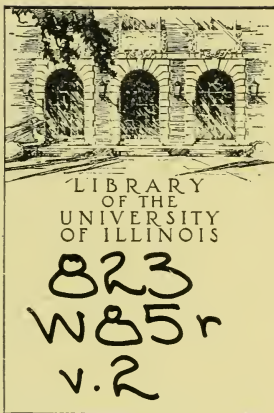


Katherine A. Watson.



Return this book on or before the
Latest Date stamped below.

University of Illinois Library

APR 12 1957

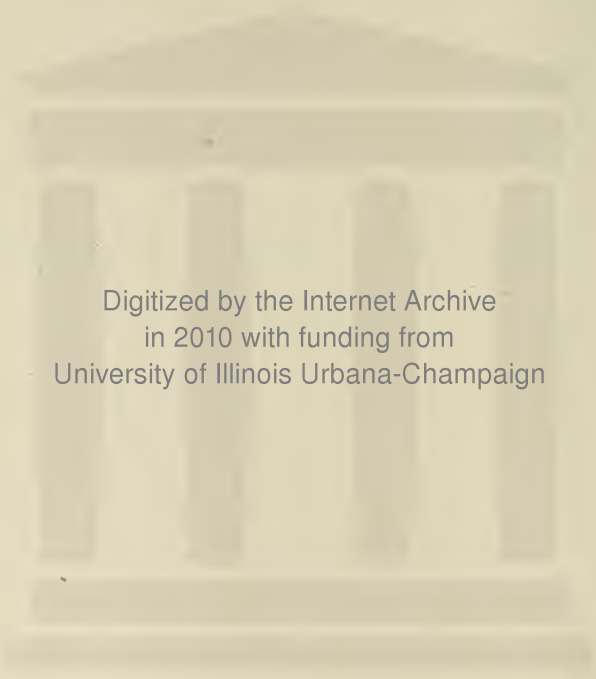
L161—H41



THE RED COURT FARM.



VOL. II.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

THE
RED COURT FARM.

A Novel.

BY
MRS. HENRY WOOD,
AUTHOR OF
"EAST LYNNE," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.
1868.

[All rights of Translation and Reproduction are reserved.]

LONDON:
SAVILL, EDWARDS AND CO., PRINTERS, CHANDOS STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.

823
W85 r
v. 2

CONTENTS
OF
THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. COASTDOWN	1
II. WHAT WAS THE FEAR?	31
III. SUPERSTITIOUS TALES	64
IV. THE NEW MISTRESS OF THE RED COURT	86
V. AT SCHOOL IN LONDON	118
VI. CAPTAIN COPP	137
VII. ISAAC THORNYCROFT'S STRATAGEM . .	160
VIII. IN LOVE	179
IX. WILFUL DISOBEDIENCE	202
X. THE HALF-MOON BEACH	230
XI. MY LADY AT THE RED COURT	261

J. A. E. Watson

THE RED COURT FARM.

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

COASTDOWN.

RUSHING through the streets of London, as if he were rushing for his life, went a gentleman in deep mourning. It was Robert Hunter. Very soon after we last saw her, he had followed the hearse that conveyed his wife to her long home in Katterley churchyard.

Putting aside his grief, his regret, his bitter repentance, her death made every difference to him. Had there been a child, the house and income would have remained his; being none, it all went from him. Of his own money but little remained: he had been extravagant during the brief period when he was Lieutenant Hunter, had spent right and left. One does not do these things without having to pay for it. Mrs.

Chester, going over to offer a condoling visit, heard this, and spoke out her opinion with her usual want of reserve. She looked upon him as a man lost. "No," said he, "I am *saved*! I shall go to work now." "Hoping to redeem fortune?" she rejoined. "Yes," he said, "and something else besides."

Heavily lay the shadow of the past upon Robert Hunter. The drooping form of his loving and neglected wife, bright with hope once, mouldering in her grave now, was in his mind always; the years that he had wasted in frivolity, the money he had recklessly spent. Oh, the simpleton he was!—as he thought now, looking back in his repentance. When he had become master of a good profession, why did he abandon it because a little money was left him? To become a gentleman amongst gentlemen, forsooth; to put away the soiling of his hands; to live a life of vanity and indolence. Heaven had recompensed him in its own just way: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap. His soldiership was gone; his wife was gone; money, the greater portion of it, was gone. Nothing left to him but remembrance, and the ever-present, bitter sense of his folly, He was beginning life

anew: he must go back to the bottom of the tree of his engineering profession, lower than where he had left off: he would so begin it and take up his work daily, and untiringly persevere in it, so as—Heaven helping him—to atone for the past. Not all the past. The wasted years were gone for ever; the gentle wife, whom he had surely helped to send to the grave, could not be recalled to earth. Not so much on his wife were his musings bent as on the career of work lying before him. He had so grieved for her in the days before and immediately after her death, that it seemed as though the sorrow had, in a degree, spent itself, and reaction set in. If his handicraft's best skill, indifference to privation, unflagging industry, could redeem the past idleness, he would surely redeem that. Not in a pecuniary point of view, it was not of that he thought, but in the far graver one of wasted life. His eyes were opening a little; he saw how offensive on High must be a life of mere idle indulgence; a waste of that precious time, short at the best, bestowed upon him to use. This, this was what he had resolved to atone for: Heaven helping him, he once more aspirated in the sad but resolute earnestness of his heart.

Making an end of his affairs at Katterley, he came to London, presented himself at the office of the firm where he was formerly employed, and said he had come to ask for work. They remembered the clever, active, industrious young man, and were glad to have him again. And Robert Hunter—dropping his easy life, just as he dropped the name he had borne in it—entered on his career of toil and usefulness.

The spring was growing late when his employers intimated to him that he was going to be sent to Spain, to superintend some work there. Anywhere, he answered; he was quite ready, let them send him where they would.

On this morning that we see him splashing through the mud of London improvised by the water carts, he was busy making his preparations for departure, and was on his way to call on Professor Macpherson. He wanted some information in regard to the locality for which he was bound, and thought the professor could supply it. The previous night, sitting alone in his lodgings, he had been surprised, and rather annoyed, by the appearance of Mrs. Chester. That lady was in town on her own business, and found him out. Incautiously he let slip that he

was going on the morrow to Dr. Macpherson's. She seized upon the occasion to make a visit also.

At this very moment Mrs. Chester was en route also. Pushing her way along, inquiring her road perpetually, getting into all sorts of odd nooks and turnings, she at length emerged on the more open squares of Bloomsbury, and there she saw her brother, who had been calling at places on his way, in front of her.

“You might have waited for me, Robert, I think.”

“I did wait twenty minutes. I came on then. My time is not my own, you know, Penelope.”

“Have you seen anything of Lady Ellis since you came to London?” inquired Mrs. Chester, as they walked on together.

“No, I should not be likely to see her.”

“She is staying in London; she came to it direct when she left me. At least, she was staying here, but in a letter I had from her she said she thought of going on a visit to Coast-down. Her plans——”

“Excuse me, Penelope, I don't care to hear of Lady Ellis's plans.”

“You have grown quite a bear, Robert! That’s what work’s doing for you.”

He laughed pleasantly. “I think it is hurry that is doing it for me this morning, I feel as if I had no time for anything. Number fifteen. Here we are!”

It was a commodious house, this one in Bloomsbury, steps leading up to the entrance. He sent in his card, “Mr. Robert Hunter,” and they were admitted.

“Lawk a’ mercy! Is it you?” exclaimed Mrs. Macpherson, looking first at the card and then at its owner, as they were shown into a handsome room, and the professor’s lady, in sky-blue silk, and a scarlet Garibaldi body elaborately braided with black, advanced to receive them. She did not wear the bird-of-paradise feather, but she wore something equivalent to it: some people might call it a cap and some a turban, the front ornament of which, perching on the forehead, was an artificial bird, with shining wings of green and gold.

Mrs. Macpherson took a hand of each, shaking them heartily. “And so you have put away your name?” she said.

“Strictly speaking, it never was my name,”

he answered. "It was my wife's. I had to assume it with her property, but when the property left me again, I thought it time to drop the name."

The professor came forward in his threadbare coat, with (it must be owned) a great stream of some sticky red liquid down the front of it, for they had fetched him from his experimenting laboratory. But his smile was bright, his welcome genial. Mrs. Macpherson, whose first thoughts were always of hospitality, ordered luncheon to be got ready. Robert Hunter, sitting down between them, quietly told them he had become a working man again, and where he was going, and what to do. Mrs. Macpherson heard him with a world of sympathy.

"It's just one o' them crosses in life that come to a many of us," remarked she. "Play first and work afterwards! it's out o' the order of things. But take heart. You've got your youth yet, and you'll grow reconciled."

"If you only knew how glad I am to be at work again!" he said, a faint light of earnestness crossing his face. "My years of idleness follow me as a reproach—as a waste of life."

"But for steady attention to my work and

studies, I should never have been able to contribute my poor mite to further the cause of science," said the professor, meekly, speaking it as an encouragement to Robert Hunter.

"If he hadn't stuck at it late and early—burning the candle at both ends, as 'twere—he'd not have had his ologies at his fingers' tips," pursued Mrs. Macpherson, who often deemed it necessary to explain more lucidly her husband's meaning.

"And so you are about to migrate to Spain?" said the professor. "You——"

"He says he's going off to it by rail," interposed Mrs. Macpherson. "What are the people there? Blacks?"

"No, no, Betsy; they are white, as we are."

"I knew a Spanish man once, professor, and he was olive brown."

"They are dark from the effects of the sun. I thought you alluded to the race. The radiation of heat there is excessive; and——"

"That is, it's burning hot in the place," corrected Mrs. Macpherson. "I wish you joy of it, Mr. Hunter. You'll catch it full, a-laying down of your lines of rail."

“I think you have been in Spain?” observed Mr. Hunter to the doctor.

“I once stayed some months there. What do you say?—that you want some information that you think I can supply? I hope I can. What is it? Please to step into my room.”

The professor passed out of the door by which he entered, Mr. Hunter following him. A short passage, and then they were in the square back room consecrated to the professor and his pursuits. It was not a museum, it was not a laboratory, it was not a library, or an aviary of stuffed birds, or an astronomical observatory; but it was something of all. Specimens of earth, of rock, of flowers, of plants, of weeds, of antiquarian walls; of animals, birds, fish, insects; books in cases, owls in cages; and a vast many more odd things too numerous to mention. Mrs. Macpherson thought it well to follow them.

“Law!” said she to Mrs. Chester, “did living mortal ever see the like o’ the place?”

“What a confused mass of things it is!” was the answer, as Mrs. Chester’s eyes went roving around in curiosity.

“*He* says it isn’t. He has the face to tell me everything is in its place, and he could find it in

the dark. The great beast there with its round eyes, is a owl that some of 'em caught and killed when they went out moralizing into Herefordshire."

"Not moralizing, Betsy. One of the excursions of the Geological Society——"

"It's all the same," interrupted Mrs. Macpherson; and the professor meekly turned to Mr. Hunter and continued an explanation he was giving him, a sort of earthenware pipe in his hand. The ladies drew near.

"You perceive, Mr. Hunter, there is a small aperture for the passing in of the atmospheric air?"

"That is, there's a hole where the wind goes out," explained the professor's wife.

"By these means, taking the precautions I have previously shown you, the pressure on the valve may be increased to almost any given extent! As a natural consequence——"

"Oh, bother consequences!" cried Mrs. Macpherson; "I'm sure young Robert Hunter don't care to waste his time with that rubbish, when there's cold beef and pickled salmon waiting."

"Just two minutes, Betsy, and Mr. Hunter shall be with you. Perhaps you and Mrs. Chester will oblige us by going on."

“Not if I know it,” said the lady, resolutely. “I’ve had experience of your ‘two minutes’ before to-day, professor, and seen ’em swell into two mortal hours. Come! finish what you’ve got to say to him, and we’ll all go together.”

Dr. Macpherson continued his explanations in a low voice, possibly to avoid more interruptions. Five minutes or so, and they moved from the table, the doctor still talking in answer to a question.

“Not yet. I grieve to say we have not any certain clue to it, and opinions are much divided among us. It needs these checks to remind us of our finite nature, Mr. Hunter. So far shalt thou go, but no farther. That is a law of the Divine Creator, and we cannot break it.”

Robert Hunter smiled. “The strangest thing of all is to hear one of you learned men acknowledge as much. The philosopher’s stone; perpetual motion; the advancing and receding tides—do you not live in expectation of making the secret of these marvels yours?”

Professor Macpherson shook his head. “If we were permitted: but we never shall be. *If*. That word has been the arresting point of man in the past ages, as it will be in the future.

Archimedes said he could move the world, you know, if he had but an outward spot to rest the fulcrum of his lever on."

"It's a lucky thing for us that Archimy didn't," was the comment of Mrs. Macpherson. "It wouldn't be pleasant to be swayed about promiscuous, the earth tossing like a ship at sea."

Robert Hunter declined the luncheon; he had many things to do still, and his time in England was growing very short; so he said adieu to them both then, and to his sister.

"Now remember, Robert Hunter," said Mrs. Macpherson, taking both his hands, "when you visit England temporay, and want a friendly bed to put yourself into, come to us. Me and the pefessor took to you when we first saw you at Guild. You remember that night," she added, turning to Mrs. Chester: "we come up in a carriage and pair; I wore my orange brocade and my bird-o'-paradise; and there was a Lady Somebody there, one o' those folks that put on airs and graces; which isn't pretty in a my lady, any more than it is in a missis. You took our fancies, Mr. Hunter—though it does seem odd to be calling you that, and not Lake—and we'll look upon it as a favour if you'll come to us

sometimes. The professor knows we shall, but he's never cute at compliments. He was born without gumption."

The professor's lingering shake of the hand, the welcoming look in his kindly eyes, said at least as much as his wife's words; and Robert Hunter went forth, knowing that they wished to be his friends.

So they sat down to their luncheon and he departed; and the same night went forth on his travels.

Coastdown lay low in the light of the morning sun. The skies were clear, the rippling sea was gay with its fishing boats. Spring had been very late that year, but this was a day warm and bright. The birds were singing, the lambs were sporting in the fields, the hedges were bursting into buds of green.

Swinging through the gate of the Red Court Farm, having been making a call there to fetch a newspaper, came Captain Copp: a sailor with a wooden leg, a pea jacket, and a black glazed hat. Captain Copp had been a merchant captain of the better class, as his father was before him. After his misfortune—the loss of his leg in an

encounter with pirates—he gave up the sea, and settled at Coastdown on his small but sufficient income.

The captain's womenkind—as he was in the habit of calling the inmates of his house—consisted of his wife and a maid servant. The former was meek, yielding, gentle as those gentle lambs in the field; the latter, Sarah Ford, worth her weight in gold for honest capability, liked to manage the captain and the world on occasions. There were encounters between them. He was apt to call her a she-pirate and other affectionate names. She openly avowed her disbelief in his marvellous reminiscences, especially one that was a standing story with him concerning a sea-serpent that he saw with his own eyes in the Pacific Ocean. He had also seen a mermaid. Like many another sailor, the captain was a simple-minded man in land affairs, only great at sea and its surroundings; with implicit faith in all its marvels.

On occasions the captain's mother honoured him with a visit; a resolute, well-to-do lady, who used to voyage with her husband, and had now settled in Liverpool. When she came she ruled the house and the captain, for she thought him

(forty, now) and his wife little better than children yet. In solid sense, if you believed herself, nobody could approach her.

Captain Copp came forth from his call at the Red Court Farm, letting the gate swing behind him, and stumped along quickly, his stout stick and his wooden leg keeping time on the ground. The captain's face was beaming with satisfaction, for he had contrived to lay hold of young Cyril Thornycroft, and recount to him (for the fiftieth time) the whole story of the sea-serpent from beginning to end. He was a short, wiry man, with the broad round shoulders of a sailor. The road branched off before him two ways, like an old-fashioned fork; the way on the right led direct to the village and the common beach; the way on the left to his home.

The captain halted. Sociably inclined, he was rather fond of taking himself to the Mermaid; that noted public house where the sailors and the coast-guard men congregated to watch the omnibus come in from Jutpoint. It must be getting near to the time of its arrival, half-past eleven, and the captain's leg moved a step forward in the direction; on the other hand, he wanted to say a word to that she-serpent Sarah

(with whom he had enjoyed an encounter before coming out) about the dinner. The striking of the clock decided him, and he bore on for home, past the churchyard. Crossing part of the heath, he came to the houses, red brick, detached, cheerful, his own being the third. At the window of the first sat an old lady. Captain Copp went through the little gate and put his face without ceremony against the pane, close to Mrs. Connaught's.

"How's the master this morning?" he called out through the glass.

She answered by drawing aside and pointing to the fire. An asthmatical old gentleman, just recovering from a fit of the gout, sat there in a white cotton nightcap and dressing-gown made of yellow flannel.

"He's come down for the first time, Captain Copp. He looks brave this morning," was Mrs. Connaught's answer.

"Glad to see ye, comrade; I'll come in later," cried the captain through the window, flourishing his stick in token of congratulation. And old Mr. Connaught, who had not heard a word, nodded the tassel of the white cap by way of answer.

In the parlour at home, when Captain Copp

entered it, sat his wife at work, a faded lady with a thin and fair face. Taking out the newspaper he had brought, he began to open it.

“Did you see the justice, Sam?” asked his wife in her gentle, loving tones.

“No, he was out. I only saw Cyril. There’ll be a fine row when he comes home. Mary Anne has run away.”

Mrs. Copp dropped her work. “Run away! oh, Sam! Run away from where?”

“From where?—why, from school,” said the choleric captain, who was just as hot as his wife was calm. “She came bursting in upon them this morning at breakfast, having run home all the eight miles. And she says she won’t go back.”

Mrs. Samuel Copp, who had never in her life presumed to take a walk without express permission given for it, lifted her hands in dismay. “I feared she would never stay at school; I feared she would not.”

“Old Connaught is downstairs to-day, Amy,” observed the captain to her after a long interval of silence, as he turned his paper.

“I am glad of that. He suffers sadly, poor man.”

“ Well, he’s getting old, you see ; and he’s one that has coddled himself all his life, which doesn’t answer. I say ! who’s this ? ”

A vision of something bright had flashed in at the little garden gate, on its way to the door. Mrs. Copp started up, saying that it was Mary Anne Thornycroft.

“ Not a bit of it,” said the captain. “ Mary Anne Thornycroft would come right in and not stand knocking at the door like a simpleton.”

The knocking was very loud and decisive, such as, one is apt to fancy in a simple country place, must herald the approach of a visitor of consequence. Sarah appeared showing in the stranger.

“ Lady Ellis, ma’am,” she said to her mistress.

A dress of rich black silk, a handsome India shawl, a girlish straw bonnet, with a great deal of bright mauve ribbon about it, a white veil, and delicate lavender gloves. My lady had got up herself well for her journey ; stylish, but not too fine to travel. She had discarded her mourning, but it was convenient to wear her black silks. The captain and his wife rose.

Yes, it was Lady Ellis. But she had mistaken the direction given her, and had come to Captain

Copp's instead of Mrs. Connaught's. When the explanation came, the gallant captain offered to take her in.

"Old Connaught is better to-day," observed he, volunteering the information. "He's down stairs in a nightcap and flannel gown."

Another minute, and Lady Ellis had the opportunity of making acquaintance with the articles of attire mentioned, and the old gentleman they adorned. Captain Copp, with his nautical disregard to ceremony, went into his neighbour's house as usual, without knocking, opened the sitting-room door, and sent the visitor in. Mrs. Connaught was not there, and he went to the kitchen in search of her. They were primitive-mannered, these worthy people of Coastdown, entering each others' kitchens or parlours at will.

Mr. Connaught, very excessively taken aback at the unexpected apparition, did nothing but look up with a stolid stare, as unable mentally to comprehend what the lady did there, and who she might be, as he was physically to rise and receive her. Lady Ellis lost her ready suavity for a moment, struck out of it by the curious old figure before her.

Mrs. Connaught was preparing some dainty little dish for her husband ; sick people have fancies, and he liked her cooking better than the cook's. She heard the wooden leg coming along the passage.

“ Here !” said the captain, “ some lady wants you. Came by the omnibus from Jutpoint, I gather ; got a white figure-head.”

He stumped out the back way as he spoke, and Mrs. Connaught entered the parlour. When Lady Ellis was a girl of fifteen, twenty years before, and she an unmarried woman getting on for forty, they had seen a good deal of each other. Not having met since, each had some little difficulty in making the recognition of the other ; but it dawned at last.

“ I could not stay any longer from coming to see you,” said Lady Ellis. “ You seem to be the only link left of my early home and my dear parents. Forgive me for intruding on you to-day ; had I waited longer I might not have been able to come at all.”

She sat down and untied her bonnet, and laid hold of Mrs. Connaught's hand and kept it, letting fall some tears. Old Connaught stared more than ever ; Mrs. Connaught, not a demon-

strative woman, but simple and kindly, answered in kind.

“How long it seems ago! And you must have grown grand since then, Lady Ellis! But I never knew your people very much, you know.”

“Ah, you forget! *I* grand!”—she went on, with a cheery laugh; “you will soon see how different I am from that. I came home to find nearly all those I cared for dead; you only are left, and I thought I must come down and find you out. Dear Mrs. Connaught, dear old friend, the longing for it got irrepressible.”

Lady Ellis, it may be remembered, had pencilled down Mrs. Connaught’s address at Mrs. Chester’s, as supplied by Mr. Thornycroft. It might prove useful, she thought, on some future occasion. And the occasion had come.

The world, as she thought, had not dealt bountifully with her; quite the opposite. Not to mince the matter, she had to scheme to live, just as much as Mrs. Chester had, only in a different way. She liked good clothes, she liked ease and good living. Never, save for those few short days of her Indian marriage, had she known what it was to be free from care. Her father had liked play better than work; he and her

mother, both, had a propensity to live beyond their income, to get into society that was above them, for they were not altogether gentlepeople. Extravagance, struggles, debts, pinching; all sorts of contrivances and care, outside show, meanness at home—such had been the experience of Angeline Finch, until some lucky chance took her to India as companion to a lady, and a still luckier introduced her to Sir George Ellis, an old man in his dotage. Two years of her reign as my lady—two blessed years; show, ease, life. Looking back upon them now, they seemed like a very haven. But Sir George died; it came to an end; and she home to Europe again, where she found herself a little embarrassed how to get along in the world.

Whether she had lost sight of her European acquaintances during her stay in India, or whether she had originally not possessed many, certain it was they seemed scarce now.

The vision, coming and going almost like a flash of lightning, of Mr. Thornycroft and his daughter, the gentleman's evident admiration of her, the tales she heard (perhaps exaggerated) of the style of living and the wealth at the Red Court, had set her mind a-longing. She thought

often how desirable would be a visit there: what might it not lead to? The determination to effect it grew into a settled hope. It might almost have been called a prevision, as you will find from what came of it. Of all the ills that can possibly befall this life, Lady Ellis, perhaps from the circumstances of her early experience, regarded poverty as the most fatal. She had grown to dread it awfully. After that short interval of ease and luxury, the thought of having to relapse back to contrivances, debts, duns, difficulties, turned her sick. Ah, what a difference it is!—what a wide gap between!—a shoulder of mutton for dinner one day, cold the next, hashed the third, beer limited, a gown turned and turned again, shabby at the best; and a good dinner of three courses and wines, and the toilette of Madame Elise!

And so, Lady Ellis, working out her own plans, had come swooping down to-day on Coast-down and Mrs. Connaught.

She went up to Mr. Connaught and took his hand; she looked admiringly at him, as if a yellow flannel gown and cotton nightcap were the most charming articles of attire that fashion could produce; she expressed her sorrow for his

ailments with a gentle voice. Certainly she did her best to win his heart and his wife's, and went three-parts of the way towards doing it.

Meanwhile things were in a commotion at the Red Court Farm. On the departure of Miss Derode at Christmas the justice had put his daughter to school, an eligible place eight miles only away. She had gone rebelliously; stayed rebelliously; and now finished up by running home again.

As the justice found when he got home. Mary Anne flatly refused to go back. She refused altogether to leave home.

Mr. Thornycroft, privately not knowing in the least what to do with his self-willed daughter, sat in his magisterial chair, the young lady carpeted before him. All he could say, and he said a great deal, did not move her in the least; back to school she would not go. It seemed that she had resumed at once old habits; had fed her birds, sang her songs to the grand piano, danced gleefully in and out amid the servants, and finally put on a most charming silk dress of delicate colour, that she would never have been permitted to wear at school, and was too good to have been taken there.

“I shall drive you back in an hour, Mary Anne.”

“I will not go, papa.”

“What’s that, girl? Do you mean to tell me to my face you will not go when I say you shall? That’s something new.”

“Of course if you make me get into the carriage and drive me there yourself, I cannot help it; but I should run away again to-morrow.”

“It is enough disgrace to you to have run away once.”

Mary Anne stood, half in contrition, half in defiance. Nearly seventeen now, tall and fair, very handsome, she scarcely looked one to be coerced to this step. Her clear blue eyes met those of her father; the very self-same eyes as his, the self-same will in them.

“As to disgrace, papa, I did nothing more than come straight home. It was the same thing as a morning walk, and I have often gone out for *that*.”

“What do you suppose is to become of you?” questioned Mr. Thornycroft, the conviction seating itself within him that she would not be forced from home again. He ran away from school himself, and his father had never been able to

get him back to it. Mary Anne had inherited his self-will.

“I can learn at home. Oh, papa, I will be very good and obedient if you let me stay.”

“You are too old now to be at home alone. And you would not obey mademoiselle, you know.”

“If you had wanted to place me at school, you should have done it when I was young, papa. I am too old to be sent there now, for the first time.”

Inwardly the justice acknowledged the truth of this. He began thinking that he must keep her, and engage some strict governess. But he did not want to do this; he objected to having governesses at the Red Court Farm.

“You don’t believe me perhaps, papa. Indeed, I will be good and obedient; but you must not send me away!”

He supposed it must be so. He did not see his way clearly out of the dilemma; she had been indulged always, she must be indulged still. Some signs of relenting in the blue eyes—handsome still as his daughter’s—Mary Anne saw it, and flew into his arms with a shower of tears.

What an opportunity for Lady Ellis! She

stayed on at Mrs. Connaught's, and went daily to the Red Court, and read with Mary Anne and saw to her studies; and was her charming companion and indulgent governess. Excursions abroad in plenty! Going to Jutpoint in Mr. Thornycroft's high carriage; sailing to sea in Tomlett's boat; here, there, everywhere! The young men happened to be away at this period, and Lady Ellis had the field open.

There were some weeks of it. My lady had made a private arrangement with Mrs. Connaught, insisting upon paying for herself while she stayed. The sea air was doing her so much good, she said. The sea air! My lady would have taken up her permanent abode in old Betts's boat rather than have removed herself to a distance from that desirable pile of buildings, the Red Court Farm. Looking at it from her little chamber window, that is, at its chimneys, and imagining the charming life underneath, it appeared to her as a very haven of refuge.

And Justice Thornycroft was becoming fascinated. He began to think there was not such another woman in the world.

Perhaps there was not. Let Harry Thornycroft be assured of one thing—that when these

clever women set their minds to lay hold of a man, to bend him to their will, in nine cases out of ten they will carry it out, surrounding circumstances aiding and abetting.

One day when she was dining at the Red Court Farm, she suggested to Mr. Thornycroft that he should take a *dame de compagnie* for Mary Anne. She always appeared to have that young lady's best interest on her mind and heart and tongue. Mary Anne, accustomed to do what she liked, went out with the cheese.

"It is the only thing, as you will not have a governess. Believe me, my dear sir, it is the only thing for that dear child," she urged, her dark eyes going straight out to the honest blue ones of Harry Thornycroft.

He made no reply. He was thinking that a *dame de compagnie* might be more troublesome at the Red Court than even a governess.

"Mary Anne wants now some one who will train her mind and form her manners, Mr. Thornycroft. It is essential that it should be done. Wanting a mother, wanting a step-mother, I see only one alternative—a gentlewoman, who will be friend, governess, and companion in one. It is a pity, for her sake, that you did not marry again."

Mr. Thornycroft put out a glass of wine with a sudden movement, and drank it. Lady Ellis resumed, piteously.

“Ah, forgive me! I know I ought not to be so free; to say these things. I was but thinking of that dear child. You will forgive me?”

“There’s nothing to forgive,” said the justice. “I am exceedingly obliged for the interest you take in her, and for any suggestion you may make. The consideration is—what to do for the best? I don’t see my way clear.”

He sat with his fine head a little bent, the light of the wax chandelier falling on his fair, and still luxuriant, hair; his blue eyes went out to the opposite wall, seeing nothing; his fingers played with the wine glass on the table. Evidently there were considerations to be regarded of which Lady Ellis knew nothing.

“It has been partly out of love to my daughter that I have never given her a step-mother,” said he, coming out of his reverie. “Second wives are apt to make the home unhappy for the first children; you often see it.”

She smiled sweetly on him. “Dear Mr. Thornycroft! Make the home unhappy! Ah, then, yes, perhaps so! Women with a hard selfish nature. Still I do not see how even

they could help loving Mary Anne. She is so——”

What she was, Mr. Thornycroft lost the pleasure of hearing. Sinnett the housekeeper came in at this juncture, and said the landlord of the Mermaid, John Pettipher, had come up, asking to see the justice. “Tomlett has been quarrelling with him, he says, sir,” added Sinnett, “and he wants to have the law of him.”

“Tomlett’s a fool!” burst impulsively from the lips of Mr. Thornycroft. “Show him into the justice room, Sinnett.”

He went out with a brief word of apology, and he never came back again. My lady sat and waited, and looked and hoped, but he did not return to gladden her with his presence. At length Sinnett came in with some tea.

“Is Mr. Thornycroft gone out?” she asked.

“Yes, my lady. He went out with John Pettipher.”

She almost crushed the fragile cup of Sèvres china in her passionate fingers. Had Mr. John Pettipher heard the good wishes lavished upon him that evening, he might have stared considerably.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT WAS THE FEAR?

THE early buds had gone, the flowers of May were springing. Richard and Isaac Thornycroft were at home again, and the old profuse, irregular mode of life reigned at the Red Court Farm.

The skies are grey this afternoon; there is a chillness in the early summer air. Mr. Thornycroft, leaning lightly on the slender railings, that separate his grounds from the plateau, looks up to see whether rain will be falling.

There was trouble at home with Mary Anne. Uncontrolled as she was just now, no female friend to watch over her, she went her own way. Not any very bad way; only a little inexpedient. Masters came from the nearest town for her studies, taking up an hour or two each day; the rest of it she exercised her own will. The fear of school had subsided by this time, and she was

growing wilful again—careering about on the heath; calling in at Captain Copp’s and other houses; seated on some old timber on the beach, talking to the fishermen; riding off alone on her pony; jolting away (she had done it twice) in the omnibus to Jutpoint, without saying a word to anybody. Only on the previous day she had gone out in old Betts’s tub of a boat, with the old man and his little son, got benighted, and frightened them at home. Clearly this was a state of things that could not be allowed to continue; and Mr. Thornycroft, leaning there on the railings, was revolving a question: should he ask Lady Ellis to come to the Red Court as *dame de compagnie*?—or as his wife?

“Of the two, a wife would be less dangerous than a companion,” thought Justice Thornycroft, giving the light railings a shake with his strong hand. “I’m not dying for either; but then—there’s Mary Anne.”

Almost as if she had heard the word, his daughter came out of the house and ran up to him. The justice put his hand on hers.

“What are you doing here, papa?”

“Thinking about you.”

“About me?”

“Yes, about you. You are getting on for seventeen, Mary Anne; you have as much common sense as most people; therefore—listen, I want to speak to you seriously.”

She had turned her head at the ringing of the bell of the outer gate. But the injunction brought it round again.

“Therefore you must be quite well aware, without my having to reiterate it to you, that this kind of thing cannot be allowed to go on.”

“I do no harm,” said Mary Anne, knowing well to what the words tended.

“Harm or no harm, it cannot go on; it shall not. Now, which will you do—go to school again, or have a governess?”

“I don’t want either,” she answered, with a pout of her decisive lips.

“Or would you like—it is the one other alternative—a lady to come here as your friend and companion?”

“Frankly speaking, papa, I don’t see what the difference would be between a companion and a governess. Of course, of the two I’d rather have a companion. To school I will not go. Lady Ellis was talking to me of this. I think she was fishing to be the companion herself.”

“Fishing!” echoed the justice.

“Well, I do.”

“Would you like her?”

“Not at all, papa.”

“Who is it that you would like?” asked the justice, tartly.

“I should *like* nobody in that capacity. I might put up with it; but that is very different from liking.”

“For my own part, if we decide upon a companion, there’s no one I would so soon have as Lady Ellis,” remarked Mr. Thornycroft. “Would you?”

“La la, la la!” sang Mary Anne, her eyes following a passing bird.

“Answer me without further trifling,” sternly resumed Mr. Thornycroft, putting his hand on her shoulder.

The tone sobered her. “Of course, papa; if some one must come, why, let it be Lady Ellis.”

Heaving a sort of relieved sigh, he released her, and she went away singing to herself a scrap of a pretty little French song, the refrain of which was, rendered in English—“If you come to-day, madam, you go to-morrow.”

The misapprehension that arises in this world!

None of us are perfectly open one with the other. Between the husband and the wife, the parents and the children, the brothers and the sisters, involuntary deceit reigns. Mr. Thornycroft assumed that Lady Ellis would be more acceptable to his daughter as a resident at the Red Court than any one else that could be found: had Miss Thornycroft spoken the truth boldly, she would have said that my Lady Ellis was her *bête noire*; the person she most disliked of all others on earth.

But the chief question was not solved yet in the mind of Justice Thornycroft. Should it be wife, or should it be only companion? He was quite sufficiently taken with my lady's fascinations to render the first alternative sufficiently agreeable in prospective; he deemed her a soft-hearted, yielding gentlewoman; he repeated over again to himself the mysterious words, "As a wife she would be less dangerous than a companion." But still, there were considerations against it that made him hesitate. And with good cause.

He went strolling towards the village, turning down the waste land, a right-of-way that was his own, past the plateau. The first house, at the

corner of the street, was the Mermaid. He passed the end of it, and struck across to a low commodious cottage on the cliffs, whose rooms were all on the ground-floor. Tomlett lived in it; he was called the fishing-boat master, and was also employed occasionally on the farm of Mr. Thornycroft, as he had leisure. Mrs. Tomlett, a little woman with a red face and shrill voice, was hanging out linen on the lines to dry.

“Where’s Tomlett to-day?” asked the justice. “He has not been to the farm.”

Mrs. Tomlett turned sharply round, for she had not heard the approach, and dropped a curtsey to the justice. “He have gone to Dartfield, sir,” she answered, lowering her voice to the key people use when talking secrets. “Mr. Richard he come in the first thing this morning and sent him.”

Mr. Thornycroft nodded, and went away, muttering to himself exclusively something to the effect that Richard might have mentioned it. Passing round by the Mermaid again, he went towards home.

And he was charmingly rewarded. Standing on the waste land near the plateau, in her pretty and becoming bonnet of delicate primrose and

white, her Indian shawl folded gracefully round her, her dress looped, was Lady Ellis.

“Do you know, Mr. Thornycroft,” she said, as he took her hand, “I have never been on the plateau. Will you take me?”

Mr. Thornycroft hesitated visibly. “It is not a place for a lady to go to,” he said, after a pause.

“But why not? Mary Anne told me one day you objected to her going on it.”

“I do. The real objection is the danger. The cliff has a treacherous edge just there, and you might be over before you were aware. A sharp gust of wind, a footing too near or not quite secure, and the evil is done. Some accidents have occurred there; one, the last of them, was attended by very sad circumstances, and I then had these railings put round.”

“You said the *real* objection was the danger; is there any other objection?” resumed Lady Ellis, who never lost a word or its emphasis.

“There are certain superstitious fancies connected with the plateau,” answered Mr. Thornycroft, and very much to her surprise his face took a solemn look, his voice a subdued tone, just as if he himself believed in them: “a less

tangible fear than the danger, but one that effectually scares visitors away, at night especially."

They were walking round towards the Red Court now, to which he had turned, and Mr. Thornycroft changed the subject. She could not fail to see that he wished it dropped. At the gates of the farm she wished him good afternoon, and took the road to the heath.

Justice Thornycroft did not enter the gates, but went round to the back entrance. Passing by the various outbuildings, he gained the yard, just as a man was driving out with a waggon and team.

"Where are you going?" asked the justice.

"After the oats, sir. Mr. Richard telled me."

"Is Mr. Richard about?"

"He be close to his own stables, sir."

Mr. Thornycroft went on across the yard, not to the house but to the stables at its end. This portion of the stables (as may be remembered) was detached from the rest, and had formed part of the old ruins. It was shut in by a wall. The horses of the two elder sons were kept there, and their dog-cart. It was their whim and pleasure that Hyde, the man-servant (who could

turn his hand to anything indoors or out), should attend to this dog-cart and the horses used in it, and not the groom. Richard was sitting on the frame of the well just on this side the wall, doing something to the collar of his dog.

“Dicky,” said the justice, without any sort of circumlocution, “I think I shall give the Red Court a mistress.”

Richard lifted his dark stern face to see whether—as he verily thought—his father was joking. “Give it a what?” he asked.

“A mistress. I shall take a wife, I think.”

“Are you mad, sir?” asked Richard, after a pause.

“Softly, softly, Dick.”

Richard lifted his towering form to its full height. Every feeling within him, every sense of reason rebelled against the notion of the measure. A few sharp words ensued, and Richard went into a swearing fit.

“I knew it would be so; he was always hot and hasty,” thought the justice to himself. “What behaviour do you call this?” he asked aloud. “Perhaps if you’ll hear what I have to say you may cool down. Do you suppose I should be intending to marry for my own gratification?”

“ I don’t suppose you’d be marrying for that of anybody else,” said the undaunted Richard.

“ It is for the sake of Mary Anne. Some one *must* be here with her, and a wife will be less—less risk than a crafty, inquisitive governess.”

“ For the sake of Mary Anne !” ironically retorted Richard. “ Send Mary Anne to school.”

“ I did send her ; and she came back again.”

“ I’d keep her there with cords. I said so at the time.”

“ Unfortunately she won’t be kept. She has a touch of the Thornycroft will, Dick.”

“ Hang the Thornycroft will !” was Dick’s angry answer. Not but what it was a stronger word he said.

“ When you have cooled down from your passion I’ll talk further with you,” said the justice, some irritation arising in his own tone. “ You have no right to display this temper to me. I am master here, remember, Dick ; though sometimes, if appearances may be trusted, you like to act as if you forgot that.”

Richard bit his dark lip. “ You must know how inexpedient the measure would be, sir. Give yourself a wife !—the house a mistress ! Why, the place might no longer be our own.”

“Do you suppose I have not weighed the subject on all sides? I have been weeks considering it, and I have come to the conclusion that of the two—a wife or a governess—the former will be the less risk.”

“No,” said Richard; “a governess may be got rid of in an hour; a wife, never.”

“But a governess might go out in the world and talk; a wife would not.”

Richard dashed the dog's collar on the ground which he had held all the while. “Mark me, father”—he said, his stern eyes and resolute lips presenting a picture of angry warning rarely equalled—“this step, if you enter on it, will lead to what you have so long lived in dread of,—to what we are ever scheming to guard against. Mary Anne! Before that girl's puny interests should lead me to—to a measure that may bring ruin in its wake, I'd send her off to the wilds of Africa.”

He strode away, haughty, imperious, rigid in his sharp condemnation. Mr. Thornycroft, one of those men whom opposition only hardens, turned to the fields, thinking of his brother Richard; Dick was so like him. There he found Isaac, stretched idly on the ground with a book.

The young man rose at once in his respect to his father. His handsome velveteen coat, light summer trousers and white linen, his tall form with its nameless grace, his fair features, clear blue eyes and waving light hair, presenting as fine a picture as man ever made.

“That’s one way of being useful,” remarked Mr. Thornycroft.

Isaac laughed. “I confess I am idle this afternoon : and there’s nothing particular to do.”

“Isaac—” Mr. Thornycroft came to a long pause, and then went on rapidly, imparting the news that he had to tell. And it was a somewhat curious fact, that an embarrassment pervaded his manner in making this communication to his second son, quite contrasting with the easy coolness shown to his eldest. A bright flush rose to Isaac’s fair Saxon face as he listened.

“A wife, sir! Will it be well that you should introduce one to the Red Court?”

“Don’t make me go over the ground again, Isaac. I repeat that I think it *will* be well. Some lady must be had here—a wife or a governess, and the former in my judgment will be the lesser evil.”

“As you please, of course, sir,” returned Isaac,

who could not forget the perfect respect and courtesy due to his father, however he might deplore the news. "I have heard you say——"

"Well? Speak out, Ikey."

"That had the time to come over again you would not have married my mother. I think it killed her, sir."

"My marrying her?" asked the justice in a joke. Isaac smiled.

"No, sir. You know what I mean; the constant state of fear she lived in."

"She was one of those sensitive, timid women that fear works upon; Cyril is the only one of you like her," said the justice, his thoughts reverting with some sadness to his departed wife. "But the error committed there, Isaac, lay in my disclosing it to her."

"In disclosing what, sir?" asked Isaac, rather at sea.

"The secret connected with the Red Court Farm," laconically answered Mr. Thornycroft.

There ensued a pause. Isaac put a straw in his lips and bit it like a man in pain. He had loved his mother with no common love; to hear that her place was to be occupied fell on him like a blow, putting aside other considerations against it.

“ It is a *great* risk, sir.”

“ I don't see it, Isaac. But for an accident your mother would never have suspected. I then disclosed the truth to her, and I cursed myself for my folly afterwards. But for that she might have been with us now. As to risk, we run the same every day with Mary Anne. Ah me ! your poor mother was too sensitive, and the fear killed her.”

Isaac winced. He remembered how his mother had faded visibly, day by day ; he could see, even now, the alarm in her soft eyes that the twilight often brought.

Mr. Thornycroft went away with the last words. Richard, who appeared to have been reconnoitring, came striding up to his brother, and let off a little of his superfluous anger, talking loud and fast.

“ He is going out of his senses ; you know it must be so, Isaac. Who is the woman ? Did he tell you ?”

“ No,” replied Isaac ; “ but I can give a pretty shrewd guess at her.”

“ Well ?”

“ Lady Ellis.”

“Who?” roared Richard, as if too much surprised to hear the name distinctly.

“Lady Ellis. I have seen him walking with her two or three times lately.”

“The devil take Lady Ellis!”

“So say I; rather than she should come into the Red Court.”

“Lady Ellis!” repeated Richard, panic-stricken. *That* beetle-browed, bold-eyed woman—with her soft, false words, and her stealthy step! ‘Ware her, Isaac. Mark me, ‘ware her, all of us, should she come home to the Red Court!”

The June roses were in bloom, and the nightingales sang in the green branches. Perfume was exhaled from the linden trees; butterflies floated in the air; insects hummed through the summer day. Out at sea the fishing-boats lay idly on the sparkling waves that gently rippled in the sun. And in this joyous time the new mistress came home to the Red Court Farm.

Lady Ellis had departed for London. Some three weeks afterwards Mr. Thornycroft went up one day, and was married the next, having said

nothing at all at home. It came upon Mary Anne like a thunderbolt. She cried, she sobbed, she felt every feeling within her outraged.

“ Isaac, I *hate* Lady Ellis !”

In that first moment, with the shock upon her, it was worse than useless to argue or persuade, and Isaac wisely left it. The mischief was done ; and all that remained for them was to make the best of it. Mary Anne, with the independence of will that characterized her, wrote off a pressing mandate to France, which brought Mademoiselle Derode back again. In the girl's grief, she instinctively turned to the little governess, her kind friend in the past years.

And now, after a fortnight's lapse, the mature bridegroom and bride were coming home. The Red Court had made its preparations to receive them. Mary Anne Thornycroft stood in the large drawing-room, in use this evening, wearing a pale blue silk of delicate brightness. Her hard opposition had yielded. Isaac persuaded, mademoiselle reasoned, Richard came down upon her with a short, stern command—and she stood ready, if not exactly to welcome, at least to receive civilly her father's wife. Richard appeared to have fallen in with Isaac's recommendation—

that they should "make the best of it." At any rate he no longer showed anger; and he ordered his sister not to do it. So, apparently, all was smooth.

She stood there in her gleaming silk, with blue ribbons in her hair, and a deep flush in her fair face. Little Miss Derode, her dark brown eyes kindly and simple as ever, her small face browner, sat placidly working at a strip of embroidery. It was striking six, the hour for which Mr. Thornycroft had desired dinner to be ready.

Wheels were heard, the signal of the approach. They were pretty punctual, then. Isaac went out; it was evident that he at least intended to pay due respect to his father's wife. Presently Hyde, who had worn a long face ever since the wedding, threw open the drawing-room door.

"The justice and Lady Ellis."

The man had spoken her old name in his sore feeling, little thinking that she intended to retain it, in defiance of good taste. She approached Mary Anne, and kissed her. That ill-trained young lady submitted to it for an instant, and then burst into a passionate fit of angry sobs on her father's breast.

"Don't be a goose," whispered the justice,

fondly kissing her. "Halloa! why, is it *you*, mademoiselle?" he cried out, his eyes falling on the governess. "When did you come over?"

"She came over because I sent for her, papa; and she has been here nine or ten days."

A few minutes and they went in to dinner. Richard's place was vacant.

"Where's your brother, Isaac?" asked the justice.

"I believe he had to go out, sir."

Lady Ellis wondered a little at the profuseness of the dinner, but supposed it was in honour of herself, and felt gratified. It was, in fact, the usual style of dining at the Red Court, except at those quiet times (somewhat rare) when the two elder sons were away from home. But Lady Ellis did not suspect this.

Vastly agreeable did she make herself. Isaac, seated at her left elbow, was the most attractive man she had come in contact with since the advent of Mr. Lake, and Lady Ellis liked attractive men, even though they could be nothing more to her than step-sons. But she had come home to the Court really intending to be cordial with its inmates. And, as it has been already hinted,

Richard and Isaac saw the policy of making the best of things.

If ever Mademoiselle Derode had been fascinated with a person at first sight, it was with Lady Ellis. The delicate attentions of that lady won her heart. When they crossed the hall to the drawing-room after dinner, and my lady linked her arm within that of her unwilling step-daughter, and extended the other to take the poor little withered hand of the Frenchwoman, mademoiselle's heart went out to her. Very far indeed was it from the intention of Lady Ellis to undertake the completion of Mary Anne's education, whatever might be the private expectation of Mr. Thornycroft: in the visit of the ex-governess she saw a solution of the difficulty—mademoiselle should remain and resume her situation. To bring this about by crafty means, her usual way of going to work, instead of open ones, my lady set out by being very charming with the governess. The very fact of mademoiselle's having been prejudiced by Miss Thornycroft against the stepmother who was coming home, served to augment within her the feeling of fascination. "A dark, ugly woman, poor and pretentious, who has not an iota of good

feeling or of truth within her whole composition," spoke Miss Mary Anne, judging of her exactly as Richard did. Great was mademoiselle's surprise to see the handsome, fascinating, superbly dressed lady, who came in upon them with her soft smile and suave manners. She thought Miss Thornycroft had spoken in prejudice only, and almost resented it for the new lady's sake.

It was daylight still, and Lady Ellis stood for a minute at the window, open to the evening's loveliness. The sun had set, but some of its golden brightness lingered yet in the sky. Lady Ellis leaned from the window and plucked a rose from a tree within reach. Mademoiselle stood near; Mary Anne sat down on the music stool, her back to the room and her eyes busied with an uninteresting page of music, striking a bar of it now and again.

"Are you fond of flowers, miladi?" asked the simple little Frenchwoman. "I think there's nothing so good hardly in the world."

"You shall have this rose, then. Stay, let me place it in your waistband. There!—you will have the perfume now until it fades."

Mademoiselle caught the delicate hand and imprinted a kiss upon it. Single-minded, simple

hearted, possessing no discernment at the best of times, artless as a child, she took all the sweet looks and kind tones for real. Lady Ellis sat down on an ottoman in front of the window, and graciously drew mademoiselle beside her.

“Do you live in Paris?”

“I live in Paris now with my mother. We have a sweet little appartement near the Rue Montagne—one room and a cabinet de toilette and a very little kitchen, and we are happy. We go to the Champs Elysées with our work on fine days, to sit there and see the world:—the fine toilettes and the little ones at play. It was long to be separated from her, all the years that I was here.”

“How many were they?”

“Seven. Yes, miladi, seven! But what will you? I had to gain. My mother she has a very small rente, and I came here. Mr. Thornycroft he was liberal to me—he is liberal to all,—and I saved enough to have on my side a little rente too. I went home when it was decided I should leave my pupil, and took my mother from the pension where she had stayed: and now we are happy together.”

A thought crossed Lady Ellis that the charm-

ing apartment near the Rue Montagne, and the mother in it, might prove some impediment to her scheme. Well—it would require the greater diplomacy.

“Is your mother old?”

“She will be sixty-five on the day of the All-Saints; and I was forty last month,” added mademoiselle, with the candour as to age that is characteristic of a Frenchwoman. Suddenly, just as Lady Ellis was clasping the withered brown hand with a sweet smile, mademoiselle, without intending the least discourtesy, started up, her eyes fixed upon the plateau.

“Ah, bah,” she said, sitting down again. “It is but the douanier—the preventive man.”

Lady Ellis naturally looked out, and saw a man pacing along the border of the plateau. The superstition, said to be connected with the place, came into her mind, but did not stay there.

“You were here in the time of Mrs. Thornycroft, mademoiselle?”

“Ah, yes; she did not die for a long while after I came.”

“She had years of ill health, I have heard. What was the matter with her?”

“It was but weakness, as we all thought,” answered the Frenchwoman. “There was nothing to be told; no disease to be found. She got thinner every week, and month, and year; like one who fades away. The doctor he came and came, and said the lungs were wrong; and so she died. Ah, she was so gentle, so patient; never murmuring, never complaining. Miladi, she was just an angel.”

“What had she to complain of?” asked miladi.

“What to complain of? Why, her sickness; her waste of strength. Everything was done for her that could be, except one—and that was to go from home. It was urged upon her, but she would not listen; she used to shudder at the thought.”

“But why?” wondered Lady Ellis.

“I never knew. My pupil, Miss Mary Anne, never knew. She would kneel at her mamma’s feet, and beg her to go anywhere, and to take her; but the poor lady would shake her head, or say quietly, no; and that would end it.”

Mademoiselle Virginie Derode was a capable woman in her vocation. She could do a vast many things useful, good, necessary to be done

in the world. But there was one thing that she could not do, and that was—hold her tongue. Some people are born with the bump of reticence; my Lady Ellis was a case in point: some, it may be said, with the bump of communicativeness, though I don't know where it lies. Mademoiselle was an exemplification of the latter.

“There was some *secret*—some trouble on Madame Thornycroft's mind,” said good mademoiselle in her open-heartedness. “Towards the last, when the weakness grew to worse and worse, she would—what do you call it?—wander a little; and I once heard her say that it had killed her. Mr. Isaac, he was in the room at the time, and he shook his mother—gently, you know, he loved her very much; and told her she was dreaming, and talking in her sleep. That aroused her; and she laid her head upon his shoulder, and thanked him for awaking her.

“And was she talking in her sleep?”

“Ah, no; she was not asleep. But I think Mr. Isaac said it because of me. I saw there was something, always from the time I first came; she used to start at shadows; if the window did but creak she would turn white, and stare at it; if the door but opened suddenly, she

would turn all over in a cold sweat. It was like a great fear that never went away."

"But what fear was it?" reiterated Lady Ellis.

"I used to repeat to myself that same question—'What is it?' One day I said to Hyde, as I saw him watching his mistress, 'She has got some trouble upon her mind?' and he, that polite Hyde, called me a French idiot to my face, saying she had no more trouble on her mind than he had on his. I never saw Hyde fierce but that one time. Ah, but yes; she certainly said it; that it had killed her."

"That *what* had killed her?" still questioned Lady Ellis, considerably at sea.

"I had to guess what; I knew it quite well as I listened; the secret trouble that had been upon her like a fright perpetual."

Lady Ellis threw her piercing eyes upon the soft and simple ones of the little Frenchwoman. All this was as food for her curious mind. "A perpetual fright!" she repeated musingly. "I never heard of such a thing. What was it connected with?"

"I don't know, unless it was connected with that horror of the plateau. Miladi, I used to think it might be."

Casting her thoughts back some few weeks, Lady Ellis remembered the little episode of her proposing to go on the plateau, and Mr. Thornycroft's words as he opposed it. She turned this to use now with mademoiselle in her clever way.

“Mr. Thornycroft was speaking to me about this—this mystery connected with the plateau, but we were interrupted, and I did not gather much. It is a mystery, is it not, mademoiselle?”

“But, yes; it might be called a mystery,” was the answer.

“Will you recite it to me?”

Mademoiselle knew very little to recite; but that little she remembered with as much distinctness as though it had happened yesterday. One light evening in the bygone years, shortly after she came to the Red Court, she went out in the garden and strolled on to the plateau. There were no preventive railings round it then. It was fresh and pleasant there; the sea was calm, the moonbeams fell across the waves; and a vessel far away, lying apparently at anchor, showed its cheery white light. Mademoiselle strolled back towards the house, and was about

to take another turn, when she saw a figure on the edge of the plateau, seemingly standing to look at the sea. To her sight it either wore some white garment, or else the rays of the moon caused it to appear so. At that moment Richard Thornycroft came up. In turning to speak to him mademoiselle lost sight of the plateau, and when she looked again, the figure was gone. "Was it a shadowy sort of figure?" Richard asked her, in a low voice, when she expressed her surprise at the disappearance; and mademoiselle answered after a moment's consideration that she thought it *was* shadowy. Mr. Richard looked up at the sky, and then down at her, and then far away; his countenance (it seemed to mademoiselle that she could see it now) wearing a curious expression of care and awe. "It must have been the ghost," he said; "it is apt to show itself when strangers appear at night on the plateau." The words nearly startled mademoiselle out of her seven senses; "ghosts" had been her one dread through life. She put her poor trembling fingers on Richard's coat sleeve, and humbly begged him to walk back with her as far as the house. Richard did so; giving her scraps of information on the way.

He had never seen the figure himself, perhaps because he had specially looked for it, but many at Coastdown had seen it; nay, some even then living at the Red Court. Why did the ghost come *there*? Well, it was said that a murder had been committed on that very spot, the edge of the plateau, and the murderer, stung with remorse, killed himself, within a few hours, and could not rest in his grave. Mademoiselle was too scared to hear all he said; she heard quite enough for her own peace; and she went into the presence of Mrs. Thornycroft, bursting into tears. When that lady heard what the matter was, she chided Richard in her gentle manner. "Was there *need* to have told her this?" she whispered to him with a strange sorrow, a great reproach, in her sad brown eyes. "I am sorry to have said it if it has alarmed mademoiselle," was Richard's answer. "It need not trouble her; let her keep off the plateau at night; it never comes in the day." That Richard believed in it himself appeared all too evident, and she remarked it to Mrs. Thornycroft as he left the room. That good lady poured a glass of wine out for her with her own hand, and begged her, in accents so imploring as to take a tone of

wildness, never again to go on the plateau after dusk had fallen. No need of the injunction; mademoiselle had scuttered onwards ever since with her head down, if obliged to go abroad at night in attendance on Miss Thornycroft.

To hear her tell this in a low earnest whisper, her brown hands clasped, her scared eyes strained on the opposite plateau, whose edge stood out defined and clear against the line of sea beyond and the sky above, was the strangest of all to Lady Ellis.

“If there is one thing that I have feared in life it is a revenant,” confessed mademoiselle. “Were I to see one, knowing it was one, I think I should die. There was a revenant in the convent where they put me when I was a little child; a white-faced nun who had died unshriven; and we used to hear her in the upper corridors on a windy night. Ah, me! I was sick with fear when I listened; I was but a poor little weak thing then, and the dread of revenants has always rested with me.”

Lady Ellis suppressed her inclination to smile, and pressed the trembling brown fingers in her calm ones. With the matter-of-fact plateau lying there before her, with her own matter-of-

fact mind so hard and real, the ghost story sounded like what it must be, simple delusion. But that something strange was connected with the plateau, she had little doubt.

“And what more did you hear of it?” she asked.

“Nothing—nothing more after that night. In a day or two, when my courage came to me, and I would have asked details, Mr. Thornycroft, who happened to be in the room, went into great anger. He told me to hold my tongue; never to speak or think of the subject again, or he should send me back to France. I obeyed him; I did not speak of it; even when there was talk in the village because of the accident, and he had the railings put up, I kept myself silent. I could not obey him in the other thing—not to think of it. I tried not; and I got dear Mrs. Thornycroft to put my bed in a back room, so that I did not see the plateau from my window. Well, to go back, miladi: I think it must have been this cause, or something connected with it, that brought the fear in which she lived to Mrs. Thornycroft.”

Lady Ellis was silent. She could not think anything of the sort. Unless, indeed, the late

Mrs. Thornycroft was of a kindred nature to mademoiselle ; timorous and weak-minded.

“ The preventive men pace there, do they not ? ”

“ By day, yes ; they walk on to it from their beat below, but not much at night. Ah, no ! not since the accident ; they do not like the ghost.”

Mademoiselle rose ; she was going to Mrs. Wilkinson's, on the heath, for the rest of her stay in Coastdown. Saying good night to my lady, she went in search of Mary Anne, and could not find her.

Mary Anne was with her brother Isaac. She had flown to him after quitting the presence of her step-mother, having had much ado to repress all the feelings that went well nigh to choke her. With a crimson face and heaving bosom, with wild sobs, no longer checked, she threw herself on his neck.

“ Now, Mary Anne ! ”

“ It has been my place ever since mamma died. It is not right that she should take it.”

He found she was speaking of the seat at table. Every little incident of this kind, that must inevitably occur when a second wife is

brought home, did but add to the feeling of bitter grief, of *wrong*. Not for the place in itself did she care, but because a stranger had usurped what had been their mother's.

Letting the burst of grief spend itself, Isaac Thornycroft then sat down, put her in a chair near him, and gave her some wise counsel. It would be so much happier for her—for all of them—for papa—that they should unite in making the best of the new wife come amidst them; of her, and for her.

All he said was of little use. Anger, pain, bitter, bitter self-reproach sat passionately this night on the heart of Mary Anne Thornycroft.

“Don't talk, Isaac. I hope I shall not die of it.”

“Die of it?”

“The fault is mine. I can see it well. Had I been obedient to Miss Derode; had I only stayed quietly at school, it never would have happened. Papa would not have brought her home, or thought of bringing her home, but for me.”

That was very true. Mary Anne Thornycroft, in her strong good sense, saw the past in its right light. She could blame herself just as

much as she could others when the cause of blame rested with her. Isaac strove to still her emotion ; to speak comfort to her ; but she only broke out again with the words that seemed to come from a bursting heart.

“ I hope I shall not die of it ! ”

CHAPTER III.

SUPERSTITIOUS TALES.

WITH the morning Lady Ellis assumed her position as mistress of the Red Court. She took her breakfast in bed—a habit she favoured—but came down before ten, in a beautiful challi dress, delicate roses on a white ground, with some white net lace and pink ribbons in her hair. The usual breakfast hour was eight o'clock, at least it was always laid for that hour; and Mr. Thornycroft and his sons went out afterwards on their land.

Looking into the different rooms, my lady found no one, and found her way to the servants' offices.

The kitchen, a large square apartment, fitted up with every known apparatus for cooking, was the first room she came to. Its two sash windows looked on the side of the house towards the church. It had been built out, com-

paratively of late years, beyond the back of the dining-room, a sort of added wing, or projecting corner. But altogether the back of the house was irregular; a nook here, a projection there; rooms in angles; casements large or small as might happen. The sash windows of the kitchen alone were good and modern, but you could not see them from the back. Whatever the irregularity of the architecture, the premises were spacious; affording every accommodation necessary for a large household. A room near the kitchen was called the housekeeper's room; it was carpeted, and the servants sat in it when they pleased; but they were by no means fashionable servants, going in for style and ceremony, and as a rule preferred the kitchen. There were seven servants in-doors; Sinnett being the housekeeper.

My lady—as she was to be called in the house—was gracious. The cook showed her the larder, the dairy, and anything else she chose to see, and then received the orders for dinner—a plain one—fish, a joint, pudding, and cream.

It was the intention of my lady to feel her way, rather than assume authority hurriedly. She saw, with some little surprise, that no rem-

nant was left of the last day's dinner ; at least none was to be seen. Not that day would she inquire after it, but keep a watchful eye on what went from table for the future. To say that her rule in the house was to have one guiding principle—economy—would be only stating the fact. There had been no marriage settlements, and my lady meant to line her pocket by dint of saving.

The rooms were still deserted when she returned to them. My lady stood a moment in the hall, wondering if everybody was out. The door at the end, shutting off the portion of the house used by the young men, caught her eye, and she resolved to go on an exploration tour. Opening the door softly, she saw Richard Thornycroft in the passage talking to Hyde. He raised his hat, as in courtesy bound ; but his dark stern face never relaxed a muscle ; and somehow it rather daunted her.

“ My father's wife, I believe,” said Richard. “ To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit ? ”

Just as if the rooms at this end of the house were his ! But my lady made the best of it.

“ It is Mr. Richard, I am sure ! Let us be friends.”

She held out her hand, and he touched the tips of her fingers.

“Certainly. If we are not friends the fault will lie on your side,” he pointedly said. “I interfere with no one in the house. I expect no one to interfere with me. Let us observe this rule to each other, and I dare say we shall get on very well.”

She gently slid her hand within his, encased in its rough coat. Hyde, recovering from his trance of amazement, touched his hat, and went out at the outer door.

“I have not been in this portion of the house. Will you show it to me?”

“I will show it to you with pleasure: what little there is of it to see,” replied Richard. “But—once seen, I must request you to understand that these rooms are for gentlemen only. Ladies are out of place in them.”

She had a great mind to ask why; but did not. Very poor rooms, as Richard said—one on either side the passage. Small and plain in comparison with the rest of the house. A strip of thick cocoa-nut matting ran along the passage to the outer door. It was open, and my lady advanced to it.

Looking at the most confined prospect she ever saw; in fact, at no prospect at all. A wall, in which there was a small door of egress, shut out all view of the sea and the plateau. Another wall, with wide gates of wood, hid the courtyard and the buildings beyond. Opposite, in almost close proximity, leaving just space for the dog-cart or other vehicles to come in and turn, was the room used as a coach-house, formerly part of the stables when the house was a castle. My lady walked across the gravel, and entered it. A half-smile crossed Richard's face.

"There's not much to see here," he said.

Certainly not much. The dog-cart stood in one corner; in another were some trusses of straw, and a dilapidated cart turned upside down. Adjoining was a stable for the two horses alternately used in the dog-cart. My lady stepped back to the house door, and took a deliberate survey of the whole.

"It strikes me as being the dreariest-looking spot possible," she said. "A dead wall on each side, and a shut-in coach-house opposite!"

"Yes. Those who planned it had not much regard to prospect," answered Richard. "But, then, prospect is not wanted here."

She turned into the rooms; the windows of both looking on this confined yard. In the one room, crowded with guns, fishing-rods, dog-collars, boxing gloves, and other implements used by the young men, she stood a minute, scanning it curiously. In the other, on the opposite side the passage, was a closed desk-table, a telescope and weather-glass, some armchairs, pipes, and tobacco.

“This is the room I have heard Mr. Thornycroft call his den,” said she, quickly.

“It is. The other one is mine and my brother’s.”

A narrow twisting staircase led to the two rooms above. My lady, twisting up it, turned into one of the two—Richard’s bed-chamber. The window looked to the dreary line of coast stretching forward in the distance.

“Who sleeps in the other room?” she asked.

“Hyde. This part of the house is lonely, and I choose to have him within call.”

In her amazement to hear him say this—the brave strong man, whom no physical fear could daunt—a thought arose that the superstition obtaining at the Red Court, whatever it might be, was connected with these shut-in-rooms;

shut in from within and without. Somehow the feeling was not pleasant to her, and she turned to descend the stairs.

“But, Mr. Richard, why do you sleep here yourself?”

“I would not change my room for another; I am used to it. At one time no one slept here, but my mother grew to think it was not safe at night. She was nervous at the last.”

He held the passage-door open, and raised his hat, which he had worn all the while, as she went through it, then shut it with a loud, decisive click.

“A sort of intimation that I am not wanted there,” thought she. “He need not fear; there’s nothing so pleasant to go for, rather the contrary.”

In the afternoon, tired of being alone, she put on her things to go out, and met Mr. Thornycroft. She began a shower of questions. Where had he been? What doing? Where were all of them—Isaac—Mary Anne? Not a soul had she seen the whole day, except Richard. Mr. Thornycroft lifted his finger to command attention, as he answered her.

It would be better that they should at once

begin as they were to go on; and she, his lady wife, must not expect to get a categorical account of daily movements. He never presumed to ask his sons how their days were spent. Farmers—farming a large tract of land—had to be in fifty places at least in the course of the day; here, and there, and everywhere. This applied to himself as well as to his sons. When Cyril came home he could attend upon her; he had nothing to do with the out-door work, and never would have.

“Hyde said you rode out this morning.”

“I had business at Dartfield: have just got home.”

“Dartfield! where’s that?”

“A place five or six miles away: with a dreary road to it, too,” added the justice.

“Won’t you walk with me?” she pleaded, in the soft manner that had so attracted him before marriage.

“If you like. Let us go for a stroll on the heath.”

“Where is Mary Anne?” she inquired, as they went on.

“Mary Anne is your concern now, not mine. Has she not been with you?”

“I have not seen her at all to-day. When I got down—it was before ten—all the world seemed flown. I found Richard. He took me over the rooms at the end of the passage; to your bureau (he called the room that, as the French do), and to his chamber and Hyde’s, and to the place filled with their guns and things.”

The justice gave a sort of grin. “That’s quite a come-out for Dick. Showing you his chamber! You must have won his heart.”

My lady’s private opinion was that she had not won it; but she did not say so. Gracefully twitching up her expensive robe, lest it should gather harm in its contact with the common, she tripped on, and they reached the heath. Mr. Thornycroft proposed to make calls at the different houses in succession, beginning with Captain Copp’s. She heard him with a little shriek of dismay. “It was not etiquette.”

“Etiquette?” responded the justice.

“I am but just married. It is their place to call on me first.”

Mr. Thornycroft laughed. Etiquette was about as much understood as Greek at Coast-down. “Come along!” cried he, heartily.

“There’s the sailor and his wooden leg opening the door to welcome us.”

The sailor was doing it in a sailorly fashion, —flourishing his wooden leg, waving his glazed hat round and round, cheering and beckoning. The bride made a merit of necessity, and went in. Here they had news of Mary Anne. Mrs. Copp, Mademoiselle Derode, and Miss Thornycroft had gone to Jutpoint by omnibus under Isaac’s convoy.

“And the women are coming back here to a tea-fight,” said the plain sea-captain; “cold mackerel and shrimps and hot cakes; that she-pirate of ours is baking the cakes in the oven; so you need not expect your daughter home, justice.”

Mr. Thornycroft nodded in answer. His daughter was welcome to stay.

The dinner-party at the Red Court that evening consisted of five. Its master and mistress, the two sons, and a stranger named Hopley from Dartfield, whom Richard brought in. He was not much of a gentleman, and none of them had dressed. My lady thought she was going in for a prosy sort of life—not exactly the one she had anticipated.

Very much to her surprise she found the dinner-courses much augmented ; quite a different dinner altogether from that which she had ordered. Boiled fowls, roast ducklings, tarts, ice-creams, maccaroni—all sorts of additions. My lady compressed her lips, and came to the conclusion that her orders had been misunderstood. There is more to be said yet about the dinners at the Red Court Farm ; not for the especial benefit of the reader, he is requested to take notice, but because they bear upon the story.

At its conclusion she left the gentlemen and sat alone at the open window of the drawing-room ;—sat there until the shades of evening darkened ; the flowers on the lawn sent up their perfume, the evening star came twinkling out, the beautiful sea beyond the plateau lay calm and still. She supposed they had all gone out, or else were smoking in the dining-room. When Sinnett brought her a cup of tea, presenting it on a silver waiter, she said, in answer to an inquiry, that the gentlemen as a rule had not taken tea since the late Mrs. Thornycroft's time. Miss Thornycroft and her governess had it served for themselves, with Mr. Cyril when he was at home from his tutor's.

“That is it,” muttered my lady to herself, as Sinnett left the room. “Since their mother’s death there has been no one to enforce order in the house and they have had the run like wild animals. It’s not likely they would care to be with the girl and that soft French governess.”

It was dull, sitting there alone, and she wound an Indian shawl round her shoulders, went out across the lawn, and crossed the railings to the banned plateau.

It was very dreary. Not a soul was in sight; the landscape lay still and grey, the sea dull and silent. A mist seemed to have come on. This plateau, bare in places, was a small weary waste. Standing as near to the dangerous edge as she dared, my lady stretched her neck and saw the outline of the Half-moon underneath, surrounded by its waters, for the tide was nearly at its height. The projecting rocks right and left seemed to clip nearly round it, hiding it from the sea beyond. The cliff, as she looked over, was almost perpendicular, its surface jagged, altogether dangerous to look upon, and she drew back with a slight shudder—drew back to find Richard Thornycroft gazing at her from the plateau’s railings, on which he leaned. They met halfway.

“Were you watching me, Mr. Richard?”

“I was,” he gravely answered. “And not daring to advance or make the least sound, lest I should startle you.”

“It is a dangerous spot. Mr. Thornycroft was saying so to me one day. But I had never been here, and I thought I would have a look at it; it was lonely in-doors. So I came. Braving the ghost,” she added, with a slight laugh.

Richard looked at her, as much as to ask what she knew, but did not speak.

“Last evening, when we were sitting in the drawing-room, the plateau in view, your sister’s governess plunged into the superstitious, telling me of a ‘revenant’ that appears. I had heard somewhat of it before. She thinks you believe in it.”

Richard Thornycroft extended his hand to help her over the railings. “Revenant, or no revenant, I would very strongly advise you not to frequent the plateau at night,” he said, as they walked on to the house. “Do not be tempted to risk the danger.”

“Are you advising me against the ghostly danger or the tangible?”

“The tangible.”

“What is the other tale? What gave rise to this superstition?”

Richard Thornycroft did not answer. He piloted her indoors as far as the drawing-room, all in silence. The room was so dusk now that she could scarcely see the outline of the furniture.

“Will you not tell it me, Mr. Richard? Mademoiselle’s was but a lame tale.”

“What was mademoiselle’s tale?”

“That she saw a shadowy figure on the plateau, which disappeared almost as she looked at it. You gave her some explanation about a murderer that came again as a revenant, and she had lived in dread of seeing it ever since.”

If my lady had expected Richard Thornycroft to laugh in answer to her laugh, she was entirely mistaken; his face remained stern, sad, solemn.

“I cannot tell you anything, Lady Ellis, that you might not hear from any soul at Coastdown,” he said presently. “People, however, don’t much care to talk of this.”

“Why don’t they?”

Richard lifted his dark eyebrows. “I scarcely

know : a feeling undoubtedly exists against doing so. What is it you wish to hear?"

"All the story, from beginning to end. Was there a murder?"

"Yes; it took place on the plateau. I can give you no particulars, I was but a little fellow at the time, except that the man who committed the deed hung himself before the night was out. The superstition obtaining is, that he does not rest quietly in his unconsecrated grave, and comes abroad at times to haunt the plateau, especially the spot where the deed was done."

"And that spot?"

Richard extended his hand and pointed to the edge as nearly as possible in a line with the window.

"It was there; just above the place they call the Half-moon. The figure appears on the brink, and stands there looking out over the sea. I should have said is reported to appear," he corrected himself.

"Did you ever see it yourself?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Not tell me!"

"I have undoubtedly seen a figure hovering there; but whether ghostly or human it has

never given me time to ascertain. Before I could well cross the railings even, it has gone."

"Gone where?"

"I never could detect where. And to tell you the truth, I have thought it strange."

"Have you seen it many times?"

"Three or four."

He was standing close against the side of the window as he spoke, his profile stern as ever, distinct in the nearly faded light. My lady sat and watched him.

"The superstition has caused an accident or two," he resumed. "A poor coastguard-man was on his beat there one moonlight night and discerned a figure coming towards him walking on the brink of the cliff, as he was. What he saw to induce him to take it for the apparition, or to impart fear, was never explained. With a wild cry he either leaped from the cliff in his fright, or fell from it."

"Was he killed on the spot?"

"So to say. He lived but a few minutes after help came: the tide was up, and they had to get to him in boats: just long enough to say some nearly incoherent words, to the effect of what I have told you. A night or two after that

a man, living in the village, went on the plateau looking for the ghost, as was supposed, and he managed to miss his footing, fell over, and was killed. It was then that my father had the railings put; almost a superfluous caution, as it turned out, for the impression made on the neighbourhood by these two accidents was so great, and the plateau became so associated in men's minds with so much horror, that I think nobody would go on it at night unless compelled."

"Lest they should see three ghosts instead of one," interrupted a light, careless voice at the back of the room. My lady started, Richard turned.

It came from Isaac Thornycroft. He had come in unheard, the door was but half closed, and gathered the sense of what was passing.

"Quite an appropriate atmosphere for ghostly stories," he said; "you are all in the dark here. Shall I ring for lights?"

"Not yet," interposed my lady, hastily; "I want to hear more."

"There's no more to hear," said Richard.

"Yes there is. You cannot think how this interests me, Mr. Richard; but I want to know

—I want to know what was the cause of the murder. *Can't* you tell me?"

Isaac Thornycroft had perched himself on the music-stool, his fair, gay, open face a very contrast just now to his brother's grave one. In the uncertain light he fancied that my lady looked to him with the last question, as if in appeal, and he answered it.

"Richard can tell it if he likes."

But it seemed that Richard did not like. He had said the neighbourhood cared not to speak of this; most certainly *he did not*. It was remembered afterwards, when years had passed; and the strange fact was regarded as some subtle instinct lying far beyond the ken of man. But there was my lady casting her exacting looks towards him.

"They were two brothers, the disputants, and the cause was said to be jealousy. Both loved the same woman, and she played them off one on the other. Hence the murder. Had I been the Nemesis I should have slain the woman after them."

"Brothers!" repeated Lady Ellis. "It was a dreadful thing."

Richard, quitting his place by the window,

left the room. Isaac, who had been softly humming a tune to himself, brought it to a close. A broad smile sat on his face: it appeared evident to my lady that the superstition was regarded by him as fun rather than otherwise. She fell into thought.

“You do not believe in the ghost, Mr. Isaac?”

“I don’t say that. I do not fear it.”

“Did you ever see it?”

“Never so much as its shadow; but it is currently believed, you know, that some people are born without the gift of seeing ghosts.”

He laughed a merry laugh. My lady resumed in a low tone.

“Is it not thought that your mother feared it? That it—it helped to kill her?”

As if by magic, changed the mood of Isaac Thornycroft. He rose from the stool, and stood for a moment at the window in the faint rays of the light; his face was little less dark than his brother’s, his voice as stern.

“By your leave, madam, we will not bring my mother’s name up in connexion with this subject.”

“I beg your pardon; but—there is one thing

I should like to ask you. Do not look upon me as a stranger, but as one of yourselves from henceforth; come here, I hope, to make life pleasanter to all of us," she continued, in her sweetest tone. "Those rooms at the end of the house, with the high walls on either side—is there any superstition connected with them?"

Isaac Thornycroft simply stared at her.

"I cannot tell *why* I fancy it. To-day when Mr. Richard was showing me those rooms, the thought struck me that the superstition said to obtain at the Red Court Farm must be connected with them."

"Who says that superstition obtains at the Red Court Farm?" questioned Isaac sharply.

"I seem to have gathered that impression from one or another."

"Then I should think, for your own peace of mind, you had better ungather it—if you will allow me to coin a word," he answered. "The superstition of the plateau does not extend to the Red Court."

She gave a slight sniff. "Those rooms looked dull enough for it. And your brother—your strong, stern, resolute brother—confessed to feeling so lonely in them that he had Hyde to sleep

in the chamber near him. 'There's not so much space between them and the plateau.'

Isaac turned from the window and faced her; voice, eye, face resolute as Richard's.

"Mrs. Thornycroft—or Lady Ellis, whichever it may please you to be called—let me say a word of advice to you in all kindness. Forget these things; do not allow yourself to recur to them. For your own sake I would warn you never to go on the plateau after daylight; the edge is more treacherous than you imagine; and your roving there could not be meet or pleasant. As to the rooms you speak of, there is no superstition attaching to them that I am aware of; but there may be other reasons to render it inexpedient for ladies to enter them. They belong to me and my brother; to my father also, when he chooses to enter; and we like to know that they are private to us. Shall I ring for lights now?" he concluded, as he turned to quit the room.

"Yes, please. I wonder where Mr. Thornycroft can be?"

"Probably at the Mermaid," he stayed to say.

"At the Mermaid? Do you mean the public-house?"

Yes. A smoking bout takes place in its best

parlour occasionally. My father, Mr. Southall, Captain Copp, Dangerfield the superintendent of the coastguard, old Connaught, and a few other gentlemen, meet there."

"Oh!" she answered. "Where are you going?"

"To fetch my sister from Mrs. Copp's."

In the short interval that elapsed before the appearance of the lights, my lady took a rapid survey of matters in her mind. The conclusion she arrived at was, that there were some items of the recent conversation altogether curious; that a certain mysterious atmosphere enveloped the present as well as the past; not the least of which was Richard Thornycroft's manner and his too evident faith in mystery. Take it for all in all, the most incomprehensible place she had ever come in contact with was the Red Court Farm.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW MISTRESS OF THE RED COURT.

My lady was up betimes in the morning. Remembering the previous day's dinner, she went to seek the cook, intending to come down upon her with a reprimand. The servants were only just rising from breakfast, which afforded my lady an opportunity of seeing the style of that meal as served in the kitchen of the Red Court Farm.

Tea and coffee ; part of a ham, cold ; toasted bacon, hot ; eggs boiled ; watercress and radishes ; a raised pie ; cold beef ; shrimps ; hot rolls ; toast and butter. The sight of all this so completely took Lady Ellis aback, that she could only stare and wonder.

"Is this your usual breakfast table?" she asked of the cook when the rest had left the kitchen.

"Yes, my lady."

"By whose permission?"

“By—I don’t understand,” said the cook, a stolid sort of woman in ordinary, with a placid face, though very great in her own department.

“Who is it that allows all this?”

Still the woman did not quite comprehend. The scale of living at the Red Court Farm was so profuse, that the servants in point of fact could eat what they pleased.

“Sometimes the eatables is varied, my lady.”

“But—does Mr. Thornycroft know of this extravagance going on? Is he aware that you sit down to such a breakfast?”

Cook could not say. He did not trouble himself about the matter. Yes, now she remembered, the justice had come in when they were at breakfast and other meals.

“Who has been the manager here?—who has had the ordering of things?” inquired my lady, in a suppressed passion.

“Sinnett, chiefly. Once in a way the justice would give the orders for dinner; a’most never,” was the reply.

Compressing her lips, determining to suppress all this ere many days should be over, my lady quitted the subject for the one she had chiefly come to speak upon.

“And now, cook, what did you mean by flying in the face of my orders yesterday?”

“Did I fly in the face of ’em?” asked the cook, simply.

“Did you! I ordered a plain dinner—fish, a joint, and pudding. You sent up—I know not what in addition to it.”

“Oh, it’s them extra dishes you mean. Yes, my lady, Sinnett ordered ’em.”

“*Sinnett!*” echoed my lady. “Did you tell her I had desired the dinner should be plain—that I had fixed on it?” she asked after a pause.

“Sinnett said that sort of dinner wouldn’t do for the justice, and I was to send up a better one.”

My lady bit her thin lips. “Call Sinnett here if you please.”

Sinnett, about her work upstairs, came in obedience to the summons. She was a little, pale-faced, dark woman, of about thirty-five, given to wear smart caps. My lady attacked her quietly enough, but with a manner authoritative.

“I beg you to understand at once that I am mistress here, Sinnett, and must be obeyed. When I give my orders, whether for dinner or

for anything else, they are not to be improved upon."

"My lady, in regard to adding to the dinner yesterday, I did it for the best; not to act in opposition to you," replied Sinnett, respectfully. "A good dinner has to be sent in always: those are the general orders. The young gentlemen are so much in the habit of bringing in chance guests, that the contingency has to be provided for. I have known a party of eight or ten brought in before now, and we servants quite unaware of it until about to lay the cloth."

"Yes," said my lady, hastily, "that might be all very well when there was no controlling mistress here. Mr. Thornycroft's sons appear to have been allowed great license in the house; of course it will be different now. Remember one thing, if you please, Sinnett, that you do not interfere with my orders for dinner to-day."

"Very well, my lady."

Catching up her dress—a beautiful muslin that shone like gold—my lady turned to the larder, telling the cook to follow her. She had expected to see on its shelves the dishes that left the table yesterday; but she saw very little.

“What has become of the ducks, cook? They were scarcely touched at table.”

“We had ’em for our suppers, my lady.”

My lady had a wrathful word on the tip of her tongue; she did not speak it.

“Ducks for supper in the kitchen! Are you in the habit of taking your supper indiscriminately from the dinner dishes that come down?”

“Yes, my lady. Such is master’s orders.”

“It appears to me that a vast quantity of provisions must be consumed,” remarked my lady.

“Pretty well,” was the cook’s answer. “It’s a tolerable large family; and Mr. Thornycroft has a good deal given away.”

“Provisions?”

“He do; he’s a downright good man, my lady. Not a morning passes, but some poor family or other from the village comes up and carries home what’s not wanted here.”

“I wonder you don’t have them up at night as well,” said my lady, in sarcasm.

The cook took it literally.

“That’s one of the few things not allowed at the Red Court Farm. Mr. Thornycroft won’t have people coming here at night: and for the

matter of that," added the woman, "they'd not care to come by the plateau after dark.—About to-day's dinner, my lady?"

Yes; about to-day's dinner. As if in aggravation of the powers that had been, my lady ordered soles, a piece of roast beef, the tart that had not been cut yesterday, and the remainder of the lemon cream.

As she went sailing away, the cook returned into the kitchen to Sinnett. The woman was really perplexed.

"I say, Sinnett, here's a start! A piece of ribs of beef, and nothing else. What's to be done?"

"Send it up," quietly replied Sinnett.

"But what on earth will the justice and the young masters say?"

"We shall see. I wash my hands of interfering. Exactly what she has ordered, cook, and no more, mind: she and the master must settle it between them."

Mary Anne Thornycroft had hoped she "should not die of it." Of that there was little chance; but that the girl had received a great blow, there was no disputing. Mr. Thornycroft had said a word to her that morning after breakfast in his

authoritative manner, to remind her that she was not to run wild, now there was some one at home to be her friend, mother, companion. Smarting under the sense of wrongs that in her limited experience, her ignorance of the woes of the world, she believed had never fallen on anybody's head before, Mary Anne when left alone burst into a flood of tears ; and Isaac surprised her in them. Half in vexation, half in pride, she dried them hastily. Isaac drew her before him, and stood holding her hands in his, looking down gravely into her face.

“ What did you promise me, Mary Anne ? ”

No answer.

“ That you would, for a time at least, make the best of things. That you would *try* the new rule before rebelling against it.”

“ But I can't. It is too hard, Isaac. Papa's beginning to interfere now.”

“ Interfere ! Is that the right word to use ? ”

She looked down, pouting her pretty lips. It was a good sign, as Isaac knew.

“ There was no harm in my walking to Mrs. Copp's after breakfast yesterday ; or in my staying there ; or in my going with you to Jutpoint.”

“ Did papa say there was harm ?”

“ He told me I was not to run wild now. He told me that I had a”—the poor chest heaved piteously — “ a mother. A mother to control me !”

“ Well !” said Isaac.

“ She is not my mother—I will never call her so. Oh, Isaac ! why can’t the old days come back again, when mademoiselle was here ?”

“ Hush ! don’t cry. Richard or she may be coming in. There ; be your own calm self, while I say a word to you. Listen. This calamity has been——”

“ There !” she interrupted. “ You say yourself it is a calamity.”

“ I have never thought it anything else ; but it cannot be averted now, and therefore nothing remains but to try and lighten it. It has been brought about by *you* ; by you alone, Mary Anne ; and if I revert to that fact for a moment, my dear, it is not to pain you, but to draw an inference from it for the future. Do not rebel at first to the control of my lady. It would be unjust, ungracious, altogether wrong ; it might lead to further trouble for you, we know not of what sort. Promise me,” he added,

kissing her lips, "that you will not be the one to make first mischief. It is for your own good that I urge it."

Her better judgment came to her, and she gave Isaac a little nod in answer.

My lady reaped the benefit of this lecture. Coming in from her somewhat unsatisfactory visit to the cook, she found the young lady dutifully practising the Moonlight sonata. My lady looked about the room, as if by good luck she might find something to avert weariness. Miss Thornycroft had hoped she should not die of *her*; my lady was beginning to hope she should not die of ennui.

"Do you never have any books here? Novels?"

"Sometimes," replied Mary Anne, turning round to speak. "We get them from the library at Jutpoint. There are some books upstairs in the book-case that used to be mamma's—Walter Scott's, and Dickens's, and others."

The Moonlight sonata went on again. My lady, who had no soul for music, thought it the most wofully dull piece she had ever listened to. She sat inert on the sofa. Life—this life at the Red Court Farm—was already looking indescribably dreary. And she had pictured it as a second

Utopia! It is ever so; when anticipation becomes lost in possession, romance and desire are alike gone.

“How long has Sinnett lived here?” she suddenly asked, again interrupting Miss Thornycroft.

“Ever so long,” was the young lady’s reply. “She came just before mamma died.”

“What are her precise functions here?—What does she call herself?”

“We don’t call her anything in particular. She is a sort of general servant, overlooking everything. She is housekeeper and manager.”

“Ah! she has taken a great deal of authority on herself, I can see.”

“Has she?” replied Mary Anne. “I have heard papa say she is one of the best servants we ever had; thoroughly capable.”

My lady gave her head a little defiant nod: and relapsed into silence and ennui.

Somehow the morning was got through. In the afternoon they set out to walk to the heath; it was rather late, for my lady, lying on the sofa in her bedroom, dropped off to sleep after luncheon. The dinner hour had been postponed to eight in the evening in consequence of a message from Mr. Thornycroft.

Winding round the churchyard, Mary Anne stood a moment and looked over the dwarf quickset hedge, on that side not much higher than her knee. My lady observed that her hands were clasped for a moment, that her lips moved.

“What are you doing, Mary Anne?”

“I never like to go by mamma’s grave without staying a moment to look at it, and to say a word or two of prayer,” was the simple answer.

My lady laughed, not kindly. “That comes of having a Roman Catholic governess.”

“Does it!” answered the girl quietly, indignant at the laugh. “Mademoiselle happens to be a Protestant. I did not learn it from her, or from any one; it comes from my heart.”

Turning abruptly on to the heath, Mary Anne saw Mademoiselle Derode coming towards them, and sprung off to meet her with a glad step.

Disappointment was in store for my lady’s private dream of keeping Miss Derode as governess. Mademoiselle was then on her way to the Red Court to tell them she was leaving for France in two days.

“You cannot go,” said Mary Anne, with the decisively authoritative manner peculiar to the

Thornycrofts. "You must come and spend some weeks with me at the Red Court."

Mademoiselle shook her little brown head. It was not possible, she said; happy as she could be at the Red Court; much as she would have liked to stay again with her dear Miss Mary Anne. Her mother wanted her, and she must go.

Turning about and about, they paced the heath while she repeated the substance of her mother's letter. Madame, said she, was suffering from a cold, from the separation, from loneliness, and had written for her. The Champs Elysées had no charms without her dear daughter; the toilettes were miserable; the playing children hustled her, their bonnes were not polite. Virginie must return the very first hour it would be convenient to do so. The pot-au-feu got burnt, the appartement smoked; madame had been so long en pension that she had forgotten how to manage things; never clever at household affairs, the craft of her hand appeared to have gone from her utterly. She had not had a dinner, so to say, since Virginie left; she had not slept one whole night. While Monsieur and Madame—her pupil's parents—had been away on their

wedding tour, she had said nothing of this, but now that they were home again she would no longer keep silence. Virginie must come; and her best prayers would be upon her on the journey.

A sort of mocking smile, covered on the instant by a sweet word, crossed my lady's lips.

"It was all very well," she said, "just what a good mother would write; but mademoiselle must write back, and explain that she was wanted yet for some weeks at the Red Court Farm."

"I cannot," said mademoiselle; "I wish I could. Miladi is very good to invite me; but my mother is my mother."

"You left your mother for seven years; she did well then."

"But, yes; that was different. Miladi can picture it. We have our ménage now."

"I have set my heart upon your coming to us, mademoiselle," was miladi's rejoinder, showing for a moment her white teeth.

"I should not need the pressing, if I could come," was the simple answer. "It is a holiday to me now to be at the Red Court Farm; but some things are practicable and others are not practicable, as miladi knows."

And the poor little governess in the cause of her mother was hard as adamant. They walked about until my lady's legs were tired, and then prepared to return.

"Of course you will come back with us, and dine for the last time?" said Mary Anne.

On any other occasion my lady might have interposed with an intimation that Mary Anne Thornycroft had no longer licence to invite whom she pleased to the table of the Red Court Farm. Without waiting for her to second the invitation, mademoiselle at once accepted it.

"For the last time," she repeated; "I shall be making my baggage to-morrow."

My lady did not change her dress for dinner. The odds and ends of what we are pleased to call full dinner-dress did not seem to be appreciated at the Red Court. Yesterday Richard and Isaac had sat down in their velveteen clothes. A moment before dinner Mr. Thornycroft came into the drawing-room, and said his sons had brought in two or three friends. My lady, meeting them in the hall, stared at their appearance and number.

"What is it? who are they?" she whispered to Mary Anne.

“ Oh, it is only one of their impromptu dinner parties,” carelessly replied Mary Anne. “ I guessed they were thinking of it by their delaying the dinner. They have supper parties instead sometimes.”

My lady thought she had never seen so rough a dinner party in her life, in the matter of dress. Richard and Isaac wore thin light clothes, loose and easy ; the strangers’ costume was, to say the least of it, varied. Old Connaught, temporarily abroad again, was wrapped in a suit of grey flannel ; the superintendent of the coast-guard wore brown ; and Captain Copp had arrived in a pea-jacket. Mary Anne shook hands with them all ; Miss Derode chattered ; and Mr. Thornycroft introduced the superintendent by name to his wife—Mr. Dangerfield.

“ Only six to-day,” whispered Mary Anne to her step-mother. “ Sometimes they have a dozen.”

Quite enough for the fare provided. Before Mr. Thornycroft began to help the soles, he looked everywhere for a second dish—on the table, on the sideboard, on the dumb waiter. “ There’s more fish than this, Sinnett?” he exclaimed, hastily.

“No, sir. That’s all.”

Mr. Thornycroft stared his servants severally in the face, as if the fault were theirs. Three of them were in waiting: Sinnett, a maid, and Hyde. He then applied himself to the helping of the fish, and, by dint of contrivance, managed to make it go round.

Well and good. Some ribs of beef came on next, fortunately a large piece. Mr. Thornycroft let it get cold before him; he could not imagine what the hindrance meant. Presently it struck him that the three servants stood in their places waiting for the meat to be served. The guests waited.

“Where are the other things, Hyde?”

“There’s only that, sir.”

The justice looked up the table and down the table; never in his whole life had he felt ashamed of his hospitality until now. But by this time the curious aspect of affairs had penetrated to Richard.

“Is this all you have to give us for dinner?” he asked of Sinnett, in his deep, stern tones; and he did not think it necessary to lower his voice.

“Yes, sir.”

“ *This!* That piece of beef?”

“There’s nothing else, sir.”

“By whose management?—by whose fault? Speak, woman.”

“My lady gave the orders, sir.”

Richard turned his dark face on my lady, as if demanding whether Sinnett was not telling a lie; and Mr. Thornycroft began to cut the beef as fast as he could cut it.

“I did not anticipate that we should have friends with us,” murmured the new mistress. She felt truly uncomfortable, really sorry for the contretemps; all eyes were turned upon her, following the dark condemning ones of Richard.

“We must make the best of our beef; there are worse misfortunes at sea,” said Isaac, his good-natured voice breaking the silence. “You will judge of our appetites better when you get more used to us,” he added to my lady with a kind smile.

“I should think there is worse misfortunes at sea,” observed Captain Copp, forgetting his grammar in his wish to smooth the unpleasantness. “Bless and save my wooden leg! if us sailors had such a glorious piece of beef to sit down to of a day on the long voyages, we should

not hear quite so much of hardships. I remember once—it was the very voyage before the one when I saw that sea-serpent in the Pacific—our tins of preserved meat turned bad, and an awful gale we met washed away our live stock. Ah, you should have been with us then, Mr. Richard; you'd never despise a piece of prime beef again."

Richard vouchsafed no answer: he had been thoroughly vexed. Captain Copp, seated at my lady's right hand, asked her to take wine with him, and then took it with the table generally.

My lady got away as soon as she could: hardly knowing whether to resent the advent of the visitors, the free and easy hospitality that appeared to prevail at the Red Court, or her own mistake in not having provided better. With that dark resolute face of power in her mind—Richard's—instinct whispered her that it would not answer to draw the reins too tight. At any rate, she felt uncomfortable at the table, and quitted it.

Leaving Miss Thornycroft and mademoiselle to go where they pleased, she went up at once to her chamber: a roomy apartment facing the sea. By its side was a small dressing-room, or

boudoir ; with a pleasant window to sit at on a summer's day. It was night now, but my lady threw up the window, and remained at it. A mist was arising out at sea : not much as yet. She was musing on the state of affairs. Had she made a mistake in coming to the Red Court for life ? Early days as yet to think so, but a doubt of it lay upon her spirit.

The subdued tones of the piano underneath were echoing to the beautiful touch of Mademoiselle Derode ; the soft, light touch that she had not been able to impart to her pupil. Mary Anne Thornycroft's playing, though clear, brilliant, and good, was, like herself, firm and decisive. You never heard the low melodious music from her that charms the heart to sweet sadness, rather than wins the ear and the admiration.

Suddenly, as my lady stood listening and musing, a figure, very dim and shadowy, appeared on the edge of the plateau, and she strained her eyes on it with a start.

Not of fear ; she had no superstition in her hard composition, and all she felt was curiosity—surprise. Mademoiselle Derode might have given utterance to a faint scream, and scuttered

away where she could not see the plateau, in dread belief that the ghost was walking. My lady had the good sense to know that a figure, shadowy by this light, might be very substantial by daylight. All in a moment she lost sight of it. It appeared to be standing still on the plateau's edge, whether looking this way or over the sea, her far sight, remarkably keen, could not tell her, but as she looked the figure disappeared. It was gone, so far as she could see; certainly it did not walk either to the right or the left. For a brief instant my lady wondered whether it had fallen over the cliff—as the poor coastguard-man had once done.

Footsteps underneath. Some one was crossing the garden, apparently having come from the direction of the plateau, and making for the solitary door in the dead wall at the unused end of the house; the end that she had been warned could not welcome ladies. To her intense surprise she recognised her husband, but dressed differently from what he had been at dinner. The black frock coat (his usual attire) was replaced by one of common velveteen, the gaiters were buttoned over the pantaloons, the customary hat by a disreputable wide-awake. Where could

he have been?—when she had thought him busy with his guests!

The mist was extending to the land very rapidly; my lady shut down the window in haste and descended the stairs. The drawing-room windows were open, and she rang the bell for them to be closed. In those few moments the mist had increased so greatly that she could not see halfway across the garden. It was almost like an instantaneous cloud of blight.

“Mr. Thornycroft has left the dining-room,” she observed to Hyde, as he was shutting the windows. “Have the people gone?”

“No, my lady. I have just taken in the pipes and spirits.”

“Pipes and spirits! Do they smoke at these impromptu dinner gatherings—and drink spirits?”

“Generally,” answered Hyde.

“But Mr. Thornycroft is not with them? I saw him out of doors.”

Hyde, his windows and shutters closed, turned round to face her, and spoke with emphasis.

“The justice is in the dining-room, my lady. He does not quit it when he has friends with him.”

Believing the man told her a lie, for her own sight was perfectly reliable sight—at least it had been so hitherto—she determined to satisfy herself. Waiting until he had gone, she crossed the hall, opened the dining-room door an inch and peeped in. Hyde was right. There sat Mr. Thornycroft in his place at the foot of the table, almost close to her, in the same dress he had worn at dinner, a long churchwarden's pipe in his mouth, and a steaming glass of something hot before him.

“What will you allow me for housekeeping, Mr. Thornycroft?” she asked in the morning.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“Nothing,” repeated the justice in his firmest tone, decisive as Richard's. She was taking her breakfast languidly in her room. It was eleven o'clock, but she had a headache, she said: the truth being that my lady liked to lie in bed. Mr. Thornycroft, coming in, condoled with her in his hearty manner, never believing but the plea was genuine—the straightforward country gentleman would as soon have believed Captain Copp's wooden leg to be a real one, as

a headache false. He entered on the matter he came to speak of, the dinner of yesterday. Kindly enough, but very emphatically, he warned her that such a thing must not occur a second time. It had been altogether a mistake.

“Any money you may wish for yourself, for your own purposes, is yours heartily,” he resumed; “but in the housekeeping you must not interfere. The cost is my care, and Sinnett sees to it: she has been in the house so long as to know perfectly well how to provide. I would have given ten pounds out of my pocket rather than have had that happen last night,” added the justice, giving a flick to his trousers’ right-hand pocket in momentary irritation at the recollection.

“But to provide such dinners is most unreasonable,” she remonstrated. “It is only for the servants to eat. I don’t think you can have an idea of the extravagance that goes on in the kitchen.”

“Pooh! Extravagance! I can afford it. The servants only eat what goes down from our table; and what they can’t eat is given away to those who want food. It was my father’s plan before me, and it is mine.”

“It is sinful waste,” retorted my lady. “If you choose to sit down to an outrageously profuse table yourself, the servants ought not to follow suit.”

“What would you have done with the superfluous victuals?” demanded the justice. “Put up for auction of a morning and sold?”

“As you ask me what I would have done, I will answer—do not provide them. The housekeeping is altogether on too liberal a scale.”

Mr. Thornycroft, who had been looking from the window over the sea, lying hot and clear and beautiful this morning, turned and stood before her; his fair, handsome face grave, his towering form raised to its full height, his voice, as he spoke, impressive in its calm decision.

“Lady Ellis, understand one thing—that this is a matter you must not interfere in. The housekeeping at the Red Court Farm—that you are pleased to find cause of fault with—is an established rule; so to say, an institution. It cannot be changed. Sinnett will conduct it as hitherto, without trouble to or interference from yourself. Whenever it does not please you to sit down to table, there are other rooms in which you can order your dinner served.”

“And suppose I say that I must exert my right of authority—my privilege of controlling the dinners?” she rejoined, her voice getting just a little harsh with the opposition.

“You cannot say it. I am master of my own house and my own table.”

“You have made me the mistress!”

“Just so; but not to alter the established usages.”

Lady Ellis tapped her foot on the soft carpet. “Do you consider that there is any *reason* in keeping so large a table?”

“There may or may not be. My pleasure is that it shall be kept. My sons have been brought up to it; they would not have it curtailed.”

“I think your sons have been brought up to a great deal that is unfitting. One would think they were lords.”

“Handsome, noble fellows!” aspirated the justice, with perhaps a little spice of aggravation. “There are not many lords that can match them.”

My lady bit her thin lips, a sure sign of rising temper. “It seems to me to be my duty, Mr. Thornycroft, exercising the authority you have

vested in me by making me your wife, to control the extravagance hitherto running riot. Opposition, ill-feeling, in the house will not be seemly."

"Neither will I have it," put in the justice.

"I do not see that it can be avoided. I give certain orders. Sinnett, acting under you, opposes them. What can the result be but unseemly contention? How would you avoid it, I ask?"

"By going to live in one of the cottages on the heath, and leaving Isaac—I mean Richard—master of the Red Court Farm."

He spoke promptly—like a man whose mind is fully made up. The prospect of living in a cottage on the heath nearly took my lady's breath away.

"Mr. Thornycroft!" she passionately exclaimed, and then her tone changed to one of peevish remonstrance: "why do you bring up impossibilities? A cottage on the heath!"

Mr. Thornycroft brought down his hand, not in anger but emphasis, on the small breakfast table.

"Were the order of the Red Court upset by unnecessary interference on your part—were I to find that I could be no longer master of it

without being subjected to continual opposition, I should surely *quit* it. If a cottage on the heath were distasteful to you I would take lodgings at Jutpoint."

Lady Ellis sipped her coffee. It did not appear safe to say more. A cottage on the heath, or lodgings at Jutpoint!

"I only wished to put a stop to unnecessary extravagance," she said, in a tone of conciliation.

"No doubt. I give you credit for good motives, of course; but these things must be left to me. The same gentlemen who dined here yesterday evening are coming to supper this. I have made out the bill of fare myself, and given it to Sinnett."

"Coming again to-night!" she could not help exclaiming.

"To atone for the shortcomings of yesterday's dinner," spoke the justice. "I never had occasion to feel ashamed of my table before."

"I cannot think what possible pleasure you can find in the society of such men," she said, after a pause. "Look at them, coming out to dinner in those rough coats!"

Mr. Thornycroft laughed. "We don't go in often for evening dress at Coastdown. As to

the pleasure, they have been in the habit of sitting at my table for some years now, madam, and I enjoy the companionship."

"I fancied you left them early; I thought I saw you cross the garden, as if coming from the plateau," she said, resolving to speak of the matter which had so puzzled her.

"We did not leave the dining-room until eleven o'clock."

"Well—it was very strange. I was standing at this window, and certainly saw some one exactly like you; the same figure, the same face; but not in the same dress. He seemed to have on gaiters and a velveteen coat, and a low broad-brimmed hat, very ugly. What should you say it could have been?"

"I should say that you were dreaming."

"I was wide awake. It was just before that mist came on," she added.

"Ah, the fault must have lain in the mist. I have known it come as a mirage occasionally, bringing deception and confusion."

Did he really mean it? It seemed so, for there was seriousness on his face as he spoke. Quitting the room, he descended the stairs, and made his way to the fields. In the four-acre

mead—as it was called in common parlance on the farm—he came upon Richard watching the hay-makers. Richard wished him good morning; abroad early, it was the first time he had seen his father that day.

“What was the failure, Dick?” asked the justice.

“Fog,” shortly answered Richard. “Couldn’t see the light.”

Mr. Thornycroft nodded.

“Are we to have a repetition, sir, of yesterday’s dinner table?” resumed Richard. “If so, I think the sooner your wife is requested to take up her residence somewhere else, the better.”

“You will not have it again. Sinnett holds my orders, and my wife has been made aware she does. There’s no need for you to put yourself out.”

With the injunction, spoken rather testily, Mr. Thornycroft left him. But a little later, when he met Isaac, he voluntarily entered on the subject; hinting his vexation at the past, promising that it would never again occur, almost as if he were tendering an apology for the accident.

“I’m afraid I made a mistake, Ikey; I’m

afraid I made a mistake ; but I meant it for the best."

It was ever thus. To his second son Mr. Thornycroft's behaviour was somewhat different from what it was to his eldest. It could not be said that he paid him more deference : but it was to Isaac he generally spoke of business, when speaking was needed ; if an opinion was required, Isaac's was sought in preference to Richard's. It was just as though Isaac had been the eldest son. That Richard had brought this on himself, by his assumption of authority, was quite probable : and the little preference seemed to spring from the justice involuntarily.

The evening supper took place, and the guests were consoled by the ample table for the scantiness of the previous dinner. My lady was not invited to join it ; nothing appeared further from Mr. Thornycroft's thoughts than to have ladies at table. She spent a solitary sort of evening ; Mary Anne was at Mrs. Wilkinson's, taking leave of Miss Derode.

Was it, she asked herself, to go on like this always and always ? Had she become the wife of Justice Thornycroft only to die of the dreary life at the Red Court Farm ? Let us give her

her due. When she married him she did intend to do her duty as an honest woman, and send ridiculous flirtations, such as that carried on with Robert Lake, to the winds. But she did *not* expect to be done to death of eunui.

A short while went on. Nearly open warfare set in between Mary Anne and her stepmother. To-day my lady would be harsh, exacting, almost cruel in her rule; to-morrow the girl would be wholly neglected—suffered to run wild. Mr. Thornycroft saw that things could not continue thus, and the refrain of the words he had spoken to Isaac beat ever on his brain, day by day bringing greater force to them: “I fear I made a mistake; I fear I made a mistake.”

One morning Mary Anne astonished the justice by appearing before him in his bureau, in what she was pleased to call the uncivilized rooms. He sat there with Mr. Hopley, of Dartfield, some account books before them. Her dress, a beautiful muslin with a raised blue spot, was torn out at the gathers and trailed behind her. My lady had done it in a passion.

“Holloa! what do you do *here*?” cried the justice, emphatically; and Mr. Hopley went out whistling, with his hands in his pockets, and

crossed over to stare at the idle dog-cart in the coach-house, as if to give privacy for the explanation.

She had come with one of her tales of woe. She had come to beg and pray to be sent to school. What a change! Mr. Thornycroft was nearly at his wits' end.

Ere the day was over, his wife brought a complaint to him on her own score: not altogether of Mary Anne. She simply said, incidentally, that ill-trained young lady was getting quite beyond her control, and therefore she must wash her hands of her. The complaint was of her own health; it appeared to be failing her in a rather remarkable manner, certainly a sudden one. This was true. She had concluded that the air of Coastdown was inimical to her, and she wished it might be managed for her to live away—say Cheltenham, or some other healthy place.

How eagerly Mr. Thornycroft caught at the suggestion, he felt afterwards half ashamed to think of. In matters involving money he was always liberal, and he at once named a handsome sum per month that she might enjoy, at Cheltenham, or anywhere else that pleased her.

PART THE THIRD.

CHAPTER V.

AT SCHOOL IN LONDON.

Two years have gone by, and it is June again.

A good, substantial house in one of the western suburbs of the metropolis—Kensington. By the well-rubbed brass plate on the iron gate of the garden, and the lady's name on it—"Miss Jupp"—it may be taken for a boarding-school. In fact, it is one: a small select school (as so many schools proclaim themselves now; but this really is such); and kept by Miss Jupp, once of Katterley. That is, by Miss Jupp and two of her sisters, but she wisely calls it by her own name singly, avoiding the ugly style of the plural. "Miss Jupp's establishment."

Fortune changes with a great many of us;

every day, every hour of our lives, some are going up, others down. When death removed old Mr. Jupp (an event that occurred almost close upon poor Mrs. Lake's), then his daughters found that they had not enough to get along in the world. Wisely taking time and circumstances by the forelock, the three elder ones, Mary, Margaret, and Emma, removed to London, took a good house at Kensington, and by the help of influential friends very soon had pupils in it. Dorothy and Rose were married; Louisa remained at Katterley with her widowed mother. They professed to take ten pupils only: once or twice the number had been increased to twelve; the terms were high, but the teaching was good, and the arrangements were really first-class. It was with the Miss Jupps that Mary Anne Thornycroft had been placed. And she did not run away from them.

Quite the contrary. The summer holidays have just set in, and she is to go home for them; as she did the previous midsummer; but she is expressing a half wish, now as she stands before Miss Margaret Jupp, that she could spend them where she is, in London. Long and long ago has she grown reconciled to the regularity

of a school life, and to regard Miss Jupp's as a second and happy home. She spent the first Christmas holidays with them; the second Christmas (last) at Cheltenham with her step-mother; she and her brother Cyril.

Lady Ellis (retaining still the name) is in very ill health now. Almost simultaneously with quitting the Red Court after her marriage, a grave inward disorder manifested itself. Symptoms of it indeed had been upon her for some time, even before leaving India; but—as is the case with many other symptoms—they had been entirely disregarded, their grave nature unsuspected. Instead of leading a gay life at the gay inland watering-place, flaunting her charms and her fashion in the eyes of other sojourners, Lady Ellis found herself compelled to live a very quiet one. She has a small villa, an establishment of two servants only; and she does not wish for more. In heart, in nature, she is growing altered, and the refining, holy influence that very often—God be praised!—changes the whole heart and spirit with a change which is not of this world, is coming over her. Two visits only has she paid to the Red Court Farm, staying about six weeks each time, and Mr. Thornycroft

goes to Cheltenham two or three times a year. Miss Thornycroft and her stepmother are civil to each other now, not to say friendly; and when she invited the young lady and her brother Cyril for the holidays last Christmas, they went. The previous midsummer they had spent together at Coastdown, it having been one of the periods of my lady's two visits. Fortune had contrived well for Lady Ellis, and her marriage with the wealthy master of the Red Court Farm enabled her to enjoy every substantial comfort in her hour of need.

Two other young ladies connected in a degree with this history are at Miss Jupp's this evening; the rest of the pupils have left. One of the two we have met before, one not. They are in the room now, and you may look at them. All three, including Miss Thornycroft, are about the same age—between eighteen and nineteen. She, Mary Anne, is the same tall, stately, fair, handsome, and (it must be owned) haughty girl that you knew before; the fine face is resolute as ever, the cold blue eyes as honest and uncompromising. She had been allowed to dress as expensively at Miss Jupp's as her inclination leads: to-day she wears a rich pale-blue silk; blue

ribbons are falling from her fair hair. She is standing doing nothing : but sitting in a chair by her side, toying with a bit of fancy-work, is a plain, dark, merry-looking girl in a good useful nut-brown silk, Susan Hunter. She is the sister of Robert Hunter, several years his junior, and has been sent up from Yorkshire by her aunt, with whom she lives, to have two years of "finish" at a London school. Accident—not their having once known something of her brother—led to the school fixed on being Miss Jupp's. And now for the last.

In a grey alpaca dress, trimmed with a little ribbon velvet of the same hue, her head bent patiently over a pile of drawings that she is touching up, sits the third. A very different footing in the school, hers, from that of the other two; *they* pay the high, full terms; *she* pays nothing, but works out her board with industry. Have you forgotten that pale, gentle face, one of the sweetest both in feature and expression ever looked upon, with the fine silky chesnut hair modestly braided round it, and the soft brown eyes that take all the best feelings of a genuine heart by storm? The weary look telling of incessant industry, the pile of work that she does

not look up from, the cheap holiday-dress (her best) costing little, all proclaim sufficiently her dependent position in the house — a slight, graceful girl of middle height, with a sort of drooping look in her figure, as if she were, and had been all her life, in the habit of being pushed into the background?

It is Anna Chester. Her life since we saw her has been like that of a dray horse. Mrs. Chester placed her at an inferior school as pupil-teacher, where she had many kinds of things to do, and the mistress's own children to take care of in the holidays. For a year and a half she stayed at it, doing her best patiently, and then the Miss Jupps took her. She has to work very much still, and her health is failing. Captain and Mrs. Copp have invited her to Coastdown for a change, and she goes down to-morrow with Miss Thornycroft. Miss Hunter spends the holidays at school.

Mrs. Chester? Mrs. Chester quitted Guild, to set up a fashionable boarding-house in London. It did not answer; the mass of people remained cruelly indifferent to its advertisements; and the few who tried it ran away and never paid her. She then removed to Paris, where (as some

friends assured her) a good English boarding-house was much wanted ; and, if her own reports are to be trusted, she is likely to do pretty well at it.

There remains only one more person to mention of those we formerly knew ; and that is Robert Hunter. Putting his shoulder to the wheel in earnest, as only a resolute and capable man can put it ; I had almost said as one only who has some expiation to work out ; his days are spent in hard industry. He is the practical energetic man of business ; never spending a moment in waste, never willingly allowing himself recreation. The past folly, the past idleness of that time, not so very long gone by, recurs to his memory less frequently than it used, but ever with the feeling of a nightmare. He is still with the same firm, earning a liberal salary. Since a day or two only has he been in London, but there's some talk of his remaining in it now. Nothing seems to be further from his thoughts than any sort of pleasure : it would seem that he has one vocation alone in life—work.

These three young ladies were going out this afternoon. To a grand house, too : Mrs. Macpherson's. The professor, good simple man,

had been content, socially speaking, with a shed on the top of Aldgate pump: not so madam. As the professor rose more and more into distinction, *she* rose; and the residence in Bloomsbury was exchanged for a place at Kensington. Possibly the calling occasionally on the Miss Jupps, had put it into her head. A house as grand as its name in the matter of decoration; but not of undue size: Mrs. Macpherson had good common sense, and generally exercised it. A dazzling white front with a pillared portico and much ornamentation outside and in—"Majestic Villa." The professor had wanted to change the name, but madam preferred to retain it. It was not very far from Miss Jupp's, and these young ladies were going there to spend the evening.

In all the glory of her large room, with its decorations of white and gold, its mirrors, its glittering cabinets, its soft luxurious carpet, its chairs of delicate green velvet, sat Mrs. Macpherson, waiting for these young guests. In all her own glory of dress, it may be said, for that was not less conspicuous than of yore, and that of to-day looked just as if it were chosen to accord with the hangings—a green satin robe with gold leaves for trimmings, and a cap that could

not be seen for sprays and spangles. In her sense of politeness—and she possessed an old-fashioned stock of it—Mrs. Macpherson had dressed herself betimes, not to leave the young ladies alone after they came. Thus, when they arrived, under the convoy of Miss Emma Jupp, who left them at the door, Mrs. Macpherson was ready to receive them.

It was the first time they had been there for many weeks; for the professor had been abroad on a tour in connexion with some of the ologies, as his wife expressed it, in which she had accompanied him. The result of this was, that Mrs. Macpherson had no end of Parisian novelties, in the shape of dress, to display to them in her chamber.

“I know what girls like,” she said, in her hearty manner, “and that is, to look at new bonnets and mantles, and try ’em on.”

But Mary Anne Thornycroft—perhaps because she could indulge in such articles at will—cared not a jot for these attractions, and said she should go down to see the professor.

He had some rooms at the back of the house, where his collection of scientific curiosities—to call things by a polite name—had been stowed.

And here the professor, when not out, spent his time. Mary Anne quite loved the man, so simple-minded and yet great-minded at one and the same time, and never failed to penetrate to his rooms when occasion offered. Quickly wending her way through the passages, she opened the door softly.

It was not very easy to distinguish clearly at first, what with the crowd of things darkening the windows, and the mass of objects generally. At a few yards' distance, slightly bending over a sort of upright desk, as if writing something, stood a gentleman; but certainly not the professor. His back was towards her; he had evidently not heard her enter, and a faint flush of surprise dawned on Mary Anne's face, for in that first moment she thought it was her brother Cyril. It was the same youthful, supple, slender figure; the same waving hair, of a dark auburn, clustering round the head above the collar of the coat. Altogether, seen in this way, there was a certain resemblance; and that was the first primary link in the chain that attracted Mary Anne to him. The door, which she had left open, closed with a slight bang, and the gentleman spoke, without lifting his head.

“I have worked it out at last. You were right about its being less than the other.”

“Is Dr. Macpherson not here?”

He turned sharply at the words, a pencil in his hand, surprise on his face. A good face; for its old gay careless look had departed for ever, and the dark blue eyes — darker even than of yore — wore a serious gravity that never left them, a gravity born of remorse. The face was older than the figure, and not in the least like Cyril Thornycroft's; it looked fully its seven-and-twenty years — nay, looked nearer thirty; but all its expression was merged in surprise. No wonder; to see a beautiful girl in blue silk, with blue ribbons in her fair hair, standing there; when he had only expected the professor, in his old threadbare coat and spectacles. It was Robert Hunter.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, coming forward. “Can I do anything for you?”

“I thought Dr. Macpherson was here. I came to see him.”

Never losing her calm self-possession on any occasion, as so many young ladies do on no occasion at all, Miss Thornycroft stepped up to the side glass cases to examine the curiosities, talk-

ing as easily to him as though she had known him all her life. Without being in the least free, there was an openness of manner about her, an utter absence of tricks and affectation, a straightforward independence, rather remarkable in a young lady. For Robert Hunter it possessed a singular charm.

Before the professor came in, who had forgotten himself down in his cellar, where he had gone after a cherished specimen in the frog line; before Mr. Hunter had pointed out to her a quarter of the new acquisitions in the glass cases — animal, vegetable, and mineral — they knew all about each other: that he was Susan Hunter's brother, and that she was Miss Thornycroft of Coastdown. At mention of her name, a brief vision connected with the past floated across Robert Hunter's brain—of a certain summer evening when he was returning to Guild with his poor young wife, and saw the back of a high open carriage bowling away from his sister's gate, which he was told contained Mr. and Miss Thornycroft. Never since that had he heard the name or thought of the people.

“Do you know, when I came into the room just now, and you were standing with your back

to me, I nearly took you for one of my brothers. At the back you are just like him."

Robert Hunter smiled slightly. "And not in the face?"

"Not at all—except, perhaps, a little in the forehead. Cyril has hazel eyes and small features. The hair is exactly like his, the same colour, and grows just as his does in front, leaving the forehead square. If you were to hide your face, showing only the top of the forehead and the hair, I should say you were Cyril."

The professor appeared, and they went into the more habitable part of the house. Robert had not seen his sister since she was a little girl; he had not seen Anna since they parted at Guild. It was altogether an acceptable meeting; but he looked at Anna's face somewhat anxiously.

"Have you been working very much, Anna?" he took occasion to ask, drawing her for a moment aside.

"I am always working very hard," she answered, with her sweet smile of patient endurance. "There is a great deal to be done in schools, you know; but I am well off at Miss Jupp's compared to what I was at the other place. They are very kind to me."

“ You have a look upon you as if you felt tired always. It is a curious impression to draw though, perhaps, considering I have seen you but for ten minutes.”

“ I do feel tired nearly always,” acknowledged Anna. “ The Miss Jupps think London does not agree with me. I am going to Coastdown for a change for the holidays ; I shall get better there.”

He thought she would require a longer change than a few holiday weeks. Never in the old days had it struck him that Anna looked *fragile* ; but she certainly did now.

“ And now, Robert Hunter, you'll stay with us, as these young ladies are here ?” said hospitable Mrs. Macpherson.

He hesitated before replying. Very much indeed would he have liked to remain, but he had made an appointment with a gentleman.

“ Put it off,” said Mrs. Macpherson.

“ There's no time for that. Certainly—if I am not at the office when he comes, one of the partners would see him. But——”

“ But what ?” asked the professor. “ Would not that be a solution of the difficulty ?”

“ A way out of the mess,” put in the professor's wife.

Mr. Hunter laughed. "I was going to say that I have never put away any business for my own convenience since—since I took to it again."

The attraction, or whatever it might be, however, proved too strong for business this afternoon, and Robert Hunter remained at the professor's. When he and Miss Thornycroft parted at night, it seemed that they had known each other for years.

It was very singular ; a thing of rare occurrence. We have heard of this sudden mutual liking, the nameless affinity that draws one soul to another ; but believe me it is not of very frequent experience. The thought that crossed Robert Hunter's mind that evening more than once was—"I wish that girl was my sister." Any idea of another sort of attachment would be a very long while yet before it penetrated to him as even a possibility.

In the evening, when they got home at an early hour—Miss Jupp had only given them until eight o'clock, for there was packing to do—Mary Anne Thornycroft went into a fever of indignation to think that no message had been left by or from any of her brothers.

“It is so fearfully careless of them! That is just like my brothers. Do they expect we are to travel alone?”

“My dear, do not put yourself out,” said Miss Jupp. “Two young ladies can travel alone very well. You will get there quite safely.”

“So far as that goes, ma’am, I could travel alone fearlessly to the end of the world,” spoke Mary Anne. “But that is not the question; neither does it excuse their negligence. For all they know, I might have spent all my money, and have none to take me down.”

Miss Emma Jupp laughed. “They would suppose that we should supply you.”

“Yes, Miss Emma, no doubt. But they had no business to send me word that one of them would be in London to-day to take charge of me home, unless ——”

The words were brought to a sudden standstill by the opening of the door. One of the maids appeared at it to announce a guest.

“Mr. Isaac Thornycroft.”

There entered the same noble-looking young man, noble in his towering height and strength, that we knew two years ago at Coastdown; he came in with a smile on his bright face—on its fair

features, in its blue eyes. Miss Emma Jupp's first thought was, what a likeness he bore to his sister; her second that she had never in her whole life seen any one half so good-looking. It happened that she had never seen him before. Mary Anne began to reproach him for carelessness. He received it all with the most ineffable good humour, the smile brightening on his sunny face.

"I know it is too late, quite wrong of me, but I missed the train at Jutpoint, and had to come by a later one. Which of these two young ladies is Miss Chester?" he added, turning to the two girls who stood together. "I have a--a trifle for her from Captain Copp."

"You shall guess," interposed Mary Anne. "One of them is Anna Chester. Now guess."

It was not difficult. Miss Hunter met his glance fearlessly in a merry spirit; Anna blushed and let fall her eyes. Isaac Thornycroft smiled.

"This is Miss Chester."

"It is all through your stupid shyness, Anna," said Mary Anne in a cross tone. Which of course only increased her confusion. Isaac crossed the room, his eyes bent on the sweet blushing

face, as he held out the "trifle" forwarded by Captain Copp.

"Will you accept it, Miss Chester? Captain Copp charged me to take particular care of it, and not to touch it myself."

It was a travelling wickered bottle, holding about a pint. Anna looked at it with curiosity, and Emma Jupp took it out of her hand.

"What can it be?"

"Take out the cork and smell it," suggested Mr. Isaac Thornycroft.

Miss Emma did so; giving a strong sniff. "Dear me! I think it is rum."

"Rum-and-water," corrected Isaac. "Captain Copp begged me to assure Miss Chester that it was only half-and-half, she being a young lady. It is for her refreshment as she goes down to-morrow."

"If that's not exactly like Sam Copp!" exclaimed Miss Jupp with some asperity, while the laugh against Anna went round. "He will never acquire an idea beyond his old sea notions; never. I remember what he was before his leg came off."

"He came all the way to Jutpoint in the omnibus after me when I had driven over, to

make sure, I believe, that Mrs. Copp should not be privy to the transaction. It was through his injunctions as to the wicker bottle that I missed my train," concluded Isaac—his eyes, that were bent on Anna Chester, dancing with mirth. At which hers fell again.

If all of us estimated people alike, especially in regard to that subtle matter of "liking" or "disliking" on first impression, what a curious world it would be! Miss Emma Jupp considered Isaac Thornycroft the best-looking, the most attractive man she had ever seen. Mary Anne Thornycroft, on the contrary, was thinking the same of somebody else.

"I never saw anybody I liked half so much at first sight as Robert Hunter," she softly said to herself, as she laid her head on her pillow.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN COPP.

CAPTAIN COPP was a true sailor, gifted with more good nature than common sense. On the rare occasion of receiving a young lady visitor under his roof, his hospitality and his heart alike ran riot. Anna Chester, the pretty, friendless girl whom he had heard of but never seen, was coming to him and his wife to be nursed into strength and health, and the captain anticipated the arrival as something to be made a fête of.

A feast too, by appearances. It was a bright summer morning, with a fresh breeze blowing from the sea; and the captain was abroad betimes with some flowing purple ribbons fastened round his glazed hat. Greatly to the grievance of Mrs. Copp: who had ventured to say that Anna was not a captured prize-ship, or a battle won, or even a wedding, that she should be rejoiced over to the extent of streamers. All of

which Captain Copp was deaf to. He started by the ten o'clock omnibus for Jutpoint, having undertaken first of all to send home provisions for dinner. A pair of soles and two pounds of veal cutlet had been meekly suggested by Mrs. Copp.

The morning wore on. Sarah, the middle-aged, hard-featured, sensible-looking, thoroughly capable woman-servant, who was bold enough to dispute with her master, and not in the least to care at being likened to pirates and other disrespectful things, stood in the kitchen making a gooseberry pudding, when the butcher-boy came in without the ceremony of announcing himself; unless a knocking and pushing of his tray against the back door-posts, through awkwardness, could be called such.

“Some dishes, please,” said he.

“Dishes!” retorted Sarah, who had one of the strongest tongues in Coastdown. “Dishes for what?”

“For this here meat. The captain have just been in and bought it, and master have sent it up.”

He displayed some twelve or fifteen pounds of meat—beef, veal, lamb. Sarah’s green eyes—

good, honest, pleasant eyes in the main—glistened.

“Then your master’s a fool. Didn’t I tell him not to pay attention to the captain when he took these freaks in his head?” she demanded. “When he goes and buys up the whole shop—as he did one day last winter because he was expecting a old mate, of his, down—your master’s not to notice him no more nor if he was a child. An uncommon soft *you* must be, to bring up all them joints! Did you think you was supplying the Red Court? Just you march back with ’em.”

There was an interruption. While the boy stood staring at the meat, hardly knowing what to do, and rubbing his fingers amidst his shining black hair, Mrs. Copp entered the kitchen, and became acquainted with the state of affairs. She wore a pale muslin gown, as faded as her gentle self, with pale green ribbons.

“Dear me,” she meekly cried, “all that meat! We could not get through the half of it while it was good? Do you think, James, your master would have any objection to take it back?”

“Objection! He’ll take it back, ma’am,

whether he has any objection or not," cried the positive Sarah. "Now then! who's this?"

Somebody seemed to be clattering up in clogs. A woman with the fish: three pairs of large soles and a score or two of herrings, which the captain had bought and paid for. Mrs. Copp, fearing what else might be coming, looked inclined to cry. The exasperated Sarah, more practical, took her hands out of the paste, wiped the flour off them on her check apron, and went darting across the heath without bonnet to the butcher's shop, the boy and his tray of rejected meat slowly following her. There she commenced a wordy war with the butcher, accusing him of being an idiot, with other disparaging epithets, and went marching home in triumph carrying two pounds of veal cutlet.

"And that's too much for us," she cried to her mistress, "with all that stock of fish and the pudding. What on earth is to be done with the fish, I don't know. If I fry a pair for dinner, and pickle the herrings, there'll be two pair left. *They* won't pickle. One had need to have poor folk coming here as they do at the Red Court. Master's gone off with purple streamers flying

from his hat ; I think he'd more need to put on bells."

Scarcely had she got her hands into the flour again, when another person arrived. A girl with a goose. It was in its feathers, just killed.

"If you please, ma'am," said she to Sarah, with a curtsy, "mother says she'll stick the other as soon as ever she can catch him ; but he's runned away over the common. Mother sent me up with this for 'fraid you should be waiting to pluck him. The captain said they was to come up sharp."

Sarah could almost have found in her heart to "stick" her master. She was a faithful servant, and the waste of money vexed her. Mrs. Copp, quite unable to battle with the petty ills of life, left the strong-minded woman to fight against these, and ran away to her parlour.

The respected cause of all this, meanwhile, had reached Jutpoint, he and his streamers. There he had to wait a considerable time, but the train came in at last, and brought the travellers.

They occupied a first-class compartment in the middle of the train. There had been a little matter about the tickets at starting. Isaac Thornycroft procured them, and when they were

seated, Anna took out her purse to repay him, and found she had not enough money in it. A little more that she possessed was in her box. Accustomed to travel second-class, even third, the cost of the ticket was more than she had thought for. Eighteenpence short !

“ If you will please to take this, I will repay you the rest as soon as I can get to my box,” she said, with painful embarrassment—an embarrassment that Isaac could not fail to notice and to wonder at. Reared as she had been, money wore to her an undue value ; to want it in a time of need seemed little short of a crime. She turned the silver about in her hands, blushing painfully. Miss Thornycroft discerned somewhat of the case.

“ Never mind, Anna. I dare say you thought to travel second-class. You can repay my brother later.”

Isaac’s quick brain took in the whole. This poor friendless girl, kept at the Miss Jupp’s almost out of charity, had less money in a year for necessities than he would sometimes spend in an hour in frivolity. Anna held out the silver still, with the rose-coloured flush deepening on her delicate cheeks.

“What is it, Miss Chester?” he suddenly said. “Why do you offer me your money?”

“You took my ticket, did you not?”

“Certainly,” he answered, showing the three little pieces of card in his waistcoat. “But I held the money for yours beforehand. Put up your purse.”

“Did you,” she answered, in great relief, but embarrassed still. “Did Mrs. Copp give it you?—or Miss Jupp?—or— or the captain?” Isaac laughed.

“You had better not inquire into secrets, Miss Chester. All I can tell you is, I had the money for your ticket in my pocket. Where is that important article—the wicker bottle? Captain Copp will expect it returned to him—empty.”

“It is empty now; Miss Jupp poured out the rum-and-water,” she answered, laughing. “I have it all safe.”

She put up her purse as she spoke, inquiring no further as to the donor in her spirit of implicit obedience, but concluded it must have been Miss Jupp. And she never knew the truth until—until it was too late to repay Isaac.

At the terminus, side by side with the captain and his streamers, stood Justice Thornycroft.

Anna remembered him well ; the tall, fine, genial-natured man whom she had seen three years before in the day's visit to Mrs. Chester. All thought of her had long ago passed from his memory, but he recognised the face—the pale, patient, gentle face, which, even then, had struck Mr. Thornycroft as being the sweetest he had ever looked upon. It so struck him now.

“ Where have I seen you ? ” he asked. And Anna told him.

The carriage, very much to the displeasure of Mary Anne, had not come over for her. Mr. Thornycroft explained that one of the horses he generally drove in it was found to be lame that morning. They got into the omnibus, the captain preferring to place himself with his ribbons and his wooden leg flat on the roof amidst the luggage. On the outskirts of Jutpoint, in obedience to his signal, the driver came to a standstill before the door of the “ White Cliff ” publichouse, and the captain's head appeared at the back window, in a hanging position, inquiring whether brandy or rum would be preferred ; adding, with a somewhat fierce look at Mr. Thornycroft and Isaac, that *he* should stand glasses round this time. Very much to the cap-

tain's discomfiture, the young ladies and the gentlemen declined both; so the only order the crestfallen captain could give the White Cliff was for two glasses of rum, cold without; that were disposed of by himself and the driver.

"Mind, Anna! I feel three-parts of a stranger in this place, and have really not a friend of my own age and condition in it, so you must supply the place of one to me during these holidays," said Miss Thornycroft, as the omnibus reached its destination—the Mermaid. "Part of every day I shall expect you to spend at the Red Court."

"I beg to second that," whispered Isaac, taking Anna's hand to help her out. And she blushed again that day for about the fiftieth time without knowing why or wherefore.

Not upon these summer holidays can we linger, because so much time must be spent on those of the next winter. *On those of the next winter!* If the inmates of the Red Court Farm could but have foreseen what those holidays were to bring forth for them! or Mary Anne Thornycroft dreamt of the consequences of indulging her own

self-will! Just a few words more of the present, and then we go on.

Anna Chester's sojourn at Coastdown was passing swiftly, and she seemed as in a very Elysium. The days of toil, of servitude, of incessant care for others were over, temporarily at any rate, and she enjoyed comfort and rest. The hospitable, good-hearted sailor-captain, with his tales of the sea-serpent, the mermaid he had seen, and other marvels; the meek, gentle, ever-thoughtful Mrs. Copp, who caused Anna to address her as "aunt," and behaved more kindly to her than any aunt did yet; the most charming visits day by day to the Red Court Farm, and the constant society of Isaac Thornycroft. Ah, there it lay—the strange fascination that all things were beginning to possess around her—in the companionship of *him*. To say that Isaac Thornycroft, hitherto so mockingly heart-whole, had fallen in love with Anna the first evening he saw her at Miss Jupp's, would be going too far, but he was certainly three-parts in love before they reached Coastdown the following day. To watch her gentle face became like the sweetest music to Isaac Thornycroft. To see her ever-wakeful attentions to her entertainers,

her gratitude for their kindness, her prompt help of Sarah when extra work was to be done, her loving care for the friendless and poor, was something new to Isaac, altogether out of his experience. Come weal, come woe, he resolved that this girl should be his wife. People, in their thoughtless gossip, had been wont to predict a high-born and wealthy bride for the attractive second son of Justice Thornycroft; this humble orphan, the poor daughter of the many years poor and humble curate, was the one he fixed upon, with all the world before him to choose from. How Fate changes plans! "L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose," was one of the most solemn truisms ever penned. Long ere the six weeks of holidays had passed, Isaac Thornycroft and Anna Chester had become all in all to each other: and he, a man accustomed to act upon impulse, spoke out.

It was during an evening walk to the Red Court Farm. Anna was going to tea there; Isaac met her on the heath—no unusual thing—and turned to walk by her side. Both were silent after the first greeting: true love is rarely eloquent. With her soft cheeks blushing, her pale eyelids drooping, her heart wildly beating,

Anna sought—at first in vain—to find some topic of conversation, and chose but a lame one.

“Has Mary Anne finished her screen?”

Isaac smiled. “As if I knew!”

“She has the other one to do; and we shall be going back in a week.”

“Not in a week!”

“The holidays will be up a week to-morrow.”

A vista of the miserable time after her departure, when all things would be dark and dreary, wanting her who had come to make his heart's sunshine, cast its foreshadowing across the brain of Isaac. He turned to her in his impulse, speaking passionately.

“Anna, I cannot lose you. Rather than that, I must—I must——”

“Must what?” she asked, innocently.

“Keep you here on a visit to myself—a visit that can never terminate.”

Insensibly, she drew a little from him. Not that the words would have been unwelcome had circumstances justified them; how welcome, the sudden rush of inward joy, the wild coursing on of all her pulses, told her. But—loving him though she did; conscious or half-conscious of his love for her—it never occurred to the mind of Anna

Chester that a union would be within the range of possibility. She—the poor humble slave—be wedded by a great and wealthy gentleman like Isaac Thornycroft!

“Would you object to the visit, Anna—though it were to be for life?”

“It could not be,” she answered, in a low tone, not affecting to misunderstand him.

“Oh, couldn’t it!” said Isaac, amused, and taking up rather the wrong view of the words. “But if you and I say it shall?”

“Halloa! Is it you, Isaac? How d’ye do, Miss Chester?”

Richard Thornycroft, coming suddenly into the path from a side crossing, halted as he spoke. Isaac, put out for once in his life, bit his lips.

“I want you, Isaac. I was looking for you. Here’s some bother up.”

“What bother?” testily rejoined Isaac.

“You had better come down and hear it. Tomlett—— Come along.”

Seeing plainly that his walk with Anna was over for the time, Isaac Thornycroft turned off with his brother, leaving Anna to go on alone to the gate, which was in sight.

“Good-day for the present, Anna,” he said,

with apparent carelessness. "Tell Mary Anne not to wait tea for me. I may not be in."

More forcibly than ever on this evening, when she sat in the spacious drawing-room surrounded by its many elegancies, did the contrast between the Red Court and her own poor home of the past strike on the senses of Anna Chester. Nothing that moderate wealth could purchase was *here* wanting. Several servants, spacious and handsome rooms, luxuries to please the eye and please the palate. Look at the tea-table laid out there! The delicately-made Worcester china, rich in hues of purple and gold; the chased silver tea and coffee service on their chased silver stands; small fringed damask napkins on the purple and gold plates. Shrimps large as prawns, potted meats, rolled bread-and-butter, muffins, rich cake, and marmalade, are there; for it is Justice Thornycroft's will that all meals, if laid, shall be laid well. Sometimes a cup of tea only came in for Miss Thornycroft, as it used to do for my lady when she was there. It almost seemed to Anna Chester as if she were enacting a deceit, a lie, in sitting at it, its honoured guest, for whom these things were spread, when she thought of the scrambling

meals in her former home with Mrs. Chester's children. The odd teacups—for as one got broken it would be replaced by another of any shape or pattern, provided it were cheap ; saucers notched ; cracked cups without handles ; the stale loaf on the table ; the scanty, untidy plate of salt butter, of which she had to cut perpetual slices, like Werther's Charlotte ; the stained table without a cover, crumbs strewing it. Look on this picture and on that. Anna did, in deep dejection ; and the thought which had faintly presented itself to her mind when Isaac Thornycroft spoke his momentous words, grew into grim and defined shape, and would not be scared away—that she could be no fit wife for Isaac. She resolved to tell him of these things, and of her own unfitness ; how very poor she was, always had been, always (according to present prospects) would be ; and beg him to think no more of her ; and she did not doubt he would unsay his words of his own accord when he came to know of it. It is true she winced at the task : but her conscience told her it must be done, though her heart should faint at it. She could imagine no fate so bright in the wide world as that of becoming the wife of Isaac Thornycroft.

“What makes you so silent this evening?”

Anna started at Miss Thornycroft's words. That young lady was eyeing her with curiosity.

“I was only thinking,” she answered, with a vivid blush. “Oh, and I forgot: your brother wished me to ask you not to wait tea for him.”

“My brother! Which of them?”

“Mr. Isaac.”

“Very considerate, I'm sure! seeing that I never do wait, and that if I did he would probably not come in.”

There was a mocking tone in her voice that Anna rather winced at as applied to Isaac. She went on explaining where she saw him; that he and Richard had walked away together—she fancied to Tomlett's.

“They are a great deal too intimate with Tomlett,” spoke Miss Thornycroft, curling her lip. “He is no better than a boatman. My belief is, they go and drink gin-and-water with him. They ought to have more pride.”

“Mr. Richard said there was some ‘bother.’”

“Oh! of course; any excuse before you. I tell you, Anna, they are just a couple of loose young men.”

The “loose young men” came in shortly;

Richard to go away again, Isaac to remain. He had told Mrs. Copp he would see her home safely. "Let it be by daylight, if you please," answered that discreet lady.

Not by daylight, but under the stars of the sweet summer's night, they went out. There was no one to see; the way was lonely; and Isaac drew Anna's hand within his arm for the first time, and kept it a prisoner.

"I must take care of you, Anna, as you are to become my own property."

"But I—I am not to become that; I wish I could, but it is impossible," she stammered, setting about her task in hesitating perplexity.

"Anna, do you understand me? I am asking you to be my wife."

"Yes, I—I believe I understood; and I feel very grateful to you, all the same."

"All the same!" Isaac Thornycroft released her hand and turned to face her.

"Just tell me what you mean. Don't you care for me?"

Agitated, embarrassed, she burst into tears. Isaac took both her hands now, holding them before him. They had reached the churchyard, and its graves were distinct in the twilight; the

stars looked down on them from the blue sky above; the sound of the surging sea came over with a faint murmur.

“I thought you loved me, Anna. Surely I cannot have been steering on a wrong tack?”

As the soft eyes glanced at him through their tears, he saw enough to know that she *did* love him. Reassured on that score, he turned and walked on again, her arm kept within his.

“Now, tell me what you mean,” he said, quietly. “There can be no other bar.”

“I do not know how to tell you,” she answered. “I do not like to tell you.”

“Nonsense, Anna. I shall keep you out here pacing the heath until you do tell, though it be until morning, which would certainly send Mrs. Copp into a fit.”

Not very awkwardly when she had fairly entered upon it, Anna told her tale—her sense of the unfitness, nay, the impossibility of the union—of the wide social gulf that lay between them. Isaac met the communication with a laugh.

“Is that all! It is my turn now not to understand. You have been reared a gentlewoman, Anna.”

“ Papa was a clergyman. I have been reared, I think, to nothing but work. We were so very poor. My home—ah ! if you could see, if you could imagine the contrast it presented to this of yours ! As I sat in your drawing-room to-night I could not help feeling the difference forcibly.”

If Isaac Thornycroft had not seen what she spoke of, he had seen something else—that never in his whole life had he met any one who gave him so entirely the idea of a gentlewoman—a refined, well-bred gentlewoman—as this girl now speaking with him, Anna Chester. He continued in evident amusement.

“ Let us see how your objections can be refuted. You play and sing ?”

“ A little.”

“ You draw ?”

“ A little.”

“ You can dance ?”

“ Yes ; I can dance.”

“ Why, then—not to enter on other desirable qualities—you are an accomplished young lady. What *do* you mean about unfitness ?”

“ I see you are laughing at me,” she said, the tears struggling to her eyes again. “ I am so very poor ; I teach for the merest trifle : it

barely finds me in the cheapest clothes. I only looked forward to a life of work. And you are rich—at least Mr. Thornycroft is.”

“If we have a superfluity of riches, there’s all the more cause for me to dispense with them in a wife. Besides, when I set up my tent, it will not be on the scale of my father’s house. Anna, my darling!” he added, with a strange gravity in his eye and tone, “we are more on an equality than you may deem.”

She made no reply, having enough to do to keep her tears from falling.

“I have sufficient for comfort—a sort of love-in-a-cottage establishment,” went on Isaac; “and I am heartily sick of my bachelor’s life. It leads me into all sorts of extravagances, and is unsatisfactory at the best. You must promise to be my wife, Anna.”

“There are the lights in Captain Copp’s parlour,” said she, with singular irrelevance.

“Just so. But you do not go in until I have your promise.”

“They were saying one day, some of them—I think it was Mrs. Connaught—that you would be sure to marry into one of the good county families,” murmured Anna.

“Did they? I hope the disappointment won't be too much for them. I shall marry you, Anna, and none other.”

“But what would your family say? Your father—your sister?”

“Just what they pleased. Anna, pardon me, I am only teasing you. Believe me, they will only be too glad to hear of it; glad that the wild, unsteady (as Mary Anne is pleased to call me on occasion) Isaac Thornycroft should make himself into a respectable man. Anna! can you not trust me?”

She had trusted all her life, yielded implicitly to the sway of those who held influence over her; little chance was there, then, that she could hold out now. Isaac Thornycroft received the promise his heart hungered for, and sealed it.

Her face gathered against his breast; her slight form shrinking in his strong arms; he kept her there a prisoner; his voice breathing soft love-vows; his blue eyes bent greedily on her blushing face; his kisses, the only honest kisses his life had known, pressed again and again upon her lips.

“Who on earth *is* that? Avast, thieves! sea serpents! pirates!”

The gallant Captain Copp, his night-glass pushed out at the open window to an acute angle, had been contemplating these puzzling proceedings for some time. Fortunately he did not distinguish very clearly, and remained ignorant of the real matter. Ill-conditioned people, tipsy fishermen and else, their brains muddled with drink, found their way to the heath on occasion, and the captain considered it a duty to society to order them off. Sweeping the horizon and the nearer plain to-night, his glass had shown him some object not easy to make out. The longer Captain Copp waited for it to move, the longer it stayed stationary; the more he turned his glass, the less chance did it appear to give of revealing itself. Naturally, two people in close proximity, the head of the taller one bent over the other so as to leave no indication of the human form, would present a puzzling paradox when viewed through a night-glass: the captain came to the conclusion that it was the most extraordinary spectacle ever presented to his eyes since they had looked on that sea serpent in the Pacific; and he rose his voice to hail it when suspense was becoming quite unbearable.

Isaac Thornycroft, adroitly sheltering his com-

panion, glided up the little opening by Mrs. Connaught's. In a few minutes, when the captain had drawn his head and glass in for a respite, he walked boldly up to the door by the side of Anna.

“ Good evening, captain.”

“ Good evening,” blithely responded the captain. “ Sorry you should have the trouble of bringing her home. Come in, Anna. I say, did you meet any queer thing on the heath?”

“ Queer thing?” responded Isaac.

“ A man without a head, or anything of that light sort?”

“ No. There's a strange horse browsing a bit lower down,” added Isaac. “ Some stray animal.”

The captain considered, and came to the conclusion that it could not well have been the horse. What it really was he did not conjecture.

Meanwhile Anna Chester had gone upstairs to the pleasant little room she occupied, and took off her bonnet in a maze of rapture. The world had changed into a heavenly Elysium.

CHAPTER VII.

ISAAC THORNYCROFT'S STRATAGEM.

A STILL evening in October. The red light in the west, following on a glorious sunset, threw its last rays athwart the sea; the evening star came out in its brightness; the fishing boats were bearing steadily for home.

Captain Copp's parlour was alight with a ruddy glow; not of the sun but of the fire. It shone brightly on the captain's face, at rest now. He had put down his pipe on the hearth, after carefully knocking the smouldering ashes out, and gone quietly to sleep, his wooden leg laid flat on an opposite chair, his other leg stretched over it. Mrs. Copp sat knitting a stocking by fire-light, her gentle face rather thoughtful; and, half-kneeling, half-sitting on the hearth-rug, reading, was Anna Chester.

She was here still. When Mary Anne Thornycroft returned to school after the summer holi-

days, Captain Copp had resolutely avowed Anna should stay with him. What was six weeks, he fiercely demanded, to get up a lady's health : let her stop six months, and then he'd see about it. Mrs. Copp hardly knew what to say, between her wish to keep Anna and her fear of putting the Miss Jupps to an inconvenience. "Inconvenience be shot !" politely rejoined the captain ; and Mary Anne Thornycroft went back without her, bearing an explanatory and deprecatory letter.

It almost seemed to the girl that the delighted beating of her heart—at the consciousness of staying longer in the place that contained *him*—must be a guilty joy,—guilty because it was concealed. Certainly not from herself might come the first news of her engagement to Isaac Thornycroft : she was far too humble, too timid, to make the announcement. Truth to say, she only half believed in it : it seemed too blissful to be true. While Isaac did not proclaim it, she was quite content to let it rest a secret from the whole world. And so the months had gone on ; Anna living in her paradise of happiness ; Isaac making love to her privately in very fervent tenderness.

In saying to Anna Chester that his family would be only too glad to see him married, Isaac Thornycroft (and a doubt that it might prove so lay dimly in his mind when he said it) found that he had reckoned without his host. At the first intimation of his possible intention, Mr. Thornycroft and Richard rose up in arms against it. What they said was breathed in his ear alone, earnestly, forcibly; and Isaac, who saw how fruitless would be all pleading on his part, burst out laughing, and let them think the whole a joke. A hasty word spoken by Richard in his temper as he came striding out of the inner passage, caught the ear of Mary Anne.

“Isaac, what did he mean? Surely you are not going to be married?”

“They thought I was,” answered Isaac, laughing. “I married! Would anybody have me, do you suppose, Mary Anne?”

“I think Miss Tindal would. There would be heaps of money and a good connexion, you know, Isaac.”

Miss Tindal was a strong-minded lady in spectacles, who owned to thirty years and thirty thousand pounds. She quoted Latin, rode straight across country after the hounds, and

was moreover a baronet's niece. A broad smile played over Isaac's lips.

"Miss Tindal's big enough to shake me. I think she would, too, on provocation. She can take her fences better than I can. That's not the kind of woman I'd marry. I should like a meek one."

"A meek one!" echoed Mary Anne, wondering whether he was speaking in derision. "What do you call a meek one?"

"A modest, gentle girl who would *not* shake me. Such a one as—let me see, where is there one?—as Anna Chester, say, for example."

All the scorn the words deserved seemed concentrated in Miss Thornycroft's haughty face.

"As good marry a beggar as *her*. Why, Isaac, she is only a working teacher—a half-boarder at school! She is not one of *us*."

He laughed off the alarm as he had done his father's and brother's a few minutes before, the line of conduct completely disarming all parties. *She* would not tolerate Miss Chester, *they* would not tolerate his marriage at all: that was plain. Isaac Thornycroft did not care openly to oppose his family, or be opposed by them: he let the subject drop out of remembrance, and left the

future to the future. But he said not a word of this to Anna; she suspected nothing of it, and was just as contented as he to let things take their course in silence. To her there seemed but one possible calamity in the world; and that lay in being separated from him.

Sitting there on the hearth-rug, in the October evening, her eyes on the small print by the fire-light, getting dim now, Anna's heart was a-glow within her, for that evening was to be spent with Isaac Thornycroft. A gentleman with his daughter was staying for a couple of days at the Red Court, and Anna had been asked to go there for the evening, and bear the young lady company.

"My dear," whispered Mrs. Copp, in the midst of her knitting, "is it not getting late? You will have the daylight quite gone."

Anna glanced up. It was getting late; but Isaac Thornycroft had said to her, "I shall fetch you." Still the habit of implicit obedience was, as ever, strong upon her, and she would fain have started there and then, in compliance with the suggestion.

"What a noise Sarah's making!"

"So she is," assented Mrs. Copp, as a noise

like the bumping about of boxes, followed by talking, grew upon their ears. Another moment, and Sarah opened the door.

“A visitor,” she announced, in an uncompromising voice, and the captain started up, prepared to explode a little at being aroused. Which fact Sarah was no doubt anticipating, and she spoke again.

“It is your mother, sir.”

“Yes, it’s me, Sam;” cried an upright wiry lady, very positive and abrupt in manner. Her face looked as if weather-beaten, and she wore large round tortoiseshell spectacles.

“Who’s that?” she cried, sitting down on the large sofa, as Anna stood up in her pretty silk dress, with the pink ribbons in her hair. Who? The daughter of the Reverend James Chester and his first wife! You are very like your father, child, but prettier. Where’s my sea-chest to go, Sam?”

“I am truly glad to see you, dear mother, whispered Amy Copp, in her loving way. “The best bedroom is not in order, but——”

“And can’t be put in order before to-morrow,” interposed Sarah, who had no notion of being taken by storm in this way. “The lug-

gage had better be put in the back kitchen for to-night."

"Is there much luggage?" asked the captain.

"Nothing to speak of," said Mrs. Copp; who, being used to the accommodation of a roomy ship, regarded quantity accordingly. Sarah coughed.

"My biggest sea-chest, four trunks, two band-boxes, and a few odd parcels," continued the traveller. "I am going to spend Christmas with some friends in London, but I thought I'd come to you first. As to the room not being in apple-pie order, that's nothing. I'm an old sailor; I'm not particular."

"Put a pillow down here, if that's all," cried the captain, indicating the hearthrug. "Mother has slept in many a worse berth, haven't ye, mother?"

"Ay, lad, that I have. But now I shall want some of those boxes unpacked to-night. I have got a set of furs for you, Amy, somewhere; I don't know which box they were put in."

Amy was overpowered. "You are too good to me," she murmured, with tears in her eyes.

"And I have brought you a potato-steamer; that's in another," added Mrs. Copp. "I have

taken to have mine steamed lately, Sam ; you'd never eat them again boiled if you once tried it."

In the midst of this bustle Isaac Thornycroft walked in. Anna, in a flutter of heart-delight, but with a calm manner, went upstairs, and came down with her bonnet on, to find Isaac opening box after box in the back kitchen, under Mrs. Copp's direction, in search of the furs and the potato-steamer, the captain assisting, Amy standing by. The articles were found, and Isaac, laughing heartily in his gay good-humour, went off with Anna.

"What time am I to fetch you, Miss Anna?" inquired Sarah, as they went out.

"I will see Miss Chester home," answered Isaac: "you are busy to-night."

Mrs. Copp, gazing through her tortoiseshell spectacles at the potato-steamer, as she pointed out its beauties, suddenly turned to another subject, and brought her glasses to bear on her son and his wife.

"Which of the young Thornycrofts *is* that? I forget."

"Isaac; the second son."

"To be sure; Isaac, the best and handsomest

of the bunch. You must take care," added Mrs. Copp, shrewdly.

"Take care of what?"

"They might be falling in love with each other. I don't know whether he's much here. He is as fine a fellow as you'd see in a day's march; and she's just the pretty gentle thing that fine men fancy."

Had it been anybody but his mother, Captain Copp would have shown his sense of the caution in strong language. "Moonshine and rubbish," cried he. "Isaac Thornycroft's not the one to entangle himself with a sweetheart; the young Thornycrofts are not marrying men; and if he were, he would look a little higher than poor Anna Chester."

"That's just it, the reason why you should be cautious, Sam," rejoined Mrs. Copp. "Not being suitable, there'd be no doubt a bother over it at the Red Court."

Amy, saying something about looking to the state of the spare room, left them in the parlour. Truth to say, the hint had scared her. Down deep in her mind, for some short while past, had a suspicion lain that they were rather more attached to each other than need be. She had

only hoped it was not so. She did not by any means see her way clear to hinder it, and was content to let the half fear rest; but these words had roused it in all its force. They had somehow brought a conviction of the fact, and she saw trouble looming. What else could come of it? Anna was no match for Isaac Thornycroft.

“Sam,” began Mrs. Copp, when she was alone with her son, “how does Amy continue to go on? Makes a good wife still?”

Captain Copp nodded complacently. “Never a better wife going. No tantrums—no blowings off: knits all my stockings and woollen jerseys.”

“You must have a quiet house.”

“Should, if ’twere not for Sarah. She fires off for herself and Amy too. I’m obliged to keep her under.”

“Ah,” said Mrs. Copp, rubbing her chin. “Then I expect you get up some breezes together. But she’s not a bad servant, Sam.”

“She’s a clipper, mother—A 1; couldn’t steer along without her.”

What with the boxes, and what with the exactions of the spare bed-room to render it habitable for the night, for Mrs. Copp generally chose to put herself into everybody’s business,

and especially into her own, the two ladies had to leave Captain Copp very much to his own society. Solitude is the time for reflection, we are told, and it may have been the cause of the captain's recurring again and again to the hint his mother had dropped in regard to Isaac Thornycroft. That there was nothing in it *yet* he fully assumed, and it might be as well to take precautions that nothing should be in it for the future. Prevention was better than cure. Being a straightforward man, one who could not have gone in a roundabout or cautious way to work, it occurred to the captain to say a word to Mr. Isaac on the very first opportunity.

It was the first evening Anna had spent at the Red Court since Miss Thornycroft left it. The walk there, the sojourn, the walk home again by moonlight, all seemed to partake of heaven's own happiness—perfect, pure, peaceful. There had been plenty and plenty of opportunities for lingering together in the twilight on the heath in coming home from the seashore, but this was the first long legitimate walk they had taken; and considering that they were sixty minutes over it, when they might have done it in sixteen, it cannot be said they hurried themselves.

The captain was at the window, not looking on the broad expanse of heath before him, but at the faint light seen now and again from some fishing vessel cruising in the distance. It was his favourite look-out; and, except on a boisterous or rainy night, the shutters were rarely closed until ten o'clock.

“Come in and have a glass of grog with me,” was his salutation to Isaac Thornycroft as he and Anna came to the gate. “’Twill be a charity,” added the captain. “I’m all alone. Mother’s gone up to bed tired, and Amy’s looking after her.”

Isaac came in and sat down, but wanted to decline the grog. Captain Copp was offended, so to pacify him he mixed some. As Anna held out her hand to the captain to say good night he noticed that her soft eyes were full of loving light; her generally delicate cheeks were a hot crimson.

“Hope it hasn’t come of kissing,” thought the shrewd and somewhat discomfited sailor.

“How well your mother wears!” observed Isaac.

“She was always tough,” replied Captain Copp, in a thankful accent. “Hope she will be

for many a year to come. Look here, Mr. Isaac, I meant to say a word to you. Don't you begin any sweethearting with that girl of ours, or talking nonsense of that sort. It wouldn't do, you know."

"Wouldn't it?" returned Isaac, carelessly.

"Wouldn't it! Why, bless and save my wooden leg, *would* it? A pretty uproar there'd be at the Red Court. I'd not have such a thing happen for the best three-decker that was ever launched. I'd rather quarrel with the whole of Coastdown than with your folks."

"Rather quarrel with me, captain, than with them, I suppose," returned Isaac, stirring his grog.

Captain Copp looked hard at him. "I should think so."

By intuition, rather than by outward signs, Isaac Thornycroft saw that the obstinate old sailor would be true to the backbone to what he deemed *right*; that he might as well ask for Amy Copp as for Anna Chester, unless he could produce credentials from his father. And so he could only temporize and disarm suspicion. Honourable by nature though he was, he considered the suppression of affairs justifiable, on

the score, we must suppose that "All stratagems are fair in love and war."

"Good health, captain," said he, with a merry laugh—a laugh that somehow reassured Captain Copp. "And now tell me what wonderful event put you up to say this."

"It was mother," answered the simple-minded captain. "The thought struck her somehow—you were both of you good-looking, she said. I knew there was no danger; 'the young Thornycrofts are not marrying men,' I said to her. But now, look here, you and Anna had not better go out together again, lest other people should take up the same notions."

With these words Captain Copp believed he had settled the matter, and done all that was necessary in the way of warning. He said as much to Amy, confidentially. Whether it might have proved so, he had not the opportunity of judging. On the following morning that lady received a pressing summons to repair to London. One of her sisters, staying there temporarily, was seized with illness, and begged the captain's wife to come and nurse her. By the next train she had started, taking Anna.

"To be out of harm's way," she said to her-

self. "To help me take care of Maria," she said to the captain.

Mrs. Wortley was a widow without children. So many events have to be crowded in, and the story thickens so greatly, that nothing more need be said of her. The lodgings she had been temporarily occupying were near to old St. Pancras Church, and there Mrs. Sam Copp and Anna found her—two brave, skilful, tender nurses, ever ready to do their best.

Never before had Anna found illness wearisome; never before thought London the most dreary spot on earth. Ah, it was not in the locality; it was not in the illness that the ennui lay; but in the absence of Isaac Thornycroft. He called to see them once, rather to the chagrin of the captain's wife, and he met Anna the same day when she went for her walk. Mrs. Sam Copp did not suspect it.

They had been in London about a month, the invalid was better, and Mrs. Copp began to talk of returning home again; when one dark November morning, upon Anna's returning home from her walk—which Mrs. Copp, remembering her past weak condition, the result of work and confinement, insisted on her taking—

Isaac Thornycroft came in with her. He put his hat down on the table, took Mrs. Copp's hands in his, and was entering upon some story, evidently a solemn one, when Anna nearly startled Mrs. Copp into fits by falling at her feet with a prayer for forgiveness, and bursting into tears.

"Oh, aunt, forgive, forgive me! Isaac over-persuaded me; he did indeed."

"Persuaded you to what?" asked Mrs. Copp.

"To become my wife," interposed Isaac. "We were married this morning."

The first thing Mrs. Copp did was to sink into a chair, her hair rising up on end; the next was to go into hysterics. Isaac, quiet, calm, gentlemanly as ever, sent Anna away while he told the tale.

"I thought it the best plan," he avowed. "When I met Anna out yesterday—by chance as she thought—I got a promise from her to meet me again this morning, no matter what the weather might be. It turned out a dense fog, but she came. Through the fog I got her into the church door, and took her to the clergyman, waiting at the altar for us, before she well knew what was going to be."

Mrs. Copp threw up her hands, and screamed, and cried, and for once in her life called another creature deceitful—meaning Anna. But Anna—as he hastened to explain—had not been deceitful; she had but yielded to his strong will in the agitation and surprise of the moment. Calculating upon this defect in her character—if it could be called a defect, brought up as she had been—Isaac Thornycroft had made the arrangements at St. Pancras church without saying a word to her; and, as it really may be said, surprised her into the marriage at the time of its taking place.

“There’s the certificate,” he said; “I asked the clergyman to give me one. Put it up carefully, dear Mrs. Copp.”

“To be married in this way!” moaned poor Mrs. Copp. “My husband had liqueur glasses of rum served out in the vestry at our wedding, but that was not half as bad as this. Not a single witness on either side to countenance it!”

“Pardon me; my brother Cyril was present,” answered Isaac. “I telegraphed for him last night, and he reached town this morning.”

Isaac Thornycroft had sent for his brother out of pure kindness to Anna, that the ceremony

might so far be countenanced. It had turned out to be the most crafty precaution he could have taken. Seeing Cyril, Anna never supposed but that the Thornycroft family knew of it; otherwise, yielding though she was in spirit, she might have withstood even Isaac. Cyril gave her away.

“And now,” said Isaac, in an interval between the tears and moans, “I am going to take Anna away with me for a week.”

Little by little Mrs. Copp succeeded in comprehending Mr. Isaac’s programme. To all intents and purposes he intended this to be a perfectly secret marriage, and to remain so until the horizon before them should be clear of clouds. When Mrs. Copp went back home, Anna would return with her as Miss Chester, and they must be content with seeing each other occasionally as ordinary acquaintances.

Mrs. Copp could only stare and gasp. “Away with you for a week! and then home again with me as Miss Chester? Oh, Mr. Isaac! you do not consider. Suppose her good name should suffer?”

A slight frown contracted the capacious brow of Isaac Thornycroft. “Do you not see the

precautions I have taken will prevent that? On the first breath of need my brother Cyril will come forward to testify to the marriage, and you hold the certificate of it. Believe me, I weighed all, and laid my plans accordingly. I chose to make Anna my wife. It is not expedient to proclaim it just yet to the world—to your friends or to mine; but I have done the best I could do under the circumstances. Cyril will be true to us and keep the secret; I know you will also.”

Mrs. Sam Copp faintly protested that she should never get over the blow. Isaac, with his sunny smile, his persuasive voice, told her she would do so before the day was out, and saw her seal the certificate in a large envelope and lock it up.

Then he started with his bride to a small unfrequented fishing village in quite the opposite direction to Coastdown. And Anna had been married some days before she knew that her marriage was a secret from her husband's family, Cyril excepted, and to be kept one.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN LOVE.

ROBERT HUNTER sat in his chambers—as it is the fashion to call offices now. They were in a good position in Westminster, and he was well established; he had set up for himself, and was doing fairly—not yet making gold by shovelfuls, as engineers are reputed to have done of late years, but at least earning his bread and cheese, with every prospect that the gold was coming.

Plans were scattered on the desk at which he sat; some intricate calculations lay immediately before him. He regarded neither. His eyes were looking straight out at the opposite wall, a big chart of some district being there, but he saw it not; nothing but vacancy. Very unusual indeed was it for Robert Hunter the practical to allow his thoughts to stray away in the midst of his work, as they had done now.

During the past few months a change had

come over his heart. It was of a different nature from that which, some two or three years before, after the death of his wife, had changed himself—changed, as it seemed, his whole nature, and made a man of him. Even now he could not bear to look back upon the idle, simple folly in which his days had been passed; the circumstances that had brought this folly home to his mind, opened his eyes to it, as it were, had no doubt caused him to acquire a very exaggerated view of it; but this did no harm to others, and worked good for himself.

With the death of his wife, Robert Hunter had, so to say, put aside the pleasant phase, the ideal view of life, and entered on the hard, the stern, the practical—as he thought for ever. He had not calculated well in this. He forgot that he was still a young and attractive man (though his being attractive or the contrary was not at all to the purpose); he forgot that neither the feelings nor the heart can grow old at will. It might have been very different had his heart received its death-blow; but it was nothing but his conscience; for he had not loved his wife. But of that he was unconscious until lately.

Love—real love—the sweet heart's dream that

can never but once visit either man or woman, had come stealing' over Robert Hunter. Never but once. What says a modern poet ?

“ Few hearts have never loved ; but fewer still
Have felt a second passion. None a third.
The first was living fire ; the next, a thrill ;
The weary heart can never more be stirred :
Rely on it, the song has left the bird.”

Truer words were rarely said or sung. The one only glimpse of Paradise vouchsafed to us on earth—a transitory glimpse at the best—cannot be repeated a second time. When it flies away it flies for ever.

Ah, how different it was, this love, that was making a heaven of Robert Hunter's life, from that which had been given to his poor dead wife—the child-wife, who had been so passionately attached to him ! He understood her agony now—when she had believed him false to her ; when he, her heart's idol, had apparently gone over to another's worship—he did not understand it then. When inclined to be very self-condemnatory, to bring his sins and mistakes palpably before him, he would ask himself, looking back, what satisfaction he had derived from my Lady Ellis's society, taking it at its best. A few soft glances ; a

daily repetition of some sweet words ; a dozen kisses—they had not been more—snatched from her face ; and some hand pressing when they met or parted. Literally this was all : there had been nothing, nothing more ; and Mr. Hunter had not even the poor consolation of knowing now that any love whatever on his side, or hers, had entered into the matter from the beginning to the ending. It was for this his wife had died ; it was for this he had laden his conscience with a weight that could never wholly leave it. He was not a heathen ; and when, close upon the death, remorse had pressed sorely upon him, an intolerable burthen of sin grievous to be borne, he had, in very pity for his own miserable state, carried it where he had never before carried anything. Consolation came in time, a sense of mercy, of help, of pardon ; but the *recollection* could never be blotted out, or the sense of too late repentance quit him.

He remembered still ; he repented yet. Whenever the past occurred to him, it brought with it that terrible conviction—a debt of atonement owing to the dead, which can never be rendered—and Robert Hunter would feel the most humble man on the face of the earth. This sense of

humiliation was no doubt good for him ; it came upon him at odd times and seasons, even in the midst of the new passion that filled his heart.

“ Shall I ever win her ? ” he was thinking to himself, seated at his for once neglected desk. “ Nay, must I ever dare to tell her of my love ? A flourishing engineer, with his name up in the world, and half a score important undertakings in progress, might be deemed a fitting match for her by her people at the Red Court ; but what would they say to *me* ? I am not to be called flourishing yet ; my great works I must be content to wait for ; they will come ; I can foresee it ; but before then some man with settlements and a rent-roll may have stepped in.”

It was not a strictly comforting prospect certainly, put in this light ; and Mr. Hunter gave an impatient twist to some papers. But he could not this morning settle down to work, and the meditations began again.

“ I know she loves me ; I can see it in every turn of her beautiful face, hear it in every tone of her voice. This evening I shall see her ; this evening I shall see her ! Oh, the——”

“ Mr. Barty is here, sir.”

The interruption came from a clerk ; it served

to recal his master to what he so rarely forgot, the business of every-day life. Mr. Barty was an eminent contractor, and Robert Hunter's hopes went up to fever-heat as he welcomed him. One great work entrusted to him from this great man, and the future might be all plain sailing.

He was not wholly disappointed. Mr. Barty had come to offer him business; or rather, to pave the way for it; for the offer was not positively entered on then, only the proposed work—a new line of rail—discussed. There was one drawback—it was a line abroad—and Robert Hunter did not much like this.

Mary Anne Thornycroft had not many friends in London; nearly all her holidays during the half-year had been passed at Mrs. Macpherson's. Susan Hunter invariably accompanied her; and what more natural than that Robert should (invited, or uninvited, as it might happen) drop in to meet his sister? There had lain the whole thing—the intercourse afforded by these rather frequent meetings—and nothing more need be said; they had fallen in love with one another.

Yes. The singular attraction each had seemed to possess for the other the first time they met, but increased with every subsequent interview..

It had not needed many. Mary Anne Thornycroft, who had scarcely ever so much as read of the name of love, had lost her heart to this young man, the widower Robert Hunter, entirely and hopelessly. That he was—at any rate at present—no suitable match for her, she never so much as glanced twice at: the Thornycrofts were not wont to regard expediency when it interfered with inclination. Not a word had been spoken; not a hint given; but there is a language of the heart, and they had become versed in it. Clever Mrs. Macpherson, so keen-sighted generally in the affairs of men and women, never so much as gave a thought to what was passing under her very eyes; Miss Hunter, who had discernment too, was totally blind here. As to the professor, with his spectacled eyes up aloft in the sky or buried in the earth, it would have been far too much to suspect him of seeing it. A very delightful state of things for the lovers.

When Robert Hunter reached Mrs. Macpherson's that dark December evening, he saw nobody in the drawing-room. He had been invited to dinner; five o'clock sharp, Mrs. Macpherson told him; for the professor had an engagement at six which would keep him out,

and she did not intend that he should depart dinnerless.

This was Miss Thornycroft's farewell visit ; in two days she was going home for Christmas, not again to return to school. She had invited Susan Hunter (who would remain at school until March), to come down during the holidays and spend a week at the Red Court Farm ; and her brother was to accompany her.

It wanted a quarter to five when Mr. Hunter entered. The drawing-room was not lighted, and at first he thought no one was in it. The large fire had burnt down to red embers ; as he stood before it, his head and shoulders reflected in the pier-glass, he (perhaps unconsciously) ran his hand through his hair—hair that was darker than it used to be ; the once deep auburn had become a reddish-brown, and—*and*—some grey threads mingled with it.

“ How vain you are ! ”

He started round at the sound—it was the voice he loved so well. Half buried in a lounging chair in the darkest corner was she. She came forward, laughing.

“ I did not see you, ” he said, taking her hand.
“ You are here alone ! ”

A conscious blush tinged her cheeks; she knew that she had stayed in the room to wait for him.

“They have gone somewhere, Susan and Mrs. Macpherson—to see a new cat of the professor’s, I think. I have seen so many of those stuffed animals.”

“When do you go down home?”

“The day after to-morrow. Susan has fixed the second week in January for her visit. Will that time suit you?”

“The time might suit,” he replied, with a slight stress on the word “time,” as if there were something else that might not. “Unless, indeed——”

“Unless what?”

“Unless I should have left England, I was going to say. An offer has been made me to-day—or rather, to speak more correctly, an intimation that an offer is about to be made me—of some work abroad. If I accept it, it will take me away for a couple of years.”

She glanced up, and their eyes met. A yearning look of love, of dire tribulation at the news, shone momentarily in hers. Then they were bent on the carpet, and Mr.

Hunter looked at the fire—the safest place just then.

“Are you obliged to accept it?” she inquired.

“Of course not. But it would be very much to my advantage. It would pave the way for— for——” He hesitated.

“For what?”

“Wealth and honours. I mean such honours (all might not call them so), as are open to one of my profession.”

A whole array of sentences crowded into her mind—begging him not to go; what would the days be without the sunshine of his presence? They should be far enough apart as things were; he in London, she at home;—but the other separation hinted at would be like all that was good in life dying out. This, and a great deal more, lay in her thoughts; what she said, however, was cold and quiet enough.

“In the event of your remaining at home, then, the second week in January would suit you? It is Susan who has fixed it.”

Not immediately did he reply. Since the first intimation of this visit to Coastdown, a feeling of repugnance to it had lain within him; an instinct, whenever he thought of it, warning him

against accepting it. Ah! believe me, these instinctive warnings come to us. They occur oftener than we, in our carelessness, think for. Perhaps not one in ten of them is ever noticed, still less heeded; we go blindly on in disregard; and, when ill follows, scarcely ever remember that the warning voice, if attended to, would have saved us.

Just as Robert Hunter disregarded this. But for his visit, destined to take place at the time proposed, the great tragedy connected with the Red Court Farm had never taken place.

Stronger than ever was the deterring warning on him this evening. He said to himself that his repugnance lay in the dislike to be a guest in any house that Lady Ellis was connected with; never so much as thinking of any other cause. He fully assumed there would be no chance of meeting herself: he knew she lived in Cheltenham. Miss Thornycroft had once or twice casually mentioned her stepmother's name in his presence, but he had not pursued the topic; and the young lady did not know that they had ever met.

“You do not reply to me, Mr. Hunter. Would the time be inconvenient for you?”

“It is not that,” he answered, speaking rather dreamily. “But — I am a stranger to your father: would he like me to intrude, uninvited by himself?”

“It would be a strange thing if I could not invite a dear school friend, as Susan is, down for a week, and you to accompany her,” returned Miss Thornycroft, rather hotly. “You need not fear; papa is the most hospitable man living. They keep almost open house at home.”

“You have brothers,” returned Mr. Hunter, seeking for some further confronting argument. At which suggestion a ray of anger came into Miss Thornycroft’s haughty blue eyes.

“As if my brothers would concern themselves with me or my visitors! They go their way, and I intend to go mine.”

“Your stepmother——”

“She is nobody,” quickly interposed Miss Thornycroft, mistaking what he was about to say. “Lady Ellis lives in Cheltenham. She is ill, and Coastdown does not suit her.”

“Why does she still call herself Lady Ellis?” he asked, the question having before occurred to him.

“It is her whim. What does it signify?”

She is one of the most pretentious women you can imagine, Mr. Hunter—quite a parvenu, as I have always felt—and ‘my lady’ is sweeter to her ears than ‘madam.’”

“What is it that is the matter with her?”

“It is some inward complaint; I don’t quite understand what. The last time I saw my brother Cyril, he told me she was growing worse; that there was not the least hope of her cure.”

“She does not come to the Red Court?”

“No, thank fortune! She has not been there at all during this past year. I believe she is now too ill to come.”

Mr. Hunter glanced at the speaker with a smile. “You do not seem to like her.”

“Like her! Like Lady Ellis! I do not think I could pretend to like her if she were dead. You do not know her.”

A flush of remembrance darkened the brow of Robert Hunter. Time had been when he knew enough of her.

“She is a crafty, wily, utterly selfish woman,” pursued Miss Thornycroft, who very much enjoyed a fling at her stepmother. “How ever papa came to be taken in by her—but I don’t care to talk of *that*.”

She seized the poker and began to crack the fire into a blaze. Mr. Hunter took it from her, and he adroitly kept her hand in his.

“Had she been a different woman, good and kind, she might have won me over to love her. The Red Court wanted a mistress at that time, as papa thought; and, to confess it, so did I. A little self-willed, perverse girl I was, rebellious to my French governess, perpetually getting into scrapes, running wild indoors and out.”

Entirely unconscious was Miss Thornycroft how mistaken was one of her assumptions—“papa thought the Red Court wanted a mistress.” Mr. Thornycroft had been rather too conscious that it did *not* want one, looking at it from his point of view; though his daughter did.

“Ah, well; let bygones be bygones. You will promise to come, Mr. Hunter?”

“Yes,” he answered, in teeth of the voice that seemed to haunt him. “If I have not gone away from England on this expedition, I will come.”

“Thank you,” she said, with a soft flush.

He turned and looked fully at her. Her hand was in his, for he had not relinquished it. Only about half a minute had he held it; it takes

longer to tell these things than to act them. The poker was in his other hand, and he put it down with a clatter, which prevented their hearing the footsteps of Mrs. Macpherson on the soft carpet outside. That discreet matron, glancing through the partially open door, took the view of what she saw with her keen brain, and stood transfixed.

“My heart alive, is there anything between *them*?” ran her surprised thoughts. “Well, that would be a go! Robert Hunter ain’t no match for her father’s child. Hand in hand, be they! and his eyes dropped on her face as if he was a-hungering to eat it. Not in this house, my good gentleman.”

With a cough and a shuffling, as if the carpet had got entangled with her feet, Mrs. Macpherson made her advent known. When she advanced into the room the position of the parties had changed: he was at one corner of the fire-place, she at the other, silent, demure, innocent-looking both of them as two doves.

Not a word said Mrs. Macpherson. Miss Hunter came in, the professor followed, the announcement of dinner followed him. And somehow there arose no further opportunity for as much

as a hand-shake between the suspected pair. But on the next day Mrs. Macpherson drove round to Miss Jupp's, and made to that lady a communication.

“I don't say as it is so, Miss Jupp; mind that; their fingers might have got together accidental. I am bound to say that I never noticed nothing between 'em before. But I'm a straight-forward body, liking to go to the root o' things at first with folks, and do as I'd be done by. And goodness only knows what might have become of us if I'd not been, with the professor's brain a-lodging up in the skies! I'll go to Miss Jupp, says I to myself last night; and here I am.”

“I think—I hope that it is quite unlikely,” said Miss Jupp; beginning, however, to feel uncomfortable.

“So do I. I've told you so. But it was my place to come and put you on your guard. I declare to goodness that never a thought of such a thing struck me, or you may be sure I'd not have had Robert Hunter to my house when she was there. ‘When the steed's stole, one locks the stable door.’”

“Miss Hunter tells me that she and her

brother are going to spend a week at Coast-down."

"And so much the better," said Mrs. Macpherson, emphatically. "If there *is* anything between 'em, her folks won't fail to see it, and they can act accordingly. And now that I've done my duty, and had my say, I'll be going."

"Thank you," said Miss Jupp. "Is the professor well?"

"As well as getting up at three o'clock on a winter's morning and starting off in the dark and cold 'll let him be," was the response. "I told him last night he shouldn't go; there's no sense in such practices; but he wouldn't listen. It's astronomicals this time."

Watching her departure, remaining for a few minutes in undecisive thought, Miss Jupp at length made up her mind to speak, and sent for Mary Anne Thornycroft. No prevision was on the young lady's mind of the lecture in store; upright, elegant, beautiful, in she swept and stood calmly before her governess. Miss Jupp spoke considerately, making light of the matter, merely saying that Mrs. Macpherson thought she and Mr. Hunter were rather fond of "talking" together. "I thought it as well just to men-

tion it to you, my dear ; school-girls—and you are but one as yet, you know—should always be reticent.”

Mary Anne Thornycroft's haughty blue eyes, raised in general so fearlessly, drooped before Miss Jupp's gaze, and her face turned to a glowing crimson. Only for a moment : the next she was looking up again, *meeting* the gaze and answering with straightforward candour.

“ Nothing has ever passed between me and Mr. Hunter that Mrs. Macpherson might not have heard and seen. I like Mr. Hunter very much. I have frequently met him there ; but why should Mrs. Macpherson seek to make mischief out of that ? ”

“ My dear girl, she neither seeks to make mischief nor has she made any. All I would say to you—leaving the past—is a word of caution. At your age, with your good sense, you cannot fail to be aware that it is advisable young ladies should be circumspect in their choice of acquaintances. A mutual inclination is sometimes formed, which can never lead to fruition, only to unhappiness.”

Mary Anne did not answer, and the eyes dropped again.

“ I have a great mind to tell you a little epi-

sode of my life," resumed poor Miss Jupp, her cheeks faintly flushing. "Such an inclination as I speak of arose between me and one with whom, many years ago when out on a visit, I was brought into daily contact. We learnt to care for each other as much as it is possible for people to care in this world. So much so, that when it was all past and done with, and I received an excellent proposal of marriage, I *could* not accept it. That early attachment was the blight of my life, Mary Anne. Instead of being a poor school-mistress, worried with many anxieties—a despised old maid—I should now have been a good man's wife, the mistress of a prosperous home."

Miss Jupp kept her rising tears down; but Mary Anne Thornycroft's eyes were glistening.

"And that first one, dear Miss Jupp: could you not have married him?"

"No, my dear. Truth to tell, he never asked me. He dared not ask me; it would have been quite unsuitable. Believe me, many an unmarried woman could give you the same history nearly word for word. Hence you see how necessary it is to guard against an intimacy with unsuitable acquaintances."

"And you put Mr. Hunter into the cata-

logue?" returned Miss Thornycroft, affecting to speak lightly.

"Most emphatically—as considered in relation to you," was Miss Jupp's answer. "Your family will expect you to marry well, and you owe it to them to do so. Mr. Hunter is in every respect unsuitable. Until recently he was only a clerk; he has his own way to carve yet in the world; he is much older than you; and—he has been already married."

"Of course I know all that," said Miss Thornycroft, with the deepest colour that had yet come over her. "But don't you think, ma'am, it would have been quite time to remind me of this when circumstances called for it?"

"Perhaps not. At any rate, my dear, the warning can do you no harm. If unrequired in regard to Mr. Hunter—as indeed I believe it to be—it may serve you in the future."

Miss Jupp said no more. "I have put it strong," she thought to herself, as the young lady curtsied and left the room. "It was well to do so."

"Engineers rise to honours, as he said, and I know he is going on for them," quoth Mary Anne Thornycroft, with characteristic obstinacy,

slowly walking along the passage. "I should never care for anyone else in the world. As to money, I daresay I shall have plenty of that; so will he when he has become famous."

They travelled to Coastdown together—Isaac Thornycroft and his sister, Mrs. Copp and Anna Chester, as we must continue to call her—by a pleasant coincidence, as it was deemed by Miss Thornycroft. Mrs. Copp, living upon thorns—but that is a very faint figure of speech to express that timid lady's state of mind—was ready some days before, but had to await the arrival of Anna. Isaac kept her out longer than the week, getting back just in time to take charge of his sister.

As they sat in the carriage together, what a momentous secret it was that three of them held, and had to conceal from the fourth! If Anna's eyes were bright with happiness, her checks looked pale with apprehension; and Mrs. Copp might well shiver, and lay it upon the frost. Not so Isaac. Easy, careless, gay, was he—"every inch a bridegroom." After all, there was not so very much for *him* to dread. It was expedient to keep his marriage secret, if it could be kept so; if not, why he must face the explosion at home as he best could: the precautions

he had taken would ward off reproach from his wife.

“Here’s Jutpoint!” exclaimed Mary Anne Thornycroft. “How glad I am to come back!”

“How glad I should be if I were going away from it!” thought poor Mrs. Copp.

As they were getting out of the carriage, Isaac contrived to put his arm before Anna, an intimation that he wanted to detain her. The others were suffered to go on.

“What makes you look so pale?”

“Oh, Isaac! can you ask? Your father—my uncle—may be here waiting for us. I feel sick and faint at the thought of meeting them.”

“But there’s no reason in the world why you should. One minute after seeing them the feeling will wear off. *Ce n’est que le premier pas qui coute.*”

If they should suspect!—if they should have heard! It seems to me people need only look in my face to learn all. I have never once met your sister’s eyes freely in coming down.”

He laughed lightly. “Reassure yourself, my darling. There’s no fear that it will be known one hour before we choose it should be.”

“ I am remembering always that stories may get abroad about me.”

“ What you have to remember is that you are my honest wife,” gravely returned Isaac. “ I told Mrs. Copp—I have told you—that on the faintest breath of a whisper, I should avow the truth. You cannot doubt it, Anna ; nothing in the world can be so precious to me as my wife’s fair fame. They are looking back for us. God bless you, my darling, and farewell. For the present, you know—and that’s the worst of the whole matter—you are not my wife, but Miss Chester.”

CHAPTER IX.

WILFUL DISOBEDIENCE.

MARY ANN THORNYCROFT sat in the large, luxurious, comfortable drawing-room of the Red Court Farm. The skies without were grey and wintry, the air was cold, the sea was of a dull leaden colour; but with that cheery fire blazing in the grate, the soft chairs and sofas scattered about, the fine pictures, the costly ornaments, things were decidedly bright within. Brighter a great deal than the young lady's face was; for something had just occurred to vex her. She was leaning back in her chair; her foot, peeping out from beneath the folds of her flowing dress, impatiently tapping the carpet: angry determination written on every line of her countenance. Between herself and Richard there had just occurred a passage at arms—as is apt to be the case with brother and sister, when each has a dominant and unyielding will.

At home for good, Miss Thornycroft had assumed her post as mistress of the house in a spirit of determination that said she meant to maintain it. The neighbours came flocking to see the handsome girl, a woman grown now. She had attained her nineteenth year. They found a lady-like, agreeable girl, with Cyril's love for reading, Isaac's fair skin and beautiful features, and Richard's resolute tone and lip. Very soon, within a week of her return, the servants whispered to each other that Miss Thornycroft and her brothers had already begun their quarrelling, for both sides wanted the mastery. They should have said her brother—very seldom indeed was it that Isaac interfered with her—Cyril never.

She had begun by attempting to set to rights matters that probably never would be set right; regularity in regard to the serving of the meals. They set all regularity at defiance, especially on the point of coming in to them. They might come, or they might not; they might sit down at the appointed hour, or they might appear an hour after it. Sometimes the dinners were simple, oftener elaborate; to-day they would be alone, to-morrow six or eight unexpected guests, invited on the spur of the moment, would

sit down to table ; just as it had been in the old days. Mr. Thornycroft's love of free-and-easy hospitality had not changed. To remedy *this*, Mary Anne did not attempt—it had grown into a usage ; but she did wish to make Richard and Isaac pay more attention to decorum.

“ They cannot be well-conducted, these two brothers of mine,” soliloquized Miss Thornycroft, as she continued to tap her impatient foot. “ And papa winks at it. I think they must have acquired a love for low companions. I hear of their going into the public-house, and, if not drinking themselves, standing treat for others. Last night they came in to dinner in their velvet-coats, and gaiters all mud—after keeping it waiting for five-and-forty minutes. I spoke about their clothes, and papa—papa took their part, saying it was not to be expected that young men engaged in agriculture could dress themselves up for dinner like a lord-in-waiting. It's a shame !”

Richard and Isaac did indeed appear to be rather loose young men in some things ; but their conduct had not changed from what it used to be—the change lay in Miss Thornycroft. What as a girl she had not seen or noticed, she

now, a young woman come home to exact propriety after the manner of well-conducted young ladies, saw at once, and put a black mark against. Their dogcart, that ever-favourite vehicle, would be heard going out and coming in at all sorts of unseasonable hours ; when Richard and Isaac lay abed till twelve (the case occasionally) Miss Thornycroft would contrive to gather that they had not gone to it until nearly daylight.

The grievance this morning, however, was not about any of these things : it concerned a more personal matter of Miss Thornycroft's. While she was reading a letter from Susan Hunter, fixing the day of the promised visit, Richard came in. He accused her of expecting visitors, and flatly ordered her to write and stop their coming. A few minutes of angry contention ensued, neither side giving way in the smallest degree : she said her friends should come, Richard said they should not. He strode away to find his father. The justice was in the four-acre paddock with his gun.

“This girl's turning the house upside down,” began Richard. “We shall not be able to keep her at home.”

“What girl ? Do you mean Mary Anne ?”

“There’s nobody else I should mean,” returned the young man, who was not more remarkable for courtesy of speech, even to his father, than he used to be. “I’d pretty soon shell out anybody else who came interfering. She has gone and invited some fellow and his sister down to stay for a week, she says. We can’t have prying people here just now.”

“Don’t fly in a flurry, Dick. That’s the worst of you.”

“Well, sir, I think it should be stopped. For the next month, you know——”

“Yes, yes, I know,” interposed the justice. “Of course.”

“After that, it would not so much matter,” continued Richard. “Not but that it would be an exceedingly bad precedent to allow it at all. If she begins to invite visitors here at will, there’s no knowing what the upshot might be.”

“I’ll go and speak to her,” said Mr. Thornycroft. “Here, take the gun, Dick.”

Walking slowly, giving an eye to different matters as he passed, speaking a word here, giving an order there, the justice went on after the fashion of a man whose mind is at ease. It

never occurred to him that his daughter would dispute his will.

“What is all this, Mary Anne?” he demanded, when he reached her. “Richard tells me you have been inviting some people to stay here.”

Miss Thornycroft rose respectfully.

“So I have, papa. Susan Hunter was my great friend at school; she is remaining there for the holidays, which of course is very dull, and I asked her to come here for a week. Her brother will bring her.”

“They cannot come,” said Mr. Thornycroft.

“Not come!”

“No. You must understand one thing, Mary Anne—that you are *not at liberty* to invite people indiscriminately to the Red Court. I cannot sanction it.”

A hard look of resentment crossed her face; opposition never answered with the Thornycrofts, Cyril excepted: he was just as yielding as the rest were obstinate.

“I have invited them, papa. The time for the visit is fixed, the arrangements are made.”

“I tell you, they cannot come.”

“Not if Richard’s whims are to be studied,” returned Miss Thornycroft, angrily, for she had

lost her temper. "Do you wish me to live on in this house for ever, papa, without a soul to speak to, save my brothers and the servants? And cordial companions *they* are," added the young lady, alluding to the former, "out, out, out, as they are, night after night! I should like to know where it is they go to. Perhaps I could find out if I tried."

A fanciful person might have thought that Mr. Thornycroft started. "Daughter!" he cried, in a hoarse whisper, hoarse with passion, "hold your peace about your brothers. What is it to you where they go or what they do? Is it seemly for you, a girl, to trouble yourself about the doings of young men? Are you going to turn out a firebrand amongst us? Take care that you don't set the Red Court alight."

The words might have struck her as strange might indeed have imparted a sort of undefined fear, but that she was so filled with anger and resentment as to leave no room for other impressions. Nevertheless, there was that in her father's face and eye which warned her it would not do to oppose him now, and her rejoinder was spoken more civilly.

“Do you mean, papa, that you will never allow me to have a visitor?”

“I do not say that. But I must choose the times and seasons. This companion of yours may come a month later, if you wish it so, very much. Not her brother. We have enough young men in the house of our own. And I suppose you don't care for him.”

Miss Thornycroft would have liked to say that he was the one for whom she did care—not the sister—but that was inexpedient. A conscious flush dyed her face; which Mr. Thornycroft attributed to pain at her wish being opposed. He had not yet to learn how difficult it was to turn his daughter from any whim on which she had set her will.

“Write to-day and stop their coming. Tell Miss—— what's the name?”

“Hunter,” was the sullen answer.

“Tell Miss Hunter that it is not convenient to receive her at the time arranged, but that you hope to see her later. And—another word, Mary Anne,” added Mr. Thornycroft, pausing in the act of leaving the room; “a word of caution; *let your brothers alone*; their move-

ments are no business of yours, neither must you make it such. Shut your eyes and ears to all that does not concern you, if you want to live in peace under my roof."

"Shut my eyes and ears?" she repeated, looking after him, "that I never will. I can see how it is—papa has lived so long under the domineering of Richard that he yields to him as a habit. It is less trouble than opposing him. Richard is the most selfish man alive. He thinks if we had visitors staying at the court, he must be a little more civilized in dress and other matters, and he does not choose to be so. For no other reason has he set his face against their coming; there can be no other. But I will show him that I have a will as well as he, and as good a right to exercise it."

Even as Miss Thornycroft spoke, the assertion, "there can be no other," rose up again in her mind, and she paused to consider whether it was strictly in accordance with facts. But no; look on all sides as she would, there appeared to be no other reason whatever, or shadow of reason. It was just a whim of Richard's; who liked to act, in small things as in great, as though he were the master of the Red Court Farm—a whim

which Miss Thornycroft was determined not to gratify.

And, flying in the face of the direct command of her father, she did not write to stop her guests.

The contest had not soothed her, and she put on her things to go out. The day was by no means inviting, the air was raw and chill, but Miss Thornycroft felt dissatisfied with home. Turning off by the plateau towards the village, the house inhabited by Tomlett met her view. It brought to her remembrance that the man was said to have received some slight accident, of which she had only heard a day or two ago. More as a diversion to her purposeless steps than anything else, she struck across to inquire after him. Mrs. Tomlett, an industrious little woman with a red face and shrill voice, as you may remember, stood at the kitchen table as Miss Thornycroft approached the open door, peeling potatoes. Down went the knife.

“Don’t disturb yourself, Mrs. Tomlett. I hear your husband has met with some hurt. How was it done?”

For a woman of ordinary nerve and brain, Mrs. Tomlett decidedly showed herself wanting

in self-possession at the question. It seemed to scare her. Looking here, looking there, looking everywhere like a frightened bird, she mumbled out some indistinct answer. Miss Thornycroft had seen her so on occasions before, and as a girl used to laugh at her.

“When did it happen, Mrs. Tomlett?”

“Last week, miss; that is, last month—last fortnight I meant to say,” cried Mrs. Tomlett, hopelessly perplexed.

“What *was* the accident?” continued Miss Thornycroft.

“Well, it was a—a—a pitching of himself down the stairs, miss.”

“Down which stairs? This house has no stairs.”

Mrs. Tomlett looked to the different points of the room as if to assist her remembrance that the house had none.

“No, miss, true; it wasn’t stairs. He got hurted *some way*,” added the woman, in a pang of desperation. “I never knowed clear how. When they brought him home—a carrying of him—his head up, as one might say, and his legs down, my senses was clean frightened out o’ me: what they said and what they didn’t say, I

couldn't remember after no more nor nothing. May be 'twas out o' the tallet o' the Red Court stables he fell, miss : I think it was."

Miss Thornycroft thought not ; she should have heard of that. "Where was he hurt?" she asked. "In the leg, was it not?"

"'Twas in the arm, miss," responded Mrs. Tomlett. "Leastways, in the ankle."

The young lady stared at her as a natural curiosity. "Was it in both, Mrs. Tomlett?"

Well, yes, Mrs. Tomlett thought it might be in both. His side also had got grazed. Her full opinion was, if she might venture to express it, that he had done it a climbing up into his boat. One blessed thing was—no bones was broke.

Miss Thornycroft laughed, and thought she might as well leave her to the peeling of the potatoes, the interruption to which essential duty had possibly driven her senses away.

"At any rate, whatever the hurt, I hope he will soon be about again," she kindly said, as she went out.

"Which he is a'most that a'ready," responded Mrs. Tomlett, standing on the threshold to curtsy to her guest.

No sooner was the door shut than Tomlett, a short, strong, dark man, with a seal-skin cap on, and his right arm bandaged up, came limping out of an inner room. The first thing he did was to glare at his wife; the second, to bring his left hand in loud contact with the small round table so effectually that the potatoes went flying off it.

“Now! what do *you* think of yourself for a decent woman?”

Mrs. Tomlett sat down on a chair and began to cry. “It took to me, Ben, it did—it took to me awful,” she said, deprecatingly, in the midst of her tears; “I never knowed as news of the hurt had got abroad.”

“Do you suppose there ever was such a born fool afore as *you*?” again demanded Mr. Tomlett, in a slow, subdued, ironical, fearfully telling tone.

“When she come straight in with the query—what was Tomlett’s hurt and how were it done?—my poor body set on a twittering, and my head went clean out o’ me,” pleaded Mrs. Tomlett.

“A pity but it had gone clean *off* ye,” growled the strong-minded husband; “’tain’t o’ no good *on*.”

“What were I to say, took at a pinch like that? I couldn’t tell the truth; you know that, Tomlett.”

“Yes, you could; you might ha’ told enough on’t to satisfy her:—‘He was at work, and he fell and hurt hisself.’ Warn’t that enough for any reasonable woman to say? And if she’d asked where he fell, you might ha’ said you didn’t know. Not you! He ‘threwed hisself down the stairs,’ when there ain’t no stairs to the place; he ‘fell out o’ the tallet;’ he ‘done it a climbing up into his boat!’ Yah!”

“Don’t be hard upon me, Tomlett, don’t.”

“‘And the hurt,’ she asked, ‘was that in the leg?’” mercilessly continued Mr. Tomlett. “‘No, it weren’t in the leg, it were in the arm, least-ways, in the ankle,’ says you; and a fine bobbin o’ contradiction that must ha’ sounded to her. Yah again! Some women be born fools, and some makes theirselves into ’em.”

“It were through knowing you’d get a listening, Tomlett. Nothing never scares the wits out o’ me like that. When I see the door open a straw’s breadth, I knew your ear was at it; and what with her afore me talking, and you ahind me listening, I didn’t know the words I said no

more nor if it wasn't me that spoke 'em. Do what I will, I'm blowed up."

"Blowed up!" amiably repeated Mr. Tomlett; "if you was the wife o' some persons, you'd get the blowing up and something atop of it. Go on with them tatures."

Leaving them to their domestic bliss and occupations—though from the above interlude Tomlett must not be judged: he made in general a good husband, only he had been so terribly put out—we will go after Miss Thornycroft. As she struck into the road again she saw Anna Chester talking to one of her two elder brothers, it was too far off to distinguish which; and indeed Richard and Isaac were so much alike in figure, that the one was often taken for the other. That it was the latter, Miss Thornycroft judged; there appeared to be a sort of intimacy—a friendship—between Isaac and Anna that she by no means approved of, and Isaac had taken to go rather often to Captain Copp's.

Anna came on alone; her gentle face beaming, her pretty lips breaking into smiles. But Miss Thornycroft was cold.

"Which of my brothers were you talking to?"

"It was Isaac," answered Anna, turning her

face away, for the trick of colouring crimson at Isaac's name, acquired since her return, was all too visible.

"Ah, yes, I knew it must be Isaac. What good friends you seem to be growing!"

"Do you think so?" returned Anna, stooping to do something or other to her dainty little boot, and speaking as lightly as the circumstances permitted. "He stopped me to say that Captain Copp was going to dine at the Red Court this evening, and so asked if I would accompany him."

"Oh, it's to be one of their dinner gatherings this evening, is it?" replied Mary Anne, alluding to her brothers with her usual scant ceremony. "Well, I hope you will come, Anna; otherwise I shall not go in."

"Thank you. Yes."

"But look here. If you get telling Isaac things again that I tell you, you and I shall quarrel. What is he to you that you should do it?"

Not for a long while had Anna felt so miserably bewildered. She began ransacking her memory for all she had said. At these critical moments, discovery seemed very near.

“This morning, Richard chose to question me about Susan Hunter’s coming down. He had heard of it from Isaac. Now I had not mentioned it to Isaac, or to any one else at home: time enough for that when the day was fixed; and Isaac could only have learnt it from you.”

“I—I am not sure—I can’t quite tell—it is possible I did mention it to him,” stammered poor Anna. “I did not think to do harm.”

“I dare say not. But it *has* done harm; it has caused no end of mischief and disturbance at home, and got me into what my brothers politely call a ‘row.’ Kindly keep my affairs to yourself for the future, Anna.”

She turned away with the last words, and the poor young wife, in a sea of perplexity and distress, continued her way. The life she was leading was exceedingly unsatisfactory; never a moment, save in some chance and transitory meeting in the village or on the heath, did she obtain one private word with Isaac. Isaac was rather a frequent dropper-in now at Captain Copp’s; but the cautious sailor, remembering the warning hint of his mother, took care to afford no scope for private talking; or, as he phrased it, sweethearting; and Mrs. Copp—her

terror of discovery being always fresh upon her—guarded Anna zealously. Could she have had her way, they would have passed each other with a formal nod whenever they met.

“Never again,” murmured Anna. “I must never again speak to him about his home—unless it be of what the whole world knows. How I wish this dreadful state of things could terminate! I have heard of secrets—concealments—wearing the life away; I believe it now.”

The former resident superintendent of the coast-guard, Mr. Dangerfield, had left Coastdown, and been replaced by Mr. Kyne. Private opinion ran that Coastdown had not changed for the best; Mr. Supervisor Dangerfield (the official title awarded him by Coastdown) having been an easy, good-tempered, jolly kind of man, while Mr. Supervisor Kyne was turning out to be strict and fussy on the score of “duty.” Justice Thornycroft, the great man of the place, had received him well, and the new officer evidently liked the good cheer he was made welcome to at the Red Court Farm.

On this same morning Mr. Thornycroft, strolling out from his home, saw the supervisor on the plateau, and crossed the rails to join him. Mr.

Kyne, a spare man of middle age, with a greyish sort of face and hair cut close to his head, stood on the extreme edge of the plateau, attentively scanning the sea. He slowly turned as Mr. Thornycroft approached.

“Looking out for smugglers?” demanded the justice, jestingly. For this new superintendent had started the subject of smuggling soon after he came to Coastdown, avowing a suspicion that it was carried on; the justice had received it with a fit of laughter, and lost no opportunity since of throwing ridicule on it.

“Shall I tell him, or not?” mentally debated Mr. Kyne. “Better not, perhaps, until we can get hold of something more positive. He would never believe it; he would resent it as a libel on Coastdown.”

The fact was, Mr. Kyne had received information some short while before, from what he considered a reliable source, that smuggling to a great extent *was* carried on at Coastdown, or on some part of the coast lying nearly contiguous to it. He was redoubling his own watchfulness and his preventive precautions: to find out such a thing would be a great feather in his cap.

“ You won’t ridicule me out of my conviction, sir.”

“ Not I,” said the justice ; “ I don’t want to.”

“ I shall put a man on this plateau at night.”

Mr. Thornycroft opened his eyes. “ What on earth for ?”

“ Well—I suspect that place below.”

“ Suspect that place below !” repeated the justice, advancing to the edge and looking down. “ What is there on it to suspect ?”

“ Nothing—that’s the truth. But if contraband things are landed, that’s the most likely spot about. There is no other at all that I see where it *could* be done.”

“ And so you look at it on the negative principle,” cried the justice, curling his lip. “ Don’t be afraid, Kyne. If the Half-moon had but a bale of smuggled goods on it, there it must be until you seized it. Is there a corner to hide it in, or facility for carrying it away ?”

“ That’s what I say to myself,” rejoined Mr. Kyne. “ It’s the only thing that makes me easy.”

“ Don’t, for humanity’s sake, leave your poor men here on a winter’s night ; it would be

simply superfluous in the teeth of this impossibility! The cold on this bleak place might do for some of them before morning, or a false step in the dark send them over the cliff. Not to speak of the ghost," added the justice, with a grim smile.

The supervisor gave an impromptu grunt, as if the latter sentence had jarred on his nerves.

"That ghost tale is the worst part of it!" cried he. "Cold they are used to, danger they don't mind; but there's not one of them but shudders at the thought of seeing the ghost. I changed the men when I found how it was; sent the old ones away, and brought fresh ones here; well, will you believe me, justice, that in two days after they came they were as bad as the old ones? That fellow, Tomlett, with two or three more that congregate at the Mermaid, have told them the whole tale. I can hardly get 'em on here since, after nightfall—though it's only to walk along the plateau and back again."

Mr. Thornycroft looked straight out before him. The supervisor noticed the grave change that had come to his face; and remembered that this, or some other superstitious fear, was said to have killed the late Mrs. Thornycroft. What

with this story, what with the other deaths spoken of, taking their rise remotely or unremotely in the ghost, what with the uncomfortable feeling altogether that these things left on the mind in dark and lonely moments, Mr. Supervisor Kyne might have confessed, had he been honest enough, to not caring to stay himself on the plateau at night. But for this fact, the place would have been better guarded, since his men, in spite of the ghost, must have remained on duty.

“Do you happen to know a little inlet of a spot lying near to Jutpoint?” asked Mr. Thornycroft. “They say that used to be famous for smuggling in the old days. If any is carried on still—a thing to be doubted—there’s where you must look for it.”

“Ay, I’ve heard before of that place,” remarked the supervisor. “They say it’s quiet enough now.”

“I should have supposed most places were,” said the justice, a mocking intonation again in his tone, which rather told on the ears it was meant for. “We revert to smuggling now as a thing of the past, not the present. What fortunes were made at it!”

“And lost,” said the supervisor.

Mr. Thornycroft shrugged his shoulders.

“Were they? Through bad management, then. Before that exposure of the custom-house frauds, both merchants and officers lined their pockets. And do still, no doubt.”

They were slowly walking together, side by side on the brow of the plateau, as they talked. Mr. Thornycroft stole a glance at his companion. The supervisor's face was composed and cold; nothing to be gathered from it.

“It has its charms, no doubt, this cheating of the revenue,” resumed the justice. “Were I a custom-house officer, and had the opportunity offered me, I might be tempted to embrace it. Look at the toil of these men—yours, for example—work, work, work and responsibility perpetually; and then look at the miserable pittance of pay. Why, a man may serve (and generally does) until he's fifty years of age, before he has enough salary doled out to him to keep his family in decent comfort.”

“That's true,” was the answer; “it keeps many of us from marrying. It has kept me.”

“Just so. One can't wonder that illegitimate practices are considered justifiable. The world in its secret conscience exonerates you, I can tell you that, Mr. Supervisor.”

Mr. Supervisor walked along, measuring his steps, as if in thought; but he did not answer.

“Why, how can it be otherwise?” continued the magistrate, warming with his subject and his sympathy. “Put the case before us for a moment as it used to be put. A merchant—Mr. Brown, let us say—has extensive dealings with continental countries, and imports largely. Every ship-load that comes for him must pay a duty of four hundred pounds, more or less, to the customs. Brown speaks to the examining officer, ‘You wink at this ship-load, don’t see it; and we’ll divide the duty between us; you put two hundred in your pocket, and I’ll put two.’ Who is there among us that would not accede? Not many. It enables the poor, ill-paid gentleman to get a few comforts; and he does it.”

“Yes; that is how many have been tempted.”

“And I say we cannot blame them. No man with a spark of humanity within his breast could give blame. Answer for yourself, Kyne: were it possible that such a proposal could be made to you in these days, would *you* not fall in with it?”

“No,” said the officer, in a low but decisive tone. “I should not.”

“No?” repeated Mr. Thornycroft, staring at him.

“It killed my father.”

Mr. Thornycroft did not understand. The supervisor, looking straight before him as if he were seeing past events in the distance, explained, in a voice that was no louder than a whisper.

“He was tempted exactly as you have described; and yielded. When the exposures took place at the London Customs, he was one of the officers implicated, and made his escape abroad. There he died, yearning for the land to which he could not return. The French doctors said that unsatisfied yearning killed him; he had no other discoverable malady.”

“What a curious thing!” exclaimed Mr. Thornycroft.

“There were some private, unhappy circumstances mixed with it. One was, that his wife would not share in his exile. I could not; I had already a place in the Customs. Just before he died I went over, and he extorted a solemn promise from me never to do as he had done. I never shall. No inducement possible to be offered would tempt me.”

“It is a complete answer to the supposititious case propounded,” said the justice, laughing pleasantly.

“Supposititious, indeed!” remarked Mr. Kyne. “It could not occur in these days.”

“Certainly not. And *therefore* your theory of present smuggling must explode. I must be going. Will you come in to-night and dine with us, Kyne? Copp is coming, and a few more. We’ve got the finest turbot, the finest barrel of natives you ever tasted.”

Inclination led Mr. Supervisor Kyne one way, duty another. He thought he ought not to accept it; the dinners at the Red Court were always prolonged until midnight at least, and his men would be safe to go off the watch. But—a prime turbot! and all the rest of it! Mr. Kyne’s mouth watered.

“Thank you, sir; I’ll come.”

The evening dinner-gathering took place. Mr. Kyne and others, invited to attend it, assembled in the usual unceremonious fashion, and were very jolly to a late hour. Miss Thornycroft and Anna sat down to table, quitting the gentlemen as soon as dinner was over. Ladies, as a rule, were never invited to these feasts, but if Miss

Thornycroft appeared at table, the justice had no objection to her asking a companion to join her. Generally speaking, however, her dinner on these occasions was served to her alone.

“ My darling, I am unable to take you home to-night ; I—I cannot leave my friends,” whispered Isaac, finding himself by a happy chance alone with Anna. Going into the drawing-room for a minute, he found his sister had temporarily left it to get a book.

“ Sarah is coming for me.”

“ Yes, I know.”

His arms pressed jealously round her for the first time since they parted, his face laid on hers, he took from her lips a shower of impassioned kisses. Only for a moment. The sweeping trail of Miss Thornycroft’s silk dress was even then heard. When she entered, Anna sat leaning her brow upon her raised fingers ; Isaac was leaving the room, carelessly humming a scrap of a song. Yes, it was an unsatisfactory life at best—a wife and no wife ; a heavy secret to guard ; apprehension always.

The days went on. Miss Thornycroft, defiantly pursuing her own will, directly disobeying her father’s command, did not write to stop the

arrival of her guests; and yet an opportunity offered her of doing so. I fully believe that these opportunities of escape from the path of evil are nearly always afforded once at least in every fresh temptation, if we would but recognise and seize upon them.

It wanted but two days to that of the expected arrival, when a hasty note was received from Miss Hunter saying she was prevented coming; it concluded with these words: "My brother is undecided what to do; he thinks you will not want him without me. Please drop him just one line; or if he does not hear he will take it for granted that you expect him."

There was an opportunity!—"Just one line," and Mary Anne Thornycroft would have had the future comfort of knowing that she had (in substance at least) obeyed her father.

But she did not send it.

CHAPTER X.

THE HALF-MOON BEACH.

DODGING about between the village and the Red Court Farm, went Miss Thornycroft. Her mind was not at rest. The day on which she had expected her guests—or rather, *one* of them—had passed. It was on Saturday; here was Monday passing, and nobody had come. Each time the omnibus had arrived from Jutpoint, the young lady had not been far off. It had not brought anybody in whom she was interested. Forty-five minutes past three now; ten minutes more, and it would be in again. She was beginning to feel sick with emotional suspense.

But, for all this dodging, Miss Thornycroft was a lady; and when the wheels of the omnibus were at length heard, and it drew up at the Mermaid, she was at a considerable distance, apparently taking a cold stroll in the wintry

afternoon. One passenger only got out; she could see that; and—*was* it Robert Hunter?

If so, he must be habited in some curious attire. Looking at him from this distance, he seemed to be all white and black. But, before he had moved a step; while he was inquiring (as might be inferred) the way to the Red Court Farm; the wild beating of Mary Ann Thornycroft's heart told her who it was.

They met quietly enough, shaking hands calmly while he explained that he had been unable to get away on Saturday. Miss Thornycroft burst into a fit of laughter at the coat, partly genuine, partly put on to hide her tell-tale emotion. It was certainly a remarkable coat; made of a smooth sort of white cloth, exceedingly heavy, and trimmed with black fur. The collar, the facings, the wrists and the back pockets had all a broad strip. He turned himself about for her inspection, laughing too.

“I fear I shall astonish the natives. But I never had so warm a coat in my life. I got it not from the professor.”

“From the professor!”

Mr. Hunter laughed. “Some crafty acquaintance of his, hard up, persuaded him into the

purchase of two, money down, saying they had just come over from Russia—latest fashion. Perhaps they had; perhaps they are. The professor does not go in for fashion, but he cannot refuse a request made to him on the plea of unmerited poverty, and all that. I happened to be at his house when he brought them home in a cab. You should have heard Mrs. Mac.”

“I should have liked to,” said Mary Anne.

“First of all she said she’d have the fellow taken up who had beguiled the professor into it; next she said she’d pledge them. It ended in the professor making me a present of one and keeping the other.”

“And you are going to sport it here!”

“Better here than in London; as a beginning. I thought it a good opportunity to get reconciled to myself in it. I should like to see the professor *there* when he goes out in his.”

“They must have taken you for somebody in the train.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Hunter. “I and an old lady and gentleman had the carriage to ourselves all the way. She evidently took me for a lord; her husband for a card-sharper. But I think I shall like the coat.”

Opinions might differ upon it—as did those of the old couple in the train. It was decidedly a handsome coat in itself, and had probably cost as much as the professor gave for it; but, taken in conjunction with its oddity, some might not have elected to be seen wearing it. Mr. Hunter had brought no other; his last year's coat was much worn, and he had been about to get another when this came in his way.

“And what about Susan?” Miss Thornycroft asked.

“Susan is in Yorkshire. Her aunt—to whom she was left when my mother died—was taken ill, and sent for her. I do not suppose Susan will return to London.”

“Not at all?”

Mr. Hunter thought not. “It would be scarcely worth while; she was to have gone home in March.”

Thus talking, they reached the Red Court Farm. When its inmates saw him arrive, his portmanteau carried behind by a porter, they were thunderstruck. Mr. Thornycroft scarcely knew which to stare at most, him or his coat. Mary Anne introduced him with characteristic equanimity. Richard vouchsafed no greeting in his

stern displeasure, but the justice, a gentleman at heart, hospitably inclined always, could do no less than bid him welcome. Cyril, quiet and courteous, shook hands with him; and later, when Isaac came in, he grasped his hand warmly.

There is no doubt that the learning he was a connexion of Anna Chester's (it could not be called a relative) tended to smooth matters. As the days passed on, Mr. Hunter grew upon their liking; for his own sake he proved to be an agreeable companion; and even Richard fell into civility—an active, free, pleasant-mannered young fellow, as the justice called him, who made himself at home indoors and out.

Never, since the bygone days at Katterley, had Robert Hunter deserved the character; but in this brief holiday he could but give himself up to his perfect happiness. He made excursions to Jutpoint; he explored the cliffs; he went in at will to Captain Copp's and the other houses on the heath; he put out to sea with the fishermen in the boats; he talked to the wives in their huts: everybody soon knew Robert Hunter, and especially his coat, which had become the marvel of Coastdown; a few admiring it—a vast many abusing it.

Miss Thornycroft was his frequent companion, and they went out unrestrained. It never appeared to have crossed the mind of Mr. Thornycroft or his sons as being within the bounds of possibility that this struggling young engineer, who was not known to public repute as an engineer at all, could presume to be thinking of Mary Anne, still less that she could think of him; otherwise they had been more cautious. Anna Chester was out with them sometimes, Cyril on occasion; but they rambled about for the most part alone in the cold and frost, their spirits light as the rarefied air.

The plateau and its superstition had no terror for Mr. Hunter, rather amusement: but that he saw—and saw with surprise—it was a subject of gravity at the Red Court, he might have made fun of it. Mary Anne confessed to him that she did not understand the matter; her brothers were reticent even to discourtesy. That some mystery was at the bottom of it Mr. Hunter could not fail to detect, and was content to bury all allusion to the superstition.

He stood with Miss Thornycroft on the edge of the plateau one bright morning—the brightest they had had. It was the first time he had been so

far, for Mary Anne had never gone beyond the railings. Not the slightest fear had she ; for the matter of that, nobody else had in daylight ; but she knew that her father did not like to see her there. In small things, when they did not cross her own will, the young lady could be obedient.

“ I can see how dangerous it would be here on a dark night,” observed Robert Hunter in answer to something she had been saying, as he drew a little back from the edge, over which he had been cautiously leaning to take his observations. “ Mary Anne ! I never in all my life saw a place so convenient for smuggling as that Half-moon below. I daresay it has seen plenty of it.”

Before she could make any rejoinder Mr. Kyne came strolling up to them in a brown study, and they shook hands. Robert Hunter had dined with him at the Red Court.

“ I was telling Miss Thornycroft that the place below looks as if it had been made for the convenience of smuggling,” began Robert Hunter. “ Have you much trouble here ?”

“ No ; but I am in hopes of it,” was the reply. And it so completely astonished Mr. Hunter, who had spoken in a careless manner, without real

meaning, as we all do sometimes, that he turned sharply round and looked at the supervisor.

“ I thought the days of smuggling were over.”

“ Not yet, here—so far as I believe,” replied Mr. Kyne. “ We have information that smuggling to an extent is carried on somewhere on this coast, and this is the most likely spot for it that I can discover. I heard of this suspicion soon after I was appointed to Coastdown, and so kept my eyes open ; but never, in spite of my precautions, have I succeeded in dropping on the wretches. I don’t speak of paltry packets of tobacco and sausage-skins of brandy, which the fishermen, boarding strange craft, contrive to stow about their ribs, but of more serious cargoes. I would almost stake my life that not a mile distant from this place there lies hidden a ton-load of lace, rich and costly as ever flourished at the Court of St. James.”*

Robert Hunter thought the story sounded about as likely as that of the ghost. ‘The in-

* This was just before the late alteration in the Customs’ import laws, when the duty on lace and other light articles was large : making the smuggling of them into England a clever and enormously profitable achievement, when it could be accomplished with impunity.

credulous, amused light in his eye caused Mary Anne to laugh.

“Where can it be hidden?” she asked of the supervisor. “There’s no place.”

“I wish I could tell you where, Miss Thornycroft.”

Anything but inclined to laugh did he appear himself. The fact was, Mr. Kyne was growing more fully confirmed in his opinion day by day, and had come out this morning determined to do something. Circumstances were occurring to baffle all his precautions, and he felt savage. His policy hitherto had been secrecy, henceforth he meant to speak of the matter openly, and see what that would do. It was very singular—noted hereafter—that Robert Hunter and this young lady should have been the first who fell in his way after the resolution to speak was taken. But no doubt the remark with which Mr. Hunter greeted him surprised him into it.

“But surely you do not think, Mr. Kyne, that boat-loads of lace are really run here!” exclaimed Robert Hunter.

“I do think it. If not in this precise spot,”—pointing with his finger to the Half-moon beach underneath—“somewhere close to it. There’s

only one thing staggers me—if they run their cargoes there, where can they stow it away? I have walked about there”—advancing to the edge cautiously and looking down—“from the time the tide went off the narrow path, leading to it round the rocks, until it came in again, puzzling over the problem, and peering with every eye I had.”

“Peering?”

“Yes. We have heard of caves and other hiding-places being concealed in rocks,” added the supervisor, doggedly; “why not in these? I cannot put it out of my head that there’s something of the sort here; it’s getting as bad to me as a haunting dream.”

“It would be charming to find it!” exclaimed Mary Anne. “A cave in the rocks! Ah, Mr. Kyne, it is too good to be true. We shall never have so romantic a discovery at Coast-down.”

“If such a thing were there, I should think you would have no difficulty in discovering it,” said Mr. Hunter.

“I have found it difficult,” returned Mr. Kyne, snappishly, as if certain remembrances connected with the non-finding did not soothe

him. "There's only one thing keeps me from reporting the suspicions at head quarters."

"And that is——?"

"The doubt that it may turn out nothing after all."

"Oh, then, you are not so sure; you have no sufficient grounds to go upon," quickly rejoined Mr. Hunter, with a smile that nettled the other.

"Yes, I have grounds," he returned, somewhat incautiously perhaps, in his haste to vindicate himself. "We had information a short time back," he continued after a pause, as he dropped his voice to a low key, "that a boat-load of something—*my* belief is, it's lace—was waiting to come in. Every night for a fortnight, in the dark age of the moon, did I haunt this naked plateau on the watch, one man with me, others being within call. A very agreeable task it was, lying *perdu* on its edge, with my cold face just extended beyond!"

"And what was the result?" eagerly asked Mr. Hunter, who was growing interested in the narrative.

"Nothing was the result. I never saw the ghost of a smuggler or a boat approach the place. And the very first night I was off the

watch, I have reason to believe the job was done."

"Which night was that?" inquired Miss Thornycroft.

"This day week, when I was dining at the Red Court. I had told my men to be on the look-out; but I had certainly told them in a careless sort of way, for the moon was bright again, and who was to suspect that they would risk it on a light night? They are bold sinners."

The customs officer was so earnest, putting, as was evident, so much faith in his own suspicions, that Robert Hunter insensibly began to go over to his belief. Why should cargoes of lace, and other valuable articles, not be run? he asked himself. They bore enough duty to tempt the risk, as they had borne it in the days gone by.

"How was it your men were so negligent?" he inquired.

"There's the devil of it!" cried the supervisor. "I beg your pardon, young lady; wrong words slip out inadvertently when one's vexed. My careless orders made the men careless, and they sat boozing at the Mermaid. Young Mr. Thornycroft, it seems, happened to go in, saw them sitting there with some of his farm-labourers,

and, in a generous fit, ordered them to call for what drink they liked. They had red eyes and shaky hands the next morning."

"How stupid of my brother!" exclaimed Mary Anne. "Was it Richard or Isaac?"

"I don't know. But all your family are too liberal: their purse is longer than their discretion. It is not the first time, by many, they have treated my fellows. I wish they would not do so."

There was a slight pause. Mr. Kyne resumed in a sort of halting tone, as if the words came from him in spite of his better judgment.

"The greatest obstacle I have to contend with in keeping the men to their duty on the plateau here, is the superstition connected with it. When a fellow *is* got on at night, the slightest movement—a night-bird flying overhead—will send him off again. Ah! *they* don't want pressing to stay drinking at the Mermaid or anywhere else. The fact is, Coastdown has not been kept to its duty for a long while. My predecessor was good-hearted and easy, and the men did as they liked."

"How many men do you count here?"

"Only three or four, and they can't be avail-

able all together; they must have some rest, turn on, turn off. There's a longish strip of coast to pace, too; the plateau's but a fleabite of it."

"And your theory is that the smugglers run their boats below here?" continued Robert Hunter, indicating the Half-moon beach.

"I think they do—that is, if they run them anywhere," replied Mr. Kyne, who was in a state of miserable doubt, between his firm convictions and the improbabilities they involved. "You see, there is nowhere else that privateer boats can be run to. There's no possibility of such a thing higher up, beyond that point to the right, and it would be nearly as impossible for them to land a cargo of contraband goods beyond the left point, in the face of all the villagers."

There was a silence. All three were looking below at the scrap of beach over the sharp edges of the jutting rocks, Miss Thornycroft held safe by Mr. Hunter. She broke it.

"But, as you observe, Mr. Kyne, where could they stow a cargo there, allowing that they landed one? There is certainly no opening or place for concealment in those hard, bare rocks, or it would have been discovered long ago. Another thing—suppose for a moment that they do get a

cargo stowed away somewhere in the rocks, how are they to get it out again? There would be equal danger of discovery."

"So there would," replied Mr. Kyne. "I have thought of all these things myself till my head is muddled."

"Did you ever read Cooper's novels, Mr. Kyne?" resumed Miss Thornycroft. "Some of them would give you a vast deal of insight into these sort of transactions."

"No," replied the officer, with an amused look. "I prefer to get my insight from practice. I am pretty sharp-sighted," he added with complacency.

Robert Hunter had been weighing possibilities in his mind, and woke up as from sudden thought, turning to the supervisor.

"I should like to go down there and have a look at these rocks. My profession has taken me much amidst such places: perhaps my experience could assist you."

"Let us walk there now!" exclaimed the supervisor, seizing at the idea—"if not taking you out of your way, Miss Thornycroft."

"Oh, I should be delighted," was the young lady's reply. "I call it quite an adventure.

Some fine moonlight night I shall come and watch here myself, Mr. Kyne."

"They don't do their work on a moonlight night. At least," he hastened to correct himself, with a somewhat crestfallen expression, "not usually. But after what happened recently, I shall mistrust a light night as much as a dark one."

"Are you sure," she inquired, standing yet within them on the plateau, "that a cargo was really landed the night you speak of?"

"I am not sure; but I have cause to suspect it."

"It must be an adventurous life," she remarked, "bearing its charms, no doubt."

"They had better not get caught," was the officer's rejoinder, delivered with professional gusto; "they would not find it so charming then."

"I thought the days of smuggling were over," observed Mr. Hunter: "except the more legitimate way of doing it through the very eyes and nose of the custom-house. Did you know anything personally of the great custom-house frauds, as they were called, when so many

officers and merchants were implicated, some years ago?"

"I did. I held a subordinate post in the London office then, and was in the thick of the discoveries."

"You were not one of the implicated?" jestingly demanded Mr. Hunter.

"Why, no—or you would not see me here now. I was not sufficiently high in the service for it."

"Or else you might have been?"

"That's a home question," laughed Mr. Kyne. "I really cannot answer for what might have been. My betters were tempted to be."

He spoke without a cloud on his face; a different man now, from the one who had betrayed his family's past trouble to Justice Thornycroft. Not to this rising young engineer, attired in his fantastic coat, which the supervisor always believed must be the very height of *ton* and fashion in London; not to this handsome, careless, light-hearted girl, would he suffer aught of that past to escape. He could joke with *them* of the custom-house frauds, which had driven so many into exile, and *one*—at least, as he believed—to death. On the whole, it was

somewhat singular that the topic should have been again started. Miss Thornycroft took up the thread with a laugh.

“There, Mr. Kyne! You acknowledge that you custom-house gentlemen are not proof against temptation, and yet you boast of looking so sharply after these wretched fishermen!”

“If the game be carried on here as I suspect, Miss Thornycroft, it is not wretched fishermen who have to do with it; except, perhaps, as subordinates.”

“Let us go and explore the Half-moon beach below,” again said Robert Hunter. Mr. Kyne turned to it at once: he had been waiting to do so. The engineer’s experience might be valuable. He had had somewhat to do with rocks and land.

It was a short walk, as they made their way down to the village, and thence to the narrow path winding round the projection of rock. The tide was out, so they shelved round it with dry feet, and ascended to the Half-moon beach. They paced about from one end of the place to the other, looking and talking. Nothing was to be seen; nothing; no opening, or sign of opening. The engineer had an umbrella in his hand,

and he struck the rocks repeatedly : in one part in particular, it was just the middle of the Half-moon, he struck and struck, and returned to strike again.

“ What do you find ? ” inquired Mr. Kyne.

“ Not much. Only it sounds hollow just here.”

They looked again : they stooped down and looked ; they stood upon a loose stone and raised themselves to look ; they pushed and struck at the part with all their might and main. No, nothing came of it.

“ Did you ever see a more convenient spot for working the game ? ” cried the supervisor. “ Look at those embedded stones down there, rising from the lower beach : the very things to moor a boat to.”

“ Who do you suspect does this contraband business ? ” inquired Robert Hunter.

“ My suspicions don't fall particularly upon any one. There are no parties in the neighbourhood whom one could suspect, except the boatmen, and if the trade is pushed in the extensive way I think, they are not the guilty men. A week ago (more or less) they ran, as I tell you, one cargo ; I know they did ; and may

I be shot this moment, if they are not ready to run another! That's a paying game, I hope."

Ready to run another! The pulses of Mr. Kyne's hearers ran riot with excitement. This spice of adventure was intensely charming.

"How do you know they are?" asked Robert Hunter.

"By two or three signs. One of them, which I have no objection to mention, is that a certain queer craft is fond of cruising about here. Whenever I catch sight of her ugly sides, I know it bodes no good for her majesty's revenue. She carries plausible colours, the hussey, and has, I doubt not, a double bottom, false as her colours. I saw her stern, shooting off at daybreak this morning, and should like to have had the overhauling of her."

"Can you not?"

"No. She is apparently on legitimate business."

"I thought that her Majesty could search any vessel, legitimate or illegitimate."

Again Mr. Kyne looked slightly crestfallen. "I boarded her with my men the last time she was here, and nothing came of it. She happened

by ill-luck to be really empty, or we were not clever enough to unearth the fox."

The reminiscence was not agreeable to Mr. Kyne. The empty vessel had staggered him professionally; the reception he met with insulted him personally. Until the search was over, the captain, a round, broad Dutchman, had been civil, affording every facility to the revenue officers; but the instant the work was done, he ordered them out of the ship in his bad English, and promised a different reception if they ever came on it again. That was not all. The mate, another Dutchman, was handling a loaded pistol the whole time on full cock, and staring at the superintendent in a very strange manner. Altogether the remembrance was unpleasant.

The tide was coming up, and they had to quit the strip of beach while the road was open. Mr. Kyne wished them good morning and departed on his own way. Robert Hunter turned towards the plateau again, which surprised Miss Thornycroft. "Just for a minute or two," he urged.

They ascended it, and stood on the brow as before, Robert Hunter in deep thought. His face, now turned to the sea, now to the land, wore a business-like expression.

“We are now standing exactly above the middle of the rocks on the Half-moon beach below,” he remarked presently, “just where they had a hollow sound.”

“Yes,” she replied.

“And the Red Court, as you see, lies off in a straight line. It is a good thing your father lives there, Mary Anne.”

“Why?”

“Because if suspicious persons inhabited it, I should say that house might have something to do with the mystery. If Kyne’s conclusions are right—that smuggled goods are landed on the beach below, they must be stowed away in the rocks; although the ingress is hidden from the uninitiated. Should this be really the case, depend upon it there is some passage, some communication, in these rocks to an egress inland.”

“But what has that to do with our house?” inquired Mary Anne, wonderingly.

“These old castles, lying contiguous to the coast, are sure to have subterranean passages underneath, leading to the sea. Many an escape has been made that way in time of war, and many an ill-fated prisoner has been so conducted

to the waves, and put out of sight for ever. Were I your father, I would institute a search. He might come upon the hoarding-place of the smugglers."

"But the smugglers cannot get to their caverns and passages through our house!"

"Of course not. There must be some other opening. How I should like to drop upon the lads!"

Mr. Hunter spoke with animation. Such a discovery presented a tempting prospect, and he walked across the plateau as one who has got a new feather stuck in his cap. In passing the Round Tower, he turned aside to it, and stepped in through the opening. He found nothing there that could be converted into suspicion by the most lively imagination. The worn grass beneath the feet was all genuine; the circular wall, crumbling away, had stood for ages. Satisfied, so far, they crossed the railings on their way home.

Mr. Thornycroft was in the dining-room writing a note; Richard, who had apparently just stepped in to ask a question, held a gun; Cyril lay back in an easy-chair, reading. When Mary Anne and their gentleman guest burst in

upon them with eager excitement, the one out-talking the other, it was rather startling.

“Such an adventure! Papa, did you know we probably have smugglers on the coast here?”

“Have you ever explored underneath your house, sir, under the old ruins of the castle? There may be a chain of subterranean passages and vaults conducting from here to the sea.”

“Not common smugglers, papa, the poor tobacco-and-brandy sailors, but people in an extensive way. Boat-loads of lace they land.”

“If it be as the man suspects, there may be often a rare booty there. There may be one at this very moment; I would lay any money there is,” added Robert Hunter, improving upon the idea in his excitement. “Mr. Richard, will you bet a crown with me?”

The words had been poured forth so rapidly by both, that it would seem their hearers were powerless to interrupt. Yet the effect they produced was great. Cyril started upright, and let his book drop on his knees; Mr. Thornycroft pushed his glasses to the top of his brow, an angry paleness giving place to his healthy, rosy colour; while Richard, more demonstrative, dashed the gun on the carpet and broke into an

ugly oath. The justice was the first to find his tongue.

“What absurd treason are you talking now? You are mad, Mary Anne.”

“It is not treason at all, sir,” replied Mr. Hunter, regarding Richard with surprise. “It is a pretty well ascertained fact that contraband goods are landed and housed in the rocks at the Half-moon. It will be loyalty, instead of treason, if we can contrive to lay a trap and catch the traitors.”

Richard Thornycroft moved forward as if to strike the impetuous speaker. It would seem that one of the fits of passion he was liable to was coming on. Cyril, calm and cool, placed himself across his brother's path.

“Be quiet, Richard,” he said, in a tone that savoured of authority; “stay you still. Where did you pick up this cock-and-bull story?” he demanded with light mockery of Robert Hunter.

“We had it from the supervisor. He has suspected ever since he came, he says, that this station was favoured by smugglers, and now he is sure of it. One cargo they landed a few days ago, and there's another dodging off the coast,

waiting to come in. He intends to drop upon that."

"It is a made-up lie!" foamed Richard. "The fellow talks so to show his zeal. I'll tell him so. Smuggled goods landed here!"

"Well, lie or no lie, you need not fly in a passion over it," said Mary Anne. "It is not our affair."

"Then, if it is not our affair, what business have you interfering in it?" retorted Richard. "Interpose your authority, sir, and forbid her to concern herself with men's work," he added, turning sharply to his father. "No woman would do it who retains any sense of shame."

"Miss Thornycroft has done nothing unbecoming a lady," exclaimed Mr. Hunter, in a tone of wonder. "You forget that you are speaking to your sister, Mr. Richard. What can you mean?"

"Oh, he means nothing," said Mary Anne, "only he lets his temper get the better of his tongue. One would think, Richard, you had something to do with the smugglers, by your taking it up in this way," she pursued, in a spirit of aggravation. "And, indeed, it *was* partly your fault that they got their last cargo in."

“ Explain yourself,” said Cyril to his sister, pushing his arm before Richard’s mouth.

“ It was a night when we had a dinner-party here,” she pursued. “ Mr. Kyne was here ; the only night he had been off the watch for a fortnight, he says. But he left orders with his men to look out, and Richard got treating them to drink at the Mermaid, and they never looked. So the coast was clear, and the smugglers got their goods in.”

Cyril burst into a pleasant laugh. “ Ah, ha !” said he, “ new brooms sweep clean. Mr. Superintendent Kyne is a fresh hand down here, so he thinks he must trumpet forth his fame as a keen officer—that he may be all the more negligent by-and-bye, you know. None but a stranger, as you are, Mr. Hunter, could have given ear to it.”

“ I have given both ear and belief,” replied Robert Hunter, firmly ; “ and I have offered Mr. Kyne the benefit of my engineering experience to help him discover whether there is or is not a secret opening in the rocks.”

“ You have !” exclaimed Justice Thornycroft. He glared on Robert Hunter as he asked the question. From quite the first until now he

had been bending over his note, leaving the discussion to them.

“To be sure I have, sir. I have been with him now, on the Half-moon, sounding them; but I had only an umbrella, and that was of little use. We are going to-morrow better prepared. It strikes me the mystery lies right in the middle. It sounds hollow there. I will do all I can to help him, that the fellows may be brought to punishment.”

“Sir!” cried the old justice, in a voice of thunder, rising and sternly confronting Robert Hunter, “I forbid it. Do you understand? *I forbid it.* None under my roof shall take act or part in this.”

“But justice demands it,” replied Mr. Hunter, after a pause. “It behoves all loyal subjects of her majesty to aid in discovering the offenders: especially you, sir, a sworn magistrate.”

“It behoves me to protect the poor fishermen, who look to me for protection, who have looked to me for it for years; ay, and received it,” was the warm reply, “better than it behoves you, sir, to presume to teach me my duty! Richard, leave me to speak. I tell you, sir, I do not believe this concocted story. I am the chief of

the place, sir, and I will not believe it. The coast-guard and the fishermen are at variance; always have been; and I will not allow the poor fellows to be traduced and put upon, treated as if they were thieves and rogues. Neither I nor mine shall take part in it; no, nor any man who is under my roof eating the bread of friendliness. I hope you hear me, sir."

Robert Hunter stood confounded. All his golden visions of discoveries, that should make his name famous and put feathers in his cap, were vanishing into air. But the curious part was the justice's behaviour; that struck him as being very strange, not to say unreasonable.

"It is not the first time, sir, that the coast-guard have tried it on," pursued Mr. Thornycroft. "When the last superintendent was appointed, Dangerfield, he took something of the sort in his head, and came to me to assist him in an investigation. 'Investigate for yourself,' I said to him. '*I shall not aid you to tarnish the characters of the fishermen.*' It may be presumed that his investigation did not come to much," was the ironical conclusion; "since I heard no more about the smugglers from him all the years he was stationed here."

“And you think, sir, that Mr. Kyne is also mistaken?” cried Robert Hunter, veering round.

“What I think, and what I do not think, you may gather from my words,” was the haughty reply. “I tell you that no man living under my roof shall encourage by so much as a word, let alone an act, anything of the sort. Mr. Kyne can pursue his own business without us.”

“If it were one of my own brothers who did so, I would shoot him dead,” said Richard, with a meaning touch at his gun. “So I warn him.”

“And commit murder?” echoed Robert Hunter, who did not admire this semi-threat of Richard’s.

“It would not be murder, sir; it would be justifiable homicide,” interposed the justice, rather to Robert Hunter’s surprise. “When I was a young man, a guest abused my father’s hospitality. My brother challenged him. They went out with their seconds, and my brother shot him. That was not murder.”

“But, papa, that must have been a different thing altogether,” said Mary Anne, who had stood transfixed at the turn the conversation was taking. “It——”

“To your room, Miss Thornycroft! To your

room, I say !” cried the passionate justice, pushing her from him. “ Would *you* beard my authority ? Things are coming to a pretty pass.”

It was a stormy ending to a stormy interview. Confused and terrified, Mary Anne Thornycroft hastened upstairs and burst into tears in her chamber. Richard strode away with his gun ; Cyril followed him ; and the justice bent over his writing again quietly, as though nothing had happened.

As for Robert Hunter he felt entirely amazed. Of course, putting it as the justice had put it, he felt bound in honour not to interfere further, and would casually tell Mr. Kyne so on the first opportunity, giving no reason why. Pondering over the matter as he strolled out of doors uncomfortably, he came to the conclusion that Mr. Thornycroft must be self-arrogant, both as a magistrate and a man : one of the old-world sort, who jog on from year’s end to year’s end, seeing no abuses, and utterly refusing to reform them when seen.

CHAPTER XI.

MY LADY AT THE RED COURT.

AT the end window of the corridor, looking towards the church and village, stood Mary Anne Thornycroft. Not yet had she recovered the recent stormy interview, and a resentful feeling in regard to it was rife within her. The conduct of her father and eldest brother appeared to have been so devoid of all reason in itself, and so gratuitously insulting to Robert Hunter, that Mary Anne, in the prejudice of her love for *him*, was wishing she could pay them off. It is the province of violent and unjust opposition to turn aside its own aim, just as it is the province of exaggeration to defeat itself; and Miss Thornycroft, conning over and over again in her mind the events of the day, wilfully persuaded herself that Mr. Kyne was right, her father wrong, and that smuggling of lace, or anything else that was

valuable, *was* carried on under (as may be said) the very face and front of their supine house.

Cyril came up the stairs—his book in his hand—saw her standing there, and came to her side. The short winter's day was already verging towards twilight, and the house seemed intensely still.

“Is it not a shame?” exclaimed Mary Anne, as Cyril put his arm about her.

“Is what not a shame? That the brightness of the day is gone?”

“*You know!*” she passionately exclaimed. “Where's the use of attempting subterfuge with me, Cyril? Cyril, on my word I thought for the moment that papa and Richard must have gone suddenly mad.”

In Cyril Thornycroft's soft brown eyes, thrown out to the far distance, there was a strange look of apprehension, as if they saw an unwelcome thing approaching. Something was approaching in fact, but not quite in sight yet. He had a mild, gentle face; his temper was of the calmest, his voice sweet and low. And yet Cyril seemed to have a great care ever upon him;—his mother, whom he so greatly resembled, used to have the same. He was the only one of her children who, as yet, had profited much by her counsel and

monition. In the last few years of her life her earnest daily efforts had been directed to draw her children to God, and on Cyril they had borne fruit.

In the German schools, to which he had been sent, in the Oxford University life that succeeded, Cyril Thornycroft had walked unscathed amidst the surging sea of surrounding sins and perils. Whatever temptation might assail him, he seemed, in the language of one who watched his career, only to come out of them more fit for God. Self-denying, walking not to do his own will, remembering always that he had been bought with a price and had a Master to serve, Cyril Thornycroft's daily life was one of patient endurance of a great inward suffering, and of active kindness. Where he could do good he did it; when others were tempted to say a harsh word he said a kind one. He had been brought up to no profession; his inclination led him to go into the Church; but some motive, of which he never spoke, seemed to hold him back. Meanwhile Mr. Thornycroft appeared quite content to let him stay on at the Red Court in idleness—idleness as the world called it. Save that he read a great deal, Cyril did no absolute work;

but many in Coastdown blessed him. In sickness of body, in suffering of mind, there by the bed-side might be found Cyril Thornycroft, reading from the Book of Life—talking of good things in his low, earnest voice; and sometimes—if we may dare to write it—praying. Dare! For it is the fashion of the world to deride such things when spoken of—possibly to deride them also in reality.

And now that is all that will be said. It was well to say it for the satisfaction of the readers, as will be found presently, even though but one of those readers may be walking in a similar earnest path, the world lying on one hand, heaven on the other.

“Courtesy is certainly due to Mr. Hunter, and I am sorry that my father and Richard forgot it,” resumed Cyril. “When does he leave?”

“On Saturday,” she answered, sullenly.

“Then—endeavour to let things go on peaceably until that time. Do not excite him by any helping word on your part to oppose home prejudices. Believe me, Mary Anne, my advice is good. Another such scene as there was to-day, and I should be afraid of the ending.”

“What ending?”

“That Richard might turn him out of the house.”

Miss Thornycroft tossed her head. “Richard would be capable of it.”

“Let us have peace for the rest of his sojourn here, forgetting this morning’s episode. And—Mary Anne—do not ask him to prolong his visit beyond Saturday.”

He looked with kindly earnestness into her eyes for a moment as if wishing to give impression to the concluding words, and then left her to digest them: which Miss Thornycroft was by no means inclined to do pleasantly. She was picking up the notion that she would be required to give way to her brothers on all occasions; here was even Cyril issuing his orders now! Not ask Robert Hunter to stay over Saturday!—when her whole heart had been set upon his doing it!

Playing with her neck-chain, tossing it hither and thither, she at length saw Robert Hunter come strolling home from the village, his air listless, his steps slow; just like a man who is finding time heavy on his hands.

“And not one of them to be with him!” came her passionate thought. “It *is* a shame. Bears! Why! who’s *this*?”

The exclamation—cutting short the complimentary epithet on her brothers, though it could not apply with any sort of justice to Cyril, who had been prevented by his father from following Robert Hunter—related to a Jutpoint fly and pair. Driving in at the gates, it directly faced Mary Anne Thornycroft; she bent her eyes to peer into it, and started with surprise.

“Good gracious! What can bring *her* here?”

For she recognised Lady Ellis; with a maid beside her. And yet, in that pale, haggard, worn woman, who seemed scarcely able to sit upright, there was not much trace of the imperious face of her who had made for so brief a period the Red Court her home. Illness—long-continued illness, its termination of necessity fatal—changes both the looks and the spirit.

The chaise had passed Robert Hunter at right angles: had my lady recognised him?

But a moment must be given to Cyril. On descending the stairs, he saw Richard striding out at the front door, and hastened after him.

“Where are you going, Richard?”

“Where am I going?” retorted Richard. “To Tomlett’s, if you must know. Something must be done.”

Cyril laid his calm hand on his brother's restless one, and led him off towards the plateau.

"Do nothing, Richard. You are hasty and incautious. They cannot make any discovery."

"And that fellow talking of going to sound the rocks, with his boasted engineering experience?"

"Let him go. If the square sounds as hollow as his head, what then? They can make nothing else of it. No discovery can be made from the outside; you know it *can not*; and care must be taken that they don't get in."

"Perhaps you would not care if they did," spoke Richard in his unjust passion.

"You know better," said Cyril, sadly. "However I may have wished that certain circumstances did not exist, I would so far act with you now as to ward off discovery. I would give my life, Richard, to avert pain from you all, and disgrace from the Red Court's good name. Believe me, nothing bad will come of this, if you are only cautious. But your temper is enough to ruin all—to set Hunter's suspicions on you. You should have treated it derisively, jokingly, as I did."

Richard, never brooking interference, despising

all advice, flung Cyril's arm aside, and turned off swearing, meeting Isaac, who was coming round by the plateau.

"Isaac, we are dropped upon."

"What?"

"We are dropped upon, I say."

"How? Who has done it?"

"That cursed fellow Mary Anne brought here—Hunter. He and Kyne have been putting their heads together; and, by all that's true, they have hit it hard. They had got up a suspicion of the rocks; been sounding the square rock, and found it hollow. Kyne has scented the cargo that's lying off now."

The corners of Isaac Thornycroft's mouth fell considerably. "We must get *that* in," he exclaimed. "It is double the usual value."

"I wish Hunter and the gauger were both hanging from the cliffs together!" was Richard's charitable conclusion, as he strode onwards. "It was a bad day's work for us when they moved Dangerfield. I'm on my way now to consult with Tomlett; will you come?"

Isaac turned with him. Bearing towards the plateau, but leaving it to the right—a road to the village rarely taken by any but the Thornycroft

family, as indeed nobody else had a right to take it, the waste land belonging to Mr. Thornycroft—they went on to Tomlett's, meeting Mr. Kynce en route, with whom Isaac, sunny-mannered ever, exchanged a few gay words.

Cyril meanwhile strolled across the lawn as far as the railings, and watched them away. He was deep in thought; his eyes were sadder than usual, his high, square brow was troubled.

“If this incident could but turn out a blessing!” he half murmured. “Acted upon by the fear of discovery through Kynce's suspicions, if my father would but make it a plea for bringing things to a close, while quiet opportunity remains to him! But for Richard he would have done so, as I believe, long ago.”

Turning round at the sound of wheels, Cyril saw the fly drive in. Reaching it as it drew up to the door, he recognised his stepmother. Mary Anne came out, and they helped her to alight. Hyde, every atom of surprise he possessed showing itself in his countenance, flung wide the great door. She leaned on Cyril's arm, and walked slowly. Her cheeks were hollow, her black eyes were no longer fierce, but dim; her gown sat about her thin form in folds.

“My dears, I thought your father would have had the carriage waiting for me at Jutpoint.”

“My dears!” from the once cold and haughty Lady Ellis! It was spoken in a meek, loving tone, too. Mary Anne glanced at Cyril.

“I am sure my father knew nothing of your intended arrival,” spoke Cyril; “otherwise some of us would certainly have been at Jutpoint.”

“I wrote to tell him; he ought to have had the letter this morning. I have been a little better lately, Cyril; not really better, I know that, but more capable of exertion; and I thought I should like to have a look at you all once again. I stayed two days in London for rest, and wrote yesterday.”

She passed the large drawing-rooms, and turned of her own accord into the small comfortable apartment that was formerly the school-room, and now the sitting-room of Mary Anne. Cyril drew an easy-chair to the fire, and she sat down in it, letting her travelling wraps fall from her. Sinnett, who had come in not less amazed than Hyde, picked them up.

“You are surprised to see me, Sinnett.”

“Well—yes, I am, my lady,” returned Sinnett,

who did not add that she was shocked also. "I am sorry to see you looking so poorly."

"I have come for a few days to say good-bye to you all. You can take my bonnet as well."

Sinnett went out with the things. It was found afterwards that the letter, which ought to have announced her arrival, was delayed by some error on the part of the local carrier. It was delivered in the evening.

As she sat there facing the light, the ravages disease was making showed themselves all too plainly in her wasted countenance. In frame she was a very skeleton, her hands were painfully thin, her black silk gown hung in folds on her shrunken bosom. Mary Anne put a warm footstool under her feet, and wrapped a shawl about her shoulders; Cyril brought a glass of wine, which she drank.

"I have to take a great deal of it now, five or six glasses a day, and all kinds of strengthening nourishment," she said. "Thank you, Cyril. Sometimes I lie and think of those poor people whose case is similar to mine, and who cannot get it."

How strange the words sounded from her!

Thinking for others ! Miss Thornycroft, remembering her in the past, listened in a sort of amused incredulity, but a light as of some great gladness shone in the eyes of Cyril.

As he left the room to search for his father, who had gone out, Robert Hunter entered it. Seeing a stranger there, an apparent invalid, he was quitting it again hastily when Mary Anne arrested him.

“ You need not go, Robert ; it is my step-mother, Lady Ellis. Mr. Hunter.”

At the first moment not a trace could he find of the handsome, haughty-faced woman who had beguiled him with her charms in the days gone by. Not a charm was left. She had left off using adjuncts, and her face was almost yellow ; its roundness of contour had gone ; the cheeks were hollow and wrinkled, the jaws angular. Only by the eyes, as they flashed for a moment into his with a sort of dismayed light, did he recognise her. Bowing coldly, he would have retreated, but she, recovering herself instantly, held out her hand.

“ No wonder you have forgotten me ; I am greatly changed.”

Mary Anne Thornycroft looked on with astonishment. Had they ever met before?

“Yes,” said Lady Ellis; “but he was mostly called Mr. Lake then.”

A flush dyed Robert Hunter’s brow. “I threw off the name years ago, when I threw off other things,” he said.

“What other things did you throw off?” quickly asked Mary Anne.

“Oh, many,” was the careless answer; “frivolity and idleness, amidst them.”

Perhaps he remembered that his manner and words, in the view of that wasted face and form, were needlessly ungracious, for his tone changed; he sat down, and said he was sorry to see her looking ill.

“I have been ill now for a long while; I must have been ill when I knew you,” she said; “that is, the disease was within me, but I did not suspect it. Had I taken heed of the symptoms, slight though they were, and for that cause entirely unheeded, perhaps something might have been done for me; I don’t know. As it is, I am slowly dying.”

“I hope not,” he said, in his humanity.

“You cannot hope it, Mr. Hunter. Look at me!”

Very true. Had she been all the world to him—had his whole happiness depended on his keeping her in life, he could not have hoped it. With her wan face, and eyes glistening with that peculiar glaze that tells of coming death; with her thin frame and deep, quick breath, that seemed to heave the body of her gown as though a furnace-bellows were underneath, there could be no thought of escape from the portals that were opening for her. As she sat before him leaning in the chair, the shawl thrown back from her chest, Robert Hunter looked at her and knew it.

There ensued a silence. He did not answer, and Mary Anne was much wondering at this suddenly-discovered past intimacy, never spoken of by either to her, and resenting it after the manner of women. The fire flickered its blaze aloft; the twilight deepened; but it was not yet so dark but that the plateau was distinct, and also the figure of the preventive man at the edge, pacing it. Lady Ellis suddenly broke the stillness.

“Do the people believe in the ghost still, Mary Anne?”

“I suppose so. There has been no change that I know of.”

“I meant—has anything been discovered?”

Mary Anne Thornycroft lifted her eyes. “How do you mean, discovered? What is there to discover?”

“Not anything, I dare say,” she said. “But it used to strike me as very singular—this superstitious belief in these enlightened times—and a feeling was always on my mind that something would occur to explain it away. Have you heard of it?” she asked, directing her eyes to Robert Hunter.

“Somewhat. There is a difficulty, I hear, in keeping the preventive men on the plateau after dusk. What it is they precisely fear, I do not know.”

“Neither did I ever know,” she observed, dreamily. “The curious part of it to me always was, that Mr. Thornycroft and his sons appeared to fear it.”

Before Miss Thornycroft, who sat in silence, the subject was not pursued. Lady Ellis started a more open one, and inquired after Mrs. Chester.

“She is living in Paris,” said Robert Hunter.

“At least—she has been living there; but I am not sure that she is still. A few days ago I had a letter from her, in which she said she was about to change her residence to Brussels.”

He did not add that the letter was one of Mrs. Chester's usual ones—complaining grievously of hard times, and the impossibility of “getting along.” Somehow she seemed not to be able to do that anywhere. She had two hundred a year, and was always plunging into schemes to increase her income. They would turn out well at first, according to her report, promising nothing less than a speedy fortune; and then would come a downfall. In this recent letter, she had implored of Robert Hunter to “lend” her fifty pounds to set her going in Brussels, to which capital she was on the wing, with an excellent opportunity of establishing a first-class school. He sent the money, never expecting to see it again.

“Are her children with her?” questioned Lady Ellis.

“Only Fanny. The boys are at school in England. And Anna—you remember Anna?”

“I should think I do, poor girl. The slave of the whole house.”

“ Anna is here on a visit.”

“ *Here !*”

“ I mean at Coastdown. She is staying with a Captain and Mrs. Copp, who are some slight relatives of hers.”

“ I have thought of Anna as teacher in a school. Mrs. Chester said she should place her in one.”

“ She is a teacher. This visit is only a temporary one, prolonged on account of Anna’s health. She was with Miss Jupp.”

With the last word, all the reminiscences, as connected with that lady’s name and the past, rose up in the mind of Robert Hunter—of a certain Christmas-day, when Mary Jupp had brought some shame home to him : perhaps also to her of the faded face sitting opposite. It brought shame to him still ; but, seeing that faded face, he was vexed to have inadvertently mentioned it.

“ Mary Anne, I think I will go to my room. The fire must have burnt up now. No, don’t come with me ; I would be quiet for a little while.”

As she got up from the chair, she staggered. Robert Hunter, who was crossing the room to

open the door for her, stopped and offered his arm. He could do no less in common pity: but the time had been when he registered a mental vow that never again should the arm of that woman rest within his.

“Thank you: just to the foot of the stairs. I have but little strength left, and the journey to-day has temporarily taken away that. Are you getting on well in your profession, Mr. Hunter?”

“Oh, yes. My prospects are very fair.”

Sinnett happened to be in the hall; her mistress called to her, took her arm, and quitted that of Robert Hunter. He returned to Mary Anne, who was rather sulky still. What with the scene in the afternoon, with the unexpected and not over-welcome appearance of her step-mother, and with this mysterious acquaintanceship, about which nothing had been said to her, the young lady was not in so amiable a mood as usual.

“When did you know Lady Ellis?” she abruptly began after an interval of silence. “And where?”

“Some years ago; she was staying, for a few months with my half-sister, Mrs. Chester, at Guild.”

“At Guild; yes, I know; I saw her there when I went over with papa. But I was not aware that you were intimate there.”

Robert Hunter had never spoken of that past time in any way to Mary Anne. It happened that Anna Chester had not.

“I went over to Guild sometimes. I was living at Katterley, seven miles off.”

“Was that in your wife’s time?”

“Yes.”

“It is strange you never told me you knew my stepmother.”

“It never occurred to me to tell you. Business matters have so entirely occupied my thoughts since, that those old days seem well-nigh blotted out of them.”

“Were she and your wife great friends?”

“No. My wife did not like her.”

Robert Hunter was standing at the window, looking out in the nearly faded twilight. He could not fail to perceive by the tone of her voice that Mary Anne was feeling displeased at something. But her better nature was returning to her, and she went and stood by him. He held out his arm, as he had done once or twice before when they were thus standing together:

and she slipped her hand within it. The fire had burnt down to dulness, emitting scarcely any light: the preventive man could no longer be seen on the plateau.

“How dark it is getting, Robert!”

“Yes; but I think it will be a fine night. There’s a star or two twinkling out.”

Very, very conscious was each, as they stood there. In these silent moments, with the semi-darkness around, love, if it exists, must make itself felt. Love within, love around, love everywhere; the atmosphere teeming with it, the soul sick to trembling with its own bliss. It seemed to them that the beating of their own hearts was alone heard, and that too audibly. Thus they stood; how long it was hard to say. The room grew darker, the stars came out clearer. The softness of the hour was casting its spell on them both; never had love been so present and so powerful. In very desperation Mary Anne broke the silence, her tone sweet and low, her voice sunk to a half-whisper.

“Robert, how is it you have never spoken to me of your wife?”

“I did not know you would like it. And besides——”

“ Besides what ? ”

“ I have not cared to speak of her since her death. A feeling has been upon me that I never should speak of her again, except perhaps to one person.”

“ And that person ? ”

“ My second wife. Should I be fortunate enough ever to marry one.”

He turned involuntarily and looked at her. And then looked away again hastily. It might be dangerous just now. But that look, brief as it was, had shown him her glowing, downcast countenance.

“ What was her name ? ”

“ Clara. She was little more than a child—a gentle, loving child, unfit to encounter the blasts of the world. One, ruder than ordinary, struck her and carried her away.”

“ Did you love her very much ? ”

He paused, hesitated, and then turned to her again. “ Am I to tell you, Mary Anne ? ”

“ As you like,” she whispered, the blushes deepening. “ Of course not, if it be painful to you.”

“ I did not love her ; taking the word in its truest extent. I thought I did, and it is only

within a few months—yes, I may as well tell you all—that I have learnt my mistake.”

Mary Anne Thornycroft glanced at him in surprise. “Only within a few months! How is that?”

“Because I have learnt to love another. To love—do you understand, Mary Anne?—to *love*. With my very heart and soul; with my best and entire being. Such love cannot come twice to any man, and it teaches him much. It has taught me, amidst other knowledge, that I liked my wife as one likes a dear child, but not otherwise.”

Mary Anne Thornycroft’s hand trembled as it lay upon his arm. In her bewilderment of feelings, in the tumultuous sensation born of this great love that was filling all her mind, she nearly lost command of her words, and spoke at random.

“But why should this be told only to your second wife?”

“Because I should wish to show her that my true love is hers; hers only in spite of my early marriage. The rest of the world it concerns not, and will never be spoken of to them.”

“You assume confidently that you will feel this love for your second wife?”

“I shall if I marry her. *That* is by no means

sure. Unless I marry *her*, the one to whom my love is given, I shall never marry at all."

Ah, where was the use of keeping up this farce? It was like children playing at bo-peep with the handkerchief over the face. The other is there, but we pretend to know it not. With their hearts wildly beating in unison—with her hand shaking visibly in its emotion—with the consciousness that concealment was no longer concealment but full and perfect knowledge, stood they. Mary Anne rejoined, her words more and more at random, her wits utterly gone a-woolgathering.

"And why should you not marry her?"

"I am not in a position to ask for her of her father."

It was all over in a moment. Save that he turned suddenly to look at her, and laid his hand on hers as if to still its trembling, Mary Anne Thornycroft doubted ever after if she had not made the first movement. Only a moment, and her head was lying on his breast, his clasped arms were holding her there, their pulses were tingling with rapture, their lips clinging together in a long and ardent kiss.

“Dare I speak to you, Mary Anne?” he asked, hoarsely.

“You know you may.”

“Oh, my love—my love! It is you I would, if possible, make my wife. None other. But I may not ask for you of Mr. Thornycroft. He would not deem my position justified it.”

“I will wait for you, Robert.”

Only by bending his head could he catch the low words. His cheek lay on hers; he strained her closer, if that were possible, to his beating heart.

“It may be for years!”

“Let it be years and years. I ask no better than to wait for you.”

The stars shone out brighter in the sky; the fire in the room went quite down; and nothing more could be heard from those living in their new and pure dream, but snatches of the sweet refrain—

“My love, my love!”

17/2/9



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 056549337