarto of poetry, original, and translated.

Now, Drewe the elder was a man of Bloomsbury; in his youth a working-placeman, but long since retired on a pension and a moderate competence, to find recreation in remodelling his education by the lectures of the Royal Institution, and the sittings of the Horticultural, Linnæan, Zoological, Philological, Ethnological, Medico-botanical, Entomological, and Heaven knows how many more learned societies; where he fancied himself as much instructed as men really instructed find themselves amused. At all events, he acquired the cant of scientific knowledge; as the connoisseurs of the last century, so ably described by Goldsmith and Sterne, acquired the jargon of criticism. A few dinners, in the course of the season, to the sapient professors rejoicing in the appendix to their names of all the letters in the alphabet conjoined with that of F, obtained for him a reputation of Mæcenas-ship. And though he would have been puzzled to classify the groundsel springing within the rusty palisades of Bloomsbury Square, or the aphides sulkily fattening thereon, he passed, from Museum street to the London University, as an embodied Cosmos. Rusty-coated literati inclined their heads reverentially when they heard mention of the name of Mr. Wroughton Drewe.

By way of introducing his rich and accomplished admirable Crichton of a ward to the *beau monde*, he put up his name at the Alfred, and one or two equally somniferous clubs, and proposed him as a member of several learned societies; and great was his mortification when, some months afterwards, the erratic genius suddenly started for the East, in a fit of disgust at the severe castigation inflicted by the critics upon his maiden volume. The ex-guardian consoled himself, as best he might, by the conviction that he would return from the Cataracts of Upper Egypt, à la Byron, exalted in importance by an Oriental beard, and a forthcoming canto of a new Childe Harold.

Nothing of the kind. The young gentleman brought only a few shawls, tobacco pouches, and papooshes; with his dragoon's and courier's accounts, to be audited, and a constitution considerably enfeebled by the debilitating fever of the Levant.

He had, however, established in the interim a species of reputation. He had been called in literary journals "that enterprising traveller, Mr. Hamilton Drewe"—nay, in a journal seldom read except by the victims of its sanguinary articles, that "promising scholar," that "distinguished and rising poet;" and he became consequently still more enamoured of himself than when simply patted on the back by Bloomsbury-Square.

The promising scholar and distinguished poet considered it due to his reputation to give literary breakfasts and literary dinners; sedulously frequented by certain pseudo scholars and self-styled men of letters; who fooled him to the top of his bent—called him Byron—Lamartine—Eothen—drank his claret, drew on his banker, and when his back was turned, laughed him to scorn. In Hunt and Roskell's bill, there appeared to his debit an item of six silver-gilt standishes. Six! Could the ink consumed in inditing "Blossoms of the Soul," have demanded the use of six standishes? No! but the small reviewers did—who had wrapped up that delicate and well-puffed effusion in the cotton of their bespoken praise.

The youthful bard, or as the Knights of the Standish styled him, the youthful darling of the Muses, had not thought it necessary to re-explore, on his return to Christendom, the "wilds of Bloomsbury." Having despatched to his ex-guardian his tributary offering of papyrus, and a MS. or two purchased for its weight in gold, at one or other of the Levantine monasteries which Mr. Curzon's interesting work had brought into notice, he issued strict orders to the Giannino whom Byron's example had erected into his Groom of the Chambers, never to admit into them a bald-headed, hook-nosed elderly gentleman, bearing his own name and the physiognomy of a vulture digesting.

In exchange for what he renounced in this erudite privy councillor, the incipient Byron, devoted to the pursuit of literary distinction under difficulties, had acquired only the friendship of Marcus Davenport. And to a man like Drewe, it was invaluable.

able. Marcus was an unsparing hater of humbug;—a sworn enemy to impostors. He would not have toadied a king for his throne: far less a reviewer for his praise. Least of all, any of the six bestandished editors, unheard of in the world of letters save by hapless authors of volumes of Occasional Poems.

CHAPTER V.

BUT it is almost time to return into Gloucestershire; where incidents of unusual interest were disturbing the even tenour of the ways of Meadowes Court.

In Amy Meadowes's monotonous life it was an event to migrate from home even to the distance of a couple of miles. Sir Mark was to remain on the spot, as overseer of the works. But the transfer of the invalid to her new domicile was not effected without some anxiety both to her husband and child.

To their great surprise, Lady Harriet was standing under the porch of Radensford Manor to receive her guests.

"Yes, it is even so," said she, offering her arm to assist Lady Meadowes into the drawing-room, where a cozy sofa drawn near the fire, awaited her. "After all my fine professions of making you lady-paramount here, dear Lady Meadowes, I must claim your hospitality. I am prevented going to my sister Louisa by illness in her house. So far from receiving me, she has sent me her son William, to be out of the way of the fever which is raging around them. Had she wished me, however, to keep the engagement, I should not have thought of taking the poor boys into the danger of infection."

"But under all these circumstances, we shall perhaps be in your way?" said her visitor. "The carriage is not yet unpacked. Nothing would be easier than to return, and postpone our undertaking for a time."

"Nothing would be more difficult, if you intend to complete it before the frosty weather sets in. And why, my dear friend? Surely you know enough of this rambling old house to admit that it contains three or four spare bedrooms; and that nothing

could delight me half so much as to have them occupied by you and yours."

"Then we are all happy, and the thing is settled," interrupted Amy. "Our visit to Radensford will be far pleasanter than we had a right to expect."

Then, recollecting that Lady Harriet's nephew, William Eustace, who had occasionally visited the Manor House as long as she could remember, was now a young man of four-and-twenty, a Member of Parliament, and a star in the fashionable world, it suddenly occurred to her that she had said too much; and, blushing and confused, she made matters worse by endeavouring to modify her frank declaration.

She could have withdrawn her compliment in all sincerity on the morrow. After an evening spent in disjointed chat in Lady Harriet's old-fashioned drawing-room, Amy felt that the Mr. Eustace, who was no longer called William in the family, was anything but an acquisition. He was either dull, or supercilious. She wasted some time in endeavouring to find out *which*. For though silent and unsympathetic, he was too good-looking and too well-bred to be an object of indifference. The result of her cogitations was, that it was a pity so handsome a young man should be so thoroughly disagreeable. But Amy's cheerful temper was not long influenced by the dryness of their unexpected inmate. She proceeded to amuse the little boys when they were released from the school-room, and to arrange Lady Meadows's work-table and sofa, exactly as if he had not been present.

To do him justice, he intruded as little as possible into the family circle. Off at early morning with the keepers to shoot over the wide-lying farms of the Manor, he was never visible till dinner; to the hilarity of which, he contributed about as much as the statue of the commandant would have done to the supper of Don Juan. Even at the tea-table, with the honours of which Amy was entrusted, while her mother and Lady Harriet crooned together over their household interests and parish gossip, instead of making the smallest effort to entertain the fair young guest of the house, he retreated to a distant sofa with a reading lamp and a pamphlet.

Marvellous, indeed, would it have appeared to Amy, had any

one informed her that this silent young gentleman passed for a Phoenix in his own county; and was classed, even in London, among the "men of wit and pleasure about town." His abilities, unquestionably above par, had been polished by what Great Britain calls a first-rate education, viz., a public school and the university;—on learning which, Amy was disposed to attribute his dulness to an overweight of classics and mathematics.

She judged him wrongfully. Young Eustace was no pedant. His present moroseness arose from a certain lecture by which his aunt had signified, on his arrival, that she considered his heart in considerable danger from the attractions of a simple country girl;—*his* heart—for which Clarissa Harlowe, in all the glory of her beauty and heiress-ship, would have had as little attraction as her dairy-maid! Even in the midst of her flurries and fusses at the compulsory change of her plans, Lady Harriet had found time to exact from her nephew that he would not endeavour to turn the head of the rustic beauty under her roof by unmeaning attentions; which after all would possibly end in his own entanglement.

"Fear nothing, my dear aunt," was his scornful reply. "I promise you that your partridges and pheasants are the only victims likely to signalise my sojourn at Radensford."

"That's well—that's well,—that's all I wanted to hear," said she, accepting at once his self-confident assertion. "For I am too well acquainted with my sister Louisa's principles, to hope for forgiveness if I allowed you to form an attachment to Amy Meadowes."

"To the daughter of an old baronet? Why what am I myself but a baronet's son?"

"No matter. Louisa and I understand each other. I know her views for you; and shall certainly do nothing to thwart them."

As might be expected, Lady Harriet's officiousness and superfluous prohibitions secured the usual results. Amy, who would have been mystified and probably disgusted by Mr. Eustace's habitual style of London trifling and flirtation, was piqued by his incivility. While on the other hand, the self-sufficient Club-lounger, who would have resented the *corvée* of making the agreeable to a country Miss, began to fancy that the fruit must

be indeed golden, when so dragonised by his dictatorial aunt. He was startled to find his apparent incivility fail to humiliate as he thought it ought the untutored country girl; nor could he help continually speculating on the influence of his conduct on her countenance and manner. He always watched her. Even when beating a covert at three miles' distance from the Manor House, he found himself wondering what Amy was doing by the fireside; and how she managed to get through the morning amidst skeins of silk and balls of worsted, enlivened only by such wearisome companionship as that of his perpendicular kinswoman.

One day, it suddenly crossed his mind that some trick or artifice was concealed under the sage counsels of Lady Harriet. Conscious how deeply he was touched by the singular loveliness and *naïveté* of Amy Meadows, it occurred to him that this might be the end Lady Harriet had intended to accomplish. The visit of the Meadoweses to Radensford might have been pre-arranged. He, *he*, the sapient and fashionable William Eustace, Esq., M.P. was perhaps the dupe of a confederation of rustics—a fox caught in a mole trap!

When this surmise presented itself first to his mind, in the course of one of his snipe-shooting excursions in the forest of Burdans, he happened to be almost within view of poor Amy's birthplace; and, as if pricked by a spur, he suddenly started off in the direction of Meadows Court. In his whelphood, he had been a favourite with the sonless old baronet. He would go and ask him for some breakfast, and ascertain whether there were really works and workmen in the case, to account for the dispersion of the family.

Long before he reached the grey walls of the ancient *Stamm-Haus*, the question was answered. The road was cut up, and unsightly with ruts. Muddy planks were lying about; a fishy, fœtid odour pervaded the atmosphere. Dirty-looking labourers were driving barrows, or wielding shovels; and in coasting the mansion in order to reach the entrance-bridge, Mr. Eustace obtained an enlivening glimpse of a muddy fosse, whose filthy surface, partially clothed with coarse herbage, decayed weeds, gaping blue cockle-shells and broken crockery, was quite as vex-

ations to the eye as its emanations were unsatisfactory to the smell.

The young sportsman began to feel that he might as well have pursued his sport in the forest. It was however too late to think of retreat. Sir Mark who, in his old green cutaway and well-worn flat straw hat, was inspecting the unloading of the earth-carts, a few of which had discharged their burden at the further extremity of the moat, was already hurrying forward to meet his visitor, shading his eyes from the morning sun to assist his scrutiny. Eustace was forced to advance; with far less alacrity however, than the pointers, who seemed to perceive that they had reached a land of plenty—whether as regarded its kennel or its coverts.

“Why ’tis—yet no, it can’t be—little Willy Eustace—that is, young Mr. Eustace!” cried the frank old baronet, seizing the hand which his visitor shyly extended towards him. “Well, God bless me this *is* a surprise! We haven’t met—let me see, ’twas when I was serving as High Sheriff—not these six years—eh? And heartily glad I am to see you again,” he continued, giving a rough shake to the hand he had grasped so firmly during the progress of his reminiscences. “I’m only sorry that Lady Meadowes and my daughter should be absent, to make an old man’s welcome less acceptable. But, as you see, the works going on here are of a nature to drive ’em away.”

Mr. Eustace could almost have fancied that the motives of his visit were discovered.

“But now I think on’t,” resumed Sir Mark, interrupting his train of reflections, “you must be staying with Lady Harriet? You are perhaps in the house with them at Radensford?”

“I left the Manor, Sir, only a couple of hours ago; and have the pleasure of assuring you that, when we parted last night, Lady Meadowes and your daughter were in excellent health and spirits.”

“That’s right—that’s well! And what’s again right and well, your news will spare me a trot to the Manor this afternoon, for which I could ill spare time; though, to do the old shooting-pony justice, she carries me to the village in less than a quarter of an hour.”

"No visit of inspection, I can assure you, is at all necessary," rejoined Mr. Eustace, cheerfully. "I am here to answer every question you may be inclined to ask."

"Then let 'em be asked and answered over the breakfast-table," said Sir Mark, cordially. "The bell rang five minutes ago—just as I spied you. But a fresh supply of steaks and hot cakes will soon set the matter to rights. Here you! John—Dick—Manesty!—Take Mr. Eustace's dogs round to the stable-yard; unless," he continued, with a sly smile, "petticoat-government being in interregnum here just now, you like to have the poor fellows with you in the breakfast parlour?"

The dogs being Lady Harriet's and not his own, Mr. Eustace preferred seeing them consigned to their proper place; and having given up his gun to one of the keepers, he followed Sir Mark into the cheerful breakfast-room, liberally supplied with cold turkey-poult and home-smoked ham, pressed beef and mealy potatoes, hot bread, marmalade, and a smoking broil;—all that maketh glad the heart of sportsman, and put to the blush the meagre, dowager fare of Radensford Manor.

Before Sir Mark had despatched his first bowl of tea, he acquainted his visitor with all he had to tell concerning the nature and motive of his improvements; adding a declaration that, had he known how lonesome he should feel in this first separation from his womankind, he would have seen the moat further, before he thought of filling it up. Then came the avowal that the thought of filling it would never have occurred to him, but for the influence it was supposed to exercise over the health of the best and dearest of wives.

"You're not old enough," added Sir Mark, "to understand that sort of thing at present. It takes years and years, Mr. Eustace, to ripen one's boyish notions of sentimental love into the right-down manly feeling that binds a man to the wife of his choice, and the fireside gladdened by their children. But when the time comes, Sir, for you to make the discovery, mind my words, 'twill be the best-spent and happiest day of your life."

The young snipe-shooter, who for twenty minutes past had been getting smaller and smaller in his shoes, overpowered by

the hearty spirit of his host, his liberal sentiments and liberal housekeeping, enhanced by the fine old plate, china and pictures, which implied small need to descend to stratagem to secure a partner for the daughter and heiress of the house, gave a timid assent. At length, having breakfasted as became one of the old baronets whose bronzed faces smiled upon him from the walls of the breakfast-parlour, rather than as befitted a fastidious young Pelham of St. James's street, he took pity on the evident desire of his host to return to his workmen, and rose to depart: or perhaps took pity on himself—to whom Sir Mark, cheered by a copious succession of the "cups that cheer but not inebriate," insisted on showing and explaining the system of the forcing-pumps, by which the still moist moat had been partially desiccated.

"Unless I am back by twelve o'clock," he said, in apology for his hasty departure, "Lady Harriet, who is not aware of my intended visit, will be anxious and fidgety."

"Ay, that's the worst of my dear kind old neighbour—a sad fidget—a sad fidget!" cried Sir Mark. "I can't understand for my part, how she ever came to admit you under her roof, coming, as you say you do, from a district where fever is raging. Why, bless your soul! Lady Harriet would run away from the nettle rash, if old Burnaby took it into his head to make her believe it was infectious."

Mr. Eustace endeavoured to make him understand that his visit to Radensford Manor was thoroughly independent of the will and choice of his aunt. But Sir Mark was too much pre-engrossed to listen. His thoughts were divided between the wagons of earth he saw slowly approaching over the turf, and the assurances to be conveyed to his wife and daughter, that (please God, and Lady Harriet permitting), he would meet his daughter in the family pew the following Sunday, and "take his Sunday beef and pudden, afterwards, at the Manor." Sir Mark proposed the plan as frankly as he would have wished such a scheme to be proposed to himself. The old fellow's heart was as open as his hand. He could understand no motive for demur in matters of hospitality.

By the time Eustace had traversed half a mile of the jolly old baronet's property, on his way back to the narrow estate and

penurious habits of the Warnefords, he felt lowered in his own estimation. Absurd, to suppose that the proprietors of such a house as Meadows Court could descend to paltry plotting in behalf of their daughter; even were she a thousand times less charming than the pretty Amy whom he had been intent on keeping at a distance. As he glanced at the autumnal rose which Sir Mark had snatched from the porch, and charged him to convey to his wife, with his best love and blessing, and which was already fading in the button-hole of his shooting-jacket, he began to be aware that, though a very fine gentleman in Rotten Row, he was but a poor creature now that his varnished boot was exchanged for a shooting-shoe; and its sole planted on honest wholesome turf, a hundred miles distant from the sooty herbage of Hyde Park.

CHAPTER VI.

“No! don’t put it into water to refresh it, please,”—said Amy, on receiving from him, on his return, her father’s message and flower,—to convey to Lady Meadows, who was undergoing one of her “poorly” days, and had not yet made her appearance.—“My mother would prefer to have it in its present state,—exactly as it was sent by papa. Particularly, accompanied by such a pleasant message. Sunday dinner with us! We shall all be so happy! It seems so long since we left him. After all, Mr. Eustace, the song says true, ‘There’s no place like home.’”

William Eustace gazed after the animated girl as she hurried out of the room with the rose in her hand, and a flush of joy brightening her pleasant face: overcome by the confidingness of her manner,—by her deep sense of conjugal affection,—as well as by the consciousness of his own inferiority of nature. He understood, now, how much Eton and Oxford had extracted of good out of it, in exchange for the little they had conferred.—Virgil and Horace,—or faith in the affection of a woman of forty-five for a husband of sixty-six!—The odds were certainly not in favour of the classics.

But it was written in the book of fate that the Sunday dinner so sanguinely anticipated was not to come off. Sir Mark sent word

by Manesty, that he was vexed and disappointed, but that "a friend out of the West of England having come unexpectedly to stay with him, he was under the necessity of remaining at Meadows Court, to do the honours to his guest."

This excuse passed as current with his wife and daughter, as with most people, it would have done if issued by the Bank of England, whose promises are, in these our times, the only ones implicitly confided in. For Sir Mark was essentially a man of his word;—a man incapable of swerving a hair's breadth from the truth;—and on the present occasion, the pretext, for a pretext it was, was none of his devising. Old Nichols, once his foster-brother, now his butler, suggested what he had often heard suggested by his master, "anything rather than alarm my lady and Miss Amy!—"

The truth was that Sir Mark, pretty nearly for the first time in his life, was unwell and under medical superintendence; and Dr. Burnaby having decided that he must on no account leave the house in the present indefinite stage of his complaint, the innocent subterfuge was concocted between them.

An equally innocent spirit of coquetry having caused Lady Meadows and her daughter to await the coming of this much-loved, simple-hearted husband and father not only in their "Sunday best," but prepared with all the news of the more than ten days they had passed asunder, and all the honey of love they had been hiving for the moment of their meeting, the disappointment was great. They wished the visitor from the West of England back at the Land's End; and already began to prepare for the happiness of the following Sunday.

The under-keeper who brought the message, meanwhile, his tongue being unloosed by the excellent quality of the Manor ale, had let fall hints of the truth in the servants' hall; which would not have failed of reaching Lady Meadows through her maid, had she indulged in the vulgar habit of gossiping with her attendant, common among finer ladies. But Amy was in such systematic waiting upon her mother that this was impossible. Both retired to rest, that night, satisfied that Sir Mark had been enjoying his claret with an old friend; and hoping it was only the gravity of the Sabbath evening which had rendered Mr. Eustace

even more taciturn than his wont. For while Lady Harriet was dozing over Porteus's Sermons (the pet theology of her girlhood) her nephew's depression had seemed to amount almost to indisposition.

Next morning, for a wonder, he joined the family breakfast-table, and watched with quiet admiration the assiduity of Amy in concocting and carrying up-stairs her mother's tea. Not all Lady Harriet's entreaties would induce her to delegate the task to menial hands.

"I always wait upon mamma, at home," said Amy. "Pray allow me to carry up her breakfast. She would not enjoy it unless in her customary way. Invalids have fancies. Excuse me, dear Lady Harriet—and let me do as at home."

Amy carried her point. But Lady Harriet, who, judging from her own feelings, felt that the dutiful daughter was gaining too great an advantage over the heart of her sister's son, began to exclaim against the dangers of morbid sensibility. "Lady Meadows's dry toast might just as well have been administered by her maid."

Mr. Eustace thought otherwise. And he managed to think otherwise than Lady Harriet's thoughts during the remainder of breakfast; and oppose every word she uttered, till she began to consider him exceedingly disrespectful. The simple truth now occurred to her—that he was ill. If he saw cause to find fault that his three little cousins, after breakfasting in their nursery, were allowed to murmur over the Barbauld's hymns they were committing to memory, in a corner of the breakfast-room, for the better chance of embellishing their pages with traces of Dundee marmalade, her ladyship little surmised that the origin of poor William's captiousness was an aching head, rather than an aching heart.

Amy was kinder. Amy was more considerate. When she came back from her mother's room to hurry through her own tepid breakfast, she felt real pity for the cross young man who was gazing out of the window, with brows contracted by suffering, at Lady Harriet's gaudy autumnal parterres of China asters, African marigolds, and marvel of Peru.

"I am sure you are not well this morning, Mr. Eustace," said

she, in the frankest manner. "You don't look like yourself. You are quite heated and feverish."

"Thank you. I am not ill that I am aware of. A little headache, perhaps, after the ponderous Sunday fare of yesterday. Roast beef and plum-pudding (especially if eaten together after my dear aunt's heretical House of Hanover imaginations,) are dyspepsia and death."

"Dyspepsia—as I perceive; I trust not *death!*" said Amy, smiling as she finished her breakfast: Lady Harriet having already proceeded, with praiseworthy exactitude, to her daily conference with the housekeeper. "But come into the library, Mr. Eustace. There we shall find a good fire. You only want warming to be on a par with the rest of us."

The captious young gentleman clearly wanted more. For even while seated beside a huge fire piled up with blazing beech-roots and sparkling coal, he began to shiver and look blue. The delinquent himself imagined that his qualmish sensations arose from being conscience-stricken—and he longed to make a clean breast of it, and avow to the girl who evinced such ingenuous sympathy in his distemperament, his penitent self-conviction of coxcombry and presumption. But how was this to be done without insulting her with an explanation of his former impertinent surmises? He sat, therefore, aguish and depressed, but apparently stupid and indifferent; while Amy prepared her mother's work to be ready when Lady Meadows was able to make her usual noontide appearance.

Grateful, however, did he feel for her cheerful conversation. He had never before noticed how great a charm the habit of living with a gentle invalid had imparted to her manner. No bursts of hilarity—no impetuous step or gesture. It was more like a tame fawn gliding through the room, than a lively, healthy girl with the first bloom of youth still mantling on her cheek.

At first, indeed, it was difficult to withdraw her attention from the pattern she was tracing on the canvas, or the worsted she was sorting. But at length, he touched upon his visit at Meadows Court; and the sluice-gates of mutual confidence flew open in a moment. Tears came into Amy's eyes as she adverted to her disappointment of the preceding day. But they soon evaporated

when she began to talk of home. How was her father looking? Did he seem fatigued? Was he harassed by his workmen? Was he anxious for her return?

When these queries had been answered, came secondary inquiries. Had he spoken to old Nichols? Were Blanche and Sting admitted to the breakfast-room? Did he notice in the hall her pair of paroquets? No child could have been simpler in her questioning—no child more eager for his replies.

A colder-hearted man than William Eustace would have found it difficult to resist the earnestness of her sweet face—the mutable expression of her hazel eyes. Still, though inexpressibly touched by the *naïveté* of poor Amy's country-bred manners, and the expressive animation of her countenance, he felt too much oppressed to answer as he could have wished, the catechism to which he was subjected. Much within an hour, partly owing to the genial warmth of the fire opposite to which he was seated, partly from unaccountable weariness, he dropped asleep.

The moment Amy perceived the condition of her companion, she crept quietly out of the room, and went in search of Lady Harriet. Decorum or hypocrisy, call it what you will, had no influence over the impulses of Amy Meadows.

“I am afraid, dear Lady Harriet,” said she, “that Mr. Eustace is ill. He has had a sort of shivering fit; and he is now asleep in the drawing-room. Pray go and see him as soon as he wakes again. I will stay up-stairs in mamma's dressing-room, not to disturb him. But he has caught cold, or is what Miss Honeywood used to call *couver-ing* an illness.”

Lady Harriet tapped her on the shoulder, and smiled. She would have said—“foolish little girl! why so over-solicitous?” but for the fear of hurting Amy's feelings. But after noticing her susceptibility, she determined that so decided a case of sympathy between her young friend and her nephew rendered it desirable that he should return to his infected home in the North, sooner than the bulletin of its bills of mortality seemed to justify.

She scarcely knew whether to be more amused or vexed by Amy's solitudes. But before twenty-four hours had elapsed, her mind was made up. Mr. Eustace's increasing indisposition, which before night had assumed a character of most alarming

lethargy, determined her the following morning to summon Dr. Burnaby, her family physician; who, residing at the neighbouring town of Cardington, nearly ten miles off, was only called in at Radensford Manor in cases of emergency. He came; and the grave face with which he contemplated his now nearly insensible patient, sufficed to excite the old lady's utmost alarm, even before his mode of cross-questioning her concerning the nature of the epidemic from which her nephew had fled, and the length of time which had elapsed since he established himself at the Manor, apprised her of the nature of his attack.

"A fever, with something of typhoid symptoms?" cried the blunt old doctor, repeating the words in which Lady Louisa Eustace's letter had explained the matter to her sister: "Stuff and nonsense! Why not say typhus fever at once? Why not put people on their guard?"

He was almost inclined to rescind the opinion, however, when he saw to what a state of agony mere mention of the dreaded word had reduced Lady Harriet. Not on her own account. She was conscious of her own ripeness of years. She was prepared to suffer—she was prepared to die. But she was *not* prepared to witness the sufferings or death of the promising children committed to her charge by her departed son; whose well-being she regarded as a sacred deposit. It would scarcely have been desirable just then for Lady Louisa Eustace to have encountered her indignant and terrified sister.

"But my dear, good lady," cried Doctor Burnaby, alarmed at the outpourings of acrimony he had brought forth—"where's the use of wasting all these hard words on other people? Better turn round, and look about you, and see what's to be done. 'Tisn't altogether civil, Lady Harriet, to make so sure my patient will die. I flatter myself I've brought worse cases through, before now."

"I was not thinking of your patient, doctor; very dear though he is to me. I was thinking of my three poor boys. What will become of *them*, doctor?"

"Why not send them to the Rectory, dear Lady Harriet?" said Amy, who was standing, pale as death, listening to the doctor's award.

“When I am not certain but that they might carry with them the germ of the fever,” she replied, severely. “Fie, Amy! Sophia Burton is the only child of her mother, and she is a widow.”

Doctor Burnaby looked better pleased with his old friend now, than while she was reviling her absent sister.

“If you’re not afraid of trusting them to me and my house-keeper, dear lady,” said he, “I’ll undertake the bantlings, and bring them back safe to you when the battle is over.”

“My dear doctor!”

“To be plain with you, however,” he continued, “I never saw much good arise from running out of the way of infection. I’m not clear that it does not evince an unbecoming mistrust of the Providence of God. But of that sin, I’m afraid, by the blueness of your lips and tremor of your hand, your ladyship already stands convicted,” added he. “I’ll be bound you’ve not a thread of pulse to be felt at this moment.”

“I will not boast,” replied Lady Harriet, gravely—“I confess to being at my wits’ end.”

“Then lose no time, Miss Meadowes, my dear,” resumed the kind-hearted but gruff old man, “in getting the children and their traps packed up, that I may carry them off without further delay. I’ve given my instructions in the sick room. Elsewhere, keep vinegar burning, and don’t let more people than are necessary wait upon the East wing. I shall be here again betimes in the morning. The case is urgent.”

An alarming word, as it recurred to Lady Harriet’s mind when her three darlings were off—safe, as she already fancied—and she heard the sound of Dr. Burnaby’s departing wheels. She had mustered courage to avoid bidding them good-bye. It would not have been prudent, after her attendance on the sick-room; and she knew she could trust to the thoughtful Amy to make every arrangement for their comfort. But another painful duty was awaiting her. She must write to Lady Louisa Eustace.

“Not to-day. To-day, you have nothing to say but what is painful,” pleaded Amy. “Wait till Dr. Burnaby has seen his patient again. To-morrow may produce a favourable turn.”

Lady Harriet shook her head. She foresaw too truly that her distress and agitation were only beginning. But it was difficult

to contest a point with Amy's gentle nature; and Lady Harriet was too much depressed to be very contentious.

"Another favour, if I might ask it," said the kind-hearted girl, taking courage from a first success. "Do not, at present, alarm poor mamma by announcing the nature of Mr. Eustace's seizure. Her room is at too great a distance from his to expose her to any danger of infection; and to-day, she is far too much indisposed to leave it. Were she to know the truth, her first impulse would be to return home immediately, in order to relieve your household of additional trouble while illness is in the house: and then——"

She paused. But Lady Harriet was listening so attentively as to require the full conclusion of the sentence.

"And then, I should lose the satisfaction of assisting and comforting you under your great anxieties," said Amy, not altogether without confusion of countenance.

Again, Lady Harriet shook her head. She was half afraid that this generous sympathy might originate in over-solicitude for the invalid. Though, a moment before, she had been disposed to regard her nephew as a condemned man, she was still susceptible to the repugnance entertained against an unequal match by the elders of a family submitted to the tyranny of "public opinion."

CHAPTER VII.

MISS MEADOWES'S first anxiety on learning, the following morning, that Dr. Burnaby's patient had passed a restless night, was to forestall the possibility of a visit from her father.

"We must give up the hope of seeing you for the present, dearest papa," she wrote, in all haste, to Meadows Court. "You must on no account add to our anxieties by approaching this infected house. Stop your workmen if you can; for we must return home in order to release poor Lady Harriet from additional care and trouble. Her nephew, Mr. Eustace, is in a dangerous state from an attack of fever. Dr. Burnaby seems

very anxious: and so am I, till I can get my dearest mother removed out of danger. Do not think of coming. But send the carriage for us to-morrow morning; early, if you please. Mamma is a little weak and nervous to-day, or I should propose your sending this very evening. God bless you, dear darling papa! No more, since we are to meet so soon, from

“Your own AMY.”

Alas! this letter was fated to remain unopened for evermore. It never reached the hands of the kindly being to whom it was addressed. When Miss Meadows stole from her dressing-room in search of a servant through whom it could be forwarded without alarming her mother or worrying Lady Harriet, the first person she met on the stairs was Dr. Burnaby, on his way to the remote apartment of his patient.

“Go back, child!” cried he, motioning her away. “Didn’t you hear me say, yesterday, that there was to be no communication between the East wing and the rest of the house?”

“Nor have I approached it. But as you have not seen your patient, dear Dr. Burnaby, and I hoped that—I thought that—”

“No matter what you thought and hoped. Go, child, and attend upon your mother. I hear she is ailing; and I can’t look in upon her to-day, Amy, on account of this unlucky fever. Go, my dear young lady, I am waited for yonder.”

Away he hurried to the sick room, where Lady Harriet was eagerly expecting him with anything but a satisfactory report of the sufferer; and very long did the half-hour appear to Amy which she spent in loitering about the corridor, instead of obeying his injunction and returning to watch the slumbers of Lady Meadows. She was in hopes of catching from a distance the sound of Dr. Burnaby’s voice in some parting injunction to one of the servants in attendance on William Eustace. She fancied that, even from the tone, though the words reached her not, she might be able to infer whether his view of the case were more favourable than at his last visit.

While thus anxiously listening, a whisper indeed caught her ear. But it was not uttered in the direction of the east wing. It arose from the hall below, where Dr. Burnaby’s servant was

waiting, and where the butler appeared to be questioning him beside the open door.

"*He* may get through it. At his age, young blood works its way through anything," were the expressions or nearly the expressions that reached the ears of Amy.

"God grant it!" murmured the tremulous voice of Blagrove, Lady Harriet's aged butler.

"But I know Master han't no hope o' the old gentleman," resumed the other speaker. "He told Mr. Nichols when he left the house an hour ago, that 'twas a question if he'd live through the night."

"The old gentleman!"—Mr. Nichols!" "Poor Amy was paralysed. Had she heard aright? While asking herself the question, she had to clutch the oaken balustrade of the staircase, to save herself from being precipitated to the bottom. She would have screamed aloud a question to the whisperers, that a more articulate answer might dispel or confirm her terrible apprehensions. But her voice died on her lips. She could not call—she could not breathe—dumb and motionless, as under the influence of a night-mare.

A minute afterwards, however, the two serving men, who were still gossiping and grieving together, saw Miss Meadows totter across the hall, breathless and incoherent.

"*Is it true?*" she faltered, seizing the arm of Dr. Burnaby's incautious servant. "Answer me this moment! My father—"

The venerable butler, with an admonitory glance at his companion, endeavoured to withdraw the young lady's hand, and to place her in a chair.

"We were talking, Miss Amy, of poor Mr. Eustace—"

"You were *not*. You said the old gentleman was sinking fast. Oh! my dear dear father!" cried Amy, wringing her hands. "But I will go to Dr. Burnaby,"—cried she, dreading that she might not from his awe-stricken attendant obtain the truth. "*He* will not deceive me—"

"Master will never forgive me!" ejaculated the man,—thus confirming the worst fears of Miss Meadows. "He ordered me not to drop a syllable on't in the house."

Almost before he had concluded his inconsiderate remark, the

distracted girl had darted through the open hall-door; dashed along the gravel walk,—flung open the wicket and reached the stable yard. And while the two servants stood deliberating whether they dared intimate to Dr. Burnaby what had occurred, before he had terminated his visit to the chamber of sickness which had already assumed in the house the most painful importance, Amy was assisting the groom to place a saddle on George Warneford's pony. Unaware of her object or intentions, the man dreamed not of disobeying the orders of one of his lady's guests; and as Miss Meadows was attired in a morning wrapper, without even a shawl or bonnet, it did not occur to him that the pony was preparing for her own use, till he saw her jump upon it and canter off.

Still, he fancied that she was only returning to the hall-door. Nor was it till old Blagrove hobbled down with inquiries and reproofs for the assistance he had given, that he could be persuaded the young lady was bent on so mad an exploit as an expedition to Meadows Court, thus accoutred, and unattended.

“Saddle a horse and follow her instantly, Will!” said the anxious old servant, “or my lady will never forgive us.”

But alas! the only available horse in Lady Harriet's scanty stud, had been already despatched to meet the early post with a letter intimating to the Eustaces the danger of their son.

The next resource, and the old man did not hesitate to lay it under contribution, was to despatch Dr. Burnaby's carriage in quest of the half-frantic Miss Meadows. The pony's paces would scarcely enable her to outstrip pursuit, if the coachman exerted himself. It was, however, some time before he was made to understand the urgency of the case. Unaccustomed to obey any orders but those of his somewhat peremptory master, “It was as much as his place was worth,” he argued, “if the doctor, whose time was so precious, should be kept waiting by his absence.”

When again and again assured that if he made no effort to preserve Miss Meadows from danger, his place would be in far greater jeopardy, his compliance came too late. By the time the lumbering chariot reached the high road, the frantic girl had long quitted it for the fields. A mile of the distance dividing her

from the doomed spot where her father was "sinking fast," might be saved by the bridle-road—even though she had to jump off and open gates—even though the way was rough and dangerous.

She urged the pony on. She became hoarse by urging it on,—for whip she had none. Her hair streamed back from her pale face—her dress was discomposed by gusts of autumnal wind. The stumbling of the pony over the stubbly furrows, more than once nearly flung her nerveless form from the saddle. But still she went on,—unheeding; absorbed in that one overpowering uncertainty. Was she too late? Was the old man her father yet alive?

And now, she is through the hazel copse. She has crushed down the blackened beanhalm of the last field dividing her from the paddock. Her breath is gone. Her cheek is wan and clammy as death. For she is within sight of the old house, and can as yet discern no indication of what awaits her. There is not a labourer stirring. The works are as completely stopped at the moat-side as if her morning's letter had reached its destination and accomplished its object. The barrows lie upturned. The wheel is broken at the cistern.

Scarcely dares she lift her eyes towards the windows of her father's room. But a hasty glance shows that they are open,—wide open. Is this a sign that all is over, or that air is required for the dying man?

The doors, too, stand wide apart. Not a servant to be seen. Almost before she has leapt from her pony, however, and left it to its own devices, Blanche and Sting, who run barking out at its approach, change their angry yelp into joyous howls of recognition; and keep jumping lovingly upon her, and impeding her movements.

"Down—down!" she rather shrieks than utters,—almost wild with the tumult of her agonising fears. As she rushes up-stairs, a housemaid who sits on the window-seat of the lobby,—half-dozing through excess of watching in the sick room which she has recently quitted,—starts up to beset her with exclamations.

"Oh! Miss Amy—why are you come? Master wouldn't hear of you and my lady being sent for. You can't be of no use,

Miss. The doctor says you can't. Nobody can't be of no use against the will of Almighty God!"

Amy paused for a moment,—not to listen; but with her hand pressed upon her heart, as if to repress its terrible pulsation. She looked hard in the woman's face; but could not utter a sound to frame the question she was dying to ask. Her earnest eyes spoke for her.

"Yes, Miss,—he is still alive," said the woman, following her up the stairs. "But 'twill soon be over. Better not go in. Better not see him in his present state. My poor dear master won't know you. He has not even known Mr. Nichols these two days past."

And when Amy had glided, more like a spirit than a living being, through the open door of the chamber, intensely fumigated with the same ill-omened aromatics which seemed to bring with them the fatal atmosphere of the Manor House, the first object that met her eyes was the poor broken-hearted faithful old Nichols; sitting with clasped hands, apparently stupified by tears and vigils,—watching beside the bed where a long motionless ridge denoted that a human form was extended. Even when Amy had thrown herself upon it, in the belief that her father was gone for ever, she did not for many minutes perceive that though unconscious, he still breathed. Old Nichols raised her gently and drew her down upon her knees to the bed-side.

"Let him die in peace, my dear young lady," sobbed the old man. "His moments are numbered. Let him die in peace—"

"Father—father!—dear darling papa!" cried Amy,—regardless of these remonstrances, and believing that though the eyes of the sufferer were dim and glassy, and his limbs motionless and cold, he would be roused to consciousness by the well-known voice of his child,—“listen to me. It is Amy: Amy come to nurse you, come to love you. Dear papa,—answer me, look at me!"

But no change of that wan and rigid face denoted that poor Sir Mark was conscious of her presence. So little of life remained, that it could scarcely be called existence. The solemnity of death was upon that honest face. That honest heart had all but ceased to beat. The poor dogs whining and cringing at the door which

though open they dared not enter, seemed instinctively to understand what the distracted daughter would not believe, that the kindly hand which had so often caressed them would never be upraised again.

An angry voice and a hurried step were at that moment audible on the stairs. But the moment they reached the threshold of the sickroom, both were hushed. Dr. Burnaby, who had driven off as hard as his horses could carry him, in hopes to intercept the visit of poor Amy to the infected house, and on finding himself too late, had begun by chiding everybody, and railing even at the poor girl whose danger was the origin of his wrath, no sooner glanced at the bed, than he checked his hurried words and footsteps. Gravely approaching it, he closed the eyes of the dead.

A moment afterwards, he was enabled partly to fulfil his intentions by raising in his arms and bearing from the room the inanimate form of the afflicted daughter, to whom this act had announced the fatal truth. On recovering her consciousness, Amy found herself in a carriage, supported on the shoulder of the good doctor, whose tears were falling on her hand.

"You are not taking me away from him," she faltered,—struggling to regain her self-command. "Let me go to my father. Let me go to my dear, dear father."

"No, my child," replied the physician, in a tone of grave authority. "He is beyond reach of your affection and duty. Prove how much you have loved him, Amy, by devoting yourself at once to the consolation of your surviving parent:—your mother, who has none else to comfort her;—your mother, Amy, entrusted by *him* and the Almighty to your filial care!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE country gossips in the narrow circle of Radensford predicted of course that poor feeble Lady Meadows would be extinguished at once by the sudden calamity which had befallen her. Experience confuted their calculations. Persons of infirm health are often roused and excited by a shock, fatal to others of more robust habits. On learning at one and the same mo-

ment that she had lost the affectionate partner of her life, and that the daughter so dear to them was in an alarming condition, she stationed herself by the bedside of her dear Amy, prepared to assuage her sufferings and sustain her courage. Lady Harriet herself, with all her severity of self-control, could not have exhibited greater strength of body and mind than Lady Meadowes.

“All, all is well with her, my dear lady. I foresaw what would be her state of mind,” whispered Mr. Henderson in a subdued tone to the lady of the Manor House, when summoned to exhort the afflicted invalid, who stood in no need of better counsel than that of her own excellent head and heart. “She has forgotten *herself*. Her own ailments are as nothing, now that others need her assistance.”

Without ministering spiritually to her sorrows, however, the aid of the good Rector was invaluable in the fulfilment of other duties to which the widow was unequal. The sickness already assuming an epidemic character, was so appalling in the neighbourhood, that an early interment of the dead was judged desirable. The infection must not be suffered to extend. There appeared little hope that the afflicted daughter would escape; nor might even the prayers of the terrified Lady Harriet avail for the preservation of the beloved boys whom Dr. Burnaby had taken in charge. But no precautions must be neglected.

Within four days, therefore, of the sad event which had deprived Meadowes Court of its master, he was laid in the family vault. No need to look into his testamentary instructions to determine that question. Where the eight baronets bearing his name, from sire to son, were gathered together in the dust, he also was to laid. Thither was he followed in all sincerity of love by his nearest neighbours: Admiral Tremenheere, the kind physician, and a few magistrates of the districts—emulators of his uprightness and right-heartedness. And but that her only child lay insensible upon the bed of sickness, his widow would have been herself conveyed into the church, to meet on the brink of the grave him from whom she had been so rarely parted, since the day on which they were conjoined together at the altar.

When the will *was* opened, it appeared that the desire of the

testator to be buried with the utmost simplicity in the church where he had been so long accustomed to worship, had been strictly fulfilled. Nay more, the Rector and the physician, his constant friends and associates, were nominated executors. The testamentary paper was indited in a few homely phrases. A deed executed on his marriage when issue male was anticipated, assigned to Lady Meadows only four hundred per annum to be levied on the estate, which he had a right to charge with dowry. But he now constituted her his sole heir: "certain," he added, "that she would act towards their only child, in every future emergency, as he would act himself if living to watch over her interests."

"Right—all right—quite right," was the reciprocal exclamation of the two executors. "Lady Meadows will enjoy something more than two thousand a year for life; and be able to make a suitable provision for her daughter, should she determine on marriage."

Though prudent and practical men, they were not base enough to fancy that the easy circumstances secured to the bereaved mother and daughter would reconcile them to the severity of their loss. But they rejoiced, and Lady Harriet rejoiced, when the moment poor Amy's comparative convalescence rendered removal possible, and Lady Meadows insisted on returning to the house replete with associations so painful, that their sorrows would not be aggravated by those cares which, at such moments, too often increase the poignancy of family affliction.

They re-entered the gates of Meadows Court overpowered by their griefs: discerning nothing in those desolate rooms but the absence of the eager step and the silence of the joyous voice which had animated their life and love. But they felt that they were come to abide for evermore where *he* had lived and loved:—to cherish his memory: to talk of him, to think of him, and prepare to follow him in a happier world.

In their presence, the question had never been mooted whether the malignant fever, to which Sir Mark Meadows had unquestionably fallen a victim, originated in the miasma created by the disturbance of the old moat; or whether it had been introduced into the neighbourhood and communicated to him by young

Eustace, at his ill-timed visit. The Eustace family persisted for the rest of their lives in asserting that their son and heir had all but fallen a victim to the infection created by poor Mark Meadows's rash experiment in desiccation. But many were of opinion,—Dr. Burnaby openly, Lady Harriet tacitly,—that William Eustace had brought with him the germs of the fatal malady, and communicated them to one predisposed by local influences to fructify the evil. For months to come, nay, for ensuing years, the question was one of the favourite paradoxes of the neighbourhood. It was only the good Rector of Radensford who from the first discountenanced the discussion.

“To what purpose pursue an investigation,” said he “the solution of which cannot restore the dead, and must unquestionably give pain to the living? We have lost our friend. Let us respect the decree of Him who has taken him from us. No human prevision could have forestalled the fatal event.”

He was especially anxious that the convalescence of Mr. Eustace might not be retarded, through the remarks occasionally extorted from Lady Harriet by the risk to which her darling grand-children had been subjected. Though, had it been asserted in her presence that Sir Mark Meadows had taken the fever from her nephew, she would have deeply resented it, she could not help plainly writing to her sister Louisa that, had the children fallen victims to it, she would never have pardoned her having billeted William upon her house.

“Even now,” she wrote—“now that he is perfectly recovered and on his way to Torquay for change of air, previous to rejoining you, to enable me to submit the poor Manor House to a complete fumigation, preparatory to the return of my treasures, I can scarcely persuade myself that all danger is past. We have undergone a terrible shock. The loss sustained by my kind neighbours at Meadows Court is alas! irreparable. Amy is broken-hearted; and her mother will never lift up her head again. They would see me, I know, if I visited them. But I have not courage, my dear Louisa, to go and witness the terrible desolation of a house thus cruelly deprived of the fondest of husbands and fathers.”

She went, however, at last; prompted less by the desire of

soothing their trouble, than by the notion that it became her consequence to afford immediate countenance to the widow. Lady Harriet as first in rank of the neighbourhood, considered herself bound to take the initiative step in its social measures. It became her to show an example which might regulate the vacillations of public opinion.

On the present occasion, at least, nothing of the kind was needed. High and low, rich and poor, all were anxious to offer their tribute of sympathy to the mourners; and all were equally edified with Lady Harriet by the composure and resignation exhibited by the mother and daughter. Amy, indeed, could not always repress the outbursts of anguish which her mother's longer experience of the trials of life enabled her to subdue till she could weep unobserved on the congenial bosom of her daughter. But on the whole, their reverend counsellor found far less occasion than he had anticipated to exhort them to submission, and even Dr. Burnaby had almost ceased to scold. Their repinings and tears were so exclusively reserved for each other, that their nearest friends were deceived.

The executors took upon themselves to suggest a temporary removal from Meadows Court, as likely to be beneficial to the health of both; and favourable to the completion of the improvements, too far advanced not to render it necessary to carry them out. But Lady Meadows entreated to be left in peace. Winter was at hand. The early frosts were come. No further danger was to be apprehended from infection. All she asked was to be allowed to remain, at least till spring, without the smallest change or disturbance. She felt and Amy felt, that the slightest alteration in the place or establishment would dispel the charm under which they seemed to live—as if *he* were still present with them—as if *he* might again return to occupy his accustomed seat and resume his place in the domestic circle.

“Leave Meadows Court? Endure the hurry and noise of Brighton? Surround ourselves with strangers?” was Amy's indignant exclamation after the departure of Lady Harriet, who, at the instigation of the old doctor, had undertaken the task of proposing such a measure. “Oh! mother, mother! How little they understand us! Sometimes, in those happy old times which

I feel now that I never sufficiently appreciated, I used to fancy that I should like to make a few acquaintances, in active life. But I know better now, mother. I know how little there can be in the world to compare with the happiness we have enjoyed here—”

Lady Meadows replied by a tender pressure of her hand. “Fear nothing, my child,” said she, “There is no chance of any desire on my part to quit this place. I have never lived in the world, Amy. The position in life from which your father raised me afforded no connections to tempt either of us from our retirement. His few relatives disclaimed me. My own resented their conduct. We became isolated—estranged from everything and everybody—”

“And all the happier for it—far far the better and happier for it—” interrupted her daughter.

“That your father was content with the destiny he had created, suffices. And these peculiar circumstances, my dearest child, will at least justify the tranquil seclusion to which I look forward.”

“Even in our affliction, mother,” observed Amy, after a few moments’ pause, “my Aunt Davenport has never written—never inquired—”

Lady Meadows started. The name of “Aunt Davenport” applied to the sister of her husband, from which she had received such slights, seemed to jar upon her ear.

“Can she, do you think, be ignorant of the event?” persisted Amy.

“Lest she should be so, our kind friend Mr. Henderson wrote to apprise her. A few cold words were returned by Lord Davenport; a mere formal acknowledgment of his letter.”

“My poor dear cordial father did not deserve to have such a sister,” was all that Amy could reply.

“*She* did not deserve such a brother. But let us talk no more of her, Amy. Let us never mention the name of Davenport again.”

“Never—never. We must only love each other the more, mother, for being alone in the world.”

“Your cousin, Sir Jervis Meadows has written—courteously

at least—more could not be expected from him, in reply to the communication of my poor husband's executors."

"Sir Jervis!" repeated Amy, musingly. "I am glad he does not bear my father's name. How I should have grieved to hear it applied to a stranger."

"It matters little. We shall never meet. Sir Jervis behaved through life ungraciously to your father. It is not likely he will attempt to renew with *us* the acquaintance which respect for the head of his family never prompted him to keep up."

It was on a dreary afternoon, towards the end of December, this conversation took place. Sleet was falling audibly against the windows, the blinds of which were partially drawn down; and though Lady Meadowes's sofa was drawn close to the fire, she lay cold and shivering. Just the season of the year when Christmas cheer, and Christmas charity, had been wont to brighten the time-worn old mansion! Just the hour of day when they were accustomed to listen for the tread of poor Sir Mark across the hall, on his return from his day's sport; announced by the joyful cry of old Sting, who lay on the mat awaiting his arrival. At that hour, they seemed to miss more than ever the kindly voice and face so sure to impart cheerfulness to the hearth.

Old Nichols often crept in at dusk, with a log in his hand, on pretext of attending to the fire; but in reality to certify to himself that my lady and Miss Amy were not endangering their health by what he called "taking on." If he found them engaged in quiet talk, he would creep out again, without any attempt to fulfil his pretended purpose; thereby betraying that he came only because he knew *their* heaviness of heart must be still harder to bear than his own.

On the evening in question, while he stood inquiring whether "my lady was pleased to wish that the lamp should be brought in," there came a sharp ring at the jangling hall bell.

Lady Meadowes, satisfied that she had borne to the fullest extent required of her the burthen of visits of condolence from the half-dozen near neighbours who had so long constituted themselves her friends, determined to resist the appeal. She had

signified to each of them that they would show their kindness best by leaving her for the present alone with her daughter.

"I can see no one this evening, Nichols," said she faintly, "*No one*:—not even Mr. Henderson."

The old man hurried out to convey her prohibition. Already, the footman was parleying at the hall-door with a stranger. Not a gentleman; for he was loud, peremptory, and presuming.

"It was absolutely necessary that he should have an interview with Lady Meadowes. He came on business. He came from a distance."

The country footman was about to yield to the importunities of a man who, though his great-coat was of the roughest, spoke in the tone of one having authority, when Nichols arrived in all the dignity of his mourning and white hairs, to confirm the original negative.

"Business, or no business, it was quite impossible that her ladyship, who was infirm of health, as well as suffering from recent family affliction, could be disturbed at that hour."

"I come on the part of Sir Jervis Meadowes," rejoined the intruder, "I fancy you'll find it your best interest to admit me at once."

Nichols was startled. Instinctive deference towards the reigning representative of a family with which a service of half a century had connected him, rendered it difficult to persevere in opposition. This man, common-looking as he was, might be a messenger of peace and good-will from the head of the house. To reject the olive-branch, might be an injury to those whom he would have died to serve or defend. Uttering a word of admonition to Sting, who still maintained his post of guardianship of the door-mat, he invited the stranger to step in; and ushered him across the grim, low-browed old hall, into what, in that old-fashioned place, was called the eating-room: a spacious chamber, wainscoted and ceiled with carved oak; enlivened only by family portraits of baronets and dames of the Meadowes family; most of them curious specimens of exploded art; and about as graceful and life-like as the effigies of painted alabaster recumbent on their tombs in Radensford Church.

Still, such as they were, old Nichols regarded them almost

with idolatry. And on perceiving that his companion did not show their goodly presence the respect of so much as removing his hat, he eyed the offender with such marked disgust and reproof, that involuntarily he marked his consciousness of infraction of the laws of good breeding.

"I will speak to Miss Meadows, Sir; I will apprise my young lady that you are here," said he, while the stranger somewhat sulkily removed his hat. "What name shall I announce to her?"

"Mr. Chubbs Parkis—but my name will tell her nothing. Say I represent the heir-at-law of "the *late* Sir Marcus Meadows, Baronet."

Now Nichols could no more have pronounced the name of "the *late* Sir Marcus Meadows" to his master's daughter, than have lifted the roof of Meadows Court. The utmost he attempted was to whisper to Amy that she was wanted; and, when she reached the hall, to apprise her that a messenger awaited her on the part of Sir Jervis Meadows.

Though little used to encounter strangers, poor Amy did not for a moment resist. The visit probably involved some trouble or ceremony from which she might spare her mother. She advanced therefore with a timid step towards Mr. Chubbs Parkis, who was warming himself with an air of complacent self-possession on the hearth-rug, with his back towards the fire. But the moment he caught sight of her slender figure, looking slighter than ever in her deep mourning attire, and that childlike face, so pale and so gentle, his manner became subdued to decency. He took his hands from his pockets, and bowed respectfully.

"You wished to speak to me, Sir?" she said in those silvery tones that went to the heart of most people.

"On the contrary, Madam; I wished to speak to Lady Meadows," replied the intruder, glancing reproachfully at Nichols, who had closed, but still stood beside the door, as if officiating as chamberlain for the protection of his young lady. "Your servant, yonder, denied me admittance to her."

"He did right. Mamma is a great invalid: unequal to an interview with strangers—unequal to the transaction of business."

"Business, however, Miss Meadows, must be done; and I

doubt you are less equal to answer the questions I am compelled by my duty to my employer, Sir Jervis Meadowes, to ask, than even her ladyship."

"Questions on business I am *wholly* incapable of answering," replied Miss Meadowes, gathering firmness as her companion resumed, though civilly, his tone of authority. "And as I know that Sir Jervis Meadowes has already been in communication with my father's executors—both of whom are in the country—I must refer you to *them*, Sir, for any information you wish to obtain."

"Nevertheless," persisted Mr. Chubbs Parkis, "there are points on which a plain answer rendered by members of the family, might save a world of trouble and litigation."

"Or might *produce* them," said Amy, with more self-possession than was to be expected. "You must therefore excuse my entering into business discussions of any kind."

"This evasion, Madam, looks very far from satisfactory," retorted Chubbs, knitting his brows and beginning to bully. "I expected at least frankness from so young a lady."

Old Nichols now thought it time to interpose. "Miss Meadowes has signified, Sir, that she wishes the interview to be at end," said he. "Your gig is at the door. At this hour, you will be sure to find the Rector or Dr. Burnaby, my late master's two executors, at home."

Under sanction of the butler's interference, Amy now effected a quiet retreat from the room; Old Nichols with a firm demeanour keeping back Mr. Chubbs Parkis till she had time to regain the drawing-room. "If neither of them is to be found, Sir," continued the old man, while his baffled companion angrily resumed his hat, with more than one muttered oath, "the family solicitors are Preston and Son, of Cardington, with whom you may communicate at pleasure."

"Ten miles off, across the forest; and I have already driven sixteen!" rejoined Parkis, angrily buttoning up his wrap-rascal as he strode across the hall. "However—there's one comfort, old gentleman—you'll have to pay for your impudence. *Your* time is 'most over, and ours is coming. Good night, old boy.

When next we meet, you and your young lady will have had to lower your flag by a peg or two."

Already, almost before the gig was out of sight and hearing, the quakings of poor old Nichols appeared to justify the prediction. Who was this strange messenger? Why should Sir Jervis Meadows communicate through such a medium with his kinsman's widow and daughter? As to Amy, her self-possession had deserted her the moment she quitted the presence of one who addressed her in a tone of insolence to which she was so little accustomed; and when Nichols rejoined her in the corridor leading to the drawing-room, she was in tears.

She had called him softly to her to enjoin that nothing might be said to create uneasiness to her mother. Enough to inform his lady that a person had called on business whom he had referred to the lawyers. Nothing could be simpler or more likely; nor was the Lady Meadows of a nature to inquire over-anxiously concerning any matter of pecuniary interest.

Poor Amy exerted herself more than usual that evening, to divert her mother's attention and prevent her recurring to the subject. They talked together—each trying to solace the other by assumed cheerfulness—of the works to be completed at Meadows Court on the return of spring. They talked together on many subjects;—*any*, but the one that hung so heavy on their hearts!—

CHAPTER IX.

"COME and dine with me, to-day, at Richmond, like a good fellow, my dear Davenport," said Hamilton Drewe to his fellow-lodger, whom he was surprised and overjoyed to find still in London, early in the autumn, on his return from a cruise to the Channel Islands.

"Too late in the year," replied Marcus, as usual, busy at his easel.

"On the contrary. This bright September sun is warmer than July."

“Ay, But it don’t last long enough to enable one, as in July, to boat or drive back pleasantly to town, after an overplus of Moselle-cup. One should never dine by candlelight at Richmond and Greenwich; or by daylight, in town.”

“You are so fastidious!—I want you to meet one or two chosen friends—artists—men of letters—who don’t belong to the Coventry.”

“Take them to the Albion, then—or the Blue Posts—or the devil,” was Davenport’s churlish reply.

“But I particularly wish you to make their acquaintance; and unluckily, Richmond, which affords no temptation to *you*, was one to *them* when I made the invitation. The sight of a green tree is refreshing to poor unfortunate fellows who spend twelve months of the year with their noses in an inkstand, in this confounded smoky town.”

“That is your mistake. London, in September and October, when all the blockheads of the earth have guns on their shoulders, or spy-glasses in their hands, is neither smoky nor confounded. On the whole, I think there is less noise here, just now, than on the moors.”

Poor Drewe, perceiving that his friend was in one of his contrary moods, thought it better to let him exhaust his bitter vein, as the shortest mode of obtaining final acquiescence.

“You asked me yesterday,” resumed Marcus, “what tempted me to remain in London at this empty season; and as you do not often listen to answers, I replied by a shrug, which I left you to interpret. But if you really care to know the reason why I prefer Babylon deserted, to Babylon swarming, it is because, in the autumn, one is safer from idle intrusion. People who remain in town when Grosvenor Square and the Opera are closed for the season, are mostly persons having a purpose and occupation in life. The atmosphere, too, is now nearly as clear as in the fens or the Highlands. I have seen a hand’s breadth of blue sky several times lately. Cocotte’s complexion is, as you may perceive, some degrees less like a chimney-sweeper’s than when you last saw her smoothing her ruffled plumes.”

“Still, I don’t see why, because you find London more countrified than the country, you should be less sociable than in

the dog-days," pleaded Drewe, not unreasonably. "You can have no engagement, for there is not a soul in town."

"I never *am* engaged to those whom *you* call souls. The chum whom I am sworn never to throw over is one Marcus Davenport, who loves to vagabondise in his own time and place. I don't care to leave my palette, as long as there is a clear sky. When the last gleam of sunshine departs, I follow it, staff in hand; dine at the Travellers on the joint and a pint of pale-ale; and then, at half-price, to the play."

The looks of Hamilton Drewe would have betrayed some disgust at these plebeian arrangements, had he not stood in awe of the raillery of his outspoken friend.

"Well, take your staff as usual; and instead of dining at the Travellers join us, where you will. My friends must give up Richmond, since you have taken the Star and Garter *en grippe*.—You shall have your pale-ale and mutton elsewhere."

"In order that you and your friends may wish me at some unpleasant remote locality, all dinner-time?—No, no!—Why can't you let me alone?—I am really not worth your trouble, or worthy your hospitality."

"*That* point, allow me to determine. *I* consider you cheap at the money," said Drewe, laughing. "I have a foreign friend, whom I picked up touring in the Channel Islands, a sunny-hearted fellow, whom I am sure you will not dislike; and a literary man—not first chop, I admit;—a man without a name—a sturdy labourer in the vineyard—who embraces the calling as it is rarely embraced in England, and always in France—as a profession—as a *trade* if you will; a practical man, who rears his offspring upon printer's ink."

"Pho, pho, my dear Drewe. Such men there be—'more power to their elbow,' as say our Dublin brothers-in-law. But *such* men dine not at Richmond with dilettante dandies."

"Pretty nearly what Hargood himself said to me, when I invited him. However I promised him green grass (just as I should have guaranteed an alderman green fat), and secured my man."

"I hope you did not tell this person I was coming?"

"I never mentioned your name. If I had, he would have

been little the wiser. For he knows no more of the great world than I of the Thugs; and among literary people the *paraphe* of Marcus D., you know goes for nothing."

Albeit Davenport was perfectly aware of the fact, the remark piqued him. Of the many worlds of which English society is composed, the literary one was perhaps the one that interested him most. Probably as *terra incognita* to him; the same reason which rendered his own aristocratic sphere a matter of curiosity to Grub Street.

Though he still persisted in insulting Hamilton Drewe, by assuring him that his foreign *protégé* was probably some *chevalier d'industrie*, getting up a tour with views of English society studied in a boarding house at "Volvich," and his professional man of letters a hack, who would testify his value of the autograph of Drewe, by getting it inscribed on the back of a bill, he agreed to join them at Richmond; and, in fact, arrived at the Hotel some hours before them, in order to enjoy a row up the river to Hampton Court, and a glimpse of the pictures; by way of atonement to himself for dining with so slight a thing as Hamilton Drewe.

The consequence of this expedition was that, by the time he returned to Richmond, "Mr. Drewe's party" was already at table; having made considerable progress in the early dinner for which they had conditioned, and reached a second course consisting of the inevitable unctuous duck and green peas, and limp jelly tasting of bergamot; strengthened by the local dainty called Maids of Honour which, in the days of King William of glorious and immortal memory constituted a *friandise* of our Anglo-Batavian or Bœotian Court.

When ushered into the little parlour nearest the river, which, so much resembles a canary's breeding-box lined with moss and wool, Marcus Davenport, albeit unused to the apologetic mood, thought it necessary to mutter a few words of excuse for his unceremonious costume—which was that of a gallant young waterman fresh from the oar, and scarcely fit to encounter the scrutiny of Monsieur le Vicomte de Grugemonde, who was in full dinner dress—undergoing the slow torture of a stiff white choker, and a new pair of varnished boots.

It was not however to *him*, with his little semi-bearded kid's face, and *jeune premier* costume, that Davenport addressed his apologies. There was a plain, stern, hard-featured man seated at the right hand of Hamilton Drewe, whose deliberate scrutiny, on his free-and-easy entrance into the room, somewhat abashed him. To each, however, he directed one of those awkward nods which a shy Englishman calls a bow; in return for an equally awkward muttering of names on the part of their host, such as a shy Englishman calls an introduction.

In order to fill up the pause which is apt to follow the entrance of a stranger, Hamilton Drewe endeavoured to resume the *mauvaises plaisanteries* by which he had been previously endeavouring to draw out his guest, the Vicomte.

Gentle dullness ever loves a joke; and some people find it difficult to manufacture one, unless by social persecution: to chaff a friend—or embarrass a butt—being one of the exquisite tilting-matches of modern chivalry.

“And so, my dear Grugemonde,” said he, “you were with Méry in those fashionable promenades in London, in which he describes himself as drinking ‘hafnaf à Ship-Taverne,’—and talks of the hotel yonder as ‘l’Hôtel de l’Eglise et de la Jarretière,’ translating it, for his less erudite countrymen: as ‘*Stard and Garter?*’ ”

“I was with him in several very pleasant excursions,” replied the Viscount in excellent English. “I do not know how he describes them in print. *Le nom ne fait rien à la chose*: or, as your great poet phrased it—‘What’s in a name?’ ”

Charmed by the good-humoured manner in which the young foreigner parried an ill-bred attack, Davenport immediately challenged him—Anglo-Saxon-wise—to a glass of champagne. The stern Hargood, without relaxing a tittle of his scowl, testified his satisfaction in a sparkling bumper, and in the course of the dinner and after chat, the ice melted so speedily between Davenport and Hargood that when the moment arrived for returning to town, it was agreed that they should charter the same Hansom. Congeniality of feeling and opinion soon ripened into acquaintance; and as much pleasant talk ensued as, before they reached Hyde Park Corner, might have been condensed

into a striking article for the oldest number of Blackwood or newest Fraser. Ere they parted, their addresses had been mutually exchanged. Neither thought it necessary to apologise for not inviting the other to a palace:—for both were men of plain sense and simple dealing.

Edward Hargood, however, had by twenty years the advantage or disadvantage of his new friend. His nature was more crabbed, his clay was harder set; nor was his severe philosophy mitigated by that innate love of the beautiful, which Hamilton Drewe called æsthetic, and his brother-officers had been wont to call bosh.

Even Davenport was struck, at his first visit, by the bareness and squareness of the domicile of his new acquaintance: a first-floor over an upholsterer's in one of those streets of Soho now occupied by pianoforte or soda-water manufacturers, or other seekers after space: attesting by their liberality of proportion the correctness of Macaulay's statement, that this quarter of the town was long the favourite resort of wealth and fashion. A roomy staircase, of which the inlaid floor proved its date to be prior to the invention of stair-carpet, ascended by low, well-graduated steps to a lobby wide enough to contain one of the mouse-trap mansions of the purlieus of Hyde Park; from which opened the spacious, comfortless apartments of the drudge of letters.

The meagre spider-legged furniture was probably coeval with the house; a ponderous writing-table covered with discoloured black leather, being the only modern appurtenance. But although this and every other spot in the room where books or papers could be laid was loaded with unbound volumes, in boards or cloth, the strictest order and cleanliness prevailed. Nothing of the dust and confusion of a lawyer's office.

Hamilton Drewe had incidentally informed Davenport that Hargood was a widower.

“He must have daughters, though; or probably, a maiden sister,” was the reflection of Marcus. “None but a woman ever tyrannises sufficiently in a household, to produce such neatness as this.”

There was something dispiriting, however, in so much pre-

ciseness. Though scarcely five minutes elapsed before Hargood, in a grey camlet wrapper, made his appearance from an inner room, Davenport had found leisure to fancy himself in a Moravian settlement.

“I am glad you have not forgotten your promise,” said his host; “and still more so that you have so timed your visit as to enable me to receive you. Saturday is my holiday; and this morning, my week’s work was done and sent off. To-morrow, I devote to reading;—often the heavier work of the two.”

Davenport was about to remark on the pleasant facility of “skip”—of turning over a dull page, or laying a heavy volume on the shelf. But by a peculiar glance directed by Hargood towards a pile of works, evidently fresh from the press and guiltless of the intervention of a circulating or “select” library, he inferred, and justly, that the reading of Hargood was professional; the reading of the critic, not of the book-worm, or book-butterfly.

“We had a pleasant dinner the other night at Richmond,” remarked Hargood; “pleasanter than I ever expected to enjoy in the company of young Drewe:—an amiable, well-intentioned young fellow, who has grievously mistaken his vocation.”

“I’m afraid so—I’m sadly afraid so.”

“These are not times,” resumed Hargood, “for what used to be called ‘a young gentleman with a pretty taste for poetry,’ to be written up into notice by partial critics. Good poetry—strong prose—will always find readers: but education for the million has placed the parts of speech at too low a premium, for a moderate use of them, if addressed to the public, to be regarded otherwise than an impertinence. I have known the elder Drewe these dozen years past, as an old donkey browsing on the wastes of Science. Through him I became acquainted with his ward: to whom I wish humbler ambitions than inflate his empty head: for his heart is in the right place.”

“I have no great fault to find with my elegiac friend,” replied Davenport, who, when bow-wowed, was apt to bark again. “He is a good-natured, easy, unmeaning fellow,—not near so great an imposter as the learned Pundit his relation. But even old Wroughton has his use in the world. His fussy officiousness is

invaluable in vivifying those thousand moribund societies and institutions ending in 'logical,' which, like a boa-constrictor, seem to subsist on a monthly meal; and afterwards lie torpid."

"Yes,—I believe the old gentleman has his use," replied Hargood. "But I own I look on such people as interlopers. It is perhaps because, a compulsory labourer in the vine-yard, and following literature as a calling, I feel a little jealous of the idlers who come plucking off the half-ripe grapes, and spoiling my market. My gorge rises against amateurs:—amateur actors, always more stagey than the stage;—amateur dramatists, who steal the stolen goods of our translators;—amateur painters, who—"

"Come, come, come!" interrupted Davenport. "If Drewe have failed to apprise you of my usurped vocation, know me as one of the race you are about to denounce. *I am an amateur artist.*"

"I ought to have guessed it, from your preferring the other day, Vandyck and Lely to turtle and lobster cutlets!—But again I find my vineyard trenched upon. I have a daughter who is an artist—a professional artist. Stay," said he, rising and opening the door through which he had made his entrance, "you shall give me your opinion of her talents. Mary!—I am bringing a gentleman into your studio, he continued, ushering Mark Davenport into a chamber still more spacious than the sitting-room; in which the concentrated light fell full upon an easel at which a young girl was working. She scarcely raised her eyes, and not at all her voice, as they entered. Her dress, an artist's grey blouse of the simplest form and meanest material, imparted little charm to her somewhat insignificant figure; and when, struck by the masterly execution of her work, Davenport found it impossible to repress an exclamation of surprise and admiration, she slowly turned upon him a pair of wondering dark eyes; as if the voice of praise was to her an unknown tongue.

Nothing could be more subdued than her air. Her cheek was colourless. Her lips smileless. Mary Hargood was evidently a household victim. Davenport had been impressed at the Richmond dinner by the contemptuous and arbitrary tone in which Hargood spoke of the weaker sex. The fruits were before him.

This calm sad-looking little girl of eighteen, in her grey gown, who was painting as men rarely and women never paint at eight-and-thirty, evidently knew not the meaning of a will of her own.

The work on which Mary Hargood was occupied, was a copy of Murillo's "Assumption of the Virgin," which the painter himself recopied so often, though not half often enough for the requirements of posterity: and while Marcus looked over her shoulder with unceasing wonder and delight, he could hardly sufficiently admire the vigor of her touch,—the correctness of her eye.

"Your copy, Miss Hargood," said he, "nearly equals the original!"

"Have you ever seen the original, that you can utter so gross a piece of flattery?" she quietly replied, without lifting her eyes from the canvas.

"I have seen the picture at the Louvre, and the smaller one at Lansdowne House. But I allude to the one you are copying."

"Not very difficult for her to equal, for it is her own," interposed her father, abruptly. "It is the first copy after Murillo she executed; at the British Institution, where it won the second prize. We sold it for fifteen guineas,—a handsome price. The dealer who purchased it soon obtained an order for a second copy. But Mary has no longer the original to work from; and feels that it will be inferior to the first. For *this* therefore she intends only to ask twelve guineas."

"It is worth ten times, twenty times the money!" replied Davenport with enthusiasm. But it grated a little upon his ear to hear the buying and selling of the young artist's works so crudely alluded to in her presence. She did not join, indeed, in the conversation; but went calmly painting on, as if accustomed to be treated as a nonentity.

"Have you anything else to show this gentleman?" inquired her father in a tone of severe authority, which Davenport feared would produce a peevish negative. Instead of which, she quietly laid aside her palette, and fetched a portfolio.

"Nothing but sketches," said she, placing the book on a chair for her visitor's inspection, and instantly resuming her work.

“We will take it with us into the other room to glance over the drawings,” said her father to Marcus, placing it under his arm, and carrying it and his reluctant guest off together. “We should interrupt her by staying here; and Mary cannot afford to be idle. I was reading to her when you came in. But that is no interruption. She is used to it. Mary has received most of her lessons from me while occupied at her easel.”

“A heavy pull upon the faculties,” observed Davenport, as Hargood drew after him the heavy black door of the studio. “Are you not afraid, my dear Sir, of overtaxing her fine genius?”

“Fine *what?*” cried Hargood almost with indignation. “You don’t call it a proof of genius, I hope, to make a tolerable copy of one of Murillo’s pictures?”

“I call *this* a proof of genius,” replied his visitor, holding at arm’s length an exquisite landscape in water-colours, which Hargood had taken from the portfolio and placed in his hand. “The composition is exquisite; the ærial perspective, by Jove, as fine as Turner’s!”

“If it were, it would be worth hundreds of pounds,” was the cold calculating rejoinder. “And for the best of Mary’s drawings, I have never been able to get more than a couple of guineas.”

Again Davenport felt disgusted. Still more so when, by a closer survey of the portfolio, he saw he was dealing with an artist as imaginative in design as superior in the mere mechanism of her art.

“How hard she must have worked to have attained at so early an age, such perfection!” murmured he, musing aloud.

“Hard indeed!—But Mary has had great advantages. Turner, Constable, Etty, all of them my friends, overlooked her early progress. She exhibited, indeed, an almost equal talent for music. But the career of a public performer, Captain Davenport, is far from desirable; so *that* pretension I nipped in the bud; and should she be lucky in the first work she exhibits, my daughter will probably realise nearly as much money as an artist. Angelica Kaufmann made a rapid fortune.”

“I should much like, if you will permit me,” said Davenport,

“to express to Miss Hargood before I go, the delight which these exquisite works of hers have afforded me.”

“Better let it alone. The fewer compliments the better!” said the matter-of-fact father, tying the ferret strings of the shabby portfolio with as much indifference as he would have corded a portmanteau. “Mary is a good girl, and must not be spoiled. For the last five years, ever since her mother’s death, she has been working as hard as I have, to provide the means of giving her young brothers a solid classical education. I do not want her to be disturbed by flattery, or her time wasted by idle visitors.”

Davenport felt that it would be a relief to his feelings to take one of the quarto volumes of Johnson’s Dictionary from the table, and discharge it at the head of this dry mercenary father, as the great lexicographer did at the head of a shabby bookseller.

“My friend Drewe did not apprise me, Mr. Hargood, that you were so fortunate in the talents of your family” said he gravely, having overmastered his impulse.

“How should he? He knows not that I have a child belonging to me! Had I informed a rich man like young Drewe that my daughter was painting for the benefit of her family, he would have thought it necessary to give her an order; besides perhaps besetting the girl with the compliments you were preparing just now. *You* are in a different position. You have given me grounds to surmise that you are a poor man; and by your own accomplishments, are capable of appreciating her merits, without forcing yourself on us as a patron.”

“Nevertheless, if you would permit me,” stammered out Davenport—though little subject to shyness, “and if Miss Hargood were willing to re-copy a second time the picture on which she is engaged, I should be overjoyed to pay for it double the price given by her present employer.”

“I will speak to her about it,” replied Hargood, coldly. “At all events I should not permit you to pay more than the market-price; unless, on delivery, superior execution warranted an advance.”

“I confess,” said Davenport, seeking to prolong his visit, in some hope that the large black door might again revolve on its

hinges—"I confess to a weakness in favour of Murillo. I prefer his Holy Families to those of any other painter."

"To even Raphael's?"

"Even Raphael's. To me, the Virgins of the Italian artist are too spiritual; and as opposite to the maidens of Galilee (whom I have studied, Mr. Hargood face to face), as if the models which sat for them had been Finmarkers."

"We are not bound to imagine that Mary of Galilee resembled any other daughter of the land. For *my* part, nothing surprises me more than the audacity of the artist who first endeavoured to paint a Holy Family;—unless, indeed, it were the inspired St. Luke. As a lover of painting, I have a strong general objection to Scripture subjects."

"Yet you will hardly deny that the arts have done nearly as much as the pulpit, towards the diffusion of Christianity?"

"And not a little to its detriment. Nay, I am not sure that the enormous spread of Mohammedanism is not partly attributable to its proscription of all representation of the human face, and consequently to the absence of all physical representation of the divinity. Your favourite Murillo, for instance, who copied *his* Marys from the water-carriers of Madrid—"

"The very origin of their truthfulness!" interrupted Davenport. "The human touch, the working of the muscles of the heart portrayed in their faces, is wholly wanting in those fair ineffable simperers of Raphael. Nothing interests—nothing searches the heart like the Real. This book," continued Davenport, snatching up a volume of *Jane Eyre*, which had recently appeared and was lying under critical sentence upon Hargood's reading desk—"this book, by which I have been lately enthralled, is in my opinion the most remarkable specimen of autobiography published since the most shameless but most forcible of all works of the kind—Rousseau's *Confessions*. And why?—because it is the daguerreotyped picture of a human heart, in all its strength and all its weakness."

"I am glad you like the book; for I have marked it down for especial praise," replied Hargood. "For me, it possesses a peculiar and melancholy interest, as the *History of a Governess*;—a class with which my own life has been miserably connected.

But now, my dear Sir, I must send you away; or Mary will slacken over her labour, poor girl, if I do not return to cheer her up with a chapter or two of the *Vestiges of Creation*."

Davenport took a reluctant leave. He fancied that his conversation might have supplied far pleasanter topics to lighten the professional labours of poor Mary Hargood.

CHAPTER X.

"I'm sure, my dear Doctor, I don't know how we shall ever break it to her," was the closing remark of good, gruff old Barnaby to Mr. Henderson after a long discussion between them of some unpleasant tidings communicated by Messrs. Preston of Cardington, relative to the Meadows estate. "One can't leave such a task to the lawyers. Their hateful technicalities would confuse her mind. One or other of us must tell her the plain truth, in the simplest manner. But by Jove! I've hardly courage to take this disagreeable business on myself."

"There is no need, my dear Doctor," replied the Rector mildly. "The undertaking does not alarm me. The scenes of grief and anxiety we have witnessed this autumn, have rather hardened my heart towards mere mercenary distresses. As to Lady Meadows, I know no woman on earth more thoroughly disinterested."

"Disinterested, as it is easy to be, and as all women fancy themselves, in despising imaginary millions, and supposititious diamond coronets! After that fashion, you or I might disdain the throne of Spain, or the wealth of the Indies. But faith when it comes to a question of bread and butter—when it comes to being turned out of the house where you have lived happily for the last thirty years—"

"But the ejection is not yet certain," pleaded Mr. Henderson, in a reprehensive tone.

"I don't know what you'd have! Our friends the Prestons strongly advise our not bringing the business to trial. They have taken the best legal opinions. Three leading conveyancers have

decided that the objection to Sir Mark's disposal of the property, is fatal. Those fine and recovery questions, to us a mystery, are points clearly laid down by the law of the land: and the only wonder is, how Sir Mark Meadowes and his father before him, to both of whom the custom of Radensford Manor must have been perfectly familiar, allowed themselves to neglect it. As to Sir Mark, there's no forgiveness for *him*—with a daughter—and such a daughter—unprovided for.”

“There is no forgiveness for his having squandered away the six thousand a-year which he originally inherited. As to this unfortunate forfeiture of the Meadowes Court estate to the heir-at-law, the family attorneys, whoever they were at the time, are solely to blame. In matters of business, Sir Mark was a mere child.”

“At fifty-nine, no man has a right to remain a child in matters of business. It is culpable, Sir—it is heinous.”

“In the eyes of my cloth, my dear Doctor,” rejoined the Rector, “there are many less pardonable transgressions.”

“But all this don't help us towards our explanation with the poor dear lady,” cried Dr. Burnaby. “Would you have me pave the way, pray, by a hint or two to Miss Amy; or will you at once blurt it out to her mother?”

“I will explain it, with proper caution to her mother. But I am mistaken if I do not find Lady Meadowes rise at once to the level of her position.”

“*Fall* at once, you mean.”

“Fall, if you will. But such a trial, nobly encountered, is, in my opinion, a step upward—a step leading to the skies.”

“I'm glad you see it in *any* favourable light. I could be content to spare them such an advantage,” said the more worldly-minded old doctor. “Four hundred-a-year for the support of two delicate helpless creatures, accustomed to all the luxuries of life—”

“To all its comforts—not to all its luxuries,” pleaded the Rector. “And reflect how great a blessing it is that they *have* four hundred a-year! Unless the careless man, whom you admit was a child in matters of business, had charged the estate on his marriage with his wife's dowry, they would have been absolutely

penniless. The stock and furniture at Meadows Court will not sell for £1,200; and that miserable pittance might have been their all?"

"You are right, my dear friend, as you usually are, and as most people are who look to the sunny side of things," replied Dr. Burnaby. "May you be able to satisfy this poor widow as readily as you have silenced me. And now, with your leave, while you make the plunge, I'll drive on to the Manor House, and let Lady Harriet know how matters stand. She will be of service to us in helping to temper the wind to these shorn lambs."

The Rector of Radensford who, though he made the best of an irretrievable grievance, was deeply troubled by the darkened prospects of Amy and her mother, experienced some reluctance at the idea of their misfortune becoming so soon a matter of notoriety in the neighborhood. But it could not be helped. Sir Jervis Meadows showed every intention of bringing matters to a speedy crisis. Perhaps it was as well that the ice should be broken at once.

Little however did he surmise,—little did even the kind-hearted bustling Dr. Burnaby imagine when he drove up to the door of the Manor House, how extensive a castle in the air his visit was fated to bring down.

From the period of her hospitable housing of the Meadows family, three months before, poor Lady Harriet had led an unquiet life. With all her reliance on her own infallibility, she had been at times almost puzzled; with all her confidence in the superiority of principle innate in herself and her family, she had been more than once inclined to self-condemnation.

The heart of her nephew, London-man and callous as he appeared, had been wounded to the quick by the afflictions of the Meadows family; aggravated by a conviction that he had been the means of conveying the fatal infection to the good old baronet: and he resigned himself by degrees, but without much of a struggle, to the passion which had in fact originated his ill-fated visit to Meadows Court. Towards Amy, happy, laughing, prosperous, and a trifle contemptuous, he might have maintained his dignified reserve. But the interest she had evinced in his indisposition, as well as her subsequent sorrows, and patience

under suffering, had impelled him to throw off at once his ungracious armour of defence. On his sickbed, and scarcely yet redeemed from the shadow of death, he not only admitted to himself that, if he recovered, Amy Meadows would be the wife of his choice and wife of his heart, but made no secret of it to his aunt. Even Lady Harriet had been sufficiently dismounted from her pedestal of pride by so close an encounter with the grisly enemy who makes small distinction between ennobled clay and plebeian, that she refrained from indulging in the sermons and prohibitions by which she had endeavoured to forestal the evil.

“I will do all I can for you, my dear boy,” said she, when her nephew’s now nerveless hand enfolded her own, while endeavouring to secure her good offices in his favour. “But I give you little hope, William—I have often heard your father and mother applaud the firmness of the Davenports in discountenancing their brother’s *mésalliance*; and I am convinced neither Sir Henry nor my sister would ever give their consent to your marriage with the daughter of a governess.”

“A woman derives her position in life from her father, dear aunt, not from her mother.”

“She derives her nature and instincts from both. I confess that, equally with your parents, I dread and detest the influence of ignoble blood. Well! don’t take away your hand, Willy. You have retained me as your advocate: and, as I said before, I will do my best.”

“No one does their best, Aunt Harriet, where their own opinions or prejudices are adverse. But when will you write? When will you endeavour to sound my mother about the best mode of attacking my father?”

“No hurry, my dear child. You are as yet scarcely able to sit up. Besides, Amy, in her present deep affliction, is no object for courtship. It would be an offence both to her and her mother even to hint at such a thing. Get well—get strong, Willy. Let us endeavour to recover some degree of calmness after all the shocks we have undergone: and rely upon it, I will lose no time in opening a way for what I fear you will find a stormy discussion.”

The moment for such a disclosure was, however, more favourable than was dreamed of in her ladyship's philosophy. The Eustaces, male and female, were in a mood unusually humane. They were both grateful to Providence, and ashamed of themselves; thankful that their only son had been spared to them; ashamed that they should have risked the lives of others by despatching him from the midst of infection, to Radensford Manor; and at the announcement of his danger, have hesitated about hurrying to his bedside. When, therefore, Lady Harriet eventually announced that he was about to return home still enfeebled by his terrible malady, and dispirited by having to communicate to them a circumstance—an attachment—little likely to meet with their approbation, they prepared themselves to meet the worst with patience. At all events, they would not endanger the convalescence of the invalid by premature opposition to his wishes.

When he made his first appearance at last, wan, wasted, nervous, these good intentions were confirmed. There were tears in his mother's eyes: and never had Sir Henry been so near the verge of an emotion, as when his son re-entered the hall of his forefathers, instead of being conveyed, as at one time they apprehended, to the family vault. Even Mr. Eustace himself was sufficiently satisfied of their kindly feelings towards him, to postpone till the morrow tidings likely to ruffle their good understanding.

Before the flowing lava of parental tenderness had found time to harden, a letter from the Manor House accomplished Lady Harriet's promise to her nephew, that she would do her best as his advocate. By apprising the Eustaces that at the death of her mother, Amy would come into an unencumbered estate of two-and-twenty hundreds a-year, she removed from their minds all superfluous scruples. Sir Henry thought it necessary, indeed, for the sake of consistency, to accompany his pompous "assent to his intended proposals to the daughter of the late Sir Mark Meadows," with a declaration that he ought to have done better; that for the last three generations, the Eustaces had intermarried with the peerage, so that they had not a single low connection or objectionable relative; whereas there was no sur-

mising to what humiliation they might not hereafter be exposed by such a blot on their scutcheon as the origin of the present Lady Meadowes. But he by no means forbad the match. He even promised to make suitable settlements; and to talk over with his man of business the proper amount of jointure and pin-money.

The heart of the young lover leapt within him at the sound. Never in his life had he been so moved, except when, after a two hours' homily, his father agreed to settle his book on his first Derby: and never, even then, had he been half so fervent or half so sincere in expressions of gratitude. He longed to rush back into Gloucestershire that very day; and place his heart and hand at the feet of the good and precious being whom he accused himself of having presumed to slight and depreciate. It was only because aware that the gates of Meadowes Court were closed against intrusion by the sacredness of family affliction, that he contented himself with pouring out his hopes and feelings in a letter more voluminous than judicious, which he forthwith despatched to Lady Harriet, to be placed in the hands of poor Amy at the first favourable moment.

"Of course, my dearest sister," wrote Lady Louisa, by the same post, "we are not a little grieved and disappointed. We had expected that a young man, circumstanced like William, would form an unexceptionable match. But God's will be done! It might have been worse. The conduct of Lady Meadowes in married life has been such as in some measure to efface the stigma of her origin; and as Sir Henry has generously sacrificed his feelings on this grievous occasion, and consented to a step on which his son has unfortunately set his heart, lose no time, dearest Harriet, in bringing the disagreeable affair to an issue. Till it is settled, William will recover neither his strength nor his looks; and I do not wish the cause of his low spirits to be discussed in the school-room. The girls must not be allowed to surmise the unpleasant drawback attaching to their future sister-in-law. They must know nothing about the marriage till it is on the eve of solemnization."

After perusing this epistle, Lady Harriet gravely shook her head. Though she had fulfilled her promise to her nephew, it

was in the belief that his parents would be inexorable; nor did she approve so complete an abnegation of principle on the part of the Eustaces. What would the world say? How would their inconsistency be judged by the merciless severity of public opinion?

Meanwhile, like most weak-minded people entrusted with a negotiation, she was in no hurry to bring it to a close. It was not often she had so grand a secret in her keeping; and unusually stately was her demeanour when Mary Tremenheere dropped in at luncheon time, wondering as usual, "how their poor dear friends at Meadows Court were getting on, or whether they would ever hold up their heads again;" and felt that her ample pocket contained credentials, likely, at no distant time, to raise those depressed heads and make their hearts sing for joy.

For two long days did she revolve in her mind the best mode of breaking the happy intelligence to Amy and her mother; and on the third, rose earlier than usual to indite a few lines, somewhat too grandiloquent for the occasion, begging "leave to wait upon Lady Meadows at two o'clock that day, to communicate something of the highest importance; something which she trusted would prove as agreeable to her friends at Meadows Court as to herself;" and, having sealed the letter with her largest and best emblazoned lozenge, and despatched it by her little foot-page in the form of Bill the weeding-boy, she was reclining back in her chair, meditating on the terms suitable to convey her nephew's proposals to her invalid neighbour, without marking too great a condescension on the part of the Eustaces, or too unchristianly a sense of the sacrifice her family was making, when Dr. Burnaby was suddenly announced. She was startled. The little boys were in perfect health and safe in the school-room with their tutor. The establishment, down to the minutest scullery-maid, was free from catarrh.

She felt that mischief was impending. Though so thoroughly worthy a man as the good doctor ought never to be invested with the attributes of the Stormy Petrel, his spontaneous appearance was an evil omen.

Luckily for Lady Harriet, he had no time to lose in ambiguous phrases. Old Burnaby was no diplomat; and so short a time

did he expend in making her acquainted with the fatal fact that her well-to-do neighbours were reduced to a humbler level of life, that, instead of listening to the sequel with uplifted hands, upturned eyes, and the profound sympathy he had anticipated from her well known good-will towards the family, her first impulse was to start from her seat, and vehemently ring the bell.

What could she want so suddenly? A glass of water? A bottle of Godfrey's salts? The good doctor was half-inclined to seize her ladyship's hand and place a finger on her pulse! But, no! She was full of animation. No symptoms of syncope. No fear of a swoon.

"Is the boy gone? Has my letter been taken to Meadows Court?" cried she, with a degree of abruptness almost worthy of her guest, and altogether foreign to her usual dignified reserve.

"I will inquire, my lady."

Unaware of the critical nature of the case, the rheumatic butler inquired so leisurely that, before his answer was rendered, and while Dr. Burnaby still sat wondering and tapping his snuff-box, Lady Harriet again addressed herself strenuously to the bell.

"The lad *is* gone, my lady. He went instantly on receiving your ladyship's orders."

"Then hurry after him, Blagrove. But no! you could not overtake him. Let Master Warneford's pony be saddled. John or the gardener must instantly follow him and bring back my letter."

"Bill will take across the fields, my lady, and—"

"No matter, no matter! Some one can go round by the road, and meet him when he arrives at Meadows Court. But let no mistake be made, Blagrove. I *must* have the letter back."

The old man retired, with a grave and thoughtful countenance. He had not forgotten—none in the household *had*—Miss Meadows's frantic expedition from the Manor House to the death-bed of her father, which the utmost exertion had been unable to prevent.

When the door closed on him, Dr. Burnaby, evidently a little huffy at the interruption offered to his narrative, could not forbear

observing:—"The letter your ladyship has so eagerly recalled, was doubtless calculated to aggravate the pain this sad discovery is about to inflict on our poor friends?"

"If it should reach its destination, it will at all events prove grievously mistimed," replied Lady Harriet, evasively. "But do you really believe, Doctor, that Sir Jervis's pretensions are well-grounded? Is there no hope—*no* hope for poor Amy?"

"Not a shadow! The Prestons, it seems, had their suspicions from the first. But they had some delicacy about mooted the question. Unluckily, however, old Preston observed to his son in presence of one of his clerks, that he should scruple to advise any client of *his* to purchase the Meadowes Court estate; for he was afraid no title could ever be made out. On the strength of which, some blackguard in the office made it his business to afford a private hint to Sir Jervis Meadowes. Ah! my dear lady! In matters of business let not thy right hand know what thy left doeth: or thy words may be carried up even to the King's chamber."

Lady Harriet, who had often before taken occasion to resent the old doctor's unorthodox application of Scripture texts, looked solemn, and remained silent. Perhaps she was listening for the return of old Blagrove's footsteps across the hall. The doctor of course imagined that his adjuration had made a suitable impression on her mind.

"And how far may we count upon your ladyship," said he, after allowing some minutes' pause to her cogitations, "to assist us in disclosing these painful facts to the ladies at Meadowes Court?"

Lady Harriet looked bewildered, and tried to recover the use of her faculties. But alas! her heart was still far away, with Bill the weeding-boy.

"Count upon *me*?" she reiterated at last, as if she had not heard a word of his preceding explanations.

"May we, in short, hope that your ladyship's aid will not be wanting in softening this sad blow to our poor friends?" persisted Dr. Burnaby, getting almost incensed by her evident absence of mind.

"Surely," she replied, drawing up with some dignity, "the

executors of Sir Mark's will are the proper persons to apprise Lady Meadows of the results of his culpable negligence?"

"The proper persons—though perhaps not the fittest!" cried the doctor, starting up and planting himself on the hearth-rug without noticing her air of hauteur. "For, by Jove, though my last birthday was my seventy-third, the ways of the world have not yet hardened my heart to sufficient firmness for the undertaking. However that good Samaritan—that worthy man yonder at the Rectory—has consented to bear the brunt; and all I can do is to step in with my counsels and services, when the worst is known and has to be palliated. Good morning, Lady Harriet Warneford—I wish you a very good day."

The doctor's hat was in his hand, when Blagrove luckily appeared at the door, holding in *his* the fatal note; and lo! his lady, rescued at once from the terrors under which she had been labouring, became in a moment complacent, affable, and fluent. She was quite ready to assist in comforting the Meadows family in any other capacity than as members of her own. She proposed making her appearance at Meadows Court early in the afternoon.

Somehow or other, as he gazed in Lady Harriet's countenance, the old doctor's mind misgave him that the iron gripe of worldliness was hardening her heart. He could not shake her hand so cordially as usual, when again bidding her good-bye. Before he left the room, he saw her hastily commit to the flames the epistle she had recovered, as if she could not too speedily secure the extinction of so unpleasant a document. But very little did he surmise with what eagerness she sat down, immediately on his departure, to address her nephew, re-enclosing the long letter of explanation intended for Amy—and congratulate him on his escape.

"Another half-hour, and he would have been irretrievably committed to a marriage with a pauper!"

CHAPTER XI.

MARK DAVENPORT, like other wilful men, was apt, when he *did* surrender himself to a new impulse, to give up without a struggle the keys of the fortress. His artistic eye had been singularly captivated by the picturesque and characteristic aspect of Hargood's daughter; and his somewhat rugged nature was touched by her patient servitude. He could not drive her from his mind. Through the fragrant clouds of his hookah, her sad face seemed gazing upon him from a distance. At length he determined to exorcise the spirit, as he had done in similar cases, by transferring to canvas or paper the image that haunted him; as poets imprison an idea in a sonnet, or musicians in an *adagio*.

The gloomy studio with its stream of light falling from the lofty window was soon sketched in: and the slave of the easel was beginning to stand out from the background, in her pale grey blouse. But when it came to the stern but mournful face of the girl who, with the proportions of a child, looked as if she had never been young, the rapid hand of the artist paused, as from momentary compunction. Mary Hargood's grave countenance seemed gazing at him reproachfully, as if he were unlawfully prying into the dimness of her melancholy life.

He threw aside his brush; and resumed the book he had left half open by the fireside. It was Chamisso's striking poetry of Peter Schlemihl. But his eyes wandered listlessly over the pages. He could not—*could* not—recal his wandering attention.

"By Jove," cried he, at length, with sudden impetuosity, which caused the terrier basking at his feet to start up barking as though it heard "a rat behind the arras"—"by Jove, that fellow was born to be a nigger-driver or a dentist. He weighs his own flesh and blood in the balance as though it were so much putty; and looks upon that gifted child as *my* father on one of his Leicester sheep—calculating it at so much a pound.

I'm not one of those who fancy women formed to live under a glass, like eggshell china, and other fragile curiosities. But hang it—one need not treat them quite like potter's clay!—'Let us take care of the Beautiful,' said old Goethe. 'The Useful will take care of itself.'"

And back he went to his sketch; and by a few able touches, brought out the physiognomy of the youthful artist.

Scarcely had he satisfied himself by a certain conscious tingling of the cheeks (as if the forbidding but fascinating girl were again before him with her rebuking glances), that the likeness was one of the best he had ever produced, when the hurrying step of Hamilton Drewe upon the stairs startled him from his reverie; and his ejaculations concerning the threatened intrusion were not much more complimentary than they had been towards Mary's taskmaster.

"Confounded bore, to have that moth perpetually buzzing about one's ears!" muttered Mark. "If he don't leave town shortly, I shall sport my oak as if in chambers, or fairly lock my door, as one does on the continent."

While giving utterance to these threats, he shuffled away into his dressing-room the block of paper on which he had been working.

"What are you shuffling out of sight, my dear Davenport?" inquired the poet, who, being in the habit of turning his own empty mind inside out as people turn their pockets, did not admit that others could have secrets to keep.

"Something I do not wish you to see," was the cool reply.

"But it is only a drawing?"

"If you know what it is, *why* so curious?"

"Not curious: only interested in every work of yours."

"But this is not work—it is play."

"*Raison de plus.* Do let me see it?"

"Certainly *not.*"

"Not when it is finished, my dear Davenport?"

"It will never be finished. Like the Cathedral at Cologne—the Church of St. Geneviève—the Palace of the Louvre—and the story of the Bear and Fiddle, it is fated to be immortal in incompleteness. But what has caused you, Drewe, to be armed

cap-à-pie so early in the morning? I never saw you dressed like a Christian before, till the sun was vertical."

"Because," replied his visitor, taking a letter from the pocket of a fur-coat, built as if for an Arctic expedition, "because old Wroughton has just sent me an order for the private view of the new gallery of Egyptian antiquities at the British Museum; and I want you to come with me and inspect them."

"I have seen them already. I assisted at the packing. I was six months in Egypt on my way overland from India."

"Then I will go in search of Hargood," said Drewe, re-pocketing the ticket, and preparing to depart.

"Oh! if Hargood is to be of the party, I am your man," said Davenport. "Wait a moment, and I will be ready."

"I wonder why on earth I submit to your impertinent caprices!" cried Drewe, shrugging his shoulders.

"Simply as people overlook the rough coat of a pine-apple," was the cool rejoinder; "because you know me to be fine fruit at the core. By the way," continued he, as, some minutes afterwards they were driving through the damp dark narrow streets, towards the domicile of their literary friend—"has not Hargood a professional artist in his family—wife, sister, daughter, niece—I forget what—to whom a sight of these pictures might be a blessing?"

"I had rather not invite his wife, who has been dead these six years. He has probably a maiden sister—for I never saw rooms kept in such apple-pie order."

"Ask her, then. It would be a charity."

"Charity begins at home; and I might be required to drive her in my cab."

"Not at all. Send her with Hargood. But here we are," he continued, as his companion suddenly reined up. "Let me out, Drewe, and I will carry your message to our friend; for I don't care to be left in charge of your frisky bay, while you are making a short story a long one."

In a moment, the lone bright brass bell-pull, in a line of dirty tarnished ones, had summoned the tidy parlour-maid of the Hargoods, by whom Davenport was primly informed that "Master was not at home."

"I know it. But I have a message to Miss Hargood," said he, brushing vigorously past her up-stairs: and he had opened and traversed the chilly drawing-room, and knocked at the door of the studio, before the scared little woman had found time to close the street-door in the face of Hamilton Drewe.

A low sad voice bad him enter; and enter he did. And *there* stood the pale little artist, with the same palette and brush in her hand, and the same sad look in her eyes; stationed precisely on the same spot, with the same gleam of light falling on her glossy hair. It was like the realisation of a dream. Half-an-hour before, Davenport had been labouring to recall all these details, and fix them into reality by his pencil. And now, all was before him; his vision verified.

His explanations were hurriedly made. But Mary was not slow of comprehension.

"It is very kindly thought of on your part," said she, when he had made all clear. "But even had my father been at home, I could not have accompanied you to-day. I have three hours' work before me. When my palette is prepared, I never work less than six hours."

"But for such an exceptional occasion—"

"Not exceptional to *me*. To-morrow is Saturday—my father's holiday; and he has promised to take me to the Museum."

"To the *public* view."

"Public or private, the objects viewed will be the same. We have a ticket for to-day, which we do not use. It is one of the advantages my father derives from his connection with the press, that such places are always open to us."

By this time, Davenport had made his way to the side of the artist, who had not so much as laid aside her brush in compliment to his presence. With the keenness of a practised eye, he saw in a moment that several slight criticisms he had hazarded on the occasion of his former visit, had been carefully attended to. The picture had grown and ripened during his absence. It was indeed a masterly production; and his praises were as fervent as sincere.

"You should attempt some original production, Miss Hargood,"

said he. "You are wasting the most precious time and talents on these copies."

"Not so long as I continue to receive commissions for them," she coldly replied. "Original composition is always a risk. Have you any further message, Mr. Davenport, to my father?"

This was uttered in so decided a tone of dismissal, that he felt it necessary to express his negative in a hasty leave-taking. Just in time!—for when he reached the street, the impatient Drewe was preparing to come in search of him.

"A surly, unmannerly, piece of goods!" muttered Davenport, as he re-adjusted himself in the cab.

"Of whom are you talking?"

"Miss Hargood."

"Oh? there *is* a sister then?"

"A dozen, for what I know or care. Hargood was out. But drive on for the love of Heaven;—for we have wasted so much time by coming out of our way, that half the fools in London will have the start of us."

With very little ceremony would he have abandoned his companion altogether, now that all hope of the Hargoods' company was at an end; but that he felt a sort of hankering to see what Mary was to see on the morrow.

And apparently he felt so much more interested in the colossal faces of Memphis transplanted from the African wilds into those of Bloomsbury, than when he last beheld their impassible faces in the land of the Sun, as to fancy that he could not visit them too often. For, in spite of many wise resolves to the contrary, on the morrow he returned; exhibiting of course as much surprise when he found himself face to face with Hargood and his daughter, as if he had gone thither for any other purpose than that of meeting them.

On their part, surprise was neither felt nor assumed. Both were engrossed by the novel and interesting spectacle before them; nor was it till Hargood perceived that Davenport had information to impart concerning Egypt, its ancient mysteries and modern government, that he took much heed of his presence. That any friend of Hamilton Drewe should turn out an acute

observer, and be able to relate with precision and without affectation what he had accurately examined, was an unexpected satisfaction. Warmed by the attention bestowed upon him, Mark Davenport described with graphic eloquence the wonders of Thebes and the desolation of Tadmor.

“I have some sketches made on the spot, which I should very much like to show to Miss Hargood,” he continued, while the critic, with his brows knitted and his arms folded, stood contemplating the colossal faces which have been staring the world out of countenance for so many ages. “I would offer to send them to your house for her inspection; but that I fear many of my sketches stand as much in need of verbal explanation as the Red Lion of immortal memory.”

“Have you got them with you in town?—Why not let us see them at your lodgings?” demanded Hargood, with the utmost simplicity. For the shallow etiquettes of life were thoroughly out of his sphere; and having already visited Captain Davenport’s perfectly decorous apartments, he saw no reason why he might not take his daughter there, for a purpose all but professional. It was their weekly holiday. The only obstacle he suggested was that Mary might be tired by so long a walk.

Startled by such ready compliance almost into regretting that he had made the proposal, Mark Davenport began to reconsider whether his sketch-book might not be found lying on the table, displaying the interior of Mary’s studio, and betraying the interior of his heart. He would perhaps have felt inclined, like Boccacio’s hero, who sacrificed his falcon to feast a beloved guest, to wring the neck of the pink cockatoo in her honour, but for the extraordinary composure with which the apathetic young lady acceded to her father’s proposal. She entered his bachelor’s sanctum as unconcernedly as she would have crossed the threshold of a railway station!

Scarcely however could he refrain from telling her, as she warmed her hands at his fire, how much she had been thought of and dreamed of within those walls. But he restrained himself. He was beginning to understand the nature of Hargood sufficiently to know that *he* must fancy himself the first object of the visit, or that it would never be repeated. For his daughter

to be raised into more than a mere supplement to himself would have soured his humour for the day.

As it was, he laid the flattering unction to his soul, that to enjoy the pleasure and benefit of his conversation, a rough young soldier like Davenport extended his hospitality even to his poor yea-nay child.

They turned leisurely over the Egyptian portfolio; Mr. Hargood entering largely into historic doubts and antiquarian disquisitions. But though fully appreciating the vigour and grace of the sketches, not a syllable of praise escaped the lips of Mary. She had been brought up to regard the language of compliment as contemptible—a noxious aliment acceptable only to children and fools. But Davenport was content. She had taken off her shabby straw-bonnet so as to display her well-turned head and the prettiest little ear in the world; and thrown wide her heavy woollen shawl—not to exhibit her well-fitting black-silk dress, but the better to approach and admire the drawings extended on the table before her. Already, she seemed perfectly at home, and never before had so intelligent a face brightened the atmosphere of that solitary lodging.

By Davenport's orders, a cup of hot tea was brought, which the coldness of the day rendered acceptable: and by the time Mary Hargood was thoroughly cheered and carried out of herself by the novel *chefs-d'œuvre* placed before her, she could no longer disguise her consciousness of the *bien être* she experienced.

“How happy you must be here!” said she, abruptly addressing Davenport, after a glance round the room, which comprehended even the bird and the terrier.

“Is any one happy any where?” he replied, by way of concealing his delight at this unconscious betrayal of her satisfaction.

“Here is a face that portends perfect contentment,” observed Hargood, laying his hand on a portrait of Hugh Davenport—one of the earliest attempts in water-colours of his brother.

“Perfect contentment and perfect excellence!” replied Marcus; “the best of all human beings—my brother Hugh.”

“Ay, by the way. What has become of that paragon of

brothers?" inquired Hargood. "Am I never to see him but in effigy? The day we dined at Richmond, you mentioned that you were expecting him in town."

"I am expecting him still. But he is at his old lunes; renouncing his own pleasures to comfort the sorrowful and heal the sick. My mother has lately lost her only brother; and though they had not been on speaking terms for the last thirty years, remorse of conscience has replaced on this occasion the instincts of natural affection. She probably reproaches herself for having allowed him to slip out of the world unreconciled; for I find she is terribly cut up."

"The sisterly attachment which could hold itself suspended for the third of a century, can scarcely, however, be of a very potent quality," rejoined Hargood. "I have not much faith in posthumous atonements. But since you have so recently lost an uncle, Captain Davenport, how comes it you are not in mourning?"

"You may well rebuke me. Alas! I am apt to deport myself far from respectfully towards conventional forms. I never saw this old man. His very name was tabooed among us: and I should almost as soon have thought of ordering for myself a black coat for the King of Ashantee. I am wrong, however. For his memory is entitled to some reverence. There lived not a truer-hearted British sportsman, or kinder-hearted British gentleman than poor Sir Mark Meadows."

"Sir Mark *whom* did you say?" inquired Hargood, as though he misdoubted his senses.

"Meadowes, of Meadowes Court: as I suppose the Baronetage or the Landed Gentry books would style him," replied Davenport, gazing on the graceful contour of his fair guest.

"And who, may I ask, was his wife?" said Hargood, in a tremulous voice.

"*That* faith, I can hardly tell you. Something low and disgraceful, I'm afraid, from the manner in which he was sent to Coventry by the elders of the family; some waiting-maid,—or worse—"

"*You lie, Sir!*"—cried Hargood, in a tone that thrilled to the

very marrow of his daughter, and caused Davenport to start forward as though a weapon had been thrust into his side.

"Father,—father—" interposed the terrified Mary, too well aware of the violence of his nature; and clinging to his arm as though she foresaw that to words so harsh, blows would probably follow.

"I say again, *he lies!*" cried Hargood, with quivering lips and panting emotion. "She was good and virtuous as his own mother; a gentlewoman, though humbled by misfortune—a governess, but a clergyman's daughter—*my father's* daughter, Sir—my sister—my only sister!"

"Hargood—you are forgiven—and it is now my turn to crave your pardon," said Captain Davenport,—the fire which for an instant had flashed from his eyes being lost in a look of the deepest concern. "My offence was one of complete but pardonable ignorance. All I ever heard of my uncle's wife was learned, in forbidden moments, from the gossiping of servants."

"A worthy source for such infamous detraction!" cried Hargood, still unappeased.

"You cannot imagine that I would have wilfully insulted you," earnestly persisted Captain Davenport. "You do not surely suppose that I was in the slightest degree aware of the connection between us?"

"As little as myself. You would else shunned the society of the literary hack, as loathing as *I* should have avoided communication with any member of a family by whom my poor sister had been so disgracefully trampled on. Your name is not a rare one; I did not connect it with the race of her persecutors. Ours is too plebeian even to have attracted your notice. Mary, child! your bonnet and shawl—!" he continued, suddenly addressing his daughter; down whose blanched cheeks tears were beginning to flow.

"At least do not leave the house in so bitter a spirit," pleaded Davenport. "I offer you every apology in my power—I will do and say anything you desire. Only give me your hand at parting."

For a moment, Hargood seemed disposed to comply. But a sudden revulsion of angry feeling got the better of him, as he put

aside the extended hand of Davenport, who had followed him to the door.

“*I can't!*”—cried he. “By the God who made me, I can't—*I can't!*—‘a servant-maid or worse.’ My sister—my poor sister!”

He went straight out of the room, still muttering indignant ejaculations; and poor Mary followed, in trembling silence. As she crossed the threshold, she raised her large eyes filled with tears to the harassed face of Davenport, and quietly extended her hand.

“Try to make peace between us,” he whispered, gratefully pressing it. “Pray, pray let us be friends!”

But his words were lost in the sobs of his departing guest.

CHAPTER XII.

IN the course of the painful disclosures which it was now necessary to make to Lady Meadows, so completely did she rise to the standard of excellence by which her champion the Rector had measured her character, that only once was a harsh word forced from her lips. She bore with patience the announcement that herself and her child were reduced from affluence to comparative poverty. She submitted without repining to the necessity of quitting for ever the home of her married life. But when Dr. Burnaby with more zeal than tact ventured to avow in her presence those displeasures against poor Sir Mark which he had so openly expressed to Lady Harriet, she stopped him at once.

“Negligence—but not *culpable* negligence, my dear Doctor,” said she. “You have no right to apply such a word to the conduct of my husband. He did his best for us, according to his knowledge and judgment.”

“He ought to have known *better*. Those who undertake the responsibilities and duties of a family, ought to make them their study.”

“Sir Mark entrusted his affairs to the better wisdom of professional advisers. If they failed to instruct him, on *their* heads

be the fault. But once for all, let no blame be imputed to him I have lost."

"The woman's a dunderhead after all," mused the provoked old gentleman as he drove from the door. "On *their* heads be the fault indeed! As if they cared a rush about the matter! On hers and little Amy's head will fall the penalty. She don't know what she's talking about. For the last thirty years, poor ailing soul, she has been wrapt up in cotton—the winds of Heaven not allowed to visit her cheek too roughly. And now she fancies it will be all pleasantness and pastime to go and live in lodgings, and see that pretty creature, Amy, snubbed and scoffed at by upstarts not worthy to carry her clogs. Even the darling herself looks on as complacent as a cherub; ignorant, poor child, of the accursed realities of the case: pinching poverty and undeserved humiliation."

Would the sympathising old man have been better pleased, had he known the truth? that Amy Meadows was cognizant to the full extent of the evil which had befallen her;—and that she had scarcely tasted food,—scarcely closed her eyes,—since she heard her sentence of exile from the spot she loved so dearly;—the scenes of her youth,—the grave of her lamented father!

It mattered not that Lady Meadows had assumed in her presence an attitude of perfect resignation. It mattered not that the naked fact of their banishment from their happy home had been clothed by the Rector in words of soothing plausibility. Had her own welfare only been involved in the event, she might have been induced to accept it as a trial against which she had no right to rebel. But her poor mother! It needed not all the tears shed by old Nichols over the miseries awaiting his poor dear lady, to apprise her of the extent of the evil.

"Mother, dear mother,"—said she, sinking on her knees by Lady Meadows's bedside, on the second night after the worst had been communicated to them; having stolen back to her mother's chamber after taking leave of her for the night, unable to bear in her own the monotonous clicking of the watch, and the flickering of the wood on the old hearth. "Let me stay by you to-night: let me comfort you. I know you cannot be sleeping. How can either of us sleep! Talk to me, mother. Let

me hear the sound of your voice. Let me learn your thoughts. Till now, I always fancied that I knew them—that we lived together like sisters—like friends. But since this dreadful stroke, I have seen clearer. I now find that I know nothing of your inward feelings. Mother—what is to become of us if we do not clearly understand each other! —

As yet incapable of utterance, Lady Meadows replied to this earnest appeal by encircling the neck of her daughter with her languid arm, and drawing her fondly towards her pillow. For some minutes, they wept together in silence.

“Fear nothing, my darling Amy,” said she at length. “For my sake, as for your own, be brave—be strong. We *are* strong, my child; strong in mutual affection, that will enable us to bear and surmount any sorrow *this* world can give.”

Amy would not grieve her by dissent. But she was beginning to think otherwise. She was beginning to believe that, once estranged from their familiar haunts, and when their home knew them no longer, they would stand in need of new friends to afford them courage and comfort. Everything beyond the limits of Radensford—and *there* it would have been cruel to entreat her bereaved mother to abide—presented to the inexperienced girl vague pictures of strife and torment: of an angry over-reaching crowd, jeering two defenceless women.

“Dearest mother, surely I heard you request Dr. Burnaby to inform those people—those lawyers of Sir Jervis’s—that we were ready to quit Meadows Court at once?” said she faintly.

“Better make a virtue of necessity, Amy. Do not let us wait to be turned out.”

“No, no! Situated as we are, the effort cannot be made too soon. It is only prolonging torment to linger on. I am quite prepared to go, mother. But whither?”

“I have scarcely yet considered. To Clifton, perhaps. The distance is inconsiderable, and the climate likely to be favourable to my health.”

“Then let us go there at once. But, dearest mother—if I were not afraid of vexing and hurting you, there is one question I should like to ask—”

“Ask it, Amy—I am callous to suffering *now*.”

“I once ventured to talk to you of our relations:—*not* the Davenports; if they did not like us in our poor father’s lifetime, they are not likely to be kinder now. I mean your own family. Surely *some* of them must survive?”

“Would that I could answer you. When I married, I had a dear and only brother, some years younger than myself:—an impetuous, headstrong boy; who chose to resent the conduct of the Meadows family in such terms, and to insult your father so grossly, that reconciliation became impossible. For some time, though thus estranged, I managed to follow his movements from a distance. But at length, by a sudden change, I lost all clue to his abode. He was poor, Amy; poor and obscure. I sometimes thought he purposely baffled my search, that he might evade the little officious kindnesses with which I pursued him. And now, I might as well look for a grain of sand on the shore, as for my poor brother in that great metropolis where I left him struggling for bread.”

“It is indeed a hopeless prospect,” said Amy, mournfully. “I was in hopes that some single hand—some single strong arm—might be in reserve to protect us.”

Lady Meadows replied by a heavy sigh. She had been in hopes so too. But it was not the hand of which Amy had been dreaming. With the sagacity of a mother’s eye, she had noted the impression made by her daughter upon William Eustace; and though for the moment far from eager to promote a prepossession which she feared would not be sanctioned by his parents, yet since her great misfortune, Lady Harriet had inadvertently let fall so many hints of the growth and stability of her nephew’s passion, and of her hopes that in the sequel a closer connection might unite, as near relatives, those who had been friends so long, that the poor invalid had permitted herself to look forward to a happy settlement in life for the dear child, the loss of whose society would have been to her as a sentence of death.

But of late these allusions had ceased. For a week past, no mention of William Eustace’s name. His aunt seemed to have forgotten his existence. Lady Meadows trusted only that Amy might be less interested than herself in so sudden a change:—that she might never have noted Lady Harriet’s insinuations, or

be looking out vainly, like herself, for the appearance of a faithless champion.

It was some allusion to this subject she had apprehended from Amy's uncontrollable distress of mind. She felt thankful to find that her daughter's yearnings were after the solace of natural ties; and was comforted when the repining girl consented to receive her parting benediction for the night, and retire to rest in her own adjoining room.

But the chord which Amy had touched did not cease to vibrate. Throughout the watches of the night, the image of the brother from whom she had been so long parted, kept recurring to the mind of Lady Meadows. She could not accuse herself of having neglected him. She had done all that a person disconnected from London and active life could effect, to obtain a clue to his residence. But often as she had grieved before, on *his* account, that he chose to hold himself aloof, it was now on her own she began to lament his estrangement. If she should die (and her heart often sank within her from growing weakness), who was to protect her orphan child? Her good neighbours at the Rectory and at Radensford were kind and willing. But both were aged; and they had families and household cares of their own. Her brother—she recalled him to her mind's eye as when, a fine lion-hearted young fellow of twenty, though only a struggling and a poor servitor—he had rushed up from Oxford, on hearing of the insults offered to her by the Meadows family, and done her irreparable injury by his intemperate interference. His noble forehead—his open countenance—his closed-curved raven hair—rose up before her. Already highly excited, the impression upon her nerves became so vivid, that she could almost have fancied he was present;—her feverish condition being such as has produced more than half the best-attested ghost-stories on record. Even when, towards morning, she dropped asleep, the last impression she retained—an impression that prevailed during her almost somnambulistic sleep—was that Edward Hargood was watching over her.

Such being the disordered state of her imagination, it was not wonderful that when, on waking next morning and ringing her bell some hours later than usual, and on inquiring for her daugh-

ter, she was told that Miss Amy was engaged in the drawing-room, speaking to a gentleman who had arrived from town—her half-murmured exclamation should be—"I knew it! My brother is come at last."

She made an effort to rise hastily; which, like most hasty efforts, defeated itself. For before her toilet was half accomplished, she was forced by faintness to lie down again. Her daughter was instantly fetched: a great relief to Amy; to whom the "gentleman in the drawing-room" had proved a most embarrassing visitor. Not Edward Hargood however:—no one but his sister could have imagined so improbable an incident as his falling from the clouds upon Meadows Court; and though from the flush upon her cheek as she approached, Lady Meadows discerned in a moment that the interview from which she had been summoned was one of unusual interest, she was too feeble to utter a syllable of inquiry.

Amy waited till she was alone with her mother to allude to it. Even when she simply announced—"Mr. Eustace, mamma, has been here"—she trusted Lady Meadows would conclude that he had walked over from the Manor House, to make formal inquiries after their health. She did not wish her mother's mind to be agitated, as her own had recently been.

Lady Meadows's murmured ejaculation of "Thank Heaven!" undeceived her at once: even before she found the hand enfolding her own, to be moistened with tears. She dared not, however, interrogate her as to the motive of her gratitude. The mother was the first to speak.

"I was sadly afraid, dear Amy," said she, "that he would not return. I feared that his parents would never countenance his attachment."

"You were aware of it then, mother? Yet he assures me he had never said a word to you on the subject."

"A mother's eye, my child, is to be trusted on such points. All I dreaded was that I had been too sanguine."

"You wish to lose me, then?" said Amy, with a swelling heart.

"For myself, I do not allow myself a wish. For you, all I desire is a safe and happy home."

Amy's face grew sadder and sadder. It was grievous to think how great a disappointment was preparing for that kind, unselfish mother.

"Is Mr. Eustace gone?" inquired Lady Meadowes, endeavouring to rally her strength. "When shall I see him? When will he return? When are we to meet?"

"Never, dear mother!" replied Amy, in a low, unsteady voice. "But could I have thought—could I have believed—your heart was set upon my marrying him, I should have found less courage to assure him just now that I could never become his wife!"

"You have *refused* William Eustace?" faltered Lady Meadowes.

The assent implied by Amy's grave silence was not to be mistaken.

"And why? You always appeared to like his society?"

"As an acquaintance, mother; as nearer my own age than Dr. Burnaby or Admiral Tremenhore."

"But during his illness, you showed such symptoms of interest?"

"He was Lady Harriet's favourite nephew. We were inmates under the same roof."

"Surely, surely, Amy," pleaded Lady Meadowes, still more surprised and distressed, "you have no secret object of preference? You have seen no one worthy to supplant—"

"On that point, be perfectly easy, dearest mother," interrupted Amy. "I have no other love or liking. All I desire is that I never *may*. Let us still be all in all to each other, and I am content. But to marry, for an establishment—for bread—a man for whom I feel no affection, would degrade me in my own eyes, and render life a burthen."

"I can say no more," said Lady Meadowes, with her usual meek resignation. But her eyes brimming with tears could not conceal from her daughter the greatness of her disappointment. She tried to busy herself in dressing, to avoid dwelling too painfully on the subject. But her movements were so languid and her air so depressed, that Amy was forced to avert her face and stifle her self-reproaches: gazing vaguely from the dressing-room

window over a vast expanse of half-melted snow, varied only by leafless woods and a few mournful fir-trees;—a cheering contemplation for her wounded heart.

A heavy sigh from Lady Meadows, who was now reclining in her arm-chair, roused poor Amy from her reverie.

“Let it afford some consolation to you, mother,” said she, suddenly turning her tearful face towards Lady Meadows, “to know that Mr. Eustace’s offer of his hand was made under circumstances which even *you* will admit to be a sufficient justification of my refusal, though I admit that I was wholly unaware of them when I declined his proposals. He has asked me to be his wife in direct defiance of his father’s authority. His parents have positively refused their consent. Lady Harriet has done her utmost to dissuade him from the match. Friends—family—all were against it.”

A deep flush—but not of indignation or resentment—overspread the pale face of Lady Meadows.

“Mr. Eustace would probably not have confided so much to me, had I evinced the gratitude which he seemed to think his confession demanded,” resumed Amy, reddening in her turn. “But when he found that, instead of being amazed at his asking a penniless girl to be his wife, I frankly told him we could never be happy together, he lost his temper; and with as little delicacy as justified my previous opinion of him, apprised me of all he had sacrificed and all he had braved, in order to court what he called my ungracious rejection.”

Lady Meadows shuddered at the idea of her young and timid daughter having been exposed to a scene of so much emotion.

“Mr. Eustace had no right to force such an explanation on you,” said she, “unauthorised by myself or your guardians. It was a disrespect to us all that he sought this private interview.”

“On that head, dear mother, let him stand excused,” said Amy. “He came here to see *you*—he asked for *you* only. But you were too unwell to be disturbed; and, little surmising the object of his visit, I hurried into the drawing-room to explain it. I believe he was not quite master of himself. He has been harassed and upbraided on my account by his family; and the dread that Lady Harriet might be beforehand with him here, to ac-

quaint you with his father's threats and exasperation, hastened his explanations and rendered his manner so flurried and excited, that it was indeed a relief when the interview was at an end."

"Then let us talk of it no more, my darling child," said Lady Meadowes, folding her daughter to her heart. "A marriage under such auspices was indeed undesirable. I have only to be thankful that I was mistaken in my estimate of your feelings towards him. Let us talk of him no more."

CHAPTER XIII.

ILFORD CASTLE is a beautiful spot, situated in one of the most favored counties in the district of Lake-land. An English home usually boasts its cheerful fringe of evergreens, to form, in combination with the glowing hearths within, a factitious, nameless season, which has no direct mission from the sun.

Captain Davenport, as he drove up towards what it becomes our wire-wove pages to call the "hall of his ancestors," pondered upon these things.

"By Jove! how comfortable it all looks," said he, as he wrapped his railway rug of racoon-skins closer round him, in the fly that conveyed himself and his traps from the railway station. "How Christmassy and cheerful, with its hospitable blue smokes circling from the roof, like one of Washington Irving's Utopian pictures of British domesticity! And how wrong I may have been to muddle my brains and derange my system among the November fogs of yonder confounded metropolis. Here, I might have been happy—here, I might have been well—here, I might have been——"

He paused. A burst of monologic laughter startled him in the midst of his soliloquy. In a moment, the real state of things at Ilford Castle flashed upon his mind—recalling to memory a sketch he had once made after one of *Æsop's* fables, of the fox moralising over a Vizard.

"Ah!—well!" was his secondary view of the case and the place—"it needs to have been in Bridewell and worn the handcuffs, to know that so goodly-looking an edifice is but a prison."

He no longer, however, even in thought, ventured to call Ilford Castle a prison, when welcomed under the portico by his cordial brother; or folded to the heart of Lady Davenport, on the threshold of her own apartment. Attired in the deepest mourning, his mother looked worn and harassed; and the manner in which she leant back in his enfolding arms to look earnestly in his face, as if to read the secret of his welfare, seemed to apprise him that she sought comfort from the source that was dearest to her heart.

"And you are come at last, my own dear Mark," said she, scarcely able to stanch the tears which afforded a mother's greeting to the truant. "Hugh and I have wanted you sadly."

"And my father?"

"Lord Davenport has so lost all patience, that he has ceased to talk about your delay."

"But is he prepared with extenuating circumstances? Is the fatted calf on the spit, or am I doomed to husks and recriminatory lectures?"

"That will depend on yourself. But for all our sakes, my own dear son, do not wantonly provoke them. Your father is not in—in cheerful spirits."

"You mean that he is savage and out of temper?"

"I mean that he has had lately more than his share of annoyance and provocation. And then your brother Hugh—dear and good as he is—has completely disappointed his views."

"Because my father wanted him to become a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal; a millionaire in the copper currency of vulgar popularity—a man to be bought off by some future government with an additional pearl or two to the family coronet; or—who knows?—eventually strangled with a Garter? Instead of which, my brother is as wise as Solomon, and just as Minos."

"My dearest Mark—why so bitter?" mildly remonstrated his mother.

"Because—because—because I'm afraid I have naturally something of the crabstock in my nature," said he, not daring to assign the real motive of his unfilial outbreak. "However, mother, for *your* sake, I will endeavor to engraft better fruit

upon it. I fear," he continued, glancing hurriedly at her suit of sables, and then significantly at the door, "I greatly fear you have yourself lately had cause for sorrow."

Lady Davenport's brow contracted.

"I would not for worlds give you pain, mother—but—"

"If you *really* would not give me pain, say no more on the subject," replied Lady Davenport. "Let it suffice that I have lost my nearest living relative—with the consciousness of having acted an unworthy part towards him."

"Thank you, at least, for *that* admission," said her son, taking her hand, and fervently kissing it—a little to the surprise of Lady Davenport. A moment afterwards, Hugh made his appearance; having allowed what he believed to be time enough for confidential conversation between his mother and her favourite child. Then came their young sister, Olivia, blushing and formal from the school-room; always a little in awe of her bronzed and travelled brother. They soon, however, began to talk themselves out of the awkwardness which absence is apt to engender even among those most closely united; and mother, brother, sister, were as undisguisedly enchanted at Marcus's having condescended to come down and spend his Christmas among them, as though he were a lost sheep restored to the fold.

Even Lord Davenport rejoiced, after his kind, over the arrival of his younger son—gave him his whole hand instead of his customary three fingers; and went to the frantic extremity of a second bottle of claret. But this effort of hospitality had better have been omitted. For, under its influence, both father and son gradually laid aside those restraints over the unruly member, which were alone likely to maintain peace between the two.

"If the weather continues open, Marcus, which I doubt," said his lordship, "I should like to take you to-morrow over the home-farm. I never saw the Swedes, or indeed any of the winter crops, look anything like what they are looking this Christmas. Smith, my new bailiff, has done wonders; a very superior man, Marcus, is Smith. We have sent two fat oxen and a heifer up to the Smithfield Show; and a pair of Herefords to Edinburgh, which I flatter myself will make some sensation. As to my pigs, both my mixed breeds and my pure Chinas

obtained premiums at the Kendal Exhibition. Yes, I have every reason to be proud of Smith."

"Pity that you can't exhibit *him*, and get a premium for a prize bailiff! It would be the higher ambition of the two," muttered Mark, who was waxing fractious under the pressure of the plough and harrow.

"I think you will find that we have made some wonderful improvements, Mark, *won-der-ful* improvements!" added the lord of Ilford, gradually sunning himself in the genial warmth of the huge wood fire, and the Château Margaux.

"I am glad to hear it, my lord," replied his son, "and heartily trust I may *see* it. I glanced, however, down Quag Lane as I drove here this evening—and regretted to perceive that horrible line of old cottages still standing—or rather, still falling."

"There's ten years' life in them yet, I flatter myself," replied Lord Davenport. "Ilton Cottages bring me in something like sixty-seven pounds a-year, Mark."

"More shame for them," was Mark's dauntless rejoinder. "I should like to hear the opinion of your lordship's pigs, if turned into them for a sty!"

"The people are satisfied with them—which is more to the purpose. Most of the inhabitants were born there."

"And how many of them have died there? Does your lordship remember the fever in 1832?"—

"You have taken up the humanity-dodge, have you, Mark?" sneered Lord Davenport, whose sacramental notions of "improving" an estate consisted of high-farming and high rent. "Like Hugh yonder—who seems half asleep, and is probably dreaming of laborers' model-cottages, or some other philanthropical toy of that description—agrarian playthings, woven in spun sugar!"

"I was dreaming of something far less important, I am afraid," said Hugh, starting up, anxious to give a new turn to the conversation. "I was wondering how many days your lordship would claim to lionise my brother; before I made an appointment with my friend Harley, for his otter hounds?"

Lord Davenport, who had not vigour of soul or body for sportmanship of any description, did not of course refuse himself a snarl at the humanity of his otter-hunting sons. He tried in

vain, however, to draw back the conversation to Smith and his mangold wurzel; and revenged himself for the disrespectful apathy of his son Mark by talking of poor-law and pauper bastilles till coffee was announced, in a style that might have converted his wooden brethren of the Quarter Sessions into stone.

“No smoking allowed in any of the company’s carriages, I find,” said Mark to his brother, when they met, that night, in the comfortless dressing-room allotted to Hugh—because in the late lord’s time, it had been apportioned to his father as son and heir.

“No—on that point, my father and mother are alike rigid. Those, who cannot dispense with a cigar, must repair to the stable-yard.”

“Pleasant winter quarters upon my word!—The governor seems as companionable as ever, my dear Hugh;—as much inclined to live and let live.”

“He as been unusually cheerful to-night in honour of your arrival,” replied the simple-hearted Hugh, deceived by his irony.

“And my mother—poor soul—how thin and depressed she is looking. Tell me, dear Hugh—you were here when she received tidings of her brother’s death. How did they reach her?”

“My father read the announcement aloud from the newspaper. He chooses always to be the first to dispense the news brought by the *Times*.”

“And was she very deeply affected?”

“You know how she makes it a point of conscience to conceal her feelings from my father, if likely to annoy him. She said little—shed few tears. But next morning, she looked ten years older.”

“And does so still. But explain to me a little about old Sir Mark Meadows, and his widow—”

“I know little more than yourself. His dowager mother, old Lady Meadows, quarrelled with him for marrying his sister’s governess; and my father has consistently kept up the quarrel. There was no congeniality between them. They differed in politics as on most other points. And I suspect my father was

glad to shake off a half-ruined brother-in-law, who had disgraced the family by a low connection."

"What my father was glad of, or sorry for, is scarce worth speculating upon!" cried Mark, who, in pure impatience, was beginning to tear impatiently into shreds the pages of his Bradshaw—the only specimen of ancient or modern literature to be found in one of the bed-chambers of Ilford Castle. "But that my mother should submit to it!—"

"When does she do otherwise than 'submit?' Her whole life has been an act of submission."

"Say of slavishness!"—cried the indignant Mark. "And we two, Hugh, are getting as bad herself:

They who allow oppression share the crime."

"A sonorous watchword of sedition!" said Hugh—smiling at his vehemence. "But when experience proves that the resistance of the weak against the strong, only drives them into grosser tyranny, passive obedience becomes not only an act of policy, but a virtue."

"I deny it to be either!—Had my poor mother steadily resisted from the first my father's system of domestic oppression, he would not have hardened into what he is.

"And *she* would not be half the angel she is; and we should love her far less dearly."

"Speak for yourself, Hugh. For *my* share, I should respect her twice as much."

"And yet, my blustering brother, I suspect that, should a Mrs. Marcus D. ever appear on the boards, and pretend to have a will of her own, it will only be hers in so far as you have peremptorily assigned it to her."

Marcus paused a moment in his work of destruction. He had more than once secretly taxed himself with having inherited something of his father's despotic temper. He now felt self-convicted that the sole attachment or rather preference of which he had been ever conscious, was for one who charmed him chiefly as an uncomplaining domestic victim. Nor could anything be more certain than that the strong interest he was

beginning to feel in the fate of Mary Hargood, arose in the first instance from the sight of her quiet resignation.

“There never *will* be a Mrs. Mark Davenport,” he replied, in a more pacific tone, “unless, when King Hugh comes to the throne, he choose to allot a cottage and cow’s grass to his poor dog of a younger brother, for the maintenance of a brood of young barbarians; or unless the reigning majesty of Ilford will sanction my surrendering my sword, like Sterne’s Marquis, and taking up a yard measure or a camel’s-hair brush—which my father seems to hold in the same light, as equally badges of trade. But even if there *were*, I know no one more likely than myself to be a hen-pecked husband. It is the common fate of great heroes—from Mark Antony and Marlborough, to Mark Me.”

“The very man for a Jerry Sneak, certainly!” replied his brother, surveying him with a smile, overjoyed to see him lapsing into good humour. “Whereas I—whom you sometimes insolently characterise as the meekest man, after Moses—pretend to be, in married life, a very Bruin. I am by no means one of those who proclaim the equality of the sexes.”

“It is somewhat too early in the day (and a little too late at night) to enter into the great question of White Slave Abolition,” rejoined Mark, convinced that, in the hope of changing the argument, his brother was giving utterance to sentiments foreign to his own. And in order to release him from his false position, he began to discuss otter-hunting in all its branches, and their friend Harley’s pack in particular, till the waning of the candles in their sconces warned them to rest.

An early opportunity, however, was seized by Marcus for putting to the test the feelings of his sorrowing mother towards her brother’s family.

“Hugh endeavours to heal her wounded heart with balsams and unguents,” argued he. “I will try the probe, and astringents. Momentary torture sometimes produces lasting cure.”

When, therefore, a few days after his arrival, the illness of Olivia’s governess, a kind-hearted elderly German, who had attended her from childhood, gave rise to the momentous question of a successor, in case Madame Winkelried’s indisposition should necessitate her retirement from office, Marcus took occasion

to suggest to his mother, whom he was driving in her ponyphaeton through the park, that it was time his sister should be placed under more intellectual tutorage than that of the motherly old Franconian.

"Who is nevertheless a mine of information," replied Lady Davenport; "and who has taught her almost all it is necessary for a woman to know, without allowing her to acquire an idea or feeling which it would be desirable a woman should forget."

"Still, it would be pleasanter for a girl so nearly on the verge of womanhood to have a more congenial companion. I suspect, mother, that solicitude for myself and Hugh had some share in your choice of Olivia's governess? You were afraid of a second snake in the grass,—a second Mary Hargood?"

Lady Davenport was silent for some minutes—not, as her son supposed, from embarrassment, but from profound emotion.

"No fear of my encountering on this side the grave a second Mary Hargood," said she at length, in faltering accents. "If there ever lived a perfect being, Mark, it was she. To maintain her widowed mother, she undertook duties which ought not to have been made what they were, in my father's house. For while to *me* she was the fondest of friends, as well as best of instructresses, every opportunity was afforded by my parents for the growth of that affection between her and poor Mark, which ripened into a frantic passion. He was wild, wayward—a spendthrift—a prodigal. They wanted to reclaim him. They wanted to attach him to home. They wanted to preserve himself and his patrimony from utter ruin. And at whose cost? At that of the poor little governess, whose beauty and talents were to attract him to the dull fireside he had hitherto shunned for gayer scenes."

"And they succeeded?" inquired Mark, with unspeakable interest—finding his mother, overpowered by her feelings, pause for breath.

"They succeeded. My brother was always with us—what an acquisition to Mary—what an acquisition to me! How happy we all three were together! How doubly pleasant were the woods and fields of Meadows Court—dear, dear old Meadows Court!"

And again, she paused and wept.

“And did you never suspect, mother, the state of feeling of your companions?”

“Never. To my shame be it spoken, Mark, I inherited the notion, then universal in our class of society, that governesses, however endowed, and however attractive,—were a prohibited caste;—parias, with whom alliance was as impossible as with negroes or Red Indians.”

“Had he confided to you, then, that he was *in love* with Mary Hargood, you would have shrunk from it as from something indecent, or the avowal of a crime!”

“I was never put to the trial. He never did confide it to me. I knew nothing on the subject till the discovery had been made by my mother, and Mary expelled the house.”

“And you gave up your friend without a struggle! Oh! mother!”—

“Ah! my dear Mark,—if you only knew how little any effort of mine would have availed her cause. What you term a struggle,—that is a remonstrance with my parents,—would have been called rebellion, and denounced as the result of her evil lessons.”

Mark Davenport unconsciously shrugged his shoulders.

“I did hope,” she resumed, “hoped for years, that I might obtain sufficient influence over your father to induce him to favour a reconciliation.”

Lord Davenport’s undutiful son reasoned within himself that to endeavour to soften his lordship’s stubborn nature was about as hopeful a task as (to use Cowper’s expression,) to ‘clap a blister on the wooden pate of a wig-block.’

“But a thousand circumstances combined against me,” continued his mother. “Mary had a wrong-headed brother, who stirred up coals of discord: a violent man—a violent writer—a democrat—who seemed to take delight in irritating and disgusting the family. Then, my poor dear brother himself did a thousand vexatious things to widen the breach.”

“And you literally, from the day of rupture till now, never beheld them again?”

“I could not have done so, unless in defiance of your father’s will, by journeying down to Meadowes Court. From the day of

his marriage, my brother abjured London, as a place in which he had no longer a part."

"Wise man!—Happy man!"—

"Thank God, he *was* happy—which is the best proof of his wisdom, or of any one's wisdom," said Lady Davenport. "I believe no one ever led a more contented life."

"But why so sure of it, since no communication ever took place between you?"

"A sister of Lady Louisa Eustace resides within a couple of miles of Meadows Court; and through them, I have heard frequently of my brother and his wife—"

"Lady Louisa Eustace," repeated Mark, musingly, as if endeavouring to recall the name to his mind.

"The Eustaces of Horndean Court. Sir Henry is an old schoolfellow of your father, and Lady Louisa one of Lord Davenport's few favourites. He told me the other day that there was something of a project between them to marry Olivia to their son."

"Olivia? That *child!*"—

"You forget how time runs on. Next year, she will be presented. But I trust many more will pass before I am called upon to resign her to a husband; above all, to one of any other person's choosing than her own."

"And these Eustaces are friends of poor Lady Meadows?"

"They have never even seen her. But Lady Harriet Warneford, Lady Louisa's sister, resides at Radensford Manor house; and through her and them, the first intelligence reached me of my brother's death."

"And what of his widow? Surely mother, you have written to her?"

"I resolved to do so—I made the attempt. But every word that came to my pen seemed like an insult to my brother's memory. To have remained silent so long; and then, the moment he was laid in the grave, burst through all prohibitions to address her who had been the cause of the estrangement between us!—There was something unnatural in it, Mark."

"On the contrary. It was all the atonement you could offer to his memory. What was unnatural in it? Nothing that is humane, mother, can ever be unnatural."

"I felt that, in Mary's place, I should return the letter unopened. In short, dear Mark, I *dared* not write."

"Oh! that miserable mortal cowardice! What fools, and sometimes what knaves it makes of us!" sighed Mark Davenport.

"Had she required aid or assistance from me, it would have been another thing," pleaded his mother. But "Lady Meadowes is very well off. She and her child inherit the Meadowes Court estate—more than two thousand a-year. I have little doubt that the partial reconciliation I should be able to propose, (for your father would never be a party to it), would be painful and embarrassing to her rather than otherwise."

"Not if she be the kind and perfect being you have described. At all events, mother, for the ease of your own conscience, make the attempt."

Lady Davenport gravely shook her head. Their drive was drawing to a termination. They were within view of Ilford Castle, with all its dreary associations of marital and paternal authority. The iron gauntlet of the domestic tyrant seemed again pressing upon her neck, and bending down her spirit.

"Then let *me*!"

"*You*, Mark?"

"Let me write, or better still, let me go—"

"To a person you have never seen?—A place you have never visited?"—

"Why not—if I visit it in your name, as a messenger of peace?"

"And your father?"—

"My father troubles himself very little about my movements, unless when he has to pay for them. He need not be apprised of *this*."

"I have no secrets from him, Mark."

"I have many. If I venture to behave myself like a Christian towards my aunt and cousin—"

"Hush, hush!—for *Heaven's* sake, hush!" whispered Lady Davenport—for they had now entered the court-yard.

"I shall of course do it with a mental reservation; like the young Irish lady who went through the marriage ceremony,

adding to each response, 'provided my father gives his consent.'"

Hugh Davenport noticed with delight, that day at dinner, that his mother's eyes looked far less heavy than usual; and Olivia, who rarely ventured to utter an opinion in her father's presence, took courage to say that she was sure her mother's drive in the open carriage with Marcus, had done her good:—a remark which deepened the faint tinge of colour on her ladyship's pallid cheek.

Lord Davenport was of opinion, on the contrary, that her spirits must have been raised by the thriving aspect of his farm. But Marcus could not help hoping that his darling mother felt gratified by a project which she dared not openly sanction. Who can say which was the true surmise?—The secrets of that harassed heart lay betwixt herself and Heaven!

CHAPTER XIV.

LOVE is your only modern alchemist;—transmutation of character being the substitute for transmutation of metals. Love, which had rendered the self-seeking William Eustace humble, was already rendering the frank, reckless Mark Davenport cautious and sage.

Instead of rushing off the following day to fulfil his promise to himself and his mother of visiting Meadowes Court, he judged it prudent not to incense Lord Davenport by disappointing his expectations of completing his family circle at Ilford, during the Christmas holidays. It was one of the old customs to which he clung as to a duty—a duty towards Public Opinion. His fat cattle were slain—his strong beer broached—his offspring collected under his roof. And if their mirthfulness were a little dashed by the overclouding of parental authority, or diluted by a copious admixture of paternal prose, the county paper, which duly announced their Christmas festivities, was none the wiser.

So poor Marcus stayed, and listened. Lord Davenport conde-

scended to notice to Hugh that never had he seen his younger son so companionable or so rational. And as the for once self-governed Mark was able to occupy his mornings to his satisfaction, by giving lessons in his favourite art to his interesting young sister, the four weeks of his sentence to what *he* called the House of Correction, passed far less tediously than he had expected. Association with three natures so gentle and refined as those of his mother, his brother, and the timid Olivia, had almost tamed the wild elephant by the time he started for the South.

February had set in, bright and sunny, as that most deceptive month occasionally does, as if to add unnecessary bitterness to the biting blasts of its successor; and never perhaps in his life had Marcus been conscious of such elasticity of spirits as when progressing with his dog and portmanteau from those beautiful dales, where *he* saw only scenes worthy the pencil of Turner or Lee, and Lord Davenport only wilds to be converted by the appliance of patent manure—towards the sunny banks of the Severn.

He fancied himself on the eve of a new era of his existence. He was about to redress an injury. He was about, like some hero of the antique world, to propitiate Heaven by atonement for an ancestral crime. What more he purposed or anticipated, it matters little to inquire. For so prone are we to deceive ourselves, that, had he been asked whether the pacification of Hargood had any share in his movements, he would have replied by a negative as indignant as usually forms the response to questions convicting us as impostors.

Marcus had despatched his active and assiduous servant straight from Ilford Castle to town; for over-active and assiduous servants are apt to prove as troublesome appendages as inquisitive friends. He was consequently responsible to no one for the erratic nature of his movements; nor was there a single prying eye to notice that his hand shook strangely while making his elaborate toilet at Cardington, previous to entering the fly about to convey him to Meadows Court—the home of his mother's childhood—the stronghold of her time-honoured race.

“What would I give if this visit had taken place in the lifetime of my poor old uncle!” said he, as he surveyed the wide pastures

dividing Cardington from Radensford, so exciting to the eye of the fox-hunter. "How I should have liked the jolly old sportsman, who appears to have sown and reaped his wild oats in a single harvest, and to have had but one mind during the remainder of his life. A great thing that!"

In passing hurriedly through Radensford, he noted the old lichen-stained lodge leading to the Manor-House—and the Rectory, with its trim shrubbery of laurels. The cottages looked wholesome and cheerful. The country did not wear that constrained aspect of the highly-farmed environs of Ilford—clearly belonging to a proprietor who regarded the kindly fruits of the earth but as the means of increasing the balance of his banker's book, or creating an ideal capital in that misty and mysterious abyss of property, called Public Securities.

"My poor mother! What a change for her, from this pleasant open country to the narrow horizon of Ilford," thought Marcus, as at length, through a glade in the forest of Burdans already brightened by patches of yellow gorse, which in the distance gleamed like scatterings of sunshine, he discovered the outline of the old family mansion.

And lo! a few minutes more conveyed him to Meadows Court. To his utter dismay, he saw that the window-shutters were closed, and the chimneys smokeless!

"How is this?" said he to the driver, who seemed to hesitate about pulling the bell, which probably there was no one to answer. "Is not the family here?"

"Sir Jervis ben't a come yet, Sir. They do say he ben't a coming. Master heerd a talk as the place war to be let; and there'd been priest folk from Bristol, a looking a'ter it, to make what's called a Summin-hairy."

"But Lady Meadows and her daughter?"

"*Hev'* Sir Jervis ever a lady, Sir?"

"The widow of the late Sir Mark—"

"Oh! the widder, Sir. Pity but what you'd mentioned it afore you left Card'nt'n. She's gun away for good an' all. Went jist afore Christmas, Sir. There's been a sale here, sin' then; which brought all the gentlefolk of the keounty for twenty mile round."

If any one averse to profane swearing had been just then within earshot, Mark Davenport might have risked both fine and remonstrance. He was vexed beyond measure—beyond measure disappointed. His feelings had been wound up to a pitch of excitement and expectation, from which it was difficult for a being so unreasonable to fall with decency.

“But *whither* was the widow gone—and where was her daughter?”

Ah! *that* the flyman didn't pretend to know. And he began zealously pulling at the door-bell, in hopes of amending his ignorance. For some time their united efforts produced no result. At length a slatternly servant-girl peeped sulkily through the half-opened door, of which she had found the chain too hard to unbolt; one of those blighted slips of human nature, which nothing but a house agent or lodging-house keeper ever contrives to rake out of the human rubbish-heap.

To a reiteration of Captain Davenport's queries respecting Lady Meadows, she had no answer to afford. Of the late family, she knew nothing. She and a deaf old mother were engaged by the attorney of the present proprietor, to take care of the empty walls of the old mansion, till something should be arranged respecting its occupancy. To his request to “see the house,” she replied that it was “all shut up;” and though a handsome gratuity eventually enlightened her mind as to the possibility of opening the shutters, she did her spiriting in the operation far more like a Caliban than an Ariel.

As the little slovenly maid of all work proceeded to open the shutters and admit the tell-tale brightness of the midday sun, Marcus was almost tempted to bid her close them again. If *this* was Meadows Court, he had seen enough of it.

The girl insisted, however—as if she thought her fee would otherwise be unhandsomely earned—on escorting him through the house:—and though his disgusts and mortification increased at every step, he was pleased for a moment by the light and pretty hangings of the room designated as “Miss's,” adjoining the vast old oak-wainscoated apartment of “my lady.”

“And was the whole furniture sold then?” he inquired—as

he looked from the wide Elizabethan windows over the well-timbered paddock.

“A'most all,” she believed. “Everything had been removed afore she came. Muster Preston, the lawyer, know'd all about it, and could tell where the ladies was to be heard on.”

To the lawyers, therefore, whose address she communicated, Marcus was fain to refer himself for further information; and cheerless indeed was his drive back to Cardington, with a tired horse and grumbling driver—all three frustrated in their expectations. No longer surveying the landscape with the eye of a fox-hunter or an artist, Marcus rolled himself up like a hedgehog in a corner of the fly: swearing at the climate—the county, the country—and occasionally including himself and all his members in his imprecations.

But if the feelings of the young soldier, a comparative stranger, were thus deeply touched by the desolation of the venerable *Stamm-Haus* of the Meadowes family, what must have been the grief of poor little Amy on witnessing the desecration of their lares and penates! In all her plans and resolutions, the conduct of Lady Meadowes had been regulated by regard for the future interests of her daughter. Placing her own predilections entirely out of the question, she did not allow herself to retain a single object or article that could be advantageously disposed of for the benefit of the little fund that was to form her daughter's future dependence. At first, indeed, the advisers of Sir Jervis had suggested that much of the property—such as plate and pictures—was heir-loom. But of this, he could produce no evidence, and the Will of Sir Mark, bequeathing his personaty specifically to his widow, was eventually established.

From that day, Lady Meadowes sanctioned the preliminaries of the sale by auction which was to clear the premises for their new proprietor; and with the exception of their personal belongings, and a small case of miniatures of no intrinsic value, all was speedily ticketed and destined to the hammer. It had been the earnest desire of both mother and daughter to escape from the scene of confusion before their sacred haunts were invaded. But this was impossible. The inclemency of the weather rendered perilous the immediate removal of the invalid; and she had to

endure the rough intrusion and coarse questioning of the auctioneer and his workmen, ere the doors closed upon her for ever.

But why dwell upon the details of that mournful exodus!— They went. Their place remembered them no longer.

Not Hagar, driven forth into the wilderness, was more desolate than they!—

CHAPTER XV.

GENTEEL poverty is too apt to be garlanded about with arabesques by descriptive writers: like the deceptive honeysuckles twined over a rustic porch. Even poor Mary Tremeneere, far advanced in the thirties, and much addicted to weak poetry and weak tea, allowed herself to whine occasionally to Mrs. Burton about the “humble cot” of their banished friends, as “the abode of frugality and content.”

But Mrs. Burton knew better. Mrs. Burton had tasted of the bitter waters and found them unpalatable;—and, aware that the “humble cot” consisted of two floors in one of a row of comfortless lodging-houses, so small, that the smell of the kitchen and voices of its inmates were never absent from the drawing-room, she knew how greatly the long-pampered invalid would have to suffer, and how much poor Amy would feel in noting her mother’s loss of comfort.

The time had arrived, Mrs. Burton thought, alas! far sooner than she had expected, which justified her former disapproval of the mode of Amy’s bringing up. Too early, poor child, had she been summoned to meet misfortune, face to face. The sight of that terrible aspect might perhaps have proved too much for her courage.

Mrs. Burton believed too, and the prim maiden lady believed, that other mischances besides pecuniary ones, had their share in rendering the health of Amy Meadows at the moment of leaving Radensford nearly as precarious as that of her mother. They had witnessed the commencement of her acquaintance with William Eustace; they had noticed his attentions to her.

they had seen her intense anxiety at the commencement of his illness. But they also remembered the severity of countenance assumed by Lady Harriet when they hazarded the smallest allusion to the subject: and neither of them was in the slightest degree aware of Mr. Eustace's hurried visit to Meadows Court, or its results.

It was consequently only natural that, with the proneness of their sex for hearing the wings of invisible Cupids perpetually fluttering in the air, they should decide that Amy Meadows's fall from her high estate was grievously embittered by the pangs of a disappointed first love.

Poor girl!—her troubles needed no such enhancement. It was enough to see the darling mother she loved so dearly, ill-lodged, ill-fed, and ill-attended: to have had the sunshine of her innocent life extinguished in a moment; to leave old neighbour Savile and the rest of her pensioners succourless in the midst of winter;—to find the hands of strangers laid upon objects she had been accustomed to hold sacred;—and feel herself razed from an honourable line.

While Mary Tremenheere was whispering at the Rectory her fears that dear Lady Harriet and the Eustaces might not prove the only family of distinction likely to disdain an alliance with the poverty-stricken daughter of an ex-governess, the tears of the object of her pity were falling in secret over her discovery, *not* that her mother was of humble birth, but that her father's living sister kept aloof from them, even in the day of their tribulation: that no cousin Hugh, or Marcus, or Olivia, took pity on her fate.

The beauty and novelty of the scenery to which they were thus disastrously transferred, had no charms for the mourners. Overpowered by her journey, and the harassing events by which it was preceded, Lady Meadows was again confined to the sofa; nor would her daughter quit her side, save for her Sabbath devotions. In the little glaring drawing-room, from which it was equally impossible to exclude the sun and wind that rendered its tawdry ornaments so faded, and brought down such gusts of smoke from its narrow chimney, they were

Cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd,

as in a lantern. For some days after their instalment, Amy, with the sanguine promptings of her age, kept listening for arrivals. She felt sure that one or other of the kind friends who had taken so much thought for them, would follow them to see how they fared under their trials. Clifton was scarcely thirty miles from Radensford. They could come and return in a day. Alas! poor girl, she took not into account the amount of time already sacrificed by these good people in their behalf; that each and all had other duties to attend to. The bounds of human virtue have their limit. Even the Good Samaritan took out only two pence for the benefit of the wounded wayfarer; and others besides Lady Harriet Warneford were perhaps of opinion that Sir Mark's widow and daughter must learn to shift for themselves.

Amy continued, however, to rush to the window whenever some vehicle stopped in the vicinity of their house; hoping to see the benevolent countenance of Mr. Henderson, the kindly smile of his daughter, or the knitted brows of Dr. Burnaby. Even the deaf old Admiral and his niece would have been welcome. But the carriages brought only strangers to visit the strangers by whom they were surrounded. Not one familiar face—not one kindly word—not one glance of comfort for Amy Meadows.

The worst was that the only civilities offered her were far more irksome than this enforced solitude. The person by whom their lodgings were kept—the “lady,” as she carefully styled herself—having no other occupation for her time and thoughts but the victims under her charge, was moved to bestow an unusual share of both upon her new inmates. They had been especially recommended to her by Dr. Burnaby—from whom she had often before received consignments of invalid patients. But never a Baronet's widow—never a girl so lovely as “sweet Miss Meadows.” Mrs. Darby felt that she had a right to affect extraordinary interest in their welfare; and bestow her longest dictionary words and profoundest curtsies upon them, while daily inquiring what it would please her ladyship to take for dinner—because the appetite of an invalid like her ladyship ought to be consulted—and she could easy get a spring chicken

for her ladyship, or a little grass, if her ladyship would only condescend to say the word.

To such suggestions, when Amy was alone, Mrs. Darby by degrees ventured to add a few words of advice on the subject of domestic economy and the etiquettes of life: interrupting her officious counsels with cant and palaver only the more offensive to pious ears for being clothed in the language of Scripture;—like robes stolen from a sacristy to be degraded into masquerade costumes.

“Poor dear! one hardly knows which is the greater child, the mother or the daughter,” observed Mrs. Darby, shaking her long streamers of forlorn ringlets as she whispered her confidences to her parlour lodger, Mr. Alaric Amphlett—(“a hindependent gentleman” she described him to Amy, “which lives on his means, and has resided under my humble roof these seven year come Michaelmas).” “One wishes to do one’s dooty, and something more than one’s dooty, Mr. Halaric, to such poor forlorn creaturs. The widow of Sir Mark Meadows, of Meadows Court, Sir; one of the first families in Gloucestershire; but left very bad off I’m afeard;—no male attendant—nothing but one superannuated groping old maid for both—as cross and short, if I ask her a question, as if she didn’t understand who she was a speaking to.”

After which explanations, interlarded with a few well-worn texts which she was accustomed to mince up for her lodgers with their stale bread and rancid mutton, she was requested by her sympathising first-floor to convey to the “poor forlorn creaturs” a copy of the *Somersetshire Weekly Herald*—and the last *Punch*, “with Mr. Alaric Amphlett’s best respects, and hopes that her ladyship felt herself the better for the salubrious climate of her new abode.”

Not a little was Mrs. Darby offended when, on gliding more theatrically than usual on the morrow into Amy’s chamber, and delivering her credentials with her accustomed attention to stage-effect, Miss Meadows received the overtures of her gallant fellow-lodger with somewhat more than indifference. She begged Mrs. Darby would return the papers. Her mother did not care for such things. She had herself no time for reading.

When, by dint of perpetually throwing himself in her way in the narrow entry, on her way to church, Mr. A. A. eventually contrived to make himself known by sight, Amy's indifference to his overtures ripened into disgust. The self-conceited vulgarity of the "independent gentleman" (a superannuated Bristol clerk, the Lovelace of the small tea-parties of Clifton), rendered it pleasanter to proceed in the rain when overtaken by a shower, than accept the umbrella with which he had been officiously following her for the chance of a self-introduction.

"I know it does not become me to be proud. I know I ought to be thankful for any one's civilities. But I have not patience with this forward man. How am I to make Mrs. Darby understand that she is only to make her appearance when rung for; and that I do not wish to hear again the name of Mr. Alaric Amphlett?"

She *did* contrive to make both facts clearly understood. But in doing so, when Mrs. Darby presented herself as the bearer of a "bittiful boquet, which Mr. Halaric 'oped would be hacceptable to her ladies," she also contrived to make an enemy. Though Miss Meadows announced her own and her mother's wishes for the strictest privacy, in the gentlest terms, with all her usual lady-like self-possession, Mrs. Darby flounced out of the room, scarcely able to bridle her indignation.

"They shan't be troubled much more with my hassiduties," she observed, in reporting to her parlour-floor the ill-success of her mission. "Folks which content themselves all the month round with harrow-root and boiled mutton, needn't give themselves quite the hairs of Hempress Queens."

It was precisely while occupied in giving vent to her resentments, in A. A.'s private apartment, that she overheard her Nora in dimity anything but *white*, informing an applicant for an interview with Lady Meadows, that her ladyship was a great invalid, and saw no company.

"Miss Meadows, then;—he particularly wished to see Miss Meadows."

"The young lady never left her mamma."

The visitor gave utterance to several exclamations of vexation and disappointment. "It was particularly provoking. He had

come from a great distance to see them." To all which, Mrs. Darby listened through the half-open door of Mr. Halaric's parlour; delighted to believe that Miss Meadowes's haughty prohibition would prove the means of depriving her of the sight of some valued friend.

A peep at the visitor seemed to render this still more probable. For though bronzed in face, and though his mourning-suit was of a cut very different from the Bath fashions sported by the independent gentleman, he was strikingly handsome in face, and possessed a fine manly military-looking figure.

"Couldn't you send up your name, Sir?" suggested the servant, on whom his appearance seemed to produce as favourable an impression as on her mistress.

The proposal probably staggered the intruder; for he neither answered it, nor retreated from the door. Probably because he knew that *his* name was the last in the world likely to be acceptable to those he was desirous to conciliate. But the suggestion had given a new direction to his plans. Taking out his pocket-book, he wrote a line or two on a leaf hastily torn from it; and requested that it might be immediately taken to Miss Meadowes.

What would the lady in the forlorn ringlets, ensconced behind the parlour door, or the individual in the plaid jacket who stood biting his nails in her rear, have given for a glimpse of the mysterious missive!—It was not for them to surmise that the nameless individual had announced himself as waiting upon Lady Meadowes on the part of Messrs. Preston of Cardington; and when the servant returned, bidding him "walk up," they naturally attributed the audience so readily granted by a young lady requiring the "strictest privacy," to the mustachios that graced his lip, and the assurance of his deportment.

Amy, meanwhile, who, after her dismissal of the importunate Mrs. Darby, had sat down to occupy herself at her drawing-table, hoping to recover her composure before her mother, who was enjoying her afternoon nap, should wake and summon her, was little prepared for the appearance of the supposed clerk of Messrs. Preston and Son. Having risen at his entrance and advanced a few steps to meet him, instead of offering him a seat,

she paused in an embarrassed manner, colouring deeply, as she surveyed the handsome stranger.

"I fear there has been some mistake," she began—scarcely knowing how to express her regret at having sanctioned the visit.

"None—if I have the honour of addressing Miss Meadowes," replied the frank stranger; in a voice which still further deepened the flush on Amy's cheek.

"You have probably some message for my mother from Mr. Preston," said she. "I regret to say that mamma is as yet unequal to business."

"The only business I have to transact with Lady Meadowes," he rejoined, courteously placing for poor Amy the chair she seemed so loth to offer to himself, "is to express those heartfelt apologies for neglect and estrangement, which would not have been so long delayed, but that the last half-dozen years of my life have been spent in India. I have only very lately become aware of my unintentional failure in duty to so near a relative."

"My cousin—yes, my cousin, Mark Davenport!" exclaimed Miss Meadowes, starting forward with extended hands and a countenance brightened with joy. "I guessed it—I was sure of it the moment you spoke. Your voice and countenance are both so like—so very like"—her voice faltered. She could not conclude her sentence. But there was no need to name her "poor father."

"I have been told so before, Amy. I have been told that I was quite a Meadowes; and I have a fond mother who does not, I suspect, like me the less for the resemblance," said he, cordially pressing her hands, as he stood contemplating his charming new-found relative; who, trembling in every limb with surprise and emotion, was only too glad to accept the chair placed for her, and to find Marcus, the often dreamed of Marcus—seated by her side.

"I have thought of you so much," said she, with frank unreserve. "Alone as I am in the world, cousin, it seemed so hard to have such near relations without a hope of ever meeting. How happy, how *very* happy, my mother will be!"

"Are you sure of that, Amy? Lady Meadowes has much to resent!"

"She never resents. My mother is an angel. She may perhaps grieve that you never took courage to come and see us at Meadows Court, during the lifetime of my father. Now, your visit will seem like a concession made to people fallen in the world:—not a spontaneous impulse of affection."

Captain Davenport felt perhaps a little guilty: conscious that a spontaneous impulse of affection for his aunt or cousin was by no means the *primum mobile* of his visit.

"It will be more generous of you, Amy," said he, "to accept without retrospect, the contrition of one who has offended. It is the privilege of the Almighty to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children. At Ilford Castle, I promise you, the children—even when men—are allowed no will of their own. Will you believe that, for twenty years of my life, I was ignorant that my mother had a brother?"

"I believe it readily—because I was brought up in the same error. Never in their lives did my father and mother mention before me the name of Davenport."

"Then how came you so familiar with that of your cousin Mark?" he inquired, with a smile. "You welcomed me as if I had been long looked for, come at last!"

"Long *wished* for—not expected," was her honest reply. "I had heard of you from one of our neighbours at Meadows Court."

"Lady Harriet Warneford—the sister of a friend of my mother—"

"No, our Rector's daughter—the widow of one of your friends—"

"Mrs. Burton? You know Rachel Burton?" said he—and an expression of reserve suddenly overclouded his face. He would have been better pleased, could he have surmised how very little concerning him the "widow of his friend" had ever allowed herself to communicate to his young cousin.

"She once showed me some of your beautiful sketches, continued Amy, not noticing his change of countenance; "and I felt quite proud of you. And then, your bearing my father's name made you seem almost more than a cousin—more like a brother. It appears absurd, now that we have met at last, and

you are sitting here by my side, how often and often I have wished some accident might bring us together !”

Mark Davenport did not seem to think it at all absurd. Nothing could be more natural. But he was inexpressibly charmed by the kindness and candour of his uncle's child. He could trace in her, as she discerned in him, marked evidence of kindred blood. Her delicate features resembled those of his sister Olivia. Her winning manner brought Lady Davenport before his eyes.

“And how am I to prepare dear mamma for all this?” said Amy, too much disturbed by the flurry of her own thoughts and feelings, to perceive how earnestly he was examining her—perhaps with the hope of discerning some trait of Hargoodism among the many characteristics of the house of Meadowes. “What am I to say to her? That you are come with a message of kindness from Lord and Lady Davenport?”

“No, Amy—you must not say *that*. My father is neither milder nor wiser in his old age than he was in his youth : and there are some points on which I never consult him. My life would otherwise be a perpetual skirmish. But you may tell her, Amy, and you cannot tell it her too kindly,” he continued, again taking his cousin affectionately by the hand—“that her once cherished Gertrude is breaking her heart that her brother should have gone down to the grave unreconciled. Go and tell her that, dear child. Prepare her to be lenient towards the son of her old friend. Prepare her to accept such atonement as I have to offer. Prepare her to look kindly on my mother's son.”

Amy hesitated. She dreaded the agitation to which such an explanation would expose her enfeebled mother. If it were but over! If all were said, and settled, and Lady Meadowes would consent to take to her heart this out-spoken and warm-hearted nephew!

“Have you brought no letter—no express message from Lady Davenport?” she inquired, endeavouring to gain courage from delay.

“No my dear cousin. We trust to the voice of nature to plead for us.”

“It will require some time, at all events, to prepare my mother's feelings,” resumed Amy. “To-day, probably, she will not make up her mind to an interview.”

"She must—she must! To-morrow I shall be gone. My time is limited."

"You surely cannot leave us so very soon!" she exclaimed, startled by this announcement.

"It would be too hard to lose you, Cousin Mark, before our acquaintance is half begun!"

"It will depend on yourself, dear Amy, to see as much as you please of me, for the remainder of our days." And having drawn to his lips the hand he was holding, he was proceeding to imprint upon it as warm a kiss as if it had been that of Mary Hargood, when a disagreeable voice apprised them that the head of the inquisitive Mrs. Darby was intruded into the room.

"If you please, Miss Meadows, mem, her ladyship's rung her bell twice, mem," said the lady of the forlorn ringlets—"and nobody seems to attend to it. If you wish, mem, I have no objection to step up to her ladyship and inform her you are particularly engaged."

CHAPTER XVI.

THOUGH the spring was now breaking, the orderly domicile of Hargood was, if possible, still more gloomy than in those short November days when Mary was vainly watching for a ray of real daylight to shine upon her unfinished Murillo.

Never in the darkest moments of their unjoyous life had she seen her father so taciturn as during the month which followed his outbreak of ire against Captain Davenport. She knew him too well to recur to the subject. She was aware that no intercession of hers would prevail upon him to withdraw his interdiction of the offender's further visits, or induce him to answer poor Marcus's letters of apology. Inflexible as Jove the Inscrutable, the man who had spent thirty years of his life sitting in critical judgement upon dynasties and governments, kings, lords, and commons—extinguishing poets by a sneer, mangling heroes by a home-thrust, torturing artists, exasperating comedians, and putting poets to the edge of the penknife—was not likely

to abdicate his opinion at the intercessions of an inexperienced girl. The systematic manufacture of leading articles has a marvellous effect on the human mind; and since the frog in the fable, self-inflated into emulation of the ox, nothing perhaps has more nearly approached the arrogance of Oriental autocracy, than the "we" of a popular editor. Hargood, under his private sense of provocation and injury, went on slashing books, and carving ministerial measures into mince-meat. But he was none the milder in his intercourse with his unoffending daughter.

Nevertheless, under all this seeming rigour, tender feelings were throbbing in his heart. His sister's name was once more ringing in his ears. She from whom he had parted a girl, was now, it appeared, a widow—a widow with an only daughter: and such a position was only the more sacred in his eyes from the afflictions with which his family experience had brought him acquainted.

He would have given worlds to obtain some information about her, could he have done so without compromising by inquiry, his surly dignity. Right well he knew how long and diligently she had endeavoured to trace him out; and what trouble, for many years, it had cost him to evade her officious beneficence. But this obduracy came back to him, now, like a bitter reproach. He sometimes threw aside his pen, in the midst of a caustic article likely to exterminate some thin-skinned, ill-fated author, to rest his brow upon his hand, and live over again those happy days at Henstead Parsonage, when Mary was his idol: and her gentle nature interposed like a medium of peace between his victims and the retributive justice of a severe editor. For like most tyrants, he had been a rebel in his youth: just as now, though one of the most eloquent champions of universal freedom, he held in more than iron durance his children and household.

Though he would have rebuked her presumption, had his daughter taken courage to question him concerning the intelligence communicated in her presence by Captain Davenport, he almost resented her seeming *insouciance* on the subject. Mary did not appear interested so much as to know what had become of her brother artist!—

Hargood was aware that Captain Davenport had left town. Was it to return to India? Were they never to meet again? The notion troubled him sorely: and to the great surprise of Hamilton Drewe he found himself called upon one morning by one for whose visits he had vainly canvassed.

But Drewe knew nothing more than that the pink cockatoo was incessantly screeching after its master; and that Davenport's servant had returned from Ilford Castle, stating that "the Captain was gone on a tower." For this scanty intelligence, Hargood had to pay the penalty of listening to half-a-dozen wiry lyrics, which the poet modestly hinted he should not be sorry to see inserted in the leading journal of which his visitor was the hierophant.

"The servant did not mention whether Captain Davenport was gone into Gloucestershire?" was all the answer he vouchsafed to this modest suggestion.

As if the lyrist, whose ears were ringing with the rhythm of his own strophes, could have certified just then whether Gloucestershire lay north or south of the Trent! Hargood perceived, at last, that the poet's thoughts, like his eye, were "in a fine frenzy rolling;" and quietly took his hat and returned home.

His two boys had arrived at home for the holidays; holidays which consisted in being kept harder at work and far more tongue-tied, than in their Hammersmith playground; and had found their home if possible more joyless, and Mary still more silent, than on any preceding Christmas. It was almost a release when they stepped into the omnibus which conveyed them from that well-regulated home, where affection and leisure were as conscientiously economised as money or money's worth. For them, poor lads, no pleasant pantomime—no visits to panoramas, or public shows: albeit tickets of free-admission were lying dusty and uncared for in the card-rack of their father; who regarded such temptations as a farmer regards the gaudy poppies and darnel among his corn.

There were others, however, besides the young Hargoods who, at the close of that Christmas vacation, returned to school far more saddened than cheered by the results of their holidays. A

sadder if not a wiser man, was the William Eustace who returned to his chambers in the Albany, on the self-same day that conveyed Mark Davenport to Clifton, than the fastidious young gentleman who had made the Manor House of Radensford his city of refuge during the preceding season of partridge shooting.

The excitement of mind under which he had hurried from Meadows Court, after his humiliating interview with Amy, had scarcely yet subsided; for his mortification was in proportion to his self-conceit. For her sake he had embroiled himself with all his nearest relatives; and to return to the home on whose hearth he had played the Ajax, was impossible. And though he had made a momentary appearance at the Manor House, not to confide to Lady Harriet the indifference of the woman he loved, but to accuse the Semiramis of Radensford of being, by misrepresentation and plotting, the cause of his rejection, he had quitted the house as impetuously and resentfully as he sought it: scurrying off, like a whirlwind, towards London—Paris—Vienna—Constantinople—he did not much care where! so that he might never again set eyes on any member of that degraded and stultified class of the community, the Baronetage of the United Kingdom—or old granges with moats effusing miasma, and inmates encrusted with Prejudice.

He found himself attacking a basin of mulligatawney soup in the Ship Hotel, Dover, before he half recovered his breath or self-command. And since for Paris his passport was taken out, and to Paris his baggage was addressed, onward went the penitent *blasé*; in a miserable state of mind, between frost and thaw; much as Don Juan may have felt, when the icy grasp of the Commendatore was sending its first chill through his marrow. After a few weeks spent in wandering about without motive or purpose, and in a most misanthropical state of mind, William Eustace returned to London, and took his seat in the House at the commencement of the Session, in a mood as changed as if some mesmeric operation had transformed his nature. Like the relief we experience in throwing off an eider-down coverlet after a nightmare, as though a mountain were removed from one's breast, he felt unaccountably emancipated.

As yet, he had accomplished nothing, but the resolution to look the world steadily in the face. But such resolutions lay the first stone of the greatness that won the battle of Waterloo, or established steam locomotion.

The great point was to turn as deaf ear as Princess Parizade in the story, to the idle voices scouting his progress.

“What a prig Billy Eustace is becoming,” was soon a common cry at his club. “He has returned from Paris ‘*trainant l’aile et trainant le pied*,’ like a disabled carrier pigeon.”

“The worst result of these wondrous wise times!” sneered one of his playfellows.

“And he looks as wise, all the time,” added Lord Curt de Cruxley, “as a magpie that has stolen a marrow-bone, which it does not know how to pick.”

* * * * *

“What possible advantage can you foresee, Captain Davenport, in our removal to London?” expostulated Lady Meadowes, as the family at Clifton sat united round a sociable tea-table, the evening after Marcus’s arrival at Clifton; already, after a thousand grievous explanations, animated by a spirit as friendly as though their intimacy were of half a century’s duration.

“A thousand!—ten thousand!” was his earnest reply. “In the first place, to people of small means, London is the cheapest place in the world. In the next, since you desire to throw off at once the habits of your days of opulence, so complete a change will greatly facilitate the task. Above all, this dear little cousin of mine will lead a far more cheerful life.”

“Mark is right, dear mother,” said Amy, having at once adopted that familiar name, which Lady Meadowes, haunted by painful reminiscences, found it impossible to pronounce. “I have been thinking over the Welsh cottage scheme, to which I had been looking forward for next spring. But it would involve a thousand evils. You cannot live at a distance from medical advice. You cannot stir out on foot.”

“And do you imagine, darling, that London would make me stronger for the attempt?” said Lady Meadowes, smiling at her enthusiasm.

"You might obtain carriage exercise at an easier rate," said Captain Davenport.

"Above all," pleaded Amy, "we should not be watched and overlooked as we are here. In this small place, minnows are Tritons. In the great throng of London, we should be unnoticed."

"Remember, darling child," said Lady Meadows, "that in fixing ourselves on leaving this place, we must make no mistake. We cannot afford to be whimsical or restless. It would be criminal to encroach on the little fund created by the sale at Meadows Court to gratify our roving fancies; and, moreover, we know so little of the ways of the great world, that surely we are safer in the country."

"You set little value on my zeal and prowess as a champion, my dear aunt," said Captain Davenport, encouraged in his pleading by the earnest looks of Amy. "Did you not promise me this morning to accept my poor services as a friend—a nephew—a son?"

"Most thankfully. But *you* will return to your regiment—"

"Never! I have done with soldiering."

"At all events, you have engrossing occupations and engagements, which would often leave us lonely."

"Why lonely?" rejoined Captain Davenport. "You cannot mean to remain permanently estranged from society? For some time to come," he added, as he saw her cast a saddened glance on her weeds, "you will naturally live in seclusion. But Amy must not, at eighteen, renounce a world she has never seen."

"She must—she must," interrupted his cousin. "Poor as we are, it will be an act of self-respect to avoid collision with people richer and greater than ourselves. Why may not a quiet home, with all its duties, be enjoyed in London as elsewhere?"

"We will leave *that* question to take care of itself hereafter," said Captain Davenport, glancing at the lovely face as yet so completely unconscious of its attractions—a dowry how much richer than the fund created by the sale of his uncle's pictures and plate! But he fondly fancied that the occasion was a good one for alluding to a subject which, at present, he had not ventured to approach—a reconciliation between Lady Meadows and her

established than many a counting-house clerk, and her younger banished from the family circle by the prison-discipline of New street, was fain to content herself with rendering Olivia's school-room and chamber as trim and cheerful and simply-elegant, as became their pretty occupant.

Olivia, though shy and timid in her father's presence, expanded into another being when alone with her mother, who looked forward with pain and grief to the discovery awaiting her of her father's coarseness of mind, and hardness of heart: and endeavored to get her out of the room whenever the tact, created by long experience, forewarned her that a domestic storm was at hand.

One day, shortly after their arrival in town, Hugh was in the drawing-room with his mother and sister, when a heavy creaking step to which even the massive stone staircase responded as if in awe, announced that the head of the family had issued from his sanctum below, to join the family conclave.

"Can either of you inform me," he inquired, addressing his wife and son, after assuming his most imperial and tonant attitude on the hearth-rug, "What has become of Captain Davenport? When he quitted Ilford, he told me, with his usual disrespectful levity, that we should meet in town—nay, that he should probably be in London before me."

"And is he not arrived?" inquired Lady Davenport, anxiously.

"Neither arrived nor expected, that I can hear of. Having business of importance to talk over with him, I wrote to desire he would wait on me at dinner to-day. No answer. Accustomed to his habitual disregard of the decencies of life, I thought it better to send and inquire whether he chose to give me the honor of his company. John has just returned."

"Why not mention the subject to me, my dear father," interposed Hugh, "I could at least have told you he was not in town."

"Perhaps, then," grunted Lord Davenport, "You can relieve my uncertainty by favoring me with his address?"

"I wish I could. But on that point I must plead ignorance. Mark informed me that he promised himself the relaxation of a little tour in the South of England, before he settled in town for the season."

"Relaxation!" cried Lord Davenport, indignantly shrugging his shoulders. "A pretty person to need relaxation, whose whole life is a system of the most contemptible lounging."

"He earned his leisure, however, father, by some years of professional exertion."

"Professional fiddlestick! Carried by sepoy's in a palanquin, smoking a hookah. I heard him own it, one evening at Ilford, to my neighbor, Sir Gardner Dalmaine."

"As a joke, my dear Lord Davenport," remonstrated his wife. "Mark is, I own, a little too fond of hoaxing our country neighbor."

"At all events, he has had time to recover from what Hugh is good enough to call his professional exertions; and having partaken throughout the holidays of the cheer and cheerfulness of our fireside, there is no occasion surely for his wasting money in skulking about the country, like Dr. Syntax in search of the Picturesque, without so much as acquainting his servant where his letters are to be addressed."

"His servant accompanied him when he left Ilford," observed Lady Davenport in a deprecatory tone.

"When he *left* Ilford. But he soon shook him off. And I know nothing more suspicious than when a man gets rid for a time of a favourite servant, on whose attendance he is at other moments effeminately dependent."

Lady Davenport whispered to Olivia, who was beginning to look nervous and alarmed at the increasing irritability of her father's manner, that she ought to run over her *solfège* for half an hour in the school-room, preparatory to her lesson from Signor Garcia. But the angry man did not wait for the door to close upon his daughter before he renewed his vituperation.

"It is scarcely respectable," said he, "for a man's whereabouts to be so great a mystery, that his own father knows not where to address a letter to him. And I shall be placéd under the necessity of making this disgraceful admission to my friend Lord Lothbury."

"I have not the least doubt that Mark will be here in a few days," said Hugh. "London is filling—the exhibitions are opening—"

established than many a counting-house clerk, and her younger banished from the family circle by the prison-discipline of New street, was fain to content herself with rendering Olivia's school-room and chamber as trim and cheerful and simply-elegant, as became their pretty occupant.

Olivia, though shy and timid in her father's presence, expanded into another being when alone with her mother, who looked forward with pain and grief to the discovery awaiting her of her father's coarseness of mind, and hardness of heart: and endeavored to get her out of the room whenever the tact, created by long experience, forewarned her that a domestic storm was at hand.

One day, shortly after their arrival in town, Hugh was in the drawing-room with his mother and sister, when a heavy creaking step to which even the massive stone staircase responded as if in awe, announced that the head of the family had issued from his sanctum below, to join the family conclave.

"Can either of you inform me," he inquired, addressing his wife and son, after assuming his most imperial and tonant attitude on the hearth-rug, "What has become of Captain Davenport? When he quitted Ilford, he told me, with his usual disrespectful levity, that we should meet in town—nay, that he should probably be in London before me."

"And is he not arrived?" inquired Lady Davenport, anxiously.

"Neither arrived nor expected, that I can hear of. Having business of importance to talk over with him, I wrote to desire he would wait on me at dinner to-day. No answer. Accustomed to his habitual disregard of the decencies of life, I thought it better to send and inquire whether he chose to give me the honor of his company. John has just returned."

"Why not mention the subject to me, my dear father," interposed Hugh, "I could at least have told you he was not in town."

"Perhaps, then," grunted Lord Davenport, "You can relieve my uncertainty by favoring me with his address?"

"I wish I could. But on that point I must plead ignorance. Mark informed me that he promised himself the relaxation of a little tour in the South of England, before he settled in town for the season."

“Relaxation!” cried Lord Davenport, indignantly shrugging his shoulders. “A pretty person to need relaxation, whose whole life is a system of the most contemptible lounging.”

“He earned his leisure, however, father, by some years of professional exertion.”

“Professional fiddlestick! Carried by sepoy in a palanquin, smoking a hookah. I heard him own it, one evening at Ilford, to my neighbor, Sir Gardner Dalmaine.”

“As a joke, my dear Lord Davenport,” remonstrated his wife. “Mark is, I own, a little too fond of hoaxing our country neighbor.”

“At all events, he has had time to recover from what Hugh is good enough to call his professional exertions; and having partaken throughout the holidays of the cheer and cheerfulness of our fireside, there is no occasion surely for his wasting money in skulking about the country, like Dr. Syntax in search of the Picturesque, without so much as acquainting his servant where his letters are to be addressed.”

“His servant accompanied him when he left Ilford,” observed Lady Davenport in a deprecatory tone.

“When he *left* Ilford. But he soon shook him off. And I know nothing more suspicious than when a man gets rid for a time of a favourite servant, on whose attendance he is at other moments effeminately dependent.”

Lady Davenport whispered to Olivia, who was beginning to look nervous and alarmed at the increasing irritability of her father’s manner, that she ought to run over her *solfège* for half an hour in the school-room, preparatory to her lesson from Signor Garcia. But the angry man did not wait for the door to close upon his daughter before he renewed his vituperation.

“It is scarcely respectable,” said he, “for a man’s whereabouts to be so great a mystery, that his own father knows not where to address a letter to him. And I shall be placèd under the necessity of making this disgraceful admission to my friend Lord Lothbury.”

“I have not the least doubt that Mark will be here in a few days,” said Hugh. “London is filling—the exhibitions are opening—”

“In a few days, Sir!” reiterated Lord Davenport, in a louder key; “London filling! the exhibitions opening! A pretty plea for me to adduce to my Lord Lothbury. Do you suppose his Excellency will wait,—for a week perhaps, to learn whether Captain Davenport is graciously pleased to accept the offer he has made me to appoint him his aide-de-camp?”

“Aide-de-camp to the Lord Lieutenant?” repeated Lady Davenport—astonished that anything like preferment should be tendered to poor Mark through the medium of his father.

“I am persuaded my brother would *not* accept the appointment,” said Hugh, almost equally surprised. “Indeed I think you must admit, my lord, that it is a place for which he is peculiarly unfitted, by his independent habits and hatred of everything like courtly formality.”

“And what business, Sir, has he to hate it, or to pretend to independent habits? Who, pray, is to afford him the means of maintaining them? Captain Davenport is always complaining of the narrowness of his fortune. An opportunity is afforded him of doubling his income. Let me see him refuse it. I say, only let me see him refuse it!”

Lady Davenport and her son interchanged a hurried glance; as if to interrogate each other as to the prudence of placing his lordship at once in possession of Marcus’s intentions. The candour of Hugh Davenport’s nature prevailed. He could not be a party to even an innocent concealment.

“I fear, my lord, it is now too late,” said he. “Lord Lothbury’s kind intention can no longer be of service to my brother. I have reason to think he has already sent in his papers to the Horse-Guards, with the intention of selling out.”

“Without apprising *me*?” roared Lord Davenport. “A son of mine has actually committed me by an important communication to the Horse-Guards, concerning which the Commander-in-Chief may at any moment accost me, in the House or elsewhere, and find me utterly ignorant! Impossible, Sir, impossible!”

“I understood that he *did* consult you, so long ago as last spring,” expostulated Lady Davenport: “but found you so vio-

lently opposed to his views, that he dared not again broach the subject."

"My opposition to his project, then, you consider a justification of his rushing headlong to its execution?"

"Not a justification,—a motive. He was afraid to displease you by communicating his plans."

"Then let him pause before he announces that they are carried out!" cried Lord Davenport, livid with anger. "For by the living God, if Mark Davenport renounces an honourable profession to become a mean, snivelling, hireling mechanic of a limner, never shall he enter my doors again—no, *never*. Nor will I harbour even his brother or sister, if they keep up the smallest intercourse with him under circumstances so derogatory. This I will thank you, Mr. Davenport, not only to bear in mind, but to communicate to your brother, in its full extent, when he skulks out of his hiding-place, and makes his appearance among gentlemen."

The loud clap of the door slammed behind himself by his lordship on quitting the room after this outburst, scarcely sufficed to startle his wife out of her stupefaction. She knew that her son *would* persist in his intentions; that he had already taken measures past recalling. And what would be the result to them all? Family disunion—family disgrace! the affection which united in so strict a bond of mutual reliance herself and her three children, seemed on the eve of dissolution.

"For mercy's sake, dear Hugh, hurry off to your brother's lodgings," she faltered, the moment she recovered her power of utterance, "and if he be not yet arrived, leave a line for him, explaining all this, and entreating him not to appear in this house till you have had a personal interview. Marcus *must* not meet his father in Lord Davenport's present state of excitement."

Almost before the charge was given, he was gone. And not till then, and she found herself alone, did poor Lady Davenport give free course to her maternal anguish. She resolved to address a few words of admonition to her rebellious son. But before her pen was dipped in the ink, the door opened hastily, and he was by her side.

"My dearest, dearest Mark—how lucky that you are come!"

cried she. "When did you arrive? Have you—*have you*—seen your father?"

"Seen him? Yes! Though, thank Heaven, he did not see *me*. I perceived him at a distance just now, near the Horse Guards,—pushing down to the House I presume,—with his hat pulled over his brows as if he had been bonneted! I need not add that I instantly glided off towards the Mall; and sidled round gracefully into Spring Gardens."

"Luckily; for he is greatly incensed against you, my dear boy!"

"Of course, mother, of course. From the day I went to Eton, when was he otherwise?"

"But this is a very different affair. He threatens—"

"To disinherit me,—to throw me up,—to cut me off with a shilling. I know it all, mother! I have heard it hundreds and thousands of times. It is about as alarming to my ear as the thunder of an Adelpi melodrama."

"Mark,—I must not hear you talk thus of your father."

"Then don't listen to my father when he talks such nonsense of me. But I have things of greater consequence to say to you, dearest mother," he continued, having closed the still open drawing-room door, and taken a seat beside Lady Davenport; who vainly endeavoured to recal his attention to his father's anathema. "I have a great deal to tell you that will give you pain."

Lady Davenport thought, perhaps, that no addition to her present sorrow was needed.

"I have just quitted Lady Meadowes and my cousin."

Involuntarily she started, and turned towards the door. As if, though this time her husband was at the House of Lords, the treason might reach his ear.

"You fancied them safe at Meadowes Court. You thought poor Amy was an heiress. My dear, dear mother, they are all but beggars."

"Impossible! I knew through the Eustaces that my brother left all he possessed in the world to his daughter."

"But he had nothing to leave. The heir-at-law is in actual possession of the estate. The house is dismantled—uninhabited;—the most desolate place you ever beheld."

“Poor old Meadows Court!”

“Say rather poor Lady Meadows,—poor little Amy!”

“You found them, then, Mark? You made all the explanations we agreed upon?”

“I found them in a wretched lodging, and was far better received than was due to any one bearing the name of Davenport. I disclaimed, however, at once, all share in my father’s doings or opinions.”

“And Amy—is she pleasing,—does she resemble my poor brother?”

“My uncle I never saw. But she resembles *you*, mother; you, and Olivia. You will shortly have an opportunity of judging. I am going straight from here to engage lodgings for them. I have persuaded them to come to town.”

“A rash step, dear Mark, seeing their circumstances are so narrow.”

“You must do something for them; we must all do something for them.”

“You did not, I trust, promise this?” said poor Lady Davenport, conscious how often the disposal of a five pound note was beyond her command.

“Indeed, I did. I promised that you would be all kindness to them. I told Lady Meadows how bitterly you repented having been so tardy in advances of reconciliation to him she has lost.”

And this, Lady Davenport, even alarmed as she was at the thought of an impending struggle with her husband, could not deny.

“But it is not too late to make amends,” resumed her son. “And I am convinced that when my father sees what a pleasing lady-like woman is Lady Meadows, and what a charming creature her daughter, he will bury the past in oblivion, and receive them as they deserve.”

“Will you *ever* gain experience, my dear boy?” was Lady Davenport’s mournful rejoinder. “Surely you should know your father well enough to conclude that if he rejected my poor sister-in-law, when prosperous and under her husband’s protection, he is not likely to be kinder to her now she is indigent and helpless. You, and I, and Hugh, must do what we can;—cautiously, however, and by stealth; or family disunion will be the result.”

“And let it!” cried Mark, with indignation. “By stealth and cautiously? No! by Jupiter,—in the open face of day! I have not many relations, mother; but the two I am proudest of, are Amy and her mother. I challenge the whole dry, cold-blooded race of Davenports, from the wars of the Two Roses to the wars of Mark Davenport and his father, to produce anything worthy to be their waiting-maid! By stealth? No! You will hear me vindicate their claims to my father’s face, ay, as boldly and conscientiously as to yours.”

“Do not, however, too precipitately sacrifice to these new-found relatives all consideration for the comfort of your mother!” remonstrated Lady Davenport. “Wait, at least, for the advice and assistance of Hugh!”

“I will wait for nothing!” said Captain Davenport, angrily seizing his hat. “I have pledged my word to stand by them. I cannot compel you, mother, to keep the promises I made them in your name. But *my* word is not to be broken.”

He was off before she could reply. All her present anxiety was that he might clear the house without encountering his father. The new sources of discord opening between them were not likely to slake the blaze of the feud already flaming.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LADY MEADOWES was not altogether fortunate in her self-constituted champion. Though no man could be more honourable of purpose, or more undaunted in carrying it out, he was too much of a Hotspur for one who needed quieter sustainment. Uninfluenced by the wisdom of his ancestors or experience of his contemporaries, he took, in sporting phrase, “a line of his own across country,” which often brought him to grief; betraying him in miry ways, and even peril of life and limb.

It was March when he returned to town, to perpetrate his single combat with his father, and throw the whole family into confusion. But the buds on the sooty shrubberies of the squares

were attempting to turn green, before Captain Davenport proceeded to the Paddington station to welcome the inexperienced travellers he had taken under his protection.

Only twice before, in her life, had Lady Meadows visited London,—her daughter and their attendant, never; and as it was already dusk when, weary and saddened, they reached the outskirts of the foggy, misty, unsavoury city, wearing that heavy coverlid of smoke which modern bombast has dignified into “the tiara of commerce,” their impressions were somewhat disheartening. Several miles still divided them from the domicile provided for them. Captain Davenport’s experience of Hargood’s gloomy lodgings had decided him against the interior of the town; and the more fashionable outskirts, with their little two-storied pigeon-houses, of equivocal respectability, were ill-adapted, he thought, to the age and appearance, and unprotected position, of his cousin Amy. Ever in extremes, he had consequently selected for their domicile the antipodes of these sunny little bird-cages; and engaged a portion of an old-fashioned brick house in the Battersea road, the other half of which was partitioned off for the family of the proprietor,—a thriving market gardener.

To attain this far from attractive abode, with its slanting floors, creaking staircase, sloping ceilings and ill-fitting windows, they had to undertake five miles of suburban road, converted by the rains of the preceding day into rivers of mud—ill-lighted, ill-scented, solitary—the dreariest causeways which ever in her life Amy Meadows had been fated to traverse. Poor old Marlow, their prim maiden attendant, heaved a deep sigh as she secretly wished they were all safe back in Gloucestershire, on the pleasant banks of the Severn.

Even Marcus, when he saw them installed, enlivened by the light of a pair of blinking, tallow candles, and a smoky fire, began to fear he might have chosen better. The horse-hair couch on which he carefully deposited the invalid, was hard as Neighbour Savile’s oaken settle; and though Amy declared that the tea provided for them, in a black, earthy-smelling teapot, was excellent, and that they should make themselves perfectly comfortable on the morrow, her cousin felt his chest tighten at her assumed cheerfulness; and had never so deeply lamented his own

want of means to place those dear relatives in a situation more consonant with their rights. He kept glancing at Lady Meadows's pale face and wasted features, till, albeit unused to the melting mood, tears came into his eyes; and even after, at her request, he had taken leave of them for the night, he could not forbear remounting the creaking staircase and looking again into the sitting-room, to say that if they wanted him earlier than his appointed noon-day visit the following day, one of the garden lads could be despatched by the omnibus to fetch him, and he would be with them in a moment.

"I am almost sorry now," said he, with an involuntary glance round their cheerless abode, "that I did not engage a bed here, or in the neighbourhood. I cannot bear to leave you, alone."

He shrank, somehow, from the avowal, in Amy's presence, that he had been debarred from such an arrangement, lest, among strangers, it might lead to injurious imputations.

"If you don't go away, at once, Cousin Mark, I and Marlow must put you out of the house!" cried Amy, so cheerfully as almost to disarm his suspicions of her heavy-heartedness. And in a moment he was gone; leaving them to their weariness and their tears.

Davenport had as yet been unable to extort from his mother an explicit promise concerning a renewal of intercourse with Lady Meadows. The woman who had sacrificed her inclinations through life to the maintenance of family peace, was not likely to rush unguardedly into proceedings certain to exasperate her lord, and create an unhappy home for Hugh and Olivia. They had stronger claims upon her than even her brother's widow. It was quite enough to have to confront just then Lord Davenport's sullen resentment of the conduct of his younger son in leaving the army. He had forbidden Marcus the house. He had forbidden Lady Davenport to communicate with him. He would fain have forbidden Hugh. But he knew from former experience that it was useless.

With his usual perversity, however, Mark Davenport had himself effected what his father's prohibitions would have failed to accomplish. When he found his brother seconding Lord Davenport's projects for his advancement, and strongly recommending

his acceptance of the aide-de-campship, he chose to take in dudgeon the interference of Hugh, and express his sentiments in terms the most ungracious.

A coolness naturally ensued. But it was the commencement of a busy session, and Hugh Davenport was too fully occupied by a tedious committee, which added a long legislative morning to a long legislative night, to have leisure for grieving over the interruption of fraternal intercourse arising from the turbulent spirit of his brother.

"I wish, dear mother," said he one day to Lady Davenport, "you would ask my father's permission to invite young Eustace here, with his father and mother, whose names I see on your dinner list for Saturday next."

"Willingly—for we have two places vacant. But I fancied you disliked that young man?"

"I am not particularly fond of any of the family."

"Nor I," thought Lady Davenport; and she sighed when she recalled to mind her former motives for cultivating the acquaintance.

"It was Marcus, however, not myself, of whom William Eustace was always the pet aversion. It was Mark who gave him at Oxford the name of Young Vapid. Eustace made a capital speech the other night. All the clubs are talking of it; and as we happen to sit on the same side of the House, I am of course interested in his triumph."

A formal card of invitation was accordingly written and despatched. No fear that the son of a great landed proprietor and thorough-going Tory, like Sir Henry Eustace, would prove an unwelcome guest to the lord of Ilford Castle.

The result of this dinner-party was, that Lady Davenport fully concurred in the opinions concerning Young Vapid expressed by her son. She was pleased by his endeavors to meet the spirit and level of one of those intolerable dinner-parties composed of dunny, prosy, petty-minded people of established position, whom other people of established position are compelled to invite in London, because they have the misfortune to live near them in the country. But most of all, she admired the tact with which Mr. Eustace appeared to turn the deaf ear

becoming a respectful son, while Lady Louisa held forth, in her usual peremptory tone concerning books she did not understand, and political measures she could not appreciate.

"If Mark were here he might take a lesson much to his advantage," glanced through the mind of Lady Davenport. And the thought that he was absent from his father's board, and long likely to remain so, cast a sudden gloom over her countenance.

It brightened, however, when on adjourning to the drawing-room after that long, weary dinner, Olivia went the round of presentation to her female friends; and she saw how even those lukewarm judges were struck by the sight of her beauty. It needed not the admiration of others to apprise the fond mother of the native grace investing even her shyness with a peculiar charm. But she was delighted to see her encounter, with perfect self-possession, the ordeal of being complimented to her face by a half-doting dowager, and loftily interrogated touching her studies and pursuits by Lady Louisa Eustace, with the air of a doctor of divinity catechising a Sunday-school.

Olivia was still seated by this education-crazed lady, when Mr. Eustace, who made his appearance as punctually as the coffee tray, approached the sofa where Lady Davenport was listening with the good-breeding able to disguise the most perfect absence of mind, to the dowager's blundering description of a flower show of the preceding day.

"Your ladyship's daughter, I presume?" said he, glancing towards the poor girl, who was fluttering in the talons of his intellectual mamma, like a dove in those of a hawk; adding, less audibly—"a most singular likeness! I should have known her anywhere as a relation."

Lady Davenport, fancying he alluded to herself, pitied his deficiency of perception. How was she to conjecture that he was comparing the ingenuous countenance of Olivia with that of her cousin Amy. He did not, however, follow up his indiscreet remark, by requesting a presentation to the young lady whose muslin frock and unadorned braids announced her as "not out:"—perhaps because unwilling to undertake the task of reviving a victim who had been talked dead by his lady-mother. He

endeavored more sagely to recommend himself to Lady Davenport, by relieving her from the necessity of replying to questions put by the dowager, much after the style of those addressed by "correspondents" to weekly newspapers; assuring her that the Duchess of Kent had never been Duke of Cornwall—and that the *Freischütz* was *not* the last opera of Rossini.

He *had* his reward. When, on the old lady's carriage being announced, he offered his arm to conduct her to it, after which, he was to give a lift to Hugh Davenport in his brougham to be in time for a division, his hostess, while receiving his parting bow, expressed a wish to see him again.

On overhearing the invitation, Hugh Davenport was of opinion, that his dear mother was nearly as susceptible as himself to the flattery and improved deportment of William Eustace. He would have been still more amused could he have heard his father, when the party broke up, observe with much solemnity to Lady Davenport, "a very promising young man, Mr. Eustace, to be the son of that old Tweedle-dum, Sir Henry, and that dictionary-in-petticoats, Lady Louisa. Some very remarkable proofs he related to me of the superior advantage of sowing, in low-lying pastures, the *Festuca heterophylla*, instead of *Dactylis glomerata* or *Aira cæspitosa*, so much recommended by our Northern Agricultural Society."

If that dear Duchess, to whom William Eustace was just then repairing at the opera, after giving Hugh Davenport the slip at the House of Commons, could but have heard him talking turnips and artificial grasses with an ill-conditioned old landed proprietor! Above all, if she could have imagined that his object in the attempt was to ingratiate himself with the nearest relations of an insignificant country girl,—by whom his hand and heart had been already ignominiously rejected!

CHAPTER XVIII.

LADY MEADOWES would not have been induced to renounce so readily her plans of provincial retirement, even by the earnest

persuasions of her nephew, had he not afforded hopes, amounting almost to certainty, of a reunion with her brother.

He had not indeed been perfectly frank with her: for men in love conceive themselves privileged to assume a vizard. He had not courage to avow that he was actually acquainted with Hargood: fancying that his aunt would infer the covert motive of all his advances; an act of ingenuity of which that single-minded woman was about as capable as, by ruminating on her sofa, to discover the north-west passage. He promised, however, to leave no means untried to bring together the brother and sister.

Now that they were installed in the environs of London, a thousand coincidences seemed to suggest delay. Hargood must not find him established as the guardian angel of his sister and niece, till some act of conciliation had been vouchsafed by his parents. The unbending spirit of the clear-sighted man would perceive the indelicacy of their relative position:—and, sternly ejected, Battersea would fail to afford him a single step towards Soho. To engage his mother to meet his wishes, was at present impossible. His own wilfulness had created too powerful a barrier betwixt himself and home.

All he could do was to trust, as too many of us trust, to the chapter of accidents: a confidence which utterly depreciates the value of duty and principle. It was passing pleasant, however, to be welcomed every morning,—those bright spring mornings, when the vivifying influence of purer air and renovated vegetation seemed to put new life into his veins,—by the grateful mother and lovely, loving girl, who evidently regarded him as a guardian angel sent to guide them out of the land of Egypt.

Blind,—wilfully blind, perhaps,—to the decorum of the case, Lady Meadows could not deny her daughter the enjoyment of early walks with her cousin, which were to render Amy acquainted with the beauties of the neighborhood; the shrubby heights of Wandsworth,—the terraced banks of the Thames. Sometimes he took her on the water. Mark was a capital oarsman; and a glowing summer rendered the river breezes a delicious refreshment. It was there he received from her, in his turn, his first lessons in Italian. It was there he rehearsed to

her, by way of repayment, the stirring lyrics of Macaulay, or charmed her ear with the magic rhythm of Edgar Poe.

In the confiding self-surrender with which she hung upon his accents, spontaneously and unconsciously adopting his sentiments and opinions, he fancied he could recognise the influence of what the French call *la force du sang*. She loved him nearly as well as Olivia. A cousin resembled a sister then, still more closely than he had supposed! Would the time ever come, he wondered, when Amy's cousin would be added to the party; wandering with them among the ferny paths of Putney Heath, or listening to the dipping oars and the even-song of the blackbirds, in the green depths of Twickenham meadows?

Had the more cautious judgment of the Rector of Radensford, or his gruff colleague, been exercised upon the state of the case, Lady Meadows would perhaps have been accused of rashness, in her unreserved adoption of her nephew's supremacy in her house. But their interference was limited to the control of her pecuniary affairs. They had already invested her small personalty of £900. They were to receive quarterly, and pay down to her, her jointure; but by Sir Mark's will she was left sole guardian of her daughter. And even had it been otherwise, what pretence could they have found for denouncing an intimacy, likely to place their ward in the honorable position of daughter-in-law to the highly-allied sister of her father?

The lady of the forlorn ringlets had in fact accounted to her patron Dr. Burnaby, for the premature departure of her lodgers, by announcing an approaching marriage.

On his first visit to Clifton, he was assured that "his interesting prottijay was about to be led to the Hymminial haltar by the Honorable Captain Davenport; leastwise it was to be 'oped so,—for there was hevery *happearence* of a hengagement." And when the vindictive lady endeavored to avenge by this malicious insinuation the slights inflicted on the independent gentleman whom Captain Davenport had threatened to kick into a limbo often named in vulgar parlance, though unknown to ancient or modern geographers,—“the middle of next week,”—the good old doctor accepted the announcement in its pleasantest

sense; and wrote immediately to offer his hearty congratulations to the mother of his "hinteresting prottijay."

The letter startled her. But, however little she knew of the world, Lady Meadowes was aware that, in nine instances out of ten, such reports attend the commencement of every intimacy likely to end in courtship and marriage; and, prematurely promulgated, often lead to their termination. She contented herself, therefore, with vaguely replying that "there was no probability of her losing her dear child so soon as her kind friend seemed to anticipate;" and, having committed his letter to the flames, hoped that the subject was disposed of.

One day, when dusty and tired, Mark Davenport arrived at his lodgings, after spending a pleasant June morning at Battersea,—partly in his favorite occupation of sketching from nature with Amy, when the emulation excited between them served as a stimulant to both,—partly in reading aloud to Lady Meadowes, Fortune's descriptions of Oriental scenery, to which his own experience enabled him to append unnumbered valuable comments,—he found his brother Hugh waiting for him, newspaper in hand, in his easy-chair.

They had not met for weeks; and Mark was prepared when they *did* meet, to testify the most magnanimous resentment. But the man must have possessed a colder heart than his, who could have resisted the extended hand and winning smile of the attached brother who started up to greet him, as though estrangement between *them* were out of the question.

Both longed to say "forgive me." Both longed to say "I was wrong." Though in truth, blame was attachable only to the less repentant of the two.

"I could not stay away any longer," Hugh was the first to observe. "I have been wanting to come this long time. I have many things, my dear brother, to say to you; but first and chiefly, our dear father is failing fast, and I beseech you come with me, and make your peace."

To this Mark gave an indignant reply, urging that his father had forbidden him the house; but after much urging on the part of his brother, he allowed himself to be persuaded, and sallied

forth with Hugh to enter that home where he had so long been a stranger.

His brother was too wise to exhibit either surprise or exultation at the move. He had long been accustomed to accept his brother as he could get him; and he accordingly talked all the way down stairs and into Pall Mall, of the telegraphic news from Paris, in the evening papers—anything rather than the subject uppermost in their hearts.

The interview between the stubborn father and stubborn son was, at last, all but impossible to accomplish. Poor Hugh had to undertake in Spring Gardens the same hard work, using the same levers and pulleys he had already brought into action. But the end of it was that Mark stayed to dinner in New Street; not a little shocked to find that Lord Davenport was far too seriously affected to appear at table.

He was repaid for the concession by the heartfelt joy of his brother and sister. Not that their tears were altogether stanch'd by his presence. But there was more comfort for them, now that this, their brother, who was lost, was restored.

After dinner, Lord Davenport appeared in the drawing-room; and it seemed strange to find him established there in his novel character of an invalid. But even when reclining feebly in an easy-chair, the acerbity of his nature was perceptible through the languid movement and tremulous voice. Though gratified by his son's return, he could not for the life and soul of him refrain from his usual taunts. He informed Marcus that poor Olivia had gone back sadly lately in her drawing,—as well she might:—that he had been forced to sell his bay colt by Jason,—since no longer wanted for a charger,—more was the pity,—where was the use of keeping it, to eat its head off?

On finding the rebel remain silent,—for Marcus, painfully impressed by the dispensation which had overtaken the hard old man, answered never a word,—he became as angry with his son's submission as ever he had been with his assumptions.

“What the devil! Hadn't he a word to say for himself? Evidently didn't care a straw for anything that happened within the pale of his own family.”

“Answer him,—no matter what,” whispered Hugh, under

cover of the tea-tray, which was at that moment passing round. "We are ordered carefully to avoid the slightest exasperation."

Marcus accordingly inquired the name of the purchaser of the bay colt; and threatened to bring up Olivia's halting proficiency by a severe course of lessons.

"You will find Miss Olivia requires putting down, instead of bringing up,"—said the old despot, with a grim smile, which appeared peculiarly hideous on his ghastly face. "Your sister has had her flatterers, lately, though *your* compliments have been wanting. We have made a pleasant acquaintance, Mark, during your absence. Shall I tell him, Lady Davenport?"

"Mark is well acquainted with Mr. Eustace," stammered her ladyship, remembering with dismay her son's antipathy to the individual who, till the moment of Lord Davenport's illness, had perseveringly frequented the house.

"Ay, but he never saw him in his new character of Sir Charles Grandison," added the old lord, whom the completion of his family circle rendered, for *him*, almost jocular. "Capital pheasant shooting at Horndean Court, Mark! Four or five years hence," he continued, lowering his voice as if to be unheard by his daughter, "young Eustace might suit you very well as a brother-in-law."

"Suit *me*? As a *brother-in-law*?" cried Mark, no longer able to master his temper. "A pitiful fellow, without moral pith or marrow,—a snob only fit to dance attendance on dowagers!"

"My dear Mark, you have mistaken your man," interposed Hugh, who discerned by the swelling veins in his father's forehead, that the mercury of his ire was rising. "*You* are talking of the Billy Eustace of last year. The Eustace who visits here, belongs to another species."

"The transformation must be very recent, then. Not six months ago, he was refused as an empty coxcomb by the daughter of Lady Meadows."

"By *whose* daughter?" muttered Lord Davenport, almost inarticulately.

"My late uncle's, Amy Meadows."

"You mean to say that Mr. Eustace actually offered his hand to the offspring of—of that governess-woman?"

“To his credit be it spoken, he did.”

“Ay, ay! Plain enough—plain enough!” rejoined the old man, panting for breath, “Meadowes Court and two or three thousand a-year cover a multitude of sins.”

“You labour under a complete mistake, my dear father,” cried Mark. “Amy Meadowes has not a shilling. The whole property has devolved upon the heir-at-law, the present baronet, Sir Jervis Meadowes.”

“Thank God!” was the vindictive rejoinder of his lordship—losing sight, in this unexpected triumph, of the slight offered to Olivia. “So should all such shameful matches be punished!”

“You would scarcely say so, my lord, if you were acquainted with my Cousin Amy and her mother,” persisted Mark, in spite of the interdictory gestures by which his mother and brother were endeavoring to stop his indiscreet communications. “Two more amiable, more charming women never lived—worlds too good for an empty impostor like William Eustace!”

“You know them, then, Sir?” inquired Lord Davenport, in a low tremulous voice.

“Intimately. I left them only a few hours ago.”

“Being aware that, through life, I have interdicted all intercourse between them and my family?”

“Having heard so from vague rumour,—from your servants,—from country gossips. From yourself, I never heard mention of their name: except that you have once or twice, when angry, accused me of being a thorough Meadowes.”

“And so you are,—and so you are,—so, by GOD ALMIGHTY, you are!” cried the old man, almost in a state of frenzy—“to harp on the quibble that I never expressly forbid you to consort with these low baggages;—when you *know*—when—when—” A frightful execration closed the sentence he was unable rationally to terminate.

It was the last articulate word uttered in this world by Lord Davenport. A few minutes afterwards, he was borne insensible to his room, and laid on the bed from which he was never to rise again. Apothecaries, instantly summoned, came in haste; and physicians, at leisure. In vain! Cupping and leeching could not supersede the will of Heaven. They did not even serve to

torment the palsy-stricken man,—so heavy upon him lay the hand of death.

Next day, all was over. The window-shutters in New Street were reverentially closed; and the answer at the door to inquiring visitors was, that “My Lady and Miss Davenport were very poorly; and Lord Davenport as well as could be expected.”

Let us hope for the credit of the decorous-looking family butler, by whom the solemn phrase was so often repeated, that it was the present peer to whose present state he made allusion.

CHAPTER XIX.

LET no one imagine that, because released by this solemn event from domestic thralldom, Mark Davenport so far lost sight of the decencies of life as to renew in haste the intimacy with which it was so sadly connected. However reckless his nature, he was painfully shocked by the scene he had witnessed; still more so, by the consciousness of his share in bringing it to pass. The whole family, horror-stricken, nay even grief-stricken by the presence of death, united in beseeching him to remain with them for a time, to afford both counsel and comfort.

In New Street, therefore, was he at once established; and from thence,—from the roof which covered his father’s coffin,—it would have been heinous to emerge for the direct purpose of outraging his latest wishes.

His advice too, was required in a thousand emergencies. The new head of the family seemed unwilling to take the smallest step without consulting him. As to Lady Davenport, the knowledge she had recently acquired of his friendship for the niece and sister-in-law, towards whom she had acted so harshly, though feelings of delicacy restrained her at such a moment from any allusion to the forbidden topic, seemed to render him the dearest of her children. She was not satisfied to have him a moment absent from her side.

It was arranged that he was to escort her and his sister to Ilford Castle, to be in readiness to receive the body of his father, which the young lord undertook to accompany to its last abode. The funeral was to take place within ten days of his accession to the title: and till then, no object was allowed to divert the attention of the family from the respect and forms of respect due to the dead.

Independent of the usual pomp which converts virtuous men deceased into saints, and sinners into virtuous, all that transpired after death of the late lord of Ilford Castle, was highly to his advantage. The opening of his will brought to light that not only had his penurious habits of self-denial tended in a wonderful manner to the extension of his family estate, but that the most prudent combinations and foresight had enabled him to double the portion of his daughter, and lay by for the benefit of his second son no less a sum than forty thousand pounds, in addition to the provision which was his birthright. During those uneasy years in which the impracticable Marcus had persevered in kicking against the pricks, sometimes fancying himself an object of malicious persecution on the part of his father,—at others, of complete indifference,—Lord Davenport had unswervingly watched over his interests, both private and professional; as a series of elaborate codicils to his will, and copies of letters to the Horse Guards, now brought to light.

Among other testamentary suggestions was a request addressed to his successor, that his brother should succeed to the representation of Rawburne: the improved fortunes of Marcus justifying his entrance into the Senate. Had no such desire been expressed, indeed, the seat vacated by the new peer would, as a matter of course, have been offered to his brother. But there was something in the forethought evinced by his father in his behalf, which called up all the compunction of that undutiful son. After perusing such sentences, traced by the tremulous hand of the old man now stretched in the stiffness of death, he could no more have disobeyed his last wishes by rushing off to Battersea, than have smitten him as he lay in his grave-clothes.

There was no need to write and apprise Lady Meadows of

what had occurred. The newspapers took care that an event so important to society as the exit from the stage of life of a wealthy peer, should be suitably recorded and deplored—with an appropriate emblazonment in the “Illustrated News” of his armorial bearings, in token of his being conjoined with the dust. Marcus *did*, however, previously to his leaving London for the North, despatch a few lines acquainting her that, having succeeded by his father’s decease to ample means, he trusted she would permit him, as one of the nearest relatives of her late husband, to place her and his cousin in a more agreeable position: enclosing a cheque to her order upon his banker, which he entreated her to fill up at her convenience. But he knew both Lady Meadows and Amy well enough to be certain that this would afford a poor substitute for the visit and words of affection he did not at that moment feel entitled to afford.

Even when the mournful ceremony was at an end, till the conclusion of which the new Lord Davenport seemed scarcely in lawful possession of his honors, Marcus was unable to resume at once the command of his leisure. His brother continued to look to him with the helplessness of a loving child. He was made to confer with the men of business and address the tenantry, as if *he* rather than the elder born were in possession of the title and estates. And if Lord Davenport did not insist on his accompanying him to town when he went up to take his seat in the House of Lords, it was only because, the time being too short for the issuing of a new writ for Rawburne during the present Session, he dispensed with his company in favor of the mother and sister still more in need of his protection.

At Ilford Castle, therefore, with Lady Davenport and Olivia, he remained; and in their congenial society, amidst the most delicious summer weather, how different did the place appear from the irksome prison of the preceding winter.

At times, he might sigh after a companion more intellectual than his little sorrowful sister; to whose sympathetic eye to point out the matchless beauty of the scenery, and the improvements he was prepared to suggest hereafter to a brother, as eager as himself to ameliorate the condition of the working classes. But if, when mooning in the twilight, in the gardens

now fragrant and florid in their summer luxuriance, he not only *dreamed* of such companionship but invested it with a pair of large dark eyes and a blouse of grey camlet, he had not yet allowed himself to avow even to his mother, that he was such a "thorough Meadows" as to contemplate the confirmation of his happiness for life by stooping to an unequal marriage.

But how, during this interval, was poor Amy enduring so sudden an interruption of her golden days of happiness? Even as girls of her age, under the influence of a first attachment, usually support the trying moments of separation from its object; fancying each of them an age, and every inhabitant of the civilized globe in league to render those ages a term of torment. Had it been possible for one by nature as blithe as a bird and sweet-tempered as an angel, to become peevish and perverse under the excitement of constant watchfulness and repinings, Lady Meadows would have passed a miserable summer. But for her mother's sake, the anxious girl took as much pains to conceal her heart-aches, as she had done to meet with fortitude their reverses of fortune.

She was rewarded by the improving health and increasing cheerfulness of the invalid; who, though she seldom permitted herself to revert to the Davenport family or their affairs, was not the less convinced in the happy secrecy of her heart, that the wealth and distinction acquired by Marcus had removed the only obstacle to his seeking the hand of his cousin. As soon as the formalities of the case would admit, she felt certain of his making his appearance among them to accomplish the dearest wish of her heart.

Meanwhile the influence of the absent one was not a moment suspended. Till he came again, till he returned from that terrible Ilford Castle, which appeared to Amy as many thousand miles off as though Cousin Mark were still botanising in the Himalaya, what could she do better than devote herself to the study of the art so dear to him? She rose accordingly, with the sun, to watch its ever-varying sports and gleamings among the kindling clouds, and transfer them to her sketch-book; and almost every line of the copy of "Bell's Anatomy of Expression" which he had left with her for perusal, had she committed

to memory. Alas! poor Amy! How was she to conjecture that in a murky back-room in Soho abided a Muse, in whose bright intelligence all she was laboring to acquire, was spontaneous and intuitive:—that unknown cousin, on whose image the absent Marcus dwelt with a perseverance as infatuated, as was squandered by her own young heart on the image of the absent Marcus!

A portion, a very small portion of the garden adjoining their quaint old house, had been fenced off by Mrs. Margams at Captain Davenport's solicitation, the preceding spring, to substitute a few flower-plots for the asparagus-beds and ridges of French beans, extended under their windows;—a poor substitute for the beautiful shrubberies and greenhouses of Meadows Court, but delightful to Amy and her mother as a token of the kindly thoughtfulness of Marcus. And now, as the repining girl watched, day after day, the growth, and bloom, and decline of the successive summer flowers, she could scarcely forbear complaining to Mrs. Margams, her jolly comely old landlady, of their transient nature. "Scarcely a blossom left! If her cousin absented himself any longer, there would not be so much as a carnation to offer him on his return!"

The old market-woman, who went rumbling off in her cart to Covent Garden, every morning, at daybreak, and returned thence only when daylight was disappearing, was beginning indeed to feel nearly as much surprised as "Miss" that the "Young Capting" for a time so devoted to "her ladies" was heard of no more.

One morning—the summer was over and even the autumn beginning to wane—many hours after jolly Mrs. Margams had rumbled off to "maarket," presiding in her black calash over a cartful of hampers of salsify and spinach, Amy had been present as usual at her mother's toilet, and was assisting Marlow to place her comfortably on the sofa before she established herself at her drawing-table for the day, when she was startled by a footstep on the creaking stairs far heavier than that of the boy who at that hour usually brought in the newspaper. The door was hastily opened—a handsome young man in deep mourning hurried forward—Cousin Mark was by their side!

In five minutes, all three felt as though he had never been away. For he was come back full of animation, joy, and love; and all compunctions were overlooked in the delight of the meeting. Everything, in short, was overlooked; for in the excitement of the moment he folded Amy in his arms, and, for the first time, imprinted a cousinly kiss upon her forehead.

"You *must* forgive me," said he, with a half-conscious laugh, as he performed the same ceremony over the thin trembling hand of Lady Meadowes. "I am so happy—so *very* happy to find myself with you again!"

Scarcely *less* happy, Lady Meadowes was not unrelenting. She listened anxiously while he announced that he was "only just come to town with his brother—on business—to squabble with lawyers—and go through a few necessary forms." He was a long time in coming to the point so near the hearts of both.

"My mother is still in sad low spirits," said he, at length. "It is only lately I have ventured to talk to her about you—and explain a thousand things it was necessary she should know. But she knows all, now; and though she has not charged me with a letter, *feels* as we could wish. The moment she returns to town—(it will not be till January, I'm afraid, dear Lady Meadowes)—she will hasten thither with my sister, and take our dearest Amy to her heart."

This was speaking plainly. This was saying all, or nearly all, the mother could desire. But the result of so complete a realisation of her hopes was a sudden; and so evident and painful to witness was her emotion, that to resume a subject likely to increase her agitation was just then impossible.

Luckily, the day was fine; and nothing seemed more natural than that, after a little desultory conversation, Marcus should propose a walk. It was like falling unconsciously into his old habits. He wanted, he said, to ascertain whether Amy had worked as diligently in her garden as with her color-box. He wanted,—and he glanced fondly and significantly towards her as he spoke,—to "have a little private talk with his cousin."

They did not loiter long over the glaring petunias and African marigolds, which were the pride of Mrs. Margam's heart. Away they went, on the old track,—a favorite road bordered

with villas and gardens, and leading to the river: and though no fashionable carriages now disturbed its dust on their way to Gaines's adjoining nursery-gardens, a few tramping holiday-makers, hurrying to Cremorne, stared after the handsome young couple with their smiling faces and deep mourning, deciding them to be a newly-married pair.

Regardless of the yellow leaves, and dusty, shrivelled hedges, so changed since their last expedition, they went on and on; and had reached the more secluded portion of the lane, before Marcus found courage to unburden his heart.

"Your mother is still very feeble, dear Amy," said he. "I wanted to talk to her on a most important subject,—a subject that involves all the happiness of my life. But I was afraid. I really was afraid of shaking that fragile frame. You must help me, Amy. You must bear your portion of the danger and difficulty. May I count on you, darling Amy, to do your part?"

It needed not the fond pressure of the arm by which these words were accompanied, to point out to his cousin the nature of the office to be imposed upon her.

"I have some news,—*good* news I hope she will think it,—to communicate to my aunt. But I scarcely dare attempt it to-day. You must prepare the way this evening, Amy: and to-morrow I may be able to venture all.

"In the first place, my dear child," said he, "you must prepare her for an interview with her brother—"

"Her brother? My uncle lives, then?" murmured Miss Meadows,—for this was not the question the expectation of which had caused her heart to throb, or her eyes to glisten.

"I should long ago have satisfied her of the fact," resumed Mark, "for Mr. Hargood was known to me previous to our first interview. But circumstances connected with himself and his family, rendered it desirable to postpone the announcement. Hargood is a peculiar man,—good, gifted, but eccentric,—and far from easy to deal with. The wounds inflicted on his pride by the Meadows and Davenport families, are still festering in his heart. Even against myself, though a mere collateral, he has exhibited the most vindictive rancor. I almost dread, Amy, unless at a moment when Lady Meadows is in the enjoyment

of her best health and composure, any attempt at an interview between them."

He paused,—either for breath or reflection; and Amy fancied he might be waiting for her opinion.

"It is hard to decide for others in matters of feeling," said she. "But had *I* an only brother, long estranged from me, I could not rest an hour till I had fallen on his neck, and entreated him to exchange forgiveness with me."

"You are a dear and good girl, Amy; and from *your* entreaty, forgiveness could never be withheld. But Hargood's is a different nature,—the nature of the old Puritans,—from whom, he once told me, he was lineally descended,—conscientious, upright, but hard and pitiless. Sooner or later, however, the attempt to soften him must be made; not only for yours and your mother's sake, Amy, but for mine and hers."

Miss Meadows felt puzzled; and her expressive face was turned inquiringly towards her cousin, for the first time during their walk.

"Yes, dearest, for hers;—for the sake of your two cousins,—Mark, and Mary."

Amy, who knew only of a cousin Olivia, was still more astonished.

"For I have not yet told you," he resumed in a more hurried manner, "half the happiness awaiting you. Your uncle Edward Hargood has a daughter,—nearly of your own age,—lovely—to *my* thought at least—in person as in mind:—full of the highest qualities, the highest genius,—noble-minded, honest-hearted—the epitome of all that is touching and ennobling in your sex."

"You are acquainted with her then?" said Amy, in a voice that differed singularly from her usual tones.

"*Acquainted* with her? For nearly a year past, Amy, she has been the ruling influence of my life! It was for her sake,—it was with the view of furthering my addresses to her,—that I first sought out the unknown aunt and cousin who constituted so valuable a link between us. I dare to make you this frank avowal, darling Amy, because since I came to know you, I have loved you for your own sweet sake, almost as much as for Mary's."

He did not hear the gasping sigh that burst from the bosom of his companion. He was listening only to himself.

“And when you come to know your cousin,” he continued, “you will open your heart to her, for *her* sake, as I now ask you, dear cousin, to do for mine. Esteem and admiration Mary Hargood must command from every one. Attachments such as mine is, and I trust yours will become, must remain the privilege of the few.”

Amy's heart was sinking: her legs were giving way under her. But there was no resting place at hand. Even had a seat been near, she would have shrunk from the betrayal of her weakness. But Mark, in his paroxysm of selfish passion, heard and saw nothing of her faltering; and proceeded to describe his introduction, already known to the reader, into the silent, solitary studio where the patient girl stood slaving away the bright morning of her days, for the maintenance of her indigent family.

“Think, my dearest cousin,” said he, “think of the happiness awaiting me, in the power of transporting this noble girl from her dungeon, into the sunshine of a prosperous home and affectionate family.”

Amy thought of it, ay! thought of it with a degree of anguish which was as the burning of iron into her flesh and calculated to leave a scar upon her wounded heart, ineffaceable till it should have ceased to beat!

But she uttered not a word,—she uttered not a moan. She listened with patience while, throughout their way homewards her selfish cousin, engrossed by his own transports, left no circumstance untold of his happy hopes and expectations.

CHAPTER XX.

It did not strike Lady Meadows as at all surprising, that, after so prolonged a *tête-à-tête* between the supposed lovers, they should part at the door; her nephew having doubtless delegated

to Amy the duty of asking her consent to his proposals. It did not even surprise her that her daughter, instead of rushing into her presence and asking her blessing, should retire for a time into her own room. Overpowered by the emotions consequent on her new position, Amy was doubtless endeavoring to recover breath and self-possession for the task of apprising her that the best of daughters was destined to become the happiest of wives.

But when half an hour—an hour—more than an hour, passed away, and no Amy made her appearance, the good mother grew a little uneasy. She could not move unassisted from her couch. But Marlow, summoned by her little hand-bell, was desired to go into her young lady's room, and inquire whether she would not take some refreshment after so long a walk.

Poor, good mother! She fancied this ruse would succeed. She expected to see her darling hurry into the drawing-room, to make a clean breast of her happy prospects.

The report rendered by Marlow that Miss Amy, overtired by her walk, was lying down and nearly asleep, was rather a disappointment than a warning. And when, after the lapse of a full hour, Lady Meadowes herself rose from her couch, and crept quietly into the room, on finding Amy still wrapt in slumber, she was more inclined to rejoice than to experience the smallest uneasiness.

Poor, good mother! To believe that a daughter such as hers, newly affianced and full of joy, could sink off into the heaviness of sleep without a word of gratulation exchanged between them! She gazed anxiously on her child, as Amy lay extended on the bed, with her face half buried in the pillow, half covered with the locks of her dishevelled hair. For so fatigued was she, that she had left untouched the tresses escaped from the comb; and it was only through that partial veil the outline of her features was discernible.

“How wrong of him to take her so far—how very, *very* unreasonable!” murmured Lady Meadowes, as she moved slowly back to her accustomed place. “Amy is but delicate. He ought not to have overtaxed her strength.”

The dinner hour arrived, which, in that humble household was an early one; and Amy was still fast asleep. It was not till dusk,—again early, for the autumn was far advanced,—that Amy emerged quietly from her room; her hair carefully rebraided—her dress carefully refreshed; but with a sort of unnatural quietude pervading her face and person, as if suddenly converted into stone, or walking in her sleep.

Having approached and kissed her mother, she jested faintly on her own laziness in having absented herself from the dinner-table for the sake of rest. But to Lady Meadowes's entreaties that she would still "take something," she replied by a request for tea. She was so completely overtired, that solid refreshment was distasteful.

"It was very, *very* wrong of Mark to take you so far," said Lady Meadowes, in a tone of vexation; for instinctively she began to fear more was amiss with Amy, than the over-extension of her walk. "It was selfish of him to consider you so little."

"You must not blame him, dear mamma," said Amy, placing herself on a low stool, which she often occupied beside Lady Meadowes's couch. "He came to bring us news likely to afford you such heartfelt pleasure, likely at once so to surprise and gratify you."

"Not surprise me, darling—I was prepared for it"—replied her mother, stooping to imprint a kiss upon her cold forehead, and inexpressibly relieved by this opening.

"Not prepared for what I am about to tell you, mother. You must call up all your self-command, for good news is sometimes as painful to hear as bad."

"I *am* prepared—I *am* prepared!" said Lady Meadowes—perplexed and painfully anxious. "Tell me, my child! What, what had Mark to communicate?"

"That my Uncle Hargood is not only alive, but well and prosperous; that he inhabits London; that we may see him if we will, to-morrow."

"God be thanked!" murmured Lady Meadowes, clasping her hands fervently together. "My brother; my dear, dear brother! To-morrow, Amy? Why not to-night? It is not late."

"Too late; and we are neither of us strong enough for the interview," replied Amy, faintly. "We have borne his absence long; let us bear it a few hours longer."

"Well, well! I must take patience, I suppose. I am accustomed, Amy, to take patience. But tell me, dearest child, how came Captain Davenport to discover him?"

"I can scarcely tell you how. My uncle is, it seems, a man of letters; well known and respected in his calling," said Amy, to whom prudence suggested some limit to her immediate disclosures.

"Well-known and respected in his calling," mechanically repeated Lady Meadows. "Yet scarcely distinguished, or his name would have reached us through the public press."

"Many authors are celebrated under a *nom de plume*. We may not know my Uncle Hargood's. We know so little, mother, of what is passing in London!"

"True; true! And Marcus lives in the centre of the intellectual world. But why did he not come and tell me all this himself? There is so much I want to know; so much I want to ask. Edward is now a middle-aged man. Is he married, Amy?"

"A widower."

"With children?"

"Several, I believe," replied Miss Meadows, whose mind was made up to leave untouched a chapter, for the discussion of which she knew her moral strength to be unequal.

"Several children! Several dear nephews and nieces! How often have you wished for this, dear Amy! How fortunate for you!"

"Yes; if on acquaintance my cousins love me."

"How can it be otherwise, my child? Look at Marcus. In spite of a family quite as much alienated from us as my brother's — *he* sought us, *he* loved us, *he* devoted himself to our cause. I feel persuaded that Edward's children will become equally dear."

"God grant it!" was Amy's scarcely audible reply. "Surely, mother, the evenings are getting chilly enough for a fire?" she added, with an involuntary shiver. "May we not have a fire? Shall I ring?"

The tea-tray, opportunely brought in by Marlow, afforded a

welcome interruption to their confidences. But was Lady Meadows growing as selfish as her nephew, that, in the midst of the tumultuous emotions besieging her heart, she had no leisure to note, when the lamp was lighted, the death like paleness of her child?

So long as Marlow was fussing about the room, to resume their conversation was impossible. The fire had been lighted by the "gurl"—not without sulky mutterings about the unreasonableness of the demand at so late an hour. Amy sat shuddering down before it; chiefly that, by turning her back towards her mother's sofa, the disturbance of her features might remain unnoticed. But no sooner had the two servants left the room, after removing the tea-things, than the nervous and excited Lady Meadows resumed her questioning and cross-questioning. Had Mark said this? Had Mark undertaken that? When was he to write? When was he to return?

Poor Amy found all this too much. She began to feel the room circling round with her. Dizzy, despairing, she asked leave to retire to rest.

"If you would permit Marlow to wait upon you alone to-night, dear mother, it would be a relief to me," said she, faintly. I cannot shake off my fatigue. Sleep, alone, can restore me. And we have a busy day before us to-morrow! I must rise *very* early, to go and fetch my uncle to you. No! mother, no! Impossible for *you* to attempt the exertion of seeking him out," she continued, interrupting the proposal Lady Meadows was beginning to make. "You are not equal to it. You are uncertain, too, how he may receive you. My uncle appears to be a peculiar person—severe and resentful. Against you he may cherish animosities. *I* can have done nothing to offend him."

"*You* offend him, Amy! *You* offend *any one*!"

"He may, therefore, hold out less sternly against *me* than against yourself. I have his address. Let me go there early, in a cab, with Marlow if you think it better; and, trust me, trust your child, mother, before the day is over, he shall be here."

The objections raised by Lady Meadows were gradually overruled by the mild perseverance of her daughter. When she bestowed upon Amy her parting kiss for the night, all was settled

between them. The pre-occupied mother bade her, carelessly, "take care of herself and sleep off her fatigues, for she was looking sadly pale;" then, almost before Amy had left the room, was resuming her audible ejaculations of "*Several* children. What a heavy charge for a widower. If they are but half as handsome and as clever as dear Edward used to be!"

Alas! it was evidently the spirited young brother of Henstead Vicarage, the excited Lady Meadows was preparing to meet on the morrow. The present was nothing. Surrounded by visions of the past, she saw nothing, knew nothing, that was passing around her.

It was a rainy, misty day—the first fog of approaching winter; and very long did that wet, dreary drive appear even to Marlow, as their rough vehicle jolted leisurely from Battersea to Pulteney street. She was anxious to arrive early; apprised by Mark Davenport that her uncle's professional avocations often took him out for the day.

Her diligence had not its reward, however. The same little weazened female servant, who had so often repulsed her cousin Mark, the preceding year, answered her inquiries whether Mr. Hargood were at home by a sour negative—"Master was out."

"When was he expected back?"

"She could not say. Certainly not before an hour or so. Would the lady please to call again?"

"The lady would very much prefer to wait for Mr. Hargood's return." And perceiving the hesitation of the woman to admit her into the house for this purpose, she unwisely suggested as a passport the name of Captain Davenport.

The prim servant now became inexorable. That name insured denial.

"If you insist upon it," pleaded Amy, humbly, "I will wait in the cab at the door, till Mr. Hargood arrives. But I assure you," she continued, on reflecting how vexatious it would be if her first interview with this dreaded uncle occurred at the street door,— "I assure you that I am one of Mr. Hargood's nearest relations. I am persuaded he would not wish me to be kept here in the rain."

The woman hesitated. A relation of "master's" was such a novelty in that house, that it seemed as monstrous to close the door upon her, as upon some angel seeking hospitality in the olden time. After some moments' delay, she showed symptoms of mollification; ushered her up into the drawing-room, and left her to her reflections.

Upon Amy, that square graceless room, rendered more than usually chilly and disheartening by the state of the weather, created a very different impression from the light in which it had been originally viewed by Davenport. It was the scene of her cousin's love,—of her cousin's courtship. What could Windsor Castle or Osborne,—the Escorial or Versailles,—Schönbrunn or the Alhambra,—exhibit to vie in interest with a spot so favoured! Every syllable he had told her of his *liaison* with the Hargoods,—and she naturally supposed it to be a millionth part of what he *had* to tell,—was engraven in her mind; and she sat trembling and tearful, with her eyes fixed upon the heavy black door of the studio,—remembering with agony the scene he had so graphically described as concealed within:—knowing that *she* was there,—her enemy,—the being who stood between her and perfect happiness:—that she had only to turn the handle of that door, and stand in Mary's presence:—that she was equally entitled to rush upon her with words of reviling, as one by whom she had been made a wretch for life; or to steal lovingly to her side, as one in whose veins her own blood was flowing. Cousin Mary! Mark Davenport's bride! In which light did this favoured being possess most interest in the eyes of Amy Meadows?

It was perhaps because still asking herself the question, that unbidden tears found their way between the slender fingers of the hand by which she was concealing her face. She fancied she could hear the slight rustling of a dress, in the chamber within. She almost fancied she could hear her breathe. What would she have given to obtain a glimpse of her, unseen: the grave calm face described by Mark; the intellectual countenance,—the outward development of the elevated soul that inspired her character and conduct: a more than mother to her young

brothers,—a more than daughter to the tyrant by whom she was held in durance,—a more than angel to the lover who was willing to become her slave in his turn.

Creeping cringingly towards the studio door, her face clouded with tears, Amy was about to enter the presence of her cousin, cast herself at her feet, and appeal to her for affection and mercy,—when the opposite entrance suddenly admitted a stranger; a man, whose lowering countenance and sable-silvered hair, seemed to announce Mr. Hargood, even before he accosted her in the authoritative tone announcing the master of the house.

Her abject attitude as she approached the forbidden door, and the face bathed in tears she turned towards him, prepared him for one of the scenes to which, as a professional critic, he was often exposed by candidates for public favour;—some rising actress or poetess,

Some virgin tragedy, some orphan Muse.

But Amy no sooner found herself in presence of her uncle, than she recovered herself. She advanced towards him, if not boldly, with a frankly extended hand.

“My business,” said she, in answer to his question, “is to claim your love and kindness. You do not know me, uncle. But I am Amy,—Amy Meadows.”

Already, Mr. Hargood, struck dumb by the familiarity of her address, was about to withdraw the hand which, in his first surprise, he had mechanically extended to meet her own: for he now began to fancy he was dealing with a mad-woman or an imposter. But Amy was too earnest to be discountenanced.

“My mother sent me here, uncle,” she faltered; “my poor mother, your sister, now a widow; who, after seeking you for so many years, and grieving over you as dead, only discovered yesterday that you were alive, at no great distance. Judge what must be her happiness in the prospect of meeting her dear brother Edward, once more, in this world.”

While she thus spoke,—tenderly—falteringly, femininely,—in the sweet tones which few people ever resisted,—something in

her voice and manner so powerfully recalled to Hargood's mind the Mary of his youth, the loved lost sister of Henstead Vicarage so long deplored, that, clasping her at once to his heart, he lifted up his voice and wept. The emotion of the strong man so new to such impulses, was terrible to witness. His frame was all but convulsed. His tears fell large and heavy, like the thunder-drops that precede a storm.

For some minutes, not another word was spoken.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN, by degrees, all was explained and some degree of composure restored, Hargood's joy was demonstrated in truly English fashion, by an extraordinary expansion of hospitality. The weazened maid was scolded for not having lighted the fire; and in spite of Amy's entreaties, refreshment was called; nay, even wine,—a rare indulgence in that wisely parsimonious household. The delighted uncle seemed as if he would have moved Heaven and earth to banquet this fair and loving niece. Like Schiller, in his lyric, he wanted all the Immortals to crowd his terrestrial hall.

The last presence which he seemed to miss, was that of his daughter. Warmth and wine were wanted, but no Mary. It was not till some reference to "the keys" on the part of the weazened parlor maid reminded him of the omission, that he hurried into the studio, bidding his daughter come instantly forth and welcome her cousin Amy Meadows.

And now, once more, it was Cousin Amy's turn to start and tremble.

The lapse of a year, so important to them all, had been nowhere more productive of change than in the person of the poor neglected Mary. The stores of sensibility fermenting in her close-sealed heart, now imparted threefold expression to her fine features; and she had gained in height and contour, and consequently in grace. What a model for a Cassandra, a Sibyl, an Egeria! Amy Meadows could not disguise from herself, as

her cousin slowly and scrutinisingly approached her, that she had never seen a finer form or more impressive countenance.

Her father's hurried explanations she met half way. What appeared so strange to *him*, seemed to *her* perfectly natural: for, from the moment of that terrible scene at Captain Davenport's lodgings, Mary had been looking forward to active advances on the part of Lady Meadows.

Still, Mr. Hargood—circumstantial in all his measures—saw fit to enter into the fullest particulars; and while so enlarging, and dwelling on the past, recurrence to the name of his once-loved sister caused a renewal of his former emotion. Again he clung, weeping and fondly, to the being so much resembling the Mary of "poor old Henstead."

The spectacle converted his daughter into stone. He had not wept so, even when her mother died! And what would she not have given, at times, for even the slightest indication of his present over-wrought sensibility, bestowed upon her brothers or herself! This stranger, this fair-faced Amy Meadows—was she come to conquer in a moment the affection for which through life they had all labored in vain?

With a pang of jealousy, in short, quite as painful as that which was gnawing the heart of her cousin, Mary Hargood advanced to offer her hand to the new comer. There was at that moment as much hatred between those two beautiful girls—those all but sisters—as might have been engendered by a Corsican *Vendetta*.

It was a relief to both of them when Mr. Hargood, about to quit the house with his niece and return with her to Battersea, signified in his usual lofty manner to Mary, that she was not to be of the party. Not directly, however; for it did not occur to him as possible that she could have presumed to form such a project. He merely said when he took his hat to leave the house, "I shall not be at home till late. Do not wait dinner."

He would as soon have thought of offering an apology or explanation to his old leather-covered writing table, or his elbow chair, as to his taciturn daughter.

She was not, however, fated to remain companionless during his absence. The weazened maid, whose mind was a little

bewildered by a succession of remarkable events in that usually unincidental house, did not find it in her heart to persist in denial when Captain Davenport, soon after Hargood's departure, applied for admittance. She even deigned to accompany him half-way up stairs and point out the door of the sitting room, where she believed her young lady—her neglected young lady—to be still lingering, after the departure of her guest.

But no Mary was there. He found all in its usual order. More new books lying on the desk, to be cut, and cut up. More new engravings, craving for notice. More tickets in the card-rack for more exhibitions, shows, and theatres. The same process of mind mongery. The same tare and tret of the intellectual market.

He naturally expected that notice would be given to Miss Hargood of his visit, and that she would soon make her appearance. It was not his intention to greet her as more than a friend. Marcus was, by this time, too well acquainted with the positive character of Hargood, to risk exasperating him by addresses to his child unsanctioned by his paternal authority. But he wanted to see her again—only to see her. His eyes hungered and thirsted after that mournful but noble face.

After waiting, with more patience than might have been expected, for her arrival, he gently opened the door of the studio; that door on which poor Amy's eyes had been so anxiously fixed.—But the wonted aspect, rendered so familiar to him by the sketch which never quitted him, no longer presented itself. The easel stood solitary. The artistic light streamed upon vacancy.

Grievously disappointed, he advanced into the room. But Mary was not far distant. Coiled up into the wide window seat, she was weeping her very heart away. No luxurious sofa pillows, in that frugal house, to conceal the face of a mourner! She was resting her aching head against the closed window-shutter; thinking, amidst her tears, how many comforts and alleviations were denied her; that, however hard to live, she must not—*must not*—die. She could not leave her mother's sons to the rearing of so severe a taskmaster as her father!—

That Mark Davenport hastened to evince his sympathy in her sorrow, cannot be doubted. But Mary was in no mood to be

comforted. The less amiable qualities of her nature were in ruffled activity. Having hastily dried her tears, and composed her countenance, she asked him why he came, and what he was doing there, in opposition to her father's wishes, as crudely as became the daughter of Edward Hargood.

"I came," said he, (with a ready mendacity, for which, Heaven his soul assoilzie!) "thinking to find Mr. Hargood. I was in hopes that, as having been the means of reuniting him with his sister and niece, he would receive me back into favour."

"It was *you*, then, who sent Amy Meadows hither! I guessed it!" cried Mary, bitterly.

"Your father received her, I trust, with kindness?" said he, in some alarm.

"He received her," murmured, or rather growled Mary Hargood, "as though she were an angel from Heaven!"

"And so she *is*," said Marcus, with generous enthusiasm, so warmed was his heart by finding himself once more under that forbidden roof. "Never was there a sweeter creature! She has not your genius, Miss Hargood,—she has not your energy. But she is the most dutiful of daughters to an ever-ailing mother; and the kindest and most forgiving of human beings."

Propitiated by his praise, praise she could enjoy because she knew it to be just,—she invited him in a somewhat more gracious tone to accompany her into the sitting-room. But Mark found himself best where he was. On uncoiling herself from her recumbent position at his entrance, Mary had sought the reading-chair usually occupied by her father; while her visitor unceremoniously assumed the comfortless place she had quitted. Attributing her swollen eyelids to emotion arising from her recent affecting interview with her new cousin, he endeavoured to brighten her thoughts by reference to avocations;—the pictures she had recently undertaken,—the Murillo in whose progress he had been so deeply interested.

She answered him pettishly: fancying that he was soothing her distemperature by pretended interest in her pursuits:—how little, how little surmising the portion they had occupied in his thoughts since their last meeting!

"And the bird and dog, to which you introduced me last year,"

said she, in her turn, with a smile bordering on the ironical: "I suppose courtesy requires me to be as inquisitive as yourself—"

"Thanks," he replied,—accepting all in good part. "The dog has been begged from me by a dear little sister of mine, who fancies herself fond of him for my sake. The bird, being of a more sociable nature than its master, fretted so sadly for companionship during my absence, that I presented it to my friend Drewe."

Mary Hargood, acquainted only, through his occasional visits to her father, with the elder Drewe,—member of so many learned societies, but of society, so useless a member,—smiled, and this time, in earnest, at the notion of a colloquy between the prosy old gentleman, and the flippant bird.

"I was not aware," said she, "that so learned a pundit as Mr. Wroughton Drewe would condescend to 'speak parrot.' Better have given the bird to *me*, Captain Davenport; to me, so often in need of a companion."

The melancholy intonation of other days was in her voice as she made this avowal. Marcus liked her better so, than when caustic and bitter. He now noticed for the first time the extraordinary development which time had wrought in her appearance since last they met; and could hardly refrain from telling her how beautiful he thought her.

To avoid the temptation, he rose and examined the painting on her easel. And there, too, improvement was delightfully perceptible. It almost vexed him to think that in the interval of absence *he* had acquired so little, and Hargood's uncared-for daughter so wondrously much.

A little moved by his enthusiasm—but far more so by a few judicious words of censure (which attested the worth of his eulogy as a flaw, the genuineness of a gem)—she opened her portfolio, and showed him hundreds of half-finished sketches, the recreation of her leisure hours.

"You must not mention this rubbish to my father," said she, on perceiving how eagerly he entered into the spirit of her works. "My father discountenances everything that leads to waste of time."

"He may be right," replied Mark. "But in the grandest for-

est, nature finds space between oak and oak for wild flowers and wild fruit, without impeding their growth."

He said nothing, however, of the exquisite pleasure it afforded him to know he was the only person to whom these sportings of her fancy had been exhibited. He was glad that not even her father had sullied the bloom of their freshness. There were jottings of Egyptian scenery; dim reminiscences of his own. There were designs after Shakspeare, Dante, Goethe; and more than one humorous sketch of the notabilities who frequented her father's tea-table; among others, of Wroughton Drewe, in the character of an owl, endeavouring to decipher through a huge eye-glass the hieroglyphics inscribed on the Rosetta stone; the likeness being of so speaking a nature as to elicit peals of laughter from Marcus.

"And who are these?" said he, on turning to a page on which a couple of rough-looking lads were delineated in every possible posture and pastime; reading, writing, boxing, playing at ducks and drakes.

"The two beings dearest to me on earth," she replied. "My own two scrubby school-boy brothers, Ned and Frank; whom I must cherish more than ever, now that my father's affections are likely to be largely diverted from them, by the postulants for his love with which you have supplied us. But we are forgetting," said she, taking the volume from his hand and closing it, "that *my* time is not my own. We have idled enough for to-day, Captain Davenport. Thank you for having cheered me into better spirits. But I must now to work, with what appetite I may. I have only six days remaining to finish this copy of the Aurora; and of those one perhaps must be devoted to the claims of my father's newly-found relations."

Before Mark had time for remonstrance, the bell was gently rung by Mary, and he found himself forced to perform his parting salutations in presence of the weazened maid.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FAMILY recently deprived of its head and ruler, is sure to present curious anomalies. Between respect for the dead and respect for the living, a straight course is not always attainable. A too sudden reform of established abuses conveys reproach to your predecessor; a too patient tolerance implies approval.

The kindly heart of the new Lord Davenport might perhaps have fallen into the latter error, but for the vigorous counsels of Mark.

“Whatever you mean to reform, reform at once,” said he, on the week succeeding the funeral at Ilford. “At this moment, your people are prepared for a change. Don’t give them leisure to fall back into their old habits. Strike your *coup-d’état* and have done with it.”

Already, therefore, contracts had been entered into for the construction of a hamlet, to which a suitable allotment of ground was apportioned; to supply habitations for the families about to be ejected from the houses in Quag Lane, so long an eye-sore to Marcus, and now condemned to demolition. Several of the larger farms on the domain were to be divided, on the falling in of the present leases; and a large enclosure and drainage of heathland for future plantation, was to afford work and winter wages for the labouring poor.

Within the walls of Ilford Castle no need to operate a change. The relief, spontaneously though unavowedly experienced by all its inmates, was as if an iron cincture were removed from every heart. Every one now breathed freely.

Poor old Madame Winkelried, relieved from her functions as governess, remained attached to the family at her own entreaty, though her future independence was secured; that when her pupil was sick, or her patroness sorry, or any one wanted comforting or nursing in the household, her services might be at

hand. But Olivia and her mother, now for the first time admitted to unrestrained intercourse, found in each other's society a degree of comfort and confidence which perhaps no human affection so intimately engenders as the love between mother and daughters.

So peaceful in mind was the widowed Lady Davenport in Ilford Castle, where no discontented looks or knitted brows were longer perceptible, that she would have been content to abide there for ever—the world forgetting, by the world forgot—but that she felt the destinies of her children to be as yet imperfectly accomplished. London, the grand exchange for the negotiations of worldly interests, must be again visited. Since her sons were now in Parliament, both, at the opening of the Session, must repair to town; where they would probably settle in life, as their liberal fortune entitled them. Domestic happiness, she trusted, was in store for them, to moderate the turbulent nature of the younger brother, and animate the indolence of the elder.

But it was for the sake of Olivia, she had chiefly made up her mind to resume for a time her place in London society, as soon as the solemnity of her position as Lord Davenport's widow gave place to the influence of her maternal duties. In spite of what had broken from the lips of Marcus, in that fatal scene to which neither herself nor her son had ever found courage to revert, she felt convinced that her daughter was the magnet by which the once supercilious son of the Eustaces had been attracted to their unfashionable house. Mr. Eustace had been the friend and associate of Hugh; but his admiration of Olivia was unquestionably the ruling influence.

She could desire nothing better for her daughter than such a marriage. Dismissing from her mind all she had heard to the disparagement of William Eustace—for what human being endowed with advantages of birth and fortune, is not the chartered victim of detraction?—she saw in him only what was pleasing and estimable; good breeding and good looks that were pleasing—good feelings and good principles that were estimable. And thus convinced of his rectitude of mind, the worldly position which she would have otherwise disregarded, was not without its charm.

There was nothing in Mr. Eustace's personal standing to dete-

riorate his consequence as heir in tail to a landed estate of ten thousand a year and a baronetcy of the seventeenth century; with the inestimable advantage of somewhat more than a couple of thousands per annum in enjoyment. It was in fact, this liberal provision which had enabled William Eustace, in defiance of parental thunder, to offer to Amy Meadows the hand she had so injudiciously rejected.

“If Olivia were only to take a fancy to him,” was Lady Davenport’s *résumé* of the case, “I know no one with whom I consider my darling child more likely to be happy. As regards *his* feelings, I am convinced that all is right.”

To the flighty assertion made by Marcus of his attachment to her niece, she assigned little importance; for Marcus was neither a careful observer nor an accurate historian. Just as unscrupulously as he mystified their country neighbor, Sir Gardner Dalmaine, with tales of insurrections in Iceland, or the discovery of a dodo’s nest on Salisbury Plain, would he have declared his brother to be in love with Madaine Tussaud, or reported Lady Louisa Eustace to have become a Mormon, had the fancy of the moment dictated the flighty assertion.

Of that dear unknown niece, however, both Lady Davenport and Olivia were beginning to think and speak with the utmost interest. Her beauty and diffidence had been described by Mark in glowing colors; and it was settled in the family that, on arriving in town in January, their first visit should be to Lady Meadows. Meanwhile, it was no secret that her sons were about to take the initiative during their present hurried sojourn in town; and as Olivia and her mother pursued their walks beside the lake, or drove through the rocky defiles interspersed among the green dales of Ilford, they often indulged in surmises concerning the welcome likely to be afforded to Lord Davenport and his brother by the hardly-used widow of poor Sir Mark.

Little dreamed they how much more occupied, just then, was the mind of Lady Meadows by her unhoped-for reconciliation with her brother! The first meeting between them, indeed, had excited emotions productive of more pain than pleasure; for each measured the duration of their enstrangement rather by those whom they had lost, than by the years of their lives. The

husband of the one, the wife of the other, had in the interim lived, and loved, and vanished, as flowers had sprung up and withered. There seemed to exist a chasm between their hearts which nothing now could fill up, to enable them to meet on level ground. It was not the premature wrinkles stamped on the brow of the invalid; it was not the silver hairs interspersed among the massive dark locks of her brother which served to record the lapse of time. There were scars upon the hearts of both, of which their faces exhibited a sad reflection. Hargood saw the beautiful girl of Henstead Vicarage transformed into a careworn matron; Lady Meadowes beheld the handsome, sportive, ardent Edward changed into a grave, stern-visaged, middle-aged, necessitous-looking man. Neither, alas! had escaped unwounded from the Battle of Life.

When they spoke, however, the tones of their voices possessed a mutual charm. There, they recognised each other; and before they had talked an hour together, "with open hearts, affectionate and true," they were Mary and Edward again. Intervening obstacles, intervening injuries had disappeared; and but for their living children as witnesses of the fact, it was difficult to believe that half a life had divided them from each other.

This state of reciprocal feeling afforded heartfelt gratification to Amy; for she foresaw in it a mine of happiness for her mother. And it was also a relief to find that, absorbed in her brother's presence, Lady Meadowes took little heed of her saddened looks. It was doubtless only natural she should retire to her chamber, leaving their conference undisturbed. But the tears of solitary anguish she was shedding might have lasted the day long without exciting notice or sympathy, but that, at the hour of their homely dinner, which Hargood had consented to share, it was necessary she should make her appearance. Those meals—those meals! To what subordination do they reduce the most critical interests of life!

On rejoining, with a face as serene as she could assume, her mother and uncle, she found them seated side by side—the past forgiven—the future unthought of; loving, confiding, gracious; nothing more, she fancied could be desired to perfect their reunion. Her father had never looked more tenderly upon his wife, than Hargood on his sister. All his former pride in her

was renewed; all his early love revived, like flowers emerging from the soil, at the touch of May.

It was late in the day, when Captain Davenport joined the party. Marcus entered the room with some degree of confusion, arising from remorse of conscience at his invasion of Hargood's castle during his absence; or from disagreeable reminiscences of the attitude in which they had last parted. But his embarrassment was of short duration. Ere a word was uttered on either side, Hargood started up and grasped his hands with the most friendly welcome. The recital in which Lady Meadows had been indulging of her nephew's devoted kindness to her, and of the affectionate overtures already made by his mother, had softened Hargood's feelings towards all possible Davenports,—Marcus among the rest.

"I was hasty," he said in an abrupt allusion to what had formerly passed between them. "Forgive me. Let by-gones be by-gones. We are all upon velvet, now."

Poor Amy, whose heart had fallen below freezing point on the entrance of her cousin, felt it growing colder and colder as she listened to their expressions of mutual regard; evidently precursive of their future relative position as father and son. It wanted only Mary to complete the family circle:—the family circle, from which she might as well be excluded at once, for any interest that any one of them seemed to take in her existence. All three were far too much occupied with each other to think of Amy. Marcus, full of the studio he had quitted an hour before, saluted her with the careless gaiety he might have bestowed on his terrier or his bird!

"Did not Miss Hargood accompany you here to-day?" said he, addressing her father; in pursuance of the abominable hypocrisy he had been practising so successfully elsewhere.

"No! But I must bring or send her here to-morrow, my sister tells me," replied Hargood.

"Without fail, dear Edward. I long to embrace my niece."

"You have a nephew too, Lady Meadows, who hopes to make your acquaintance to-morrow," rejoined Mark,—having thus adroitly obtained the information he wanted. "My bro-

ther Hugh craves leave to deliver to you a letter from my mother."

"What! the pearl of brothers, of whom you used to be so proud?" inquired Hargood cheerfully.

"And of whom I am prouder than ever. I trust, Hargood, you will allow me to present him to you?"

"It does not need, my dear Sir," he replied. "I have already made Lord Davenport's acquaintance. He was on a committee, last spring, before which I had to be examined, touching the state of the pictures in the National Gallery; and I can scarcely tell you whether I was more struck by his extensive information on matters of Art, or prepossessed by his manners."

"You forgave in *him*, then, the name of Davenport which you visited so heavily on *me*!" said Marcus, laughing. "But I don't wonder. The man who could cherish a malicious feeling against Hugh, would tar and feather a child. - Amy, dearest,—why are you sitting out yonder by the window? Why so still and silent, when we are all so happy?"

"Only still, because I am listening," she gently replied.

"So hoarse, too! I'm afraid you have caught cold. That long walk, yesterday, was too much for you!"

"She said so herself, poor child, on her return," interposed Lady Meadowes, "and then she was forced to go out this morning in the rain."

"I hope she is not delicate?" inquired Hargood, with as reprehensive an air as though he had inquired whether she were addicted to shop lifting.

"Not very strong. But she had better go to bed and take care of her cold, that she may be able to devote the whole of to-morrow to her cousin."

"Ah, go to bed, dear Amy!" rejoined Mark, humanely. "A little gruel and a great deal of sleep, will bring you all right again. Good night, dear little coz!" said he, holding open the door for her to pass, after her hurried salutations to her mother and uncle. "We must not have you ill. Think,—think what a happy day we have before us to-morrow!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

NEXT morning, greatly to his inconvenience, but punctual as a chronometer, Hargood conveyed his daughter to the old garden-house,—where, having ascertained that his niece was disabled by a severe cold, he left her with injunctions to devote herself for the day to her aunt; as peremptorily delivered as those he had previously issued that, in her best attire, she should be ready at noon to accompany him on his visit to Lady Meadows.

The best attire of Mary Hargood consisted, as aforetime, of a black silk gown of the simplest form: her dress alternating between the costume of a *sœur grise* or *sœur noire*, for her work-day or Sabbath costume. But there was an ornament of nature's bestowing, which imparted grace and even dignity to both:—the profusion, namely, of rich black hair which, crowning her head in a thick braid, became a diadem; or falling over her shoulders, was in itself almost a garment. It was in the former guise that, when her bonnet was removed, she presented herself to Lady Meadows; who, accustomed to Amy's light brown hair and girlish features, was startled by the lofty character of her beauty. There was, in fact, nothing of the "girl" in Mary Hargood. She had never been young. When a child, she was a mother to the boys; as through life, her father's slave.

The aunt who had once borne her name, was not the less prepared to cherish the noble-looking being of whom her brother had spoken, if not in the words of tenderness she was wont to lavish upon Amy, in terms of esteem more commonly bestowed on persons of twice her age; as Lord Russell might have spoken of his Rachel, or More of his Margaret. Strange did it seem to her, when Hargood under the pressure of his professional avocations had returned by omnibus to town, to find herself alone with a young companion as different from her Amy as night from day; still more so when, by degrees, the young girl, won to con-

fidence by Lady Meadows' kind and attaching manners, drew nearer and nearer, and was led by her inquiries to talk of her mother and brothers; the dear mother she had lost—the brothers who were all but lost to her. Tears moistened her slumbrous dark eyes when thus kindly questioned. She was not used to sympathy. It almost pained her torpid heart; like the pang we experience on the first renewal of sensation in a frozen limb.

“We do indeed lead a cheerless and isolated life,” she replied to her aunt's interrogations. “My father's time is too deeply engaged to afford leisure for society, or the cultivation of new impressions. He is afraid of distracting my attention, or his own, from pursuits with which we cannot afford to trifle.”

“Still, dear Mary, occasional relaxation is indispensable.”

“My father thinks otherwise. He fancies that glimpses of the land of Canaan only deepen the darkness of the land of Egypt.”

“In future, my dear girl, this house will afford you some little change—though smaller and probably far less provided with means of entertainment than our own—”

“Did I not describe our own as the House of Bondage?” answered Mary, with a melancholy smile. “And here, dear aunt, I feel already half enfranchised. This air seems easier to breathe: and though *you*, accustomed to extensive landscapes, probably despise the view from your window over yonder orchards, to *me* they are country:—something, at least, of nature's creating, in place of soot-stained houses, and staring windows.”

She spoke with animation; for it was not often she obtained a sympathising ear. It was pleasant, indeed, to talk of the two absent boys she loved so dearly; and whom her father seemed to consider only like the rags thrown into a paper-mill—valueless till they finally emerge from its complex machinery, in the form of glossy cream-laid. Lady Meadows encouraged her to talk of their looks and disposition—the quaint originality of Ned—the affectionate simple nature of little Frank.

“Frank—after my grandfather, I believe,” added she, hoping to recommend the child to the kindness of her grandfather's daughter.

While still absorbed in these family details—seated upon the

same cushion by the sofa-side habitually occupied by Amy—the door was quietly opened by Marlow, with the announcement of “a gentleman.”

And a gentleman, decidedly, was the visitor who closely followed her into the room. But she might quite as well have announced him as “a stranger;” for neither Lady Meadows nor her niece had ever seen him before.

“You must allow me to make myself known to you as your nephew Hugh,” said he, approaching the sofa from which the invalid was making a languid effort to rise; “and for a nephew, you will not surely disturb yourself!” he continued, addressing Lady Meadows, and pressing the hand already extended to welcome him. “Lest you should misdoubt me as an impostor, dear Lady Meadows, I lose no time in presenting my credentials, as envoy from my mother.”

The letter placed in her hands, addressed in the once familiar writing of the once dear Gertrude Meadows, brought an instant flush of pleasure to her cheek. But it faded as it came. Her head was dizzy from emotion.

Lord Davenport stood watching her with an embarrassed air; but when, endeavoring to recover herself, and relieve his awkwardness, she said in a scarcely articulate voice, while the letter still trembled in her hand—“You are most welcome. Pray sit down. Let me introduce you to—”

“Thanks, thanks! don’t thing of me just now,” interrupted Lord Davenport, taking the nearest chair, after courteously shaking hands with Mary. “No introduction is necessary. Pray read your letter. My brother Mark has so often talked to me of you,” he added, addressing Miss Hargood, “that I feel as if we were already well acquainted.”

“I understood from him that he was coming here this morning,” observed Mary, humanised at once by his graceful ease of manner—the charm of high breeding being as yet as little known to her as the lustre of brocade, or glitter of diamonds.

“It was a great disappointment to Marcus to be prevented accompanying me, as he promised,” replied Hugh. “Just as we were starting, he was summoned by a lawyer’s letter, to make an affidavit before the Accountant General; essential to the inter-

ests of the widow and orphan of a brother officer, killed by his side in one of his Indian campaigns."

"A paramount duty," rejoined Mary. "A claim he could not compromise."

"Was he to have given you a drawing-lesson to-day?" inquired Lord Davenport, with an air of interest. "I assure you he often vexes his other pupil, my sister Olivia, by taunting her with an account of your superior progress."

Mary Hargood, conscious of the parity of proficiency between herself and Captain Davenport, was not a little amused at the idea of his having represented himself as her master; and the momentary smile which, like summer lightning, brightened her countenance, imparted to it the only charm in which it was deficient. No wonder Lord Davenport thought he had never seen so beautiful a face.

"My father informed me," said she, "that if you cannot say, like your brother, '*anch'io son pittore*,' you have devoted much time and thought to the interests of the art."

Lord Davenport looked exceedingly bewildered. How his late uncle should ever have become cognizant of the nature of his studies, or how a mere fox-hunter like Sir Mark should have acquired any information concerning arts of a higher order than regarded the sporting prints of Fores and Ackermann, puzzled him extremely. At length, Lady Meadowes, after a second perusal of the few affectionate lines addressed to her by her once-loved Gertrude, resumed sufficient self-possession to perceive that her companions were at cross purposes.

"You are mistaking my niece Mary Hargood for her cousin Amy, who keeps her room to-day in consequence of a severe cold," said she, cheerfully. "Another time, I hope you will make acquaintance with my daughter."

"I have only my own stupidity to blame," replied Lord Davenport, a little embarrassed by the familiarity he had unduly assumed. "I ought to have known that the auburn curls and hazel eyes described by Mark to my mother, as the counterpart of Olivia's, could not have been so suddenly converted into Miss Hargood's raven braids. I am grieved, however, to learn that

Amy is indisposed. For I may not for ages enjoy another opportunity of seeing her. To-morrow, I am forced to leave town again, on my return to Ilford Castle."

"For 'ages,' if I am to believe Lady Davenport's letter, we are to read, 'till the month of January,'" said Lady Meadows, with a cordial smile. "To me, however, the time will indeed seem long; so anxious am I to take dear Ger—Lady Davenport," she added, checking herself,—“once more by the hand. But you, between shooting and fox-hunting, will find little idle time."

"*Very* little—if you knew what a multiplicity of work the Ilford estate has brought on my hands," he replied. "But you mistake me, dear aunt—I am no fox-hunter; nor much of a sportsman in any way. Marcus has always been the Nimrod of the family."

"True, true," rejoined Lady Meadows,—with a sigh, as she reflected how much, in manliness of pursuit as in name and feature, he resembled her beloved husband:—while Mary, whose cockney prejudices connected something of the rat-catcher with the idea of a thorough-going sportsman, conceded all the greater interest to Lord Davenport's expressive countenance, already familiar to her in his brother's sketch book, on finding him no votary of the stable or kennel. She longed to question him concerning his occupations. But since she found that his previous sociability originated in the belief of consanguinity between them, she felt scarcely privileged to address him again.

Lord Davenport, on the other hand, would have found it difficult to renew his conversation with the beautiful girl whom he still kept furtively watching, and noting as a living impersonation of Sir Joshua Reynold's picture of St. Cecilia;—for to her tastes and pursuits he possessed not the slightest indication. While rambling with him among the mountain passes of the north, Mark had talked to him for hours of Amy Meadows,—of her sweetness, and daisy-like prettiness, and endearing *naïveté* of nature. But touching a certain studio, and a certain Muse, converted by her selfish father into a domestic drudge, as the Mexicans used to frame their vilest household implements of virgin gold, he had been cautiously mute. He had in fact

endeavored, by a lapwing-cry of pretended enthusiasm for Amy, to mislead his brother from his nest. How therefore was Lord Davenport to accost this unknown cousin of his cousin?

Lady Meadows soon relieved his embarrassment by taking the conversation into her own hands. Often as she had questioned Mark concerning the inmates of Ilford Castle, endless inquiries suggested themselves respecting Lady Davenport and her daughter. Nor were they half brought to a close, when Hugh, whose diffidence of nature was apt to make him fancy himself an intruder, decided that he ought to hasten his departure, as they must wish to be in attendance on his cousin Amy. Having secured a promise from Lady Meadows that she would lose no time in acknowledging his mother's letter, he took leave of the old garden house, little accustomed to the presence of guests so distinguished; so little, indeed, that, on espying from her latticed window the coronet on the blinkers of his lordship's cab-horse, Mrs. Margams scarcely refrained from rushing forth and offering him a posy composed of Michaelmas daisies and sprigs of winter savory.

"Neither so handsome nor so brilliant as our dear Mark," was Lady Meadowe's commentary, after his exit: "but apparently a most amiable young man!"

To which Mary, who was already projecting a study of his graceful head for that of the Beloved Disciple, had scarcely patience to answer. As it was clear, however, that Lady Meadows, like Antony, paused for a reply, she at length rejoined—"Less *showy*, perhaps, than Captain Davenport; but I suspect, infinitely more elevated in mind and humane in nature."

CHAPTER XXIV.

It is not to be supposed that while Lady Davenport and Lady Meadows were thus profoundly interested in the prospects of their children, the patriarch of Horndean Court and the casuistic Lady Louisa were regardless of the laurels sprouting round the brows of their son and heir.

Lady Harriet had never acquainted her sister with his ignom-

inious rejection at the hands of Miss Meadows, which, in the paroxysm of his disappointment he had confided to her;—though almost might she as well have made a clean breast of the secret, since their utmost stretch of credulity would never have accomplished faith in the story. And as from that moment, the name of Amy had never escaped the lips of William Eustace, they concluded that their arguments had prevailed, and that their family tree had been preserved from pollution.

Still, when they found him so changed in temper and pursuits, they began to fear that love or the typhus fever, might have bequeathed to his constitution the germ of some other disease.

Sir Henry, the more uneasy of the two, often ejaculated in private to the mortified Lady Louisa, that Heaven above only knew how it would end; that he was jeered by his demi-semiquavering old chums at Arthur's for the profligate Radicalism of his son; and that Mr. Dundeput, the family apothecary, assured him that many highly respectable people among his patients were of opinion that the safety of the country might be seriously compromised if such Jacobinical principles as those of Mr. Eustace were suffered to spread. The poor old gentleman was getting quite thin on the strength of it.

When they returned to Horndean Court, at the close of a Session throughout which, for the first time in his life, the rash frenzy of his paternal and political curiosity induced him to snatch unaided the Times newspaper every morning, steaming from the press, and run his eye over the leading articles to ascertain whether his patronymic were held up to shame,—Lady Louisa found her usual resource from his peevishness in the school-room: where she instructed the governess, tutored the provincial masters, and kept the poor girls strictly to their backboards.

Sir Henry, however, remained true to his indignation against his son. It would have been like Lady Townshend's rabbits quarrelling for the Holkham blade of grass, had *both* parents endeavoured to find food for their fidgetiness in an over-strenuous education of their daughters:—and the poor little baronet was content to worry himself with wondering what could have become of Mr. Eustace; who was neither up to his knees in heather on the moors, nor up to his chin in tepid water, at the German

baths; nor attempting the nautical in the still waters of the Solent, nor prosing at Mechanics' Institutes, nor doing anything that may become a man whose pastimes still savour of the boy.

Had Sir Henry Eustace, instead of gazing mopingly through the small panes of his narrow windows at Horndean Court, been just then an inmate of one of those pleasant and popular country-houses where the chosen sportsmen of the *beau monde* succeeded by direct inheritance to the stubble fields vacated by the Michaelmas geese, he might have learned that Billy Eustace had hired a place in Gloucestershire, and was assiduously devoting himself to hard study. This place, by the way, was none other than Meadows Court.

We will now return to the time-crazed old garden house with pointed gables, where Amy Meadows was weeping her girlish tears;—precious as the “med’cinable gums” that flow from some tree in Araby the Blest—because indicative of its balsamic nature.

“You are pleased, dearest mother, with your new niece?” said she, approaching Lady Meadows, when later in the evening, she rose; and, as they were now alone together, there was no further motive for reserve.

“*Much* pleased,” replied Lady Meadows. “No one who looks at Mary Hargood can deny the loveliness of her person; no one who listens to her, the superiority of her talents.”

“She is indeed beautiful—*most* beautiful!” rejoined Amy, with a heavy sigh.

“My brother has great reason to be proud of her,” resumed Lady Meadows. “But as regards my own prepossessions, Mary is a person whom I would far rather possess as a niece than as a daughter.”

“Thank you for *that*, mother,” said Amy, sighing more deeply than before.

“It is perhaps because accustomed to a gentle manner and a more loving heart, that I am so fastidious,” resumed Lady Meadows; “but Mary’s self-assertion depresses me. The strict subordination maintained by my brother seems to have had the effect of enfranchising her opinions to a degree alarming at her age. Forbidden to act for herself, she thinks for herself more, I fear, than is good for her.”

"It was, perhaps, that very independence of mind that attracted him!" mused Amy, aloud.

"Attracted *whom*, my dear?"

"My cousin Mark. Has not Miss Hargood informed you that—"

"Not Miss Hargood, darling;—*Mary!*"

"Has not Mary, then, informed you that she is about to become doubly your niece?"

Lady Meadows kissed her daughter's cheek with a smile implying compassion for her girlish jealousy.

"Not exactly, Amy. On that point, she probably knew me to be better informed."

"What information can be better than the express avowal of Mark?"

"His *avowal*?"

"My cousin himself apprised me of his attachment."

"To Mary Hargood. No, no!" cried Lady Meadows, changing color and countenance.

"And that the dearest object of his life was to make her his wife," added Amy, with a degree of exactness not to be mistaken.

For some minutes Lady Meadows remained silent as death. Unconsciously her arm extended itself round the waist of poor Amy, whose tears were now falling unrestrainedly. Poor girl! Poor darling child! Her fatigue of the day before—her sudden indisposition—were now explained.

"You, mother, will, I know, bear with me," whispered Amy, "if I experience a little sorrow and mortification at discovering that we are not first objects with one who has so long seemed to make us so; nay, that so far from being his first objects, he has frankly owned to me that—"

It was hard to complete the purposed avowal! While resting her head on her mother's shoulder, she was forced to take breath for the effort.

"He has owned to you, darling?" inquired Lady Meadows, in an encouraging voice.

"That he sought us out, at first, *not* as the nearest relations of his mother—but of Mary Hargood!"—

“From first to last, then, his conduct has been as false as cruel!” was the indignant rejoinder.

“Not intentionally. But he seems to have thought only of *her*. You know his impetuous nature; all impulse—all energy—”

“All selfishness, Amy. He has thought only of himself. But how strange—how more than strange—that a son of Lord Davenport—of the man by whose animosity my whole life has been embittered—should so little inherit his prejudices as thus to ally himself with a family so contemptuously spurned by his father!”

“Marcus is a person thoroughly independent in mind and conduct.”

“Which makes me doubt their being happy together. For Mary appears to be as opinionated as himself. Already, though you assure me they are engaged, she judges him with the most impartial severity. So far from reciprocating his love, I should say that she almost disliked him.”

“You really think so, mother?” said Amy, a ray of hope brightening her face.

“She spoke of him this morning so harshly, that I was hurt and offended.”

“May she not have wished to conceal her real feelings towards him?”

“Concealment is not in her nature. Never was human being more thoroughly ingenious.”

“I may perhaps come to like her better on acquaintance, dear mamma,” said Amy, with a sigh a trifle less heavy than that which accompanied the commencement of her confidences. “After all, it is not Mary’s fault, if my want of experience and knowledge of the world should have induced me to assign to Mark’s attentions a stronger preference than cousinly good-will. Still, he certainly seemed convinced of Mary’s attachment.”

“Because he is as vain as selfish,” replied Lady Meadows, who was rapidly acquiring strange impartiality towards the virtues of her nephew. “But the whole affair is a mystery—a mystery I must lose no time in clearing up. To-morrow, I am to see my brother again.”

“Not a word to *him*, however, darling mother, till we have

Marcus's permission to speak out. If you think my uncle is not as yet in the secret, it might seriously injure my cousin's cause to have it prematurely disclosed."

Lady Meadows imprinted a fervent kiss on the cheek of her generous child; amid her own disappointments, ever careful of the happiness of others.

"And Hugh, dear mother. You have told me nothing about Hugh. Is he likely, do you think, to approve his brother's choice?"

"I saw little of Lord Davenport—I was occupied with his mother's letter. To own the truth, I fear he interested me only as the brother of Mark. When I found him so unlike, I looked no further. But I cannot help fearing—"

It was perhaps as well that she was prevented confiding to Amy the nature of her apprehensions, by the bustling entrance of Marlow; who persisted in administering to Miss Meadows' cold as assiduously, as though her reddened eyes and husky voice were really the result of the influenza.

"Her ladies" were hurried angrily to bed.

If the officious zeal of the waiting-maid could only have secured rest to their pillows!

CHAPTER XXV.

WITH his mind still agitated by his affecting interview with his sister, Hargood was startled by a note from Captain Davenport, requesting an audience for the following morning:—"A private audience for the discussion of business of importance;" not commencing "My dear Hargood," as of old, when offering an opera ticket, or proposing an excursion to the Dulwich Gallery;—but filially and respectfully, "My dear Sir."

That he wanted to discuss the affairs of Lady Meadows, probably to inquire in what manner the pecuniary aid of the Davenport family could be most delicately and effectively afforded, seemed a matter of course; and Hargood consequently set aside his customary avocations, and appointed an early hour for the visit. It even occurred to him that Captain Davenport might be

desirous of soliciting, through his good offices, the hand of his niece. Without positively asserting the existence of an attachment between the young people, Lady Meadows had talked of Marcus far more as her son-in-law than as her nephew; and as Hargood cut the pages of a new review, while waiting his arrival, he kept smiling to himself at the notion of the futility of human prejudices:—Lord Davenport scarcely cold in his grave; and his son already renewing the forfeiture of caste, which, for forty years, the old lord had resented with the utmost rigour of his narrow mind.

He accordingly received his guest with a degree of cordiality foreign to his nature. Lady Meadows's account of Marcus's kindness had touched his heart. On noticing the flush which animated the young man's cheek, and the emotion which somewhat impeded his utterance, Hargood congratulated himself, as we are wont to do when we most deceive ourselves, on the perspicuity which had so readily foreseen the purpose of his visit.

"In love,—poor fellow,—decidedly in love!" thought he; and he assumed a benign countenance and gracious attitude, to encourage him to be as brief as possible in announcing his passion and detailing his proposals.

"You must have seen, my dear Sir," said Mark, "you cannot but have noticed that for some time past, my heart has been no longer in my own keeping. Clear-sighted as you are, Hargood, you probably penetrated my secret long before it was known to myself."

"I am not very observant of such matters. But I am certainly prepared for your avowal of attachment."

"And I trust also to sanction and promote it?"

"Certainly,—certainly:—though *my* consent is perhaps not the most important."

"Hers will follow. Hers, if I may say so without presumption, I entertain little doubt of obtaining. But I thought it right first to place before you the exact state of my affairs. The sale of my commission cleared me, some months ago, from every sort of embarrassment; and I now stand in possession of something more than two thousand a-year. Of this, I propose to settle half

on her and her children, securing three hundred a-year pin-money to her for life; and if—”

“Stop stop, my good friend,” cried Hargood, scarcely able to follow his impetuous volubility. “Before we enter into all these commercial particulars, surely it will be better to satisfy yourself if the young lady’s feelings justify such an exposure of your affairs.”

“They do,—they do!” cried Marcus. “I am satisfied that she loves me,—perhaps I should say *likes*,—for till after marriage, few women have courage to apply the right name to the right thing. But for Heaven’s sake, Hargood, do not keep me in suspense. Tell me that I have your sanction to my addresses.”

“Of course you have;—but—”

“No buts, no buts, I entreat! I feel so happy, so hopeful,—that the slightest obstacle drives me distracted. But when may I see her?”

“As soon, I presume, as you can make your way to Battersea.”

“Gone there, already? I felt so sure, at this early hour, of finding her!”

“Gone there?” repeated Hargood, a little astonished; yet making due allowance for the bewildering influence of love.

“I fancied that, having passed the day yesterday with her aunt and cousin, Mary would to-day remain at home.”

“*Mary!* Of whom in God’s name are you talking?” exclaimed Hargood, aghast.—“Are you out of your mind?”

“A little, I’m afraid! Nor can you wonder at it, my dear Hargood, when you reflect that you have just given your consent to my marriage with your daughter.”

“*My daughter*, Captain Davenport? I believe, throughout, that you were alluding to my niece Amy Meadows.”

“*My cousin Amy!*” cried Mark, impatiently shrugging his shoulders. “Amy is a charming little girl. But who that has been admitted to the happiness of seeing and conversing with her cousin, would for a moment think of one so every way inferior!”

“And am I to understand,” said Hargood, “that an attachment exists between you and my daughter;—and that you

are only waiting for me to give my consent to make her your wife?"

"And myself, the happiest man on earth."

"That miserable phrase follows as a matter of course?" retorted Hargood with a scornful smile, "for so grateful a daughter must needs become a true and faithful wife. Mary!" cried he, almost fiercely, having stalked across the room and snatched open the heavy door of the studio,—“Mary, come hither! I wish to speak to you.”

"I find, Mary Hargood," said her father, "that I have been warming a serpent in my bosom. Instead of the perfect confidence which I supposed to exist between us,—instead of the affection which *ought* to have existed between us,—you have given, without consulting your father, your affections and troth—plight to a comparative stranger!"

"Who says so,—who accuses me?" inquired Mary, almost too much amazed to be angry. "I will not say that perfect confidence subsists between us, father; but *this* I can assert,—that had any man living spoken to me of love or marriage, I should have instantly apprised you; and that, till this moment, no word of courtship has ever been uttered in my presence."

"Thank God!" ejaculated her father,—immeasurably relieved. "To see you married to an Emperor, Mary, would not have repaid me for having reared a thankless child!"

A stern glance towards Mark Davenport seemed to demand further explanations.

"You mistook me, Sir," said he, chiefly moved at finding himself the cause of the severe admonition addressed to that dear Mary, into whose ears he was burning to pour a thousand endearing protestations. "You mistook me in supposing that I announced myself as *engaged* to your daughter. The utmost I asserted was a hope that I was not altogether indifferent to her; and *in* that hope, I asked your sanction to my addresses."

"I did mistake you, then. You seemed to imply that my daughter,—that this girl,—this child,—had been wooed and won, in secret, without my sanction or knowledge. You certainly told me that she preferred you. But in these days, and in *your* class, Captain Davenport, I believe it is customary to make such

boasts concerning every woman with whom you ever held ten minutes, conversation."

"I trust at least, Mr. Hargood," said Marcus, "that, if I should hereafter obtain your daughter's favourable reception of my proposals, your consent will not be withheld on account of this misunderstanding?"

"Mary is at liberty to choose for herself, Sir. In my opinion unequal matches afford small prospect of happiness. Whether she likes you well enough to overlook the objection, must rest with herself.

"What say you, Mary?" continued Hargood, addressing his daughter, who was now leaning against the arm-chair, in which he was magisterially enthroned.

"I do not admit the objection, father," said she, in a tone of decision, for which Captain Davenport longed to throw himself at her feet. "I do not consider worldly position of sufficient moment to make it either a motive or an obstacle. But as regards the affection which Captain Davenport is generous enough to profess for me, I owe it to him to declare, at once, that my heart says nothing in his favour. Were he an artist like myself, or did I belong to his own class of society, it would be the same. I could never love him. There are points in Captain Davenport's character which would render him insupportable to me as a companion for life. The man to whom I devote myself, as a wife, must be steady of purpose, gracious of deportment, gentle with his friends, generous with his enemies, forbearing with my faults, cognizant of his own, and submissive, humbly and trustfully as myself, to the will of God. I do not find these qualities in Captain Davenport;—and therefore, could not love him as a husband. I do not care for distinctions, either of birth or talent. Affection must be all in all."

"You have said enough, Miss Hargood," exclaimed Mark Davenport, stung to the quick. "God forbid that I should force my addresses on any woman breathing;—more especially on one so exacting and fastidious. Whether I have deceived myself, or whether you have deceived me, it matters not now to inquire, I take my leave of you at once and for ever,—lamenting only to have wasted a year of my life,—with all its honest purposes,

manly projects, and warmth of affection,—on what appears to have been the shadow of a dream!”

It was perhaps because he found himself on the point of betraying emotions which he was too proud to exhibit in presence of the woman who had so cruelly slighted him, that, having wrung Hargood by the hand, he hastily quitted the room. As the door closed loudly after his departure from the house, Mary, whose courage had not failed her when it was wanted, sank languidly into a chair.

“You are not angry with me, father?” said she, perceiving that the brows of Hargood were contracted by vexation or displeasure.

“Not angry with you for having a mind,—and knowing it;—not angry with you for disclaiming a preference you do not feel. But it strikes me, Mary, that you owed me the respect of consulting me before you so decidedly rejected an opportunity of securing an honourable home for yourself, and an advantageous connection for your brothers.”

Mary Hargood folded her arms over her bosom with a look of despair. Were *her* feelings then *never* to be consulted? Was she always to be a mere stepping-stone to the family?

“But it is too late now to discuss the matter,” added Mr. Hargood, noticing her desponding attitude. “Davenport is not a man to be recalled, or trifled with. So now, my dear, go back to your painting-room. All this must not distract our attention from business:—and I have already wasted half my morning. Remember, Mary, that, at this time of year, every glimpse of daylight is precious. We have contracted to send home your ‘Aurora’ varnished and dry before Christmas Day. We cannot afford to be idle.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE heart of Lady Meadowes sank within her when, two days afterwards, she heard her brother, while ascending the stairs, inquiring of Marlow after the health of his niece. She dreaded his entry into the room. His joy and exultation would be too much for her. She knew not where she should find

presence of mind to offer him the congratulations on Mary's approaching marriage, which he was doubtless come to demand.

But to her surprise, Hargood seemed irritable and out of spirits. His manner towards herself was far less kind than at either of his former visits. Something had evidently ruffled his temper. But he did not suffer her long to remain in ignorance of the cause of his ill-humor, but abruptly introduced the subject by saying—

“That young man Mark, who, you say, has proved so kind a friend to you, has to *me* proved the worst of enemies.”

“Indeed?” murmured his astonished sister.

“By sowing the seeds of perpetual discord in my house! He has inspired Mary with notions of her own consequence, that will doubtless sooner or later estrange her from her duties, and create a distaste for her allotted portion in this world!”

“By expressing an attachment to her?” faltered Lady Meadows, anxious to bring him to the point.

“By asking her to become his wife.”

“And you refused him?” faltered Lady Meadows, scarcely able to articulate.

“Not I! She might have married him and welcome, had she thought proper. It was Mary herself who dismissed him.”

“She has formed, then, some other attachment?”

“No! But she is a girl of sterling principle. The same strength of body and mind which secures her from nervous headaches, would disdain even a coronet, where she could not conscientiously pronounce the marriage vow. She neither loved nor honored Captain Davenport; and told him so frankly to his face.”

Lady Meadows was thunderstruck. Their own dear generous, spirited, accomplished, distinguished Mark, to be thus ignominiously rejected!

“And what has become of him, then?”

“Gone back to the North, I suppose. I have never inquired. It is enough for me that he has set fire to the train of vanity latent in every female nature. Mary has already become moping and taciturn—reflecting upon—perhaps repenting—the precipitancy of her decision. And now the boys are coming home

from school, instead of attending to them as usual, I shall probably have her neglect the business of the household to indulge in idle reveries and construct castles in the air!"

It was a relief to Lady Meadowes when this trying interview was interrupted by an event so rare in her solitary life as a morning visit. A visitor, too, from Radensford! And if it afforded satisfaction to Edward Hargood to see his sister affectionately and deferentially accosted by a woman of superior manners and appearance with whom she seemed to have been intimately connected throughout the years of his estrangement, it caused equal surprise to Mrs. Burton to find in the burly surly man, who disappeared shortly after her entrance, a brother of Lady Meadowes; whom, during their long friendship, she had regarded as much isolated from human relationship, as though she had been produced out of a crucible.

Lady Meadowes meanwhile welcomed her warmly: for Rachel Burton seemed to bring with her something of the climate of her lost Eden. She was looking so well and so bright, that it was clear her sudden visit to the metropolis was connected with some pleasant vicissitude.

"My father could not be prevailed upon to accompany me," said she, in reply to the inquiries of her friend after Mr. Henderson. "His days are numbered, he says; and he has scarcely time left to attend to his professional duties; far less to indulge in pastime. But I know you will be glad to hear, dear Lady Meadowes, that in his declining years his labors will be lightened. Since he undertook the maintenance of his daughter and grandchild, my dear father has, as you know, been forced to relinquish the assistance of a curate. But all will now be right again. We are grown wonderfully rich. He is released from all anxiety on our account."

Congratulations were readily offered; and the explanations asked for, as readily offered.

"My husband's father (who was on terms of enmity with poor Sylvester nearly from the time of our marriage) has lately died, without a will; and my little Sophia becomes his heiress. My business in London was to make her a ward in chancery; and a liberal allowance has been already assigned me as her guardian."

Again, the friendly sympathy of Lady Meadows was forthcoming.

“Yes! it is indeed an unexpected turn of fortune,” replied Mrs. Burton. “Yet, discontented mortals that we are,—I find myself oftener repining that riches should come so late,—than grateful that they should come at all. Something whispers to me, dearest Lady Meadows, that had that dear child obtained better medical treatment immediately on our return from India, her health might have been established. Good old Dr. Burnaby pats me on the back, and says, ‘No, nothing more could have been done.’ But already, since I came to town, a consultation of the first advisers has decided that warm sea-bathing must be instantly resorted to. The curvature of the spine beginning to be apparent, may thus, they hope, be remedied.”

“God grant it! You have been some time then in London?”

“Only long enough for the execution of legal forms indispensable to substantiate our claims on the estate of the late Mr. Burton,” replied Rachel. “This is the first day I have had to dispose of.”

Lady Meadows shook her head misgivingly. “Nay, nay, for some months past, you have almost ceased to write,” she resumed. “Except for an occasional letter of business from Dr. Burnaby, I should fancy we were already forgotten at Radensford.”

“Never, dear Lady Meadows,—never,—*never!* But to own the truth, I believed your thoughts to be engrossed by Amy’s marriage.”

“Her *marriage?*”

“The news was brought back from Clifton by her guardian, last spring. You yourself seemed to confirm it.”

“If my refraining from direct contradiction was so interpreted, I am much to blame,” said Lady Meadows, with something of a guilty consciousness; “for Amy is not, and never has been likely to be married to her cousin.”

Mrs. Burton started forward, and seized her hand.

“Then accept my heartiest congratulations,” said she. “For Mark Davenport is wholly unworthy of her!”

“You know him, then?”

“No one better.”

“Yet believing him to be affianced to Amy, you said not a word to his disparagement!”

“To what purpose,—if they were *really* betrothed?” Besides, from peculiar circumstances, my lips were sealed.”

“But even before this supposed engagement, dear Mrs. Burton,—at Radensford,—at Meadows Court, you never spoke of Captain Davenport as an acquaintance?”

“I once mentioned his name to poor Sir Mark; who burst into such a fury of invective,—disclaiming and denouncing the whole family,—that I never ventured on the subject again. Of yourself, dear Lady Meadows, I still stood on my return from India, somewhat in awe. I fancied you still saw in me the wilful, flighty, Rachel Henderson, who had been such a torment to her father.”

“Rather the *child*, Rachel Henderson,” rejoined Lady Meadows, “who, from being spoiled by her father, became so great a torment to herself.”

“It was only after I had proved to you by years of resignation and retirement, that time and suffering had subdued me to a sense of duty, it was only *then* I ventured to approach you on a more equal footing.”

“Admit, at least, that you were received with open arms:—that we all loved you Rachel, both for your father’s sake and your own?”

“The best consolations of my forlorn life reached me from Meadows Court,” was Mrs. Burton’s earnest reply. “Still, the difference of age between us,—my own recent afflictions,—your personal motives for avoiding every allusion to the name of Davenport, united to preclude all confidences connected with Marcus.”

“But *now*, dearest Rachel, these objections are removed. *Now*, you can no longer hesitate to acquaint me with your reasons for believing him unworthy to become the husband of Amy.”

Mrs. Burton did, however, hesitate. To talk of him at all, seemed like withdrawing a veil of oblivion from afflictions only half obliterated.

“When I tell you,” persisted Lady Meadowes, “that, by convincing us of his want of merit, you would be the cause of softening to your young friend the bitterest disappointment;—and by this means, reconcile me to myself for having rashly exposed my darling child to the penalties of an ill-placed attachment?”

“Thus adjured, I cannot refuse,” replied Mrs. Burton. “But bear in mind, dear Lady Meadowes, that it is only on such sacred grounds, I revert to this painful history. It is at least known to you,—no, of even *that* circumstance you are ignorant,—that Mark Davenport and my husband belonged to the same regiment. It was not till we landed in India, however, that I made Captain Davenport’s acquaintance. Nor was it till I landed in India that I became aware of being united to a man to whom the excesses of vice were familiar. In these, as in all else, Davenport was his associate; but to do him justice, it was as a scholar rather than a teacher. I hate to dwell on that miserable period of my life. Neglected and insulted by the man for whose sake I had sacrificed my father and my country, I was often in want of the necessaries of life. The feeble health of my poor little Sophia is in fact attributable to the privations I endured previous to her birth.”

She paused for breath. But Lady Meadowes was too deeply interested to interpose a word.

“Throughout my troubles as the wife of a drunkard and a gambler,” she resumed, “but one protecting hand was extended towards me—that of Marcus. Amidst the worst of my husband’s follies and extravagances, Marcus seemed to be endeavoring to reclaim and recal him to a sense of duty towards his helpless wife and child. Often, the common necessaries which I was no longer able to purchase reached my bungalow, or were supplied to me on our line of march, at the moment they were most wanted, as if by magic interposition. I will not deny that I soon guessed to what compassionate friend I was indebted; and, knowing that I should eventually obtain from my father the means of repayment, I accepted in silence—but even more gratefully than if I had spoken my thanks. I felt that to this generous protector I was indebted for preserving the life of my

sickly infant. Judge, therefore, dear Lady Meadows, of the nature of my feelings towards him!"

"It was like Marcus!" ejaculated Lady Meadows. "Just so kind—so considerate was his conduct towards ourselves, when he withdrew us from our miserable retreat at Clifton and escorted us hither."

"In *that* case, his interference was justifiable—his motives honorable. In mine, he acted like a villain. After establishing himself by my side as a benefactor—protector—friend—after winning my confidence and loading me with obligations—he presumed upon his trust to offer himself as a lover! Yes, to *me*, the wife of his friend and brother officer—the daughter of a minister of the church—the mother of a dying child! I scarcely knew in what words of disgust I banished him from the house. He knew that, from my husband, the fear of bloodshed would compel me to conceal his conduct. But I threatened should the offence be renewed, to expose it to his superior officer, and his family at home; and by this means, succeeded in breaking off the connection. Remittances from home luckily enabled me to discharge my pecuniary obligations. To requite the sense of humiliation to which he had reduced me, was impossible."

"And at your husband's death?" inquired Lady Meadows, with lips now pale and tremulous.

"At my husband's death, to render him justice, he behaved as became his ostensible friendship for the dead. Of all that occurred on that terrible occasion, I am not fully certain. But he did not again intrude upon my presence; and I have since learned that, among the friends who busied themselves most actively in arrangements for my comfort on my return to my native country, was Captain Davenport."

"The least reparation he could offer."

"The least—fer, to my apprehension, he owed me more. I need not tell you that at the moment of his insolent advances, the outrage was attributed to the violence of an insurmountable passion. On that occasion, he swore that, from our first interview, his sole care or thought had been for *me*; that, had I been free, he would have instantly offered me his hand; nay, that if I would even then desert my husband for his sake, a

divorce should be obtained, enabling him to make me his wife. He promised to be a father to my child—to watch over me—to love me. My only answer was to bid him begone, lest I should be tempted to bring down upon his head the vengeance of the man he was betraying.”

Mrs. Burton's voice was now becoming broken by sobs. She was evidently scarcely able to support the reminiscences her narrative had conjured up. She recommenced, however, in a subdued voice, and with an air of despondency.

“I thought, therefore—I believed—I *hoped*—that if the repentance he professed were real, he would, when the decencies of society permitted, offer me the best proof of his sincerity, and the only reparation in his power; by seeking as a wife the woman he had vainly attempted to detach from her duties.”

“As, Heaven knows, was her due.”

“I heard from him no more. I saw his name mentioned with honor in the despatches. I knew that he was pursuing with success—I might say with glory—his military career. From Marcus himself, not a word!”

“He perhaps felt unworthy to address you. He dreaded a second repulse.”

“No—the levity of his nature was alone in fault. He had forgotten me. I waited for him and watched for him; but he had forgotten me. In time, I learned to reproach myself for having watched and waited; and began to submit myself, without one backward glance, to the exigencies of my position. In the accomplishment of my duties as a daughter and a mother, I entered a new phase of my existence. Thanks be to Heaven, dear Lady Meadows, I soon forgot him in my turn.”

This last assertion was, perhaps, of all the narrative, the only word that did not bring instant conviction to her auditors. There was no need, however, to open the eyes of poor Rachel Burton to the real origin of the tears that were, even now, flowing from her eyes. Enough that she was able to thank her warmly for her confidence; and fully assent to the assertion that, united with a man so unprincipled—so given up to the impulse of the moment—poor Amy would have been a miserable wife.

“You will tell her as much of all this as is good for her to

know," said Mrs. Burton, having gradually recovered her composure. "I own it deeply grieved me when I heard that the misdeeds of her cousin were crowned by the conquest of her innocent affections. He used to boast that he was 'on the best terms with luck.' Those who lean on such a shadow for support, sooner or later find themselves grovelling in the dust."

Lady Meadows did not feel justified in relating to her companion the humiliation lately undergone by this grievous offender. But it was agreed between them that, previous to repairing to Brighton, where the good Rector was to join his daughter as soon as an efficient substitute could be procured for his Radensford duties, little Sophia, the new heiress, should be brought to visit her dear Amy and her kind friend Lady Meadows

"And then," added Mrs. Burton at parting, "I shall have leisure to give you news of your old neighborhood, of which I must now glance over the details. Old Nichols, as you doubtless know, has established a Meadows Arms in the village. Neighbor Saville has followed her beloved old master to the grave. The Manor House has been empty throughout the autumn; and Lady Harriet has been on a visit to her sister at Horndean Court, where there has been a sad family affliction. The eldest of Lady Louisa's daughters—a young girl, not yet introduced into society—has disgraced the family by an elopement of the most unfortunate nature; and Lady Harriet has been remaining ever since with her sister, affording such consolation as lies in her power. But Lady Harriet herself, I suspect, is really as much mortified as the parents. It does not appear to have entered into the minds of either of the sisters that a member of *their* family could possibly stoop to a plebeian attachment."

"The lover then is of a rank beneath their own?"

"The son of the gamekeeper. Judge of Lady Louisa's horror—of Lady Harriet's consternation:—they, such slaves to public opinion?"

"May the blow soften their hearts," said Lady Meadows, in a saddened voice. "They have been smitten where they were most vulnerable. And Meadows Court—poor old Meadows Court?" she added, with averted eyes, and in a faltering voice.

“I scarcely liked to pronounce the name till you broached the subject. Meadows Court is undergoing the most complete repair. The gardens have been completed; the paddock is newly fenced—”

“Sir Jervis, then, is coming to reside there?”

“No, it has been taken, on a long lease, by a stranger; a friend or relative of Lady Harriet Warneford. She is not expected to return home from Horndean, till the new tenant is installed at Meadows Court.”

“And you do not know his name?” said Lady Meadows, greatly interested.

“I have heard—but not from good authority—only from the supposition of poor old Nichols—that the new tenant is no other than our old acquaintance—Mr. Eustace.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

It was on one of those December days when London is at its hatefullest, and the atmosphere seems doubly dense from coming snow and impending Christmas bills, that unannounced and impetuous as a whirlwind, Mark Davenport rushed into Hamilton Drewe's apartment, and threw himself on the sofa; while Cocotte, recognising in ecstasy her unquwhile master, kept screaming from her perch “Marcus, old fellow, Marcus, Marcus!”

“My dear Davenport!” exclaimed the recumbent neophyte, who lay masticating a preparation of haschish, in order to get up the steam for a page of hexameters:—“where, *where* on earth do you start from?”—

“No matter whence I come or whither I am bound—for I have little leisure for idle gossip,” said Mark, in an accent to which any one who dared to take liberties with him might have ventured to answer “Cease, rude Boreas.” “I am here to ask a favor of you, Drewe,—a *great* favor!”

Involuntarily, the man of many stanzas glanced towards the wall; where, betrophied in warlike attitude, in company with Malay kreeses and Turkish yataghans, hung a pair of Wagdon's

duelling pistols, to which he had succeeded with his family estates:—nothing doubting that the favor about to be demanded at his hands by his fiery friend, was to accompany him as second, in a single combat, to Wimbledon Common.

“You are a gentleman and a good fellow, Drewe,” resumed Davenport—“though a bit of an—no matter! *Will you oblige me?*”

“Willingly—if you will explain yourself,” rejoined Drewe—who was seldom asked to oblige anybody, unless with his autograph, inscribed on the reverse of a bit of stamped paper.

“I want you to take *this*,” said Davenport, opening his pocket-book and presenting him with a blank cheque upon Coutts, “to fill up as you find occasion. Take it!” said he, extending the paper (in a hand whose tremulousness sufficiently attested his emotion), on seeing that Drewe was so utterly at a loss to interpret this act of munificence, as to hesitate about accepting the deposit. “You know the Hargoods—that is you know Hargood—you know his pursuits, his necessities—or at all events, you know those better informed concerning them, who will place you *au courant* of his wants. To supply them, use my money as you will. I am going away—to leave town—to leave England—to leave Europe. I scarcely know indeed at present *whither* I am bound. But you must represent me here, Drewe. All I ask—and I know no man’s word of honor on whom I can more fully rely—is that you will never name to any living soul the nature of this interview; or risk the discovery of the source of the benefits secretly conferred on Hargood.”

“This is a serious commission, my dear fellow,” said Drewe, unspeakably surprised. “I must think twice ere I accept it.”

“No! Like a good fellow, close with it at once.”

“But reflect that, in the first place, some unexpected chance may bring your share in the business to light; when the vials of wrath you are likely to pour on my head would be no trifle. In the next, that if Hargood, as haughty in his way as Coriolanus, were to find out that you were insinuating alms into his wallet, an eruption of Vesuvius would be a mild alternative. No! take back your cheque, my dear Davenport. By Jove, I daren’t!”

“I might have expected it!” cried Marcus, starting up.

“Everything and everybody are against me! I haven’t a friend I can trust to in the world!”

Drewe surveyed him with amazement. He, Mark Davenport the bold,—the overbearing,—the triumphant,—the successful,—who “drew out Leviathan with an hook, and bored the jaw of Behemoth with a thorn;” he, the crusher of other men’s feelings, the anatomist of other men’s thoughts, the analyser of other men’s purposes, to be so thoroughly cast down! The kind-hearted lyrist could scarcely set bounds to his sympathy. His voice became troubled—his eyes tearful. It might be that the influence of the *haschish* had its share in streaking his sallow cheek with hectic spots and veiling his glazy eyesight. But Marcus was deeply moved by his apparent warmth of feeling.

“I will do what you wish, Davenport,” said Drewe, resignedly. “Only explain yourself as clearly as possible, to avoid all chance of my mistaking you. For, as you were about to say just now,—I am but an ass—especially in matters of business: and you are not the man to be tolerant of a fellow-creature’s deficiency of judgment. So tell me—how much am I to devote to the exigencies of Hargood and his family—and how is it to be applied?”

“How *much*? Hundreds, thousands if you will. Anything within compass of my fortune, the cypher of which you know: as much at all events as can be converted to his advantage without exciting his suspicions.”

“You have answered only half my question. How is all this to be done?”

“A poet, and so wanting in invention? It is to be done like Ariel’s spiriting,—‘gently.’ Is anything easier than, in this town, to forward to a house the objects wanting to its comfort, as from a nameless friend? To what purpose are red-men and ticket-porters, to what purpose parcel-delivery companies, or railway-vans? My dear Drewe, I don’t wonder your play was damned, if for such plotting and stage business as this, you are incompetent.”

“I am glad, at all events, to see you more cheerful,” said Drewe, rallying a little. “You almost frightened me, just now. But I really believe you use me as a damper, and come and tame

down your rage upon poor me, as the Roman Empress used to try the strength of her poisons upon slaves."

"You, too, are recovering your courage, since you can afford to be pedantic!" replied Marcus, shrugging his shoulders. "But whether I draw it mild or bitter, be certain, Drewe, that I have a sincere regard for you. I should love you better if you would go and spud up weeds in your neglected Northumbrian farms, instead of digging hopelessly on in this over-worked garden of the Hesperides. Perhaps by the time I return, you may have wisely exchanged your ever-pointed Mordan for a bill-hook? And now, good bye, God bless you, Drewe. We may perhaps never meet again. Take care of poor Cocotte for my sake. Let her have her almond daily, and don't corrupt her ears by nonsense. Good bye. I sail, that is, I steam to night from Southampton, a first class screw—letter A 1. am going sketch-making to the Ionian Islands. Better for me, and all belonging to me, if we went down at once, like the poor Amazon."

Another second, and he had disappeared. Hamilton Drewe felt as if a rocket had gone up, or a diving-bell down, leaving him a gaping, powerless spectator. But that the *haschish* was inflaming his veins with its subtle poison, and subduing his brain with its narcotic ascendancy, he would have endeavoured to follow him, and offer to accompany him to his place of embarkation.

As it was, he only sank powerless into his lounging-chair; as much excited, yet as fairly overcrowded, as Dominie Sampson after his interview with the terrible Meg Merrilies; while still Cocotte kept muttering elegiacally on the perch, "Marcus, old fellow! Marcus, Marcus!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CHRISTMAS, so great an impostor in its usurped character of an epoch of universal peace, proved that year a season of probation to those two young cousins whose beauty and merit, though not

without votaries, had failed to accomplish a single object prized by either.

Hargood had succeeded—for when does a quietly arbitrary man fail to succeed?—in determining his sister's removal to town. She now resided near him, in an ill-furnished roomy lodging in Golden Square; as if to place herself and her daughter more immediately within reach of his objurgation. Seldom a day passed that, in spite of his occupations, he did not find ten minutes' leisure to break in upon them, and find fault: if fine, because they were keeping house; if they had been out, because the weather looked uncertain. He was often angry with Amy for reading; because, if engaged in needlework, she might have amused her mother with conversation. But if he happened to discover her at work, he blamed still more an employment which encouraged Lady Meadows to fatigue herself by reading aloud for her entertainment. Amy was beginning to understand why her cousin Mary often came to them with such harassed looks and heavy eyes. Nor was she much puzzled to discover why her two young cousins, Ned and Frank, on their arrival at home for the Christmas holidays, found so pleasant the dull drawing-rooms in Golden Square; because it contained no moral crank to which they could be sentenced.

Mary was thankful to her cousin and aunt for the kindness with which these intrusions were tolerated. From her heart of hearts, she thanked them that the two motherless boys were able, for the first time, to apprehend the value of home, and understand the meaning of the word holiday. Under Lady Meadows's wing, they were able to indulge their youthful fancies; wandering far and far away, out of foggy London, out of blue-booked England, into the land of Faëry: into the magic realm of Scott's novels, into the wilds of Arctic or Australian adventure. How their young eyes sparkled over the pages of Robinson Crusoe; in which, if placed for the first time in the hands of the eldest Hargood, he would have seen only a book to review!

Amy, on her part, was keenly alive to the affectionate interest maintained towards her by her cousin. Intuitive perception had warned her of the jealousy of which she was at first the object: for her own wounded heart emulated this defeaturing sen-

timent so long as she beheld in Mary Hargood the envied object pre-engrossing the affections of Marcus. But no sooner did the *sœur-grise* of the studio perceive that her father was becoming still severer towards Amy than he had ever been towards herself, than she became her unflinching champion and advocate; just as Amy, on learning that her cousin Mark had quitted England, perhaps for years, perhaps for ever, turned spontaneously towards the being he loved best on earth, as towards a guardian angel.

They sought each other, in short, with reciprocal affection and to their mutual advantage. Each sisterless,—they became as sisters. The strength of mind of the one,—the tenderness of heart of the other,—could afford to amalgamate without loss to either.

To Mary, the mere detail of Amy's daily life at Meadows Court, was a page of the choicest poetry. Every one has heard the mournful answer of the Birmingham child when examined at the National School—"flowers, child, you must have seen flowers?"—"Yes, but never *growing!*"—Such was nearly the condition of Mary Hargood. The nearest approach she had seen to the majesty of nature was in the landscapes of Claude or Turner; and to listen to Amy's vivid description of the beechen avenue at Meadows Court, the old chase at Burdons with its ferns and lichens,—its orchises and anemones,—its birds and squirrels, its "spotted snakes" with shifting skins,—its urchins and newts all breathing to Mary's ear of the Midsummer Night's Dream rather than of vulgar experience, was as if a minstrel were reciting.

All the advantage, however, was not on Amy's side. When her talk was ended of homely scenes, such as Gray and Goldsmith have described in song, or Izaak Walton in prose, and her own turn came for drawing or stitching, Mary used to recite to her chosen passages from Massinger and Johnson, Corneille and Moliere; imposed as tasks, by her father in her childhood, and now familiar to her lips as her national language. Her declamation was of the highest order. She enunciated these noble passages with that spontaneity of intuition, the want of

which, owing to the overburthened memories of actors, is one of the chief deteriorations of the public stage.

The nature of the two cousins was of too refined an order to admit of indulging in vulgar confidences about lovers and conquests, such as are occasionally audible in the boudoirs of May Fair. There were reasons, indeed, for a more than common reserve between them. The name of Marcus, for instance, was impossible to pronounce. Once, when Amy adverted to some letter which had just reached them from Lady Davenport, dwelling with fond partiality on the merits and charms of her dear Olivia, Mary could not restrain a half envious ejaculation of: "You are fortunate, Amy, you are indeed rich in cousins."

But it was not of Olivia Davenport Mary Hargood was thinking;—still less, of Mark.

A nice observer might have been amused, perhaps, to perceive that, unconsciously to himself, Hargood's appreciation of his daughter was gradually rising. Had some frank speaker adverted to the fact, he would probably have ascribed his increased approbation to the disinterested spirit she had displayed in her rejection of worldly distinctions. But it was not really so. He now saw in her one who might have been, had she chosen, and might still be, if she chose, the associate and equal of that aristocratic class which he opposed only under the instigations of wounded pride.

He was aware—for the vicissitudes of his public avocations often brought him into collision with men of the highest rank—that no class of society contains a larger portion of administrative talent, of refined taste, of generous purposes, than the nobility of England; and above all, of the tact and courtesy which brings all these to bear like the unguent indispensable to keep in movement all complex machinery. Hugh Davenport was far from the only man of his caste to whose abilities and intentions he rendered justice. And to know that Mary, had she so wished it, might have walked in silk attire for the rest of her days, hand in hand with one of the privileged, seemed to affix on her a hall stamp of sterling value, guaranteeing the purity of the gold.

He was even beginning to judge less highly of the sweet little niece who had failed to obtain a similar certification. It extorted from him some peevish remark whenever Lady Meadows seemed to hold *her* daughter exonerated from certain duties all but menial, which he strictly exacted from his own. The incomes of their parents were nearly on a par. Why was one to be more fastidious than another?

But when in Mary's presence he once gave utterance to the same opinion, her honest indignation was not to be silenced.

"*Why?* Because Amy has been reared in the lap of luxury—with servants to wait upon her—with friends to idolize her: as the heiress of Meadows Court—as the spoilt child of doating parents. Whereas I have roughed it through life; and scarcely know the difference between white bread and brown."

"Amy Meadows has now attained woman's estate, and should understand her new position," persisted Hargood, gruffly. "It is time she took a lesson out of your book, Mary, and turned her hands to useful purposes."

"It is a shame to carry a porcelain vase to the well as you would an earthen pitcher," rejoined Mary. "Amy's nature, so instinct with delicacy and refinement, would wither up if she were compelled to labour as I have laboured. God has appointed a different vegetation, father, to the hill and the valley; and a different temperament to the enjoying and the working class. Don't quarrel with Amy. She was born to be sweet, and dear, and ornamental. It makes my poor aunt happy only to look at her. It makes *me* happy only to listen to her. I am persuaded some auspicious destiny is in store for her. We are told that

spirits are not finely touched

Save to fine issues.

A being so formed to diffuse happiness as my cousin Amy, cannot have been intended to waste her charms and talents in hemming dusters and chronicling small beer. When I look at her, father, in her *robe de bure*, the 'All hail, Macbeth! that

shall be king hereafter,' of the weird women of Forres, comes to my lips in the shape of 'Porphyrogenita! thou wert born to the purple, and in the purple shalt thou die. Thou art too noble for any humbler tenement.'"

Hargood's rage was now irresistible.

"This foolish girl is making you as romantic as herself," cried he. "But beware, Mary! People must have clothes to their backs before they can indulge in vagaries and megrims. Enough that we have two porcelain vases in the family. You and I must not forget that 'we are of the earth, earthy.'"

But it was not by his daughter only, that Hargood's patience was just then to be tried. So practical a man, measuring both time and people by money's worth, was not likely to be tolerant of the importunate espionage with which he was pursued by Hamilton Drewe.

In what he considered the conscious discharge of the duty he had undertaken towards his exiled friend, the zealous poet kept dogging the steps of Hargood, with his blank cheque in his pocket; intent on discovering the foot of clay or vulnerable heel lacking a lamb's wool sock. How was he to ascertain what might be the necessities of the Hargood family, unless he could penetrate into their interior, and discover whether they were hungry and wanting to be fed, or naked and wanting to be clothed? Wherever Hargood turned his steps, followed this troublesome appendage! At the meetings of the learned societies whose initials were legion, where the two Drewes (*Canis major* and *Canis minor*, both erudite puppies) were as essential as subscribers, as himself as reporter, he was sure to find the poet fidgiting at his elbow. Whether the lecturer were describing the reliques found in the tombs of the Pharaohs, or classifying the strata on the height of Topocatepetl, if Hargood did but turn his head while screwing down the lead of his patent pencil, *there* smiled the trivial insignificant face of Hamilton Drewe! He began at last to feel almost afraid of drawing out his handkerchief, lest the Homer of the Rose and Cross should emerge with it from his pocket, and roll over like Vathek's dwarf, upon the floor.

Now there was very little of the Man of Uz in Edward Har-

good; and it was astonishing how a being so slender in mind and body as Hamilton Drewe, could venture to confront the thunder-storms levelled at him while pursuing his courteous aggravations. Though Hargood had ceased to reply to the questions, frivolous and vexatious as those of a parliamentary committee, or college tutor, or catechizing curate, which Drewe was perpetually discharging at him, except by the most snappish monosyllables—a “yes” or “no,” impelled as by a percussion cap—still, true to his promise, the faithful hound went on licking the hand of the tyrant, and dogging his heels.

One day, one glittering frosty day in January, either because the cheque was burning in his pocket, or because Cocotte at breakfast time, cheered by a gleam of sunshine, had indulged in her usual cry of “Marcus, old fellow!—Marcus, Marcus!” so as to rouse up a thousand echoes in the sympathetic bosom of Hamilton Drewe, he started off, resolved to penetrate at all hazards into the sanctuary in Soho, where abided the “family” forming the Co. of the firm recommended to his protection. The maiden sister, or aunt, or whosoever might be the presiding genius of the place, should be coaxed or coerced into explaining the domestic cares to which the poet attributed the frowns and peevishness he had of late seen lowering on the brow of Hargood.

Leaning upon the huge gold-headed Malacca cane, almost large enough for a beadle, which he was in the habit of wielding as if it constituted his wand of office as Chamberlain of the Muses, and buttoned to the chin in a dollman lined with sables which he had brought back with him from the Balkan, he addressed himself so strenuously to the weazened maid, whose appointment as Cerberus was beginning to be no sinecure, that half-a-sovereign obtained him access to the house.

“I don’t know whether you means Miss Mary or Miss Amy, Sir,” said she, having pocketed the baksheesh insinuated into her hand by the visitor, whom she knew not whether to class as a play-actor, a painter’s model, or a quack-doctor; “but you’ll find ’em both together, Sir, in master’s room.”

And together he found them; seated side by side at Hargood’s old leather-covered table, their heads inclined so closely that they might have been comprised in a medallion, over a volume of

Callot's etchings borrowed by her father from an eminent print-seller at the request of Mary, who was pointing out to her cousin, in the series of Spanish Mendicants, the origin of innumerable modern plagiarisms—when the sudden opening of the door and the announcement of "Mr. Drewe," caused them to look up, exhibiting to the poet a brighter Vision of Fair Women than Watteau, Redgrave, or Frank Stone ever put upon canvass, or Tennyson upon paper.

Dryden's proverbial hero, "the fool of Nature," did not stand more stupidly transfixed, when first he caught sight of Iphigenia! The latest echo evoked by Cocotte in his bosom seemed to reiterate in tones most significant—"Marcus, old fellow! Marcus, Marcus!" on discovering, at a glance, the origin of his friend Davenport's munificence, in the lovely objects before him.

The two girls, on the other hand, were scarcely less struck by the singular figure that presented itself: the long-haired, moustachioed, be-furred, be-frogged incognito; something between Beniowski escaped from Siberia, in the frontispiece to a cheap edition of his memoirs, and Tekeli, as performed at Her Majesty's Theatre, Drury Lane. Since Amy Meadows's last encounter with the independent gentleman, so liberal of "bouquets," she had never beheld a more ludicrous specimen of the severer sex.

As he stood blushing, tiptoeing, and twisting in his hands his somewhat broad-brimmed beaver, Mary Hargood almost expected to hear him break out into exclamations of "O sweet Anne Page!" Nor was his self-possession restored when, finding him still speechless, she rose and accosted him; her noble head, crowned with its rich black braid, making him fancy himself in the presence of a queen of Nature's making. Since his memorable *fiasco* on the hustings, never had he felt so much as if his legs were made of cotton, and his tongue of flue.

The last male intruder on Mary Hargood's privacy was Mark Davenport; that ready-witted, ready-voiced Leonatus, who had very soon contrived to make her feel herself at home in her own apartments; and whose "garment, whose meanest garment," possessed more character and substance than the whole composition of the Cloten before her.

"You probably wish to see my father, Sir?" said she. "You will find him at his business chambers, in St. Martin's Lane."

"Pardon me, Madame; that is, I—I *do* wish to see him; that is I—I have the honor to be particularly known to him. But if I have the pleasure of now addressing his—his family—it is to them—that is, by Captain Davenport's express desire, I—I—

"Captain Davenport?" exclaimed Amy, starting up from the volume of Callot, over which she was endeavoring to conceal her merriment. "You can, perhaps, give us news of my cousin Mark!"

"*'Cousin Mark.'*—'Marcus, old fellow, Marcus, Marcus!'" again significantly repeated the echo in the mind of poor Drewe. "And this mystery—these charming cousins—he kept to himself!"

But the spell was now, in some degree, broken; and he replied in a more coherent manner to the milder-looking of the two beauties.

"I wish it were in my power to afford you the smallest intelligence. His sudden departure from England caused as much uneasiness to myself as to his numerous friends—*and family,*" added the poet, with a profound inclination of the head towards the fair kinswomen of "Cousin Mark."

"You are at least acquainted with his destination," said Amy, impatiently.

"He spoke of Egypt, Australia—" Hamilton Drewe remembered that there were other places suggested by Marcus, which it might not be decorous to name. "But he chiefly talked of a sketching tour in the Ionian Islands."

"You have not heard from him, then, since he quitted London?"

"Not exactly; but the 'Orinoco,' in which he embarked, arrived at—"

"Yes, we know, we know! Of that, the public journals apprised us," interrupted Mary Hargood. "But I do not yet exactly understand the motive of your visit here?"

Again poor Cymon was beginning to quake. Another investigating look from those large dark eyes, and he was a gone coon! But the case was desperate; and, with as strong an

effort of nature as if, with a fresh sheet of cream laid before him, and a new goose-quill in his hand, he were about to lay the foundation stone of a Shelleyan lyric, he informed her that, at the moment of quitting England forever, Captain Davenport had charged him with the duty of watching over Mr. Hargood and his family, as the objects dearest to him on earth.

Though Mary could not but consider the guardian selected for her, somewhat strangely chosen, she was touched by the forgiving spirit which had suggested the appointment.

"I am afraid, Mr. Drewe," said she, still struggling with a smile, at the oddity of his appearance and address, and the locks curling up on either side the central parting of his hair, like the waves in a bad picture of the Passage of the Red Sea, "I am afraid that, like diplomatists in general, you have somewhat overstepped your mission. I can scarcely imagine that Captain Davenport instructed you to *call* here, since he was not himself a visiting acquaintance."

He was just warming up into courage to state that some cases were exceptional—that great minds were superior to vulgar conventions—when a glance of Miss Hargood's towards the door—a glance full of mirth and malice—caused him to turn around. And lo! Edward Hargood, looking very much like the didactic apparition in the *Haunted Man*, stood in an imposing attitude by his side.

Like Nicol Jarvie in his interview with Helen Macgregor, the terrified man endeavored to conceal his dismay under an assumption of familiarity.

"He had called hoping to find his friend Hargood—and not finding him, was on the point of returning. But since his friend Hargood had so opportunely returned," he added, taking a much begilded volume from his pocket, "he would not neglect the object of his visit: which was to recommend to his critical indulgence a new comic serial work by his friend Dick Dodsley, author of '*Fast and Slow, or the Dodgers*,' illustrated by Cruickshank. That is *a* Cruickshank—not *the* Cruickshank."

"A very indefinite article, indeed!" ejaculated Hargood, who was in one of his most volcanic humors:—having just returned from a visit to his sister, whom he found full of pleasant antici-

pation from the expected arrival in town of the Davenports. "But you must really excuse me, Mr. Drewe, from dipping my pen in the same puddle with those literary associates of yours who seem to confound the Pierian spring with a bowl of ginsling or whisky-toddy. I do not profess to understand slang; I leave it to dustmen and cab-drivers. I have some difficulty, I confess, in following even Thackeray and Dickens; though one is a man of education, the other, a man of genius. But when it comes to the detestable school they have founded—to the rinsings of the punch-bowl—the ashes of the cheroot—the peel of the forbidden fruit—my gorge rises at it! So long, Sir, as we have classical authors on our shelves—a legitimate drama bequeathed us by our ancestors, and immortal specimens of high art to elevate our tastes and understandings, I do not see why we should descend to such trash as 'Fast and Slow'—the monstrosities of Adelphi farces, or the vulgarisms of Phiz and Cruikshank."

Hamilton Drewe felt very much as if an elephant's foot were upon his neck:—or as Bozzy may have felt under the influence of one of Samuel Johnson's knock-me-down diatribes.

It scarcely needed for Hargood to add, "But I fear I must wish you good morning. We are interrupting the occupation of these ladies,"—to stimulate him to a profound parting salutation to the fair *protégés* of Cousin Mark, a hurried farewell to the Rhadamanthus of criticism—and a hasty exit.

It would have been a dangerous inroad upon Captain Davenport's balance at Coutt's, had Hamilton Drewe proceeded to fill up the blank and cheque in favor of the Hargood family, while his feelings were perturbed by the majestic and intelligent beauty of Mary Hargood; or the sweet countenance of the cousin already eliciting from his heart a jealous echo of Cocotte's evocations of—"Marcus, old fellow! Marcus, Marcus!"

What would he not have given to have called cousins with such an angel!—

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT the appointed moment, Lady Davenport and her daughter quitted Ilford Castle with the deepest regret. For it was no longer the Ilford of other days. It sent no more prize cattle to the Smithfield show; nor claimed premiums for uneatable poultry. But thanks to the subdivision of farms and allotments of land to the new cottages, contentment, which follows successful industry like its shadow, was beginning to establish itself where "curses not loud but deep" had been overheard, for the last half century by the recording angel.

But it was not alone because the place afforded them such interesting and healthful occupation, that they dreaded to leave it. In London, they must be in a great measure deprived of the society of that best of sons and brothers, who was now their constant companion; seeking their aid and counsel not only in his domestic arrangements, but in his plans for bettering the condition of the hundreds of human beings committed to his guardianship.

In London, a home awaited them darkened by painful reminiscences. Even the prospect of rejoining the beloved companion of her youth, the widow and child of her lost brother, did not reconcile Lady Davenport to the idea of the gloomy drawing-room in Spring Gardens, with its mournful associations with her departed husband and banished son.

She said nothing to Hugh upon the subject. For he was one of those who seem to hold the charter of life on the privilege of averting every grievance from the paths of his fellow-creatures; and she feared he would sympathize too painfully in her uneasy feelings.

But on arriving in New Street, she saw how insufficiently she had estimated his kindness of heart. The family mansion of Hugh, Lord Davenport, retained scarcely a vestige of the family mansion of his predecessor. It was to watch over the progress of its metamorphosis, that he had visited London in November; and now, all was as perfect as could be desired to welcome the

best of mothers. Brick had become stone, and gloom cheerfulness. No more dark corners. No more ill-ventilated rooms. The old official-seeming library, furnished with oak and dark green velvet, opened through a small conservatory into the park; and the meagre den once apportioned to its present lord, was not only enriched by the treasures of art removed from Captain Davenport's lodgings, but lavishly supplied with all the inventions by which modern luxury endeavours to enervate the manhood of our soldiers, and hardihood of our fox-hunters.

But it was in the drawing-rooms that Lord Davenport's taste had been chiefly exercised. An entrance had been opened between them, divided only by *portières*; and glossy chintz supplied the place of faded damask. Musical instruments of the first order were provided for Olivia; new book-cases, supplied with all the meritorious books of the day, for his mother. Nothing sumptuous,—nothing showy. All was pleasant for use; all calculated to efface from the mind of Lady Davenport and her daughter, the impression that their present airy domicils had anything in common with their sombre dungeon of old.

Even old Madame Winkelried had her little snuggerly: with a bracket for her mealy old canary, and a hob for her ever-simmering cup of lime-flower tea.

One only thing was wanting, and that, alas! was beyond the compass of Lord Davenport to obtain;—the presence of Marcus. And it was in the deserted room of the truant that his mother and sister found a pretext for the tears sacred to reminiscences of the past; those indelible traces, which neither paper-hangers nor upholsterers ever yet wholly effaced.

“Marcus *ought* to have been here,” said Olivia, as they all three sat together over their wine and chestnuts, with the cloth, for the first time in that dining-room, unremoved,—“to introduce us to-morrow to the dear cousin Amy of whom he used to be so fond.”

“Nature is surely a sufficient Master of the Ceremonies where the tie of kinship is so close,” replied her brother.

“And you forgot,” sighed Lady Davenport, “that Amy's mother, at least, is no stranger. For five long years, we were never an hour apart.”

And as she involuntarily reverted to the approaching reunion of two hearts between which the waters of strife had so long been interposing, as roaring waves now disunite the congenital shores of England and France, it was impossible not to recur to the lines of Coleridge, so prized by Scott and Byron, but now hackneyed by perpetual citation,—

“They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs which had been rent assunder
A dreary sea now flows between,
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
Shall wholly do away I ween
The marks of that which once hath been.”

They had parted young, blooming, sanguine, full of trust in human nature. They were about to meet, worn by long suffering, distrustful, discouraged not only by the influence of the past, but by misgivings touching the future welfare of their children. The blossoms on the Tree of Life had fallen; the half-developed fruit seemed already sickening.

When they met on the morrow, however, the lapse of time was for a moment forgotten. They were in each other's arms; they were again Mary and Gertrude;—they were the mothers of promising children, who were to each other as near of kin, as exists short of brother and sisterhood.

How much they had mutually to confide! Yet so it was that the lips of both were sealed! Neither could relate domestic troubles in which the nearest and dearest to the other had exercised so large a part.

Between Amy and Olivia, however, there existed no such drawback. *They met sans peur et sans reproche*; with as utter incapability of evil feeling or evil thought, as between two flowers blooming side by side in the sunshine. An additional year of worldly experience imparted to Amy something of a graver aspect than was perceptible with the child-like fairness of Olivia Davenport; invested by education with the *naïveté* which, in German nature, is compatible with the highest order of intellectual cultivation. Olivia's joys and griefs called forth her tears and smiles as spontaneously as the hours on the dial are

revealed by a sunbeam:—and she fancied she could not too often express to her new cousin how warmly she was prepared to love her; how favorably she had been described to them by Marcus; and how eagerly her brother Hugh desired to make her acquaintance.

Amy said less in return. She trusted perhaps less largely than of old to cousinly enthusiasm.

“Hugh did not see you when he visited Aunt Meadows in the autumn?” said she. “You were ill or absent—ill, probably, for I am sure you never leave your sick mother.”

Amy remembered only too bitterly the cause which confined her to her room during the visit of her cousin Hugh.

“But now, we shall be constantly together,” resumed the affectionate girl. “The mourning which keeps strangers out of our house will only bring us closer together. You do not know, —you cannot believe—how often I and my brothers have talked over all this, and how I have looked forward to this happy day!”

It was impossible to acknowledge such overtures with less than an affectionate embrace; and the two mothers seemed to see their own youth revived in the mutual cordiality of their children.

“Amy, darling,” said Lady Meadows, when the mother and daughter were once more alone together, “do you remember, at Meadows Court, sighing after a cousin or two,—a Lucy and Nancy Selby,—to make friends of, and correspondents?”

“I do, I do! Just when poor Miss Honeywood left us, and I was beginning to fancy myself a little lonely.”

“You are satisfied now, then, my child? Two cousins of your own age—”

“And two *such* cousins!” interrupted Amy, “so kind, so beautiful, so clever.”

“So different too, that their several claims on your friendship will not clash.”

“I think, mamma, I shall love Olivia most; but most admire and respect my cousin Mary.”

“No need to compare them,—no need to analyse,” replied Lady Meadows. “The affection arising from natural ties should never be searchingly examined. By handling the butterfly too closely, the lustre of its beautiful wings is brushed away.”

A few days afterwards, Lady Davenport came to fetch her in-

valid sister-in-law to pass the day with them in Spring Gardens : and, for the first time, Amy was introduced into the interior of a first-rate London house. Neither Meadows Court nor Radensford Manor afforded her the remotest idea of what is to be effected for domestic comfort by the union of wealth and good taste. Everything she saw delighted her. But what gratified her most was the solicitude for the well-being of his family evinced by her cousin Hugh.

By a mere chance, Lord Davenport was absent ; having profited by his Parliamentary Wednesday holiday, to visit some farms in Buckinghamshire,—the only portion of his estate which, since his accession to his fortune, he had left unexamined. But his absence was not regretted. They felt more completely at home together, for the absence of broadcloth from their little circle.

Amy was introduced to Marcus's pleasant back-room, that she might admire the celebrated Himalayan landscape, of which his family were so proud.

“ Beautiful,—most beautiful !” exclaimed Miss Meadows, standing entranced before one of the noblest delineations of mountain scenery she had ever beheld. “ This must be the picture which my cousin Mary saw at Captain Davenport's house, and described as so admirable !”

Olivia, a little surprised that any female cousin of her cousin should have been a visitor at her brother's lodgings, paused a moment ; then, too courteous to express her wonder, reverted to Mark.

“ He was so fond of you, Amy !” said she. “ Do you know I used sometimes feel a little jealous, when he was talking about you. I was afraid he was beginning to love you better than myself. For *I* was only his sister by birth right,—*you* by election. I fancied I should have better liked to be the chosen one !”

So perhaps thought poor Amy. But the chosen one of Mark was neither sister nor cousin.

“ It seems so strange, does it not, his never writing to us ;” resumed Olivia. “ *He*, so devoted to my mother,—so kind to *me* !—Something seems to have changed him in a moment. Hugh endeavours to cheer us by assurances that he *must* return in April. On the plea of ill-health, he has paired off till then. But afterwards, his Parliamentary duties will imperatively recall him.”

“He may perhaps resign his seat,” said Amy Meadows, in a low voice, still examining the picture.

“I think not. He would do nothing to give pain to Davenport, who has set his whole heart upon Marcus’s success in the House.”

Amy said no more. She had not found Captain Davenport easily swayed to a purpose on which others had set their hearts, unless it happened to square with his own. He was not the man to sacrifice himself or his inclinations. But she allowed Olivia to prattle on, unchecked, in his praise.

There was one person, however, with whom Amy Meadows often found herself in company who seldom neglected an opportunity of disparaging this absent cousin: her uncle Hargood. Perhaps because, under his sister’s roof, he was tired of hearing Aristides called the Just; perhaps because anxious that no one should imagine him capable of regretting the loss of an aristocratic son-in-law; perhaps because his vocation, which now hung upon his shoulders like second nature—or a little, perhaps, like the robe of Nessus, inspired him with an irretrievable habit of criticism;—perhaps, tell it not in Gath, nor even whisper it in Soho—perhaps because his nature had just been scarified by passing through the savage ordeal of Christmas bills: that epoch when the gap which defies the best endeavors of people of small and precarious incomes to make both ends meet, is so apt to neutralize the promises of peace and good will towards men, which ought to sanctify the primal festival of the Christian year.

Certain it was that the arrival in town of the Davenports and the frequent mention of their name he was compelled to hear, stirred up bitterness in his soul. It is true that in consequence of their claims on his sister, he saw much less of her. She was often in Spring Gardens. The carriage of Lady Davenport, whom he scrupulously avoided meeting, was stationed at the door whenever he called in Golden Square; her Ladyship’s two tall footmen in their morning suits, stationed there like mutes, to dignify the funeral of its departed sociability. His republican spirit—that is the spirit which he fancied was republican—chafed against this display. He fancied that his sister had too easily abdicated her self-respect, by snatching at the tardy olive-branch tendered by “these aristocrats.” And he used to go home after

his disappointment of a chat with her, as mortified as poor Oliver Goldsmith when he saw public attention diverted from him by a company of dancing dogs.

“Sprighted by a fool,” in the person of Hamilton Drewe, whose officious patronage not even the brutality of Hargood could extinguish after he had ascertained, according to his own romantic version of the fact, “by how charming a Miranda the solitude of Prospero was lightened,” and irritated to find his leniency towards his sister’s past offences lost in the blaze of Lady Davenport’s earnest attachment, he would go home and reproach poor Mary with the staleness of his bread, or toughness of his mutton chops—the unpunctuality of the laundress or smallness of the coals—as if *he* were Lear, and herself the Goneril who grudged and diminished the quality of his meagre entertainment.

On such occasions, Mary answered him never a word. She would have scorned to be taunted out of her self-government by a father who, in addition to the spirit-wearing duty of grinding his bones and brains to make their bread, was undergoing the humiliation so galling to a proud spirit, of being dunned by the botching tailor who supplied clothes to his boys.

But though patient and resigned, she never allowed herself to scathe his perturbed spirit by joining in his diatribes against the aristocratic pretensions of the Davenports. She *would* not be the confederate of his injustice. Conscious of the happy influence exercised over her own somewhat rugged nature by the mildness of Lady Meadows and sweetness of Amy, she admitted that the courtesy of high-breeding was only a grace the more superadded to solid virtues. As to believing that her aunt or cousin loved her a jot the less because they were the frequent guests of a nobler family with which they were as closely connected as with herself, she would as soon have suspected them of petty larceny. But she grieved over her father’s prejudice against the Davenports less as a source of disunion between the families, than as an evidence of pitiable narrowness of mind.

Mary heard without a pang her cousin Amy’s praises of the family. She could not be jealous of *them* as she had been when she found herself robbed of her birthright, by her father’s momentary preference of Amy. It pleased her to hear of their

sayings and doings: of the zeal with which old Madame Winkelried had undertaken to overlook the German lessons given by Olivia to Miss Meadowes; of the fondness testified towards Amy by her cousin Hugh, who had adopted her at once as a second sister, and brought home no *cadeau* for Olivia, unless accompanied with a fac-simile for her cousin.

It is true that, not being an eye-witness of his perfectly straightforward attentions, Mary Hargood fell into the mistake which, for a moment, misled the not very perspicacious mind of Lady Meadowes; that Lord Davenport was not unlikely to repay by an attachment to the daughter, the injuries which his father had wantonly inflicted on the mother. But there was no indication on Amy's part of sharing their error. She was charmed with her cousin Hugh; with his humanity—his nobleness—his amenity. She accepted his gifts with gratitude; and would thankfully have called him brother. But the cry of her heart was still like that of Cocotte—"Marcus—Marcus!"

CHAPTER XXX.

"TELL me, my dear Davenport," said Lord Curt de Cruxley, throwing himself, uninvited, on the red morocco cushion of a window-seat in the lobby of the House of Lords, where the young peer sat waiting for the close of one of those replies to a reply signifying nothing, as regarded the charge against Government, which was extending the dreary waste of a heavy debate; "who were those two beautiful creatures in your mother's carriage, this morning, when it was stopping at Maurigy's hotel?"

"Is Lady Curt de Cruxley in small health, that you make the inquiry with so much emotion?" replied Lord Davenport, not a little amused by the springy vivacity of the grey haired *bel esprit*.

"No! I ask the question in behalf of my son and heir, who will soon be in the remove."

"One of the beautiful creatures, then, was my sister, not yet out; the other, if it was not my sister's old German governess, must have been Miss Meadowes."

"What Meadowes? Anything to an old horror of a Sir Jervis

Meadowes, a Bedfordshire neighbour of ours, who commands our detestable militia; the last of the Pipeclays, and greatest of bores,—who can't address one without my-lording one like a tinker?"

"I have not much acquaintance among tinkers," said Davenport, laughing, "Sir Jervis is my distant cousin. You, who might go up for examination in Lodge's Peerage, ought to know that my mother was a Meadowes. The angel you are bespeaking for your son, is her niece."

"I wish you would give it me all in writing. Pedigrees, whether of man or horse, wear my memory to tatters. But what has all this to do with some swampery—Meadowes Marsh or Meadowes Spring,—I forget what,—that Billy Eustace has hired on the banks of the Severn?"

"If you mean Meadowes *Court*, in Gloucestershire, it was the seat of my late uncle Sir Mark Meadowes, and is now the property of his heir-at-law, Sir Jervis."

"True, very true. One keeps forgetting these things," said Lord Curt,—a man who never forgot anything except himself. "Eustace has been horribly cut up by an escapade in his immaculate family. One of those well-drilled daughters of Lady Louisa's, to escape from the maternal rattan, eloped lately with something in a fustian jacket and leather gaiters!"

"I was in hopes the story was exaggerated," said Lord Davenport. "Lady Louisa and my mother are old friends; and the Eustaces are people whose intentions are far better than their judgment."

"Which is saying little for their intentions. To my thinking, they are people who ought to be suppressed by act of parliament: or at all events, condemned to hard labour *à perpétuité* at their family seat. If chimneys can be made to consume their own smoke, why should not counties be made to consume their own bores?"

"William Eustace, so far from being a bore is—"

"A prig of the first magnitude. Granted! We were all sorry for him, however, when this sister of his stooped to dilute the blood of all the Eustaces with ditch-water. As to himself, poor fellow, he seems to have disguised himself in his queerest Mackintosh, and taken the longest line to be found in his Bradshaw. For he has never been heard of since the event."

"It is true, I have not seen so much as his card since I returned to town," said Lord Davenport, musingly.

"I never touch a card!" was his companion's rejoinder, in the mincing tone of an elderly spinster, pressed to the whist-table. "But I saw Billy, t'other day:—where was it?—buying a benefit-ticket for Exeter Hall,—or cheapening tracts at Rivingtons',—or early clover-seed at the Agricultural Society,—or committing some other outrage that may become a country gentleman."

"Surely," said Davenport, "he spoke the other night on the Game-law Question?"

"In the interests, of course, of his new brother-in-law!"

"Don't be merciless, Curt. Remember you have daughters of your own!"

"I wish I could forget it. But as *my* daughters are not immured from the society of gentlemen and ladies, *they* are accustomed to regard gamekeepers *et hoc* in the same light as sheep or oxen."

"*Ne gagez pas!*—'Frailty, thy name is woman!'" replied Davenport, recalling to mind how, at one of Lord Curt's concerts, he had noticed the singular intimacy between the Honourable Sophronia Curt, and a handsome young Venetian Tenor.

"How goes the debate? Who's up?" suddenly demanded the Honourable Sophronia's father, catching the sleeve of one of a couple of elderly gentlemen, who, at that moment went chuckling past.

"Lord Rumbleman's up, and Burnsey is to follow. He's gone to ginger himself with a glass or two of sherry, and if you mean to hear him, Curt, I advise you to quadruple the dose," said the sleeve-held man, shaking off his interruptor.

"There go two political swindlers, if ever there lived one since the days of Sir Robert Walpole!" ejaculated Curt, as they proceeded along the lobby. "Confederates in jobbery, who back each other's accommodation-bills, to raise the public wind! One forges the lie against Government, which t'other endorses; and both, though honest men in private life, consider any amount of roguery meritorious, which purports to unseat the administration. How are you, my dear duke! When did you come to town?—

‘To show our eyes and grieve our heart,
Come like a slow coach,—so depart.’ ”

added he, in a stage whisper, as his Grace after having shaken his extended finger, rolled ponderously on, like a mountain in labour. “Ha! Madgman! How are you? Pilled, I’m sorry to hear, at Brookes’s! Your own fault, my dear fellow! You ought to have had your name up three years ago, while you were still a dark horse, instead of a detected ass,” added he, in the same *à parte* tone, when the young Viscount had nodded and disappeared.

For some minutes more did the epigrammatic Curt extend his pleasant observations to friend and foe; sporting with the most malicious scandals, as the serpent-charmers of Egypt, or bathers at Schlangenbad, twist asp’s in playful coils round their fingers.

But Lord Davenport, who had no taste for such pastimes, rose from his seat, to avoid further “asides,” and made his way into the body of the House.

A few days after this conversation, the young lord, on entering Lady Meadowes’s drawing-room, to confer with her touching some family news he had just learned from his mother, found seated beside her work-table, a grave or rather a severe-looking man, who after surveying him with a scrutinizing eye, but no acknowledgment or salutation, took up his hat abruptly, and, with a slight nod to the lady of the house, prepared to leave the room.

A glance of surprise towards Lady Meadowes, produced by the uncourteousness of the stranger, induced her to whisper in explanation: “My brother, Mr. Hargood.”

Lord Davenport started up: and, in a moment, was between the retreating gentleman and the door.

“I owe you a thousand excuses for not remembering your features, Mr. Hargood,” said he, “for which this,” pointing to the eye glass at his button-hole, “must be my apology: I am very near-sighted. We have met before, in a public, if not private capacity.”

Hargood, surveying him with much such an expression as his

Puritan ancestor may have worn while addressing one of the malignants of Charles Stuart, made a scarcely perceptible inclination of the head.

"If I might take so great a liberty on so slight an acquaintance," resumed Lord Davenport, still cutting off the retreat of the surly fugitive, "I would venture to request you and your daughter to partake of a family dinner with Lady Meadows and my cousin Amy on Wednesday next. My plea for such an invitation, without the formal preliminary of a visit to your house, is having just heard with great regret, from my mother, that Lady Meadows is on the point of leaving town. You will naturally wish to see the most of our friends during the short remnant of their stay."

"I flatter myself, my lord," replied Hargood, stiffly, "that the arguments I have been using with my sister will suffice to deter her from this projected visit to Radensford." Saying which, he returned towards the place he had quitted, as if to satisfy himself of the issue of the debate.

"No, brother—my plans are fully settled," replied Lady Meadows, with a gentle yet determined countenance. "I will, if you please, make my nephew umpire in the case."

"Do not expect to find me an upright judge," replied Lord Davenport, cheerfully, "on any question that involves the loss of your society."

"I *do* expect it—nay, I am certain of it, my dear Hugh," replied his aunt. "My brother cannot be persuaded that my intended visit to Radensford Rectory has not its origin in a natural yearning after the neighborhood in which I spent so many happy years. That I long to see dear Meadows Court again, it would be idle to deny. Still less that, after an absence of nearly a year and a half from the *real* country, I do not feel that Amy and myself would be the better for its restorative influences."

"Sheer nonsense," muttered Hargood. "To revive associations, better forgotten! Your health was always ailing at Meadows Court!"

Her nephew was disposed to listen more patiently to the end of her ladyship's explanations; and it was to him, consequently, she now addressed them.

"I received yesterday, my dear Hugh, a letter from our friend,

Mrs. Burton, written in great affliction. Her only child has been condemned by the Brighton physicians, unless she can be immediately transported to a milder climate; and they are to depart in the next Peninsular steamer for the coast of Spain."

"Far better remain quietly at home. Change of climate never yet cured a consumptive patient," pronounced Hargood with the self-constituted authority of a President of the College of Physicians.

"Mrs. Burton's father, who was on the point of joining her at Brighton, will thus be left alone in his rectory. You do not know this father, Hugh; or you would understand the urgency of his claims upon me. Inquire of your mother what Mr. Henderson was, even during her girlhood at Meadowes Court. But the interim of thirty years has converted all that was excellent into all that is venerable; and during that interim, what has he not been to me! Instructor, protector, pastor, friend! From the day of Amy's birth, he seemed to love her as his child; and from the trying moment of my husband's death, became a guardian to us both. He is now considerably past fourscore—infirm and feeble; and, long accustomed to the watchfulness of a female companion, his daughter's absence would I am sure prove fatal to him, unless I accepted the duty she has charged me with, to fill her place at the rectory. Can I refuse?"

"Certainly *not*," was Lord Davenport's unhesitating reply. "Go, dearest aunt, and God speed your errand. I have not a word to urge against it."

Hargood remained contemptuously silent. His over-rational view of the things of this life suggested that beneficed clergymen long past fourscore, are better disposed of sleeping in their chancels, than in their pulpits;—and Mr. Henderson's house-keeper would administer his camomile tea and water gruel quite as punctually as Dame Mary Meadowes.

"And since that point is settled," continued Lord Davenport, having been rewarded by a grateful smile from his aunt, "I trust, Mr. Hargood, you will concede to my previous request. Lady Meadowes, who disposes of my mother's carriage, will I am sure be delighted to call for you and Miss Hargood, on their way to Spring Gardens."

This good-natured offer—regarded by Hargood as a piece of impertinent patronage, lest a hack cab should be seen driving up to his lordship's aristocratic residence—decided the matter. Already afraid of incurring the suspicion of ceding too readily to patrician influence, his stubbornness now took the alarm. Up went the bristles of his pride. All his former approval of Lord Davenport's character and abilities vanished *in fumo*. He saw in him only a lord—a lord whom it was in his power to mortify.

“Neither my daughter nor myself, my lord, ever dine out,” said he, again drawing towards the door. “We have duties which do not allow us the disposal of our time. Your lordship will be pleased to accept my thanks, and my excuses.”

After Hargood's final exit, Lord Davenport, with an air of vexation, resumed his place by Lady Meadowes.

“A forgiving disposition, I am sorry to see, dear aunt, is not universal in your family,” was his only comment. “Mr. Hargood still owes us a grudge.”

“You mistake him, I fancy. You mistake him *I hope*. But my brother is a man of strong prejudices; and it would be difficult to persuade him that persons of his class and yours ever meet without an abdication of dignity on both sides. Nay, not without real injury; like the encounter of the iron and earthen pot—in which the frailer vessel is sure to suffer.”

“I don't think he had much to fear, either from myself, my mother, or little Olivia,” said Lord Davenport, laughing. “However, a wilful man must have his way. A wilful woman, too, I'm afraid:—since, in spite of all our prayers, you leave us so soon as Thursday next. Well, well—I will say no more, I admit, though reluctantly, that for once your obstinacy is praiseworthy.”

Throughout the remainder of the morning, however, after completing his arrangements with Lady Meadowes, Lord Davenport kept recurring with deep regret to the discourtesy of Hargood. He had it deeply at heart to obtain a second view of the striking girl who had made so deep an impression on his mind. But independent of Mary, he set a due value on Hargood himself; as a mine of information and a man on whose word, as a public journalist, implicit reliance might be placed. Lord Davenport had not been moving for the last ten years in even a

lower walk of political life, without appreciating the value of this distinction. He was aware that, as regards those whose eyes are ever fixed upon governmental machinery, and whose pens perpetually pointed to record its movements,

Old experience doth attain
To something like prophetic vein ;

and, however distasteful to him the brusquerie of Hargood's manners, he felt that his counsel might often prove invaluable.

Moved either by the first or second of these considerations, he left a card the following day at his door ; too delicate and conscientious to attempt to force an entrance during the absence of the master of the house, like his impetuous brother, or the tactless Hamilton Drewe.

If his overtures were met with tolerable civility, he intended to renew his attempt at drawing the Hargoods to his house. But previous to taking any further steps, he determined to refer the question to his dearest friend and best adviser,—his excellent mother.

In relating his story, he concealed nothing. Most men counsel advice, unless from their lawyer or physician, reserve some single point which invalidates the advice they receive. But Hugh was too honest and too wise for any weakness of the kind ; and the result was that Lady Davenport was equally ingenuous.

“Nothing have I more at heart,” said she, “than that you should marry the moment you find a wife to your mind. But there are few I should more dislike for a daughter-in-law, than Mr. Hargood's daughter. Not for her own sake,—for I have heard the highest praise of her from Amy and her mother. Not because she is a professional artist ; for beyond the small circle of her family, that circumstance has never transpired. But on account of her father's odious temper, and despicable prejudices. It was entirely Mr. Hargood's hot-headed interference that inspired my poor mother and your father with their unreasonable detestation of the whole family.”

“I can say little, alas ! in praise of his manners or disposi-

tion," replied her son. "Hargood is not improved since the days you speak of. The angry boy of twenty, has become the surly man of fifty. He has learned and forgotten nothing: not having mixed enough in society to have his prejudices pumiced down by the friction of the world."

"At the same time," returned his mother, "so deeply,—so *very* deeply,—am I impressed with the necessity of perfect sympathy of character to insure the happiness of married life, that, had you seen enough of Mary Hargood, my dear son, to feel certain of your preference, I would overlook every obstacle and welcome her warmly as a daughter-in-law."

"I have had but a glimpse of her,—enough to decide me that her person is all I most admire. But if countenance,—if voice,—if deportment go for anything, Mary Hargood's disposition must be as faultless as her style of beauty is noble."

"Trust not to specious appearances, my dearest Hugh."

"I do *not*, mother," cried he; "for which reason, I am here to consult you. I may not find the wife of my choice in Lady Meadows's niece. But in what is called society,—that is, in my own class of life,—I have sought and sought, and met with nothing but disgusts."

"Yet several times, since you left Oxford, I have fancied you what is called in love?"

"Often,—oftener perhaps than you are aware of. I am no stoic, to be proof against the spells of a lovely face or winning manner. But what has been the result? That I have followed these charmers from ball-room to ball-room, through those detestable wife-markets of the London Season which almost put to shame the slave-markets it has cost us so many millions to suppress; till I have blushed for myself and the objects of my pursuit. What have I found, mother, in those stifling mobs, to reward me for submitting to be elbowed, suffocated, and wearied out of all patience? Insipid platitudes or audacious bantering, from those in whom I was seeking a gentle intelligent companion for my fireside! Be just, dear mother. Can these over-dressed dolls, whose sole object in life seems to be to whirl about, night after night, in over-lighted, over-heated rooms, be expected to subside at once into rational beings,—into wives and mothers,—devoted like myself to a country life? I could not,—no, I *could*

not, entrust my honour and happiness to the keeping of such giddy puppets!"

Lady Davenport answered only by a sigh.

"Whereas a girl accustomed from childhood to rational pursuits, and prepared by a life of duty and industry to find enjoyment even in enfranchisement from care, is likely to be both happy and grateful."

"You would not, surely, dearest son, be loved as a benefactor?"

"Far rather than be accepted as the *gros lot* of a lottery won by some flirting girl,—the hack of the London ball-rooms."

"But where lies the necessity for such an alternative?" said Lady Davenport, gravely.

"The truth is, mother," added her son, "you have spoiled me for female companionship. And you, so reasonable, so domestic, so patient, so affectionate, were married from the school-room. *You* never ran the gauntlet of May Fair flirtations, or the whispers of the crush-room! Even thus, would I choose my wife. And even thus would I fain commit Olivia, undefiled in ear and eye, to the safe keeping of her husband. Such was my motive for introducing so readily, last year, William Eustace to our fire-side.

"Have you seen him lately?" inquired Lady Davenport, considering perhaps that they had insisted long and largely enough on his matrimonial projects.

"Not once this season. This unfortunate business in his family,—this unlucky *mésalliance*,—has probably disinclined him to appear in society."

"You admit, then, that a *mésalliance* is a thing to be ashamed of?"

"That was not spoken like yourself, mother," replied Lord Davenport. "Of course I do, where the disparity regards cultivation of mind. Surely you do not class a handsome game-keeper who can barely write or read, in the same category with an accomplished, well bred woman?"

"Pre-advised as I am of the state of the case, and that her father is a clergyman's son, *I* may judge her otherwise. But I fear, my dear son, you will find that public opinion—"

"Public opinion!" interrupted Lord Davenport, rising impa-

tiently from her side, "leave that specious tribunal to adjudicate for your Eustaces and Warnefords. It is not worthy of my mother. The time is past for responsible human beings to sacrifice their children to the hateful rites of Moloch!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

It was a matter of unspeakable consternation to Hamilton Drewe, while prowling about Pulteney street, "his custom ever of an afternoon," to note the visit of Lord Davenport to Hargood's lodgings; nothing doubting that his lordship was deputed by his brother to keep an eye upon the progress of his delegate. Conscious how ill he had succeeded in advancing the plans of Marcus, and dreading to see the return of the new M.P. announced in the daily papers, poor Drewe almost fretted himself into a fever of terror and remorse.

He sometimes thought of frankly seeking Lord Davenport, with whom he had become acquainted at his brother's lodgings. But this was in such palpable opposition to the strict secrecy enjoined by his absent friend, that he had not courage; and between his fear of Marcus's resentment, and his reminiscences of the Helena and Hermia he had beheld "sewing at one sampler," his mind was so troubled, that there seemed every probability of his at length producing a poem sufficiently obscure and incomprehensible to be pronounced by modern critics the height of sublimity.

But there were others besides the transcendental Drewe to whom the expectation of Captain Davenport's return was a source of painful anxiety. His cousin Amy, though the *prestige* of his name was considerably diminished by the slight esteem in which she found it held by the Hargoods, as well as by the proverbial fact that, "the absent are always in the wrong," felt so guiltily apprehensive that her former feelings towards him could not have escaped his penetrating eye, as to look forward with the utmost repugnance to meeting him again.

Right joyfully, therefore, had she seized the pretext afforded by Mrs. Burton's letter, to urge her mother into leaving town;

and so benevolent a being as the Rector of Radensford would have rejoiced indeed could he have surmised how completely the seeming sacrifice made to his comfort, accorded with the earnest desire for retirement of the young girl he welcomed so fondly; no less than with the yearning of her widowed mother to kneel once more beside her husband's grave. Even Marlow, when her eyes rested upon the well-clipped laurel hedge of the rectory garden, after so many penitential months of brick and mortar, could scarcely refrain from an outcry of joy.

After folding Amy in his arms, the venerable pastor whose long grey locks hung down upon cheeks considerably hollowed by care and anxiety since their last meeting, held her back for a moment at arm's length, to ascertain what changes had been effected by a London life in her youthful countenance. But the traces he had dreaded to find, were wholly wanting. The London which, at the same early age, had done so much to estrange from him the heart of his daughter, was still as much a mystery to Amy as when she quitted Meadows Court. Though her mourning had been for six months laid aside, not so much as a glimpse of the gay world had dazzled her young eye. Yet while the good old Rector was examining her sweet face, though the blush that accompanied her ready smile attested her sensibility to be as lively as ever, he fancied he discerned a little dimness in those soft hazel eyes. But what wonder? Sorrows wholly unconnected with what *he* esteemed the besetting trial of her age and sex, had indeed overclouded the destiny of the darling of poor Sir Mark.

It was no small relief to her to find that Lady Harriet was absent from the Manor. Mr. Henderson was of opinion that his old friend purposely prolonged her absence, from reluctance to meet the neighbors before whom she had so pompously paraded the standard of her family immaculacy, which the frailty of her niece had now dragged down to the ordinary level of sinful human nature.

To her nephew, the new tenant of Meadows Court, he refrained from all allusion; feeling that the subject must be unpleasing to the inmates to whom he hoped to make the sojourn in his house as cheerful as was compatible with its gravity. Nor indeed, if they had questioned him, had he much to

tell. Mr. Eustace had as yet visited the place only to superintend the progress of the workmen; and was now settled in London, for the discharge of his parliamentary duties.

Even Mary Tremeneere, when she came jogging with the deaf old Admiral to administer vapid embraces and commonplaces to her former neighbors, had nothing to whisper concerning "poor dear Lady Harriet's nephew." It is true that even her usual diluent small-talk was in some degree suspended with wonder at seeing Amy lovely and light-hearted as ever, though still Miss Meadows.

"It is a great comfort to have you and your dear mother here again, Amy," said she, in her usual querulous accents; "for this neighborhood is not what it was, my dear, nor ever will be, I sadly fear, again. In the first place, Meadows Court is as good as lost to us. That supercilious Mr. Eustace, whom they used to call Young Vapid, never makes his appearance; and when he comes at last, will probably fill the house with disreputable broken-down men of fashion. Then, poor dear Rachel Burton, between little Sophy's increased illness and increased fortune, seems so pre-occupied that she cannot command a leisure hour for rational conversation. As to poor dear Lady Harriet, Radensford has probably seen the last of her!"

"We must try and make amends to you, during our visit here, for all you have lost," said Amy, good-humouredly. "The last two years have indeed effected sad changes for us all."

Of the changes effected in her old home, Amy took an early opportunity of judging. The first time Mr. Henderson succeeded in persuading Lady Meadows to accompany him in a gentle airing in the pony phaeton sent down to him by Rachel on her first visit to town, Amy persuaded Marlow to bear her company, across the forest to Meadows Court.

The spring was in its best of beauty. Green leaves bursting on every tree,—birds carolling on every branch,—squirrels flitting from bough to bough,—the ground covered as by a snowshower, with white anemones,—the moss pretending to blossom and spread as if, on forest ground, it were no longer a weed or an intruder. How she enjoyed the freshness and verdure, from which she had been so long estranged! How heartily did she join in the exclamation of poor old Marlow—"Ah! Miss Amy, darling,

there warn't nothing compare-able with this in smoky Lunnon." "Nay, my mind misgives me, Marlow," she added, "that Mrs. Burton will find no purer or more wholesome air for poor little Sophy, in the climate to which she is conveying her."

Perhaps while Marlow was venting her philosophy on the "foolishness of dragging sick folks away from their comfortable homes to die among strangers," Amy's discursive imagination might be roaming still further. But both she and her attendant pursued their way in silence, each absorbed in affecting recollections connected with the surrounding landscape.

At last, towering over the rugged, stag-horned trees of the forest, appeared the noble line of the beechen avenue of Meadows Court; like a well-drilled brigade drawn up in line, after an irregular skirmish of sharpshooters. They looked like friends, those dear old trees; and Amy stood still to salute them with looks of love; then pursued her way onwards,—why, *why* could she no longer say homewards,—with a heavy and more deliberate step than before.

When the house itself came in sight, she held her breath for anguish. Thankful was she to find it looking so different from its days of old. Plate-glass windows, each of a single pane, and the well laid out French garden, surrounding the house in place of the old moat, had as completely changed its outline, as the careful cleansing of the mossy stone walls, its complexion. It was now a cheerful modern residence; less venerable, but far more attractive.

"I am glad, after all," thought Amy, "that Mr. Eustace took the place. Sir Jarvis is not rich enough to have done all this; and had I found it as it used to be, and myself a stranger within its gates, it would have broken my heart. *This Meadows Court is not the one I loved so well.*"

Still, Amy gently proceeded, leaving her companion loitering behind. When within a very short distance of the hall-door, however, she stopped short, as if paralyzed. Could she believe her eyes? Old Blanche,—old Sting,—basking on the door-step; who, on recognizing her, darted forward to overpower her with rough caresses, just as they used in days of old!

Oh! how she missed the hearty laugh that used to encourage their uproarious proceedings;—the kindly smile which used to

beam upon her from the doorway! No dear father, now! The very dogs, by their whining response to her endearments, seemed trying to remind her that some one was absent, who would never return to caress them again.

She could not but wonder how the poor animals, crouching at her feet, came to be on the spot. For at her departure, Lady Meadows had bestowed them on Manesty the keeper, with a sufficient gratuity to ensure their being taken care of for life. But a moment afterwards, her astonishment was completed by seeing Manesty himself emerge from the house,—*minus* only the tanned leggings and shot-belt of former days.

What joy to the old man when he saw on whom the dogs were fawning! It was as much as he could do to refrain from placing his hand upon her head and bestowing his blessing on dear Miss Amy; and it was as much as Amy could do to refrain from resting her head upon his shoulder, to conceal her bursting tears. Manesty, her father's foster-brother, seemed a portion of her father's self.

His tale was soon told, when she became composed enough to listen. He and his wife had been re-engaged from the first by the new tenant; and were, during his absence, custodians of the house.

“So that you can take me round the place, Manesty, without fear of interruption?”

“Ay sure, Miss Amy. Proud and glad 'll be my ould 'oman to show you over the ould 'ouse.”

Saving for the five minutes required to tie on a clean white apron, and her Sunday cap, Mrs. Manesty lost no time in obeying the summons of her husband, whom Amy had despatched in the interim to fetch and re-assure poor Marlow.

“It seems as if master wouldn't be much here, Miss Meadows,” said the old lady, who insisted upon throwing open every nook and cranny; “n for if you'll believe me, Miss, he's never yet slep' in the 'ouse. Howsever, he's got one-and-twenty year afore him; so he may take his time and pleasure.”

Miss Meadows was soon engaged in admiring the simple and well-selected furniture of the drawing-room—chintz and maple wood only, but of the newest and best patterns, and wearing as yet their gloss of newness. In the “eating room” and library,

on the contrary, all was rich and massive. But to her amazement, many of the old family pictures were restored, Eustace having bought up all he could recover from the auction which had formerly taken place, and he had also been at great pains and expense to make the rooms look as near like their former selves as possible.

Even gratified as she was, Amy was glad to get out of the house, and it was a relief to get into the air again. Leaving Marlow to maunder on with her old fellow-servants, she was off into the shrubberies—across the lawns—to lean once more on the iron-fence of the paddock as she had done on that bright June morning—that happy birthday—which first introduced her to the reader.

“It is as well,” mused Amy, as she once more fixed her eyes on the silvery bolls of the old beech trees, still leafless though exhibiting a partial tinge of green—“it is as well, perhaps, that William Eustace should be absent. I could not help thanking him. I feel really grateful, really touched by his devotedness. How few men are capable of such thoughtful and unselfish delicacy! Least of all Mark Davenport. I should not have found poor Blanche and Sting at the hall door, or my foolish old muslin curtains re-instated, had *he* succeeded us at Meadows Court. He calls such things ‘bosh.’ Perhaps he is right. But at all events things may be *bosh*, yet exercise a wonderful influence over the happiness of daily life.”

A little further on, an old hunter of her father’s, which, failing a kind master, Lady Meadows, at her departure, had ordered to be shot, was comfortably grazing in the paddock,

Unkempt, untrimm’d, unshorn,

evidently kept for his own enjoyment of the hay and corn of this world.

“There *must* be good in this man!”—mused Amy. “After all, it was perhaps unfortunate that we had not met previous to my having heard the name of my cousin Mark, and admired his sketches in Rachel Burton’s album.”

She might, in that case, have been less keenly alive to Young Vapid’s supercilious languor of character and deportment. If

he had betrayed the smallest indication of the warmth of attachment and sacrifices of which he had now shown himself capable, she should most assuredly have— But it was no use thinking of it *now!*”

CHAPTER XXXII.

AMY almost dreaded the prospect of meeting her mother, after her recent discoveries. She was afraid of betraying too much feeling in recounting to Lady Meadowes all she had seen; still more afraid of raising up, by the narrative, too eager an advocate for William Eustace.

But the moment they were alone together, before she had time to utter a syllable, her mother threw her arms round her neck in an agony of tears.

As might have been predicted, the object of Lady Meadowes' drive with the good old Rector, was to visit the grave of her husband, as yet unhonoured by a tribute to his memory; and, leaning on Mr. Henderson's arm, she tremblingly approached the spot. But what was her emotion when, having reached the chancel of Radensford church, under which lay the family vault, on raising her eyes towards the long line of monuments recording the antiquities and virtues of the family of Meadowes, she beheld a handsome tablet of black and white marble, bearing his arms and consecrated to the memory of Sir Marcus Meadowes, Bart., with the dates of his birth and disease, and a record that he lived beloved by his family, and died respected by his tenants and esteemed by his neighbours.

Such a tribute to the worth of her late husband, it had been her utmost ambition to dedicate. The object of her more than strict economies during the preceding year, had in fact purposed to compass an expense scarcely compatible with her straitened income. But as yet, the fund set apart for this sacred object was not half equal to the purpose. And to have been thus kindly anticipated!

She could not doubt that Sir Jervis Meadowes, indifferent as he had shown himself to the interests of herself and her daughter, had fulfilled the pious duty of completing the monumental

record of the family honors; and in the warmth of her gratitude, already extended her forgiveness to a thousand minor offences of the new baronet. Though he had acted shabbily in trifles, it was clear he had a noble heart.

In the prayers which she had come thither to address to the Almighty for him who slept beneath, and which now, amid her widow's tears, came forth from the very depths of her heart, the compassionate friend who had fulfilled a kinsman's office by honoring the memory of the dead, was duly remembered.

It was long after she came forth again from the gloomy church into the reviving air, that the cessation of her broken sobs enabled her to testify to her reverend companion her deep sense of obligation towards Sir Jervis Meadowes.

"We seem strangely in the dark, dear lady," replied Mr. Henderson, "if I understand you to refer to the tablet we have just visited. Sir Jervis has nothing to do with the affair. Here, we have been led to believe that it was by yourself the monument was put up."

"Would that it had been so. But you, who know the limit of my means, will not be surprised to learn that I have been yet unable to economise a sufficient sum for the purpose."

"It is true that Burnaby and I were a little startled by so considerable an outlay. It was, however, on your ladyship's account that application was made to me for leave to erect the monument; and it was most decidedly in *your* name, that the workmen on the spot were remunerated."

"It is an unaccountable mystery," said Lady Meadowes, with a deep sigh; "and one I must make it my duty to unravel." But she shrewdly suspected that Mr. Eustace, the rejected suitor of her daughter, was the one to whom she was indebted for this most delicate kindness.

It was not till she found herself alone with her darling Amy, that Lady Meadowes gave free indulgence to the tears which her conflicting emotions had drawn from her heart. But not even to Amy did she confide how deep was her sorrow that the mere caprice of girlish levity had induced her to reject, without thought or investigation, a man so endowed with noble qualities as the new master of Meadowes Court.

Amy had lost him. His troth-plight with her cousin, which

fact Lady Meadowes had learned from the good Rector, would doubtless be proclaimed as soon as she had accomplished her seventeenth year, and laid aside her mourning. Olivia Davenport was to be the happy mistress of that beloved Meadowes Court, overclouded, for so many years, by the enmity of her parents. Olivia was to reign and rule in a spot where she had once flattered herself of seeing her own dear daughter installed by hereditary right; where from childhood she had been loved and respected; and where she might now be established by its master's unbiased choice.

But as Amy had herself said—"It was too late! Too late! How useless to think of it now."

If these perplexities afforded some drawback to the enjoyment anticipated by Lady Meadowes and her daughter in the tranquil seclusion of Radensford, and the sweetness of the bursting spring, the absence of Amy from London was equally regretted by her two cousins—the aristocratic, and the plebeian.

No Marcus had arrived, or was likely to arrive, to fill her place. On the contrary, he had written to Lord Davenport entreating him to procure a further privilege of absence, on the ground of ill-health; assuring him that if the plea did not avail, he preferred resigning his seat, at once, to returning to London. And the kind Hugh, though less alarmed than his mother at the announcement of prolonged indisposition from one accustomed to consider only his own wild and wayward fancies, at the cost of any other person's convenience or of his own credit, complied with his request. Still, after obtaining the concession, he would have been better pleased to feel certain that he was only gratifying a whim, than that illness might have some real share in detaining the truant.

Nor would he have regretted perhaps that Marcus should be on the spot to witness the verification of his often-repeated prophecy that Hugh, so overmastered in the Commons, was pitched to the exact diapason of the Upper House. Among his peers, his mild unpretending Reason was accepted with respect, though ungarnished with the flash eloquence, or pretentious solemnity, of popular mountebanks. Already, Lord Davenport was acquiring a name; a name endorsed by the press, and accredited by

the public. Such honors had been hitherto alone wanting to stimulate him to exertion. Repressed from boyhood by his father, outpassed by his younger brother, he had given up the race too early in the day. But already in a more genial atmosphere, his feelings and faculties were beginning to expand and fructify.

"I envy you, Davenport," William Eustace often said to him, as they quitted together the House in which they officiated at the minute-hand and hour-hand of the same dial. "Were I in the Lords, I feel that I could do something, both for myself and the world. But, in *our* House, the time is past for individual ambition. The atticism of Parliament has disappeared, like the colors of some fine old fresco. While it lasted, to be a good listener was nearly as great a distinction as to be a good speaker. But now, one is ashamed to listen; unless some party cry, some Dumfäter or Abyssinian War-boast, has given the signal that he who hath ears to hear, may as well be attentive. Even this comes so seldom, that I wish I were out of it all."

"And yet, when I was one of you, which is not so long ago," replied Lord Davenport, with a smile, "I always found that, independent of one's duties, the House of Commons was the pleasantest lounge in London; the best club, the best party, and the place where more information might be picked up in a given time, than in any other public assembly. From a moderately good speaker, one learns and retains more than from a remarkably good book."

"Don't talk to me about moderately good speakers!" cried Eustace. "Confound them all, individually and collectively! When the French had exhausted every other crime, they invented Deicide. To my thinking, the everlasting drawlers one is called upon to endure, night after night, are accomplishing the extinction of patriotism, without extenuating circumstances. After listening for a couple of hours to one of Humanhaw's speeches (cofferdams *I* call them—hollow obstacles to the tide of public business), I swear I am capable of voting for the Repeal of the Union, the Independence of Scotland, or the Emancipation of India; so that chaos might come again, the Constitution be reduced to immortal smash, and Humanhaw to silence!"

Lord Davenport perceived, by the bitterness of his friend—a

mood so much more characteristic of a Curt de Cruxley than of the sober-minded Eustace—that something sorely ailed him. But he was not sufficiently in his secrets to surmise the origin of his irritation, however intent on soothing it.

“Shall we dine together to-day at the Travellers’?” said he. “Your family, I find, are not in town this season; and mine have still two months unexpired of their mourning; so that we are two destitute orphans; or, shall I lay the *venue* in Spring Gardens, instead of in Pall Mall: what say you?”

“That I thankfully accept the exchange. I was in hopes Lady Davenport had begun to consider me, last year, so much one of her family, as not to feel me, even now, out of place at her dinner table.”

Such was the origin of Eustace’s re-admittance into the home-circle of the Davenports, and which gave rise to the rumor of the troth-plight mentioned to Lady Meadows by the rector of Radensford. He was now constantly in New Street. Vicinity to the House of Commons and intimacy with Hugh, had of course some share in his visits. What other motive rendered him so keenly alive to the charm of a quiet orderly home, was yet to be determined.

Somewhat late among the visitors who arrived to welcome Amy and her mother to Radensford Rectory, was the gruff old doctor from Cardington.

“I ought, perhaps, to have been with you sooner, my dear good lady,” said he, in answer to the grateful greeting of Lady Meadows. “But, faith and truth, I’m a little in the suds with ye both. Yes, Miss Amy, you may raise your pretty eyebrows; but you, in particular, have not dealt handsomely with your poor old co-guardian.”

Miss Meadows took her customary place by his side, and sportively demanded an explanation.

“Well, then, if I am to state my grievances in detail, as though memorializing the Treasury, in the first place you make and unmake matches for yourself, as though I were not the first person to be consulted!”

“I can assure you dear doctor,” interposed her mother, “there has been no question of a marriage for her.”

“No question *popped*, I suppose you mean; for you won’t

deny, I suppose, that all your acquaintances in Clifton were talking of the courtship betwixt her and her soldier cousin?"

To this Lady Meadows contented herself by saying that "Whatever might have been said or thought by their friends, Captain Davenport was otherwise attached before he became acquainted with his cousin Amy. So now for the second place of your apology."

"Well, the second reason for my procrastinated visit, does not exactly regard Amy. To own the truth, I avoid as much as possible, just now, to find myself within hail of poor Henderson."

"*You?* His friend for forty years past!"

"Ay, 'tis for that very reason! I love him like a brother, and therefore can't answer him like a Judas. He *will* question me about his daughter—about his grandchild; and I don't care to answer."

"You have a bad opinion, then, I fear of poor little Sophy?" said Lady Meadows, anxiously.

"I look upon her, my dear ma'am, as already in her coffin."

"Poor child! Poor mother!"

"I told Mrs. Burton nearly as much before she started. 'Twas my duty—a painful one—but still, a duty."

"And how did she bear it?"

"She turned deaf as a stone. She did not choose to hear."

"We mothers cling so earnestly to *any* spar, in such a wreck of the affections!"—

"I can't admit you both into the same category under the name of 'we.' Had I told *you* that your child was beyond the aid of medicine or the curative influence of climate, and that it would be a mercy to let her last moments elapse in peace among her own people, you would not have dragged her to a foreign country, to be harassed by strange faces and comfortless surroundings."

"I will not answer for myself, doctor. In the darkness of such a moment, the slightest hope shines with a phosphorescent light."

"What could be more natural than that she should profit by her change of fortune to use every effort in little Sophy's behalf?" asked Amy, sorrowfully.

"Many things, my dear child, might be more natural. That she should stoop, for instance, to be instructed by those wiser than herself; that she should consider her father as well as her child. I've known Rachel Burton nigh upon thirty years. She saw the light here, an infant in my arms, just when your precious mother came among us as a wife. Don't fancy that I compare them. It would be Lombard street to a chayny orange, or a golden guinea to a silver groat."

"Come, come, my dear doctor," exclaimed Lady Meadows, "I am not so long past the blushing age, as to sit and listen to such flatteries."

"No flatteries—truth, ma'am, severest truth," cried the old doctor, shaking a lingering grain of snuff from his finger and thumb. "Yours has been through life the portion of the Roman matron—we'll drop the Latin, Miss Amy, and call it the hearth-side and the distaff. Hers—"

"No scandal about poor Rachel, doctor," interposed Lady Meadows somewhat anxiously, dreading some allusion to the name of Marcus.

"Hers—though a single old fellow betwixt two females, let me have my say—*hers* has been the portion of the restless heart, the unquiet mind. From the time when she wore her poor old father to a thread by fretting after theatres and ball-rooms and London fiddle-faddle, to the days when she worried *me* into a fever by insisting on carrying about my little patient to whom rest and quiet were all in all, to Malvern, Torquay, Buxton, Scarborough, anywhere and everywhere but home, I have perceived there was a worm at the core to induce such perpetual motion. Rachel Burton's nature is not in a healthy state. If I could lay my finger on her moral pulse, my life on't I should find it out."

"Sacred be the secrets of the prison-house, dear doctor," said Lady Meadows, placing her own finger on her lip. "For many years, we have witnessed the exemplary life poor Rachel has been leading. Let us pray that all may yet end well; and both mother and child be restored to us in safety."

"Your kind wishes were never yet wanting, even when undeserved," rejoined Dr. Burnaby.

"The only thing that reconciles me to this foolish, feverish,

woman's love of gadding, is that her absence is the cause of your presence here. But that the office of the good Samaritan awaited you, you might never have returned to Radensford!"

"This place possesses attractions for us, my dear doctor, which time nor tide can ever wear away," rejoined Lady Meadows, feelingly.

"Well, well! I'll scold *you* no more just now. But while we're in the vein for abusing our neighbors, let us go the whole round of them. The poor admiral, for instance, grows deafer and deafer every day. I doubt whether he'd flinch under the broadsides of a fleet of steam-frigates; at a naval review! As to Mary, unless I despatch her to the chaperonage of Madam Darby, Ringettina, to put up with Amy's leavings, I'm afraid we shall never find a Corydon herabouts for our superannuated Phillis."

"Doctor, doctor!—what have we all done to you?"

"I say nothing of your friend, Lady Harriet," said he, in conclusion, "because, as her pride has had a fall, we must show mercy. Whatever may have been their stiff-neckedness, she and her sister have severely paid the penalty."

"Is she likely to return soon to the Manor?"

"I should say not. I don't think she'll show again in this part of the country till young Eustace establishes himself at Meadows Court for the shooting season. He has hired both this and the neighbouring manor; and under shelter of her nephew's importance, perhaps her ladyship may once more venture to look the sun and moon (and Public Opinion) in the face."

"Have you seen Mr. Eustace since he came into the country?" inquired Lady Meadows, timidly, fancying she might be leading to some critical disclosure.

"Not I! I have seen only what my old housekeeper calls the colour of his money. His parents sent me in a cheque, a Jew's ransom, for what they called curing him of his 'fever with typhoid symptoms.' But the fee was due to youth and a good constitution; not to the old doctor. If *my* skill could have availed"—

He stopped short. It was not to Lady Meadows and Amy he could avow that the patient whom, during that grievous epidemic, he would have given his right hand to save, was lying in the chancel of Radensford Church!

To divert the conversation into some more cheerful channel, the old doctor began bantering anew his little friend.

“And what have you brought me from London, Miss Amy?” said he. “Since you have not, as I supposed, been occupied with conquests and courtships, I trust your pretty eyes and hands have been employed in the old doctor’s behalf. Where are the slippers you have worked for me, pray; and where is the drawing for me to hang t’other side my parlor chimney-piece, to match the lame horse, and dog with three legs, you made me frame upon your birthday, ten years ago? Ringlettina informed me that you had been taking lessons of the cousin Capting, and got on, under his tuition, like a good ’un.”

To his great surprise, a pair of slippers, with his initials in cut-velvet work, artistically finished, were immediately produced.

“For the drawing, dear Doctor Barnaby, you must choose your own subject, and it shall be ready in a great deal less than no time,” said Amy, when the little hand that presented the slippers had been gratefully and paternally kissed.

“You are a better girl than I expected,” said the old doctor, with tears in his eyes. “My fees, I see, are quite as readily forthcoming from *you* as from Lady Louisa Eustace! Well, then, I choose a scene in the forest of Burdans, with wood-cutters in the foreground—time, morning; to complete which, will necessitate early rising, and sweep away the trace of London smoke (though I can’t say I see much of it) from your pretty face. But hush! here comes my friend Henderson,” said he, glancing from the window towards the entrance gate. “A letter, too, in his hand; and far from a cheerful expression in his face. Heaven grant that he may have received no ill news from the Mediterranean!”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE progress of the session brought, among other tardy perceptions, to the mind of Government, that the name of Lord Davenport, high as it stood among the rising orators and patriots of the day, would form a highly advantageous make-weight to

its list of adherents. He was accordingly courteously summoned to an audience by a noble Nestor, the blackness of whose youthful locks were silvered over into venerability, like an old park-paling overgrown with lichen; by whom, after the usual solemn exordium, he was favoured with a tender of any reasonable office in the gift of the Government. But Lord Davenport was by no means dazzled, and only consented to ask for a working place of some few hundred pounds a year, for a gentleman and a scholar, of whose ability and integrity he offered himself as a guarantee, and in whose favour he was deeply interested. This was most readily granted, and in the course of the week a letter from the Treasury duly confirmed the gift.

The appointment which Her Majesty's Government had the "satisfaction of placing at Lord Davenport's disposal, in behalf of his *protégé*, Mr. Hargood," was just such as he could have desired: a gentleman's place, where abilities, and, above all, industry and zeal, would tell; securing, after twenty years' service, a retiring pension.

Great was his gratitude, and becomingly expressed in the proper quarter. But now, for the first time, occurred to him a doubt whether he was likely to have secured gratitude in his turn; whether he had not been precipitate. In short, the amiable Hugh, enlightened and civilized, but timid as a girl, almost trembled when he sat down to tender to the literary porcupine a provision of five hundred per annum.

It happened that, at the moment he thus offered himself as the second providence of Pulteney Street, Hargood was temporarily released from the hauntings of Hamilton Drewe. For the preceding week, his erudite kinsman of Bloomsbury had departed this life. The bookworm had become food for worms.

It was on returning from the funeral of his former friend, disgusted a little with himself, and a great deal with the learned friends of the deceased, his companions in the mourning coach, who, while crawling along in all the pomp of sable plumes and black cotton-velvet housings, had beguiled the tediousness of their progress by a squabble anent the Sidereal systems of Struve and Arago; and an argument concerning the sacred tooth of Gôtama, the son of Soudhohnana, King of Kapilavaston, and founder of the Buddhist faith, as exhibited under sanction of

the British resident at Kandy, and saluted by British sentinels—the one declaring it to be an eye-tooth, the other, a molar—it was while labouring under a sense of the littleness of those minds which the ignorant are deluded into believing great, that the letter of Lord Davenport was placed in his hand.

What a transition! from the gloom of an open grave, where he had just seen a handful of dust rattle down upon a coffin, to a prospect which was to him as a glimpse of the land overflowing with milk and honey!

He was alone when he perused the letter. But he was literally ashamed to let even *himself* perceive how much he was agitated by the contents; muttering, as he rang for and hastily swallowed a glass of water, that the day was sultry and the Highgate Road a dust.

Even after a second perusal of Lord Davenport's missive, and making himself master of the facts of the case, the easy and pleasant nature of the duties imposed upon him, the liberal salary, the certainty of a provision to the end of his days, instead of offering grateful thanks to Providence, for his emancipation from comparative slavery and a precarious livelihood, he kept searching into the possible motives that might have induced this young aristocrat to take him under his protection. Oh! organs of causality and comparison, how often do ye beguile us into looking into milestones, and cutting blocks with a razor!

The most plausible reason he could surmise, nearly resembled that he had previously assigned to Lord Davenport's offer of his mother's carriage to convey him and his daughter to dinner in Spring Gardens. He decided that, aware of his brother's desire to make Mary his wife, he was eager to retrieve the family from the ignominy of an alliance with a writer for bread: "It would sound better for the house of Davenport, if its son wedded with an official man, than with a public journalist."

Poor Hargood. It was he, and not the Davenports, who was guilty of so narrow-minded a conclusion:—

He, to whose smooth-rubb'd mind could cling,
Nor form, nor feeling, great or small,

A reasoning, self-sufficient thing,
An intellectual all-in-all—

without human sympathy or human tenderness.

The notion being one of his own, he adopted it without much scrutiny. In that case, he must consider himself indebted to his daughter for his advancement in life. For the rest of his days, he, the scholar, the strong-minded man, must feel that he had been dragged into notice by an insignificant girl. At the mere thought, he compressed his lips till the blood came!

While chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancies, he threw himself back in his elbow-chair before the leather-covered table, heaped with volumes fresh from the press; emitting that sour and sickly smell of newly boarded books and freshly printed paper, so different from the pungent muskiness of the old bindings in the Bodleian and National Museum, the very aroma of learning—an atmosphere redolent of Ruskin and Ainsworth, instead of Erasmus and Roger Ascham. For fifteen years not an object had been altered within the four walls of that room, stuffy and dusty as it seemed, after the purer air of Maytide which he had been inhaling in the suburbs. For fifteen years, not an object of comfort or luxury had his straitened income enabled him to add to his household gear. And now, because his daughter was comely of aspect, he was to become the object of preference, and attain comparative wealth.

He flung the letter into his desk, locked the drawer with a jerk as if hiding from his eyes some vexatious object, and resolved to "take time" ere he closed with the specious offer.

Another moment, and his daughter was hastily summoned to his presence. Not to be conferred with, or consulted. Of that he never dreamed. But she might perhaps throw some light on the officious patronage of Lord Davenport. She had perhaps been appealing in his behalf to the powerful brother of Marcus? Perhaps, complaining of their miserable poverty, of her laborious life? Perhaps, who knows, betraying to this young lord that they were dunned by the tailor; and anxious about the grocer's bill? He rang the bell with such vehemence, while smarting

under the supposition, that even the little weazened maid looked terrified, though simply ordered, when she answered it, to tell Miss Hargood she was waited for.

With her usual ladylike serenity, unsuspecting of a coming storm, poor Mary made her appearance, to be roughly interrogated. But her straightforward answers were readily made. She had seen Lord Davenport but once in her life, the preceding autumn. No communication between them had since taken place.

Pacified on that score, he proceeded to inquire about Marcus. But her conscience and her replies were equally clear. Since his departure from England, she had not heard a word of Captain Davenport.

As if by way of reparation for his unjust suspicions, her father unlocked his desk and placed the ominous letter in her hand. And now, if Lord Davenport could have been an unseen spectator, he would indeed have triumphed in the result of his good offices. Such a glow of exultation streamed over her fine features! Such a joyful consciousness seemed to pervade her whole frame!

Having completed the perusal of the letter, and thoroughly mastered the contents, she approached her father and imprinted a pious kiss upon his forehead.

“Free, at last!” she exclaimed. “An honorable independence for life! A position worthy of my grandfather’s son! No more drudgery;—no more truckling to low employers! Thank Heaven—and *him*—you are free! Dear Ned and Frank, too. They will be reared as gentlemen—they will become all my poor dear mother desired them to be!”

“And you are certain Mary,” said her father, bending upon her one of his keenest glances, unmoved by the sensibility which streamed like sunshine from her looks—“that you have never apprised either of the brothers Davenport of these ambitious pretensions—never, through my poor foolish sister’s weakness, allowed them to spy into the miserable nakedness of our land? You are *quite* certain?”

“Father, you do me great injustice—you often do me injustice,” replied Mary, firmly. “I would no more betray a secret of yours, than you would betray it yourself. Not a complaint ever

escaped my lips, either to my aunt Meadows or to any other person. What Lord Davenport has done, is, I verily believe, a tribute to his conviction of your merit. What *you* will do to him—to me—to all of us—if you mar this stroke of fortune only to gratify your personal pride, is scarcely to be thought of. You cannot, *cannot* so fling away your prospects, and those of your children! I have a right to ask it of you, father. I have worked away my brightest days. I have never known an idle hour—scarcely a minute. But I have submitted cheerfully; for it was for your sake and that of the boys. For *my* sake and theirs, father, listen to me now. Accept this generous offer; accept it courteously and thankfully. Lord Davenport deserves it. You know he does. For long before he stirred in your behalf, or troubled his head about us, you used to tell me how highly you thought of him; and that he would one day or other prove an honor to the country.”

“Go to your own room, Mary, for I have a great deal of business on my hands in consequence of the indispensable engagement which absorbed my time this morning,” said Hargood, with repressed displeasure. “And for the future, spare me these effusions of nervous excitement. Such displays are pardonable in Amy Meadows, who has been reared on ether and sal-volatile. But you, Mary, a rational being, with occupations not to be trifled with, should exercise more self-control. Go—my dear—Retire to your painting-room.”

CHAPTER XXXIV

HARGOOD'S first proceeding was such as almost to justify the sinister anticipations of his noble patron. He wrote to request a week's time for deliberation, ere he accepted the greatness thrust upon him. Influenced, however, either by a sense of decency or his daughter's eloquence, he phrased the request with the utmost courtesy; and expressed as humble a thankfulness as was compatible with the attitude of a man “*le plus debout possible pour être à genoux.*”

But his next measure was one that surprised even himself.

Having informed his daughter that private business required him to absent himself from town for a day or two,—but nothing wherefore,—he put himself into an express-train, and hurried down to his sister. From her, he fancied he should learn something of the views and connections of the Davenports;—something that might explain why he had been so favoured, and whether the patron were in word and deed, a man from whom he might stoop to incur obligation.

He did not think it necessary, on leaving home, to commend his daughter and his ducats to the care of Launcelot Gobbo, in the shape of the weazened maid. Ducats were next to none with him; and his Jessica was one who might be safely intrusted to her own good guardianship.

That he was a stranger to the venerable rector of Radensford, and therefore unprivileged to intrude, occurred as little to the self-sufficient Hargood, as that “drums and wry-necked fifes” might be stirring in Soho. He went straight to his mark,—bearing his own carpet-bag; and the warmth with which he was welcomed, certainly seemed to justify his expedition.

Even when the good old pastor returned home from his professional duties and found a stranger within his gates, there was no embarrassment on any side. Mr. Henderson, indeed, was unable to extend his hospitality as cheerfully as he would have wished; for the unfavourable news recently received from his absent daughter, sat heavily on the spirits of the whole party. But the brother of Lady Meadows had claims upon his regard, that were readily and cordially acknowledged.

From the moment of his arrival, his sister felt convinced that she was not indebted for his coming to the simple desire of seeing her again after a month's short absence. And when, with the awkwardness of a person unused to dissimulation, he began cross-questioning her about the Davenports, poor Amy instantly jumped at the conclusion that some terrible disaster had befallen the absent Marcus.

But no! Marcus was by no means the hero of his dittay. Marcus was comparatively out of favour. It was Lord Davenport and his mother, concerning whom Hargood seemed chiefly anxious.

Of *him*, Lady Meadows could speak only in terms of the high-

est eulogy:—as the best of sons—best of brothers—best of nephews—best of cousins.

But even this was not enough. Hargood wanted to hear something of his character as a friend and acquaintance,—as a master and landlord,—as a subject and politician; and on these heads, Lady Meadowes, a timid woman, never allowing herself to pronounce on subjects beyond her reach, was puzzled to reply. She scarcely knew whether the newly inheriting peer were Liberal or Conservative; except that, judging from the pretty general example of the day, she concluded that, because the late Lord Davenport had been a bigoted Tory, the present must be a Whig. In her married life, when poor Sir Mark used to prose over his port, such names were familiar in her ears as household words: for there were Whigs and Tories on the earth in those days.

These slight revelations, however, afforded small advance to Hargood. But though he had obtained little of the information he expected, he had derived advantages from the journey, on which he had not calculated—the disengagement of thought and opinion sure to arise from hurried travel and relief from the routine of home. Under the salutary influence of that peaceful parsonage, those fertile meads of the Severn side, and the pleasant summer atmosphere, his irascible feelings subsided into a calm—his brow unbent; his heart became susceptible of gentler impulses and nobler interpretations.

He had intended to remain forty-eight hours absent—whether as a guest at the rectory or a sojourner in Cardington; as so hurried a journey and too short a visit, would have afforded subject for surmise. But had it been otherwise, neither his sister nor Mr. Henderson would have heard of his immediate departure. Lady Meadowes, above all, was eager that he should visit the place where so many years of her tranquil life were passed; and on the morrow, accordingly, a beautiful morning in May, the air fragrant with blossoms and the whole landscape a garden, he consented to accompany Amy on the self-same track so recently described.

It had gained, however, in the interim. The shaggy thorns were now frosted with blossoms—the chesnut-trees were in full leaf—the starry celandine glittered profusely amidst the moss, as though the white anemone blossoms had exchanged their silver

for gold. The orchis in all its quaint varieties of shaping,—lilies of the valley shooting up their silver bells among the tawny oak-leaves of the preceding year—with hundreds of wild-flowers of less general note and favour, carpeted the way with a rich interminglement of colours.

The London Paria proceeded on and on; absorbed in thought, and seemingly regardless of the gentle fawn that glided by his side. He was revolving in his mind the beauties of nature; but only in their relation to himself and his fortunes. These scenes, these flowers, these branching trees, this blue sky flecked with silver clouds, the glassy pool sleeping yonder in the bottom:—had he inherited no part in them? Was he from his birth an out-cast? Could the merest hewer of wood or drawer of water enjoy his fill of these sylvan glories, while *he*, the intelligent,—the enlightened,—the laborious,—was doomed for life to the midnight gas, sooty atmosphere, and muddy street-ways of a city? Was his foot *never* to be on the springy turf,—his eye *never* uplifted to the “vault of Heaven serene?”

While Amy's simple heart luxuriated in the poetry of the season and the scene, —singing with the birds and blooming with the hawthorns,—Hargood was, as usual, wrapped round in philosophic discontent; moralizing and grumbling, when Nature called upon him to enjoy.

At length, having traversed the strip of ragged chase which the forest of Burdans interposed between Radensford and Meadows Court, and reached the first fence of Sir Jervis's estate, Hargood, suddenly brought to a stand-still, raised his eyes from the ground, and saw before him at a short distance, the fine old avenue of beeches, at that moment green as an emerald with the first vegetation of the year; save when, here and there, a slanting sunbeam, breaking through the branches, mellowed off the transparent verdure into gleaming topaz.

“Beautiful—most beautiful!” said he, with genuine admiration.

“Beautiful, indeed, uncle! Our own dear Meadows Court!” cried Amy; and she had no further difficulty in hurrying on her hitherto laggard companion. He was full of interest in the spot: as the former home of his sister, as the birthplace of Mark Davenport's mother.

It was scarcely possible for experience of rural life to be narrower than that of Edward Hargood. Henstead, the home of his youth, was a straggling village situated in the Essex marshes; and from the fenny environs of Cambridge, his next abiding-place, he removed at once into his London apprenticeship of literary drudgery. Poor, and unconnected, few holidays brightened his laborious year. An occasional snatch of sea-air at Brighton or Ramsgate, or far oftener on the monotonous shores of South-End or Broadstairs, was attempted more as a restoration than a pleasure. The nobler features of that land of hypochondriacism and blue devils which, even in the days of the Puritians, had the audacity to call itself "Merry England," were unknown to Hargood. The feudal castle, the Elizabethan palace, the Corinthian façade, the baronial hall, the mere, the mountain pass, the spreading valley, figuring on his table in portfolios or illustrated serials,—had been as little realized to his perceptions as the cities of Mexico or temples of Ellora. Never had he beheld them face to face:—never seen the emblazoned banner waving from the keep, the ivy mantling the loop-holed watch-tower, the prancing of horses issuing from the Gothic gateway; the pomp and circumstance of aristocratic life. Still less the

Mountain crags and mountain torrents, whose
Wild vapours shape illimitable worlds!

Even an antiquated house like Meadows Court, with its stone gables, and mismatched turrets, was as new to him as it would have been to an American tourist. And while ushered at Amy's request, by Manesty and his dame, over its rambling suites and corridors, with constant reference to "my lady's room," "my lady's library," "my lady's private staircase," he remembered that, but for a trifling legal oversight, the girl by his side would have been now the owner of this fine old mansion and the spreading lands surrounding it, he felt a little less inclined to upbraid his sister for overrating the hereditary distinctions of her child.

The old armorial bearings carved in stone over the vast hall-chimney, and corresponding quarter by quarter with a singular escutcheon laughingly pointed out to him by Amy as they traversed Radensford village, in front of the public-house in which

poor old Nichols and his savings were dwindling away,—were marked with the date 1618: the epoch when Whigs and Tories had just started into existence; when Gustavus Adolphus was warring and Barnevelt expiring, for the same doctrinal casuistries over which his own forefathers were puzzling and canting in the Conventicle in Bunhill Fields;—when James Stuart and Babie Steenie were reigning at Whitehall, and Sir Jacob Meadows, one of the earliest English Baronets, at Meadows Court.

There is something imposing in more than two centuries of family stability. The Crown of England itself has twice been transferred from dynasty to dynasty during that period. Though Hargood had scorned to bestow more than a passing glance at the finely-emblazoned genealogy which, redeemed from the hands of old Nichols by the present resident, had been replaced in the hall, to denote, in common with its stained-glass windows and the carved escutcheon crowning the mantel, that it was still, though in the occupation of a stranger, an appanage of the family of Meadows, his practised eye did not fail to note that it traced the origin of the race to Saxon times: that under the Norman sceptre, it had intermarried with royalty; that in the Wars of the Roses, it had sacrificed more than one valiant knight to the strifes of king-mongery; and that under the more civilised tyranny of Elizabeth, it had danced at court-revels, and sent martyrs to the Tower. It had done all, in short, which yellow parchments, corroded brasses, and mossy tombstones tend to immortalise in a land, which still, in spite of the light shed upon its records by Holinshed or Hume, Lingard Alison or even Macaulay, has a world of domestic archives, waiting to be pounded in the mortar of history and presented in a concrete form to our digestion.

So strong was the impression produced upon the mind of Edward Hargood, that he wandered with far less interest than Amy had expected, through the beautiful shrubberies; so many a favourite spot in which was consecrated by family anecdotes, vainly recounted. The man of cities, the man of books, was reasoning, not observing.

Though unable to retrace the chain of thought producing these reveries, Amy soon perceived, with woman's readiness, that they

were favourable to herself and her family. When he spoke, it was more mildly,—almost deferentially. He seemed to recognise claims hitherto unappreciated. Perhaps he was thinking it less inexcusable than he once supposed in the parents of the heir of those hereditary dignities, to desire that their only son should form an alliance enabling him to substantiate and exalt them. For when Sir Mark became the husband of his sister's governess, he had scarcely sufficient income left, to maintain the respectability of his name.

Before they returned to the Rectory, Amy beguiled her uncle into a visit to Radensford Church. The honourable testimonial destined to keep her father's memory green in the land would, she thought, confirm his favourable impressions. Alas! for frail human nature, whether fermenting under the Spartan tunic, Roman toga, Saxon broadcloth, or even a Patent Siphonia, his attention was absorbed by the ancient family monuments; barons and dames in coloured alabaster, holding each other at arm's length by the hand, as if about to start for a mazurka; recumbent crusaders,—knights of the Shire yclept Meddhowes,—to say nothing of a privy councillor of that most Christian youthful king, whose effigies by Holbein so strongly resemble those of his bluff and wicked father, with the malice taken out.

A Wroughton Drewe might have examined this rare collection of monuments, with the curious eye of an archæologist. Edward Hargood contemplated them with a half-scornful, half-gratified air; as tokens of the greatness of a house into which his sister had married, and of which one of the descendants had vainly solicited to become his son-in-law.

Amy Meadows turned aside while he was examining the inscriptions and dates on these storied tombs; unspeakably mortified at the air of unconcern with which he had surveyed the only one she cared for,—the simple tablet inscribed to the memory of her father.

Meanwhile, by one of those chances said to occur only in the pages of a novel, but more frequently perplexing the progress of actual life, where the Unforeseen is by far the most predominant agent, though Hargood had for the last eight years resided in London without wider excursions than a Saturday's holiday now and then to the suburbs, he had not been four-and-twenty

hours at a hundred miles' distance from the metropolis, before his absence became a serious evil.

He had taken precautions as regarded his employers. He had provided a substitute for his public duties. To his own family, he had not so much as left his address!

And on the morning following his departure, a letter was brought to his house, superscribed "immediate." If absent, the bearer was to follow Mr. Hargood wherever he was most likely to be found.

Mary's first suggestion to the weazened maid by whom this business-like missive was placed in her hand, was to desire the messenger would carry it on to St. Martin's Lane, where, at her father's chambers, his substitute would be found at work. But the woman saw it was time to speak out.

"I'm afraid, Miss, 'twouldn't be no use. None but master or yourself could be of any service in this emudgency. I'm sorrow to say one of the young gentlemen's met with a accident."

In most cases, she would have called them the "boys." Sad indeed must be the accident which caused her to invest them with so much dignity!

Mary instantly took the alarm. But so severe was the discipline of the family, that still she dared not open a letter addressed to her father. The messenger, by whom it had been brought, was summoned to be questioned.

It was not much he could relate. He could not even tell whether the elder or younger child were the sufferer. But "one on 'em had had a bad fall, in climbing over the play-ground wall. His arm was broke; his state alarming!" Mr. Hargood was requested to repair immediately to Hammersmith, to "advise on the measures to be taken."

Within a few minutes, Mary was on her way thither in a cab. She had summoned all her courage. She had gathered together the money, little enough, left by her father for household purposes. Poor boys! Poor darlings! She did not dare allow herself to dwell upon *which* might be the one whose life was perhaps in danger. But Frank was her mother's favourite. She prayed earnestly for Frank.

Arrived at the square red brick house, within iron gates and palisading, bearing ACADEMY aloft on a portentous board,

Mary was far from courteously welcomed. Mr. Hopson, the proprietor, *Dr.* Hopson as styled in his prospectus, was a schoolmaster, a whole schoolmaster, and nothing but a schoolmaster; and he consequently regarded a casualty—perhaps a death—in the Establishment as a calamity not only to be deplored but to be resented. “The classes were completely interrupted by this unfortunate affair. The drawing-master had been dismissed for the day. Order was consequently broken up; and all because Hargood Minor had chosen to disobey the long-standing regulations of the Establishment, and climb over the play-ground wall into the adjoining gardens, in search of green gooseberries, flowers, or some such trash.”

“In search perhaps of liberty,” thought Mary. But she said nothing. She had heard the worst. It *was* Frank who was the sufferer.

She now required to be taken to her brother; and was accordingly ushered up several flights of stairs to the condemned cell or sick room of the Academy—a miserable hole, though the object of much ambition among the boys, as securing indemnification from study. The shutters of the curtainless window were closed, to exclude the afternoon sunshine. But there was still light enough in the cheerless room to enable her to discover the little form extended on a mattress upon the iron bedstead, with the shattered limb resting on a folded sheet.

Mary was soon on her knees by the bedside.

“Is papa very angry, sister Mary?” murmured the feverish boy.

“No one is angry, darling. Do you suffer much, Frank?”

A deep moan was the reply; a moan replete with anguish.

She had already been informed that the Hammersmith surgeon, who had quitted his patient only a quarter of an hour previous to her arrival, had stated that it would be impossible for the fracture to be reduced till the swelling of the mangled limb had in some degree subsided. Cold compresses were to be applied; and in a few hours he was to return. All she could now do, therefore, for the sufferer, was to instal herself as his nurse; undertaking to moisten his lips when thirsty—a considerable relief to Mrs. Hopson, a voluminous middle-aged lady, adorned with a chesnut front, and a black lace *coiffure* overgrown with faded sweet peas, who thankfully

resigned her occupation. But even Mrs. Hopson, though in accepting the cares of office, she had enlarged in Frank Hargood's hearing on the fitting chastisement inflicted by the justice of Providence on refractory young gentlemen unable to resist the temptations of original sin and green gooseberries in the teeth of academic rules and regulations, after listening for an hour or two to the suppressed cries of the brave little patient, had refrained from further objurgation.

How much more, then, "Sister Mary;" who stood listening to his oppressed breathing, and wiping the cold perspiration from his forehead, till her very heart sickened. Few pangs more grievous in this world, than to watch beside a suffering child, whose torments are beyond one's power of assuagement. Poor Mary rolled herself up in the nursery chair, with every pulse in her frame beating, wondering and wondering how this poor little injured frame would ever sustain the torture consequent on setting the doubly-fractured arm; wondering even whether he would outlive so severe a shock on the constitution; wondering, above all, where her father could be found, and whether he were likely to return home in time to authorise a consultation. Every time she bent over the boy, administering to his thirst, or applying the cooling applications ordered, she counted the quarters and the minutes, till the return of the Hammersmith surgeon.

Already, by anticipation, she recoiled from the idea of this man. For it had been whispered to her in his honour, by the lady in the chestnut front, that he was "a tiptop man of the new school, having walked the hospitals in Paris, and been a pupil at the Hotel Dieu;" and Mary, who had heard it said that this dashing guild of chirurgery was far prouder of its address in removing a limb than of skill in preserving one, trembled at the prospect of a disciple of the iron-handed Dupuytren.

Nor were her alarms groundless. When evening and the experimental Saw-bones arrived together, he decided, at once, on what appeared to Mary a very cursory examination of the patient, that amputation must take place. "The nervous system was becoming alarmingly excited—no time was to be lost."

But when Mary discovered that he had arrived, accompanied by his assistant, and bringing his bag of instruments, she saw im-

mediately that he had prejudged the case, and firmly opposed his decision.

"It was natural," he said, with a nauseous simper, "for ladies to be tender-hearted. She must not think about the business. She must leave the room—had better leave the house, indeed, till all was over. But she need not be under the least alarm. Chloroform would be employed. The boy would feel nothing and his life be happily preserved."

But Mary turned a deaf ear. That right arm, so lightly valued by the operator, was to afford the future means of subsistence to her helpless brother. It might, perhaps, yet be saved. Acting on her own judgment, she forbade, in her father's name, any operation to be attempted till her return from town with further advice. She would be off immediately, and be back within a couple of hours.

The professional man rebelled. The Hopsons looked cross, and seemed perplexed. But as Mary now ventured to pronounce the names of Brodie and Guthrie, they dared not risk any overt act of defiance.

She was soon jogging back again to town in a sluggish hack-cab. But civility and a liberal bribe induced the man to accelerate his pace; and again she was coiled up musingly, as in the old arm arm-chair at Hammersmith, cold and faint, though the weather was balmy. She had not tasted food all day, and a ball of ice seemed lodged in her heart of hearts. Consciousness seemed almost to have forsaken her when she arrived at the Davenport's door in Spring Gardens, whither she had desired to be driven. If any one in London knew her father's address, it was likely to be his benefactor.

"My lord was dining out—my lady and Miss Davenport, having dined early, were out for a walk in St. James's Park," was all the answer she could obtain.

In the heaviness of her misery, Mary, in an humble tone, asked leave to wait;—and the old hall-porter, believing her at first to be a tradesperson appointed by my lady, readily consented. Scarcely, however, had she seated herself on one of the hall-chairs, when the same "old experience" that endows with "prophetic vein" statesmen and editors, and with a detective police-

man's eye a vigilant old porter, induced him to throw open the door of the only uninhabited chamber in the house, that of Marcus. And there, in that little Zoar, poor Mary and her tears took refuge.

Had she possessed one faculty disengaged from terror of the edge of the surgeon's knife and grating of his saw, she would have noticed the beautiful landscape so prized of old;—and recognized that she was in the private room of "Marcus, Marcus." But her eyes were blinded with sorrow; and in the porches of her ears sounded only that perpetual, meaningless murmur, which an eminent writer has likened to the sound of sand pouring eternally through the great hour-glass of Time.

Twilight had come,—dusk,—almost darkness, before the door opened and Lady Davenport and her daughter approached her:—at first, with curiosity,—soon with the deepest interest.

Concisely, and self-contained, she told her name and errand.

"I thought," she said "that, failing all other sources of information, my father's address might perhaps be known to Lord Davenport,—by whom he has been lately much befriended. I was almost in hopes that, through my aunt Meadows, it might be known to your ladyship."

Lady Davenport professed her utter ignorance.

"To-morrow's post," she said, "might perhaps bring information from Radensford."

"To-morrow!" cried Mary clasping her hands—"when even to-night, it is almost too late!"

"If to know it be of such moment, my dear Miss Hargood," said Lady Davenport, a little startled, "I will instantly dispatch a servant to my son. He is dining at no great distance, in Richmond Terrace."

"Yes, yes—for mercy's sake!" exclaimed Mary; and between broken sobs, she now explained with deep feeling to her sympathizing companions, the origin of her anxiety. "My brother will suffer agony all night—perhaps have to undergo amputation—perhaps death—my poor little brother!" said she; "unless I can obtain my father's sanction to calling in better advice."

"But why wait? Why not instantly take down Brodie to the school where you say this poor unfortunate child is lying?" said Lady Davenport, with earnest sympathy.

Mary answered only by her tears. But they reminded her hearers that whatever the kindness and energy of her heart, she was not a free agent. She had sunk down again, powerless, into a chair, to wait for Lord Davenport's answer; and her paleness and faintness were so manifest, that Lady Davenport pressed upon her with motherly thoughtfulness, offers of refreshment. Though Mary silently shook her head, tea was brought—(again tea, in presence of the old Himalayan landscape!) And to satisfy them, she took a cup into her hand. But it was soon set down untasted. The choking in her throat rendered it impossible to swallow.

The moment the sound of an arrival in the hall reached her ears, she started up refreshed. Lord Davenport's messenger. No! Lord Davenport's self! She rushed towards him, as if to welcome a friend. A hurried pencil-line from his mother, despatched by the servant, had imperfectly acquainted him with her errand.

"You judged very rightly in supposing that I might assist you, dear Miss Hargood," said he, while cordially pressing her hand; all joy, all amazement at finding her under his own roof. "Mr. Hargood informed me before he left London that he was about to visit Radensford, for a family consultation with his sister."

"Then his advice or consent will come too late!" exclaimed Mary, relapsing into despair.

"You must not wait for it," interposed Lady Davenport. "You must act on your own judgment, and I am sure you can never act amiss," she kindly added. Then, in as few words as possible, she explained to her son the previous origin of Mary's affliction.

"Not a moment must be lost!" cried he, almost before he came to a conclusion. "You, mother, will, I am sure accompany Miss Hargood back to Hammersmith."

"I have already ordered the carriage for that purpose," was Lady Davenport's prompt reply.

"And I will hasten to Brodie or Guthrie, and send on the first man of eminence whose services I can procure. Let nothing be done till he arrives. I will then telegraph for Hargood. Or stay!" said he, reflecting that, if the first surgical advice were

secured, the temporary absence of that stern-minded individual might be a benefit. "He would, perhaps, be disabled by the shock of a too sudden communication. We have still time for the express train; I will hurry down to Radensford and fetch him at once."

No further need to recommend the object of his preference to the protection of his mother. He saw, at once, that the good sense and good feeling of Mary had made instant way with one whose natural sense and feeling were equally genuine.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THANKFUL was the poor, worn, and broken-spirited girl to Lady Davenport, for leaving her to her silent reflections; the whole way from London to Hammersmith. Her return had been anxiously expected; but when news transpired in the Establishment that little Hargood's sister had come back in a "coronet carriage," accompanied by a live ladyship, Mrs. Hopson, in a state of nervous consternation, exchanged her sweet peas for a blonde cap of the first magnitude, prepared to be as fussy as she had been hitherto neglectful.

Lady Davenport took little heed of her importunities. She was absorbed in watching the silent joy of the poor suffering little fellow when sister Mary again kneeled down beside him; and by her well-understood and almost maternal croonings and questionings, afforded comfort to *him* while she satisfied herself that no unsatisfactory change had taken place.

Before she had risen from her knees, one of the most eminent of London surgeons, apprised by Lord Davenport of the urgency of the case, made his appearance; and the local Esculapius having been already summoned, speedily arrived, *minus* a cubit of his stature.

From the consultation, Mary and her friend were of course excluded; but even in the adjoining chamber to which, having declined the honor of the state-parlor below, they were hastily conducted, the shrieks of the poor boy when the mangled limb from which the bone was protruding, was handled and examined, were terrible to hear, even to the less interested of the two.

The consultation lasted long—*very* long—to Mary's feelings interminably. She could scarcely control her anguish. A mother's feelings were stirring in that young heart!

Now, had Mary Hargood been required to propitiate the mother of Hugh and Marcus in the common course of events, she would probably have spared no effort to make the best of herself and her belongings, in order to produce a favorable impression. But here, in the attic of a third-rate boarding school, with bare boards, a long-snuffed tallow candle, and a few miserable tenantless stump-bedsteads by way of furniture, disregarding of everything around her, even of Lady Davenport herself, she was grappling that kind woman to her heart with hooks of steel. She went up to her once or twice, interrupting herself as she hurriedly paced the room; not to apologize for the inconvenience to which she was putting so great a lady; but to seize her hand for sympathy and support, as a woman, a mother, a fellow Christian—when the poor child's cries grew fainter and fainter. At length, poor Mary's heart grew fainter than all; and for the first time in her life, she sank upon one of those wretched beds, in an all but deathlike swoon.

Lady Davenport assisted her unaided; for she knew that the help she would fain have called for, was wanted in the adjoining room. But while bathing her temples with water luckily at hand, and loosening her collar and waistband, she could not resist imprinting a tearful kiss upon her forehead—a kiss that accepted her at once and for ever as her adopted daughter.

When Mary recovered her consciousness, her head was resting on the bosom of Lady Davenport; and before her were the two surgeons, cheerful and at ease. What pleasant intelligence they had to communicate! The limb was set—the patient doing well. No fear or chance of an amputation. The stilling of the boy's cries had arisen from the influence of chloroform.

And now came anxious suggestions that Mary should return home at once with Lady Davenport. "Ill and overcome as she was, her presence could be of no possible service."

"Not to *him*, perhaps, but to *me*. I *could* not leave him. I should suffer more at a distance. And though you say his sleep is assured by opiates, should he wake and not find my hand

ready to meet his own, he would feel *too* lonely. No! you must really allow me to stay."

Her arguments prevailed; though of course it would have been pleasanter to the Hopsons to consign the sick room for the night to darkness and neglect.

"Since you will not come with me, good-night, then, my dear child," said Lady Davenport, bestowing upon her a parting embrace. "Compose yourself as far as is possible under such sad circumstances. To-morrow morning, doubtless, your father will be brought back by my son."

Lord Davenport would have been edified could he have learned on his way down to Radensford, by spirit-rapping, electric acupuncture, or any other of those miraculous modern processes which render "Every Man," even the most cloddish and material, "his own Prospero," the table-talk which followed his hasty exit from the dinner-table at Richmond terrace, before the claret had completed its first round.

It was not opera-night; so that there was no plea for one of those apologetic nods with which the fashionable melomaniac signals the master of the house along his dinner-table, on Tuesdays or Saturdays, before his cab-horse is heard starting off at the rate of twelve miles an hour, to be in time for the *aria d' entrata* of the *prima donna* of the night.

"Let us hope," said one of the Cruxleyan set, as soon as the door had closed after him, "that Davenport has not taken up the dodge of sending for himself away from dinner-parties, like Sir Quinine Flam, or Swainson of the Blues, who pays a guinea a dozen to Barry for scented envelopes directed to himself in the tenderest of handwritings."

"You don't know Davenport. Billet-doux are quite out of his line!" mumbled old Cruvey. "I'll answer for it he has been sent for to Coldbath Fields, to some felon wanting to turn Queen's evidence by a 'full and ample confession.' Davenport has invented a moral emetic for the use of the Model Prisons, which compels a man to clear his conscience, will-he, nill-he."

"More likely," observed old Wormwood, the literary Thug, "his presence has been required at the private view of some political autopsy, in the proof-sheets of a certain leading journal. I hear there is some wholesale butchery in hand."

“You talk after the desires of your own heart, my dear Wormwood!” rejoined the Cruxleyan. “Davenport may be a crotchety fellow and a party man; but he would not kill a midge as you are always endeavoring to slay eagles—by the wind of a spent pen! I found Jack Beresford reading one of your reviews this morning at the Carlton; and though he took all the fences, (as he calls skipping the uncut pages) he was as much affected by the *malus animus* exuding from your article, as a dog by the carbonic-acid-gas in the Grotta del Cane. I was obliged to call for a glass of Curaçoa for him; or your malice might have made another victim besides poor *****!”

“Like Tom Thumb, my dear lord,” rejoined Wormwood, with cynical self-possession, “when I unmask literary impostors,

I do my duty—and I do no more.

Let angry authors be as resentful as they please—

Nitor in adversum; nec me, qui cetera vincit
Impetus; et rapido contrarius Euchor orbi.”

“Away with him, away with him, he speaks Latin!” cried the Cruxleyan, in the heroic vein of Jack Cade.

“Why not? I seldom hear *you* speak English!” retorted Wormwood; who prided himself on being one of those narrow-minded purists who would fain surround the language that embodies our hourly amplifying knowledge and experience, with an iron barrier like that of the fortifications by which Louis Philippe attempted to compulse the good city of Paris, which ended by expulsing himself.

“Truly,” retorted the angry Cruxleyan, “it is tolerably good Saxon which describes a certain man as

Best of all he males,
To butcher, and mangle, and scarify females;
If he can't find a woman, his talent will show it
The best in abusing some very great poet:

or a good fellow whose back is turned, like Davenport.”

“I wonder,” insinuated old Cruvey, who had reasons of his own for disliking the personal turn the conversation was taking, inasmuch as, having officiated half his life as *souffre-douleur* to

Wormwood, he knew he should become the scapegoat of his vengeance later in the evening at the Carlton,—“I wonder whether Davenport will ever marry?”

“I’m sure I hope so,” answered the Cruxleyan. “Davenport’s the sort of fellow of whom slips ought to be taken. A man willing to do everybody’s business besides his own; to belong to all sorts and conditions of committees;—poke his nose into every description of abuse; promote every species of inquiry; sift public charities to the bottom of their strong box, and subscribe to private ones. Davenport is a phenomenon compounded of Philanthropist Howard, Henry Brougham, and Joseph Hume, sweetened with a small spoonful of Mrs. Fry.”

“I’m told,” rejoined Cruvey, as he filled his glass, “that young Eustace, who has so strangely cast his slough, after making the discovery that he has a country as well as a soul to save, is about to marry Davenport’s sister.”

“Is he? So much the better. These political puritans ought to intermarry, like the Jews, to maintain the immaculacy of the race; or we shall be having them disappear, like golden pippins or Albemarle spaniels. Billy Eustace is more than half a good fellow, though, in his way. Billy was one of *us*, till he got bit by Davenport, and Barfont Abbey hasn’t been the same place since he made his recantation. However, I suppose we shall have him back again, when love and politics drop him down upon *terra firma*; like the old tortoise in the fable carried up into the sky by a brace of eagles.”

While they thus praised and scandalized him, Lord Davenport was pursuing his way into Gloucestershire, “straight as an arrow from a Tartar’s bow,” and nearly as rapidly. Having arrived at Cardington at an hour when nothing is welcome or provided for but mail-bags, he took a couple of hours’ rest and refreshment before he proceeded to Radensford; satisfied that the longer Edward Hargood’s interference between his mother and Mary and the sick child, was deferred, the better for all parties.

And this opinion was considerably strengthened after his interview with the individual in question. Hargood received the intelligence of his child’s misfortune with frowns rather than tears: enlarging upon the accident as a most offensive proof of

the want of care and discipline in Dr. Hopson's establishment, without once adverting to the sufferings of the boy.

"Frank might be maimed for life: a cripple thrown on the hands of his family: a burthen to himself and others." The practical-minded father talked himself in short into a fit of indignation, which sounded very much as if he were about to bring an action for damages against Providence.

In such a mood of mind, it was clear that his company back to town would have been far from recreative; and Lord Davenport was thankful when, after an insinuation of surprise that his lordship should have taken the trouble of coming when a letter would have served the purpose quite as well, Hargood proposed that he should at least remain and pass the day with his aunt and cousin, to console them for *his* abrupt departure;—a hint of wishing to make the journey alone, which his young patron readily accepted.

When, therefore, Amy and her mother made their appearance for the day, they found Mr. Hargood departed, and a new guest installed at the Rectory breakfast-table: a guest they dearly loved, and who was far more congenial with the taste of its venerable master than the dogmatic Hargood. The name of Hugh Davenport was familiar to him, moreover, as brother to the friend of his late son-in-law; by whom, on her departure from India, the interests and comfort of his widowed Rachael had been chiefly provided for. More concerning Marcus, she had of course never confided to her father.

That poor little Frank's sufferings met with far deeper sympathy from Lady Meadows and Amy than from his own father, did not surprise Lord Davenport. Both were full of compassion; not for the boy alone, but for his kind-hearted sister. It touched him to the soul to hear them describe her more than maternal sacrifices to those boys:—her provident care,—her sisterly love. The hope that he was perhaps about to put an end to her domestic troubles, and secure peace and prosperity to her and them, almost produced a betrayal of his feelings.

The road from Radensford to Meadows Court seemed now the allotted daily walk of Amy; for Lord Davenport naturally declined a proposed drive in the Rector's pony-chair to see the

lions of the neighborhood, in favor of a saunter with his cousin. He wanted to talk to her of Mary, unlistened to by the elders of the family. Amy was more likely to prove *simpatica* with his bursts of enthusiasm,—more likely to render him familiar with her cousin's tastes and predilections, to which it might shortly be his happy lot to administer.

Full of Mary—full of his own prospects—a lover, in short, in every sense of the word, he was naturally less alive than even her uncle had been to the beauties of the forest of Burdans. As to the avenue, instead of bursting into the transports for which her partial heart was prepared, Lord Davenport prosaically stated his general objections to the beech. Oak or elm, he thought, from their longevity, were the only trees for avenues.

“But they never form, by the interlacing of their upshooting boughs, a Gothic aisle like *this*?” cried Amy, when they reached the beautiful shady path, sheltered as by the groined arches of a cathedral.

Again, however, Hugh the utilitarian, objected to a close avenue:—“always damp in summer, and in winter impassable.” He still obstinately adhered to oak and elm, planted at sufficient distances to admit the free passage of light and air to the road they border.

Amy was getting almost angry. A fault found with Meadows Court, seemed in *her* ears a sacrilege. Still greater was her vexation when she began to perceive that this cousin Hugh, whom she had hitherto found so brotherly and affectionate, was far more interested in the spot they were visiting as the present and future residence of his friend Eustace, than as the home of his mother's childhood, or as her own birth-place! He kept enlarging on the improvements he should make, “were *he* Eustace,” and “the changes he should strenuously suggest to Eustace, on his return to town;” as if he had totally forgotten that this beautiful estate, so dear to her, was long supposed to be her own.

“After all, it is but natural,” mused poor Amy, as Lord Davenport stalked across the grass, to examine the facilities afforded for draining the lower portion of the paddock, which the suppression of the moat, as a reservoir, had rendered unusually swampy. “*He* looks upon the poor old place as his sister's future

residence. *He* already beholds Olivia installed in these delicious gardens!"

After his survey of the mansion itself, Lord Davenport spoke out more freely: alluding openly to "the time when Eustace would bring down a wife, and make the house more comfortable."

"I should not be surprised," said he, "if, on his father's death, he left Horndean Court entirely to the occupation of Lady Louisa and his sisters. That unfortunate business of the eldest daughter has given his mother such a shock that she will never return to London; and she is fond of Horndean,—which Eustace detests. Situated in the midst of a stately, formal neighbourhood, thirty miles from a railroad, and a hundred miles behind the progress of civilization, he fancies he should be much happier here, within a pleasant distance of town, and immediate reach of fox-hounds."

Amy was silent. *Those* were not the grounds on which she wanted Meadows Court to be preferred. The place possessed inherent merits, which she thought deserved some share in his approbation. She ventured, at last, to remark that she had formerly heard Mr. Eustace declare himself to be thoroughly sick of London.

"As a man of pleasure, I grant you, he had become, as they all do in their turn, completely *blasé*. How should it be otherwise? London is of all cities the one least adapted to a mere sensualist:—all its luxuries imported,—from claret and *pâté de Strasburg*, to French plays and Italian operas. But Eustace, thank Heaven, has outlived that miserable phase of his existence. Eustace has acquired a purpose in life: no longer the lazy, lounging, lanky fellow, who found life 'a bore,' and its sayings and doings '*bosh*.' You would scarcely know him, Amy. There is not a man on earth I value more highly."

His cousin would have given worlds for courage to allude explicitly to his projected marriage with Olivia, as the probable cause of this transformation. But allusion to the subject was impossible. It was pleasanter to let her cousin proceed with his enthusiastic recountal of the golden opinions which his friend had recently won, both in public and private life. "And what I par-

ticularly admire in him," added Lord Davenport, "is the tact with which he has incorporated himself into rational society, without breaking with the set which, however frivolous and vexatious they may now appear in his eyes, were once his bosom friends and hospitable entertainers. I sometimes wonder, Amy," said he, with the utmost carelessness, snatching from a thicket, as he passed, the first dog-rose of the year, and offering it to his cousin,—“I sometimes wonder how you escaped falling in love with Eustace. For I know that, at one time, he admired you exceedingly. However, marriages, they say, are made in Heaven!”

And before Amy could find breath to reply to this direct attack, he had plunged *in medias res* of a full avowal of his own passion for Mary Hargood, and his intention to offer her his hand.

Startled beyond measure, Amy had no longer the smallest inclination to recur to William Eustace. She both loved and valued her cousin Mary; and her expressions of joy were as warm as the occasion required. She seized Lord Davenport by the hand, and thanked him as cordially for having appreciated the merit of her friend, as though it had been a kindness done to herself. Still, the woman,—the *girl*,—predominated. She kept ever and anon stopping short to accuse herself of blindness and stupidity, in not having at once discovered his prepossession, from the endless inquiries he had addressed to her throughout the winter, touching Mary's occupations and sentiments:—then flying off to a thousand anecdotes of Mary's excellence and self-abnegation. It was a subject which neither of them was likely to grow weary of discussing.

“But how is all this to be settled with Marcus?” exclaimed Amy, suddenly pausing in their pleasant plan-makings. “Surely you are aware of his attachment to Mary?”

“Shall I surprise you much by telling you that, only four days ago, I received a letter from him, written in utter ignorance of my project, and suggesting her to me as a wife?”

“*Marcus*? Only six months ago, so passionately in love with her!”

“Only six months ago deliberately *rejected* by her. You do

not know my brother as I do; or you would be aware of the influence of such a fact on the sensitiveness of his self-love. The world scarcely holds the woman he would not prefer to a girl who had calmly declined his hand and resisted his attractions. But it seems that, in describing the individual she considered suited to her as a partner for life, Miss Hargood sketched an ideal which Marcus declares to be my life-like portrait: and such is his estimate of her excellence, that, since he cannot obtain her as a wife, he insists upon having her for a sister-in-law."

Amy could not forbear a passing tribute to the singular good-fortune which seemed to throw every advantage into the hands of her cousin.

"There is a person of your acquaintance," resumed Lord Davenport, following his own line of reflection, "whom it would never surprise me to see resume over Marcus an ascendancy which long preceded his passion for Mary Hargood."

"Mr. Henderson's daughter?"

"Why not say Sylvester Burton's wife and widow—for it was in that position she won his boyish affections! I remember when his letters from India were filled with ravings about this gentle, patient, tender, Rachel Burton; and, but that personal extravagance had so injured his income as to render marriage just then impossible, he would certainly have offered her his hand."

"The attachment could scarcely be very strong, which did not prevent his falling in love, at first sight, with Mary!"

"Like all over-impressionable people, Marcus is fickle; and long absence and the imprudence of the whole affair had probably effected their usual consequences. But I suspect that, at the bottom of his heart, there has always abided a leaning towards the '*premier amour*' to which, the song says '*on revient toujours*;' based perhaps on his conviction that the attachment was mutual."

Amy, to whom her mother had confided only a moderate portion of Rachel Burton's confessions, was a little surprised. But Marcus and his caprices had long lost their paramount interest in her mind. The spell was broken. This further proof of the instability of his character only served to renew her self-

gratulations that she had *not* broken, but gradually unlinked her chain.

Ere they regained the house, Lord Davenport exacted a promise from her that, at present, all these plans and surmises should be reserved from her mother.

“Let everything be satisfactorily arranged,” said he, “before she hears a word about the matter. My dear aunt is so kind-hearted, that should any disappointment arise to frustrate my hopes, it would distress her affectionate nature. She has had plagues enough in life. We must all henceforward do our best, Amy, to keep her well, and make her happy.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

At an earlier hour, the morning following poor Frank's disaster, than the interview took place between his father and Lord Davenport, Olivia, escorted by Madame Winkelried, and bringing a plentiful supply of forced fruit and other pleasant gifts for the little sufferer, made her appearance at Ham-smith : the Hopsons, male and female, who had refused ingress into the sick-room, the preceding day, even to little Ned, being now prepared to admit the whole House of Lords, had it thought proper to present itself.

Grateful indeed for these gifts was the solitary watcher; for the sick child, though proceeding favourably, complained of intolerable thirst. But still more grateful was she for the affectionate greetings of Olivia, and the motherly counsels of the good-hearted German, who, in a sick room, seemed in her element. Before they quitted it, the surgeons arrived; and a highly satisfactory report was the result of their consultation.

And now, again left alone, poor Mary began to look forward with terror to her father's arrival, so anxiously desired the preceding day. She felt certain of having incurred his displeasure. She had either involved him in heavy expenses, or in alarming obligations towards the Davenports; and if he recoiled from merely accepting a place under Government on the recommendation of the young lord, how was he likely to submit, even for

a time, to be indebted to him in the frightful amount of a surgeon's fee!

She turned sick at the thoughts of his displeasure; and but that, while she dwelt upon it, her ear was released from the piteous moans of that suffering boy, by which yesterday she had been distracted, her courage would have failed her.

But *that* sufficed. Let her father rage as he might, the child was relieved—the child, thank Heaven, was safe.

After many weary hours, the creaking of boots on the crazy old attic staircase renewed the beating of her heart. And well it might; for scarcely were the first greetings exchanged between her and her father, when he began to lecture poor little Frank on his disobedience, and herself for having so superfluously intruded their family affairs upon the Davenports.

He brought intelligence, however, which almost reconciled her to his rebukes. The result of his journey was decisive. He had made up his mind to accept the offered place: and was about to return home for the purpose of despatching to Spring Gardens an answer to that effect. It was clear, alas! to Mary, from his present mood of mind, that he was likely to intimate to Lord Davenport that, having made cautious inquiries into his lordship's character, he found him possessed of such qualities as entitled him to become his patron; in other words, that, having ascertained him to be right-minded, humane, learned, charitable and pious, he, Edward Hargood, consented to accept obligations at his hands.

No matter! A being so generous as Lord Davenport, would overlook the eccentricities of a really good and able man. The essential was that the yoke was removed from her father's neck and the goad from the sides of her young brothers; and the remainder of that day was one of comparative peace and rest to Mary.

The night that followed it, however, was less satisfactory. According to the usual reaction, feverish symptoms rendered the little patient restless, and necessitated constant watchfulness. On the morrow, therefore, when Mr. Hargood made his appearance, he was exceedingly displeased; both at the languor of the exhausted child, which he attributed to the peaches and grapes forwarded by Lady Davenport; and at the pale cheeks and anxious eyes of his daughter.

“If things went on so badly,” he said, he should be obliged, in spite of the arduous business he was just then compelled to wind up, and the new duties into which he was about to be initiated, to come and establish himself at Hammersmith, till his son’s cure was completed.”

At this hint, Mary did indeed bestir herself to look well and cheerful; for she felt that her father’s enthronement in the sick room would convey a sentence of death to one or both his children. The remainder of the Ilford Castle fruit was instantly dispatched down to little Ned, to be shared with his rough-headed school-fellows.

But to her father’s visit succeeded one which was indeed consoling. Scarcely had the sick chamber been set in order, and refreshed for the day, when Lady Davenport was seated by the bedside in the great nursing-chair; looking, with her widow’s weeds and serene countenance, the picture of a Sister of Mercy. Having whispered off the sick child into a doze, she began to relate to Mary her son’s visit to Meadows Court; to talk of Amy and her mother; and above all, of Henstead Vicarage—of her good old grandfather, of whom the sick boy was the namesake: and of the venerable widowed grandmother who, once a year in the childhood of Gertrude Meadows, used to visit Gloucestershire for a peep at the dear Mary who was slaving for her support.

“I was very, very fond of old Mrs. Hargood,” added Lady Davenport. “I sometimes almost envied Mary her mother; who was far milder than mine. I felt that for *her*, I would have done all Mary was doing.”

From one so reserved as Lady Davenport, such remarks as these were a greater proof of confidence than Mary could then understand. But she was thankful to her for placing her family in so pleasant a light; and strange to tell, she heard more of her relations during the ensuing half-hour, than, during her whole preceding life, she had heard from her father. But for the sour portraits in his writing-room, she might have had some reason indeed for surmising that she was the daughter of a foundling.

When taking leave, after a long visit, Lady Davenport ventured to remark on the cold hand and palid cheeks of her young friend.

“You must be completely shut up in this close room, my dear Miss Hargood,” said she. “If to-morrow should prove a good day with our poor little patient, you must take a short airing, with Olivia and her brother. They will call for you at about this hour; and Madame Winkelried shall bring some picture-books, and assume your place here till you return. Don’t be afraid to trust her. She is the best old soul in the world. Ask Hugh and Marcus through how many influenzas and sore throats she has nursed them.”

Mary accepted and was grateful. What Lady Davenport proposed could not fail to be right and good; and *she* at least knew better than to decline any friendly overtures made to her all but friendless little brother.

She was still stationed at the window of the old lofty attic, peering down into the court below, to see the last of the departing carriage in which Olivia had been sitting waiting for her mother. And as it disappeared through the huge iron gates, she felt as if she had lost a friend.

In the centre of the small court-yard or front-garden, constituting the *cour d'honneur* of the Academy, grew an aged cedar; such as may be seen in almost every suburban garden on the northern banks of the Thames, derived from the nursery of Sir Hans Sloane in the old Physic Garden at Chelsea: a melancholy looking tree, apparently moulting, so spare was its verdure and so grey the moss encumbering its upper branches out of reach of the gardener’s ladder.

Into the heart of this dreary tree, which had as completely overgrown the little garden as the celebrated American parsnip the garden well in which it had accidentally taken root,—did Mary look down; noting the happy birds flitting among its branches as cheerily as though it had been a huge rose-tree blooming in the gardens of Damascus.

While moralising on their gaiety and her own dejection, for which she called herself severely to account as unbecoming a moment bringing gladness to the whole family, she leaned against the open window-frame, to inhale that delicious fragrance of early summer, from the sweetbriars and honeysuckles of surrounding shrubberies; and in spite of herself, tears came into her eyes while reflecting on the grievous disproportion of birth

between herself and her new friends; not as likely to influence *their* feelings towards herself, but as certain to provoke the surly arrogance, which her father mistook for greatness of mind.

Before those tears had gathered strength to fall, however, the sound of a light footstep caused her suddenly to turn round; and Lord Davenport, already in the room, was instantly by her side.

He had probably met his mother's carriage, and, on learning that Miss Hargood was alone, keeping watch over the slumbering patient, had found it impossible to wait for the appointed meeting of the following day. On presenting himself for admittance, the "Open Sesame" of his coronet procured him of course a ready entrance into Hopsonia.

Is it fair to relate what followed? Is it fair to describe the influence exercised over a heart, for the first time desperately in love, by the sight of two large expressive eyes, "each about to have a tear," but lighted up with sudden joy at sight of the intruder! Even the obtuse Laird of Dumbiedikes admitted the irresistible of Jeanie Deans, when her eyes glanced "like lamour beads" under the effects of the same touching suffusion; and so it was that the evident despondency of Mary Hargood, forced from the tender-hearted Lord Davenport a full avowal of his passion and his hopes, at least four-and-twenty hours before prudence and propriety warranted the confession.

The spot was strangely chosen for it:—that meagre attic,—that cheerless prospect:—how little in accordance with the noble position of the one,—with the graceful refinement of mind of the other! Yet then and there were those few words mutually spoken which reciprocally explained to both the emotions of their hearts, and cemented them to each other, for time and for eternity.

To find her pale, nervous, tremulous, so completely upset the sage intentions of poor Hugh, that cold-blooded wisdom preached in vain. Blessings on his low-voiced exhortations, and gentle endearments! Blessings on the opiates which caused little Frank to sleep on and on, through the afternoon; till the birds began to hover round their nests in the topmost branches of the mossy old cedar. There was, however, still light enough for

Lord Davenport to discover upon the no longer faded cheeks of his own dear Mary, the soft bloom, like the delicate lining of a sea-shell, which denoted the awakened sensibility of her long-reserved nature.

“Your kindness,” said she, “has averted the only drawback that could have embittered my personal prospects of happiness.—You have so altered the position of the family, that I am no longer wanted at home. Do not think me ungracious if I own that I shall be all the happier as your wife, from knowing that I shall not be missed by my brothers or father.”

Just so would Lord Davenport have had her think and feel. Not a thought or sentiment of Mary’s that he could not echo from the bottom of his heart.

When they parted,—for the poor little fellow could not sleep for ever, and became clamorous for water or lemonade,—it was agreed that the driving-party should still take place on the morrow. In the interim, he was to apply to her father, who was already installed in his new office, for his sanction to his addresses.

“I will not conceal from you, dear Mary,” said he, “that among my recent satisfactions has been an observation made to me by Mr. Hargood on accepting the appointment which Government enabled me to offer him. ‘If,’ he said, ‘your lordship’s patronage has any ulterior views involving my daughter,—in plain English, if you expect that Mary will, at some future time, become the wife of your brother Marcus, I owe it to all parties to say that her feelings towards him are unchanged. She has clearly proved to me that between them there exists a total incompatibility of temper and character.’ Now, as all the world is of opinion that no two human beings were ever more dissimilar than myself and Mark, I could not help hoping, darling, that, where White had been rejected, Black might possibly have a chance.”

Poor little Ned Hargood, when he stole in for a moment to wish his sister and sick brother good-night, ere he repaired to his truckle-bed, could scarcely make out what was come to Mary. She strained him so earnestly to her heart,—she mingled something so much like a maternal benediction with her usual kiss! Nay, unless he was much mistaken, tears had fallen from her eyes upon his cheek. Why should she cry *now*, he wondered,

when Frank was out of pain and pronounced to be completely out of danger?

Could any of the many-daughtered London dowagers who, for the last ten years, had been paying their addresses to the heir of Ilford Castle and his coronet,—aided by the means and appliances of balls and dinners,—picnics and Greenwich parties,—operas and French plays,—have surmised how little is required to bring a man to the point of proposal when once he has got his own consent to be married, they might have kept their money in their pockets; and Mitchell, the Trafalgar, and the Star and Garter, have been considerably the losers.

The quiet indolent Hugh had become, on a sudden, twice as impetuous as Mark; like the still water which, having once overleapt the dam, dashes on in headlong vigour. Sir Gardner Dalmain, who met him that evening in the lobby of the House of Commons, in search of his *fidus Achates* Billy Eustace, to confide to him the secret of his approaching happiness, protests to this day that on shaking hands with him and inquiring after his health, Lord Davenport replied with evident aberration of intellect, "Yes, for ever and ever." But previous to this Malvolio-like exhibition, having rashly voted in a division of the Lords, for which the vigilant Whip laid violent hands upon him, and to which he had previously pledged himself, he is said, like Sir Francis Wronghead in the play, to have cried "Ay" when he ought to have cried "No." His worst friend, in short, could hardly have hoped to see him more desperately in love.

Poor little Frank Hargood had no fault to find with the arrangement which brought the good-humoured old Trot, Madame Winkelried, the following afternoon, to relieve the sick guard of sister Mary; provided as she was with strawberries and cherries, with Otto Speckter's charming story-books, and the still better, nay best in the world, tales for one of his years, Miss Edgworth's Parents' Assistant. When the old lady proposed to read aloud to him the incomparable story of Lazy Lawrence, it must have required, on Mary's part, a considerable inclination towards the company of Olivia and her brother who were impatiently waiting for her, or perhaps towards the grassy shady glades of Richmond Park to which they were bound, to seduce her from remaining one of the audience.

Lord Davenport was the bearer of a letter from her father; a letter of unqualified and gratified consent to his proposal. He could not, however, refrain from observing that, as the mutual understanding between the young couple must have been of some duration, he felt that he might have been earlier consulted; adding, that Mary must dispense with his coming in person to congratulate her, as the business of his new office had paramount claims upon his time.

Lord Davenport could have told her had he chosen, when a smile overspread her features at this last piece of information, that already Mr. Hargood was assuming the cut and jargon of an office man. Eight-and-forty hours within the walls of the Treasury had already set their mark upon the middle-aged novice.

They had a charming drive. A still pleasanter walk followed. The parks have been denominated, even in the grave ears of Parliament, the "lungs of London." But what name ought to be applied to those shady groves of Richmond, which, from the days of Strawberry Hill and Kitty Clive, till now, have annually favoured the flirtations of so many happy couples? The charming cavatina sung by Madame Damereau in *L'Ambassadrice*—

Que ces lieux coquets
S'ils n'étaient discrets
Diraient des secrets,

would be far more appropriate to the Richmond avenues, than to the diplomatic box. Few happier, perhaps, among them, than the pair who now wandered there, forming fabulous plans for future felicity. Olivia, who with the consciousness of seventeen, began to perceive that she should prove a pleasanter companion at a dozen yards' distance than close by their side, was of opinion that never in her life had she seen two human faces so thoroughly radiant.

It seemed hard to Hugh that, for some days to come, their interviews must be of this public nature, as well as of limited duration. But it had been already decided and sanctioned by the surgeons, that as soon as the sick boy could be with safety removed in a bed-carriage, he and his brother were to anticipate by a week the Midsummer holidays, and all the world was to be happy.

“And never, I trust, again to return to durance and discomfort with those Hopsons—the most wretched toadies I ever met with!” said Lord Davenport. “When I have won a little on your father’s confidence, dearest Mary, and he begins to treat me like a son-in-law, I shall persuade him to let me place Frank at Woolwich, with a view to the Engineers;—his wall-scaling propensities pointing him out as likely to do an honour to the service. As to our grave little Ned, there is a tolerable living within three miles of Ilford, that will be the very thing for him. Mr. Hargood will scarcely object to render hereditary in the family, his own father’s profession.”

How happy was Mary to hear him talk thus thoughtfully. Those dear boys, whose precarious destiny had so often kept her pillow sleepless were about to be as kindly cared for as herself!

When the appointed day arrived for their removal from Hammersmith, in spite of the restless desire of the only half-convalescent child to be gone, Mary almost regretted to take leave of the little, close, miserable attic, which had been to *her* more than the stateliest chamber of the noblest palace; more than the Tribune at Florence—more than the Golden saloon at Augsburg.

She rather dreaded the cold square room in Pulteney-street, with its Beccarian rewards and punishments, and old black leather table, groaning under uncut duodecimos—corpses for literary dissection.

But what had become of them all? When the disabled child, carefully raised from the carriage by Lady Davenport’s towering footman, was laid upon the most comfortable sofa ever invented by Dowbiggen, she looked round, and no longer recognised her former home. The writing-table was (by a consent with difficulty wrung out of Paterfamilias) shunted into a corner: to make way for the sociable-looking round table, cheered by a vase of flowers from Ilford Castle, arranged by the delicate hands of Olivia; several choice new volumes, and gifts and treasures innumerable, not offered by the bridegroom elect, but by his rejoicing mother.

“How could she do enough,” she said, “to testify her gratitude to one who was about to confer happiness for life on the dearest and worthiest of sons!”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THOUGH it deserves to be recorded in natural, or any other history, that poor Cocotte, under the tuition of her new master, had acquired a polyglot jargon unequalled since the confusion of Babel—compounded of all the tongues of ancient and modern Europe, with a little touch of Sanscrit and Chinese, to the utter oblivion of her original cry of “Marcus, Marcus,”—let us not be a moment supposed to have become equally forgetful.

To follow, step by step, the voyages or travels of a man of his temper, spurred into frantic activity by recent rejection, would have been as pleasant a fate as being tied to the tail of a kite, or stick of a rocket; and very much to be pitied was an invalid gentleman on his way to Alexandria, whose state cabin squared with that of Captain Davenport. Snatches of songs—soliloquies compounded of Coal-Hole and Béranger—Corneille and Shakespeare—oaths on the smallest possible scale, succeeding to rhapsodies to which those of Nat Lee would sound tame and prosaic, were distinctly audible from his berth, nearly three-and-twenty hours of the twenty-four. The Bay of Biscay, which was in a state of calm when the steamer cut through its blue waters, was probably overawed by the storm raging in the breast of the Honourable Marcus.

But these moral typhoons are seldom of long duration. His anger soon raved itself to rest. Before they neared Gibraltar, he had brought himself to own that, after all, Mary might be right; that their natures *were* dissimilar; and that with a wife possessed of such decided opinions and a will so much her own, he should probably have been a miserable man.

Valuing and loving her, however, as much as ever, he solaced himself with the hope that the commission undertaken by Drewe would place her in some degree in the position she had scorned to accept as his wife; and by the time they reached Malta, calmer and still calmer reflection had convinced him that her fine sterling character, joined to the gentle confidingness

of his brother, was eminently calculated to create a model *ménage*.

Such was the origin of the letter which, after some irresolution and compunction, he addressed to Lord Davenport: admiring himself all the time, as being as fine an example of magnanimity as Quintus Curtius. After sealing and despatching it, he swallowed a tremendous glass of cognac and soda-water, the nepenthe of modern heroes; and straightway paraded on deck, and whistled "Love not" in divers keys and with many variations, till several squeamish passengers devoutly wished him overboard.

To Parents and Guardians. *Nota bene.* That a long journey of any kind is a sovereign remedy for unhappy love, a sea voyage, an unfailing specific; and the Oriental and Peninsular Mail Company have first-class vessels chartered to sail every week, which are especially recommended for the purpose.

When Captain Davenport, his gun-cases and colour-boxes reached Corfu, where his old regiment was quartered to recruit after severe service in the East, he had brought himself tolerably on a par with his fellow Christians; and pleasant enough it was to find himself once more among his old brothers in arms, released from military thralldom, wealthy and independent: rich, above all, in a capital Purdey and rifle, two couple of well-broke spaniels, within reach of the finest woodcock-shooting in the world. With such pleasures and pastimes in store, no chance at present of his taking a header from the Leucadian promontory.

Engrossed in field-sports, or interrupting them only when the pursuit of game led him into mountain-passes or sequestered valleys appealing irresistibly to the exercise of the pencil, Marcus spent many weeks in Albania, endeavouring to forget there was a London on the surface of the globe, and earnestly wishing that the free and independent electors of Rawburne might be induced to forget *him*: or that, as he had never taken his seat, his return to Parliament might be cancelled. But the constant expectation of a peremptory recall served only to add zest to his travels; and the Isles of Greece "where burning Sappho" and icy Byron "loved and sung" were successively visited; their fairer features sketched, their coverts thoroughly beaten. When he returned to Corfu,—himself and his spaniels very little the worse

for wear,—Mark Davenport was nearly the same gay manly fellow, who had fought like a hero in the Punjab.

While waiting to take a passage in the first steamer bound for Constantinople, enduring with as little patience as might be, during the Easter festivities, the noise of the petards whizzed in honour of St. Spiridion, he chanced to dine at the Government House, to meet a former brother officer of some distinction, that morning arrived from England; who was of course beset by all present for London news,—the last gossip of the Clubs—the anticipated chit-chat of the newspapers. For the tediousness of colonial exile does not fail to stimulate that wondrous appetite for tidings of marriages between titled persons with whom we have no acquaintance, and deaths of titled people in whom we have no concern, which characterises the Great British Gôbe-mouche.

Major Harland had been questioned and cross-questioned till his mind grew a little confused, and his fashionable intelligence somewhat turbid; so that he appeared hardly certain whether it were Mario who lived in fear of the stiletto from Rachel, or Grisi in fear of the knout from the Emperor Nicholas, or *vice versa*.

He was immediately attacked, by a facetious aide-de-camp, with inquiries whether Lord Brougham had not been consecrated Bishop of Cannes, and S. G. O. or D. C. L., Archbishop of Nomansland;—and by way of silencing this impertinent wag-gery, he began to recount the sudden distinctions of two rising politicians,—Lord Davenport in the Upper, William Eustace in the Lower House.

“By the way, my dear Mark,” added he, turning to Captain Davenport, “I was beset, on leaving London, with urgent messages for you. Don’t look so frightened; they were neither from your tailor nor your tobacconist, nor Tattersall’s. Your brother, of whom I have been giving news to which you turn a deaf ear, threatens to marry and cut you out with a whole grove of olive-branches, if you do not instantly return to your Ps and Qs at Westminster.”

“It was scarcely like Davenport, my dear Harland, to load you with *viva voce* lectures which he has delivered much more concisely by this morning’s mail,” replied Marcus, dryly.

“Well, then,—since you repudiate fraternal authority, tell me if you dare, that I was not assailed with a thousand inquiries concerning yourself and your prospects in life, by a fair widow, an old Indian flame of yours and mine, with whom I renewed my acquaintance the other day.”

“The lady seems to have chosen her confidant discreetly,” said Marcus, with some bitterness. “But however lightly you may treat *her* secrets, Harland, I will thank you to show more respect for mine.”

At that moment, the courses were luckily changing, and the conversation was impeded; much to the relief of several persons present who were aware of the gunpowder texture of Mark Davenport’s temperament. When coffee was served after dinner, Major Harland seized the opportunity of taking the angry man apart, not to “demand an explanation,” but to afford one, pleasantly and gratuitously, of all he had advanced.

“*Faut pas m’en vouloir*, my dear Mark,” said he, “because Mrs. Burton has a better memory than your own. ’Tis not *my* fault that you go about the world, breaking hearts, and leaving other people to pick up the bits.”

“You were in Gloucestershire, then, before you left England?” inquired Davenport, coldly. “Mrs. Burton has for some years past resided with her father, near Cardington.”

“Near fiddlestick! I don’t believe you have inquired, these hundred years past, what has become of your once idolized Rachel,” replied Harland, under the inspiration of a glass of Maraschino, produced in the “Isles of Greece” as potent as their Sapphics.

“In that case, by informing me what has become of her, you will assist a cause to which few people of my acquaintance have less conduced—the diffusion of useful knowledge,”—retorted Davenport, for he hated to have a hand profane laid on the ark of his domestic interests.

“Well then,—know that she was my fellow passenger from Gibraltar to Malta.”

“To Malta? You must be dreaming! What on earth could take Mrs. Burton to Malta? On the eve of leaving town I was summoned by her lawyer to make an affidavit of Sylvester Burton’s death, of which I was an eye-witness; to assist some law-

plea she was about to institute in behalf of her poor little girl."

"She gained it; and the child is a ward in Chancery, and an heiress. A few years hence, we shall see in the papers some spendthrift lord referred to the Master in charge of her wealth, to have a proper allowance settled upon the minor."

"I doubt it. Little Sophy will survive neither to woman's estate nor to her grandfather's. Those Anglo-Indian children, poor shivering little atoms,—never prosper."

"Yet one has heard tell of one Thackeray, and one Roebuck; and last, and very far from least, what say you to poor Charles Bullen?"

"Well, if you will have it so, may Burton's little girl grow up to write Pendennis, or become Judge Advocate!"

"I wish you would be serious; for I assure you the case is far from mirthful. When Mrs. Burton and her little daughter were put on shore at Malta, our doctor heaved a sigh of relief. He had been afraid of a gale, or change of weather, he said:—when the life of the child would not have been worth four-and-twenty hours' purchase."

"You had a fortunate escape. A funeral at sea is a depressing operation," replied Marcus,—doing his utmost to conceal the deep interest he took in Harland's intelligence.

"Don't be a brute!" cried the latter, provoked by his pretended indifference. "Had you been on the spot, you would have been as deeply touched as I was by that poor woman's heart-clinging to her declining child. I am no more of a muff than yourself, Mark. But, by Jove, I could hardly bear to see her on deck, hanging over the mattress where the poor little creature was daily led for the benefit of the Mediterranean breezes. It struck me as an all but providential coincidence that I, who like yourself, had so often carried little Sophy an infant in arms, by way of paying court to her pretty young mother, in a remote country so many thousand miles distant, should be on the spot to see the poor little thing resign the life for which she has ever since been struggling."

"A hard fate, Mrs. Burton's!" murmured Davenport, with emotion no longer to be disguised. "Exile and a vile husband—exile and a dying child! Ten weary years between, to complete the cycle of her sorrows!"

“Are you acquainted with any one at Malta?” inquired Harland, glad to have succeeded in reaching at last his vein of sensibility. “It would be a great mercy to write and recommend her to the kindness of some lady of your acquaintance. She has no friend with her—nothing but servants. Had I not been overdue at head-quarters, I could not have resisted my inclination to land with her, and see her comfortably established, before I joined the regiment. You remember how quiet, and ladylike, and gentle, we always thought her. She is now twice as attractive. Country life in England, and the society of her own sex, has rendered her one of the most pleasing little women in the world!”

Major Harland, a renowned chess-player, was at that moment summoned by the facetious aid-de-camp for the honor of a game with his *chef*; and Marcus was left to make up his mind whether Constantinople or Malta afforded the most direct course to the discharge of his parliamentary duties. Setting geography at defiance (secure from the criticisms of the Drewes, Senior and Junior) he made it a question of time or place. If time were to decide it, the odds lay in favor of his reaching England sooner *via* the Dardanelles, than by taking Valetta in his way.

But as nothing had transpired in public of the tidings communicated by Major Harland, when it appeared that his name was included among the first-class passengers of the next homeward-bound mail-steamer, it was settled among his Corfuote friends that he had been suddenly summoned to London by a call of the House. It was only the captain who could have apprised them that the passage of the unstable Marcus was taken only as far as “the little military hot-house.”

Among the tokens of change and progress remarkable in these our times, when, as an able American writer has expressed it, “steam and electricity concentrate the significance of every passing hour,” is the seeming ubiquity of people travelwise addicted; and the probability of stumbling on an acquaintance in any possible public conveyance—whether on the Ganges or the Mississippi—across the Pampas or the Punjaub.

The first person who hailed Captain Davenport from the paddle-box of the Stromboli, was a singular individual attired

“in a Scotch” as Chateaubriand translates “*en écossais* ; in a tartan shooting jacket, waistcoat, and trowsers, and a Highland cap, the incongruities of which would have made Glasgow hide its head under its plaidie. Davenport was thoroughly puzzled ; till, leaping on deck, the stranger all but embraced him while announcing himself as “*Grugemonde. Vous savez bien, mon cher ? Le Vicomte de Grugemonde.*”

“You must easily recall to yourself, my dear friend,” added he, fearing that, *ce bon Davenport* might have forgotten his French, “our charming country dinner at Richmond with our friend Le Drew, and a swarthy man of letters which his name I forget, who made me eat cold butter with my *limandes*, what you call them, Thames flounders.”

The memory of Mareus was no longer at fault ; and he was soon ready to lend his ear and his sympathies to the mischances undergone since they parted, by the little be-Scoticized *Vicomte*. Small as he was, he had been fractured by the reverberation of the *coup-d'état* ; and was now one of many thousand exiles, more or less illustrious. Like nearly every Frenchman with tolerable abilities or education, he had been dabbling in press intrigues ; and seemed as surprised as indignant, that even an elective monarchy does not choose to be conspired against, without returning the enemy's fire.

He was now, he said, like Marius at Carthage, or his friends Dumas and Hugo wherever they might be, “eating the bitter bread of banishment.” His only consolation was that the present state of things could not last (when did a banished *intrigant* ever say otherwise ?) and the restoration to power and influence of himself and his friends, would once more restore in France the balance of power, and reassure the pacification of Europe.

“*D'ailleurs pensons !*” said he, in the words of his brother exile, Victor Hugo :

“ Nos jours sont des jours d'amertume,
Mais quand nous étendous les bras dans notre brume,
Nous sentons une main ;
Quand nous marchons, courbés, dans l'ombre du martyre,
Nous entendon quelqu'un derrière nous, nous dire
C'est ici le chemin !”

Mark Davenport laughed—but only in the sleeve of his pilot-coat, at the fluttering of the fly on the wheel; strongly of opinion that poor Grugemond had better extend his attempts at national reform, to eating cold butter with flounders. But it served to beguile the tediousness of the voyage far better than the sight of flying-fish and dying dolphins, with which his Mediterranean experiences rendered him over familiar, to listen to the marvellous histories related by this diamond edition of a conspirator, as only a Frenchman knows how to mouth his nothings; with his far-extended right hand inverted and closed, save the second finger, serving as an index to his eloquence; after the form of the coral charms against the evil eye, worn by the fishermen of Naples.

The Vicomte de Grugemond evidently considered his quality of "*proscrit*," to be like his miraculous tartans, "*très-bien porté*;" and fancied that he had achieved a position for life, as a victim of the *coup d'état*. It was a surprise as well as a deep mortification to him to learn from Mark that he had no chance of becoming, as he evidently expected, a great lion under the pilotage of "*ce cher Le Drew*," throughout the remnant of the London season; and that the exiled patriot market had been so long overstretched, that, let a Lucius Junius Brutus make his appearance, with his estates ever so confiscated, or his papers ever so burned by the public executioner, he would have little chance of picking up a decent livelihood nearer the centre of civilisation than New York. So long as we deposit our own rebels at Spike Island, it would be absurd indeed to offer a premium to foreign disaffection.

The little Vicomte, though somewhat crest-fallen, still seemed to trust in the charm of his "*position affreuse*;" and Marcus found that he was undertaking a volume of unedited memoirs, likely in all probability to consign to durance.vile a score or two of his Parisian confederates; as the frontispiece to which, himself and his tartans, sketched by a far more illustrious exile, Gavarni, were to figure as a sample of the last invented Coriolanus of the Boulevart des Capucins.

As they approached Malta, however, Captain Davenport gave less attention to the mock heroics of his companion than to the

uneasy suggestions of his own mind. Like the gallant earl of Peterborough,

He said to his heart betwixt sleeping and waking,
"Thou wild thing that art always leaping or aching,

what is to become of us both, if little Sophy Burton's despairing mother should treat us with the contumely we have so richly deserved?"

It required some courage, and that courage he found in his consciousness of superiority to all mercenary motives, to approach Mrs. Burton at all. For he had left her poor, and was seeking her, wealthy. But he knew that it was his own want of fortune, not hers, which had rendered it impossible for him to offer her his hand; and would not believe that *his* motives could be misinterpreted.

It was evening when he landed; and so much had the mercury in his veins been depressed by misgivings, that he did not bestow more than half an oath, in *lingua franca* or any other lingo, upon the noisy touters besetting him on the quay.

There was little difficulty in ascertaining at the Consular Office the residence of a person so newly landed as Mrs. Burton. She had been fortunate in securing a small but lovely villa, half a mile from the city, called the Marino Sant 'Uberto. But let no future sojourner in the Island of Saintly Knighthood extinct, and oval oranges still flourishing, attempt to discover the spot, (if indeed there exist a man capable of attempting to realise the localities of modern romance, save that genial enthusiast, Lord S——;) for the fortifications completed last year by a barbarous Governor, destroyed the last vestige of this terrestrial Paradise!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LESS philosophic in his generation than Athenian Socrates, Hargood did not seem to enjoy that delightful titillation of the epidermis ensuing the removal of manacles, declared by that eminent sage to be a sufficient indemnification for previous

bondage. He rather resembled those modern martyrs, who, having worn all day a coat too tight in the arm-holes, kept hitching and grumbling on, even after the offending garment has given place to a wadded wrapper.

He was not quite satisfied to find that his place had been readily filled up; and that his value in the literary market was only that of one of the mechanical portions of a mighty engine: one of the fourteen thousand mirrors contained in the eye of a bluebottle. Misled by the overweaning "*We*," he had been so long permitted to emblazon on a scutcheon of pretence, he had calculated the square of his pedestal on too vast a basis; and dreamed not that there may exist as must disparity between *we* and *WE*, as the thunder of Olympian Jove and a Cremorne cracker.

"I am rejoiced, dear Hugh, to find you have got a good birth for Hargood," wrote Marcus in reply to his brother's first communication, purporting to prepare the way for the announcement of his marriage; "for he is an able scholar, and an upright and honorable man. But now you have extricated him from the Blindman's buff of his critical calling—and removed the bandage from his eyes, extend your kindness further, and let him see something of living authors and politicians. Dizzy, in his *Vivian Greyhood*, used to say he hated the society of literary people—they were so *very* illiterate. Nothing struck me more in Hargood than his utter ignorance of the literary tastes and tendencies of the age. Professional critics see nothing in a book, but the passages to be extracted. The soul of its goodness is as invisible to them as to eyes profane, the spirits revealed to the *Scherinn von Prevorst*. I should really like the old fellow to hear a little strong, straightforward talk about books, and men, and measures, concerning which he has been mining his way in letter-press for the last five-and-twenty years, like Queen Emma charily creeping among the burning ploughshares. Let him have a glimmer of Macauley, Austin, Fonblanque—Bulwer and Smythe, Dickens and Milner, and he will come down from his stilts. Don't let him fancy himself too great an officer, or that it is decreed—

Sit Cato, dum vivet, sarie vel Cæsare major."

Lord Davenport knew better than to follow such advice. He would as soon have offered to a pastrycook's apprentice a banquet of cheese-cakes, followed by a digestive pill. He had already perceived that Hargood was becoming as anxious as the worldly-minded, but (in spite of Thackeray) most witty Congreve, to emancipate himself fully and completely from what is called the livery of the Muses. Perhaps he thought this a becoming tribute to the dignity of his future son-in-law! More likely, he was vexed at finding his very name unknown among the conscript fathers of the republic of Letters, to whom he was now, for the first time, presented.

One of the questions chiefly agitated between the families in Pulteney-street and Spring Gardens, was the time and place to be selected for the wedding. The anniversary of the late Lord Davenport's death was overpast; the achievement with its ghastly emblems of mortality, removed from the front of the house; the family liveries restored to their wonted colours; so that there was no impediment to Olivia appearing as bridesmaid to the sister-in-law she was prepared to love so dearly. But the other? Mary could not bear the thought of renouncing the presence of her darling Amy. It was however impossible for Lady Meadows to quit Radensford Rectory at the very moment the worst tidings were expected from the Mediterranean? Even a proposal that Amy should quit her mother for a day or two, and become a guest in Spring Gardens for the marriage solemnity, met with a decided refusal. "It would be unpardonable if, at such a crisis, she were to desert her mother and their venerable friend."

That she felt it far more impossible to meet William Eustace at the altar under the circumstances of the case, Miss Meadows did not think it necessary to expound. But, knowing from Lady Davenport that her son was to officiate as bridesman to her son, and nothing doubting that his betrothal to her cousin Olivia would, on this solemn family gathering, be decided, she felt unequal to the occasion. If the Hargoods thought themselves fortunate that Marcus, accidentally detained at Malta, would spare them the embarrassment of his presence, Amy congratulated herself quite as much that she had so good a pretext for remaining quietly in the country.

She heard daily from Olivia how everything was going on; how speedily dear Mary had endeared herself to all their hearts; how Mr. Hargood was constantly at his new office; and how the family diamond had been reset, and presented to one who, having gratified her future mother-in-law by placing them round her slender throat and graceful brow, looked, thus suitably adorned, more queenly than a queen.

It was much that, under all these details, Amy grew neither envious nor jealous. Would it could be added that she was not growing miserably unhappy.

One evening, at the close of June, Lord Davenport having persuaded his mother to allow Olivia, escorted by her ex-governess, to chaperon his bride elect to the Opera, an inostensible box was secured; and at an early hour, they were prepared to enjoy a representation of the divine Favorita of Donizette. It was to be one of Grisi's last appearances in the part; and Mary had never seen either the actress or the piece; never in short, save on one occasion as a child, been present at an opera. The fear that she might altogether lose the delight of Grisi's now precarious voice, if the attempt were postponed, had prompted Lord Davenport to overcome the scruples of his mother.

Perhaps he would have urged his request less eagerly in behalf of his beloved Mary, had he been prepared for the sensation caused by this first appearance in public. Though her dress was of the very simplest kind, and though she remained by choice, completely in the back-ground, yet a glimpse obtained of her in the lobby, on her way to the box, by a knot of Cruxlyans, lounging near their own omnibus, sufficed to attract all eyes towards the "beautiful Nobody, whom Davenport is about to marry." Once seen, she was not likely to be again overlooked.

Among the fashionable critics, some discovered in the new beauty the blended features of the Undying One and a lovely Irish marchioness, in the best days of both. Others, the classical head of the Amberwitch, enhanced by the grace of the Virginia Lady. The artists present referred her countenance to the magical spell-binding framed picture by Van Holt at Lansdowne House. But all agreed that, save in the Clytra of the National Museum, so perfect a model of female beauty never demanded perpetuation from sculpture.

“Vexatious enough to have to own that great reformer Davenport to be in the right,” observed one of the Cruxleyans. “I hoped he had found a mare’s nest; and it turns out to be that of a Phoenix!”

“But one must get an Act of Parliament passed to prevent his immuring this superb creature. It would be a national calamity!” observed Lord Curt, without withdrawing his glasses from the Davenport box. “She looks as if she had stepped from a canvas by Van Dyck.”

“But Van Dyck has been dead a good many years, hasn’t he, uncle?” demanded the innocent Captain Tollemache.

“A couple of ages, or so. But that is nothing now-a-days. He paints still, through a medium, in Hades, whenever he gets a good order.”

“But I thought the famous medium’s name was Haden, not Hades?”

“Don’t begin to *think*, my good fellow, or you won’t be worth half the money. The difference lies between an S. and N.;—an *asinine* objection. But who has spoken to Davenport to-night? Is he affable? Is he likely to present one to his bride?”

“See! he is at this moment presenting Eustace!”

“Eustace is one of the family. He is about to become the pastor and master of yonder little pet-lamb, with a blue ribbon round its neck.”

“I hope not. Two such paragons in our family as Eustace and Davenport, would be turbot upon turtle,” said Lord Curt. “One should see them going down to posterity hand in hand in marble, on canvas, or bound in calf for the use of schools—like Damon and Pythias—Harmodious and Aristogiton—or Sternhold and Hopkins! No, No! I mean the little pet-lamb to marry my nephew Tollemache here. *She* would supply the Simple in their *ménage*, and he, the *ton*.”

“Let the boy alone, Curt,” cried his favourite disciple. “You always drive him out of the box.”

“For the credit of the family taste, I trust he is gone to the stalls to obtain a nearer view of the future Lady Davenport. I would do as much myself, if diffidence and the gout did not stand in my way.”

“Look at her now. By Jove! the *Diane chasseresse* of the

Louvre is not fit to hold a lucifer match to her!" cried his *double*, directing his glasses full upon Mary; who, touched to the heart by the exquisite fourth act of the Favorita out of all consciousness of the public stare, was leaning forward to listen, in the ecstasy peculiar to those of whom music is the natural language.

Eustace, who was still lingering in the box, surveyed her with wonder; Davenport, with adoration; the former secretly congratulating himself that the lady of *his* thoughts had a little less of the music in her nature and bearing.

"I should always fancy I saw the making of a Clytemnestra," thought he, "in that terribly Grecian line of features. I can't fancy her and that fellow, Davenport, united in holy matrimony. They will be like the mismatched halves of two five-pound-notes, rendered blank by the junction."

"I am a little disappointed in your friend," was on the other hand the verdict of Mary, the following day, after the admirable performance of the night before had been feelingly discussed between them. "I said nothing about him last night, as dear little Livy was present. But he really seems to *me* a dull, reserved young man. His air of being *désabusé du monde* is so out of keeping with his age and prospects."

"Show more mercy to a man in love! Eustace is far from happy."

"Not happy in company with his *fiancée*, and *choisée* by her whole family?"

"Be pleased, my little wife that is to be, to talk English, and talk sense. Surely, dearest, *you* are not one of those who fancy that William Eustace is to be my brother-in-law? My father and his used to talk the matter over when there was an occasional armistice in their warfare concerning long and short-horned cattle. But this was the very thing to prevent it. Besides, I hope my mother will enjoy for some years to come, the comfort of Olivia's society. She is too young to marry."

"I grant you. But in that case, by whom is he rendered unhappy?"

Aha! Have I worked upon your curiosity, at last, and forced you into a question you ought to have asked long ago?"

"Perhaps I was too proud—or too lazy."

“Neither. You fell in one of those mistakes which produces half the evils in the world—you took things for granted. ‘Everybody’ says that Eustace is too marry my sister, and as there is no smoke without fire—and as *l’ universale non s’inganna*—Olivia is of course to be Mrs. Eustace!”

“I plead guilty. I believed it all. And therefore forbore to question you concerning what you did not communicate, unquestioned.”

“Well then; question me now; and I will fairly own that Eustace never evinced the smallest inclination to become my brother; and that, highly as I value him, it would have annoyed me if he had. I should scarcely have liked poor little Livy to become daughter-in-law to Lady Louisa: a formal, cold-hearted woman, alive only to the opinion of the world, who has lived all her life in trammels of her own devising, which have imparted to her nature the same constrained uneasy uprightness which irons worn in youth impart to the human shape.”

“But Olivia would have married the *son*, not the *mother*?”

“I am afraid I entertain rather foreign notions concerning the influence a mother is entitled to exercise over the wife of her son. To me a *belle mère* is’—

“Be pleased, my tall husband that is to be, to talk English and talk sense; and, without further circumspection, to give up the maiden name of my future friend Mrs. William Eustace.”

“I did not tell you that he was going to be married. I told you he was deeply in love.”

“If not with Olivia, then, it is with Madame Winkelried; for he is never out of your house.”

“If you have not guessed nearer the mark than that, you are very stupid. If you have, you are a little hypocrite to force me to tell you what you know as well I do.”

“Well, then, I *am* a little hypocrite. Only speak out!”

“As if you were not perfectly aware that, from the period of that miserable fever at Radensford, which nearly cost Eustace his life, and *did* cost my poor uncle’s, he has been devotedly attached to Amy Meadows!”

“I know that he formerly admired her. But I also know that

from that time to this, there has been no communication between them. Traitor! why have you kept me so long in the dark?"

"Because Eustace imposed discretion on me. He begged me to leave you to your surmises; convinced that, between two girls, two cousins, there must exist sufficient *esprit de corps* to"—

"English, if your lordship pleases"—

"Enough female confederacy, then, to induce you to apprise poor Amy of the steadfastness of his attachment"—

"And if I did?"

"If you did, prematurely, you would expose him to the probability of a second rejection."

"He *did* propose to her, then?" inquired Mary, from whom the delicacy of Amy Meadows towards Eustace had hitherto reserved the fact.

"He did, and most inopportunately; while still in deep affliction for her father's death, and sharing, perhaps, the general opinion that Eustace had been the means of introducing into the neighbourhood the fatal infection."

"But had she entertained any real affection for him, that untoward circumstance, Lady Louisa's fault rather than his, would not have induced her to refuse him"—

"She entertained *no* affection for him, or for anybody. She was too young. She was a spoiled child. She did not know what she wanted."

"But why should she know better now?"

"By *wanting* it. Amy has discovered that the world is not at her feet. That, of the few men she has known, I and Marcus, for instance, never dreamed of falling in love with her. And she has consequently discovered, or will discover in time, that to have secured the permanent affections of a man of first-rate principles and intellect, well-looking, well-born, well-mannered, is a blessing not to be trifled with."

"And so, all this has been a foul conspiracy betwixt you and your friend, against my poor little helpless cousin!"

"With the best intentions towards her, on my part, I dearly love Amy. She is the prettiest, blithest little bird in the world; and will make the sweetest of wives and mothers. But she wanted bringing to reason; and to reason, I trust, she has been

brought. From the first, I was aware of Eustace's continued preference and intention to renew his suit if ever he saw an opening with any prospect of success; and having, during her sojourn at Radensford, constantly seen her letters to Livy and to yourself"—

"Again I say, traitor! How was I to suppose that in asking to see them, and obtaining an insight into all her little frank ingenuous avowals, you were gathering up mischiefs to be conveyed to your friend!"

"As yet I have not told him a word. I leave him to make his own discoveries."

"Then why so anxious yourself to ascertain the state of her mind?"

"Because, having the greatest regard for Eustace, I was eager to satisfy myself of his prospects of happiness. Had I only breathed to him all I saw, and heard, and deeply enjoyed seeing and hearing, the other day when I visited Radensford in search of your father, I should have been having him start off the following day, perhaps startling her again to take refuge on her pedestal of maidenly pride; or if Amy understood her own happiness sufficiently to accept him at once, and be thankful, lose him for the remainder of the session, when he is of the utmost use and value to us here!"

"A party job, after all! I wish you knew how thoroughly I am ashamed of you!" said Mary, with assumed indignation; "I have a mind to write this very moment to my cousin and encourage her to play the Beatrice to the last moment, with this impertinent Benedict."

"Just the *esprit*"—

"Hush! English and common sense!"

"In the plainest English, then, and common sense, if you are bent upon acquainting Amy Meadows that there is a miserable man burning to throw himself and a handsome fortune at her feet, you may enclose her a letter which I have this morning undertaken to forward to her, through my aunt"—

"From Mr. Eustace?"

"From Hamilton Drewe; who, from poet that he was, has been struck unspeakably prosy by the sight of two fair cousins whom he seems to have surprised, in a family group, in this very room."

"The animal! I well remember his breaking in upon us."

"At first, his sensitive heart inclined towards the darker beauty. But, finding her devotedly attached to myself—I beg your pardon—of course I mean finding me devotedly attached to her—he thought it better to alter the epithets in the Sonnet addressed 'To ——,' beginning: 'O angel bright!' or words to that effect. And ever since old Wroughton Drewe's fortune, added to his own, has enabled him to offer to Miss Meadows what he considers a suitable position (and for a poet, he has wonderfully material notions about town and country houses, pin-money, jointure, and so forth), he has been wild to throw himself at her feet. Poor Drewe has been running about with his letter in search of me—from Spring Gardens hither, from hence to Lincoln's Inn, from Lincoln's Inn to the House of Lords—like a dramatic author after a manager, with his MS. sticking out of his pocket—till the poor letter is literally worn at the edges. *Ecce signum!*" said Lord Davenport, drawing from his pocket-book an epistle as limp and shapeless as though it had arrived per mail from Rio Janeiro.

"And am I to forward to Amy this unsightly article?"

"Certainly. But if you despise its form and pressure, what would you say to its contents!"

"You have not surely read it?"

"I have had it, alas! read to *me*. When he caught me at length, Drewe did not spare me, I promise you. But that I know he had previously recited it to half-a-dozen members of his club, I should fancy myself especially favored; and that under my unfortunate circumstances as an engaged man, Drewe might suppose me in want of a model for the letters I address you."

"But you address me none. Less fortunate than Amy, I must submit to be bored through the ear rather than the eye—by far the less evitable evil."

"To punish your sauciness, dear darling Mary, I am half inclined to favor you with such an epistle as Drewe's, containing 'Selections from popular poets'—English, French, German, Italian—besides his own most poetical prose. Just such a farrago, in short, as his speeches on the hustings. Is it not strange that a good-hearted fellow like Drewe cannot be one moment natural?"

“*Natural!* I never saw a man who better merited the name! But it is really a pity to send such a letter to Amy, she will only laugh at the writer.”

“The best thing that can happen to him. All Hamilton Drewe requires is to be laughed out of his absurdities; just as all Amy wanted was a little uncertainty touching her power over the heart with which she had trifled.”

“After all, I am afraid I have pledged my fate to a Pombal, an Alberoni, a Richelieu, a Sir Robert Walpole, instead of the honest man I fancied you! I am half inclined to give back this ring, dear Hugh, and demand in exchange my lock of hair!”

“Better not. You will be asking for it back again before the day is over! Well, well! I ask pardon on my bended knees. People so happy as I am are apt to get saucy. If I dared address you in French, I should say, *que j'ai le bonheur insolent*. And now, let us look for a large envelope, and enclose to ‘Miss Meadowes, Radensford Rectory,’ an amount of British and other classics that will cost you at least three blue postage stamps for conveyance.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

At his last visit to Valetta, in early spring time, Marcus had endured cheerfully in favour of his artistic gratifications, both sun and sirocco, and all the noise and formalities of a fortified city. The lightness and cheeriness of the scene—the pearl-like whiteness of the city, embedded in its sapphire sea,—the striped awnings,—the rose-coloured oleanders, the fragrant orange blossom, had charmed him on his return from central India,—equally sultry, but unrefreshed by vicinity to the sea.

Now, at midsummer, all looked unpropitious: the white walls discoloured and degraded,—the heat intolerable,—the population a heterogeneous compound of the orts and ends of Europe. He was out of sorts. He was out of temper: and, like Byron on the same spot,

Could only stare from out his casement,
And ask for what is such a place meant.

On presenting himself at the Marina Sant' Uberto, he had been

refused admittance. He could not take it for a personal rebuff, for to the respectable middle-aged English man-servant who opened the gate, no name had been announced. But he had reason to infer, from the man's dejected manner, as well as from his answers, that "Miss Burton had derived no benefit from change of climate." The "baby" progressed into "Miss Burton!" Poor Marcus! What a reminder of the progress of time!

That evening was dreary, indeed. Though Captain Davenport had many friends in the garrison, he remained moping at the hotel; and even for his saunter on the ramparts, selected the messhour, when he knew he should be secure from all military encounter.

What was to be done? Should he write? Should he renew his call? To have come, then, for the sole purpose of watching over one apparently in need of protection, and keep aloof, conscience-stricken and ashamed, was a weakness foreign to his nature. On the spur of the moment, he set off a second time to the villa. Though an undue hour for visiting, it was the most enjoyable portion of those thickening summer days, fit only for cicadas and lizards; and *this* time he prepared himself beforehand with a few lines signed with his name; stating that an old friend was desirous of inquiring after the little girl, and offering his services to her mother.

He had chosen his time auspiciously; for Miss Burton, who was, as usual, watching beside the cane couch drawn towards the windows, for the benefit of the cooling evening breeze, where lay her little suffering charge, on finding that an answer was waited for, opened and perused the letter. An exclamation of "Marcus Davenport?"—"Captain Davenport!" when the signature met her eye, was not to be repressed.

She was about instantly to dispatch by the servant a message of ceremonious thanks. But the name had caught the ear of her little companion. It was one associated with her earliest impression—with dusky faces, swift borne palanquins—and the delicious fruits and flowers of a tropical country. No toys had ever half so much amused her, as those presented to her by Marcus. She had a vague recollection of being carried in his arms, in a city of domes and minarets; and returning home laden with these varnished delights.

With the eagerness of sickness, little Sophy entreated that "Marcus" might not be sent away. She wanted to see him again.

Mrs. Burton demurred. It was the last thing on earth she could have wished. But how to deny *any* request to the child whose days,—whose very hours were numbered! There was nothing under the face of Heaven that Sophy could have asked for, which her mother would not have made some wild attempt to promise.

In compliance with her little daughter's twice-repeated request, therefore, she desired that Captain Davenport might be admitted; and a few minutes afterwards, she felt, rather than saw, that he was approaching her through the twilight.

A very few low and incoherent words were exchanged between them. For Rachel's voice was broken by suppressed tears; tears in which Marcus Davenport had no more share than the bat that was flitting to and fro before the varandah-shaded windows. She was thinking only of the child:—the tender-hearted child whom time nor absence had estranged from her earliest friend; the child whose loving heart would so soon cease to beat.

Even Marcus seemed to be thoroughly occupied by Sophy. The little thin hand, scarcely human in its slenderness, which she extended towards him the moment he approached her, was silently raised to his lips. A rougher movement seemed unfitted to its unearthly texture.

"Do you remember me?" asked her faint little voice, as he bent towards her for the purpose. "And have you still got poor Cocotte? I have often thought of you both. Why did you never come and see us, at grandpapa's? I asked mamma. But she said you were not in England."

"I was very long absent."

"And when you came back, you had perhaps forgotten us?"

Another kiss bestowed upon the little feeble hand which he still held, was his reply. And little Sophy, feeling when he relinquished it, that it was wet with tears, perceived with the double tact of childhood and of disease, that there must be no further allusion of the past.

It was dusk almost to darkness; so that neither could distinguish the countenance of the other; and under favour of this

concealment Marcus cleared his voice and endeavoured to talk cheerfully of his voyage and of home.

"I can give you news of my cousin Amy," said he; "who, I find, is occupying your post at Radensford Rectory during your absence."

"I heard this morning from home," replied Mrs. Burton, in a tone of deep dejection. "There, thank Heaven, all is well. Lady Meadows more than supplies my place with my dear old father; and Amy is his constant companion."

"And a cheerful and charming one," added Capt. Davenport; "the kindest-hearted creature breathing. Amy and I often talked together of you, in England," he added in a low voice to Mrs. Burton; but not so low as to escape the vigilant ear of the sick child.

"And is Amy Meadows then your relation?" said she, addressing Marcus. "How strange, that she should never have told me so. But I ought to have guessed it. Dear good Amy! She used to bring me fruit and flowers from Meadows Court, just as you, Captain Davenport, used to give them to me in India. I think you are just alike—alike, that is, in kindness"—

This was so much for the poor little creature to see and feel, that her mother trembled lest she should be tiring herself.

"You must not encourage her to talk—you must not allow her to excite herself," whispered she to Mark. "The slightest exertion, the doctors say, is too much."

"Don't believe them, mamma, don't believe them, Marcus," said the child, though gasping for breath. "The only thing that makes me worse is to be among strange faces—always, *always* among strange faces. And I feel much better this evening, only for seeing *you*. Marcus, do you remember the little gold heart you gave me on my birthday, when I was two years old? I have got it still, in my desk at home. Among the few presents that were ever made me, I always loved it best, because it was the first. Do you think, mother—do *you*—do you think I shall ever go back and open that poor old desk again?"

Was it wonderful that with such appeals sounding in her ears, Rachel Burton should be as indifferent to the presence of Captain Davenport, as to the chair he sat on! All his value in her eyes at that moment, was relatively to the little being whose voice was soon to be heard no more.

So true is that of her quoted sentence of La Rochefoucault "that the things we most desire, are rarely realised; or if they occur, it is at a moment when they have lost their power to please." The presence so earnestly sighed for at Radensford was now valueless!—though,

In that last moment of expiring day,
While summer's twilight swept itself away,
They should have felt the softness of the hour
Sink in the heart, as dew along the flower,
And gently shar'd that calm, so still, so deep,
The voiceless thought, which would not speak, but weep,

the anxious grief that harassed the feelings of both rendered them nothing to each other.

It was soon time for the unexpected visitor to depart; for Sophy's faithful old attendant—her attendant from infancy—was not to be deterred by the presence of a guest, from obeying the orders of the doctors and removing her darling to bed ere the night air exercised its injurious influence.

"Bowen, here is Captain Davenport. You remember Marcus, at Calcutta, don't you, Bowen? Marcus, don't you remember dear old Bowen, whom you used to plague so much about her Norwich shawl?"

Marcus tried to remember. But there was no need for any effort of memory on the part of the old nurse. The Captain had officiated, as proxy for her grandfather, at Miss Sophia's christening; and his generosity on the occasion had made an indelible impression.

"To be sure, she remembered Captain Davenport, and she hoped she saw him well. Only he mustn't keep Miss Burton from going to rest at her usual hour; 'cause that was out of all rule and reg'lation."

Marcus instantly rose to depart. But after taking leave of Mrs. Burton, he was gently called back by little Sophy.

"You must come to-morrow—early to-morrow, *very early* to-morrow, please," said she. "Perhaps I may feel stronger and able to talk. For I want so much to chat to you about India—and about Amy—and about—about everything. It makes me feel better to hear your voice again."

It will be readily believed that Marcus was not slow to make the engagement. At the earliest hour named by Mrs. Burton as suitable for the interview after the invalid had taken her midday *siesta*, he was at the villa. But since they parted the night before, all his thoughts had been with *them*. His chief desire had been to procure for the child some gift that would remind her of her balmy days, when he was the fountain-head of her childish delights.

That Luck with which he had formerly boasted when on the best of terms, favored his wishes. While lounging betimes in the port on his return from his morning bathe, Marcus discovered on the forecastle of a felucca just arrived from Tangiers, a sailor having on his shoulder one of the most beautiful of foreign birds, a king-bird of Africa, tamed as only sailors know how to tame; and after a very short parley the beautiful creature was pluming its scarlet wings on the sleeve of a new master. Gentle, brilliant, and playful, it was the very pet for an ailing child.

So thought little Sophy, when in the course of the afternoon it took its perch upon the edge of her couch; sidling and fondling with a grace which brought to her memory, as that of the donor, poor Cocotte, with her cry of "Marcus, Marcus." But when the bird crept onward to the sick child's pillow, the contrast between its vivid plumage of scarlet and purple and the deathly hue of the sweet face that was smiling on its movements, forced a painful perception upon his mind. There would be little life remaining in that attenuated frame.

There was enough, however, to take delight in his company. The startle of his unexpected arrival had roused up the child. He reminded her of the time when, wilful and wayward, she would allow no one but himself to carry her on some Punjaub expedition. And, pleased with the idea, she insisted that he should again be her bearer; should take her across the lawn to look down upon the glacis; or into the adjoining saloon, which was adorned with rich cornices said to be pillaged from the ancient Palace of the Knights.

"I am not very heavy—not much heavier, Marcus, than when you used to be so kind and indulgent to me, in old times. But it is because I am dying," she whispered, raising her head to his ear, when she found herself alone with him under the awning

on the lawn. "Dear mamma fancies I do not know what makes her sit crying, in the dark, every evening, as she was when your coming surprised us so pleasantly last night. But I often overhear the doctors, when they think me asleep. And I know that it will shortly be over here, Marcus: that I shall soon feel no more pain—no more struggle for breath. I shall be in Heaven. There is no need to cry for me. If I could only take her with me! But she will be so lonely when I am gone—so very, *very* lonely. You must write to Amy Meadowes, and beg her from me to be very loving and attentive to my dear, dear mother when she has lost her little girl."

Mark Davenport, like most selfish people, was by no means fond of children. It has been already admitted that the prospect of becoming a step-father had been one of the causes that originally estranged him from Rachel Burton; and that the portraits of Ned and Frank in Mary Hargood's sketch-book, nearly effected a similar disenchantment. But while listening to the languid prattle of poor little Sophy, the child who through six years of estrangement had been so true to him, he felt that he would willingly sacrifice half his fortune to restore her to health.

Mrs. Burton saw and heard nothing. Grief had blinded her eyes to all but a single object. But old Mrs. Bowen was touched to the bottom of her heart by the tenderness with which that stern and manly-looking soldier tended her nursling. "To be sure, the Captain was a brother to Miss Burton's papa," she had always heard. "And now, he was like more than a father to the child."

While these sad scenes were proceeding on the shores of the Mediterranean, the banks of the Thames were resounding with their usual summer pastimes. Those days "woven of silk and gold," which constitute the brightest part of the London season, with its déjeuners, races, water-parties, and reviews, were anxiously counted over, like a boy notching off the days till the holidays, by Lord Davenport. For about the middle of July, when the most important of his Parliamentary duties should be brought to a close, he was to receive at the altar of St. Margaret's Church, the hand so eagerly coveted.

All, meanwhile, was proceeding smoothly. The *trousseau*, a well-selected and costly gift to Mary from her future mother-in-

law, was already brought home; and scarcely a day but placed upon her table some pleasant *cadeau* from the bridegroom.—Wants hitherto undreamed of, were forestated; and of many of the rich and tasteful objects heaped upon her, she was literally obliged to inquire the use. Readily, however, did she adopt every suggestion and every offering. She felt that it was her duty to be guided by Lady Davenport in all that could conduce to the credit of the family, or satisfaction of her husband.

She did not spoil him, however. She still continued to assert, when occasion needed, opinions of her own.

“A pretty *imbroglio* we have all made of it,” said she, when he entered the studio,—no longer a house of bondage,—some days after Mr. Drewe’s letter had been forwarded to Radensford. “I have heard from Amy.”

“Who does not, I hope, write about an *imbroglio*?”

“I will call it *mull*, if you prefer slang to Italian. But in plain English, she accepts.”

“Accepts Hamilton Drewe? Impossible! I can’t and won’t believe it.”

“Then you are very unreasonable. Did you not tell me, a few days ago, that my cousin had shown herself unreasonably haughty in refusing Mr. Eustace; that, like Rosalind, she ought to “down on her knees, and thank Heaven fasting for a good man’s love?”

“But no such a man as Hamilton Drewe. No, no! Marcus may bestow *Cocotte* upon our gentle shepherd. But I cannot think of throwing away upon him my favourite cousin. Why, your wicker lay-figure, Mary, has more brains and substance in it, than Drewe.”

“My wicker lay-figure has not laid at Amy’s feet six thousand a-year and a fine old seat in Northumberland.”

“Fie, Mary, fie!”

“Did you not throw some such advantages into the balance when extolling the merits of William Eustace? Amy is, as you then observed, all but friendless.”

“But then I tell you that Eustace is as much attached to her as ever; that he has never swerved from his desire to make her his wife.”

“Ay,—but you never told *her* so. And how was she to sur-

mise it? It would have been great presumption on my cousin's part, to fancy that a man like your friend, Mr. Eustace, apparently engrossed by his public duties, surrounded by the more important calls and claims of parliamentary business, was secretly cherishing a little flickering invisible flame for a poor girl moping in country obscurity! I think she was perfectly right to accept Mr. Drewe; a well-educated, enlightened man,—whom she will fashion as she likes, and convert into a reasonable being."

"Oh! Mary, Mary!"

"I have just written her *my* consent in form. And it only remains for you to convey the good news to your amiable friend Mr. Drewe."

"My *friend*, Mr. Drewe! At most, an acquaintance of Marcus, and an object of ridicule even to *him*."

"Many highly meritorious people are the objects of fashionable sarcasm."

"Dear Mary! You are really too provoking!" cried Lord Davenport; "for you *must* be aware how much this vexatious business grieves and disappoints me! I have been buoying up poor Eustace with such false hopes."

"*That* was wrong and imprudent. But with half the qualities and qualifications you vaunted so highly the other day, 'poor Eustace' will have no difficulty in providing himself with some charming wife."

"No wife is charming but the one on whom one has set one's heart!" cried he. "I scarcely know how I shall find courage to break to him this unfortunate business!"

"If you wish it, I will undertake the task. Having never encouraged his irresolutions, I have no scruples of conscience. Let me write or speak to him."

"No! for you do not sympathise with him so kindly as you ought."

"Why ought I? You have both been conspiring against Amy, hoping to render her sufficiently mortified and miserable to jump at last at Mr. Eustace's proposals."

"You do not state the case fairly. All I have done has been for her good."

"Aye, as my father used to tell poor Ned, while caning him,

or Frank, when kept drimless and supperless, till too much exhausted to eat!"

"And, after all, to throw herself away on that egregious gander!"

"I have always heard him spoken of as a very amiable man," said Mary provokingly.

"And will that suffice *pour tout potage*?"

"*Hugh!*" interrupted Mary, with uplifted finger.

"I apologise. Will that suffice for a beautiful, excellent, accomplished, well-born girl, with a very good prospect of a fortune of two thousand a year?"

"Make it ten, while you are about it; for, as it can be only derived from a fairy godmother, a few millions more or less are not worth considering."

"The fairy godmother is myself. The other day, during my visit to Radensford (an additional proof of the truth of the old saw that there is a source of goodness in things evil—for poor Frank's disaster may be the ultimate means of restoring his cousin to her estate), when left alone with Mr. Henderson after dinner, we began to talk of Sir Mark's singular oversight and carelessness; of the chance which had let Sir Jervis Meadowes into the secret; and, altogether, the law and equity of the case. I then ascertained, to my amazement, that the executors had given up the cause on the opinion of a single counsel. Neither of them appears to be much of a man of business; and their country attorneys, the Prescotts, terrified them with their sketch of the cost and trouble of a plea in Chancery, as likely to involve themselves and their heirs for ever in litigation and ruin."

"And so they surrendered poor Amy's inheritance to the heir-at-law, without striking a blow in her defence!"

"Even Mr. Henderson admitted that he sometimes thought they had been a little hasty, that they had taken things too much upon trust. But he assured me that it was Dr. Burnaby who, from the first, as residing within call of the lawyers at Cardington, had undertaken the part of acting executor in liquidating Sir Mark Meadowes' estate."

"And to Dr. Burnaby, I am certain, you repaired"—

"To Dr. Burnaby and the Prescotts. Of course, they scouted the idea of stirring up a question so completely settled; the heir-

at-law in possession—all claim from the female line withdrawn. But I chose to obtain further information; and in my capacity of *prochain ami*—no, don't stop me, Norman French is good Law English (to the shame of the British Constitution be it spoken)—in my capacity of nearest friend to the infant, then—for Amy is still only twenty—I required copies of the title-deeds they had surrendered, and the information they had taken of the Steward of the Manor of Radensford; the rolls of which, it appears, they had never personally examined. All these, on my return to town, I placed in the hands of my own excellent solicitor to draw out a case for a counsel's opinion."

"And you never told me a syllable about the matter!"

"On my return from Radensford, darling, had I not pleasanter things to think of? Amy may consider herself lucky that I did not make a bonfire of her family papers, in my joy at being accepted by her cousin."

"But why never acquaint me, since, that you were stirring so kindly in her behalf?"

"Because I was afraid of raising false expectations. Till I obtained an opinion in some degree favourable, I would not agitate even *you* on the subject. Even now, that I have received the most satisfactory confirmation of my favourable view of the case, I entreat you, dearest, to refrain from a single word to Amy or my aunt, till all is perfectly authenticated."

"You may trust me," replied Mary, giving him her hand, as her act and deed, on which he was not slow to impress a suitable seal.

"But what signifies all this *now*?" cried Lord Davenport, with sudden recollection. "It was delightful to think that, in becoming the wife of William Eustace, she would only legalise his occupancy of the home of his choice. But the idea of that skipjack, Hamilton Drewe, presiding as lord and master in the venerable family mansion, stringing rhymes in the old hall, and substituting orgeat and iced coffee for the manly potations of poor old Sir Mark!"

"Well, well! Since it seems that you have been doing good in secret, and are really a friend to Amy, I must forgive what I consider trifling with her, of late, in the matter of Mr. Eustace's attachment; and put you out of your pain. Here is

her letter," continued Mary, taking one from her desk, "which you must take care to forward to the devoted Sonaton. But you had better provide yourself at the same time with a bottle of hartshorn, or, as more appropriate to a poet's nature—with a goose-quill to burn: for his suit is decidedly rejected."

"Thank Heaven! I am relieved beyond measure. But what shall I say to *you*, or what shall I do to you, little traitress, to punish you for having so abominably tormented me?"

"*A trompeur, trompeur et demi!*" cried Mary. "And take it this time in French, for I have nothing else to offer you. As you chose to keep me so long in the dark and deceive me concerning Mr. Eustace's intentions, half an hour's uncertainty respecting those of Mary Meadows, is a very lenient punishment. And lo! I fling aside my black cap."

CHAPTER XL.

So affecting, because so accurate, was the news that reached Radensford Rectory by each succeeding mail, that Lady Meadows was fully prepared for the return, at any moment, of Mrs. Burton; bringing with her all that was mortal of her idolized child. After this *sad* event, her continued presence at the Rectory would be only a constraint upon Mr. Henderson and his daughter.

The old Rector dearly loved his little grandchild. But he had long given her up as lost to this world; and at his age, the approaching separation was not of much account. Another home, he knew, was prepared for both; and the deep sorrow often perceptible in the mild blue eyes, whose benevolent expression still beamed brightly from amidst his long white hair and snowy eyebrows, arose simply from compassion for the mother about to be doubly bereaved.

"Promise to be as kind to poor Rachel when we have both forsaken her," he once said to Lady Meadows, "as you have been during our lifetime; and I shall feel less reluctant to leave her alone in this world."

Conscious that her visit to the old neighborhood was drawing to a close, Amy reproached herself with having postponed the completion of the drawing that was to redeem her promise to the good old doctor; and, one fine morning at the beginning of July, accompanied by the Rectory weeding boy to carry her camp-stool and box of materials, and escorted by little Sophy's asthmatic old spaniel, a former gift from Captain Davenport, which ever since the poor child's departure had become her constant companion, Miss Meadows set off for the forest which, from the clump of oaks commanding a view of the shady pool where the water-lilies were now in exuberant blossom, she had already sketched in her landscape.

The morning was fresh and beautiful, and the verdure, refreshed by the sparkling of a summer shower late in the night, looked bright as spring; so that Amy's paint-box seemed scarcely equal to delineate its vivid hues. She had often before been baffled in her attempts to colour after nature, in the open face of day. Never so much so, as that morning. Perhaps because, notwithstanding the brightness of the season and the scene, the heart within her was as dull as Rosalind's, when *she*, too, found in her wanderings in the forest, that she had not "a word to throw at a dog."

Lady Meadows had that morning announced to her an impending family arrangement, if possible more unsatisfactory than to become Mrs. Hamilton Drewe, and the rival of the tuneful Nine. She had solved it with her brother that since, on Mary's marriage, he was to give up his present dreary home and engage a small house nearer to his office, they had better form but a single household; which their united income of a thousand a-year, might render advantageous to both.

Now, between the cheerful, lightsome, easy temper of Amy, and the ratiocinatioous manhood of her Uncle Hargood, there existed as utter an incompatibility as between liberal and conservative, or fire and water. Far rather become a national school-mistress, or a sewer of shirt-seams, or any other species of female white slave, than submit to the thralldom of being tyrannised over by so harsh a monster. There was not a grain of fellow-feeling between them.

It was already settled that she and her mother were to spend the autumn at Ilford with Lady Davenport; the newly-married couple being bound for Italy, where Hugh was looking forward to the delightful task of introducing to the classical scenery and noble galleries which he had reviewed with so little interest when under the documentation of his travelling tutor, the highly-gifted being whose inspirations would intellectualise his mind, while her liveliness gladdened his heart.

But *after* the autumn—*after* the winter which was to unite the whole family under the roof of Ilford Castle—what was to become of her, then; if exposed to perpetual lectures and the unpleasant spectacle of the overbearing despotism exercised over her mother by the Cato of Soho—Lady Meadowes would be routed out of all those indolent habits which had become second nature to her. Her health would probably suffer. But what remonstrance of *hers* was likely to prevail against the iron will and grating voice of Uncle Hargood?

Like the lovely Lady Christobel, “she drew in her breath with a hissing sound” at the thought!

Just then a supposed yelp from Dotty the old spaniel, who was snuffing about at a distance in pursuit of the shrewmice, abounding on the spot, caused her to look up; and lo! old Sting, bounding amidst the fern, and a stranger approaching her along the path from Meadowes Court. Her breath grew nearly as short as Dotty’s: for she saw in a moment that, though wonderfully changed by the lapse of nearly two years since they parted, it was none other than William Eustace.

His step was no longer the lounging stride of the *blasé* London man, but firm and elastic. His countenance was no longer that of the supercilious exquisite of Barfont Abbey, but manly and intelligent. You were prepared by his exterior to find that he could at length utter six consecutive sentences without pronouncing the words “bosh” or “bore.”

Amy, however, was prepared for nothing, except to let the greater part of her drawing materials fall in confusion to the ground, as he drew near. Her hand had been taken and shaken, and she had answered several inquiries concerning the health of Lady Meadowes, before the tumultuous beating of her heart allowed her to understand very exactly what she was about.

It is probable that Mr. Eustace—if anything of Billy Eustace remained in him—was not altogether dissatisfied with the embarrassment his arrival seemed to create.

“You are here to draw or paint,” said he—patting down the yelping Dotty, who alone seemed to resent his intrusion—“and I am interrupting your occupation. I understand from Davenport that you have profited much, since I last saw your performances, by the instructions of my friend Mark.”

The observation was accidental, but Amy, conscious how large a share the then unknown Mark had exercised in her girlish rejection of the suit of the individual now addressing her felt half disposed to resent it.

“I have finished my work for this morning,” said she. “The sun is getting too high for me.” And as she held out to dry in the sunshine the landscape she was desirous of replacing in her portfolio, it was impossible for her companion not to commend its highly artistic execution.

He took it at once in his hand, as if to compare it with the points of scenery it purported to concentrate; perhaps in order to afford a little breathing time to his agitated companion.

She would have given worlds to recover her composure. She would have given worlds to command her voice. But in spite of herself, her colour went and came, her hands trembled so violently that she could not untie the strings of the portfolio to receive the drawing; and when she finally thanked Mr. Eustace for his assistance, it might just as well have been any other person who addressed him.

“You seem almost afraid of me, Miss Meadows!” said he, perceiving that her henchman in the smockfrock was out of hearing, and that even Dotty had forsaken them in the henchman’s favour. “And how can I wonder, when I recall to mind my detestable, my most ungentlemanly conduct at our last meeting! It scarcely becomes me to say by what deep, deep repentance and regret it has been atoned. But if I could dare to hope that such an assurance might effect a single step towards obtaining your forgiveness—”

“You have long been thoroughly forgiven,” faltered Amy, more and more confused. And how she longed, at that moment for the power of expressing graciously, but not *too* graciously

that perhaps her own conduct on that occasion might require a little indulgence.

The shrewd Goldoni has observed that there are occasions when a good tongue is of ten times more value than a good head. Miss Meadows's tongue refused altogether to obey her word of command. It was indeed an unruly member.

The lubberly boy whom Hamilton Drewe would probably have called his "little foot page," was now summoned and charged with her "impedimenta;" having taken possession of which, he started off at a postman's pace towards the village: conceiving that his attendance could not be wanted when such a fine young gentleman was on the spot, to take charge of Dotty and his young lady.

To Amy, this was somewhat annoying; for it seemed to impose on her companion the necessity of escorting her home. But again, the *langue bien pendue*, whose fluency she envied, came to his aid.

"I am on my way to the manor-house," said he, "to convey some orders from my Aunt Warneford. If I am not unreasonably intruding, perhaps you will allow me the honor of accompanying you as far as the village."

"Lady Harriet is not coming then, at present?" inquired Amy, after an awkward bow of acquiescence.

"No! she has all but established herself at Brighton. Some pill-monger, who has obtained her ear (no difficult question where her grandchildren are in conquest!), has persuaded her that sea-air is essential to the boys; and she has consequently placed them at one of those dreadful nurseries for puny little lords, who send so many miserable starvelings to rough it afterwards at Harrow or Eton—

"And Lady Harriet is living at Brighton to be near them?"

"Say rather to preclude the least chance of their being properly and wholesomely disciplined. The fate of this poor little child of Mrs. Burton's, seems to have alarmed her."

"But the Warnefords are healthy boys—the very opposite of poor dear delicate little Sophia!"

"Who can account for the vagaries of excessive affection! Those who have seen the all but last idol of their lives broken

before their eyes, must be pardoned for clinging, a little unreasonably, to what remains to them."

Amy silently applauded the sentiment; though it was one that the Billy Eustace of former times would probably have pronounced "bosh."

"I fear," said she, nervously, "by the manner of your allusion to little Sophy, that you have heard further ill news respecting her?"

"The very worst. Her dissolution, hourly expected when the last packet left Malta, *must* by this time have taken place."

"Poor dear child! I have known and loved her for so many years," said Amy, her eyes filling with tears, "that I cannot reconcile myself to the idea of never seeing her again."

"Marcus writes word that she is perfectly resigned: fully aware of what awaits her, but perfectly resigned."

"*Marcus?* Do you allude to my *Cousin Mark?* How should he know anything of her state?"

"Are you not aware," rejoined Eustace, and his conscious companion fancied that there was malice in his eye and intonation as he spoke—"that Captain Davenport followed Mrs. Burton to Malta, and is now, most fortunately, on the spot to act for them both?"

Marcus! Only six months before, prepared to sacrifice body and soul for love of Mary Hargood! And now, once more at the feet of his once-loved Rachel! "Oh! Marcus, Marcus!"

"No," she replied, firmly, "I knew nothing of it. When I left home, the Davenports were still uneasy concerning my cousin, and anxious for his return to his parliamentary duties. Olivia, who constantly writes to me, has never mentioned his being at Malta."

"The circumstance has only lately transpired." He did not think it necessary to add that it was not without its share in his own hurried journey to Meadows Court.

"Will it be better, do you think," added Amy, "to mention it to Mr. Henderson? To my mother, of course. From her, I have no concealments. But it seems possible that—" she paused.

"That *what?*"

"That he might almost prefer Mrs. Burton being alone with her dying child."

“And why?” persisted the pitiless Eustace, who, though he perfectly understood her meaning, chose to make her explain herself. She ought to be made to tell what danger she apprehended from the presence of this irresistible Mark.

But Amy was as brave as he was cruel, and disappointed him by speaking out. High-minded people gather courage from persecution.

“Because in former times, Marcus was known, it seems, to entertain a strong attachment for Mrs. Burton: and the present moment is scarcely the one for renewing his attentions.”

“I cannot agree with you, my dear Miss Meadows. Unhappy and friendless in a stranger country, what time could be more auspicious for his devoting himself to her service? Even my aunt, with her once-strict notions of propriety, was overjoyed at hearing that poor Mrs. Burton, for whom she has the sincerest regard and compassion, had so devoted a protector at hand.”

“In that case, we will at once mention it to Mr. Henderson,” said Amy.

And how in his heart did he thank her for the “we” which, even for so trifling a measure, served to unite their names and wills in one.

“You have seen a great deal of the Davenports lately?” said Amy, gathering courage from his silence.

“A great deal. As you may suppose, *I* can never see too much of them.” And there was an unmistakable emphasis on the personal pronoun.

“Olivia is an excellent correspondent,” added Miss Meadows. “She often mentions you in her letters.”

“Yes, darling child! She is kindness and good nature personified! And so happy just now. It is like a gleam of sunshine to see her happy face.”

Amy would have given half that she possessed—little enough, as she imagined—for courage to offer him her congratulations. But Sisyphus might as well have pretended to play at ball with his stone, as Amy to pronounce the word marriage that hovered on her lips.

They had now emerged from the last thicket of the forest; where the haws were beginning to redden on the fine old thorns. They had reached the meadows; and had no great distance

before them in the ferny path skirting the hedgerows of the pastures still dividing them from Radensford. The old grey tower of the church was already visible between the ash-trees of the screen sheltering the Rectory. Yet still, neither had really spoken to each other. That is, neither had uttered a single syllable of what lay nearest their hearts! For all the vaunted eloquence of William Eustace, on one point he was tongue-tied!

As they approached the Rectory, both were equally startled by perceiving that, at the door stood a posting-carriage, with a pair of smoking horses! The same idea presented itself to both. News, bad news—from Malta.

In that case, days, nay, weeks might elapse, before such another opportunity presented itself to Mr. Eustace as the one he had so memorably neglected! On the spur of his apprehensions, he suddenly entreated Miss Meadows to grant him five minutes' conversation before she entered the house.

They had fortunately just reached a screen of fine ash-trees, planted by the old Rector, some ten years before his daughter saw the light, to shelter the house from the north and east; to which, in honor of their growth, he had within the last six months assigned the air of a double avenue, by a gravel-walk in the centre, rendering available, at all seasons, their pleasant shade. To a sheltered seat, placed in the further extremity, Amy now led the way; for she was forewarned by the beating of her heart that the five minutes requested, would pass less agreeably in presence of a postboy and pair, than in that of linnets and chaffinches.

One minute of the five sufficed to convince her that her surmises were just. Of what passed during the remaining four, she was not very accurately conscious. William Eustace had probably inquired with some degree of unction into his chances of success if he presumed to renew the suit she had formerly rejected. For when the mist cleared from her eyes, and the confusion from her ears, she found herself thanked again and again and again, and again addressed as a more than angel, not in the polyglot lingo of Hamilton Drewe, but in the plainest English that ever managed to express, I "love you. Deign to become my wife."

Poor Amy, however, was not so thoroughly overcome as to be

indifferent to the injury which the fickleness of her adorer was inflicting upon her cousin Olivia.

“You cannot—no, surely you cannot have been so ready to think ill of me as to imagine that, having once loved and appreciated a being like yourself, I could be enthralled by the attractions of a mere child?” said he, in answer to her prompt accusations.

“But the whole family—the whole world—was equally deceived.”

“The whole world perhaps—for it will swallow nearly its own bulk in fabrications. But believe me the family was from the very first aware of the nature of my views and feelings. Inquire of Lord Davenport, and he will tell you how early in our intimacy I confided to him the state of my heart.”

Amy made no reply. She was perhaps occupied in adding up the amount of sleepless nights from which her cousin Hugh might have rescued her, had he chosen to be a little more communicative.

Her reply, meanwhile, was of a nature to restore as much peace of mind to Mr. Eustace as he had been instrumental in conferring on herself. For the ensuing five minutes, in addition to those originally demanded, no two persons on earth could be more exquisitely happy than those who had severally overcome so strong a prejudice, in order to arrive at a due appreciation of each other's merits.

As they were now resting in the shady arbor-seat which occupied the angle of the avenue, old Sting seized the opportunity to renew to the daughter of his kind master his rough caresses of former years—considerably to the detriment of Amy's muslin dress.

“No, poor fellow! let him alone,” said she to the happy man who wished to disencumber her of the heavy paws that rested on her knees. “You are more indebted to Sting for my good opinion than you are at all aware of. The feelings I have just avowed in your favor date, I am sadly afraid, from the moment of seeing him installed in his old place on the door-mat at Meadows Court! I could not believe that act of kindness to be altogether a tribute to Olivia Davenport; I could not help even

fancying that poor Amy had some little share in your goodness to the Manestys, and Blanche and Sting. I began by being grateful. How it all ended, you have already forced me to confess."

The arguments used by William Eustace in reply, it is by no means necessary to transcribe. If his sentiments were not clothed in those well-rounded periods for which his parliamentary eloquence was already attaining considerable renown, they were all that was desired by his companion; and would probably have been extended with a diffuseness which, from the House, might have elicited cries of "Question, question!" (albeit the momentous question was now both asked and answered), but for the anxieties on account of Mrs. Burton, which by degrees overmastered even the satisfaction of the happy Amy.

"Wait for me here," said she, "and I will bring you, as soon as I can, the tidings, good or bad, conveyed by yonder messenger."

Before he could assent or dissent, she was off like a bird into the house.

Bad indeed was the news—though scarcely worse than the previous anticipations of the family. Captain Davenport himself was the messenger; having landed at Southampton the previous day, in a steamer especially chartered to bring back to England the remains of Mrs. Burton's idolised child, to be interred in Radensford church by the side of her own mother.

He was come to prepare Mr. Henderson for the commencement of the necessary arrangements. What more he came to announce to the good Rector, he confided at present only to Lady Meadowes. For so completely was the kindly-affectioned man overcome by the confirmation of his sinister presentiments concerning the darling of his old age, that Marcus had not courage to accost him at such a moment with a love-story.

He was to return instantly to Southampton, and accompany back into Gloucestershire all that remained to poor Rachel of her lost treasure. In the interim, "the kindest of aunts" was to seize some favorable moment for enlightening the inhabitants of the Rectory as to the part he was in future to assume in the family.

It is to be hoped, nay, it is easy to be believed, that this

single-minded woman, so much more in awe of the rebukes of her own conscience than of those of Public Opinion, would fulfil her mission in a better spirit than that exercised by another "kindest of aunts," when she undertook to diplomatise at Meadows Court in behalf of William Eustace!

CHAPTER XLI.

SUCH was the state of affairs between Lady Meadows and her nephew Marcus, when the return of Amy apparently from her sketching expedition, relieved her mother from the necessity of doing the honours of the luncheon table to one who, after his melancholy night journey, stood much in need of refreshment.

But when she had departed on her errand of mercy, to offer such scanty comfort as affectionate friendship can afford to the afflicted old Rector, an explanation took place between the cousins which her presence might have in some degree impeded. Marcus, whose feelings were never of a very ethereal nature, did not hesitate to inform her while he ate his cold lamb and drank his pale ale, that though at present her heartbroken friend was unable to detach a thought or feeling from the loss of her beloved child, he had reason to hope that, at no distant period, Rachel Burton would seek in "a happy marriage," (oh! Marcus, Marcus!) consolation for her heartrending loss.

In as few words as possible,—a stenographic edition of the eloquence of the M. P.,—"couched" like Beatrice, "in the woodbine coverture,"—he stated how greatly his care and attention has assisted to alleviate the sufferings of both mother and child. And Amy could well believe his assertion that, but for his devotion to them, the hopeless position of Mrs. Burton alone in a foreign colony, would have been indeed hard to endure.

"But what is to become of you, Cousin Mark," inquired Miss Meadows, "when poor Rachel is installed here with her father? You can scarcely become at once the inmate of Mr. Henderson, to whom you are at present a stranger?"

Captain Davenport looked more puzzled than pleased. Apparently, the dilemma had not before presented itself to his ima-

gination. John Gilpin may have been satisfied that “his *wife* should dine at Edmonton, and *he* should dine at Ware:”—but lovers are less patient. Daily interviews if not daily dinners eaten in common, seem indispensable as a prelude to connubial happiness.

“Because,” persisted Amy, in pity to his sorrowful countenance, “I think I can venture to offer you the hospitalities of a house in this neighbourhood.”

“Not Lady Harriet Warneford’s I hope! That stiff-necked Pharisee is one of my abominations.”

“Of a house in this neighbourhood,” continued his cousin, “where, happy as I once was as Amy Meadows, I mean some day to be happier as”—

“Amy Eustace! I knew it—I guessed it! That charming old Meadows Court. How long, Amy, has it all been arranged?”

“Not quite a quarter of an an hour. And my dearest mother’s consent has still to be asked. I can venture, however, to promise that it will not be *very* reluctantly bestowed!”

“I should think not!” cried Marcus,—who, in the joy of his own happy prospects, was in charity with the whole world; and had thoroughly forgiven William Eustace his manifold offences, from the cricket-match at Eton down to his last triumphant speech in the House,—“one of the first men of the day,—one of the best fellows going! Amy, I heartily wish you joy!”

“And let us keep our own counsel and betray to nobody,” archly rejoined Miss Meadows. “How often, in the old house at Battersea, we used to call him a prig and a bore,—Young Vapid, &c., &c.”

“Hush, hush!” cried Marcus, full of compunction; “the man of whom we then spoke was Billy Eustace, the duchess fancier, not the honourable member for Horndean. As far as I am concerned, I repent, I recant, I apologise. And when may I apologise in person?”

“The moment you have finished your glass of sherry. Mr. Eustace is at this moment waiting for me yonder under the ash-trees.”

Marcus snatched up his hat, and was ready in a moment. It seemed as if a new cousin was all that had been wanting to per-

fect his domestic felicity. Anybody would have thought so, at least, who could have overheard his fluent congratulations to the heir of Horndean Court. He nearly shook his hands off! Amazing what gusto is imparted to this truly great British salutation by long absence in foreign parts, where bows and scrapes restrict the politeness of life to heads and feet, instead of dislocating people's wrists in token of amity.

As happy an understanding was speedily established among the three, as between the sides of a triangle. Before they parted, it was arranged among them that though Lady Meadows might feel it her duty to remain a short time longer at Radensford Rectory, till Rachel and her father could be left to their mutual comforting, Amy might at once complete the happiness of the family circle in town, as the inmate of Lady Davenport. She was so much wanted there, by Olivia,—by Mary,—by the happy man who could, no more than Marcus, intrude his raptures into the house of mourning.

In the house of feasting, in Spring Gardens, meanwhile, all went well. Lady Davenport had gained another daughter in the dear Mary; so clear-headed, so right-minded, so affectionate now, that a key of kindness had been applied to unlock the rich treasury of her heart. They were all so happy!—and happiness, like varnish applied to a well-painted picture, brings out the brightest colors.

When the news reached them from Radensford of the two marriages so desired and so desirable, that were about at once to enlarge and concentrate the family connection, so great was the general joy, that the fate of poor little Sophia met with scarcely becoming sympathy. Lord Davenport, indeed, assumed to himself no small share of the honor in having brought about the match of his Cousin Amy. But whenever Mary saw him disposed to plume himself on his successful machinations, she insisted that his first attempt at manœuvring should be his last. Having discovered, she said, the vile duplicity of his character, it would be painful to be always on her guard against his stratagems.

When at length Amy made her appearance among them, in spite of all her happy prospects, deeply saddened by the scenes of affliction she has recently witnessed at Radensford, it became

her turn to be questioned concerning the new sister-in-law to whom, in process of time, they were to be introduced by Marcus. None of them had seen her; and the idea of a middle-aged widow was not altogether attractive. It was a relief indeed to learn that the Rachel they were required to love, was younger than Marcus, gentle, pleasing, and possessed of considerable personal attractions; nor was it an unsatisfactory addition to the list of her merits that, having inherited the property of her child, by law an infant, she was in possession of an income of nearly three thousand pounds. About five thousand per annum would be the stint of the Pariah who, for so many years, had been rebelling against the decree of Providence.

“Do you remember quarrelling with me, at Battersea,” had been one of his parting observations to his dear Cousin Amy, “for telling you that I was on the best possible terms with Luck? Have I not proved my words? Am I not one of the most fortunate of mankind?”

“Not more so than your brother Hugh.”

“Why not add not more so than my friend Eustace?”

“Well, then,—not more so than your friend Eustace. Heaven has decided for us all, far better than we had chosen for ourselves. Our own choice, our own prejudices, if indulged, would have created at least two miserable couples. Whereas, as far as human foresight can be relied on, our chances of happiness are far beyond the common lot.”

“The only person on whose account I feel uneasy and compunctious,” said Lord Davenport, when Miss Meadows reported to his mother, in his presence, this last edition of the ‘Marcusonian Philosophy,’ ” is our friend Drewe. Poor fellow! do you experience no pangs of conscience, Amy, when you reflect on that unfortunate individual, and consider that for the remainder of his days he may be reduced for consolation to his colloquies with poor Cocotte?”

“On the contrary,” cried Mary, who, the least fickle of the party, had been listening, much amused, to their mutual recriminations, “you have conferrèd on him an inestimable benefit. Already I foresee, in our poor bewildered Master Slender, a lyrist of the first magnitude. ‘*Donnez moi de l’indignation et de la misère,*’ says Gozlan, ‘*et je vous rendrai des poètes l’Insomnière*

fait chercher. Hamilton Drewe will emerge from the gulf of milk of roses into which he has probably plunged with a view to committing suicide, a rival of Tennyson and Longfellow! I look forward, Amy, to your becoming the fair Geraldine, or Leonora d'Este, or Beatrice, of Drewe, of the Lovelocks."

"On the contrary, if we can only persuade him to make firewood of his laurels," said Lord Davenport, who, not having been admitted, like his brother, to a view of a certain album containing sketches of "The Lady of Avon," and other striking lyrics, had less sympathy perhaps with the Guild of Balladmongers than is their due, "and descend from the clouds to *terra firma*, and become a rational being, some five years hence, he would make the very husband for Olivia. Drewe is an excellent creature; and his good old Northumbrian Manor House of Birkeun Tower is only forty miles from Ilford. Think of the happiness of dear old Winkelried, if her darling pupil should marry a poet, and that *rara avis*, a rich poet, at last."

The *employé* of the Treasury, meanwhile, was beginning to find elbow-room in his new suit, and more at ease with himself; he was far pleasanter company to other people. Immediately after his instalment in his new duties, an official crisis happened to arise from a harassing motion in Parliament, requiring not only the utmost zeal and industry in his department to enable Government to meet an important discussion, but a degree of general historical knowledge rarely to be found among the murrers of Treasury pens, and the blurrers of Treasury blotting-paper. The aid Edward Hargood, unpretending and spontaneous, afforded, proved of sterling value, and brought him frequently into communication with the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

At a ministerial dinner, some weeks afterwards, Lord Davenport was taken aside with solemn mystery, and thanked as the means of having secured to Government a highly valuable assistant. The noble Earl thus grateful, probably feeling that he could not have afforded to be half so well served by a man of greater pretensions and a more exacting position than the new clerk.

But the tribute rendered to his merits imparted new life to Edward Hargood. His pride was relieved from an insupportable burthen. He was no longer the creature of patronage. He was rendering back money's worth for money.

Under this conviction, he approached the house in Spring Gardens with a stouter step, and bolder gait. A little more, and his deportment might have attained, perhaps, an objectionable touch of Malvolio. At present, he was a man who bore his part in conversation with the highest credit at Lord Davenport's table, and it seldom happened, after one of the dinner parties, now of almost daily occurrence, that some man of mark did not request the favour of being presented to the able stranger, whose information appeared so general, even before it transpired, that he was on the eve of becoming father-in-law to their host.

One evening, the party being limited to the family, they were admiring a gorgeous present of emeralds despatched to the bride by that sister of the late Lord Davenport, whose tardy marriage had been supposed to overcloud the early destinies of her nephew Mark.

"All this is very gratifying, very pleasant, Mary," said he to the daughter, who was, as usual, required to exhibit these splendid jewels in her beautiful hair. "But what is your father to give you for a wedding present? Silver and gold have I none."

"You have something, my dear Mr. Hargood," interrupted Lord Davenport, "which Mary has been sadly wanting to ask you for, but has wanted courage"—

"Wanted courage to ask anything of her own *father*?" exclaimed Hargood, preparing to be affronted. "I should have hoped that she had acquired some experience of my indulgence."

"But the boon to which Hugh alludes, my dear father, is so *very* great a concession," faltered Mary, the colour rushing to her cheeks with anxiety.

Hargood reflected for a moment, but could bethink him only of the grim portraits of the Rector of Henstead and his wife, his sole family treasures. But if she wished them to figure in the gallery at Ilford Castle, she was welcome.

"We want you to make us a present of the two boys, my dearest father," whispered Mary, having, meanwhile, so closely approached him as to be able to throw her arm round his neck. "You are now too much occupied to be troubled with them. And it would be doing the greatest kindness to Lord Davenport, and prove the means of keeping him out of worlds of mischief,

to afford him something on which to exercise his genius for education. With his usual self-conceit, dear Hugh fancies himself 'to the manner born,' and wants to make a Newton and a Wellington out of my brothers."

There was a considerable struggle in the mind of Hargood. He could be insensible neither to the kind intentions of his daughter and her noble *fiancé*, nor to the advantage likely to accrue to his sons from such an adoption. But his pride rebelled against such an abdication of paternal authority. And then, to renounce the last victims upon whom he was entitled to wreak his wholesome tyrannies!

"If you would gratify this earnest desire of Mary's," added Lord Davenport, "I should much wish to place our elder boy at Woolwich, with a view to the highest branch of military service. Of little Mark, if you did not object, his sister is bent upon making a civil engineer."

A pretty story, truly. They had literally been carving out the destinies of his children, without a word of reference to his opinion! Edward Hargood's heart hardened and his countenance darkened at once.

"We will talk of this another time," said he, glancing sternly round the room; though it contained only Olivia and Madame Winkelried, stitching away at the two extremities of some carpet-work, in lambs-wool, as soft and innocent as themselves. "Two human destinies are objects far too important to be thus frivolously trifled away."

"Do not despair, dearest Mary," said Lord Davenport, when her father had taken his majestic departure. "We will return at some more auspicious moment to the charge. Trust me, I will leave nothing undone or unsaid till I have obtained their young Gracchi as a wedding-present for my Cornelia."

"Perhaps, for the present, we had better let him alone," replied Miss Hargood. "My father's is a mind which may be safely left to its own reflections. It always works itself clear. Unless when its temper, like the irritated Sophia, creates a turbid medium around him, no human being can see clearer. But tell me, Hugh!—what is the meaning of all these voluminous despatches passing daily between you and my Aunt Meadows? Draughts of marriage settlements for Amy?"

“Not yet, though when the good time comes, Marcus and I are to be his trustees”—

“And your private conferences with Mr. Eustace?”

“To-morrow you shall know all. But it is a secret of which others are intitled to the first disclosure.”

“A secret to be kept from one so soon to be your wedded wife? Beware! Remember how I punished your last disingenuous manœuvre.”

“I am not afraid. For the *present* mystery involves the happiness and prosperity of Amy and her mother.”

“I see, I know, I guess it all,” said Mary, enthusiastically clapping her hands. “A few words have caught my ear, which afford me perfect enlightenment. Meadows Court is about to be restored to them! Meadows Court is again theirs.”

“It never belonged to any other person, except in the credulous belief of two very muzzy old gentlemen, united by blending country attorneys. When you make your will, Mary, if ever you sufficiently instruct your husband to find such an operation desirable, see that you choose middle-aged executors—neither young enough to be flighty, nor old enough to be hoodwinked.”

“I wonder what other possible, or impossible wish one could form,” said Miss Hargood, who had been listening to the promptings of her own heart, rather than to his counsels,—“to perfect the happiness of our family circle! Almost too many blessings have been showered down upon us! Would Olivia, do you think, like to become a maid of honour, or Hamilton Drewe, poet laureate?—or Madame Winkleried almonress to the Queen?”

“No jesting on such a subject, darling Mary!” whispered Lord Davenport. “For I sometimes fancy that we are almost *too* happy. Evil fortune is ever lying in wait for those who do not appreciate, with as much reverence as gratitude, the unmerited favours of Heaven.”

CONCLUSION.

“OLD CRUVEY, again, by Jove!” cried one of the Cruxleyans, who was watching for arrivals, at the Club window; which, now that London was beginning to thin, at the close of the season were hailed as a refreshing novelty; “Old Cruvey, dyed to look as good as new; and with a white moss-rose in his button-hole, like a Zephyr in the last ballet. Where has poor Methuselah been hiding himself? I never missed him.”

“He goes down into Gloucestershire, every summer, to eat seven salmon in the original,” replied Lord Curt.

“Rather,” added Ned Barnsley, one of the amplefiers, “to sponge upon an old brother-in-law, who, being deaf as a post runs less risk of being prosed to death by his lengthsomeness.”

“Don’t abuse Cruvey;—Cruvey has his value,” retorted Lord Curt. “His memory is a sort of national warehouse, in which everything lost, stolen or strayed, is to be found in bond. Did you never see the list of articles deposited by honest Cubureu (*mirabile dictu*) at the Inland Office? “No. 1, a cotton umbrella. No. 2, a lace veil. No. 4, a walking-stick. No. 5, a diamond necklace. No. 6, a pair of gloves. No. 7, a packet of railway debentures.” Just such a jumble does a second bottle of claret extract out of the knowledge-box of my friend Cruvey.”

“But what the deuce is he talking about? *Do* let one listen, Curt.”

“Surely your ears are long enough, for anything, my dear Ned?”

“Why not,—extended as they are by the immense practise you afford them!”

“Here, Cruvey, my good fellow,”—cried the imperturbable Curt, “come this way, and tell us all *that* over again. It sounds good enough for an encore.”

And Cruvey, seldom honoured with an audience by the brilliant founder of the Cruxleyans, recommenced his tune as punc-

tually as a barrel-organ to which a shilling has been thrown from some nursery window.

“The story is many days old,” said he. “I only wonder that”—

“I beg your pardon, my dear Cruvey,—but, before we begin to wonder, is this history a true bill, or a *blague*? For at this oppressive time of year, one can’t afford to believe, then disbelieve, and finally argue matters over. Give us first your authorities. Under what act of parliament, in what reign?”

“Under favour of my having been resident within a quarter of a mile of the spot where the whole business occurred; and an ear-witness of the greater part of it.”

“A quarter of a mile? *There, Ned!*” whispered Lord Curt, aside to Barusley. “A pair of ears that beat your own by a couple of lengths!”

“My brother-in-law, Admiral Tremenheere; from whose house I returned this morning,” gravely recommenced old Cruvey, “resides exactly between Meadows Court and Radensford Rectory; and was summoned as a witness to the formal ejection of Billy Eustace, as tenant to Sir Jervis Meadows; to whom possession of the estate had been illegally granted by the steward of the Manor. Lady Harriet Warneford’s grandson, a minor, is lord of the Manor (a Court Baron affair); and thanks to the irregularity with which the late Colonel allowed the Rolls to be kept, certain deeds executed by the late Sir Mark Meadows and his father were missing, when wanted, at his decease. Lord Davenport’s solicitors have however been hunting them up, with care and cost; and lo! they have emerged from the Warneford private deed-chest, instead of having laid safe and mouldering in that of the Barony.”

“And the end of it is, that Billy Eustace’s love, that pretty girl with the brown ringlets, retains possession of the estate; and that Billy becomes the tenant of his wife, hey, Cruvey?”

“Precisely—minus the yearly rents. They are to be married the end of the week; and I left the people at Radensford preparing triumphal arches and bonfires, sufficient to drive any reasonable being out of the country.”

“Ay, true! Davenport and Billy, *arcades ambo*, are to be

turned off at the same hour from the same drop at St. Margaret's on Saturday next; 'to be sold in one prime lot,' as Leifchild would advertise it," observed a junior Cruxleyan, whose attempts at wit Lord Curt often endeavoured to nip in the bud—for there is nothing so injurious to an actor as an inexperienced double.

"You are, as usual, mistaken, Ned!" said he. "Even my nephew Halliday could correct your copy. They are to be married in the Abbey, to afford room for the House of Commons, which is to attend in numerical force, at the Summon of the Black Rod: besides deputations from the different Public Charities, at whose dinners Davenport and Eustace have speechified, and a procession of Ragged Schools, Royal Academicians, the Soup Kitchen and the Foundling Hospital."

"Bosh, my dear Curt, bosh! The chaff would be better done in an American paper," retorted Ned Barnsley. "But what was that other piece of news you were telling, just now, Cruvey, about that Bengal Tiger of a brother of Davenport's,—whom one used to see smoking on the doorsteps of the Junior United Service with a face the colour of the electric ball?"

"Mark Davenport? Only that he is to be privately married down in the country, in a week or two, to a very pretty widow, to whom he has been long attached; who is in the enjoyment of three or four thousand a year."

"Say it again, and more correctly: a very pretty widow, with three or four thousand a year, to which he has been long attached."

"The original reading was the correct one. But no matter. He has managed to get forty shillings in change for his sovereignty, which few of us arrive at."

"In short, 'good deeds are beginning to shine in a naughty world!' I wish to badness I could go *in* again and accomplish a second *débüt* and new maiden speech," said Lord Curt, with pretended peevishness. "I have been all my life too virtuous. But one must have a charm, now that the children of light are admitted to have become wiser in their generation than the children of this world."

And all these details, though spoken in jest and by professed jesters, were true as truth! Before Michaelmas had once more

reunited for pheasant-shooting, the distinguished chatter-boxes of the clubs, the bridal tours of the three happy couples in question, were passed and over; and Ilford Castle concentrated the united family under its roof. They were just in time to inaugurate the new village of Ilford; which to the delight of Mark Davenport has superseded in the parish all memory of even the name of Quag Lane.

But it was at Meadows they were to spend the Christmas holidays:—"dear old Meadows Court,"—where we found the happy Amy: and where, after her painful probation, we leave her, still happier than before.

To Dowager Lady Davenport, estranged for thirty years from the home of her childhood, the visit was one of intense gratification; and the more so, that it was paid hand in hand with that excellent sister-in-law, that early friend to whom she was endeavouring to atone for the neglect of years.

Never was there a happier—never a more cheerful family party. The fine talents of Mary, Lady Davenport, served to embellish and enhance all their pastimes; while the quieter cheerfulness of Mrs. Eustace brightened their fireside. She had taken care that her little cousins, Ned and Frank should accompany her uncle Hargood: already so far humanized by independence, or rather competence—as to sanction their introduction to skating, curling, sleighing, nay, even fox-hunting—all the pleasures of a country winter. Having fortunately assured to himself the task of assorting and cataloguing the miss-matched old library, which absorbed the whole leisure of his week's holiday, his severe rationality interfered but little with the joyousness of the junior branches.

Blanche and Sting retained, of course, possession of their post; and Amy's paroquets, bequeathed by her on leaving Radensford to poor little Sophia Burton, were now, alas! restored to their perch.

Lady Harriet, whether enlightened or shamed, no matter, often brought over her little grandsons to play with the young Hargoods, to the mutual benefit of all parties; and good old Doctor Burnaby, though for a long time he kept aloof, self-condemned at having allowed himself to be humbugged by a Mr

Chubbs Parkes into too hasty a cession of the rights of his ward, was eventually persuaded to forgive himself.

“All the better in the end, perhaps, my dear Mrs. Eustace,” said he, in his first private colloquy with Amy. “Sweet are the uses of adversity: though neither you nor your mother wanted much of that sort of trial to make you perfect angels. I hear you’ve let off that old militia man his two years’ arrears of rent? Prescott is furious at it. But you can better spare the money than Sir Jervis.”

And so she could, if all the happiness this world affords, may entitle people to be liberal!

William Eustace, while contemplating the cheerful circle created around him by the extinction of family “prejudice,”—and the “progress” of civilization,—could not help reverting to the prophecy of poor old Sir Mark, on his first disastrous visit to Meadows Court: “The day that renders you conscious of the value of domestic happiness, will be the best spent day of your life.”

Not one of that little party but fully ratified the decree.

THE END.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00014873144

