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TONY BUTLER

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TONY BUTLER.



CHAPTER XX.

THE MINISTER'S VISIT.

WHILE Tony was absent that morning from home, Mrs Butler had a visit from Dr Stewart; he came over, he said, to see Tony, and ask the news of what he had done in England. "I hope, ma'am," said he—and there was something dry and reserved in his manner—"I hope, ma'am, your son has brought you good tidings of his late journey. A big city is a big temptation, and we dinna want temptations in this world of ours."

"I know it well, Doctor," said she, with a sigh, "and if it had been any other than Tony—Ah, Doctor! why do you shake your head?—you make me think you've heard something or other. What is it, sir?"

“It’s just nothing at all, Mrs Butler, but your own fears, and very proper fears too they are, for a young lad that goes away from home for the first time in his life, and to such a place too. Ah me!” cried he, in a sort of apostrophe, “it’s not so easy to be in grace down about Charing Cross and the Haymarket.”

“You’re just frightening me, Dr Stewart, that’s what it is you are doing.”

“And I say it again, ma’am, it’s yourself is the cause o’ it all. But tell me what success he has had—has he seen Sir Harry Elphinstone?”

“That he has, and seen a greater than Sir Harry; he has come back with a fine place, Doctor; he’s to be one of the Queen’s—I forget whether they call them couriers or messengers—that bring the state despatches all over the world; and as poor dear Tony says, it’s a place that was made for him, for they don’t want Greek or Latin, or any more book-learning than a country gentleman should have. What are you sighing about, Dr Stewart? there’s nothing to sigh over getting five, maybe six, hundred a-year.”

“I was not sighing; I was only thinkin’. And when is he to begin this new life?”

“If you are sighing over the fall it is for a But-

ler, one of his kith and kin, taking a very humble place, you may just spare your feelings, Doctor, for there are others as good as himself in the same employ."

"And what does Sir Arthur say to it, ma'am?" asked he, as it were to divert her thoughts into another course.

"Well, if you must know, Dr Stewart," said she, drawing herself up and smoothing down her dress with dignity, "we have ventured to take this step without consulting Sir Arthur or any of his family."

A somewhat long silence ensued. At last she said, "If Tony was at home, Doctor, he'd tell you how kindly his father's old friend received him—taking up stories of long ago, and calling him Watty, just as he used to do. And so if they did not give my poor boy a better place, it was because there was nothing just ready at the moment, perhaps—or nothing to fit him—for, as Sir Harry said, laughingly, 'We can't make you a bishop, I fear.'"

"I dinna see anything against it," muttered the old minister, not sorry for the chance of a shot against Episcopacy.

"I'm thinking, Dr Stewart," said she, tartly, "that your rheumatism must be troubling you to-day;

and, indeed, I'm ashamed to say I never asked you how the pains were?"

"I might be better, and I might be worse, ma'am," was the qualified reply, and again came a pause.

"Tony was saying the other day, Doctor," resumed she, "that if you will try a touch of what he calls the white oils."

"I'm very much obliged to him, Mrs Butler; he put a touch of the same white oils on my pony one day, and the beast that was always a lamb before just kicked me over his head when I got into the saddle."

"You forget, Doctor, you are not a beast of burden yourself."

"We're all beasts of burden, ma'am—all of us—even the best, if there be any best! heavy laden wi' our sins, and bent down wi' our transgressions. No, no," added he, with a slight asperity, "I'll have none of his white oils."

"Well, you know the proverb, Doctor, 'He that winna use the means must bear the moans.'"

"'Tis a saying that hasna much sense in it," said the Doctor, crankily; "for who's to say when the means is blessed?"

Here was a point that offered so wide a field for

discussion, that the old lady did not dare to make a rejoinder.

“I’ll be going to Derry to-morrow, Mrs Butler,” resumed he, “if I can be of any service to you.”

“Going to Derry, Doctor? that’s a long road for you!”

“So it is, ma’am; but I’m going to fetch back my dochter Dolly; she’s to come by the packet to-morrow evening,”

“Dolly coming home! How is that? You did not expect her, did you?”

“Not till I got her letter this morning; and that’s what made me come over to ask if Tony had maybe told you something about how she was looking, and what sort of spirits she seemed in; for her letter’s very short—only says, ‘I’ve got a kind of longing to be back again, dear father; as the song says, “It’s hame, and it’s hame, and it’s hame I fain wad be;” and as I know well there will be an open heart and an open door to greet me, I’m off to-night for Liverpool.’”

“She’s a good girl, and whatever she does it will be surely for the best,” said the old lady.

“I know it well,” and he wiped his eyes as he spoke. “But I’m sore troubled to think it’s maybe her health is breaking, and I wanted to ask Tony

about her. D'ye remember, ma'am, how he said she was looking?"

Now, if there was anything thoroughly repugnant to the old lady's habits, it was untruthfulness; and yet, as Tony had not mentioned Dolly since his return, her only escape was by a little evasion, saying, "When he wrote to me his first letter from London, Doctor, he said, 'I was sorry to find Dolly looking pale, and I thought thin also; besides,' added he, 'they have cut off her pretty brown hair.'"

"Yes, she told me of that," sighed the Doctor. "And in her last note she says again, 'Dinna think me a fright, father dear, for it's growing again, and I'm not half so ugly as I was three weeks ago;' for the lassie knows it was always a snare to me, and I was ever pleased wi' her bright cheery face."

"And a bright cheery face it was!"

"Ye mind her smile, Mrs Butler. It was like hearing good news to see it. Her mother had the same." And the old man's lip trembled, and his cheek too, as a heavy tear rolled slowly down it. "Did it ever strike you, ma'am," added he, in a calmer tone, "that there's natures in this world gi'en to us just to heal the affections, as there are herbs and plants sent to cure our bodily ailments?"

"It's a blessed thought, Doctor."

“Eh, ma’am, it’s more than a thought, it’s a solemn truth. But I’m staying ower long; I’ve to go over to John Black’s and see his sister before I leave; and I’d like, too, to say a word o’ comfort to auld Matty M’Clintock.”

“You’ll be back for the Sabbath, Doctor?” asked she.

“Wi’ *His* help and blessing, ma’am.”

“I was thinking if maybe you and dear Dolly would come and take dinner here—Saturday—there will be nothing ready for you at home; and it would be such a pleasure to Tony before he goes away.”

“I thank you heartily, Mrs Butler; but our first evening under the auld roof we must e’en have it by ourselves. You’ll no think the worse o’ us for this, I am sure, ma’am.”

“Certainly not: then, shall we say Monday? Dolly will be rested by that time, and Tony talks of leaving me so soon.”

“I’ll just, wi’ your good leave—I’ll just wait till I see Dolly; for maybe she’ll no be ower strong when she comes. There’s nothing I can do for you in Derry, is there?”

“Nothing, sir—nothing that I think of at this moment,” said she, coldly; for the Doctor’s refusal

of her second invitation had piqued her pride ; and whether it was from his depression or some other cause, the Doctor himself seemed less cordial than was his wont, and took his leave with more ceremony than usual.

The old lady watched him till he was out of sight, sorely perplexed to divine whether he had really unburthened his conscience of all he had to say, or had yet something on his mind unrevealed. Her kindly nature, however, in the end mastered all other thoughts ; and, as she sat down once more to her knitting, she muttered, " Poor man ! it's a sore stroke of poverty when the sight of one's only child coming back to them brings the sense of distress and want with it." The words were not well uttered when she saw Tony coming up the little pathway ; he was striding along at his own strong pace, but his hat was drawn down over his brows, and he neither looked right nor left as he went.

" Did you meet the Doctor, Tony ?" said she, as she opened the door for him.

" No : how should I meet him ? I've not been to the Burnside."

" But he has only left the house this minute—you must have passed each other."

" I came down the cliff. I was taking a short

cut," said he, as he threw himself into a seat, evidently tired and weary.

"He has been here to say that he's off for Derry to-night with the mail, to meet Dolly."

"To meet Dolly!"

"Yes, she's coming back; and the Doctor cannot say why, for she's over that fever she had, and getting stronger every day; and yet she writes, 'You must come and fetch me from Derry, father, for I'm coming home to you.' And the old man is sore distressed to make out whether she's ill again, or what's the meaning of it. And he thought, if he saw you, it was just possible you could tell him something."

"What could I tell him? Why should he imagine I could tell him?" said Tony, as a deep crimson flush covered his face.

"Only how she was looking, Tony, and whether you thought she seemed happy where she was living, and if the folk looked kind to her."

"I thought she looked very sickly, and the people about her—the woman at least—not over kind. I'm not very sure, too, that Dolly herself wasn't of my mind, though she didn't say so. Poor girl!"

"It's the poor old father I pity the most, Tony; he's not far off seventy, if he's not over it; and sore

work he finds it keeping body and soul together ; and now he has the poor sick lassie come back to him, wanting many a little comfort, belike, that he can't afford her. Ah, dear ! isn't there a deal of misery in this life ?”

“Except for the rich,” said Tony, with an almost savage energy. They certainly have fine times of it. I saw that fellow, Maitland, about an hour ago, lolling beside Alice Lyle—Trafford, I mean—in her carriage, as if he owned the equipage and all it contained ; and why ? just because he is rich.”

“He's a fine handsome man, Tony, and has fine manners, and I would not call him a fellow.”

“I would, then ; and if he only gives me the chance, I'll call him a harder name to his face.”

“Tony, Tony, how can you speak so of one that wanted to befriend you ?”

“Befriend me, mother ! You make me ashamed to hear you say such a word. Befriend me !”

“What's the matter with you, Tony ? You are not talking, no, nor looking, like yourself. What's befallen you, my dear Tony ? You went out this morning so gay and light-hearted, it made me cheery to see you. Ay, and I did what I've not done for many a day—I sang to myself over my work without knowing it, and now you're come back as dark

as night. What's in it, my boy? tell your poor old mother. What's in it?"

"There's nothing in it, my own little mother, except that I'm a good-for-nothing, discontented dog, that sees himself in a very shabby condition, without having the pluck to try and get out of it. I say, mother, when are we to begin our lessons? That confounded river Danube goes between me and my rest. Whether it rises in the Black Sea or the Black Forest, is just as great a puzzle to me as whether the word is spelt peo or poe in people."

"Oh, Tony!"

"It's all very well saying, 'Oh, Tony;' but I tell you, mother, a stupid fellow ought never to be told two ways for anything: never say to him, You can do it in this fashion or in that; but, There's the road straight before you; take care you never go off it."

"Mr Maitland made that same remark to me last week."

"Then don't tell it to me, for I hate him. By the way, there's that gun of his. I forgot to take it back to Lyle Abbey. I think it was precious cool in him to suppose a stranger—a perfect stranger, as I am—would accept a present from him."

"If you are going to the Abbey, Tony, I wish

you'd leave these books there, and thank my lady for all her kind attentions to me; and say a word to Sir Arthur, too, to excuse my not seeing him when he called. Tell Gregg, the gardener, not to send me any more vegetables now; it's the scarce season, and they'll be wanting them for themselves; and if you should chance to see Mr Lockyer, the steward, just mention to him that the new sluice is just no good at all, and when the rain comes heavy, and the mill is not working—the water comes up to the kitchen door. Are you minding me, Tony?"

"I'm not sure that I am," said he moodily, as he stood examining the lock of the well-finished rifle. "I was to tell Lady Lyle something about cabbages, or the mill-race—which was it?"

"You are not to make a fool of yourself, Tony," said she, half vexed and half amused. "I'll keep my message for another day."

"And you'll do well," said he; "besides, I'm not very sure that I'll go farther than the gate-lodge;" and so saying, he took his hat, and, with the rifle on his shoulder, strolled out of the room.

"Ah! he's more like his father every day!" sighed she, as she looked after him; and if there was pride in the memory, there was some pain also.

CHAPTER XXI.

A COMFORTABLE COUNTRY-HOUSE.

IF a cordial host and a graceful hostess can throw a wondrous charm over the hospitalities of a house, there is a feature in those houses where neither host nor hostess is felt which contributes largely to the enjoyment of the assembled company. I suspect, indeed, that republics work more smoothly domestically than nationally. Tilney was certainly a case in point. Mrs Maxwell was indeed the owner—the demesne, the stables, the horses, the gardens, the fish-ponds, were all hers ; but somehow none of the persons under her roof felt themselves her guests. It was an establishment where each lived as he liked, gave his own orders, and felt, very possibly, more at home, in the pleasant sense of the phrase, than in his own house. Dinner alone was a “fix-
ture ;” everything else was at the caprice of each. The old lady herself was believed to take great

pride in the perfect freedom her guests enjoyed; and there was a story current of a whole family, who partook of her hospitalities for three weeks, meeting her once afterwards in a watering-place, and only recognising her as an old woman they saw at Tilney. Other tales there were of free comments of strangers made upon the household, the dinners, and suchlike, to herself, in ignorance of who she was, which she enjoyed vastly, and was fond of relating, in strict confidence, to her few intimates.

If there were a number of pleasant features in such a household, there were occasionally little trifling drawbacks that detracted slightly from its perfect working—mere specks in the sun, it is true, and, after all, only such defects as are inseparable from all things where humanity enters and influences. One of these—perhaps the most marked one—was the presumption of certain *habitués* to instal themselves in certain rooms, which, from long usage, they had come to regard as their own. These prescriptive rights were so well understood that the frequenters of Tilney no more thought of disturbing them than they would of contesting their neighbours' title-deeds, or appropriating to themselves some portions of their wardrobes. Occasionally, however, it did happen that some guest of more

than ordinary pretension arrived—some individual whose rank or station placed him above these conventionalities—and in such cases some deviations from ordinary routine would occur, but so quietly and peacefully withal, as never to disturb the uniform working of the domestic machinery.

“I find my rooms always ready for me here,” said Mrs Trafford; “and I have no doubt that Mrs Maxwell has given orders about yours, Mr Maitland; but it’s your own fault, remember, if you’re not lodged to your liking.”

Maitland was not long in making his choice. A little garden pavilion, which was connected with the house by a glass corridor, suited him perfectly; it combined comfort and quiet and isolation; who could ask for more?—within an easy access of society when it was wanted. There was the vast old garden, as much orchard and shrubbery as garden, to stroll in unobserved; and a little bath-room, into which the water trickled all day long with a pleasant drip, drip, that sounded most soothingly.

“It’s the Commodore’s favourite place, sir, this garden-house,” said the butler, who did the honours to Maitland, “and it’s only a chance that he’s not here to claim it. There was some mistake

about his invitation, and I suppose he's not coming."

"Yes, I passed him a couple of miles off; he'll be here almost immediately."

"We'll put him up on the second floor, sir; the rooms are all newly done up, and very handsome."

"I'm sorry if I inconvenience him, Mr Raikes;" said Maitland, languidly; "but I've got here now, and I'm tired, and my traps are half taken out; and, in fact, I should be sorrier still to have to change. You understand me—don't you?"

"Perfectly, sir; and my mistress, too, gave orders that you were to have any room you pleased; and your own hours, too, for everything."

"She is most kind. When can I pay my respects to her?"

"Before dinner, sir, is the usual time. All the new company meet her in the drawing-room. Oh, there's the Commodore now; I hear his voice, and I declare they're bringing his trunks here, after all I said."

The old sailor was now heard, in tones that might have roused a maindeck, calling to the servants to bring down all his baggage to the pavilion, to heat the bath, and send him some sherry and a sandwich.

“I see you’re getting ready for me, Raikes,” said he, as the somewhat nervous functionary appeared at the door.

“Well, indeed, Commodore Graham, these rooms are just taken.”

“Taken! and by whom? Don’t you know, and haven’t you explained, that they are always mine?”

“We thought up to this morning, Commodore, that you were not coming.”

“Who are ‘we’—you and the housemaids, eh? Tell me who are ‘we,’ sir?”

“My mistress was greatly distressed, sir, at George’s mistake, and she sent him back late last night.”

“Don’t bother me about that. Who’s here—who has got my quarters? and where is he? I suppose it’s a man?”

“It’s a Mr Norman Maitland.”

“By George, I’d have sworn it!” cried the Commodore, getting purple with passion. “I knew it before you spoke. Go in and say that Commodore Graham would wish to speak with him.”

“He has just lain down, sir: he said he didn’t feel quite well, and desired he mightn’t be disturbed.”

“He’s not too ill to hear a message. Go in

and say that Commodore Graham wishes to have one word with him. Do you hear me, sir?"

A flash of the old man's eye, and a tighter grasp of his cane—very significant in their way—sent Mr Raikes on his errand, from which, after a few minutes, he came back, saying in a low whisper, "He's asleep, sir—at least I think so; for the bedroom door is locked, and his breathing comes very long."

"This is about the most barefaced—the most outrageously impudent——" he stopped, checked by the presence of the servant, which he had totally forgotten. "Take my traps back into the hall—do you hear me?—the hall."

"If you'd allow me, sir, to show the yellow rooms up-stairs, with the bow-window——"

"In the attics, I hope?"

"No, sir—just over the mistress's own room, on the second floor."

"I'll save you that trouble, Mr Raikes; send Corrie here, my coachman—send him here at once."

While Mr Raikes went, or affected to go, towards the stables—a mission which his dignity secretly scorned—the Commodore called out after him, "And tell him to give the mare a double feed,

and put on the harness again—do you hear me? —to put the harness on her.”

Mr Raikes bowed respectfully; but had the Commodore only seen his face, he would have seen a look that said—“What I now do must not be taken as a precedent—I do it, as the lawyers say, ‘without prejudice.’”

In a glow of hot temper, to which the ascent of two pairs of stairs contributed something, the old Commodore burst into the room where his daughters were engaged unpacking. Sofas, tables, and chairs were already covered with articles of dress, rendering his progress a matter of very nice steering through the midst of them.

“Cram them in again—stow them all away!” cried he; “we’re going back.”

“Back where?” asked the elder, in that tone of dignified resistance years of strong opposition had taught her.

“Back to Port-Graham, if you know such a place. I’ve ordered the car round to the door, and I mean to be off in a quarter of an hour.”

“But why—what has happened? what’s the reason for this?”

“The reason is, that I’m not going to be packed up in the top storey, or given a bed in a barrack-

room. That fellow Raikes—I'll remember it to him next Christmas—that fellow has gone and given the garden-house to that Mr Maitland."

"Oh, is that all?" broke in Miss Graham.

"All, all! why, what more would you have? Did you expect that he had told me to brush his coat or fetch his hot water? What the d—l do you mean by all?"

"Then why don't you take Mrs Chetwyn's rooms? they are on this floor. She's going now. They are most comfortable, and have a south aspect: by the way, she was just talking of Maitland; she knows all about him, and he is the celebrated Norman Maitland."

"Ah, let us hear that. I want to unearth the fellow if I only knew how," said he, taking a chair.

"There's nothing to unearth, papa," said the younger daughter. "Mrs Chetwyn says that there's not a man in England so courted and fêted as he is; that people positively fight for him at country-houses; and it's a regular bait to one's company to say, 'We're to have Maitland with us?'"

"And who is he?"

"She doesn't know."

"What's his fortune?"

“She doesn’t know.”

“Where is it?”

“She’s not sure. It must be somewhere abroad—in India, perhaps.”

“So that this old woman knows just as much as we do ourselves, which is simply nothing; but that people go on asking this man about to this dinner and that shooting just because they met him somewhere else, and he amused them.”

“’Tis pretty clear that he has money, wherever it comes from,” said Miss Graham, authoritatively. “He came to Hamilton Court with four hunters and three hackneys, the like of which were never seen in the county.”

“Tell papa about his yacht,” broke in the younger.

“I don’t want to hear about his yacht; I’d rather learn why he turned me out of my old quarters.”

“In all probability he never heard they were yours. Don’t you know well what sort of house this is—how everybody does what he likes?”

“Why didn’t Alice Lyle—Mrs Trafford, I mean—tell him that I always took these rooms?”

“Because probably she was thinking of something else,” said Miss Graham, significantly. “Mrs

Chetwyn watched them as they drove up, and she declares that, if Maitland hadn't his hand in her muff, her eyes have greatly deceived her."

"And what if he had?"

"Simply that it means they are on very excellent terms. Not that Alice will make any real conquest there; for, as Mrs Chetwyn said, 'he has seen far too many of these fine-lady airs and graces to be taken by them;' and she added, 'a frank, outspoken, natural girl, like your sister there, always attracts men of this stamp.'"

"Why didn't he come over on Wednesday, then? It was his own appointment, and we waited dinner till seven o'clock, and have not had so much as one line—no, not one line of apology."

"Perhaps he was ill, perhaps he was absent; his note might have miscarried. At all events, I'd wait till we meet him, and see what explanation he'll make."

"Yes, papa," chimed in Beck, "just leave things alone. 'A strange hand on the rod never hooked the salmon,' is a saying of your own."

"There's that stupid fellow brought the car round to the door, just as if our splendid equipage hadn't attracted criticism enough on our arrival," said Miss Graham, as she opened the window, and

by a gesture, more eloquent than graceful, motioned to the servant to return to the stableyard: "and there come the post-horses," added she, "for the Chetwyns. Go now and secure her rooms before you're too late," and, rather forcibly aiding her counsel, she bundled the old Commodore out of the chamber, and resumed the unpacking of the wardrobe.

"I declare I don't know what he'll interfere in next," said Miss Graham.

"Yes," said Beck, with a weary sigh, "I wish he'd go back to the American war, and what we did or did not do at Tinconderoga."

Leaving these young ladies to discuss, in a spirit more critical than affectionate, the old Commodore's ways and habits, let us for a moment return to Maitland, who had admitted young Lyle after two unsuccessful attempts to see him.

"It's no easy matter to get an audience of you," said Mark. "I have been here I can't say how many times, always to hear Fenton lisp out, 'In the bath, sir.'"

"Yes, I usually take my siesta that way. With plenty of eau-de-Cologne in it, there's no weakening effect. Well, and what is going on here? any people that I know? I suppose not."

“ I don't think it very likely ; they are all country families, except a few refreshers from the garrison at Newry and Dundalk.”

“ And what do they do ?”

“ Pretty much the same sort of thing you'd find in an English country-house. There's some not very good shooting. They make riding parties. They have archery when it's fine, and billiards when it rains ; but they always dine very well at seven, that much I can promise you.”

“ Not such a cook as your father's, Lyle, I'm certain.”

“ Perhaps not,” said Mark, evidently flattered by the compliment. “ But the cellar here is unequalled. Do you know that in the mere shadowy possibility of being one day her heir, I groan every time I see that glorious madeira placed on the table before a set of fellows that smack their lips and say, ‘ It's good sherry, but a trifle too sweet for my taste.’”

“ And this same heritage—how do the chances look ?”

“ I shall want your power of penetration to say that. One day the old woman will take me aside and consult me about fifty things ; and the next she'll say, ‘ Perhaps we'd better make no changes,

Mark. Heaven knows what ideas they may have who'll come after me.' She drives me half-distracted with these capricious turns."

"It is provoking, no doubt of it."

"I'd not care so much if I thought it was to fall to Bella; though, to be sure, no good-looking girl needs such a fortune as this. Do you know that the timber thrown down by the late gales is worth eight thousand pounds? and Harris the steward tells me it's not one-fourth of what ought to be felled for the sake of the young wood."

"And she has the whole and sole disposal of all this?"

"Every stick of it, and some six thousand acres besides!"

"I'd marry her if I were you. I declare I would."

"Nonsense! this is a little too absurd."

"Amram married his aunt, and I never heard that she had such a dower; not to say that the relationship in the present case is only a myth."

"Please to remember that she is about thirty years older than my mother."

"I bear it most fully in mind, and I scout the vulgar impertinences of those who ridicule these marriages. I think there is something actually

touching in the watchful care and solicitude of a youthful husband for the venerable object of his affections."

"Well, you shall not point the moral by *my* case, I promise you," said Mark, angrily.

"That sublime spectacle that the gods are said to love—a great man struggling with adversity—is so beautifully depicted in these unions."

"Then why not——" He was going to say, "Why not marry her yourself?" but the fear of taking such a liberty with his distinguished friend just caught him in time and stopped him.

"I'll tell you why not," said Maitland, replying to the unuttered question. "If you have ever dined at a civic fête, you'll have remarked that there is some one dish or other the most gluttonous alderman will suffer to pass untasted—a sort of sacrifice offered to public opinion. And so it is, an intensely worldly man, as people are polite enough to regard me, must show, every now and then, that there are temptations which he is able to resist. Marrying for money is one of these. I might speculate in a bubble company, I might traffic in cotton shares, or even 'walk into' my best friend at faro, but I mustn't marry for money—that's positive."

“But apparently *I* might,” said Mark, sulkily.

“You might,” replied Maitland, with calm dignity of manner.

“It is a privilege of which I do not mean to avail myself,” said Mark, while his face was flushed with temper. “Do you know that your friends the Grahams are here?”

“Yes; I caught a glimpse of the fair Rebecca slipping sideways through life on a jaunting-car.”

“And there’s the old Commodore tramping over the house, and worrying every one with his complaints that you have turned him out of his rooms here—rooms dedicated to his comfort for the last thirty years.”

“Reason enough to surrender them now. Men quit even the Treasury benches to give the Opposition a turn of office.”

“He’s a quarrelsome old blade, too,” said Mark, “particularly if he suspects he’s been ‘put upon.’”

“No blame to him for that.”

“A word or two, said as you well know how to say it, will set all right; or a line, perhaps, saying that having accidentally heard from me——”

“No, no, Mark. Written excuses are like undated acceptances, and they may be presented unex-

pectedly to you years after you've forgotten them. I'll tell the Commodore that I shall not inconvenience him beyond a day or two, for I mean to start by the end of the week."

"They expect you to come back with us. Alice told me you had promised."

"*L'homme propose,*" said he, sighing. "By the way, I saw that young fellow you told me about—Butler; a good-looking fellow too, well limbed and well set up, but not a marvel of good-breeding or tact."

"Did he attempt any impertinences with *you*?" asked Mark, in a tone of amazement.

"Not exactly—he was not, perhaps, as courteous as men are who care to make a favourable impression; but he is not, as you suspected—he is not a snob."

"Indeed!" said Mark, reddening; for though provoked and angry, he did not like to contest the judgment of Norman Maitland on such a point. "You'll delight my sisters by this expression of your opinion; for my own part, I can only say I don't agree with it."

"The more reason not to avow it, Lyle. Whenever you don't mean very well by a man, never

abuse him, since after that, all your judgments of him become '*suspect*.' Remember that where you praise you can detract; nobody has such unlimited opportunities to poison as the doctor. There now—there's a bit of Machiavelism to think over as you dress for dinner, and I see it's almost time to do so."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DINNER AT TILNEY.

WHEN Maitland entered the drawing-room before dinner, the Commodore was standing in the window-recess pondering over in what way he should receive him, while Sally and Beck sat somewhat demurely watching the various presentations to which Mrs Maxwell was submitting her much-valued guest. At last Maitland caught sight of where they sat, and hurried across the room to shake hands with them, and declare the delight he felt at meeting them. "And the Commodore, is he here?"

"Yes; I'll find him for you," said Beck, not sorry to display before her country acquaintance the familiar terms she stood on with the great Mr Maitland.

With what a frank cordiality did he shake the old sailor's hand, and how naturally came that laugh

about nothing, or something very close to nothing, that Graham said, in allusion to the warm quarters they found themselves in. "Such madeira!" whispered he, "and some old '34 claret. By the way, you forgot your promise to taste mine."

"I'll tell you how that occurred when we've a quiet moment together," said Maitland, in a tone of such confidential meaning that the old man was reassured at once. "I've a good deal to say to you, but we'll have a morning together. You know every one here? Who is that with all the medals on his coat?"

General Carnwroth; and that old woman with the blue turban is his wife; and these are the Grimsbys; and that short man with the bald head is Holmes of Narrow Bank, and the good-looking girl there is his niece—an heiress too."

"What red arms she has!" whispered Maitland.

"So they are, by Jove!" said Graham, laughing; "and I never noticed it before."

"Take me in to dinner," said Mrs Trafford, in a low voice, as she swept past Maitland.

"I can't. Mrs Maxwell has ordered me to give her my arm," said he, following her, and they went along for some paces conversing.

“Have you made your peace with the Grahams?” asked she, smiling half-maliciously.

“In a fashion; at least I have put off the settling-day.”

“If you take to those morning rambles again with the fair Rebecca, I warn you it will not be so easy to escape an explanation. Here’s Mrs Maxwell come to claim you.”

Heaving with fat and velvet, and bugles, and vulgar good-humour, the old lady leaned heavily on Maitland’s arm, really proud of her guest, and honestly disposed to show him that she deemed his presence an honour. “It seems like a dream to me,” said she, “to see you here after reading of your name so often in the papers at all the great houses in England. I never fancied that old Tilney would be so honoured.”

It was not easy to acknowledge such a speech, and even Maitland’s self-possession was pushed to its last limits by it; but this awkward feeling soon passed away under the genial influence of the pleasant dinner. And it was as pleasant a dinner as good fare and good wine and a well-disposed company could make it.

At first a slight sense of reserve, a shade of restraint, seemed to hold conversation in check, and

more particularly towards where Maitland sat, showing that a certain dread of him could be detected amongst those who would have fiercely denied if charged with such a sentiment.

The perfect urbanity, tinctured, perhaps, with a sort of racy humour, with which Maitland acknowledged the old Commodore's invitation to take wine with him, did much to allay this sense of distrust. "I say, Maitland," cried he from the foot of the table, "are you too great a dandy to drink a glass of wine with me?"

A very faint flush coloured Maitland's cheek, but a most pleasant smile played on his mouth as he said, "I am delighted, my dear Commodore—delighted to repudiate the dandyism and enjoy the claret at the same time."

"They tell me it's vulgar and old-fashioned, and I don't know what else, to take wine with a man," resumed the old sailor, encouraged by his success to engage a wider attention.

"I only object to the custom when practised at a royal table," said Maitland, "and where it obliges you to rise and drink your wine standing." As some of the company were frank enough to own that they heard of the etiquette for the first time, and others, who affected to be conversant with it,

ingeniously shrouded their ignorance, the conversation turned upon the various traits which characterise different courtly circles; and it was a theme Maitland knew how to make amusing—not vain-gloriously displaying himself as a foreground figure, or even detailing the experiences as his own, but relating his anecdotes with all the modest diffidence of one who was giving his knowledge at second-hand.

The old General was alone able to cap stories with Maitland on this theme, and told with some gusto an incident of his first experiences at Lisbon. “We had,” said he, “a young attaché to our Legation there—I am talking of, I regret to say, almost fifty years ago. He was a very good-looking young fellow, quite fresh from England, and not very long, I believe, from Eton. In passing through the crowd of the ball-room, a long streamer of lace which one of the princesses wore in her hair caught in the attaché’s epaulette. He tried in vain to extricate himself, but, fearing to tear the lace, he was obliged to follow the Infanta about, his confusion making his efforts only the more hopeless. ‘Where are you going, sir? What do you mean by this persistence?’ asked a sour-faced old lady-of-honour, as she perceived him still after them. ‘I am attached to her

Royal Highness,' said he in broken French, 'and I cannot tear myself away.' The Infanta turned and stared at him, and then instantly burst out a-laughing, but so good-humouredly withal, and with such an evident forgiveness, that the duenna became alarmed, reported the incident to the Queen, and the next morning our young countryman got his orders to leave Lisbon at once."

While the company commented on the incident, the old General sighed sorrowfully—over the long past, perhaps—and then said, "He did not always get out of his entanglements so easily."

"You knew him, then?" asked some one.

"Slightly; but I served for many years with his brother, Wat Butler, as good a soldier as ever wore the cloth."

"Are you aware that his widow and son are in this neighbourhood?" asked Mrs Trafford.

"No; but it would give me great pleasure to see them. Wat and I were in the same regiment in India. I commanded the company when he joined us. And how did he leave them?"

"On short rations," broke in old Graham. "Indeed, if it wasn't for Lyle Abbey, I suspect very hard up at times."

"Nothing of the kind, Commodore," broke in Mrs

Trafford. "You have been quite misinformed. Mrs Butler is, without affluence, perfectly independent; and more so even in spirit than in fortune."

A very significant smile from Maitland seemed to say that he recognised and enjoyed her generous advocacy of her friend.

"Perhaps you could do something, General, for his son?" cried Mrs Maxwell.

"What sort of lad is he?"

"Don't ask me, for I don't like him; and don't ask my sisters, for they like him too well," said Mark.

"Have you met him, Mr Maitland?" asked the General.

"Yes, but passingly. I was struck, however, by his good looks and manly bearing. The country rings with stories of his courage and intrepidity."

"And they are all true," said Isabella Lyle. "He is the best and bravest creature breathing."

"There's praise—that's what I call real praise," said the General. "I'll certainly go over and see him after that."

"I'll do better, General," said Mrs Maxwell; "I'll send over and ask him here to-morrow. Why do you shake your head, Bella? He'll not come?"

"No," said she, calmly.

“Not if you and Alice were to back my request?”

“I fear not,” said Alice. “He has estranged himself of late from every one; he has not been even once to see us since he came back from England.”

“Then Mark will go and fetch him for us,” said Mrs Maxwell, the most unobservant of all old ladies.

“Not I, madam; nor would that be the way to secure him.”

“Well, have him we must,” said Mrs Maxwell; while she added, in a whisper to Mrs Trafford, “It would never do to lose the poor boy such a chance.”

“Beck says, if some one will drive her over to the Causeway,” cried the Commodore, “she’ll vouch for success, and bring young Tony back with her.”

“Mr Maitland offers himself,” said Alice, whose eyes sparkled with fun, while her lips showed no trace of a smile.

“Take the phaeton, then,” said Mrs Maxwell, “only there will be no place for young Butler; but take a britscha, and order post-horses at Greme’s Mill.” And now a sharp discussion ensued which road was the shorter, and whether the long hill or the “new cut” was the more severe on the cattle.

“This was most unfair of you,” said Maitland to

Mrs Trafford, as they rose from table ; “but it shall not succeed.”

“How will you prevent it?” said she, laughing.
“What can you do?”

“Rather than go I’d say anything.”

“As, how, for instance?”

He leaned forward and whispered a few words in her ear, and suddenly her face became scarlet, her eyes flashed passionately, as she said, “This passes the limit of jest, Mr Maitland.”

“Not more than the other would pass the limit of patience,” said he ; and now, instead of entering the drawing-room, he turned short round and sought his own room.



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FIRST NIGHT AT TILNEY.

MAITLAND was not in the best of tempers when he retired to his room. Whatever the words he had whispered in Alice's ear—and this history will not record them—they were a failure. They were even worse than a failure, for they produced an effect directly the opposite to that intended.

“Have I gone too fast?” muttered he; “have I deceived myself? She certainly understood me well in what I said yesterday. She, if anything, gave me a sort of encouragement to speak. She drew away her hand, it is true, but without any show of resentment or anger; a sort of protest rather, that implied ‘We have not yet come to this.’ These home-bred women are hard riddles to read. Had she been French, Spanish, or Italian—ay, or even one of our own, long conversant with the world of Europe—I never should have blundered.”

Such thoughts as these he now threw on paper, in a letter to his friend Caffarelli.

“What a ‘Fiasco!’ I have made, Carlo mio,” said he, “and all from not understanding the nature of these creatures, who have never seen a sunset south of the Alps. I know how little sympathy any fellow meets with from you, if he be only unlucky. I have your face before me—your eyebrows on the top of your forehead, and your nether lip quivering with malicious drollery, as you cry out, ‘Ma perche? perche? perche?’ And I’ll tell you why: because I believed that she had hauled down her colours, and there was no need to continue firing.

“Of course you’ll say, ‘Meno male,’ resume the action. But it won’t do, Signor Conte, it won’t do. She is not like one of your hardened coquettes on the banks of the Arno, or the slopes of Castellamare, who think no more of a declaration of love than an invitation to dinner; nor have the slightest difficulty in making the same excuse to either—a pre-engagement. She is English, or worse again, far worse—Irish.

“I’d give—I don’t know what I wouldn’t give—that I could recall that stupid speech. I declare I think it is this fearful language has done it all. One can no more employ the Anglo-Saxon tongue

for a matter of delicate treatment, than one could paint a miniature with a hearth-brush. What a pleasant coinage for cajolery are the liquid lies of the sweet South, where you can lisp duplicity, and seem never to hurt the Decalogue."

As he had written so far, a noisy summons at his door aroused him, while the old Commodore's voice called out "Maitland! Maitland! I want a word with you." Maitland opened the door, and without speaking returned to the fire, standing with his back to it, and his hands carelessly stuck in his pockets.

"I thought I'd come over and have a cigar with you here, and a glass of brandy-and-water," said Graham. "They're hard at it yonder, with harp and piano, and, except holystoning a deck, I don't know its equal."

"I'm the more sorry for your misfortune, Commodore, that I am unable to alleviate it. I'm deep in correspondence just now, as you see there, and have a quantity more to do before bed-time."

"Put it aside, put it aside; never write by candle-light. It ruins the eyes; and yours are not so young as they were ten years ago."

"The observation is undeniable," said Maitland, stiffly.

“You’re six-and-thirty? well, five-and-thirty, I take it?”

“I’m ashamed to say I cannot satisfy your curiosity on so natural a subject of inquiry.”

“Sally says forty,” said he, in a whisper, as though the remark required caution. “Her notion is that you dye your whiskers; but Beck’s idea is that you look older than you are.”

“I scarcely know to which of the young ladies I owe my deeper acknowledgments,” said Maitland, bowing.

“You’re a favourite with both; and if it hadn’t been for the very decided preference you showed, I tell you frankly they’d have been tearing caps about you ere this.”

“This flattery overwhelms me; and all the more that it is quite unexpected.”

“None of your mock modesty with me, you dog!” cried the Commodore, with a chuckling laugh. “No fellow had ever any success of that kind that he didn’t know it; and, upon my life, I believe the very conceit it breeds goes half-way with women.”

“It is no small prize to learn the experiences of a man like yourself on such a theme.”

“Well, I’ll not deny it,” said he, with a short sigh. “I had my share—some would say a little

more than my share—of that sort of thing. You'll not believe it, perhaps, but I was a devilish good-looking fellow when I was—let me see—about six or eight years younger than you are now."

"I am prepared to credit it," said Maitland, dryly.

"There was no make-up about *me*: no lacquering, no paint, no padding—all honest scantling from keel to taffrail. I wasn't tall, it's true. I never, with my best heels on, passed five feet seven and a half."

"The height of Julius Cæsar," said Maitland, calmly.

"I know nothing about Julius Cæsar; but I'll say this, it was a good height for a sailor in the old gun-brig days, when they never gave you much head-room 'tween decks. It don't matter so much now if every fellow in the ward-room was as tall as yourself. What's in this jar here?"

"Selzer."

"And this short one—is it gin?"

"No; it's Vichy."

"Why, what sort of stomach do you expect to have with all these confounded slops? I never tasted any of these vile compounds but once—what they called Carlsbad—and, by Jove, it was bad, and no mistake. It took three-fourths of a bottle of strong brandy to bring back the heat into my vitals

again. Why don't you tell Raikes to send you in some sherry? That old brown sherry is very pleasant, and it must be very wholesome too, for the doctor here always sticks to it."

"I never drink wine, except at my dinner," was the cold and measured reply.

"You'll come to it later on—you'll come to it later on," said the Commodore, with a chuckle, "when you'll not be careful about the colour of your nose or the width of your waistcoat. There's a deal of vanity wrapped up in abstemiousness, and a deal of vexation of spirit too." And he laughed at his own drollery till his eyes ran over. "You're saying to yourself, Maitland, 'What a queer old cove that is!'—ain't you? Out with it, man. I'm the best-tempered fellow that ever breathed—with the men I like, mind you; not with every one. No, no; old G. G., as they used to call me on board the Hannibal, is an ugly craft if you board him on the wrong quarter. I don't know how it would be now, with all the newfangled tackle; but in the old days of flint-locks and wide bores I was a dead shot. I've heard you can do something that way?"

"A little," said he, dryly.

"Every gentleman ought; I've always maintained it: as poor old Bowes used to say, With a

strong head for port, and a steady hand for a pistol, a man may go a long way in this world. There, I think it's your turn now at the pump. I've had all the talk to myself since I came in, and the most you've done has been to grunt out 'Indeed!' or 'Really!'"

"I have listened, Commodore—listened most attentively. It has been my great privilege to have heard your opinions on three most interesting topics—women, and wine, and the duel; and, I assure you, not unprofitably."

"I'm not blown, not a bit run off my wind, for all that, if I wasn't so dry; but my mouth is like a lime-burner's hat. Would you just touch that bell and order a little sherry or madeira? You don't seem to know the ways of the house here, but every one does exactly as he pleases."

"I have a faint inkling of the practice," said Maitland, with a very peculiar smile.

"What's the matter with you this evening? You're not like yourself one bit. No life, no animation about you. Ring again; pull it strong. There, they'll hear that, I hope," cried he, as, impatient at Maitland's indolence, he gave such a jerk to the bell-rope that it came away from the wire.

“I didn’t exactly come in here for a gossip,” said the Commodore, as he resumed his seat. “I wanted to have a little serious talk with you, and perhaps you are impatient that I haven’t begun it, eh?”

“It would be unpardonable to feel impatience in such company,” said Maitland, with a bow.

“Yes, yes; I know all that. That’s what Yankees call soft sawder; but I’m too old a bird, Master Maitland, to be caught with chaff, and I think as clever a fellow as you are might suspect as much.”

“You are very unjust to both of us if you imply that I have not a high opinion of your acuteness.”

“I don’t want to be thought acute, sir: I am not a lawyer, nor a lawyer’s clerk—I’m a sailor.”

“And a very distinguished sailor.”

“That’s as it may be. They passed me over about the good-service pension, and kept ‘backing and filling’ about that coast-guard appointment till I lost temper, and told them to give it to the devil, for he never had been out of the Admiralty since I remembered it; and I said, ‘Gazette him at once, and don’t let him say, You’re forgetting an old friend and supporter.’”

“Did you write that?”

“Beck did, and I signed it, for I’ve got the gout or the rheumatism in these knuckles, that makes

writing tough work for me, and tougher for the man it's meant for. What servants they are in this house!—no answer to the bell.”

“And what reply did they make you?” asked Maitland.

“They shoved me on the retired list, and Curtis, the Secretary, said, ‘I had to suppress your letter, or my Lords would certainly have struck your name off the Navy List’—a thing I defy them to do—a thing the Queen couldn't do!”

“Will you try one of these!” said Maitland, opening his cigar-case; “these are stronger than the pale ones.”

“No; I can't smoke without something to drink, which I foresee I shall not have here.”

“I deplore my inhospitality.”

“Inhospitality! why, you have nothing to say to it. It is old mother Maxwell receives us all here. You can be neither hospitable nor inhospitable, so far as I see, excepting perhaps letting me see a little more of that fire than you have done hitherto, peacocking out the tail of your dressing-gown in front of me.”

“Pray draw closer,” said Maitland, moving to one side; “make yourself perfectly at home here.”

“So I used to be, scores of times, in these very

rooms. It's more than five-and-twenty years that I ever occupied any others."

"I was thinking of going back to the drawing-room for a cup of tea before I resumed my work here."

"Tea! don't destroy your stomach with tea. Get a little gin—they've wonderful gin here; I take a glass of it every night. Beck mixes it, and puts a sprig of, not mint, but marjoram, I think they call it. I'll make her mix a brew for you; and, by the way, that brings me to what I came about."

"Was it to recommend me to take gin?" asked Maitland, with a well-assumed innocence.

"No, sir—not to recommend you to take gin," said the old Commodore, sternly. "I told you when I came in that I had come on an errand of some importance."

"If you did, it has escaped me."

"Well, you shan't escape me—that's all."

"I hope I misunderstand you. I trust sincerely that it is to the dryness of your throat and the state of your tonsils that I must attribute this speech. Will you do me the very great favour to recall it?"

The old man fidgeted in his chair, buttoned his coat, and unbuttoned it, and then blurted out in an abrupt spasmodic way, "All right—I didn't mean

offence—I intended to say, that as we were here now—that as we had this opportunity of explaining ourselves——”

“That’s quite sufficient, Commodore. I ask for nothing beyond your simple assurance that nothing offensive was intended.”

“I’ll be hanged if I ever suffered as much from thirst in all my life. I was eighteen days on a gill of water a-day in the tropics, and didn’t feel it worse than this. I must drink some of that stuff, if I die for it. Which is the least nauseous?”

“I think you’ll find the Vichy pleasant; there is a little fixed air in it, too.”

“I wish there was a little cognac in it. Ugh! it’s detestable! Let’s try the other. Worse! I vow and declare—worse! Well, Maitland, whatever be your skill in other matters, I’ll be shot if I’ll back you for your taste in liquors.”

Maitland smiled, and was silent.

“I shall have a fever—I know I shall—if I don’t take something. There’s a singing in my head now like a chime of bells, and the back of my throat feels like a coal-bunker in one of those vile steamers. How you stand it I don’t know; but to be sure you’ve not been talking as I have.” The old Commodore rose, but, when he reached the door, seemed

suddenly to have remembered something; for he placed his hand to his forehead, and said, "What a brain I have! here was I walking away without ever so much as saying one word about it."

"Could we defer it till to-morrow, my dear Commodore?" said Maitland, coaxingly. "I have not the slightest notion what it is, but surely we could talk it over after breakfast."

"But you'll be off by that time. Beck said that there would be no use starting later than seven o'clock."

"Off! and where to?"

"To the Burnside—to the widow Butler's—where else? You heard it all arranged at dinner, didn't you?"

"I heard something suggested laughingly and lightly, but nothing serious, far less settled positively."

"Will you please to tell me, sir, how much of your life is serious, and how much is to be accepted as levity? for I suppose the inquiry I have to make of you amounts just to that, and no more."

"Commodore Graham, it would distress me much if I were to misunderstand you once again to-night, and you will oblige me deeply if you will put any question you expect me to answer in its very simplest form."

“That I will, sir; that I will! Now then, what are your intentions?”

“What are my intentions!”

“Yes, sir—exactly so; what are your intentions?”

“I declare I have so many, on such varied subjects, and of such different hues, that it would be a sore infliction on your patience were I only to open the budget; and as to either of us exhausting it, it is totally out of the question. Take your chance of a subject, then, and I’ll do my best to enlighten you.”

“This is fencing, sir; and it doesn’t suit me.”

“If you knew how very little the whole conversation suits *me*, you’d not undervalue my patience.”

“I ask you once again, what are your intentions as regards my youngest daughter, Miss Rebecca Graham? That’s plain speaking, I believe.”

“Nothing plainer; and my reply shall be equally so. I have none—none whatever.”

“Do you mean to say you never paid her any particular attentions?”

“Never.”

“That you never took long walks with her when at Lyle Abbey, quite alone and unaccompanied?”

“We walked together repeatedly. I am not so ungrateful as to forget her charming companionship.”

“Confound your gratitude, sir! it’s not that I’m talking of. You made advances. You—you told her—you said—in fact, you made her believe—ay, and you made me believe—that you meant to ask her to marry you.”

“Impossible!” said Maitland; “impossible!”

“And why impossible? Is it that our respective conditions are such as to make the matter impossible?”

“I never thought of such an impertinence, Commodore. When I said impossible, it was entirely with respect to the construction that could be placed on all my intercourse with Miss Graham.”

“And didn’t I go up to your room on the morning I left, and ask you to come over to Port-Graham and talk the matter over with me?”

“You invited me to your house, but I had not the faintest notion that it was to this end. Don’t shake your head as if you doubted me; I pledge you my word on it.”

“How often have you done this sort of thing? for no fellow is as cool as you are that’s not an old hand at it.”

“I can forgive a good deal——”

“Forgive! I should think you could forgive the

people you've injured. The question is, can *I* forgive? Yes, sir, can *I* forgive?"

"I declare it never occurred to me to inquire."

"That's enough—quite enough; you shall hear from me. It may take me twenty-four hours to find a friend; but before this time to-morrow evening, sir, I'll have him."

Maitland shrugged his shoulders carelessly, and said, "As you please, sir."

"It shall be as I please, sir; I'll take care of that. Are you able to say at present to whom my friend can address himself?"

"If your friend will first do me the favour to call upon me, I'll be able by that time to inform him."

"All right. If it's to be Mark Lyle——"

"Certainly not; it could never occur to me to make choice of your friend and neighbour's son for such an office."

"Well, I thought not—I hoped not; and I suspected, besides, that the little fellow with the red whiskers—that major who dined one day at the Abbey——"

Maitland's pale cheek grew scarlet, his eyes flashed with passion, and all the consummate calm of his manner gave way as he said, "With the

choice of my friend, sir, you have nothing to do, and I decline to confer further with you."

"Eh, eh! that shell broke in the magazine, did it? I thought it would. I'll be shot but I thought it would!" And with a hearty laugh, but bitter withal, the old Commodore seized his hat and departed.

Maitland was much tempted to hasten after the Commodore and demand—imperiously demand—from him an explanation of his last words, whose taunt was even more in the manner than the matter. Was it a mere chance hit, or did the old sailor really know something about the relations between himself and M'Caskey? A second or two of thought reassured him, and he laughed at his own fears, and turned once more to the table to finish his letter to his friend.

"You have often, my dear Carlo, heard me boast, that amidst all the shifting chances and accidents of my life, I had ever escaped one signal misfortune—in my mind, about the greatest that ever befalls a man. I have never been ridiculous. This can be my triumph no longer. The charm is broken! I suppose, if I had never come to this blessed country, I might have preserved my immunity to the last; but you might as well try to keep your

gravity at one of the Policinello combats at Naples as preserve your dignity in a land where Life is a perpetual joke, and where the few serious people are so illogical in their gravity, they are the best fun of all. Into this strange society I plunged as fearlessly as a man does who has seen a large share of life, and believes that the human crystal has no side he has not noticed; and the upshot is, I am supposed to have made warm love to a young woman that I scarcely flirted with, and am going to be shot at to-morrow by her father for not being serious in my intentions! You may laugh—you may scream, shout, and kick with laughter, and I almost think I can hear you; but it's a very embarrassing position, and the absurdity of it is more than I can face.

“Why did I ever come here? What induced me ever to put foot in a land where the very natives do not know their own customs, and where all is permitted, and nothing is tolerated? It is too late to ask you to come and see me through this troublesome affair; and indeed my present vacillation is whether to marry the young lady or run away bodily; for I own to you I am afraid—heartily afraid—to fight a man that might be my grandfather; and I can't bear to give the mettle-

some old fellow the fun of shooting at me for nothing. And worse—a thousand times worse than all this—Alice will have such a laugh at me! Ay, Carlo, here is the sum of my affliction.

“I must close this, as I shall have to look out for some one, long of stride and quick of eye, to handle me on the ground. Meanwhile order dinner for two on Saturday week, for I mean to be with you; and therefore say nothing of those affairs which interest us, ‘*ultra montani*.’ I write by this post to M’C. to meet me as I pass through Dublin; and, of course, the fellow will want money. I shall therefore draw on Cipriani for whatever is necessary, and you must be prepared to tell him the outlay was indispensable. I have done nothing, absolutely nothing, here—neither seduced man nor woman, and am bringing back to the cause nothing greater or more telling than

“NORMAN MAITLAND.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STARLIT NIGHT IN A GARDEN.

IT was late at night, verging indeed on morning, when Maitland finished his letter. All was silent around, and in the great house the lights were extinguished, and apparently all retired to rest. Lighting his cigar, he strolled out into the garden. The air was perfectly still; and although there was no moon, the sky was spangled over with stars, whose size seemed greater seen through the thin frosty atmosphere. It was pre-eminently the bright clear elastic night of a northern latitude, and the man of pleasure in a thousand shapes, the voluptuary, the *viveur*, was still able to taste the exquisite enjoyment of such an hour, as though his appetite for pleasure had not been palled by all the artifices of a life of luxury. He strolled about at random from alley to alley, now stopping to inhale the rich odour of some half-sleeping plant,

now loitering at some old fountain, and bathing his temples with the ice-cold water. He was one of those men—it is not so small a category as it might seem—who fancy that the same gifts which win success socially, would be just as sure to triumph if employed in the wider sphere of the great ambitions of life. He could count the men he had passed, and easily passed, in the race of social intercourse—men who, at a dinner-table or in a drawing-room, had not a tithe of his quickness, his versatility, his wit, or his geniality, and yet, plodding onwards and upwards, had attained station, eminence, and fortune; while he—he, well read, accomplished, formed by travel and polished by cultivation—there he was! just as he had begun the world, the only difference being those signs of time that tell as fatally on temperament as on vigour; for the same law that makes the hair grey and the cheek wrinkled, renders wit sarcastic and humour malevolent.

Maitland believed—honestly believed—he was a better man than this one here who held a high command in India, and that other who wrote himself Secretary of State. He knew how little effort it had cost him, long ago, to leave “scores of such fellows” behind at school and at the university;

but he, unhappily, so forgot that in the greater battle of life he had made no such efforts, and laid no tax on either his industry or his ability. He tried—he did his very best—to undervalue, to his own mind, their successes, and even asked himself aloud, Which of them all do I envy? but conscience is stronger than casuistry, however crafty it be, and the answer came not so readily as he wished.

While he thus mused, he heard his name uttered, so close to him, too, that he started, and, on looking up, saw that Mrs Trafford's rooms were lighted, and one of the windows which "gave" upon a terrace was open. Voices came from the room within, and soon two figures passed out on the terrace, which he speedily recognised to be Alice and Mark Lyle.

"You mistake altogether, Mark," said she, eagerly. "It is no question whatever, whether your friend Mr Maitland goes away disgusted with Ireland, and sick of us all. It is a much graver matter here. What if he were to shoot this old man? I suppose a fine gentleman as he is would deem it a very suitable punishment to any one who even passingly angered him."

"But why should there be anything of the kind? It is to me Maitland would come at once if there were such a matter in hand."

“I’m not so sure of that; and I am sure that Raikes overheard provocation pass between them, and that the Commodore left this half an hour ago, merely telling Sally that he had forgotten some lease or law-paper that he ought to have sent off by post.”

“If that be the case, there’s nothing to be done.”

“How do you mean nothing to be done?”

“I mean, that as Maitland has not consulted me, I have no pretence to know anything about it.”

“But if you do know it, and if I tell it to you?”

“All that would not amount to such knowledge as I could avail myself of. Maitland is not a man with whom any one can take liberties, Alice.”

“What?” said she, haughtily, and as though she had but partly heard his speech.

“I said that no man takes liberties with Maitland.”

A very insolent laugh from Alice was the answer.

“Come, come,” cried Mark, angrily. “All these scornful airs are not in keeping with what you yourself wrote about Maitland to Bella just two days ago.”

“And had Bella —— did she show you my letters?”

“I don't believe she intended me to see the turned-down bit at the end; but I did see it, and I read a very smart sketch of Norman Maitland, but not done by an unfriendly hand.”

“It's not too late to revoke my opinion,” said she, passionately. “But this is all quite beside what I'm thinking of. Will you go down and see Mr Maitland?”

“He's in bed and asleep an hour ago.”

“He is not. I can see the light on the gravel from his windows; and if he were asleep, he could be awakened, I suppose.”

“I have not the slightest pretext to obtrude upon him, Alice.”

“What nonsense all this is! Who is he—what is he, that he must be treated with all this deference?”

“It's somewhat too late in the day to ask who and what the man is, of whom every society in Europe contests the possession.”

“My dear Mark, be reasonable. What have we to do just now with all the courtly flatteries that have been extended to your distinguished friend, or the thousand and one princesses he might have married? What I want is, that he shouldn't, first of all, make a great scandal; and, secondly, shoot

a very worthy old neighbour, whose worst sin is being very tiresome."

"And what I want is, first, that Maitland shouldn't carry away from this county such an impression, that he'd never endure the thought of revisiting it; and, secondly, I want to go to bed, and so good-night."

"Mark, one word—only one," cried she, but he was gone: the bang of a heavy door resounded, and then a deep silence showed she was alone.

Maitland watched her as she paced the terrace from end to end with impatient steps. There was a secret pleasure in his heart as he marked all the agitation that moved her, and thought what a share he himself had in it all. At last she withdrew within the room, but the opening and shutting of a door followed, and he surmised that she had passed out. While he was disputing with himself whether she might have followed Mark to his room, he heard a footstep on the gravel, and saw that she was standing and tapping with her finger on the window of his chamber. Maitland hurried eagerly back. "Is it possible that I see you here, Mrs Trafford," cried he, "at this hour?"

She started, and for a moment seemed too much overcome to answer, when she said, "You may

believe that it is no light cause brings me; and even now I tremble at what I am doing: but I have begun, and I'll go on. Let us walk this way, for I want to speak with you."

"Will you take my arm?" said Maitland, but without anything of gallantry in his tone.

"No—yes, I will," said she, hurriedly; and now for some paces they moved along side by side in silence.

"Mr Maitland," said she at last, "a silly speech I made to-day at dinner has led to a most serious result, and Commodore Graham and you have quarrelled."

"Forgive me if I interrupt you. Nothing that fell from you has occasioned any rupture between Commodore Graham and myself; for that I can pledge my word of honour."

"But you have quarrelled. Don't deny it."

"We had a very stupid discussion, and a difference; and I believe, if the Commodore would have vouchsafed me a patient hearing, he would have seen that he had really nothing to complain of on my part. I am quite ready to make the same explanation to any friend he will depute to receive it."

"It was, however, what I said about your driving

over with Miss Rebecca Graham to the Burnside that led to all this?"

"Nothing of the kind, I assure you."

"Well, I don't care for the reason," said she, impatiently; "but you have had a quarrel, and are about to settle it by a duel. I have no doubt," continued she, more rapidly, "that you, Mr Maitland, can treat this sort of thing very lightly. I suppose it is part of your code as man of the world to do so: but this old man is a father; his life, however little you may think of it, is of very great consequence to his family; he is an old friend and neighbour whom we all care for, and any mishap that might befall him would be a calamity to us all."

"Pray continue," said he, softly; "I am giving you all my attention. Having given the sketch of one of so much value to his friends, I am waiting now to hear of the other whom nobody is interested for."

"This is no time for sarcasm, however witty, Mr Maitland; and I am sure your better feeling will tell you that I could not have come here to listen to it. Do not be offended with me for my bluntness, nor refuse what I have asked you."

"You have not asked anything from me," said he, smiling.

“Well, I will now,” said she, with more courage in her tone; “I will ask you not to go any farther in this affair—to pledge your word to me that it shall stop here.”

“Remember I am but one; any promise I may make you can only take effect with the concurrence of another.”

“I know nothing—I want to know nothing—of these subtleties; tell me flatly you’ll not give this old man a meeting.”

“I will, if you’ll only say how I am to avoid it. No, no; do not be angry with me,” said he, slightly touching the hand that rested on his arm. “I’d do far more than this to win one, even the faintest smile that ever said, ‘I thank you;’ but there is a difficulty here. You don’t know with what he charges me.”

“Perhaps I suspect it.”

“It is that, after paying most marked attention to his daughter, I have suddenly ceased to follow up my suit, and declared that I meant nothing by it.”

“Well?” said she, quietly.

“Well,” repeated he. “Surely no one knows better than you that there was no foundation for this.”

"I! how should I know it?"

"At all events," replied he, with some irritation of manner, "you couldn't believe it."

"I declare I don't know," said she, hesitatingly, for the spirit of drollery had got the better even of the deep interest of the moment. "I declare I don't know, Mr Maitland. There is a charm in the manner of an unsophisticated country girl which men of the world are often the very first to acknowledge."

"Charming unsophistication!" muttered he, half aloud.

"At all events, Mr Maitland, it is no reason that because you don't admire a young lady, you are to shoot her papa."

"How delightfully illogical you are!" said he, and, strangely enough, there was an honest admiration in the way he said it.

"I don't want to convince, sir; I want to be obeyed. What I insist upon is, that this matter shall end here. Do you mind, Mr Maitland, that it end here?"

"Only show me how, and I obey you."

"Do you mean to say that, with all your tact and cleverness, you cannot find a means of showing that you have been misapprehended, that you are deeply mortified at being misunderstood, that by an ex-

pression of great humility—do you know how to be humble?”

“I can be abject,” said he, with a peculiar smile.

“I should really like to see you abject!” said she, laughingly.

“Do so then,” cried he, dropping on his knee before her, while he still held her hand, but with a very different tone of voice—a voice now tremulous with earnest feeling—continued, “There can be no humility deeper than that with which I ask your forgiveness for one word I spoke to you this evening. If you but knew all the misery it has caused me.”

“Mr Maitland, this mockery is a just rebuke for my presence here. If I had not stooped to such a step, you would never have dared this.”

“It is no mockery to say what my heart is full of, and what you will not deny you have read there. No, Alice, you may reject my love; you cannot pretend to ignore it.”

Though she started as he called her Alice, she said nothing, but only withdrew her hand. At last she said, “I don’t think this is very generous of you. I came to ask a great favour at your hands, and you would place me in a position not to accept it.”

“So far from that,” said he, rising, “I distinctly tell you that I place all, even my honour, at your feet, and without one shadow of a condition. You say you came here to ask me a favour, and my answer is, that I accord whatever you ask, and make no favour of it. Now what is it you wish me to do?”

“It’s very hard not to believe you sincere when you speak in this way,” said she, in a low voice.

“Don’t try,” said he, in the same low tone.

“You promise me, then, that nothing shall come of this?”

“I do,” said he, seriously.

“And that you will make any amends the Commodore’s friend may suggest? Come, come,” said she, laughing, “I never meant that you were to marry the young lady.”

“I really don’t know how far you were going to put my devotion to the test.”

The pleasantness with which he spoke this so amused her that she broke again into laughter, and laughed heartily too. “Confess,” said she, at last — “confess it’s the only scrape you did not see your way out of!”

“I am ready to confess it’s the only occasion in my life in which I had to place my honour in the hands of a lady.”

“Well, let us see if a lady cannot be as adroit as a gentleman in such an affair; and now, as you are in my hands, Mr Maitland—completely in *my* hands—I am peremptory, and my first orders are, that you keep close arrest. Raikes will see that you are duly fed, and that you have your letters and the newspapers; but mind, on any account, no visitors without my express leave: do you hear me, sir?”

“I do; and all I would say is this, that if the tables should ever turn, and it would be my place to impose conditions, take my word for it, I’ll be just as absolute. Do you hear me, madam?”

“I do; and I don’t understand, and I don’t want to understand, you,” said she, in some confusion. “Now, good-bye. It is almost day. I declare that grey streak there is daybreak!”

“Oh, Alice, if you would let me say one word—only one—before we part.”

“I will not, Mr Maitland; and for this reason, that I intend we should meet again.”

“Be it so,” said he, sadly, and turned away. After he had walked a few paces, he stopped and turned round; but she was already gone, how and in what direction, he knew not. He hurried first one way, then another, but without success. If

she had passed into the house—and of course she had—with what speed she must have gone! Thoughtful, but not unhappy, he returned to his room, if not fully assured that he had done what was wisest, well disposed to hope favourably for the future.

CHAPTER XXV.

JEALOUS TRIALS.

WHEN Mrs Maxwell learned in the morning that Mr Maitland was indisposed and could not leave his room, that the Commodore had gone off in the night, and Mark and Mrs Trafford had started by daybreak, her amazement became so insupportable that she hastened from one of her guests to the other, vainly asking them to explain these mysteries.

“What a fidgety old woman she is!” said Beck Graham, who had gone over to Bella Lyle, then a prisoner in her room from a slight cold. “She has been rushing over the whole house inquiring if it be possible that my father has run away with Alice, that your brother is in pursuit of them, and Mr Maitland taken poison in a moment of despair. At all events, she has set every one guessing and gossiping at such a rate that all thought of archery

is forgotten, and even our private theatricals have lost their interest in presence of this real drama."

"How absurd!" said Bella, languidly.

"Yes, it's very absurd to fill one's house with company, and give them no better amusement than the chit-chat of a boarding-house. I declare I have no patience with her."

"Where did your father go?"

"He went over to Port-Graham. He suddenly bethought him of a lease—I think it was a lease—he ought to have sent off by post, and he was so eager about it that he started without saying good-bye. And Mark—what of him and Alice?"

"There's all the information I can give you," and she handed her a card with one line in pencil: "Good-bye till evening, Bella. You were asleep when I came in.—ALICE."

"How charmingly mysterious! And you have no idea where they've gone?"

"Not the faintest; except, perhaps, back to the Abbey for some costumes that they wanted for that 'great tableau.'"

"I don't think so," said she, bluntly. "I suspect—shall I tell you what I suspect? But it's just as likely you'll be angry, for you Lyles will never hear anything said of one of you. Yes, you may smile,

my dear, but it's well known, and I'm not the first who has said it."

"If that be true, Beck, it were best not to speak of people who are so excessively thin-skinned."

"I don't know that. I don't see why you are to be indulged any more than your neighbours. I suppose every one must take his share of that sort of thing."

Bella merely smiled, and Rebecca continued: "What I was going to say was this—and of course you are at liberty to dissent from it if you like—that, however clever a tactician your sister is, Sally and I saw her plan of campaign at once. Yes, dear, if you had been at dinner yesterday you'd have heard a very silly project thrown out about my being sent over to fetch Tony Butler, under the escort of Mr Norman Maitland. Not that it would have shocked me, or frightened me in the least—I don't pretend that; but as Mr Maitland had paid me certain attentions at Lyle Abbey—you look quite incredulous, my dear, but it is simply the fact; and so having, as I said, made these advances to me, there would have been considerable awkwardness in our going off together a drive of several hours without knowing—without any understanding——" She hesitated for the right word, and Bella added, "*A quoi s'en tenir*, in fact."

“I don’t know exactly what that means, Bella ; but in plain English, I wished to be sure of what he intended. My dear child, though that smile becomes you vastly, it also seems to imply that you are laughing at my extreme simplicity, or my extreme vanity, or both.”

Bella’s smile faded slowly away ; but a slight motion of the angle of the mouth showed that it was not without an effort she was grave.

“I am quite aware,” resumed Beck, “that it requires some credulity to believe that one like myself could have attracted any notice when seen in the same company with Alice Lyle—Trafford, I mean—and her sister ; but the caprice of men, my dear, will explain anything. At all events, the fact is there, whether one can explain it or not ; and to prove it, papa spoke to Mr Maitland on the morning we came away from the Abbey,—but so hurriedly—for the car was at the door, and we were seated on it—that all he could manage to say was, that if Mr Maitland would come over to Port-Graham and satisfy him on certain points—the usual ones, I suppose—that—that, in short, the matter was one which did not offer insurmountable obstacles. All this sounds very strange to your ears, my dear, but it is strictly true, every word of it.”

“I cannot doubt whatever you tell me,” said Bella, and now she spoke with a very marked gravity.

“Away we went,” said Rebecca, who had now got into the sing-song tone of a regular narrator—“away we went, our first care on getting back home being to prepare for Mr Maitland’s visit. We got the little green-room ready, and cleared everything out of the small store-closet at the back, and broke open a door between the two so as to make a dressing-room for him, and we had it neatly papered, and made it really very nice. We put up that water-coloured sketch of Sally and myself making hay, and papa leaning over the gate; and the little drawing of papa receiving the French commander’s sword on the quarterdeck of the Malabar: in fact, it was as neat as could be,—but he never came. No, my dear—never.”

“How was that?”

“You shall hear—that is, you shall hear what followed, for explanation I have none to give you. Mr Maitland was to have come over on the Wednesday following to dinner. Papa said five, and he promised to be punctual; but he never came, nor did he send one line of apology. This may be some newfangled politeness, the latest thing in that fashionable world he lives in, but still I cannot

believe it is practised by well-bred people. Be that as it may, my dear, we never saw him again till yesterday, when he passed us in your sister's fine carriage-and-four, he lolling back this way, and making a little gesture, so, with his hand as he swept past, leaving us in a cloud of dust that totally precluded him from seeing whether we had returned his courtesy—if he cared for it. That's not all," she said, laying her hand on Bella's arm. "The first thing he does on his arrival here is to take papa's rooms. Well—you know what I mean—the rooms papa always occupies here; and when Raikes remarks, 'These are always kept for Commodore Graham, sir; they go by the name of the Commodore's quarters,' his reply is, 'They'll be better known hereafter as Mr Norman Maitland's, Mr Raikes.' Word for word what he said; Raikes told me himself. As for papa, he was furious: he ordered the car to the door, and dashed into our room, and told Sally to put all the things up again—that we were going off. I assure you it was no easy matter to calm him down. You have no idea how violent he is in one of these tempers; but we managed at last to persuade him that it was a mere accident, and Sally began telling him the wonderful things she had heard about Maitland from Mrs

Chetwyn, his fortune and his family, and what not. At last he consented to take the Chetwyns' rooms, and down we went to meet Mr Maitland—I own, not exactly certain on what terms it was to be. Cordial is no name for it, Bella: he was—I won't call it affectionate—but I almost might: he held my hand so long that I was forced to draw it away, and then he gave a little final squeeze in the parting, and a look that said very plainly, 'We at least understand each other.' It was at that instant, my dear, Alice opened the campaign."

"Alice! What had Alice to do with it?"

"Nothing—nothing whatever by right, but everything if you admit interference and—well, I'll not say a stronger word to her own sister. I'll keep just to fact, and leave the commentary on this to yourself. She crosses the drawing-room—the whole width of the large drawing-room—and, sweeping grandly past us in that fine Queen-of-Sheba style she does so well, she throws her head back—it was that stupid portrait-painter, Hillyer, told her 'it gave action to the features'—and says, 'Take me in to dinner, will you?' But she was foiled; old Mrs Maxwell had already bespoke him. I hope you're satisfied now, Bella, that this is no dream of mine."

“ But I cannot see any great mischief in it either.”

“ Possibly not. I have not said that there was. Sally’s no fool, however, and her remark was— ‘There’s nothing so treacherous as a widow.’ ”

Bella could not contain herself any longer, but laughed heartily at this profound sentiment.

“ Of course we do not expect you to see this with our eyes, Bella, but we’re not blind for all that. Later on came the project for fetching over Tony Butler, when Alice suggested that Mr Maitland was to drive me over to the Burnside——”

“ Was that so very ungenerous, then ? ”

“ In the way it was done, my dear—in the way it was done. In that—ha, ha, ha!—manner, as though to say, ‘ Hadn’t you both better go off on a lark to-morrow that will set us all talking of you ? ’ ”

“ No, no ! I’ll not listen to this,” cried Bella, angrily; “ these are not motives to attribute to my sister.”

“ Ask herself; let her deny it, that’s all; but, as Sally says, ‘ There’s no playing against a widow, because she knows every card in your hand.’ ”

“ I really had no idea they were so dangerous,” said Bella, recovering all her good-humour again.

“ You may perhaps find it out one day. Mind, I’m not saying Alice is not very handsome, and has

not the biggest blue eyes in the world, which she certainly does not make smaller in the way she uses them; or that any one has a finer figure, though some do contrive to move through a room without catching in the harp or upsetting the china. Men, I take it, are the best judges, and they call her perfection."

"They cannot think her more beautiful than she is."

"Perhaps not, dear; and as you are so like as to be constantly mistaken——"

"Oh, Beck! surely this is not fair," said she, and so imploringly, that the other's voice softened down as she said,

"I never meant to be rude; but my head is gone wild to-day; for, after all, when matters had gone so far, Alice had no right to come in in this fashion; and, as Sally says, 'Why did she never encourage him till she saw his attentions addressed to another?'"

"I never perceived that she gave Mr Maitland any encouragement. Yes, you may hold up your hands, Beck, and open your eyes very wide; but I repeat what I have said."

"That's a matter of taste, I suppose," said Beck, with some irritation. "There are various sorts of encouragements: as Sally says, 'A look will go

further with one than a lock of your hair with another.' ”

“ But really Sally would seem to have a wisdom like Solomon’s on these subjects,” said Bella.

“ Yes; and what’s more, she has acquired it without any risk or peril. She had neither to drive half over a county with a gentleman alone, or pass a good share of a night walking with him in the alleys of a garden.”

“ What do you mean by this ? ” asked Bella, angrily.

“ Ask Alice ; she’ll be here, I suppose, this evening ; and I’m sure she’ll be delighted to satisfy all your sisterly anxiety.”

“ But one word, Beck—just one word before you go.”

“ Not a syllable. I have said now what I rigidly promised Sally not to mention when I came in here. You got it out of me in a moment of irritation, and I know well what’s in store for me when I confess it—so good-bye.”

“ But, Beck——”

“ Don’t make yourself cough, dear ; lie down and keep your shawl round you. If I’d thought you were so feverish, I’d not have come over to torment you—good-bye ; ” and, resisting all Bella’s entreaties and prayers, Beck arose and left the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BESIDE THE HEARTH.

As Tony sat at tea with his mother, Janet rushed in to say that Dr Stewart had just come home with his daughter, and that she seemed very weak and ill—"daunie-like," as Janet said, "and naething like the braw lassie that left this twa years ago. They had to help her out o' the stage, and if it hadna been that Mrs Harley had gi'en her a glass o' gooseberry wine, she wad hae fainted." Janet saw it all, for she had gone into Coleraine, and the Doctor gave her a seat back with himself and his daughter.

"Poor girl! And is she much changed?" asked Mrs Butler.

"She's no that changed that I wudna know her," said Janet, "and that's all. She has no colour in her cheeks nor mirth in her een; and instead of her merry laugh, that set everybody off, she's just

got a little faint smile that's mair sad than ony-thing else."

"Of course she's weak; she's had a bad fever, and she's now come off a long journey," said Tony, in a sort of rough, discontented voice.

"Ay," muttered Janet; "but I doubt she'll never be the same she was."

"To be sure you do," broke in Tony, rudely. "You wouldn't belong to your county here if you didn't look at the blackest side of everything. This end of our island is as cheerful in its population as it is in scenery; and whenever we haven't a death in a cabin, we stroll out to see if there's no sign of a shipwreck on the coast."

"No such a thing, Master Tony. He that made us, made us like ither folk; and we're no worse or better than our neighbours."

"What about the letters, Janet? Did you tell the postmaster that they're very irregular down here?" asked Mrs Butler.

"I did, ma'am, and he said ye're no warse off than others; that when the Lord sends floods, and the waters rise, human means is a' that we have; and if the boy couldna swim, the leather bag wi' the letters would hae gi'en him little help."

“And couldn't he have told ye all that without canting——”

“Tony! Tony!” broke in his mother, reprovngly. “This is not the way to bear these things, and I will not hear it.”

“Don't be angry, little mother,” said he, taking her hand between both his own. “I know how rough and ill-tempered I have grown of late, and though it frets me sorely, I can no more throw it off than I could a fever.”

“You'll be soon yourself again, my poor Tony. Your dear father had his days when none dare go near him but myself; and I remember well Sir Archy Cole, who was the General, and commanded in Stirling, saying to me, ‘I wish, Mrs Butler, you would get me the sick return off Wat's table, for he's in one of his tantrums to-day, and the Adjutant has not courage to face him.’ Many and many a time I laughed to myself over that.”

“And did you tell this to my father?”

“No, Tony,” said she, with a little dry laugh; “I didn't do that! The Colonel was a good man, and a God-fearing man; but if he had thought that anything was said or done because of certain traits or marks in his own nature, he'd have been little better than a tiger.”

Tony pondered, or seemed to ponder, over her words, and sat for some time with his head between his hands. At last he arose hastily, and said, "I think I'll go over to the Burnside and see the Doctor, and I'll take him that brace of birds I shot to-day."

"It's a cold night, Tony."

"What of that, mother? If one waits for fine weather in this climate, I'd like to know when he'd go out."

"There you are railing again, Tony, and you must not fall into it as a habit, as people do with profane swearing, so that they cannot utter a word without blaspheming."

"Well, the country is beautiful; the weather is more so; the night is a summer one, and I myself am the most jolly light-hearted young fellow from this to anywhere you like. Will that do, little mother?" and he threw his arm around her, and kissed her fondly. "They've got a colt up there at Sir Arthur's that no one can break; but if you saw him in the paddock, you'd say there was the making of a strong active horse in him; and Wylie, the head groom, says he'd just let him alone, for that some horses 'break themselves.' Do you know, mother, I half suspect I am myself one of these

unruly cattle, and the best way would be, never to put a cavesson on me?"

Mrs Butler had not the vaguest conception of what a cavesson meant, but she said, "I'll not put that nor anything like it on you, Tony; and I'll just believe that the son of a loyal gentleman will do nothing to dishonour a good name."

"That's right; there you've hit it, mother; now we understand each other," cried he, boldly. "I'm to tell the Doctor that we expect him and Dolly to dine with us on Monday. Ain't I?"

"Monday or Tuesday, or whenever Dolly is well enough to come."

"I was thinking that possibly Skeffy would arrive by Tuesday."

"So he might, Tony, and that would be nice company for him—the Doctor and Dolly."

There was something positively comic in the expression of Tony's face as he heard this speech, uttered in all the simplicity of good faith; but he forbore to reply, and, throwing a plaid across his shoulders, gave his habitual little nod of good-bye, and went out. It was a cold starlit night—far colder on the sea-shore than in the sheltered valleys inland. Tony, however, took little heed of this; his thoughts were bent upon whither he was going;

while between times his mother's last words would flash across him, and once he actually laughed aloud as he said, "Nice company for Skeffy! Poor mother little knows what company he keeps, and what fine folk he lives with."

The minister's cottage lay at the foot of a little hill, beside a small stream or burn—a lonesome spot enough, and more than usually dreary in the winter season; but as Tony drew nigh, he could make out the mellow glow of a good fire as the gleam, stealing between the ill-closed shutters, fell upon the gravel without. "I suppose," muttered Tony, "she's right glad to be at home again, humble as it is;" and then came another, but not so pleasant, thought—"but why did she come back so suddenly? why did she take this long journey in such a season, and she so weak and ill?" He had his own dark misgivings about this, but he had not the courage to face them, even to himself; and now he crept up to the window and looked in.

A good fire blazed on the hearth, and at one side of it, deep in his old leather chair—the one piece of luxury the room possessed—the minister lay fast asleep, while opposite to him, on a low stool, sat Dolly, her head resting on the arm of a chair at her side. If her closely-cropped hair and thin wan face

gave her a look of exceeding youthfulness, the thin hand that hung down at her side told of suffering and sickness. A book had fallen from her fingers, but her gaze was bent upon the burning log before her — mayhap in unconsciousness; mayhap she thought she read there something that revealed the future.

Lifting the latch—there was no lock, nor was any needed—of the front door, Tony moved stealthily along the little passage, turned the handle of the door, and on tip-toe moved across the room unseen by Dolly, and unheard. As his hand touched the chair on which her head leaned, she looked up and saw him. She did not start nor cry out, but a deep crimson blush covered her face and her temples, and spread over her throat.

“Hush!” said she, in a whisper, as she gave him her hand without rising; “hush! he’s very tired and weary; don’t awake him.”

“I’ll not awake him,” whispered Tony, as he slid into the chair, still holding her hand, and bending down his head till it leaned against her brow. “And how are you, dear Dolly? are you getting quite strong again?”

“Not yet awhile,” said she, with a faint shadow of a smile, “but I suppose I shall soon. It was

very kind of you to come over so soon ; and it's a severe night too. How is Mrs Butler ?”

“ Well and hearty ; she sent you scores of loves —if it was like long ago, I'd have said kisses too,” said he, laughing. But Dolly never smiled ; a grave, sad look indeed came over her, and she turned her head away.

“ I was so glad to hear of your coming home, dear Dolly. I can't tell you how dreary the Burnside seems without you. Ay, pale as you are, you make it look bright and cheery at once. It was a sudden thought, wasn't it ?”

“ I believe it was—but we'll talk of it all another time. Tell me of home. Janet says it's all as I left it: is it so ?”

“ I suspect it is. What changes did you look for ?”

“ I scarcely know. I believe when one begins to brood over one's own thoughts, one thinks the world without ought to take on the same dull, cold colouring. Haven't you felt that ?”

“ I don't know—I may ; but I'm not much given to brooding. But how comes it that you, the lightest-hearted girl that ever lived—what makes you low-spirited ?”

“ First of all, Tony, I have been ill ; then I have

been away from home ; but come, I have not come back to complain and mourn. Tell me of your friends and neighbours. How are all at the Abbey ? We'll begin with the grand folk."

"I know little of them ; I haven't been there since I saw you last."

"And how is that, Tony ? You used to live at the Abbey when I was here long ago."

"Well, it is as I tell you. Except Alice Trafford—and that only in a carriage, to exchange a word as she passed—I have not seen one of the Lyles for several weeks."

"And didn't she reproach you ? didn't she remark on your estrangement ?"

"She said something—I forget what," said he, impatiently.

"And what sort of an excuse did you make ?"

"I don't remember. I suppose I blundered out something about being engaged or occupied. It was not of much consequence anyhow, for she didn't attach any importance to my absence."

"Don't say that, Tony, for I remember my father saying in one of his letters, that he met Sir Arthur at the fair of Ballymena, and that he said, 'If you should see Tony, Doctor, tell him I'm hunting for him everywhere, for I have to buy some young

stock. If I do it without Tony Butler's advice, I shall have the whole family upon me.'"

"That's easy enough to understand. I was very useful, and they were very kind; but I fancy that each of us got tired of his part."

"They were stanch and good friends to you, Tony. I'm sorry you've given them up," said she, sorrowfully.

"What if it was *they* that gave *me* up? I mean, what if I found the conditions upon which I went there were such as I could not stoop to? Don't ask me any more about it; I have never let a word about it escape my lips, and I am ashamed now to hear myself talk of it."

"Even to *me*, Tony—to sister Dolly?"

"That's true; so you are my dear, dear sister," said he, and he stooped and kissed her forehead; "and you shall hear it all, and how it happened."

Tony began his narrative of that passage with Mark Lyle with which our reader is already acquainted, little noticing that to the deep scarlet that at first suffused Dolly's cheeks, a leaden pallor had succeeded, and that she lay, with half-closed eyes, in utter unconsciousness of what he was saying.

"This, of course," said Tony, as his story flowed

on—"this, of course, was more than I could bear, so I hurried home, not quite clear what was best to be done. I hadn't *you*, Dolly, to consult, you know;" he looked down as he said this, and saw that a great tear lay on her cheek, and that she seemed fainting. "Dolly, my dear—my own dear Dolly," whispered he, "are you ill—are you faint?"

"Lay my head back against the wall," sighed she, in a weak voice, "it's passing off."

"It was this great fire, I suppose," said Tony, as he knelt down beside her, and bathed her temples with some cold water that stood near. "Coming out of the cold air, a fire will do that."

"Yes," said she, trying to smile, "it was that."

"I thought so," said he, rather proud of his acuteness. "Let me settle you comfortably here," and he lifted her up in his strong arms, and placed her in the chair where he had been sitting. "Dear me, Dolly, how light you are!"

She shook her head, but gave a smile at the same time of mingled melancholy and sweetness.

"I'd never have believed you could be so light; but you'll see what home and native air will do," added he, quickly, and ashamed of his own want of tact. "My little mother, too, is such a nurse, I'll be sworn that before a month's over you'll be skip-

ping over the rocks, or helping me to launch the coble, like long ago: won't you, Dolly?"

"Go on with what you were telling me," said she, faintly.

"Where was I? I forget where I stopped. Oh, yes; I remember it now. I went home as quick as I could, and I wrote Mark Lyle a letter. I know you'll laugh at the notion of a letter by my hand, but I think I said what I wanted to say. I didn't want to disclaim all that I owed his family; indeed I never felt so deeply the kindness they had shown me as at the moment I was relinquishing it for ever; but I told him that, if he presumed, on the score of that feeling, to treat me like some humble hanger-on of his house, I'd beg to remind him that by birth at least I was fully his equal. That was the substance of it, but I won't say that it was conveyed in the purest and best style."

"What did he reply?"

"Nothing—not one line. I ought to say that I started for England almost immediately after; but he took no notice of me when I came back, and we never met since."

"And his sisters: do you suspect that they know of this letter of yours?"

"I cannot tell, but I suppose not. It's not likely Mark would speak of it."

“How, then, do they regard your abstaining from calling there?”

“As a caprice, I suppose. They always thought me a wayward, uncertain sort of fellow. It’s a habit your well-off people have, to look on their poorer friends as queer and odd and eccentric—eh, Dolly?”

“There’s some truth in the remark, Tony,” said she, smiling; “but I scarcely expected to hear you come out as a moralist.”

“That’s because, like the rest of the world, you don’t estimate me at my true value. I have a great vein of reflection or reflectiveness—which is it, Dolly? but it’s the deepest of the two—in me, if people only knew it.”

“You have a great vein of kind-heartedness, and you are a good son to a good mother,” said she, as a pink blush tinged her cheek, “and I like that better.”

It was plain that the praise had touched him, and deeply too, for he drew his hand across his eyes, and his lip trembled as he said, “It was just about that dear mother I wanted to speak to you, Dolly. You know I’m going away?”

“My father told me,” said she, with a nod of her head.

“And though, of course, I may manage a short

leave now and then to come over and see her, she'll be greatly alone. Now, Dolly, you know how she loves you—how happy she always is when you come over to us. Will you promise me that you'll often do so? You used to think nothing of the walk long ago, and when you get strong and hearty again you'll not think more of it. It would be such a comfort to me, when I am far away, to feel that you were sitting beside her—reading to her, perhaps, or settling those flowers she's so fond of. Ah, Dolly, I'll have that window that looks out on the White Rocks in my mind, and you sitting at it, many and many a day, when I'll be hundreds of miles off."

"I love your mother dearly, Tony; she has been like a mother to myself for many a year, and it would be a great happiness to me to be with her; but don't forget, Tony"—and she tried to smile as she spoke—"don't forget that I'll have to go seek my fortune also."

"And aren't you come to live at home now for good?"

She shook her head with a sorrowful meaning, and said, "I'm afraid not, Tony. My dear, dear father does not grow richer as he grows older, and he needs many a little comfort that cannot come of

his own providing, and you know he has none but me."

The intense sadness of the last few words was deepened by the swimming eyes and faltering lips of her that uttered them.

"And are you going back to these M'Gruders?"

She shook her head in negative.

"I'm glad of that. I'm sure they were not kind."

"Nay, Tony, they were good folk, but after their own fashion; and they always strove to be just."

"Another word for being cruel. I'd like to know what's to become of any of us in this world if we meet nothing better than justice. But why did you leave them?—I mean, leave them for good and all."

She changed colour hastily, and turned her head away, while in a low, confused manner she said, "There were several reasons. I needn't tell you I wasn't strong, Tony, and strength is the first element of governess life."

"I know how it came about," broke in Tony. "Don't deny it—don't, Dolly. It was all my fault."

"Don't speak so loud, Tony," whispered she, cautiously.

"It all came of that night I dined at Richmond. But if he hadn't struck at me——"

"Who struck at you, Tony, my man?" said the

old minister, waking up. "He wasna over-gifted with prudence whoever did it, that I maun say; and how is Mrs Butler, and how are you yourself?"

"Bravely, sir, both of us. I've had a long chat with Dolly over the fire, and I fear I must be going now. I've brought you a brace of woodcocks, and a message from my mother about not forgetting to dine with us on Monday."

"I don't know about that, Tony. The lassie yonder is very weak just yet."

"But after a little rest, eh, Dolly? Don't you think you'd be strong enough to stroll over by Monday? Then Tuesday be it."

"We'll bide and see, Tony—we'll bide and see. I'll be able, perhaps, to tell you after meeting to-morrow; not that you're very reg'lar in attendance, Maister Tony; I mean to have a word or two with you about that one of these days."

"All right, sir," said Tony. "If you and Dolly come over to us on Monday, you may put me on the cutty-stool if you like afterwards;" and with that he was gone.

And all this has been my doing, thought Tony, as he wended his way homewards. I have lost to this poor girl the means by which she was earning her own livelihood, and aiding to make her father's

life more comfortable! I must make her tell me how it all came about, and why they made her pay the penalty of my fault. Not very fair that for people so just as they are. "And to think," added he, aloud, after a pause—"to think it was but the other day I was saying to myself, 'What can people mean when they talk of this weary world—this life of care and toil and anxiety?'"—and already I feel as if I stood on the threshold, and peeped in, and saw it all: but, to be sure, at that time I was cantering along the strand with Alice, and now—and now I am plodding along a dark road, with a hot brain and a heavy heart, to tell me that sorrow is sown broadcast, and none can escape it."

All was still at the cottage when he reached it, and he crept gently to his room, and was soon asleep, forgetting cares and griefs, and only awaking as the strong sunlight fell upon his face and proclaimed the morning.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN UNWELCOME LETTER.

THE Doctor had guessed aright. Tony did not present himself at meeting on Sunday. Mrs Butler, indeed, was there, though the distance was more than a mile, and the day a raw and gusty one, with threatenings of snow in the air.

“Are you coming with me, Tony, to hear the minister? it will be an interesting lecture to-day on the character of Ahab,” said she, opening his door a few inches.

“I’m afraid not, mother; I’m in for a hard day’s work this morning. Better lose Ahab than lose my examination.”

Mrs Butler did not approve of the remark, but she closed the door and went her way, while Tony covered his table with a mass of books, arranged paper and pens, and then, filling the bowl of a large Turkish pipe, sat himself down, as he fancied, to

work, but in reality to weave thoughts about as profitable and as connected as the thin blue wreaths of smoke that issued from his lips, and in watching whose wayward curls and waftings he continued to pass hours.

I have often suspected—indeed, my experience of life leads me much to the conviction—that for the perfect enjoyment of what is called one's own company, the man of many resources must yield the palm to him of none; and that the mere man of action, whose existence is stir, movement, and adventure, can and does find his occasional hours of solitude more pleasurable than he who brings to his reveries the tormenting doubts and distrusts, the casuistical indecisions and the dreary discontents, that so often come of much reading. Certainly in the former there is no strain—no wear and tear. He is not called on to breast the waves and stem the tide, but to float indolently down the stream without even remarking the scenery that clothes the banks.

Tony, I fancy, was a master of his art; he knew how to follow up any subject in thought till it began to become painful, and then to turn his attention to the sea and some far-off white sail, or to the flickering leaflet of falling snow, tossed and drifted here

and there like some castaway—a never-failing resource. He could follow with his eyes the azure circles of smoke, and wonder which would outstrip the other. To fit him for the life of a “messenger” he had taken down ‘Cook’s Voyages;’ but after reading a few pages, he laid down the book to think how far the voyager’s experiences could apply to the daily exigencies of a Foreign Office official, and to ask himself if he were not in reality laying down too wide and too extensive a foundation for future acquirement. “No,” thought he, “I’ll not try to be any better or smarter than the rest. I’ll just stick to the practical part, and here goes for Ollendorf.” Three or four sentences read—he leaned back, and wondered whether he would not rather undertake an excursion on foot to Jerusalem, than set out on an expedition into the French language. As if a whole life could master that bulky dictionary, and transfer its contents to his poor brain! To be sure, Alice knew it; but Alice could learn what she pleased. She learned to skate in three lessons—and how she did it, too! Who ever glided over the ice with such a grace—so easy, so quiet, but with such a perfection of movement! Talk of dancing—it was nothing to it. And couldn’t she ride? See her three fields off, and you’d know the ground

just by the stride of her horse. Such a hand she had! But who was like Alice?

Ah! there was the boundless prairie, to his thoughts, on which he might ramble for ever; and on that wide swelling savannah, roaming and straying, we shall now leave him, and turn our glance elsewhere.

The morning service of the meeting-house over, Dr Stewart proposed to walk home with Mrs Butler. The exposition about Ahab had neither been as full or as able as he had intended, but it was not his fault—at least, only in part his fault; the sum of which consisted in the fact that he had broken through a good rule, which up to that hour had never met with infraction—he had opened a post-letter on the Sabbath morn. “This comes,” said he, plaintively, “of letting the sinfu’ things of this world mingle wi’ the holier and higher ones of the world to come. Corruption is aye stronger than life; and now I maun tell you the whole of it.” If we do not strictly follow the good minister, and tell what he had to say in his own words, it is to spare our reader some time on a matter which may not possess the amount of interest to him it had for the person who narrated it. The matter was this: there came that morning a letter from Mrs M’Gruder to Dr Stewart—a letter that almost overwhelmed him.

The compensation to humility of station is generally this, that the interests of the humble man are so lowly, so unpretending, and so little obtrusive, that they seldom or never provoke the attention of his more fortunate neighbours. As with the rivulet that can neither float a barque nor turn a mill-wheel none meddles, so with the course of these lowly lives few concern themselves, and they ripple along unheeded. Many and many a time had the old minister hugged this thought to his heart—many and many a time had he felt that there were cares and troubles in this life so proud and so haughty that they disdained the thatched cabin and the humble roof-tree, but loved to push their way through crowds of courtiers up marble stairs, and along gilded corridors. It was then with a perfect shock that he came to learn that even they, in all their lowliness, could claim no exemption from common calamity. The letter began by stating that the writer, before putting pen to paper, had waited till Miss Stewart should have reached her home, so that no anxieties as to her health should be added to the pain the communication might cause. After this luring commencement the epistle went on to state, that the satisfaction which Dolly had at first given by her general good temper and strict atten-

tion to her duties, "compensating in a great measure for the defects in her own education and want of aptitude as a teacher," soon ceased to be experienced, as it was found that she was subject to constant intervals of great depression, and even whole days, when she seemed scarcely equal to her duties. The cause was not very long a secret. It was an attachment she had formed to a brother of Mr M'Gruder's, who, some years younger than himself, had been established in Italy as a partner, and had now come over to England on business.

It was not necessary to say that the writer had never encouraged this sentiment; on the contrary, she had more than remonstrated with her brother-in-law on the score of his attentions, and flatly declared that, if he persisted, she would do her utmost to have the partnership with his brother dissolved, and all future intercourse at an end between them. This led to scenes of a very violent nature, in which she was obliged to own her husband had the cruelty to take his brother's side against her, and avow that Samuel was earning his own bread, and if he liked to share it with an "untochered lassie," it should be far from him, Robert M'Gruder, that any reproach could come—a sarcasm that Mrs M'Gruder seemed keenly to appreciate.

The agitation caused by these cares, acting on a system already excited, had brought on a fever to Dolly; and it was only on her convalescence, and while still very weak, that a young man arrived in London and called to see her, who suddenly seemed to influence all her thoughts and plans for the future. Sam, it appeared, had gone back to Italy, relying on Dolly's promise to consult her father and give him a final reply to his offer of marriage. From the day, however, that this stranger had called, Dolly seemed to become more and more indifferent to this project, declaring that her failing health and broken spirits would render her rather a burden than a benefit, and constantly speaking of home, and wishing to be back there. "Though I wished," continued the writer, "that this resolve had come earlier, and that Miss Stewart had returned to her father before she had thrown discord into a united family, I was not going to oppose it, even late as it occurred. It was therefore arranged that she was to go home, ostensibly to recruit and restore herself in her native air; but I, I need hardly tell you, as firmly determined she should never pass this threshold again. Matters were in this state, and Miss Stewart only waiting for a favourable day to begin her journey—an event I looked for with the more impati-

ence as Mr M'G. and myself could never, I knew, resume our terms of affection so long as she remained in our house—when one night, between one and two o'clock, we were awoke by the sound of feet in the garden under our window. I heard them first, and, creeping to the casement, I saw a figure clamber over the railing and make straight for the end of the house where Miss Stewart slept, and immediately begin a sort of low moaning kind of song, evidently a signal. Miss Stewart's window soon opened, and on this I called Mr M'Gruder. He had barely time to reach the window, when a man's voice from below cried out, 'Come down; are you coming?' On this, Mr M'Gruder rushed down-stairs and into the garden. Two or three loud and angry words succeeded, and then a violent struggle, in which my husband was twice knocked down and severely injured. The man, however, made his escape, but not unrecognised; for your daughter's voice cried out, 'Oh, Tony, I never thought you'd do this,' or, 'Why did you do this?' or some words to that effect.

“The terms on which, through Miss Stewart's behaviour, I have latterly lived with Mr M'Gruder, gave me no opportunity to learn anything from *him*. Indeed, he never so much as spoke of an incident

which confined him two days to his room and five days to the house ; but, as if bent on exasperation, redoubled his kind inquiries about your daughter, who was now, as she said, too ill to leave her room.

“ No other course was then open to me than to write the present letter to you and another to my brother-in-law. He at least, I am determined, shall know something of the young lady with whom he wishes to share his fortune, though I trust that a minister of the gospel will have no need of any promptings of mine to prevent such a casualty. My last words, on parting with your daughter, were to ask if the man I saw that night was the same who had called to see her, and her reply was, ‘ Yes, the same.’ I will not disguise that she had the grace to cry as she said it.

“ That she is never to return here, I need not say. Ay, more than that ; no reference to me will be responded to in terms that can serve her. But this is not all. I require that you will send, and send open for my inspection, such a letter to Mr S. M’Gruder as may finally put an end to any engagement, and declare that, from the circumstances now known to you, you could neither expect, or even desire, that he would make her his wife.

Lastly, I demand—and I am in a position to enforce a demand—that you do not communicate with my husband at all in this affair; sufficient unpleasantness and distrust having been already caused by our unhappy relations with your family.”

A few moral reflections closed the epistle. They were neither very novel nor very acute, but they embodied the sense of disappointment experienced by one who little thought, in taking a teacher from the manse of a minister, she was incurring a peril as great as if she had sent over to France for the latest refinement in Parisian depravity. “Keep her at home with yourself, Dr Stewart,” wrote she, “unless the time comes when the creature she called Tony may turn up as a respectable man, and be willing to take her.” And with a gracefully-expressed hope that Dolly’s ill health might prove seasonable for self-examination and correction, she signed herself, “Your compassionate friend, MARTHA M’GRUDER.”

“What do you say to that, Mrs Butler? Did ever you read as much cruelty in pen and ink, I ask you? Did you ever believe that the mother of children could write to a father of his own daughter in such terms as these?”

“I don’t know what it means, Doctor; it’s all

confusion to me. Who is Tony? it's not our Tony, surely?"

"I'm not so sure of that, Mrs Butler. Tony was up in London, and he called to see Dolly. You remember that he told in his letter to you how the puir lassie's hair was cut short——"

"I remember it all, Dr Stewart; but what has all that to do with all this dreadful scene at night in the garden?" The Doctor shook his head mournfully and made no reply. "If you mean, Dr Stewart, that it was my Tony that brought about all these disasters, I tell you I will not—I cannot believe it. It would be better to speak your mind out, sir, than to go on shaking your head. We're not altogether so depraved that our disgrace is beyond words."

"There's nothing for anger here, my dear old friend," said he, calmly, "though maybe there's something for sorrow. When you have spoken to your son, and I to my daughter, we'll see our way better through this thorny path. Good-bye."

"You are not angry with me, Doctor?" said she, holding out her hand, while her eyes were dimmed with tears—"you are not angry with me?"

"That I am not," said he, grasping her hand warmly in both his own. "We have no other

treasures in this world, either of us, than this lad and this lassie, and it's a small fault if we cling to them the more closely. I think I see Tony coming to meet you, so I'll just turn home again." And with another and more affectionate good-bye they parted.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AT THE MANSE.

IN no small perturbation of mind was it that Mrs Butler passed her threshold. That a word should be breathed against her Tony, was something more than she could endure; that he could have deserved it, was more than she could believe. Tony, of whom for years and years she had listened to nothing but flatteries, how clever and ready-witted he was, how bold and fearless, how kind-hearted, and how truthful—ay, how truthful; and how is it then, asked she of herself, that he has told me nothing of all this mischance, and what share he has had in bringing misfortune upon poor Dolly?

“Is Master Tony at home, Jenny?” said she, as she entered.

“Yes; he’s reading a letter that has just come wi’ the post.”

The old lady stopped, with her hand on the

handle of the door, to draw a full breath, and regain a calm look ; but a merry laugh from Tony, as he sat reading his letter, did more to rally her, though her heart smote her to think how soon she might have to throw a shadow across his sunshine.

“ Who’s your letter from, Tony ?” said she, dryly.

“ From Skeffy ; he’ll be here to-morrow ; he’s to arrive at Coleraine by six in the morning, and wants me to meet him there.”

“ And what’s the other sealed note in your hand ?”

“ This ? — this is from another man — a fellow you’ve never heard of ; at least, you don’t know him.”

“ And what may be his name, Tony ?” asked she, in a still colder tone.

“ He’s a stranger to you, mother. Skeffy found the note at my hotel, and forwarded it—that’s all.”

“ You weren’t wont to have secrets from me, Tony,” said she, tremulously.

“ Nor have I, mother ; except it may be some trifling annoyance or worry that I don’t care to tease you about. If I had anything heavier on my mind, you may trust me, I’d very soon be out with it.”

“But I’m not to hear who this man is?” said she, with a strange pertinacity.

“Of course you are, if you want to hear: his name is there on the corner of his note—Robt. M’Gruder—and here’s the inside of it, though I don’t think you’ll be much the wiser when you’ve read it.”

“It’s for yourself to read your own letter, Tony,” said she, waving back the note. “I merely asked who was your correspondent.”

Tony broke the seal, and ran his eye hastily over the lines. “I’m as glad as if I got a hundred pounds!” cried he. “Listen to this mother:—

“‘DEAR SIR,—When I received your note on Monday——’

“But wait a bit, mother; I must tell you the whole story, or you’ll not know why he wrote this to me. Do you remember my telling you, just at the back of a letter, that I was carried off to a dinner at Richmond?”

“Yes, perfectly.”

“Well, I wish I hadn’t gone, that’s all. Not that it wasn’t jolly, and the fellows very pleasant and full of fun; but, somehow, we all of us took too much wine, or we talked too much, or perhaps both; but we began laying wagers about every imaginable

thing, and I made a bet—I'll be hanged if I could tell what it was, but it was something about Dolly Stewart. I believe it was that she was handsomer than another girl. I forgot all about her hair being cut off, and her changed looks. At all events, off we set in a body to M'Gruder's house. It was then about two in the morning, and we all singing, or what we thought was singing, most uproariously. Yes, you may shake your head. I'm ashamed of it now, too, but it was some strange wine—I think it was called Marco-brunner—that completely upset me; and the first thing that really sobered me was seeing that the other fellows ran away, leaving me all alone in the garden, while a short stout man rushed out of the house with a stick to thrash me. I tried to make him hear me, for I wanted to apologise; but he wouldn't listen, and so I gave him a shake. I didn't strike him; but I shook him off, roughly enough perhaps, for he fell, and then I sprang over the gate, and cut off as fast as I could. When I awoke next morning, I remembered it all, and heartily ashamed I was of myself; and I thought that perhaps I ought to go out in person and beg his pardon; but I had no time for that; I wanted to get away by that day's packet, and so I wrote him a few civil lines. I

don't remember them exactly, but they were to say, that I was very sorry for it all, and I hoped he'd see the thing as it was—a stupid bit of boyish excess, of which I felt much ashamed; and here's his answer:—

“ ‘DEAR SIR,—When I received your note on Monday morning, I was having leeches to my eye, and couldn't answer it. Yesterday both eyes were closed, and it is only to-day that I can see to scratch these lines. If I had had a little more patience on the night I first met you, it would have been better for both of us. As it is, I receive all your explanation as frankly as it is given; and you'll be lucky in life if nobody bears you more ill-will than—
Yours truly,

‘ROBT. M'GRUDER.

“ ‘If you come up to town again, look in on me at 27 Cannon Street, City. I do not say here, as Mrs M'G. has not yet forgiven the black eye.’ ”

“ Oh, Tony! my own dear, dear, true-hearted Tony!” cried his mother, as she flung her arms around him, and hugged him to her heart. “ I knew my own dear boy was as loyal as his own high-hearted father.”

Tony was exceedingly puzzled to what precise part of his late behaviour he owed all this enthusiastic fondness, and was curious also to know if giving black eyes to Scotchmen had been a trait of his father's.

"And this was all of it, Tony?" asked she, eagerly.

"Don't you think it was quite enough? I'm certain Dolly did; for she knew my voice, and cried out, 'Oh, Tony, how could you?' or something like that, from the window. And that's a thing, mother, has been weighing heavily on my mind ever since. Has this unlucky freak of mine anything to do with Dolly's coming home?"

"We'll find that out later on, Tony; leave that to me," said she, hurriedly; for, with all her honesty, she could not bear to throw a cloud over his present happiness, or dash with sorrow the delight he felt at his friend's coming.

"I don't suspect," continued he, thoughtfully, "that I made a very successful impression on that Mrs M'Gruder the day I called on Dolly; and if she only connected me with this night's exploit, of course it's all up with me."

"Her husband bears you no grudge for it at all, Tony."

“That’s clear enough ; he’s a fine fellow ; but if it should turn out, mother, that poor Dolly lost her situation—it was no great thing, to be sure ; but she told me herself it was hard enough to get as good ; and if, I say, it was through me she lost it——”

“You mustn’t give yourself the habit of coining evil, Tony. There are always enough of hard and solid troubles in life without our conjuring up shadows and spectres to frighten us. As I said before, I’ll have a talk with Dolly herself, and I’ll find out everything.”

“Do so, mother ; and try and make her come often over here when I’m gone ; she’ll be very lonely yonder, and you’ll be such good company for each other, won’t you ?”

“I’ll do my best, for I love her dearly ! She has so many ways, too, that suit an old body like myself. She’s so quiet and so gentle, and she’ll sit over her work at the window there, and lay it down on her knee to look out over the sea, never saying a word, but smiling a little quiet smile when our eyes meet, as though to say, ‘This is very peaceful and happy, and we have no need to tell each other about it, for we can feel it just as deeply.’”

Oh, if she’d only let Alice come to see her and sit

with her, thought Tony; how she *would* love her! Alice could be all this, and would too; and then, what a charm she can throw around her with that winning smile! was there ever sunshine like it? And her voice—no music ever thrilled through *me* as that voice did. “I say, mother,” cried he aloud, “don’t say No; don’t refuse her if she begs to come over now and then with a book or a few flowers; don’t deny her merely because she’s very rich and much courted and flattered. I pledge you my word the flattery has not spoiled her.”

“Poor Dolly! it’s the first time I ever heard that you were either rich or run after! What’s the boy dreaming of, with his eyes staring in his head?”

“I’m thinking that I’ll go in to Coleraine to-night, so as to be there when the mail arrives at six in the morning,” said Tony, recovering himself, though in considerable confusion. “Skeffy’s room is all ready, isn’t it?”

“To be sure it is; and very nice and comfortable it looks, too;” and as she spoke she arose and went into the little room, on which she and Jenny had expended any amount of care and trouble. “But, Tony dear,” she cried out, “what’s become of Alice Lyle’s picture? I put it over the fireplace myself this morning.”

“And I took it down again, mother. Skeffy never knew Alice—never saw her.”

“It wasn’t for that I put it there; it was because she was a handsome lassie, and it’s always a pleasant sight to look upon. Just bring it back again; the room looks nothing without it.”

“No, no; leave it in your own room, in which it has always been,” said he, almost sternly. “And now about dinner to-morrow; I suppose we’d better make no change, but just have it at three, as we always do.”

“Your grand friend will think it’s luncheon, Tony.”

“He’ll learn his mistake when it comes to tea-time; but I’ll go and see if there’s not a salmon to be had at Carrig-a-Rede before I start; and if I’m lucky, I’ll bring you a brace of snipe back with me.”

“Do so, Tony; and if Mr Gregg was to offer you a little seakale, or even some nice fresh celery—eh, dear, he’s off, and no minding me! He’s a fine, true-hearted lad,” muttered she, as she reseated herself at her work; “but I wonder what’s become of all his high spirits, and the merry ways that he used to have.”

Tony was not successful in his pursuit of proven-der. There was a heavy sea on the shore, and the

nets had been taken up ; and during his whole walk he never saw a bird. He ate a hurried dinner when he came back, and, taking one more look at Skeffy's room to see it looked as comfortable as he wished it, he set out for Coleraine.

Now though his mind was very full of his coming guest, in part pleurably and in part with a painful consciousness of his inability to receive him handsomely, his thoughts would wander off at every moment to Dolly Stewart, and to her return home, which he felt convinced was still more or less connected with his own freak. The evening service was going on in the meeting-house as he passed, and he could hear the swell of the voices in the last hymn that preceded the final prayer, and he suddenly bethought him that he would take a turn by the Burnside and have a few minutes' talk with Dolly before her father got back from meeting.

"She is such a true-hearted, honest girl," said he to himself, "she'll not be able to hide the fact from me ; and I will ask her flatly, Is this so ? was it not on my account you left that place ?"

All was still and quiet at the minister's cottage, and Tony raised the latch and walked through the little passage into the parlour unseen. The parlour, too, was empty. A large old Bible lay open on the

table, and beside it a handkerchief, a white one, that he knew to be Dolly's. As he looked at it he bethought him of one Alice had given him once as a keepsake ; he had it still. How different that fragment of gossamer with the frill of rich lace from this homely kerchief ! Were they not almost emblems of their owners ? and if so, did not his own fortunes rather link him with the humbler than with the higher ? With one there might be companionship, with the other what could it be but dependence ?

While he was standing thus thinking, two ice-cold hands were laid over his eyes, and he cried out, "Ay, Dolly, those frozen fingers are yours ;" and as he removed her hands, he threw one arm round her waist, and, pressing her closely to him, he kissed her.

"Tony, Tony !" said she, reproachfully, while her eyes swam in two heavy tears, and she turned away.

"Come here and sit beside me, Dolly. I want to ask you a question, and we haven't much time, for the Doctor will be here presently, and I am so fretted and worried thinking over it that I have nothing left but to come straight to yourself and ask it."

"Well, what is it ?" said she, calmly.

"But you will be frank with me, Dolly—frank and honest, as you always were—won't you ?"

"Yes, I think so," said she, slowly.

“ Ay, but you must be sure to be frank, Dolly, for it touches me very closely ; and to show you that you may, I will tell you a secret, to begin with. Your father has had a letter from that Mrs M'Gruder, where you lived.”

“ From her ? ” said Dolly, growing so suddenly pale that she seemed about to faint ; “ are you sure of this ? ”

“ My mother saw it ; she read part of it ; and here's what it implies, that it was all my fault—at least, the fault of knowing me—that cost you your place. She tells, not very unfairly, all things considered, about that unlucky night when I came under the windows and had that row with her husband ; and then she hints at something, and I'll be hanged if I can make out at what ; and if my mother knows, which I suspect she does not, she has not told me : but whatever it be, it is in some way mixed up with your going away ; and knowing, my dear Dolly, that you and I can talk to one another as few people can in this world—is it not so ? Are you ill, dear—are you faint ? ”

“ No ; these are weak turns that come and go.”

“ Put your head down here on my shoulder, my poor Dolly. How pale you are ! and your hands so cold. What is it you say, darling ? I can't hear.”

Her lips moved, but without a sound, and her

eyelids fell lazily over her eyes, as, pale and scarcely seeming to breathe, she leaned heavily towards him, and fell at last in his arms. There stood against the opposite wall of the room a little horse-hair sofa, a hard and narrow bench, to which he carried her, and, with her head supported by his arm, he knelt down beside her, as helpless a nurse as ever gazed on sickness.

“There, you are getting better, my dear, dear Dolly,” he said, as a long heavy sigh escaped her. “You will be all right presently, my poor dear.”

“Fetch me a little water,” said she, faintly.

Tony soon found some, and held it to her lips, wondering the while how it was he had never before thought Dolly beautiful, so regular were the features, so calm the brow, so finely traced the mouth, and the well-rounded chin beneath it. How strange it seemed that the bright eye and the rich colour of health should have served to hide rather than heighten these traits!

“I think I must have fainted, Tony,” said she, weakly.

“I believe you did, darling,” said he.

“And how was it? Of what were we talking, Tony? Tell me what I was saying to you.”

Tony was afraid to refer to what he feared might

have had some share in her late seizure ; he dreaded to recur to it.

“ I think I remember it,” said she, slowly, and as if struggling with the difficulty of a mental effort. “ But stay ; is not that the wicket I heard ? Father is coming, Tony ; ” and as she spoke the heavy foot of the minister was heard on the passage.

“ Eh, Tony man, ye here ? I’d rather hae seen ye at the evening lecture ; but ye’re no fond of our form of worship, I believe. The Colonel, your father, I have heard, was a strong Episcopalian.”

“ I was on my way to Coleraine, Doctor, and I turned off at the mill to see Dolly, and ask her how she was.”

“ Ye winna stay to supper, then ? ” said the old man, who, hospitable enough on ordinary occasions, had no wish to see the Sabbath evening’s meal invaded by the presence of a guest, even of one so well known as Tony.

Tony muttered some not very connected excuses, while his eyes turned to Dolly, who, still pale and sickly-looking, gave him one little brief nod, as though to say it were better he should go ; and the old minister himself stood erect in the middle of the floor, calmly and almost coldly waiting the words “ Good-bye.”

“Am I to tell mother you’ll come to us to-morrow, Doctor—you and Dolly?” asked Tony, with his hand on the door.

“It’s no on the Sabbath evening we should turn our thoughts to feasting, Master Tony; and none know that better than your worthy mother. I wish you a good evening and a pleasant walk.”

“Good - night,” said Tony, shutting the door sharply; “and,” muttered he to himself, “if you catch *me* crossing your threshold again, Sabbath or week-day——” He stopped, heaved a deep sigh, and, drawing his hand across his eyes, said, “My poor dear Dolly, hasn’t my precious temper done you mischief enough already that I must let it follow you to your own quiet fireside?”

And he went his way, with many a vow of self-amendment, and many a kind wish, that was almost a prayer, for the minister and his daughter.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DEPARTURES.

ALL was confusion and dismay at Tilney. Bella Lyle's cold turned out to be scarlatina, and Mark and Alice brought back tidings that old Commodore Graham had been seized with a fit, and was seriously, if not dangerously, ill. Of course, the company scattered like an exploded shell. The Graham girls hastened back to their father, while the other guests sought safety in flight, the great struggle now being who should soonest secure post-horses to get away. Like many old people rich in this world's comforts, Mrs Maxwell had an especial aversion to illness in any shape. It was a topic she never spoke on; and, if she could, would never have mentioned before her. Her intimates understood this thoroughly, and many were the expressions employed to imply that Mr Such-a-one had a fever, or Mrs So-and-so was given over by her doctors.

As to the fatal result itself, it was always veiled in a sort of decent mystery, as though it would not be perfectly polite to inquire whither the missing friend had retired to.

“Dr Reede says it is a very mild case of the malady, and that Bella will be up in a day or two, aunt,” said Alice.

“Of course she will,” replied the old lady, pettishly. “It’s just a cold and sore throat—they hadn’t that fine name for it long ago, and people got well all the sooner. Is he gone?”

“No; he’s talking with Mark in the library; he’ll be telling him, I think, about the Commodore.”

“Well, don’t ask him to stop to dinner; we have sorrow enough without seeing a doctor.”

“Oh, here comes Mark! where is Dr Reede?”

“He’s gone over to see Maitland. Fenton came to say that he wished to see him.”

“Surely he’s not ill,” said Alice.

“Oh, dear! what a misfortune that would be!” cried the old lady, with real affliction in her tone; “to think of Mr Norman Maitland taking ill in one’s house.”

“Haven’t you been over to ask after him, Mark?”

“No. I was waiting till Reede came back: he’s one of those men that can’t bear being inquired

after ; and if it should turn out that he was not ill, he'd not take the anxiety in good part."

"How he has contrived to play the tyrant to you all, I can't imagine," said Alice ; "but I can see that every whim and caprice he practises is studied as courtiers study the moods of their masters."

"To be sure, darling, naturally," broke in Mrs Maxwell, who always misunderstood everybody. "Of course, we are only too happy to indulge him in a whim or fancy ; and if the Doctor thinks turtle would suit him—turtle is so light ; I took it for several weeks for luncheon—we can have it at once. Will you touch the bell, Mark, and I'll tell Raikes to telegraph ? Who is it he gets it from ?"

Mark pulled the bell, but took no notice of her question. "I wish," muttered he below his breath, "we had never come here. There's Bella now laid up, and here's Maitland. I'm certain he's going away, for I overheard Fenton ask about the distance to Dundalk."

"I suppose we might survive even that misfortune," said she, haughtily.

"And one thing I'll swear to," said Mark, walking the room with impatience—"it's the last Ireland will see of him."

"Poor Ireland ! the failure in the potato-crop

was bad enough, but this is more than can be endured."

"That's all very fine, Alice, but I'm much mistaken if you are as indifferent as you pretend."

"Mark! what do you mean?" said she, angrily.

"Here's Raikes now, and will some one tell him what it is we want?" said Mrs Maxwell; but the others were far too deeply engaged in their own whispered controversy now to mind her.

"Captain Lyle will tell you by-and-by, Raikes," said she, gathering up the mass of loose *impedimenta* with which she usually moved from one room to the other, and by which, as they fell at every step, her course could always be tracked. "He'll tell you," added she, moving away. "I think it was caviar, and you are to telegraph for it to Swan & Edgar's; but my head is confused to-day,—I'll just go and lie down."

As Mrs Maxwell left by one door, Alice passed out by another; while Mark, whose temper evinced itself in a flushed cheek and a contracted brow, stood at a window, fretfully tapping the ground with his foot.

"Have you any orders, sir?" asked Raikes.

"Orders! No—stay a moment. Have many gone away this morning?"

“Nearly all, sir. Except your family and Mr Maitland, there’s nobody left but Major Clough, and he’s going, I believe, with Dr Reede.”

“You’ve heard nothing of Mr Maitland going, have you?”

“Oh, yes, sir! his man sent for post-horses about an hour ago.”

Muttering impatiently below his breath, Mark opened the window and passed out upon the lawn. What an unlucky turn had everything taken! It was but a week ago, and his friend Maitland was in high delight with all around him. The country, the scenery, the people, were all charming—indeed, in the intervals between the showers, he had a good word to say for the climate. As for Lyle Abbey, he pronounced it the perfection of a country-house; and Mark actually speculated on the time when these opinions of his distinguished friend would have acquired a certain currency, and the judgment of one that none disputed would be recorded of his father’s house. And all these successes were now to be reversed by this stupid old sailor’s folly—insanity he might call it; for what other word could characterise the pretension that could claim Norman Maitland for a son-in-law?—Maitland, that might have married, if the law would have

let him, half a score of infantas and archduchesses, and who had but to choose throughout Europe the alliance that would suit him. And Alice—what could Alice mean by this impertinent tone she was taking towards him? Had the great man's patience given way under it all, and was he really going away, wearied and tired out?

While Mark thus doubted and reasoned and questioned, Maitland was seated at his breakfast at one side of the fire, while Dr Reede confronted him at the other.

Though Maitland had sent a message to say he wished to see the Doctor, he only gave him now a divided attention, being deeply engaged, even as he talked, in deciphering a telegram which had just reached him, and which was only intelligible through a key to the cipher.

"So then, Doctor, it is simply the return of an old attack—a thing to be expected, in fact, at his time of life?"

"Precisely, sir. He had one last autumn twelve-month, brought on by a fit of passion. The old Commodore gives way rather to temper."

"Ah! gives way, does he?" muttered Maitland, while he mumbled below his breath, "'seventeen thousand and four D + X, and a gamba'—a very

large blood-letting. By the way, Doctor, is not bleeding—bleeding largely—a critical remedy with a man of seventy six or seven?”

“Very much so, indeed, sir ; and if you observe, I only applied some leeches to the *nuchæ*. You misapprehended me in thinking I took blood from him freely.”

“Oh yes, very true,” said Maitland, recovering himself. “I have no doubt you treated him with great judgment. It is a case, too, for much caution. Forty-seven and two G’s,” and he hastily turned over the leaves of his little book, muttering continually, “and two G’s, forty-six, forty-seven, with two B’s, two F’s. Ah! here it is. Shivering attacks are dangerous—are they—in these cases?”

“In which cases?” asked the Doctor, for his shrewd intelligence at once perceived the double object which Maitland was trying to contemplate.

“In a word, then,” continued Maitland, not heeding the Doctor’s question, but bending his gaze fixedly on the piece of paper before him, scrawled over and blotted by his own hand—“in a word, then, a man of seventy seized with paralysis, and, though partially rallied by bleeding, attacked with shivering, is in a very critical state? But how long might he live in that way?”

"We are not now speaking of Commodore Graham, I apprehend?" asked the Doctor, slyly.

"No; I am simply putting a case—a possible case. Doctors, I know, are not fond of these imagined emergencies; lawyers like them."

"Doctors dislike them," broke in Reede, "because they are never given to them in any completeness—every important sign of pulse and tongue and temperature omitted——"

"Of course you are right," said Maitland, crumpling up the telegram and the other papers; "and now for the Commodore. You are not apprehensive of anything serious, I hope?"

"It's an anxious case, sir—a very anxious case; he's eighty-four."

"Eighty-four!" repeated Maitland, to whom the words conveyed a considerable significance.

"Eighty-four!" repeated the other once more. "No one would suspect it. Why, Sally Graham is the same age as my wife; they were at school together."

Too polite to push a question which involved a double-shotted answer, Maitland merely said, "Indeed!" and, after a slight pause, added—"You said, I think, that the road to Dundalk led past Commodore Graham's cottage?"

"By the very gate."

“May I offer you a seat with me? I am going that way. I have received news which calls me suddenly to England.”

“I thank you much, but I have some visits yet to make before I return to Port-Graham. I promised to stop the night there.”

Having charged the Doctor to convey to the Commodore's daughters his sincere regret for their father's illness, and his no less sincere hope of a speedy recovery, Maitland endeavoured, in recognition of a preliminary question or two about himself, to press the acceptance of a fee; but the Doctor, armed with that self-respect and tact his profession so eminently upholds, refused to accept it, and took his leave, perhaps well requited in having seen and spoken with the great Mr Norman Maitland of whom half the country round were daily talking.

“Mr Maitland is not ill, I hope?” said Alice, as she met the Doctor on his way through the garden.

“No, Mrs Trafford; I have been making a friendly call—no more,” said the Doctor, rather vain that he could thus designate his visit; and, with a few words of advice about her sister, he went his way. Alice, meanwhile, saw that Maitland had observed her from his window, and rightly guessed that he would soon be in search of her.

With that feminine instinct that never deceives in such cases, she determined that whatever was to pass between them should be undisturbed. She selected a most unfrequented path, bordered on one side by the high laurel-hedge, and on the other by a little rivulet, beyond which lay some rich meadows, backed in the distance by a thick plantation.

She had not gone far when she heard a short quick footstep behind her, and in a few minutes Maitland was at her side. "You forgot to liberate me," said he, "so I had to break my arrest."

"Signor mio, you must forgive me—we have had such a morning of confusion and trouble : first Bella ill—not seriously, but confined to bed ; and then this poor old Commodore—the Doctor has told you all about it ; and, last of all, Mark storming about the house, and angry with every one for having caught cold or a fever, and so disgusted (the great) Mr Maitland that he is actually hurrying away with a vow to heaven never more to put foot in Ireland."

"Be a little serious, and tell me of your mission this morning," said he, gravely.

"Three words will do it. We reached Port-Graham just as the Doctor arrived there. The Commodore, it seemed, got home all safe by about four o'clock in the morning ; and, instead of going

to bed, ordered a fire in his dressing-room, and a bottle of mulled port ; with which aids to comfort he sat down to write. It would not appear, however, that he had got far in his correspondence, for at six, when his man entered, he found but two lines, and his master, as he thought, fast asleep ; but which proved to be a fit of some kind, for he was perfectly insensible. He rallied, however, and recognised his servant, and asked for the girls. And now Dr Reede thinks that the danger has in a great measure passed off, and that all will go well."

"It is most unhappy—most unhappy," muttered Maitland. "I am sincerely sorry for it all."

"Of course you are, though perhaps not really to blame—at least not blamable in a high degree."

"Not in any degree, Mrs Trafford."

"That must be a matter of opinion. At all events, your secret is safe, for the old man has totally forgotten all that occurred last night between you ; and, lest any clue to it should remain, I carried away the beginning of the letter he was writing. Here it is."

"How thoughtfully done!" said he, as he took the paper and read aloud, "'Dear Triphook, come over and help me to a shot at a rascal'—not civil, certainly—'at a rascal ; that, because he calls him-

self——’ It was well he got no farther,” added he, with a faint smile.

“A good, bold hand it is too for such an old man. I declare, Mr Maitland, I think your usual luck must have befriended you here. The fingers that held the pen so steadily might have been just as unshaken with the pistol.”

There was something so provocative in her tone that Maitland detected the speech at once, and became curious to trace it to a cause. At this sally, however, he only smiled in silence.

“I tried to persuade Mark to drive over and see Tony Butler,” continued she, “but he wouldn’t consent: in fact, a general impulse to be disobliging would appear to have seized on the world just now. Don’t you think so?”

“By the way, I forgot to tell you that your *protégé*, Butler, refuses to accept my offer. I got three lines from him, very dry and concise, saying ‘No’ to me. Of course I trust to your discretion never to disclose the negotiation in any way. I myself shall never speak of it; indeed, I am very little given to doing civil things, and even less accustomed to finding them ill received, so that my secrecy is insured.”

“He ought not to have refused,” said she, thoughtfully.

“Perhaps not.”

“He ought certainly to have given the matter more consideration. I wish I could have been consulted by him. Is it too late yet?”

“I suspect it is,” said he, dryly. “First of all, as I told you, I am little in the habit of meeting a repulse; and, secondly, there is no time to renew the negotiation. I must leave this to-day.”

“To-day?”

“Within an hour,” added he, looking at his watch; “I must manage to reach Dublin in time to catch the mail-packet to-morrow morning.”

“This is very sudden, this determination.”

“Yes, I am called away by tidings I received a while ago—tidings of, to me, the deepest importance.”

“Mark will be extremely sorry,” said she, in a low tone.

“Not sorrier than I am,” said he, despondently.

“We all counted on your coming back with us to the Abbey; and it was only a while ago Bella begged that we should wait here for a day or two, that we might return together, a family party.”

“What a flattery there is in the phrase!” said he, with deep feeling.

“You don’t know,” continued she, “what a fa-

yourite you are with my mother. I dare not trust myself to repeat how she speaks of you."

"Why will you multiply my regrets, Mrs Trafford? why will you make my parting so very, very painful?"

"Because I prefer that you should stay; because I speak in the name of a whole house who will be afflicted at your going."

"You have told me of all, save one," said he, in a voice of deepest feeling; "I want to learn what she thinks."

"She thinks that if Mr Maitland's good-nature be only on a par with his other qualities, he would sooner face the tiresomeness of a stupid house than make the owners of it feel that they bored him."

"She does not think anything of the kind," said he, with a peculiar smile. "She knows that there is no question of good-nature or of boredom in the matter at all; but there is something at stake far more touching than either." He waited to see if she would speak, but as she was silent, he went on. "I will be honest, if you will not. I am not going away of my free will. I have been called by a telegram this morning to the Continent; the matter is so pressing that—shall I confess it?—if this stupid meeting with the Commodore had been arranged, I

should have been a defaulter. Yes, I'd have made, I don't well know what explanation to account for my absence. I can imagine what comments would have been passed upon my conduct. I feel very painfully, too, for the part I should have left to such of my friends here as would defend me, and yet have not a fragment to guide their defence. And still, with all these before me, I repeat, I would have gone away, so imminent is the case that calls me, and so much is the matter one that involves the whole future of my life. And now," said he, while his voice became fuller and bolder, "that I have told you this, I am ready to tell you more, and to say that at one word of yours—one little word—I'll remain."

"And what may that word be?" said she, quietly; for while he was speaking she had been preparing herself for some such issue.

"I need not tell you," said he, gravely.

"Supposing, then, that I guess it—I am not sure that I do—but suppose that—and could it not be just as well said by another—by Bella, for instance?"

"You know it could not. This is only fencing, for you know it could not."

"You mean, in fact, that I should say, Don't go?"

"I do."

“Well, I’m willing enough to say so, if my words are not to convey more than I intend by them.”

“I’ll risk even that,” said he, quickly. “Put your name to the bond, and we’ll let lawyers declare what it is worth after.”

“You frighten me, Mr Maitland,” said she, and her tone showed that now at least she was sincere.

“Listen to me for one moment, Alice,” said he, taking her hand as he walked beside her. “You are fully as much the mistress of your fate as I am master of mine. You may consult, but you need not obey. Had it been otherwise, I never would have dared on a hardihood that would probably have wrecked my hopes. It is just as likely I never could satisfy the friends about you on the score of my fortune—my means—my station, and so on. It is possible, too, that scandal, which makes free with better men, may not have spared *me*, and that they who would have the right to advise you might say, Beware of that dreadful man. I repeat, this is an ordeal my pride would feel it hard to pass through; and so I come to you in all frankness, and declare I love you. To you—you alone—I will give every guarantee that a man may give of his honour and honesty. I will tell all my past, and so

much as I mean for the future ; and in return I only ask for time—nothing but time, Alice. I am not asking you for any pledge, simply that you will give me—what you would not have refused a mere acquaintance—the happiness of seeing you daily ; and if—if, I say, you yourself should not deem the hand and the love I offer beneath you—if you should be satisfied with the claims of him who would share his fortune with you—that then—not till then—others should hear of it. Is this too much for me to ask, or you to give, Alice ?”

“Even now I do not know what you ask of me.”

“First of all, that you bid me stay.”

“It is but this moment you have declared to me that what calls you away is of the very last importance to you in life.”

“The last but one, Alice—the last is here,” and he kissed her hand as he spoke, but still with an air so deferent that she could not resent it.

“I cannot consent that it shall be so,” said she, with energy. “It is true, I am my own mistress, and there is but the greater reason why I should be more cautious. We are almost strangers to each other. All the flattery of your professions—and of course I feel it as flattery—does not blind me to the fact that I scarcely know you at all.”

“Why not consent to know me more?” asked he, almost imploringly.

“I agree, if no pledge is to accompany my consent.”

“Is not this a somewhat hard condition?” said he, with a voice of passionate meaning. “You bid me, in one word, place all that I have of hope on the issue—not even on that, but simply for leave to play the game. Is this generous, Alice—is it even just?”

“You bewilder me with all these subtleties, and I might ask if this were either just or generous; but at least I will be frank. I like you very well. I think it not at all impossible that I might like you better; but even after that, Mr Maitland, there would be a long stage to travel to that degree of regard which you profess to desire from me. Do I make myself understood?”

“Too well, for me and my hopes!” said he, despondingly. “You are able, however, to impose hard conditions.”

“I impose none, sir. Do not mistake me.”

“You leave none others open to me, at least, and I accept them. To give me even that faint chance of success, however, I must leave this to-day. Is it not better I should?”

“I really cannot advise,” said she, with a well-assumed coldness.

“Even contingently Mrs Trafford will not involve herself in my fortunes,” said he, half haughtily. “Well, my journey to Ireland, amongst other benefits, has taught me a lesson that all my wanderings never imparted. I have at last learned something of humility. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye, Mr Maitland,” said she, with calm, but evidently not without effort.

He stooped and kissed her hand, held it for a moment or two in his own, and, with a very faint Good-bye, turned away and left her. He turned suddenly around, after a few paces, and came back. “May I ask one question, Alice, before I go?”

“I don’t know whether I shall answer it,” said she, with a faint smile.

“I cannot afford to add jealousy to my other torments. Tell me, then——”

“Take care, sir, take care; your question may cost you more than you think of.”

“Good-bye—good-bye,” said he, sadly, and departed. “Are the horses ready, Fenton?” asked he, as his servant came to meet him.

“Yes, sir; and Captain Lyle has been looking for you all over the garden.”

“He’s going—he’s off, Bella,” said Alice, as she sat down beside her sister’s bed, throwing her bonnet carelessly down at her feet.

“Who is going?—who is off?” asked Bella, eagerly.

“Of course,” continued Alice, following up her own thoughts, “to say ‘stay’ means more than I like to be pledged to—I couldn’t do it.”

“Poor Tony!—give him my love, Alice, and tell him I shall often think of him—as often as ever I think of bygone days and all their happiness.”

“And why must it be Tony that I spoke of?” said Alice, rising, while a deep crimson flush covered her face and brow. “I think Master Tony has shown us latterly that he has forgotten the long ago, and has no wish to connect us with thoughts of the future.”

CHAPTER XXX.

CONSPIRATORS.

IN one of those low-ceilinged apartments of a Parisian *hôtel* which modern luxury seems peculiarly to affect, decorating the walls with the richest hangings, and gathering together promiscuously objects of art and vertu, along with what can minister to voluptuous ease, Maitland and Caffarelli were now seated. They had dined, and their coffee stood before them on a table spread with a costly dessert and several bottles, whose length of neck and colour indicated choice liquor.

They lounged in the easiest of chairs in the easiest of attitudes, and, as they puffed their havannahs, did not ill represent in tableau the luxurious self-indulgence of the age we live in. For let us talk as we will of progress and mental activity, be as boastful as we may about the march of science and discovery, in what are we so really conspicuous

as in the inventions that multiply ease, and bring the means of indulgence within the reach of even moderate fortune?

As the wood fire crackled and flared on the ample hearth, a heavy plash of hail struck the window, and threatened almost to smash it.

“What a night!” said Maitland, drawing closer to the blaze. “I say, Carlo mio, it’s somewhat cosier to sit in this fashion than be toddling over the Mont Cenis in a shabby old sledge, and listening to the discussion whether you are to spend the night in the ‘Refuge No. One’ or ‘No. Two.’”

“Yes,” said Caffarelli, “it must have been a great relief to you to have got my telegram in Dublin, and to know that you need not cross the Alps.”

“If I could only have been certain that I understood it aright, I’d have gone straight back to the north from whence I came; but there was a word that puzzled me—the word ‘*calamità*.’ Now we have not yet arrived at the excellence of accenting foreign words in our telegraph offices; and as your most amiable and philosophical of all nations has but the same combination of letters to express an attraction and an affliction, I was sorely puzzled to make out whether you wrote with or without an accent on the last syllable. It made all the differ-

ence in the world whether you say events are a 'loadstone' or a 'misfortune.' I gave half an hour to the study of the passage, and then came on."

"Per Bacco! I never thought of that; but what, under any circumstances, would have induced you to go back again?"

"I fell in love!"

Caffarelli pushed the lamp aside to have a better view of his friend, and then laughed long and heartily. "Maso Arretini used often to say, 'Maitland will die a monk;' and I begin now to believe it is quite possible."

"Maso was a fool for his prediction. Had I meant to be a monk, I'd have taken to the cowl when I had youth and vigour and dash in me, the qualities a man ought to bring to a new career. Ha! what is there so strange in the fact that I should fall in love?"

"Don't ask as if you were offended with me, and I'll try and tell you."

"I am calm; go on."

"First of all, Maitland—no easy conquest would satisfy your vanity, and you'd never have patience to pursue a difficult one. Again, the objects that really have an attraction for you—such as Ambition and Power—have the same fascination for you

that high play has for a gambler. You do not admit nor understand any other; and, last of all, one is nothing if not frank in these cases—you'd never believe any woman was lovely enough, clever enough, or graceful enough to be worthy of Norman Maitland."

"The candour has been perfect. I'll try and imitate it," said Maitland, filling his glass slowly, and slightly wetting his lips. "All you have just said, Carlo, would be unimpeachable if all women were your countrywomen, and if love were what it is understood to be in an Italian city; but there are such things in this dreary land of fog and snow-drift as women who do not believe intrigue to be the chief object of human existence, who have fully as much self-respect as they have coquetry, and who would regard no addresses so offensive as those that would reduce them to the level of a class with which they would not admit companionship."

"Bastions of virtue that I never ask to lay siege to!" broke out the other, laughing.

"Don't believe it, Carlo. You'd like the campaign well, if you only knew how to conduct it. Why, it's not more than a week ago I quitted a country-house where there were more really pretty women than you could number in the crowd of one of your ball-rooms on either Arno or Tiber."

“And, in the name of heaven, why didn’t you bring over one of them at least, to strike us with wonderment and devotion?”

“Because I would not bring envy, malice, and jealousy to all south of the Alps; because I would not turn all your heads, or torment your hearts; and, lastly, because — she wouldn’t come. No, Carlo, she wouldn’t come.”

“And you really asked her?”

“Yes. At first I made the lamentable blunder of addressing her as I should one of your own dark-skinned damsels, but the repulse I met taught me better. I next tried the serious line, but I failed there also; not hopelessly, however—at least, not so hopelessly as to deter me from another attempt. Yes, yes; I understand your smile, and I know your theory—there never was a bunch of grapes yet that was worth going on tip-toe to gather.”

“Not that, but there are scores within reach quite as good as one cares for,” said Caffarelli, laughing. “What are you thinking of?” asked he, after a pause.

“I was thinking what possible hope there was for a nation of twenty millions of men, with temperament like yours—fellows so ingrained in indolence that the first element they weigh in every enterprise was, how little trouble it was to cost them.”

“I declare,” said the Italian, with more show of energy, “I’d hold life as cheaply as yourself if I had to live in your country—breathe only fogs, and inhale nothing pleasanter than coal-smoke.”

“It is true,” said Maitland, gravely, “the English have not got climate—they have only weather; but who is to say if out of the vicissitudes of our skies we do not derive that rare activity which makes us profit by every favourable emergency?”

“To do every conceivable thing but one.”

“And what is that one?”

“Enjoy yourselves! Oh, caro amico, you do with regard to your pleasures what you do with your music—you steal a little from the Continent, and always spoil it in the adaptation.”

Maitland sipped his wine in half-sullen silence for some minutes, and then said, “You think then, really, we ought to be at Naples?”

“I am sure of it. Baretti—do you forget Baretti? he had the wine-shop at the end of the Contrada St Lucia.”

“I remember him as a Camorrista.”

“The same; he is here now. He tells me that the Court is so completely in the hands of the Queen that they will not hear of any danger; that they laugh every time Cavour is mentioned; and now

that both France and England have withdrawn their envoys, the King says openly, 'It is a pleasure to drive out on the Chiaja when one knows they'll not meet a French gendarme or an English detective.'"

"And what does Baretto say of popular feeling?"

"He says the people would like to do something, though nobody seems to know what it ought to be. They thought that Milano's attempt t'other day was clever, and they think it mightn't be bad to blow up the Emperor, or perhaps the Pope, or both; but he also says that the Camorra are open to reason, and that Victor Emmanuel and Cavour are as legitimate food for an explosive shell as the others; and, in fact, any convulsion that will smash the shutters and lead to pillage must be good."

"You think Baretto can be depended on?"

"I know he can. He has been Capo Camorrista eight years in one of the vilest quarters of Naples; and if there were a suspicion of him, he'd have been stabbed long ago."

"And what is he doing here?"

"He came here to see whether anything could be done about assassinating the Emperor."

"I'd not have seen him, Carlo. It was most unwise to have spoken with him."

“What would you have?” said the other, with a shrug of his shoulders. “He comes to set this clock to rights—it plays some half-dozen airs from Mercadante and Verdi—and he knows how to arrange them. He goes every morning to the Tuileries, to Mocquard, the Emperor’s secretary: he, too, has an Italian musical clock, and he likes to chat with Barette.”

“I distrust these fellows greatly.”

“That is so English!” said Caffarelli; “but we Italians have a finer instinct for knavery, just as we have a finer ear for music; and as we detect a false note, so we smell a treachery, where you John Bulls would neither suspect one or the other. Barette sees the Prince Napoleon, too, almost every day, and with Pietri he is like a brother.”

“But we can have no dealings with a fellow that harbours such designs.”

“Caro amico, don’t you know by this time that no Italian of the class of this fellow ever imagines any other disentanglement in a political question than by the stiletto? It is you, or I, or somebody else, must, as they phrase it, ‘pay with his skin.’ Fortunately for the world, there is more talk than action in all this; but if you were to oppose it, and say, ‘None of this,’ you’d only be the first victim.

We put the knife in politics just as the Spanish put garlic in cookery : we don't know any other seasoning, and it has always agreed with our digestion."

"Can Giacomo come in to wind up the clock, Eccellenza?" said Caffarelli's servant, entering at the moment ; and as the Count nodded an assent, a fat, large, bright-eyed man of about forty entered, with a mellow frank countenance, and an air of happy joyous contentment that might have sat admirably on a well-to-do farmer.

"Come over and have a glass of wine, Giacomo," said the Count, filling a large glass to the brim with burgundy ; and the Italian bowed with an air of easy politeness first to the Count and next to Maitland, and then, after slightly tasting the liquor, retired a little distance from the table, glass in hand.

"My friend here," said the Count, with a motion of his hand towards Maitland, "is one of ourselves, Giacomo, and you may speak freely before him."

"I have seen the noble signor before," said Giacomo, bowing respectfully, "at Naples, with His Royal Highness the Count of Syracuse."

"The fellow never forgets a face ; nobody escapes him," muttered Caffarelli ; while he added, aloud, "Well, there are few honester patriots in Italy than the Count of Syracuse."

Giacomo smiled, and showed a range of white teeth, with a pleasant air of acquiescence.

“And what is stirring?—what news have you for us, Giacomo?” asked Caffarelli.

“Nothing, Eccellenza—positively nothing. The French seem rather to be growing tired of us Italians, and begin to ask, ‘What, in the name of wonder, do we really want?’ and even his Majesty the Emperor t’other day said to one of ours, ‘Don’t be importunate.’”

“And will you tell me that the Emperor would admit to his presence and speak with fellows banded in a plot against his life?” asked Maitland, contemptuously.

“Does the noble signor know that the Emperor was a Carbonaro once, and that he never forgets it? Does the noble signor know that there has not been one plot against his life—not one—of which he has not been duly apprised and warned?”

“If I understand you aright, Master Giacomo, then, it is that these alleged schemes of assassination are simply plots to deliver up to the Emperor the two or three amongst you who may be sincere in their blood-thirstiness. Is that so?”

Far from seeming offended at the tone or the tenor of this speech, Giacomo smiled good-naturedly,

and said, "I perceive that the noble signor is not well informed either as to our objects or our organisation; nor does he appear to know, as your Excellency knows, that all secret societies have a certain common brotherhood."

"What! does he mean when opposed to each other?"

"He does, and he is right, Maitland. As bankers have their changing-houses, these fellows have their appointed places of meeting; and you might see a Jesuit in talk with a Garibaldian, and a wild revolutionist with one of the Pope's household."

"The real pressure of these fellows," whispered the Count, still lower, "is menace! Menace it was brought about the war with Austria, and it remains to be seen if menace cannot undo its consequences. Killing a king is trying an unknown remedy; threatening to kill him is coercing his policy. And what are you about just now, Giacomo?" added he, louder.

"Little jobs here and there, signor, as I get them; but this morning, as I was mending a small organ at the Duc de Broglio's, an agent of the police called to say I had better leave Paris."

"And when?"

"To-night, sir. I leave by the midnight mail for Lyons, and shall be in Turin by Saturday."

“And will the authorities take his word, and suffer him to go his road without surveillance?” whispered Maitland.

“Si, Signore!” interposed Giacomo, whose quick Italian ear had caught the question. “I won’t say that they’ll not telegraph down the whole line, and that at every station a due report will not be made of me; but I am prepared for that, and I take good care not even to ask a light for my cigar from any one who does not wear a French uniform.”

“If I had authority here, Master Giacomo,” said Maitland, “it’s not you, nor fellows like you, I’d set at liberty.”

“And the noble signor would make a great mistake, that’s all.”

“Why so?”

“It would be like destroying the telegraph wires because one received an unpleasant despatch,” said Giacomo, with a grin.

“The fellow avows, then, that he is a spy, and betrays his fellows,” whispered Maitland.

“I’d be very sorry to tell him so, or hear you tell him so,” whispered the Count, with a laugh.

“Well, Giacomo,” added he, aloud, “I’ll not detain you longer. We shall probably be on t’other side of the Alps ourselves in a few days, and shall

meet again. A pleasant journey and a safe one to you;" he adroitly slipped some napoleons into the man's hand as he spoke. "*Tanti saluti* to all our friends, Giacomo," said he, waving his hand in adieu; and Giacomo seized it and kissed it twice with an almost rapturous devotion, and withdrew.

"Well," cried Maitland, with an irritable vibration in his tone, "this is clear and clean beyond me. What can you or I have in common with a fellow of this stamp? or supposing that we could have anything, how should we trust him?"

"Do you imagine that the nobles will ever sustain the monarchy, my dear Maitland? or in what country have you ever found that the highest in class were freest of their blood? It is Giacomo, and the men like him, who defend kings to-day that they may menace them to-morrow. These fellows know well that with what is called a constitutional government and a parliament the king's life signifies next to nothing, and their own trade is worthless. They might as well shoot a President of the Court of Cassation! Besides, if we do not treat with these men, the others will. Take my word for it, our King is wiser than either of us, and he never despised the Camorra. But I know what you're afraid of, Maitland," said he, laughing—"what

you and all your countrymen tremble before—that precious thing you call public opinion, and your ‘Times’ newspaper! There’s the whole of it. To be arraigned as a regicide, and called the companion of this, that, or t’other creature, who was or ought to have been guillotined, is too great a shock for your Anglican respectability; and really I had fancied you were Italian enough to take a different view of this.”

Maitland leaned his head on his hand, and seemed to muse for some minutes. “Do you know, Carlo,” said he at last, “I don’t think I’m made for this sort of thing. This fraternising with scoundrels—for scoundrels they are—is a rude lesson. This waiting for the *mot d’ordre* from a set of fellows who work in the dark, is not to my humour. I had hoped for a fair stand-up fight, where the best man should win; and what do we see before us? Not the cause of a throne defended by the men who are loyal to their king, but a vast lottery, out of which any adventurer is to draw the prize. So far as I can see it, we are to go into a revolution to secure a monarchy.”

Caffarelli leaned across the table and filled Maitland’s glass to the brim, and then replenished his own.

“Caro mio,” said he, coaxingly, “don’t brood and despond in this fashion, but tell me about this charming Irish beauty. Is she a brunette?”

“No; fair as a lily, but not like the blonde damsels you have so often seen, with a certain timidity of look that tells of weak and uncertain purpose. She might by her air and beauty be a queen.”

“And her name?”

“Alice—Alicia, some call it.”

“Alice is better. And how came she to be a widow so very young? What is her story?”

“I know nothing of it; how should I? I could tell nothing of my own,” said Maitland, sternly.

“Rich as well as beautiful—what a prize, Maitland! I can scarcely imagine why you hesitate about securing it.”

Maitland gave a scornful laugh, and with a voice of bitterness said, “Certainly my pretensions are great. I have fortune—station—family—name—and rank to offer her. Can you not remind me, Carlo, of some other of my immense advantages?”

“I know this much,” said the other, doggedly, “that I never saw you fail in anything you ever attempted.”

“I had the trick of success once,” said Maitland, sorrowfully, “but I seem to have lost it. But, after

all, what would success do for me here, but stamp me as an adventurer?"

"You did not argue in that fashion two years ago, when you were going to marry a Spanish princess, and the half-sister of a queen."

"Well, I have never regretted that I broke off the match. It estranged me, of course, from *him*; and indeed he has never forgiven me."

"He might, however, now, if he saw that you could establish your fortunes so favourably—don't you think so?"

"No, Carlo. It is all for rank and title, not for money, that he cares! His whole game in life was played for the Peerage. He wanted to be 'My Lord;' and though repeatedly led to believe he was to have the title, the minister put off, and put off, and at last fell from power without keeping his pledge. Now in this Spanish business he bargained that I was to be a Duke—a Grandee of Spain. The Queen declared it impossible. Muños himself was refused. The dukedom, however, I could have. With the glitter of that ducal coronet before his eyes, he paid three hundred thousand francs I lost at the Jockey Club in Paris, and he merely said, 'Your luck in love has been somewhat costly—don't play such high stakes again.'"

“He is très grand seigneur!” said the Italian, with a voice of intense admiration and respect.

“Yes,” said Maitland; “in every case where mere money enters, he is princely. I never met a man who thought less of his gold. The strange thing is, that it is his ambition which exhibits him so small!”

“Adagio, adagio, caro mio!” cried Caffarelli, laughing. “I see where you are bound for now. You are going to tell me, as you have some score of times, that to all English estimation our foreign titles are sheer nonsense; that our pauper counts and beggarly dukes are laughing matter for even your Manchester folk; and that in your police code baron and blackleg are synonyms. Now, spare me all this, caro Maitland, for I know it by heart.”

“If one must say such impertinences, it is well to say them to a cardinal’s nephew.”

The slight flush of temper in the Italian’s cheek gave way at once, and he laughed good-humouredly as he said: “Better say them to me, certainly, than to my uncle. But, to be practical, if he does attach so much importance to rank and title, why do you not take that countship of Amalfi the King offered you six months ago, and which to this day he is in doubt whether you have accepted or refused?”

“How do you know that?” asked Maitland, eagerly.

“I know it in this wise: that when his Majesty mentioned your name t’other day to Filangieri, he said, ‘The Chevalier Maitland or Count of Amalfi—I don’t know by which name he likes to call himself.’”

“Are you sure of this?”

“I heard it; I was present when he said it.”

“If I did not accept when it was offered, the reason was this: I thought that the first time I wrote myself Count of Amalfi, old Santarelli would summon me before him to show birth and parentage, and fifty other particulars which I could have no wish to see inquired after; and, as the title of Amalfi was one once borne by a cadet of the royal family, he’d have been all the more exacting in his perquisitions before inscribing my name in that precious volume he calls the ‘Libro d’Oro.’ If, however, you tell me that the King considers that I have accepted the rank, it gives the matter another aspect.”

“I suspect poor old Santarelli has very little heart for heraldry just now. He has got a notion that the first man the Revolutionists will hang will be himself, representing, as he does, all the privileges of feudalism.”

“There is one way to do it if it could be managed,” said Maitland, pondering. “Three lines in the King’s hand, addressing me ‘The Chevalier Maitland, Count of Amalfi!’ With these I’d defy all the heralds that ever carried a painted coat in a procession.”

“If that be all, I’ll promise you it. I am writing to Filangieri to-morrow. Let me have some details of what men you have recruited and what services you have rendered, briefly, not formally; and I’ll say, ‘If our master would vouchsafe in his own hand a line, a word even, to the Count of Amalfi, it would be a recompense he would not exchange for millions.’ I’ll say ‘that the letter could be sent to Ludolf at Turin, where we shall probably be in a week or two.’”

“And do you think the King will accede?”

“Of course he will. We are not asking for a pension, or leave to shoot at Caserta. The thing is the same as done. Kings like a cheap road out of their indebtedness as well as humbler people. If not, they would never have invented crosses and grand cordons.”

“Now, let us concoct the thing regularly,” said Maitland, pushing the decanters from before him, as though, by a gesture, to show that he had turned

from all conviviality to serious considerations. "You," continued he, "will first of all write to Filangieri."

"Yes. I will say, half incidentally, as it were, Maitland is here with me, as eager as the warmest of us in the cause. He has been eminently successful in his recruitment, of which he will soon send you details——"

"Ay, but how? That fellow M'Caskey, who has all the papers, did not meet me as I ordered him, and I cannot tell where he is."

"I am to blame for this, Maitland, for I ordered him to come over here, as the most certain of all ways of seeing you."

"And he is here now?"

"Yes. Arrived last night. In the hope of your arrival, I gave him a rendezvous here—any hour from ten to one or two to-night—and we shall soon see him."

"I must confess, I don't care how brief the interview be: the man is not at all to my liking."

"You are not likely to be much bored by him here, at least."

"How do you mean?"

"The police are certain to hear of his arrival, and to give him a friendly hint to arrange his

private affairs with all convenient despatch, and move off."

"With what party or section do they connect him?"

"With how many? you might perhaps ask; for I take it he has held office with every shade of opinion, and intrigued for any cause from Henry V. to the reddest republicanism. The authorities, however, always deal with a certain courtesy to a man of this sort. They intimate, simply, We are aware you are here—we know pretty well for what; and so, don't push us to any disagreeable measures, but cross over into Belgium or Switzerland. M'Caskey himself told me he was recognised as he drew up at the hotel, and in consequence thinks he shall have to go on in a day or two."

"Is not the fellow's vanity in some measure a reason for this? Does he not rather plume himself on being 'l'homme dange-reux' to all Europe?"

"In conversation he would certainly give this idea, but not in fact. He is marvellously adroit in all his dealings with the authorities, and in nothing is he more subtle than in the advantage he takes of his own immense conceit. He invariably makes it appear that vanity is his weak point; or, as he phrases it himself, I always show my adversary so much of my hand as will mislead him."

“And is he really as deep as all this would imply?”

“Very deep for an Englishman; fully able to cope with the cunningest of his own people, but a child amongst ours, Maitland.”

Maitland laughed scornfully as he said, “For the real work of life all your craft avails little. No man ever cut his way through a wood with a pen-knife, were it ever so sharp.”

“The Count M’Caskey, Eccellenza, desires to know if you receive?” said Caffarelli’s servant, in a low tone.

“Yes, certainly, but do not admit any one else.”

Very significant—but very differently significant—were the looks that passed between Maitland and Caffarelli in the brief interval before M’Caskey entered. At last the door was flung wide, and the distinguished Major appeared in full evening dress, one side of his coat a blaze of stars and crosses, while in front of his cravat he wore the ribbon and collar of some very showy order. Nothing could be easier than his *entrée*—nothing less embarrassed than his salutation to each in turn, as, throwing his white gloves into his hat, he drew over to the table, and began to search for an unused wine-glass.

“Here is a glass,” said Caffarelli. “What will

you drink? This is Bordeaux, and this is some sort of Hock; this is Moselle."

"Hand me the sherry; I am chilly. I have been chilly all day, and went out to dine against my will."

"Where did you dine?"

"With Plon-Plon," said he, languidly.

"With the Prince Napoleon?" asked Maitland, incredulously.

"Yes; he insisted on it. I wrote to him to say that La Verrier, the sous-prefet, had invited me to make as short a delay at Paris as was consistent with my perfect convenience—the police euphuism for twenty-four hours; and I said, 'Pray excuse me at dinner, for I shall want to see Caffarelli.' But he wouldn't take any apology, and I went, and we really were very pleasant."

"Who was there?" asked Caffarelli.

"Only seven altogether: Bagration and his pretty niece; an Aldobrandini Countess—bygone, but still handsome; Joseph Poniatowsky; Botrain of 'La Patrie'; and your humble servant. Fould, I think, was expected, but did not come. Fearfully hot, this sherry; don't you think so?"

Maitland looked superbly defiant, and turned his head away without ceremony. Caffarelli, however,

came quickly to the rescue by pushing over a bottle of burgundy, and saying, "And it was a pleasant party?"

"Yes, decidedly pleasant," said M'Caskey, with the air of one pronouncing a judicial opinion. "The women were nice, very well dressed—the little Russian especially; and then we talked away as people only do talk in Paris, where there is none of that rotten cant of London, and no subject discussed but the little trivialities of daily life."

Caffarelli's eyes sparkled with mischievous delight as he watched the expansive vanity in M'Caskey's face, and the disgust that darkened in Maitland's. "We had a little of everything," said M'Caskey, with his head thrown back and two fingers of one hand jauntily stuck in his waistcoat-pocket. "We had politics—Plon-Plon's own peculiar politics—Europe a democracy, and himself the head of it. We discussed dinners and dinner-givers—a race fast dying out. We talked a little finance, and lastly, Women."

"Your own theme!" said Caffarelli, with a slight inclination of the head.

"Without vanity, I might say it was. Poor old D'Orsay always said, 'Scratch M'Caskey, and I'll back myself for success against any man in Europe.'"

Maitland started as if a viper had bitten him, but by an effort he seemed to restrain himself, and, taking out his cigar-case, began a diligent search for a cigar.

“Ha, cheroots, I see!” cried M‘Caskey; “cheroots are a weakness of mine. Pick me out a well-spotted one, will you?”

Maitland threw the case as it was across the table to him without a word.

M‘Caskey selected some six or eight, and laid them beside him. “You are low, depressed, this evening, Maitland,” said he; “what’s the matter with you?”

“No, sir, not depressed—disgusted.”

“Ah, disgusted!” said M‘Caskey, slowly, and his small eyes twinkled like two balls of fire. “Would it be indiscreet to ask the cause?”

“It would be very indiscreet, Count M‘Caskey,” interposed Caffarelli, “to forget that you are here purely on a grave matter of business—far too grave to be compromised by any forgetfulness on the score of temper.”

“Yes, sir,” broke in Maitland; “there can always be found a fitting time and place to arrange any small questions outstanding between you and me. We want now to learn something of what you have done in Ireland lately, for the King’s service.”

M'Caskey drew from his pocket a much worn pocket-book, crammed to bursting with a variety of loose papers, cards, and photographs, which fell about as he opened it. Not heeding the disorder, he sought out a particular page, and read aloud: "Embarked this twenty-second of September at Gravesend, on board the Ocean Queen, bound for Messina with machinery, two hundred and eleven labourers—labourers engaged for two years—to work on the state railroads; twenty-eight do. do. on board of the Star of Swansea, for Molo de Gaeta with coals—making, with three hundred and eighty-two already despatched, within about thirty of the first battalion of the Cacciatori of St Patrick."

"Well done! bravissimo!" cried Caffarelli, right glad to seize upon the opportunity to restore a pleasanter understanding.

"There's not a man amongst them would not be taken in the Guards; and they who regard height of stature as the first element of the soldier—amongst whom I am not one—would pronounce them magnificent!"

"And are many more available of the same sort?" asked Caffarelli.

"Ten thousand, sir, if you like to pay for them."

"Do these men understand that they are enlisted

as soldiers, not engaged as navvies?" asked Maitland.

"As well as you do. Whatever our friend Caffarelli may think, I can tell him that my countrymen are no more deficient in acuteness than his own. These fellows know the cause just as well as they know the bounty."

"I was not inquiring as to their sympathies," said Maitland, caustically; "I merely wanted to hear how they understood the contract."

"They are hirelings, of course, as I am, and as you are," said M'Caskey.

"By what presumption, sir, do you speak of me?" said Maitland rising, his face dark with passion. "If the accidents of life range us in the same cause, is there any other tie or bond between us?"

"Once more I declare I will have none of this," said Caffarelli, pushing Maitland down into his chair. "Count M'Caskey, the Central Committee have placed you under my orders. These orders are, that you report yourself to General Filangieri at Naples as soon as you can arrive there; that you duly inform the Minister at War of what steps you have already taken in the recruitment, putting yourself at his disposition for further service. Do

you want money?" added he in a lower tone, as he drew the Major aside.

"A man always wants money, sir," said M'Caskey, sententiously.

"I am your banker: what shall it be?" said Caffarelli, drawing out his pocket-book.

"For the present," said M'Caskey, carelessly, "a couple of thousand francs will suffice. I have a rather long bill against his Majesty, but it can wait."

He pocketed the notes without deigning to look at them, and then, drawing closer to Caffarelli, said, in a whisper, "You'll have to keep your friend yonder somewhat 'better in hand'—you will, really. If not, I shall have to shoot him."

"The Chevalier Maitland is your superior officer, sir," said Caffarelli, haughtily. "Take care how you speak of him to any one, but more especially to me, who am his friend."

"I am at his 'friend's' orders equally," said the Major: "my case contains two pistols."

Caffarelli turned away with a shrug of the shoulder, and a look that unmistakably bespoke disgust.

"Here goes, then, for the stirrup-cup!" said M'Caskey, filling a large goblet with burgundy.

“To our next meeting, gentlemen,” and he bowed as he lifted it to his lips. “Won’t you drink to my toast?” said he, stopping.

Caffarelli filled his glass, and touched it to his lips; but Maitland sat with his gaze bent upon the fire, and never looked up.

“Present my homage to the pretty widow when you see her, Maitland, and give her that,” and he flung down a photograph on the table. “It’s not a good one, but it will serve to remind her of me.”

Maitland seized the card and pitched it into the fire, pressing down the embers with his boot.

Caffarelli sprang forward, and laid his hands on M’Caskey’s shoulders.

“When and where?” said the Major, calmly.

“Now—here—if you like,” said Maitland, as calmly.

“At last,” said a deep voice, and a brigadier of the gendarmerie entered, followed by two of his men.

“M. le Comte,” said he, addressing the Major, “I have been in search of you since eleven o’clock. There’s a special train waiting to convey you to Macon—pray don’t lose any more time.”

“I shall be at Naples within a fortnight,” whispered Maitland.

“All right,” replied M‘Caskey. “M. le Brigadier, *à vos ordres*. Good-bye, Count. By the way, I was forgetting my cheroots, which are really excellent;” and so saying he carefully placed them in his cigar-case; and then, giving his greatcoat to one of the gendarmes to assist him while he drew it on, he waved a little familiar adieu with his hand and departed.

“My dear Maitland, how could you so far forget yourself, and with such a man?” said Caffarelli, laying his hands on his shoulder.

“With any *other* man I could *not* have forgotten myself,” said he, sternly. “Let us think no more of him.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

TWO FRIENDS.

IT was like a return to his former self—to his gay, happy, careless nature—for Tony Butler to find himself with his friend Skeffy. As painters lay layers of the same colour on, one over the other, to deepen the effect, so does youth double itself by companionship. As for Skeffy, never did a schoolboy exult more in a holiday, and, like a schoolboy, his spirits boiled over in all manner of small excesses, practical jokes on his fellow-passengers, and all those glorious tomfooleries, to be able to do which, with zest, is worth all the enjoyment that ever cynicism yielded twice told.

“I was afraid you wouldn't come. I didn't see you when the coach drove into the inn yard; and I was so disappointed,” said Tony, as he surveyed the mass of luggage which the guard seemed never to finish depositing before his friend.

“Two portmanteaus, sir,” said the guard, “three carpet-bags, a dressing-case, a hat-box, a gun-case, bundle of sticks and umbrellas, and I think this parrot and cage, are yours.”

“A parrot, Skeffy!”

“For Mrs Maxwell, you dog: she loves parrots, and I gave ten guineas for that beggar, because they assured me he could positively keep up a conversation; and the only thing he *can* say is, ‘Don’t you wish you may get it?’”

No sooner had the bird heard the words than he screamed them out with a wild and scornful cry that made them sound like a bitter mockery.

“There—that’s at *me*,” whispered Skeffy—“at *me* and *my* chance of Tilney. I’m half inclined to wring his neck when I hear it.”

“Are you looking for any one, Harris?” asked Tony of a servant in livery who had just ridden into the yard.

“Yes, sir; I have a letter from my mistress for a gentleman that was to have come by the mail.”

“Here he is,” said Tony, as he glanced at the address. “This is Mr Skeffington Damer.”

While Skeffy broke the seal, Tony muttered in his ear, “Mind, old fellow, you are to come to us before you go to Tilney, no matter how pressing she may be.”

“Here’s a business,” said Skeffy; “as well as I can make out her old pothooks, it is that she can’t receive me. ‘My dear’—she first wrote ‘Nephew,’ but it’s smudged out—‘My dear Cousin Damer, I am much distressed to tell you that you must not come here. It is the scarlatina, which the doctors all think highly infectious, though we burn cinnamon and that other thing through all the rooms. My advice would be to go to Harrogate, or some nice place, to amuse yourself, and I enclose this piece of thin paper.’ Where is it, though?” said he, opening the letter and shaking it. “Just think of the old woman forgetting to put up the enclosure!”

“Try the envelope!” cried Tony, eagerly; but no, the envelope was also empty, and it was plain enough she had omitted it.

Skeffy read on—“I had a very pretty pony for you here, and I remember Lydia Damer told me how nice you looked riding, with the long curls down your back.’ Why, that was five-and-twenty years ago!” cried he, with a scream of laughter—“just fancy, Tony!” and he ran his fingers through his hair. “How am I ever to keep up the illusion with this crop! ‘But’”—he went on to read—“‘But I suppose I shall not see that now. I shall

be eighty-one next November. Mind that you drink my health on the 22d, if I be alive. I could send you the pony if you thought it would not be too expensive to keep him in London. Tilney is looking beautiful, and the trees are budding as if it were spring. Drop me a line before you leave the neighbourhood; and believe me, your affectionate godmother,

“ ‘DINAH MAXWELL.’ ”

“ I think I'd better say I'll send an answer,” said Skeffy, as he crumpled up the letter; “ and as to the enclosure—— ”

A wild scream and some unintelligible utterance broke from the parrot at this instant.

“ Yes, you beggar, ‘ you wish I may get it. ’ By the way, the servant can take that fellow back with him: I am right glad to be rid of him. ”

“ It's the old adage of the ill wind,” said Tony, laughing.

“ How so? What do you mean? ”

“ I mean that *your* ill-luck is *our* good fortune; for as you can't go to Tilney, you'll have to stay the longer with us. ”

Skeffy seized his hand and gave it a cordial shake, and the two young fellows looked fully and frankly

at each other, as men do look before the game of life has caught too strong a hold upon their hearts, and taugth them over-anxiety to rise winners from it.

“Now then for your chateau,” said Skeffy, as he leaped up on the car, already half-hidden beneath his luggage.

“Our chateau is a thatched cabin,” said Tony, blushing in spite of all his attempts to seem at ease. “It is only a friend would have heart to face its humble fare.”

Not heeding, if he even heard the remark, Skeffy rattled on about everything — past, present, and future; talked of their jolly dinner at Richmond, and of each of their companions on that gay day; asked the names of the various places they passed on the road—what were the usual fortunes of the proprietors, how they spent them, and, seldom waiting for the answer, started some new query, to be forgotten in its turn.

“It is a finer country to ride over,” said Tony, anxious to say something favourable for his locality, “than to look at. It is not pretty, perhaps, but there’s plenty of grass, and no end of stone walls to jump, and in the season there’s some capital trout-fishing too.”

“Don’t care a copper for either. I’d rather see a new pantomime than the best stag-hunt in Europe. I’d rather see Tom Salter do the double spring backwards than I’d see them take a whale.”

“I’m not of your mind, then,” said Tony. “I’d rather be out on the hillside of a dull, good-scenting day—well mounted, of course—and hear the dogs as they rushed yelping through the cover.”

“Yoics, yoics, yoics ! I saw it all at Astley’s, and they took a gate in rare style : but, I say, what is that tower yonder topping the trees?”

“That is Lyle Abbey, Sir Arthur Lyle’s place.”

“Lyle—Lyle. There was such a picture in the Exhibition last year of two sisters, Maud, or Alice, or Bella Lyle, and another, by Watts. I used to go every morning, before I went down to the Office, to have a look at them, and I never was quite certain which I was in love with.”

“They are here; they are Sir Arthur’s daughters.”

“You don’t say so ! And do you know them, Tony?”

“As well as if they were my sisters.”

“Ain’t I in luck !” cried Skeffy, in exultation. “I’d have gone to Tarnoff—that’s the place Holmes was named consul at, and wrote back word that it didn’t exist, and that the geography fellows were

only hoaxing the Office! just fancy, hoaxing the Office! Hulloo!—what have we here? a four-horse team, by all that's stunning."

"Mrs Trafford's. Draw up at the side of the road till they pass, Peter," said Tony, hurriedly. The servant on the box of the carriage had, however, apparently announced Tony Butler's presence, for the postilions slackened their pace, and came to a dead halt a few paces in front of the car.

"My mistress, sir, would be glad to speak to you," said the servant, approaching Tony.

"Is she alone, Coles?" asked he, as he descended from the car.

"Yes, sir."

Somewhat reassured by this, but at the same time not a little agitated, Tony drew nigh the carriage. Mrs Trafford was wrapped up in a large fur mantle—the day was a cold one—and lay back without making any movement to salute, except a slight bend of the head as he approached.

"I have to apologise for stopping you," said she, coldly; "but I had a message to give you from Mr Maitland, who left this a couple of days ago."

"Is he gone—gone for good?" asked Tony, not really knowing what he said.

"I don't exactly know what 'for good' means,"

said she, smiling faintly ; “but I believe he has not any intention to return here. His message was to say that, being much pressed for time, he had not an opportunity to reply to your note.”

“I don’t think it required an answer,” broke in Tony, sternly.

“Perhaps not as regarded you, but possibly it did as respected himself.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“What I mean is, that, as you had declined his offer, you might possibly, from inadvertence or any other cause, allude to it ; whereas he expressly wished that the subject should never be mentioned.”

“You were apparently very much in his confidence,” said Tony, fixing his eyes steadily on her.

“When I learn by what right you ask me that question, I’ll answer it,” said she, just as defiantly.

Tony’s face became crimson, and he could not utter a word. At last he stammered out, “I have a friend here, Mr Damer : he is just come over to pay a visit at Tilney, and Mrs Maxwell sends him a note to say that they are all ill there.”

“Only Bella, and she is better.”

“And was Bella ill ?” asked Tony, eagerly.

“Yes, since Tuesday ; on Wednesday, and even up to Friday, very ill. There was a time this could

scarcely have happened without your coming to ask after her."

"Is it my fault, Alice? First of all, I never knew it. You know well I go nowhere. I do not mix with those who frequent grand houses. But tell me of Bella."

"She was never alarmingly ill; but the doctor called it scarlatina, and frightened every one away; and poor Mrs Maxwell has not yet recovered the shock of seeing her guests depart and her house deserted, for Bella and myself are all that remain."

"May I present my friend to you?—he would take it as such a favour," asked Tony, timidly.

"I think not," said she, with an air of indolence.

"Do let me; he saw your picture—that picture of you and Bella, at the Exhibition—and he is wild to see yourself. Don't refuse me, Alice."

"If you think this a favour, I wonder you have courage to ask it. Come, you need not look cross, Master Tony, particularly as all the fault is on your own side. Come over to Tilney the day after to-morrow with your friend."

"But I don't know Mrs Maxwell."

"That does not signify in the least; do what I bid you. I am as much mistress there as she is while I stay. Come early. I shall be quite alone,

for Mark goes to-morrow to town, and Bella will scarcely be well enough to see you."

"And you'll not let me introduce him now?"

"No; I shall look more like my picture in a house dress; and perhaps—though I'll not promise—be in a better temper too. Good-bye."

"Won't you shake hands with me, Alice?"

"No; it's too cold to take my hand out of my muff. Remember now, Saturday morning, without fail."

"Alice!" said he, with a look at once devoted and reproachful.

"Tony!" said she, imitating his tone of voice to perfection, "there's your friend getting impatient.—Good-bye."

As the spanking team whirled past, Skeffy had but a second or two to catch a glance at the veiled and muffled figure that reclined so voluptuously in the corner of the carriage; but he was ready to declare that she had the most beautiful eyes in the world, and "knew what to do with them besides."

"You're in love with her, Tony," cried he, fixing a steadfast stare on the pale and agitated features at his side. "I see it, old fellow! I know every shade and tint of that blessed thing they miscall the tender passion. Make me no confessions; I don't

want them. Your heart is at her feet, and she treats it like a football.”

Tony's cheeks grew purple.

“There's no shame in that, my boy. Women do that with better men than either of us; ay, and will continue to do it centuries after you and I shall be canonised as saints. It's that same contempt of us that makes them worth the winning; but, I say, why is the fellow drawing up here?—is he going to bate his beast?”

“No,” muttered Tony, with a certain confusion; “but we must get down and walk here. Our road lies by that path yonder: there's no carriage-way up to our ‘chateau,’” and he gave a peculiar accent to the last word.

“All right,” said Skeffy, gaily. “I'm good for ten miles of a walk.”

“I'll not test your powers so far; less than a quarter of an hour will bring us home. Take down the luggage, and I'll send up for it,” said he to the driver.

“What honest poor devils you must be down here!” said Skeffy, as he saw the carman deposit the trunks on the road and drive off. “I'd not like to try this experiment in Charing Cross.”

“You see there is some good in poverty, after all,” said Tony, laughing.

“Egad, I’ve tried it for some years without discovering it,” said Skeffy, gravely. “That,” continued he, after a brief pause, “it should make men careless, thoughtless, reckless if you like, I can conceive; but why it should make them honest, is clean beyond me. What an appetite this sharp air is giving me, Master Tony. I’ll astonish that sirloin or that saddle of yours, whichever it be.”

“More likely neither, Skeffy. You’re lucky if it be a rasher and eggs.”

“Oh that it may be,” cried the other, “and draught beer! Have you got draught beer?”

“I don’t think we have any other. There’s our crib—that little cabin under the rocks yonder.”

“How pretty it is—the snuggest spot I ever saw!”

“You’re a good fellow to say so,” cried Tony, and his eyes swam in tears as he turned away.

What a change has come over Tony Butler within the last twenty-four hours! All his fears and terrors as to what Skeffy would think of their humble cottage and simple mode of life have given way, and there he goes about from place to place, showing to his friend how comfortable everything is, and how snug. “There are grander dining-rooms, no doubt,

but did you ever see a warmer or a 'cozier'? and as to the drawing-room—match the view from the window in all Europe: between that great bluff of Fairhead and the huge precipice yonder of the Causeway there is a sweep of coast unrivalled anywhere. Those great rocks are the Skerries; and there, where you see that one stone-pine tree—there, under that cliff, is the cove where I keep my boat: not much of a boat," added he, in a weaker voice, "because I used always to have the cutter—Sir Arthur's yacht. Round that point there is such a spot to bathe in; twenty feet water at the very edge, and a white gravel bottom, without a weed. Passing up that little pathway, you gain the ledge yonder; and there, do you mark the two stones, like gate-piers? there you enter Sir Arthur Lyle's demesne. You can't see the shrubberies, for the ground dips, and the trees will only grow in the valleys here!" And there was a despondent tenderness in the last words that seemed to say, "If it were not for that, this would be paradise!"

Nor was it mere politeness, and the spirit of good breeding, that made Skeffy a genial listener to these praises. What between the sense of a holiday, the delight of what Cockneys call an "outing," the fine fresh breezy air of the place, the breadth and space

—great elements of expansiveness—Skeffy felt a degree of enjoyment that amounted to ecstasy.

“I don’t wonder that you like it all, Tony,” said he. “You’ll never, in all your wanderings, see anything finer.”

“I often say as much to myself,” replied Tony. “As I sit here of an evening, with my cigar, I often say, ‘Why should I go over the world in search of fortune, when I have all that one wants here—here at my very hand?’ Don’t you think a fellow might be content with it?”

“Content! I could be as happy as a king here!” and for a moment or two Skeffy really revelled in delighted thoughts of a region where the tinkle of a Minister’s hand-bell had never been heard; where no “service messengers” ever came; where no dunning tailors invaded! a paradise that knew not the post nor dreamed of the telegraph.

“And as to money,” continued Tony, “one does not want to be rich in such a place. I’m as well off here with, we’ll say, two hundred a-year—we haven’t got so much, but I’ll say that—as I should be in London with a thousand.”

“Better! decidedly better!” said Skeffy, puffing his cigar, and thinking over that snow-storm of Christmas bills which awaited him on his return.

“If it were not for one thing, Skeffy, I’d never leave it,” said he, with a deep sigh, and a look that said as plainly as ever words spoke, Let me open my heart to you.

“I know it all, old fellow, just as if you had confessed it to me. I know the whole story.”

“What do you know, or what do you suspect you know?” said Tony, growing red.

“I say,” said Skeffy, with that tone of superiority that he liked to assume—“I say that I read you like a book.”

“Read aloud then, and I’ll say if you’re right.”

“It’s wrong with you here, Butler,” said Skeffy, laying his hand on the other’s heart; and a deep sigh was all the answer. “Give me another weed,” said Skeffy, and for some seconds he employed himself in lighting it. “There’s not a man in England,” said he, slowly, and with the deliberateness of a judge in giving sentence—“not a man in England knows more of these sort of things than I do. You, I’m certain, take me for a man of pleasure and the world—a gay, butterfly sort of creature, flitting at will from flower to flower; or you believe me—and in that with more reason—a fellow full of ambition, and determined to play a high stake in life; but yet, Tony Butler, within all these there is another

nature, like the holy of holies in the sanctuary. Ay, my dear friend, there is the—what the poet calls the ‘crimson heart within the rose.’ Isn’t that it?”

“I don’t know,” said Tony, bluntly.

And now Skeffy smoked on for some minutes without a word. At length he said, in a solemn tone, “It has not been for nothing, Butler, that I acquired the gift I speak of. If I see into the hearts of men like you, I have paid the price of it.”

“I’m not so certain that you can do it,” said Tony, half doubting his friend’s skill, and half eager to provoke an exercise of it.

“I’ll show whether I can or not. Of course, if you like to disclaim or deny——”

“I’ll disclaim nothing that I know to be true.”

“And I am to speak freely?”

“As freely as you are able.”

“Here it is, then, in five words: You are in love, Tony—in love with that beautiful widow.”

Tony held his head down between his hands, and was silent.

“You feel that the case is hopeless—that is to say, that you know, besides being of rank and wealth, she is one to make a great match, and that her family would never consent to hear of your pre-

tensions; and yet all this while you have a sort of lurking suspicion that she cares for you?"

"No, no!" muttered Tony between his hands.

"Well, that she did once, and that not very long ago."

"Not even that," said Tony, drearily.

"I know better—you *do* think so. And I'll tell you more: what makes you so keenly alive to her change—perfidy, you would like to call it—is this, that you have gone through that stage of the disease yourself."

"I don't understand you."

"Well, you shall. The lovely Alice—isn't that the name?"

Tony nodded.

"The lovely Alice got your own heart only at second hand. You used to be in love with the little girl that was governess at Richmond."

"Not a word of it true—nothing of the kind," broke out Tony, fiercely. "Dolly and I were brother and sister—we always said we were."

"What does that signify? I tried the brother-and-sister dodge, and I know what it cost me when she married Maccleston;" and Skeffy here threw his cigar into the sea, as though an emblem of his shipwrecked destiny. "Mind me well, Butler,"

said he at last: "I did not say that you ever told your heart you loved her; but she knew it, take my word for it. She knew, and in the knowing it was the attraction that drew you on."

"But I was not drawn on."

"Don't tell me, sir. Answer me just this, Did any man ever know the hour, or even the day, that he caught a fever? Could he go back, in memory, and say, It was on Tuesday last, at a quarter to three, that my pulse rose, my respiration grew shorter, and my temples began to throb? So it is with love, the most malignant of all fevers. All this time that you and What's-her-name were playing brother and sister so innocently, your hearts were learning to feel in unison—just as two pendulums in the same room acquire the same beat and swing together. You've heard that?"

"I may; but you are all wrong about Dolly."

"What would she say to it?"

"Just what I do."

"Well, we cannot ask her, for she's not here."

"She is here—not two miles from where we are standing: not that it signifies much, for of course neither of us would do *that*."

"Not plump out, certainly, in so many words."

"Not in any way, Skeffy. It is because I look

upon Dolly as my own dear sister, I would not suffer a word to be said that could offend her."

"Offend her! oh dear, how young you are in these things!"

"What is it, Jenny?" cried Tony to the servant-girl, who was shouting, not very intelligibly, from a little knoll at a distance. "Oh! she's saying that supper is ready, and the kippered salmon getting cold, as if any one cared!"

"Don't they care!" cried Skeffy. "Well, then, they haven't been inhaling this sea-breeze for an hour, as I have. Heaven grant that love has carried off your appetite, Tony, for I feel as if I could eat for six."

CHAPTER XXXII.

ON THE ROCKS.

IT was a rare thing for Tony Butler to lie awake at night, and yet he did so for full an hour or more after that conversation with Skeffy. It was such a strange blunder for one of Skeffy's shrewdness to have made—so inexplicable. To imagine that he, Tony, had ever been in love with Dolly! Dolly, his playfellow since the time when the "twa had paidled i' the burn;" Dolly, to whom he went with every little care that crossed him, never shrinking for an instant from those avowals of doubt or difficulty that no one makes to his sweetheart. So, at least, thought Tony. And the same Dolly to whom he had revealed once, in deepest secrecy, that he was in love with Alice! To be sure, it was a boyish confession, made years ago, and since that Alice had grown up to be a woman and was married, so that the story of the love was like a fairy tale.

“In love with Dolly!” muttered he. “If he had but ever seen us together, he would have known that could not be.” Poor Tony! he knew of love in its moods of worship and devotion, and in its aspect of a life-giving impulse—a soul-filling, engrossing sentiment—inspiring timidity when near, and the desire for boldness when away. With such alternating influence Dolly had never racked his heart. He sought her with a quiet conscience, untroubled by a fear.

“How could Skeffy make such a mistake! That it is a mistake, who would recognise more quickly than Dolly herself; and with what humorous drollery—a drollery all her own—would she not treat it! A rare punishment for your blunder, Master Skeffy, would it be to tell Dolly of it all in your presence;” and at last, wearied out with thinking, he fell asleep.

The day broke with one of those bright, breezy mornings which, though “trying” to the nerves of the weak and delicate, are glorious stimulants to the strong. The sea plashed merrily over the rocks, and the white streaky clouds flew over the land with a speed that said it blew hard at sea. “Glorious day for a sail, Skeffy: we can beat out, and come back with a stern-wind whenever we like.”

“I’ll anticipate the wish by staying on shore, Tony.”

“I can’t offer you a mount, Skeffy, for I am not the owner of even a donkey.”

“Who wants one? Who wants anything better than to go down where we were yesterday evening, under that big black rock, with the sea before us and the whole wide world behind us, and talk? When a fellow lives as I do, cooped up within four walls, the range of his view some tiers of pigeon-holes, mere freedom and a sea-breeze are the grandest luxuries in creation;” and off they set, armed with an ample supply of tobacco, the life-buoy of those strugglers in the sea of thought who only ask to float, but not to reach the shore.

How delightfully did the hours pass over! At least so Tony felt, for what a wonderful fellow was Skeffy! What had he not seen, or heard, or read? What theme was new, what subject unknown to him? But, above all, what a marvellous insight had he into the world—the actual world of men and women! Great people were not to *his* eyes mighty gods and goddesses, seated loftily on a West-End Olympus, but fallible mortals, with chagrins about the Court, and grievances about invitations to Windsor. Ministers too, whose nods shook empires, were humanities, very irritable under the gout, and much given to colchicum. Skeffy “knew

the whole thing"—*he* was not one of the mere audience. He lived in the green-room or in the "flats." He knew all the secrets of state, from the splendid armaments that existed on paper, to the mock thunders that were manufactured and patented by F. O.

These things Skeffy told like confidences—secrets he would not have breathed to any one he held less near his heart than Tony. But somehow common-places told by the lips of authority will assume an immense authority, and carry with them a stupendous weight; and Tony listened to the precious words of wisdom as he might have listened to the voice of Solomon.

But even more interesting still did he become as he sketched forth, very vaguely, indeed—a sort of Turner in his later style of cloud and vapour—his own great future. Not very clear and distinct the steps by which he was fated to rise, but palpable enough the great elevation he was ultimately to occupy.

"Don't imagine, old fellow," said he, laying his hand on Tony's shoulders, "that I am going to forget you when that time comes. I'm not going to leave you a Queen's messenger."

"What could you make of me?" said Tony, despondently.

"Fifty things," said the other, with a confidence that seemed to say, I, Skeffy, am equal to more than this; "fifty things. You, of course, cannot be expected to know it, but I can tell you it's far harder to get a small place than a big one—harder to be a corporal than a lieutenant-general."

"How do you explain that?" asked Tony, with an eager curiosity.

"You can't understand it without knowing life. I cannot convey to you how to win a trick where you don't know the game." And Skeffy showed, by the impatient way he tried to light a fresh cigar, that he was not fully satisfied with the force or clearness of his own explanation; and he went on: "You see, old fellow, when you have climbed up some rungs of the ladder with a certain amount of assurance, many will think you are determined to get to the top."

"Well, but if a man's ladder has only one rung, as I imagine is the case with mine!" broke in Tony.

Skeffy looked at his companion for a moment, half surprised that he should have carried out the figure, and then laughed heartily, as he said, "Splice it to mine, my boy; it will bear us both."

It was no use that Tony shook his head and looked despondingly; there was a hopeful warmth

about Skeffy not to be extinguished by any discouragement. In fact, if a shade of dissatisfaction seemed ever to cloud the brightness of his visions, it was the fear lest, even in his success, some other career might be neglected wherein the rewards were greater and the prizes more splendid. He knew, and he did not scruple to declare that he knew, if he had been a soldier, he'd have risen to the highest command. If he'd have gone to the Bar, he'd have ended on the Woolsack. Had he "taken that Indian appointment," he'd have been high up by this time on the Council, with his eye on Government House for a finish. "That's what depresses me about diplomacy, Tony. The higher you go, the less sure you are. They—I mean your own party—give you Paris or St Petersburg, we'll say; and if they go out, so must you."

"Why must you?" asked Tony.

"For the reason that the well-bred dog went down-stairs when he saw certain preparations that betokened kicking him down.

"After all, I think a new colony and the gold-fields the real thing—the glorious independence of it; you live how you like, and with whom you like. No Mrs Grundy to say, 'Do you know who dined with Skeffington Damer yesterday?' 'Did you re-

mark the young woman who sat beside him in his carriage?' and suchlike."

"But you cannot be always sure of your nuggets," muttered Tony. "I've seen fellows come back poorer than they went."

"Of course you have; it's not every horse wins the Darby, old boy. And I'll tell you another thing too; the feeling, the instinct, the inner consciousness that you carry success in your nature, is a rarer and a higher gift than the very power to succeed. You meet with clever fellows every day in the week who have no gauge of their own cleverness. To give an illustration: you write a book, we'll say."

"No, I don't," blurted out Tony.

"Well, but you might; it is at least possible."

"It is not."

"Well, let us take something else. You are about to try something that has a great reward attached to it, if successful: you want, we'll suppose, to marry a woman of high rank and large fortune, very beautiful—in fact, one to whom, according to everyday notions, you have not the slightest pretensions. Isn't that a strong case, eh?"

"Worse than the book. Perhaps I'd better try authorship," said Tony, growing very red: "but

make the case your own, and I'll listen just as attentively."

"Well, here goes : I have only to draw on memory," said he, with a sigh ; " I suppose you don't remember seeing in the papers, about a year and half ago, that the Prince of Cobourg Cohari—not one of our Cobourgs, but an Austrian branch—came over to visit the Queen. He brought his daughter Olga with him : she was called Olga after the Empress of Russia's sister. And such a girl ! She was nearly as tall as you, Tony—I'll swear she was—with enormous blue eyes, and masses of fair hair that she wore in some Russian fashion that seemed as if it had fallen loose over her neck and shoulders. And weren't they shoulders ! I do like a large woman ! a regular Cleopatra—indolent, voluptuous, dreamy. I like the majestic languor of their walk ; and there is a massive grandeur in their slightest gesture that is very imposing."

"Go on," muttered Tony, as the other seemed to pause for a sentiment of concurrence.

"I was in the Household in those days, and I was sent down with old Dollington to Dover to meet them ; but somehow they arrived before we got down, and were comfortably installed at the Lord

Warden when we arrived. It did not matter much; for old Cohari was seized with an attack of gout, and could not stir; and there I was, running back and forward to the telegraph office all day, reporting how he was, and whether he would or would not have Sir James This or Sir John That down to see him! Dollington and he were old friends fortunately, and had a deal to say to each other, so that I was constantly with Olga. At first she was supremely haughty and distant, as you may imagine. A regular Austrian Serene Highness grafted on a Beauty—fancy that! but it never deterred *me*; and I contrived that she should see mine was the homage of a heart she had captivated, not of a courtier that was bound to obey her. She saw it, sir—saw it at once; saw it with that instinct that whispers to the female heart, ‘He loves me,’ ere the man has ever said it to himself. She not only saw, but she did not discourage, my passion. Twenty little incidents of our daily life showed this, as we rambled across the downs together, or strolled along the shore to watch the setting sun and the arrival of the mail-boat from Calais.

“At last the Prince recovered sufficiently to continue his journey, and I went down to order a special train to take us up to town the following

morning. By some stupid arrangement, however, of the directors, an earlier announcement should have been given, and all they could do was to let us have one of the royal carriages attached to the express. I was vexed at this, and so was Dollington, but the Prince did not care in the least; and when I went to speak of it to Olga, she hung down her head for an instant, and then, in a voice and with an accent I shall never forget, she said, 'Ah, Monsieur Damer, it would appear to be your destiny to be always too late!' She left me as she spoke, and we never met after; for on that same evening I learned from Dollington she was betrothed to the Duke Max of Hohenhammelsbraten, and to be married in a month. That was the meaning of her emotion—that was the source of a sorrow that all but overcame her; for she loved me, Tony—she loved me! not with that headlong devotion that belongs to the warmer races, but with a Teutonic love; and when she said, 'I was too late,' it was the declaration of a heart whose valves worked under a moderate pressure, and never risked an explosion."

"But how do you know that she was not alluding to the train, and to your being late to receive them on the landing?" asked Tony.

"Ain't you prosaic, Tony—ain't you six-and-

eightpence! with your dull and commonplace interpretation! I tell you, sir, that she meant, 'I love you, but it is in vain—I love you, but another is before you—I love you, but you come too late!'"

"And what did you do?" asked Tony, anxious to relieve himself from a position of some awkwardness.

"I acted with dignity, sir. I resigned in the Household, and got appointed to the Colonial."

"And what does it all prove, except it be something against your own theory, that a man should think there is nothing too high for his reach?"

"Verily, Tony, I have much to teach you," said Skeffy, gravely, but good-naturedly. "This little incident shows by what slight casualties our fortunes are swayed: had it not been for Max of Hammelsbraten, where might not I have been to-day? It is by the flaw in the metal the strength of the gun is measured—so it is by a man's failures in life you can estimate his value. Another would not have dared to raise his eyes so high!"

"That I can well believe," said Tony, dryly.

"You, for instance, would no more have permitted yourself to fall in love with her, than you'd have thought of tossing for half-crowns with the Prince her father."

“Pretty much the same,” muttered Tony.

“That’s it—that is exactly what establishes the difference between men in life. It is by the elevation given to the cannon that the ball is thrown so far. It is by the high purpose of a man that you measure his genius.”

“All the genius in the world won’t make you able to take a horse over seven feet of a stone wall,” said Tony; “and whatever is impossible has no interest for me.”

“You never can say what is impossible,” broke in Skeffy. “I’ll tell you experiences of mine, and you’ll exclaim at every step, ‘How could that be?’” Skeffy had now thoroughly warmed to his theme—the theme he loved best in the world—himself; for he was one of those who “take out” all their egotism in talk. Let him only speak of himself, and he was ready to act heartily and energetically in the cause of his friends. All that he possessed was at their service—his time, his talents, his ingenuity, his influence, and his purse. He could give them everything but one; he could not make them heroes in his stories. No, his romance was his own realm, and he could share it with none.

Listen to him, and there never was a man so traded on—so robbed and pilfered from. A Chan-

cellor of the Exchequer had caught up that notion of his about the tax on domestic cats. It was on the railroad he had dropped that hint about a supply of cordials in all fire-escapes. That clever suggestion of a web livery that would fit footmen of all sizes was his—he remembered the day he made it, and the fellow that stole it, too, on the chain-pier at Brighton. What leaders in the 'Times'—what smart things in the 'Saturday'—what sketches in 'Punch,' were constructed out of his dinner-talk!

Poor Tony listened to all these with astonishment, and even confusion, for one-half, at least, of the topics were totally strange and new to him. "Tell me," said he at last, with a bold effort to come back to a land of solid reality, "what of that poor fellow whose bundle I carried away with me? Your letter said something mysterious about him, which I could make nothing of."

"Ah, yes—a dangerous dog—a friend of Mazzini's, and a member of I can't say how many secret societies. The Inspector, hearing that I had asked after him at the hotel, came up to F. O. t'other morning to learn what I knew of him, and each of us tried for full half an hour to pump the other."

“I’ll not believe one word against him,” said Tony, sturdily; “an honest, franker face I never looked at.”

“No doubt! Who would wish to see a better-looking fellow than Orsini?”

“And what has become of him — of Quin, I mean?”

“Got away, clean away, and no one knows how or where. I’ll tell *you*, Tony,” said he, “what I would not tell another—that they stole that idea of the explosive bombs from *me*.”

“You don’t mean to say——”

“Of course not, old fellow. I’m not a man to counsel assassination; but in the loose way I talk, throwing out notions for this and hints for that, they caught up this idea just as Blakeney did that plan of mine for rifling large guns.”

Tony fixed his eyes on him for a moment or two in silence, and then said gravely, “I think it must be near dinner-time; let us saunter towards home.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A MORNING CALL AT TILNEY.

ON the morning after this conversation the two friends set out for Tilney — Skeffy, as usual, full of himself, and consequently in high spirits—happy in the present, and confident for the future. Tony, indeed, was delighted with his companion, and thoroughly enjoyed the volatile gaiety of one who seemed to derive pleasure from everything. With all a schoolboy's zest for a holiday, Skeffy would be for ever at something. Now he would take the driver's seat on the car and play coachman, till, with one wheel in the ditch and the conveyance nearly over, he was summarily deposed by Tony, and stoutly rated for his awkwardness.

Then it was his pleasure to "chaff" the people on the road—a population the least susceptible of drollery in all Europe!—a grave, saturnine race, who, but for Tony's intervention, would have more

than once resented such liberties very practically. As they saw the smoke from the chimney of a little cottage under the hill, and heard it was there Dolly Stewart lived, it was all Tony could do to prevent Skeffy running down to "have a look at her," just as it required actual force to keep him from jumping off as they passed a village school, where Skeffy wanted to examine a class in the Catechism. Then he would eat and drink everywhere, and, with a mock desire for information, ask the name of every place they passed, and as invariably miscall them, to the no small amusement of the carman, this being about the limit of his appreciation of fun.

"What a fidgety beggar you are!" said Tony, half angry and half laughing at the incessant caprices of his vivacious companion. "Do you know it's now going on to eleven o'clock, and we have fourteen miles yet before us?"

"One must eat occasionally, my dear friend. Even in the 'Arabian Nights' the heroine takes a slight refectation of dates now and then."

"But this is our third 'slight refectation' this morning, and we shall probably arrive at Tilney for luncheon."

"*You* can bear long fasts, I know. I have often

heard of the 'starving Irish;' but the Anglo-Saxon stomach requires a 'retainer,' to remind it of the great cause to be tried at dinner-time. A mere bite of bread and cheese, and I'm with you."

At last the deep woods of Tilney came in sight; and evidence of a well-cared-for estate—trim cottages on the roadside, and tasteful little gardens—showed that they were approaching the residence of one who was proud of her tenantry.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Tony, struck by a momentary silence on his companion's part.

"I was thinking, Tony," said he, gravely—"I was just thinking whether I could not summon up a sort of emotion at seeing the woods under whose shade my ancestors must have walked for heaven knows what centuries."

"Your ancestors! Why, they never lived here."

"Well, if they didn't, they ought. It seems a grand old place, and I already feel my heart warming to it. By the way, where's Maitland?"

"Gone; I told you he was off to the Continent. What do you know about this man—anything?"

"Not much. When I was at school, Tony, whenever in our New Testament examination they'd ask

me who it was did this or said that, I always answered, John the Baptist, and in eight times out of ten it was a hit; and so in secular matters, whenever I was puzzled about a fellow's parentage, I invariably said—and you'll find as a rule it is invaluable—he's a son of George IV., or his father was. It accounts for everything — good looks, plenty of cash, air, swagger, mystery. It explains how a fellow knows every one, and is claimed by none."

"And is this Maitland's origin?"

"I can't tell; perhaps it is. Find me a better, or, as the poet says, 'has accipe mecum.' I say, is this the gate-lodge? Tony, old fellow, I hope I'll have you spending your Christmas here one of these days, with Skeff Damer your host!"

"More unlikely things have happened!" said Tony, quietly.

"What a cold northernism is that! Why, man, what so likely — what so highly probable — what, were I a sanguine fellow, would I say, so nearly certain? It was through a branch of the Damers — no, of the Nevils, I mean—who intermarried with us, that the Maxwells got the estate. Paul Nevil was Morton Maxwell's mother — aunt, I should say——"

“Or uncle, perhaps,” gravely interposed Tony.

“Yes, uncle—you’re right! but you’ve muddled my genealogy for all that! Let us see. Who was Noel Skeffington? Noel was a sort of pivot in our family-engine, and everything seemed to depend on him; and such a respect had we for his intentions, that we went on contesting the meaning of his last will till we found out there was nothing more left to fight for. This Noel was the man that caught King George’s horse when he was run away with at the battle of Dettingen; and the King wanted to make him a baronet, but, with tears in his eyes, he asked how he had ever incurred the royal displeasure to be visited with such a mark of disgrace? ‘At all events,’ said he, ‘my innocent child, who is four years old, could never have offended your Majesty. Do not, therefore, involve him in my shame. Commute the sentence to knighthood, and my dishonour will die with me.’”

“I never heard of greater insolence,” said Tony.

“It saved us though; but for this, I should have been Sir Skeffington to-day. Is that the house I see yonder?”

“That’s a wing of it.”

“‘Home of my fathers, how my bosom throbs!’ What’s the next line? ‘Home of my fathers,

through my heart there runs!’ That’s it—‘there runs’—runs. I forget how it goes, but I suppose it must rhyme to ‘duns.’”

“Now, try and be reasonable for a couple of minutes,” said Tony. “I scarcely am known to Mrs Maxwell at all. I don’t mean to stop here; I intend to go back to-night. What are your movements?”

“Let the Fates decide; that is to say, I’ll toss up—heads, and I am to have the estate, and therefore remain; tails—I’m disinherited, and go back with you.”

“I want you to be serious, Skeffy.”

“Very kind of you, when I’ve only got fourteen days’ leave, and three of them gone already.”

“I’d rather you’d return with me; but I’d not like you to risk your future to please me.”

“Has jealousy no share in this? Be frank and open; ‘Crede Damer’ is our proud motto; and by Jove, if certain tailors and bootmakers did not accept it, it would be an evil day for your humble servant!”

“I don’t understand you,” said Tony, gravely.

“You fear I’ll make love to ‘your widow,’ Tony. Don’t get so red, old fellow, nor look as if you wanted to throw me into the fish-pond.”

"I had half a mind to do it," muttered Tony, in something between jest and earnest.

"I knew it—I saw it. You looked what the Yankees call mean-ugly; and positively I was afraid of you. But just reflect on the indelible disgrace it would be to you if I was drowned."

"You can swim, I suppose?"

"Not a stroke; it's about the only thing I cannot do."

"Why, you told me yesterday that you never shoot, you couldn't ride, never handled a fishing-rod."

"Nor hemmed a pocket-handkerchief," broke in Skeffy. "I own not to have any small accomplishments. What a noble building! I declare I am attached to it already. No, Tony; I pledge you my word of honour, no matter how pressed I may be, I'll not cut down a tree here."

"You may go round to the stable-yard," said Tony to the driver—"they'll feed you and your horse here."

"Of course they will," cried Skeffy; and then, grasping Tony's two hands, he said, "You are welcome to Tilney, my dear boy: I am heartily glad to see you here."

Tony turned and pulled the bell; the deep sum-

mons echoed loudly, and a number of small dogs joined in the uproar at the same time.

“There’s ‘the deep-mouthed welcome as we draw near home,’” said Skeffy, while he threw the end of his cigar away.

A servant soon appeared and ushered them into a large low-ceilinged room, with fireplaces of antique fashion, the chimney-pieces of dark oak, surmounted by massive coats of arms glowing in all the colours of heraldry. It was eminently comfortable in all its details of fat low ottomans, deep easy-chairs, and squat cushions; and although the three windows which lighted it looked out upon a lawn, the view was bounded by a belt of trees, as though to convey that it was a room in which snugness was to be typified, to the exclusion of all that pretended to elegance. A massive and splendidly-bound Bible, showing little signs of use, lay on a centre table; a very well-thumbed ‘Peerage’ was beside it.

“I say, Tony, this is evidently aunt Maxwell’s own drawing-room. It has all the peculiar grimness of an old lady’s sanctum; and I declare that fat old dog, snoring away on the rug, looks like a relation.” While he stooped down to examine the creature more closely, the door opened, and Mrs

Maxwell, dressed in bonnet and shawl, and with a small garden watering-pot in her hand, entered. She only saw Tony; and, running towards him with her open hand, said, "You naughty boy, didn't I tell you not to come here?"

Tony blushed deeply, and blurted something about being told or ordered to come by Mrs Trafford.

"Well, well; it doesn't matter now; there's no danger. It's not 'catching,' the doctor says, and she'll be up to-morrow. Dear me! and who is this?" The latter question was addressed to Skeffy, who had just risen from his knees.

"Mr Skeffington Damer, ma'am," said Tony.

"And who are you, then?"

"Tony Butler: I thought you knew me."

"To be sure I do, and delighted to see you too. And this Pickle is Skeff, is he?"

"Dear aunt, let me embrace you," cried Skeffy, rushing rapturously into her arms.

"Well, I declare!" said the old lady, looking from one to the other; "I thought, if it was you, Skeff, what a great fine tall man you had grown; and there you are, the same little creature I saw you last."

"Little, aunt! what do you mean by little? Standard of the Line! In France I should be a Grenadier!"

The old lady laughed heartily at the haughty air with which he drew himself up and threw forward his chest as he spoke.

“What a nice parrot you have sent me! but I can’t make out what it is he says.”

“He says, ‘Don’t you wish you may get it?’ aunt.”

“Ah! so it is; and he means luncheon, I’m sure, which is just coming on the table. I hope you are both very hungry?”

“I ought to be, aunt. It’s a long drive from the Causeway here.—Hold your tongue, you dog,” whispered he to Tony; “say nothing about the three breakfasts on the road, or I shall be disgraced.”

“And how is your mother, Mr Tony? I hope she has good health. Give me your arm to the dining-room; Pickle will take care of himself. This is a sickly season. The poor dear Commodore fell ill! and though the weather is so severe, woodcocks very scarce—there’s a step here—and all so frightened for fear of the scarlatina that they run away; and I really wanted you here, to introduce you to—who was it?—not Mrs Craycroft, was it? Tell Mrs Trafford luncheon is ready, Groves, and say Mr Butler is here. She doesn’t know you, Pickle. Maybe you don’t like to be called Pickle now?”

"Of course I do, aunt; it reminds me of long ago," said he, with an air of emotion.

"By the way, it was George, and not you, I used to call Pickle—poor George, that went to Bombay."

"Ah, yes; he was India Pickle, aunt, and you used to call me Piccalili!"

"Perhaps I did, but I forget. Here, take the head of the table; Mr Tony, sit by me. Oh, dear! what a small party! This day last week we were twenty-seven! Oh, he'll not find Alice, for I left her in my flower-garden; I'll go for her myself."

"Make yourself at home, Tony," said Skeffy, as soon as the old lady left the room. "Believe me, it is with no common pleasure that I see you under my roof."

"I was going to play parrot, and say, 'Don't you wish you may?'" muttered Tony, dryly.

"Unbeliever, that will not credit the mutton on his plate, nor the sherry in his glass! Hush! here they are."

Alice sailed proudly into the room, gave her hand to Tony with a pretended air of condescension, but a real cordiality, and said,—“You're a good boy, after all; and Bella sends you all manner of kind forgivenesses.”

"My nephew Damer, Alice," said Mrs Maxwell,

never very formal in her presentations of those she regarded as little more than children. "I suppose he'll not mind being called Pickle before you?"

Even Tony—not the shrewdest, certainly, of observers—was struck by the well-bred ease with which his friend conducted himself in a situation of some difficulty, managing, at the same time, neither to offend the old lady's susceptibilities, nor sacrifice the respect he owed himself. In fact, the presence of Alice recalled Skeffy, as if by magic, to every observance of his daily life. She belonged to the world he knew best—perhaps the only one he knew at all; and his conversation at once became as easy and as natural as though he were once more back in the society of the great city.

Mrs Maxwell, however, would not part with him so easily, and proceeded to put him through a catechism of all their connections—Skeffingtons, Damers, Maxwells, and Nevils—in every variety of combination. As Skeffy avowed afterwards, "The 'Little Go' was nothing to it." With the intention of shocking the old lady, and what he called "shunting her" off her inquiries, he reported nothing of the family but disasters and disgraces. The men and women of the house inherited, according to him, little of the proud boast of the Bayards;

no one ever before heard such a catalogue of rogues, swindlers, defaulters, nor so many narratives of separations and divorces. What he meant for a shock turned out a seduction; and she grew madly eager to hear more—more even than he was prepared to invent.

“Ugh!” said he at last to himself, as he tossed off a glass of sherry, “I’m coming fast to capital offences, and if she presses me more I’ll give her a murder.”

These family histories, apparently so confidentially imparted, gave Alice a pretext to take Tony off with her, and show him the gardens. Poor Tony, too, was eager to have an opportunity to speak of his friend to Alice. “Skeffy was such a good fellow; so hearty—so generous—so ready to do a kind thing; and then, such a thorough gentleman! If you had but seen him, Alice, in our little cabin, so very different in every way from all he is accustomed to, and saw how delighted he was with everything; how pleasantly he fell into all our habits, and how nice his manner to my mother. She reads people pretty quickly; and I’ll tell you what she said—‘He has a brave big heart under all his motley.’”

“I rather like him already,” said Alice, with a

faint smile at Tony's eagerness; "he is going to stop here, is he not?"

"I cannot tell. I only know that Mrs Maxwell wrote to put him off."

"Yes, that she did a couple of days ago; but now that Bella is so much better—so nearly well, I may say—I think she means to keep him, and you too, Tony, if you will so far favour us."

"I cannot—it is impossible."

"I had hoped, Tony," said she, with a malicious sparkle in her eyes, "that it was only against Lyle Abbey you bore a grudge, and not against every house where I should happen to be a visitor."

"Alice, Alice!" said he, with trembling lips, "surely this is not fair."

"If it be true, is the question; and until you have told me why you ceased to come to us—why you gave up those who always liked you—I must, I cannot help believing it to be true."

Tony was silent; his heart swelled up as if it would burst his chest; but he struggled manfully, and hid his emotion.

"I conclude," said she, sharply, "it was not a mere caprice which made you throw us off. You had a reason, or something that you fancied was a reason."

"It is only fair to suppose so," said he, gravely.

“Well, I’ll give you the benefit of that supposition; and I ask you, as a matter of right, to give me your reason.”

“I cannot, Alice—I cannot,” stammered he out, while a deadly paleness spread over his face.

“Tony,” said she, gravely, “if you were a man of the world like your friend Mr Damer, for instance, I would probably say that in a matter of this kind you ought to be left to your own judgment; but you are not. You are a kind-hearted, simple-minded boy. Nay, don’t blush and look offended; I never meant to offend you. Don’t you know that?” and she held out to him her fair white hand, the taper fingers trembling with a slight emotion. Tony stooped and kissed it with a rapturous devotion. “There, I did not mean that, Master Tony,” said she, blushing; “I never intended your offence was to be condoned; I only thought of a free pardon.”

“Then give it to me, Alice,” said he, gulping down his emotion; “for I am going away, and who knows when I shall see you again?”

“Indeed,” said she, with a look of agitation; “have you reconsidered it, then? have you resolved to join Maitland?”

“And were you told of this, Alice?”

“ Yes, Tony : as one who feels a very deep interest in you, I came to hear it ; but, indeed, partly by an accident.”

“ Will you tell me what it was you heard ?” said he, gravely ; “ for I am curious to hear whether you know more than myself.”

“ You were to go abroad with Maitland—you were to travel on the Continent together.”

“ And I was to be his secretary, eh ?” broke in Tony, with a bitter laugh ; “ wasn’t that the notable project ?”

“ You know well, Tony, it was to be only in name.”

“ Of course I do ; my incapacity would insure that much.”

“ I must say, Tony,” said she, reproachfully, “ that so far as I know of Mr Maitland’s intentions towards you, they were both kind and generous. In all that he said to me, there was the delicacy of a gentleman towards a gentleman.”

“ He told you, however, that I had refused his offer ?”

“ Yes ; he said it with much regret, and I asked his leave to employ any influence I might possess over you to make you retract the refusal—at least to think again over his offer.”

“And of course he refused you nothing?” said Tony, with a sneering smile.

“Pardon me—he did not grant my request.”

“Then I think better of him than I did before.”

“I suspect, Tony, that, once you understood each other, you are men to be friends.”

“You mean by that to flatter me, Alice—and of course it is great flattery; but whether it is that I am too conscious of my own inferiority, or that I have, as I feel I have, such a hearty hatred of your accomplished friend, I would detest the tie that should bind me to him. Is he coming back here?”

“I do not know.”

“You do not know!” said he, slowly, as he fixed his eyes on her.

“Take care, sir, take care; you never trod on more dangerous ground than when you forgot what was due to *me*. I told you I did not know; it was not necessary I should repeat it.”

“There was a time when you rebuked my bad breeding less painfully, Alice,” said he, in deep sorrow; “but these are days not to come back again. I do not know if it is not misery to remember them.”

“John Anthony Butler, Esq.,” cried a loud voice, and Skeffy sprang over a box-hedge almost as tall

as himself, flourishing a great sealed packet in his hand. "A despatch on her Majesty's service just sent on here!" cried he; "and now remember, Tony, if it's Viceroy you're named, I insist on being Chief Sec.; if you go to India as Governor-General, I claim Bombay or Madras. What stuff is the fellow made of? Did you ever see such a stolid indifference? He doesn't want to know what the Fates have decreed him."

"I don't care one farthing," said Tony, doggedly.

"Here goes then, to see," cried Skeffy, tearing open the packet and reading: "'Downing Street, Friday, 5th.—Mr Butler will report himself for service as F. O. Messenger on Tuesday morning, 9th. By order of the Under-Secretary of State.'

"There's a way to issue a service summons. It was Graves wrote that, I'd swear. All he ought to have said was, 'Butler for service, F. O., to report immediately.'"

"I suppose the form is no great matter," said Mrs Trafford, whose eyes now turned with an anxious interest towards Tony.

"The form is everything, I assure you. The Chief Secretary is a regular Tartar about style. One of our fellows who has an impediment in his speech, once wrote, 'I had had,' in a despatch, and

my Lord noted it with—‘It is inexcusable that he should stutter in writing.’”

“I must be there on Wednesday, is it?” asked Tony.

“Tuesday—Tuesday, and in good time, too. But ain’t you lucky, you dog! They’re so hard pressed for messengers, they’ve got no time to examine you. You are to enter official life *par la petite portz*, but you get in without knocking.”

“I cannot imagine that the examination would be much of a difficulty,” said Mrs Trafford.

Tony shook his head in dissent, and gave a sad faint sigh.

“I’d engage to coach him in a week,” broke in Skeffy. “It was I ground Vyse in Chinese, and taught him that glorious drinking-song, ‘Tehin Tehan Ili-Ta!’ that he offered to sing before the Commissioners if they could play the accompaniment.”

Leaving Skeffy to revel in his gratifying memories of such literary successes, Alice turned away a few steps with Tony.

“Let us part good friends, Tony,” said she, in a low tone. “You’ll go up to the Abbey, I hope, and wish them a good-bye, won’t you?”

“I am half ashamed to go now,” muttered he.

“No, no, Tony; don’t fancy that there is any breach in our friendship; and tell me another thing: Would you like me to write to you? I know you’re not very fond of writing yourself, but I’ll not be exacting. You shall have two for one—three, if you deserve it.”

He could not utter a word; his heart felt as if it would burst through his side, and a sense of suffocation almost choked him. He knew, if he tried to speak, that his emotion would break out, and in his pride he would have suffered torture rather than shed a tear.

With a woman’s nice tact she saw his confusion, and hastened to relieve it. “The first letter must, however, be from you, Tony. It need be only half-a-dozen lines, to say if you have passed your examination, what you think of your new career, and where you are going.”

“I couldn’t write!” stammered out Tony; “I could not!”

“Well, I will,” said she, with a tone of kind feeling. “Your mother shall tell me where to address you.”

“You will see mother, then?” asked he, eagerly.

“Of course, Tony. If Mrs Butler will permit me, I will be a frequent visitor.”

“ Oh, if I thought so ! ”

“ Do think so—be assured of it ; and remember, Tony, whenever you have courage to think of me as your own old friend of long ago, write and tell me so.” These words were not said without a certain difficulty. “ There, don’t let us appear foolish to your smart friend yonder. Good-bye.”

“ Good-bye, Alice,” said he, and now the tears rushed fast, and rolled down his cheeks ; but he drew his hand roughly across his face, and, springing upon the car, said, “ Drive on, and as hard as you can ; I am too late here.”

Skeffy shouted his adieux, and waved a most picturesque farewell ; but Tony neither heard nor saw either. Both hands were pressed on his face, and he sobbed as if his very heart was breaking.

“ Well, if that’s not a melodramatic exit, I’m a Dutchman,” exclaimed Skeffy, turning to address Alice ; but she too was gone, and he was left standing there alone.

“ Don’t be angry with me, Bella ; don’t scold, and I’ll tell you of an indiscretion I have just committed,” said Alice, as she sat on her sister’s bed.

“ I think I can guess it,” said Bella, looking up in her face.

“ No, you cannot—you are not within a thousand

miles of it. I know perfectly what you mean, Bella ; you suspect that I have opened a flirtation with the distinguished Londoner, the wonderful Skeffington Damer."

Bella shook her head dissentingly.

"Not but one might," continued Alice, laughing, "in a dull season, with an empty house and nothing to do ; just as I've seen you trying to play that twankling old harpsichord in the Flemish drawing-room, for want of better ; but you are wrong, for all that."

"It was not of him I was thinking, Alice—on my word, it was not. I had another, and, I suppose, a very different person, in my head."

"Tony !"

"Just so."

"Well, what of him ? and what the indiscretion with which you would charge me ?"

"With which you charge yourself, Alice, dearest ! I see it all in that pink spot on your cheek, in that trembling of your lips, and in that quick impatience of your manner."

"Dear me ! what can it be which has occasioned such agitation, and called up such terrible witnesses against me ?"

"I'll tell you, Alice. You have sent away that

poor boy more in love than ever. You have let him carry away a hope which you well know is only a delusion."

"I protest this is too bad. I never dreamed of such a lecture, and I'll just go down-stairs and make a victim of Mr Damer."

Alice arose and dashed out of the room; not, however, to do as she said, but to hurry to her own room, and lock the door after her as she entered it.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TONY ASKS COUNSEL.

It was just as Bella said ; Alice had sent off that poor boy "twice as much in love as ever." Poor fellow ! what a strange conflict was that that raged within him !—all that can make life glorious, give ecstasy to the present and hope to the future, mingled with everything that can throw a gloom over existence, and make it a burden and a task. Must it be ever thus?—must the most exquisite moments of our life, when we have youth and hope and health and energy, be dashed with fears that make us forget all the blessings of our lot, and deem ourselves the most wretched of created beings?

In this feverish alternation he travelled along homeward—now thinking of the great things he could do and dare to win her love, now forth-shadowing the time when all hope should be extinguished, and he should walk the world alone

and forsaken. He went over in memory—who has not done so at one time or other?—all she had said to him at their last meeting, asking what ground there might be for hope in this, what reason for belief in that. With what intense avidity do we seek for the sands of gold in this crushed and crumbled rock! how eagerly do we peer to catch one glittering grain that shall whisper to us of wealth hereafter!

Surely, thought he, Alice is too good and too true-hearted to give me even this much of hope if she meant me to despair. Why should she offer to write to me if she intended that I was to forget her? “I wonder,” muttered he, in his dark spirit of doubt—“I wonder if this be simply the woman’s way of treating a love she deems beneath her?” He had read in some book or other that it is no uncommon thing for those women whose grace and beauty win homage and devotion thus to sport with the affections of their worshippers, and that in this exercise of a cruel power they find an exquisite delight. But Alice was too proud and too high-hearted for such an ignoble pastime. But then he had read too that women sometimes fancy that, by encouraging a devotion they never mean to reward, they tend to elevate men’s thoughts,

ennobling their ambitions, and inspiring them with purer, holier hopes. What if she should mean this, and no more than this? Would not her very hatred be more bearable than such pity? For a while this cruel thought unmanned him, and he sat there like one stunned and powerless.

For some time the road had led between the low furze-clad hills of the country, but now they had gained the summit of a ridge, and there lay beneath them that wild coast-line, broken with crag and promontory towards the sea, and inland swelling and falling in every fanciful undulation, yellow with the furze and the wild broom, but grander for its wide expanse than many a scene of stronger features. How dear to his heart it was! How inexpressibly dear the spot that was interwoven with every incident of his life and every spring of his hope! There the green lanes he used to saunter with Alice—there the breezy downs over which they cantered—yonder the little creek where they had once sheltered from a storm; he could see the rock on which he lit a fire in boyish imitation of a shipwrecked crew! It was of Alice that every crag and cliff, every bay and inlet, spoke.

“And is all that happiness gone for ever?” cried

he, as he stood gazing at the scene. "I wonder," thought he, "could Skeffy read her thoughts and tell me how she feels towards me? I wonder will he ever talk to her of me, and what will they say?" His cheek grew hot and red, and he muttered to himself, "Who knows but it may be in pity?" and with the bitterness of the thought the tears started to his eyes and coursed down his cheeks.

That same book—how it rankled, like a barbed arrow, in his side!—that same book said that men are always wrong in their readings of woman—that they cannot understand the finer, nicer, more subtle springs of her action; and in their coarser appreciation they constantly destroy the interest they would give worlds to create. It was as this thought flashed across his memory the car-driver exclaimed aloud, "Ah, Master Tony, did ever you see as good a pony as yon? he's carried the minister these eighteen years, and look at him, how he jogs along to-day!"

He pointed to a little path in the valley where old Dr Stewart ambled along on his aged palfrey, the long mane and flowing tail of the beast marking him out though nigh half a mile away.

"Why didn't I think of that before?" thought

Tony. "Dolly Stewart is the very one to help me. She has not been bred and brought up like Alice, but she has plenty of keen woman's wit, and she has all a sister's love for me besides. I'll just go and tell her how we parted, and I'll ask her frankly what she says to it."

Cheered by this bright idea, he pursued his way in better spirits, and soon reached the little path which wound off from the highroad through the fields to the Burnside. Not a spot there unassociated with memories, but they were the memories of early boyhood. The clump of white thorns they used to call the Forest, and where they went to hunt wild beasts; the little stream they fancied a great and rapid river, swarming with alligators; the grassy slope, where they had their house, and the tiny garden whose flowers, stuck down at daybreak, were withered before noon!—too faithful emblems of the joys they illustrated!

"Surely," thought he, "no boy had ever such a rare playfellow as Dolly; so ready to take her share in all the rough vicissitudes of a boy's pleasures, and yet to bring to them a sort of storied interest and captivation which no mere boy could ever have contributed. What a little romance the whole was—just because she knew how to

impart the charm of a story to all they did and all they planned!"

It was thus thinking that he entered the cottage. So still was everything that he could hear the scratching noise of a pen as a rapid writer's hand moved over the paper. He peeped cautiously in and saw Dolly seated, writing busily at a table all strewn over with manuscript: an open book, supported by other books, lay before her, at which from time to time she glanced.

Before Tony had advanced a step she turned round and saw him. "Was it not strange, Tony?" said she, and she flushed as she spoke. "I felt that you were there before I saw you; just like long ago, when I always knew where you were hid."

"I was just thinking of that same long ago, Dolly," said he, taking a chair beside her, "as I came up through the fields. There everything is the same as it used to be when we went to seek our fortune across the sandy desert, near the Black Lake."

"No," said she, correcting; "the Black Lake was at the foot of Giant's Rock, beyond the rye field."

"So it was, Dolly; you are right."

“Ah, Master Tony, I suspect I have a better memory of those days than you have. To be sure, I have not had as many things happening in the meanwhile to trouble these memories.”

There was a tone of sadness in her voice, very slight, very faint indeed, but still enough to tinge these few words with melancholy.

“And what is all this writing about?” said he, moving his hands through the papers. “Are you composing a book, Dolly?”

“No,” said she, timidly; “I am only translating a little German story. When I was up in London, I was lucky enough to obtain the insertion of a little fairy tale in a small periodical meant for children, and the editor encouraged me to try and render one of Andersen’s stories; but I am a very sorry German, and, I fear me, a still sorrier prose writer; and so, Tony, the work goes on as slowly as that bridge of ours used long ago. Do you remember, when it was made, we never had the courage to pass over it! Mayhap it will be the same with my poor story, and, when finished, it will remain unread.”

“But why do you encounter such a piece of labour?” said he. “This must have taken a week or more!”

“A month yesterday, my good Tony; and very proud I am, too, that I did it in a month.”

“And for what, in heaven’s name?”

“For three bright sovereigns, Master Tony!” said she, blushing.

“Oh, I didn’t mean that,” said he, in deep shame and confusion. “I meant only, why did you engage on such a hard task.”

“I know you didn’t mean it, Tony; but I was so proud of my success as an author, it would out. Yes,” said she, with a feigned air of importance, “I have just disposed of my copyright; and you know, Tony, Milton did not get a great deal more for ‘Paradise Lost.’ You see,” added she, seriously, “what with poor papa’s age and his loneliness, and my own not over-great strength, I don’t think I shall try (at least not soon) to be a governess again; and it behoves me to be as little as I can of a burden to him; and after thinking of various things, I have settled upon this as the best.”

“What a good girl you are!” said he, and he fixed his eyes full upon her; nor did he know how admiringly till he saw that her face, her forehead, and even her neck, were crimson with shame and confusion.

“There is no such great goodness in doing what is simply one’s duty,” said she, gravely.

“ I don't know that, Dolly.”

“ Come, come, Tony, you never fancied yourself a hero, just because you are willing to earn your bread, and ready to do so by some sacrifice of your tastes and habits.”

The allusion recalled Tony to himself and his own cares, and after a few seconds of deep thought he said, “ I am going to make the venture now, Dolly. I am called away to London by telegraph, and am to leave to-morrow morning.”

“ And are you fully prepared, Tony, for the examination ?”

“ Luckily for me, they do not require it. Some accidental want of people has made them call in all the available fellows at a moment's warning, and in this way I may chance to slip into the service unchallenged.”

“ Nay, but, Tony,” said she, reproachfully, “ you surely could face the examination ?”

“ I could face it just as I could face being shot at, of course, but with the same certainty of being bowled over. Don't you know, Dolly, that I never knew my grammar long ago till you had dinned it into my head ; and as you never come to my assistance now, I know well what my fate would be.”

“ My dear Tony,” said she, “ do get rid once for

all of the habit of underrating your own abilities: as my dear father says, people very easily make self-depreciation a plea of indolence. There, don't look so dreary; I'm not going to moralise in the few last minutes we are to have together. Talk to me about yourself."

"It was for that I came, Dolly," said he, rising and taking a turn or two up and down the room; for in truth he was sorely puzzled how to approach the theme that engaged him. "I want your aid; I want your woman's wit to help me in a difficulty. Here's what it is, Dolly," and he sat down again at her side, and took her hand in his own. "Tell me, Dolly," said he, suddenly, "is it true, as I have read somewhere, that a woman, after having made a man in love with her, will boast that she is not in the least bound to requite his affection if she satisfies herself that she has elevated him in his ambition, given a higher spring to his hope—made him, in fact, something better and nobler than his own un-inspired nature had ever taught him to be? I'm not sure that I have said what I meant to say; but you'll be able to guess what I intend."

"You mean, perhaps, will a woman accept a man's love as a means of serving him without any intention of returning it?"

Perhaps he did not like the fashion in which she put his question, for he did not answer, save by a nod.

“I say yes; such a thing is possible, and might happen readily enough if great difference of station separated them.”

“Do you mean, if one was rich and the other poor?”

“Not exactly; because inequalities of fortune may exist between persons of equal condition.”

“In which case,” said he, hurriedly, “you would not call their stations unequal, would you?”

“That would depend on how far wealth contributed to the habits of the wealthier. Some people are so accustomed to affluence, it is so much the accompaniment of their daily lives, that the world has for them but one aspect.”

“Like our neighbours here, the Lyles, for instance?” said he.

Dolly gave a slight start, like a sudden pang of pain, and grew deadly pale. She drew away her hand at the same time, and passed it across her brow.

“Does your head ache, dear Dolly?” asked he, compassionately.

“Slightly: it is seldom quite free of pain. You have chosen a poor guide, Tony, when there is a

question of the habits of fine folk. None know so little of their ways as I do. But surely you do not need guidance. Surely you are well capable of understanding them in all their moods."

With all her attempts to appear calm and composed, her lips shook and her cheeks trembled as she spoke; and Tony, more struck by her looks than her words, passed his arm round her, and said, in a kind and affectionate voice, "I see you are not well, my own dear Dolly; and that I ought not to come here troubling you about my own selfish cares; but I can never help feeling that it's a sister I speak to."

"Yes, a sister," said she, in a faint whisper—"a sister!"

"And that your brother Tony has the right to come to you for counsel and help."

"So he has," said she, gulping down something like a sob; "but these days, when my head is weary and tired, and when—as to-day, Tony—I am good for nothing—Tell me," said she, hastily, "how does your mother bear your going away? Will she let me come and sit with her often? I hope she will."

"That she will, and be so happy to have you, too; and only think, Dolly, Alice Lyle—Mrs Trafford, I

mean—has offered to come and keep her company sometimes. I hope you'll meet her there: how you'd like her, Dolly!"

Dolly turned away her head, and the tears, against which she had struggled so long, now burst forth, and slowly fell along her cheek.

"You must not fancy, Dolly, that because Alice is rich and great you will like her less. Heaven knows, if humble fortune could separate us, ours might have done so."

"My head is splitting, Tony, dear. It is one of those sudden attacks of pain. Don't be angry if I say Good-bye; there's nothing for it but a dark room, and quiet."

"My poor dear Dolly," said he, pressing her to him, and kissing her twice on the cheek.

"No, no!" cried she, hysterically, as though to something she was answering; and then, dashing away, she rushed from the room, and Tony could hear her door shut and locked as she passed in.

"How changed from what she used to be!" muttered he, as he went his way; "I scarcely can believe she is the same! And, after all, what light has she thrown on the difficulty I put before her? Or was it that I did not place the matter as clearly as I might? Was I too guarded, or was I too

vague? Well, well. I remember the time when, no matter how stupid *I* was, she would soon have found out my meaning! What a dreary thing that life of a governess must be, when it could reduce one so quick of apprehension and so ready-witted as she was to such a state as this! Oh, is she not changed!" And this was the burden of his musings as he wended his way towards home.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SIR ARTHUR ON LIFE AND THE WORLD IN GENERAL.

“HERE it is at last, mother,” said Tony, holding up the “despatch” as he entered the cottage.

“The order for the examination, Tony!” said she, as she turned pale.

“No, but the order to do without it, mother dear!—the order for Anthony Butler to report himself for service, without any other test than his readiness to go wherever they want to send him. It seems that there’s a row somewhere—or several rows—just now. Heaven bless the fellows that got them up, for it gives them no time at the Office to go into any impertinent inquiries as to one’s French, or decimal fractions, or the other qualifications deemed essential to carrying a letter-bag, and so they’ve sent for me to go off to Japan.”

“To Japan, Tony—to Japan?”

“I don’t mean positively to Japan, for Skeffy

says it might be Taganrog, or Timbuctoo, or Tamboff, or some other half-known place. But no matter, mother; it's so much a mile, and something besides per day; and the short and long of it is, I am to show myself on Tuesday, the 9th, at Downing Street, there to be dealt with as the law may direct."

"It's a hasty summons, my poor Tony——"

"It might be worse, mother. What would we say to it if it were, 'Come up and be examined'? I think I'm a good-tempered fellow; but I declare to you frankly, if one of those 'Dons' were to put a question to me that I couldn't answer—and I'm afraid it would not be easy to put any other—I'd find it very hard not to knock him down! I mean, of course, mother, if he did it offensively, with a chuckle over my ignorance, or something that seemed to say, 'There's a blockhead, if ever there was one!' I know I couldn't help it!"

"Oh, Tony, Tony!" said she, deprecatingly.

"Yes, it's all very well to say Tony, Tony; but here's how it is. It would be 'all up' with me. It would be by that time decided that I was good for nothing, and to be turned back. The moment would be a triumphant one for the fellow that 'plucked' me—it always is, I'm told—but I'll be shot if it should be all triumph to him!"

“I won't believe this of you, Tony,” said she, gravely. “It's not like your father, sir!”

“Then I'd not do it, mother—at least if I could help it,” said he, growing very red. “I say, mother, is it too late to go up to the Abbey and bid Sir Arthur good-bye? Alice asked me to do it, and I promised her.”

“Well, Tony, I don't know how you feel about these things now, but there was a time that you never thought much what hour of the day or night it was when you went there.”

“It used to be so!” said he, thoughtfully; and then added, “but I'll go, at all events, mother; but I'll not be long away, for I must have a talk with you before bedtime.”

“I have a note written to Sir Arthur here; will you just give it to him, Tony, or leave it for him when you're coming away, for it wants no answer?”

“All right, mother; don't take tea till I come back, and I'll do my best to come soon.”

It was a well-worn path that led from the cottage to Lyle Abbey. There was not an hour of day or night Tony had not travelled it; and as he went now, thoughts of all these long-agos would crowd on his memory, making him ask himself, Was there ever any one had so much happiness as I

had in those days? Is it possible that my life to come will ever replace to me such enjoyment as that?

He was not a very imaginative youth, but he had that amount of the quality that suffices for small castle-building; and he went on, as he walked, picturing to himself what would be the boon he would ask from Fortune if some benevolent fairy were to start out from the tall ferns and grant him his wish. Would it be to be rich and titled and great, so that he might propose to make Alice his wife without any semblance of inordinate pretension? or would it not be to remain as he was, poor and humble in condition, and that Alice should be in a rank like his own, living in a cottage like Dolly Stewart, with little household cares to look after?

It was a strange labyrinth these thoughts led him into, and he soon lost his way completely, unable to satisfy himself whether Alice might not lose in fascination when no longer surrounded by all the splendid appliances of that high station she adorned, or whether her native gracefulness would not be far more attractive when her life became ennobled by duties. A continual comparison of Alice and Dolly would rise to his mind; nothing could be less alike, and yet there they were, in incessant juxtaposition;

and while he pictured Alice in the humble manse of the minister, beautiful as he had ever seen her, he wondered whether she would be able to subdue her proud spirit to such lowly ways, and make of that thatched cabin the happy home that Dolly had made it. His experiences of life were not very large, but one lesson they had certainly taught him—it was, to recognise in persons of condition, when well brought up, a great spirit of accommodation. In the varied company of Sir Arthur's house he had constantly found that no one submitted with a better grace to accidental hardships than he whose station had usually elevated him above the risks of their occurrence, and that in the chance roughings of a sportsman life it was the born gentleman—Sybarite it might be at times—whose temper best sustained him in all difficulties, and whose gallant spirit bore him most triumphantly over the crosses and cares that beset him. It might not be a very logical induction that led him to apply this reasoning to Alice, but he did so, and in so doing he felt very little how the time went over, till he found himself on the terrace at Lyle Abbey.

Led on by old habit, he passed in without ringing the bell, and was already on his way to the drawing-room when he met Hailes the butler.

In the midst of a shower of rejoicings at seeing him again—for he was a great favourite with the household—Hailes hastened to show him into the dining-room, where, dinner over, Sir Arthur sat in an easy-chair at the fire, alone, and sound asleep. Roused by the noise of the opening door, Sir Arthur started and looked up; nor was he indeed very full awake while Tony blundered out his excuses for disturbing him.

“My dear Tony, not a word of this. It is a real pleasure to see you. I was taking a nap, just because I had nothing better to do. We are all alone here now, and the place feels strange enough in the solitude. Mark gone—the girls away—and no one left but Lady Lyle and myself. There’s your old friend; that’s some of the ’32 claret; fill your glass, and tell me that you are come to pass some days with us.”

“I wish I was, sir; but I have come to say good-bye. I’m off to-morrow for London.”

“For London! What! another freak, Tony?”

“Scarcely a freak, sir,” said he, smiling. “They’ve telegraphed to me to come up and report myself for service at the Foreign Office.”

“As a Minister, eh?”

“No, sir; a Messenger.”

“An excellent thing, too; a capital thing. A man must begin somewhere, you know. Every one is not as lucky as I was, to start with close on twelve hundred a-year. I wasn't twenty when I landed at Calcutta, Tony—a mere boy!” Here the baronet filled his glass, and drank it off with a solemnity that seemed as if it were a silent toast to his own health, for in his own estimation he merited that honour, very few men having done more for themselves than he had; not that he had not been over-grateful, however, to the fortune of his early days in this boastful acknowledgment, since it was in the humble capacity of an admiral's secretary—they called them clerks in those days—he had first found himself in the Indian Ocean, a mere accident leading to his appointment on shore and all his subsequent good fortune. “Yes, Tony,” continued he, “I started at what one calls a high rung of the ladder. It was then I first saw your father; he was about the same age as you are now. He was on Lord Dollington's staff. Dear me, dear me! it seems like yesterday;” and he closed his eyes, and seemed lost in reverie; but if he really felt it like yesterday, he would have remembered how insolently the superb aide-de-camp treated the meek civilian of the period, and how immeasurably above

Mr Lyle of those days stood the haughty Captain Butler of the Governor-General's staff.

“The soldiers used to fancy they had the best of it, Tony; but, I take it, we civilians won the race at last;” and his eyes ranged over the vast room, with the walls covered by pictures, and the side-board loaded with massive plate, while the array of decanters on the small spider-table beside him suggested largely of good living.

“A very old friend of mine, Jos. Hughes—he was salt assessor at Bussorabad—once remarked to me, ‘Lyle,’ said he, ‘a man must make his choice in life, whether he prefers a brilliant start or a good finish, for he cannot have both.’ Take your pleasure when young, and you must consent to work when old; but if you set out vigorously, determined to labour hard in early life, when you come to my age, Tony, you may be able to enjoy your rest”—and here he waved his hand round, as though to show the room in which they sat—“to enjoy your rest, not without dignity.”

Tony was an attentive listener, and Sir Arthur was flattered, and went on. “I am sincerely glad to have the opportunity of these few moments with you. I am an old pilot, so to say, on the sea you are about to adventure upon; and really, the great

difficulty young fellows have in life is, that the men who know the whole thing from end to end will not be honest in giving their experiences. There is a certain 'snobbery'—I have no other word for it—that prevents their confessing to small beginnings. They don't like telling how humble they were at the start; and what is the consequence? The value of the whole lesson is lost! Now, I have no such scruples, Tony. Good family connections and relatives of influence I had; I cannot deny it. I suppose there are scores of men would have coolly sat down and said to their right honourable cousin or their noble uncle, 'Help me to this—get me that;' but such was not my mode of procedure. No, sir; I resolved to be my own patron, and I went to India."

When Sir Arthur said this, he looked as though his words were: "I volunteered to lead the assault. It was I that was first up the breach. But, after all, Tony, I can't get the boys to believe this." Now these boys were his three sons, two of them middle-aged, white-headed, liverless men in Upper India, and the third that gay dragoon with whom we have had some slight acquaintance.

"I have always said to the boys, 'Don't lie down on your high relations.'" Had he added that they

would have found them a most uncomfortable bed, he would not have been beyond the truth. "Do as I did, and see how gladly, ay, and how proudly, they will recognise you. I say the same to you, Tony. You have, I am told, some family connections that might be turned to account?"

"None, sir; not one," broke in Tony, boldly.

"Well, there is that Sir Omerod Butler. I don't suspect he is a man of much actual influence. He is, I take it, a bygone."

"I know nothing of him; nor do I want to know anything of him," said Tony, pushing his glass from him, and looking as though the conversation were one he would gladly change for any other topic; but it was not so easy to tear Sir Arthur from such a theme, and he went on.

"It would not do for you, perhaps, to make any advances towards him."

"I should like to see myself!" said Tony, half choking with angry impatience.

"I repeat, it would not do for *you* to take this step; but if you had a friend—a man of rank and station—one whose position your uncle could not but acknowledge as at least the equal of his own——"

"He could be no friend of mine who should

open any negotiations on my part with a relation who has treated my mother so uncourteously, sir."

"I think you are under a mistake, Tony. Mrs Butler told me that it was rather her own fault than Sir Omerod's that some sort of reconciliation was not effected. Indeed, she once showed me a letter from your uncle when she was in trouble about those Canadian bonds."

"Yes, yes, I know it all," said Tony, rising, as if all his patience was at last exhausted. "I have read the letter you speak of; he offered to lend her five or six hundred pounds, or to give it, I forget which; and he was to take *me*"—here he burst into a fit of laughter that was almost hysterical in its harsh mockery—"to take *me*. I don't know what he was to do with me, for I believe he has turned Papist, Jesuit, or what not; perhaps I was to have been made a priest, or a friar; at all events, I was to have been brought up dependent on his bounty—a bad scheme for each of us. He would not have been very proud of his protégé; and, if I know myself, I don't think I'd have been very grateful to my protector. My dear mother, however, had too much of the mother in her to listen to it, and she told him so, perhaps too plainly for his

refined notions in matters of phraseology ; for he frumped and wrote no more to us."

"Which is exactly the reason why a friend, speaking from the eminence which a certain station confers, might be able to place matters on a better and more profitable footing."

"Not with *my* consent, sir, depend upon it," said Tony, fiercely.

"My dear Tony, there is a vulgar adage about the impolicy of quarrelling with one's bread-and-butter ; but how far more reprehensible would it be to quarrel with the face of the man who cuts it?"

It is just possible that Sir Arthur was as much mystified by his own illustration as was Tony, for each continued for some minutes to look at the other in a state of hopeless bewilderment. The thought of one mystery, however, recalled another, and Tony remembered his mother's note.

"By the way, sir, I have a letter here for you from my mother," said he, producing it.

Sir Arthur put on his spectacles leisurely, and began to peruse it. It seemed very brief, for in an instant he had returned it to his pocket. "I conclude you know nothing of the contents of this?" said he, quietly.

"Nothing whatever."

“It is of no consequence. You may simply tell Mrs Butler from me that I will call on her by an early day; and now, won't you come and have a cup of tea? Lady Lyle will expect to see you in the drawing-room.”

Tony would have refused, if he knew how; even in his old days he had been less on terms of intimacy with Lady Lyle than any others of the family, and she had at times a sort of dignified stateliness in her manner that checked him greatly.

“Here's Tony Butler come to take a cup of tea with you, and say good-bye,” said Sir Arthur, as he led him into the drawing-room.

“Oh, indeed! I am too happy to see him,” said she, laying down her book; while, with a very chilly smile, she added, “And where is Mr Butler bound for this time?” And simple as the words were, she contrived to impart to them a meaning as though she had said, “What new scheme or project has he now? What wild-goose chase is he at present engaged in?”

Sir Arthur came quickly to the rescue, as he said, “He's going to take up an appointment under the Crown; and, like a good and prudent lad, to earn his bread, and do something towards his mother's comfort.”

"I think you never take sugar," said she, smiling faintly; "and for a while you made a convert of Alice."

Was there ever a more commonplace remark? and yet it sent the blood to poor Tony's face and temples, and overwhelmed him with confusion. "You know that the girls are both away?"

"It's a capital thing they've given him," said Sir Arthur, trying to extract from his wife even the semblance of an interest in the young fellow's career.

"What is it?" asked she.

"How do they call you? are you a Queen's messenger, or a Queen's courier, or a Foreign Office messenger?"

"I'm not quite sure. I believe we are messengers, but whose I don't remember."

"They have the charge of all the despatches to the various embassies and legations in every part of the world," said Sir Arthur, pompously.

"How addling it must be—how confusing."

"Why so? You don't imagine that they have to retain them, and report them orally, do you?"

"Well, I'm afraid I did," said she, with a little simper that seemed to say, What did it signify either way?

"They'd have made a most unlucky selection in

my case," said Tony, laughing, "if such had been the duty."

"Do you think you shall like it?"

"I suppose I shall. There is so very little I'm really fit for, that I look on this appointment as a piece of rare luck.

"I fancy I'd rather have gone into the army—a cavalry regiment, for instance."

"The most wasteful and extravagant career a young fellow could select," said Sir Arthur, smarting under some recent and not over-pleasant experiences.

"The uniform is so becoming, too," said she, languidly.

"It is far and away beyond any pretension of my humble fortune, madam," said Tony, proudly, for there was an impertinent carelessness in her manner that stung him to the quick.

"Ah, yes," sighed she; "and the army, too, is not the profession for one who wants to marry."

Tony again felt his cheek on fire, but he did not utter a word as she went on, "And report says something like this of you, Mr Butler."

"What, Tony! how is this? I never heard of it before," cried Sir Arthur.

"Nor I, sir."

"Come, come. It is very indiscreet of me, I

know," said Lady Lyle; "but as we are in such a secret committee here at this moment, I fancied I might venture to offer my congratulations."

"Congratulations! on what would be the lad's ruin! Why, it would be downright insanity. I trust there is not a word of truth in it."

"I repeat, sir, that I hear it all for the first time."

"I conclude, then, I must have been misinformed."

"Might I be bold enough to ask from what quarter the rumour reached you, or with whom they mated me?"

"Oh, as to your choice, I hear she is a very nice girl indeed, admirably brought up and well educated—everything but rich; but of course that fact was well known to you. Men in her father's position are seldom affluent."

"And who could possibly have taken the trouble to weave all this romance about me?" said Tony, flushing not the less deeply that he suspected it was Dolly Stewart who was indicated by the description.

"One of the girls, I forget which, told me. Where she learned it, I forget, if I ever knew; but I remember that the story had a sort of completeness about it that looked like truth." Was it accident

or intention that made Lady Lyle fix her eyes steadily on Tony as she spoke? As she did so, his colour, at first crimson, gave way to an ashy paleness, and he seemed like one about to faint. "After all," said she, "perhaps it was a mere flirtation that people magnified into marriage."

"It was not even that," gasped he out, hoarsely. "I am overstaying my time, and my mother will be waiting tea for me," muttered he; and with some scarcely intelligible attempts at begging to be remembered to Alice and Bella, he took his leave, and hurried away.

While Tony, with a heart almost bursting with agony, wended his way towards home, Lady Lyle resumed her novel, and Sir Arthur took up the 'Times.' After about half an hour's reading he laid down the paper, and said, "I hope there is no truth in that story about young Butler."

"Not a word of it," said she, dryly.

"Not a word of it! but I thought you believed it."

"Nothing of the kind. It was a lesson the young gentleman has long needed, and I was only waiting for a good opportunity to give it."

"I don't understand you. What do you mean by a lesson?"

“I have very long suspected that it was a great piece of imprudence on our part to encourage the intimacy of this young man here, and to give him that position of familiarity which he obtained amongst us; but I trusted implicitly to the immeasurable distance that separated him from our girls, to secure us against danger. That clever man of the world, Mr Maitland, however, showed me I was wrong. He was not a week here till he saw enough to induce him to give me a warning; and though at first he thought it was Bella’s favour he aspired to, he afterwards perceived it was to Alice he directed his attentions.”

“I can’t believe this possible. Tony would never dare such a piece of presumption.”

“You forget two things, Sir Arthur. This young fellow fancies that his good birth makes him the equal of any one; and, secondly, Alice, in her sense of independence, is exactly the girl to do a folly, and imagine it to be heroic; so Maitland himself said to me, and it was perfectly miraculous how well he read her whole nature. And indeed it was he who suggested to me to charge Tony Butler with being engaged to the minister’s daughter, and told me—and, as I saw, with truth—how thoroughly it would test his suspicions about him. I thought he

was going to faint—he really swayed back and forwards when I said that it was one of the girls from whom I had the story.”

“If I could only believe this, he should never cross the threshold again. Such insolence is, however, incredible.”

“That’s a man’s way of regarding it; and however you sneer at our credulity, it enables us to see scores of things that your obstinacy is blind to. I am sincerely glad he is going away.”

“So am I—now; and I trust, in my heart, we have seen the last of him.”

“How tired you look, my poor Tony!” said his mother, as he entered the cottage and threw himself heavily and wearily into a chair.

“I *am* tired, mother—very tired and jaded.”

“I wondered what kept you so long, Tony; for I had time to pack your trunk, and to put away all your things; and when it was done and finished, to sit down and sorrow over your going away. Oh, Tony dear, aren’t we ungrateful creatures, when we rise up in rebellion against the very mercies that are vouchsafed us, and say, Why was my prayer granted me? I am sure it was many and many a night, as I knelt down, I begged the Lord would send you some calling or other, that you might find

means of an honest living, and a line of life that wouldn't disgrace the stock you came from; and now that He has graciously heard me, here I am repining and complaining just as if it wasn't my own supplication that was listened to."

Perhaps Tony was not in a humour to discuss a nice question of ethical meaning, for he abruptly said, "Sir Arthur Lyle read your note over, and said he'd call one of these days and see you. I suppose he meant with the answer."

"There was no answer, Tony; the matter was just this—I wanted a trifle of an advance from the bank, just to give you a little money when you'd have to go away; and Tom M'Elwain, the new manager, not knowing me perhaps, referred the matter to Sir Arthur, which was not what I wished or intended, and so I wrote and said so. Perhaps I said so a little too curtly, as if I was too proud, or the like, to accept a favour at Sir Arthur's hands; for he wrote me a very beautiful letter—it went home to my heart—about his knowing your father long ago, when they were both lads, and had the wide world before them; and alluding very touchingly to the Lord's bounties to himself—blessing him with a full garner."

“I hope you accepted nothing from him,” broke in Tony, roughly.

“No, Tony; for it happened that James Hewson, the apothecary, had a hundred pounds that he wanted to lay out on a safe mortgage, and so I took it, at six per cent, and gave him over the deeds of the little place here.”

“For a hundred pounds! Why, it’s worth twelve hundred at least, mother!”

“What a boy it is!” said she, laughing. “I merely gave him his right to claim the one hundred that he advanced, Tony dear; and my note to Sir Arthur was to ask him to have the bond, or whatever it is called, rightly drawn up and witnessed, and at the same time to thank him heartily for his own kind readiness to serve me.”

“I hate a mortgage, mother. I don’t feel as if the place was our own any longer.”

“Your father’s own words, eighteen years ago, when he drew all the money he had out of the agent’s hands, and paid off the debt on this little spot here. ‘Nelly,’ said he, ‘I can look out of the window now, and not be afraid of seeing a man coming up the road to ask for his interest.’”

“It’s the very first thing I’ll try to do, is to pay

off that debt, mother. Who knows but I may be able, before the year is over! But I am glad you didn't take it from Sir Arthur."

"You're as proud as your father, Tony," said she, with her eyes full of tears; "take care that you're as good as he was, too."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A CORNER IN DOWNING STREET.

WHEN Tony Butler found himself inside of the swinging glass-door at Downing Street, and in presence of the august Mr Willis, the porter, it seemed as if all the interval since he had last stood in the same place had been a dream. The head-porter looked up from his 'Times,' and with a severity that showed he had neither forgotten nor forgiven, said, "Messengers' room — first pair — corridor — third door on the left." There was an unmistakable dignity in the manner of the speaker which served to show Tony not merely that his former offence remained unpardoned, but that his entrance into public life had not awed or impressed in any way the stern official.

Tony passed on, mounted the stairs, and sauntered along a very ill-kept corridor, not fully certain whether it was the third, fourth, or fifth door he

was in search of, or on what hand. After about half an hour passed in the hope of seeing one to direct him, he made bold to knock gently at a door. To his repeated summons no answer was returned, and he tried another, when a shrill voice cried "Come in." He entered, and saw a slight, sickly-looking youth, very elaborately dressed, seated at a table writing. The room was a large one, very dirty, ill-furnished, and disorderly.

"Well, what is it?" asked the young gentleman, without lifting his head or his eyes from the desk.

"Could you tell me," said Tony, courteously, "where I ought to go? I'm Butler, an extra messenger, and I have been summoned to attend and report here this morning."

"All right; we want you," said the other, still writing; "wait an instant." So saying, he wrote on for several minutes at a rapid pace, muttering the words as his pen traced them; at last he finished, and, descending from his high seat, passed across the room, opened a door which led into another room, and called out,

"The messenger come, sir!"

"Who is he?" shouted a very harsh voice.

"First for Madrid, sir," said the youth, examining a slip of paper he had just taken from his pocket.

“His name?” shouted out the other again.

“Poynder, sir.”

“I beg your pardon,” suggested Tony, mildly.

“I’m Butler, not Poynder.”

“Who’s talking out there—what’s that uproar?” screamed the voice, very angrily.

“He says he’s not for Madrid, sir. It’s a mistake,” cried the youth.

“No; you misunderstand me,” whispered Tony.

“I only said I was not Poynder.”

“He says he’s in Poynder’s place.”

“I’ll stop this system of substitutes!” cried the voice. “Send him in here.”

“Go in there,” said the youth, with a gesture of his thumb, and his face at the same time wore an expression which said as plain as any words could have spoken, “And you’ll see how you like it.”

As Tony entered, he found himself standing face to face to the awful official, Mr Brand, the same who had reported to the Minister his intended assault on Willis the porter. “Aw! what’s all this about?” said Mr Brand, pompously. “You are Mr—Mr——”

“Mr Butler,” said Tony, quietly, but with an air of determination.

“And instead of reporting yourself, you come here to say that you have exchanged with Poynder.”

“I never heard of Poynder till three minutes ago.”

“You want, however, to take his journey, sir. You call yourself first for Madrid?”

“I do nothing of the kind. I have come here because I got a telegram two days ago. I know nothing of Poynder, and just as little about Madrid.”

“Oh—aw! you’re Butler! I remember all about you now; there is such a swarm of extras appointed, that it’s impossible to remember names or faces. You’re the young gentleman who—who; yes, yes, I remember it all; but have you passed the civil-service examiners?”

“No; I was preparing for the examination when I received that message, and came off at once.”

“Well, you’ll present yourself at Burlington House. Mr Blount will make out the order for you; you can go up the latter end of this week, and we shall want you immediately.”

“But I am not ready. I was reading for this examination when your telegram came, and I set off at the instant.”

“Blount, Mr Blount!” screamed out the other, angrily; and as the affrighted youth presented himself, all pale and trembling, he went on, “What’s the meaning of this, sir? You first attempt to pass

this person off for Poynder ; and when that scheme fails, you endeavour to slip him into the service without warrant or qualification. He tells me himself he knows nothing."

"Very little, certainly, but I don't remember telling you so," said Tony.

"And do you imagine, sir, that a bravado about your ignorance is the sure road to advancement? I can tell you, young gentleman, that the days of mighty patronage are gone by ; the public require to be served by competent officials. We are not in the era of Castlereaghs and Vansittarts. If you can satisfy the Commissioners, you may come back here ; if you cannot, you may go back to—to whatever life you were leading before, and were probably most fit for. As for you, Mr Blount, I told you before that on the first occasion of your attempting to exercise here that talent for intrigue on which you pride yourself, and of which Mr Vance told me you were a proficient, I should report you. I now say, sir—and bear in mind I say so openly, and to yourself, and in presence of your friend here—I shall do so this day."

"May I explain, sir?"

"You may not, sir—withdraw!" The wave of the hand that accompanied this order evidently

included Tony, but he held his ground undismayed, while the other fell back, overwhelmed with shame and confusion.

Not deigning to be aware of Tony's continued presence in the room, Mr Brand again addressed himself to his writing materials, when a green-cloth door at the back of the room opened, and Mr Vance entered, and, advancing to where the other sat, leaned over his chair and whispered some words in his ear. "You'll find I'm right," muttered he as he finished.

"And where's the Office to go to?" burst out the other, in a tone of ill-repressed passion—"will you just tell me that? Where's the Office to go—if this continues?"

"That's neither your affair nor mine," whispered Vance. "These sort of things were done before we were born, and they will be done after we're in our graves!"

"And is he to walk in here, and say, 'I'm first for service; I don't care whether you like it or not'?"

"He's listening to you all this while—are you aware of that?" whispered Vance; on which the other grew very red in the face, took off his spectacles, wiped and replaced them, and then, addressing Tony, said, "Go away, sir—leave the Office."

“Mr Brand means that you need not wait,” said Vance, approaching Tony. “All you have to do is to leave your town address here, in the outer office, and come up once or twice a-day.”

“And as to this examination,” said Tony, stoutly, “it’s better I should say once for all——”

“It’s better you should just say nothing at all,” said the other, good-humouredly, as he slipped his arm inside of Tony’s and led him away. “You see,” whispered he, “my friend Mr Brand is hasty.”

“I should think he *is* hasty!” growled out Tony.

“But he is a warm-hearted—a truly warm-hearted man——”

“Warm enough he seems.”

“When you know him better——”

“I don’t want to know him better!” burst in Tony. “I got into a scrape already with just such another: he was collector for the port of Derry, and I threw him out of the window, and all the blame was laid upon me!”

“Well, that certainly was hard,” said Vance, with a droll twinkle of his eye—“I call that very hard.”

“So do I, after the language he used to me, saying all the while, I’m no duellist—I’m not for a saw-pit, with coffee and pistols for two, and all that vulgar slang about murder and suchlike.”

“And was he much hurt?”

“No; not much. It was only his collar-bone and one rib, I think—I forget now—for I had to go over to Skye, and stay there a good part of the summer.”

“Mr Blount, take down this gentleman’s address, and show him where he is to wait; and don’t——” here he lowered his voice, so that the remainder of his speech was inaudible to Tony.

“Not if I can help it, sir,” replied Blount; “but if you knew how hard it is!”

There was something almost piteous in the youth’s face as he spoke; and indeed Vance seemed moved to a certain degree of compassion as he said, “Well, well, do your best—do your best—none can do more.”

“It’s two o’clock. I’ll go out and have a cigar with you, if you don’t mind,” said Blount to Tony. “We’re quite close to the Park here; and a little fresh air will do me good.”

“Come along,” said Tony, who, out of compassion, had already a sort of half-liking for the much-suffering young fellow.

“I wish Skeffy was here,” said Tony, as they went down-stairs.

“Do you know Skeff Damer, then?”

“Know him! I believe he’s about the fellow I like best in the world.”

“So do I,” cried the other, warmly; “he hasn’t his equal living—he’s the best-hearted and he’s the cleverest fellow I ever met.”

And now they both set to, as really only young friends ever do, to extol a loved one with that heartiness that neither knows limit nor measure. What a good fellow he was—how much of this, without the least of that—how unspoiled too in the midst of the flattery he met with! “If you just saw him as I did a few days back,” said Tony, calling up in memory Skeffy’s hearty enjoyment of their humble cottage-life.

“If you but knew how they think of him in the Office,” said Blount, whose voice actually trembled as he touched on the holy of holies.

“Confound the Office!” cried Tony. “Yes; don’t look shocked. I hate that dreary old house, and I detest the grim old fellows inside of it.”

“They’re severe, certainly,” muttered the other, in a deprecatory tone.

“Severe isn’t the name for it. They insult—they outrage—that’s what they do. I take it that you

and the other young fellows here are gentlemen, and I ask, Why do you bear it—why do you put up with it? Perhaps you like it, however.”

“No; we don’t like it,” said he, with an honest simplicity.

“Then, I ask again, why do you stand it?”

“I believe we stand it just because we can’t help it.”

“Can’t help it!”

“What *could* we do? What would *you* do?” asked Blount.

“I’d go straight at the first man that insulted me, and say, Retract that, or I’ll pitch you over the banisters.”

“That’s all very fine with you fellows who have great connections and powerful relatives ready to stand by you and pull you out of any scrape, and then, if the worst comes, have means enough to live without work. That will do very well for you and Skeffy. Skeffy will have six thousand a-year one of these days. No one can keep him out of Digby Damer’s estate; and you, for aught I know, may have more.”

“I haven’t sixpence, nor the expectation of sixpence in the world. If I am plucked at this examination I may go and enlist, or turn navvy, or

go and sweep away the dead leaves like that fellow yonder."

"Then take my advice, and don't go up."

"Go up, where?"

"Don't go up to be examined; just wait here in town; don't show too often at the Office, but come up of a morning about twelve—I'm generally down here by that time. There will be a great press for messengers soon, for they have made a regulation about one going only so far, and another taking up his bag and handing it on to a third; and the consequence is, there are three now stuck fast at Marseilles, and two at Belgrade, and all the Constantinople despatches have gone round by the Cape. Of course, as I say, they'll have to alter this, and then we shall suddenly want every fellow we can lay hands on; so all you have to do is just to be ready, and I'll take care to start you at the first chance."

"You're a good fellow," cried Tony, grasping his hand; "if you only knew what a bad swimmer it was you picked out of the water."

"Oh, I can do that much at least," said he, modestly, "though I'm not a clever fellow like Skeffy; but I must go back, or I shall 'catch it.' Look in the day after to-morrow."

“And let us dine together; that is, you will dine with me,” said Tony. The other acceded freely, and they parted.

That magnetism by which young fellows are drawn instantaneously towards each other, and feel something that, if not friendship, is closely akin to it, never repeats itself in after life. We grow more cautious about our contracts as we grow older. I wonder do we make better bargains?

If Tony was then somewhat discouraged by his reception at the Office, he had the pleasure of thinking he was compensated in that new-found friend who was so fond of Skeffy, and who could talk away as enthusiastically about him as himself. “Now for M’Gruder and Canon Row, wherever that may be,” said he, as he sauntered along; “I’ll certainly go and see him, if only to shake hands with a fellow that showed such ‘good blood.’” There was no one quality which Tony could prize higher than this. The man who could take a thrashing in good part, and forgive him who gave it, must be a fine fellow, he thought; and I’m not disposed to say he was wrong.

The address was 27 Canon Street, City; and it was a long way off, and the day somewhat spent when he reached it.

“Mr M’Gruder?” asked Tony, of a bleary-eyed man, at a small faded desk in a narrow office.

“Inside!” said he, with a jerk of his thumb; and Tony pushed his way into a small room, so crammed with reams of paper that there was barely space to squeeze a passage to a little writing-table next the window.

“Well, sir, your pleasure,” said M’Gruder, as Tony came forward.

“You forget me, I see; my name is Butler.”

“Eh! what! I ought not to forget you,” said he, rising, and grasping the other’s hand warmly; “how are you? when did you come up to town? You see the eye is all right; it was a bit swollen for more than a fortnight, though. Hech sirs! but you have hard knuckles of your own.”

It was not easy to apologise for the rough treatment he had inflicted, and Tony blundered and stammered in his attempts to do so; but M’Gruder laughed it all off with perfect good-humour, and said, “My wife will forgive you too, one of these days, but not just yet; and so we’ll go and have a bit o’ dinner our two selves down the river. Are you free to-day?”

Tony was quite free and ready to go anywhere; and so away they went, at first by river steamer

and then by a cab, and then across some low-lying fields to a small solitary house close to the Thames —“Shads, chops, and fried-fish house,” over the door, and a pleasant odour of each around the premises.

“Ain’t we snug here? no tracking a man this far,” said M’Gruder, as he squeezed into a bench behind a fixed table in a very small room. “I never heard of the woman that ran her husband to earth down here.”

That this same sense of security had a certain value in M’Gruder’s estimation was evident, for he more than once recurred to the sentiment as they sat at dinner.

The tavern was a rare place for “hollands,” as M’Gruder said; and they sat over a peculiar brew for which the house was famed, but of which Tony’s next day’s experiences do not encourage me to give the receipt to my readers. The cigars, too, albeit innocent of duty, might have been better; but all these, like some other pleasures we know of, only were associated with sorrow in the future. Indeed, in the cordial freedom that bound them they thought very little of either. They had grown to be very confidential; and M’Gruder, after inquiring what Tony proposed to himself by way of a

livelihood, gave him a brief sketch of his own rise from very humble beginnings to a condition of reasonably fair comfort and sufficiency.

“I’m in rags, ye see, Mr Butler,” said he; “my father was in rags before me.”

“In rags!” cried Tony, looking at the stout sleek broadcloth beside him.

“I mean,” said the other, “I’m in the rag trade, and we supply the paper-mills; and that’s why my brother Sam lives away in Italy. Italy is a rare place for rags—I take it they must have no other wear, for the supply is inexhaustible—and so Sam lives in a seaport they call Leghorn; and the reason I speak of it to you is, that if this messenger trade breaks down under you, or that ye’d not like it, there’s Sam there would be ready and willing to lend you a hand; he’d like a fellow o’ your stamp, that would go down amongst the wild places on the coast, and care little about the wild people that live in them. Mayhap this would be beneath you, though?” said he, after a moment’s pause.

“I’m above nothing at this moment except being dependent; I don’t want to burden my mother.”

“Dolly told us about your fine relations, and the high and mighty folk ye belong to.”

“Ay, but they don’t belong to me—there’s the difference,” said Tony, laughing; then added, in a more thoughtful tone, “I never suspected that Dolly spoke of me.”

“That she did, and very often too. Indeed I may say that she talked of very little else. It was Tony this and Tony that; and Tony went here and Tony went there; till one day Sam could bear it no longer—for you see Sam was mad in love with her, and said over and over again that he never met her equal. Sam says to me, ‘Bob,’ says he, ‘I can’t bear it any more.’ ‘What is it,’ says I, ‘that you can’t bear?’—for I thought it was something about the drawback duty on mixed rags he was meaning. But no, sirs; it was that he was wild wi’ jealousy, and couldn’t bear her to be a-talkin’ about you. ‘I think,’ says he, ‘if I could meet that same Tony, I’d crack his neck for him.’”

“That was civil, certainly!” said Tony, dryly.

“‘And as I can’t do that, I’ll just go and ask her what she means by it all, and if Tony’s her sweetheart?’”

“He did not do that!” cried Tony, half angrily.

“Yes, but he did, though; and what for no? You wouldn’t have a man lose his time pricing a bale of goods when another had bought them? If

she was in treaty with you, Mr Butler, where was the use of Sam spending the day trying to catch a word wi' her? So, to settle the matter at once, he overtook her one morning going to early meeting with the children, and he had it out."

"Well, well?" asked Tony, eagerly.

"Well, she told him there never was anything like love between herself and you; that you were aye like brother and sister; that you knew each other from the time you could speak; that of all the wide world she did not know any one so well as you; and then she began to cry, and cried so bitterly that she had to turn back home again, and go to her room as if she was taken ill; and that's the way Mrs M'Gruder came to know what Sam was intending. She never suspected it before; but, heh sirs! if she didn't open a broadside on every one of us! And the upshot was, Dolly was packed off home to her father; Sam went back to Leghorn; and there's Sally and Maggie going back in everything ever they learned—for it ain't every day you pick up a lass like that for eighteen pound a-year and her washing."

"But did he ask her to marry him?" cried Tony.

"He did. He wrote a letter—a very good and sensible letter, too—to her father. He told him

that he was only a junior, with a small share, but that he had saved enough to furnish a house, and that he hoped, with industry and care and thrifty ways, he would be able to maintain a wife decently and well; and he referred to Dr Forbes of Auchterlonie for a character of him; and I backed it myself, saying, in the name of the house, it was true and correct."

"What answer came to this?"

"A letter from the minister, saying that the lassie was poorly, and in so delicate a state of health, it would be better not to agitate her by any mention of this kind for the present; meanwhile he would take up his information from Dr Forbes, whom he knew well; and if the reply satisfied him he'd write again to us in the course of a week or two; and Sam's just waiting patiently for his answer, and doing his best, in the meanwhile, to prepare, in case it's a favourable one."

Tony fell into a reverie. That story of a man in love with one it might never be his destiny to win, had its own deep significance for him. Was there any grief, was there any misery, to compare with it? And although Sam M'Gruder, the junior partner in the rag trade, was not a very romantic sort of character, yet did he feel an intense sympathy for him.

They were both sufferers from the same malady—albeit Sam's attack was from a very mild form of the complaint.

“ You must give me a letter to your brother,” said he at length. “ Some day or other I'm sure to be in Italy, and I'd like to know him.”

“ Ay, and he'd like to know *you*, now that he ain't jealous of you. The last thing he said to me at parting was, ‘ If ever I meet that Tony Butler I'll give him the best bottle of wine in my cellar.’ ”

“ When you write to him next, say that I'm just as eager to take *him* by the hand, mind that. The man that's like to be a good husband to Dolly Stewart is sure to be a brother to *me*.”

And they went back to town, talking little by the way, for each was thoughtful—M'Gruder thinking much over all they had been saying, Tony full of the future, yet not able to exclude the past.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MR BUTLER FOR DUTY ON —.

“ I SUPPOSE M'Gruder's right,” muttered Tony, as he sauntered away drearily from the door at Downing Street, one day in the second week after his arrival in London. “ A man gets to feel very like a 'flunkey,' coming up in this fashion each morning 'for orders.' I am more than half-disposed to close with his offer and go 'into rags' at once.”

If he hesitated, he assured himself, very confidently too, that it was not from the name or nature of the commercial operation. He had no objection to trade in rags any more than in hides, or tallow, or oakum, and some gum which did not “ breathe of Araby the blest.” He was sure that it could not possibly affect his choice, and that rags were just as legitimate and just as elevating a speculation as sherry from Cadiz or silk from China. He was ingenious enough in his self-discussions; but, somehow,

though he thought he could tell his mother frankly and honestly the new trade he was about to embark in, for the life of him he could not summon courage to make the communication to Alice. He fancied her as she read the avowal repeating the word "rags," and, while her lips trembled with the coming laughter, saying, "What in the name of all absurdity led him to such a choice?" And what a number of vapid and tasteless jokes would it provoke! "Such snobbery as it all is," cried he, as he walked the room angrily; "as if there was any poetry in cotton bales, or anything romantic in molasses, and yet I might engage in these without reproach, without ridicule. I think I ought to be above such considerations. I do think my good blood might serve to assure me, that in whatever I do honourably, honestly, and avowedly, there is no derogation."

But the snobbery was stronger than he wotted of; for, do what he would, he could not frame the sentence in which he should write the tidings to Alice, and yet he felt that there would be a degree of meanness in the non-avowal infinitely more intolerable.

While he thus chafed and fretted, he heard a quick step mounting the stair, and at the same in-

stant his door was flung open, and Skeffy Damer rushed towards him and grasped both his hands.

“Well, old Tony, you scarcely expected to see me here, nor did I either thirty hours ago, but they telegraphed for me to come at once. I’m off for Naples.”

“And why to Naples?”

“I’ll tell you, Tony,” said he, confidentially; “but remember this is for yourself alone. These things mustn’t get abroad; they are Cabinet secrets, and not known out of the Privy Council.”

“You may trust me,” said Tony; and Skeffy went on.

“I’m to be attached there,” said he, solemnly.

“What do you mean by attached?”

“I’m going there officially. They want me at our Legation. Sir George Home is on leave, and Mecklam is Chargé d’Affaires; of course every one knows what that means.”

“But *I* don’t,” said Tony, bluntly.

“It means being bullied, being jockeyed, being out-manceuvred, laughed at by Brennier, and derided by Caraffa. Mecklam’s an ass, Tony, that’s the fact, and they know it at the Office, and I’m sent out to steer the ship.”

“But what do *you* know about Naples?”

“ I know it just as I know the Ecuador question—just as I know the Mouth of the Danube question—as I know the slave treaty with Portugal, and the Sound dues with Denmark, and the right of search, and the Mosquito frontier, and everything else that is pending throughout the whole globe. Let me tell you, old fellow, the others—the French, the Italians, and the Austrians—know me as well as they know Palmerston. What do you think Walewski told Lady Pancroft the day Cavour went down to Vichy to see the Emperor? They held a long conversation at a table where there were writing materials, and Cavour has an Italian habit of scribbling all the time he talks, and he kept on scratching with a pen on a sheet of blotting-paper, and what do you think he wrote?—the one word, over and over again, Skeff, Skeff—nothing else. ‘ Which led us,’ says Walewski, ‘ to add, Who or what was Skeff? when they told us he was a young fellow’—these are his own words—‘ of splendid abilities in the Foreign Office ;’ and if there is anything remarkable in Cavour, it is the way he knows and finds out the coming man.”

“ But how could he have heard of you ?”

“ These fellows have their spies everywhere, Tony. Gortchakoff has a photograph of me, with two words

in Russian underneath, that I got translated, and that mean 'infernally dangerous'—*tanski seratcz-trakoff*, infernally dangerous!—over his stove in his study. You're behind the scenes now, Tony, and it will be rare fun for you to watch the newspapers and see how differently things will go on at Naples after I arrive there."

"Tell me something about home, Skeffy; I want to hear about Tilney. Whom did you leave there when you came away?"

"I left the Lyles, Alice and Bella—none else. I was to have gone back with them to Lyle Abbey if I had stayed till Monday, and I left them, of course, very disconsolate, and greatly put out."

"I suppose you made up to Alice. I thought you would," said Tony, half sulkily.

"No, old fellow, you do me wrong; that's a thing I never do. As I said to Ernest Palfi about Pauline Esterhazy, I'll take no unfair advantage—I'll take no steps in your absence; and Alice saw this herself."

"How do you mean? Alice saw it?" said Tony, reddening.

"She saw it, for she said to me one day, 'Mr Damer, it seems to me you have very punctilious notions on the score of friendship.'"

“ ‘I have,’ said I ; ‘ you’re right there.

“ ‘I thought so,’ said she.”

“After all,” said Tony, in a half-dogged tone, “I don’t see that the speech had any reference to *me*, or to any peculiar delicacy of yours with respect to me.”

“Ah, my poor Tony, you have a deal to learn about women and their ways ! By good luck fortune has given you a friend—the one man—I declare I believe what I say—the one man in Europe that knows the whole thing ; as poor Balzac used to say, ‘Cher Skeffy, what a fellow you would be if you had my pen !’ He was a vain creature, Balzac ; but what he meant was, if I could add his descriptive power to my own knowledge of life ; for you see, Tony, this was the difference between Balzac and me. He knew Paris, and the salons of Paris, and the women who frequent these salons. I knew the human heart. It was woman, as a creature, not a mere conventionality, that she appeared to me.”

“Well, I take it,” grumbled out Tony, “you and your friend had some points of resemblance, too.”

“Ah ! you would say that we were both vain. So we were, Tony—so is every man that is the depository of a certain power. Without this same conscious thought, which you common folk call

vanity, how should we come to exercise the gift? The little world taunts us with the very quality that is the essence of our superiority."

"Had Bella perfectly recovered? was she able to be up and about?"

"Yes, she was able to take carriage airings, and to be driven about in a small phaeton by the neatest whip in Europe."

"Mr Skeff Damer, eh?"

"The same. Ah, these drives, these drives! What delicious memories of woodland and romance! I fell desperately in love with that girl, Tony—I pledged you my honour I did. I've thought a great deal over it all since I started for Ireland, and I have a plan, a plan for us both."

"What is it?"

"Let us marry these girls. Let us be brothers in law as well as in love. You prefer Alice—I consent. Take her, take her, Tony, and may you be happy with her!" And as he spoke he laid his hand on the other's head with a reverend solemnity.

"This is nonsense, and worse than nonsense," said Tony, angrily; but the other's temper was imperturbable, and he went on. "You fancy this is all dreamland that I'm promising you; but that is because you, my dear Tony, with many good quali-

ties, are totally wanting in one—you have no imagination, and, like all fellows denied this gift, you never can conceive anything happening to you except what has already happened. You like to live in a circle, and you do live in a circle—you are the turnspits of humanity.”

“I’m a troublesome dog, though, if you anger me,” said Tony, half fiercely.

“Very possibly, but there are certain men dogs never attack.” And as Skeffy said this he threw forward his chest, held his head back, and looked with an air of such proud defiance that Tony lay back in a chair and laughed heartily.

“I never saw a great hulking fellow yet that was not impressed with the greatness of his stature,” said Skeffy. “Every inch after five feet six takes a foot off a man’s intellectual standard. It is Skeff Damer says it, Tony, and you may believe it.”

“I wish you’d tell me about Tilney,” said Tony, half irritably.

“I appreciate you, as the French say. You want to hear that I am not your rival—you want to know that I have not taken any ungenerous advantage of your absence. Tonino mio, be of good comfort—I preferred the sister; shall I tell you why?”

“I don’t want to hear anything about it.”

“What a jealous dog it is, even after I have declared, on the word of a Damer, that he has nothing to apprehend from me! It was a lucky day led me down there, Tony. Don’t you remember the old woman’s note to me, mentioning a hundred pounds, or something like it, she had forgotten to enclose? She found the bank-note afterwards on her table, and after much puzzling with herself, ascertained it was the sum she had meant to remit me. Trifling as the incident was, she thought it delicate, or high-minded, or something or other, on my part. She said ‘it was so nice of me;’ and she wrote to my uncle to ask if he ever heard such a pretty trait, and my uncle said he knew scores of spendthrifts would have done much the same; whereupon the old lady of Tilney, regarding me as ill-used by my relatives, declared she would do something for me; but as her good intentions were double-barrelled, and she wanted to do something also for Bella, she suggested that we might, as the Oberland peasants say, ‘put our eggs in the same basket.’ A day was named, too, in which we were all to have gone over to Lyle Abbey, and open negotiations with Sir Arthur, when came this confounded despatch ordering me off to Naples! At first I determined not to go—to resign

—to give up public life for ever. ‘What’s Hecuba to him?’ said I; that is, ‘What signifies it to me how Europe fares? Shall I not think of Skeff Damer and his fortunes?’ Bowling down dynasties and setting up nine-pin princes may amuse a man, but, after all, is it not to the tranquil enjoyments of home he looks for happiness? I consulted Bella, but she would not agree with me. Women, my dear Tony, are more ambitious than men—I had almost said, more worldly. She would not, she said, have me leave a career wherein I had given such great promise. ‘You might be an ambassador one day,’ said she. ‘Must be!’ interposed I—‘must be!’ My unfortunate admission decided the question, and I started that night.”

“I don’t think I clearly understand you,” said Tony, passing his hand over his brow. “Am I to believe that you and Bella are engaged?”

“I know what’s passing in your mind, old fellow; I read you like large print. You won’t, you can’t, credit the fact that I would marry out of the peerage. Say it frankly; out with it.”

“Nothing of the kind; but I cannot believe that Bella——”

“Ay, but she did,” said Skeffy, filling up his pause, while he smoothed and caressed his very

young mustaches. "Trust a woman to find out the coming man! Trust a woman to detect the qualities that insure supremacy! I wasn't there quite three weeks in all, and see if she did not discover me. What's this? Here comes an order for you, Tony," said he, as he looked into the street and recognised one of the porters of the Foreign Office. "This is the place, Trumins," cried he, opening the window and calling to the man. "You're looking for Mr Butler, aren't you?"

"Mr Butler on duty, Friday, 21," was all that the slip of paper contained. "There," cried Skeffy, "who knows if we shall not cross the Channel together to-night? Put on your hat and we'll walk down to the Office."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TONY WAITING FOR ORDERS.

TONY BUTLER was ordered to Brussels to place himself at the disposal of the Minister as an ex-messenger. He crossed over to Calais with Skeffy in the mail-boat; and after a long night's talking, for neither attempted to sleep, they parted with the most fervent assurances of friendship.

"I'd go across Europe to thrash the fellow would say a hard word of him," muttered Tony; while Skeffy, with an emotion that made his lip tremble, said, "If the world goes hard with you, I'll turn my back on it, and we'll start for New Zealand or Madagascar, Tony, remember that—I give it to you as a pledge."

When Tony presented himself at the Legation, he found that nobody knew anything about him. They had, some seven or eight months previous, requested to have an additional messenger appointed,

as there were cases occurring which required frequent reference to home ; but the emergency had passed over, and Brussels was once again as undisturbed by diplomatic relations as any of the Channel Islands.

“Take a lodging and make yourself comfortable, marry, and subscribe to a club if you like it,” said a grey-headed attaché, with a cynical face, “for in all likelihood they’ll never remember you’re here.” The speaker had some experiences of this sort of official forgetfulness, with the added misfortune that, when he once had summoned courage to remonstrate against it, they did remember him, but it was to change him from a first to a second class mission—in Irish phrase, promoting him backwards—for his temerity.

Tony installed himself in a snug little quarter outside the town, and set himself vigorously to study French. In Knickerbocker’s ‘History of New York,’ we read that the sittings of the Council were always measured and recorded by the number of pipes smoked by the Cabinet. In the same way might it be said, that Tony Butler’s progress in Ollendorf was only to be computed by the quantity of tobacco consumed over it. The pronouns had cost two boxes of cigars ; the genders,

a large packet of assorted cavendish and bird's-eye; and he stood fast on the frontier of the irregular verbs, waiting for a large bag of Turkish that Skeffy wrote to say he had forwarded to him through the Office.

Why have we no statistics of the influence of tobacco on education? Why will no one direct his attention to the inquiry as to how far the Tony Butlers—a large class in the British Islands—are more moved to exertion, or hopelessly muddled in intellect, by the soothing influences of smoke?

Tony smoked on, and on. He wrote home occasionally, and made three attempts to write to Alice, who, despite his silence, had sent him a very pleasant letter about home matters. It was not a neighbourhood to afford much news; and, indeed, as she said, "they had been unusually dull of late; scarcely any visitors, and few of the neighbours. We miss your friend Skeff greatly; for, with all his oddities and eccentricities, he had won upon us immensely by real traits of generosity and highmindedness. There is another friend of yours here I would gladly know well, but she—Miss Stewart—retreats from all my advances, and has so positively declined all our invitations to the Abbey, that it would seem to

imply, if such a thing were possible, a special determination to avoid us. I know you well enough, Master Tony, to be aware that you will ascribe all my ardour in this pursuit to the fact of their being an obstacle. As you once told me about a certain short cut from Portrush, the only real advantage it had was a stiff four-foot wall which must be jumped; but you are wrong, and you are unjust—two things not at all new to you. My intentions here were really good. I had heard from your dear mother that Miss Stewart was in bad health—that fears were felt lest her chest was affected. Now, as the doctors concurred in declaring that Bella must pass one winter, at least, in a warm climate, so I imagined how easy it would be to extend the benefit of genial air and sunshine to this really interesting girl, by offering to take her as a companion. Bella was charmed with my project, and we walked over to the Burnside on Tuesday to propose it in all form.

“To the shame of our diplomacy we failed completely. The old minister, indeed, was not averse to the plan, and professed to think it a most thoughtful attention on our part; but Dolly—I call her Dolly, for it is by that name, so often recurring in the discussion, I associate her best

with the incident—Dolly was peremptory in her refusal. I wanted—perhaps a little unfairly—I wanted to hear her reasons. I asked if there might not possibly be something in her objections to which we could reply. I pressed her to reconsider the matter—to take a week, two if she liked, to think over it; but no, she would not listen to my compromise; she was steady and resolute, and yet at the same time much moved. She said No! but she said it as if there was a reason she should say so, while it was in direct violence to all her wishes. Mind this is mere surmise on my part. I am speaking of one of whose nature and temperament I know nothing. I may just as easily be wrong as right. She is indeed a puzzle to me; and one little trait of her has completely routed all my conceit in my own power of reading character. In my eagerness to overcome her objections, I was picturing the life of enjoyment and interest Italy would open to her—the charm of a land that realises in daily life what poets and painters can only shadow forth; and in my ardour I so far forgot myself as to call her Dolly—dear Dolly, I said. The words overcame her at once. She grew pale, so sickly pale, that I thought she would have fainted; and as two heavy tears stood

in her eyes, she said, in a cold quiet voice, 'I beg you will not press me any more. I am very grateful to you ; but I cannot accept your offer.'

"Bella insisted on our going over to your mother, and enlisting her advocacy in the cause. I did not like the notion, but I gave way. Your dear mother, all kind as she ever is, went the same evening to the Burnside ; but a short note from her the next morning showed she had no better success than ourselves.

"Naturally—you, at least, will say so—I am ten times more eager about my plan now that it is pronounced impracticable. I have written to Dr Stewart. I have sent papa to him ; mamma has called at the cottage. I have made Dr Reede give a written declaration that Miss Stewart's case—I quote him—'as indicated by a distinct "Bronchofany" in the superior portion of the right lung, imperatively demands the benefit of a warm and genial climate ;' and with all these *pièces de conviction* I am beaten, turned out of court, and denied a verdict.

"Have you any explanation to offer about this, Master Tony ? Dolly was an old playfellow of yours, your mother tells me. What key can you give us as to her nature ? Is she like what she

was in those old days? and when did you cease to have these games together? I fancied—was it mere fancy?—that she grew a little red when we spoke of you. Mind, sir, I want no confessions. I want nothing from *you* but what may serve to throw light upon *her*. If you can suggest to me any means of overcoming the objection she seems to entertain to our plan, do so; and if you cannot, please to hold your peace on this matter ever after. I wrote yesterday to Mark, who is now at Milan, to make some inquiries about Italian villa life. I was really afraid to speak to your friend Skeff, lest, as mamma said, he should immediately offer us one of the royal palaces as a residence. No matter, he is a dear good fellow, and I have an unbounded reliance on his generosity.

“Now, a word about yourself. Why are you at Brussels? Why are you a fixed star, after telling us you were engaged as a planet? Are there any mysterious reasons for your residence there? If so, I don't ask to hear them; but your mother naturally would like to know something about you a little more explanatory than your last bulletin, that said, ‘I am here still, and likely to be so.’

“I had a most amusing letter from Mr Maitland a few days ago. I had put it into this envelope to

let you read it, but I took it out again, as I remembered your great and very unjust prejudices against him. He seems to know every one and everything, and is just as familiar with the great events of politics as with the great people who mould them. I read for your mother his description of the life at Fontainebleau, and the eccentricities of a beautiful Italian Countess Castagnolo, the reigning belle there; and she was much amused, though she owned that four changes of raiment daily was too much even for Delilah herself.

“Do put a little coercion on yourself, and write me even a note. I assure you I would write you most pleasant little letters if you showed you merited them. I have a budget of small gossip about the neighbours, no particle of which shall you ever see till you deserve better of your old friend,

“ALICE TRAFFORD.”

It may be imagined that it was in a very varying tone of mind he read through this letter. If Dolly's refusal was not based on her unwillingness to leave her father—and if it were, she could have said so—it was quite inexplicable. Of all the girls he had ever known, he never saw one more likely to be captivated by such an offer. She had that sort of

nature that likes to invest each event of life with a certain romance; and where could anything have opened such a vista for castle-building as this scheme of foreign travel? Of course he could not explain it; how should he? Dolly was only partly like what she used to be long ago. In those days she had no secrets—at least none from him—now she had long dreary intervals of silence and reflection as though brooding over something she did not wish to tell of. This was not the Dolly Stewart he used to know so well. As he re-read the letter, and came to that passage in which she tells him that, if he cannot explain what Dolly's refusal is owing to, without making a confession, he need not do so, he grew almost irritable, and said, What can she mean by this? Surely it is not possible that Alice could have listened to any story that coupled his name with Dolly's, and should thus by insinuation charge him with the allegation? Lady Lyle had said to himself, "I heard the story from one of the girls." Was it this, then, that Alice referred to? Surely she knew him better; surely she knew how he loved her, no matter how hopelessly it might be. Perhaps women liked to give this sort of pain to those whose heart they owned. Perhaps it was a species of torture they were given to. Skeffy could

tell if he were here. Skeffy could resolve this point at once, but it was too much for *him*.

As to the passage about Maitland, he almost tore the paper as he read it. By what right did he correspond with her at all? why should he write to her even such small matter as the gossip of a court? And what could Alice mean by telling him of it, unless—and oh the bitterness of this thought!—it was to intimate by a mere passing word the relations that subsisted between herself and Maitland, and thus convey to him the utter hopelessness of his own pretensions?

As Tony walked up and down his room, he devised a very strong, it was almost a fierce, reply to this letter. He would tell her that as to Dolly he couldn't say, but she might have some of his own scruples about that same position called companion. When he knew her long ago, she was independent enough in spirit, and it was by no means impossible she might prefer a less brilliant condition if unclogged with observances that might savour of homage. At all events, *he* was no fine and subtle intelligence to whom a case of difficulty could be submitted.

As for Maitland, he hated him! he was not going to conceal it in any way. His air of insolent supe-

riority he had not forgotten, nor would he forget till he had found an opportunity to retort it. Alice might think him as amusing as she pleased. To himself the man was simply odious, and if the result of all his varied gifts and accomplishments was only to make up such a being as he was, then would he welcome the most unlettered and unformed clown that ever walked rather than this mass of conceit and self-sufficiency.

He sat down to commit these thoughts to paper, and though he scrawled over seven sheets in the attempt, nothing but failure came of it. Maitland came in, if not by name, by insinuation, everywhere; and in spite of himself he found he had got into a tone not merely querulous, but actually aggressive, and was using towards Alice an air of reproof that he almost trembled at as he re-read it.

“This will never do,” cried he, as he tore up the scribbled sheets. “I’ll wait till to-morrow, and perhaps I shall do better.” When the morrow came he was despatched on duty, and Alice remained unanswered.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE MAJOR'S MISSION.

IF my reader has been as retentive as I could wish him, he will have borne in mind that on the evening when Major M'Caskey took a very menacing leave of Norman Maitland at Paris, Count Caffarelli had promised his friend to write to General Filangieri to obtain from the King a letter addressed to Maitland in the royal hand by the title of Count of Amalfi—such a recognition being as valid an act of ennoblement as all the declarations and registrations and emblazonments of heralds and the colleges.

It had been originally intended that this letter should be enclosed to Count Ludolf, the Neapolitan envoy at Turin, where Maitland would have found it; but seeing the spirit which had now grown up between Maitland and M'Caskey, and foreseeing well what would occur whenever these two men

should meet, Caffarelli, with that astuteness that never fails the Italian, determined to avert the peril by a stratagem which lent its aid to the object he had in hand. He begged the General would transmit the letter from the King, not to Turin, but to the Castello di Montanara, where Maitland had long resided, in a far-away part of Calabria, and employ as the messenger M'Caskey himself; by which means this very irritable and irritating individual might be, for a time at least, withdrawn from public view, and an immediate meeting with Maitland prevented.

It was not very difficult, without any breach of confidence, for Caffarelli to convey to Filangieri that his choice of M'Caskey for this mission was something stronger than a caprice, and that his real wish was that this fiery personage should not be at Naples when they arrived there.

A very brief note, which reached Caffarelli before he had left Paris, informed him that all he requested had been duly done. "He gave it"—it was of the King he spoke—"he gave it at once, Carlo; only saying, with a laugh, 'One of my brothers may dispute it with him some of these days—for it gives some privilege; but whether it be to claim the rights of the Church after high treason, or

to have two wives in Lower Calabria, I don't remember; but tell your friend to avoid both murder and matrimony, at least till he returns to a more civilised region.'

"I shall send the Irish Major with the despatch, as you wish. If I understand you aright, you are not over-anxious he should come back with the answer. But why not be more explicit? If you want —— remember Calabria is—— Calabria—— you understand."

At first Caffarelli had intended not to show this note to Maitland; but the profound contempt which his friend exhibited for M'Caskey, proved that no sense of a debt of honour outstanding between them would lessen Maitland's satisfaction at hearing that this troublesome "cur"—so he called him—should not be yelping at his heels through the streets of Naples.

Maitland, in fact, declared, that he knew of no misfortune in life so thoroughly ruinous as to be confronted in a quarrel with a questionable antagonist. From the ridicule of such a situation, he averred, the only escape was in a fatal ending; and Maitland knew nothing so bad as ridicule. Enmity in all its shapes he had faced, and could face again. Give him a foe but worthy of him, and no man ever

sprang into the lists with a lighter heart : the dread of a false position was too much for him.

Leaving these two friends then at Paris, to talk, amid their lives of many dissipations, of plots and schemes and ambitions, let us betake ourselves to a very distant spot, at the extreme verge of the Continent—a little inlet on the Calabrian coast below Reggio ; where, on a small promontory separating two narrow bays, stands the lone Castle of Montanara. It had been originally a convent, as its vast size indicates, but was purchased and converted into a royal residence by a former king of Naples, who spent incredible sums on the buildings and the gardens. The latter especially were most costly, since they were entirely artificial—the earth having been carried from the vicinity of Naples.

The castle itself was the most incongruous mass that could be conceived—embracing the fortress, the convent, the ornate style of Venice, and the luxurious vastness of an Oriental palace, all within its walls. It may be imagined that no private fortune, however ample, could have kept in perfect order a place of such immense size, the gardens alone requiring above thirty men constantly at work, and the repairs of the sea-wall being a labour that never ended.

The present occupant, Sir Omerod Butler, lived in one small block called the "Molo," which projected into the sea at the very end of the promontory, and was approachable on the land side by a beautiful avenue of cedars. They were of great age, and, tradition said, had been brought from Lebanon. If ruin and neglect and desolation characterised all around, no sooner had the traveller entered this shady approach than all changed to the most perfect care and culture—flowery shrubs of every kind, beds of gorgeous flowers, *pergolati* of vines leading down to the sea, and orange-groves dipping their golden balls in the blue Mediterranean at every step, till the ample gate was reached; passing into which you entered a spacious court paved with variegated marble, with a massive fountain in the centre. From this court, under a pillared archway, led off all the lower rooms—great spacious chambers, with richly painted ceilings and tessellated floors. Into these was gathered the most costly furniture of the whole palace:—tables and consoles of malachite and porphyry, gorgeously inlaid slabs of *lapis lazuli* and agate, cabinets of rare beauty, and objects of ancient art. Passing through these again you gained the rooms of daily habitation, arranged with all the taste and luxury of modern

refinement, and distinctively marking that the cold splendour without could not attain to that sense of comfort and voluptuous ease which an age of greater indulgence requires.

The outer gate of the castle, which opened by a drawbridge over a deep moat, on the Reggio road, was little less than a mile off; and it may give some idea of the vast size of the place to state that, from that entrance to the Molo, there was a succession of buildings of one kind or other, only interrupted by areas of courtyard or garden.

When, at the close of a sultry day, Major M'Caskey presented himself at this gate, summoning the porter with a vigorous pull of the bell, he was not admitted till a very careful scrutiny showed that he was alone, and did not, besides, exhibit anything very formidable in his appearance. He was told, as he passed in, that he must leave his horse at the stables beside the gate, and make the rest of his way on foot. The Major was both tired and hungry; he had been in the saddle since day-break, had twice missed his way, and tasted no food since he set out.

“Is there much more of this confounded way to go?” asked he of his guide, as they now mounted a terrace, only to descend again.

“About a quarter of an hour will bring you to the Molo,” said the other, just as ill-pleased to have the duty of escorting him. A quick glance at the fellow’s face showed the Major how hopeless it would be to expect any information from him; and though he was burning to know who inhabited this lonesome place, and why he lived there, he forebore all questioning, and went along in silence.

“There!” said his guide, at last, as they reached a great archway standing alone in a sort of lawn—“there! you follow that road to the little gate yonder, pass in, cross the garden, and you will be at the side-entrance of the Molo. I don’t suppose you want to enter by the grand gate?”

Major M’Caskey was not much in the habit of suffering an insolence to pass unresented; but he seemed to control himself as he drew forth his purse and took out a crown-piece. “This is for your trouble, my worthy fellow,” said he; “go and look for it yonder,” and he jerked the piece of money over the low parapet, and sent it skimming along the sea a hundred yards off.

Though the man’s lips murmured in passion, and his dark eyes flashed anger, one look at the face of his companion assured him that the safer policy was

to restrain his wrath, and, touching his hat in salute, he retired without a word.

As though he felt in better temper with himself for having thus discharged this little debt, the Major stepped more briskly forward, gained the small postern, and entered a large and formal garden, the chief avenue of which showed him the gate at the extremity. It lay open, and he found himself in a large vaulted hall, from which doors led off. In doubt which course to take, he turned to seek for a bell, but there was none to be found; and after a careful search on every side, he determined to announce himself by a stout knocking at one of the doors before him.

The hollow clamour resounded through the whole building, and soon brought down two men in faded livery, half terrified, half angry at the summons.

M'Caskey, at once assuming the upper hand, a habit in which practice had made him a proficient, demanded haughtily to see "the Count," their master.

"He is at dinner," said they both together.

"I wish I were so too," said the Major. "Go in and tell him that I am the bearer of a royal despatch, and desire to see him immediately."

They held counsel together in whispers for a few

minutes, during which the name Maria occurred frequently between them. "We will tell the Signora Maria you are here," said one, at last.

"And who may she be?" said M'Caskey, haughtily.

"She is the Cameriera of the Countess, and the chief of all the household."

"My business is not with a waiting-woman. I have come to see the Count of Amalfi," said the Major, sternly.

The men apparently knew their own duties best, and, civilly asking him to follow, they led the way up a small flight of stairs, and after traversing some scantily-furnished rooms, showed him into a pretty decorated little chamber, with two windows looking on the sea.

Having politely begged him to be seated, they left him. The Major, besides being hungry and jaded, was irritable and angry. Filangieri had told him his mission was one of importance and high trust; in fact, so much so, that it could not be confided to one less known than himself. And was this the way they received a royal envoy, sent on such an errand? While he thus fumed and chafed, he heard a door open and close, and shortly after the sweep of a woman's dress coming along

the corridor; and now the step came nearer, and the door opened, and a tall, sickly-looking woman entered; but scarcely had she advanced one pace within the room when she uttered a faint scream and fainted.

The Major's first care was to turn the key in the lock, his second was to lift up the almost lifeless figure and place her on a sofa. As he did so, any emotion that his features betrayed was rather of displeasure than astonishment; and in the impatient way he jerked open the window to let the fresh air blow on her there was far more of anger than surprise.

"So, then, you are the Signora Maria, it would seem," were the first words she heard as she rallied from her swoon.

"Oh, Miles!" cried she, with an intense agony, "why have you tracked me here? Could you not have let me drag out my few years of life in peace?"

It was difficult to guess how these words affected him, or rather in how many different ways; for though at first his eyes flashed angrily, he soon gave a short jeering sort of laugh, and, throwing himself down into a chair, he crossed his arms on his breast and gazed steadily at her.

The look seemed to remind her of bygone suffering, for she turned her head away, and then covered her face with her hands.

“Signora Maria,” said he, slowly — “unless indeed you still desire I should call you Mrs M‘Caskey.”

“No, no—Maria,” cried she, wildly; “I am but a servant—I toil for my bread, but better that than——” She stopped, and, after an effort to subdue her emotion, burst into tears and sobbed bitterly.

“It matters little to me, madam, what the name. The chain that ties us is just as irrevocable, whatever we choose to call ourselves. As to anything else, I do not suppose you intend to claim *me* as your husband.”

“No, no, never,” cried she, impetuously.

“Nor am I less generous, madam. None shall ever hear from me that you were my wife. The contract was one that brought little credit to either of us.”

“Nothing but misery and misfortune to me!” said she, bitterly; “nothing else—nothing else!”

“You remind me, madam,” said he, in a slow, deliberate voice, as though he were enunciating some long-resolved sentiment—“you remind me much of Josephine.”

“Who is Josephine?” asked she, quickly.

“I speak of the Empress Josephine, so you may perceive that I have sought your parallel in high places. She, like you, deemed herself the most unhappy of women, and all because destiny had linked her with a greatness that she could not measure.”

Though her vacant stare might have assured him either that she did not understand his words, or follow their meaning, never daunted he went on.

“Yes, madam; and, like *her* husband, yours has had much to bear—levity—frivolity—and—worse.”

“What are you here for? Why have you come after me?” cried she, wildly. “I swore to you before, and I swear it again, that I will never go back to you.”

“Whenever you reduce that pledge to writing, madam, call on me to be your security for its due performance; be it known to you, therefore, that this meeting was an unexpected happiness to me.”

She covered her face, and rocked to and fro like one in the throes of a deep suffering.

“I should be a glutton, madam, if I desired a repetition of such scenes as these; they filled eight years—eight mortal years—of a life not otherwise immemorable.”

“And what have they done for *me*?” cried she, roused almost to boldness by his taunting manner.

“Made you thinner, paler, a trifle more aged, perhaps,” said he, scanning her leisurely; “but always what Frenchmen would call a *femme charmante*.”

The mockery seemed more than she could bear, for she sprang to her feet, and, in a voice vibrating with passion, said, “Take care, Miles M‘Caskey—take care; there are men here, if they saw me insulted, would throw you over that sea-wall as soon as look at you.”

“Ring for your bravos, madam—summon your condottieri at once,” said he, with an impudent laugh; “they’ll have some warmer work than they bargained for.”

“Oh, why not leave me in peace—why not let me have these few years of life without more of shame and misery?” said she, throwing herself on her knees before him.

“Permit me to offer you a chair, madam,” said he, as he took her hands, and placed her on a seat; “and let me beg that we talk of something else. Who is the Count?—‘The Onoratissimo e Pregiatissimo, Signor Conte,’” for he read now from the address of a letter he had drawn from his pocket—

“ ‘Signor Conte d’Amalfi’—is that the name of the owner of this place ? ”

“ No ; it is the Chevalier Butler, formerly Minister at Naples, lives here—Sir Omerod Bramston Butler.”

“ Ah, then I perceive it is really meant for another person ! I thought it was a mode of addressing him secretly. The Count of Amalfi lives here, perhaps.”

“ I never heard of him.”

“ Who lives here besides Sir Omerod ? ”

“ My lady—that is, the Countess ; none else.”

“ Who is the Countess—Countess of what, and where ? ”

“ She is a Milanese ; she was a Brancaleone.”

“ Brancaleone, Brancaleone ! there were two of them. One went to Mexico with the Duke of Sommariva—not his wife.”

“ This is the other ; she is married to Sir Omerod.”

“ She must be Virginia Brancaleone,” said M’Casky, trying to remember—“ the same Lord Byron used to rave about.”

She nodded an assent, and he continued.

“ Nini Brancaleone was a toast, I remember, with Wraxall and Trelawney, and the rest of us. She

was the 'reason fair' of many a good glass of claret which Byron gave us, in those days before he became stingy."

"You had better keep your memories to yourself in case you meet her," said she, warningly.

"Miles M'Caskey, madam, requires very little advice or admonition in a matter that touches tact or good-breeding." A sickly smile of more than half-derision curled the woman's lip, but she did not speak. "And now let us come back to this Count of Amalfi: who is he? where is he?"

"I have told you already I do not know."

"There was a time, madam, you would have required no second intimation that it was your duty to find out."

"Ah, I remember those words but too well," cried she, bitterly. "Finding out was my task for many a year."

"Well, madam, it was an exercise that might have put a fine edge on your understanding, but, like some other advantages of your station, it slipped by you without profit. I am generous, madam, and I forbear to say more. Tell me of these people here all that you know of them, for they are my more immediate interest at present."

"I will tell you everything, on the simple condi-

tion that you never speak to me nor of me again. Promise me but this, Miles M'Caskey, and I swear to you I will conceal nothing that I know of them."

"You make hard terms, madam," said he, with a mock courtesy. "It is no small privation to be denied the pleasure of your agreeable presence, but I comply."

"And this shall be our last meeting?" asked she, with a look of imploring meaning.

"Alas, madam, if it must be!"

"Take care," cried she, suddenly; "you once by your mockery drove me to——"

"Well, madam, your memory will perhaps record what followed. I shot the friend who took up your cause. Do you chance to know of another who would like to imitate his fortune?"

"Gracious heaven!" cried she, in an agony, "has nothing the power to change your cruel nature; or are you to be hard-hearted and merciless to the end?"

"I am proud to say, madam, that Miles M'Caskey comes of a house whose motto is 'Semper M'Caskey.'"

A scornful curl of her lip seemed to show what respect she felt for the heraldic allusion; but she recovered herself quickly, and said, "I can stay no

longer. It is the hour the Countess requires me ; but I will come back to-morrow, without you would let me buy off this meeting. Yes, Miles, I am in earnest ; this misery is too much for me. I have saved a little sum, and I have it by me in gold. You must be more changed than I can believe, or you will be in want of money. You shall have it all, every ducat of it, if you only pledge me your word never to molest me—never to follow me—never to recognise me again !”

“Madam,” said he, severely, “this menial station you have descended to must have blunted your sense of honour rudely, or you had never dared to make me such a proposal. Let me see you to-morrow, and for the last time.” And haughtily waving his hand, he motioned to her to leave, and she turned away, with her hands over her face, and quitted the room.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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