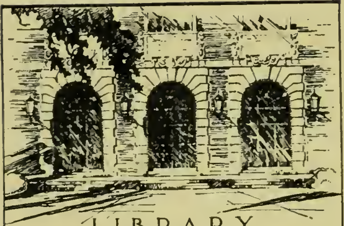

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COUSIN STELLA:

OR,

CONFLICT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "VIOLET BANK AND ITS INMATES."

"I saw her upon nearer view,
A spirit, yet a woman, too!
Her household motions light and free,
And steps of virgin liberty;
A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet:
A creature, not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles.
And now I see with eyes serene
The very pulse of the machine;
A being breathing thoughtful breath,
A traveller betwixt life and death;
The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill;
A perfect woman, nobly planned
To warm, to comfort, and command;
And yet a spirit still and bright,
With something of an angel light."
WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

1859.

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COUSIN STELLA:

OR,

CONFLICT.

PART I.

"OF A RUGGED COLTE COMYTH A GODE
HORS."

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COUSIN STELLA.

CHAPTER I.

A ROSE WITH A THORN.

An unruffled lake, reflecting the glories of a setting sun—the dark Jura crowned with molten gold, looking down on its shadowy silhouette and shadowy diadem in the mirror below—a few white-sailed boats, glinting for an instant like rosy sparks on the blue expanse, then dwindling gently away into the fast spreading shade. Such was the prospect.

In the foreground an old stone house, with moss and lichen covering, yet widening perseveringly its many cracks and fissures—a house all hoary, wrinkled, and frowning.

Two figures are at one of the windows: one of them, a girl of fifteen, or rather more, is leaning out; her elbows resting on a faded red cushion, her small dark face on a pair of thin hands, her eyes fixed with a look more of perplexity than enjoyment on lake, mountain, and sky. She is probably trying to harmonize the world within those ugly walls and the bright world without.

"Eh bien! Mademoiselle, si je ne dois pas aller à la fête demain, je quitte Madame."

This was pronounced in a voice full of passionate vehemence by the second figure at the window; a handsome young woman, no longer a peasant, but the serving maiden of Mrs. Joddrell and her grand-daughter Stella Pepita Joddrell.

Rose was a roseindeed. Health, and youth, and luxuriance of feminine proportion and of colour, made her not only the belle of her native village, but of the picturesque little town of Evian, in which stood the old stone house. Rose, in her quaint, flat, lace-frilled cap, like a dinner plate, knew herself to be a match, and more than a match, for the smartest of the Evian artificial flower makers in their best bonnets — consequently Rose was a most vigorous stickler for attendance at church and all processions. Neither for thunderstorm nor snowstorm, much less for the frowns of a heretic mistress would she have missed, not to say the obligatory ordinances of her church, but not a feast, fast, or vigil. Rose of course maintained, perhaps believed, that religious scruples alone made her so unflinching an attendant on these occasions. Mademoiselle turned her large dark perplexed eyes from mountain and sky to Rose's flushed face, and answered in French with some impatience.

"I think you might give up *one* fête when I have so begged it of you."

"But, Mademoiselle, remember, this is the Fête Dieu."

"Oh! no matter what fête it is. I know that in your place, I would give up any fête for your sake."

"Chère Mademoiselle — pardon," and Rose showed symptoms of weeping, "but——it is my religion."

"Nonsense. Rose! what religion is there in dressing fine and following after a priest, who claps two pieces of wood together when you are to kneel down, or turn round and make a courtesy;" and Miss Stella began imitating the evolutions of a priest in some procession she had witnessed.

"Mademoiselle Stella—c'est vrai—mais très vrai, ce qu'on dit de vous et de Madame—vous êtes des—des—Hébreuses."

"Hérétiques! hérétiques! you preposterous

Rose," cried Stella, laughing and clapping her hands.

At this stage of the conversation a rustling was heard, and a thin old lady entered the large half-finished saloon in which were the speakers.

This was Mrs. Joddrell. She made a sort of half stop as she came in, but uttered not a word. Rose, with downcast eyes, instantly hurried out of the room by the door nearest to her: then, and not till then, Mrs. Joddrell pursued her way, and seating herself on a hard narrow sofa, said in a dry, cold voice—

"How often must I tell you, Stella, not to talk to servants?"

Stella's countenance had been melancholy and meditative while gazing at the sunset; it had varied from impatience to mirth while speaking to Rose; it now looked mutinous as she replied to her grandmother:

"It is the only way I have of learning

French, Grandmamma, and I don't see what harm it does. I think I should forget how to speak at all if it were not for poor Rose;" and Stella turned once more to look out of the window.

Mrs. Joddrell was on the very wrong side of sixty, but looked even many years older, so bent her figure, so deep cut the lines of her face. Her sunken eyes rested for a little on the slender young figure leaning on the faded cushion, in such a languid, listless attitude, and the old lady's voice was slightly softened as she asked—

"What are you looking at, child?"

"The world," answered the girl.

"And what do you think of the world?" with a touch of sarcasm in the tone.

"That it is very beautiful—that I should like to have friends, quantities of friends, and go and live in the world."

"Oh! indeed; that is some of your Auntie's talkie, talkie. So she tried to make you discontented, did she—to set you against me?"

"No, she did not; but when she comes here, it is so different—so very different. There must be plenty of people like Auntie in the world, it must be so pleasant."

There came a pause, the brightness of day was quite at an end. Twilight wrapped up the fair lake, and only a deeper gray marked to the familiar observer where the purple mountains stood. Mrs. Joddrell spoke again:

"So you think you would find plenty of friends in the pleasant world? What is there about you to make friends?"

"I do not know, but people who live among people always have friends: Auntie has lots."

"Poor child! you really are fitted to live in the world," ejaculated Mrs. Joddrell, with contemptuous pity. "Auntie is quite a case in point, much to be envied for her friends. But Auntie is pretty, accomplished, with a good house;

her *friends* court her to sing and play at their parties; it saves hiring professional musicians."

"I don't believe ladies and gentlemen are so mean," retorted Stella. "And why shouldn't I be pretty, and sing and play? I would do it with all my heart to make people love me. If you were to do what you promised papa—if you took me to Italy and Paris, and gave me masters as you did Auntie, I should grow the same as she is."

"So you reproach me, do you? That's the thanks I get for having taken all the responsibility of you, with your hot Spanish blood. Do you know that the Auntie you are always raving about would not have the trouble of you for anything."

"I never asked her," muttered the girl.

"And there are *not* plenty of people like your aunt," Mrs. Joddrell was waxing very wroth; "if you had all the masters in the world, you would never be like her—friends, indeed!"

"Yes, I will have friends," said the girl, resolutely. "I shall not care whether they love me much or little, I'll love them with all my heart, and I'll live with my family, and I won't be buried in the bushes."

"Shut the window, Miss, and go and practise."

Stella closed the sash with violence, rang the bell loudly, and when Rose brought in the candles took one and went to the piano—a wretched thing, its sweetness all gone, its tones harsh, and strong, and confused. The young girl sat down before it, opened her music book, squared her elbows.

It was perfectly marvellous to watch the velocity of her long thin fingers, perfectly marvellous the strength she exhibited. She dealt blows on the ivory keys, as swift and strong as those of half a dozen smiths working in time on an anvil.

Mrs. Joddrell drew some work out of a basket, a frock she was making for Stella.

How tragical the face that bends over the muslin, sorrows of one kind or other have writ their story in mysterious, indelible characters on every feature! Stitch, stitch, the thread hisses as the old lady draws it rapidly and sharply. Ancestress and descendant have the same gestures. Stella's frightful execution manifestly excites Mrs. Joddrell, but she makes no remark, until her grand-daughter begins the symphony of a popular Italian song, "Benedetta sia la Madre."

At the very first sound of the shrill childish tone, Mrs. Joddrell claps her hands to her ears, and exclaims, "For Heaven's sake, child, be quiet; I can bear it no longer."

Stella was cruelly mortified; she did not care for scoldings about her playing, or her walking, or her manner of speech. The last too loud, the former too free, both more suited to the wild mountain side than to the precincts of a drawing-room. But this song, she had learned it in secret, meaning to give a pleasant surprise to her grandmother, for Mrs. Joddrell had often talked to her of her love for it, and of how charmingly Auntie had sung it, even before being taught to sing. Thus, when one day Stella had discovered the favourite among some old music, her ambition had been stirred to do something which should win for her a word of loving kindness.

Stella, so adjured, left the piano very quietly and unlike her usual quick movement. She sat down to work also, a tear at intervals rolling down her cheek.

"Your tears fall for very little, Stella."

"I cannot help it, Grandmamma."

Another silence, only broken by the click of the needles against the thimbles, and the cracking or whish of the thread. Stella first breaks her thread, then her needle, and finally throws down her work.

"What a horrid gloomy place this is," she sighs, looking round the lofty, large room, with its dozen faded velvet chairs, its two narrow, hard sofas, the scanty muslin curtains, the carpetless floor, the marquetry of which is shrinking each piece from its fellow, her eye at last lighting and fixing on the most desolate-looking object in the room—her grandmother.

"Grandmamma, tell me about Auntie when she was young, and you used to take her to balls."

"What can I tell you, my dear?" returned Mrs. Joddrell, jerking her work. "When people are young, everyone flatters and courts them; when they are old, everyone neglects and ridicules them."

"People get what they deserve, I suppose," said Stella.

"No; not always. Deceit often prospers better than sincerity. I never could fawn on anyone, or say, or look, as if I approved when I did not."

"Is Auntie deceitful?"

"Your aunt is a woman of the world."

"And what does that mean?" asked Stella.

"You are a downright worry, child, with your questions."

"Well, Grandmamma, how can I know things if you don't tell me? I have nobody else to ask."

Mrs. Joddrell had risen from the sofa while Stella was still speaking, had opened her desk, and taken from it a small case made of plaited straw, like a card-case. She re-seated herself.

"You said that if I took you to Italy and Paris, you would grow pretty, like your aunt. Look at that," and, without allowing herself to glance at it, she drew from its hiding-place a miniature of a young lady, handing it to her granddaughter.

"La chère petite!" burst forth Stella, as she saw this picture of a beautiful girl of eighteen, and began showering kisses on the protecting glass.

"Give it me back, you foolish child."

"Oh, Grandmamma! just a little longer; dear little aunt, pretty little aunt! was she really like that?"

Mrs. Joddrell put out her hand for the miniature, and this time as she held it, her glance sought the well-remembered innocent face, and she choked back a sigh, while drops of water moistened the dry old eyes.

Youth and beauty in tears is sometimes a touching sight; but ah! not heart-stirring like tears in aged, sunken eyes; legacy of remorse, even to the most deserving of children. Stella was not looking at her grandmother, and the idea that Mrs. Joddrell could weep had never entered her head.

"Was Auntie ever really so beautiful as that picture, Grandmamma?" she reiterated.

"Yes; quite as lovely, twelve years ago.

I shall never see anything like her again." A pause, and then Mrs. Joddrell continued in her usual voice: "Much good having her own way has done her; as if God did not put in a mother's heart the instinct of what is best for her children. God help me! God help me!"

She took up her work again, and with her usual jerk stitched away passionately.

"Is Auntie's husband a bad man?" inquired Stella, looking anxiously in the stony face of her grandmother.

"You are always in extremes, Stella. Cannot you imagine that a person may be disagreeable and tiresome, without being what you call bad."

Then, as Stella remained pondering, Mrs. Joddrell added—

"Don't go and accuse me of slandering Major Dashwood. The world calls him a delightful man. *So* good-natured; *so* easy to live with!"

"And is he not, Grandmamma?"

"I never saw the man yet, my dear, who was the same at home and abroad. They are none of them to be trusted."

"Did Auntie like him very much?"

"She liked her own way."

Another long silence and then Stella said,—

"Grandmamma, I wish you would tell me all about my relations, about my mamma. I am old enough; in five months I shall be sixteen."

Mrs. Joddrell went on with her work. Her inflexible face showed she was no common character. She had possessed, too, a constitution of iron to carry out the decisions of her strong, prompt will. Accustomed till within the last eight years to even the extreme of luxury, she never appeared to feel or suffer now from her self-imposed privations. With the income she still had, she might have lived like a queen at Evian. She chose to be economical even to miserliness. She could perform a noble and self-sacrificing action, and the moment after lacerate the heart of the one she had obliged by the most poignant sarcasm or the most ignoble suspicion. Passionate yet cold, sceptical yet bigoted, one instant calm in manner and word, the next, with or without provocation, breaking out into anathemas delivered with the tragic vehemence of a Pythoness, Mrs. Joddrell had never restrained herself from sowing bitter impressions in the hearts within her sphere, and she nevertheless wondered when the seed sprang up, and overran and made desolate the garden of human affections. As she had lived, so would she die. Ever putting aside with jealous dread the cup brimming over with the draught of love.

"What do you want to know about your relations?" she said, breaking her long silence.

"About my poor mamma?" this was spoken in a very low voice.

"I can tell you very little. I had never even heard of her existence, when you were presented to me. She was the child, your father said, of Spanish parents, natives of Cuba. She died very young—when you were born."

Stella was as white as paper; her voice came tremulously from between her quivering lips.

"It did not make Papa hate me, did it?"

"It was the will of God to take her," answered Mrs. Joddrell, with gentleness.

"Am I ever to go back to Jamaica and live with Papa?"

"I do not know; probably, not till I am dead. You will not have to wait long."

"Oh! Grandmamma!" and the pent-up tears began to fall.

"I never expect either love or gratitude, Stella. I gave up all that long ago. I do my duty. Some day you will regret poor Grandmamma."

The softening or complaining of a stern nature is always overpowering. Everyone regards a shattered rock with a sort of respect; Stella answered in a quick, panting voice—

"I do not want to leave you. I never will leave you, Grandmamma."

Mrs. Joddrell went on drawing her thread with unvaried celerity, without looking at her agitated grandchild. "You will be much happier, you know, with your Auntie. She is not buried in the bushes; she is young and gay, and she will pet and flatter you; it's her way; the sooner you can go the better."

"Why do you say such things, Grandmamma?"

The old lady gave a short dry laugh.

"Why do you suspect everyone?" exclaimed the girl, angrily, and starting to her feet. "It is downright wicked. It is enough to keep anyone from loving you. I will never tell you again, no, never as long as I live, that I care for you!"

Mrs. Joddrell sat stitching away; when Stella stopped speaking, she said in a peculiarly quiet voice:

"What have I done or said to put you in a passion?—a poor, helpless, deserted old woman!"

"You are not poor; you are not helpless nor deserted; Auntie loves you and so does Papa."

"Ah! my dear, fine words are easy said, but I should like to have some proof of their truth."

Mrs. Joddrell was not without proof, but it had really always seemed a necessity of her nature to urge everyone of her family into paroxysms of violence, which as soon as she had accomplished, her own equanimity returned; and strange to say, for a time her adversary or victim found favour with her, to find, however, at the next outbreak their catalogue of sins enriched by the one apparently forgiven. No one can have confidence in an irritable person; self-control is absolutely one of the greatest ingredients in affection.

Presently Stella went on with what sounded like the summing up of some private meditation: "It's quite deplorable to have such a bad family."

It was Mrs. Joddrell's turn now to look at Stella.

"What on earth have you got in your silly head now?"

"I am sure I never heard any good of one of us. Old Aunt Gautier, she did something or other horrid; and Cousin Louis, don't you say he is a good-for-nothing, ungrateful fellow? Isn't Auntie always doing wrong? and haven't you warned me till I am sick, that you could tell me what would take the pride out of me? I suppose we have had some wicked ancestor and are a doomed set," wound up the young lady in a despairing tone.

"I think, child, you are enough to drive any reasonable woman distracted. What do you mean, eh?"

"There *are* doomed families, Grandmamma. I have read of them in the Old Testament and in some of Papa's old school-books; and I know, besides, of real living people. Are not the very

Boccardi here under a curse? and is it not true that they all die an unnatural, violent death? and was it not prophesied that it should be so on account of their crimes centuries ago?"

"You are full of nonsensical superstitions. Remember what a goose you made of yourself about the *drowning seed.* Let me hear no more of all this folly about dooms and ancestors. I beg you will not make use of such words as 'curse,' or bring me into trouble with the Gautiers by saying I accused my sister of wrong-doing."

"You did say Aunt Gautier had behaved ill," said Stella, bluntly.

"There's no mystery as to that, Miss Pert. She married a nasty Frenchman against our father's will, and she has had to suffer for it. Disobedience to parents is visited even to the third generation."

"That's exactly what I call being doomed, Grandmamma."

"Come, come; it's ten o'clock, put away your work: it is time for prayers, and do not always be asking questions; it is very rude, to say the least of it."

The old lady and Stella put away the books and work strewed on tables and sofa. As Mrs. Joddrell locked up the miniature of her daughter, she laid her hand on her desk, saying—

"Remember, Stella, all my jewels are in this; letters, papers, whatever it contains, is to be your Aunt's when I die."

"Why are you always talking of dying, Grandmamma?"

"Because death is the only thing living beings are sure of."

They went first to the kitchen to see that Rose had gone to her bed, and then they made the round of the large, desolate house, so damp, too, that, in spite of daily use, the locks rusted and the keys turned gratingly in them. Along the whole back of the building ran a wooden gallery, into which most of the rooms and corridors opened, and which was but a trifle above the level of a small garden, a wilderness of roses and jessamine, on which now lay the gentle light of the stars.

The girl stepped out, and looked into an entrance court, twenty feet at least below where she stood; either the court had been excavated, or the garden raised.

"Perro, old Perro," called Stella, and instantaneously a great black dog sprung up some gray, mouldy, crumbling steps, and twisting himself like a snake, licked Stella's feet. "Good Perro," says she, stooping to put her arms round his neck, "it is better to have a dog to love one than nothing."

The dog had a Spanish ancestry as well as his young mistress. Both had been confided by George Joddrell (Stella's father) to the care of his mother, some ten years previously. Stella tied her handkerchief round the old dog's throat, and so led him along till they found Mrs. Joddrell. She was sitting in the prettiest and most cheerful room in the old house. It had four doors, and over each was a painted panel, representing one of the seasons, the female figures far above mediocrity.

Mrs. Joddrell took no notice of the entrance of her grandchild and the dog. She made no attempt to move; her eyes were wandering from a small bed, with fanciful drapery, to a Prie-Dieu chair, covered with fine tapestry work. In the centre of the back, within a wreath of flowers, were the initials C. J.; a footstool to match was before the chair. The work was faded but not moth-eaten; a large tiger's skin with silver claws was spread out on the floor; on either side the mantel-piece, which was of sculptured marble, were tiny bookshelves of white and gold, filled with tiny gaily bound books. The furniture and books had belonged to Celia Joddrell, before she became Mrs. Dashwood, and

Mrs. Joddrell carried it about with her wherever she went.

Perro sniffed round the room as if to ascertain that all was right; when he came up to Mrs. Joddrell, he gazed up in her face, faintly wagged his tail, and suddenly gave out a low dismal howl.

"Perro, old boy, what's the matter?" exclaimed Stella, patting him.

He answered by another low howl.

"Grandmamma!" cried Stella, with a sudden flutter at her heart.

"Well, of what are you afraid, Stella? You grow more superstitious every day."

Mrs. Joddrell rose from her seat, passed her handkerchief over the diminutive books—contemplated one by one the bed, the chair, the footstool, the tiger-skin, all full of recollections—landmarks in her memory—did not sigh so as to be heard—she was surely an iron woman—tried the locks of the door, and then marshalled the way to a bedchamber next to the saloon. Anything more dreary than this apartment could scarcely be. A bed in an alcove, hidden by dark green serge curtains, for the grandmother; a curtainless stretcher between the windows for the granddaughter. The dog laid himself on a mat outside the door; as Mrs. Joddrell closed it, she said—

"Get your Testament, Stella."

Mrs. Joddrell's strong face looked stronger when she replaced the black lace that had covered her head during the day by a white muslin cap, with broad frills, and changed her black dress for a white wrapper. She looked like a marble effigy of a woman, rather than living flesh and blood.

What a contrast hers to the earnest, speaking countenance of the girl, feeling in her heart's core every word she read. The chapter finished, Stella kneels down and prays aloud. Mrs. Joddrell folds her hands and listens, but her lips do not move, nor lose their rigidity.

The candle is out, and Stella sleeps, and smiles in her sleep; she is dreaming of that pretty Auntie. And Mrs. Joddrell is awake, and for many hours of the night lies tossing her arms within the dark serge curtains, sighing out from time to time, "My God! what is this? what is this?"

For many weeks past, at longer, then at shorter intervals, had this awful question hovered on Mrs. Joddrell's lips. Whatever her dread, it met no human ear; her defiant spirit would remain defiant to the last.

CHAPTER II.

RESTLESS BONDAGE.

It was not the bright June sun forcing his early beams through the bars of the jalousies and playing on Stella's eyelids, that made her unclose her eyes with a start. It was the stealthy opening of the bedroom door. Rose's pretty face peeped in—the wilful little head nodded a significant adieu and vanished.

The young lady, rising noiselessly, slipped into an adjoining dressing-closet. Not the first time by many, that Mademoiselle had performed Rose's service, to shield the truant. A trifling act of goodness certainly, but even the most trifling of good actions has this one beneficial effect, it makes the doer cheerful. Stella went into the kitchen as merry as a lark.

Rose had lighted the charcoal and placed the bouillote of water on it, thus sparing Stella the most difficult part of her task. While sweeping out and dusting the saloon, the young lady could not help thinking with envy of the great kisses Rose was without doubt receiving just at that moment from a hearty father, mother, brothers, sisters, and cousins of all degrees. Stella had once been allowed on Rose's name-day to accompany her to her home, and the manner in which Rose had been all but eaten up by her relations, was well remembered. Quite a child at the time, it made Stella understand her own loneliness, made her long for family affection. In recalling that scene now, she quite forgave Rose's obstinacy, and began to be very glad she had gone to the fête.

When the baker's little girl brought the bread, Stella, in her desire to have some friendly greeting, suddenly kissed the very small maiden with the round black eyes, black as sloes, and gave her a moutta (fourpence). Stella had not many coins in her purse, yet it was not too much to pay for such a kiss and golden smile as she received in return.

Well! she has buttered the hot rolls, folded them in a napkin, as Mrs. Joddrell liked to have them, poured the boiling water on the coffee, scalded the milk, singing under her breath one of the child's songs she had learned from Rose's sister and predecessor—

"J'aurai une robe,
J'aurai une robe,
Et de quoi? d'écarlate, d'écarlate :
Tu n'en auras pas, tu n'en auras pas."

It is a capital quality to be able to be happy on account of the happiness of others.

The last touch to her preparations was given, and Stella knocked at the bedroom door to say that breakfast was ready.

Mrs. Joddrell called to Stella: "Bring me my coffee here, my dear; I have had a bad night. It's cold! it's abominable," exclaimed Mrs. Joddrell: "take it away."

Very much disconcerted, Stella disappeared with the tray: she reheated the coffee and strained it over again.

"It is smoked," was Mrs. Joddrell's observation, and once more the cup was put down. "You don't care, Stella, what I get. You are a most unfeeling girl; you would starve me if you could;" and to Stella's great terror, her grandmother burst into tears.

"Indeed, I do care, Grandmamma; I'll bring you a fresh cup directly."

"I wish your aunt were here," sighed the old lady.

The third cup was more successful. Mrs. Joddrell swallowed a morsel of bread and said she would like to sleep.

Stella sat down in the large, scantily furnished saloon. For a long while she sat motionless; from the street came the joyous hum of a festival; how busy and friendly it sounded! but neither the merry buzz, the bright summer sky, nor yet the thought of Rose's pleasure, could banish the faint-heartedness which had crept over her. She wished that Rose, her grandmother's and her own only friend in Evian, nay, throughout the wide space between Lake Leman and England, would come home. Her thoughts were sometimes reminiscences, sometimes forebodings.

The strokes of a strong, sweet chapel-bell roused her. The church-bells of Evian are all peculiarly sweet. The one that had awakened Stella from her meditations came from the convent of San Joseph, only separated from the old stone house by a broad alley leading down to the Lake. She went into the round room, formerly her play-room, and where she still kept her books and other girlish property. The windows overlooked the convent garden, and many and many a time had the good-natured sisters beckoned to her, when she was younger, to come and join in the romps of their pupils. The sisters of San Joseph are not cloistered nuns; they devote themselves to teaching and other social duties.

Mrs. Joddrell had been most positive in refusing to let Stella go among Roman Catholics. She had never allowed her either, to enter one of the Evian churches. There was no Protestant place of worship there in 1827, nor is there any now in 1859. Mrs. Joddrell abhorred and avoided holy water as much as the Evil One is said to do. Stella, therefore, though in her sixteenth year, had no recollection of ever having been within the walls of a church. In the heaviness of her spirit she longed for the sight of the familiar figures in their white tippets, their hands hidden within the wide sleeves of their black gowns. Could she see a sister in the garden, she would bow and try to show by signs that she wished to speak to her, but the garden was empty;—every one probably in the procession.

To say the Joddrells knew not a soul in Evian but Rose, is going too far; at all events, they had had one acquaintance, a *soi-disant* professor of music, a little hunchbacked man, named Hoche. This person's head-quarters were in Evian, though he was as often away as at home; for he travelled in the vicinity to give lessons in singing and the piano, and did not disdain besides to repair musical instruments of all kinds.

Shortly after Mrs. Joddrell's instalment in the old house of Evian, the small, deformed professor of music had penetrated to her presence. Everyone else who had tried had failed. Mr. Hoche was a queer, sarcastic, sharp-nosed individual. He began by giving a catalogue of his own merits, he ended by laughing at them; laughed while describing his miserable position among the ignorant, bigoted boors of Evian;

looked grave, however, when he spoke of the Heaven's boon that the advent of a real born lady was to him, and, finally, accomplished the intention of his visit, by inducing Mrs. Joddrell to purchase the wretched instrument he proudly offered as a specimen of his talent for repairs.

Mr. Hoche became Stella's music-master, and continued to stand high in Mrs. Joddrell's favour. It would really seem that the old lady enjoyed his fantastic tricks, and the mysterious terror he produced in Stella. Hoche's face showed deformity as much as his figure. It was a very large face, its large features more or less awry. He could distort them besides in the most extraordinary and, to his pupil, most alarming way. He had positively a real genius for music, and the little girl's blunders and false notes would make every nerve in his body quiver. He did not scold her, but, when he could endure no more, he would shove her away, take her place at the piano, produce the most unearthly chords, then swing himself round on the music-stool, and make such grimaces that Stella could have sworn he turned nose and eyes and mouth upside down. Her grandmother's laugh, far from being any encouragement, added to the cold creeping of the little girl's skin. She never cried or complained—only to Jeanneton, Rose's sister and predecessor, did she ever confide her wondering fears about Mr. Hoche, and this only after Jeanneton had told her a terrible story of a witch, who had been ducked and drowned by the men of Jeanneton's own village. Stella had acquired by her grandmother's style of education an unusual power of self-repression and silent endurance, but a crisis came however, and it put an end to Mr. Hoche's instructions.

In one of the sudden squalls, to which, like all large lakes, the lake of Geneva is subject; a boat belonging to Evian upset in sight of the windows of the old house, and the crew were drowned. The bodies were recovered, all save one. Jeanneton related to Mrs. Joddrell, in Stella's presence, the great distress of the widows, in particular of the one whose husband could not receive Christian burial. Mrs. Joddrell had sent money to each of the bereaved families, she now gave an additional sum to pay the expense of another search for the missing corpse.

In vain; the lake held its prey, and would hold it till the great Day should force its deliverance. Stella was greatly troubled for this poor widow's sake, and to her Jeanneton said in confidence, that there was a way by which the body might be recovered; there was a seed if the widow could get *that!*

"And why does not the poor woman buy some?" inquired the undoubting listener.

"Oh, Miss, it is not so easy to get, only the wise folk know about it; but if you throw ever so little on the water, it will run along just as if it were alive, and never stop till it comes to just over where the dead body is lying."

"Where could one buy it, Jeanneton?"

Jeanneton shook her head. "Those who have it, don't like it to be known; and if you anger them, they make you remember it."

"Do you think Mr. Hoche knows about the seed," whispered the child.

"*Dame!* like enough; he's too ugly for a Christian."

Stella had no rest for the pungent thoughts of the widow's grief, so on Jeanneton's hint she spoke to her music-master. Mr. Hoche, mad with passion, on being so openly told that he looked like a wizard, swore he would never cross the threshold of the old house again. He kept his word in spite of Mrs. Joddrell's excuses and promises to punish Stella, in spite of Stella's humble prayers that he would forgive her. This was the history of the "drowning seed" alluded to by Mrs. Joddrell.

And in this horrible conjuncture, happening to pass the door of the round room, the old lady had overheard the child saying in an excited voice—

"Robbick, you know she can but kill my body."

An unknown child's voice answered—

"My dear sister, you are only to care for those who can kill the soul."

Surprised and alarmed, Mrs. Joddrell pushed open the door, looking sharply about her; there was no one visible but Stella.

"To whom are you speaking, Stella?"

Stella hung her head, then in a whisper—

"To my eldest air-brother, Grandmamma."

In her great need of playfellows, Stella had invented air-brothers, and one air-sister. Robbick was the favourite and adviser, the others were playfellows, and were named Bird's-bone, Bull'shorn, Horse's-head, and the sister, Merrick. Why these names? What did they mean? Who can explain the vagaries of a lonely child's imagination? Her air-brothers and sister were the mystery and delight of Stella's life; instead of playing egotistically at "my lady in her coach going to visit," she tried to amuse these air-comrades by telling them all the stories she read or was told. It was a pity her grandmother had never overheard her relating the history of "Joseph sold into bondage." It was told in a dramatic form, with all the "says he" that make a story sound so real; the loneliness of the Hebrew boy, with no father, no mother to love him, or take care of him when he was sick, or to kiss him when he went to bed, were feelingly dwelt upon. The air-brothers were also playmates; often they had games of hide-and-seek, and puss in the corner, and that with so much animation, and with such rapid and complete changes of voice, that you could have understood the game as if you had actually seen it.

Mrs. Joddrell did not love Stella as most women do their first grandchild. The little creature reminded her in nothing of either of her own children. She was a brunette, and her father and aunt were dazzlingly fair. Stella's Spanish complexion was a species of disgrace in the eyes of a lady who had spent most of her life among blacks. She rough-handled Stella as she had never done either George or Celia, but there was an innate courage in the child which preserved her truthful. She often dared the utmost severity of her grandmother rather than say the thing that was not.

It was not in woman's nature to withhold forgiveness from a little culprit so prepared to endure punishment.

It will be fitting to say here, as shortly as possible, how the grandmother and grandchild came to be domiciled in this out-of-the-way town of Savoy.

Mrs. Joddrell was the widow of a rich West Indian planter—such beings did exist in Mrs. Joddrell's time. She was the mother of two children; a son and daughter. George, Stella's father, now lived on the paternal estates in Jamaica; Celia, the daughter, was the wife of Major Dashwood, late of the staff corps.

Ten years before the opening of this story, George Joddrell had brought to England, to place under his mother's care, his motherless six-year-old Stella. Till that moment, as she had told Stella, Mrs. Joddrell had been in ignorance of her son's marriage. At the same period, her son-in-law was placed on half-pay, and to the shock of her son's previous want of confidence was added the pang of Major and Mrs. Dashwood declining her proposal that they should take up house together.

"After so much as I have done for my

children," exclaimed the disappointed lady, "that they should show me neither affection nor confidence!"

Poor Mrs. Joddrell! it was her creed that children must love their parents whether or no; she never took into account how human nature rebels against duty; she never dreamed of original sin coming between her heart and theirs, if she did not set an example of gentleness, and forbearance, and long-suffering.

George and Celia early learned deceit in order to avoid violence and injustice; neither respect, nor trust, not even the familiarity of child's love, united them to their mother. How could they, while she tortured them, believe that they were her idols; that jealousy for their exclusive affection caused their torment?

In vain did Celia protest that it was from motives of prudence that Major Dashwood decided on their living with his aunt, Miss Philadelphia Dashwood, to whose fortune, unless she married in her old age, the Major was heir.

"We go to her that we may take care of our interests, Mamma," assured Celia.

Mrs. Joddrell did not believe her daughter. She knew that she was too timid to tell the truth, and say, "Mamma, you would never let me have my own way." Mrs. Joddrell smiled bitterly as the thoughtless Celia detailed to her the care she had taken to secure independence in her domestic arrangements with old Miss Philly. "My own drawing-room, my own servants, my own visiting list." Yes—yes! Mrs. Joddrell understood it all. In a paroxysm of bitterness, she gave up her house, sold her furniture, and, as soon as her son sailed for Jamaica, crossed the Channel with her young charge; resolved to renounce her habits, her country—even her family. This voluntary exile was from a thirst for vengeance; it would give a life-long remorse, she trusted, to the daughter she adored.

Geneva was Mrs. Joddrell's first resting-place. She did not like it; she met there too many English of her world. She sought round the lake for some retirement, and thus chanced on the hoary house in Evian. She was told it had once been tenanted by an Englishman, who had restored to the principal apartments much of their original richness of decoration, besides putting the whole building into habitable repair.

The traditions of the wealth and splendour of this Englishman still live in Evian. Within a mile of the town, on the road to Meïlleraie, is an oblong space of turf surrounded by trees of great and symmetrical height and size. This space is yet called "the Englishman's ball-room," for here the rich man gave a fête that has never been rivalled in that district. The countless coloured lamps which garlanded the trees, and hung from their branches, sent their radiance, it is said, across the lake to Lausanne.

The Englishman's caprice for Evian was short-lived, and from his time no one had occupied the old stone house. Its air of decayed grandeur, its lofty halls, its endless passages, chimed in well with Mrs. Joddrell's tastes; she was soothed by some similarity between its decay and desertion and her own.

"What was the name of that Englishman?" she inquired.

The sound made by the Savoyard house-agent she took for granted meant Beckford.

He, too, was a West Indian. Yes, she would take the house. Stella was too young for any teaching but her own; by and by, she would take her to Italy and Paris.

As the green mildew eat silently away, first, the strong stones of the hoary house, then crept through chinks and crannies, stealing the bright colours from the frescoes of the guest-chambers, unfastening the paper-hangings, running riot with red rust here, with white fur there, Mrs. Joddrell loved the old house better and better—it maintained its sympathy with her.

In the course of years, Jeanneton had married, and gone away, Rose taking her place; but no other stranger had ever entered the house, not even during the two visits Celia had paid to her mother.

Mr. Hoche had revenged himself, though his victims knew it not. He had described Mrs. Joddrell as a Megæra, doubtless full of crime, and Stella her familiar monkey. Everyone drew back from the solitary pair in their walks; and the very beggar who accepted a sous from them, spat on it, and in his frightful patois denounced them as worse than Protestants.

As Stella's mind developed, her air-brothers faded, and faded, till they vanished; they left her to extreme loneliness. Not only had she longing for companionship, but strong impulses were stirring within her to accomplish something—she knew not what; she had a craving after knowledge of all kinds; she wanted arrows to take aim—at what she could not tell; but at some object very high. The tiny books on the tiny shelves had been read, nay, devoured, and had taught her this—to be impatient of her present life.

But not only had she aspirations, she had fears; her grandmother's taunts, few and far between as they were, seemed to point at some mystery which stamped her as differing from those of her kindred whom she knew. Why should she not play at acting? The rebuke and still more its tone and emphasis were remembered. What was acting? Stella had never known the delights of a pantomime or Astley's, never even seen a circus at a fair. Once she had thrilled with delight and terror at the sight of a little girl of her own size in dirty spangled jacket and petticoat dancing on a rope. The heaviest slap Mrs. Joddrell had ever bestowed on her was when in a spirit of emulation she had tried to balance herself on the back of a chair.

"Gipsy once, gipsy always," were the scornful words that broke from a lip protruded with unmistakeable disgust.

Lately Stella had felt a rising rebellion against the parent who inflicted on her, ignorance and almost solitary confinement; the old house she likened to some lonely castle, herself to a prisoner. She would write to her father and complain; then the sight of her grandmother's worn face, the stoop of the once erect figure, the foot leaving the ground evidently less and less, seemed to reproach her and say, "Wait a little, only a little."

What rich floods of affection were shut up in that young girl's heart, ready to force their way out! Her grandmother might have been renovated to happiness in those sweet waters, had she so chosen. It was not in her nature to draw forth love, or perhaps some fierce love-fire had hardened and sealed up the door of her heart. No one knew; no one can ever know. The original of a washed-out picture, the colourless ivory still in her desk, might have told; but who among the living, unless her absent sister, Madam Gautier, remembered Mrs. Joddrell's early life?

CHAPTER III.

DREADED FREEDOM.

Stooping more than usual, and hesitating in her walk, the old lady came into the room, and took her way silently to the sofa. Stella stood up ready for orders.

"Bring me some wine, child."

Mrs. Joddrell drank a large glassful with avidity.

"Where is Rose?"

Stella braced herself to bear a tempest of anger.

"She is gone to church, Grandmamma."

No answer, but a deep sigh.

"Write to your aunt, and ask when she is coming to see us? Write to-day, and say my head is so giddy that I cannot hold a pen."

"Shall I tell her you want her to come?"

"No; let her do as she likes."

Stella was accustomed to obey her grandmother implicitly, even when she inwardly rebelled. She wrote the letter; showed it to Mrs. Joddrell, whose only remark was—

"How badly you write; my children write beautifully, and I taught them."

"The third generation is falling off," said Stella, laughing; "for my cousin Louis writes very badly, I know."

Mrs. Joddrell did not carry on the subject. Stella looked at her, and had what the French call a *serrement de cœur*, a tightening of the heart; and on the instant impulsively added to her letter two lines, praying her aunt to come at once, with the additional remark, "I am afraid about Grandmamma." Grandmamma's sharp eyes watched the addition of a postscript; usually so scrutinising, to-day she asked no questions. The letter was sealed, but there was no Rose to send out with it to the post-office.

"Are you afraid to go alone?"

"Oh, no, Grandmamma."

"Better not lose a post, Stella."

The fête was at its height. Seeing the rival *reposoirs* (moveable altars) passing under innumerable moss-chains, from which fluttered paper doves, paper hearts, hearing the sweet voices of the young girls belonging to the church choir mingling with the rough basses of the men's confraternities, all seen and heard as if in a dream, Stella ran to the *Bureau de Poste*, dreading it might be already shut on account of the festival. The clerk of the post was desperately tipsy, and let her take the bag he was sealing, open it, and put in her letter. The idea that Mrs. Joddrell was going to die had fixed itself in Stella's brain, and with the idea had come such a grief, as if she never could be happy again, should she lose this stern grandmother. Strange fascination *that* possessed by habit; we fret and fume against what we have; the instant we conjecture the removal is at hand, lo! we clutch at it, as if it had been the acknowledged treasure of our lives.

Stella, as she was hastening home, saw Mr. Hoche standing at the door of the Carabineers' guard-house. He scowled at her, and evidently pointed her out to the soldiers—a bad omen, poor Stella thought. On her return she found Mrs. Joddrell lying doubled up in one corner of the sofa.

"Are you ill, Grandmamma?"

"I am dying, my dear."

A sobbing shriek of "Let me go for a doctor—let me go for a doctor," answered the horrible announcement.

"Send if you like, though I do not know if there be a doctor in this stupid place; do not cry, it pains me."

Stella had no one to send; she stopped

crying however, by force of will, and once more left the house, this time to seek Mr. Hoche himself; he was angry with her, but he was the only creature she knew.

"Will you tell me where the best doctor lives, sir?" going up to him.

"Eh! eh! I am not sorcerer enough to tell you that, Mademoiselle."

"I was an ignorant child when I offended you, sir," the young face was lined with agony. "My poor grandmamma is dying," the sob in her throat would rise. "You are the only person I know here."

"Stand back," cried Mr. Hoche, as the priest heading the procession approached. Children with their gauze wings, white frocks, and curled hair to simulate angels, were hovering on either side, then three nuns in black with long veils leading a group of young girls all in white from head to foot, came on. Shrill, yet indescribably touching the singing.

"Pange, lingua, gloriosi
Corporis mysterium,
Sanguinisque pretiosi,
Quem in mundi pretium."

"Sing, my tongue, the Saviour's glory,
Of his flesh the mystery sing,
Of the blood, all price exceeding,
Shed by our immortal King."

Mr. Hoche's discordant tones shouted out the hymn; then he stopped, whispered to Stella—"Mère Thérèse has a diploma; go to the convent and ask for her. If she cannot cure the body, she may do something for the soul." He turned away, and went on shouting responses louder than any one else.

"Go to the convent and ask for a nun!" Stella, who had been even forbidden to look at nuns! But inexorable necessity forced her to the dreaded door of the sisters of San Joseph; she really trembled as she rung the dispensary bell.

"Entrez:" and with a mental shock, she found herself face to face with Mère Thérèse herself, a flat-faced, stout, short female, the very picture of content. Stella's errand might have been one of daily occurrence for any emotion it called up on the Mother's face. She asked few questions—but enlarged on the fact that diplomas of medicine were only granted to those sisters who were considered peculiarly gifted, told Stella—while she went to Madame Supérieure for leave—to look at the museum in the ante-room; about the rarities of which sister Consolazione lectured to the pupils.

Stella's fright augmented when she found herself actually going back with a nun instead of a doctor—still she felt a comfort in having a woman with her. Mère Thérèse asked where Rose was; the Mother knew all concerning the old house establishment apparently; and as she trotted through the damp court, remarked that such a place was not suitable for an old lady. "Had she no family to look after her?"

"Yes; Stella had written that day to Mrs. Joddrell's daughter."

Mrs. Joddrell looked surprised, and then angry at the nun. Mère Thérèse did not heed looks; she felt the old lady's pulse, nodding in too cordial and cheering a manner for any one really ill and alone in a foreign land long to be resentful. It was wonderful the deft activity of the stout, heavy-limbed sister of San Joseph. She moved even noiselessly over the disjointed floors, now preparing a fever beverage, now arranging the bed-chamber. Shrewd penetration was still less to be expected from the owner of the commonplace countenance. It has been said that the most alarming penetration comes forth from the cell of an anchorite, that all persons living an unsocial, single, solitary life acquire a double sight, one that sees clearly into your inner being, besides the common and more usual vision. Be the case so or not with recluses in general, the fact is, that Mère Thérèse did easily divine the principal subject of Mrs. Joddrell's thoughts. Communication by speech was not easy, so pantomime was called on to help. At a moment when Stella was at the other end of the room, Mère Thérèse whispered to her patient, while pointing to the young lady—"Ne vous inquiétez pas, chère dame, à cause de la petite—moi, je m'en charge jusqu'à l'arrivée de madame sa tante." The nun laid her two thumbs together so as to form a cross, and then kissed them by way of sign and seal to her promise.

Of what avail to describe the next fortnight, during which the sad mystery of the parting between soul and body was being accomplished in the old house. Stella was almost as pale as the poor old lady; but her fortitude and activity never failed. She was on her feet the whole day; even the greater part of the night. There was such controlled agony in her constant cry of "Grandmamma, can't you take this? if you could only eat, you would be well," that it brought tears into Mère Thérèse's eyes, and made Mrs. Joddrell smile and try to swallow.

As each morning the curtains of the window were withdrawn and the jalousies opened, there was more and more of impatience in Mrs. Joddrell's questions of, "How many days is it, Stella, since you wrote to your aunt?" The eleventh day since Mère Thérèse had entered the old house was come. She will not have to remain much longer.

"Is your aunt's room ready?" asked the dying woman.

"Yes; it is all ready—the bed is made."

That evening Mrs. Dashwood jumped out of a carriage, and ran past Rose and Mère Thérèse, without a question, till she saw Stella.

"Auntie, you *are* come at last."

"I have not been in bed since your letter reached me," replied Celia.

Aunt and niece entered Mrs. Joddrell's room together. A spasm passed over the ashy gray face.

"Mamma," came forth in a sob.

"You have come to an uncomfortable house, Celia."

"Oh! Mamma, if it were a palace, what would it matter, now?"

Mrs. Joddrell closed her eyes, and Celia, unable to stand, took the chair at the foot of the bed. Her face was buried in her hands. She was giddy and faint with fatigue and emotion.

Mrs. Joddrell broke the silence. "Celia, when you were a little child, you used to say, 'Mamma, shall I amuse you?' and then you would bring your spelling-book and read aloud, 'There's a time to sow, and a time to reap.'"

Celia gave her mother such a look that,

involuntarily Mrs. Joddrell exclaimed, "My poor Celia!" The daughter sprang forward, and felt her mother's hands caressing her head as they had not done since she was the little child of the spelling-book.

A doctor from Geneva was with Mrs. Dashwood, and now ventured, uncalled for, into the room.

"What is he come for? What is the use of such an expense?"

"To try and do you good, Mamma."

Dr. P——, after feeling the sick woman's pulse, and studying her physiognomy, drew a small phial from his pocket, and putting a few drops into a wine-glass full of water, held it to Mrs. Joddrell's lips.

"Why can't you let an old woman die in peace?" she asked. As she spoke she caught a glimpse of Celia's tortured face. "To satisfy you, my dear," and the dose of ether was swallowed.

The struggle was not long after that. Mrs. Joddrell exacted a promise from her daughter that Stella should be sent to her father. "You are *not* to keep her with you." The ruling passion was strong in death. No questions were asked by the daughter except that usual heart-breaking one,—"Is there anything in the world I can do for you—any wish—any thing on your mind?"

"Nothing, my dear: Stella understands what to do."

At last there came a request, "Don't forget me," not addressed apparently to any one in particular; a dovelike expression took, and kept, possession of the hitherto stern eyes, until they were piously closed.

After it was all over, Stella slept, scarcely once waking for twenty-four hours — twenty-four hours in which poor Celia's heart felt breaking. A terrible time when memory paints only one side of the past; and that the one which condemns the best of survivors. Words, more than actions, rose up vividly as at the instant they were uttered; and the daughter watching by the side of the motionless form, with its face so calm now, though marked by suffering as its own, wondered how anything should ever have provoked a retort from her. Celia sat through that first night by that solemn bed, her spirit steeped in bitterness. She had forgotten provocation, injustice, harshness; memory did not portray them.

The nun and the physician spared her all the harrowing details that follow a death. She was a loving creature, Celia Joddrell: how was it that, from childhood upwards, she had had to live with people she either could not love, or who could not love her?

When Stella awoke from her sleep, she had a quiet conversation with Mère Thérèse. She then busied herself silently gathering all her own and her grandmother's property together.

She helped Rose, to the astonishment of Mrs. Dashwood's maid, who treated her accordingly. In the evening she cut all the white roses off the bush in the garden, and went silently into the room where Death was. Celia had been persuaded to take some rest. Silently Stella spread the flowers over the white motionless figure, putting one close to the right hand; looked alarmed for an instant, then stooping kissed the brow, and knelt down, trying to say steadily, " Grandmamma, I will be good. Grandmamma, grandmamma, will you never speak to me again? Poor grandmamma! poor grandmamma!"

Mère Thérèse came to her, with a quantity of lovely fresh-gathered "forget-me-nots."

"Mr. Hoche sent them," said Mère Thérèse.

"I know where they came from," said the girl—"from our favourite walk. Grandmamma, we shall never go out together again. Madame," (to the nun,) "you do not know how badly I used to behave. I shall never be happy again." The bells rang out their chimes. "Grand-mamma cannot hear them now: she said they were the sweetest she had ever heard. Madame, do comfort me! pray, do comfort me!"

"Pray poor child," said the nun, grave and calm. She gently forced Stella to her knees, folded her hands, holding them within her own rough prayerful ones. "Pray to God. Pray to Him now and always, and He will comfort you."

CHAPTER IV.

SWEET HOME.

Waterloo Cottage was a long, low, detached building, spreading over a good deal of ground, with green verandahs to the two stories of which it alone consisted. It stood, for it stands no longer, within a low wall, surmounted by a high iron railing, at right angles with one of the roads leading from Kilburn to Hampstead, the small garden in front expanding into a large one behind. The casement windows, both above and below, opened on to the verandahs, filled in summer with flowers of every hue. Up slender pillars clustered roses and passion-flowers, hiding the ivy and Virginian creeper, which only waited, however, for winter to make good their claims to notice. Waterloo Cottage, in a word, was one of those dwellings, the sight of which develops pleasant associations, and excites one to covet one's neighbour's house.

Six weeks after the death of Mrs. Joddrell, on a dull, blustering day in the last week of September, at that uncertain hour when parting light still struggles with coming darkness, a hackney coach stopped at the gate.

"Here we are at last," exclaimed Major Dashwood, jumping out of the coach. He had met his wife and Stella at the White Horse Cellar. A grizzly-haired negro, in a suit of pepper-and-salt, came out to the travellers, his eyes so wide open that a circle of white was visible round the black irids.

"Hi, me missus," and the shrivelled hands, with their yellow palms, seized the small gloved ones of Mrs. Dashwood. "My heart sore for you, missus—me dar missus," and heavy tears came to bear witness to old Pompey's words. "Dis Massa Joddrell darter? glad to see you, young missus."

In the meantime Major Dashwood was helping the coachman to bring in the luggage. The Major was so cheerful and bustling, you might have fancied they were guests from a wedding.

When Stella and her aunt entered the dining-room, the scene that presented itself was one very consoling to persons just arrived after a cold, damp journey. There was a bright sea-coal fire, a singing kettle, and a large white cat spread out on the Persian rug, purring in its dreams.

At the well-covered tea-table sat a stout old gentlewoman, Aunt Philly herself. She had probably taken a nap after dinner, as her high silk head-dress, something of the nature of a turban, called in those days "a toque," was visibly awry. There was comfort in the closed shutters against which the wind was rattling the fallen leaves; comfort in the thick crimson curtains, in the blazing fire, in the purring of the luxurious cat, in the well-clothed, stout old lady, in the warm quiet of the room, even in the dimly burning pair of mould candles. There was nothing active or wide-awake to be seen.

Aunt Philly only shook hands with her nephew's wife, and made a low, old-fashioned courtesy to Stella, who, looking both awkward and frightened, said—

"How do you do, ma'am?"

"Quite well, I thank you, miss," answered Aunt Philly. "You are a day before the time you fixed, Mrs. Dashwood, but you will find everything prepared for you;" and the speaker compressed her lips like one who had discovered the uselessness of rebuke in certain quarters.

"I was sure of that, ma'am, or I should not have come," answered Celia, carelessly; then whispered to Stella—

"This is Aunt P——'s domain; the drawing-room is mine."

Yes, the scene was excellent: one of those English interiors considered peculiarly the result of English laws, the growth of English soil. Paint it. A lovely young woman on a sofa, a handsome husband placing a footstool under her feet; a respectable old lady, a model for any one bent on delineating motherly love, presiding at the rich tea-table; a young girl in her teens, to be the object of anxious interest to those so happily themselves in harbour. Even behold an attached old servant in the background completing the picture.

How is it in reality?

The dear old lady makes the room ring with a species of shout.

"You stupid creature, mind what you are doing!" This was addressed to the attached old

Pompey, waddling forward with a large salver; the wine-glasses and decanter on it, making an ominous jingle. "Who told you to bring wine?"

"Massa say——"

"What has 'massa' to do with it?"

Here Celia said sharply to her husband—

"What makes you interfere? As you choose to live here, you know it's no business of yours to give orders."

"This is not your wine, ma'am," said the Major. "I brought it with me to drink Celia's happy return. Let us be merry once in a way."

Stella saw her aunt close her eyes. What an expression of pain there was in the slow dropping of the eyelids!

"Here, Madam Celia, take a glass of wine, it will do you more good than tea;" and the husband carried a glass of port wine to the wife.

"You know I hate port wine," said Celia, as she put it aside.

"It will do you good," he insisted.

"It is very strange," said Celia, her face suddenly growing like Mrs. Joddrell's, "that it is impossible to make some people believe that what they like, another may not."

The Major laughed, and took his dismissal; but he attacked Stella.

"Take a glass of wine, Miss Stella."

"I don't take wine, thank you, uncle."

"But you should, you know. Don't follow your aunt's example: she doesn't know what's good for her."

"Let the girl do as she likes," interfered Celia.

Major Dashwood drank off the wine himself, and then went and stood on the rug, his back to the fire.

"I wish, Major D——," exclaimed Aunt Philly, "you would remember that we cannot see through you."

One, two, three loud hems sounded as if

Major Dashwood was clearing his throat for a speech, but nothing came of the hems.

For all the trials of his life—and, reader, never question the reality of what your neighbour calls trials—well, then, for all the trials of his life, Major Dashwood had found in "*The Times*" a panacea. He now subsided into an easy chair with that day's paper. To spell through every column, was the business of his life; though when asked if there were any news, any article of interest, his invariable answer, till very lately, had been, "Nothing particular." To watch the military obituary was his serious occupation, his anxiety for deaths most disinterested.

Just at this period, however, the increase of public excitement as to the slaves in the British Colonies affected him too personally not to make some impression on his memory.

"Did you see this morning's leading article on the West Indies?" asked the Major of his wife; "we shall have emancipation before we know where we are."

"And quite right, too," exclaimed Aunt Philly, hotly adding: "Blacks are bad enough any way, that I know to my own cost; but slaves! goodness gracious! it makes me sick to think of born Christians being waited on by creatures with iron chains round their legs."

"But that is an entire mistake, ma'am," said Celia. "I assure you I believe my brother's negroes are better treated, and have far less to do, than your English servants."

"Nonsense, niece! I believe my own eyes—ay, open yours as wide as you please—I believe my own eyes."

Celia shrugged her shoulders, and again leaned back in her corner of the sofa.

"Ah, ah! you can't deny it, you see. Niggers well-treated! Have a hot kitchen dinner every day, I suppose? I haven't looked over your Jamaica papers for nothing. Ain't the greatest half of them covered with disgraceful pictures of black Apollos and Venuses, and what not; and don't they have scars here and scars there as marks, and chains into the bargain? Don't tell me!"

"Those are the runaway slaves," said Celia.

"I wonder they don't all run away. I wish, nephew, you could read quietly, like other people," and Aunt Philly turned sharply on the Major: "that 'whish!' 'whish!' wears one's nerves to a fiddle-string."

The sound so reprobated was a way Major Dashwood had of making known his dislike to any subject under discussion.

When old Pompey was removing the tea-things, Major Dashwood once more took up his forbidden position on the hearth-rug.

"Prices of coffee lower every day. I don't believe your brother will nett half the income he did last year. I'll be bound he won't make his clear two thousand."

The Major pronounced "two thousand," as if the sum were one which was quite habitually in his pocket.

"In my father's time, Cedar Valley never gave less than five thousand a year," said Celia, plaintively.

"Monstrous!" said Aunt Philly. "Time such iniquities should cease."

"I don't see why one man is to be injured that another may be benefited, Aunt," retorted the Major.

"Oh! for Heaven's sake, do let us drop this odious subject," cries Celia. "If we talk till Doomsday, we shall never alter the case."

"That's just your way," said the Major; "always stopping a man's mouth when he has got something to say. I declare it is abominable, it is."

Mrs. Dashwood suddenly rose from the sofa, saying—

"I hate arguments at all times, and I do think the very evening of my coming home, after such painful scenes as I have gone through, I might have been spared a subject known to be disagreeable to me, and one that always forces me to hear innuendoes against my family."

Celia made Aunt Philly a courtesy, and walked out of the room, followed by Stella.

Her tirade was rather strained, and her manner tragi-comic, still it made its impression on Aunt Philly, who privately was very proud of her nephew's pretty, accomplished wife. The Major returned to his newspaper and arm-chair. So ill-assorted, so without sympathy the one with the other, how had this trio come together? The answer is "Circumstances;" and the same answer will explain many of those unions, intimacies, and situations, which provoke the question of how they ever came to exist or subsist. Who knows, when he rises in the morning, what his actions are to be during the day? The state of the atmosphere, a cloud charged with electricity that delays, a clear sky that induces, a visit, some unexpected meeting, and the face of our lives is changed without our consciousness. We trust, we hope, we pray, we try to conjure the future to give us happiness; there is something more to invoke. Submission must play its part towards the inevitable suffering of life. Common sense, reflection, experience, faith, how can they save us? There is no omniscience belonging to the one or the other.

CHAPTER V.

PORTRAITS.

THE garden overlooked by Mrs. Dashwood's bedroom balcony lay fresh and lovely in the autumn sunlight next morning. Four or five tall cedars, their majestic heads seeming to repose on the blue sky, marked the limits of the ground belonging to Waterloo Cottage. There was a man mowing the lawn; and the busy sharpening of his scythe was of that peculiar rural sound, suggestive of green pastures, with milky kine and rosy milkmaids—in fact, of a sort of Arcadia.

Trees, birds, flowers, the vocal and perfumed air, were more than sufficient to heave the bosom of the impressible Celia with pleasurable emotion. Last evening's discomfort was forgotten; even the impression left by the sad scenes at Evian lost its dark hue, as the healthy blood coursed rapidly through her veins, brightening her cheeks, lips and eyes. As she stood in the verandah, eagerly breathing the sweet morning air, feeling that she loved life, vague projects of hitherto unattempted well-doing, of being more worthily employed, played at hide-and-seek in her mind. Her eyes shone with her good intentions; and animated, blooming, with more the appearance of a girl of twenty than of a woman of thirty, she went to seek her young niece. She found Stella on her knees, saying her morning prayers. The girl was pale, depressed-looking. Her nature was composed of sturdier fibres than was that of her aunt. There was in Stella a force of resistance, equally opposed to sudden changes in herself or others, to external as well as internal sudden transformations. Still a child in knowledge, experience, and language, she was already a woman in serious feeling. Her moral powers had made a certain start forward during the past year, her grandmother's unexpected death developing the latent self-reliance of her character. Stella could not have put her meaning into explicit words; but she knew with that quick consciousness given to very young girls as guiding instinct before reason is matured, that her dear pretty auntie would be no stay nor guide for her—that she had none of that rocky material in her composition against which she (Stella) could dash herself in her dark moments, and find support. The journey from Switzerland to England had taught her this.

The first exhibition of the domestic circle in which her aunt lived had painfully recalled many of her grandmother's conversations about this dear auntie: she could not stem this tide of thought, and it carried her on to the saddest of all meditations, whether for old or young—on the absence for her of all happy family ties.

Curiously enough, the comforts of Waterloo

Cottage, its carpets, screens, easy chairs, and footstools, did not impress her happily. She looked back to the large, desolate house, and its nude floors, its nude walls, with longing; she had not been accustomed to the nattiness and luxury, the self-worship visible in every corner of the Dashwoods' home. She did not like it. In it there was none of the chivalrous contempt of creature comforts she had witnessed in her grandmother. Mrs. Joddrell had belonged to a race of giants, in opposition to whom pretty Celia, with her cushions, was very degenerate and commonplace. Stella's grave morning face disappointed Mrs. Dashwood. She had expected her niece to be astonished and charmed by the luxurious prettiness of the room appropriated to her.

Celia having herself forgotten the evening's dissension, had no suspicion that it had sent Stella to bed, disheartened and feeling homeless. Mirrors and lace toilette-covers have no powers to console that state of mind. The girl had in her ears still the many sounds of the beautiful lake, in her eyes still the pale stern face she should see no more: she prayed alone, and was aware of how much she missed her grandmother. Poor Perro, too, left behind with the sister of San Joseph! Mrs. Dashwood took Stella to the drawing-room; the conservatory was on the one side, and what Mrs. Dashwood was pleased to call "her study," on the other. There was the expression of Celia's self on every thing; an artistic harmony of colour and form. But the arrangements spoke more to the highly civilized denizen of great cities, than to a quasi-savage like Stella, who had yet to acquire the desire and need for luxury, before she could admire the means of gratification. Had she spoken her mind at that moment, it would have been to own that she should have preferred toasting her rolls before a wood fire, and flying to and fro between the kitchen and parlour, and bandying words with Rose, to the well-appointed table at which she was now going to breakfast.

The only objects that brought a question from her lips were the pictures over the study mantel-piece. Those were not the days of stern-lined daguerreotypes, but of shadowy water-colours. The artist then in vogue, whatever one's defects, whether of outline, colouring, or expression, managed to produce a charming picture, and, every one allowed, also a capital likeness. It was possible to look at one's own portrait, without the dismal ejaculation of, "Am I really so frightful?" And that, too, in the days of frizzed curls, high heads, and gigot-sleeves, with crinolines inside of them. Only think of sleeves with hoops! With the present fashion, quaint and fantastic as it is, what a portrait would not the artist have made of the lady in question—that is, Mrs. Harriette Hood, the wife of Mr. Hood, the great ship-owner, and Mrs. Celia Dashwood's bosom friend.

Mrs. Hood lives about a quarter of a mile from Waterloo Cottage, on the Heath, in a fine mansion surrounded by fine grounds. She has carriages and horses, manifold men and maid servants, and some few children also, with whom, as she never troubles her friends, it will be useless to vex the reader. Mrs. Hood, quite unintentionally on her part, gets mixed up with Stella's history—she is the unconscious stick that beats the pig, and brings matters to a conclusion satisfactory to all probably but the said pig.

Harriette Hood has not yet quite reached the famous half-way of life—thirty-five years; of an evening, when in good humour, she looks younger. Her face is not handsome, but full of character: you cannot pass her unobserved, for she has that something about her, and in her, which forcibly arrests the attention. Her brow is broad, and not too high; her eyes, deep-set, not constantly bright, nor yet melancholy, serve faithfully to reveal every emotion of her soul. Her nose singularly Saxon, not pretty, but with a wide, sensible bridge. The mouth well curved, not such a common beauty as a fine complexion among the natives of the Fortunate Islands. It was when she laughed that this Mrs. Harriette Hood was pretty. Her jaw was too solid, her shoulders too broad for classical outlines. Nevertheless she was an attractive woman.

She was accustomed honestly to regret her own want of beauty, not as a bait for inane, insincere compliments. A Mr. Stapylton Smyth once replied to her: "Very lucky you have not *that* into the bargain, otherwise you would upset the world."

Celia had added: "I don't know any one I would so little wish for a rival as you, Harriette."

"Nonsense!" says Harriette, "at my age and with my plainness—agreeable plainness if you please,—but still plainness."

"Oh, Harriette! if yours is plainness, it is better than other people's beauty."

Has the reader a clear idea of Mrs. Hood?

In the picture she wore bright crimson ribbons to fasten the drapery of her dress, and bows of the same in her hair (*blond cendré*), of which she had a great profusion. Mrs. Hood could wear crimson with as much good effect as any French or Italian woman.

There was a romantic friendship between Mrs. Harriette and Mrs. Celia, which thus originated. Mrs. Hood adored beauty in woman as much as if she had been a man. Impossible for her to have kindly feelings for any plain one of her sex; she would not have them in her house or at her table, but under vigorous protestation, or as a bribe or reward to her husband.

Mr. Hood, be it said, was a tall, well-figured, well-looking man; according to some, because he had large, placid, blue eyes, and a great talent for silence, he was a benevolent person; others, who pretended to shrewdness themselves, affirmed he was a sharp, hard man, addicted to sarcasm, and habitually laughing in his sleeve at his wife and her society.

His wife spoke approvingly of him, and when her mother-in-law or her sisters-in-law reported to her the suppositions relating to her, currently cherished in their school for scandal, Mrs. Harriette would answer, "she should be a fool, which she was not, to prefer any one to Mr. Hood: he suited her exactly."

Celia, like a "Keepsake," as a French gentleman speaking English had described her, was met by Mrs. Hood in some Hampstead artistic or musical meeting; and, struck by Celia's loveliness, she had been introduced, and immediately vowed herself to this new fancy. A torrent of visits ensued. Mrs. Hood drove out Mrs. Dashwood—Major and Mrs. Dashwood must dine to-day, to-morrow, with the Hoods—morning, noon, and night, pages and grooms were conveying and reconveying tiny notes.

"You admire my Harriette, don't you, Stella?" asked Celia, fondly wiping off a speck on the glass of the picture.

"No; it is not a nice face."

"But you will not be able to help admiring her when you see her. She is one of the persons a picture never does justice to; you may not think much of her at first, but she is one who throws every one else into the shade, I assure you, when once you come to know her."

"I like *this* face," said Stella, pointing to another picture.

"Of course you know who that is?"

Stella shook her head.

"How should I, Auntie?"

They were standing before the half length of a youth; also by the artist then in vogue. The face was finely formed, the chin rather long, giving the head a resemblance to the portraits of the men of Shakspeare's time. The complexion was pale, of an opaque white—glorious, thoughtful, dark hazel eyes—all the limner's skill had been called into action to do justice to those eyes. As for the rest of the features, they were good and in keeping; perhaps, too clearly cut to be considered as belonging to an English type; doubtless the original of the portrait had southern blood in his veins. There were signs of intellect enough and to spare, but the crowning merit of the countenance consisted in this: you could not trace a line in it indicative of anything petty—of any lurking vanity—yet you would not term it exactly an open or frank face—you could imagine rather its present calm vanished, replaced by a profound melancholy, or the eyes flashing with angry, lurid light.

"Don't you guess who that is, Stella?" reiterated Mrs. Dashwood.

"Not papa? Oh, now I know: it is cousin Louis."

"Yes; it is cousin Louis, as you call him—what he was at twenty, when he was an Edinburgh student. Who can tell what the slave-driver is like? I dare say nearly as black as one of his own negroes—a perfect rum-and-water savage." Celia spoke in a harsh voice.

"He does not look like a bad boy," said Stella, "yet grandmamma quite hated him. She called him selfish, and all sorts of bad names."

"She was fond enough of him once," replied Celia, "but he disappointed her sorely. In her secret soul, my poor mother despised every profession but that of the army or navy. Louis refused a cadetship to India, all to go back to that horrid Silver Hill of his."

"But papa went back to Jamaica," objected Stella.

"He was very differently situated. He could keep as many overseers and book-keepers to do his dirty work as he chose. Your papa had town-house, country-house, mountain-house. He is the *custos rotulorum* of his parish, styled the Honourable George Joddrell; he is in the House of Assembly, while Louis cannot even have a book-keeper, but must look after his property himself, nothing better than a negro-driver."

"Why would he not have the cadetship?"

"Some overstrained notion that he owed it to his mother to go back to her, as she was a widow, and he was her only child."

"Do you think he would have liked better to have gone to the East Indies?"

Celia hesitated.

"I am not sure. I don't know. I remember when he and mamma quarrelled about it, his saying, as it was a choice of blacks, he preferred his own. That is a likeness of his mother when she was seventeen."

Mrs. Dashwood pointed to a small miniature of a girl in white muslin, blue sash, and powdered hair.

"I cannot make out any face: it's all dots," said Stella.

"Well, she is rather a weak, washed-out person in reality, so I have been told at least; but, poor thing," went on Celia, "her life has been a very sad one: really, some people's lives seem riveted and iron-clasped into them. What that little woman has suffered would suffice to kill a dozen Hercules. Her father cursed her for marrying Mr. Gautier, who did not turn out the best of husbands. She lost child after child, and at last Mr. Gautier was killed by a fall from his mule, three months before Louis's birth, leaving her little beside a legacy of debts."

"I think Louis was quite right to go back to her," said Stella, with great warmth and decision.

"There are two sides to every question, Miss Enthusiast, but Louis never did see but one, he will always be one-sided. Mamma had a right to be considered as well as his mother. She had saved them from having Silver Hill taken from them after Mr. Gautier's death, getting my father to take up the mortgage. Mamma paid out of her own purse for Louis' education; he was sent to the same school where your father had been educated, he lived in our house when mamma came to England, just as if he had been her son. His mother had done without him for twelve years, she could have gone on without him for twelve more, they knew nothing of one another, there's no softness in Louis—yes, he was ungrateful."

Stella heard such an irritation in her aunt's voice, that she remained silent for a minute; but her curiosity about all her relations made her venture on one more question.

"Are the Gautiers very poor still?"

"They can't be rich, because their property is small; but they have managed somehow to clear it of all debt."

"I am very glad, he cannot be a bad man," said Stella.

"Proud as Lucifer, son of the morning," laughed Celia.

There was a black silhouette on the mantelpiece, which was not Major Dashwood. Stella took it in her hand, asking—

"Is this papa?"

"No, indeed," said Celia. "Your papa cannot boast of such a classical profile. Poor brother George, he is a regular bluff, round-featured, square-made John Bull, but he was a pretty boy—there's his picture behind you."

A commonplace oil painting represented Stella's father as a boy of fifteen in his first coat.

"That black thing," explained Celia, "is a Mr. Smythe, whom you will see some day."

At breakfast-time the general post brought Mrs. Dashwood a letter from Mrs. Hood, dated Brighton, a closely written and crossed epistle. It began—"Celina, Nina, darling:" it ended—"I embrace you in the spirit till I can do so in the body; the gods alone know when that will be, for Hood has taken an obstinate fit about the sea air being necessary for the children.

Nota bene: They are all in a plethora of good health. S. S. is here, airing his handsome self on the Steyne, and pretending he cares not for men, nor women either, when all the while he would commit suicide if he believed himself unnoticed. He says it is quite unnatural to see me without you, and that he does not like his scoldings half so well given in my Amazonian tones, as when your dove-like coo mingles therewith: I suppose as you have just flown back to the nest, I must not do so desperate a deed as to ask you to come to me here, and yet we shall not move for another six weeks, I know. What are you going to do with the niece? Do not keep her with you, she'll be horridly in our way. *Be on your guard.* Miss Philly will be on the look-out for bringing a little money into the family by the girl's board. Send Miss Stella to Mrs. Tait's, or I'll never forgive you."

Celia refolded the letter in a musing manner;

it had set her powerful imagination in motion, and she already foresaw with flashing lucidity a terrific interference with what was the happiness of her life. Celia was always under some dominant influence. She was a susceptible, clinging creature, all over tendrils that adhered, but did not twine round and round a chosen support, or force a passage into the very core, and become with it one and indivisible. There was no heart-breaking wrench when wrench there came; she drooped only till she could again attach herself. But she had this peculiarity: once detached, it was for ever.

She was actually shuddering at the breakfast table at visions of the sacrifice of a society all in all to her at the present time. Celia could never judge of a position. She rushed to an extreme immediately. "To be horridly in the way" was tantamount "to being for ever separated from Harriette" by a gorgon in Stella's shape. Aunt Philly and Major Dashwood were conspiring to dig a pitfall into which they meant her to fall. This was the twenty-ninth of September; Jamaica packet-day was close at hand. She would write to brother George, and get the business off her mind. She would ask him what he wished to be done with his daughter, as—oh! Jesuitical Celia—the want of a house of her own precluded her proposing to take charge of his dear girl, until her education should be completed. He knew by this time of their late lamented mother's wish that Stella should return to him as soon as possible. All that she (Celia) had it in her power to offer was to keep Stella with her until she received her dear brother's directions.

Celia felt very treacherous towards her confiding, loving niece. She knew that the idea of going to a school had never come into the poor girl's head. Celia was self-condemned, too, for the cruel hint thrown out in her letter, of sending Stella, with a woman's growth and a woman's sensitive feelings, to be penned up with a parcel of thoughtless children, certain to make a mockery of her want of the glittering erudition indigenous to all establishments for young ladies. But not for self-condemnation did the pretty aunt hesitate; Harriette told her to be on her guard, and she was on her guard.

By the same mail Stella wrote to her father; she stated her deficiencies broadly, and required rather than petitioned Mr. Joddrell to grant her the means of having the best masters.

"I have cost you little hitherto, dear Papa," so she wrote. "You know that poor grandmamma gave me no means of learning what young ladies learn. I suppose you left me with her so long, that I might take care of her, as neither you nor Auntie could do so, but now let me make up for lost time. I am your only child, so I am sure you can afford it. I want a piano master, and a singing master. I want to learn drawing, dancing and Italian. French I know, and I should like to have riding lessons. You must make out a list of all I may do, that dear auntie may not be worried, and write by the very next packet and say how long it will be before I go to Jamaica. I am much taller than auntie, and we hope I shall not grow any more; and

"I am, dearest Papa,
"Your affectionate child,
"STELLA PEPITA JODDRELL."

CHAPTER VI.

MISTRESS AND PUPIL.

Her letter to Mr. Joddrell was gone; Celia "had got it off her mind:" the expression was a common one of Mrs. Dashwood's, and felicitously rendered her feeling. Whatever the subject, she could and did dismiss it from her thoughts as soon as she had taken any step towards its solution.

During the six weeks before Mrs. Hood's return to Hampstead, Stella was very happy. Celia petted her; Mrs. Joddrell had described it as Celia's way. Nor with all her impatience after what young ladies learn, did Stella show any impatience under her present deprivation of Italian, or the piano, or dancing. For the first time in her life the young lady had it in her power to read a romance. She sat in the study day after day, dead to this world, alive only to that in which the heroes and heroines of Walter Scott moved and had their being. Her dumb faculties were being unlocked, the eyes of her soul unsealed; the haze over her thoughts being lifted away, the miracle of light was taking place for her. There was none by to mark her. All the morning Celia was engrossed by her maid or her letters. Aunt Philly was in her store-room; the Major shut up with his newspaper. For a wonder, these three persons had a unanimous opinion; they all described Stella as the very best and least troublesome girl in the world. They left her to stillness and solitude; she had a book in her hand, therefore she was out of mischief. In stillness and solitude her imagination worked, probing the emotions she read of. Girl-like she clothed with flesh and blood the enchanter's offspring. Seated opposite to

Celia's picture, her favourite heroes, every one of them, took the features of Cousin Louis. Leicester and those resembling him were like the black silhouette; the ladies, such as excited her indignation, assumed the semblance of Mrs. Hood; Amy Robsart, Rowena, and Lucy Ashton were her aunt; Flora McIvor and Rebecca, the dark-haired and dark-eyed, the devoted, the unhappy, she blushed at doing so, but she could not help identifying them with herself.

The day Stella had finished the Bride of Lammermuir, she craved for some sympathy. She had almost wept the eyes out of her head. The first time she found her aunt alone she began, plunging into her subject abruptly, as her wont was—

"Auntie, *do* you think that there is really love like Lucy Ashton's and Ravenswood's in the world, now?"

Mrs. Dashwood had a recollection that in her young days, it used to be considered highly indecorous to talk of love before girls, that mammas and aunts were accustomed to whisper among themselves of the existence of such a thing, or insinuate it by dreadful wry faces. This was the first time Celia had been called on to act the maternal character; so she bridled up a little, and answered Stella's question diplomatically by asking another—

"Why otherwise are there marriages?"

"But love like *that?*" persisted Stella.

Mrs. Dashwood became Celia again; laughed, blushed, and, with a shake of her long curls, answered:—"I don't know."

A silence of a minute or two, then Stella went on—

"I can understand loving one's parents and brothers and friends—doing like Flora. I should have quite despised her had she married Waverley." Stella was leaning towards her aunt, her great dusky eyes full of anxious meaning. "I wonder if I ever shall! Does everybody?"

"No; I believe not—at least so I have read," replied the puzzled matron.

"Did you, auntie—ever?" This interrogation was spoken in a very low, hesitating voice.

"What a question, child! do you expect me to answer it?"

"Why should you be ashamed?"

"Stella, you are a goose—talking of these sort of things is like talking of one's religious feelings."

Stella considered for an instant; looked perplexed, as if the knot of her thoughts was beyond her power to unloose; first she uttered some broken words, then, as if she had caught the right end of the thread, she added, with gravity—

"We ought not to be ashamed of confessing we love God and our Lord; you know we are told, 'He will be ashamed of us if we are.'"

"Now, Stella, my child, this is what I cannot endure, mixing up sacred and profane subjects.

Love like that mentioned in the Gospel has nothing to do with, and ought NEVER to be coupled with that other one."

"Must it not?" asked Stella, and here the conversation ended.

Mrs. Dashwood's uneasiness at the new phase of thought into which she saw her niece had entered, was not little. As the only person with authority over Stella, she felt herself called upon to do something in the way of checking, encouraging, or directing her to some good purpose, and, at the same time, Celia had the consciousness of not being quite clear about the course that was best to pursue.

This consciousness was the spur that made her send Stella to practise the piano a couple of hours every morning, and afterwards call her to read aloud Russell's Modern Europe. Celia was working a regal pair of slippers for Mrs. Hood, and was well amused finding her place in the pattern, and matching her colours, but for poor Stella the change from Walter Scott was very dreary.

For a few days Celia kept up this sort of surveillance, and during this time she opened her mother's desk; she had never yet had courage to do so.

The sight of the familiar objects, some of her own child's story-books—her own first glove, her own first copy-book, a lock of her hair when she was a baby, when a girl, and the long ringlet severed on the eve of her wedding-day; some trifling presents she had made to her mother, labelled "From my precious Celia;" the miniature, with the glass dimmed perhaps by the very tear that Stella had seen roll on it from the stern eyes: one and all of the relics troubled the heart, and shook the fragile frame, of the daughter.

The secret of Mrs. Joddrell's penurious economy came to light. In one drawer were two small packets; on the one was written—"For my funeral expenses;"—on the other,—"For my dear only daughter, from her ever affectionate mother." Each parcel contained money: a large sum had been saved for Celia.

Celia threw herself on Stella's neck. "I wish I had never done as I did. I wish I had never married. Oh! how I wish she were alive, I would bear with all—I would never cross her! Oh! why—why did I ever leave her?—what love is like hers?—I shall never be happy again. Mamma! mamma! take me to you." She clenched her hands, threw her head back till her whole face was turned to the sky with upbraiding, pleading looks. "No time was given me to make her know that I did love her better than any one, and now who is to comfort me and take this dreadful, dreadful pain from me!"

Stella held her aunt in her arms and answered her:—

"It was only because you were married grandmamma was angry with you. She said you never gave her half the trouble that I did, and that it was uncle and Miss Dashwood made you do what you did. She never blamed you, Auntie, and you saw how comforted she was when you came."

Celia sobbed on; but the heavy tide of feeling was already on the turn.

"Do you remember grandmamma's eyes?" went on Stella; "how they looked like a dove's after you arrived. She was not angry with *you* a bit—poor auntie, don't cry so. I don't think if you had done ever so, you could have helped grandmamma's being unhappy."

Celia turned her blue eyes like violets wet with dew on her little friend; she resembled a repentant child rather than a sorrowing, remorseful woman. This extremely youthful appearance always did serve as an apology for Celia's extremely unformed character. To expect firmness or lasting impressions from such a tender plant, would have seemed nothing less than absurd. Her emotions were acute but fleeting; they were fast ebbing even now, and with a vehement impatience of suffering, she exclaimed, in answer to Stella's assurances, "I hope so; you do not say this only to comfort me, do you, Stella? When poor mamma was alive, it never came into my head that I was behaving so, that it would be downright torture to me when she was dead. Every one said I was right not to stay with her, that being married it was not my duty; and now I feel as if I would give anything I had never left her, but borne with her; I even wonder I ever thought her wrong and tyrannical. I often wake in the night and see her as I did the day I arrived at Evian, and I dream of her taking me to parties." The sweet blue eyes once more overflowed.

"Grandmamma said she was not at all jealous," replied Stella, in her strong, truthful way; "but she was; the reason she was never pleased with you, was because of uncle. She never really thought you were wrong: when you were at a distance, she wouldn't allow that any one could be equal to you."

"Did you love your grandmamma, Stella?"

"Yes, while I was a little child I loved her dearly; she was very good to me then, but latterly she was bitter, and I was bitter, and she reproached me with my Spanish blood, and that was like speaking ill of my mother—it made me feel revengeful. It is very hard to be really good, Auntie."

Celia did not answer, she was handling some of the rings and brooches packed in the desk.

"I want you to have some of these gewgaws, Stella."

"No, I thank you, Auntie; grandmamma didn't mean that I should. She trusted to me that I would take care you should have them all."

"But if they are mine, I may give some of them to you."

"No; there are packets for papa. See—even one for Louis, with a lock of her soft grey hair; my name is nowhere; I won't have anything." Celia saw Stella was in earnest, and did not press her offer.

"Auntie," began Stella again, "I believe there is something disagreeable for me to know about myself. Will you tell me what it is?"

"My dear Stella, your poor mamma is dead and ——."

"Stop a minute, dear Auntie, and just hear me: there is something wrong. I am sure of it now. I *must* know it some day, and I would not like to ask papa. He is not ashamed of my being born, is he?"

"No,—no! it is not that."

"What is it, then?"

"I wish I knew whether it would be right to tell you," hesitated Celia.

"Pray, pray do, dear Auntie," persisted Stella.

"You never knew your mother's maiden name, did you?" began Celia.

Stella, surprised, answered, "Yes: Josepha or Pepita Gautier."

Celia shook her head. "No; she had nothing whatever to do with the Gautiers. The story, as far as I know it, is this. At the time when Louis's father escaped from the massacre of St. Domingo, he saved the life of an unknown Spanish woman and her two little daughters, one quite a baby, and paid for their passage, in the same ship with himself, to Jamaica. The woman turned out to be Loaysa Perez, a famous rope-dancer; and it was the eldest of those children saved by Mr. Gautier, who afterwards became my brother's wife and your mother. Mr. Gautier very shortly after arriving in Jamaica bought Silver Hill, the next plantation to my father's, fell desperately in love with my mother's sister, and married her too, in spite of every one. It was just about the same time, that the Perez, finding little encouragement in Kingston, was going to Spain. The child Pepita had attached herself in a most extraordinary manner to Mr. Gautier; and he persuaded his bride to adopt her. Of course when George went to take possession of Cedar Valley he became acquainted with her. We none of us knew of his marriage till you appeared; and an awful explosion there was, I assure you."

"And what became of the others, Auntie?"

"Señora Perez, the mother, died years ago. Her youngest daughter was a rope-dancer also. I believe she was very famous. I have an idea I once saw her at Vauxhall floating about in the middle of fire-works."

"Then, that is what grandmamma meant by saying, she could tell me something that would take the pride out of me."

"Ah! poor mamma! George's marriage was an awful blow to her."

"And is this all you can tell me, Auntie?"

"Very little more, Stella. When your father went back to Jamaica, after leaving you in England, to his horror and astonishment he found a Madame Olympia, who said she was your mother's sister, domiciled at Silver Hill. I believe the old Señora Perez had written a letter before she died to Aunt Gautier, begging her to be kind to her daughter, who had made some bad marriage. George has never told me any particulars; he said it was a ridiculous, romantic business, with which he would have nothing to do."

"And is she at Silver Hill now?"

"Oh! dear, yes: the Gautiers, mother and son, make an idol of her."

"And what is her other name besides Olympia."

"Heaven knows! I don't; and remember, Stella, we *none* of us ever speak of her; there is no necessity: *Il faut laver son linge sale en famille.*"

"She could not help being a rope-dancer," said Stella.

"I don't say she could, but let each rank keep its own sphere," said Celia, colouring, and speaking angrily.

Stella's face was hidden in a sofa cushion, but there was a motion of the shoulders that showed she was weeping.

"Do not cry or you'll make me regret that I ever told you," said Celia; "and for Heaven's sake never say anything about being half Spanish, otherwise the whole story will be ferreted out, and there will be no end of gossip."

"We are a very unfortunate family," observed Stella, her former set of ideas reviving; "I wonder if we *are* under a punishment."

"What for?" asked Celia.

"Suppose it should be for having slaves."

"There's no harm in that, Stella; the custom of possessing slaves is mentioned both in the Old and New Testaments. It's an institution like any other. The Romans had even white slaves. We were allowed to have them by the laws of this country. Don't let Aunt Philly make you a blue light, my dear child."

"Pompey is free?"

"Of course, the moment he touched English soil he became free."

"There cannot be two right ways, Auntie, one for England and just the contrary for Jamaica."

"I think as my parents thought," returned Celia; "I am sure they were as good as most people, far better than these saints, who are so generous with other people's property. I advise you not to talk in that way to your father."

Celia was not calculated to guide the young; everything became a personal matter with her. She could not express dissent or put forth advice with the calm of a superior who disinterestedly finds fault with an inferior; there was a passionate tone and look that always brought her down to the level of the one she was instructing.

Stella valiantly withheld her tongue from further discussion. She would not tease poor auntie, and again on going to bed she thought, "how hard it is to be really good." Stella was thinking solely of her own defects, pretty auntie was not to be judged. The girl had avoided arguing; yes, but nevertheless, that youngest member of a family, dependent on slave labour and brought up in its reverence, lay down to rest that night with her young heart overshadowed by the dread that her kindred were under a curse for its sake.

Are there divine revelations now-a-days? Surely not. The fact was, one of the great epochs of English History was at hand. The public conscience was crying aloud to be relieved from a burden it found intolerable. Society was positively tumultuous with petitions for the freedom of the blacks. The cry against slavery was in every mouth. Pictures of men in chains, more terrible than those quoted by Aunt Philly, met every eye. The men appointed to overcome the monstrous evil had appeared, and were bearing down the passionate resistance of the West Indians, with the resistless force of a national agitation. Tens of thousands of unconscious missionaries, as is always the case when a question is ripe for solution, were busy pushing round the wheel of the Propaganda of Emancipation; none more zealously or unconsciously than Aunt Philly, through whose bigoted and prejudiced notions on the matter, Stella was notwithstanding contriving to arrive at a tolerably sound and just estimate of the great wrong existing, and of the great redress it demanded.

CHAPTER VII.

A FIRST PARTY.

With November came Mrs. Hood; she walked from her house to Waterloo Cottage, and opening the drawing-room like one at home, found *her* Celia giving Stella a music lesson.

Size is always imposing, and Mrs. Hood had besides that attribute peculiar to ladies denominated "stylish," of taking up more room than any other of her sex present, the faculty also of making every woman she met feel herself ill-dressed. Stella rose from the piano, waiting while the two ladies embraced, but finding herself unnoticed she slipped away.

"Did I not warn you what would be the case," said Mrs. Hood reproachfully.

"It's only till I hear from George," was Mrs. Dashwood's humble reply; "really I had not the heart to leave the girl to herself; she was getting into mischief."

"If she were, you are not the one, my dear child, to keep her out of it. You ought never to trust to your own judgment in such things, Celia. Don't you see you have been making a case against yourself by playing governess at all. I foresee how it will end."

"I am not so soft as you think," returned Celia, with a flush on her cheek; "I can be firm enough when I choose."

"Well, show your spirit now by giving up to-day entirely to me without asking any one's leave, and then we can trace out the plan of a campaign for you. Let the girl alone; if she has good dispositions she'll be good, and if she hasn't she won't—you can't change nature. One of my girls is an angel, and the other is—hem! and yet they are the children of the same parents."

Celia's doubts and qualms of responsibility vanished before her friend's sunny presence. Old habits of gossip and intimacy were renewed. Stella was left once again to her heroes and heroines; the number increased by those of the Corsair and Lara. How she did devour these poems! All the rest of one day, after finishing Lara, she went about the house, in the same state of uneasy excitement that she would have felt had she been an eye-witness to some tragical occurrence.

A walk with Major Dashwood in the forenoon on the heath, enjoined by Celia, and backgammon in the evening imposed by Aunt Philly, were the stern realities of Stella's life.

A batch of elderly ladies called at regular intervals on Miss Dashwood; and the clergyman's wife, the doctor's wife, and the widow of the Colonel of Major Dashwood's regiment, appeared at the cottage from time to time. But Celia was far too careless, and at the same time too exclusive to keep up any regular round of visiting.

Mrs. Hood had been a month at home when she said to Celia, "Hood has met your niece with Major Dashwood two or three times on the heath, and he is in one of his obstinate fits. He insists on the propriety of my inviting Miss Stella to come sometimes with you to our house. He has no idea—no man ever has—what a restraint a girl of that age is."

"Tell him, though she is so tall, she is not old enough to go to grown up parties," said Celia.

"What would be the use of telling him? Two days after he would begin again just as if one had never said a word on the subject. No, no! Bring the girl, and let us be done with it. If he sees her once he'll be quiet. I'll ask the Bury girls, and then they can dance."

Stella had never been to a party in her life; her ideas on this point, drawn from her daily reading, were very magnificent. The evening fixed for her going to the Hoods found her full of wondering, dreadful expectation. Her heart beat fast as the carriage stopped before the broad flight of stone steps which led up to the great door of the mansion. Powdered footmen in gay liveries astonished her. She took the butler for a gentleman, and immediately after mistook Mr. Hood for the butler. Their dress, indeed, was identical. Like master, like man.

Mrs. Hood met the Dashwoods at the drawing-room door, and after a few brief words of welcome, she carried off Stella to a sofa on which sat two young ladies.

"Make room for my young friend between you, dears; Miss Joddrell, Isabel and Adela Bury. Now you are to be charmed with one another;" and away went Mrs. Hood.

Hitherto Stella had kept her large eyelids over her eyes; she now began to glance shyly from side to side. How pretty all the ladies are! like pictures! The sisters, Isabel and Adela, with their long brown curls, their white muslins and blue ribbons, so dazzled her that for one instant she anxiously sought to see Mrs. Dashwood, to make sure that pretty auntie was not outshone.

There were so many nymphs grouped about, or darting half merrily, half timidly across the room, that she could not at once distinguish Celia. Unconscious in her eagerness she rose from her seat, thus herself attracting the notice of several persons. One gentleman actually started, as he caught sight of her.

"Who is that?" asked Mr. Smythe, the "S. S." of Mrs. Hood's letter, touching that lady on the arm, and motioning with his head in Stella's direction.

"Do you mean the girl in black between the Burys?" He nodded assent. "That's only Celia's niece, a Miss Joddrell. What a way of dressing!" and Mrs. Hood put up her lip.

Mr. Smythe turned his gaze from Stella to Mrs. Hood, letting a half satirical smile appear on his face.

"It does not much matter how she's dressed, she is the handsomest girl in the room."

"Of course: *belle de sa laideur.*" And the lady laughed.

"I wonder at *you*," returned S. S., "for you *can* judge of another woman's beauty."

"I must confess, that in this case I only see a gawky girl with large eyes," said the lady.

"Ah! what eyes! examine their shape; and then the lashes: I never before saw an Englishwoman with such long thick eyelashes."

"They must be like horsehair, if you can see them from this distance," observed Mrs. Hood.

"It is the shade they throw on her cheek, which reveals them to me."

"You had better reveal to Celia the beauties of her niece, and exhort her to make the girl look a little more like other people."

"What do you find fault with?" asked Mr. Smythe; "her dress, not too high nor too low, seems to me very maidenly and appropriate, and now I think of it, it has the very cut chosen by Rafaele and Leonardo for their ideal women."

"And you approve of the way her hair is strained off her forehead, as if she were going to wash her face! you admire that, too, don't you?"

"A trick to show her beautiful ear; but I assure you, those heavy plaits are very Grecian."

Mrs. Hood, with a slight toss of her frizzed head, left him.

Dancing began, and Stella's neighbours were led off by partners. She was looking on with curiosity, pleasure, and longing, when she was startled by a gentleman asking her to dance.

"Thank you, sir, but I have never learned to dance," answered Stella, with a stern promptitude amazingly diverting to Mr. Smythe.

"Why, what have you been doing all your

life?" he said, smiling, as he seated himself by her side. The smile and voice were of rare sweetness.

Mr. Smythe was a tall thin man, broad of shoulder, with the stoop of delicate health. His forehead was high, shaded with clustering light brown curls. He had blue eyes, well opened, but rather sunk in his head, an aquiline nose, and a beautiful mouth. He would have been a remarkably handsome man, both as regards figure and face, had he been healthy. As it was, at first, you could only see the traces of what he might have been; but once accustomed to his invalid appearance, women in particular pronounced him handsome.

With something of his own half-jesting, half-earnest manner the girl replied—

"Nothing but growing up, I believe."

"You can read, I hope?" studying the already firm intellectual lines of her face.

This time she smiled, and again Mr. Smythe felt the same wonder as to who she was. A silence ensued, Stella watching the dancing, her foot keeping time to the music; Mr. Smythe earnestly yet furtively examining her features.

"Would you like to go nearer to the dancers? See how your aunt and Mrs. Hood are watching us."

Stella looked towards the pair of ladies, perfectly unembarrassed, as she got up from the sofa.

"Won't you take my arm?" continued Mr. Smythe; "it is quite proper to do so, I assure you."

Stella put her hand on his offered arm, saying—

"I have never been to a party before."

"Where could you have been living to escape parties?"

"With my grandmamma, at a little town called Evian," replied the literal Stella.

"Then you know French. *Ce n'est que le* *premier pas qui coûte.* I shall soon not be able to distinguish you from the Miss Burys, or any other belles. You will be surprised to find how easy it is to acquire their airs and graces."

"But I shall not be going to parties for a long while. After Christmas I am to begin having lessons."

"Nonsense!" looking astonished.

"It is dreadful, isn't it, at my age to be so far back in everything?"

Stella's was real simplicity. Mr. Smythe's long experience allowed him at once to decide between the real and the imitation.

"Certainly you are very tall for a schoolroom," he replied. "I suppose I must not ask how old you are?"

"Oh, yes, you may. I was sixteen last month."

Mr. Smythe thought, "What a pity to teach you to be anything but what you are!" but he said aloud—

"I should say Mrs. Hood has designs on one of us. See how she is sailing through the confusion directly down upon us. Can you sing or play? You say No? Very well: shall we run away from her?"

"If you like," replied Stella, briskly.

Mr. Smythe laughed.

"You do not admire Mrs. Hood, I perceive."

Stella answered—

"No; she is out of proportion."

"Better and better," thought Mr. Smythe. "So, Miss Joddrell, you are an artist." Stella gave a little shake of the head. "I mean you have a turn for drawing."

"I cannot tell yet; but I am going to learn."

Mrs. Hood was now standing in front of Mr. Smythe, steadily regarding him with hard, unwinking eyes; however, her tone was courteous enough as she said—

"Will you sing something while the Bury girls are getting back their breath?"

"I am always at your command, fair lady."

"Come at once then," adding, without looking at Stella, as she took hold of Mr. Smythe's disengaged arm, "Miss Joddrell will excuse you."

Stella understood very well that Mrs. Hood wanted her away, but she hesitated at the idea of being left alone in the middle of the large room. She looked round for her aunt, involuntarily tightening her hold on Mr. Smythe's left arm. As the trio were advancing towards the piano, Mrs. Hood said, in a fierce whisper—

"I didn't know your taste before; you had better go to the nursery the next time you come here."

Stella espied a quiet seat in a corner, and letting go her hold of Mr. Smythe, went and installed herself there.

Mr. Smythe's singing was very imperfect; no one would ever have dreamed of comparing him with Rubini, the Mario of those far away days, yet Mr. Smythe had a voice that penetrated to your heart; he had notes that made you feel cold from head to foot. He sang, one after the other, several ballads—Italian, Spanish, even Romaic; picked up, this last, from Greek boatmen. Mr. Smythe had been all over Europe, if not over Asia and Africa, for he was a member of a club where only men who had seen the Great Desert could be admitted, and all the while he sang he watched Stella flushing and turning white, and her serious eyes suddenly soften and glisten.

When he left the piano, he did not seek Stella again; he did not intend to quarrel with Mrs. Hood. Stella expected him to come and speak to her; she even wished it, that she might tell him how beautiful his music was. She rather wondered to see him seek the sisters, Isabel and Adela, and seated between them appear quite devoted to them.

Adela played the guitar, the two girls sang charming little duets. Mr. Smythe fetched the instrument, and passed the broad blue ribbon over Adela's shoulders with an air that convinced Stella Mr. Smythe must be devotedly attached, like another Edgar Ravenswood, to that young lady. It was just such a manner as she had read of.

When the young ladies had finished their song a doubt crept over her, so earnest was now Mr. Smythe's look and whisper to Isabel, if, after all, Isabel might not be the object of his secret adoration. Suddenly, before she could settle the point, there was a little bustle, and Miss Adela was led into a space cleared for her in the centre of the room. Once more Mr. Smythe placed the guitar in her hands and the ribbon over her neck. Adela played and danced to her own music a little figure dance, which so delighted Stella that she joined with the gentlemen in clapping.

"So you admire the exhibition, do you?"

said Mr. Smythe, coming up suddenly to her.

"I do, indeed; I shall be so glad to know how to dance."

"You would like to be in Miss Adela's place?"

"I am too big; but, when music is playing, I feel as if I could act a story to it."

"Do you?" and Mr. Smythe's face assumed an expression of actual disgust. "It is a strange coincidence," he continued, half to her, half to himself, "for you really reminded me at first sight of a person I once heard say something of the same sort."

A recollection also shot through Stella's brain, a distressing recollection of what her mother's mother and her mother's sister had both been. Perhaps she was like them, and the inclination to rope-dancing, considered as such a disgraceful secret by her father's family, might run in that Spanish blood of hers. Who could tell but that this gentleman, so kind, so very kind, only a minute ago, now looking and speaking scornfully, might have seen those near relations performing?

The feeling of anything in one's self, or in one's history, which is to be concealed, makes the most innocent ready to take alarm.

"I wish I could see my aunt," said Stella.

"I will find her for you," and Mr. Smythe moved away.

The sixteen-year-old Stella went home from her first party with a weight on her spirit. "I wonder what could make me say such a foolish thing?" was the ever recurring thought.

CHAPTER VIII.

S. S.

Mr. Stapylton Smythe returned that night to his lodgings, over a circulating library in Mortimer Street, in Mrs. Bury's carriage. Every one knows the sort of half affectionate, half paternal manner gentlemen of a certain age adopt towards girls. Mrs. Bury, after depositing her ineligible cavalier, employed the time of the drive from Mortimer Street to her own dwelling in Queen Anne Street in lecturing her two young ladies, and in calling Mr. Stapylton Smythe by very ugly names. Naturally, Isabel and Adela only liked him all the better; but we have nothing to do with Mrs. Bury or the "Bury girls," and a great deal to do with Mr. Stapylton Smythe.

He has taken his candle from Miss Herring, who generally sits up for him herself. She is a spare woman of thirty-five, full of devotion to her lodger. She never presses him for money, and allows him to pay her by instalments, and at long intervals.

Mr. Smythe has given her his sweet smile, and is now alone in his drawing-room, within which is his bed-room. The rooms are shabbily and scantily furnished; there are, however, handsomely bound books on the centre table, a vase of rare china in which are costly exotic flowers. And on chairs are pictures of some pretension, as if waiting to be hung up; there is a Holy Family, a dying Magdalen (very green), and two small oil landscapes are on the chimney-piece. Foils, masks, boxing-gloves, Turkish yataghans, curious pipes, riding whips, dog whips, whistles, are scattered about the room. Before the smouldering fire a rich dressing gown, rather worn at the elbows, is spread out on the shabby easy chair, and a pair of elaborately worked slippers are inside the fender.

Mr. Smythe has changed his evening coat for the dressing gown, his polished boots for the slippers of red and gold; he holds his hands towards the fire; they are so thin and transparent that they have a false air of elegance; the feet are large and flat, and no thinness can give them an air of high race.

In other respects Stapylton Smythe had an aristocratic look, though he had no right to it by birth; he had picked it up as he had done other trifles in his passage through life up to his thirty-ninth year. For instance, he had begun life as Richard Smith, he was now Stapylton Smythe; picked up two "y's" and an "e." He had a sort of right to the name of Stapylton, it being his mother's maiden name, and no doubt his manners, habits, and appearance were more in accordance with a Stapylton Smythe than with a Dick Smith.

Like many other agreeable, sensible people, Mr. Smythe seasoned his discourse with high and world-known titles, and might do so more truthfully than many. He had at one period, the most brilliant episode of his career, been the *protégé* of the bosom friend of the wife of a Premier of Great Britain. He had made love to the lovely daughter of an English Ambassador, and not been severely frowned away; he had been the idol of the young female part of a worthy Admiral's family. There was a tradition extant, that one of those young ladies married out of pique under his very eyes, and was unhappy ever afterwards. Even at this present time, there were rumours afloat in his circle of his matrimonial intentions, the ladies, however, moving in a less elevated region — denizens of Harley Street and Devonshire Place, in lieu of Park Lane and Grosvenor Square.

Fortune had been ever kindly to him, who in early life had been Richard Smith. When he was twenty years old—that is to say, twenty years before the date of Mr. Hood's party—he had been offered the appointment of paymaster to a regiment, and had declined, forsooth, because he was not to wear exactly the same uniform as the officers. Richard was the fourth or fifth son of a small attorney of C——, and one of the handsomest fellows parading the streets of his native town—also a garrison town.

The military life rejected, Richard Smith the father was at his wit's end how to dispose properly of a son so much the object of public admiration.

The captain of a three-decker line-of-battle ship, a great growly old fellow, came to the rescue. He met the C —— Adonis at a jovial party, and was so highly delighted with his good looks, his singing, and his histrionic powers, that he forthwith offered him the berth of private secretary on board the old "Thunderbolt"— private secretary to help the gallant old captain to bear his *ennui.*

The name of the thing decided its being accepted; Richard went on board the good ship, narrowly escaped any share in the naval glory won by the "Thunderbolt," through an attack of fever, which sent the private secretary to the hospital at Gibraltar.

His illness, his youth and beauty—together with his friendlessness—excited quite a small sensation. Every woman on that remarkable and uncomfortable rock was interested for him, and when he was convalescent he received a pretty little ovation. The youth, in spite of his personal advantages, had a share of common sense; he would have nothing more to do with the sea—no, not though he could ride the waves triumphantly in a three-decker, like many other triumphs better to see than endure; he preferred going to Lisbon for change of air to making any attempt to rejoin the Jupiter of the "Thunderbolt."

He carried some letters of recommendation from his new friends to citizens of Lisbon, and very soon after became manager to one among the first wine-merchants who have a *quinta* on the Tagus.

During the years when France and Italy were dangerous resting-places, invalids from Great Britain were often sent to Lisbon and thereabouts. Among the consumptive patients came a lady belonging to a noble family with her husband. They were provided, as befitted their rank, with all sorts of excellent introductions; among others, with one to Smith's employer—a steady-going man, with a certain inaptitude for strangers.

The old gentleman deputed his handsome manager to be his proxy — to be cicerone or purveyor to this English couple. The husband was a small lump of respectable mediocrity; the clever wife was literally dying of him: that at least was young Richard Smith's private opinion.

This lady was a woman past youth; not handsome, but gifted with an enthusiastic, poetical temperament. She was as much Richard's superior in mind and heart as she was in station. At first his civilities procured for him a courteous reception, and then the invalid, like the navy captain, welcomed him as a resource from *ennui.*

It was this lady who gave Mr. Smith his fine manners, and embued him with her love for literature and the fine arts. She, in fact, educated him. It was again she who on his visit afterwards to England set him afloat in what *was,* but was not yet so nicknamed, the cream of English society—nay, she placed him in the very double cream.

Richard, tired of the wine business and the Portuguese, corresponded with his patroness on the subject of a consulship; but he stipulated for one in Europe—he could not leave the sphere she inhabited; and if he could obtain this semidemi-diplomatic post, would it be impossible to renew the days of Lisbon?

The patroness really liked him, was grateful to him for the attentions which make an invalid state rather pleasant than otherwise, and brought it to pass that she might summon him from St. Mary's in Spain, his last date, to comply with some formalities. She had obtained the promise of a vacant consulship.

The letter, it sought him up, it sought him down—at St. Mary's, at Lisbon—and it sought in vain for a time. When it did reach him, instead of hurrying to England with the speed of a Queen's messenger, he wrote a long-winded reply, to say he would come some day; it was quite in the man's character to let a whim interfere with a serious object.

This was the flow of his fortunes: like many he dallied with it, a tide to-day, and a tide to-morrow—it cannot make much difference; but it does, and he found it out to his consternation.

When he arrived in London, his patroness was dead and buried; had died at last of her malady, whatever it was, and there was an end of the consulship for Mr. Richard Smith.

That occurred somewhere about 1817, and now, verging towards the Christmas of 1827, within three weeks of it, we find him lodging in Mortimer Street. Mr. Stapylton Smythe is the name printed on his visiting cards, and Mrs. Hood, the rich shipowner's wife, is his patroness.

Mr. Hood, in one of his disagreeable moods, had questioned Mrs. Harriette, his wife, as to the ways and means of her new and agreeable friend; Mr. Hood never feeling at his ease in a poor gentleman's company. Mrs. Harriette had indignantly retorted that no one had any business with how Mr. Smythe lived. Every man to his gifts;— one was born to be a mill-horse (Mr. Hood may take that slap to himself if he so pleases), and another to be a Pegasus. A Pegasus might be forced to wear a yoke; but no person with eyes to his understanding would expect Pegasus to have the lumbering gait of said mill-horse.

For one thing, Mrs. Harriette knew to a certainty that Mr. Smythe wrote in newspapers and magazines, and that he had interviews with members of Parliament on commercial questions.

"Ha! if so," replied the shipowner, ironically, "he may be of use to me."

"You will find it true, however you may laugh at me, Mr. Hood: one of these days he will be the principal of a great speculation, and you'll regret not believing me."

The shipowner, to his surprise, found his wife's assertion pretty well borne out, and then he took to relishing Mr. Smythe's society, though he still considered him, as formerly, a cross between the adventurer and mendicant.

Mrs. Hood saw the upper side of the medal only, Mr. Hood the reverse. Mr. Smythe, however, had not only the two sides to his character common to mankind in general, but many sides. His intellectual faculties were high, his moral qualities low; he thought nobly, acted meanly; his understanding was enlightened, his heart only full of love of self. He admired goodness, worshipped simplicity; and consorted with the artificial and sensual. His errors were not the fruit of evil principles, for his theory was excellent. He might have said, as a classical heroine did, or did not, "I see the better, and still follow the worse."* But to bear witness by *deeds* to goodness, required an amount of sacrifice of which he did not feel himself capable. So he let himself go with the torrent, and committed the thousand and one meannesses, falsehoods, and treacheries, which are indispensable in those who live and would be welcome in a certain world; and when his conscience smote him too hard, which it did at times, then he became cynical, bitter, even misanthropic for a couple of days or so. This was his safety-valve; and he then returned to his old ways and tenour of life with the consciousness of having paid the tribute an honest man ought to do, to virtue.

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* "Video meliora proboque: deteriora sequor."

On his first acquaintance with Mrs. Hood, she had been in the habit of advising her friend to marry some girl with money. They discussed the point; she urging, he declining, declaring that, though far from impeccable, he had a horror of mercenary marriages. This was very true, and led to many confidences of former possibilities neglected; and thus Mrs. Hood became acquainted with what great fish Mr. Smythe had swum. Once, indeed, Mrs. Hood had pushed her anxiety so far as to find the very young lady most suitable for him, and had gone into hysterics, because he would not accept the invitation she had obtained. When he yielded and went, he discovered his intended bride to be deformed and subject to fits. A dark page followed; for Mr. Smythe did not drop the acquaintance, and consciously or unconsciously (are such things ever unconsciously done?) won the girl's heart, and then acted up to his noble maxim of not marrying for money. There was a painful scene, for which Mrs. Hood was made accountable by all parties. A scene there was, of a girl on her knees, praying only to be allowed to breathe the same atmosphere as that handsome, accomplished, shallow-hearted man, and to let him take all her worldly wealth.

Men do occasionally appear—a great rarity, no doubt—who set themselves up as rivals to "green-eyed maids" and "warbling syrens," in whose elderly eyes foolish girls will "descry heaven." It is very rare that men ever break hearts, or lay waste other human lives: they leave all that sort of evil-doing to the weaker sex.

Well, every one concerned laid the blame of this bit of tragedy on Mrs. Hood: so ever since that, she had let alone the subject of matrimony with Mr. Smythe.

His intimacy with the Hoods continued. He liked a safe, luxurious lounge, his imagination demanded the sight of gold and silver and Tyrian colours. His taste guided that of Mrs. Hood, and though expensive, it was still good taste. Mr. Smythe called himself the Hoods' friend. Theirs was not friendship, it was an affair of calculation on both sides. It was a mere superficial association, in which the capital was flattery and amusement.

Mr. Smythe sat now in his brocade dressing-gown, tongs in hand, picking up bits of cinder, and building with them an arch over the two or three red coals at the bottom of the grate. He was doing this, as persons do on whom an uncomfortable thought has laid hold, mechanically, and without any particular interest to succeed in their occupation.

There come lulls in every troubled life—seasons of a certain regularity, in which the possibility of a renewal of former agitations and distresses seems out of the question. There comes a time, when a man as it were forgets the past, each suffering or disaster rubbing out the trace of its predecessor, until a whole series of events fall out of his habit of thought, and then suddenly either the pronouncing of a name' the sight of a countenance, a tone of voice, even some tune pitilessly wailed forth by an organ-grinder, summons to sight, in all their pristine vigour, the *dramatis personæ* and the drama of long ago.

Stella's appearance had done this for Mr. Smythe. Had he had a confidant by his side, he would have made strange revelations that night, so strongly was his memory stirred.

As it was, he was showman and spectator in one.

CHAPTER IX.

A STORY TOLD BY DANCING.

"It is half-past nine, miss, and it is Sunday." These were the words that forced Stella to open her eyes on the morning after Mrs. Hood's party.

"Is Miss Dashwood down-stairs, Firman?" asked Stella of auntie's own maid, and bounding out of bed, though it was a bitter cold December morning.

The "Yes, miss," induced the young lady to inquire, in a sort of desperate soliloquy, "Why *did* Mrs. Hood invite us on a Saturday evening?"

To account for this uneasiness, it is necessary to state that the Major and Miss Dashwood were exceedingly strenuous as to the propriety of church-going. They had failed in making a convert of Celia to their views on that point; so much diplomatic talent in avoiding church had Mrs. Dashwood displayed, that at last Aunt Philly ceased to suppose her attending divine service possible; but Major Dashwood, having less mother-wit, had continued to this very Sunday putting the same question to his wife, and making the same remark on her refusal.

"Very wrong—very wrong, indeed. I wonder what people will think?"

Celia on her side varying her replies from either "I can't help what people think, but I cannot sit such a time to hear that poor dear Mr. Prosser go on and on, getting into the wilderness and never getting out of it again," or "I really can-*not,* it is so cold," or "so hot. Medical men say the half of women's illnesses in England arise from their inveterate church-going in all weathers. If I had a carriage, I shouldn't mind."

Major Dashwood would be sometimes silently cross—sometimes wordily so.

"I wonder if you have any religion in you?"

"To be sure I have; perhaps more than you steady Pharisaical church-goers: you indemnify yourselves for the sacrifice by harsh judgments on those who stay away. I don't care, besides." The "don't care" was irrefutable.

When Stella came to Waterloo Cottage, Celia, it must be owned, was quite willing to make of her a Sunday offering, even had not the girl herself liked to go to church. There was more of Sabbath peace at the cottage since Stella's arrival there. Major Dashwood was much consoled by having another member of the family to fill the pew.

Stella was delighted at finding herself one of an orderly crowd flocking with one intent towards the venerable ivy-covered building. The burst of the organ, heralding the approach of the officiating clergyman, inspired her with awe.

Inside and outside of the church, the inviting bells, God's acre so thickly planted, the anthems, the one voice uplifted above all, the rush of whispered responses, all expressed one meaning to Stella:—"Think of God. Remember the Lord."

"True hearts," like Stella's, "spread and heave unto their God as flowers do unto the sun."

Stella, in right of her real love of going to church, and also, it must be owned, her willing backgammon-playing, basked in the sunshine of Aunt Philly's favour, and, being a girl most greedy of affection, and most grateful for it, she must be excused now if it were more the dread of that lady's lowering brow, than even the fear of being late for morning service, that made her dash through the duties of her toilette so rapidly. "There is a deal of human nature in us," says some one who knows that peculiar subject well. Thus it was, that the over-night's new scenes and new persons successfully disputed with Stella's prayers that morning. "Why, indeed, did Mrs. Hood ask us on a Saturday evening to a dance?"

One thought in particular would come back, in spite of clergyman and organ. Most people know the disagreeable sensation of regretting something said, that had better have been left unsaid—Stella's case just now. It was so disagreeable to think that she had lowered herself in Mr. Smythe's opinion, that she longed to see him again just once, to explain that she meant nothing wrong by making a story to dancing music; probably even if she ever did meet him again, he would not speak to her, and so that Sunday, church was of little use to Stella. Returning from church, near the gate of Waterloo Cottage (she could scarcely credit her eyes) she descried a gentleman standing there, and that gentleman the very one she had been thinking of, and was so desirous to see again. She was further quite astonished at the smile with which he greeted her. Not a trace in his agreeable face of any displeasure.

Celia was first surprised, then delighted to see the visitor. Stapylton Smythe was not in the habit of calling at the cottage—her intimacy with him being the shadow of his intimacy with her friend Harriette.

"Had he brought her a message from the Lodge?"

"No, indeed." Mr. Smythe had come to pay them a visit on his own account, and he had brought a pretty book to show to Miss Joddrell in particular; and he smiled very significantly, but so pleasantly, that Stella never imagined the smile had any allusion in it to her last night's speech.

Mr. Smythe's smiles had very little effect on Aunt Philly. She looked very sour when he made her his bow at the outer gate, and she continued to look very sour at him, even after he had risen on purpose to place a screen between her and the fire, twice recovered the shawl, which, like most shawls, would fall off her shoulders, and praised the tartlets and seed-cake, both of home manufacture, he was sure, by their exceeding superiority.

There are some enviable people whose intuition with respect to administering praise partakes of the miraculous. It is difficult to offer an acceptable compliment to an artist or an author; but to thaw a cross old maiden lady into friendliness against her will, requires positive sincerity.

Aunt Philly had her just share of weaknesses. She was bigoted, to begin with—no salvation out of the pale of her opinions. Vain—yes: though she was on the sharp edge of seventy, "didn't know if she mightn't make some worthy man happy yet, and disappoint some expectations." She was exacting, egotistical, but very shrewd, and also conscientious according to her lights.

Mr. Smythe prided himself on his fine tact, but no tact ever answered with Aunt Philly.

He praised the cookery, as if that were the only thing Aunt Philly could understand, and changed his topic as soon as he addressed Celia or Stella. Nothing so irritating as to have people visibly bringing down their talk to what they judge to be the level of your comprehension. Aunt Philly was in the habit of boasting that she could see as far through a mill-stone as her neighbours, and as Mr. Smythe was neither so thick nor so passive as a mill-stone, there was no reason why she should not see through him also. She was herself as hard and as rough as granite to her visitor.

Mr. Smythe brought out of his pocket a thin book, elegantly bound in purple velvet. He opened this small volume, and showed the frontispiece to Celia, who exclaimed—

"Oh, how capital! Come here, Stella."

Mr. Smythe, who was seated by Mrs. Dashwood, looked up and smiled in Stella's face, as she took her station behind her aunt's chair.

"This is a story told by dancing," he said; "the story of *Flore et Zéphyr:* and a friend of mine has painted it from the life as represented at Her Majesty's Theatre."

The illustrations were in water-colours, finely drawn and brilliantly coloured. The first of the number was *Flore* on tiptoes—her dress whirling like a cloud about a figure that had a fairy look, certainly; but the face! the be-rouged cheeks, the fierce eyebrows, the dancer's terrible smile, the strained muscles of the neck, the panting of the thin but thickly padded bust, were all minutely portrayed; perhaps, too cruelly faithful to truth. The Major capped his wife's admiration by a "Pon my honour, it 's famous: it is now, pon my honour." Miss Dashwood would not look at it when the book was offered to her, declaring such sights were not fit for Sunday. Stella had grown very red, and remained perfectly silent.

The next picture was of *Zéphyr*, a stout middle-aged man, wings at his shoulders, and a diminutive petticoat round his waist, suspending himself in mid air, his knees and feet close together, his mouth distended by a painful grin, intended to hide the effort with which he violated one of the laws of nature.

Once more Celia and the Major emphasized on the fun and ability displayed by the artist; now came the group of *Flore et Zéphyr*, the goddess balancing herself on one foot, on the knee of the West Wind. The clever artist had given a slight slant to that knee, to indicate that it bent under the weight it was sustaining, while *Flore's* off leg was held out or up at its greatest stretch, and so until the story arrived at its conclusion, the happiness of the hero and heroine indicated by each holding high in air one of their legs, evidently in the act of giving the breathless spectators what the Italians call the "*benedizione delle gambe.*"

"Very clever—very clever," said the Major.

"Now, do tell us who did them!" cried Celia.

"Miss Joddrell, what do you think of a story told by dancing?"

"Did you think I ever imagined anything so ugly as that?" asked Stella, with indignation in her voice.

"But this is the reality of a ballet," rejoined Mr. Smythe.

"But I suppose I was not thinking of reality," replied Stella.

"I 'll be bound you were not, my dear," burst out Aunt Philly. "It 's strange to me that any gentleman should bring such shameful things to show a young lady—married ladies seem to think they may see or hear anything. I should just like any one to have dared to show me such pictures when my poor mother was alive—he wouldn't have done it twice, I can tell him."

"I disapprove of what the book represents, ma'am, as much as you do," answered Mr.

Smythe, gravely. "It was to show Miss Joddrell the reverse of the medal."

"What medal, sir? But it doesn't matter; another time I advise you to remember that the Apostle says, 'With the knowledge of evil——' What's it?" turning to the Major.

"I understand you, ma'am," said Mr. Smythe; "you mean that, 'by the law is the knowledge of sin.'"

"I dare say you are right, sir: you seem to know everything. I am a poor ignorant old woman, who can't argue. Pray, don't let me be any further interruption to you."

It was quite astonishing how cheerfully Mr. Smythe took his rebuff—quite astonishing, at least to Stella, who felt ashamed of Miss Dashwood, and ashamed for Mr. Smythe. She went and stood by herself in the window, as though anxious to withdraw herself from the conversation. She was greatly mortified by the ridicule implied by Mr. Smythe's bringing those caricatures. The evening before, by look and manner, he had captivated a beginning of her confidence; she had willingly told him her impressions, nor had his half-expressed displeasure militated against him; on the contrary, she had at once accorded him a decided superiority. Now her young girl's pride was wounded; she felt as though he had taken an unwarrantable liberty in showing her those pictures.

The young admire easily, but they are as intolerant as they are enthusiastic: reality, in general, shocks them.

Mr. Smythe presently came to Stella, saying, "Do you not admire '*Flore et Zéphyr?*'"

"No, sir."

"Why do you call me 'sir?' Grown-up young ladies only use that respectful title to very venerable beaux."

Mr. Smythe was always conscious of not being yet forty. He succeeded in making the colour rise in Stella's cheeks, but no smile answered his; her smiles did not come at every bidding. He went on—

"I see that none, not even the most innocent of your sex, can bear the truth. Your illusions must be cherished, or we fall into disgrace: we must always present nectar to your lips. Suppose I had replied to you last evening by a compliment on your poetical feelings, you would be lavishing sweet smiles on me at this very moment." Mr. Smythe had guessed the very way to treat Stella, and his air of sincerity was not assumed: she had taken his fancy. "I have been very stupid to displease you."

"I don't understand you very well," replied Stella, "but I am sure I did not want any compliments."

"Let us make friends:" and he held out his hand.

With a little hesitation, Stella gave him hers; it was a finely-shaped, but thin, and not at all a yielding hand.

"You have not looked at me, and that's a bad sign of peace," insisted Mr. Smythe.

She showed him a face that feared not the light, and again he wondered who she was.

Aunt Philly had recommenced her usual fidgetting in and out of the room. Her habits did not belong to the kingdom of courtesy. She cared little for the current of cold air constantly inflicted on the occupants of the dining-room by her exits and entrances; nay, nor yet for the admission of savoury perfumes from the kitchen: all the intermediate doors must be opened, that the careful eye of the mistress might be on her handmaids. Sundays were her especial days of fidget. Church added to State affairs. Mr. Smythe had contributed another item to her disturbance.

"Well, my dear, are you coming?" This to Stella. "I have my bonnet on, and the afternoon bells are ringing."

Stella moved from the window with alacrity.

Mr. Smythe glanced at Mrs. Dashwood.

"Suppose you take a walk with us this afternoon, Stella?" said Celia: "the sun is shining so brightly, the Heath will be lovely."

Aunt Philly twisted round savagely, and surveyed Celia and her niece in a way that made Stella say—

"I had better go with Miss Dashwood."

"Don't you think," asked Mr. Smythe of the young lady, "that the looking on the outward signs of the Eternal and Divine preaches to us as well as any words of man?"

"You don't seem to know much of the church, sir," retorted Aunt Philly, briskly. "We don't go to listen to MAN'S words."

Mr. Smythe bowed, as though he would have said, "I am convinced."

Stella went to church: Miss Philly all the way giving vent to short startling denunciations of the Evil One going about like a roaring lion, and of wolves in sheeps' clothing.

Major Dashwood, his wife, and Mr. Smythe's walk to the Heath ended at the Hoods', and there the conversation was of that kind which has the trick of condemning the faults the speakers have no mind to.

People are mightily fond of arranging the mortal and immortal chances of others according to their own ideas of right and wrong; according as they clash or harmonize with their own pet wrong-doing, or even with their social interests. How indulgent in the one case!—Let us not judge, they say. How severe in another!—Let them be stoned. Go where you will, with some few honourable exceptions, under one form of speech or another, sentence is being passed by one erring fellow-creature on another.

During all the gossip going on in Mrs. Hood's drawing-room, and in which Mr. Smythe took a witty part, he was secretly thinking of, and contrasting with these two lady friends of his, Stella and her simplicity, her straightforward candour, her dawning beauty, which made her a rare specimen of young womanhood. Pity it was, he was saying to himself, that she had fallen among such commonplace people. If he meant by commonplace the morally vulgar, Mr. Smythe was right. Moral vulgarity is never self-denying, never generous; uncalculating enthusiasm it abhors; moral vulgarity is without just ideas of what is due from man to man: so that, except a downright morally vicious atmosphere, there can be none more deteriorating or more hardening than a commonplace one.

Now Mr. Smythe's theories, as before said, were unimpeachable. He was one of those who burn a taper to God, one to the Devil, and make a bow to St. Michael.

CHAPTER X.

CANDLES ON THREE ALTARS.

An experienced old lady once said to her daughter, who was fretting her with various devices how to make easy a gentleman's visits—

"My dear, if he wishes to come, he will find a way without your help."

Mr. Smythe easily found a way to visit, and that with steady regularity, at Waterloo Cottage. Middle age had not cooled his imagination.

He had among various talents that one of speedily accomplishing intimacy. He did not drag out hours with his hat in his hand, dropping into silences that make some people feel probably like criminals in a dock. He left his hat on the hall table, and entered right into the family occupations, whatever they might be. He would not have been out of his place with Aunt Philly in the kitchen; he would have proclaimed that man is a cooking animal, and proposed amendments in sauces, with a smile that would have made sure of his measures being adopted.

It is quite certain that he made Waterloo Cottage more cheerful; most peculiarly so to Stella.

He inaugurated her into the world of literature, and into the domain of the fine arts; above all, he gave her the inestimable advantage of interchange of thought with a cultivated mind. She followed Mr. Smythe's lead with great ardour, but he found her no humble postulant; she had a searching, inquisitive mind, and often put him on his mettle with her Why and Wherefore.

It was on such occasions that Stella awoke to the charm of self-control and courtesy; she saw the influence these qualities possessed, and how often her impetuosity placed what was right in itself in an odious light. She had that genuine love of beauty, which belongs to strong and perfect organization. So she hated her own brusquerie, and strove in earnest after gentleness and grace of mind and body.

Mr. Smythe had set it down in his plan to be the Pygmalion of Stella's intellect; he was to show a godlike benevolence; holding himself free from all selfish impulses: but the celestial spark which he was blowing into a flame was in danger of lighting the taper to the devil.

No risk of my exciting her heart. May she, sweet child, ever remain ignorant of how great is my interest in her. My aim is solely to develop her fine mind. I should wish to possess her innocent affection, to have her attached to me, as I am to her, without any thought of the future.

It was not difficult for a Stapylton Smythe to make a Celia Dashwood believe in this sort of reasoning. His conscience was as light as a feather; never did he miss an opportunity of declaring that he was not a marrying man: he was besides always putting pretty auntie on her guard, taking her into confidence about his determined celibacy—the necessary result of health, and age, and circumstances. Never was a matron more carefully warned not to look for a husband for her niece in him. When alone with Mrs. Dashwood it was thus: "You think me an idle dog, Mrs. Dashwood. But I am a man of many trials, without any claims on my time or labour. I may be as lazy as I please, I defraud no one when I pass hours in this happy nook. Let me do the little good that falls in my way. I am too lazy to go a hand's-breadth to find any for myself; let me lead this dear girl through the morning gate of the beautiful into the magnificent, unbounded realms of knowledge. Were I ten years younger it would be impossible, I know. Every age has its privilege—a sad enough privilege the one I lay claim to."

Celia thought, "How charmingly he expresses himself! How delightfully different from other people!" and believed herself as doing a real good action to both Stella and Mr. Smythe when she welcomed him to his seat in the warmest corner of the sofa, with a little reading-table at hand.

"I am growing a better man in your pure, healthy society. You don't know how charitable you are," says Mr. Smythe to Celia.

"Reclaiming the heathen," replied Celia, smiling: while Stella opened her eyes, and wondered what Mr. Smythe meant by growing a better man; he had then been bad once? None of the heroes she had any knowledge of had ever been bad at the beginning. Such confessions did not suit her ideal.

"You view me with astonished eyes, Miss Joddrell. I understand your look. You cannot imagine in your innocence what a Pandemonium general society is. What a fiction every man is, and still more so, every woman in the great world. No physical malaria is more destructive to our bodily health than the corruptions of fashions to our moral strength. Frauds and tricks on every side, nothing true. Everything artificial, nothing valued but show and glitter, the obligation to shine and live beyond one's means under penalty of social ostracism. What a contrast I find here!" and the speech concluded with a smile pointed by a sigh. And so Mr. Smythe burned candles on his three altars, and enjoyed the light and warmth they gave him, thoroughly.

One would have imagined that much less than this accomplished, handsome gentleman gave would have sufficed to obtain a complete hold on so naïve and ignorant a young creature as this Miss Joddrell. But Mr. Stapylton Smythe was certain that he had imparted no new life to his present Galatea. The contradictory elements of human nature began, therefore, to make Mr. Smythe more imprudent; that is, more in earnest than he had been for half a score of years.

But Stella did not understand the fascination of reforming Mr. Smythe. She did not like what she did understand of the glimpses he gave her of his so-called Pandemonium.

She was dreaming, dear girl, of a hero—of a Bayard—*sans peur et sans reproche.* How could Mr. Smythe's self-pity agree with her idea? besides, he was not at all like Ravenswood. No, no: Mr. Smythe's is not the hand that will strike the "living lyre," and make it conscious of its own melody.

She was one of those who must worship, and not one who would love from pity.

And Celia, that pretty silly auntie, was often provoked at the girl's unconsciousness. "As much a baby as if she were entering her seventh instead of her seventeenth year," thought Mrs. Dashwood—ungrateful instead of piously thankful to Providence for such a *statu quo.* "She takes everything he says or does as a matter of course—is as callous as a stone."

Mrs. Celia had already at thirty forgotten what young girls are; indeed, her knowledge of the heart was of the most limited kind. Having never experienced any of the more violent emotions of the soul, she had no fear of them.

There was another subject for Celia to speculate on, and that was what Mrs. Harriette felt, at the late defalcation in S. S.'s allegiance. But not a whit better could Mrs. Dashwood understand her friend than her niece.

Once when Celia had been pouting at Harriette and making some explanations, Harriette had placed her finger across Celia's lips, saying, "Hush! *Qui s'excuse, s'accuse.*"

Mrs. Hood's smile was as saucy and agreeable as ever, the Dashwoods and Mr. Smythe dined as often as before at the Lodge: if ever Mrs. Hood did thrust her claws through her velvet gloves and give Stapylton Smythe a scratch, he never told. Mrs. Hood was accustomed to his aberrations; she was not, indeed, opposed to their occasionally occurring. She was indisputably what the French call a *maîtresse femme,* for which the term "superior," or "strong-minded," is not an equivalent.

For six weeks, then, Mr. Smythe was daily at Waterloo Cottage, trying to cultivate Stella's taste for literature and the fine arts; each day of the forty-two making him feel younger, happier, healthier than he had done since the Lisbon days.

The end of these six weeks brings us to the beginning of February 1828.

On the morning of the 4th, Major Dashwood announced the arrival of the Jamaica packet, and again the postman was fruitlessly watched.

"Something must be wrong," exclaimed Celia.

"Perhaps your brother may be coming home himself," conjectured the Major, looking at his wife. "I should not wonder. In fact," turning now to Stella, "it must be so, we shall see your father: my dear, we may have him here at any hour. Yes; that's it, depend on it, depend on it."

The Major made this reiteration because he saw Celia about to contradict him.

"What abominable nonsense!" cried Celia; vexed out of an intended more polite disclaimer, by the way the Major had raised his voice to annihilate hers.

"Why nonsense, my dear? You are not a prophetess—you don't know everything that's going to happen. Why shouldn't I guess right sometimes? Pooh! pooh! pooh! You say No: I say Yes. Who is right? Toss up: heads or tails? Ha! ha! ha!"

It was not often the Major broke out so turbulently, but when he did he could be peculiarly irritating.

"Here you see," he went on, "I was right about Jamaica. The House of Assembly in a state of rebellion. No doubt of that d——d emancipation. Listen." And he read aloud from the newspaper he held in his hand. "They say they expected to have had the King's approbation of their new slave law, having conceded every point not positively dangerous. Can't you listen to me, Celia, for a moment?"

But Celia drank her tea and whispered to Stella, "Let us go to the drawing-room and get a little quiet."

"Too bad—too bad!" muttered the Major, as his wife disappeared. Stella lingered at the door; she wished to hear more on the subject.

"You see, Madam," addressing Aunt Philly, "your party had got their will; slaves were admitted to give evidence against whites, and now they have had to go back to the old law, and serve them right, for not being satisfied with good, without asking for better. The anti-slavery party will cut their own throats yet."

"No, they won't," said Aunt Philly, stoutly.

"All I hope is that the planters will be so cruel, that the blacks will rise and murder every man Jack of them; if they'd take my advice, they'd soon have emancipation. And now you know my mind, perhaps you'll let me finish my breakfast in peace."

"But, Madam, I tell you, your friends are forfeiting the humane provisions——"

"Humane, indeed!" said Aunt Philly; adding, "A set of Jews and Jesuits, with their whips and their chains——"

"God bless me, Madam, let me explain," interrupted the Major.

"You won't change my opinion, whatever you explain, nephew; no man can do that, thank God!"

"But, Madam, Jews and Jesuits! surely you will let a man explain."

It was of no use, the Major had to strike his colours.

Celia was not only disappointed, but greatly perplexed at receiving no letter from Stella's father. Did he mean to leave the girl on her hands, whether she would or not?

Mrs. Hood called, but although the two ladies spoke in whispers, it did not need more penetration than Stella possessed, to be very sure that, somehow or other, some change had been contemplated for her.

Her stern grandmother's words, "The pretty auntie you think so much of will pet and flatter you, but she won't be troubled with you," recurred distinctly to her recollection.

"Am I always to be on sufferance with people?" thought poor Stella. "Oh! for a home, and some one really to care for me!"

Then she remembered her answer to her grandmother's warning: "I will care for my friends, and never think whether they love me or not."

She struggled valiantly that day to keep her promise.

It is to be remarked how strangely, amid the vicissitudes of our lives, one set of circumstances cling to us through them all. With some, it is their fate to have bad health to struggle against; with others, in every connection they have or make, it is a scramble for money enough—not poverty exactly, but insecurity,—single, married, widowed, always in the same predicament. Then again some never can have a settled home, but are tossed about from country to country, in spite of will or inclination: their neighbours, on the contrary, condemned to be fixtures.

With Stella, her case seemed to be that of a waif or stray.

CHAPTER XI.

MIRANDA.

Mr. Smythe might have discovered what quicksands he was nearing, by the anxiety he could not subdue to hear if a letter from Mr. Joddrell had been received at Waterloo Cottage. He also had read in the morning paper that the Jamaica mail was in.

It was severe weather, unfit for any delicate constitution to brave. Snow had fallen, and turned into mud in London; but on the road near Kilburn it lay like a thick white carpet. Mr. Smythe spent some shillings he could not afford, to reach the cottage with dry feet.

He had so long shown indulgence to all his vagaries of feelings, there was no chance that he would set a curb on a fancy now. He was far more likely to class it as a good impulse. Was it not a sign of goodness to love what is good? Did not Stella's society keep him out of mischief? Did not her pure thoughts disinfect his mind of evil ones? Did she not drive away that miserable under-current of uneasiness and dissatisfaction, that nothing hitherto had deadened save wild excitement. "Tell me with whom you live, and I will tell you what you are." Were they not among the best creatures living, the inmates of Waterloo Cottage? Imperfect beings: yes, but with an angel for their guest.

The image of this angel, with her fine slim body, her elastic, springy mountaineer's step, her eye with still the frank stern look of childhood, whom he had called to himself the Miranda of the desert island of his heart, she could not cure him, but while he was with her he ceased to think of his causes of irritation. He smiled even now as he recollected the conversation which led him to be travelling in a hackney coach on this snowy night to the cottage to read the Tempest to Stella. He had happened to call her Miranda, in answer to Mrs. Dashwood's lamentations over some of her niece's singularities, and, with the sort of defiant manner to which Celia could not be reconciled, Stella had asked—

"And who is Miranda?"

"The only child of Prospero, Duke of Milan, Miss Joddrell," he had replied, laughing.

"My dear girl, don't you recollect Miranda and Caliban in the Tempest?" had observed Celia, rebukingly.

"I never read the Tempest, Auntie."

"Miranda," exclaimed Mr. Smythe, "was a young lady about your age, Miss Joddrell, brought up from a child on an enchanted island by her exiled wizard of a father; they had a bad spirit to do their hard work, and a lovely sprite called Ariel to put a girdle round the waist of the earth, when they pleased to order him to do so; and there was a shipwreck and a handsome cousin thrown quite conveniently on the coast."

"Have you the play, Auntie?" The enchanted island, the solitary girl, the arrival of the cousin, the bad and good spirits, had made Stella's voice very eager.

"Yes, of course." And then Mr. Smythe had pleaded,

"Allow me to have the pleasure of introducing your niece to her likeness. You don't know, perhaps, that I have gained honours in my day, by my reading of Shakspeare. Let me prove I am not unequal to my younger self," for Celia hesitated. "I assure you, Mrs. Dashwood," guessing at last the cause of Celia's unusual backwardness, "I manage my author as well as any editor for families."

So it was arranged there should be a reading of the Tempest some evening—and on this fourth of February, Mr. Smythe determined to go to Waterloo Cottage and say, "I have come in spite of weather to read the Tempest."

He was very welcome as usual—to all but Aunt Philly—on whom, however, the habit of seeing him had rubbed away some of the sharp corners of her antipathy to him.

The ladies took their work, the Major was admonished to be quiet in the nap he always indulged in after dinner, and the reading began.

Girls of sixteen, far more precocious in their feelings than was our young lady, might hear the Tempest read for the first time, withou discovering any great beauty or interest in it, beyond what any love-tale would possess for them. But Stella had a noble imagination, it wanted words to express itself in; but it never failed to kindle at the contact of what was grand and beautiful.

When Mr. Smythe read the scene where Miranda first sees Ferdinand, the girl's work dropped on her knee; Mr. Smythe always read admirably, but to such a listener who, with her beautiful young face all a-light with intelligence, sat there hanging on his words, he read miraculously.

He had reached the scene where Ferdinand is carrying wood, to the speech where Miranda asks, "Do you love me?" and Ferdinand answers:

> "O heaven, O earth, bear witness to this sound,
> And crown what I possess with kind event,
> If I speak true; if hollowly, invert
> What best is boded me to mischief! I,
> Beyond all limit of what else i' the world
> Do love, prize, and honour you.
>
> *Miranda.* "I am a fool,
> To weep at what I'm glad of."

As the gathered tears in Stella's eyes here rolled down her cheeks, pale with emotion, a loud ring at the bell startled them all, waking the Major and bringing him to his feet.

Old Pompey was heard to stumble along the passage—there was a pause of uneasy expectation, ended by Pompey throwing wide the drawing-room door, his mouth on so broad a grin that he could not articulate, and ushering in a gentleman.

The stranger had on rather an incongruous dress. A dark blue riding cloak lined with red, the collar up to his ears, and nankeen trousers.

Every one stared inquisitively at him for a couple of seconds, as people do, when an unknown individual presents himself like a bomb among them. Then Stella clapping her hands, cried out, "It's cousin Louis—it's cousin Louis," and ran to him with an extended hand, which she almost thrust into his.

"If I am cousin Louis," returned the stranger, looking earnestly at her, "you must be cousin Stella."

"Yes, indeed I am," was the rejoinder, in a joyous voice.

A scene followed of mingled congratulations and explanations. "When did he arrive in England? Why had he come? Business! Oh! well, time enough to talk of that," says the Major to his inquisitive wife, "let your cousin have something to eat."

Mr. Gautier had never seen Major Dashwood—Celia's marriage having taken place after Louis had left England. Celia looked curiously at the two gentlemen as they stood side by side—both good-looking, very different though.

Mr. Gautier must be presented to Miss Philadelphia Dashwood. He had fallen into a nest of new connections, one within another, like a nest of tables.

"Our friend, Mr. Stapylton Smythe—my cousin, Mr. Gautier."

One seldom sees beams of benevolence pass between men at a first meeting, but here there was a decided evolvement of repulsion. Their eyes met like swords, keen, bright, piercing, the glances flashed at each other and over each other, from head to foot.

At that moment, when Stella put her hand into her cousin's with so joyful a cry, Mr.

Smythe's heart had leaped up with a bound of hatred against the stranger. He hated Louis at once, and broadly and deeply. There is hate at first sight, as well as love. Mr. Smythe remembered vividly at this instant, he never utterly forgot it, that time when he had wilfully neglected his noble patroness's recall to England, and slipped for ever from Fortune's ladder, on which she had so anxiously placed him. Was it, indeed, abstract goodness, abstract beauty, that he sought at Waterloo Cottage?

Mr. Smythe, however, smiled blandly in return to Mr. Gautier's grim bow. Mr. Smythe smiled on, though his heart was withering within him, as if the avenging angel of his past life had suddenly stood before him. Mr. Smythe smiled on as he listened to the cordial pressing of the Dashwoods, that Louis would remain at the Cottage—smiled as he heard Stella's clear voice; never before had he heard in it so joyful a sound, as when praying cousin Louis to stay. "She had so much to ask him." Smiled even when he saw the brilliant colour of excitement on her cheeks, making her more like Miranda than ever.

How friendless he suddenly felt in that room he had been used to deem so friendly! Family ties, that he had scoffed at, were now very nearly his envy—no one to cry, "God bless him!" as he should take his leave.

Mr. Gautier, who had been hitherto excusing himself from accepting the Dashwoods' hospitality, yielded now at his young cousin's solicitation.

"I will take advantage of Mr. Gautier's hackney-coach to return to London," said Mr. Smythe.

He shook hands very warmly all round, except with cousin Louis, who gave him another grim bow. Celia forgot her usual "When shall we see you again?" and the "not marrying man" rattled back to his lodgings in Mortimer Street, with a chilling perception of having entirely missed the right road in life.

Aunt Philly bustled away to prepare "the best room" for the stranger, and Stella, having her one question of, "Is papa quite well?" answered affirmatively, ran after Miss Dashwood to help that lady.

It was Stella who dragged up Mr. Gautier's valise, at some risk to the carefully preserved stair-carpet. It was Stella who dressed the toilette table, and insisted on the best of everything being brought out of the linen closets for her cousin, her own cousin's use.

"How nice my cousin will think this, after the horrid ship," observed Stella, to the smart housemaid, warming the bed.

"He has an outlandish look, miss, hasn't he?" asked the critical Maria.

"And so he ought," says Stella, "for he comes off the sea from far distant lands."

"Well, for my part," returns Maria, "I must say I prefer the regular English to all the world."

Stella heaped coals on the fire, stirred it up to a fierce blaze, surveyed the room with satisfaction, but lamented that gentlemen did not need pincushions nor ringstands, so that the dressing table looked quite bare. The only article of luxury she possessed, a gay blotting-paper book, Celia's Christmas present to her, she brought and placed on the writing-table, instead of the black leather one belonging to Aunt Philly.

In the meantime Major and Mrs. Dashwood had been listening to a most portentous piece of news, and for which they were totally unprepared. Mr. Joddrell, Stella's father, had taken a wife—had been married for nearly a couple of months, when the news of his mother's death reached him. His letter announcing his marriage must have crossed that from Celia, informing him of Mrs. Joddrell's decease. This was the conclusion arrived at, by a comparison of the probable dates of the respective communications, and Mr. Joddrell's subsequent letters to his mother and daughter were probably still in the custody of the drunken clerk at Evian.

"Poor Stella!" sighed Celia. "I am afraid she will feel it very much."

"Why?" asked Mr. Gautier. "It can make no difference to her; she knows nothing of her father, nor he of her. There are no habits to break, no resignations in this case. I hope you will not encourage the girl in any morbid, selfish ideas, if she has them at least."

"One-sided as ever," thought Celia, but she said, "You judge as a man, and men never can understand some things."

Louis was silent.

"Any money?" asked the Major, in an insinuating, offhand way.

"Not a penny," answered Mr. Gautier. "A soldier, with a family of several children, has seldom a fortune to bestow with his daughters. However, Mrs. Hubbard assures all her friends that her girls are treasures in themselves."

"Hubbard!" ejaculated Celia, in dismay. "What a dreadful name! What is the young lady's father?"

"General, no, Major-General Wolfe Hubbard."

"Ha! I know," exclaimed Major Dashwood, producing his Army List, a perfect wonder of emendations and erasures. "Hubbard? here he is, promoted lately from D. A. G.—lost by his promotion, I imagine."

"Probably," said Louis; "but I do not understand army matters. You will be able to judge of the family for yourselves, for they all came home in the same ship with me, and they are going to settle in London."

Celia turned her deep blue eyes with such a speakingly inquisitive look on Louis, that the muscles of his grave mouth relaxed a little, and he replied to the gaze: "I am uncaught, I assure you, though both Miss Hubbard and Miss Emily are nightingales, and gentle and good-looking. Mrs. Hubbard quite counts on your good offices, Celia." How Mrs. Dashwood started as the familiar name fell so familiarly from her cousin's lips, it took her back at once to twelve years ago. "I heard something about your wish to get rid of Stella, and of Mrs. Hubbard having the charge."

Celia had the grace to blush, when Major Dashwood looked at her, hummed and ha-haed, and to prevent his developing into speech, Celia said to Mr. Gautier, "Let us keep all this news from Stella to-night. Let her sleep in peace," she pleaded.

Mr. Gautier raised his eyebrows: he was surprised, but too polite or too indifferent to dissen or refuse.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. GAUTIER OF SILVER HILL.

Mr. Gautier was vastly mistaken if he supposed that Stella would take the same view of her father's marriage as he did, and consider that it made no difference to her, nor required any resignation from her. Stella had lately been full of projects of keeping papa's house and remodelling the government of his slaves. She had been busy erecting a visionary Church on Cedar Valley. She was to make such an Eden of her father's estates, that every planter in the Island was to be led to emulate the good example.

Stella had excellent Henry Martyn's life by heart, and entirely believed in the facility of making slaves, the offspring of slaves, into enlightened, self-denying Christians. She was to establish infant schools, and evening schools for the adults. Papa was to distribute prizes.

Many a gay and pleasant scene she conjured up; herself a presiding Lady Paramount in a romantic palm-thatched arbour under the shade of her paternal cedars, mocking-birds thrilling forth their loud, emphatic, thrush-like notes; humming-birds, with "gemmed frontlets, and necks of verdant green," "glancing like living jewels through the melodious air," kept cool by the waving of the broad plantain leaves. Around her, eager, upturned, black faces, listening with delight to the words of peace and good-will to men.

Stella, having read of such scenes, longed to realize the idea of a sort of angelic life. Papa was to be happy, the slaves happy, she the happy servant of all. Cousin Louis and his mother figured on the scene, but their parts had not been exactly traced out yet. Their characters and actions being transformed according to the author most in favour with the castle-builder at the time.

And now down tumble builder and castle and all. Her father did not require her, Cedar Valley and the other estates had a Lady Paramount. Adieu to presiding in bowers or schools, and all hail to a stepmother, the certainty of being a Cinderella, and having no Godmamma to turn pumpkins into coaches, or mice into footmen. Poor Stella!

She ran away and shut herself into her room to read the letter her father had indited to her on the happy subject. Mr. Joddrell called on his daughter to rejoice with him on the step he had taken;—his bride was the most graceful, accomplished, and lovely of ladies. Stella must strive with all her might to become fit to be admitted into such society; it was a crowning grace to all the family, this new connection. Not one kind allusion to the lost mother of the daughter he was addressing: no interest shown in her for *her*self or *him*self, only on account of the stepmother. She must become mild and obedient: he was afraid she was neither, from Celia's wish that she should be sent to school. Here Stella's heart ached with a sudden sharp sting of bodily pain. "Cruel—cruel!" so she said to herself. "I wonder why I was born. I seem to have no right place in the world. I am in everyone's way, even auntie ——"

Here a gentle tap at her door interrupted the soliloquy. Stella hardened her heart and closed her ears to the sound. Another tap, and she heard auntie's voice, asking quite humbly for admission. To this Stella dared make no resistance; she opened the door and stood cold and tranquil before her aunt. Celia tried to meet Stella's glance with a firm eye, but it was with a very pleading gesture that she laid her hand on her niece's arm. The weakness of her adversary was a potent appeal to the brave heart of the young girl.

"Dear Stella! just listen to me patiently for one minute," and Mrs. Dashwood entered the fortress of Stella's chamber. "You must not exaggerate the change your father's marriage will make to you; as Louis says, it is not the trial it would have been, had you been brought up with your father; you can scarcely remember him, you know."

The commonplace tone and words completely sobered down Stella's passion. A great power resides in polite mediocrity. How often it puts to flight a noble enthusiasm! Celia might go on now. "You'll find it a capital thing, dear, to have a motherly person to look after you when you go to Jamaica—a girl is always the better of some one to bear the responsibilities."

As Mrs. Dashwood stopped, evidently, for an answer, Stella said, "Who knows?"

"What do you mean by 'Who knows?'" enquired Celia. "Of course you will go some day to your father, and she will have to take care of you till you are married, and I assure you it's a good, and not a bad business, your father having married again. It's an awful worry, child, when a father or mother has to be left alone."

Celia was thinking of the harassing scenes she had gone through with *her* mother, on the occasion of her own marriage, and judging Stella by herself, supposed Stella would set her heart on being married young.

"Oh! Auntie, you do not understand," Stella stopped abruptly.

"Yes, I do," said Celia, wagging her long bright curls. "But now, dear Stella, do say you will try not to be unhappy; it makes me so uncomfortable, and it will throw such a damp on our pleasure in Louis's visit."

"You *do* love me a little, Auntie, don't you?" Stella questioned in a sort of despair at this reasoning.

"I do, I do," cried Celia, kissing, and rocking her in her arms, with soft, dove-like, inarticulate murmurings. Celia was far better at coaxing than arguing. "You must not think because I proposed your being sent to school I did not love you."

"If you had only told me, Auntie—it was such a cruel surprise."

"It was to save you unnecessary pain, my darling, and you see I was right, for you are not to go to school, only to stay with Mrs. Hubbard, and she has two nice daughters, Louis says."

Deep, hard-drawn sighs, not like the sighs of a young girl, beat on Celia's ear.

"Oh! Stella, do believe me; I do care for you, and if you had only needed finishing masters—but I have not the time, nor the strength ——" here Mrs. Dashwood began actually to cry.

"I want to have something to comfort me when I leave you. Oh! Auntie, to have no one to care for you really, the way fathers and mothers care for their children, not bearing even to think of parting with them, loving them right or wrong, never, never to know what a mother is! Do forgive me, Auntie, if I am rough sometimes, it is that makes me so. I promise you I will not be sad; it is very difficult always to do right. Forgive me, Auntie."

Celia was like a penitent child all that day towards Stella, and Mr. Gautier amused himself in watching the aunt and niece, deciding in his own mind that his dark-eyed, black-browed cousin had a temper of her own, and treated poor little Celia like a negro. The fair-haired, cherub-faced aunt had no chance, as he saw, with her tall niece, with a voice that was like the tone of a silver trumpet.

Now Stella's grief, it must be owned, drew much of its poignancy from imagination, and such grief has a very different duration from that founded on reality. As she had never possessed the good she sighed over, so had she not lost it. Very different when we have losses that make positive gaps in our lives; when the dearest part of ourselves is wrenched away, and we are left bleeding and forlorn. There are trials worse than death, trials inflicted by man, not God, and for which we cannot console ourselves by kissing the rod that chastises us—finding comfort in performing the duty of resignation. But Stella knew nothing as yet of the sorrows of trust betrayed, or of love wronged. At sixteen the imagination has no divination in those directions; therefore, though she went to bed sad, there was no reason why she should rise sad. Her last thought ere sleep came had been, "They cannot put me out of the world;" her first waking one, that in cousin Louis she should find a standpoint.

And with this belief there shot into her heart an ecstacy of joy, cloudless as the frosty sky on which her regardless eyes were fixed. She arranged her long thick hair with less of haste than usual; smoothed again and again its rebellious waviness, one of her special beauties, but which, as it was rare, the young lady rashly concluded must be a defect.

The musings of sixteen, full of harmonies, who can describe? They are too evanescent for even the best of memories to recall.

To breakfast then went Stella, with the resolve of making of Louis Gautier the confidant of her fears and perplexities relating to her father and her new connections, the Hubbards.

Mr. Gautier was the last to appear in the breakfast-room, and while he was calmly and methodically eating his toast, Stella indulged in an examination of his countenance. The description of her favourite hero, Edgar Ravenswood, might serve for Louis. She remembered the very words. "His features were dark, regular, and full of majestic though somewhat sullen expression. Some secret sorrow, or the brooding spirit of some moody passion, had quenched the light and ingenuous vivacity of youth in a countenance singularly fitted to display both, and it was not easy to gaze on the stranger without a secret impression either of pity or awe, or, at least, of doubt and curiosity allied to both."

But such heroic-looking people are more attractive in fiction than in reality, and there dawned in Stella an idea that her cousin might be dangerous to meddle with. There was an inflexible look about his mouth, an absent expression in the eye, as of one accustomed to live among inferiors, more repelling than any mere sternness. But in looking up to answer some playful remark of Celia's, Louis smiled. That smile was exactly what was wanted to relieve Stella of her doubts. A smile in a dark face, the sun breaking from behind an inky cloud, are always two most successful effects; and Mr. Gautier's smile, though not lusciously sweet like that of Stapylton Smythe, was peculiarly agreeable, lighting up his eyes before banishing the rigid look of his lips. It was a genuine, frank, heart-born smile.

Stella rushed at once from one extreme to the other, impetuously deciding that she should never be afraid of telling cousin Louis anything. She was so wonderfully comforted by this discovery, that she confided it to Celia in the course of a conversation they had about him that forenoon.

"I suppose Louis is very clever?" so did Stella open the subject.

"Clever! what makes you think so?" inquired Celia, in some astonishment, as Louis had scarcely had time, had he been the admirable Crichton in person, to display any of his accomplishments.

"Because he has been sent to England to speak about Jamaica."

It had come to pass that in the September of the preceding year Mr. Huskisson had written his famous letter, which announced the rejection of what has since been called the "Disallowed Slave Act," and thus set the Jamaica House of Assembly into a blaze. But is not all this chronicled in the chronicles of *The Times?* Only a passing mention of such matters is necessary here, to make clear the cause of the voyages and travels of one of our personages.

There had been objectionable clauses in this Slave Act, restricting religious worship and religious instruction among the slaves; a change from the government proposal of a slave protector to each parish, to a council of protection. For these reasons and others the new Slave Act had been "disallowed."

The Jamaica House of Assembly was furious, the planters were furious, the slaves disappointed. Every party claimed to be in the right, and the small minority who saw the wrong and were desirous of having it redressed without calling in the aid of civil war, of course fell to the ground between the stools.

To this small minority belonged Mr. Gautier, Stella's cousin Louis. At a meeting of influential liberal men, and such did actually exist even then in Jamaica, chiefly, it must be owned, among the clergy, lawyers, and physicians, it was decided to send a private deputation to England to plead the cause of the Island in high places, and to try to find defenders in Great Britain, who, while upholding the rights of humanity and justice as regards the blacks, would also require that neither humanity nor justice should be forgotten towards the whites.

Mr. Gautier being recognised as a favourable specimen of his class, and more at liberty to bestow a few months on the general weal than his professional friends, he with one other gentleman was chosen to represent the seven wise men of the community. This it was which had so unexpectedly brought cousin Louis to Waterloo Cottage, and made Stella ask if he were not "clever?"

"Clever in a way," returned Celia: "very far from being accomplished, as is your friend Mr. Smythe."

"Mr. Smythe is not more my friend than he is yours, Auntie," said Stella, briskly.

Celia laughed, and with her usual thoughtlessness said what she had better have left unsaid.

"Oh! you little inconstant monkey!"

Stella stared, looked grave, as if charged with a high misdemeanor, and replied—

"No, I am sure I am not inconstant. I think one ought to like one's own cousin better than a stranger, and I may admire a person's singing without being fond of that person."

"My dear stupid child! do not, for heaven's sake, use such strong expressions as 'fond,' when you are speaking of gentlemen. Where will people think you have been brought up? Oh, Stella, Stella!"

Stella was silent for a minute or two before she continued the conversation. "I do like Mr. Smythe in a way, Auntie; he is very amusing. It would be deceitful if I let you imagine

I did not like him at all, only I could never feel as if I could make a friend of him, or ask his advice about anything of consequence, as I would Louis."

"That's your opinion, is it?" said Celia. "Louis is very well when he is pleased, but I should not advise you to make too many demands on his forbearance."

"Oh, Auntie! and his face when he smiles looks—looks like an apostle's."

"Stupid, stupid, enthusiastic child! Now, Stella, will you believe me, that we used to think Louis had a bad temper; if you ever see his eyes when he is angry, you will never forget them again."

Stella was obstinate in her own conviction.

"Such a nice voice he has, and he speaks so evenly!"

"Evenly!" repeated Celia.

"Yes: he never seems hunting for the right word,—it comes. I watched that, when he was talking to uncle about Jamaica."

"You seem to have taken a good many observations; but do not call him Louis, though he is your cousin; he is too old to be treated as a playfellow,—he is double your age."

"Thirty-two!" exclaimed the literal Stella.

"Nearly; but I won't be malicious, he is not quite thirty yet."

Desire a private interview with any one particular person residing in the same house with you, and whom you cannot with propriety pursue to his or her sleeping-chamber or hunt into your own, and you will promptly discover how difficult it is to secure a ten minutes' tête-à-tête.

You think yourself tolerably sure from the known habits of the several individuals you are domiciled with, that at such and such a time they will be, as usual, out of your way. Only one member of the domestic circle remains between you and your point, but he or she loiters from some sudden inspiration of decorum or politeness—loiters, rousing your bile, till you are ready to exclaim, "For the love of Heaven *do* go, and stand not on the order of your going!" Or else some maid-servant, who never before thought of needlework as coming within her avocations, is suddenly seized with an industrious fit, at the particular moment most inconvenient to you; or the footman, who every other day allows the fire to expire, remembers, with equal fitness, the necessity of attending to the state of the temperature in the drawing or dining room or study, exactly where he is not wished for. Who knows the great events such hindrances may have nipped in their budding time? But girls of sixteen are not easily turned from their purpose; the tenacity of childhood has not left them, to give place to the embarrassing little prejudices of young ladyhood. Girls of Stella's age are oftener fearless and wilful than shy or pliant. Speak to them, draw them out of their silence, and you will often have reason to be astonished at their boyish candour and straightforwardness. It was therefore sheer absence of opportunity that stood in the way of Stella's friendly confidences to Mr. Gautier.

The first few days after his arrival at the cottage, when he stayed at home in the mornings, he remained shut up in his own room. In the evenings naturally all the family were assembled. During this period of waiting, Stella's admiration for her cousin was sensibly on the increase, and there really was something of the hero of romance about Louis's appearance. And his manner to women, whether young or old, was a manner belonging to the old French school.

For one example: He rose from his seat every time Celia, or Aunt Philly, or even Stella came into the room, offering them a chair, or waiting till they were seated before he resumed his own place. It may sound ridiculous to English ears, but it did not appear so. Stella was more abashed by this courtesy than she had ever been before by any action of man, and tried either to be beforehand in the room, or else waited till she could share the homage with one or other of the elder ladies.

Mr. Gautier placed a footstool under old Miss Dashwood's inelegant feet with the same grave gallantry as under Celia's fairy slippers.

Aunt Philly, who had never been the object of small attentions, very soon adored Mr. Gautier. She pronounced him to be a perfect gentleman; he very nearly caused the old woman to become a renegade to her party.

"If all Jamaica people were like him," said Aunt Philly, when laughingly reproached by Celia for her partiality to a slave-owner, "there would be no occasion for emancipation."

CHAPTER XIII.

A TÊTE-À-TÊTE.

On the fifth afternoon since he had been a guest at the cottage, Mr. Gautier returning from Major Dashwood's tailor, a preparatory step to paying some ceremonious and official visits, found Stella alone, practising on the piano.

"Pray, go on," he said. "I am very fond of music."

"I cannot play well enough for any one to like to hear me," answered Stella.

"Shall we talk, then, and make acquaintance with one another?" said Louis.

Stella went towards the fire where he was standing; he placed a chair for her, took another himself, much as they do at the theatre, and they sat down; but for a minute or two neither of them spoke.

Stella at last made that hesitating sound which betrays an intention of speaking.

"What were you going to say?" asked her cousin, smiling.

Stella's courage came at once. She placed one of her hands over the other, pressing both on her knee, straightening her arms,—a most untutored but not ugly attitude,—and then said, "I should like to ask you about papa, Mr. Gautier."

"Very well, question me; but pray, why do you call me Mr. Gautier; it was Louis at first."

"Auntie said you might think me bold if I did."

"But indeed I should not. I liked the sound of Louis in your voice very much. If you are afraid of offending my dignity, call me cousin Louis."

"I am not afraid of you at all," said Stella, looking at him; "it makes *such* a difference when a person is your own relation."

This was said in a tone of affection which touched Mr. Gautier.

"How came you to recollect me?" he inquired. "You were scarcely more than a baby when you saw me before."

"I knew it was you from the picture in the study."

"In spite of this growth?" touching his great black whiskers.

"The eyes are the same, and altogether you are like it still."

"You are a sharp observer. Now what do you wish to ask me about your papa."

Out it came with a burst. "Oh, cousin! I cannot bear his being married again."

"That is perhaps natural as a first feeling," answered Louis. "A prejudice against stepmothers has been sown broadcast in the world; I hope it is only some nonsensical hearsay of that kind which troubles my young cousin?"

"I meant to be a comfort to papa, and do so much good!" said Stella, in a low voice, with a perceptible quavering in it.

"Of course you did, like a good little girl. You had planned one duty for yourself, and now you find that one of another kind is designed for you, *and you will fulfil that.*"

Louis spoke in a cheerful, decided tone. He received no answer, and was aware that the muscles round Stella's delicate child's mouth were tremulous to an alarming degree.

"I will tell you of lessons I have learned, little cousin. We all begin by supposing we have a choice as to how our lives shall be parcelled out and spent. Alas! no—yet why alas? It is better to obey necessity: it spares us much regret at our own shortsightedness. Things are of two kinds in this world of ours, Stella; some are in our own power—others not. Our opinions, our affections, our dislikes, these we can rule; but if you wish to infringe on what is in the power of others to dispute with you, my poor child, you will be constantly in trouble and complaining alike of gods and men."

Louis had risen, and was standing with his peculiarly erect carriage before the seated Stella. She did not quite seize his meaning, but as he paused, she thought she must make a reply.

Reverently, and rather timidly she said, "I might complain of men, cousin, but never of God."

"I said the gods, Stella, for indeed I was quoting from a fine old Greek. I fancy you have a stout enough spirit to do battle with any of your rebellious feelings, or I should not talk thus with you. If you only aim at governing that which is in your own power, you will never strive in vain, and no one can hinder or hurt you."

Stella was very much honoured indeed by

her grand-looking cousin's conversing in so high a strain with her, though not very certain about her stout spirit, for she was feeling more forlorn than before he began his consolation; she made sure he must be right, it was his immeasurable superiority which placed her too far away from him, poor ignorant child as she was.

Louis was scrutinizing her face as she sat before him. He was given to probing the characters and motives of others, addicted to digging down to the very foundations of their being; not the happiest habit for those who wish to preserve their philosophical calm. Besides, pride in our penetrating powers is one of the Evil One's temptations. "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Why is it that this injunction, which carries in it so direct a promise of retribution to ourselves—why is it so constantly disobeyed? Mr. Gautier had a most lively faith in his power to read the mind's construction in the face.

"Now," went on Louis, as if guided by a

perception of Stella's inmost thoughts, "if you had made up your mind to be an heiress, that was just one of the things which did not depend on you; in short, not in your power to realize."

Stella's fine eyes here opened on the speaker with the untroubled gaze of wonder; then, as she gathered his meaning, they flashed on him, and she burst out with, "I never thought of such a thing, I only wanted papa's love."

Mr. Gautier was unyielding. "His having a wife will not prevent that. Do not you see what a selfish love yours is? Tell me, how often have you, when enjoying music and books in the midst of cheerful society, as I found you, for instance, on the night I arrived, how often have you thought of your father, perhaps pining in solitude?"

"I know how bad it was at Evian," remarked Stella, with a sigh of self-reproach for not having sympathized with her father.

Louis thought, "What a stiff-necked girl!"

mistaking her meaning. She interested him, however; she was quaint, and not a mere echo.

"Yes," he said, "I dare say it was very sad for you at Evian; but does your suffering give you any right to exact payment in kind from others? You must, as a duty, begin at once to combat any aversion you have conceived against a lady, merely because she is your father's wife. Learn to forget yourself, devote yourself, sacrifice yourself, that is the law set up, not by man, but proclaimed by God."

Stella understood him now; a soft blush rose in her cheek, her eye glistened with a chivalrous ardour, as when one listens to the spirit-stirring strains of martial music.

"I *will* try, cousin Louis," and her heart bounded at his words.

"Honour bright?" he asked, looking down at her, his face and voice softened.

"Honour bright," she repeated, firmly.

"You will succeed," he said. "You remind me too much of one superior to all her sex, not to have some of her good qualities."

"Am I like your mamma, cousin Louis?"

"Not at all: your resemblance is to my mother's adopted daughter, and your mother's sister."

The waning light was still sufficient to let Mr. Gautier's piercing eyes perceive the sudden falling of his young cousin's face.

"A slight family resemblance," continued Louis, "that you may be proud of, to the best of women."

He spoke in a voice more than sufficiently stern. Louis had spoken so loudly, both he and his companion were so interested in their conversation, that neither had noticed a ring of the door-bell.

"That is a daring assertion to make of one lady to another," said Mr. Stapylton Smythe's agreeable voice.

Mr. Smythe had abstained from his evening visits to the cottage since Mr. Gautier's arrival; had indeed only called once to leave a card for that gentleman. With Mr. Smythe were Celia and Mrs. Hood. Mrs. Harriette having come to have a look at the Caribbean savage, as she designated Mr. Gautier. Stella was sorry for the interruption, she had hoped to hear more of that family story which her grandmother had held as a threat over her head, and her aunt as a reproach.

Mr. Gautier had a repartee on his lips, but he was one of those men too reserved to enter into a war of wit; so he only replied drily, "You rate women very low."

"Thank you, Mr. Gautier," cried out Mrs. Hood. "I always judge of men's own calibre by the way they speak of women."

"Perhaps my favourable judgment arises from my small experience," returned Louis; "but I owe all the happiness of my life to two noble, devoted women."

There was no call for this avowal. Why did Louis make it? Did you ever, reader, remark how some secret consciousness provokes your or your neighbour's unnecessary candour.

"One too many," laughed Mrs. Hood. Then in that flute-like, innocent voice, which Celia knew meant mischief, Harriette went on. "I did not know Mr. Gautier was married."

"No more he is," exclaimed Stella.

Celia was twisting her brains how to change the subject, for she dreaded Louis's explanation of his family arrangements, which would be unhesitatingly given if Mrs. Hood continued her cunning attacks. The revelation of her brother's Spanish connections seemed imminent, and the only diversion she could think of was ringing the bell for lights.

Pompey brought in candles and Mrs. Dashwood then ordered coals. No use: Harriette was not to be diverted.

"What a charming, romantic country Jamaica must be!" sighed Mrs. Hood. "Do you know I have often thought that if I were ever single again, I would always be *just* on the point of marrying—never going further."

"My dear Hatty!" said Celia, reprovingly.

"Just ask Mr. Gautier or Mr. Smythe if it is not the stage of life most conducive to felicity."

Mr. Smythe laughed and Mr. Gautier frowned. Louis did not understand persiflage. To Celia's indignation he continued the subject, saying seriously,

"There is no courtship in my case."

Mrs. Hood smiled, as persons do who have had enough of one topic, or who are thinking of something else. She was, in fact, trying to hear what Mr. Smythe was saying to Stella, and though his back was turned, she knew as well by the tones of his voice as if she had seen him, that he was using his sweetest smile.

Mr. Smythe was asking Stella if she could let him have a small MS. music book he had brought her on some occasion. He was informing Stella in the same little lover-like whisper, that he had met with a charming young widow, a most accomplished *artiste,* to whom he had promised to take these unprinted treasures of his travels.

Stella most actively searched the music stand, casually wondering what singing had to do with an artist. Though well enough acquainted with French, Stella was not yet mistress of this technical designation applied to musicians.

Mr. Smythe saw Stella's untroubled mien, but both the penetrating ones, Mrs. Hood and Mr. Gautier, were led into error.

"Don't you think the climate and customs of Jamaica would suit Mr. Smythe very well?" asked Harriette, pointedly, of Mr. Gautier.

Mr. Smythe turned round at this, saying, "I never thought of it before, but really, Mrs. Hood, your idea is not a bad one. I think I will try for the post of protector of slaves: it is a taking title. There are to be such appointments, are there not, Mr. Gautier? And if not, why should I not grow vines there, and sit under their shade? Miss Joddrell, you will patronize me, I hope, if we should meet in a Spanish Town Assembly? I was very civil to you, you know, at your first English party."

Before the speech ended, Mr. Gautier had slipped out of the room.

"How could I patronize you?" asked Stella.

"I am afraid you will soon be taught your power," returned Mr. Smythe, with a glance that had in it a little regret.

"Good-bye, Celia," said Mrs. Hood. "I like your cousin Gautier. He has a stiff sturdiness that one learns by experience to prefer to insidious elegance and all that humbug. If his clothes were better made, the man would be handsome. Ta—ta." She pinched Stella's cheek as she passed, saying, "Little fool."

CHAPTER XIV.

LETTERS.

Louis Gautier to the Ladies of Silver Hill.

"Waterloo Cottage, February 6th, 1828.

"My dear Maman—my dear Olympia:

"In England only forty-eight hours, and you see I am already writing to you. A good sign! Apparently, the indolence of which you were afraid, and to the existence of which I so humbly agreed, is not an incurable evil.

"We had an excellent passage; no cold to speak of in the Channel, no adventure, no misfortune. Do I need to tell you how often I have thought of home, or that whether watching the magnificent spectacle of the sun sinking beneath the boundary line of heaven and earth, or lying sleepless at night, listening to the restless waters around me, or forced into companionship by my shipmates, still I was with you in spirit. Verily, the pleasures of travelling can exist only for those who have no strong affections.

"Immediately on my arrival in London, I went to Messrs. Holden and Van Voorst for funds. A clerk presented me with a letter. It was addressed in your handwriting, Olympia. I was not in the least surprised. Do you not possess, more than any other living being I know, the genius of goodness. You have divined every feeling I should experience on finding myself in London—terrible London! You tell me to trust to your care of my mother. I do trust to your care, my dear friend, more even than to my own Maman. You are the saint to whom I pray. What a lucky fellow I am to have not only a noble mother, but a faithful, disinterested friend. Two such affections make life blessed in spite of its trials and bereavements, its blunders and difficulties. I believe that I replied categorically enough to Mr. Holden, and altogether behaved like a man in his senses; but I shook with impatience to break the seal of my letter.

"In spite of my wishes, it was evening before I could reach Waterloo Cottage. I guessed that Mrs. Dashwood and Stella Joddrell must be anxious for news from Cedar Valley, so I decided on trampling on conventionality, and, in right of cousinhood, rang at their gate bell at ten o'clock at night.

"The servant, old Pompey, recollected me directly; these blacks have the memory and instincts of spaniels. The old fellow nearly threw himself at my feet, and grinned so, that he could not pronounce my name when he ushered me into the drawing-room. Coming out of a half obscurity, the sudden glare of light dazzled me; I fancied I had tumbled into a tea-party, the room seemed so full of people.

"I recognised Celia's long golden curls at once; but she did not return the compliment; on the contrary, her blue eyes opened wide with wonder as they fell on me. Suddenly I heard Olympia's voice, that clear, ringing voice, crying out, "It is Louis, it is cousin Louis." A tall, slim girl started forward, and forced her hand into mine. This was your niece, Olympia, so she had a fair right to your voice. I could not consider it sacrilege. I found out afterwards that Stella had guessed who I was from a likeness taken of me before I was twenty, and which Celia had preserved.

"My identity ascertained, there was no lack of greeting, nor of kindly welcome; in short, there was no satisfying the hospitable instincts of my connections, until I agreed to take up my quarters with them. I argued that my luggage was still in the ship, that I had only a small valise with me, that I was unfit to appear in fashionable society; all my excuses were overruled, and here, in despite of a predetermination to enjoy the liberty of a lodging of my own, I am definitively established. Man proposes, but woman disposes, for it was the ladies who were so strenuous.

"The attention bestowed on me is often a constraint. I am ungrateful enough to have the inclination to cry out, "Not so much zeal, for the love of heaven, ladies." Celia, I must tell you, looks nearly as young and quite as pretty as she did ten years ago. Though fully thirty, she might still play the young girl in a white frock. Not a line, not a ruffle on her satin skin: her lips are red, smooth, and smiling; her eyes retain their former diamond lustre; her hair is as glossy and abundant as ever. I confess (misanthrope that I am) the sight is not one pleasing to me. Life's rude apprenticeship ought to leave some traces behind it. We should augur but ill of a workman whose hands did not bear true witness to his toil.

"Major Dashwood has progressed into a portly middle-aged gentleman; and his aunt is a stout, red-faced, silent old gentlewoman.

"Celia has candidly bid me seek the good offices of a London tailor; clothes of a different shape from the prevailing mode are sufficient, I see, to make a sensible man ridiculous, so I must lose no time.

"*10th February.*—On the evening of my arrival I was formally introduced to a Mr. Smith—I beg his pardon, Mr. Stapylton Smythe, as I see by the card he left to-day for me. Strange that the first acquaintance I make in England *should* bear that odious name—Smith or Smythe; they come from the same root. The gentleman is quite at home in this family, and I can see that Celia wants us to be friends. Either because of that, or of his name, or the combination of the two causes, I feel a prejudice springing up, full-grown and lively, against this agreeable friend of the family. He is a favourite with them all, except with old Aunt Philly.

"Celia and I have some sentimental conversations—particularly when I come back from London disappointed in the errand that took me there. She tries to console me for what I begin to consider a wildgoose chase, by assuring me that I am vastly improved from what I was; worth twice as much as when we parted. Eheu! Occasionally she tells me some of her troubles and disappointments. After all, she is a sweet creature, obliging and sound at heart. I could tell you now things very honourable to her. Pity it is that she had not fallen into the hands of a superior man! He would have filled up the good outlines of her character. I was too harsh in my judgment of her. It is not the modest rivulet's fault that you can see every grain of sand over which its inch-deep waters murmur along. It freshens many and many a blade of grass, that would else have withered. God, who has created the great ocean for its uses, created also the small rivulet for some good end. Celia has, however, one great want in my eyes: she has never received the baptism of suffering. I do not think that you, Olympia, know that Celia was the object of my first passion,—a youth's fierce, intolerant, exacting passion. I wonder, had her mother not interfered between us, if the fire would have burned steadily on, or burned out, leaving us each with cold grey ashes, for all the interest of the great capital embarked?

" *Thursday night.*—The more I see of men and things here, the faster do my hopes of any reasonable settlement of the most arduous question of slavery dwindle away. A compromise might be easily effected, at least I believe so, but compromise implies mutual concession; and party spirit runs too high on both sides to admit of any yielding. It is a sad spectacle, I assure you, to see passions paramount where principle ought to prevail, and poor coterie interest substituted for the eternal rights of justice and humanity. A man of moderation, as I am by nature and habit, cast into this heated medium, is just like the earthen pot among the iron ones of the fable, and quite as sure of being broken. My colleagues in the deputation look coldly upon me already, and so do the Abolitionists, for the simple reason that I refuse to go the lengths of either; and I expect soon to be stigmatised as a renegade. Let it be so. At my time of life, a man knows that parties are exclusive and intolerant. An old school line says: '*Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas.*' So long as I am at peace with my conscience, what matters the rest?

"The windows of the pretty room allotted to me look into the garden: they might as well look into the street, or anywhere else, for all I can see from them in general is a thick fog. My soul was untuned by yesterday's labours. I struggled out this morning to try and shake off the gloom I felt creeping into my soul. The only object of interest I came across was a solitary cow reposing tranquilly on a small mound, and receiving that falling mist with admirable stoicism. The poor cow set a good example to the vexed man. I determined to be resigned to my fate. I hailed a passing hackney-coach, and went to—where do you think?—to the Major's tailor. On my return home, hearing the sound of the piano, I opened the drawing-room door, and found Stella alone. She declined playing to me, so we sat down by the fire to talk. She is the completest specimen you can imagine of a transition state—of the child becoming a woman; it is difficult to treat her as either the one or the other. She is both brusque and sensitive, fearless and timid; her eyes, by-the-by, are not black, like those of Olympia, but grey with brown in them, and they are encased in the longest, thickest, blackest lashes I ever saw, which makes them look black at night.

“ She spoke to me of her father's marriage in a tone of morbid feeling, unpalatable to me. I did not handle this sort of disease very tenderly; but my reproofs were received without the flow of tears which I had expected. On the contrary, I was listened to with attention, almost with respect, except when I proceeded to hint at the possibility of her regretting her heiress-ship; then the humble expression of the large eyes changed to a haughty flash, and the girlish figure took a womanly, rebuking attitude. We did not come to the good understanding I think we should have done, because our tête-à-tête was interrupted by Celia's entrance, accompanied by her present bosom friend, a Mrs. Hood, and that same Mr. Smythe. I wonder who he is, and what he is about among these ladies?

* * * * *

"I have found it materially impossible to follow up my plan of keeping a regular journal for you. Celia considers me as her property—as a kind of country cousin,—and carries me to exhibitions and sights, forces me into paying morning visits and going to dinner parties.

"Yesterday we dined with the Hoods, who have a very fine house near this. Mr. Smythe was there, and a most powerful magnetic current of antipathy is now established between that gentleman and me. Both of you know that I am unfortunately a Sybarite in some things, for many the lecture Olympia has bestowed on me for allowing the little miseries of life, and the contact of obnoxious persons, such as one is sure to meet at every turn of the road, to take such a hold of me. It is the nature of the animal, I suppose. Strange, also, how commonly shyness is mistaken for haughtiness!

"The two young daughters of our hostess, pretty girls with ringlets, came down from the school-room in the evening. We played at various games by way of amusing the young people; among others, at forfeits. I did my best to be agreeable. When it came to Mrs. Hood's turn, her penance was to find a fault or a good quality for every one present. She scanned me for an instant, then pronounced that "I was too high for the company I was in."

"Rather to my surprise, Stella seemed ready to applaud the sentiment. Surely, I have not made the child into my enemy? It would be unfair, for I confess that Stella is the only creature, not even excepting you, Olympia, my good, kind friend, with whom in the first meeting I ever felt perfectly at my ease.

"I have dined at several other houses; but I find that wherever I go the conversation rolls round a very limited circle. Try to detach it from its accustomed route, and you find yourself left alone. Perhaps others would make a similar remark were they transported to Silver Hill. But what a change all this is to me, from the ease of our evenings there, where there was no occasion for explanation,—where subject followed subject as much without confusion as without prejudice or pretension. Since I have been in England, I have got into the habit of talking of one thing while thinking of another. Very often my words sound to me as if they were being spoken by some one else, so completely do I echo the conventionality of my neighbour on the right hand and the left.

"Another element of my loneliness here is, that I have no one to whom I can talk with any chance of being understood, of either my noble mother or my noble friend; Stella perhaps, were she some years older. The fact is, English people do not understand friendship: they acknowledge the ties of relationship,—they decline any other. Poor little Celia complains of this; people are always asking what relation Mrs. Hood is to her.

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"She is a strange child, this cousin Stella of mine, this niece of Olympia's; I never saw in any one such a respect for life. She cannot endure seeing an insect destroyed. None are repulsive to her. She appears literally without an idea that any living thing can be disgusting. This morning when she saw Mr. Smythe put his foot on a spider, she gave a cry, and a look of anger and dislike appeared on her face.

Celia, who has a shrinking horror of every crawling thing, called Stella unnatural and foolish; Stella scarcely ever defends herself from Celia's reproaches or remarks. She seems to consider "pretty Auntie,"—her way of describing Mrs. Dashwood,—as an Indian savage does his idol. It may do any harm or evil and still be blindly worshipped. Some natures have this aptitude for devotion, *quand même.*

"*Saturday.*—Packet-day at last approaches. A whole month has passed without the power of sending you a line. The mail from Jamaica, I am told, is due next week, but it always arrives just too late to send answers by the outward-bound packet. This information makes me feel more sad and discouraged than usual. Whatever the news of my mother, dear Maman, or of you, Olympia, I shall be able to give no sign of sympathy, no word of advice, for six mortal weeks! Day after day one hears moralising about the shortness and uncertainties of life; but of what avail our assent to the preacher's words? Who bears separation the better for being conscious that it is no uncommon occurrence, that it is only what falls to the lot of every creature of woman born? How many who have pressed each other's hands in the certainty of the morrow's meeting, have never again met here below! Separated from my dearest by a wide ocean, which takes a month and a half to traverse! I wonder at my own serenity.

"My placidity is sometimes troubled by a vision of Olympia, contending alone with the difficulties of managing the negroes; in any trouble apply for advice or assistance to Dr. McNiel. He is less likely to resort to severe measures than my cousin of Cedar Valley. Has the bride been to visit you? If not, make no advances. Remember my advice to keep Maurice at a distance: he is a clever fellow, but encroaching. As I write these words, my present powerlessness to be of use to you in any strait makes this absence too trying. I shall push hard for such an interview with the great man, as shall allow me to fix the time of my leaving England.

"28*th February.*—Yesterday I and my colleagues had an interview with Mr. Blank; satisfactory in so far as an interview with a clever, far-seeing, just-minded man must be to the oppressed. The interest he showed in our subject is valuable, coming from one so everyway superior, but as for any chance of staving off the ruin of the West Indies, that is as likely as my squaring the circle. The punishment of the children for the sins of the father is at hand, believe me. The popular ignorance here about the colonies, and the popular excitement about the black race, coupled with the pig-headedness in Jamaica, will speedily bring about the sacrifice. Benevolence will be misapplied: the rights of thousands of innocent whites will be recklessly destroyed, while any kind of progress among the blacks will be arrested for generations to come.

The leadership of both parties has fallen to the hottest and blindest partisans, and the first consequence is, our retracing our steps to the old law of 1816, back to absolute power; and when did despotism fail to lead to oppression? We do not need to make a voyage to the West Indies to find that out. I am uneasy about Maurice; he will resent the withdrawal of the privileges so lately conceded to his race. Meddle with him as little as possible.

"*March* 1*st.*—We have seen nothing of General Hubbard or his family. I begin to wish for their appearance,—guess why? Nothing less than to see my young cousin Stella out of this house, under the protection of the fiery little soldier, and some motherly person to watch over her.

Queer as she is, Mrs. Hubbard is a better guide than such a thoughtless creature as pretty Celia.

"Mrs. Hood would willingly have opened my eyes, had they required opening, to the fluttering of this gaudy butterfly, Mr. Smythe, about our half-opened flower. I have thought once or twice of giving this child-woman, Stella, some advice, but to tell the truth, I have not the courage.

"Poor little girl! she has never been in the normal condition designed for all human beings at the beginning of their lives; she has no recollection of a father's caress, or of a mother's kiss. Just at the age to require all the bulwarks of parental protection, she is sent like a shuttlecock from stranger to stranger.

"Luckily nature has gifted her with a brave spirit, there is no cowardice about her. More women do wrong from timidity than from evil impulse. Breathing an air thick with conventionalities, Stella does not imbibe them,—does not even perceive their existence.

"Celia says she is too much of a savage as yet to understand their necessity. A fine necessity indeed! I confess that her manner is a little too uncombed, but her untamed ways are more like those of a bird newly caught, than proceeding from any innate roughness. She has at times a sort of inspired Joan d'Arc expression, that must be the emanation of a noble soul. Could I paint, I would make a picture of her for you, taken in the attitude she naturally falls into when listening to anything that awakens her interest. Her cheek, looking pale against the masses of her dark hair, lightly pressed on her girlish hand; her dreamy eyes, where the light of womanhood begins to dawn, contrasting with a serious, but still a child's mouth.

"Once at some story of heroic self-sacrifice, I saw her flash and thrill as if her whole being vibrated with sympathy, just as I have seen the ocean's expanse turn to crimson and seem to heave with joy under the touch of the glorious day-star. You can understand my sensations, those of any man of right feeling, when he sees a blight preparing to fall on some noble lily's bosom,—about to destroy all its gracious promise.

"As yet Stella is unconscious of the nature of Mr. Smythe's sentiments and attentions; but how long can she remain so? and Celia is not the woman to ward off a bad influence and keep the knowledge of evil to herself. I am inclined to go and find Mrs. Hubbard myself. If Stella ever goes to Jamaica, we must adopt her. Olympia, you will be to her the mother she has never known,—she is worthy of being your pupil.

"*Thursday evening.*—What a pleasure! the first object that met my eyes on my return this afternoon from a tedious day of disappointment in London, was Stella waiting at the garden gate in a bitter east wind. As soon as she caught sight of me, she shouted at the top of her voice, "Good news! glorious news! two

Jamaica letters, cousin Louis," waving them as she spoke high in the air.

"Two letters, did she say? Two hymns! What have I ever done to merit so much affection from two beings so superior to me in heart and mind as Maman and Olympia?"

CHAPTER XV.

SPRING BUDS OPEN.

Mr. Gautier had been six weeks an inmate of Waterloo Cottage when Stella waved before his eyes, as banners of joy, the two Jamaica letters. The address on the one was written by feeble, uncertain fingers; on the other, every letter was clear and firm as print, yet delicate and minute: you would have said at once that it had been a labour of love.

Stella had admired this writing, wondered over it, and then contrasted it with her own miserable, rough, unshapely penmanship. She had taken possession of the letters, her cousin having gone out earlier than usual to wait on an influential M. P. believed to favour the West Indian interest.

Stella had been busy and preoccupied with these letters all day: first, she placed them conspicuously on the head of the bronze statuette paper-weight on Mr. Gautier's writing-table, going in and out of the room to make sure of the striking effect of her arrangement. She knew how these letters had been longed for, so much so, that she had often lately felt, when fancying her cousin more than usually dull and depressed, that she would have braved fire and water to bring back cheerfulness to his eyes. The more cousin Stella sympathized, the less, however, could cousin Louis divine the strength of her sympathy, for it made her as brooding and silent as himself.

On the contrary, he set down this change in her spirits, this shade on her brow, this abstraction in her manner, to Mr. Smythe's account. Mr. Gautier was sorry to think this, nay, he was grieved; there was a feeling also of disappointment in his mind. Under his taciturnity lay a heroic, chivalrous nature, which had instinctively recognised a counterpart in young Stella Joddrell and he had dwelt on the discovery with an emotion of pleasure (we must call it for want of a better word) such as a man of science may experience in arriving at some rare and precious result.

It would seem that one of the great interests of life is that of exercising our penetrative faculty,—of trying to pierce through the visible into the invisible; we none of us are willing to rest satisfied with what is only external. Yet from the girl scrutinising her lover, and the youthful poet, up to the philosopher and the divine, all are held equally in suspense by their misinterpretations of the unseen by the seen.

Louis Gautier, the man of experience, was to be no exception to the rule. As yet, however, Stella had proposed to herself no problems about cousin Louis. To her, he was the demonstration of a hero; he and his prototype Ravenswood, one entire chrysolite.

As the timepiece in the drawing-room marked the fourth hour of this afternoon in March, Stella once more raced up to Mr. Gautier's room; her patience was worn out; the letters, seen so often on the head of the statuette, no longer looked effective; she snatched them off, and oscillated between the hall door and the garden gate, until she descried his tall, upright figure approaching.

In spite of north winds and east winds, it was spring; buds were opening on trees and hedges; tender green leaves, the heralds of flowers, the heralds of fruitful harvests of many kinds, were rousing the earth from her winter's sleep. On this particular afternoon the sun was bright, the air full of joyous sounds, the sky very blue, most intensely blue, wherever the white fleecy clouds were battling for a place. A great long ray of the declining sun came and lighted on Stella, as she held up the letters to her cousin; she stood before that dark cousin, "a very shower of beauty, her face with gladness overspread, soft smiles by human kindness bred," playing over mouth and cheeks.

Louis only seemed, however, to perceive the letters she offered; he seized them and hastened to his own room. There he devoured the contents, thanked God for the safety of those so dear to him, felt his heart full as with new wine, sought out certain passages to re-read, had an impulse to pack his portmanteau and try to catch the next day's outward-bound packet, and sail back without delay to his Lares and Penates. Sighed a little, and, finally, added the concluding lines to his journal, given in the last chapter, and obeyed the summons to dinner.

In the meanwhile Stella's joy was overshadowed; she had been so exceedingly glad for cousin Louis's sake, and he had not even said one word to the harbinger of good tidings. In smoothing her hair, tossed and ruffled by that sharp March wind which had met her at the garden gate, she saw that her eyes were glistening. The boisterous March wind was not to blame for this; there are omissions in our kindliness to one another, keener, more chilling, than even a north-east wind.

People made a common remark that year, as indeed they do most years, that "spring was late." The buds on trees and hedges had grown rounder and redder, bright suns had warmed them, birds had called impatiently to them, "It is time to open," but no unfolding had followed the sun's darts or the birds' call. The buds had waited for the one particular fore-ordained hour; when that came, without any perceptible difference in it from the hour gone by, they had spread open and showed their tender beauty. Let the same bleak gusts blow on the morrow, or the next day, as had shaken branch and new-sprung stem the week before; let whirlwinds of dust arise, or pitiless sleet fall down, the buds can never more roll up their tender leaves and be buds again.

Bud of tree and flower, human heart in the bud, once open into full life, there will be no shrinking back for you into the calyx in which you lay so calm, in ignorance of the bitter hazards awaiting your blossoming, blighting your prime, dogging your decay.

It was the day after she had given the Jamaica letters to Mr. Gautier, that Stella found him alone in Celia's study, reading.

With his usual courtesy he rose, placed a chair for her by the side of the fire. Sitting down by his side she said to him, after a minute or two of silence, during which he had resumed his reading—

"It will be a long time, I fancy, cousin Louis, before you will let me rank as a friend?"

Mr. Gautier looked up surprised, laid aside his book, and answered gravely—

"Life is too short to waste it in apprenticeships. I see no reason why I should not consider you as a friend."

"I don't mean just a common everyday friend," said Stella, very earnestly, "but one like—like what your mother's adopted daughter is to you."

Louis, with the same seriousness as before, replied—

"When you know that excellent woman, you will be able to judge how much you ask."

Stella's heart swelled as it had never swelled before.

"I am only a girl, I know; but I could be a good friend. Try me, cousin Louis."

This time Mr. Gautier smiled as he looked into the depths of the eyes gazing on him. Very few human eyes have that expression of honest faithfulness in them, but you may see the look any day in your dog's eyes, when they are watching for your withheld caress.

"So be it," said Mr. Gautier. "We will sign a contract of friendship immediately: and now, remember, you must tell me all your secrets."

"And you?" asked Stella, anxiously.

"Of course," he laughed.

"But I am in earnest, cousin Louis," said Stella, imploringly.

"Are you, indeed? Do you not understand, Stella, that friendship and confidence (one and the same thing they ought to be) must be won? They cannot be given, as one gives a flower to a young lady."

"I don't know that," said Stella, stoutly. "I have given you mine, and you have done nothing to win my friendship. If I had any secrets, I could tell them to you sooner than to anyone I ever knew in all my life, and I could tell you what I feel. I want some one to help me, for sometimes I think I have very bad feelings."

The child-like eyes were still fixed confidingly on Mr. Gautier. He did not respond to the offer; his impulse was to repel it; so, passing over the last part of Stella's speech, he replied to the first—

"You are very young and very inexperienced. Friendship and confidence are nothing but vague, meaningless expressions in your child's mouth. At my age they are stern realities, comprising stern duties."

Very stern and not very attractive if they resembled Mr. Gautier at that time of speaking. He took up his book, and, as Stella remained silent, recommenced reading. Presently she interrupted him with the question—

"What did that lady do to gain your friendship and confidence?"

"She has given years of unsparing devotion to my mother, years of disinterested aid and sympathy to me."

"I can do the same, cousin Louis. I am

your relation, and she is not even that," said Stella, with unshrinking ignorance.

"My dear cousin, do you know this is very unaccountable talk?"

Louis was stopped by the great blush that overspread Stella's face and throat, a blush that tingled down to her finger tips. What was it in Louis's tone, or words, or look, that thus awoke for the first time in that young being the shamefacedness of a woman?

His young cousin's deep, painful flush made Louis's colour rise also, from a keen sensation of self-reproach. He made a quick diversion, however, by saying—

"What is the reason you speak of your mother's sister as merely *that* lady?"

"I never heard of her until lately, and then by no name," said Stella, embarrassed.

"Could you not have called her *Aunt?*"

"I have no wish to do so, cousin Louis," was the unhesitating answer, but in a low voice.

"Now, then, give me your first proof of the confidence you say you feel in me." Mr. Gautier's flush had vanished, he looked now pale, as well as stern. "You have probably heard some silly, idle reports from persons either ignorant of the truth or else mischievously inclined. Set aside as untrue whatever you may have heard, and believe my simple assurance, the assurance of a man who despises big words, that your Aunt Olympia is as much the superior of every one you have hitherto known as the heavens are above the earth. She is a pure, transparent vase, full to the brim of benevolence and long-suffering."

Stella's eyes were on the ground, but Louis saw the muscles round her lips quivering: his voice softened. "Love and respect her now for my sake, will you?" he said. "When you once know her, there will be no need of constraint."

"What is her name?" asked Stella.

"Olympia Gautier."

"That is not her real name. Why does she use any other than her own, cousin Louis? Why is she not called by her husband's name, for I know she is married?" questioned Stella impetuously.

"For excellent reasons not convenient to give to you. I will confide in you so far, Stella, as to tell you, that if ever I come across her husband, it will be a death struggle between us; if ever he attempts to see her again, he shall find me in his path."

As Mr. Gautier spoke, his eyes darted flashes of fiery light; the large lids opened back, showing the white all round the irids;—he was terrible to behold.

Stella remained silent, though her half-opened lips seemed to form words which she had no voice to utter. The troubled expression of her face was that of one on the borders of delirium. Her look and his look crossed. Louis was rather startled by the strange glance meeting his, but his anger overpowered his fear.

"Well?" he exclaimed, in the tone of one forcing his enemy at the sword's point to cry for quarter, "well?"

Stella looked, without quailing, into his fierce face, and said, "I hate her, cousin Louis: you have made me hate her!" And then the girl turned away and left him.

She went to her own room, and there, with flushed cheeks and clay-cold hands, quaked and trembled, and in that hot flush, accompanied by quailing and trembling, her child's heart burst from the bud.

Mr. Gautier, left alone, tried to settle himself to his book again, but he could not banish Stella's angry face from the pages. "Nature will prevail," he mused; "the passionate Moorish blood speaks out in her, spite of her cold grandmother's stern training and her frivolous aunt's example."

Mr. Gautier felt the want of discussing this subject, as indeed he did every other, with

Olympia, his friend and adopted sister; he mused on the blank in his life her absence created. Had this guardian angel been by his side, however, it is probable our friend Louis would not have been able clearly to explain the exact state of his mind about his wilful young cousin. He had been excessively and unreasonably angry at her hesitation in acknowledging her mother's sister, and yet the broad statement of hatred which followed had somehow left him softened. His Mentor might have guessed the gradations of her Telemachus' feelings, but certainly not from the clearness of the explanations he could have afforded her.

Try to paint with the finest colours painter's palette can hold, a blue misty distance, athwart which slants a ray of yellow light. You see the church spire, it glitters, and so do the windows and the metal-bound roof: beneath and around the House of God are grouped dwellings; the river glances here and there like a silver ribbon, cattle dot the pasture. Try to give the mingling of that ideal and real so strongly exciting your divine and human sympathies, and you turn away baffled from the effort you have made. Objects are either too defined, press too materially forward, or else are blurred, blotched, confused. Our sensations share the same fate. Who has not felt the jar of his own language when seeking to make known what is arising in his soul? Is that the reason we have learnt to call silence eloquent?

As Mr. Gautier went on with his musings, the image of Stella at the garden gate, steeped in the parting sun's golden light, rose suddenly before him, and the impression made by the sight, unconscious as he was of it at the time, was reproduced. He remembered that it had flashed on him, that Raphael's idea of an angel must have been taken from some young girl on the eve of womanhood, when the face and its expression, softer and finer than that of a youth, had as yet none of the mobility or consciousness of her sex.

That day Mr. Smythe dined at the cottage. On Stella's cheek, when she came to dinner, still glowed the flush of the afternoon, lighting up her eyes to a feverish brilliancy. During the evening, instead of shy silence and devoted listening to cousin Louis, Stella allowed Mr. Smythe to draw her into conversation, talking with a flutter in her manner, but still gaily. When Major Dashwood turned the conversation on the news from the West Indies, it was from Mr. Smythe Stella asked an explanation of what her uncle was saying.

Mr. Smythe represented the anti-slavery party, while Louis was more than usually harsh and stiff in defence of the measures taken by the Jamaica House of Assembly. He declared that the three clauses in the Disallowed Slave Act, which Mr. Huskisson gave as the grounds for its rejection, proved ignorance and malice on the part of the Home Government; that he further believed, that the forcing the Island back to the old laws of 1816, after the negroes had just had sufficient time to understand and appreciate the laws of 1826, was an artifice of the emancipation party to reach their ends through the insurrection of the slave population. "The end, with them, justifies the means," wound up Louis.

Louis, though possessed of a thorough knowledge of his subject, spoke confusedly. At all times he had to contend against an almost invincible reserve, an instinct of his nature fostered by his habits of life, which made it painful for him to enter into discussions with strangers; but this evening he laboured, besides, under the influence of a strong involuntary antipathy strengthened by a new vexation.

Mr. Smythe's answer was calm, unprejudiced, lucid, as suited one sensible he had the best cause by the hand, and the approbation of the young lady by his side. His eloquence never halted; he trusted to his memory, and he knew he might safely do so; for his aptitude at reproducing as his own the arguments he had heard brought forward by others was marvellous, as was his power of combining the most heterogeneous information into reasonings, quotations, and authorities for his arguments. He never made a slip.

Celia, who averred she always trembled when men spoke loudly and with angry eyes, stopped the conversation by calling on Mr. Smythe to join her at the piano. Stella went and stood by her aunt, petitioning for duet after duet, even asking Mr. Smythe for his Romaic song, and going so far as to be persuaded to try it over with him. The sound of her voice assuredly did not reach Mr. Gautier's ears, it was so low a murmur: but the fact of her joining her voice with Stapylton Smythe was made patent to every one in the room, by the instructions

Stapylton Smythe continually stopped his own singing to give her.

In spite of Stella's gaiety, the evening seemed very long to her; her eye constantly turned to the clock on the mantel-piece, the quarter chimes lingered so unusually.

At last she is in her own room, and her bright cheeks have grown pale, her bright eyes are dull. She undoes her long thick hair, letting it hang over her shoulders, fancying that her head aches less now the plaits are undone. Stella is dissatisfied; more than that, she is positively unhappy—a nameless dissatisfaction and unhappiness. The thought of cousin Louis is always uppermost. She recalls every word against him that she had heard from either Mrs. Joddrell or Aunt Celia.

"One-sided and fierce," said the latter. "Selfish and ungrateful," accused the former. They might have been the pleasantest of recollections, for the way in which the poor little girl cherished them—the way in which she annotates on his letter-writing and letter-receiving—is very like hatred, and yet she longed with all her heart to say, "Cousin Louis, forgive me, and I'll try to like your friend. I will call her Aunt Olympia."

She would have liked to go and knock at his door at that very instant, in her dressing-gown and her long streaming hair, and beg him to be friends again; to own that she did not agree with what Mr. Smythe said, and did not like his Romaic song. But she knew she was past sixteen, and too tall to do such things; how she wished she were little once again, and might ask anybody and everybody at any hour of day and night to forgive her. Such a stupid world!

She went to sleep at last, closed her eyes to all conventionalities, and ranged at will in the happier sphere of dreams.

But when, on the following day, and the one that followed, Stella might have asked forgiveness, she did not; the moment she came into cousin Louis's presence, she felt there was a barrier between her and him, one not the less impassable because invisible. All the day she acted as if obstinately impenitent, never even looking towards cousin Louis, and always so kind and polite to Mr. Smythe. Every night, out of remorse, crying herself to sleep. "Cousin Louis was quite right, cousin Louis was most excellent. One ought to love and defend one's friends."

Stella probably had never heard of Seneca; but those fine words, "I desire a friend so that I may have some one to die for," might have been written for her. Her whole heart superabounded with such a feeling, and acknowledged it in another.

Mr. Gautier never sought her—never appeared to notice her; but, nevertheless, the manner she had adopted towards Mr. Smythe had not escaped his attention, and that he considered the case serious was proved by his taking a step very much at variance with his character, that is, to interfere, unasked, in another person's concerns.

He spoke earnestly to Major and Mrs. Dashwood on the subject of Mr. Smythe's attentions to Stella.

"She is far too young for anything of the kind," said Louis, "and I do not like the man; his manner is not that of a loyal lover."

The Major was sure it would come all right; did not think Stella cared more for Mr. Smythe than she did for himself; but if she did, why, Smythe was quite the gentleman. It was a good thing to get girls married—it was not right to doubt a man without some proof. For the Major's part, he would be willing to go bail that Smythe was all right. Mr. Gautier listened patiently to this and to a great deal more of a piecemeal, groundless harangue. Then he turned to Celia: "What had she heard from Mrs. Hood of Mr. Smythe and his family—of his calling—of his antecedents?"

"Louis," replied Celia, "you have found a mare's nest. Cannot you trust my woman's instinct. Stella does not care a jot for her handsome middle-aged admirer, he is old in her eyes; I dare say she thinks him as old as Methuselah. I am sure I can't tell why the little monkey has suddenly changed her manner to him, unless it's out of coquetry, to make you jealous, Louis."

The Major, the apologiser-general for every one but his wife, with an exclamation of, "Abominable nonsense!—stuff!" vanished.

"That is carrying the war into your neighbour's country," said Louis, calmly. "You are shifting the question. I am asking you about Mr. Smythe, and not about Stella."

"But if the tiresome child does not care for him, what does it matter to us who or what Mr. Smythe is?"

"As there is an *if* in the case, it does matter to us—to you especially, who have the charge of your niece."

"I am sure I should be thankful if you would take the charge off my hands, Louis, you have such a paternal air, you can't think."

Louis looked displeased, and Celia, as timid as she was thoughtless, at once lowered her flag of defiance.

"I wish that dear Mrs. Hubbard would come and claim Stella. Indeed, Louis, I am quite sensible that I am not the right person to have the care of a growing up girl. I feel as if I needed some one to guide me, rather than to have to guide another. I really do care very much for Stella, so don't think me hard-hearted; but I am convinced it would be better for her to be under some other management than mine. I am half afraid of her, and then, you see, it is a great tie upon me. I could not always be thinking and calculating whether every agreeable male creature from sixteen to sixty who comes to the house was a fit *parti* for my brother's daughter." Celia spoke this very fast.

"I understand that you would be glad to get rid of Stella."

"What a horrid way you have of putting things!" interrupted Celia.

"Pardon my masculine coarseness," went on Louis, "and pardon me also, my dear Mrs. Dashwood, for observing to you that good never comes of shirking one's responsibilities."

Something in the unusually formal appellation, something piquant in the tone of voice in which Mr. Gautier spoke—something, in short, that must have touched some old, long unused spring, set the lady's temper in a blaze.

"I don't admit the responsibility," she said. "Sisters are not born merely to look after their brother's children." And the beauty shook all her long bright curls, with the angry toss she gave her little head. An instant to collect her energies—then: "I quite agree with you, however, about no good coming of shirking one's responsibilities, when responsibilities exist. I think now, a wife has a responsibility, and when she shirks it, she should give the world good proof she is in the right to do so. We admire Miss O'Neill in Mrs. Haller; we don't want Mrs. Hallers in our own families."

Mr. Gautier gave Celia a bitter, scornful look in return for this evident attack on Madame Olympia. Celia was in a sort of angry delight; the drop of gall at the bottom of her heart had been stirred up, and for a minute she was bomb-proof.

"Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones, my wise cousin Louis."

Mr. Gautier rose, bowed as if in a silent acquiescence, and walked towards the door.

Celia ran forward, standing between him and the door, saying, "You are as one-sided and furious as you were ten years ago; do not go away in a passion. Come, forgive me, Louis, forgive your cousin Celia, who never was wise nor good, nor ever will be. I believe I am bitter because I am not happy; it is not worth while to be angry with me, when we shall soon be separated for life."

The violet eyes having recovered their sweetness, Louis could not, and did not resist the hand of amity offered to him, though he still wore a sullen look.

"I do so hate changes and separations," continued Celia; "but I think, to avoid worries and always being put in the wrong by everybody, do what I will to please them, it would be best for Stella to go to Mrs. Hubbard. I wish, Louis, you would manage it for me, without its seeming unkind to the poor girl. She is a good girl indeed, Louis, and if you were to advise her to go, she would be quite satisfied, and not think me hard-hearted. *Do* speak to her, will you?"

The pleader got a rash promise from Louis. "Well, I will see what can be done; but I don't approve of this manœuvring, this mining to cover your approach. I cannot see why you should not tell Stella what you have just said to me."

"Please, Louis," and of course Louis, stern as he could be, was pleased to do what those sweet eyes pleaded for. He remembered how once upon a time he had doated on their colour and form.

CHAPTER XVI.

"SPEAK OF THE WOLF, AND YOU SEE HIS TAIL."

"PARLEZ du loup, et l'on en voit la queue," is not a polite way of ushering in Major-General Wolfe Hubbard, but it is convenient and explicit.

While Mr. Gautier still held Mrs. Dashwood's hand, and remembered how, long ago now, he had doated on the colour of her eyes, a lumbering coach, called in 1828 a glass coach, drawn by two heavy horses, stopped before the gate of Waterloo Cottage. The tidy, low Brougham of to-day, with its showy, worn-out horse, used by carriageless ladies for their monthly shopping and visiting, would have been pooh-poohed by Major-General Hubbard and his lady, as beneath their social position.

Louis and Celia, from the dining-room windows, watched the advent of the papa and mamma and two daughters, Louis explaining who they were. The visitors were shown into the drawing-room, where Stella was practising. She stood up as they came in; Pompey, not seeing his mistress, thought it unnecessary to give any name.

The old general, as upright as if he had swallowed a ramrod, marched straight to the piano, took up his double eye-glass, suspended by a narrow blue ribbon round his neck, and peered at the music Stella had been playing. It was "Dormez, dormez, mes chers amours," arranged by H. Herz.

"Trash—trash!" he muttered; "bad school—fond of music, my dear?" turning to Stella, who had remained standing by the music stool.

"Yes, sir; but I play very little."

"We shall soon mend that," he answered, turning his eye-glass now on the young lady.

"Get to Beethoven and Mozart: glorious school that, my dear Miss Joddrell, for of course you are Miss Joddrell?"

The speaker smiled triumphantly at her. He was an under-sized, straight-backed, sloping-shouldered, big-nosed man of sixty-five. He wore his white hair, long, and flying to all the points of the compass, about his head. His forehead was high and retiring, the skin remarkably transparent, his eyes were of a bright light blue, half-concealed by shaggy grey eyebrows; he had a large mouth, large teeth, a large voice, and peculiarly large distorted feet. He was as upright in character as in figure, a brave officer, and a selfish man.

The companion of his life, his larger, taller half, on entering the room, without paying any attention to Stella, had walked to the fire. She wore a wide-brimmed black velvet hat, the crown of which was shaped like a lancer's cap. A bunch of very shiny close-curling ringlets was on either side of her face, free from the silver lines variegating the rest of her visible hair; and across the top of her forehead, to mark its limits or be useful in some other way, ran a narrow black velvet. In an evening Mrs. Hubbard fastened a brooch in the centre of the black velvet, never absent, let her head-dress be what it might. Her face had a false air of youth and bloom about it, that was indescribably perplexing to her contemporaries. Mrs. Hubbard had been once the reigning beauty of a garrison town, and at night her well-preserved figure, how well preserved her evening dresses allowed the public to judge, she was still a handsome woman, but she had withal that peculiar air which clings to women who have roughed it, at some time or other, in barracks.

While the General was criticising Stella's music, the General's lady remained before the fire, presenting first one foot and then the other to the genial glow, and in what was meant for an aside, imparting her observations of Stella and the furniture to the Miss Hubbards. "She is darker than I expected," Jane and Emily Hubbard were blondes. "Everything very handsome, I am glad to see," sweeping the room with her experienced eyes. "Solid, not sham," gently raising, as she spoke, the velvet cover on the table nearest to her.

The youngest daughter of the Hubbards was a perfect ball, so round, and so soft, with a pretty, good-natured face. Miss Hubbard was very like other people: you could find nothing salient about her,—not plain, rather pale, with a patient expression in her intelligent eyes.

Until Celia entered the room, the Major-General cross-questioned Stella, first, as to her age: "Ha! nearly sixteen and a half? Hand will not be too stiff yet," taking her unresisting fingers and stretching them as wide asunder as could be done with safety.

"Had she a music-master? No!"—the shaggy eyebrows went up,—"not since she was nine years old! God bless me!"

At this exclamation Stella was so ashamed of herself that she burst out, "My aunt sings beautifully."

"Charming, charm-ing!" cried the General. "Maria!"—to his wife, "what an acquisition!"

Mrs. Dashwood here appeared to answer for herself. Stella's pretty auntie, with her aërial, graceful walk, seemed more graceful, more lovely than ever. She and the visitors could not surely be of the same race. It was quite droll to see the impression Celia produced. The General brought his feet together in the first position, straightened his back,—no! that was impossible: he only tried to do so—held up his head, and did look so like a cock going to crow, that even Stella, without much sense of the ridiculous, very nearly laughed out.

Mrs. Hubbard, on her side, looked as if somehow Mrs. Dashwood's personal appearance was a premeditated offence; but her daughters, the sensible one as well as the pretty one, smiled with pleasure. Without flattering Celia, it must be allowed that the sensation she generally produced was agreeable, and she was aware of it. There were hosts of handsomer women; Stella, for instance, was critically better-looking than her aunt, but Celia bore about her something like a ray of sunshine: her air was sunny, her eyes, her complexion full of sparkle, her teeth glanced like light. Society had always petted her, so she had acquired a childlike, coaxing, cordial manner, that seldom failed of fascinating both men and women: indeed, her own sex were great patronisers of Celia. She was not, with all her charms, a woman who excited jealousies. She was a flower to be admired and valued, the length of a flower's bloom: not a gem to be hoarded for a lifetime.

But Mrs. Hubbard did not patronise other people's flowers; from the time she had had the happiness of becoming a mother, she had commenced a struggle for the pre-eminency of her own children. She had depreciated and despised all little girls and boys, when her own were little boys and girls, growing more savagely and exclusively in jealous admiration of her own brood as they advanced to maturity.

The Major-General thought his own family so superior, that he might afford to be generous to those not so fortunate as to be Hubbards born, but the feminine shrewdness of the lady would not allow her such repose.

Mrs. Hubbard permitted her hand to be shaken, but it hung very limp in Celia's grasp.

"Apologies are tiresome, Mrs. Dashwood," said Mrs. Hubbard; "if I were to give you an account of my occupations since my arrival in England, you would be able to frame an excuse yourself for my not having sooner called on you."

" I should think," said the little General, standing before Mrs. Dashwood, " that Mrs. Dashwood was one like Hotspur, to pluck a rose from a nettle."

Celia was full of courtesy and sweet welcomes.

" Had they had a good passage from Jamaica ? "

" Very; the sea, in compliment to me," affirmed Mrs. Hubbard, " was as smooth as glass."

" In this young lady, Mrs. Dashwood," interrupted the General, bringing forward Miss Emily, " you have a facsimile of your new sister."

" You give Stella and me a very pleasant idea of our new connection," replied Celia, intending to give a hint to the Hubbards, that Mr. Joddrell's daughter was present, and ought not to be so overlooked.

" Mrs. Joddrell is taller and slighter than Emily," said Mrs. Hubbard, impervious to all that did not regard her own family.

Miss Hubbard, who was sitting near Stella, was the only one who took Celia's hint.

"Do you remember your father, Miss Joddrell?" she asked.

"No."

"You will like my sister Georgy, I am sure," continued Miss Hubbard, kindly.

"Ah! Mrs. Dashwood!" exclaimed Mrs. Hubbard, with her powerful organ, "it is a sad thing for a mother to have one of her fair flock torn from her side."

"Hush! hush! my dear," interposed the General; "*torn* is a strong word — too strong; I am sure we are all very much satisfied, very much so indeed, with Mr. Joddrell; and my daughter, I know her, she is thoroughly right-minded, a young woman to know her duties, and to perform them; brought up in a soldier's family, excellent school for wives, ma'am: only three things necessary, I say, discipline, discipline, discipline!"

Major Dashwood, in a great state of fuss, here entered. The Major's bow was very low, and his manner excruciatingly civil to the Major-General and the Major-General's family. The ladies were delighted with him directly, as he hoped this, and trusted the other, and assured them he should never have suspected they had ever been in the West Indies, they looked so fair and fresh.

Occasionally Major Dashwood had a boyish simplicity of manner, which passed current for simplicity of character: then the way he said "Sir" to the little General, in such a respectful official tone!

General Wolfe Hubbard immediately drew over himself all the mantle of dignity the other so eagerly doffed. The General mounted his highest horse, and the Major sprang aside from its various vicious propensities, with a pleasurable alacrity that was wonderful. The Major's chuckle of delight made Celia wince so, that she bade Stella call her cousin; Louis would soon take the man on the high horse off it, and replace the man tumbling head-over-heels on his feet again. Stella left the room with an expression on her face which made Mrs. Hubbard, who had no want of shrewdness, say: "Miss Joddrell is a fine girl: her eyes are good, but is she good-tempered?"

"The best little thing in the world," replied Celia, eagerly.

Looking very unlike this description, Stella presented herself to Mr. Gautier, who had remained in meditation ever since the arrival of the Hubbards. "Auntie has sent for you," was all that the girl, pale with repressed emotion, said.

Louis wanted to comfort her, for he guessed some of the feelings she was struggling with. He half put out his hand, but Stella either did not or would not see the movement. At that instant she was full of scorns for the whole of mankind; she was wondering why there was a world at all, when it was for creatures such as she saw. Her young fiery heart was boiling over with rebellion.

A Miss Hubbard chosen to fill her mother's place, to be her father's wife! Like many wiser and older people, Stella did not take the same view of those closely connected with her, as she did of those entirely unconnected with her.

Louis paid his compliments to the Hubbard family, and as Celia had instinctively foreseen, as soon as Mr. Gautier appeared, father, mother, and daughters had neither tongues, nor eyes, nor ears for any one else. They had none of them ever succeeded in establishing an intimacy with him, even during the tedium of a long sea voyage, but he had undeniable advantages, one, the being a single man, the other, of being difficult of approach. Every one understands the attraction of an obstacle.

Well, the Hubbards are gone, they have shaken hands affectionately all round. Emily kissed Stella: it was by surprise though. They are gone, but they are to come again that day week to dinner.

For seven days Major Dashwood worried his wife about this dinner.

"What were they going to have?"

Celia of course neither knew nor cared; the Major dared not ask his Aunt, and Celia would not. "It will be all quite right," she said; "you make me hate the sight of people, there's always such a fuss about them."

The Major was not to be repulsed.

"Who were they to have?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Hood, and Mr. Smythe of course, four Hubbards, ourselves, and Louis."

"Hang it! let 's have some one else," said the Major, half-plaintively; "not always the same over and over again."

"Who can you get on such short notice?" asked Celia. "But I am sure I don't care; ask twenty strangers, if you like; settle it with your aunt: don't plague me."

The Major spoke confidentially to Louis about the keeping up the honour of the family, of the necessity of showing General Hubbard that they had a social position. It didn't do to let oneself down; one should always be trying to hold one's place; if you relaxed the least, you would go to the bottom at once and be trampled in the mud.

Louis was of opinion that the Hubbards would be only too glad to know Mrs. Hood; for to Louis a lady with so fine a house, carriage, and clothes, was a personage. Ten years in the mountains of Jamaica, surrounded by overseers and book-keepers, were great excuses for Louis, and Major Dashwood made allowances for him. "It was the fault of his situation, poor fellow! but certainly no one was ever more ignorant of what was due to his social position."

Unsympathized with, as he found himself, there was some glory in the Major's single-handed efforts, and he deserved his success. He caught a G. C. B., with a real, born Lady Almeria for his wife, and the G. C. B.'s nephew, a young saucy lieutenant-colonel of dragoons.

"God bless me!" exclaimed the poor Major in his hour of triumph; "that makes us just thirteen."

Celia burst into a merry laugh.

"Tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin! But how do you make out only thirteen?" and Celia counted up the dinner party on her fingers, ending with Mr. Smythe. "I make fourteen," says she.

"No, no—nonsense!" cried the Major, in a hot, overbearing tone. "I won't have a man we know nothing about, without a penny to bless himself with, to meet men of rank,—two Generals and a Colonel!"

Stella, who was sitting by, opened her eyes very wide when she heard her good-natured uncle speak in these terms of their most intimate acquaintance and daily visitor.

"Well, *I* don't know who you can ask," said Celia.

"No: I dare say not; it's just your way—you neglect all my friends for the sake of some singing fellow, pottering in, morning, noon, and night."

It was Major Dashwood's way to put up with everything, to be friendly and intimate with any and every one who came to the house; but one day or other, when matters went contrary to his wishes, the small bitternesses garnered in his heart came dropping out.

"How dare you say such things to me?" flashed out Celia. "No man ever pottered about the house, as you elegantly express it, until Stella came here. If you don't like it, why don't you tell the singing man so, instead of hitting at a poor woman who can't help herself?"

Major Dashwood cleared his throat noisily, and then—walked away.

"I cannot help speaking that way, Stella," said Celia; "if I don't put my foot on your uncle's neck, he would ill-treat me. People talk of happiness: I wish they would tell me where it is to be found. I never saw it anywhere but in a novel; in real life things never go as one wants them, or expects them! The warmest heart woman can have is very soon frozen. Instead of being cared for, she must make herself a slave to every whim her husband chooses to have: she dare not have an opinion of her own, nothing but contradiction, till in self-defence she is forced to act the virago,—heigh-ho!"

And Celia sauntered away in her turn, leaving Stella to reflect, not on the perplexities of married life (girls, whatever they hear or see, always imagine there is a paradise on earth in reserve for them), but to reflect that Mr. Smythe came to Waterloo Cottage for her, Miss Stella Joddrell. The first time her power to attract is made plain to a young woman, it marks an epoch in her life.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DOOR MUST BE OPEN OR SHUT.

Who that saw Celia, looking like a white rose, receiving her dinner guests, would have had the temerity to suppose that she and that handsome, urbane Major ever did all but fight?

Mrs. Hood was as faultlessly appointed as usual, quite mischievously handsome. How did she manage it?

Mr. Hood, tall, slim, silently benevolent.

Mrs. Hubbard's turban had a bird of paradise on the right side; Aunt Philly wore one equally handsome on the left. But every one, somehow, felt themselves reduced in size when the G. C. B. came in, with Lady Almeria on his arm.

My lady was forty at least, but alas! neither fat, nor fair,—just the contrary. The only thing really worth remarking about her was a good-natured smile, and some magnificent pearls gained in India: and yet even Mrs. Hood felt cowed. Oh! subtle influence of those four letters LADY preceding her name!

Mrs. Hubbard was accustomed to courting commanding officers' wives, and she courtesied and smiled, and moved from the warmest corner of the sofa to the coldest. But in her heart of hearts she felt ill-used by being made second in a party she had supposed given in her honour. There was consolation, however, in the sight of that saucy young Colonel, though Miss Emily rather shrunk from his bold dragoon eyes.

The dinner was like all other London dinners, and does not need describing. So we will suppose it well over, and pass to the drawing-room. When the ladies adjourned thither, they found Stella waiting for them. She was not yet come out, so did not dine with the company. Celia had been very strong on that point.

"Who is that pretty girl?" asked my lady of Mrs. Dashwood.

"My brother's daughter:" and Mrs. Dashwood called Stella to her.

Now my lady had a horror of increasing her visiting list; so to avoid Mrs. General Hubbard's civilities, she took to patronising Stella.

"You look like a rosebud, my dear," began my lady, glancing at her own gorgeous attire, and the shine of bare arms and necks in the room. "How I do like these high white muslin dresses! Mrs. Dashwood; they give such a distinguished look. What a pity they are not more the fashion!" and Lady Almeria, seeing Stella admiring her bouquet, took out of it some sprigs of *ginesta* (Spanish broom), and said, "Sit down on that footstool, and let me put these into your dark hair; you remind me quite of Eastern girls."

The G. C. B.'s wife had been greatly accustomed to her own way in the Colonies over which she had reigned with her husband; and she sat in

Mrs. Dashwood's drawing-room, amusing herself with decorating Stella's hair, and talking to Stella as coolly as though no one else had been in the room.

My lady was fond, as most people are, of talking of themselves and their adventures; fondest of all of relating her terrors over her gallant husband's perils in battle. The nature of my lady was good; if she had grown trivial, and artificial, and arrogant, it was the fault of society. There was still some heart left in her. She adored her husband: he was her hero, because he was the hero of a hundred battle-fields. She did not see the least bit in the world that he was coarse, illiterate, or egotistical. Tears, real, honest tears were in her eyes, as she described to Stella her sufferings during the battle that had made him a G. C. B.

"I locked myself up, my dear. I was not going to hear any of their reports or rumours. I should have died if I had. I got hold of my prayer-book, and I read over and over again the 130th Psalm. I shall never forget it—never! I put cotton in my ears, but I heard Jack's voice a long way off, and then ——. Never marry a soldier, child; one grows old too soon."

There was quite a hush through the room, so that all the ladies had the benefit of Lady Almeria's reminiscences. Mrs. Hood sat with her eyes shut; Emily Hubbard simpered, as if she were listening to some laughable tale; Mrs. Hubbard, looking extremely offended, kept as far as she could from my lady's sofa, to show that she did not wish to hear what was being said, but still would not converse herself, in spite of Celia's conciliatory efforts. There was a spell on every one—they were over-crowed,—except Aunt Philly, whom the monotony of Lady Almeria's voice soothed into her usual after-dinner nap.

My lady's amusement lasted till the gentlemen came dropping in.

"Look here, Jack," cried she, to her big husband, more like an alderman, truth to say, than a soldier. "Isn't she a pretty girl? Dear child! I have made her quite pale, telling her of our last battle."

The G. C. B., the Major-General, the saucy Colonel, nay, all the gentlemen, save Mr. Smythe, clustered about my lady and Stella.

Beauty at any age is attractive, but great youthfulness has a still more inviting power to elderly, or old persons. The two old officers poured out the most gallant speeches to Miss Joddrell, making her fully conscious of her own loveliness. Stella knew Louis heard every word, for she recognised his feet among all the varnished leather about her: she lacked the courage to look up at his face, but she was very glad he was there.

Mrs. Dashwood, usually as calm as moonlight with regard to the beauty of other women, this evening felt aggrieved by the notice bestowed on Stella. Celia felt like the spoiled child of a family, overlooked in her own domain. Even Louis,—ah! there was the sting,—even Louis was following the crowd. "Stella seemed to be giving herself," so thought Celia, "strange airs," and somehow pretty Auntie was surprised into being angry with the young creature smiling and blushing under the first impression of her own attractions.

Stella's attention was here drawn from trying to hear what cousin Louis was saying to General Hubbard about the failure of his mission, by Lady Almeria's question of "What is that gentleman's name, my dear?" pointing out Mr. Smythe, who had not formed one of the little court round her ladyship and Stella. Mr. Smythe seemed to have returned to his allegiance to Mrs. Hood, so sedulously was he devoting himself to that lady, seated half-hidden behind her chair.

As soon as Lady Almeria heard the name, she pushed her way to Mr. Smythe, and tapping him on the shoulder with her fan, exclaimed, "I did not think I was so changed that old friends could not recognise me."

Mr. Smythe's delicate pallor turned to crimson as he rose, stammering in a way most unusual for him,—stammering as folks do who meet some one they had rather not,—something about "being honoured by her ladyship's recollection and unwillingness to intrude."

"Nonsense!" said my lady, with soldier-like frankness to him: "I am always glad to see old friends, particularly those I knew in our campaigning days—how many years, eh? since we last met? thirteen at least,—it was at Toulouse, was it not? Ah! I recollect all about it now, as if it were yesterday—and how curious! Seeing you, reminds me who it is that pretty girl is like. I have been trying all the evening after it. It's that Spanish dancer who turned all our heads—what days those were! You recollect as well as I do, I know," and my lady laughed.

"You were in the same boat with all our young men." Stella grew white and red, looked furtively at Louis; she was afraid he might hear what Lady Almeria was saying about *a dancer*. Stella was as sensitive for him as he could be for himself—no one must give him pain. She might hate a dancer or dancers in the lump: that was another affair; but she would rather fall down and worship them all than ever see his feelings hurt again.

But Louis, though his eye caught Stella's, did not hear what my lady was saying; and my lady, who noticed Stella's changing face and Mr. Smythe's confusion, said to him: "I am not going to tell tales out of school. Come and speak to Sir John; he will be very glad to see you again."

The G. C. B. made his Commander-in-Chief's bow, and said, "Very happy," without any very clear understanding of what he was called on to remember. The G. C. B., as a rule, never recollected civilians. Lady Almeria cross-questioned Mr. Smythe first about himself, what had he been about all these years? and then about Stella; every now and then observing, "What a likeness to La Nena! You are faithful to old partialities, for I see you are in love again."

Mrs. Hood had heard all that was said about the dancer, and she heard the present accusation. Mrs. Hood was one of those women who cannot be mortified with impunity. She was a woman who must pay back a secret humiliation by some public one. Ah! Mr. Smythe had paid her attention to keep out of Lady Almeria's way, so that Stella might not hear of any of his follies. Ah! he was trying to make a screen of her, Mrs. Hood.

But for a while, all conversation and hostilities were put out of the question by Celia being led to the piano by the little Major-General, who had been perfectly wretched at the time slipping away so wasted.

In Celia's singing, art veiled itself. Every one, except the very initiated, talked of how sweetly and naturally Mrs. Dashwood sung—so simply! Her style had, indeed, none of the impressiveness of that of the Miss Hubbards. Theirs was of the kind that seems to bring plaudits as a natural result. Celia's, on the contrary, often threw you into a reverie, that made you forget the singer and compliments.

While Miss Emily sang, the Major-General stood as nearly as possible in the centre of the room, his quick eyes roaming round in quest of a stray whisper. Mrs. Hood, who enjoyed no music but that of a military band, exerted herself to praise Miss Emily's performance, and when the General, who made the tour of the company, collecting praises as a blind man's dog does pence, stood before her, she emphatically declared that Miss Emily Hubbard's singing went far beyond the limits of the young-lady school of music.

Down into a chair by the cunning woman's side dropped the gratified General. "Ah! I am afraid you are flattering a silly old father; but I may say to you, who understand and appreciate good music, that I have been told (sinking his voice, and with his hand screening his mouth) that she might shine professionally: of course, I consider that going rather too far, but the voice, the voice itself, that is the gift of Providence, and there would be something worse than ingratitude in denying that it *is* good."

The Major-General put on a very seriously believing face as he said these last words. There was no wrong done, but it was very droll to Mrs. Hood who cunningly took up the cue.

"What an advantage it will be for that poor uneducated Stella Joddrell, to be with your daughters, General; I cannot tell you how I rejoice to think of it. One must be a mother to know how to manage children, and Mrs. Dashwood, poor thing, has neither the experience nor the necessary strength of character to educate that girl.

I assure you I have often had sad thoughts about her."

Mrs. Hubbard, who was within hearing, remarked that she suspected the management of the young lady would be no sinecure.

Sagacious Mrs. Hood turned to the Roman-looking matron and replied, "She is fond of reading and tractable, and I dare say with proper regular instruction, and with such examples as the Miss Hubbards, she would improve immensely."

Here Celia came to say civil things about Miss Emily's singing.

"We were just saying, dear, what an advantage it will be for Stella to have a companion of her own age and so gifted as Miss Emily Hubbard." Stella was certainly more than ten years Emily's junior.

"I am sure of that," stammered Celia. "She knew very well what Mrs. Hood was about; if my lady had left Stella's hair alone, and Louis sat in a corner as usual, probably Celia might not have felt so sure of that."

"Has Miss Joddrell any voice?" asked the General.

"A little, a very small compass," answered Celia.

"My dear madam, no one can decide on the little or the much, until the organ has been subjected to tuition; my eldest daughter was said to have scarcely any voice, and see what we have drawn it out to." What could Celia do, but smile and looked convinced?

The G. C. B. and his lady went away first; then the Colonel of Dragoons with a blossom of *genista* fallen from Stella's hair in his hand; presently the Hoods, Mrs. Hood telling Stella to remember my lady's lesson in hairdressing: the result was charming: adding distinctly, "I shall not say good-bye now, I shall see you again before you go."

Mrs. Hood's voice ceased, and Stella could hear Mrs. Hubbard saying to her aunt. "I am busy reading with my boy to prepare him for a military tutor; he is much about Miss Stella's age, they can take their lessons together. My Tom has a taste for figures, and gets on well with algebra, but slowly with languages; the one will be an assistance to the other on the system of mutual instruction. We begin our daily studies, Miss Joddrell," facing round on the surprised girl, "with a page or two of Locke or Dugald Stewart; and then after serious lessons are over, we have Sir Walter, or Campbell as a reward; music I leave to the General."

"Capital, indeed," resounded from Major Dashwood, not understanding the motive of the lady's harangue, and speaking merely from horror of the silence with which it was received.

"Carriage is waiting, my dear," whispered the General. "We'll settle the preliminaries about our young friend on our next meeting: as a rule I never keep horses waiting; a merciful man is merciful to his beast, Mrs. Dashwood."

That was the most comforting speech Stella had heard from any of the Hubbards. She said, "Good-night," and went hastily away: too sad to be rebellious. This then was to be the end of all the brightness she had anticipated from cousin Louis's visit?

When she had closed the door, Major Dashwood asked his wife, "What the deuce the General and Mrs. Hubbard were preaching about?"

Aunt Philly remarked before she left the room to count over the plate, that "she could not understand people wanting to get rid of their own flesh and blood."

"What do *you* think I ought to do, Louis?" asked Celia, turning to him. "I am so badgered by one person and another, that I declare I can no longer distinguish between what's right and what's wrong."

Louis looked up from a book of engravings he had been apparently studying. "My dear cousin," he said, "what has passed this evening between you and the Hubbards, appears to me to have ratified the arrangement your brother made with them according to your own wish."

"You are just as bad as the rest, Louis, making out that I am in fault. I could not help Harriette's speaking to Mrs. Hubbard on the subject."

"Do you wish to keep Stella with you?" inquired Louis.

"I should not like to be unkind to her," was the reply.

"There's an old French proverb, Celia, which says, "A door must be either shut or open." Shut your door and retain Stella, or open it and let her go. You must do one or the other: take counsel of your pillow."

"I would rather take counsel with you."

He thought for an instant, hesitating between what he knew Stella would prefer, and that which he believed best for her, and said, "Open the door."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DOOR IS OPENED.

Stella, on going to her own room, did the most natural thing in the world for a girl, nay, even for a heroine to do. She looked at herself in the glass, my lady's flowers still in her hair, and she saw that she was lovely. Over her serious face slowly stole a smile, in the way smiles come to a child's face after the shock of a surprise. What is the first thought of a young girl when she becomes aware of her own gifts? Why did Stella smile at the sight of the celestial treasure of beauty she possessed, but that she had a treasure to give away.

She took the flowers from her hair, one by one; there were many both rich and rare. Stella knew the name and quality of none except of the pale yellow blossoms. "*Genista* or Spanish broom," she would remember it by its prettiest name, and she wrote *genista* on the piece of paper in which she wrapped a sprig before consigning it to her desk.

Stella, though unvarnished by education, perhaps because little educated, had a good share of poetry in her nature. Mr. Smythe had sentimentalised over this flower, telling her that it grew on rock and waste, bestowing on the one and the other its own sweetness, and asking nothing in return. That was exactly her child's ideal, of loving for love's sake. She dwelt on the description, till a network of thoughts enmeshed her brain and heart, and languid, softened, wearied, she lay down to sleep.

When Stella had kept a furtive but steadfast look on Louis's boots, while Lady Almeria ornamented her hair, she had heard the tones of his voice, but not the words he was saying to General Hubbard. He had said decidedly, "I have nothing further to do here, I shall sail by next month's packet."

Louis calculated, as soon as he was in the enjoyment of the quiet of his own room, that he would be gone in three weeks. How glad he should be to get back to his own home, to see none but familiar faces, hear none but familiar voices, not wasting life as these people did, blowing bubbles themselves, and full of insatiable desire for the bubbles of others; the party had left Louis's thoughts double-dyed with misanthropy. Society (so called) he considered to be full of traps for men like himself, scrupulous and serious where others would be careless. "Who can tell," quoth he to himself, "whether the meaning of that warning, 'Thou shalt give an account of every idle word,'—a warning apparently involving a punishment disproportioned to the offence, might not be an admonishment that as no action of our life can be without a result, it behoved us to be for ever on our guard."

And yet he had almost in a joke decided Celia to send away her friendless niece.

Louis was a self-tormentor, and spent a sleepless night; unlike the generality of mankind, his having injured any one was no foundation for his dislike. He took himself roundly to task, calling up for his own punishment a most forlorn picture of Stella. He wished—he could not distinctly state what he wished. "Does any one ever know in time?"

What did the Hubbards talk of during their long drive home?

"A pleasant party," remarked the General. "Good wine and pretty women."

"Hem!" responded Mrs. Hubbard.

"Oh! how sweetly pretty Mrs. Dashwood is," exclaimed Emily.

"Mrs. Hood is the finer woman of the two," was what Mrs. Hubbard said, but did not think.

"She asked where we lived, so I suppose she means to call; we are not compelled to visit every one who calls, we may pick and choose."

"I know that Mrs. Hood has a carriage of her own," said Emily.

"Stella is an interesting-looking girl, don't you think so, mamma?" asked Miss Hubbard.

"Interesting? no, she looks a sly minx. I have my doubts about her parentage. As soon as I get hold of her, I'll examine her finger-nails and the back of her neck, and if I find she has any black blood in her, I'll tell Mr. Joddrell pretty plainly that I won't have the care of any half-castes, were they twenty times his daughters."

"But, mamma," began Miss Hubbard.

"Hold your tongue, Jane; what do you know about such things I should like to know?"

"My dear," interposed the General, "I suppose you'll allow that I may know something of the subject, and I assure you there is no black blood in this case, more likely blue blood, for Miss Joddrell is the child of Joddrell's first wife, a Spanish lady. All correct, I assure you; he showed me the certificate of his first marriage and of the child's birth and baptism. She is his heiress, recollect, unless, indeed——"

"Black or blue, I don't see much difference," returned Mrs. Hubbard. "A foreigner is nearly as bad as a negro: I hate them with all their nasty, vicious, attractive ways. As for this Miss, I can tell her I'll soon cure her of her vanity."

Nobody answered Mrs. Hubbard, for all the party present knew her bark was worse than her bite: she was in the habit of intoxicating herself with her own words, but as to deeds, she was harmless.

Ten days after the dinner party at Waterloo Cottage, Stella was domiciled with the Hubbards. The condemned criminal has all his wants and wishes carefully attended to during his last hours. His judges, who when he was free would have thought it beneath their dignity to remember or recognize his existence, are ready, so soon as he is condemned, to show him a certain attention and condescension. Much in the same way did Celia heap benefits on Stella during these ten days; and very much like the condemned criminal probably Stella felt. The kindnesses perhaps scarcely perceived from the tension of the mind with another subject.

The days seemed to Stella without time; it was breakfast, dinner, and night. Stella was not alone thinking of her own going away, she was also counting how many days—only days now—Louis would be in England. It would be very strange not to see him! Stella turned very cold when she thought of it, but the resigned feeling of one who can do nothing to avoid what is about to happen, made her appear calm. She attended to all Celia's demands on her attention, for Celia was soothing her conscience by uncommonly active care of Stella's wardrobe.

"If you want anything, Stella," kissing her at the same time, "remember to write to auntie, but there won't be any need of letters, for I shall be constantly going to see you and having you here."

Privately Celia wished that Harriette would advise her, that is, give her leave, to keep Stella — but Harriette was inexorably blind—blind as destiny itself, to Celia's compunctions.

"I shall not be unhappy, auntie," replied Stella. Pretty auntie's eyes with tears in them always fortified Stella's powers of endurance. "I shall work hard with 'my son Tom,'" and Stella smiled.

Celia did not bear the smile well, it smote her heart.

From out of the bosom of the most commonly endowed families there sometimes issues forth a being so peculiarly gifted, that we raise our hands in wonder how so superior a being could spring from such a source. Whatever strength or virtue had belonged to her English or Spanish ancestors, was certainly summed up in Stella. She was brave of heart, generous, truthful, forbearing with the weak, intrepid with the strong. See how courageous a child she had been with her stern grandmother, how gentle to her aunt.

For Celia's sake she tried to shed no tear, give no sign of distress, even when delivered over to Mrs. Hubbard.

Cousin Louis was not well impressed by her fortitude. Despite his lively faith in his own penetration, Louis was very apt to see through the dark glass of a preconceived opinion: perhaps it is that men are more flattered by a display of weakness than gratified by that of strength in women.

The trial was greater for Stella when Louis went to the General's house to bid her farewell.

"What shall I say to your father for you, Stella?"

She could not answer directly: she put her hands together, rubbed them with a quick nervous movement, almost wringing them in the effort to say quietly, "Give him my kind love."

"And nothing else?"

"I don't think I have any more to say," the muscles round the mouth quivering, so that it was a pain in itself merely to look at her.

Louis took her hand, it was icy cold. "Then now I must say, Good-bye."

"Pray forgive me, cousin Louis, for what I said one day," was spoken in a breathless whisper.

"Forgive you? to be sure, we shall always be friends."

Stella thought she saw the glitter of joy in his eyes. "You are glad to go, cousin Louis?"

"I am returning home," he said. "And now may I go?" he half smiled; it was to hide an emotion that was gaining on him every moment.

Stella loosened her grasp of his hand. Poor child! she was past feeling any shyness or embarrassment.

"When we meet again, I shall expect great things from you. God bless you, my dear little cousin."

He was gone! Stella rushed to the window, regardless of the presence of Mrs. and the Miss Hubbards, threw up the sash and leant far out.

She watched Mr. Gautier's erect figure go slowly and firmly along the street; he did hesitate when he reached the corner, but he turned it, and then she felt as if it was too hard to bear, better to dash herself down on the pavement.

Jane Hubbard (perhaps she had once known such a state of mind) came quickly to the girl's side, and threw her arm round Stella's waist. They remained at the window as if looking into the street, Stella seeing only a great darkness. She could not swallow, and her breath came in hoarse gasps. Jane was very patient and tender, but Mrs. Hubbard cried—

"Shut that window, girls; the air cuts one in two."

Mrs. Hubbard was quilting a grey silk cloak lined with pink, Louis having been admitted to the ladies' work-room. Stella could never afterwards see a grey silk cloak with a pink lining without a contraction of the heart.

Jane Hubbard took Stella away to her own room. There Stella's courage at last broke down, and with a sharp cry of—

"I can't help it, I can't help it; he is my own cousin!" she burst into bitter weeping.

For days and days after, Stella used to look wildly into every hackney coach with luggage that passed her in her daily walks; for days and days she would start and redden at any glimpse she caught of some tall, slender man with an inflexibly upright carriage. Then she learned to expect no more, and to apply herself to the lessons she had in common with Mrs. Hubbard's son, Tom; but she did not forget that cousin Louis was in the world, and often found comfort in the saying, "Mountains alone do not meet."

END OF VOL. I.

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