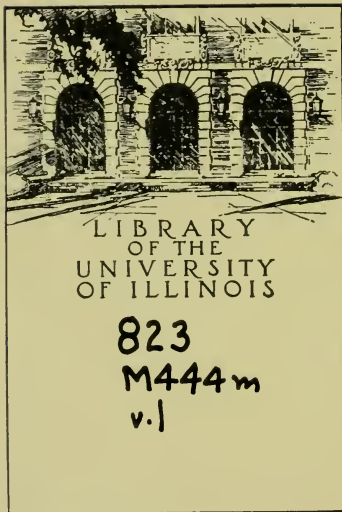




by  
Janet Maughan.





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**THE MAN OF MARK.**



THE  
MAN OF MARK.

BY  
THE AUTHOR OF  
"RICHARD LANGDON."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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# THE MAN OF MARK.

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## CHAPTER I.

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THE deep golden rays of the setting sun, as it sank in dying splendour behind a range of purple, sea-girt mountains, fell upon the lofty towers of a castle embowered amid dark green woods. From a broad gravel walk before the entrance-hall of the castle the smooth-shaven lawn sloped gently down for some distance ere it was abruptly terminated by a precipitous wall of rugged rock, which rose up from the deep blue waves calmly sleeping at its foot. All along the ledge of the precipice, where the lawn met the rocky boundary, a strong parapet wall was erected to guard from danger the steps

of those who walked near the cliffs. At several points of the iron-bound coast the parapet was formed into a small circular enclosure, round which rustic oak seats were placed, while in the centre of the open space were piled up masses of different coloured rocks, climbing over which were numerous parasitical plants. From each of these places of vantage the eye of the spectator ranged over a noble prospect. Before him spread out, like a vast azure plain, an illimitable expanse of ocean. Towards the distant horizon a large island, whose majestic coronet of heath-clad mountains was now burnished by the beams of the evening sun, rose up in lone grandeur from the deep. As the eye glanced along the rugged shore it dwelt upon range after range of lofty mountains, which stretched far inland till they were lost in clouds and mist. Overhead the deepening blue of a summer sky told of the imperceptible approach of twilight, as a rich, rosy blush, cast over the face of heaven,

faded away into the sombre hue of the shadows of eve.

Reclining on a seat close by the brink of the precipitous cliffs, a man in the prime of youth was listlessly gazing across the waves all gilded by the reflection of the glowing skies. Clustering locks of dark brown hair fell over his forehead, and the pallid hue of his face seemed to tell of studies prolonged far beyond the midnight hour. His form was rather slender, and the whiteness of his hands, the studious care with which his dress was arranged, and the indolent attitude in which he lay,—all appeared to indicate a person of luxurious, if not effeminate tastes. His dark eyes wore an expression of settled melancholy, which was not belied by the other features of his countenance. Seemingly his reverie was not of a very cheerful nature, for once or twice he almost bit his lips in endeavouring to stifle some secret emotion, and at such times his hands became clenched

through involuntary sympathy with his thoughts.

“Yes!” at length he exclaimed, starting up, “it is this inaction that bears me down, that leads my thoughts ever towards that dreadful subject. Could I even cease to dwell upon the horrid memory—could I persuade myself that the day I have so often prayed for is past, as it surely must be, all might be well.”

The fast sinking sun warned him that it was time to turn his steps towards the castle, and he saw parties of the guests, who had been strolling about the extensive pleasure-grounds, slowly sauntering in the same direction. Several of them seemed to be unused to the striking grandeur of the scenery, and constantly turned to survey its many beauties. The lawns, walks, and shrubberies, laid out as they were with consummate taste, formed of themselves a delightful prospect. Herds of deer scattered over the distant glades gave animation to the land-

scape, and a deep, smoothly flowing river wound through a part of the demesne. Bridges were thrown across the stream at different points, each one of hewn stone with massive balustrades, at either end of which were groups of statuary. Two or three open summer-houses in the shape of temples, their roofs supported upon graceful columns of different orders of architecture, offered a cool retreat from the heat of the sun.

The interior of the castle fully realized the anticipations of splendour which its palatial aspect externally would naturally lead the visitor to expect. An immense entrance-hall, lighted up with subdued effect by two lofty and richly stained glass windows, had to be traversed ere the grand flight of stairs which led to the reception rooms could be reached. Both hall and staircase were constructed of dark green marble, and the massive bronze balustrades formed a harmonious contrast in colour.

Every door which opened on to the stairs and hall was of ebony inlaid with gold devices, and a very fine effect was produced when the magnificent bronze candelabra, disposed at intervals along the walls, were fully lighted up. Extending from the top of the staircase was a noble picture gallery, of great length and proportionate loftiness, adorned with countless gems of ancient and modern art. Statues by the first sculptors in Europe were ranged in two rows along each side of the gallery, and so highly polished was the oak floor that it almost reflected the various works of art on the walls. Four small octagonal rooms opened out from one side of the gallery, each fitted up as a sort of lounge, where visitors might recline after they were tired of gazing at the pictures and statues. One of these rooms had its walls and ceiling entirely composed of mirrors of different size and shape, which reflected the landscape without in its endless variety of aspects. Another

was in a similar way inlaid with pieces of mother-of-pearl, a third was entirely panelled with every possible variety of polished woods, and the fourth was similarly fitted up with beautiful specimens of crystals, pebbles, and marbles.

Leaning out of the window in the last-mentioned chamber was a lady, who might have been one of the innumerable figures of Venus which adorned the gallery, dressed in the costume of 1864, so finely moulded were her limbs. Her face, though good, was not seen to advantage in profile, and a profusion of wavy auburn tresses concealed the contour of her graceful neck. But her marvellous hand—so soft, so dimpled, so delicately marbled in its ivory whiteness with faint blue veins—how shall it be described? Men had been heard to declare that its touch thrilled them with a strange, electric throb of delight which they could not account for, and, when aided by a glance from her deep hazel eyes, rendered them

helpless instruments of her will. The attitude in which she stood was a strikingly graceful one, and the evening costume she wore allowed her finely formed arms and shoulders to be seen to great advantage. A simple gold bracelet was bound round each of her wrists, and one superb diamond ring sparkled on her left hand. Her dress, pure white, but of very rich material, was disposed over her person with evident care, and this, added to her rather studied posture, increased her statuesque appearance.

Ida von Borgern was the only child of the baron of that name, and she and her father might now almost be considered as part of the establishment of the owner of these splendid halls. Aubrey De Vaux, for he it was who called this fair domain his own, had some years since met the baron while travelling abroad, and invited him to visit his ancestral residence in Scotland. The visit resulted in the baron being induced, partly through friendship and partly



from other considerations, to remain always at the disposal of his friend, either as a travelling companion or a confidential adviser to whom private affairs could be entrusted. People wondered how this singular connexion had been formed, and various were the solutions of the problem offered to appease vulgar curiosity. The baron, however, was inscrutable, and evaded with excellent address any attempts to fathom the mystery. He was a man of gentlemanly, even refined manners, and had little in his bearing or appearance to indicate his foreign birth. Long intercourse with the better classes of society, both in England and the Continent, rendered him a most agreeable companion and an invaluable aid in a country house. Frequently, when Mr. De Vaux was summoned away on his own private business, he would leave the baron in charge of his extensive household; and the latter being known to be completely in his friend's confidence, a most efficient check

was established. Indeed it was absolutely necessary that some one, besides De Vaux himself, should have the surveillance of his vast possessions, where so much must needs be delegated to others.

When the Baron von Borgern first became the favoured friend of Aubrey de Vaux, his daughter Ida was but a golden-haired girl of some sixteen years old, very shy and silent. But the six years which had elapsed since that period till the time our story opens, had intensified and strengthened the native force of her intellect. Deeply observant of all that went on around her, and by her position thrown very much on her own resources for entertainment and information, she made no great figure in that society where her place was but uncertain and ill defined. Mr. De Vaux's enormous wealth, reputed talents, and winning address made him sought after in the very highest circles. Consequently, when his hospitable mansions were thrown open in return, few

there were who held aloof from them because, as yet, there was no lady to preside over such a splendid home. But the toleration extended to the baron by the highly born ladies who were frequent guests of Aubrey De Vaux was by no means always accorded to his daughter. Not that anybody ventured to behave with ill-bred *hauteur* to a girl of so ladylike and unpretending appearance as Ida when Mr. De Vaux was present, but she had often to endure little slights and annoyances when she was unavoidably left alone with these illustrious dames and their exquisitely fashionable offspring. With gentlemen, however, the case was very different, for there was something in the tones of her voice and the calm witchery of her singular eyes that made them willing to linger long by her side. But, as Ida was not unaware of the unpleasantness such attentions might cause, she rarely encouraged them. Sometimes she kept entirely to the suite of apartments which she and her

father occupied, for days at a time, only joining the general circle of guests at the special invitation of Mr. De Vaux.

For the first three or four years since the baron and his daughter came to stay with him, Aubrey had never thought of, or treated, Ida otherwise than as his friend's pretty, lady-like, but rather shy and immature girl. Circumstances had occurred, however, which changed the current of his feelings towards her; and Aubrey sometimes almost trembled, he scarce knew why, when he felt Ida's calm but keen eyes fixed upon his. Although living under the same roof they seldom were thrown together, except when they met in the general circle; and De Vaux rather avoided, for reasons of his own, any very intimate or direct communications with a young, attractive girl, placed in the delicate position of the baron's daughter.

Ida was leaning out of the window, her cheek lightly resting upon her left hand, while in her right was a gauzy cambric

handkerchief. She watched Aubrey De Vaux, who was moving listlessly across the soft mossy lawn with his eyes on the ground, as though still in a dreamy reverie. All at once, when he had just stepped on to the gravel walk, she allowed her handkerchief to escape from her hand, and, floating slowly downwards, it fell lightly on the ground in front of Aubrey. He stooped down to pick it up, and read the word "Ida" fancifully embroidered on the border. For an instant his face changed its expression—a change marked by the lady who watched him—and he looked up as she pronounced his name in a low, subdued voice.

"Excuse my troubling you, Mr. De Vaux; but might I ask you to bring it up to me?"

When he entered the room she still stood by the open window, nor did she move forward to meet him, but her lips parted with a smile of singular sweetness as he restored the handkerchief.

“You are early dressed, Ida; have you not been enjoying your usual evening walk?” said Aubrey, not moving away, as Ida almost expected, but throwing himself down on a damask ottoman.

“No; I have been watching the sunset from here—I did not care to go out by myself.”

“I am glad you are coming down to-night, Ida,” said De Vaux; “you so seldom join the dinner party.”

These simple words, uttered in what to most people would have seemed a conventional tone of courtesy, caused a faint—a very faint—blush to tinge Ida’s cheek; but an instantaneous flash of joy lighted up those wondrous eyes of hers.

“Well, you know, Mr. De Vaux, I feel rather lost in such a large company of strangers; and then I am not familiar with their topics of conversation.”

“Little do you lose, indeed!” replied her companion, bitterly. “Great deprivation is

it to be unaware that Lady Olivia was a week ago forced by her mother to accept Lord Frederick; that Sir Arthur has at length fulfilled the world's expectations by running off with Lady Vereker Varnish; that the Marquis of Glittersham is about to retire to the seclusion of the Continent for some years in consequence of his recent losses on the turf; and similar important announcements!"

While Aubrey was talking, Ida could not help wondering at the unusual style of his conversation, so different from the taciturn manner he generally adopted towards her. When he ceased, instead of replying in a similar strain, she merely looked at him for a few moments with a sort of fixed melancholy interest, and a scarcely perceptible sigh escaped her lips.

"Ida! you are unhappy," said De Vaux, in a strangely altered tone of voice, starting up at the same time. "Yes, I have long suspected this; I see it all now. These

noble ladies, who honour my poor house by condescending to make it a hotel for themselves and their retinues, cannot allow within their illustrious circle one of equal birth and far superior breeding, merely because she is an unknown foreigner. Do you think I have not marked narrowly their treatment of you, Ida? As if I valued their favours a jot, or all the languishing glances of their sweetly disinterested daughters, who might possibly be brought to smile upon the last of the De Vauxs with a hundred thousand a year! Why, in a fortnight I mean to close these doors for ever, and seek in distant lands the peace and happiness I cannot find in this."

Aubrey paced through the room as though consumed with devouring rage and passion, but, all at once, he stopped, and taking Ida's hand in his gentlest manner, said, in a voice of the greatest calmness, and with a languid, lisping drawl—

"Pray excuse my excessively bad breed-



ing, Ida, in allowing my feelings to get the better of me. I hate any one to get excited in my presence, and talking loud is fatiguing in this hot weather."

"Oh! dear, no," she replied, with a slight laugh, "I never supposed that your feelings were getting the better of you. I imagined that you were practising one of the scenes out of the 'Provoked Husband' for the theatricals next week. You looked the character to perfection; but if you mean to dress for dinner, I am afraid that we have hardly time for another scene."

"By the way, Ida, I quite forgot that I have something here for you; this is your birthday, you know."

Again her eyes lighted up with that quick flash of joy which Ida could not subdue as she did her voice.

"How kind of you, Mr. De Vaux; but I never imagined that you remembered such an unimportant anniversary as poor Ida's birthday."

“Ah!” he returned, bending over the fair girl before him till his face nearly touched hers, and speaking in a whispered tone of almost endearing fondness—“you little know how often I think of you!”

He marked the faintly rising blush again and the slightly tremulous accents, as she said, “You are too good to me, indeed you are; I do not deserve this.”

“What, this bauble?” returned Aubrey, taking up a superb diamond necklace, glittering with costly gems—“why, you have only to ask me for what you wish, and it is yours.”

“A thousand thanks for this lovely present,” said Ida; “but, indeed, it is far too handsome for me to wear. Oh! Mr. De Vaux, this is too liberal of you; why, no lady in the castle has such a necklace as this,” she continued, holding up the sparkling ornament, and turning it round and round till each gem glittered in the faint sunlight.

“Don’t speak of it, Ida; it is not worth thanking me for; one day I may be able to do something worthy of your gratitude.”

“Oh, I have a small request—a very trifling one, certainly—will you grant it?” said Ida, eagerly, yet striving to look calm and unconcerned.

“Let me hear it, fair lady, and if it is in my power you shall be gratified.”

“Well then, I heard some of the ladies projecting a cotillon for this evening, will you refuse to dance it?”

“Why, how can it possibly please you to deprive me of a harmless waltz? But if you wish it—I shall certainly refuse.”

“Even if Lady Mildred Beauchamp should press you?”

“Lady Mildred is rather irresistible, certainly; but I shall be true to my word.”

“*Au revoir*, then,” said Ida, bestowing her sweetest smile upon Aubrey as she left the room.

“I have long suspected this,” he murmured, as he watched Ida’s fine figure passing into the picture-gallery; “but it must be stopped. Foolish girl, to allow such a vain chimera ever to occupy her thoughts; she betrayed it distinctly when I purposely spoke sentiment to her; yet there is something about her that puzzles me, and warns me not lightly to contemn one who has a powerful will, and will certainly prove her strength some day. Beauchamp, Deloraine, and other men about town, who habitually laugh at women’s love, have confessed to me that a touch of Ida’s hand and a glance from her eyes thrills through them. Yet how cautious she is; no one, except myself, notices her manner with men. I believe the women all think her shy and stupid; even I can’t always stand a full gaze from these singular orbs of hers. She is afraid of Lady Mildred’s beauty, I see, and wants me to pique her by refusing to join the cotillon; well, I am not sorry, because that

haughty damsel is making powerful advances just now."

The guests shortly after this were all seated in the large dining-room, partaking of a repast as sumptuous as the extravagant splendour everywhere visible throughout the castle would lead one to expect. Every dish was of massive gold plate, and delicacies from all parts of the world were offered in endless variety. Handsome pages with powdered hair, in the costume of the 18th century, bore gold salvers in their hands piled up with the rarest Oriental confections and the most luscious preserved fruits of China. Ida was seated next to Lord Deloraine, and nearly opposite to them was Lady Mildred Beauchamp, confessedly the beauty of last London season.

"Why do you come so seldom among us, Miss Ida?" demanded Lord Deloraine of his fair companion. "Has our society so little charms for one whose absence we all deplore?"

“What would you have me do, my lord? Do you think that Lady Mildred, and all the great ladies I see round the table, would thank me if I was to offer my society to them in the morning rooms?”

“It is jealousy, miserable envy,” returned the nobleman, with an admiring glance at Ida; “they feel that you cut them out, and how they hate to see De Vaux attentive to you.”

“Why should such beautiful creatures be envious of the poor nervous foreigner, whom kind Lord Deloraine is always so good to?” said Ida, in her most musical tones, and with her sweetest smile.

“Because they are afraid that the vicinity of the poor foreigner may be dangerous to De Vaux’s peace of mind, and they are all excessively anxious to add to his mental or personal comfort,” returned Lord Deloraine, with a laugh.

“How little do you fine gentlemen, with your grand airs and worldly wisdom, under-

stand our easy, pliant natures ! No doubt you all think that I, who find simple happiness in my books, my music, and my canary, passing weeks at a time without seeing any one except my father, would like to be courted and fêted like Lady Mildred Beauchamp there. You probably believe, too, that the great triumph of my life would be achieved if I were to become the wife of Mr. De Vaux, when in reality such a destiny would be to me a life of splendid misery. Now, tell me, Lord Deloraine, have I deserved this ? Have my looks, actions, words, ever warranted you in drawing this conclusion ? I ask you, because you have always been my friend ?”

Ida uttered these words in low but rapid tones, yet scarcely looking at the gentleman she addressed, and all the while with her eyes bent on the gold-lettered *carte* before her. Lord Deloraine was a little taken aback at the sudden appeal made to him, and although he was by no means satisfied

that Ida's notions of earthly felicity were centred in her bird and her music, he was too well-bred to hint at his scepticism on this point. What his reply might have been it is difficult to conjecture, for, in addition to his attention being distracted by a *suprême de volaille* of exquisite flavour, Lady Mildred, who did not choose that Ida should engross his conversation, bent over the table to put a series of questions about the forthcoming theatricals. Ida gave a glance at the haughty beauty, and a faint sneer for an instant curled her lip as she turned round to answer some commonplace remark of the gentleman who sat on her other side.

When the lengthened banquet had reached its termination, and the gentlemen, after having indulged to the full in the costly and rare vintages which Mr. De Vaux's cellar afforded, reappeared in the drawing-rooms, a simultaneous move was made to the apartment fitted up as a theatre. Aubrey De Vaux, being an enthusiastic lover of music, had



among his large establishment a private band of musicians of first-rate talent. It was his custom to make them perform a select programme every evening for the amusement of his guests. Frequently, too, when the concert was over, he would arrange a series of *tableaux vivants*, and the splendid wardrobe of dresses, illustrating the costume of every nation in the world, was brought into requisition. The theatre was fitted up with every appliance the most luxurious taste could devise. For the accommodation of the audience, large easy chairs, covered with the richest crimson damask, were ranged in rows facing the stage. The walls and ceiling were of a pale azure hue, and the various deities of the heathen mythology were lightly and gracefully depicted on them by a skilled artist. Large mirrors were fixed at intervals in the walls, and between each stood a statue of purest marble, while above every mirror was a crystal chandelier glittering with innumerable pendent drops.

Delicious perfumes pervaded the theatre, diffused from several silver censers which depended from the ceiling, and nothing was wanting that could minister to the delight of the senses. The proscenium was adorned with the most elaborate devices; the drop scene represented a sunset view of one of the most beautiful scenes on the Mediterranean, and the orchestra was skilfully concealed from observation.

“Well, Lady Mildred,” said Mr. De Vaux, as he seated himself by that lady’s side, “I hope the programme is to your mind to-night, not too classical.”

“Yes, I think it will do,” said the lady, glancing at the embossed card presented to her. “There is not so much Beethoven as usual; but, I forgot, he is your favourite composer.”

“Favourite!—I care for no one more than another; tell me who is *your* favourite, Lady Mildred, and he shall be mine,” said Aubrey, sinking his voice low, and looking full into

her dark eyes. He had been drinking deeper than was his wont that evening, and there was a flush upon his cheek, and a singular expression in his eyes that made Aubrey De Vaux reckless of what he uttered.

“Ah, now, I see you mean to be pleasant to-night,” said Lady Mildred, inclining towards Aubrey till her softly-rounded ivory shoulder almost touched his, and laying her fan lightly on his arm. “Why are you so changeable?”

“Pity me, then, most beauteous Lady Mildred, that nature has made me wayward and inconstant to all save one. Yet what do I gain for my devotion—does it yield me one joy unalloyed with a mixture of sadness? Oh, that I could change places with you, that I could barter my satiated feelings and exhausted fancies for your fresh innocence of mind! In other words I am a martyr to *ennui*—my father was to gout; alas, there is nothing perfect in this world!”

There was a mixture of sentiment and sarcasm in Aubrey's words which displeased Lady Mildred, who had hoped for something more in accordance with her wishes from such a glowing commencement. But her object was not to be gained by any affectation of displeasure, so she replied, with an arch look :

“ Here is a disclosure, indeed—the proud, clever, gloomy, Mr. De Vaux confesses to his peace of mind having been disturbed by some unknown charmer ; do let us hear who it is.”

“ Can you doubt who it is whose lovely form haunts my dreams, and disturbs the calm of my waking hours—you, who reign undisputed queen over all the beauties of Mayfair ? Oh, cruel one thus to trifle with my feelings !”

Lady Mildred did not know how to receive this rhapsody, and would have been much better pleased had De Vaux expressed himself in a more intelligible fashion, so

she merely looked down and adjusted her bracelets.

“Really I can’t understand you to-night, Mr. De Vaux; you are excessively enigmatical.”

“The fact is, I indulged in a glass of maraschino after dinner, and that liqueur always disarranges my intellects; but I am at this moment speaking sober truth, when I say that I wish I could divest myself of my whole worldly means and possessions, and pass the rest of my life in some secluded village at least fifty miles from any railway.”

“So far as that goes, I daresay some kind person could be found accommodating enough to relieve you of the little encumbrances you speak of; but I should imagine that you would be pretty well tired of the peaceful village in about a fortnight.”

“Not if I could induce one gifted with every charm of mind and grace of person, who combines in her own exquisite self that

consummate union of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good, so vehemently sought after by the whole range of philosophers, from Plato down to Mr. Martin Tupper, to share my happy home," replied Aubrey, with an ardent glance at Lady Mildred.

"Ah, but where could such an one be found?" returned the lady, modestly, yet with a pleased consciousness that none other than Lady Mildred Beauchamp could be the perfect personage indicated. Unquestionable, therefore, was her disappointment when Aubrey said, in a thoughtful tone—

"Where, indeed! Not in this hemisphere I fear; but hush, what a savage I am to talk through this lovely movement!" And he languidly threw his head back upon the cushion, and, closing his eyes, seemed intensely absorbed in the harmonious *andante* of the Italian symphony.

Lady Mildred felt deeply mortified, and a flush of rising anger crimsoned her cheek, as she gave a haughty look of displeasure at

Mr. De Vaux's imperturbable countenance ; a glance joyfully noted by Ida von Borgern, who had been keenly watching them from the opposite side of the theatre. The conversation was not renewed as long as the concert lasted, and soon after they all adjourned to the dancing saloon, where waltzing commenced to the music of the band.

"Come, Lady Mildred, the cotillon is just beginning ; you dance it, of course," said Lord Deloraine, who was passing by with Ida on his arm.

"Yes, I think I shall, but I must get a partner first."

"Oh, here is De Vaux," exclaimed his lordship, as Aubrey came up ; "he is looking for one."

"No, I don't mean to dance this evening," said that gentleman.

"Will you refuse me, Mr. De Vaux, if I ask you to join the cotillon?" said Lady Mildred, in a low, almost a reproachful tone.

“Even Lady Mildred Beauchamp must I refuse. When I have said this I have said all,” replied Aubrey, with a low bow as he moved away.

Exquisite as was the lady’s sense of mortification at being thus foiled, she was too proud to show it, but merely gave a cold stare of surprise at De Vaux’s retreating form; and said, with a smile, to Lord Deloraine—

“What manners these *parvenus* have! Did you ever know such a strange man, Lord Deloraine? Now, if I had asked *you*, how differently would you have behaved.”

“Ah! Lady Mildred, you know I would do anything for you; I am, indeed, your slave. May I be allowed the next waltz?”

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That night, when all was still in the castle, Aubrey opened his chamber window, and stood upon the stone balcony, from which he could survey the calm sea, now



silvered by the soft summer moon. His brow was troubled, and he heeded not the tranquil beauty of the lovely scene on which he looked.

“Where,” he murmured, “shall I find happiness? Everything around me speaks of unbounded wealth; my slightest nod is obeyed. I meet no one who does not profess the deepest friendship; the loveliest of women reserve their sweetest smiles for me—but all in vain. My life might be one continued scene of splendour and triumph, and no honours that I might seek would be refused me. All my political friends assure me that I possess vast capabilities for public life. The Prime Minister himself, one of the haughtiest men in England, condescended to solicit me to accept a very high office. Of what avail would be honours showered upon me? Would they throw a veil of oblivion over the dreadful fear which haunts my waking hours and robs my slumbers of repose? Where is the potent

magician that would exorcise the horrid phantom that ever flits before my vision? I, so young, so nobly favoured by fortune, so richly endowed with every earthly blessing, to be thus condemned to suffer the deepest tortures of hell! My breast overflows with tenderness; I feel the fondest emotions of love throb through every vein, yet I dare not gratify the irrepressible longings of my soul. I adore the beauties of nature, and worship her with all a poet's ardour. All day long I can wander through the woods or by the river's brink, and discover fresh loveliness in each waving bough, each teeming rill. Nature has cursed me, too, with a vivid imagination, and I involuntarily picture to myself scenes of Arcadian sweetness, whose charm consists in the perfect innocence and peace of mind of their happy inhabitants. Even now I see before me an exquisite mirage of the mind. It is the balmy hour when the first hues of twilight are blending with the de-

clining evening sun ; a rich humming music from the countless insects glancing amid the clustering lime trees fills the air. In the midst of a lovely green sward, all fringed round with trees clad in the brightest robes of summer, stands a cottage mantled over with honeysuckle and ivy. The gentle breeze fans the rose bushes, and wafts their fragrance up to heaven. A delicious calm pervades the whole scene ; not a sound is heard to jar upon the ravished senses save the faintest rustle of an unseen rivulet. One young, beautiful girl alone breathes life over the picture, who stands at the open cottage window. Her dress is of spotless white, her cheek faintly tinged with red, her eyes of a lustrous hazel hue, her hair glossy as violets steeped in dew—a maiden moulded for princes to love. Let me kiss the foot of her snowy robe, and ask her to love me. Oh, God ! why must I torture myself thus ? Do I dare to pollute such a peaceful scene with my hated presence ?

Did that maiden but know what I bear within my bosom, would she not rather die this instant at my feet than suffer me to touch the hem of her garment?"

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## CHAPTER II.

ONE sunny summer's afternoon two young persons of different sexes might have been seen seated under the boughs of an old oak tree, which grew at the extremity of a strip of common land, near the picturesque village of H——. Some five-and-twenty summers might have passed over the youth's brow, while the age of his companion seemed at least five years less. Her fresh, open countenance was a true type of English beauty; but although her dress indicated that she moved only in the middle ranks of life, there was a delicacy in her looks and a grace in her motions that showed an inborn refinement of nature. The artless, yet thoughtful, blue eyes were bent on her

companion's face with a seemingly intense interest, and one hand was unwittingly toying with two long curls of fair glossy hair that escaped below her simple head-dress. Where they sat was a comparatively secluded spot, though from it could be seen at a little distance the neat cottages, each in its trim garden, the old-fashioned but hospitable looking inn, the venerable church, surrounded by dark green yews, and the imposing manor-house, that overlooked the quiet village below. Not two hundred yards off, but concealed by an intervening bordering of trees, flowed on smoothly and silently a broad clear river, whose grassy banks, now decked with the flowers of summer, were reflected in the limpid stream.

“You ask me where I learned all these things,” said the young man—whom we will call Edward Milroy—“where should I, but from my own observation? Doubtless I have read much, but reading will not

alone suffice; it is the serious study and earnest thought resulting from it that enable the mind to form and give expression to its ideas."

"Then, how unfit am I to talk to one so clever and so learned!" answered his companion, with a sigh; "but you have promised to show me the way to improve myself. Oh! I should like so much to be able to read all the beautiful works that you can, Mr. Milroy!"

"And so you shall in time, Mary. May I call you Mary?—it is such a simple, pretty name."

"Yes, do, if it pleases you, Mr. Milroy," said Mary, with a faint blush. "I shall look forward with such delight to your instructions; but I am afraid you will be wearied by my questions and out of temper at my stupidity."

"No fear of that, Mary, trust me; I am sure you will prove an apt scholar. But I want to know what has awakened all this

sudden spirit of inquiry in you. Is it a hastily-formed resolution, or a steady impulse, urging you to seek after the truth?"

"I don't think I can answer that, just yet, at least; and even if I tried, I am sure I could not express myself so that you could understand me. But if you care to hear it, I will tell you all I can remember of my life as far back as my memory will carry me, and you can form your own opinions from this," said the young girl, casting a modest yet eager glance into her companion's face.

"Please go on, Mary; I am all attention."

"My earliest recollections go back to the farmhouse my parents lived in, surrounded on all sides by bare moors, with a few trees scattered here and there. But they both died, and I was left an orphan so soon after my mind began to receive any impression from what was passing around me, that I



have only the dimmest remembrance of even their personal appearance. Sometimes, when I am alone in my room at nights, my thoughts wander back to these childish days and scenes, and indistinct pictures flit before me. I seem to recollect the farmyard where I played at hide and seek ; the little brook, in which I used to delight to wade ; the barn, where I used to watch wonderingly the rude winnowing-machine ; and above all, the round shed, where the old horse that turned the thrashing-mill worked. As I had no brothers or sisters my playmates were the children of the neighbouring farmers ; and our favourite spot was in a sort of hollow near the brook, where there were some large moss-grown stones and rocks. My father and mother were a quiet, grave, elderly couple, but I am sure they idolized me ; and they were always unhappy when I was long out of their sight. Then the great change came, and they both died within a few weeks of

one another. Child as I was, I felt a terrible sickening; sorrow when day after day passed and I never heard the fond voices or the well-known footsteps."—Here Mary's voice faltered, and the gathering tears filled her eyes; which her companion observing, he, with true delicacy of feeling, withdrew to a little distance, and busied himself in culling some of the wild flowers that grew on the grassy bank.

"See! here are some pretty violets, Mary; let me offer you a few. Now, please, go on with your story—you don't know how much I am interested."

"Well, then, I came to this village to live with my aunt, and have continued with her up till now. She is a very reserved person; and, from having many troubles to vex her, has become more silent and careworn than ever, so that for years past I have had no one of my own age to hold communion with or to seek sympathy from. It is this that I have so desired—some one

to talk freely to and to gain instruction from, for I am anxious to do right—but have so many doubts and fears. I have no proper religious feelings, I know that I am selfish and inconsiderate; my ideas and aims are vague and unsettled; my wishes and thoughts are too often silly and senseless, if not worse. You can understand all this, Mr. Milroy, can't you?"

"Ah! that I can, Mary. From the sketch you have given me of your past life and present position, I think I can fill in the details with tolerable exactness. Listen to me for a few minutes and I will complete the outlines of your character from your own remarks and the observations I have formed since we first met, and you will tell me if I am correct."

"Do, if you please; I should so much like to hear what you will say."

"Judging from what I have seen, I feel sure you have an ardent enthusiastic spirit and an anxious temperament, that prompt

you to look forward, in place of resting content with your present position. Situated as you have been, with no one to guide your aspirations or mould your character, you have fallen back on the books you possess for instruction or consolation. No doubt, too, you have indulged your fancy in many pleasing illusions, and often pictured to yourself radiant scenes of ideal happiness. Yielding too much to this seductive, but dangerous, pleasure, a reaction sets in, and the disappointment of cherished hopes must be the result. Possessed of a mind, and gifted with ideas, infinitely more refined than those with whom it is your lot in life to associate, you recoil from the necessity of mingling in their commonplace amusements, and thus have come to prize the pleasures of solitude. I know well what pain it must cause one full of highly wrought, delicate feelings, to be condemned to the society of the illiterate though kindly yeomen of an agricultural district. Therefore, when he

whose heart beats with kindred emotions, and who has had better opportunities of cultivating the small powers nature has given him, crosses your path, you naturally attach far greater weight to his words than they deserve, and would trust implicitly to his guidance."

"Oh! that I would!" interrupted the impulsive girl; "for there is something in your voice and features that tells me you would never mislead me. Besides, what motive could you have but in advising me for the best?"

"Ah, Mary! there the innocent heart of the unsophisticated girl spoke; for little do you know the baser feelings by which those who have been accustomed to the ways of the world are swayed, and how easily you might be lured on to your destruction."

"I do not understand you—how could I?" inquired his companion, looking artlessly into the stranger's eyes as she awaited his reply.

“Pray heaven you may not, some day!” he replied, with a sad smile. “But tell me, are you pleased with the character I have drawn?”

“That indeed I am—only it is much too favourable. You have said nothing about my faults, and I must hear these.”

“Come now, Mary, you are too exacting. I can only speak of what I have seen; you must first let me discover the spots upon my sun,” said Milroy, with a courtly grace, as though he were paying a compliment to some haughty, fashionable beauty, instead of a simple, rustic girl. Something in his manner and tone of voice attracted Mary’s attention and turned her thoughts into a new channel, for she suddenly said—

“How is it that you talk so little about yourself, Mr. Milroy? I have told you all my humble story, and now it is only fair to expect something of yours in return.”

The stranger changed colour slightly at these words, as he replied—

“ My life has been an uneventful one, and a few words will suffice to run over its brief details. I, too, am an orphan, and early lost the guardianship of kind parents, who left me an humble competence, which I have struggled to improve as best I might. For several years I lived in the great metropolis and gained a modest living by toiling for ten hours a day in the office of a solicitor; but, being intensely fond of a country life, I began to weary of the close confinement and terribly uninteresting work I had to perform. During my few moments of leisure I ardently devoured those books my slender means enabled me to become possessed of, and thus acquired the small amount of knowledge that you so greatly over-rate. Occasionally, too, I made fugitive efforts of a literary nature, and, after many disappointments, was so fortunate as to be admitted as a contributor to one of the periodicals. This connexion was of great value to me; and, hating the life of

drudgery I passed during the day, I resolved to quit London altogether and depend upon the subsistence I might gain by my pen, added to the little competence I derived from my parents. Thus I was enabled to gratify my cherished love for a quiet country life, and I took up my abode in a secluded village in a neighbouring county; and in one of the excursions I sometimes make on foot from there, I was so happy as to meet you, Mary. The rest you know."

"There seems a good deal of resemblance in our lives hitherto, and our tastes in many respects agree. How curious that we should have met! But I must tell my aunt of our friendship, for I know it is not right that we should walk together every evening without her knowledge. And stay—there is six o'clock striking!—she will be wondering where I am."

"What!—going so early, Mary? Must I see you no more for another day? Will



you be here at this hour to-morrow night?"

"I hardly know what to say, for I feel that I have not acted quite properly in withholding from my aunt all knowledge of our friendship."

"Do not let that trouble you. I wish to avoid all appearance of deceit, and would prefer that I should make the acquaintance of your relative. I shall call at your cottage to-morrow forenoon, and then you can get your aunt's sanction to our meetings for the future."

"Good-by, then, Mr. Milroy."

"*Adieu*, dearest Mary!" said her companion, who gazed fondly after the fair young girl, until a turn in the path concealed her from his view.

## CHAPTER III.

“WHAT’S this I hear?” said Lord Deloraine to Lady Mildred Beauchamp, as they met on the croquet ground on the forenoon of the day following the events narrated in our first chapter,—“De Vaux about to leave this country and retire to the Continent for Heaven knows how long!”

“So it was mentioned at the breakfast-table, though no one seemed to know from where the rumour originated, and as usual Mr. De Vaux was not present to be appealed to on the subject. By the way, that is one of his strangest peculiarities, never condescending to show in the morning, and letting any one do the honours of the breakfast-table. Does he watch the stars all

night, or hold communion with the spirits of the air like Manfred, that his morning toilet is hardly got over when many people dine?"

"Yes, everyone wonders what he can possibly do with himself, as there is always a light to be seen in his room, however late one may have been keeping it up in the smoking room, for you know he never dreams of expecting that the whist or billiard parties should break up when he retires."

"That must be what gives him such a frightfully pale colour, which, combined with his dark, melancholy eyes, quite realizes one's idea of a vampire," observed the lady.

"Ah, that is all in his favour—at any rate in the eyes of your sex, Lady Mildred. I know you can't bear colour in a man, and that is where I labour under such a serious disadvantage. It is only when I have got a splitting headache after a severe dinner at

the Trafalgar that my visage is at all 'sick-  
lied o'er with the pale cast of thought.' "

"Come, that's rather successful, Lord Deloraine. I didn't think you were so well up in 'Hamlet.' Now Mr. De Vaux is eternally boring one with quotations, and I never knew a man so fond of talking."

"You must allow he does it well, however," said the gentleman; "one may safely call his conversation brilliant, when he chooses to exert himself and is in his best vein. I allow that when he is trifling with the newest beauty in her first season he seems to pride himself upon the amount of clever nonsense he can rattle through, with that everlasting grave face of his all the time."

"Yes; but what I complain of is the condescension in his tone on such occasions, and the patronizing way in which he offers any amount of devotion, so long as he is not put to the slightest trouble or exertion. Then he is so ridiculously effeminate in his tastes, and appears always in such agony of

mind lest he should soil his hands, which, I allow, are certainly wonderfully white. There is nothing manly about Mr. De Vaux, either in his habits or his pleasures; he doesn't shoot, for a gun, I believe, generally leaves black marks on the fingers; he doesn't hunt, because he is afraid, and not one of the superb animals in his stable is ever mounted by its owner; he doesn't play rackets or cricket, as it might bring on palpitations of the heart—positively he seems too lazy and listless to do anything *actively* wrong, although he is very nearly an infidel in religion.”

“A pretty little picture of poor De Vaux you have drawn, Lady Mildred; it is very evident that he is slightly out of your good graces just now. Come, I think you are rather hard on him, for you will allow he entertains in princely style; there is nothing incomplete in his establishment, and the guests do precisely as it suits them. Every visitor's taste, in the way of exercise or

amusement, is studied by the trained staff of servants De Vaux keeps in his employment; and then, did any mortal ever sit down to such a table? Why, the *chef* has, I believe, fifteen hundred a year—an Under-Secretary of State's income—and what marvellous wines!"

"Yes, marvellous they must be, Lord Deloraine—at least, to judge by the effect they seem to produce upon Mr. De Vaux; I declare I don't think he ever rises from table quite sober—look, for instance, at his behaviour last night."

"Well, I cannot defend him there. I allow he had taken a very large quantity of wine; but you know that sometimes he does affect a singularity of manner, and a peculiarity of conversation which is very apt to mislead those who do not understand his ways, and they might possibly suppose that he had been indulging somewhat too freely. As for his shooting, cricketing, and hunting, his excessive short

sight incapacitates him for the two first, and, owing to a fall he once got from his horse, the doctors warned him that, as he had seriously injured his head, he must avoid all violent exercise for the future. His physical strength is undeniable——”

“And so is his moral weakness,” interrupted Lady Mildred, with a sneer, when her charitable remarks were brought to a conclusion by some of the other guests arriving on the ground to take part in the exhilarating and highly intellectual game of croquet, upon which a celebrated author has recently written an elaborate treatise to prove that this driving about of painted wooden balls over damp grass calls into play some of the most delicate powers of the eye, judgment, brain, and mind, and that billiards, whist, and chess must “pale their ineffectual fires” before this latest importation from the French.

“Come, Mildred, you will be on our side, and Lord Deloraine, too,” said the Honour-

able Miss Blanche Conyers, a delicate blonde beauty of the most fashionable type, but withal of a peculiarly sweet expression of countenance, and gifted with a smile that would captivate an adamant heart.

“Is it true, Blanche, what I hear about Mr. De Vaux?” said Lady Mildred. “He seemed to be taking you into his confidence last night while the dancing was going on, and possibly you can explain the cause of his sudden departure.”

“Not, I, indeed,” replied the fair beauty, with a laugh; “our conversation last evening related to nothing more confidential than the distinctive features of British ferns, which, you know, I am collecting just now. Mr. De Vaux surprised me by the intimate knowledge of botany he seemed to possess, and even had the Linnæan names of plants at his fingers’ ends; I never met anybody who explains these dry subjects in such an attractive manner.”

“What an uncharitable world it is,” ob-



served Lord Deloraine ; “ Miss Conyers and De Vaux are deep in the mysteries of natural history, and they are at once convicted of an outrageous flirtation.”

“ Why, here comes Mr. De Vaux himself !” exclaimed Miss Conyers ; “ it is not often that he honours the croquet-ground with his presence.”

“ Good morning, De Vaux,” said Lord Deloraine ; “ you have just come in time to tell us if it is true that you are off to the other extremity of Europe at a moment’s notice. Miss Conyers declares it is nonsense, and that you are only giving this out because you mean to withdraw from the world for six months to write a history of British flora, to be dedicated to her.”

“ Now, Lord Deloraine, take care what you say,” laughingly exclaimed Miss Conyers ; “ I shall tell Flora Montresor what you said about her waltzing last night, if you go on this way, and your nice little arrangement there will be spoilt.”

“I did not think that my motions were of sufficient importance to interest in the slightest any of my fair friends,” said De Vaux. “However, I promised Miss Conyers some peculiar specimens of ferns which are only to be found in one of the Russian provinces, and I mean to select them myself.”

“Well, Blanche, you ought to be highly flattered,” said Lady Mildred, “it is not everyone who would go some thousands of miles to pick a few plants for a lady’s herbarium.”

“The age of chivalry has returned!” exclaimed Lord Deloraine.

“What nonsense we are all talking,” said Miss Conyers, “and was there ever such a morning for croquet. How much more time are we going to waste? It is all your fault, as usual, Lord Deloraine; I shall certainly tell Flora Montresor.”

The croquet party was now formed, but it did not include De Vaux, who pleaded

letters to write as an excuse for not playing, and taking one of the broad turf walks that led through this portion of the pleasure-grounds, he turned his steps towards the mansion-house. At one turn of the walk a pretty rustic summer-house was erected, which was a favourite resort of Ida von Borgern, who would bring her book and her work, and sometimes pass the whole forenoon in this cool retreat. This morning she had early repaired to her accustomed seat, and was deep in a volume of German poetry when Mr. De Vaux passed. Light as his step was, it caught the lady's ear, who looked up, and her features suffused with a sudden glow of pleasure when she saw who it was.

“ Good morning, Ida ; at your favourite occupation, I see. Which poet are you reading now—Schiller ? I know you love his works ; I confess I cannot quite comprehend your German authors ; they are too dreamy and mystical even for my taste.”

“Indeed, I always fancied that you enjoyed works of a highly imaginative nature, and I think you once told me that you sometimes pass hours and hours in the most fanciful and airdrawn reveries.”

“I cannot deny it; and a very dangerous habit it is—one that grows upon you, and leaves the mind in a listless and exhausted state, after frittering away so much precious time.”

“Alas! Mr. De Vaux, why is it that you will not turn your rare talents to any practical use, instead of allowing the heyday of your youth and energy to glide silently away? Pardon my boldness in thus speaking, but I know it is not in your nature to take offence at what is said in innocence and good faith.”

“Ah! Ida, there you touched a chord that often vibrates in my breast, and far better would it have been for me had I been early surrounded with those who would have pointed out my many and grievous faults and

shortcomings, and not flattered me to the top of my bent. Too late now, I find out, that those who are born to inherit lavish gifts of fortune rarely hear the language of truth. Young as I am, I take no interest in the ordinary pursuits and avocations of those with whom I associate, and with difficulty can bring myself even to attend to business arrangements and affairs of personal and pressing importance. I wish I could take a flying leap over the next forty years of my life, and awake some morning to find myself a thoroughly domestic, gouty, tamed down, stout elderly gentleman."

"And would you willingly give up all the romance and passion of youth, its generous sensations and thrilling joys, to slumber on into a gradual and listless decay?"

"Bah! don't talk to me of thrilling joys, Ida; such high-wrought and dramatic feelings I have long been a stranger to. They may suit young ladies at your sentimental time of life well enough, I daresay."

Ida did not like the rather slighting tone of this last remark, and answered with some warmth—

“ Pray, Mr. De Vaux, is it a sign of great weakness in our sex to admit that we do take some rational interest in what is passing around us, and are capable of appreciating and enjoying the blessings which Providence has vouchsafed to us ?”

“ I feel the force of your rebuke, Ida,” said her companion, with a grave and courteous inclination of the head, “ and I mean to take into serious consideration the desirability of effecting a reformation in my ways. By the way, I intend to set off for St. Petersburg this day week, and I hope to have the pleasure of your and the baron’s society during the trip ; my new steam-yacht is to arrive in the bay to-morrow, and I think you will find it most comfortably fitted up.”

“ St. Petersburg !” exclaimed Ida, with unfeigned surprise ; “ what is the meaning

of this sudden move, with a house full of guests, too? Surely you are not in earnest."

"Never more serious in my life," answered Aubrey; "every one leaves my house this week, and it may be a considerable time before I return. The fact is, I shall move about a good deal now; I want some healthy excitement, and, as people when they get on in the world talk of setting up their carriage, I think I shall set up a wife, and also (what I have long had in view) a private balloon."

"You are in a very flippant humour this morning, Mr. De Vaux," said Ida, seriously, and looking wistfully at the former; "I don't like to hear you talking of such a sacred tie as marriage in so trifling a manner. May I tell you that, in my poor judgment, if your wayward feelings would own allegiance to some woman who would love you as you ought to be loved, all this instability of character would be changed."

“And how do you know that I am not deeply attached to some one already, to whom is poured out all the adoration I have to bestow?”

Ida looked down for a moment as she replied—

“I fancy, from your whole manner and conversation, that you have hitherto only looked upon our sex as pleasant objects to trifle away a few passing hours with. Besides, the world must have seen or heard of any real attachment or preference shown by you; in your position such things can hardly be concealed.”

“Possibly not; but you may be very sure I do not mean to publish to the world the name of the girl who wins my affections; on the contrary, I should take great pains to conceal this and mislead every one. And now I must say good morning, for I escaped from the croquet party on the plea of letters to write, and it wont do to let any of them find me here.”



De Vaux turned away, leaving Ida in a very thoughtful mood, his latter words appearing to her to have a certain significance. The truth was that Ida had for some time past allowed herself insensibly to be drawn within the sphere of attraction that seemed to encircle Aubrey de Vaux. Owing to the peculiarity of his disposition and the singular bent of his character, it depended entirely upon the mood he was in whether he would exert his rare powers of fascination and act the thoughtful, polished host to perfection, or affect a sort of sullen, lazy indifference. Sometimes, too, when the whim seized him, he would set himself to produce a favourable impression upon some one whom at another moment he would never notice, and his vanity would be gratified if he saw that he was successful. Never having been accustomed to place the smallest value upon what the world was disposed to say of this capricious behaviour, its censure or approval were alike unheeded by

him. Generally he took but little notice of Ida von Borgern, though always jealously observant of the reception she met with from his fashionable guests, for he looked upon a slight given to her as a mark of personal discourtesy to himself. This being the case, whenever Ida attended the general circle she was received with perfect politeness, though without cordiality, and she emerged from the solitude of her own apartments as seldom as possible. Still she and De Vaux had many opportunities of meeting, and he always enjoyed a *tête-à-tête* with Ida, as on such occasions he was sure to hear something original and different from the inane talk of his fashionable guests. These brief interviews were dearly prized by Ida, and she could not repress the feelings of ripening affection which now began to be awakened in her heart. When she was alone, her thoughts naturally turned towards De Vaux, and she delighted to picture to herself scenes of pleasure in which they were to be brought

together. Not that she had yet allowed all her affections and hopes of happiness to centre upon Aubrey, for her love was still dormant in her bosom; but she could not conceal from herself the growing pain with which she marked any instances of more than ordinary attention he might show to the fashionable beauties who happened to be his guests. Aubrey had noticed this, and consequently had been more reserved in his intercourse with Ida of late, but his habitual indifference and indolence prevented him thinking much of the matter.

## CHAPTER IV.

IT was nearly noon when Milroy repaired to the cottage where Mary and her aunt lived, to pay his promised visit. Their abode was situated not far from the common, but in a quiet and unfrequented spot; and a large elm tree, which grew in the small garden in front, threw its shadow completely over the pretty residence. A rough sort of seat was formed round the shaggy stem of the old tree, and this was a favourite resort of Mary's on a summer evening, with a book for her companion. She carefully tended the little garden, with its few modest and simple flowers, and trained the honeysuckle and scarlet-runners to spread themselves over the walls of the cottage. There was a

pleasant portico, completely grown over with ivy and creepers, with seats on both sides, and all enclosed by trellis work, up which the green and fragrant plants clustered.

The morning being fine, Mary and her aunt were both in the garden in front of the cottage, and Mary was busy picking up weeds that interfered with the growth of her flowers, while her relative busied herself with some needlework.

“ Well, Mary, I must say you take great pains with the garden ; it is not your fault if we have not a lovely display before the summer is over. I think you should do more needlework, however, for this is much more likely to form an occupation for you hereafter than cultivating flowers.”

“ Oh ! but aunt, I do so love working at my flower beds, and you know how pleasant it is to be out of doors this warm weather ; besides, I have nothing else to do at present.”

“ Yes, child, that is all very well ; but I

should like to see you making your own dresses or bonnets, because, remember, you have very little to depend on when I am gone, except the small sum your poor father was able to leave you and my own humble competence."

"It is very long, dear aunt, to look forward to, I hope, and by that time I shall have gained wisdom to guide me."

"Seriously though, Mary, you must bethink yourself of what you would do if it pleases the Almighty to take me away soon; you know how subject to illness I am, and how little bodily strength I possess. What I should like would be to see you well married; but you seem to care nothing about the neighbouring farmer's two sons, who are considered steady and well-doing young men. Living in our quiet cottage, apart from the villagers' circle, we see so few people that your chances are small, and I don't suppose that young artist, who has been here occasionally, has much to marry on."

“Give yourself no uneasiness about him, aunt, for we very seldom meet; and while I cannot say I dislike him, still he is merely an ordinary acquaintance. I met another gentleman lately”—here Mary involuntarily blushed slightly, though her aunt did not observe her confusion—“whom, I think, you would like; indeed, he wishes to know you.”

“And who is he, Mary? Take care, my good girl, you do not know what a wicked world this is, and no good can come of your associating with those who are your superiors in position.”

“Still, I think you will like the gentleman, aunt; he is so good, so clever, and his manners are most winning,” said Mary; and again her colour heightened as she spoke in Milroy’s praise. Her quiet and unob-servant relative could not forbear from raising her head from the work she was busy with, as her niece descanted upon the unknown stranger.

“ I fear, child, you are too romantic, and pick up many foolish notions from these books you seem so fond of reading. What have you got to do with poetry? Such fine writing is only fit for lords and ladies, who can sit on their sofas all day long and make others work for them. Depend upon it you would be much better employed in household duties, cooking the dinner, churning butter, or learning to make home wines, than filling your head full of nonsense about love, beauty, and pleasure. I wish you would read your Bible more : that book you never can consult too often, and I hope that your religious duties are fulfilled with the true earnestness of faith.”

Mary listened to her aunt's admonitions in silence ; indeed, she was somewhat surprised at what she heard, for it was most unusual in her relative to talk to her on anything beyond their ordinary domestic topics. In fact, Mary always thought her aunt neither observed nor cared much what



she did, and in consequence she never affected to assume any great interest in the ordinary domestic details of the cottage. Uncertain what to reply, she felt rather relieved when Milroy, who, according to his promise, came to see Mary's only relative and protector, appeared at the wicket that afforded entrance to the garden. As soon as he observed her, Milroy noticed the confusion visible in her looks, and guessing the cause, did not wait for Mary to speak, but raised his hat, and introduced himself to her aunt.

“My name is Milroy, and I believe I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Forester's aunt. Your niece and I became acquainted by accident, and I trust I may be permitted to visit your cottage as a friend.”

“You are welcome, sir, to our humble home; we are but poor, still it has pleased Providence to give us a comfortable shelter for our heads. Will you not walk in and rest yourself?”

There was a composed and serious tone in Janet Forester's demeanour that suited her grave and respectable appearance, and her language, though simple, was never coarse or vulgar.

"Thank you, I think I can be very comfortable here," said Milroy, seating himself on the edge of the strip of grass near Mary's feet; "it is so cool and pleasant out of doors to-day, that one likes to get as much of the open air as possible."

"And have you been long in these parts, Mr. Milroy?" said Janet Forester, who had laid her knitting down, and meant to find out who this young man was that Mary spoke so highly of.

"Not above three weeks, though it is such a beautiful neighbourhood that I think I shall come here for a time. I am so fond of the country, that I like to pass a great deal of my time in it, and I mean to take a cottage near this and live here as much as possible."

“Have you no business affairs to occupy yourself with, as I should think you would find it dull?”

“Oh, yes, I write for periodicals, and hard work it is too, I assure you; besides, I have constantly to be in London in connexion with a new literary undertaking. A life of total idleness would soon make one weary, and deaden the enjoyment I now feel in quiet rural retirement.”

“Well, Mr. Milroy, we lead a most retired life; as our means are too small to enable us to mix with the well-to-do families about here; but we shall be always glad to see you,” said Janet, who was a good deal taken with the stranger’s gentle mode of address and good appearance. It was evident, from his manner, that he admired her niece, and she could not select a more desirable suitor for her hand, if he had sufficient means to support a wife. Of this there seemed little doubt, and Janet had such entire confidence in Mary’s good prin-

principles as to feel sure she would never allow Milroy to approach her with other than honourable proposals.

“Thank you,” said Milroy, pleased with the reception he had met with; “if my society can enliven your dull moments I shall be only too glad to do my utmost for your amusement.”

“Do not expect to see anybody when you come but ourselves, for no one hardly ever crosses the door—unless it be the clergyman or Mr. Lawrence,” added Janet, after a moment’s hesitation.

“And who is he, may I ask?” inquired Milroy, with some quickness, while a slight change came over his countenance for a moment.

“A gentleman—an artist, I believe—whom I met much in the same way I did yourself,” said Mary, who noticed the change that passed across her lover’s face.

“As I live, here he is!” exclaimed Janet.

“How strange that we should be talking of him at the very moment!”

This was said as a young man of tall figure, with dark close-cut hair, and keen grey eyes of a restless expression, walked up to the garden gate. Seeing Milroy he hesitated, and was on the point of passing by when Janet said—

“Good morning, Mr. Lawrence; this is a fine day for your picture of the old Hall.”

When he was thus addressed, Lawrence could do nothing else than reply in the same civil manner.

“Thank you, Mrs. Forester, this is indeed a pleasant morning; you will excuse my coming in—in fact, you seem engaged,” he added, with a quick look towards Milroy.

“Not at all,” said Mary; “Mr. Milroy is, like yourself, quite an accidental acquaintance. Will you not sit down for a little?”

There was no resisting this invitation,

and the young man came in and leant against the tree near which Mary sat, but it could easily be seen that there was an awkwardness and constraint in his manner. He had not known Mary long, but the few interviews he had with her sufficed to inspire him with an ardent admiration for the beautiful and artless girl. He told Mary that his parents lived a few miles from the village, and held themselves rather aloof from the neighbours, and that they did not wish their son to associate with the families of the substantial yeomen who inhabited the district, as they fancied he possessed talents that might bring him into the notice of those much their superiors in position. Indeed young Lawrence showed some promise as a landscape painter, and stated that he had received instructions from a master in London, who advised him to make art his profession, as he considered his talents lay in that direction.

It was evident that Milroy was discon-

certed by the other being invited to remain, for he rose up immediately and took his leave—not, however, before he had closely scanned the appearance of the person he instinctively looked on as his rival. His departure was a great relief to Lawrence, who now placed himself by Mary's side.

“I see you have made a new acquaintance, Miss Forester,” he said, with a jealous glance towards Milroy, who had nearly disappeared from sight.

“Yes; and a very agreeable person he is,” replied Mary, a little coldly; “I hope, aunt, we shall see more of him.”

“I have no objections, Mary,” said her aunt, “as I confess his appearance and manner rather take my fancy.”

“He is a stranger to this neighbourhood,” remarked Lawrence, who was waiting for an opportunity to say something to the other's disadvantage, without allowing his motive to be too apparent. Just then Mary's aunt went into the cottage, leaving

the two by themselves, and Lawrence moved still nearer to Mary, who, in consequence, drew herself slightly back.

“ I imagine Mr. Milroy has not been here very long,” she replied ; “ but really I do not see why you should be so suddenly interested in him.”

“ Well, naturally enough, I think ; seeing the intimate terms you all seemed to be upon, I wondered who the stranger was, and where he came from.”

“ And pray, Mr. Lawrence, are any acquaintances my aunt and I may form to be made known to you, whom I first spoke to about three months since ?” inquired Mary, with a rather displeased air.

“ Oh ! pardon my apparent rudeness, dear Miss Forester ; but I had hoped you would understand the reason why everything and every one about you has such a keen interest for me” — here Lawrence hesitated, and the colour mounted up to his forehead, nor did he finish the sentence he began



with so much animation. The truth was, he had upon his lips the declaration of his hitherto concealed love for Mary, but her cold manner prevented him from going farther at present. They had met a good many times since Lawrence first made Mary's acquaintance, as he sought every opportunity for that purpose; but she had never, by word or look, given him the smallest encouragement. Indeed, it was only the previous week that the inexperienced girl, ignorant of the customary indications by which love first declares its presence, had noticed anything in Lawrence's behaviour or words that betrayed his secret passion. When this took place the discovery pained her, because she had hitherto looked upon Lawrence as a pleasant acquaintance, and admired his sketches and paintings, which he took great delight in submitting to her notice. His conversation, too, was intelligent, for his was no vitiated or vulgar mind, and its best sentiments

were called forth in the presence of the girl who had won his heart. Mary was no dissembler, and felt that, as she could never return Lawrence's love, their intercourse must cease; and it was with the view of intimating this that she wished him to stay this morning. Although she had not known Milroy for a longer period than his rival, while she felt conscious that the former took a warm interest in her, still he had never made any declaration of love. On the other hand, Mary, from the first moment Milroy crossed her path, had been irresistibly fascinated by his singular grace of manner and impassioned words.

"You seem to have very few friends about here, Mr. Lawrence," remarked Mary, not knowing very well what to say.

"I do not care to know the commonplace people who live about us; their manners and ideas alike are distasteful to me," replied the young man.

"Surely this is unnatural," returned

Mary, "and must only make you enemies among those from whom you might gain both advantage and pleasure. But if you do not care to join in the field-sports and gatherings of our neighbours, why not settle in some large town, where you could either pursue your profession of a painter or follow some other one?"

"Can you not guess the reason why? Suppose I am unable to quit a neighbourhood which I confess I do not much care about, because there is one living there who has it in her power to fix my destiny either for good or evil."

"I do not like to hear you talk in that way, Mr. Lawrence; it is wicked and absurd both, to say that any one on earth has this power."

"Ah! I see you misunderstand me; the influence I talk of is of a softer nature than this; and I cannot help feeling that you must be aware who it is that has this power."

Mary was a good deal agitated, and felt her nervousness increasing as Lawrence grew more pointed in his remarks. Both of them lacked the courage to speak boldly out what was on their minds: and every minute Mary felt less able to intimate the hopelessness of his suit. In truth, it is a most painful duty to perform, this having to dash to the ground hopes that have taken possession of a loving heart. Yet it only prolongs the ultimate agony which must otherwise be sustained by the victim to his own too fond aspirations, and the shock is rendered all the more poignant. Equally painful is it to confess that our affections have been misplaced, and to have to own that the being who once moved to ecstasy our inmost emotions, now has lost that magic power. Oh! the gnawing and bitter disappointment, when we awake from what has proved but a transient dream of felicity, to feel that we deliberately set up an idol in our hearts to whose sway we have become faithless. Keen are the

pangs which must be experienced by any one save a systematic and cold deceiver, who, knowing that some gentle being only draws the sweetness of her existence from the man on whom her affections are set, still feels that he cannot give his heart in return.

It was a great relief to Mary's mind when her aunt, who thought the young people had been left alone long enough, appeared at the cottage door, thus preventing any further recurrence to the subject; and shortly after Lawrence took his departure.

## CHAPTER V.

THE castle of Invermay was now deserted by all the gaudily-plumed birds of fashion who the week before had flaunted in its gorgeous apartments; and the yacht that was to convey Aubrey and the two mysterious foreigners, who were his constant guests, to the distant shores of Russia, was all made ready for their departure. It was a bright morning, towards the end of summer, and the deep green leaves faintly rustled in the breeze that fanned the waters of the bay into gentle ripples. Overhead the birds were gaily singing amid the warm sunshine, and the hardy shepherd was glad to seek a shady spot to shelter him from the burning rays of the sun. Scarce a

fleecy cloud moved across the broad blue sky; and the lofty mountains that rose up behind the castle showed no passing shadows over their towering sides.

De Vaux gave orders that all should be in readiness to start soon after mid-day, being anxious to take advantage of the favouring breeze, and had now strolled to one of his favourite haunts at the foot of the cliffs. Here, reclining on the soft sandy beach, he seemed to give himself up to deep contemplation. Many had been the comments made upon the sudden resolution he adopted of setting sail for the bleak Russian shores. He tried to account for the vague spirit of restlessness which impelled him to take this voyage, and wondered what he should do when he arrived at his destination. As yet he had proposed no plans to himself, having not even taken the trouble to ask for a single letter of introduction. All he wished for was a total change of scene; and he appeared to have conceived a sudden

dislike towards those fashionable friends among whom he had hitherto been content to pass his time. And yet now he looked wistfully round upon each well-remembered spot, as though he were leaving them never to return; and a feeling of sadness began to oppress his mind. He could not help reflecting with bitterness how his life had been wasted, what splendid opportunities were wantonly thrown away. Aimless and supine, he allowed the best days of vigorous youth to ebb away without one effort on his part to redeem from obscurity the proud name he bore. If ever he was recalled to mind, it would be for some act of thoughtless extravagance, or to demonstrate how such consummate advantages of position and worldly wealth might be frittered away. He asked himself, what incentive had he to give up his time to the dull drudgery of political occupations, and to demean his proud spirit by courting the suffrages and approbation of



the vulgar crowd? Had he lived in the Middle Ages in all probability he would have been found heading a magnificent crusade, and seeking under the burning skies of the East the renown that fortune might afford. To a mind constituted like De Vaux's, partial success and mediocre results would be more galling than absolute failure; he must either take the world by storm, or perpetrate a splendid fiasco.

Presently the captain of the handsomely-appointed yacht moored in the bay came to warn De Vaux that it was time to start. When they reached the castle, the baron and his daughter were found waiting to proceed to the vessel fully equipped for a lengthened cruise. The former, whose acquaintance we have not made before, was a tall, quiet, gentlemanly-looking man, rather past the middle period of life. There was an air of courteous affability in his manner that easily accounted for his being the favourite he was, while an unmistakeable

appearance of decision in the well-cut features, indicated his ability to act with great firmness when necessary. Ida was dressed lightly and becomingly; and the excitement caused by the prospect of a long and pleasant voyage lent an additional charm to her expressive countenance.

“Well, baron, you and Ida are ready, I see,” said De Vaux. “I hope I have not kept you waiting.”

“Oh, no; we have just finished putting up the multifarious articles one always takes on a sea voyage, not one-tenth of which probably will ever be removed from the packages in which they are so very carefully stowed,” replied the baron, as he left the room to look for his cigar-case.

“And my fair Ida, I trust, has not forgotten to take her most sparkling jewels, and her prettiest costumes, for St. Petersburg is a gay capital, as you must know,” continued De Vaux.

“Why, I thought you meant to live in

perfect seclusion, and gather Russian ferns, keeping entirely away from the busy haunts of [the capital of the Neva," said Ida, with a smile.

"We will have a little of both, Ida. I am sure you would not thank me for condemning you to the ice and snows of that northern region unless your time was to be varied by some light relaxation."

"Oh, the charms of novelty will be sufficient for me; for there is nothing I like more than travelling through new scenes, and observing different customs and manners from our own. I know, too, how unsettled your fancies generally are at first, and how you will pass from one interesting spot to another, only never allowing the effect produced by the previous one to take clear hold of the mind."

"Take care, Ida, that you are not raising up a bright series of anticipations which may never be realized; for only suppose I change my mind, and shunning anything

like excitement or pleasure, settle down in some unfrequented and desolate province."

"I know quite well that an uncertain disposition like yours is capable of any sudden caprice; but I trust you will have sufficient consideration for your guests not to force them to adopt a course which naturally implies a total deprivation of any pleasure the journey we are taking may afford," said Ida, in a somewhat cold, proud tone.

"A reproof, indeed, from Ida von Borgern, the patient and incomparable female philosopher, who was equally at home in a drawing-room or a desert!" returned Aubrey, in an ironical tone. "You must perfect yourself in your professed stoicism, believe me, before you turn round upon me in this manner. No; you young ladies had better stick to your crochet and afternoon tea and scandal, not presuming to dabble in anything more ideal than love or the consolations of religion."

By this time Ida had fully recovered her equanimity, and answered quietly—

“I like to provoke you to a little animation, Mr. De Vaux; anything is better than that stagnation of intellect into which, I fear, you would soon sink if I were not at hand occasionally to stir the sluggish stream your mind too often represents. Now, what you really want is a troublesome shrew of a wife, who should be perpetually trying to domineer over the spoilt Mr. Aubrey De Vaux, and inflicting ceaseless annoyance upon her would-be morose and gloomy lord.”

“Upon my word, Ida, I think I must positively take matrimonial orders. It is in every sense a more respectable mode of life, and removes one out of the reach of many snares and temptations, to say nothing of the happiness marriage ought to insure. I often think what an utter waste of life is the existence one leads at present; week succeeds week, and nothing worthy of being

remembered is ever performed. Is any one the better for my presence on the earth, and would a single friend be found to breathe a sigh or drop a tear over my grave?"

"Indeed, there would be very many, if you only invited confidence and sympathy by seeming to place some value upon unselfish attachment and disinterested regard, or rather if you could be brought to believe that such feelings exist. By isolating your affections within the cold citadel of an affected cynicism, you repel all attempts to wean you to a more genial course of action, and deliberately exalt the mechanical functions of the brain above the warm impulses of the heart."

Aubrey could not help being struck with the thoughtful tone of Ida's remarks, and he felt, too, the justice of her reproof. He had more than once been surprised by the evidences of deep reading and observation her conversation evinced, for her apparently

retiring nature prevented Ida from ever making any public display of the considerable powers of mind she possessed. In short, he began to believe she was gifted with talents of no mean order, and no longer to be treated, as hitherto, merely as a romantic girl.

“My fair mentor, you are right,” returned De Vaux, “and I own it is a real misfortune for me that I seem to have been unable to awaken feelings of tender regard and sympathy in some kindred bosom; but there is hope yet.”

Ida could not repress a sigh as she answered, “How can you tell whether this has not already been done—indeed, is it not far more likely that you have but to select one from among the many who are only too anxious to win your affections?”

It was impossible to mistake the fond look with which these words were accompanied, and so sweet was the expression beaming in Ida’s beautiful eyes, that De

Vaux could not help feeling a certain degree of fascination.

“Now, you flatter me, Ida; but you must allow that vanity is not one of my besetting sins. I have no doubt that my fortune and position could easily purchase me a bride with all the beauty that men most prize, but this is not the love that I want. Rather would I select some unnoticed fair one from a sphere of life that would insure her being free from the taint of mere mercenary motives, and with that unsullied purity of mind which those nurtured in the lap of fashion never possess.”

“I can understand this, for the worldly advantages fortune has bestowed on you make you independent of those paltry considerations which sway so many on the question of marriage. But your fastidious notions of delicacy and refinement would be shocked by anything approaching vulgarity, such as a bride selected from the ranks of life you seem to indicate might display.”



“ I admit the faint probability there is of encountering one who will come up to my standard of perfection, but I believe such a gem might be found. Nature is impartial in her gifts, and I see no reason why a simple cottage girl may not be blessed with as sweet a disposition, as loving a heart, as any princess. The jewel needs only the finishing polish of culture and art to shine with as pure a lustre as the brilliant already enhanced by the advantage of a perfect setting.”

“ In all this I quite agree with you, and do not wonder that, with these ideas, you hesitate before uniting yourself to one who might prove unworthy of the love bestowed on her. I dare say you are amused at me, with my inexperience in the ways of the world, presuming to offer you advice on such a momentous question,” said Ida, laughing.

“ No, indeed I am not, because I like to hear the sentiments of one who is uninflu-

enced by slavish and commonly received opinions, and by her peculiar position a passive and perfectly disinterested spectator of passing events.”

These words sent a strange pang through Ida's heart, because she could never indorse their purport, and had allowed herself to be allured by a dazzling but treacherous phantom towards dangers she little imagined. However, she had little time now for reflection, as the captain of the yacht sent word that everything was in readiness, and he was anxious to get under weigh. Half an hour afterwards the trim vessel, taking advantage of a favouring breeze, swept gently round the headland at one extremity of the bay, and, ere long, became a mere speck on the horizon.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE meetings between Milroy and Mary Forester generally took place in a grassy glade in the wood not far from her aunt's cottage, and he was accustomed to look for her about midday, this being the time she was most at leisure. His encountering Lawrence at the cottage, and the apparently friendly footing on which the latter seemed to stand with its inmates, had somewhat disquieted Milroy, and he was anxious to learn all about the young artist. Accordingly the next day he repaired to the usual place of rendezvous, and had not been there very long before he caught sight of Mary's advancing figure among the trees. Joyfully running to meet her, he eagerly scanned her

features to mark any unfavourable symptoms, but this scrutiny was unnecessary, for the pressure of her hand, and the artless expression of fondness in her eyes, unmistakably told their tale.

“And how are you this morning, dear Mary?” he began; “I hope you had pleasant dreams last night—indeed, I am sure you must, for you look so bright and happy.”

“Yes, I had a beautiful dream,” she replied; “but when I awoke I seemed to have forgotten it all. This is always the case with my dreams, however; and perhaps it is as well, for I suppose you will think it a great waste of time to try and remember them.”

“Well, I daresay your days are not so fully occupied that you cannot afford to spare a short time for such an innocent amusement,” said Milroy, smiling. “I hope, however, you have not to be back so early as usual to-day, for I want to take a long walk.”

“ My aunt knows I have gone to meet you, so I can remain a little longer ; you see I am very honest, and tell her all I do. Is there anything improper in our walking in the woods alone in this way ; do people do such things in the great world you tell me of ? ”

Milroy was amused at the *naïveté* of Mary's question and the innocence of mind it evinced. It was this guileless openness and simplicity, so fresh and winning, that had gained his heart.

“ A good deal depends upon the age and character of the person with whom you happened to be taking these woodland rambles, Mary, dear. Now, if I were a venerable old gentleman, with gold spectacles, and a thick umbrella under my arm, the world would see not the slightest impropriety in my being intrusted to accompany a beautiful and modest young girl in her walk through the woods. ”

“ Then I am afraid you mean that it is

not quite right our going about by ourselves in this way," said Mary, seriously, and with a downcast look; "but still my aunt does not mind, and she would never allow me to do anything wrong. I feel quite safe with you, too, Mr. Milroy; I am sure I would trust myself anywhere under your protection," she added, looking up sweetly into her lover's face, and gently clasping his proffered arm. The most hardened profligate could not have seen that confiding look of exquisite purity without feeling some emotion.

"You may well trust me, dearest, for I would stab any one to the heart who dared to injure a hair of your head," replied Milroy, vehemently; and he strode on silently for a few minutes, softly pressing the arm that clung to his own. Mary felt proud of her protector, and then, indeed, experienced the full tide of ecstasy that throbs in the veins of the woman who abandons herself to the exquisite delights of a first and fer-

vent love. She seemed bathed in an atmosphere of perfect joy, and felt a sort of languid sensation, which made it delicious to lean on the man she had made the idol of her heart. All consciousness of aught except the ethereal passion of the moment vanished away, and though Milroy had never yet told her how fully her feelings were reciprocated, still a kind of sympathetic electric current appeared to pass between them which revealed to Mary that she was beloved. It is this wondrous sense of perfect abandonment to the joy of the moment, this disregard of any chilling contingencies or prudential considerations, which constitutes the sweetest charm of the newly-felt rapture that pervades the lover's frame. Why should we seek to mar the divine bliss that attends this first glimpse into the realms of Paradise, and suffer the mind to be for one instant distracted by cold or sordid calculations! How greatly is the miserable being to be pitied who has

not a soul that can be moved by love, whose benumbed and stagnant sensibilities refuse to be kindled into warmth even by the witchery of woman! The man has lived in vain who has never loved; and though he may pass along the pathway of life heedless of the roses that shed their fragrance around, he will assuredly ere long enter upon those dreary solitudes where no flowers can ever bloom.

It was some time before either of the lovers spoke, as Mary was fully absorbed in the enjoyment of sensations so novel, and Milroy still hesitated before avowing what he really felt.

“I have one favour to ask you, Mary, dear, and it is that you will call me Edward; I think we know one another well enough now,” said Milroy, at length.

“Indeed I will,” replied Mary, eagerly. “I like the name so much, and it seems so cold always to call you Mr. Milroy.”

“Now we understand one another, and



you must always come to me when you are in any doubt or difficulty," said the latter. "I shall be very exacting, and feel that I could listen to you for hours."

"I am only too anxious for you to know everything that passes in my mind, Edward; but, indeed, very many of my thoughts are of you, and I am never tired of remembering all your kind words."

"Oh, you do think of me sometimes during my absence, Mary," said Milroy, in a slightly absent tone, for he was inwardly debating what course to pursue as to making his sentiments known.

"Think of you sometimes!" exclaimed Mary, her open, truthful eyes fondly resting on her lover—"when rather are you out of my thoughts? At least, that is, you know I cannot help often thinking of you, Mr.—Edward, I mean," continued Mary, timidly; and a deep blush overspread her face when the full import of what she had said came home to her mind.

“Dear, good girl,” said Milroy, impulsively, “what a treasure your heart will be to the man who wins it!”

Not a word did Mary utter; but no one could mistake the deep meaning of the silent gaze with which she regarded Milroy, saying more eloquently than the most impassioned phrases—“Ah, Edward, why do you trifle with my feelings by affecting not to understand what, in the excitement of the moment, I have just divulged? I am naturally open-hearted, unskilled in the art of dissembling; and if I have betrayed my secret, for pity’s sake do not take advantage of this to buoy me up with false ideas, but rather at once destroy my peace of mind for ever and tell me that I am deceived in my love. Then can I lie down and die; for why need I live longer now that the hopes which led me on to pure happiness are ruthlessly dashed to the ground!”

Milroy could not withstand that gaze; it dispelled at once the chilling, selfish doubts

that hung like unwholesome vapours about his heart. The clear rays which streamed from the eyes of a pure-minded girl in a moment burst through the misty clouds that obscured his better judgment.

“I must go on; the die is cast!” he muttered to himself; then, exclaiming aloud as he firmly clasped the gentle hand that lay within his own—

“Mary, you shall know all—you shall know that I love you. I cast aside all reserve now, and tell you this with the full knowledge of what it will lead to, for you are, indeed, worthy of all the devotion I can offer. In doing this I make a sacrifice you will at some future time understand; at present, let me quaff to the full the nectar draught which a merciful Providence offers. Dearest, you can form no estimate, from what you know of me, of the real nature of my love. Now I can really enjoy the sweets of life; with you by my side I wish for no more.”

Milroy spoke in a quick, excited tone, and there was a strange, almost an unearthly fire in his eye, which Mary, even deeply moved as she also was, could not help noticing with a sort of shudder. It was but a momentary, though a singularly wild glare, and had scarce appeared ere it died away into a glowing gaze of inexpressible tenderness. Mary saw the change, and her surcharged bosom was relieved by a deep sigh, followed by some tears of soul-felt joy, which she tried to conceal by bending her eyes to the ground.

“Why do you weep, my sweet pet,” said Milroy, noticing Mary’s emotion.

“Because I feel so happy, dearest,” she replied, looking up in her lover’s face with a glance so full of gentleness and beauty as to thrill through his heart.

As she spoke she laid her head close upon his breast, and they both, by one impulse as it were, seemed to register a vow of unalterable love. They leaned against a venerable

oak tree, whose gnarled trunk was encircled by a few green tendrils of ivy, and whose hoary branches had cast their shade over many generations of lovers long since mouldered into dust. Neither wished to speak; it was so delicious to feel the throbbings of each other's heart, more eloquent even than the ardent glances of their eyes.

“My beautiful Mary, what are you thinking of,” said Milroy, as he imprinted his first kiss on her soft cheek.

“I was almost wondering, dearest Edward, if all this can be true; it seems to me like a dream, and yet, silly girl that I am, do I not read in your eyes that it is all true. And you are now mine, and nothing can ever separate us! Oh, what joy there is in this thought!”

“Yes, love, I am indeed yours; but,” added Milroy, compressing his lips for a moment as though to repress some disquieting thought that rushed across his mind, “you

know that I must be absent occasionally for a little time to come."

A disappointed expression crossed Mary's face at these words, and her voice was tremulous as she replied—

"But may I not go with you, Edward, dear, when you leave again? Surely I shall not be in the way; I promise to do all you tell me. Oh, say that I can!"

Milroy was touched to the quick by the imploring tenderness of Mary's words, and bitter was the inward emotion he felt, for well he knew they must part very soon for a long period. Indeed, it was partly the knowledge that his stay here was so uncertain, and his return might be so long deferred, that prevented him from declaring his love to Mary ere now.

"My own Mary must dry her eyes," he began, soothingly, "and not make herself unhappy. She knows that, till I return to make her my bride, the days and hours will be to me at best but weary and full of gloom.

It will only be for a few short months, and then, when once more the voice of spring summons the birds to carol amid the young leaves, and the first flowerets scent the morning air, I will hasten to clasp my Mary to my bosom."

Poor Mary's tears still continued to flow, and a sad reaction began to set in after the bewildering ecstasy she had just experienced. Milroy, who was a keen observer, and had studied the human countenance well, was grieved when he remembered that he could at any rate have concealed for a short space longer the fact of having to leave the village. Come what might, he resolved that the brightness of the moment should no longer be overcast.

"Cruel one that I am thus to play with you," said Milroy. "Believe me, now, Mary, when I say, that henceforth we shall never be parted; without you I cannot live."

In an instant the sunshine again beamed in Mary's face, and she gazed with rapture

on her lover. Fondly did she return the gentle pressure of his arm, and her cup of joy once more overflowed.

“ Oh, Edward, how changed do I feel even since this morning. I could sing aloud for pure happiness, and my blood seems to dance through my veins. Even the leaves seem of a more beautiful green than they were when I left the cottage, and the song of the lark high above our heads is doubly sweet. I want no books now, my attention would every instant wander to you, dearest. I shall sit still and think of you each minute of the day I have to myself.”

“ Stop, stop, Mary, this is too much ; you must not make me vain. Everything in moderation, for if you go on so fast as this you will exhaust your love, and then, when we are married, I shall be sorry you have lavished it away.”

“ Never fear for me, Edward ; my love will last for ever, and so will yours, too, dear — will it not ?” said Mary, with an arch look.



“Can you doubt me, sweetest?” replied Milroy, again kissing the willing lips placed so temptingly close to his own.

“Now, I can tell you all my thoughts, Edward, and confide everything to your keeping; you will look kindly upon all my faults I hope, and show me how to do right. I will keep a diary, as you told me I ought, and write down every idea as it occurs to me, that you may see the progress I make. You know, dear, I must try to be worthy of so clever and gifted a husband as you, for I dare say you will want to go and visit your friends in the great city of London, and I must not let the simple country girl put you to the blush by her ignorance.”

“My own Mary, you will soon know as much as I do; and only think how delightful it will be for me to guide your mind towards fresh channels of thought, and, to the best of my poor ability, show you the way to cultivate your understanding. In the meantime let us think of nothing but

love; let me sun myself in the light of your eyes, and revel in the sweets of a first passion."

Milroy's words at times contrasted strangely with the apparent calmness and gravity of temperament which at first he seemed to wish to impress upon Mary. This day, however, he had appeared under a different character, and there was at times a singular wildness in his words, and a vague abstractedness in his demeanour. He seemed to have made up his mind to yield to the impulse of the moment, stifling as it were the disquieting fancies and saddening recollections that threw their ominous shadows over the present happy scenes.

Mary was so wrapped up in the new-born transports of joy that had been unfolded to her, as not to observe the occasional symptoms of suppressed emotion which Milroy displayed. They were now over, and the lovers strolled on through the woods indulging in sweet communion of

thoughts and fond interchange of confidences sacred to the new relation in which they stood to one another. The hours sped rapidly on, and the shades of evening beginning to close in, warned them that it was time to part. A last lingering embrace they took ere Mary crossed the little brook that ran before the cottage; and Milroy arranged to meet her at the same hour on the morrow. Mary gazed after him till his form was lost in the gloom of the wood, and inwardly breathed a prayer of gratitude for the dawning joys that had so suddenly burst upon her.

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Milroy paced his chamber that evening in deep meditation; his books lay untouched, and even the writing materials he had spread out were left unheeded. A strange reaction must have set in to cause his features to wear the terribly haggard look of anxiety they now had. Where was the transient flush of joy that lighted up his

dark eye when Mary innocently revealed her love that afternoon? What meant this sudden paroxysm that sought to wrench asunder the golden chains which he had linked round the trusting heart of that pure girl?

“What have I done?” he exclaimed, unable to bear his feelings any longer. “Why did I seek this happy solitude only to bear woe in my train? I have won the heart of a beautiful and confiding girl, and evoked a spirit in her bosom seemingly of radiant loveliness; but ah! too soon will it prove her ruin. Fool that I was not to tear myself away when I saw what must come. Fool did I say! nay rather I acted as a monster, a murderer, who for the selfish gratification of a momentary passion destroys another’s happiness for ever. And all this to take place when I was endeavouring to withdraw myself beyond the reach of temptation, and carrying out a plan I had well deliberated on! Must I now abandon

her, and desolate the fair flower which has sprung up so suddenly, and blossomed so sweetly? For her sake I ought; and the blow may bruise, but will not so utterly crush, this fond girl, as if it came upon her when her hopes have taken deeper root. Cursed be my evil lot, that prompts me to mar the prospects which otherwise were so serene. Delay and doubts now will but deepen the injury I have wrought, therefore let me summon all my fortitude to dethrone the idol I had suffered to usurp the place of reason. Henceforth my heart must be dead to all feelings of love; I must wrap myself up in a panoply of frigid isolation, and close my ears to the tender sighs of passion."

It was late ere Milroy sought relief from his troubled thoughts in slumber; but when he did, he could not shut out from his wearied brain the tormenting phantoms that chased away the [repose he vainly courted.

## CHAPTER VII.

LIFE on board a well-appointed yacht is one round of indolent enjoyment, seasoned with the zest of ever-changing novelty in the scenes past which the voyagers tranquilly glide, unless when a continuance of dead calms causes the trim vessel to rock idly on the gently heaving ocean. As long as the land is close under the bows an ever-varying panorama passes before the eyes of those luxuriously reclining among the cushions that are strewed over the deck. The rippling sound of the dancing wavelets against the yacht's sides makes a sweet and soothing music which falls lightly on the ear; green fields, smiling in their summer vestments; long reaches of white glistening

sands ; jutting promontories of rock, fantastically hung with seaweed, or standing out in dark relief against the surrounding verdure ; fishermen's cottages, with the blue smoke curling upwards from the roof, and the ruddy children playing by the door ; occasionally a ruined castle, frowning in lone grandeur over the quiet waters of a sheltered bay ; anon a white lighthouse, with its sharply-cut walls and trimly kept garden at the back, standing like a friendly guardian to watch over the mariner's safety ; perhaps a wave-washed village, with its cottages sparkling in the sunbeams ; and the small cluster of masts denoting the harbour which shelters the imperilled fishing-boats, when the storm arises—all present a prospect of ever-changing interest and novelty. Glancing to the other side of the vessel, the voyager's eye wanders over a broad expanse of blue ocean, with bright shining patches of sunlight intervening between the dark hue of the surface, faintly

rippled by the light breeze. A passing cloud hides the face of the sun, and in an instant the waters assume a leaden-coloured tinge, but soon again smile into the same lustre as before ; here and there a rock-bound islet rises out of the deep, barren it may be of all herbage save the few scanty blades of grass and grey lichens that scarcely yield the seagull materials for her simple nest; towards the far-off horizon a dim haze throws its deceptive veil over the faint line where the sky and waters seem to meet; occasionally a passing ship, with every sail set to catch the favouring breeze, gives variety to the monotonous waste of waters ; or a cluster of fishing-boats may be seen, their busy crews intently watching the sunken nets which yield them a frugal subsistence ; high over the mast's head the seafowl wheel their circling flight, every now and then a solitary bird sinking with a sudden splash into the waves, while others are calmly floating on the surface, basking in the



warm rays of the sun. All these various objects strike the beholder's eye as he lolls at ease on the deck, and fill his mind with a succession of pleasant tranquil thoughts, the true *dolce far niente* of delicious reverie.

Of course this picture has its reverse, when angry storms lash the sea into fury, and the blinding rain drives all below save those who watch over the safety of the yacht; but this only makes the succeeding fair weather more enjoyable. Then, if the vessel is within reach of land, the captain will take care to moor her in some sheltered and secure anchoring place, where she will ride out the gale unharmed. While bad weather lasts, the voyagers make themselves comfortable in the well-appointed cabin, where books, selected with discrimination, or portfolios of sketches and engravings, offer food to the mind, and cards, chess, music, or letter-writing, fill up the intervals of time both pleasantly and profitably.

With a genial party of friends, and so many appurtenances of enjoyment at hand, there is no excuse for weariness or ennui; and even the lowest form of animal gratification, in such a yacht as we have been describing, is certain to be insured—namely, an irreproachable *cuisine*. What more need be wished for? Here are luxurious quarters, pleasant company, a perfect table, abundance of mental recreation, and, above all, full liberty to roam wheresoever is agreed upon—all provided for the yachting party. Strangely must those be constituted who cannot derive both health and enjoyment under such agreeable circumstances.

The yacht's course, by Mr. De Vaux's orders, was kept as near the land as possible in order that the party on board should see the beauties of the coast. Being a fine mountainous seaboard of Scotland along which the favouring breeze was rapidly taking them, the views were often picturesque and grand. Ida proved herself a

very fair sailor, and seemed to experience nothing unpleasant in the lively tossings of the yacht as she bounded lightly over the waves. With her sketch-book ever at hand, she would occasionally take a rapid pencilling of some rugged mountain outline that struck her fancy; and, when tired gazing at the views, turned over the leaves of some of her favourite authors. The baron consumed endless numbers of cigars, indulging the while in those cloudy reveries the fragrant weed is supposed to engender; indeed at all times he was a man of few words, though, when he spoke, his conversation was sensible and to the point. De Vaux sometimes read, and often sat near Ida, calling her attention to such scenery as struck his fancy. Then he would pace the deck, and even take the helm for a spell, watching with interest those evolutions of the sailors consequent upon a change in the yacht's course or a stiffening of the breeze.

On several occasions they came to anchor

in one of the numerous inlets of the sea which promised a view of some fine scenery, and landed to take a short excursion on foot. It made a pleasant variety to be able to tread the heathery slopes of those wild valleys far beyond the route of tourists, and rarely visited even by the hardy shepherd. The days sped rapidly past, and ere long the coast began to change its character, for they had now rounded the extreme north of Scotland, and were about to strike across the North Sea for the shores of Norway. It was Aubrey's intention to run a little way up one or two of the fiords of that iron-bound coast, and then shape his course for the Baltic.

Ida was greatly pleased with the Norwegian fiords, which amply fulfilled the expectations she had formed of them, and regretted they had not a longer time to spend in examining those remarkable arms of the sea. The simple character of the few peasants they saw during their short rambles

on shore made a favourable impression upon her. She would like to have taken some lengthened tours inland, but De Vaux now gave orders to hurry on with all speed to Elsinore, at which town he expected to find letters of importance.

It was a pleasant, warm evening when the yacht entered the harbour of this famous seaport, and as soon as she had taken up her moorings a boat was despatched for the letters. Ida had few correspondents, and therefore took little interest in the departure of the messenger. Aubrey was standing silently by the helm watching the gradually sinking rays of the sun as they faded from the higher portions of the town. He was thinking of Ida, for during the voyage they had naturally been thrown greatly together, and many traits in her character had been developed which he never observed before. He could not blind himself to the fact that she was beginning to regard him with feelings somewhat warmer than mere

friendship, although Ida flattered herself that he had no notion of their existence. These symptoms might have passed unnoticed had his attention not been called to them by the tell-tale blush that always tinged her cheeks when they first met in the morning. Still, the sensation was not a disagreeable one, to feel that a young and beautiful girl cherished a secret passion for him, although it would one day entail a scene when it was necessary to dissipate the fond illusion. Indeed he felt that the sooner this was done the better, but, with Aubrey's accustomed irresolution, he preferred to let matters go on as they were. This vacillation and infirmity of purpose had been his greatest bane throughout life.

After a while the messenger returned, and delivered to Aubrey the packet of letters he had been expecting. Several of them he perused in silence, but the next, written in a lady's delicate hand, drew from him an exclamation of surprise. It contained an intima-

tion that the writer's father, who was Aubrey's cousin, and almost the only relative he had left, was on his deathbed, and urgently wished to see De Vaux, as he had an important communication to impart.

"This is unfortunate, Ida," he exclaimed; "here is a letter summoning me to go and see a relative of mine who is just dying, and I hardly know what to do about it."

"I think you should start at once, if you feel it your duty to go," said Ida, with the generous promptings of a compassionate heart.

"But what will become of you, and how will you spend the time in a strange town until I return?"

"Oh, papa will take care of me, and we can make some excursions into the country. I should like to see something of Denmark."

"Let me see; how long will it take me to go by steamer to England and return. I may not get a vessel for some days; then

I suppose it requires two or three days to reach the Thames, and after that I have to go to the West of England where my cousin lives. At any rate I could not be back under three weeks: now will you not grow very impatient if you have to stay here that time?"

"Do not think of us at all; only consider your dying relative who makes this last request. Papa and I will wait here as long as you like, and I dare say we shall find plenty to do."

"Very well, Ida, I shall send a boat ashore to learn when the next steamer for England sails." And De Vaux turned away to give the necessary orders.

The prospect of Aubrey's departure threw a dulness over Ida's spirits, but she strove hard to appear cheerful. Having lately passed almost every hour in the day in his society, and he appearing to enjoy sitting by her side as she sketched, or reading aloud to her as they reclined on the deck, it was not



easy to reconcile herself to a sudden break in so much happiness.

Ida sometimes reflected that it was foolish of her to nourish the secret passion for De Vaux she found it impossible to subdue, for she had a consciousness how hopeless it must be. Could it be otherwise, when she remembered how so many proud, beautiful, and highly-born girls had striven to entangle him in their wiles. And yet she, a simple and unnoticed-dependent, presumed to covet so splendid a prize as the love of such a man. Much need had she of sober reflection after the dangerous temptations she had been subjected to, and the departure of De Vaux for England gave her an opportunity that might be turned to the best use.

It was ascertained that the English steamer happened to sail the very next day, and Aubrey soon made his preparations for departure. The baron was to remain in charge of the yacht during his absence, and Aubrey promised to let them know by the

earliest opportunity when he might be expected back. That evening, and most of the following morning, Aubrey was engaged in writing, and about noon started for England.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Now that Milroy had declared his love Mary had free scope to revel in her new-born sensations, and indulge in day-dreams full of pictures and scenes coloured with the glowing tints of a youthful fancy. She had awakened to a new sense of existence, and could not help wondering if there lived another girl so thoroughly happy as she was. Her destiny in life seemed to be fulfilled; her future lay clearly revealed to her eyes; she had been told by the man to whom her heart was given that all this intensity of love was returned; this was sufficient, and nothing now remained but to wait till they should be united never again to part.

With feelings such as these, it is not surprising that on the following morning Mary could eat little breakfast, seemed dreamy and abstracted, and did not answer when spoken to. Her sole wishes were that twelve o'clock would come, that being the hour when Milroy promised to call for her. As soon as possible she escaped to her room, and sitting down on a chair looked out of the open window in the direction where she knew Milroy to be. Fragrant with the sweet odours of wild flowers, and musical with the matin carollings of the birds, the soft breeze dallied amid her glossy curls. What a rare prize was the warm trusting heart so freely offered by this devoted girl! However pure may be the love of those brought up to regard marriage as a sacred duty, and nurtured in the refinements of polished life, there is always a certain faint colouring of conventionality inseparable from the position they occupy, and the doctrines inculcated from infancy, that detracts from

the perfect loveliness of the picture. But here was an instance of a woman yielding up her whole soul to the man she loved, abandoning herself a passive instrument to his will ; for at his bidding she would almost sacrifice her religion, her hopes of salvation, everything that she held most dear. She knew no future, even beyond the grave, without him ; she could think of nothing else than his fond words ; his image was for ever before her eyes.

Punctually to the appointed hour Milroy came to the cottage-door, and Mary, her heart beating tumultuously, flew to meet him. Oh ! the thrilling sensation of joy she felt as his lips touched hers. They wandered forth into the sunshine, and thence through the shady glades of the forest, until they emerged upon the sea-beach, near where the river we have before mentioned discharged its waters into the sea. Sitting down on a soft bank of white sand, under the shade of a lofty rock, they talked the hours

away as only lovers can. No pen could transcribe the conversation of lovers at such a time as this — or rather, the attempt ought not to be made. Every one will admit that the sentiments uttered, and the wishes formed, are wildly enthusiastic, exaggerated, and extravagant. Excess of passion leads to weakness, and no one would willingly lay bare the secrets of lovers in the first flush of their ecstasy. Mary was so absorbed by the joy of the moment that she did not mark the haggard look on Milroy's features, or the faint tremulousness of his hand. At times, too, he felt a sort of chill come over his spirit; but, ere long, these uneasy symptoms had vanished away in the presence of the affectionate girl whose heart beat against his own.

The rapidly lengthening shadows first warned the lovers that it was time to part, and with slow, lingering steps they turned towards home. Milroy had intended to tell Mary that it would be necessary for him to

leave the neighbourhood for a time; but knowing well what effect it would have upon her overwrought feelings, he could not bring himself to make the disclosure. This thought ever and anon flung its baleful shadow across the brightness of the moment, mingling the drop of gall with the sweet waters of love. Then pressing Mary to his side with renewed tenderness, he stifled the disquieting reflection. He resolved to be perfectly happy—at any rate, for that day—and, after awhile, all trace of uneasiness had disappeared. And so the hours sped on till the long summer's day came to an end.

\* \* \* \*

Milroy took leave of Mary at the cottage door, promising to be back at the same time to-morrow; and, with sad foreboding, turned his steps homewards. Mary sat down by her window, and watched his figure as long as he was in sight; then leaning back, thought over the happy day she had passed. Her reflections were in a little time dis-

turbed by the unwelcome appearance of the young artist, Lawrence, who could not bear any longer to remain in suspense, and had come to learn his fate. Directly she saw him it occurred to Mary for what purpose he had come ; and a more inopportune moment he could not have chosen, when her whole mind was filled with the thoughts of his rival. However, she deemed it best to undeceive him as quickly as possible ; and as her aunt happened to be out they had an opportunity for some undisturbed conversation.

“I happened to be passing by,” began Lawrence, with a beating heart, “and just looked in to see how you were. This has been a delightful day, has it not?”

“Yes, it has,” replied Mary, rather coldly ; “and I suppose you have been taking advantage of it for your drawing.”

“No ; I have done nothing in that way. The truth is, I have not much heart for my work now.”



“Indeed! Why should this be, Mr. Lawrence? Surely you cannot change so suddenly without some reason.”

“What if there be a reason?” he continued, with heightening colour and rapid utterance, “that changes the whole current of my existence, filling me with torturing doubts and anxieties. You must—you shall know all now!”

Mary felt that the sooner this painful scene was over the better, although she was sorry for the disclosure she must make of the hopelessness of Lawrence’s suit. She was nervous and agitated, too, after all the novel excitement of the day; and only hoped Lawrence would soon leave her in peace.

“Well, let me know what you mean, Mr. Lawrence, at once, for my aunt will soon be in, and she will wonder at our being alone together again,” said Mary, determined to bring matters to a crisis.

“Mr. Lawrence, indeed!” exclaimed the

young man, bitterly. "Oh! Mary; have you no kinder name for me than this? Can it be that you have not, ere now, read my secret, and guessed my love? Yes, my deep and passionate love for you, which has consumed within me from the first moment we met. I had intended not yet to have revealed this secret, until I might dare to hope that you would learn more of my character, and possibly look favourably on my suit. Oh! tell me I have not loved in vain; do not drive me to the lowest depths of despair!"

There was a tone of melancholy foreboding in the young man's words, as though he anticipated the reply that was to crush his hopes for ever, which rather touched Mary; but her resolution was formed from the first, and her reply was calm and decided.

"I must answer at once, and for ever, Mr. Lawrence—I cannot, can never love you. Even apart from any other conside-

ration, I have this day pledged my heart irrevocably to another.”

Mary's words, cold and clear, came with withering effect upon the unfortunate young man, utterly precluding the faintest vestige of hope. There was no mistaking their purport; and the announcement that her affections were given to another proved how completely his chance of ever gaining a more favourable verdict was gone. It was this circumstance, too, which imparted additional keenness to his misery, adding the pangs of jealousy to those of disappointed love. He buried his face in his hands, as though to hide the bitterness of the emotion he felt; and Mary could not help being touched by his sorrow.

“Then I must abandon all hope?” he said, at length looking up, “and pass a wretched life of despair. You will at least let me know who is my successful rival. But why need I ask; I suppose it must be that Milroy. I saw him here two days ago.”

The blush that rose to Mary's face clearly showed that his surmise was correct.

"I do not see that you have any right to require me to answer your question," replied Mary, with a trace of anger in her tone; "but I scorn concealment. You have guessed rightly who the person is I spoke of."

"Enough, enough! I wish to hear no more," said Lawrence, rising; "only I should like to see my rival, to congratulate him on his success!"

An unmistakeable intensity of hatred in the mocking manner in which these words were uttered, frightened Mary, who remarked also the livid look of rage on Lawrence's features.

"Oh! you would not seek to harm him?" she said, almost imploringly, apprehensive of what might ensue if the two met.

"Harm *your* lover: harm the man who has won *your* heart!" replied the other, with a bitter sneer. "Surely I am in-

capable of such conduct ; besides, I dare say he is well able to protect himself.”

Without another word, Lawrence left the cottage, and had disappeared ere Mary, who felt anxious and alarmed, she scarce knew why, could make any reply. As it was, she trembled visibly, and dreaded lest her aunt should return and see her agitated state. Repose was absolutely necessary to calm her nervous excitement, for during that day her bosom had been torn by most conflicting emotions. Poor Mary ! she who could not bear to give a moment's uneasiness to any one, had been compelled to inflict a terrible blow upon a man she had no cause to dislike. Still it was forced on her, and he might be very sure with sorrow and reluctance.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE waning moon had arisen, and flung her pale rays over earth and sea, silvering the hoar ruins of an ancient feudal keep that had for centuries crowned a rugged precipice of great depth overhanging the mouth of the river. Each mouldering battlement and ivy-hung tower stood out clearly defined against the sky, and deep shadows obscured those portions of the building that were not reached by the mellow light. Originally of great extent, the dilapidating hand of time had now destroyed large portions of the castle walls, but enough remained to show the lordly proportions they once attained. Large square courts, carpeted with grass, occupied the interior

spaces, from which vaulted flights of stairs gave access to the battlements above; long narrow corridors, pierced with small oblong windows, branched off from the different staircases leading to the various halls and apartments, where, in ages past, high revelry had been held, or deeds of horror and violence done. In some of them the vast yawning fireplaces still remained comparatively uninjured, and square openings in the walls, at regular intervals, showed where the massive beams forming the roof had once stood. It was a scenewhere imagination loves to picture the time when those chambers were filled with the motley groups they sheltered in days long since gone by. The dauntless knights, the proud and courtly ladies, the trim pages in gay liveries, the troops of inferior retainers, all gathered round the noble host who presided at the banquet, rise up vividly to view. The merry laugh which followed the keen jest; the responsive sigh from some fair one who hears a soft

tale of love from the gallant cavalier by her side; the strains of music mingling with the voices of the revellers; the acclamations that followed some favourite toast—all, all are stilled for ever. Standing alone in that deserted court, no sound breaks upon the stranger's ear save the faint rustle of the fitful breeze amid the ivy leaves, and the hollow murmur of the restless waves as they beat upon the rocks far below.

Built as the castle was on the verge of the precipice, many of its windows overlooked the waves, and were guarded by iron bars, now all corroded with rust. Down in the face of the rock narrow slits, with cross-bars in front, showed where the vaults and dungeons were situated. Terribly suggestive were those grim and scanty apertures of the dark and lonesome caverns, to which they lent a feeble light. Immured in those living tombs, the wretched captives might breathe their prayers to heaven, or yell out deep curses of despair, but no



human voice could ever respond: the pealing of the thunder-storm, or the roaring of the ocean in its fury, fell but faintly on the doomed prisoner's ear.

At one angle of the basement wall, facing the sea, a small square enclosure afforded a coign of vantage whence a watch could be kept over the coast on either side of the castle. The walls guarding this court were of great thickness but moderate height, and near the centre of the outermost battlement an embrasure was formed, protected by massive iron bars, over which the sentinel might safely look down upon the beach below. When the tide was at its extreme ebb point only a narrow margin of strand was visible, but generally the base of the precipice was covered by the waves. Round the court itself a strong *banquette* of masonry was built, as it seemed to have been judged important that a fire could be directed upon any enemy venturing to attack the castle from the sea.

A solitary stranger was now slowly pacing the interior of the court with measured tread, as if in deep thought. It was Edward Milroy who kept watch so late, and whose steps woke the slumbering echoes of the old tower. He had only a few days before visited the spot for the first time, but its weird, ruined aspect struck his fancy, and evoked recollections of other scenes. Something in the solemn antiquity of the venerable ruins, and the perfect seclusion of the spot from the outward world, with its busy tide of life, harmonized with the emotions by which he was at present swayed. Here he might muse for hours without a chance of any one breaking in upon his retirement, and each time he visited the castle the impression was deepened. Even during the daytime, when the bright sunshine lit up the dim corridors and streamed through each vaulted chamber's narrow window, there was an impressive stillness which could not fail to strike the most stolid visitor. It was not as though

the castle stood surrounded by cottages and corn fields—a relic of the past in the midst of the dwelling-places of a hard-working population—for in such a site the hum of the outer world jars upon the ear of the artist or poet who strives to avail himself of the ideas the scene calls forth. For a considerable distance around, a barren common thickly covered with gorse intervened between the ruins and the richly wooded country beyond. Emerging from the woods the visitor had to cross this heath before he could gain the castle to enjoy the noble sea-view to be obtained from its battlements. A few sheep scattered over the common tried to pick their scanty grazing from such portions which the furze had not overrun, and in the noonday heat of the sun sought the shade of the castle walls. To gain an entrance the visitor first passed through a small postern gate; as the principal doorway had been for many years built up. All the outermost walls were in a good state of pre-

servation, and any gaps caused by the masonry having given way had been filled up, the lord of the manor wishing to arrest as much as possible the gradual decay of so fine a specimen of ancient baronial splendour.

Alone amid the mouldering walls and long deserted courts paced Edward Milroy. It was an hour and a spot in which few men save those of the most fearless nature would care to find themselves. Although owing to the situation of the castle, far removed from any path travellers were likely to take, there was little danger to be apprehended from mere midnight marauders, still the perfect impunity with which a deed of lawless violence could be committed was plainly apparent. As it was, a terrible interest attached itself to the very court in which Milroy now stood, though he was ignorant of the horrid tradition. Many years since an unfortunate gentleman, who was riding at night along the neighbouring road, with a

considerable sum of money on his person, was waylaid by highwaymen who infested the district. Being a strong and courageous man, he made a determined resistance, but was overpowered, dragged off his horse, and robbed of the gold he incautiously carried. Enraged at his stubborn defence, and hoping to prevent any chance of future identification, the brutal assailants bore their helpless victim to the old castle, where, in the very court before-mentioned, they completed their crime by murder. Thinking to hide all proofs of the foul deed, they threw the body over the iron rails of the embrasure into the waves beneath. A large reward was offered by the relatives of the unhappy traveller for the apprehension of those implicated in his murder, and, one of the band turning king's evidence, the whole crime was divulged, and the murderers brought to justice. Thus, after nightfall the ruins were shunned by such as had to cross the common, as though they feared the spectre of the murdered man

might suddenly appear; and even during the daytime few cared to loiter alone in the remote enclosure where the deed was perpetrated.

Milroy drank in the tranquil beauty of the scene, undisturbed by those dismal ideas which might have forced themselves on his mind had he known what a dark tragedy had been enacted in that very spot. He watched the moonbeams quivering on the gently-heaving ocean, and thought of the pure-minded girl who had given him her love. One or two bats were wheeling their silent flight above his head, and at intervals the shrill whoop of an owl resounded from a tower at the other end of the castle. He had not meant to extend his walk thus far, but, tempted by the beauty of the night, had strolled on and on until he reached the ruins. Accustomed to walk abroad when most men retire to rest, he preferred those paths which were least frequented. To those possessed of restless, unquiet dispositions, there is

something wonderfully soothing in the silence of night when the curtain of sleep has descended upon the world. No disturbing and rude sounds of vulgar labour, or ordinary domestic life grate unpleasantly upon the ear, but everything is hushed into a solemn stillness. More especially is this the case when one is standing under the open canopy of heaven, at a distance from any human habitations, and surrounded by the mementoes of bygone generations. No place is more suggestive of thoughts such as these than the ruins of a castle on the sea-shore by moonlight, and the least sound or motion is magnified tenfold when all around is dark, tranquil, and mysterious. The ear is acutely alive to the slightest motion of even the smallest animal, and what during the day would pass unnoticed, at midnight is invested with a singular and intense interest.

Slowly up and down the narrow court did Milroy pace. At last he stopped, and, lean-

ing over the iron grating, looked down upon the calm ocean far below. The moonbeams resting upon the mouldering bastions and towers gave a spectral hue to some of the more prominent objects, and a heated imagination might easily have fancied that the shades of their former inhabitants hovered round the spot.

All at once the sound of a footstep fell upon Milroy's ear with perfect distinctness, and it appeared to come from a distant part of the ruins. There was no mistaking the sound; it was a firm, decided footfall, although instantly afterwards the previous death-like stillness pervaded the castle. Milroy listened intently, while his heart involuntarily beat quicker, but all was silent as the grave. Many minutes passed, and still the same awful, almost unnatural, quiet. He began to think it must only have been fancy, when once more the mysterious tread woke the slumbering echoes. This time it was repeated, and it became evident that



some unknown person was moving in the direction Milroy now stood. Again the sound stopped, and all was still. Milroy, though a bold man, could not help feeling startled, and instinctively grasped still tighter in his hand the stout oaken staff he carried. He wondered who the mysterious visitant could be, for the hour and the place seemed to render it certain that his moonlight ramble would not be disturbed. Evidently it was no one who wished to conceal his motions, or to steal upon him unobserved, for no care was taken to avoid the noise necessarily made in walking amidst the mouldering *débris*. Milroy's first impulse was to advance and accost the stranger, who, like himself, thus wandered abroad while others reposed, but on second thoughts he refrained. Nearer and nearer drew the footsteps until at length the figure of a man appeared in the clear moonlight standing on a projecting point of the castle rock, about thirty yards from where Milroy

was. The stranger remained motionless for a few minutes, and was turning away when he caught sight of Milroy, who, on his part, recognised the young man Lawrence, of whom Mary had spoken.

Not for a moment did Lawrence hesitate when he saw before him the man who had supplanted him in the affections of the girl he loved; but instantly quitting the spot where he stood, in a few seconds had gained the enclosed court, and was face to face with Milroy ere the latter had recovered from the surprise occasioned by so unexpected a rencontre. The unhappy youth had wandered about, he scarce knew whither, since his interview with Mary that evening; and being a person of wild and excitable disposition, he did not wish to appear before his friends in this disturbed state, lest his secret should be discovered. It was strange that fate should have brought the rivals together at so unlikely a spot and hour for meeting; but thus it was,

and who could tell what the issue might be?

“We have met before, I think,” said Milroy, calmly, not knowing to what cause to attribute the ill-concealed hate visible in Lawrence’s countenance, though a suspicion of it did cross his mind.

“Yes, indeed, we have; and you must remember in whose company it was,” returned the other with a bitter sneer.

The whole truth was now evident to Milroy, who replied quietly, resolving not to force on a quarrel.

“Like myself, I presume, you are fond of a stroll by moonlight; but I certainly did not expect to find any one in these lonely ruins at this hour of the night.”

“Doubtless, it must be delightful for you to take a moonlight walk, but I wonder you have no companion. Surely the girl whose love you have won would have been only too happy to be with you,” said Lawrence, in the same bitter tone.

“What do you mean, sir?” demanded Milroy, with rising temper. “That is a subject on which I will have no jesting.”

“Well, at any rate the laugh is on your side,” returned the other; “but perhaps I may be even with you some day.”

“Without further preface, I am to understand that we are rivals in love,” said Milroy, with perfect composure; “well, be it so. The lady has, I think, given her decision, and I am perfectly content with the verdict. As it is now growing rather late, and I am some distance from home, I have the honour to wish you a very good night.”

With these words, uttered in a tone of calm courtesy that was doubly galling to the man who was smarting under the pangs of rejected love, Milroy was about to step down from the embrasure, against whose sides he had been resting, when Lawrence seized his arm, and took up a position to prevent his departure.

“Stop, sir; we do not part thus,” said Lawrence, in an excited tone. “I have a right to demand from you an answer to certain questions, and here I stand to enforce that right.”

Milroy drew back, and folding his arms across his breast, leant with his back against the iron grating of the embrasure, and surveying Lawrence from head to foot, replied with an air of composure and perfect politeness—

“I am disposed to make every allowance for the present unfortunate circumstances in which you are placed, and will be happy to afford you any satisfaction in my power; but I must request you to be brief.”

Lawrence strove hard to control his passionate fury, for he was conscious how great a disadvantage it placed him under in dealing with so cool an adversary. It was a strange sight at that solemn hour of the night, in those lone ruins, all flooded with the pale moonlight, to see those two men

standing face to face in that narrow court. Then the horrid tradition that hovered over the spot—the bloody struggle that these stones had once witnessed—gave an intensely dramatic interest to the scene.

“I will not detain you long,” began Lawrence, with tolerable quietness of manner, though his words grew more impassioned as he proceeded; “but as we may perhaps never meet again, I wish to avail myself of this opportunity. To be brief, then, let me tell you that I too loved Mary Forester with all the passionate ardour of a first love. Oh! the rapture that I felt when first she seemed to smile upon my suit, for I mistook the kindly sympathy she evinced in my pursuits for emotions of a more tender nature. I would dwell for hours upon the memory of some simple words which appeared to me—fool that I was—to indicate that I occupied some place in her thoughts. Miles and miles would I walk, and long hours would I wait, only to

catch a momentary glimpse of the dear girl; in short, I loved her with the most passionate devotion. Blinded by my love, I never perceived that it was not returned; and only this day did I learn the fatal truth that renders my life a miserable void, and will assuredly drive me from my home a vagabond and an outcast!"

Here the unhappy youth could not conceal his emotion, but covering his face with his hands, was silent for some minutes.

Milroy did not utter a word, remaining motionless as before; but he really felt touched with pity for the suffering he witnessed.

Well would it have been had Lawrence allowed his grief to have spent itself, and reason again to assert its sway, but his evil passions once more gained the ascendant.

"This is childish," he exclaimed, "but it is over; and now I demand from you an answer to this question—are your intentions towards that innocent girl honourable?"

The reason Lawrence put this question was because there was something in Milroy's appearance indicating that he moved in a superior grade of life to that of the pretty cottage girl, whose heart he had won ; thus engendering the suspicion that honourable marriage was not his object. Though his love had been rejected, still the young artist cherished such feelings towards Mary as to render her welfare and honour objects of his tenderest solicitude.

Well meant as was Lawrence's intention in demanding from Milroy an answer to his question, it had an unfortunate effect upon the latter, who replied, haughtily—

“What can you take me for, that you imagine I would condescend to tell you what my motives may be? What right or authority have you to constitute yourself the guardian over that girl's interests? Surely, you had a tolerably plain intimation from her that any further acquaintance or communication between you should cease,



and I desire to hear nothing more on this subject.”

Maddening in the last degree to Lawrence was the cool tone of superiority in which these words were uttered, and he felt inspired with the bitterest hatred and animosity towards his successful rival. A vague and horrid longing to be revenged for the ignominious slight which he had sustained took possession of Lawrence's mind. He seemed suddenly indued with supernatural strength, and felt as though, without much effort, he could crush Milroy beneath his feet. Not a jot cared he for the consequences that might follow any deed of violence, so long as this newborn feeling of vengeance was gratified, for his reasoning faculties were obscured by the tumultuous passion of the moment. The demon was at his elbow whispering revenge, and no guardian angel stood near to stay his hand. They were miles from any human beings; it was an hour when sleep seals all eyes,

and no earthly witness could ever summon him before the dread tribunal of justice. Not a sound was to be heard throughout the old ruins, for even the wakeful owl from the distant watch-tower had ceased her melancholy whoop, and the ocean below was slumbering as an infant in its cradle. Far up in the sky the clear lamp of night diffused a wan and ghostly lustre over earth and sea, and its rays streamed into the long-deserted court where those two men stood face to face. Naught stirred save the little bat, which still wheeled her silent, but restless flight over their heads.

Drops of cold perspiration stood on Lawrence's brow, and he shuddered inwardly as he felt the horrible spell of the fiend pervading his spirit. And yet he was not stealing with noiseless footfall upon his slumbering victim, as the guilty Thane of Fife approached his aged monarch; for there, erect and facing him, was Edward Milroy, a man in the prime of youth and strength.

“Then, I understand you still refuse to satisfy me?” said Lawrence, in a hollow and strangely altered voice.

“I again repeat, that I do not admit your right to say a single word to me on the subject; and if you persist in such a course, I can only award such insolence the chastisement it deserves,” replied Milroy, scornfully; and drawing out his cigar-case, bent slightly to one side as he struck a light against the iron rail at his back.

These words were scarcely uttered ere Lawrence, taking advantage of the other being off his guard, sprung at his throat with a tiger-like rush, and by the weight of his body added to the impetus of the attack, forced Milroy completely over the low iron railing before-mentioned as guarding the mouth of the embrasure. It was the work of an instant; and such was the violence with which Lawrence threw himself on his hated rival, that both were very nearly precipitated into the sea below. As it was,

Milroy barely contrived to grasp the lowest iron bar with one hand, so arresting his fall, and the next moment seized it with the other, while he vainly sought some point of vantage on which to plant his foot, in order to swing himself to a place of safety. But to his horror, he found that he was dangling in mid-air, for immediately below the stone-work of the embrasure the rock shelved inwards, thus rendering it an impossibility, without help from above, for any one in his fearful position to regain a foothold. One despairing glance he cast down at the perfectly still sea far beneath him ; but though he was a good swimmer, the plunge from such a dizzy height must be certain death. The tide was at its full flood point, and there was ample depth of water, free from any sunken rocks, at this particular spot, but the drop down would be at least a hundred feet. Each rugged point of rock and fragment of wall was as distinctly visible in the clear moonlight as though it had been midday,

but Milroy sought in vain for any mode of extrication from his impending fate.

“Cowardly villain!” he gasped out, looking upwards at Lawrence, who watched the struggles of his hated rival with unmoved countenance. “Will you allow me to perish thus? Do but stretch over your hand and I swear solemnly that not a whisper of this will I ever utter to living soul.”

Not one word did Lawrence reply, but the steadfast and stony, yet horribly triumphant expression in his face, held out no hope that he would take pity on his victim.

“Will money, wealth, anything tempt you?” again demanded Milroy, who now felt his strength fast ebbing away.

Still the same unmoved, determined look—promises, entreaties, or curses, were but too evidently all alike vain. All that he uttered was—

“Wealth! Fool, do you think money

would tempt me? You do not know who I am!"

"Then, may the curse of a dying man cleave to you for ever!" hissed out Milroy, whose exhausted strength was but too apparent in the gradually relaxing grasp with which his hands encircled the rusty bar. He gnashed his teeth in the agony of the moment, to think that the bitterness of death was so near and he so helpless to arrest his doom. Could his foot but find the narrowest fissure, or even the least roughness in the treacherous and slippery rock, he had yet a chance of safety. All was in vain, and he only expended the feeble remnants of his strength in the frantic efforts he made. Besides, was not Lawrence keenly watching this terrible death struggle with cold remorseless eye; and if he saw the slightest chance of the unhappy man clambering up to his former position, would he not hurl him headforemost into the deep? As Milroy swung helplessly over the fatal abyss, years

of anguish seemed compressed into these few terrible moments; each evil deed was magnified tenfold; and he then too late remembered the solemn admonitions and warnings of his youth. The thread of life was about to be cut, but how ill prepared was he for death! Visions of paradise, with angels in pure white robes, and golden harps in their hands, shot for an instant across his reeling brain, followed, alas! by awful thoughts of the "worm that never dies, and the fire that is not quenched." Then, some innocent scenes of childish days would start up, and he seemed to hear once more the beloved tones of a mother's voice. Well remembered faces appeared before his eyes, and they wore a sorrowful expression, as though upbraiding him for opportunities of good neglected, or wanton injuries done. Milroy's face was in itself a horrible spectacle: his tongue protruded from the foaming mouth; naught but the bloodshot whites of his eyes were seen wildly rolling

about; the cold sweat of his death agony poured over his ghastly pallid cheeks; each knotted vein on his clammy forehead seemed distended almost to bursting; and his breath was with difficulty drawn in deep gasping sobs. It was an awful and a sickening sight, one over which the pen need no longer dwell with harrowing detail.

Still Milroy retained his presence of mind, though all hope on this side of the tomb seemed gone; and with one last effort he steadily poised himself, bringing both feet close together, so that his body was in a perfectly perpendicular position; then with an involuntary ejaculation of prayer he relinquished his hold of the iron rail, and the next instant, cleaving the still air with a great rush, dropped like a leaden weight into the sea.

A sudden reaction of feeling now came over Lawrence, and, when it was too late, he wished he had stretched forth a saving



hand. He dared not look over the fatal parapet, but as he heard the great splash in the calm, moonlit sea, turned away in horror from the spot, and fled through the old castle—an outcast and a murderer!

## CHAPTER X.

It was a bright warm morning, and the Baron and Ida were seated on the deck of the yacht watching those busy sights which the harbour of a thriving port generally presents. Ida usually worked at some trifling article of elegant embroidery, but this morning she brought up a book from the cabin; while the Baron, as usual, was enjoying one of his full-flavoured Havannahs. Most of the men had obtained leave of absence, and were spending their time, as British yacht sailors generally do on shore, in carousing at the cheap taverns, which are the curse of seaport towns, and quarrelling with one another when they were tired of fighting with the promiscuous herd of

foreign tars whom they encountered. Idleness and drunkenness unfortunately seem to go hand in hand—at least, in the case of those who man what may be called the pleasure navy of England—and this phase of nautical character is especially apparent in the yacht hands of the northern portion of our island. There is no more picturesque and beautiful yachting waters than are to be found all along the western coast of Scotland, and nowhere are crews more marked by the unfortunate characteristics we have mentioned. However, so long as the Baron was not brought into collision with the local authorities he did not care a jot what manner of roistering pleasures his friend's sailors indulged themselves in; while on board the yacht, of course, the strictest order and discipline were maintained.

“What should you like to do to-day, Ida?” observed the Baron, as he lighted a fresh cigar.

“Well, papa, I think I should like a ride. We might go along that road where we were obliged to turn back last time for the rain, and I don’t think we need be afraid of getting wet to-day.”

“With all my heart, my dear; only let me know when you wish to start, that the boat may be ready in time. I think in our next ride we shall have De Vaux for a companion—at least, in his letter this morning he talks of being here by the end of this week.”

Ida’s countenance flushed with a sudden glow of joy at these words—a change which the Baron noticed, although he made no remark at the time. Aubrey had been gone now upwards of a month, and during that period he had only written once or twice to the Baron. In fact, his letters usually were rather curt, for he disliked the trouble of writing; although, when he took pains, no one could dash off a more interesting and neatly-expressed epistle. The days seemed

to Ida to pass very slowly since his departure; and she now had a good opportunity of examining her heart, to probe the feelings she entertained towards De Vaux. There was no disguising the truth: she had allowed her imagination to dwell so much upon his image, and had associated him with all that gave its sweetness to her very existence, that her future destiny almost was dependent on Aubrey.

The day was well suited for a ride—not too hot, for the bright autumn season had now set in, tempering the atmosphere with cooling breezes; all the woods that here overspread the landscape were gilded with the glowing tints which paint the decay of the leaf with beauty; in the orchards, each apple-tree was decked with golden fruit, awaiting the time when they should be stripped of their treasures. Already had the somewhat scanty harvest been gathered in, and the busy peasants were securing the stacks from the dreaded gales of a northern

winter. The finely undulating country through which the Baron and Ida rode was well calculated to strike the tourist's eye, with its venerable woods, teeming orchards, picturesque thatched cottages, clean villages, and rich pasture-lands. As they passed along the single street, forming generally the whole extent of the village, no annoyance was experienced from the vulgar curiosity too often called forth by the appearance of foreigners, even in countries boasting of their intelligence and civilization. No peasantry in the world is more docile and warm-hearted than the Danish, and their simple virtues might well be imitated by the ignorant and turbulent population of our own manufacturing districts.

“How do you like the sort of life we are leading, Ida?” remarked the Baron, after they had ridden some distance in silence, and were now proceeding slowly up a slight ascent.

“Why do you ask this, papa, with such a serious air?” answered his daughter, laughing; “I am afraid I don’t think enough of the future, but only too much of present enjoyment.”

“You see, Ida, dear, you are now at an age when we must consider what is to become of you supposing I should happen to be carried off. Our position with De Vaux is a peculiar one—in fact, what an ill-natured world probably terms ambiguous; and it is absolutely necessary that, in the view of any unfortunate contingency, you should have a protector and guide.”

“Very true, papa, dear; but you are in the prime of life, and never have a day’s illness—and such, I fondly hope, may long be the case. It was only the abruptness of your question about my present life that surprised me a little, for I know what tender anxiety my welfare causes you.”

“Now you can understand better my fear of what the ill-natured world may say

of you in connexion with Aubrey De Vaux. You are an inmate of his house, of course under my immediate eye and protection; but the time may soon come when it might be necessary for me, acting in your interests, to break off the closeness of my intercourse with De Vaux."

Although she strove to hide it, the Baron could not help noticing the change that was too apparent in his daughter's countenance.

"I don't see what particular business the world has with our private arrangements with Mr. De Vaux," replied Ida, with a beating heart. "Surely we are not bound to take the opinion of those with whom we have no concern upon such a question."

"But, my child, can you not see another danger—one that peculiarly affects you? De Vaux is young, handsome, and, when he chooses, particularly fascinating in his manner; and I think your own good sense must point out to you that it is not ad-



visible you should be too much thrown in his way. Suppose, only for a moment, that you should allow yourself to take too tender an interest in—in short, to love this man—look what unhappiness would be in store for you.”

The blood rushed into Ida's cheeks at those words of her father's, for it was evident he had penetrated her secret. She did not know how to act, as he had hardly ever spoken to her on any of those delicate subjects which only a mother or an elder sister can fully enter into. Indeed, the Baron was in general little disposed to discuss with Ida anything more important than the usual topics which an easy tempered, middle-aged gentleman is accustomed to converse upon with his daughter. He had so long been used to consider her a mere child, and indeed saw so little of her amid the gaieties and splendours of De Vaux's princely establishment, that he even felt a little strange and awkward to find

himself touching upon a subject so delicate and difficult to handle. Not only this, but he was absolutely ignorant of the qualities and depth of his daughter's mind, so little mutual confidence and interchange of ideas had ever passed between them. Having been always under the care of a governess, Ida was seldom brought in contact with her father, except in presence of this lady or some of the constant succession of visitors who filled De Vaux's residences. Consequently this yacht voyage had done more to open up his daughter's character and disposition to the Baron than years of previous opportunities and experience, and he had learned enough to cause him some uneasiness. He fancied he detected an under-current of subtle and imperious self-will below the seeming outward simplicity and pliability of Ida's manner. There was a mixture of candour and evasive reticence in her conversation and remarks which puzzled her father, who now greatly regretted his

culpable negligence in not taking more interest in her early development and education. The truth was, Ida had, by being left so much alone, and having free access to De Vaux's large and admirably selected library, acquired and fostered a taste for deep study and meditation, which, coupled with an original turn of mind, resulted in moulding the girl, who most people thought merely shy and artless, though handsome and interesting, into a woman of quick, varied intellect, and powerful character. Although she regarded her father with all those feelings of affection natural to her sex, still she had formed no very high estimate of his powers of mind—because any one could see that the Baron was a mere man of the world, rather indolent, and fond of pleasure. Consequently she had not sought to open up the secrets of her heart to him, and rather depended on her own judgment in determining her course of action on different occasions. Therefore

she was a good deal surprised to find that her father had divined the state of her feelings towards De Vaux, for she was almost unwilling to own to herself that her love for the latter really existed.

“Well, but dear papa,” answered Ida, recovering her composure, “how could you suppose I should be so silly and vain as to imagine Mr. De Vaux ever looks upon me as anything more than a young girl full of romance and nonsense, if in fact he ever thinks of me at all?”

“Yes, Ida, that may be very true, but suppose you should allow yourself to be carried away by any romantic, foolish ideas, and form hopes of happiness which, of course, can never be realized. I fondly trust you have far too much good sense ever to be led by any girlish notions of love to nourish a secret passion which most certainly must cause you great misery eventually.”

The Baron did not wish Ida to think he

really believed that she loved De Vaux, but only intended to convey to her, as delicately as possible, a hint that he suspected the former too often occupied her thoughts and longings. Therefore he meant to say no more upon the subject at present; but Ida's curiosity was awakened, and she resolved to find out, if possible, whether De Vaux had asked her father to mention this delicate matter.

“Surely, papa, Mr. De Vaux himself gives me credit for more sense than to imagine I could indulge in any idle day-dreams of winning the heart of one whom all the fashionable beauties in England have in vain tried to captivate?” said Ida, laughing.

“I cannot tell what De Vaux thinks of you, or whether he would care to interest himself in such little things as the extravagant fancies you young ladies are too apt to revel in,” said her father, gravely smiling.

“Oh, I thought you and he might perhaps have been talking about me over your evening cigars, because it is only natural that Mr. De Vaux, having seen me grow up from a mere child, should feel some interest in my future.”

“So he does, Ida; I am satisfied he would like to see you comfortably settled in life, and I own this is my ardent wish also.”

“What!” exclaimed Ida, with mock gravity, but an arch expression beaming in her fine eyes, “have you and he been so hard-hearted as to plot together to take away my liberty! Dreadful thought, that perhaps some horrid Russian ‘eligible’ may be set on by you to lay siege to this trembling little heart!”

“Never fear, my charming Ida, I can answer for it that you will soon tame this bearish wooer and lead him with a silken thread. But seriously, Ida, have you ever thought of marriage and its duties, because

if we should happen to encounter any one you believed likely to make you happy I would throw no obstacles in the way?"

"To tell the truth, papa, I have given this subject very little consideration, and as I am always, to use the hackneyed phrase, 'as happy as the day is long,' you may suppose I do not wish to change my position."

"You must think seriously over what I have been saying, however," replied the Baron, "and we can recur to it again. As I said before, it will be necessary when we return from this Russian tour to lay down different plans of living, even if I continue my connexion with De Vaux."

"Oh! dear papa, let us enjoy the present; we do not know what clouds may overcast the future. For my part, all I ask is a comfortable house to live in, with beautiful scenery around, plenty of books, and a few real friends to make a little society."

"Come, Ida, I must say your ideas of a

happy life are very ordinary and prosaic, but I can't help suspecting that your clever fingers could trace a much more glowing picture than this sober outline. Still I should wish to add to your simple pleasures by all means in my power, and I only hope you remember that you have but to seek me if you are ever in the slightest doubt or difficulty, and whatever a father's watchfulness and love can suggest will guide my decision."

With these words the Baron rode forward at a more rapid pace, thus putting an end to their conversation for the present. He resolved for the future, however, to make his daughter more of a companion than he had hitherto done, and indeed could not help reproaching himself for neglecting her society to mingle always with the giddy, heartless set that De Vaux gathered around him. Ida, too, on her part, felt that her father was in earnest in what he said, and saw that, as a matter of duty, she ought to



seek his counsel and advice more than she had done. She required some guiding influence—gentle but firm—to control her wayward and much too imperious will, for the want of this timely sway threatened to involve her in unknown difficulty and danger. Of all the perils that surround a pure-minded woman's path, one of the worst is having too much self-reliance on her own judgment, and if to this be added a certain degree of contempt for the opinion of those to whom properly she ought to look for guidance, she wanders on the verge of a treacherous abyss where the first false step may seal her doom for ever.

## CHAPTER XI.

WITH fond and anxious expectation Mary Forester waited for the hour to strike that would tell her Milroy was at hand. The conflicting agitations she had undergone the previous day contributed to give a tinge of sadness to her thoughts as she awoke from somewhat troubled slumbers, but the fresh morning air and bright sunshine made all nature smile, and her spirits rose as the time of their meeting approached. Her interview with Lawrence had much to do with this, as she really felt for the genuine emotion he displayed, and hoped the wound might soon heal. Too many women might only have triumphed at his woe, but Mary was cast in a very different mould. But

it was only natural that she should endeavour to put away any painful recollections, leaving the cold shade of sorrow to bask in the warm beams of fully requited love.

Unusually irksome seemed the little household duties Mary had to perform for her good and kind, though terribly formal and precise aunt. The round-faced, good-natured country girl, who acted as maid-of-all-work in the cottage, wondered what was the matter with her young mistress. Mary often talked to this girl, and to the best of her ability tried to improve her by inculcating carefulness in conduct, neatness in dress, and other little details. She would frequently read to her when the work was done, and on Sunday evenings made the girl repeat hymns and texts. For Mary had a deeply religious and inquiring spirit, and it was only her shyness and timidity which baffled the village curate when he paid his occasional visits to the cottage. Indeed these visits would have been made much

oftener, only that the Reverend Wilfred Massey was himself afflicted with a sort of constitutional bashfulness, more especially apparent when Mary was present. Not that he wished to avoid the performance of his ministerial charge, for he was enthusiastic in his profession, and especially fond of parish work. Yet while his heart was earnestly given to his duties, still it was not so engrossed by them as to exclude the softer influences that might unwittingly be brought to bear upon so tender an organ. But more of this hereafter.

A state of expectancy is always an anxious one. No matter whether we strive to pre-occupy the mind with certain fixed objects on purpose to wile away the sluggish moments that drag wearily along, one's thoughts inevitably, as the needle to the pole, return to the original subject. We take up a book, but any amount of wisdom and wit, printed in the choicest typography on the thickest of "toned" paper, is simply

choice typography to us, and "nothing more." The mind imbibes no sense either of pleasure or pain from what we read, but still it is a relief to close the volume. No better results follow if we try a violent remedy, and resolutely sit down to solve a problem in the Sixth Book of Euclid, or to prove the binomial theorem. We can settle to nothing; and the best thing is to take a walk or ride out on horseback, always provided the day be fine. If it be wet the case is ten times worse, for, of all the dreary methods of killing time ever discovered, unquestionably the most dismal is to watch the meanderings of rain-drops down one's window panes. No doubt there are degrees of weariness even in this particular instance; for, of the two, one would prefer on a wet day to look out of a window in a pleasant country house, overhanging, we will suppose, some picturesquely wooded valley, with a foaming torrent rushing through its midst, than to peer disconsolately at the pitiless

rain from one's dark dining-room window in a "quiet" street, while a damp organ-grinder, two doors off, is remorselessly serenading the neighbourhood with the strains of "Home, sweet home."

With as much patience as she could muster did Mary await the approach of Milroy; but she found it impossible to sit quietly at her needlework, as usually was her wont. Fearful of attracting the observation of her aunt, she strove to seem engrossed in her simple occupation, but in vain. The stitches all seemed unaccountably to go wrong, and the needle oftener found its way into her finger than the neat trimming at which she was engaged. Occasionally, too, a sigh escaped from her bosom—a manifestation of feeling, by the way, only to be tolerated from one in her situation, for it is a most unpleasant habit to acquire, and justly lays a man, at least, open to the keenest ridicule. Poor Mary, however, might well be excused for show-

ing her suppressed emotion in so innocent a manner; and most men would have given a great deal to have drawn forth such a sigh from this beautiful and pure girl.

“Do you know, Mary,” said her aunt, suddenly looking up, “it is a long time since we promised to go and see poor Mrs. Redgrave, who is, I hear, worse than ever; and I think we can’t do better than walk over this fine day.”

A terrible disappointment this was to Mary, and her colour came and went so palpably that her aunt noticed the change.

“Why, child, what is the matter with you the last day or two?” continued the latter. “You don’t seem yourself at all; “you are not ill, I hope?”

“Oh! no, aunt; but I feel——”

Here Mary stammered and stopped, not exactly knowing what to say; for though her aunt by no means appeared to disapprove of Milroy’s acquaintance, she hesitated

to confess what had taken place between them.

“Well, and what do you feel, Mary? You had better tell me, and perhaps I can cure you without the doctor’s aid.”

Mary’s love of truthfulness and the natural openness of her character at once prevailed, and she resolved to confess all to her aunt.

“You will not be angry with me, dear aunt,” began Mary, coaxingly, “if I confess I have a little deceived you?”

“Not unless you have done something very wrong; but indeed, Mary, I believe you never could be guilty of anything downright wicked. I trust I have watched over your moral principles too carefully.”

“The truth is,” said Mary, blushing deeply, “I am in love—and now you know what is the matter.”

“In love, indeed!” exclaimed her aunt, surprised that the symptoms should have escaped her notice, although the good



woman had a very shrewd suspicion who it was that caused them; “and who has brought this about—Mr. Lawrence, I suppose?”

“No, aunt; I thought you knew I never liked him much. Can you guess no one else?”

“What!—not Mr. Milroy, surely?” said Mrs. Forester, with, for her, positively a sly look, as if a new light suddenly flashed across her mind.

The silence that followed these words and Mary’s downcast looks of modest confusion plainly confirmed her aunt’s surmises. Nor was her prudent relative at all sorry at the prospect of Mary being comfortably settled in life, provided she could ascertain that her lover was in a position to maintain a wife. She had been much impressed in Milroy’s favour; and, though it was only a few days since *she* had seen him for the first time, it was tolerably apparent on that occasion that Mary and he were no

strangers to each other. Knowing, too, what young girls are, it did not much astonish her that Mary should not have confessed their very first meeting, and asked permission to continue the acquaintance. Although sorrow had the effect upon Mrs. Forester of rendering her silent and reserved in manner, still she could overlook the innocent romance of an inexperienced girl, while at the same time she would strongly disapprove of any clandestine communications being carried on against her express orders. But from the very first, when Mary told about Milroy, and had presented him to her aunt, she distinctly countenanced their meetings, for her niece asked permission to go each time the lovers made an appointment. What now remained to be done was to have an interview with Milroy herself, and ascertain from his own lips what were his intentions and prospects.

“Then we need not call in the doctor, Mary,” said her aunt with a smile; “we

can leave it to some one else to cure you. Ah, well! I was much the same at your age, and so I must not complain."

"You remember, aunt, you rather took a fancy to Mr. Milroy the first time you saw him?" said Mary, slightly hanging down her head.

"So I did, child—I own it. As far as I have seen, Mr. Milroy is everything that can be desired; but, of course, now I shall require to find out all about him. I must say, however, he gives one very little chance of doing this, for I never heard him say a word about his past life; and, the only time he mentioned the subject, he spoke rather vaguely of his present occupation."

"Depend upon it he will satisfy you on these points," replied Mary, eagerly. "Why should he wish to make any concealment? Besides, he has told me all about himself, and you know he is the soul of honour, scorning anything underhand or surreptitious."

Mary's enthusiasm was but natural, and her aunt resolved to take the earliest opportunity of questioning Milroy. It may seem to most people somewhat strange that she should allow a girl of so attractive an appearance as Mary to take long walks with a gentleman; but Mrs. Forester had the most perfect confidence in her niece's purity of mind and propriety of conduct. There was something, too, about Milroy that convinced her he would not take any advantage of an artless girl's love; moreover, Mrs. Forester having all her life been among simple-minded, pious people, remote from the haunts of luxury and vice, was slow to attribute wickedness to those of her fellow-creatures who seemed removed from suspicion. Her reserved and dreamy nature, too, contributed to warp her judgment in many respects, rendering her less attentive to prudential considerations than might be quite desirable in one who had so precious a charge to watch over.

“I am glad you have told me what has taken place, Mary,” said Mrs. Forester; “for the next time I see Mr. Milroy I can come to an understanding with him.”

“Then you wont have to wait long,” replied the niece, with a bright smile, “for he will be here very soon, and I know he means to ask your permission to marry me.”

“I must say he has been pretty quick in making up his mind, considering that you can scarcely have known one another more than a month.”

“Oh! but, dear aunt, I know his noble heart as if we had been brought up from childhood together. You should hear him talk about poetry and music; and his voice is so rich and beautiful when he repeats the passages and quotations I love to hear. Then what fire there is in his eyes at times, yet they can express the most melting tenderness. I may well be proud of him!”

“Well, my dear child, I pray heaven

for your sake that all may end happily. Only I have been accustomed to so much disappointment and misery in this life that I always like to look at the dark side of everything as well as the bright.”

“Now, auntie dear, you shall only look at the bright side to-day, for I feel so full of joy that I could sing aloud for pure happiness. I can’t stay in the house any longer this lovely morning, so I shall run to meet some one, and bring him before you to speak for himself,” exclaimed Mary, merrily, bounding out of the room to put on her bonnet.

Mrs. Forester resumed her knitting with something like a sigh, as she inwardly hoped that all might go well with her niece; and presently the latter passed out of the garden-gate on her way to meet Milroy. Mary’s feeling of sadness had been dispelled by the delightful anticipations of their meeting, and her step never was so elastic, or her whole bearing so full

of glee. The spot to which she repaired was a smooth corner of green sward, spreading round the foot of a venerable beech-tree, situated at a turning of the path leading to the cottage. Here they had sat together a few evenings before, watching the summer moon gradually rising from the horizon; from this point the course of the footpath could be traced for nearly a mile, so that Mary would be enabled to see her lover while he was yet afar off. Accordingly she sat down on the soft grass, and took out of her pocket the refractory sewing materials, by way of giving her hands something to do, while her fluttering heart throbbed with expectation. Slowly, very slowly did the time pass, and many an anxious glance she cast along the footpath to catch the first glimpse of Milroy. Working was impossible; every stitch went into the wrong place, and the pretty trimming was again laid aside. She looked at her watch, and saw that it wanted but a few

minutes till the appointed hour should arrive, but still there was no sign of her lover's approach. An irrepressible longing to see him made her start to her feet, and hastily proceed along the path she knew he must take. Each moment her feverish expectation and impatience increased, and she strained her eyes in the hope of discovering Milroy, but in vain. Then stopping suddenly, she tried to think calmly how foolish it was to flurry and agitate herself in this manner when very possibly he might have approached the cottage not by the usual track, but from some other direction. It was now nearly half-an-hour beyond the time at which he promised to meet her, and hitherto he had always been at the appointed place with scrupulous punctuality. Retracing her steps, and doing the utmost to regain her composure, Mary soon found herself back again at the cottage. Eagerly did she listen to catch the sound of his voice, in case he had already arrived, and



her aunt had kept him to talk over the necessary matters they would require to consider. Quite still and silent was all within the cottage; and as every door and window was wide open to admit the warm summer air, she must have at once heard any voices. Presently, coming closer, she could see her aunt sitting placidly knitting, apparently having never moved since she went out, so it was evident Milroy could not have been there; because Mrs. Forester would have either kept him, or made him go to meet her niece. Unobserved, Mary stole quietly to her room, and closing the door tried to reason with herself how foolish it was thus to give way to her impatience. What more natural than that Milroy might have been delayed by some letter to write, or possibly a call in the neighbourhood to make? At any rate, there was no use thus agitating herself without a cause; so she strove once more to build gay castles in the air, but with little success. Her eyes in-

voluntarily filled with tears, and she began to feel like a petted child, who, hoping to be brought forward with pride, is suffered to remain unnoticed in the background. Ashamed of this weakness, she took up a book, and tried to pass away the time in reading; but after turning over a page or two she threw the volume aside.

More than an hour had now elapsed since Milroy should have been at the cottage, and as Mary could no longer remain by herself, she again sought her aunt. The latter was much surprised to see the traces of tears in her niece's eyes, and to hear the tremulous sobbing tones of her voice.

“What is the matter, Mary?” she said; “why you look as if you had heard some terribly bad news.”

“I am so disappointed that Edward is not here, aunt,” replied Mary, striving to speak calmly, but with indifferent success.

“Is he much past his time, then, that you are so impatient?”

“Oh, yes; he ought to have been here an hour ago; and I am sure something must have happened. He never did this before.”

“Nonsense, Mary; what put it in your head that anything is wrong? Surely, he may for once be a little behind time without disturbing your peace of mind so much.”

“I cannot help thinking some accident must have occurred,” said Mary, in a mournful tone. “I feel an indefinite foreboding of evil; yet why should I thus anticipate misfortune?—he was in perfect health yesterday. Tell me, dear aunt, that it is all right,” she continued, leaning on Mrs. Forester’s shoulder, and giving way to a flood of tears.

“Don’t agitate yourself, my dear child,” said her aunt, distressed to witness Mary’s grief. “He will no doubt be here shortly. Stay here a moment and I will look along the path, in case he may be in sight even now.”

“Oh, do, aunt; that is so kind of you,” replied Mary, still sobbing bitterly. In truth the sudden reaction of feeling from the height of delicious anticipation to the gnawing sensation of unexpected disappointment was too much for Mary, more especially after the events of the previous day. By the time her aunt returned she had dried her tears, and was altogether in a calmer frame of mind, therefore could the better bear her mortification.

“No signs of him yet I see by your looks, aunt,” said Mary, trying hard to seem cheerful.

“Don’t think anything more of Mr. Milroy at present, Mary; it will be all the pleasanter for you when he does come, and you can make him stay so much the longer. Depend upon it he will have some good excuse, but you may scold him to your heart’s content if he has not. You must keep up your spirits, child, and not let any man think that his breaking an appointment would

hurt you so much. When I was your age I would have hated that anybody should know they could interfere with my peace of mind. Even my poor dear husband, when he was courting me, never imagined that I should break my heart if he had proved faithless—yet I should have,” said Mrs. Forester, sadly, as a long, dormant train of recollections was awakened in her breast.

“Well, aunt, I mean to forget Edward for the present,” said Mary, with assumed gaiety; “and I think we had better go to Mrs. Redgrave, leaving a message for him to wait till we return. It will punish him for being so late in keeping his appointment, and I shall pretend to be excessively angry when I return.”

“A very good idea,” returned Mrs. Forester; “the day is so pleasant that I shall enjoy the walk, and the fresh air will do you all the good in the world.”

“Put on your shawl and bonnet then,

aunt, for I am all ready," said Mary, starting up, and in a few minutes more they were both on the road to Farmer Redgrave's.

## CHAPTER XII.

NEAR the centre of the extensive woods we have spoken of, which extended for many miles in circumference round the village of H——, was a small stone quarry, long since disused, and far removed from any public road or pathway. The trees, which were unusually densely planted at this part of the forest, completely overshadowed the quarry, forming an impervious gloom rarely penetrated even by the mid-day beams of the sun. What remained of the excavation scarce deserved the name of a quarry; indeed originally it was a mere working for some temporary purpose, and evidently had soon been abandoned. A deep pool of inky black water, always calm and unruffled as

the surface of a draw-well, almost entirely filled the quarry. The trees grew close up to the brink, and some of them inclined over the treacherous-looking water, while their branches interlacing formed a screen over the spot. Not a reed or weed found a resting-place in the slimy bottom of the pool, and neither sun nor moon was ever reflected in its dark bosom. No silver trout, with its shining speckled breast, ever glanced amid the icy cold water, which was never disturbed save when an occasional horse-leech or toad darted at their insect prey. An indescribable air of gloom and desolation pervaded the noisome spot; every object seemed black and unhealthy; no flower wafted its scent over the lonely tarn, and the songsters of the woods were silent as they skimmed across its dark surface.

Seated on a block of stone overhanging the pond, with his eyes fixed on its black depths, was John Lawrence. His brow was haggard, his feet sore and weary, his clothes



soiled, and his hands bleeding and torn. Hardly once had he rested his limbs since he rushed away from the scene of the horrid tragedy of the previous night. On, on he ran all through the hours of night and the cold grey dawn of the morning, as though the spectre of Milroy was on his trail, until he reached this lone corner of the forest, where, for a time at least, he might hope to be secure.

It was now nearly twelve o'clock, but neither bread nor water had passed Lawrence's lips, and he began to feel very faint, but there was little chance of satisfying his wants unless he ventured from his present concealment. Thirsty as he was, he turned with loathing from the slimy stagnant pool at his feet, and he knew of no spring near at which to moisten his parched lips. His brain reeled, and seemed to burn within his throbbing temples, and he was almost frightened by the ghastly look of his

countenance as reflected in the black waters of the quarry.

Then a new train of thought occurred to him, and vague ideas of self-destruction crossed his brain. Here was a secret nook, remote from the haunts of men, and his body might repose peacefully in the still cool depths into which he gazed so wistfully. It needed but one resolute spring to end for ever an existence which could now only be dragged on in ignominy and wretchedness. Then, at once and for ever, on this side of the tomb, he would elude the terrible pangs of remorse—the gnawing throes of a guilty conscience. And yet instinctively he shrunk from passing the dread portal of death while his faculties and strength still remained, and his life was not demanded by the stern emissaries of justice.

Slowly he rose up, resolving no more to give way to thoughts of self-destruction, for the present at least, and taking a narrow

pathway which led to the quarry, he walked along in the hope of finding some woodman's cottage where a little refreshment could be procured. The path wound through the woods, which, as the quarry was left behind, became more open, and in many places rich glades of mossy verdure offered a delightfully soft carpet to the foot-sore wanderer. At last, to his great joy, he came to a small limpid brook of cool water, which crossed one of those grassy dells, and he took a long, delicious draught from the spring. Close to where he stood the turf formed a sort of smooth natural basin, admirably suited for spreading a sylvan repast. Indeed it seemed as though it was likely to be resorted to for that very purpose, for as Lawrence, having slaked his thirst, was about to set forward once more, he was startled by hearing voices, evidently close at hand, and proceeding from a numerous party. Lawrence looked round in despair for some place to conceal himself, for he was

well aware his appearance was such that it would instantly attract great attention, if not suspicion. There happened to be a grove of very thickly planted alder-bushes close to the brook, and he had barely time to dash in and crouch down amid the leafy undergrowth when the foremost of the cavalcade appeared.

There was a large and gay throng, some riding and some on foot, and apparently this spot had been selected for spreading their al fresco repast, and forming a rendezvous where all could meet. All the usual features of a pic-nic were unmistakably visible. There were exquisite specimens of female loveliness and *fois gras*, serving-men and Strasburg pies, matrons and mayonnais, cavalry officers and cold punch, civilians and champagne, all literally jumbled up together, as every one was doing duty in transporting the substantial dainties from the carriages some distance off to this shady retreat for the delectation of the ethereal

beings in mauve, violet, and lavender, whose soft musical laughter put to silence the nightingales of the grove. Wonderful was the change which came over the landscape, so lonely and still but a few minutes before. All the lady riders were dismounting, each dutifully attended by a watchful cavalier, while grooms, footmen, and coachmen bustled about, laden with cloaks, hampers, umbrellas, dishes, knives and forks, and all the innumerable adjuncts of a well organized *fête champêtre*. The warm, yet pleasant-tempered sunshine greatly heightened the gay aspect of the scene, and a soft breeze, just sufficient to steal kisses and perfume from the rosy lips of the houris in hoops dotting the green glade, faintly rustled amid the trees.

Cowering down beneath the bushes and furze like a wild beast in his lair, faint, hungry, with bleeding hands and deathly pale face, was the trembling fugitive. He, too, had often taken part in gay scenes

similar to that of which he was an unwilling spectator ; and it seemed a cruel fate that mocked his present anguish and remorse by forcing a sight such as this on his attention. How was he to steal away unperceived from his retreat, for an accident might easily reveal his figure to some of the party ? Cushions and cloaks were being arranged by the servants for such as did not choose to join the strollers through the woods ; and on one smooth plat of turf some enthusiastic votaries of the dismal pastime of croquet had commenced operations with the inevitable wrangle about partners and choice of mallets, which forms the usual prelude to the two hours' medley of flirtation, mild cheating, and very small talk, which is the only tolerable part of the game. Presently the peculiar clack, clack of the mallets striking the balls—a sound now familiar to all ears—was heard, mingling with the silvery laughter of half-a-dozen perfectly-dressed, fashionable sirens.

Famished as Lawrence was, he had to endure the torments of Tantalus, for almost by stretching out his hand he could reach a whole array of cold pies, tongues, lobster salads, and innumerable other herbaceous and carnal dainties. Extricate himself from his humiliating position he must, even although it should entail his being discovered, and accosted. It was possible for him to steal away unperceived by forcing his way through the thick bushes into the woods beyond, but the noise he would necessarily make was almost sure to be heard. However, anything was better than the ignominy of being discovered like a guilty eavesdropper; so he cautiously put aside the branches, and tried to get his body through the undergrowth. Fortunately for him, the noise made by the croquet party, the clattering of champagne bottles, knives and forks, and plates, and the rippling of the brook, drowned the cracking sound he made, as the twigs broke on either

side of his body; and in a few minutes he once more found himself alone and unseen. Hastily arranging his dress, and wiping the dirt from his hands and face, he plunged into the thickness of the forest, avoiding any beaten tracks, in case he might encounter some of the pic-nic party. After awhile he seemed to have placed such a distance between himself and the scene we have been describing that all chance of discovery was at an end. Still his hunger was unassuaged; and it was certain that his strength could not hold out much longer without some stimulating refreshment.

In a little time he struck upon a road which led through this part of the woods, and walked along beside it in the hope of coming to some cottage. Presently a small straggling hamlet, consisting of little more than half-a-dozen houses, appeared in sight, and Lawrence stopped to consider how he should proceed. Once more adjusting his



tangled hair, and striving to assume an easy, unembarrassed air, he boldly stepped on to the road, and walked towards the village. Some little children, with bright, ruddy cheeks and curly white heads, were playing near a gateway, and they placed their fat, chubby hands up to their eyes to have a better look at the strange gentleman. Poor unconscious innocents, they little knew the guilty thrill this simple gesture caused to shoot through Lawrence's frame. He inwardly cursed them for noticing him at all, fearing that their simple glance might draw additional observation to the travel-soiled wayfarer.

As he passed the village smithy, where one or two labourers were collected, he suddenly felt himself tapped on the shoulder; in an instant his blood ran cold, and his trembling limbs nearly gave way, as though an officer of justice had laid his hand upon the fugitive. But it was nothing more than an honest countryman, who

pointed out that he had dropped his handkerchief some little distance back. Without even thanking him, in his agitation, Lawrence hurried on to a modest hostel, entitled the "Rose and Crown," where, for a time, he hoped to be at peace.

"Blest if that ere ain't a queer chap," remarked the countryman who had been polite enough to call Lawrence's attention to his loss. "Well, I suppose the napkin been't a very valuable one."

"He looked like as his money gear was rather low," observed his companion; "and his trousers wouldn't be the wur o' a stitch here and there."

Lawrence entered the old-fashioned, modest inn; and a buxom, good-natured country girl came forward to serve him.

"What can I have to eat?" said Lawrence, in thick, husky tones, at the same time flinging himself on a bench in one corner of the room, comparatively screened from observation.

“Cold boiled beef, sir, is all the meat we have in the house,” was the reply.

“Well, let me have some,” he answered, almost in a savage tone, observing that the girl was surveying his figure with womanly curiosity, which was natural enough, for it was seldom that any one in the guise of a gentleman stopped at the “Rose and Crown.”

When he was once more alone, Lawrence shrunk into a corner of the room, and taking up a newspaper a week old, all stained with beer marks, he hid his face behind its sheltering columns. To his great relief, there was no one in the humble coffee-room, and his eyes involuntarily wandered round the walls, taking in all its simple details at a glance: one or two gaudily-coloured prints, in the very rudest and most elementary form of pictorial art, were hung over the mantelpiece, which was further garnished with two small stucco heads of their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of

Wales, shining with all the sticky brilliancy of several coats of varnish, recently laid on ; a large delf jug, full of very dusty and decayed-looking artificial flowers, formed the central ornament on the chimney-piece ; and the only other decorative objects were two framed placards, profusely gilt and glazed, setting forth in elaborate and variegated letters the fact, that Bass and Allsopp's ales could be had on the premises ; and the mystic hand and triangle were prominently developed on the respective scutcheons of these eminent benefactors of the human race. The furniture of the room was characterized by the most Spartan simplicity, the benches and tables being rough and unpainted, while the floor was much worn away in several places.

Presently the girl brought in a tray with some meat, bread, and a jug of beer. Pouring out a large glass of the latter, Lawrence enjoyed a long and refreshing draught, and thankfully devoured the simple

fare set before him. Again the girl gave a curious glance at his person and dress, but this time he did not notice her scrutiny. He had scarcely finished his frugal meal when two sturdy countrymen came into the room, and took their seats at one of the tables. Lawrence at once caught up the paper and put it before him, so as to hide his face; and again his torments recommenced. Presently he moved the paper a little to one side, and observed that one of the men was staring fixedly at him. Natural as this was on the part of the rough, sturdy peasant, it once more caused a guilty tremor to agitate Lawrence. It was intolerable to be seemingly regarded with suspicion by each person he encountered; for to Lawrence's diseased brain, the simplest gestures or looks conveyed a sinister meaning. Although he still held the newspaper before his face, he felt sure the man's eyes were peering at him; and yet he did not dare to show any annoy-

ance, which might only attract additional observation.

Wearied and sick at heart, Lawrence called for the buxom, cheery waiting-woman, and asked if he could have a bed-room for that night. His request was at once answered in the affirmative; and the girl went upstairs with him to point out the room he was to occupy. Jaded, anxious, and scarcely able to conceal his increasing nervousness, brought on by the fatigue and terrors of the previous night, Lawrence slowly followed, and when the bed-room door was opened, at once sank into a chair with an irrepressible air of exhaustion. This motion again attracted the notice of the kind-hearted girl, who was inwardly taken with the dark-eyed, pale-faced young man, who now spoke so quietly and sadly, quite different from his first words to her.

“Are you quite well, sir?” she made bold to inquire, as Lawrence still continued

silent; "because I fancy you look as though you were in pain."

These few words were said with modest hesitation, but all a woman's touching tenderness of heart spoke in each sympathizing accent.

Surcharged as was Lawrence's breast with concealed emotion, this kindly interest in an unknown stranger deeply touched his heart, more especially as he expected now to find every man's hand turned against him. Involuntarily a tear started to his eye, and his voice was evidently affected as he replied—

"Thank you; I have come a long way, and do not know this neighbourhood—in fact, I met with a little accident," he continued, with some confusion, for he felt the girl must be wondering what it could all mean.

"Indeed, sir; I hope you are not much hurt," said his warm-hearted companion, "for there is no doctor nearer than six

miles off. Had I not better give you a little brandy?"

"No, I thank you; I shall rest here for a little, and will ring the bell if I want anything," answered Lawrence, who felt inexpressibly moved by the kindly interest of the honest girl. So much were his feelings stirred, that he felt as though he could weep like a child, yet must he sternly repress the smallest manifestation of sorrow. No, this man was no cruel murderer, no cold-hearted, scheming villain; and it was sad to see a fine character blasted by yielding to a momentary impulse of passion.

When the servant left the room, Lawrence carefully fastened the door, and flinging himself on the outside of the bed, for the first time felt a slight sensation of relief. It was so pleasant to rest his weary limbs, and, closing his eyes, he calmly reflected upon what course he must now pursue. Soon a languid feeling of drowsiness crept over his senses, and he was about to



settle himself to sleep, when he remembered the door was not locked. Starting up, he turned the key; and then, happening to glance out of the window, to his dismay he saw two of the county police conversing together right opposite the inn door. At once he felt a terrible misgiving as to what errand had brought them to his present retreat; and again the horrors of his situation returned in full force. It seemed as though some mysterious agency was at work to prevent his escape, and that the myrmidons of justice were already on his track.

Sleep was now out of the question in the face of this new danger; and Lawrence anxiously watched the constables from his window. To his excited imagination they seemed to be talking earnestly, and he fancied they more than once directed significant glances towards the very window from behind whose partially drawn blind he was peering; their countenances, too, ap-

peared to have a determined, resolute look, as though they were conscious of having an important duty to perform. Lawrence almost felt impelled to come forward and give himself up into their hands; for what use was it to drag on a wretched existence, hunted like a chased hare, until he was compelled to succumb from mere exhaustion. Yet, again, the irrepressible desire to cling to life as long as the faintest hope remains, so powerfully implanted in the human breast, urged him to elude his pursuers; and, as yet, they had made no sign, but still stood in the roadway conversing with one another. At length one of them stepped up to the inn door, and the next moment Lawrence heard him enter the public room, while his companion moved slowly along the road.

With restless misgiving of mind, Lawrence deliberated what to do in the face of this fresh complication. His resolution was quickly taken, and quietly unlocking the

door, he descended a few steps of the flight of wooden stairs until he could see into the public room; there was the officer, seated on one of the benches, with a mug of beer before him. This was reassuring, for it was not likely that a criminal, whose apprehension was eagerly sought, would be allowed to remain unmolested in the place to which he had been tracked, while one of his pursuers comfortably refreshed himself, and the other kept entirely out of the way. Still it might be a ruse to lull suspicion, only to make his capture more easy and safe; and therefore the greatest caution was necessary to withdraw from the menaced danger.

Assuming a bold, unembarrassed air, Lawrence sauntered slowly past the public room, noticing, however, that the constable scanned his figure intently, and said to the servant girl, whom he met—

“ You will understand that I engage the bed-room for this night, at least. I am now going out, but will return in two or

three hours, when I should like some refreshment."

"Yes, sir; I will take care it shall be ready. I hope you feel better now, sir," was the reply.

"Thank you, I do," was all Lawrence said, as he passed out at the door on to the dusty road.

Where now to turn was his next consideration, for all hope of finding even a temporary refuge in this retired hamlet was at an end. Bitter it was to taste the sweets of repose for a brief moment, and then, ere the dust and heat of the previous weary hours had been wiped from his brow, to have once more to drag on his miserable flight. Verily, the accursed brand of Cain was striking into his soul; and he strode sadly on—a vagabond and a wanderer over God's earth!

It mattered little now which path he took, for he began to feel reckless of detection, and only instinctively sought out the

shade of the woods, where he had least chance of encountering any of his fellow-creatures. Before he left the village he took the precaution of purchasing two loaves of bread and a small bottle of spirits, as he meant to remain in solitude for a few days, until a reasonable chance offered of escaping unobserved from this part of the country altogether. Could he only gain some large seaport town he would take his departure for a foreign land, where he might reasonably expect to be beyond the reach of justice. But it was weary, weary work, this threading his way through the lonely woods; and every now and then Lawrence sank down in sheer physical exhaustion.

Longer and longer grew the shadows of the tall trees, as the evening sun gradually sunk in the west, and the worn-out traveller was now far from human habitation. He anxiously sought for some refuge where he could pass the night, and obtain the repose so necessary to recruit his strength. A sort

of rocky ravine lay to his right hand, down which he now turned, examining the openings in each bank as he went along, to find any shelter suitable for his purpose. At length he stopped before an old ash tree growing out of the bank, beside whose stem was a mass of broken rocks, forming, in one place, a sort of cave. On closer inspection, Lawrence found that there was a hollow excavation sufficiently deep to contain his body, and it was not a spot likely to attract observation from without. It was by mere chance that he noticed it, for some wild-briars and ferns almost completely hid the entrance to the cave. Fortunately the interior was quite dry; and Lawrence pulled up a quantity of fern leaves, which he strewed about, forming a clean dry surface to lie upon. Then, going to the small brook that coursed quietly through the picturesque ravine, he cooled his hands and face by plunging them in its clear water. This done he returned to the cave, and,

forming a pillow of his cloak, stretched his weary limbs on the fern leaves, and in a few minutes was buried in slumber.

Poor, miserable wretch!—he slumbered indeed, but horrid dreams marred the sweets of repose; and one pale, ghastly form seemed ever to hover before his eyes, glaring at him with cold glazed orbs from between the rusty bars of an iron grating!

### CHAPTER XIII.

AUBREY DE VAUX was punctual in returning the very day he had indicated to the Baron, and gave immediate orders to get up steam the first thing in the morning, and to proceed on their voyage. It was rather late at night when he arrived on board the yacht, and, whether from fatigue or illness, he was unusually taciturn. He greeted the Baron and his daughter with the utmost courtesy, but his features never once relaxed into a smile, and he said not one word on the subject of his journey to England. The Baron, understanding his friend's humours, did not attempt to draw him from his studied reserve; but Ida, who was not prepared for this unwelcome change, tried to



induce him to talk, but in vain. The few words he spoke were on the most ordinary topics, and presently he withdrew to his own cabin, thus precluding any further conversation that night.

In the morning Aubrey did not appear at the breakfast table, and, when that meal was over, he sent a message to the Baron to request that he would come and see him.

“Good morning, Baron,” said De Vaux, when the former made his appearance; “I have rather a headache, and so you must excuse my troubling you, but I want to know how you passed the time in my absence.”

“Very pleasantly indeed, thank you,” replied the Baron. “Ida and I used to make short excursions into the country; and, the weather being fine, we saw a good deal.”

“And how does Ida get on? Did you sound her upon that subject?”

“Yes, I did; and I am grieved to see

that the foolish girl has been allowing her silly fancies to run away with her judgment—just as you feared. However, I spoke very seriously to her, and I hope that a little reflection will soon set matters to rights, for I think she has good sense and some share of firmness.”

“Oh! yes,” said De Vaux; “it was a mere passing flight of romance, and I was wrong to be so much alone with her during the voyage, after noticing what was going on. However, that is easily remedied now; for I must tell you, Baron, I mean to hurry on to St. Petersburg as fast as steam and canvas will carry me—and, once there, to plunge into the gaieties of the capital. I want a total change of scene and people, and I must have excitement. My spirits are a good deal depressed, and I am glad we have but a short time longer to be on board the yacht, for I cannot stand the confinement.”

“Well, a few days more will see us in

the Neva, and you will find the capital full of fashion and splendour. It is some years since I have been there, and I well remember its glories; but this is not the gay season, and you must wait till the spring of the year for the full tide of revelry and dissipation."

"Indeed! I am sorry for that, as I wanted an immediate change," said De Vaux; "but at any rate we will go to Moscow and other large towns; and I dare say, one way or another, the time will pass away."

"Never fear that you will not be fully amused, for there is much that is certain to interest you in many parts of the country."

"By the way, I mean to look out for some suitable husband for Ida—that is, with your permission," said Aubrey, with a smile; "and you must allow it to be understood that I am responsible for her marriage portion."

"Indeed, De Vaux, your generosity has

been so great that I hardly know what to say," replied the Baron, who was interrupted by Aubrey—

"Come, we will not dispute about trifles. You know as well as I do what my wealth is, and that I have no relative I care for to inherit it. I mean to astonish the good citizens of St. Petersburg by showing them how an Englishman can spend money; and I wrote to Mr. Lambert to send six of my finest carriages, with horses to match, by the first steamer."

"In ten days you will know all the grandees in the capital, at this rate. Of course you will call at the English embassy, and, as you are acquainted with Her Majesty's representative, the rest is easily done."

"I should like you to engage me—say for three months—the finest residence that you can secure; and I may as well tell you that, as the whim pleases me, I mean to spend at least fifty thousand pounds during

that time. The fact is, I am not well, and intend to do a little amateur doctoring, and what I prescribe is—excitement,” said Aubrey, with almost a sad smile.

“You know best, De Vaux, what remedies will be most efficacious;—but don’t you include matrimony among the specifics in your pharmacopœia? Now, to my mind you would be acting more wisely to look out for some Russian princess, since your own countrywomen don’t seem to have much power to effect a cure.”

A singular expression came over De Vaux’s countenance at these words of the Baron’s, and he heaved a slight sigh as he replied—

“Ah! Baron, I am afraid I am fated never to taste the sweets of wedded life; but then I escape the bitterness, which too often forms a considerable ingredient in the hymeneal draught. But let us not talk of this just now,—indeed, you know I have peculiar theories on this subject—and rather

tell me how I shall best astonish the Russian fashionable world, no matter at what cost."

"It will certainly be rather an expensive process, for the Russian nobility do things themselves on a grand scale; however, I daresay we shall manage to strike out some novelties. The first week or so must necessarily be taken up in putting your house in order, presenting your letters of introduction, and other preliminaries. Then I should take the initiative, and issue invitations to all the *élite* for a grand ball, at which the ambassador's wife can do the honours."

"A capital idea; it shall be done at once, and I will get his excellency to excite their curiosity by whispering mysteriously that his friend is an eccentric Englishman, enormously rich, and who has come to St. Petersburg because he is utterly *blasé* from the effects of half a dozen London seasons. Then he can insinuate that they must not

mind my appearance and manners, that you never can judge from my exterior, &c. &c., and the people will all rush to see some new and singular specimen of humanity. I tell you, Baron, I expect to create a sensation," said Aubrey, laughing.

"As you seem to have quite made up your mind to carry out this idea," replied the Baron, "I think there is no harm in doing it thoroughly. Although I must take the liberty of an old friend to say that some time hereafter you may regret having wasted such an enormous sum of money, still, if you are resolved to gratify your humour, there is no help for it."

"Yes, yes, I quite understand," returned De Vaux, a little impatiently; "but, my dear Baron, my mind, I assure you, is made up on the subject. Now, how are we to get through the time till we sight Cronstadt? Oh, yes; I mean to try my hand at writing a play, so I must get up my *dramatis personæ*."

“Then I shall leave you undisturbed to your reflections, and tell the captain to press on all the canvas he can carry,” said the Baron, as he left the cabin.

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During the rest of the voyage Aubrey kept a good deal to his own cabin, and, as the weather proved somewhat stormy, this partial seclusion did not seem so very marked. Still Ida noticed that a great change had taken place in him as regarded herself. He never now sought an opportunity, as before, of talking with her alone, and even when they were together, he either remained quite silent or made only the most ordinary and trifling observations. But, indeed, her father took care that he should invariably be present when Ida and De Vaux were on deck, so as effectually to prevent anything like a *tête-à-tête*, which, he knew, would be distasteful to the latter. The Baron never again recurred to the subject of conversation he had with Ida on the



occasion of their last ride together, and she did not particularly care that he should. Indeed Ida began to be convinced, after mature reflection, that her father was right, and that no good would be gained by clinging to the fond illusion which had taken possession of her heart. Still it was no easy matter to uproot what had almost grown to be part of her nature, and she could scarcely help hoping on. Aubrey's capricious behaviour and uncertain disposition contributed to this result, for it was impossible to predict what turn his humour might take. With all her pride of character, too, Ida confessed to herself that, although she knew De Vaux was so apt to play with woman's affections, yet a few fond words from him could send a thrill of delight to her heart's core.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE Reverend Wilfred Massey was one of the most amiable of men, and his heart overflowed with kindness towards his fellow-creatures, which characteristics were abundantly evidenced by his demeanour and conversation. He was tall in person, and of the requisite degree of slimness for a curate, as it is not seemly that a mere neophyte should assume the portly dimensions suitable only to a dignitary of the church. His hair was light in colour, corresponding to the benignant blue hue of his eyes, and the intellectual pallor of his countenance added further to his interesting and engaging appearance. There is no doubt that a blooming, healthy complexion has rather a

prejudicial effect upon some minds, and a ruddy curate is a little suggestive of sporting and fox-hunting propensities. Not that Mr. Massey's external attributes conveyed an impression that he disapproved of innocent, manly recreation of a reasonable nature. When he spoke, a pleasant smile generally hovered about his lips, and there was something winning in his soft and gentle voice. There was a very perceptible degree of modesty in his demeanour, especially towards his female parishioners, and he greatly preferred to lead their thoughts towards a better world by dwelling upon the unspeakable delights of heaven rather than dilating on the tortures of hell. He aspired to wean their affections gradually from the dangerous fascinations of the world, and to fix them upon immortal joys—not to bring about a mere temporary fit of despondency and remorse by terrifying threats or denunciations.

Thus it was that Mr. Massey's visits

were always welcomed by his parishioners ; and the most stolid agriculturist, with a mind incapable of anything more exalted than fat cattle and mangold wurtzel, at least always listened to him with respect and attention. All the ladies of the village thoroughly appreciated the young curate, and showed a most praiseworthy anxiety to have the benefit of his spiritual admonitions. This gratifying tribute to the excellency of his counsels was at times somewhat embarrassing to Mr. Massey, for, having a large district to attend to, his time was fully occupied. However, no one ever heard a murmur from his lips, and his ready smile and kindly exhortations were at the disposal of all.

The afternoon being warm and pleasant, Mr. Massey went out to enjoy a walk, and he took the path through the woods which led to Mrs. Forester's cottage. He had not been above six months in this parish, consequently was not on very intimate terms,

as yet, with any family in it. But he had from the first been struck with Mary's beauty of person, although he could form little idea of her mental qualifications from the few formal visits he had paid to the cottage. Both being naturally somewhat shy, their conversation consisted necessarily of rather formal topics, and Mrs. Forester was invariably present on such occasions. Had it not been for this, Milroy would have found a formidable rival in the earnest and enthusiastic curate, whose personal qualities were exactly calculated to captivate a girl of Mary's ardent, inquiring temperament.

When Mr. Massey drew near the cottage it suddenly occurred to him that it was a little time since he had seen its inmates, therefore he resolved to pay them a visit. He felt the faintest possible tremor agitate his frame as he knocked at the door, which he was somewhat puzzled to account for. In answer to his inquiries, the girl informed him that Miss Forester was within, but not

her aunt. After a moment's hesitation, and a perceptible increase of the unaccountable flutter at his heart, the curate entered the cottage, and was shown into the parlour, while the girl ran to tell Mary who was there. Little need was there of this, for Mary rushed to her window the moment she heard Mr. Massey's knock, in the joyful hope that Milroy had come at last. Deep was her mortification when she perceived who the visitor was, and the unconscious curate could never have presented himself at a more unpropitious moment. However, she made haste to lay aside her walking attire, and, after glancing in the looking-glass, proceeded to the parlour where sat the expectant Mr. Massey.

“Good morning, Miss Forester,” he said, as she entered; “I hope you have both been well since I had the pleasure of calling here last.”

“Thank you, Mr. Massey, we have,” was the reply.

“This has been a delightful day; have you been out at all?” continued the curate, venturing a very safe remark, not being particularly reassured by Mary’s downcast manner.

“Yes, I went out with my aunt to call upon Mrs. Redgrave, and have just returned. My aunt went afterwards to see another friend, and will be sorry to have missed you.”

“Oh, it is of no consequence, Miss Forester; I will call again. The truth is, I did not come out with the intention of seeing you to-day, but, finding myself so near, I thought I might as well look in.”

This admission slipped out quite by accident, and it was precisely what Mr. Massey did not intend to make, so it had the immediate effect of causing him to feel uncomfortable and uncertain what to say next. Mary, too, was silent, for she was absorbed by a new idea, which was nothing less than

to ask Mr. Massey's consolation and advice in her present distress of mind. She was naturally of so artless and truthful a disposition, that she considered that those whom she regarded with feelings of duty and respect ought to be made aware of any occurrence likely to influence her future in life. Had she known Mr. Massey longer, or if he had been an older man, she would have experienced no difficulty in confessing her feelings and present sorrow, but a natural degree of bashfulness made her hesitate before entrusting so delicate a matter to a comparative stranger, even though he stood to her in the solemn relation of spiritual adviser. Yet, were the ice once broken, Mary felt that it would be a relief and consolation to tell all to the kindly and sympathizing young clergyman, whose benign countenance seemed to invite such confidence.

“How do you like this neighbourhood, Mr. Massey,” at length said Mary,



timidly; "you can judge by this time, I suppose?"

"I like it exceedingly, Miss Forester," replied the other, his face brightening at this indication on Mary's part that she wished him to remain. "The scenery round about is beautiful, the village people are orderly and well conducted, and I have already made many kind friends."

"I am glad you find it so pleasant," said Mary, "for along with all this there must be a great deal of hard work to do. Still I think the life of a village clergyman, under such circumstances as you speak of, must be a very delightful one."

"It is indeed," replied Mr. Massey, "and I would not change places with any of my brethren in town charges, however advantageous, in a worldly point of view, it might be for me. To me it is the greatest joy in the world, setting off on a fine summer morning to make my customary visits. The beauties of nature seem doubly sweet

when I am endeavouring, to the best of my poor ability, to minister to the wants of my fellow-creatures."

"This I can well understand, but you must often have to witness very sorrowful scenes, and I should think they would leave a sad impression on your mind. It must be dreadful to see the agonies of a dying sinner and the grief of heart-broken relatives."

"True," replied the curate, rapidly warming at the turn the conversation had taken, "but there is the blessed opportunity of snatching a soul from the flames, of pointing out to the affrighted sufferer that all is not yet lost. Tell me what human pleasure or reward can equal the consciousness of having been the humble instrument of Providence in rescuing a fellow-creature from everlasting woe?"

"Happy must you be, Mr. Massey, that are thus influenced, for I am afraid there are too many in the world who are swayed

by other motives in the good deeds they seek to perform. At least," added Mary, modestly, "I must speak for myself in this matter."

"No, Miss Forester, I cannot believe this of you, for the little I know of your disposition warrants me in drawing quite an opposite conclusion."

"I would it were true," replied Mary, sadly, "for of late I have been led by circumstances to examine my motives of action upon different occasions, and I am sorry to have to confess that I found nothing but weakness and irresolution."

"But you must remember," said the curate, kindly, "that you are very young and inexperienced, having, I presume, lived here alone with your aunt, and knowing little of the world except what you derive from books. Rest assured that, at all times, what advice or information I can offer is at your disposal; and nothing will afford me greater pleasure than to

dispel any doubts under which you may labour.”

“One great weakness that I feel, Mr. Massey, is being unable to bear disappointment calmly. When I have built my hopes upon some object, I am angry and petulant if they are not realised.”

The curate could not help smiling at the *naïveté* of this admission, so thoroughly in keeping with the winning simplicity of Mary's character.

“This weakness, Miss Forester, I assure you, is shared by us all, for it was only the philosophers of a bygone age who could witness the destruction of their cherished schemes without emotion. Of course, we must guard against any undue paroxysms of sorrow and anger; but, so long as human nature remains what it is, these disturbing influences are sure to be felt by all. We can only pray to acquire a control over our angry passions; and one of the surest symptoms of success in this object is

the fact of our acknowledging their existence."

"Well, then, there is some hope for me," replied Mary, "because I freely own that disappointment, of all things, is what I can least bear patiently."

It was now on the tip of her tongue to touch upon the delicate subject of her engagement to Milroy, if it were only to find out whether Mr. Massey knew, or had ever heard, anything of the former. But a feeling of diffidence, which can be easily understood, contributed to seal her lips upon the subject, at least on this occasion. She might be very sure that Mr. Massey would afford her plenty of opportunities of renewing their conversation, although an engagement elsewhere forced him now to take his departure. Even Mary, preoccupied as her mind was with her recent disappointment and sorrow, could not help observing that the curate grasped her hand and looked in her face in a manner he never did before.

When he was gone she was once more left to speculate and fret as to the cause of Milroy's non-appearance, and it seemed almost a certainty that she must give up hope, for this day at least.

And so the weary hours passed away, and Mary's despondency grew deeper and deeper.

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## CHAPTER XV.

It was the soft twilight hour, and the balmy atmosphere lightly quivered as the last lingering sunbeam faded away, to shed its lustre on another and a brighter world. Not a breath of air raised the flowerets that drooped with the evening dew; no sound was wafted to the leafy glades of the darkening woods. A solitary nightingale, concealed amid the clustering foliage, alone gave voice to the peaceful landscape, and her rich melody echoed amid the long drawn aisles of the forest. Thin columns of blue smoke wound up into the grey twilight air, and the peasant returned to his cottage to share the well-won pleasures of home with her who lightened each weary hour, and

sweetened the bread of honest labour. The little prattler, so loved and so lovely, climbed upon his father's knee, kissing his rough unshaven cheek,—and the happy labourer thanked heaven for all the mercies shown to him. What a bright and beautiful picture of English peasant life did this peaceful scene present—the simple, but scrupulously clean cottage; the tidy, fresh-coloured, proud mother; the strong, sober, fearless, and devout father—one of nature's true nobility, though no more than a poor son of toil; the lisping infant, with its arms clasping a parent's neck;—and all around the green and sylvan solitude.

Yet a little distance off, in a neighbouring glade of the forest, was another scene, which presented a sad contrast to this happy picture. There too was a cottage, clustered over with ivy and many twining flowers, with its trimly kept garden once so carefully tended by sweet Mary Forester, but now, alas! weeds began to creep over the



neat and tasteful parterres. Sick at heart, worn out with weariness and bitter disappointment, was the once joyous and blithesome girl, who so lately bathed herself in the flowing tide of a pure and passionate love.

Six days had elapsed since Milroy took his last fond farewell at the very spot where Mary now sat; and, from that hour to this, she had heard neither from him nor where he had gone. He was to have returned the following morning, as we have seen, but the evening waned, the night passed away, and still he came not. Each succeeding morrow brought renewed hopes, which buoyed up Mary's spirits for awhile, but ere evening they gave place to an ever-increasing anguish of mind. Lawrence's last words, as he rushed from her presence on that well-remembered night, often recurred, to Mary with a terrible significance; and she called to mind, too, the look of intense hatred his features wore when she confessed

her love for Milroy. Yet her guileless nature could not understand the possibility of Lawrence attempting any harm towards his rival; and, with innocent tenderness of heart, she had even meditated writing the former a letter to mitigate the severity of the blow she unwittingly was compelled to bestow upon the unfortunate young man. Still at times a strange, mysterious dread lest anything sinister could have occurred to Milroy, crept over her mind, and she resolved to satisfy herself by requiring Lawrence to come to the cottage and tell her all he knew. She only waited till the week had elapsed, although a natural repugnance to have any further communication with the young artist made her most reluctant to write to him.

Mary Forester sat upon the mossy bank, spangled with bright-coloured wild flowers, where last she parted with Milroy. It used to be a favourite spot with both of them, and those vows of adoration, which sounded

so sweetly when they were poured forth with all Milroy's impassioned utterance, had been breathed in her ear under the very tree beneath whose venerable boughs she now reclined. 'The roses had well-nigh faded from Mary's wan cheek; the sparkling lustre of her beautiful eyes was dimmed with tears; her gentle bosom ever and anon heaved with uncontrollable emotion; and even the light zephyrs of eve seemed to chill her trembling frame. Where now was the bounding elasticity of movement with which she would spring up at the approach of the loved one, where the radiant glow of joy that suffused her features as she heard his step in the distance?—Gone, gone for ever. There she sat, dull, motionless, and well-nigh heart-broken, yet still faintly hoping against hope, and meekly bowing her spirit to meet her approaching fate.

Deeper and deeper fell the shades of night upon the lonely forest glade, and slowly Mary rose to return to her once happy

home. One glimmering star already appeared in the dark grey horizon, and the rosy after-glow of the glorious sunset had long since faded away.

At the instant Mary rose to her feet, and turned to go homewards, a crackling sound of some one treading upon dried leaves and broken twigs startled her, and, in another moment, a man stepped upon the narrow pathway, and then stood still. His sudden appearance and singular manner gave Mary a terrible fright; but the knowledge that she was close to her home somewhat reassured her. At first, owing to the dim, uncertain light, she did not recognise his face. His features, too, were of a ghastly, ashy pallor, his eyes deep sunk in his forehead, his dress soiled and disordered, and evidently the man was under the influence of some strong excitement.

It was John Lawrence, the murderer of Edward Milroy!

Trembling in every joint, she scarcely

knew why, Mary gazed at him in silence, waiting until he should announce wherefore he had sought her presence unasked. They stood almost touching one another, so that she had instantly discerned who it was after the first sudden shock of alarm and surprise. She felt, too, an inward pang of sorrow as she marked Lawrence's terribly wasted appearance, his hollow cheeks, and the desolate and miserable air which characterized him at this moment. There was a strange lurid light in his glittering eye that forcibly contrasted with the cadaverous hue of his blanched face.

For a little time neither spoke; but Mary was the first to break the silence.

"I wished to see you, Mr. Lawrence," she began, in nervous accents, although she did her best to appear calm and at ease; "and had intended to write you a few lines, but now this is unnecessary."

"Be brief with what you have to say, Mary Forester," answered Lawrence, in

husky, hollow tones, "for my time here may not be long; but I can anticipate it is of" — here his voice faltered, and grew more tremulous—"of Milroy you would speak?"

"You have guessed right," said Mary, eagerly. "Oh! do tell me if you know anything of his movements; I have not seen him since last I parted with you."

At these words Lawrence's forced calmness gave way, and uttering a deep groan, he buried his face in his hands, while his whole frame trembled with suppressed emotion.

Mary mistook the nature of his agitation, and her gentle woman's heart was touched at his apparent grief. She reflected that this young man had loved her deeply, and had told his love manfully and honourably. He pursued no tortuous and devious paths towards this end, but approached her with the candour and frankness of a fervent and ingenuous passion. Remembering her own

misery during the past week, she could deeply sympathize with that fearful searching, scorching sorrow, which flames like hell-fire within the bosom of one who has loved from the innermost depths of his soul, and loved in vain.

Laying her hand lightly upon Lawrence's arm, Mary said, soothingly—

“Do not give way to your feelings thus—do not, for my sake. Let us forget the past, and pray that the future may bring happier days for both of us. We can, at any rate, always be friends.”

The well-remembered, endearing accents of the woman he had loved but too well, under other circumstances would have fallen like dew upon Lawrence's ears, but now they dropped like burning lava. Little did she dream of the awful disclosure he came to make; for, tortured into madness by the agonies of remorse, he resolved to inform Mary of his guilt. Drawing himself back from her, he gently put her hand away.

“Touch me not!” he gasped out; “lay not a finger upon my accursed form! but, before all is over, may I beseech your forgiveness?”

His wild incoherent words sounded strangely and ominously in Mary’s ear.

“What mean you?” she said; “what have I to forgive?—oh! tell me quickly. Edward is well, surely?—Mr. Milroy I mean—do you know?”

Suddenly she ceased speaking, for when she named Milroy a visible shudder passed over Lawrence’s frame, and again he groaned heavily.

“Mary Forester,” he said, solemnly, “look at me. Here, in the face of heaven, I confess——”

What more he meant to say Mary knew not, but something in her fixed vehement stare, and intense expression of countenance, made Lawrence pause ere he uttered the fatal words. He could not bring himself to commit a double murder, for knowing



what a woman's heart is, he dreaded lest the terrible announcement he came to make should have too deadly an effect.

“Speak, for God's sake!” exclaimed Mary, eagerly; “what is it you would say?—is he ill, or gone away from here? Oh, no; he never would leave me thus. Oh! Lawrence, by all you hold sacred and dear, tell me if you know anything—stay, you could not have injured him?” she added, as if a vague suspicion for the first time crossed her brain.

“To-morrow night, at this same hour, you shall know all,” said Lawrence, feeling that this painful scene was unfitting him for another awful deed, that was to be performed ere the fast waning moon had passed away from the dark empyrean.

Without another word he turned away, and the next instant his form was lost in the gloom of the forest.

Mary, too, walked rapidly homewards, as this unexpected interview had awakened a

new train of thought in her mind ; and she felt that a solution of the doubts which surrounded her seemed to lie with Lawrence.

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Unseen by Mary Forester or John Lawrence, a man, muffled in a dark cloak, had been a witness to their interview. Favoured by the deep shade cast by the lofty trees, he was enabled to approach so close as to hear every word which passed between the two. Carefully screening himself from observation behind the seamed trunk of a venerable elm, the stranger listened with intense interest to the conversation. He riveted his eyes upon Mary, watching each motion she made with a lynx-like gaze, and eagerly drank in every syllable she uttered. When the interview was over he cast a long, lingering look upon Mary's retiring form, and then followed rapidly in the path of John Lawrence. Keeping just sufficiently far behind to prevent any little noise

his steps made from reaching the latter's ears, the stranger bore down on Lawrence with the unerring track of a sleuth-hound.

Lawrence took a narrow and unfrequented pathway which wound through the woods, and his tread was measured and slow. He walked as though he had some fixed, settled purpose to carry out, never once turning his head, or even casting a glance into the dark glades on either side of the path. Within the wood every sound was now hushed and still; the thrush had ceased his gushing melody, and the nightingale, too, was silent, but at intervals the faint and plaintive note of the turtle-dove floated on the night air. Where Lawrence now walked was a remote and unfrequented part of the wood, and no woodman's cottage sent forth its friendly ray of light to cheer the wanderer on his lonely path. Too dim and lustreless was the uncertain light of the moon to penetrate the thick gloom, but seemingly Lawrence knew the road well, for he never hesitated

in his course. And always stealing onwards from behind was the dark muffled form of the mysterious stranger, who crept with noiseless vampire step after the unsuspecting Lawrence. Occasionally a sudden rushing noise broke the dead stillness of the gloomy wood, as a roosting wood-pigeon, startled by the sound of footsteps, flew from its nest until the intruders should be gone. But soon again the same deathly calm, hushed as the solemn depths of some vast catacomb, pervaded the forest.

All at once Lawrence stood still, and, for the first time, peered anxiously round in every direction, as though to make sure that he was quite alone. That same moment his unseen pursuer halted also, knowing from the cessation of the slight noise Lawrence's footsteps caused, that the latter had paused in his advance. Some heavy clouds now totally obscured the face of the moon, effectually veiling even the feeble radiance cast by the pale crescent of night.

At that instant an unutterably sad wail was borne along the dewy air, apparently from some wakeful hound afar off, whose melancholy howl slightly startled Lawrence and interrupted the train of his thoughts, for presently he slowly resumed his onward path. Faithful as his shadow followed the dark spectral figure, like an Indian warrior on his enemy's trail.

They now had but a short way to traverse ere the woods ended and the faint path emerged upon an expanse of common land. This was the same track of heath which stretched round the old ruined castle we have before mentioned, and a rough, ill-kept cart-road separated the woods from the common. When Lawrence gained this road he again stood still, seemingly irresolute which direction to take. The muffled stranger, who so warily dogged his steps, also stopped. Just then the clouds glided over the face of the moon and once more her wan light shone upon the earth.

Vague and mysterious was that impulse which irresistibly drew Lawrence on to the old castle, the scene of so fearful a drama only six nights since. It might well have been supposed that the tomb itself could offer no greater horrors for him than those mouldering walls which witnessed the dreadful tragedy. But it is often the case that a horrid fascination attracts to the fatal spot, even though the ghastly spectre of the murdered man might be there to demand atonement for the foul crime. The grave might give up its dead from the depths of the great ocean, and the shade of Edward Milroy glare with glazed and soulless orbs upon the daring intruder, but a demon spell was at work and Lawrence once more moved onwards through the misty light.

Caution was now necessary on the part of his stealthy pursuer, to prevent Lawrence from detecting that he was followed. Nearly a mile of open common had to be traversed ere the castle walls could be

gained, and, though the moonlight was feeble while the air was thick and heavy, still it was possible to distinguish objects some distance off. Sound, too, would travel farther than in the dense wood through which they had just passed, and there was nothing to conceal the stranger from observation should Lawrence suddenly turn round. Consequently he allowed the latter to advance until his figure was almost lost to view, when he started in pursuit, picking his steps with the utmost circumspection. More than a quarter of a mile was gained, when all at once the stranger struck his foot against a stone with sufficient noise to cause Lawrence sharply to turn his head. Instantly crouching down among some low furze bushes which abounded at that point, the former anxiously waited to see if he was observed. After a few minutes, however, Lawrence, who fancied the noise proceeded from some stray animal, again slowly strode on, nor did he pause until the darkly-frown-

ing walls of the old castle loomed, solemn and hoar with antiquity, in the grey, cold moonlight.

Then, for the first time he seemed to shudder inwardly, as each thrilling memory of that awful night vividly recurred to his mind. Straight before his eyes was the narrow postern door, deep sunk in murky shade, black as the grim portal of a charnel house, through which they had both gone ; yes, both passed through that gloomy archway but only one returned—and where was the other ?

Well might he pause, for many a murderer who will boldly face the doom he has called down upon his own head in the broad light of day, pales away into a crouching coward when, alone and unassailed, he finds himself at night near the scene of his crime. But the accumulated horrors of the last six days had nearly unsettled Lawrence's reason, and his fevered mind seemed almost to derive some consolation by forcing itself to



return to the actual realities of that fatal night. His agony was too bitter to be borne, but he acknowledged that the retribution was only the meet reward of so black a crime. Oh, love! thou glowing, radiant passion, in what a dark and awful catastrophe does thy rosy dream too often end! Lambent as a sunbeam, thy blushing dawn steals softly over the path of the rapt votary, but, as he hails the swiftly approaching effulgence of thy dazzling meridian, may not the thunderbolt be at hand that closes his career for ever!

With faltering steps Lawrence passed through the narrow postern gate, and slowly moved onwards amid the masses of mouldering *débris* that filled the interior of the castle. The atmosphere here was denser, for a mist hung over the sea, whose moaning surge could now be heard, and the massive walls cast a murky shade all around, which the waning moonlight but faintly illumined. In some places Lawrence had actually to feel

his way, and it was with difficulty that he avoided stumbling over the numerous obstacles that intercepted his path. The measured rise and fall of the tide was now more distinctly audible as the waves broke upon the sea-beach and gurgled in the hollows and crevices of the rocks. Again sounded in his ears the shrill whoop of the wakeful owl, who kept watch from her lonely tower. Save that the moon was but a thin sharp crescent of silver, and the air more hazy and cold, it might have been the self-same night when he and Milroy had their death-grapple upon these very battlements.

Lawrence's pulse throbbed wildly, his heart beat as though it would burst, and his parched tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, when, little by little, he neared the fatal spot. A cold sweat bedewed his forehead, his limbs trembled as though he had suddenly been struck with paralysis, and his whole appearance was that of a man suffering from excess of physical terror. Then

why was it that he had persistently sought out this dreaded scene?—why had he not fled to the uttermost parts of the earth rather than come wilfully to tempt the ghost of Edward Milroy to demand vengeance at his hands? Was it in expiation and atonement for so dark and hideous a crime that the unhappy man forced himself to return to the scene of the foul tragedy, ere yet the moon had passed away that gleamed on the glazing eye of his helpless victim?

Step by step, with a seemingly unerring instinct, followed the mysterious stranger, who now drew his cloak over his face until his features were almost entirely concealed. As Lawrence approached nearer to the fatal court, the scene of a double murder, his silent follower somewhat diverged from his course until he gained a portion of the battlements that overlooked the spot. Here, completely screened from observation by the dark shadow of one of the old towers, he

calmly watched Lawrence's motions. The latter at length gained the goal he had resolutely set before him, and rested his trembling limbs against the walls of the court, almost in the identical position in which Milroy stood six nights before. But he durst not look at the narrow embrasure lest a ghastly, pallid face should be seen above the rusty bars, glaring at the intruder with its fixed and glassy eyes.

Lawrence now bent his head upon his breast, and tried to pray.

“Oh God!” he murmured, “what agony have I suffered—how swiftly hath thy vengeance overtaken me! A few days back and I walked this earth young, joyous, full of youth's energy and hope, while now I crouch beside these ruined walls a fugitive, an outcast, and a murderer. And how has this terrible change been wrought in me—what strange combination of circumstances has brought about my ruin and damnation? Love! Ay, and a pure and honourable

passion too—no unholy lust and base purpose had a place in my heart. Had it been so, when I found that another was preferred before me I might have given a passing sigh over the ungratified passion of the hour, and soon found consolation in some fresh adventure. Yet how has this fond attachment—or rather, this blind adoration—been rewarded? I was rejected, despised, and slighted for an unknown stranger. I, with my prospects, my birth—but stay, she knew not who I was. Well, it were of little avail now that she did, and all that remains for me is to fill a secret grave, where no one can point a finger of scorn at the felon's tomb. Weak fool that I was to give way to the frenzied impulse of the moment, to wreak my vengeance upon a hated rival! What had this man done to me that I should basely stain my hands with his blood? It was no fault of his that he was preferred to me—he took no dishonourable advantage of a trusting girl;

he did not seek to fix a quarrel on me, and to lash me to madness by any display of triumph. We met by some mysterious coincidence when my brain was fevered, my reason subverted by excess of rage, disappointment, and sorrow—and my evil demon being at hand to prompt the horrid deed, I yielded to the tempter. Let me no longer pollute with my breath this calm atmosphere—let not the morning sun, which brings gladness and peace to all good men, beam upon the midnight murderer. Murderer! Yes, let me repeat that awful word which even now, methinks, the foul spirits—who seem to beckon on me with their shrivelled, grisly fingers—are hissing in my ears. Stay: ere all is over, let me try to breathe a prayer—let not my last accents be words of blasphemy and madness!”

The unhappy man sank upon his knees and wildly clasped his hands, as he poured forth some incoherent expressions of prayer.

During the time in which he reasoned

with himself how it was he committed the fatal deed, the unseen stranger keenly watched every motion he made. And now this mysterious figure silently drew nearer and nearer to the wretched Lawrence, until he stood upon an angle of the parapet-wall almost directly overlooking the court. With his arms folded across his breast, his cloak thrown back, and his hat partially raised from his forehead, allowing a full view of the stern, determined countenance, he surveyed the prostrate figure at his feet with a singular, fixed gaze. Once more a shrill note of the restless owl sounded in the cold air, and again the bat wheeled her noiseless flight round the fatal spot.

All at once the screech-bird ceased her whoop, and instead there came, trembling faintly at first, but swelling gradually on the ear, from some distant churchyard, the deep tones of a bell. At the first stroke Lawrence started, but did not lift his head; and as the last note gradually died away

he drew forth a pistol, and placed it at full cock ; then closing his eyes, which for an instant he had opened, he pressed the muzzle to his breast.

“Heaven forgive me!” was all he said, in low, gurgling accents ; and instantaneously the sharp report followed, re-echoing from wall to wall, and from battlement to battlement, throughout the old castle.

As Lawrence drew out the fatal weapon the stranger sprang down from his position of vantage ; but if he intended to have arrested the suicide’s hand it was too late. The trigger was pulled by Lawrence at the exact moment the other rushed forward ; and all he could do was to raise the prostrate form and endeavour to stanch the gushing torrent of blood. Lawrence had completely turned round after delivering the shot, and his face was almost hidden by the dark shade of the wall, while the stranger’s was exposed full to the moonlight. His hat,



too, had fallen off, allowing the latter's whole countenance to be seen; and some obscuring clouds had now passed away from the moon's orb, rendering more brilliant the previous dim light.

Just then Lawrence, who was lying quite still, as though the paralysis of death had already fastened on his limbs, opened his bloodshot eyes, and fixed them upon the stranger's face. Strange was the effect of what he saw upon the wounded man, for he instantaneously raised both hands to his eyes, at the same time shrinking back with the wildest gestures of terror.

“Away, horrible vision!” he burst forth; “let me die in peace! Oh, God! might I not have been spared this awful sight!”

Again his head sank, for his strength was fast becoming exhausted, and it seemed as though the vital spark would soon be extinct. He was now quite unconscious, and the stranger, who had partially succeeded in stopping the flow of blood, placed

his body against the wall, having first folded up his cloak so as to make a pillow for Lawrence's head. The former paced up and down the narrow court, apparently debating within himself what to do. In a few minutes he appeared to have made up his mind, and, casting a last look at the apparently lifeless figure before him, turned his back upon the ghastly spectacle, and sped rapidly through the castle.

As he passed out of the postern gate, and stepped on to the barren heath, once more the thrilling screech of the owl resounded amid the ruins, and the hollow surge of the sea was faintly heard chafing against the rocks.

## CHAPTER XVI.

OUR story now passes over a period of six months, during which time Aubrey De Vaux had been restlessly wandering about from place to place—now remaining a week in a town, then going a fortnight into the country, exploring its rugged scenery, and getting an insight into the manners and customs of the inhabitants. Immediately on his arrival at St. Petersburg he had taken for a year one of the finest palaces in the fashionable part of the city; but as it would be some time before the season commenced, he left the Baron and Ida to make things comfortable, while he made a tour about the country. It soon got whispered abroad that an immensely rich Englishman

had come to take up his abode in the capital, and much curiosity was shown to find out who he was. But the Baron and Ida kept very quiet, and did nothing in the way of making any acquaintances until De Vaux himself should return.

When he did come back it was the month of February, and everything had been arranged so that he should at once find the doors of the fashionable world open to admit the wealthy stranger. His friend, the ambassador, had easily managed this; and this evening was to witness Aubrey's first introduction to the *élite* of St. Petersburg, at a grand ball given at the British embassy; which scene we will now present to the reader.

Carriage after carriage rolled up to the door of the ambassador's palace, and set down the guests, who were closely wrapped up in thick fur cloaks to guard against the intense cold. The moon shone brilliantly, and flashed upon the accoutrements of the

soldiers who kept guard near the doors. As soon as the entrance-hall was gained, a flood of light dazzled the spectator's eye, and a delightful warmth pervaded the air; magnificent exotics diffused a delicious perfume around; lines of liveried officials ushered up the visitor to the reception-rooms; and the band of one of the crack regiments was stationed in the vestibule to play a choice selection of music as the guests arrived.

A still more brilliant scene awaited the guests when they gained the large ball-room, at one end of which the host and hostess received their friends. It was a long and lofty apartment, lit up by hundreds of variegated wax candles in candelabra of the most classic and elegant devices, and was thronged with a gay multitude of the fashionable society of the capital. The wax-lights flashed in a thousand rays from the costly gems glittering on many lovely women; and rich silk and brocade dresses

rustled as their fair wearers wheeled round in the mazy waltz.

Aubrey De Vaux was not dancing the waltz, but stood beside the beautiful young Countess Z——, whose wit, raillery, and bewitching voice had captivated her staid husband, an elderly capitalist, immensely wealthy, but stolid, taciturn, and business-like. Aubrey's appearance had little changed since we saw him at his baronial castle, in the commencement of our story. Although he had travelled a good deal, and been exposed to all sorts of weather since his departure from Scotland, his features still retained the rather effeminate look which characterized them at that time; the same singular pallor was observable on his countenance, and there was even yet a more melancholy expression in his large dark eyes than was before noticeable; his glance, too, was more uncertain than ever; and his lips never wore a smile, but were invariably tightly compressed, as

though to stifle some secret emotion. But there was a restlessness in his motions, unlike the former languid indifference he displayed; and his hair was cut and parted differently from the way it used to be worn; although, except by those who knew him intimately, those little changes would never have been observed.

“And what do you think of our cold northern climate and dull, damp country, after your bright, clear English skies, Mr. De Vaux?” demanded the fair countess, with an arch twinkle in her merry eyes.

“Ah, you must not be too severe upon our dreadful, foggy old England,” said Aubrey. “I admit the delicacy of your satire, but you know the sun does not always shine even where the Countess Z—— makes the earth smile with her presence.”

“Well, the icy atmosphere of the last week has not frozen up the spring of compliments which wells from Mr. De Vaux’s

lips," returned the lady, alluding to the strain in which his companion had been talking since they were introduced.

The truth was, Aubrey was not quite at his ease this evening. It was the first time he found himself in the society of polished women for many months past, for during the time he was roving about from place to place, he had been out of the way of social intercourse with his fellow-creatures, and, in consequence, a little rust was visible.

"I forgot that you must be so surfeited with pretty speeches, that compliments sound very insipid in your ear," returned De Vaux; "but you must remember I have been wandering far away from civilized haunts of men for months past."

"Yes, I will make some allowance for that; but tell me, what do you think of our Russian beauties?"

"Well, they decidedly come up to my expectations, for I confess they are very



lovely, and I like their style much better than that of our London belles."

"By the way, who is the young lady who is always of your party?—indeed, she and her father live with you, don't they?"

"Oh! they are old and great friends of mine. I asked them to join me on my visit to Russia; it is so stupid living alone."

"She is very handsome. I wonder you don't fall in love with her; it must be dangerous having such a charmer always near you."

"There is little chance of that ever coming about; you must remember I have known her since she was a child."

"Therefore you imagine there is no possibility of your ever loving her. I do not see your reason in this, Mr. De Vaux."

"Poor Ida! she is a good, clever girl, and will be very well off. I wish to get a husband for her, but he must be something

out of the common run of men, for I assure you she is no ordinary girl."

At this juncture some one came to claim the countess's hand for the dance; and Aubrey sauntered away, scanning with critical eye the row of young Russian beauties who adorned the raised dais which ran along one side of the room. Seeing Ida Von Borgern seated by herself, he gave her his arm, and conducted her to a side room, where refreshments were served; and a sofa just large enough for two happening to be vacant, they had an opportunity for some undisturbed conversation.

"And how is my fair Ida?" began Aubrey, who had just swallowed a tumbler of champagne, and was in the humour for one of his periodical fits of flirtation, half-serious, half-jesting, which, above all things, contributed so greatly to buoy Ida up with false hopes.

"Do you know, Ida, you are looking very lovely to-night," continued DeVaux, without

giving her time to answer; "it is evident the northern climate has not robbed your cheeks of their roses."

Indeed Ida was looking surpassingly beautiful this evening. Her rich pink silk dress, heavily trimmed with deep edged lace, fell about her full form with statuesque grace, and her wavy masses of hair were bound with a light coronet of diamonds, a recent gift from De Vaux. Gently inclining towards him, her exquisitely-shaped shoulders and arms were fully exposed to view, and the wonderfully tender expression in her eyes would have melted a heart of adamant. Her passion for him, instead of diminishing by absence, had only increased, and she now began to feel more reckless of the consequences of his reading her secret. She had observed, ere now, that her glance had often a singular effect upon Aubrey, as though she acquired some mysterious mastery over him when he was under the spell of her deeply expressive eyes. To-night

there was an unwonted fire and power in her gaze, and Aubrey almost felt fascinated by its mute and sympathetic influence.

“It is a long time since you have paid me a compliment, Mr. De Vaux,” said Ida, with some hesitation; “I almost began to think you had forgotten me altogether.”

“No; there you wrong me,” exclaimed Aubrey, with vehemence; “I swear you are very frequently in my thoughts. Stay,” he said, abruptly, “I will no longer have you call me Mr. De Vaux. Do, dear Ida, from henceforth drop that absurd formality.”

“Well, I will, if you promise to be very good and obedient,” said the lady, with a sweet smile, and another glance from her eyes that thrilled through De Vaux’s frame.

“Let me hear it, then—do, please, my own Ida,” said Aubrey, with increasing warmth.

“Aubrey, Aubrey—it is a name I like!” said Ida, glancing down at her fan; “what

do you say, Aubrey?" she continued, again raising her eyes and fixing them on his.

"Now I love it as I never did before," said Aubrey, and, turning round, asked for another glass of champagne. When this was served him he held it up to the light and then quaffed it down, as though he wished to prolong the stimulus it gave. "How delicious this tastes!—it is seldom that I enjoy champagne."

"You seem very happy to-night; perhaps the smiles of that beautiful countess have raised your spirits above their usual level. I see you so seldom now that I must make the best of this opportunity," said Ida.

"I have certainly been leading a vagrant life lately, but now, for the next few months, I am fixed here; so we shall see a great deal of each other," answered De Vaux.

"Do you find your expectations realized of the benefit you were to experience by

the change and novelty of your present life?"

"I fear not, Ida; you see before you the same fickle, wayward, inconstant Aubrey De Vaux, whom in happier days you used to chide for wasted energies and valuable time ill spent."

"Why do you say 'in happier days?' What change has come over you? What expectation is unfulfilled?—is any fond illusion dissipated?"

"All is against me—each hope is dashed to the ground. Turn which way I may, nothing but sorrow and disappointment are my lot. Wine! wine!—give me more champagne," said Aubrey, turning round to the attendant. His countenance was flushed, his eye rolled wildly, and Ida noticed an unusual expression in its dark depths.

Unknown to those around him, Aubrey bore a terrible secret in his bosom, the faintest hint of which he never dared breathe to mortal soul; but, like the Roman

of old, had to preserve a calm exterior while his vitals were being consumed slowly but surely. This hidden mystery was the cause of much that was eccentric and inexplicable in his conduct; and the unbidden spectre would stalk before his eyes in the very midst of those hours when most he abandoned himself to unrestrained enjoyment. Thus now, when Ida's soft form touched his own, and the magic influence of her loving eyes held him spell-bound for the moment, the insidious cankerworm gnawed at his heart's core.

"Dear Aubrey," said Ida, unable to conceal the intensity of passionate fondness her voice revealed, "why do you withhold all knowledge of what vexes you from those who might bring comfort to your troubled spirit? Now do tell me what it is that causes you such disquiet? Surely it is woman's truest mission to pour balm upon the bruised feelings of man."

"Selfish and inconsiderate that I am!"

exclaimed De Vaux, "why do I thrust my sorrows upon your gentle bosom? No, Ida, I cannot consent to relieve myself of any portion of my misery by imparting it to you. I do not know what has led me to say thus much, only it is dreadful to have to smile upon the world when one's life's-blood is drop by drop ebbing away."

"Is it any actual physical disease that preys upon you? If so, your wealth could purchase all the skill of the physician's art. I fancied the pain you alluded to was entirely mental."

"You are right, Ida—but oh! I would rather undergo any amount of mere bodily suffering than the constant corroding agony of the mind. Listen to me, Ida, and pity me, but seek not at present to penetrate my secret. Some day, I solemnly swear, you shall know all. All my wealth, my worldly advantages, and envied position, I would surrender to-morrow to the man who could relieve me of my burden. Music, exquisite



to others, has no charms for me ; the material world, with all its splendour and beauty, cannot conceal the phantom from my gaze ; even women, let them exert to the full their wondrous witchery, can only make me forget my lot for a brief moment. And you," he continued, sinking his voice low, and passionately returning her ardent gaze, "you would seek to share the weight of my sorrow, to raise the dull film which overspreads my hopes? No, sweet one! you shall live and be happy! Forget all this—it is a mere paroxysm of the moment. I tell you I am trifling with your feelings, amusing myself at your expense—hate me for it, leave me: I am not worthy of the regard of so sweet a heart."

These last words were uttered in a half-mocking, half-serious voice ; but there was a peculiar expression in Aubrey's eye which could not deceive Ida. She was convinced something was wrong, for it was inconceivable that a man with the talents she knew

De Vaux to possess could think it worth his while persistently to waste his whole life's energies in frivolity and idleness.

“No, Aubrey! you shall not put me off in this way; I must compel you to tell me what this hidden sorrow is that sits so heavy on your heart. Remember, I am an old friend, for it is nearly seven years since you first made the acquaintance of the shy, silent, foreign girl, who now asks you to place trust in her discretion. What is it that goads the diseased mind to the verge of insanity but constantly brooding over fancied woes? It is inconceivable that you, apparently on the pinnacle of happiness, without a cloud to mar your bright destiny, can really be the victim to so much unseen misery.”

“Let us think no more of it,” said Aubrey, with forced gaiety; “of course it is all mere whimsical fancy. Unhappy, indeed! I feel light as air, and long to wheel round with you, dear Ida, in a waltz. You

know you dance waltzes to perfection. My fingers shall clasp your taper waist, and our hearts shall beat time to the music. I do love a waltz," he continued, throwing his head back and speaking with half-closed eyes—"one floats round in dreamy delight, just faintly conscious that a tender form is leaning on our arm."

"And is this the way you would put me off from seeking to know more of your secret trouble?" said Ida, reproachingly; "but the time may come when all sympathy may be too late."

"This gay and festive scene, Ida, is not the place for such gloomy talk. Life is fleeting fast away, and why need we dwell upon dismal topics. What a pretty air is that they are playing; I do not remember hearing it before; will you have a turn with me before the band stops?"

"At any rate you cannot say that I introduced the subject you complain of; it is out of place I know, but this is not the first

time we have talked of solemn matters in a ball-room.”

“What have you and I, two young spirits in the full tide of the world’s prosperity and smiles, to do with anything solemn? ‘Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!’” exclaimed De Vaux, with a reckless, mocking air, as he drank off a glass of champagne.

“It is not for me to play the saint, Aubrey; but I should not have expected you to quote such an awful text so lightly. No, we are both bad enough, Heaven knows, but do not let us mock our Maker in pure wantonness.”

“I ask your pardon, Ida, for the thoughtless slip I made, but that is one thing which my conscience does not reproach me with. I never wilfully jested with sacred subjects; on the contrary, I have a particular horror of it; no one can say that I ever openly and ostentatiously paraded my wickedness in the face of the world.”

“No, that I never heard alleged, and indeed you are generally very guarded in your expressions; that made me wonder at your saying what you did.”

“Now that you have pardoned my error, Ida, I think we may join the waltz. I feel suddenly inclined for some active motion; it is tantalizing sitting here when so divine an air is inviting us to dance.”

Aubrey half-playfully placed his arm round Ida's waist and gently drew her from the sofa; at the same time his eyes met hers with a glance of intense meaning. It was a look that boded no happiness for Ida, although she could not understand its expression. Hitherto he had merely been playing with her, as a temporary relief from *ennui* and in mere wantonness of purpose, but a terrible danger was awakened by the very increase of influence she seemed this evening to have won. To a mind such as Aubrey's, unsustained by any lofty principle of duty, the feeling of honour which

should have invested with a peculiar sacredness the daughter of his friend, might at any moment be overwhelmed by the impulse of passion. He had been the spoilt child of fortune, and was accustomed to gratify every whim which a wayward fancy could suggest, without any regard to consequences. Certainly, up to this time, he had endeavoured to evade the dangerous fascination which Ida unquestionably exercised, and more than once thought of putting an end to the anomalous position in which he stood with the Baron and his daughter, by no longer having them inmates of his house. But, somehow or other, things always went on as usual, and a mysterious destiny seemed to draw Aubrey and Ida still more closely within the circle of its influence.

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