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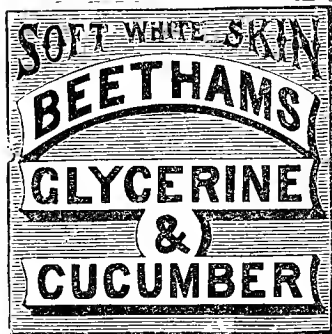
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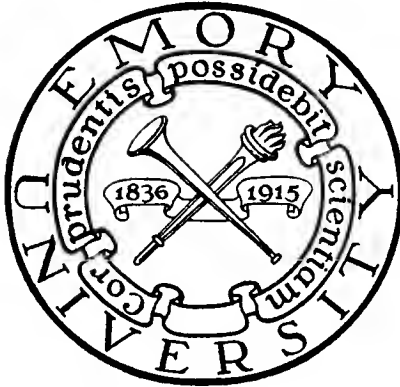
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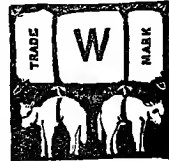
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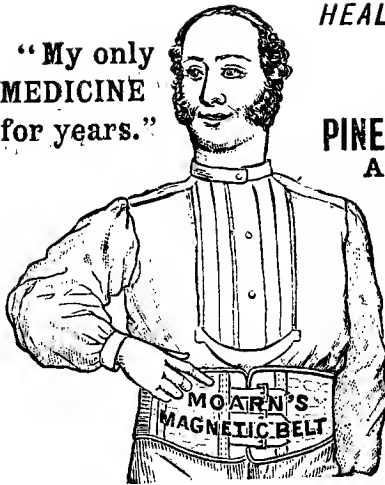
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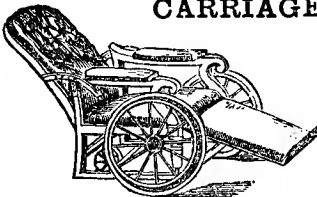
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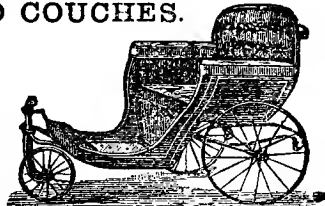
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FANCY FREE





# FANCY FREE

BY

CHARLES GIBBON

AUTHOR OF "ROBIN GRAY," "QUEEN OF THE MEADOW,"  
"THE GOLDEN SHAFT," ETC.



*A NEW EDITION*

London

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1886



## CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. TWENTY-ONE ... ..	1
II. LEO'S PRISONER ... ..	13
III. MISTRESS MEG'S OPINION ... ..	26
IV. MEDWYN'S SECRET ... ..	33
V. SPECULATIONS ... ..	41
VI. DAVIE ... ..	48
VII. THE FIRST ARROW ... ..	55
VIII. AT HAZARD ... ..	62
IX. THE GUESTS ... ..	70
X. AN INTERESTING VISITOR ... ..	80
XI. THE PUZZLE ... ..	86
XII. THE EXCURSION ... ..	93
XIII. THE NEW LIGHT ... ..	105
XIV. BETWEEN TWO FIRES... ..	110
XV. CHANGES ... ..	119
XVI. COLBOROUGH... ..	128
XVII. CALAMITY ... ..	140
XVIII. EGLINTON'S TRIAL ... ..	151
XIX. FATHER AND SON ... ..	158
XX. DAVIE IN A QUANDARY ... ..	169
XXI. CONSIDERATIONS ... ..	176
XXII. A BONFIRE IN THE BREAKFAST-ROOM	184

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXIII.	“THE LETTER TO INDIA” ...	191
XXIV	UNDER A CLOUD ... ..	196
XXV	AT BAY ... ..	204
XXVI.	RECALLED TO LIFE ...	213
XXVII.	GLADNESS AND SADNESS ...	222
XXVIII.	IN PERPLEXITY ... ..	227
XXIX.	ON THE TRACK ... ..	235
XXX.	HIDE AND SEEK ... ..	241
XXXI.	THE ESCAPE ... ..	249
XXXII.	NELL'S AFFIRMATION ...	255
XXXIII.	HESITATIONS ... ..	262
XXXIV	A DIFFICULT POSITION ...	270
XXXV	A STROKE OF BUSINESS ...	282
XXXVI.	CONFUSION ... ..	288
XXXVII.	A LUCKY MISTAKE ... ..	299
XXXVIII.	A COUNCIL OF WAR ...	307
XXXIX.	A REVELATION ... ..	311

# FANCY FREE.

## CHAPTER I.

### TWENTY-ONE.

SHE stood at the open window, hands linked behind her, a piece of sugar held between her lips, and a coaxing smile in her large blue eyes, as she watched a canary perched on the top of his cage. The bird glanced with a critical turn of the head, now at the pretty temptress, and again at the open window which offered him freedom.

He yielded, fluttered down to her shoulder—then, after one or two sly glances, darted at the sugar, snatched it from her lips and flew into his cage with the prize.

She laughed, a fine healthy girlish laugh of triumph.

“Ah, birdie, you like sugar better than liberty! Silly thing! If I had been you

I would have been off through the window and taken my chance with the sparrows and crows. You don't know what a merry life they lead, flying away wherever they please and when they please. They don't get sugar, perhaps, but they don't care, and neither would I. You are a fat, lazy bird, and have no notion of what your wings were meant for. I should like to be a bird."

"To fly away, Davie?"

"I suppose so," she replied, without turning to the gentleman who had just entered the room, and closing the door of the cage as she continued: "I have such a longing to be able to flit about all over the world like the birds!"

"But they have to encounter storms and dangers in their way as we have in ours."

"That would be the fun of it."

"You think so now."

"And will always."

He shook his head, smiling at her humour.

"You do not know what the world is."

"But I want to know," she answered, as if wondering at his stupidity

"Have you been so very unhappy here, then?"

She turned to him quickly — a clear honest face, fair, soft features surmounted by thick bands of silky hair of a light sand colour.

There was no sign of appreciation of his pain in her expression, only a dreamy sort of wonder that he did not understand her vague desire to step out of the dull routine of the life she had been leading.

“What could make you ask such a question, Medwyn? I have always been happy here, and since—” (a little hesitation at this point, because she was touching a sad memory) “—and since your mother died, nobody could have been kinder than you. You have done everything for me that she could have wished; you have given me the best tutors; I know all about the geology of Lochore; I can read French, although I can’t speak it; I know the multiplication table, and the dates of the reigns of all the Kings and Queens since the arrival of William the Conqueror; and I can make porridge and bannocks! Only, sometimes,” she went on, laughing, “I wonder what it is to be in a ball-room, and passing through all the gaieties Aunt Wybrant writes about, and I make up my mind to run



away But then, I like the old place, and, with all its drowsy dulness, I feel as if I could never leave it."

"Davie, will you——"

He had taken her hand and was speaking with unusual earnestness, when her look of simple inquiry checked him. He patted the hand, and looking into her eyes with a suppressed laugh at some joke that was only visible to himself, he said quietly—

"You will soon have an opportunity of acting very much as your own will dictates."

"That will be splendid," she cried, without the least idea of the struggle through which the man had so quickly passed, or of the emotion he had overcome.

He saw that, and it helped him to speak composedly

"Do you know what day to-morrow is?"

"The sixth of August, of course, and my birthday."

"Your twenty-first, and according to your father's will you are to pass a year with Mrs. Wybrant, and then you are to determine whether you are to remain under her care, or to adopt some other

plan of which your guardians, Mr. Bonsfield and myself, may approve."

"And that is what you call being left to follow the dictates of my own will! Birdie, birdie—I suppose you were wise to take the sugar and go back to your cage."

"You are not afraid that your guardians would interfere with any reasonable wish you might express?"

"That's just it—any reasonable wish! But suppose I were to do something that was not reasonable?"

"I am sure you will never do that."

"I don't know Mr. Bonsfield is too busy with his farming, and shooting, and fishing, and his wife, to care a pin about what I might do. He would say 'All right' if I proposed a trip to the moon, and leave me to find the way myself. Mrs. Wybrant would be delighted by anything ridiculous; but you——"

She paused. She had been talking gaily, running on without heeding what she was saying until she came to this point; and now she felt awkward, for the grave quiet eyes of Medwyn Corbett were fixed upon her with an expression of amazed curiosity and some sadness.

She went close to him and rested her head on his arm.

“You would not permit me to do anything foolish,” she said, completing the sentence.

“Not if I could prevent it, Davie. And yet I sometimes think that if you very much desired it, I would yield to anything you proposed.”

“Then I should think you as big a fool as myself—and bigger, because you are old enough to be wise.”

“I never felt myself so old as I do now,” he said, passing his fingers through his bristly black hair, in which there were a few streaks of silver.

He was only forty; but then she was only on the eve of twenty-one, when even five or ten years appear to mark the difference between youth and age.

“But you are not so very old, Medwyn, after all. Why, we used to romp together as if you were a boy like myself—I mean, a boy just as I was a girl; and I forgot you were a man. That was before your mother died. You seemed to grow very old after that, and I don’t wonder, she was so good and loving, and, forgive me, Medwyn, I did not mean to pain you.”

“Go on. I like to hear you speak kindly of my mother, because I wish to believe

that I have done for you all that she would have wished me to do."

"And you have—indeed, you have!"

She rested her head on his shoulder with the confident affection of a daughter leaning upon a parent.

"I have tried to be kind," he said, very quietly. "Before my mother left us, seven years ago—how short the time seems to me, and yet how long!—before she left us, she gave you to my care, as your father had done. She desired me to do all that might seem best for your future happiness; and I have tried to do it. But Bonsfield left me to act entirely on my own judgment——"

"Just like him," she interrupted, with a laugh.

"Sometimes I think that it would have been better if, instead of educating you at home, I had sent you to a school either in England or on the Continent; you would have been better prepared to enter the world to which Mrs. Wybrant will introduce you.

"I have thought of that too," she said honestly; "for we are very quiet here, and often the moors, and the loch, and the hills have seemed to me as if they were all asleep; and I have had a silly

fancy that I was like the sleeping beauty in the wood, and that by-and-by I would waken up in some bright world of sunshine, with a gay cavalier who had broken through the spell of the wicked fairy, waiting to carry me off to the realms of wonder and delight. And yet I love the dear old place—and the dogs, and the cows, and the horses—and I don't know how I could manage to live away from them."

"You do not include me in the list of your pet animals."

"You!" she cried, "I like you best of them all!"

"Oh, Davie, Davie, what a reckless speech! How long is it since you discovered that I was your first favourite?"

"As long ago as I can remember; but I discovered it first on that day when Meg refused to let me join the party going to Aberdeen, and you persuaded her to yield the point. Then I thought you the boldest and grandest man in all the world to dispute Meg's will on my account. And you behaved so pretty that day. Do you see this?"

She showed him a little onyx cross with a centre of opals which was suspended to a simple necklet of black velvet. He smiled: it was very pleasant

to the man to listen to all this prattle, although he knew that it was no more than the frank confession of a childish admiration.

“You have preserved it well.”

“Because I am very fond of it, and when you gave it to me I would have kissed you if we had not been in a shop in Union Street.”

“That was a loss to me.”

“Was it?—then, why don't you wish me many happy returns of my birthday?”—this with a roguish smile.

He kissed her on the brow

“May every new birthday bring you happiness enough to compensate you for the youth that is passing away”

“You speak as solemnly as a minister at a funeral,” she said gaily, and moved towards an old-fashioned cabinet that stood in the corner.

“Because I know what it is to wish for youth,” he continued sadly, “to wish to be able to begin life again. Some day, perhaps, you will understand the feeling; I fear neither man nor woman can escape it—we always see so much more clearly what we ought to have done than what we ought to do.”

“That's too deep into history for me.

You are gloomy—here is something to make you merry. Guess what I have been doing this morning. You can't? Well, I have been looking over your birthday gifts, and there is such a pile of them, for I have preserved them all."

"What made you do that?"

"I don't know—because you gave them, I suppose." She opened the cabinet. "Here is a big doll first."

"A pretty one, I hope."

"I thought it lovely! But you see its nose is smashed, the chin has melted, the eyes have fallen out, and its beauty 'is a' wede away'" She sang the last words, and continued to hum the pathetic air of "The Flowers of the Forest" as she gazed with a kind of comical gravity at the wreck of beauty. Then, "I wonder if I shall be like that when I am old."

"Impossible," said Medwyn, standing behind.

She was sitting on a low stool gazing dreamily at her treasures.

"I am glad you think so. Here is 'Sandford and Merton,' and 'Watts's Hymns,' and 'A Good Book for Good Girls——'"

"Surely I never gave you that?"

"You did, and I deserved it, for you

see how nice and clean it is, and how few of the leaves have been cut. I used to look at it and wonder what it was all about, but whenever I began to read, I grew sleepy, or wanted to speak to the dogs or something. So I never learned what a good book or a good girl was."

"What a fool you must have thought me!" he muttered with impatience—thinking of himself.

"A fool!—why?"

"To give you such silly presents."

"I didn't think them silly; I was very proud of them, and used to watch for them, and wonder what would come next."

"And which did you like best?"

"I scarcely know; each was delightful in its turn. But I think I liked the cross best, for when your mother asked where it came from, you told her that you had bought it for your little sweetheart; and I thought it was so nice to be the sweetheart of a big grown-up man. Wasn't it funny?"

"Yes, if you thought so. But I must not call you sweetheart any more."

"Why not?"

She asked the question wonderingly. She was not thinking of the different meaning which the title bore when ad-



dressed to a child and to a woman of twenty-one.

“I must not call you sweetheart any more,” he answered, laughing, “because you will soon have others who will have a right to call you so, and whom you will like better——”

“Oh, Medwyn, what nonsense you are talking!”

“You will not think so by-and-by. Let me finish my nonsense. To-morrow my personal care of you ends, although I shall still remain one of the trustees of your fortune. Now, I want you to promise me something, Davie.”

“Yes.”

She answered mechanically, for she was trying to solve the problem of the change which had taken place, and had separated her from her brother and guardian, and which was to remove her from the place that was always “home” in her eyes.

“Although I am no longer to direct your ways, I want you to promise me that whenever you are bothered about anything, or whenever you are meditating any important step—marriage, for instance—that you will make me your confidant.”

"Of course I will. Who else should I go to?"

"You promise that you will never be afraid to tell me all that may concern your life?"

"Yes, I will tell you everything," she answered dreamily, for she was still busy with her problem.

"That's a bargain, then. Now, suppose you put on your hat and come for a walk round the loch. Mr. Bonsfield and Mrs. Wybrant cannot arrive before seven, so Meg is to have dinner at eight, and we have a long day before us. How long will it take you to get ready?"

"Ten minutes."

"You will find me at the door."

She locked the cabinet and went away, still dreaming.

## CHAPTER II.

### LEO'S PRISONER.

TWENTY-ONE, and she was to begin the world as a grown woman; at liberty to choose her own way in life, and provided with a fortune which seemed to her sufficient for a princess! She ran up the

stairs to get her hat and jacket. There was a kind of music in her blood, and her steps were light and joyful.

She was to leave the place in which she had grown up, the people with whom she had been so long associated, and now she discovered that place and people were very dear to her. Davina Morrison—whose awkward, half-masculine name was always softened into “Davie” by her friends—had a grateful nature, and she felt some twinges of pain at the pleasure she found in the mysterious attractions of the new world which to-morrow was to throw open to her. Yet she could not help the thrills of joy with which she thought of the undiscovered glories of life in cities. She had read novels, and from them she knew that the world was full of lovers and rivals for the hand of every woman. It would be such a delightful experience to find ever so many fond swains fighting for the honour of her hand. There were no duels now; that was a pity, for it would have been such fun to know that there were a couple of gentlemen anxious to blow each other’s brains out, all for love of her! Then she would laugh at them and tell them what fools they were,

because she did not care about either of them and had fully made up her mind to be an old maid, giving all her attention to cats and dogs. That would be fun!

Then there was her boundless wealth—a thousand a year entirely at her own command! How could she spend it all? What ecstasy there would be in being able to dress as she pleased, and to play the good fairy to anybody who was in trouble about money! There was Sandy White, with his dozen children, his farm of sixty acres, and his rheumatism—she could relieve him of the difficulty he was always in about his rent, and she could enable him to carry out his cherished idea of sending his seventh son to the University to prepare for the Kirk. With such boundless wealth as hers, what was there that she could not do to make others happy?

What a glorious thing to be twenty-one, with riches galore, and free to use them as you please! That was the burthen of her thought, and the visions and hopes which it stirred within her were so bright that they dazzled and confused her.

This was ecstasy. Her movements were usually of a somewhat sedate order;

but the exhilarating air of the morning, and the excitement of the changed conditions of her life, made her feel incapable of walking steadily: she felt that she must dance and sing.

The morning was very bright and beautiful. The few brown leaves here and there imparted colour to the landscape, and suggested nothing of decay. The morning of her life, too, was unclouded.

As she stepped out into the sunlight on the lawn there was a chorus of dogs. First, her three favourites: Chio, a delicate Italian greyhound, who had a trick of rolling himself up in his mistress's shawl, and lying on the couch in her room until she happened to be going out—a fact which he discovered by some instinct, for he never moved when she was only going from one part of the house to another; next, Pab, a shaggy little terrier whose customary place was on the mat before the door of whatever room Davie might be in, and there he kept strict guard, very chary of giving entrance to any unknown visitor; and then there was Lulu, a tiny black and tan terrier, who skipped about everywhere with extraordinary vivacity, and who on occasions of mirth, such as the beginning of a walk, contrived with

a shrill voice, and a silver bell pendant to her neck, to make as much noise as the other two.

In addition to the din which these three made, there was the deep bay of Leo, a mastiff who was chained at the back of the house, and who knew by the voices of Chio, Pab, and Lulu, that an excursion was meditated.

“I must have Leo with us this morning,” cried Davie, as she saw Medwyn approaching. “We must make this a holiday for the dogs.”

Leo was only permitted to leave his chain on fête days, when Davie was ready to take care of him, because he had a droll habit of seizing any stranger he might find within the precincts of Balnagairn, and marching him up to the house to be examined by the butler or some person of authority. If the stranger happened to be a ragged tramp, he was lugged along unceremoniously; but if he happened to be well dressed he was conducted quietly, although resolutely, by the coat-tail or sleeves. This habit was inconvenient when he was accompanying ladies, and had led to many ridiculous scenes.

Leo rushed round the house with a loud “wowf” of joy, dashed across the lawn,

clearing a large bed of geraniums at one bound, and returned to Davie at a jumping gallop, proclaiming his delight with a big voice, as if he knew that he owed his liberty to her. He performed elephantine gambols round about her in expression of his gratitude. The other dogs barked at him, and jumped upon him, risking their lives every moment under his heavy paws; but with the careless pride of strength he contrived to avoid them, and spared even Lulu, who, with the spitefulness of a little nature, snapped at him and strained to reach his neck, interfering with his movements, but not in the least disturbing his good humour.

“Off!” cried Davie, and Leo sped down the avenue, Pab, Chio, and Lulu barking in full chase after him.

But the three soon halted and rejoined their mistress.

“You had better walk on,” said Corbett, “Mathers wants to speak to me. I shall overtake you.”

He entered the house, and she walked slowly across the lawn. Pab fell into his place, walking sedately at her heels; Chio and Lulu made excursions to right and left and returned barking, looking up to her as if for approval of their enterprise.

As she entered the avenue she was startled to see Leo holding a strange gentleman by the skirt of his coat and leading him towards her.

He was a young, handsome fellow, with dark curly hair and a black moustache. After a momentary awkwardness, he laughed frankly as if amused by the position in which he was discovered by the lady.

He patted the dog's head and tried to coax him to release his gripe; but Leo eyed him with calm resolution, and would not be bribed. The stranger's good-humoured submission to his fate amused Davie, and made her feel the more annoyed with the dog.

"Come here, Leo, you bad dog," she cried, her face flushing.

Leo very leisurely obeyed, and took his place by her side, still eyeing the stranger with an expression which hinted that he had better be on his good behaviour.

The young fellow, laughing, lifted his hat. "I have to thank you for rescuing me from this ridiculous position. Your dog is a capital fellow, and was as civil as a bailiff who expects a tip, when he arrested me. But he must be rather alarming to strangers who are not accustomed to dogs."



“He is usually chained, sir, and I am sorry that he has been so rude, for he has just obtained his liberty at my request. But he is very gentle and good-natured.”

“I would not like to offend him, though; for those enormous jaws of his would make an ugly impression if he cared to use them, and I must own that I am very well pleased to find myself free again. I see you are fond of dogs.”

Chio and Lulu were sniffing round the stranger suspiciously; he spoke to them and tried to coax them into friendship. Pab remained in the background, growling in an undertone which threatened to become a furious bark if the man advanced a step farther.

“Be quiet,” commanded Davie, and the dogs obeyed.

“I never found dogs so unwilling to make friends with me before,” said the stranger, still laughing, and without the least sign of annoyance. “I suppose it is because they are faithful watchmen and know that they have a treasure to guard. I presume I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Morrison?”

“Yes.”

“Then I shall always be Leo’s debtor for the introduction. But I must com-

plete his work by telling you my name is Eglinton."

She bowed.

"Mr. Corbett will be pleasantly surprised, for he did not expect you till evening."

As she spoke Corbett appeared, and he did look surprised to see Davie and the visitor together. While cordially shaking the latter's hand, he asked—

"How did you manage to get here so early?"

"I was just going to explain to Miss Morrison. I contrived to reach Aboyne last night, slept at the inn, and this morning, being in the humour for a good walk, thought I would indulge the humour and take you by surprise."

"I am glad to see you, and you look as if hard work agreed with you."

"So it does. Hard work is the best medicine for a fellow who is inclined to be so lazy as I am. Your dog there has presented me to Miss Morrison in a funny way, and she has reversed the order of romance, for in this case it is the beautiful lady who rescued the knight from the dragon of the enchanted forest. Miss Morrison has evidently quite forgotten me."

“It is nearly ten years since you were here, and she was a child then.”

“But I remember Mr. Eglinton,” said Davie. “You have so often spoken about him that he comes like an old friend.”

“I hope you will always regard me as one, for I am anxious to feel that you have forgiven me for shooting your tame fox. I have been haunted by his ghost ever since, and am filled with shame and remorse whenever I think of the pride with which I marched into the house with my prize, then I see you sitting on the floor, crying over your dead pet. But, I assure you, the fellow was prowling about the hen-house as thief-like as if he had never known better than his kindred. Besides, who could have imagined that you had contrived to tame such an animal? You hated me then, did you not?”

“I did, with all my heart, for I was very proud of the amazement he caused when people saw him following me about just like a dog.”

“It was all a part of his cunning. He knew that under your protection he had the free use of the poultry yard, and that was much more agreeable than

taking his chance of an occasional chicken, with every gun in the house ready to slay him. I don't believe you tamed him after all—he managed to deceive you.”

“I am afraid I shall not be able to forgive you even now if you talk so!”

“Forget, then, if you cannot forgive—the fox is gone, the goose remains, and that is some satisfaction, however poor the goose may be.”

In George Eglinton's manner there was a frankness, approaching to boldness, which was apt to make strangers shrink from him; but they soon came to like him, for it was evident that he was perfectly honest in whatever he said, although it was equally evident that he uttered the thought which turned uppermost without the least reflection.

“We had better say no more about the fox and the goose,” interrupted Corbett. “I suppose you would like to go into the house and have a rest?”

“Not at all; I can do ten miles without fatigue, and I would much prefer to accompany you, if you will permit me.”

“Come, then; we are only going for a turn round by the loch. The wagonette is going to Aboyne in the after-

noon to take up Mrs. Wybrant and some other friends. That will be time enough for your traps ? ”

“ Thank you, that will do excellently I am glad I came in time to have a quiet walk and gossip with you before the others arrive—it gives me a capital opportunity to make my peace with Miss Morrison.”

Corbett did not reply to this, for, whilst glad to see his friend, his early arrival had caused him some disappointment. He had calculated on spending this morning alone with Davie, revisiting familiar haunts and recalling their happy associations, which in future could only appear to him through a mist of sad reflections.

His disappointment became almost chagrin as he found Eglinton, with the blissful inconsiderateness of youth, taking possession of everything and everybody. He talked and seemed to incite Davie to talk as she had never done before. At the same time he kept up a parenthetical conversation with the dogs, so that when they passed from the grounds on to the moor, even Leo seemed to accept him as a friend ; as for the flighty Lulu and the shy Chio, they had long ago surrendered to his fascination. But Pab was “ dour,”

and apparently as far as ever from being satisfied with the new comer.

Davie could not help being impressed by the glamour which the mere gaiety of this thoughtless youth threw over the place. She had been so long accustomed to the quietude of the moorland, the dark silence of the loch, and the solemn grandeur of the distant mountains, that at first she was almost startled by the noise Eglinton seemed to make. Presently, however, his strange chatter amused her, and by-and-by the novelty of his manner and conversation interested her. She laughed at his stale jokes, which were all new to her. The sweet eyes opened with an expression of quiet wonder, and were turned full upon him as he spoke of the merry life in London, in Paris, Berlin, New York, Boston, and Saratoga, with a glance at the pleasant wildness of San Francisco and its neighbourhood.

It was like a new chapter of Gulliver's Travels to her, but it was so much more enjoyable because it was all true, and it was what she herself might one day see.

“But do you really mean that the people in California go about with revolvers in their pockets, and are ready

to shoot one another when they are angry?"

"They all carry revolvers, some in the breast, some in the side pocket, and some in pockets made for the purpose behind them. So when you are in a row and see a fellow putting his hand anywhere, you cry 'hands up,' and if he doesn't hold up on the moment, you fire, or the chances are you'll get a pellet yourself. I saw a fellow knocked over in the main street in broad daylight, only on account of a quarrel about a bet."

Davie shuddered, but was still interested. Corbett and Pab marched on in silence. The fun was much too fast for them, the danger too apparent.

### CHAPTER III.

#### MISTRESS MEG'S OPINION.

DAVIE felt as if the spirit incarnate of restlessness had taken possession of the whole place. Even Miss Corbett, the sharp, stern, and not-to-be-contradicted commander-in-chief at Balnagairn—Meg, at whose bidding Davie and Medwyn went and came submissively—even Meg

was for a little while dumb and meek in the presence of this youth, with his boisterous clatter. He seemed to have been everywhere and done everything, and he seemed to know everybody. He made Miss Corbett for a moment anxious about the lunch—a sensation she had rarely experienced since the days of her youth—how long ago!—when she first took the reins of government into her hands.

That was a triumph for Eglinton, if he had only known it, and there was a wicked twinkle of amusement in Davie's eyes as she watched Meg's wonderment, followed by a very sharp commentary on the remarkable changes in the young men of the present day when compared with the young men of her day. For Meg was one of the few sensible maiden ladies who are not afraid of their age being known.

She was forty-nine. Her black hair showed many streaks of grey: it was brought close down the sides of her cheeks, and wound in a thin wisp at the back. She wore no cap, but a very high and broad tortoise-shell comb secured the wisp, and rose over her head in such a formidable way that Davie had christened it the "Tower of Babel." It certainly



shook in a very funny manner at any offender who had succeeded in rousing Mistress Meg so far as to induce her to "speak her mind."

Her face was fresh and handsome, although the features were of a masculine cast; the expression, that of one who had serious business in hand; and her keen grey eyes were always on the look-out for something to set right—a speck of dust here, a chair out of place there, an anti-macassar or a table-cloth turned awry, and she never was so happy as when hard at work at something, "redding-up" everything everywhere, frequently to the great discomfort of her brother. He disliked fuss of all kinds; he hated the prim fastidiousness which insisted upon a chair being always placed in a particular position, as if it had been intended for looking at and not for use. Whenever he saw his sister in one of her "redding-up" humours, he made his way to the library and shut himself in; or he whistled for the dogs, and took a long walk across the moors.

It must not be thought, however, that Mistress Meg was exactly fussy. She was simply imbued—as so many of her old-fashioned country-women were and are

imbued—with the spirit of the martinet ; she would have everything in order and in its right place. Rebellion against this law was a capital offence and involved severe punishment—to say nothing of her “reasoning” with the offender, which was the worst part of the punishment.

Davie was frequently subjected to these “reasonings,” and she would listen with a demure face and downcast eyes. She had learned somehow to call Mistress Meg, Aunt, although the relationship was that of cousins, and in her affectionate way she always used the homely form of the word, “Aunty” So, whilst she was submitting to the lectures, she would only reply at appropriate intervals, “Yes, Aunty,” “I understand, Aunty,” and so forth. But generally there was a light in the corners of her eyes, and an occasional movement of the lips, as if the fun of the words of wisdom that were being poured upon her affected her more towards laughter than towards serious reflection.

As lunch proceeded Mistress Meg recovered her self-possession, and in her own opinion she successfully and repeatedly “set down” this chattering young man, Eglinton. He, unfortunately, turned upon the subject of French

cookery, and was beginning to describe some special dinner in the Palais Royal; but Meg could not stand that, for with the help of "Meg Dods," and her own skill, she could defy all the French cooks in Christendom to produce such a dinner as on special occasions was to be found on the table at Balnagairn.

"Awa' wi' your whigmaleeries and puddocks' legs. I mind fine when you could sup your parritch and milk in the kitchen with the herd-laddie, and be thankful for them. Ay, and you looked a heap bonnier then than you do now, with all your travels."

"That's prejudice, Miss Corbett," answered Eglinton, laughing, "but the porridge is a substantial fact, and on one occasion at least the remembrance of it made my teeth water, and it seemed to me the most delicious food that ever man had tasted."

"I'm glad you had as muckle judgment as to think about them."

"I could not help myself—for I was starving at the time."

"Ay, and when was that?"

"Only last year, when I was in the States. I was out with an exploring party in the Yellowstone Region—went

into the pine forest in search of a path, lost my way, lost my companions, and for seven days lived upon nothing but thistle roots."

"You seemed to have thriven brawly on your natural provender," observed Mistress Meg dryly, congratulating herself upon again setting down this boisterous young man.

Davie's face flushed, and Meg's quick eyes noted the change of colour. Medwyn moved uneasily in his chair, and nodded to his guest as if he would say—"You have got it this time, my friend; but grin and bear."

That was just what Eglinton did. He gave instant relief to Davie and Medwyn by the heartiness of his laughter.

"That scores a bull's-eye for you, Miss Corbett," he said, still laughing; "we are just that fu' o' wut we cannot help saying clever things. But, mind, I mark it against you, and shall have my revenge. I shall ask you to give me porridge to-morrow, made by your own hands, and you shall see that I have neither lost my liking for it nor my appreciation of your skill in making it."

Meg was flattered, but half suspicious that he was making fun of her, and the

Tower of Babel shook at him warningly

“I’ll make the porridge, but I’ll have you to sup them.”

“You shall not be disappointed.”

Davie and Medwyn were relieved by this comical treaty between the opposing forces, and the meal was continued merrily; Davie and Eglinton chatting away like old friends who are delighted to meet again after a long separation, and Mistress Meg breaking in occasionally with some sharp comment upon their conversation.

Medwyn rarely spoke, and when he did so it was with an effort. Something was troubling the man. He was glad when they all rose from the table.

“I’ll get you a cigar,” he said, “and we can have a smoke outside.”

He went into the library, whither he found Meg had preceded him. There was an anxious expression on her face.

“I’m no enterteened with that young man; he’s no what he was, and he has come here to steal.”

“Steal!—what?”

“Davie.”

Medwyn’s lips closed tightly, and his face became pale; but he answered

quietly, "Well, if she likes him, so be it, you know that I can never marry her or any one else."

## CHAPTER IV.

### MEDWYN'S SECRET.

"You're jist a fusionless, havoring body," was the severe comment which Mistress Meg muttered as she stalked out of the room, her nose uplifted, anger and disappointment in her grey eyes.

She had observed that, during the past six months especially, her brother had become strangely abstracted and silent. He had never been boisterous like Eglington, but he had been mirthful and happy in his nature; could laugh, could sing and make little jokes as well as heartily enjoy those of others—which is almost a greater gift than the talent for making them oneself. He would whistle gaily of a morning as he went out to consult with the grieve and the cattleman and the keepers about the business of the day; and the springiness of his step indicated that he was still a youth at heart. Now, he never sang, he never whistled, except

for the dogs; he so rarely laughed that when he did so it caused uneasy surprise. He smiled always when Davie appeared—as if she were the sunlight bursting through dark mists and lighting up his face—but the smile was a sad one.

Davie had always regarded Medwyn as a man so much absorbed in his books, and deeply occupied, not only with the affairs of his own property, but also with the great and mysterious affairs of the State, that although she observed the change she did not think it at all extraordinary. She attributed it to two causes; first to the death of his mother, and second, to the ceaseless labour which he had expended in preparing certain agricultural statistics to be presented by the member for the county to Parliament. He had been twice invited to stand for the county himself, and had declined, saying that he could be more useful by living amongst the people than by spending six or eight months of the year at St. Stephen's. He did his best to prove this by supplying the sitting member with all the information which his local and general knowledge could afford—and that was both practical and considerable.

His sister saw more and understood more than Davie did; she could almost fix the date on which the change began. The first symptoms appeared after he had had a long conversation with his sick mother, just six days before her death. He had come out of the room with vacant eyes and white face, passing his sister in the hall apparently without seeing her. His look was so strange that even Mistress Meg did not feel able to stop and question him. He had attended to all the details of the funeral with perfect composure, no one saw tears in his eyes, or heard him sob, although in giving his directions he would occasionally pause as if to gain breath, and perhaps, for a second, turn away his head. Otherwise there was only the white, sad face to suggest that he was suffering, but would not wear his sorrow on his sleeve.

Then came a period during which Meg said he was in a "dwam," a sort of waking stupor, and Meg used all the powers of a sharp tongue and an active mind to rouse him from it. She scolded him from early morning till night, she discovered all sorts of work for him to do, and he obeyed her patiently: *that* aggravated her the more. She brought



all the prettiest girls of the county—every one endowed with a considerable “tocher”—to the house; she gave dinners, suppers, and dances, but without much effect. Medwyn, whilst always courteous, seemed to act his part as host rather as a duty than as a matter of pleasure. The many bright eyes turned upon him with a sympathy which might readily have developed into a still more precious sentiment, had no further effect than to arouse his gratitude for the kindness of all his neighbours.

“Lord save us!” exclaimed Mistress Meg, as she was undressing one night, after having made her greatest efforts to rouse him out of his morbid humour by the help of pretty faces and jovial youths, “Lord save us!—the man’s clean off his head—he doesna’ even care for the lasses!”

Still she did not despair, she never did. She “banged through” as her own phrase went—with whatever she took in hand, and she had found that banging through was a much better way of doing anything, whether it turned out right or wrong, than standing by wondering whether to do it this way or that way, and ending in nine cases out of ten

by losing the opportunity of doing it at all.

One morning she suddenly entered the library. Medwyn was seated with elbows resting on the table and his fingers clasped tightly over his brow, gazing intently at a book which lay open before him. She had little respect for his studies—indeed, she had rather a contempt for them as being partly the cause of his present unhealthy condition. So, as he did not observe her entrance, she advanced briskly to address him; but when she reached the corner of the table there was an abrupt halt and something like a start of surprise. The expression of the woman's face was that of unutterable amazement, and her mouth was open as if she were about to speak.

Medwyn was not reading. He was looking at the photograph of a charming girl, whose smiling face was partly shadowed by the broad brim of a gipsy hat, the ribbons of which two dainty hands (dainty even in a photograph!) were tying into a bow. It was Davie's portrait.

The effect upon Mistress Meg was like a transformation trick in a pantomime. Davie, who had been in her eyes only

a bit bairnie hitherto, became a grown woman, with lovers and prospects of marriage. The idea was, like all other new ideas which are suddenly thrust on one, startling; and yet Mistress Meg wondered that it had never occurred to her before. She ought to have seen it—she ought to have known it long ago, for she had had some experience in lovers' ways. She had had "offers," and might have been mistress of some "bien" house of her own at this date if she had chosen, only the right man had not turned up. The immediate effect of the discovery that her brother was thinking of Davie was to make her feel that she must be growing very old—and that is always a disagreeable sensation when it is first experienced.

"I see you are busy with your book, Medwyn," she said in her shrill voice. "I'll no fash you at present—I'll come back in a whilie."

"Is it you, Meg?" he answered, raising his eyes slowly, as if they were reluctant to leave the beautiful vision before them. "I am not busy; I was only looking at this photograph which Davie had taken the last time she was in Aberdeen, and trying to see in this bonnie lady some-

thing of the child we used to know. Is it not fine?"

He handed the photograph to his sister without the least sign of embarrassment. She was disappointed by his coolness, for she had been congratulating herself upon having discovered the lever by which she might raise him into happiness. Still she was not deceived by his apparent indifference; she formed a resolution on the instant.

"Davie can do it, and she shall," was her thought; what she said was—"Oo ay, it's good enough in its way, but it's no nearly so bonnie as Davie—though some folks say that a body looks better in a picture than in reality"

"That's true, Meg—no art could produce a face like Davie's," he exclaimed, with brightening eyes; "it is like the sun, and we cannot look at it long enough to copy all its beauties."

"You might put green specs on," said Meg, practically. "But there is no need of specs to see Davie; and I'm thinking, Medwyn, that we had better keep her here."

"But we cannot. The instructions are clear, and—what would Mrs. Wybrant say?"

“I care nothing about what she would say. I say, keep Davie here.”

“I should be very glad to do so,” he answered, amused by his sister’s singular earnestness; “but how can we?”

“Just make her the mistress of Balnagairn.”

He started, and looked like one who is suddenly made aware that a precious secret has been discovered. He made an attempt to appear as if he regarded the suggestion as a joke.

“You are not serious, Meg,” he said, leaning back in his chair, and steadily meeting the keen eyes of his sister.

“Serious!—’deed am I, and I have just planned the whole business. You’ll marry Davie—it’s a fair match for both of you—and I’ll take up my abode at Greenknowe.”

“No, no, Meg; if such an event as my marriage were possible, you should stay here.”

“Hoots, man, you’re but a loonie yet. The saying that twa’s company but three’s nane is truer as regards families than as regards strangers. I’ll come to you when you need me, but I’ll no bide with you. Greenknowe is my own place, and when there is a mistress here, I mean to go

there, and I hope it will not be long before the time comes for me to flit."

He closed the book, shutting up the photograph in it, and rose from his seat. There was no further attempt to make light of her suggestion.

"You will never require to flit, Meg, unless you wish to do so on your own account; what you wish for on my account can never be realized. Now, if you wish to prove to me that you still care for me, don't speak of this again, because—it hurts me."

She saw that it did by the effort he made to remain calm, and by the slight tremor of his lips. He had often puzzled her; he puzzled her more than ever by his present manner.

## CHAPTER V.

### SPECULATIONS.

WHEN Medwyn went out with the cigars, he saw Eglinton leaning on the ledge of the dining-room window talking to Davie, and they were both evidently enjoying the conversation. As he ap-

proached them he heard Meg's shrill voice calling from within—

“Davie, come here. I want you.”

Davie lifted her eyebrows and glanced at Medwyn with a comical smile. Then, nodding to Eglinton, she disappeared. Medwyn smiled, too, at the evident resolution of his sister to keep the enemy outside the gates at any sacrifice. Eglinton was not exactly disconcerted, but he did not feel joyful in finding that his pleasant *tête-à-tête* was checked from two quarters at the same moment.

“I was just saying, Corbett,” he remarked as he lit his cigar, “that you must have had a delightful time of it in this quiet place, with such a pretty cousin for your daily companion.”

“We get along comfortably; but I did not imagine that you admired quiet places.”

“That depends. I am seriously thinking of settling down.”

“Since when has that serious thought occurred to you?”

“Within the last three hours.”

Medwyn laughed. He understood perfectly whence the inspiration had come.

“Impetuous as ever!” he said, with the good-natured tolerance which an old

man might give to the waywardness of a boy, although Eglinton was no more than ten years his junior. "And to-morrow you will be packing your portmanteau to start on some wild goose chase to the Antipodes?"

"No, not this time. I shall give up roving if——"

"Well, if what?"

"If what I wish comes to pass," answered Eglinton, emitting clouds of smoke and staring into them as if he perceived there some glorious vision.

"Let us hope your wishes may be realized," said Medwyn quietly, as they walked down a path sheltered on each side by huge, close-cut box trees, the growth of many years and the pride of Balnagairn. "Meanwhile, tell me something about what you have been doing?"

"Hunting for silver mines, copper mines, lead mines, or anything else the search for which would afford excitement and the discovery, a fortune."

"Have you found your Golconda?"

"We have—or, rather, we have found a man who discovered it for us. It is a silver mine which will make us all wealthy in a few years. I went into the thing myself, made careful inspections, and



found everything as he described. He is a mining engineer of long experience, and as I know something of the science, he could not easily take me in."

"Yes, you know a little about many things," said Medwyn dryly.

"At any rate, I have satisfied myself about this speculation, and mean to put into it everything I have, and everything I can beg, borrow, or—no, not steal, but raise."

"Synonymous terms," observed Medwyn, smiling at the enthusiasm of his friend, "the only difference is that in one case you are tried in a police court, and in the other you become bankrupt and pay a penny in the pound."

"What a cynic you have become!" exclaimed Eglinton, taking the cigar from his mouth and looking at him with an expression of curiosity.

"You ought to say how old I have grown. But who is this man, and why does he not keep this enormous fortune to himself?"

"Because he can't keep it to himself," answered Eglinton, a little nettled by the scepticism of his friend. Youth always resents any doubt of its wisdom. "He requires capital to work it, and so he is

forming a company. The shares will go like wildfire as soon as our announcements and reports are published. I am to be one of the London directors."

"Oh!" There was a wonderful variety of meaning in that simple exclamation, as Medwyn turned his cigar round between his fingers. "But about the man?"

Eglinton evidently felt the question not so much as an awkward one to answer, but as one which he ought to have asked himself before.

"Upon my word, Corbett, there you puzzle me. He puzzled me too, but Leighton and I were so satisfied by our investigations made on the spot that we did not care who the man was. You know it does not do to inquire too closely into the antecedents of a man out there."

"The more reason why you should be careful, Eglinton, with all due respect to your own skill. Where did you meet him?"

"In 'Frisco; and what made us become friendly was the fact that he was a fellow-countryman, and when you are a long way from home you do draw towards a countryman as if he belonged to the same family. But what made me

still more friendly with him was the discovery that he had known you and your father and all the people in Balnagairn."

"What was his name?"

"Davidson."

Medwyn repeated the name several times, as if searching his memory for its associations with the past.

"I cannot recollect any one of that name who was in your friend's profession," he said at length, "but the circumstance is curious. Are you sure that you did not give him the key to the names of your friends, and he used it to inspire confidence?"

"You are the most suspicious beggar I ever came across," replied Eglinton, laughing. "He happened to ask if I had ever been in this district, and I only said, 'Yes, I have friends at Balnagairn.' Then he inquired about every one of you by name, not forgetting your sister's big comb. More than that, he asked if I knew what had become of Miss Morrison's father, and of course I could not answer, but it showed me that he really had known you all. By the way, what did become of Morrison?"

"He is dead. Shortly after his wife's funeral he settled his affairs here, left

his daughter to our care, and went to India to superintend some engineering works for which he had obtained the contract. Two years afterwards we received a letter from Bombay announcing his death. The contract had turned out well, for his bankers remitted a considerable sum to be invested on his daughter's behoof. What made you ask?"

Medwyn's quick eyes scanned the face of his companion, and observed a little hesitation; but the habitual frankness of the man soon relieved him, and he made answer—

"Curiosity, first; personal interest, second—no, I ought to reverse the position of these two reasons. Suppose them reversed. My third reason is because Davidson asked me, and I want you to see that he was not an impostor, so far as his acquaintance with you folk of Balnagairn was concerned."

"Was he an educated man?"

"Decidedly, and reputed to be one of the cleverest men going."

"How old?"

"About a hundred, if a bald head, white hair, and a face—at least what you could see of it—scored with lines like Bradshaw's railway map count for any-

thing. Now, what do you think of him?"

"That you should not risk your fortune in his scheme."

"He was beforehand with you in that advice; that is, he said no man should put all his eggs into one basket, although he had no doubt of the result of the speculation. Neither have I, and I am going to make a plunge. . . . What are you speculating about now?" he added, seeing Medwyn looking at him with a curious expression.

"About the plunge you are going to make, and about what may come of it."

Eglinton only laughed and smoked.

## CHAPTER VI.

### DAVIE.

THE "plunge" to which Medwyn referred was not the mining speculation, but the plunge into love with Davie; and it became a grave question with him as her guardian whether or not he should permit such a man to become her suitor. That was why he had looked so curiously at his friend.

George Eglinton had been and was always impetuous in everything he took in hand; he had been volatile in his youth (Medwyn feared that he might be so still), and during the last five or six years he had been a restless wanderer over the world. At eighteen he had been required to make choice of a profession, not from necessity, but because his father wished him to have something to do in order to steady him.

“Nothing like having something practical to occupy the mind, George,” the old laird had said.

“Yes, sir,” the dutiful son replied, with a sly twinkle in his eyes; “but when you have solved the problem of the Parallel Roads, what will become of you?”

“I shall find some other great problem in nature to occupy me,” was the answer.

Mr. Eglinton had spent the greater part of his life in the endeavour to clear up the mystery of the Parallel Roads; he was an enthusiastic geologist and archæologist, and his son had been left very much to his teachers and himself.

But George saw the wisdom of his father’s words, and, being ambitious to do something in the world, he entered into the scheme at once. The Bar was his

first choice, and for a year he worked vigorously at the preliminary studies necessary to qualify himself for the profession of an advocate; then he gave it up. Next, he turned his attention to the Church; tiring of that, he turned to medicine, with the same result—always giving the same reason—he did not feel qualified for any of these professions, and there was no use in entering one for which a man had no special talent.

But when he turned to engineering he seemed at last to have fallen into his right place, and he really did work hard until he became entitled to write C.E. after his name. Then he had set off on his wanderings, on the plea that he wanted to do something on a big scale, like Lesseps.

“A railway to the moon wouldn’t be a bad idea,” suggested his father, as they were parting; “it would save astronomers a great deal of trouble if they could make their observations of its nature on the spot.”

And now at twenty-nine, George Eglington returned with no grander scheme matured than that of investing all he possessed and all he could obtain in a silver mine! This was indeed a fall from

the ambitious visions with which he had set out upon his travels ; but he did not appear to feel the downcome much. Indeed, he seemed to regard this mining speculation as the preliminary step towards the " something big " which he was yet to accomplish.

Medwyn, aware of all this, felt the responsibility of his position in relation to Davie weigh heavily upon him at this moment, as he walked up and down the library floor. Eglinton was certainly a pleasant companion and a handsome fellow, it was in every way probable that he would win Davie's affection if opportunity were afforded him.

Should the opportunity be afforded him?

Medwyn halted. He searched his own heart, questioning himself if there were no selfish interest which caused his hesitation to allow this man to win her if he could? It might be so, but he was not conscious of it. He felt the pain of losing her, but he believed that he would place her hand in that of the man she chose, and say fervently, " God bless you and make you happy, Davie." Why should not Eglinton be the man? He had many good qualities, and love would draw them forth.



Even if he should ruin himself by this speculation, Davie had enough to enable them to live comfortably, and Medwyn felt sure that he could arrange her marriage settlements so that no one could touch her fortune. Still, he wished that the responsibility had rested on other shoulders.

That wish somehow recalled the wild idea which had occurred to him whilst Eglinton was describing Davidson. The description of the man and his occupation had in some mysterious way revived the memory of Davie's father and the circumstances of his death. He remembered a man full of nervous activity, successful in so many undertakings, and yet failing to secure domestic happiness because of the irritable, passionate nature which is so often the attendant demon of the inventive brain.

In a fit of jealous anger, David Morrison had left his home, but he was, according to his lights, just even in his wrath. He made proper provision for his wife and child, making only one condition, that they should live near his sister, Mrs. Corbett. His condition was obeyed, but Mrs. Morrison felt her position keenly, and rarely showed herself in the village

on busy days. One night, returning to her own house from Balnagairn, through a bitter east wind and a sharp, pelting rain, she caught cold, became feverish, and her husband—summoned by Medwyn's father — only arrived two days before she died. During that time he was constant and most devoted in his attendance upon her, and she seemed to have satisfied him that he had misjudged her conduct.

In his remorse the man was as unreasonable as in his passion : he determined to leave the country, never to return. He desired that his child should think of him, too, as of one dead. So he made the arrangements which Medwyn explained to Eglinton, and went away, the successful completion of his contract in India being followed quickly by the report of his death. He had done everything in the most orderly manner : all due instructions for the settlement of his affairs had been carefully drawn up by an eminent firm of solicitors, and his will was beyond dispute.

“ Why on earth should Eglinton's chatter recall all this to me ? ” muttered Corbett, as he gazed vacantly out at the window. “ It is ridiculous to fancy that

Morrison could have carried his foolish idea to such an extent as to pretend that he had died. . This man Davidson is so like him in his eagerness to carry out a favourite project at anybody's expense, and then, suddenly pitying the gullibility of Eglinton, giving him a warning not to be too sanguine. I wish I could find out what kind of man he is, before Eglinton involves himself too far."

He still stared vacantly into the shrubbery outside, and presently turned to his chair.

"Tush, it is nonsense," he muttered impatiently, taking up the *Field* and attempting to read.

But the printed characters appeared like simple black lines to his eyes, and his thoughts were busy with the strange possibilities which surrounded Davie. Her mother's short life had been sad enough; he was eager that the life of the daughter should be as free from care as human foresight could make it.

Then he tried to divert his thoughts by writing letters which he desired to have ready for the evening post at Aboyne, whither the waggonette would be going presently.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE FIRST ARROW.

In spite of Eglinton's confidence in his own judgment, after a practical examination of the mine in which he was about to sink his fortune, the scepticism of Medwyn had caused him to reflect—so far as he could reflect; for he was one of those who jump to conclusions, clearing quicksands at a bound, and ignoring their existence until the fatal day when they sink into one.

“It's always a safe thing to predict a failure!” he exclaimed manfully “If the thing turns up a trump, you can say with a grace how glad you are that you were mistaken; and if it does fail, you can shrug your shoulders in triumphant pity and say, ‘I told you so, but you would not be advised’—which just means, ‘Serve you right for not believing me to be a Solomon.’ What can Corbett know about mining?”

But mines and disagreeable advice were at once forgotten when, as he walked down the garden, he saw Davie

gathering flowers, with which she intended to decorate the dinner-table.

He halted a moment, admiring the tall graceful form of the girl—rendered more graceful by the delicate folds of the perfectly plain lavender dress she wore. Her fair hair, simply drawn over the head and arranged in a plaited rosette at the back, was radiant under the soft glow of the afternoon sun. At her feet was a flat basket, in which she had already placed a goodly array of ferns and flowers. She was stooping to take it up when Eglinton stepped forward.

“Let me carry the basket, Miss Morrison,” he said eagerly

“Thank you, Mr. Eglinton, but it is quite light,” she answered, a little surprised by his sudden appearance.

They were both stooping, each with a hand upon the handle of the flower basket; they would have looked very ridiculous in the eyes of a bystander if one had seen them in that position. They rose, their eyes met—his full of admiration, hers full of mirth. Their hands, somehow, met in the playful contest for the possession of the basket, and Davie had no notion that the proper thing for her to do was to instantly with-

draw her hand. She was utterly devoid of that self-consciousness by which the girl of the period instantly detects the point at which an acquaintance or a friend begins to change into the character of a lover. It was to her nothing more than a bit of fun on the part of a very agreeable, if somewhat audacious acquaintance.

“Do let me carry it,” he said, as if his whole life depended upon her granting the appeal.

She laughed, and relinquished the basket.

“Well, if you are so very anxious to play carrier, you may; but you have not to bear the burden far—only into the dining-room.”

“I would carry it to the world’s end,” he exclaimed, with a grand, melodramatic air and a merry light in his eyes, and adding quickly in softer tones—“if you were with me.”

“I am afraid I should get tired before we had gone many miles on the way, and then you would have to carry me as well as the basket.”

“I would enjoy it all the more.”

“Your enjoyment would not last long.”

“It would—and will—last for ever!”

There was too much fervour in that exclamation—too abrupt a change from the tone of banter in which they had been conversing.

Davie had not the least experience in flirtation; she was one of the very few girls who reach their majority without having had a love affair of any sort. She had no skill in the arts of coquetry, and no suspicion that her innocent enjoyment of his droll humour might be misunderstood by a man who had moved about the world a good deal, and had encountered many of the ordinary types of girlhood and womanhood, to whom flattery and admiration were always acceptable, being always suggestive of possible marriage settlements.

But there was something in the tone of his last words, something in the expression of his face so earnest, that her fawn-like eyes opened wonderingly and gazed upon him with a dreamy sort of pleasure, behind which lurked a vague fear: it was just such an expression as that with which a child first looks upon a mechanical mouse, or a speaking doll. Then, still in a dreamy way, still uncertain about her own thoughts, she said very gently—

“I am going in now.”

“Will you not gather some more flowers? I was hoping to be your escort round the garden, and to obtain a lesson in floriculture. I am very fond of flowers, but I am the most ignorant fellow in the world regarding their names.”

“You must wait for your lesson, then,” she answered, and she came back from dreamland to the common earth; “for I have enough flowers, and have to arrange them and to dress myself before Aunt Wybrant arrives. You know she believes in fashion, and she would refuse to acknowledge me if I appeared without dressing in her especial honour.”

“Then she must be——” a fool he was going to say; but, recollecting himself in time, turned the phrase into—“She must be very fastidious if she would not be pleased with you as you are now, for you could not look more beautiful than at this moment even if you were robed like the Queen of Sheba.”

Davie laughed heartily at this extravagant comparison, it seemed the more funny as she recalled at the same time some of the long epistles in which



Aunt Wybrant endeavoured to impress upon her the high duty she owed to herself, and particularly to society, to dress well and in the fashion. She had dutifully acknowledged the receipt of the words of wisdom, and, like other sensible women, followed her own simple taste.

“That is a compliment,” and she made a pretty bow, “thank you, but I am afraid my aunt and you will never agree.”

“I only care to agree with you; but if you wish me to please your aunt, I shall say that her knowledge of what ought to be is perfect, that her taste is sublime, and that——”

“That I think you had better wait until you see her,” interrupted Davie, again surveying him with that strange, wondering look. She could not understand him. She moved on towards the house.

He felt a sudden chill. He had been frivolous and too bold, forgetting that this was not the child he used to tease long ago, but a young lady to whom he was almost a stranger. Therefore, he was silent for a few minutes; and then, swinging the flower-basket on his forefinger, and watching its motion as if he were calculating something, he said—

“I hope I have not done anything to displease you, Miss Morrison?”

“What could make you think so?” she asked, in new surprise.

“Your aunt.”

“I see she has already taken possession of you, and I expect to see you become her slave from the moment of her arrival. She always contrives to make everybody do everything for her.”

“Then I shall join the throng—for your sake. Having made that promise, you can allow me to go in and watch you arranging the flowers.”

He entered the dining-room with her, and when she had seated herself in a large armchair by the window, he placed himself before her, humbly holding the basket. She proceeded to arrange the flowers with deft fingers, but whilst she was picking some from the basket, a forget-me-not and a pansy fell upon the floor.

“This is for me—it is from you,” cried Eglinton, dropping on his knees to pick up the tiny treasure.

The door opened, and Mistress Meg entered. She was thunderstricken at sight of the position in which she discovered Eglinton, and was only able to cry in her shrill voice—

“Davie!”

## CHAPTER VIII.

## AT HAZARD.

“PREPARE to receive cavalry” was what Eglinton said to himself, as he turned his frank face to meet the astounded and indignant gaze of Mistress Meg. The Tower of Babel was absolutely quivering with agitation.

Most men would have been abashed, and made some blundering explanation of the position. Eglinton took a wicked delight in Mistress Meg’s bewilderment, and he would have been very willing to increase it had he not observed that Davie’s cheeks were crimson, and that her hands showed signs of nervousness as they fastened the flowers together.

“I was just picking up these flowers, Miss Corbett,” he said, rising composedly; “and I have been admiring the genius Miss Morrison displays for this kind of work.”

“Ay, she’s clever at it,” was the somewhat dry response; “but you have not seen her at her best, for what she has done to-day is not nearly so good as usual. I’m thinking, Mr. Eglinton, you have

been havoring till her and taking her mind off what she was doing."

"Oh, no, Aunty, he did not disturb me in the least," cried Davie, smiling, "and I fancied that I was to make a very pretty display on the table this evening."

"And I shall make bold to say that the effect will be very pretty, although Miss Corbett should condemn me to banishment from the table and to porridge in the kitchen for daring to contradict her."

Mistress Meg forced herself to smile, but the expression was so gruesome that Eglinton's eyes meeting those of Davie they had difficulty in restraining a burst of laughter.

"I'll no be so cruel as that for a first offence, Mr. Eglinton" (she used to call him George); "but I'll take you to the new billiard room, and Medwyn and you can entertain yourselves while we get on with our work. I have no liking for men pottering about among womenfolk, for they are for aye in the road."

"I would like to see this task finished—I am interested," pleaded Eglinton; "besides, Corbett has letters to write."

"Aye, but he has finished them and was asking for you. It'll please me if you

leave Davie and me to finish what we have to do in quietness."

"I obey. When you say it is to please you, Miss Corbett, there is no alternative left me," he said gallantly. Then, as he bowed to Davie, he showed a sprig of the forget-me-not in his hand, saying—"I shall keep this, if you please. I am very fond of this flower. May I take it?"

"Oh, certainly," exclaimed Davie; "you can have a whole bunch if you like. We have plenty of them."

He wondered—was she making fun of him? or did she really not understand the reason why he chose this flower?

"I shall be content with this if you give it to me."

"Come away, Mr. Eglinton," said Mistress Meg; and she marshalled the way along the hall, through a conservatory, and into the new billiard room. There she left him with the parting word of consolation—"I'll send Medwyn to you in a minute. You'll find a game with the bools a heap more entertaining than a senseless gossip with a lassie like Davie."

Eglinton had his own opinion on that score, and a very decided one. He wished Mistress Meg had been—any-

where except in the dining-room to interrupt what had been a pleasant conversation, and, what had promised to be still more interesting, a playful lesson in coquetry. He was fond of billiards, and yet when he took up a cue—without any of that careful inspection of its fitness which those who are experts always display—he banged away at the balls as if he were trying to knock down somebody who had annoyed him. The balls clacked, ran up and down and across the table in a wild way, and he scarcely waited for them to stop before he made another stroke, sending them flying about again.

Medwyn entered, and for a minute looked on with an amused smile at his friend's performance.

“Are you trying flukes, Eglinton? They sometimes turn up trumps, but they don't win in the long run. I would give you fifty in a hundred if you were going to play in that way.”

“All right, come on; but no, we shall start even, and I shall do my best to beat you. I know you won't bet, or I would stake my——”

He paused, and Medwyn, as he quietly chalked his cue, suggested—

“Your silver mine?”

Eglinton had been about to say, "My hopes of winning Davie on the game," but he discreetly kept that idea to himself, and said, "No; my shilling against your sixpence. Come, break your rule for once; it adds to the zest of the game when there is something depending on the result, and I am in the humour to play for something more than fun at present."

"That is a bad humour; I think that play should always be for fun, as a distinction between it and work, which should be always earnest and for a definite object. But I can gratify your whim without altering my rule; suppose you think of something that you wish very much to obtain, and play for that."

"Agreed," cried Eglinton gaily, taking off his coat and hanging it up; "but I shall not tell you what the something is until we have finished."

"As you please. A hundred up and you can break."

Eglinton began merrily, but taking some care now that he had an opponent, and he scored fifty when Medwyn had only scored thirteen. The latter played steadily and quietly, never attempting a fluke, and watching the result of each

stroke with the interest which a chemist feels in some new experiment. The more points he gained the more excited Eglinton became, and his eagerness to win rendered him somewhat nervous. This excitement increased as he found Medwyn gaining upon him and gradually reducing the number of points between them. He changed his cue, suggested that the chalk was damp (bad signs always), and finally observed that he was not "in form" that afternoon, and that he could always play much better by gas-light than by daylight. During the first part of the game he had been laughing boisterously at every good stroke he made and at every failure of his antagonist.

"You are faint-hearted, Corbett," he said, as he took the rest and prepared to make a good stroke; "and you know faint heart never won either fair lady or billiards."

"We shall see," was Medwyn's answer, smiling at his friend's philosophy as he had done at his enthusiasm about the mine.

But by-and-by Eglinton's mirth disappeared, and his countenance assumed that sour and yet despairing expression of the gambler who has staked his last sove-



reign. The score still stood in his favour, ninety-nine, and he had only to make one stroke to win the game. Medwyn had now ninety-five to his credit, and it was his turn to play. He chalked his cue with unusual deliberation as he put the question—

“You seem so anxious, Eglinton, that I would like to know what it is you are playing for—is it much?”

“Everything; but go on. You have the game—cannon off the red and pocket. You can do it easily if you try; and as I believe you would not try if you knew what I was thinking about, I shall not tell you until you have played.”

Medwyn played with every appearance of care, and placed the ball close to one of the upper pockets. Eglinton's next stroke finished the game in his favour.

“Won!” he cried joyfully, and then, as if struck with commiseration for his opponent, he added, “but you ought not to have missed that shot; I thought you could not help taking it.”

“What is won?” asked Corbett, undisturbed; “I was not playing for any stake.”

“But I was, as you know, and the stake was Miss Morrison. Funny idea, wasn't it? But it took possession of

me, and upon my word I felt as if all my hopes depended on the game. Of course it's only a joke, but I have won and shall enjoy my dinner."

"You cannot rate your hopes very highly, or you would not have hazarded them in such a way as that," observed Corbett; "and I am sure the lady would not regard your joke as a compliment."

Eglinton seated himself on the edge of the billiard table and regarded his friend with an expression of curiosity

"Do you always take the whims of the moment so seriously, Corbett? If that is the effect of a quiet, steady-going life such as yours, I give up the idea I had a few hours ago of trying to imitate your ways and give my adherence to bustle, speculation, success, and the enjoyment of it when it comes."

"But if it should be failure instead of success?"

"The best skaters have an occasional tumble, but they get up and fire away again. That is what I would do. Here is an aphorism—good digestion is the secret of success in life; and whenever I see a man dealing with trifles as solemnly as you do, I always say—that man's dinner doesn't agree with him."

“I hope you will never have to learn how much your digestion depends upon your circumstances. But I had no intention of stirring up these extraordinary depths of philosophy which you so suddenly reveal to me. I only intended to hint that when a man sees a lady whom he thinks he would like to make his wife, the matter is not one to joke about. Most men find it a very serious business indeed.”

“True enough,” exclaimed Eglinton, when mentally he said, “the man is surely in love with her himself.”

And for the first time it occurred to him that Corbett was not so old as he looked.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE GUESTS.

FIVE guests arrived at Balnagairn on the eve of Davie's majority. First, Harry Bousfield, of Colborough, Yorkshire, and his wife. He was a man over six feet in height, broad in proportion, with a solid head and a stolid expression—his wife always affectionately addressed him and

spoke of him as her "stupid old man," and he once observed that the appellation was quite correct, because he had married her. It was the only joke he had ever attempted to make. He had always been accounted a dunce at school, and after his marriage he continued to be regarded as a dunce at home. His breed of cattle, however, was not only famous in Yorkshire, but at Smithfield and elsewhere; and he was universally acknowledged to be a high authority in scientific farming. Every new invention for lessening labour and improving crops was sure to find a fair trial on the lands of Harry Bousfield. The cottages which he erected for his labourers were accepted as models of all the elements of utility, comfort, and cheapness; and he was eagerly sought after as a judge at all the local and county agricultural shows. At home he remained the "stupid old man," although he was little more than forty, and possessed of the vigour of youth.

Mrs. Bousfield was the daughter of a Bradford woollen manufacturer who had made a large fortune. She was a plump, pretty matron of thirty, with the skittishness of a kitten, a passion for society, a firm belief that life should be made

up of one continuous stream of laughter, and with a secret craving for titles of any kind, whilst affecting to be indifferent to them. With this worthy couple was Miss Hannah Schoumert, who had been Mrs. Bousfield's school companion and confidant, and continued to be her most intimate friend. She was a tall, graceful lady, with a pale face and singularly bright eyes; features irregular, and when in repose presenting no special attraction; but when she was stirred by mirth or by interest in any subject of conversation, the pale cheeks flushed, the eyes sparkled, and she became beautiful. She was about the same age as her friend, Mrs. Bousfield, who, in the playful way she had of giving nicknames to everybody, had christened her her "dear old Blue," because Miss Schoumert was given to much study of various kinds, and was strongly suspected of holding advanced opinions in regard to woman's rights and the equality of the sexes.

Captain Albert Graham, R.N., and—most important of all—Mrs. Beatrice Wybrant, the sister of Davie's father and of Medwyn's mother, completed the number of guests who arrived in the waggonette.

There was such a bustle in and about the house as had not been known there for many years. Mathers, the old butler, reflected sadly that he was not so young as he used to be, and that he would not be able to stand much of this sort of thing. It was all very well for an evening when people came and went at a decent hour, and there was no more to do about them, but when they came to stay for a fortnight, and probably longer, it became a serious affair, and he was sure that the master could not understand how his strength and patience was taxed. He believed, however, that he could have given full attention to everybody if only Mrs. Wybrant had been absent. He had had experience of her "visitations," and the prospect of another had cast a shadow over his life during the last few days, notwithstanding the pleasure he took in doing anything in honour of Miss Davie.

His forebodings were promptly fulfilled. Mrs. Wybrant was a widow, forty at least in the estimation of others, about sixteen in her own, in her robust spirits, and in her utter insensibility to the responsibilities of to-morrow. She lived for the day and thoroughly enjoyed it, never heeding who might be suffering. She

had an income of £500 a year, was always in a state of impecuniosity, and yet never hesitated to gratify her fancy for anything in the way of dress or luxury. On one of the many occasions when Medwyn had come to her relief she appeared to be in the extremity of distress, and with the money he gave her to pay pressing debts she bought a parrot and a diamond ring! How she managed to get on only her friends and her creditors knew. She had no idea about it herself.

She had apartments in a side street sufficiently near Park Lane to be on the borders of that mysterious and undefined circle called "society." In the season she hired a brougham, left cards everywhere, and in return received cards, invitations to afternoon tea, to "at homes," where she saw "everybody," and occasionally to dinner at the houses of some old friends of her brother. She regarded herself as a most distinguished lady of fashion.

About ten minutes after her arrival at Balnagairn she had successfully upset all poor Mathers' arrangements for the evening. She seemed to spend her time in ringing the bell for the most trivial requirements, and the door was scarcely

closed when she remembered something else, so that the bell rang again, and there was a constant trotting up and down the servants' staircase to her room.

Mr. Mathers was a very respectable man, he had been an esteemed member of the Free Kirk since the Disruption, faithful to his master's interests, and steady in the performance of his duty. He had so strong an objection to worldly frivolities that he declined a very advantageous engagement because he would be required to go to London in the season. London was in his eyes the magnet which attracted all wickedness; and he would not go, lest he should fall. Mrs. Wybrant lived in London; she took part in all its frivolities; and that was enough to make him her enemy. But when she came to upset all the arrangements of this orderly household, he felt that the burden was almost greater than he could bear.

Mistress Meg had a similar opinion on this subject, but she had the relief of being occasionally able to express it. As when the company had been kept waiting more than half-an-hour Mrs. Wybrant entered the drawing-room with the exclamation—



“My dear Margaret, I hope I have not kept you waiting.”

“’Deed have you, though, and everything will be fusionless in consequence,” was the disagreeably honest reply.

“I am so sorry, my dear,” said Mrs. Wybrant, with an emphasis on the “so,” but the tone conveyed not the slightest indication of regret for any inconvenience she might have caused. “You see, the time was so short that one could scarcely make oneself look like a Christian without a little delay ”

She was a short, stout, florid woman, with small quick eyes, and if she was not witty in herself she was unconsciously the source of much amusement to others. Turning to Davie, who was talking with Mr. and Mrs. Bousfield, she kissed her effusively

“You look charming, my dear, but—” whispering with affectionate anxiety—“why do you wear a yellow rose? It does not become your complexion at all. You must study these things—they are of the greatest importance to a girl in your position.”

Eglinton had a faint recollection of having seen this fussy little lady long ago, and the recollection was not an agreeable

one; therefore he was chagrined when he found himself appointed to conduct her to the dinner table. That was no doubt a cruel joke on Corbett's part, he thought; but if there was any fun in it at all, the credit of the arrangement was due to Mistress Meg, who had resolved to keep him as far apart from Davie as possible. Eglinton had a knack of suiting himself to circumstances, and remembering the position which Mrs. Wybrant held in relation to Miss Morrison, he set himself with all his might to please her. He succeeded to such an extent that when the ladies adjourned to the drawing-room, Mrs. Wybrant's first exclamation was—

“What an exceedingly pleasant young man Eglinton has turned out! He was a mere boy when I saw him last, and, to tell you the truth, my dear, I thought him a fool.”

She extolled him as a marvel of the beneficial effects of travelling, and hinted that her niece must prepare herself to undergo a similar process of cultivation; she tried to repeat some of the funny stories with which he had so amused her that she had been scarcely able to take her dinner for laughing—but she did not

remember the point of one of them, and could only assure her auditors that it really was "very nice."

She would have spoken differently if she could only have known with what relish Eglinton emptied his glass of champagne when the door closed upon the ladies, and said to himself — "Thank heaven, that's over."

"By-the-way, Bousfield," said Medwyn as he passed the claret, "have you any spare money to invest? Because our friend Eglinton has come back to us with a scheme for making our fortunes by means of a silver mine which he and some friends of his have discovered."

"I only said it was as promising a speculation as I have ever come across," interpolated Eglinton, "and if it proves to be a mistake, don't blame me. I believe in it, and that's why I risk everything in it. Davidson believes in it, and he is 'cute enough to know on which side his bread is buttered."

"Davidson," muttered Bousfield; "why, that was the name of one of the fellows Morrison took out with him to India."

"That is just what I wanted to learn," said Corbett. "You were the last who

saw Morrison before he left England, and as this Davidson appears to know something about us, I was curious to know something about him. What was he?"

"I don't know," replied Bousfield, in his slow way, "but according to Morrison's account he was one of the cleverest fellows in the world—up to all sorts of tricks, as sharp as a razor, with a hawk's eye for the main chance in everything, and cunning enough to keep always on the right side of the law. The only objection Morrison had to him was that he was too clever. Where did you meet him?"

Eglinton explained, and Bousfield with a loud laugh answered:

"Well, I never give advice—I only say what *I* would do; and if this man be the same we are thinking about, and if I were you, I would get out of the business as quickly as possible."

The servant entered and presented a card to Corbett. He looked up in amazement, and then, smiling, said—

"Gentlemen, it will surprise you, but I have to announce the arrival of Mr. Davidson. Show him in, please."

## CHAPTER X.

## AN INTERESTING VISITOR.

MR. DAVIDSON ! It was a matter of amusement as well as amazement to the company that the man about whom they had been speaking so much should turn up just at that moment, the more surprising as the place was one not easily reached.

Bousfield muttered, "Speak of the something and there you are." A tall gentleman just such as Eglinton had described entered the room. There was a curious combination of age and yet of nervous activity. Very calm and evidently a man capable of taking advantage of every opportunity to serve himself.

Corbett rose and for a moment paused with an expression of bewilderment on his face.

"I am pleased to see you, sir," he said with some awkwardness, owing to his astonishment; "but you are so strangely like a friend of ours that your appearance startled me for the moment."

Eglinton, who had already risen from his chair, shook hands with the visitor

with much warmth, and said, "How on earth did you come here at this time?"

Mr. Davidson smiled. "I ought to have apologised before now for being here at all, but my friend Morrison was so closely attached to me in friendship that, having business to do in Aberdeen, I have taken the liberty to come here to ask you to permit me to see Miss Morrison, knowing that she attains her majority to-morrow."

Corbett still looked puzzled, but maintained the courtesy of a host, and after offering the usual civilities, which Mr. Davidson declined, saying that his time was short, conducted him into the library. Then he sent for Davie. Whilst they were waiting for her, Corbett expressed his surprise at the singular resemblance of Mr. Davidson to Miss Morrison's father.

"He used to laugh at that," answered Davidson; "it was often remarked amongst us. In our expeditions we were usually taken for brothers. It is singular how these resemblances occur. But nature plays strange freaks."

This was said with a curious laugh, which Corbett could not understand, but he noticed the peculiar expression on the man's face as he spoke.

At that moment Davie entered the room, and Medwyn introduced her to the strange visitor. Davidson turned to him, and said—

“I am obliged to ask your leave to permit me to speak to Miss Morrison alone.”

Davie was as much amazed by his singular request as Corbett was himself.

Davidson observed this, and added, “I ought to say that I have a particular reason for this request.”

Corbett looked for a moment at Davie, and as she seemed to give consent, he bowed and left the room.

Then Mr. Davidson offered her a chair. She sat down, utterly bewildered by the singular position in which she was placed, and yet not displeased by the presence of the stranger, who was polite, and his white beard entitled him to some respect, but she had an amount of reserve which prevented her from at once admitting him to the privilege of friendship.

“I have no doubt you are surprised by my singular request to see you alone. Do you not know me?”

She was startled by the strange question, and drew back. The man smiled at her terror. “I did not think you could, but

perhaps you will be surprised, and, it may be, not pleased when you learn that I am your father."

The gentlemen had gone up to the drawing-room, and the ladies were most gracious; but to Eglinton the whole thing was stale, flat, and unprofitable because Davie was not there. At last he took courage to ask where she was, and as he did so Mr. Davidson led her into the room.

She looked very pale, but quiet. There was a strange light in her eyes, as if there was something she could not understand in the whole proceeding.

Mr. Davidson, cool as ever, walked forward to Corbett, and said to him, "I have now seen Miss Morrison, and I am satisfied. I wish you good night."

Corbett, with his sense of hospitality, and in spite of his intense dislike to the man, said, "No; you must stay here to-night, and I must ask you to go with me into another room, as I have something to say to you."

Davidson bowed, and said "Certainly" They walked together into the library, leaving Davie sitting in a strange dazed way on the couch.

When Corbett was alone with him, he



first offered him a cigar; then, when Davidson had seated himself, Corbett, standing by the fireplace, said—

“There is something very peculiar, Mr. Davidson, in your arrival and in the effect which your conversation has produced upon Miss Morrison. Will you explain to me what it means?”

“I have no explanation to offer. My conversation with her related to her father, and to him alone.”

“You were with him when he died, I believe?”

There was that strange smile again upon Davidson’s face as he answered, “Yes,” with a peculiar emphasis upon the word, “and I saw him die. You are aware that I arranged all his affairs for him, and Messieurs Take & Co., Calcutta, will supply you with any further information you may require.”

“But, come now,” said Corbett, “can we not come to some understanding, or will you wait over to-night, and perhaps to-morrow you may be more willing to speak?”

Davidson remained silent.

Corbett rang the bell. When the servant came he requested that Mr. Eglinton should be sent down to him.

When Eglinton came in, Corbett suggested that they should have some conversation about the mine, and then left the room. He went straight to the drawing-room, and, with an apology to the guests, took Davie by the hand and led her out. When they had got into the parlour, he held her by both hands, and looking at her with earnest affection, he said, "Tell me, Davie. What has this man been saying?"

She was silent.

"Speak, Davie. I know he has told you something which has frightened you. You promised that when you were in trouble you would speak to me. Speak to me now."

"I cannot answer," she replied, and poor Davie's face was full of sorrow.

"I will not press you any further just now, but I know there is something that he has said to you that is causing you great trouble, and I know that when you think a little longer you will tell me what it is. Be sure that I am ready to do anything that will serve you."

And then suddenly drawing her head towards him and kissing her on the brow, he murmured, "My darling, why is it you won't trust me?"

Looking at him with apathetic quietness in her eyes, she answered—

“Medwyn, why will you not trust me? I cannot tell you what he has said, but it has been something to startle me—something so strange that I don’t know how to believe it. If it is true, then all you have told me was wrong, and I cannot believe that either. Do forgive me for to-night. Let me go to my room. To-morrow I shall be calmer, and then I may be able to take your advice. But *I cannot* tell you what this man has said.”

Corbett released her hands and said, “My poor child, you need rest; but before this man leaves the house I will discover the cause of your trouble.”

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE PUZZLE.

DAVIE in her own room sat down and cried. The revelation had been so strange, and the conditions attaching to it so much stranger, that the poor child felt as if the whole sunshine of her young life had disappeared.

How was it this man could claim her as his child ?

He had shown her the letters of her mother, which she could recognize, and how could she doubt that he was the man he represented himself to be ?

The strange words which he had spoken to her told her a strange story—that he had for reasons of his own made use of the death of Davidson to assume his place, and had for so many years been silent because he wished to tell her that when he claimed her as his daughter she was the heiress of a large fortune. He had done so much already—he had won so much and lost so much—that he still hoped he would be able to make her one of the richest women in the country. But fortune had gone against him—only for a little while, for he knew that he had the power to overcome fortune. She was to wait only for a little while and he would prove to her that she was the daughter of a man of genius.

But, meanwhile, she was to be absolutely silent about his re-appearance. She had no reason to complain, for he had left her sufficient to make her life easy and comfortable ; as she was already aware.

All this was true, and therefore Davie was astounded — the more astounded when she read the letters of her mother. How could she doubt when there were these treasures presented to her to prove the truth of what the man said? And yet there was a doubt in her mind which she could not explain even to herself. That he was like her father she knew from Medwyn's exclamation; that he was her father seemed true, because he had her mother's letters; more so that he showed her a portion of her mother's hair—at which her heart grew sore, for she had no such relic.

She swayed to and fro in her chair trying to work out the problem how she was to act. To tell Medwyn was to break the pledge she had given to the man; to deny Medwyn was to break the promise she had given to him. She could not see any way out of the difficulty.

But while she was crying and trying to solve this curious puzzle Mrs. Wybrant burst into the room.

“My dear child, what is the meaning of all this? You are ill. We must see at once what we can do for you, and the first thing that I think should be

done is that we should have a pic-nic to-morrow.”

The absurdity of this proposal in contrast with the grief of the girl was even to her in her condition enough to cause a smile.

Mrs. Wybrant regarded that as a good sign, and thought her influence was already proving of good effect.

“I would rather be left at home to-day, if you please, for just now there are matters stranger than you can imagine passing within me.”

“What nonsense, my dear child! You have nothing of serious consequence to trouble you. You are rich—comparatively, that is; you are free—that is to say, you can do as you like; and yet you are fretting, as if you were a woman with all the cares of the world upon your head. They will come soon enough: don’t meet them. *I* have had troubles, too, but I always left them aside, and took to the pleasure that was given to me.”

Davie raised her head in a wearied way and said—“Aunt Wybrant, will you leave me?”

“Why so? Surely I can comfort you, surely I can be of use to you?”

“No,” she answered sadly; “no one can be of use to me just now”

Mrs. Wybrant, with her breast swelling like that of a pigeon in the presence of a rival, and with an amount of severity in her voice, said: “That is not right, Davie. You understand that I am now your guardian,—I am, indeed, your mother; or at least I take your mother’s place; and I demand to know why you are ill and who has made you ill?”

Davie, with a helpless look, implored her to leave her alone.

“Very good, child; I shall leave you alone till to-morrow, and then I expect you to be ready to drive with us to Braemar.”

“To-morrow is Sunday,” pleaded Davie.

“So much the better; we shall go to the church, and maybe see the Queen and the rest of the royal family. That would be a very good idea,” said Mrs. Wybrant, with a laugh. “It is rather a long drive, but we can do it easily, and I see an outing will do you good.”

“Very well, I will do whatever you wish,” said Davie, “if you will only leave me alone just now”

“Leave you alone, poor child!” Mrs.

Wybrant said, with that assumption of authority and that intonation of forced affection which is always disagreeable—“certainly, if you wish me to do so. But why should I leave you?”

Davie's face suddenly became hard and cold. She rose; then, with a voice so firm that it astounded her aunt, answered—

“Because I wish it.”

“Oh, very well, my dear. I wanted to comfort you. I do not wish to disturb you. But remember that to-morrow you must be ready to go with us on our proposed journey. It will be delightful going over the hills; delightful to be at the church; delightful to have dinner at Braemar; and altogether we shall have a day of unmitigated enjoyment.”

With that she swept out of the room with the air of one who had done the duty of a good Samaritan, and immediately went to the piano in the drawing-room, where she strummed in such a way as to cause annoyance to everybody, although politeness would not allow anybody to speak.

Corbett had again returned to the room and inquired for Eglinton, who presently appeared; and on asking him where Mr.



Davidson was, he received the information that he had gone.

“Gone where,” said Corbett, “at this time of night?”

“Well,” replied Eglinton, “he said he was going to Aboyne. He had his horse ready, and in this house he could not rest. He asked me to make an excuse for him, but I am forced to tell the truth.”

Corbett shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, he is simply the most incomprehensible being that I have ever met. What do you think of him?”

“Just what I have told you before—that he is the cleverest fellow I have ever met.”

At this juncture Bousfield, in his rough way, said—

“He is a most inconsiderate scoundrel, and if I were you I would at once pursue him and force him to explain the reasons of his visit here and how he has so affected Miss Morrison.”

Medwyn felt that there was truth in the words, and that he had failed in the purpose he had intended. The man's escape was almost more than he could endure, and he felt inclined to follow Bousfield's advice and to pursue him as fast as possible. He stood for a moment

in hesitation; then he shook his head, saying—

“We can wait.”

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE EXCURSION.

A BRIGHT morning, with the sun shining on the dull grey landscape. Eglinton was out early ready for the journey, and again found Davie in the garden. All round about was the bloom of the heather; within their immediate circle were the blossoms of many trees and the fragrance of many roses.

He, advancing to her, congratulated her upon the day of her majority, and hoped that many birthdays might return in happiness.

As they walked along the shaded path, he talked nonsense and quoted poetry. She listened, with sad eyes, occasionally speaking a word and saying yes, it was good, or it was bad.

“Shall I tell you,” said Eglinton, “one of the old verses of Tennyson which I have associated with you? The lines are short, and I will repeat them if you will listen.

She walked on with a bowed head, and he murmured that old sonnet :—

“ As when with downcast eyes we muse and brood,  
 And ebb into a former life, we seem  
 To lapse far back in a confused dream  
 To states of mystical similitude ;  
 If one but speaks or hems or stirs his chair,  
 Ever the wonder waxeth more and more,  
 So that we say, ‘ all this hath been before.’  
 All this *hath* been I know not when or where.  
 So, friend, when first I looked upon your face  
 Our thoughts gave answer, each to each so true—  
 Opposéd mirrors each reflecting each—  
 Altho’ I knew not in what time or place,  
 Methought that I had often met with you  
 And each had lived in the other’s heart and speech.”

Davie was in a too distressed state of mind to appreciate the lines which Eglington quoted. But she felt that in his words there was something more than mere quotation.

She mentally echoed them, and then said—

“ The lines are interesting ; where did you learn them, and why ? ”

“ I learned them for you.”

He pressed her hand in such a way that she drew back, and he instantly said—

“ Forgive me, I have been too rash, but the morning and the place seemed suitable for a confession of—— ”

“Of what?” she asked, somewhat sternly.

“Of the fact that I love you.”

The underlying sense of humour which Davie possessed rose at that moment, and in spite of all the sorrow which had been suddenly cast upon her, she felt like her old self, and said with a laugh—

“Don’t you think, Mr. Eglinton, that you should wait a little before you make such a serious assertion? I am quite ready to believe in your sincerity, but I would prefer to have a little longer acquaintance before I accept the offer of your love—if we may call it so.”

“Call it so? Why not? I do love you. You may not believe it, but I have thought of you since you were a child. I have remembered you in many strange situations and many strange places, and now I come to claim you.”

Davie, still treating the matter as one of fun, answered—

“Mr. Eglinton, you are really very humorous, but you must not think that I can believe all you say. I am amused by what you have told me, and interested in the verses you have quoted; but for the rest you must wait.”

He, bowing his head seriously, said, “I

shall wait—wait until you are ready and willing to give me your hand.”

She laughed at his earnestness and seemed to be merrier than she had been for some time.

“Very good, Mr. Eglinton, when Leo again brings you to me I will give you an answer.”

At that time there was a general summons to dress for the excursion, and, much to his chagrin, Eglinton was separated from Davie.

The large waggonette was the vehicle chosen for the drive over the hills. Mrs. Wybrant appeared in a flaring hat and high-coloured dress, which was sufficient to attract the attention of anybody. Miss Schoubert was very quietly dressed, and Davie, of course, appeared in the simplest possible costume. Bousfield decided to drive, and the party started in all good-humour—the fact that Mr. Davidson had taken his departure having apparently made a satisfactory impression upon all the company.

They drove up the grey roads, the perfume of the heather in their nostrils, the keen air exhilarating their spirits, and the waving lines of hills suggesting beauty and interest to their minds.

In the drive Davie almost forgot the trouble which had come upon her. She seemed to begin a new life.

A new life due to the wonderful recuperative powers of youth. The scent of the heather delighted her, and when on reaching the first height they came to a well, the stonework of which had been arranged by a village simpleton in remembrance of his benefactor, she jumped out quite gaily and drank a cup of the water to the memory of the unknown hero who was in this strange place endowed with monumental honours. To most of the party it was a surprise to find deep vales and hills covered with sheep; and then broad stretches of moorland; and again farms and villages with all the signs of homely comfort about them. At one place they passed over a bridge that spanned a deep ravine, the road having a peculiar turn at that point which required skilful management of horses to cross in safety. But Bousfield was a good driver, and he only laughed at the hysterical exclamations of Mrs. Wybrant. She became more fussy and hysterical when Eglinton's hat was blown off and flew down the scarp of the hill, and he had to follow it, with apparently every danger of

tumbling headlong over the rough boulders into the ravine.

He secured his hat, however, and returned with a merry smile upon his face, which was only the reflection of that of all the party except Mrs. Wybrant.

“It is easier to get down than up,” said Eglinton laughing. “I am sorry to have kept you waiting, but one can’t go driving through the country without a hat.”

“Good gracious, Mr. Eglinton,” said Mrs. Wybrant, “I did not think you would risk your life for the sake of a hat.”

“There was no risk at all,” he said reassuringly, and the whole party laughed.

To all the party except Medwyn and Davie it was a new world they had entered. They had passed the Grampians on one side in proceeding to Aberdeen, and on the other side as they had journeyed by rail down the side of the Dee to Ballater, but they had never understood that on the top of the hills was a large population.

“Dear me,” exclaimed Mrs. Wybrant, “I thought there was nothing but snow on the tops of the Grampians, and here I find people and schools and churches, and I must say a very lovely country.”

Medwyn smiled and said—

“You see you have always made your journey by the railway, and therefore you could not conceive how much beauty there was on the hill-tops. But you can judge for yourself of the beauty of the place, although you may still see snow on some of the cairns or on Lochnagar. I assure you people can live very happily here.”

“No doubt,” she said snappishly; “that is, people who care for nothing else but living.”

Bousfield broke in with his hearty laugh—

“And what else are the people to do but to think of their living and what they can get to live upon? I should say that the happiest state we could reach would be that in which we should have no thought of living at all but simply to vegetate.”

Mrs. Wybrant turned her head away, disdainingly to answer such a proposition.

To the others the question and the answer afforded much merriment.

They arrived at Ballater in time to have breakfast, change horses, and to proceed to Crathie.

To Medwyn the outing was anything but pleasant. Apart from his annoyance



at the fact that Davidson had escaped him, there was before his eyes a very clear evidence that Davie and Eglinton were becoming more than friends. He blamed himself for feeling vexed at this; he reproached himself for even wishing to interfere—and yet he was sorely troubled. At last he owned to himself that he could not part with Davie.

On the top of Morven the sun shone brilliantly, and as they passed Abergeldie they were not a little amused to see some of the domestics of the Prince of Wales crossing the river in a basket swung on a rope. They came to the grey church of Crathie, situated upon a hill looking so peaceful that it seemed a fitting place for calm worship. When they entered church they found it crammed with visitors, and the ordinary congregation almost driven out of their places. Her Majesty entered by the private staircase, and as much attention was shown in the eyes of the people to the Prince and Princess of Wales as to herself. The service proceeded without any distinct recognition of royalty being present.

The preacher, a tall man with an intellectual face, an eminent professor in

one of our northern colleges, delivered his sermon without any reference and without any apparent deference to the distinguished audience to which he had to preach. It was notable that he did not even lift his eyes to any of the royal party, but proceeded as calmly as if he had been preaching to an ordinary congregation. The sermon certainly touched upon the affairs of the world, but only on the affairs which were always occurring. His text was a simple one, and when he prayed it was that the world might have peace. When the service was over the people quitted the church in quite as orderly a way as if no one of distinction had been present.

Mrs. Wybrant, however, highly excited by the pleasure of seeing royalty, was much disappointed that there was no element of excitement in the other people. She could not understand the Queen appearing in such a small, stuffy church, as she called it, without anybody recognizing her. She just seemed to be like an ordinary woman, the only difference being that her Majesty left the church before the other people.

They returned to the waggonette, which had been put up at a small way-

side inn, and Davie laughed very much at her aunt's indignation that the Queen had not made a speech or done something unusual. Then they drove on, still by the river, past the Lion's Face, past the Castle of Braemar, and presently arrived at Braemar itself, where they had arranged to dine.

But as there was some time to wait for dinner the party separated with the intention of taking a view of the surrounding scenery. The Linn of Quoich was an object of interest to Davie, and with willing steps she accompanied Eglinton in order to obtain at least a glimpse of it. But somehow they wandered down by the river at the back of the village, and lingered long gazing at the water as it flowed onwards. They were under the shade of the trees, and Eglinton again took his opportunity. The river, shallow and glistening under the sunlight, and reflecting the trees, seemed as it murmured along to be a fitting chorus to a tale of love.

"Fine scenery round about here, Miss Morrison," said Eglinton, with a chuckle of enjoyment at his own commonplace observation.

"Beautiful," was her answer, with an

equal sense of the commonplace but with deeper feeling of the beauty of the scenery which surrounded her.

“Don’t you think that one could be happy in such a place as this?”

“Yes, *one* might be, but two might not,” she answered with a laugh. “I have often puzzled myself by what rule of arithmetic two are made into one, but I always understood the people who marry were transformed into that singular condition. Although, by the way, I find that railway clerks do not recognize it. They show their wisdom in that, because it so seldom happens that the two are one in reality. The man is fond and often foolish at first. The woman is flattered and weak, and yields to his approaches. By-and-by there comes a time when each draws back from the other, and discovers that a mistake has been made.

“Could that be in our case?”

“I don’t know, but it is very probable. Two people are very apt to imagine that their future is to be one of entire bliss, but they do not make allowance for the change of thought and feeling which comes with better acquaintance. You know the old proverb which so many

people illustrate, 'Marry in haste and repent at leisure.'"

"I see you are a philosopher," said Eglinton, smiling, and then suddenly changing his tone. "I had no idea that you had studied life so deeply as to become such a cynic."

"A cynic is often best able to answer folly."

"You are playing with me. Can you not be serious for one moment? Can you not tell me in all earnestness that I may hope some day you will think of me—that you will love me?"

Davie looked at him with that strange expression of surprise that she had often shown, and then with a frankness which few women show she answered—

"Love you? I think I do so now"

Eglinton, amazed and delighted by this confession, took her in his arms intending to kiss her. She thrust him back, and at that moment Corbett's voice was heard behind them saying quietly—

"You will be late for dinner if you do not come at once."

Both were startled by this sudden interruption. Davie blushed. Eglinton looked confused and then murmured, "We were only interested in some

matters concerning ourselves, and you must excuse our delay. The scenery is very beautiful, we were both interested in it."

Corbett gazed from one to the other, and the sad look which had so often appeared in his eyes was there again, in his mind was the sad cry—

"Oh, Davie, why will you not trust me?"

Eglinton was full of joy, he had won the prize he had sought, and although he was sorry for Corbett, there was too much pleasure in his own triumph to permit him to yield a point to his adversary.

Corbett only saw that some understanding had occurred between them and was silent. Eglinton gaily said—

"Come, let us go to dinner."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE NEW LIGHT.

THE party was a merry one. They had been lucky enough to secure a private room in the hotel, and were consequently free from the disagreeable feeling that

other people were listening to their conversation. Mrs. Wybrant was brilliant—in her own estimation—and made much fun, as she thought, of Bousfield's stolid manners, and of Graham.

The latter certainly had an idiosyncrasy which would have astonished as well as amused most people. Although he had done good service in the navy, he disliked the sea.

“It is all very well for boys who have been reading Marryat,” he said; “but after you have been a dozen years upon the water you tire of it—at least I have done so, and keep away from it except when I am compelled to go on duty.”

“That's a joke, Graham,” said Corbett, “for we know what you have done.”

“Yes,” answered Graham with epigrammatic severity, “but there is a difference between doing one's duty and liking it.”

To Davie the whole scene was one of intense enjoyment; she laughed at Bousfield when he attempted to make a joke, and at Graham when he railed against the sea, the new light that had flashed upon her made all the world beautiful. Only the sad expression in Medwyn's

eyes disturbed her happiness. What *could* she do for him to make him happy like herself, to make him feel the pleasure of the sunshine and the air, of the singing of the birds and the murmur of the water?

She tried hard to rouse him, and he responded with gentle words and evident pleasure in the recognition of her endeavours to please him; but the remembrance of what he had seen was still in his mind, and he almost shrunk from her approaches. He commanded himself, however, because he was eager to avoid causing her pain, and she, still unconscious of the feelings with which he regarded her, tried by trifling attentions, to show that she was happy, expecting that he would be happy too in knowing it.

But he was not happy, in spite of his effort to believe that he could be content with any arrangement which satisfied her. He had decided that he was never to marry, but as soon as he saw that Davie was being taken away from him, he had become conscious that his resolution was very feeble indeed. He wished to study her interests, he wished to see her in the future a woman in comfortable



circumstances and free from care. But the character of Eglinton did not please him, and he was frightened at what the issue might be.

The party, however, went on merrily, and on the return journey Mrs. Wybrant was gratified with another sight of the Queen. As the outrider approached, the carriage stopped, and the gentlemen rose and lifted their hats. Her Majesty bowed and smiled, as Eglinton suggested, at the extravagant dress of Mrs. Wybrant. This was the source of much merriment to the party, and they drove on admiring the scenery in its calm sun-down light, the grey-green shades predominant, and rabbits starting hither and thither as if they were conscious of being safe from the guns. When they reached Balnagairn, Mistress Meg received them with due honours, but she kept her distance from Eglinton, who had quite clearly foiled her plan of settling Medwyn comfortably and of giving Davie a good husband.

The party had been so very happy that Medwyn thought there was no chance of danger; he even fancied that what he had seen had been some accidental

movement of Eglinton's which had deceived him. But still there was the doubt, and still there was the worrying thought within his own mind—should he permit this to go on. Apparently Davie was quite agreeable. She continued to puzzle herself about the strange joy which had entered her life; a joy which filled her heart with wonders; a joy which filled her mind with vague and wondrous visions of the future.

This made the road homeward bright as a day in June, and then roses would have perfumed the way; and indeed it was remarkable to observe how many roses garnished the cottages which they passed, even at this time of year. Eglinton was merry, for happy thoughts were in his mind, and so he asked—

“Do you often have such bloom on the heather?”

Davie laughed, saying—“Why, that's not heather at all—that is broom.”

Eglinton looked put out, but still quite cool, for he had got his hold of Davie, and whatever she might do he was still able to claim her. Corbett was quite aware of this from what he had observed on the hillside, and so he drew back without the slightest sign of animosity.

But there was a feeling that suggested that she had never thought of him as a lover, and that was the unkindest cut of all. He endured his disappointment with marvellous calmness, but he did feel pain—a pain such as a long life could not overcome.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

WHEN they reached Balnagairn there was a general expression of the pleasure which the excursion had afforded. Mrs. Wybrant was quite sure that the Queen had honoured her with a special bow, and was happy. Mrs. Bousfield and Mrs. Schoumert smiled at her vanity, and then proceeded to their rooms to arrange their dresses.

Davie had already done so, and Corbett had asked her to see him in the library, whilst Eglinton had made his claim to a meeting in the Boxwood Park.

She went first to Corbett.

“It is strange, Davie, that we cannot understand each other,” he said smilingly; “but I suppose it is the nature of a

woman to be a mystery to those who love her most."

"What mystery is there, Medwyn? I know of none."

"Oh, Davie, the mystery is in my feeling for you, and the future will be a blank to me without you."

"I do not know what you mean," she said quietly.

"Then I shall not tell you," he said.

"Our relationship has been of such long standing that I suppose you cannot believe in the existence of something more than a brotherly feeling?"

She placed her hands upon his shoulders, and her large blue eyes scanned his face curiously.

"What is it that makes you so strange?—we are good friends, and you were the dearest that I ever had. Why is it that now you look so sadly at me?"

"Can you not guess?" he said in a low tone, and looking at her with sad eyes.

"No."

"Then shall I tell you?"

"Yes. I would like to know. Lately you have not been like yourself with me, and it would be some satisfaction to know what I have done to cause such a change."

“Oh, Davie,” was his exclamation, “you know——”

“I do not—I only know that you are a father to me as well as a friend.”

“That is the unkindest cut of all. I wish to be more than a friend. I wish to be your husband.”

She, with a look that expressed wonder and something like fear, gazed at him, and then made the simple exclamation—

“Medwyn!”

There was such a strange look in her eyes that he paused, and hesitated to make the revelation which was on his lips. Was it possible that in such a short time she could have given up all the love that had been bestowed upon her, and could be ready to give herself to one who was a comparative stranger, without one apparent thought of the pain she was causing?

He patted her on the head—

“Quite right, Davie; so long as you make things plain there is no difficulty. What you wish shall be done. I have only desired to secure your happiness, and evidently I have failed.”

“Don’t talk like that, Medwyn. You have been kind and generous. If my thoughts have wandered in other ways

than those in which you would have wished them to go, I cannot help it. But for you there is all the gratitude my heart is capable of feeling."

"Davie," he murmured, "why do you speak as if there had been nothing more between us but ordinary intercourse? I have held back for a long time. My thoughts have been with you day and night; I held back because I loved you so, and because there is a reason why we should not be together."

"What reason?" asked Davie, wonderingly. "You know, Medwyn, that you have always been very dear to me. Something new has happened, and I don't understand myself."

Medwyn smiled, and taking up a book, played with it in his hand.

"I understand you, Davie—you have lost yourself."

"Not quite," she said with a sly twinkle in her eyes; "but I know what you mean, and I will be frank with you. I am going to meet Eglinton in the Boxwood Park. He will be there, and I will talk to him and laugh with him, and maybe"—this with a smile—"make love with him. Will you be very angry?"

"No, darling. Whatever pleases you

will satisfy me until there comes a point at which there is danger, and I am afraid that is very near. Don't think I have any angry thoughts towards Eglinton. He is a good fellow, and would not do any harm if he could help it, but, unfortunately, his good intentions only pave the way to his blunders. Davie, Davie, can you not understand how eager I am to save you from harm—how my whole life is devoted to you !”

She bent down upon the couch, hiding her head and sobbing.

“ Oh, Medwyn, you are cruel to me in your kindness. I cannot give you what you ask. I am walking blindly in a path which is strange to me, but you are and always will be very dear to me.”

“ So be it, Davie. We can agree between ourselves. Let the future be what it may, we shall always be at least brotherly and sisterly ”

“ Oh, more than that, Medwyn,” she exclaimed. “ Much more than that. And yet—— ” She paused and looked up to him with a pitiful and tearful face. “ Have you no pity, Medwyn ? Do you not see how troubled I am ? ”

He placed his hand quietly on her head, and smoothed her hair with a ten-

derness which a father might have displayed to a vexed child, and then said—

“Davie, I knew it all. Don’t be ashamed, and don’t be afraid. If I find that Eglinton is a safe man, I shall give my consent at once to your wishes.”

She looked up with such a startled expression that even Corbett, with all his coolness, was astonished.

“You are very good. Then let me go to him.”

It was hard upon Corbett, but he took her hand and led her to the door.

“Yes, Davie, go to him, since it is your wish. For what your wishes are I want to fulfil.”

She went away, but she did not go immediately into the garden. Medwyn’s tenderness had so affected her, and his kindness had so impressed her, that she doubted within herself which of the two men she loved.

Looking from the window she saw Eglinton impatiently passing up and down the path, and there was a certain sense—a very disagreeable sense—of having done something wrong in her mind. There was also a certain longing to speak to him and to explain that there must be nothing more between them. It was a foolish



thought, but like a woman she acted upon it and went out to him. He, as soon as he saw her, darted forward with an exclamation which rather astounded her.

“ Oh, my darling, why have you stayed away from me ? I want you to go away from this place ; take every hazard, and be my wife. You have said that you love me, then, what fear should there be between us ! ”

Davie had been prepared for much, but not for so much. That the effect of the strange moonlight which had arisen in her life was very strong ; she knew that Eglinton’s influence upon her was very strong she felt ; but that he should have discovered it and used the power he possessed was startling in the extreme.

“ I don’t know what bar there should be between us except that we know so little of each other, and in a little while you would tire of me, and perhaps I would tire of you. Can you not understand that whilst I think of you so much I may still doubt myself ? ”

“ Why doubt yourself ? Why doubt me ? There is a bright future before us. We have many things to hope for, many things to look forward to. Listen to me. If your heart has come to me, let me take you too.”

There was that sudden change again in Davie which showed her sense of fun, and looking askant at him, she said—

“But how do you know that my heart has gone to you?”

He drew up, and was almost inclined to be indignant, but then he softened and quietly observed “Because you said so; and when a woman once says that she loves, a man is entitled to claim her love.”

Davie’s face would have been amusing to any one who had seen it at that moment. It expressed the sense that she did care for him combined with the foolish feeling of an endeavour to torment him. She was not quite sure of herself in what she was doing or saying. And there was the dreadful memory that she had listened to the strange story of Mr. Davidson. Bound to silence, and yet knowing what she did, could she accept the advances of any man? To the poor girl the position was very trying. She was pressed on the one hand to accept the love of a man who was very dear to her, and on the other to accept that of one who had brought fresh thoughts and prospects into her eyes. And yet she dare not speak. She dare not decide. There was a certain sense of responsibility in all that she was doing.

“Do not speak to me now, Mr. Eglinton,” she said sadly, “for I cannot answer you. You do not know the sad secret of my life, and I cannot tell you. Even Medwyn, who has been brother and friend and father almost to me, does not know it, and I am helpless. I must obey, because I know that I am forbidden to let others know.”

“That is folly,” said Eglinton in his impetuous way “If any one harms you, why not speak to those who care for you and let them protect you? If any one threatens you, why not stand back and tell those who have the power to guard you?”

There was such a pitiful look in Davie’s eyes that even Eglinton, so blind to the general phases of expression, was impressed, and he said in a bewildered way: “I do not understand what *can* have happened to you.”

“I dare not tell. I have pledged myself to silence, and the thought of what has occurred is killing me.”

“More fool you,” said Eglinton hotly “What has occurred cannot be anything on your account, and your proper course is to protect yourself.”

That was not precisely the language

which a lover might have used, but it was honest and sincere, and intended for her interest. She felt that, and did not resent it. She felt the kindly feeling that was in his voice and look, and in the touch of his hand. As they walked along the Boxwood Park, the soft shadows of the gloaming falling upon them, she knew that her heart was indeed gone, and that Eglinton had got it. She remembered Medwyn, and there was something of painful regret in thinking that he would be disappointed—he who had been so good, and had in every way shown his devotion towards her. It was hard to think of his suffering, after what he had just said to her. But love was more powerful than judgment, as it always has been; and, come what might, she had yielded herself to Eglinton.

## CHAPTER XV.

### CHANGES.

THE struggle in Davie's mind that night was a cruel one, for the joy she had found was quite darkened by the consciousness of the sorrow she had unknowingly

caused. Her self-reproach was of course foolish, but it was natural enough, considering the affectionate regard she had for Medwyn. She felt that she had neglected many opportunities of doing him service, and for his sake she felt that it was almost her duty to turn away from Eglinton. That thought distracted her more; for she could not decide between her own inclination and her desire to make Medwyn happy.

What could she do?

And with that sad question in her mind, she fell asleep, only to dream in a confused way of the troubles which surrounded her. She remembered vaguely the sonnet which Eglinton had quoted, and wished that they might have realized it. But in her thoughts of Medwyn the bar between them seemed too great.

She was almost glad when Mistress Meg—who was like the early bird, first to learn anything—came to her with the intelligence that Eglinton had received an urgent request from his father to return to him at once. And yet the thought that the man who had now become dear to her was going away, and that they were to be separated, was not a pleasing one.

She felt his departure the more painful because at breakfast he seemed to be so merry that it occurred to her he had no regret in leaving. He was such a strange fellow that if she had thought of it she would have doubted the affection he professed. But then there was the tender touch of his hand as he asked her to take a last walk in the garden. She could not refuse, and all the dogs followed her when she went out.

“ You will let me now call you Davie ? You know that we are to each other all that a man and woman can be until they are married.”

Davie held down her head, for the struggle was still in her mind as to the duty which she owed to Medwyn, and the feeling which she felt for Eglinton.

“ I am going away,” he continued ; “ but you will be in my thoughts every moment. It is no use hiding it from ourselves. The strange affinity which directs the fate of us all is between us. You are strong in owning your fate. Then do not let us play with it. Let us be frank, and own that we belong to one another.”

Davie still hesitated—still thought of Medwyn and of his sorrow.

“Give me time,” she said. “I have still a year of the training to pass through, and it is better that I should pass through that before I gave you a final answer.”

“So be it,” said Eglinton, with more seriousness than he had yet displayed.

When he had gone Davie was very quiet, but in her manner there was an evident sense of loss. The days passed quickly; the gentlemen were quite happy in their shooting; the ladies amused themselves as best they could in excursions through the neighbourhood, with an occasional sail on the loch. Then came the time when the party was to leave for Colborough, where Bousfield intended, as he said, using an Americanism, that they should have a good time. She had often thought of this departure, often wished for it, and now that the time had come she felt full of fear, as if she were leaving the haven in which she had known happiness to venture out upon a sea of troubles. Mrs. Wybrant was of course buoyant in the anticipation of the merry times she was to have at Colborough, for, as she whispered to Davie, Corbett was such a moody creature that it was scarcely possible to be gay in his presence, and she hoped that he was not to be one of the

party Davie was more shocked by this than by anything Mrs. Wybrant had said yet.

She thought there was something very curious in the resemblance between the manner of Mr. Davidson and Mrs. Wybrant. Both vexed her by their strange propositions, and both tried her temper so that sometimes she had felt inclined to speak very sharply.

Medwyn had intended to accompany the party to Yorkshire, but Mistress Meg spoke so seriously to him, seeing his low condition, that he agreed to allow them to go without him, and promised to follow.

He drove them to the station, and Davie, sorely troubled by this strange parting, walked with him up and down the platform, dreading the moment when the train would arrive.

“Are you cold?” he said, as he felt her hand tremble on his arm.

“Yes, Medwyn, I am shivering. I do not understand it, but I have a great fear of leaving you.”

“Do not fear,” he said; “I shall soon be with you.”

But there was something so weariful in his look that she felt still more frightened.

“Are you ill?” she asked.



He turned to her with one of those sad smiles.

“I would be well, Davie, if I knew that you were happy.”

“I cannot be happy, Medwyn, so long as I see you so sad.”

He laughed as if there was some joke in what she had said, and then he pressed her arm, saying—

“I am afraid, Davie, there is some blunder between us, but we must try to make the best of it, and, if we can, laugh rather than cry at our spilt milk. You will enjoy yourself at Colborough. Bousfield is a good fellow, and he will do all that possibly can be done to make you happy. I shall be with you very soon. At present I have things to do here which will not allow me to accompany you.”

“Do you still care for me, Medwyn?”

He looked at her in surprise.

“Why do you ask such a question?”

“Because you are so cold—because you allow me to go away with so little sign that you are sorry for it.”

“Oh, my darling,” he murmured in her ear, “you are very cruel to me, and try me very much.” Then, feeling ashamed of his harshness, he pressed her arm again, and looked into her eyes tenderly, and

would have taken her in his arms but for the place in which they were.

The train was approaching. She understood him, and the tears sprang to her eyes.

“How can you say that I am cruel, Medwyn, when I would do anything to please you? and I am going away too, and it hurts me very much to leave you in this unkind way.”

“Do not say unkind, Davie; we shall all be merry enough by-and-by. Here is the train.”

Bousfield and Graham bustled about seeing after the ladies' boxes, and then they all went into the compartment. Medwyn, standing at the window, said “Good bye,” promising that it should only be for a short time.

Davie, sitting by the window when the train moved, seemed inclined to cry. She strained her eyes as long as it was possible to see, and almost wished that she might have stayed behind, notwithstanding the visions she had had of the new life upon which she was now entering.

Medwyn turned away with a heavy heart, and yet that look which Davie had given to him as the train moved out of the station, and the motion of her hand

in token of adieu, afforded him some comfort. There had been in the expression something that made him think he might almost hope yet to win her.

On returning to the house he found some letters and a telegram waiting for him.

He had been quietly making inquiries about Mr. Davidson. The letters informed him that the man was one of the most dangerous speculators known in the States. The telegram informed him that the Silver Mine Company was an utter failure, and that every one connected with it would be ruined.

Medwyn started at this with an exclamation of terror, thinking of the association of Davie and Eglinton, and pitying the latter in spite of their rivalry. He pitied him still more when thinking of the old man, his father, who had unconsciously allowed his son to waste his means, and who would now be penniless. Although he did not know much of Mr. Eglinton, senior, he knew enough to know his simple nature and his devotion to science, and it distressed him to think how this old man was to be suddenly left without the means of livelihood. Unfortunately, the letters did not

give him sufficient information to enable him to act in such a way as to protect his friends; but he was resolved that, come what might, he would pursue this man until he had discovered something which would enable him to bring home the knavery of which he was sure he was guilty, and to punish it properly

“Eh, man, have you gone clean geyt?” said Meg, when she saw Medwyn walking up and down the terrace meditating over the news he had received. “Can ye no come in to your dinner like a sensible man, and if you want comfort—I will comfort you.”

This was meant in all good nature, and Medwyn smiled.

“Ah, Meg, I wish you could comfort me. I know you would like to do so, and I thank you, but you know as well as I that it is some one else whom I need to give me happiness.”

Meg raised her head and the Tower of Babel quivered.

“It’s your own fault. Why did you let that man come into the house? Why did you let him stay? Why, the very dogs jaloused that he was to bring mischief with him.”

Medwyn shook his head sadly

“Poor fellow, he has contrived to bring as much trouble upon himself as he has brought sorrow to me.”

## CHAPTER XVI.

### COLBOROUGH.

Bousfield's place was situated in one of the loveliest valleys in Yorkshire. The house was a plain old-fashioned building of red brick, but the colour had been toned down by age and it now had a venerable greyish tinge. One side was completely covered with thick ivy, through which the windows flashed in the sunlight, and in the summer evenings appeared like enormous rubies set in green.

Behind was a range of hills, the slopes of which were in some parts densely wooded; in front was a broad plain of rich fields full of golden grain rippling under the wind like the wavelets of a lake. The plain was bordered by a long wood through which ran a stream famous for its trout, and often Bousfield would be out in the morning with his rod in time to bring home a sufficient number

of the glistening speckled delicacies for breakfast. But the wood itself was famous for its walks, its wild flowers, and its broad-spreading trees. In winter it was bleak and weird enough, but in summer it was the retreat sought by many tired merchants of Leeds and Bradford. There they could forget their cloth manufactories and warehouses, and relish the homely but ample dinners supplied at the old inn of the village.

The house stood on low ground and several large French windows gave exit to an extensive lawn which was bordered by flower beds and shrubberies. Beyond that was a line of magnificent beech and chestnut trees, screening a park in which Bousfield kept some of his favourite cows. The farm-buildings and stables were at the foot of the park and were notable throughout the country for the trim state in which they were kept; the stables especially and even the pigstye were sights which other farmers came to see.

Then, in a large shed he had a collection of all the latest and most improved agricultural implements and machinery. A little way from this shed were the labourers' cottages, built on a plan of his own and affording to each married man

a comfortable house with a bit of ground to cultivate on his own account. Bousfield had reason to be proud of his place, and whenever he had visitors his first pleasure was to show them over it; and although he had not much to say on general topics he was fluent enough when talking of his farming experiments.

So on the first morning after their arrival Davie and Captain Graham had to make the round, Bousfield discoursing all the time about what he was doing for the benefit of British farmers. Graham, who was as indifferent to farming as he professed to be to the sea, put the pertinent question—

“But does it pay?”

Bousfield paused, and there was a somewhat puzzled look on his face for a moment, then his expression brightened.

“Yes,” he answered, “it pays in two ways; first in discovering what may be done in farming, next in giving one an occupation and pleasure. But if you mean profit in money, it is chiefly from the cattle I obtain that.”

Davie was much amused by the discussion which followed regarding the advantages of a model farm, but Bousfield insisted that it served a purpose,

and at any rate it pleased him. The gentlemen were perfectly good-natured in their argument, and Graham, who seemed always to take unpleasant views of everything—most of his friends thought it was more in jest than anything else—insisted that Bousfield was wasting his capital and keeping some good practical farmer out of an honest living. Bousfield laughed and pointed to the fields of ripened grain where the harvesters were at work, and the most improved reaping machines were clearing the ground with a rapidity which made the labour easy.

“As long as I can show that,” he said, “and my stock of cattle I may call myself a practical farmer. You are the most awful grumbler I ever knew; and the fun is you grumble most about the things of which you know least.”

“Except the sea,” suggested Davie, with a wicked smile.

Bousfield’s loud laugh showed how he appreciated her quickness.

“You are right, and I beg your pardon, Graham; you can grumble about the thing of which you have knowledge.”

“I wish you were at sea, Miss Morrison,” said Graham, without the shadow of a smile on his grave face, although he



was paying a compliment, "and then I would be pleased with it."

"Thank you," replied Davie, merrily, "but probably I would not be so."

And so they made their first inspection of Bousfield's place with much banter and good humour.

Davie had entered upon the new life to which she had looked forward so eagerly, but it was not with the free spirit of enjoyment she had anticipated would be hers. There was the remembrance of the sad face of Medwyn as he stood on the railway platform watching her depart, she felt as if she would like to go back to cheer his lonely life, and she wished that he would hasten his coming to Colborough in order that he might assure her she had not been unkind to him. Then for Eglinton there was a vague longing, and yet she almost wished that she had never seen him because Medwyn was unhappy. They were both coming soon, but instead of being glad on that account she had something approaching to a feeling of dread at the meeting of the two.

Then there was the shadow of the mysterious Mr. Davidson hanging over her thoughts and life.

The hospitality of Colborough was of the most liberal character, and both Mr. and Mrs. Bousfield resolved that their young guest should be well entertained during her stay with them. There were dinners, and balls, and picnics amongst the most picturesque scenery in such rapid succession that Davie began to wish for a little quietude. To Mrs. Wybrant all this was the height of felicity, and she could not understand how a young girl like Davie could tire of it. Bousfield was more considerate, and, seeing that Davie was becoming wearied, said to her—

“I think we had better call a halt to our outings and have a quiet time at home. What do you say?”

“That is just what I would like,” she said gladly.

“Very well, we shall disappoint Mrs. Wybrant by refusing the invitations for the next fortnight, but to tell you the truth, I rather enjoy the fun of disappointing her.”

“Is not that a little unkind?” asked Davie.

“Yes, it is,” replied Bousfield frankly, and his face showed that he was sorry to have spoken unkindly even in jest; “but I’ll tell you what we shall do—

leave her to accept what invitations she pleases for herself. We can have plenty of amusement, however, for Eglinton is to be here to-morrow—that's Friday—and Corbett comes on Saturday ”

That was good news for Davie, and she had pleasant meditations of rambles through the fields and along the straggling paths of the wood by the side of the stream with Eglinton and Medwyn. She had once longed for change and to know something of the gaieties of life, now she was longing for the quiet joys which are only found in undisturbed intercourse with those whom we love.

Eglinton arrived, gay as ever, for his father was better and he was still unaware of the terrible misfortune which was about to befall him. On the brink of ruin he was bright and cheerful, and the first opportunity of speaking to Davie alone was after luncheon, when he proposed that she should show him “the way through the wood”—intending a joke, of course, but serious enough in his desire to have her all to himself.

She hesitated at first, and as the woman who hesitates is lost, she presently consented. He crossed the lawn to the gate, and in a few minutes she

joined him, so that they thought no one knew that they had gone together. But when Mrs. Wybrant, fussily moving about in search of her, exclaimed—"Bless my soul—where *can* Davie be?" Bousfield grinned and glanced at his wife, who laughed, for both had seen the couple depart.

"She has gone for a walk, I believe; and if you go round by the kitchen garden and take the path up the hill, when you get to the top you may find her."

Mrs. Wybrant fanned herself in dismay; the very thought of such an exertion on such a hot day to one of her plethoric condition was fatiguing.

"She ought to have told me before going; but she is a most singular girl. I could not follow her up there, and I shall go and write my letters."

When they were alone Bousfield turned to his wife. He had a shrewd suspicion in which direction the young people had turned their steps.

"I say, these two mean to make a match, and I don't think we should interfere unless Corbett objects."

"I saw that at Balnagairn," said the wife, "and there is no reason why any one should interfere. I like him; he is

fairly well off, and I think she might find a worse husband under her aunt's guidance."

The young people, in happy unconsciousness that they had been observed, strolled out in the sunshine of the day, and of youth—there under the shade of the trees, which were already marked with the varied tints of autumn. Beside them ran the stream glistening like silver, and the occasional flash of a trout was like a sunbeam dancing on the water.

Davie gathered wild flowers as they passed along, and tried by ingenious references to botany and its pleasures to prevent him speaking of the subject which she knew was uppermost in his thoughts as well as her own—although in a different way

But they came to a large oak tree, underneath which was a rustic seat, and Eglinton insisted that she should sit down.

"Now," he said, taking her hand in his, "do you know why I was in such a hurry to come to Colborough?"

"I suppose because you wanted to enjoy yourself."

"Exactly—in your society. How I have longed for you! how I have wearied

for the time when I could be with you again, and how I weary for the time when I shall have the right to be with you always."

"And then how you will weary for the time when you can get away from me!" she said, with one of those smiles in which good nature and satire were curiously mingled.

"Why will you not be serious with me?" he said earnestly.

"I am quite serious."

"No, you are laughing at me" (this with a little impatience).

Davie raised those quiet blue eyes and met his gaze with an expression partly of wonder and partly of reproach.

"I could not do that, Mr. Eglinton," she said quietly, "after what I have told you."

"But is it still true?" he cried impulsively. "Have you not changed?"

She turned away her head.

"Why should you think that?"

"Because you are so strange in your manner; because all the time we have been walking here you would not allow me to speak of my love for you."

"I said you were to wait—I wish to make sure of myself."

“Is it not that you wish to make sure of me?” he said with some bitterness.

She rose.

“I think we had better go now,” she replied, with an attempt at playfulness, “for I think we are about to quarrel.”

But he held her firmly by the hand, and with passionate earnestness said—

“No, no, Davie, you must not go yet.”

“I do not like ‘must,’” she replied, trying to laugh and at the same time to release her hand.

“Will you not listen to me for one moment more? I cannot wait.”

“Why not?”

“Because I fear to lose you. It is ridiculous, I dare say, but I have never known anything like this before, and if you turn away from me I can never know anything like it again. There is pain as well as joy in this experience.”

Her head dropped and there was a serious expression on her face, whilst her pretty foot patted the ground impatiently

“There should be no pain.”

“There must be when it is so difficult to understand you. Give me your promise to be my wife, and then I will be all happiness.”

She looked up now and responded firmly—

“It would be folly, Mr. Eglinton, to give a promise which might be broken; it would trouble me and the disappointment might lead you to think more unkindly of me than you will do if you wait until I feel in myself that I can give you a definite answer.”

“When will that be, then?” he asked eagerly. “To-morrow?—or next day? I want it before you leave Colborough.”

“Before I leave Colborough, then, I shall give you my answer. And now we *must* return, for they will be all wondering what has become of us.”

“Ah, well, I suppose beggars must be content with what alms are given them.”

And they retraced their way—silent, and both having an uncomfortable feeling that there had been something like a quarrel between them.

Sunshine still about them, but shadows in their hearts.



## CHAPTER XVII.

## CALAMITY.

THE arrival of Medwyn Corbett on the next day was not altogether pleasing to Eglinton, for he had a strong suspicion—and probably it was a justifiable one—that Davie's hesitation to give the promise he sought was on account of her thoughts of him.

He was therefore somewhat cool in his greeting to him, and he was inclined to feel irritable at the kindness with which Corbett grasped his hand. There was also a sort of pitying look in his eyes which suddenly suggested to Eglinton that Davie had already pledged herself to him. He could not imagine that it was the thought of his impending ruin which caused the expression.

Davie was full of joy at Medwyn's arrival, and when he saluted her with a kiss Eglinton chewed the end of his moustache in chagrin.

“You are looking well, Davie,” said Medwyn, “the Yorkshire air appears to agree with you. I am afraid you will not care to visit Balnagairn again.”

“How can you say that, Medwyn?” she said reproachfully “You know how dear the place is to me—for your mother’s sake and for your own sake.”

That was another sting to Eglinton; but if he had not been in love he would have understood that such a frank conversation would not have been carried on in the presence of others by lovers.

He patted her hand affectionately, and with a brotherly smile he said—

“That is right, Davie, never forget your old friends. You have good ones here, but you can always keep a place in your heart for us.”

“I have been very happy here, indeed, and if I had a complaint to make it would be that Mr. and Mrs. Bousfield have been trying to give me too much pleasure.”

“Nonsense, child,” exclaimed Mrs. Bousfield, laughing, “we have only been having a good time, as the Americans say; and, as life is short, the more merriment you can get into it the better.”

“So say I,” remarked Graham, who looked as if he had never laughed in his life. “I like fun and nothing to do but enjoy it.”

“You want a mixture of work, though, to enable you to enjoy it thoroughly,” suggested Bousfield.

“You are always so practical,” was Mrs. Wybrant’s comment.

“I am sure a day of unmitigated enjoyment is hard enough work for anybody.”

Davie was considerably surprised when she was told that one of the ploughmen’s wives wished particularly to see her; and she was still more so when she went into the hall and the woman handed her a letter.

“Beg pardon, miss, but the gentleman told me I wasn’t on no account to give the letter to anybody but yourself. I know nought about ’im, but he came to our house and asked if I knew you, and when I said ‘Yes, sir,’ he asked me to bring this to you and to say that you were to read it when nobody was with you. He was an old gentleman.”

Davie felt sick at heart, for she at once surmised from whom the letter came; and when she opened it in her own room her surmise was confirmed.

“Come to me at once,” the letter ran, “you will find me at the old oak tree where you were sitting with Eglinton yesterday I did not intend to see you

so soon again, but circumstances have occurred which render it imperative that we should meet. Do not fail; it is your happiness I am thinking about.

“YOUR FATHER.”

She was bewildered. Her first impulse was to take the letter to Medwyn and seek his advice; then she remembered the pledge she had given at Balnagairn not to reveal what this man—she found it difficult to think of him as her father—had told her.

Then she thought it best to obey the summons, and making the feeble excuse to Mrs. Bousfield that she wished to take a walk, she went out. But as she was going she heard the voice of her hostess exclaiming sympathetically—

“Eh, deary, what love will do,” for Mrs. Bousfield had not the slightest doubt that she was going to meet Eglinton.

That gentleman was, however, busily engaged with his cigar and billiards.

She hurried along, her heart palpitating with vague fears of the meeting with this strange man whose claim she doubted, and yet dared not openly deny after the proofs he had given her. How could he have possessed her mother's letters and

her mother's hair if he were not the man he represented himself to be? And if he were, how wicked it was of her to have such a desire to avoid him.

She was distracted by the doubt whether or not she ought to keep the promise she had made to be silent. At one moment she believed she had a right to break it as it was forced from her, and then the memory of her mother, to which he had appealed, tied her tongue.

She saw him when she turned the last bend of the umbrageous path, standing under the oak tree resting on his staff. There seemed to be a difference in his appearance compared with what it had been when she had seen him last. He seemed to be feebler, and much older, as if he had passed through a severe illness.

He advanced a few paces to meet her, and notwithstanding that doubt in her mind, she submitted to be kissed on the brow.

"It is so good of you, my child, to come at once," he said softly; "you cannot know how much I have wished to see you. Of course, I cannot hope that you will give me a daughter's affection, since you have never known me; but you seem willing to give me a daughter's duty."

She drew back with something like a shudder of fear.

“You are wrong, sir. I will give you affection when I am quite satisfied that you are my father.”

“It is hard to find that you still doubt when I have given you such proofs of my identity. But I will give you another proof. I am here to warn you against marrying George Eglinton.”

She started, blushed, and trembled a little as she put the question—

“What do you mean?”

“That he is not the man I would like my daughter to marry. He has led a wild life, and is still too unsettled in his ways. But more important even than that is the fact that he invested everything he possessed in a silver mine which has proved to be a failure, and he is utterly ruined.”

Davie became pale. She had heard Eglinton talk of the mine and of Mr. Davidson. It flashed upon her that if he was ruined the ruin had been brought about by her father! The thought made her shudder.

“Are you sure of this?” she asked with trembling lips.

“I am, for I, too, have lost in the same

venture, and am now, like him, penniless."

"Was it not you who induced him to risk his fortune in this speculation?"

"He may say so, but it is not true. I believed in the mine, and he, after making an inspection himself, also believed in it. I even advised him to be very careful, as I saw the impetuosity of his character. But he would not be advised."

She looked at him steadily now.

"Your advice was intended to make him the more eager, and you knew it. If you are my father, I must try to make up to him in some measure for the ruin you have caused."

"How can you do that?" he said, "and why do you say *if* I am your father? Do you require further proof?"

"Yes."

He quietly produced a pocket-book and took from it two rings; one a wedding ring, the other set with opals and diamonds.

"I have kept these precious relics always by me since I took them from your mother's finger," he said, with a sad voice; "I never intended to part from them, but now I give them to you."

Inside the opal ring you will find your mother's name. Show it to Corbett, and he will tell you that no man except your father could possess it."

She took them from his hand, her own trembling as she did so, and when she saw her mother's name, tears filled her eyes, and she bowed her head.

"I cannot doubt any longer," she said in subdued tones; "what you have told me must be true."

"Then, if you no longer doubt, will you promise still to keep my secret?"

"I promise. But why have you hidden yourself from me and from your friends during all these years? Why do you still wish to conceal yourself?"

"It was a resolve—a foolish one, perhaps—which I took the day your mother was buried, a resolve that, as soon as I had provided for you, I would take another name, begin a new life, and forget the past. When I had completed the Indian contract, the death of Davidson afforded me the opportunity I desired. Often the desire to see you was in my mind, but I held doggedly to my resolution until Eglinton met me. Then his talk of the old place and old friends and of you overcame my resolu-



tion. I decided to see them once more, but without revealing myself to any one except you, and even to you only if you proved to be like your mother."

"And why was this strange resolve taken?" she inquired with wondering eyes.

A shadow seemed to fall upon his face, he shook his head and sighed.

"You are too young yet, Davie, for me to explain that. But this I can tell you; it was chiefly because I had done your mother a great wrong, and the thought of it filled me with remorse. That was why I wished to forget the past."

"My poor mother," sobbed Davie, pressing the rings to her lips.

Whenever she was looking at him, his face had an expression of grave melancholy, but when, as now, her eyes were turned away, there was something in his gaze which suggested an eager desire to discover what effect his words had upon her. He had an expressive visage, and its rapid changes would have puzzled the most acute observer to make out the character of the man.

"You may well say that," was his answer to Davie's exclamation. "She

suffered much on my account, and I have found relief from the remembrance of it only in hard work. But my long penance should obtain pardon from you, as it would have obtained forgiveness from her if she could have known it. Give me your hand in token that you pardon me."

She gave him her hand, but did not look at him, the poor girl was sobbing all the time, so many sad thoughts were passing through her mind. The mother who had been wronged, the father who had deserted her and now claimed her under such strange conditions, formed a combination of troubles which overwhelmed her.

"Why do you not speak?" he continued. "I want you to tell me how you propose to help Eglinton."

She looked up again and answered promptly, her voice now quite steady—

"I shall marry him, and the money you left to me will save him from the poverty you have brought upon him. I hesitated when he asked me yesterday, but now it becomes necessary to atone for what you have done."

"You are to do nothing of the kind. Your father has the first claim upon you,

and he requires assistance at present. But I know you do not mean what you say, and so we can pass it over. You will come to London soon with your aunt, and I wish you to come to me immediately after your arrival."

"I shall go to you since you command me; but I do mean what I say, and, as my husband, he alone will have the right to control my actions. You have forfeited a father's rights, and I seek only to make amends for a father's guilt. Oh! can you not understand how the confession you have made has shocked and alarmed me."

"These are hard words, coming from my daughter, and you will be sorry for having spoken them when you come to think of it calmly. I forbid you to marry him."

Here was a divided duty, indeed. Should she give allegiance to the father who had left her so long as an orphan, or should she follow her own generous impulse and endeavour to redeem his faults by accepting Eglinton?

"I will let you consider the matter," Davidson said quietly; there will be time enough for me to interfere should you persist in disobedience. Now we

may say good-bye until you come to London."

And so they parted.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### EGLINTON'S TRIAL.

SHE went back to the house with the determination that she would speak to Eglinton, and tell him that he need not wait any longer. She would keep her promise not to reveal the secret that Davidson was her father; but she would do her utmost to make amends to her lover, and to comfort him in his misfortune.

She saw Bousfield and Medwyn on the lawn, talking seriously.

"It's a bad business," said the former, "and you know that I was suspicious of it when it was first mentioned to me that Eglinton was obstinate, and I suppose he took the customary view of good advice, and thought it was not worth anything."

"It was not so much that as his belief in the result of his own and his friend Leighton's examination of the mine and

the trickery of Davidson which induced him to go into it."

"It comes to the same thing in the end—ruin."

"Absolute ruin, I fear, it is for him. He said so himself when he received the news to-day."

Davie overheard the words, and hastened on to the house. There she inquired for Eglinton, and told the servant to say that she desired to speak to him in the drawing-room, which she had observed was vacant.

He came in, pale and wearied looking. She met him with both hands extended; he grasped them, and there was a grateful, although faint, smile on his face.

"It was good of you to send for me, Davie; the sight of you is a relief greater than I can tell or you imagine to the misery of my position. It is not myself I care about, but my poor father. I am going to him at once to tell him how I have blundered. The news may kill him, for he loves the old place and its surroundings. Oh! Davie, could you only know the suffering which my folly has caused me!"

She put her hands upon his head, and drawing him towards her, kissed him.

The man's eyes glistened as if with tears at this sign of tender sympathy

"Let me share the trouble with you," she murmured. "I will try to comfort you, and my fortune will save your father from the necessity of quitting his house. You asked me yesterday to be your wife, and I hesitated. To-day, in your hour of sorrow, I say—Yes."

"Davie!" he cried in joyful surprise, and clasping her in his arms with passionate fondness.

She yielded to him, resting her head upon his shoulder and breathing quickly. This new life upon which she had entered seemed to be full of sorrow instead of the joys to which she had looked forward. Still, there might be a future in which happiness would be found. She was young; she could hope!

To him the sudden realization of the bliss for which he had craved for the moment made him forget his misfortune and all that it involved. She was there in his arms, and as he kissed her again and again he repeated the dearest title which can be given to a woman—

"My wife—my own wife! You come like a guardian angel to lift me from despair. If it were not for my father I

would now almost rejoice in this misfortune because it has brought you to me—my darling!”

“Yes it is the misfortune which has brought me to you, and it is in misfortune that we find our friends.”

“You mean that we find out how few they are,” he said bitterly “But, Davie, I have something to say which will perhaps displease you. Can you bear it?”

“Anything from you now,” she answered, her head still resting on his shoulder.

He tightened his arm around her and there was deep sorrow in his voice.

“Do not be angry with me, if you can help it. I have been thinking during the last minute that we must wait. I cannot accept relief from your fortune—oh, my darling, do not misunderstand me! I must work, and by-and-by, when I have redeemed the follies of the past, I can claim you. I shall work now in earnest, and will make myself worthy of you. Till then, be free. It costs me more to say that than you can think.”

“Why say it?” she answered, hiding her face.

“I have been thinking during the last few minutes what a mean fellow you

would believe you had married if I accepted your generous offer.”

“Never,” she interrupted eagerly “I have reasons for believing that you should have all I possess.”

He was amazed and puzzled, the statement was so strange and her agitation so inexplicable.

“What reasons?”

“Do not ask—if you care for me at all, do not ask. You are suffering, but I am suffering more because I do not tell the cause of it. I implore you not to press me further. I will do all I can to help you—have not I proved it by offering you myself and all I own? I would call you cruel but that I know how much you are distressed.”

“Not cruel, Davie, but grateful—most grateful and happy even in this trial, now that I know you care for me so much. But I dislike secrets which cannot be explained. Secrets are always dangerous barriers between those who love.”

“I am sorry I said it, then, since I cannot explain—in time it will all be clear to you.”

He held her out from him and gazed long at her tearful face; then drawing her to him again—



“So be it. I shall wait till you are ready to explain. Meanwhile, I leave here to-night, in order that I may be the first to bear the bad news to my father. But oh, Davie, you do not know how hard you have tried me in giving me another chance of taking you just now. I crave so much for you that, if you had been penniless like myself, I would have said—‘Come with me.’”

Then he released her and she went to the window. She did not understand how difficult it had been for Eglington to come to what was really a wise and generous resolution. She only felt that she had tried to relieve him and that he had declined to accept her aid.

“You are vexed with me,” he said sadly. “Do not add in that way to the burden which is already hard enough to bear.”

“I have shown you how the burden might be taken off at once,” she answered, and there was certainly temper in the way she spoke. “You refuse it. I have nothing more to say.”

He approached her and placed his hand tenderly on her shoulder, she made a movement as if to throw it off.

“You should pity me, Davie, rather

than be angry with me. I do not refuse your help. I only say that I wish to prove myself worthy of you by my endeavour to save my father pain, and to be able to come to you as an equal."

She could not resist that appeal, and she turned to him again.

"You are much changed," she said, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Yes ; I am changed, and I hope for the better, I only want you to believe in me, and it will be for the better."

With one of her impulsive movements, she placed her hands on his shoulders and gazed in his face for a long time before she spoke. Then with a tender voice—

"I *will* believe in you, but you must let me help you."

"You have helped me, and the future will prove that the thought of you has enabled me to overcome mountains."

Davie smiled, and with a slight trembling of the lip—

"That is what you say; it will be some time before I know that it is what you feel."

"Then the time will come. Oh, Davie, have you no faith in me at all? At one moment you seem to love me, and at the next you seem to laugh at me."

“There is no laughing now,” she answered with drooping head.

He clasped her in his arms.

“Then if I live, and health is granted to me, there *shall* be laughter by-and-by ”

He felt convinced that he had strength enough to fight with fate. She felt sure that he loved her; and that to a woman of right mind is the best thought of all.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### FATHER AND SON.

A LONG room with three windows. At one end were tables covered with glass cases containing specimens of many varieties of minerals, and in different parts of the room were skeletons of animals, so that it formed a miniature museum. At the other end were large book-cases, furnished chiefly with works on the sciences. A writing-table, before which in an easy-chair sat an old gentleman.

His hair was perfectly white, his face intellectual and showing few wrinkles. It was the face of one who had taken life easily and passed through it in comfort.

This was Eglington's father, and he was

busily engaged with the manuscript which was to solve the problem of the Parallel Roads.

The door opened and his son entered, but Mr. Eglinton neither heard nor saw him until a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and the word "father" was spoken affectionately in his ear.

"Why, Geordie," exclaimed his father in surprise, "I thought you were in Yorkshire."

"I was, but I have been obliged to return."

Mr. Eglinton raised his spectacles and examined his son's face.

"What is the matter? You look as if you were not well."

"I am not well, and I have something very serious to tell you."

"Are you going to get married?" said the father, smiling. "That is the only serious matter I can think of in regard to you."

Eglinton, as he looked at that good-humoured face, felt positive anguish at the thought of the cloud which he was about to bring over it. He felt as if he could not tell him, and delayed the communication of the evil tidings as long as possible.

“No, it is not that, father; it is something else. I am almost afraid to tell you, because it will make you so unhappy.”

Mr. Eglinton still smiled at his son's curious manner and speech.

“Have you committed a robbery, Geordie? or a murder? It must be something of that kind to make you look so serious.”

“I am afraid it is something very like robbery.”

“Toot, toot!” exclaimed the still sceptical father, “you are hivering. You will never make me believe anything of that kind. Tell me what is wrong at once.”

The son looked earnestly at him, and then took his hand, an act which did more to convince Mr. Eglinton that the case was a very bad one indeed than anything that had been yet said. Then the son spoke one sentence which revealed the extent of the calamity which had befallen him.

“The Davidson mine is an utter failure, and we have lost everything.”

The father sat perfectly still; his calm face became pale, but that was the only change in his expression. Then he rose from his chair and walked to the window,

where he stood a long time gazing out upon the garden and fields of his small property, whilst the son stood with the dejected appearance of a condemned culprit.

The old man's mind could not immediately grasp the terrible fact that he was ruined; his son's enthusiasm, and his assurances that the mine was a Golconda, had induced him to invest all he possessed in the speculation. He had not given the matter much thought; in his easy-going way, and absorbed in his studies, he had left the whole of the arrangements to his son. Now he found it difficult to believe that George could have been so greatly deceived; he found it still more difficult to believe that he would have to give up his property, to give up the home where he had lived so long in quiet happiness.

It was the most afflicting thought that all this had been brought about by his son's blunder.

He turned at length from the window, and with a sad smile, said gently, "Ah, well, Geordie, it's a bad business, but we must just thole."

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Eglinton, the ring of intense remorse in his voice, and overcome with grief.

He was unable to say more at that moment, for his father's gentleness impressed him with a sense of his guilt more deeply than the severest reproaches could have done. He felt that he deserved the sharpest reprimand that could be spoken, and to find that none was given to him was to his generous mind the greatest punishment he could have had.

The father saw his grief, and approaching him placed his hands kindly on his shoulders, and still with that sad smile gazed at him earnestly—"Man, Geordie, you are not to hang your head that way, but put a stout heart to a stey brae and so meet our ill luck. That's the only way to overcome misfortune. The deil is a coward, and if you only stand your ground firmly enough against him he will run away like a whipped dog with his tail between his legs."

Eglinton's teeth closed tightly, and he drew a long breath which was like a sob. He seemed to draw himself up and with grateful eyes looked his father straight in the face.

"You are right, sir," he said calmly "The ruin which I have caused you I *will* retrieve. I had determined upon that before I came here, but your kind-

ness was too much for me. It is thinking of you that makes me so broken down, but you will see that I can follow your advice and meet the misfortune boldly ”

“ That’s the way to speak, Geordie,” said the father cheeringly; “ and maybe after all we shall not have to part with the old place. I think we can raise sufficient money on its security to satisfy all claims; and by-and-by we shall be able to pay that off. Then we can be merry again.”

“ I hope we shall be able to do so—I believe we shall. I have already formed my plans, and have written to my friend Leighton, who, as you know, is a member of one of the largest engineering firms in Glasgow; and he has offered me a very good position, with the prospect of a partnership. In the meanwhile I shall have a good salary and the opportunity to make experiments.”

Mr. Eglinton shook his head.

“ I wouldn’t make any more experiments, Geordie—the last one has cost too much,” said the father, and that was the only word of reproach he uttered. “ Stick to the ordinary work and make what you can of that. And now I’ll try and go on with the ‘ Parallel Roads.’ ”



Eglinton was greatly relieved by his father's calmness, although he suspected that it was partly assumed in order to comfort him; but the old man showed no sign of extreme depression, and took up his pen with apparently undaunted enthusiasm in his great work.

From the day on which he had discovered the ruin he had brought about Eglinton's whole character seemed to be transformed. The light-hearted, careless, and adventurous youth had disappeared, and a man with a grave purpose in life took his place. No one who had known him even a few months before would have recognized him, he was so changed in manner and appearance. Life was now to him real and earnest, and not as he had hitherto taken it—a thing to sport with. There still lingered, however, a certain amount of the eager hopefulness which had led him into difficulty; but it was tempered by reflection.

With the assistance of the family lawyer, he succeeded in making arrangements to meet all the claims that might be brought against him or his father; but it was with bitter chagrin it became necessary to sell a hundred acres of the land: the rest, however, could be re-

deemed. When this was effected he prepared to start for Glasgow, and on the morning fixed for his departure his heart was made glad by the receipt of an unexpected letter from Davie:—

“Colborough, Monday

“Why are you silent? If you could only know how much troubled I am about you, you would not be so unkind as to leave me without any information as to what you are doing. You refused my help, but you cannot refuse my sympathies. I have reasons for feeling and thinking that you should accept both, but I cannot explain them. I have been thinking of you constantly, and of your father, to whom the shock of this calamity must have been very great.

“Tell me about him and tell me about yourself. My anxiety makes me restless, and your silence makes me sometimes almost doubt your affection. We leave here in about a week for London, and surely before then you will make some sign. I shall look for it, and will be much disappointed if it does not come.

“Some day when you come to learn all that I dare not tell you now, you will pity me and understand why my conduct has been so strange. “D. M.”

This letter was like sunshine to him. He noted that she did not begin or end with any ordinary phrase of affection, but the love that was in the letter itself was sufficient.

He sat down at once to answer it. He hesitated for a minute as to how he should write, he wished her to remain free, and yet he wished to write to her as a lover. Then throwing away all scruples, he began—

“Thank you, my own darling, for the light which you have let into my sad life. We are gloomy enough here, but we have set ourselves firmly to overcome our misfortunes, and I am glad to say that I think we see daylight. My poor father received the news very calmly, and treated me with a kindness unspeakably greater than I deserved. Owing to the arrangements we have been able to make he will not be obliged to leave the place, as I at first feared he would have to do, and he is already so much absorbed in preparing for the press a book which he is writing that he seems almost to have forgotten what has happened.

“I have secured an appointment in Glasgow, which offers me the prospect of

being able in the course of a few years to make some amends for my folly. Meanwhile, the man Davidson has to be prosecuted; but up till this moment his whereabouts has not been discovered. He is a very cunning scoundrel, and has succeeded in deceiving not only me, but hundreds of others. I shall probably have to make a journey to London in order to give evidence against him, and then I shall see you. The thought of seeing you cheers me, the thought of being able some day to claim you as my own will keep my heart up and quicken my wits—such as they are. But, whether I win you or not, the memory of your kind words and the vision of your dear self will be a joy to me always.

“I would like to write to you often, but shrink from doing so, because of my position and because I think it is unfair to you. Will you decide for me?”

“Good-bye. I linger over this letter, feeling as if the closing of it were a second parting—good-bye is such a sad word! But I am thine ever,

“GEORGE EGLINTON.”

Having closed his letter he got into the gig, which was waiting for him, and,

with his father beside him, drove to the station. He was lighter of heart with Davie's letter in his pocket than he had been for some time. As he walked up and down the platform with his father he could not help thinking of the day on which he had first gone out into the world—so gaily and so buoyant with hope that he was going to do something great. Evidently Mr. Eglinton was thinking of it too, for, with his kindly smile, he gave this advice.

“Now, Geordie, no more of your grand discoveries and inventions. Mind what I said, and try to keep yourself steadily at work. You know the story of the man who wanted to fly and his contrivance broke his neck. It is a wise rule to follow the common path instead of trying to make a short cut to fortune, because there are so many chances of losing your way.”

“I shall remember your advice,” answered the son, with the first smile which had appeared on his face since he brought the bad news home.

## CHAPTER XX.

## DAVIE IN A QUANDARY.

IF Eglinton had only known the effect which his letter had produced upon Davie it would have given him many sad hours. When she read it her thoughts flew at once to the position of the man who claimed to be her father. According to this letter he was a criminal hiding from the law, and her lover was one of the most eager to prosecute him. As she had said, she could no longer doubt, after the proofs he had given her, that Davidson was her father, and the revelation of his character filled her with shame.

She would have liked to have gone to Medwyn for advice, but she could not yet make up her mind to break the promise given to one whose relationship entitled him to her first consideration.

Medwyn found her with the letter in her hand, and he saw the tears in her eyes. How deeply pained he felt by that sight he could not express.

“More sorrow, Davie?” he said tenderly. “How is it to end? You are

not keeping the promise you gave to me, to tell me whenever trouble came upon you what the nature of it was. Do be frank with me, and let me guide you if I can."

"There is nothing I can tell you, Medwyn," she answered, with her head turned aside. "And if I were to tell you the cause of my suffering, you could not help me."

It was impossible for Medwyn to surmise the real cause of her sorrow, but he had a suspicion that it had something to do with the visit of Mr. Davidson to Balnagairn. How the man could have obtained in such a short time so strong an influence over her he could not imagine; but that he had done something and said something to afflict her greatly was plain to him, and that conviction made him more determined to pursue the man till he had brought him to justice.

"I cannot force you to give me your confidence, Davie; but I know that Davidson is the cause of your trouble, as he has been the cause of trouble to so many others."

Here was the same verdict pronounced against her father that Eglinton had

indicated in his letter; and whilst these two friends declared him to be a scoundrel, and their determination to discover him, she had his address in her pocket. Moved by a sudden impulse she took from her pocket the rings which had been given to her by Davidson, and held them out to Medwyn.

“Do you know these?” she asked, with passionate earnestness.

Medwyn took them from her hand, and when he had examined them, he looked up with an inquiring expression.

“Where did you get these? Your father took them from your mother’s finger when she died, and I heard him tell my mother that he intended them to be buried with him when his time came.”

Davie trembled the last proof that she could have required of the truth of Davidson’s assertion had been given to her by her dearest friend. The man *was* her father. She threw herself into Medwyn’s arms, and resting her head upon his shoulder sobbed bitterly.

“Oh, Medwyn, Medwyn, I am very miserable and you cannot help me, for my tongue is tied as to the cause.”

There was a sudden light in his eyes, a suspicion flashed upon him, and his



guess touched the real cause of her distress nearly. But to her he said nothing of the suspicion, he only tried by gentle words to soothe her grief, and to assure her that all would be well by-and-by.

But the remembrance of the strange request of Davidson at Balnagairn to see Davie alone, the painful effect which the private interview had had upon her, and now the production of these rings, suggested to his mind an idea which appeared so wild that he felt inclined almost to laugh at himself for entertaining it.

“You will tell me the cause some time, and you may be sure that you have plenty of friends anxious to make you happy. Come, cheer yourself with that thought, and try to keep well.”

“I am so confused, Medwyn, by what has occurred lately that I do not know whether or not I should tell you all, and so perhaps be saved from future distress. But I have given my promise to be silent to one who has a right to command me, and if it be wrong I must endure the punishment of the result.”

“You should not have given any promise which interfered with the one you gave to me,” he said gravely.

“I know, I know,” she cried, in much anguish, “but I did not know what to do.”

“Poor Davie,” he said gently, “you are acting under some strange influence, and you are acting wrongly. There, I shall not question you any more; I shall wait for the time when you will be able to speak to me, and then I may be able to help you. But at present you leave me in the dark, and I can only say, my poor child, I am sorry because you are sorry.”

It was very difficult for Davie to hear Medwyn speak in this way and keep her secret. If he had remained many minutes longer she would have told him all. She did not know whether to be glad or not that she had been able to restrain herself. She knew the generous nature of Medwyn, but there were so many others who would have sent Davidson to prison if they had known of his presence in England that she felt it was best to screen him as far as she could. He might be a scoundrel, as Eglington had called him (and oh, how bitter it was to have that word applied to a father by one she loved!), but as a daughter she had a duty to perform, and she would try to do it, although she could feel no affection.

There was a great deal of bustle and another round of dinner-parties during the last week she remained at Colborough, and this in some measure distracted her thoughts from her painful relationship to Davidson. But if she had heard the gentlemen talking amongst themselves she would have learned that the failure of the Davidson mine was a topic of general conversation, and that the conduct of the promoter of it was universally condemned as that of a thorough swindler who should be brought to trial at once.

All the reports which had been published had been already proved to be false. The affair was talked of as one of the most glaring bogus companies that had ever been started.

But without hearing all this Davie knew enough, and she dreaded the visit to London to which she had once looked forward with such pleasant anticipations. She would have to call upon her father, and she would have to do it in secret. Then, when she did go to him, how could she approach him, having no feeling of respect for him ?

Whilst she was pondering, Mrs. Wybrant entered the room in her fussy way and desired her to go for a walk.

“My dear, you are not looking well,” she said, “and as we are to leave here so soon, I think we might as well take a last look at the wood, and the stream, and that old oak which charmed me so much.”

The thought of the oak made Davie shudder, and Mrs. Wybrant observing it, with her usual perspicuity, attributed it to quite a different cause from the real one.

“Ah! I guessed it. You have been looking sad ever since Eglinton went away. But you mustn't fret, my dear; I shall invite him to London if you wish, and I think him a very nice young man—although you might do better. Still you could be comfortable enough with him, as I understand he has a nice little property in the north.”

“He has lost everything in an unfortunate speculation,” replied Davie.

“What!” screamed Mrs. Wybrant, in dismay at the thought that she had offered to invite a ruined man to her house. Then with much austerity—“I forbid you to speak to him again.”

## CHAPTER XXI.

## CONSIDERATIONS.

THE fiat of Mrs. Wybrant, pronounced with so much vehemence, startled Davie, and added another pang to the many from which she had been already suffering. It seemed as if she could never again know peace or hope in this world. The girl who had been so bright and happy in her northern solitude until within a few weeks ago, seemed to be stricken down by the sudden accumulation of sorrows.

She stood for a time gazing vacantly at the door which Mrs. Wybrant had violently closed behind her; then turned towards the window and the blaze of sunlight on the hilltops. The glitter of leaves in the valley as they seemed to dance in the wind, formed a strange contrast to the darkness which she felt around her. The light glared in her eyes, and seemed to waken her. She could not cry, and yet there was such a dull aching in her head that tears would have been a relief.

But there was an underlying strength

in her character which none suspected, because it had not been hitherto tried. Mrs. Wybrant's conduct roused the spirit of opposition, and after a little while of depression Davie, with an impatient movement of the hands, seemed to cast away all regard for her aunt's authority. Was she not mistress of her own fortune? Was she not of age, and could she not choose what friends she pleased? True, she remembered that Mrs. Wybrant had the right to control her conduct for a year, but, after all, a year was a very short space of time. How long that space had appeared to her in her childhood!

She put on her hat and quietly left the house; then, quickening her pace as she neared the wood, she took the path which overlooked the river, and which had been her favourite resort since she had arrived at Colborough; it had been also the walk which Eglinton had most frequently chosen when he was with her. But she did not saunter now as she had done in those times; she walked with the eager pace of one who is anxious to escape from that worst of all enemies—bitter thought. But the rapid pace served to quicken the blood and so quicken the whirl of disagreeable reflec-

tions which beset her. There was compensation, however, for the brisk air refreshed her, and the murmur of the stream soothed her. By the time she returned to the house, she was more like herself than she had been for some days. There was colour in her cheeks, her eyes brightened, and she could laugh at Captain Graham. The latter was standing in the hall, taking off his fishing-basket and grumbling as usual at everything in general.

“I wish you had been with me to-day, Miss Morrison”—turning his brown, expressionless face towards her. “You might have learned a lesson in fly-fishing, and, at the same time, you would have discovered that Yorkshire streams are not so full of trout as they used to be. After five hours of hard work, I have only caught four miserable sprats.”

“But then you had the sport, you know.”

“Oh yes, sport is all very well in its way, but I like to have something to show for it. You might as well tell a man who has lost heavily on the Derby that he had his sport for his money—that wouldn't satisfy him. Perhaps it's luck.”

“Or skill?” suggested Davie, slyly.

Graham opened his eyes as if quite a new idea were dawning upon him. Then he slowly moved his head like the old man with the snuff-box in Madame Tussaud's.

"That's a joke, I suppose. Am I to laugh?"

"You might try," said Davie, laughing herself.

Graham compressed his lips, wrinkled his cheeks, and suddenly became grave as ever, as he inquired, "Will that do?"

"For the present, it is quite enough."

"You are too quick for me, Miss Morrison. I thought it would be hard enough to endure Bonsfield's banter, but it is still harder to endure yours."

"But I am sure that you can bear without hurt any shaft that I may throw at you, Captain Graham," she answered, in a tone of apology.

Graham's head ceased moving, and so far as his features could express anything, they indicated now that her words had pleased him.

"Yes, and the more shafts *you* throw the better I shall be pleased."

"A compliment, and from Captain Graham! I am afraid Mr. Bonsfield



would banter you more upon that point than about your ill success in fishing."

With that she went upstairs. Graham looked after her, and slowly walked out into the garden.

"There's something I like in that girl," he said mentally. "I wish I could make up my mind to retire from the service."

Then he walked on, gazing steadily before him as if he were on board ship and on the look-out.

When Davie entered her room, she was surprised to find Mrs. Wybrant waiting for her, and still more surprised when that lady impulsively embraced her.

"My dear child, I have been quite miserable all the time you have been away," said Mrs. Wybrant, a little nervously. "I am so hasty, you know, that I could not help speaking to you about Mr. Eglinton in the way I did this morning. But you must not mind what I say when you put me out of humour."

"No, aunt, I don't," was the straightforward answer.

This was not the reception which Mrs. Wybrant expected for her sub-

mission. After leaving Davie, she had reflected upon the possibility that it would be inconvenient to offend her niece just as they were about to begin their year of companionship. She was fond of her own comfort, and although a woman who rarely considered the consequences of anything she did, she had perception enough to understand that Davie had a will of her own, and might, if she pleased, make her year of guardianship a very disagreeable one. Therefore, she had resolved upon making a prompt effort to conciliate her niece. At the same time, it was unpleasant to be frankly told that her authority was not heeded.

“That is right, my dear,” she said, with a simpering laugh; “it is so nice to find that you already understand me so well. You know that my health is not good, and delicate people—especially we women,” laying an emphasis upon the we—“are apt to be irritable.”

“Yes, aunt.”

This was said so quietly as to make it evident to Mrs. Wybrant that Davie did not intend to help her out of her difficulty. She believed that she was

acting in Davie's interest in determining to prevent her marrying a ruined man, but she did not wish her to feel any vexatious restraint.

"Well, I wanted you to understand that, although I am your guardian," she began awkwardly, "I wish—that is to say, I should like you to feel quite at liberty, that is to say, as much at liberty as—as I can allow you to be."

She spoke the last words hurriedly, and appeared to be heated by the exertion of speaking them.

"That is very kind of you, aunt," replied Davie, meekly, "and I shall try to obey you in every way—if I can."

"Very good, my dear, and it makes me so happy to find that everything is satisfactorily settled between us, and that you will not require me to invite Mr. Eglington to London."

"I shall certainly not ask you to invite him, aunt."

There was something in the manner in which this was spoken which struck Mrs. Wybrant as implying that some one else might invite him; but she decided not to comment upon it at present.

"You know there is so much for you to see, and so much for you to do—so

many places to visit—that it would never do to be—well, to be restrained in any way by an engagement of this kind. I wish you to be perfectly free.”

Davie smiled quietly, and now helped Mrs. Wybrant out of her difficulty

“So far as Mr. Eglinton is concerned, you may be at ease, aunt; for as soon as he discovered his position he relinquished all claims he might have had upon me.”

“A very sensible and proper young man!” exclaimed Mrs. Wybrant, with delight; but her delight would have been modified if she had detected the lurking laugh in Davie’s eyes. “I shall always respect him for his consideration; and, of course, when you are settled, and when you have forgotten whatever has passed between you, there can be no objection to your seeing him—as a friend. There now, you have quite relieved me.”

She kissed Davie on the cheek, and proceeded to prepare her elaborate toilette for the evening—an operation which was the most important event of her day, and occupied considerable time.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## A BONFIRE IN THE BREAKFAST-ROOM.

A CLOUDY sky, threatening rain, and a keen east wind which bit the cheeks of those who were early out of doors. The grey hills, which on the previous day basked in sunlight, now looked cold and bleak, and the leaves, now of a dull green, seemed to shiver in the blast.

But Davie was not deterred from taking her early morning walk, and brisk exercise soon rendered her indifferent to the keenness of the air. But the air had its revenge, for although it is pleasant enough to feel one's cheeks aglow with healthy colour, it is not quite so pleasant to know that the tip of one's nose is tinged with the same hue. As she was returning to the house she encountered Captain Graham, who had accompanied Bonsfield in his morning round, and who had just left him in order to visit the stables.

Graham would have been glad to have persuaded her to prolong the walk which she had evidently enjoyed so much, but he did not know exactly how to suggest this course; and so, as if no such thought

had ever entered his head, he accompanied her into the house.

“There would have been time enough for it,” he reflected with regret, when he found that they were the first to enter the breakfast-room.

The room was large and somewhat chilly, as the fire had only been recently kindled. Davie had a passion for fire-making, and was frequently found on her knees before the grate, actively engaged in the capacity of stoker. She immediately advanced to fulfil her mission, and assailed the half-dying fire in the breakfast-room. Her efforts were not effective at first; and in order to quicken the flame she took a newspaper and held it before the grate.

“Let me help you,” said Graham, taking one corner of the paper; “we shall make it blaze in a minute.”

“Please do not trouble; I can manage it easily.”

As she spoke, however, the paper would have slipped from her fingers had not the captain been holding it.

“There, you see, even I can be useful.”

Davie laughed, and ran her fingers along the top of the paper as if to resume entire possession of it; in doing so, her

hand accidentally touched Graham's. If ever his face had expressed pleasure it was at that moment, and in an awkward way he endeavoured to touch her hand again without showing that he did so intentionally. But she, having apparently made up her mind to allow him to share in the labour of holding up this substitute for bellows, moved a little to one side. Then, silence; Davie occupied watching the progress of the fire, and Graham watching her. Presently, she:

“It is beginning to blaze now.”

“It has been blazing for some time,” said he.

“What—the fire?”

“Yes; not the one in the grate, though.”

“Why, there is no other fire here,” she said, looking up, smiling.

“There is, but you don't see it, and one which will not burn your fingers, though it has burnt mine.”

“Then you should rub them with some soap or oil,” she said, accepting his words literally.

“That would be adding fuel to the flame.”

This curious expression suggested his real meaning, and she began to feel exceedingly awkward. She was relieved,

however, by the paper which they were holding between them suddenly catching fire. The captain doubled it up, instantly extinguishing the flame, and threw it under the grate, saying with a grim smile—

“I suppose that is what I shall have to do with my fire. I wish I knew how to tell you, Miss Morrison, what a bother it is to me. But I suppose, if I could, you would not listen.”

“I am afraid I do not understand you, Captain Graham,” she said, drawing back, but not unkindly.

“Then I shall tell you. Shake hands first, and promise that you will not be offended with me.”

Davie, with a hesitation so slight that he did not remark it, gave him her hand.

At that moment the door opened and Mrs. Wybrant entered: the hands instantly separated. Davie was glad that her aunt had arrived in time to interrupt the captain; the latter muttered something to himself which neither of the ladies would have liked to have heard. The fussy friendliness with which Mrs. Wybrant advanced to greet him only aggravated Graham the more, and his salutation was anything but cordial. He felt as if she had inflicted upon him an



irreparable injury. He had overcome all his hesitation, and had brought himself to the point of making his declaration; the whole business might have been settled in a moment one way or other, and here everything was spoiled by the appearance of this old woman.

How he coveted the smile with which Davie greeted the entrance of Medwyn Corbett; and how he wished that he had gone to the stables with his host instead of being obliged to listen to the guileless gossip of Mrs. Wybrant. It was fortunate for him that his reticent habits were understood by all, as he was thus saved from any necessity for attempting to make conversation.

Before breakfast was over there was a sudden lull of the wind; heavy clouds gathered overhead, and presently a long zigzag of fire flashed across them, followed immediately by a loud peal of thunder, then rain fell so thickly that it seemed like a dark mass of water.

“ Bless me!” cried Mrs. Wybrant, starting at the first flash of lightning, and uttering an exclamation of terror as the thunder rolled over the house. “ Do you think it is near? do you think the lightning will strike the house, Mr. Bonsfield?”

“Don’t alarm yourself. We have two excellent conductors outside, and as I have just had them put up, I am glad to have an opportunity of testing them. But you may make up your mind for a day in the house, for this sort of thing will go on till night. I know what a Yorkshire thunderstorm is.”

“I shall go to bed,” said Mrs. Wybrant, trembling; “they tell me that is the safest place during a thunderstorm, as they say feathers are——”

“Non-conductors,” suggested Bonsfield.

“Yes, yes, that is just it—I will go to my non-conductors. Excuse me, Mrs. Bonsfield, I really am so frightened that I must go. Davie, will you come with me?”

All the ladies left the room.

“I am surprised to find Mrs. Wybrant so frightened,” said Bonsfield, with a stolid laugh.

“So am I,” muttered Graham, who was at the window, gazing gloomily out upon the storm. “I wish I could have produced the same effect on her as a thunderstorm this morning.”

“What—to drive her away?”

“Exactly,” was the dry response

“That is not fair of you, Graham,” said Corbett, who was sitting by the fire reading the *Leeds Mercury*. “She is a great admirer of yours, as we have all seen. Indeed, she made it quite plain to me yesterday, when I met her in the course of her walk, and she looked very well, dressed up to her neck in furs and ruffles.”

“Wish they had been over her head and smothered her,” growled the captain, still brooding over the morning’s disappointment.

“Come, that’s too bad. She would be just the sort of wife to suit you, she could do all the talking, and so save you the trouble of altering your ways.”

Graham had his own opinion on that score.

“You’re not in good humour this morning,” broke in Bonsfield. “Come and have a cigar, and we can look over the drawings of those new machines I was telling you about. I shall be ready to look at the letter to India, Corbett, as soon as you have finished it. I suppose it will be all right with the people out there?”

“I have no doubt of it; the telegrams give me assurance of every assistance.”

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### “THE LETTER TO INDIA.”

THE letter to which Bonsfield had referred was one of very grave importance in regard to the man Davidson; and, although firmly convinced that he was an impostor and a swindler, Medwyn hesitated to write it. The reason for this hesitation was not clear to himself: he was only conscious of a vague feeling that in some unknown way Davie's happiness might be affected by it.

The wild idea which had occurred to him when Davie had showed him her mother's rings and lock of hair he could not entertain. And yet—if he should have stumbled upon the truth as to the source of the man's influence over Davie—it would be folly to reject it because it seemed so improbable.

He was about to begin the letter, when he was interrupted by Davie, who brought the intimation that Mrs. Wybrant was very anxious to see him.

“Is she so very ill?” he asked, rising immediately.

“I am afraid she is frightening herself

into an illness, but I think it is more fright than anything else, and she has had almost every one in the house up to her room. Now she wants you."

The storm continued with sufficient violence to alarm any person of a nervous temperament; but, although Mrs. Wybrant spoke much about the high-strung condition of her nervous system, Corbett found it difficult to believe that there was anything more the matter with her than an inordinate craving to have everybody fussing around her. However, he accompanied Davie to her room.

In the centre of the large old-fashioned bedstead he saw what at first sight appeared to be a heap of pillows and blankets; but, on approaching, he discovered the small face of Mrs. Wybrant peering out at him. She had seated herself like an Indian squaw, calling frantically upon the others to pile non-conductors about her; at every flash of lightning she closed her eyes and groaned; at every peal of thunder she thrust her fingers into her ears; she had the window-curtains drawn; afterwards she had the shutters closed and the lamp lit. In this way she had succeeded in making everybody uncom-

fortable, and in communicating some of her terror to a young girl who waited upon her.

“Oh, Medwyn,” she said solemnly, when Corbett stood beside the bed, “tell me the truth—do not be afraid to alarm me; I can bear anything now—do you think it is the Last Day?”

He endeavoured to soothe her with the usual commonplaces, and whilst he was doing so, Mrs. Bonsfield and Miss Schoumert left the room. Corbett was very patient in listening to the reiteration of the lady’s fears and occasional petulant complaints against Providence for having invented such instruments of terror. But all the time he was thinking of the letter to India which he had to despatch that afternoon.

“I am afraid I shall have to leave you,” he said at length; “I have important business on hand, and must have my letters off in time for the Indian mail.”

“Don’t leave me,” she cried excitedly; “there is nobody in India now that you can want to write to so particularly”

“It is about your brother’s affairs, and the information we seek is of the greatest importance to Davie especially, and to

many others. So I must ask you to let me go for the present."

"I thought his affairs were all settled," she said, putting back the blanket which had almost completely covered her face.

"We believe they are settled, but the arrival of Mr. Davidson rendered it necessary to make prompt inquiries regarding some events which occurred about the time of your brother's death."

Mrs. Wybrant seemed to have forgotten the storm, and there was real uneasiness in her look and voice as she said—

"Did you not tell me that by his own orders all his letters and papers, except those relating to business, had been destroyed immediately after he died?"

"Yes, but it is chiefly in regard to his business arrangements and the terms of his dealings with Mr. Davidson that we require information."

The answer appeared to afford her much relief, and her attention was again bestowed upon the non-conductors.

"Oh, if that is all, you may go, my dear Medwyn; but I do wish you could induce Mr. Bonsfield, or — or Captain Graham, to spare me a few moments. They know all about these dreadful thunderstorms, and it would comfort me

to hear from one of them that the danger is over—— Oh dear, there is more thunder!"

Corbett, remembering the conversation which had taken place after breakfast, with difficulty repressed a smile as he quitted the room. He saw the two gentlemen, and gravely delivered Mrs. Wybrant's message. Bonsfield simply laughed and nodded to Corbett, whilst he continued his examination of some sectional drawings of the new agricultural machines in which he was interested, Graham turned away as if with a feeling that this was a bad joke made at his expense.

"Well, I have done my duty," said Corbett, laughing, "and I leave you to do yours."

Then he returned to his own room. The interruption had served to divert his mind from those vague speculations as to the effect which his present investigations might have on Davie's future, and he proceeded rapidly but carefully with his letter. He briefly referred to the arrival of John Davidson at Balnagairn, gave what details he possessed regarding the silver mine, and desired explicit information as to the man's movements immediately before and after the death of



David Morrison. He was just finishing when Bonsfield joined him.

“That will do,” he said, after reading the letter, “and if we can only prove that your suspicion is correct, we shall at least have the satisfaction of disposing of Mr. Davidson for some time.”

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### UNDER A CLOUD.

THE address which Mr. Davidson had given to Davie was that of a street in the Soho district. The houses were for the most part let to lodgers. But then there were many shops, the most remarkable of which were those of the dealers in second-hand furniture, displaying a curious assortment of odd chairs, tables, and nick-nacks. Greengrocers came next in number, and after them the butchers, whose loud voices were constantly inviting the passers to “Buy, buy, buy”—an old custom which is practised only in such districts. Then there were the cleanly looking shops of French laundresses, and you could see over the frilled white curtains women

wearing large white caps busy starching and ironing.

Crowds of children made the street a playground, and groups of them were dancing to the enchanting strains of a barrel organ, as happy and light-hearted as the most thoughtless young lady at her first ball; and as they danced, their voices joined in the music of polkas and waltzes. There was so much merriment in their movements and laughter that no casual observer would have suspected that these children knew what it was to be hungry without being able to procure food to satisfy the cravings of their appetite.

In spite of the disagreeable nature of her visit to this quarter, the novelty of the scene interested Davie; and she laughed when she saw a little girl who was returning from school drop her book, and, picking it up with an exclamation of dread at thought of the punishment she would receive for her carelessness, begin to wipe it with her skirt. There were tears in her eyes, but at that moment an organ began to play, the child forgot her sorrow, and, whilst still wiping the book, danced to the music.

On her arrival in London she had been

much troubled by the thought that she had promised to visit her father secretly, and she had found great difficulty in getting away from her aunt. Mrs. Wybrant did not believe that it was the thing "for a young lady to be going about London without a 'chaperone'", and consequently she accompanied Davie everywhere. But Mrs. Wybrant caught a slight cold, and having a great fear of anything that approached to illness, she exaggerated every symptom and confined herself to her room. This gave Davie the opportunity she required.

The house to which she drove up was one of a dingy-looking row with very dusty windows. The door was opened to her by a girl whose expression was sharp enough, although her face was smudged with coal dust and her dress was somewhat tawdry

"Yes, miss, 'e's at 'ome, and said as he was expecting of a lady to call."

When she entered the dark narrow hall Davie felt her heart sink with a presentiment of evil, and thought that after all it would perhaps have been wiser not to have come to the place.

"First floor, front, mem," was the girl's direction, having evidently no in-

tention of showing her the way. But Davie dropped half-a-crown into her hand with the request that she would do so, and the girl instantly obeyed.

The door was opened by Davidson himself.

“I saw you arrive and was going down for you,” he said, as he took her hand and drew her into the room, closing the door immediately. “This is very good of you, my child. You cannot guess how miserable I am, and how the sight of you cheers me.”

Although his words affected her, thinking of their relationship, she could not even now feel anything like affection for him. She remained silent, and as he placed a chair for her she glanced round the room.

It had evidently been furnished at intervals from the second-hand shops in the street, for there were not two chairs of the same pattern. The walls were dark with the dust of years, and the ceiling was almost black. The couch was covered with cotton velvet, the colour of which had quite faded, and in several places there were distinct signs of patches. The contrast between this and the daintily furnished rooms which she

had just quitted was too striking not to make her pity the father who had provided her with a fortune whilst he remained in poverty himself.

He saw her examining the place, and with an apologetic expression said—

“You see to what straits I am reduced. I have been throughout my life very fortunate in all my speculations, but this time I have not only lost my money but also my reputation. Can you understand it? I know that it is difficult to do so.”

“I am sorry, sir,” she answered faintly, “that you should find yourself in such a position.”

She felt awkward, and that was all she could say

“But you do not know the worst,” he continued. “You are surprised to find me in such a place as this, you were surprised when I asked you to keep the address secret. I did not like then to tell you all the truth, but I will tell you now.”

“You have said enough to enable me to understand that you were in danger; and for my mother’s sake I would be glad if it were in my power to help you.”

He paced the room as if under the influence of strong emotion. His hands

were clasped behind him, and his head was bowed. She felt sorry for him; but if she could have seen the curious light in his eyes all her doubts of him would have returned.

Presently he seated himself on the couch and covered his face with his hands, as if trying to hide from her the weakness of tears. Then with an impatient movement, apparently making an effort to control himself, he bent towards her.

“This affair has turned out so badly for me, and for so many others, that they regard me as a criminal. They believe that out of their losses I have made money, and it is not true. But I am helpless. I believed in the mine; I did assure people that it was a safe investment; I did tell them that all my experience proved to me that there was a vein of silver ore which would last for years—in fact, I believed there were several veins in the ground which we had secured. It has proved to be a mistake; but unfortunately the whole blame rests upon me.”

“But can you not explain this?” said Davie eagerly.

“I have tried to do so, and if I had the

means I could bring witnesses to prove that the calculations I made were accurate and fair.”

“What *can* I do to help you?”

“Much, my dear child. You can give me a part of your income until I am able to set matters right by some new and happier discovery than the last, either here or in America. I am sorry to trouble you about it, but when one is under a cloud one does many strange things. You know that if I chose to disclose myself I could take everything from you. But I do not want to do that—partly, I must own, because of the foolish trick which I have played, and partly because of the danger which I run if I were to reveal myself. Although I do not feel that I have done any wrong, I know that appearances are against me.”

“But why will you not speak to your friends—Mr. Corbett, for instance?”

Davidson smiled sadly, as if the suggestion afforded him more amusement than he at that moment could quite enjoy

“Corbett, my child, would be the first to denounce me. You do not understand these things, a man is often blamed as much for a blunder as for a crime.”

“But to yourself it must be a relief to know that you intended no wrong.”

“ True, my conscience is easy on that score ; but all the same I am obliged to hide myself or run the risk of being sent to prison for years. People who lose money are naturally very angry with the persons who seem to have caused the loss, and they are very glad to seize the first scapegoat they can find. Now, Davie, I want you to lend me five hundred pounds, in order that I may be able to defend myself. Money is always required in these matters, and you can have no better proof of my honesty than the fact that I am obliged to ask you for this assistance.”

Davie was generous to a fault, and even if she had still doubted the nature of the man's relationship to her, she would have given the same answer.

“ Certainly, sir ; you gave me the money, and when you require it my duty is to restore it,” she answered quietly.

There was no suspicion in her mind now, and she was ready to surrender her whole fortune. Flashes of thought told her of the trouble which Eglinton must be enduring in quite an opposite position. He had ruined himself and his father ; she was able to help her father in his misfortune. But the bitterness of the thought that the hand of every one she



loved was turned against her parent was hard to bear.

Davidson gave a sigh of relief.

“You are so like your mother, Davie; you are so good and generous. She also would have come to my help had she been here. But enough of that—I scarcely dare to think of her—the memory of the pain which I in passion and jealousy caused her is too much for me.”

He wiped his eyes with a handkerchief, and then took from a drawer a piece of paper which he requested her to sign. It was an order for the amount he had asked her to give him.

“You will come again the day after to-morrow, and I shall tell you how I am situated.”

Then he led her to the carriage.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### AT BAY.

DAVIDSON, as soon as he saw the carriage drive off, returned to his room and dressed to go out. There was now a complacent expression on his face, which indicated

that the melancholy appearance Davie had been so much moved by had been only assumed to serve his own purpose. There was no weakness in his movements, but the activity of a strong man.

He took a hansom and drove straight to the bank.

There was some difficulty made about the payment of the order, as it was on a piece of stamped paper instead of being on one of the regular cheque forms. The cashier consulted the manager, who, finding the signature genuine, allowed the order to be cashed.

Davidson was perfectly at his ease, in spite of the evident suspicion with which he had been regarded, and when the signature had been verified, he said with some coldness to the cashier—

“I am sorry to have troubled you, sir.”

He turned away and advanced towards the door, which at that moment swung open, and Medwyn Corbett confronted him. Cool as he was in all emergencies, Davidson looked at the man who was his enemy with a startled expression; but it instantly disappeared, and he held out his hand, smiling, as if he were glad to meet an old friend.

Medwyn put his hands behind him.

“What!” exclaimed Davidson, “are you afraid to shake hands with me?”

“No,” answered Medwyn, instantly, “but I do not care to do so. However, if it is any satisfaction to you, there is my hand. I am glad to have found you here, because I have been in search of you for several days.”

Davidson shrugged his shoulders, and bowing with mock politeness, answered—

“You honour me, Mr. Corbett. May I ask the cause of your anxiety to find me?”

“I must ask you to accompany me to the office of my solicitors, where we shall have an opportunity of speaking in private,” said Corbett coldly.

Davidson smiled superciliously.

“I really see no necessity for going to the office of your solicitors, as we can obtain a private room in the nearest hotel.”

“So be it. I have only a few words to say, but they are of much importance.”

“I am at your service.”

They entered a house in Cheapside, where they obtained a private room. Corbett laid his hat and umbrella on the table, and began slowly to take off his

gloves. Davidson seated himself and took out his cigar-case, which he presented to Corbett, who, with a motion of his hand, declined the offer.

“You don’t smoke much,” said Davidson coolly. “I always do when I have anything serious to think about; and from what you have said, and from the fact that you have been searching for me for several days, I presume that your subject is of a serious nature.”

He lit his cigar, and settled himself in his chair as if preparing himself to listen for any length of time.

Corbett remained standing, and there never had been such a stern expression upon his countenance before as at that moment.

“The subject is serious, Mr. Davidson. I have procured information about your conduct of the silver mine in which several of my friends had the misfortune to invest; and you are aware that if any of the unlucky shareholders discovered you at this moment you would be arrested for fraud.”

“Perfectly correct, Mr. Corbett; and that is why I am so glad you are not one of them. I give you credit for not being capable of playing the part of a spy

or detective; and, therefore, although it was not a pleasure to me to be discovered by you, I felt perfectly assured that I was safe in your hands."

"Do not be sure of that, I shall do nothing to shield a man who has by lies, told for his own profit, ruined so many families."

Mr. Davidson held up his hands as if in appeal against such a harsh judgment, and partly turned his head aside, not as if ashamed of himself, but as if in his meekness deprecating the cruelty of the man who spoke to him.

"You do not understand the case, Mr. Corbett," he said mildly. "It was one of the greatest blunders I ever made in my life, and the misery it has caused to the shareholders is not greater than what I feel myself. I assure you that it was only a mistake on my part, and that if I could recoup the people I would gladly do so."

It was Medwyn's turn to be supercilious now.

"That may be so, but it is difficult to believe that the man who has led the life of a gambler—whether it be in mines, cards, or the Stock Exchange—is likely to tell the truth about himself."

Mr. Davidson calmly smoked his cigar,

and leaned back in his chair with the air of a man who, having long experience, pities the impetuosity of a junior.

“My dear Mr. Corbett, you have lived so much in the country, and you are so entirely unacquainted with the ways of business men, that I cannot expect you to understand me.”

Corbett, quite as cool as Davidson, threw his gloves into his hat, took a chair, and seated himself opposite to him.

“No, Mr. Davidson, I do not understand you, or the kind of business you carry on; but I have sufficient common sense to comprehend that you have deceived a number of innocent people, and that you have in some way obtained an influence over Miss Morrison which is dangerous to her. Now, I am one of her guardians, and, more than that, I have a great affection for her; and whatever may be the power which you possess over her, I mean to protect her. I have just learned that you have obtained a considerable sum of money from her, and I require you to refund it instantly.”

Davidson rolled the cigar between his fingers nervously, and then suddenly rising, threw it into the fireplace. He

had lost his coolness. He paced the room in much agitation.

Corbett leaned back in his chair, keeping his eyes fixed upon him, and trying to make out whether or not this was affectation. But the paleness of the man's face, and the anxiety of his expression, convinced him that there was something more than he yet understood in Davidson's conduct. Presently Davidson resumed his seat with every appearance of calmness, and leaning towards Corbett, he said quietly—

“ Shall I tell you a story, Mr. Corbett? It is one which will interest you, although it will pain you, for the subject is most disagreeable to every one related to the persons concerned. It was my intention, and my earnest desire, that the facts should never be known to any one beyond your father, your mother, and myself; but you are so persistent in your pursuit of me, that I am inclined to speak if you insist.”

Corbett became pale, for he remembered what his mother had said to him when she was dying, and by some strange association of ideas this man's speech recalled her words. But with a firm voice, he replied—

“Speak. If you have anything to tell me that will enable me to think better of you than I do now, I shall be pleased. If it be anything that affects me, or any friends of mine, it will be a kindness on your part to enable me to understand matters.”

“Are you determined that I should speak?” said Davidson very slowly, and gazing at him with an expression of compassion.

“I do insist,” said Corbett; and although there was much emotion in his mind, his voice was perfectly calm.

Davidson bent forward, and touched his knee with his hand in a friendly way

“Before I speak, may I give you a piece of advice? I know that advice from one man to another is never pleasant, however well-intentioned the adviser may be.”

“I am ready to hear whatever you may have to say,” answered Corbett quietly; but there was a compression of the lips after he spoke, which indicated that he feared what might be said.

Davidson looked at him still with that curious expression of compassion, which from him was to Corbett both irritating and surprising.



“Let us have a glass of sherry first,” he said, rising and ringing the bell, “for you will require something to steady your nerves during what I have to say. And remember, you bring it upon yourself; it was my wish that the past should be forgotten, and that the future should be bright in forgetfulness of the unhappy circumstances which separated a man and wife—which drove the man who loved his wife passionately to fly from her.”

“You have a most peculiar way of dealing with very common subjects,” said Corbett satirically, but it was evident that he was putting a strong pressure upon himself to preserve his calmness. “Husbands and wives often separate without any particular fuss being made.”

“Yes; but there may be circumstances which render such a separation anything but common.”

The waiter brought the sherry; Corbett did not touch it, but Davidson drank his at a gulp. Then standing up, with one hand resting on the table, looking straight into the still calm face of Medwyn Corbett, he said—

“I shall begin with a surprise. I am not Davidson—I am David Morrison.”

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### RECALLED TO LIFE.

THE statement was so startling that Corbett sat for a moment mute. Then, rising, he examined the man's face suspiciously. Davidson submitted to the gaze quite calmly.

“I knew that you would be astounded and incredulous,” he said, smiling sadly, “but if you will be good enough to resume your seat I shall satisfy you. I have told you that I did not wish to be known—and least of all to you. But you have forced my hand, and you must take the consequences.”

“I am prepared,” answered Corbett firmly, and he remained standing, his hands clasped tightly behind him.

Davidson performed a nervous tattoo on the table with his fingers, and displayed some signs of agitation.

“You are opening old wounds that are very sore, Mr. Corbett,” he proceeded, and his voice seemed to quiver a little as he uttered the words. “I shall say nothing of your unkindness in doing so,

because you, too, will suffer before I have done."

Medwyn's face grew paler than it had been yet, and he spoke with clenched teeth.

"If you *are* Morrison, I know that it is in your power to cause me much pain. It is so long since I saw him that it might be easy for any one to deceive me; and I own that when I first saw you I was surprised by something in your face which reminded me of him. If you are the man, give me the proof. I have a duty to perform to Morrison's daughter, and I will do it, whatever it may cost me, either in pain or money "

Davidson had succeeded at last in arousing Corbett's temper, and he was just the man to take advantage of it.

"You are a younger man than I am, and if you choose to stand, it is your own pleasure. I must sit down."

With a coolness which was not only impertinent but cruel under the circumstances, he seated himself in an arm-chair. Medwyn did not move; he only tightened the clasp of his hands behind him, and kept his eyes fixed upon the man's face.

"Go on, sir—I am waiting."

"You were young when I went away;

but still you were a man, and able to understand the ways of the world. You knew why I went away, although you did not know why I returned. I thought myself a fool for going back, but in spite of all that she had done I pitied the woman who was my wife, and wished to save her reputation.”

Davidson took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. There was such a mixture of earnestness in his looks and voice and actions, that Corbett's doubts of his identity were rapidly disappearing. Still he remained watchful and suspicious. Davidson leaned back in his chair, and the gloom on his face suggested that he was too much affected by the thought of what he had to say to be able to continue immediately. At length—

“I wish you had not forced me to this,” he continued; “but since you will have it, I shall speak, although I had resolved that no word of this strange story should ever pass my lips. . . Will you not even now allow me to be silent? I make this last appeal for your sake as well as my own.”

“You cannot be silent now, sir,” said Corbett impatiently. “What you have said only shows me that you know

something of my family's affairs, what you have promised to do is to prove to me that you are David Morrison."

"I did, indeed," was the answer, with a sad smile. "You must not forget that my sister was your mother."

"She was the sister of David Morrison."

Davidson made a motion with his hand as if deprecating the suspicion which Corbett's words so plainly implied.

"Well, you know the story of his life up till the time when he was reported to be dead; and I think I can tell you some things in connection with him which you will understand no one but himself could know. I have already given to Davie some of her mother's last letters and the hair which I cut from her head after her death. When Davie doubted me, I asked her to show these things to you; and besides, I gave her the rings which I took from her mother's finger. I wished to keep these relics to myself, but found it necessary to give them to her in order to satisfy her of my identity."

"This, then, is the secret of your influence over her!" exclaimed Corbett.

"It is."

"And how have you used it? Since it

was your desire not to be known, why should you disturb the poor girl's life by revealing yourself?"

"You do not understand the feeling of a father. You cannot understand how I have longed to see my child; but I am glad to perceive that you are already beginning to have some faith in me."

"I did not say that," was the sharp retort.

"Well, then, I will briefly tell you David Morrison's career. The son of a poor shepherd, by dint of hard work he secured a bursary in the Aberdeen University; then he became an engineer, and, having some wit, he invented several machines which secured for him a considerable sum of money. He was able to educate his two sisters and to give them a comfortable home until your father married one of them, and Wybrant, a London merchant, the other. So far, am I correct?"

"Perfectly correct; but there are many people who could have told me as much."

"True, and therefore I must go on. He met the lady who became his wife at Balnagairn. For two years they were very happy, and Davie was born. But at

the end of that time he discovered, on his return from one of the journeys which he was obliged frequently to make, that his wife's manner was singularly cold and strange. From that day they were never happy together; he was always glad when his business called him away, and it seemed to him that she was always glad to see him go."

He paused, and pressed his hand upon his brow, whilst Corbett's face assumed an expression of something like terror at the thought of what was to follow.

"He discovered—it is not necessary to tell you how—that his wife's affection was given to another man. If you have ever loved, you can understand the bitterness of that discovery; circumstances, however, added to the intensity of his pain. He left the woman, but, for the sake of one who was very dear to him, he remained silent. He believed that her degradation was complete, but afterwards thought that there might be a doubt, and returning to her when she was ill, gave out that he was convinced that he had been wrong."

He rose, and, stretching his hand towards Corbett in a wild way, continued—

"Now, shall I tell you for whose sake

he remained silent, and who was the man?"

There was perfect stillness in the room.

Corbett seemed unable to speak; his face, so white before, flushed as if with shame, and he seemed to hesitate to answer.

"Yes, tell me." The voice was very feeble and the manner very unlike that of the usually calm, self-possessed Master of Balnagairn.

"Then, now know me," said Davidson sternly. "It was for your mother's sake that I was silent, and the man was your father."

Corbett's head dropped; he grasped the back of the chair as if to save himself from falling, and muttered huskily—

"You must be David Morrison, for this is the cruel story my mother told me."

Then, raising his head suddenly, he added proudly, "But it is all a lie. I knew my father well, and he was incapable of wronging his wife's brother. You deceived yourself, and unfortunately you succeeded in deceiving my mother."

Davidson bowed; but although he spoke considerately, there was a smile upon his face which proved that he was of the same opinion still.



“I am glad you should believe so; I try to take your view of the matter—I have been for a long time trying to do it.”

“Be sure of it. Good Heavens, man, think of what you are saying! This false idea has held its place in your mind so long that you have come to regard it as truth,” cried Corbett passionately

Davidson resumed his ordinary cool and suave manner, and no one would have suspected that he regarded himself as a victim. He sat down again and took another glass of sherry

“I *have* thought of it, Mr. Corbett, and have put it aside. I have only spoken of it because you forced me to do so. I warned you that before I had done speaking you would have cause to be sorry! I appealed to you not to insist upon my speaking. Now we have done with that matter, will you tell me why you followed me? I have been merciful to you and yours, and you have been pitiless to me.”

At this, Corbett seemed to be recalled to himself, and after a brief pause answered—

“I must first apologize for having troubled you, and also for entertaining suspicions of your character. Then, I

must frankly tell you that my reason for following you was to ascertain how it was that Davie was so much distressed after your interview with her at Balnagairn. Now that I have your explanation I understand it all, and I am sorry for Davie. Have you told her, as you have told me, why you pretended to be dead?"

"No," replied Davidson, with the air of an honourable man who is suspected of dishonesty. "In speaking to her I took all the blame upon myself, and I hope she will never know what I have suffered."

"I respect you for that, sir, and you may depend upon my silence. But, if I live, I shall prove to you that you have been wrong in this miserable affair, and that my father was as guiltless as Davie's mother."

"When you do that, I shall be grateful."

Corbett took up his hat and umbrella, and left Davidson alone in the room.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## GLADNESS AND SADNESS.

DAVIDSON looked from the window and saw Corbett drive off westward in a hansom.

“Going to speak to Davie at once,” was his reflection, and his eyes brightened. “So much the better; for when they talk together in confidence about me, the one will help the other to believe all.”

His expression was not so much that of a man who has gained a victory as that of one who was brooding seriously over the question—“How much further dare I go?”

So far he had done well, and now he was calculating how he could do better. He had satisfied Davie and Corbett that he was David Morrison; and having done that, the only one he had to fear was George Eglinton. But he reckoned that his present position rendered it impracticable for him to take any active part in the prosecution which was impending.

In this he was mistaken, for Eglinton

had already given instructions to a London firm of solicitors, and was prepared to take the first train from Glasgow on receiving the intimation that he was required. Davidson, however, was quite sensible of the fact that the cry against him, and against the unfortunate gentlemen he had induced to accept the position of directors of the company, was growing louder and louder every day, and he was still uncertain whether to meet the storm or to run from it. Several of the shareholders had combined in a charge of fraud, and Eglinton was the most prominent amongst them. If he met the charge boldly, he would have the chance of defeating it, for it was true that he had acted to a certain extent upon a miscalculation; but he was conscious that he had exaggerated the prospects and wealth of the mine, and that made him hesitate.

In his own mind he had elaborated a grand line of defence, and had almost determined to conduct the case himself. He had been made well acquainted with all the quirks of the law by frequent appearances in the Courts; and his speeches at the board-meetings of the various companies he had started had

been always fluent and effective. Still, there was the fear of failure, and it would depend upon the conduct of Davie whether or not he would attempt the boldest course. If she came to him on the day appointed, he would then decide.

When Corbett entered the room where Davie was waiting for him, she met him with eager questioning in her eyes. She had seen him before her interview with Davidson, and the agitation she had displayed had caused him to follow her. When she left the man's lodgings, he had stopped the carriage and insisted upon knowing what she had been doing in that strange place. She had told him that upon her father's account she had paid this man five hundred pounds; and that was why he went to the bank.

"Well, Davie," he said, taking her hands tenderly; "I am afraid that you are right and I am wrong. I have had a long conversation with this man, and he has told me such things as no one but your father could know, and yet I still doubt. For your sake as well as my own, I shall prove whether my doubt is correct or false. I have already

written to the agents in Bombay and Calcutta who conducted your father's affairs, and in a week or two we shall have full particulars of all that occurred."

At his request she showed him the lock of hair and the rings which Davidson had given her, and he recognized them.

"Can it be that this man is an impostor," she said, "when he possesses all these proofs?"

"I do not understand it," he answered gloomily.

She put her arms round his neck and rested her head upon his shoulder, as she had been accustomed to do in childhood.

"Oh, Medwyn, I cannot understand it either. I ought to feel some affection for my father, but this man only frightens me. I shrink from him instead of throwing myself into his arms as I do into yours. The touch of his hand makes me shiver and wish to run away. Tell me, Medwyn, can it be possible for a child to have such repugnance to a father? Is it true? *Can it be true?*"

"I am afraid it is true, Davie," answered Corbett with a sigh of regret. "I still doubt, and yet his knowledge of our affairs is so precise that I, who was most suspicious, have been obliged

to yield, and to own that *he is* David Morrison. Why he has remained so long silent I cannot make out, for according to what he has said he has been frequently in difficulties, and yet he did not attempt to make use of your money. He evidently means to do so now, and we cannot prevent him. Davie, Davie, I wish I could help you, but the position is so strange that I am powerless."

"You do help me, Medwyn, by your love," she said, still resting her head upon his shoulder.

The words and the movement were very pleasing to him.

"Thank you, Davie. It was very kind of you to say that—every loving word from you gives me happiness, and the whole desire of my life is to see you happy—my little sweetheart."

"Ah, you remember that, and I was very proud of it when you said it first."

"Ay, but you have changed now," he said, holding her head between his hands and gazing into her eyes earnestly.

"There is no change, Medwyn. I regard you still as my brother."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### IN PERPLEXITY.

CORBETT, when about to leave Mrs. Wybrant's house, was informed by the servant (who with difficulty suppressed a smile) that a woman from Scotland desired to see him on particular business. He was surprised, but Davie was delighted when she learned that the woman was Nell Paterson.

“Tell her to come in at once,” she said, with a brightening face; “I would have been glad at any time to see some one from my home, but Nell was always a favourite of mine, and I am curious to know why and how she has come to London.”

Nell was a character well known in the district surrounding Balnagairn. She had a pack, and went about selling laces, thread, needles, buttons, and “Brummagem” trinkets to servant girls, not only at the farmhouses, but also at those of the country gentlemen and proprietors. She was almost as well known in the parlour as in the kitchen, for there were



strange stories about her early life which had somehow got into the mouths of the people, and she was in herself a droll mixture of cunning and simplicity. She would take sixpence for some bauble that was not worth a penny, and she would divide her last crust with any hungry tramp.

She had been married twice, and the story went that her first husband, Davidson, having been caught working an unlicensed still, she had assisted him in murdering the exciseman who had made the discovery. The man died during the trial, and she had been acquitted. Then she married a pedlar, Paterson, and on his death she took the pack herself, and, thanks to a strong constitution, a lively memory, and a gossiping tongue, contrived to make an income which was considerable for a woman in her position.

When she entered the room she made a very low "boo" to Corbett and to Davie. She wore a coarse wincey dress, a tartan shawl, and a large bonnet.

"Why, Nell," cried Davie, "what brings you here?"

Nell made another "boo," and replied—

"If you please, miss, I wanted to see the laird, as I believe he can tell me

something that I want to ken particular. Ye see, I was doon at Balnagairn, and ane o' the servants telt me that you had a visit from John Davidson—him that was out with Miss Morrison's father; and if it is the same John Davidson he is my bairn, and I want to ken where he bides. I have not seen him for sixteen years, and as I had a pickle siller saved up, I thoct I would like to see him now. A bairn is aye a bairn to a mither; though whiles he forgets it, the mither disna."

Corbett and Davie looked at each other in amazement. Here was a new event in the strange experiences through which they were passing. It immediately occurred to Medwyn that this woman might be able to help him to decide whether or not Davidson was an impostor; but there was the strong impression produced upon his mind by what he had been told, and there was also the fact that Davie was convinced that her father had simply assumed the name of his assistant in order to carry out his foolish scheme.

He acted promptly. There was a simple way of settling the question, and he adopted it.

"If you can identify the man as your

son, and if you can prove it, we shall all be very grateful."

"Maybe I can, maybe I cannot, but I want to see him, for I believe he is my ain born son, and I want you to tell me where I will find him."

"You shall find him in a few minutes," said Corbett as he rang the bell; "we shall go together to the man's lodgings, and Nell will prove to us whether or not the man is what he represents himself to be. Go and dress yourself."

When Davie had left the room, Corbett turned to Nell Paterson with an anxious expression.

"If you can help me to prove that this man is your son, you will do me the greatest service that ever one person rendered to another. He represents himself to be David Morrison, and he has told me things which make it almost impossible to doubt that he is speaking the truth."

"Weel, whether he is David Morrison or no can easily be settled, for my bairn has a scar on the right temple that I could tell him by at any moment. He was just a wee thing when the accident happened. We were walking through a new street in Glasgow where there was a

new Catholic Kirk being built, and they had put up a lot o' figures o' saints and apostles, and he was glowering at them when he came bang against a railing that left the mark on his temple for his life."

"Very good," answered Corbett, "if we can find that mark I presume you can identify it, and that will enable us to prove whether this is your son or Morrison. What you have told me has astounded me even more than what he has said. Between the two of you I am utterly bewildered."

"That's no my fault."

"Just so, but I am placed in a very grave position. I have to protect this lady, and at the very time when she is at liberty to use her fortune as she pleases, a man appears claiming to be her father, with such proofs as we are afraid to doubt. He gives to her letters of her mother, a locket containing a portion of her mother's hair, and to me he gives other proofs which according to my belief no man but David Morrison could give."

"It's just possible that I may be wrang," said Nell Paterson sadly. "You ken that I hav'na seen him; but when I do see him I could swear to him if the

scar is on his brow He was a clever laddie, and made a way for himself, though he didna do precisely as he ought to have done to his mither. He ran awa' frae the house when he was barely twall, and I never kent onything aboot him till I learnt that he was going out to India with Mr. Morrison. But if you will just bring me face to face with the man who calls himself David Morrison I'll tell you whether he is my bairn or no."

"Are you sure you would know him after so many years of absence?"

"There is nae doubt about it," said Nell emphatically. "He was aye a clever loon at making himsel' look like ither folk, but he could never cheat me. I could tell him amongst a hundred, just as a good sheep farmer could tell his ain ewe amongst a drove. And, besides, the scar on the brow would speak for me."

"And you shall see the man," said Corbett determinedly, "and Miss Morrison shall go with us. More than that, I shall send for Bonsfield, who was the last to see both men, and he will help us to decide the case."

Davie was ready, and the cab was at the door. They entered it, and drove at

once to the lodgings of which Davidson had given the address.

The "slavey" who answered the door looked in surprise at Corbett.

"Mr. Davidson has gone away, and said he was not to be back, as he was going to America, and his friends knew his address."

Corbett thanked the girl, and turning to Davie and Nell Paterson repeated the information he had received.

"It's no true," said Nell. "It is just ane o' his lees, and it makes me sure that he is the laddie I am seeking. He was aye guid at making up stories, and mony a time when he was at school he got other poor laddies whuppet for the thing he had done himsel' "

"Well," said Corbett calmly, "before we return to Mrs. Wybrant's house, we must discover what steamer starts for America to-day or to-morrow. Scotland Yard will do the rest."

Although Davie did not understand what Scotland Yard meant, or what was to be discovered there, she was glad to learn that there were means of finding out something concerning the man in whom she had such unhappy interest.

They drove straight to the place, and

Corbett saw the chief inspector. He gave the necessary information, and directed that no expense should be spared in tracking the man.

The business in which he was engaged was altogether so curious that he acted rather from impulse than from reason. His next step was to drive to the telegraph office at Charing Cross, and to send a message to Eglinton to come at once.

“And when do you think he will get it?” said Nell Paterson; “and when do you think he will be here?”

“I suppose he will get it in about an hour,” responded Corbett; “he will have time enough to catch the evening train, and he will be with us early to-morrow morning. He knows more about this man than any of us—except Bonsfield, for whom I have already sent—and when we have the two together to confront him, we shall have no difficulty in discovering whether he is your son or David Morrison. At present I am much puzzled. I doubt and yet believe. I have not been able to master the case; but I shall do so in a few days.”

“Just let me see him, Laird, and I’ll settle it for ye in twa minutes,” said Nell, clenching her hand as if there were some

recreant before her whom she was about to chastise. "He is just a born deevil: and from what ye have telt me, it's as sure as death that he is nae mair David Morrison than I am. Dinna fash your thoomb about him, for I'll catch him."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### ON THE TRACK.

EGLINTON promptly obeyed the summons, and was at Mrs. Wybrant's on the following morning in time for breakfast. Corbett was there also, and Bonsfield had telegraphed that he would be with them in the afternoon.

The meeting of the lovers was very quiet. Eglinton only took Davie's two hands in his, and looked into her face affectionately.

"I am glad to be with you again," he said; "but I am sorry that you have to pass through such a trial as this. Wait only a little while, Davie, and I shall be with you always."

Corbett had walked to the window, and turned his back upon them.

"Now," he said, "I have a letter to



write, Eglinton. Mrs. Wybrant allows me to use her boudoir, and you will find me there."

He left the room without raising his eyes to Davie.

Then Davie shyly held up her face to Eglinton, and he with a passionate impulse kissed her; but drawing back suddenly, he said, with a frightened air, like that of a man who feels he has done wrong—

"I ought not to have done that, Davie, but can you understand the struggle that is going on in my mind? I wish you to be free, and yet my heart cries for you day and night. I came to see your face, and feel your hand in mine. I keep thinking of you until I am ashamed of myself for allowing the thought of you to interfere so much with my duty: yet the thought of you helps me, and the hope of winning you enables me to do double a man's work. I am grateful to you, Davie, for the help you have been to me. I shall always love you, although you may never be my wife."

"I am to wait for you," she said quietly. "I have faith in you, and I believe you have faith in me."

“My darling,” he exclaimed, clasping her in his arms, “you make me more your debtor for the comfort you give me than I can tell you.”

“I am glad to help you—even in that way,” she said.

“You will not have to wait long. Things go well with me, and I expect in a short time to be able to ask you to—come home.”

“But what if this man who has caused your ruin should prove to be my father?” she asked, with a shudder.

“I would still say the same, Davie—I love you, I love you.”

Everything is said in these three words. What more could there be to say? All the sweetness of two lives is summed up in that one simple phrase. And when it is spoken first the soul is too full of joy to think it possible that sorrow may come afterwards. Nature is most beneficent. What would be the life of a baby if it knew that sugar may ferment and produce an acid more disagreeable to the taste than rhubarb powders? What would be the life of lovers if their eyes were not too much dazzled by the sunshine of their state to permit them to see the shadows.

Eglinton only saw that she was more beautiful than ever. She only saw the hopeful change in his manner. Formerly he had been like a boy whose sorrows passed with the breeze; now he was a steady, serious man.

"You are very much changed," she said, looking into his pale face.

"Yes, and I almost believe that all this trouble will be the cause of my awakening to the serious business of life. I feel a different man, and who knows, my darling—now I dare to call you that—who knows but this will be like the caning a boy gets at school which quickens him to his task? You know that my poor father suffers from my folly, and he has done so without a word of reproach to me. He treated me as if I had done him no wrong, and that was harder to bear than the severest anger."

"But you will get over it; and you would do so all the sooner if you would allow me to help you."

"How you tempt me, Davie," he said, holding her head between his hands, and gazing tenderly into her clear blue eyes, "but I want to make myself worthy of you by proving that I can work my way

out of this difficulty without your aid. You said I was changed, and I am."

"You will have your own way, and I must submit. But it seems very disagreeable to me that you should refuse to allow me to help you out of the difficulty which my father has caused."

"But *is* he your father? That is the question we have to decide, and we mean to do it with the least delay possible."

Davie held down her head and cried.

"It is too true." Then she added timidly, "I wish it had not been so."

"Well, we shall see about that. Corbett and I both doubt him; and our business now is to secure him, so that we may settle the question one way or the other."

"But you will do no harm to him," she exclaimed piteously; "for my mother's sake—for my sake, you will do nothing to harm him."

"I cannot promise that. You must understand there are many other persons besides ourselves involved in this miserable affair. If it be true that he is your father, I will, for your sake, do everything that is in my power to save him. But my conviction that he is an im-

postor is so strong that I can promise you nothing."

At this moment a servant entered the room.

"If you please, sir, Mr. Corbett says he wishes to see you immediately"

Davie looked in alarm at Eglinton, and he grasped her hand.

"Do not be afraid. Whatever is right shall be done; and be sure, for your sake, I shall be merciful."

Then he followed the servant to the boudoir, where he found Corbett excitedly pacing the floor.

"Do you know what I have learned?" he asked abruptly "From what Nell Paterson has said to me I am convinced that Davidson is her son. He went away from home when young, and obtained employment in an engineering workshop, and from that time she heard nothing of him until she learned that he was going out to India as the chief assistant of David Morrison."

"It will be all right in the course of time, I dare say, but in the mean while we have only got to prove that he is the man we charge with swindling."

"You are right, Eglinton; but the man who successfully carried out the

schemes of the Viendon Water Works and the Paradoe Railway is not likely to be a person such as this fellow Davidson."

"But how on earth are we to show that he is not the man? You yourself have said that you are convinced; but what are we to do when Davie acknowledges him as her father?"

Corbett again paced the room in agitation. His first desire was to satisfy Davie that he was acting justly, but he found himself extremely perplexed as to how he should do it.

"We can do nothing with a man until we have reasonable proof of his guilt," he said at length. "If Nell Paterson will speak out we may take decisive action even before our witnesses arrive."

## CHAPTER XXX.

### HIDE AND SEEK.

DAVIE'S friends continued their pursuit of Davidson, and whilst they were doing so she had many nervous doubts as to whether or not she should consent to their proceedings.

Although she had the feeling that the man was not her father, there was still a great possibility

The proofs were so much in his favour, and yet the general feeling was so strong against him, that she did not know what to do or think. If Nell Paterson had only seen him!—she would have decided the matter.

They were all in a state of excitement and of doubt.

Corbett, although now well pleased to be satisfied that the man was Nell Paterson's son, could not yet produce proofs sufficient to satisfy a jury. He was waiting letters from New York, Bombay, and Calcutta, but he had also to wait for the arrival of the witnesses in order to identify the man.

Meanwhile Davidson was quietly smoking a cigar in the front room of the first floor of a house nearly opposite Mrs. Wybrant's.

He had taken apartments there on the principle that the nearer he was to the enemy the less likely he was to be discovered.

He kept close watch upon all who came and went to and from the other house.

He noted the movements of Eglinton,

Corbett, and Bonsfield, but somehow he had missed seeing Nell Paterson.

He remained in perfect safety for several days, for no one suspected that he would dare to come so near to the place where so many people were waiting eagerly to find him.

But on the fourth day after taking up this position, he did see Nell; and upon peering at her through an opera-glass as she waited at the door for admittance, his face became pale, and he threw the glass aside with an exclamation of anger.

His being at the window was unfortunate for him, for Nell saw him, and although it was only a glance, she was startled by the resemblance to her son.

She asked in an excited manner to see Miss Morrison, and Davie was much startled by the way in which the woman spoke. "I've see'd him, I've see'd him," she cried, "and the born deevil is just like himsel', and has taken up his abode just before ye. He means harm, and noo's the time to catch him. Whaur's the Laird? whaur's Mr. Eglinton? whaur's Mr. Bonsfield? let them a' come wi' me noo, and I'll let them see that I'm richt. I telt ye that he wasna going to America, but that he just said it to put ye off the scent."



Davie was bewildered by this astounding news.

None of her friends were in the house, and she did not know where to find them. She knew it would be useless to speak to Mrs. Wybrant, who was still confined to her room.

“But none of them are here. Can we not go ourselves?”

“Come awa’ this minute, or he’ll be off before we can cross the road,” responded Nell, still in a high state of excitement. “I am sure that he see’d me, and there is nae counting upon what he will do.”

“Yes,” said Davie, “we should go at once.”

She put on her hat, and they went over to the house where Nell had seen the man.

But when the door was opened and they asked for Mr. Davidson, the servant told them that no gentleman of that name lived there.

“It’s no true,” said Nell, “for I see’d him wi’ my ain een.”

“Well, there was a gentleman here who left about five minutes ago, but his name was Morrison.”

Nell, shaking her umbrella and apparently quivering with passion, said—

“That’s him! He’s ower quick for ony o’ us. Do you no ken whaur he went till?”

“No; he walked out and said he must take a cab to the King’s Cross railway station, because he had received a sudden summons from Scotland, and was obliged to go immediately. His baggage was to be sent after him.”

“Then did he say where it was to be sent to?”

“No; he told us he would send for it.”

Nell Paterson turned with a despairing look to Davie.

“It’s nae use trying to chase him, it seems to me, for we have no chance wi’ him, he is that cunning.”

“Let us go in search of Mr. Eglinton; I know that he is staying in St. James’s Street, and we can find the place.”

“Anybody! anybody that kens the man. Just let me get at him, and there will be no more difficulty about the matter.”

They drove at once to Eglinton’s lodgings and happily found him there.

He, smarting under the sense of his recent failures, at once accompanied them to the place where they expected to find the culprit. Then they learned that

there was no train for Scotland until the evening, and Eglinton was again chagrined to find that pursuit was fruitless. He, however, was determined to do something, and he gave a minute description of the man to the police inspectors at the station; and he also gave a description of him to the inspectors at St. Pancras and Euston Square.

All their efforts were in vain, however, because Davidson had boldly returned to Mrs. Wybrant's house, and when Davie arrived she found him waiting for her.

Her amazement was great, but again the chances of proving who the man was were lost, because Eglinton had left her in order to visit Scotland Yard, and had taken Nell Paterson with him.

He had been shown into the drawing-room, and when she entered he advanced to her with his usual suave smile.

"Why is it you join with my enemies, Davie?" he said softly, and there was something in his expression which rendered it impossible for her to draw back. "I have been longing to see you, but you have taken such a strange notion into your head that I cannot move without the fear of arrest. I know what Corbett

and the others mean, but you at least should help me, for your mother's sake."

She did not answer at once, but took off her hat and laid it on the table; the doubts and suspicions in her mind were still so conflicting that she did not know how to act.

"Why do you not answer?" he continued. "This is not a question of mere kindness, but of filial duty. I have told you that I am in difficulties—told you frankly. I have told you how and why I have so long passed under the name of Davidson—I have given you the proof that I am your father, why then do you not believe me and help me?"

"I wish you to give me one more proof."

"What is that?"

"Turn to the window and let me see your face."

He wheeled round instantly, and she looked at the right temple, but she could see no scar.

Then sinking on a chair, her hands covering her face, she cried piteously—

"It must be true! it must be true!—and Nell is mistaken. Oh, sir, if I could only feel for you the affection a daughter should give to a father I would be happy, but you know how difficult it is

to understand the circumstances under which you have presented yourself to me."

"At least trust me so far that I mean you no harm. By-and-by you will come to understand all. At present you are acting under the influence of men who distrust me, and who mean to injure me in every way that is in their power. I have asked you—Will you protect me from them?—and you have not answered. Answer now."

Her eyes were full of tears and her head drooping.

"How can I answer for them? They are convinced that you are——"

She stopped because she could not speak the word, but Davidson did it for her.

"Convinced that I am an impostor. But wait, my child, and you shall find that they are wrong and I am right. Keep them quiet only for a few days; let them leave me alone, and I shall satisfy them all."

"But they are too determined, and I cannot stop them," she said in a distressed voice.

"Then, will you come to me to-morrow? I claim you as my child, and I wish you to go with me from this country."

He looked grave and earnest, she drew back shuddering and with startled eyes.

“Go with you—where?” she asked.

“To America,” he answered quietly  
“There I have every opportunity to exercise what ingenuity I possess, and there I shall be free from your persecuting friends.”

“But how—how can I go with you whilst there is still a doubt of who you are? You know the will, and you know that I am under the charge of my Aunt Wybrant.”

“Promise to be silent.”

“I promise.”

“Then to-morrow you shall be satisfied.”

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE ESCAPE.

BOTH Corbett and Eglinton were at the house shortly after her interview with Davidson, but she would tell them nothing.

The calmness of her manner left the two men in extreme doubt as to whether or not the story which Nell Paterson had told them was true.

Corbett tried to persuade her to speak, but she would not.

Eglinton implored her to speak and to tell all about their journey to the different railway stations, but she had given her promise and she remained doggedly silent.

Corbett drew her aside gently and whispered in her ear.

“Davie, tell me.”

Her lips were compressed and then opened tremblingly, “Wait until to-morrow I have seen him—he has been here—I have spoken with him—and until to-morrow I can say nothing.”

“This is most strange, Davie. You know we wish to do all that can be done for your happiness, and yet you will not allow us to do anything. If you would only give us a little of the information you possess it would be useful to us, and I have no doubt benefit you.”

“Do not press me, Medwyn, for you only cause me pain.”

“That would cause me pain too, Davie, for I seek only to give you pleasure. I wish to get hold of this man to relieve you of doubt and to relieve myself of responsibility I know that these are hard words, but you know that there is a duty which I owe to myself as well as to you; and when one loses self-respect one loses the power to be of use to others.”

These were the hardest words Medwyn had ever spoken to her, and she looked at him with sad eyes.

“You are cross with me, but if you could only know how much I suffer by refusing to answer, you would pity me and not be angry.”

“I am not angry, Davie. I am only sorry that you do not see how much we need your help. This man eludes us in such a way that without your help we can do nothing. For your own sake—for *my* sake—will you not speak?”

Davie clasped her hands and looked imploringly in his face.

“Don’t ask me. I know that you care a great deal for me; I know that you would do anything that a man could do for me. Then do what is best for my comfort, and leave me unquestioned until to-morrow.”

“You are a strange girl,” he responded sadly; “you will neither help yourself nor let others help you. I only asked you to tell me what you know—this man’s address—in order that we might free you from an impostor or bring you to your father.”

“I have given you my answer,” she said coldly.



“And you have given the wrong one,” cried Eglinton passionately.

“Do you also turn against me?” was her exclamation, and she felt inclined to cry. “It is so very hard to find all one’s friends say that you are in the wrong. It may be so—but, God help me, I do not know what it is best to do.”

“There, there, Davie,” said Corbett, patting her on the head, “we shall not press you any further. I see that you are much pained, and we are sorry for it, but I know that you will forgive us, because you will remember that we are acting for your sake.”

“I remember all that, Medwyn. Never doubt that, however cruel you may appear to me, I shall remember that you always are, and always have been, good and kind. Now, let me send for Nell Pater-son; she is waiting downstairs. The one mark by which she said she could identify him is not on his temple. I would like her to know it, because it may relieve her.”

Nell was brought into the room, and Davie told her of the examination she had made of the man’s temple, and that the mark of which she had spoken was not there.

“Hoot awa wi’ ye, lassie. Do ye think he doesna ken how to hide such a mark from you? The man that I saw at yon window was John Davidson, as like his father as twa peas are like ilk other.”

The confidence which Nell displayed affected Davie very much, in spite of the test to which she had put Davidson. Could it be that this man, who had so resembled her father as to deceive his intimate friends, had befooled her when she was under such a strong impression that he was doing so, and when she had been given a distinct sign by which she could recognise him?

“How could that be, Nell, when I took him to the window and examined him myself?”

“I canna tell you that, but he is clever enough for anything, and I believe he could make the scar disappear like magic if he wanted to do so.”

Nell was rather indignant at her veracity being doubted. Corbett was gentle, but convinced that Davie had been deceived. Eglinton remained in a state of agitation. He could not understand how it was possible for Davie to persist in her foolish belief, when at every turn they found proofs that Morrison was dead, and

that Davidson was only presuming upon his unhappy resemblance to her father and his knowledge of his private affairs to obtain possession of her fortune.

He turned to her sternly.

“You must allow us to act, Davie, in this matter. You are too weak—I ought to say too good—to act for yourself; but though I am angry with you, I have told you again and again that we wish him no harm but that we are determined to protect you.”

“Wait until to-morrow,” she said, with teeth set.

“So be it, then,” responded Eglinton. “What time shall I come? And he—when is he to come to you?”

“I cannot say. You must wait.”

“You are deceiving yourself, and you are preventing us from giving you the help we could have done, if you would only have told us all you know instead of obeying the commands of John Davidson. Till to-morrow, good-bye.”

He left her without shaking hands and without giving her one kind look. The acute pain she felt at this abrupt leave-taking was almost more than she could bear.

The doubts in her own mind made her

feel that her friends were right in condemning her, but Corbett spoke to her gently, and the touch of his hand on her head was as soothing as that of a mother on the head of her child.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### NELL'S AFFIRMATION.

To Corbett it was hard to be a daily witness of the tenderness which Davie gave to Eglinton. He argued with himself, and tried to make up his mind to what he saw was inevitable. She loved him, and to himself he had pledged himself that what she wished should be done.

When that pledge was made, however, he had resolutely fixed his mind upon a bachelor's life. Gradually the change had come about when his heart craved for her in spite of himself.

"Poor child, poor child!" he often repeated in his lonely walks; "you will be happy with him, and I wish you to be happy with him;" and then, with a sudden burst of passion—"but, oh, my darling, how I long for you. If you were with me all would be right, but when you go

away it will be all darkness, and I can only say, God bless you. If your happiness lies with him, I shall try to help you towards it—but it might have been—it might have been . . . and I wish you to be happy with him.”

That was his constant cry. His whole thoughts now were taken up by the position in which she was placed, and after what Nell Paterson had said he asked to be allowed to speak to her in private. Then he questioned her more closely than he had yet done in regard to the man who called himself Davidson. The result was still the same; she asserted that he was her son, and that Miss Morrison had been mistaken in some strange way about the absence of the scar on his temple.

“Suppose we get hold of him,” said Corbett, “will you come to the Court and identify him?”

There the mother's heart began to quail.

“What would they do to him?” she asked cautiously

Corbett looked at the woman with some suspicion of her willingness to serve the cause which was uppermost in his mind, but then he answered frankly—

“I am afraid that it would be a bad case for him. If they find that he has been representing himself as another man and obtaining money, he would probably be condemned to penal servitude.”

“And what’s that?” she asked.

“Well, it means imprisonment for so many years, and it is very probable that whether he is your son or not he will be condemned on other grounds, because he has by false representations brought a large number of people to ruin.”

Nell shut her mouth close, her brows contracted, and she seemed to be looking far into the distance. Then, what was very strange, tears came into her eyes. She looked still into the distance, and spoke as if in a dream, her voice husky and her heart throbbing quickly.

“He is my bairn, and if he is to be doomed, it shall no be by me. I’ll gang hame.”

“That would be cruel of you, Nell,” said Corbett. “You should at least be grateful to Miss Morrison for all the kindness she has shown you, and you ought to try to help her out of a position of very great difficulty.”

“I would like to do that, Laird; but, mind you, when I came here it was to see

my bairn, and not to persecute him. I'll gang hame, and I will not speak a word about him."

"But remember, Nell, how much depends upon what you can say"

"Whether or no, I am going to leave the matter in your own hands."

"You must not do so; we require you, and by law we can compel you to bear witness for or against him."

The woman clenched her hand, and with an energy which startled Corbett, replied—

"If he happens to be my laddie my evidence would be for him. If you keep the thing in your ain hands I will tell you everything that I can, but if you are going to send him into a gaol I will tell naithing. And that's my last word. You wouldna expect a mother to turn against her own bairn—but if one could, I would turn against him. I have telt ye that he has no behaved weel to me, but that's nae reason why I should turn against him."

Corbett was sensible to all the motherly feelings which she expressed, because he remembered his own mother, and her tenderness in regard to him. He looked back upon the last day which they had

passed together, and he felt that he could not press Nell to betray her own son. And yet the position was so grave that he could not afford to allow the woman to escape him.

“I will pledge myself, Nell, that if you prove the man to be your son, he shall be allowed to go free; but if you refuse, I know that in a few weeks—it may be a few days—I shall be able to prove who he is, and then I shall have no mercy upon him. It is only for your sake that I stretch my conscience so far as to promise this.”

Nell seemed staggered by the firmness with which he spoke and the words which he uttered, but still she remained stubborn.

“I’ll no’ speak, Laird. Do what you will, unless you tell me that you have seen the scar on his brow, I’ll no’ speak.”

“But why are you drawing back, now, Nell, when you were so willing to help us at first? I thought you intended to do all that was in your power to make this matter straight. Why is it you stop?”

Nell shrugged her shoulders, as if she wondered at such a question being asked. “Just because he is my bairn. I ken him weel, and though he may have made Miss



Davie think that he was another, I am no to be cheated. But why is it you canna let me see him face to face?"

Now Corbett entered into a stratagem, of which, under ordinary circumstances, he would have been ashamed.

"Davie said to-morrow. Let us wait, as she asks us to do, and we can find out then the man and his purpose."

Nell made a bow.

"Jist as you like, Laird, but I'm thinking that if you want to catch him, it would be better to try it now than to wait till the morning, because I have no intention of speaking a word about him. I am no' going to be a Judas! And so I will leave you."

Corbett tried to persuade her to stay, but she refused with such firmness that he could not ask her again.

Nell had apparently made up her mind, after the experience she had had in London, that the proper thing for her to do was to hold her tongue, and she seemed determined to do it. Whatever angry thoughts she had had regarding Davidson, they seemed to have passed away as soon as she became convinced that he was her son.

He took her back to the room where

he had left Davie, and found that Eglington had returned.

Davie insisted that Nell should stay in the house all night; and after a little while Nell agreed, but it was with the air of a woman who consented against her will.

When she had left the room, Davie sat down upon the couch; Eglington and Corbett stood together at a window, considering what was best to be done.

Corbett turned to Davie.

“Are you to help us in what we are to do, or are we to act alone?”

She held up her hands.

“Don't ask me; I can neither promise to help you in what you do, nor consent to what you do. There has been so much trouble already that I will not take further action. You ask me to take part in the prosecution of a man who seems to be so near to me that it would be my duty to protect him.”

“Oh, be reasonable, Davie,” said Eglington, with some irritability. “How can you believe in this man? How can you think of him, even for a moment, as anything but a scoundrel?”

She looked at him for a moment in amazement, and then, with indignation, said—

“ You do not understand the position, or you would not speak so, Mr. Eglinton. I am striving to do my duty even to a father who has not done his duty to me.”

“ But you have duties you owe to others that you should not forget ; and if you forget them, then the sooner we part the better.”

Davie’s eyes opened wide in surprise at this passionate exclamation, and she answered bitterly—“ We *shall* part.”

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### HESITATIONS.

THE moment Davie had spoken, Eglinton quitted the room again, without even saying good-bye.

She stood for a little while, her face white, and her eyes still with the look of wonder in them, and then she sank upon a chair and burst into tears.

Medwyn came to her assistance, and, laying his hand gently upon her head, said softly—

“ Don’t fret, Davie ; this is only a misunderstanding which can be easily arranged. Try to remember that Eglin-

ton's passion is owing to his love for you. He wants to help you. He wants to save you from a mistake which, if made, will ruin your whole life. Come, come, my child, be reasonable. I think you treated him very harshly ; and to one of his nature, your words must have conveyed the feeling that you cared little for him. He is a good fellow, and means well."

"But he should have some consideration for me, and for the doubts which are in my mind."

"He will have consideration for you when he has had a little time to think over the matter. What he said was quite true. You must remember you have a duty which you owe to others, as well as to yourself and your father, even if Davidson proves to be so."

"You seem to be all so cruel," she sobbed ; and then, suddenly clasping her hands, and with a repentant look—"No, no, Medwyn, I did not mean it—forgive me. But this is trying me too much."

Medwyn smiled as he again passed his hand over her head, with a mesmeric touch of affection which seemed to soothe her.

"Cruel to be kind, Davie ; that is all. You will find it in the end—and your

own good heart will appreciate it. It is for your sake we are acting so resolutely."

"But why give me no voice in my own affairs? Why pursue this man when I do not wish it, and when I cannot see any good to come of it?"

"Because——" Corbett began very slowly—hesitated, and then went on—"because we love you, we cannot leave you to run the risk of a danger which we both believe is near you."

"I know that you would not harm me. I know that it is because you care for me that you desire to protect me."

"There, there, child, we need not talk any more about it just now. When you are calmer we will explain to you all that we mean to do. It is not much if he be your father. As we have told you, then we shall obey your wishes and if possible save him."

"Thank you, Medwyn, for so much comfort. I shall try hard to believe that all these worries are for the best, and that there will be sunshine at the end—to you if not to me."

With that she left him, and Corbett proceeded to Eglinton's hotel, where he found him pacing his room in the utmost agitation.

He had already repented having spoken so passionately to Davie, and was wishing himself in "kingdom come," so that he might escape from the feeling of having been harsh to her. And yet he was convinced that all he had said was right. Still, the feeling that he had hurt her was enough to make him curse his hasty speech and himself.

When Corbett entered he looked ashamed, and halted in the middle of the room.

"Will she ever forgive me?" he exclaimed eagerly. "Have you brought any message for me, and is it good or bad?"

"She has sent no message," answered Corbett; "but I know from her manner that reconciliation is possible. She is a sensible girl, and although you wounded her severely, I believe, as I have just told her, that she will soon see you were in the right. I would advise you to sit down and tell her in a note what you yourself feel about the quarrel."

"I do not feel able to say a word to her, and yet I am anxious to tell her how miserable all this has made me. If I could only tell her how wretched I have been since I left her, she would perhaps pardon me."

“Then do it,” said Corbett calmly. “I like a man who helps himself, and I thought you had become such a man.”

Eglinton, with clenched teeth and with excited manner which still indicated resolution, answered—

“Necessity has made me such a man. I know that my life has been hitherto frivolous. I know that you and all my friends condemn me for the ruin I have brought upon my father and myself. But a new life is open to me, and I believe that I shall be able to redeem the past.”

“I like to hear you speak that way, for it gives me hope for the future. I have often felt pained in speaking to you of your careless ways and of your indifference to the common rules which conduct a man to success. But if you are really determined this time—as I think you are—to hold to your good resolutions, I shall be your friend, and Davie”—here he drew a long breath as if afraid to speak the words—then firmly, “and Davie will be your wife.”

Eglinton grasped his hand enthusiastically.

“You are a good fellow, and I would not lose your friendship if I could help it.

But there come trials in a man's life which make him act ridiculously, and I fear one has come to me. Trust me, this time you shall not be disappointed in me."

"I hope not; more than that, I believe not, because you have lately done so well."

"Thanks again; your confidence in me gives me strength, and it shall go hard with me but I shall satisfy you."

"All right," said Corbett, with an attempt to be cheery. "Now for the letter; that's the first proof you can give me that you mean what you say, because it is one of the hardest things in the world for a man to acknowledge—even to a woman—that he is sorry for having done wrong."

Corbett took up a book, and, lying on the couch, prepared himself to wait for the epistle. He had just begun to read, when he was interrupted by an exclamation from his friend—

"But what am I to say?"

"Say what you feel!"

"But, don't you see, I feel that I am right."

"Exactly," said Corbett quietly; "each



party to a quarrel always feels that he or she is right. Now go on. Set down as plainly as you can your regret for having vexed her, and never mind the question as to who was wrong."

"You are a Solomon!" cried Eglington, in something like his old gleeful voice; "and, by Jove, you have hit the right plan. I could not say to her that what passed between us was anything but what should have been said by one who loved her. Now I see the way to make my apology without interfering with the truth of my assertions."

And then he began his letter. He wrote rapidly, as if under some strong impulse, and the letter was made up rather of passionate declarations of love than of any clear explanation of his conduct.

"There!" he exclaimed triumphantly, when he had finished. You may read it, and see whether or not I have said all that you would have liked me to say."

Corbett, with a smile, handed the letter back to him.

"I shall be the bearer of your letter, if you please, but I will not read it. I have a strong prejudice against looking at any letter a man addresses to a woman, however simple it may be." Then, in

a lower voice—"And in this case an especial objection."

Eglinton did not understand the objection, but suddenly he remembered the suspicion which had occurred to him at Balnagairn, that Corbett himself was in love with Davie. In the joy of knowing that she loved him, he had forgotten all about it. Now he quietly closed the envelope.

"Yes, be you the bearer of the message," he said in a serious voice. "I could not have a better one; but there is something, Corbett, which makes me wish that it had been somebody else. Do you understand me?"

The two men looked into each other's faces earnestly, and then Corbett spoke with some huskiness in his voice—

"I do not know what you mean; but if there is anything I can do for you, I shall do it. You seem to have some curious thought about me, which you conceal. Speak out—you can say nothing that would displease me, for I know your hot temper, and will make allowance for it. Speak."

Eglinton hesitated for a moment, and then with a sort of fierce resolve to utter his inmost thoughts,

“We are rivals,” he said.

“No,” answered Corbett quietly, “not rivals; but I love her as you do, and I will take your message.”

Then he went away.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### A DIFFICULT POSITION.

WHILST Davie had found herself very firm when she spoke those hasty words to Eglinton, she was most despondent when she reached her own room, notwithstanding the soothing influence of Medwyn's sympathy.

Could it be that they had parted in consequence of those few words? Surely he would forgive her? That was the weakness of the woman. Presently her vanity asserted itself. Why should she wish to be forgiven? If he could deal with her love so lightly now, what would it be in after years? Her face assumed an expression of indignation which had been very seldom seen upon it.

“Let him go,” she said to herself, with an assumption of indifference which her second self knew all the time was false.

“What do I care for him? He has shown me that he does not love me, and yet I was fool enough to believe in him. What fools women are!”

And then, as if shocked at herself for having such thoughts, she crossed her arms upon the table, and, bowing her head upon them, again sobbed piteously. The light of her life seemed to have gone out.

Do you know what it is to receive a blow straight from the shoulder, right on the forehead—such a blow as a skilled pugilist can give when he breaks through all the ordinary guards and stuns his adversary? That was just the kind of blow which Davie felt she had received, and all her energies were exhausted. Eglinton had never cared for her, and she felt hopeless.

At that moment there was a tap at the door. At first she did not hear it, and the knock was repeated more loudly.

She shrank from allowing any one to see her in her present condition, and yet, with a despairing indifference as to what might happen, she called, without raising her head—

“Come in!”

She did not know who entered, and

there was a pause, as if her visitor were hesitating as to what to do, but presently she felt a hard hand on her shoulder, and a homely voice speaking in her ear—

“Eh, lassie, what’s wrang wi’ ye?”

Then she knew it was Nell Paterson, and she felt grateful for the sympathy even of this humble friend, who was the only one to make any effort to defend Davidson, although on different grounds from those which inspired her own action.

“Everything is wrong, Nell. I feel worried out of my life by the difficulty which I find in agreeing or disagreeing with my friends. At one moment I feel disposed to let them do what they will, at the next I am frightened at the thought of what may be the result.”

“I thought you had the right to decide for yoursel’; and if I was you I would do it in spite of them a’ Never heed what they say”

“I cannot do that, Nell.” And now she rose, with a tearful face, and, looking at the woman with an expression of anxiety, continued—“What can I do with this doubt still in my mind? I have asked Mr. Corbett—he who is my dearest friend—and he joins with the others in telling me to allow them to find

this man, and to prove whether or not he is an impostor. But worse than that—if there can be anything worse—I have quarrelled with one who——”

She stopped, blushed, and bit her lip with vexation at what she had been about to declare.

Nell nodded her head, as if she understood all about it, and complacently offered this consolation—

“Ou aye, I ken; you’ve quarrelled wi’ your lad, and you want to make it up again. Weel, if I was you, I would just tell him that I never ken’t ony guid come out o’ keeping up quarrels between folk that want to be friends. There, noo, dry your een, and take a stout heart to a stev brae. It’s nae use greeting for what canna be helped. I’ve had mony ups and downs in my life, and I aye found that the best thing to do was to snap yer thumbs at the downs and try the ups again.”

This was all very good and sensible counsel; but, unfortunately, good counsel generally comes at a time when one is unable to act upon it, however much it may be appreciated. So it was with Davie. She was grateful to the woman for her kindness, but in her own mind

was thinking how little she could understand the agony of her position.

“Thank you, Nell, you are very kind,” she said pathetically; “but we cannot always do what is wisest and best, for we do not always understand what it is. I wish I could have a stout heart, but it seems very far from me.”

She took her handkerchief, dried her eyes, and became calmer. Then, turning to Nell, she asked with some hesitation—

“But why have you come to me just now?”

“Aweel, there was a laddie came to the door and asked for me, and he gied me this bit o’ paper that he said I was to place in yer ain hands without letting anybody see it. Can ye guess wha it will be frae?”

“Eglinton!” exclaimed Davie, her eyes brightening again with the hope that Medwyn had succeeded in clearing up the misunderstanding, as he had promised to do.

“Na, it’s no’ frae him, although I ken’t it was him ye were thinking o’, for I saw you thegither on the hills round Balnagairn, and it doesna need a long sight to ken what a lad and lass is.”

Davie looked disappointed, and turned away with a tear in her eye.

“I do not care to know what it is, then.”

Nell's expression suggested that she was about to reveal some mystery, and it at the same time indicated a proud sense of superior acuteness. When she handed the note to Davie, the latter took it with an air of utter indifference, and was apparently in no hurry to open it, for she held it between her fingers and gazed abstractedly out of the window.

“I jaloused in a minute wha sent it, and that was what for I came to you at once. It is from *him!*”

Davie understood, and hastily opened the note. It ran thus, without date or signature :

“I *must* see you, and without any one knowing it. A brougham will call, and a man will say you sent for him. He will be at the door in an hour after you receive this. My life depends upon your coming.”

This was such a startling message that Davie's first impulse was to send a servant after the boy who had delivered the note, and to bid him say she refused to obey the summons. Then she remembered



that some time must have elapsed since the boy had been at the door, and that it would be impossible to discover him. Besides, there was the simple alternative that when the brougham came she could refuse to enter it.

But she looked at the note again, and the words "My life depends upon your coming" frightened her. She wished that Medwyn had been with her, and then remembered that to tell him was to betray Davidson—and whatever the man might be, she could not make up her mind to that.

"He wants me to go to him," she said, in her distress taking Nell into her confidence.

"Then go, and let me go with you," was the prompt reply. "I'll take care that no harm comes to you."

Davie was still doubtful. She knew that neither Medwyn nor Eglinton would approve of such a step, and yet her pity for the man tempted her to take Nell's advice.

"But do you think it is safe? He is acting so strangely that he frightens me. I have asked him to come forward at once, and told him that none of my friends would harm him; but he still holds back, and sends me these secret

messages, which I do not know whether to obey or not."

Nell had her own selfish reasons for wishing her to go. She was eager to find out the whereabouts of Davidson, whom she persisted in believing to be her son, although they had not been able to find the scar upon his eyebrow; and therefore, in emphatic tones, she said—

"But you maun go—it is losing a chance to catch him."

Davie still remained in doubt, influenced partly by fear and partly by the thought of what Medwyn would say when he came to know of her obeying such a summons. There would be, however, she thought, protection in the presence of Nell Paterson, who was, like herself, desirous of allowing the man to escape.

She determined to go.

"You're a brave lass," said Nell, "and I'm certain sure that you and me will find out everything whilst the laird and the other folk are havering about their proofs."

Thereupon Davie dressed herself, and when the brougham was announced, she went down to it, but with slow steps, still uncertain as to the course she was to take.

A footman opened the door, and she stepped in. Nell, who was decidedly proud of having the opportunity of riding in such a splendid equipage, with two magnificent bay horses, and a real coachman and a real footman to attend upon her, was preparing to follow when the door was slammed and fastened, the footman sprang into his place, and the horses were driven off at full speed.

Nell was so much amazed at this strange manœuvre that she stood gaping and looking after the carriage instead of attempting to pursue. She had not experience enough of London to know that she might have hailed a hansom and have had a good chance of overtaking the brougham. She turned into the house and appealed to the butler for assistance which he could not give, so that she could only wait until the laird returned.

What Davie's feelings were when she found the door of the carriage shut in the face of her companion it would be difficult to describe. She called to the men to stop, but either her voice was not heard amidst the clatter of the horses' hoofs and the rumbling of the wheels, or they had been bribed not to listen.

So she, with what patience she could command, awaited the end of this singular adventure. What it meant she could not guess further than that it was one which seemed to mean that Davidson was resolved at any risk to see her alone, and remembering the position in which he was placed, she thought perhaps it would be best to submit to his wishes.

The carriage stopped at the door of the Paddington Hotel, and Davidson himself assisted her to alight. He had engaged a private suite of rooms, to which he conducted her. She accompanied him quietly, without any fear now, because in such a public place there was no possibility of danger.

However, when they entered the room she at once turned to him, asking with dignity and some sternness—

“Why have you sent for me in this strange way, and why did you give directions—for you must have done so—that I should not be allowed to have a companion.”

“Ah, my child, have you no pity for a man hunted on all hands, and without a friend in England to comfort him but you? Do you know that your friends have set detectives at my heels, who

pursue me from place to place until life is a misery? I desired to wait until to-morrow, but circumstances rendered that impossible. Forgive me."

Davie's sympathetic nature was touched by this appeal. She pitied him, although she could not help still doubting him.

"But why are you in this position? I have asked you that question again and again, and you have not yet given me any satisfactory answer."

"You are cruel to me, Davie, for I have told you that the unfortunate blunder which I made long ago leaves me almost helpless to claim even my own child; and the unfortunate business of this mine has made for me many enemies. But with your help I shall soon set all right. I have a project now in view which will yield us a fortune as soon as we reach America."

"We!" she ejaculated, utterly astounded.

"Yes, we!" he said quietly, but with a determined tone that showed he meant what he said; and then softening—"I do not wish to threaten you, Davie, but here are certificates which will prove my right to control you; and if you refuse, I shall use the power I possess. But I wish to appeal to you in the name of your

dead mother to come with me, to comfort me and help me."

Davie felt utterly dazed by the conflicting emotions which the name of her mother raised and the doubts she felt as to what she ought to do.

"How can I go with you in this secret manner? It is like running away"

"There is no help for it! Your fear of me has obliged me to take this course. Now you are with me, I implore you to stay! Do you refuse?"

She did not know what to say, his voice was so sad, his face expressed extreme distress, and the gentleness with which he touched her hand dispelled all fear.

"I will stay with you," she said, with impulsive resolution, "until you have been able to get all this disagreeable business settled, and I may see my friends again."

He smiled gratefully he was satisfied with this concession for the present.

## CHAPTER XXXV

## A STROKE OF BUSINESS.

DAVIDSON'S intention was to remain in London until Davie's fortune had passed into his hands. Here, however, he had a serious difficulty to overcome, for although she had complete command of her income, she could not touch the principal without the consent of Corbett and Bonsfield.

He was cautious in approaching this subject with Davie. She, still acting under her impulse, although bewildered by her strange position and much distressed by the thought of the anxiety which her friends would feel in consequence of her absence, was ready to do almost anything that Davidson wished.

He took her to a small hotel in the neighbourhood of Grosvenor Square, where they were to remain for the present. At breakfast he spoke.

“ You see, my child, how we are obliged to run about in order to escape from those who persecute me. But this will not be for long, if you will agree to the plan of which I have thought.”

“What is that?” asked Davie meekly.

“That you should sell all your railway and bank shares and transfer the money to America.”

She was startled by this proposal, and answered—

“But you know I cannot do that. Mr. Corbett and Mr. Bonsfield would never consent.”

Davidson smiled as if an innocent child had said something foolish.

“So long as I have your signature I can arrange the rest.”

Again her suspicions were aroused. Why should he desire to secure the money? And then, remembering that he was her father, she thought that she was compelled by duty to do what he desired. But the effect of his proposal was to make her cautious; for she knew that her guardians would never sign the necessary documents for the sale of the stock unless she were with them herself, and Davidson could satisfy them, as he had satisfied her, that he was her parent. The wish to help him was strong, but the doubt was stronger.

“But how can you do that? You have told me yourself that they are your enemies, and you know that they do not believe in you as I do.”



“What matter, if I can arrange to do without their signatures? Trust me to overcome whatever objections they may raise. Will you consent to sign this?”

He presented a formal-looking document, which Davie regarded with an expression of terror. She did not know anything about law, but she had once been in a Court of Justice and had seen similar papers in the hands of the barristers. It occurred to her that there was something very singular in the conduct of her father. Then the wild thought again arose—Could he be what Corbett and Eglinton said—an impostor? and was she trusting herself in the hands of a man who had no claim upon her at all? The suspicion was so strong that she resolved to try him.

“If I sign this, how will you get my guardians to give their consent?” she said quietly.

“Leave that to me, my child,” was the answer. “I will obtain their signatures, don’t you fear!”

“But how?” she insisted.

Then he assumed a different tone, he looked at her with the air of a man who has been cruelly injured, and whose dignity has been offended.

“ Will you not trust me in anything, Davie ? ” he said in a sad tone. “ This matter concerns our whole life. You have agreed to go with me to a place where we may have a chance of being happy, and why should you leave your fortune behind you ? ”

Davie was silent, and played with her teaspoon while pondering over what she should do. She had already gone so far that she could not easily draw back, and yet this proposal made her pause.

Then came the thought—“ If I sign this, he must see my guardians, and they will act for me.”

“ Give me the paper ; I will sign it,” she said quickly

There was a gleam of triumph in Davidson’s eyes as he laid the document before her, and placed the pen in her hand.

She wrote her name at the places which he indicated, apparently without any hesitation.

“ That is right, Davie. Now we shall be able to carry out our plans without inconvenience. You know that I am peculiar in my ways, but by-and-by you will come to understand me, and, I hope, to like me—I will not say love me ; it would be difficult, after the foolish course I

have pursued, for you to do that yet awhile.

She rose. It was to her a bitter reflection that she could neither like nor love her father, although, acting under a strong sense of her duty, she was ready to obey him.

Davidson put his arm round her waist tenderly

“Come, my child, I see you are still unhappy. Try to be cheerful; all will be well soon!”

She did not answer, she trembled and shrank from him.

Then, with an appearance of deep emotion, he drew back and gazed at her earnestly

“Take back the paper, Davie; return to your friends. I see that you care nothing for the memory of your mother or for me.”

This was spoken with an expression of mingled regret and indignation which affected her keenly. She felt as if her mother, looking upon her, would lament her cruelty, and she turned to him with tearful eyes.

“Don’t say that; I have thought of my mother often. I have thought of the sadness of her life, and have wished I

had been old enough to comfort her. I know that I was brought up under the care of one who was all that a mother could be to me, and yet I have selfishly looked back and craved for my own mother. When you speak of her I am ready to do anything."

"Anything but forgive me!" he said bitterly. "Anything but that."

"Yes, yes; I forget, I forgive all that you have done, and will try to help you for her sake," she cried passionately.

For the first time she put her arms round his neck and kissed him. The emotion of the moment had carried her away, and as soon as she had done this she would have drawn back, but he held her in his arms as if afraid that this feeling would pass away, and with joy in his voice exclaimed—

"My child, my child, you have spoken like your mother's daughter at last. I live only for you, and you shall yet be proud of your father."

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## CONFUSION.

WHEN Corbett returned to Mrs. Wybrant's with Eglinton's letter, hoping to give Davie a pleasant surprise, he found the whole place in confusion. Nell Paterson explained, with many cunning suggestions of her own eagerness to accompany "the leddy" to take care of her, which good intentions had been entirely frustrated by the loons in charge of the carriage.

Corbett immediately communicated with Eglinton and Bonsfield; and the three took such measures as they could devise to trace the carriage.

Mrs. Wybrant actually got out of her bed, and appeared in the drawing-room in her dressing-gown, when she learned the dreadful tidings that Davie had been carried away or had run away—she did not know which, for she became very much confused and fussy, as usual, whenever there was any disturbance.

She remained in the drawing-room until the gentlemen returned from their fruitless quest. Then her excitement

reached its zenith, and she fell on the couch in an hysterical fit. It was a long time before they could soothe her and make her listen calmly to the details of what they had done.

“Oh! but my poor dear girl! What will become of her in the hands of that villain? He will murder her or do something else dreadful.”

“Have no fear of that; he is too cautious,” said Corbett gently “We are not afraid of any danger to her person; what we do fear is that he may persuade her to do something foolish in regard to her fortune. He must have succeeded in convincing her that he was no impostor. I know Davie’s generous nature, and she would give up everything for her mother’s sake.”

“What has her mother to do with it?” cried Mrs. Wybrant, fanning herself furiously and stamping her foot in rage.

“Everything, my dear Mrs. Wybrant; for I know by a letter which I found in Davie’s room that this man has appealed to her in the name of her mother.”

“Then why don’t you catch him?” she exclaimed, with all the unreasonableness of her eccentric nature. “Catch him and kill him.”

“ We cannot exactly do that,” answered Corbett, “ but we will go as near to it as possible. We have been trying with all our might to find him and have failed. We made sure of catching him at one of the railway stations, but he has managed to elude us at the last moment by taking his train from one of the local stations, and thus passed us by. We have telegraphed to all the ports, so that he cannot escape us this time.”

“ Why did not that woman Paterson catch hold of the carriage and hold it back somehow ? ” continued the excited lady.

In spite of the gravity of the position Corbett could not help smiling.

“ Well, I scarcely think that one woman could hold back a carriage and two horses, and you must remember that Nell was so astounded at what occurred that she was unable to speak or move for some minutes.”

“ She’s a fool—I would have done it! and if I could not hold back the carriage, I would have jumped on behind it, and kept there until I had found where they were going to. Don’t try to defend her; she’s a useless, faithless creature.”

“ There now, Mrs. Wybrant, be calm.

We shall find her if human effort can do it. Supposing they do escape to America we can still trace them ; for if we do not find them by to-morrow night, we shall telegraph to the New York police, who will arrest him on the charge of forgery and conspiracy. Again, Nell could have done nothing even if she had succeeded in accompanying Davie. He would have found some other ruse by which to get rid of her."

"Don't tell me !" cried Mrs. Wybrant indignantly. "The man is not born who could outwit a woman when she sets her mind to overcome him."

This querulous conversation was interrupted by Bonsfield, who in his blunt way struck at the root of the matter.

"I tell you what: this man has not taken Davie out of London, and does not mean to do so. What he means is to get possession of her money. Instead of watching at railway stations and ports, I would keep a watch at the bank."

"Right," said Corbett. "I once before caught him there and may do so again. We shall try in the morning, and we shall keep watch every day until he is found."

Here they were interrupted by the



servant, who informed Eglinton that there was a man below desirous of seeing him.

“It is one of the detectives, no doubt,” he said, and at once went out into the hall.

There he found a man who stooped very low and rested upon a very thick stick as if he were too feeble to do without its support. He wore green spectacles, and part of a thick muffler that was round his neck was drawn over his chin. When he took off his hat, making a very humble bow, Eglinton saw that his head was covered by a skull-cap.

“From Scotland Yard, if you please, sir,” he said, speaking through his nose.

“All right,” said Eglinton hastily “Is there any news? have you discovered them?”

“Not quite, sir, but we’ve got so far as to find out that they was at the Paddington Hotel, and then they got away by a train to Uxbridge. We telegraphed after them, but it weren’t no use.”

“What on earth was the use of coming here to tell me this?” said Eglinton impatiently.

“Well, sir, we think it something; and I was sent to get further instructions.”

“Why, of course, continue the pursuit; but we have come to the conclusion that he has not left London at all.”

“Very likely, sir. Coves like him as you’ve described knows the best place to hide in; and there’s no better place than London. All the same, they did go to Uxbridge, and if you and your friends would go down there with one of us, the chances are you will find them, and you would be ready to identify our man. He’s as ’cute a chap as I was ever after.”

“Wait there a minute and I shall tell you what we mean to do.”

Eglinton returned to the drawing-room and repeated what the man had told him.

“Then he means to cross the country and get to Bristol,” said Corbett; “and there he will be caught.”

“Not a bit of it,” said Bonsfield; “this man is quite correct in what he says. London is the place to hide in, and supposing Davidson has gone to Uxbridge—which I don’t believe—it is only a feint. Ask the fellow’s opinion.”

Eglinton went to the hall again, and the man bowed as before very humbly

“Do you think they really went to Uxbridge?” he inquired.

“ Well, sir, they took tickets for the place, and my chief says they did go.”

There was a kind of smirk on the detective's face, as if he thought he knew better than his chief, and this Eglinton detected, which led him to put the question—

“ But what is your own opinion ? ”

“ Well, sir,” he said, as if flattered, “ I would say, if I might be so bold, that he got out at some station short of Uxbridge and came back by road. Now, what are we to do ? ”

“ Keep close watch at the doors of the chief office of Coutts's Bank. If he is in London, he is sure to go there in a day or two.”

The man bowed, and looked as if he was inclined to wink knowingly

“ Is that all, sir ? ”

“ That's all, except to continue the watch at the railway stations.”

“ Very good, sir. We'll take care that he won't slip through our fingers this time. Good night, sir, your orders will be obeyed.”

Then he took his leave, bowing obsequiously, and hurried down the steps as if anxious to fulfil his commission. He glanced back towards the house several times, and when he had got out of sight

of the bow windows of the drawing-room, he lifted his hat, removed the skull-cap, drew down the muffler from his chin, and took a long breath.

“It was stifling,” he muttered. “I thought I should have choked. But they have shown me their hand, and the game is still in mine.”

It was Davidson himself!

When Eglinton went back to his friends he told them the instructions he had given.

“That is exactly what we intended, but you should have told him whose cheque Davidson was likely to present, and to give directions at the bank to detain any one presenting one from Miss Morrison,” said Corbett.

“He cannot be far away,” said Eglinton hastily, “and I saw the direction he took. So I can easily catch him up.”

With that he rushed out of the house, and just saw Davidson getting into a hansom. He recognized him by his brown coat and the thick staff.

“By heavens! we are caught by this villain again! It is himself!” he exclaimed.

He rushed after the hansom, but it drove off at such a pace that he was unable to

overtake it. He was, however, sufficiently close to make out the number, although he was uncertain as to having caught it correctly. It was, however, enough to be of use in the hands of the police in discovering the man. Unfortunately, there was no cab-stand near, and no passing cab to enable to pursue. He was therefore obliged to return to the house.

“How could you be so deceived,” said Corbett with some acerbity—“you who know the man better than any of us, and more recently than Bonsfield?”

“There, I admit it, I am a confounded ass,” answered Eglinton, annoyed beyond measure with himself. “That man makes a fool of me in everything I have to do with him. It was an evil day when I first saw him. But I shall be even with him yet.”

Bonsfield first chuckled at the stupidity which Eglinton had shown, and then became serious.

“I think you have given yourself the right name,” he said somewhat gruffly. “But it is no use crying over spilt milk. What we have got to do is to find that cabman, and then we can afford to laugh at your folly. You have got an idea of the number, and if it is anything like

correct, we can discover him. Come along; we had better go together."

Mrs. Wybrant began to be hysterical again.

"Don't all of you leave me," she cried. "I am frightened; that man may return at any moment and murder me, or do something else—he might even carry me away! and I should die. Don't leave me!"

"Oh no!" growled Bonsfield unceremoniously. "He is too wide awake to come here again."

"That is true," said Corbett, with an effort to comfort her. "You need have little fear of his coming again, he has discovered our plans, and that was all he wanted to do."

She was not at all reassured, but she was obliged to allow them to depart.

They succeeded in obtaining the addresses of the proprietors of several cabs bearing numbers approaching to that which Eglinton fancied he had detected on the vehicle Davidson had taken. They arranged that each should visit the different cab-owners, each taking a different district, and they agreed to meet at the Criterion. Then they separated.

It was Eglinton who was fortunate

enough to find the right man. But all the information he could obtain from him was that the gentleman he had taken up in Park Lane stopped him in Piccadilly Circus, paid him his fare, and walked up Regent Street. That was all he could tell.

When the three friends met, their faces expressed bitter chagrin and disappointment. Eglinton mentally said very hard things of himself, and looked forward to the day when he could get hold of this man by the throat. That was a day of reckoning for which he longed, and he felt assured it would come.

“It shall come,” he muttered between his teeth; “and the Lord have mercy upon him, for I will have none.”

“What are you grumbling about now?” said Bonsfield in his stolid way “The man has been too clever for us so far—and, upon my soul, I am rather inclined to admire him for it. Here are we three men, we are not fools—at least, we don’t think so—and yet one man beats us all. But patience and time will help us.”

“I am sure of that,” said Corbett. “We know at any rate now that he is still in London, and we have some faint

clue as to the direction of the place in which he has taken up his abode. You may be sure that he will not leave until he knows that the course is clear, and until he has by some means secured Davie's fortune. We have only a few days to wait now until we shall be able to prove who he is."

"That is poor consolation," responded Eglinton, "when we know that all this time Davie is in his charge and subject to his influence."

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### A LUCKY MISTAKE.

DAVIDSON'S triumph was complete. He now knew how to act, and he acted promptly. He did *not* go to the bank; he took Davie's assignment of her shares to a stockbroker, and desired him to convert them into cash as speedily as possible, as the lady was leaving the country. The document he presented was in perfect form, duly signed by the trustees and witnessed. The stockbroker, a respectable man and doing a good business, saw nothing suspicious in the



transaction, and promised that in a few days the shares would be sold.

“How soon do you think you can dispose of them?” said Davidson, quietly enough outwardly, but in his heart he felt very anxious.

“Probably to-morrow,” was the answer of the broker, “but am I to sell at any price?”

“The case is pressing, and it is very desirable that the capital should be realized at once.”

“Very well; if you will be good enough to call upon me at two o’clock, I will tell you what I have done.”

Davidson promised to do so, and departed. The information he had received from Eglinton had enabled him to regulate his movements, and decided him to remain in town, in order that he might the more promptly carry out his scheme of realizing Davie’s fortune.

But he made one miscalculation. He did not think of her longing for the dear friends from whom she was parted, and for the lover to whom she had promised herself; and how, compelled to remain in a dull room of a small hotel in a narrow street, she craved for the voices that were dear to her—craved to see the

old familiar faces—and began to doubt that she had taken the right course.

She cried a good deal in her solitude ; then, suddenly springing up, she called for pen, ink, and paper, and wrote to Medwyn.

She did not mean to betray Davidson, but made two very stupid blunders. She forgot that the post-mark would betray the district in which they were settled, and she used an envelope on which was impressed the name of the hotel. This was what she wrote, without date or address :—

“ DEAR MEDWYN,

“ I know that you think I have behaved very badly towards you, but if you only knew the torture of my mind—thinking of you, and trying to help my father—you would pity me and not blame me. I cannot say that I have any affection for him, but I have a sense of duty that you should respect.

“ And I know you do, Medwyn. . . I thought there was so much to say to you when I began to write, and now it all comes to this—I hope you will forgive me ; I am doing what I think my mother would have wished me to do—taking

her place beside my father in his misfortunes.

“But, oh, the doubt, Medwyn, the horrible doubt!

“I expect soon to be able to give you an address to which you may send some token of forgiveness to your affectionate

“DAVIE.”

“What does George say about me? Is he *very* angry?”

She had no idea of the effect which this letter would produce. She posted it herself, and was under the belief that a thick veil would prevent anybody from recognizing her.

But Davidson had seen her and followed her to the pillar-box. He almost succeeded in snatching the letter from her hand, and she turned with a look of surprise.

“Why do you wish to stop me from writing to my friends? I obey you for my mother’s sake, but I can neither love nor respect you until we have been together some time, and if I find you are the man of whom old Mr. Corbett used to speak, who, as he said, had made a life of misery for himself through his own imagination——”

Davidson took her hand in his, and,

smiling suavely, led her back to the hotel.

“You are the drollest creature that I have ever known,” he said, parting with her hand and looking into her face with an expression of combined affection and amusement. “You shall be satisfied before long.”

“How and when?” she exclaimed with some irritability.

“All in good time, my child,” he answered, taking no notice of her anger. “Meanwhile we have got to arrange for our journey, and there will be some trouble about it, for I am placed in such a fix, that at any moment I may be arrested. If you turn from me God knows what will happen, for then I shall have no friend at all.”

Again her heart was touched—again she looked back towards the shadow of her mother—again she felt that for her sake she ought to pity and help this man.

“I don’t know what to say,” she exclaimed distractedly. “At times I feel ready to do anything for you; and again my heart turns against you, so that I wish I had never seen you.”

“Davie, Davie, Davie! You hurt me

much, but you are hurting yourself more. I have made a blunder; but I can overcome it. I have told you that. Will you not trust me?"

"How can I trust you? You have separated me from all my friends—from all who are my real relatives—and now I am ready to give you the fortune that you bestowed upon me, if you will allow me to go back to them."

Davidson smiled, and taking her hands quietly, said—

"You are excited, my child. Wait a little while, and you will learn that I have been acting according to the best of my judgment. I own that I have been acting wrongly. Your mother was faithful and I was foolish, and that is the whole story—a very sad one. You will come to understand how sad in a few years."

"Sad indeed, sir, it is now: what it may become I don't know."

He still maintained the coolness which he had shown from the beginning. He still treated her as a spoilt child whom he wished to soothe by his own calmness.

"There is no use speaking any more, Davie. We shall not agree just now. I have done all that could be done to make matters right. You are doing all

that you can to make matters wrong. I made good arrangements for your future, and if you will think of it for a little while you will see that the arrangements were on a scale which few men in my position would have made. Now, because I am poor and come to you, you have turned upon me and tried to resist my claim."

"Oh, father, can you say that, when I have given up everything to you?"

He played with the chain which dangled at his buttonhole, and answered quite quietly—"Because you are doing so, let us understand each other. If you wish to go to your friends, go. My whole desire was that my daughter should be with me. The fortune I gave her should help me over my present difficulties. If you wish it to be otherwise, go now."

The boldness with which he spoke impressed her still more with the sense that he *was* her father.

"Will you give me a little time to think of this?" she muttered agitatedly. "I should like to be just to you, but I wish also to be just to my friends."

"Take what time you please, my child; only I ask you not to leave me."

She paused before replying, and then:

"I will do as you wish; I will stay

here ; I will wait till my friends find me, but I will obey you."

Davidson was very gracious in the way he took her hand again as he said—

"So be it, Davie. I feel very much pained by the manner in which you have spoken to me ; but I shall always remember that you have been, like me, trying to act justly in a very singular position. My life has been a strange one—at one moment so fortunate that it seemed as if the whole world belonged to me ; at another so unhappy that I was a beggar. These things happen to men who speculate. I was lucky, and, counting upon my luck, went too far. The result was ruin ; and the desire to see you brought me back to England. I saw you, and my heart craved for you, and therefore I told you who I was. You, at any rate, should not blame my weakness in caring so much for you."

They said good-night, and she quitted the room.

Davie's letter did its work promptly. It informed her friends where the fugitives were to be found, and active measures were at once taken to ensure her release and Davidson's capture.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

EGLINTON and Corbett sat down, and Bonsfield, putting his thumbs into his waistcoat, faced them both

“Look here ! This man went out with Morrison as his chief assistant. When Morrison was ill Davidson was there and had all the papers in his hands ; therefore, he knew the whole position, and he has taken advantage of it now. So, he, having all the papers, came here under the pretence of being the girl’s father. We can charge him with fraud at any police court, and by that means stop any further proceedings until we have time to prove what he is.”

“That is true,” said Corbett.

“Then,” said Bonsfield, “the first thing you have got to do is to send a message to all the London stockbrokers, if that can be done ; and if it can’t, then let somebody watch the Stock Exchange to-morrow ”

“I have already seen to that,” said Medwyn quietly ; “for he has obtained from Davie an assignment of all her



consols and shares, and of course, before selling, he must forge our names. There is the power that we have over him."

"Bravo!" cried Bonsfield. "I always thought you a shrewd fellow until lately, when I certainly began to think you were rather stupid, but now I return to my original opinion. Let us once find that paper and you shall have your wish so far as punishing him is concerned."

Eglinton struck in with a bright idea—

"Can you not get Mrs. Wybrant to make some effort to identify him?"

"We are not to hurry. We need all our coolness to baffle him. To-night we can keep watch upon the house; to-morrow the detectives will follow him, and if anything unusual takes place, I shall take the responsibility of arresting him."

This was Medwyn.

"Then let us go to dinner," said Bonsfield practically. "I am getting hungry."

This good advice was adopted, and after dinner an unexpected visitor arrived. Captain Albert Graham, still being on leave, was following out his theory of keeping away from the sea as long as he could. Eglinton had left a note at the

Army and Navy Club, and his friend had come at once to him.

“It’s lucky we are together, because I believe Graham has information which will be of use to us.”

“I don’t know much,” answered the captain, “but I think it will be of some advantage to you to find the servant who attended David Morrison in his last illness. He will at once be able to settle the case which so puzzles you.”

“Where is he to be found?” asked Medwyn quickly, “and what is his name?”

“His name is Harper, and it was by an accidental call on an old friend in Bayswater that I discovered him. My friend is Colonel Stewart, and this man is now acting as his valet. Besides, I think Stewart himself had some acquaintance with Morrison.”

“Then, if we can get this man and Colonel Stewart, we can easily upset Davidson’s plans, whatever they may be, without further delay.”

Medwyn said this with vehemence. Even Eglinton was astonished to hear him speak so warmly.

“Let us all go at once,” said the latter.

“Hold hard,” exclaimed Bonsfield. “If we all go at once in search of such a

clever scoundrel as Davidson, he will be sure to discover us, and so again outwit us. Try a little strategy!"

"What do you propose?"

"I propose that we should first learn what news there is for us at Scotland Yard. Next, that we should leave the detectives to do the work of watching him, and that one of us should try to obtain rooms in his hotel, and so be ready to report what his movements are."

"I shall do that," said Corbett. "You, Eglinton, go with Graham and persuade Colonel Stewart and Harper to come here. You, Bonsfield, remain here, and I will direct Nell Paterson to be in readiness. The only thing I dread is that when she discovers that he is her son she will refuse to give evidence against him. Indeed, so much she has said to me."

Thus the plan of the campaign was settled, and the friends parted. Eglinton became calm now, but he set his teeth with a determination that showed how strong was the feeling of bitterness which he held towards Davidson.

"It will be an ill day for him when we stand face to face," he muttered to Graham as they got into a hansom.

"He ought to go on board a man-of-war," was the stolid reply.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### A REVELATION.

DAVIDSON was for once outwitted. Corbett obtained a room on the same floor as the chambers occupied by Davie and Davidson in the hotel.

But he was assisted by the detectives to a greater extent than he had expected, and about eleven o'clock one of them came to him from Bonsfield with the information that the stockbroker to whom Davidson had applied was perfectly willing to make any arrangement which might be necessary. This was a most satisfactory triumph, and Medwyn was accordingly glad.

He contrived to get a message conveyed to Davie, and she came to him in his room, her eyes expressing alarm and her hands trembling as she clasped those of Medwyn.

"What has brought you here at this time of night?" she gasped.

"I am staying here to protect you. I believe that to-morrow morning we shall be able to satisfy you. Tell me what has happened."

Again the poor girl was frightened

by the perplexity of the position in which she was placed, but Medwyn insisted.

“I see you are under his influence still. For God’s sake, Davie, let there be no secrets between us. Tell me all. You are only delaying the evil day by your present conduct.”

She hid her face with her hands and sobbed. Then suddenly rousing herself, she spoke.

“First, Medwyn, give me your promise that you will not harm him.”

“I give you the promise—I think I have already done so—that if he be your father we shall try to save him.”

Then she yielded, and told him that it was arranged to start for New York next morning.

Corbett was somewhat puzzled by this, for, according to the information he had received, Davidson had appointed to call upon the stockbroker at two o’clock, and it immediately occurred to him that the man had succeeded in some way in making away with the securities already. Still there was a probability that he intended to play some new trick upon them, and suspecting that Davie had betrayed him, he was trying to deceive her as to his future course.

“What you tell me only determines me to be the more watchful,” he said.

“Will you tell me what you mean to do, Medwyn? It is foolish, I know, but he has spoken to me with so much earnestness that it pains me to do anything that would hurt him. He has even offered me free leave to return to you at any time I wish.”

“Then, do you not wish to do so?”

“I do, indeed.”

“In that case come with me now!”

“You have not answered me, Medwyn, as to what you mean to do.”

“I would rather you did not know until after it is done,” he answered, with a very grave look in his eyes.

“But why not tell me now?”

“Because I want you to have as little to do with it as possible. The case is a very disagreeable one, and you had better not get further involved in it. I have told you I am satisfied about who he is. I think also that he is deceiving you as to what he means to do.”

“I do not know how that can be, for he implored me to go with him.”

“Are you quite sure that he means you to go with him?” said Corbett, watching her face with inquiring eyes.

The question was so curious that Davie for some moments could not grasp its meaning. At length :

“You are very suspicious, Medwyn, and see things in such strange lights. How could I doubt that he means me to go with him after the manner in which he has, in my dear mother’s name, implored me to go? Besides, we are just now packing for our journey.”

“Is he still in the next room?” inquired Medwyn after a pause.

“Yes, he is writing.”

“Now, suppose that it was in my power to compel this man to own himself an impostor, would you wish him to escape punishment?”

She hesitated. It was a serious thing for a girl like her to decide the fate of a man—and he, too, one who, if not her father, had been his companion.

“I should wish him to escape, Medwyn,” she said, “because I pity him; and I also wish to escape the terrors of an appearance in a court.”

“So be it,” he replied, bowing to her decision, although it was very different from the one which he would have given.

“Now, you will stay here till I call for you.”

“What are you going to do?” she asked with some alarm.

“I am going to speak to Mr. Davidson.”

“Let me go with you—he is a desperate man, and might do you some injury.”

“I have no doubt he will attempt it, but I do not see how your presence would protect me.”

“It might,—somehow—I don’t know how ”

“Do not alarm yourself, Davie ; I am quite safe. What I have to say to him will make him glad to escape from England. Stay here quietly for a few minutes.”

With that he left her, and went to Davidson’s room. When he knocked at the door, a low voice responded, “Come in.”

Corbett entered and closed the door behind him.

Davidson was seated at a table, writing by the light of a large lamp, on which was a green shade. The upper part of the room was therefore darkened, and at first Davidson did not recognize his visitor.

“What is it?” he inquired, thinking it was one of the servants with some



message. "I thought I gave instructions that I was not to be interrupted on any account."

"I think my intrusion will interest you, Mr. Davidson," said Corbett, as he advanced to the table, and coolly removed the shade from the lamp.

Davidson started to his feet, his face pale and expressive of much agitation. He immediately recovered himself, and, walking to the other side of the table, placed a chair for Corbett. The latter was certainly surprised by this act of courtesy.

"Be seated, sir, and be good enough to let me know your business in as few words as possible."

"I have very little to say," answered Corbett, taking no notice of the proffered chair, and the two men stood face to face, a stern expression upon each.

"I am glad of that, for I am busy to-night, as I intend to start for America to-morrow with my daughter."

"I am afraid your journey will be postponed unless you agree to a little proposal I have to make."

"I listen, sir," replied Davidson, bowing, "although your manner is somewhat unpleasant."

“I am afraid you will find it more so before we are done. Do you know a man named Harper?”

“Certainly; he was my servant when I was in India.”

“Yes, I know he was Mr. Morrison’s servant. You think he is in India—he is here.”

Davidson still remained cool.

“Well, sir, what of that?”

“Simply that he is ready to give evidence as to the death of Mr. Morrison, and to the fact that you, on the night of his death, removed a large number of letters under the pretence that they were entirely connected with business matters.”

“What more?” asked Davidson sneeringly.

“Not much. There is another person—Mrs. Paterson—who has declared you to be her son. After that comes your abduction of my ward; and next your forgery of my name and Mr. Bonsfield’s.”

“Who dares to say I forged your name?” he said, with assumed boldness, but he was clearly losing courage.

“You had better give it up at once,” said Corbett quietly “You have played a bold game and have lost it. The docu-

ment is in our lawyer's hands. The detectives are waiting outside ready at my call to arrest you."

Davidson rested his hands on the back of a chair, and there was a dangerous glitter in his eyes, as through his clenched teeth he asked—

"Then what is your proposal?"

"That you shall own to Miss Morrison that by obtaining possession of her father's papers and other things you have been able to deceive her—even I was at one time more than half inclined to believe your story. Now, you have no alternative but to consent to this or go to prison."

Still with clenched teeth, and that dangerous glitter in his eyes, whilst he put his right hand under his coat:

"I will not consent."

"Then I have only to call the men in. You will find them less gentle than Miss Morrison," said Corbett, making a movement as if to reach the bell, but instead of doing so, he suddenly grasped Davidson's right arm and wrenched a revolver from his hand.

"You devil!" growled Davidson, as Corbett presented the revolver at him.

"You once before told us what you would do when hard pressed, and so I

was prepared for you. I am master of the situation, and now I give you one more chance to escape."

The man seemed suddenly to collapse, and gasping, said, "I agree."

Thereupon Corbett went to the door and called Davie. She entered with a pale face and wondering eyes.

"I told you that I was quite safe," said Medwyn, smiling and showing her the revolver. "I knew this fellow's tricks."

Then he led her forward to Davidson, and in a stern voice put the question—

"Now, sir, will you tell this lady that you are John Davidson, and not her father?"

The man's head was bowed, not in sorrow, but regret that he had failed to carry out his plot to a successful end.

"It is true—I am John Davidson."

\* \* \* \* \*

Davie returned with Medwyn that night to Mrs. Wybrant's house. For some weeks she was confined to her room by an attack of fever. The shock had been too great for her, but the careful nursing of her friends speedily restored her to health.

A year afterwards there was a marriage at Balnagairn. Davie was the bride and Eglinton the bridegroom. Corbett gave the bride away, and there was no sign of

sorrow on his face, but only the earnest expression of an affectionate father who was confiding to another's care his dearest treasure. He had resolved to enter upon an active life, and so try to forget what he had lost.

“What has become of that confounded scoundrel?” inquired Bonsfield, after the happy couple had started on their honeymoon tour.

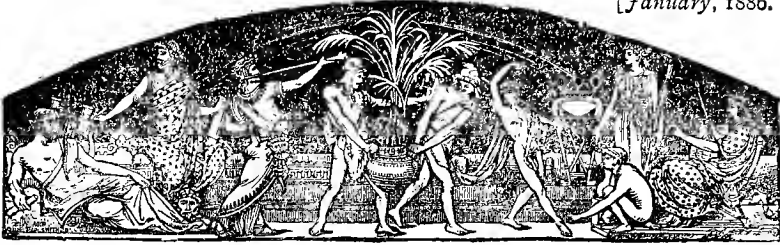
“Well,” answered Medwyn, “I believe he has gone out to San Francisco again, and I do not think we are likely to hear any more of him. I pity his poor mother, because she longed to see him before he went away, and he refused, pleading that he had no time. But the real reason was that he believed she had betrayed him and had been the chief instrument of his detection.”

Bonsfield took his wine, and smacked his lips with intense satisfaction.

“Well,” he said, “let us thank Heaven for a good riddance of a knave who nearly fooled us all.”

THE END.

[January, 1886.



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