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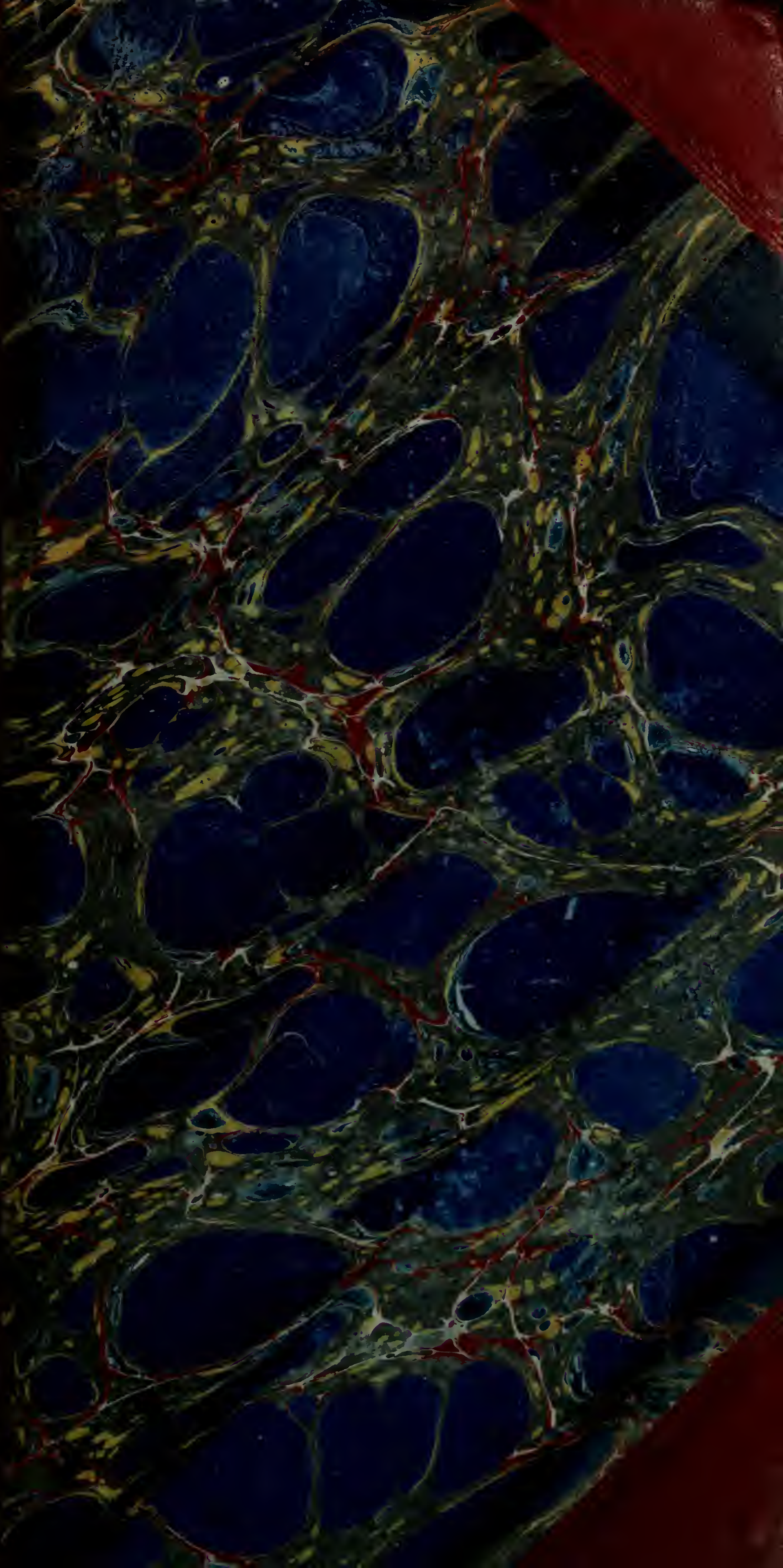

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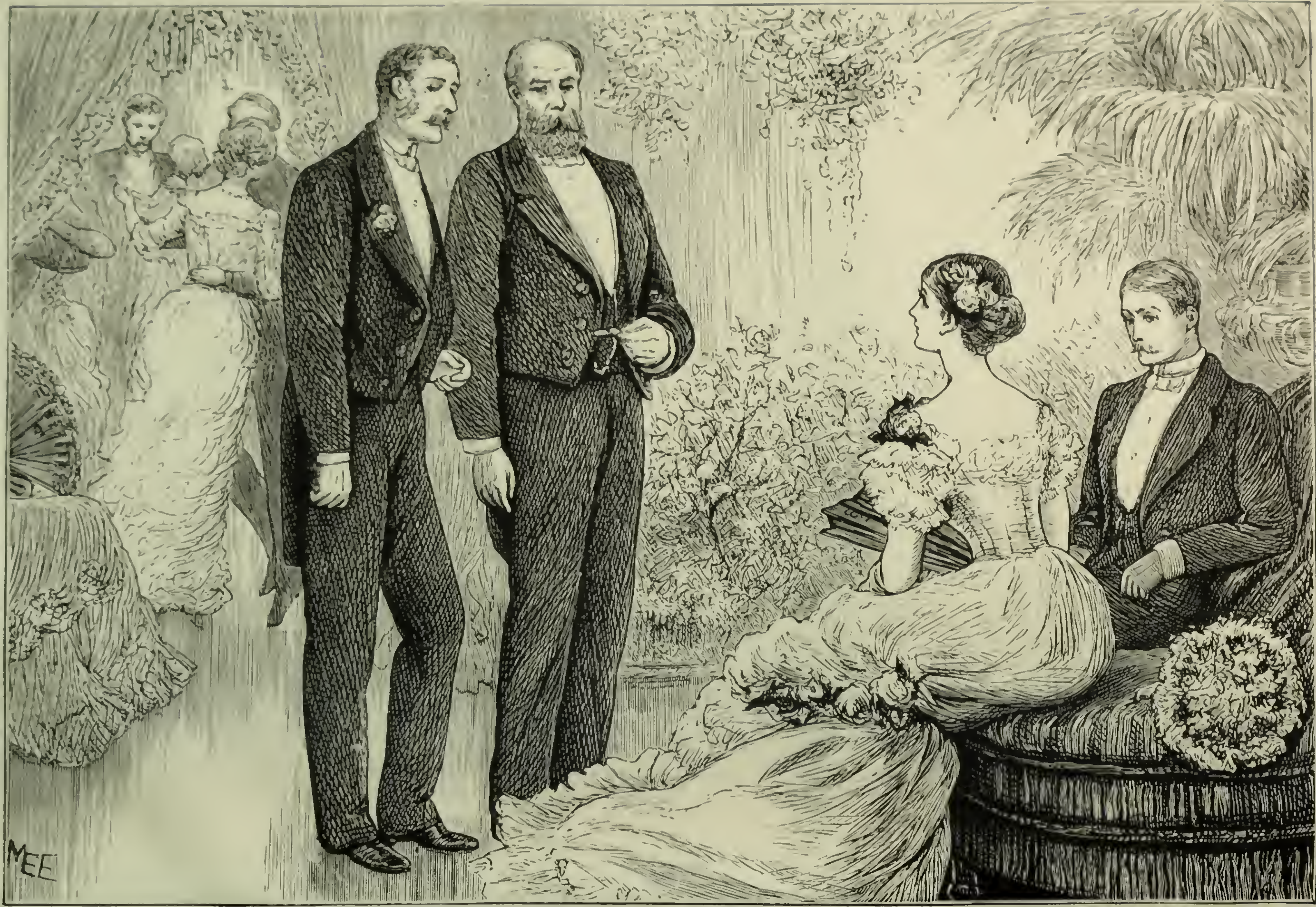

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"*Laden with Golden Grain.*"

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD.

VOLUME XXXVIII.

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"Face to Face with Sir William."
"Godfrey could scarcely restrain himself."
"'You read these letters, Ben?'"
"'I am here to look after you, you see.'"
"Godfrey felt as if he had suddenly been awakened from a dream."
"It was all at an end; the fear and the fever and the pain."

THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1884.

THE WHITE WITCH.

CHAPTER XIX.

GODFREY AND MARY.

SIR WILLIAM HUNT, followed by his groom, rode quickly away from the gates of Croxham Abbey; leaving Godfrey Mayne, who had attended the baronet from the door, a prey to about the most uneasy excitement that had ever stirred his nature. To Godfrey the proofs appeared now to be indisputable that his father's wife had positively some urgent reason for keeping out of the sight of Sir William.

Coupling this with the dark deed of the past connected with Sir William's dead son, and with Sir William's mysterious accusations, Godfrey asked himself whether it was indeed possible that there could be aught in it. He recalled what Mary Dixon had confided to him—that her mother wished not to meet the baronet, because she did not behave well to him in early days; had, in fact, jilted him for another lover—Dr. Dixon, presumably. Such was the impression, not a very clear one, left on Godfrey's mind, for Mary had not been minutely explicit: she could not well be so when telling tales of her mother. With his whole heart Godfrey hoped it was only this latter trifle: pretty girls jilt men every day: he revered his unsuspicious, single-minded father; and to imagine, only as a fable, that he had been lured into marrying a woman to whom danger or difficulty attached, through past antecedents, was to Godfrey utterly intolerable.

Not of Mary did he, or could he, believe ill. She had become too dear to him for that. If her mother had got into dangerous trouble in the past, Mary, as her loving and beloved daughter, might have been drawn into it so far as to try to shield her; to be striving to shield her still, was but natural; but as to any worse stigma, the young man made up his mind that none such could attach to Mary. The girl herself might need to be shielded now from undue worry and suspicion, and that should be his own business. He had told her that he would protect her as anxiously as he would a cherished and only sister. He meant to do it, no matter at what cost to himself; and he gave vent to a harsh word of self-reproach for ever having let her know that he had doubted her.

Godfrey turned back into the house, and went upstairs; and met Mary, who had come out of her mother's room, at the turn of the gallery. The traces of tears on her sweet wan face, the sad look in her soft dark eyes, set all Godfrey's veins of pity passionately throbbing: and in the impulse of the moment he whispered a few comforting words, rather too warmly for his adopted rôle of brother. Mary seemed to shrink into herself, and waited silently for him to allow her to pass, bending her head in acknowledgment of his words, but evidently not at all soothed by them.

"Is Mrs. Mayne's foot better?" asked Godfrey. "I hope it is not seriously hurt?"

"Oh no, not seriously, I think. Only enough to confine her for a few days to the sofa in her room."

Mary went one way and Godfrey another. He turned into one of the many rooms, unoccupied, whose window looked upon the thickly-grown trees of the plantation. He stood watching the red glow, left by the sunset, between the dark boughs, until his reflections became too disagreeable to be borne.

"I'll take in the man's sketch-book," he said aloud: "it's hardly time to dress yet."

He was passing through the hall to go out by the entrance near the refectory, when he again met Miss Dixon. She had been into the garden to gather some fresh mignonette for her mother.

"Is that the sketch-book you spoke of?" she said, noticing the book in his hand. "I should like to see it."

"There's nothing in it worth seeing," answered Godfrey, as he put it on one of the hall tables and opened it for her. "A sketch or two of parts of the Abbey, and what looks like a plan of it where it joins the farm; that's all at present. The book is new."

"Why should he sketch parts of the Abbey?—Why should he take a plan of it: if it is a plan?"

"Artists sketch anything—especially idle ones."

"Here's some writing."

It was but a word or two: "Garden," and "south wall:" but Mary Dixon's eyes devoured them as if they were illuminated characters of gold. As Godfrey stood regarding her, a shade of terror seemed to pass over her face.

"What do you see in the words to alarm you, Miss Dixon?"

"Nothing in the words; nothing at all. But the hand-writing," she slowly added, "exactly resembles one that I—I——once saw in the days gone by."

"Some coincidence," lightly spoke Godfrey. "People write much alike now-a-days."

"Yes," she answered; and ran lightly upstairs with her handful of mignonette.

Mr. Cattermole was out; so Godfrey delivered the sketch-book to Nancy, who said it belonged to him, that he had missed it, and thought he must have left it in the churchyard.

At dinner that evening, Mr. Mayne had most of the talk to himself. Mrs. Mayne, who was lying on the sofa in her dressing-room to rest her foot, had dinner sent up to her. Mary, looking pale and ill, sat as silent and depressed as during the first days of her stay at Croxham, and Godfrey was too much absorbed in her and in his own thoughts, to be very entertaining. When she left the dining-room, Mary stood hesitating which way she should turn. She looked towards the drawing-room, she looked towards the staircase; as she heard a footstep behind her she turned with a start which frightened poor Hawkins, solemnly advancing towards the hall table with candles, nearly out of his life. Then she began slowly walking upstairs; but she was not half-way up when the dining-room door opened, and Godfrey overtook her.

"Don't go up," said he, softly. "When you are ill and nervous, talking to your mother always makes you worse." These words set her trembling as she glanced quickly up in his face. "And my father is going up to talk to her, and you will only be in the way. Come down into the drawing-room and take pity on me. You know what a bad hand I am at entertaining myself."

He laid his hand gently on her arm with a new authority which she did not understand, but which she was at the time too broken-spirited to resist. But in her heart she felt afraid of him; the dreamy vacancy had gone from his eyes, leaving them bright and thoughtful. He was no longer the listless Godfrey of every day, or the irritable Godfrey whose vehemence had sometimes surprised her. She let him lead her down again, passed Mr. Mayne on his way up to his wife, and into the drawing-room. There, by the exercise of tact so clever and careful that she quite failed to appreciate it, he soothed her and then teased her, waited upon and trifled about her, until she laughed at him in her old half-arch, half-contemptuous fashion. For the first time since her fright at the farm-house she was her usual brilliant, saucy self.

"How silly it was of me to have been frightened that other evening when watching for the monk!" she exclaimed.

"Very," returned Godfrey, smiling. "I have never understood what it was that did frighten you."

"My nerves, I suppose; or want of them. The best of us get frightened in the dark, Mr. Godfrey; like naughty children."

"I think you want bracing. You would not have been frightened that evening, or to-day in the vestry, if you were in good health."

"Oh, well—perhaps it is so. I'll get a tonic at the chemist's when I next go into Cheston, and some delicious sweet-stuff to eat after it and take the taste out of my mouth. But please do not say anything of this to mamma," she went on, an uneasy tone superseding the playful one. "She would begin to worry about me; and she has enough little worries of her own—poor mamma!"

Godfrey was delighted that he had had the power to win the girl back to happy lightness. But she soon made use, perhaps unconsciously, of her recovered spirits to wound him. He was trying to hinder her in her work; it was an antimacassar in crewels, of the usual kind.

"You must let me finish this; I've promised it to Ernest for a birthday present."

"Indeed! Does he mean to cover his pillow with it? Or the back of his seat in the dog-cart?"

"He did not tell me which," replied Mary demurely. "I was doing it for Mrs. Underwood, but he saw it, and said he should like it for himself. As his birthday was so near, I thought I would indulge him."

Young Mr. Underwood was coming of age on the following day, and there was to be a ball at the Grange in celebration of it. Godfrey's face clouded.

"He considers himself a man now, I suppose."

"So he is. He is the nicest man I know."

"He will be getting married next, perhaps." A pause. "I should be sorry for the woman who trusted her happiness to such a weathercock."

"He is not that, I assure you," said Mary steadily, with her eyes upon her work. "I don't say he has any deep resources of feeling or passion, or any disconcerting and uncomfortable qualities of that kind." Godfrey winced. "But as far as I know he is not fickle. I think if he were once engaged to a girl, he is too manly and loyal not to stick to her without one faithless look, or word, or thought."

Godfrey knelt with one knee upon a chair, fidgeting with the blind.

"So you think passion and feeling disconcerting qualities, do you, Miss Dixon?"

"Yes; very."

"You have had an unfortunate experience of them, perhaps?"

He spoke at the moment without any more settled purpose than that of entering upon a topic always fascinating when discussed with a beautiful woman. But her sensitive face contracted at once with a spasm of acute pain which was gone almost immediately.

"Yes, my experience has been rather unfortunate," she said.

"What do you think of—of love?" asked he, rather shyly, catching up a wooden knitting-pin.

"I think it is an awful, terrible madness, to be avoided like a disease," said she in a low voice.

"Oh," cried he, taken aback. "Don't you think people ought to fall in love at all, then?"

"Yes, certainly, if they can do it calmly, sensibly; in the right way."

"How do you mean calmly? It isn't love at all if it's calm."

"Perhaps calm is the wrong word. But I mean that to admire and esteem a person until he or she gradually becomes the most precious thing in the world to one must be the greatest happiness possible in this life; and married life begun like that is nearly sure to be peaceful and sweet."

"But look here! There is a lot of love like that about, but it doesn't seem in real life to be at all the sublime thing you describe. Why, half the people about here married just like that, and they might be sheep for all they get out of existence."

"But they are much better and happier like that," said she with rising excitement. "Do you think they are less to be envied than those brothers or cousins who have ruined their brains and their fortunes by dissipation, and have to drag on their lives through years and years of debt and difficulty in consequence? There are some like that in every family."

"Of course they must pay for their pleasure. But they did get something out of life first."

"You are not in earnest, are you, Mr. Godfrey?"

"Yes, I am. I know you mean I haven't talked like this before; no, because I have not thought it before; a man doesn't know what he thinks until he begins to feel. There's the weak point of your 'calm, peaceful existence:' if a man once finds that he can enjoy something stronger, he can't go back quietly to it until he has worn out the capacity for less simple pleasures."

All the serenity he had worked so hard to restore in her was gone in a moment. She looked at him silently, in remorseful terror.

"I have frightened you," said he, with reassuring gravity, as he sat down on the chair he had been playing with. "But you misunderstand me. You are a woman, and I am a man, and we don't look at life in the same way. I believe you think that from an idle young man in the country I am anxious to become a vicious young man in town. That is not so. I have been woke up rather suddenly from the torpid state in which I have lived an ornament to my native parish for so long; but I don't think I shall be less of a man for finding out that I am not a vegetable, and I don't think the —the influence which has done this has anything to reproach itself with."

She grew calmer as he said this; for although he spoke with his eyes fixed earnestly upon her face, his tone and manner were reassuringly quiet and self-possessed.

"Now, what dances am I to have to-morrow night?" he went on in quite a different tone. "You won't believe it, but I assure you I am a better waltzer than the peerless Ernest."

At that moment the door opened and Hawkins came in.

"Miss Wilding would be glad to speak to you for a minute, Master Godfrey, if you are disengaged."

Godfrey went into the library, where he found Nancy with a small packet in her hand.

"Miss Dixon must have dropped a bracelet in our sitting-room the other evening, Master Godfrey. I don't know how it is I didn't find it myself when dusting the room: but Mr. Cattermole picked it up to-day, and he has sent it back."

"And Mr. Cattermole takes the opportunity of enclosing a billet-doux to Miss Dixon, I see!" remarked Godfrey.

"Oh, the note is to apologise for its having been trodden on: or Mr. Cattermole would never have taken the liberty to write."

"Did I understand your people to say Mr. Cattermole was a gentleman, Nancy?" said he, with a sudden, unaccountable impulse of jealousy.

"He can be if he likes, so I reckon he must have been brought up one; but he has fallen down considerably from it," replied Nancy, with a smile in her eyes, for she was sharp enough to understand in a degree the question.

"Why, of course he has. I remember the tobacco and the dirty newspapers. All right, Nancy, I'll give it to Miss Dixon."

"And if you please, I want just to speak to you about Dick," she went on, as Godfrey was moving to the door. "I know you've had to complain of him before; and the other evening, when he ——"

"Oh, you must not think any more of that," said Godfrey. "And as to his having taken this wonderful fancy to Miss Dixon, I am rather glad of it. Dick thought he was defending a lady against a ruffian, or against the dead ——"

"But he thinks so still, I believe, Master Godfrey, and I'm beginning to be afraid of his doing someone a mischief," she interrupted. "He is not so quiet as he used to be, and these last few days I've had trouble with him; and he has taken to rambling about at nights, and may frighten people. He does not mean any harm, as you know, sir: but when a notion gets into his poor head, nobody can get it out. And he has picked up a fancy since that evening when he saw her all pale and frightened and trembling, that Miss Dixon is in danger from someone; and—he takes such prejudices ——" Nancy hesitated to continue.

Godfrey understood her, and laughed. "Dick thinks that 'someone' is myself, I suppose? Never mind, Nancy; the lad won't do me any harm; I shall not be angry with him."

"Thank you, Master Godfrey. You're very kind; I was afraid, after his rudeness the other night, you would perhaps want him sent away again. You see, Miss Dixon has been kind to him and he worships her. Our spare room is next to your schoolroom, you know, sir; and before Mr. Cattermole came, Dick had only to get out on to the wall between the Abbey garden and the farm-yard and creep along the top of your green-house and put his cones and grasses and rubbish on to the schoolroom window-ledge. And the young lady in her kindness took it all in when she found it, and pretended to be as pleased as if it was diamonds. So he has got to think she's a kind of angel, poor fellow, and if he fancies anyone wants to hurt her, he goes right off his poor head."

Godfrey was touched. "Be at ease, Nancy: he shall not be sent away on my account."

"Thank you, Master Godfrey, that is very kind of you; for I should miss him dreadfully. He is kinder-hearted than are many people who are in their right senses. Mr. Cattermole has taken quite a fancy to him, and lets him go too far: this morning I caught Master Dick playing with his revolver. A pretty toy for my poor brother to be handling! Mr. Cattermole was really shocked when I told him, and locked it up at once."

"And what does Mr. Cattermole want with a revolver?"

"What do men want with half the things they litter the place up with? Especially artists. Not that he colours much except his pipe. Well, good-night, Master Godfrey. I hope Miss Dixon will excuse the damage to her bracelet."

She passed out, and Godfrey went back to the drawing-room. Mary, who had finished her work, was sitting by the table, with her hands clasped on her lap.

"Is it indiscreet to ask if you expect a love-letter?" began Godfrey.

"Have you one for me?" she asked with a forced smile, as she held out her hand. He put the packet into it. She did not open it.

"Our illustrious friend Mr. Cattermole found a bracelet of yours in the sitting-room at the farm, where you must have dropped it the other evening. How is it you didn't miss it!"

"I—I don't know; it is only a little porte-bonheur."

"Then she must have missed it," thought he. "Why can't she open the note?"

"Would you mind putting that window up?" she said. "The room is getting so warm."

"Godfrey went to the window and instantly heard her tear the envelope. When he returned, she had put the note into her pocket, and the bracelet had fallen on the floor.

"Was the artist very ardent?"

"Very. It appears I am the lodestar of his existence." Her voice was hard through her attempted playfulness.

Godfrey picked up the tiny bracelet; it was bent out of all shape. "This is quite spoilt," he remarked. "You will never be able to wear it again."

"I dare say not."

"Will you—will you let me keep this, and buy you another?"

"Certainly not."

"Well then, I'll get it mended for you." And he slipped it into his pocket.

She got up restlessly, without paying him much attention, and again complained that it was warm. "I think I must take a little stroll before I go upstairs," said she. "You have been chattering so much that I haven't had a minute's peace this evening."

"Yes, you have—while I was talking to Nancy. You are so tired that you can scarcely stand, and if you go out I shall go with you."

She did not object: perhaps she thought to do so would be useless. It was an uncertain night, now light, now dark, the moon chiefly hiding herself behind dense clouds. They went through the plantation and down the lane together. She was so much exhausted by the emotions of the day that she was glad of his arm to lean upon; but when they got opposite the stables she asked him to do something. Was it to get rid of him?

"I wish you would go and see if I left mamma's card-case in the pocket of the brougham yesterday. She could not find it to-day. It won't take you more than a minute."

It did not take more. For when Godfrey got there, the groom chanced to be unlocking the coach-house door, and he was in and out in no time. He could not see Mary: she must have walked on past a bend in the lane. As he ran to rejoin her, his footsteps sounding sharply on the hard, dry road, he saw someone quit her, or pass her, and disappear over a stile. He thought it looked like the artist.

"Did that man frighten you? You are shaking all over."

"He didn't mean to. But I turned round quickly, thinking it was you; and seeing a stranger, it rather startled me,"

"But he was coming the other way—this way!"

"I don't know how it was. I am nervous to-day. You know why."

He drew her hand through his arm, with a pang of compassion, and led her back to the Abbey without another question. It was getting late, and she bade him good-night and went up to her mother's room; while Godfrey smoked a cigar in the refectory, and grew soft and silly over his precious prize, a broken bracelet. Shortly, he went upstairs himself; left his candle in his room, and then paced quietly along the gallery, towards the window at which he had stood with Mary the previous night.

At that moment the moon was under a cloud again, and the gallery was in darkness. As he passed the back staircase, which was nearly opposite the schoolroom door, he fancied he heard the faint sound of a sharply-drawn breath. He whispered quickly, "Who is that," and put out his hand. It touched a face. He pulled out his cigar-lights and struck one. It was Mary Dixon. She stood cowering against the wall in terror, her face white.

"My poor child!—what has happened?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing," she whispered faintly. "When I got as far as here, after staying with mamma, I thought I heard something, and I felt afraid to go into my room."

"Afraid of the dark? And your lamp is out. Poor child!"

He took the tiny lamp she always used from her hand and lit it; but still she did not move.

"Look here. I will go into the schoolroom and light the candles for you, and then you won't mind going into your own room."

She held back his arms as he touched the door handle. "No, no, thank you, I shall be all right now."

But Godfrey's ears had also caught a sound inside the schoolroom. He dashed open the door; and as he did so, someone sprang upon him from the window. For one moment they struggled together in the dark, for the lamp had fallen and was out again; and then Godfrey stood over his assailant, pinning him on the floor.

"He's a devil; he wanted to hurt her; to take her away," muttered a voice. "But you sha'n't, Master Godfrey; you sha'n't!"

"It's Dick!" cried Mary. "Oh, thank heaven, it's only Dick!"

CHAPTER XX.

FACE TO FACE WITH SIR WILLIAM.

As Godfrey turned at Miss Dixon's exclamation, Dick Wilding jumped up, flew to the open window, and with the agility of a cat, alighted upon the woodwork on the top of the greenhouse, and was making his way homewards, before his foe could give him so much as a shaking.

"Who did you fear it was?" said Godfrey to her.

"I never thought of Dick," she faintly answered. "I thought of —of Hawkins —— "

"Ah, yes," said Godfrey, apparently seeing nothing astonishing in this suggestion.

But she saw that he was not deceived; that he suspected she had been entertaining some more terrible fear.

"Mr. Godfrey, we will talk about it to-morrow; I am too tired to-night," she said, tremulously, supporting herself against the table. "When I got to that part of the corridor and thought I heard sounds, I was too frightened to stir —— "

He had lighted the candles, and he turned and looked down upon her in a tumult of passionate pity, as he interrupted what she was saying.

"Look here. You need not trouble your poor little head to think of excuses and explanations for me. I don't wish to hear them. But if ever you want to escape out of any difficulty, or any fear, whether fancied or real, or—or to avoid any danger you don't want to meet, just come to me and say, ‘Godfrey, help me,’ and I will pour out my heart’s—I mean I will put forth my best strength to aid you. Do not shrink away; do not mistake me: I am not making love to you,” continued he, utterly unconscious that, motionless as he was standing before her, deliberately as he was forcing himself to speak, something in his face and voice made this a transparent mistake: “and I never will. But I want you to see that whatever happens, whatever you like to do, whatever you have done, there is always one person in the world to whom you can go, and who will protect and shield you.”

She sank down on a chair, with her arms on the table, and laying her head upon them, burst into tears. Godfrey turned to the window, clasping his hands together with a grip like iron, while calling up all his self-control. But for the time and place, he would have liked to take her to his breast and comfort her.

“Don’t cry; you had better not cry,” said he, apathetically.

“I cannot help it,” she answered, getting back her self-command in very shame at showing the weakness; and she raised her head and dried her eyes, without looking at him. “I have never in all my life before had anyone to go to for help in need.”

He could not restrain a sudden movement, and she turned to him quickly.

“You cannot help me,” said she, “more than by just that—letting me see that you are sorry for me; that you will not help to chase me down. Listen,” she continued, stopping the outburst on his lips, “I will just tell you this; yes, yes, I want to tell you, and I am not saying anything but truth to you now. More than two years ago, when I was scarcely nineteen, I did something wrong; something to ruin my whole life.” She glanced up, and saw, by the acute pain that mingled with the pity in his face, that he was mistaking her words. “No, no!” she cried eagerly, with a burning blush; “it was not—not anything that you would be likely to think of: but it was something very foolish and wrong, and it spoiled my life and happiness.”

“Yes,” breathed Godfrey, in agitation: and waited for her next words.

“It was the work of a rash mad impulse; of love, not for a man, but for a woman. I cannot tell you what it was, or even its nature, because there were others concerned in it, and it might be dangerous, and I have bound myself by cruel promises that I must keep. But I can tell you this: mine was not the worst guilt, though it is mine to have the worst punishment. And there is no escape.”

“But there shall be,” said Godfrey, with trembling lips.

“No, no,” she said, wearily, “there cannot be. And—” dropping her voice, and casting a shuddering glance around her—“I am afraid that I am being hunted down. If so—why, then there will perhaps never more be any escape for me in this world. Now good-night; thank you for your kindness. I don’t know why I have told you this,” she added in a bewildered manner, "and perhaps you won't believe me, because I have told you other things that you did not believe. But though I seem to have given you different versions of the same story, I have never told you a real falsehood since—since that first evening down by the churchyard wall. And—and you were so kind to me then, that—that I was ashamed, bitterly ashamed, of having done so. Good-night."

"Before I go," said Godfrey, holding her hand and noticing her still nervous manner, "you had better go into your room and make sure that no hobgoblins are there to frighten you. Whatever happens, you may trust me, you know," changing his tone from the light one he had purposely put on.

She went in, and came back with a look of relief, saying it was all safe—as if she *had* feared hobgoblins. Godfrey had opened the big cupboard which stood on the left-hand side of the schoolroom fireplace, and taken from a shelf at the top a box of nails, screws, and curtain-rings. He shut the window by which Dick had entered, and began hammering a long nail into the wood, beside the fastening, with the poker.

"You can push back the catch of a window with the blade of a knife, you know," he observed to Miss Dixon. "I've often done it myself when I was a boy, to get at the apples in the store-room. But you can't if there's a nail in. So now you can sleep quietly without fear of invasion from that idiotic Dick. Though the fellow came, I believe, in faithfulness."

She held out both hands impulsively at the schoolroom door. "I shall never forget your kindness this evening, as long as I live."

He pressed the fingers impulsively to his lips. It seemed to alarm her, and she fell to trembling again.

"No, no, you promised to be—to be only my friend. Remember, I am at your mercy now," she whispered piteously.

"As my dear sister," he whispered back.

Godfrey could not help feeling hurt by her avoidance of him the next day. Surely she might trust him! What it was, that she had done in the past, he could not imagine; or what she meant by the expression she had used of being "hunted down." That the crime—if crime there was—was not hers, he felt certain; though she might have been drawn helplessly into its consequences. Was it her mother's? And of whom was she afraid? Not a single private word did he get with her all day: which did not lessen his own state of suspense and uneasiness.

It was the evening of the ball at Colonel Underwood's. When Mary came down stairs dressed for it, she seemed to Godfrey so dazzlingly lovely that he hardly dared to look at her. She was in cream satin and tulle, with deep red roses from breast to shoulder, and in the coils of her dark hair. Mrs. Mayne, still enjoying the privileges of an invalid, was not going, and Mary was to be under the particular care of Mrs. Underwood, as Mr. Mayne intended to return early.

Elspeth and Matilda Thornhill were in white, and wore roses; but it was white that just wanted the softening tint of cream, and the flowers in their hair were placed just a little too high on the one head, and a little too low on the other. In Godfrey's eyes, the only girl whose appearance was perfect was Mary Dixon; and by some subtle instinct, the other and less fastidious men in the room seemed to think so too. She was the beauty of the evening. Godfrey, who devoted assiduous and indiscriminating attention that night to all his other partners, including Elspeth, concerning whom he had certain twinges of remorse as she reproached him for not calling more frequently, was silent and stupid when his first dance with Mary came. He had not boasted without reason of his waltzing, and when they had been round the room a few times, and were resting, she looked up at him, smiling with surprise and pleasure.

"You waltz better than any man in the room."

"You have thought I was a muff at everything, have you not," said he, in a low voice. But he was in a state of inward delight. He was not jealous that night of even Ernest, who of course felt himself justified in absorbing a great deal of Miss Dixon's attention. For whatever share of her confidence young Underwood might have, he had more. However much that boy might get of her talk and laughter, it was he, Godfrey, whose hand would help her in difficulty or danger. He had plenty to say to her, but unfortunately nothing that he might say; so when the waltz was over he led her out into the wide hall, where the lights were kept low, and flowers and leafy plants were piled up in the corners, and sat down beside her on a low soft velvet couch, and stroked his moustache and said nothing. And she did not repress him by a flow of small talk, but let him feel that he had her confidence by quietly fanning herself, without taking the trouble to entertain him. When another came to claim her hand for the next dance, Godfrey remained lounging in the hall, unwilling to break the spell that waltz had cast upon him by plodding through a dull quadrille with some wretched girl, who would expect him to talk. He could afford to be magnanimously sorry that the fellow Mary was dancing with was evidently boring her to death, as he glanced into the ball-room to catch a furtive glimpse of her. As the music ceased and the sets broke up, he turned back again to the hall, just as she and her partner passed out and crossed to the morning-room for an ice. Then there was a sound of wheels at the door, and a late arrival. Godfrey turned to see who it was.

It was Sir William Hunt.

Sir William shook hands with Godfrey as he passed him; regretting that Mrs. Mayne, for whom he enquired, had not been well enough to come. "But I shall have the pleasure of seeing Miss Dixon at last, at any rate," he observed, as he moved away to meet

Colonel Underwood, and tell him he had felt so moped at home that evening, he thought he would come out for an hour.

Godfrey crossed the hall and entered the conservatory. Mary was sitting with her late partner, enjoying the scent of the flowers and the comparatively cool air. As Godfrey, on fire with this new anxiety, which all his efforts could scarcely hide, came up, he fancied he saw in the darkness, outside, a man's face appear and disappear, but he was in too feverish a state to be sure of his own eyesight. Mary saw by his looks that something was wrong. As an excuse to get her away, he told her that Mr. Mayne was looking for her, wanting to know whether she was ready to go home.

"Why no, not yet," said she, surprised. "If he wants to go early, as he said, I am to go back with you, you know."

"I thought perhaps you might be tired." Then, as her late partner bowed and left them together, he threw himself into the seat beside her and said below his breath, "Sir William Hunt is here."

She turned pale, but did not move. He had just begun: "Let me take you home now—if you would like to go," when voices at the door made him look up, and he saw Colonel Underwood enter with Sir William. Mary glanced at them but gave no sign; Sir William looked from Godfrey to her and evidently asked his host some question, but the young man caught the answer, which was:

"Pretty! I should think so; she is the belle of the room." And they came forward to the window.

"That is Sir William Hunt," said Godfrey to her in a low voice, bewildered by this apparent want of recognition, and then the colour rushed to the girl's face.

In another moment the introduction was over, and Godfrey felt sure from the baronet's manner, more easily read than Miss Dixon's, that he had never seen her before; and as far as he could judge he decided that she had never seen him. He left them talking together, the old gentleman evidently much impressed by her beauty.

Bewildered by this strange discovery, mad with the joyful relief it brought, Godfrey sauntered out into the garden, away from the music and the lights and the crowd, to puzzle himself afresh. Were they only very clever actors, both of them, he wondered, as he drew instinctively near to the window of the room where he had left them. He was strolling over the grass by the side of the house, among the trimly-cut yew trees with which this part of the lawn was dotted. A few yards from the window he stopped short, for among the tall rhododendrons in the bed close to the house there was something moving, faintly stirring the branches. He remembered the fancy he had had when he first approached Mary and her partner in the window-seat; and now, with little doubt that it would prove to be an unwarrantable intruder, he stepped behind a yew tree to watch. The night was dark, warm, and still, but there came a stream of light from the window of the room; and the spy, whoever it might be, kept well under the bushes. Godfrey could plainly see Mary's beautiful profile, as she got up and went away, Sir William with her. In another moment he saw the rhododendron bush in front of the window stirred again, and by the slight movement of the branches he could track the passage of the unseen figure along the flower-bed, under the wall of the house towards the front door, past the yew-tree behind which he himself was standing, unseen. It halted near him. But Godfrey could only catch the merest outline of the figure. The man wore a grey, broad-brimmed hat, slouched over his face.

Close upon that, Sir William came out of the house, and began strolling towards the window of the morning-room. His keen sight detected the figure standing amid the bushes, and that it looked like someone who could have no business there.

"Who are you?" cried Sir William: "What do you want?"

"I beg your pardon," said the intruder, in a soft, gentlemanly tone, "I am waiting to try to get speech of someone. Can you tell me whether Sir William Hunt is here to-night?"

"I am Sir William ——. You are come here to seek for me!" impulsively broke off the baronet, an idea seizing him upon the one subject that was never long absent from his mind: "You are the detective from Scotland Yard!"

"Yes," replied the man, after a pause.

"I could not imagine why you did not come down at once—as soon as I wrote. The right man was not at liberty, I suppose?"

"Just so, Sir William," came the whispered response. "But," continued the stranger, with another pause, "I may as well tell you that I have been down here a few days. When we know the matter upon which we are called out, we like, if practicable, to keep ourselves quite quiet for a short time in the suspected neighbourhood, and make our own silent observations and private enquiries."

"Quite right, quite right; of course you detectives are adepts at your own business," assented Sir William. "Are you fully acquainted with the matter upon which I need your services—the murder of my son in Rome?"

"Almost better than any other man you could employ, sir, since I was in Rome about that same time, and heard a good deal of it."

Sir William Hunt quite started at the unexpected answer. "Dear me! How fortunate!—how providential, I may say, that you should be at liberty to come down here! Did you know who it was that committed it?"

"I think so, Sir William."

"Ah, then, our task may be an easy one. I believe the people are now in this neighbourhood, or have been recently. They seem to elude me like magic, and I am again utterly at a loss."

"It may prove a more complicated affair than you imagine, sir, and I will frankly tell you that, professional detective as I am, I doubt if I myself could make head or tail of it had I not chanced to be in Rome. I went to Rome after a bank clerk who had absconded, and reached it a few days after your son's murder. I found out all I could about it just by professional instinct; and I should have found out a good deal more if I had not had to follow my own man to New York. But that you had already again left Rome, Sir William, I might have been able to put you on the right track there and then."

Sir William touched the officer. "What did you find out?" he asked.

"I found out what Mr. Hunt's habits had been, sir, and who he was mostly seen with. His tutor was a young man of the name of Robertson, who wore glasses."

"Yes, yes. Well?"

"I found out that Mr. Hunt had had a quarrel with one of his companions on the night of his death: it was about a young lady, I believe: he and she both disappeared after the murder, and were never traced."

"Did you see that companion of my son's?" eagerly questioned Sir William.

"I saw a likeness of him," replied the detective. "He was painted as a young, fair, slight man, looking almost like a boy. I learnt that he had been regarded in Rome as an idle, worthless sort of young chap, with persuasive manners and a way of getting round people."

"Ay ay," assented Sir William with emotion. "You have not told me your name. What is it?"

The answer was given in too low a tone to reach Godfrey. Some stir occurred just then at the hall door: three or four young men, heated with dancing, came out. Sir William and his companion both turned their heads that way to look.

"We had better walk about a little," whispered Sir William.

They stole away, under the dark shade of the trees, in the contrary direction to that in which Godfrey was standing, and were lost to his view. Godfrey had not obtained a clear view of the detective officer, or heard his voice above a whisper; yet a suspicion, alarming and disagreeable, had arisen in his mind. Rather miserable and very anxious, he returned to the ball-room to receive another shock.

The next dance on the programme was a waltz, which Mary had promised to him, so he went in search of her through the rooms; but he could not find her, and he noticed that Ernest Underwood was missing too. He returned to the hall just in time to see Mary, her face disfigured by tears, come out of the library, flit across to the staircase, and run up. Wondering what could be amiss, he went to the foot of the stairs to await her return and to claim her hand for his promised dance. Ernest, violently excited, had followed her out of the library and run up a few steps after her, bidding her make haste; coming down again, he faced Godfrey.

"The next dance is mine," said the latter, rather stiffly.

"Oh, but it is the supper-dance; surely you dance that with Miss Thornhill," cried Ernest, his temper rising.

"No; with Miss Dixon."

They looked steadily at each other; Ernest was loud and restless, Godfrey languid and soft-voiced to affectation, both assuming the manner best calculated to annoy the other. For both knew quite well that at heart they were rivals.

"Miss Dixon has promised the supper-dance to me," said Ernest.

"I think you will find my name on her programme for the fourth waltz," returned Godfrey, stroking his moustache.

"Perhaps we had better let Miss Dixon decide the matter?"

"I think so, certainly."

She was coming downstairs at this moment, pale, with the traces of tears still visible in her eyes: which made her doubly interesting in the sight of the two young men impatiently waiting for her decision.

"I think this is my waltz, Miss Dixon, isn't it?"

"It's the supper-dance," said Ernest.

She turned to Godfrey. "I'm so sorry. I promised this—a long time ago to—to Ernest," she answered, watching him nervously.

He bowed and stepped back, while she went off on Ernest's arm. By a lucky chance he almost ran against Elspeth, for he would not have remembered to look for her. They waltzed and went in to supper together, Godfrey not knowing in the least what he was saying to her, though he chattered and laughed and drank all through supper, his eyes wandering in Mary's direction every other moment. He could see that she and Ernest were both grave and silent, but absorbed in each other. Godfrey was temperate by nature and habit, but to-night he could eat nothing, and as he drank off glass after glass of champagne his talk grew faster, his laugh louder, his restless glances up the table more frequent, until Elspeth wondered what was the matter with him, and Mrs. Thornhill from the other end of the table watched him with anxious disapproval. As he was leading Elspeth from the room her mother stopped her, said she looked tired and had better not join in the next dance. So Godfrey was turning away, when a hand, whose touch he knew, sent a thrill through him.

"If you are not engaged for this dance, I will give it you instead of the waltz we missed," said Mary, with almost a pleading face.

They returned to the ball-room and joined in the galop; but they had not gone once round the room before Mary stopped him. "I think I am too tired to dance," said she tremulously; and he led her into the conservatory and leant against the framework of the door in front of her while she sank down on a low ottoman.

"You are not tired?" she began.

"No," he replied.

"You are angry with me?"

"No. What right have I to be angry? When you fancied that my unwelcome attentions to you might be remarked, you did right in seizing the chance of repelling me openly."

"You are mistaken; indeed you are. Is it likely that I should dare to offend *you*, after last night?" she whispered.

He laughed. "You need not pretend to be afraid of me. Your dislike cannot prevent your seeing that I am a gentleman."

"I don't dislike you. I had promised Ernest. He—he has just asked me to be his wife."

Godfrey turned cold, and shivered as he heard her; but he neither looked up nor spoke: there was that in her tone which told she had accepted him. At last she touched his hand and said in a timid voice:

"Don't look like that; you frighten me. It cannot matter to you; you are engaged to Elspeth."

"Not matter!" said he, hoarsely. "No, not more than life itself matters to me. You cannot pretend you don't know that I love you. Why do you talk of my engagement, when you know that I was led into that by a trick—that I might be kept from you?" Mary started violently. "Yes, yes, I know that now. Heaven knows why, but your mother wanted to keep me from you——"

"You do know why," she interrupted. "How could I, with a blight on my life——"

"But you are going to marry Ernest?"

"But—but," she began with hesitation, "but he knows more than you do, and he will love me all the same."

"And do not I love you?" cried Godfrey, flinging himself on the ottoman beside her and looking into her eyes with an overmastering vehemence that frightened her. "A smile from you makes my senses reel, every tear I see you shed scalds me like fire. You pull at my heart-strings with every word you say, and when you touch me I know not where I am or what I'm doing. I tell you, Mary, if you cared for a man's love, you could no more resist me, to give yourself to a feather-headed, light-hearted, impulsive boy like Ernest, than you could prefer starvation to the wealth of a queen. Oh, how can you be so hard to me?" he concluded piteously.

"Hush," she whispered, afraid of this outburst being heard. "You should not talk like that, Mr. Godfrey: you have no right to. This is not love; it is an infatuation, and worth nothing."

"How dare you say that?" said he, rising. "How dare you presume to judge a passion you cannot feel! How can you sit there, and shrink, and shiver, without one touch of pity for the suffering you have caused me?"

"Because I know that a passion like yours is a selfish, cruel thing, more to be dreaded than anything else in the world," said she, firmly. "When you were gentle and kind, I respected you, I was sorry if I hurt you; but when you are like this, you make me sick with terror."

She was white and trembling; and as Godfrey looked up, bewildered and amazed by the dread with which his words had filled her, he struggled to conquer his own emotion.

"I did not mean to frighten you," said he at last. "I am excited to-night, I think, and not quite master of myself. I will not talk—like this again. I would not willingly have given you pain: I think you know that."

He was subdued now, and he began to put on his glove. She got up and walked quickly towards the door. Godfrey followed, but as he did so he caught sight once more of a face outside, peering through the plants and the steaming glass; no eyes that were not keen and well on the alert would have seen it at all; but Godfrey's attention was alive that night. He knew that there was a spy at work, *watching*. Was he watching Mary Dixon? At the door she turned to him impulsively; her tone was softer than her words:

"Mr. Godfrey, I have been hard to you, but I cannot help it. I am sorry, for you have been very kind to me."

He drew her arm through his with some incoherent commonplace, to take her to Mrs. Underwood.

"Now, will you do something that I want you to do, Mr. Godfrey?"

"Anything. You know that," said he in a low voice.

"Go and make your peace with Mrs. Thornhill, and devote yourself for the rest of the evening to Elspeth."

He gave her a sharp look of reproach. Then "All right," said he after a moment's pause. But there was just one point on which he felt he must be satisfied first.

Giving up Mary to a partner, finding Elspeth and engaging her for the next dance but one, Godfrey went out by the front door, so that the man who was watching might not see him coming. He wanted to discover who it really was, and so set that suspicion, which he had caught up, at rest one way or the other.

Stealthily making his way round to the conservatory, the figure of a man, standing there to peep in, was plainly to be seen. He heard Godfrey's steps, took alarm, disappeared among the evergreens, and tore away round to the back of the house. Godfrey gave chase, and caught his man crouched behind the water-butt.

"You let me alone, sir. Who is it? I wasn't doing nothing," said a lad's voice, which Godfrey thought he knew.

"Who the deuce are you?" cried Godfrey, angrily.

"I'm only Dod, sir, one of the grooms. Why, it's—it's young Mr. Mayne, I do believe!" added the speaker, straightening himself in amazement.

Godfrey, in disgust, put his hand in his pocket.

"Please sir, I was only peeping in to have a look at the company and the dancing: and I humbly ask your pardon, sir; but I thought it was the butler after me. I'm sure I meant no harm."

"No, of course not, Dod; I'm sorry to have given you a fright; but when I saw you rushing away like that, of course I took you for—for a thief," said Godfrey, enraged at his mistake. "Here's something for the run you've given me. Good-night."

"But it's my belief," commented Dod, to the other servants, when he related this adventure with much stress upon young Mr. Mayne's excited manner, "that it must have been—champagne."

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. MAYNE'S NIGHT ALARM.

When Godfrey returned indoors, crestfallen and angry, he took a few minutes to recover himself before seeking Elspeth: who was in high good humour. Although not a very good dancer, her pretty looks had got her plenty of partners, and as her attachment to Godfrey only grew strong in the absence of any other excitement, she had enjoyed the evening unrestrainedly, pleasantly occupied with listening to the compliments of other young men—for Elspeth was the type of the innocent-eyed girl to whom men pay them. So she and Godfrey got on quite well together through the Lancers, which was her favourite dance, and then he set about the more difficult and less pleasing task of propitiating his future mother-in-law.

Those wall-flowers see such a lot, between the intervals of scandal and refreshments. Mrs. Thornhill must have seen much more than was good for any of them, he felt sure, as she glared at him icily to see that he was perfectly sober and answered his civil commonplaces with tightly-drawn lips. But he had perfect command over himself now, and he kept his eyes stoically away from that one little flitting, floating figure that, whether dancing or walking, most attracted the eyes of all the room. He divided his time for the rest of the evening between the frigid Mrs. Thornhill who, in the course of conversation, asked him if he had ever thought of joining the Band of Hope, and said she thought it was a very good thing, and Elspeth, who felt a glow of pride in him as the acknowledged best waltzer present.

Then his father came up and said he was going to take Mary home and was Godfrey coming.

"No, I'll stay and see Mrs. Thornhill home, if she will allow me," said the reformed young man dutifully. He was in the hall as Mary passed to the front-door on Ernest's arm, stopping for him to arrange about her head the wrap, made of an Indian shawl bordered with gold fringe and marabout trimming, which made her look, Godfrey thought, as he indulged his eyes with one long gaze, like a princess out of the Arabian Nights. Then he went back to reality and his duty, and in the bracing atmosphere of the vicar's wife and daughters, easily kept his fevered thoughts in check. He drove back to the Vicarage with them in the hired carriage—for they did not keep a close one.

The Vicar met them at the door, with the sublime gravity of manner he wore when he had been startled out of a doze. As Godfrey paused to exchange a few words with Matilda and Elspeth, Mrs. Thornhill drew her husband aside and rapidly made some communication to him. When the doomed young man advanced to say good-night, the Vicar spoke in an ominously soft voice:

"Can you come over to-morrow morning early, Godfrey? I have to go to Keighley at ten, and on Monday we start for Coniston, and I particularly want to speak to you first."

"Won't to-night do, Mr. Thornhill? I don't know whether I could be here so early," said Godfrey, who wanted to get it over, knowing that something particular is generally something unpleasant.

"Very well," said the Vicar after a moment's pause. "Will you come into the study?"

The Vicar's evening manner, when he was tired with his day's work in the parish, was never one to encourage a wandering sheep; but when he had firmly insisted on sitting up far into the night, alternately dozing and waking up to feel chilly, waiting for the return of his wife and daughters from a festivity of which he at heart disapproved, his manner was calculated to induce the sheep to turn his back to the fold and run the other way. So that Godfrey's proposal had a touch of Marcus Curtius' heroism.

They went into the great bare-looking study, and the two girls, who knew papa's bland voice, felt a pang of pity for the victim as they heard the door close.

"I shouldn't like to think, Godfrey," began the Vicar very gently, looking up at the opposite wall, as he did when he was preaching, "that your father's son was anything but honourable."

"I hope not, Mr. Thornhill," replied Godfrey, playing with his glove, and seeing that he was likely to enjoy himself.

"But do you think that you are behaving quite rightly, quite as you should do, to my little daughter?"

"To Elspeth? How do you mean, sir?"

"I think you must know; I may say I see that you do know. I don't want to be severe with you. I have been among the first to notice the great improvement, if I may use the expression, in you lately, the new manliness you have shown. I had begun to congratulate myself on being about to confide the happiness of one of my children to a man whom I would myself have chosen for the trust. But now—I have seen signs, and my wife has seen signs, little Elspeth herself has guessed something too, that this change in you is not the result of her influence; nor, as far as I can see, of the thought of marriage with her."

"But if the change in me is for the better, surely it is for her advantage, whatever influence it may be due to," returned Godfrey.

"Not quite, in this case, I think. At least I should not feel justified in trusting my daughter for life to a man whom I suspected at the time to be strongly under the influence of—another woman." The last words were so low that the young man had almost to guess at them.

There was a pause. Then the Vicar looked at him for the first time.

"I don't think you can say I am too hard upon you, Godfrey. I don't want to preach to you about faith and loyalty, and what a man owes to the young woman he has asked to be his wife. I am quite sure that, if my suspicions are correct, you have not yielded to temptation without making many a sermon of that kind to yourself, without struggles and—perhaps—prayers. I know how a beautiful girl, who dresses in the fashion, and who has been used to a great deal of attention, makes a simple little country lass seem very tame—especially to young men. But you must have known your danger, if you have indeed been in danger, and I cannot acquit you of blame in not making stronger efforts to escape it. Perhaps I ought to have spoken to you before, but it is the sort of accusation a man naturally shrinks from until he is quite sure."

There was another pause, a longer one; then the young man raised his head.

"I have been to blame, Mr. Thornhill," said he, candidly. "And—you are right—I've suffered for it. I've been under—an infatuation. There were reasons, which I cannot tell you, which made escape more difficult than you think. She was not to blame," he resumed quickly, as the Vicar looked round. "When she guessed, she was indignant. So you may be satisfied—I shall be well punished. Infatuation over, and engagement broken—at the same time."

He got up restlessly, but the Vicar signed to him to sit down again. "One minute, Godfrey," said he, less sternly. "You say your infatuation is over."

"Yes, it is, sir."

"And you wish your engagement to be broken?"

"That is not my wish. I understood it to be your decision."

"Was the wish father to the thought, Godfrey?"

"On my honour, no. I have lived in a fever lately; I want to get back my health and my peace. I have had thoughts, as you know, sir, of obtaining some post in London, under Government; I shall now do so, if possible, and go away to begin a manlier life than the useless and aimless one I have led here. Yet at the moment of beginning to work, the object of work is taken away from me. Do you think a return to peace is likely to follow?"

"If you mean that as a threat that you intend to let yourself go and lead a disorderly life, once the restraint of your engagement is removed, I can only think my daughter has had a lucky escape from a man of so little self-control, Godfrey."

"I did not mean that. I have neither the wish nor the intention to lead a disorderly life; I have never had yet. But I could set to work with more heart if I had still the prospect that it would not long be a lonely one."

"Elspeth is not the only girl in the world," suggested the Vicar.

"The only other I should have cared to marry is engaged," replied Godfrey steadily.

"Look here, Godfrey," said the Vicar after a short pause: "You have been frank in this matter, and I don't wish to be hard or unjust to you. You say you are going away. Now we are all going to the lakes for a month. Suppose we allow the matter to rest in abeyance: there shall be no formal breaking-off of the engagement, but let the correspondence drop for that time. I will settle it with Elspeth. If you leave Croxham before the end of next week—that must be a strict condition—I shall understand that you are in earnest about wishing to keep on the engagement. And if, when we return at the end of the month, you write and satisfy me that you are anxious to keep your faith loyally to her, the engagement shall go on as before. If you cannot satisfy me or yourself of that, why, my little daughter will have to shed a few tears that a more constant wooer would have spared her, and the matter will be at an end. You had better come over as usual to-morrow; but I think I must ask you not to make a long tête-à-tête with Elspeth, and to let me break this matter to her as seems best to me."

They both rose, and Godfrey left the Vicarage a good deal impressed by the Vicar's justice and unexpected leniency. He walked through the avenue on his way back to the Abbey in a state of more sobriety of mind than he had been in for weeks. That acquiescence of his in the decision both of Mr. Thornhill and Mary herself, that his love for the latter was a wicked infatuation, made it treacherously easy for him to look upon it, after the refrigerating society of the Vicar and his wife, as a folly to be easily crushed—if that blow of her engagement to Ernest had not yet quite killed it.

Then arose the thought of her danger. That the bringing down of this detective from Scotland Yard by Sir William Hunt, did some how menace Mary with danger, Godfrey felt all too sure of—though he was unable to foresee precisely in what manner, or what shape it would take. Well, if he could not be at hand to watch over her himself, he must hand over that care to her future husband. But he had more than a week to stay at home yet—and who knew what might come to pass in that time?

The disagreeable suspicion, spoken of as having arisen in Godfrey's mind during the interview he had been a witness to between Sir William and the detective officer, was this: that the latter was no other than the artist-lodger at the farm—Mr. Cattermole.

The suspicion was more than disagreeable; it was hideous. Had this man, an acute adept in all the tricks and turns of the criminal law, placed himself in that close contiguity to the Abbey, passing himself off as an inoffensive artist, for the purpose of keeping a watch over Mary, or her mother, or both of them? If so they must be already safe in his toils; no escape could remain for them; whenever he chose to put out his capturing hand they must yield to it. Godfrey grew hot at the thought.

The more he dwelt upon it, the stronger grew his opinion that this suspicion was correct. He had not seen enough of the man to recognise his person, but he had thought he recognised the voice. When it was raised somewhat above a whisper, Godfrey had been struck with its tone of softness, and began wondering whose it was and where he had heard it: and there flashed upon his mind in answer, It is that of the artist, Cattermole.

He recalled the little episode related to him by Nancy Wilding: of her seeing a rough sketch of the likeness of Mary Dixon, growing under their lodger's hands; he had said it was not a likeness of any Miss Dixon, but of a lady he had met abroad, and had since lost sight of. What could this mean?

Terribly uneasy, he turned aside from the front gates of the Abbey, and made his way round to the farm-house, with what purpose he could hardly have told, unless it was the vague wish of ascertaining whether the artist had been abroad that night. The earth was damp and fresh, one or two sharp showers having fallen during the evening.

As Godfrey halted before the farm, looking up at it, the church clock struck the half hour after two. Of course everybody had been in bed for hours!—and what good had he done by coming there?

At that same moment, the curtain was suddenly pulled aside from an end window, which he knew to be Nancy's, and her head appeared at it. Her room was at the opposite end of the farm to the room occupied by the lodger, which joined the Abbey. After taking a look at Godfrey, standing there in the rather watery moonlight in his thin, light overcoat, she withdrew, and closed the curtain.

"I'll ask Nancy: she won't mind," thought Godfrey: and he took up some gravel and flung it at the window.

It did not bring forth any response. Godfrey threw again.

At this Nancy pulled back the curtain and looked down. Godfrey made a sign to her to open the window; and she obeyed him.

"Good gracious, Master Godfrey, whatever do you want at this time?" she exclaimed in a whisper. "Is anything the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter; it's all right. I say, Nancy," he continued, in a voice as cautiously low as her own, "I want you to tell me whether your lodger has been abroad to-night."

"What do you want to know for?" returned Nancy, womanlike.

"Never you mind that: not for any harm, you may be sure," returned Godfrey. "Was Mr. Cattermole out late this evening? Come! don't keep me here all night, Nancy."

"Well, sir, he was, if you must know. He went out at ten o'clock, which was very late for him, just as we were all going to bed, and carried the key of the door with him. Mother said she thought he must be going to take sketches by moonlight."

"What time did he come in? *Is* he come in?" added Godfrey.

"He came in, but I can't tell you what time it was, Master Godfrey. I had been asleep when I heard him come creeping up the stairs and go along the passage to his room; and I have been asleep again since."

"It was he with Sir William, sure enough," mentally decided Godfrey. "Thank you, Nancy," he said; "I'm sorry to have disturbed you. By the way, what was it that you came to the window to look for? Me?"

"None of your nonsense, Master Godfrey. It was Dick. I am so uneasy about him after what he did last night at the Abbey, that I can't sleep soundly as usual; the least noise startles me and I'm wide awake in a moment. Father gave him a good stroke or two this morning, and mother and I have talked to him; but, to tell you the truth, sir, we can't feel sure of him: poor Dick's reason is not like other people's, you know. So, hearing your footsteps just now, Master Godfrey, I was afraid they were Dick's—afraid he might have got out again."

"What could have moved him to play up that prank last night, I wonder?" cried Godfrey.

"I *can't* imagine what," replied the young woman energetically. "The more I've tried to get it out of him, the surer he baffles me. I can only think his poor weak head must have picked up a notion that his idol, Miss Dixon, was in some danger, and he climbed in at the schoolroom window to see that she was safe. He is not half so tractable as he was before Mr. Cattermole came: he makes so much of Dick."

"Well, good night, Nancy—or rather good morning," said Godfrey. "Shut your window and get to sleep again. Pleasant dreams!"

In a few seconds, Godfrey was round at the Abbey entrance, ringing gently at the door. Mr. Mayne appeared in his dressing-gown, rather cross.

"When I offered to sit up to let you in, Godfrey, I did not think you were going to keep me up for a week," he grumbled. "You said you should follow me directly."

"I am very sorry, father. I went into the Vicarage, and Mr. Thornhill kept me talking. You ought to have gone to bed, and left Hawkins up."

"I should not have rested if I had gone," again grumbled Mr. Mayne. "The fact is, my wife is in so nervous a state to-night that she can't sleep herself, or let anybody else sleep."

"What is she nervous about?" asked Godfrey.

"I can't quite make it out," said Mr. Mayne. "It seems that Lydia, who was sitting up to undress Mary, went in to her mistress's dressing-room for something or other she wanted, and heard sighs and sobs in the bed-room. Running in, she found Mrs. Mayne in a most nervous and excited condition, as if she had seen a ghost. Lydia asked what had frightened her; and, to her horror, my wife asked if the house was haunted. Lydia enquired what she had seen, and was for calling to Hawkins and Mrs. Garner, and having the rooms searched. But her mistress refused: it might have been only her fancy, she said, and ordered Lydia to say nothing about it. The girl, however, was frightened, and spoke to me as soon as I came home."

"I wonder what time the fright happened?" said Godfrey.

"It was a little before one o'clock, Lydia says, that she went to the dressing-room. We got home not very long after one. It does not matter what time it happened, Godfrey."

"If there was anything in it more than fancy, the time might be a guide to our finding it out."

"What, have you taken to believe in ghosts?"

"Ghosts are at the bottom of a good many things, father," returned Godfrey, drily.

"Well, for goodness' sake don't persuade your mother she has seen a ghost, or I should have no peace at all," said his father, as he turned to the library. "I shall get a book, for I can't sleep."

Godfrey had lighted his candle and was crossing the hall towards the staircase when, glancing down the passage which led to the refectory, with the nervous alertness produced by his late investigations, he fancied he saw a perpendicular line of light, and that he felt at the same time a draught of air. He went down the passage and found, as he had expected, the refectory door ajar.

"Confounded carelessness! In a house where we seem to be most of us at the proper pitch for a fright, if the wind were to blow a door to in the middle of the night I think some of them would lose their wits altogether."

He was just going to shut it, when a new idea made him change his mind and enter the room. One of the windows was open. He went up to it, looked out, but could not see or hear any signs of an intrusion outside. There was a narrow flower-bed with nasturtiums and china-asters running along under the window. Then he turned to examine the room, and on the floor just inside, the light of the candle plainly showed the print of a man's dirty boot. There was a succession of smaller marks as far as the door, from the shape of which it was evident that the intruder had advanced on tip-toe. Godfrey's thoughts turned upon Mr. Dick.

Outside the door the marks ceased. Godfrey looked carefully at the mat outside; but there was on it only one footprint and not any sign of boots having been rubbed on it. To the right was a housemaid's cupboard under the staircase. Godfrey opened it, and was instantly blinded by something flung over his face; he made a lunge forward, however, hitting his hand against the wall and his head against a shelf. There was a clatter of pails and brooms, into which he had walked, and the cloth which covered his eyes fell on to the candle and put it out. He backed quickly out, fastening the door.

Finding his way back to the table in the hall, he felt for the matches and relit his candle. Then he returned to the cupboard. It could only be fastened from the outside, and the fastening was undisturbed; so that no one had escaped in his absence. He re-opened the door and searched the long slanting cupboard from end to end; there was no one there, and no appearance of anyone having been there. A duster on the floor, which he recognised by its smell of paraffine as the one which had been over his face, had evidently fallen on him on his first entrance from a high upper shelf, on which he saw oil-cans and lamp-glasses. He stepped back out of the cupboard, fastened the door again and re-entered the refectory. There were no return marks of feet, there was no one hidden in the room, no one crouching in the passage. He shut the window and left the room, locking the door and taking the key away with him.

He was creeping slowly along the passage, examining the floor at every step, when a woman's shrill shriek from above made him fly to the staircase. A door opened immediately above, and his father came out of the library. At the same moment, Godfrey caught sight of a woman's figure flitting along the upper corridor.

"Laura!" cried out Mr. Mayne. "Mary!" cried out Godfrey; both speaking at the same time.

They hurried upstairs to Mrs. Mayne's room. Mr. Mayne ran in, and his son followed without ceremony.

Mrs. Mayne was sitting up in bed, a large woollen shawl flung over her shoulders, and supported in the arms of her daughter. Mary, who had taken off her ball dress and put on a grey-coloured dressing-gown, was standing by the bedside, wiping her mother's face with a handkerchief. Both were pale and trembled; but Mary was quite self-possessed, while the elder lady was speechless and shuddering.

"What on earth is all this?" exclaimed the bewildered husband.

"Poor mamma!" cried Mary, turning calmly to them. "It is I who have given her a fright now. I thought I would just come to see how she was. My knock at the door she did not hear; and when I came in she screamed out, taking me, I think, for a ghost."

"It must be all the fault of that silly Lydia," returned Mr. Mayne. "She absolutely put the question to me—had the Abbey ghosts in it? Ghosts indeed! I should have thought you possessed better sense, my dear, than to be disturbed at any such nonsense," he added, soothingly, regarding his trembling and terror-stricken wife.

"I think I had better sleep with her to-night, Mr. Mayne, for I am quite sure she would never let you have any rest, and that would disturb her still more," said Mary.

"Do so, my dear, if you think that is best for her. I can sleep on the sofa in the dressing-room."

"No, no," said Mary quickly, "that is too near; you would be listening all night long and get no rest. Why not sleep in the Swallow-room? The bed there is always kept aired and ready."

"Very well," said the compliant easy man. "It is rather far off this room, though."

"Oh, not at all," returned Mary. "I could run for you in half a minute if you were wanted here. But you will not be; I am sure mamma will sleep ——"

Mary stopped suddenly, and her face changed. For the first time she had caught sight of Godfrey. He had stayed behind near the door, and occupied himself with making searching glances round the room. Lydia was the next to come in, looking nearly as frightened as her mistress.

"Do not stay, please, Mr. Godfrey," said Mary to him. "The sight of so many people here only makes mamma more nervous. Lydia, we shall not want you; you can go to bed. It was my coming in unexpectedly that startled mamma again and caused her to cry out," she concluded to the maid.

But Godfrey remembered he had seen a figure he knew to be Mary's flying along the corridor towards her mother's room after the shriek. Therefore he concluded that whoever or whatever it was that frightened Mrs. Mayne at first, had frightened her a second time.

He had glanced in the corner between the chest of drawers and the wall, at the window, the wardrobe, the curtains of the huge old-fashioned mahogany bedstead, and he was stooping to look under the sofa when Mary first saw him. But he did not go at her bidding. In point of fact, Godfrey's mind was filled with Dick Wilding, and the new tricks that young man might be up to.

The chamber was a large one, with two doors; one opened into the corridor, facing the window; the other into the dressing-room. Mary had not moved from her position by the bed. Mr. Mayne advanced, wanting to say a few private words to his wife, and would have put Mary aside; but she would not be put aside; she would not stir. Godfrey, his suspicions alert, though he knew not of what, noted this, and began to think she must be concealing something.

It struck him that he might as well examine the dressing-room, and he was moving towards it when Mary left the bed with a hurried movement and placed herself in his way.

"Please do not trouble to look further now," she said; "you disturb mamma."

Godfrey turned sharply back, and went to the side of the bed where she had been standing. Then he saw what it was that she had been hiding.

His eyes met hers, for she also had returned to the same spot: and Mary knew that he had seen the print of a man's hand, soiled with damp, black mould upon the white counterpane.

(To be continued.)

GODMOTHER DOROTHY.

I THINK my story began at the moment when my hat box was bundled out of the van of the London train at the Crossbridge station. It was certainly before the extraction of my second portmanteau, for I was too anxious about that to pay any attention to the fact that a porter at my elbow had made several attempts to complete an observation beginning "Beg pardon, sir,"—didn't discover that he intended the remark for me, in fact, for some little time—"The lady is in the waiting-room, sir. If you'll please step this way."

Lady? What lady? I wasn't expecting any lady, and so I told him; but when the portmanteau was found at last, and the other portmanteau, and the helmet-case, and the sword-case, and the Overland trunk, and the hamper, and the uniform-case, and the sticks and rugs, and the train had moved off, I turned to find him and myself the only visible beings on the platform, and to hear him still persuasively reiterating, "If you would kindly step this way, sir. There don't seem to be any other party about, that the lady might be expecting." And he looked feebly along the down line and into the signal-box, and back into my face again for a suggestion.

"Whoever she expects it's quite certain not to be me," I assured him. "Now suppose you bring these things along to wherever the Rocksedge train starts from."

He obeyed under an evident burden of misgivings. "Military gent, walks lame, straight figure, grey moustache; odd if there's two of them about," I heard him murmur to himself as he piled his truck. "Rocksedge, sir? That's where the lady is going to," he said, lifting his handles and trundling off with his load.

"What's she like?" I asked with some curiosity, as I walked beside my possessions to a distant end of the platform: "an old lady?"

"Not an *old* lady, sir," very positively.

"A young lady, then?"

"I shouldn't exactly call her young either, sir," extinguishing a rising glimmer of interest in my mind. I dismissed him, and felt for my cigar-case, smiling to myself at the idea his words conveyed. The sort of woman who is decidedly not old but can't be called young—I had a vision of her on the spot. She wears a tailor suit, her figure being the last spar of youthfulness to which she can cling. A grizzled fringe peeps from beneath a hat of a severe build, and she is also addicted to further emphasising the hard outline of cheek and chin by tight collars and brilliant scarves. Her boots are a strong point, and are usually worth looking at—instep and ankle know no age. I had got so far in my fancy sketch while preparing to light up, when I beheld my porter back again.

"I ask your pardon, sir, I really *do!* But the lady she is that positive, that just for the satisfying of her mind if you *would* step round, I'd take it as a kindness."

I replaced my cigar case, amused in spite of myself, but provoked also. Crossbridge is a little deserted strip of a platform, at the junction of two lines of railway. We had it all to ourselves except for two market-women, who were slumbering over their baskets on the bench outside the one little waiting-room. "The lady" whoever she might be, and I, would have practically an unbroken tête-à-tête till the arrival of my train; a trying position for me, who am emphatically not a society man. I compromised.

"If the lady likes to come and look at me, she will find me at the book-stall; I am going to get a paper," and off I walked as briskly as a recent attack of rheumatism would allow.

I found the stall nearer to the waiting-room door than I had supposed, and heard the rustle of a gown almost at my elbow as I unfolded the largest daily paper in the world, and from its cover took a view in return of the lady who was so desirous of appropriating me. She was retreating hastily, the porter following, uttering regrets in a gruff whisper. "But," I heard her say, "I told you an *elderly* gentleman. *Quite* elderly." I looked again, and my fancy picture vanished into thin air. It no more resembled her than, in my opinion, her description did me. First of all she was clad in a big mantle that draped her in graceful, glossy folds. Then she wore a bonnet—I don't commit myself to the style or material—but it was dark and close, and the strings marked the outline of a soft pink cheek, and tied themselves up snugly under a round, white, determined chin. The mouth above was a little square resolute one too, and explained the porter's blind zeal in her service. I couldn't see the colour of her eyes, but they were dark and soft, and in place of the grizzled fringe with which my fancy had endowed her, wavy bands of brown hair, possibly sprinkled with grey, were brushed back from a low, white forehead. Altogether I almost caught myself wishing for a moment I *had* been the right man.

I wished it completely and unfeignedly a moment later, when her travelling companion joined her at the waiting-room door. This was simply the loveliest young creature I had ever set eyes on. A slip of a girl, at the "bud" stage of existence, with great sapphire eyes, a mass of paly gold hair, and the tints of a wild rose. She was well got-up in a neat grey travelling suit, with a crimson knot at her throat, and a crimson band round her grey sailor hat, and she carried a little silky black dog in her slim, grey, long-gloved hands. She made a little confidential pantomime of despair when she beheld me, and the two retired within the doorway. I was so lost to all sense of propriety as to follow them. There was a big poster about cheap trips to the Fisheries hanging close to the door, and taking out pencil and an old envelope I began to note down carefully the terms on which I could get five hours in London, with entrance to the Exhibition, eight hours' railway travelling included.

"Oh Auntie, what *are* we to do?" I heard a girlish voice exclaiming. "It's *too* bad of Colonel Wriothesley! *Must* we wait here till the next train?"

"Certainly not," spoke a voice to match the chin; soft and round and resolute. "We can find our way alone; we—or he—must have made some mistake about the day. If only we can get anything in the shape of a carriage at Rocksedge!" Here another train came in, not ours, but it brought the two ladies to the door, as if there had been some faint possibility of the missing Colonel appearing from the other end of England. It was an opening for me, and I seized it.

"You are expecting Colonel Wriothesley, I believe. He is a friend of mine. You may have heard him mention my name—Travers—Major Travers—if I can be of any service in his absence." She took a good look at me, as a sensible woman should; a cool, deliberate, considering gaze; then accepted the introduction frankly.

"I am a cousin of Colonel Wriothesley—Mrs. Darsie Pierpoint—and was relying on him to meet me here and take us down to Rocksedge. This is a strange land to us, and I am not quite sure of being able to find my way to my own house when I get there—as I have been rash enough to take it without seeing it." I assured her of my intimate acquaintance with the place and its ways, and she ended by introducing "My niece, Miss Leyland," whereon the bud blushed as is not the wont of even buds to blush in these days.

We had a pleasant journey down, during which Mrs. Pierpoint explained that she had taken a cottage for a month at Rocksedge on Colonel Wriothesley's recommendation, in search of quiet and sea-breezes; and I in turn told her how I came to be there. How I was in command of a detachment at Fort Limpet, a small military penitentiary, situated on a forlorn little spit of land at one end of the strip of pebbly beach along which Rocksedge extends its stucco lines of terraces and esplanades. "Then we are quite near neighbours," she was pleased to say, with a charming smile. "I believe my cottage, Tamarisk Lodge, is near the fort, quite away from the town. I hope you will come and see us soon."

I drove the ladies home in my trap, there being nothing on wheels procurable at Rocksedge without special notice, and received and accepted an invitation to luncheon for the next day.

"Something to write about to-night at least," I thought, when I retreated to my room that evening after mess to despatch my weekly letter to my regular correspondent, the widow of my late godfather, whom—at first in fun, and also partly to keep her position well before my own mind, and afterwards because I didn't quite know what else to call her—I had always addressed as "Godmother." I am, it is as well to explain at once, a creature of routine; my life is made up of little practices and habits, from which it is pain and grief to me to depart; but the one to which I cling most fondly, and for the sake of which I am ready to throw overboard all the rest if need be, is my weekly letter to Godmother and her weekly reply to mine. Every Tuesday night have I opened my great shabby old leather writing-case—her present when I was starting for India more than twenty years ago—taken out her photograph and propped it up before me, and then addressing it, as it were, proceeded to pour out all the week's experiences, as I could have done to no living being beside, in the full confidence that Sunday evening would find her pondering over the last letter she had received from me, and answering it with the best of her sympathy. Delightful answers, full of fun, piquant gossip, personal and otherwise, and talk about myself and my concerns, touched with the lightest, most delicate finger. I am naturally a reserved man, reserved to unsociability. I can only make myself decently companionable by a strong and continuous effort, and no one can tell the relief it has been to pour out my thoughts to this half-known, shadowy confidant; as shadowy as her photograph, in a voluminous crinoline and flowing sleeves, taken before her marriage, and which was all I had ever had of her till she sent me a new one last year. We met once, for two days, at the time of her marriage with my godfather.

All my people were beyond measure wrathful with Lady Dolly, the little minx of a school girl who had bewitched him into marrying her, and so disposed effectually of all *my* prospects of heirship; prospects, I am bound to admit, of the most airy and baseless nature. They were so urgent that I should make my approaching departure for India an excuse for not being present at the wedding that I was stimulated to opposition, and started off to Yorkshire to present my congratulations in person, and offer my services as best man. Within half an hour after my arrival at the forlorn, out-at-elbows old castle, I had struck up a friendship with the little childish bride that was to last my life. She was so romantic in her devotion to her handsome, middle-aged bridegroom, so splendid in her scorn of any advantage that his wealth might bring her, and so determinedly loyal to my interests when it came to a question of settlements, that it is less than wonderful that she should touch my heart as no woman could before or since. The day after the wedding I sailed for India, and we never met again. When I came home on leave, my godfather was trying a voyage to Australia as a last remedy for his failing strength. And when I came home for good she was nursing her only brother, taking him from one German bath to another in a fruitless chase after health.

Somehow I did not regret the postponement of our meeting. My visionary Lady Dolly was very dear to me—so dear that on her behalf I felt an odd jealousy of the claims of the original. Just as the new Van der Weyde photograph, so like and yet so unlike my hoarded recollections, came upon me with a sort of shock. I had become accustomed to the great speckled expanse of skirt, the mass of netted hair, and undistinguishable features of the old one, and looked with disfavour on the exquisite artistic finish of its rival, to whom I grudged its place. However, there it stood, while I covered page after page with matter trivial enough to anyone but Godmother Dorothy.

I made as amusing a story as I could of my meeting with Mrs. Darsie Pierpoint, and even essayed a word picture of pretty Miss May Leyland, which I guessed would bring me into dire disgrace. My godmother, good soul, oblivious of the years that had rolled over my head since we parted, had let slip in one of her later letters a hint of a certain romantic scheme in petto.

My godfather had remembered me handsomely beyond all expectation in his will, but the bulk of his property was naturally left to his wife for her lifetime. She in her childless widowhood had adopted a pretty penniless relation, "the sort of child I was myself," she wrote; and I knew what her frequent mention of May's goodness, and pretty ways, and general delightsomeness meant; and gave no sign in return. When I had finished my letter, I took up the photograph and examined it closely. A good, grave face, worn and lined by a long life of care and nursing, hair prematurely grey, rather quaintly dressed, and kind bright eyes, looking out from under heavy dark eyebrows. She wore a cap and a plain black gown, with a lace cape fastened by a big brooch, containing what was presumably godfather's likeness. "Do *I* look as old as *she* does?" I found myself asking, with quite a new anxiety. "She must have given up being young long before there was any need, surely. It is always the result of living with old people. Still, I wonder if in people's eyes—in a young girl's, for instance—*I* look the same."

I was punctual to the time named at Tamarisk Lodge next day. The drawing-room was empty, and I had time to look about me and note the traces of its occupants with approval. I don't mean that there was that litter of cheap china and rickety photograph stands, tawdry lace and sham bric-a-brac, with which some women deluge the place under the belief that it gives an artistic air to their surroundings; but the lodging-house furniture was veiled and draped in oriental silks and stuffs, there were fresh flowers about, and a side table with a supply of new books and magazines. A lovely water colour drawing stood on an easel in the proper light; there was a piano that did *not* look as if it came from the Rocksedge circulating library and music-seller's; and lastly, leaning up against the wall was a violoncello, that grinned me a welcome from its every string. I was gazing amicably at it, thinking of a certain cherished household god of my own, and, I suppose, whistling involuntarily, for ——

"Beethoven, C minor, No. 3," remarked Mrs. Pierpoint's voice behind me. "You don't mean to tell me you play the violin! I thought I saw something like its case when we came down yesterday, but did not like to ask. That's May's 'cello. She will be here presently." Then in she came, fresh as a rose.

We had a dainty, well-served luncheon, that proved what an adept Mrs. Pierpoint must be in her manipulation of unpromising material, for they were entirely dependent on the local resources, she told me. They had not brought even a maid with them, and had not an acquaintance in the place, nor did they wish to make any. "What we want is *perfect* quiet, and Colonel Wriothesley promised me we should find it here." I was able to confirm the statement emphatically. "Miss Leyland is not out yet," she went on, as we strolled on the slopes of Tamarisk Lodge in a sunny half hour after luncheon, awaiting the arrival of my violin, which a servant had been despatched to Fort Limpet for. "And while she is under my care I am cautious about allowing her to make any acquaintance here." I had not the highest opinion of Rocksedge society myself, I intimated. "And—I hardly know how to put it graciously—but I would rather you did not introduce any of your friends at the fort to us. You are not offended, I hope?" I assured her I understood her position perfectly, and the tête-à-tête ended with May rushing out to announce Amati's arrival.

We had a glorious practice. The two ladies knew all my favourites as well as I did, and had piles of things, new and old, that it was a perfect feast for me to plunge into. Mrs. Pierpoint's music was something out of the common too. She played us "Chopin," while May poured out afternoon tea, and I let my cup get cold untasted as I listened. When we parted, Mrs. Pierpoint had given a half doubtful consent to my suggestion of a drive to Shingle Bay next day, and luncheon with me after, with an inspection of my collection of Indian curios to follow. We were to meet for a practice in any case before long, and a blissful vision of days to come stretched out before me as I took my way back to my quarters.

The days flew by with harmony on their wings: *how* fast, I hardly guessed, till I found with a start that Godmother Dorothy's letter had fallen due for once without my having counted the posts to its arrival. I was engaged to dine at Tamarisk Lodge that day. We had some music in the evening, and after that strolled out together on the terrace under the summer moon. May and her dog Scrap flitted about like elves in and out of the shrubbery paths below us, while Mrs. Pierpoint and I drifted into a conversation a trifle more personal and more freely expressed than was ever possible to me except by fits and starts and under favouring conditions. Mrs. Pierpoint was an easy woman to talk to; quick to comprehend a half-expressed thought, ready with an answer to an unspoken question.

I found myself telling her a great deal about myself, and learning very little about her in return. She had seen a great deal of the world, and her life had been a sad one—that was all I gathered. *My* life had been a lonely one too, she divined instinctively—here, half unwittingly, I let Godmother Dorothy's name fall. It was followed by a sudden chill and silence, as if a cold mist from the sea had blown up to us. My companion indeed was shivering. "May! May!" she called, "come in It is damp, the dew is falling." May obeyed, her wavy locks straightened and stiffened by the salt air, her cheeks rosy. We went back to the softly-lighted room and sipped our coffee and talked commonplace for a few minutes; then May disappeared, and her aunt sat down to the piano, as if to avoid any further speech. She sang song after song in the rose-tinted gloom,—sang them to me, every word, and I listened till my heart grew full, and my eyes wet, and the years seemed to roll their long length backwards, and, instead of the elderly bronzed old major I had left in my looking-glass that afternoon, I was the careless subaltern, with the world before me and a heartful of hopeless love for little Lady Dolly again.

May came skipping back with trim, neatly-coiled tresses, and an armful of songs with violin obbligato for me to try with her; but I excused myself and said adieu.

When I entered my room, there on the table lay a letter from my godmother, with the Paris postmark. An odd misgiving came over me as I opened it, but it was just the same as ever—amusing, friendly, sympathetic—with bright little comments on my bits of news.

"I utterly decline to be interested in your new friends," it ended. "I mistrust that wandering widow, without luggage or escort, and should not be surprised to hear that Colonel Wriothesley knew no more about his charming cousin than I do. I must decidedly exercise my godmotherly privilege, and come down to look after you as soon as I can get free. The meeting at the station reads so very like a put up thing. Miss Leyland *may* be the sweetest bud that ever bloomed, but buds are not such harmless playthings as roses, remember. Good-bye, my dear boy. Take good care of yourself till the arrival of

"Your loving godmother,
"M. Dorothea Champneys."

I laid the letter down, laughing to myself. There was an awkwardness, a sort of forced liveliness, in the whole of the last paragraph, very unlike the rest of the letter. It read as if godmother had felt obliged to say something when she had nothing good to say, and I fancied I detected a flash of mild spite in the reference to Miss Leyland that bore out the supposition. Poor dear godmother! If she only knew how indifferent I was to the charms of that dangerous little bud, except from an artistic point of view. As for Mrs. Pierpoint, *she* had only to be seen and known to dispose of all criticism. As soon doubt that the stars are fire, in fact much sooner, than suspect her to be of a Brummagem origin. She was thoroughbred to the finger-tips: and I forthwith opened my letter-case and told Lady Dolly so indignantly, three posts before my letter was due.

Then, with a parcel of new music for excuse, I sallied forth to call at Tamarisk Lodge, and obtain material on which to form my opinion. I devised a few neat diplomatic little questions, that should extract sufficient particulars of the birth, parentage, and social position of my new friends to set godmother's doubts and—must it be confessed—my own likewise at rest for ever.

All sorts of ungracious little doubts, each light and harmless in itself as a single midge, buzzed through my mind in a distracting swarm. Chance observations of May's, nipped off unfinished by her aunt; small discrepancies of statement; even a cut-off corner of a piece of music where the name should have been: all joined in the ungracious murmur of suspicion that seemed to vex my ears.

After all, when I got there, May was alone and defenceless. "Auntie has a headache and is not up to music to-day," she explained. I expressed due regret.

"Where do you go when you leave Rocksedge?" I asked, casually, dusting my Amati tenderly with his silk handkerchief before reclosing his case. She hesitated.

"Home with Auntie, I think—I don't quite know."

"Home? Where is that?" I demanded, inquisitorially.

"In London. Won't you play this for me before you put Amati by?" she asked, hurriedly fluttering the leaves of the music.

"With pleasure," I replied, with small satire. "It is an arrangement for voice and piano. Which part shall I take?—My dear Miss Leyland," I went on, looking straight into her embarrassed face, "did I do wrong in asking that question? It was only in the hope that some day we might meet again."

She blushed deeper and deeper. "I did not know whether Auntie would like my telling you," she murmured.

"Then consider it unasked: only, like a good little girl, don't burden your soul with a fib by way of answer. Your aunt has assured me that she has not stayed in London for many a day."

May tossed her head and then looked saucily penitent.

"I'm not out yet, you see, and don't know what I ought to say when a gentleman asks my address with a view to future acquaintance. I'm sure I shall be happy enough to see you. It has made a great difference to our stay here, meeting you and Amati."

We parted friends. Only, as I took my way homewards, I did not feel exactly as if I had prospered greatly in my first steps towards the conversion of Lady Dorothy.

I met Mrs. Pierpoint that evening as I was smoking a lonely cigar on the Esplanade. As a rule she avoided the town, and I don't know what brought her there, though I won't swear that a distant glimpse of a yellow Japanese parasol had not brought *me.* It was a still, warm-tinted evening, and the fishing-boats rocked on a glassy sea, the line of the net marking one long curve of ripples in the water. All the population of Rocksedge were congregated on the Esplanade, watching to see the net drawn in. The little brown, bare-legged children scrimmaged about on the wet pebbles below, and Scrap barked excitedly at them from the edge of the sea wall above.

Mrs. Pierpoint had chosen a seat apart, and welcomed me with a faint smile. She had come to town to try and get rid of her headache, but I might stay, if I did not mind a dull companion. So we sat and talked softly together in the still clear evening, and when she rose to go home I went with her.

"May tells me she made a foolish mystery of our plans when she saw you this morning. I was very angry with her, silly girl! The fact is, we don't quite know ourselves where we shall stay in town. It is an odd time to be there, but May has a chance of getting some violin lessons, and we can stay on to get a peep at the autumn exhibitions. When I have succeeded in finding rooms I will send you our address, if you care to have it."

"Colonel Wriothesley could help you in your quest. Nobody knows town better than he. I expect him here in a day or two."

I didn't make that speech, I'll swear. It was some demon, who got possession of me for the moment and spoke with diabolic significance through my voice. I saw—and oh, how I wished I *hadn't* seen—her start and colour, as no mention of an ancient and respectable relative need cause any woman, conscience-free, to blush. I blurted out some common-place stupidity in haste, to save her the embarrassment of a reply, but the walk homewards was ended in silence, except for a few forced fragments of conversation. When we parted she gave me no invitation to enter, nor did her eyes meet mine as she held out her hand. "Shall we see you to-morrow?" and to my fancy there was a wistful apologetic ring in her words: "You promised May to come. She will be disappointed, and wonder ——"

"Thank you, I will come."

"In the afternoon I shall be glad to see you," and she bowed and let the gate close gently on me, while I—as miserable and conscience smitten as if I had been found out in anything—I turned slowly homewards to compose another letter to Lady Dorothy.

This is what I said:

"I can only answer your anxieties about me by the truth. The truth about myself, I mean. Perhaps you have already guessed somewhat of it from the letter that this follows. As for Mrs. Pierpoint, I am as far from knowing anything about her as I was then. You hinted, half in joke, that she was not what she pretends to be—plainly spoken, that means that she is an adventuress, of whom a wise man would keep clear. I think you are right; at least I have been trying all day to convince myself that you are wrong, and have succeeded in discovering—what? That if she is an impostor, instead of unmasking her, I, for my part, am ready to turn round and make common cause with her against you and the rest of the world—if she'll have me for an accomplice. The murder's out, and I can but throw myself on your mercy. It is somewhat of a relief to have my own folly set clear and plain before my eyes, and to have fathomed its depths. Dorothy—kindest and wisest of fairy godmothers! you have helped me before this out of many a difficulty—out of many more than you ever suspected; but here even you are powerless. You are indignant with me, and ashamed of my folly? So ought I to be, and the worst symptom is I am no such thing. Here I am at five-and-forty, a steady-going old veteran, hopelessly in love with a woman, not young nor beautiful (as beauties go—I have my own opinion on the subject), of whom I know absolutely nothing, except that she has a brilliant touch on the pianoforte, a delicious contralto voice, and a laugh like somebody I met, years ago, down in Yorkshire.

"No, I am not ashamed, and I decline to be pitied.

"'What is to come of it?' you ask. I have not an idea. Of one thing only I am certain—believe it or not—Mrs. Pierpoint is in total ignorance of my folly, and shall remain so. She thinks, indeed, that I am unjustifiably curious about her past life, and there it ends. Perhaps the advent of Colonel Wriothesley may frighten her away—I devoutly hope it may. If not, I shall keep discreetly apart from Tamarisk Lodge till their stay here comes to an end. Not from one remaining spark of prudence or common sense; but simply because Mrs. Pierpoint cares not one whit for me, and I don't want to provoke her into telling me so, as I should most assuredly do if I gave myself the chance."

I added a few more lines that I am afraid hardly bettered my case, and finding that there was time to catch the night's post, sent my servant off with it, feeling that now for certain I had burned my ships behind me.

May and her aunt welcomed me as usual, when I paid my promised visit next day. My Amati had already established a special corner for itself beside the 'cello, and I wondered what excuse I could make for carrying it away with me. We began upon music directly. May indulged me with Haydn and all my other favourites, and then we tried one thing after another in a steady, business-like manner, quite different to our former idle dallying. May seemed to notice it. "This is severe," she presently remarked, laughing; "sing something, Auntie." But Mrs. Pierpoint shook her head and walked away to the window, where she sat gazing meditatively out at the distant sea, while May accompanied me in "To Anthea."

I'm afraid my performance was not as correct as it might have been had I not been absorbed in watching the changes of expression that drifted across that handsome, inscrutable face at the window. I caught her eyes fixed on me, too, once. It was when May had left the piano and returned to her 'cello. I liked to watch her as she played. With her long white arms and fingers, her intent luminous eyes, and her loose rippling hair, May always reminded me of some angel making music I had seen in a church window; and I sat admiring till I seemed to feel Mrs. Pierpoint's glance rest on me, and turned to intercept a curious look. A queer, wistful, yearning, heart-sick look that was gone in a flash, and left her smiling content on us. One more and one more—we had got amongst the duets now—and then I said I must go.

"Only this before we part," begged May, holding up one of Reissiger's trios. "Come, Auntie!"

"Can you two *never* get on for five minutes without my assistance?" she demanded, rather impatiently, rising and joining us however. Well, it all came to an end at last, and I left, but had not courage to bring away the violin, though no hint of further practice was given.

I kept away for three days, and on the fourth, as I was leaving the orderly-room, I came full upon Colonel Wriothesley.

He is in the Engineers, and had come down to inspect the fort. It took up the rest of the morning and some time after luncheon. I listened with nervous interest to the Colonel's gentle little stream of small-talk, hoping against hope that some allusion to his friends here might escape him—in vain. We discussed Rocksedge, its visitors, its merits as a seaside resort and as a military station, and still no mention of his cousins came. At last, heart-sick and desperate, I bluntly asked—

"You were coming down here one day last month, were you not, Colonel?"

"Who? I? Never rightly knew where the place was till last week, I am ashamed to say," was the answer that crushed my last hopes. Yet to make certainty more sure I persisted.

"Do you know any lady down here of the name of Pierpoint? Darsie Pierpoint?"

"Pierpoint? No. I've heard the name somewhere. Pierpoint—? There was a Pierpoint—a young fellow—drowned on his way to India, I remember. Nice fellow, engaged to a Miss Lawler: one of the Devonshire Lawlers. Is there anyone here of that name?"

All I could do now was to keep him away from the subject, and the chance of meeting them. Unfortunately there remained two hours to dispose of before his train left. We strolled down to the sea, took a turn on the Esplanade, and up the cliff by the old town. About half a mile from Rocksedge lies a fine old ruined church, and the Colonel, to my unexpected relief, professed himself a bit of an archæologist, and expressed a wish to explore it. As it lay on the road to the station I ordered my trap to meet us there, and off we started.

The Colonel had a great deal to say about ruins, and we amused ourselves harmlessly for some time, tracing out foundations, peering into holes and corners, and examining vestiges of ancient decorative work. He was in the middle of explaining authoritatively how the whole place came to be built, when I felt a cold thrill shoot through me, as a voice I knew sounded through the roofless aisle from the other side of the mouldering wall.

"I don't want to hurry you, but isn't it almost time to start?" I cried. The Colonel had turned away, and was digging excitedly in a corner with his umbrella.

"Roman, distinctly Roman!" declared he, straightening himself. "It's not easy to mistake the handiwork. Just see here for yourself, Travers. There has been an inner coating of cement; I grant you that." (As if I had ever disputed it! And the voices drawing nearer and nearer.) "Have that carefully cleared, and you'll find as fine an example of herring-bone work——" (There was Scrap's black nose round the gap in the wall.) "The Saxons imitated it, you know, but they hadn't the stuff to work with——"

"Of course; they did, there's some up there," I declared. (A yellow Japanese parasol appeared at the opening, and paused.)

"Where? Saxon herring-bone work?" asked Wriothesley, eagerly.

"Of course; up there. Lots of it," and I dragged him up a grassy mound where was once a chancel. "Don't you see something like it hereabouts?" Another minute and we should have descended safely on the far side, but, as luck would have it, in that minute Scrap spied me, and with a sociable bark came tearing up to us, and May after Scrap. She stopped on seeing us and bowed demurely.

"Who's that?" demanded the Colonel—as great a connoisseur, I knew, in female beauty as in Roman tiling. He caught my arm, and Mrs. Pierpoint stepped into the sunlighted space in front of us.

"Eh! What!" and Colonel Wriothesley adjusted his pince nez in a violent hurry. I saw the startled look on her face—the detected look. I saw, with a sense of sickening humiliation, her glance of dismay at the sight of me. But all my worst imaginings paled and faded before the shock that followed.

"Eh?" cried the Colonel. "It is—no really—little May Algar and —Lady Dorothy Champneys," and he trotted down the bank with outstretched hands to greet—my Godmother!

I don't know what the proper bearing of the hero of such a dramatic situation should have been; I only know what I did. I made off as quickly as possible, and without a word. I don't know what the Colonel thought, or how he got into the dog-cart and away to the train. I heard his wheels roll off as I sat on a fragment of an overturned pillar in a secluded angle of the ruined transept, holding my head in my hands and struggling with the bewilderment of this most astounding revelation. Lady Dorothy Champneys, Mrs. Pierpoint! My godmother here, all the time comparing my letters and knowing that I considered her an Impostor. To whom had I been writing, and with which was I in love? Both were the same, of course: but, I lifted my dazed head, and—there she stood.

"Are you *very* angry—past all forgiveness?" she demanded, in a soft little voice. "It seemed such an innocent little plot—and all for May's sake. I didn't know how utterly it had failed till your letter reached me this morning."

She suddenly blushed red as a rose. I kept a pitiless silence.

"You seemed so set against the poor child, and wrote so disagreeably and sarcastically about matchmakers and their victims, that it was a temptation to give you a lesson; or at any rate to determine that May *should* have a fair chance—that you should be forced into forming an unprejudiced judgment of her. It was such an opening!" she pleaded. "We came home unexpectedly. I had absolutely nothing to do, and nowhere in particular to go, and was just speculating on the possibility of taking you unawares at Rocksedge, when in came your letter, telling me even the train by which you were going down there yourself."

"So the meeting was a put up thing?"

"Didn't I tell you so?" slightly laughing.

"And the photograph?" I demanded, still stern.

"That was taken after the theatricals. You know I told you all about them. I was disgusted when I found you took that thing for a genuine likeness; too disgusted to undeceive you, especially as I hadn't a better to send."

"And you read all the letters I wrote to you about yourself?"

"Of course—" faltering for the first time. "What then?"

"This! You were acting a part for a few days' amusement, while I was unhappily in earnest—in bitter earnest!"

She stood with her head bent, silent and confused.

"However, I am glad of it," I declared, springing to my feet and confronting her. "It has helped me to find out something that I might have gone through my life unknowing. I understand you now, Lady Dorothy!"

She lifted her dark eyes affrighted. "What do you understand?"

"That you love me, Dorothy, as I love you. You *could* not be Dorothy—the Dorothy that I have known and loved all these long years, my darling, and have played your part to the end, if you had not meant the end to be . . . . THIS!"

And I caught her in my arms.

UNDER THE LIMES.

In the last sweet hours of sunny June,
When summer was ringing her loudest chimes,
I stood in the shade in the sultry noon—
In the shade of the sweetly scented limes.
In the cloistered arch of the boughs above
The bees were singing their anthem low,
And the sough of the wind was soft with love,
As it blew on my heart—as I heard it blow.

A voice, that was sweeter than wind or bee,
Spoke there with such solemn earnestness,
That the face grew pale as it turned to me,
And the eyes looked dim in their deep distress:
"Oh, I could not live if love were gone,
And I cared for none till I cared for you—"
And the antiphon of the bees went on,
While the soughing wind in the branches blew.

Yet ever the roses died away,
The love was dying—the love was dead,
And the eyes that burned my heart that day,
Burnt all the flowers of my heart instead;
The lips that framed those changeless vows,
Gave careless greeting when next we met;
Yet the wind still sighed in the scented boughs,
And the bees were in the branches yet.

Since then, I have wondered many a time
If I really stood on that day in June,
And heard the bees in the fragrant lime,
With the soughing wind and my heart in tune.
Perhaps 'twas a dream, and the dreamer I!
And dreams are fickle, as all men know!
But whenever I smell the limes, I sigh,
And the wind is weird, when I hear it blow.

J. T. Burton Wollaston.

THE CHANNEL ISLANDS.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S.

Author of "Through Holland," "The Cruise of the Reserve Squadron," &c.

IT had been very pleasant, that day at Herm and Jethou. And the boatmen could not have found their patience heavily taxed, for they hoped we should visit the little islands—or some other islands—some other day. It was very pleasant, too, in walking through the streets of Guernsey, to come every now and then upon one or other of the men we had employed in our various little cruises; to see their faces light up in recognition, and to hear a jovial voice, accompanied by quite an orthodox salute, exclaim: "Fine weather, sir! Hope you mean to give us another day on the water." It was good to feel that we had left a pleasant impression behind, and that at least for one day in their lives, these men, from coming into contact with us, were none the worse, none the less happy, none the poorer. A small matter; but our lives are made up of small matters. It is the small things of life we should look up and look after; the great ones will take care of themselves. It requires more real strength, moral courage, resolution to go day by day through life's small duties, which by frequent recurrence and familiarity grow so prosy and so commonplace, than to raise oneself by one stupendous effort to the glory of martyrdom.

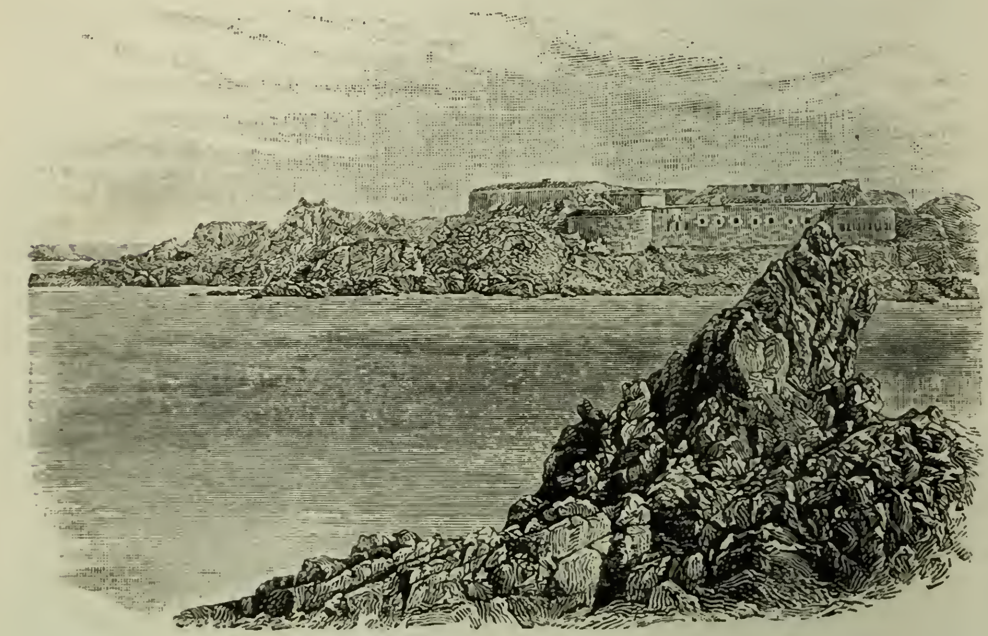
Day by day, in Guernsey, we seemed to find out new walks and fresh attractions. The twists and turnings of the roads seemed to become quite intricate, and when we thought we had reached the end of a given area, behold fresh fields and pastures new to right and left. The place seemed to expand, until, at the close of our stay, we began to feel as if we knew less of it than we had known at the beginning. It was almost perplexing. Houses embowered in green trees, or screened behind high walls, made one long to sojourn within their cool retreats. The perpetual seclusion of a monastery must be petrifying to body and spirit, a weariness to the soul; but an occasional withdrawal from the hurry and bustle, the "double, double, toil and trouble," of the world, to quiet rooms and smiling lawns, and cool breezes laden with the scent of flowers—this only enables us to plume our feathers and expand our wings for onward flight, and shake off the dust of the earth—which will not leave us quite unspotted, try as we will—and gather together fresh strength for the conflict which never ceases: for the ever-recurring moments and days when the battle grows too strong, and life too sad, and the soul goes out like the dove from the ark, and behold, nothing but a wide waste of waters, and a lost world, and grey skies, and a sun withdrawn, and not even the promise of an olive branch, and no resting-place, no resting-place anywhere for the sole of her foot.

Within the town, too, there was much that was pleasant. After six days spent on the water, or in scrambling amongst the rocks, or looking out skywards and seawards from some fine point or headland, or exploring lanes and villages, or familiarising oneself with ghostly tenements, it was especially grateful and restful to spend the morning of the seventh amongst the cool arches and solid pillars and high-backed pews of the old parish church. In a very small way there was a cloistered atmosphere about it, calm and dignified. It was never crowded, and perhaps it is wrong to say that the half-empty benches added very much to the peaceful and refreshing element that hung about the aisles. But in a London church it is so hard to feel in church. The rustle of silks and satins, the head-dresses that are often so fearfully and wonderfully made, the wandering glances, the restless hands, the constant movement around, which is seen even with closed eyes: it all makes one feel in coming out—well, that the peace which passeth all understanding seems much nearer to us in a quiet, homely country church, where we may find an aid, not an interruption, in watching through the windows the fleecy clouds floating across the blue sky, and the trees waving and rustling in the noiseless breeze, and listening to the birds, "ever soaring, ever singing." There, indeed, we find rest unto our souls.

Again, within the town, we found more mundane attractions. One day, in our exquisite and beloved little Sark, we entered the small church, where every Sunday a service is held in French, and the little band of Sercquois worship in their simple way. It has very little of the ceremonial, this service, and so the spiritual has no let or hindrance there. In the church we found a stonemason carving an inscription on a marble tablet. He had come over from Guernsey expressly to do the work, and the weather kept him a prisoner on the island. He was full of intelligence, and told us many anecdotes and traditions concerning the islands and the people. Amongst other things, how, not so many years ago, people would flock from far and near, even from England, to eat boiled bacon and pancakes on Shrove Tuesday in a certain house in St. Peter's Port, famous for these delicacies. It sounded an odd mixture; but tastes differ, and happily, are as varied as the wind is uncertain. And as there are some singular and nerveless people who glory in a strong easterly breeze, so mercifully there are tastes that find beauty in ugliness, and soft flowing curves in the most acute angles: and things that grate and jar upon one will pass unnoticed by another.

"And, sirs," continued our pleasant informant, "though bacon and pancakes have disappeared, the real Guernsey cake still exists. And if you wish to taste it in perfection you must go to a certain baker's in the market place."

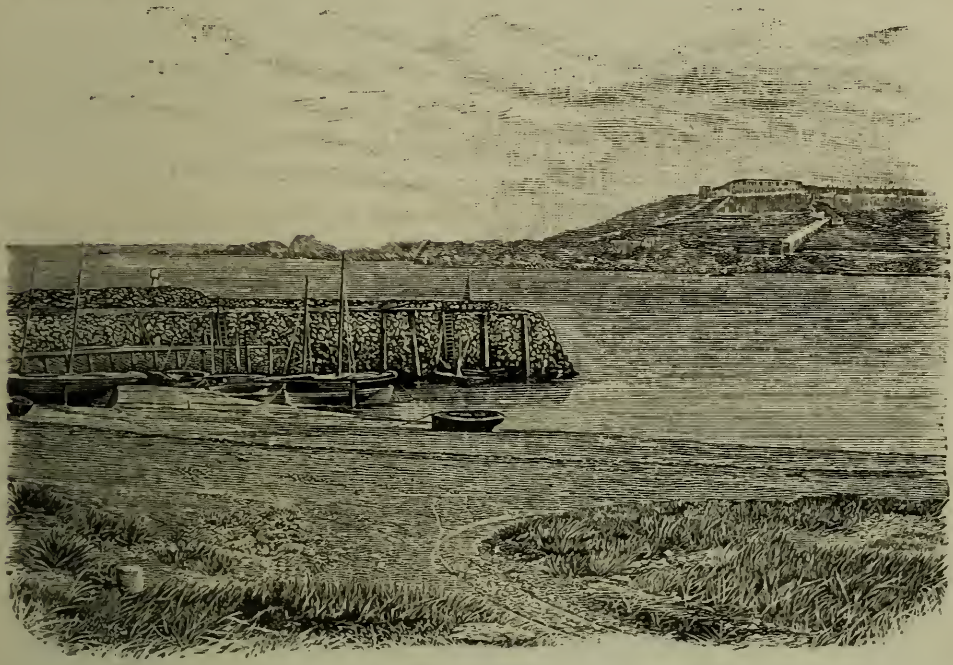
I forget the name of the shop; but if we do wrong, I fear there is too much consolation in the thought that others do wrong too, and so, reader, I will describe it, for your future possible benefit, as precisely as possible. It lies, then, on the left-hand side of the market-place as you go from the sea, and it is quite three parts of the whole way up. Tempting loaves and soft rolls and rich cakes are in the window, and two gentle-voiced, lady-like women supply your needs. We found them out one day, and to our consciences called it five o'clock tea; but it was utterly a work of supererogation, and if it spared our host's resources at the dinner that so soon followed, it worked no special good to ourselves. But the white china plates were attractive, and the Guernsey cake, cut in large, hot, smoking pieces by liberal hands, was excellent, and the ladies behind the counter had a pleasant way of chatting, and gave us many a wrinkle about the islands, and many a bit of information, which, we will pretend, was, more than the cake, the main object of our repeated visits. Our kind host would put down loss of appetite to other causes. "I think, sirs, you must be overdoing it in the way of exertion," with a shake of the head; or: "Surely you are not doing justice to Guernsey air!" but we never confessed that Guernsey cake, not Guernsey air, was at the bottom of it all; that the disease was moral, not physical.



ENTRANCE TO ALDERNEY.

Nevertheless, pleasant though Guernsey was, we could not shake from our spirits those little solitary islands of Sark, and Herm and Jethou, where, to quote once more those words so full of solemn meaning, we had found rest unto our souls. And as there was one more island to be seen, and that we wished to see before leaving Guernsey for good—the Island of Alderney—no wonder that one morning, in spite of a heavy sea that was running, and skies that were not full of promise, we took heart of grace, and departed in the little steamer that plies regularly once or twice a week between Alderney and Guernsey, wind and weather permitting. The passage is often frightfully rough, and on this occasion it was bad enough to draw from H. the remark that it was the happiest time he had yet spent in the Channel Islands. Every man to his taste, even the most eccentric and the most insane. Away we went, pitching and tossing, steering bravely and steadily amongst the rocks that abound on the Guernsey coast, over which the waves were dashing in angry, seething hillocks of foam and froth.

The passage takes about two hours, and the steamer being very small, it is indeed, in tempestuous weather, a mauvais quart d'heure to those who are not sea-proof. On this occasion we mounted the bridge between the paddle-boxes, and had a most splendid game at see-saw. The boat went up and down like the swings one sees at a village fair, and if the play was varied, it was only to turn itself into the circular motion of a merry-go-round: that wonderful and misnamed instrument of torture, without which no fair would be perfect in youthful estimation.



THE OLD HARBOUR, ALDERNEY.

Our little steamer bravely made way, in spite of rough usage, and in due time we found ourselves nearing Alderney. The approach is at its finest point, where the cliffs are highest and grandest, and give rise to hopes and expectations not afterwards fulfilled. To-day the aspect as we neared the island was unusually splendid. Small detached rocks abounded, stretching far out around the coast, and the waves dashed over them with tremendous fury. Dashed too, against the island itself, as if they would hurl it from its very foundation. We rounded, and came up with the immense breakwater, which, owing to some error in site or construction, has not withstood the sea, and has fallen away in two places.

It was a veritable witch's caldron. The whole scene was sublime and terrific. Great waves were rushing in, wave after wave, rolling and breaking, and sweeping onwards. They met the breakwater and dashed over it with a noise of thunder. White foam and spray swept high into the air, and the water swirled over the inner walk of the breakwater like a miniature Niagara. All around, far as the eye could reach, the sea was heaving and swelling, rising and falling. The sky, now black and lowering, seemed to frown upon our approach. It threw a dark shadow upon Alderney, which looked indescribably grand and gloomy, but chilling and inhospitable. The forts themselves, on the right hand and on the left, seemed to declare that the place existed only for the stern and cruel purposes of war, and that pleasure and profit would not here be found.

Up, within the breakwater, passed the steamer, but owing to the two breaches in the masonry, by no means into calm waters. Even when alongside the jetty, it was some time before she could be moored, for she floated like a cork upon the waves, and fenders and other safeguards had to be used to keep her from beating against the stonework. All this time, down the length of the breakwater, which is considerable, the sea was ever and anon flushing over, and pouring in a torrent of foam and spray that few would have cared to encounter.

At length we landed; the difficult fact was accomplished. A small crowd waited there to meet the boat, and one or two vehicles, half carts, half baggage-waggons. But everyone seemed to have his destined occupation, and not a creature would, for love or money, consent to carry our bag to the hotel. At last—necessity is the mother of invention—H. suggested that we should become our own porters and lighten our labour by slinging the bag on our sticks and carrying it between us, after the manner of Caleb and Joshua with the grapes of Eshcol. In this way we made progress, even though it was uphill work. The steamer remained long enough to transact her business, and then proceeded on her way to Cherbourg. She would return in the afternoon of the next day, when, if we had had enough of Alderney, we might set sail for Guernsey.

Certainly the earliest impression one gains of Alderney is that it is strongly fortified. Immense sums have been spent upon the works. At first sight these fortifications seem utterly out of place and unnecessary, but the position of Alderney is said, by those who ought to know, to require all the strength that has been given to it. We accepted this declaration in faith, nothing doubting.

The second impression, to those who are carrying their own baggage, is, that it is a very tough climb to get to the inn, and that if there is only one in the place, it might have quartered itself somewhat nearer the pier. But the longest lane has a turning, and Scott's Hotel loomed upon us at last. We had been told that Mrs. Scott, the landlady, was very independent; would take in whom she pleased and reject whom she would; was capable of sacrificing herself for those she took a fancy to, and for the unhappy ones with whom she did not fall in love at first sight, would do little or nothing.

We believe nothing of all this; or, if it be true, we certainly fell at once into her good graces. We were the first arrivals, and seeing no one and making no one hear, we boldly marched through, right into her very kitchen.

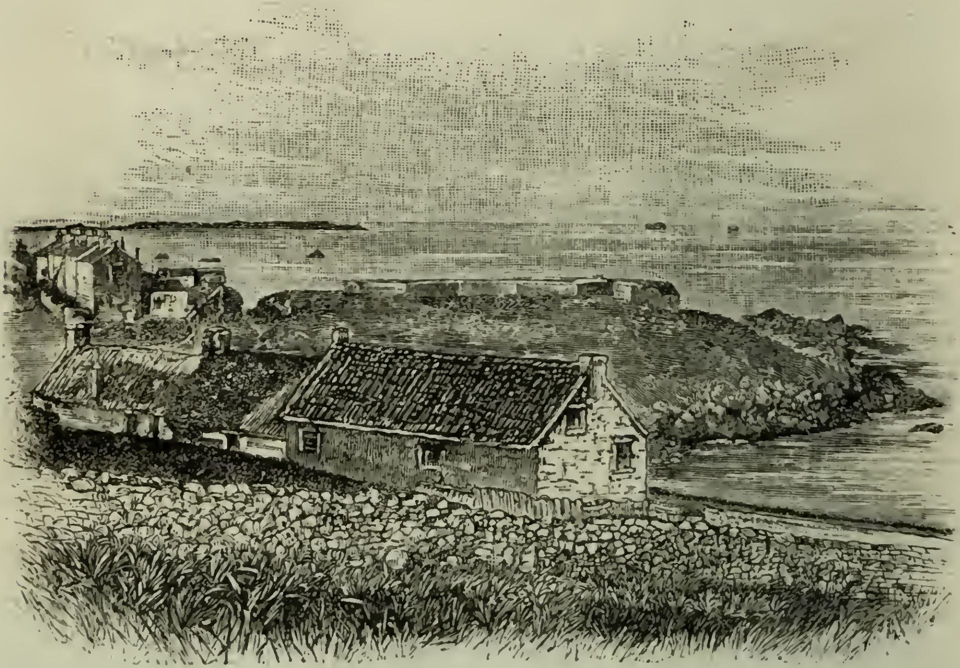
It might have been a palace, so spotlessly clean, so wonderfully orderly was the whole room: and somehow, a well-appointed kitchen is a sight that comes home to us, conjuring up all sorts of homely and domestic visions and pleasant emotions. As a rule, too, it is the embodiment of unceremonious comfort. This particular kitchen certainly was. And not the least comfortable and pleasant object was Mrs. Scott herself, who stood in the middle of the floor and gazed at us as if we had dropped from the clouds. We at once fell in love with her motherly face and earnest grey eyes, and felt ourselves at home. Then her tongue loosened.

"Eh, my dears!" She lifted up her hands to give force to the exclamation. It was impossible not to smile at the greeting. Coming from her kindly lips and voice, it had a genuine, unstudied directness which made it not in the least familiar, but very pleasant. At once we were no longer strangers, but might have known her for ten years.

"Eh, my dears! but you must have had a rough passage!" And as Mrs. Scott was the widow of a former captain of one of these boats, she was an authority upon the point. "And you are wet and cold!" she cried, coming up to H., who had received on the voyage, more than once, the benediction of a wave. And forthwith she conducted him to the roaring fire, and turned him round and round, for all the world as if he had been a jack wound up and hung, and ready to begin its work. Our hold upon the house at any rate was secure, and Mrs. Scott's best and kindliest was at our service.

And so, by and by, all things comfortably settled, we wandered out to become acquainted with the island.

It may at once be said that the aspect of Alderney is most mournful, most melancholy. It has the appearance of a town once populated, now deserted; the look of a dead city. In revenge, it possesses the newest, and, in the opinion of many, the most beautiful church in all the islands, built after designs by Gilbert Scott. The town itself is quaint, irregular, without any vestige of beauty. The principal streets are deserted, whether in the morning, at midday, or in the evening. The shops seem to exist for their own sake, not for the sake of the community. We never saw anyone within them, and if we ourselves entered, those who served seemed to wake up from a trance. Of course things are not actually quite so bad as this, or the shops themselves would cease to exist; but one old Frenchman, who shook his head sadly, and lamented in a torrent of eloquent words his "belle France," did not hesitate to declare, in tones fitted to the sentiment: "Ah, monsieur! c'est une ville morte!" Years ago, he declared that, comparatively speaking, they had done there a thriving trade. Four thousand workmen were upon the island, building the fortifications: they had brought life and business with them. But, the works finished, the men had departed, and the place became more dead than if they had never been there.

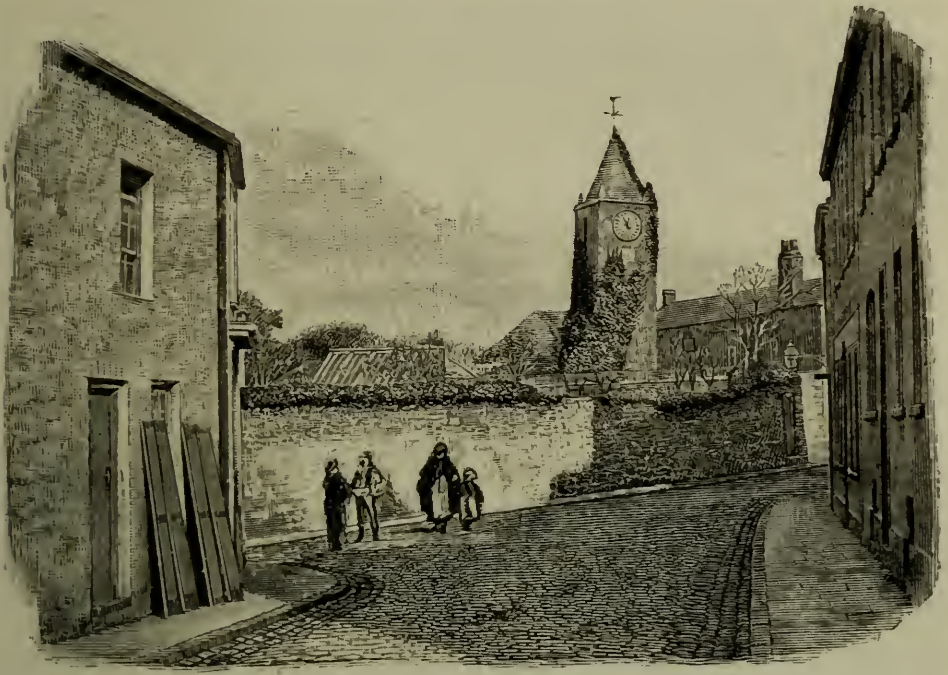


ALDERNEY.

This accounted for the rows of shut-up houses one came across. They looked, indeed, as if the plague had swept away the inmates, or as if the Court of Chancery had thrown its stagnant and destructive influence over them. They were abandoned to the rats; windows were broken, shutters closed, an atmosphere of death and decay hung about them.

Then, besides the two principal streets of Alderney—at right angles with each other—there are inferior streets, which might be called the east end of the town. They are dirty, crooked, and ill-paved, or not paved at all. The cottages looked old and decrepit; they might be so many cow-sheds. One passes quickly along, glad to escape from their depressing influence. And all through the town, in every street, you may walk up and down and wander to and fro, and never meet a soul, see no face at any window. Perhaps it is not always so; it was so with us. A very different thing, this depressing desolation, from the grand, invigorating solitudes of Sark. These seemed to proclaim nothing but the death of man, those the life, health-giving quietudes of nature.

But the greater part of Alderney does not offend in this way. You may stroll over nearly all the island and see no trace of habitation. It is one mournful stretch of country; some of it cultivated, much of it nothing but hills and valleys, and downs of gorse and heather and grass. It is very melancholy and depressing: has in it very little beauty. Occasionally you come upon a ruined kiln, and the bare walls of a house that must once have echoed to the sound of human voices, and they look old enough to have passed into antiquities. But as a rule you see nothing but the bare country around you, and if you are not sure of your way, there is no one to put you right. Sign-boards there are none, and if there were, perhaps they could bear only one announcement: "This way to Scott's Hotel." Scarcely there seemed any roads in the island. Half the time, in going from one point to another, we were walking over ploughed fields, trudging up and down heavy hill sides, getting into bogs and marshes unawares—and for what reward? Certainly we grew inconceivably weary, for it was hard work getting about Alderney, but the beauties of nature were conspicuous by their absence. I cannot remember that we saw a single tree. The shady lanes of Sark, with their



ST. ANNE'S CHURCH, ALDERNEY.

over-arching, interlacing branches existed not here. No banks of wildflowers, and only now and again a blackberry hedge or two.

One piece of colouring we met, but it was sad of tone. We came upon the cemetery just as a military funeral was going on, and the scarlet coats of the soldiers stood out in bright contrast with the surrounding landscape. It was the funeral, if I remember, of a non-commissioned officer, who had slowly died of consumption. He had been a Roman Catholic, and the priests in their robes, and the cross that was elevated, formed an imposing pageant to the eyes of those who had come upon it unawares. The soldiers fired a volley over the grave, and the air was startled with the sharp sound, and then all was over, and everyone departed, and the tenant of the new grave was left to await that great day when at the sound of the last trump we all shall come forth to Judgment.

Our one reward for visiting Alderney was its rocky coast. Here and there the cliffs are exceedingly fine, and almost more picturesque than any to be found in the other islands. They are occasionally fantastic in shape, and splendid in their varied colour. There are splendid bits that overhang the shore, and tall cliffs that are perpendicular. So much so that we could not get down to the white, enticing beach below, and this was tantalising. One longed to reach the bottom and look upwards at these eternal monuments of nature; it was impossible to appreciate them properly without doing so; but it would have been more easy to scale a house.

To take a boat and go round was equally impossible. The sea was raging; the sky was dark and lowering; a strong, cold wind searched out one's very bones; and every now and then showers came down with a strength that defied anything in the shape of an umbrella. This was very much against us and against the island. In summer weather and under sunny skies, there is quite enough to repay one in Alderney for a run across from Guernsey, especially as peace and plenty abound at Scott's Hotel. But in uncertain seasons, when the days are growing cold and the sun goes down before the afternoon is well over, then to visit Alderney is a mistake. We did not regret it, being of a contented mind, and reading sermons in stones, and books in the running brooks; nevertheless we felt that a sojourn of many days would have proved Alderney a weariness to the flesh.

And our stay was destined to be not quite so short as we had anticipated. If the day of our arrival was boisterous, what can be said of the next, when we were to return? If the sea had run hills yesterday, to-day it ran mountains. The steamer from Cherbourg was hours behind time, and everyone prophesied that she would not venture from the shelter of that magnificent harbour. However, about two o'clock in the afternoon, in she struggled, drenched to the skin, if one may apply the term to a boat. She had been buffeted about by the stormy winds and tempests, and was weeping salt tears. But she was going on to Guernsey, and so we packed up and said good-bye to kindly Mrs. Scott, and carried our bag down as we had brought it up, like another Caleb and Joshua.

At the boat all was confusion. There was an immense cargo of wood to land, men were working like slaves, and even some of the passengers helped; for unless we could get out by four o'clock, said the skipper, and so make Guernsey by daylight, he would not leave Alderney before to-morrow morning. Everyone felt this to be wisdom. The wind and the waves were roaring. If the sea broke over the pier yesterday like a miniature Niagara, to-day it seemed bent upon rivalling those celebrated falls. We made the vessel through showers of spray, glad to do it even on those terms.

And the time went on, and four o'clock struck, and the work was not done, and the captain said there should be no going out to-day, for him or for anyone. At half-past seven to-morrow morning he would start, not before. There was nothing for it but to go back and throw ourselves once more on Mrs. Scott's mercy; and this time we found a lad to relieve us of our encumbrances.

Mrs. Scott was not surprised to see us again. She had given a shrewd guess as to what would happen, and was prepared for our reappearance. To those who had time to spare, the only unpleasant part of the delay was the fact of having to get up early and turn out the next morning; but Mrs. Scott faithfully promised breakfast at 6.30, and no end of creature comforts, and we felt that after all there is a silver lining to every cloud. The clouds to-day certainly were very thick indeed, and the lining was all out of sight, but we hoped the morning might bring a change.

The change was of the slightest. The steamer had left the side, and we had to reach it in a small boat. It was hard work to get into it, and I wondered whether we should be swamped or merely get drenched in making the good ship. Before 7.30 everyone was on board, and away we went. And what a passage we had! She shook and trembled, and vibrated and rocked and tossed about, and did everything but turn head over heels. Once I thought she had even done that, for she stood nearly on end, paused as if to take counsel with herself, and I waited for the next move, and wondered what it would be. It really seemed doubtful. But she behaved nobly, and she was in the hands of a man whose skill and courage had carried him through worse straits than these.

We left Alderney enshrouded in a morning mist which clung about it, but was not on the sea. The waves dashed over the rocks with a fury I have scarcely ever seen equalled; indeed I have never seen any spot look so wild and dangerous, so exposed to the rage and violence of all the elements. The sight was nothing less than terrifically grand and sublime, and alone would have repaid us for our visit. Above, on the bridge, clinging to anything that would give support, we gazed upon a scene that the coming years would never efface from memory.

After a quick but stormy passage, for the last time we entered the quiet waters of Guernsey harbour. Our stay was drawing to a close. For three weeks the comfortable shelter of Old Government House had been our head quarters, and we had always returned to it with feelings of pleasure; even as, when the hour came, we left it with regret. But time runs on, sometimes all too quickly. For us, in these days, the sun will not stand still, or go back ten degrees, and we have no Joshua to command it, and no Hezekiah to pray for it. The beauties and glory even of this world are greater than our minds can always fully realise, and our souls bow down before them in silent adoration of Him by whom are all things and for Whose pleasure they are and were created. But after all we have them only occasionally. They come before us and vanish as a dream that is told. Summer gives place to winter, when nature dies, and the heart grows sad, while yet living in hope of spring. And presently, almost before we know it, our own life's spring-time has changed to summer, as our summer must one day yield to winter, when the golden bowl will break and the pitcher go for the last time to the fountain. It must come, and our days are fleeting, and life is sad, and saddest of all the inevitable fact that all things change; friends fall away, loved voices that made our music are hushed, and eyes that were our delight are closed, and our heart has gone with them to the silent land, while we remain behind, sad and solitary pilgrims. And so, will not one of our greatest charms and delights in the next world be our eternal youth, where, if we gain experience and make progress, it shall not bring to us furrows and grey hairs, or pain or sorrow, or memories full of regrets, or consciences laden with remorse; the miseries of life shall be no more, and the mistakes of life shall have been turned aside to bear good fruit. Eternal sunshine and eternal youth, and happiness and companionship without measure. And everlasting spring in nature, and we ministers of boundless realms: melodies around us and within us that ear hath not heard nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. Then—

All hail the hour when Heaven's celestial chimes,
Shall ring our souls to that eternal shore,
And safe within those everlasting climes
We clasp our loved and lost for evermore!

THE OLEANDER.

By A. de Grasse Stevens, Author of "Old Boston," &c.

WE who know the Lady Diana love her, because of the love that is reflected in her beautiful face. Her youthful eyes look out upon the world fearlessly, yet with a touch of retrospection and sadness in their depths; a sadness that deepens at any appeal to her sympathies, or vanishes at any tale of happiness, especially if that happiness has come as an unlooked-for sequence to sorrow and trouble.

She has only just touched the outer circle of years when a woman leaves behind her the first freshness of girlhood, and takes up the more serious side of life. And in spite of the snow-white hair that shades her low, broad brow, and deep, serious eyes, she is what she appears to be: a woman, young, handsome, high-born. It is a face and a character strangely attractive, because, seemingly, so open and so easily understood.

She is very kind-hearted in a gentle, quiet fashion, and when she confers a favour it is done with so matchless a grace that its worth is double that bestowed by anyone else. Were it not for the sad, reflective expression that gathers on her face when in repose, and that lurks always in the shadow of her dark eyes, you would write her down, not only the most fortunate among women, but also the most happy. When my little history of her is finished you may each judge whether this would be a truthful decision regarding her.

As we all know, she is the only daughter of the late Earl of Welford, and at his death inherited a considerable portion of his personal wealth and a small estate in Hampshire that had come to her through her mother. Her only brother, the present Lord Welford, was never a favourite, either at home or in the world, and Lady Diana saw as little of him as family feeling would allow; but until she reached her majority he was her guardian and trustee, and assumed complete control over her actions. How she broke these irksome bonds will be seen later on.

Of course Lady Diana had a brilliant first season. She was rich, beautiful, and owned a lineage second to none in the peerage. What more could any right-minded young lady desire? She drove the prettiest ponies in the park, rode the finest horse in the row, owned the most perfect sapphires out of the royal regalia, had a charming house in Park Lane and an old estate in Hampshire, whose traditions and histories would fill a volume of themselves; and yet—and yet—the Lady Diana was not altogether happy.

In these days Diana's eyes were speculative only and beautiful, while the glorious coronet of hair that crowned her small head was alight and glowing, imprisoning every unwary sunbeam in its golden sheen. Diana possessed one friend, to whom she opened as much of her inner nature as lay in her power to impart. This friend often gave advice to Diana, which she very rarely followed. I am not sure that Millicent Denman was altogether a judicious confidant for Lady Diana; but be that as it may, she was loyal, and loyalty counts for much, and should weigh down the balance against frivolity and want of judgment. I wonder how many of us could prove our title to loyalty as securely as Millicent Denman?

The house in Park Lane, where Lady Diana lives now, is the same over which she ruled as a young princess of eighteen. The drawing-room is little changed. I can remember the same white panelled walls decorated with rare pictures, and a fragile cup or tazza of Saxe or old Dresden on velvet consoles; the same amber draperies fall at the windows, and the same quaint chairs and divans invite repose or suggest confidences. But apart from its surroundings, this boudoir possesses a curious charm of its own. It does not consist in the subtle perfume that clings to each fold of drapery, a perfume as intangible as it is seductive, since there are never any flowers here. Flowers are in abundance all about the house, but not in Diana's own private and particular room. I questioned her once on this point and she answered with one of her slow, sweet smiles:

"My dear Theresa, do you never punish yourself? Or rather, do you never enforce a penance upon yourself? Once, long ago, I willfully destroyed one of God's most beautiful flowers; was I worthy after that to indulge myself with their beauty, when, in a passion, I tore asunder each blossom and cast them beneath my feet? My dear, I have been forgiven, but I cannot forget."

Nor does it exist in the wealth of books, so daintily bound, so richly embossed, nor in the sheen of Moorish plaques that catch the gleam of firelight on their Tyrian discs and flash back a trinity of colour, red, golden, purple, from out the century of time they represent. No, it is something apart from these accessories; the influence of a presence distinct yet invisible, that dwells within the apartment and dominates it with a furtive yet positive personality.

It was the spring of 1871, and Lady Diana had come up to town just when all the primroses and cowslips were decking the Hampshire meadows with golden glory, and the great crimson and white may trees before the low stone porch at Heron's Court were bursting into full bloom, and flinging wide their sweets with Nature's lavish generosity. The trees in Hyde Park were fresh and green, the horse-chestnut buds at Bushey growing daily larger. Flowers bloomed everywhere.

London was alive once more. The season, with its rush and toil after pleasure, was in full tide, and amongst the gayest, the most admired, the most fêted was the Lady Diana. The house in Park

Lane resounded all day long to the echo of happy voices and gay laughter. Di's feet were never weary, her spirits never flagged, her enjoyment never faltered. She sang, she danced, she flirted, she rode, she drove; and her aunt, good-natured old Lady Paragon, was heard to declare, that not all her own bevy of wild Irish girls had caused her one half the amusement, excitement and fatigue that the chaperonage of beautiful Lady Diana entailed upon her.

On this particular morning Diana was discussing, not too amiably, the counter attractions of a very grand dinner versus a merry drive to Richmond, a row on the river, and an impromptu dance and supper at her own home, on their return.

Lady Paragon was all in favour of the dinner, naturally, being old and a trifle stout, with a soul not above truffles, forced strawberries, and hot-house peaches, interspiced by the latest risqué on-dit and most piquant scandal. But Diana and Millicent Denman would hear of nothing so respectable and dull, and to this effect Di's young voice was raised in rather loud tones.

"It's perfectly horrid," she was saying to the long-suffering Dowager. "I never heard, or read, or dreamed of such barbarity! To want to go to old Lord Potmore's on such a night as this, and stuff oneself with baked meats until one is as red and as cross as twenty Potmores rolled into one!"

"My dear Diana," expostulated her ladyship, "you really should be careful! You make such random statements, my love! I am positively certain that Lord Potmore's cook knows quite well that to serve *baked* meats is not at all the thing; and as to my growing red and cross—my dear Diana, my complexion and temper are my two strong points."

"Now you know you want to go, Aunt Parry," cried Diana shortly, "because the Reigne-bisque is particularly good at Potmore House. I have heard you say so thousands of times. Now I detest Reigne-bisque, and I know I shall be as cross and as ugly as Theresa, who sits moping there, if you make me go; and when I do look ugly, you know there is no one can touch me."

"Oh, Diana," said Lady Paragon plaintively, "what can I do? We have been promised, you know, for a fortnight—and then there is Welford. Your brother will never forgive me, for you know quite well who is to be there, especially to meet you."

"If you mean Horace Browne," cried Di, with flashing eyes, emphasizing each syllable of his name scornfully, "then I can tell you, Aunt Paragon, I simply *won't go.* Welford ought to be ashamed to treat me so. I hate Horace Browne. He's disagreeable and deceitful, and if Welford thinks to make me listen to him by threats or by promises, he is very much mistaken. He can keep my money from me, I know, but he cannot, and he shall not, make me marry a man I despise."

Diana burst into tears, and sobbed so piteously and so long that it took Lady Paragon and Millicent, with what small assistance I could offer, an hour or more to console her. Of course she got her own way in the end; Lady Paragon braved the wrath of Lord Potmore and Welford alone, and Diana and Millicent went off to Richmond under the care of little Mrs. Camoys, Millicent's married sister. I remained at home, but that was nothing new; I was only Theresa White, a poor relation, whom in her capricious way Diana loved, and in her heart, I think, respected.

I never knew all that happened at Richmond. The girls came home in the gayest spirits, and both the dance and the supper were a great success, poor Lady Paragon relinquishing the most seductive post-dinner anecdotes to hurry home and give countenance to the affair. When Mrs. Camoys came she was accompanied by a tall, dark young man, whom I had never seen before, and whose manner was a curious mingling of boyish frankness and foreign politeness. He seemed a little, a very little, shy, as if unused to such gatherings, and to the light and colour and unobtrusive richness of his surroundings. He was very handsome certainly, with a brow broad, like Keats, and hair so dark as to appear black, brushed back from his forehead; his eyes were large and calm, but with a faithfulness and constancy in their regard that bespoke a nature trusting and believing. His hands were small, dark-tinted, and with fingers as delicate as a lady's.

Mrs. Camoys presented him to Lady Paragon, who looked at him doubtingly, ere her good nature responded to his deferential manner. I did not hear his name until late in the evening, when Millicent whispered to me hurriedly:

"Isn't he too delightful? And only think of our securing him, when he was due at a hundred different places! But that's Camilla Camoys' luck; she *always* gets what she wants!"

"But who is he, Millicent?" I asked, catching hold of her arm as she was flying off.

"Who is what?" she cried. "Oh, Theresa, don't you know? but you never do know anything. Why, Tito de Lisle, to be sure, you little ignoramus!"

Antonio de Lisle was a name well known in those days. He had made, so to speak, a triumphal entry into London and London society. By birth a Tuscan, he inherited his beauty, his quick appreciation and adaptability from his high-born Italian mother, his grand air and noble carriage from his English father, who was a cadet of the old and honourable family of de Lisle, and who, having contracted a marriage of the affections when very young, renounced his country, and dwelt and died in that of his southern bride. Antonio, the only child of this union, had never seen the land of his Norman forefathers, and held for it none of the love and veneration with which he clothed his mother's fairer country. He was an artist, but an artist of a century, with the genius of a Tintoretto, and the religion of a Raphael. Santa Lucca, in Rome, was the first to recognise his genius; then followed the Salon and Munich; and, lastly, the great Academy of England opened its doors to the young foreigner, who, after all, was not a foreigner, but an alien, and admitted his pictures to places of honour on the line.

He also brought letters of introduction to one or two of his father's old friends, and if his work was warmly received and indiscriminately praised, his own welcome lacked nothing in cordiality and empressement.

Camilla Camoys had been among the first to know and patronise him; a patronage he quietly set aside in his own way; and she it was who carried him off from a dinner and two balls, to dance attendance upon her at a frivolous Richmond party. I am not above the average woman in my curiosity, and therefore I looked at Tito with much inward satisfaction. Meantime the music went on about me, and light feet trod out the hours to flying measures.

In the midst of it all, the door opened and Lord Welford entered, accompanied by a stranger. He stood for a few moments unnoticed; a tall, fair man, who, save for a furtive, uncertain glance, would have passed as good-natured and inoffensive. His companion was also tall and fair, with a waxen sallowness of cheek and forehead, heightened by his sandy hair and black evening dress.

Welford surveyed the room in silence, and then with a short nod to his friend crossed to where I sat, half-hidden by the window draperies. He stood before me, bowing with deliberate politeness, before he addressed me, in his half-bantering, half-earnest fashion.

"Well, Miss White, why do you not join the merry-makers? Is the soul above your foot more tyrannous than that beneath?" he asked, laughing at his own poor wit. "Now I believe, my little Theresa, that you sit solitary here only because no one has asked you to leave your lonely position. Ah, I see I am right. Well then, my little wall-flower, I offer you my hand, and insist upon its acceptance."

He put his arm about me as he spoke, and before I could collect my senses, we were whirling about lazily and delightfully to Weber's "Last Waltz."

Lord Welford danced very well, and like most plain people, who are always out of everything of the kind, I was a mad devotee of the art. Presently he stopped, and as we stood at the top of the room, his quick eye noted each passing couple. He spoke at last, bending down to look at me.

"Theresa, who is the excessively dark young man upon whom my sister bestows so many smiles?"

"You mean Antonio de Lisle," I said, proud of my knowledge. "I am sure, Welford, you must be pleased to see him here. Camilla Camoys brought him, and he gave up a dinner and two balls to accompany her."

"Oh, wise Camilla!" exclaimed his lordship, very softly. "'Tis a pity, Theresa, but I am afraid I must break up Camilla's little game."

Then, without apology, he strolled away from me, and rejoined his friend. I crept back to my corner and watched Diana, as she rested from her waltz, and fanned her flushed cheeks with the feathers of an ibis. Before her stood Tito de Lisle, his dark face all alight with animation. He was looking down upon her, and she with her beautiful eyes upraised, listened to his words, while a tender little smile played about the corners of her mouth.

Across the pretty comedy came Welford, followed by his friend. There was a moment's silence. De Lisle stood aside, and Horace Browne bowed low before Lady Diana. But the girl made no response; she drew up her slender form to its full height; she lowered her crimson fan, and with one stately curtsey she turned from him, and putting her hand on Tito's arm, walked swiftly away from her brother and his disconcerted companion. Lord Welford's face grew very dark; he muttered something beneath his breath; then, with an easy laugh, laid his hand upon Horace Browne's arm, and both shortly afterwards left the room.

The fair spring days gave place to the deeper glories of summer Diana was very happy, despite her aunt's complaints and her brother's half-scornful, half-threatening words, when in their rare interviews he renewed the subject of Horace Browne's pretensions to her hand. Yes, she was very happy, and the truth of her happiness lay neither in the bottom of a well nor in a leaden casket, for was not Antonio de Lisle always at her side? And did it need any brighter eyes than mine to read the sweet story opening before them, in all its beauty and all its pain?

Alas! poor Lady Diana! Of what was she dreaming when she let her fancy wander away to a possible future, when Tito's presence would be hers by right of possession, and Tito's Tuscan eyes never wander far from the fairness of her face? A daughter of Lord Welford marry a poor painter and half a foreigner! That would be a horror so overwhelming as to strike terror even into the cold hearts and lifeless forms of all the brave Earls of Welford, who lay so quiet and so still in the little old church in Hampshire.

In July the house in Park Lane was closed, and we all went down to Heron's Court. At first Diana was as bright and happy as need be, and to my eyes became more and more beautiful. Then she grew a little restless, and her temper flashed out on certain occasions rather alarmingly. Then she grew listless and dull, moped all day over a book, and cried at night over her imaginary woes.

This went on for some time, but as Lady Paragon did not notice it, and I was sharply repulsed for commenting upon it, there was nothing to be done. I knew what she wanted well enough; haven't we all of us cried for our own particular moon; and who amongst us has forgotten the hopeless misery of such weeping?

In September, Millicent Denman joined us, and immediately Diana recovered her gaiety and her spirits. The fourth day after Millicent's arrival the two girls started off on a long walk through the woods to a certain "wishing-tree," renowned for its miraculous powers when sought with faith. I don't know what petition they proffered to its hoary heart, but if it was what I shrewdly suspected, the old oak did not belie its reputation; for as Aunt Paragon and I were pacing slowly up and down the rose parterre in the afternoon, three happy young voices saluted our ears: two girlish sopranos and a low, mellow baritone. It was an old glee they sang—"All in a Garden Fair"—and the quaint refrain floated sweetly through the evening air.

Lady Paragon and I stood speechless. She made some incoherent exclamation to which I had no time to reply, for as the song ended, followed by a trill of happy laughter, three figures sprang from out the deepening gloom of the acacia trees, and to our consternation it was Antonio de Lisle who accompanied the girls. It was therefore Antonio de Lisle's dangerous voice that had mingled its deeper tones with theirs.

Diana dashed into the subject at once—poor Di; she was always so impetuous.

"Dear Aunt Parry, only see whom we have found! Mr. de Lisle, whom you liked so much in London, you know. He is staying at Petersfield, with the Mortons—come down for some shooting. Fancy an artist liking to kill all the pretty brown partridges!"

Diana stopped, and the young man made his bow to the elder lady, kissing her hand with the courtly grace of a de Medici. Who could resist the graciousness of youth to age? Not Lady Paragon. In one moment her prejudices fell from her; she let prudence fly to the winds; she forgot Welford's anger and Horace Browne's claims, and welcomed poor Tito with a cordiality as sincere as it was graceful. Diana was delighted, and Millicent, walking demurely by my side to the house, imparted her conviction that for once the wishing-tree had accorded a prompt and effectual response.

September flew by, and October broke upon us with cold, fresh mornings and evenings, when the open fires made more delightful than ever the low-ceilinged hall and drawing-rooms, and the pretty drama fulfilled itself before our very eyes.

Very often, at this time, I asked myself if the fatal little word had been spoken. Antonio, coming day by day from Petersfield, had grown a part of Diana's life, accepted even as the air she breathed.

He began a portrait of her one day, which was to win him further glory, and on which, poor fellow, he, with the superstition of his race, pinned his failure or success in winning Diana's hand; at least, so *I* read the writing between the lines. So innocent and so good was his nature, he never thought to weigh her social claims against his, or find a stumbling-block in the difference between them in station. His art ennobled him, and made him the peer of all men.

The portrait was a very simple one. Diana, in a gown of white satin, was standing, her graceful head crowned with its coronet of golden hair, her beautiful face upraised, her earnest, happy eyes—whose dark shadows caught and held so many changeful expressions—looking forth joyously; in one hand she held a spray of pale pink oleander bloom; and as a counterfoil to this fair woman in her shimmering robes, the young artist had introduced, with happy harmony, a background of the dark shining oleander trees, their polished leaves of varying green relieving here and there the more sombre tones.

For a few days all went well. Diana was pleased and flattered at being painted and adored at one and the same time, and with Millicent Denman enjoyed the hours of posing to the full. Then came a difficulty. Nature, not so willing to own the Lady Diana's supreme sovereignty as were we poor mortals, refused to force into bloom, out of due season, the fragile oleander flowers. The trees were there in full magnificence of leaf, but neither blossom nor bud was discernible. Indeed Macduff, the old Scotch gardener, when impatiently questioned by Diana as to the prospect of any flowers forthcoming, made the depressing statement that, though he had lived ten good years at Heron's Court, his eyes had never seen any one of them in bloom, and to his thinking nothing short of a miracle would produce even the tiniest flower.

Now Diana was a trifle vain, and what she had set her heart upon was to see her counterpart, in fairest guise, hung upon the Academy's walls in the coming May. She knew that November would see them all on the wing for Italy, with no chance of a return until after Easter; how then was her portrait to be accomplished, since, as we all know, it must go to be judged, two weeks before the great spring Festa, by the terrible forty who weigh out fame to the trembling aspirants at Burlington House?

Millicent, however, rose to the occasion. She came dancing in one morning, with a sealed box in her hand addressed to the Lady Diana; this, on being opened, displayed a spray of exquisite pink oleander in full bloom. There came no message with it, but Diana charged Millicent with the gift, and Millicent, looking pleased and proud, could only mutter something about Nice and the South of France, and the rail being wonderful now-a-days. When Tito came that day, the flower was carefully arranged to greet him, and the portrait made several great leaps towards completion. They had turned the morning room into a studio, and Diana had ordered the three great pots of oleanders to be brought from the winter-house and placed as a background to her charms. With these and the spray of blossom Tito would evolve wonders.

The next day saw us as breathlessly eager over the portrait as though 'twas but just begun. Tito came early, for with a clear morning before him he hoped to see the oleander blooms all transferred to his canvas ere nature's forced flower withered and died. Diana placed herself in position, the sunlight falling in subdued brilliancy across her satin robe, glistening in and out amidst her golden tresses, and caressing into warmer colour the pink flower she held; Millicent on the hearth-rug was making us laugh by her absurd rattle; Lady Paragon was nodding over the last novel from Mudie's, and I was knitting silently, finishing my last half-dozen of serviceable winter hose.

Presently Antonio looked up and made some little half-foolish, half-tender speech, beneath whose light expression lurked a deeper meaning than Diana surmised. She blushed and looked down, twirling the spray of oleander between her slender fingers; and as she so stood, the tell-tale blood in her cheeks and Tito's ardent eyes resting upon her, the door was thrown open and Lord Welford, accompanied by Horace Browne, walked in upon us.

Diana gave a little cry and start as she caught sight of her brother. Antonio, with that innate courtesy that so well became him, laid down his palette and brushes, and with a bow to Welford quietly withdrew, Horace Browne following him.

Without a word of greeting Welford came up to Diana and caught hold of her arm; his face was very pale, his blue eyes flashed, his voice was low but stern.

"I interrupt you, Diana, I fear," he began, "in a most interesting amusement. Truly it is a pretty scene! A young lady dressed at high noon in a costume de bal, posing in sweet simplicity to Signor Italiano, who responds in like manner, and evidently has filled his head with all sorts of unheard-of and impossible ideas and pretensions." Then with sudden warmth, he continued: "In truth, Diana, I am surprised. I think you strangely forget your own dignity, and that due to our name, when you consent to trifle with a passion which you cannot return. Who is this young fellow who dares to instal himself so intimately here, and who would, I repeat, evidently further presume to ally himself with our house?"

Diana broke forth at this. "It is *my* house, Welford, unpleasant as it is to remind you of it. Mr. de Lisle is my guest, invited by me; his name should be passport sufficient, since it is as old and as honourable as our own."

She flashed out at him in a girlish burst of impotent rage, and Welford treated her with as little respect as a child.

"Don't be foolish, Diana; it is useless work splitting straws. As your guardian, I have every right to suggest who shall be admitted as your friends, until you come to years of discretion. I find no fault with Mr. de Lisle as a stranger; but as a friend for you, Diana—I find so many objections in that point of view, that my safest and wisest course is to forbid him the house. I am not only your brother, Diana, but I am your guardian, and unless you please me in your choice of a husband you will drive me to sterner actions. You can listen to no love and wed no suitor, save such as I sanction. Be obedient, and I will be gentle and show you only love and protection; but—do not cross me, Diana."

Lady Diana looked at him earnestly as he spoke, all the passion and fire of her heart glowing in her eyes. As she stood, white and dauntless before him, her cheeks burned hotly, the waxen oleander flower quivered in her tightly-clasped fingers, as its delicate petals drooped in the fierce noonday sun. Then with a sudden long-drawn sigh, as if awakening from sleep or dream, she moved towards him, her satins trailing after her catching and reflecting the sunbeams. I saw the look upon her face, and I knew that Antonio de Lisle had spoken, and the love wavering in her heart against the pride and prejudice of her race and order, which, if left alone, might possibly have proved too feeble to combat the instincts and education of her creed, was by Welford's ill-advised interference fanned into a depth and constancy that would render the sequel of this morning's action more complex and doubtful than it at present seemed.

In a voice as low and even as his own she answered him:

"You have said enough, Welford. It hurts me, indeed, to think how much of insult you have bestowed upon me. If as a woman I have no claim upon your manhood, as a sister I might surely urge one. I am to have no suitor save as you direct—then I will have none. I am to wed no man save as you may choose—then I will never marry. You have chosen to insinuate a sordid motive for Mr. de Lisle's attentions to me; you have not spared him or me in what you say; and you pretend it is affection that rules your actions towards me. Unfortunately I call it by a less generous name. Be careful; you may take one step too far, and what you think to force on me may turn to your own hurt."

"Do you mean this for a challenge, Diana—your will against mine?" said Lord Welford in low, determined tones. Then, before she could reply, he turned from her with a careless laugh and called out: "Alas! Millicent, was it for *this* I spent my valuable time to procure at your request yonder pink spray Diana cherishes so ardently? It is another lesson in woman's deceit! You told me of your desire, Millicent, but you forgot to mention the reason, or the use for the pretty trifle."

His mirth was interrupted by Diana, who with a short, hard cry burst forth: "I despise you, Welford! You are cowardly in your taunts. And to think I owe *this* to you." She caught the pink flower in her fingers and ruthlessly tore it apart, casting the petals from her in a passion of scorn; then she flung down the denuded stalk and trampled it under her feet.

"I despise you!" she cried under her breath, and with a superb gesture of head and hands she passed from us and went towards the door. As she neared it Mr. de Lisle entered and met her on the threshold; she scarcely heeded him, save by a bend of her head; but he, looking up, caught the wrath and scorn upon her face and shrank beneath it, even as the Campagna wild flowers shiver and tremble when the hot breath of the Sirocco passes over them.

Antonio closed the door after her and walked slowly down the room towards Lord Welford. He stood perfectly quiet and apparently submissive as his lordship with haughty arrogance addressed him. A great patience and gentle dignity seemed to hold in leash the fiery passion and impulse of his southern race.

"Mr. de Lisle," began Welford, "I am not well versed in the customs of your country, but there is a certain code of politeness among gentlemen which teaches them when they intrude upon unsuspecting hospitality. It is no doubt agreeable work to while away the days in so pleasant a spot and with so fair a model from which to draw inspiration; but can you say truly that it is the love of art only that keeps you so ardent a devotee to your labours? Has not Mr. de Lisle a more earthly motive than real glory, which he hopes to advance through the Lady Diana's portrait?"

It was not Welford's words so much as his manner and tone that gave the sting of insult to his address. Antonio never flinched; he waited a moment and then with a great effort he spoke, his words coming slowly, and with a slightly foreign accent:

"You are but right, my lord. I *had* another motive, as much dearer to me than the success of my art, as is the Lady Diana's beauty above my poor handiwork. I love your sister, and it is for the honour of her love that I strive. I am neither rich nor great, but I wear a blameless name, and can show a pure past. I have offered my love, my life, to the Lady Diana, and I await her answer to my petition."

"That is scarcely sufficient, sir. The Lady Diana listens to no lover and accepts no suitor except as I direct. What your past or future may be I neither know nor care, for your cause is as hopeless as it is pretentious."

"Lord Welford can scarce prevent my constancy," replied Antonio. Then, with a touch of Tuscan poetry, he added, turning to the oleanders: "Since nature's sunshine can blossom into fairest flowers these bare trees, so the sunshine of love can arouse the hardest heart, and overcome all obstacles. I can treasure hope and faith, Lord Welford, without your sanction."

"I wish you joy of your simile," sneered Welford. "If you elect to wait for the blossoming of these oleanders before venturing to pursue your suit, you will serve my cause better than your own; for, to my own knowledge, not one of them has flowered these ten years or more. It would be weary work waiting for your blooms of imagery to flourish in a woman's heart at such a rate. I think, sir, your myth bears little prospect of fulfilment. *When the oleander* *blooms again*, then you will look for the corresponding flower of love in Lady Diana's heart! I give you my consent beforehand to that proposition, for it never will blossom again. Another time, sir, fit your parable more aptly."

He laughed superciliously, and with easy indifference prevented further speech by leaving the room, dismissing de Lisle with a courteous but sarcastic farewell.

Winter came, and Heron's Court was deserted; if Lord Welford had accomplished no other end he had at least broken up all intercourse between Mr. de Lisle and Diana. De Lisle had never come again to Park Lane, and though we heard his name mentioned in society, we never met him. Rumour recounted all manner of things concerning him, but one thing at least was certain: he had fallen, purposely or otherwise, from grace in the shape of society, and the great world let him go as easily and as carelessly, and forgot him as quickly and completely, as it had once petted and spoiled him. And with his disappearance there also disappeared the incompleted portrait of Lady Diana, and one of the oleander trees.

Millicent declared to me in private that she had overheard Welford and Antonio's last words on that morning in October, and that Welford had laughed sneeringly as he said: "Bring me the tree in bloom, then mayhap you will find the corresponding blossom in the Lady Diana's heart;" and Tito had replied, very gravely: "I have a great faith. I shall return, and the Lady Diana will then listen to me."

When I questioned Camilla Camoys on this sudden exit of her favourite knight, she shrugged her round white shoulders, and said with her little lisp: "My dear Theresa! what a horrible barbarian you are! As if one *could* remember who was their favourite of last season. Mr. de Lisle? Oh, yes, he is dead, or dying, or gone to the North Pole, or run off with some one—anything you like, Theresa. Certainly he was very handsome, but then a foreigner, you know—so exacting—and so utterly without discretion, and positively, my dear, *honest*."

And with a nod and a laugh Camilla accepted "Baby" Gresham's arm and walked off with him, smiling just as I had seen her smile upon Tito scores of times.

Early in December we went to Rome, I for once being included in the party, while Millicent was left at home. The morning of our departure a small box was left at the door for Diana, and I took it to her room, where, surrounded by boxes and portmanteaus, she sat looking a little absent and sad. As I handed her the parcel, I noticed in the cold, searching sunlight, that her face was thinner and her cheeks paler than a few months ago. She untied the string listlessly, and raised the lid. On a bed of white wool lay a single pink oleander flower, and on a card attached were the words: *Beware and trust.*

I looked at Diana. Her face had grown strangely tender, her eyes were suffused, her lips trembled. Then suddenly she shut the box and tossed it from her. "Are you superstitious, Theresa?" she cried sharply; "then here is food for it; make what you can of my anonymous gift. Its message is as melodramatic as one could desire: *Beware and trust.* Of whom shall I beware, and whom shall I trust? Read me the riddle, Theresa."

"Beware, is the meaning of the oleander, according to flower language," I replied, prosaically. "I suppose you are to beware of its charms and trust the sender."

"You are very silly," she answered pettishly, and turned from me shortly; but I noticed later on that the box was empty, and the flower with its message had disappeared.

My recollections of that winter are not very pleasant ones, in spite of the charm and grace of the Eternal City,—a charm and a grace bestowed by centuries of religion united to art in every form and made glorious by the grand legacies of time. Lady Diana was the pivot upon which all our actions turned, and upon her moods rested our happiness or discomfort. At best this was a frail foundation, and we tottered and trembled, and were in daily danger of earthquakes owing to that little lady's uncertain temper.

Very soon after our establishment in a large, echoing palace, full of ghostly memories and traditions, she made her appearance at a grand embassy ball, and as usual her beauty, her wealth, her air of grande dame, won for her many admirers, and Diana, I am sorry to say, encouraged them all. I shudder to think how many sprigs and flowerets of the Roman nobility she wilfully enticed by her Lurelei-witchery and then scornfully rejected.

Lady Paragon and Camilla called the winter a great success, and so I suppose it was. I only know that my life grew broader and calmer under that blue Italian sky, and when I—Protestant though I was—knelt within St. Peter's, I was never lonely. Something of peace and rest came to me then that has never left me since.

As Easter came on, Diana's pale cheeks and bright eyes attracted Lady Paragon's attention, and it was decided in solemn conclave, Lord Welford being of the number, that a summer at one of the German Spas would be better for Diana than a return to England. When Lady Paragon told her their decision, she looked up startled and made a movement forward. "I thought we were to go home," she said. "Indeed, Aunt Parry, there is nothing the matter, and I must go home; I want to be at Heron's Court."

Lord Welford, who was present, laughed a little cold laugh. "Is it Heron's Court you most desire to see, or do the oleander trees call out across the Channel for you to come and behold their miraculous blossoms?"

Diana sat silent. She never spoke to Welford unless forced to do so, and soon she left the room. When next I met her she had been crying, and she held a letter in her hand which she begged me to post for her. The letter was addressed to Millicent Denman.

Easter came, fragrant with big blue violets and white narcissus; all the Campagna was thick strewn with purple and white anemones, the air was sweet with Spring's pungent perfume, and the earth rejoiced in the swift approach of summer. Lady Paragon and Camilla Camoys were busy planning their speedy exodus from the City of Seven Hills. They rejoiced openly at leaving Rome for a common-place German spa, and talked of miasma and Roman fever in the same breath as they chattered about the tables at Monte Carlo, and the eloquence of Monsignor Howard.

Diana joined rarely in their conversation; she had grown very quiet and reserved of late, and her eyes had a strange, far-away expression, as of one in eager search, yet never finding that for which they looked.

That year Easter fell on the last day of March, and Lady Paragon and her party were to leave on the Thursday following, thus securing the solemnities at St. Peter's on Sunday, and a grand ball at the Embassy on Wednesday. Of course Diana was to go to both; I was at liberty to share the carriage, black veils and reserved seats that the cardinals' complaisance placed at Camilla's disposal; but I preferred to go alone, and find a place for myself among the contadini who filled the grand nave, and held up their brown, dark-eyed bambini for the blessing of the Pope as he was carried far above their heads.

As I thus knelt a little apart from the crowd, my wandering attention was attracted by a woman, dressed plainly in black, with a large bonnet and veil. Something in her movements and appearance seemed familiar to me. I could not see her face, but without knowing why I became vaguely alarmed. When she arose from her knees and turned towards the entrance I followed her, but owing to the press of people was unable to come up with her. As she reached the door she turned, and at that moment the heavy leather curtain was lifted from without, and like a silhouette against the clear vivid sunshine that poured in, I saw the face of Millicent Denman. I cried out and started forward, but the silver trumpets rang out, like angel voices, the crowd fell upon their knees, there were moments of utter silence, and then, when I turned again, she was gone.

I told Lady Paragon on my return, but she was blandly incredulous, and Lady Diana laughed in my face.

"My dear Theresa, where would Millicent Denman get the money to come to Italy! And why should she hide herself if she had come?"

All the same, my opinion was not changed; it certainly was Millicent Denman's face I had seen in St Peter's.

Then came the ball, for which Diana daparted more beautiful than I had ever seen her, but at a comparatively early hour she returned. She came into my room to explain; she was very tired, and we were to make an early start next day; the Marchesa d'Albino was returning and Aunt Paragon had allowed her to come home under her care. Di crossed the room and flung open the window; the April moon flooded my chamber with a pale silvery light.

Diana, standing in its rays, became etherealised; her ball dress of shimmering blue grew cloud-like, while her beautiful, proud face became tender and gentle as a child's. After a moment she came back to my bed-side.

"Good-night, Theresa," she said lightly; then suddenly she bent down and kissed me. "Theresa, you have always been kind; I thank you a thousand times."

I put out my hand to stop her, but she sprang back and ran lightly away. On my bed, however, lay a locket attached to a fragment of slender gold chain; one side was glass, and beneath the crystal lay some withered petals. In a moment I knew they were those of the anonymous oleander. Diana had dropped the pretty trifle as she kissed me, and Diana had treasured and worn the faded flower. I would return the trinket to her the next day.

The morning came fair and mild, and sweet with the odour of lilies and violets; but alas! for all well-laid plans, not one of Lady Paragon's party left the Platzzo Runini, for the Lady Diana had disappeared!

Her maid, in tears, told how she had put her young mistress to bed, and how she was gay and gentle as a lamb; she had chatted longer than usual, and only departed when her ladyship seemed overcome with sleep; then she had gone early to awaken her, but had not found her. The room was undisturbed, nothing was missing, except Diana's travelling-bag, and a case of jewels that had been her mother's.

This was all we could learn. I told of my interview, but I concealed the locket, saying nothing about it; it belonged to Diana, and what clue could a few withered petals give to her whereabouts? Lady Paragon wept and wrung her hands incessantly. Camilla Camoys went off in hysterics, and was dosed alternately with red lavender and chloral, until she was properly subdued to a state of quiescence. Lord Welford was telegraphed for, and in two days arrived from Homburg in a great rage; all was confusion and consternation, one telling one tale and another contradicting it. Welford grew more and more angry, and at last called upon me to give as lucid a statement of the affair as a woman's brains and tongue would permit. I repeated all I knew, and again spoke of my seeing Millicent Denman in St. Peter's. At her name he broke forth in language scarcely polite for ladies' ears.

"Commend me to women," he said, "for downright stupidity. Of course it was Millicent Denman, Theresa saw; and equally of course it is Millicent who arranged and carried out Diana's flight. I can see it all, and Antonio de Lisle is the load-star. I congratulate your ladyship on the brilliant finale accomplished by your niece!"

But poor Lady Paragon was far too overcome with sorrow and mortification to care for Welford's reproaches.

"Such a disgrace, Theresa," she moaned. "And to have the duchess know that Diana was one of my débutantes!" The Duchess of Cavel was Aunt Parry's fetish and oracle; a word of approbation from her Grace, or a frown of disapproval, sent her mental barometer up or down at an alarming pace.

We all left Rome on Sunday, and in due course of time reached England. Acting under Welford's orders, Lady Paragon, Camilla and he went at once to Heron's Court, where he made sure they should find Diana. I was to stop in Park Lane and await further orders.

The season was but scarcely begun as yet, but as I drove along the old familiar streets in a four-wheel cab, my eyes caught sight of many a pretty picture made up of youth and happiness upon which the sun shone full as lovingly as it did in fair Italy. The house in Park Lane looked dull enough; the blinds were all closed. Wearily I rang the bell, and then standing with my back to the door looked across to the Park, where the trees were all decked in their fresh unsullied green, and the hyacinths, in great beds of varying colour, made sweet the light wind that blew across my face.

The door opened, and I turned, with a sigh, to enter. I hurried past the servant and made my way up-stairs. On the landing I paused. The door of Lady Diana's boudoir stood slightly ajar; I heard the murmur of voices, and one, rising above the others, struck terror into my very soul. It was the voice of Antonio de Lisle.

I pushed open the door and stepped across the threshold. The light was subdued, and the room bore the solemn impress of illness, but of illness that touched very closely upon death. On a low bed lay a motionless figure, whose only sign of life was the feverish light in the great, dark eyes, and the ceaseless movement of the lips, that every now and again resulted in a low, piteous cry, followed by random words of Italian. A slight dark form rose up from beside the bed and came towards me. It was the Lady Diana.

But ah, how changed, and how transfigured! All her wealth of golden hair had grown as white as though the snows of seventy years had powdered it; her eyes were unnaturally large and wore a look of patient pain and endurance; the colour had flown from her cheeks, the young face had lost its rounded outline; there were shadows about the mouth and temples, and a listlessness of movement pathetic in one so young. She put up her hand to arrest my exclamation.

"Hush!" she said, and her voice was dull and hard. "Do not disturb him; he is so very, very ill." Then as she looked at me more closely: "Is it you, Theresa? I thought it was Millicent. When did you come? How did you know? Are they all here, Theresa?" with a frightened look towards the door.

I took her cold hands in mine.

"I am alone, Diana," I said, "and I have come to help you."

Then she broke down and laid her head upon my shoulder, weeping violently. "He is so very, very ill," she sobbed; "they say he will die, and I was cruel to him; and oh, Theresa, I love him! See," she went on, and drew me towards one of the windows that led into a tiny conservatory: "he said he should win me through his faith and his art. It is a great thing to have such faith, Theresa. Do you remember what Welford said when he compared his love for me to the bare oleander tree? He, Tito, answered, that he still believed in miracles; and see here, Theresa, what his prayers have done! This is the oleander from Heron's Court, that for ten long years had never borne bud or blossom. Look what faith and prayer have wrought! * Would you know it again, Theresa?"

She pushed me gently into the conservatory, and there indeed stood the tree I had last seen bare and flowerless, covered now with pale pink blossoms that glowed in roseate beauty; the warm air was permeated with its faint perfume. I looked in amazement from Diana to the flowering shrub; both were transformed, and yet both were a part of my life. Diana did not speak again; she glided from me, returning once more to her watch beside Antonio de Lisle's sick bed.

That evening Millicent told me the tale. After Diana had gone to Italy she went one day to Heron's Court, and there found that Tito was in the habit of visiting the place in secret. She bribed old Macduff to let her know of his next visit, and she caught him in the room they had called the studio, at work upon Diana's portrait. He looked very ill, but was most hopeful, not only for his art, but that he should win Diana. "But that will only be," he had said, "when the oleander blossoms again."

Certainly nothing ever looked less like bursting into flower than the insensate tree, with its dark-green leaves and tough bark. Millicent wrote to Diana of Tito's infatuation, and scarce a letter passed that did not bear some reference to him.

The winter came; long, dull, grey days, and still Antonio worked on perseveringly and unremittingly. Millicent saw him from time to time, looking ill and worn, and then as the early spring advanced she lost sight of him. But one morning a little boy brought her a note. It was from Antonio; a few lines, weak and trembling. Always warm-hearted, she determined to go to him, and she found him, but too ill to recognise her. For a week she nursed him, and in that week two things occurred: his picture was accepted at the Royal Academy, and the *oleander burst into full flower.*

But Antonio never knew that his efforts were thus crowned with success. He lay stricken down with fever, and day succeeded day, as he tossed on his bed of pain. Then Millicent went to Rome, and saw Diana. She told her of his love, his constancy, his faith, his prayers, and Diana's heart responded only too readily to her supplication. Together they planned their flight. On reaching London, Diana insisted on having Tito removed to her own comfortable house, and sent for Mrs. Prosser, the old housekeeper at the Court, "to make it quite proper," as Millicent said, with a little laugh.

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* A fact.

"But, Millicent," I asked, "how could you undertake such a responsibility? I am not sure but that abetting a young lady in her love affairs, when not of age, is actionable, and I am quite certain that Welford would not at all mind bringing a suit against you."

"Then Diana and I will plead our own cause," replied Milly, "and win over judge and jury in a twinkling. Only fancy Diana appearing at Westminster with her lovely eyes and white hair! Why there's not a barrister alive wouldn't dance out of wig and gown to serve her. Did you notice her hair, Theresa? It turned snow-white during our journey from Italy. It was the only sign the anxiety and strain of those two terrible days left upon her."

I think there is little more to be told. Antonio de Lisle did recover, but not until the summer was far on the wane. Lord Welford and Lady Paragon were very angry with Lady Diana, and threatened many things, but Welford had pledged his word to yield consent when the oleander bloomed again, and he was too true a gentleman to forget, and as Diana seemed unconscious of them all, in time their ire died out for want of fuel to feed it. Antonio's portrait of the Lady Diana and oleander blooms, was the gem of the Academy; it hangs now at Heron's Court, and is treasured beyond all price.

In October, the old, grey church in Hampshire was gaily decked and festooned in honour of the young bride who walked forth from out its shadowy porch, her hand upon her husband's arm. It is not necessary for me to say that the beautiful bride was the Lady Diana and her husband Antonio de Lisle.

That was twelve years ago, and yet I think you will not easily find another such home, or such married happiness as theirs.

Do you know now whose is the spirit that dominates the Lady Diana's boudoir, and why her lovely eyes are retrospective and a little sad?

My friends, we can bear with marvellous fortitude trials almost beyond human strength, but they leave their traces, indelible and indefaceable, upon our hearts, and of what the heart endures the countenance is ofttimes the mirror.

The oleander has never bloomed again.

COUSIN BARBARA'S PREJUDICE.

"YOU mean, then, Trevor, that you have the serious intention of marrying this Miss Craigie?"

"I don't think, Cousin Barbara, that I have ever mentioned the word marriage; before I speak of such a thing I must first discover if sweet Madge Craigie loves me."

"Sweet Madge Craigie, indeed! Fancy calling her sweet! Commend me to a man for being taken in by a pair of bright eyes and a silly giggle! No man ever knew yet who was his truest friend—Miss Craigie isn't yours."

"My dear cousin, you are prejudiced. Madge has lived a great deal abroad, and acquired manners which I will acknowledge do not exactly resemble those you are accustomed to see every day; but she is none the less true and loyal and womanly, on that account, while she is certainly ten times more fascinating than most of the people one meets."

"Humph!" growled Cousin Barbara. "Well, those who live the longest will see the most."

Then there was a silence: Trevor Lane, who was an artist, went on with his painting, and the middle-aged spinster he called Cousin Barbara, sewed her white seam with much diligence as she sat in the sunlight on an old settle by the window.

Cross-grained though Barbara was, there was one being she loved with a deep, fervent devotion, and that being was Trevor Lane. And so she ought, for he had been the kindest of friends to her. Left, at the age of fifty, without a sixpence, Trevor Lane, who was only her second cousin, had invited her to come and live with him and manage his house for him. This for the last five years she had done right conscientiously, both as regards housekeeping and the giving such good advice as she considered a young man required.

Trevor Lane accepted both services with apparent gratitude, bearing the infliction of constant advice with so much resignation, even cheerfulness, that he proved himself to be a thoroughly good-tempered fellow.

The fact was he was truly sorry for his cousin Barbara, who had, he considered, been soured by bad treatment in the past; and, though it was no fault of his, yet he was resolved if possible to make her life fair and happy in the future. Hence every cross word he answered with a caress, every recommendation that he should alter his ways with a promise that he would be circumspect.

And so five years had dawdled on, and the summers at Heathfield, about ten miles from London, where Trevor Lane's studio and pretty home were situated, came and went with but few incidents to disturb the even current of the cousins' ways—till Madge Craigie came.

This was the evil day for which Cousin Barbara had never ceased to look—the day on which Trevor Lane would elect to devote to another some portion of the love she wished to appropriate wholly to herself.

"Trevor was not yet thirty, how could she expect it to be otherwise?" she would ask herself, repeatedly. Then she would shake her head and mutter: "If I could only like her: but this Madge, this flighty, silly Madge—to marry my Trevor! Ah, me!" Cousin Barbara failed utterly to recognise that whoever the girl was on whom Trevor bestowed his affection, she would consider her objectionable and displeasing.

For a long while there was no sound heard in the studio save the flies buzzing on the window-panes and the old clock ticking on the mantel-shelf. Trevor himself at last broke the silence.

"Madge is coming here this evening, Cousin Barbara—you will be civil to her for my sake, will you not?"

Miss Barbara looked up suddenly and saw the light of love in Trevor's flashing eyes, the glow of a deep passion on his handsome face, and the sight of it seemed to chill her heart to ice.

She answered coldly: "Miss Craigie wants no warm words from me; since you can utter them so glibly it is enough; but for the last time I say—beware."

Trevor Lane went on working deliberately at his picture; and Miss Barbara, huddling up the white work on which she was engaged into a bundle, escaped with it to her own apartment.

When this scene took place the afternoon was already pretty far advanced, and the month being May it was not very late when the sun finally departed behind the western hills. Trevor could no longer see to paint, but he lingered on in the studio, gazing dreamily at his picture till it was nearly dark.

At last he shook himself back into reality, and raising some portières which divided the studio from the dwelling room in which he and Barbara usually sat, he went in, struck a match and lighted a lamp which stood on his own particular writing-table.

"I wonder if she will come—I almost hope she will not. Till this prejudice of Cousin Bab's is over-ruled, I must try and keep her from the house. I would not for worlds that she should know that Bab has taken fancies into her head about her."

And, half-murmuring his thoughts aloud, he proceeded to answer two or three business letters which had arrived during the day. One of them necessitated reference to some old papers, and, taking a key from his pocket, he unlocked the side drawer of his table and began to look for the document he required.

So absorbed was he in his search, or the subject that caused it, that for the time Madge Craigie and the trouble with Cousin Barbara was forgotten.

It was not till a light hand was laid on his shoulder and a rippling laugh fell on his ear that he looked up from the open drawer into the sweet face of the lady who had bewitched him.

"Is this what you call meeting me by the garden gate and bringing me in to tea with Cousin Bab? Look you, sir, I have a mind to be very angry."

"Not with me to-night, sweet lady. I have had much to trouble and vex me—a letter here which gives me endless worry. Besides, Cousin Bab has gone to bed; she is not well."

"Gone to bed! Oh, then, I ought not to have come, I suppose."

"Since you are here, however, you will not go. Let us chat together, for a little; later on I will see you home."

And he rolled an easy chair to where she stood, and invited her to sink down into its softness, for Trevor Lane was a sybarite in his home. Madge Craigie obeyed him, and, tossing her straw hat from her head to the ground, lay back among soft cushions, her golden wavy hair and white skin forming a striking contrast to their crimson hue.

For a moment or two he sat and gazed at her in mute admiration, till her merry laugh recalled him to himself.

"One would think that I am a picture," she said, "instead of ——"

"So you are a picture—a lovely picture—the embodiment of my perfect ideal. Say, Madge, beautiful Madge, will you be my own, my wife, my very true, devoted, loving wife?"

She looked into his eyes, still laughing.

"Dear me, what an amount of truth, and devotion, and tenderness you seem to require. And pray may I ask how much you intend to give in return?"

"My thoughts by day, my dreams by night, everything I have shall be yours, if only you will consent. My dearest Madge, do not keep me in suspense, but tell me ——"

"Stop your rhapsodies, foolish man! Believe me, I am not worth them. I'll acknowledge, however, that I am rather fond of you, perhaps on account of the spontaneity there is about you. Hope it will last, though—there, there, don't gush again. I believe you'll try and be true to me, and"—with more seriousness of manner—"I will never be false to you."

He tried to take her in his arms, but she repulsed him gently, bidding him be rational and discuss their future prospects calmly. And so, for awhile, they did, no allusion being made to Cousin Barbara, or the part she was likely to play in their lives.

On a sudden Madge's eye fell on the open drawer.

"Wilfrid Lane!" she exclaimed, pointing to some papers on which that name was written. "Wilfrid Lane! Is he a relation of yours? How odd I should never have thought of that before."

"Why? Do you know him?"

"I know Wilfrid Lane! As well as though he were my own brother."

"How strange! He is my half-brother."

"Yes, he is much older than you are. When did you see him last?"

"I have not seen him for seven years."

"Ah, of course; he is always abroad. But you go abroad sometimes; why not to see your brother?"

"There have been family differences, Madge."

"Oh! It will be awkward when we are married, if I may never see Wilfrid. I wonder what he will say when he hears I am going to marry you."

A sort of shiver passed over Trevor Lane.

"My brother Wilfrid is scarcely the sort of man with whom I should care for my wife to be on intimate terms," he said.

"Oh yes, I know he is a vaurien, but that can't hurt me, and he is very amusing. Quite a treat to see his dear old hand-writing in your drawer."

"He ruined Cousin Barbara—that is why she is here," persisted Trevor.

"Very likely. He ruined my father and my father ruined him; that's why I am poor. Yet I owe him no grudge, Trevor; why should you?" and once more she looked into his eyes with that strange mesmeric power she had, which set every nerve in his body vibrating.

And from talk of Wilfrid Lane they drifted back once more to themselves and their own affairs, murmuring together softly in the light of the pale moon, which had risen and cast a magic spell over the scene: broken at last, however, by a little scream from Madge.

"What is it? I heard something moving. Is it a bogey or Cousin Bab?"

"Cousin Bab!" And Trevor, indignant lest Bab should have been listening, went through the portières into the painting-room, the moon as it were followed him.

No one to be seen—out into the garden he passed. Barbara was in her room; he could see the reflection of her form on the drawn blind. Instead of returning to the spot where he had left Madge, he walked down the garden and called to her to come to him. "The night was so beautiful, the moon so bright," he said, "it was better there than indoors."

From the garden they strolled into an adjoining wood, along a pathway leading to the village where Miss Craigie dwelt. The vicar was her uncle, and she was on a visit there for a while. Nor did they come back to Trevor's cottage that evening; on the contrary, he went into the Vicarage and stayed talking to the vicar till past ten o'clock.

How he should tell Barbara that he was absolutely engaged to Madge Craigie puzzled him not a little during his walk home, and probably would have engrossed him even more had not his thoughts been diverted from it by almost a feeling of annoyance that his Madge should be on friendly terms with the half-brother whose very name was never mentioned in Heathfield Cottage.

When he reached home all was as silent as the grave; the glass door leading from the sitting-room to the garden was ajar, as Miss Craigie had left it when she joined him, the lamp was still burning on the writing-table, everything was as he had left it. No—the drawer was still wide open, but the papers had been touched. He noticed it at a glance; those which had attracted Madge Craigie's attention, with Wilfrid Lane's name on them, were gone.

Pearly drops burst forth on Trevor's brow as he perceived it, and staggering into the seat which Madge had but recently quitted, he remained there for a time immoveable. What did she know of Wilfrid Lane, was the question he asked himself over and over again. Were the details of this man's shameful past known to her—had she had aught to do with them? Could it be possible that she had made the excuse of sending him away in search of bogies, while she possessed herself of letters and documents inculpating Wilfrid Lane? No—no—the thought was madness!

Yet the papers were gone, and that they did inculpate Wilfrid Lane very heavily there was little doubt, since more than one of them was a forgery of his half-brother's name, and it was by the holding of them that Trevor succeeded in keeping the vaurien out of England, and his own hearth and home in peace.

Cousin Barbara's warnings against Miss Craigie rose like spectres into his mind, and would not be chased away, let him struggle as resolutely as he would. Madge and none other had been in that room, and the papers were gone—the case was conclusive. And he had promised to marry this woman! What should he do? Go to her as soon as possible, accuse her straightforwardly of the theft, demand the return of the stolen papers, and then spurn her image for ever from his heart.

That was the decision he arrived at while he sat gazing at the open drawer, and the clock struck four before he attempted to go to bed.

To bed, but not to sleep; and when he met Cousin Barbara at breakfast, he looked pale and haggard, and was very silent, while Bab grumbled away in her usual style over the thousand and one petty annoyances which she managed to find at every turn.

At last Trevor rose and took up his hat.

"Going out, Trevor, instead of to work?"

He leant over her, and kissed her. "Ay, only for a little while, dear cousin. I shall soon be back, and we will have some long hours together in the painting-room."

"Yes—silent hours, while you are dreaming of that Miss Craigie's false bewitching face. You will rue it, Trevor—you'll rue it, as I am a living woman."

He was gone, but her words followed him all through the wood; seemed to be echoing among the leaves.

In the Vicarage garden stood Madge, fresh and pure and lovely-looking, in the daintiest of blue muslins. She kissed her hand to him when from some distance she perceived him, and he scarcely returned the salutation as coldly as he intended, for at the sight of her more than half his suspicions seemed to disappear.

Her love a sham, her kisses but to betray? Could woman be so false?

"Oh, Trevor," she cried out when he was within hearing, "such glorious news I have for you. Your brother Wilfrid has not so utterly ruined my father as was at first imagined! Some of the property is saved, and I shall have a *dot*, and not come to your home an utter beggar."

"I do not want money," answered Trevor, scarcely graciously. "I have enough for both."

"Why, Trevor, what has happened? How gloomy and stern you look."

"Something has happened which has upset me exceedingly. Those letters—Wilfrid's letter, that you saw in my drawer last night—are gone." And he looked at her very fixedly while he spoke.

"Gone—what do you mean?"

"Some one has taken them away: do you know who it is?"

"Trevor, you frighten me—don't glance at me like that—but tell me—whose interest would it be to take them? What are they about?"

"I am afraid you know full well what they are about."

"I! Why, it was only last night I discovered that Wilfrid Lane was your brother."

"Ah! You are a good actress, Miss Craigie."

"Trevor—great heaven, Trevor—you do not believe that I —— oh, this is too absurd!"

"You know nothing of the disappearance of those letters?"

"Nothing, upon my word—as I stand here a living woman, I swear it."

He shook his head; her very determined assurance made him doubt her more, and he turned away.

"Alas, Miss Craigie, that I should live to say it, but till those letters are found I can enter into no further engagement. Robbing me of them could be the act of no common thief, attracted by an open door; other valuables which were in the room have not disappeared."

"As you will," she answered, bowing her head proudly. "If you can believe this of me, it is indeed better we should part."

And so, as Trevor had promised, in less than an hour he returned to Barbara in the studio; but during all that day, and for many days to come, both the conversation and the painting went on haltingly.

Miss Craigie he did not see again, and report said she lay ill at the Vicarage; but this report did not reach Trevor Lane, since he never went out of the house now; and so no one but his cousin Barbara heard it, and she, in her gruff, rough way, said: "It was wiser to let sleeping dogs lie, and make no allusion to Miss Craigie, with whom it was evident that Trevor had quarrelled," though he had never vouchsafed to tell Barbara about the letters. He did not care to allude to them, for one reason, and he thought their loss might worry Barbara, for another.

Heavily the weeks passed by, and the autumn tints were mellowing the trees in the little wood. Madge Craigie had left Heathfield, and already the episode of her love passages with Trevor Lane was forgotten. Forgotten by all but him; he could never forget the vision of beauty that had crossed his path, and changed so speedily into a hideous spectre.

No, he would never marry now. So he had told Barbara more than once of late, and a smile had for a moment lighted up her wrinkled, soured face at his words.

Towards the end of October a change came to the every-day routine of Heathfield Cottage. Barbara fell ill. Seized with a paralytic stroke, she lay speechless and powerless. The grand doctor Trevor sent for from London said she might rally, but it was doubtful; at all events, she would never be the same again.

The solicitude and devotion Trevor showed her was rather that of a son than a cousin, forsaking even his beloved painting to remain by her bedside and minister to her every want. If ever a woman ought to have been happy and at peace, Cousin Barbara was that woman. But content was not one of her acquirements, and she kept up her character for fretfulness to the extent of trying Trevor's patience not a little. There was evidently something she wished to say, and that her loss of speech prevented; and Trevor's repeated recommendation that she should remain quiet till she was better, only served to annoy her.

He was sitting with her at the wane of day, the room only lighted by a feeble gleam of departing twilight, and an occasional flicker from a wood fire. Cousin Barbara made a strange unearthly sound, and pointed with the fore-finger of her left hand to an old bureau which stood in the corner. Trevor took little notice at first, but she was so persistent that at last he rose and unfastened the bureau. Its carved doors shut in rows of small drawers, one after another. He opened several of them but found nothing, and was beginning to think that he was merely the victim of a sick woman's caprice, when on a sudden he uttered a cry. There, in one of them, was the bundle of documents marked Wilfrid Lane.

He turned and glared on the woman who lay in the bed looking at him almost piteously. It was the first time Barbara had ever seen anger against herself expressed in Trevor's eyes, and she cowered beneath it, closing her own, and pulling the bed-clothes over her face.

He did not attempt to speak to her, but taking up the letters walked out of the room, called the little maid of the establishment and bade her go to her mistress. Then, the letters still in his hand, he put on his hat and went out.

Poor, wretched Barbara; her punishment, when they told her he was gone, was almost more than she could bear. He had never forgiven Madge Craigie when he believed her to be the thief, how then could Barbara hope to be forgiven.

All that night he did not return, and during the next day there was no sign from him; the servants and neighbours did the best they could for Barbara, who was so quiet and enduring and patient, that they all believed the end must be very near, since no one had ever seen her so subdued before.

Twenty-four hours had passed since Trevor Lane went away with the letters, when a London hansom drove up to the garden-gate, and he himself got out, accompanied by Madge Craigie.

She looked very ill and wan, and was by no means the handsome Madge she had been five months ago; still there was a bright expression in her eyes which looked like returning happiness.

Trevor led her straight upstairs to Barbara, whose agitation on beholding her was painful to witness, but Madge knelt down beside the bed, and taking the old woman's hand she kissed it gently.

"You loved him so, you grudged him to me, did you not, poor cousin? Well, he has promised for my sake to forgive you, and together we will try and nurse you back to health, and you will on your part try to love me just a little."

Barbara nodded her head in assent, and the doctor coming in at that moment ordered no more talking; so the lovers, restored to bliss in each other's society, went downstairs into the studio, and the old lady with a load taken off her mind was left by means of one of Dr. Bell's draughts to have a few hours of quiet sleep. Nor did Cousin Barbara die. She fought vigorously with death for a day or two, as though she were determined to conquer the foe, and for awhile she succeeded. She would never be able to speak quickly or sharply again, but she managed to make herself understood, and in expressing her deep contrition for the past she kept her word when she said she would always be gracious and pleasant to her new cousin in the future.

So Trevor and Madge were married. Of course Cousin Barbara had to give up the housekeeping to the young wife; but she still kept her place in the studio window, though the white work was no longer on her lap, and instead of it the poor powerless right hand lay on her knee as though seeking strength in the sunshine.

SWALLOW, SWALLOW!

NEVER talk to birds.

For several months an unmistakable flirtation had been carried on between Captain Algernon Clayton and Miss Lilian Murray. The first was a captain in a marching regiment, the last a very decided heiress, whose beauty and riches were formidably protected in the person of an old bachelor uncle, her guardian.

At seventeen it is so delightful to outwit guardians; to scoff confidently at all their prosaic warnings, and to feel so sure that there never has been, and never will be again, such a pure unselfish love as that which the captain in a marching regiment feels for the sweet, persecuted girl who has the ill-luck to be an heiress.

When uncle had glowered fiercely at the suitor for about a month, and, finding reasonable representations useless, had threatened to carry off his ward unless she gave up all thoughts of the penniless lover, then Secrecy came to help Love, and the old apple-tree near the orchard gate became a post-office.

All this was very discreditable to Lilian. If she had been a properly brought-up girl she would have known at a glance that Captain Clayton was all very well as a partner at a ball, being very fascinating and a capital dancer; but a husband is another matter. A husband should always have *money*. Never mind about character or disposition. A man of most noble resolves and amiable temperament will gain nothing from society but a doubtful shake of the head if he be poor; but if a man be rich, and has no character—ask any well-bred dowager if he cannot always *buy* one? Lilian was horribly ignorant.

One lovely summer's eve they met. "My darling! all is against us," cried the soldier; "we had better part now, and end our sorrow."

"No, no!" earnestly responded Lilian. "I love you; and I cannot, cannot forget you."

"Then I must take you away with me; say, will you give up all brighter dreams, and be a poor soldier's wife?"

She *had* no brighter dreams, so she said, "Yes."

Uncle's eyes saw nothing. He thought his words had taken effect, and that his ward was amenable to all his persuasions. He endeavoured to interest her mind in fossils and botanical specimens, and felt sure he had hit the right nail on the head.

One evening Lilian sang to herself the song of "Swallow, Swallow, flying South." She was in the large empty drawing-room; and then she strolled out on the terrace, where twilight and moonlight were gently waging war against each other. Throwing a light shawl over her lovely golden head she wandered towards the old apple-tree. Yes, there was a note; and it ran thus:

"My Adored Lilian,—Meet me to-morrow evening at eight—the old tree. All is arranged, and we part no more!—A. C."

As her trembling hands refolded the paper, she raised her beautiful blue eyes and beheld a bird skimming low through the air. In uncontrollable sentiment she cried:

"Swallow, swallow! tell him I will come!"

"By Jove, *no*, swallow! she'll do nothing of the kind!" angrily exclaimed uncle's voice. And at hearing the same, Lilian fainted.

Five years after. Pining, sorrowful, faithful? Oh dear, no. At seventeen Lilian was *ignorant;* at twenty-two she is a leader of fashion, and the wife of a nonentity, with ten thousand a-year; and *she* says:

"My dear girls, avoid love if you can: but if you ever mean to indulge seriously in the foolish dream, avoid my pit-fall. Never talk to birds!"

Minnie Douglas.

* * *

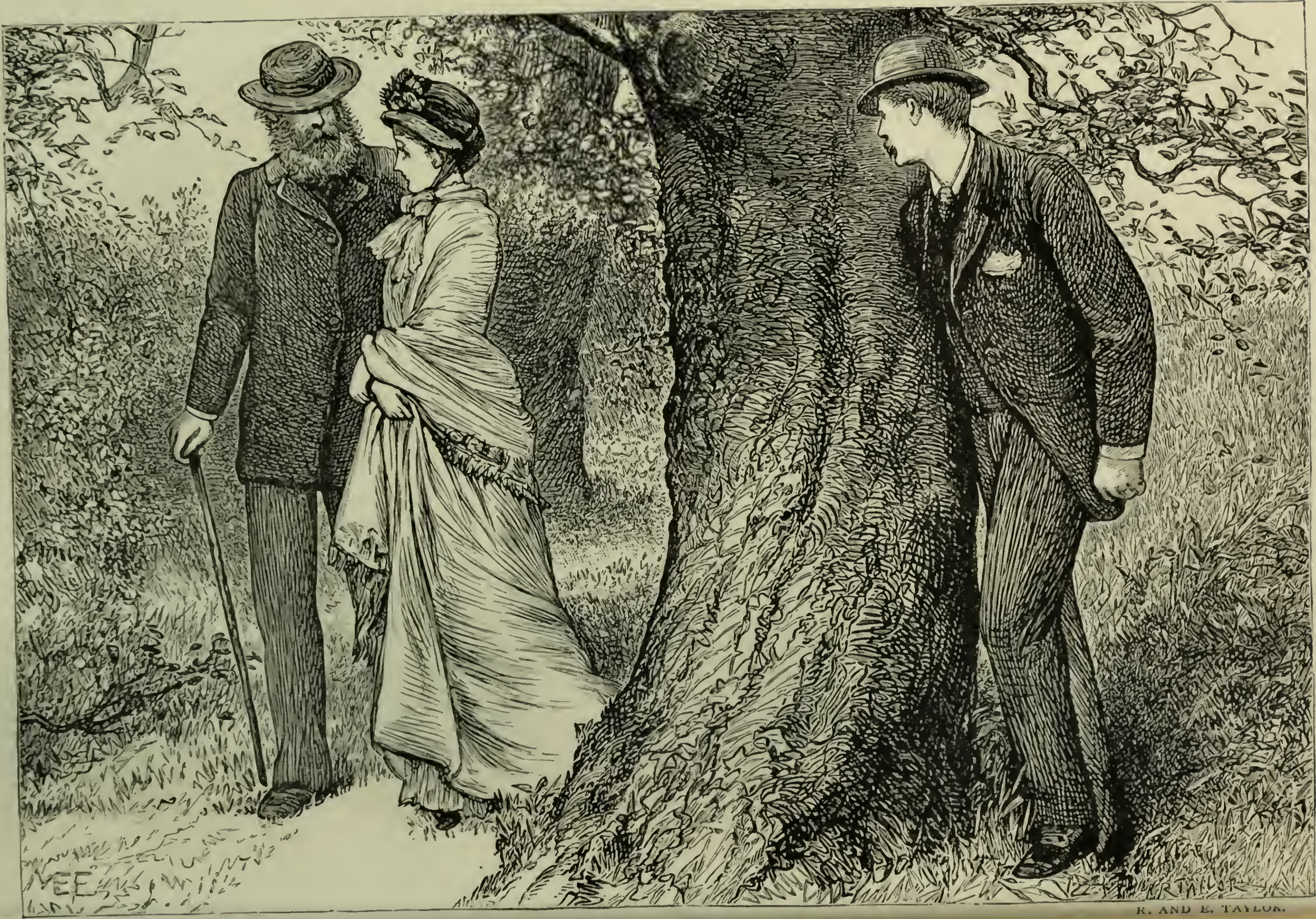
LIFE IS BUT A DAY.

A blithesome maid, at early morn,
Comes tripping lightly o'er the lea;
Of all God's creatures ever born
The brightest, gladdest heart has she.
And owning by her speech the sway
Of rapt emotion, she doth say:—
"How glad a thing is life!"

O'ercome at last by midday heat,
And well nigh unremitting toil,
A man of care lay down to sleep,
And snatch repose from life's turmoil.
He woke, and with a sigh he said,
As Care reigned in Oblivion's stead:—
"How sad a thing is life!"

An aged pair at eve draw near,
With faltering steps, a lone churchyard;
Death long to them has lost its fear,
Although, in youth, to die seemed hard.
All hope in time has passed away,
Yet from the heart each one doth say:
"How grand a thing is life!"

F. W. J.



R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1884.

THE WHITE WITCH.

CHAPTER XXII.

DICK'S WOUNDS.

THREE o'clock was chiming forth from the various clocks of Croxham Abbey in the early morning, as Godfrey Mayne left his step-mother's room with his father, followed by Lydia. The maid swiftly disappeared. Godfrey dutifully accompanied Mr. Mayne to the door of his new quarters, the Swallow chamber, wished him good-night, and then went back along the cross passage, deep in thought.

He knew that some audacious intruder must have got into the Abbey and penetrated to Mrs. Mayne's room: a strong impression lay upon him that the man had not yet effected his escape, but was concealing himself somewhere or other. Was it Dick Wilding? Godfrey did not know. If it was, Mr. Dick should be treated to the soundest castigation he had ever yet experienced—and his migrations effectually stopped for the future. But it might not be Dick; Godfrey hardly thought it was: and he would never have thought of him at all in such a matter but for Dick's escapade of the previous night.

When he got into the main corridor, he walked noisily to the door of his chamber at the end of it, and shut it with a bang—but without going in. As he had on his dancing boots, he could tread pretty lightly; however, he took them off; and as he did so it occurred to him that the very same precaution might have been taken by the midnight visitor outside the door of the refectory. Godfrey was about to see if he could find traces of this man, but he wanted to do it noiselessly, lest the household should hear him and fall into another fright.

As he came to the door of his stepmother's room, he saw it was not quite closed. Lydia, who had been the last to pass out, might have left it so. Mary and her mother were talking in whispers, and Godfrey absolutely thought he heard also the tones of a man's voice. Suddenly Mrs. Mayne's was somewhat raised, so that Godfrey distinguished her words, piteous, quavering, pleading:

"Oh! Mary, for my sake!—you promised."

Whether Godfrey made any movement and it was heard, he knew not, but a hand was laid upon the handle of the door; and so swiftly that he had only time to put his back against the wall at the side and hold his breath. The door was pulled open for a moment, and some one looked out; then it was closed and locked, and Godfrey could catch no further sound. He almost felt that he was growing old with suspense. It did not last long, however. The dressing-room door, further on, was heard to open, and Mary's voice called softly in the darkness:

"Mr. Godfrey, are you there?"

He was beside her in an instant.

"I am sure you will want an explanation of all this."

"Yes, but not from you," said he gently.

"From whom then?" she asked, in trembling words.

"You know better than I—at present."

"But if I ask you not to—not to try to find out what is amiss?"

"I must serve you against your will, in my own way."

"Will you step inside just for a moment? Mamma ——"

Quick as thought he turned, as a slight sound behind him fell on his ear while she was speaking. He could see nothing, but he rushed down the gallery, in pursuit of what he thought was a running footfall. That the midnight intruder was in advance of him, endeavouring to effect his escape, Godfrey felt sure of. There was a stumble over something; and then the faint light coming through the window at the end of the corridor showed Godfrey indistinctly the figure of the man. Where was he going? He dashed into the last room, the old school-room, slammed the door and turned the key. Godfrey hurled himself against the panels, but after the first shock he paused, arrested by a noise inside. It was the smash of glass, a window being broken, battered in. Then a sound of scrambling through and a fainter crash of glass outside.

At the same moment Godfrey forced the door in, flew to the shattered window and looked out. But there was no further sound, and there was no one to be seen. Some panes of the greenhouse roof below him were broken, and the lower part of the window through which he was looking was a wreck. The reason for this last wholesale destruction lay in the fact that he had put in that strong nail to secure the window the night before.

"One clue I shall have," thought Godfrey as he looked out: "The beggar must have cut himself to mincemeat. By Jove!"—as he examined more closely the hole in the greenhouse roof—"if he really did take his boots off I may look out for a man without any feet."

He went to his room; though not to bed. The danger, still only half known, which hung over Mary, which the night's events seemed to be drawing nearer, kept him feverishly wakeful: it was morning already, and he thought it might be as well if he sat up. Sir William

Hunt had not recognised Mary: it must then be indeed Mrs. Mayne who had reason to avoid him; but Mary might be intending to sacrifice herself in the cause of her mother.

One especial question kept pressing itself upon Godfrey: could this midnight invader have been the detective?—come in to search in secret for some proof or other of the former crime; or else boldly to confront Mrs. Mayne and extort confession from her?

When dawn had broken, Godfrey, who was still intensely restless, went into one of the rooms that overlooked the farm, and was just in time to see Dick Wilding get over the wall, and begin searching the flower-bed underneath the refectory windows. Dick had his head bandaged up and one arm in a sling.

Godfrey's first impulse was to go down stairs and waylay him; but he changed his mind and watched. After carefully turning over the leaves of the nasturtiums Dick tried to open the window. Failing in that, Godfrey himself having made it secure, the lad turned and followed the course of black footmarks which Godfrey could see from where he stood: they were right through a geranium bed, about the window, and the gravel-path coming from the direction of the meadow. The ground was damp yet; and Godfrey supposed that the midnight intruder must have slipped, or otherwise brought his hands in contact with the earth, to account for the marks on the counterpane. Dick was evidently searching for something. He followed the footsteps carefully and minutely, until he disappeared from sight round a corner.

Then Godfrey ran lightly downstairs, unbolted the door and went in pursuit. Dick was continuing his search across the meadow towards the avenue. As soon as he caught sight of Godfrey coming down upon him with a face like a thunder-cloud, he fled like the wind, reached the avenue, crossed it, jumped, rolled, slid down the wooded hill on the other side, and was lost among the brambles and bracken. Godfrey knew better than to try to follow him.

"All right, my lad; I'll have you presently," he called out to the still shaking bushes; and then he turned back, wondering what it was the imbecile had been in search of, and how he could run like that with his feet cut to pieces, as they must have been last night. But how was it, if Dick had been the intruder, that he, with his cat-like carefulness and intimate knowledge of the place, had been so clumsy as to walk through a flower-bed.

When Godfrey returned indoors, the household was astir. He went in through the refectory and up the back stairs three at a time, anxious not to be seen, and almost fell against Mary: who gave a low cry at sight of him. She was going from her mother's to her own room, in her dressing-gown; but instead of hurrying past Godfrey, she stopped short and stared at him blankly. His fair hair lay lank and disordered, his pale face and the dark rims round his eyes showed traces of a troubled night.

"Where have you been?" said she, falteringly.

"Oh, I've been making a night of it," answered Godfrey grimly. "I look as if I had been enjoying myself, don't I?"

But there was anxiety in her eyes—not for him. "You ran away very suddenly from me at mamma's dressing-room door last night, Mr. Godfrey. As if—as if you had seen a ghost too."

"So I did. Just step with me to the school-room and I will show you what the ghost has done."

She followed him into the school-room, without a word.

"Did you catch him?" she asked, turning to him suddenly, after they had both looked for a few moments at the shattered window.

At that moment the housemaid came in with a broom and duster. It was Friday, the day she generally cleaned the school-room.

"Why, Master Godfrey!" she cried in astonishment. Then the broken window caught her eye. "Oh, my!" she exclaimed, lifting her hands in dismay. The consternation of the past night's doings had spread to the entire household through Lydia; and the girl stared at the ruins with the others until light came into her face. "Then that's how he did it, miss!" she said.

"Who? What do you mean?" returned Mary.

"Dick Wilding, miss. We guessed it was he who had got in and caused the alarm; just now he passed the kitchen window with his head bound up. My! what a crash he must have made!"

"Listen, Emily," interposed Miss Dixon: "None of you must tease the poor lad about it: he is not as you are, remember. He frightened us, but he has done more harm to himself than to anybody. Mr. Godfrey"—turning to him—"I must beg of you also not to punish poor Dick."

"Don't be alarmed. I shall certainly not try to punish—poor Dick," replied Godfrey looking at her intently. He left the room as he spoke and went back to his own.

"I do believe Mr. Godfrey's going off his head," observed Emily to Lydia in the course of the morning. "I've thought him rather queer several times lately, and the fright last night must have finished him. I found a pair of boots, all over mud, in the back-stair closet, poked behind the brooms and brushes; first I thought they were master's, but he said no, so then I took them to Mr. Godfrey. He angrily said they were not his, they must belong to one of the gardeners: but when I said where I found them, he clutched at 'em like mad, and told me to leave them with him."

"He wants to confront that stupid Dick with 'em," remarked Lydia.

Godfrey went round to the farm when breakfast was over. Nancy met him at the door, looking troubled and ashamed.

"Oh, Master Godfrey! I don't know how to face you, sir," said she, almost with tears in her eyes. "I told you Dick had been breaking away from me lately; but I never thought he would go these lengths; I did not indeed."

"Dick?" repeated Godfrey gently. "It was Dick?"

"Why yes, sir, of course it was. He will have to be sent away somewhere now: and it will just break my heart."

"Well, then, you may keep your heart whole, Nancy," he answered, "poor Dick shall not be sent away."

Nancy looked at him, to read his countenance, hardly believing. "Do you mean that, sir?"

"Yes, Nancy; or I should not say it."

The young woman's face lighted up. "Well, you are good-hearted, Master Godfrey! I could kiss you for that."

"You may if you like, Nancy. If I kissed you when you were a young damsel, you used to give me a swinging box on the ears for it, I remember."

Nancy laughed, but did not respond to the permission. She enquired what it was that her poor brother had really done, having heard different versions of it from the servants.

"The intruder must have got in through one of the refectory windows and then crept upstairs," said Godfrey. "When he wanted to get out again, he tried the school-room window, broke through it, fell on the greenhouse roof, and crashed it in."

"That's the part of the story that puzzles me most, sir: Dick isn't clumsy: like most half-witted folk, he is light and careful as a cat. Of course my father will send to have the repairs done, sir."

"Nonsense, he will do nothing of the kind," returned Godfrey peremptorily. "What does Dick say for himself?"

"First of all, he declared he did not do it. Then he turned sullen and wouldn't say anything more."

"He came to you to have his head bound up, I suppose?"

"No; Dick won't let me touch him. In the night; that is, early this morning—it could not have been very long after you called me to the window, sir—I heard somebody stumbling and limping along the passage. Dick, I supposed, and he seemed to be making for Mr. Cattermole's room. I called out to know what he could want, daring to wake up a gentleman at that time of night. But he took no notice, and when I opened my door Mr. Cattermole had let him in."

"You did not see him, then?"

"The first I saw of him was at breakfast, with his head and arm bound up. We had heard the story then, and didn't father give it to the poor lad! I know he deserved it; but ——"

"Did nobody take his part?"

"Nobody but Mr. Cattermole. He opened the door while father was talking and threatening, and pulled Dick away and sheltered him in his parlour. It was he who had dressed Dick's wounds. Dick must have been going to his room in the night for consolation. He worships Mr. Cattermole, who is really very kind to him, just as he does Miss Dixon."

"Where is Dick now?"

"Mr. Cattermole has taken him for a drive in the gig, and the boy went off as happy as if he had done something to be proud of! I shall let Mr. Cattermole have a piece of my mind about that; it is not right to pet and encourage Dick when he has been doing wrong."

"*When* he has been doing wrong, no," pointedly observed Godfrey.

Nancy, keen of insight, noted the tone. "Do you mean anything, sir, in saying that?" she asked.

"I mean—that is, I am thinking a great many things, Nancy," he answered. "Things that puzzle me."

"Can I help you, sir? I will if I can."

"Will you," rejoined Godfrey: and on the spur of the moment he made up his mind to play a bold stroke. "You must recollect, Nancy, mentioning to me that you saw your lodger making, as you believed, a likeness of Miss Dixon. Have you any reason to suspect that he—that he"—Godfrey hardly knew how to word it—"has ever had any acquaintance with Miss Dixon; or that he has come here with any special purpose connected with her?"

Nancy did not reply.

"Come," said Godfrey, "I see you know something. What is it?"

"I have only known it since yesterday," she replied in a low tone. "As to telling it—it is not my secret, Mr. Godfrey."

Godfrey bent his head, and said, without giving any particulars, that he had reason to believe Miss Dixon had enemies, and that they were menacing her with what might be fraught with irredeemable danger. He and Nancy were both standing at the entrance gate; a good position, since they could see on all sides of them, yet could not be overheard.

"You have known me all my life, Nancy; you should know, I think, that I am to be trusted, and can be prudent. Can you hesitate?"

"You'll not betray me if I tell you, Mr. Godfrey? Or let—let harm come of it?"

"No, no; rely upon me."

"Then Mr. Cattermole is Miss Dixon's cousin."

"I thought so!" returned Godfrey, drily. "And pray, Nancy, how came he to confide the secret to you?"

"Well, he had been wanting me, more than once, to take a note from him in secret to Miss Dixon. But I had never consented: except the one that I gave to you, sir, with the broken bracelet. Yesterday afternoon, he called me into his parlour, and said he had great need to get a letter conveyed to her before she went off to the ball at Colonel Underwood's—which we had all been talking of—and he begged of me to take it to the Abbey. I refused; I told him I had never been a help in anything clandestine, and I never would be. Upon that he said he must entrust me with his secret, but I must be cautious not to repeat it. Miss Dixon was his cousin, he said, and Mrs. Mayne his aunt."

"I wonder he did not add that I was his brother!" retorted Godfrey, his lip curling with scorn.

"You don't believe it, Master Godfrey?"

"I certainly do not. Look here, Nancy—if he were thus related to them, why does he not come openly to the Abbey to see them; instead of sneaking about the place incog. pretending to be an artist?"

"I suppose he is really an artist," replied Nancy. "But, Mr. Godfrey, I think there must be some truth in it. I took the letter to the Abbey, and Emily carried it in to Miss Dixon. In less than half an hour an answer to it came back here in Miss Dixon's handwriting. He told me he had his reasons for keeping himself in the back-ground down here, and that Mrs. Mayne and her daughter knew what the reasons were."

"I wonder," thought Godfrey, "whether they do know it yet—the real truth: that he is a detective from Scotland Yard, come down for the purpose of watching them?" One aspect of the case now puzzled him—the motive for wishing to communicate privately with Miss Dixon. Could the man be wishing to save her from the punishment that was threatening to overtake her mother, and would make terms with her?

"Nancy," he said with a sigh, "there are many complications surrounding this matter, and I cannot explain them to you. You must be very cautious—and so must I, or we might do incalculable harm. You must say nothing, and do nothing, and appear to know nothing. One thing I will mention to you; I suspect it was not Dick who got into the Abbey last night, and I don't believe the lad has a cut or bruise about him."

"That the bandages and sticking-plaster are all sham!" exclaimed Nancy, aghast.

"Put, at any rate, upon sham places."

"My goodness! Then, Mr. Godfrey, who or what is it that you do suspect?"

"I cannot tell you, Nancy; I say there are complications. And I am not sure. Keep strictly my confidence, as I will keep yours—and continue to believe in Dick's damages. Good morning."

Godfrey knew perfectly well how much Nancy's whispered news was worth, but he resolved to test it. At luncheon, he referred incidently to some pretty bangles of Mary's: "Those, I mean, that your brother brought you from India," he added.

"Why I never had a brother," she said, looking at him in surprise.

"Ah no. Your cousin—was it?"

"And I never had a cousin, either," she said, laughing and unsuspicious. "You must have misunderstood me in some way, Mr. Godfrey. I bought these bangles in London."

Godfrey accepted the correction, but he felt sick with alarm at what might be threatening her, and began to revolve all sorts of plans of action for her defence.

Early in the afternoon he went over to the Vicarage, where he found the girls cross and languid after the previous night's excitement. It was Mary who had reminded him that he ought to call; and, remembering his promise to the Vicar, he had snatched up his hat and started. But to the very door he was thinking of Dick Wilding and the detective, and wondering whether the latter was to be bought off with money; and he all but called Mrs. Thornhill "Nancy." He dared not let his thoughts dwell upon Mary herself; although the yoke of his engagement was now loosed from off his neck, to be taken up or not at the end of a month, he felt bound in honour to consider it only temporarily lifted. As Mary was not in any case to be his, he must fight down that passion which would spring up into such fierce life just when he thought he had got it under; and the best distraction he found was in devising plans to save her. He would use the month's respite in assuring, if it were possible, her security and happiness; and by that time he felt that, at the rate at which he was living now, he should have used up every strong emotion of which he was capable, and could enter matrimony safely and glad of rest.

Elspeth knew of the Vicar's decision and was rather tearful about it. It was better to be engaged to a man who admired Miss Dixon than not to be engaged at all. She supposed she must give him back her ring. This was to Elspeth the worst blow of all.

But of course he would not hear of that; and as she looked relieved, he promised that at the end of the month he would give her a bracelet.

"If we keep on our engagement?" said she, her eyes sparkling.

"Even if you decide to throw me over, I shall beg you to accept it as a sign that you bear me no ill-will."

"But mamma wouldn't let me if I were not engaged to you."

"Then you will have to be constant, whether you like it or not."

"Oh, it is not I who will be inconstant," said she naively. "There is nobody nice up there where we are going to—at least at this time of the year."

Godfrey laughed. "I shall then feel more sure of your devotion," he said lightly, but rather drily.

Perhaps when she was his wife he would be able to strike some speck of fire out of the unstirred nature, but just now her shallowness from irritating began to disgust him.

"And I could give a woman a love worth having!" he thought to himself, in sadness.

But he had done so already—and to the wrong woman. This often happens.

On his return home, he found Mary and his father on the point of starting to call at Goule Park. It had been announced that Lady Hunt was about to leave for town shortly; so as Mrs. Mayne still kept her room, the call must be made without her. Godfrey jumped into the carriage too. All intercourse with Sir William was now interesting to him.

"Have you your detective down yet?" he said to the baronet, during the visit, when they were standing for a few moments apart.

"Yes," replied Sir William. "Curious to say, he came after me to Underwood's last night. Nothing has been done as yet: but he has the clue, he has the clue; and when his plans are matured, he will act."

"Act?" repeated Godfrey, vaguely.

"Pounce upon his prey," explained the baronet.

"What is the clue you speak of, Sir William?"

"The first clue," answered Sir William, after a minute's hesitation, "I got in a shop at Cheston. I think I have already told you of it. I saw there a face which I knew to be that of a woman who if not the actual murderer of my son, was an accomplice in the murder. It was she who helped the actual murderer to escape. When I saw the face, I seemed for a moment to lose the sight of my eyes. The shop was full of people, and when I recovered—it was only a few seconds—she was gone. A few days later I heard her voice in Croxham Church, as you know, Godfrey, or a voice so miraculously like hers that I thought I could not be mistaken! That was the second clue. Taken in conjunction with that meeting in the shop, it is a proof indisputable that at least one of the guilty parties is in this neighbourhood; and the detective officer thinks so too."

"You have related all this to him then?" spoke Godfrey.

"I related it to him last night at Underwood's; we walked about together in the garden. He was to have called on me here this morning, but I have had a note from him, saying he is busy at work, and for reasons which he will give me later, he thinks it best not to appear here for a day or two."

"May I ask what his name is, sir?"

"I cannot tell it you, Godfrey," said Sir William quickly. "Of course I know it myself; but he warned me not to repeat it to others, and not to speak of him at all in any way. You are partly in my confidence, you know, but I have not talked to anybody else."

"But, Sir William," resumed Godfrey after a pause, "surely you would not track a defenceless woman down, merely for helping the real criminal—perhaps it was a dear friend, or even relative—to escape?"

"I would hunt down the fiends who plotted to kill my boy, and laughed and sang before he had been laid in his grave, were they men or women."

"But—supposing you were to find out that one of the people suspected had generously incurred the blame of guilt in order to shield another, what then?" said Godfrey, keeping as cool as he could.

"I should say it was very improbable," said Sir William, drily.

Mr. Mayne drew near them, which put an end to the conversation. Godfrey fell into a fit of musing. What could have caused the strange confusion the baronet seemed to have made between mother and daughter? Which of the two was really implicated, and in what way? Was Mary trying to take upon herself her mother's act, or bearing the consequences of her own? And which of their faces was it that he saw in the shop?

Godfrey was silent on the way back and at dinner. Afterwards, Mr. Mayne went up to his wife, and his son looked wistfully at Mary as she was following. She turned back towards the drawing-room and, opening the piano, sang two or three songs softly, so that her voice should not be heard elsewhere.

"Thank you, I should not have dared to ask you for such a pleasure," said Godfrey, holding himself well under control. He had taken the precaution to shut the windows, lest any ears outside should catch a note of that treacherous voice. She had now risen from the piano and was gazing with a dull stare of hopelessness out of one of the windows towards the meadow.

"We had better not talk about—what would make us both uncomfortable and unhappy," said she in a low voice. "But I must just say this to you: I heard what you said to Sir William to-day and—and I wanted to show you that I thanked you."

"How could you have heard it?" he exclaimed impulsively, in his surprise.

"I had followed to the bay-window where you were both standing—Lady Hunt was engaged with those other callers and Mr. Mayne—and I waited behind that great bunch of side curtains; they quite shielded me from view."

Godfrey said nothing more; he did not look at her. If he had spoken, if he had looked, the "selfish infatuation" with which she had reproached him would have burst all bounds. He turned away, trying to hum the air of the song she had just sung, but not doing it justice. When he did dare to let his eyes steal again towards her, the sight of her pale, sad face as she took up her work pierced him to the heart. He mustn't comfort her; he couldn't comfort her: *he* had no right to do that.

Why was not Ernest Underwood here, he was generous enough to go on to think. What was the fellow made of, to let a whole day pass—and the day after she had promised to be his wife—without coming near her, when he, Godfrey, would have died for the privilege of spending his time at her feet? If he stayed here much longer he felt that he should have to tell her so, and should get reproved for it; so he made a pretext to leave the drawing-room. As he went outside, he saw a figure approaching the house, and made it out through the gathering twilight to be that of Ernest. Godfrey tapped at the window, and she rose and opened it. He seized one of her hands in great excitement, and pressed it tenderly, with misty, shining eyes.

"You will be all right now, Mary. He is coming up the avenue and he—he'll comfort you," concluded Godfrey : and went away before she could speak.

Godfrey had an errand to perform. After taking council with himself, he had come to the determination of seeking an interview with that powerful and dangerous man (as Godfrey regarded him) whose quarters were close by. Even detective officers were not always superior to bribes ; perhaps this one would not be.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WITH THE DETECTIVE OFFICER.

Passing through the lane on his way to the farm, Godfrey came upon Dick Wilding, who was sitting on a heap of stones, injudiciously employed in peeling the plaster off his face and pulling off his bandages. When he caught sight of Godfrey he jumped up and disappeared through a gap in the hedge with a yell. The farm-house door was open and there were sounds of voices in the big sitting-room to the right. The flickering glow of firelight shone through the windows ; and in the lodger's parlour there was the steady light of a lamp. Nancy saw Godfrey coming, and met him at the door.

"Is Mr. Cattermole in ?" said he, softly.

"Yes, sir. He is writing his letters."

"Will you ask if he can see a messenger from his *cousin ?*"

Nancy stared. "I—I don't understand."

"No, no ; women are not expected to. Do as you're told, Nancy."

She went into the parlour, and exchanged a few words with the occupant in a low voice. Then Godfrey heard a voice which made him start, prepared though he was. It was undoubtedly that of the man whom he had heard talking with Sir William.

"Take away the lamp, Nancy," he was saying. "I have finished writing, and the light hurts my eyes."

"If that be to keep up the delusion that you are a simple-minded artist, my friend, you are taking unnecessary pains," thought Godfrey.

Nancy came out and showed him in. The room was almost dark.

"I hope you don't mind this semi-obscurity, sir," said the man, rising and offering Godfrey a chair. "I suffer from weak eyes—a bad thing for an artist—I have the honour of speaking, I believe, to Mr. Godfrey Mayne."

"You do not let the weak sight check your ability in your other profession, however," observed Godfrey civilly. The man said nothing ; he did not start, but Godfrey thought he was surprised. "I have reason to know that you are a detective, brought down here by Sir William Hunt. I know the business you are here upon : and I know that you are a man of experience and of distinguished ability."

Mr. Cattermole laughed lightly. "Really, sir, you do me too much honour. I fear you are quite mistaken. Is it because I am so very poor an artist that you have felt compelled to find another, and, I should think, more difficult profession for me?" said he, as if much amused.

Godfrey felt that he must make a bold stroke at once.

"Well, I apologise for my mistake," said he rising. "I can only say that, knowing the cleverest detective from Scotland Yard was down here, I wanted his advice in the matter of investing a little money—perhaps five hundred pounds, perhaps more, perhaps twice that sum. And a very clever little trick which was practised at the Abbey last night by some person staying here at the farm, made me jump rashly to the conclusion that you, Mr. Cattermole, were the very man I wanted."

"And you thought you could bribe the detective," observed the officer drily, after a pause.

"Oh, dear, no," disclaimed Godfrey. "But in the discharge of a detective's duty, it may sometimes happen that a little delicate consideration on his part may spare people—never actually concerned in the case, but who may have been drawn into it unwittingly—great pain; and of course the relatives and friends of those people cannot do enough to show their gratitude."

Godfrey was standing, with his hand busy among the china ornaments on the mantel-piece. He could not see Mr. Cattermole's face, as that gentleman was sitting with his back to the very little light that came from the window. But he was attentively studying Mr. Cattermole's manner, and the more he studied it, the lower grew his opinion of the man's integrity, and the higher his own hopes of success.

"And who is the person not concerned?" asked the officer, with a stress on the word, "to be delicately considered in this case?"

"A young lady."

Mr. Cattermole smiled. It was a smile that seemed to tell of conscious power. "Unfortunately, instead of being unconcerned in the case, sir, that is the very person whom the business touches."

For a moment Godfrey's head swam; then he steadied himself and spoke quickly. "On what charge?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Godfrey Mayne. I understood you to say that you knew the case."

"I know it so well," said Godfrey slowly, "that I even know the young lady is taking upon herself the burden of a crime which she did not commit."

The words startled even the detective; and in a manner Godfrey had not thought possible with a member of such a profession. By a movement of the elbow Mr. Cattermole, who was sitting by the small fire-place, had brought the hearth broom down upon his feet; curiously too, the fall of the light wooden handle made him wince with pain. Godfrey was not too much interested to notice this.

"Perhaps you know who did commit it," resumed Mr. Cattermole.

"I have a strong suspicion," replied Godfrey, assuming a good deal more certainty here than he felt.

The officer looked at him long and keenly. He was used to the study of men's faces, and even in the dusk Godfrey's stolid expression did not deceive him. "I am afraid your suspicion would not count for much against what *we know*," said he, civilly.

"Then, if you know so much, why waste time hanging about here, instead of at once apprehending the criminal?" cried Godfrey.

"You want to question too far, sir."

"And I will do it, too," said the young man, setting his teeth. "I will ride over this very night to Goule Park, and tell Sir William ——"

"And so defeat the very purpose you had in coming to me this evening," interrupted the other, in a hard voice of authority, which checked Godfrey's rising excitement.

"You have made a pretty shrewd guess in coming to me, or else a very lucky chance brought you; for I am cognisant of all the circumstances of the murder of young William Hunt. I know who committed it; I know where the criminal is, and it only rests with me whether the apprehension is or is not made at once."

Godfrey shook inwardly. Mr. Cattermole continued:

"I was in Rome two days after the murder was committed, and I could have laid my hand on the actual criminal then."

Godfrey hung forward, listening intently, unable to speak. Mr. Cattermole saw the tremor, and went on:

"I had not the heart to do it, and that's the truth, Mr. Mayne. She was so young and so pretty, and I knew it was done in a moment of passion, *not of intention*. So I let her escape—and, indeed, interference on my part would have been gratuitous, for the business was not mine. But it was known at head-quarters that I was acquainted with the case, and when Sir William Hunt wrote to Scotland Yard the other day, it was I who was sent down upon it."

"You spared her then, you might spare her now," cried Godfrey in agitation, not knowing what to think or believe.

"I cannot tell that," replied Mr. Cattermole. "For her own sake, I might be tempted to do it; but, unfortunately, Sir William is all alert, and he knows that some of the—the people—are here."

"Is it out of consideration for her that you have not already acted?"

"Out of pity—yes. And any leniency on my part would involve grave difficulties."

"To yourself?"

"Undoubtedly. See you not, sir, that if I were caught tripping in this case, or made a failure of it when the game is so ready to my hands, I should be ruined. Scotland Yard would send me packing."

"Even if it did—you might try a fresh life in America," said

Godfrey, with hesitation, uncertain how far he might venture. "With a thousand pounds in your pocket, you might do well."

"Catch thieves over there, instead of here," remarked Mr. Cattermole, pleasantly. "The young lady would have to get away also."

"But why?"

"She must do that in any case, and without much delay, if she is to avoid the worst. Sir William, as you probably are aware, does not know her by sight; as long as he does not see her *with* the other lady, she is safe. But when once the younger one is out of reach, even if he does see the elder he has no proof that he could bring against her, whatever his suspicions may be."

"You are sure of this?" asked Godfrey, thinking of his father.

"Absolutely sure. If the young lady stays here, neither of them is safe; if she goes, both are. That is the whole sum and substance of the matter. You see, sir, I am placing confidence in you."

"Yes; thank you. Do they know this themselves?"

"Why, of course they do. I am not so officially hard as you may deem me, Mr. Mayne; and I have taken my opportunities to *let* them know it—both mother and daughter."

Godfrey thought he understood now the reason of his sending notes to Miss Dixon, and of the hazardous intrusion of the previous night.

"But," he said aloud, "where could the young lady take refuge?"

"Not anywhere in this country—to be safe. You have mentioned the best place, for her, sir—America."

"America!" echoed Godfrey, startled. "How could she go all that way alone?—and stay there unprotected?"

"I would take her, and stay with her to protect her."

"You!" exclaimed Godfrey. "What are you thinking of? Are you mad?"

"Not in the least mad," said Mr. Cattermole. "I have reposed some confidence in you, sir, and I may as well go a little further. I have proposed to the young lady, and to her mother, to make her my wife. Don't fling away like that, sir! Listen: I have liked her ever since I saw her in Rome; I like her so much that I am willing to overlook that past blemish in her life—she was but a young thing at the time—and marry her. You surely do not think, Mr. Mayne, that a man who has worked himself up step by step to a difficult and responsible position, would throw up his career just for a few hundred pounds, as you have suggested to me? No, no, sir. You look down upon me and my profession; but, rough though I may appear, I was born a gentleman, the son of a gentleman, and reared one. It is not every man, allow me to say, who'd make a wife of a woman with the charge of murder hanging over her."

"You must be mistaken," said Godfrey, hotly, in his confusion. "She is engaged at this moment to a gentleman who knows all her history, and to whom she is attached."

"Yourself, perhaps?" said Mr. Cattermole.

"No, not myself."

"Are you sure he knows all her history?" returned the other, again speaking with conscious power. "Sir, I *know* he does not. Would he take one whom he may yet see in the criminal dock?"

"Would you force her to marry you against her will?" scornfully demanded Godfrey, in his disgust and alarm.

"No. Ask Miss Dixon, in presence of her mother, whether she will have this fine young gentleman for a husband, or whether she will escape with the detective who saved her and her mother—mind you say *and her mother*—at Rome. If she chooses him, I must do my duty. I do not pretend to be generous all round; or to benefit others without any recompense. Why, see you not, Mr. Godfrey Mayne, that I *must* do it if she stays here?"

Godfrey broke out in strong language. He was beside himself. "You deserve to smart for your presumption, and for your treachery," he continued. "The police authorities ought to know of this."

"Go and inform them," said Mr. Cattermole, who became more cold and steely as the young man took fire. "Even if you hadn't the best of reasons yourself for keeping this attempted negotiation private, what do you think any member of the police force, high or low, would say if you told him how a detective had tried to make a rascally arrangement with you for helping a criminal to escape justice? He would listen to your story quite gravely, and then say: 'Very sorry you were put out, sir; but a detective is obliged to resort to all sorts of dodges.' And when your back was turned he would laugh at your simplicity."

Godfrey walked to the end of the small room, convulsed with impotent rage; a burning wish to fly at the man's throat, was only restrained by the feeling that nothing short of strangling would either punish him as he deserved or render him innocuous. In the pause which followed the officer's cool speech, a step on the flag-stone outside and then in the passage was heard; there was a knock at the door of the room, and without waiting for permission Dick came in.

His arm was out of the sling, and was as free as the other. The bandage on his head had fallen on his neck.

"May I take these off now?" he asked meekly, without seeing Godfrey, who took the opportunity to turn to the door.

"I need not trouble you any longer, Mr. Cattermole," said he coldly; and Dick, scared at his enemy's voice, crouched down, frightened, by Mr. Cattermole's chair. "Good evening to you."

"Good evening, Mr. Godfrey Mayne," he answered, rising somewhat stiffly. And Godfrey noticed for the first time that the hand with which Mr. Cattermole grasped the arm of his chair was gloved.

"It is he who has the wounds, not Dick," thought Godfrey, as he left the farm; "but his head does not appear to have suffered: and I expect Scotland Yard would say that the invasion of my father's house at midnight was all in the legitimate way of his business, and justify it!"

Godfrey Mayne returned to the Abbey, fuming with rage at the detective-officer's audacity. To imagine Mary Dixon, of refined nature and delicate instincts, in companionable contact with such a man was revolting. He might have been born and bred a gentleman, but he was anything but that now. Godfrey had not yet obtained a distinct, observant view of his face, but he felt that his feelings were as destitute of honour and chivalry as his general manners were of polish; that he was corrupt, or might be made so; and that if Mary had stood accused of all the crimes under the sun, this man's touch on her hand would be profanation. So decided Godfrey; and that Mary must be saved from him.

He himself could not save her, but Ernest Underwood might. Judging of the young man's feelings by his own, Godfrey supposed that he had but to whisper a word to him of Mary's danger, not stating its nature, to induce him to make her his wife with all speed, and carry her away out of reach of the clutches of wicked and self-interested police-officers. Perhaps Ernest had not yet left the Abbey, and he could speak to him now.

He dashed through the refectory, and into the drawing-room. Ernest was just gone. He was rushing out again, when Mary stepped forward and stopped him.

"Where are you going, Mr. Godfrey?"

"I want to speak to Ernest. Don't keep me"—entreatingly.

Even the clasp of her slender fingers on his sleeve could not keep him now; her safety might depend upon minutes. But she followed him into the hall, and clung to his arm.

"Mary, let me go! I pray you to let me go. You don't know what depends on it."

He was shaking her off again, gently, but surely and resolutely. She seized his right hand with both hers, and held it against her. Her soft, beseeching eyes were shining into his in the lamplight.

"Godfrey, stay with me! Say that you won't leave me!"

He felt all on fire; but what could he do? "Very well, I say it," he answered in despairing resignation.

But the words had scarcely left his lips before she dropped his hand, and stood apart from him. Godfrey would have taken her hand again.

"Don't touch me, don't touch me," she whispered imploringly. "You—you do not understand. And—I do not want you to speak to Ernest. Remember, you said you would not leave me."

"I remember," he replied, in a voice that sounded cold and proud. And he went to the hall door and flung it open, and stood there. He would not look at her. Then he heard a fall, and, turning, saw her lying on the floor. She had fainted—no doubt from strong emotion. Her poor face lay white and still, her arms and hands were at rest. Godfrey was beside her in a moment, kneeling, calling out for anybody whose name came first; and it was not until he had transferred her head softly from his own knee to Lydia's, and seen Mrs. Garner hurrying from the housekeeper's room, and Mary assisted to her own, that he took advantage of his liberty to follow Ernest.

"I did not promise her not to speak to him," Godfrey told himself, which perhaps savoured of sophistry; "and it is for her safety that I must do it."

"Mr. Ernest is gone to London, sir," was the answer that met him at the Grange. "He started in the dog-cart to catch the train not five minutes ago."

Godfrey felt a weight of black anxiety suddenly lifted from his shoulders. This abrupt departure could only mean one thing: Ernest must have been told enough of Mary's danger to be preparing at once some safe shelter for her until he could make her his wife. It did not occur to Godfrey to ask the servant any particulars, or he might possibly have doubted his own conclusion.

He saw no more of Mary that night. The schoolroom window and the greenhouse had been mended in the day, but Godfrey felt pretty sure that Mr. Cattermole's feet were not yet in a condition for another midnight invasion; neither, perhaps, was another necessary. However, he patrolled the house once or twice during the night, and on one occasion met his father doing the same and pointing an old flint-lock pistol at a statue on the staircase, in alarm at his son's footsteps. And after having been seized and pounded by Mrs. Garner, who was taking a reconnaissance in undress, Godfrey retired, satisfied that any intruder would have a warm time of it.

He puzzled himself about Mary's unwillingness for him to speak to Ernest, which had led her to play him a trick, the result of which she herself could not measure. In that one moment, when she had drawn his hand into hers and called him by his name, it had stirred his very soul; for there was a look in her face and a soft witchery in her tone which seemed to say she loved him.

He asked her the next morning at breakfast what it was that was taking Ernest to town in such a hurry. She answered that he had been neglecting his work lately, and she had recommended him to make up for lost time.

"You know," added Mary, "he has annoyed his father lately by being so idle and by running into debt; so that our engagement has to be a secret until he has worked himself into favour again."

Godfrey was not satisfied. Colonel Underwood was never annoyed at anything his son did; and Ernest might ride, or drive, or dress himself into favour, but he would certainly never work himself into anything. He was always running backwards and forwards to town, where he was supposed to be studying for the bar with a professional man; but it was a standing joke that he took his lessons on the box-seat of a four-in-hand.

On this day, Saturday, Mr. Mayne and Godfrey were engaged to join a sporting party at a nobleman's house several miles distant from Croxham. Godfrey would now willingly have excused himself, but he had no plea to offer his father for doing so. They left home betimes, and were not back until night.

Mrs. Mayne did not attempt to go to church in the morning on account of her foot, though she had walked out of doors the previous day. Neither did Mary go, which caused Godfrey vexation. He expressed it as he proceeded thither with his father.

"What is she staying away for, sir, do you know? All right-minded girls like to be at church on Sunday morning."

"Well, I suppose she is staying at home to sit with her mother," replied Mr. Mayne. "And I'm sure, Godfrey, I don't see any difference that it can make to you; you seem to regard it as a personal grievance. If it were Elspeth, now, I—— "

"Yes, yes," laughed Godfrey, recovering his good humour; "if it were Elspeth, I suppose I might ask leave of the Vicar to stay away myself to sit with her? Is that it, father?"

"I don't know whether it's 'it' or not, Godfrey," returned his father. "You young people do your courting in a very different fashion from what mine was when I was young. There's no ardour in it, lad, and be hanged if I can see that there's any love."

"Fashions change with the times, you know, sir," replied Godfrey, demurely.

"So it seems," concluded Mr. Mayne, as they reached the churchyard gate.

After service, in going home, they overtook Nancy and her father. Mr. Mayne fell into conversation with the farmer; Godfrey drew behind with Nancy. He began reproaching her in a semi-serious tone for her sinfulness in coming late, service having commenced nearly half-an-hour when she stole up the aisle to her pew.

"It does not happen often, and I felt downright ashamed of myself," answered Nancy. "Just as I was about starting, father having walked gently on, mother was taken with shivering, a sort of ague-fit, and I stayed behind attending to her. I wanted to stay altogether, but she got better and would not let me. The fact is, Master Godfrey, that Dick's new pranks have upset her seriously."

"I don't wonder at it," returned Godfrey.

"I fancy Mr. Cattermole has taken the opportunity of people being at church to enjoy an interview with his *aunt* and *cousin*," said Nancy, stealing a glance at Godfrey, and laying a laughing emphasis on the two words.

"Why so," he asked, with flashing eyes.

"I saw Miss Dixon and her mother in the plantation when I came out, sir, and Mr. Cattermole was walking towards them with a limp in his gait."

Godfrey felt boiling over with rage. They must have planned to meet him—and come out for the purpose! What could he do against this underhand conspiracy? Was Mrs. Mayne in league with the man to sacrifice her daughter?

As soon as he got indoors, he sat down to write a hurried letter to Ernest. Mrs. Mayne was keeping her room again; and gave never a hint to her unsuspicious husband that she had been down stairs.

"DEAR ERNEST,—I hope you won't think I am taking a great liberty in interfering in your affairs. I remember we scowled at each other like stage-villains on Thursday night, but it was before I knew she cared about you; now I know she does, nobody will congratulate you more sincerely. I will prove you this. I have found out by accident the danger she is in; she tells me that you know more than I do; I therefore conclude you are gone to town to make preparations to save her from it. But I know more of it than she is aware of, and I want to tell you that it is drawing very near, so that there is no time to lose, and the sooner you get her away from this place, the better. If it is any question of funds—the most lucky of us are short at times—I can help you, for I chance to have a few hundred pounds of my own lying idle at Coutts's, and I know, old friend, you will not scruple to make use of them in this emergency. One line from you, and you shall receive my cheque by return. I have not heard anything of your plans and hers, but I suppose you will be married by special licence upon her arrival in town, and then go off to some place of safety. It would save time if I brought her up to you, while you make your preparations and get the licence ready. I swear that she should come to you safe from her enemies, if I had to cut my way through a troop of dragoons. You need not be jealous of me, for I don't think she would say 'Thank you' to me if I jumped into the sea for her, unless it were to pull you out.—Yours very sincerely, "GODFREY MAYNE."

The writing of this letter caused Godfrey to be late at the luncheon table. Mary enquired what he had been doing.

"Writing to Ernest Underwood," he said; and he saw her cheeks flush at the answer.

Mr. Mayne always attended church in the afternoon: Godfrey but rarely; for at the afternoon service Mary always sat at the other end of the church among the school-children, whose former prejudice against her had totally, as already mentioned, given way; not so much under the influence of her personal character, as of toffee and a nasty but popular black sweetmeat made of liquorice and other things and sold in sticks. But on this afternoon Godfrey resolved to go. He saw her go up to her room to dress, and he went through the refectory into the garden and gathered her a sprig of geranium and some mignonette; then he returned to the hall and waited for her till the church-bells had ceased. Concluding that she had started, he went off to the church by himself, glanced down the ranks of the school-children without seeing her, and marched up to the Abbey pew. His father was there alone, in his seat at the outside end of the pew. Godfrey went in hesitatingly.

"Where is Mary?" he whispered, as soon as they stood up.

"She said she was not coming this afternoon," replied Mr. Mayne.

Godfrey instantly grew inattentive, fidgetted, and then disturbed everybody near by upsetting all the books in front of him with one sweep on to the floor. His father, scandalised, stared at him.

"Godfrey, if you feel faint again, you had better go out."

This was merely meant as a hint for him to conduct himself properly; but Godfrey instantly seized his hat, squeezed past his indignant father, went out of the pew, down the aisle, and through the porch, to the gaping surprise of the congregation.

He was back at the Abbey in a few moments, and had searched the house for her, knocking and calling at the different doors. Last he went to that of Mrs. Mayne.

"Who is it?" said the voice of his step-mother.

"It is I," replied Godfrey. "May I come in?"

"Not now," came the quick answer. "I want to sleep if I can."

"Is Mary here?"

"Yes, she is here"——after a brief pause. "Don't tease her now, Godfrey, she is tired."

And Godfrey knew as well as if he had been in the room that Mary was not there. A presentiment flashed over him that she had gone to the farm to hold another interview with that man. With a furious step, Godfrey strode thither. He saw nobody about but a little girl, Mrs. Wilding's niece, who had come on a visit.

"Are they all out, Susan?"

"Yes, sir; they are all gone to church."

"And Mr. Cattermole—where is he?"

"He went out, too, sir; just after the others."

"Can you tell me which way he went? I want to know."

"No, sir," hesitated Susan. Of course she knew, having watched him from behind the muslin blind.

"Now what a pity that is! I've got a shilling, that is burning a hole in my pocket, for anybody that can tell me."

"He went that way, sir; right out at the gate and along the lane to the left."

"Godfrey gave her the shilling, and was in the lane in a moment, hurrying up it into the plantation. He glanced to right and left, and listened as he walked. The place was so thickly wooded as to make search difficult; but presently he saw them coming along towards him, walking slowly side by side. Godfrey drew back among the trees, so as not to be seen. Mary wore a bonnet and veil, and a shawl on her shoulders; Mr. Cattermole's hat was brought low upon his head and his hands were gloved. Now that Godfrey saw his face by daylight, he did not like it at all.

But the strongest impression that the sight of Mr. Cattermole now produced upon Godfrey was, that he was the ideal of what a detective should be; stolid, commonplace, uninteresting, with nothing furtive, nothing salient about him, a man one would pass without notice; and yet shrewd, and authoritative and impressive when he chose, as he was last night to him, as he was now to Mary. He was speaking to her in a low voice, but with a deliberate earnestness which enforced attention. To Godfrey, fiercely prejudiced against him, his look and manner were bad, but it was with a badness not striking to a casual observer. From his iron-grey head to his slowly moving feet, now encased in a large pair of carpet slippers, he looked respectable and uninteresting. The first words Godfrey caught were his.

"You have kept your word to her through everything, she tells me: you have loved her, been devoted to her. For her sake, keep your word to her now, and come away quietly with me. Remember, it will save all scandal to these people you have been living among. They do not expect you to stay here for ever; let them think you have joined that sisterhood of which you have spoken to them."

"But my life!" wailed the girl in a low voice, shrinking back: and by this hesitation enabling Godfrey to hear more than if they had hurried past.

"Your life is safe; and it will not be hard, as you seem to think," said the detective rather impatiently; yet speaking always in his soft, sweet voice: "I have lost time enough over this business, as you well know, and I cannot afford much more. If you do not come to a speedy decision—"

"I will, I will," she interrupted in a tone of anguish; "but you cannot wonder that I shrink from it. Either alternative is so very terrible."

"That of the criminal dock is terrible," he answered sternly. "As matters are being let drift on now, there's a good chance of all the people connected with that past matter speedily standing in it. Have you no pity for your mother?"

"You need not ask that," she answered.

"To escape with me, and under my protection, is absolutely the only alternative left you," continued the detective. "I will not be played with any longer. If you do not agree, I must—"

"I will tell you my decision to-morrow for certain," she spoke hastily, as if wishing to stop his words. "Spare me until to-morrow."

"That will be quite the latest. I have delayed too long. Every day I am expecting that Scotland Yard will be sending someone down to see into things. Especially if Sir William Hunt—"

"Yes, yes, I know what you would say. When you gave the explanation to mamma this morning I saw the necessity of something being done without delay—"

Godfrey heard no more. They had passed him; the man earnest, imperious; the girl shrinking, trembling. He could scarcely restrain himself from dashing out from his ambush to take advantage of the tempting pond to give the tyrant at least a ducking, and from throwing his arms round Mary to vow that she should be saved in spite of herself. But this vow could be better kept by saying nothing about it. He waited until after he judged that they had had time to separate at the plantation gate, in which direction they had disappeared, and then he followed. There was no one about. He went through the garden into the Abbey, and saw Mary at the foot of the stairs, about to go up. His heart ached for her as she tried to speak to him brightly and lightly, to ward off any suspicion.

"Where have you been, Mr. Godfrey? Not to church, I'm afraid; you are back too soon."

"How is it you are not at church?" asked Godfrey.

"I had a headache, so I went for a walk instead. By-the-bye, you said something at luncheon about writing to Ernest; is it too late for me to send him a message?"

"I said I had written. I can tear up the envelope and charge the penny to him."

Mary laughed. "It does not matter. I'll write him a whole independent letter another day. Mamma wants to see you," she continued. "She says you never come to speak to her now."

"I was at her door not long ago," returned Godfrey, "and she would not admit me; she said she wanted to sleep."

"But she is awake now. Come."

Mary ran lightly up to her mother's room, and introduced Godfrey. She left him with her mother—who was lying on the sofa to rest her foot, and looked as if she had been crying instead of sleeping, and seemed in very low spirits—and went to her own room.

There she penned a hasty note to Ernest; its purport being to warn him not to pay attention to anything he might hear from Godfrey, who had, she lightly ran on, to be entertained with no end of silly fables to keep his suspicions off the truth. This letter she asked Emily, who was going out to meet her sweetheart, to put in the post-office, there being no letter-bag from the Abbey on a Sunday evening. Godfrey strolled to the post-office after leaving Mrs. Mayne, and posted his letter himself; so that both letters would reach Ernest Underwood's chambers by the same delivery on the following morning.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PUTTING UP USELESS BARS.

In coming back from the post-office Godfrey called at the blacksmith's, whose place was nearly opposite to the Vicarage gate. As it was Sunday, he got at him with difficulty, and found him rather drunk. He looked at Godfrey in disgust and astonishment on finding that the young man wanted him to do a bit of work at once.

"On Sunday! Well, sir, I never should have thought as—"

"Where's Ben?" interposed Godfrey."

Ben was the blacksmith's eldest son, and he was watching a dog-fight near by.

"Are you too good to work on Sunday?" asked Godfrey of Ben.

"No, sir."

"Have you got a couple of iron bars, three feet four inches long, that you could put across a window?"

"I have not got 'em ready, sir."

"Can you have them ready, and put them up this evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Come up to the Abbey and ask for me. Say nothing to anybody."

Godfrey walked home to dinner. Mrs. Mayne had come downstairs for it. Towards its close Mrs. Mayne spoke of the Sisterhood which Mary had proposed to join when she first came to the Abbey. This question had been again mooted within the past few days, and a letter which had come addressed to Mary on this same morning was understood to have reference to it.

"She shall do nothing of the kind," said Mr. Mayne irritably, in answer to his wife's remark. "Where do you say this place is—?"

"At Kensington," said Mary.

"Kensington!" echoed Mr. Mayne. "Why I thought you said, Laura, it was at——"

"Only a branch of it is at Kensington; not the one Mary will go to, I think," timidly interposed his wife, with a curious warning glance at Mary.

"And pray, Mary, what duties do you expect to have to perform?" he went on.

"I must visit the sick and the poor, I suppose, and—but I shall know more about it when I get there," replied Mary, nervously.

"Well, then, my dear, I tell you that you shall *not* go," he repeated. "I absolutely forbid it. You need nursing yourself, and have done for the last week, and this anxiety to go away is nothing but the feverish restlessness arising from ill-health. You have every comfort at the Abbey, child, and when you know how much your leaving it would hurt and annoy me, I should have to think you not only silly but ungrateful."

He spoke in a deeply-wounded tone. Mary was crying. "I don't want to go away; but I've promised, and I must," said she, in a voice that went to Godfrey's heart.

"There is no 'must' in the case," answered Mr. Mayne. "I say you shall not——when your mother is ill, and wants you, too!"

"Then let mamma decide for me," said the girl quickly.

"I think," said Mrs. Mayne, whose hands were quivering nervously, "that Mary ought to go."

"And I think," said her husband, growing really angry, "that you are both talking undutiful nonsense. I have made up my mind: and pray let no more be said about it."

When Godfrey went to the drawing-room after dinner, only Mary was there. She, as if anxious to escape his watchful eyes, turned to leave it.

"I am tired, and going to my room," she said, by way of excuse.

"You had better stay here," said Godfrey. "A man is coming to do some work in the schoolroom, and the noise would disturb you."

"What man? What work?" she asked, with a start of surprise.

"Ben Griffiths is going to put some bars before the window, so that Dick may not frighten you again."

"But I thought all that was mended on Friday."

"Not to my satisfaction," replied Godfrey. "When I looked at it to-day, I saw that a strong arm and hand could undo, without much difficulty, what has been done. So I have told Ben to bring up a couple of iron bars."

Even as he spoke, Hawkins came to say Ben was there. Godfrey went to the schoolroom, and watched him at his work.

"It would take more than an idiot to get over those," he remarked, when it was nearly over.

"Yes, sir," said the lad, and looked at him shrewdly.

"You heard all about the business, of course," said Godfrey, wondering what the thought was that caused the twinkle in Ben's keen, grey eyes.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"What do they say of this outbreak of Master Dick's in the village?"

"They say a good many things in the village just now, sir, since it's been known there was a detective about."

"A detective!" exclaimed Godfrey. "And who is he after?"

"Don't know, I'm sure, sir."

Godfrey regarded the shrewd young Northerner, popularly supposed to have the makings in him of a great rascal. "Are you quite sure you don't, Ben?"

"Well, they do say that we ought to know more about it at this end of the parish than they do at the other. But that's all, sir."

"A cock-and-bull tale, I expect, Ben? Who knows him? Detectives don't go about with a label on their back."

"No, sir. But Jo Longton, who is porter at Cheston Station now, and was before that at Rigby, says this same man, as he's a'most sure it is, came there twelve months ago after a chap who was wanted."

Leaving Ben to complete his job, Godfrey went back to the drawing-room. Mary was not there. Restless and uneasy, as he could but feel now if she was ten minutes out of his sight, he wandered into the hall, and half-way up the stairs again. There he heard Mrs. Mayne's door shut, and saw Mary leaving her mother's room. She caught sight of Godfrey, and beckoned him up to her.

"Can you amuse yourself for the rest of the evening, Mr. Godfrey? I am so tired, I want to go to my room already," said she with a new kindness, a new gentleness in look and manner which intoxicated him.

"I can frolic and gambol about by myself till doomsday, if it will save you fatigue," said he. He was kneeling with one knee on the topmost stair at her feet, and lounging against the banisters.

"Yes, you are always kind. I know that—and—and good-night."

She gave him her hand, and would have withdrawn it quickly, and hurried away, but it was only the second time she had given him encouragement enough to kiss it, and Godfrey was in the mood to make the most of his chance. He drew it into both his and, burying as much of his face as he could in it, pressed his lips to the little pink palm.

"What makes you so kind to me to-night?" he asked suddenly, with a new fear in his eyes.

And she began to tremble and to try to draw her hand away. His tone changed.

"Well, never mind why. I am thankful for it. And you won't talk any more about 'selfish infatuations,' will you?"

"Not so long as you remember that you are engaged, and that I am engaged, and that you are only my brother."

Godfrey knew that was an arrangement that never answered; but he knew better than to say so. He instantly sealed the proffered relationship with another kiss on her wrist, and this time his fair hair brushed the flower at her bosom. Drawing her hand away, she left him.

She had never treated him like that before, for a true instinct told him that her sweetness to-night was no artifice to blind him, but the result of real feeling: he almost fancied that he was loved. He walked to his own room, delirious with happiness. But the delirium did not last long. The suspicion which had flashed upon him, even while she spoke, came back to him now: this might be a last relenting impulse of kindness before she left the Abbey—if indeed she did leave it.

Godfrey knew not what to think. There appeared to be some imminent cause why she should leave it, and with Mr. Cattermole. Mr. Cattermole had spoken to him of marrying her for her protection, as it seemed; but his manner to the girl herself gave forth no token of tenderness for her, or of love; and Godfrey felt almost disposed to doubt whether that had not been a mere device on the detective's part spoken on the spur of the moment to mislead or anger Godfrey, or to make him acquiesce quietly in her departure.

He could not rest. He was anxious for her protection, as he would have been for that of a sister, and a vague feeling of uneasiness lay upon him with regard to the movements of the detective. *As* a detective the man might consider himself justified in entering the Abbey again at night to obtain speech of Mary or of Mrs. Mayne. Did he possess false keys to open house doors at will? Probably.

Quite late, when everybody ought to be in bed, Godfrey went to the school room. He meant to stay there for a bit, eyes and ears alike alert. Down he sat upon the old horsehair sofa; and whilst thinking he was listening with all his ears—fell asleep.

He awoke with a start—his fears realised. Someone was in the room, trying softly the handle of Mary's door; then softly knocking at it. Godfrey was on his feet in a moment, his hands stretched out to seize on the intruder. It was too dark to see anything, but he felt sure it could only be Mr. Cattermole.

Mr. Cattermole eluded the grasp, and seemed to make, Godfrey thought, for the window; Godfrey, in blind pursuit after him, fell over a chair, and threw it down with a noise. *Nobody* seemed to be in the room, and Godfrey took a match from his pocket and lighted it. The room was quite empty; the door leading into the corridor was shut: the large cupboard in the wall by the side of the fire-place, which Godfrey opened, was empty also.

"Who is there?" came the voice of Mary, who must have been disturbed by the noise. "Who is that at my door?" she added, having got no answer.

What should Godfrey say? Here was a nice predicament for a newly adopted brother. He did not want to frighten her by telling her that someone had been there, nor did he feel at all sure that he should be able to prove it. The sudden, unaccountable disappearance of the intruder had confounded him.

"Say what you have to say through the door," said she in a low, hard voice.

But he had nothing to say. He thought he had better steal off and hope for the morning light to give him some inspiration for an excuse or apology. And yet, could he go off without satisfying himself that she was safe from further intrusion? No, he wouldn't, and she must think what she liked. He undrew the curtains and pulled up the blinds, and while doing this spoke a hasty word, which betrayed him.

"Godfrey!" he heard Mary exclaim. "Can it be you?"

"Yes," he answered; "I came to see that things were safe." Rather to his surprise she unlocked her door and walked in, a lighted candle in her hand. She was in the silk dress she had worn that evening; she had not been to bed at all.

"Was it you who tried my door?"

Godfrey nodded: not liking to alarm her, but not choosing to tell a deliberate untruth.

"I am glad!—oh, I am very glad!"

Godfrey looked infinitely astonished. She smiled, and a moment after said hesitatingly—"I am not afraid of *you*. I know if you came, it was with some good motive. While you were at hand to take care of me, I could go to sleep like a trusting child."

This overwhelming confidence took his breath away. She went on with a sudden change to anxiety. "But there was someone here beside you. Did you not hear the noise?"

"I thought I heard——a cat."

"Why don't you say a cow?" said Mary, her eyes twinkling, in spite of her anxiety, in the almost hysterical relief she felt at the unexpected presence of one she could trust. But the smile died out again from her face as she stooped and snatched something from the floor. It was something so small that it escaped Godfrey's eyes altogether; but he saw the movement, and asked what she had found. She answered, shaking from head to foot.

"Something which proves that someone has been here besides you."

"No, I daresay I dropped that," cried Godfrey, without the least idea what it was, but alarmed by the terrible misery in her eyes.

"No, no," she said, bursting into tears. "I—I wish you had." And she began to glance fearfully round the room.

But there was no one in it but themselves, no one in the cupboard, for Mary opened it as Godfrey had done, and the outer door was safely shut. They looked at each other, as if asking what the mystery could be, and whither the intruder could have betaken himself.

"My father is still in the Swallow Chamber: I would advise you to go to your mother's room for the night," remarked Godfrey.

"I think I will," said Mary. And I hope you will go to yours now and get a good night's sleep."

"No," answered Godfrey, "I shall stay here in the schoolroom."

"Oh—but—surely there's no necessity for it. Nobody will dare to come a second time."

"All the same, I shall stay to see."

He lighted her along the gallery and saw her softly open her mother's door and enter. Godfrey was not again disturbed, and got some snatches of sleep on the hard horsehair sofa. His broken rest had not improved his appearance, and he was rallied by his father at breakfast for looking like a scare-crow.

Mary joined quite heartily in the laugh against him. This made him cross, he thought her ungrateful, and he called women all sorts of names in the refectory by himself: after first going round to the farmhouse, however, and learning from the servant that Mr. Cattermole was not up yet.

They're a set of ungrateful, heartless creatures, and they oughtn't to have human faces at all, for they haven't human feelings, he thought ferociously; and drawing his head sharply in through the window as he heard a sound behind him, he found Mary with a glass of sherry and some sandwiches on a salver.

"You did not touch anything at breakfast, Mr. Godfrey. You must eat these; I cut them for you. And why don't you smoke? That always makes you better-tempered."

"Do you mean to say that I'm ill-tempered?" said he, taking the salver from her and drawing his hands over hers as he did so.

"Certainly. You are the worst-tempered man I ever met."

"And don't you like ill-tempered men?"

"Of course not. Nobody does. Come, I shall see you light your cigar before I go away again." But she coolly took up his box of fusees herself and struck one; then, as he seized her other hand, she let the fusee fall on his fingers and burn them.

"Oh, I am so sorry! I only wanted you to light a cigar. Please take one out."

He thought it better to obey without further demonstration, but he asked very quietly:

"Are you a true, loving woman?—or a hard and deceitful one?"

"I don't know. And it does not in the least concern you." But when she reached the door she turned, and he saw that there were tears in her eyes. "Whether I am woman, or fiend, or angel," said she in a very low voice, "for all the kindness and generosity that I have never thanked you for, I thank you now."

Soon after that, in passing through the gallery, Godfrey heard sounds within Mrs. Mayne's room; the mother talking fast in persuasive tones, Mary sobbing bitterly. He could do nothing; and, as an outlet to his feelings, he rushed off again to the farm. Nancy saw him this time. Mr. Cattermole was not down stairs yet, she said, but she could hear him getting up.

"Was he out last night, Nancy?" he asked. "Quite late; past eleven?"

"That he was not, Master Godfrey. He was tired, he said, and went to his room before ten o'clock."

Godfrey could not make it out. He stayed in the kitchen, talking to Nancy, who was slicing kidney beans for dinner, until Mr. Cattermole should be down. While there, Miss Dixon came to the house door and asked to see the lodger. She was shown into his parlour, and he came down to her.

Godfrey, who would not show himself, sat in an agony of suspense. In about twenty minutes, during which not the faintest sound of voices in converse could be heard within it, the door opened; and, with a quiet "Good morning, Miss Dixon," "Good morning, Mr. Cattermole," they separated.

It was now Godfrey's turn, and he went in. The detective was looking glumpy, and told Godfrey, with every appearance of truth, that the young lady had prevailed upon him to let her slip through his fingers again.

"It is hard upon me, and I expect I shall get into trouble over it," he grumbled. "But she pleaded so feelingly. It appears she's attached to that young Underwood, and they are to be married shortly. Any way, she has promised me to get away from here not later than to-morrow. She has got to do that for her mother's sake as well as her own."

"And how is she to get away?" inquired Godfrey. "She ought not to go to London alone."

"Ernest Underwood is coming for her," said the other, lowering his voice. "Not but that a well-conducted young lady is safe, travel where she may."

Godfrey paused. "How do you know he is coming?"

"Miss Dixon has just told me. He has sent her word that he will be down to day."

Godfrey concluded that she must have had a telegram, as no post came in from London on Monday morning, and that it had been sent in answer to his own letter. "Then I am to understand, Mr. Cattermole, that neither Miss Dixon nor the Abbey will be molested—by the law—again?"

"Not again; so far as I am concerned."

"And what do you propose to do yourself?"

"I shall not be here long now; my occupation's gone, as Othello says. Just a few days more of it to make peace with Sir William, which can only be done by throwing dust in his eyes; and then Croxham will see me no more, sir."

"Very good," replied Godfrey. He hoped it was all true and genuine; and for the present he did not say what he had come to say.

From the farm he went on to the Vicarage, and was just in time to see the Thornhill family start upon their journey, and to wish them Godspeed.

"You will not forget your promise Godfrey," whispered the Vicar, as he shook hands with him—"to be away from Croxham by the end of the week."

"I will keep it, sir; all being well."

But Godfrey would not have spoken so confidently had he foreseen the crisis, even then close at hand, fated to be brought about by the action of Mr. Cattermole.

(To be continued.)

* * *

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

SOME of those whose names, in art or letters, are as household words among us, have, with toil and effort, struggled up into fame, while others have glided into it almost as if it were a matter of course that they should reach it. Of this latter class is the history of Mary Russell Mitford. She stepped into celebrity as easily as she did into the figure of her first country dance in her first ballroom experiences.

There were various causes for the quickness and ease with which Miss Mitford's name became known in her day. In the first place, her parents were on terms of close intimacy with many of the most distinguished people of their time, who belonged to the aristocracy of both birth and intellect, and all of these were naturally interested in the bright, lively-witted girl, and did their utmost to bring her forward. Constant intercourse with such visitors at her father's house had also sharpened prematurely, no doubt, her faculties, and given her whole character something of calmness and assurance which is not very common in youth. Besides all this, Mary Mitford certainly, like many highly-gifted girls, ripened early, and sprang at once into considerable intellectual power, though the best fruit of her talents is most decidedly that of her middle age, " Our Village."

Mary Russell Mitford was born in 1787. Her father, Dr. Mitford, was one of the most popular men of his day in the best English society of the period. Gentlemanly manners were his birthright, coming to him from the race from which he sprang, and his genial, sunny, affectionate nature, and ready tongue made him, with these, a welcome guest in every drawing-room, and at every table.

There were most grave faults in his character, as the future story of his daughter will show; but there was a certain lovable, attractive sweetness about the man which caused these faults to be overlooked by friends, and wife and child alike. Mrs. Mitford, in many respects, widely differed from her husband; but she possessed, in common with him, those social qualities which easily win friends. Moreover, she had a calm, gentle temper, which enabled her to live far more tranquilly and happily at Dr. Mitford's side than a woman of an anxious, restless temperament would have done. The pair were always gay, always in love with each other, always in a crowd, always full of talk, and always empty of pocket, yet always dressing and dining as if they had gold mines in their garden.

From her very babyhood little Mary breathed an atmosphere of love and of wit. Her parents idolised her, for she was an only child, and a child whose sparkling face and eager busy prattle showed soon that she would do them honour and credit in the world: and she gave back their affection in no scant measure, and displayed for them both, and for her handsome, brilliant father especially, a tender devotion which colours her whole life. She began to learn the meaning of talking well almost before she learnt her alphabet, and she put the lesson in practice with wondrous rapidity, as, after dinner at dessert, she sat on the knee of some gentleman guest, or, in her mother's drawing-room, chattered with childish grace about the pattern of her doll's new dress-hat.

As she grew older she began to understand, with the singular sharpness of brain with which she was gifted, what the people around her were talking about: and they were no commonplace subjects which were discussed by Dr. Mitford's guests. She took in this way, almost instinctively and without effort, just as a clear stream reflects the objects on its banks, many an idea concerning politics, and art, and literature; and as years went on she put forth opinions of her own on all these points—opinions produced by lively active thought on what she heard; and the men and women who were her parents' friends listened to her kindly, and smiled approvingly as they watched the play of her expressive features.

Thus, brooded over by the soft, broad opinions of strong love, yet allowed to gaze out with a long, steadfast look from beneath those sheltering wings at the things and people around her, Mary Mitford glided on from childhood into early womanhood. During the later years of her education she was sent to a good school in London, where she acquired a large store of book knowledge, and carried off many a school prize triumphantly. Still, no doubt she gained her best teaching, and the teaching which was most useful to her in after life, as she played or listened in her home.

She was no beauty; yet was there a meaning in her eyes, a flash in her smile, a miracle of sympathy, and a feeling in her changeful cheek, her mobile mouth, and earnest brow which more than mere regularity of outline attracted to her every eye. Her figure was short, but she had a brisk light way of moving about which was not ungraceful; her merry childish prattle had developed into a bright stream of conversation in which many a spark of wit glistened; her head was stored with quite enough knowledge to make her seem something of a wonder in days when a well-educated woman was a very rare bird indeed in society. When we take all these things into consideration, we cannot be surprised that Mary Mitford became a pet about whom much was thought and said among the men and women with handles to their names, and the authors and artists who daily came down in their carriages to Dr. Mitford's country house near Reading.

The picture of Mary Mitford's youth, at this period, is a very bright picture as it rises up before us.

At one time she is visiting in the North of England among her father's relations, and is being made much of, in old-fashioned, quaint manor houses, by stately uncles and prim lady aunts. Next she is in a London drawing-room, with the grave brows of statesmen and thinkers unbent as they lean over her chair, and smile at her playful sayings. Bye-and-bye we find her back again in her home, as sunny and contented as if she had never gone beyond its gates. Now she is reading in the arbour, the intent earnestness of eye and lip telling that hers is no light skimming over of the pages before her. Now she is in the garden reviewing with a keen glance the lately arrived, gayly dressed squadrons of spring flowers. Now she is sitting at her father's side, listening with bright, eager interest to the description of one of his favourite coursing-matches—for Dr. Mitford was a sportsman of no mean degree. Now she is having a hearty game of play with the numerous dogs, who were sure never to be wanting wherever Dr. Mitford's home might be, and who were always his and his daughter's constant companions.

Mary Mitford was still little more than a girl when her first book of poems appeared in print. Her fancies had long flowed almost naturally into rhyme, and thus found their way on to paper. Her parents, who had from the very first, been made the confidants of her childish authorship, were full of pride and delight as the little volume, with their daughter's name on the title-page, went forth into the world. The book was well received, partly from its own real merit, which was doubtless considerable when the age of the authoress was taken into account, and partly from the interest and favour with which it was regarded by the young lady's crowd of influential friends. The poetess was most fully encouraged to go on and to hope to prosper.

Mary Mitford was not slow to profit by the impulse forward thus given her. Now that the poems had succeeded, something more ambitious must be tried; but what should that something be? It was the age of play-going, when one of the first great events in little Mary's life had been being taken to a play. Mrs. Siddons and her brothers were making the heroes and heroines of the drama real beings of flesh and blood to English minds, and were spreading round the theatre a halo of light which naturally was attractive to all young, warm imaginations. Thus, the period when Mary Mitford was a girl was not only a play-going period, but it was a play-writing period too. Every young man of talent wrote his play, and every romantic school-girl had her tragedy hidden away, blistered with her tears, in a secret drawer of her desk. Plays were, to the literary world of those times, what novels are to the literary world of to-day. Some thousands were written, and some hundred or so found their way to the surface of the great ocean of public attention and favour. Young Mary Mitford was therefore only doing what it was almost an instinct with every clever intellectual young man and woman of her time to do when, after the success of her poems, she wrote a play.

To the joy and triumph of the young poetess and her parents, the play flashed into public notice just as the volume of poetry had done. It was both read and acted, and was talked of and admired in both the drawing-room and the theatre. This came to pass probably in some measure because there was far more in it than in most of the dramatic productions with which the young England of that day were favouring the world and wearing out the patience of much-enduring literary friends. But most certainly, also, Mary Mitford's first play, like her first poems, owed, in part, its immediate popularity to the position held by her parents and herself in the best and most intellectual society of the time. A second play soon followed the first, and Miss Mitford's literary reputation became an article in the literary creed of the period.

Vast was the shower of honours of all kinds which now began to pour in from all quarters, on the young authoress. Men of European fame wrote her letters of flattering compliment. Women whose drawing-rooms were regarded as very temples of fashion by maids and matrons who cast longing, but hopeless glances towards their doors, asked her to their houses, and fêted and petted her. Royalty itself took its share in the general chorus round her. The Prince Regent asked to be introduced to her, and addressed to her several very empty but very pretty speeches. All this incense might very well have turned a mature head wearing a legal wig or a shovel hat, let alone a young head wearing a wreath and a coronet of plaits. It is, therefore, little to be wondered that at this period Mary Mitford grew to have a somewhat exalted idea of herself and her own talents, and that her adoring parents were intoxicated with pride and pleasure.

Mary Mitford's poetical writings, highly though they were esteemed in her own day, have now ceased to find a place on our book-shelves; they had not in them enough of the immortal spark of genius to make them live. But there is one book of hers which still survives among us, and still is loved and honoured, and this is, "Our Village."

There are various reasons why Mary Mitford's prose book has reached a niche in literature which was never attained by her more ambitious poetical works. It is the fruit of her maturer years, and of more ripened thought; it has in it more heart and sympathy than her poetry, always a telling point in the writings of women; and, moreover, its subject strikes exactly the cord in her mental organisation which vibrates with the harmony of real genius. "Our Village" seems to have been the very thing which the intellect of Mary Mitford was intended to produce.

Miss Mitford's history has fewer dark spots in it than the history of most human lives. Still there is one shadow which we find frequently falling across it, though her sunny nature prevented her feeling it as much as many people in her place would have done.

This shadow was caused by the incorrigible, boundless extravagance of Dr. Mitford, her father. He quickly ran through the fortune of his wife, who was an heiress, and after that he did the same by a second fortune which was left him by one of his own relations. After this second exploit, he and his family were forced to leave Bertram House, their comfortable home of several years' standing, and to retire into a cottage at Three Mile Cross. No doubt Mary Mitford often wished that things, in this respect, might have been different with her father's character, but this fault of his, and all the many discomforts and deprivations which it must have brought upon her, never seem for a moment to have dimmed, in the faintest degree, the flame of her great love for him. Directly she arrived at the cottage at Three Mile Cross, she set about making it, what it soon became, one of the brightest and prettiest little homes that ever man entered; her cheery, energetic nature rather rejoicing than otherwise in the task. And later on in Dr. Mitford's life, when he had completely emptied his own pockets, his daughter refilled them willingly with her literary earnings.

Mrs. Mitford died some time before her husband, and father and daughter lived on for several years alone together. Her mother's loss was one of the few great griefs of Mary Mitford's life, for the close, intimate affection and entire confidence between the two had been more like the tie that joins sisters than that which unites in general parent and child. She struggled bravely, however, against her sorrow, and found relief for it in literary work, in redoubled devotion to her father, and in wider spreading sympathies which drew more and more friends towards her.

That cottage at Three Mile Cross shows a wondrously animated scene; a scene full of figures that rouse our love and interest, as we glance into it during the days when Mary Mitford and her father lived there together. Let us enter the trim garden, so brightly starred with flowers, one summer afternoon, and try for a moment to describe what we see there. We must tread carefully, or we shall disturb some of the many members of the canine family who are lying stretched at ease, or otherwise taking their pleasure on all sides, and shall call forth a whimper or a petulant growl, the sound of which will gain for us no favour in the eyes of the master and mistress of the place, with whom their pets are not animals, but regular personalities. There are dogs everywhere; in the garden, in the drawing-room, in attendance at the dinner-table. Two lovely Scotch terriers are gambling on the lawn, a greyhound is slumbering in the porch, a curly spaniel on the doorstep, a splendid deerhound is majestically taking a constitutional up and down the gravel walk. It is a perfect dogs' paradise, where all their whims are allowed full scope, and all their habits and customs respected.

But to turn from the dogs to the men and women present.

Here are two elderly gentlemen walking to and fro leisurely in the sunshine. What a free, airy, jaunty bearing one of them has, in spite of his years; what grace there is in the upright carriage of his head; with what a springy step he moves; what a genial sunbeam there is in his glance; what wondrous sweetness in the handsome mouth. And yet the face of the gentleman in the clerical dress who is his companion, certainly inspires more feelings of reliance as we gaze at the friendly smile and calm, honest brow. When we look at Dr. Mitford, we cannot wonder that everybody loves him; but when we look at Mr. Harness, the clergyman, we cannot wonder that everybody trusts him. There is another gentleman not far off sauntering up and down with a book in his hand, a book over which he is now very intent, and now full of sly laughter that ripples over from eye and lip. This is Chorley, the journalist, and he is reading an unlucky book, on which to-morrow he is going to write a critique that will not be exactly all sugar.

But out attention soon wanders from the gentlemen to two ladies who are sitting on a garden bench hard by. There is singular matronly grace in the little figure of the elder of the pair, and there is singular brightness and sweetness, too, in her face, which is wondrously young and smooth, though the small lace cap proclaims that she must be somewhat advanced in years. Yet attractive though her appearance is, the eye is drawn, as with a spell, to her companion. Oh! let us gaze on and on into those delicate features, where heart and intellect seem married in such fair accord. Who would not be ready to live for that smile, to die for that glance? Who, in deepest sadness, could not but be soothed by listening to the melody of that voice? As we watch her and hear her, we do not marvel that she is to be the queenly moon of a poet's home, the mother of an artist, and that England is to count her as her greatest poetess, the girl, Elizabeth Barrett, who now sits beside her closest, and warmest, and almost motherly friend, Mary Russell Mitford.

It was a cruel tearing of her heart's tenderest fibres for Mary Mitford when her old father was taken away from her side. She did not wrap herself up, however, in a dark, heavy mantle of sorrow; she did not let her healthy interest in life and the commonplace, daily things of life grow pale and dim; such a course of action would have been completely foreign to her sympathetic, genial nature, in which the fountain of sweet waters never could grow dry. Her poorer neighbours basked in the sunshine of her free liberality; her dogs still frisked around her; her garden was still a rainbow of richly-blended colours; her little house was still the favourite rendezvous of all that was wisest, and brightest, and best in the land. Even now, dwellers in the neighbourhood of Three Mile Cross recollect the strings of carriages which used to besiege the charming old lady's modest gate on summer afternoons, when she gave her so-called "strawberry parties."

A few years before her death, Mary Mitford removed from Three

Mile Cross to Swallowfield, on account of the house she there took possession of being more comfortable. Here, as in the old home, it was all sunshine, all perfume in the atmosphere which surrounded her; even when age and infirmity began to creep upon her, she could never forget to be sympathetic and gracious. At length, after her health had been gently declining for some time, she passed calmly out of this life at the age of sixty-eight, leaving a name that we still love.

ALICE KING.

* * *

LILIES ABLOOM!

LILIES abloom!
While the earth is heavy and wet with dew,
And the darkness is not, or the light,
And the west is red, and the east is blue,
The one in a flame of day, and the other in shade of night!
Lilies abloom!

Lilies abloom!
Standing upright in the shadows, all silver and gold,
With a strange sweet breath, faint on the fainting wind,
So white and sweet! Yet rooted deep in the mould,
With a thousand clinging roots that in darkness and dust are twined!
Lilies abloom!

Lilies abloom!
Passionless! dreamlike! wonderful! fit for a little child
To worship and gaze at and wonder with strange surprise,
Each one alike undefiled and fit for the undefiled,
Born of the earth—and earth—yet that which the earth defies!
Lilies abloom!

Lilies abloom!
Fit for sad eyes to see, beclouded with misty tears,
And fit for the touch of heavy and fevered hands;
When Death rules as a king over the barren years,
And the roadway is rocky and rough that leads to the peaceful lands!
Lilies abloom!

Lilies abloom!
Fit for the silent and still, a gift to the dead who rest,
For the quiet of folded hands, for the eyes that open not;
To lie for a pledge of life on a world-weary silent breast,
For one who has hoped, and prayed, and died in the common lot!
Lilies abloom!

T. S. CUNNINGHAM.

ON AND OFF:

A STORY OF TWO WORLDLY PEOPLE.

By Vera Singleton, Author of "My Saturdays."

CHAPTER I.

MR. and Mrs. Chesney were honeymooning in the Isle of Wight. Having committed the ecclesiastical impropriety of being married in Lent, they were doing penance for it by futile endeavours to enjoy idling about in a British east wind. And as they had come to Ventnor in search of sun and shelter, they found the double pleasure of being baked when they loitered along the esplanade, or rested on the sunny seats with the invalids, and suddenly caught and scarified by the wind, when they grew tired of the hillside nest, and ventured inland, or walked boldly along the shingly or clayey beaches of the island.

Under this régime, the bride's complexion and the bridegroom's temper suffered about equally, and after a week it became rather hard work to keep up to the proper pitch of felicity. All the more that they had never professed to be deeply in love with each other, but had married for liking and convenience. Ada Lifford's father had been in the India Office, and accordingly his orphan daughter enjoyed a small pension until her marriage. She was taken care of by a rich widowed aunt, but, unluckily for herself, was rather fond of telling everyone that she was independent; and as old Mrs. Lifford lived in every comfort, it was generally reported that Ada had a handsome income of her own, and would come in for all her aunt's money when she died.

Wilfrid Chesney had been a tolerably promising medical student, and had just taken out his licence to practise, without having learnt more mischief or less science than usual on the way to it, when he had the misfortune to be left a legacy of £4,000. He got drawn into speculative investments, and new companies; lost money as a shareholder, and determined to have no more to do with any company in which he had no share in the management; went into two new concerns, as director in one and secretary of another, and gave up his profession in order to devote his whole time to doubling his capital. The company of which he was secretary collapsed altogether, and that of which he was director did not prove a gold-mine as fast as was expected; whereby it came to pass that three months before his marriage he had made the pleasing discovery that his balance at his banker's was £50, and that his most promising shares could not possibly bring in any dividend for a year.

There was nothing to be done for it but to marry someone with money enough to buy him a practice, and give him a fresh start—for Wilfrid had no mind to go to the dogs, or to be called "Poor Chesney" by his friends. He and Ada met a few times at the houses of mutual acquaintances, who lived under pleasing delusions about the position of both parties; they liked each other fairly well, and Mrs. Lifford (who was in very weak health) was anxious to see Ada settled. Hence the present situation of affairs, and therefore are they sitting side by side on one of the benches near the sea, feeling tired and cross, and heartily sick of Ventnor, each wondering how long this sort of thing was going to last, and neither liking to be the first to say so.

"There!" said Ada, jumping up at last. "That miserable young man in the bath-chair has passed six times while we have been sitting here, and I can't stand seeing him a seventh. I hate sick men."

"I suppose men have to be sick sometimes as well as women," remarked her husband, rather gloomily. The speech was not a pleasant one to hear from his future ministering angel.

"Then they shouldn't wear scarlet knitted comforters, to make themselves look worse. And they should either get well or die, and not attempt to do the interesting invalid. It is only women that can play that part. Let us go in, do; I am tired of them all, men and women."

"Are you tired of Ventnor?" asked Wilfrid, seizing his chance. "Perhaps you would not care to stay here long?"

"Well, really, since you propose it, I think we might do better. I don't care for knocking about in hotels and trying to make holiday at this time of year, unless we could go quite south, to the Riviera or Naples."

"Suppose we have a regular business talk, then, and settle our plans—give up billing and cooing, and take to bills and counting?"

"We haven't been doing so very much of the billing and cooing," said Ada, with a little pout; "it doesn't seem in our line. I dare say the realities of life will suit us better."

Wilfrid did not see his way to reply to this accusation, so he told his wife, with an air of solicitude, that her dress was in the mud. It is odd that nothing annoys a woman like this kindly-meant warning: for your own sake you may just as well tread on her skirt and tear it, as remark to her that it is sweeping the street. Ada said "Bother!" picked up the offending fold, and walked on in silence.

On the table of their hotel sitting-room there lay a yellow envelope, directed to Mrs. Chesney. Ada tore it open, and read a bluntly-worded message from a servant, telling of her aunt's sudden death. She sat down, faint and shocked.

"When did it happen, dear?" said her husband, putting his arm round her.

"This morning, quite early," she answered, tearfully. "Oh, I can't believe it. Poor aunt; she was very kind to me."

"Well, love, she has left you with someone to be kinder to you, I hope. I am sorry for the poor old lady, since you were fond of her. I suppose I ought to go to the funeral."

"Of course you ought," said Ada, gratified by the little bit of love-making. "There can't be any hurry, though."

"I'll telegraph to them to let us know all arrangements at once," he said, glad to have something to do. "Cheer up, dear; you're not alone in the world now, as you would have been if she'd died three months ago." He kissed her and strode out, thankful to be able to light a cigar, and to have got away from her tears without showing any annoyance at them. On the whole, he felt he had come through a severe trial very well. He had been affectionate and sympathetic with his wife, he had not resented her crying over her aunt, he had spoken properly of the old lady, he was going to see her buried—though he hated funerals, and he was fully determined not to ask a question about the will. For which reticence he indemnified himself by calculations. Mrs. Lifford had kept a snug villa, three maids, and a man to look after the horse and brougham, a nice garden and greenhouse, had given away money handsomely, and liked good dinners.

"She never did it on less than £1,000," he soliloquised, "and cheap at that. More likely twelve hundred. Hope the capital isn't tied up. I'd rather get a lump sum down, and buy a practice, than live on my wife's income. I should only burn my fingers again, dabbling in speculations with a few hundreds, and be always something to the bad. It will be better for me to have something to do, and with money in hand I can start a decent house and a brougham at once, and do the thing properly. It's a very lucky thing for me, and that's a fact; there's no use in humbugging. Old women have got to die; she was a decent old body, and no doubt she's better off. So am I; so there are two of us, and all's for the best."

In this genial mood he prolonged his stroll and his meditations, and returned to the hotel in about an hour. Matters were looking more cheerful there also. Ada had done crying, and ordered some tea; there was a good fire, and Wilfrid sat down by it, and took his cup, determined to continue to tread in the paths of virtue, go on sympathising with his wife, and not say a word about the will. But fate was too strong for him.

"I was thinking," Ada began, "that as soon as we have had letters in answer to your telegram, we had better go quietly up to town. I shall want to get some mourning at once. It is a great pity, when all my things are new; but then, it is such an inconvenient time of year that I didn't get much. One can't buy summer things in March, you know."

"I suppose not," Wilfrid answered vaguely, wondering whether he had enough money to pay the hotel bill.

"And very likely there will be arrangements about the funeral for you to see to. Dear aunt left directions in her will, I know, as to what she wished done; for she often told me that it should be opened before anything was decided."

"Did she tell you how she left her property?" The words slipped out before he knew that they were coming.

"Oh, she had scarcely anything to leave, you know. She may have put by a little for legacies to the servants, and so on; and there is the silver and the pictures; but all her money goes to my cousin, John Lifford, at her death."

"*What!*"

"You seem surprised. Were you calculating on its coming to me? You made a mistake then; she had only a life-interest in her property."

"I always understood you were to be her heir?"

"You did not understand it from me; I am sure I never said a word about it. Did you marry me for money?"

"Certainly I did not marry you for money; but I could not have married you if you had not had money."

"Why, haven't you enough for us both?"

"No, indeed. I shall have plenty by-and-bye, when my shares begin to pay; but the plain truth is that at present, if I have as much cash as will pay our bill here, it is all that I can muster."

"And what are we to do?"

"I am afraid we must manage upon your income for a year, and then we shall be all right."

"But my pension was only £50 a year, and it stopped when I was married."

"The deuce!"

Ada burst into tears. Wilfrid walked up and down the room furiously, biting his moustache in savage disappointment, and holding his tongue with difficulty. At last, he flung out of the room, and walked out into the chilly March dusk. He walked for miles and miles, tiring down his rage, and partly succeeded. His mind was all in a turbid whirl at first, in which he knew only that all the world had been in a conspiracy to delude him. Gradually it cleared a little, and he began to recognise how far he had been self-deceived. Ada had told him no untruths, that was clear; it was all the doing of those meddling, chattering fools who had told him that she had a fortune, and he had been double-dyed idiot enough to believe them, and hurry to secure it without knowing what he was about. In this fashion, with endless reiteration and far more emphatic mental expressions, he abused himself and his acquaintances, until he found himself in the outskirts of Newport, having walked nearly across the island. Here he suddenly discovered that he was dead tired, with the excitement and the furious pace at which he had walked; and that it was long past dinner-time. So he looked for a respectable hotel, ordered dinner, and found that his misfortunes did not prevent him from eating it when it came.

Dinner put a different complexion on matters, as it always does; and by the time that Wilfrid Chesney had finished his dinner, and stretched out his feet to the coffee-room fire, it began again to seem possible that life was not altogether a delusion, and that every hopeful path might not prove a cul-de-sac, in which you must end by knocking your head against a dead wall.

This more cheerful view of things was confirmed by their further course. One or two men dropped into the hotel smoking-room, whom he had met here and there, and exchanged a few words with; he fell into chat with them and their acquaintances, cards were sent for, and Nap. became the order of the evening. Wilfrid had a few sovereigns in his pocket, and was in the humour to be reckless; but his play was good, and his luck was steady. Shillings soon run into pounds at that very immoral game; the other players grew excited, and raised the points, but Wilfrid kept his head and his luck. When he drove back to Ventnor that night in one of the hotel flies, he had no longer any anxiety about the bill, nor indeed about anything else. When a man can make twenty guineas in an evening's amusement, why need he care for any old woman's leavings? In whatever fashion Ada had spent the evening, she was sound asleep when he arrived; and so peace and downy slumber sealed up the cataclysmic day which ended the Chesneys' honeymoon.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Lifford's will proved somewhat to exceed Ada's expectations. She had left her niece residuary legatee; and as she had few debts, a good balance at her banker's, and some small investments, it appeared that when the other legacies were paid, Ada would come in for a couple of hundred pounds in cash, a good many spoons and forks, a genuine Teniers (representing two Dutch boors drinking in a cloud of tobacco-smoke), and a dubious Turner, representing thumb-smudges and sunset glory; besides an annual income from railway shares of twenty-seven pounds ten, as long as the island of Cuba maintained its usual peaceful and prosperous condition. This was so much more than Wilfrid had expected, when he had once fallen from his heights of happy anticipation, that he grew quite jubilant, and was rather surprised that his wife did not seem to share his good spirits. In fact, he did not understand her at all. She treated him in a polite and friendly way, but never now seemed to expect to be made love to, or gave him any opening for doing it, if he had been inclined. They went at once to Mrs. Lifford's house, and she occupied herself in looking over stores, clothes, &c, and in making all the arrangements for the break-up of the establishment. Wilfrid did his duty manfully in moving heavy things for her, and nailing up boxes; and he it was who sold the Teniers, and fought many a battle over the Turner. But he was a good deal puzzled at finding that suggestions about keeping this or that little knickknack to adorn their own future quarters fell flat; Ada went on steadily packing up everything for sale, and would not be drawn into any talk about what was to come next. Her husband wondered what on earth she was up to, but thought he might as well let her alone until the legacy was paid, and it was necessary to decide something.

His own reflections were often the reverse of cheerful. They had some money in hand, and Ada's legacy would soon be coming in, as Mrs. Lifford's affairs were simple, and her executor prompt. But it was only a plank between them and that sea of poverty which is so salt on the lips and so heavy on the limbs of those who carry weight. Wilfrid had not yet felt its actual touch, but he dreaded the cold plunge. Ada, he owned to himself, was the difficulty. If he were alone, he could go as a ship's doctor, try his luck at the diggings, or turn army surgeon. There was no reason why *he* should not be jolly enough; but to drag a wife about the world, and see her growing shabby and sickly and spiritless!

"What a fool I have been!" thought Wilfrid, dolefully. "But I'm in for it now, and I've got to stick to it. I fancy the army is the least altogether intolerable chance, but with a wife it will be just genteel starvation. And if I must have the starvation, I'd rather of the two have it cold without. The gentility, which is supposed to be the sweetener, seems to me just the one thing wanting to make every step down worse than the catastrophe itself."

Matters came to a point at last. The carpets dolefully cumbered the ground which once they covered, in huge bales that seemed to be always in the way; the ottomans had donned canvas surtouts; and the chairs had lost their sociable individuality, and stood in rank, or stacked up one on the other, waiting for the van that was to swallow them up. The Chesneys sat by the fire in one of the two rooms they used, which alone remained comparatively habitable, and then at last Ada opened her mouth.

"I'm horribly tired, but I think I've done a good day's work."

"Rather," responded her husband. "Only about enough to kill two strong men, and most of it totally unnecessary."

"Because you want me to leave everything to the servants, and a nice mess they would have made of it. In the end you will always find it is twice as much trouble not to see to things yourself."

"Oh, no doubt. Only I think that when you have told a woman twice what she is to do, it is more satisfactory to pitch into her for not doing it than to stand over her and see it done. But if you like that way of amusing yourself, my dear, do it by all means."

"Amusing myself!" echoed Ada, with high disdain. "But it is not worth while to argue about that, we have more important things to talk about."

"Well, I think so myself. I don't know that I have gone to the ant, and been wise; but even the most improvident of men likes to have an idea where he is going to sleep to-morrow night."

"And have you no ideas on your own account?"

"Plenty, but I've been waiting for you to emerge from your aunt's boxes before I could propound them. One does not feel encouraged to discuss one's future destinies, when the partner of them lives with her head in a cupboard."

"I don't know that I feel encouraged to be the partner of your future destinies."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Do you think your prospects are cheerful?"

"I don't see that they are so bad. We've got something in hand, and something coming in, and I bring home something every evening I get a game. We can go into lodgings for a little, and look about us. I think of going into the army. They haven't enough men for their vacancies now, so there will be no trouble. You would like a military life, wouldn't you?"

"When we had to live on your pay! It would be simply genteel starvation."

"I suppose that must be the word for it, for it's exactly what had occurred to myself. But what else is there for us? We may as well put the best face we can on it."

"Yes, there is something else for us."

"What, then?"

"Separation."

Wilfrid jumped up from his chair with a force that knocked it down, and began to walk about. Ada, having launched her torpedo, stitched nervously at some wretched little bit of work, rather frightened about the effect.

"You don't mean that?" he said presently, stopping at the mantelpiece again.

"I do," she replied, growing bolder; and she laid down her work and looked at him. "The poverty, and the worry, and the wretched struggle of keeping up appearances all belong to our keeping together. Each of us can get on much better alone. You would do very well in the army without a wife. I have a little money, I have friends, and I have wits; I can support myself."

"And what about getting married, and taking each other for better for worse?"

"Why, you know we never meant it in the least. We agreed to take each other for worse, because we were quite sure that it would turn out for better. That was a condition understood. It has not been fulfilled; and circumstances alter cases."

"Well, you *are* the coolest little piece of goods I ever heard of!" declared Wilfrid, half angry and half amused. There was Ada proposing the straight course out of all the ignominious miseries which had been afflicting his imagination, and yet he was vexed with her for proposing it, and in no hurry to take it. To be sure, no man cares to be jilted by his own wife.

"There's no use in being anything but cool. Besides, I have been thinking it over a great deal, and I have talked to Mr. Burdon about it." Mr. Burdon was Mrs. Lifford's lawyer.

"The deuce you have! You're in a hurry to get rid of your bad bargain. And what will become of your precious plan if I hold to my rights, and say that I choose to keep my wife with me?"

"Why should you?" asked Ada quietly, looking straight at him, as he stood angrily twisting his moustache.

"Why should I?" he echoed loudly. "Because—because—— Why should I want my wife to live with me? What a question for any woman to ask!" He began walking up and down again, and there was a minute's pause. Then he laughed awkwardly. "Why should I? Upon my word I don't know."

"You aren't going to say that you are in love with me?"

"Might as well be in love with a dissecting-knife at present, it seems to me."

"And I never professed to be in love with you. I don't know whether the sort of thing one reads about in books would make it tolerable to knock about the world always poor and miserable, but I am very sure that nothing else can. You would lose your temper, and I should lose my looks. We should come to hate each other."

"A pleasing picture," muttered Wilfrid to his moustache.

"We've made a mistake, and the best thing we can do is to undo it as far as possible. We shall have a pleasanter remembrance of each other if we say good-bye next week, than if we fret and quarrel through twenty years."

Somehow the little bit of sentiment about saying good-bye touched Ada's feelings, and she began to cry. Those tears did more than all her arguments. She looked ugly when she was crying—nearly all women do, by-the-bye—and Wilfrid hated to see it. He took a few more turns, and then sat down facing her, in a business-like fashion.

"Now, look here, Ada: after the way you've been talking, you're far too sensible to go on crying when I'm ready to talk business. I should never have thought of what you have proposed; I have married you, and I'm willing to stick to you, and do my best to maintain you in whatever way I can. But it's true that it's likely to be a very poor way, and if you think that you can do better for yourself, I don't feel that I have a right to hinder you."

"I think of you as well as myself," put in Ada. "It will be best for us both."

"I don't deny that. Of course I shall be freer alone, and have a better chance of getting work. What I don't like is your going out on the world by yourself. But remember it is your own choice."

"Yes," she said, meekly.

"I'll have no lawyer sticking in his oar. I've got nothing to settle on you, and no money to allow you. But if I get any you shall have some."

"Not unless I can't manage for myself," she said. "I mean to."

"I'll give you an address where you can send letters for me, if you want to. But I'm a bad hand at writing."

"That's a half-and-half way of doing things," said Ada. "It would keep us always unsettled. I mean to support myself, and there is no use in keeping up a correspondence. When we say good-bye, you must forget me. I'm only sorry that I can't set you free to marry somebody with a real fortune," she added, with a touch of spite.

"You seem bent on reconciling me to your plan," he retorted, stormily. But you shall have your way. You choose not to be my wife, and you shall not. I won't write to you, I won't hear of you; if I see you on the other side of the street, I won't cross it to speak to you. You've made your bed, and you may lie on it; and you can begin to-night. I'm going to the Club."

"I never would have done it, Wilfrid," she cried after him, "if you had loved me."

"Bother! You needn't begin with sentiment now," he said, roughly, as she followed him down the noisy carpetless stairs. "It's rather too late in the day for that."

"I won't be sentimental; but, Wilfrid, let us part friends."

"Oh, of course. We aren't enemies, but as for anything else, the less said about it the better," he answered, desperately plunging into his coat.

She helped him into it. "Good-bye, Wilfrid," she said, looking at him, wistfully.

He caught her in his arms, and kissed her.

"Good-bye, Ada. I—I hope you will never be sorry for this."

The hall-door clanged, and sent its echoes rattling along the bare staircase and the deserted rooms. Ada took her empty heart back to the fireplace, and there, crouched in a heap on the hearthrug, she sobbed again and again:

"I never, never would have done it, if he had only loved me!"

CHAPTER III.

A CLOUDLESS sky and a sapphire sea, of a deeper blue than Mediterranean waters. An amphitheatre of roofs, slated or red-tiled, accented here and there by turrets and towers and church-spires, looking down upon a large harbour well filled with yachts and fishing-vessels, held safe within the long fingers of great white break-waters. At the point of the longest of these, brandished defiantly at the distant coast of France, a queer old castle upon a tiny island, which once proudly protected the town behind it, but now would not furnish an hour's amusement to a gunboat. Prince Albert in cast-iron, patronising the pier from a granite pedestal. A semi-foreign, semi-English town, quaint and picturesque once, now modernised till there is scarcely a sketchable bit in it; yet not quite spoilt, and keeping its individuality still. Guernsey. And here it is that we shall again meet our friends, the Chesneys.

One of them, at least, is visible now; for the fair little lady in black, walking along the pier beside a bath-chair, is certainly Ada. Two years have passed since she and Wilfrid parted, and they seem to have done her good rather than harm. She was merely good-looking then, but she is pretty now. Her black (of that type which may be either mourning or choice, and commits the wearer to nothing) is becoming to her, and she seems to be in capital health. Just at present she looks mildly and politely bored, as she goes on coining remarks for the benefit of an old gentleman in the bath-chair; but some boredom is the lot of most people in this world, and whatever has fallen to her share seems to have agreed with her. The invalid whom she has in charge is a gentle-looking, yellow-faced man, well on the other side of sixty.

"Shall we go out on the North Arm now, Mr. Plympton," she asks, "or would you rather have the chair drawn into the shade for a little? I am afraid the heat is rather too much for you."

"My head aches a good deal," he answered in a mild plaintive voice, "and the glare is rather trying. But we mustn't complain, must we? If I don't like the sun, I can go into the shade; and that is more than those poor fellows at work out there can do." He nodded at a group of labourers engaged on some of the never-ending finishings which the new pier seemed to be always requiring.

"Well, let us go into the shade, then," said Ada, thinking to herself that if she could cart stones she would not envy anyone who was wheeled in a bath-chair. Accordingly, they turned to the group of shrubs planted below what is known as the Fort Hill, on the top of which are the barracks.

"We should always look on the bright side, shouldn't we?" continued Mr. Plympton. "Now, there are those poor fellows, roasted in the sun, toiling beyond their strength, perhaps, for their wives and children. They were up and at work long before I left my bed this morning, and they must not leave off to sit and cool in this nice refreshing shade. The heat and the labour make them thirsty, and so they go into the public-house and spend their hard-earned wages on liquor; and then I, who have been doing nothing but make myself comfortable all day, call them drunkards, and sentence them to prison. I am ashamed of myself."

Ada glanced towards the victims. The only one whom she could see was sitting on the shaft of a cart, with his cap off, smoking a pipe.

"Isn't that looking very much on the dark side?" she said. "This sort of life is what those men have been used to; they don't feel it as you would. I don't think they look as if they minded the heat at all; whereas, you know, it really does upset you. And I am sure you never sentence anybody to anything, except me to go to bed when I want to sit up with you."

"I did when I was a magistrate," he replied, shaking his head sorrowfully over the memories of his Rhadamanthine past. "It was hard to know what to do; because, you know, when they got drunk they used to beat their wives. One had to give them a lesson sometimes. But I generally paid their fines myself," he added, brightening up again.

"And these Guernsey labourers need not get drunk unless they choose," suggested Ada. "They can get temperance drinks at the coffee-house close by."

"So they can, so they can," Mr. Plympton assented. "But the soldiers at drill can't. What a day for marching about in the open field, dressed up tightly in heavy cloth uniforms! I suppose poor Freddy is doing that now. I do hope the dear boy will not get a sun-stroke; he looks strong, but I have no faith in his constitution. And he takes no care of his health. Of course, a young man with a profession can't fad about himself all day as I do," he ended, with a gentle sigh.

Ada was accustomed to these self-upbraidings, and knew that to establish Mr. Plympton in his own good opinion was a hopeless task. At this moment, however, she caught sight of a figure descending the winding paths which led down the face of the hill from Fort George to the pier.

"I do believe that is he coming down now," she exclaimed. "Look, Mr. Plympton; here are your lorgnettes."

"What good eyes you have, my dear! To make him out at all that distance! What it is to be young! But I mustn't complain. I had my youth once, and I am afraid I made a very bad use of it. Yes, it is Freddy. I hope he won't slip; that path is so steep."

In a few minutes the object of all these solicitudes was by their side, a plump, red-faced, extremely jovial youth of about three-and-twenty, who looked more than equal to the task of taking care of himself.

"Hallo, uncle, how d'ye do? Good morning, Mrs. Chesney. Saw you from the top, and thought I'd have a scud down, to see how you were enjoying yourselves this fine day. Jolly weather, isn't it?"

"Very fine, dear boy; but we thought you would find it hot at your drill."

"Well, it wasn't exactly cool, but it might be hotter. Bless you, I don't mind if it does take me down a bit, it's good for my figure. You graceful creatures who have nothing to lose must take care of yourselves."

"So we have been doing," said Ada; "this is a nice place to sit."

"Are you too much in love with it to leave it?" asked Freddy. "Because there's a splendid yacht coming into the roads, and I want to have a look at her. I fancy I know her cut. I'm just going out to the North Arm to see her come in. You come along, too, uncle, and I'll hold your white umbrella over you. She's worth looking at."

Mr. Plympton would have been wheeled into a furnace to please Freddy; and after all, the North Arm was not a furnace, though the sun was very powerful; for a fresh breeze was blowing from the sea, and bringing in the yacht in question. Accordingly, they left their retirement, and passed again the party of labourers who had already excited his compassion. One of them was mopping his head.

"Poor man," said Mr. Plympton; "how hot he does look! Oh, stop, please, Smith. Freddy, do go down and give those poor men half-a-crown from me to get a drink at the coffee-house—at the coffee-house, mind. No, perhaps you'd better tell them that they can get the worth of it there, and I'll pay as we pass it."

"Uncle," remonstrated Freddy, gravely, "where are your principles? Isn't it my duty to do as I would be done by?"

"Why, yes, of course; but ——"

"And do you think that *I* would have any fellow come and mock me with offers to treat me to lemonade and cold tea? I couldn't do it, uncle; I shouldn't have the face. If it were champagne, now, with a lump of ice in it,—or brandy-and-seltzer, or even shandy-gaff, my conscience might sanction the act."

"To be sure, shandy-gaff could not do them much harm," said Mr. Plympton irresolutely.

"They could not get it without going to a public-house," said Ada. "Your plan is much the best, Mr. Plympton; and as *my* conscience is not on the side of brandy-and-seltzer, I'll carry it out, if you'll just give me your card and the half-crown."

Freddy perceived that he was to consider himself snubbed, and when Ada returned from transacting the affair, he wore an air of the deepest dejection. In ostentatious silence, he walked beside his uncle to the end of the pier, and there they stopped, and looked out to sea. In front of them stretched the blue waters of the roadstead, sparkling here and there with little points of light, as wavelet after wavelet danced and dipped in the sunshine. On the other side lay two green islands, side by side, Herm and Jethou; a stretch of yellow beach gleamed there, little white houses sunned themselves, and sharp brown rocks ran out into the sea at the ends. Between the two appeared the sea again, "wine-dark" there, and bordered by a misty vision of the coast of France. Further back, to the right, rose the long range of cliffs which builds up the island of Sark,—brown and green, softened into a shade of lilac by the distance, and the summer haze, and the blue and purple reflections of the water; and on the horizon lay a narrow gray band of cloud, which was Jersey. It was a lovely scene—it would be hard to find a lovelier; Ada leant on the wall, and gazed at it in silence. She was not wont to be wrought upon by Nature, but to-day the mighty mother was too strong for her. The sun kissed the sea; and the sea laughed up at him, and tossed its skimming sea-gulls to their play, and cradled all its lazy islands, and softly nursed its fretting rocks. The gladness of it, and the brightness, and the peace, suddenly forced the looker-on to a sense of contrast. Was *she* happy? Oh, she was comfortable enough; she had everything she wanted, money for her needs, all the luxuries of life, easy duties, nothing but kindness. Is there nothing better than this? insisted the little waves that splashed round the big buoy,—nothing better, nothing better? They made a sort of refrain of it, and splashed it out again and again.

"What should I want better?" Ada asked herself petulantly. "I never went in for sentiment."

The sea murmured on, and the sun shone still upon it. They seemed to be waiting for her answer. "We are happy: are you?"

"I don't suppose anyone is absolutely happy," she thought. "If they are, I never met them. No, I'm not very happy. What does it matter? I get on very well; but, no, I'm not happy at all."

Two sea-gulls were chasing each other up and down the waves, rising and falling, gliding in the air and resting in the water, but always keeping near each other. "They look happy, at any rate," thought poor Ada. And then, curiously, there came into her mind some words heard long ago in a common hotel sitting-room: "Cheer up, dear, you're not alone in the world now."

"I am alone," she answered, "all alone, quite alone in the world." And her tears dropped upon the great stones of the harbour wall.

"There she comes," cried Freddy, tired of standing on his dignity. "Isn't she a beauty?"

A splendid schooner yacht was sliding in between the islands; and as they looked, her great sails dropped, and she rocked idly outside the harbour.

"It is the *Wild Swan*. I was sure I knew the cut of her. It's Lord Clitheroe's: a capital fellow is Clitheroe: met him at Gib. Lady C.'s wretchedly delicate; he's always taking her about somewhere for change of air, or warm climate, or something—generally with a tame doctor to look after her. Awful bore, I should think."

"Ah!" said Mr. Plympton; "how sad that is! A young creature, with every luxury, and all the world smiling on her, not able to enjoy anything. It's natural for old people to be ailing and poorly; and they ought to take it so, and not be for ever grumbling and fretting, and making themselves a nuisance. But a young thing like that—a countess, too—with a devoted husband—dear me! dear me!"

"Dear Mr. Plympton," said Ada, "you are the most inveterate grumbler for other people I ever knew. Why don't you grumble a little for yourself, by way of a change? If Lady Clitheroe has every luxury, and a devoted husband, she ought to be the better able to bear her ill-health."

"Ah, my dear," he answered, "you don't know."

"No," said Ada, "I don't; that's true." And somehow she found the tears so near her eyes again, that she had to turn away to hide them. Poor Mr. Plympton was inexpressibly distressed.

"My dear, my dear," he entreated, "don't cry. It was so thoughtless of me; I don't know how I could have said such a thing, to remind you of your troubles. Just like me—always inconsiderate."

"Hem," meditated Freddy. "Never thought that jolly little woman could cry. I suppose these tears are a tribute to the memory of the late lamented Chesney. It's the first hint I've heard of his existence.

"Never mind," said Ada, turning round brightly, "it was not your fault. It was my own thoughts that upset me; not anything that you said. I don't know what made me so horribly sentimental; forget it, please. They are lowering a boat from the *Wild Swan* now; perhaps you will see your friend, Mr. Whipple." (I ought before this to have introduced Freddy in form as Frederick Plympton Whipple, Esq., lieutenant in the ——th Artillery.)

"In a hurry for his letters, no doubt. Yes, by Jove, there he is; and I bet that other chap with him in the boat is the doctor. I'll run round to the steps and shake hands with him. By-bye, Uncle. Good-bye, Mrs. Chesney."

Ada scarcely noticed his farewell. There was something strangely familiar about the figure of one of the two men who sat in the stern of the approaching boat, which made her heart beat fast. She could not see the face at first, but she never had a doubt of what she should see. Sheltering her own with her parasol, she leant forward on the wall, and peeped from under. She had not been mistaken; it was her husband; and to her own extreme surprise, she felt an intense joy. There he was, once more before her, after so many months; and she who had sent him away from her was utterly delighted to see him again. But she had no mind that he should see her, and keeping her glowing face well behind the hood of Mr. Plympton's chair, she proposed to go home.

Mr. Plympton's penitence for his unfortunate remark was such that he was prepared to accede to any wish of hers; so they went straight towards their lodgings, avoiding the steps, on which Wilfrid Chesney was just setting his foot.

(*To be concluded.*)

MONSIEUR MICHAUD'S FIANCÉE.

By Esme Stuart.

MONSIEUR MICHAUD lived in Paris. Not the Paris known to rich English and Americans who drive up the Champs Elysées and ride in the Bois de Boulogne, dine at a famous restaurant, and take their café noir at the Palais Royal. Quite another kind of Paris, which foreigners know nothing of, and where the real heart of middle-class life palpitates and struggles, trying to work itself into a state of calm prosperity, through byeways never suspected by strangers who do not cross the Seine to plunge into a narrow street nearly parallel with the Rue du Bac.

Only in Paris would there be men like Monsieur Michaud to be found. He was a bachelor, verging towards the far side of middle age, very ugly, and living alone in a small apartment in a tall, narrow house, with a spiral staircase. Madame Joliet, who lived just one stage above M. Michaud, came and attended to his ménage, and smiled as women will smile at bachelor eccentricities, chatting to him meanwhile, poor soul, about the hardship of life and the difficulty of getting enough money for herself and Georgette. Monsieur Michaud always listened good-naturedly, paid regularly for her labour, and was delighted when the door shut behind madame again, and he murmured, contentedly:

"Ah, ciel! quelles sont bavardes, ces femmes. Not that her Georgette is like her in that, or I should hear her. No, Georgette is not like the other woman's daughter below. What a chattering magpie, a brainless piece of goods *she* is."

It must not be thought that M. Michaud did not possess the characteristic French politeness. On the contrary, he was *very* polite, and to her face the "woman below" was madame; but when alone he consoled himself with unadorned truth.

Georgette worked at something: all the demoiselles in this house did, except the one who occupied the rez de chaussée, and she turned up her nose at the others as they daily descended the corkscrew staircase and hurried away to various shops, or places where francs were to be made by very patient toil.

Georgette was one of these; and every morning her light step could be heard just touching each stair with the gentlest footfall, and yet with a certain decision of character. But her face had something more than character in it; it was a thin face, with large, penetrating grey eyes, which now and then seemed to sparkle; but only on occasions when she felt great joy or sorrow. A low, broad forehead, delicate Roman nose, and a mouth with so much and such varying expression, that description is impossible. Looking at Georgette, one instinctively coiled up her hair over a cushion, powdered it, gave her a fichu à-la-Marie Antoinette, and fancied her going to the scaffold with raised head and half pathetic, half scornful expression. This was purely imaginative, nothing so tragical ever befell Georgette, her hair was just brushed off her delicate temples, and instead of the scaffold she merely went daily to Madame Bertine. This lady made head-dresses, and was in no way connected with a guillotine.

Sometimes, however, the illusion might have been almost perfected, for Georgette occasionally said half aloud, as she neared the Bertine establishment, and thought of those she must associate with all day, "Mais! quel supplice!" Georgette was very young for such an exclamation, but she felt she was made for better things, and that if she had only been somebody else, somewhere else, she would not have been found day after day at Madame Bertine's. This discontented feeling had begun years before: when Georgette was about twelve years old, her mother had taken her to a free representation at the "Francais," and there she had seen a little piece, entitled "On ne badine pas avec l'amour." The girl had sobbed so loud that someone had angrily said "Hush!"

"Maman, I could do that; I could act like that, because I could feel it all real," she said when they came out. "It was real, wasn't it?"

"But no, little silly one, it was only la comédie."

Nevertheless it was real to Georgette, and from that day she knew she could act if her mother would let her. But Madame Joliet had no artistic ideas; Georgette should earn her livelihood with her needle in a respectable manner, and not go among a set of actresses whose characters were, according to madame, always doubtful. Was it likely that an honest and respectable widow should listen to her only child's longing for the stage?

That was all the history of Georgette's life, and young as she was, and with that wonderful face, she just sighed, "quel supplice," when she stepped over the threshold at Madame Bertine's.

One winter's evening Monsieur Michaud had settled himself very comfortably in his arm-chair, near his white-tiled stove; the "Figaro" lay on his knees, but he himself was just then meditating on his past history. Most of his friends had forgotten him, and they had never guessed that Gustave Michaud had had a history at all. After all, it was a common one—a bad-tempered father who had driven his wife into a madhouse, and had thwarted his only son's inclination to marry a pretty, gentle girl for love. She never guessed that money, or rather the want of it, had made her Madame Acard instead of Madame Michaud, or that cruel fate had killed M. Michaud pére on her wedding day, making his son a man with enough money to live on, but with no interest in life. He gave up his profession, society, and friends; and settled down in that out-of-the-way street, cultivating a hard exterior, but unable to get rid of that one warm place in his heart which love for Julie had kindled. Now he had reached a stage in life when he could think of Julie without bitterness.

Suddenly a light hasty ring at his tinkling little door bell made him start as if he had been caught in the act of doing something he was ashamed of. Crossing two small rooms to reach his door, he opened it, and held his lamp so that the light fell upon the intruder.

It was Georgette; her face strangely altered, her hands clasped nervously together, her grey eyes kindled with suppressed feeling.

"Mdlle. Georgette! What is the matter?"

"Oh, M. Michaud, we have no friend but you. Will you come and see my mother? I think she is dying, and she moans out your name."

M. Michaud was not over-pleased to hear this; still he followed Georgette without more ado. The Doctor had been sent for, and was certainly the only man necessary for this occasion, thought M. Michaud to himself, as he stood by Madame's bed-side. She had only just strength to motion her daughter away; and but one wish to mention to M. Michaud before going to another existence, where there would be no anxiety how to keep herself and Georgette in respectable poverty. But then—and here was her difficulty—Georgette would have to keep up the struggle alone.

"Monsieur, will you be kind to Georgette, for the love of your mother? She is my only child; and she must not be as are many other friendless girls in Paris—rather may God take her, too. You understand, M. Michaud?"

M. Michaud found himself suddenly in a very strange position; it was the last thing he had thought of to have the care of a young girl thrust on him; though certainly even the little he knew of her made him aware that Georgette was not quite like other girls.

"But—" he began, hesitatingly.

"But, Monsieur, you are so kind—you have a good heart. Think if Georgette were your child, left alone in Paris! She is a good child, only not quite liking common work, and that may lead her astray."

Suffice it to say, that before Madame died M. Michaud had accepted the charge. He would be good to Georgette, and keep an eye on her: but he did not then realise what this meant! When he had arranged that Georgette should lodge with the Madame below, and that what she could not pay he would he answerable for, he fancied he had fulfilled his promise. He found out his mistake.

In the first place Georgette's face would come between him and his "Figaro" when he sat by his stove. Not that she at all reminded him of his long-lost meek-eyed Julie; but yet those grey, earnest eyes haunted him strangely. Sometimes he was impelled to go and ask after Mdlle. Georgette; and when she expressed her thanks in her earnest way, he felt he had really done nothing to deserve them.

There was no great harm in this; and M. Michaud was quite happy to let things go on in this manner; he had money, and he did not miss the little he spent on Georgette. However, one day, when spring was beginning to make Paris look beautiful, suggesting new life and new hopes, M. Michaud had a surprise. It was not an agreeable one. He often took his constitutional walk across the Tuileries, because it was a pleasant place, and it was not his fault that it was also Georgette's shortest way home. This spring afternoon, as he sat down on a seat watching the girls skipping and the boys racing, he kept his eye also on the steps down which Georgette must come; but when he did see her, he almost started, for there was something strange in her expression.

"Bon jour, Mdlle. Georgette; did not you see me?" he called out, whilst his ugly grotesque face beamed upon the girl so pleasantly that she did not notice its want of beauty.

"No, Monsieur," she answered; "but I was thinking of you. I was wondering how I should manage to see you. May I sit down and talk to you?"

"Yes, yes; tell me what you like, Georgette. Your mother ——"

"Don't mention her. Look here, M. Michaud, I can't help it; I have tried so hard to like it—the hats and bonnets—but I can't. I must leave them, because I can do something better; it is in me; I am sure it is. Do you understand, M. Michaud?"

No, M. Michaud did not understand. Was the child a little off her head? "No, indeed, Mdlle. Georgette; I don't know what you mean. Are you complaining of Madame Bertine's bonnets? She is, I believe, as honest as other women of her occupation.

"Bah!" said Georgette impatiently. "I beg your pardon, M. Michaud, but I know you cannot understand; only do try to believe that it isn't fancy. I must go on the stage; I must act; I feel it is all here," touching her forehead. "It is stronger than I."

M. Michaud gave a low whistle. How was he to look after Georgette on the stage?—he had long ago given up going to theatres. One was stifled within them and caught cold coming out. Besides —an actress!

"Would your mother like this, Mdlle. Georgette?" The girl turned away her face and was silent; then she seized M. Michaud's hand.

"My mother was good, very good, but she could not understand *that* feeling. She was angry when I mentioned it, but she knows everything now; she knows I have tried to get over it and I can't. You are my only friend; help me."

It so happened that in old days M. Michaud had known a clever actor who, having made a name and a fortune, was now director of a theatre: for the sake of past friendship, he might perhaps try Georgette. But then—after that?

"It's a bad life, Georgette," he said, sternly and paternally. I don't feel that I ought to help you with this strange idea. Won't you think better of it? Try dresses, my child, if bonnets are dull; try anything rather than the theatre." Then, shyly, the bachelor added, "The life is not fitted for such as you, Georgette."

"It has temptations, I know," said Georgette simply," but so has any life here in Paris, and my mother brought me up to take care of myself. Ah! she was good, and if I could crush the wish I would."

Georgette got round M. Michaud of course, and when he let out that he knew M. Roche, it was all over with him. The girl calmed down when he promised to hunt out the director, and putting her small hand into his, spoke earnestly:

"How shall I ever repay your kindness?"

"Tut, tut," he answered. "But tell me, Georgette, what was your father like; do you remember him?" He was thinking that she could not have inherited her face and her character from commonplace, honest Madame Joliet.

"My father—oh no; he was a painter. He died of failure. Yes, I believe failure in everything killed him."

II.

"Ma foi, Michaud? No offence meant, but really I fancied you were buried years ago! It's like seeing my grandfather walk out of his grave. As to the girl you speak of, we have a dozen every week of such prodigies; they crop up like mushrooms. I know their tale by heart now: they feel a vocation for the stage—have been complimented by everybody, &c. I used to believe them when I first began, but now my answer is, I am sure you would be prima donna, Mademoiselle, but we are full."

"I am really delighted to hear you say this," said M. Michaud. "Its a bad life for a young girl like Mdlle. Georgette; no friends, you know, and nothing but this fancy."

"Fancy—that's it, nothing more; but look here, Michaud—— our old friendship. Take this little play, and when your genius has learnt the principal part bring her to me. There's a rehearsal of it in a week; the actress of this part will be away, and your girl shall fill up the gap. There—now about yourself."

They plunged into old stories, but M. Michaud was not communicative about himself. He went away carrying Georgette's book as if he were loaded with an evil talisman that would work only harm.

"How am I to keep an eye on her if she goes there?" he thought sadly. "Why did Fate throw her in my path? Sapresti!"

That night Georgette, who possessed a small room of her own, might have been heard pacing up and down like a caged animal. She learnt that little paper book through, rehearsing it till her brain felt giddy and every pulse beat furiously. What did it matter? By morning she knew it perfectly, and she went off to Madame Bertine, and worked away happily, even though her eyes and head ached. Would the week never pass—when she could tell Madame that she would make no more bonnets? But if she failed? Why then it would be bonnets for the rest of her life. Quel supplice!

The day came. Georgette was ready long before M. Michaud appeared to accompany her. She walked more like Marie Antoinette going to execution than ever, and felt like her, too. The dream of her life hung on this trial.

But Georgette had never imagined what the reality of this ordeal would be like. The dark theatre, not built to admit pure daylight, the great desolate house, and those rows and rows of empty seats—terrible in their emptiness, making one feel that a myriad of invisible beings were seated there listening, jeering, and criticising, ready at the first trip to hiss you off the stage. Then the gloomy stage itself, and the real flesh-and-blood actors barely visible! But now was heard the prompter's voice, from his mole-like hole, rapping the boards with his wand.

"Allons!"

Suddenly to Georgette it was no longer dark, the ghosts became clothed in ordinary attire, the actors, shadowy though they might be, were not actors but living lords and ladies. And she was not Georgette Joliet, but another woman with a simple, sad pathetic history; a history which would, if people understood it, make them cry from sympathy, and the stage was the world, the world in which the heroine had to live and to suffer.

Georgette walked into the Director's private room after the play as if she were in a dream. She did not notice M. Michaud seated in a corner, she only saw M. Roche whom she had not beheld before, having been ignorant of his presence in one of the boxes. He came forward and patted her on the shoulder.

"Not bad, my child: never done anything of this kind before! Nobody would hear you, you know, beyond the first four rows, and you were all over the stage—but still, practice and hard work may cure that. Would you like to join us? Very little to earn at first, for we shall have all the trouble of training you. Think the question well over."

"I have thought," said Georgette, quietly; "ever since I was a girl."

"Never mind about the pay," put in M. Michaud. "If she can get on?"

"That depends on herself." The Director was guarded. Georgette had gone to fetch her hat.

"Do you recommend her to give it up? It won't do, will it?"

"But it will," answered M. Roche: "and really, Michaud, I think this time it's not only an idea."

"I wish it were," sighed the good man. Nevertheless, as he walked home with Georgette, they turned into Madame's establishment, and Georgette took leave of her for ever. Happy Georgette!

In future she would have to work hard, but not in a crowded room; not in making coverings for the heads of ladies.

"I owe it all to you," she said once again, looking at M. Michaud with grateful eyes.

"Hush! child!" but to himself he said: "How on earth am I to keep an eye on her?" Over and over again he said it, imagining first one way and then another, but only one way persistently occurred to him and this one made him miserable. It was so stupendous a question; it might frustrate the very thing he wished to bring about; it might even make Georgette wretched.

Meanwhile he daily went to and from the theatre with Georgette, who soon found out that the stage means more hardship than she had conceived; weary hours of rehearsal, during which she might have one sentence only to say, sometimes but a word. Still M. Roche was satisfied; he was training her in his own way, and he found this girl, who had genius, more docile than half his young ladies.

One day a chance word, a little dart sent from an unfriendly bow, suddenly settled M. Michaud's tumultuous thoughts. Much meditation had solved the question, and one fine evening in June he waited for Georgette in the gardens on his favourite seat just below an orange tree in its great ungainly green tub. Georgette was altered even in these few months, she walked down the stone stairs with a firm step, head more erect and a more graceful bearing altogether. All the discontent was gone from her face, for to-day M. Roche had praised her and was going to give her more than a sentence to say before the public.

"Mdlle. Georgette! You did not see me, eh? You must have very pleasant thoughts." She smiled, and sat down by him and held out her hand with one of her modest, graceful movements.

"Whenever I am not thinking of my part, I think of how good you have been to me."

"That's nothing, Georgette. I promised your mother to keep an eye on you; but—may I say a few words? She did not foresee events, she never imagined this other life for you, my child. A life full of work and grand things, I know, but still a life of danger for one so gifted as you are—yes, Georgette, I must say it—and so beautiful. But Mdlle. Georgette, you do not know the world."

Georgette hung her head; a rosy hue spread over her face.

"I think of nothing but my work, M. Michaud."

"Of course. But listen, mon enfant, and tell me, will you promise to be my fiancée, and then all the world would know it, and I could keep an eye on you. I am not so young as I should be, Georgette, and I am not handsome; but still—"

Georgette was crimson now. Her hands trembled, but her words were quiet enough.

"I never thought of such a thing, Monsieur, I dream only of my work. And I am a penniless orphan, not good enough for you, for I know, in spite of your hiding it, you are not such as I am: only I owe you everything, and can refuse you nothing."

"Don't say anything about my kindness, but tell me of your own free will that at some future time—for I do not wish to interfere with your work—you will be my wife."

"Yes," said Georgette.

"Then we shall feel bound to each other till one of us asks to be released—and the request is granted."

"I could not be so ungrateful, Monsieur—I promise."

"We are quite agreed then?" M. Michaud just raised Georgette's hand to his lips and kissed it; that was the only sign of the compact, and after a short silence they both walked home together. Georgette looked round at the gardens and the signs of young life and happiness which they inspired, and heaved a litle sigh. She did not regret her compact, she was even proud to be M. Michaud's fiancée, for she loved him; still, in her girlish day-dreams her lover had not been at all like him, but young and handsome; indeed, just like the hero in "On ne badine pas avec l'amour." Well, her day of romance had come and the lover was a middle-aged and decidedly plain man, but his heart was good and true, and as to his kindness—had not she said often she could never repay him—and now that she had found a way, how happy, very happy she ought to be!

Monsieur Michaud spoke of his engagement. He told Madame below, he told everybody, and he took no notice of the smile that now and then was barely hidden. Georgette, too, made no secret of her new happiness, and when some of the theatre people began laughing at her, she flared up and said:

"You could not find in all Paris a man with a better heart," and the answer from a malicious brunette was:

"Je ne dis pas, chérè, but anyhow you need not go further than the next street to find one handsomer!"

III.

TIME passed swiftly on with Georgette. She almost forgot the episode in the Tuileries, except that M. Michaud usually came to fetch her, and sometimes had a talk with M. Roche about her, always hearing great things of his fiancée. As for M. Michaud himself, he began to get accustomed to the alterations in his daily life, and as changes had come upon him he expressed no great surprise when something else occurred to disturb the former even course of his existence. This was the advent of a young cousin!

Blaise Michaud had made a moderate fortune as a doctor in America, after which he came home to his beloved Paris, bought a practice, and then hunted up the relations whom absence had not made him forget. He was delighted when at last he found Cousin Gustave, but surprised when the latter introduced his fiancée. To himself he said, "How beautiful she is, and how fortunate my cousin is," then he whistled softly, which with him meant a great deal, and went that evening to see Georgette act: that evening and many others too. There was no harm in looking at his cousin's beautiful fiancée! Besides it was company for Gustave, who night after night went to the theatre to escort Georgette home, instead of being comfortably in bed. What an interest they both took in the pieces played; how quickly they picked up what people said about Georgette, though it was only by degrees that her name began to be mentioned by the public; not till a second winter had come round. It was then Georgette was to take the principal part in a play. M. Roche was more nervous about it than Georgette herself. If she took the fancy of the public now she would have made her fortune, if she failed she must go on again for years, perhaps just a mere nobody, although she and the Director both felt she was somebody!

M. Michaud talked to his fiancée a great deal about her coming trial. He was going to see it of course, and tried to encourage her, for Georgette had been very silent lately; sometimes she did not speak a word to him all the way home, at others she talked excitedly, very unlike her old self. And yet through it all she was the same true, simple, high-minded Georgette.

That eventful evening came at last. There was quite a stir in the corkscrew staircase to see Mdlle. Georgette go off in a carriage, accompanied by M. Michaud. Georgette spoke as she was nearing the theatre.

"After to-night perhaps you will not be proud of me."

"Tut, tut," said M. Michaud. "What the world thinks of you, Georgette, makes no difference to me. You are yourself." She half opened her lips to say something, but at that moment the carriage drew up, and Blaise Michaud was there waiting to hand her out and present her with a big bouquet. "Pour encouragé Mdlle. Georgette," he said. Surely there was no harm in that; it was only a compliment to his cousin's fiancée.

That evening she surpassed herself. She was a success; she was recalled; she was showered with bouquets; her future was assured. M. Michaud, junior, was the only one who did not clap and applaud.

"Eh bien toi, mon cousin," said M. Michaud, "don't you admire Georgette? Doesn't she please thee?"

"Mdlle. Georgette is everything that is perfect; but nevertheless, cousin, do you mean your future wife to be always on the stage? Mine should not be!" M. Michaud looked furtively at the younger man, and made his own reflections.

"There's time yet, and Georgette is happy."

"She doesn't look it," growled Blaise.

"She is given up to her work at present, and has no time to think of love." But Blaise was not convinced.

"A woman has always time to think of love," he said, sulkily.

"Georgette is not like the rest of her sex. I'll tell you what it is, Blaise, she is a pearl among women, she is so true, so good, so altogether unlike most women, that you couldn't find such another if you looked all through Paris."

"I'm not going to try," was the savage answer.

"But then she's poor, and an orphan, no one to look after her interests but myself, you understand, mon cher?"

"You make it quite plain to me, Cousin Gustave. Bon soir."

M. Michaud was not at all angry with Blaise for his ill-temper. On the contrary, it seemed to put him in high good humour. He was so tired that night that he overslept himself, and found in the morning that Georgette had gone off to a rehearsal without waiting for him. So he determined to go and meet her in the Tuileries and see how she looked after her triumph.

It was a cold winter's day; now and then the sun burst out brightly in the gardens, trying to cheat the children who were playing about into the belief that it was not winter, and then going suddenly behind a cloud to see them look anxiously with their bright eyes for his coming out again. A regular game of hide-and-seek they had, the children and the sun!

It was in one of these intervals of retirement when a melancholy gloom spread quickly over the gardens, and through the leafless chesnuts, and round the statues, and across the deserted chairs in cafés, that Georgette ran hastily down the stone steps and saw M. Michaud waiting for her. She looked terribly disturbed and not at all like a success, her head, instead of being erect was bent low, slow tears made their way through her heavy eyelids and fell on the fur of her winter jacket; she made straight for the seat, however, and never paused till she reached M. Michaud's side.

"Well, mon enfant, what says M. Roche?"

"M. Roche says that I shall do now, he will give me a good salary, and——ah! M. Michaud, I owe it all to you; but—yes, I am a wretch, an ungrateful, cold-hearted wretch, still I have tried, I have fought against it and now I am come to ask you to release me from my promise. You don't know what it costs me to say this, more tears than you can imagine, more hours of misery than I ever knew in my life before; but—I love another. Look, M. Michaud, despise me, but give me back my word."

M. Michaud was almost struck dumb. He looked at Georgette for one instant and knew it was real, knew that whatever she was, Georgette was true, she *did* love another."

"Georgette, is it——"

"No, no; you don't know him; he came to the theatre, he would come. I told him of you, of your goodness, what you had done for me, and—please give me back my word."

"Tell me his name, Georgette."

"Henri Delibes."

M. Michaud started. "What business has he to go behind the scenes? Georgette, do you know he is a Count?"

"Yes. What does that matter? If he were a beggar he would be the same kind——"

"Do you think he will marry you?"

Georgette drew herself up proudly. "Of course he will; but, M. Michaud, do not imagine it is his rank I care for."

"No, Georgette, I know you do not; but, my child, life is not like the stage." M. Michaud's voice was trembling; he was so grieved for Georgette: grieved that he had failed after all to take care of her and protect her; and now it had come to this!

"You are so good," continued Georgette, hurriedly. "My best friend, I know I am asking what I never ought to ask, and yet——"

"Georgette, when I asked you on this very seat to give me your promise, I believed you would be true to it. I said to myself, Georgette is not like other girls, she will say yes, and mean it; she will not think herself free till I release her."

"And you thought rightly, Monsieur. I have done nothing underhand, nothing to be ashamed of. You said we should ask to be released, and I still feel bound by my word and yours."

"And I, Georgette," said M. Michaud, taking off his hat for a moment, as if he were performing a religious duty, "and I, Georgette, before Heaven, I will *not* release you."

That was all they said. Georgette slowly rose from her seat, motioned to M. Michaud not to follow, and walked home alone.

M. Michaud might have sat a long time on the seat, plunged in deep thought, only, curiously enough, his cousin came by almost immediately, and catching sight of him, laughingly warned him that he was courting death in the shape of a bronchite.

"Take a turn with me, mon cousin," continued Blaise. "I want to speak to you. I want to tell you I am going to leave Paris soon."

"I thought you were getting on in your profession?"

"So I am, but there's something better than money or fame—peace of mind; mine will be gone if I stay longer, and to say the truth—don't call me impertinent—it's about Mdlle. Georgette. Do not look so astonished, Gustave, I haven't a thought I would wish to hide, only, of course, she is young and beautiful, and you—well, you have won her, and you are my cousin."

M. Michaud's face was a study at this moment; and the mouth that had been drawn and full of pain relaxed. A smile almost parted his lips, an expression of kindliness broke over his face, making its plainness invisible.

"Blaise, give me your hand. You are a noble fellow! You would throw up your appointment rather than win her from me."

"Yes, I would. Not that it is easy; and of course you know you did throw me in her way."

"You haven't told her this?"

"What do you take me for?"

"Forgive me! Only, Blaise, she loves another, not me nor you, but a man I believe to be a scoundrel. Be generous yet further, Blaise; help me to find this out; to unmask him, and Georgette will—I know her—she will herself recoil from him as a dove would from a snake."

Never before had Blaise Michaud had such a struggle with himself. He had so far acted right nobly; but how could he go further, and help to snatch Georgette from one she loved in order that his elderly cousin should keep her for himself? And yet surely this cousin was fond of Georgette and good.

As to Georgette, would she not be happier with the worthy Michaud than with a villain? If she could be saved from such a fate would any sacrifice be too great, even if she never knew to whom she owed her happiness? And Blaise accepted the offer.

"Look here, Gustave, between us, as you say, we can find out this man, show her what her fate would be, and if it is as you think ——"

"Then I hope Georgette may still be M. Michaud's fianceé," said the elder man wringing his cousin's hand, "Blaise, mon ami, I am glad you hunted me out when you came to Paris." Blaise murmured an inaudible answer, but it certainly was not "*So am I.*" Rather he desired heartily that he had never cast his eyes on Gustave Michaud and Georgette, his fiancée.

The world seemed suddenly convulsed for Georgette when she left M. Michaud's side; but she knew she must try and set her ideas straight before the evening, when she should see Henri Delibes, to give him her final answer. Georgette had promised that, and though she had cried bitterly over the thought of asking for release, yet never for a moment had she believed M. Michaud would say *no*. Now as she hurried along towards home she called him wicked, selfish, cruel; and then again she looked back on his unvarying kindness, his patience, his goodness to her, and she was tortured by her ingratitude.

If she had been like many girls, Georgette would have made very light of her promise; but she was true, and meant to be true, to her word. "Only it will kill me," she murmured in her exaggeration of feeling.

The public expects its entertainment punctually to the hour however unhappy the actors may be; so Georgette drove off to the theatre as usual, not waiting for M. Michaud's escort. There was a small room behind the stage where idlers met their friends, and which was opened to those who claimed acquaintance with the director; it was nearly always empty before the play and full between the acts. Georgette hurried there now, wishing to have the pain over, and knowing *he* would be waiting for her answer.

"I will be true to M. Michaud and to my mother," she murmured as she pushed open the door; and, straightening herself to her full height, she stood face to face with Henri Delibes. It was quite true what M. Michaud had said. Georgette was young and did not fully understand that life was not like the stage. To her, Henri Delibes had appeared like a very hero of nobility and uprightness; and in this belief she had given him her heart. It is so easy to love at Georgette's age; so easy to believe good of everyone; so impossible to forgive evil; in this very youth was her danger and her safeguard. Even now, though she loved this man so much, she never showed it, because she was so afraid of letting him see it, and so afraid of doing wrong.

"Mdlle. Georgette, I have come to get your answer," he said, looking at her with admiration: but his tone was so quiet, so respectful, that Georgette loved him all the more for it. She clasped her hands very tightly together, and the strange sparkle came into her eyes, as she answered as quietly as he had asked, and very simply.

"M. Michaud will not release me."

"Is that all you have to tell me?" said the Count, in the same low voice. Every movement was graceful, studied, thoroughbred.

"Yes, that is all," said Georgette, trying to steady her voice, and slowly raising her head à la Marie Antoinette. A low laugh escaped the Count; it expressed delicate scorn of Georgette, and involuntarily her cheek flushed.

"Do you mean to say that you intend to be bound by the word of a man old enough to be your father, and wicked enough to spoil your life for his selfish pleasure? Do you mean to say ——"

"No, no; nothing more," broke in Georgette; "for the love of heaven do not ask me more." She moved towards the door.

"What nonsense," said the Count, raising his voice. "Georgette"—it was the first time he had called her so—"look here; tell me you hate me and never wish to see me again, but do not tell me the mere word of *that* man holds you back."

There are people who say that a woman cannot fight against her heart, that the conflict becomes too great for her, that she must fall before the unequal contest; but, happily, truth points to women who can and have done this, and Georgette was one of these. She said to herself that life would, from henceforth, be a burden and a misery; but she never once said "I cannot help myself."

"If you are afraid of him," continued the man before her, "if you fear the reproaches he may heap upon you, or anything else, let me save you from him, Georgette, this very evening ——"

"Pardon, Monsieur le Comte." Georgette blushed crimson as she heard these words, for the voice belonged to Blaise Michaud, who seemed suddenly to have come from another world, and to bring with him a new atmosphere of truth, of strength, and of all that was good, as he gently pushed open the door and made a third at the interview. There was quite a transformation in the Count's face. Georgette had never before seen the look that came into his eyes. It was a sudden, sweeping expression of hatred and anger, so that unconsciously she moved a few steps from him.

"Mademoiselle is engaged," said the Count haughtily, intimating that outside the door was the best place for Blaise. This latter looked not the least disconcerted at the scornful face of the man before him; he was just the same as usual, simply Blaise Michaud, with nothing tragic or melodramatic about him.

"Mdlle. Georgette and I are old friends," he answered, "and I thought that, as this was a public room, she would like to have a friend at her side in case a man of M. le Comte's well-known character should annoy her. In fact, in case she did not know what I can now tell her: that M. le Comte has a wife—in Auvergne."

Georgette looked up fiercely, ready to defend the man she loved, ready to tell M. Blaise that he was strangely mistaken. She even moved forward as if to protect him; but at that moment she read the truth in his livid and angry face.

At this moment the dressing-bell rang. Georgette had not a moment to lose; she must go, she must act.

"Is this true?" she quickly asked of the Count. She would not go without hearing him say it. Blaise was holding the door for her, but she waited for the answer. It came. A shrug of the shoulders, a smile, the same she had learnt to love, an assumed indifference.

"Let it be. Au revoir—not adieu, Mdlle. Georgette."

Then Georgette knew everything, and she walked out of the room in silent dignity, whilst M. Blaise shut the door for her, and accompanied her as far as her dressing-room. Never had she looked more truly grand than at this moment of supreme self-control, as she dismissed him with, "Merci, M. Blaise," and then she was alone. She did not wish to bemoan herself. She did not faint; on the contrary she was very quiet; she dressed with the same care as usual, only just before she went on the stage she put her hand to her cold forehead, and murmured: "Quel supplice!"

Mdlle. Georgette played better that evening than she had ever done before. Perhaps she had wanted just that touch of real humanity which sorrow, and not joy, can give; perhaps also she was thanking God that even through this fiery ordeal He had kept her safe, for Georgette could no more love evil than she could break her word, and the one ray of comfort she now had in this anguish was that she had conquered self, before knowledge had made it easy.

After the play she found M. Michaud waiting for her, just as usual; she even remembered afterwards that M. Blaise got on the box, as if to take care of her. Now she lay back weary and very quietly. She put her hand into M. Michaud's, and said, like a penitent child:

"Will you forgive me?—and I don't want now to be released."

M. Michaud had been with Blaise in the pit, and between the acts he had had a long conversation with his cousin, so that he understood Georgette, and wanted no explanation.

"Forgive you, Georgette? Perhaps *I* ought to be forgiven for saying *no* yesterday. I have thought better of it, mon enfant, and now I give you back your word—you are free, Georgette."

Georgette heaved a little sigh of relief. She was glad to be free because she said she meant to be free always now, for she felt such a deep gratitude to M. Michaud she did not wish to give him half a heart.

"You sent M. Blaise," she answered. She should never forget how he had come to her in her need.

"No, no. Ce pauvre Blaise went of his own accord. In fact, Georgette, though I ought not to praise my own cousin; yet I must say there is not a better fellow in Paris; I am sure there is not. He was going to leave our town for good, but to-night I persuaded him he had better stay. We cannot spare him, can we, Georgette?"

And Georgette said, "No." She felt that all her life long she would wish to say "Merci, M. Blaise."

That night was the last that saw Mdlle. Georgette on the stage; and, indignant that one whom it had applauded should suddenly disappear, the public took pains to discover the reason. What had she done? why had she left off acting? The truth was so very uninteresting that the public smiled, and said it was only an excuse, when told that Mdlle. Georgette was ill, even dying.

However it was true. Georgette had low fever. A strange doctor, called in to consult with M. Blaise, said it was the result of overwork; as did the chattering Madame, who suddenly turned into a ministering angel on seeing Georgette suffering, and always declared the poor child would have died but for the care and the constant attendance of that clever doctor, M. Blaise Michaud. It was a very long illness, and only by slow degrees did Georgette begin to feel any wish to get well; but after a time she did look forward to M. Blaise's visits, and wondered whether there was such another man in all Paris. Then spring came on and brought sunshine and new life, so that Georgette at last could sit by the open window in Madame's salon and enjoy long chats and long silences with M. Michaud as her companion.

What a fête day it was when Mdlle. Georgette was pronounced quite well again! M. Michaud gave a grand dinner in Madame's room, and sent out a good many invitations to several kind hearts living at various points up and down the corkscrew, who had brought flowers and dainties to Georgette in her illness. No need to say that M. Blaise was invited, or that he overheard Georgette remarking to his cousin:

"I must go back to work now, M. Michaud. I must have used up all my savings with this illness. I should never have got well but for you—and M. Blaise."

"It was all Blaise, mon enfant," he answered, in the fatherly way he had adopted since he had set Georgette free. "I believe he looks upon you as a famous cure. N'est-ce pas, mon cousin?"

Blaise was very bashful, and would take no credit to himself; only when it came to the health-drinking period and the glasses were all ready to be clinked against each other, M. Blaise gave out:

"A la santé de Mademoiselle Georgette!" Then under cover of the general noise he whispered—"Mademoiselle Georgette, do you want very much to go back to the theatre?"

"I *must* go," said Georgette simply, though curiously enough the wish to act had left her since that last night she had appeared. It was not that she could not do it as well as before, but all the golden light that had surrounded it had vanished.

"But suppose, Mademoiselle Georgette, you gave it up, and let me do the bread-winning?" M. Blaise's voice was almost trembling from anxiety and feeling, whilst his cousin, on the contrary, was cracking jokes and making a furious noise with the glasses.

Blaise's tone was so intensely earnest, so true, that Georgette knew all at once that he loved her, and that she returned the love. She understood that on his side at least this was the real thing, and that what she had taken for love before had been but a counterfeit of it. Her silence frightened Blaise. He nodded towards his cousin.

"Do you know, Mademoiselle Georgette, that he wishes it too? He told me to try and win you, otherwise I should not be here. I don't think there is another man like him in all the world."

"Except yourself," said Georgette. "I owe you both everything." She was thinking that her life might have been so different but for them, and then she added, "And I do care for you, M. Blaise."

At this moment there was one of those sudden pauses in the conversation which occur at every dinner-table. Whereupon M. Blaise was seized with a frantic wish to do something, and rising up, glass in hand, he called out:

"Let us drink the health of Monsieur Michaud's fiancée." This was such an old joke that only M. Michaud laughed and winked at Georgette and at Blaise, then returned thanks with great gravity.

What a happy evening that was! No one was angry, except the public and M. Roche; they both felt terribly cheated by that simple-minded genius, Mademoiselle Georgette, who ended by marrying just an ordinary doctor instead of rising to the top of the ladder of Fame. Everybody knows, however, that the feelings of the public are never stirred for more than nine days by one event; and Georgette's happiness would go on till death parted her from Blaise Michaud and from his cousin, who lives with them, and who in making Georgette's happiness has found his own.

ACROSS EGYPT.

THE traveller who in these days hangs up his hat in his cabin at Colombo, Ceylon, and is not required to take it down again until he arrives at Plymouth or Gravesend, little thinks of the fatigue and worry there was in crossing the Isthmus of Suez before the canal was made.

It is just twenty years ago now since I and a board-ship chum—an officer in a Highland regiment—were landed off the P. and O. Company's ship *Simla*, at Suez, to find our way across the Isthmus at our own sweet will and pleasure. For we had only taken passage as far as Suez, being undecided as to what route we should take afterwards; whether *viâ* Marseilles, *viâ* Southampton, or *viâ* Naples by Italian boat from Alexandria. The old *Simla*, a long narrow vessel, with a strong tendency to roll, was considered a splendid vessel in those days; but the great ships of the present time could almost take her on board as a jolly boat. Nevertheless she was crammed with passengers; who, with the selfishness peculiar to landsmen at sea, hustled one another, struggled, and even fought to be first into the steam tender that was to take us ashore, and, as a consequence, first for choice of rooms in the Suez Hotel, or first for places in the Suez and Cairo railway train. My friend, Mac, was a very cool, cynical Scot, over six feet high, red haired, and brawny. He could have made his way with the best there, but he suggested that we should wait quietly to the last; for, as he sagaciously remarked, "Those who go first will be torn to pieces by the donkey-boys and the beggars, while those who are the last will come in for the additional carriage that is sure to be put on to the train when the others are all crammed to suffocation."

So we waited until the tender had to return for the second and smaller batch of passengers, and then sauntered up to the hotel, which in those days was a sort of compromise between an Eastern caravanserai and a Paris café chantant.

We dined at long tables in the open air, in a kind of courtyard. The sleeping rooms were up above, round the sides of the quadrangle. The courtyard was made green and refreshing to the eye by orange-trees and shrubs in tubs and pots, it being one of the hobbies of all foreigners in Egypt to have as much green about their dwellings as possible. After all, this craving for verdure is very natural, considering the stony, sandy character of the country around, and the blinding glare of the sun in the desert. Along the Suez Canal, in these times, the little gardens at the stations are inexpressibly refreshing; just as much so as the similar collections of flowers and plants which adorn the dusty railway of India.

The food at the hotel was far from good. As a rule the traveller fares badly in Egypt. The subaltern in British Burmah had a lament about the menu at his mess—mutton being a rarity in that country—that

> "Whenever it was not ducks and fowls,
> 'Twas always fowls and ducks."

And in Egypt a similar complaint might justly be made regarding chickens and eggs.

Chickens—and remarkably tough and leathery ones, too—are the staple food of the country, if we except flies, which take every opportunity of going down after the chickens. Of course, then, we had fowls—and flies. Fowls curried, fowls fricasseed, and fowls pillaoed. That is to say fowls smothered in heaps of rice, raisins, and pistachio nuts; rather worse that way, if possible, than au naturel. To compensate for the sameness of this carte we had fair claret and good music. The French seem to send the best of their vin ordinaire to Egypt for their own drinking: the Egyptians themselves like something stronger. In those days one could get a really decent bottle of wine for one franc, and I was glad to see, when lately at Port Said, that fair claret is still to be had there at a reasonable rate. The music was Maltese, which is saying all that is good of it. The Maltese are the only people in the world who have really good street music, and the vagabond musicians who used to play cornet, fiddles, and double bass to the diners at the Suez Canal would not have disgraced the orchestra of any opera house.

But the bulk of our passengers could neither eat their food, drink their wine, nor listen to the music. They were on pins and needles to be off as soon as they sat down. Their souls were exercised within them to outwit one another in the struggle for seats in the train, in the fight for rooms at Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo; nay, even for berths in the mail steamer waiting for them at Alexandria. Again Mac suggested patience, and amused himself at his fellow-passengers' expense by telling them awful stories of quarantine, and all the modern plagues of Egypt. As he whispered in my ear, "The sooner we get them away to Cairo the better for ourselves;" and no doubt his dismal anticipations, recounted with a long face that never smiled, hastened many on their way westwards. A lot went away by train in the roasting mid-day sun, leaving the hotel for us half empty. And Mac, as he noted this exodus, concluded to remain at the hotel all the night.

There is not much to be done at Suez. It is a deadly lively place. Simpletons go ten miles down the coast to see some puddles that go by the name of Moses' Wells. They sometimes get sunstroke for their pains; they always use very bad language when they return. Pedants dispute as to the exact place the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, which sea ends in a cul de sac here. And they generally fall out, what with the argument, the heat, and the flies.

Wise men follow the example of the Turks in such circumstances, and give themselves up to "Kieff" and tobacco. There is fishing, for those who like fishing under a broiling sun, at Suez. A fine large fish called the Red Sea salmon is abundant, and will give good sport if trawled for from a boat after the manner adopted on the Scotch and American lakes.

But the night at Suez is the most wearisome of all times there. It is too hot to sleep, and it is too stupid to stay awake. What then is to be done?

"Let us go and see a gambling house," said Mac. "Egypt is infamous for Greeks in more senses than one."

So we strolled out in the bright moonlight, cigars in mouth, and heavy sticks in hand, mindful of the indigenous curs that snarl and bay near the dingy street corners. It was only ten o'clock, yet the streets were deserted, except for a stray figure in white that flitted across from one side of the road to the other now and then. Our guide, one of the dragomen of the hotel, was a villainous looking specimen, but to do him justice, he endeavoured to dissuade us from satisfying our curiosity regarding a Suez gambling den. Possibly his own experiences of such places were far from pleasant: at all events, he gave us to understand that knives were freely used there. A tragedy enacted at Suez, a few years later, justified his warning. A captain of an English Lancer regiment, who entered one of these Suez gambling houses out of curiosity, was stabbed by a Greek, and killed on the spot.

The place to which we were taken reminded me of the opium-smoking dens which are one of the sights of the island of Singapore. The room was just as oriental, and just as revolting as John Chinaman's favourite haunt of vice; but it was better lit up with a tawdry French crystal lustre. The game played was some kind of roulette, and round the table were some twenty or thirty men of all nations, but chiefly Arabs and Greeks. Most of them smoked, and the atmosphere was exceedingly dense in consequence. There was little noise, and indeed little to see except the eyes of the Arabs, which literally blazed—magnificent coal-black eyes they were—when they clawed up their gains with their long brown fingers. One or two seemed to regard our entrance with disfavour, but after a few words with the dragoman, and a mental calculation perhaps of Mac's thews and sinews, we were left at peace. However, not knowing the language used, and finding the air oppressive, we soon departed, and were allowed to leave without hindrance.

The railway journey across Egypt, whatever it may be now, used to be one of the most tedious in the world. The dead level of the desert, the glare, the heat, the flies, were all bad enough; but to enhance still further the discomforts of the train, the Turkish railway officials used to stop the engine when they pleased—often only for the sake of a little conversation. There was one terrible spot in the midst of the desert where the train was delayed a long time, in order to give the irritable and irritated Indian passengers an opportunity of eating stale refreshments. Such a place! A kind of wooden booth in a stony waste, where Mugby Junction sandwiches were sold for a shilling each, and a bottle of ale for one rupee.

However, the longest journey has an end at last: though when we got to Cairo, and to Shepheard's Hotel, in the evening, our troubles were by no means over. Here we first heard the news that the Nile had washed away the railway bridge between Cairo and Alexandria; consequently it was impossible to proceed to the latter place by rail. A steamer was to be provided next day by the Pasha's government—there was no Khedive in those days—to take us down the river, and the Mahmoudieh Canal to Alexandria, and my friend Mac's face was a study as he saw Shepheard's Hotel crammed from garret to basement with the crowd of passengers he had flattered himself were far ahead of him by this time. There was a rueful re-union between the whilom friends (?) of the good ship *Simla* who had parted, as they fondly hoped, never to meet again, and the Highland blood of my guide, philosopher and friend, mantled in his freckled cheeks, as he reflected how beautifully he had been "done" by sending these people on in front of him to engage, for themselves, all the best rooms in the hotel! In effect, Mac and I had to sleep on a table in the dining-room, over which a charitable Egyptian rigged mosquito curtains.

To beguile the hours, and to escape the quarrelling and complaining of our fellow travellers, and the screams of the babies that accompanied some of them, we strolled out to see Cairo. In those times it was possible to buy really good Latakiah tobacco in the Egyptian capital, so we provided ourselves with two goatskins' full, and with cherry-stick chibouques about six feet long. We also visited the mosque, which is really worth seeing, and the Pasha's palace, a marvel of extravagant upholstery and bad taste. And from the Citadel we looked down upon a troop of our fellow passengers on donkey-back, wending their way to the Pyramids with that restlessness for sight-seeing so characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon abroad. But the best time in Cairo was at night, when the band played in the illuminated gardens in front of the Hotel, and all Cairo turned out to make a promenade under the trees, or to eat ices and drink coffee at the little tables scattered, boulevard fashion, all about. I have heard that this garden had to be suppressed later, on account of its immorality, but I saw nothing of an immoral character there at the time of our visit: on the contrary, the people, promenading or sitting at the tables, seemed to be enjoying themselves in a very sober and orderly manner.

Next morning, after a sleepless night, we were all, to the number of about two hundred souls, bundled on board a Nile steamer calculated to hold only half that number, and were kicked to sea, as the sailors say, in half a gale of wind. The Nile, then in full flood, was indeed a sea to look at. Its turbid brown waters, lashed by the wind into muddy waves, rolled as far as the eye could see in the distance, and our little ship heaved and swayed in such an alarming manner that we expected it every now and then to turn turtle. Engines and all were completely under the control of Turks, and this fact did not add to the comfort of the Europeans on board. The Qui hys of Calcutta ceased their eternal grumblings and stared apprehensively at the surrounding flood; the "Ducks" of Bombay did not behave as ducks might be expected to do under such circumstances, but regarded the water with horror. The grass widows and flirts of the Red Sea postponed their wiles, their coquetries and their killing glances, to a better season, and cowered down on deck, saying, let us hope, their prayers.

But the horrors of this alarming voyage culminated when we got into the lock at the place where the Nile has been dammed across from bank to bank below Cairo. Here the river rushed down like a sluice, and our Egyptian captain, standing on the paddle-box, seemed completely to lose his head, as he actually lost his long pipe. We had a narrow squeak of a complete smash up; a critical moment, of which friend Mac took occasion to admonish the company in sepulchral tones, "I told you so," and then we shot out of the lock into the broad river like an arrow from a bow, and after that had, comparatively, better sailing.

By noonday, indeed, the wind had gone down, and the boat had steadied sufficiently to allow us to do justice to the capital luncheon the Government, or the Company, had provided for us. Under the grateful awning on deck we devoured ham and chicken, drank cool claret, and forgot half our troubles for a season. Some of the flirts even attempted to make romance out of the muddy Nile and the distant palm-trees on its equally muddy banks, but that would not do. From Cairo down to the entrance of the Mahmoudieh Canal, the river Nile is about the most uninteresting stream imaginable.

The Mahmoudieh Canal is, however, worse. This abominable ditch, with banks so high that one cannot see over them, offers the very worst of all travelling. The ghosts of the myriads of fellaheen whom Mehemet Ali slew in constructing it, seem to revenge themselves in this way on the innocent traveller. And never shall I forget the long weary hours, as day passed to evening, and evening to night, and we still puffed and laboured along with asthmatic engines through that dismal ditch.

To add to our impatience we were continually fouling, or having to stop to let pass, those gracefully-winged Nile sailing vessels familiar to everyone in pictures. And as hour after hour passed, and Alexandria seemed as far off as ever, the ladies of our party sank down on the deck in despair, and the children cried themselves, one by one, to sleep. We had an Anglo-Indian on board whose nose was plainly coloured by the rosy god. He drank steadily all day from a bottle of brandy, which he carried in a leather case, and which to the uninitiated looked like a telescope. About 10 p.m. he fell overboard, and we picked him up in the starlight. The rest were too weary and listless to care much whether he was drowned or not. The two hundred lay, packed head and foot together, on the little deck, wishing for an end to their misery that came not. They groanfully regretted the luxuries of the old long sea route to India round the Cape, and the greatest flirt on board was so snappish that not one of the gentlemen in her train dared speak to her.

About midnight we arrived at Alexandria, cross and weary, when the struggle for quarters had all to be gone over again. The Grand Hotel in the square—where they used to charge the traveller a pound a day for the most villainous cuisine of the Mediterranean—was quite full of outward and homeward bound passengers, so canny Mac left the company to quarrel and fight about rooms, while we two slipped away to the harbour, and after some difficulty got a boatman to take us on board the old *Indus*, the Southampton boat, the first officer of which vessel was a friend of my companion. We slept comfortably on board, free from mosquitoes, and worse; and next day had the melancholy satisfaction of seeing some of our late fellow-passengers come trooping off to the steamer with frowsy hair, half-washed faces, and all the tokens on their persons of a bad night, followed by an incomplete toilette in an Egyptian hotel.

Before this, at sunrise, my friend Mac, who knew all the ropes, took me off in a boat for a swim in the Pasha's bath. Judging from the many baths in his palaces at Cairo and Alexandria, Said must have been a very clean monarch, if not an amphibious potentate altogether. But it is to be feared that in his case cleanliness was not allied with godliness. There were many scandals current of the Pharoah of the period ; among other things, how he used to throw the ladies of his harem into these baths, and wickedly enjoy the splashing, kicking, and screaming that always followed. His marble baths in the Cairo palace were superb, but his salt water swimming bath in the harbour of Alexandria was even better.

In appearance this delightful bath was like a mosque built out in the middle of the sea. One entered by a flight of stone steps at which the boat was left moored, and after climbing the steps we found ourselves in a spacious quadrangle of coloured tiles ; overhead, a handsome oriental domed roof. A venerable Mussulman, the guardian of the bath, affected the utmost indignation at our impudence at even coming to such a place, much more at our dreaming of bathing there ! Why the Pasha himself might come at any moment, or the ladies of the harem, and then our infidel heads would pay the penalty of our unparalleled audacity ! Mac, who knew the ways of the Egyptians, let the old fellow run on until he was tired and scant of breath. Then he produced half-a-crown, and quietly mentioned, what was the fact, that Said Pasha was away at some one of his palaces on the Nile, and that the probability—which he, Mac, greatly regretted—was, that the ladies of the harem were away with him.

On this, Cerberus moderated his truculent tone; and after some more conversation allowed us to enter the bath in consideration of another half-crown from myself. We had a most delightful swim in water of a perfect temperature. The bath was so built that it was really a bit of sea roofed in, and luxuriously arranged with dressing-rooms all round. Only the rascally old guardian of the place *would* persist in frightening us with fearful anticipations of what must follow should any of the Pasha's household come off and catch us there. He was condescending enough, nevertheless, to produce two of the Pasha's towels for our use, and on our threatening to throw him into the bath in case of refusal, he even unlocked one or two of the dressing-room doors to satisfy our curiosity. To tell the truth, the Pasha's naiades seemed easily satisfied. The retiring rooms were of the very simplest description, and I noticed a broken shilling-looking-glass on the wall of one of them. Cerberus was evidently much relieved when we left him, and got into our boat again to pull back to the ship. Perhaps it was really a serious piece of pleasure to bathe in the Pasha's private bath; but baksheesh will do anything with the Egyptians: for a sovereign one might sleep in the Pasha's palace.

On board, we heard of the adventures of two of our fellow passengers, who were foolish enough to wander about the back streets of Alexandria the night before. They had entered a third-class café with the idea of getting a lobster salad, when they were set upon by some rascally Greeks, who attempted to stab and rob them. Luckily, some English sailors were passing the house at the time and heard the row. If they had not come to the rescue promptly it might have fared badly with our friends. But in those days Egypt was a land of adventures for anyone who lagged at all behind the ruck of passengers that were dispatched like so many parcels from sea to sea. Very different, is it, now that the Suez Canal affords no opportunity for shore going, except at Port Said, and then only if the canal is so blocked as to necessitate the delay of an hour or two to enable the steamer one sails in to take her turn.

What it will be in the future when Egypt's present troubles have passed away to give place to a higher order of things—or to a lower—who can tell?

F E. W.

A STRANGE COINCIDENCE.*

IT happened, three or four years ago, that a young English lady in leaving the boat at Lucerne met with what at the moment appeared to be a very trifling accident. She slipped and fell; and in falling struck her head against the bulwark of the boat. Her mother, who was close by and had seen the blow, was alarmed by it and asked her daughter if she had hurt her head.

"No, mamma," the girl answered; "nothing to signify; but I have hurt my foot. I don't think I can stand."

By this time she had been helped out of the stream of passengers, which was pouring from the boat to the shore, and placed on one of the deck seats. Even this movement had given her so much pain that there was clearly a bad sprain, if not a fracture, to be apprehended, and father, mother, and sister were standing round the sufferer in considerable perplexity and dismay.

Suddenly the girl broke into a half-merry, half-rueful laugh. "Don't look so miserable, please," she said. "I suppose I must get to the hotel somehow, and the sooner the better, but I doubt very much whether I can stand. Papa, do you think I could be carried on shore?"

Two gentlemen, the last of the passengers, had been standing at a short distance from the family group until this moment. When the girl spoke the elder of the two made a step forward with a remonstrative, "Well, I suppose I must, but it's a horrid bore!" and then, with a rapid change of tone and a courteous raising of his hat, addressed the mother.

"I am a doctor—can I be of any service to you?"

The poor lady turned round with a wonderfully relieved countenance. "Oh, thank you!" she said. "How very fortunate! What a comfort to see an English doctor! If you *could* tell us how much she is hurt?"

"Not very much, I hope," he answered and proceeded to feel the girl's foot and ankle gently. She winced a little, but smiled and thanked him prettily.

"It is a slight sprain," he said, "which must be strapped and kept still for a few days. She had better be taken to your hotel. If you have a carriage ready I will carry her to it at once, so that she may be made comfortable. The less delay in these cases the better."

In another minute he had picked her up (she was not a very heavy weight, certainly) and had put her—"hardly hurting her at all," she laughingly said to him—into the carriage which was to take her to the

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* The author vouches for the truth of this incident.

Schweizerhof. Her mother and sister went with her—her father was for the moment absorbed in the care of luggage—and the doctor, with his fellow-traveller, walked briskly along the sunny street after the invalid and her companions.

Mr. Garston, the English surgeon who had so opportunely come to the relief of his countrywoman in distress, was by no means a knight-errant, nor was he at all pleased by the unexpected call made on his time and services. He had just begun to enjoy a long-desired and hardly-earned holiday, and had come to Switzerland resolved to conceal his profession and avoid his compatriots. Even when the accident happened before his eyes he had only waited to assure himself that no danger to life had apparently arisen before he said to his brother: "Now we will keep out of their way—there are plenty of other people to help them," and he had been rather annoyed at being answered: "All the same, I think if I were you I should see that the sprain was properly attended to."

When the girl, whose very lips were white with pain, had said those few laughing words as he put her into the carriage, his disinclination to help her had partly melted. "She does not make an unnecessary fuss," he said to himself; and although he still grumbled at his brother's remark, he offered himself as a victim to circumstances. He and his brother were going to stay a few days at the Schweizerhof, and as they walked thither, he felt that after all it would have been brutal to refuse his aid in a case where it could be given with so little trouble, and might alleviate much suffering.

Before the end of the day, tolerably friendly relations had been established between the Garstons and the family of the elder Mr. Garston's patient. The head of this family was Mr. Sterling, a Scotchman long established in Manchester, and very wealthy. His wife was a kind, simple woman, who was not yet quite sure whether, for her own part, she liked the grandeur of her later days one bit better than the comparative poverty of her earlier ones, but who certainly did like her pretty daughters to have "everything of the best," and their own wills in *almost* everything. The girls were both pretty and good; and that one of them, at least, possessed a considerable amount of courage and self-control Mr. Garston could have testified after he had strapped up and bandaged her poor swollen ankle, and told her that for a good many days to come she would have to limit her acquaintance with beautiful Lucerne to as much of it as could be seen from her couch and a window.

Nor was his opinion shaken even when, quite early the next morning, Mr. Sterling came to his room and begged he would have the goodness to visit Minnie as soon as possible, as she had had a restless night and much alarmed her mother. He obeyed the call directly, and was shocked to find the girl half delirious, moaning now and then, "My head! my head!" and in a high fever. It was evident that the blow on her head, regarded as of no consequence at the time, had been really the more serious injury of the two, and Mr. Garston at once found all his care and skill called upon to avert very serious consequences.

This care and skill, however, were not small, nor were they grudgingly used, and with the tender nursing of mother and sister, they succeeded bye-and-bye in bringing all danger to an end. For some days Mr. Garston made himself almost a prisoner; then, as cause for anxiety diminished, he ventured to go with his brother on various short expeditions; and presently things reached a stage at which he saw his patient in the morning, and then felt himself at liberty (so far as she was concerned) to be absent until the same hour on the following day. Mr. Sterling joined in some of these excursions; two or three times his youngest daughter Emmie (the Sterlings were great in diminutives) was of the party; and the Sterlings' sitting-room was always open to the brothers in the evening. Thus a considerable degree of intimacy grew up before Minnie was able to leave her room.

It was in the very end of her imprisonment that a curious incident occurred.

One evening, after the two brothers had been absent all day, and when they had come back to the hotel unusually tired, Mr. Garston refused to drop in for the customary cup of tea in the Sterlings' sitting-room. He would smoke a cigar, he said, and go to bed early. The heat of the day had made his head ache, and he was not bright enough to care for talk. So he was left alone, and before ten o'clock went to bed.

He had taken a book with him, which at first interested him a good deal. He had no premonitory feeling of drowsiness to warn him to put out his light, but he probably did fall asleep—as we sometimes do—quite abruptly. At any rate, waking or asleep, his attention was roused by the opening of his door, and the entrance of a man into his still-lighted bed-room. The intruder appeared to be about his own age—thirty; he was rather good-looking, tall, and well-made, with blue eyes and a quantity of wavy or curly brown hair. He was in a brown knickerbocker suit—a very prominent brown, not at all likely to be mistaken for any other colour; and he was carrying something, not clearly distinguishable, in his hand. He walked composedly into the middle of the room, looked steadily at its startled occupant, and then, without having spoken a word, turned round and walked out again.

Mr. Garston, astonished at this midnight visitation, and annoyed with himself for not having spoken to the intruder, which he had seemed unable to do, quickly jumped out of bed, threw on a dressing-gown, and hurried to the door. Bright moonlight was filling the corridor, and he could see the stranger going deliberately towards the staircase. Of course the natural conclusion was that he was some belated guest, who had missed the way to his own room; but against this theory there was some mysterious feeling of "uncanniness" in the whole proceeding that seemed to compel Mr. Garston to follow and see whither the unknown would go. This curious feeling increased as the man, his noticeable dress fully lighted up from time to time by an inflowing stream of moonlight, went on, leaving the storey on which were the rooms occupied by the two brothers, and descending to the corridor partly occupied by the Sterlings. They had five rooms, and the middle one of these was that occupied by Minnie.

She was now so far recovered as to be left alone at night, her sister's room adjoining and opening into hers. Mr. Garston was, of course, acquainted with these arrangements, and it was with an increase of surprise and curiosity that he now saw his mysterious visitor pause at Minnie Sterling's door, then open it quietly and walk in. The young man followed. The stranger approached the bedside where the girl lay calmly sleeping, undisturbed by the invasion of her room. He paused for a minute, then raised his arm, and with one strong, steady stroke plunged a long knife into the sleeper's breast!

There was a moment in which the horrified bystander saw nothing; then his vision steadied, and he perceived that the murderer was gone, that the sleeper still lay before him, but that sleep had passed into death without a cry, without a struggle. And then he was conscious of a strange numbness of all his faculties, which made it seem impossible to speak, or act, or even think. It did not occur to him to give any alarm, or in any way make known what had happened. He turned away and left the room, and got back to his own without shaking off this numbness in the least; and so, from a kind of horrible mental haze, he fell into a deep but troubled sleep.

He woke in the morning later than usual, and as he woke the fearful experience of the night returned to his memory. At first he thought it had been a dream; then every detail came to his recollection with such perfect clearness that he assured himself it was not so; and then came a dread of being summoned by the Sterlings, as he certainly would be the moment the tragedy was discovered.

He sprang up and dressed. The hotel was already awake and astir, and he wondered the murder had not yet been made known to fill the cheerful house with horror and dismay. Every moment he expected some cry of distress, some hurried footstep rushing to tell him the fatal news; but all was quiet, or, rather, all was noisy with the usual sounds of coming and going, in that great caravanserai.

At last he could endure suspense no longer. He went downstairs, and, though it was far before the hour of his daily visit, he approached with indescribable anxiety the door of the Sterlings' sitting room. Just as he did so it opened, and Mr. Sterling came out.

"Ah, Mr. Garston," he exclaimed, in his cheery voice and homely Northern accent; "well met! My wife was just sending me to ask you to speak to her before breakfast."

What could it mean? The young man followed the elder into the room in the strangest confusion of mind. Mrs. Sterling was there, fresh and cheerful as the morning.

"Minnie won't rest, Mr. Garston," she said, "unless I ask your leave for her to go out a little this morning. Early, she says, before the sun gets too hot. I told her it would be time enough to ask you when you came to see her; but she is spoiled, you know. We must humour her a little."

Minnie! then she was not dead? Was it a dream? It was not a truth, at any rate—for she was there; weak certainly, but bright and eager to be in the fresh air. And from that day she was allowed to move about and enjoy herself by progressive steps more and more, until, when the Sterlings left Lucerne, there was scarcely a trace of her illness left.

They were all very grateful to Mr. Garston for his care of the girl, and several times during the last days they spent together he was on the point of telling them the singular vision he had had, which he now believed to have been simply a strange and horrible dream. But a repugnance to awaken in them anything of the sensations he had suffered made him keep silence, and they parted without a word having been said on the subject.

The Garstons left Lucerne first. They were going to prolong their tour for several weeks, while the Sterlings were going leisurely homewards. Warm expressions of regard and invitations were exchanged when the brothers were departing, and there, for a time, all intercourse ceased.

More than two months after the parting at Lucerne Mr. Garston, who had left his brother behind him in Paris, arrived at Victoria Station by the Continental train. The station seemed to be fuller and busier than usual, so, having rescued his portmanteau from the hurly-burly, he decided to carry it himself into the open yard in front of the station, and then get a hansom to convey it and himself home. But as he emerged from the station on to the long line of pavement running from end to end of it in front of its many entrances, he saw, coming towards him, a man whom he instantly recognised. There could not be a shadow of doubt about it. There were the thick, curly brown hair, the singularly bright blue eyes, the tall well-knit figure, and the very costume, with its noticeable tint and material—all exactly as he had seen them. It was the man of his vision at Lucerne!

Whoever or whatever he might be, he was now walking unconcernedly out of Victoria Station, carrying a travelling bag in his hand and evidently looking for a cab. In a minute he hailed one, and got into it. The crowd was at one of its moments of crisis, and it was impossible to move otherwise than slowly. Mr. Garston determined to see whither he went. A hansom drew up close by him.

"Do you see that cab?" he said, pointing out the one. "Follow it wherever it goes, and be sure do not lose sight of it."

He sprang in. The cabman manœuvred so cleverly that he followed the unknown closely out of the yard; and then a long chase began.

Through street after street, round corner after corner they went, sometimes separated, but never far apart or out of sight, until at last the journey ended at the door of a house in Regent's Park. The unknown alighted, rang the bell, and paid the cabman. It was evident that he meant to stop at this house; was probably at home there.

Mr. Garston hesitated what to do; but the sight of the man in the full light of day, and in London, was so linked with the recollection of him as he plunged his long knife into Minnie Sterling's heart, that it seemed impossible to let him go without some certainty about him. After all, he could plead a misdirection—a mistake. To penetrate into that house, to clear up the mystery of this identity, had become an imperious necessity.

As the stranger entered the door with the air of one familiar and expected, Mr. Garston jumped from his cab and followed him. An astonished footman suffered the second visitor to pass; he pursued the man upstairs, saw him open a door, and heard exclamations of welcome. Almost too quickly to recognise the voices, he had also entered, and found himself in the presence of the Sterlings!

He thought afterwards how fortunate it was that, in their warm welcome, they forgot to be very exacting in the matter of explanations. They took it for granted he had somehow learned that they were living in this "furnished house" for a few weeks to make preparations for Minnie's wedding, and they only said "How lucky he had not gone to Manchester to look for them!" But when Minnie came to him and said shyly that Fred did so want to thank him for all his kindness to her at Lucerne, and he felt himself compelled to shake hands with the man of his vision, so strong a horror thrilled all through his frame that the remembered horror of his dream was as nothing to it.

Minnie has been for some time the wife of the dream-murderer. What the end of this true story will be no one knows.

* * *

POSSIBILITIES.

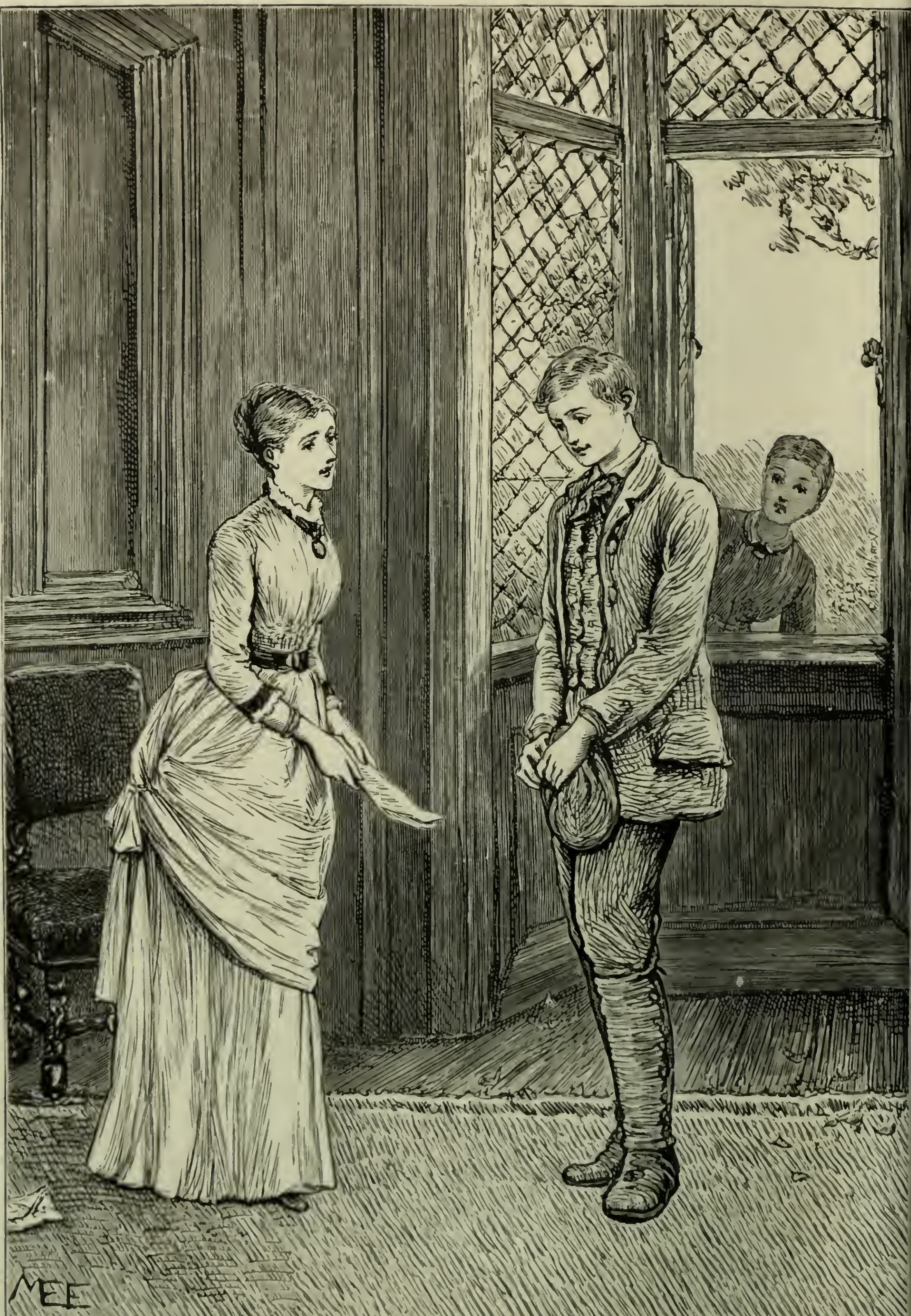
If one should wake one's frozen faith
In sunlight of her radiant eyes,
Bid it forget its dream of death
In this new dream of Paradise;
Bid it forget the long, slow pain,
The agony, when, all in vain,
It fought for life, and how one swore,
Once cold, it should not waken more:

If hope one buried long ago
Should thrill beneath those smiles of hers,
Should in one's sere life stir and grow,
As in brown woods the young spring stirs;
If, breaking icy bonds of grief,
One's soul should start to bud and leaf,
One might forget in that Springtide,
How last year's leaves fell off and died.

If from warm faith and hope set high
A lovely living child were born,
With lips more pure than starlit sky,
And eyes as clear as summer dawn;
Child-love might grow till one forgot
Old love, that was and now is not;
Forget that far-off time of tears,
And all these desolated years.

How vain to question! Ah, *one* knows
Faith is alive and hope awake—
And love has stirred beneath Time's snows,
And sprung to life for her sweet sake.
She only can divine and see
What future lies before those three,
Since all their chance hangs on her breath,
Her "Yes" or "No"—their life or death.

E. Nesbit.



M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"YOU READ THESE LETTERS, BEN?"

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER, 1884.

THE WHITE WITCH.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ACCIDENT.

IT was Monday morning—as may be remembered. Godfrey Mayne walked slowly home, after seeing the Vicar and his family away on their travels, and a good portion of the rest of the day was spent with his father in the library, examining some accounts. Mary Dixon passed the afternoon in her mother's room, neither of them coming down at all. Two gentlemen called from Cheston, old friends, and stayed a good while with Mr. Mayne and Godfrey.

Dinner was served earlier than usual, Mr. Mayne having promised to preside at a vestry meeting in the absence of the Vicar. As the two ladies rose from table, and Godfrey also, to open the door for them, Mary spoke to him in a whisper as she passed.

"I wish you would do something for me, Mr. Godfrey."

"Certainly I will. What is it?"

She waited until her mother was inside the drawing-room. Godfrey had stepped out and drawn the door to, holding it in his hand.

"I am very uneasy: I'm sure you must have noticed it at dinner; I expected Ernest here this afternoon, and he has not come. Would you mind going as far as the Grange to see if you can learn anything of him?"

"I will go immediately: I'll be back in no time," said Godfrey. Somehow their hands had met, and he was holding her fingers with a tender pressure.

"Thank you," replied Mary; "thank you for *all*."

He started at once. A few paces down the drive he overtook Biddy Milman's cart, driving away with the week's washing.

"Give me a lift, Biddy, I'm in a hurry," said he. And he jumped up and, seizing the reins, prodded and excited the old horse to go along the avenue at quite a dashing pace. He leapt down as the cart turned into the high road, and was running the rest of the way, when he met Colonel Underwood, who was walking to the vestry-meeting.

"*Ernest?*" he exclaimed, in answer to Godfrey's hurried appeal. "Why, what put it into your head that he was coming, Godfrey? He crossed over to Ostend yesterday."

With a sharp, passionate word, for he saw that the girl had dealt treacherously with him, as well as the detective, Godfrey set off back at a pace that amazed the Colonel. He went up the lane, intending to have it out at the farm with Mr. Cattermole, when in turning a curve he came upon the farmer's gig, about to start, the detective and Miss Dixon seated in it. Godfrey seized the horse's head, and Mr. Cattermole flung an oath at him.

"Stand back, Mr. Godfrey, for heaven's sake!" cried Mary. "I am going of my own free will."

"Hold on tight," he called out to her in answer, as he pulled out and opened his pocket knife.

The detective struck the horse with the whip, and then struck at Godfrey; but, at that, Mary turned upon the man with anger, and the lash caught in the harness. The horse started and reared, but Godfrey held fast.

"Will you let go, sir?" roared Mr. Cattermole.

"Not until I have cut the traces."

"Then I must make you. Take that."

There ensued the sharp report of a revolver, and the frightened horse leaped onwards. The traces and back strap, almost cut through, gave way, and the shafts fell. Godfrey staggered and fell with them, face downwards, and lay motionless.

The catastrophe had happened in a few seconds of time. Mary Dixon clung to the seat of the gig in terror. The detaining hand of the detective officer was laid upon her.

She succeeded in pushing his hand away, scrambled out of the gig, knelt down by Godfrey, and strove to turn his face, to see whether life was left in it.

"Help me, help me; come and help me!" she cried passionately, with wide eyes and terror-stricken lips. "He may be alive still. Help me, if you are human, or he will suffocate."

Mr. Cattermole turned Godfrey quickly over, and regarded him attentively. It was dusk, but not yet dark.

"He will be all right soon; he is not dead."

"How dared you shoot him?"

"I did not mean to hurt him, only to frighten him. The fellow should not have interfered. We can escape before anybody comes up," he coolly added. "Come."

"Escape now, and leave him here for dead!" gasped Mary. "What are you thinking of?"

"He is not hurt; he must have fallen from fright. The shot went over his head; it did not touch him."

"Do you call this fright?" said she, shuddering, as a dark-red stain spread the earth where Godfrey lay. "You have murdered him—you have killed him! Help! help!" she shrieked out at the top of her voice, hoping to be heard: and shouts soon answered from a distance, followed by coming footsteps.

Mr. Cattermole, for reasons no doubt well-known to himself—and who can fathom those of a wily police-detective?—disappeared through a thin place in the hawthorn hedge, cleverly drawing together the branches again to cover the gap his passage had made, just as Ben Griffiths and another young man came running up, one of them having caught the horse. Ben, ready and keen upon any emergency, knelt down over Godfrey and strove to stem with his hands the blood flowing from the wound in his side. Mary rose, making an effort to subdue her agitation.

"You of course know where Dr. Scarsdale lives?" she said to the other lad. "Jump on the horse and go for him. Tell him what it is, and that he must come instantly: it may be a matter of life or death."

The next to appear on the scene was Mr. Mayne. When half way on his road to the church, he had dimly heard the shot and the other sounds, and turned back to ascertain what could be amiss. He at once grew very tiresome. Unable to understand what he saw, or how it had happened, he was beside himself with wondering perplexity; terribly shocked at the state of his son, anxious to do something, yet having nothing to do. Mary (he supposed she had come running to the scene like himself) contrived to take, unseen, a small hand-bag of hers from the gig and put it under her cloak; and she went with it swiftly into the Abbey.

Farmer Wilding, dressed up in his Sunday's best to attend the parish meeting, for he was churchwarden, came down the lane with a brisk step. He had not heard anything, so that his consternation was excessive. He said that he had lent the gig to his artist lodger, Mr. Cattermole; but what had happened he could not think.

"And Mr. Godfrey with a shot in him!" he exclaimed to Mr. Mayne. "Why then, sir, it must be the doing of some wicked tramp; some footpad, who must have attacked the gig! Perhaps Mr. Godfrey came up at the moment, and got the shot meant for our lodger, who must have resisted."

"But where is the lodger?" cried Mr. Mayne.

"Gone in pursuit, I trust," said the farmer. "Well, this is a dreadful state of things!"

Presently Mary came back again, too uneasy to remain away. Hawkins and the footman had come up, with the housekeeper and others. With a sharply-drawn breath of pain Godfrey at length opened his eyes, and they recognised Mary; who was then bending over him. She softly touched his hand and his fingers feebly clasped hers.

"Let me lie still," he murmured; "I shall soon be all right. Stay with me."

Dr. Scarsdale made good haste and came rattling up the lane in his brougham. Two or three minutes were spent in his examination of Godfrey.

"Whoever it is that has held the wound together, so as to stop the flow of blood, has done good service," he observed. "Perhaps saved his life."

It was Ben Griffiths who had done that. The young man modestly retreated to the back of the group. Mary followed him. She had a gold locket with broad gold chain on her neck, and she took them off and put them into Ben's hands impulsively.

"I can't thank you enough," she whispered, with tears starting to her eyes, in the wild joy she felt at hearing that Godfrey's life was saved. "Keep that, Ben; and if you come to the Abbey to-morrow, I will give you five pounds."

The ready generosity, the gratitude that shone in the lady's lovely eyes, touched the rough and daring young fellow. He would have sold his soul without scruple for her in that moment, and not have minded it. In after life it might be that Ben, if in straits, would pawn his wife's wedding ring; but he would never part with that chain and locket.

When the surgeon had done what he could, Godfrey was taken to the Abbey and borne upstairs to his bed-room. Mrs. Mayne, in a state of intense terror, watched from a distant part of the corridor; but she did not approach. Her lips were white, her tremulous hands would not keep still.

It chanced that nobody was at home at the farm that Monday evening but Mrs. Wilding and her little niece, Susan; Nancy had gone out on an errand, and the servant had a holiday. Mrs. Wilding fell into a doze over the sitting-room fire, and was woke up from it by the return of her husband and daughter. They came in together and in great excitement.

"Why, here you are, sleeping through it all!" cried the farmer. "Don't you know that Mr. Godfrey's been nearly murdered out in the lane there?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the horror-stricken woman. "Who has done it?"

"Well, I can't make out," said the farmer—as he related the circumstances he knew. "Mr. Cattermole asked me, you know, for the loan of the gig for an hour and started off in it. I should think he was set upon by some desperate jail bird of a tramp; but Ben Griffiths has just whispered to me that he fancies Mr. Cattermole may have fired the shot himself. If so, it must have been in self-defence."

"I don't know that," impulsively spoke up Nancy. "He was too fond of that revolver."

Her father turned round to regard her as he pondered the words. "Cattermole has disappeared somewhere at present, and I can't question him," he slowly remarked. "Anyway, he does not come inside this house again till he satisfies me as to the facts."

"Has Mr. Cattermole been in, Susan?" asked Nancy, suddenly noticing the girl, and annoyed that so much had already been said before her.

"No, Nancy," said she, trembling.

"And I say he shall not come in again, unless he can give a good account of himself," repeated the farmer sharply. "Run out and shut the front door and draw the bolt, Susan."

The child obeyed hesitatingly. After listening in horror to her uncle's story, she did not even like to go out into the passage alone in the gathering darkness. She was a sturdy-looking girl of about ten, not strongly imaginative by any means, though she was not proof against a little natural nervousness. But a few moments after she had left the room, just as they heard her shut the front door and begin to move the bolt, they were startled by a shrill shriek and the sound of the door flung violently open. Mr. Wilding and Nancy rushed into the passage and found that the child had been thrown to the ground.

"What is it? What was it, Susan?"

But it was some moments before the frightened child could answer. Nancy had picked her up and discovered that she was unhurt. "It was Mr.—Mr. Cattermole," she sobbed.

But in the meantime the farmer had run straight upstairs and dashed open the door of the artist's room, then his own, Nancy's, and the other rooms in succession. But there was no one in any of them. He came slowly downstairs again. Mrs. Wilding had come into the passage then, and was gently scolding Susan.

"It's nothing but your fancy, child," said she. "It was just Dick, and not Mr. Cattermole at all. I heard his step, I thought, in his room over my head."

"No, you didn't, Martha," corrected her husband. "And whoever it was must have gone out and not come in, for there's no one at all upstairs."

"He came *in*, and it *was* Mr. Cattermole," sobbed Susan.

At this moment there was a noise outside, and Mr. Mayne's coachman, Barth, with Ben Griffiths and another lad, dashed in without ceremony.

"Have you got him, Mr. Wilding?" asked Barth.

"Got who?"

"The man that shot Master Godfrey—as I believe. We saw him come crouching on this way from the direction of the pond; he made for the door here."

"But he is not here," said the farmer, looking rather troubled. "Who was it?"

"Couldn't make that out; 'twas too dusk," replied Barth. "He turned off into the fold-yard, may be; I did hear the gate go."

The coachman went in pursuit to the fold-yard, the boy following him; Ben Griffiths, unperceived in the darkness of the passage, had stolen upstairs. Mr. Wilding, with his wife and Susan, returned to the sitting-room, Nancy remaining at the door. Presently Ben came softly down, and strove to pass her.

"Now, what have you been up to?" demanded Nancy.

"I've been upstairs, looking for the man."

"Looking for what you could lay hold of, more likely," retorted Nancy, who held not too good an opinion of the lad. "What's this?"—drawing out of his pocket a big silk handkerchief, which she recognised as one Mr. Cattermole sometimes wore swathed round his neck. "Where did you get this from?" she asked sharply.

"Off his neck," coolly replied Ben.

Nancy stared. "Off who's neck?"

"*His*," responded Ben. "Upstairs, just now."

"If you don't tell me what you mean, Ben Griffiths, I'll call my father out to you."

"You do, and I'll mix you up in as ugly a business as ever you heard of in all your born days," said Ben viciously.

"What do you mean?—what business?"

"Mr. Cattermole's."

"You simpleton, I know all about that. I know who it is he is come here to look after."

"But do you know what for?"

Nancy looked at him again, keenly, inquiringly.

"Well, I do, that's all," said Ben. "Now you let me go."

He was a well-grown lad of seventeen, and strong as Nancy's own hands were, he could have got away before, but that he did not want her to call her father out to him. In her surprise at the emphasis he gave to this last statement, she released her grasp on him and he went out. Nancy then went upstairs and made a careful examination of the bedrooms, but without finding any trace of the artist's recent presence. For once in her life, the girl was puzzled, and warmly anathematised Ben for a story-teller.

Ben meanwhile went straight to the back-door of the Abbey and asked if he could see Miss Dixon.

"No, I'm sure you can't. What do you want with Miss Dixon?" asked the maid who came to the door.

"If you just say it's Ben Griffiths that wants her, p'raps she'll see me," said he.

"I don't think she will now. She's with Master Godfrey; she and Mrs. Garner. They are going to sit up with him."

"Going to sit up with him! Miss Dixon is?—are you sure?" asked he, eagerly.

"Yes. Why, what's that to you?"

"All right. I'll come to-morrow." And Ben went away.

When Godfrey was laid on the bed in his own room, he missed

Mary. She had walked by his side as they carried him along; and as they brought him in by the wide hall-door and up the staircase, where he could no longer keep her in sight, he had called to her at intervals, to be sure by the sound of her answering voice that she was still near him and not again in the clutches of that dangerous detective. Of course she had not followed into the bed-room, and Godfrey, in his uneasiness, strove to get off the bed where they had laid him.

"I want Miss Dixon—where is she?" cried Godfrey.

"She can come to you by-and-bye, sir," replied Mrs. Garner. "She is with her mother."

"But I want her here," said Godfrey in excitement, giving way to his inward fears.

"How long do you propose to be under my care?" asked the doctor drily.

"I must be well in a day or two—immediately—so as to be able to travel," answered Godfrey, his face flushing.

"Well, you may give up all thought of that, for you have only to go on behaving as you are doing to be in a fever in twenty-four hours."

Godfrey lay back like a lamb, and submitted to have his wounds examined. He was eager to have the bullet extracted from his side at once, but was told that was impossible. His head had been struck in the fall, no doubt against the shaft, and one of his knees was a little injured.

The worst danger of all might come on from fever, Dr. Scarsdale observed to Mr. Mayne, when he was about to leave his patient, and he must be kept tranquil both in mind and body. If it pleased him to have the young lady by his bed-side—why, let her be so.

Later, Mr. Mayne went and fetched her into his son's room, telling her what the doctor had said and of Godfrey's unaccountably restless anxiety that she should be near him; which, he candidly added, he could not see any reason in.

"He has no sister, as you know, my dear; at least not in this country, and he looks upon you as one. I suppose that's it. So stop with him as much as you can, Mary, child; in a day or two the danger of fever may have passed. Mrs. Garner and some of us will be always in attendance as well, you know."

"I will be with him, dear Mr. Mayne," answered Mary, who quite well understood in her heart why Godfrey feared to have her out of his sight. "I will do for him what I can, as though he were my true brother."

And when she sat down by his bed-side and Godfrey greeted her with a faint smile and put out his shaking hand to imprison hers within it, he whispered a few words.

"You will not go away from me, Mary; you will sit up with me?"

And, as Mr. Mayne went out of the room at the moment, and

Mrs. Garner had temporarily left it, so that they were alone, he gently drew her face towards his. From some instinct of gratitude, which suddenly burst out in an uncontrollable impulse, she pushed his fair hair back from his forehead with shaking hand, and pressed her lips to his brow passionately, tenderly. But before he could return the kiss, she had withdrawn her face.

"You are to be still; you are not to move," she whispered: "I was but thanking you. I had got into that gig of my own will, as I told you, yet I am very grateful to you for saving me." Though it is only for the present, she added sadly to herself. "And now we must be quite still. I am your sister, you know, and shall make you obey me."

"I will be still; but you must let me take one brother's kiss in return."

She did not quite like the eager, feverish look in his eyes; so, after a moment's hesitation, and blushing violently, she bent her cheek. Godfrey might have taken but a single kiss; if so, it was a lingering one.

Mrs. Garner came in. Mary sat holding his hand, while he peacefully gazed at her, until he fell asleep. When her own eyes grew heavy and her fragile frame grew limp and weary, the housekeeper, who was a little way off in an arm-chair, came up and softly told her to go and get some rest, while she took her place.

"I can't go. If I took my hand away I'm afraid he would wake up," said Mary.

So Mrs. Garner put a pillow behind her, and within ten minutes the girl had fallen back asleep. When Godfrey woke up early in the night, and the housekeeper gave him some medicine, he found that Mary, asleep with her hand still locked in his, had slipped down on one side in her chair till her hair brushed his pillow. Mrs. Garner drew near to raise her head.

"Don't touch her, don't disturb her," pleaded Godfrey in a whisper. "She's tired out, don't wake her up."

"But she'll feel uncomfortable at being on your pillow, when she does wake up, sir."

"No, no. When I see her opening her eyes, I'll turn the other way." But when the girl did wake up, no scruples of that kind occurred to her to trouble her. The thoughts which instantly filled her mind as she raised herself, stiff and cramped, from her uncomfortable position, were remorse at having proved so bad a nurse and anxiety as to whether he was better. Her hand was still in his, and she knew by his tightened clasp as she moved that he was awake, though his eyes were closed. She bent over him and scanned his face in the dim light; he looked quite peaceful and free from pain, and she drew a breath of relief.

"Give me something to drink, please," he whispered.

Mrs. Garner came forward with it. "And now you must be reasonable, Master Godfrey," she said, "and let the young lady go away and get a bit of rest herself."

"She has had rest," cried Godfrey, clasping the slender fingers tighter; "she has been asleep."

"That's no rest; sleeping in that cramped position," said the housekeeper positively, whose early sway over Godfrey was not entirely lost yet. "You go into the next room to this, Miss Mary, and lie down. The bed's a beautiful soft bed there and always kept aired and made."

"Yes, it may be better for you, Mary," assented Godfrey. "I must not be too selfish."

Mary did as advised. She was in truth worn out with weariness and the agitation that had preceded it. It was a small, pleasant room, called the blue chamber, from the colour of its furniture. She sank into a dreamless sleep, and awoke in the morning refreshed.

She went at once to Godfrey's door, and was admitted by Mrs. Garner. Dr. Scarsdale had been there and was gone again.

"I am much better, nearly well," said Godfrey in answer to her softly-breathed enquiries. "I could get up if I liked this morning."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Mary in alarm. But the housekeeper, hearing this, laughed to herself. She knew there would be no getting-up for her young master yet.

"Of course I don't mean to," said Godfrey. "I must husband my strength for what I have to do."

"The strength must come back to you first, Master Godfrey."

"You be quiet, Garner. I'm not half as weak as you and old Scarsdale think."

But his voice grew faint as he spoke, and Mary left the room after praying him to be still and cautious. He nodded an assent.

"What does Dr. Scarsdale say?" whispered Mary, drawing the housekeeper outside the door. "Is he in danger?"

"He will go on all right, Miss Mary, if he will but keep tranquil," she answered. "You must please come back by-and-bye and sit with him, for it's only when you are here that he seems at ease."

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE SICK ROOM.

Mary Dixon went straight downstairs, from the sick chamber, to the breakfast room. The breakfast bell had rung, and Mr. Mayne did not like to be kept waiting. Her mother was also at the table.

Not for a single minute during the meal did Mr. Mayne cease talking of the event of the previous night. Scarsdale had again asked him, and before Godfrey, he said, how it had happened, and he could not give him any satisfactory answer. The doctor observed that a person had told him it was in some way connected with the

Scotland-yard police, upon which Godfrey had spoken up, and said "What nonsense!" He, Mr. Mayne, felt sure it would turn out to be the work of a footpad. The fellow had attacked the gentleman in the gig—an artist, lodging at Wilding's—and, upon meeting with resistance must have fired upon him. Godfrey, unluckily passing through the lane at the moment, had received the shot.

This was what Mr. Mayne said to the doctor, and now said to his wife and Mary, little thinking how much the latter had had to do with the affair. And it was the version, garbled in various ways, that obtained credence in the neighbourhood. Nobody, except Godfrey, had seen Mary in the gig, so her name was not mixed up with the matter at all, indoors or out.

Poor Mrs. Mayne had sat in evident dread as she listened to her husband, her thin lips drawn into a line, her plump hands trembling. Mary said nothing, and strove to eat.

After breakfast, when Mary was passing through the hall on her way to her room, one of the maids came to her to say that Ben Griffiths was asking leave to speak to her; that he would not go away and said she had promised to see him.

"Ben Griffiths!" exclaimed Mary, whose thoughts were elsewhere. "Oh, yes, yes, I remember," she added in a moment. "Show him into the refectory, Emily, and I will come to him."

Mary went to her room, took some gold from her purse, which had been well-filled for the journey on which she had been starting the night before, and ran down again.

"Good-morning, Ben," said she kindly. "I might have given you at the time what I promised you last night, but I was too bewildered to remember that I had my purse about me."

"It was not that I came for, miss," said the lad, shifting from one foot to another, and avoiding her eyes with all the signs which are generally supposed to indicate extreme shyness, self-consciousness, or the confirmed evil-doer.

"No! Well, you must let me take this opportunity of thanking you for the pluck and energy you showed last night, and the help you gave, and you must let me give you what I promised."

She put the five sovereigns into his hand with a gracious, winning manner that made her seem like some unreal creature of a different, brighter world to rough Ben, who looked at her slim white fingers as if they were something a human touch would break.

"Thank you, miss," said he shyly. And then, after a little more hesitation, a little more shuffling about, he took from his cap and thrust out towards her a folded piece of paper.

It was an old letter. She took it from him, saw that it was in her own handwriting, that the heading was Naples, the date of more than two years ago, and cried out against her will. For it spoke of matters that no stranger's eye ought to see. Controlling herself by an effort, she read it through.

"How did you get this, Ben?" she asked quietly.

"I found it under the hedge between the avenue and the field yonder, miss, with a handkerchief and a pocket-knife. I expect the things must have fallen out of some man's pocket. And after I had picked them up and was running away, I saw this as well."

It was another note which Ben handed to her. One more recently written, and addressed to Miss Dixon. Mary knew it for the writing of Mr. Cattermole.

"But when did you find these?"

"On Friday morning, miss. I had seen Dick Wilding looking and searching about, so I thought I'd look too; and I suppose my eyes were keener than his. If they didn't fall out of Dick's pocket," went on Ben, in a curious tone, "maybe they fell from the painter's—Mr. Cattermole."

"Then why did you not give them back to Mr. Cattermole?"

Ben shuffled his feet about and looked uncomfortable. "Your name being there, miss, I thought I'd better give 'em first to you."

"You read these letters, Ben?"

"Yes, miss," in a strangled voice. Then quickly: "I couldn't help it: but I'll be shot if I'd ever repeat a word that's in them—and I don't rightly understand, either. I'd be true to you always, miss."

The tears rose to Mary's eyes. She knew that the letters had told the shrewd young Northerner too much: but yet—wanting the clue—he——

"You don't think I would, miss, do you?" interrupted Ben eagerly.

"No, Ben, I do not. I know that I may trust you," she said, taking his rough, hard-working hand into hers. But neither Mary nor Ben noticed that Nancy's face, staring in at the open window, made an astonished third at the interview.

"I'd like to say another thing, miss," said Ben, regarding Mary with grateful reverence. "I beg pardon, but is not your room next to the schoolroom, where I put up the bars on Sunday evening? Well, I'd take the liberty, miss, of advising you to get into another room and not sleep there any longer. One on t'other side the house."

"But why do you say this?" questioned Mary, looking at him.

"Well, miss, there's—there's—all sorts o' things said about them two rooms, the schoolroom and yours," spoke Ben, with as much hesitation as if he were taxing his invention. "Ghosts, and that. *Don't you stay in 'em*, miss."

Ben pulled his hair by way of salutation, after his emphatic speech, once more thanked the young lady for her liberal kindness, and went away. Mary remained a few minutes in anxious thought and then went up to her room.

She looked about carefully. Some stranger had evidently been there, for on the dressing-table, pushed partly underneath one of the ornaments, was a scrap of paper bearing these words:

"I am not to be trifled with; therefore see to it."

Any of the maids, reading it in curiosity, could have made nothing out of the mandate, but Mary knew the handwriting and shivered. He must have contrived to place it where it lay: shrewd Ben did well to warn her from the room.

Traversing the gallery, passing her mother's door with soft step, lest she should be heard and called to, Mary hastened to the sick chamber. Godfrey lay on the pillow with wide-open eyes, impatient for her return.

"Oh, Mary, what a long while you have been!" he cried. "You must have been eating ten breakfasts instead of one. What is the matter with you?—you look frightened," he continued anxiously.

"No," she answered, as she sat down by him: though very conscious that she lived in a chronic state of fright now. "I am but a little out of breath; I came along quickly, fearing you might think I was neglecting you."

"It isn't selfishness that makes me keep you with me, Mary," said he earnestly. "I know while you are here you are safe. But if, when you are out of the room, I hear a voice raised or a door shut, I think you have been carried away—and—and—Mary, promise me you will not let them take you away while I am lying ill here and cannot stop it. You could not have the heart to leave me now in this state, could you?"

"No, no," said she, with the tears coming. "You may be sure of that. While you are so ill I will stay with you."

"And when I am well?"

"When you are well you shall—shall—know more than you do now," she answered, fearing for his agitation. "But now you are to keep quiet and not excite yourself, and I will read to you."

"Reading aloud is tiring; and you only want to do it to keep me from talking," returned Godfrey. "How could you run away as you did, without a word of notice or of farewell to me?"

"I had left a note for you, Godfrey."

His eyes lighted. "Where is the note? Let me have it."

"The note is torn up. As I came back, it was useless, you know."

"Won't you tell me what the mystery is—and why you must go?"

"I cannot tell you; especially now that you are ill: it would excite and injure you. The time may come when I shall tell you all. Mamma urged me to go."

"Were you going to escape out of England, with that man?" he asked, making the tones of his faint voice even lower. Mrs. Garner was at the far end of the room, busy with some tea cups.

"No, no, no," returned Mary with emotion; "never that. I was but going to London—to friends who live there."

"He spoke to me about carrying you off to America."

She passed her hand across her brow, as though it were aching, and bit her trembling lips.

"There is great trouble," she whispered, bending over him, "and

I am not able to explain to you what it involves. A detective officer is powerful, you know,"—with a sad smile—"and we may not lightly resist him, or his decrees either."

"Why did he say it was to America he meant to take you?"

"A detective has to invent fables as well as other people," she answered, after a pause. "But, Godfrey, you must please to drop this subject: it is too exciting; if you persist in pursuing it, I must leave you alone. And I cannot tell you more about it at all."

Godfrey gave a sort of groan. "You are tired, I know, Mary; sit you down in that easy chair, and lean back."

She obeyed him in silence. Mrs. Garner came up to look at him, and then went back again.

"I want to ask you a question, Mary," he began, in a low voice, pulling his moustache nervously. "Give me your hand first." She did so at once, but rather timidly. "You know that evening last week, Wednesday evening, I think it was, when we had that long talk in the drawing-room, before Nancy came to the Abbey with your bracelet?"

"No; I—I don't particularly remember it."

"Yes, you do. We were talking about—love, and about getting married, and we didn't agree at all. Do you still think a person ought to take a husband or a wife just as they would take a cup of coffee?"

"I never said that."

"No; but you thought a man ought to say to himself: 'Here is a nice lady-like girl; I will fall in love with her and marry her,' and you were very severe on the poor fellows who get excited about it. Do you *still* think the same?"

"Yes, yes; I think just what I thought then," replied Mary, restlessly trying to get away.

"Stay by me one moment," pleaded he, his eyes shining with the love light, his voice very low and gentle. "I will only keep you a few minutes, Mary, and I won't say anything to hurt you. Suppose a girl were in some great danger, which she could only escape from by going away; and suppose a man whom she didn't care particularly about, whom at one time she had disliked, in fact"—involuntarily her fingers tightened their clasp of his—"but who knew her tastes, and—and wasn't very old or very ugly, suppose he were ready to give his life, his health, his comfort, his happiness—anything—to save her. Well, and supposing he was ready to go anywhere, to do anything, to watch and to work all day and all night for her protection and comfort, to take care that she shouldn't ever have time to think of hateful, unpleasant things she wanted to forget, and supposing she knew he wasn't the kind of fellow to change—don't you think, in time, she'd get to like him?"

"No, no," said Mary, trying to draw her trembling hand away, while the tears ran down her cheeks, "I'm sure she couldn't. She would only think him very silly."

"Yet you have seemed to like me better lately, Mary," sighed Godfrey, letting her fingers go reluctantly. "Don't cry, my darling," said he, stretching out his arm to touch her with an impulse of passionate tenderness: she was not cold to him, or hard to him, she was only pitifully unhappy. "You are afraid you have hurt me, and you are sorry. I know you think kindly of me, you trust me; you do care whether I live or die."

She turned her soft brown eyes, troubled now, upon him, and her cheek touched the loving hand he had laid upon her shoulder.

"Yes, I do care," she whispered; "but I—I am afraid of you."

With a faint cry of rapture, Godfrey drew her hand to his breast. But Mary checked him.

"Do not mistake me," she said, striving to be calm. "You know what our agreement was—that we would be as brother and sister. It is impossible that we can be anything more to each other than that. Do you think I should sit by you here, and talk to you as I do, but for knowing that, positively, and—and feeling it? Dear Godfrey, it may be a little—trial—to you, but trials of one kind or other come to us all. You must not speak of this again."

Just for the present there was no opportunity for Godfrey to rebel. Dr. Scarsdale was coming up the stairs to pay his second visit that morning. Another accompanied him, a renowned man in surgery.

Some days passed on. The affair had caused, naturally, great commotion throughout the neighbourhood. Godfrey was a favourite, and people were loud in expressing their indignation. The local police authorities sent out men to hunt up footpads. Mr. Mayne, more fussy than usual, was kept by his wife from stirring in it actively; to do so, she pointed out to him, would only increase Godfrey's risk of fever; he at first talked of sending, like his friend, Hunt, for help from Scotland Yard. Mr. Cattermole had reinstated himself in the farmer's good will by a very plausible story. He upheld the popular tale of the footpad's attack upon him, and said that his revolver, fired in self-defence, unfortunately struck young Mr. Mayne, instead of the right man. He had chased the fellow, he added, through the gap in the hedge, and over fields, and down lanes, but had lost him at last in the growing darkness. Mr. Cattermole kept himself very quiet, in doors, in those days, ostensibly occupying his time in painting, and in laughing at little Susan's having said he had come in and rushed past her in the passage, frightening the child much in assuring her it must have been the ghost of the dead monk. At dusk he would go out for a stroll; and twice over, Nancy Wilding, whose eyes and mind were all curiosity just then, saw him meet Mrs. Mayne, and stop to speak to her.

Amidst other friends who came driving to the Abbey with their condolences, were Sir William and Lady Hunt. Mrs. Mayne did not come down to receive them, but Miss Dixon did. Her mother was sadly fatigued, she pleaded, with her ministrations to Mr. Godfrey (they had not been many), but would see Lady Hunt in her dressing-room. Accordingly Lady Hunt went up to it, and found Mrs. Mayne lying on the sofa, looking very poorly indeed, and with a worried look in her eyes.

Lady Hunt was leaving for London on the morrow; she had had quite enough of Goule Park at present, she told Mrs. Mayne. Her husband would take her to London, stay there a day or two, and then return. She was not taken in to see Godfrey, neither was Sir William, as it was necessary to keep him absolutely quiet, so she stayed in the dressing-room talking with Mrs. Mayne and Mary.

"Is your detective officer down here yet?—the one you said you had sent to Scotland Yard for?" asked Mr. Mayne, when alone with his old friend.

Sir William dropped his voice and put on a mysterious air. "He *is* down here, Mayne; but keeping himself incog.: I may tell you so much in confidence. Nobody knows that he is here, not even my wife. She has her prejudices, you know. I have held one or two private conferences with him."

"But why should he be here incog.?" asked Mr. Mayne.

"He has his reasons you may be sure: he is the most astute detective in the force. The track that he is following up—a very difficult track indeed he tells me—might be lost if it were known who he is. We have been looking for these people from two to three years in vain," added Sir William, "and though we are now certainly upon their trail, precaution is needful."

"I can fully believe that," assented Mr. Mayne.

"She looks really ill, William, and *so* worried," observed Lady Hunt to her husband of Mrs. Mayne when they had driven away. "I don't wonder at her not being equal to visiting just now."

Thus a week wore away. Under the treatment of the skilful surgeons and the attentive care of Mrs. Garner, and of Hawkins, who helped in the nursing, Godfrey was recovering quickly. The only anxiety remaining was a tendency to lightheadedness, which kept manifesting itself occasionally. Mary often sat by him, but she would not allow a relapse to any conversation that might not be spoken openly. She grew more sad, more troubled, day by day. Even her mother she seemed to shun now; whenever an interview took place between them, Mary came from it with red eyes.

One afternoon when it was growing late, and Mary chanced to be alone with Godfrey, who was supposed to be asleep, he suddenly looked up and put a question to her.

"Do you still think of going away?"

"Yes; I must go. It will be better—safer."

"Better to go with that man than to stay here with me!" he exclaimed. "Why if I were a raving lunatic, I tell you, Mary, you would be safer with me than with him. He is a worse man than you think; I am sure of it. Better give yourself up at a police-station, charging yourself with all the crimes that were ever committed, than accompany him. I know him, and I am sure of it; I see what he is. Promise me that you will not trust him."

"I trust no one in the world so well as you," said she gravely. And the words without satisfying set him trembling with sudden pleasure, of which she took advantage to quiet him by threats of leaving the room if he talked and excited himself any more.

"No, no, I won't excite myself. Look here—I have been thinking, Mary. You say that you will be safer away from the Abbey, that you have to leave it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have planned it all out. I am getting rapidly better, shall soon be well, as you know; well enough to travel, at any rate. I will take you away to London, to Mrs. Penteith; she will protect you from all harm for my sake, I know that. You will be as sure and safe in her house as if you were in some uninhabited land, and you can be sheltered there until these difficulties, whatever they may be, shall have blown over."

"Your aunt lives in Liverpool."

"Just now she is in London; she went up to stay with her late husband's sister, Lady Anne Northstone, in Eaton Place. Lady Anne, who is quite an old lady, is gone to Mentone for her cough, and my aunt thinks of remaining in her house for the winter."

"Eaton Place, did you say?"

"Yes," replied Godfrey, and mentioned the number, which Mary made a mental note of. "Don't you think that will be a very good plan?" he added, looking at her with eyes anxious for her answer.

"Oh, very good," replied Mary with ready cheerfulness, inwardly wishing it could be carried out, but knowing, alas, that it could not be. "How good of you to think of it, Godfrey!"

His mind was set at rest, and he fell asleep. Mary sat with her gaze fixed upon his face curiously, kindly, until a smile curved the corners of her mouth and the tears welled up to her eyes.

I could have loved him, I could have loved him, she thought to herself, as her face stole nearer to his in the dim light of the shaded room until, frightened by a longer-drawn breath from the sleeper, she drew back hastily and ashamed, got up, crept to one of the windows, and looked out round the blind on to the garden and the dark plantation beyond, wrapt in the growing mist of an autumn afternoon. But she could not keep her eyes long away from that sleeping face on the pillow. She wondered whether all men looked so much better and handsomer when they were asleep than when they were awake; for to her this fair-faced, fair-haired young Englishman, lying there so tranquilly, seemed to be transfigured to a creature of ideal nobleness and beauty whom she looked at with reverence and remorse. His devoted love for her, which she might never return, bewildered, touched, awed her. Nay, a still small voice was whispering to her that she loved him in return. And yet, nothing could come of it, nothing but misery; she must hide herself from him as from the rest of the world.

She slid on to her knees beside his bed and prayed—whether for him or to him she was not quite sure. And while she still knelt, her mother came softly in. Mrs. Mayne had been very little in the sick-room, and now she gave only one look at Godfrey as she laid her hand on her daughter's shoulder and made her rise. She was looking anxious, as usual, but angry too.

"Come to my room, Mary; I want to speak to you."

"Not now, mamma. I promised to stay here till he woke up."

"But I insist. It is important."

"I will come as soon as he wakes."

Then her mother began to cry, but her tears did not move the girl to-day. "You are in love with him!" sobbed Mrs. Mayne below her breath.

"Hush! hush!" said the girl, flushing as she glanced at him, "I am not indeed: and if it were so, where would be the use of it?" she added passionately. "Don't be afraid, mamma: I shall do for you what I have promised to do. Mrs. Garner will be here soon with his tea, and then I will come to you."

When she reached her mother's room, the latter handed her a note. Mary read it quietly. "You have seen him, mamma, to-day?"

"For two minutes only; I met him in the plantation, and he asked me to give you that. He is still very miserable about the accident."

"Accident?" said the girl drily.

"Yes, yes, it *was* an accident. Of course he did not intend harm. His elbow slipped."

Mary had much ado to keep back the retort that rose to her lips. "He says he wants to see me for a few minutes," she observed, glancing again at the note. "He asks me to meet him in the Avenue after dinner."

"And you will go, will you not?"

"Yes, I will go," repeated Mary slowly. "It will be safe, I suppose. He cannot well attempt to run away with me by force; or to shoot me——"

"How dare you say such things, Mary?—when you know that his protection is, of all, the best for you!" interrupted Mrs. Mayne.

Dinner over, Mary put on a shawl and garden-hat, slipped out of doors by way of the refectory, went round through the garden to the front of the house, and walked quickly down the drive that led to the Avenue. It was growing dark, and lights were gleaming from the Abbey windows. When she reached the Avenue she peered along it and could see no one. Presently she crossed the road into the wood which covered the slope on the one side, and crept along, unde cover of the trees and bushes, towards the high-road.

She had not gone far before she saw in the darkness under the trees of the avenue, a horse and vehicle of some kind, standing on the other side of the road. For a moment her heart stood still; then, creeping cautiously on, she recognised Mr. Wilding's gig in which she had sat some evenings before, and she saw that the person in it was Dick. She was on the point of hailing him as a friend, when a man who was standing on the other side of the horse, watching the meadow over the hedge, turned and came up to him.

"And you'll take her away safe from the devil, won't you?" said the lad, in a loud hissing whisper that Mary heard distinctly.

"Yes, yes, I'll take care of her and save her from him," answered Mr. Cattermole's voice. "You had better get down, Dick, and go along the avenue and see if the young lady's coming that way. Don't let them see you from the house, or the devil might send out to have us caught, and we should not be able to save her."

"All right," said Dick; and, jumping down, he ran quickly and lightly along the road in the direction in which she had come.

This manœuvre was to get rid of Dick, in the expectation of her coming across the meadow by the foot-path. Mary knew it was the way her mother had told her to come, and she did not like it. She turned and crept back, going a little further down into the wood, lest the sound or sight of the moving bushes should attract the officer's attention. Her return took some time; and when at last she got opposite to the Abbey drive, Dick, lurking about in the road above, heard her as she crept up, darted in among the trees, dragged her out with his indomitable strength, and with pleasure and pride in his capture, began to pull her energetically along towards the gig.

"Let me go, Dick, let me go," she whispered imploringly, not daring to raise her voice, lest Mr. Cattermole should hear.

"It's all right, it's all right; he's there, and we're going to save you—save you from the devil," said Dick triumphantly, still dragging her along.

She fell down on her knees and faltered out, "Dick, Dick, I don't want to go. I want to go back to the—to the devil," with wild earnestness so unmistakable that the half-witted lad paused and looked down at her in a bewildered manner. "There's a good, good Dick?" said she, as she sprang away towards the Abbey.

But Mr. Cattermole had left the gig, and was walking along the avenue to reconnoitre. He caught sight of her at that moment, flying from him, and he set off in pursuit at the top of his speed. Fortunately for her, his feet were still somewhat crippled, but he followed her, inciting the puzzled Dick to do the same, to within a dozen yards of the Abbey-door, at which she rang the bell violently, trembling lest even there she should be caught and torn away. But, that, even the detective officer did not dare attempt, and she almost threw herself into the arms of Hawkins as he opened the door. Mr. Mayne came out of the dining-room.

"Why, where have you been?" he cried in amazement. "How can you dare go out by yourself when the parish is full of cut-throats and foot-pads? It is very imprudent, Mary. And there's Godfrey been asking for you a dozen times, and working himself into a fever when they could not find you and told him you must have gone out for a 'turn in the fresh air!'"

Mary went straight to Godfrey's room to reassure him, throwing off her hat and cloak in the corridor. He was sitting up in bed, his arms held out, his cheeks aflame, and his eyes wild.

"You are in pain," spoke Mary, as gently as she could for her quick breath. "You should not be so anxious, Godfrey."

But Godfrey, with a faint cry of joy, had let his head fall upon her shoulder. Mr. Mayne stared a little. Garner seemed to regard it as nothing particular.

"Sick folk will have their fancies, you know, sir," she said to her master. And, with that, Godfrey let his head fall back to its proper resting place, the pillow.

Mrs. Mayne had offered to sit up with Godfrey that night, so that Garner might take some needful rest. Mary rather opposed this; she thought her mother was not in a condition of health to risk the loss of a night's sleep with impunity; but Mrs. Mayne was, as usual, determined. So Mary resolved to sit up herself in the next room, so as to be at hand to call assistance in case Mrs. Mayne felt tired or faint. Godfrey was ill at ease this night; as might be known by his sighs and restless movements.

About ten o'clock the house settled down for the night. Mrs. Mayne took up her watch in the sick chamber; Mary went into the blue one adjoining it. While ostensibly keeping to her own room, and using it in the day-time for dressing purposes, she had continued to sleep in the blue chamber since the first night when Garner sent her to it. No one knew of this except Garner and the housemaids; Mary had not mentioned it to her mother.

She took off her dress, nothing else, and put on a warm dressing-gown, lying down then upon the bed, and drawing the counterpane over her. Nothing could have been further from her intention than to go to sleep; she lay down because she was so exhausted and weary, but she meant to keep awake and listen. The result was a very common one: in ten minutes she was asleep.

Something awoke her, in how short or long a time afterwards she did not know, and she lay listening. There was no sound to be heard, and she supposed she had awoke simply from her own anxiety of mind. Slipping off the bed, she went into the corridor and listened at Godfrey's door. Hearing her mother stirring about, she knocked very gently.

"Who is there?" whispered Mrs. Mayne through the key-hole.

"It is I, mamma."

"You!" exclaimed Mrs. Mayne, as she drew the door open and came out. "What brings you here, Mary?—what do you want?"

"I only just came out of my room to see if you needed anything. How is Godfrey?"

"Godfrey is all right; he is in a sound sleep. Where are you sleeping?" continued Mrs. Mayne, struck by a sudden idea.

"In the blue-room: the one next to this."

"Go back to it at once, Mary: you must need rest."

To enforce obedience, she took her daughter's hand and led her into the chamber. Failing to persuade her to undress, Mrs. Mayne saw her lie down, and, in going out, she made an attempt to take out the key to lock the door on the outside. But Mary was too quick for her; in an instant she was off the bed and had seized the key. Her mother laughed nervously.

"I wanted to force you to get some rest, instead of wandering about the gallery disturbing Godfrey," said she.

"Very well, mamma, I won't disturb him again," said Mary.

But the girl's senses were now all alert. Instead of lying down again, she sat back in a chair, and unlatched her door, the better to listen. Some instinct seemed to whisper her that Godfrey was worse; might want better attention than her mother was able to give; but she could not at all account for the feeling.

Presently, in the still silence of the night, Mary fancied she heard a sound in the gallery, as of cautious steps stealing along it. Then she heard a single, faint knock at Godfrey's door. The door was noiselessly opened to admit somebody, and then closed again.

Away went Mary, softly knocking in her turn. Her mother came out. "Is Godfrey worse?" asked the girl. "Is it Mrs. Garner who is gone in to him? Did you call her?"

Before Mrs. Mayne could answer, she was pushed further out, the door was closed by someone inside, and the key turned. The thought that crossed Mary was, that her mother had committed some frightful mistake in the nursing, and that Garner had taken the liberty of locking her mistress out.

"Who else should it be but Garner?" cried her mother fretfully. "You are too ridiculous, Mary. Come back to your room."

She stepped briskly towards it, over the carpeted corridor. Before following her, Mary bent her lips to the door, with a whisper.

"Is he worse, Garner? Is anything wrong?"

"No, he is not worse," answered a soft, masculine voice, which Mary knew too well, as the door of the room was opened, and Mr. Detective Cattermole came forth from it.

"I must speak with you," he whispered with stern authority, laying his hand upon her shoulder.

Mary shivered. "Speak?" she said. "What is it?"

"Not here. We might be overheard. Come downstairs with me."

Yielding to the mysterious power which he possessed over her, she let him lead her to the staircase; but in the same moment she fancied she heard a faint cry in Godfrey's voice: "Help, help!"

"Go to him," called out Mary to her mother. "Can you not speak here?" she added to the detective as they neared the refectory.

"No. It is safer out of doors." He went on into the garden, halting in a sheltered spot under some trees. Mary had caught up a shawl hanging in the passage, and put it over her head.

"What is the meaning of this prolonged delay?" he questioned. "You know the peril that threatens. We ought to have been off days ago."

"I told you I would not go until Godfrey Mayne was out of danger."

"Or dies, I suppose?" interrupted Mr. Cattermole with callous mockery.

"And I will not," she went on. "It was in our cause—say mine if you like—his life was imperilled; the least I can do is to stay by him until he is safe."

"I am told he *is* safe."

"I believe he is. Or nearly so."

"And when will you be ready?"

Mary hesitated. "I cannot trust you," she said. "You would have taken me away by force to-night, after getting me out by stratagem. I saw the gig waiting."

"And for whose benefit?" he retorted. "Do you no longer want to save your mother? Not for a single day is there safety. Each day as it rises, I say to myself, "By night the worst may have happened. You must fix, now, the time and hour of escape, and keep it."

Mary sighed. "I *will* escape; I will keep my word. To-morrow you shall have the time from me."

"No," said he, "I will not trust you till to-morrow. You must fix it now."

She might have wrung her hands in distress but for fearing to anger him to passion. That she must keep her word, she knew.

"I will say to-morrow afternoon. In time to catch the five o'clock train."

"The evening will be better, on account of its being dusk."

"But I should not reach London in reasonable time. If we cannot get the five o'clock train, I will not go until the next day. Now let me go back please."

"You will keep your word?"

"I will," she answered. "Good night."

He released his hold of her, and she ran back like the wind. Mrs. Garner was coming forth from Godfrey's chamber with a horror-stricken face.

"What is amiss?" gasped Mary.

"The bandages have been loosened from the wound: torn off, as it looks like," answered the dismayed housekeeper. "If we can't help him he will bleed to death."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE POLICE.

Mrs. Garner flew along the gallery, calling out for Hawkins, for William, for anybody to run to one of the grooms, and send him galloping for Dr. Scarsdale. Godfrey's room was all in darkness. Mary rushed to his bedside: he was insensible, and his face was wet and cold. She shrieked out as she bent over him. The discovery had filled her with unutterable horror.

Mrs. Mayne came first to the room, stealing in with trembling steps, and asking in a timid tone what was the matter.

"You have let him kill him," answered Mary. "He has torn off the bandages."

"Oh, Mary, no; how can you imagine anything so dreadful?" wailed the poor lady, in piteous terror. "Godfrey must have got the bandages loose in his restlessness."

"Did you not hear me call to you to go to Godfrey?"

"But I only thought you wanted me to make a third at your interview in the corridor, and I knew it was as well I should not," she explained. "I have been shut up in your room, waiting for you."

Old Hawkins, in picturesque undress, came running with a light. Other servants followed with more lights. Mr. Mayne appeared last, quite beside himself with it all. For once he was roused out of his placidity, and spoke with a voice of thunder.

"The bandages loosened!" he exclaimed. "Who has done this?"

Mary, her face white and rigid, stepped forward to speak; but Mrs. Mayne put her aside, confronting her husband with some uncertain words.

"Poor Godfrey must have done it himself," she said; "he is very restless. I thought he was asleep, and went into Mary's room to get a book to read, and so while away the time here. Perhaps—perhaps"—her white lips and her hands were shaking—"he missed me from the room, and strove to get up, and so—and so—"

"But was it you that called to me, ma'am?" Garner asked.

"No, I did not call; I did not know anything was amiss till a minute ago," answered Mrs. Mayne.

Garner had lain down in a chamber near, leaving its door open to the corridor. Her account was that she had been aroused out of her sleep by the cry of an anxious voice, saying, as she thought, "Go to him!" She listened for a minute or two, but heard no more, and supposed it might have been only a dream. Then she grew uneasy, and thought it might be as well to see if all was right in the sick chamber. She found its door locked on the outside, which surprised her; turning the key, she went in and found the chamber all in darkness. Mr. Godfrey did not answer her when she spoke; his face was still and cold; and then she found out what the matter was—the bandages had been burst open.

This appeared to be the only account that any of them could give; and as it was impossible to suppose that the damage was caused wilfully, or indeed that anybody could have been there to do it, the theory of Godfrey's own restlessness was adopted as an established fact. Mary's presence before the alarm was not suspected. All that could be done for him before Dr. Scarsdale's arrival was done. The bandages were replaced, and means taken to revive the patient. Then the room was cleared, leaving only Mrs. Garner and Mary in it.

"Stay by him for a little while if you don't mind, my dear," said Mr. Mayne to his step-daughter. "There's a look of dreadful anxiety in his eyes as they follow you about. I can't make it out, I'm sure, or what it is he wants."

"Am I dying?" Godfrey presently asked her, in faint tones, as she bent over him.

"No, no, I trust not. How did it happen," she whispered.

He took time to consider. "I was asleep: your mother was sitting in the chair yonder. Then I awoke and heard some whispering in the room, just inside the door. I raised my head to look, and saw *him* there—that man, Mary!"

"Yes," she faintly answered.

"I cried out; I asked what he wanted. Then I heard a knock at the door, and your mother opened it, and I saw him push her out and turn the key upon her. He came to the bedside, and we had a sort of struggle; I forgot how weak I still was, and would have struck him. In the scuffle the bandages were torn; I know he did it, but I don't know that he meant to harm me; he was in a foaming passion. He went out of the room then, and I heard him put the key in the lock outside and lock me in; I cried out for help; at least, I think so; but I don't remember clearly, and after that I know no more. Oh, my darling, my darling," he wailed out in pain, "has the crisis come? What is to become of you? How can you escape that dangerous man?"

Mary let her cool cheek rest for a moment on his anxious face, now a scarlet hectic. "I can only trust in God," she said. "He has taken care of me hitherto; He may take care of me to the end."

Godfrey kissed her lips. "Be mine," he whispered. "We could be married, here, at the bed-side; it only needs a special licence. Mary, Mary, be my wife! I should then have a right to protect you."

She burst into sobs. Hot tears rained from her eyes. "It cannot be: there is an insuperable obstacle. Oh, Godfrey, believe me; what I have always said is true. You and I can never be anything more to each other than brother and sister."

The damage done to Godfrey by the loosening of the bandages was not so great as feared: though it would undoubtedly have killed him, Dr. Scarsdale said, had not the prompt discovery taken place.

"There's a Providence ruling over all things," said the surgeon, in reverent sententiousness. "That call which Mrs. Garner heard might have been only fancy, as she says; but it brought to him the needed help."

The household agreed with this—partially. "I say it must have been a ghost crying out," remarked Lydia, and she carried the belief of the servants with her. "The Abbey lately has been full of nothing but ghosts and mysteries."

The first thing Mary did the following morning was to write a short note to Mr. Cattermole, which she sent to the farm under cover to Nancy. In it she told him that she must retract her promise of the previous night, and further delay for a few days the step which he required her to take. Dangerous sickness again reigned at the Abbey: none could know better than Mr. Cattermole what had renewed it: the fault of the delay therefore lay with him, and not with herself.

"And now I must lay my own plans," reflected Mary, after despatching the note. "I must contrive to get away alone, for I dare not trust myself with him. He has nearly murdered Godfrey twice over in his passion; he might murder me if he fell into one, should I cross him. Mamma will be desperately angry with me, and perhaps ——"

Here Mary came to a sudden pause. A thought had struck her.

"Why need I tell mamma at all? Dear mamma! she will say it is treachery; but I must think a little of myself, and she has been hard upon me lately. Naturally she thinks if anybody has to be sacrificed it is I. But I cannot and will not do quite all she wishes; I would rather die. No, I must keep it from mamma; what I do, I must do alone."

Two or three days went on. Godfrey grew so much better as to be pronounced out of danger, and was allowed to sit up a little. Mary saw that the time for action had come: she must put in practice what she had resolved upon. Entirely without aid she could not get away, and she had decided to trust Ben Griffiths, believing he would be true and silent. The first person she had thought of was Nancy Wilding, so keen and capable: but Nancy lived too near Mr. Cattermole, and a chance word might be dropped.

While she was pondering how to get speech of Ben without exciting suspicion, it seemed that luck was favouring her, for Ben came up to the Abbey with a message from his father about the horses. After delivering it to Hawkins, Ben was going away whistling, when Mary called to him from one of the refectory windows.

"Would you come in here, Ben, for a minute," she said.

He came in, doffing his old cap. "Yes, miss," said he.

"Ben, I—I want you to do something for me; I want you to help me. Will you?"

"That I will, miss. You've only got to say what's to do."

"But I want to *trust* you, Ben. It is a secret, and must not be talked of. Will you keep it strictly for me?"

"Never nobody kept nothing stricter in this world than I'll keep it," said Ben, with honest eagerness. "I'd go through fire and water for you, miss, if need be, and never tell."

Mary smiled, and saw that she might implicitly trust him. She proceeded to tell him that she had a reason for wishing to leave the Abbey for a short while, but that it was not expedient anybody should know of her going until she was safely gone: in short, that she wanted to get away in secret. And she asked Ben whether he could borrow some vehicle in which he could drive her to Cheston Station to take the train. Neither of them noticed Nancy Wilding peering in at one of the windows after Ben. She had seen him go in, and wondered what it was he wanted there.

Ben rubbed his hair in some perplexity, as he thought over the conveyances kept by his neighbours. "Lots of 'em have got gigs," said he; "but a open gig mightn't do, perhaps, miss? You'd not care to be seen, I take it, going along the road."

"I would rather not be, Ben. We might meet someone who knew me."

"Could you go after dark, miss?"

"No. I want to catch the train that passes Cheston at five o'clock."

"I know of a covered, light spring cart, miss, if I could only get it," resumed Ben. "It belongs to Bowden, the miller; but old Bowden's a regular screw in the way of lending. Anyway, I'll try. I'll get it somehow, if I have to steal it temporary. It'll rattle us to the station, miss, in no time. Young Jim Bowden and me are chums, and Jim won't be backward to help me."

"Then, Ben, I shall depend upon you," she said. "You can bring the cart at four o'clock, to the back of the house by the farm wall, and I will come out quietly to you."

"This afternoon, did you mean?" cried Ben, foreseeing difficulties.

"No, no; to-morrow. This afternoon would not suit me."

"All right, miss. You'll find me and the cart there, safe enough."

Later in the morning, Mrs. Mayne called Mary to her dressing-room to do a bit of work, and there took her to task. Escape she must, she told her, and nobody knew that better than Mary herself; why then this delay? Mary said very little, and when she came away she left her mother in a passion of tears.

In the afternoon, Mary, shut up in her chamber, wrote a hasty letter. She was affixing the postage stamp to it when Mr. Mayne's voice was heard in the passage calling to her.

"What are you about, Mary? Here's Godfrey been asking for you this half-hour. Where are you?"

"I will go to him, dear Mr. Mayne," she answered, running out; "I will go to him now. Let me just put this in the bag first."

She went swiftly downstairs to the hall table, put the letter in the post-bag, and then went up again to Godfrey's room.

But it chanced that Mrs. Mayne, not intentionally, had overheard this. When the coast was clear, she also went softly down to the post-bag and looked at the address of Mary's letter.

"Mrs. Ross,
Great Cumberland Street,
Hyde Park, London."

"*Oh!*" cried Mrs. Mayne, with a long breath. And she drew together her thin lips, and nodded her head several times in angry perplexity as she stole away, after replacing the note in the bag.

Godfrey, fully dressed for the first time, was sitting in the arm-chair in his bedroom; he looked up eagerly as Mary came in. Garner, her duties partly relaxed, had gone below.

"Why do you stay away from me?" he said, holding out his hand. "You know I only live in your presence."

"I stay away because you will talk nonsense," replied Mary, putting on a gay air. "I allowed you to do it while you were so very ill; but all that is over, and must be forgotten."

Godfrey flushed scarlet. "Don't you care for me, Mary?"

"Not in that way: neither do you, I am sure, for me. Sick persons have fancies, as Mrs. Garner says, and while they are sick it does not do to contradict them. Why, Godfrey, what can you be thinking of?—there's Elspeth, you know, and Ernest."

"I don't believe you care for Ernest."

"Oh, yes I do. Do be reasonable."

He lay back his head on the soft-cushioned rail of the chair, his face a picture of mortification. Mary sat near, cutting the leaves of a new book.

"Yes, of course, there's Elspeth," he said at length, "and—and Ernest; and I've been a fool. But I have a brother's right to protect you, Mary, and I shall exercise it."

"When it is needed," she said, laughing. "Shall I read to you, Godfrey?"

"If you like. I don't mind."

She read to him in her soft low voice. It soothed him to sleep. Mrs. Garner came in and he opened his eyes.

"There," said Mary to him, "I have put the mark in the place until to-morrow. "It is an amusing book."

"I hope to-morrow I shall get downstairs," said Godfrey.

Mary laughed at the remark, and Mrs. Garner remonstrated. "Don't you think about that yet, Master Godfrey. It would just lay you up again, sir; worse perhaps than before."

In the morning, Mary made the slight preparation needful for her departure. She could only venture to take with her a small travelling bag, one that might be carried in her own hand. In the afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Mayne went for a drive in the brougham; and now Mary's time was approaching.

Putting on the things, including a close bonnet and veil, which she meant to travel in, and hiding the bag under her cloak, Mary stole downstairs. She had reached the hall and was about to turn to make her way out by the refectory, when she saw the lady's maid, Lydia, standing in the passage; so Mary passed on to the drawing-room. And then she found that she was somewhat early: that drawing-room clock kept perfect time.

She had been keeping up a brave face lately for the world, but her misery nearly over-mastered her now. She let the bag fall, flung herself on the ground, and buried her face in the little low chair on which she had sat so often while Godfrey hung over her and teased her. How could she leave him! What would he do when he found her gone? He had risked his life for her, had poured out upon her a love so unmeasured, so fervent, that it had woke hers in spite of herself; and in obedience to cruel promises, which had been wrenched from her in a time of loneliness and weakness by a woman whose motherly instincts towards her seemed lately to have failed, she must leave him now, perhaps to die. She dared not go back to him to take one farewell look; she could no longer trust herself. She got up quickly from her knees in a fever of passionate longing that must find some outlet; she threw aside her mantle, opened the piano, and with all the burning tenderness and the wild despair at her heart vibrating in her voice, she sang as she had never sung before, as the woman and the artist could never sing again, Tosti's "Good-bye."

The melody, in its stirring mournfulness, rang through the house; though she never supposed it could be heard in Godfrey's room; faint echoes reached the servants' hall, and made the cook set wide the door and say with mild approval that she liked that and it made her feel quite all-overish-like. Unfortunately it reached the ears of Godfrey, then all alert, listening for Mary's entrance to continue the book; and it roused him like a trumpet-call. While the wailing "Good-bye for ever" was on her lips, there was a halting footstep in the passage, the door opened, and Godfrey came limping in. His knee was weak yet.

"No, no; you shall not go. I see what you were about to do, Mary. You cannot, shall not leave me."

Instinctively his arms closed round her, and he bent his fair, flushed face towards hers—upon her. But Mary put him away from her with a long, wailing cry.

"You don't know what you are saying," said she, piteously. "I must go, I must leave you. You are putting me in a danger more awful than you know of by wishing me to stay. If you do care for me, Godfrey, you will let me go."

"You are in no danger," he cried, passionately. "If you had broken every law of God and man, I would take you away and find some spot where my hands could work for you, where my eyes could watch over you, and where, in my love, you should forget every trouble. Ernest?—Elspeth?—what are either of them compared with what we are to one another? But I know you have done no wrong, Mary; my sight is clear enough now, and I am certain that you are bearing a burden which is not yours. You are doing this for your mother."

Mary started. "She did not tell you that."

"No, my love told me. Your life shall not be ruined for her. She is selfish, heartless, wicked to ask it. Wicked——"

"No, no, no; you do not understand. But there's no time to lose. Listen, Godfrey; I am not going with that man, as perhaps you think. I *must* go, there's no help for it; but I'm going alone. I am going to friends who will protect me, and you would do me more harm than you can possibly imagine were you to try to hinder it."

As she ceased speaking, a figure darkened one of the windows, which was open, and the head of Ben Griffiths appeared at the aperture. The young man, daring and bold in general, looked scared to death.

"Mr. Godfrey"—in a husky, alarming whisper—"the police are coming. They are in the avenue, half-a-dozen of them, making for the Abbey. I beg pardon, sir, but I thought I'd better run on and warn somebody."

"The police!" shrieked Mary. "Coming here!"

She caught up her cloak and bag, threw the latter to Ben from the window, and escaped out of the room. Godfrey, perplexed, astounded, and too weak yet to be of much use in any way, was hardly sure that he had heard correctly.

"What did you say, Ben?—that the police were coming here?"

He spoke to empty air. Ben Griffiths had left the window, and Godfrey could see no trace of him. In the same moment he caught sight of the glazed hats of the policemen, and then of the men themselves, advancing upon the Abbey with steady measured tread.

(To be continued.)

* * *

A FEW WORDS ABOUT BLINDNESS.

IT is always much better to read a description of a country, written by some one who has lived in it, than to read such a description written by one who only knows the country of which he speaks through the careful picking up and arranging of words dropped by travellers, or through the diligent study of books which treat minutely of the land in question.

Many great authors have striven to portray, in their word pictures, blind men and women; many great thinkers have put on paper weighty sayings about blindness in the abstract; but very rare have been the blind people who themselves have said anything in print on the subject. This is why the writer, who has had, since childhood, a long personal experience of blindness, ventures to ask an audience for the following remarks, thinking that they may lighten the hearts of some who are watching, in heavy sadness, the gradual darkening of eyes that they love, and may make the way which they have to tread seem less gloomy to those on whom the deprivation of sight comes late on in life, and may take from kindly souls some of the burden of pity which oppresses them when a blind neighbour passes by.

In most minds there seems to exist a notion that the blind man goes about the world shut up in a sort of terrible iron cage, like the Tartar king of old renown. He is still in the midst of God's blessed light and air; he is still in the midst of the haunts of men, where laughter is laughed, and tears are shed, and loving looks and words are exchanged; and yet from all these things he is irrevocably shut out as long as he remains upon earth.

Now no idea is more mistaken than this. Blind men or women have to the full as much enjoyment, in their own peculiar way, of the glories and beauties of fair external nature, and of the sweetnesses of social intercourse, as those who can see. When they feel the warmth of the sun, it calls up before them a picture of exceeding brightness, which, very likely, far outshines the radiance of the actual scene around them. Their sense of smell, which is always especially delicate, fills, for them, the summer breeze, which comes stealing up from the garden, or dancing across the fields and woodland, with a spell of many-woven perfume which language has no words subtle enough to describe. The different tones of loved voices have, for their ears, a range and depth of meaning, which betrays to them, often more quickly than the most careful study of a face will do, what is going on in the heart and mind within.

Nor are the eyes of others sealed books to the blind. This statement may appear, perhaps to some, incredible, but it is simply and literally true. The writer is always most fully aware when any pair of eyes is fixed upon her, and is aware, too, of the meaning of the look; whether it is wonder, affection, or dislike. The writer is instantly conscious of the fact when any point in her dress or appearance is attracting the gaze of another, and she has many a secret bit of amusement at the manner in which usually very civil, well-bred people will, sometimes, favour her with a prolonged stare, under the impression that blindness makes her quite impervious to such rudeness of behaviour. When any one sitting or standing near is talking to a third person, yet thinking of her, and glancing, from time to time, at her, the circumstance never remains unknown to her; it is as plain to her as it would be to one with the most watchful, discerning eyes.

The writer has often the privilege of speaking of the Word of God to full Bible-classes or in meeting-rooms. Though she cannot see her audience with the bodily eye, she never fails to know whether their attention and their looks are wandering, or whether both are fixed earnestly upon her. What the instinct or the feeling is like which gives thus consciousness of the language of the eye to one who is without sight, it is very difficult to describe; still more difficult is it to give it a name. Medical men, or men of science or metaphysics, can endeavour, if they please, to classify it, and ticket it with some long-sounding title; those who are the servants of the King are content to see in it one more proof of a Heavenly Father's love and mercy. Whenever He takes away anything from His children, He always, in tenfold ways, gives compensation. It is His will that all His creatures shall be fearfully and wonderfully made, and in their making shall show forth His glory; if He takes away a sense or a faculty, He gives a new one in its place, or bestows double perfection and keenness on one already possessed.

A beautiful country gives as much pleasure to a blind man as to a man who can see. How full Switzerland or Wales, or any other land sought after for picturesque scenery, is of sounds that delight the ear, and wake up the imagination! The rush of the cataract, the airy tinkle of the smaller waterfall, the gurgle, and bubble, and murmur, and ripple of many-toned brooks; the long sweep of melody made by the wind as it hurries down some mountain gorge; the whisper of the little breezes to the listening leaves in wood or forest; the sighing of the storm as it rises to begin its grand chorus among the hills and ravines; the varied song of birds that dwell in bowers of deep green foliage, song that is now a musical trill, and now a drawn-out thread of silver, and now a dropping well of liquid sweetness—all these things have in them a wondrous meaning of beauty for one who receives impressions only through the ear. A meaning and a beauty that cannot be more than faintly conceived by him who, while his eyes are feasting, gives but little heed to the delights that his other senses are, almost imperceptibly, gathering up.

A blind man or woman gains, much more quickly than is often supposed, a knowledge of a new house or locality, and a correct notion of space, size, &c. The noise made by a closing door or window gives the practised ear, at once, the dimensions of a room, the sound of a footstep tells the length of a passage, the roll of carriage wheels describes the extent of the street. And when the chimes break into little waves of harmony among the lofty arches of some cathedral, or the organ pours a majestic river of swelling tones down the vast shadowy aisles, what a vision of grandeur, built up in glorified stone, rises before the mind, which, by means of the ear alone, takes in the whole fabric.

In the same way the experienced ear gauges characters by the voice, and seldom is wrong in its conceptions. In this respect, indeed, the blind have often the advantage over those who can see, for the voice always betrays emotion more quickly even than the face; it is more difficult to school our tones into playing a hollow part than our features.

If the blind man is in the middle of unsympathetic scenes, and people, and surroundings, he need never remain there long; just one strong effort with the wings of imagination, and he is far away in an instant. His eyes do not show him the cold, or uncomfortable realities in the midst of which he is, and so his fancy is at liberty to play any bright magic tricks she pleases. When he is walking through a dusty, prosaic town thoroughfare, he may, unknown to the matter-of-fact companion at his side, be treading the dew-drenched paths of some forest solitude; or when he is sitting in a strange house, he may be in the familiar chair at some well-loved fireside, miles distant. It is a precious, blessed power, this, granted to the blind, the so-called afflicted—a power, which many who have eyes to see will, perhaps, with dreary longing in different stages of their life's journey, envy.

"He is dark," or "She is dark," is not at all an uncommon way among the lower orders for speaking of a blind man or woman; but, "He is light," or "She is light," would be, in reality, a much truer form of expression. We are not talking now of the radiance that illuminates the mind; we mean the eye, and the eye alone. There is one sort of blindness which consists in a cloud of dazzling brightness, such as must have surrounded the Mercy Seat of the Most High of old, into which the eyes are incessantly gazing. Let the night be ever so black, the sky ever so gloomy, this flood of excessive brilliancy still encircles him whom men call unhappy. And when any colour is named, and the blind seer of this wondrous light wishes to behold the mentioned hue, he has but to think intently on it, and the harmless fire, which is his constant companion, becomes a beautiful red, or blue, or green blaze. No doubt oculists can account fully for this apparently singular phenomenon, but not the less is it a further sign of God's love for His blind children.

The very mistakes and small confusions which blindness sometimes brings about in daily life, are, to blind men or women, if they have a spark of humour in them, sources of perennial amusement. What can be more comic than the situation, when, misled by the singular similarity of voices which we so often find in families? You think that the prim old-maiden lady, who has just shaken hands with you, is her younger sister, the happy mother of thirteen, and ask, with affectionate interest, whether she left the dear twins at home feeling better after the measles? Who can resist a hearty laugh; the sort of laugh that makes the spirit of ennui spread his wings and take flight; when, on wandering along an inn passage, trying to find your way back to your own room, which sometimes at first, without your eyes, when you have not quite learnt the bearings of the place, is a rather puzzling task, you suddenly come in contact with a fussy, nervous old gentleman, who sees that you are not moving about exactly like other folk, and cannot quite make up his mind whether he shall run away or offer you his arm.

The writer has had many experiences of this ludicrous kind. Once she was sitting by an old lady in church who could not, by some unlucky mischance, find out the right lessons; either the church was unusually dark, or she had forgotten to put her spectacles in her pocket. Now it struck this dear old lady that her neighbour in the pew, as she had a young face, must certainly have young eyes too. So it came to pass that the writer suddenly felt a book poked into her hand, and heard a somewhat imperative whisper bidding her find out the right places at once, as the service was just going to begin. The writer meekly declared her inability to do the old lady's behest in as loud a tone as time and place would allow; but what with the pealing notes of the organ which just then were beginning to fill the building, and what with the dame being apparently a little hard of hearing, she could not make her meaning understood. The old lady would not and could not realise the true state of the matter. She thrust her prayer-book closer, as if it were a bayonette, and there was a terrible exasperation in her whispered tones, which seemed to indicate that the old lady's husband, if she had one, must have, occasionally, no very good time of it. The writer continued her explanations in much fear and trembling, but the resolute old lady could not be turned from her purpose. What might have been the end of the affair is a question we shrink from uneasily, if a kind-hearted verger, noticing on his rounds that something was amiss, had not come to the rescue and satisfied the old lady, who thereupon arranged her silks and laces with a sniff of triumph, and evidently considered that she had had her own way in spite of everything.

Such is the laughable side of blindness. Now let us look at the subject more earnestly, and with a view to the use which blind men and women may make of their lives. We will begin by saying that they have not the smallest right, more than any other member of the community, to sit down and say that they can make their lives of no possible use at all; they must never forget the beautiful old Italian proverb, "If God closes for us a door, He only does it that we may make, for ourselves, a wide gate by which to go out and serve Him."

In the large, and well-taught, and admirably appointed institutions for the blind, which flourish, under excellent management, throughout the length and breadth of the land, different kinds of handicrafts are carefully taught the boys and girls, until their fingers become as useful as other people's, which are guided by the eye as well as the touch. We have no space now to enter into and dwell upon these; we would only recommend, in the education of blind children, great pains being taken in developing and strengthening the faculty of memory, which is a power that, in the course of their lives, will be essentially useful to them in unnumbered ways. We would also wish that in schools for the blind, a little more cultivation was, in general, given to the fancy, and a little more encouragement to its flights. Teachers and directors seem to be backward and timid on this point, they appear to have a notion that such things will be dangerous for these children, one of whose senses is walled up; but we can assure them, from personal experience, that a lively imagination is one of the most precious possessions that can belong to the blind. Poetry and fiction of the highest class should be freely and largely read aloud to the blind children, and they need not fear for the result.

What are the intellectual fields of work open to the blind? They are more numerous than any casual thinker might suppose. A musical blind man or woman, whose talent has been properly educated and strengthened, can bring in no inconsiderable income to themselves and their families as organists, or as teachers of music. Most of the schools and institutions for the blind recognise very fully and rightly this fact, and cultivate to the utmost their pupils' musical powers. But there is one branch of learning that might bring the blind lucrative employment in after life, which does not seem to be so general in blind schools; we mean the study of languages, and especially of modern tongues. The quick ear of blind boys and girls would gain, by means of conversation with a foreigner, correctness of pronunciation, and ease of expression in any language with marvellous rapidity and facility. And what an advantage it would be to them, as men and women, to be able to instruct pupils in the fluent use of some foreign tongue. No exercises in the world that ever were penned can teach a language like the scholar being compelled to converse in it, and our blind French and German and Italian masters and mistresses would be, if beforehand well trained, the best and most ready conversers for a pupil to be placed under.

By means of the Brail system, which makes reading with the fingers a perfectly easy task, a blind man or woman has it put fully within their power to become a Scripture reader or Bible-woman. This is work for the blind which may produce comfortable small salaries; moreover, it is glorious work for God and man in which they may have a share. Those blind gentlemen and ladies who are possessed of independent means may, in this way, use most nobly their energies.

Literature, the lecture-room, the pulpit, and Parliament are all arenas of noble effort which are just as much open to the blind as to those who can see. No wonder, then, that we say our blind children should have the richest stores of education lavished upon them. Of course, their lessons will need special earnestness and patience, particularly at the beginning, on the part of the teachers; but those engaged in the work will find it one of rare interest as they go on. Of course, too, those blind people who would enter upon any of the careers in life we have just named, must make up their minds to use and display an extra amount of energy and perseverance; but when they succeed, their merit is all the greater.

The beautiful and wonderful American machine called the type-writer, which year by year is being brought to greater perfection, is likely to open a new gate in the world's vast workshop for the blind to enter in at. The simple expedient of the letters and numbers being carved upon the keys, instead of printed, as is ordinarily the case, makes the machine easily learnt by any blind person with even moderate application. With the outlay of about twenty guineas to buy a type-writer, a blind man can become a clerk who writes more distinctly and swiftly than the readiest scribe that ever put pen to paper. Copying letters, &c., might, perhaps, seem at first to form an obstacle to this employment in offices for the blind; but how easily a blind clerk could, for a very small remuneration, furnish himself with a boy who would act in such cases as his eyes. Other and cheaper type-writers are also gradually springing up, and presently they will be no doubt within the reach of the most moderate resources.

Finally, let all blind men and women, and all connected with them, remember, that He whose will it is that they should walk through the world deprived of a sense, is a loving, omniscient Father, who knows, in some way that they cannot perhaps as yet see, that this will be well and good for them; therefore in every moment of their lives let them keep in mind the words, "Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but that the glory of God may be shown forth in him." Let this be their high and holy object in all they strive to do or to speak, and both here and in the heavenly country they shall not be behind those who can see.

ALICE KING.

ON AND OFF:

A STORY OF TWO WORLDLY PEOPLE.

By Vera Singleton, Author of "My Saturdays."

CHAPTER IV.

FREDDY WHIPPLE'S appearance took Lord Clitheroe somewhat by surprise; but yachting men are too much accustomed to dropping from the skies themselves to be astonished at finding anyone turning up anywhere. There was just enough bustle, however, about the landing and meeting to allow Wilfrid Chesney to slip off unintroduced, and pursue his way to the post-office alone. He was not fond of appearing in the character of what Freddy had called "tame doctor," and sometimes now took solitary fits, which Lord Clitheroe called "grumps," and Lady Clitheroe "melancholy."

A new arrival and an old friend was too great a windfall into the dullness of garrison life in Guernsey to be lightly let slip; Freddy kept hold of his prize, and inquired his intentions. When it appeared that he was in search of rooms, where his wife would be comfortable on shore for a week or so, and had not the least idea how to set about looking for them—Freddy insisted that he and "the doctor" should come up to lunch at Mr. Plympton's, and consult Ada, whose name, however, he did not happen to mention. After some demur from fear of intruding, Lord Clitheroe finally accepted the invitation, and went off to seek Wilfrid; while, by dint of much muscular exertion, guided by local knowledge, Freddy contrived to dash through the market, buy a basket of the peculiar Guernsey make, and fill it with great golden plums, and red-brown figs bursting with warm oozy sweetness; and moreover to scale the face of the hill by endless flights of steps, and give Ada timely notice of the approach of guests. She had been making up her mind to the chance of a meeting, but this was sooner than she had bargained for.

"What is the doctor's name?" she asked.

"Don't know. I didn't ask, and I don't think Clitheroe mentioned it. I didn't see him to be introduced."

Had Freddy mentioned hers, she wondered, but dared not ask. "If he knows that I am here, he won't come," she decided. But since the days of her short courtship she had not dressed herself so carefully as she did for luncheon that day, though she had not much time for thinking of it.

Lord Clitheroe and Dr. Chesney were rather late in arriving at the pretty little furnished house which Mr. Plympton had taken, overlooking the harbour. They were shown into a prim, pleasant room, with French windows opening on a little plot of grass garden. Wilfrid caught sight at once of an old gentleman in an arm-chair, and of a fair, graceful little lady in black standing behind him. He stood stock-still, uncertain whether to bolt or face it out, and feeling suddenly as if he had committed some tremendous crime, and were going to be publicly exposed. Before he had thought of any measures of self-defence, Freddy had introduced Lord Clitheroe to the gentleman and lady, and Lord Clitheroe was saying :

"This is curious. I was just about to introduce my friend as Dr. Chesney, but perhaps it is unnecessary."

"Yes," said Ada, advancing calmly, and holding out her hand. "Dr. Chesney and I have met before."

Wilfrid shook hands with her in stupid silence. He literally could not find a word to say. What a fashion in which to meet his wife ! He did not know whether he ought to recognise her or not.

"It is pleasant for you to meet a friend, my dear," remarked Mr. Plympton. "I suppose Dr. Chesney is a relation."

"We are connexions by marriage," Ada replied, with an audacious glance at Wilfrid's confused face. "Dr. Chesney belongs to my husband's family."

He recovered his self-possession in a sudden sense of the absurdity of the position.

"It is a long time since I had the pleasure of seeing you. I hope you have been well ever since, and enjoyed yourself."

"We will compare notes at our leisure by-and-bye," she answered, airily. "I want to hear your adventures too, but in the meantime luncheon waits."

The luncheon did credit to the extempore resources of both housekeeper and cook ; and Freddy took great pride in the sumptuous dish of fruit which he had piled up himself, and decorated with vine-leaves. Lord Clitheroe enjoyed himself ; he liked his kindly host ; he promptly got up a mild flirtation with Mrs. Chesney ; he made acquaintance with Guernsey sour curds, rich and flaky, and under her tuition treated them in proper style with cream, sugar, and nutmeg ; while Wilfrid sat at the side, a very secondary personage indeed, with Freddy to do the civil to him,—and watched his wife presiding at another man's table, bestowing all her smiles and her lively remarks upon another guest, and seemingly only remembering his existence to perform the courteous duties of a hostess. If she had absolutely ignored him, he thought it would have been less infuriating ; but when she told Freddy to give Dr. Chesney a clean plate, he longed to hurl it at her head, and when she asked him carelessly if he would not try the curds too, he would as soon have swallowed poison. He would be even with her, though. She was mistress of the situation now ; and after all, he did not want to change it. She treated him as a stranger, and so would he treat her ; he would ignore her airs and graces, and her flirtations, and her confounded coolness, and be as cool as herself. After all, what was there between them, but a few weeks' folly two years ago, which they had agreed to forget?

Luncheon over, the question of lodgings was fully discussed, Ada contributing all the information she possessed, and Wilfrid going into Lady Clitheroe's special requirements in the most matter-of-fact fashion. Just as a list of possible rooms was being drawn up, a strong tug at the door-bell made Mr. Plympton start, and preluded the appearance of a fat middle-aged man, creasy as to the eyes, smooth as to the cheeks, and either oily or careless as to manner, who pressed the middle of Ada's hand with the tips of his fingers, and made a low rather un-English bow, when introduced by Freddy to Lord Clitheroe as Major Bangham.

"I am happy to meet your lordship. Do you make a long stay in the island?"

"That will depend upon Lady Clitheroe's health, and upon the advice of our friend, Dr. Chesney," the Viscount answered, introducing the latter by a gesture.

"Chesney? Ah!" remarked Major Bangham, looking interrogatively at Ada.

"A connection by marriage of Mrs. Chesney," explained Mr. Plympton, carefully rehearsing his information.

"Ah!" repeated the major. "Relative of the late Mr. Chesney, I presume?"

"His son," put in Ada, demurely.

Wilfrid's eyes met hers with a glance of intense amusement. Angry as he was, he could not help entering into the fun.

"Oh, indeed! Indeed," rather puzzled. "Oh, yes, to be sure," brightening up as a solution occurred to him. "Mrs. Chesney's step-son, of course. I never could guess those puzzles about relationship. If John married James's sister, and James married John's mother, you know: that sort of thing."

"The only puzzle that has to be solved at present," Ada interrupted, "is where to find rooms with a sea view, a cool bedroom, a nice garden to sit out in, and not approached by streets with a pavement calculated to dislocate the springs of a bath-chair, and the nerves of an invalid. Do you know of such an elysium, Major Bangham?"

"Upon my word, I think those rooms the Robinsons have just turned out of—you know them, Whipple—are as like it as anything you'll find."

"To be sure," said Freddy, "Abominably stupid of me not to have thought of it before. Nice little diggings they are, I know; but how to find them is past me. I know you go up a road, and down a lane, and into another road, and down another lane, and then find yourself somewhere between Fermain and Pleinmont, close to the cliffs."

"Not very clear," responded his superior officer. "I will write down the address, and then if Lord Clitheroe takes a trap, the driver will probably be able to find the place."

"I am much obliged to you, I am sure," responded Lord Clitheroe. "If you have nothing better to do this afternoon, perhaps you would have the kindness to join us. I suppose I can get a carriage that will hold the party, and it is a lovely afternoon for a drive."

"Guernsey carriages can be had of all dimensions," put in Freddy. "A chair accommodates two affectionate people and a pug dog; the larger vehicles are designed to convey a Rechabite picnic party each, together with the tea-kettles."

"Thanks," responded the major; "but really it is rather hot to be out, you know; and this drawing-room has charms which it is difficult for a man to resist," with a languishing look at Ada.

"I hoped to rob it of most of its charms by persuading Mr. Plympton and Mrs. Chesney to accompany us," Lord Clitheroe answered, turning to them. "It would be so kind of you to act as guides and counsellors, and make quite a pleasure party of that most wearisome business, hunting for lodgings."

Mr. Plympton, of course, took a good deal of persuading, but he yielded as soon as he realised that his presence was the condition of Ada's. Freddy rushed off, vowing that he would be back in less than half-an-hour in possession of the largest carriage St. Peterport could produce; and Ada stepped outside the window to gather a spray of jessamine.

"Is there not a charming view from this little lawn, Dr. Chesney?" she asked. Her manner gave an invitation to join her, which he was too sulky to accept at once.

"Charming," he answered, lazily; "and this chair is judiciously placed so as to command it without the trouble of going there."

The pink in her cheeks grew deep; she turned away to choose a rose. Lord Clitheroe stepped out instantly.

"It is lovely," he said with emphasis. "Might one light a cigar and take a stroll round?"

"By all means. Mr. Plympton does not dislike tobacco in the open air."

"But do *you* dislike it?"

"Oh, not in the least; I can even stand it in-doors. Not that I am ever called on to do so now, but when I lived in the world I found it necessary. A sort of conventual atmosphere enwraps the woman before whom men dare not smoke."

"I am happy to say that Mrs. Chesney is always indulgent to our little foibles," inserted the bland voice of Major Bangham, who had likewise emerged from the drawing-room, and was producing a fat cigar from a fatter cigar case, elaborately embroidered.

"Not to all," said Ada, with a pretty little shake of her head; "it wouldn't be good for you."

"What are on your Index Purgatorius, then?" asked the Major. Lord Clitheroe gave a little gasp.

"Brandy before dinner-time, I think,—and bad tobacco, I am sure. Oh, and flattery. Not compliments, you know, but flattery."

"Pray, what is the difference?" inquired Lord Clitheroe.

"Compliments are praise that one can appropriate; flattery is praise that one can't. If you praise me only a little beyond my real deserts, I absorb it, and think you very discriminating; but if you say of me more than my self-conceit can swallow, I find you out as a humbug, and think you must be very blind to my real merits to be obliged to invent imaginary ones."

"One would have to be so, indeed," smiled the Major.

"So in fact," said Lord Clitheroe, "compliment is the radius that measures the sphere of self-conceit."

"Or the plumb-line that sounds its depths," laughed Ada. "But now I must go and dress, or the impatient horses will be pawing the ground before the portal."

The vehicle did not quite come up to Freddy's description, but it was a capacious one. Mr. Plympton and Mrs. Chesney were soon settled in the back seat, with Lord Clitheroe and Major Bangham opposite to them; Wilfrid mounted the box, and Freddy declared that the rumble suited him best, because he could keep an eye on the whole party, and feel himself in command.

The lodgings were found, surveyed, and taken; the landlady was induced to prepare tea; and while she was making her arrangements, the party went out on the cliffs. Ada settled Mr. Plympton on cushions in the shade, and sat down by him; Freddy and Lord Clitheroe stretched themselves on the grass beside them; while, to Wilfrid's great surprise, he was taken possession of by Major Bangham, who insisted on his walking out to the end of the "point" to look at the view. This sudden development of energy in one who looked the incarnation of laziness was rather startling, and Wilfrid was not much disposed to respond to the air of *chumminess* which his new acquaintance at once assumed. For some distance Major Bangham seemed to devote his attention to making himself agreeable; but when they came to the end of the grassy promontory, and, leaning over a bit of rough granite wall, looked down at the brown cliffs and blue sea below, he left off talking, and they smoked in silence.

"He's trotted me out here to say something," meditated Wilfrid, "and now he's bound to say it. Wonder if he's going to ask my leave to propose to my wife. I should think I was the right one to give her away. Well, he's welcome to her for me." Presently the Major began.

"Pretty little woman, your fair relative."

Wilfrid nodded.

"Lots of life about her, and no end of go. I hate your dead-and-alive beauties, who always want one to be mooning round. I like a woman that makes some stir round her."

"I should not have thought that Mrs. Chesney's position admitted of her making a stir," answered Wilfrid, coldly.

"That's so; and an abominable shame it is that a woman like her should be in such a position. She might be a duchess from her style; she'd become any position. Even as it is, when she comes into a room, one feels quite different, you know; one isn't bored any more. She's like the brandy in the soda." Wilfrid ground his teeth, and muttered something that was not heard, and need not be written.

"I don't deny," Major Bangham went on reflectively, "that I'm rather gone on her. You can see that for yourself, and I'm not ashamed of it. But," continued the Major, growing still more confidential, "it wasn't exactly for that I wanted to speak to you. I wanted some information. You see, I've an awkwardness about asking herself, and one likes to be on the safe side."

"No doubt the lady's employer was well informed of her antecedents when he engaged her. I should think he was the best person for you to make your inquiries of."

"Never thought I should get any sense out of him, poor old fellow. She turns him round her finger, of course. But here are you, you see, one of the family; and if there's anything shady, I'll just let the matter alone. I've not compromised myself—I always take care of that; and you needn't say anything. If you don't want to answer any questions, we'll say no more about it."

Wilfrid was dismayed at the effect of his silence, and hurried to repair it.

"Not at all, not at all. You've taken me up quite wrongly. I know nothing to her disadvantage, nothing at all, quite the reverse. I only meant that as I had not seen anything of her for some years, I could tell you very little about her affairs, and was not much inclined to interfere in them. You must understand that there isn't the shadow of an imputation upon her in any way."

"Well, that's all right. But the thing I really wanted to ask you is very simple. It's only when your respected father died, and where he was buried. I always like to have these matters quite clear," observed the Major, as if he made a matrimonial contract once a year.

"My father?" Wilfrid stared. He had totally forgotten that he was supposed to be his own son. "He died about six years ago, at Bournemouth. Though really, why ——"

"That's very satisfactory—very satisfactory indeed. I'm delighted to hear it, and much obliged to you for the information."

"Upon my word, sir, you are somewhat less than polite. I don't know what reason you can have to rejoice over my father's death; and at any rate, I won't have you do it in my presence."

"I'm sure I beg your pardon. It was confoundedly bad form, but for the moment I only looked at it from my point of view. You must make allowances."

"I don't know what your point of view is," returned Wilfrid, glumly, "and I don't want to. But of course, if you apologise, that's all about it."

"I do, indeed; it was merely a *lapsus.* Suppose we join the party now; that tea ought to be brewed by this time."

They turned back, and soon met the indefatigable Freddy, coming to hunt them up. Tea was ready in the little parlour. Wilfrid was hesitating between sulks and a cigar outside, and tea and sociability inside, but Ada pressed down the more genial scale. She turned back as the party were filing in at the narrow door-way, and simply said:

"Won't you come too?"

There was appeal in her voice, and forgiveness in her eyes. Wilfrid felt that he needed the latter more than she knew, and he yielded. He sat near her at tea; she was quietly graceful in her manner, and did not flirt with Major Bangham; she drew him into talk about the scenery and the climate, and soothed his hurt pride with gentle attention; and best of all, she did not once call him Dr. Chesney. He melted and expanded under this sunshine, and became a lively member of a lively party, instead of a wet blanket. Major Bangham felt left out, and looked cross. He was mentally concluding that he had been a fool to say anything to that conceited pill-box, who was evidently trying to cut him out. It was infamous on his part to interfere with a man of his position who had serious intentions; for even if a woman affected by Major Bangham were silly enough to think twice of a travelling apothecary, he couldn't marry his step-mother. However, the young saw-bones (Major Bangham found in his somewhat narrow vocabulary an unexpected wealth of contemptuous terms for his rival) was here to-day, and would be gone to-morrow; while he remained, with his position, and his private fortune, and his irresistible address, and his pleasing personal appearance. He had no doubt whatever of the result, and concluded that he need not disturb himself.

The pleasant meal came to an end, and thoughts of Lady Clitheroe and dinner forbade any further loitering on the cliffs. The party returned as it had set out, and Wilfrid, re-consigned to his solitary elevation, had time to think matters over.

"Let me see," he meditated, "I understand the position now, and what that fat fool meant by crowing over the poor old governor's death. I'm my own father—no, I was my own father, and now I'm my own son; and my wife is my step-mother, and also my widow. It's as pretty a mess as ever I saw, but it's none of my making. Ada got us into it, and she may get us out. Not that it matters to me. I suppose the fellow will go now and propose to her, right off the reel. I wonder how often he has squeezed her hand; hang his impudence! But why shouldn't he if she lets him? I should have thought Ada would have taken better care of herself. Of course she likes it; she's an arrant flirt; all women are when they get the chance. I suppose she was flirting at me to-night; but how she does it, the little baggage!

She never was so charming when I was married to her. Tell you what, Wilfrid Chesney, the worst danger in all this business is—that you should go and fall in love with your own wife. That would just do for you, when you've got comfortably settled, and she too. You just keep out of the way, and let her manage her own affairs. What does it matter if Bangham does make love to her? She won't commit bigamy. It's only a piece of fun for her, and why shouldn't he come a cropper? It won't hurt him; he's too fat, and too conceited; he'll fall soft. And may I be there to see!"

CHAPTER V.

WILFRID found it considerably easier to make these sensible resolutions than to keep them. When Lady Clitheroe was comfortably installed in her new quarters, at Lord Clitheroe's request Ada called upon her, and they took to each other. As she was the only lady whom the invalid knew in Guernsey, her help was called for upon a hundred trifling occasions, and it seemed necessary for her to be often at Plaisance Cottage. Mr. Plympton liked it; he enjoyed the little stir, and the object for drives; and he liked the Clitheroes well, and Wilfrid better. The cliffs suited him too, and he would spend hours contentedly upon rugs and cushions, in some nook among the gray dry rocks flecked with rosettes of yellow lichen, dreaming, dozing, or reading, in the warm scented air which breathed over the short grass and the aromatic cliff-plants. It very often happened that Wilfrid would be his companion, while Ada sat with Lady Clitheroe; and the two men, although as different as any two could possibly be, had a liking for each other's society. Mr. Plympton was not at the time under any regular medical treatment, and he gladly consented to try some suggestions of his new friend. The result was satisfactory, and in consequence Wilfrid took him regularly in hand. From which it followed, that besides Ada's coming to see his charge, he went to see hers, and all idea of keeping out of the way had to be given up.

How did it fare then with the other and more important resolution—not to fall in love with her? Well, Wilfrid flattered himself that he was keeping it bravely. He met her constantly, that was inevitable,—and after all, he thought it was the best plan. He did not sulk at her, and she did not flirt at him: they met as friends, among friends. When he went out for a long day's fishing with Freddy or some of his set, and caught himself wondering again and again if Ada were at Plaisance Cottage while he was away,—it was only because he was anxious that Lady Clitheroe should have some experienced friend with her, in case that she had one of her "attacks." If the days were long when he did not see her, it was only because Guernsey *was* a dull little hole, and he felt bored there, as anyone else would. His pulse did not quicken when she appeared; he never felt the least inclination to kiss her, or treasure up a scrap of her handwriting.

These were the sort of things fellows did who were in love; he didn't want to do them, so it was clear that he was not in love, nor going to be.

He very seldom saw her in company with Major Bangham, who did not love him, and avoided him when possible,—or perhaps his composure might not have been so complete. For every idle afternoon that the Major did not devote to improving Lord Clitheroe's acquaintance brought him to the door of Mr. Plympton's house, generally with offerings of flowers; and the motive of his siege became sufficiently obvious to frighten Ada. She had played with her pseudo-widowhood, and used it half as a joke, half as a shield, not knowing herself what she meant, and drawn on partly by fun and partly by the force of circumstances. But that she, a married woman, a wife (as she now was keenly conscious, in spite of her strange position), should be seriously made love to, was an insult to which she had never dreamed of exposing herself. And that it should be done almost under her husband's eyes was simply odious. "What *must* he think of me?" she asked herself bitterly again and again. The easy and friendly terms on which they now were sometimes solaced and sometimes stung her. They seemed to prove that he trusted her in spite of all; and then again, might they not mean that he had expected nothing better of her, and cared not how she bore herself? At any rate, the only thing to be done was to repel Major Bangham's advances with all possible decision, and try to hurt his pride.

But unluckily it was not possible for Major Bangham to receive for a moment the idea that Mrs. Chesney meant to refuse him. When he found that she was seldom to be seen, and that when he did see her, she was cool and reticent instead of being lively and fascinating,—he only concluded that his attentions had become too marked for her to receive without compromising herself, until she was sure of his meaning.

"Very right, too," he soliloquised. "Poor little thing, in her position she can't be too careful. I like her all the better for it, but I'll put her out of her pain as soon as possible. Besides, this sort of thing is a horrid nuisance. I can't go on sitting upon a chair with my stick between my legs, talking to that old fool. The very first chance I get, I'll just put my arm round her pretty little waist, and ask her to be Mrs. B."

Opportunities, however, are slow of coming when some one is always on the watch to stave them off, and Major Bangham found it necessary to make one. He paid yet another visit, in which he succeeded in finding Mr. Plympton at home, and Ada could not abandon him. So he leaned back in a chair for half-an-hour, and gazed at Ada, and from time to time smiled quietly at her, as she sat stitching and making conversation, until she was driven to desperation. When at last he uncrossed his legs, and lifted himself from his chair, she felt too angry to shake hands, and was going to let him depart with a bow. But he came close to her, sidled in between her and Mr. Plympton, and held out three fingers persistently. She was obliged to let him touch her hand, and then felt that he was holding it tight, and mumbling it with his fingers, and trying to work something into it,—like a nervous man with a doctor's fee, only that the doctor generally co-operates to make things easy. Ada would not co-operate, and the something dropped between them on the carpet. It was a little metal tube of some sort.

"You have dropped something, Major Banghan," she remarked, innocently.

"Oh, ah, yes," he said in a flurry, stooping to look for it. It was close to Ada's foot, and she made a slight movement, which swept the flounce of her dress over it.

"I don't see it," he said. "It must have fallen here. I wouldn't have it lost on any account." Ada moved politely out of his way, carrying the article with her.

"Ring for Jane, my dear," suggested Mr. Plympton. "It may have gone under the fender. Was it a pencil-case?"

"Ah; no, please don't ring," said the Major, getting down on his knees with difficulty, and peering under the fender. "It—it wasn't exactly a pencil-case; it was a new kind of pen. I brought it for Mrs. Chesney to try; ladies are such letter-writers."

"Was it anything like this?" asked Ada, with eyes full of mischief, holding up two ordinary barrel-pens, with the nib of one inserted under that of another, so as to make a tube.

Major Bangham looked up on all-fours, very red in the face indeed. When he recognised his property, he scrambled to his feet.

"Yes, yes; that's it. It doesn't matter. Just try them, and if they suit you, you know, I can get you some more. Very much obliged, I'm sure. Sorry to have disturbed you, sir."

He extricated himself from the room somehow, in a state of incoherency which was so uncommon with him as to excite Mr. Plympton's curiosity.

"Our friend seemed strangely excited about his pens," he observed. "What is there remarkable about them, my dear?"

"Nothing at all, I think," answered Ada, who had meantime pulled them apart, and found inside a piece of thin paper tightly rolled up, which she promptly dropped into her work-box. "Externally, they seem the usual pen of the period. Perhaps Major Bangham has discovered that he can spell with them, and so considers that they must be a boon and a blessing to men."

When Ada had an opportunity of untwisting and deciphering the missive thus curiously delivered, she found the following:—

"DEAREST MRS. CHESNEY,—Why this coldness? I can never now win a glance of affection, or a word of encouragement. Alas, how changed! Do you mistrust my intentions? They are all that you can desire. Ah, be no longer coy! I shall be at church on Sunday morning, and will wait for you. Then let me have the word or the sign that I long for, to tell me that you will be wholly mine.

"Ever thy adoring "B."

That day was Friday, and Ada promptly determined to abandon her usual place of worship on the following Sunday; but matters were otherwise decided for her. Early on Sunday morning, a messenger brought her a note which made her heart leap, and the colour rush to her face. It was from her husband: the first she had had from him since they had been married, and was a curious contrast to her last-received letter.

"Plaisance Cottage, Sunday, 7 A.M.

"DEAR ADA,—Lady Clitheroe is ill. She has one of her usual attacks, not especially bad, but needing constant attendance. Her maid was unwell herself, and this morning she has knocked up. The woman of the house is perfectly useless. Can you come out for the day? "Yours affectionately,

"WILFRID CHESNEY."

Mr. Plympton was unusually well, so that she could leave him with a clear conscience in the charge of his man-servant, who was very nearly as good a nurse as herself. When he heard of the emergency, he of course insisted on her going to the rescue as soon as she had breakfasted; so before long, she was driving through the lanes in one of those tiny carriages described by Freddy, and now and then alleviating her sympathetic regret at the cause of her expedition with enjoyment of Major Bangham's discomfiture. "It ought to settle that matter," she thought.

Wilfrid met her at the door of Plaisance Cottage. "I thought you would come," he said, and shook hands warmly.

"How is she?"

"Not in danger, but suffering a good deal. I think the worst is over, and I want to get Lord Clitheroe to bed. I daresay he will go now you have come. The maid will have to be looked after a little too."

Lord Clitheroe appeared at the head of the little stairs, looking haggard after his sleepless night. He welcomed Ada, and yielded easily to Wilfrid's recommendations to go to bed; for indeed the poor man could scarcely keep his eyes open. Wilfrid himself looked only a little tired, and Ada was far too much afraid of undivided responsibility to suggest his retiring. As soon, however, as she felt tolerably at home in Lady Clitheroe's sick-room, she asked him if he had had any breakfast.

"I had a glass of milk and some bread some time ago. I have scarcely been able to leave the room."

"You could go now, couldn't you? I could call if there is the least occasion. It would not do for you to knock up."

"Well, no; and I ought to set a good example. I always insist on people who are nursing taking their regular meals. I will see about it. But it is kind of you to think of me," he added, with a sudden change of tone.

Ada blushed deeply and vividly. "Kind of her"—his wife—to have the simplest thought for his needs! When her duty was to be caring for him every day as now she was caring for a stranger, while all *his* thought and help and tenderness were bought and paid for by Lady Clitheroe! The unshed tears stung her eyes, but she forced them back, and gave her whole mind to her duties.

They were not light. There was much to be done for the mistress, and something for the maid; and both forms of illness were of a sort of which Ada had no experience, so that she was anxious, and uncertain of herself. Nothing of this would have been guessed from her quiet watchfulness and ready ministry; common sense and sympathy were enough to enable her to act under Wilfrid, and twenty times that day he blessed his stars (to use his own form of thanksgiving) that she had been within reach. They were drawn closer together than ever they had been before, as they worked in harmony for relieving the two sick women,—he directing, she helping and seconding him,—until towards afternoon the servant's indisposition (which had never been serious) needed no more treatment, and Lady Clitheroe, relieved from pain, had fallen into a sound sleep.

Ada signed to Wilfrid, and they stepped outside the bed-room. She looked at him, inquiringly.

"She is all right now," he said. "Probably she will sleep for some hours, and when she wakes there will not be much to do for her."

"Then," said Ada, timidly, "won't you go to bed now? I will stay until Lord Clitheroe comes back; and you were up all night."

"Thinking about me again? It is good of you; but you needn't. I'm tough. But what a good nurse you are, Ada! I had no idea that would have been your line."

He did not know that this was the first time he had called her by her name since they had met again, but she did. She found it hard to answer calmly:

"I have had a good deal of practice with Mr. Plympton, of course."

"I thought you didn't like sick men. I remember you once said that they were hateful, or something of the sort. I thought then it was a bad prospect for me if I were sick, but after all you are a born nurse."

"It was a hasty speech," said Ada; "but I hope I am not quite so hard-hearted now."

"You are not hard-hearted at all, and I don't believe you ever were. If *I* were sick now—but what nonsense I'm talking—that comes of sitting up all night. I'm never sick. I feel muddled now, though; I don't quite know what I'm saying; you must excuse me. I think if you will sit with Lady Clitheroe for the present, I will take advantage of your kindness, and go to bed for a few hours. Lord Clitheroe will be sure to turn up soon. I'll order some tea for you now. Good-bye; and thank you very much for your kind help; I am sure we are greatly indebted to you."

He shook hands hastily, and was gone before she could say a word. "That was an awfully close shave," he thought, as he plunged under the blanket. "Wilfrid, my boy, you've had the narrowest escape of making a fool of yourself that ever you had since you were born. But how could I tell that she was going to turn out such a—such a—brick?" Slumber suddenly dropped on him like a featherbed, and smothered his reflections.

Ada sat in the quiet room that summer Sunday evening, while the softened sunshine lay all around, and the scent of the great cabbage-roses in the little garden came up to her. She was tired and happy; all was well with her patient; and somehow, some time, might not all be well with her? For now she could see that her husband's heart was turning to her, and she did not care that he still tried to hold her at arm's length, and treat her as a stranger. "He won't keep *that* up long," she thought, triumphantly; though she did not know what would happen when he failed, and, just now, she did not care.

CHAPTER VI.

MAJOR BANGHAM had had an exceedingly uncomfortable time of it in church. Under the most favourable circumstances it was not an institution which suited his tastes; but this Sunday he had had no room for his legs, he had sat next to a High Church lady, who looked daggers at him when he stared about and fidgeted,—and last, and worst, he had seen nothing of Ada. He was returning to his quarters in the blackest of sulks, when he met Freddy Whipple.

"Morning, major. You look virtuous, not to say glum. Been to church?"

"Well, yes," grunted the major. "Long time before you catch me there again, though."

"Ah, I thought so. Seemed to me your virtuousness had left you slightly vicious. Now, I'm going to be just as good, and I shan't look vicious after it."

"What are you after, then?"

"Going to keep my old uncle company this afternoon. Mrs. Chesney sent me word that she'd suddenly been sent for this morning to Plaisance Cottage; Lady Clitheroe taken ill. So I'm just going to look after the old buffer a bit while she's away."

"Ah, very right—very right. I hope Lady Clitheroe's illness is not serious."

"Hope not; but I don't know anything more about it."

"I must call and inquire to-morrow. Good afternoon."

Major Bangham went home to his luncheon in much improved spirits. Ada's absence from church was now explained, and, of course, she could not send him a note openly, even if she had had time. The cause of it pleased him too: the future Mrs. Bangham was quite at liberty to be as intimate with Lady Clitheroe as she pleased, or as she could. To-morrow, he would call at Mr. Plympton's, and enquire if she had returned, and what news there was from Plaisance Cottage; and if she were still there, he would make his enquiries in person. The difficulties in his way roused his obstinacy, and a battalion of duennas could not now have prevented him from proposing in the form that he thought most suitable for a romantic attachment, in which there were no considerations of property. "I shall give my hand," he said to himself, "where I have given my heart. There is enough in it, and I demand no more. All shall be my Ada's, and I desire only herself in exchange." These sentiments seemed to him so magnanimous, and so well expressed, that he committed them to memory for the benefit of their object.

On Monday Lady Clitheroe was suffering from nothing but exhaustion, and was quite as well as those who knew her could have expected. Wilfrid had had some sleep in his clothes, but was beginning to look rather done up; Lord Clitheroe tried vainly to prevail on him to go to bed, and only succeeded in inducing him to take a walk, by producing various urgent pieces of business to be transacted in the town of St. Peterport. One of these was to leave word for Ada of the patient's condition. Wilfrid accepted the commissions and started on his way, trudging along between closely-cut hedges that twenty years ago were tangles of beauty, through lanes which once were shady, but which now bear no tokens of their former beauty, except the stiff upright trunks of trees, from which every bough has been lopped away. By the time that he had finished his shadeless walk, and transacted his business in the town, with much ascending and descending of its steep streets and queer short cuts, and found himself before Mr. Plympton's door, he was both hot and tired. Truth to tell, he had been keeping that visit before him as a *bonne bouche* all the time. Ada was becoming associated in his mind with repose and pleasantness; she was sure to be at home, after a tiring day yesterday, and he would rest in the cool drawing room, and watch her pouring out tea for him and waiting gently on the invalid, and enjoy himself quietly after his anxious days and disturbed nights.

He was wrong in his calculations, however; for the servant informed him that Mr. Plympton and Mrs. Chesney were both out. She thought they would soon be in, though, and asked if he would come in and wait. It was certainly a pleasanter plan than setting out at once on his hot backward tramp, so he entered the little drawing-room, desiring her to tell Mr. Plympton when he came in that he was here. The French windows stood open as usual, and the part of the lawn next to the house was in shade. A cane lounging-chair stood temptingly placed under some shrubs, a little aside from the window, and there Wilfrid sat him down. Although he could not see the inside of the room, he could hear the moment the door opened, and would show himself as soon as anyone came in. The roadstead lay before him, with the lovely groups of islands beyond, and he remembered how on his first visit Ada had invited him to look at that view, and how he had refused. If he had known how to set about it, he would have blushed to think of his own rudeness.

"I might have treated her with ordinary politeness, at any rate," he growled to himself, "if she *was* my wife. A regular surly brute! I wonder she ever spoke to me again. She's a hundred times too good for me, and that's a fact; and it was a lucky day for her when she got rid of me. It's a pity though that I haven't tumbled into something settled, a practice at Cape Coast Castle, or private physician to King M'Tesa. I should like to have a little place of my own, and Ada to boss it. However, here I am knocking round, and things are best as they are. I've got a very good berth, I know—but ——"

Gradually these reflections grew somewhat vague, and the view somewhat misty. Nature had her way, and sleep swallowed him up.

About a quarter of an hour later, Mr. Plympton's bath-chair was wheeled up to the door, with Ada in attendance; and at the same moment Major Bangham arrived from the other direction. He was not lounging along as usual, nor smoking, but had an air of business. His dress was something supreme, and the exquisite rose in his buttonhole amounted to a declaration of marriage. Ada's heart sank; she felt that she had no escape.

"So happy not to have missed you," he said. "I have been unfortunate lately. How do you do, Mr. Plympton?"

"Not quite as well as usual to-day, I think," answered the latter. "I suppose I missed my kind nurse yesterday. Though my nephew came to keep me company, and I was well taken care of by my good Smith," indicating his servant.

"Anyone who has the pleasure of Mrs. Chesney's society must miss her when she withdraws it," replied the Major; "but I trust Lady Clitheroe profited by our loss."

"I left her much better," Ada answered; "but I found Mr. Plympton so much the reverse that I am going to induce him to stay quite quiet for the rest of the day, and to lie down at once. I am afraid going out at all has been imprudent."

"I hope that does not mean that I may not come in. Will you permit me, Mr. Plympton? I particularly wish to speak to Mrs. Chesney."

Nothing would stop him now; he did not even care that Smith and Jane were listening with undisguised interest. Mr. Plympton gave a ready—though surprised—assent. Smith attended him upstairs, and Jane hurried down to confide to the cook that as sure as possible that fat Major Bangham was come to propose to Mrs. Chesney. As the probability of his doing so had long been a topic of discussion in the domestic circle, it is not to be wondered at that Wilfrid's existence was wholly forgotten in the excitement.

Ada resigned herself to her fate, and walked into the drawing-room. Major Bangham held the door open, and shut it after her, as if he were the spider into whose parlour she—the fly—had walked. She seated herself on the sofa near the window, and plied her fan. He drew a chair exactly opposite her, and sat down.

"I need not tell you," he began, "how deeply disappointed I was at church yesterday."

"Indeed," she replied, demurely; "was not Mr. Lefroy as good as usual?"

"You know that it was not to hear Mr. Lefroy—or any other parson—that I went."

"I am sorry to hear it."

"You know why I went to church yesterday morning."

"Do I?"

Major Bangham shifted on his chair, and pulled a clean bandanna handkerchief out of his pocket. He felt that he was getting on.

"I sent you a note, telling you that I had but one motive for that and everything else, to see you, and—ah ——" He put the handkerchief on his knees, and fidgeted a little nearer her.

"That was the note inside the pens," said Ada. "I don't think you did quite make yourself out such a one-idea'd person, but I know you asked me to meet you."

"And you would have come, if you could; would you not? Oh, say you would have come!" He tried to take her hand, but the chairs were not near enough, and it was a failure.

"No, I certainly should not have come. I don't approve of assignments at church, Major Bangham."

"Ah, I am not so good as you. But you shall be my guardian angel, my divinity." He gazed at her ardently, with his head on one side, and fidgeted more with the handkerchief.

"I'm afraid the task would be too formidable for me," answered Ada, with a little choke. "I would rather not undertake it, please."

"Ah, say not so." He had got the handkerchief well spread out now, and down he came fearlessly upon the knees of his new trousers. Ada hid her face in her handkerchief, and he got hold of one hand.

"Ah, say not so. It shall be my study to forestall your every wish. You shall lead me with a rein of silk."

These words were the first which fairly reached the consciousness of the involuntary eavesdropper outside. He opened his eyes in the bewildered state of a person suddenly aroused from a sound sleep; he understood what he had heard, but his faculties were all in a whirl, and it was a minute before he realised where he was, and what was going on. In that minute Ada had recovered herself, and when she had spoken, it seemed to him that to show himself would be cruel.

"Indeed, I have no wish to lead you," she said, drawing away her hand. "Please get up, Major Bangham. I would rather hear no more of this kind of talk."

"I will not rise," he returned, in impassioned accents, "until you have granted my prayer. I will not rise until you have promised to be my own. I will not rise—ah —— "

"Then, I am afraid you will stay on your knees much longer than you have ever done before. Do get up; I assure you it is ridiculous."

The Major scrambled to his feet with the help of the end of the sofa.

"Ridiculous!" he said sulkily; "I am not accustomed to be considered ridiculous. I do not see what there is absurd in offering my hand where I have already—where I have already —— "

"I beg your pardon, really, Major Bangham, if I have hurt your feelings. Forgive me, and let us be friends, and say no more."

"To be sure I will forgive you, my sweet," answered the appeased warrior, thinking the victory won. Before Ada knew what he was doing, he had thrown his arm round her, and was trying to kiss her. She sprang to her feet in a blaze of indignation.

"Major Bangham, you insult me! I am a married woman!"

He fell back slowly, and stared at her.

"Heavens and earth! what do you mean?"

"What I say."

"But you are a widow?"

"I am not, never was; I hope never shall be."

"You told me so."

"I never said a single word about it."

"Your step-son told me so."

"I haven't any step-son."

"That Dr. Chesney—I asked you particularly if he was a relative of the late Mr. Chesney, and you said he was his son."

"His father is dead; *he* was the late Mr. Chesney. I never said that I was married to him," said Ada, losing her fire as she began to feel ashamed of herself.

"Who *are* you married to, then, you lying little flirt?" shouted the Major.

"To a man who can protect her from insult," cried Wilfrid, striding in at the window. "Now, then, Major Bangham, if you have anything more to say, you had better say it to me. You have annoyed my wife enough already."

"Well, then, I say that you two have been in a conspiracy to make a fool of me. I don't care how you twist it; you've told me lies, or made me believe lies; it's all the same. If my life did not belong to my Queen and my country, I'd have you out to-morrow, and shoot you like a dog—I would. You've made me the laughing-stock of the place between you. But I suppose that was what you wanted to do. It's a—a—it's a shame." He looked round for his hat.

"Well, look here," Major Bangham," said Wilfrid more quietly, "I don't deny that things have been hard on you, and that you have some right to complain. My wife and I, for reasons which are nobody's business but our own, preferred to keep our marriage secret. Of course, this brought about misunderstanding: we were not willing to talk about our affairs, and we let you go on with the idea you had taken up. When you think about it, you'll see that we neither of us told you anything that was not true. All the same, of course there was a little deception, and we are both sorry for the annoyance it has caused you. All I can say is—that what has passed to-day shall not be known through us; and I hope you will accept my apology in my own and my wife's name for anything that was not quite fair to you."

He held out his hand. Major Bangham hesitated a moment; then he said, "All right—never mind," shook hands with Wilfrid, bowed to Ada, and left the room.

"There—he's gone," said Wilfrid. "My poor little darling, what a horrid bother for you!" He sat down on the sofa by her, and drew her to him. She rested her head on his shoulder, and cried a little.

"It was all of my own making," she said. "Oh, Wilfrid, I must be—I *am*—a horrid little flirt! But I never meant to be so bad. And I never got into a scrape before—never the least bit."

"You never shall get into a scrape again, never the least bit," answered her husband, looking down fondly at the fair head. "I'll take care of you."

"Oh, Wilfrid, can you? It would be so nice."

"Would it? Should you really like it, Ada? You know it was you who sent me away."

"Yes, but I have wanted you so badly lately. And since I saw you I found out—what I never knew before ——"

"You found out—what?"

"That I loved you. Oh, what am I saying? It's as bad as proposing to you." And she buried her face in his coat, in a sudden rush of shyness.

"Well," he said, with a merry laugh, "I did the business the first time; it's only fair you should do it the second. Anyway, it's done. And see now, darling; we two have come together again, and we'll stick together, fair weather or foul, and nothing on earth shall ever part us."

"But how can we do it?"

"I'll see to that. We'll manage it somehow. What I can't stand is doing without you any longer. I've been fighting hard against it, and trying to believe I didn't care; but when I heard that fellow making love to my wife— Did he kiss you?"

"Not quite," murmured Ada, hanging down her head.

"Not quite, eh? Then I will—*quite*, and that shall be our second wedding."

It all came right after that. Mr. Plympton was the good fairy who made everything smooth for the happy lovers. He declared that he could not live at all without Ada, and that he was sure he should live twice as long—not that it mattered much whether he did or not—with Wilfrid. So he offered Wilfrid £200 a year to remain with him as his private physician, Ada continuing to act as nurse and housekeeper, and receive her £100. If they would live with him, he would settle down in his own house in Surrey, and Wilfrid could practise in the neighbourhood.

"I am an old man," he said pathetically, "and a sick one. I can only be a burden to myself and all around me, and I have lost all to whom that burden could be lightened by love. If you two will let me share your happiness, I shall feel that I have a home once more; and when I die, you will not find yourselves thrown on the world again."

"Dear Mr. Plympton," said Ada, kissing his forehead, "we will be a son and daughter to you."

Wilfrid had only one stipulation to make; and though that was not an easy one to express, it was finally put into shape. He could only consent to take the best chance he had ever had, if it were made perfectly clear that he and his wife had no designs upon Mr. Plympton's property. When this was with some hesitation explained to Mr. Plympton, he met it by immediately making his will. The Chesneys were not privy to its contents, but Freddy Whipple was; and as he declared himself perfectly satisfied with its provisions, Wilfrid's scruples were appeased, and he consented to be happy.

The Clitheroes were in despair when they first heard the news, but after a time reconciled themselves to the loss of Wilfrid, by observing that there was no good in keeping him; for from the day when he became—as Lady Clitheroe put it—"engaged to his wife," he was just as useless to anybody else as a boy in his first love-fit. In truth, he *was* in love—for the first time in his life, and very pleasant he found it. So pleasant that he has never emerged from that condition, although he is now a noted provincial physician, and Mr. Plympton (who, being at all times only half alive, is likely to make life last twice as long as anybody else) calls himself a grandfather. Ada has grown plump, and says she has given up flirting. There may be two opinions on that point. But there can be only one as to whether she ever regrets that she proposed to her husband.

with regret over his own deficiencies. Could he ever hope to grow worthy of so much beauty, innocence, and grace?

Such were his thoughts. Man-like, he made no allowance for the nature within being possibly at variance with the fair exterior, and the hour was too strong for him. Gazing at her thus in silence for some moments, he spoke his thoughts aloud; and, crowning triumph of that happy day, he was not repulsed. There, in that old hall, their fate was sealed, and their lives were linked each with each, for good or for ill, until death should them part.

In due course of time the wedding followed. In the interim Lady Griselda had impressed her lover in some inexplicable way, for it was not in plain English, that she had stooped low and sacrificed much in accepting his hand; and he had promised she should go to London every Spring; had promised that his life, not blameless in the past, should be reformed on all points in the future; had promised—oh, who could say all he promised, and was willing to promise, if only she would indeed come to Bothwell Hall to be its pearl, its flower, its guardian angel, and his most faultless wife?

And so the marriage took place, and Lady Griselda Venner became Lady Griselda Beverley.

Humphrey belonged to that species of country squire which, let us please ourselves by imagining, is in the present day extinct, but which, in the early part of the century knew more about the pedigrees of their favourite hounds and horses than that of the monarchy of England, and held an unwritten code of laws that required a gentleman and M. F. H. to forget as soon as possible, and as a point of honour, the classics and mathematics with which he had been regaled (with due accompaniments) at the public schools. The foreign politics of these gentlemen were not complicated, but consisted in a firm belief that England knew what was proper and right for all nations a good deal better than the nations did themselves, and could and would beat them by land and sea to the tune of "Rule Britannia" as often as occasion required. Home politics were, on the contrary, a mighty occasion of words and blows, especially when they touched local interests, and election times were half-carnival, half-Pandemonium. The hunting-field was Elysium, literature nowhere, and the feudal system, with all its sins that now, no doubt, we have expunged, and its dear old kindly virtues that we still regret, was carried out in some of its most cardinal points on large and small estates alike. Ecclesiastical matters troubled nobody much, not even the parsons, and drinking was conducted on liberal, not to say lavish principles.

To that species and those days, then, belonged Humphrey, carrying on the traditions of his fathers with unswerving faith, but stamping his own individuality none the less on his tenure of power at Bothwell Hall. He was the only son of his parents, and prized and spoilt accordingly. His father's eyes glistened with pride as he tossed the handsome boy on his shoulders for a visit to the kennel; and every servant and labourer on the estate vied with each other to abet his whims, and to initiate him into the mysteries, legal or otherwise, of those field sports so dear to the hearts of Britons.

It was hard to say whether the Squire punished himself or Humphrey most when at last the lad was sent to school; but a certain quiet influence, of which we have yet to speak, was no longer to be resisted, and in the doubtful hope that Master Humphrey might now be induced for the first time in his life to sit quiet at his books for half an hour, he was sent to Harrow, and the echoes of home were silent to his merry laugh and boyish shouts. Everyone missed and regretted him; and the Squire on his return from escorting the boy to his new abode drank quantities of bottled ale and port.

But Humphrey's parting words to his father had been, "Be sure to tell mamma to write to me often, and to write plain, and tell her I won't forget to try to be a good boy."

This mother of Humphrey's gave him, as mothers often do, and, alas, often do not, his first idea of excellency in woman. Her beautiful oval face, the regular features of which he inherited, was to him more sacred than any of the Madonnas. Calm, noble-minded, unselfish, loving, she was spending herself devotedly for husband and son, and fulfilling all her duties faithfully and unostentatiously. Content with the age in which she lived, she yet wished that her boy should rise above it, be more cultivated, more fit to be the master of others.

For the destiny of the young life of Humphrey she felt she stood in part responsible, and that from her training and example his first bias must of necessity be taken. Perhaps it would seem from the foregoing picture of Humphrey's boyhood that she succeeded but ill; but many other influences, and some harmful enough, were at work on him: over-indulgence, flattery, and surrounding licence.

But let those who think she failed, remember this: Humphrey to the end of his days could scarcely speak her name with clear voice and dry eyes; he never asked pardon of an offended Maker without feeling he had sinned also against her who had taught him so much better. He never gave up the hope that in his wife he might meet again her rare sweet goodness and wise ways; never until in his married days the hag Disappointment revealed her hideous shape and pointed the road to Despair.

Humphrey was left master of himself and Bothwell Hall at an early age, for the Squire and his wife both died prematurely; and by the time he attained his majority, the loss of his parents had become an outgrown grief, unconnected with the present, although tenderly honoured in remembrance. The hatchment was down, the flags of rejoicing were up, and it takes but a few years to make up a long ago at twenty-one.

He was a handsome and popular young man; and with no particularly wise counseller at his side to keep him in check it was small with regret over his own deficiencies. Could he ever hope to grow worthy of so much beauty, innocence, and grace?

Such were his thoughts. Man-like, he made no allowance for the nature within being possibly at variance with the fair exterior, and the hour was too strong for him. Gazing at her thus in silence for some moments, he spoke his thoughts aloud; and, crowning triumph of that happy day, he was not repulsed. There, in that old hall, their fate was sealed, and their lives were linked each with each, for good or for ill, until death should them part.

In due course of time the wedding followed. In the interim Lady Griselda had impressed her lover in some inexplicable way, for it was not in plain English, that she had stooped low and sacrificed much in accepting his hand; and he had promised she should go to London every Spring; had promised that his life, not blameless in the past, should be reformed on all points in the future; had promised—oh, who could say all he promised, and was willing to promise, if only she would indeed come to Bothwell Hall to be its pearl, its flower, its guardian angel, and his most faultless wife?

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He was a handsome and popular young man; and with no particularly wise counseller at his side to keep him in check it was small wonder that he fell a good deal in love with his fortunes and himself. Warm-hearted by nature, intoxicated by the rare atmosphere he breathed on the heights of youth and pleasure, he thought life and liberty perfection, and meant to do always well; when lo, first came one slip and slide, and then another, and he found he did ill instead of well, the rare heights had been profaned, and the good intentions were not so easy to carry out.

That beginning was only too typical of his bachelor career. His was essentially a sinning and repenting nature, like the old Squire's before him, but the passions of the son ran deeper than those of the father. He could not sin and repent, or love and lament in moderation; and since pride and shyness made him reserved about his feelings, in spite of his popularity, the storms within him often left him spent and shattered; and his life, as time went on, was not very happy. But he had not forgotten his mother, and always meant to marry someone who should be marvellously like her, and make the old hall again the happy orderly home of his boyhood. And now that he was well over thirty he would probably have soon made choice not far amiss among the pretty daughters of his fellow squires, if Fate had not brought Lady Griselda across his path.

It was all quick work then. Good-bye to other maidens for evermore. The pretty girl who had known him since childhood, and on whom he had spent a great many smiles ere Lady Griselda's advent, had scarcely time to realise the situation and take up her disappointment ere she heard he was fairly engaged. She was a good, true-hearted girl, although she has nothing to do with the further history of Beverley, and nursed a memory of a few bright scenes of which he was the hero to the end of her days: and so, missing a wife who would well have filled his mother's place, and had already learned to love him, to her cost, Humphrey wedded a woman who was incapable of any deep affection, and was, moreover, destined to bring ill-fortune and grim disaster to his hearth.

The first few months of their married life passed well enough. No woman could be wholly insensible to such devotion as Humphrey showed his bride, and the novelty of her surroundings had a charm.

But Lady Griselda was one who must tyrannise over affection; she loved to tease Humphrey even in these early days, although she knew from report, though not as yet from experience, that his temper was one dangerous to rouse. Also, if visitors were not, and no diversion called them from home, she very soon began to shrug her shoulders at a wet day, or even a quiet one, to bury herself in French novels, or oftener still retire with her maid to the study of French toilettes, and her own fine figure and face when adorned with the same. The cares of housekeeping she delegated to the housekeeper, and referred everyone who troubled her to Mr. Beverley; and thus studiously avoiding the responsibilities of her lot, while she maintained firm hold on its privileges, she started on her career as wife.

There was no lack of company at the Hall that winter. The wedding festivities were prolonged; and Humphrey, profuse at all times in his hospitality, felt proud that his beautiful wife should be admired by his neighbours, and was glad to welcome her friends.

Then came the London season; Lady Griselda's attendance at which lasted much longer than Humphrey had understood her to intend, and his impatience for her return was great. He had stayed in town himself for a few weeks, for his ideas were strong on the subject of married life, with its duties and pleasures; but like many who have taken free latitude of enjoyment in younger days, he was now extremely anxious to lead an exemplary life and attend well to his duties as a country gentleman. Seasonable pleasures should not be forgotten, and in all measures, domestic and otherwise, he would be aided by his wife. So he hoped: not knowing as yet that he had taken counterfeit for coin, and that it would not pass in the market, and bring him those goods that he required.

Lady Griselda returned overdone with gaiety, yet disgusted with her home and inclined to think her marriage an ignominious mistake. Humphrey's warm welcome, his caresses and devotion, all bored her heartily, and though she made little outward opposition to his domestic views and plans, she was secretly determined they should not be carried out. She had asked a sufficient number of people to visit her to prevent much possibility of quiet for some time to come, and she traded on Humphrey's hospitality to keep him from giving his guests the cold shoulder.

As time went on, that hospitality was put to the proof in no small measure, especially as by degrees the fact dawned on Mr. Beverley that the visitors Lady Griselda most delighted to honour were those least suited to his taste, and who amalgamated but ill with his own straightforward, honest intentioned, though ill-regulated nature. The times were out of joint, but he would scarcely allow it, even to his own heart, still less admit a doubt of his wife's affection to himself, even though the proofs given him of it grew fewer and fewer, and the time she spent in his companionship, or rather in that dual solitude that he desired, was ever less and less.

He tried to win her to quieter ways in vain; then he flung himself headlong into the dissipation of the hour, and tried to believe that he was happy. All delusion would have been over much sooner with most men than it was with Humphrey, but he had built too largely on the hope of an ideal marriage to believe quickly that the foundations were baseless.

Another autumn and winter came and went; another London season; and still Humphrey nursed the hope that his own mismanagement and ancient over-fondness for pleasure had somehow been to blame, and that it was not Griselda's fault altogether. Other eyes were clearer; and indeed Lady Griselda, from being simply a heartless flirt, was rapidly degenerating into worse, and becoming more dependent on excitement and conquest. No children came to bless this union, and with their little loving, unconscious hands draw tighter the wedded bonds that had begun to slacken.

The servants, with whom Humphrey was a universal favourite, while Lady Griselda was secretly despised and disliked, saw enough to make them whisper and shake their heads; and nothing but wilful blindness made Humphrey ignore so long the fact that sighs came easier to him than smiles, that Lady Griselda's principles were not as faultless as her features, and that their differences were something more than "lovers' quarrels." As the little rift within the lute, the one drop from the reservoir, the petal fallen from the full-blown rose, are the insignificant, but sure heralds of disaster, so the slight incidents of life will often reveal the secret of a dead or dying affection.

One fine September morning, when a party of visitors, who had been spending some weeks at the Hall, had just driven off, Humphrey espied his wife feeding the peacocks on the grass in front of the house. He hastened to join her in the best of spirits, and would have put his arm around her waist.

The lady of Bothwell Hall was not in the mood for these little attentions. Humphrey gave her as true an attachment as it is in the power of man to bestow, and she despised him in return; but one of the gentlemen just departed, although she half-guessed him to be as heartless as herself, had inspired her with something as near to passion as she was capable of feeling. Some of his fine compliments and flattering looks were filling her thoughts now, as she threw an occasional dole half-absently to the peacocks.

"Hurrah for a little solitude!" said Humphrey. "I declare I never was so glad to see the backs of any people before, and I don't care who calls me inhospitable for saying so; but it is something to have you all to myself for two quiet days and evenings."

"You forget," Griselda said, carelessly bribing the handsomest peacock to a nearer approach, only to disappoint him by tossing the gift to another, "we go to-morrow evening to the ball at Baggely."

"Nonsense!" said Humphrey, with a little laugh, "you don't mean that seriously. A public ball twenty miles off, and nobody there we want to see. We will have a dance together out here instead; our ball-room will be a finer one than theirs, and cooler too in this weather."

He spoke gaily, and helping himself to her bread, began throwing it to the peacocks too. They looked such a handsome, happy couple in the sunshine, with the peacocks swaying their bright-eyed trains around, and the old-fashioned picturesque house as a background, that it seems terribly ill to remember that treachery lay in the heart of one of them.

"You can do as you like, of course," said the loving wife, "but certainly mean to go, and I told our guests so only this morning."

"Why, what difference does that make? They will be there, no doubt; but I am not going to drive twenty miles for the pleasure of seeing them again. No, Grizel, do not disappoint me of these two days. I want our life to be a quieter one, my dear; we see too little of each other with these perpetual visitors, and I do not care a brass farthing for any one of them beside my bonnie wife."

One of the peacocks saw an angry gleam in Lady Griselda's handsome eyes. "You know I hate sentiment," she said; "and as for the ball I really cannot think of giving it up: for nothing, too."

"Are my wishes nothing?"

"Here is Mr. Fordyce coming," said she: "and I think interruptions are blessings to a matrimonial tête à tête."

"Do you *mean* that?" began Humphrey, hotly; but his wife had already advanced towards the visitor.

Mr. Fordyce was the clergyman of the parish, and he loved Humphrey as a father. He was a quaint old figure, and sometimes afforded food for mirth to Lady Griselda, who loved to puzzle him with gay raillery. She now pressed him to continue there for the remainder of the day, and it pleased her to be very gracious to him, and to pilot him round the garden and along the shrubberies to spots that he knew far better than she.

Dinner at Bothwell Hall was served at five o'clock, and Humphrey was beguiled out of all ill-humour by his wife's wit and fascination at that meal. She had but an old-fashioned country parson upon whom to exercise them, but vanity like hers is a very ostrich in its diet. Now she rallied him on some sly allusion, of which he was as innocent as the chair whereon he sat; now her pretty white teeth flashed out in laughter, either with him or at him, but veiled under a sufficient pretext for Humphrey to join in with a clear conscience; and now she would press the parson to some especial dainty with a charm which, to Humphrey, seemed to combine all perfection in its wiles. So lost was he in admiration that when left with his guest and the decanters, he could not leave the topic, but talked to his old friend more like a lover of his wife than a husband, of her superiority to other women, her beauty and her charm. His spirits had returned with interest, and neither he nor Mr. Fordyce spared the wine as they passed from one pleasant topic to another in the familiar old dining-room.

"And now we will go to Grizel," said Humphrey, blithely, as they rose at last, "and she shall give us some of her best songs, for I know you like her singing."

"Assuredly," said Mr. Fordyce, adding mentally, "a good deal better than I like herself: she'll be a thorn to him yet." But when they reached the drawing-room my lady was not there. Humphrey rang the bell, and made enquiries for her, when he was told that her ladyship had a headache, and would not come down stairs any more that evening.

With a slight frown on his brow, he went up at once to his wife's room, and found the invalid lying on a sofa reading a French novel.

"Why, Grizel," said he, "is your head really bad? Will it not be well enough to give us some singing? Fordyce wants so much to hear you again."

"He will most likely have plenty of opportunities for that," said Lady Griselda, carelessly, not looking up from her book. "I cannot go down stairs again to-night."

"But if your head is not well enough for singing, surely reading does not make it better," said Humphrey, with more truth than tact. "See now, I don't want you to sing or do anything to make it worse, only come down just to be with us. We are as quiet as possible."

"Thank you, I have had enough of the old man for one day," said Lady Griselda; "you can entertain him now. I mean to rest this evening so as to be fresh for the ball to-morrow night."

"I thought you had given that up; but no doubt I was a fool for thinking so," said her husband, and turned in silence to the door.

The Humphrey that rejoined Mr. Fordyce was not the Humphrey of the dinner-table; but his abstraction was wisely ignored by his companion. As the clergyman walked home across the fields he shook his head several times with a threatening frown. His mother-wit had long seen through every wile and grace of Lady Griselda, and he pondered with grief and apprehension over a certain look of misery, betrayed more than once that evening by Humphrey's face.

The day following passed slowly for Humphrey. Too proud to again ask his wife to put aside her pleasure for his sake, he ordered the carriage in her hearing to be in readiness to convey her to the ball, cherishing a hope even to the eleventh hour that she meant to countermand it. Lady Griselda did nothing of the kind. She took her husband's arm to walk to the carriage and wished him a pleasant evening as calmly as if she had obeyed his every wish, feeling very thankful all the time that he was staying at home instead of inflicting his presence upon her. The carriage drove off, and Humphrey Beverley re-entered the house with a strange feeling that a new phase in his life had begun.

He ignored the truth to himself no longer; he knew his wife not only did not love him, but cared no more for his wishes or happiness than the thrush on the lawn cares for the worm it devours. He looked at the prospect before him with an amazement of distress that left him mute. Happiness then had failed him, nay, the very dearest hope and purpose of his life, and no thoroughfare seemed open to him to continue on his way. A strongly loving nature was thrown back upon itself; a proud and passionate man was set at nought by a heartless and beautiful woman, whom he loved distractedly, and an undisciplined heart had now no guiding star.

The episode of the ball went by. New visitors arrived at Bothwell

Hall, and life went on in its accustomed channel, but all was changed for Humphrey Beverley. All things, animate and inanimate seemed to have taken a hideous turn.

Lady Griselda was enjoying the excitement of a flirtation with the gentleman to whom allusion has been made. Into the details there is no need to enter. That she was guilty at heart has sufficiently been shown, but she was too selfishly awake to her own interests to risk her reputation seriously, although the neighbourhood indulged in whispered comments on the general levity of her deportment. Humphrey's popularity in the county, and the high-standing and character of Lady Griselda's father, gave her an immunity from open disapproval, that her own beauty and charm might not have commanded. But the hour of her triumph was not to last.

As the months rolled on, Humphrey realised it all, and saw no outlet from his troubles. Sometimes he became violently jealous, when stormy scenes would ensue; but oftener he was sunk in an intense inner despondency, of which the chief sign was a scornful indifference to what went on. Though he were to dismiss the almost constant guests and refuse to allow his wife to visit, what then?—he knew her affections were not his. Every new vanity, every fresh admirer might chain her fancy for a time; for him alone there never came a softening glance or loving word: and after a few mad or futile attempts to woo her anew, Humphrey accepted his doom and brooded over the ruin of his hopes with that useless persistency which bodes trouble. He hunted recklessly, drank deeply, and was the one moody figure in the gay scenes into which he accompanied his wife.

Now and then he would watch her from behind a newspaper or book, smiling with her admirers around, and would wonder in wearying circles of thought why everyone seemed easily to please her, and only he, with a love that had outlived his respect for her, alone failed. Sometimes he would steal off alone to the dining-room where the portraits of his parents hung, as if seeking their advice or sympathy. They were not masterpieces of art. Mr. Beverley was in his red hunting-coat and other accoutrements of sport ostentatiously insisted on; but the artist in a happy moment of inspiration had fixed on the canvas a real likeness of his wife's sweet, good face. Humphrey knew now that in his own wife he had been duped by beauty unhallowed by the graces and womanly wisdom that had sanctified that of his mother. That pictured face had in it thought and sympathy and counsel for others; there had been harmony and happiness where that face dwelt, as he well knew; and best of all, she had been the priestess in her own home of that religion, which now seemed banished from his all-but Pagan household. One day, as he gazed, his wife's heartless laugh pealed out from the drawing-room, and voices rose in jesting dispute. Humphrey leant his forehead against the frame of his mother's picture and groaned, and the butler who had come in, tray in hand, beat a hasty and noiseless retreat, sighing deeply over the ill fate of the master, whom he had held in his arms as a baby.

Only one scene more.

It was winter and the floods were out. Bothwell Hall was not wholly shut out from communication with the world, but the lanes that lay between it and the high road were half under water, and travelling along them was neither pleasant nor expeditious. The Beverleys were engaged for an evening party at a house some ten miles off, where the wedding gaieties of one of Humphrey's especial friends were being celebrated. They were to stay at this place for some days; but in the deep gloom that had settled on his spirits Humphrey could with difficulty rouse up to pay the visit, and but for loyal friendship's sake would have declined it altogether.

The last week had been one of intense dreariness at the Hall, the heavy rains having kept its master and mistress close prisoners, and thrown them entirely on each other's society. Who can wonder that the storms within doors had fairly matched the raging elements without? Angry words, then sullen silence, then Humphrey sitting long and late over the wine that befriended him only to betray, and Lady Griselda fighting the meagrims in her own comfortable domains. That had been the history of the few days; and now the one had come on which they were to start for the aforesaid visit.

"Remember," said Humphrey, rising from the luncheon-table, and from a weary and overwarm discussion in which he knew she had been wrong, but had not the consolation of feeling he had been right, "not to be late in starting this evening. I have told you the hour, and it is the latest I can give you, for the roads are at their worst, and Raymond cannot manage them like old John."

"And why is John not to drive?" asked Lady Griselda.

"Why, you know the poor old fellow has a racking cough! I would sooner stop at home than take him out in such weather."

"Nonsense," said Lady Griselda; "Raymond drives like a fool. If *you* care to coddle your servants, *I* do not. John can drive."

"John is *not* to drive," said her husband decidedly. "The man who has been our family's faithful servant all his days shall not have his life risked by me. So remember, if you please, to be ready at the given hour: do not keep me waiting as you did last time."

Lady Griselda was playing with her poodle, and gave a derisive little laugh.

"Do you hear me, Griselda?" asked Humphrey.

"I hear you," she replied, "and shall be ready—at my own time."

She could play on Humphrey's ill-trained passions as on a child's, and she knew it. He stamped his foot impatiently, and turned a darkened face on her.

"By heavens, how you try me!" he exclaimed. "Understand me once for all, Griselda. Be ready this evening, or ——"

"A few more black looks, a few more polite speeches for me, I suppose," interrupted she, with a laughing contempt that might have driven a calmer man than Humphrey to white heat.

"No," said her husband, in tragic earnest. "Be ready; or I swear it shall be the last time I leave it in your power to disobey my wishes or break my heart."

A dreary afternoon passed. The wind moaned through the trees and wet shrubberies; within doors it seemed that ghosts were wailing along the passages with their old-fashioned gates, and down the long staircase and across the hall. Tick, tick, went the clock in Lady Griselda's sitting-room, and it told her, loudly as voice of clock could do, that it was time to go and dress. She did hear it. It broke the sense of her novel over and over again, secretly disturbed her ease of mind, her power of enjoyment, but it did not send her to dress. She heard her husband come in and go to his room. Her maid came to remind her it was getting late, and was dismissed with a nod. At last she rose from her sofa, surveyed her fine features in the mirror, and then with leisurely steps she went into her chamber.

The carriage came round to the hall door at the appointed hour, the servants were in attendance. Humphrey walked down stairs a little slowly, and sent up to tell Lady Griselda that it was time to start. All the servants doated on Humphrey, and the old butler now glanced pityingly at the white changed face of his master and its stern look. The footman came back to say her ladyship would not be ready for a while yet; which message Humphrey received in silence but strode upstairs to his wife's room.

He opened the door and looked in. She was seated before her glass looking very beautiful, but not half-dressed yet; her maid was arranging flowers in her hair. Many a pretty trinket and bauble lay around in confusion, but the jewel she was toying with half-absently could not be colder than she. There were plenty of lights around, and as Humphrey stood still for a moment the eyes of husband and wife met in the looking-glass and spoke, although their lips were mute. The next minute Humphrey left the room, and while the frightened maid strove with anxiety that defeated its own end to hasten that ill-starred toilette, a sharp, clear sound rang through the house—the report of a pistol. The maid gave a piercing shriek as if she had herself been wounded; confused sounds came from below, and Lady Griselda, white, but calm, flung a shawl round her and went downstairs.

There at the foot of the staircase where they had plighted their betrothal, with his handsome face still troubled, lay Humphrey Beverley, shot through the heart by his own misguided hand. The servants were already grouped around, their faces aghast with sorrow and dismay, and the old butler who supported Humphrey in his arms, sobbed like a child over the man he had loved and honoured above peer or king.

Erring, tempted, fallen, yet beloved so tenderly by those who knew him best and longest, let us say a prayer for the peace of the soul of Humphrey Beverley, no matter what may be our creed.

The story made a sensation, but, as in most such cases, there was much of it hushed out. Lady Griselda went back to her own family, where perhaps less was known than elsewhere of the sins and shortcomings of her married life. Two years onwards, and she eloped with a certain married nobleman; which caused more stir than had her husband's death.

Bothwell Hall being entailed on male heirs, became an object of contest between two Beverleys, distant cousins of Humphrey in about the same degree. While Chancery pondered their claims, the deserted house passed slowly into decay. It never again became a dwelling-house, unless for certain denizens of the shadowy world by whom it was said, and is still said, to be haunted. When ultimately a possessor to the estate was established in his claims, he being non-resident, preferred building a modern farm-house for his tenant on a more cheery site, and the shrubberies and gardens were thrown open and converted into pasture-land.

I have seen the ruins. They stand in a broad flat meadow with trees scattered about them. Only a few bare walls stand upright with window apertures, and chimneys from which smoke will never more wave its hospitable banner. A portion of the fine staircase is there; and those who are so minded may look on the very spot where the last of the Beverleys sought and met his end.

As I stood gazing at it there was a sudden shuffling and stumbling sound heard in the ivy, and then a great dusty white owl flew out from the ruin, and dodging in and out among the trees took its unsteady flight towards the river, as if tired of loneliness. Not feeling quite sure what the next sight would be with which I might be favoured in the gathering shades of evening, I turned away; but every lane seemed full of the tragedies, the strange stories and the unexplained mysteries of the past.

Let me give a voice, however inadequate, to one of these: that the wind may wail less sadly over Bothwell Hall, and the spectre of the last of the Beverleys be laid to rest.

A NEW ZEALAND MAIL-DAY.

TO-DAY the English mail is in, and all the little town is about and astir. There, at the wooden wharf, lies the steamer that has brought it from the North, and which in another hour or two will carry on the Southern portion. Upon the public buildings there flutters in the languid breeze the flag that announces to the town the fact of the mail's arrival. The sleepy little place seems wide awake this morning. Late comers are hurrying to the tiny post-office with expectant faces, passing those earlier ones, who have already obtained their budgets, with only a word or nod. What a clatter in the dusty street as strange uncouth and bearded men come cantering up—they always canter—and wend their heated way to the little wooden building that does duty as post-office amidst many other functions. Let us go too.

I fasten my horse to one of the posts in front of the buildings, put there for that purpose, and cram myself into the little office that is already as full as it can well hold. A poky little place it is, suffocatingly hot to-day, although its one window is thrown wide open. The holland blind is swaying to and fro, as though the room, as well it might, were panting for breath. A row of little pigeon-holes, in which dirty-looking letters sometimes lie for months until claimed by some up-country shepherd; a narrow counter with a blotted leaden inkstand and a desk, with a faded green curtain, is all the furniture.

How good-naturedly everybody waits his turn to reach the counter, and what sun-burnt, ruddy faces they mostly present! Here is a woman who has driven in from some outlying district, where there are roads; and she is dressed—heavens, in what strange colours is she not dressed! They much affect, these women, a violent and truly awful purple, which they call, I believe, "puce;" their bonnets are large, and, if the lady is elderly, umbrageous; therein repose whole banks of flowers, chiefly pink roses, reclining on trusses of the most verdant moss. Their husbands, if accompanying their spouses, are dissolving in suits of abnormally shiny black, and hats of a loftiness and hardness not to be described. If they are alone they look much better in their moleskin trousers, flannel shirts, and soft felt hats. They all have pipes in their mouths, but are not smoking in the building.

What a chattering is going on, and how active are the generally sleepy clerk and the small boy who assists him upon these occasions. It is a wonder to me, however some of these letters reach their destination, for, when the meaning of the series of hieroglyphics is deciphered, the address is often found to be almost as obscure.

Here, just now, a great, red-bearded Hercules is making room at the counter for a little, quiet, subdued widow, evidently a resident in the town, who, dry-lipped and tremulous, awaits an answer to her question : " Anything for me this time, Mr. Wilson ? " and turns away, poor little soul, with something very like a sob as the clerk gives, what is, I fear, his usual answer : " No, not this mail, Mrs. Thorpe." She hastily pulls down the veil of her rusty black bonnet and moving quickly to the door, walks away silently with the child that has been sitting on the sand, awaiting her outside.

The big man himself is being served now, and receives a bundle of papers that will amuse him for nights in his solitary hut " on the run." One letter only is his, sealed with a slab of red wax, but this he receives with evident satisfaction ; and, with a bashful grin, as though everyone must know from whom it comes, he retires.

Many more are served, and some few disappointed, and then comes my turn. I cannot help a foolish sort of smile curving my lips as I see each familiar handwriting. When my packet is complete, a large and glorious one this mail, I too go out. And what to do, think you ? Tear open my letters and devour the contents then and there ? No such thing ; I've grown too wise for that. I puzzle myself delightfully over any unfamiliar writing ; I feel each envelope to see how thick the letter inside may be and so judge of its length ; I pinch it, and so discover if there may be, by any chance, a photograph inside. If there be, my resolution not to open my letters in the town is generally broken, and I hasten to see what " dear familiar face " it may contain. Ah ! dear friends and true, if only you could know the keen delight it is to an exile to have a letter from the old country, you would never fail to write. No matter how few words, it shows that one is not forgotten. In these great wildernesses we have more time for thoughts of home and friends than those we left behind have to think of us, and it *does* wound to think that, absent, we are not remembered.

I lead my horse away and feed him, for we have come far since early morning, and whilst he takes his rest I visit " the store," where I have to make a whole list of purchases, for not often do I get the chance. A wonderful place, too, this store is. Not only is it the emporium of grocery, literature, saddlery and drugs, but it devotes one counter to haberdashery and the fine arts ; and in a small room at the back, screened from the vulgar gaze by muslin curtains, the wife of the store-keeper displays what are evidently very home-made " Modes de Paris."

One hears the rustle of letters in almost every quiet corner of the town, where someone has gone to read his news. How oblivious of all that is going on around him is that tall young fellow sitting on a rail of the pound ! What brings him here with his refined-looking face and artist bearing ? Surely he can't be happy with sheep and tallow and wool as sole topics of thought and conversation? Why, his eyes are humid now with tears, and yet his lips are half smiling as he turns the page. That letter is from his old home, I swear, by his look. His sister, maybe, is telling him that the village looks just the same, and that she visits still the old grey church nestling amongst the trees where of yore they prayed together. That lad is a better lad than he was an hour ago. The light of sweet, sad memories shines from his eyes, and his face is beautiful with the feeling he forgets to hide. Happy it is for us that those thin sheets can convey so much, and that the senders can, as it were, write themselves on to the pages. Yet at times how inadequate seem the most glowing words when a smile from love-lit eyes, or a touch of some dear hand, at once would say what all words fail to do.

The shopping done, I start for my home amongst the hills, passing at the entrance of the town the noisy "Bar" that always drives a roaring trade on Mail-day. Some silent savages are crouching in their blankets on the step. At first my road lies along the harbour shore; the sun has sunk some time behind the rounded hills. Across the darkening water the opposite range of mountains is arraying itself in its gorgeous vesture of evening crimson, which deepens to dark purple in the folds of the hills. Light wreaths of summer mist rise from the harbour and drape the distant rocks, which grow darker and dimmer as the gold fades from the azure of the sky. The heaven is now as one great pearl, and through its tender tones there now shine out the golden stars, and Canopus and Acherner divide with Sirius the realm of night, till they too fade in the greater radiance of the rising moon.

By her friendly light my horse—I leave it to him—finds his way along the track, for I have long left the road and am now upon the hills. Soon I am home at my hut, having passed through the deep blackness of the last bit of bush, and brushed aside the last frond of tree-fern, and turning my horse loose in the home paddock, I enter my whare. Quickly have I finished my supper, yesterday's damper does, and pulling my box to the fire, for the nights are chill up here though the days are hot, I am rapidly immersed in my much long-wished-for letters.

* * *

A CROSS AT KILBARRACK.

By E. Owens Blackburne.

SOMEWHAT less than one hundred years ago, when Francis Higgins, the notorious "Sham Squire" of Dublin Society bequeathed his body to Kilbarrack churchyard, the place was even more lonely and picturesque-looking than it is at present. Bleak and desolate, it is situated upon the southern margin of the beautiful Bay of Dublin. In the midst of the churchyard is a little ruined chapel, which was built by the hardy; pious fishermen of the district, that their wives and children might there offer up prayers for their safety whilst they were away gathering the harvest of the ocean.

In the little churchyard of Kilbarrack many generations of the rude forefathers of the neighbouring hamlets of Kilbarrack, Baldoyle, Sutton, and Howth sleep their last long sleep. It is also the repository of the remains of many of a higher rank in life than the fishing class already alluded to; for old tombstones and headstones, with preposterous spelling and epitaphs thereon, mark many a family burial-place—notably that of Margaret Lawless, the mother of the incorruptible patriot peer, Lord Cloncurry. Her tomb is beside the traditionary grass-grown grave of the "Sham Squire," unfit company for even the mortal remains of so noble a woman.

The whole neighbourhood is rife with traditions, and one of its latest, most tragic, and most pathetic, forms the framework of this veritable story.

Looking westward from the old church of Kilbarrack, you can see Ireland's Eye, Lambay Island, and Howth Harbour; and right in sight of them, leaning against the outer walls of the ruins, is a black wooden cross.

It is rather of better workmanship than those around. It is more substantial-looking, and there is an attempt at rude carving at the extremities of the arms of the cross. The fierce gales which sweep over the district had torn it from its position lately, but reverent hands had reinstated it. It now stands upright, but the words originally painted upon it are but dimly decipherable. Yet, not so very many years ago, it bore the following inscription:

"Sacred . to . the . memory . of . Ellen . Sheridan . who broke . her . heart . April . 21, . 18—.

R . I . P.

"Mother, ye might let me go to school, the day?"

The half-timid, half-pleading request was uttered by a little Irish peasant girl, of about ten or eleven years of age. Her scanty attire would have been rejected with disdain by a discerning scarecrow. Shoes and stockings were to her an unknown resource of civilisation, and her thick, straight, matted black hair, fell in jagged masses over her forehead, meeting her heavy black brows, and almost obscuring her eyes. The latter was much to be regretted, for the child's eyes were her only redeeming feature. They were the sweet, deep, violet-blue eyes of the Celt, with long, thick black lashes. In other respects she had no features to speak of, except her mouth, which certainly could not be overlooked, for her family and friends, with charming frankness, repeatedly told her when alluding to that feature, that if it were not for her ears—which certainly proved admirable and formidable barriers—her mouth would have gone round her head.

"Arrah! then! how bad ye are, wantin' to go to school. I can't read or write, nor me mother. afore me, an' I got on in the world. Mick," to a youngster of about three years old—the senior of two other children, one of which his mother was then nursing—"lave that stirabout pot alone! School, indeed!" she continued, recurring to the former topic; "betther for ye to stay at home an' mind the childhre."

The little girl threw her hands before her face and began to whimper.

"Come, stop that!" exclaimed Peggy Sheridan, in a peremptory tone. "Be off, out ov this, an' let me av none av yer cryin'. There's scarce enough sayweed in to make manure for the next crap av piatiees, so take the ould tin can down an' hape some up down there on the burrow."

"I will, mother; but can't ye let me go to school, and I'll do it whin I come back?"

"Troth, ye're enough to vex a saint! Talkin' av yer school whin there's such hapes of blobby-wore down on the sthrand that it 'ud be flyin' in the face av Heaven not to gether it!"

Ellen Sheridan, urged thereto by unmistakable evidences upon her mother's part that she was likely to become demonstrative in her anger, left the squalid, untidy, fish-smelling little cabin, which she called her home, and walked slowly down the road with the old tin can in her hand, until she came to the shingle where the glistening, dark brown seaweed lay sparkling in the September sunshine. The tears were yet wet on Ellen's cheeks as she walked listlessly along, cooling her bare feet amongst the slippery seaweed, when some shouts caused her to toss away the mane which hung over her forehead, and, shading her eyes with her hand, she looked up.

A great pang of jealous envy took possession of her soul as she saw four or five boys and girls on their way to the parish school and the Nuns' School. With that inherent demonism, which seems to be common to schoolboys and schoolgirls of all classes, they proceeded to counteract the effects of their presumably too highly cultivated brains by a little physical exertion.

As her veracious chronicler, we are bound here to state that Ellen Sheridan—ugly, uncouth, ignorant, and sensitive—was a butt for the jeers and taunts of her more audacious compeers. As she looked up, a stone from the group resounded against the tin can, this was followed by another and another, and a peal of jeering laughter from her assailants. Ellen—valiant because she was at some distance from them—stooped to pick up a stone with which to retaliate, when she received a sharp blow just behind her ear, whilst a youth, coming from a field at the other side of the road, set off in pursuit of the vanishing school-children.

"I know every wan av yez," he said, shaking his hand at them as they deftly evaded him, "an' I'll complain av yez to Father Grogan! Did they hit yeh, ochorra? Are yeh much hurted?" he asked kindly, running down the shingle to where Ellen was sitting sobbing bitterly, and trying to staunch the blood with her tattered skirt, for pinafore she had none.

"Yis," she sobbed, "an' it was that Maggie Moran that did it."

"Och! maybe it wasn't, now," he replied in an easy, good-natured voice. Dan Coyle was a good-looking peasant of about eighteen. "Come up to the well in the field, an' we'll wash it, an' put some crowsfeet leaves on it. They're the finest thing out for a cut."

Dan performed the part of surgeon, if not according to the most orthodox fashion, at least kindly and with a good will, and the leaves were bound on by a neat and artistically-tied small hay-rope.

"An' so ye'r goin' to gether blobby-wore, asthore?" he said.

"Yis; but I'd rather be at school," responded Ellen. "I wanted me mother to let me go to-day, for I want to know how to read books."

Dan looked at the dirty, tear-stained little figure before him. It was rather a puzzle to him how anyone could like to go to school. His own father had owned a couple of fishing-boats, and was considered a well-to-do man in the neighbourhood, so that he had been able to spare Dan to go to school, much against his own inclination. However, the result was that Dan had so far advanced up the thorny paths of learning that he knew how to read and write tolerably well. What giddy heights he might have attained in further scaling Parnassus could only be conjectured, as his father and the two fishing-boats were all lost one stormy night when Dan was about thirteen, and he had from thence to do an odd day's fishing or an odd day's field-work, as either presented itself.

"Sorra bit much good it would do yeh, Ellen," he said. "It's betther for yeh to get the sayweed for the crap, for the fishin' was very bad this year, an' God knows the piatiees an' a bit av cabbage 'll be wanted. I'll come down an' put some on yer hape at dinner-time."

Ellen soon had a good heap collected. As she toiled on, her busy brain kept time with her busy hands, she forgot all about her accident, and in a voice clear and sweet as a skylark's, she ever and anon carolled forth scraps of songs and masses, which latter she had picked up in the chapel. The sacred music seemed to be her especial favourite. Her melodies were correct; every note was true; for Ellen was a born musician and possessed such an accurate ear, and such a rare vocal organ as one in a million is ever endowed with. The poor, ignorant, untutored child had some dim yearnings after something brighter and braver in her life. It was this feeling that made her long to learn how to write and read, as she had a firm conviction that she could then, as she said to herself, "know everything."

But Peggy Sheridan was inexorable. Certainly, the herring fishing was bad for many subsequent seasons, and it was hard enough even with the combined labour of the father and the growing up family to keep body and soul together. Moreover, the shifting sands had just commenced to silt up and form a bar across the harbour, so that by the time Ellen Sheridan was sixteen years of age, the Baldoyle fishermen were in woeful plight. During the time there had been but little variation in Ellen's sordid, hardworking life. She fully bore out the promise of her extreme uncouthness, yet people liked Ellen, who was always spoken of as "a quiet, dacint girsha."

The one relaxation of her existence was attending every available service in the chapel. Her apparent piety gained her a good reputation amongst her pastors and neighbours, who little guessed that the chief attractions there were the exquisitely-rendered masses, during which Ellen Sheridan sat enraptured, listening with the soul of an extremely personally ill-favoured St. Cecilia.

Nevertheless, Father Grogan had some shrewd suspicion of the real state of affairs. Meeting Ellen one day, near the chapel, he said brusquely:

"Ellen Sheridan, I think you're very fond of music?" The priest was a thorough musician himself, and to his exertions and example was due the excellence of his choir, which ranked as one of the best in the diocese. Ellen coloured painfully as he addressed her, and her heart beat violently.

"I am, sir," she replied.

"Come in here," he said, entering the chapel, where one or two were practising. "Listen to that," he continued, as they stood at the foot of the ladder leading up to the organ loft.

Ellen listened. They were singing the sweetest of all the Christmas hymns—the immortal "Adeste, fideles"—truly immortal words wedded to immortal song!

They soon all descended from the organ loft, and presently left the chapel. Desiring Ellen to follow him, Father Grogan seated himself at the organ, and said:

"Could you sing—of course without the words, for they are in Latin—the air you have just heard?"

"I could, sir," promptly replied the bewildered and delighted Ellen.

She sang it throughout, Father Grogan playing the accompaniment. Her glorious voice echoed and re-echoed throughout the chapel. Not a single false note could the priest's critical and educated ear detect. As she concluded, he turned to her and asked:

"Ellen—would you like to come and sing in the choir?"

The girl almost gasped for breath! Could she have heard aright?

"Nit me, sir!"

"Yes—you, Ellen. If you will take this home and learn off the Latin words, I'll get someone to teach you how to pronounce them, and you shall sing in the choir on Christmas day."

Ellen's heart sank. Never before did she regret so bitterly her inability to read! If Father Grogan knew this defect, he certainly had forgotten it. He did not wait for a reply, but handing Ellen a small piece of music, looked at his watch, and went off quickly.

The girl did not know what to think. A heaven upon earth was prepared for her, did she possess the golden key of knowledge! She walked slowly out of the chapel, and as she wended her way along the road with the music in her hand, in the dim light she saw approaching her her old acquaintance, Dan Coyle. Almost without knowing what she said, Ellen told the wonderful news to Dan, concluding, with—

"Och! Dan! Dan! if I only could read! I wish I had your book-larnin."

Dan turned and walked along the road with Ellen. He listened to her lamentations, and presently said slowly and diffidently: "Ellen—shure if it's only to taiche yeh the readin' on the paper, I cud say it ever so often, an' yeh could larn it by heart."

The project was too delightful not to be entertained. Dan Coyle, accompanied Ellen home, and the whole affair was explained to the family.

Ellen was a willing and docile pupil, and soon learnt the words. Father Grogan then took her in hand, and on Christmas Day, Ellen Sheridan, shoeless, stockingless and bonnetless, sang for the first time in public in the choir of Baldoyle Chapel.

And thus the winter and early spring passed over. Dan Coyle goodnaturedly spent many an evening in Joe Sheridan's little cabin, sitting out on the shingle, teaching Ellen the words of the Masses and various responses. Also, before the fields were again yellow with the waving corn, Dan Coyle had taught Ellen Sheridan how to love him. The days passed away, in an ecstacy of joy for Ellen—she was learning:

> "The lesson of loving,
> The sad, sad lesson of loving;
> And all its powers of pleasure or pain
> Was slowly, surely proving."

For her happiness was not without alloy. The news that she was to be married to Dan Coyle soon got noised abroad, and "ugly Ellen Sheridan" was made the theme of many a coarse jest. They at length reached her ears, for those in her station in life are not overburdened with sensitive feelings. The cruel things they said gave the girl exquisite pain—as keen as was the joy with which she had responded to Dan Coyle's request that she would be his wife. Dan Coyle was looked upon with favouring eyes by many a comfortable fisherman's daughter, and by none more favourably than by Maggie Moran—now a fine handsome, bold-looking girl. She was maddened by Dan Coyle's preference for Ellen Sheridan. Industriously and insidiously she circulated reports detrimental to Ellen's good reputation. She took care they should reach Dan Coyle's ears. He never had been very much in love with Ellen Sheridan. He had been attracted by her gentleness, her evident admiration for himself, and her economical, housewifely ways. But he was not strong enough to run the gauntlet of the remarks he heard anent her appearance and character. He did not like to say anything to her on the subject. Like many others, he trusted to time to make all things come straight for him. And thus it came to pass that Dan Coyle's visits to Joe Sheridan's cabin became more infrequent. And Ellen, with a breaking heart, became conscious of "the little rift within the lute" which gradually grew wider and wider.

Yet Ellen made no sign, even when she heard her lover's name mentioned in connection with Maggie Moran, and at length the long, dreary winter evenings came, and Dan Coyle's visits ceased altogether. Ellen could no longer bear the sneers and taunts of her own family, and one wild March morning as she was going to the fields to her daily toil, she met Dan Coyle and spoke to him. "Dan," she said, confronting him, and looking steadily at him, with never a quaver in her voice—"is it thrue what I hear, that you're goin' to be married to Maggie Moran?"

Evidently disconcerted by this abrupt and leading question, he did not reply for a minute, and then stammered forth:—"Why then, where did ye hear that, Ellen?"

"From everyone. Dan Coyle, I want to hear from yourself if ye'll want to take back the promise yeh gave me?"

"Och, shure, Ellen," he replied half-ashamed and half evasively, "it was only all foolishness betchune us! There, Ellen!" and he magnanimously held out his hand towards her, "don't let there be any ill-will betchune old friends like us. Shure we both made a mistake."

"Yes," said Ellen, ignoring his proffered hand and pressing her own over her throbbing heart beneath her poor thin shawl; "we both made a mistake." And so saying she passed swiftly on.

With an effort at repression which would have done credit to one reared in a higher social atmosphere, Ellen Sheridan went about her daily tasks as though her heart had not received its death-blow.

She sang as usual every day during Lent, at Vespers in the chapel, and the Thursday before Easter Sunday as she concluded assisting in the solemn and mournful music of the *Tenebræ*, she heard the whisper go round as she left the chapel, that Dan Coyle and Maggie Moran were to be married after first mass on Easter Sunday. Ellen Sheridan said nothing, she scarcely seemed to feel anything, her heart felt dead within her. On the Good Friday none threw themselves more fully into the music of the *Stabat Mater*, and Easter Sunday morning found Ellen Sheridan—calm and composed—in her customary seat in the choir.

A glorious Easter Day—the brilliant gleams of the sun typical of the sun that arose and illumined Christendom more than eighteen hundred years ago. It streamed over altar and aisle, where lingered some of the congregation. The organist, with a smile at his choir, commenced playing the *Regina Cœli*, and as he did so a rustic wedding party walked up the aisle.

Ellen Sheridan stood in front of the choir; she saw Dan Coyle and Maggie Moran advance to the altar, there to be made man and wife. As she looked at them she seemed to be nerving herself for a supreme effort, for never before did her splendid voice do such justice to the grand music of Mozart as she sang:—

"Regina Cœli, lætari! alleluia!
Quia quem meruisti portare, alleluia!"

Scarcely had she come to the last syllable, when she suddenly ceased for a moment, a piercing shriek resounded through the chapel, and Ellen Sheridan with a wailing cry of:—

"Dan! Dan! Dan!" fell senseless, her life-blood flowing from her lips.

In utter consternation all looked wildly around. Heedless of his bride, Dan Coyle rushed up to the organ-loft, and took the girl in his arms. She opened her eyes, and looking at him with a faint smile, said:—

"Dan—you've broke me heart!"

One sigh and all was over.

That Cross at Kilbarrack was carved and erected by Dan Coyle, who never again led a bride to the altar. Maggie Moran, universally execrated by her neighbours, at length left the place, and Dan Coyle yet lives, faithful to the loving memory of Ellen Sheridan, who died for love of him.

* * *

THE INVISIBLE HAND.

I CANNOT pretend to explain away or to account for the following incidents. I am not a fanciful or imaginative man, and if ever I thought of "ghosts," or took part in any conversation of which they happened to be the topic, it was always to throw ridicule upon them. That I shall never do again. The sceptical reader may declare that what I am about to relate was the result of a dream or hallucination. I know that I was never in fuller possession of my waking senses, and that I actually saw and went through the following experience.

It is now about seven years ago since the announcement appeared in a local paper that "Shufton Villa," a most desirable, excellently ventilated, and advantageously situated residence, was to be let. I had long been in search of a suitable house for myself and my family, and regularly every day had described a circuit of about seven or eight miles round the fair city of Exeter with the most disheartening results.

It was while plunged in despair at my non-success that the above advertisement one morning attracted the eye of my wife. We eagerly caught at the prospect of such a solution to our difficulty; it seemed a blessing indeed after so much labour spent in vain. The preliminaries were arranged, and in due time we were installed in our new home.

After about a week's sojourn, however, we began to be unpleasantly conscious that to the surrounding inhabitants, and the peasantry in particular, we were regarded with absorbing interest and curiosity; and it was not until Jane, one of our domestics, had captured the heart of a certain son of toil that any clue was afforded to the mystery. Then we learnt for the first time since taking our new residence, that it bore the reputation of being *haunted.*

A former proprietor, so ran the story among the ignorant villagers, had surprised his daughter, one evening, inditing a loving epistle to the son of his enemy; had seized it over her shoulder, and after reading it, had compelled her to write another appointing a meeting in that room that very night. Providing himself with a pistol, the enraged father himself met the young lover, and after bestowing upon him many hot words, presented a loaded revolver at the young man's breast. This probably was done merely to intimidate the hero, but at that very moment the door was flung open by his daughter, who, taking in the terrible situation at a glance, cast herself upon the form of her lover.

This seems to have turned the father's wavering purpose into a fixed determination. At any rate, whether from accident or design, the pistol went off, and before the wretched man's gaze the next moment were the dying forms of his daughter and his enemy's son. Casting himself wildly before them in passionate grief, the terror-stricken father besought forgiveness. It was too late. No word escaped their cold lips, and ere he could summon assistance he felt upon his brow the brand of Cain.

That night the master of the house disappeared, and some fishermen, rowing on the river the following morning, discovered his body floating down with the tide.

Thus ran this very tragic story; and, as it appeared on further inquiry, our new and enviable residence, unknown to us, had been let and re-let again and again. On each occasion the tenants had quitted it after a very short stay, from some unknown cause, and this had at last given the house the reputation of being in the possession of disembodied spirits.

I was sitting, at half-past eleven, one night, in the latter part of February, in the room I used as my study, busily writing, when my mind in a careless fashion reverted to this superstition concerning "Shufton Villa." I had not been thinking of the story, which seemed in some strange manner to be *borne in* upon my mind. My wife and children and our servants had retired to rest, and my thoughts were undisturbed by the slightest sound. All about the house was as silent as the grave.

At the same moment that I began to recall the legend in the form in which it had reached me, it suddenly flashed across me that I was seated in the very room in which the terrible deed was said to have been enacted.

I am by no means a superstitious man, but the dead silence in the house and the wind moaning among the tall trees without, and the hollow ringing sound produced by my own footsteps whenever I moved to stretch myself, combined with the influence of the supposed witching hour, were calculated to produce a certain sensation of awe even in the most unimaginative of mortals. I again settled myself to my work, but I quickly discovered that it was almost impossible to divert my thoughts from the subject of the haunted room.

My writing—a philosophical treatise that I was preparing for a quarterly review—was spread out on the table before me, and I had eant back upon my chair in a futile endeavour to get again into my train of thought; my eyes meantime, being bent listlessly upon the paper. It was while gazing thus that, to my utter astonishment, I beheld the sheets slowly rise from the table and move forward in the direction of my shoulder as if drawn there from behind me by some Invisible Hand.

The lamp had burnt rather low, and a gentle, subdued light was in the room, and in it I saw distinctly the paper shake and quiver (but without a single rustle or noise of any kind), as if the hand that held it was violently trembling. I felt myself quite powerless either to move or utter a sound; my tongue became rooted to my mouth, and my hair seemed to assume a perpendicular position.

By a great effort of will I pushed back the chair and rose from my seat and the paper as I did so fell silently upon the table. I drew my handkerchief from my pocket and wiped my forehead, and walked round to where the lamp burned to turn it up. As I did so my eyes fell upon the opposite side of the wall and rested for a moment upon the portrait of the dead master of the house. I involuntarily shuddered, I knew not why, at the sight, and then my gaze dropped to the chair I had just quitted, and behind it I saw, *with the utmost vividness*, the outline of a human form.

The features, as I looked, became plainly visible and were those of the picture on the wall. Transfixed to the spot, my hand resting upon the lamp, unable to move it up, I watched the countenance of the figure and saw that it was convulsed with rage and surprise. For a moment I thought a fearful gaze was fixed upon me, when its hand slowly rose and was shaken furiously at some invisible object apparently in the seat I had left. The expression next changed to one of intense malice and anticipated revenge, and the forefinger pointed to the paper on the table.

Drawing a deep breath, I still gazed at my unearthly visitant. For the moment all fear had left me, and I waited calmly for what was to follow. I assert this most emphatically. From the gestures of the figure there appeared to be another invisible personage in the room whom it was upbraiding. Suddenly a frightful change passed over the distorted features and I beheld written upon them as if it had been stamped in legible letters the word "Murder." My lips tried to cry "Forbear," but no sound escaped them. The horrible despair upon that face which followed, as succeeding some rash deed, was awful to witness, and it haunted me for many a long day after. The figure wrung its hands with a look of unspeakable agony, and to my horror was stealthily turning its eyes full upon me, when the lamp, which up to now had been burning low, suddenly went out and left me in total darkness.

How long I stood there I know not; but at last, with a feeling of faintness, I groped my way to the door and made for my wife's room. She was awakened by my coming upstairs, and in wonderment beheld my staggering gait and pallid countenance; and looked with astonishment at the glass of brandy which I swallowed at a gulp.

In less than a week our excellently situated and enviable residence had lost its tenants and we were numbered amongst the panic-stricken occupiers of the past. Many times after our departure I read that "Shufton Villa" was to be let. But the last time the announcement was varied. Through the medium of the same local paper, a paragraph informed me that "Shufton Villa" was to be pulled down and a church erected on the site out of the bounty of a lately deceased Lord of the Manor.

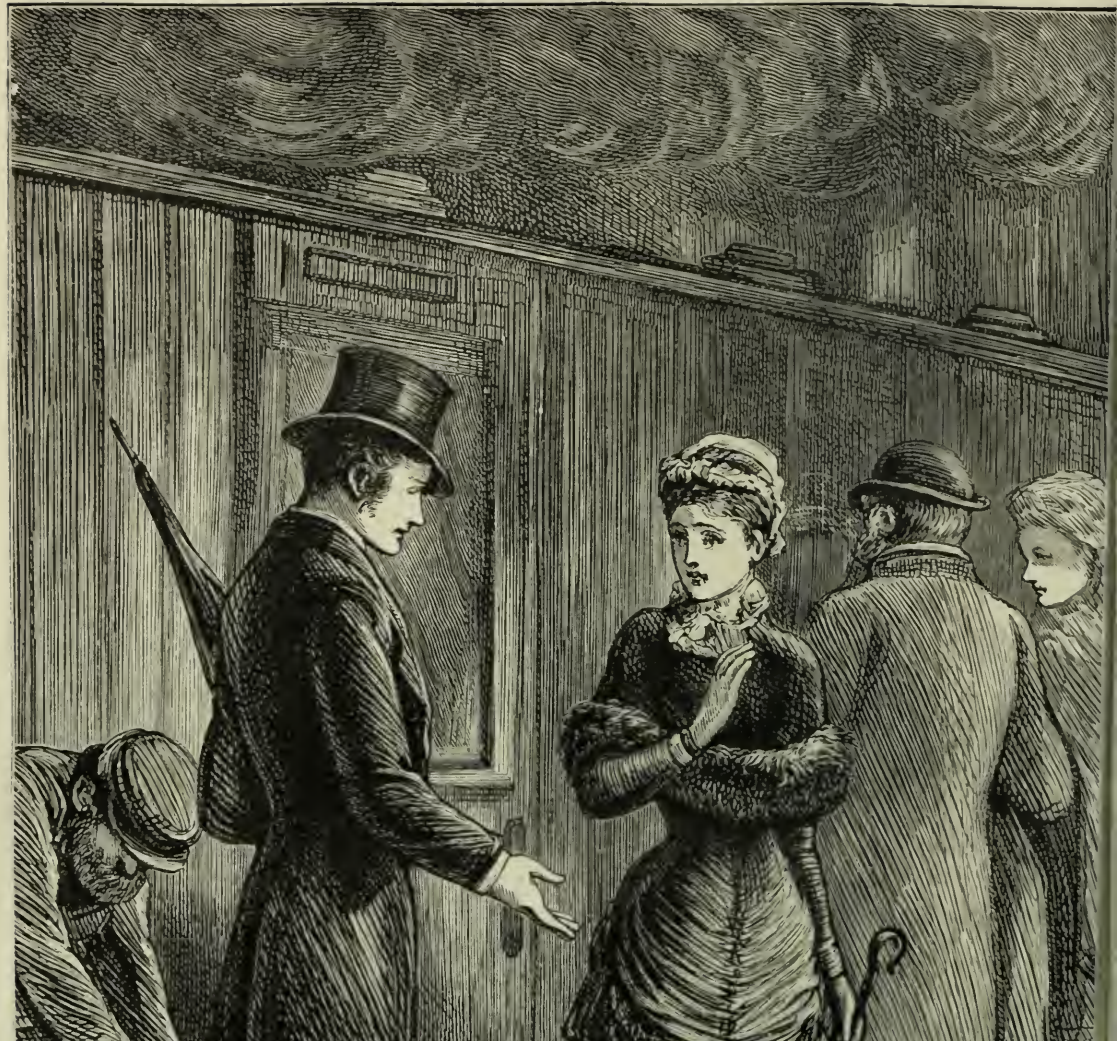
TO MY QUEEN.

Soft, as the light of southern moon
Shining on rippling summer seas,
Or music of the whispering breeze
Which stirs the sleeping woods at noon:
Sweet, as some old familiar strain
Which fills the trav'ller's eyes with tears,
After a weary lapse of years
Of wandering on the billowy main:
Shine so thine eyes for me, my Queen,
Sounds so the music of thy voice,
Which bid my longing heart rejoice
Far more than all things heard or seen.

Dearer than all the world hath best,
More dear than any words can say;
I think of thee when far away,
And hush each anxious thought to rest.
Could I but tell thee all, and see
An answering message in thine eyes,
So I might only win the prize
More dear than all beside to me:
If but thy voice, so soft and low,
Whispered love's accents in mine ear,
If but thine eyes, so bright and clear,
Looked pityingly on all my woe:

Then, brighter than the southern moon
Shining on rippling summer seas,
And softer than the whispering breeze
That stirs the sleeping woods at noon;
Sweeter than vesper-hymns, that rise
From convent walls, to highest heaven,
Or distant chiming bells at even
That tell of peace which never dies;
My Queen, thine eyes would shine on me,
Thy voice would cause my heart to beat,
And I would cast me at thy feet,
And give myself, my all, to thee.

F. W. Grey.


MEE
R.TAYLOR

M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR

"I AM HERE TO LOOK AFTER YOU, YOU SEE."

THE ARGOSY.

OCTOBER, 1884.

THE WHITE WITCH.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE JOURNEY.

THE afternoon had been dull and dreary, and though it was not much past four o'clock, the evening mists were already gathering over Croxham woods and Croxham Abbey. Godfrey Mayne stood in the drawing-room of the latter edifice, gazing about him as a man bewildered. Events seemed to be taking a sudden turn which for the moment dazed him.

Ben Griffiths, who had been talking to him outside the window, had disappeared from the scene; Mary Dixon had been with him inside the room, and had disappeared: instead of these, Godfrey saw advancing the band of policemen. Not six of them, as Ben had said in his haste: there were four, and someone who was in plain clothes and seemed to be their head, a stranger to Godfrey.

Holding his hand to his forehead for a moment, as one does whose brain is confused, Godfrey remembered that his first work must be to find Mary and protect her. Were these ominous officers of the law coming after *her*, he asked himself, or after her mother. Swiftly passing into the hall, he was wondering whether to look for her upstairs or down, when one of the maids, singing a light song under her breath, came towards him from the servants' apartments. It was Emily. Evidently she knew nothing yet of the grave crisis that was threatening. The girl started when she saw Godfrey. She had supposed him to be still confined to the easy chair in his room.

"Oh, sir!" she cried in her surprise, "are you well enough to be downstairs? I'm sure I'm glad."

"Oh, quite well," returned Godfrey. "I was looking for Miss Dixon. Have you seen her?"

"I saw her go out by the refectory two or three minutes ago," replied Emily. "She's gone for a walk, I think, sir: she had her bonnet and mantle on."

Godfrey caught up his hat and went out also. He did not know in what direction to look, and took a few steps hither and thither as well as his weakness and lameness allowed, for his knee was feeling troublesome, and gazed about him; but he could not see her. Perfectly aware that he was in no state to follow up the search, he turned back, hoping she was in some secure hiding-place, safe from the policemen. As he was entering the Abbey, one of them met him, a man he knew.

"Did I see three or four of you coming up to the house just now, Taylor?" he asked, with all the indifference he could assume.

"Yes, sir," replied Taylor, dropping his voice to a confidential key. "We are come to search the Abbey, sir."

"To search the Abbey!" repeated Godfrey, proudly and resentfully. "What for? What do you mean?"

"Well, sir, we men don't know the rights of it; it has not been explained to us. Inspector Macdonald ordered us out on the errand. It has to do with a murder, we heard, and that the party wanted for it is hiding himself in the Abbey, or somewhere round about it."

Godfrey's ears eagerly caught up the word "himself." It was evident that the men knew little or nothing.

"Who was it gave the information?" he asked.

"A London detective, sir, who was sent for by Sir William Hunt."

Godfrey was not in the habit of swearing, but he threw a very bad word at Mr. Cattermole and his treachery, as he went forward to meet Inspector Macdonald.

"I ask your pardon, sir, for this intrusion," said the latter with deprecation, "but we could not help ourselves. Mr. Mayne is not at home, I find."

"No," replied Godfrey; "but *I* am. What is the meaning of this?"

"We've got a warrant, sir, to search the Abbey. I'm sure I feel ashamed to put such an indignity on Mr. Mayne; but the law must be obeyed, sir, as you know. It is about that old business of Sir William Hunt's, sir, the murder of his son," added the inspector. "The people who were connected with it are thought to be staying now in this neighbourhood."

"But not at the Abbey?" flashed Godfrey. "Who granted the search-warrant?"

"The new magistrate, sir; that rich cotton-broker, who has just come to live at Elm Hall ——"

"I thought so," haughtily interjected Godfrey. "One of our own order would never have thus insulted my father."

"It was applied for by a detective who is down here from Scotland Yard; he is acting with Sir William," continued the inspector. "I will read it to you, sir, before we begin our search."

"No," dissented Godfrey, "I decline to hear it. My father will be in very shortly: he can do as he pleases."

Terrified on the score of Mary, restlessly uneasy, Godfrey wandered out again. It struck him that she might have taken refuge at the farm under the friendly wing of Nancy Wilding. He was limping towards it when he met Nancy.

"Is Miss Dixon at your house, Nancy?" he asked. "Have you seen her?"

Nancy looked at him keenly. "No," she answered slowly, "Miss Dixon is not at our house. Ought you to be about, Master Godfrey?"

But Godfrey was struck with something peculiar in her look and tone; he also noticed that she did not deny having seen Miss Dixon. With a warm impulsive movement, he put both his hands upon her shoulders.

"Nancy," he said earnestly, "you have been my good friend for many years. Be so now. If you know aught of Miss Dixon, tell it me. More danger is gathering about her than you can picture, and I must shield her from it if I can."

"Then I think I had better tell you, Master Godfrey," was the unexpected answer. And Nancy began a short narrative.

That afternoon, soon after four o'clock, Nancy Wilding, coming towards home from an errand, saw accidentally a light spring cart with a white covering drawn up in the lane by the back wall of the farm. She knew both the cart and horse to be Miller Bowden's. In her curiosity she went up to it, to inquire as to what it was doing there, and to her surprise found the cart had nobody in it. While wondering at this, and exercising her imaginative powers, Ben Griffiths came rushing up from the direction of the Abbey, carrying a lady's handbag, which he put into the cart.

"What's the English of all this, Ben?" cried she.

"The English of it is, that it's no business of yours, Miss Nancy," answered impudent Ben. "The sooner you make yourself scarce, the better."

"No doubt," retorted Nancy.

She went a little way farther off, and stood watching. In a minute, she saw Miss Dixon, also hastening in the direction of the cart. Before she had quite gained it, Nancy advanced and stood in her way.

"Don't hinder me, Nancy," pleaded the panting girl; "oh, don't hinder me!"

"I'd not hinder you, Miss Dixon," replied Nancy gravely. "I'd rather help you if I can; though I don't know what the trouble is."

"I am trying to escape from my enemies," she said. "Ben is so good; he has got this cart, and is going to drive me to the station. Do not let anybody know that you have seen me, for the love of heaven!"

"Not *any* body," said Nancy.

Mary, now on her way to the cart, arrested her steps, and turned. "Except Mr. Godfrey—should he ask," she whispered. "Tell him that I am gone away to where I shall be protected and sheltered."

The next moment, Mary was hidden from observation under the cover of the cart, and Ben was rattling it along the lane on its road to Cheston Station. This was the information that Nancy now disclosed to Godfrey.

"Thank you, Nancy," he quietly said : and went back indoors as quickly as he was able.

He must follow Mary to the station, and go up with her to London, to be her protector on the journey. A fond thought (though not a very likely one) took possession of him—that she was probably gone to take refuge with his aunt, Mrs. Penteith. He remembered how, a day or two ago, she had thanked him for suggesting it. In two minutes he was ready for the journey, even to his overcoat, which he put on.

To walk to Cheston station in time to catch the five o'clock up-train, would have been nothing to Godfrey a short while ago, but he knew that he could not do it now. He was feeling sick and giddy already from pain and exhaustion, and made for the stables, hoping, praying that some horse, some vehicle might be there, and one of the grooms to make ready and drive it. His head was becoming curiously confused.

His own horse was in the stable, his dog-cart in its place in the coach house; but never a groom could he see. Not a sign of man anywhere. Steadying himself for a short interval against the wall to gather strength, Godfrey was proceeding to the task of harnessing the horse himself, when the brougham drove slowly into the yard, after leaving Mr. and Mrs. Mayne at the Abbey.

"Barth," said Godfrey, appearing before the astonished coachman, 'I have business at Cheston station. Drive me to it at the top of your speed, or I may be too late. Don't spare your horses."

Barth turned his horses round, noticing that his young master reeled from weakness as he got into the carriage, and drove off, indulging his amazement.

It was some minutes before Mr. Mayne's anger, at finding his house in possession of the police, allowed him to understand or even listen to the inspector, who at last induced him to give him a private interview. But Mrs. Mayne, whose presence, as she stood without speaking by her husband's side since their entrance, had prevented the man from explaining his business promptly, now interfered, and in a hoarse whisper begged him and her husband to let her know the truth of the matter at once. Mr. Mayne, returning to his senses a little, would not hear of this ; but, giving her fussily in charge of Mrs. Garner, he went with the police-inspector into the library.

"Now, what is all this confounded nonsense?" asked he, as soon as he had settled himself judicially in his chair.

The inspector produced the warrant, and told him respectfully, that it had been granted that morning, on information supplied by a London detective named Power, who had been brought down from Town by Sir William Hunt.

"Now that's talking nonsense, Macdonald," said the irascible old gentleman. "My good friend, William Hunt, would not send you into *my* house with a search-warrant. You must have made some strange mistake."

The inspector hastened to say that if there was a mistake, it was not he who had made it; he had only done as he was ordered. Whilst he was speaking, the front door bell rang loudly, and Hawkins, who had entirely lost his head in the alarm the police caused him, showed in Sir William Hunt.

In a small neighbourhood, a matter of this kind—the march of the police upon one of its most important mansions—cannot be kept quiet. All kinds of versions were beginning to circulate; and Sir William Hunt, walking abroad in Cheston, had heard of them. It *was* a mistake; and he had come striding over to the Abbey in deep distress and contrition, to set it right.

The search-warrant applied for by the London detective, Mr. Power, to the new magistrate, ought to have been for "the Abbey Farm." Between them they had committed the error of making it out for "The Abbey;" perhaps not altogether conscious that the two places were distinct.

"You don't think I'd allow such a thing, my old friend, do you?" cried Sir William, his hands and Mr. Mayne's locked together.

"I *know* you'd not; I was telling Macdonald so." And they both relieved their ire by turning it on the inspector.

"But what does it all mean?" cried Mr. Mayne. "What is the search-warrant for? Who is being looked after?"

Sir William's explanation took up a little time. It appeared that while he was in London with Lady Hunt, he paid a visit to Scotland Yard. He had intended to stay but a day in town; but he stayed two or three days; and being impatient to hear whether Mr. Detective Cattermole was progressing in his search after the guilty parties, he betook himself to Scotland Yard to enquire, supposing that the detective force there received Mr. Cattermole's reports daily. Sir William was introduced to a superior officer named Johnson, he had a long and confidential conference with him, and the result was that Mr. Johnson determined to send another detective to Croxham, to "look up" Mr. Cattermole and his dilatory proceedings. At least, that was the impression Sir William carried away with him. This second detective, Mr. Power, had now been at Croxham for two days, hard at work in secret; and the first step he took openly was to apply for a search-warrant for the Abbey Farm, the new justice, a stranger to the place, having granted it, in error, for the Abbey.

Inspector Macdonald listened to this explanation as eagerly as Mr.

Mayne; more so, indeed, for the latter was too bewildered to pay much attention.

"Look here, Hunt," he said, "what is it that's amiss at the farm? What do they expect to find there? Tell me that."

Sir William looked bewildered: to answer the question was quite beyond his power. The new man, Power, did not give him reasons for what he did; he was remarkably close and silent.

"It is all about my poor son's murder, and the people who are thought to be somewhere near, and who are dodging us," said he. "I say, Mayne, it's a blessing my wife is away! She'd never let me have any more peace if she knew of this entrance into your house to-day."

Sir William Hunt, backed by the Inspector, stopped the search, and the men withdrew from the Abbey. The farm could not be entered, as no warrant had been obtained for it.

Meanwhile Ben Griffiths drove the spring-cart cheerily along, and reached Cheston station before the train was up. Soon they saw it come in, and Mary despatched Ben to get her a ticket for London.

"First-class, miss?"

"Oh, any class, Ben, so that I get away," she said trembling. "Yes; first-class, I suppose."

Ben got the ticket and came back to her. The train waited ten minutes at Cheston, but Mary thought she had better get into it at once, while few people were about. "Ben," she said, taking his hand into hers before she left the shelter of the cart, "I shall never forget your kindness. I cannot reward it now, but ——"

"Don't you talk about that, miss," interrupted Ben with moist eyes. "I'd rather do things for you for nothing than for other folks at a price. I *stole* this here cart to-day," he went on to confess, "and old Bowden will go on at me like a house afire; but I'd do as much again to-morrow for you, and a deal more."

Mary could not forbear smiling. She chose a carriage that had some passengers in it, and Ben placed her little bag beside her as she took her seat. An old gentleman and old lady were beyond her in the carriage; they were talking and did not notice her. She drew the curtain before the window at her elbow, and sat back, hoping to escape observation. Passengers came up by twos and threes, and took their places in the train, and the time of its departure was at hand. Ben strolled about on the platform, leaving the miller's horse to take care of itself.

Dashing up to the station came the well-known brougham of Croxham Abbey. Barth pulled up his horses with a jerk, and Godfrey Mayne got out. Mary Dixon, cowering behind her blind, saw him, and clasped her hands in trouble. "What shall I do?" she gasped to herself: "how avoid him?"

Godfrey had only time to take his ticket and dash into the nearest first-class compartment he came to before the train started. It was already in motion when a young, slight, fair man rushed on to the platform without having had time to take his ticket, and going, as Godfrey had done, straight to the nearest carriage, halted at that in which young Mr. Mayne was already seated.

Ben, standing at the door, glancing at Mr. Godfrey and thinking he looked very ill, was pushed aside by the new comer, who spoke sharply:

"Here, out of the way, will you!" and he opened the door and jumped in.

Ben staggered back at sound of the voice, and stared at him with wide eyes, again and again. He then tore along by the side of the moving train, looking with eagerness into every carriage. At last he succeeded in finding Miss Dixon. She was not alone, as Ben knew: the old lady and gentleman, smothered in rugs, were curled up in the corner of the other end of the compartment. But Ben's errand was too important for the presence of strangers to prevent his speaking; he sprang up on the step and hissed out in a gruff whisper which made the old lady scream:

"Look out! Look out, miss. As sure as I'm alive there's somebody after you."

Before Mary could speak Ben had sprung down and disappeared.

Godfrey Mayne, feverish with anxiety about Mary, fatigued by premature exertion, was sitting a few carriages away from her, staring fixedly at the opposite seat, taking no notice of his fellow-traveller, who sat at his end of the carriage very quietly, apparently asleep. But when Godfrey, growing sick and faint with weakness, went to the window, opened it, put his head out, and then drew back, turned, and moved restlessly about, unable to keep still, he seemed to communicate his uneasiness to his companion, who bent his head still lower on his breast as if in sleep, but gave from time to time keen glances at the other man.

When the train, an express, reached its next stopping-place, Clewe, Godfrey felt too ill to get out and look for Mary's carriage. When the guard came by to look at the tickets, his companion had to explain that, having been only just in time to catch the train, he had started without one; and during the colloquy which followed as he drew out his purse and paid his fare, his voice, which he kept low, struck Godfrey and caused him to examine the stranger for the first time. He was so slight, so fair, so beardless, that he looked scarcely more than a boy; his eyes were light, his eyebrows and eyelashes flaxen, his mouth had thin, straight lips. Godfrey fancied he had somewhere seen somebody a little like him.

The young man seemed disconcerted by the close attention his fellow-traveller now, for a few minutes, bestowed upon him; but as the train whirled on all Godfrey's thoughts were diverted to Mary, and his chances of taking her safely to his aunt's house in Eaton

Place when they reached London. The fatigue and anxiety he was going through were telling heavily on him; his face was ghastly white, and he could not rest in any position; he began to fear his strength would not hold out to the journey's end.

Then the voice of the stranger, not in quite the same tones as he had used before, addressed him:

"I can see that you are far from being well enough to take so long a journey, sir. I am a doctor; will you allow me to prescribe for you?"

He spoke very courteously and genially, and drew from his pocket a case, from which he took a small bottle.

"Thank you; you are very kind," answered Godfrey faintly. "It is true I am not very well," he added, still wondering what it was about this stranger which seemed just to stop short of bringing some memory to his mind. "But if, as I think, it is a sedative you propose to give me, I dare not take it: it might throw me into so deep a sleep that I should not awake at the journey's end."

"It is not a sedative, but a stimulant. And you had better take it, for unless you do have something to keep you up, trust me, you will be insensible long before we reach London."

Godfrey felt this to be so probable that he hesitated no longer, but swallowed the draught, and settled himself again in his corner. But he had scarcely time to discover, by the drowsiness which he felt creeping over him, that he had been deceived, before the sleeping-draught overcame him, and he fell back unconscious. The stranger then arranged him comfortably in his corner with a satisfied expression of face, and went to sleep himself.

When at last the express was nearing the terminus in London and came to a standstill for the collection of tickets, the young doctor ingeniously slipped out of the carriage, and got into the next. The guard had much difficulty in arousing the other passenger, and thought he had never seen a man so sound asleep before. Godfrey seemed dazed, and could hardly be brought to understand that it was his ticket which was wanted. Then the train went on.

Now Mary Dixon, knowing that Godfrey was in the train and fearing very much that somebody else was, a greater enemy than Godfrey, or what did Ben's parting warning mean, had been wondering how she could best elude the notice of these two pursuers; and she could think of nothing better than remaining in the carriage until the crowd of people should have left the station. Accordingly when the train slowly drew up at the terminus, Mary ensconced herself right back in her corner, her feet doubled up on the seat and the blind well drawn before the window. A porter looked in, saw nobody, and went on again. The old gentleman and lady, her fellow travellers, had left the train at its last stopping-place.

Presently, peeping out, Mary saw Godfrey assisted across the platform by a man in the station uniform. He looked frightfully ill, and was taken into the waiting-room. Her heart ached for him, her heart yearned to comfort him; she could hardly help running to him there and then.

Waiting yet a little while until he should be safely away, she began to think her time for escape had come. As yet she had not seen a sign of anybody else to dread. Most of the passengers had gone, with their luggage, and the bustle of the platform had nearly subsided. It was not late; not yet half past ten.

Carrying her bag in her hand, Mary quietly left the carriage and was about to walk towards the cabs, when the young man who had been so attentive to Godfrey came up to her and raised his hat.

"I am here to look after you, you see," said he cheerfully.

She glanced round at the fair beardless face, at the bright hard smile on the thin lips, and, shuddering from head to foot, gave vent to an exclamation of terror, which was lost in the shriek of a moving engine.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT MRS. PENTEITH'S.

After the guard had gone off with his ticket, Godfrey Mayne lay back in the carriage, dazed and bewildered. Where was he? What had happened to him? It was with an effort that he recalled only an outline of the circumstances.

Mary? Yes, Mary was in one of the carriages before him. He must find her as soon as they got in, and convey her to his aunt's in Eaton Place. But how was it that he felt so drowsy?—why could he not keep his eyes open? Then he remembered the draught the young doctor had given him, and looked round the carriage. But where was the doctor? He was gone. The mental effort to recall these facts was too much for Godfrey; his head fell back, and he slept again.

At the terminus, when the train stopped, there was the same difficulty in arousing him that the guard had experienced. The latter, called to by a porter, came to the carriage door. He was from Lancashire, and knew Godfrey.

"Dead drunk," pronounced the porter.

"Get along with you!" cried the guard indignantly. "Drunk indeed! It is young Mr. Mayne of Croxham Abbey."

"Folks drink, if they've a mind to, whether they live in a Abbey or an hovel," retorted the porter.

"*He* doesn't," said the guard. "He has had a bad illness: got shot in mistake for somebody else. I never was more surprised than when I saw him come to the train."

"I think I must have been drugged," said Godfrey, when they had succeeded in awaking him. "There was a young man in the carriage with me, a doctor he called himself, and he gave me a draught."

"Why should he drug you, sir?" asked the guard, believing that young Mr. Mayne's mind was wandering.

"Well, I suppose he meant it for a sleeping-draught," amended Godfrey: "he saw I was faint and ill."

They brought him a glass of water in the station room, and Godfrey, after drinking it, tried to collect his thoughts. Suddenly he remembered Mary, and staggered to his feet.

"I must go out," he said. "There was a young lady somewhere in the train; I must find her. I have to take her to my aunt's."

But even in the midst of speaking, he fell back from weakness and looked up at them bewildered, his mind once more losing itself. He then got up again, and said he must go.

"The young lady must be gone too," said the porter, winking at the guard, supposing that she existed but in imagination. "See, sir," as they supported him out to the platform, "all the passengers have cleared out."

They put him into a hansom, Godfrey being just able to give the address: Lady Ann Northstone's, Eaton Place. And the porter, at the suggestion of the guard was about to get in after him to see him safely to his destination, when a policeman, who had been looking on from the first, quietly pushed the man aside and took his place.

"I shall go with him myself," said he. "It is as much like a case of drugging as any I ever saw. Drive gently," he added to the driver.

The cab was going slowly out of the station, when another hansom came out, and rattled past it. By the light of the gas-lamps, Godfrey saw Mary Dixon seated in it; he bent forward, and in her sad eyes, as they met his, there lay a great terror. By her side, holding his hand on her shoulder, with what was evidently a firm grasp, sat the young doctor who had travelled up with Godfrey.

And whether it might have been something in the detaining grasp which struck on Godfrey's senses, or whether the side-face of the man, seen by Godfrey for the first time, betrayed him, he could not have told; but enlightenment flashed on his mind. That young, fair man, whose face had been familiar, and yet not familiar, was no other than the detective, Cattermole.

Godfrey sprang up from his seat with a great cry: but the policeman held him down.

"Quite off his head," thought the officer.

All kinds of questions were whirling through Godfrey's brain. That the present aspect of the young and slim man was his natural aspect, could admit of no doubt. He must have come to Croxham in disguise; padding his back and shoulders, and wearing iron-grey hair on his head and face, to make himself look like a middle-aged man! But for what? How crafty these detectives were, and how could Mary or her mother hope to defend themselves from him?

"It's fearfully cold to-night," said he to the man beside him. His teeth were chattering, and he was shivering from head to foot.

"Yes, sir," said the policeman. But the weather was warm for the time of year, and he knew that the gentleman was only cold because he was ill. Turning as he gave his answer, and seeing that the shivering had suddenly ceased, and that some startling change had come over the sickly face, it struck him all at once that it was a dead man he was carrying home to his friends. He touched his arm, and Godfrey opened his eyes and shivered again.

"I beg pardon, sir; hadn't you better stop at a doctor's?"

"Doctor's! Oh, no. I'm all right, thank you; only rather done up."

Lady Ann Northstone's was an early, sober household; and Mrs. Penteith, mistress of it for the time being, was early also. When the cab stopped in Eaton Place, the lights of the hall and passages had been extinguished for the night, and everybody was gone upstairs. The policeman rang them down again, and Godfrey was helped into the sitting-room.

Mrs. Penteith came down in great alarm. The policeman detained her for a moment before she went into the room, to explain what he knew of the matter.

"He seems very ill indeed, ma'am," he whispered in conclusion. "I think a doctor ought to see him at once. I'll fetch one if it will be any accommodation to you—if you'll tell me who."

"Thank you; wait one moment," she answered.

Godfrey was lying back in the chair where they had placed him. He kissed his aunt affectionately, and asked her pardon for coming to her so unexpectedly, and in such a sick state.

"I didn't know where else to go to, Aunt Madge," said he. "The hotels ——"

"My poor boy," she interrupted, bending over him with tears in her eyes, "how can you talk like that?—where should you go, but to me? Who in the whole world would welcome you so warmly as I, or nurse you so tenderly?"

"I know, I know," he murmured, getting faint again. "But it is only for to-night, you know, aunt. To-morrow, I ——"

Godfrey did not conclude the sentence; he broke down. His head fell, his face turned whiter even than it had been before, and he looked like a dying man.

With streaming eyes, Mrs. Penteith availed herself of the friendly policeman's offer, and told him what medical man to fetch. Meanwhile a room was hastily prepared for Godfrey; and Mrs. Penteith's own maid, Dunning, a sour-faced woman who had been in her service twenty years, and was almost as much attached to the young fellow as she was herself, persuaded Godfrey to get into his comfortable bed and sat watching him and telling him rather tartly to go to sleep, as if he were a boy of five sent to bed for being naughty.

The doctor came and saw Godfrey alone, and spoke with Mrs. Penteith before his departure. She went into the bed-room afterwards, and stood silently by Godfrey.

"I'm all right now, Aunt Madge. I've been ill lately, and the long journey knocked me up. I shall be off again to-morrow," added he, with an assumed sprightliness; which, from the mouth of that helpless figure, with wan face and hollow eyes, was as cheering as the ghastly smile of a skeleton.

As she passed her loving fingers through his hair and looked down upon him, he read in the kind grave face that she knew the truth about his condition, and that it was not favourable. He rolled his head uneasily on the pillow.

"That old man has been frightening you. I shall be all right to-morrow, aunt. You don't think I would have landed myself upon you if I had been seriously ill."

He meant to take himself off somehow, before she got up the next morning, and to go he did not yet know where. To some hotel perhaps.

"My poor boy," she whispered gently. "Someone has been treating you badly, I fear. You never doubted my love before."

His features contracted, and then relaxed, as with a sob of terrible pain, which seemed to thrill through his whole frame, he raised his hands to her compassionate, well-loved face, and smiled up at her.

"No no, I don't doubt it—heaven help me if I did! Oh Aunt Margaret, my very soul seems on fire. I think the sight of your dear old face has saved me from a fit of madness. Saved me! It—it was *he*, you know."

His hands fell, his eyes were glittering with fever. Mrs. Penteith saw how it was—that the trouble which beset him, of whatsoever nature it might be, had been too much for his brain. His reason was temporarily gone; his speech wandered incoherently. She tried to soothe him, but he did not know her.

The only influence that had any power over him in his delirium, was that of the sour-faced Dunning, who took the high ground of Christian indignation at his impious outbursts, and held him down with strong skinny arms, while she lectured and scolded him in a loud harsh voice, which perhaps, unconscious though he was, impressed him with the feeling that he was in the reverend hands of some energetic and muscular dignitary of the Church. At any rate, she succeeded in quelling his tendency to violence.

"A pretty thing to talk about in the hearing of two respectable women, and one of them your own aunt!" rebuked Dunning, upon hearing him mutter that something was as hot as a certain place. "I wonder you're not afraid of the floor opening and swallowing you up!

And you lying on a sick-bed and ought to be preparing yourself for heaven; but it's little you'll see of that, Master Godfrey, if you keep your thoughts fixed so much on the other. Instead of bearing a little pain as a Christian should, you—What? Gone away and left you, has she? No, she hasn't; she's sitting beside you all the time.—Saw her with him in the cab? Good gracious, who are you talking about? Don't think any more about her, then, she isn't worth it. And what's her beauty worth if she's so bad? I'm ashamed to sit and hear you go on, sir."

But Dunning nursed him indefatigably all the same; and when he apostrophised her in terms to which she was not accustomed, and implored her to kiss him, she swooped upon him and gave him a quick little peck with a glimmer in her sharp eyes which did not make her look any sweeter, but which, nevertheless, signified that there was nothing she could refuse to the boy whom she had smacked and soaped and made to say his prayers twenty years ago.

The exertion of body when he was not in a state to bear it, added to his mental perplexity and torment, had been too much for Godfrey Mayne. His recognition of Mr. Cattermole had served to upset what little equanimity was left to him; and the doubt racking him now was—whether Mary was with him by mutual arrangement, or whether Cattermole had exercised his power, as a detective, to compel it. He remembered that Mary had been going away with him from Croxham *of her own free will*, as she had taken care to assure Godfrey: and now that Godfrey saw him as he was—a young and good-looking man—he knew not what to think, except that he was all the more dangerous.

With all this making havoc of his brain, Godfrey was not likely to lie like a lamb under the ministrations of his aunt and the injunctions of Dunning. But the night passed better than it had begun, and towards morning he fell asleep.

In a few days the fever had subsided, and Godfrey began to get well. Dunning, from being a devoted nurse, became a tyrant, claiming the privilege of an old servant to read aloud to him passages selected by herself from religious works that she found in Lady Ann Northstone's library and in her own, which she judged suitable to the case of a young man whose mind was certainly in a far from healthy state. Her mistress was aghast at this liberty, for although she prayed constantly that her darling nephew might be led to think more seriously of sacred things, she would never have dared to open the subject unasked with him, still less to storm him with extracts from "Steps and Stages on the Road to Glory," and to pause impressively and glare at him with penetrating fixity, as Dunning took upon herself to do, whenever she came to a passage which she thought particularly applicable.

Mrs. Penteith was sorry to see, too, that Godfrey took a questionable pleasure in these readings, and even indulged Dunning with a nod, and "That's just my case, isn't it?" when she read any sentence with special emphasis.

"It isn't right to laugh at her, because she is in earnest, Godfrey," said she gently, one day when they were alone.

"What does it matter as long as I don't let her know I'm laughing, Aunt Margaret? I wouldn't hurt the good old thing's feelings for the world; she's working me a book-marker with a text about the lusts of the flesh on it, which I'm to put in every novel I read. There isn't much in the world I can laugh at now, aunt: let her preach at me, it won't do me any harm."

He searched the newspapers through as soon as he was able; but there was never a word upon the subject he feared to find. The past tragedy connected with Sir William Hunt's son found no mention in them. Mrs. Penteith had of course written to Mr. Mayne: who had sent back a long, confused account of the trouble things were in: his wife was ill in bed; his step-daughter had gone suddenly away, in defiance of his wishes, to join a Sisterhood in London; while the whole household had been thrown into a state of disorganisation and commotion through a search made by the police for some criminal who was supposed to have taken refuge in the Abbey; fortunately, before they had proceeded far in it, they discovered their mistake, and that it was another place which ought to have been searched. Mr. Mayne continued, in a deeply injured and complaining strain, to speak of Godfrey's inexplicable freak of taking himself off so unexpectedly and leaving no word behind him. He was of course sorry, he said, to hear of his illness, but if he would travel up to London or elsewhere before he was well, he must expect to suffer for it. Why his son should have gone, he was unable to understand; it was thought that the visit of the police must have scared him, his mind being weakened by illness and, consequently, his fears ready to be acted upon. Mr. Mayne concluded by asking, with cutting sarcasm, whether Godfrey had expected to be robbed or murdered, and that at twenty-five a boy ought to have got over being frightened by a few policemen.

Mrs. Penteith felt rather indignant at this letter and its aspersions on her nephew. Godfrey had given her no explanation of his sudden journey, but she had found out a great deal from his ravings while he was delirious. She did not press his confidence, she did not dare. He was now able to leave his room and breakfast with her in the boudoir on the same floor. She watched him one morning as he took up and opened a letter which was waiting for him on the table, directed in Elspeth's handwriting. But his face betrayed nothing but indifference, and when he had read it he tossed it carelessly down; then noticing his aunt's look of interest, he passed it to her. It was from Mrs. Thornhill.

"My Dear Godfrey,—We have just heard, by a letter from Mrs. Underwood, of the accident which happened to you the very day we left home; it has grieved us greatly. We were all also much touched to hear how you went up to town before you were fit to travel, in your anxiety to fulfil Mr. Thornhill's conditions. *Elspeth especially;* who, as she may not write to you, has directed the envelope. Coniston is getting very cold and we shall probably return to Croxham sooner than we intended, and I hope we shall see you there before long. You need not trouble to answer this, as I dare say you are not well enough yet for much letter-writing. I hope you are taking good care of yourself, and that you are very temperate in your diet; I know many doctors recommend stimulants, but I do not think they are good things, as they tend to cause inflammation. As I do not know your address in town, I send this to the Abbey to be forwarded.

"With kind regards from all, yours very sincerely,

"JANE R. THORNHILL."

Mrs. Penteith put it down and took off her glasses in silence. When Godfrey looked at her again, he was surprised at her expression of face.

"Why, what's the matter, Aunt Margaret?—you look so angry."

"That letter has put me rather out of temper, my dear."

"What, Mrs. Thornhill's? I don't see anything in it to be angry about. She has not any special gift for composition, certainly."

"But it is so cold and commonplace. Is Elspeth like that? If so ——" She stopped.

"If so?"

"I am not surprised—at anything. Are you still engaged to Elspeth, Godfrey?"

"I don't quite know," said he, carelessly. "She has been away lately and I haven't thought about her. The Vicar accused me of want of fervour; or, rather, I believe, of misdirected fervour, and suspended my engagement. But they seem satisfied now," added he in a hard voice.

There was a long silence. Godfrey got up from the table and walked with the help of a stick to the window. This short colloquy had roused the sleeping dogs of thought. His aunt watched him anxiously. When he came back, moody and miserable, to the fireplace, on one side of which she was sitting, his face relaxed a little, and he stretched himself on the hearthrug and laid his head on her lap like a boy.

"My poor, poor boy," said she tenderly, lifting his head with loving hands and looking anxiously into the face that had become worn and wan.

"You need not pity me, aunt. It is all my own fault. I've been playing with the matches like a naughty boy, and burnt myself."

Mrs. Penteith said nothing; only stroked his hair, and waited.

"You know what has happened to me," said he presently, looking shrewdly up into her face. "At least you know a good deal, and part of the rest I expect you guess. I have gone through the experience which you recommended to make a man of me; but instead of that it has taken more than half the man away, and left me three parts incapacited, mind and body. I feel sometimes that I would like never to set eyes on a woman again, for they are all false—you and Dunning are angels and don't count—and I have no ambition, and no talents to satisfy it if I had, and I find myself in a blind alley, without energy and without hope."

"What has she done to you, Godfrey, that girl? I know her name—Mary," continued Mrs. Penteith. "It was on your lips in your delirium, sometimes with reproach, more often with loving tenderness."

"Why she has done nothing," said he, raising himself and looking up at her with a flush on his face and glittering eyes; "absolutely nothing. The fault was all mine: I fell in love with her, and could not help myself. For she fulfilled my ideal, she stirred my imagination, she touched my heart, she fired my senses; I loved her better than my own soul; I would have died for her. All this is profane, is it not, aunt?—wicked, contemptible. But the end is unimpeachably moral. I thought she was in some great danger, I am not quite clear on that point yet; at any rate, I ran my head obstinately against a brick wall and persisted in trying to save her from an individual, from whom, as it turns out, I conclude she did not wish to be saved. After following her up here in the train to protect her, and intending to bring her to you, aunt, and to tell you all at the same time, I found that he had come up also, and I saw them both driving quietly away together in the same cab."

"Is she heartless, Godfrey?"

"Oh no. She has a heart; it is only that, in my opinion, she has not given it to the right person. She was so sorry for me when I was ill and so sweet to me, that I deceived myself into the belief that she cared for me—and I was madly happy. I could have been shot once a week to have had her there by me—" he stopped, his voice quivering. "Poor little thing! She used to sit by me and look at me like some beautiful child, her sweet, brown, loving eyes saying a hundred strange and wonderful things as they looked into mine. And her fragile white hands, which she used to leave in mine to please me, thrilled me with their soft touch just like fairy fingers, and when she kissed me, if she only let her lips rest for a moment on my forehead, she cast a spell over me that lifted me into another world."

"Kissed you, Godfrey! Did she do that?"

Godfrey was now sitting on the sofa, his head bent down on the cushion, so that his face was hidden. At the question he looked up.

"She did once or twice. I was very ill, you see, aunt; and she said she did it as my sister. But it had not a sisterly effect on me."

"No, no," murmured Mrs. Penteith. "What is the real truth of it all?" she went on to think: "what about the girl's own feelings? Godfrey," she said aloud, "you must forget her; it is best you should."

"Yes, when I can," he answered. "It may cost time to do it, though. She has taken from me every hope and interest I possessed in life."

He went out of the room as he spoke, carrying with him his pain and anguish. It was portrayed unmistakeably on his countenance, and Mrs. Penteith's heart ached as she gazed after him.

"If I could but restore him to happiness!" she sighed passionately; "he does not deserve to have been rendered miserable. *What* about the girl?"

When Godfrey came back to the boudoir, it was empty; his aunt had gone downstairs. He drew the easy chair before the fire, and sat down in dreary apathy. He could hear the front-door bell from time to time, and his aunt's voice below, and the footsteps of the servants going about the house, but nothing to rouse or to disturb him. Presently, however, he turned his head sharply and looked round the room as if in search of something; then he looked back at the fire as vacantly as before. But a minute later he raised his head and listened, with an eager, hungry look in his eyes. There was nothing to hear but Dunning's sharp voice on the stairs. He sprang up, however, restless and excited, and was at the door when it opened and Dunning came in with beef-tea and toast upon a tray.

"Now what is the good of our wearing ourselves to skin-and-bone nursing you, Master Godfrey, if you can't be left to yourself five minutes but you must be pottering about and trying to get your knee inflamed again?" cried she. "I knew what it would be if we let you get up! You sit down there, sir, and eat this, and don't let me catch you walking about again."

He obeyed meekly, but spoke as he sat down.

"I say, Dunning, didn't I hear the front-door bell just now?"

"I dare say you did; it's been going all the morning. The people Mrs. Penteith helps for Lady Ann come on a Wednesday morning. Some of 'em are gentle-folks who've seen better days."

"But just now, that last ring: who came in then?"

"Oh, that was a young lady; a stranger."

"A stranger!" he cried excitedly, springing up and spilling his beef-tea.

"Good gracious, what's the matter?" exclaimed Dunning.

"But who was it? Did you hear the name?"

"Yes, I did, and the name was Davenant," said Dunning. "A Miss Davenant; come about the Home Mission."

Godfrey sat down again, disappointed, and stared into the fire. Dunning stood over him to watch the consumption of the beef-tea; which Godfrey took; and then, finding he was not in a fit state to receive a word in season, she left the room with the empty cup and tray, sighing over his unregenerate state.

"Desperately wicked of him!" pronounced Dunning. "And all, I reckon, because he got out of me that it was a *young* lady who was below!"

Godfrey could no longer sit still; his apathy had changed into intense restlessness. He turned and twisted himself in his chair, he walked about; at last he opened the door and listened. As he did so, he heard the front door close, and his aunt's old butler come back from showing somebody out. Godfrey limped across the landing and down the stairs to the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. Penteith just shutting her work-table drawer. She started on seeing him.

"Oh, Godfrey, you should not walk about so much; you ought not to have come down," said she anxiously.

But he had advanced to the middle of the room with an eager light in his eyes. "She has been here; she has been here!" he cried. "I know it, it was Mary Dixon. Oh, aunt, why did you not let me see her?"

"My dear boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Penteith, startled at his excitement. "It was not Miss Dixon indeed. Come to the window and look; she cannot be out of sight yet."

She threw open the window and he looked hurriedly out. But whoever the visitor might have been, Mary was not to be seen. He drew in his head, not in the least satisfied.

"I tell you I can find out the very chair she sat on," said he, on fire with excitement still. And he did throw himself into the very compartment of the ottoman on which the visitor had rested.

Mrs. Penteith looked bewildered. "It is a most curious mistake of yours, Godfrey. Miss Davenant, instead of being a beautiful, well-dressed woman, such as you describe Miss Dixon to be, is insignificant and poorly attired, with nothing striking about her."

"Poorly attired!" echoed Godfrey, his face contracting with pain.

"Now listen, and I will tell you all about it. Miss Davenant is a lady who saw you on your journey; and when you arrived at the terminus she, knowing who you were, was much concerned to see you looking so very ill. Hearing this address given, she called to enquire after you. She called last week also, but did not then come in."

"But she has left a note for me? She must have left *something?*"

"She left no note." Mrs. Penteith seemed to hesitate a little.

Godfrey stumbled across to her work-table. "What were you doing here when I came in, aunt? He pulled the drawer out and took from among the wools and canvas a plain card, on which was written 'Miss Davenant.'"

Godfrey laughed painfully. "This tells it, aunt: it is Mary Dixon's own handwriting. Why, *why* should she be calling herself Davenant?'

Mrs. Penteith could scarcely believe that the grave, sad-faced, pale young woman who had just left her could be the brilliant Mary Dixon, the lovely White Witch who had taken hearts by storm and enslaved her nephew hopelessly. She concluded that there must be some mistake.

"What made you think it was she, Godfrey?"

"I hardly know. But I believe I felt her presence in the house," he answered dreamily. "And as soon as I came in here I detected the faint perfume she uses either about her hands or her handkerchiefs or her dresses—I don't know what it is; like violets, I think; but I should know she was near if I met with it at the ends of the earth."

"I didn't notice that she used perfume."

"I don't believe anybody would notice it but myself," said he, and he leant back in the seat for some time in silence. "Aunt Margaret," said he at last, "will you lend me the brougham after luncheon?"

Mrs. Penteith assented sorrowfully. For she saw that the spell which had been cast upon him was as strong as ever, that his peace and his happiness were still in the fragile, cruel little hands of the White Witch.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN HYDE PARK.

It was on this same Wednesday afternoon that Godfrey Mayne left his aunt's house for the first time since his illness, with the fixed intention of finding out Miss Dixon's hiding-place. In hiding she must be, he considered. She was hiding from him, and also from his father: for Mr. Mayne had complained in a recent letter that the address of the Sisterhood was kept from him, lest (as he supposed) he should journey to it and snatch Mary away by force—which he meant to do, in spite of her mother, the moment he got hold of it.

It was ten days now since their arrival in town: and Godfrey wanted to know what Mary had been doing all that while—which seemed to him like ten weeks—and where she was, and where Cattermole was: and why she was, as it appeared, calling herself Miss Davenant.

He was carried away in Mrs. Penteith's comfortable carriage, having given his orders to the servants on the box. "Great St. Helen's, Bishopsgate."

Godfrey was going, first of all, to see Mr. Thorn: a solicitor, and Miss Dixon's acting trustee, a member of a firm whose offices were in Great St. Helen's. He knew that much. Mary had spoken of him while she was at the Abbey and sometimes heard from him.

Godfrey was set down at the right place and admitted to the lawyer's presence. Mr. Thorn was a thin, worn, restless man, with the bright, searching, dreamy grey eyes of an artist. His hands, never still, wandered from lip to chin, across his wide forehead, through his wavy hair, during the whole of the interview. Nature had made him a musician; circumstances a lawyer. He knew Godfrey's name as that of a member of the Lancashire family in which Mary had lately lived, and waited for him to state the object of his visit.

"I am come to ask if you can give me Miss Dixon's present address," said Godfrey. "I have been ill since I left Croxham, and have not been able to go out. My father, from whom I heard this morning, does not mention in his letter where she is staying, though he has charged me with some messages for her. So, knowing your name as one of her trustees, I have ventured to call, to ask if you would be kind enough to help me."

"I am sorry to say that is not in my power," said the little man. "Croxham Abbey is the only address I have."

Godfrey's penetration was seldom at fault where Mary was concerned. He knew, while the solicitor answered him in the frankest manner, that there was some clue to be had here, if he could only get hold of it.

"I am sorry to have troubled you to no purpose," said he. "Mary always spoke of you with so much respect and confidence as a friend of her father's, that I thought she would be sure to have called on you."

The piercing grey eyes looked at him, and dropped on to the blotting-paper on which Mr. Thorn was busily drawing fantastic things with a dry pen.

"I will tell you frankly why I am so anxious to see her," continued Godfrey, pulling his moustache. "I have reason to believe she is in trouble about—about something; and that she may be hiding from some of her friends. I know she has money of her own, but I fear it may not be adequate to her present needs. The marriage of her mother with my father enables me to stand, as may be said, in the relation of a brother to her. I, therefore, hope she would have no scruple in allowing me to help her out of any difficulty she might be in."

He spoke very quietly, but his soul shone through his grey eyes and made his grave words eloquent and pleading. The lawyer read him like a book, with sympathy as well as intelligence. Mary had, indeed, called upon him the day after her arrival in town, and had let fall a few words about this young fellow which had given the lawyer a key to understanding him.

"You are not, I believe, aware of the full extent of that difficulty, or even of its nature, Mr. Mayne?" said he, gravely.

"No, I am not," frankly replied Godfrey. "And if only I could get her out of it, I assure you I should not much care what its nature was."

"I will tell you this much: that no amount of money could help her out of it, nor any effort of yours, or indeed, of any man's. Except, perhaps, one," he added, rather grimly.

"But at least money can make life easier; and she has been accustomed always to the comforts it gives."

"Are you aware to what purpose your money would be applied?" interrupted Mr. Thorn.

"I should not even ask," said Godfrey. "I only beg you to oblige me by transmitting it to her, wherever she may be, without mentioning my name at all. If you would send it as an advance of her own money."

"I am sorry that I must decline to do so," again interposed the lawyer: and I will tell you why. On her arrival in town, Miss Dixon did call upon me: her object was to endeavour to induce me to comply with a request of hers, which I had already refused by letter while she was at the Abbey. Finding me impervious, as I was obliged to be—and, upon my word, the ridiculous ideas that women entertain of business amazes me!" broke off Mr. Thorn. "A child would hardly have been so silly as to ask me to do what Mary Dixon asked."

"Yes—but please go on," cried Godfrey.

"Well, finding that was of no use, she then begged me to advance her some money, having already spent what was due to her this year; but, knowing the purpose to which it would be applied, I refused."

"Is she well off!" asked Godfrey.

"She has the interest of five thousand pounds: two hundred and fifty pounds yearly. When she shall be twenty-five—she is as yet more than two years short of that—she comes into the whole sum, and can throw it all away, if she so pleases, on the following day. Until then —— no."

"You will not be the means of conveying money to her from me?"

Mr. Thorn shook his head. "To advance her more money," he said, "whether yours, or her own, or mine, would not contribute to her happiness, but to her ruin. It would all be sunk in the same old quicksand; and if she does not mind she will fall into it at last herself. Take my advice, Mr. Godfrey Mayne: keep your money in your pocket, and do not waste it on encouraging the quixotic caprices of a rash and self-willed woman."

Godfrey rose, with the same light of an immovable resolution burning steadily in his eyes. "Thank you for your advice, Mr. Thorn. It is not my fault that I cannot follow it."

"One moment, sir. When a man is so bent upon one particular course of action as I see you are, such a trifle as my refusal to help you does not stand long in his way. Perhaps the fact that Miss Dixon herself begged me not to give you any information as to her movements in case of your applying to me, may have some influence with you."

"It will not prevent my finding her out and assuring myself that she is in safety and that she wants nothing. How can I sit still and eat and drink and sleep while I know there is some mystery hanging over her, sapping out her life and happiness, driving her from her home and from the very people who are ready to love and cherish her?" he asked vehemently.

"I think she would have been wiser to confide in you more than she has done," quietly remarked the lawyer; "but she gave me reasons for her reticence, and I am bound to respect her wishes in the matter. If, however, you do succeed in discovering her, I should advise you to insist upon a full explanation of her position before offering to assist her in any way."

Godfrey laughed shortly. "She knows very well that I can insist on nothing with her."

"Not even when I tell you that is your only chance of doing her any good? Look here, Mr. Godfrey Mayne: I think so well of your disinterestedness that I would freely help you to find her if I knew where she was, but I do not. You may say, why don't I find her for myself: well, because I have not the right to interfere in defiance of her wishes, and because I am very angry with her."

"Then it is true that you cannot give me her address?" cried Godfrey wistfully.

"No, I cannot," said Mr. Thorn. "But I can give you that of a lady who may know something of her; who may, even now, be striving to save Mary from the consequences of her own folly."

He looked about for a card, and went on talking while he wrote upon it. "That girl has thrown away the most brilliant chances that a woman could wish for, for the most absurd and unreasonable infatuation that ever turned a clever young head. She has a voice that would make her fortune; training would have enabled her to enter upon an artist's career," and as Mr. Thorn spoke, his manner changed to enthusiasm, the lawyer was merged in the musician. "Her father, my good friend, was a successful man and could provide for her; but what of that?—as I often said to him, when we were wrangling over his prejudices; I striving to persuade him that it was his duty to give such a talent to the world, a sin if he withheld it. Well, well—she went, herself, and made havoc of her life at the outset, threw her career to the winds; and has entailed more trouble than you suspect, sir, upon those connected with her."

Mr. Thorn checked himself, and looked fixedly at the card on which he had been writing.

"She might take it up yet," he continued, his eyes growing brighter and more dreamy, while his nervous hand wandered over his forehead and over his wavy hair faster than ever; "I do not see that it is too late. The career of a successful artiste brings the greatest happiness possible in this world—one of those sweet and wonderful singers that are so rare. Where can you lose yourself but in listening to these intoxicating melodies? You forget your troubles: your wife, your creditors, your business perplexities, your ——"

Again Mr. Thorn stopped. He had suddenly remembered himself, and gave Godfrey the card with a laugh.

"If you were to come to me in my lawyer's capacity, I should not treat you to these rhapsodies," said he. "There is the address of the lady who can, if she chooses, enlighten you on a good many points concerning Mary Dixon's history."

The card bore the name and direction :

"Lady Davenant,
Wandsworth Common."

"I believe they call it Tooting," observed Mr. Thorn. "But I have given you the name of the station where you should get out. The house is close by ; anybody can direct you to it."

Godfrey thanked him, and left. He recognised the name, Davenant, as being the one Mary had called herself by that morning at his aunt's.

It was past four o'clock, and he considered whether he should go to Wandsworth to-day ; some instinct which he did not understand prompted a wish to stay in Town, but it was so vague, so unreasonable, that he concluded it was only the result of the fatigue he began to feel creeping over him. He therefore told the coachman to drive to Victoria. As he passed along the Strand, however, he found himself growing so faint and stupid, that he stopped the carriage, got out, and went into a café for a glass of madeira. As he was drinking it, he caught the sound of a man's voice he thought he knew. It came from a small, inner room, raised a couple of steps above the outer one, divided from it only by a curtain half-way across. The voice was raised to address the waiter.

Godfrey crossed the outer room so that he could see the people in the inner one. There were only two, a man and a woman, seated facing each other at the same table. The man had his back towards Godfrey, but the latter could see that he had curly chestnut hair, and that he wore fashionable attire. The lady was handsome, and quietly but well dressed. They were talking in too low a tone for Godfrey to hear the voice again, but he was keenly anxious to see the man's face. In another minute their chairs moved ; Godfrey hastened out to the carriage, took his seat in one of its corners, partially drew the blinds, and told the servants to wait. The lady and gentleman came quickly out and walked away up the Strand : but yet Godfrey had not seen the man's face, for many passengers were passing up and down the pavement at the time. He was slightly built, and of middle height, and there was nothing about him that he absolutely recognised : but Godfrey could not divest himself of the belief that the voice had been the soft voice of Mr. Cattermole. If so, he was now appearing in another disguise. Was the man an actor as well as a detective?

Godfrey put his head out to speak to the servants. "Did you see that lady and gentleman come out?" he asked. "She is tall ; dressed in black. Keep them in sight, and drive on gently."

The coachman followed them to the turning opposite Charing Cross, past St. Martin's Church and the National Gallery, up the Haymarket as far as Charles Street, along that and to the right up

Waterloo Place, where they stopped at the Pall Mall restaurant, appearing to hesitate whether to enter it or not. It was then that Godfrey caught sight of the man's face, and felt savage with disappointment. For it was that of a young man with a silky chestnut moustache, and a mild, uninteresting young face. He was on the point of ordering the carriage home in irritation, when some movement, some gesture, he hardly knew what, on the part of the man he had been watching, woke his attention again and made him say instead, "Follow them still."

They went along Piccadilly and into the Burlington Arcade. There Godfrey got out; dismissed the brougham, with a message to Mrs. Penteith that he might not be home till late; and, allowing time for the couple he was watching to get well into the Arcade, he followed. There were enough people about for him to be able to keep them in sight without fear of attracting their own observation, and when after sauntering along to the very end, they turned back, he slipped into a glove-shop, instinctively asked for sixes, twenty-five button length, and turned them over, with his eyes carefully watching the passers-by until the two he waited for passed. They looked in at the window, but did not notice Godfrey peeping from behind a barricade of many-coloured and fantastically-worked gloves. He noted the man well, and as he turned to the counter and paid for his purchase, the pretty ogling girl who served him noticed that a strange change came over the face of her eccentric customer. He wanted to be again in pursuit; for in spite of the wonderful alterations and the get-up of the silky chestnut hair and moustache, and of the darkened eyebrows and eyelashes, he had recognised the detective, Cattermole.

He watched them from the door of the shop as they went out into Piccadilly and got into a hansom. Godfrey jumped into another and told the man to follow. They stopped at Blanchard's, got out and dismissed the cab: so did Godfrey. They sat down to a table to dine; Godfrey chose one where he could only be seen by the lady, and dined and read the papers, taking care not to appear to notice them. He studied her appearance and manner. She had an innocent face, sleepy eyes, and dark hair. Her manners were shy and quiet, her voice was low, and her attention scarcely wandered from her companion, whose eye and hand she watched as a dog watches that of an ill-tempered master. When they left the place, and got into another hansom, Godfrey followed again. They stopped at a house in Brompton, with "Apartments" over the door. Mr. Cattermole went in with a latch-key, telling the driver to wait; and both he and the lady went upstairs.

Godfrey waited at a distance. Presently, seeing the man come out of the house in evening-dress, and drive off alone, he dismissed his hansom, and knocked at the door. He had seen the blinds of the first floor drawn down and lights introduced, so he asked the servant who opened the door to inquire if the lady on the first floor could spare a few minutes to see him. The girl stared at him, went upstairs at once however, and he, having advanced well into the passage, had the satisfaction of hearing himself described in a loud whisper as a tall, handsome gentleman, looking frightful ill.

Returning, after a little whispered conversation, the girl showed him up into a tiny front room, overcrowded with gaudy furniture; and very shortly the lady came in through the folding doors. Her plump, babyish, pretty face was rather worn; and, commanding though she was in figure, it was apparent that she was nothing but a weak, helpless creature, led by every impulse, incapable of self-government, and at the mercy of any will that might find it worth while to guide her. Godfrey read this nature easily while she was saying that her husband was out. Godfrey said he wished to see her husband, and enquired when, next day, he was likely to be at home. She did not know; she seemed curious about her visitor, her eyes wandered shyly from his face to the carpet and back again while he talked, and at last she asked awkwardly where he had met her husband.

"It was in the country, a short time ago," answered Godfrey.

This answer roused her to sudden anger; it blazed in her long dark eyes, and brought two bright spots of colour to her cheeks. She lost her shyness, and broke out vehemently:

"Yes, yes, that was when he left me here by myself for weeks—and would not disclose to me where he was; but I know as well as possible he was after somebody or other. Yes, yes, and I believe it is the same girl I have seen him with twice—he has brought her to London—oh, I know his old tricks. He'll be going off with her one of these fine days, and leave me, his lawful wedded wife, that has worked and slaved and cared for him, and followed him half over the world, to starve! She's got money, I think, and that's why. For money he'd sell his soul."

Godfrey, suppressing his emotion, listened to this outburst quietly.

"I don't suppose it is as bad as that," said he. "He would never have the heart to leave you, after all you have done for him."

"Oh, wouldn't he! You don't know him, sir. Why, during the year I've been married to him he has left me three times; and each time has only returned to me when he'd spent every penny, and had to come back to my earnings. I'm a singer, sir, by profession, and a good one too, though I say it that shouldn't; and I never need be at fault for a profitable engagement in America."

Godfrey was looking at her curiously. She mistook the gaze.

"Are you thinking I am not married—that I am like some of those girls that run after him?" she cried. "Wait a minute."

She sprang up, swept past him into the next room, and came back with her certificate of marriage in her hand. Godfrey read it: it was celebrated in New York, between Edward Grey and Susan Jane Waters. The date was October of the year before.

"Is that his true name?" she asked eagerly. "At times I fancy it is not."

"I do not know," cautiously replied Godfrey. "It may be. I know nothing of your husband's antecedents."

"The villain! But I'll be even with him. He is gone to meet that girl to-night; I *know* he is; He meets her in Hyde Park: twice that I've followed him I've seen him with her."

"Will you tell me about it, and what it is you mean," said Godfrey. "I am as much interested in that young lady as you can be. At least if she be the one I think she is."

Mrs. Grey, obeying her angry dictates, told him what she knew. Being curious as to her husband's movements, she had twice followed him when he left the house in the evening, and tracked the cab he was in, she being in another, to the Marble Arch in Hyde Park. There she had seen him walking by the side of a young lady—or a girl, as she phrased it—who wore a close bonnet and kept her veil down.

"I'll take you there now, if you like," she cried eagerly; "that is, if you'll undertake not to make a scene—for if he caught me watching him he might kill me; he has pointed his revolver at me once or twice when he was in a passion."

Godfrey thought that this hot-headed, impulsive lady was a great deal more likely to make a "scene" than he was: he assured her that she might trust his discretion, and she ran into her room to put her bonnet on, as gleeful as a child at the prospect of a little dangerous excitement instead of the dull evening at home to which her husband had condemned her. Meanwhile Godfrey thought over all she had told him, and considered what he should do.

He handed her into a hansom; Mrs. Grey directing the man to drive to the Marble Arch as fast as his horse would go.

She was much impressed by the quiet courtesy of Godfrey's manner towards her, and she rambled on with confidences concerning her wrongs and her husband's unkindness in going out to places of amusement at night and leaving her at home. "He is going to one to-night," she said; "I know it by his having dressed; and I shouldn't wonder but he'll take that other with him!"

"Is your husband an actor?" he asked. "He can get himself up cleverly."

"Yes that he can," she answered, in a tone of admiration. "He can be an old man to-day, and a young man to-morrow; he can be dark and fierce as a Spanish bandit in the morning, and like a fair, frank school boy in the afternoon. No, sir, he is not an actor, but he knows all their tricks, and can use them at will."

They got out at the Marble Arch. Mrs. Grey turned into Hyde Park, walked a short distance, and fell back behind the trees.

"We are a little late," she whispered to Godfrey; "but there they are!" and he looked out eagerly.

Mr. Cattermole, young, slender, and fashionable, was walking slowly towards them on the path, buttoned up in his light overcoat; Mary Dixon, her face hidden by her veil and close bonnet, walked by his side, apart. He had his head turned towards her, and was speaking vehemently, but in a low tone.

"Look at that person behind them, in a dark cloak," whispered Mrs. Grey to Godfrey.

Godfrey carried his sight past the couple it was so hungrily fixed on, and saw a tall, angular, strong woman of middle age, apparently following them at a respectful distance.

"I think it must be the girl's mother, on the watch unknown to them," said Mrs. Grey. "I noticed her the first time I came, and I noticed her the second time, and now she's here again; so I know she must belong to them in some way.—Good heavens, sir! what are you going to do? Have you forgotten your promise to me?"

The couple had halted for a moment by the Marble Arch, apparently about to separate: and Godfrey, in the moment's mad impulse, was starting forward to confront them. But Mrs. Grey's alarmed words and her detaining hand upon his arm, recalled him.

"I beg your pardon," he said with a groan. "Yes, I did for an instant forget it."

"He would shoot me as soon as look at me; and I did it out of kindness to you," bewailed poor Mrs. Grey.

"Yes, yes," spoke Godfrey, reassuringly.

So his opportunity was lost. Mary crossed the street quickly, and was joined on the other side by the woman in the dark cloak. Mr. Cattermole watched them away and then hailed a passing hansom and was driven down Oxford Street.

To attempt to track Mary then was impossible; she had disappeared: moreover, Godfrey was physically incapable of it. "Let me see you into a cab," said he to Mrs. Grey; "and I thank you for what you have done for me."

"I'll see *you* into one first, sir," said she significantly; "you look as if in another moment you'll not have the strength to get into one. There, there's two cabs waiting; I'll call them both."

Godfrey was unable to say yes or no. She helped him into one, and he gave the direction to the driver; while she got into the other, and was driven away.

"I could not do more than I did, in the face of my promise to that poor woman," reasoned Godfrey in his terrible disappointment. "To-morrow I will try Lady Davenant."

(To be continued.)

A VISIT TO MARY COWDEN-CLARKE.

By Helen Zimmern.

NEXT to the sunshine of child smiles, and the music of child laughter, is there anything in life more charming and attractive than the society of the old who have kept their hearts unwrinkled; and especially old people who have known intimately the best and finest minds of their day; old people who can sing at threescore with the American poet George Calvert:

> "I am not old and will not be;
> I daily grow, and joys are piled
> About my life."

Of such Mary Cowden-Clarke (née Mary Novello) is a rare and notable example, and I never availed myself of the proud privilege of visiting her without feeling that I was entering a sanctuary of which she was the priestess, keeping alive with sacred care the memories of great departed spirits.

It is in Italy that Mrs. Cowden-Clarke has elected to spend the closing years of a busy and useful life: Italy, "Europe's Eden," where the old, shipwrecked, and weary may find the rest they seek in vain, in the surging turbulent life of England or America; and it is in Genoa, one of Italy's many fascinating spots, that the family Novello, returning in the second generation to their paternal home, have pitched their tent. Those who have not visited that proud, queenly city, self-styled *La Superba*, "whose marble round the bosom of the sea its arm enclasps," are probably weary of hearing its beauties praised; while for those who know it well, "that of which the heart is full, the mouth runeth over," and they cannot cease from extolling its varied and luxurious beauty, its blue sweep of bay, its hills that girdle the city, its palaces, its orange groves and orange plantations. As for views, there is no city in Europe that I know which can compare with Genoa. Every house, every garret boasts a vista.

It is in the fairest, and for views most fortunate point, that is situated the Villa Novello, standing, as it does, upon a promontory that juts out to sea, commanding, on the one side, the wide sweep of harbour, and the curving, graceful mountain-flanked coast, where bay threads itself on bay, far away down to Nice; and on the other, the Ligurian chain of hills, closed by Porto Fino's sphinx-like rock, of ever varying amethystine hue, while at the back expands "the wide opaque blue breadth of sea without a break," affording a feeling of immensity by the thought that here nothing intervenes 'twixt us and the far distant continent of Africa.

One of those narrow, tortuous, cobble-stone paved *vicoli*, mere mule tracks, that thread between high stone walls, and jealously hide from view the gardens they skirt, so common in Genoa, leads us up to a tall iron gate, flanked by marble pilasters inscribed with the name Villa Novello. As we turn the handle, the gate admits us with a musical sound, that gives advertisement to the lodge-keeper of our approach. It may be mere accident, it probably is, but it always tickled my fancy that the handles of this Italian *cancello* giving admission to an Anglo-Italian home, should bear impressed on them the Lion and Unicorn of England. It seems as though the very portal gave the key-note to the dual patriotism of the establishment it guards.

The inner approach to the villa is bordered by a low hedge of red and pink monthly roses, which I have never seen out of bloom; and as we follow its path, there comes to view the grand sweep of harbour, the noble lighthouse uprising from its rocky bed, the hills on which are perched the marble palaces of Genoa, the forts that crown and guard her peaks, while immediately around extends the carefully tended garden of the Villa Novello, where flowers are never out of bloom, and trees are ever green.

A word about the inmates ere we cross the threshold of the wide, low house, within whose walls three erst useful servants of the British public are placidly living out their lives; namely: Alfred Novello, the publisher, the first to purvey cheap music to the mass, the singer and admirable teacher Sabilla Novello, and last, but not least, their now widowed sister, Mary Cowden-Clarke, whose rare good fortune it was never to leave her paternal roof.

Those who remember Charles Lamb's delightful essay "On Ears" may perchance recall a passage wherein reference is made to evenings spent at the house of a Catholic friend who by his music "converted his drawing-room into a chapel and his weekdays into Sundays." This friend was Vincent Novello, in whose sitting-room in Oxford Street, London, were, early this century, to be met persons great in literature and art. Here could be seen Keats, with his picturesque head leaning against the organ, one foot raised on his knee and smoothed beneath his hands; Shelley, with his poet eyes and brown curls; Leigh Hunt, with his jet-black hair and expressive mouth; Lamb, with his spare figure and earnest face; Varley, Copley Fielding, and what more names posterity cherishes.

The children grew up among music and literature; little wonder, therefore, that their love for these things grew with their growth and strengthened with their strength. So early was Mary Novello taken to the play that she was young enough to ride home, sleepy and tired, on her father's shoulder, yet already educated enough to appreciate seeing some of the best performers of the day act in plays that were not cribs from the French nor nauseous burlesques, but good genuine pieces of dramatic work.

Wealth was not abundant in the home, and children were, so that the eldest little daughter had early to play the housewife. She remembers, as though it were to-day, one night of joyful surprise, when the father, coming home tired with a long day's teaching, bade his little daughter get Shakespeare, and read him "Much Ado about Nothing," while he eat the dinner she had prepared and laid, the mother being busy with a new baby; and then as a reward for his daughter's good-housekeeping, telling her to put on her bonnet, and he would take her to see Kemble play Benedick.

At the early age of nineteen she married Charles Cowden-Clarke, a man of letters and lecturer, school fellow and friend of Keats, who came to live in the newly-adopted family that was to become entirely his own. This marriage, which proved childless, strengthened Mary Novello's ever existent desire to make writing her profession; and now, in concert with her fondly-loved husband, now alone, she tried her hand in various branches of literature, writing, among other works, a romance, "The Iron Cousin," that on its appearance elicited the enthusiastic praises of Leigh Hunt.

In a letter now lying before me, in which she speaks of her life, she tells me that she began writing at sixteen, and adds: "I have written and am still writing almost daily ever since, with more or less pleasure to my readers, with perpetual and zestful happiness to myself." To enumerate all her contributions to literature would more than fill our space; and able as these are, it is chiefly with those that deal with Shakespeare that her name will ever be connected, and remembered as long as the world remembers that bard of bards. "When you meet Shakespeare in Paradise you must expect a kiss, and he will give it you even if your husband is by," writes Douglas Jerrold, in his jocular way, to Mrs. Cowden-Clarke, in a letter I have had the privilege to see, wherein he thanks her for the gift of her invaluable "Concordance"—that work more valuable far than the hundreds of commentaries that have been penned upon the Swan of Avon. Truly a noble monument of industry and indomitable perseverance, which it took twelve years to compile, and four to correct for the press. A Herculean labour unintermittingly performed, often in sickness and trouble.

Like so many great things, it owed its genesis to a mere accident. It was in July, 1829, when Mrs. Cowden-Clarke was sitting at the breakfast table of some friends in Somersetshire, that regret was expressed that there existed no concordance to Shakespeare. Eager in everything, Mrs. Cowden-Clarke resolved then and there that she would write this desired concordance; and that very forenoon, while joining her friends in a walk through the fields, she took with her a volume of the poet and a pencil, and jotted down the first lines of her book under B.

"Boatswain, have care," *Temp.* I., 1, &c.

The following is an account she gave me of the mode of writing she ultimately adopted for this work. "I had a separate portfolio for each letter of the alphabet; these portfolios were ranged round in front of me on my writing-table. I opened my father's copy of Shakespeare at my side, having two pages in view at a time. I took the first word that presented itself at the top of the first page (we will suppose this word to begin with "a") and entered each word commencing with the same letter on the MS. page which was headed by the word, and placed it in its respective portfolio; going thus alphabetically through the whole of the two spread-open pages, until every salient word therein was duly culled and registered. I generally worked from four to six hours per day, and always before and after breakfast till dinner-time; so that the outside of the house during those hours was little known to me, and we usually took our exercise recreation of an evening. Happy—supremely happy—were the hours then! Side by side, one working at this book, the other writing his Lectures on our poetic idol."

When she had got half way she was told that some other person was engaged on the same task. Sadly, very sadly, she packed up all her portfolios and materials, resolved to adandon the task, thinking, with native modesty, that the unknown rival would surely do it better. She told me that to this day she can recall her feelings while kneeling on the floor and pushing away the large packet under her bed for safe keeping, for they lived in small quarters then and space had to be economised. Joyful, very joyful, was she when she learned the rumour was unfounded, and she could haul her packet forth again. Some idea of the vastness of the undertaking may be gained from the circumstance that the paper alone required for the work cost over £5.

From this careful study of Shakespeare resulted some original works, of which the most notable is the "Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines," in which, with ingenuity and intuitive imagination, Mrs. Cowden-Clarke has striven to trace the probable antecedents in the history of some of Shakespeare's women; to conjecture what might have been the first imperfect dawnings of those whom he has shown us in the meridian blaze of perfection. A bold venture, truly, this series of fifteen tales, and only justified by its wonderful success. They were first brought out as separate stories. "Portia, of Belmont" was the first written and was the one that first occurred to the authoress, conducing to the production of the whole series. This is how Mrs. Cowden-Clarke explained their genesis to me:

"I had been brooding over Hazlitt's unjust words: 'Portia is not a very great favourite with us; she has a certain degree of affectation and pedantry about her which is very unusual in Shakespeare's women, but which, perhaps, was a proper qualification for the office of a "civil doctor," which she undertakes and executes so successfully.' I thought how it was probable that she had gained her legal knowledge from her 'cousin' the 'learned Bellario,' a doctor of laws, and one on whose judgment the Duke of Venice so much relies that he sends for him from Padua for the trial of Shylock the Jew; and thus I sketched her antecedent history."

It was in 1861 that the sisters, with husband and brother, settled in Genoa, the Cowden-Clarkes, "married lovers," as they were called to the end, after more than fifty years of wedlock, occupying themselves with literature, reading, working, thinking in unison; Sabilla obliged to refrain from teaching from delicacy of throat and susceptibility to damp, ever active in promoting the cause of good music; Alfred, with engineering skill and fertile invention, turning a ramshackle old house into a quaint and liveable abode, and converting an untended area of ground into a most variegated and delicious garden. To this house flock all the eminent visitors that pass through Genoa, glad to become acquainted with the woman who still preserves the gracious, courtly, old-world manner which our modern life of fret and hurry is fast rendering extinct; a charm only equalled by her mental vivacity, her cordial, frank and generous address, the zest and charm of her conversation, and, above all, by her perfect womanly gentleness. She is truly a sweet type of womanhood in its noblest expression.

It is on Sunday afternoons that the Villa Novello is opened to receive visitors, birds of passage and residents; but the doors are never closed to friends whenever the inmates are well and not too busy with their various avocations. A visit to these rooms affords a biographical synopsis of the life of Mrs. Cowden-Clarke and her gifted family. Having crossed the threshold, we find ourselves in a marble paved Italian hall; a flight of steps of alternate grey and white marble conducts us into another hall, which is the picture gallery of the family. Here hang the paintings, original and copies, executed by the brother, Edward Novello, who did not live to fulfil the promise of his youth. Here, too, hangs a fine portrait of Baron Poerio, one of the many martyrs to Italian freedom; a likeness of Garibaldi painted by Giovanni Mazzini, and a spirited sketch, by Emma Novello, of Richard Cobden, one of the best likenesses ever taken of the reformer.

In this hall, too, stands the testimonial chair America presented to Mrs. Cowden-Clarke, and of which she is justly proud. "Her throne," as her nieces called it when they were children, adding that "the ladies and gentlemen of America had put their pocket money together to buy it for auntie." The names of those who subscribed to it include the brightest and best of those alive in the States in 1851, Longfellow, Washington Irving, Willis, Allibone, Bryant. But what gave Mrs. Cowden-Clarke almost as much pleasure as the chair itself was that not only Daniel Webster's name was included among these, but that the American gentlemen who called into life the testimonial had the happy thought to send her the identical gold coin that Webster had subscribed, and that she, therefore, enjoyed the sentiment of touching what had passed through his hands.

To sentiment of this nature Mrs. Cowden-Clarke is keenly alive, and in her store closets of treasures she guards many such memorials. But she does not guard them so that others may not enjoy them also.

Enjoyment to Mrs. Cowden-Clarke is only half enjoyment if unshared. She is ready at any moment to produce her treasures, to show you the soft brown curl that was cut from Shelley's head; the lock that was his wife's, the other that grew on Mary Wolstonecraft's restless brain; the piece of grizzled jet black hair that once adorned Leigh Hunt's head; a stiff, stubbly grey lock, that it does not astonish us to hear came from the head of Beethoven; a softer, gentle bit that was Mozart's; hair that was Manzoni's, Garibaldi's, Mary Somerville's, Florence Nightingale's; and other hair relics the more. She will show you, too, a beautiful big crocodile's tooth, mounted in gold as a shawl pin, sent to her by Mr. and Mrs. Furness, her American cousins-in-Shakespeare; a morsel of the Plymouth rock on which the Pilgrim Fathers landed, set in gold, sent to her by a gentleman of Puritan descent. Indeed, to Mrs. Cowden-Clarke's treasures there is no limit, be it portraits or photographs of friends kept sewn into bands of ribbon, in a most ingenious manner of her own invention, be it letters from eminent persons with whom she has had the privilege of corresponding. Everything is kept in the most tidy way, docketed, sorted. One case is reserved to her American correspondents, that number among them some of the greatest names in the States, another to her English friends, amid whom, too, are names "familiar to our mouths as household words."

But I have wandered from the American chair, which deserves a few more words accorded to it. A handsome object it is with its fine wood carvings, portions of which are cut from the wood of Shakespeare's famous mulberry tree in New Place, its copy in ivory of the monumental bust, its graceful tribute of inscription. The rich brocade with which it was originally covered has long been worn out, but its place is now taken by a covering in its way no less precious, for it was worked by the deft fingers of the singer Clara Novello, all the Novello sisters being expert in what Mrs. Cowden-Clarke has called,

> "Dear needlework, that best of all resources for a woman's rest,
> When tired with too much headwork at a stretch."

From the Hall, we pass into a music-room, decorated in rich Italian style, with tinted stucco alto-relievi enclosing oil-colour views of the Riviera. Here stand two pianos in constant use for two, four or eight hand performances; here in the winter may be heard the voices of Clara's daughters, who have inherited a moderate portion of their mother's gift; while in a snug corner may be seen dear Mrs. Cowden-Clarke in her picturesque costume of pearl grey or black satin and close-fitting lace cap, listening intently, enrapt, to the sweet strains that recall yet sweeter memories. Mrs. Cowden-Clarke is ever a very ideal picture of what old age should and might be. Trim, dainty, full of smiles for the young, of sympathy for the struggling; for though she lives in thought so much in the past, yet she lives also in the present, and her interest in all that is good, true, noble and lovely is ever awake. She is both a lesson and a picture; a picture as pleasure to the eye, a lesson showing how, if we keep our hearts young, we not only retain our pleasure in life, but remain a pleasure, in lieu of a burden, to those around us.

Out of the music-room opens a small drawing-room, that contains many treasures of memory, among them a portrait of Mrs. Cowden-Clarke in the character of Dame Quickly, one of the various rôles she played when on that theatrical trip with Dickens of which mention is so frequently made in his letters, and whose memory she cherishes as among her brightest. Among many letters from the great novelist, she has one in which he has signed himself in handwritings the most diverse, with the name of the various characters they played together. Indeed, Mrs. Cowden-Clarke's active love for artistic and theatrical joys is far from extinct. As recently as 1881, on a visit to England she played, in private theatricals, the part of Mrs. Malaprop, in Sheridan's "Rivals," with grace and vigour; whilst the following year, at another performance, she recited, in the same character, a most entertaining prologue written by herself that is full of the choicest and happiest Malaprops. Want of space forbids me from quoting the same, either in part or at length.

Into the sanctuary of Mrs. Cowden-Clarke's bed-chamber it is, of course, permitted to few to penetrate. It is a sanctuary truly. Here, she decks with fresh flowers the portraits of her dear and dead departed—the adored husband, the loved parents. By her bedside hang the portraits of Keats, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens, Leigh Hunt, J. T. Fields, and others, loved and lost, nearer and dearer. Beside the chimney hangs a photograph of the American sculptor Gould's impressive bas-relief of Hamlet's father, a special favourite of Mrs. Cowden-Clarke's; while, richest treasure perchance of all in a room full of treasures and mementoes of the past, is a small crayon portrait of Mrs. Siddons by Sir Thomas Lawrence, which, as far as I could learn, has never been reproduced, and which furnishes a graceful and spirited idea of that wonderful actress.

From Mrs. Cowden-Clarke's room we pass into the snug library, with its two comfortable writing-tables, covered with all the needed appliances of the scribe, its walls lined with the works of the best authors, with rare and choice editions, with presentation copies rendered richer by the autographs of the donors. Needless to remark that editions of Shakespeare abound; while on the scant wall spaces unclothed with books hang portraits of the bard, views of Stratford, pictures of his house, a copy of John Bell's Tercentenary medal and other Shakespeariana the more. Here, too, hangs an interesting group of the Novello family, painted by the dead brother Edward. As is fitting, they are all grouped about the piano, on which the father is playing while sons and daughters join, as was their wont, in singing the refined compositions that were the father's especial favourites, and the mother, placid and happy, looks on, justly proud of her numerous progeny.

From the library windows are seen peaceful vistas of the garden with its roses, olives and trellised vines, its creepers and annuals, while in the rear uprise the tall aspiring cypresses that bound the garden, wherein sleep their last sleep, "Greeks, Jews, and other Protestants," as Mr. Novello was quaintly told when buying his villa and the adjoining lands.

A glance at this garden: with its tiled sunny terrace commanding the blue bay—where the African hoppoe yearly alights about September 7th—with its fountains, its runnels of fresh water, enticing the nightingale to make her abode among its eucalyptus and palm trees; its gracious Italian sights and sounds, where the peaceful lapping of the Mediterranean is interrupted by the stirring martial strains of the Garibaldian hymn, played by the soldiers that guard the forts beneath the garden walls; where the sight of bright sunny flecks of sails upon the sea alternate with mossy nooks that might be English in their luxurious abundance of green: a glance at this garden fitly closes a visit to the Villa Novello.

The motto on the sundial, too, is appropriate to the inmates who have retired from the strife of life.

"Conto soltanto le ore serene."

Serene indeed are the hours in that house. Its inmates enjoy that calm height of repose, whose aim and nature have been defined so happily in Mrs. Cowden-Clarke's "Sonnets of Labour and Leisure," that leisure which does not mean cessation from work, but relief from the fret and hurry, the leisure that means—

"To have full time
For thinking, acting, walking, resting, all
Without the sense of pressure."

I fear I have given but a pale picture of the natural beauties of the Villa Novello, of the rare charm of its owners. I can but say for myself, that I never quitted its threshold, and retrod its rosy approach without having Spenser's lines ringing in my ears as peculiarly appropriate to those who here, loving and loved, spend the evening of their days:

"Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas,
Ease after warre, death after life doth greatly please."

* * *

MICHAEL'S MISTAKE.

By the Author of "Adonais, Q.C.," "Yvonne," etc.

INTRODUCTORY.

A SHOP in one of the busiest thoroughfares of London; an old, time-honoured shop.

Look at its muddy windows—one, two, three; glance up at the weather-beaten sign. Then bring your eyes down to the windows again; this time not to look at them, but through them. What do you see? Bags, whips, dressing-cases, bridles and snaffles—is it not so? Over here the wooden effigy of a horse, harness complete; over there again straps and cleaning cloths by the score. Now bend your head low down; and hard by, a little to the right, what do you see? Lying side by side there—*three great, sturdy portmanteaus.*

Come away from the window, and stand beside the door, in this niche where no one will notice you. Stand here, as if in a dream, letting all the whirling hansoms, the rickety four-wheelers, the rambling drays, the pitter patter of all the busy and the idle feet go by. Just stand here, and watch.

You have a vision of an old, tall, stooping man in clerical dress, grey-haired, and with a proud, meek face—if one may use such an apparent contradiction. You see the girl on his right, dark and brilliant, and upright as an arrow, having his face with all its pride and none of its meekness; and on his left you see a pale, golden-haired, sweet-featured maiden.

Let them pass and open the door. Squeeze in after them—and listen.

The old man speaks; you notice that his voice is clear and bell-like.

"I want a portmanteau," he says; "something small, and portable, and ——"

"Oh, grandpapa ——!"

He looks from one girl to the other.

"Is that not it?"

"No, no! A large, strong, useful portmanteau."

"And an uncommon; different from anyone else's, if possible," the fair girl adds softly.

The shopman makes a dive into the window, and brings out one of the three portmanteaus that you were looking at.

"This here ought to suit," he says. "Look at the brass bands on the ends, and look at the lock—which is a patent. You might travel all over the world with this, and never meet with the like of it."

Well, it ends in the buying of the portmanteau, and the disappearance of the old man and his granddaughters out into the surging streets again. Stand at the door; follow them with your eyes until you can follow them no longer; then turn your head on this side; and what do you see?

A hansom stopping at this door. Who comes out of it?

This time you have a vision of a slight, dainty little gentleman, his thin sunburnt face adorned by a trimly-kept, carefully-waxed, long brown imperial. Follow him also into the shop, and listen.

"I want to see a portmanteau, if you please," and you notice the foreign ring in his voice. "Something that can stand wear and tear, and plenty of knocking about. Have you such?"

The shopman makes a dive once again into the window, and brings out the second of those that you were looking at. He lays it, with a satisfied thump, down upon the counter.

"I could guarantee this wearing all over the world, sir. What with the brass bands on the ends, and that lock—a new patent—I believe it would wear for ever. You might travel a lifetime with it, and never once come across its equal."

Well, this also ends in the buying of the portmanteau, and the disappearance of the little, middle-aged, jaunty foreigner. Watch while he springs into the attendant hansom, watch the hansom itself whirling off with the tide of its fellows; then turn your head once again, for the last time, and what do you see?

Once more you have a vision of deep, grave eyes; of a broad brow and scholarly face; of a thin, lithe, tall form. Enter when he opens the door, and listen.

His quick glance goes straight to the window.

"Show me that portmanteau, will you?"

The shopman dives for it, the last of those that you were looking at.

"I can recommend this, sir. You might travel till doomsday with it, and never once see another like it. The brass at the ends, and the lock—a patent—and ——"

"It will do; I will take it."

Come away — out of the shop into the open air again; watch him out of sight, walking, walking along there in the winter sunset. Then put it all from your mind, shop, and street, and visions, and listen to me.

I see the first portmanteau. I see it with piles of others in the long whispering loft of an old French château; I see it journeying, journeying; and now again I see it, lying as if asleep, the warm bright sun dancing upon it, the great smiling Rhine eddying along within earshot. Once again journeying, I see its arrival in an old shadowy, Continental city; I travel—travel with it; I see it at Calais; I see it at Dover. I look at the calendar of my thoughts, and there I find the date of its arrival—*August* 15, *in the year of our Lord* 1881.

I see the second portmanteau. I see it under the hot burning sun of Africa; I see it again with the icy Alpine winds whirling about it. I see it in China. I see it in America. I see it in the hold of a mighty steamer, pitching and tossing, the waves thundering, the chains rattling. Then again the blue rippling waters of the Mediterranean flop against the planks which separate it from them. I see it in a dim old Continental city; I travel—travel with it; I hear the swish of the Channel waves; I see the white cliffs of Dover. I look at the date—*August* 15, 1881.

I see the third portmanteau. I see it with the strong, Scotch heather-smelling wind blowing in through an open turret window on to it. I see it amidst the din of a troop-ship. I see it in India—now on the hills, now on the plains. I see it again journeying—journeying; I see it on the Continent, touching here, tarrying there. I feel the shock of the waves beating against a vessel; I see the confusion of a landing-stage: I find that this is Dover;—and I look at the date:—*August* 15, 1881.

That is all. That is the history, so far, of these three portmanteaus; these three that you were peering at through the muddy window of that shop in the busy London thoroughfare.

I.

On with a whirr and a rush; on, on, on. Forest, and hill, and dale; turreted castle and cotter's hovel; breezy whin-covered slopes—with the birds twittering overhead, and the wind blowing, blowing. Rippling, dancing, glistening rivers; grey, time-tried, old bridges, sunny villages, flaming forges, teeming cities. The long, lithe, serpent-like train flies on.

All through the beautiful day its windows flash in the sunshine; and the white smoke rushes out with an echoing puff; away out, spreading over the faces of the quiet field-workers, and speaking to the dreamy ones of a thousand marvellous things.

Clank, clank, clatterty clank—until the shadows lengthen, and the mist sweeps down over the hills, into the fir trees standing gloomy and stern below. The white smoke of the engine becomes gradually more indistinct, and its lights stand out redder and warmer and brighter, until at last they are glowing, glowing. The stoker heaps the coal on, and laughs merrily with his comrade as the wind whistles by; the people in the carriages yawn, and pull their cloaks about them. Some of them smoke, some of them read, some of them sleep. There are joyful hearts among them, and there is sorrow too, and pain—despair even. Oh, what a strange little world is the train!

Thus it flies on. As the darkness thickens the men on the engine increase vigilance, stretching their heads out, now to this side, now to that. Other trains meet them, passing with a noise that reminds one of nothing so much as a storm scene in a diorama. Gradually the houses thicken, chimneys rise up about them; walls ever growing higher, run alongside them. They rattle over a bridge; they sweep round a corner—and away in the distance a myriad of lights are gleaming; a city—a great city.

Down goes the window of a first class compartment with a bang; and a man's dark head bobs out, and bobs back again. He fastens his wraps hastily together, he changes his travelling cap for a hat; he pulls his coat up at the neck and smooths himself down. There he stands, a dainty, kindly-eyed, jaunty little gentleman, his sunburnt face adorned by a trim and carefully waxed imperial.

The engines slacken, the lines multiply. The train chooses its way amongst them with an echoing thud; another moment and it steams out of the darkness, solemn, snake-like, and mysterious, into the seething, glittering station.

A roar of life. The little man's door swings open and he descends cautiously, throwing a searching glance around him. Through the gleam of the porters' lights, through the people hurrying to and fro amidst the rushing trucks, there comes the flash of a long brown coat and ruddy chestnut hair. A wild salute, and he starts forward, his eyes beaming.

"Michael!"

"Uncle Fabian! How are you?—how are you? I am so glad, so very glad to see you."

He goes on shaking the hand in his as if he never meant to loose it.

"Michael! so here you are! And what was the journey from Hobart Town like? rather rough, eh? Ah! Michael; who was right—you or I?"

Brown eyes smile into the grey ones.

"Not I, Uncle—and not you. I said it would be fine; you said I should never reach home at all."

"Ah, you rogue, Michael! I tell you, you should never have left me; and since you did, what have you been about? They say in Florence ——"

"Bless me, Uncle Fabian, were you there?"

"And they tell me in Paris, that ——"

"Now, Uncle Fabian!"

"And as to that Monte Carlo affair: why Michael ——"

"Oh as to that, Uncle ——"

"And you lost your luggage, Michael?"

The young man stopped him with a burst of laughter. "So will you lose yours; I declare you will, unless someone looks after it. Uncle Fabian, go on out to the carriage; I will see to the luggage for you."

"Very well, Michael; brass bands at the ends; patent lock; you remember?"

"As if I could forget, Uncle!"

Michael turned and pushed his way towards the vans at the end o the train, where a motley group were jostling and peering together. His eyes laughed in the lamp-light as he watched them; looking handsome, and upright, and brave, as he always did. Brave—that was the secret of it. There was a certain fearless, natural grace about this Michael St. Martin, that found out the soft place in most people's hearts—and went straight there, like a ray of winter sunshine, or a kind word aptly spoken. For whether is the heart reached easier, by the eyes or by the ears—who can tell?

Brave—that was the secret of it. He was one of the few, the very few, able to carry shoulders back and head erect, and to walk so, without the suspicion of stiffness or a swagger; and to smile the world straight in the face without thought of bravado. If you had seen him as he stood there, his bright eyes and hair, and warm-coloured ulster, marking him out a patch of light against the sombre colouring around him, he might have left a vague impression on your mind of a man whom no obstacle, no trouble, however great, would entirely crush; as if he would battle with anything, keeping his face always to the wind. Or he might have made you think, somehow or other, of a graceful and taut little clipper, now in the trough of the waves, now on their crests; but always gallant, always daring. Brave-looking; that was the secret of Michael St. Martin's charm.

As he pushed his way in, one of the station officials touched him on the shoulder.

"Mr. St. Martin, can I get anything out for you, sir? the bell is just going to ring."

"Oh, Giles, would you? a big portmanteau with brass on the ends, and a projecting lock; you can't mistake it."

The man hesitated. "Only one, Mr. Michael?"

"Only one, I think, Giles. Why?"

"Because I noticed three in the van like that just a minute ago. They were lying one above the other; I couldn't help looking at them."

Michael St. Martin opened his eyes.

"Three! Nonsense; he never had more than one. Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, sir; exactly alike; and together."

"And no address on any of them?"

"No. I think not."

"Bless me, three! Yes, I see them, I see them; they must all be his, of course. Get them out, will you, and send them after me."

He turned once again, and walked rapidly between the rows of trains into the open station, wondering the while where and when Uncle Fabian had picked up these brethren for his odd portmanteau. "He must have got them made to order," he laughed to himself.

The bell began to clang, the engine whistled shrilly, sending its steam with a fizz and a wheeze about the feet of the people on the platform; Michael drew back a little, half stopping in his course to see the long train go. His eyes glanced carelessly at the first carriage, indifferently at the second, mechanically at the third; at the fourth curiously and with a smile, for there a girl's small golden head leaned far out of the window. At the fifth—what did he do? He started as though a bomb-shell had exploded beside him, stood stock still, made a frantic rush of a few steps and finally came to a dead stand again. There he waved his hat, and his stick, with the despairing ferocity of a man to whom no alternative mode of greeting is open. When it was fairly gone, he made his way hastily out into the darkness, to where the brougham, with its steaming horses, stood waiting for him. He opened the door and threw himself back among the soft cushions.

"Uncle Fabian!"

The little man, eyebrows raised, eyes lowered, bent forward in the act of setting light to a cigar.

"Well, Michael; have you missed my luggage?"

"No, no; they are bringing it out now. Uncle Fabian, do you know Christian Fane?"

The dull red light glowed. Fabian Lestrève raised himself thoughfully.

The young man laid his strong brown hand on the little gentleman's daintily gloved one. "Listen, Uncle Fabian. Christian Fane and I have been chums since our school days. I'm sure you must remember how often I got letters from him, when you and I were away together, Uncle Fabian? At any rate, I did get them—Indian letters—ever so often. Well, he wrote to me two months ago from Moultan; and not a word about coming home or anything unusual. Uncle Fabian, your train passed me just this minute on its way out of the station; I raised my eyes and there at one of the windows, was—Christian Fane."

Uncle Fabian made a movement of incredulity. "You must be mistaken, Michael," said he, as he puffed away at his cigar.

"I tell you, Uncle, it was Christian Fane. Think of my being ten minutes in there with him and not to know it. Think of his coming home in this way without sending word to anybody."

Fabian Lestrève brought his cigar out of his mouth with a flourish. "It was droll, Michael. Perhaps he was dull—eh?—and just ran away from his dullness; that's what I do. I wonder *you* don't, too, my Michael; I wonder you don't die of ennui here at Hillsborough. If you *will* stay here, why don't you marry?"

The young man laughed drily.

"Because some fine day I might take it into my head, *not* to stay here."

"Well; and if you did, you would be married, and ——"

"And dull no longer. I should have the remedy without the cause. Don't speak of marriage to me, Uncle Fabian."

The little thin bronzed face studied him calmly. "Oh, my Michael! After that ——"

The young man threw back his head, laughing. "After that—shall I tell you my adventures?"

He nodded, adjusting his cigar again, and settling himself comfortably back on the soft cushions. The dimly-lighted streets gave place to broader and brighter ones; the red and green lights of the jingling trams flashed in on them; the heavy-laden omnibuses, thundered past them; but Michael talked and laughed on, raising his cheery voice so as to be heard through the din, and Fabian Lestrĕve listened to his nephew smilingly, and with half-closed, contented eyes. For if ever one human being idolised another, little Fabian idolised this nephew of his.

He was an easy-going, kind-hearted, even-tempered little gentleman; and, more valuable, perhaps, than all these qualities put together, he had a will of his own. When Michael had taken his degree at Oxford, and was preparing to shoot and fish, and—speaking figuratively—dream his life away as a country gentleman, it was then that jaunty Fabian stepped in, showing his will. He came from wandering to and fro over the face of the earth, to Hillsborough; and when he left it, he took his nephew with him. He had argued, and expostulated, and cajoled, and finally carried his point. Michael must travel.

And Michael did travel. For three long years he went, nothing loath, exactly where the wind and Uncle Fabian listed. At the end of these three years they were at Hobart Town, and Heaven knows what possessed Michael, but he suddenly took it into his head to insist upon starting there and then for Hillsborough. Uncle Fabian argued; so did Michael. They had a nearer approach to a quarrel just then than either of them had before deemed possible. The end of it was, Michael went off, and Uncle Fabian stayed on at Hobart Town, nearly broken hearted. Two days afterwards Michael reappeared, overcome with remorse for what he called his abominable selfishness, and declaring his intention of carrying out the remainder of the tour, if Uncle Fabian still wished it.

Uncle Fabian did not still wish it; he had formed other plans in the meantime: but perhaps, after all, they were only feigned ones to prevent what he called his Michael's unselfishness. Be that as it may, uncle and nephew said good-bye again—a laughing good-bye this time—upon the quay at Hobart Town. Michael came home *viâ* the civilised parts of the East, and the Continent, taking about four months to his journey in all. Uncle Fabian after nearly losing his life a dozen times in various difficult and inaccessible regions of the globe, came home too. He arrived there upon the evening of the 15th August, 1881, just eight months after his nephew Michael.

They had rolled on, past the quiet twinkling cottages and solitary passers-by of the turnpikes; they had threaded their way amongst sweetly-smelling country lanes, they had swept down a long, dark avenue, and come out of the carriage at an ivy-covered portico, brilliant with light; going on together up the staircase of an old, rambling house. There Fabian Lestrève falls into a reverie before his bed-room fire; the flames flickering brightly up towards him, so that one can see the thin sprinkling of grey through hair and moustache, and even trace the adventurous course of a wrinkle here and there.

Michael is in his room; half-smiling to himself as he goes over in thought again a hundred and one of Uncle Fabian's vagaries. Suddenly hurried footsteps cross the room overhead, and a voice he knows well calls his name hastily.

"Michael!"

He goes up the stairs at a bound, and pushes the door open.

"Yes, Uncle Fabian?"

"Michael!" He says no more; he stands as a man in a dream; just the one word, and waves his hand to the floor. The quick brown eyes of his nephew follow the hand with a glance. Lying side by side there in the firelight, are three great, sturdy portmanteaus.

For one instant Michael St. Martin stands aghast; then he falls back on the bed, and bursts into a fit of laughter, stirring up echoes in the old gallery. Fabian Lestrève finds his voice then.

"Michael! are you mad? In all the world what—what does this mean?"

"Oh, Uncle Fabian—you don't—you don't mean to say they're not yours?"

The little man's grey eyes fairly stand out of his head.

"Mine! mine, Michael! I declare I don't know what you mean. I'm sure I don't know what *they* mean. Look at the brass bands; look at the locks. Which is mine? There's the question. Perhaps you can tell me where you got *these* from, Michael St. Martin."

"Got what—got which, Uncle Fabian?"

Fabian drew in his breath, eyeing his nephew narrowly. "Now, look here, Michael. I put one portmanteau into the van."

"And I brought out three—yes?"

Fabian Lestrève sat down abruptly.

"Michael! is this a trick—or a miracle—or what?"

"Oh, Uncle Fabian," he bent his head on the mantelpiece: "Just give me time to breathe, will you? I am so awfully sorry! It's all my mistake," said Michael.

Meantime the train flies on. The train flies quickly, almost as quickly as thought; only that thought hurries hither and thither to and fro at will, and the train pants its course nervously along one hard iron beaten track—there is no other path open to it.

So uncle Fabian's train whirled on. It had passed through many villages, and had stopped at other cities; it had gone between high rock, and dashed fearlessly, with its human freight, in the darkness, over wild yawning precipices; it had skirted tempestuous sweeping rivers; and once the white spray of the ocean itself, had sprinkled the dry windows of the carriages. Clank, clank, clatterly-clank; a wild lonely lake stretching out beside it, a vast expanse of undulating plain lying before it. At the end of the plain, a little quivering cluster of lights.

The window of a first-class compartment goes down slowly, and the wind blows fiercely against a girl's small head; the darkness is unfathomable; nothing of the lake to be seen, nothing of the plain; only the twinkling distant lights. She keeps her head out for a minute, nostrils dilated, eyes glittering; then she turns suddenly back again.

"Constella!"

A figure stretched out upon one of the seats, starts up with a bound.

"Viola!—What—why—where are we?"

Viola laughed. "Almost at home; come and look out at the lights. What a time you have been asleep, Constella! Ever since we left Hillsborough. I suppose the boat last night tired you?"

Constella nodded. "Yes, it was the boat. Also that scene—do you remember—just as we were leaving Hillsborough! The fair man on the platform, and the dark man in our train. That set me off; first day-dreaming, and then dreaming in reality. Oh, how grand! how beautiful! How is it, Viola, that the night and the darkness always raise one's spirits so?"

"Not the darkness, Constella; the bright prospect in the midst of the darkness."

"No, no, no! If we were in the most desolate place on earth it would be just the same, so long as one could breathe up the mysterious night-wind."

Viola Guyne turned away from the window with a sigh.

"You always were a strange child, Constella, and these three years abroad have made you stranger. I can assure you our rough English wind will soon blow all your dreaminess away. Oh, the dear little town! Here come the lights of the square, and the steeple clock. Oh, Constella, half past two; I can read the time. Think of arriving at this hour in the night! will grandpapa come to meet us?"

"Viola! with his rheumatism! no; but Betsy will."

Viola laughed. "So she will. Now, Constella, we must make haste to get our luggage. Have you all your wraps ready?"

"Yes. Viola, look! do you see her—Betsy?"

"Yes, and with the same old bonnet! Constella, it makes one almost ashamed."

They both laughed, and opening the carriage-door, jumped tumultuously into the tearful embrace of a kindly-faced woman on the platform.

"Betsy! you dear old creature, how are you? You shouldn't have come out so late. Is grandpapa well?"

"Quite well, quite well, Miss Viola, dear—except for his rheumatism." She kissed them again and again, wiping her eyes on her shawl. "What he will feel to see you looking so bright and beautiful! And Miss Constella just as lovely as ——"

They stopped her, laughing. "Oh, Betsy, don't! Do you want to ruin us at once?"

The old woman laughed too, tears running down her cheeks the while.

"I must get your luggage, first, at all events, my dears. What have you? Just the one portmanteau?"

"Yes, do you remember it? Brass bands at the ends; and the strange lock. See, they are opening the van; come quickly."

They hastened down the station, the quiet lamps shining upon them. A few drowsy passengers bent out from the windows of the train. The luggage van stood open, white deal packing-boxes and deserted looking hampers littered the platform around it. One passenger, a tall man, in a long grey ulster, was peering into the van as they came up; a porter was rummaging about inside. Viola bent forward.

"Oh, please would you give us out our portmanteau? A big one, with brass at the ends and a projecting lock."

The tall passenger turned round swiftly, the most intense surprise written on every feature. Viola Guyne caught a vision of a scholarly face and grave astonished eyes. Then she spoke again to the porter.

"Is it there?"

He swung himself out on to the platform, touching his hat.

"No, miss, it is not; nor in the other van either. I have been looking for one just like that for this gentleman. There's nothing of the kind in the train."

Constella came a step forward. "I think it must be there," she said quietly. "We saw it put in, and I am sure there is no other like ours. The brass runs up and down the ends in bands; and the lock stands out more than an inch from the portmanteau."

"But that is exactly the description of mine!"

Viola and Constella Guyne stared; two dark grave eyes studied them in return, after a moment smiling at their bewilderment. The old servant interfered sharply:

"The young ladies' portmanteau must be there, do you hear, porter? Just go in again and look, will you."

Viola gathered up her courage and addressed the stranger.

"I don't understand. Have you really a portmanteau like that? And—and have you lost yours too?"

He lifted his hat quietly and answered her.

"Yes; it is a very strange coincidence. I never saw another portmanteau like mine; and I have knocked about a good deal lately. They are both gone, I am afraid."

"It is dreadful. Constella, Betsy, what shall we do?"

"Goodness knows, Miss Viola; it is very unlucky; and at such an hour too!"

The dark passenger interfered again.

"Pardon me; where was your portmanteau put into the van?"

Viola raised her blue eyes frankly.

"In London. We came up from Dover."

"From Dover!"

"Yes, and changed trains in London, and came straight on."

His heavily moustached lip curled into a smile. "Matters are complicating. *I* came up from Dover to London, and changed trains, and came straight on."

The two girls stared at each other, the old woman stepped forward, and peered again into the van. Constella's golden head gleamed in the lamp light.

"Don't you think we had better do something about them?" she said hastily. "The train must just be starting now."

He bent to her gravely. "What would you suggest?"

"I—I don't know."

"Neither do I, very well. Look here, guard," and he turned sharply to a man hurrying past them. "I suppose you didn't see anything of two big portmanteaus, did you, at any of the stations? Brass bands at the ends, and projecting locks."

The man paused a moment, passing his hand over his hot forehead.

"I seem to remember something about them, sir; odd-looking things, were they? Yes, yes, of course," he went on, his face brightening; "it was at Hillsborough I joined the train, and it was there I saw them coming out of the van. Three; there were three just alike."

"At Hillsborough!"

"Three!"

The man with the grey ulster and Viola made the two exclamations together, and paused, looking at each other. The guard turned to Viola.

"Yes, miss, three, one beside the other. I must go now, but just you tell the station-master about them. Right—all right!"

In two minutes the girls, with their servant, were walking hastily down the draughty station. Somehow or other, this tall, unknown passenger kept beside them, without listening to, or taking part in their conversation. Near the door he came a step nearer and said:

"I have been thinking, I have a friend at Hillsborough, and I intend telegraphing to him to find out my portmanteau and send it on here. He can easily do the same for yours, if you have no objection."

Viola faced him a little doubtfully.

"It is very good of you, but ——"

"But perhaps you would rather not?"

"Oh no, indeed; but you see the whole thing is so strange, the guard said he saw three portmanteaus."

He laughed. "It is strange; but I have no doubt my friend will be able to unravel the mystery, if you do not mind."

"It is very good of you. How shall we know, then?" She paused a moment; then added, her colour deepening slightly: "Our name is Guyne, and we live at the Rectory. Perhaps you could let us have word there?"

He bowed gravely. "Thank you. I will let you know as soon as I hear. I—I am—perhaps I had better give you my card, Miss Guyne. I am putting up at the hotel here, for a few days' fishing, and of course ——"

He stopped abruptly, a smile breaking over his face as his eyes glanced from one girl to the other, and again to the old woman standing half-bewildered between them. "Of course if you should hear anything about yours ——"

"We will let you know at once; certainly, Mr.——Mr.——" Viola paused; the most polite people will do impolite things sometimes. Viola Guyne never could account afterwards for her own ill-breeding, but somehow she paused, and raised his card involuntarily to her eyes.

He smiled. "Yes, you will find it there. Good night, then. I hope I shall soon have welcome news for you." And lifting his hat once more, he turned slowly away, leaving Viola hot and indignant, with the cool night wind blowing in on her.

"How could I!" she exclaimed angrily. "Betsy, Constella, tell me how I could."

Constella's large eyes followed the grey ulster. "I don't know I'm sure, dear. Viola, did you recognize him? and I believe that his Hillsborough friend was the fair man on the platform. What does he call himself? Show me his card."

"Here it is. Oh, Constella!"

The girl stood for a moment, bending her small fair head, and straining her soft brown eyes—like a fawn's—under the last flickering lamp of the dingy station.

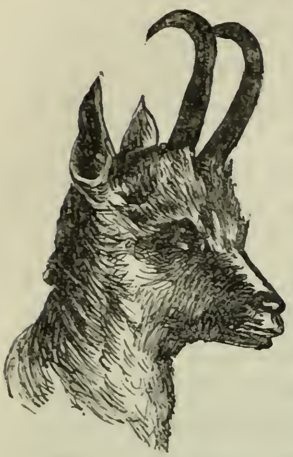
"Captain Fane," she read aloud, and added, so low that it was almost only a thought; "And I wonder what *the other* one's name is?"

(*To be concluded.*)

* * *

BY THE VULTURE'S NEST.

By Bettina Wirth, Author of "Princess Eleanor."



Head of Chamois.

Of the many friends it has been my happy lot to win in the course of a long life, there is none dearer to my heart than Douglas Graham—an English gentleman.

Douglas Graham is a bachelor, and wealthy enough to roam about the world; never tired of encountering adventures and dangers of all kinds, yet ever eager to learn and to observe. Some time ago he confessed to me that a great wish of his heart was on the eve of fulfilment—he was about to shoot his first chamois.

I had often heard him say—"If I could but once shoot a chamois I should be happy;" and so I heartily congratulated him when he at length showed me an invitation from Count P—— to his castle in the Tyrolean Alps, where a number of other well known sportsmen had already met for their favourite pastime.

There were no ladies at the castle, which was one used principally during the hunting season. The company included the "Jagdherr"—that is, the host—several Austrian noblemen, and also a young Frenchman, one of the military attachés of the French Embassy at Vienna.

As the gentlemen sat smoking round the enormous fireplace in the castle hall, conversation naturally turned upon the approaching chase; and the several places where the hunters were to be posted, in order to lie in wait for the game, were eagerly discussed. The young Frenchman, slightly heated, perhaps, by the champagne he had indulged in at table, exclaimed loudly: "If you have any *dangerous* position, which no one else cares to take, that will be the place for me."

The host rose, placed himself before the fire, and said quietly but courteously: "I am afraid I shall not be able to comply with your wish, Chevalier. Mr. Graham, who has honoured me with his presence, is not only one of my oldest friends, but he has been away from us for many years. I had, therefore, already determined to reserve for him our most difficult post; otherwise you may be sure that I should have great pleasure in meeting your wishes."

"All that I can say then, is, that I envy Mr. Graham," was the Frenchman's somewhat sullen rejoinder, whilst Graham drew nearer to the master of the house, and inquired what kind of place was so kindly reserved for him.

"We are never very certain, once the drive begins, what direction the wild creatures may take," replied Count P——. "Yet there is one certain narrow passage in the rocks, about three hours from the castle, which the chamois can scarcely help passing in their flight. But the only place where the hunter can conceal himself is a narrow ledge, with just room enough for a man to sit upon comfortably. But for anyone liable to the slightest giddiness, or even to over-excitement at the moment of shooting, it might become a position of positive danger. One cannot get to it otherwise than by being let down by ropes held by a couple of men on the rock above; but that is nothing, since of course we take good care that the tackle be secure. That is the only spot, Graham, on all my grounds, from which I think I can say that you are perfectly certain to kill a chamois. It is a hazardous post, as you see, but it is at your service."

When the gentlemen bade each other good-night on the grand old staircase of the castle, the host told them that they would unhappily have to moderate their ardour for some short time longer, since the next day being Sunday, the Chamois drive could not take place till the following morning.

The fields were still sparkling in the early dew when Douglas Graham left the castle the next day, and strolled down the hill to the riverside, where a pretty village was clustering round a handsome church with an old square tower. It was Sunday, and people were indoors preparing themselves for an early mass. Graham had long ago learnt to speak German, and loved to make friends with the poor and the humble. He sauntered about the village street, and directed his steps towards the church. As soon as the bells began to ring, the doors of several houses opened, and men and women marched out slowly and ceremoniously, as though they considered it indecorous to approach the church with a hurried step.

The congregation was not a very numerous one, and the bells soon ceased. Graham looked around, and was struck with the grandeur of the mountains, some of which were lying in deep violet shade, whilst others already glowed in the golden sunshine of a splendid summer's morning. He was leaning against the churchyard wall, so rapt in admiration of the scene before him, that he did not observe that a female figure had appeared under the doorway of a neighbouring house, and had remained there motionless for some time. Presently he lowered his eyes from the imposing mountains, and met another pair, blue as his own, but laughing with the merriment of early youth.

Graham saw at a glance that she was not dressed in her Sunday best, so he asked her: "Why do you stay away from church this morning? No sick relation to nurse, I trust?"

"Oh, no!" laughed the girl. "This is church-time for the old ones. We girls go up at ten o'clock, when the mothers must stay at home to cook the dinners." She was tall and slender, with hair and skin so fair, she might have been a lady born. After a little more conversation, she added: "Is the gentleman staying with the Herr Graf?"

"Yes," replied Graham, "and I am going to the chamois hunt to-morrow. Will you not wish me good luck?"

"Well, yes; but not with much heart. I have more sympathy with the poor little ill-used animals, than with those who pursue them. But good-day to you, sir. I must now get back to my work." And with that, she disappeared within the house.

Graham strolled on through the churchyard, softly humming a favourite air. As he slowly recrossed the village the view again opened out, and this time the castle, whose hospitable roof had sheltered him during the preceding night, appeared before him.

It stood upon a slight eminence, entirely surrounded by forests of a deep green, and was built in a fanciful style, rendered beautiful by age. In the park surrounding the castle on all sides, Graham met some of the gentlemen who were to be his fellow sportsmen, and with whom he returned to the house. After a great deal of pleasant conversation, the Count advised Graham to pay a visit to the spot where he was to shoot his chamois on the morrow, which was celebrated for its beautiful view into a dozen different valleys. Graham was delighted with the idea, and submitted with a good grace when the Chevalier offered to go with him.

It was early in the afternoon when they set out. Their guide, a young forester, led the way to a narrow path between two bright meadows, enclosed on either side by the forest's dark pine trees, and beyond them a group of successive hills, with narrow valleys between them. Graham was glad of a companion to whom he could speak about all that pleased his eye, but he found little sympathy in Monsieur le Chevalier. Frenchmen, as a rule, are no great admirers of scenery, and this young man had a firm notion that this was the time for setting up a reputation. Whatever they began to talk about he invariably found means to terminate by an allusion to some of his own exploits.

Suddenly he broke off in the middle of a sentence, and gave a low whistle of delight. Graham followed the direction of the Frenchman's eyes, but seemed—not equally pleased.

Not a hundred paces in front of them, on a wonderfully smooth sward, stood a small house, and in the dark doorway a slight female figure in bright garments—Graham's acquaintance of the morning. She was shading her eyes with her hand, and already welcoming them with the loud melodious "Jodl," common among the mountain peasantry of Tyrol, which their guide, the young forester, as cheerfully returned. Then she advanced a little to meet them, and greeted them cordially.

The girl made them at home in a very few minutes, and, seating herself on the bench at Graham's side, chatted for some time in an-easy, unembarrassed, well-bred manner, which charmed the young Englishman more every moment.

At last the Chevalier rose, and proposed that they should leave the beautiful spot, which was only half-way to the place they had intended to visit. Graham, however, preferred staying where he was for the present, and the Frenchman, after a few polite phrases to the pretty girl, went away with the guide.

As soon as they had departed, Graham explained to his companion that he had come out so far only to look at a place which was to be one of the posts in the Count's chamois hunt of the next day. The girl leaned forward, and asked in an anxious tone of voice: "What spot do you mean? Not where the Vulture's Nest was taken down last year?"

"It may be for aught I know," answered Graham. "I have not seen it, but will describe it to you, as others have described it to me."

The girl was watching him anxiously, and when he stopped for a moment in his recital, murmured softly: "This is my dream coming true! And who is going to be placed there?" she continued, with a terrified look.

"Myself," was Graham's answer.

The girl rose from her seat, looked at him imploringly, and said: "I will beg you on my knees not to go to the post by the Vulture's Nest, and you must not refuse my request. Listen. A year ago I was staying in this little châlet quite alone, as I am now. I was waiting for Jockl to come and fetch the butter for the castle, and I would not go to bed before he had been here. But I was very drowsy, and fell asleep on the bench near the window with my head on the sill, and the early moon streaming in upon me. I dreamt a horrible dream that night. I saw a hunter come to the spot where the Vulture's Nest had been. I saw him climb down to the ledge—he required no ropes to get to it. I saw him sit motionless for a long time. Then I heard a strange noise in the distance. The hunter jumped to his feet, leaned forward to shoot, and just as the peal of his rifle was heard, he lost his balance, and fell into the precipice below. I woke with a start, and found Jockl's hand upon my shoulder."

The girl paused a moment, and Graham waited in silence.

"He laughed at me when I told him my dream," she continued. "But he no longer laughed a few days afterwards, when a neighbour's son, a fine young fellow, who had always wanted to shoot a chamois on his own account, was found dead at the bottom of the high rock, where the streams join and pass out into the valley. You must not allude to his fate at the castle, for they all believe he fell while he was cutting down a tree in his father's forest. They do not know it, but I saw him go past here at dawn, warned him, and told him of my dream. He only laughed at me, and said I was paid by the Count to spread dangerous stories, in order to spoil the boys' pleasure in hunting a chamois on the sly."

Graham laughed at the girl's earnestness. "I am glad you told me all this," he said, "but I shall take better care of myself, you may be sure. The spot is not dangerous in itself; it was only that poor youth's imprudence that made it so. Besides, your dream has already come to pass—so now, all danger is over."

"No, no," vehemently cried the girl—"I have not told you all. Last night I was visited by the same dream again, and the hunter who disappeared in the precipice was not a peasant this time. Now that I see you, I could almost imagine it was yourself."

At this moment a mountain cry was heard in the distance, and shortly after the guide reappeared, emerging from the forest, but without M. le Chevalier. He explained that the Frenchman had declared he would return home by another road, and had sent him back to the châlet, in case Douglas Graham should wish to visit the spot of his intended exploits on the morrow.

Before Graham could answer the guide's question another man appeared upon the scene, and was warmly welcomed by the girl—Jockl, of whom she had twice spoken to Graham. She took his arm, and drew him aside, and whispered a few words to him, to which he replied by as many nods. He was a fine young fellow, a head taller than the girl who was clinging to him, and Graham could not look at him without a momentary pang, as of jealousy—foolish as he knew the feeling to be.

The sun was slowly setting, as Graham, with his two companions, commenced their homeward walk. For a while they walked on in silence, and Graham enjoyed the perfume of the delicious air on those heights, and watched the varying light on the mountain-chains that rose all around between the valley and the bright evening sky. Suddenly Jockl cleared his throat, and said, "Louise, I suppose, has been telling you a good deal about dreams and superstitions, and such things. She was very wrong to do so, but she was right in advising you not to accept the post by the Vulture's Nest."

Graham looked at the young peasant with a cold glance. Jockl understood the glance, and said:

"I know exactly how much you can do. I can see that at once, when I look at your legs and arms, and mark your resolute eye. But have you ever hunted the chamois before?"

"No, never."

"Does the Count know that?"

"I am not sure that he does."

"Depend upon it, then, he does not," said Jockl, "for he would never send you to the Vulture's Nest if he did. But once the game appears, if you have never seen a chamois before, your very senses will leave you. Twenty chances to one you will make a step forward, and, if so, inevitably fall into the precipice. When you have shot a dozen chamois you may go to the place and try it; but not till then.'

Graham was struck by the man's words; they were spoken so sensibly, and so quietly. They sounded like a law by which a man must abide, if he be not a madman.

After a while, Jockl added : "I have been to that place six or seven times myself, and have each time shot a chamois there. But since Louise has had that dream, she wont let me go there again. She is such a good sister—I cannot help letting her have her way."

"She is your sister!" Graham exclaimed. "What a very nice girl she is. Well, I am grateful to you both for the interest you take in my behalf, and I now promise to speak to the Count about it."

Graham scarcely had time to change his dress at the castle, before the dinner bell sounded. The company sat down to table without the Frenchman, who had not yet returned. Graham informed his host that he had not seen the place he had gone out to look at, and thought he could not do better than repeat the whole of his conversation with Jockl. But he never mentioned the young man's sister. The Count laughed and said :

"You have spent your afternoon with the most dangerous poacher of all our neighbourhood—a brave young fellow, however, whom I only wish I could get as a ranger. But he prefers his liberty to all other advantages. I believe he considers a chamois to be no longer a chamois, if he is authorised to shoot it."

After a pause the Count added :

"But why did you not tell us before that this is to be your first chamois hunt? Jockl is perfectly right, and the Chevalier has now a chance. But where is he?"

"The Chevalier left me long ago," returned Graham, "and after a time sent back our guide to me, saying he would return alone. I hope he has not lost his way."

"It is a moonlight night," observed one of the other guests, "and from all the hills around, the castle is plainly visible. Only what to a stranger seems the easiest and best road to take is sometimes very difficult to get over."

The host looked at his watch, and, while the company were assembled and smoking in the large hall, Graham withdrew. He then took his hat and strolled leisurely out into the garden, as if he intended spending only a few minutes in the open air. But as soon as he had reached the dark shadow of the pine trees, he hastened his step, and took the same direction as in the afternoon, when the Frenchman had been his companion. A vague feeling of uneasiness, almost of suspicion, had taken possession of him, and gave him no rest. The high summits of the mountains were flooded with the cold silvery light of the moon, and every shrub and stone were clearly discernible, whilst the shadows were so dark that the fancy could easily people them with phantoms of mountain spirits.

When Graham reached the plateau from whence he could distinguish Louise's châlet in the distance, he saw a light burning in one of the small casements. In a few moments he stood below the house, and, as he approached the door, suddenly the loud tones of an angry voice struck his ear. Two strides brought him to the window, which was of rude, coarse glass, but admitted of his seeing what passed within the cottage, and still better, of hearing what was said there. He felt at once that he had before him the very ideal of a brave woman.

Louise was standing beside her small, black hearth, almost touching its low vaulted roof. One of her hands was lowered to the fire, the other was extended with a menacing gesture towards the door of the cottage. Her head was no longer covered with a kerchief as it had been in the morning, and two rich plaits of golden hair fell upon her bare neck and shoulders, which were as white as her pale face. She would have been more like a statue than a living being, had not her blue eyes flashed fire. Now she parted her lips, and Graham felt a throb of gladness at being there to protect her, as he heard her exclaim:

"You will not come a step nearer if your life is dear to you. You may be thankful if I let you go out at that door without giving you a keepsake that will mark you for the rest of your life."

She bent down to the fire, and stretched out her hand to seize one of the flaming brands, but as she was bending low one of her long plaits fell forward, and took fire. She dropped the burning log, and caught her hair to extinguish the fire between her hands; and with a cry of triumph the Chevalier jumped to the hearth and caught the girl in his arms. Graham saw his form but a second—the next moment he had burst open the door, and sprung into the low kitchen. An iron hand had seized the Chevalier by the back of the neck, and shook him so violently that he was obliged to loosen his hold.

Then the two men faced each other. Graham stood cool and motionless, but the scornful curl of his lip and the burning glance of his eye told the Frenchman what he thought of him.

The Chevalier broke the silence.

"So then," he hissed out, between his lips, "I have a rival! Well, all the better. None but the brave deserve the fair! Come on, and let us fight it out at once."

They walked out into the moonlight, and Louise, followed them without saying a word. But when she saw that they were going to stand up in earnest, she threw herself between them, stretched out a hand towards them, and said:

"I am not going to let you quarrel about me. Neither of you has any right to suffer in my cause. I am very grateful to you, Mr. Graham, for having helped me. I should have had some trouble without your kind assistance, and perhaps the Chevalier a chastisement he would have remembered to his dying day. But it is all at an end now, and you must separate peacefully."

The two men stood motionless. It was evident that they intended to carry out their quarrel at some more appropriate moment. The girl returned quickly into the châlet, put out the light, and came back in an instant, with a long cloak thrown over her shoulders. Then she locked the doors of both châlet and stables, and walking up to the gentlemen, resumed, in a decided tone:

"I'm going down with you. If I let you go alone, there would be bloodshed before you got home. Don't tell me to turn back, Mr. Graham, for when I have made up my mind to anything, no power on earth can change me. The walk will do me good."

The three walked over plateaux and through forests, down steep hills and over small springs, in dead silence for an hour at least. When the lighted windows of the Castle at last became visible, Louise said resolutely: "I am going to my father's house, and there someone will return with me. But I am not going to leave you yet," she added, as Graham stopped at the bottom of the broad flight of steps that led up to the entrance hall of the castle, and extended a hand to her. She ran hastily up them, and greeted one of the servants in the hall. "Good evening, Hans," she said. "I have brought you back two of your gentlemen who had lost their way in the night. Run and tell the Herr Graf that they are here."

The servant knew that his master was anxious about the Chevalier, and did as he was bid. The girl once more thanked Graham for the great service he had rendered her, turned, and was out of sight in a moment.

The party of gentlemen spent another half-hour together in the hall, before the host announced that it was time for bed, if the hunters intended to be at their several posts in time in the morning. The Frenchman knew how to put aside for the moment his recent discomfiture, and when he was offered this time the coveted place by the Vulture's Nest, he accepted it enthusiastically, and even cast a look of triumph upon Graham. The two then separated, and did not meet again that night.

The next morning Graham found only his host and two of the guests in the breakfast-room. The others, with the Frenchman among them, had left much earlier, as their posts were more distant. A rendezvous had been agreed upon, at which all were to meet in the afternoon, when the hunt was over. Graham left the Castle with the Count and two of the foresters, besides a servant who carried provisions for the day.

Graham and his host leisurely ascended the mountain, and, catching frequent glimpses of the beautifully green valleys below them, reached after a time a considerable height. Leaving the beaten track which had hitherto been their path on comparatively easy ground, a moment's respite was now necessary to make ready the trusty rifles, which had from this moment to be ever at hand, and might at any instant be called into play.

The Count himself, acquainted with every turn and stone of those oft-trodden and favourite grounds, led the way, and after a few noiseless and cautious steps, the whole party paused again under the cloak of some dark, thick growing shrubs of the Alpenrosen kind, the wild rhododendron of the Alps, to peer over into the broken gorge below.

The gentlemen and the two attendant foresters adjusted each of them the ready telescope, and now with the utmost precision and care, each gully, each single out-jutting stone, and especially each smallest patch of bright inviting verdure, on which a chamois might possibly be still engaged in his morning repast, was eagerly scanned throughout the gorge. For had a single such outlying animal chanced to be left unperceived whilst the hunters a few minutes later descended to their destined post, the warning whistle of the startled game would have re-echoed and reverberated from rock to rock, and from hill to hill, reaching to almost incredible distances, till every head of chamois on the whole chasse would have been placed upon the qui vive, and all hope of sport for that day must have been abandoned.

The keen eyes, however, gazed in vain on every side, and the Count was on the point of rising to his feet and giving the order to advance, when a hand rested lightly and cautiously on his shoulder, and with a silent motion of the eye, but without daring to make the slightest sound or further gesture, the forester next to him pointed to a narrow ledge on the opposite side of the gully. Crouching still lower under the cover of the shrubs, each man holding his very breath from eagerness and excitement, each hunter fixed his anxious sight upon the spot indicated. The head, neck, and shoulder of a chamois, that had apparently that instant risen from his lair, were now plainly distinguishable, and a second later, issuing from behind a solitary out-jutting rock, a splendid chamois paced leisurely out. For a moment he paused and gazed around him—for a moment seemed to question the passing breath of air—then, apparently reassured, as leisurely resumed his course; reaching the grassy brow of the adjoining hill, he scaled it, and disappeared, evidently in fancied security.

" Graham," said the Count, " we may thank our stars that the wind was so favourable to us whilst that stupendous fellow was making his morning reconnaissance. Did you ever see so wary a creature? How anxiously he snuffed the tell-tale air! But we have not a moment to lose."

With that the whole party shouldered their rifles again, and set out —the Count himself, an experienced climber, leading the way. They reached their post in safety, and in good time. The attendant foresters stretched out plaids for the gentlemen to sit upon, and then themselves retired to a nook a pace or two behind, whence they could overlook the entire scene, and give timely notice of every incident.

Suddenly, after Graham had been patiently straining eyes and ears for two long hours, one of the foresters lightly touched his shoulder, and pointed silently towards a mass of stone at some distance down the gully to the right. Graham's eager eye followed the direction, and espied two fine chamois, that, stationary and with heads erect, seemed to be scanning the ground, and on the look out for danger.

A few minutes later, on the very brow of the hill, appeared several other chamois, with the former splendid buck in their midst. They came leisurely along—paused, approached to the very verge, in order to peer over into the precipice—and then retreated again. They were evidently in no alarm, and soon some of the young kids of the party began to clip the dewy grass, or to sport among themselves with light and graceful gambols.

The four hunters, carefully concealed, never for a moment detached their eyes from the interesting group, which now approached a narrow but deep fissure in the rock, filled with still unmelted snow. Towards this they all bent down, and were soon most busily engaged.

Some anxious time passed thus, when the Count exclaimed: "They are not in the least alarmed, and are quietly licking the snow, which all chamois are so specially fond of. But, if no further sound of the drivers below should chance to reach that favoured spot, they may remain there for hours; which would hardly suit us, Graham. Berger," he added, "send your companion round to try and startle them. But let him be cautious, and be sure not to be observed."

Away went Lepperl on his delicate mission, but so quietly that not even Graham and the Count, though so close to him, could catch the sound of his retreating steps.

For half an hour still the chamois remained upon the grassy plot, where some of them laid themselves down to rest, without suspicion that the hunter's eye was upon them, whilst the two sportsmen watched with breathless anxiety, their hands upon their rifles. Suddenly a movement of evident alarm was noticed among the chamois. A shrill and piercing whistle re-echoed through the gorge, and with one simultaneous bound, the whole of the little troop was in motion, dashing among the rocks, scarcely touching the ground with their elastic hoofs, and seeming to fly, rather than spring, over yawning gaps and abysses, where no living man could have followed.

One large, sagacious doe, the matron of the group, had fearlessly sprung to the head, and was now leading the desperate flight. Straight as an arrow from a bow she made for old Berger's fatal strip of white rock, with the bounding water rill. But just as they were on the point of reaching it, the simultaneous peal of two shots resounded, their number was reduced by one, and the big buck had "bitten the dust." Both Graham and the Count had fired, but evidently one of the two had missed his aim.

The last trace of the retreating game had disappeared, and the Count, rising from his seat, said to his friend: "I am delighted to tell you, Graham, that it was you who dropped the splendid buck that is lying over there, for I purposely and most willingly left him for my honoured guest, and aimed at the one beside him. I much fear that my shot did not take effect, for I confess to you that I am somewhat out of sorts. Do you know that a vague feeling of anxiety has come over me, and my thoughts have for some time back been with our young Frenchman. There is a terrible presentiment of evil upon me. I have felt it once before in my life, and then it was only too sadly fulfilled. I hardly know why, but I have actually been regretting that I allowed him to go to the Vulture's Nest! Yet you yourself saw how pressing he was; it would really have seemed inhospitable and ungracious on my part to oppose him. However, though it is still early," he added, as he drew out and looked at his watch, "let us set off at once for our appointed place of meeting. Some of the party are almost sure to be already there, and from them we may possibly hear also about the others."

It was a pleasant saunter that the two gentlemen had now before them, and they further enlivened it by many a stirring tale of hunting life. Graham thought he had never enjoyed a cigar so fully as during the good hour's walk which brought them to the trysting tree.

The Count and Graham emerged from the forest on to a beautiful green meadow; not unlike the one upon which stood Louise's châlet. In the midst of it rose a group of old pines, and under them were assembled several of the Count's guests, a few of the foresters, and some also of the peasants who had taken part in the drive. They were all pressing round some object in their centre, and all eyes were directed to a spot hidden from the view of Graham and his host.

Suddenly someone remarked the Count's approach, and told the others of it. One of the gentlemen thereupon left the group, and walked towards the new comers. But the expression of his countenance foretold some sad tale, and his lips only too soon confirmed it.

"It is the Chevalier," he said, "and we fear he is quite dead. No one knows how the accident happened, for he was alone upon his post. But a young girl who lives in a châlet upon the hill must have watched him, for it was she who gave the first tidings of his fall. She heard his rifle shot, she tells us, and saw some chamois flying past on the opposite side of the mountain, but when she looked over the edge of the precipice, the Chevalier had disappeared."

"Good heavens, how dreadful! Let us hope it is not so bad as you suppose," exclaimed the Count, as he and Graham hastened up to the assembled group. The Count murmured some further inaudible words as he approached nearer, and then knelt down by the young, and, alas, shattered corpse.

And Graham! He was deeply shocked on hearing the melancholy tidings, and the very next moment felt as though it was his own death that was being announced to the Count; as though the accident had not happened to the Chevalier but to himself. What good angels had been busy in his behalf to save him from so terrible a fate?

Very little did Douglas Graham sleep that night. His thoughts most obstinately turned upon one subject only, and the presence of that young man's dead body in the house made them gloomy and solemn. He could not help remembering that but for Louise's warning, his life would probably have been at an end by this time, and while he shuddered at the thought, a great tenderness for Louise crept into his heart. He felt that there was nothing on his part he would not have done to show the girl his gratitude, that no sacrifice would be too great to reward her.

Just as the sun rose over the mountains and filled all the country around with a bright glow, he descended the hall terrace, and directed his steps through the dewy park towards the village. Early as it was, he found Louise busy in her flower-garden. She was very pale, it is true, but as neat and pretty as ever. Her smile had changed very much since the first day he had seen her: it looked melancholy now, and the brightness of youth that shone forth from her eye on that fine Sunday morning had given place to a serious expression, which did not change when she came to the garden hedge of wild roses and extended her hand to her foreign friend. Graham held the hand in his own for a little while, and when he released it, he said:

"I am glad to see you, Louise, and have come to thank you for the warning you gave me, which has proved so useful to me, and so fatal to that young Frenchman. Alas! no warning would have been of use to him, for no power on earth could have prevented him from taking the post."

"So Johann from the castle tells me," replied Louise, in low, sad tones. "He heard him speak to you about his courage and his disappointment at not being allowed to take the post at the Vulture's Nest."

Graham looked inquiringly into the pretty girl's face. It was no longer pale, but suffused with lovely blushes, that she seemed to feel, and that increased her embarrassment. Graham approached her as much as he could with those rose-bushes between them, and taking her hand and speaking softly, said:

"Louise, look at me. What are you blushing about? Do not turn away from me, for if I cannot see you I can never be sure whether I guess aright. It is nothing so very strange after all, and before I knew that that fine fellow Jockl was your brother, I had made up my mind that he was the lucky one. It is wonderful indeed that your heart has been free so long."

Another inquiring glance, which was responded to by just one look, then the girl blushed again and said:

"Oh, it is an old story, only I had not been well aware of it myself."

Graham almost dropped her hand at those words, but he mustered up his courage, and bade her tell him all. She heaved a sigh, bent her head low, and whispered her heart's secret to him.

" I always liked Johann from the castle, long before he entered the Count's service, but I never knew I cared for him so very much until yesterday. I had seen him go to the post by the Vulture's Nest with the Frenchman, and he did not return past my châlet; so when I heard that shot and the fall, I for a moment imagined it might have been Johann, and not till the evening could I be quite sure that he was safe. I have never passed such anxious hours in all my life, not even at my mother's deathbed, which although it grieved us all so deeply, was to her a release from suffering."

She had been silent for some time, and yet not a word came from the lips of the man whom she had honoured with her confidence. At last she timidly looked up into his face. He was smiling sadly; then he kissed her hand before she could withdraw it, and after another pause, he murmured:

" Do you know what I was going to say before you told me about Johann from the castle?"

Louise looked frightened, and then with a forced smile and with much hesitation she managed to answer:

" Do you not think you had better not say it now that I have told you all?"

" You are right, Louise; but you will *not* forget that your name is inscribed in my heart for all time! Good-bye, if I stay I shall disobey you and say too much. Good-bye!"

He did not see the tears that started to the girl's eyes, nor how she turned to hide them, lest he should look back once more.

A very short time afterwards Louise married Johann, who was no longer Johann from the castle, but a forester, with a pretty house of his own, surmounted by a splendid deer's antlers, a " sixteenender " whom Johann killed the day he won his bride. The house is handsomer and much more comfortable than those of the other foresters, and yet Douglas Graham is in despair because Louise will not allow him to do her the least kindness. But Louise is right; if she gave way to the generous Englishman's fancies her forester's house would be changed into a small palace in a very short time.

On the day of the wedding, at which Graham was not present, the Count signed a document which was to be preserved in the Castle-library, and which enjoined all the future proprietors of the place never again to place a hunter upon the *Post by the Vulture's Nest.*

EXMOOR AND ITS PEOPLE.

PROBABLY many people, even in London, are not aware that, within a comparatively short day's journey exists in England a region, the inhabitants of which in their thoughts, ways, and customs, are almost as far removed from them as the men and women of the days of Queen Anne. This region lies in the west of England, in that part of Somersetshire which borders North Devon. It comprises the wide, uncultivated tract of Exmoor, Dunkerry—the highest point in the West—and the country which immediately surrounds it.

In winter, when a heavy curtain of mist spreads far and near; or when the rain comes sweeping along, driven by the rough hand of the west wind; or when a bold, strong north-easter piles up the snow upon the more open ground, the moor and the heath are certainly not desirable places to find yourself upon: especially when a grey November day is growing towards its close. Yet, even at these times, this district has its own peculiar charms, when the hills and the moorland are turned, by storm and fog, into a strange wonderland.

It is a morning of dense mist, and even the Exmoor native at our side can hardly find his way across the heather on the spur of Dunkerry over which our way is leading us. We appear to be shut out from the whole world by this impenetrable wall around us. We can see nothing but the yard of brown heath beneath our feet, hear nothing but a faint stirring, where the wind is moving the furze bushes near at hand. The murmur of the little stream, which rises in the heather hard by, is full of vague mystery when we catch its indistinct voice, which is the next sound that reaches us. Are they the tones of some spirit warning us? We do not know what to fancy, or what to dream, or what to expect. A wondrous surprise is, in truth, being prepared for us, but a surprise which is very different from any of these.

All at once, just when it seems thickest and most hopeless, there is a rift in the heavy curtain; the fog goes rolling away on either side. Without being aware of it we have reached the slope of the hill, and are just over-hanging one of the deep valleys which form a special feature of the whole country, and which, when they are small and narrow, are called "combes." As the veil of fog parts asunder, there suddenly appears before us the warm hollow, which is still green, here, in the damp, mild west, even in winter; a little homestead nestling cosily among its brown ricks, and a belt of low woodland; a stream winding with many a capricious turn, and glinting, as it goes, in a gleam of sunshine which has filtered in through the mist; a bit of narrow, stony path which goes climbing down from the hill-side opposite, and upon which an Exmoor pony is picking his way dextrously along, bearing a rider who seems well used to the situation. On each side of the picture the mist is rolling like a grey sea, framing it in, as though the valley were an island shut far away from the rest of the world. We have scarcely gazed, have scarcely wondered, when the whole is once more swept out of sight. Again we are walled in by thick fog, and nothing but its grey folds meet our eye, turn which way we may in our amazed bewilderment.

But if there are rare attractions on Exmoor and its neighbouring hills, even in winter, how shall we describe what a golden summer day is like spent amid these scenes?

After a long ascent in the burning sun, we reach at last the cairn of stones on the summit of Dunkerry, which is called the Beacon, and which is said to be formed from the remains of the three great fire-places on which the beacon fires used to be kindled to warn the country round in old days of war and trouble, and to be answered by other beacon lights shining far away on the Welsh mountains across the channel. We fling ourselves down upon the purple heather, glancing about a little anxiously at first to assure our nervous minds that there are no adders lurking near; for such unpleasant neighbours are frequently to be found on our western hills in warm, summer weather. When we have thus comfortably settled ourselves, let us first look at the soft carpet on which we are lying: a rich and wondrous carpet indeed. The heath is a deeper, more regal hue than any mantle ever worn by an eastern king; and it is all interwoven with the gold of the gorse, and the small white flowers of the dodder, and the rare, beautiful stag's-horn moss, which is sought so eagerly by botanists, and which grows here in such size and perfection, flinging itself about in wild abundance. It is much loved and prized by the west country people themselves, and is always used by them when they want to produce an effect in the way of decoration. The Exmoor lad twists it round his best hat when he goes courting, and the Exmoor girl gathers it to twine about the pillars of the country church on days of village festival or glad harvest-thanksgiving.

But strange and beautiful though our couch is, we must not spend our whole time in examining it. We will lift our heads and first notice with delight the rare freshness, yet softness of the breeze, which is so bracing that it is like a draught of champagne, yet so mild that it seems to have a breath from the distant south mixed with it. There is a briny flavour, too, in this wind, for it has come bounding across the green Atlantic, and sweeping up the channel, and then has leapt up the hill-sides to greet us here. Mindful of this message from the ocean, our eyes wander quickly across green meadow, and upland farm, and valley filled with variously-tinted foliage, till they reach the channel. There is the column of smoke which tells of the passing of some large steamer, moving swiftly towards Bristol: bearing home, it may be, from distant colonies some of our hill country folk, who left us years ago bright lads and lasses, and are now returning grave, care-worn men and women. There, too, are many gleaming sails flitting up and down, and there, beyond all, rise the Welsh mountains, filling our fancies with dreams about the Cimri. Among them all stands out the Sugar-loaf, conspicuous from its quaint shape.

Tired with gazing, we sink back on our heathery bed and float down a stream of idle musing, as we listen to the hum of the bees that are so busy, this sunny day, gathering the honey to which the heather gives such a peculiar, aromatic flavour.

All at once we are disturbed by merry children's voices near us, and we rouse ourselves and look round. The new-comers wear such shabby, not to say ragged frocks and jackets, that, at first sight, an uncomfortable notion concerning a troop of professional beggars begins to haunt us. But there is nothing of a beggar's whine or beggar's shuffle in the laughter which comes ringing towards us on the breeze, in the steps which dance lightly over the heather; there is nothing either of poverty or want in those smiling, sunburnt faces. These are the whortleberry gatherers, who, at this season, come from all the neighbouring villages both of hill and valley to pick the fruit which grows on a little stiff bush in among the heath, during the period when the whortleberries are ripe, which is August and September.

Every village school round about Dunkerry and Exmoor is closed, for the simple reason that, if it were kept open, not a single child would set foot within its doors. They are all sent out whortleberry picking by their parents, dressed in their very oldest and most dilapidated clothes; for the occupation naturally involves many a soil and many a tear, and the thrifty west country matron knows better than to allow best garments to be exposed to such dangers. The profit made by whortleberry gathering is often considerable. Carts come round to the different villages to buy the fruit, which is carried off to our large manufacturing towns, and there used to make a rich purple dye. Small quantities of it are also sold for the table—whortleberry tart and clotted cream being a dish highly appreciated by west country men and women. A hill country child will often earn her Sunday costume for the whole year by her whortleberry gathering, and one small parish last season calculated that the total gains of the boys and girls of the village amounted to above £30. The whortleberry is sweet and mild in taste. The lips of profane strangers sometimes pronounce it insipid, but this is most rank heresy in a west country house, and the visitor who holds such an opinion had best keep it to himself.

But to return to our seat on the top of Dunkerry, from which the whortleberry has made us wander for a while.

We have watched the merry children at their work, till we are tired. We have sunk back again upon the heath, and are feeling a little inclined for a mid-day doze, when something happens which drives sleep most effectually away from our eyes. There is a light sound near us, as of swift-trampling feet which tread briskly the heather. We look up enquiringly. There, at no great distance from us, a herd of red-deer are crossing the brow of the hill, led by a grand old antlered hero whose head rejoices in the glories of brow, bay, and tray, the way in which a west country sportsman describes a stag's horns which have attained to highest fulness of age and honour. What fine, noble-looking inhabitants of the heath and the woodland these are, and how, somehow, the mere sight of them carries our minds back to old days of chivalry and romance!

We have not, however, here in West Somerset, any need to go back through centuries to know what a stag-hunt among the hills is like. To-morrow these very solitudes will be ringing with the sound of horn and hound, and with the huntsman's shout, and a gallant troop of ladies and gentlemen will be galloping over the heather, while one of these same deer, which we now see pause to browse so peacefully, will be flying in front. It is a sport which seems to fascinate irresistibly all those who have once joined in it, and season after season its votaries return and return again. Ladies are often seen in the foremost flight across the moor, and many a west country maiden has been wooed and won, by a suitor from a distant county, during a long moonlight ride home from stag-hunting. The stag often runs far, so that the finish is often many miles from the meet.

One of the chief dangers of a gallop over the moor is the boggy ground which so frequently intersects it. There are on Exmoor and on Dunkerry, bogs so deep, that to sink into them, if no friendly aid was near, would be an experience full of real peril for both horse and rider. All boggy ground is, moreover, full of dangerous attraction for the unwary, as it always presents to the eye a tract of tempting green which seems to invite to a canter. When the Prince of Wales honoured the west country with a visit, he was given, as his leader across the moor, the most experienced hill country rider in West Somerset, a bog being the chief thing dreaded for him by loyal Exmoor hearts.

The country immediately round about Exmoor and Dunkerry partakes very much of the character of Devonshire in many respects. It has hills which can rival Devonshire hills in length and steepness, and it has lanes which can rival Devonshire lanes in the height of their banks, and their eccentric, winding proclivities. These high banks are perfect drawing-rooms of rare wild flowers, and still rarer ferns; looking into their wonders is, for the botanist, like seeing the realization of a beautiful, impossible dream. On every side some princess of the great flower family beckons to him, delicate green mosses twinkle him merry greetings; the vast society of the ferns lie in languid grace around him, each more bewitching than her sister. Another charming peculiarity of this favoured region is the number of bright, rapid, petulant little streams, which sparkle, and murmur, and bubble, and whisper, and chatter, and leap, and glide, and twist hither and thither, and appear suddenly in the most unexpected places, just when, having followed their course for a while, we think we have parted company with them for good.

The beautiful Exmoor ponies are a marked feature of Exmoor and its neighbourhood, they are a breed of very handsome, very spirited, tiny horses; their shape is perfect and their action leaves nothing to be desired, and their little heads, with the bright, full eyes, and fine mobile ears, bring to mind the Arab horses. They are not by any means easy to ride, for they are remarkable for a wriggling, rapid way of moving, and they shy badly at the smallest provocation, seeming to see a ghost in every shadow, and to hear a lurking brigand in every faintest rustle. Their wild life on Exmoor, and the equally wild life of their ancestors for many generations have, no doubt, produced these habits.

The dwellers on Exmoor and in its neighbourhood are in many respects a race apart. They have often the dark hair and eyes which give an almost southern type to the people of North Devon, their accent has something French about its peculiar intonation, and they have many words of their own which no one would understand who had not been for some time naturalized among them. Their modes and terms of expression are also very quaint and singular, and their very amusements have something old-world about them. Their favourite dances enjoy such names as "The Lady's Breast-knot," "The Fox Hunt," "The Queen's Quadrilles," "The Stoning Steps;" their intricacies of figure defy comprehension by all save a born west-country head. They are often, however, very pretty and interesting to the eyes of the looker-on; and there is one dance, called "The Pocket-handkerchief Dance," which, in its grace of movement, brings to mind the dances of the Spanish peasantry.

Many of the west country customs are very pretty and suggestive, and have a touch of real poetry about them. The sheep-shearing is always a festival in an Exmoor farm-house. The daughters of the family, after having displayed their highest art as cooks in the preparation of the supper, adorn themselves in all their gayest finery, and then do all that they can to ensure their lovers and brothers being suitable partners for them in the dance which is to come by-and-bye.

Before the door of the house is placed a large tub full of fresh water, in which are floating all kinds of sweet, aromatic herbs, and close to this is a primitive toilette table, which is well provided with brush and comb and glass. Here the young village dandies make themselves gay and spruce before they seek the fair presence of their lady-loves. Every Christmas day the animals in the west country farm-yard are all given, in honour to the holy morning, a double quantity of food. In harvest time, when the last sheaf is bound up, everyone in the field joins in a loud, ringing, joyful shout, which is meant to proclaim the news to the whole neighbourhood.

Such are some of their strange, old-fashioned usages, and there are many more which we have not space to chronicle here.

The west country folk are full of superstitious observances, and strange superstitions and beliefs. On the night before Twelfth day, it is fully believed by every west country man and woman, that the master bullock of the herd, exactly as midnight strikes, lows three times solemnly, and goes down on his knees before the manger. When they are ill, they would far rather go to a seventh son or daughter to be cured than to a doctor. When a little bird chirps near a window, it is a sure sign of death; so it is when the bees die unexpectedly; so it is when the cocks crow at night; so it is when a luckless individual fails to hear the cuckoo before Midsummer day.

If you give a west country boy a knife, you can never be friends again unless he returns you for it a copper coin. There are witches here in the land, and though they can go to church, they can never turn toward the east while they are there. If the death-bell tolls in some peculiar fashion, only known to the initiated, it is a certain token that someone else will soon die in the parish. If you want to know who are going to depart this life in the village during the present year, you have but to sit up in the church porch on Midsummer eve, and you will see them all pass by. If a west country girl wishes to know which of her lovers is true, she picks a rose on Midsummer day, and wears it on her breast to church on Christmas day, and he will be sure to come and take it from her bosom, and she may trust him ever after. If an old woman in the west has rheumatism, she can always cure it by wearing a toad's leg in a bag round her neck as a charm.

As for dreams, the mind grows uncomfortably bewildered as the west country dame goes through her experiences on this point, and tells us of what we may dream and of what we may not, and relates how, on various occasions, "her dream was out," which is the approved west country way of saying that a dream comes true.

The manners of the west country folk to strangers are always courteous, but frequently marked with a certain reticence. Many of them have a vague mistrust of everything and everyone they are not accustomed to; it is sure to take a considerable time to win even their partial confidence when you settle among them. In mind they are a singular mixture of shrewdness and simplicity. They will see through you in a moment if you try to cheat them or make fun of them, and yet many of them live in the most utter ignorance of ways and ideas which are as commonplace as air and sunshine to the dwellers in towns, or in regions that are nearer to the sound of the great world. They have often spent years without going more than a few miles beyond their native parish, and a journey to Taunton is a solemn event in their lives. If you are their superior in rank they will begin every sentence they address to you, whatever may be its nature, with "If you please, sir;" in this way they will commence a statement that your house is burnt down, or your favourite horse is dead. They have one or two habits of speech which are, to say the least of it, a trifle provoking to the ears of a stranger, who does not know their real meaning; such as their answering calmly, that they like a thing "very well," when you feel that they ought to be in raptures about it; and their replying about anything "Yes, I expect," spoken rather slowly and languidly, when you want to get from them a brisk "Yes, I am certain."

The fare which Exmoor and its neighbourhood can supply to tourists is certainly not to be despised. What butter in the world is like the rich, solid butter of a Devonshire or Exmoor dairy? it may have a slight flavour of smoke, sometimes, but then this is regarded as a delicate addition by real west country folk. Then there is the thick clotted cream, on which the farmers' daughters pride themselves upon piling up as many pence as they have in their pockets without their sinking in. Besides these good things, there are the trout which are caught in all the little streams and brooks of which we have spoken further back; and last, not least, there is the Exmoor mutton, which is a worthy rival to Welsh mutton in every respect. The little Exmoor horned sheep share the moor with the red deer.

Not so very many years have gone by since an old man was buried in a west country churchyard, who could recollect the sensation caused in his native village, a village on the borders of Exmoor, when the first wagon drove up its street. In days not very remote, the whole of the carriage of this steep, hilly country was done by pack-horses, who used to bring in the hay and corn from the fields laden upon their backs. In those times the west country folk were most bold and incorrigible smugglers. When the contraband goods were landed by night on some quiet part of the shore, they were at once placed upon the pack-horses which were waiting for them, and the clever animals, who were as remarkable for their intelligence as they were for their strength and beauty, would each trot home by himself as quickly as he could to his own master's yard.

A railway, with which the most retired valleys among the hills are threatened, the march of modern progress, the rising tide of education, all these things are tending to make this region become, in time, like other parts of England; but before this is the case, let all those who want a breath of freshness, of poetry and romance in these dusty, prosaic days, come and visit Exmoor and its people.

ALICE KING.

SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE.

By Charles Hervey.

On a bright August afternoon a year or two ago, one of the squares abutting on the Lees at Folkestone was thronged with a miscellaneous assemblage of visitors, strolling about or sitting in groups, and listening to a lively selection from "Olivette" played with unflagging spirit by the band of a regiment quartered at Shorncliffe.

Among the latest arrivals was a good-looking young man in a travelling suit. After pausing for a few minutes at the entrance, as if undecided whether to go in or not, he quietly made his way through the crowd, and, securing a post of vantage in a temporarily secluded part of the garden, glanced rather listlessly than curiously at the animated scene before him. He had not been there long when he felt a hand on his shoulder, and turning round beheld, to his evident dissatisfaction, a stout, smirking individual—Tommy Gabbleton, the most notorious gossip and scandal-monger since the days of Crabtree and Sir Benjamin—who accosted him with a familiar:

"Hullo, Torrens, who in the world would have thought of seeing you here! They told me you were at Homburg."

"So I was until yesterday," replied the other. "Only arrived this morning."

"Quite right to look us up on your way to Scotland," rattled on Tommy; "for of course you are off to the moors. Nothing like laying in a provision of oxygen," he continued without waiting for an answer. "I always do at this time of year; and for that sort of thing there's no better place than Folkestone. By the bye,"—here his sly puckered face assumed a semi-mysterious expression—"perhaps you don't know that Miss Trevelyan is here?"

"Indeed!" said Torrens, in a studiously indifferent tone. "I was not aware of it."

"Yes, and what's more, she is sitting yonder, not twenty yards from us with her aunt, Mrs. Mortimer, and—ahem!—Gerestein. I thought it best to give you a hint, as under the circumstances a meeting might be unpleasant, you know."

"On the contrary," was the young man's unexpected answer, "I shall be delighted to see Miss Trevelyan. And, following his not a little astonished guide, he soon found himself in the presence of the trio in question, consisting of a strikingly handsome girl, elaborately attired in one of M. Worth's latest "creations," a middle-aged chaperon, and a stout, over-dressed personage of unmistakably Teuton nationality.

"I have brought you an old acquaintance, ladies," said Gabbleton, with an insufferably self-satisfied grin. "Our friend Torrens has just landed, and is impatient to present his homage at the shrine of beauty. A charming surprise, isn't it?"

If one might judge from the effect produced on the three sitters by this introduction of the new comer, the surprise prepared for them was startling rather than agreeable. Each of the party betrayed in a greater or lesser degree very decided symptoms of embarrassment. Mrs. Mortimer blushed through her pearl powder, her niece turned ashy pale, while Herr Gerestein fidgeted uncomfortably on his chair, and glanced at the stranger with a distrustful eye. The only person—excepting, of course, the irrepressible Tommy—who appeared thoroughly at his ease was Torrens himself. After a courteous salutation addressed to both ladies, and the slightest possible acknowledgment of the German's sulky inclination of the head, he took his seat beside Miss Trevelyan, and entered into conversation with her in a low tone.

"I suppose I ought to congratulate you," he began, as unconcernedly as if he were alluding to the fineness of the weather, and looking at her full in the face as he spoke. "It is rather late in the day, perhaps, but the news of your engagement only reached me a week ago."

"You can do as you like," she replied, nervously toying with her parasol, and evidently struggling hard to maintain her composure. "I can scarcely expect you to take any interest *now* in what concerns me."

"You are wrong, Gertrude," said Torrens, gravely, but kindly. "A man must always feel interested in the future of a girl he has loved, even when," he added with a slight shade of bitterness in his voice, "he has been deliberately thrown over. I am not reproaching you," he continued, in answer to a pleading look from her beautiful eyes. "I perfectly understand that you have preferred the substance to the shadow, and acknowledge my inferiority. It is not probable that we shall meet again, for some time at least; but, believe me, I sincerely trust that the path you have chosen may be a happy one."

With these words, and a cordial grasp of her hand, he rose from his seat, and alleging to Mrs. Mortimer, by way of excuse for his departure, his wish to catch the evening train, soon after left the gardens.

"He takes it coolly enough, I must say," muttered Gabbleton to himself, "and by jove, he's well out of it. Unless I am very much mistaken, if this match ever does come off, it's my private opinion that our friend Gerestein will find that he has got a handful!"

It was the old story of love versus lucre, a contest for supremacy too often resulting, as in the present instance, in the triumph of the latter. That Egerton Torrens, a younger son and a briefless barrister, with little to recommend him but his good looks and a recognised position in society, should have fallen a victim to the charms of Gertrude Trevelyan, one of the prettiest girls of the season, was in the established order of things. That their intimacy should have ripened into something more than a mere ball-room flirtation, was equally intelligible. But that either of them should have imagined the possibility of reviving the exploded chimera of "love in a cottage," would in the eyes of the world have been simply preposterous. Gertrude, an orphan and entirely dependent on her aunt, was destined, according to the immutable ideas of that ambitious and scheming matron, to recoup her by an advantageous marriage for the cost of her maintenance and the anxiety inseparable from the office of chaperon.

It was therefore Mrs. Mortimer's bounden duty to discourage by every means in her power the palpable absurdity of a misplaced familiarity on the part of her niece with anyone so notoriously ineligible as a "detrimental."

Fortunately for her projects, matters had not gone so far as to render her interference ineffectual.

The lovers were still contentedly enjoying the present without troubling themselves overmuch about the future; nor indeed would the question of ways and means, if it had happened to be discussed by them, have presented itself to either in a particularly reassuring light. As far as Gertrude was concerned, she had literally no better expectancies than the milkmaid in the song; while the few hundreds a year that Torrens could call his own, an income barely sufficient for his bachelor wants, could by no stretch of ingenuity be relied upon to satisfy the requirements of a Benedict. This he knew perfectly well, but the temptation was too strong for him. One glance from the damsel's bright eyes, one clasp of her hand, put to flight in an instant all prudential considerations, and left him more hopelessly entangled in the toils than ever.

On her side Miss Trevelyan, although fully appreciating the exclusive privilege of monopolising the attentions of one of the handsomest men and best waltzers in London, and far from disinclined to indulge in a personal experience of "love's young dream," was not altogether insensible to the effect produced by her beauty on the world at large. She could not for the life of her refrain from certain displays of feminine coquetry which in reality meant nothing, but appeared to mean a great deal.

This had the two-fold result of arousing Egerton's jealousy, and of satisfying Mrs. Mortimer that she had still material to work upon; more especially as her arguments were backed by the advent of a powerful auxiliary in the person of Hermann Gerestein, the head of an Anglo-German house in the City, and a professed admirer of her niece. No one knew exactly who he was, or how he had made his money; but as common report credited him with the possession of a considerable fortune, and his recent purchase of a mansion in Park Lane was an indisputable fact, people in general were content to take his solvency for granted, and asked no further questions about him.

That Gertrude was flattered by his undisguised homage her aunt saw plainly enough, and lost no opportunity of profiting by it. His wealth and the manifold advantages derivable therefrom were continually dwelt upon by the manœuvring lady, and the absolute folly of throwing such a chance away was persistently hinted at. Little by little the object of her importunities began involuntarily to compare the brilliant prospect held out to her with the undesirable position of a poor man's wife, to whom a house in Park Lane must needs be a myth, and a modest home in an unfashionable quarter of the town an unavoidable necessity.

Torrens was not slow either to perceive the change in her manner, or to guess its cause. The city magnate's devotion to Miss Trevelyan had of late been too marked to admit of any doubt as to his intentions. By way, therefore, of bringing matters to a crisis, he abruptly taxed her with inconstancy; and, carried away by his feelings, urged his prior claims to her affection in so resentful a tone that at length, stung by his reproaches, she haughtily repudiated the idea of any engagement on her part, and gave him clearly to understand that she considered herself bound to reciprocate his attachment by no tie or promise whatsoever.

Shortly after this decisive rejection Egerton started for the Continent, and for the next two or three months strove to forget his disappointment by wandering about from place to place until the day when, as we have seen, he and Gertrude unexpectedly met each other at Folkestone.

His reflections, as he was whirled away northward on the following morning with the usual rapidity of the "Flying Scotchman," were by no means of a pleasurable character. Even the alluring prospect of his favourite sport on the moors failed to divert his mind from the trying interview of the preceding afternoon. It had revived all the painful memories of the past, which he had vainly imagined were forgotten. Secure as he felt himself from any return of his infatuation, he nevertheless bitterly regretted that chance should have again thrown them together, and once more exposed him to the perilous influence of her beauty. Time, however, and the congenial society of a joyous band, roughing it with true sportsmanlike equanimity in an anomalous structure by courtesy called a shooting box, gradually acted as a panacea on his over-strung imagination. The presence, moreover, of a "ministering angel," in the person of his host's sister, who presided over the household arrangements of the improvised establishment, contributed not a little to distract his thoughts from the one idea which had hitherto exclusively preoccupied them.

Annie Thornton, a bright-eyed, fair-haired lassie, in her capacity of general purveyor to the requirements of her guests, was precisely the right girl in the right place. Without being strictly pretty, she had a winning charm of manner, rendered still more attractive by a soft, low voice, "an excellent thing in woman," the soothing influence of which one of her visitors at least was fully capable of appreciating.

No more effectual cure for a "mind diseased" could have been devised than the society of, in every respect, so sympathetic a hostess. Before a fortnight had elapsed since his arrival, Egerton began to regard a stroll on the heather in her company as infinitely preferable to the best day's sport, and—although he would hardly have ventured to confess a much—had a dawning perception that the image of Gertrude Trevelyan was in imminent danger of being permanently replaced by that of Annie Thornton.

The idea that this might possibly be the case both startled and embarrassed him, and he felt half inclined to put himself out of the way of temptation by inventing a plausible excuse for his immediate return to London. He was not vain enough to imagine that after so short an acquaintance he had succeeded in producing a favourable impression, and had no fancy for being rejected a second time. Thus, inclination pointing one way and a by no means pleasant experience the other, he resembled a traveller between two cross roads, uncertain which to take, and looking in vain for a finger-post to indicate the right one.

A solution of the difficulty, however, was at hand, and coming from a totally unexpected quarter.

One evening, when—Harcourt and Stansbury, the two other guests, had retired early to rest after a hard day's deer-stalking—he and Fred Thornton were enjoying a final pipe together, the latter with apparent unconcern asked his friend what his plans were on leaving Scotland.

"Nothing fixed," replied Egerton; "haven't thought of them yet."

"Ah," said Fred," it's lucky that some one has thought of them for you. Shall I tell you what you are going to do? You are going to marry Annie."

"Annie!" echoed Torrens, staring at the speaker as if in doubt whether he had heard aright. "Miss Thornton!"

"Miss Thornton, if you prefer it," coolly retorted his companion. "Do you suppose I have no eyes?"

"I don't understand," stammered out Egerton.

"Yes you do. Now, let us be logical. What do people generally come to the moors for? Sport. How many times have you been out with us since you came? Three or four at most. Ergo, you have found metal more attractive elsewhere. Is that clear or not?"

"I assure you, I have never said a word ——"

"That's your own fault," interrupted Fred. "As this doesn't happen to be leap year, you couldn't expect her to say it for you could you? Joking apart," he continued, in a more earnest tone, "I have set my heart on having my old chum for a brother-in-law, and for two very good reasons: first, because I have a strong suspicion that you like Annie, and secondly, because I am certain Annie likes you."

"Did she tell you so?" eagerly inquired Egerton.

"Never mind. Perhaps she will tell *you* if you ask her; and, between ourselves, I shouldn't be in the least surprised if you did so to-morrow."

"Nor I," said Torrens, heartily; and with a cordial shake of the hand the friends separated for the night.

That the result of the projected interview proved entirely satisfactory to both parties concerned may be inferred from our hero's departure at the end of the week for his father's seat in Cheshire, by way of personally announcing his intended marriage. "A mere matter of form," he said to Fred. "Beyond making me a younger son's allowance of five hundred a year, the governor troubles himself very little about my concerns. Whether I take to myself a wife or remain single, it is perfectly indifferent to him. If I were my brother Augustus and heir to Somerton, any such step on my part would be an affaire d'état; but as it is, if, like Lord Privilege in 'Peter Simple,' he holds out two fingers instead of one, I shall consider myself highly honoured."

Things, however, turned out far better than Egerton had anticipated. On hearing that the fiancée was the daughter of his old acquaintance, Admiral Thornton, Mr. Torrens senior deigned to express his approval of the match, and, moreover, graciously signified his intention of increasing his son's allowance to a thousand a year: which, thought the latter, together with Annie's modest portion, would enable them to set up housekeeping pretty comfortably. He betook himself, therefore, after a stay of several days, to town in high spirits.

The train from Scotland by which his bride elect and her brother were travelling not being yet due, he strolled into his club, where the first person he met was the inevitable Tommy Gabbleton, who fastened on him like a leech.

"You have heard the news?" he gasped in a tremor of excitement.

"What news?" asked Torrens, smiling at the little man's agitation. "Anything fresh from Zululand?"

"Bother Zululand!" retorted Tommy, indignantly. "Gerestein has bolted!"

"Bolted! what on earth do you mean?"

"Given his creditors leg-bail, if you like it better," pursued Tommy. "The most complete smash the city has known for years. Offices closed, and not a shilling in the shape of assets!"

"You do astonish me," said Egerton. "Gerestein the millionaire!"

"Millionaire, pooh! a sham, sir, a most iniquitous sham. How he managed to keep afloat so long is a puzzle to everyone; but now the bubble's burst, the house in Park Lane in the market, and not a stick of furniture paid for."

"And Gertrude—Miss Trevelyan, how does she bear it?"

"Ah, rather a come down for her, isn't it?" chuckled Gabbleton, maliciously. "Match broken off, of course, and Mrs. Mortimer's poky drawing-room in Bryanston Street, instead of a boudoir looking on the park. But I wouldn't pity her if I were you. She's not a Calypso, qui ne pouvait se consoler, you know." Tommy was proud of his French, which he spoke with an accent atrociously savouring of home manufacture. "Quite the reverse, I should say. Depend upon it, she has a substitute in her eye already; and Heaven help him, whoever he is! Return to her first love, perhaps," he added, with a side glance at Torrens.

With which reflection the little man bustled away in search of fresh listeners, while Torrens beguiled the monotony of a solitary dinner by pondering over the strange news he had just heard, and counting the hours which still separated him from Annie.

Some four months later, a party of six were assembled at dinner in one of the prettiest detached villas of South Kensington, the residence of the widowed Mrs. Thornton. It was their first family gathering since the coming home of Egerton and his bride from their honeymoon trip, and included, in addition to the hostess, the young couple and Fred, Captain Augustus Torrens, of the Blues, who had officiated as best man at the wedding, and Annie's bosom friend, Carrie Wetherell, a lively little brunette who had also figured on that auspicious occasion in the character of bridesmaid.

With such congenial elements it is needless to say that the conversation never flagged for an instant. The captain was in high feather, and kept up a running fire of "chaff" with Miss Carrie, which that damsel, nothing loth, returned with interest; while Mrs. Thornton, with maternal solicitude, was busily engaged in discussing with Annie the important question of "ways and means."

"I am so glad, darling," she said, "that you like the house I have taken for you."

"It is perfectly delightful, mamma. Think how nice for me to be so near you when Egerton is at his chambers."

"Chambers!" interrupted Captain Augustus, glancing at the speaker with real or affected amazement. "What does a married man want with chambers?"

"Annie doesn't approve of my leading an idle life," said his brother, demurely. "So I intend to put my shoulder to the wheel, and Fred will pass me a brief now and then, when he has any to spare."

This allusion to Mr. Frederick Thornton, who, though some years Egerton's senior at the bar, had hitherto signally failed in convincing the attorneys of his forensic ability, was received with a roar of laughter, in which none more heartily joined than the good-humoured object of the joke.

"Well," he retorted, "if by any very improbable contingency you should be deprived of that advantage,"—here the merriment redoubled—"and are unable to earn an honest penny in a legitimate way, you have always Annie's jewel-case to fall back upon. Your governor's pearl necklace will keep you both out of the workhouse at any rate for a year or two."

"Oh, Fred, how can you!" exclaimed the youthful matron, properly shocked at the idea. "As if you didn't know that, with his talent, a man is sure to make his fortune sooner or later."

"There *may* be such phenomena, sanguine sister mine," gravely responded her incorrigible brother; "but, like Brummell and the halfpenny, I give you my word that I never saw one."

"By the way, Egerton," remarked the Captain, "talking of making fortunes, I met an old acquaintance of yours in the park to-day; Lady Berringfield, looking as pale as a ghost."

"Was she not the beautiful Miss Trevelyan?" inquired Carrie.

"The same, but so awfully gone off that I scarcely knew her. She has hardly been married two months, and looks as if she had all the cares of the world on her shoulders. No wonder, with a husband like Crœsus Berringfield, as they call him. Greatest brute alive."

"L'argent ne fait pas toujours le bonheur!" sentimentally chimed in Miss Wetherell.

"At all events," said Egerton rather sadly, "she has acted according to her lights, and chosen the substance. Whereas," he continued, glancing fondly at Annie, "a young lady who shall be nameless has charitably contented herself with the shadow."

"And a very substantial shadow too," added the irrepressible Fred. "Six feet two in his stockings, and grown so fearfully stout that, when we meet next week at Somerton, he will be lucky if he finds a horse able to carry him!"

* * *

AN OLD BIRD.

IN the streets near Leicester Square there are many such shops as Mr. Birch's. To the unaccustomed eye, and contrasted with the neat and tasteful arrangements of West-end shops, all is chaos here—bed-chairs, and sofas, tables, dim looking pictures, and cracked china vases are heaped together in gloomy confusion. The things—many of them look worthless—one wonders where the people exist who would buy them, and how Mr. Birch contrives to live. Look at that dirty stuffed parrot now! Once, perchance, it was clean and protected by a glass case—now it rests on a broken stand, leaning helplessly against the foot of a mahogany towel-horse, which piece of furniture has the dismal appearance of having discovered that "all is vanity."

Mr. Birch himself—a small, withered-looking man, who might well be supposed to have been accustomed never to see the fresh "first" of anything—advanced to the narrow opening his goods allowed him, and stood at the door one drizzly November morning. He watched the busy and anxious passengers with a dry, impassible gaze, until one paused and looked into his shop. This looker-in was an unmistakable Jew; and Mr. Birch had one strong feeling—namely, aversion to Jews.

"How mosh ish that old bird?" inquired the possible customer.

The dealer turned slowly round to look at the aged parrot; then replied "Five shillings."

"Five shillin'!" cried the Jew incredulously. "You most mean five pence!"

"I mean what I say—but you've no call to buy it," and Mr. Birch put his hands in his pockets, and stared across the road.

The Jew shook his head and passed on.

Presently there came by a young carpenter with a bright and genial face. The foggy air seemed clearer for his lively whistling, and Mr. Birch almost returned the smile with which this young man nodded, "Good morning," as was his daily custom.

For three days the Jew came and looked in at the old parrot. In spite of the chilling character of his reception, each day he offered a trifle for the bird, and the third day raised his bid to four-and-sixpence.

No persuasions would move Mr. Birch, and when the Jew went away, as usual there came by the young carpenter, just as the dealer had lifted the parrot down from its leaning place.

"That's a queer bird!" said Joe, stopping at the door. "It's not showy, governor!"

"No, but you shall have it cheap, if you want it."

Now, Joe was going to be married, and was fitting up two little rooms for his marital residence. He thought, perhaps, he could make a neat case for the bird, and ornament the top of a cupboard with it.

"You shall have it for two shillings; I want to sell it to spite a Jew that's haggling for it. I can't abide a Jew!"

So Joe paid his two shillings, rolled his purchase in a red pocket-handkerchief, and went his way.

Next day the Jew came again, and peered about for the bird.

"I've come to offer you four-and-ninepence, Mr. Birch; you can't say no to that."

"The bird's sold," calmly replied the dealer.

"Sold! and who has bought him!" exclaimed the other, with disappointed agitation.

"A young carpenter," said the dealer.

"Could you tell me where he lives?"

"I don't know. He passes this way from his work, that's all I can say," and Mr. Birch turned on his heel and left the Jew to ruminate at his door. Just then, Joe came whistling by, and his bag of tools betrayed his calling. The Jew followed him down to the corner of the street, and then spoke.

"I beg pardon—but did you buy an old stuffed bird yesterday?"

"Yes," said Joe, surprised.

"It is a very shabby bird—but I had a fancy for it. Would you sell it again, and make a little by it?"

"I don't know as I would, and I'm not sure as I wouldn't. I won't decide to-day."

"Well, I will ask you to-morrow—think it over," said the Jew. Joe nodded and went on to his dinner. That evening he determined to examine the old parrot, for he felt sure some reason must exist for the Jew's anxiety about the purchase. Accordingly he took the red bundle out of the cupboard, and untied it, placing the bird on a table before him. Dim with dirt, it had a poor appearance. Joe found a brush and set to work scattering dust from the shabby feathers. Then a duster rubbed up the eyes and legs. Presently a wonderful sparkle from the tips of the claws flashed on Joe's wondering sight. With a low whistle and a puzzled look, the young carpenter slowly began to roll up the bird in the red handkerchief.

"I'll take it to Patty."

"Of course "Patty" was the intended wife of Joe Smith. She met him with appropriate smiles and blushes at the door of her father's little workshop, the father being a working jeweller.

"Patty," said Joe, after the usual tokens of civilised love-making had passed between them: "I've got something in this bundle that puzzles me."

"Why, what can it be?" cried Patty, and her bright eyes looked so eagerly at him that he forthwith followed her into the little parlour, and untied the handkerchief.

"Is it alive?" cried Patty, shrinking with pretty fear behind her lover, as she caught sight of the tail feathers.

"No, no," said Joe, laughing; "bin dead a hundred years or more."

This announcement aroused a feeling of temporary security in Patty, and she approached to examine the parrot.

"What a queer old thing! Why it's only a parrot, Joe, just like Aunt Mary's, only dirtier!"

Patty felt and showed a little contempt that such a trifle should puzzle her Joe. He, however, had not played his cards yet, and, manlike, enjoyed the idea of crushing her with them.

He slowly lifted the bird close to the lamp and said: "Has Aunt Mary's parrot got claws like those?"

Patty darted back, her cheek paling.

"Joe," she said, in a trembling whisper, "let's take it to father."

The bird was solemnly enveloped once more, and Joe followed Patty into the presence of an old, white-bearded man who wore glasses that shone in the light of the lamp by which he was working.

"Father!" cried Patty, in an excited low voice, "put by your work a minute. Joe, show him the bird."

Off came the red handkerchief, as Mr. Bond indulgently withdrew his glasses, and down went the parrot in front of him.

"A stuffed parrot!" said the old man, quietly. "Going to make an ornament for Patty with him?"

"Look at his claws—put on your glasses!" cried Patty. Wonderingly her father obeyed—and a faint tinge rose in his withered cheek.

"Diamonds!" he whispered, in an awe-struck voice.

"The eyes are queer," pursued Joe, in a tone of concentrated excitement.

"A breathless pause while the old jeweller rubbed at the eyes with a leather.

"Rubies—splendid rubies!" cried Mr. Bond, exultantly.

Patty and Joe looked at each other, and both faces were very pale. The jeweller continued to examine the precious stones, and at length said:

"How came you by this, Joe?"

"Bought it for two shillings at a second-hand shop, full of rubbish. Mr. Birch's, you know. He offered it to me for two shillings to spite a Jew that was after it."

"Ha! a *Jew* wanted it! *He* knew its worth! Why didn't he secure it?"

"Because he wouldn't pay five shillings for it."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the old man, softly; "he lost a bargain here."

"And he foundthat out somehow," said Joe; "for he stopped me in the street to see if I'd sell it again for a trifle over what I gave."

Again Mr. Bond laughed gleefully; and then he sobered down.

"Children," he said, "Providence has put a rare chance in your way."

"Providence isn't *chance*, father," softly corrected Patty.

"No, no more it is. Well, these jewels are worth, I should say, a thousand pounds at the very least! That'll start you fair!"

There was a minute's silence. Then Joe put his arm round Patty, and whispered:

"We can go and take a little farm in America, now, Patty. You know that has been the ambition of my life."

Patty smiled—and then her face grew troubled.

"Poor father!" she whispered; "he's only got me! I couldn't leave him here, Joe."

"He shall come, too!" cried Joe; and leave off his blinding work, and enjoy his old age amongst the fields and trees—he hasn't seen many days of them in his youth."

So it was agreed. The stones realised rather more than the thousand pounds; the Jew was peremptorily told that Joe would not sell again, though he made him the handsome offer of ten shillings; and after the wedding and lively Christmas, these three departed for a new land, where they prospered.

The old bird was popularly supposed to have been the pet, while living, of some Indian Prince; and after being stuffed and enriched with jewellery, to have found its way to the old shop, through many adventures, which so disfigured it as to hide its value.

Joe and Patty had the bird "done up" again, and their children feel an admiring awe of the parrot that was the unconscious author of their prosperity.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

* * *

OVER THE SEA.

I am looking back through the days and weeks
  That lie in the shadowy land of yore,
And a waking spirit stirs and speaks—
  The spirit of dead years gone before.

Speaks with a murmur of mournful sighs,
  In a voice that carries the sound of tears,
And lighting the lamp of its passionate eyes,
  It opens the shroud of the buried years.

The wind is blowing up from the wold,
  The stars are shining down on the sea,
But the wind is bleak, and the light is cold,
  And 'tis only of pain they speak to me.

For the wind once toyed with a silken tress,
  And the stars once shone on a saintly face ;
And how can a faithful love grow less ?
  Or a new love take the old love's place ?

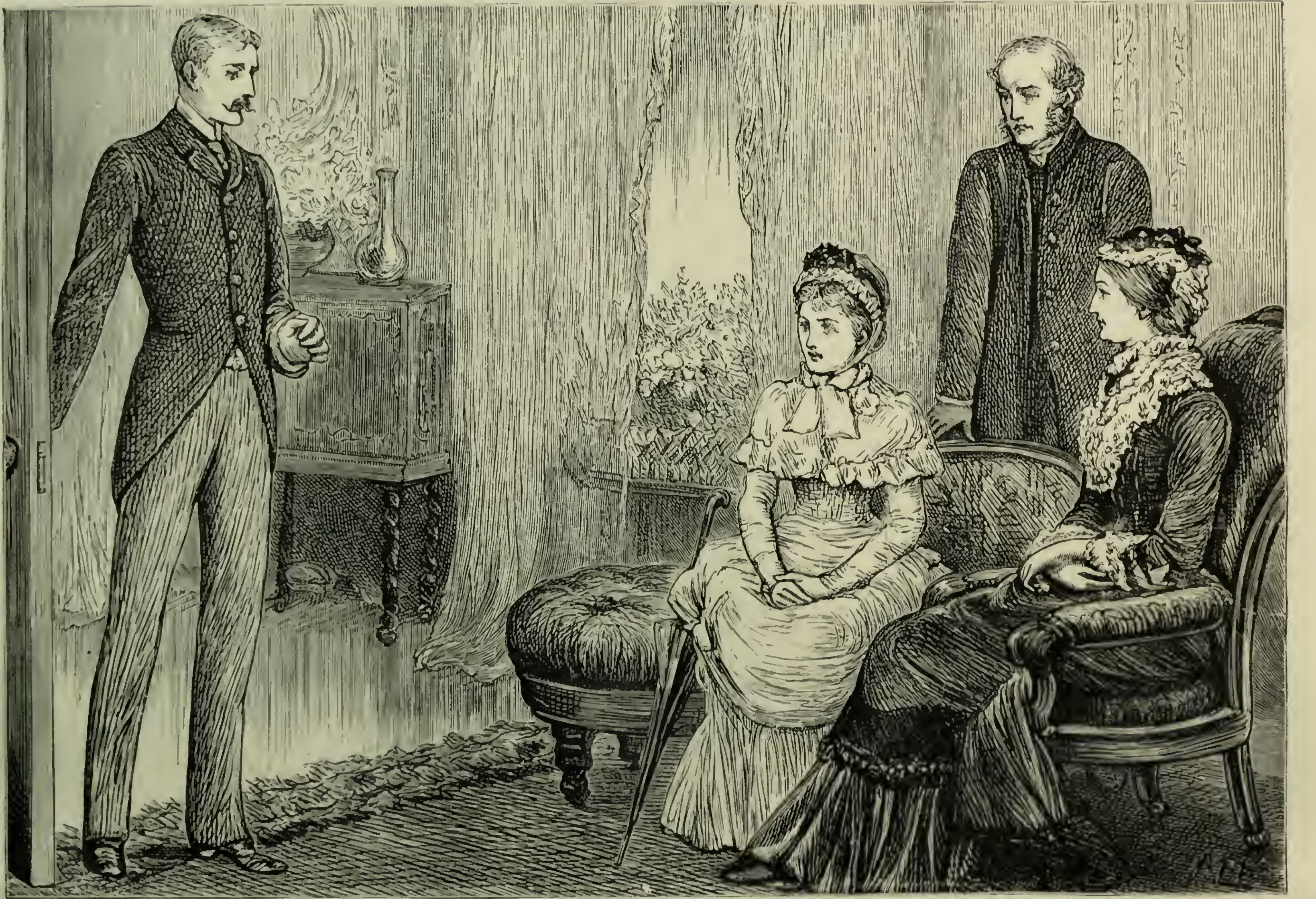
The sea is swirling up to my feet,
  Singing its monody, soft and low ;
But the song of the sea is deadly sweet,
  For I mind how it slew me years ago.

We had been parted, I and she,
  With many a hundred miles between,
And now she was coming across the sea,
  (Oh, the sky was blue and the waves were green !)

Coming—and yet she never came !
  Meeting—and yet we met no more !
She heard me not when I called her name,
  Though the dead might have heard me on that shore.

Oh, Love, though my eyes but dimly see,
  There is Hope in my pathway where I tread—
That over the sea thou wilt sail to me,
  In the day when the sea gives up her dead.

J. T. Burton Wollaston.



M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

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THE WHITE WITCH.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LADY DAVENANT.

ON the day following that on which Godfrey Mayne had been trying to track out Miss Dixon's hiding-place, he was so thoroughly used up by premature exertion that his attempt to get up failed, and he spent the morning in bed, full of inward torment.

He could not fathom the actions of the detective, Cattermole—or Grey, as he was now calling himself, and the striving to do so drove him distracted. What hold could the man have upon her that she should go out to meet him in Hyde Park at night?—as some poor young shopwoman, at liberty only when the day's toil was over, might go to meet and walk with her sweetheart! Could it be that Cattermole's course of action arose out of his legal work as a detective of the police force, or was he a designing, crafty villain, striving to decoy Mary into a false marriage, to secure her money and accomplish his own wicked ends? Godfrey regretted now that he had not questioned Mrs. Grey about her husband's relations with Scotland Yard; he had thought of it at the time, but had deemed it more prudent to hold his tongue. Dunning had a sharp lecture in store for him on the subject of imprudence, but he was too restless for her to enter upon it then.

Towards midday he got up and wrote the following letter: but in so shaky a hand that some of the words were unreadable.

"MY DEAR MARY,—I saw you last night in Hyde Park, but I could not speak to you. I *must* see you; it is necessary for your own sake. If you do not let me see you, I shall go mad. I am in torture about you. Only let me see you once more and I will undertake never to ask it again without your free permission. You know that I only wish to help you; and help you need. You are, I fear, in the power of a fiend—the person I saw you with. Why

do you meet him? See me, Mary, for the love of heaven. If you had a brother you would trust to him, would you not? Trust *me.* He is married, that man. I saw and talked with his wife yesterday. *I saw the certificate.* They were married in New York in the autumn of last year: he must have gone over there on some police business. I am getting blind and confused and can write no more; only see me.
GODFREY."

He folded this note and wrote Miss Dixon's name on the envelope, and stamped it, and then put it in his pocket until he should learn her address. Then he tottered downstairs, to the dismay of Mrs. Penteith, who told him he ought not to have got up.

"If I don't see her, Aunt Margaret, I shall go mad," said he; which was what he had told Mary in the letter.

After luncheon, he persisted in going out. Mrs. Penteith, who was in great grief at the fresh hold which his infatuation had got upon him, wanted to go with him, but he begged that she would not; he said he must go alone. It was a raw, wet October day, and she was afraid of the effect of the damp upon him, weak as he now was; but nothing would stop him. He drove first to Brompton, determined to see Cattermole, and there he heard that Mr. and Mrs. Grey had left their lodgings suddenly that morning. Then he went back to Victoria and took the train on his way to Wandsworth Common.

There was no cab at the station when he got out of the train, and enquired his way to Lady Davenant's house. Fortunately it was very near, for Godfrey was hardly capable of walking. It was a pretty, detached residence standing back from the road, with a semicircular lawn in front, surrounded by elm-trees that were now getting bare. A cab was standing outside one of the gates. Godfrey felt hope rise, he did not know why, in his heart as soon as he came in sight of the house, and the feeling became stronger as he entered. Lady Davenant being at home, he sent in his card, and was shown into the drawing-room. There was no apparent reason for this elation, for the room was furnished with light colours which gave a sense of cheerlessness, and was indifferently warmed by a small fire. He was kept waiting too, sitting in the gloom of the dull October afternoon on an ugly ottoman covered with light chintz, and still shivering from the effect of the damp out-of-doors. But his spirits remained obstinately and unaccountably high in spite of everything. He had looked at the black, smouldering fire with a strong temptation to give it a soft little touch with the poker, when, without having heard any sound, he turned suddenly round under the impression that he should see Mary. His eyes fell instead on one of the regulation old-fashioned family portraits in oils on the wall, and without being able to see it clearly, he jumped up and examined it as well as he could in the bad light in which it was hung.

"Mary?" said he to himself, questioningly, while the blood rushed to his face. No, not Mary, but a lady a few years older, strikingly like her in spite of some want of skill in the artist, and dressed in the fashion of twenty years ago. He was still looking intently at it when Lady Davenant came in.

The portrait was not hers. She was a tall, thin woman, with a hard, cold face which repelled him, and a stiff, ungracious manner. She had known his name apparently beforehand, and was for some reason evidently prejudiced against him. He found it rather difficult to open the subject which had brought him in face of the unsympathetic glare of her steely eyes.

"I have been referred to you, madam," he said, "by Mr. Thorn, of Great St. Helen's, in the hope that you would be kind enough to help me to discover the present address of a young lady who is now a close connection of my family, and in whom I believe you also take an interest—Miss Dixon."

Her face grew more rigid as she sat like a statue, still and stately, by the side of the smouldering fire, and opposite Godfrey.

"The interest I take in Miss Dixon, or rather Miss Davenant," she began, icily, "has been so effectually quenched by her own conduct, that nothing but the sense of my duty to her father, my late husband, who was providentially spared the knowledge of the wicked course of life which she wilfully entered upon, and has since pursued, sustains it in me at all. Mr. Thorn knows this."

Godfrey's head swam. This hard woman's husband Mary's father! Had Mrs. Mayne, his step-mother, been divorced from her first husband?

"I—I beg your pardon, madam," cried Godfrey, bewildered: "do I understand you to say that your husband was the late Dr. Dixon?"

Lady Davenant drew her head up. "My husband, sir, was Sir Jacob Davenant."

"Ah, yes, of course," assented Godfrey, in dire confusion of thought. "Miss Dixon has—has always shown a strong sense of your kindness to her."

"Indeed!" retorted Lady Davenant, as she shot a keen glance at him from her cold grey eyes. "Then the troubles she has brought upon herself have altered her strangely. Even now that she comes back fawning upon me, and entreating me to take her home again and bear the burden of the shame she has brought upon herself, she does not dwell much on her gratitude for my past kindness."

He listened, holding his breath. Who was she, this woman of flint? How could she refuse to shelter a girl in her sorrow and peril? Lady Davenant continued: "When, some time ago, I heard, having felt it my duty to keep myself informed as to Mary's movements, that she was living in France, away from the persons with whom she had linked herself, I put an advertisement into the *Times*, not knowing the exact address, offering to receive her again under my protection. But she wrote to decline my offer, alleging that the gentleman whom she presumed to call her step-father had asked her, most kindly, to share his hospitality, and repeating her old story of her attachment to the person whom she calls her mother."

Godfrey started. "Calls her mother!" he repeated. "Is Mrs. Mayne not her mother?"

"Mrs. Mayne is no more related to her than you are," said Lady Davenant.

"But—but—is it possible that ——" he stopped.

"That she has deceived you and your family? Unfortunately, yes. This portrait is that of Mary Davenant's mother," pointing to the picture which had attracted Godfrey's attention. "You see I am not jealous," she continued in a tone absolutely free from feeling of any kind. "My husband's first wife was an old school-friend of mine, and from the same motive which causes me to preserve her portrait I would have cherished her daughter."

"Then that is the portrait of ——?" Godfrey felt bewildered yet.

"Of the first Mrs. Davenant. She died; and some few years subsequent to that event, I became Mr. Davenant's second wife. You must have heard of him, I presume?—the great surgeon, Jacob Davenant."

"Why, yes," replied Godfrey, recollection flashing over him. "I remember his name well, as a man of fame."

"He was the chief surgeon of his day; good, respected, beloved," said Lady Davenant. "The Queen knighted him: and, alas, he died soon afterwards; died young, as may be said. Had he lived, he would have had his baronetage."

"And Mary Dixon was his daughter?"

"Mary Davenant was his daughter," corrected Lady Davenant; "his daughter and only child. I would have cherished her, I say, as my own daughter after his death, but she was wilful, fond of setting my authority at naught when she could do it; and when we were abroad, her ill-regulated mind led her to prefer the society of a weak and foolish woman, a wandering continental widow, to mine and to my just authority. However, she has met with her reward, and I bear her no ill-will."

"Of one thing Godfrey began to feel certain: that whatever trials, dangers, and difficulties Mary had brought upon herself by escaping from her step-mother's care to that of the unfortunate lady who was now his father's wife, she must have enjoyed cloudless happiness compared with the stern life of routine under Lady Davenant.

"She seems to have been severely punished," said he, hardly repressing a shiver.

"Yes." The word was snapped out. "And now that her self-found protectress turns upon her, as, I conclude, must be the case, though I am but imperfectly acquainted with particulars of the present as well as the past; that Mary has lost her money and injured her health by fretting over her folly and the position to which it has reduced her, she comes to me branded with a terrible secret, and expects me to ——"

"What is the secret?" impulsively interrupted Godfrey.

Lady Davenant regarded him with her clear, cold eyes. "It is not my secret," she answered, "and I must decline to tell you. Yes, she would fain come back to the shelter of my home now, when she finds others closed to her."

"And you will receive her, Lady Davenant!" said Godfrey, wistfully.

"And expose my home to visits from the police—as I believe she has already exposed yours!" retorted Lady Davenant. "No."

"Oh, but surely, surely you will! If she be in danger! If she has no other refuge!"

Lady Davenant's tightened lips expressed her sense of the liberty he was taking. "I think you will allow that I am the best judge of my conduct in this matter, Mr. Godfrey Mayne. Were you acquainted with all the circumstances of the case, you would scarcely accuse me of want of generosity—not to speak of justice. Mary Davenant's sense of my kindness, of which you spoke, was not, I daresay, deep enough to lead her to mention that I gave up my comfortable home in England in order that I might take her to Italy for the cultivation of her voice, and for other masters. It was in her own interest that I objected to her picking up chance acquaintances there, of whom we knew nothing, what they were, or what they had been. Was it right that a girl of position like Mary, inexperienced as she was beautiful, should plunge into intimacy with anybody that took her fancy?"

"No; it was quite wrong," said Godfrey, warmly.

"It was what she did, it was what she would do, in spite of me. And when she made the acquaintance of that specious woman, specious in looks as in manners, Mrs. Lang ——"

"Mrs. Lang!" echoed Godfrey, who remembered the name well, and where he heard it.

Lady Davenant drew in again; evidently displeased at the young man's familiarity.

"Was she the widow of Dr. Lang; a gentleman who practised in Norfolk?"

"She was a person entirely inferior to Miss Davenant, in position and otherwise," returned Lady Davenant, passing over the question. "Mary's voice, as you may be aware, is a very glorious voice, and the question had been mooted during her father's life-time, whether she should be trained for making use of it in public. Sir Jacob was against it, most decisively so; I was also; but Charles Thorn, who is himself music-mad and who had been Sir Jacob's long-attached friend, and possessed great influence over him, never ceased to urge it. The question was, I thought, entirely set at rest before Sir Jacob's death, that it was not to be: still, such a voice as that demands the best of cultivation as its own right, and I took Mary abroad, at her earnest request, to obtain it. It was there we fell in with Mrs. Lang."

Lady Davenant paused. Godfrey remained silent.

"She—that woman—obtained an influence over Mary that I can never understand. The girl's love for her amounted to infatuation, her reverence for her almost to idolatry. I once reproached Mary with seeming to look upon her as an angel: she answered me that Mrs. Lang *was* an angel—as much of one as could exist on earth. The woman took up the cause of Mary's public singing, urging it warmly, and inciting the girl to restlessness; she even went so far as to go to the master who was training Mary, and informed him that the young lady would embrace a public career. All this angered me, and I strove to put a stop to Mary's intimacy with Mrs. Lang. But she threw off all the restraints I would have imposed upon her, and preferred the companionship to my legitimate care. The woman encouraged her for her own selfish ends, wiling and caressing Mary to her ruin. I then bade Mary choose between us; she did so, and chose *her*."

"And this Mrs. Lang is—is the present Mrs. Mayne?" asked Godfrey.

"Yes."

"She has sweet, kindly manners," he observed, "just the manners likely to attract a girl." Especially one used to your society, he thought to himself.

"Very possibly. I warned Mary against those manners; I told her they were specious and delusive. It availed not. She abandoned her home, my home, for Mrs. Lang's: she preferred to cast in her lot with those wretched adventurers rather than remain with me; and she reaped her reward."

"In trouble, do you mean?"

"In trouble and shame. The blow fell almost immediately."

"Will you not impart to me its nature?" again urged Godfrey, in a low voice full of passionate entreaty, which moved Lady Davenant as the wave does the rock. "My father has married Mrs. Lang: surely, therefore, you may give me credit for a better motive than curiosity."

"I give you credit for the highest motives, Mr. Godfrey Mayne. But as Mary Davenant did not see fit to take you into her confidence, I consider myself bound to follow the example of her reticence."

"I believe her to be in danger."

"She has the means of freeing herself from the danger if she chooses to use them," said Lady Davenant, coldly; "but she will not: were she willing, I expect your step-mother would take care she did not. And under the circumstances, I must allow that Mary is right."

"Why does she call herself Dixon?" questioned Godfrey. "Why did Mrs. Lang, if that was her true name, call herself Dixon before she married my father?"

Lady Davenant did not answer quickly, but made a pause first. "She, I believe, found it convenient to drop the name of Lang, and she adopted that of Dixon. Mary, who was then living with her as her daughter, adopted the same. It is Mary's true name; she was christened Mary Dixon; Dixon after her god-father, Colonel Dixon, who left her some money later."

"If you—if you refuse to receive her and shelter her, madam, what can she do?"

"Some of the people, under whose dominion she has placed herself, are urging her to come out as a public singer: and to begin her career in America."

Godfrey's heart beat. "Do *you* advise that, Lady Davenant?"

"No. I advise just the opposite step—that she should go back to the Abbey, and to the protection of her adopted mother."

"Oh, if she would!"

"But she says she will not: can not. She says she is trammelled on all sides; and that is true."

Lady Davenant rose, making a faint apology that she was being waited for; Godfrey supposed the interview was becoming tiresome, and rose also.

"Will you kindly give me Miss Davenant's present address in London," he said. "I have written to beg of her to allow me to see her, but I don't know where to send the letter."

"She is stopping in Great Cumberland Street with Mrs. Ross; her father's former housekeeper," readily answered Lady Davenant. "She will be well taken care of as long as she is there."

Godfrey pencilled down the address. He felt so full of gratitude to Lady Davenant for the information that his heart thawed to her, and he shook her hand warmly in farewell. Lady Davenant rang the bell, and in going out, he turned to ask another question.

"Ought I to address her as Miss Dixon or Miss Davenant?"

"The one name is as appropriate as the other," she said, with a queer-looking smile.

A smart maid-servant held the front door open for Godfrey. As he passed out of the house a chill fell upon him as unaccountable as the elation he had experienced on entering it. The cab he had seen on his arrival was still standing before the garden-gate. A sudden impulse would have made him question the cabman, but that he had disappeared, probably in the direction of a small public-house, near.

Godfrey hesitated for one moment, then opened the cab-door, and entered it. His fatigue was such that he must be driven to the station if possible. Suddenly his whole face lit up: on the floor was a cambric handkerchief which bore Mary's initials, and which he knew she must have dropped. So the cab was waiting for her; she was, even then, with Lady Davenant! Godfrey sat down to wait for her, his whole frame thrilling with delight. He took out the note he had written to her and added to it her address in pencil, and put it upon the seat in readiness to give her. Ah, he felt safe now: he should see her, touch her, converse with her once again: she could not escape him. Worn out by the exertions of the previous day, by the sleepless and tormenting night, and by these later efforts to which his physical strength was still unequal, he leant back in the cab, and before many minutes were over he had fallen into so deep a sleep as to be almost like insensibility.

He woke with a start, and for some moments could not tell where he was, or how he came there. Then he found that he was alone; but a strong sense lay upon him that Mary had been in the cab, that her head had rested for an instant on his shoulder, that her lips had touched his. "I must have dreamt it," he thought to himself: but he could not find the note and could not see the handkerchief. The whistle of a railway engine sounded close to him, and looking out into the dusk of the closing day, he saw that he was at the station. The cabman came to the window and touched his hat.

"Train's comin' up now, sir."

"What train?"

"The Victoria train, sir. The lady said I was to call you when it came up. You were sound asleep, sir: you had been ill lately, she said."

"Where is the lady?"

"She walked on here to the station to catch the last train, sir, and told me to bring the cab gently in time for the next."

Godfrey put some money into the man's hand, was helped out by him, and into a carriage of the up-train. He felt so ill when he reached Victoria, as to give up all thought of further adventure that night, and drove straight home, miserable, broken-down, and cut to the heart by his disappointment.

It was only when he was going to bed later that he found a piece of folded paper in his waistcoat pocket. Opening it, he saw the following words, faintly written on it in pencil in Mary's handwriting:

"I had determined not to see you again, but Heaven has been merciful and has brought me to you without my will. I am sitting by your side as I write this. Oh, how weak and worn you look!—and all for my sake! I have read the letter that lay by you, addressed to me. You ask to see me, but it must not be. I am not equal to it, neither would it answer any purpose. I have fallen—long since now—into a hopeless path of trouble and embarrassment, and neither you nor anybody else can extricate me from it. But the best that can be done will be done; believe that, and do not be anxious for me. Dear Godfrey, forgive me for all I have cost you, the sorrow and the pain; it is as bitter—yes, I will say it—for me as for you. I have kissed your lips, here as I sit; the only lips of man that mine will ever press; and I have looked at your face as I shall look at it sleeping or waking till I die. Good-bye, Godfrey."

He pored over these nearly illegible lines, with his head sometimes in the one candle, sometimes in the other, and succeeded in reading them.

"She loves me!" he softly breathed in trembling rapture. "She loves me."

CHAPTER XXXII.

MAD?—OR SANE?

Godfrey Mayne slept late the next morning, and the first thing he did on awaking was to take Mary Dixon's note from underneath his pillow, and read it again.

The misery that ran through its every line decided him to endeavour to extricate her from it, in defiance of her injunction not to interfere, and of her assurance that all interference would be in vain. Various kinds of wild schemes and plans ran through his mind. They resolved themselves at length into this one—he would marry her without delay and carry her off straightway to the Continent. To Paris first, and thence to Spain; a country of which he knew nothing but that it was a half-civilised sort of place, where extradition laws were not strictly kept. It would be necessary to get Mrs. Penteith's consent to this, as the first step, for he knew Mary would not marry him uncountenanced by his family.

There was a necessary step, though, which must precede even this—and that was to get himself out of bed and to dress and go down; and it almost seemed as if he should not be able to accomplish so much. For he felt strangely weak and ill, and his head swam and his hands fell. However, he managed to get dressed in time for luncheon, and was leaving his room when he met Dunning, who accosted him with an acid smile.

"I thought you'd be for getting up to luncheon to-day, Master Godfrey, though you know you ought to have stayed in bed. The young lady is in the drawing-room."

As there was only one young lady in the world, Godfrey plunged headlong down the staircase, unmindful of his still lame knee, and burst into the drawing-room, his face alight with excitement: which subsided suddenly at sight of Mr. Thornhill and Elspeth, who were sitting with his aunt. Elspeth was looking very bright, and infinitely prettier than pale Mary had been latterly: but Godfrey felt as if he had been suddenly awakened from a dream of the tropics by running his head against an iceberg. He had, however, the presence of mind to go forward with a galvanised smile of enthusiastic welcome. The vicar replied to it with a stiff and dignified handshake, which was meant to be very cordial, and Elspeth, with a modest and limp replica of the same greeting. She giggled whenever he spoke to her, and blushed whenever she replied, with confusion not ill-bred, but simple-minded and rather pretty. Elspeth had suffered much from the loss of dignity she had incurred by being disengaged again; she was longing to fasten the link anew, and she hoped he had not forgotten what he said about giving her a bracelet.

Mrs. Penteith had been much struck by the girl's pretty looks; and, seeing that Godfrey chattered to her with great fluency, her hopes began to rise that he might, after all, console himself for the heartless treatment of the pale, insignificant-looking young lady, who had managed to infatuate him so deeply, in this sweet, blue-eyed young girl, who was evidently so much attached to him. Mr. Thornhill had explained that he, being obliged to come to town for a day on business, Elspeth had begged to come too, and they had hastened to call and inquire after the invalid.

Elspeth stayed to luncheon, while her father kept an appointment; and then her shyness broke down, and she talked and laughed without reserve, until Godfrey noticed a pretty little brooch she wore. This set her blushing again, as she faltered that it had been sent to her last week on her birthday.

"But don't you know who it came from?" said he, mischievously.

"No. At least ——" She had been brought up to tell the truth, so at last she stammered, "I think the writing—looked like Ern—— like Mr. Underwood's. Only of course it couldn't have been."

"Why not? Lucky fellow to be about and on his legs when other poor wretches are ill and can't remember birthdays."

"But if mamma knew it came from him, I should have to send it back: she says he isn't steady," cried the girl näively, speaking in a low voice, and unconsciously showing more feeling than Godfrey had thought her capable of.

"There's nothing the matter with Underwood," said he, like a grave old father. "He's very young and high-spirited, that's all. He will be steady enough in a year or two."

"We met him this morning," whispered Elspeth, crimson again. "He wanted to get us tickets for the theatre; but papa won't go of course, so I could not. Then Ernest said, 'Get Godfrey to take you,' and then papa said you were ill in bed."

Mrs. Penteith, who had been away to put her bonnet on, now came back. She was about to take the girl back to her father at the Midland Hotel, and her carriage was waiting at the door. Godfrey went with them, and in passing a jeweller's stopped the carriage, and got out. "Pardon me, aunt," he said; I won't keep you more than two minutes."

He bought a little gold bracelet for Elspeth, with a horse-shoe studded with pearls upon it, which gave the simple little maid five minutes of the keenest pleasure her nature could feel. She had eyes for nothing else while the drive lasted, and Godfrey, after fastening it on her somewhat bony little wrist, sat watching her delighted face with a smile, the cynicism of which his aunt failed to read. When Elspeth had been safely handed over to the vicar, after wickedly tucking the bracelet up her sleeve, and they were in the carriage again, Mrs. Penteith turned to her nephew.

"What a sweet little creature she is!"

"Yes; and what a pity she is not made of wax or china like other dolls!"

His aunt looked grave. "Do you think it right to make love to a girl one moment with presents and pretty speeches, Godfrey, and to ridicule her simplicity the next?"

"I think it can be justified when, after trying to treat the girl like a sensible woman, and exciting in her nothing warmer than indifference, I treat her like a child, and make her happy at once—with a toy."

"And have I not heard that Miss Dixon is excessively fond of dress?" asked she rather drily.

His face grew soft at once. "Yes, but her very dress illustrates the woman, instead of being tacked piecemeal on to a lay-figure. I am not too hard on that child we have just left, Aunt Madge; she is the ideal of half the wisest men in the world, I believe, those who only want a wife one day in seven. The affection she cannot give me, she gives to my bracelet; and when some other man gives her a bigger one with diamonds instead of pearls, my place in her heart will be gone for ever."

The carriage had been ordered, at Godfrey's request, to his bankers'. He alighted there and went into the bank; but was soon back again.

"Have you been drawing all that money, Godfrey?" she asked, as the carriage went on again, and he began sorting a handful of notes.

"Yes," answered he, changing a bag of sovereigns from one pocket to another. "I've been drawing three hundred pounds."

"What do you want so much money for?"

"I'll tell you, aunt," said he, turning his head to look at her and speaking gravely and quietly: "I am going to be married."

Mrs. Penteith trembled. She could not speak.

"I want you to help me, aunt," he went on, steadily. "I am going to marry a girl over whose head lies a fearful charge, who is being hunted down, driven by fierce winds. I am not even sure whether she is innocent or partly guilty, and I don't care. I am going to carry her off to-night from where she is, but we cannot be married until to-morrow, for there's the license to get. Must I take her to an hotel, or will you shelter her for one night?"

His voice was so low that through the rumbling of the wheels she could scarcely hear it, but he was white and cold with the intense eagerness with which he waited for her answer.

"It is not right. It would be your ruin, Godfrey. I cannot."

He pulled the check-string, and before the carriage had quite stopped, sprung out of it without another word or look at her, and into a hansom, then crawling by. Mrs. Penteith had not found breath to utter even his name. A fear flashed into her that he was not accountable for his actions. The illness he had gone through, and the mental distress, might have been too much for his brain.

She went home, and took old Dunning into her troubled counsels. That worthy woman gave it as her opinion that Master Godfrey's brain had been so frivolous at the best of times as not to be worth much: he might steady down perhaps when he came to a sober age; forty, or so; not before, she reckoned.

Godfrey did not return to dinner, and Mrs. Penteith spent the evening in the deepest anxiety, starting up at every sound of wheels, listening, peering out into the darkness, until it had died away. The household went to bed at the usual hour; Dunning sat up with her mistress, the two waiting with sinking hearts for a sound that one of them at least began to think she should never hear again.

At last, at twelve o'clock, a hansom stopped at the door. Dunning flew out with a torrent of acid reproaches ready, which died away on her lips as she confronted Godfrey, white as a corpse, almost as quiet.

"Turn up the gas," said he, as he took out his purse. Then, turning to the cabman: "Let me see, I took you at half-past seven. Here's a sovereign for you."

Dunning closed the door and offered to take from him a parcel he was carrying; meek, subdued almost to terror, was she, by the cold, mechanical, stony gravity of his look and manner.

"I'll take it, thank-you. I am sorry to have kept you up. There's a light in my room, I suppose. Good-night."

He passed her, went upstairs, and met his aunt standing on the landing of the first floor. He gave her a kiss with lips the touch of which made her shiver, said coldly he was sorry she had sat up; turned from her, and went up to his room, leaving her stunned into silence as the maid had been. Dunning crept up the stairs to her mistress, and the two women looked at each other with white, frightened faces. As they heard his key turn in the lock they both started, with the same thought: Was he going to injure himself?—was he insane?

"Don't come up yet," whispered Mrs. Penteith. "Give me the candle." She crept upstairs and knocked at her nephew's door.

"Who is it?"

"It is I, Godfrey. May I speak to you—for one moment?"

He opened the door at once, but at sight of his ghastly face, with eyes which seemed to her feverish fancy to be already glazing in death, she was struck dumb again. He waited, quite silently, indifferently, for her to speak.

She glanced behind him into the room. The gas was turned high and both candles were burning.

"What are you doing?" said she at last, huskily.

"I am writing a note before I go to bed."

"May—may I see it?"

"No. I am sorry, but it is on a private matter."

"Godfrey—I am sorry—for what I said to you to-day. I wish—"

"No, no, aunt, you were perfectly right. I was very rude to rush away. I will apologise properly to-morrow morning, but I am tired now. Good-night."

"I am nervous to-night, Godfrey. You don't look well. Let me stay and sleep on that arm-chair there—as I did when you were ill."

"You would not get proper rest like that, aunt. If you are nervous you had better have Dunning to sleep in your room. I am not an invalid now."

He was holding the door, patiently waiting for her to leave him. She sprang across the room to the table and tried to seize the letter. He was too quick for her; in a moment he had snatched it up and crumpled it into his pocket, as coldly, as gravely as ever.

"Godfrey, Godfrey, tell me what has happened to you to-night?"

"Yes, you shall hear all about it to-morrow. I really am so done-up now that I can't tell you anything, except that I am tired out."

"You are not—not—going to hurt yourself in any way?" she continued suspiciously.

"Certainly not. Why should I?"

"Why did you lock your door?"

"I will not lock it if it makes you nervous."

"You promise, Godfrey?"

"Yes. You can take the key of the door"—handing it to her.

She kissed him gratefully as she received it, and left him, feeling half satisfied. When she was gone, Godfrey tore up the crumpled, half-finished letter, wrote another, which he left on the table; undressed, blew out the candles, turned out the gas and got into bed. Then, having settled his head on his pillow as if for sleep, he unfastened in the darkness a tiny paper packet which he had taken from his waistcoat pocket. Having unfolded it, he carefully shifted the powder it contained so that it should lie in a neat ridge in the crease he had made down the centre of the paper, and was carrying it to his mouth, when a hand was suddenly laid with a sharp grip on his chest. He seized and held the clutching, skinny fingers with his left hand, while with his right he brought the powder to his lips. But even as it touched them, the second hand of the silent, unseen figure beside him dashed the paper away with a fierce sprawling blow. A moment later he felt a tear fall on his face, and the bony hands joined round his neck.

"God forgive you!" said Dunning's voice, huskily. She had stolen into the room and hidden herself behind the bed-curtains.

"You have done me a worse turn than you think, you stupid old thing."

"A boy that I've had upon my knee scores o' times—that I've loved better than if he was my own!" moaned Dunning, her tears falling like rain.

"There, don't be silly! Go and light the gas."

She felt under his pillow and opened both his hands first, to assure herself that he had no second supply of the powder, and then obeyed noiselessly. He sat up and blinked his eyes in the sudden light; they were quite dry. As she came back to him he turned upon her, ready for a sermon. But she gave him none; she took up his pillow, shook what grains of powder had fallen on it into the fire-place with a shudder, put it behind him again, brushed the bed-clothes with her hands, and picked up the paper which had contained the powder, the label of which had been torn off.

"What was it?" she whispered.

"Nothing but a sleeping dose," returned Godfrey. "What a goose you are, Dunning!"

In truth it was nothing but a little innocent bromide of potassium. Conscious of the excited state his nerves were in, he had gone into a chemist's as he came along, and asked for something to calm them.

Dunning, however, would never feel entirely sure to her dying day that it was not some wicked and deadly drug, warranted to destroy life.

Pretty well assured that he was safe for the night, she left him to his repose. But of repose he got none.

Early in the morning, when Mrs. Penteith stole into his room, she found him in a high state of fever. Godfrey threw all the blame upon Dunning: if she had but let him swallow his sleeping dose, he might have fallen into repose calmly. Mrs. Penteith got him some refreshment, and then sat down to talk to him.

"Let me know all about it," my poor boy, soothingly. "You will tell me, won't you? I am sorry for what I said yesterday—you thought me unkind, but indeed I am not. I would do everything to help and comfort you."

"Nobody can do anything, Aunt Margaret," he sighed, pressing her loving fingers.

"What was it that kept you out my dear?"

Godfrey lay for a few minutes without speaking.

"I suppose I was foolish," he said presently: "I mean, to think she would marry me in that haste; but it did not seem to me foolish then. I went up to Great Cumberland Street and asked to see her; but the servant said Miss Dixon never saw anyone, and shut the door in my face. Then I went into a stationer's shop and asked leave to write a note. I told her in the note what I meant to do—that I should come that night and carry her away from her enemies, and marry her on the morrow. While I was handing in this note at Great Cumberland Street, I found I had left my pocket-book in the shop, with the bank notes in it, so I went back for it——"

" And was it all safe ? " eagerly interrupted Mrs. Penteith.

" Quite safe, and its contents also. The master himself had seen it and put it aside. Well, aunt, while I was thanking him, I turned giddy, or faint, or something, and they took me into a room at the back and put me on a sofa, and brought me something by-and-by in a glass, to take. It revived me ; but I must have been there ever so long ; it was dark before I could get away. They wanted to send a shopman out with me ; but I said it was not necessary ; I left them my card, and got into a hansom."

" Where were you going ? " asked Mrs. Penteith.

" I was going to Brompton, to try to see that man again ; for I did not believe a word of his having left his lodgings with his wife. However, they had left, I found, but the people gave me his new address at Bayswater, which the wife had given them when she called to ask if any letters had come for her from America."

" Well, Godfrey ? "

" All this had taken time, you see, and I began to think it would be fully late for Miss Dixon's, so I went there at once. I insisted upon seeing her, and I got inside the passage, and would not come away. So then a tall, grim old lady, in a high white cap, as grim as Lady Davenant, but with a kinder face, and a Scotch accent, came out of a sitting-room and took me into it. She was Mrs. Ross, she said. Miss Davenant was under her care and protection, and she could not allow me to see her : the young lady herself positively refused to do so, but she had written me a short note—which she handed to me. It contained only a few words—telling me that all attempts to see her would be useless ; and that the marriage I had done her the honour to propose was quite impracticable—a wild thing that no sane man would have thought of."

" Was it as unkind as that, Godfrey ? "

" Yes. There was just a little word or two at the end, when she begged of me to leave her alone. But—well, I suppose she made it unkind purposely, to drive me away. Mrs. Ross added that, while Miss Davenant was in her house she should take good care of her."

" And then you came away, Godfrey ? "

" I could not do anything else, aunt. I got into the hansom and drove to Bayswater, but Mr. and Mrs. Grey did not live there ; the footman—it was a stately kind of house—said he did not know the name."

" And then you came home ? "

" Yes, it was time : close upon twelve. Aunt, tell me : do *you* see that the marriage I planned was so very wild ? "

" Oh, my dear," she whispered, " it did indeed seem so to me."

" What more can I do ? " he asked, with a groan.

" My dear, not anything. You must see that, as a gentleman, you cannot. And, Godfrey, I think you must give yourself a day or two's entire rest in bed, unless you want the fever to come back."

"And if it does come back—and kills me—what then, aunt? It might save me from the long and dreary life that lies before me."

Mrs. Penteith sighed bitterly. She knew that his life's happiness was bound up in Mary Dixon.

When the medical man paid his visit that morning, for he had not yet ceased his attendance on Godfrey, he felt very angry. Young men were the most difficult patients that he had to deal with, he said, and Dunning agreed with him: no sooner were they getting a little better than they went and undid all the good that had been done. He ordered Godfrey not to get up at all until he had special permission to do so. "And I don't think he can," joyously added the doctor, "for that knee of his is going to be bad again."

So Dunning took up her station once more in the sick-room, to tyrannise over her refractory patient—who was too much subdued to be very refractory to-day—and Mrs. Penteith went out in her carriage. And she was a long while away.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SOME LIGHT.

It is time that so much of past events as may yet remain a mystery to the reader, should be cleared.

When Mr. Davenant, the eminent surgeon, brought home his second wife, she proved to be by no means a person likely to win the love of his young daughter. Mary was being educated at home under a governess and masters; her former nursery governess, Mrs. Ross, had been housekeeper since the first Mrs. Davenant's death, and by all these people Mary was loved and indulged. The new Mrs. Davenant entered upon a system of severe training, as a corrective to the lax indulgence; highly wholesome, perhaps, but not pleasant. She was one of the numerous daughters of an old Scotch baronet, proud and poor, and had condescended, in her opinion, when she married a professional man, although his fame was great. She had been reared in habits of the strictest discipline, and she brought them with her to her new home. The result was, that Mary did not learn to love her step-mother, and the step-mother did not learn to love Mary.

After the death of Sir Jacob, Lady Davenant, yielding partly to the wish of Mary herself and partly to that of her guardian and trustee, Mr. Thorn, broke up her establishment in London, to take Mary to Italy for the perfecting of her education, particularly for the further cultivation of her most beautiful voice. Lady Davenant settled first of all in Naples, intending to go on to Rome later. Being thus more dependent than before upon each other's society, their mutual distaste grew. In Naples they fell in with a Mrs. Lang, the widow of a physician in Norfolk. Lady Davenant did not like her from the first; Mary, on the contrary, was most enthusiastically taken with her. Lady Davenant was proud, cold, unpopular, and mistrustful of new acquaintances. Mary was high-spirited, fond of society, and much admired. Mrs. Lang was a most fascinating, lovable woman, with soft, sweet, gentle manners; just the woman to win the heart and mind of a young girl: and she won Mary Davenant's. By-and-by Lady Davenant thought it might be as well if she moved on to Rome earlier than she had intended to go.

What Godfrey Mayne had heard in Norfolk of Dr. Lang was correct. In himself the Doctor was a man to be respected, but he died early, leaving a very slender provision for his widow. Of their two sons, the elder had died; the younger, while training for a surgeon, had become so wild and unmanageable that he was shipped off to Australia by his father, with a hundred pounds in his pocket, and a recommendation not to return. Later, upon hearing of his father's death, the young man hastened back to England to his mother, whose idol he was, and always had been. For her elder son, Reginald, she had not cared; for the younger, Edward, she would at any time have sacrificed her own life. He was a slight, fair, innocent-faced young man, fascinating and specious in manner as his mother. But there existed this difference in them: that while she was really kind-hearted and wished well to all the world (though she would have sacrificed all the world to serve her beloved son), he was essentially of a bad nature. This son was with Mrs. Lang at Naples; and Lady Davenant, prudent and cautious, soon feared him more than she feared the mother. One afternoon, when Lady Davenant made a rather unexpected call at Mrs. Lang's, she found Mary curled up on a cushion at her feet, while Edward sat close by the young girl, sketching her face, and handing her some choice fruit between whiles. On the following day Lady Davenant gave her servants orders for the removal to Rome.

But it is not a mere change of residence that can defeat the schemes of a crafty woman: and Mrs. Lang had learnt to be crafty in the interests of her darling son. That young man, wise of foresight, had taken up the notion that a marriage with Mary Davenant would lift him for ever above the ills of life. He did not particularly care for herself; but he cared for her money. Five thousand pounds may not be very much of a sum in itself, but to a lazy young fellow who is fond of spending and not fond of working, and who, moreover, does not possess five thousand pence of his own, it looks like a huge fortune. "And after the money's spent, should it get spent," reasoned Edward one day with his mother, "there's her voice to fall back upon: it will bring in its thousands yearly." "Of course it will, my darling," acquiesced the gentle lady; "you must take care, Edward, not to miss her."

So that quite close upon the arrival of Lady Davenant in Rome, she found that Mrs. Lang and her son had also established themselves there. She reproached Mary with having been a party to this. Mary denied it; she had known nothing of the movement; but she did not deny that the surprise was welcome to her. Lady Davenant next strove to forbid Mary's visits to Mrs. Lang. Mary refused to be forbidden. She was of an age then—nineteen—to select, in a degree, her own friends, and she should do so. Lady Davenant pointed out to her that the young man, Edward, was a ne'er-do-weel, with worse qualities she felt sure than appeared on the surface, and Mary ought not to subject herself to association with him. Mary laughed. She was in truth innocent of all affection for Edward Lang. He was clever and amusing, she said, and that was all, telling them laughable tales of his life in Australia. She had tolerated him for the sake of his mother, whose sweet and gentle manners made her home a Paradise after the unbending, carping coldness of Lady Davenant. Thus the winter went on in Rome; Mary taking lessons, going into a little good society with her step-mother, and spending her spare time at Mrs. Lang's.

Mrs. Lang, insinuating and sweet, whispered praises of her son to Mary, mingled with veiled hints of his admiration and love for her. He was quite equal to playing the Romeo; while the mother told her she was as much persecuted as Juliet. Mary laughed, regarding it as a joke. It was the mother she was in love with, not the son: and alas, so much in love, so entirely under her dominion, that it would be a very difficult task to deny her anything. In her love and reverence for Mrs. Lang, the girl was blind. One thought was now insinuatingly presented to her: that if she consented to marry Edward, she would be free from her step-mother's vexatious guardianship, and be able to spend openly as much time as she pleased with gentle Mrs. Lang. Most of her visits to Mrs. Lang were now paid by stealth, not an easy matter by any means, under the vigilant surveillance kept upon her by Lady Davenant, and the young lady was growing secretly rebellious.

Affairs were in this stage: Edward believing he was making some way with Mary, and the time of carnival was fast approaching, when a young Englishman, travelling with his tutor, came upon the scene as a rival. This was William Hunt, a lad of twenty, whose acquaintance young Lang had made in one of the gaming-houses to which he was himself a too constant visitor. Edward invited William Hunt to his mother's one evening, for he had no objection to a quiet game of écarté, or what not, in private, with a pigeon who was worth plucking, and there the young man met Miss Davenant and fell desperately in love with her at first sight. After that time William Hunt was for ever framing an excuse for being at Mrs. Lang's.

But Mary, pretty enough to afford to be flinty-hearted, was no more moved by his boyish passion than she had been by the less disinterested vows of her other admirer, who had, moreover, the claims of being the one whom her step-mother condemned and of being the son of her favourite friend. She wished to marry neither, and she gave scant encouragement either to their love or their rivalry. Unfortunately, there was another woman at work for each of them. Lady Davenant, who had made Mr. Hunt's acquaintance, encouraged his attentions to her step-daughter, partly because he was of good family and fortune, partly because he might put the Norfolk doctor's son out of the girl's head. Mrs. Lang, on the other hand, was working harder still in the cause of her own son. Young Hunt ridiculed the very idea of a nameless fellow like Lang aspiring to Miss Davenant: the young lady was far above him in all ways, he said: she was, moreover, very beautiful, and her singing was divine. Mary laughed and talked with him, and sang to him, but she was as truly indifferent to him as she was to Lang.

This indifference had no effect in calming the infatuation of the younger man, or in killing the self-interest of the other. The former was hasty and headstrong, the latter stubborn and savage-tempered. Miss Davenant was made a bone of contention between them, scowls and sharp words being exchanged in cafés and other places where they met.

One evening during the carnival they met at Mrs. Lang's. Mary was there and sang to them, song after song. It may be said, sang to William Hunt especially, for it was at his request, and he hung over her enraptured. After Mary went home, things came to a climax. Words brought on blows; the young men struck one another, and went out of the house quarrelling. Growling and grumbling they proceeded along, and in one of the streets, which was an obscure one, they fell in with some noisy masks. William Hunt chose that moment to taunt Lang with his inferiority to Miss Davenant—a fellow, he said, whom Lady Davenant did not feel justified in admitting to her house.

"Hold your false tongue," hissed Lang. "Miss Davenant is to be my wife."

"It is false," said William Hunt.

"Prove that it is false," retorted the other

"I can do that at once. And I will."

"How will you do it?"

"By going to Lady Davenant's and asking them. It is not too late."

"Stop where you are; you shall not go," cried Lang, savagely, between his teeth.

For all answer, William Hunt turned away in the direction of Lady Davenant's. The other put his left hand with a sinewy grip on the lad's shoulder. "Let me go," shouted Hunt, raising his voice for the first time. Until now the hot words of both had been low, so that in the noisy tumult around them they excited little attention. But the lad's voice suddenly changed to a cry. A knife had been plunged between his ribs with the careful deliberateness of a man who knows what he is doing; for Edward Lang had studied surgery under his father, and it stood him in diabolical aid now.

"Now go and do your love-making," snarled he, as he drew out the knife, threw it away, and was lost in the crowd with a skill and cunning which he had had to use before on awkward, if less critical, occasions in his discreditable career.

William Hunt was taken into a house, and his tutor was brought to him by one of the masks, who had discovered who the wounded man was. The Reverend Mr. Robertson was a gentle, well-read young man, who had never had much influence over his pupil; he was in such a highly nervous state when he was suddenly called to take down the lad's dying and imperfect deposition, that his efforts resulted in a declaration hard to be understood, except that it was the result of a stab inflicted by Edward Lang at his own house, in the presence of his mother and sister. When the trembling clergyman read this aloud, the poor young fellow had only time to murmur, "wrong as usual," before he drew his last breath.

Sir William Hunt, who was on the Continent, was telegraphed for, and on his arrival he set about the task of tracking out his son's murderer. This was not easy. Before that, Mr. Robertson had become aware that his declaration was in some way wrong. People came forward to say that the quarrel and stab had taken place in the street, and that the murderer was an Italian and one of the masks. So it was concluded that poor William Hunt's mind had wandered in dying; and as for Edward Lang, he had previously seen Mr Robertson and assured him that he had not seen William Hunt at on the fatal night, for he had been at a masked ball.

And now we must go to Edward Lang himself. No sooner had he committed the fatal act than he hastened by a devious course home to his mother's. She thought he looked pale and nervous. These were not the signs of remorse; young as he was, he was not the sort of man to be troubled with that feeling at inopportune moments. He was anxious about the means of keeping the news of young Hunt's death from Mary for a day or two, until she could be in his power; a plan for hurrying her into marriage with him was already working in his brain. He had little fear of the crime being traced home to him immediately, for he did not think he had been recognised, but it would be sure to come out later. He must secure Mary before that, or give her up for ever.

The next morning he presented himself at his mother's bedside with a revolver in his hand and a determined face, and told her he had made up his mind to shoot himself before the day was over unless she could persuade Mary Davenant to marry him. The poor lady was distracted out of her wits by this threat; she implored him to give up his purpose; she appealed to his love for her, to his duty; at last she made him promise not to attempt his life until she had seen Mary. Hurrying to Lady Davenant's house, she followed the servant without ceremony into the very presence of the woman who had branded her and her son with the name of adventurers. Mary started up on seeing her tearful and trembling, and ran towards her with pity.

"I must apologize for this intrusion," said she, brokenly, to Lady Davenant, who had risen, erect and frigid, on her entrance. Then turning to the girl, she sobbed out: "Oh, Mary, my poor boy—he is dying—dying for love of you. You are good and kind—you will not let him die. Come and save him—you can, you will—for my sake. Come, come."

Mary in her turn trembled from head to foot. Her step-mother's hard voice broke in.

"I cannot allow my daughter to leave my house with you," said she, coldly. "It would injure her reputation for common-sense to seem to give a moment's credence to a young man's idle threats. I met your son yesterday, and from his appearance and the way in which he was enjoying himself, I am convinced that he has been misleading you in making you imagine he is in any danger of dying."

"He is going to shoot himself," cried Mrs. Lang, trying to draw Mary towards the door. "Only let her come and tell him he must not—must not be so foolish—and make him promise that he will not!" she pleaded, piteously.

"I will come," said Mary, impulsively. "I will not be long, mamma. I must go; see how unhappy she is," whispered the girl, touched almost to tears herself by the distress of the woman she loved.

"If you leave me now, Mary," said Lady Davenant very slowly, with chilling emphasis on each word, "I warn you that I will never receive you back. You must choose between us."

The girl hesitated, half drawing herself out of the encircling arm of the unhappy visitor. For she knew her step-mother too well to doubt that she would keep her word; and, fond of Mrs. Lang, uncomfortable at home as she was, she shrank from the plunge to which so decisive a step might lead her. She looked from Lady Davenant's harsh countenance and unbending figure to the tender, imploring eyes of the woman whose kindness had been so often the solace of her later life; and yielded, as it was inevitable that she should do, to the instinct of her affection, and perhaps to a spirit of defiance of the unsympathetic, threatening guardian.

"Good-bye, then," she cried, impulsively and bitterly. "You have always been hard to me, mamma. If I am doing something foolish—wrong—it is you who have driven me to it. Good-bye," said she again, stepping back once more, and eagerly looking for one sign of softening in the hard face.

But there was none. At the bottom of her heart, Lady Davenant was somewhat alarmed at the fire her own flinty answer had struck out of the girl, and no doubt intended to find later some means of recalling her threat. But this moment of the girl's open defiance was not the time to draw back. She said "Good-bye" in the same harsh voice, without even putting out her hand.

And Mary, bewildered and tearful, allowed Mrs. Lang to lead her from the room, and thence from the house. Thus she left her step-mother's guardianship, without another word, for ever. She was very silent as they drove along in the hired carriage, while her companion showered upon her thanks and blessings. Though she would not own it even to herself, Mary was troubled by the feeling that her unsympathetic step-mother had had some right on her side; she little guessed how much. She felt that she had broken rashly away from all the old ties and associations of her life, to form new ones which had, after all, very little attraction for her. She had almost resolved, before they reached Mrs. Lang's apartments, that when she had once satisfied the nervous lady that her son was in no danger, she would humble herself to the extent of asking her step-mother to forgive and take her back.

But Edward Lang was too clever a plotter to lose such an advantage as her coming gave him. From the window of the sitting-room he could see them as they drove up. With a grin of successful cunning, he tossed his hair carefully before the glass, pulled his collar on one side and his cravat into disorder, and flung himself upon the sofa with his head buried among the cushions. When they came in he started up, his eyes red, his hands shaking, and said quietly, but with deep feeling:

"Oh, Mary, you have come to save me!"

She was more frightened than touched. She had never been stirred by love, or she would have recognised the want of genuine ring in his well-modulated voice, and known that true love does not work by these signs. Going forward she spoke gently, but rather imperiously: "I am come to ask you not to talk any more nonsense, Mr. Lang, to frighten your poor mother, and bring people away from their work in the middle of the morning. I have lost a singing lesson through coming to see you."

She was not at all tender, but he was undaunted. He put his head into his hands. "Go back to your singing, then. I have no claim upon you, no right ——"

But his mother, in spite of Mary's efforts to keep her silent, interrupted him.

"No, no, she cannot go back. You don't know what Mary has done to come to you. Lady Davenant told her that if she came with me she should never be received back again; and my darling girl came in spite of everything."

Edward sprang up with joy which needed no acting. He threw his arm round the shy, reluctant girl, and kissed her with a kiss which left her unmoved as marble, but bound to him by a tie which was to ruin her life.

"You must marry me at once," said he, with fierce eagerness. "To-morrow—to-day."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Lang. "It is the only course open now."

Mary shrank back, protesting, entreating. She was not of a weak nature but she was at the mercy of a will of iron; she was being carried off her feet by the torrent of cleverly-prepared circumstances. That very afternoon, just as she had begun to write a letter of apology to her step-mother, begging to be taken back, her trunks arrived, having in truth been sent for by Mrs. Lang's order, which Mary did not know; and realising that she was indeed cut off from her old life for ever, the unhappy girl let her pen fall from her hand while tears of bitter remorse and sorrow rolled down her cheeks.

Mrs. Lang came to her while she was sitting like this, put her arms tenderly round her, smoothed back her hair, and caressed her. "You are going to be my own daughter now," said she, sweetly. "And you must not cry or be unhappy, for your step-mother never cared for you as I do."

She was gentler, kinder than ever to-day, in gratitude to the girl for saving her boy's life, as the simple-hearted woman really half-believed she had done; and Mary let herself be comforted in the joy of sympathetic companionship. She tried to tell that she did not want to marry, at any rate yet; but this made Mrs. Lang so unhappy that she desisted. And the outcome of the affectionate persuasion of the mother and the cunning devotion of the son was that she passed that day and the next with them in strict seclusion, and in ignorance of the death of William Hunt. On the third morning after that event she was married to Edward Lang privately at the English consul's.

Then they returned together to Mrs. Lang, who had prepared the table festively, for it was luncheon-time, with flowers and fruit and wine and dainty dishes, that it might look like a wedding-breakfast. For to her this was a joyful event which was to steady her darling son by giving him a good, beautiful wife, with money of her own, and was to give her a daughter; this being a pleasure which had always had great value in her eyes, as nature had denied it to her.

They sat down to table. Edward was upon thorns to get away from Rome and danger; but that there was any fear of immediate danger he did not know. The sun was shining warmly and brightly down on the ancient city; they had thrown open the window and let the warm air stream in, with the faint hum from the busy street, and the occasional sounds of voices and footsteps from the pavement below.

The bridegroom seemed restless and excited, displaying little of the conventional joy and pride of a bridegroom, or of the deeper current of uneasiness underneath. Mary was silent and grave, troubled with doubts at the very outset. He had told her, within a few minutes of their leaving the room where they had been made man and wife, that he had had an offer of a medical appointment in America, that they must start that very day for it; and the news, sprung upon her so suddenly and with a fiery eagerness of manner which alarmed her, filled her thoughts and silenced her tongue.

Neither of them could eat; and Mary drew back a little from the table. Edward glanced at her. "Come, you must not be dull on your wedding-day," said he; "sing me a song."

She went to the piano, and he chose a fervid love-song. She sang it with fire and feeling. When it was over, she, after a pause, glided into a very different melody, a sacred song, that was at the moment far more attuned to her own feelings:

"Angels, ever bright and fair,
Take, ch take me to your care——"

"May they indeed have care of me!" murmured Mary to her own heart when the song was ended, and a tear softly stole down her cheek. At this moment, Edward Lang, who was leaning from the open window regarding the passers-by in the street below, drew in his head suddenly. His face had turned whiter than death.

It was on the morning of the day preceding this that Sir William Hunt had arrived in Rome, to be at first misled by the errors in the dying declaration, as taken down by his son's tutor, and otherwise. But since then matters had been clearing themselves; not altogether, but enough to satisfy the baronet that his son's murderer was no other than Edward Lang, in conjunction (as he believed) with the mother and the sister. If the two latter were not absolutely present at the time and place of death, they had done their best, by their singing and their other wiles, to lure the poor young lad to his destruction. On this day matters were sufficiently ripe to arrest the murderer, and two of the Italian police, accompanied by Sir William, reached the quarters of the town where Mrs. Lang resided just as that lady was presiding at her son's wedding-breakfast.

But these Italian police had in some way blundered over the address, or else their information had: they had not got the address of the house in which Mrs. Lang resided, but of the house next door to it. Into that house went cautiously the two men, leaving Sir William to wait outside on the pavement. He took up his station there just as Mary began her first song, and listened to it with rapture through the open window. He had never, as he believed, heard so glorious a voice in his life.

Next she began the sacred song, "Angels, ever bright and fair," and with that he was still more entranced. (It was that same song that Sir William, years later, heard her sing in the church at Croxham.) During its progress, the bridegroom, putting his head a little further out at the window, noticed the tall, grey-haired man, whose face he could not see, standing below; merely an Englishman passing by, the young man thought, attracted by the music and halting to listen to it.

But just as the song was ending, Edward Lang saw the police, whom he knew by sight, come out of the next house and join the gentleman on the pavement. The truth flashed into his mind like a flash of lightning: that it must be Sir William Hunt, and they were coming to apprehend him.

Crossing over to Mary, he said, with suppressed eagerness, "Come; we have no time to lose; it is later than I thought," and snatched up her bonnet and mantle and his own hat, and hurried her from the room, halting only to whisper a few words in his mother's ear in passing of what he feared—that the police were after him, were entering then, and he told her (he was ready at cunning resources), how he thought she might baffle them, if, as was most likely, they did not know her personally. The poor bewildered lady stood aghast as he disappeared, with a last injunction: "If ever your wits were used to serve me in my life, mother, you must use them to save me now."

When the two police, followed by Sir William Hunt, entered the room after a brief knock at its door, they saw a smiling lady seated at a gracefully-decorated luncheon table. She was beautifully dressed and wore flowers at her breast, and had a sweet, gentle face, and was altogether not at all the person likely to be associated with a murder. One of the police addressed her in Italian. She shook her head, and answered smilingly in English.

"I am sorry I do not understand Italian. I am an English lady —Mrs. Howard."

"Madam," broke in Sir William Hunt, believing the police had again made a mistake, "we have been directed to these rooms as being the residence of Edward Lang. Does he live here?"

"Edward Lang," repeated Mrs. Howard, retaining her outward self-possession and hiding her shaking hands under her delicate cambric handkerchief. "Lang?—Lang? I seem to have heard that name. Oh, I remember now—there is a young man of that name I believe living at the next door."

Now that was a hap-hazard assertion, falling without premeditation from her tongue; but she little knew how well it served her. Sir William interpreted to the men of law what she said, and one of them began to swear in Italian under his breath. "I told you I knew I was right in the number," he said to his fellow officer: "those crafty people at the next house were but hoodwinking us—no doubt to give the fellow time to get away."

They bowed to the self-possessed and handsomely-attired lady, and left the room. Sir William lingered to offer some apology to Mrs. Howard for disturbing her.

"You would pardon me, I think, madam, if you knew my business and the anxiety I am in. My name is Hunt, Sir William Hunt; and I have been summoned to Rome by the violent death of my eldest son; we are now on the track of his murderer."

"What?" exclaimed his horrified listener. "Your son—murdered?"

For, keeping in seclusion the past day or two, she had truly not heard of it.

"He was murdered by the man Edward Lang, his mother and sister having been accessories to it: wicked, designing women, who had previously cast their spells on my poor boy to lure him to his destruction. We hope to have the man in custody ere many hours have passed; and the women I shall have apprehended also. But I see I shock you, madam. Pray pardon me."

"It—it—a murder sounds so very dreadful," gasped the poor lady, who had turned white, and was trembling from head to foot. "Are you sure there is no mistake, sir? Was your son really murdered?"

"He was, madam, and by the man I speak of—Edward Lang. William lived only long enough to make his dying declaration. He had been spending the evening at the apartments of these people—next door to this, I presume. The two young men had gone out afterwards quarrelling, and Lang stabbed my son to death in the streets."

Apologising again on the score of having startled her, Sir William Hunt withdrew, leaving the lady more dead than alive.

Edward Lang had hurried his wife down some back stairs with a speed which took her breath away, and out through a back door, past an astonished old woman busy over a washing-tub, across a small courtyard and down a narrow passage into a dirty little street. There he slackened speed for her to put on her bonnet and mantle.

"Now, two streets from here we can get a carrozza to take us to the station," said he. "Make haste."

"Station!" faltered Mary. "Why should we go there yet? I don't understand. What is the matter?" with new alarm at the impatience in his face. "What does this mean?"

"I will tell you presently. Come. We have not a moment to lose."

But Mary was frightened: his face had grown hard, his manner harsh.

"I will not go until you tell me. Something is wrong. We have not said good-bye to your mother—and where are my boxes? No, you shall not force me along. If you do I will scream; I will cry out to the people."

He desisted, with a savage gleam in his eyes which completed her terror. "I am your husband, and I command you to come," he hissed out with an oath between his teeth.

"No, not until I know," she said, with blanched face.

Terrified nearly out of his senses by the dread of not escaping, catching sight of a tall *sbirro*, who might be coming after him in pursuit, Edward Lang struck his wife a blow which knocked her down in a doorway, and made off at the top of his speed. Mary gathered herself up, staggered into a courtyard where she saw a bench, and sat down upon it. There and then she made her resolve—never to go with him, never to live with him. A man, capable of striking her down in the street on the wedding-day, might kill her before the week was over. She would go to Lady Davenant, confess all, and beg to be taken again to the shelter of home.

When the afternoon shadows were falling, not before, she left the bench and went back to Mrs. Lang's lodgings, intending to acquaint her with what had passed, and to tell her of the resolution she had formed.

She found Mrs. Lang packing up, and in distress so deep, so terrible, that Mary was scared. Then she learnt the dreadful news —Edward was a murderer, and she and his mother were likely to be implicated in the consequences. She also heard that Lady Davenant had quitted Rome a day or two back. Deeply grieved and angered by Mary's conduct in leaving her for Mrs. Lang, she would not stay in the place, quitted it without delay, and was travelling towards England.

"You have only me now to protect and love you," sobbed Mrs. Lang; "and I have only you," added the unhappy lady. "Henceforth we must live for one another. You cannot abandon me in my distress. I am his mother, and you are his wife, and we must bear it as we best can; but if you leave me I shall die."

Mary promised that she never would leave her; she thought her duty lay in remaining, and she loved her as much as ever. That same day they quitted Rome in as private a manner as was possible, and travelled into Switzerland, calling themselves "Dixon." It was one of Mary's names, and she adopted it.

But Mrs. Dixon soon found that it was not safe to be together, for they were being pursued: looked after. Sir William Hunt had learnt how cleverly he had been tricked; that the charming lady, Mrs. Howard, was really Mrs. Lang, and that her guilty son was even at that same moment making his escape. Terrified half to death, Mrs. Dixon went into Bohemia, and placed Mary as a boarder in a convent there. The girl was ill when she entered, and she had a long and violent fever.

Mary stayed in the convent a year and a half, Mrs. Dixon living in obscurity in the neighbourhood. Then, pursuit having ceased, and the affair having, as they hoped, blown over, they ventured a little into the world again. At Nice they fell in with old Mme. de Breteuil, who had been Mary's governess at Mr. Davenant's. She invited the girl to make a long stay with her; and soon after that Mrs. Dixon married Mr. Mayne.

Edward Lang had made good his escape to Genoa and thence to America, a letter passed cautiously between him and his mother at rare intervals, and she sent him what money she could: and so time had gone on.

"Then, my dear," said Mrs. Penteith, having listened to this history from Mary's lips—for it was to Great Cumberland Street she had gone that day, "I am to understand that you never saw the man, Edward Lang, after his escape that day from Rome?"

"Not until he made his appearance in disguise at Croxham," replied Mary. It frightened me terribly and mamma also. We thought he was still in America."

"And you have never—pardon me, my dear—regarded him as your husband?"

"Never, never," vehemently returned Mary. "*Him!* Regard him as my husband! Dear Mrs. Penteith, can you suppose me capable of it?"

Mrs. Penteith had a great reverence for ecclesiastical forms. "But, my child, the ceremony of marriage did pass between you."

"I know it did, more's the pity; that was how I spoilt my life. But I did not know he was what he was—a murderer. He has never so much as touched my hand in friendship since; I would not allow it. Regard him as my husband!" repeated Mary, unable to forget the offensive suggestion. "Never that. I would much rather die."

Thus some light was thrown upon the past. There were circumstances, yet unexplained, which Mrs. Penteith did not understand, and she was dwelling upon them as she drove home. Her absence had been so prolonged as to arouse the suspicions of Godfrey. He was sitting up in bed when she got in, his blue eyes wild with excitement, his cheeks a hectic red.

"Aunt Margaret, you have been to her!"

"Yes, I have, Godfrey," she calmly answered, as she stood by him. "I have been hearing her past history."

"And I know she has done nothing wrong? She is good and pure as crystal?"

"Well, yes she is," acknowledged Mrs. Penteith. "She has done nothing that can be called wrong; only something very foolish."

Godfrey's whole face lighted up with exultation. "Then there exists no reason why she should not become my wife?"

Mrs. Penteith's heart failed within her. "Oh, my dear boy, you must never think of that again," she whispered; "you must put all idea of it entirely away. She cannot be your wife."

"But why? *Why*, Aunt Madge?" he fiercely questioned, his eyes ablaze.

"She is already married."

It seemed to be a full minute before Godfrey took in the sense of the low whisper: he but stared at his aunt like one bereft of the powers of hearing. Then he fell back upon the pillow with a cry of despair.

(To be concluded.)

MICHAEL'S MISTAKE.

By the Author of "Adonais, Q.C.," "Yvonne," etc.

II.

A HOUSE amongst the elms and the lindens; an old, rose-covered, grey stone house. Before it a garden rich with colour—red, blue, violet, and pink, in rounds, and stripes, and patches; behind it, a wilderness of standard roses.

The elms and the lindens!—They nodded their heads over the grey house; they dotted themselves in clusters here and there through the flower beds; they overshadowed the winding paths, and then, spreading out, formed a fringe around the orchard away down at the further end of the garden. Some of these trees tapped their heads against the upper windows of the old house, but others were high, high above the chimneys of it.

And what a view beyond! the whole beautiful expanse spread itself out before them. Undulating corn fields; winding river; turbulent brooks; white shadowy turnpike; brown business-like railroad. Away in the far distance the great glittering lake; here beside them the little, slumbering, peaceful town, with its spick and span new Bank and Courthouse, and its aged church, and its venerable bridges. Often—not always, of course—still often, the smiling sun lit up the whole; but even in the murky, rainy weather it was a fine view;—it was a pleasant face in anger. The sweeping river, and roaring brooks, and seething corn, and stormy lake, were full of movement then—full of life. They put fire into men's hearts such as they never could in the sunny weather; and set them off dreaming of things that were and were not; that might have been—and never were;—leaving them half-unhappy, unearthly sort of mortals, until the sun, as the sunshine of their own homes, brought them back to this plain, matter-of-fact world again.

The sky was red, ruby red in the light of the dying sun; and the old grey house stood bathed in a sea of glory. Crimson fire danced in the motionless trees; birds warbled amongst them; tinted leaves rustled to the ground. Standing on the doorstep you could hear the clocks chiming, bell-like, inside the house; standing there, too, the gloire de dijon roses drooped down over you; their delicious scent half intoxicating you with delight. There had been the clank of the garden gate, and the sound of footsteps on the gravel; and now three figures stood just there—on the doorstep. Two tall men, a dark and a fair; and a third—a little, dainty, kindly-eyed gentleman.

"What a lovely old house! Did you ever see a prettier, Uncle Fabian? Did you, Fane?"

The dark man laughed, casting his eyes over the flower beds.

"Which of us do you expect to answer you, Michael?"

He buried his ruddy head in a cluster of roses.—"Whichever likes.—Well, what I shall say for myself to these people I don't know. I—oh, I—I beg your pardon——"

A vision had appeared suddenly at the open doorway; a vision nearly launching Michael down the steps on to the gravel. It was only a girl in a fresh, pure-looking print, her bright hair glittering in the sun; a girl with a soft, fair, sweetly-moulded face; but Michael backed precipitately from the roses. Her colour deepened quickly, a startled look coming into her large brown eyes.

"Oh—I thought it was my grandfather. I thought he had forgotten something, perhaps, and——" she paused, her glance falling on Christian Fane—"Oh, have you—I suppose you have news for us, Captain Fane?"

He smiled. "More than news. I have secured the portmanteaus—and the culprit besides."

"Oh, I am so glad!" She just glanced at Michael, bronzed and blushing, and thence to the little brown face watching her from behind him. She laughed. "It is really very kind of you," she went on, "indeed it is. Come in; grandpapa will be back again directly; he will be so much obliged; and Viola, too. Come in."

She led the way down the long hall, into a cool, sombre-coloured drawing-room. The low window stood open, muslin curtains hanging motionless before it, a faint, sweet perfume coming through it. One had only to throw a glance in that direction to fathom the reason of the perfume—a wilderness of beautiful standard roses lay beyond. The girl half laughed as she ushered them in.

"Viola, here is Captain Fane."

Viola Guyne raised herself in great haste and confusion from the sofa upon which she had been resting, her dark hair tumbled, her deep blue eyes shining. Christian Fane smiled as he went quietly up to her, and held out his hand.

"I really must apologise, Miss Guyne, for disturbing you in this way, but I have found the portmanteaus, and thought I might just have the pleasure of telling you so myself."

Viola put her soft hand frankly into his. "Of course; yes, certainly—we are glad to see you." She paused, looking in some amazement at the strange faces behind him. Christian Fane went on hurriedly:

"These friends of mine have explanations to make to you, Miss Guyne; they didn't intend to come in, but as Miss—— as your sister asked us, they were too glad to do so. Michael," and he threw a laughing glance from his cool dark eyes into the embarrassed chestnut ones smiling at him: "Michael, I think *you* ought to have plenty to say for yourself."

Viola laughed, too. "Won't you sit down first?" Then after a pause: "Did you really run away with our portmanteau?"

Michael laid his hat down beside him on the delicately-covered little sofa, and laughed. "Yes, indeed I did;" then, his colour heightening: "Of course under the circumstances, I can hardly ask to be introduced to you, Miss Guyne, but I may as well tell you my name—Michael St. Martin. I—I think your grandfather, the rector, knew my father very well."

A light sprang into Viola's face. "St. Martin! oh dear, yes! I have heard of your father. Grandpapa has often spoken of him. Don't you remember, Constella?"

Constella nodded, smiling. "Oh yes. And there used to be a book in the house 'From Michael St. Martin,' to grandpapa, you know. I remember his speaking of you, too"—and she turned to the young man on the sofa. "He saw you just once, when you were a very little boy."

Fabian Lestrève interrupted delightedly. "Michael was not a good baby, my dear; he used to scratch and cry. It is a mercy, Michael, that you grew up so different."

"A great mercy, Uncle Fabian," laughed Michael heartily, glancing from one to the other of them. "I'm afraid this last escapade of mine doesn't say much for me, however. Strictly speaking, whose portmanteau did I run away with; was it yours, Miss Guyne, or was it—was it yours?"

Constella's brown eyes smiled at him. "Both Viola's and mine. We had only one between us."

"And the other was mine, as you know," Fane added, maliciously.

The warbling of the birds, and the distant bells ringing on the town steeples, mingled with their talk and laughter; the scent of the roses seemed to play around them. Michael's eyes passed from the one girl, sitting with her handsome face and figure in an attitude of attention, waiting for his explanation, to the other watching him with an amused smile from a low chintz-covered arm chair. He noticed that the pattern of the chintz was a pattern of lilies and roses; it flashed across his mind that this girl seemed like a beautiful combination of both these flowers.

A tall stooping man in clerical dress had come in unnoticed through the low window.

"Which of you gentlemen is Captain Fane?" he asked, in a pause in the conversation. "Oh, you! well I have just come from your hotel, Captain Fane. I called in there to see you, and to hear if you had any news of the portmanteaus."

Fane replied courteously. "It was very good of you; I am sorry I was out. The portmanteaus are at the station."

"So I was told." The rector seated himself and cast his eyes round. "I was also told you had come up to the Rectory with two gentlemen; one of them a Mr. St. Martin, from Hillsborough." He held out his hand. "Are you Michael St. Martin's son?"

"Yes, I am." A ray of sunshine danced into his laughing eyes. "And I am Michael St. Martin also."

The Rector's pale, finely-cut face examined him closely. "I am very glad to see you; very. I should never have known you, though; you are not like your father. Your mother was a fair woman; I think you are more like her."

He looked up at him quietly. "I suppose so. My Uncle Fabian always tells me so, at any rate."

The old man turned, holding out his hand for the second time.

"What, Fabian! I have often heard of Fabian. There really is something very funny about all this. I think these portmanteaus must be enchanted. How did it all happen?"

"It was just my mistake," said Michael. "I didn't know there was another portmanteau like Uncle Fabian's upon the face of the globe, until then. And when I saw the three lying one on the top of another, and all the same, I thought they must be his. What else could I think? And I ran off with them."

The Rector shook his head at his granddaughters. "Oh, Viola, Constella, I always told you what would happen if you persisted in travelling without an address on that portmanteau."

Michael laughed. "And I am sure I warned Uncle Fabian often enough."

"Nobody ever warned me," said Christian Fane. "I wish somebody had."

The sky grew ever of a deeper ruby, great boulders of fleecy gold mingling with it here and there, and wonderful combinations of greens, and violets, and greys, extending away out into the east, to where a long roll of dark cloud lay huddled together, as if hiding its head until all this brightness had passed.

Fabian Lestrève turned suddenly at last to the Rector. "Mr. Guyne, I will explain it all to you myself from the beginning."

"A very good suggestion," interrupted the Rector; "but suppose we had it all to our two selves. Viola, dear, perhaps these gentlemen would like to see the roses. Would you?"

Two minutes afterwards the four were passing slowly out amongst the blossoms, first Viola and Christian, then Constella and Michael.

"In all my life I have never seen such a beautiful old house, nor such beautiful roses."

Constella cast her soft brown eyes about her. "Yes, they are beautiful. I am sorry though, Mr. St. Martin, that we came away before your uncle had made his explanations. I was anxious to hear, for one thing, how far we had journeyed together. Our last resting place was Rouen; we stayed there three days."

"No—really! So did Uncle Fabian."

"And we crossed in the Calais-Douvres, and came straight up."

"Uncle Fabian did that too, I declare there is something unearthly about it."

She paused beside a beautiful white rose-bush, raising her eyes to him, "*So did Captain Fane.* Do you know I think there must be some magnetic influence at work, Mr. St. Martin."

"Between whom—the portmanteaus?"

"No, no; between your uncle, and us, and Captain Fane."

Michael fastened a rose in his coat slowly. "Well I don't know I hope not; that would leave me out in the cold, you know."

She drooped her eyes for a moment. "Yes, but after all, it was you who really acted the part of a magnet. You ran away with the portmanteaus, and drew us all together."

"I don't know that I like that part of it," smiled Michael.

"Magnets can't help themselves," she went on, laughing.

"I know they can't," he answered slowly, looking straight at her, "and that is just the best thing about them."

The long thin rose branch had sprung from his hand; Constella watched it waving to and fro in the sunset.

"It is a glorious evening," said Michael, following her gaze. "Shall we sit down for a minute or two and look at that wonderful western sky?"

Meanwhile Viola and Christian Fane had strayed to the further end of the garden; they stood together under the shadow of a huge old linden. Christian Fane had his hat in his hand; he looked up amongst the lofty branches.

"Two years at school in France, and a year in Germany, did you say? Three hardworking years, I suppose; terminating with Michael's mistake."

She laughed. "Yes, a romantic episode—and a funny one too."

He turned his dark eyes upon her comically. "That old servant of yours didn't think it funny last night. Was she angry with me?"

"Oh no; only startled."

They came slowly along the winding paths, to where Constella and Michael St. Martin were sitting under the roses. "You know," he went on, "that I stopped here on my way up to Scotland, because I was longing so much for a few days' really good fishing, and of course one could hardly find better fishing than there is hereabouts."

"But, Captain Fane, your friends ——" she hesitated.

He looked at her. "I have no very particular friends—no very near relations, I mean. Such as I have will wait with equanimity, I can assure you. Do you know," he went on with strange inappropriateness to what he had just been saying, "I think I shall buy a new portmanteau; I don't think I shall ever use that other again."

"Why? What could you do with the old one?"

He laughed curiously. "I don't quite know yet; have it stuck up on a pedestal, or framed and put in a glass-case; a sort of 'In memoriam,' you know."

Silence fell upon them for a moment; the sunbeams, piercing their way through a cluster of deep crimson roses, sent a faint pink shade on to Viola's classic profile.

"Oh yes, of course," she said quietly. "In memoriam of Mr. St. Martin's mistake, you mean."

And meanwhile, Fabian Lestrève, kindly-eyed, jaunty little Fabian Lestrève, had spoken of many lands, telling strange stories of past years, in the cool, softly-coloured drawing-room. The white-haired Rector listening with folded hands, and blue dreaming eyes, nodding his head here, or confirming a date there; for they had drifted far, far away from the sturdy travel-stained portmanteaus.

"Ah yes—ah well; and so this is Michael. A fine, brave-looking fellow he is, too."

Little Fabian gave a proud, half-deprecatory shrug of possession. "That he is, and as fine and brave as he looks, my dear Rector. The worst of it is, it is too dull for him all alone at Hillsborough. If he would but marry! But what can one do when he is so unreasonable?"

The blue eyes grow just a shade less dreamy, just a shadow of alarm creeps into them. He pushed his chair back, and walked slowly over to the window.

"Are you fond of roses, too, Mr. Fabian? Suppose we go out to look at these for a minute or so."

* * * * *

And the three sturdy, travel-stained portmanteaus lay all alone and dusty upon the platform of the little station. The people in the passing, hurrying trains laughed at the oddities, and wondered who owned them; and where they came from; and how long this was to be their resting place.

III:

Dead leaves rustle on the ground. Chilly breezes whisper amongst them, and go sighing away through the half-stripped branches above; roses are withering, the beauty of the flower beds fading; even the old grey house itself looks gaunt, deserted, and grim.

At the back of it, beside the wilderness of dying standards, the drawing-room window stands open—surely through neglect; for a heavy vapoury atmosphere comes in, making the pretty chintz covers hang limp, and damping the dainty china ornaments on brackets and mantelpiece. A fire crackles in the grate; and upon a low basket chair beside it there sits a man. He bends his head on his hand and gazes into it with calm, dreamy eyes. Violent emotion affects different people in different ways; but a reaction from a long spell of it affects most people in the same way. A reaction was holding its course just then over Michael St. Martin.

It is the old, old story; a casual acquaintanceship ripening into love. Christian Fane's few days' fishing had spun themselves out into so many weeks; Michael and his Uncle Fabian had stayed on too; and now here was Michael, sitting alone in the little drawing-room, looking into the fire with calm, brown eyes, his heart beating steadily, his breath coming and going in soft fitful gusts—like the wind. He had come here, and was waiting here, to ask Constella Guyne if she would be his wife.

For days past Constella had been as the very breath of heaven to him. He had thought of her, and dreamed of her—always as one might think or dream of an angel surrounded by a halo; and he had driven himself half distracted with doubts and imaginary difficulties. "Constella, Constella, Constella, you are beautiful!" he said it over and over again to himself. And it was true; he was right.

There are, perhaps, just as many pretty women in this world as there are few really beautiful ones; and Constella Guyne was really beautiful. A fair, fragile, golden-haired, sweet-featured maiden; people looked at her and people said, she is lovely. That is about the highest praise a woman can receive. It means something more than a finely-cut face, and a showy complexion. It meant far more than that in this case, to Michael. It meant a woman whose inward self corresponded to, or maybe, excelled her features; a true, pure, honest, beautiful woman. A woman in whose face one could read her thoughts; or the nature rather, of them: that they were grand, and dreamy, and noble.

A lovely woman is not always a wise woman; perhaps Constella Guyne was not wise. She was given to idealising people, and to judging them by herself. It was one of the greatest tributes to her loveliness, that though others were only too ready to idealise her in return, they never, never, never, thought of judging her by *them*selves. Even Viola, who knew Constella and her thoughts as well as one human being can know another (which after all, alas, is *not* so very well, and never can be), even she would often say: "Constella is like no one else; she is all alone in this world; she is so good that I am almost afraid of her goodness." And Michael had had a vague, glorified idea of all this in his head for days past—sending him into paroxysms at once of pleasure and pain, of hope and fear.

But now, sitting here waiting for Constella, all undecided as he was whether she did or did not love him (for Constella was a modest woman, and kept her feelings to herself), all undecided as he was, these strange, perverse thoughts of his had whirled him away back to his school-days—to a football match in which he had taken part during his first half-year there; and to the pastrycook's where he and a tall boy with a blue cap, and thin, mobile features, had sworn eternal friendship after the match was over. It made him laugh to think that that boy was Christian Fane.

It made him laugh. He remembered his own admiration of the grave scientific manner in which this boy criticised the play of the teams; and how all the other boys listened to him respectfully; and how every two or three minutes he interrupted himself, lifting his deep, dark eyes to exchange some words of nonchalant banter with the pretty shop-girl serving them. Then the other boys laughed, and so did bright-eyed, smiling Michael St. Martin.

It seemed a long time that he had sat there, dreaming after this fashion; day dreams, like night ones, are given to crowding much matter into little space. But only a few minutes had elapsed in reality, when suddenly he roused himself with a nervous start, for voices, first faint, far away among the roses, were coming swiftly towards the open window of the drawing-room. The fitful fluttering of the muslin curtain prevented his seeing anything very distinctly beyond it, but he had caught a glimpse of a grey shooting-jacket, and the vision of a woman's dress; and the voices he recognized at once. They were those of Constella and Christian Fane.

He pushed back his low chair and stood irresolute. As he did so their footsteps crunched over the narrow strip of gravel, and paused. Michael stood by the fire, his face white with nervousness, the blue veins of his forehead distended. Christian Fane spoke again.

"Do you think I might see your grandfather now, then? I am so happy I can hardly say anything more—even to you, until it is all settled."

"Yes, Captain Fane, but ——"

The deep voice interrupted reproachfully: "Call me Christian."

Michael raised his head bewildered; her low musical laugh came rolling in to him.

"Yes—Christian. But I am afraid he is engaged just now. Wait in the drawing-room; I will go round by the other way, and see."

That was all. A moment is quite sufficient to change the course of a man's life, to shatter his hopes, and maybe to break his heart into the bargain. Michael St. Martin listened to the swiftly receding footsteps, asking himself in a stunned, confused sort of way, what it could mean. He knew what the spasm of terror meant, which had seized him when through the window, in between the tossing curtains, Constella's half-shyly-said "Yes, Christian," had come to him. But that was only a foolish spasm; he put it fiercely away from him. There came a long-drawn breath from the slab outside; a brown hand pushed the curtains back—Christian Fane stood before him.

"Michael!"

Michael collected himself with an effort.

"Oh! Fane, I have been eavesdropping, I'm afraid. You see I was in here, and I couldn't tell how to let you know.—It is—it is very cold, isn't it?"

He turned abruptly away, and seizing the poker, began to lunge at the fire vigorously. A moment, and a hand rested softly on his shoulder.

"Michael!"

"What?"

They would have made a strange, and perhaps even a beautiful picture, these two men as they stood there; one with the glow of a passionate happiness written upon every feature of his dark face, looking into the face of the other—white and terror-stricken; and with a cloak of indifference thrown over all, making it yet more pitiable. Fane started.

"Michael! are you ill?"

He shook the hand off petulantly. "Ill! oh no. That is—I have a splitting headache. The cold, you know—did you ever feel such cold? By-the-bye, what were you going to say to me?"

He spoke rapidly, lunging at the fire between his sentences. If Christian Fane had been a woman, he would not have believed such an excuse for a moment, and he would have understood all at once. As he was a man, he understood nothing—and believed.

"I am very sorry, very; but oh, Michael, Michael, congratulate me! I do think I am the happiest man upon the earth this day."

For one instant, just for one short instant, Michael St. Martin stood there, struggling with himself; stood silent, with downcast face and averted head, the wind sweeping in, tossing the curtains and jingling the brass rings on the rod above them. A shadow of alarm crept into the dark eyes again.

"Michael—selfish brute that I am—you *are* ill."

Michael dropped the poker with a clatter, and turned round laughing. A forced, hysterical laugh that would have moved a woman to tears; Christian Fane laughed.

"Ill! what should make me ill? I was only thinking how I should congratulate you; I don't know what to say. I don't know I'm sure—What ought I to say?"

"Why, Michael, one would think you did *not* congratulate me; you're not jealous of me, old friend ——"

He turned away, half ashamed, half irritably.

"Jealous! Why should I be jealous? What an absurd idea, Christian. Of course I congratulate you; you know that. The fact is," he went on, a red flush mounting to his brow, as he noted the growing perplexity in Christian Fane's eyes, "I am not myself to-day, that neuralgia has been bothering me again. More than that, Fane, I came to tell you—that is—I am going away."

"Away, Michael! going away!" He leaned back on a sofa, everything forgotten in his amazement.

The flush deepened. "Yes, you see, I did not expect to go so soon, but circumstances ——"

Christian interrupted him quickly, a wave of sympathy spreading over his face.

"Not bad news, I hope?"

Michael St. Martin caught at the straw with grim desperation. "Well, rather, and so I am obliged to be off at once. In fact, would you—would you mind telling them, Fane, that I was obliged to say good-bye through you; that I could not wait. I know it is rather abrupt, but I must start by the first train, and you see ——"

The dark face flushed in something like anger.

"Michael, do you think you are going to run off from me in this way? What is it, man—and where are you going?"

Michael pulled himself up with a sort of dogged defiance.

"I tell you Fane, it is nothing more than that—rather bad news. I am going to—to Norway."

"To Norway!" He crossed his arms, wondering, in a stunned sort of way, if there was madness in Michael's family. "To Norway! for how long, pray?"

"I don't know—for two or three years, I dare say," he ended indifferently, his face growing white again as a door opened and shut in some distant part of the house. "Look here, Christian, tell them, will you? And now, good-bye."

The strong, thin lips met in a sudden compression.

"I suppose this means that you wish to quarrel with me, Michael."

He raised his quivering white face, and his brown eyes, from which the sunshine had passed away. He looked into the handsome, sternly-set features turned to him; and he was hard on this man.

"It means that I wish to get away," he said, almost roughly—"Good-bye."

And little Fabian, looking out from the hotel window into the village street, and seeing the vision of a stony, changed face, hurrying towards him through the mist, drew back with a woman's delicacy; sighing a heavy sigh, and bending his head over his book.

He bent it still lower when the door opened, and Michael St. Martin came hastily up to him; speaking with the same sullen brevity with which he had spoken to Christian Fane.

"Uncle Fabian, I am going to Norway; going to start this very afternoon. Will you come?"

Fabian Lestrève closed his book swiftly.

"To Siberia if you like, Michael—with you."

Half an hour later they had left the little town, and the rippling lake, and the old rose-covered house, far behind them. They sat facing each other, with the scenery changing, changing, ever changing on each side of them; little Fabian chattering upon one subject or another, and Michael, looking out of the window, but answering quietly and easily. They had tacitly agreed to let the old house, with its standard roses, and its fair, sweet, golden-haired Constella, pass away like a dream from their lives.

Only Michael knew—and blushed to know—that he carried one of these roses with him.

He carried something else too, but that he knew nothing of. It was a woman's heart.

And so one of these three pormanteaus jostled excitedly hither and thither, in the crowed railway van, while the other two slept on—one under the elms and the lindens, and the other in the quiet inn of the little country town.

Christmas week in Paris.—Gay booths line the streets, gay crowds jostle on the pavements, gay laughter resounds upon every side; and at the window of an hotel in a busy thoroughfare, a young man stands, with his hands in his pockets, gazing listlessly down upon the bustling scene. It is Michael St. Martin.

Just the same old laughter-loving Michael to his friends, as of yore (disappointment in real life rarely even changes the outward man); but now, as he stands here alone, you can see that his face at rest does bear the stamp of a gnawing pain upon it. A man may smile sweetly through the bitterest mental distress, in company; but put him into a room alone, and watch you through the window; then, you will see.

Michael looked out upon the life and bustle, thinking sad thoughts, Christmastide though it was, when suddenly a hand laid gently upon his elbow made him start, and turning, he confronted his Uncle Fabian.

The little brown face studied him earnestly. "Will you go and sit down there, Michael, until I have spoken with you."

Michael laughed. "Can't you speak as well if I stand here?"

"No; I can see your face there, and you are going to be angry; you are going to rage and to storm. I shall be afraid to see you, that is the truth of it."

He laughed again, turning his face round to the window. "Well you can't see it like this, at any rate; go on, Uncle Fabian; I promise not to turn until you have spoken. What is it?—something wrong with my Hillsborough affairs?"

While he spoke, his eyes followed with interest the progress of a bevy of children from booth to booth, the cold winter sunshine coming in upon him, playing with his ruddy brown hair and moustache. It lit up, too, the kindly eyes watching him half wistfully from behind.

"Michael, listen; nay, you are not to turn. I have something to tell you which—which will take some time to tell. At the very first you may be angry; promise not to interrupt me—until I have done."

He still followed the movements of the children along the boulevard. "I can't interrupt you when you have done, my Uncle Fabian. However, I beg your pardon; no, I won't interrupt. I declare you make me nervous; what is it?"

The little man threw himself down upon a low plush couch, crossing his arms, and resolutely closing his eyes, and said: "Michael, listen; nay, you are not to turn. To begin with, I have a vision. First of all, I see an old grey, rose-covered house—under the withered elms and lindens ——"

"Uncle Fabian!" With a bound, Michael was beside him, white and quivering. "Uncle Fabian! for the love of Heaven—do you wish to drive me mad?"

Fabian Lestrève opened his grey eyes calmly. "Do you happen to remember, Michael, that you gave me your promise not to ——"

"Yes, yes—but this you know, is another matter. Listen, Uncle Fabian; you have no right to torture me—for it is torture. I would rather suffer anything."

"Michael!"

"Uncle Fabian, all this time you have never mentioned that house, nor anything, nor anybody in it; and I have been grateful to you; I can't tell you how grateful. But even yet, for pity's sake—don't. I know I am a fool, but when a man loses his heart as I lost mine, and then everything falls through you know ——Upon my word, I can't bear to speak of it. Uncle Fabian—don't."

"Michael! ——"

"Yes, yes of course it must seem ridiculous to you, but ——" he turned abruptly away. "If you only knew what I have suffered. I suppose you thought I didn't care very much after all?"

"Michael; you *must* let me speak." Fabian raised himself quickly from the sofa. "You must let me speak. I did think you cared, but I did *not* think you cared so much as this. If I had I—I don't know what I should have done. Michael can you not trust me—do you think I would play with your feelings?—I have something to tell you; something good; I swear it is good.—I will say it outright; it was only because I thought you would bear it better, and because it was so hard to put into words, that I hesitated. Oh, my Michael, listen to me."

Michael's pained, troubled eyes followed a flight of birds across the horizon. He bent his head and crossed his arms upon the window, with the weary gesture of a man who has no hope in life.

Fabian Lestrève laid his hand softly upon the rough shooting jacket. "Now for my vision. I will tell it you shortly, rapidly as I can; and all that I tell is true, true, true—do you hear me? I see the old grey house, resplendent with flags, and banners, and wreaths. Packing boxes and gay dresses lie scattered about; everywhere bustle, everywhere confusion; and every thing and every person in the glow of preparation for—a wedding. Michael, I implore you, listen to me. In the middle of all this I see a girl, wandering alone to and fro in the draughty orchard. Her face is white; her brown eyes big with trouble. Michael, that girl is thinking of you."

Michael bent his head still lower on his folded arms. "Go on," he said huskily. "You remember, I suppose, what light you are representing *her* in—dreaming of me upon the eve of her marriage with Christian Fane. Go on."

The grey eyes moistened. "Yes, dreaming of you. Next I see the old church; you know it. Crimson cloth carpets the aisles; people crowd the passages; the marriage guests smile to each other in the front pews; coloured rays beam through the stained glass windows on to the old Rector, standing near the altar steps; and light up the radiant bride and bridegroom before him. The bridegroom you know—your old friend, Christian Fane; the bride you know too."

Michael lifted his head with a sigh. "So they are married, are they? Uncle Fabian, what is the use of this? of course I know—it is Constella."

"It is *not* Constella."

Just for one moment uncle and nephew might have been two figures carved from one block of marble; a dead pause of a moment; then very slowly Michael St. Martin turns his white face round.

"Uncle Fabian—for heaven's sake, tell me—what do you mean?"

All the little man's pent-up excitement burst out wildly.

"I mean this—that you have made a goose of yourself, my Michael. Yes, you have. Why did you not take your old uncle into your confidence? He wouldn't have jumped at conclusions in that manner; he wouldn't have been so stupid. I mean that it was Viola Guyne whom your friend Christian married yesterday, yes; it was. You may say 'impossible!' as often as you like—it was Viola. Ah, my Michael, I could not bear it any longer; I could not bear to see you fuming away your happiness. What could I do? Well, I thought I might at least make myself sure about things, and I wrote to the old woman they call Betsy—she was very friendly to me, you know—and I felt certain she was sharp enough to find out the real state of matters privately for me. What I thought simply was, that you had asked this little, fair-haired Constella to be your wife; and that she had refused you. I knew nothing of your mistake about Christian Fane. Very well; Betsy writes it all to me. She tells me first about the marriage of the previous day; then she tells me how you were in the drawing-room when Fane and Constella came through the standard roses; and what they said to each other outside the open window. She was in the garden, too, and heard just as well as you did—she understood; you did not. She went straight to Viola and found her radiant and blushing; and it was not until she had kissed her, and cried over her, that she remembered to send Constella to you. You were gone; and Fane stood alone on the hearthrug. Michael, where are you going?"

The young man had turned away without a word, and gone striding over the room with long rapid strides and carefully averted head. He cleared his throat at the doorway.

"We could start by the night mail, couldn't we, Uncle Fabian?"

Fabian Lestrève understood him at once. "Easily, my Michael."

"And we should arrive *there* to-morrow night, you know."

"Of course; yes. All the same, you might have let me tell you how Betsy found out Constella was thinking of you down there in the orchard. However—all in good time."

And I know what a ridiculously impossible ending it is for an English story told from real life; but then this part of it at least, took place in a foreign country—and what will you have? truth is stranger than fiction. Perhaps it was the French blood in Michael St. Martin's veins; or perhaps it was only that the soft French wind had blown his British shame away: at any rate, certain it is that, wheeling round, he went straight up to where that little, kindly-faced Fabian stood blinking his eyes in the sunshine, and putting one great arm round each side of his neck, pulled him forward, and kissed him.

* * * * *

First.—A glimpse of an old Scotch castle; a wild, stony park stretching before it; heather-smelling breezes whistling around it.

High up in one of the turret rooms a woman is upon her knees on the hard floor; before her—what? A portmanteau. A young, strikingly handsome woman fondling a strange, ungainly, travel-stained portmanteau!

Suddenly a soft laugh breaks out beside her. "Oh, Viola! what are you dreaming of? Not of Michael!"

She smiles up into the clear dark eyes that are smiling down at her.

"Of Michael's mistake; yes, Christian."

Secondly.—A glimpse of two fair heads: one of a pale, flaxen-gold colour, and the other warm, and ruddy, and bright, bending together in the sunshine—over what? A portmanteau. An ugly weather-beaten portmanteau.

A low, long-drawn sigh breaks the silence. "I know this—that I love it. Do you, Michael?"

He passed his strong, brown hand tenderly over the rough leather, laughing. "I love what it brought to me, Constella dearest."

Thirdly.—An ever changing, ever varying, whirling confusion of glimpses. Through them all, this:—

A little, dainty, kindly-eyed gentleman.

A care-worn portmanteau.

MATCHES.

A girl in the London streets,
  A match-girl, tattered and soiled,
A girl that one often meets,
  A germ of humanity spoiled:
This is the girl I see,
  When I see that box on the shelf:
Perhaps, if you'll listen to me,
  You'll think you see her yourself.

This is her picture, here:
  Brown eyes, liquid and large,
With the look of a frightened deer,
  Lest the "Bobby" should take her in charge;
A poor little frame, half fed,
  A frock with the pattern all ways,
An old shawl over her head—
  'Twas her mother's in happier days.

Happiness never was hers;
  Born to squalor and want,
Her place in this Universe
  Was to live with the grim and gaunt.
Toiled she from morn till night,
  Stood in the wind and the rain;
Sorrow was hers by right,
  And life brought infinite pain.

She had a brother—a child
  Of five years old or so;
She was sister and mother, and spoiled
  As mothers will spoil, you know.
She led him with tender hand,
  Or carried him, if he tired,
And in all the crowded Strand
  None pitied and none admired.

One night, one bitter cold night,
  They sat on a step to rest;
King Frost was there in his might,
  They, in their weakness, confessed.
She had wrapped the shawl round the child,
  Though her throat to the storm was bared.
When the "Bobby" came up she smiled—
  A smile that the angels shared!

That's the box! They're just as they were
  When they fell from her cold dead hand,
And I mean to keep them there,
  Till—but you couldn't understand.
"What good are they now?" What good!
  They'll be useful, I hope, some day:
If I could but stand where she stood,
  They'd light me the rest of the way.

J. T. Burton Wollaston.

JONATHAN SWIFT.

JONATHAN SWIFT: we speak the name, and, as it leaves our lips, what a throng of giants and dwarfs come trooping up out of our childish memories, and crowd around us. Jonathan Swift: we speak the name, and there rises up before the mind of many of us a stern figure clad in mental armour of proof, whose one task it seems to be to hurl sharp darts of satire, darts that know no stay, no pity. Jonathan Swift: we speak the name, and our fancy at once conjures up the picture of a heartless deceiver, playing with two loving women's hearts; and, finally, our souls melt into deepest compassion at the shadowy image of a lonely old man sitting sunk in dreams from which joy and hope, and even reason itself are fled.

Such are some of the varied visions called into form and shape before us at the mere mention of one of the most remarkable men in the whole rich story of English thought and English literature.

In the year 1667 there came a sudden flash of joy into a little unassuming house in the City of Dublin, a house over which a grey cloud had lately rested, for a young widow dwelt there—a widow, who but a few short years ago, had been a laughing bride, but now, on her fair head, the sable hood replaced the wedding veil. But one day, a new dawn broke on her night of sadness; she was the mother of a son.

The boy soon became a full tide of sunshine that was enough to make bright the gloomiest home; and Abigail Swift, such was that widowed mother's name, rejoiced in the renewed warmth and light around her, and knew how to make good use of it. She was one of those women who stamp the impress of themselves on their sons' hearts and minds—an impress that is never defaced. She had, no doubt, much to do with the first development of her boy's intellect; and so firm a hold did she get on his strongest affections that, though he so early left her side and her immediate influence, he never throughout the whole course of his many-coloured life would let a single year go by without a visit to his mother.

Mrs. Swift was not to enjoy long the grand, sweet privilege of watching over her son. Her husband was one of the too numerous children of a Herefordshire clergyman of small means; the young man himself had chosen the profession of an agent, and had, no doubt, hoped with time to place his wife and family in easy circumstances; but he had died early, and his widow had been left but scantily provided for. While little Jonathan was still lingering in the flower garden of childhood, his uncle, who was a lawyer in Dublin, offered to take him entirely under his care and defray the whole expenses of his education; the chance was too good to be lost by the widow for her lad; it promised to give him what she could not, and so she bravely drove back her tears, and kissed and blessed him, and, for economy, went to live alone in England.

It seems very probable that some of the outside hardness and stiffness visible in Swift's character in after life, may have, in a measure, sprung from this early thrusting out into a world of strangers; his was just the nature to expand and send forth perfume under the mild radiance of soft home moonlight. It also appears that absence from his mother's cheering, stimulating presence made him somewhat sluggish, at first, in climbing up the hill of scholastic learning; he did not do anything to distinguish himself in his schoolboy days. This same laziness, we can give it no better name with a brain such as his, followed him to college. He failed in his first examination when he entered the Dublin University, and, while there, was no shining light in the matter of classical knowledge. His moral character, however, seems to have stood high among his companions. The advantages of education thus wasted by the youth were, very soon, to be taken away from him by a sudden blow; this was the death of his uncle: after which poverty compelled him to leave the University at once.

Young Swift's prospects would now have been somewhat grey and dark, if it had not been that English friends of his mother found a kindly and powerful patron for him, and recommended him to his notice. This was no less a person than Sir William Temple, a man who stood high in royal favour, and held a lofty position, too, through the force of his own intellectual gifts. Sir William soon found out, when he was brought into close contact with him, that there was stuff of no common sort in young Swift; he sent him to finish his education at Oxford, where, feeling, no doubt, that his former idleness had been a mistake, he roused up his natural talents and took an honourable degree; then Sir William made him his own private secretary. After that his life was spent for some time among books and MSS., in Sir William's two pleasant country homes, at Moor Park, near Farnham, and at Sheen.

This was probably the calmest, brightest chapter in Swift's life, and pictures of it rise up that the eye willingly lingers upon, as it glances forward to darker scenes to come; we will pause, then, and gaze at them for a minute.

The wide, oriel windows of the lofty, oak-panelled library are open this afternoon. Two men are sitting here, two men with very different faces, but occupied in the same work, which evidently is equally congenial to both, the work of arranging sheets of MS, and consulting old books, and diving into curious authors.

The face of the elder man tells a story of ancestors that have lived in the purple of rank and wealth, of satisfied ambition, of thoughts thought out, of rest after struggle and toil. The face of the younger man is marked with characters that speak of power but half awake as yet, of storms to come, of tenderness that may sleep somewhere behind that massive brow, of sharp, satiric wit, which, though it lies dormant now in the lines about the firmly-set mouth, may one day be roused into sending forth lightning flashes that will scathe and burn. It is a face that we cannot choose but dwell upon, and yet a face that stirs within us a vague feeling of pain, a face that we must long upon, trying to get at all its secret meaning. These two men are the master of Moor Park, Sir William Temple, and his secretary, young Jonathan Swift.

The scene is much the same in the next dissolving view that passes before us. Here is the same library, and here is the young secretary busy as usual among the books which people the room from floor to ceiling, though his master is now absent in London with the King. He seems completely lost and buried in that huge quarto with the silver clasps, that he is bending over, but as a light sound draws near, the sound of small, pattering feet, he looks up with pleased interest, and loving welcome in his eyes.

A little figure is crossing the polished oak of the library floor, a figure that seems more suited to a moon-lit glade, where the fairies dance, than to that home of silent study. How the small, pale face sparkles and ripples with intelligence, what unconscious grace there is in her every movement; the tiny feet seem rather to skim than to tread; what a thing of airy beauty she is as she stands there in her simple, country dress, making her prim courtesy to Mr. Secretary. She has been taught this form by her mother, who is the humble companion of Lady Giffard, Sir William's sister, but who learns high manners from watching her mistress, and the duteous little maiden never dispenses with it.

But the secretary, on his side, does not use much ceremony; she is soon perched on his knee, repeating her Latin declensions, but listening now and then, in between, to a tale of wonderland, that none know better than he how to tell. How her eyes shine as she looks up into his face; they are, in truth, like stars, and we can well believe that in future days he will call her his Stella. It is good and sweet to gaze at these two thus, when he was still little more than a boy, and she was yet a child, before the slightest shadow from coming clouds had fallen upon them; good and sweet to gaze thus at Jonathan Swift and Esther Johnson.

Our next vision carries us away from Moor Park, and we are now in the grand old house at Sheen, where historic memories haunt and echo everywhere. What a spell of silence the autumn has cast around; we can hear the very rustle of that yellow leaf as it falls to the ground. The young secretary is walking briskly up and down yonder shadowy alley of stately trees in the park, those trees which, could they but speak, would tell such wondrous tales of Anne Boleyn, and good Queen Bess, and many a fair dame and damsel besides. To judge from his face he is thinking as quickly as he moves, perhaps he is planning the bold venture of a first book.

He is suddenly, however, roused from his meditations, whatever they may be, by a clatter of horses' feet, by a clash of arms, by a clang of loud voices. Who are these invading thus noisily this calm retreat? He peeps out between the trees to see.

He is, in truth, a right royal horse, that cream-coloured charger, who comes curvetting up the avenue. But he who rides him certainly is not clad in very royal attire; there is something careless, not to say undignified, in the fit of that tolerably well-worn velvet doublet, and yet we cannot deny that the wearer in bearing, in lightning flash of glance, in proud set of head and chin, is every inch a king. His train, who follow him, seem to have caught something of their master in carriage and dress, for they all look like gentlemen and soldiers, and yet a country squire, when he comes up to town, would be ill-disposed to be content with their garments. King William loves to visit, in this familiar fashion, his favoured subject Sir William Temple, showing scant care for state or outward appearance. The young secretary is brought into the royal presence and duly introduced by-and-by, and his martial majesty, glancing at his tall, athletic figure, whispers to Sir William, that he should be very glad to give Mr. Swift a commission in a troop of horse.

But now we must go on with our story, and pause no longer over such scenes as these.

While he lived with Sir William Temple, Swift had a long, severe attack of illness, the chief symptoms of which were giddiness and deafness. This was, no doubt, his first warning of the terrible mental disease which afterwards cast its shadow over the rest of his life. He recovered, however, after a time, and was ordained as a clergyman, having at length chosen the Church as his profession; then, by the patronage of Lord Capel, a friend he had made at Moor Park or Sheen, he was made prebend of Kilroot, near Belfast, in Ireland, and thither he went and resided for a while.

This bit of preferment was not, however, worth more than £100 a year, and Kilroot was, besides, a rather out of the world place in those days; the young clergyman found active employment enough at first in the novel task of preaching, and in a flirtation, by turns sentimental and lively, with a Miss Waring, the prettiest girl among his flock; then he got tired of the thing altogether, gave it up and returned to his secretaryship with Sir William Temple, who was glad enough to have him back again.

Swift set to work with renewed vigour among the old books and MSS. It was his former life come over again, and yet it was not his former life, for a new, wondrous brightness had flashed into the middle of the story. Esther Johnson, his old pupil and plaything, was now standing just where the girl leaps into the woman; she had left Sir William Temple's house, her mother having lately died, and was now living at Farnham with an elderly friend called Mrs. Dingley. In face and mind she was a creature made up of fire and of melody: now her radiant eyes softened with feeling; now her changeful cheek glowed with some high longing, some noble indignation; now her red lips were parted in a roguish smile, as some shaft of merry wit darted through them; she was like the fragment of a rainbow fallen down to gladden earth for a while; she was like the sparkling play of a fountain; she was like a dream come true. What could the young man do, but fall down and worship?

And the girl, standing on her pedestal in her airy queenliness, bent graciously towards her adorer. From that time forward the hearts of Jonathan Swift and Esther Johnson were given never to be taken back; but soon after this Sir William Temple died, Swift lost his situation, and the lovers were separated for a time, though no doubt they kept up a constant correspondence.

Swift had made for himself many powerful friends during the time he had been in Sir William Temple's household, and he soon got a place again as secretary to Lord Berkeley, with whom he went to Ireland, and in whose family he remained for several years.

One incident belonging to this period of his life calls up a merry smile when we picture it to ourselves.

Lady Berkeley was a woman of some cultivation, albeit of a somewhat flimsy kind, such as became a fine lady of that day. Now, it was a favourite way of killing time with her ladyship, when she did not know quite what else to do, to have the good-looking young secretary called into her boudoir, and to make him read to her. The book in hand at the time of which we are speaking was Robert Boyle's "Reflections on Commonplace Things;" it pleased her ladyship as she sat fanning herself, to fancy that she was taking in a vast amount of useful knowledge, as she listened to some serious work of this kind. One morning, however, just as her ladyship was slipping into a doze, the weather being a trifle sultry, she suddenly started up as broad awake as ever she had been on the day when she was first presented at Court; started up with a "La! Mr. Swift, what is it all about?" The tone and matter of the reading had certainly changed in a most remarkable way, the secretary was sitting, with the book upside down, improvising as fast as the words could leave his mouth, "The Meditations on a Broomstick."

At the end of some years in his service, Lord Berkeley gave Swift the living of Laracore, and he went and lived in his parish, no common thing for a clergyman of that day, and performed his ministerial duties faithfully and nobly. He rebuilt the parsonage house and the ruined church, and cared incessantly for both the souls and bodies of his people.

Having thus a fixed home of his own, it might have been expected that Swift would have made the woman he loved his wife. But a fatal barrier rose between him and his wedding-day; there was insanity in his family, and no doubt he already felt dim hints of it in himself; the truth stood out before him written in letters of fire that seared his heart: no child of his own must ever prattle on his knee.

This is doubtless the whole secret of Swift's strange conduct towards Esther Johnson. But though he might know no sweet home-joy at her side, he could not do without at least a few days from his star, his Stella, as he loved to call her in his verse; so he persuaded her and her matronly friend, Mrs. Dingley, to come and live in a small house in his parish. Thus the young lady's reputation was tenderly cared for by him, while, at the same time, he could now and then catch bright glimpses of the beloved face.

It is probable that when Miss Johnson had been some little time at Laracore, the form of marriage was gone through between her and Swift; but it was only a form; they never lived together. Stella must have been a singularly rare-natured, brave woman, with an inexhaustible fountain of sweetness springing perennially in heart and brain, to have borne as nobly and calmly as she did that long agony of love, watching Swift's gradually unhinging mind throughout the shadowy yet starry story of her married maidenhood. No doubt she suffered, no doubt she bled, but they were all secret wounds, carefully hidden beneath the breastplate of her uncomplaining woman's fortitude, while her beauty shone to light him, while her wit flashed to cheer him, while her strong good sense and trusty heart were always there to soothe and support him. There are few more simply pathetic pictures than this of Esther Johnson in the whole history of woman.

After the lapse of years Swift was made dean of St. Patrick's. This was the highest dignity to which he ever attained; his bitterness in political strife, with tongue and pen, no doubt prevented his ever being further advanced in the Church.

This was the time when he was most busy at his writing-desk, and the wondrous experiences of that strange traveller, Master Gulliver, into still stranger lands, were year by year charming the intellectual world, and dealing deadly blows at his political adversaries. "The Battle of the Books," and "The Tale of a Tub" belong also to this date. "Tale of a tub" was an old English expression for a tale of nonsense, and from thence Swift took the title.

These books, and indeed all Swift's writings, are characterised by a bitter sharpness of tone, which may, perhaps, in some degree, have arisen from the sadness of the music that rang through his whole life. With a heart torn by the pain he gave Stella, it was little wonder that he sometimes showed the world a harsh, prickly outside.

Swift often spent long periods of time in London, where he flashed into the highest intellectual society of the town like a glittering Toledo blade. He brought out a book of Miscellanies with Pope, with whom he was intimate, and at one time kept all London convulsed with laughter. By certain mock predictions he made concerning a luckless astrologer, named Partridge, under the feigned name of Isaac

Bickerstaff, Swift would keep the unfortunate Partridge in a chronic state of terror and indignation, as he now foretold his death, and now gravely described all the circumstances of it. In all this, Swift intended, no doubt, to combat playfully the stupid belief in astrology so common in that day among all classes.

In London, Swift became intimate with the other woman with whom his name has always been connected; this was Esther Van Homrigh, the daughter of a Dutch merchant. After the death of her parents, Swift took a very kindly interest in Esther and her sister Mary, an interest which Esther chose to interpret into something more. The poor girl had a rather plain face, a sickly constitution, and an ill-regulated mind; she let the Dean read pretty clearly her feelings, and he, meaning to deal tenderly with her, yet to show her, at the same time, how vain her foolish passion for him was, wrote her a half-earnest, half-playful poem, entitled "Cadenus and Vanessa;" the name Cadenus was formed by transposing the letters of his title, Decanus. Vanessa came from the Van before Homrigh.

In this poem Swift tried to laugh the girl out of her folly; but, unluckily, she was too stupid to catch his meaning; her silly little head regarded the poem as one sign more of love. Mary Van Homrigh died at Selbridge, near Dublin, where the sisters had settled, and then Swift could not help being kind to Esther in her sorrow: thus things went on, until, at length, Vanessa wrote to Stella a letter full of womanly jealousy; then Swift rode to Miss Van Homrigh's house, threw down the letter on the table before her, and never spoke to her again.

Soon after that, Esther Van Homrigh died, partly perhaps, of a broken heart, though it must be confessed that the breaking was all her own work. In her will she left directions for the publication of "Cadenus and Vanessa," and Swift's letters to her. The appearance of this book caused a fine dish of gossip and scandal to the Dublin busy-bodies, and Stella had a somewhat uncomfortable time of it. She bore it, however, with much sweet dignity, and when people said to her, "The Dean must surely have been in love with Miss Van Homrigh, since he wrote so beautifully about her," her only answer was, with a smile, "Oh! we all know that the Dean can write very beautifully—even about a broomstick."

Neither Vanessa nor anything else could bring the faintest cloud across the star of steadfast love that shone in Stella's soul to the last. When her own health was failing sadly, she cared for and watched over Swift, until, in 1728, God took her softly from his side. Then all the light of joy went out of Swift's life, his mind grew darker and darker, till there came a total eclipse of reason. Until the age of seventy-eight he lingered on in gloom; then came a burst of light and Stella.

ALICE KING.

WARD MANOR.

By Helen Prothero Lewis.

"JAMES, it is a lovely afternoon! Will you walk to the Swamp, and bring me home some bulrushes?"

"A modest request," replied James, who, with his nose flattened against the window pane, was gazing in an interested manner down the drive. "Ah!" he added, "here comes John Dwarris, with 'I'm coming to propose' written on every line of his expressive countenance. I'm off to the Swamp then, to select the finest and most edible bulrushes. Do you want them to flavour the soup, or to distribute amongst the hungry and deserving poor, Dorothy?"

"Oh stay, James, stay! I beg you to stay!" entreated Dorothy, alarmed at the approach of Mr. John Dwarris.

"Can't, possibly," returned James. "Consider the soup, consider the hungry and deserving poor!" and he disappeared with a provoking chuckle through the window, as Mr. Dwarris, in the character of an unwelcome lover, entered with more conventional grace through the door.

Dorothy stood waiting to receive him, looking very beautiful and feeling very nervous. The sunlight, streaming in a broad bar through the window, turned her hair into a golden glory, her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were like dusky stars, and Mr. Dwarris failed, so wrapt was he in admiration of her beauty, to perceive the trepidation of her manner as she greeted him. After a little very conventional conversation, Dorothy began to wonder where her aunt was, and, looking very guilty, announced her intention of going to find her; but as she rose, Mr. Dwarris also rose, and laying his hand on her arm, so as to detain her, said: "Your aunt is out; I met her at the foot of the drive. She knows of my visit—and—sanctions it."

Here it was the man's turn to get nervous. He cleared his throat, paused, opened his mouth to speak, then thought better of it and closed it again; and having failed, as most men do, to distinguish himself in the speaking line when on his legs, had recourse to the usual expedient of mankind under such circumstances and sat down again. An awkward silence ensued, which strange to say had, coupled with her visitor's obvious embarrassment, the effect of setting Dorothy completely at her ease.

"What a noodle he is," she thought; "if he finds it so unpleasant to speak, why does he? Or if he is bent on proposing, why can't he speak up like a man and go." Then happening to observe at this moment that his eyes were fixed with a crestfallen expression on the windows, she too looked out, and beheld what was to her a pleasing spectacle, but to Mr. Dwarris, a very excellent reason for not 'speaking up like a man.'

The pleasing spectacle was James, who had sauntered up to the open window in the most dégagé manner possible, and after giving his sister's visitor a nod so slight as to be scarcely a recognition, planted himself with an air of great determination on the low window-sill, with his back to the pair, stuck his hat on the back of his head, and his feet straight out in front of him, folded his arms, and gazed absently up at the sky. He had every appearance of having settled himself down for the afternoon, but evidently no intention of making himself agreeable. The situation became so unendurable that Mr. Dwarris determined to put an end to it.

"I should so like to go through your conservatories, Miss Ward," he said. "May I trespass so far on your kindness as to ask you to show them to me?"

"Oh, no trouble," said James, waking up into sudden affability; "it will be a pleasure to show them to you—I will come too," he added, pleasantly.

So the three walked off together to inspect the conservatories, and the inscrutable James became as lively as he had before been taciturn. When they reached the houses, he hooked his arm affectionately through Mr. Dwarris's, thus obliging the relieved but puzzled Dorothy to walk behind, and, addressing his conversation, which was of a strictly botanical character, exclusively to him, walked him round and round, stopping continually to point out a lovely flower, or descant upon the rarity of a particular plant.

Mr. Dwarris scarcely knew whether to be pleased at such unwonted attention, or angry at the persistent way James stuck to him, but he resigned himself to the inevitable, and did the houses thoroughly. He heaved a sigh of relief as they emerged from the last into the fresh air, and turned to speak to Dorothy, but James interrupted him.

"Oh, do come to the lower garden," he said; "our cabbages are quite a sight; I am sure they will interest you. They are the finest cabbages in South Wales!"

"Thank you," said Mr. Dwarris, whose patience was exhausted, "but I am never interested in cabbages. Miss Ward, will you do me a great favour? Will you come back with me to the house, and sing me that lovely thing from Faust I saw open on your piano when I left the drawing-room?"

"Yes, do, Dorothy," said James. "I should like to hear the song myself, and you can give us some tea afterwards. I am sure you like tea, don't you, Mr. Dwarris?"

"Thank you, I seldom touch tea," replied that now exasperated individual; "and I am sure I am detaining you from your afternoon ride or some other engagement. I beg you will not stay indoors on my account. If Miss Ward does not mind entertaining me, I shall be more than happy in her society."

"Thank you, I seldom ride," replied James, "and I have no engagement for this afternoon, so my time is quite at my own disposal," and he turned and walked by the side of his secretly furious guest back to the house.

Arrived at the drawing room, he politely placed a chair at a little distance from the piano for Mr. Dwarris, and drawing out the music stool, stood with unprecedented gallantry by his sister's side ready to turn over the leaves. Dorothy began to laugh—she could not help it—and at this juncture the door opened and Mrs. Hardman, the young Wards' aunt and only natural protector, entered the room with their young brother, Robin, a lovely boy of eleven. She was a proud, hard-looking woman of forty, with the remains of great beauty. At a glance she took in the scene, and looked angrily at James, who instantly decamped, followed by Robin. Mrs. Hardman stayed a few moments talking, and then also left the room, and Dorothy knew her hour had come. Mr. Dwarris came up to her at once, took her hand, and said in an agitated manner:

"Dorothy, I must speak now and at once. I love you as no man ever loved before; will you marry me?"

Dorothy looked at him. He was not handsome, and he was no longer young. He looked hot and red, and his face worked painfully.

"No" she said, "I cannot marry you." He turned quite white, and gave a short gasp.

"Oh don't say that," he cried, "don't say that! Think of what it means to me. I tell you that life to me will be intolerable without you. There will be nothing to look forward to in all the long years to come, nothing; and, Dorothy, I love you so, surely my love will count for something."

"But I cannot return it," said Dorothy, "I am truly sorry for you, but I could never marry you—no, not if you were the only man in the world!" she added, determined with cruel kindness to make him understand her now and for ever, and scarcely realising how her words stabbed him.

"Then I go from you the most miserable man on earth," he said, and without another word he took up his hat and left her. Mrs. Hardman was in the hall; he would have passed her but she detained him.

"Well?" she said in a low voice.

"She has refused me," he replied still lower, and then he turned sharply away from her, and walked out of the house.

Mrs. Hardman went into the drawing-room; Dorothy had slipped out by a side door, and the room was empty. She seated herself in an armchair by the window and there sat in the gloaming, gazing drearily out at the trees and the dying sun, thinking of a present which in spite of the three young faces around her was lonely, and of a past into which "the light that never was on sea or land," had never entered.

Dinner that night was a dismal meal, for the three young people knew a storm was impending. James and Robin decamped immediately after; they never could be brought to spend their evenings "in the drawing-room like gentlemen," as Mrs. Hardman would bitterly say; and small wonder, for she chilled them until gaiety of heart seemed impossible, and they would as soon have thought of romping in a charnel house, as in their aunt's presence.

Dorothy tried to follow them, but her aunt forbade her.

"Stay," she said; "I wish to speak to you. What passed between you and John Dwarris this afternoon."

"He asked me to marry him," replied Dorothy sinking into a chair, and looking the picture of unhappy guilt, "and I refused him."

"You refused him," repeated her aunt in a voice which shook with anger. "Do you know that you have acted like a fool? Do you know that you are dependent on me, and bound to do what you can for yourself? Do you know that you are wilfully putting away from yourself what many would give anything to have offered them—the love of a good, honourable man, able to offer you a happy home?—And why? for what reason? Because the shape of his eye or the turn of his lip displeases you, or his manner fails to captivate your fancy. There is no one else in the field that I am aware of; you have no other lover ——"

"No," interrupted Dorothy in a low voice, "but I may have, some day."

"And so in the hope of future conquests you trample on a heart that beats for you alone," observed Mrs. Hardman in an icy tone.

"Aunt Barbara," exclaimed Dorothy, galled beyond endurance by the stinging words "how dare you say all this to me? Do you know what *you* are doing? You are trying to force me to marry a man I do not love, and if I do that what is my life worth to me? My mother would not have spoken like this to me, and you promised her when she died, and I was a little girl, that you would be as a mother to me. How would you have liked, when you were young, to marry a man you did not care for?"

Something in this speech moved Mrs. Hardman. She covered her face with her hands, and said in a husky voice:

"Go, Dorothy; I will say no more to you." And Dorothy sobbing with unhappy anger went out into the moonlight and joined her brothers.

"Hallo," said James throwing away his cigarette, when he perceived her tear-stained face, "what's up? Cut away, Robin; see if your rabbits are asleep. What did you say to that fellow, Dolly? I did my best to save you, but fate and Aunt Barbara were too strong for me."

"I refused him," said Dorothy, "and Aunt Barbara is furious."

"Never mind the old cat," said James, irreverently, "she let herself be persuaded into marrying money, and I'll be bound had repented it often. Don't let her persuade you into marrying that confounded old prig. Promise me."

"I promise, James. I will marry no one I do not love."

The next day was very dull and cheerless. Dorothy knew by the frigid tone, the contemptuous glance, the curt replies, that her aunt did not for a moment forget the scene of the night before. When she came upon James, who had been absent all the morning, in the hall at luncheon time she could not resist giving his arm a fierce squeeze, expressive of her joy at seeing him again. Great was her delight when at luncheon Mrs. Hardman announced that this would be their dinner as she had an invitation for that evening. "An invitation in which you are not included," she added, looking coldly at Dorothy. "You two elder ones," she went on, "will I trust look after Robin during my absence, and be in to high tea which I will order for you at seven."

"We will, aunt, without fail," replied James, and observing Dorothy's brightening countenance, placed his arm beyond squeezing distance. As soon as her aunt had gone Dorothy joined her brothers in the hall.

"Now, James," said Dorothy, "I really want some bulrushes to put in my oriental jars, will you come with me to the Swamp? We have another hour before tea."

"Can't," said James; "I have formed other engagements for this evening which will take me in a different direction. Besides, it is too late to go there now; the Swamp is nearly two miles away, and you seem to forget that we are in the month of August, and that the early closing movement is going on; it would be dark before you got there. Why did you not go earlier in the afternoon?"

"Aunt said she might want me, and told me not to go far. I wish, James, you would give up this engagement; it may be long before we have another evening happily to ourselves."

"Give up my engagement!" exclaimed James, staggering with amazement. "No," he said, assuming his aunt's manner, "I have an invitation for this evening—an invitation in which you are not included"—here he gave Dorothy a chilling glance. "You will, I trust, take care of Robin during my absence, and expect me home to high supper at eleven."

Dorothy gazed after him disappointedly, as he stalked up the stairs holding an imaginary train in one hand.

"Never mind, Dolly," said Robin; "I will come with you if you will make haste, and after tea we'll have a jolly evening together."

"Dear little Robin," said Dorothy, "you are much nicer than James. Put your thickest boots on, for the grass is sure to be very wet after last night's rain, and in two minutes I will be with you."

In less than five they were on their way, a handsome, laughing pair, and many a passer by stood to look after them as they hurried along the high-road, bonnie, blithe, and gay. Presently they reached the Park gates, and beyond them their path lay for over a mile through meadows, in which the black cattle of Wales were grazing, bordered on the left by the broad, deep, and winding river, and on the right by a stretch of steep and densely wooded hill, which was crowned at its highest point by the towers of the ivied ruin, known in the neighbourhood as the "Old Castle." The Swamp seemed a good way off; it was further than Dorothy thought; and she began to be unpleasantly conscious that her feet were soaking wet, and that the skirt of the white dress she wore was muddy from contact with the long and dripping grass of the meadows.

"Here," said Robin, "I'll make you a dress holder and then you will be more comfortable." Taking a long piece of twine from his pocket he seized hold of Dorothy's skirt behind, and twisting it round as if he were making a rope, he doubled it up, wound the twine securely round the whole, and making a loop at the end of the twine passed it several times over the button at the back of her jacket.

"Well, really, Robin," said Dorothy, laughing, "I am afraid you have damaged my dress more by your original arrangement than the wet grass would have done; and it must look very funny done up into such a lump behind."

"It looks awfully nice," protested Robin, "and it can never come down; the twine is twisted round the dress seventeen times, and fourteen times round the button. Don't stand there trying to squint at it: look, it is getting dusk already."

Ten minutes more brought them to the Swamp. A more dreary spot they could not have chosen for their walk. The ground lay low, and the river, which here swept inwards, was almost level with its banks. After heavy rains it constantly overflowed, its waters spreading to the low railing which bordered the foot of the wooded hill, and giving fresh life to the stagnant pool, which dark, gloomy, deep in parts, and overhung with trees lay right under the Old Castle. It was in this pool the bulrushes grew, but Dorothy and Robin found it difficult to get to it, the ground was so wet and marshy. Their feet sank in at every step, and in many places they found it impossible to get on, and had to retrace their steps and bear more to the left, and nearer to the river, where the ground was higher and drier.

Dorothy felt tired when they reached the pool, but her spirits revived when she saw the much coveted bulrushes. There they were, the beautiful things! standing tall and stately before her in the muddy water; some singly, others in groups; whilst to the right they stretched away from her in hundreds, in thousands, a mass of long green leaves, and lovely dark brown heads. A large, dark, grey bird with immensely long legs flew up suddenly from the margin of the pool, and with a long, melancholy croak, sailed away across the trees out of sight. "The night heron," observed Robin; "I wish James was here with his gun."

"How can we gather the rushes?" said Dorothy. "There are none within a yard of the water's edge."

"I know how," said Robin, sitting down on the bank; "the water here is quite shallow; I will take off my shoes and stockings and wade in for them."

"Oh, but are you sure it is safe?" objected Dorothy.

"Safe? of course it is safe; the water will not come above my knees. But I must say it is very filthy water," he added with a gesture of disgust, taking off his coat, turning up his shirt sleeves, and rolling his trousers up above his knees. In another moment he was splashing in the water and had seized a bulrush and tried to break it; the tough stalk yielded but would not break, though he tugged hard at it. "Have you a knife, Dolly?" he called out.

"No," she said, "I haven't. You had better uproot it, and throw it to me on the bank; I can break it by putting my foot upon it."

So he uprooted the bulrushes, and threw them to Dorothy, who managed by using hands and feet to tear off a few. All this took time, and both were so excited and busy, they scarcely noticed that the sun had set, and that the clouds gathering across the sky were fast turning day into night. Suddenly Dorothy became aware that Robin had gone a good distance off, and that the darkness was increasing rapidly.

"Robin," she called out, "we must go, dear; I have as many bulrushes as we can carry, and it must be past seven."

"One moment more," he shouted back to her across the water; "there are three on one stalk only two yards away, I must get you those."

"No," shrieked Dorothy getting really frightened, "I forbid you to go a step further! Come back, Robin, come back at once, it is very deep there."

Robin reluctantly turned, and Dorothy watched him slowly splashing back through the water, and winding his way to her through the groups of rushes, his naked legs and arms gleaming like marble in the twilight.

"Oh, dear," she exclaimed when he reached the bank, "I was really frightened; it all looked so dark and gloomy, and you were almost hidden from me by the reeds, and I knew the pond was deep there. Fancy, Robin, if you had been drowned before my eyes," she went on, trembling at the very thought.

"Little silly," said, Robin grandly. "Look here, lend me your handkerchief; my arms are covered with wet mud, and my legs—oh, I say! I can never put my shoes and stockings on until they are cleaner, wait here one moment while I run to the river side and wash them, the water in that pool is too filthy for anything."

"Don't be long then, Robin, it is getting so late, and we have a long way to walk home."

"I won't keep you a minute," said Robin, and ran gaily on. Dorothy, who was a little afraid of the cattle scattered about the meadows, followed quickly behind. When Robin reached the bank, which at that spot was so low as to be scarcely higher than the river, he knelt down, and leaning on one arm plunged the other into the deep water, at the same time calling out something laughingly to Dorothy, but what, she could not hear. Through the fast deepening gloom she could only distinguish his dark figure on the bank, with white shirt sleeves standing out in relief against the trees which fringed the farther side of the stream, and in a moment this had gone; the white shirt sleeves flashed downwards, the figure disappeared, there was a loud splash, and a pitiful, agonised cry for help rang through the night. In a second Dorothy was on the spot, her heart beating until its pulsations seemed to rock the ground at her feet.

"Robin," she called, "where are you? Oh, Robin, darling Robin, answer me!" But nothing could she see, nothing hear; only the water rushing by in blackness and darkness. Stay! lower down, there was something; something white; something that cried to her in frantic, despairing tones for help; something that in another moment had disappeared. "Help," he had cried, but who could help him, what human power could save? "Oh, God," gasped Dorothy, "save my brother; bring him to me from out of the dark water!" And she waited for another moment in maddening suspense, but nothing could she see, nothing hear, save the water rushing by in blackness and darkness. Hopeless, well nigh senseless, she fell to the ground.

The night wore on and grew colder, but still Dorothy lay there, too faint to move, and overpowered by a grief that verged on madness. Oh! the long, swooning agony of those moments! Would life be long enough to enable her ever to forget them? would the day ever dawn again? would the water ever rush by in anything but blackness and darkness at her feet? She opened her eyes and looked upwards. Only last night she had been walking and talking with James in the heavenly moonlight, and Robin had run out to call them—and now—the moon had hid her face, not a star could be seen, only black, melancholy, drifting clouds, that broke here and there to reveal spaces of dark grey sky. Something dark appeared overhead, and with a wavy motion passed quickly by. By the fluttering and the flapping of wings, and the harsh disagreeable croak, Dorothy guessed it was the heron Robin had disturbed, returning to its lonely haunt in the reedy swamp.

Soon a fresh element of terror was added to the scene. The cattle, as though possessed by some demon that urged them on, began to gallop madly round and round the meadow, tearing up the ground with their hoofs, and shaking the ground on which Dorothy lay, like a distant earthquake. There was something appalling to Dorothy in the sound of their hoofs as they thundered by. Would they ever stop; would they, not seeing her, trample on her face and crush it, so that those finding her in the morning would not know her? As this last thought presented itself to her mind, a large black bull tore by so close as almost to touch her. The short hair on her forehead was lifted by "the wind of his going," the wet earth on his hoofs splashed into her eyes. It was more than human nature could bear; Dorothy's brain began to give way; with a desperate effort she raised herself and gave a loud, long, terrible scream, and then her senses left her, and the blessed waters of Lethe rolled over her head.

When next Dorothy opened her eyes, she was lying back in a cart, and being jolted along a high road. It was still night, but a pale, watery moon gave a little light from behind the breaking clouds. She tried to remember how she got there, but could not, and the effort to think made her feel faint, so she gave it up and lay back in silent, dreamy exhaustion. She was conscious that they stopped at a gate, and then they began to toil up a steep hill between two tall rows of trees that seemed strangely familiar. By-and-bye they stopped at another gate, and turned a corner. A dog barked, lights flashed from the windows of a house, and a man left the horse's head, mounted some steps, and rang a bell. The door was flung open, a tall figure stood for a moment in the door-way, clearly defined against the dazzling light which streamed from the hall. The man said something, and then the tall figure ran quickly down the steps, and in another moment Dorothy felt two strong arms around her, and knew she was being carried into the house. Whose arms were they? and what a sense of rest they gave her! would she could lie in them for ever! A face was bending over her; she knew the face—it was James's! No, James's face never looked like that! Yes, it was he, it was his dear face, only looking very white and pitiful; and, with this recognition, like a thunderbolt came the memory of the dreadful truth. "Oh, James! James!" she moaned, and then she tried to tell him, but could not; the right words would not come, and she knew that she was raving. Still she went on, trying to tell him, trying to bring her poor wandering mind into order so that she might make him understand. They undressed her, and put her to bed, but terror and exposure had nearly killed her, and for days she lay in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, either in a state of stupor or raving wildly by the hour together.

Of the agony of the aunt and brother on that first dreadful night, when, after hours of anxious expectancy, Dorothy was brought back to them more dead than alive, and without Robin, who can speak? The gamekeeper who brought Dorothy home, told them how, on returning from his midnight rounds in search of poachers, he had stumbled upon Robin's coat, and shoes and stockings, near the Swamp, and on hearing an agonised scream from near the river, had gone to the spot from which it proceeded, and found the swooning girl with some bulrushes in her hand. Beyond this, nothing could be learnt, and until morning came, nothing done. Robin was drowned. The darling of their eyes, the sunshine of their home, was gone from them for ever! The morning dawned, and found them crushed and hopeless.

James spent hours by Dorothy's side, listening to her ravings, and trying to soothe her. Sometimes she would entreat Robin to come back, and call aloud to him that it was deep and dangerous, and that it was getting dark; sometimes she would pass her hand over her face, and tell them with a shudder, that the bull had crushed it so, they would never recognise her when they found her in the morning; and sometimes she would pray that Robin might be brought to her out of the dark water. James's distress became at last uncontrollable; unable any longer to bear it, the poor fellow rose and left the room, his frame shaken with convulsive sobs.

The old butler met him in the passage, looking very excited. "Mr. James, dear," he said, "come down with me, come down with me." And he led the sobbing boy downstairs, pushed him into the library, and shut the door upon him.

When, some time after, James returned to Dorothy's room, he had become quite calm. For several days he watched patiently by her side, only leaving her when absolutely obliged to do so. She did not recognise him, but his presence seemed to calm her a little. On the sixth day, after a very restless and excited night, she fell into a long and deep sleep. It was a crisis, a time full of anxiety for the heavy-hearted watchers by her side, but she passed through it safely, and when she awoke the danger was over, and James felt as her eyes opened upon him, and she softly and with a half smile pronounced his name, that his dearly loved sister had come back to him.

But, alas! in a moment the smile faded, the white face changed and looked inexpressibly sorrowful; a faint sob escaped the pale lips. She remembered, ah! she remembered! James whispered eagerly to the doctor who was present, and, on receiving an assenting nod, left the room. Dorothy was passing through a moment of keen anguish; she felt as if nothing in life could ever comfort her. She could not bear it. She turned towards the door, and found James bending over her. "What shall I do? How shall I bear it? Who will help me?" she said. "I prayed that God would bring back Robin out of the dark water, and He did not hear me!"

"Yes," answered James, very gently, "He heard your prayer, and has answered it."

So saying he moved aside, and Dorothy, looking beyond through the open door saw —— Robin.

Could it be Robin? But no, Robin's body lay at the bottom of a deep and silent pool. This was a dream, a happy vision sent to comfort her; the image of her lost Robin, who stood there with a smile on his face, and the glory of the morning sun about him. And yet surely it was her Robin, lost, but found again; for could visions speak and call her by her name? Could she feel the touch of living lips in dreamland, and return the gaze of happy eyes there? No! this was no dream, but joyful reality.

The shock was too much for Dorothy, and she fainted. But joy does not kill, and before many days Dorothy, though very weak, was sufficiently recovered to be brought downstairs again, and to thoroughly enjoy the love and petting her brothers lavished upon her.

It was some time, though, before she could listen calmly to the account of Robin's rescue. Robin himself, as soon as he had made sure his sister was on the road to recovery, forgot, childlike, his own terror and hers, and was never tired of relating the history of that eventful night. James overheard him one day holding forth on the subject to a circle of admiring young friends.

"Of course," the hero of the hour explained, "I felt a trifle surprised when I fell in, and I called to Dorothy to help me, forgetting at the moment that girls were of no more use in the water than cats. I tried to practise my swimming, but the current carried me down right under the trees. I felt a branch smack my head, put up my hand and got hold of another, and then I screamed, and a good job I did, though, for it brought Jerry to the bank. He twigged my white shirt sleeves at once, and was in after me like a shot, but before he could reach me the branch broke, and down I went. I was nearly drowned this time, but I don't remember much more. When I came to, I was baking in a blanket before a roaring fire in Jerry's house, and he was looking uncommonly proud because he had saved me. The nice part was coming home, though. I made Simmonds fetch James down to the library, and pounced upon him from behind the door. It was a pleasant surprise for him. They would not let me do it to Dorothy, she was so ill; it was a great pity, it went off so well with James. He looked like that idiot down at the mill for a minute." And Robin laughed anew at the recollection.

After a storm comes a calm. Life after these stirring events became very quiet and monotonous at Ward Manor. James went back to Oxford, and Robin, who had become very unruly, a result partly due to the extra petting he received from everybody, was torn from his indulgent and long-suffering tutor, and sent to school.

This was a dreary time for Dorothy. Neither her health nor her spirits had quite regained their former tone, and the days dragged wearily by. She and her aunt had nothing in common; they lived side by side, yet almost like strangers.

A change was coming, though, which the girl little expected. Mrs. Hardman one night became alarmingly ill. Her suffering seemed intense, and the doctor, who was sent for at once, looked very grave. Dorothy strove by the most devoted care and attention to atone for any lack of love and confidence of which she might have been guilty in the past; but no care, no love could help her aunt now, or retard the hastening footsteps of death.

Early one morning, as day was dawning behind the hills, Dorothy stood by her aunt's bedside and saw her pass away.

Little as they had been to one another, Dorothy grieved deeply; cold looks, bitter words were all forgotten now, and only sorrow and regret reigned in her heart. Sorrow for the cold and unattractive woman who had been a beautiful woman once, and loved, long years ago; regret for the long years she had passed in the presence of a melancholy life which she had never striven to cheer. James was telegraphed for and came that evening. He, too, evidently felt his aunt's death, but he said little, and as the arrangement of everything devolved upon him, Dorothy saw but little of him until the day after the funeral, when they found themselves alone in the dining-room. Dorothy was gazing wearily out of the window. It looked very bright and lovely out-of-doors; spring had come, and the buds were bursting on the branches, whilst to the right, beneath a group of fir trees, the ground was white with beautiful clustering snowdrops. James broke the silence.

"Dorothy, Aunt Barbara has made me her heir, so Ward Manor is now ours. It is her wish that Robin, to whom she has left a large sum of money, should go into the army." He stopped a moment, and then added: "She has left you to my care."

Dorothy said nothing at first, but leaned back in her chair, an watched her brother examining some papers. James had altered greatly during the last few months, and Dorothy awoke suddenly to the fact that he was no longer a boy.

"How old are you, James?" she asked.

"Twenty-two," said James, "just two years older than you."

Again there was a little silence broken by a sob from Dorothy. James got up quietly, and came to her.

"James," she sobbed, leaning her head against him, "you will marry, and I shall not be wanted in your home."

"I, marry!" exclaimed James; "what a horrible idea; I should like to see the woman! No, my dear, you need not be afraid of that. You and I are going to live very happily together, and we will have Robin at home with us during his holidays. Your business now is to cheer up, and make the house bright for us." As he said these words he passed his arm round his sister's waist, and kissed her; and she, as she returned his kiss, smiled, and looked more like the old Dorothy than she had looked since her illness.

As soon as James had satisfactorily settled home affairs, he went back to Oxford, to take his degree, leaving Dorothy, who declined any companion, to await his return. It was certainly dull for her to be in that large house alone, but the new, delicious sense of freedom, and the duties which now devolved upon her as mistress of a large household, almost compensated for the dulness. She busied herself in putting the house in order, and what with gardening, singing, and receiving the numerous callers, the time passed rapidly by. One evening a telegram was brought to her. She opened it with a beating heart, but the first glance dissipated her fears. It was from James.

"Degree all right. Expect me to-night. Get two rooms, and a stunning dinner for three ready by eight o'clock."

"How delightful," thought Dorothy, and hastened to order "a stunning dinner," rather startling the old housekeeper by the extravagance of her demands.

"How many are coming?" she asked in an astonished tone.

"Only one person, a friend of James's, I fancy."

"In that case, my dear, will not fish, stewed kidneys, rissoles, the chickens, and two sweets be enough?"

"No, Mrs. Fletcher; I particularly wish to have everything as I have ordered it. Dinner at eight, remember;" and Dorothy ran away in the midst of another remonstrance.

The long day drew to a close at last. By seven Dorothy was ready dressed, and hovering about restlessly, now giving a finishing touch to the flowers in the rooms, and now gazing down the drive. At the first sound of wheels she flew to the hall door, and stood there waving her handkerchief to a head—James's, of course—which was protruded from the carriage window.

As the head came nearer, she perceived it was *not* James's. That curly black hair never graced his head, and James certainly never stared at her as this stranger stared. As the carriage stopped, the curly head was drawn back, and a deep voice said something to which James's voice replied:

"My sister; I forgot to tell you I had a sister."

Both gentlemen then got out, and James, after hugging his sister violently, introduced the stranger as Mr. Basil Freeland, with the remark that he was a very good fellow, and had got him out of no end of scrapes. Mr. Freeland began a polite speech, but James cut him ruthlessly short in the middle, and carried him off, remarking that dinner would spoil, but compliments would keep.

The dinner was a great success. James was much pleased with the nature and variety of the courses, and he and his friend did ample justice to them all. Dorothy felt very happy, and looked exquisitely lovely. Her black dress threw out her white neck and arms into strong relief, and her face, with its aureole of golden hair, wore a slightly excited and half shy expression, brought there by a consciousness of her guest's frequent looks of admiration. James rattled on in his usual light and airy style, and the trio were so festive that the old butler looked scandalised, and commented on it before Mrs. Fletcher as being rather unbecoming in a house so recently plunged in mourning.

"It will do the dear hearts good," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"Why did you never tell me you had such a lovely sister?" asked Basil in the smoking-room that night.

"Well," said James, "I thought if I let it out, the whole blooming lot at college would want to come down and make love to her, and I did not want her to be worried by them."

"You did me great honour then by inviting me," said Basil, in a tone which implied some doubt on the subject.

"Oh, you are all right, old fellow! To begin with, you are not susceptible, and to end with, you are not Dorothy's style; she likes a gay, rollicking chap like me, with no nonsense about him, and plenty of good looks."

Basil laughed, but made no further remark.

The next morning James took Dorothy aside, and begged her to do the civil to his friend as much as possible.

"I have so much to see to," he said, "that I shall have to leave him a good deal, and I don't want him to be dull. He is a very good fellow; the best fellow I know."

"I will do my best," said Dorothy, colouring a little. "But perhaps he will not care for so much of a girl's society."

"Of course, he will naturally prefer being with me," said James, loftily; "but when he can't get me, he must put up with you."

After this Basil and Dorothy were constantly together, and she, carefully bearing in mind that it was James's wish, treated him with the utmost sweetness, and made a most fascinating and attentive hostess. James, after the first few days, perceiving his friend was not dull, left them greatly to themselves, and was hardly ever to be seen, except at meal times, until the evening; and if ever they came accidentally upon him, in five minutes he was off somewhere else, looking very busy. After dinner the three would go to the drawing-room; Basil and James would light their cigars, whilst Dorothy sang to them in her fresh, beautiful young voice, to which an undertone of sadness only gave an additional charm. Or they strolled about the shrubberies together, and talked, as only young people who have life before them, and not a shadow between them, can talk.

It would be difficult to say which of the three was the happiest in the society of the other two. Basil's college friends would have scarcely recognised in Dorothy's devoted cavalier the man usually so cynical and indifferent in the presence of women. One shade of coquetry, one touch of caprice, one sign of selfishness or giddiness on Dorothy's part, and it is possible he might have wavered and gone back from his allegiance; but Dorothy was always natural, earnest, sweet, and true; always in the highest sense of the word a gentlewoman, and the most fastidious taste could not fail to be satisfied.

The days slipped rapidly by, and Basil had been nearly a fortnight at Ward Manor.

One afternoon he and Dorothy were sitting out in an arbour at the end of what James always called "My Lady's Garden," because Dorothy spent so much of her time there, and tended and cared for the flowers herself. It was a sweet, old-fashioned spot, bordered on three sides by a low, ivied wall, and bounded on the fourth side by a silvery trout stream, edged with forget-me-nots and bending ferns, and spanned by a rustic bridge which led into the orchard beyond. Summer was drawing nigh, and the day was warm and bright. The beds were gay with flowers, the air was fragrant with scent, the blackbirds and thrushes sang in the bushes, and in the midst of the garden a fountain was dreamily playing in the sunshine. In a corner was the arbour "all shaded with trees," in which Dorothy and Basil were sitting. They had been there some time, now talking, now listening idly to the song of the birds and the plash of the fountain. Presently Basil began to read aloud that sweetest and saddest of all poems, "Evangeline." Dorothy had never read it before, and its exquisite pathos moved her deeply. Quite carried away by her feelings, which had already been stirred by the beauty of the hour, and something else she did not yet understand, she leaned forward towards Basil, and gazed, absorbed and self-forgetful, into his face. Suddenly he paused and looked full at her, a long, eloquent look, which revealed to the startled girl depths of love that, until now, she had never realised.

"My darling!" he whispered, and leaned still nearer to her.

Caught unawares, and realising for the first time that the man by her side was her lover, the blood surged tumultuously into Dorothy's cheek, her tongue seemed tied, and she had not even the presence of mind to turn aside her eyes, but gazed at him spell-bound.

A shadow fell across the path, and James's voice, in rather a peculiar tone, said: "What a lovely afternoon." Dorothy started as if she had been shot, and then, overcome by mingled feelings of shame, joy, and surprise, she burst into tears. Basil put his arm gently round her, and she hid her tears and her blushes on his shoulder.

"Oh, James," she sobbed, "I can't help it."

"James," said Basil, in a trembling tone, "will you give me your sister? I know I am asking a great deal, but ——"

"Don't apologise," said James, "I always intended it." And to his dying day James will always maintain that he made that match. "You see," he said afterwards to Basil, "I knew Dorothy was very fond of me, but I also knew a woman was never really happy unless she married, so I determined Dorothy should marry, and should marry you. As for myself, hang it all, if you and Dorothy will not come and live with me, I shall have to marry too." And eventually he did marry a sister of Basil's, with whom he leads a happy and most festive life.

Robin was at first very averse to his sister's marriage, and wrote her a most indignant letter on the subject; but his summer holidays, which were spent with the young married couple, were made so exceedingly pleasant to him, that he became reconciled to the idea, and allowed to Dorothy that her husband "was not half bad:" which was the highest praise he ever accorded to anybody.

MY FRIEND.

A SEQUEL TO "CLEON."

AMONGST the many words which many men have used to figure forth their thoughts, the one word *friend* seems, more than any other, to have held fast its original meaning. To some, the word may bring a crowd of well-known faces; to me it brings but one, and that one I have seen but twice in all the years since we both left boyhood behind us at St. Russell's, and went our separate ways, to fight the battle of life, to conquer or to lose.

It will sound incredible to those who read—and I feel the strangeness of it all as I write—that the friendship formed between myself and Cleon Stanley that first night at St. Russell's has been, all through, the strongest influence in our lives. To me it has been all that other men can have in wife and children, home or country—and I know that he would say the same.

During my college life, and for some time afterwards, I heard at irregular intervals from him, and his letters bore the post marks of every quarter of the globe. He led the life of a true nomad. A very Ishmael I often thought, as far as social intercourse went. I could hear from others, of noble acts of daring and of self-denial, which, to me who knew him so well, were but the natural outcome of a yet nobler nature; but to others—even to those he had benefited—there was ever a proud reserve which chilled their gratitude and froze the words of thanks upon their lips.

To me he never altered; there was ever the same free interchange of confidence, of varied thought on men and things; the unfettered communion of mind with mind. The quick understanding and subtle sympathy between us rendered correspondence easy; a thought but half-expressed was sure of instant recognition; words bore double, treble meanings; we read between the lines as people say.

There was but one subject about which we differed, and that was his return to England. To all my persuasions his only answer was, "Sometime," with the promise that if ever it were really necessary, if, in the changes and chances of future years, misfortune should in any way befall me—*then* he would return, even though he had to cross the globe in coming.

After awhile I heard that he had been studying for a doctor and had, of course, gained his degree; and when I asked the reason of this sudden whim, he said it might be useful to him in his wanderings, it was cheaper and more convenient to carry his own medical man about with him. And far more convenient it afterwards proved, not for himself, but for the many specimens of suffering humanity he happened to meet with.

It was nearly two years after this, that the letters, which habit had seemed to make a necessity of my life, suddenly ceased, and for twelve months I had no sign from Cleon. All was silent as the grave, and yet I knew there was no mention of grave in the matter. I felt that if he were dead, some inner consciousness of loss would have told me. This was no mere sentimental visioning—the bond between us, which was forged neither of time nor circumstance, but surely bore the mark of a Maker far above them both, could not be snapped without a spiritual rebound: some sensible reaction of the soul.

One November evening, towards the end of the twelve months, I was making my way slowly and laboriously through a dense London fog to the hotel where I was staying. I had nearly come to the end of my walk, and was standing a moment under a gas lamp to re-light my cigar when I heard my name spoken. I finished what I was doing, and then turned in the direction of the sound.

Close by, looming out of the fog, stood a tall massively-built man with a hideous face. So much I took in at a glance and that perhaps gave the half hesitation to my manner when the stranger abruptly asked to be allowed to walk on with me to my hotel, where he would explain his business.

"But, my man," I replied, "this is rather an off-hand style of thing; who are you, and where do you come from?"

"My name is John Blake, sir. I have just arrived from California and have brought news of a friend of yours, with some letters; but I thought we had better get out of the street before I gave them to you."

"Are you speaking of Cleon Stanley?"

As I mentioned the name the man raised his hat in instinctive acknowledgment of some feeling of his own, and the next moment we were shaking hands as he answered, "Yes sir."

In a short time we were at the hotel, and in my room. I told him to sit down, then I turned the gas up to notice more particularly the strange messenger and receive his news. The man remained standing whilst he took from his pocket a small packet and a note.

"Will you read the note first, sir?" he asked as he handed me both. And I opened it and read:

"Dear Fred,—My carrier-pigeon has rather the look of a raven, but I can vouch for his not stealing, neither will he tell lies. He has had a hard life of it, everything around him to drag him downwards and one or two family heirlooms in his composition to act as extra weights. You will understand the kind of man. He made me promise to give you his true character that you might know what sort of a hand you were taking, or please yourself about taking it at all. The fact is, when first I met him, the poor fellow did not know his own character. He judged himself entirely by his acts and never stopped to think where the loathing and shame and hatred of himself came from. I found he could not tell an untruth, and had nerve enough to own to a fault when he saw it, and on that common standing ground I met him, and perhaps did him good.

"Now I have introduced him; the rest I leave with you. In the small parcel you will find a sort of diary which I kept for your pleasure and mine, when I have indulged myself with an hour's chat with you at odd times.

"CLEON STANLEY."

I turned and again held out my hand to John Blake, who had remained standing; but he drew back a step and fixing his steady gaze on mine, said:

"Has Dr. Stanley told you all, sir?"

"I don't know," I replied.

"Has he said," continued my strange visitor, "that at first I hated him and tried to take his life, but failed because my strength was not a match for his? That, when I was bruised and broken, with the blows he had to give in self-defence, then, against my will he carried me to his own quarters and doctored me? and, that when the fever, which it turned out had been lurking in me for some time, broke out, he nursed me through it all for many a week?"

"No," I answered. "He tells me nothing of all this."

"I knew nothing of it at first," continued John Blake; "for I was light-headed. When I did come to and found whose hands had been about me, and in such a way that I had dreamt of my mother—why, I had to fight it out. You see, sir, I had lived for a long time amongst men whose hands were black, but whose thoughts were blacker; and though I never scrupled to lead them, yet I hated it all, and myself more, because perhaps, as Dr. Stanley said, I felt the chance of something better in me."

"Not an uncommon case," I put in.

"Then when the doctor came, and I saw my own strength," said John Blake, "joined to something which I had not got, I became a very Cain. And so the battle went on and I lay there silent and sullen, and I knew my strength could not come to me until I gave in."

"You had to do so at last," I said. "No one ever conquered Dr. Stanley."

"Nor did I, sir," said John Blake. "For some time the doctor nursed me, taking no notice of the evil spirit that was on me till one certain night. It was hot, and I couldn't rest, for burnings within and burnings without, and I tossed about and watched him as he leaned against the tent-door, writing, I think, to you, sir. All at once, he turned his head my way and, looking me full in the face, said 'You had better give it up, Blake!' Then in a minute or two he came and threw himself down by the side of my mattress and began talking to me. His voice was quiet, and he did not speak long, but what he said made a revolution in my heart; the envy and hatred fought it out between them, to the death. I cannot give you quite his own words, but I shall never forget his meaning. He said that when we began life our hearts were like gardens full of different seeds, all sown without our choice; there they were and we must make the best of them. One man's might be choked up with deadly nightshade, whilst another's would bear only what was fragrant and beautiful, but the man who spent his life in uprooting what is evil in him would be stronger than the man whose goodness came without effort. Then he showed me clearly what my nightshade was, and told me what was his, and proposed that we should, both of us, begin afresh to keep it down."

"And you agreed," I said.

"Before he had done speaking," replied Blake, "my mind was made up, and when he held out his hand, with the look that you will know, sir, I just laid my thin hot hand in it and gave the promise."

I had listened in silence whilst John Blake told all this, but when he finished I left him in no doubt as to my feeling towards him. In a few minutes we were sitting comfortably on either side the hearth, nor did we stir until far on into the next morning. The character of my friend grew grander and nobler in John Blake's hands as he told of what his life had been since he knew him, and I had the rare delight of knowing that the actual came no way short of my ideal.

At the end of our long talk I asked what he thought of doing in England—he had already told me that the few friends who would have welcomed him back again, were dead—and he said in reply that his first wish had been to stay with the doctor; to give him any help in his wanderings that a strong man, whose life was the limit of his service, could give. But Stanley had said that he would serve him better if he would take the same generous offer to his friend; that anything done for his friend would be doubly done for himself.

"And now, sir," continued John Blake, "I offer you the same service. There are not many things you will want that I shall not be able to do, and those I should soon pick up. If I had only my word to bring I should not make the offer, but there is the Doctor's too."

I took the man into my service then and there, and in all the future years I found him better than his promise. Personal bravery I expected from him, but the delicate sympathy he showed in the times of deep trouble which followed so quickly was marvellous when one considered the rude surroundings of his past life.

During the early part of the next year I lost both my parents. The double sorrow completely overwhelmed me for awhile, and my hands felt powerless to begin the work that pressed hard on them.

A rumour of war had been going through the land for some time, and now it was openly declared. My company was one of the many told out to the seat of war, and with fresh cause for activity came the power.

I had few ties now to break in going. The one great friendship of my life had gradually excluded most others. There was a power of concentration, or shall I call it a monotony, in my nature, that never allowed me to divide my deeper feelings, my real self, amongst a crowd; and though friendship was at different times offered me, from men who did me great honour in the offering, yet we never got beyond acquaintance and respect.

The following month saw us on the future scene of action, which was soon changed into the present. I will not again go over all the details of that day—the excitement, the ambition, the courage which in some cases turned into sheer thirst for blood. Sight and sound rushed so hurriedly on the senses, that thought but flashed through the brain and feeling found no standing-point at all. All I knew was that the battle raged fiercer and yet fiercer still, and the sun had long gone down before it ceased. The cry of victory came faintly to me mingled with the groans of wounded and of dying men, who like myself had fallen in the fight.

I lay at the foot of a hill all bruised and shattered, unable to move or speak. A deadly faintness and numbness stole over my senses, and I watched the moonlight creeping down the field with eyes that mingled past and present, fact and fancy, into one. The soft, silver radiance resolved itself at last into a sad, sweet smile, that came nearer and nearer to me, and in the far distance—it might have been on the other side of the world—I heard a voice say "Fred." My lips formed the answer that they could not speak, and then I passed away from all consciousness of sight and sound.

Several weeks passed before I returned to realities. I opened my eyes in a little whitewashed room, and the first thing they fell on was a long, low beam just above my head.

For some minutes I gazed at it, trying in my weak, hazy mind, to catch at the past. A little fly appeared and slowly crawled along the beam; the motion of its legs suggested the idea of limbs of my own. I tried to move, but found one leg was stiff and one arm was bandaged to my side. The link between the present and the past grew clearer. I recalled the fight, the fall, and the moonlight. I turned my head and by the little round deal table, pouring some mixture in a glass, stood a man.

Was it John Blake? No, not quite so massive a form; more firmly knit together. And that regal head and shoulders—did I not know them?

The blood came surging through heart and brain, and caused a dizzy mist to almost blind my sight. I breathed, more than uttered "Cleon!" and the next instant the mixture I had seen poured into the glass was held to my lips. I was made to drink it, then my hot hand was in his cool, firm grasp, and he said:

"Keep very quiet, Fred; just look to see I am here, and then go off to sleep again."

I grew quieter and obeyed him; just had one gaze at the handsome, sunburnt face, with the strong, glad look on it, heard him say: "All right, old fellow, I promise not to go till you awake," and then fell asleep.

When I woke up some hours later, refreshed and stronger, I found him there, and John Blake with him. Theirs were two pleasant faces to greet a man's awakening: Cleon's, as I saw it last, John's, like some granite rock from which the sunshine has dispersed a thunder-cloud. He went to the table, poured out some of the same mixture, put it into Cleon's hand and I was made to swallow it before there was time to speak. After that I was not allowed to say much, and indeed I was too weak. The loss of blood whilst I lay so long on the field had made bad work with me.

"We sought you everywhere, sir," said John, "but the doctor knew you first after all, and when I said I thought the life had gone he said it hadn't, and made me reach his flask and give him the brandy."

I turned to Cleon and asked: "Did you call 'Fred?'"

"Yes, and I *saw* you say Cleon," was his reply. Then glancing at John he went on: "How have you liked my raven, Fred? Has he made good his promise?"

"John," I said, "you have never shaken hands to welcome me back to life again. It is not too late to be polite now, if you like to do it!"

John rose and came to the bed-side; we performed the ceremony silently, but satisfactorily, and then he left us.

Some weeks passed before I was strong enough to get up, but how I was nursed during that time, and what a jubilee my first sitting up became, I cannot even think of now without wondering what there was in me, or what I had ever done to deserve such care and service. I remember when they had carried me out into the sun, and I was seated in the easiest chair John Blake could procure within a radius of a dozen miles, I asked them both to relate some yet untold chapter in their own lives for my special benefit. After a somewhat prolonged look at both of us, Cleon turned his chair slightly away and with only his side-face visible began first. There was a ring of sadness in his voice as he spoke, such as I had never heard there before, but which we did not wonder at when he had done. I will try and give his own words.

"My story," he began, "dates many years back. Two young men were studying together at Oxford; they had been close friends for years, though totally dissimilar in character, one being stronger, physically and morally, than the other; but the two natures dovetailed. After awhile, the younger was drawn into some bad business which must have ended, when known, in a trial and public disgrace: at least, that was the most probable result. The elder friend, after hearing all the circumstances, resolved to take the blame on himself and quit the country. He went away suddenly and unknown to anyone, leaving, in the hands of the party principally concerned, a paper confessing his own perpetration of the crime."

"But surely that was wrong?" I interrupted.

"It was," replied Cleon, "though an act of rare generosity. For his friend," continued Cleon, "he left a long letter of persuasions and entreaties to leave matters alone and let him bear the blame, arguing that he would be safe out of harm's way before it was known; that he was indifferent where he lived, having only one friend and no relations in the whole world; whilst his friend had home and parents and every social reason for trying to take a fair stand in his own country. Such was the substance of his letter and he evidently calculated on still, even in this affair, being able to rule the weaker will."

"And he was mistaken," I said, sadly.

"He was mistaken. His friend confessed the truth to the one who had been wronged, the thing was looked over and hushed up, but the companion who had darkened his own life and cast the shadow of a stain on his conscience for friendship's sake, never came back to his country, or could be heard of again by those who for years after sought him. He, in his self-imposed wanderings, often longed to see his own land again, and hear his own tongue spoken round him. But as years passed on, his judgment became almost warped on one point; the punishment which he was suffering for another seemed like his own, and a shadow, deep almost as guilt itself could cast, hung over him. He wandered about, chiefly in South America, and gathered riches; but perhaps the only happy years of his later life were those he spent with his beautiful Spanish wife."

"He had, then, one ray of light in his darkness!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, but it very quickly passed. Soon after the birth of her first child, she died; and the gloom hung deeper around him. He educated his boy himself until he was old enough to go to school. Then he paid a fortune into the hands of trustees for the lad, and sent him to England.

"The boy had properly-appointed guardians until he was twenty-one. During all that time he received letters from his father, until the last came. It was very long, and rich with good advice for future years, but at the end were these words: 'Though I have done no wrong, my life has been a mistake and can never more be altered. If you were to live with me my brooding melancholy must taint you, and I will not risk it. This is the last letter I shall ever write to you, and you must not try to trace me. You have fortune enough to supply all your needs, whatever you decide to do or become. I do not say forget your father, but grow ready to meet him in that World which will set this one right.'"

Here Cleon paused a moment, as though to steady his voice: then he went on.

"The young man took the letter to his guardians, but they could give him no help, and he resolved to travel up and down the earth until he met with his father."

Again Cleon stopped, and I could see the hard set look on his face which betokened inward struggle. John Blake walked away and left us.

"Cleon," I said, with a huskiness in my voice, "was your father's name Gerald Howard?"

"Yes," he answered, without turning his head.

"Did you know, then, that the friend for whom he gave up all was my own father, Frederic Vincent? And did you know," I continued with growing excitement, "that it was my father who had blighted your life?"

Cleon turned now and sat down at my side.

"Fred, you will do yourself harm by this excitement. I did not think you knew your father's secret, or I should never have told you this. Your friendship, old fellow, has given to my life as much as your father, unwillingly, took from it. You see now why I am such an Ishmael. I must find him. I thought some time ago that I was possibly upon the track, but I could not stay then to follow it up."

"Did you leave it to come here?"

"Yes; I heard there was going to be a fight, and I knew you would be in the thick of it. Fred, you must not let this grieve you, I *will not* have you thrown back by it. My feeling for my father is of course real and very strong, but there is that between you and me which—which I really need not speak of, you know. When did your father tell you about this?"

"When he was dying; and he said the debt of gratitude lay so heavy on his soul that he would have given years of his life to be able to repay it."

"It is repaid in full and with interest," said Cleon. "I have been living on the interest since that first night at St. Russell's."

"Are you like your father," I asked.

"Yes, but like my mother, too."

As he said the name he raised his hat and a look of tenderness and veneration, a mingling of a Catholic's worship of his patron saint and a mother's worship of her first-born, came into his face. He unloosed his collar and from round his neck took a locket and chain, and in it showed me the photograph of his father and mother. I ceased to marvel then at the strange beauty of the son. *She* had given him her sad dark eyes with their long silken lashes, which sometimes gave the indolent look to Cleon's face. From his father he had taken the kingly poise of his head, and his proud, sensitive mouth. The whole formed a wondrous combination of the ripe beauty of the South with the proud strength of the North.

As we both sat in silence, looking at the two faces, John Blake appeared. He looked excited and held in his hand a thin worn scrap of paper, with a head sketched on it. So much we could see. He began speaking in a low, hesitating voice, and looked at me, not Cleon.

"The Doctor has told his story, sir; now hear mine.

"Three years back I spent a summer up amidst the ice and snow of northern Canada, and stayed three months at one far station, helping to hunt. There were only about twenty men in all, and not one I should care to see again, excepting the chief. He was a strange man, living much to himself when at home, but foremost in danger when out; in fact he seemed to carry his life in his hand, ready to lose it. When I left, it was extra cold, and he gave me one of his coats. It was not till I was far enough away that I found a little inner pocket with this in it."

He stopped, gave the paper into Cleon's hands and was walking away, when Cleon's voice, full of suppressed emotion, arrested him.

"John Blake, come here! This is my mother's face! The man you saw must have been my father! Is he there still? But of course, you cannot know! Oh why must I always just miss him?"

He bowed his head in his hands a moment, then sprang up and walked away.

We were both dumb for awhile; then I said: "John, what shall we do? You must go back with him and help him to find his father. And there must be no delay."

"But you, sir?" asked Blake. "How can we both leave you? and now! He would never allow it."

"He must allow it," I replied. "You must go; no consideration for me shall hinder it."

A hand was laid on my shoulder, and Cleon spoke.

"I know where *you* must go, Fred: back again to bed; and you must try and put all this out of your thoughts until to-morrow and get a night's rest. You are my *first* consideration just now."

I looked up in his face, and, though the signs of a past storm were plainly traceable, there was the old half-wilful smile for me which brooked no contradiction, and yet made obedience a pleasure. So they got me into bed again, and Cleon sat near until I fell asleep.

The next morning he refused to leave me until I was out of all danger, and we had five more weeks together; then I was struck off the invalided list, and ordered, with my company, to India. We said good-bye and separated, John Blake and Cleon going away together; and I felt that I had looked my last upon my friend.

My life in India was much the same as other people's, its monotony being its chief feature. I was sent to a frontier station, some distance from any English civilisation. Six months later I heard from Cleon, but it was only the story of another disappointment. His father had left the little Canadian station, and no one knew anything of him. He and John Blake were taking separate paths and intended visiting most of the settlements there before going south. After that, about every six months, I received letters, all telling the same tale: and so the time passed on, as it does when measured by long intervals.

Three, four, five years went by, and there came one summer that I was destined never to forget. It was hotter than usual, and mere existence became a labour. We decided at last to pitch our tents high up the mountains, and try for a little cooler air.

We travelled by slow stages, and at last found ourselves able to breathe. The scenery was very beautiful and very varied, which latter was a fortunate circumstance, as we had absolutely nothing to do all day but lie and look at it.

One evening towards the end of our stay there, I went alone to a favourite resort of mine near the edge of a mountain stream, where I could hear the splash of the cool water and the grinding of the pebbles, and could watch the little streak of silver in the far distance, as it nestled down the rugged side of the snow-crowned Himalayas.

The scene was one which in its every sight and sound was calculated to lull the senses, and to rest the mind. But it had the contrary effect on me, that night. It was like an opiate which acted the wrong way; instead of soothing, it seemed to rouse the brain into fresh restlessness.

It had been a strange day. In the morning I had risen with an unusual depression on me, then towards noon my spirits grew lighter, but as evening approached the former wretched feeling returned, and I came out under its influence. As I reached my resting-place it seemed to come to a climax in a sort of agonising horror that passed through me like an electric shock. My thoughts at once flew to Cleon. I hid my face in my hands, and when I raised it some minutes afterwards, I saw him standing on the opposite side of the stream, with his hand held to his breast, and a white, bloodless face.

I sprang to my feet, and uttered his name. The same old smile shone for a second through all the pain, and then he was gone, and I knew that he was dead; that in spirit only had he come to look a last farewell.

The time that followed, I have never dared to look at since. That day was the 28th of May. I know we returned to the station, that I went about as usual, that some of the men thought the hot weather had been too much for me; but no one noticed more. I was not the first man who had walked about with a smile on his face whilst his soul was in mourning.

Some months after this, John Blake walked into my room, one day, without giving me any notice of his coming. If I had not known his news, his face would have told it. If ever iron entered into any man's soul, it had into his. Twice he began to speak, but could not bear to tell me the truth, so I told him that I knew all.

"The Doctor is dead, John," I said quietly. "He died about six o'clock in the evening of the 28th of last May."

The man gazed wildly at me.

"How could you know, sir? I started as soon as—as we had buried him, and have stayed nowhere on the way. How did you know?"

I told him, and this was the news he gave me in return:

They had heard that Gerald Howard was in Lima and on the 28th of May they landed there. At first, on being told he had left the city, they almost despaired of finding him, but after wandering about the streets till noon, they suddenly recognised him. The people in the city had told them of some stranger who had helped a Spanish woman to escape from a man she hated, but whom her father intended forcing her to marry; and they said the two were bent on shooting the stranger if they could lay hold of him; but first they were going to let him see inside a Spanish prison.

In a quiet street, walking calmly between his two captors, Cleon saw his father. At once the truth flashed on him. It was the work of a moment for John Blake and him to throw the Spaniards to the ground. Then for one brief moment, Gerald Howard looked into the face of his son, the next, there was a pistol shot, and Cleon staggered. He recovered himself for a moment, and turning to the two men, said in their own tongue:

"This is my father, whom you wished to shoot. Will you be satisfied with his son's death instead of his?"

The men turned away; the others carried him under a neighbouring tree, and with his head on his father's breast, and one hand clasped in John's, he died. But the name last on his lips was neither "John" nor "Father."

Thirty years have passed since that 28th of May. I shall not have long to wait now. The battle of life is nearly ended. The rush and the whirl of the strife have died away. There is but one other short final struggle, and then the victory.

As I rest in the shadow of years that are gone, the echoes of the past fall like receding music on my ear. All the strains are mixed confusedly with one another, excepting one deep minor key which sounds clear and strong as when it first became the music of my life. And now when that life is nearly played out I have loved once more, in memory, to touch the different movements of that same key, from the first quick strong allegro to the present calm andante whic precedes the Great Amen.

AFTER OCTAVIA'S WEDDING.

"I'M glad it's all over, Flo!" announced John Belmont, a sunburnt young English squire. "Octavia is a most superior person, and she'll make that long-faced curate very happy, but there's a sense of freedom when you and I are alone."

"Yes, John," said his pretty sister merrily; "you and I never appreciated 'the rights of woman' enough to please Octavia; and I do love a little harmless frivolity!"

"And I like reading the *Field* in peace, and now we can accomplish that, and our visit to Scotland in time for the twelfth, too."

So the preparations were made with a heedless haste which would have shocked the learned newly-married sister, and John and Flo started for the north in the gayest of spirits.

A soft breeze was blowing, and the afternoon sun throwing glorious lights over the heather, where a shooting party gathered for luncheon on the hill-side.

Slaughtered game lay in picturesque confusion; dogs rested thankfully at the keeper's feet, and the young laird, Hector Stirling, shared the bounteous luncheon with which his sister Jessie and Flo Belmont had met them this glorious August day. John was lying lazily back on the soft springy heather, feeling an appreciation of the scene and its surroundings, which he was too lazy to define. Certainly one of the charms of that afternoon lay in the fact that Jessie Stirling's fair young face came between him and the distant beauties of the view, so it is to be doubted if Scotland's claims to loveliness were being fairly considered, except in the flesh and blood form. Flo had taken off her hat, and, her fresh young cheeks bright with health and enjoyment, proposed to count the spoil of the morning's sport; an offer which was not seconded, for Hector begged instead that she would accompany him round the hill to where a perfect view could be obtained. The only idle person was the keeper; and having nothing to do on his own account, he silently contemplated what others were doing, and drew his own conclusions.

"There's nae chance o' onything but *love.* They're a' ready to fa' into that. Will they shoot ony mair the day, I'm thinking?"

A few minutes later the keeper found his services dispensed with, as the gentlemen decided to walk home with the ladies.

"Leddies!" muttered Donald to his dogs. "There's never a fine day for sport but the leddies come and spoil it!"

Sunday morning. Aunt Janet and her step-daughter Jessie are waiting, like decent folk, for their guests to accompany them to church. Flo obeyed the summons, with an inward shrinking from the rows of men, wearing hats, taking spoonsful of snuff, and occasionally spilling it very close to her black silk skirt; but where a sacrifice has to be made to politeness or appearances, you can always trust a woman to make it.

"Where's John, my dear?" asked aunt Janet, raising her bible, and preparing to march.

"He went to see about his dog a little while ago, aunt," said Flo hesitatingly; "he's not come in."

"We can't wait; Jessie, call your brother."

Demurely Jessie obeyed, and Hector Stirling appeared, ready for his fate.

The bells had ceased, and Donald McIntosh, the keeper, was still about his cottage door. He whistled for the lamed dog that had delayed John's progress. A shrill woman's voice called from an opposite door.

"Eh, mon! do ye ken this is the Sawbath?"

"Oh! aye!"

"Do ye ken," persisted his monitress, "do ye ken where ye'll gae tae if ye whistle on the Sawbath?"

Donald paused in his task of examining the dog's foot, and replied calmly:

"Maybe I ken that as weel as *ye* ken where ye'll gae if ye *don't* whistle!"

"Eh, mon," wrathfully demanded the woman, "wad ye class me wi' the folk that come down wi' their guns and their dogs to disturb the peace of a decent place?"

"Come now, Mrs. McDonald—we'll no fech't—there's ae point we're agreed on at ony rate."

"What's that?" quoth the dame suspiciously.

"We baith like oor drap o' whusky."

The opposite door shut with a bang.

"Puir woman!" soliloquised Donald, as he turned his back on his neighbour, and consoled himself from his flask, "maybe she thought I'd help to diminish her bottle if she admitted she had one."

"Quiet place this!" observed John Belmont, strolling up: "looks as if the people were all dead."

"Na, sir—but they're a' at the Kirk."

"Ah, to be sure! I'm afraid I've kept you at home."

"Dinna speak o' it, sir," said Donald composedly, "the minister is unco long sometimes, and the dogs dinna like to be left."

Yes, the minister resembled one whose case has been immortalised in a book of Scottish anecdote. His precentor urged:

"Ye'll need to take mair trouble wi' your sermons, minister: the folk are a' leaving your kirk, ane by ane!"

"Do ye see ony of them taking my stipind wi' them?" quietly responded the minister.

Aunt Janet and John Belmont's mother had been sisters—brought up in a quiet Scotch manse; and Janet remained there long after

Margaret had gone away to her English home, and then the former became the wife of a widowed laird who died soon after, leaving his two children to the watchful care of their stepmother. Now for the first time John Belmont visited his relatives in Scotland, and only by slow degrees were their eyes being opened to the fact that everything Scotch is better than everything English. One great help to them was, however, that Hector Stirling—the fine, true-hearted laird found favour in Flo's sight; and demure, fair faced Jessie was making large inroads on John's peace of mind; but, alas; before John came amongst them, a quiet, well-to-do Glasgow gentleman residing near had proposed for her hand, and her stepmother had approved the match. In some way Jessie herself had kept out of all communication with Mr. Mathieson—telling her stepmother she would like to be free a little longer. Was it not hard?—The burden of recommending the approved suitor to Jessie's mercy was thrust upon John!

"Just see her, John," begged Aunt Janet, "and tell her how much better it will be for us all if she'll end the poor man's suspense. It is only time she asks for, and there is no need for delay."

Mr. Mathieson, too, confided in John, and begged him to further his case for him.

"Her brother would be best," declared John.

"No, no," said Aunt Janet; "she cares much more for what you say."

In a room where the chill of evening rendered the glow of fire pleasant, John found Jessie, standing in melancholy mood before the fender. The blinds were still up, and Mr. Mathieson had walked over to see if his suit prospered. It was most awkward! Before the words were said, Jessie's tearful eyes harassed John beyond bearing, and in an evil moment he ceased his prayers on behalf of another, and bestowed a kiss on the sweet sorrowful lips.

Now, some little demon of mischief must have been standing by just then, and laughing immoderately at the success of his favourite element; for just as the kiss was given Mr. Mathieson had paused outside one of the windows, and his wrath culminated with a muttered: "Iago!"

Shortly after, John sought his aunt and was aghast at the stiff reception he received from Mr. Mathieson, who was with her. His few civil words were interrupted by the outraged suitor.

"I saw you kiss her, sir!"

John feebly admitted the fact, justifying himself as best he might. "We were almost cousins, you know—and she needed comfort."

"*I* could have kissed her, sir!"

Looking across at the rather ungainly gentleman, John's anger rose, and he said hotly: "I had the matter forced on me: why didn't you manage it for yourself? As it is, I believe you have reckoned without your host, and that Miss Stirling will be inclined to judge for herself. I consider that the field is still open; and, Aunt Janet, perhaps you will allow me to enter the lists myself if Jessie does not choose to marry Mr. Mathieson."

"It's too bad," said Mr. Mathieson, rising wrathfully, "after all my ten-mile walks—and the encouragement—and everything!"

"I'm very much concerned—indeed I foresaw nothing of the kind!" cried Aunt Janet, in perplexity.

Here Hector put his bright face in.

"Conspirators? I want you, mother, when you've leisure."

Mrs. Stirling made "leisure" at once, and departed—Mr. Mathieson walked sullenly out at one of the windows and went home, while John uncomfortably stood first on one leg and then on the other.

"I'm so happy, Flo," confided Jessie that night. "I have no trouble left now, except that Hector will miss me so when I go to England."

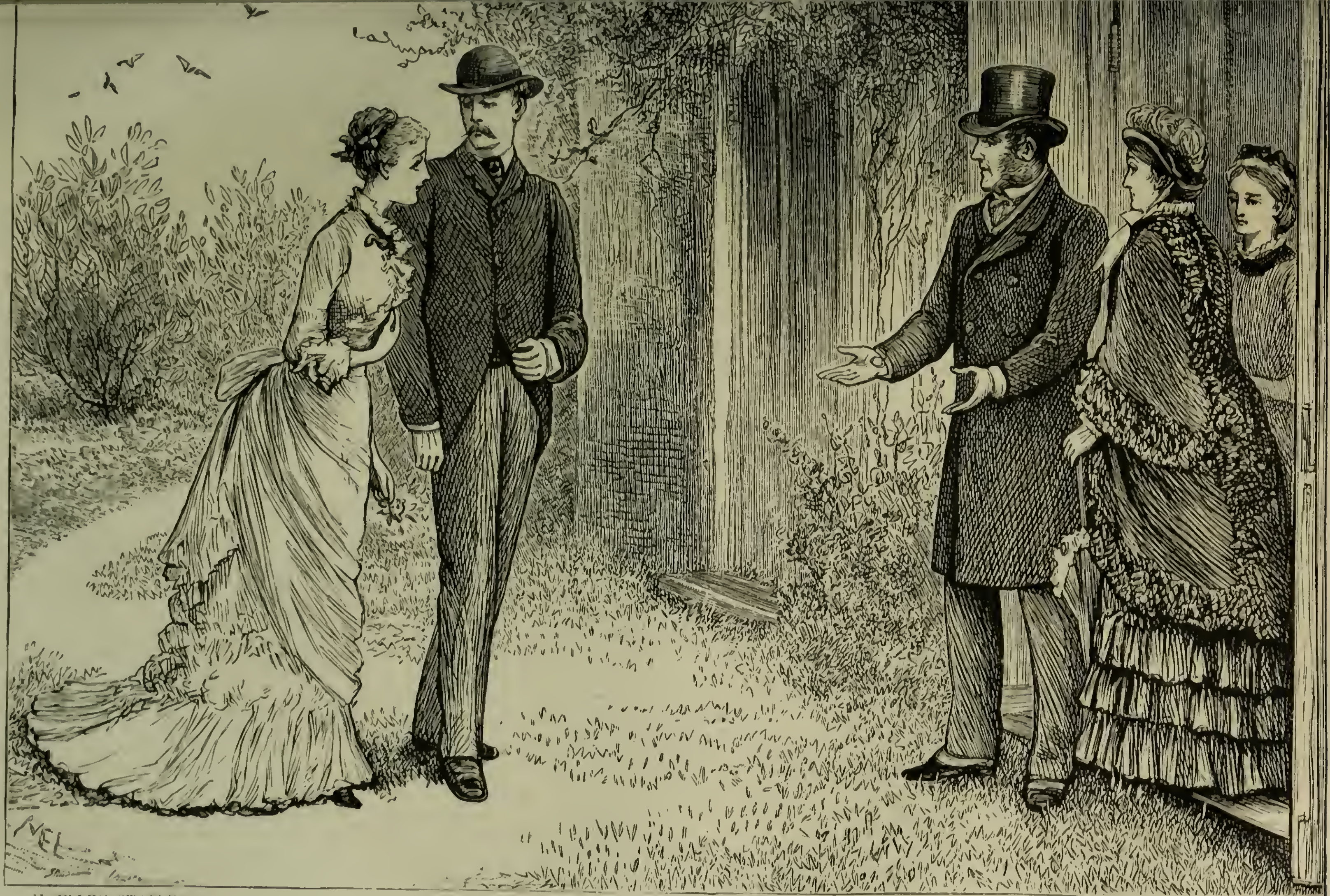
"Perhaps not!" whispered Flo, roguishly; "because I have promised to stay in Scotland—at least after I have been home once more."

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

UNFULFILLED.

I HAVE dear friends whose ways run with mine own,
  Who share my tears and smiles;
Strong friends, who wait at every stumbling stone
  And chide me from my fears:
Sweet friends, who, trusting, put their hearts in mine
  Nor claim their own again:
Departed friends, whose memory turns to wine
  Each bitter spring of pain:
But there was one I never called my friend,
  One who but came and went,
Whose life was moulded to a separate end
  With mine in nothing blent;
And yet, when darkness closes round my way
  And hides the distant shore,
I know that there must rise a longer day,
  That we may meet once more!

I. F. M.



M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

IT WAS ALL OVER NOW; THE FEVER AND THE SUFFERING AND THE PAIN, AND HER HEART WAS AT REST.

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1884.

THE WHITE WITCH.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ESCAPE.

IN Mrs. Mayne's idolatrous love for her son she had been cruel to Mary Davenant. She expected her to sacrifice herself for him utterly: and Mrs. Mayne did not look upon it as any sacrifice. She had sacrificed Mary once—in forcing her by soft, persuasive wiles, which the girl was unable to resist—to go through the ceremony of marriage with him. Fortunately for Mary the ceremony ended it; but the girl's future life was sacrificed.

Whilst the mother and daughter were afterwards together on the continent in partial hiding and in terror, she began to say a word or two to Mary, very guardedly, about the expediency of her joining her husband in America: but the girl received the suggestion with so much horror, that Mrs. Lang as she was then, though calling herself Dixon, drew in. In the very few letters Edward Lang ventured to write to his mother, he urged her to send Mary out to him; by force, if she were unwilling otherwise to go: but his mother told him that the time for that was not yet ripe. He also warned her to keep Mary away from the society of other men. It was not Mary herself he wanted; it was Mary's present income and Mary's future fortune—which he meant her to achieve for him by the exercise of her glorious voice. And it was to escape from these hints of her mother-in-law, that Mary accepted the protection of her old friend, Madame de Breteuil.

Later, after the arrival of Mary at Croxham Abbey, Mrs. Mayne again began to speak of her going over to America to Edward. Mary replied that she *would never go*, and she repeated the threat she had used before—that if unduly urged to take any such step, she would enter a Sisterhood, or even a Convent, and immure herself within its walls for life.

Things were in this state when Edward Lang came over from America, and appeared at Croxham. The first suspicion that Mary had of it was the evening when she had played the farce of watching for the dead monk in the farm-house parlour. The half-hour was nearly at its close when she, weary of standing still opposite a wall, picked up the blotting-paper that lay on the table under the window, and peered at the writing on it in the fading light. To her intense terror she read the word "Edward," and recognised Edward Lang's hand-writing—or in writing exactly similar to his. An awful fear seized upon her that the artist lodging at the farm-house must be Edward Lang, come over to look after her; and she crept under the table to hide herself from him, for someone was approaching the window, whom she thought might be he; but it was really Dick Wilding.

When in a day or two she learnt that the artist was nearly a middle-aged man and did not bear any resemblance to the slender, boyish son of Mrs. Mayne, she became somewhat reassured. But it was Edward Lang, and he soon made himself known to her by letter. At first she refused his request of meeting him out-of-doors, and she said nothing to her mother, wishing to spare her. But, peering curiously about his old-fashioned bed-room, he discovered that the closet-cupboard in it communicated with a similar cupboard in the school-room at the Abbey, and that he could, with little difficulty, enter the latter at will. And thus he made his presence known to his mother. Later, when Ben Griffiths was putting up the bars to the school-room window, he being inquisitive and fond of looking into things, found this entrance out; and hence his warning to Miss Dixon. How many years this secret passage of communication had existed, unsuspected by the innocent inhabitants of the Abbey and of the farm, could not be guessed at.

Edward Lang had come to Croxham disguised, as a matter of precaution. One or two of the Scotland-Yard detectives had known him in Rome, and he had to guard against any chance recognition. He was also aware that Sir William Hunt had a place close to Croxham; and he did not know whether Sir William had, or had not, seen him in Rome. He had meant really to pass for an artist, and nothing else: and it was Sir William's error at Mrs. Underwood's ball in mistaking him for a detective which caused him to assume that rôle. He had strolled to the ball to watch Mary and Godfrey, of whom he was becoming jealous, and he also meant to get Sir William Hunt pointed out to him if possible, for he did not remember him sufficiently to avoid him in public. His ready wit enabled him to seize upon the baronet's mistake: and it proved of service to him.

From the moment Mrs. Mayne knew her son was at hand, she set up a steady persecution of Mary, urging her to join her husband and escape with him to America. Mary as steadily refused. She said she did not mind handing over to him all the money she was worth, but never would she join him or associate with him. She wrote to Mr.

Thorn, her trustee, asking him to advance her the five thousand pounds she possessed. Mr. Thorn wrote back a refusal, appearing to treat the request as a jest. Mary then, gentle and yielding to her mother always, except upon one point, terrified also nearly to death on her mother's account at the steps threatened by Sir William Hunt, offered to go to London to see what she could do personally with Mr. Thorn, and she consented to allow Edward Lang to travel by the same train. At the London terminus Mary would be met by Mrs. Mayne's sister-in-law, who would conduct Mary to her own home.

Some little distance beyond Kensington there was a first-class educational establishment for a very limited number of girls, kept by Miss Lang, sister to the late Dr. Lang of Norfolk. She was prim and precise, the very pink of propriety in all ways; a worthy woman enough of middle age; who had ever been intensely fond of her nephew, Edward. When news of the crime which he had committed in Rome reached her, she was stricken dumb with horrified consternation, and had lived since in a state of chronic dread lest the fact of her relationship to him should transpire to her pupils and their friends.

This lady, having been written to by Mrs. Mayne, agreed to meet Mary at the terminus on her arrival in London, and to shelter her in her house during her stay. Edward was not to attempt to go near it. But the journey was frustrated by the accident to Godfrey Mayne.

When Mary did travel up—running away from the Abbey, as may be said—it was not with the intention of going to Miss Lang. She was afraid. From a word incautiously dropped by Mrs. Mayne, Mary caught up a fear that Miss Lang was intending to urge her to join her husband and sail with him for America, so that England would be rid of them both: she therefore wrote to her late father's housekeeper, Mrs. Ross, who had a boarding-house in Great Cumberland Street, to say she was coming to take refuge with her. Unfortunately Mrs. Mayne saw this letter, suspected what it meant, and warned her son. So he was prepared for Mary's going away, and resolved, all being well, to go also. He had to get away for his own safety.

When Sir William Hunt wrote to Scotland Yard for the services of a detective, poor Lady Hunt, scandalised at the proceeding, contrived to secure the letter, so that it was never posted. While Sir William wondered why the detective did not come, he little thought that the detective had not been sent for. After that, Mr. Cattermole for a time kept him quiet. But when in London with Lady Hunt, Sir William went himself to Scotland Yard. Scotland Yard felt a little mystified at what he told them. They concluded that this Mr. Cattermole must be a private detective working on his own account, and they dispatched Power to Croxham to look into it. Power speedily formed an opinion of his own—that Cattermole was himself a swindler who had been deceiving Sir William throughout: and he applied for a search-warrant for the Abbey farm. He had seen Cattermole once or twice, fancied he was disguised, and resolved to arrest him, risking the hazard of the step. Cattermole discovered somewhat of this and suspected the rest. While he was on the watch in the plantation, he saw the advance of the policemen on their way to the Abbey, and he saw the hasty flight of Mary Dixon from it, attired for travelling and the spring-cart waiting in the lane. Creeping into his own room at the farm, he put off his disguises and presently crept out again, a slight, boyish lad, looking young enough to be Mr. Cattermole's son, and thence on to the station at the top of his speed, and into the train, and the carriage which contained Godfrey. The terminus in London reached, he watched Mary's movements, and appeared beside her as she was about to enter a hansom cab, causing her to cry out with terror. She had never seen him as he appeared now since the day he knocked her down with a blow in the streets of Rome. He told her he knew that she was bound to the house of Mrs. Ross; and insisted upon accompanying her in the cab as far as the door.

They were mutually afraid of one another, this pseudo man and wife; neither of them daring to offer to the other the slightest molestation. Mary held ever a latent fear in her heart that some evil law might place her in his power; he knew that she could at any moment give him up to that law for the murder. A compact had been entered into between them at the Abbey: "You shall be safe (for me) so long as you do not attempt to molest me," Mary had said; "once presume to address me as aught but a distant acquaintance, and I give you up to justice." "I understand, and I promise," he answered; "but the condition of my keeping that promise is, that you supply me with money."

Mary had refused to allow him to call upon her at Mrs. Ross's. He had urged in reply that he must see her occasionally and hear what she did with Mr. Thorn. She then agreed, at his suggestion, to meet him two or three times a week at dusk in Hyde Park: and she did so, being attended always by Jean Drummond, cousin to Mrs. Ross, and old Jean watched over Mary like a veritable dragon. But Mr. Thorn was proving entirely obdurate, and Mary had become timid, weary, well-nigh worn out with despair, unable to see where it would all end. She had grown afraid of what Edward might do in his prolonged disappointment as to money, and she had gone down at last to Lady Davenant, praying to be sheltered, but Lady Davenant, hard and unforgiving, had only referred her back to the woman for whom Mary had left her, Mrs. Lang—now Mrs. Mayne.

So that when, shortly after that, Mrs. Penteith sought out Mary, the girl made confession to her of the miserable past, first of all exacting a promise that no harm should come of it to Edward Lang. "For his mother's sake," implored Mary with tears, "his mother whom I have so loved."

"But who does not appear to have loved you to much purpose," severely commented Mrs. Penteith.

Greatly surprised was Mary that same afternoon, an hour or two after Mrs. Penteith left her, to see the mother she spoke of walk in. Mrs. Mayne, in obedience to certain letters from her son, had journeyed to London to see what she could do with Mary. And that which she intended to do she imparted to the girl at once, without reticence, in her soft, sweet, purring whisper.

As Mr. Thorn refused to advance the money and could not be shaken out of his obstinacy, there was undoubtedly only one course to pursue: that Mary should depart with her husband by the first steamer going out of port from Liverpool for America; and they must live on her income, £250 a-year, until Edward could get into something.

The girl shrank back from her mother's kisses, and sat in silence. She was to be sacrificed, she saw that, if Mrs. Mayne could accomplish it; but Mary determined that she would not be; she would fight against it. She did not say in answer "I will," or "I won't;" she let it be supposed that she tacitly acquiesced, for she knew any open opposition would be useless and idle as the wind. "I must run away from this house and hide myself somewhere," she thought.

But, to Mary's intense dismay, Mrs. Mayne announced her intention of staying in the house herself. "That I may have you with me to the last, my darling," she affectionately said: which meant freely interpreted, "That I may have my eye upon you, sweet, to guard against your escaping us."

This was on the Friday. And we must turn for a little while to Godfrey Mayne. The blow to him of hearing that Mary was married had been great, and neither mind nor body was in a condition to bear it. The whole of that day he lay quiet, his face turned to the wall. But at night, when no one was watching him, he became alarmingly restless, tossing and turning from side to side in the bed like a maniac.

The following morning, Saturday, he was more quiet, but seemed to be in a state of semi-delirium. Mrs. Penteith and Dunning were both full of anxiety.

"How do you feel, my poor boy?" asked his aunt.

"I'm stiff," he said, querulously. "Ah!" continued he with a cry as he tried to turn, "it's my knee. Something the matter with it."

"Yes; you hurt it, don't you remember?"

He passed his hand over his head and nodded.

"Yes, yes, I remember. Dick did it, of course. He's always doing something to annoy me. He—why, aunt, is it you?"

Recollection was returning to him. He lifted his head from the pillow and looked at his aunt, and looked at Dunning.

"Am I here?" he said. "I thought I was at home. It was a dream, I suppose. What has happened?"

"My dear, you over-fatigued yourself, and were not quite so well in consequence—your knee especially. But with a little rest you will soon be all right again. I'll send you in some breakfast."

Mrs. Penteith sent in his breakfast; she sent at the same time to ask the doctor to hasten his visit. The latter came at once. Godfrey seemed bright and cheerful then, and he did not think there was much amiss.

Close upon his visit, Mrs. Penteith received a surprise. The dashing up of a cab to the door, and a loud ring at the bell proclaimed a visitor. Footsteps were heard in the hall, and Mr. Mayne was shown in.

"Henry!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, it is myself, Margaret," he answered, as he shook hands; "I thought it about time to come up and see into things. How's Godfrey?"

"He is not very—very well. But I believe what he chiefly needs now is rest. You shall go up to him presently. Sit down and take some breakfast first."

"I snatched a cup of coffee at the hotel, for I've been travelling all night," said Mr. Mayne, drawing his chair to the table. "We got in at a most unearthly hour, too early to come on to you. Miserably slow those night trains are! One might get up as soon by the waggon."

"And what has brought you to town? I am very glad to see you."

The question was enough for Mr. Mayne. He burst into an account of his grievances, and of the matter which had brought him up.

"My dear Margaret," said he, solemnly, "you have not the least idea what I've gone through lately. I've had my house turned upside down by policemen, my family running away in all directions, my wife in hysterics every other day, and yesterday morning she came up herself, and never told me why or wherefore, so I thought it high time to come also and see into things."

"Where has your wife come to?"

"She didn't tell me. She begged me to let her have a hundred pounds, by cheque on my London bankers, which I did, but she never said what she wanted it for: some milliners' bills, I suppose. I have been exceedingly ill-used, Margaret; my wife has not treated me with proper confidence of late; in fact, nobody has: and what on earth it is that's the matter with them all, I can't make out."

"But in what way?" asked Mrs. Penteith.

"In what way," repeated Mr. Mayne, who was working himself into a fluster, "why in all ways. First Godfrey gets shot and is laid up; then Mary Dixon goes off surreptitiously to put herself into some sisterhood, and I can't get to hear where it is; next Godfrey goes off without warning to me or anybody, when too ill to travel, gets laid up again here; yesterday, as I tell you, my wife came after them. Besides all that, they are saying now that the artist who was lodging at Wilding's, next door to us, was some dangerous character in disguise. I think," concluded Mr. Mayne, "the world is being turned upside down."

But, now that Mr. Mayne was up, he was no nearer finding out what the matter had been. Mrs. Penteith did not consider herself at liberty to disclose what she had learnt from Mary, or to give her address. That Mrs. Mayne had come to town to see Mary and her son, most probably to induce the former to go with him to America, she felt convinced. It was not an affair in which she could interfere: the ceremony of marriage had passed between them, and she supposed things must be left to take their course. Mary might appeal to the law for protection, if she chose to do it. So Mrs. Penteith said nothing to Mr. Mayne.

The old gentleman went up to his son's bedside, fidgeted around him, and said he looked ten times worse than when he left Croxham. Godfrey smiled at him, and lay very quiet and tranquil. Mr. Mayne was beginning to enquire whether the visit of the police had scared him, or if not why else he ran away from the Abbey, but Mrs. Penteith interposed, saying Godfrey must not answer questions until he was stronger.

Mrs. Mayne, a capable and decisive woman, did not let the grass grow under her feet. On this Saturday morning, she accomplished many things. She went to Mr. Mayne's bankers, taking Mary with her, presented the cheque for one hundred pounds, and drew the money. She telegraphed to Liverpool, ascertained that a few berths were yet to be had in a fine steamer starting for New York on Monday morning, and telegraphed back to secure two of the vacant berths in it; she purchased a few necessaries that Mary would require for the voyage.

In the afternoon Edward came to Mrs. Ross's by his mother's appointment. Mary was powerless to say nay. Mrs. Mayne did not know him and cried out, for he was still disguised as a fashionable youth with chestnut locks and a chestnut moustache.

Backed-up by his mother's presence, he dared to address Mary in terms of affection. "Oh, my dear," he cried in his softly persuasive voice, "I knew the moment must come when you would condone the past, and consent to be my own sweet wife. You little know what I have suffered for you. I could not keep away from you, my longing to see you again drew me back to England, into the very lion's mouth, by an irresistible charm. I wanted you to fulfil that golden promise which you made to me in Rome. I will make you happy as the days are long."

Every word touched his mother's heart and thrilled her like the sweetest music; Mary listened, standing away from him, and shaking from head to foot. He relied upon his mother's influence with her; though he knew he had need of exerting all possible arts to get her away with him, so that she should not draw back from the plan at last.

"You married last year in America," she said.

"Married!" he exclaimed after a slight pause, for he was taken aback. "*I*!"

"Yes. I heard so."

"How did you hear it?"

"Never mind that. It is true, I believe."

"Oh, Mary," he said, penitently, "I have committed every mad wickedness in my efforts to stifle the memory of your beautiful face which I could not see, of your sweet voice which I feared I should never again hear! But married! no, no. Women are apt to say that, if they can get people to listen to them. I have no wife but you."

"My own Mary, my dear child," sobbed Mrs. Mayne, throwing herself hysterically into the girl's arms, "all that he has done amiss he has done through love of you. You must condone it all for my sake. Henceforth ——"

"I am feeling a little tired," interrupted Mary, drawing away. "I should like to be quiet; I shall not keep up if I cannot be quiet."

Mrs. Mayne took the hint and dismissed her son, after settling the arrangements for the morrow. He was to join them at Mrs. Ross's at dinner at one o'clock, and at five he and Mary would take the train at Euston for Liverpool, getting there at half-past ten; they would put up at the North Western Hotel for the night, and go on board the steamer the first thing in the morning. Edward was advised by his mother to put off his disguises; they would not look well on board ship.

Thus it was all cut and dried, and Mary was in desperate perplexity thinking how she should get away. Openly she dared not rebel, for that iron will of Mrs. Mayne would overrule hers; she had no chance against it. And she saw not yet how it was to be done by stratagem; not for a moment was she left alone; she was being watched as closely as a cat watches a mouse. As soon as they were fairly off for the station, Mrs. Mayne was to make her way to Miss Lang's at Kensington, would sleep there, and the following day return to Croxham.

On Sunday morning Mary's luggage—it was but little—was sent to Euston Square to be in readiness. At one o'clock Mr. Lang came in, having also taken his own portmanteau to the same station. This had been settled the previous day. He had put off his disguise and was again the fair, boyish young man once known in Rome.

"I should like to go to church somewhere this afternoon," remarked Mary, as they sat at dinner.

"Oh my dear, you must not think of that," said the mother, soothingly. "It would not be at all convenient for you."

"But I wish to go," said Mary, thinking in her desperation that it might offer her some chance of escape. Start with him for Liverpool, she would not. Failing other means, she resolved to appeal to the first policeman she saw at Euston Square station; but she preferred to escape more quietly than that if possible. "Mrs. Ross would take me," she added, "if you object. I must go to church once more."

Mrs. Mayne stole a glance at her from her half-shut eyes. She noted the resolute tone. It might be as well not to thwart her in trifles.

"Suppose we all go to Westminster Abbey!" she cried, briskly. "I have never been to service there. It begins at three o'clock. We shall be out quite in time for you to catch the train, and I will part with you at the Abbey door."

They made ready to go, Mrs. Mayne taking leave of her son and daughter before quitting the house; kissing them both many times and wishing them the best of all good luck over the Atlantic.

Westminster Abbey was very full that afternoon. The two ladies found seats together, Edward stood at a distance. Mary's prayers to heaven were intense and fervent—that she might be helped to escape. The music was beautiful and touching; tears rolled down her sad face as she listened to it.

There was much crowding in coming out, and Mrs. Mayne got separated from Mary; Edward Lang, however, had drawn up, and had his hand on his wife's shoulder. Suddenly, when the crush was at the worst, Mary felt the hand withdrawn. She looked round, as well as she was able, and could not see him. She looked in front, she looked about her on all sides, but he seemed to have disappeared.

Now was her time. Regardless of good manners she wildly pushed her way onwards through the mass of people, gasping out "Pardon me! Pardon me!" They wondered who the rude young woman was.

But she got away. And, once beyond the impeding crowd, she tore along like one flying for her life, and found herself on the Thames Embankment. It was too open there; she might be seen; though she could not discern anybody following her. Presently, when quite out of breath, she came to the Temple station of the Underground railway; two or three passengers were going in, and she went also, took a ticket and got into a carriage. Anywhere, anywhere away from *him!*

The train conveyed her to the Mansion House. Whither should she go then? Finding her way to some narrow obscure streets, she walked about in them until she was tired. Then she got into a four-wheeled cab, and told the man to drive her to Highgate. She was going to Mr. Thorn.

It was a tremendous drive, for the man of course took the longest way and all the corner turnings; but she got to her destination at last. The house was an old-fashioned house, standing in its own grounds; Mary had often been to it with her father. She paid the cabman all he asked, casting glances of fear back the way she had come, lest a pursuing cab should be following, ran in at the gate, and rang the house bell. As the old serving-man opened the door to her, the light from inside fell on her face, and strains of music were echoing through the hall.

"Is your master alone, Joseph?"

"Why, dear me, it's Miss Davenant!" cried old Joseph. "Yes, he is all alone, miss, and at his organ—as you may hear."

The organ was a sort of organ-harmonium, the best of its kind; it stood at the end of the spacious dining-room. Joseph was about to announce Miss Davenant, but she stopped him from doing so. Gently opening the room door, she stole in, closed it again, and stood back in silence against the wall.

Mr. Thorn was singing the Evening Hymn to his own accompaniment, and had come to the last verse. His voice was not all it had been, but he sang fairly well still—and his heart was in it.

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen!"

The Amen came out somewhat weak and tremulous. As the echo of its sound died slowly away, it was taken up by another voice: the young, fresh, glorious voice of a woman.

"Amen."

Mr. Thorn bounded off his seat, came forward staring, and saw her standing there. "Mary!" he exclaimed. "But I knew the voice; I knew it could be only yours."

As he took her hands in his and went to kiss her tenderly, for she had ever been to him like his own child, Mary fell into a storm of hysterical tears. Some moments elapsed before she could speak. Mr. Thorn drew her to the fire, and put himself into his easy chair. She put off her bonnet and sat down on a stool at his feet.

"I am come to tell you all," she said, in a sobbing whisper, "and to ask you to save me. There's nobody else in the wide world."

"Ah," said the lawyer, quietly smiling. "My dear, you have done at last what you ought to have done at first—brought the matter to me."

"But Mrs. Mayne would never let me bring it."

"Just so."

And there, her aching head resting against his knee, Mary disclosed to him her story of the past, the true details of which he had not before heard, just as she had related it to Mrs. Penteith.

CHAPTER XXXV.

GODFREY'S WEDDING.

MRS. MAYNE, suspecting nothing amiss, travelled down to Croxham on the Monday morning, not knowing that she left her husband behind her in London.

At the conclusion of the service at Westminster Abbey the previous afternoon, when she found herself separated from Mary by the pressure of the moving crowd, she looked round anxiously, until she saw that Edward had joined Mary and had his hand upon her shoulder. So she did not hurry; but rather drew back: if there was one thing Mrs. Mayne detested, it was that of being pushed about by a crowd. A great portion of it had dispersed when she at length got out, and she did not see either of them.

He has taken her off in a cab to the station, she thought, and would not waste time in waiting for me. Well, I had already wished them good-bye.

So Mrs. Mayne took another cab and went to Miss Lang's. And on the following morning she departed for home. It was a gusty morning, the wind very high indeed. Mrs. Mayne had the first-class compartment to herself, and closed both the windows.

"Dear me, how they will be catching it!" she lamented, alluding to the two voyagers. "By this time they must be clear of the Mersey and out at sea."

Two or three days subsequent to this, Mr. Mayne also went home, taking Godfrey with him. He had been quite unable to discover aught of the matters which had puzzled him, and which he had come up to investigate; and on the Monday evening he had got a telegram from his wife, saying she was at home.

"You'll have to look well after Master Godfrey," old Dunning said to him, just before they started. "There's something queer about him."

"Queer?" repeated Mr. Mayne. "How d'ye mean, Dunning? He is not very steady in his walk yet; but that's hardly to be expected till his knee gets stronger."

"Well, I mean his head," said Dunning.

"Shakes a bit sometimes from weakness, eh? He has had a good long bout of it, you know."

Dunning did not choose to say it was not the shaking she meant; but shook her own head in pity for obtuse understandings. "You watch him, sir; he'll want it," she cried, and the tears rushed into her old eyes.

But the long journey down did not seem to fatigue Godfrey so much as might have been expected. They were at home by the middle of the afternoon; Mrs. Mayne, who welcomed them with enthusiasm, had some refreshment ready, to which Godfrey sat down; but not Mr. Mayne, who said he would prefer to wait for dinner, and went round to the stables. Mrs. Mayne was attentively affectionate to Godfrey, plying him with little cares—which he really did not seem to notice or appreciate.

"You went to London, did you not?" he remarked in a vague tone.

"Yes, dear Godfrey, I did," she answered. "I wanted so badly to see Mary before she left England."

"Oh, she has left England, has she."

"She is gone to America with her husband," said Mrs. Mayne, apparently looking at the dish before her, but really looking keenly at him. "They sailed from Liverpool on Monday morning: and I think they are having a fine passage, though it was very rough weather the first day."

"Oh, very fine," assented Godfrey, with indifference.

Presently he strolled out-of-doors. The sun was still above the horizon and shining brightly. Striking across the garden to the plantation, he met the head groom. The man stopped, respectfully saying he was very glad to see his young master was better.

"Oh, did you hear I had been ill, then?" asked Godfrey, carelessly.

Croft looked straight in front of him with a suppressed smile: he thought Mr. Godfrey was chaffing. "Why, yes, sir, we heard you were a'most as bad in London as you had been here."

"Oh, it was nothing," lightly responded the young man, walking on through the plantation.

He had only gone a few steps down the lane when he heard a well-known voice, crying, "Whoa up, Smiler!" and Dick Wilding came in sight, pulling his favourite steed after him by a bit of rope as usual.

On seeing Godfrey, he stopped short with a jeering laugh.

"Ho, ho, you haven't got her then! You couldn't catch her after all! It was Dick helped to get her away; Dick that you laugh at!"

At first Godfrey walked on without answering; but he had scarcely passed when something in the lad's words seemed to strike him, to trouble him, and he turned slowly round with an eager, puzzled look in his eyes.

"What is that you're saying?" said he, sharply. "Here, Dick—stop! What did you say just now?"

But Dick seemed puzzled in his turn. He stood fumbling at his horse's mouth in silence, and looking askance at his old enemy.

"Come, Dick, tell me what you meant," repeated Godfrey, persuasively.

Suddenly, after watching him shyly for some moments, Dick's face cleared; it became quite gentle; and instead of breaking out into more jibes according to his custom, he nodded to Godfrey with cheerful patronage.

"I'll tell you all about it some other time," said he, condescendingly. "It's time for Smiler to be in the stable now, wo-ho! then, Smiler!" And with another nod to Godfrey, he went on his way.

Coming out into the high road and passing the Vicarage gate, Godfrey suddenly made up his mind to call; and when he was shown into the drawing-room he found there, besides the family party, Ernest Underwood sitting in deep conversation with Elspeth, who got up blushing and came to greet Godfrey with downcast eyes. Ernest was very stiff, and asked how he was without seeming to care much about the answer. Elspeth had expected him, as since that meeting in town and the bracelet last Friday, she supposed he meant to renew the engagement; but she wished he had not come just then, looking so old and haggard; while Ernest, perfectly dressed as usual, looked so fresh and talked so delightfully! At the same time, it was flattering that he had come to see her within half-an-hour of Arthur's shouting out that the brougham was bringing him back to the Abbey.

But Mrs. Thornhill's motherly heart went out to the poor fellow as he stood, gaunt, pale, hollow-eyed, like a forlorn spectre, in the midst of the cheerful young faces round him, shaking hands with first one and then another in a subdued, almost shamefaced way, as if not quite sure what reception he should meet with. She made him sit down by her at the end of the room away from the rest, and talked to him about his journey. At first he answered her indifferently. But soon through all her primness of manner he read the kindliness in her eyes, and warmed beneath it, and leant over her chair affectionately like her own boy. This demonstration touched her, and, still with ramrod manner, but with very gentle voice, she said below her breath:

"So am I to have you for a son, after all?"

"A son!" he repeated, musingly. "Yes, I should like to be your son if you would have me. I want a mother dreadfully. They are all so cold."

"You won't find Elspeth cold when you are married to her," whispered Mrs. Thornhill, blushing and smiling at him.

He put his hand on hers, which was busy with an uninteresting strip of wool-work for one of the eternal bazaars.

"Am I to marry Elspeth?" he asked, enquiringly.

"If you still wish it, I don't think the Vicar will make any objection now," she replied, rather surprised by his manner.

"Yes, yes, I do wish it," said he. "I wish to be married soon—at once. I am so lonely; you don't know how lonely. You will let me be married at once?"

"I don't know about at once. You must ask Mr. Thornhill,' said she, smiling.

"You ask him too. You are kind; you will ask him?" said he, persuasively. "I have been so dull lately, and lonely, I never felt anything like it before. And I can't tell why; I think it must be that I want a wife to comfort me."

"And have you quite got over—that other liking? Do you really love Elspeth better than anyone else?" she asked, hesitatingly, very gently.

"Oh yes, yes, I have never had any other liking—except, you know, in my old dreams. They don't count, do they?" he asked, anxiously.

"No, dreams don't count, of course, when—when people have quite got over them."

"Oh, one soon gets over dreams; and they make one want realities," said Godfrey. I want a real wife now, who will stay with me and love me. Do you think Elspeth will? I seem to be *hard* to love, somehow."

"I don't think she will find you hard to love," said Mrs. Thornhill, touched by the childlike earnestness and simplicity in his face and manner, yet a little wondering at it.

And Godfrey stayed to tea, and sat by Elspeth, and was kind and attentive to her, though strangely subdued. And presently Mrs. Thornhill procured him an informal interview with the Vicar, in which Godfrey pressed for his marriage; and as there was now really nothing to wait for, it was settled, before the evening was over, that the ceremony should take place in a fortnight.

When, at half-past eight, he left the Vicarage, Elspeth, elated at the prospect of her coming dignity, expressed herself delighted with the wonderful improvement in him. Even Matilda had to acknowledge that he was now as submissive as a lover should be, Mrs. Thornhill said he was so much more affectionate, and the Vicar said Elspeth might congratulate herself on having reduced her admirer to the conventional state of moonstruck absentmindedness proper to a man in love.

"But there is much more expression in his face than there used to be," said Mrs. Thornhill. "He looks so gentle and kind now."

"And he doesn't say the silly things he used to," added Elspeth, who had no turn for satire and liked people to say what they meant.

Godfrey passed Ben Griffiths on his way home; but to the lad's great disappointment, he only gave him a nod in exchange for his greeting, and did not even stop to speak to him. When he got to the Abbey, dinner was over, and Mr. and Mrs. Mayne, who had guessed where he had gone, were in the drawing-room together. He shook hands with both, in the same vague way which seemed to be characterising him, retired to the other end of the room, away from the fire, and sat down by himself.

"Here, Godfrey, why don't you sit here?—it's cold out there," said his father, after a few minutes, during which the pair had continued their bezique rather uncomfortably.

But there was no answer. Godfrey was sitting with his arms on the table, and his head upon them. His father rose in consternation, wondering what was the matter with him; but on his bringing his hand heartily down on his son's shoulder with a cheerful "Come, my boy, don't give way like this. Are you tired?" Godfrey started up and rubbed his eyes.

"Give way? Tired?" repeated Godfrey, as if he did not comprehend. "No, I'm not tired. I'm going to be married in a fortnight to Elspeth," he added, with indifference.

"What?" cried Mr. Mayne. "In a fortnight?—to be married? Well, well, I dare say it may be all for the best, my boy," he continued in the midst of his surprise. "I suppose you have been settling it with her this evening."

But Godfrey's head had again sunk down upon his arm, and he was fast asleep. This fatigue was not very extraordinary after his journey, considering that he had not yet recovered his strength. But as the days went on, the habit of constantly dropping off to sleep remained with him; it was a curious sequel to his illness; and if he had not been so solicitously chivied about by the different members of the family with which he was now soon to be connected, he would certainly have indulged it in the very presence of his fiancée. As it was, at home he was scarcely ever awake; but as neither Mr. nor Mrs. Mayne looked upon it as anything but an effort of exhausted nature to recuperate herself, he was allowed to fall asleep when and where he would. Mrs. Mayne had not spoken of Mary Dixon to her husband; it would have been so inconvenient—nay, impossible—to explain the past. She tacitly let him think Mary was in the "Sisterhood"; while he, offended at the fact, and at the want of confidence shown to himself, avoided all mention of her name.

Of course the chief topic with everybody was the approaching wedding. Ernest Underwood was to act as best man: an office which he undertook reluctantly. He did not say why—that he had privately transferred his affections from Mary Dixon to Elspeth, and felt jealous and angry that Godfrey should have her. He had been putting Mary out of his head ever since the night of the ball on his birthday: for she had refused the offer of marriage he then made her (though she had suffered Godfrey to think the contrary), assuring him that there was a secret barrier against her ever marrying.

Dick Wilding had left off insulting his old enemy, Godfrey. He greeted him instead in their chance meetings with an affable patronage which irritated Godfrey unreasonably. It was on the very eve of his wedding-day that Elspeth gave some explanation of this with much laughter.

"Do you know, Godfrey," said she, "the children have found out that Dick Wilding thinks you are out of your mind! He touches his forehead when he speaks of you, and shakes his head, and says, condescendingly, 'Poor fellow! poor fellow!' Is it not laughable?"

But instead of joining in her laughter, Godfrey showed himself hurt and annoyed; he said he would have Dick sent away. And when he got back to the Abbey that evening, he complained about it to Mrs. Garner, who came to his room to bring a parcel containing his wedding-suit, which had just arrived from town.

"It is very disagreeable to me to have those things said," he remarked to her.

Now Mrs. Garner was the only member of the household who had a suspicion that anything was wrong. "Oh, but you know what Dick is, sir," said she, watching him narrowly.

"Yes, yes, I know. But you see I get so stupid sometimes; my head gets confused; and if once people were to know that, and to hear him, they might say—I can't tell what they might say, he broke off, playing nervously with the string of the parcel.

Mrs. Garner quitted the room, and Godfrey immediately began to put on his new clothes. She waited about in the corridor outside, deliberating whether she ought to speak to her master, or not. A very strong suspicion lay upon her that Godfrey's mind was off its balance. But she was not sure. He might have grown curious in manner, indifferent, half-silly from the effects of his illness, and would recover himself when he regained full strength. It might be only that: and in the uncertainty Garner decided that she had better hold her tongue. Mr. Mayne was an irritable man if seriously put out, and might resent the imputation.

Turning from the window at which she had stood, she was about to descend the stairs when Godfrey opened the door attired in his wedding-suit.

"Come in and look at me, Garner," cried he. "How do you like this coat? I don't care for the cut of the collar. By Jove, I look too haggard for a bridegroom. Well, what do you think?"

"You are rather thin, sir, but it's a very nice coat," said Garner.

"It's very annoying, when one ought to look plump and handsome. People may say I'm not glad to be married. But I am, you know, Garner. I wanted her to marry me in London, and she would not. I could have taken her to a safe place where those wicked enemies of hers would never have found us out, and I should have felt her dear arms round my neck again: they were once there, you know: and we should have been as happy as the day's long. But—am I dreaming again?" he continued in another tone; and down he sat on the window-seat, put his hand to his head, and looked about the room, as if trying to remember something that had escaped him.

Garner gasped out some incoherent words, and escaped from the room. She thought there would be no mistake now. Running downstairs, she found her master in the library, looking for a newspaper. With confused words and hesitating manner, she confided to him her fears—that Mr. Godfrey was not right in his head, that she had thought so for some days past. He was now trying on his wedding-clothes and saying very strange things indeed.

Mr. Mayne was not offended; on the contrary, he took it pleasantly, as if it were a joke. "What strange things is he saying?" quoth he.

"About his clothes, sir, and about wanting to feel a young lady's arms round his neck, and of his having wanted to get married in London and carrying her off to some far-away place where their enemies would not find them."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Mr. Mayne. "Why, my good Garner, that's just what all young fellows say on the eve of their wedding-day. What on earth put any other ideas into your head?"

"It was more his manner, sir, than his words. After he had spoken, he seemed to wake up quite bewildered as one does from sleep, and wondered whether he had been in a dream."

"I daresay he had," said the old gentleman, laughing again. "Let him dream as much as he likes while he can. He is all right, Garner."

Garner withdrew, saying no more. Mr. Godfrey might be all right, but she did not feel convinced of it. Of course people had different ways of taking things. She had been married herself, and remembered that for a whole day and night preceding the ceremony she had been drowned in a deluge of salt tears.

It was a bright day for November. The sun was shining through the almost bare trees on their fallen and decaying leaves, when the bells of Croxham church rang out for Godfrey Mayne's wedding. It was to be an especially quiet one, in consideration of Godfrey's recent illness, very few guests being invited to it. Mrs. Penteith, to whom the news of the speedily-approaching marriage had given a great shock, sent word that she was not well enough to leave town for it. A plain, unceremonious breakfast would be given at the Vicarage after the service; and then Godfrey and his bride would set off on their honeymoon travels, which were to be confined chiefly to Wales.

Godfrey, whom the excitement of everybody round him seemed greatly to disturb, was fidgetty, irritable and absent. He complained that he had not slept well, and was with difficulty persuaded to dress in time to go to the church. He did not forget the ring though, but kept taking it out and looking at it curiously when in the carriage with Ernest. Once inside the church, his manner changed. He walked up the aisle among the villagers with whom the pews were crowded, looking wistfully about him and trying to catch the sense of their busy whispers. When Ernest, who was highly perfumed and got up in such a manner as to excite the admiring comment, "He looks like the bridegroom himself," had fussily pushed him into what he considered his proper place in the chancel, Godfrey stood very quietly and submissively, with eyes turned towards the door, as a bridegroom's should be, but with an unconventional look in them, not knowing what he expected to see there. However, there was nothing in his manner, as he greeted the members of his bride's family, to attract surprise; and when little Elspeth, looking very pretty in her white gown and veil, came in on her father's arm, and the wedding-march pealed out from the organ, nearly everybody's attention was too much absorbed by the bride to notice the bewildered manner in which the bridegroom put one hand to his head and fumbled uneasily with the other in one of his pockets.

Only two people noticed him. One was Mrs. Garner, who was watching the young fellow from the front pew in the nave with deep anxiety; the other was the bride's uncle, Canon Thornhill, who was to perform the ceremony.

"Have you got the ring?" whispered the Canon.

"Yes, he's got the ring," answered Ernest, who was consoling himself for a feeling of disappointment that this marriage caused him, by an officious thoroughness in the performance of his own share in it which threatened to go the length of answering the responses and putting on the ring for the bridegroom, unless the latter showed proper promptitude. Still the Canon watched Godfrey rather curiously, as Ernest shuffled him up to the communion-railings and took his gloves and his hat away from him. But he stood where he was placed very quietly, and the ceremony began.

He listened quietly to the quaint preliminary exordium with evident nervousness. But when the Canon, in the usual impressive manner, went on to that more personal discourse beginning, "I require and charge you both," and looked at Godfrey with accustomed solemnity, the poor fellow gave a sudden start, looked from Elspeth to the two clergymen with wild eyes, and leaning forward at the pause at the end, said earnestly, in a low voice:

"I beg your pardon. There is some mistake. I cannot marry this lady. I ——"

He stopped, interrupted by a general movement of those within hearing, by buzzing whispers, and by subdued cries of "What is it?" from the more remote parts of the church.

The bride's father stepped to the young man's side, past poor, frightened Elspeth, who shrank back towards her elder sister with a little cry.

"What is it, Godfrey?" asked he in a low, firm voice. Already he half guessed the truth, with sudden wonder at his own past blindness.

"I can't marry her because I am married already," said the bridegroom, whose eyes were wide and vacant, but whose manner was now quieter than that of anybody present.

"Why didn't you say so before?" cried Ernest in wonder, who had not yet discovered what was really amiss.

"I—I had forgotten," said Godfrey, simply.

And the naive answer told everyone within hearing that his mind was gone.

There was a tumult in the church; the people farthest off stood upon the seats of the pews, the noise of explanation, exclamation, suppressed laughter, even hysterical crying, grew louder every moment. The Canon led Godfrey down one of the side-aisles to the vestry, the people turning with one accord, as he passed, to stare at him. Elspeth was led off quickly, by her father's order, to the carriage which was to have taken a happy bride and bridegroom to the Vicarage; but which now carried a poor little, limp, weeping, disconsolate girl back in the arms of her mother and elder sister. Ernest escorted them to the carriage, and pressed Elspeth's hand, whispering to her excitedly.

"Look here—don't cry, Elspeth—I'll come round and see you by-and-bye."

"Oh, no," she moaned, "I shan't see you again, I believe I shall d—d—die."

And with this terrible threat to damp his spirits, she was driven off from his sympathising presence.

In spite of this most disagreeable contretemps and of the disappointment in the breaking-off of the alliance, nothing but consideration could be shown to Godfrey by the Vicar and his brother. The Canon was especially compassionate.

"I can't think how I forgot," Godfrey kept repeating to them in a dazed way.

Mr. Mayne, under this new grievance, was rather more incoherent than his son. But Garner stepped forward, and ventured to whisper to the Vicar that she had seen it for several days past, but had not presumed to say much, not being absolutely sure. He must have been out of his mind ever since he came home from London.

And Mr. Thornhill, recalling Godfrey's manner and some of Godfrey's words, acknowledged that it must have been so: though he himself had attributed it to mere weakness, left by his illness.

A messenger was despatched in a carriage from the church door for Dr. Scarsdale, and Godfrey was taken home in another by his father and Colonel Underwood. He was perfectly quiet, talking occasionally in rather a silly manner; and rushed to his room on alighting, to put off his gala clothes. In coming downstairs, he met Garner, who in fact had been lingering and listening in the corridor, and told her he was going presently to the station at Cheston to meet his wife.

"No, sir, not to-day," said the housekeeper, humouring him: "her coming is put off till next week."

"Oh, is it," said Godfrey, absently pressing his hand upon his brow. "Why didn't she send me word?"

And thus ended Godfrey Mayne's wedding-day.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TROUBLE FOR MRS. MAYNE.

Dr. Scarsdale came to the Abbey and other doctors came. After examining Godfrey and learning what they could of the case, their unanimous opinion was, that it would prove to be but a temporary affliction, and not one that was at all likely to leave any fear behind it for the future. The mind, they thought, must have experienced some very great shock, when he was too physically weak to support it, and for a time had become slightly unhinged: but they believed his recovery would be speedy and permanent.

This was good news. Dr. Scarsdale's son, a very nice young fellow who had already shown skill in his profession and was of good use to his father, came to the Abbey on a visit. He and Godfrey had been on friendly terms and liked one another. John Scarsdale was to be Godfrey's companion for a time, in his walks and drives; to chat with him and amuse him indoors, and to keep him, as far as might be, strictly free from all excitement. At times it was not easy to see that anything was amiss with Godfrey, his conversation being as rational as that of other people. Nancy Wilding could not be persuaded that aught was, or had been, the matter; and reproached the world for believing it.

One curious feature in Godfrey's malady was, that he had not the least sense of having behaved ill to Elspeth. On the very day after the frustrated wedding, in strolling past the Vicarage with his father, he suddenly caught sight of some people in advance: the Vicar, his wife, Matilda, Elspeth, and Ernest Underwood. It was spitting with rain, and Ernest and Elspeth were under one and the same umbrella. They were all on their way to some service in the church: Ernest had never attended a week-day service before. Godfrey ran up, and began shaking hands all round. Poor Mr. Mayne, looking the distress he felt, cast deprecatory glances at the Vicar.

It was of course awkward—but what could be done? The Vicar in many things was a sensible man, putting a good face upon inconvenient occurrences, and his wife in general followed his example. They made the best of this: and instead of turning the cold shoulder upon poor unconscious Godfrey and ordering him away, they let him walk with them to the church door and talked to him soothingly and pleasantly. After that, Godfrey fell into the habit of strolling into the Vicarage as before, and was not repulsed; and he often saw Ernest Underwood there, leaning over Elspeth's chair, or sauntering with her in the garden.

One morning when the sun was bright and a few frosty nights had made the ground hard and crisp under foot, Mrs. Mayne set out to call upon some poor people in the village, and fell into a fit of musing as she walked along. The collapse of the marriage had not pleased her, for she thought it quite desirable that Godfrey should be settled and done with; but of course in this life one cannot have quite everything one wishes for. The departure of her son for America with Mary as his companion was a very great boon indeed; one she at one time hardly dared to hope for, as Mary had been so obstinate upon the point: but her own good management had at length brought it about, and she felt thankfully elated.

Recalling the past years, one year after another, she began telling herself that fate had been grievously unkind to her—and she did not think she had deserved unkindness. She had been a good and affectionate wife to Dr. Lang; yet providence took him away early, without affording him time to make a purse of money, which had left her with a very slender provision. That was hard. The elder of her sons was growing up steady and dutiful—though she had not loved him as she had the younger—and would no doubt have been her chief stay and support; but he had also died. That was very hard. Edward, who had been as the very apple of her eye, had given her trouble in many ways, ending with that most awful trouble in Rome. That was hardest of all.

The tears filled the poor lady's eyes as she stepped on along the field-path. She asked herself—seeing that she could not ask it of heaven, as perhaps she might have liked to do, were it likely to avail—what she had done, that so dreadful a calamity should fall upon her. Why should she have been signalled out for such—and just now her thoughts were not running on the crime as touching her son, but as touching herself. She had been totally innocent of complicity as regarded ill to young William Hunt, whether in practice or intention. She had not particularly sought his presence at her house, she had not encouraged him to play at cards in it, and she had certainly never put forth Mary as an attraction to him. Yet all these sins were charged upon her afterwards by Sir William. It was Edward who had brought the young fellow; it was Edward who *would* sit down to écarté with him; it was the young man himself who fell in love with Mary. Why, he saw her at Lady Davenant's quite as often as he did with them; and was not she herself at the time striving to do her best to secure Mary for Edward? It had been a cruel aspersion to charge upon her, embittering her life and driving her about like a felon: yet she had been unable to refute it or to extricate herself: her state of terror was too intense to do anything, save strive to hide her name and her identity.

When the pleasant gentleman, Mr. Mayne, whose acquaintance she first made at Nice, made her an offer of marriage, it came upon her like an oasis in the desert to the parched and weary traveller. She did not think upon the position she should take as his wife; she did not think of his wealth; all she thought was that Lancashire was a remote county, she was utterly unknown in it, and should be safe from old friends and new enemies. But, as she mournfully reflected now, walking along, it had not proved the safe refuge she had reckoned upon. Within a few days of her coming home to the Abbey, she had seen someone pass the gate who had known her in Rome as Mrs. Lang. She need not have feared Jane Wilding; but conscience makes cowards of us all. Jane had left Rome before the death of William Hunt took place; she knew nothing about it; and the surprise she showed at sight of Mrs. Mayne, was caused by having heard that that lady's name had been Dixon, whereas she had known it as Lang. But Jane Wilding was a prudent girl and did not speak of this.

Close upon this occurred another trouble; or danger, as Mrs. Mayne had regarded it: the coming to the Abbey of Mary Dixon. Mme. de Breteuil died, and Mr. Mayne was resolute. She believed she was safer without Mary: that it was better they should live apart: and moreover she had feared Mary's charms might prove an attraction to her inert step-son, Godfrey, and then who was to foresee what complications might ensue? The next and greatest trouble was the discovery that in coming to Croxham she had come into the very jaws of danger, for Sir William Hunt lived close by.

It had been all against her from first to last: and the tears streamed down her cheeks as she acknowledged it. Sometimes she had thought that if she could only find the courage to meet Sir William face to face, and show him the real truth of the past and how innocent of all ill she herself was, and that her own life had been blighted by the trouble, just as his had, that he would express sorrow for his persecution, and perhaps condone the crime of Edward for her sake. If she had but the courage to do this!—and perhaps she should have now, since Edward was safe away on other shores. Oh, what a delightful home the Abbey would be to her then! she would spend her days in making everybody happy about her.

Taking comfort in the anticipation, almost believing it might be realised, she dried her tears away. The handkerchief was still on her eyes when she heard a word, seemingly addressed to her, that sounded like "mother." She was at the end of the field then, close to the stile that divided it from the next field; on the right of the path was a wide bank of trees, and a rough-looking man with a quantity of red hair about his face, and wearing a slouching hat, and a shabby thick overcoat with a high collar, stood under them.

"Mother!" said he again, in a low, cautious tone.

"Who are you?" she exclaimed, sharply, not pleased with the familiarity of the address. "What do you want?"

The man lifted his hat for a moment, pushed his hair off his face, drew a step nearer, and looked at her.

"Don't you know me, mother?"

One of the shrillest screams of terror ever heard broke then from

Mrs. Mayne. She knew him now. She looked terrified to death, and leaned back against the stile, shaking and trembling.

Good heavens!—Is it you?" she ejaculated.

"I've been dodging about here these two days, trying to meet you," he said.

"But—how is it? What brings you here? Have you come back from America? There has not been time for that, has there?"

"I did not go to America," he said, savagely. "I didn't leave London. Where's Mary? That's what I'm come down to ask."

"*Mary!*" returned his mother. "Is she not with you?"

"I've never set eyes on her since that Sunday afternoon at Westminster Abbey. Didn't you take care of her when you came out? I thought you might have brought her down here."

The terror still lay on Mrs. Mayne's face; she looked, besides, helplessly mystified. "I saw her go out with you," she said; "I saw your hand upon her shoulder."

Edward Lang began to swear. When that was over, he gave his mother an outline of what had happened to him that past afternoon.

Whilst the firm grasp of his hand lay on his wife's shoulder, he had suddenly seen a man within a yard of him whose gaze was rivetted on his face. Edward Lang recognised him, and turned cold. It was one of the two police detectives who knew him personally; who had been staying in Rome just before the murder. That he had been looking for Edward Lang ever since, and would assuredly put his capturing hands upon him now when they got outside the Abbey doors, the wretched culprit knew. He released Mary, slid back amidst the crowd; he was slim and supple as an eel; and got back into the Abbey, and hid himself. His mother would see to Mary, he supposed; he did not doubt that. By-and-bye, when he cautiously emerged from the edifice, he saw, to his horror, that same detective in the company of a policeman in uniform. It was dark then; past experience had taught him craft, and he managed to steal away unseen and be lost to the world amid certain shady parts of Westminster. He stayed there for two nights and a day. On the Tuesday morning he ventured out to look about him: and, whether it was righteous Fate pursuing him, or whether it was simple ill-luck, he never knew, but within five minutes he met the policeman that he had seen with the detective. In his fear he concluded that the man was specially looking for him; turned round, took to his heels, and in avoiding a cab dashing round a corner, he fell and sprained his ankle. Back to where he had been hiding, limped he; and for ten days afterwards he could not put his foot to the ground. Now that he was better and could get about again, he had come down to see after Mary—and to take her away with him.

"I have never seen or heard from her since that afternoon at the Abbey," protested his mother after she had listened to this. "The crowd impeded me and I was a long while getting out. I looked about then, but could not see either of you: and I supposed, naturally, that you had not waited for me, but had taken a cab to Euston station."

"Then she made her escape from us!" he rejoined. "I knew it was what she meant to do if she got an opportunity. You thought she was reconciled to coming with me and trusted her: I did not."

He pushed aside the rough over-coat that covered him, took his silver watch from his pocket and glanced at it. Mrs. Mayne spoke.

"Was it necessary for you to come here in this disguise, Edward?"

"It's necessary for me to be disguised everywhere, with the police looking after me; and this is as good a disguise as any other."

"You should not lose any time in making your escape from this country."

"I'll make it to-morrow, if you'll find Mary to make it with me. What am I to do over there without her—and her money? The hundred pounds you furnished me with will not much more than take us thither now: already a tolerable hole is made in it."

Mrs. Mayne trembled yet; her eyes filled again. She was willing to help him to Mary; would ask nothing better; but she was at an utter loss to know where Mary was.

"She would not go back to Mrs. Ross; if her object was to elude you, Edward, that is the very last place she would seek. She would be quite capable of hastening over alone to that convent in Switzerland, in which she stayed so long. What is to be done?"

"Couldn't you make some enquiries for me, mother," he said, "and ascertain where she is? I dare not. I shall go back to London to-night, as she's not here, and I will send you an address in a day or two where it will be safe for you to write to me."

"Very well," sighed Mrs. Mayne. "Oh, Edward, my son, how cruel, how contrary all things seem to go!" she broke forth. "It was my one consolation—that you and Mary had escaped together."

Just a little while longer they remained talking and then parted. Mrs. Mayne did not go on to the village; she turned back home, the bitter tears falling from her eyes in a stream all the way.

She wrote to three people: Lady Davenant, Mr. Thorn, and Mrs. Ross: and she wrote craftily, as usual, saying she had mislaid her daughter Mary's address—would they kindly furnish her with it. If none of these gave her the information, she did not see how else she could obtain it, or to whom else she could apply.

Lady Davenant did not reply to her at all. Mrs. Ross sent a bare line by return of post, saying she was not acquainted with Miss Davenant's present address; and the same post brought her the following letter from Mr. Thorn.

"Madam,—When Miss Davenant escaped from the custody of yourself and your son, she came to me for protection; and she acquainted me with certain details of the past, which she had until then withheld from me. She is now under a more powerful protection than mine, for I have made her a ward in Chancery—and you can neither see her nor address a letter to her without first obtaining the permission of that court.

I must also inform you that I at once made it my business to institute full enquiries into the particulars of the marriage ceremony (so called) which she was deluded into going through with Edward Lang. I found (as I suspected from one or two remarks she let fall) that certain formalities, necessary to constitute a marriage abroad legal, were providentially not complied with: the marriage therefore, I am thankful to be able to inform you, was from the first *null and void*. I am, madam, your obedient servant, CHARLES THORN."

Mrs. Mayne gasped for breath as she read this. Could it indeed be true? An under-current of belief, that it was true, filled her heart. She remembered how hastily and confusedly the preliminaries for the marriage were arranged in Edward's hurry to get it over: no doubt some legal essential or other had been overlooked.

And now, what remained? Nothing but the fact that he had no further hold on Mary.

Mrs. Mayne wrote this miserable news to him as soon as he sent her an address in London. It was in some Terrace at Hoxton—which she believed was a populous but not distinguished part of the metropolis, considerably distant from fashionable quarters and also from Scotland Yard. In this letter she affectionately recommended him to make his way on board ship en route for another land: there was nothing now to wait for in this one. He replied to this advice by saying that he would take it as soon as she sent him some money. He must have that; another hundred pounds at least.

While Mrs. Mayne was wondering where she could get this second hundred pounds, and what excuse to make to her husband if she should have again to apply to him, some few days went on, and on one of them a telegram was brought to her. Mr. Mayne had gone out riding with Godfrey and young Scarsdale.

"What now?" thought Mrs. Mayne as she opened it. "I suppose it is from Edward."

It was not from Edward; he would never send a telegram away again. It was from his wife; the young woman he had married in America—and who, as things turned out, really was his wife. She stated that her husband had met with a dreadful accident, and he wished his mother to hasten up if she would see him alive.

Mrs. Mayne went up by the first train she could take, leaving a message for her husband that she had been called to town by the illness of a friend. The telegram had been sent from the Terrace, Hoxton, and she made her way to it when she reached town.

After breakfast that morning Edward had been doing something to his revolver; it was loaded, and by some accident it went off and shot him through the body.

"He always would keep it loaded," said the wife, amid her sobs and tears, to Mrs. Mayne, "and he was so fond of handling it."

Life was ebbing fast. Within an hour of his mother's arrival, with his yearning eyes lifted piteously to hers as if seeking forgiveness for the past, and her hand locked in his, Edward Lang passed away, with his faults and crimes and follies.

Mr. Thorn (in Mary's interests more than in Mrs. Mayne's) called upon Sir William Hunt, who was then staying in town. He there laid before the baronet a full account of the past, relating the truth minutely, and showing him that Mrs. Lang (now Mrs. Mayne) had been more sinned against than sinning, and authenticating the death of the real and only criminal, Edward Lang. Sir William, who was a tender-natured man, heard the story with emotion, warmly expressing his contrition that any misapprehension of his should have served to augment the trouble and distress of a suffering lady, especially one who was the wife of his dear old friend Mayne.

In fact, no man could have behaved more generously than Sir William. He travelled down to Croxham on purpose to hold a private interview with Mrs. Mayne at the Abbey, to which place she had returned; and he assured her that she had his truest and heartiest sympathy; he should not ever recur to the past again, or hint to the world that she had been in any way connected with it. Mrs. Mayne cried softly as she thanked him; he little knew, she said, what a life of misery and distress hers had of late years been.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CONCLUSION.

In the old-fashioned and spacious garden at Lady Davenant's, on which the back of the house looked, and which was filled with fragrant and homely flowers, the lilacs and laburnums being all in their spring bloom, strolled Mary Davenant one fine April day. She had been with Lady Davenant all the winter, that lady having stepped forward when she found Mary was made a ward in chancery, to say that her own residence was the most suitable one for her step-daughter. The court decided that it was, and Mary went to it. They became better friends than they had ever been before: with the return of the girl to her home Lady Davenant lost her harshness of manner, while Mary's yielding spirit had been toned by the trouble she had passed through. Only for two days longer would Mary be there now: it was Tuesday, and on Thursday she was to be married to Godfrey Mayne.

She was all in white that warm afternoon, except for a bit of pale blue ribbon in her dark hair and a knot of it at her throat! and the sun, drawing near to its setting, shone straight upon her; a dainty looking girl, as lovely as the sweet garden flowers that surrounded her.

Some slight stir, as of greeting, suddenly reached her ears from the drawing-room, whose large French windows stood open, and Mary turned her eyes towards it. Stepping out to the balcony, and thence to the garden, came Godfrey Mayne.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mary, in surprise. "You! You were not to be up until to-morrow, Godfrey!"

"Was I not? Shall I go back again?"

Their gaze met, each one betraying its own ardent love. Godfrey put Mary's arm within his own, and they began slowly to pace down the path together. Her hand lingered in his, yielding to its fond pressure.

Godfrey had been quite well for a long while now. Before Christmas the medical men had pronounced him cured: and then he travelled up to town to Mrs. Penteith's, and there ensued a sort of solemn betrothal to Mary at Lady Davenant's.

He knew as much of the past as she did. She had disclosed to him everything: expressing her bitter contrition for the many foolish ruses she had made use of at the Abbey, to disarm him of any suspicion he might entertain of Mrs. Mayne. She acknowledged that all had been suggested, nay enforced, by her whom she then called mother, and confessed her own inward rebellion, her unspeakable distress at having to play so false a part. It was Mrs. Mayne who ordered her to say she had heart disease, with the view of turning off the effect which the conversation Godfrey had overheard might have upon him; and other matters, which she should never recall but with shame. Mary Davenant was by nature intensely honest and truthful, and she had felt it more sharply than would one of lighter nature. It was all over now; the fever and the suffering and the pain, and her heart was at rest.

"And how is it, Godfrey, that you travelled up to-day instead of to-morrow?" asked Mary.

"It was my father," answered Godfrey. "He took a fidgetty notion into his head yesterday that the train might break down and detain us en route until Thursday, so he gave me orders to be ready to start in the morning, telegraphing to Aunt Margaret to expect us. We reached Eaton Place soon after mid-day."

"Where is he?"

"In there," nodding his head backwards, "talking with Lady Davenant. Mrs. Penteith is there also: we drove down in her carriage."

"And Mrs. Mayne? Is she better?"

"A little. Not well enough to come up to attend the ceremony, she said: and best of her not to," added Godfrey, drawing his lips into a severe curve. "Not but that the past has tried her. I have brought all sorts of messages for you, Mary," he went on; "love and congratulations, and such like. Your old ally, Ben Griffiths, begged he might send you his respectful homage! Ben must have been reading romances, I think."

Mary laughed. "Good, faithful lad!"

"And Nancy Wilding has sent up a bundle as big as a haystack: something of her own work inside it, I believe, and her 'dutiful love and best wishes' outside."

"She is another faithful friend. Did Ernest Underwood come up with you, Godfrey?"

"How could I be married without my best man?" asked Godfrey, smiling. "Oh, yes, he came with us; he is at the Grosvenor. Elspeth and he are to be married in September."

"She will suit him better as a wife than she would have suited you," said Mary, glancing shyly up.

He drew a kind of sobbing breath. "Oh, my darling, do not recur to that. There's my father looking out for us."

They turned. Mr. Mayne stood on the lawn, his arms outstretched to Mary; Godfrey led her up. Lady Davenant and Mrs. Penteith were smiling on them from inside the room.

"My dear little girl! my sweet White Witch!" cried the old gentleman, with a beaming face, as he drew her to him. "Soon to be my very own little girl for ever!"

"Your own dutiful, loving child for ever," breathed Mary; "your own little White Witch."

THE END.

THE HOUSE IN FOULIS SQUARE.

I.

FOR weeks I had been looking forward to my twentieth birthday. It came on the tenth of January, 187—, and it was the unhappiest day of my whole life.

I was a daily governess at Westow House, Kensington. My father died in Devonshire, where he was curate under the Rev. James Mostyn, of Starr. I was an only child. Frank Mostyn, the rector's son, was also an only child, and my constant playmate, and perhaps it was only natural that he should seek me out in after years, when the sudden death of his father destroyed his prospects, and sent him to earn his bread as a solicitor's clerk, in the darkest, grimiest part of London.

Equally natural and right it seemed to me, when I became Frank's promised wife. We were a couple of young simpletons I don't doubt, for neither of us could save much out of our small salaries as a nest-egg for a future home. But we were very fond of each other, and we had an immense amount of hope and faith in our future; as for the present—"How happily the days of Thalaba went by!"

Mrs. Westow was the widow of a wealthy stockbroker, and the mother of three little girls. She took a great and genuine interest in me, and to her I had confided the story of my engagement. To every one else it was a secret, the happy secret that gilded with sunshine the passing clouds of my very darkest day.

The tenth of January fell on a Monday, that year. When I put on my hat and cloak, after luncheon, on Saturday, Mrs. Westow was ready with good wishes, and the little girls came and kissed me, and threw round my neck their united gift—a costly fur cape.

"You are to wear it on Monday, dear Miss Heriot, and to think of us," they cried.

Sunday passed as usual. I rose bright and early next morning, and looked out of the one window in my upper room in the Wayland Road. The day was fair. What happiness! I could safely wear my new dress, and the hat that Frank had not yet seen, and with the new fur cape I should be well dressed enough to please even his fastidious eye.

The maid who waited on me was removing the breakfast tray, when the postman's knock shook the small house. She set the tray on the landing, and returned the next moment with a letter for me. It was from Frank, and this is what it said:

"MY DARLING LUCY,—I have just received a telegram from my Aunt Mostyn. She wishes me to come to Brighton instantly, and I have only a moment to write. I am sorry for our mutual disappointment, as you may imagine. We must make a 'movable feast' of the birthday, and celebrate it when I return.

"Ever, your devoted FRANK."

The date was Saturday afternoon.

I sat down and cried over that unlucky letter until I could cry no more.

Miss Rebecca Mostyn, wealthy and charitable, lived a life devoted to good works. She had only two near relatives in the world—the orphan sons of her two dead brothers. Gerald Mostyn, the eldest of her nephews, was said to be wild and was on the Continent, living no one knew how. Miss Mostyn had assisted the young men very little. She procured a situation for each of them, and there it ended. She believed in work for people who were well and strong. Gerald turned restive under such discipline, threw up his situation, and went abroad. Frank remained in his place, and gave satisfaction. But to neither of the two came any gift from the full purse of the aunt. Her charity was reserved for the sick and suffering. She sought out those who had fallen in life's battle, and set them on their feet again, and having done this she expected them also to work.

It was supposed that her nephews would inherit her wealth in good time. She was now seventy years of age, and within the last twelvemonth had invested a large sum of money in a seaside "Refuge" for young girls and women who needed fresh air, change, and generous diet, to enable them to recover, after the long and hopeless illnesses that come to so many of the poor. Over this, her latest and largest charity, Miss Mostyn spared no time, trouble, or expense.

It was to this house that Frank had been so suddenly summoned. I knew how good and kind his aunt was, but it *did* seem hard that she should unconsciously spoil my one bright holiday of all the year.

I put my gala attire away, and Frank's letter with it. I had no heart now for the excursion which we had intended to make together. In my ordinary walking dress I went out and strolled aimlessly away beyond Hammersmith and Brook Green.

At early dusk I returned, tired and footsore, and the first thing I heard as I came along the High Street of Kensington was Frank Mostyn's name.

I turned, surprised, to look at the speaker. Two decent working men, with bags of tools slung over their shoulders, stood before a coffee house. One was smoking, the other was pointing to a poster at the door.

"There it is, in black and white, if you don't believe me, Tom. This Mr. Frank Mostyn is a young clerk in some lawyer's office in the city, and on Saturday he goes down to Brighton to see a rich aunt. The old lady had just opened a place to take in sick women from London, and they say she had over five hundred pounds in gold in the house, that she was to pay out on the Monday. It is supposed the nephew knew this. Anyway, down he comes and dines by himself, because his aunt is over-tired, and has been forced to go to bed for a rest. After dinner he goes to see her in her bedroom, and then he comes out and tells the maid that her mistress is sleepy and mustn't be disturbed. The maid waits till eleven o'clock, and then she makes bold to go in. She finds the lady dead and cold—murdered. When she gives the alarm no one can find the five hundred pounds, or the precious nephew, though it's supposed that he has fled to France, and a detective has been sent over after him. What do you think of that by way of a holiday from Saturday to Monday?"

The men walked away discussing the case. As soon as I could command myself sufficiently, I went into the shop and bought the paper. I got to my room somehow, and read the terrible story. Then I locked the paper in my trunk, put a few things in my carpet-bag, and left the house.

I called on Mrs. Westow on my way to the railway station. She came to me in the morning room with a face full of sorrowing sympathy.

"I sent for you two hours ago, but you were out," she said, taking my hand in both hers.

"Oh, you don't—you *don't* believe that Frank is guilty?" I faltered.

"Nonsense," she answered, as she kissed me. "Of course he is not guilty."

That answer gave me fresh courage and strength. It was only what I felt and knew, but it was so much to hear it spoken by another. "Then, Mrs. Westow, help me to save him!"

"You, poor child! what can *you* do?"

"There is some horrible mystery. You must see that. If you can send me to that house I will never rest till I bring it all to light."

She shook her head.

"No guest can be received there now, Lucy. The whole house is in a turmoil. I have just had a letter from Miss Bence, the matron, begging me to send her an assistant, for the three servants are frightened to stay, and have given warning."

"There is my chance. Send me as the assistant, Mrs. Westow."

"But, Lucy, you don't understand. If the servants leave, some of the patients remain. They must be waited upon. It would be hard, heavy, disagreeable work; not at all fit for you to perform."

"I will scrub floors, or black boots, or sweep chimneys, if needful," I cried. "Only get me into that house under an assumed name, dear Mrs. Westow, and let me go at once, for it will drive me mad to feel that I am doing nothing for Frank, as this long night goes by."

I had my way. At nine o'clock that same evening a fly took me through the streets of Brighton to the quiet suburb which had suddenly obtained such an unenviable newspaper notoriety.

After driving along a lonely road for some distance the fly skirted a square of ancient looking houses. At the end the driver checked his horse before an imposing mansion of red stone, with a pillared porch. I saw him look curiously up at the front windows before he rang an echoing bell. The blinds were all drawn down. Not a gleam of light shone along the façade. A dreary and desolate "Refuge" it looked, on that evening, the house in Foulis Square.

II.

The "Refuge" was a well-built mansion standing in its own grounds, surrounded by high walls, and shaded by trees that were young when George the Fourth was king. It fronted the sea. A boisterous wind swept up from the shore that set all the windows rattling, and slammed the double-leaved hall door upon the retreating driver of the fly.

I stood in a wide old-fashioned hall, listening to the roaring of the wind, while a pert maid servant took Mrs. Westow's letter of introduction to the Matron. A stone staircase dazzlingly white wound upward from the hall, round and round to the attics. My eye was attracted, by a vivid gleam of colour, to the second landing.

A woman, dressed in black, with a scarlet shawl over her shoulders, was leaning over the banister, hanging forward dangerously, as it seemed to me. A gas-light unshaded burned close beside her. I plainly saw the reddish colour of her hair cut square across a low forehead, and braided in her neck. Distinct, also, was the singular pallor of her delicately featured face, the slenderness and uprightness of her figure, the searching intensity of the gaze she fixed on me. The colour of her eyes I could not distinguish, but their glitter and the peculiarity of the unchanged attitude and unwavering glance affected me disagreeably—I knew not why.

At the foot of the staircase a narrow hall or passage branched off towards the left. The pert servant took me down this passage to a door marked "Matron's Room." On the threshold I glanced back at the upper landing. The woman in the red shawl was looking at me still.

Miss Bence, the Matron, came forward to meet me. I was surprised to find her quite young. I set her down at five-and-twenty at the most, and very pretty. A clear, healthy complexion, soft, wavy dark brown hair, with large, innocent, deep blue eyes, and the frank, happy look and smile of a child. But her mouth and chin were firm, and the shape of her head, the "perfect head" of the phrenologist, showed that she was well adapted for her peculiar place and work.

"I am very glad to see you, Miss Smith," she said, offering me her hand. "We are in terrible trouble, as you may imagine. All the patients who were well enough to move have gone. The few who are obliged to remain through illness are half beside themselves with terror. The servants will go to-morrow. Poor Miss Mostyn! It is a cruel ending to a life lived for the good of others."

Her lip trembled. Her blue, tearful eyes, looked like forget-me-nots under still water. Murmuring a word of apology, she left the room. Presently she returned, capable and composed. With her own hands she brought a tray of refreshments for me, saying that the servants were now afraid to go about the passages at night

Soon the question that was burning in my heart arose to my lips.

"Do you think Mr. Frank Mostyn is guilty of this horrible crime, Miss Bence?"

"I do not," was the instant reply. And I blessed her in my heart.

"I only saw Mr. Mostyn a few moments on that evening, for I went out to dine with a friend," she continued. "But he impressed me most favourably. I know his strange disappearance is against him. But for that he may not be responsible, poor fellow."

"Do you mean—is it possible that you think—he is dead?" I asked, thrown off my guard for a moment.

"Candidly, I don't know *what* to think," she said, musingly. "Everything has turned thus far upon the one theory of Mr. Mostyn's guilt. Search has been made only in the one direction. My own opinion—my own suspicion—is utterly at variance with the public; but I don't know that I ought to say this. My lips must be sealed, I fear, for I must appear at the inquest—and it is only a fancy, you see—I have no actual proof."

She spoke somewhat incoherently, her eyes fixed upon the fire.

"Do you believe in *possession?*" she asked, abruptly.

I stared at her in utter surprise. The commonplace comfort and snugness of the room, with its easy chairs, and curtains, and table-covers, and sofas of purple damask, its dwarf bookcases, china, pictures, and ornaments, shown by the light of the two tall wax candles and the blazing fire; the youthful Matron's own appearance, so trim and graceful, yet so stamped with energetic capability and sound common sense: these things were so diametrically opposed to that strange question, that I wondered if I had heard aright.

"It is only lately that the theory has occupied my mind," she continued. "I have been reading—the fact is, it *haunts* me. I wish I could shake off the impression. The Bible shows us that such a thing was once possible. Why not in these days?"

She seemed to be following out some train of argument in her own mind. At that moment a voice, silky and singularly deep and sweet, spoke outside the door, in answer to some call from below.

"Prayers? Yes, it is time, Marian. As I am here I'll ring the bell. You need not come up."

"All right," shouted Marian from some lower region. And a bell rang loudly in the hall.

Miss Bence shuddered. "Such horrible mockery;" I heard her say to herself. Then she rose, and offered to show me the way to the dining-room, where prayers were to be read. At that door she left me, after pointing out my seat.

Two noble rooms thrown into one, with purple curtains depending from the arch where folding-doors had once been. The ceiling was frescoed, the walls were panelled, a vast fireplace with marble pillars filled either end of the room. In one, a dull fire was smouldering: one burner of a chandelier, above a long table, was lighted, and around the table the few remaining patients were ranged, each one with a Bible and prayer-book before her. The three servants sat a little apart, whispering and glancing over their shoulders into the darkness that lay beyond the arch. At the upper end of the table stood the Matron's chair, and on the right of that chair was the purple sofa on which I sat.

A tall woman, dressed in black with a scarlet shawl, glided in at the open door. Treading in her very steps came a white-haired lady, wearing a widow's cap and a dress of rich black silk. She was short in stature, rather stout, but singularly dignified and graceful in her movements. She stood beside the Matron's chair, the costly frills of lace at her wrists and throat just stirred by the motion of her swift entrance, the diamond on her white hand flashing out its rays of quivering blue fire; she had a fine, strong face, still handsome, with its smiling dark eyes, and a fresh colour was on her cheeks framed in their silvery curls.

I was surprised at the marked rudeness of the patients. No one rose, no one even looked up at her, as she stood regarding them with that gentle, friendly smile. I bowed, although her eyes were not turned my way, and as I did so I became aware that the woman in the red shawl had taken her place at the other end of the sofa. She was leaning forward, watching me. Her eyes were of the palest, lightest blue: almost *white* they seemed as their shrinking, evil, blighted glance searched my face with a kind of horror-stricken intensity, and then turned cowering toward that figure by the Matron's chair.

When I looked that way again the lady had gone. Miss Bence was in her place. She gave out a hymn that I knew well; I did not open my book, but leaned back and closed my eyes to listen.

Fair though she was, the woman in the red shawl was gifted with a magnificent contralto voice, dominating rather than supporting every other voice. Deep, sweet, liquid, yet ringing, it so thrilled and wrought upon my nerves, that I was forced to leave the room. I could scarcely see my way for tears.

I went back through the side passage. A cheerful glow came through the half open door of the Matron's room. The lady whom

I had seen in the dining-room passed me on the threshold: her head was bent, her eyes were fixed upon the floor. Apparently lost in thought, she glided along the hall. At a door on the right-hand she paused; then she turned and looked steadily at me; she raised her hand, pointed to the door, and passed through it. She had not spoken. I scarcely knew whether she wished me to follow. I waited a moment. Receiving no further summons, I went into the Matron's room, shut the door, and sat down before the fire.

I made my apologies to Miss Bence, when she came.

"It was that contralto voice that affected me so strongly," I remarked.

"The voice? And what do you think of its owner?" began the Matron. Then added, hurriedly: "No, don't tell me, please; I ought not to have asked. My anxiety—this great responsibility—make me imprudent, I fear."

"Why do you not share both with that sweet-faced old lady I saw just now?"

I certainly asked that question; but it seemed to me that the words were put into my mouth, and that I was forced to utter them.

"What lady?" Miss Bence turned pale.

I described her, and the colour came rushing back to her face.

"Have you ever seen Miss Mostyn?—Or her picture?" she asked.

I had not.

She took a coloured cabinet photograph from the wall, and placed it in my hand. Dark eyes, fresh colour, silvery curls, kindly smile, they were all there before me, and there was the dignified figure in the black dress and the widow's cap!

"I remember one thing now," I said, and I felt the blood leaving my own cheeks: "I *heard no step*, no rustle of silk, as that figure passed away. And no one noticed it in the dining-room except myself—and the woman in the scarlet shawl; the woman who sang."

"That woman is Julia Billings, her maid—who was the first to find her dead, and to give the alarm. Evening after evening has Mrs. Mostyn taken that chair by which you saw her stand. And the room to which she pointed is the room which her maid has used since the murder. You may have been sent here to unravel this dreadful mystery, and to save an innocent man," said Miss Bence, as we clasped hands to give each other courage, and sat cowering and whispering over the dying fire.

III.

In the hushed quiet of that midnight hour, with the books that Miss Mostyn had used, and the ornaments she had chosen, plainly visible around us, if we looked up from the dying fire it had been easy for Miss Bence, as for myself, to believe in the mysterious appearance, to say to each other nervously: "It may be possible, to save the innocent, to point out the real criminal—who knows?"

There was no disguise between us. I told her my real name and my reason for coming to Foulis House. On her part, the young Matron confided to me the suspicion which as yet she had scarcely dared whisper to herself. We agreed to watch and to act in concert. Then, with a kindly good-night, we separated.

Miss Mostyn was lying in the room on the first floor, which was called "the Superintendent's Study." During the day Julia Billings, the maid, by her own request, kept watch and ward there. At eight o'clock each evening two women relieved her, and remained till nine the next morning. No one slept on that floor now. My own room led out of the side hall. Miss Bence escorted me to the door. As I stood watching her on her way back, I saw the gleam of a red shawl inside the door of a small closet on the landing where pails and brooms were kept. Ensconced in that retreat, Julia Billings also watched and listened till my door was closed.

On the morrow the inquest took place. As a supposed stranger to all parties, who had only arrived at Foulis House after the murder, I was not summoned before the Coroner. Julia Billings was the first witness.

She stated that there were only three servants kept at Foulis House. One had leave of absence on that fatal Saturday evening. The other two being unusually busy in consequence, had begged Julia to wait upon Miss Mostyn's visitor. She, therefore, had prepared his room, had admitted him to the house, and served him with "a high tea" in her mistress's room. He had chosen that meal instead of dinner on finding that his aunt was ill.

"And did your mistress take tea with him?" asked the Coroner.

"She did not, sir," said Julia. "She had not been well all that day; and directly after breakfast she sent me to the telegraph office to summon Mr. Frank Mostyn from London. She did not rise till two o'clock. After she was dressed she turned giddy. She lay down again upon her bed with the coverlet thrown over her. After Mr. Mostyn's tea was cleared away, she ordered me to place writing materials on the table beside the bed. I did so. Mr. Mostyn drew an easy chair up beside the table. When I came in a little later to look after the fire, there was gold on the table—a great deal it looked to me. They were talking eagerly. I thought Mr. Mostyn seemed vexed at something my mistress had been saying to him. In about half an hour he came out. I was in the lower hall as he came down the stairs. He told me that Miss Mostyn wished to sleep—that I was not to go in till she rang. Then he went away."

The coroner's questions elicited nothing more than had already been told of the fatal ending of that night.

Miss Bence left the room, after giving her testimony, in tears.

"I was obliged to tell the truth," she said to me when she grew composed. "I was forced to own that Miss Mostyn herself told me that her nephew might remain here several days, and that his sudden departure while I was spending the evening out with a friend surprised me. I am afraid I have injured him, but I could not speak falsely. Oh, how I wish I had stayed at home that night! I feel as sure of his innocence as you do, my dear. But my evidence goes straight against him; and how can we make prejudiced people believe what we cannot really prove to ourselves?"

We were both hopeless, and with good reason. The evidence and the verdict were alike. Both against my Frank!

A skilled detective was sent after him—to Paris first. A second messenger was dispatched to Brussels, where Mr. Gerald Mostyn was staying when last heard from. The funeral was to be delayed till Saturday, on the chance of Mr. Gerald's arrival. In the meantime, Foulis House was under surveillance. Watched, as we all knew, in the hope of Frank Mostyn's return.

Among the papers on the table in the Superintendent's Study had been found a letter from Miss Mostyn to her nephew Gerald, virtually disinheriting him, "for reasons which he would fully understand." So ran the words. And a Will of later date, very recently signed, bequeathed the sum of ten thousand pounds to trustees for the "Foulis House Refuge" and everything else—money, houses, lands, bank-stock and shares, without reserve, to her dear nephew, Frank Mostyn.

"Monster!" cried the public through the press and the strife of tongues. "Here was *a motive* for the murder! Impatient to enjoy his inheritance, the lost man had struck the fatal blow, and the life-blood of his benefactress stained the very paper on which the Will was written!"

It was useless to attempt to stem the tide of popular indignation. Even Mrs. Westow began to doubt. I saw—or thought I saw—evidence of her wavering faith in the long, kind letter that came to me directly after the inquest, and I left it unanswered.

I had spent only eight-and-forty hours in that dreadful house, but the time seemed like so many years to me. If I had not had so much actual hard work to do, I should have broken down in absolute despair. We often pity the very poor because they have no leisure to sit down with folded hands, and mourn over their losses and their griefs; but it may be that this is the one mercy that makes their hard lots endurable.

Two of the servants left the house as soon as the inquest ended. Only the pert Marian remained. To my surprise she threw herself gallantly into the breach, doing her best to fill the vacant places; but many hard, disagreeable tasks among the patients remained for Miss Bence and for myself.

We went out alternately for fresh air and exercise; but, on the Thursday, I felt so ill that Miss Bence dismissed me for the afternoon, charging me to spend every moment of the time in brisk walking close beside the shore.

Accordingly I went into the town, along the crowded Marine Parade, past the bank marked "Dangerous," past the Gas Factory, the pretty little square cottage of dark grey stone where the coastguardsmen live, and so out along the green cliffs and through Rottingdene.

A church clock struck four as I turned to retrace my steps. A treeless country and a shipless sea—thus has Brighton sometimes been described. On all that vast expanse of water only one vessel could be seen; and the great brown fields, shadowless and bare, stretched upwards, acre after acre, till they met the bare, unshaded downs.

One house only was in sight—a singular building of pale greyish-yellow stone, its steep gable-end fronting the lonely fields. At one side was a tower; at the other some humbler addition, whose moss-grown roof sloped nearly to the ground. There were no hedges, no winding lanes, no green hills, no sunny orchards, the stock yard was bare of cattle, and no labourers were busy about the fields. Its desolate uncared-for aspect was so strange, so unsuited to the busy city at its very threshold, that I watched it, as I walked along the cliff, till the sea fog coming up around me and the gathering twilight hid it from my view. The cliff path being thus rendered dangerous, I crept over a clay bank out into the high road that skirted the farmyard gates.

Uncertain of the way, I walked cautiously and slowly; lightly, too, no doubt, for out of the silence, the darkness, and the raw fog, came a man's voice, speaking as if no listener were near.

"I tell you there *is* danger, Julia," it said. "Those confounded newspapers are already asking where I can be that I do not see their accounts of the inquest. A little more, and they will have the clue. I dare not stay here, after to-night."

"You need not, Gerald," replied the voice of Julia Billings. "I am beginning to scent danger, too, and I won't wait for the funeral, as I intended. I mistrust one person at the Refuge; perhaps two."

"And yet you stay there?"

"Not after this one night, Gerald. I came to tell you so. No one knows or dreams that *you* visited your aunt in London two weeks ago, or that you followed her here on the chance of her forgiveness. You may thank her charitable craze for that. If you had both been much in the world, at the present time you would not have found it so easy to fly to the Continent, even in that disguise, as you will now."

"The charitable craze, as you call it, has taken ten thousand pounds out of the fortune, any way," was the reply, in a tone quite as bitter as her own. "And now that idiotic Frank, whom I hated in my boyhood, will take all the rest! I ruined my life, Julia, when I married you!"

"It is not ruined," said Julia, confidently. "I did think it was when the anonymous letter came from France to tell your aunt you were married. I was sure of it when she ordered you from her house in Belgrave Square, and when she sent for your cousin to join her here. But your lucky star rose again, Gerald, on that night."

"What do you mean?"

"I will not tell you yet. Go you to France this very night. I will join you at Marseilles within two days. Then I will whisper my secret in your ear, and you will take back the hard words you have just said, and acknowledge that you did well for yourself when you took the poor, half-French ballet-girl from the stage to be your wife."

The man began to pace impatiently to and fro as she went on talking in her low caressing voice.

Under cover of his heavy footsteps I stole away. I had heard enough to guide me in a certain line of action, and there was no time to lose if I was to reach Foulis House before the lady's-maid could return.

A light glimmered, dull and yellow, through the fog, soon after I passed the coastguard-station. It was the lamp at the Aberystwith Inn, and a fly stood before the door, empty and disengaged. I got in, and told the driver to take me as near to the police-station as possible. He left me a little below its door. After a brief conversation with an inspector, I returned to Foulis House. A letter from Mrs. Westow awaited me. She begged me to return to Kensington at once. She had suddenly decided to go abroad for the remainder of the winter, and would like me to accompany them. I wrote at once, thanking her for all her kindness, but adding that I could never leave England till I had cleared Frank's name of crime.

Having thus resigned my one situation, and, perhaps, lost my best friend, next to Frank, I went to Miss Bence to report the adventure of the afternoon, and to ask her to take a little rest before the drama of the evening should begin.

IV.

The rules at Foulis House had been relaxed since the murder, with one exception. It was still imperative that no member of the "Refuge" should be absent after dusk without leave. Julia Billings had slipped out unobserved during the afternoon hours, when Miss Bence and Marian were busiest. Consequently I was prepared for her appearance at the tea-table, in her ordinary house-dress, and with her usual aspect. On the dead pallor of that inscrutable face neither sun nor wind could leave a trace of change.

But she was human (although I sometimes doubted it, as I sat musing alone), and therefore susceptible of fatigue. In spite of her iron nerves, the week must have been an anxious one to her. Doubtless she had slept little of late; and now, when tea was over, the effect of her long, hurried walk, against a stiff sea-breeze, made itself felt.

I had promised Miss Bence that I would keep watch and ward while she slumbered. After the tea-bell had summoned everyone to the dining-room, and I had seen Julia Billings safely through the door, I had stolen out to the garden-gate, and silently admitted a stalwart constable.

It was his business thoroughly to search the room in the side passage which Julia Billings occupied, and where her trunk and hand-bag stood, ostentatiously unlocked. From that room he was to make his way, before tea was over, to a bedroom on the first floor, adjoining the Superintendent's Study. It had been occupied by the lady's-maid before the murder; and the inspector's theory was, that in that room some trace of guilt—if, indeed, the woman were guilty—would be found. But the inspector, like everyone else, was so thoroughly imbued with the belief that Frank Mostyn—my loyal, noble Frank—was the murderer, that he had scarcely given his mind properly to my story. Indeed, the policeman was sent to Foulis House more, I was fully persuaded, to quiet me than because a discovery was really expected that would clear Frank from the odium of the crime.

With the consciousness of the officer's presence in that upper room weighing on me like a guilty secret of my own, I sat beside the fire pretending to read, but, in reality, keeping guard that Julia Billings might not go upstairs too soon.

But, as I have said, fatigue, long continued excitement, and the hour spent in that fresh sea-breeze, combined to chain her to her chair. She shivered, and drew nearer the blaze, as if its warmth was needed. Presently, looking up from my book, I saw her leaning back in the easy chair. Her head rested against the marble of the fireplace; she was sound asleep.

The group gathered around the fire at the other end of the room were talking noisily. Their voices did not disturb her. We two were alone, secure from observation; I bent forward, and studied that sleeping face.

I am near-sighted, and on this account, I fail to see many defects in the countenance of my associates that are only too plain to others. Looking at Julia Billings from a distance, I had always taken her for the young woman she represented herself to be. The dead whiteness of her complexion, the colour of her hair, and the youthful way in which it was worn, the slightness of her figure, and the alertness of her movements, all confirmed that impression in my mind. Only one thing had contradicted it. The evil, shrinking expression of the pale eyes—the look that retreated, seeking some covert of shelter—instead of coming forward, frankly to meet my own, as an honest glance should do.

But now those eyes were closed. I had thought them dreadful. I had turned away from the sight of them, nervously feeling as if something wickedly uncanny were near me. But now I saw that to the eyes alone was that face indebted for any semblance of youth that it might wear. In the stillness of slumber, the secrets of that past life were partially revealed. It was no girl who sat near me,—but a woman, old in the world's ways. Haggard, tempest-tossed, passion-worn, sin-driven. I looked at her, and recalled the strange question, asked by the Matron, on the night of my arrival.

"*Do you believe in possession?*"

I could not remain another moment. I stole away upstairs, candle in hand, and tapped at the door of the officer's retreat.

"Are you there?" I whispered.

And when I heard his low reply, I began to feel safe once more.

At eight o'clock the two nurses would arrive. The tea-bell had rung, punctually, at six. But I had spent some time beside the dining-room fire. It was now a quarter to seven.

I suppose the officer's close vicinity gave me unusual courage. For the wish came over me to go and pay a first and last visit to the lady who had loved, and been so kind to her nephew Frank. The door was unlocked. I opened it, and entered.

It was a large room, square and lofty, with two long windows that faced the avenue and the sea. The blinds of these windows were not drawn down, and a gas-lamp in the avenue, opposite the hall-door, threw its light directly in the room. I scarcely needed my candle there.

A large bed, draped with purple curtains, stood on the right hand side of the door, between it, and the first of the two windows.

At the lower end, next the fireplace, two purple curtains, suspended from a gilded arch, were closely drawn together. As I was about to draw these curtains aside, I heard a step coming along the hall. It might be the lady's maid, or a nurse. I blew out my candle. The great bed stood out well from the wall. Into that space I glided, and the curtains concealed me.

The door opened quietly, some one entered. Then the key was turned in the lock.

Julia Billings crossed the room carrying a small brass lamp in her hand. She wore her waterproof cloak, which came to her feet, a black velvet hat and lace veil, and a fur collar. She placed the lamp on the mantelpiece and drew the curtains aside. Then I saw that they concealed nothing worse than a window, of which the blind was drawn down.

She looked from it to the other windows, pulled down their blinds with a jerk, and drew the heavy curtains over them.

The windows in front were of the modern French kind, opening like doors to the ground. That at the end was an old-fashioned one, with a cushioned window seat. She knelt down beside this, ran her hand along the polished wood of the floor, and seemed to measure a certain space from the wall. A portion of the flooring slid aside, disclosing a square open space beneath the window seat. Thrusting her hand into the aperture, the woman drew out a small black bag. The slip of wood was pushed again into its place. She rose to her feet, and her pale eyes glittered as she lifted the bag.

"The dead are of use when a treasure is to be guarded," she said, aloud, with a sinister smile. "All your own fault, mind you, mistress! You wearied me to madness with your prayers and your Bible readings, and your wasting money on the good-for-nothing poor. But I could have endured it if you had not insulted me so, that last night. Your nephew never should marry your servant, you said—and Frank should have all, and Gerald none. You were mistaken, mistress, and you have paid dearly for the mistake."

I heard the chink of gold, the rustle of paper, saw the flash of diamonds in the lamplight, as she coolly examined the contents of the hand-bag. Evidently, she was about to leave the house, to join Gerald Mostyn, or to follow him to France.

How could I give the signal in time to the policeman, with that locked door between me and safety? I could find courage for the attempt only by thinking of Frank, and of what he would say, when he learned that I, unaided, had cleared his name.

I drew a long breath, and stole softly, still screened by the bed and its curtains, toward the door. But she heard me, and dashed the bag down on the toilet table.

"You vile London spy!" she cried. "You are here, watching me. I know it! But the door is locked, and now I'll serve you as I served her!"

What she would have done I know not. I flung open the door, with a loud scream, as she rushed across the room. I thought I heard the crash of carriage wheels on the gravel outside, mingling with the tramp of feet in the passage, as the constable sprang between us just as her arm was uplifted above my head.

The blow intended for me fell upon him, but he held her fast. People came running up the stairs and along the hall, the room seemed filled with policemen in a moment, and she was in their midst, terrible to look on as she struggled for freedom. Then all at once she seemed to realise that it was all over with her, and she became quiet.

"Release me," she said, "and I will go with you anywhere, and make no resistance." They did so. In a moment her hand had dived into her pocket; the next she had swallowed the contents of a small packet. "Now do your worst," she said, "for my moments are numbered. You don't suppose that I had not prepared for such an emergency as this."

Even as she spoke a deathlike pallor crept into her face, and she seemed about to lose consciousness. "It is death," she murmured; "place me on the bed."

Miss Bence, pale and horror stricken, was beside me at the door.

The frightened servants and nurses stood crying in the hall. I felt that I must be going out of my mind, or dreaming, for Frank, also, stood beside me. And when I followed Miss Bence to the side of the bed, it was Frank, wrapped in his travelling coat, who stood there, and looked at me as if he felt that he, too, was dreaming.

It was no time for explanations between us. The wretched woman was speaking to Miss Bence.

The wildness had gone out of her. Gone, too, was the false look of youth. Only the worn, haggard, wasted face of a woman of forty, aged beyond her years, was left.

"It is all over," she said, wearily. "Gerald will hate me when he knows all. But I've lost him, and where's the use of living!"

No words can describe the despair of that low voice, the weariness of that changed face.

"I killed her," she continued. "Frank Mostyn is innocent. She had heard of Gerald's marriage, and disinherited him because of it. After Frank went away that night, I told her that I was Gerald's wife. I thought she was fond of me. I hoped she would forgive us, but she would not. And so—you know the rest."

"She sent me to France that very night, to beg Gerald to come back and she would forgive his marriage," said Frank. "In time, she would have forgiven you, too, even if the discovery made her angry just at first. And she made me promise to share all with him, if she should die before she could alter the Will."

"Is that true?" gasped the dying woman. "Then, indeed, has judgment come to me even in this world!" And with a wild cry that I shall hear to my dying day, she fell back upon the pillow.

"It is death, indeed," said the doctor, who had been sent for, and had silently entered the room.

I hid my face on Frank's shoulder, and burst into tears.

* * * * *

An hour later, as we sat with Miss Bence in the Matron's room, a message came from the Police Office to say that Gerald Mostyn was in custody, having been arrested at the railway station, in the disguise of a sailor, as he was purchasing a third-class ticket for the London train.

Alarmed at his position, Gerald made a voluntary and complete confession.

He had met Julia Billings in Paris, and had grown so infatuated as to take her from the stage and marry her privately. He had managed to get her into his aunt's service, but an anonymous letter having informed the old lady of his marriage, he dared not stem the torrent of her wrath, and introduce Julia as his wife.

Matters went on in this unsatisfactory way for nearly a year. Miss Mostyn threatened to disinherit her nephew. He was poor, over head and ears in debt, and he had grown tired of his wife. To keep him near her at any hazard, Julia had persuaded him to follow his aunt to Brighton, and to remain there till a favourable opportunity should offer for her to bring about their reconciliation.

The letter written to Gerald, the Will made in Frank's favour, alarmed Julia greatly. Then came the sudden journey of Frank Mostyn to the Refuge, and his equally sudden departure, for a reason she did not understand. That night Julia made her confession. It seemed to her to have been made in vain. Then followed the terrible result.

Circumstances so favoured the concealment of her guilt that the task was an easy one. The secret recess in the floor had been shown to Miss Mostyn at the time of the sale, by the former owner of the house. As she received the poor into the Refuge, it seemed well to her to make use of the recess, and her money and jewels were always deposited there during her stay. She had spoken of this to no one. But her maid, ever watchful and prying, had discovered it by chance, and turned it to her own convenience and use.

Frank's innocence was loudly proclaimed by the very newspapers which had been most eager to denounce him. Gerald Mostyn only waited to see his aunt laid in the family vault, and his wife buried in a quiet village cemetery, where no one knew her history—for to every one's surprise the verdict of the Coroner's jury was one of unsound mind—and then from Frank's hand he took his portion and went abroad; never, as he said, to look upon the shores of old England again.

The Refuge is still kept up, according to its founder's wish and plan, but it is in another place and under another name; and the pretty little Matron is no longer there. She resigned her post the day after Miss Mostyn's funeral, and she is now at the head of a happy household of her own.

Westow House is again occupied by the family. The little girls are grown into fashionable young ladies, and their mother long ago begged Frank's pardon because she once judged him so wrongly.

The world goes well with us. Frank has settled down into a thorough country gentleman, honoured and respected by his equals, loved as a benefactor by the poor. And I, his happy wife, have scarcely a wish ungratified.

But even in the midst of my happiness I shudder when I recall the dreadful end of that poor sinner. I lose myself in sad speculation over the mystery of her existence, and her doom. I remember all the agony of that most sorrowful birthday, and I can never think with composure for one moment of the House in Foulis Square.

ONE NEW YEAR'S EVE.

By the Author of "Phyllis," "Molly Bawn," etc.

To Miss Kathleen Blake, *Derrygra, Galway.*

"Tomakin, Edinburgh, Dec. 22nd, 1883.

"MY Dear Kathleen,—Here I am at last, after *such* a journey! If I had only known about it, I should have stayed at home, so that now I am rather glad I didn't know. That means that I am pretty comfortable, and quite charmed with all my surroundings. We are *of* Auld Reekie though scarcely *in* it, being perched upon the outskirts of it in a quite too charming house. When I jumped out of the carriage the night of my arrival, and stood in the small outer hall waiting for the bell to be answered, and peered curiously through the glass doors into the larger hall beyond, where a goodly fire was burning, I felt as if my lonely journey had not been for nothing after all. There were two large shaded lamps, that cast a rose-coloured flame upon the polished floor—the big fire I have already mentioned—and somewhat further back a dark oak staircase that faded off into gloom.

"Then a man threw open the door, and in another moment I found myself wrapped in the glow of the crimson lamps, and following my conductor obediently across the hall and down a passage, and round a corner, and into a recess, and goodness knows where, until we came to a—compartment shall I call it? At any rate it was an antique in the way of ante-rooms, and a door in some obscure corner of it being thrown wide, I was ushered ceremoniously into a brilliantly lighted room beyond.

"I never saw so many corners in any room before in all my life; and it was full of men, and a few women, and several dogs, all more or less in reposeful attitudes. There were no pink lamps in this room, and though it was singularly bright, I think it was only the enormous pine logs on the open hearth that lit it. Lady Janet rose to welcome me, and was as gracious in her reception of me as Nature permitted.

"I felt a wee bit shy at first, and hardly knew what to say. But they were all very good to me, and the women said some pretty things about our picturesque, if somewhat unpleasant land. One of them gently pushed me into a luxurious chair, and, unrequested, deprived me of my sealskin. Another administered to me my tea. It was sweet and strong, and such as my soul loveth. Oh! Katty; the very smell of it made me long for you and our little cosy chats at home. Surely no sister ever loved another as I love you! I said 'Yes,' and

'No,' to all their pretty speeches, as eloquently as I knew how, but I was, on the whole, silent, and spent my time trying to learn by heart all the different warlike weapons that adorned the walls of this strange room. I wondered how many arsenals in how many countries had been robbed to decorate them and the ceiling of it. There were rifles, dirks, broadswords, pistols, Indian daggers, boomerangs, clubs, spears, assegais, *everything* except (I regret to say it!) the simple and gentle shillelagh.

"Lady Janet has really been quite extraordinarily kind to me, and has given me to understand that she hopes I will forget that she was only my father's step-sister, and try to think of her as his very real own one. I have promised to do all that in me lies in this direction.

"And now, Katty, a last word. Don't let George come to Edinburgh. What's the good of it? I like him; but liking isn't loving, and I don't think I *want* him to love me. I've known him such a time, And when one has almost grown up with a person it makes all the difference. And the fact of his being a baronet doesn't count a scrap! And he is always looking at me so exactly as if he felt certain I should have him after all that he aggravates me. I want you to understand that I esteem George and all his solid qualities quite as much as you and mamma do—only that he worries me.

"Now, there is a man here who doesn't worry me. He calls himself my cousin, because he is a nephew of Lady Janet's; but really he isn't our cousin in any way. He is tall, handsome, distinguished. One likes him at a first glance. He is a little light and frivolous, perhaps, but very enjoyable; and—he fancies *me!* a *great* charm! After all, most women's likes and dislikes are bound and governed by the fact that somebody else likes or dislikes *them*.

"Let that be as it may, however, I confess I find a modest amount of pleasure in Darnley Bruce's conversational efforts, and in his near vicinity. I wish I had you in the next room, Katty, that I might go in and bore you a bit with my fancies; but as it is, I can only do it on paper—a more merciful way, as you can escape it if you will, with the fire so close at hand.

"Good-bye, my darling sister; and be *sure* you dissuade George from paying that visit here to Lady Janet he has so often threatened since I mentioned my determination to accept her last invitation. A kiss to the dearest of mothers.—Ever your own, "NORAH."

To MISS BLAKE, *Tomakin, Edinburgh.*

"Derrygra, Galway, Dec. 26th, 1883.

"DARLING NORAH,—Look out for squalls! Because he has *started!* The mother having read your letter to me, let out the whole affair without meaning it. She told him how you were enjoying yourself, and what delightful people Lady Janet had gathered round her, and that there was one man in particular whom Norah seemed to have found especially interesting. You know what mamma is when she once begins! He had a flowing account, I can tell you. I gave her a somewhat severe kick (we were at luncheon), which she bore like a martyr at the time, but for which I had a lecture afterwards. George was up in arms in a moment. I could see that by the glitter of his eye, and the increased suavity of his manner. I write this thus hurriedly, to give you timely warning of his advance upon you. I was quite mad with poor mamma about her want of discrimination in mentioning to him your modern Darnley, and she, when I explained matters to her, professed to be equally mad with herself. But, to be candid, I didn't believe her. I know that in her soul she favours George, and would gladly see you Lady Blake. And I cannot wonder. George, to my thinking, suits you down to the ground; and I don't believe one bit in your hero with the romantic name.

"Dear Norah, don't stay *too* long with that pompous old woman and her nephew, or I shall do something desperate.—Ever your loving sister, "KATHLEEN."

Christmas had come and gone, and a New Year was at hand. To Norah Blake the past three weeks spent in her aunt's Scottish home had proved far from unpleasant, though it had been with a doubting heart she had accepted the invitation. There had been moments, indeed, which were altogether pleasant—moments with which Mr. Bruce had had a good deal to do. He had fallen into her life at once, from that first hour when he saw her enter the firelit room, tall and pale, and faintly smiling, and had found himself a little later on rather wrapt up in the arranging of her movements, and almost of her thoughts. He had begun by declaring he would make her visit a pleasant one to her, and had ended by finding that it would be a pleasant one for him.

She was fresh, delightful, even a little amusing; one forgot to yawn when with her, one forgot a good deal, indeed, that one might better have remembered, perhaps, were the truth told. But to be able to forget successfully at times is a very comfortable gift.

The first few days had gone charmingly, and others might have followed as smoothly but for a new element that was thrown into their midst, in the person of the stalwart, solemn young Irishman, Sir George Blake. To Norah, even though his coming had been foretold to her by a faithful sister, his sudden descent upon all the surrounding frivolity had been something of a shock. At times in her quiet home in Ireland she had found him now and then a trifle oppressive; here he was immeasurably more so. He was, yet he was not her lover. He had, indeed, gone as far in that direction as she would permit, and had certainly conveyed to her the impression that he fully intended to go farther. He had not in actual words asked her to marry him, but there was not a shadow of doubt that he meant to do so on any occasion that might happen to strike him as being favourable to the possibility of his receiving to his question the answer he desired.

He was calm, methodical, by no means an ideal lover, but he was very good looking, and there was a standing solidity about him that carried its own weight and compelled her at times to think more of him than suited her.

As for Darnley Bruce, he was altogether different. He was as light as the other was solid, and knew more of the world's ways in his thirty years, than Sir George would have discovered in a lifetime. He was a tall, dark man, with an appealing, half-subdued manner that hinted at love making, but that seldom overstepped the limit or made *himself* uncomfortable. He was, Norah told herself, everything he ought to be, and she gave herself up unconditionally to the enjoyment of his perfections, and the arrangements he made for her bien être.

Christmas had been an effective time, and Norah, in a new gown that had showed off all her many points, had been conscious of an universal admiration, strange as it was exhilarating. Mr. Bruce had looked at her in a very appreciative fashion, and even Sir George's quiet glances that always seemed to her half full of disapprobation, had not had power to damp her inward satisfaction or her open delight at the fitness of things generally.

And now it was the eve of a New Year! To-morrow would see it dawn! They were all a little depressed in spite of many efforts to the contrary, and Lady Janet was undisguisedly sleepy. Sir George, the only guest that night, tired, perhaps, of listening to Norah's soft laughter as she sat apart with Bruce, had taken an early departure, almost immediately, indeed, after dinner; and at nine precisely Lady Janet rose from her couch and declared her intention of seeking her maid forthwith and the virtuous couch, that was to follow on that damsel's administrations. Norah, a little dismayed at the idea of having so early to seek a repose in which she was of no need, rose too.

"You need not come quite yet. You may stay a little longer, dear, and entertain Darnley," said Lady Janet, with drowsy good-nature. "But don't sit up TOO late. See to that, Darnley." She smiled at them in a listless fashion, and then faded sleepily away.

Norah glanced ruefully at her companion. "That means half-an-hour's grace, no more," she said, "and I do so hate going to bed until the spirit moves me. The way Aunt Janet speaks makes one feel as if one was a baby!"

She laughed, but there was unmistakable vexation in her mirth.

"Well, don't do it," said Darnley. Then he looked at her suddenly as though some thought had just occurred to him. "It is New Year's Eve," he said, "and the city will be illuminated, and there will be rejoicings of a rather unique character in certain parts of it. You, who live so far from us and our customs, should know something of our lower classes. Lady Janet is in bed and the world lies before us. Let us play truant for once. Put on your ulster and the hat that you least esteem, and let us sally forth in search of knowledge."

"I don't think," said Norah, hesitating, "that I much care for knowledge. There should be something else."

"There will be adventure. Cannot even *that* stir you? There will be the certainty that if discovered, condemnation will fall upon our heads. There is the thought that the estimable Sir George (who plainly regards you with open disapproval) would look with scorn upon our conduct. And ——"

"Yes—let us go," interrupted she, lightly, flushing and lifting to his, eyes that burned with a quick yet sombre fire.

A few minutes later she stole down, wrapped in a warm fur cloak and gently hooded, and together they stepped across the hall with its pink shaded lamps, opened the hall door for themselves, and, unknown to the household, emerged into the dullness of the night.

Her letter to her sister, a few days later on, described rather accurately what she saw and felt that night, and the strangeness of the circumstances that were to have such an effect upon her after life.

"I was told that up in the old town at the market cross, under the shadow of the Iron Church, all the poorer people assembled to 'proclaim' the New Year. Of course few of the eminently respectable class, of which we form two units, had ever witnessed their rites or ever meant to! The way was all uphill, as slippery as glass, and thronged with people, who were making noise enough to break the drum of one's ear. I was glad I had on my warm cloak, as it was colder far than anything except ice-pudding.

"The mist was below us, and looked much as the moon might look to those who had got above it, being all luminous with a pure white brilliancy that came from the electric lamps of the railway station hidden somewhere in the depths. Above us was the black outline of the old town and the Castle rock. Everything reasonable seemed all at once *miles* away, and I was beginning to have a strong fit of repentance, and a mean hankering for my bed-room fire, when —I was rewarded for all my temerity. Oh! Katty, I *wish* you had been with me. I hardly feel sorry for *anything* when I recall it! There was the pitch darkness of the night, the surging, trampling crowd somewhere near, the gaunt houses creeping away up into the ghost-like mist like so many giant cliffs; and all, and everything lighted up in true demoniac style by the red and green and orange fires that flamed up at the corners of all the streets. The effect was indescribably weird, and to add to it one could see vaguely, through the smoke of the fires and the cloudy mist, the great tower of the church with its clock lights.

"And then suddenly there was a great silence—a silence that seemed to me louder than all the tumult that went before it. I thought I heard the beating of all the hearts around me. The fires grew on the instant brighter and brighter; they sprang up as if to reach the sky; their lurid tongues pierced and flamed through the murky darkness, and then, all at once, some clock tolled the hour. What hour I did not then know; but as the last sound of it died on the air, there arose from the multitude a shout, such as I, at least, never heard before! It rang and echoed through the night, and then it ceased, and the fires died down mysteriously, and the smoke and the mist met each other and swept over everything, and even the yellow lights in the church tower grew dim. It was all very eerie, but exciting, more than I can say."

So far, Norah's letter could explain matters; but no farther. The mist, indeed, came down upon her and Bruce, and the thought of home ran at last very high within their breasts. When the final toll of the bell had sounded on their ears, they turned, as if with one mind, and sought to escape the turmoil around them. They ran, indeed, a little, and at last paused breathless in a small side street that struck Norah as being remarkably solitary for even that time of night. But in truth she had been so entertained that she felt as if only a few minutes had elapsed since she left Lady Janet's drawing-room.

It was a quaint old-fashioned street in which they found themselves, and it might have been a city of the dead, so still it was, so replete with an unbroken calm. Norah, pausing, glanced at her companion, and then burst out laughing. It was the gayest laugh imaginable, and the lightest-hearted, but it echoed with such a cruel clearness through the deserted street that it at once sobered her.

"Why, where are we?" she said, glancing somewhat timidly to the right and left. "Who could imagine we had only just emerged from that noisy thoroughfare. Why, it might be miles away now, so—so *singular* is this quiet that has enveloped us. Where are all the people to whom this street means home? Have they, too, joined the madding crowd beyond?"

"More probably they have gone to bed," said Bruce, laughing.

"To bed!" She started violently. "At *this* hour!"

"Why, what hour do you think it is?" asked he, a little surprised at *her* surprise.

"Ten, perhaps?" faltered she, nervously.

"*Ten?* What do you think the shouting was about just now? Have you forgotten that it is the New Year's Eve? It is—twelve," said Bruce, reluctantly, taking out his watch and pretending to examine it beneath the light of the street lamp.

"Oh, no!" said the girl in a horrified tone. She clasped her hands, and a look of passionate distress darkened her face, and deepened the curves of her beautiful lips. "I forgot everything—

the hour, the occasion, the meaning of it all! But we must get home; that is the principal thing now," she exclaimed, turning to him with a pitiful attempt at composure. "What would Lady Janet say if she heard of—of this?" Then another horrible thought striking her: "How shall we get in? The servants will be all asleep."

"That will be right enough. I have a latch-key; but ——" he was glancing eagerly around him, and stopped short in his sentence.

"But what?" sharply.

"I confess I don't quite know where we are," he acknowledged with a rather forced laugh that unnerved her even more than his assertion. All at once she seemed to lose faith in him: it was he who had brought her into this scrape, and now he seemed unable to get her out of it. A little swift anger flamed into her eyes, and deadened the sweetness of her lips.

"Come," she said coldly; "we must walk on at all events until we meet someone who can tell us where our home lies."

The mist had cleared away a little, and the stars were coming out in the dark blue vault above them. A light wind arose, and softly buffeted her cheeks as she walked eagerly on, entirely silent. Almost at the end of the street a figure came towards them. It was light here, because of a gas lamp, and they could see the face of him who thus advanced towards them. It was the curate of their aunt's parish—a spare, lean, unprepossessing man, to whom Norah had not been altogether gracious in small ways, having from the commencement of their acquaintance resented a tendency on his part to discover in her certain charms and graces. He was a good man, but, like many of his class, narrow. He was now hurrying to the side of a dying bed, and as his small eyes fell full on Bruce, and then wandered from him to Norah, he paled and dropped his glance, and, with bent head and an exaggerated pretence of being ignorant of their nearness that served to heighten the hideousness of the situation, passed beyond them into the darkness.

Norah bravely repressed the tears that fought for mastery, but Bruce could feel that she was trembling. Her downcast lids hid her eyes, but he could see that the pretty mobile lips, erstwhile so prone to laughter, were now possessed by melancholy. He smothered an unmentionable word or two that rose to his lips, and were meant for the curate; but to her, to comfort her, he could find nothing to say. That he was passionately grieved for her, his own soul knew, but he could not put that grief into words.

And now the sullen mist that had overlain the town, covering it as with a shroud, was quite all gone, and the stars were twinkling gaily in the sky. The night had grown quite bright, and "there where the moonrise broke the dusky grey," one saw soft luminous clouds that crossed and dimmed the majesty of Dian for the instant, only to leave her fuller of beauty when she stole from beneath their embrace.

They had turned down one street and walked up another. But they did not know where their steps were taking them. Two people only they had met, and both were useless. It was horrible, this perpetual going on without any knowledge of the end, and with the ever-increasing desire for somebody who could give them information—that somebody who never came! Again a clock sounded in the distance. It struck the half-hour.

"This is growing too terrible," said Norah, stopping short and pressing her hand to her heart. "It cannot last, or it will kill me. Oh! think of something!"

Even as she spoke, the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps came to them. Norah almost ran to meet them, and presently could see the man to whom they belonged standing out clearly from the intense darkness behind him. And as she saw him, she came to an abrupt standstill, and turned eagerly to Bruce, who had joined her. Her heart seemed to cease beating, and she knew that her face was growing, not only white, but cold. Who was it? What fanciful resemblance was this? Surely Fate could not do her so base a turn! Even as she stood and stared blankly at him, with parted lips and wide, horror-stricken eyes, the figure emerged into the fuller light of the near lamp, and stood revealed as Sir George Blake.

Norah made a sudden retreat—a sharp movement suggestive of the idea, that for a moment she had dwelt upon the possibility of being able to hide herself behind her companion. Then she conquered the undignified desire, and as a means of proving that she had never intended it, she went ostentatiously forward and confronted Sir George as he stood rigidly upright in the centre of the street. Only for an instant, however, did he so stand: the inexpressible pain he suffered then, was subdued almost as it came to life. He recovered himself wonderfully, before Bruce had time to notice the shock he had sustained, and at all events before Norah had realised the entirety of it. He was ghastly pale, but his voice as he spoke was perfectly under control.

"Ah! so you *too* ventured out to see the ceremonies," he said, addressing himself exclusively to Norah. "Not altogether so good a thing as one had been led to believe. But we have all lived long enough to allow for exaggerations. Are you on your way home?"

"If you can *only* tell us that," said she with a poor attempt at unconcern. She tried to laugh but failed, and was unhappily conscious of her failure. She was miserable, and looked it. "The fact is," she said, breaking down a little, "we have lost our way."

"An awkward time to lose it," returned he with a pale smile.

"*So* awkward that, if you *can*, I hope you will help us," said Bruce with a frown. He had not quite liked the manner of Sir George—a manner that had distinctly ignored him.

"Yes, help us," said Norah in a low tone. Blake saw the dewy brightness of her eyes as she spoke, a brightness that hinted at tears not very far away.

"If you will follow me," he said coldly, still addressing Norah, "I think I can lead you to a stand where one cab, at least, may be found."

They followed him as culprits might, and got their cab. That he had asked for no explanation of her extraordinary appearance there, at that hour of the night, struck cold upon the girl's heart. Yes, he had condemned her. Without a word—without giving her a chance of clearing herself he had condemned her! It was hard! He declined a seat in the cab, and went away from the door of it after carefully putting her into it, without a spoken good-night, and with no courtesy indeed beyond the iciest bow and the very faintest lifting of his hat. Her drive home was one of unbroken silence, and when she got safely to her room without rousing a member of the household, she flung herself upon her bed and burst into a passion of tears.

* * * * *

Next morning Lady Janet was closeted for a considerable time with a very early visitor, who would take no denial. As he took his departure she rang her bell sharply, and demanded that Miss Blake would come to her *at once.* Miss Blake came; not without some trepidation, her conscience being anything but calm.

And then it all came out. Lady Janet, in some mysterious fashion, had been made aware of last night's escapade. Her niece had been seen at *midnight* in the streets of Edinburgh with Darnley Bruce. It was horrible, shameful! She declined to say who her informant was; she only asked if the information were true. *Was* it true? She sat in judgment and gazed at the terrified girl with a cruel sternness.

"Yes," said Norah faintly. There was a great deal more she could have said, but if her life had depended upon it then, she could not have framed more than that little damnatory affirmative. The thought that it was George—*George!* —— who had betrayed her, was so indescribably bitter, as to render her foolishly dumb.

Lady Janet, too, was apparently deprived of speech by the openness of this small avowal on the girl's part. Only for a short while, however, and when speech returned to her she made good use of it—perhaps to make up for lost time. She stormed, she scolded, she reproached, and through all said very many nasty things.

"If it had been anyone but an engaged man," she said at last, looking at the girl with contemptuous eyes.

"*Engaged!*" the word fell from Norah's lips with startling rapidity. She looked fixedly at Lady Janet. That she was thoroughly roused now was quite plain to the elder woman.

"Yes, engaged. Did you not know it? Had he not the decency to tell you? He has been engaged for more than a year to a Miss Prendergast, a girl of no family, but with a large fortune. Darnley is a man of expensive tastes, and is bound to marry some one who can help him to gratify them. He could not afford to marry a poor girl."

"You should have told me all this before; you, my guardian for the time being," said Norah, in a choked voice. "It never occurred to me that he was not heart-whole; that there was an honourable reason why he should be regarded as different from other men; men without a tie. To my mind he is as much married as though the words of our church had been read over him."

"Were he married or single there is no excuse for your conduct of last night. Were you *mad* to do such a thing?"

"I am not thinking of last night. I am thinking of all the other days. If he *is* engaged to that girl I am very sorry for her," said Norah slowly. Had her words been brilliantly eloquent she could not have further conveyed to her hearer the depth of her contempt for the man in question. "As for last night—I don't know how it happened. It was wrong, foolish, mad; but I will not admit that I meant any harm. My sole fault lies in the fact that I deceived you, but even then I thought you would not so very much care if no one knew of it but you and I and Mr. Bruce. It seemed such a simple thing—and—I did not think George would have told you."

"It was not George!" exclaimed Lady Janet impulsively, and then checked herself; but it was too late. She had explained everything. The curate's gaunt face rose before Norah, and she told herself she almost knew the very words in which he had told his tale.

"It is a most distressing affair altogether. I'm sure I don't know how I am to explain it to your mother," went on Lady Janet presently.

"*That* trouble I can at least spare you," returned Norah haughtily. "I can go home and explain it to her myself."

"Well, perhaps that would be the better plan," said Lady Janet slowly. She rose from her seat as she said this, and as if a little afraid to look at the girl, moved noiselessly from the room.

For a long hour Norah sat there silent, almost motionless, until a step in the ante-room outside compelled her to raise her head, and see that it was Darnley Bruce that had entered the room and was now standing before her. She rose involuntarily.

"My Aunt has just told me," he began, with a little amused air, "that she has been criticising, somewhat unkindly, our very harmless adventure of last evening. Has her criticism vexed you?"

"Certainly," said Norah, gravely.

"Then let it do so no longer. Let us make the impropriety of these prudes—proper." He hesitated and laughed lightly. "If a girl were to walk abroad at any hour with her affianced husband, very little would be said—isn't that so?" he asked, still smiling.

"I don't know," replied Norah, regarding him steadily with large expectant eyes. Unconsciously she afforded him encouragement.

"Place *me* in that position, Norah," said he, quickly. "Tell me that I shall one day be *your* husband." A sudden fervour fell into his usually nonchalant voice. His face changed and grew singularly earnest. The smile died from it.

"*You!*" she said. She looked at him strangely for a minute or so, and then her eyes fell to the ground. "And how about Miss Prendergast?" she went on very gently, her closed lips growing full of meaning. He coloured warmly.

"You have heard, then," he exclaimed, quickly. "That was a folly—a madness I have recovered from."

"She is pretty—an heiress!"

"She is not your equal. And it is all over now. A week ago I wrote to her to—to absolve her from her promise to me."

"A week ago!"

"A full week. And now I am free to wed you, Norah."

Did she shrink from him as he eagerly approached her?

"*Only* a week," she said, raising her hand reflectively to her forehead. "And before that?" Her pause here was so slight, that if he had meant to explain matters, his hesitation in doing so went almost unmarked. "It is all very strange," she finished, with a deep sigh.

"Strange that I should change my fancied admiration for another to my strong love for you? It would have been stranger had I not done so. And now you will take pity on me," said he, smiling fondly. "You will name our wedding-day—a *near* day. You will marry me, Norah?"

"Oh! as to that," she answered, gravely; "that is impossible!"

"Impossible!"

"Quite—*quite* so!"

"I don't think I understand," said Bruce, making a strong effort at composure, but growing extremely pale. "Do you mean to tell me that after all that has passed between us you now mean to reject me?"

She looked at him steadily and very coldly.

"After all *what?*" she demanded a little haughtily, her clear eyes darkening.

"After all our happy hours spent together. Hours in which you drew my heart from out my body and made it yours. Will you destroy that heart?"

"Ah!" she said, gently, "I do not think I shall destroy it. A month ago it was hers: to-day it is mine: to-morrow——" She paused, and ran her slender fingers, with an absent air, along the edge of the antique cabinet near her.

"This is trifling!" cried he, angrily. "I tell you that for your sake I have thrown up fortune, and now you say you will have nothing to do with me. I have given up that other girl to gain you."

"I am sorry for that other girl," replied she, a sudden flash in her eyes.

"You need not," returned he, with a bitter laugh. "Believe me, she requires no commiseration. She was *glad* to be released. She cares for me quite as little as you do."

"I am sorry," she said again, but this time she looked at him, and he could see that there was genuine kindly regret in her glance. It was a glance fatal to his hopes, yet it seemed to moisten his parched soul.

"You will have pity," he entreated, laying his fingers lightly on her arm. "What is it that stands between us? What has that old woman said? What is it you can't forgive?"

"There is nothing—*nothing!*" she declared, eagerly. "I forgive—I don't know even what it is I have to forgive. It is only"—her voice sank a little and she half turned away—"that now I *know* I could never have loved you. There, *go*," she whispered, hurriedly, a moment later, as steps could be heard outside drawing nearer and nearer to the door. "Go before Lady Janet comes to question, to learn that you—you asked, and I had nothing to give!"

He straightened himself, and with a swift glance at her—a final glance—quitted the room by the upper door. As he did so the lower one was opened and someone came in. After all it was not Lady Janet—it was only Sir George Blake.

Norah started and turned a vivid crimson. It was the first time he and she had met since that terrible moment last night, when she had found herself face to face with him in the middle of the deserted street.

"Lady Janet tells me you are thinking of returning home," he began, hardly looking at her. "I fear she has been unwarrantably severe with you. But it will be wise to make allowances. To go back now in such hot haste to Derrygra seems to me the very height of folly."

"She has left me no alternative," said Norah, making a little impulsive gesture with her right hand, that conveyed the impression that all things had come to an end between her and her hostess. "She was too angry to be reasonable. She was not so much unwarrantably severe as unpardonably *rude!* Of course, I shall go. Kathleen at least understands me, and mamma always *knows*. I am not afraid of their verdict. As for Lady Janet, she has behaved abominably."

She turned suddenly to him, with her red lips apart and her eyes aglow.

"What was it all but a *mistake*," she cried, passionately. Not for all the world could offer would she have confessed, even to herself, that the desire to clear herself with him was the uppermost thought in her heart. "My mind was so occupied—I was so interested in the people—the scene—the strange weirdness of the effects—that I forgot everything. But," haughtily, "forgetfulness is not a *crime!*"

" "No," said he, meditatively, his eyes on the carpet. "And, as you say, you were so interested."

"In the people—the whole scene," she repeated, impatiently. "But Lady Janet would not listen. She herself had so much to say, that she gave me no room to say anything. There are indeed two or three things she said that I shall find it difficult to forget." She drew herself up, and through her soft eyes there shot a flame of undisguised anger.

"She will be sorry for them herself, by and by. I think, perhaps, she is sorry for them even now," said Blake. "Sometimes, too, she speaks of things that are not quite understood by her. Perhaps——" He hesitated, and then went on: "Perhaps she spoke to you of Bruce's engagement?"

"Yes."

"She does not know the truth about that affair. Bruce is no longer engaged to be married. He has broken off any ties that bound him to Miss Prendergast. He is a free man."

"You have been speaking to him?" said the girl, regarding him fixedly.

"Yes." He looked past her, out of the window, and frowned slightly. "You see," he said slowly, "in a measure I feel bound to look after you—your interests—your *happiness!*" It was with a visible effort he made this speech, yet his voice was unbroken, and his gaze was not lowered.

"It is very good of you," said Norah, a faint inflection of sarcasm in her tone. "And what is it you want to do for me now?"

A short silence followed on her question. Then—

"Bruce loves you," said Sir George slowly. Receiving no answer to this startling assertion, he felt himself bound to look at her, and saw that she was standing motionless upon the hearthrug, her hands clasped before her. She was very pale. To him that loss of colour told its own tale. She did then love Bruce in return, and that foolish pallor was but Nature's tattler that flew to betray her secret!

"Yes, he loves you," he went on, speaking now very rapidly. "He is a man of good position, of excellent family; he is a man with many friends!" He broke off abruptly, and came a step nearer to her. "I have been assured," he said, "that the dearest wish of his heart is to make you his wife!"

Norah moved as if involuntarily, and raised to his a very pale face wreathed in a cold disdainful smile.

"All that, I know," she said. "He told me everything just before you came in."

Sir George started violently.

"So soon!" he exclaimed. "Then it is all over, and I might, at least, have spared myself—*this.*"

"Do not regret it," said she, with an ironical intonation. "You have taught me how elegantly you can plead another's cause."

"I think it was *your* cause I was advocating," returned he, a little wearily. "I had seen Lady Janet, and had listened to her angry remarks about you. I had combated with her prejudices in vain. It occurred to me you must be troubled, distressed, about all this, and then a way out of your difficulty presented itself to me. I knew how he loved you; I guessed how you loved him. I at once felt that an engagement between you would simplify all things. I knew, too —— "

"What a great deal you seem to know!" interrupted she contemptuously. "Even a great deal more than what actually *is*. As for me, I do not love, and I shall never marry Mr. Bruce. He quite understands that. He is gone. It is unlikely I shall ever see him again."

"You *refused* him?"

"Yes, yes! Why will you make me repeat it," cried she with some suppressed vehemence.

For a long time neither of them spoke. Then she raised her head and sighed heavily. She turned her eyes to his.

"Will you leave me," she murmured in her gentlest tone.

He rose at once to obey her.

"You *meant* to be kind, I suppose—I *believe*," she said, in a low voice. "And I thank you. But you have given me many things to think of, and—I would wish to be alone!"

He moved away from her down the room, but as he got to the door he paused and looked back at her, his hand upon the handle.

"If you won't marry him, will you marry me?" he said.

She let her arms fall to her sides.

"Oh! George," she cried.

"Well?" said he, looking at her. Perhaps what he saw decided him, because he dropped the handle of the door and went back to her.

"Well?" he said again, but in a very different voice this time, being now in full possession of her trembling hands.

"I know I shouldn't have been there last night," she confessed humbly. "But I did so want to know what it was all about."

"And now you know," said he. She blushed hotly beneath his grave glance and the indirect meaning of his words.

"Yes; I know—" she murmured. "And after all it wasn't so *very* much. I didn't care about it. You will believe *that?*"

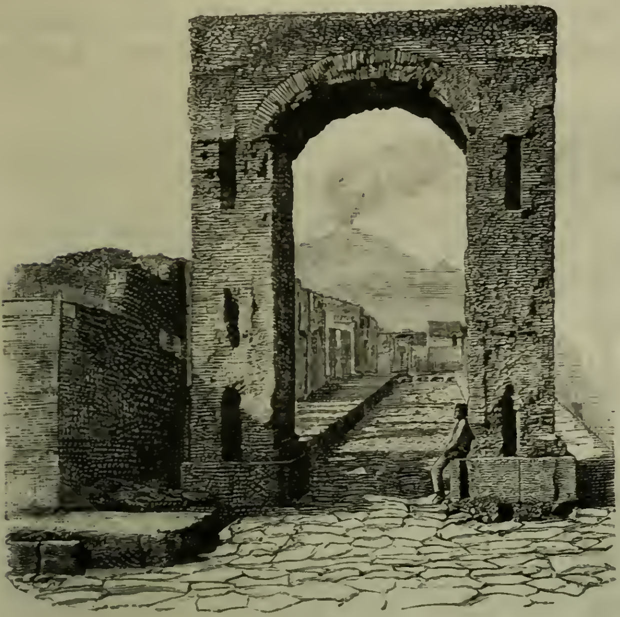
"I will," said he tenderly. "I understand *all*. And as you say there was nothing so very much in it after all."

"Still I should not have gone," whispered she penitently, lifting to his face lovely, plaintive eyes. "It was wrong of me, *very* wrong. Think, George! Consider *well* what I have done. The world is sometimes unkind, and what will people say?"

"That is my affair," said George Blake, as he bent down and sealed his forgiveness with a kiss.

THE RUINS OF POMPEII.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland," "Round about Norway," etc.



Pompeii.

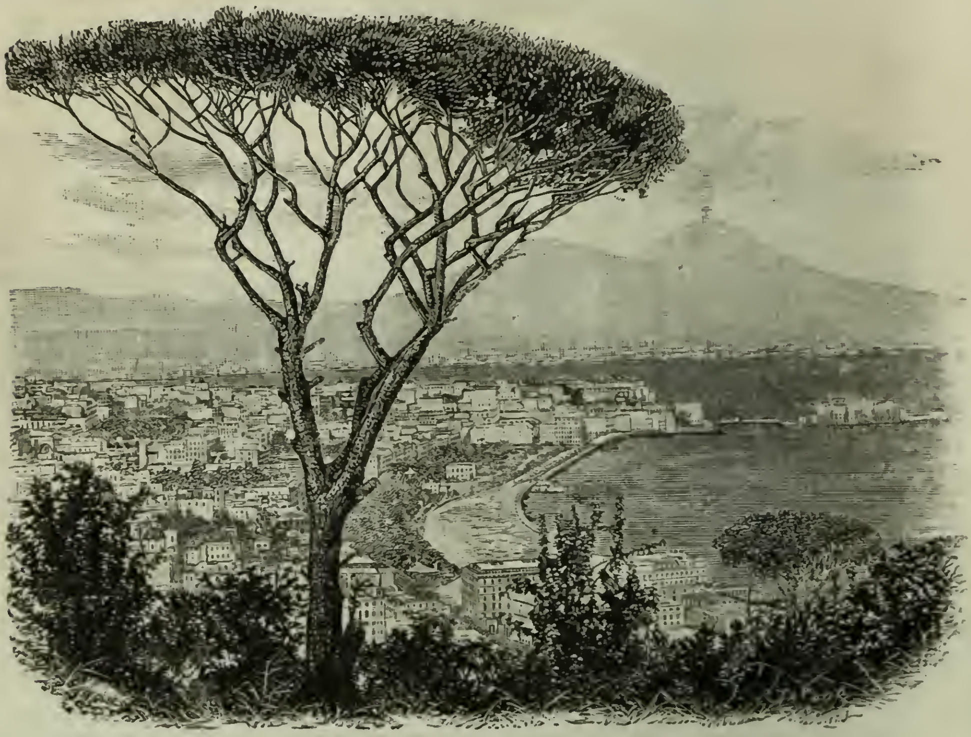
I WAS in Naples, the city that with its far-famed bay is said to be one of the three finest panoramas in the whole world. And, without having seen the whole world, I think it must be so indeed.

Climb to the convent of San Martino and look around you from those ancient and now silent walls. It is difficult to believe that anything much finer than this is to be found amongst all the glories of earth. True, you have no towering Himalayas or lofty Alpine chains, no falls of a Niagara or floating ice mountains of a frozen sea. Here, on the contrary, is all that is lovely and voluptuous in nature; everything tending to a dreamy existence; to a life of ease and indolence; to stir the passions of that emotional race, with whom, too often, the laws of society are a mere empty name, and happiness consists in the moment's gratification, and years may run quickly if only they run in golden sands.

Gazing from the Belvedere of S. Martino, before you lies the sleeping bay. Its waters, at this moment, are pure, deep and blue as the sky above them, calm and placid as the slumbers of infancy. Who could imagine them at times disturbed by angry waves that sweep away life at a moment's notice, and are often only the herald of yet greater terrors? To-day, innumerable small boats are flitting about, and their white sails look like angels' wings, pure and bright in the sparkling sunshine: an emblem of innocence that might almost grace the rivers of paradise. Only to gaze at them from this distance calms the unquiet nerves; a peace falls upon the restless brain, and the pulses beat more evenly.

There are hills all about you, and though they may not possess a

Himalayan grandeur, perhaps they have only a greater beauty of their own. Beyond the bay rises the Island of Capri, a purple haze surrounding it and giving it a romantic colouring only to be seen in this land of the south. Its outlines, in spite of the haze, are clearly defined against the brilliant sky. To the left lies fair Sorrento, with trellissed walks and rich blooms, nestling villas and picturesque women. Corinthian pillars admit you to quiet groves, where all that is lovely and graceful and luxurious in the world of nature greets the eye. Chaste statues, everlastingly white and pure in this bright atmosphere, adorn the terraces and surprise you in summer bowers:



NAPLES.

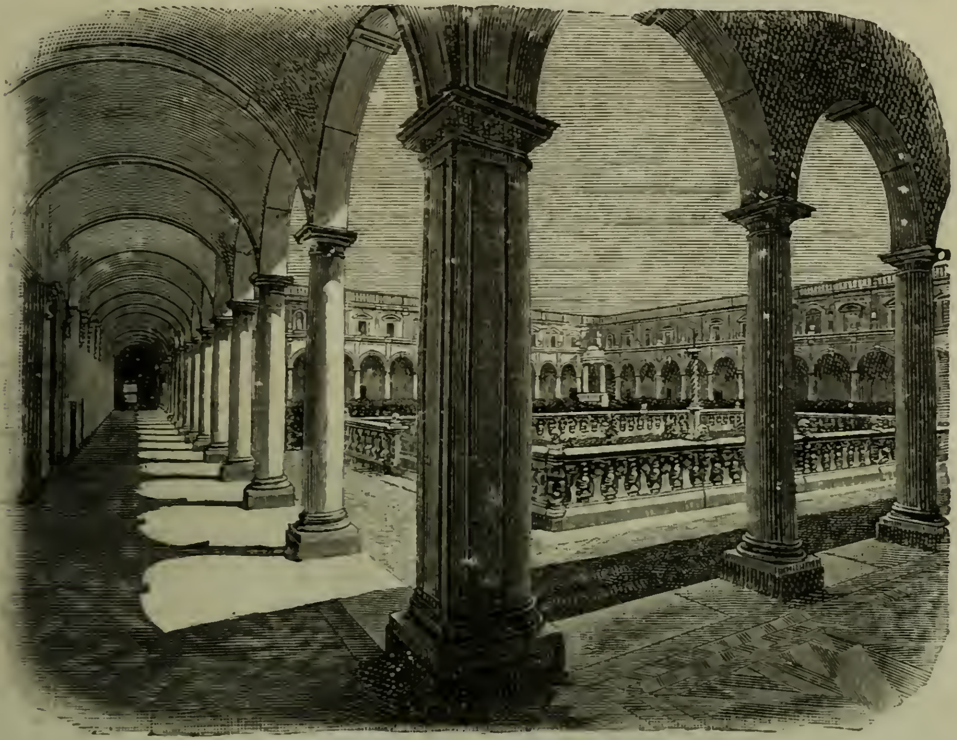
and men and women warm and beautiful with the breath of life wander here hand in hand, or clasp heart to heart and tell their tale of love, and live their passionate day in a dream that, could it but last for ever, who would care for another world? But alas

> "There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,"

and it is well to make the most of those halcyon days that pass swiftly as a tale that is told.

And across there, stretching beyond the town, is the worm in this fair bud. Vesuvius, with its everlasting smoke, raises its head, a perpetual warning alike to the lovers in the groves, and the less romantic domestic groups, whose days of stolen interviews have become a mere matter of history. Verily those who live here should adopt the Trappist motto for their own, and in place of *Salve* inscribe upon their lintels *Memento Mori.* For in such an hour as they think not, the day may be turned into night and the sky into darkness, and the doom fall from which there is no escape.

There lies the mountain sleeping quietly enough at this moment, no sign of anger about it, no token of the death it bears in its womb, except for the black smoke rising from its summit, now in a thick cloud and now dwindling away to a small slight column—but ever there. When darkness falls, it looks no longer gloomy or portentous, but red and fiery. It sends forth rockets of lava and volleys of ashes, and you feel how grand, how awful must be the sight of a great eruption. You feel it, you would like to behold it, but you may well pray to be spared the experience.



CLOISTERS OF S. MARTINO.

A link that binds us to the past is this Vesuvius, taking us back to the classic days of the Roman Empire. Before the reign of Titus it seems to have been unknown as a volcano, and its summit is supposed to have been crowned with a Temple of Jupiter. Great, indeed, would have been the fall, had a first eruption hurled it from its throne. Startled, the officiating priests, if performing at the moment their religious rites: wondering in their last moment what meant these thunders of Jove and for what special sin vengeance had fallen upon them.

The destruction of Pompeii has been recorded by many writers, far back before the Christian era down to recent times; but no record can equal a visit to the place itself, where in streets of tombs and a thousand other records, you receive a vivid, startling, and painful picture of what that hour must have been. With it all, it is one of the most intensely interesting visits that can be paid to any place: but it is an interest peculiar to itself, altogether its own.

But we are still gazing from the heights of S. Martino. And from these heights what a panorama is unfolded of the town itself, what an immense, interminable stretch of streets and houses. They wind round the bay in sweeping curves, and climb the slopes, and gradually dwindle away into suburbs and hill-scattered villas. A blazing sun pours its rays upon a seething mass of animation.

There can hardly be a greater contrast than that existing between the Neapolitans and the favoured spot of earth they call their own.

The town is unromantic and disenchanting. The surroundings of Naples alone make its fortune. The streets are narrow and irregular, with no picturesque beauty about them. The lower orders are unattractive in their habits, and seem to know and to care for nothing better. It is amusing yet startling to watch the vetturini driving about the narrow thoroughfares. No right of way seems to exist, and they tear along as if the very demon were in pursuit, and human life the last thing to be thought of. Not once, but fifty times in the course of an hour some frightful catastrophe appeared inevitable. Unwary passengers were kept continually rushing and darting out of jeopardy. Danger seemed ever present, death or at least injury to sound limbs inevitable: yet apparently nothing ever came of it. I never saw an accident there, but this circumstance must surely have been an accident in itself. The men tore round corners and dashed down streets, wayfarers flew right and left, carriages would sway over the lava pavement almost like vessels in troubled waters—and there the matter would end. It was almost disappointing.

But you could not see all this from the walls of S. Martino. You only beheld a great city of endless bustle and movement. Most conspicuous of all were the miles and miles of roofs of many shades and forms, that gave a vivid colouring to the wonderful scene; a blending of red tiles and rich azure sky, deep blue waters, and chains of green hills, and a bay whose endless curves were lined with houses that found their double in those calm waters: a "sweet reflection:" phantom tenements peopled by phantom beings of a phantom world. How pleasant to retreat occasionally into such a world from the fret of a more prosy existence whose realities sometimes become—like the pack on the back of Christian—burdens grievous to be borne.

And then, to turn for a moment to S. Martino itself. A relic of dead-and-gone greatness. Here again we have a Memento Mori; a Vanitas Vanitatum; a standing homily upon the text, THIS ALSO SHALL PASS AWAY. An immense building, representing past wealth and religious greatness; endless corridors and cloisters, now silent and dead and melancholy as the skulls that still decorate the railings surrounding the graveyard, but once echoing to the footfall of an army of Carthusian monks. The convent church is one of the most richly decorated in Europe, and a few of the frescoes in the vestibule represent the pretended massacre of Carthusians in England, in the time of Henry VIII.—just as we saw them in the Carthusian Monastery outside Granada, almost under the very shadow of the matchless Alhambra itself.

But the grand cloisters pleased one most; a great quadrangle with Doric columns of white marble, and many statues of saints. Within the enclosure was the convent cemetery, where many a dead monk lies sleeping, having exchanged the living tomb of a monastery for the silence of the grave. These cloisters were of extreme beauty, their proportions noble, an atmosphere of dignity about them, an odour of sanctity. Certainly there was a great calm, too, for no one else happened to be within the walls—a calm unspeakably pleasant. Above was the glorious blue sky, fitting canopy for such a building. The sun changed the marble pillars to dazzling whiteness, and cast deep shadows athwart the silent pavement. Hosts of departed monks, these shadows might have been; *umbræ* of those who slept within a few feet, awaiting the summons to COME FORTH. In the centre was a well, built up in circular form and surmounted by a cross. Here, no doubt, those monks of old drew forth their supply of the sparkling liquid, though who shall say that water was their only comfort in life? At the Grande Chartreuse, reposing in the solitude of the Alps, near which monastery is made the famous liqueur, the fathers are allowed two bottles of the matchless stimulant a year, the brothers are limited to one: but surely frequent Indulgences relax a rule that ought to have been made only to be broken. Or, is it that sobriety is a necessity with them no less than a virtue, because In Vino Veritas, and secrets might be disclosed that are sacred as those of freemasonry?

Yet must we not linger too long in the quiet precincts of S. Martino, for we have a journey before us, and only a limited space for its performance. It is not a very long journey, reader, but it is a very interesting: leading through miles and miles of streets; one long continuous stream of houses; one scene of life and bustle and work, the whirligig of crowds; a Babel of many voices, the pursuit of many aims. In short, that struggle for life and mastery always going on in this lower world, where men do congregate. And all this life and laughter leads to an emblem of death and destruction, at once the most absorbing and the most melancholy, perhaps, in existence.

The drive from Naples to Pompeii, as I have just said, is full of interest. From the comfortable and well-placed Grand Hotel your driver dashes down the Villa Nationale, or Public Gardens, with all the speed of two brisk horses; tears through the town and across the Piazza del Plebiscito, into the less interesting and by no means perfumed regions of the port, past the Porto Grande: thus speedily reaching the suburbs of the town. Here for a moment all view of the lovely bay is lost; but the blue sky is ever above, and the intense sunshine is dazzling in its brilliancy, and the most melancholy must become cheerful under its influence. The sparkling air has an effect of champagne upon you; all the pleasure of the wine without its nervous reaction. Well that the air does possess this virtue, born of liquid skies and summer seas, for it is not bracing, until you get up into the hills and look down upon the world from exclusive heights.

And ever before you is that mountain with its portentous column of smoke continually ascending; now breaking out in small eruptions and streams of glowing lava that twine downwards like a subtle snake; now taking a long interval of repose to gather fresh strength wherewith to bury cities and annihilate mankind.

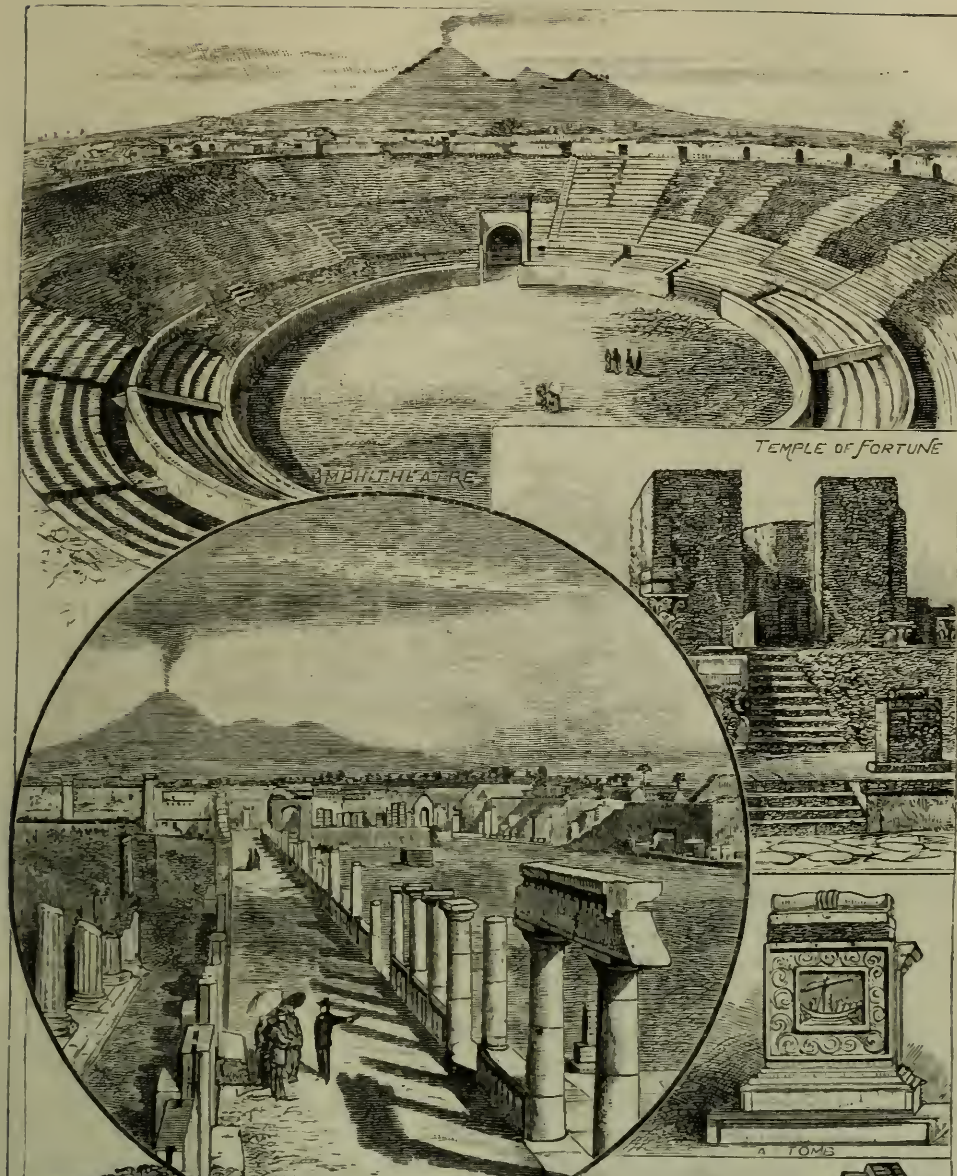
Thus was it the day we drove to Pompeii. Leaving the town, we passed, mile after mile, through one continuous scene of animation; one scene, one suburb, giving place to another. It was all picturesque, all highly coloured, all full of the Italian life and spirit one delights in for a change; delights to look upon as it were from a distance; as outside oneself; as chasing the cobwebs from the brain, and giving one more optimist views of life from its very *abandon* and vivacity; but nevertheless not to be imitated or admired, or too frequently indulged in.

And yet it is such people who live out their lives the most completely, though not in the highest and best sense. They infuse into it all the warmth of their passionate nature, trouble themselves little about the future, live for the present hour, and are satisfied.

A long line of houses on the right hid the bay from us, but every now and then a glimpse of its blue waters opened up visions of an earthly paradise. Manufactories of maccaroni abounded, and the popular preparation was hung on huge frames to harden, much of it outside the doors, exposed to all the dust and dirt that certainly blew, and all the rain that possibly might fall.

We passed through the scene of that opera, popular in France though never heard in England, "La Muette de Portici." Here and there, on the road, a great house stood as a remnant of former grandeur, with carved escutcheons over massive gateways. Many buildings were monastically closed in, and barred windows might once have held behind them many a captive beauty. However, this might be, to-day they seemed dull and deserted enough; gloomy mansions from which all life and romance had fled to happier and more favoured regions.

So we went on. Past Herculaneum, which to-day was not to be visited; through Resina, Torre del Greco, Rossi, Torre dell' Annunziata; and finally through the Porta Marina—an arched tunnel 120 feet long—into the precincts of Pompeii. Here our drive was at an end. Jehu had not spared his horses. Much of the pavement is composed of hard smooth lava, and the cattle bowl quickly over it with great clatter and little effort.


AMPHITHEATRE
TEMPLE OF FORTUNE
A TOMB
FORUM
BAKERS SHOP
STREET OF TOMBS

POMPEII.

Pompeii. The very word rings with sadness, every syllable echoes with melancholy. It conjures up one of the most terrible dramas of the world; a tragedy that seems to have gained in intensity with the burden of nearly 2,000 years. It has passed into the land of shadows. We think of it with something of the sensation wherewith we gaze at the stars. Its description comes to us with the vagueness of a far off, intangible dream. But standing face to face with the ruins of Pompeii, we realise its doom, the completeness of the destruction which overwhelmed it in the first century of our era.

To gaze upon these ruins is to be taken from the present into the distant past. At once the tragedy, in which you almost seem to be taking a part, rises before you, and you are no longer in the nineteenth but in the first century. No earthly spot—Rome perhaps excepted—so utterly conveys you into the very spirit and influence of a bygone age. A great mass of ruins; a whole town of ruins; streets and houses, temples and theatres, amphitheatre and forum; broken pillars and crumbling walls; wine jars and olive jars standing where perchance they stood two thousand years ago; dining-rooms richly decorated and almost intact, where the great banqueted while they reclined in luxurious seats; streets of tombs where the great were buried; seats in the public thoroughfares where the great and the humble alike might rest: all this may be found to-day in almost the freshness of its first youth. You see the ashes descending from that mountain, in one inexhaustible torrent; you hear the rush of thousands of terror-stricken inhabitants making for the gates and endeavouring to escape to sea; you listen to the cries of despair, as "with horror overwhelmed" the doomed gave up hope and sank into a living tomb, most horrible of deaths; walled up alive, as it were, in an impenetrable bed of ashes.

It all passes vividly before the mental vision. You gaze with the keenest interest upon the ruins, yet plunged in melancholy, and feeling that you could spend days and days amongst them. They possess a sad and indescribable charm, which asserts itself from the very moment you enter their shadow, and every moment increases. You go back in memory to the romantic descriptions of Bulwer's "Last Days." You see the blind girl hurrying through the darkened streets, and more than ever lament her fate.

It is singular that Pompeii should have remained so long buried; known to have existed, yet as lost to the world as the Cities of the Plain. Not until the year 1748 was any trace of it discovered, and then it was merely through a peasant sinking a well and coming upon a chamber below. Thus began the excavations, ever since carried on with more or less energy. More than a third of the ancient town is now laid bare, and in time, no doubt, the remainder will also be uncovered, until a perfect Ruin of Pompeii shall stand before the gazer. And then—who knows?—perhaps Vesuvius will once more hurl forth its destructive showers, and a second time plunge Pompeii in night and death. Then surely its very ruins will be for ever lost to the world, and become the mere remnant of a name, the shadow of a shade.

Our passage into the ruins after leaving the carriage was unromantic, leading through the restaurant, where the traveller may take lunch if he can face the discomforts of the place. But it was so uninviting, that one made the best speed possible up the narrow staircase and passages into the room where they sold photographs and other relics of Pompeii, through which you had to pass on your way to the buried city.

Thus we found ourselves in the streets of Pompeii, straight, narrow, and paved with blocks of lava deeply indented with wheel ruts. So narrow that vehicles could not pass each other, and there must consequently have been some strict rule of road. Some of the buildings are great and imposing, of both Grecian and Roman architecture, but most of the houses are small and low, especially those given up to shops and trading. In the Street of Tombs, in many of the compartments one traced a whole family sleeping their last sleep in massive grey stone enclosures: small coffins evidently containing the remains of young children, and larger ones for the dead parents. Another street is called Street of Abundance, where probably were the shops that supplied the inhabitants with the necessaries of life. In one house one saw jars for wine and oil; another contained the remains of primitive mills for grinding corn, and in one of these mills was found the skeleton of a donkey, the animal used by Pompeians to turn the grinding-stone.

The guide pointed out a public bakehouse and a blacksmith's shop, and it was sad and singular to come upon these evidences of an everyday life in this City of the Dead. Of course they had all these wants, like other beings, which were supplied then much as they are now; in a ruder, rougher way perhaps, but after the fashion of to-day; and, of course, we know that they were ordinary people, though of a grand type as to beauty and stature, whatever they may have been as to moral excellence. But their fate places them apart, surrounds them with a halo of romance, covers them with dramatic interest; all the interest that belongs to melancholy and tragedy; and these signs of ordinary life and occupation bring back too forcibly to the mind that the doom fell upon a people of like emotions unto ourselves. Almost, we suffer with them.

In many of the private houses are still to be seen remnants of frescoes and mosaics on the walls, and wonderfully preserved pavements. Much of this decoration, indeed, is almost as fresh as in its early days, a contrast to the ruins themselves, and recalling the old life with a wonderful realism. There is the House of the Fountain, its mosaic new and perfect, an important work of the art of that day, when men delighted in hideous representations of mythical and impossible beings; animals with glaring eyes and erect tail, spitting fire upon the world, and looking altogether a very pretty and perfect image of what one might imagine a demon or a vampire. There is the "Cave Canem," the dog in chains, resembling a griffin more than the nobler creature; an apparition sufficient to terrify the stoutest heart, and render the warning altogether superfluous.

In many of these houses it is possible to trace the plan of domestic life; the rooms set apart for their various destinations; the marble courts with their fountains, open to the sky; the apartments reserved for the ladies of the family, who were many of them guarded as jealously as the Lights of a Moorish harem. Those were days when high principles were not universal, and beauty had often to be strictly watched.

Sad indeed, fascinatingly sad is it to wander through these still existing rooms and courts and corridors. Their occupants might have left them but yesterday. They are filled with silent shadows. The very pavement seems still to echo with the footsteps that fell for the last time nearly two thousand years ago. The hum of a great multitude escaping from the coming doom fills the air. You imagine the darkness that fell upon them, to which the darkness of night was as nothing. Rolls and volumes of black sulphureous vapour envelop them in hideous despair. Showers of ashes and pumice-stone rain upon them; and some of the stones, it is recorded, were more than eight pounds in weight.

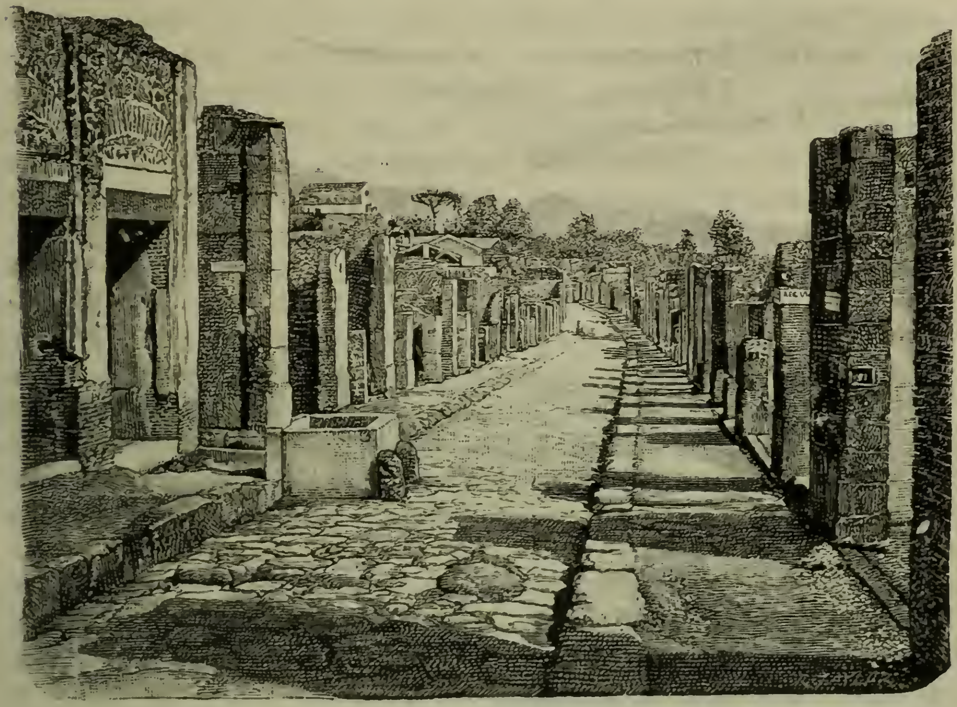
On the 24th of August, in the year 79, the great eruption took place. About one o'clock in the day there shot up from Vesuvius a black column like an immense tree. Soon the shower fell, burying beneath it the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, all their treasures and all who could not escape in time. Thousands, however, did escape, and the destruction of the inhabitants was small in comparison with the population. The elder Pliny, in going to Pompeii to discover what had happened, lost his life; and the younger of that house remained to write his vivid letters to Tacitus, and leave behind him his terrible record, for the benefit of generations and ages that were yet to come.

And when all was over, and smoke and vapour and showers had ceased, and Vesuvius had returned to its ordinary state, behold Pompeii was no more. In place of it a desolated plain, no monuments visible, no house left revealed, but a great surface of white ashes that hardened and petrified, and was to remain undisturbed whilst the world rolled on for seventeen centuries. It is this that one sees now—a buried city restored to light, but restored in ruins.

I have said that one may wander for days amongst these ruins, wrapt in the sadness and melancholy and profound impressions they call into being. The eerie feeling of a dead world creeps over you while gazing upon a universal destruction where nothing seemed to survive to tell the tale. You marvel that anyone was found with courage to remain in the neighbourhood, and feel it could only be from that singular trait in human nature which always excepts its own individual self from the ills and accidents that flesh is heir to.

And, in strange contrast, all around you are the wonderful, undying beauties of nature. The calm and lovely bay; the islands in the midst of the deep blue waters; the small boats, white winged, gliding right and left, to and fro, up and down; the distant Apennines. And ever before you, sleeping Vesuvius, cause of all the destruction on which you are gazing; beautiful also, but with a beauty that is treacherous; a fair exterior, but the blackness of darkness within.

Such are the ruins of Pompeii. An accumulation of romance, of melancholy, of intense interest. A countless number of broken pillars, fit emblems of the lives that were cut short 2,000 years ago. Fragments of temples where their heathenish rites were celebrated; remains of amphitheatres given up to plays and sports and unholy pastimes; houses without number, mute testimony to the domestic histories and daily lives that were played out; streets of sepulchres, and streets of life and abundance that in a moment became tombs for ever. Over all is the silence of death; you feel to be hovering on the confines of two worlds. The deep shadow of yourself cast athwart the lava pavement by a blazing sun might also be the shade of one of the doomed captives of Pompeii. Doubly captive were some of them, for in the prisons were found skeletons of unhappy criminals with chains round the ankle bones. Without the chance of escape so many had in those last moments, they could only



STREET OF ABUNDANCE.

accept their fate as it came to them. As for the poor of Pompeii, no trace of their habitations has yet been found, and it is thought that possibly none were permitted within the walls. Pompeii could not have been a City of Refuge, in any sense of the word.

We took a last long look at the ruins and departed. One could only return through the collection of curiosities and photographs, and down the narrow staircase into the dirty rooms where myriads of flies seemed to be undergoing a fatal eruption of Vesuvius on their own account. Before long we had once more passed through the Porta Marina, and, our backs turned on Pompeii, were bowling swiftly on the way to Naples. It was the same road, the same scene, but with the subtle change that lies between morning and evening, between going and returning, between what is to be and what has been. The shadows had lengthened, and fell eastward; the sky had taken a deeper blue; the people, if anything, had increased in number. They idled about in groups, and gossiped and gazed and laughed, and took life easily. Every now and then we met one of those curious carts, all the colours of the rainbow, with painted flowers sufficient to supply Flora with garlands for many days.

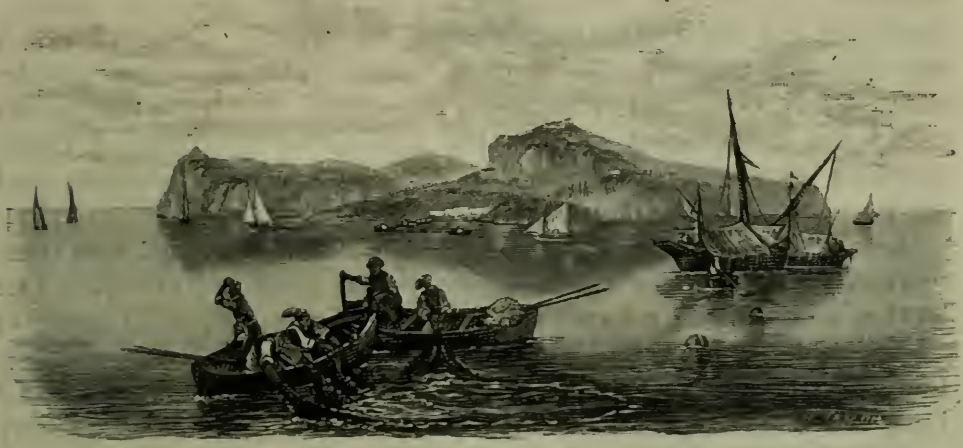
Entering Naples in the flush of sunset, everything was steeped in a rich glow. Crimson flames darted about the sky, the colours in the west were gorgeous and beautiful beyond a dream. The deep blue waters of the bay appeared to be on fire, distant Capri was rosy red. Naples itself was hot, crowded and noisy, as it always is, beyond any other city of Italy. The driver dashed through the streets with the usual indifference to human life, and with the usual good fortune. On, through the public gardens, to the comfortable quarters of the Grand Hotel.

It stands almost upon the shores of the bay. You may sit at the open windows and gaze upon the rippling waters, and watch the changing colours. You may trace the wake of the white winged boats as they lazily glide to and fro, or follow the outline of Capri and think of the pleasant hours you have spent on the little island. You may contemplate all the wonderful variations of sunset and twilight and darkness; watch the stars come out in the deep dark liquid sky, the path of the moon glistening and moving across the waters. You are enveloped in poetry and romance, and feel that this is rightly the land of passionate love. Here nightingales should sing for ever, and lovers pace these shores and pass through existence in a dream of ecstasy.

That evening when obscurity had fallen upon the world; and one could hear the plashing of the water but scarcely see it; and a few lights twinkled here and there upon its surface from boats that were gliding away; and Vesuvius was lighted up with a red glow that threw its lurid reflection upon the sky: suddenly, a man's voice serenaded us from out the darkness.

He stood under the balcony, and seemed the one thing that had been wanting to complete the enchantment of the hour. It was such a voice and such singing as one never hears in England in like conditions; pure, cultivated, and full of expression: a melancholy pathos about it that at once enlisted one's sympathies and thrilled one's soul. He sang Gounod's Serenade, and accompanied himself on his guitar, and the melody had never sounded so full of charm. He fell into Italian love songs from the operas, with such fervour that he seemed to be recounting his own experiences. In song after song his voice floated away on the balmy air, over the dark waters of the bay. The moments flew by on golden wings. He might have stayed there till morning light, and all his hearers would not have moved. It was sad, too. A man apparently full of feeling and refinement, with a capacity for nobler ends, yet dragged down to the level and lowering influences of a wandering minstrel.

But these things are different with the Italians. Their sentiment and expression are born with them, they are not the yearning of a soul struggling for higher flights; their melancholy is often the mere accident of look, it is not begotten of the heart's emotion, or of unsatisfied longing. Most things in this world find their level: and so probably our minstrel that night had no aspirations above his present life. Certainly we were the gainers for the moment; for he plunged at least one of his hearers into a profound dream of melody and romance, and cast a spell upon the memory: a charm which remained not only for wakeful night watches, but for days when blue skies and sunny seas and golden atmospheres had given place to an insular order of things where these beauties of earth and heaven may be imagined but are never, never seen.



CAPRI

MY SATURDAYS.

A GLADSTONE BAG.

I.

I HAVE held my tongue about it for a long time, and really I do not see why I should hold it any longer. It is a poor reward for having served your country at the risk of your life—never to be allowed to say a word about it. Not that I in the least wish to boast of what I did, or to make myself out a heroine; for then people would expect me to be heroic under any other circumstances, which might be awkward. But really, if my country has not by this time extracted all possible benefit out of my silence, it must be the fault of ——. But I must not tell my story wrong end foremost.

Everybody agreed that Mrs. and Miss Smith were dull people. "No addition to Tamston society" was the unanimous verdict, when they had been fairly presented to it at one of my Saturday afternoon gatherings. They bored everyone, and most of all they bored their hostess. I had only asked them to please the Vicar, who appealed to all my higher feelings: they knew no one in Tamston; they were harmless and evidently highly respectable, though we did not happen to know their friends; they were rich and well-disposed, as was evident from their liberal subscriptions to all the charities: for the sake of the parish we ought to encourage them to remain, and for Christian charity we ought to compassionate their loneliness. Then he preached me a little sermon about making feasts for the blind, halt and lame of society, the moral of which was that we ought to invite bores rather than agreeable people, because they would not recompense us. Most decidedly the Smiths would not recompense me for the trouble of entertaining them, therefore entertaining them was clearly my duty. I yielded, and did it.

An old mother, and an elderly daughter, differing in no wise from scores of others: there was really nothing to describe in them. The mother seemed rather feeble; she had a nervous way of starting at any sudden noise, and looking round at every footstep, partly frightened and partly expectant. Her dim face flushed readily and hotly on such slight occasions that one could not attribute any meaning to the change; she was merely a nervous, rather silly old lady. Miss Smith said once that her mother had suffered much from the deaths of her husband and her other children, and her afflictions had left her depressed in spirits, and shaken in health. The daughter was not any more prepossessing. She was tall and bony; her dresses fitted her badly, and always looked as if they were hung on a clothes-horse; she had a deep voice, and a constrained way of speaking; and her face was frightfully disfigured by a large port-wine mark on one cheek. To conceal this, she nearly always wore coloured veils, through which shades of complexion showed very little. Those veils were an insuperable obstacle to friendliness on my part; it is impossible really to care for anyone into whose eyes you cannot look, and see the soul behind. I suppose Miss Smith did not wear a veil at home, but I seldom saw her when I called. Sometimes she was out walking, sometimes she was away on a visit; once only I saw her, but then she was in her out-door dress, and the inevitable veil. Probably she had a morbid feeling about her disfigured face.

Their very name was part of their dullness. What can anyone make of Smith? I knew Chetwoode Smiths, and Wynne Smiths, and I had heard of Montmorency Smiths—though perhaps that was a joke; but Smith by itself is scarcely a name at all, for it distinguishes nobody. The people were practically anonymous, and they seemed to have struck no roots anywhere. Nobody ever picked up any hints of where they had lived before they came to Tamston, or whom they had known, or what the late Mr. Smith had been. They never talked of anything except Tamston gossip, which they had a marvellous faculty for collecting, and tatting, which was the old lady's main object in life. Miss Smith sometimes read novels, and after a time we discovered that she was a perfect reference book in history. Beyond that her literary tastes did not seem to go. If the two ladies had been interesting, we should have thought them mysterious; as it was, Tamston never got beyond its first verdict of—Dull.

They appeared in my drawing-room one Saturday afternoon, and I mustered all the graciousness in my nature for their benefit, as a sort of private thank-offering to my fates that I had not been afflicted with them for three weeks. On the first Saturday Miss Smith had been from home on a visit to friends, the next she had had a bad headache; and her mother never went anywhere without her. My nephew Archie was there too, and it was his joy to pay Miss Smith particular attentions, on the ground that he must thereby be giving her a totally new sensation.

He greeted her on this occasion with mock reproach.

"Wherein have I offended you, Miss Smith?"

"Why, in nothing, Mr. Rintoul. You have not offended me at all."

"Oh no," put in the old lady, in her fluttering way. "Amelia never could be offended with Mr. Rintoul, I am sure."

"Then why cut me, Miss Smith," he pursued pathetically, "cut me dead? Turn your back upon me when my heart glowed with a desire to serve you, and leave me friendless in a crowd, instead of allowing me to be your cavalier?"

"I don't understand you, Mr. Rintoul. I haven't seen you anywhere lately, and I haven't been in a crowd."

"Didn't you call that a crowd on the platform at Euston on Friday week, when we were both going by the express? Why, you hadn't even been able to get a porter, and were carrying your Gladstone bag yourself! I hurried after you, burning to carry it for you, and to point out a carriage with plenty of room in it, where I could have attended to your comforts; but you turned from me—really, I thought you did it on purpose—plunged into a carriage full of women and children, and wedged yourself in between a baby and a pug-dog. Of course, there you were inaccessible."

"Oh, it wasn't Amelia," said Mrs. Smith, eagerly; "she was at home. Don't you remember, dear, that was the night you had one of your sick headaches, and you weren't able to come to Mrs. Singleton's next day?"

"No, it was not I," repeated Amelia. "You were misled by an accidental likeness, Mr. Rintoul; and it is fortunate that you had no opportunity of astonishing my double by accosting her." She always spoke in that precise way, as if she were a governess furnishing her pupils with model conversations, or as if she had some accent or tone of voice that she wished to correct.

"Not you?" exclaimed Archie, utterly astonished. "Well, I would have sworn it was. I don't know how to believe it."

"I must ask you to make the effort," said Miss Smith, with some hauteur.

"Oh, of course; I beg your pardon, but I was so surprised. I should not have thought there could have been such a coincidence."

"You mean on account of the mark on my face," she answered, quite calmly. "It *is* very distinctive, but there are other people similarly afflicted, and one of them appears to have the misfortune of resembling me otherwise. Come, mamma, let us go into the garden, and speak to Mrs. Roper." And drawing her mother's hand inside her arm, she left the room. I could see the old lady's hand shake; she certainly *was* very nervous.

Miss Smith's manner had a certain quiet dignity which left us silenced, but presently Archie broke out again.

"It is *most* extraordinary! Would you have believed that there were two women in existence with that height, that figure, that face, *and* that port-wine mark? She—I mean the other one—was in mourning, now I think of it; for she had a thick crape veil, so that I only just happened to catch sight of her face when she was taking her ticket, and lifted it to count her change. Miss Smith isn't in mourning."

"Of course not," I assented. "Where was she going to?"

"Ireland. I was going to Rugby that night, and meant to offer to take care of her as far as that. I don't like to see women travelling alone. Lucky I didn't, though. By Jove, I can't take it in, even now. I'll never swear to anyone's identity after this, that's a fact."

The ladies certainly made the most of their afternoon. I wondered that Miss Smith did not take her mother away early, she looked so wretchedly tired and ill; but she seemed determined to talk to everybody on the ground. I had the poor old thing on my mind, and thought of asking her to come in and lie down on the sofa for a little. It was with some trouble that I found her; but coming up at the back of a little arbour, I heard her thin, plaintive voice.

"Take me home, my dear; I can't stand it any longer. I always told you that that mark ——"

"Hush!" said her daughter, in quite a different voice from the one I knew; "we can't go home yet; we must not be in a hurry. Have another cup of tea to set you up."

"I've had six," said the mother, sadly, "and they don't do me any good. I can't finish this one."

"Have some brandy in it, then," returned the other; and I heard something poured into the cup. Nothing of the kind was on my tables; she must have had it in her pocket. The disgust that I felt suddenly recalled me to the consciousness that I was spying on my guests, and I retreated as I had come.

My mind was now full of vague suspicion and misgiving about these people. I could very well have understood that Miss Smith might have good reasons for making the journey without wishing to be known, and, of course, in that case, she would have to tell a lie about it when she was driven into a corner. I could have forgiven her that, and been sorry for her; besides, such extraordinary coincidences *do* happen that, after all, she might be telling the truth, and Archie have been mistaken. But my own ears had informed me that she carried brandy in her pocket, and gave it to her mother in tea; and a person of that sort would be capable of anything. It is much worse for a woman to be unladylike than to be wicked; she can repent of the last, but never of the first; and one can love a penitent, but not a vulgarian. Henceforth, I could never love Miss Smith.

I was not called upon to do so, and, for one reason or another, I saw very little of her and her mother during the autumn. One day in winter, when my Saturday gatherings had long been suspended, Lady Jacobs called on me. I forgot to say that she had been present when Archie made his attack upon Miss Smith. She was bubbling over with news, and could hardly wait to let me take off her cloak, and give her a footstool, before she began.

"My dear, I've seen Miss Smith's double!"

"You don't say so!"

"But I do. I saw her as distinctly as I see you. I came home from Manchester yesterday; I've been spending a month with my sister there; and when I got into the railway carriage, there she was! I noticed her figure and style at once, and those extraordinary square wooden shoulders; but she was dressed in mourning, as your nephew said, and kept her veil down. I was so curious to see her face that I racked my brains to invent a decent excuse for speaking to her, but I couldn't think of one before we stopped at the first station. Then she got up, put back her veil, and left the carriage, giving me a good stare as she passed. I gave it back to her, you may guess. She certainly was the image of Miss Smith as to features, but she had rather a good complexion, and *no* port-wine mark."

"But Archie saw it!"

"I saw her full face, and there wasn't a sign of it."

"Then your lady can't be Archie's, and there must be three of them."

"Three Miss Smiths! Heaven forbid! It would be too great a burden on a suffering world."

"It does seem incredible that there can be three people so much alike, in such a peculiar style. But —— "

At this interesting juncture the knocker sounded imperatively, and Mrs. Minton was announced. Lady Jacobs was a gossip, but no scandal-monger, and she detested Mrs. Minton, so her lips were sealed, and she shortly departed, leaving me vainly revolving conjectures concerning the triple or single identity of Miss Amelia Smith.

II.

NOTHING more happened for some time. Miss Smith, in her own person and with no mystery about her, frequently travelled to and from town, and was absent for varying periods, on visits. Miss Smith apparently had many friends, who were solicitous of her company. It was pleasant to think how many good Christians there were in the world. She was a most affectionate daughter when at home, yet she was perpetually leaving her old mother to servants. Mrs. Smith said that dear Amelia was only too self-sacrificing, and that she could not allow her to confine herself entirely to a dull life. I was touched with the poor old thing's resignation to her loneliness, and took to going often to sit with her, during these absences of Amelia's. They were dreary visits—we had so little to talk of; but she seemed to cling to me, and I grew almost fond of the timid, patient creature. Once, she held my hand when I was going away, and said:

"You are very kind to me, Mrs. Singleton. I think you always would be kind."

"I hope so," I said.

"If I were in trouble, you would try to help me?"

"Indeed I would. But your daughter would be your constant support."

"Ah, yes. Dear Amelia! But if anything happened to her."

"Dear Mrs. Smith, there is no reason to be anxious about her. Travelling is so safe now."

"Yes—travelling. But things might happen. There are accidents, you know. Oh, my dear, I can't tell you what I suffer when she is away." She clutched my hand, and bent forward, looking from side to side furtively. "I can't sleep at nights. I fancy—oh, I can't tell you what I fancy. Sometimes I think I shall go mad with fancying and fearing."

"You are nervous because you are not strong," I said, trying to soothe her. "Miss Smith is quite safe with her friends, and there are very few accidents on the railways in proportion to the number of trains. You ought not to read the newspapers, because you hear of the few that do happen, and that frightens you."

"Oh, I must read the papers," she answered, shaking her head; "because I must know what happens. If anything did happen they would put it in at once, wouldn't they! Sooner than I could hear in any other way?"

"I should think so. But I hope your daughter will soon be back to relieve your mind."

"Oh yes, soon, very soon," answered the old lady, pulling herself together with a heroic effort of self-control. "Then it will be all right. I am afraid I have been silly, Mrs. Singleton, and I've been bothering you with my fancies. Amelia would scold me if she were at home. You see, she is all I have in the world, and I get low and nervous without her. But I'm glad to think that she is enjoying herself, and safe with her friends, even if I am a little nervous while she is away. She is all I have in the world," she repeated, with a pathetic iteration.

I went away, determined to speak to Miss Smith on the next opportunity, and tell her how her mother suffered during her absences. She could not be aware of it, or she would never leave her so often for pleasure. I had not to wait long for my chance.

One night in March I was coming home by an evening train, after spending a week with friends in town. I had intended to remain longer, but I had heard unsatisfactory reports of the conduct of my servants during my absence, and thought it better to return unexpectedly, and see what was going on. So I found myself at Waterloo Terminus about nine o'clock. There was only one other lady on the platform, and in her I easily recognized Miss Smith, hurrying along to a first-class carriage. There was no mistaking her figure and walk, nor the Gladstone bag which invariably accompanied her on her travels. and which was oftener in her own hand than in that of a porter. As it happened, I had a Gladstone with me too, though I was not so independent as to porterage; and the two ladies and the two bags were soon in company. Miss Smith expressed great pleasure at seeing me, but excused herself from talking much in the train, saying that she felt ill, and had a headache. I could not press conversation on her, and she leaned back in the corner, behind her blue veil, with an air of utter lassitude. When we left the last station before Tamston, however, she revived a little, sat up, and made some trivial remark.

"We shall both be glad to get to bed, I think," I said. "You have had a tiring day, I fear."

"Yes; I am rather fatigued, thank you. I am not very strong."

"And nothing is so tiring as travelling. Now that I see how it knocks you up, I do not wonder that Mrs. Smith is so anxious about you when you are away."

"Yes; my poor mother is always nervous."

"I think you can hardly have realised *how* nervous she is. She suffers terribly when you are away; more than she ought to suffer."

"What do you mean?" The question was gruffly put; it was spoken in the voice I had heard in the arbour, not the precise company accents that I was used to.

"Only that, if you knew the nervous state she falls into, you might be able to arrange to be more at home. Forgive me for interfering, but I thought she kept it from you, and that you would rather know."

"I did know that she fretted herself unnecessarily, but not that it was to any serious extent. I am obliged to you, Mrs. Singleton; and I shall certainly arrange to be with her more constantly. Indeed, I meant to do so in any case. My heart is not strong. Railway journeys are bad for me. I must make one more, and then—excuse me—I feel ill—don't mind ——"

Her head dropped forward, and she fell to one side. I sprang up, and dragged her down to the bottom of the carriage, where I laid her flat. I pulled off her veil, and untied the muffling strings of her bonnet. Her face was ghastly pale, except for the ugly red mark, which looked redder than ever; her lips were blue. I pushed back her bonnet: back went her hair with it, showing beneath a close dark crop. I undid the heavy fur mantle, and loosened the dress; but I knew now, of a certainty, that it was no woman whom I was tending. A crowd of circumstances rushed together on my mind, bringing conviction. For the moment there was nothing further to be done. I had opened both windows to let the cold air rush through, but I had neither water nor restoratives. I could only let her lie there, and I had leisure to think. She was a swindler of some sort, it was clear—not of an ordinary sort, I was sure—perhaps a forger. What had she in that bag, then? She never travelled without it; she was always travelling with it; there must be something in it very valuable, or very important to her schemes—no doubt the implements of her trade, whatever it was. I glanced down; still she lay motionless, with white face and closed eyes. The bag was close to me. I lifted it slightly; it was unreasonably heavy. I glanced at her again, and touched the spring of the fastening,—not to open the the bag, but to see if it were secured against opening. It was locked. Again I tried the weight, and compared it with that of my own, tightly packed with articles of dress: hers, though rather smaller, was much heavier. Then a kind of window in my mind seemed to fly open, and a flood of lurid light poured in. Dynamite! it was dynamite that was in that bag. I was as sure of it as if I had seen the deadly stuff—surer, for I had not the least idea what it would be like. Dynamite it must be, and she—or he—was a conspirator, a murderer,—that harmless dull Miss Smith!

And now what was I to do? Give information at once to the police? That would have been the simplest thing to do, and perhaps the right one. But then came the thought of that poor old mother, living in an agony of apprehension, and clinging to me as the one friend who was sure to be good to her when trouble came. I *could* not be the one to bring it down upon her. But could I let this woman—or man—go on in a career of murder? I should be making myself an accomplice in the worst of crimes, for the sake of sparing an old woman who was already conniving at it, and who, after all, was not likely to suffer personally? Backwards and forwards went the pendulum of my resolution, until the slackening speed warned me that we were approaching Tamston, and I had decided nothing. I could only feel that I must have time for thought, and that I must not let that Gladstone bag go out of my sight. I swung it across to the seat where my own lay, and exchanged the two. If by any possibility my suspicions should turn out to have been incorrect, it would always be easy to apologize for a mistake between two articles so much alike, and return the one that did not belong to me. We were near the station now. I re-arranged the hair and bonnet, and eagerly looked out of the window. Yes, we were near Tamston; and there! *she* was moving.

"Lie still," I said authoritatively; "we are close to the station, and some one shall help you out. You have been ill."

She was still too faint to move. The train stopped, and, seizing the heavy bag, I got out hurriedly, and called for help. There was a short confused scene; but a cab was waiting for her, and she was assisted into it, a porter following with *my* Gladstone. I dare say the railway people thought me a brute for not offering to go with her, but I was burning to examine my prize, and see if I had made a fool and a thief of myself for nothing. I had a cab there too, and was just going to get in, when a fear seized me. What might be in that bag? Dare I carry it in an ordinary vehicle? Ought I to walk home, and carry it myself? But I felt physically incapable of the last, and was more afraid to let it out of my own hands than to keep it there. Besides, Miss Smith had been going to take it home in a cab, so it must be safe. So I decided to get in, and take it on my lap.

What an interminable drive that was? How many stones there were in the roads! The horse was tired, and the driver half asleep; we jogged along slowly, taking (I thought) every rut on the way. And there was I, sitting perhaps with death in my lap! Well, who asked me? Why did I do it? Nobody asked me; and I had done it out of curiosity, or excitement, or prompted by some malicious demon. I was a meddling idiot, and if I were blown sky-high it would serve me right. How would it feel, I wondered? I fancied there would be a sort of general crash and burst, which would feel as if it were inside one's head, and then—well, another of these jolts might make me know. I would complain to the road-inspectors to-morrow—if there were any to-morrow. Why did I live so far from the station? After all, I had no one but myself to thank for the whole affair.

These pleasant meditations were ended at last by the stopping of the cab before my own hall-door, and great was my relief. Ringing, however, produced no answer; so I got out, opened the door with my latch-key, 'and struck a light. The house appeared to be perfectly empty; but at the moment I postponed my domestic difficulties to the question of the awful bag. I dismissed the cabman, lit a candle, and, heavy as the bag was, I carried it upstairs myself, and deposited it in my bedroom. There I locked myself in, and undid the straps. It was locked: I knew that; but now that I had gone so far I was quite prepared to cut it open. I was supposing myself to suppose it my own bag; and why should I not cut it open if something had gone wrong with the lock? But first I would try my own key. It chanced to fit, though not very well, but it did open the lock, and the lips of the bag separated. My eagerness suddenly faded: what was I doing, prying into some one else's property? But I could not stop now; and one glance would tell me whether the contents were innocent personalities. There was a folded cloak at the top. I took it off, and below lay a strong tin box, surrounded and wedged in by articles of woman's clothing. In the other compartment was another box of the same sort. Both had peculiar locks.

I had seen enough; nothing should induce me now to return that bag until the police had examined it. But what to do with it in the meantime? Keep it in the house? Impossible; some one might take it up, and drop it. Lock it up in a cupboard, where no one could get at it? Yes; but the least little bit of an earthquake might shake it into explosion. To be sure, in the Thames Valley we do not as a rule have earthquakes every night, or even once a month; but still, such things have happened, and they might happen again. This idea disturbed me very much; I could not think of any place to put my dynamite (as I was quite sure it was) where an earthquake could be warranted not to come; but I finally decided that, on the whole, the water-butt was the safest depository. I blessed the evil genius that had led my servants into dissipation on the very night of all my life when most I wanted them out of the way, and stole very cautiously into the yard. Fastening one of the straps to the handles of the bag, I lowered it gently into the water, and let it rest on the bottom of the barrel. I dropped the strap after it, and only as it splashed in did I remember how completely I had burnt my boats, and that I had cut myself off from any possibility of pleading a mistake and returning the bag, if I should see Miss Smith before I could see the police, or if—dreadful idea!—I were wrong after all, and those heavy tin boxes contained something innocent and explainable. Well, it could not be helped now; I must send for Mr. Inspector Punshon the first thing in the morning, and get through the night as best I could. I lit the fire in the drawing-room and the gas in the hall, and set to work to make myself a cup of tea, while awaiting the return of my truant servants.

III.

The first thing that happened was the sounding of a mild knock at the door. I was too thoroughly on the defensive to open it in a hurry, but I ran to an upstairs window which overlooked the hall-door steps, and saw some fluttering black skirts and a black-and-white shawl, which I had often seen on Mrs. Smith. What was to be done now? Of course she had come for the bag, and of course she could not have it. Either I must tell her the whole truth, or bluntly refuse to give up somebody else's property. I fancied how white her face would turn, how terrified her eyes would grow, how she would entreat me. What a dread that must be already which had urged the poor old creature to come out alone at night, to carry—if for ever such a short a distance, for no doubt Miss Smith was waiting for her near—so heavy a load, of such an awful nature! No; I could not face her and refuse her; I must not yield to her. The only thing was—not to see her. She knocked and knocked; she rang several times; she even rapped with her hand at one of the ground-floor windows, and called timidly, "Is anyone at home?" but I sat still behind my upstairs' curtain, and made no sign. My heart was wrung with pity when she turned away at last, and feebly and sadly went back into the darkness. "Miss Smith will be here next," I said to myself; and I turned out the gas in the hall, to discourage her.

Half-an-hour passed, however, and there was no sign of her. It was eleven o'clock, and I began heartily to wish for the return of my maids, although it were to receive the dismissal they so thoroughly deserved. I was tired, and had dropped into a doze, pervaded by a notion that the housemaid had eloped with the cabman, taking the bag with them, when I was awakened by a slight but distinct noise. The conservatory opened into the drawing-room, and the noise which awoke me was the click of the handle of the outer door, which my careless servants had left unlocked. I did not realise this at once, but sat up to listen, and so had no time to stop a figure which came rapidly through the conservatory, opened the door into the drawing-room, and entered, just as I sprang to my feet. There she was, having taken me in the rear by a flank march, and carried my citadel by surprise. I was not half as dismayed at seeing her as I should have been if her mother had effected the entrance, for now I could steel myself by anger. She carried my Gladstone bag, and began civilly but stiffly.

"Excuse me for coming this way; but my mother called some time ago and could not get in, and I supposed that you were nervous about opening the door so late. After all, it is only eleven, so I thought you would not mind my taking the liberty."

I only bowed my head, as I stood facing her; things had gone too far for any more pretending. She went on with the set speech she had evidently prepared.

"I wished to thank you for your attention to me in the train. I should not have disturbed you to-night about that, but I find that we have accidentally exchanged bags; and as I feared that it might be inconvenient to you to be without yours for the night, and as there were some eatables in mine that would spoil if not unpacked immediately, I thought it better to come at once, and make the exchange."

"I am sorry that you troubled yourself," I answered.

"It was in my own interests," she said, with an attempt at a laugh; "I wanted my bag. Here is yours; will you give it to me?"

"What do you want your bag for, Miss Smith?" I asked, looking at her steadily. There was no excuse or subterfuge possible now; I was driven into a corner, and in that situation the most cowardly will fight. It is the only way in which I can explain my having behaved with so much spirit.

"What do I want it for?" she echoed. "I should think there was very little explanation needed for wanting one's own property. I want it at once, because fish and cream are not the better for being packed up all night; and I shall be obliged to you, Mrs. Singleton, if you will ring the bell, and order it to be brought."

"My servants' bed-time is ten o'clock," I replied. "I will not wake them to-night, but I will send over the bag to you in the morning. I consider that you have taken a great liberty in entering my house in the manner in which you did, and I beg that you will leave it at once."

"Not without the bag," she said, her voice sinking into the low gruff tone I had twice caught.

"You cannot have the bag to-night. I will send it to you to-morrow."

"Have you opened it?" she asked. I hesitated.

She tore the veil from her face, she caught my wrists in a furious grasp, and glared into my eyes.

"*Have* you opened it?" she repeated.

"Yes, I have," I answered desperately. "And the police shall see it before I give it up. And if you do not let go my wrists, I will scream for help, and everyone shall know that you are an impostor, and a *Man!*" My belief in her feminine nature had become such a habit that I could still think of no greater disgrace than that she should be known as a member of the opposite sex. I quite forgot that she—or he—might look upon it differently.

"Oh! you have found that out, have you? Then you must have found out something more, and that is that I am a man who does not value his life one pin. Don't I risk it every day? Am I not a criminal who might be flung into gaol by the first policeman I meet? For all you know, I may be what you would call a murderer. At any rate, you know that I travel constantly, and that my travelling-companion is Death."

He shook a menacing fore-finger at me, to enforce his terrible words; but even then, they seemed to me to have a theatrical ring about them. He had not taken off his disguise, but his female appearance had slipped from him like a veil, now that he was no longer acting the part; and it was unmistakeably a man muffled in woman's clothes and disfigured with paint, who now stood before me. I wondered that I had not seen the truth long ago; but it was only one illustration of the fact, that we see more with our mind than with our eyes.

"Well!" I answered. "I have no doubt of your personal courage, but it does not require much to get into my house by a side door, and bully me."

"You think that I shall be afraid of whomever you may call; you fancy that I should be shamed by being denounced as a man. Why, the hardest of all the sacrifices I have made for the cause has been the wearing of this abominable disguise. I a woman! Yes, I have renounced my manhood, and I glory in the renunciation! But I will claim it yet once—to die in. On the scaffold I shall be a man!"

"On the gallows, you mean," I remarked, getting tired of this rhodomontade. "You have mistaken your century."

"All centuries are alike fitted for great deeds," he answered, "for tireless revolt against tyranny, for a patience that cannot be wearied, a revenge that cannot be foiled, a death that need not be feared."

"And you think it a great deed to blow up a number of innocent people—you cannot tell what number, you cannot tell how innocent—perhaps not even voters?"

"Why do I talk to you?" he replied, contemptuously. "You cannot understand: no Englishwoman can understand. But you can understand this, though you may not believe it. I have taken an oath, to keep which I have given up everything that makes life worth having, except hope—except hope. When the lives of others come in the way of my keeping it, I count them as nothing. But if it would permit that I should serve the cause by laying my own head down on that bag of dynamite, before it shattered some stronghold of the enemy into fragments, it would be the softest pillow on which I ever rested. And oh! how I should sleep! I never sleep now."

His voice dropped into a weary sadness that almost melted me.

"Give it up," I said. "Without arguing the general question, your health is not fit for excitements. You are breaking down, and anxiety is torturing your mother."

"Yes, it is so," he answered. "I must give it up, I am not fit to be trusted; I am liable to break down, and betray myself, as I did to-night. This must be the end of it. Give me the bag, swear to be silent; and I will promise you in return that I will leave the neighbourhood, and live somewhere quietly with my mother."

"I cannot give you the bag," I said; "I should be your accomplice in whatever you might do with it. Leave the neighbourhood, as you say; and I will give you time to escape before I say anything to the police."

"You must give it to me," he exclaimed in a voice like a compressed growl, kept under from fear of giving the alarm. "I told you that I counted life as nothing if it stood in my way; I count yours as nothing. What do I care for the risk of discovery? I will sweep you aside as if you were a midge."

He drew a revolver from his pocket; I shrank back, as the bright barrel glittered near my eyes, and gave a scream. It was answered by the opening of the door from the conservatory, and a black figure tumbled into the room, and caught him behind by the arms.

"Oh, my dear—my dear Amelia, don't! Oh, don't play tricks with firearms. I know it was a joke, but something might go off, and it frightens me so; and look at Mrs. Singleton, you have frightened her too, she is so pale." All the time she was fumbling at him with her hands, trying to get hold of the pistol.

"I am not frightened at all," I said, and told the worst fib of my life.

"Mother, it was no joke," he said, gloomily; but the solemnity of his accents was somewhat belied by the queerness of his aspect, as he stood with his bonnet tumbling off, holding the pistol above his head. Mrs. Smith kept trying to get at it, working her hands up his arm, one above the other, as if she thought she could "swarm" up him.

"Oh, yes, it was a joke, of course; what else could it have been? But I always think there is something vulgar about practical jokes, and I am so frightened of pistols. Do give it to me, my dear; don't terrify your poor old mother. And, besides, Mrs. Singleton's servants are just coming up the road, and we ought to be going home to bed."

"Lady, I would that you had been otherwhere, but I cannot deny you," he replied, in a tone of solemn urbanity, worthy of the original owner of the speech; and he brought down the pistol from above his head, and presented it to his mother. She instantly proceeded to extract the cartridges with a knowingness in odd contrast with her generally helpless air, which suggested that strange experiences must have passed over the head of this old lady, habitually devoted to tatting. After which, she put the whole into the handbag that she usually carried, and shut it with an air of relief.

"Now, my dear," she resumed, "I hope you have finished your talk with Mrs. Singleton."

"Not quite," he answered. "Mother, Mrs. Singleton knows too much. In fact, she knows all; there is no more disguise to keep up before her. She refuses to give back my bag, and you have deprived me of the means of compelling her; but secrecy she must promise before I leave this house. It is my last demand; I am desperate; it must be granted."

"Knows all, does she?" cried Mrs. Smith. "Oh, but she will do us no harm. You won't, will you?" she entreated, turning to me. "You have always been good to me; you said that you would help me when I was in trouble. You won't betray us, you won't give up my—child?" Her voice quavered with that piteous trembling that is worse than tears; her poor old cheeks were crimson; the hands that she held out to me, trembled. I had always known that I should not be able to resist her; I could not now.

"No," I said, "I will not give him up. But I cannot shield him long. You must escape at once."

"Oh, yes, we will go. Heaven bless you!"

"There is a workman's train at half-past five. You can leave by that. I cannot delay sending information longer than half-past eight to-morrow morning. Otherwise, I should be suspected of conniving at your escape."

"Oh, we will manage," she answered, cheerfully; "there is plenty of time."

"Remember," I said to him, "I can only reconcile this to my conscience on your distinct promise to give up all connection with this terrible conspiracy."

He had stood all this time in an attitude of sombre despair, and now only gave a sort of grunt. "Is that clear?" I persisted.

"I will have no more to do with dynamite," he replied; "I can't; I am not fit for it."

"Oh, thank Heaven," cried the poor old woman, "and thank you, Mrs. Singleton. Now it will be all right. We will go away somewhere, and have a nice little home of our own, and live quietly, and think of no more dreadful things, and sleep all night. And you will never leave me again—will you dear? until I am laid in my grave."

"Never, mother," he said, and kissed her forehead. But she flung her arms round him, and kissed him again and again, and cried, and laughed, and finally had a regular fit of hysterics.

By this time I had become aware, from an opening and shutting of doors in the back part of the house, and from various other sounds, that my servants had returned; and my great anxiety was to get rid of my unwelcome visitors without their presence being suspected. So, as soon as Mrs. Smith had recovered herself, I hurried them out as they had come, and took leave of them at the gate on the high-road.

"Good-bye," I said to Mrs. Smith. "I am very, very sorry for you; but I trust that peaceful days are coming now."

"Oh, yes," she answered, quite cheerfully. "Dear Amelia will go on no more journeys; we shall be quite happy, and I shall always be grateful to you, dear Mrs. Singleton."

She had been so thoroughly drilled into wearing the mask that she could not drop it, now that it was useless; and I really think she half believed that she had a daughter. At any rate, the sense that her life of lonely terrors was now over—was so great a relief that she could think of nothing else. She forgot her fatigue, her homelessness, and the danger of detection in the future; she only felt that her child was henceforth to be always with her, and she was happy.

"I cannot ask you to shake hands with me, Mrs. Singleton," he said, "although in after years you might be proud to remember that you had done so; but I desire that we should part without unkind feeling. You are the friend of my mother; you have, on the whole, not shown yourself my enemy. I believe you have acted conscientiously. On the other hand, I beg you to believe that I was driven almost mad by the sense of a necessity which you cannot realize, and by the pressure of my duty to others and to the cause. I would have died myself, and I would have killed you, to fulfil it. I have failed; but it was not my fault, and I bear you no malice. Indeed, I beg your pardon for the alarm I was forced to cause you."

I had not any speech ready, in answer to this odd mixture of apology and forgiveness. I had a consciousness that he had collapsed rather ignominiously, and that I had come off undisputed victor; but in dignity and fluency it was all the other way. I believe I said, "Never mind." I wonder what I meant by it? Never mind having threatened to shoot me, or—try to be consoled for not having done it? At any rate, it amounted to a burying of the hatchet, and I and my dynamiter parted in peace.

I had a bad time of it afterwards, with Mr. Inspector Punshon. He wanted to know why I had done this, and why I had not done that, and badgered me as if I had been a witness under cross-examination. I succeeded in keeping my own counsel, and revealing nothing of the Smiths' evening visit; but I am sadly afraid that it was at the expense of truth. But, really, he confused me so that I hardly know what I said, or what I did not. He intimated pretty plainly that I had made a mess of the business, and was accountable to gods and men, and—what was worse—to the Home Secretary, for the escape of an important conspirator. Which, I am afraid, was truer than he knew. However, the Home Secretary was quite civil when I met him at dinner last week, and he did not say a word about dynamite—whence I conclude that he has pardoned my crimes, if he ever heard of them.

Nothing was ever heard again of the Smiths. They vanished in the night, taking away their personal properties, and dismissing their servants. Their furniture was claimed in due time by the firm from which it had been hired. The police worked their will in the house, but held their tongues; and it was understood in Tamston that the Smiths had run away, and their things been seized for debt. The fact that they owed no one in the neighbourhood a penny did not seem to detract from the popularity of this theory, which had besides the merit of being the only one in the field. The vicar was much chaffed about his protégées, but it never occurred to any one to ask *me* any questions. "Miss Smith" was never arrested, but I don't think he could have lived long, and I am sure that his mother could not live long after him.

Mr. Inspector Punshon became much more civil, when his first disgust at the escape had evaporated. He then began to perceive that it did not exactly redound to the credit of the Tamston police to have had a criminal of such importance under their nose for so long, and never to have scented him out. Perhaps some of his superiors assisted his perceptions. At any rate, he assumed a milder tone with me, and impressed upon me that most valuable results were likely to be obtained by following up "clues" which this occurrence had put into his hands, provided that the matter was not "blown upon;" and that my duty to my Queen and my country required me to resist all temptations to reveal myself as a heroine, attractive as was the prospect of becoming a centre of public interest. and a focus for interviewers—perhaps even of having my portrait in the Penny Illustrated, with a disguised dynamiter pointing a pistol at my head. I have resisted them all hitherto, and I think now I may treat Resolution. For—as I was going to say when I began—if my country has not by this time extracted all possible benefit out of my silence, it must certainly be the fault of Mr. Inspector Punshon.

VERA SINGLETON.

"BRING MYRTLE."

By Constance M'Ewen.

A NUMBER of letters were awaiting Colonel Haldane, Commandant of Newly, on his return from Parade. He was unmarried, rich, and rather distinguished-looking. It will therefore surprise no one that he was accustomed to receive a great many sweetly-scented, delicately-monogramed, prettily-worded letters from the various members of the fair sex with whom he was acquainted. Amongst the little heap which lay before him was one conspicuous for its careless handwriting and rough envelope. Oddly enough, this was the one he selected first for perusal. Scrawled on the lip of the envelope were these words: "*Bring Myrtle.*"

Colonel Haldane put up his gentlemanly eye-glass, and held his head a little on one side; he twisted his iron-grey moustache into a yet more poignant expression as he inspected those curious words: "*Bring Myrtle.*" Who was Myrtle? What was Myrtle? How many times he read and re-read that message he was perhaps unaware. But it was useless. "Bring Myrtle" remained on the lip of the envelope, an unsolved enigma.

Slowly he opened the letter. It was an invitation to afternoon tea at the Whites—people he knew slightly, as he knew so many in the heavily-garrisoned naval and military town close to the barracks at Newly.

The letter was from Miss Florence White, who wrote in her mother's name.

He called up a vision of Florence White. Tall and stately, a girl with a mass of golden brown hair, rolled off her forehead; a girl he had greatly admired, as one admires a serene and lovely landscape; a girl who made him feel provokingly "fogieish." *Other* young ladies rattled away at him, as if he were a sub, asked him to play tennis with them, and treated him like a mere youngster. But *this* young lady had placed him, with due regard to his complexion, in a shadowy corner of the drawing-room on one or two occasions when he had taken "tea" there, and had introduced him to some deep-toned matrons, as if in that direction lay his natural bias; and now this stately young lady sends him a jocular postscript bidding him "Bring Myrtle!"

Colonel Haldane sat down in the comfortable red velvet chair which faced the Parade-ground, and commanded a fine view of the ever-companionable sea. The little rippling waves had an expression of infant smiles to-day, and the buoyant clouds were chasing one another like schoolboys on a common. How innocent and fair was the world of nature! He sate dreaming over his problem "Bring Myrtle" quite happily.

A knock with the knob of a stick on the door breaks into his reflections, and Captain Hilton enters with his customary off-parade familiarity.

"Well, old fellow, what's up? Sea and sentiment, eh? It's fatal to sit in *that* attitude, looking at the sea. What's up, I ask you?"

Colonel Haldane roused himself from his reverie with an effort; he gently tapped his left hand with the letter which yet remained idly between his finger and thumb.

"Jane!" he said, addressing Captain Hilton by his nickname: "Jane! what on earth does it mean when you receive a message from a young lady to '*Bring Myrtle?*'" and he handed the envelope to Captain Hilton.

Jane, who had a rolling eye and a rollicking smile, took the envelope daintily, and, after reading it, pressed it to his heart, and said, with a strong brogue: "Why, man, it's a proposal! What do the ladies wear on their festal brows and twist about the flowing satin of their bridal gowns but myrtle? 'Bring myrtle,' I tell you, is a proposal—a bonâ fide proposal. I wish you every joy! She is a sweet girl, if a bold one."

Without a word, Colonel Haldane sprang, in a melodramatic manner, at the throat of Captain Hilton, and held him with a grip of iron.

"How dare you speak of Miss White like that? She is the most distinguished girl of my acquaintance. Apologise!"

Captain Hilton rolled his eye with a ghastly appeal on Colonel Haldane, when the latter as suddenly relaxed his grasp, and said:

"Forgive me, Hilton; but really I—I—object to such an unseemly idea."

"I beg your pardon, Colonel," said Captain Hilton, stiffly: "I object equally to being throttled. Allow me to wish you good morning."

"Stop, my friend," said Colonel Haldane, confusedly: "I don't know what is the matter with me! I'm half asleep, I think. Sea and sentiment, as you said just now. Come, my friend! *Do* tell me what on earth Miss White means."

"Means? something *green*," said Hilton, viciously; "but whether sprouting in a tub, after the fashion of the blossoming shrub, or done up in a glass case after the artificial mode, I know not. I wish you good morning, Colonel."

And with that he retreated to the mess-room.

"Blossoming shrub," murmured Colonel Haldane. "Bless his Hibernian wit! Eureka! Now I have it!" And with that he sat down at his writing-table, and penned the following letter:

"Au Myosotis, 10, Avenue Victor Emmanuel,
"à Menton, Alpes Maritimes.

"Send the finest flowering myrtle you possess to the following address: Miss Florence White, The Grange, Porterdown, Sussex.

The myrtle must arrive on the afternoon of September the 7th, one week from this date."

Then Colonel Haldane rang the bell hastily, and told his man to post the letter. This done, he placed the note from Miss Florence White in the pocket of his frogged coat, and then proceeded to read the rest of his correspondence.

The afternoon of the 7th duly arrived, and with a strange palpitation at his heart (a sensation which ought to have aroused his suspicions as to the exact state of his susceptibilities), Colonel Haldane drove up in his little hooded carriage, with the tiger jumping up and down behind, to the gates of The Grange.

"Here comes the pig in the poke," said Felicity White, a younger daughter who was given to using her brains in off-hand criticism. "If a man will drive a carriage with a hood, what is one to call him, but a pig-in-a-poke, you know? He is fidgeting at the gate most awfully, Florence; *do* come and look."

"I like that hooded carriage," said Florence. "Le style c'est l'homme même." And then she turned with ready grace to meet Colonel Haldane, who had just entered the room.

"Felicity and I were drawn to the window by the magnetical influence of your charming little carriage," she said. "I so admire your 'poke.'"

"Do you?" said Colonel Haldane, gratefully. "It is very kind of you!" and then he looked steadfastly at Florence, absolutely blushing as he did so.

Florence, catching the glance interrogative, was arrested in her amiable intention of transporting him to the other end of the long lone drawing-room, and introducing him to Mrs. Harlington, the Rector's wife. This agitated gentleman did not look exactly in a fit state to be discoursed to about winter blanket clubs and working men's clubs and friendly societies.

It's all very fine to talk about leading an unpuzzled existence, like Jane Austen; but *why* on earth did Colonel Haldane look at *her* with this unfathomable glance from his undeniably fine grey eyes? What did it mean? She fell away from him, musing, and turned the outward machinery of trite commonplaces on her greeting of the numerous guests, who were now rapidly arriving.

The Whites had just started a page, who answered to the ubiquitous name of "Tommy;" one of those specimens much adapted by ambitious matrons as an improvement on parlour-maids; a creature raw of the fields, with the expression of an animated turnip and brains to match. In the midst of a buzz of voices intermingling with the frou-frou of rich dresses, Tommy suddenly darted into the room, and made straight for Miss Florence White; carrying in his lobster-coloured hands a book suggestive of the P. D. Company.

Colonel Haldane, from his solitary seat in the deep recess of the bay window facing the entrance to "The Grange," felt an awful sensation come over him. Was this the myrtle arriving? and had the Menton folk absolutely charged the carriage to Miss White? What should he do? He shrunk behind the deep amber of the curtains, then as suddenly emerged.

"Bring Myrtle!" these were her own words, and he made a violent rush across the room to her side.

"It's the myrtle," he said, breathlessly. "Allow me! The stupid people have made a mistake," he continued, incoherently. "The idea of charging the carriage to YOU!" And he threw a sovereign into Tommy's bashful fingers.

Miss White looked at Colonel Haldane with ever-enlarging pupils. He had returned lately from Egypt, had been indefatigable at the bombardment of Alexandria, had had an illness on his return, and she remembered hearing that he had been obliged to have his head shaved. She continued to look at him quite tenderly, as these thoughts flitted phantom-like about her.

"Thank you, Colonel Haldane," she said. "You have saved me the trouble of fetching my purse. This is a new boy—country manners, you know; he wants instruction!" and smiling pleasantly, she moved out of the room after the vanishing figure of Tommy.

In the round, roomy hall stood a huge tub matted up and bearing the name, "Au Myosotis, à Menton," etc.

"It's a flowering myrtle, Miss," said Tommy; "the biggest the carrier says it ever fell to his duty to deliver."

"Fetch a pair of gardening scissors, Tommy," said Miss White; "and another time never venture to bring P.D.C. books into the drawing-room. Go to the housekeeper with that kind of thing."

Tommy took the colour natural to him in yet deeper hues, and ran for the scissors. Miss White soon snipped the detaining strings, and gave way to a very natural delight as the starry blossoming myrtle was exposed to view.

"Very odd," she thought; "it's addressed unmistakably to me. Poor Colonel Haldane! What does it mean?"

Thinking again of the shaven head and the bombardment of Alexandria, she sighed a little pensively and a little compassionately, and returned to the drawing-room just in time to escape the entry of Mrs. Danvers, whose forest cart, drawn by a lovely pair of Welsh ponies, she saw turning in at the gates. That lady now entered, followed by her inseparable companion, a perfect Dandy Dinmont, a long-bodied, low-legged, flap-eared, pedigreed creature, which rejoiced in the possession of seven prizes.

Florence immediately made a rush at the dog. "Ah! you have brought Myrtle! I was afraid, when I saw you this morning, that you would forget, though I mentioned it in my note!"

Both ladies had moved in the direction where still sat Colonel

Haldane, plunged in startled reflections, in the recess of the window. Was this long-backed, low-legged, flap-eared dog the honoured object of that message?

"Of course, I brought dear old Myrtle," retorted Mrs. Danvers. "I should suffocate at an afternoon if I hadn't a bit of natural life like that trusty Scotchman about me."

"*Now, it's explained!*" said a deep voice, from behind the amber curtains, and Colonel Haldane came forward once more.

The hesitation of his manner had vanished; he was smiling serenely, and his eyes were fixed with an expression of perfect understanding on the countenance of Miss White.

"Bring Myrtle!" he continued, laughingly. "This is Myrtle! Rival Myrtles there may be; but this form of Myrtle can't be improved upon!"

Again Miss White's pupils enlarged sympathetically. Worse and worse! Poor Colonel Haldane! she trembled for his reason. Not so Mrs. Danvers. Fixing him with her bright eyes, she said: "What is explained? Confusion of circumstances?"

"Confusion of envelopes. Bring Myrtle was scribbled on the wrong back—that's all," said Colonel Haldane.

With a sudden illumination, Miss White sank down beside Colonel Haldane in the recess, with a deep blush of mortified confusion.

"Does that account for the presence of the flowering myrtle in the hall?" she asked, after a moment of horrified silence.

"Yes. Charming mistake for me," muttered Colonel Haldane. "Gave me an opportunity that I——" and he looked at Mrs. Danvers, who, with a finesse worthy of her, dashed away to the other end of the room to meet the extended hand of an à propos acquaintance. He went on smoothly enough now.—"An opportunity that I wanted. Will you one day wear a sprig of that other myrtle for me, Florence?"

Miss White didn't say "No;" so she evidently intended to say "Yes."

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THE MAIL-CART ROBBERY.

By the Author of "East Lynne."

AN incident savouring strongly of romance occurred many years ago in one of the midland counties of England. It is a true story.

There stood one morning in the post-office of the chief town of Highamshire (as *we* will call it) two gentlemen sorting letters. The London mail had just come in, bringing its multiplicity of business. They were the postmaster of Higham and his son. The former, most deservedly respected by his fellow-citizens, and well-connected, had held the situation for many years; the latter, a handsome young man, looked forward to holding the situation after him.

"Ready," cried out Mr. Grame, in a loud tone; and the side-door opened, and four men entered, and ranged themselves in front of the counter. They were the town postmen, and each receiving his separate freight, departed for his allotted quarter of the city. It was striking half-past nine as they left the post-office: an hour considered to be good time in those days.

Mr. Grame and his son continued their work: that of making-up the bags for the cross-country towns and villages. Upon one letter, as it came under his observation, Mr. Grame's eye rested rather longer than on the rest.

"Here's Farmer Sterling's letter at last, Walter," he observed to his son.

"Has it come?" cried the young man, in a lively tone, while he suspended for a moment his own employment, and leaned towards his father, to look at the address of the letter in question. "'Mr. Sterling, Hill House Farm, Layton, Highamshire.' Ah! he need not have been so fidgety over it; I told him it would be all right."

"He has never been otherwise than fidgety over this yearly letter."

"Because of the money it contains," rejoined Walter.

At that moment somebody's knuckles came rapping at the glazed window; and Mr. Grame, who stood next it, pushed back the wooden slide from an open pane and looked out. But, first of all, he dropped the letter for Farmer Sterling safely into the Layton bag.

"Is that there letter come yet, sir?" inquired the voice at the window.

"Oh, is it you, Stone! I don't think it is. What was to be the address?"

"Miss Parker, Post-office, till called for."

"Ay. No, it is not arrived. Better luck to-morrow, perhaps."

"It's my belief it won't come at all. The young woman, you know, replied to the advertisement for a housekeeper, which was in the *Higham Herald* last Saturday week. I tell'd her yesterday that perhaps she'd have no answer. Did you hear of Ned Cook's shop being broke into last night, sir?"

"No," shortly answered the post-master. "I am busy now, and can't talk."

And the board slided sharply back again, nearly shutting up the end of Mr. Stone's nose with it. "Good day, gentlemen," said that discomfited applicant, as he moved away.

A little more work in the post-office, and then Mr. Grame called out as before, "Weirford and Layton bags ready!" And a tall, fine young man with an open countenance, looking much more like a gentleman than like the driver of a village mail-cart, came in.

"Not a heavy freight this morning, John," observed Mr. Grame, as he handed over the bags, secured only with string, the careless practice of the Higham post-office in those days, and of other post-offices, also. "Have you had your horse rough-shod?"

"All right and ready," responded John Ledbitter, with a pleasant smile.

"Or I don't know how you would get to Layton; the roads must be dreadful. Take care that you start back in good time, or you may be too late for the evening mail."

"I'll take care," answered the young man. "As to the roads, if anybody can drive over them I can, let them be what they will. Any commands"—dropping his voice as he spoke to the son—"for the Farm, Mr. Walter?"

"Are you going there this morning?"

"If I don't change my mind. Can I carry any message, I say?"

"No," sharply replied Mr. Walter Grame, and John Ledbitter laughed to himself as he went out with the bags.

Locking them into the box of his cart, an open vehicle, and taking his seat, he drove out of the town towards Layton, as fast as the dangerous roads would allow. It was the month of January, and Jack Frost had come down with all his severity: snow on the fields, icicles on the trees, frozen snow and ice lying in wait to break limbs on the road. But John Ledbitter's horse had been prepared for the state of affairs, and he drove him cautiously.

"It's too bad of me, but I do like to nettle him," he said to himself, as he laid the reins on the dash-board, and began to beat his arms, to bring a little feeling into them. "'*Are you going there?*' cries he so sharply, when I mischievously asked him if he had any commands for the farm. Many a day does not pass over my head but I do go there, Master Walter, and that you'll find out, soon. Now, Saucy Sir! hold up!"

"The idea of *his* making up to her," continued Mr. John Ledbitter, tightening the reins. "She's a mile and a half too good for him.

Why is it I never liked the fellow? *She* has nothing to do with the dislike: he always repelled me; years before I thought of her. He is a handsome man, an agreeable companion, has plenty of intellect—yes, all that. But, there's a turn in his expression that I don't like, something crafty, not genuine; other people may not see it, but I know it repels me. And look at the fellow's vanity where women are concerned! He thinks that he has only to ask Selina and have her. Not so fast, Mr. Walter Grame: Selina cares more for my little finger than she does for your whole self—as the old song goes:

> 'Despise her not, said Lord Thomas,
> Despise her not unto me,
> For I love thy little finger
> Better than her whole body.'

Gently, Saucy Sir! keep your feet if you please to-day, of all days in the year."

Finding his whole attention must be directed to the care of his horse, John Ledbitter put off his reflections to a more convenient season. At length he reached Layton, a small town about seven miles from Higham, having left the other bag at Weirford on his way. He drove straight to the post-office, unlocked his cart, and delivered the Layton bag to the post-master, Mr. Marsh.

"A sharp day," remarked the latter.

"Sharp enough," replied John. "I have had some trouble with the horse, I can tell you."

"It's a wonder he kept his feet at all. Sir Geoffrey Adams' bailiff was coming down yonder hill last night on the bay mare, and down she went, and broke her leg. Had to be shot."

"No!"

"I stepped up and saw her lying there in the road, Mr. Ledbitter: her groans, poor thing, were just like a human creature's. Sir Geoffrey was called out from his dinner, and shot her with his own hand. He was awful with Master Bailiff over it, and told him if he had been human enough to lead her down the hill, it would not have happened. He was cut up too, and didn't offer a word of excuse to Sir Geoffrey. Good day, if you are off to put up Saucy Sir."

The mail-cart and Saucy Sir being comfortably deposited at their usual quarters, John Ledbitter took a sharp walk of twenty minutes, which brought him to Hill House Farm. Taking off his great coat and leggings before he entered the sitting-room, he appeared in morning attire usually worn in those days by gentlemen.

"Here's a morning!" he said, as a fair, quiet-looking girl rose at his entrance, the farmer's only child. Many would have called Miss Sterling's features plain, but in her gentle voice and truthful earnest eyes lay plenty of attraction.

"What a journey you must have had!" she exclaimed, giving him her hand.

"Ay, indeed. I thought once it would have come to my carrying Saucy Sir. Where's Selina?"

Before Miss Sterling could reply, her father entered. "Ah, Master Ledbitter, is it you?" he said. "Well, d'ye think you have brought that letter of mine to-day?"

"I don't know," laughed the young man. "I have brought the bag. I cannot say what letters are in it."

"Well, I can't account for the delay. If that letter's lost, there's fifty pounds gone. And fifty pounds are not picked up in a day, Master Ledbitter."

Some few years before this, the sister of Mrs. Sterling, who had married a Mr. Cleeve and settled in London, died, leaving one only daughter. Mr. Cleeve married again, and then the child was consigned to the home and care of Mrs. Sterling, Mr. Cleeve forwarding every Christmas a £50 note, to cover her expenses. It was this note that Farmer Sterling was so anxious to receive; and each year, from the moment Christmas-day was turned until the money was actually in hand, he never ceased worrying himself and everybody about him, with conjectures that the note was lost. It had been pointed out to him several times, that to have the money conveyed in a letter was not a very safe mode of transit. But the farmer would answer that it had always come safely hitherto (though with delay), and he had no time, not he, to go driving into Higham to receive it from the bankers there. So that Mr. Sterling continued to expect and receive this important letter and its enclosure every year; a well-known fact to all Layton, and to half Higham. This was the letter noticed by the post-master that morning, as he sorted it into the Layton bag.

Selina Cleeve, now grown up, and about the age of her cousin, was a tall, well-educated, handsome, dark-eyed girl, full of fun and laughter; she played and sang like the nightingales in Layton Wood (as people were wont to express it), rode her horse with ease and grace, and took everybody's heart by storm. All the bachelor farmers were quarrelling for her; and many a fine gentleman from Higham wore out his horse's shoes riding over to Hill House Farm. They might have spared themselves the trouble; the farmers their quarrelling, and the gentlemen their steeds, for the young lady's heart was given to John Ledbitter; but, woman-like, she kept this to herself, and evinced no objection to the universal admiration. As to Anne Sterling, no fine gentleman noticed her; her attractive cousin was all in all. The housekeeping and other household management devolved on Anne; who had been as well-educated as her cousin, except in the matter of some accomplishments. Mrs. Sterling was an invalid, and sometimes did not leave her room for days together.

"Shall you be able to come to-night?" said Anne Sterling to Mr. Ledbitter, as her father left the parlour.

"With this weather, Anne?" he returned, half jestingly.

"But the moon will be up. Do try."

"You unreasonable girl! the moon will not dissolve the ice on the roads. What is it you are doing there, so industriously?"

"Cutting papers for the candlesticks," rejoined Anne. "This is the last. And now I must hasten into the kitchen. I have a thousand-and-one things to do to-day, and the maids' heads seem turned."

"Can I help you?"

"No," laughed Anne, "you would be a hindrance, I suspect, instead of a help. Selina will be here directly."

She entered the parlour as Anne Sterling left it. A stylish girl, in a rich plaid silk dress, her black hair worn in heavy braids round her head. Selina's private allowance from her father was liberal, and she dressed in accordance with it. Upon her entrance, John Ledbitter's manner changed to one of deep tenderness. He closed the door, and drew her fondly to him.

"Oh, John!" were her first words, "what unfortunate weather for our party to-night! You will never be able to come."

"My darling! Had I to walk every step of the way, here and back, and could remain but time to snatch one word with you, I should not fail to come."

"But you will have both to come and return in the night! Others can choose the daylight."

"The first dance, remember, Selina, after I do get here. Who comes from Higham? Walter Grame, of course."

"Of course. And his sisters come, and several others: all the young lawyers and doctors in the town, I think. Walter Grame has engaged me for the first and last dances: you will not be here at either. And as many more as I would accord him between, he said."

John Ledbitter laughed, a meaning laugh, and his eye twinkled mischievously. "Selina," he whispered, "I fear his case is desperate. What say you?"

She understood him. And though she did not say it in words, he read the answer in her bent, happy countenance.

Delaying his departure as long as was prudent, and still talking with Miss Cleeve, John Ledbitter at length rose to go. In the kitchen, where he went to don his overalls and rough coat, he met Molly, carrying out a tray of mince pies and small tartlets. Molly had lived in the family for twenty years; and tyrannised in consequence over the other servant, Joan, who had been in it only ten.

"Don't they look first-rate!" cried Molly to the young man, who was coolly helping himself. "But they be nothing, Mr. John; just please step in here." Opening the door of a large room, she proudly disclosed to view the long supper-table, already laid out with its tempting dainties, and decorated with holly and laureltinas. A magnificent twelfth-cake stood in the middle, for it was Twelfth Day. A bright fire of wood and coal blazed away in the grate.

"Grand! Glorious!" exclaimed John. "Why you must have had half the pastrycooks in the parish here to prepare all those sweets and jellies!"

"Pastrycooks! what next?" cried the offended Molly. "Miss Anne and me did 'em all ourselves. You won't find Miss Anne's match in this county, Mr. Ledbitter; nor in any other. My mistress has brought her up right well. She don't play the pianer, it's true; and she don't spend hours over her hair, a setting of it off in outlandish winds about her head; and she don't dress in silks the first thing in a morning," satirically added Molly, with an allusion to somebody else, which Mr. John perfectly well understood, and laughed at. "But see Miss Anne in illness: who tends a sick body's bed like she?—hear her pleasant voice a-soothing any poor soul what's in trouble—look how she manages this house, and gives counsel to master about the farm out-doors! No, Mr. John: you young gentlemen like to please your eye, but give me one who has got qualities inside of 'em that will shine out when hair's grey and pianers is rusty."

John Ledbitter turned away laughing. He ran against the farmer in the kitchen.

"Are you coming to their fine doings to-night, Mr. Ledbitter?"

"If I can get here."

"Bless the foolish women, I say; putting things about, like this, for a night's pleasure! I don't know our house up-stairs, Mr. John; I don't, I assure you. They have made the big best bed-room into the dancing-room, and covered the walls with green leaves and sconces for candles, and chalked the floor. *I* won't be candle-snuffer."

"There won't be no snuffing wanted, master," interposed Molly, tartly. "The candles is wax."

"Wax! I said I'd have no wax candles in the house again," retorted the farmer. "The last time we had one of these affairs, I got my best blue coat covered with its droppings."

"Never you mind the droppings, master," cried Molly, "the room will look beautiful."

"It had need to," rejoined the farmer. "I shall stop in the kitchen and smoke my pipe. Good day, Mr. John, if you are going."

Mr. John had to go, though no doubt his will would have inclined him to stay. In half an hour's time he was driving Saucy Sir back to Higham with the Layton and Weirford letter bags for the evening mail, which was made up at Higham in the afternoon.

A merry scene that evening at the Hill House Farm! It was the custom in the neighbourhood for the more wealthy farmers to hold annually one of these entertainments, which were distinguished by great profusion of dainties, a hearty welcome, and thorough enjoyment. Dancing was kept up till daylight, then came breakfast, and then the guests dispersed. At Mr. Sterling's the party had been omitted for the last two years, in consequence of Mrs. Sterling's precarious state of health; now, as she was somewhat better, it was renewed again. Mr. Sterling was highly regarded by all. In spite of his rustic mode of speech, he was a superior man.

The ball began with a country dance, always the first dance at these meetings, the Vicar of Layton opening it with Miss Sterling. He had just been presented to the living—a very poor one, by the way—and as yet knew but few of his parishioners personally; he was a young man, and enjoyed the dancing as much as anybody. Next to them stood young Mr. Grame and Selina Cleeve, by far the handsomest couple in the room. Mrs. Sterling sat in an arm-chair by the fire, looking pale and delicate, and by her side sat the new vicar's mother, who had come to Layton to keep house for him. The farmer, as he had threatened, was in the kitchen smoking his pipe, a knot of elderly friends round him doing the same and discussing the state of the markets; but as they were all in full dress (blue frock coats with brass buttons, drab breeches and gaiters, and crimson neckties), their presence in the ball-room might with certainty be looked for by-and-by.

It was nine o'clock when John Ledbitter entered, in evening dress. Some of the young farmers nudged each other. "He's come to take the shine out of Grame," they whispered. He *did* take the shine out of him; for though young Grame could boast of his good looks and fine figure, he was not half so popular as John Ledbitter. John made his way at once to Mrs. Sterling and spoke with her a little while. He had a pleasant voice, and the accent and address of a cultivated man. Mrs. Cooper, the clergyman's mother, looked after him as he moved away to take his place in the dance. She inquired who he was.

"It is John Ledbitter," said Anne Sterling.

"I thought—dear me, what an extraordinary likeness!" said the Reverend Mr. Cooper, following John with his eyes—"how like that gentleman is to the man who drives the mail-cart! I was noticing the man this morning as he drove into Layton, he appeared to manage his horse so skilfully."

"John Ledbitter is the driver of the mail-cart," interposed Walter Grame, drawing himself up, as much as to say that *he* would not stoop to drive a mail-cart.

"I must explain it to you," said Mrs. Sterling, noting the perplexed look of the clergyman. "Old Mr. Ledbitter, John's father, was an architect and land agent in Higham. He had the best business connexion in all the county, but his large family kept his profits down, for he reared them expensively and never laid by. So that when he died they had to shift for themselves. John, the third son, had been brought up an agriculturist, and obtained a post as manager to the estate of a gentleman who lived much abroad However, the owner sold the property and John lost his situatio This was—how long ago, Anne?"

"About four months, mother."

"Yes; and he had held it about three years. Well, poor John could not immediately get into anything: one promised him something, and another promised him something, but no place seemed to drop in. One day he had come over to see Sir Geoffrey Adams on business, and was standing by the post-office here, when the driver of the mail-cart fell down in a fit, just as he was about to start, and died. There was nobody to drive the cart back to Higham; the afternoon was flying on, and the chances were that the Layton and Weirford letters would lose the mail. So John Ledbitter said he would drive it; and he did so, and got the bags to Higham in time."

"He drove to and fro the next day, and for several days," interposed Walter Grame, who had appeared anxious to speak, "nobody turning up, at the pinch, to whom we chose to entrust the bags. So my father, in a joke, told Ledbitter he had better keep the place; and by Jupiter! if he didn't nail it! The chaffing's not over in Higham yet. Ledbitter can't walk through the streets but he gets in for it. And serve him right: the fellow can expect nothing but chaff if he chooses to degrade himself to the level of a mail-cart driver."

"It is not the pay he does it for, which is trifling, but he argues that idleness is the root of mischief; and this daily occupation keeps him out of both," said Anne, looking at Walter Grame. "He has only taken it as a temporary thing, until something better falls in."

"Ledbitter's one in a thousand," rang out the bluff voice of George Blount, a keen-looking young farmer who had just come up from the card-room; "and there's not one *in* a thousand that would have had the moral courage to defy pride and put his shoulder to the wheel as he has done. Is it not more to his credit to take up with this honest employment and live on the pay while he's waiting for a place to drop from the clouds, than to skulk idly about Higham, and sponge upon his brothers? You dandy town bucks may turn up your noses at him for it, Master Grame, but he has shown himself a downright sensible man. What do you think, sir?" added the speaker, abruptly addressing the clergyman.

"It certainly appears to me that this young Mr. Ledbitter is to be commended," was the reply. "I see no reflection that can be cast upon him for driving the mail-cart while he waits for something more suitable to his sphere of life." And Anne Sterling's cheeks coloured with pleasure as she heard the words. *She* knew the worth of John Ledbitter: perhaps too well.

"He'll get on fast," cried young Blount; "these steady-minded, persevering fellows are safe to rise in the world. In twenty years' time from this, if John Ledbitter has not won himself a home and twenty thousand pounds, it will surprise me."

"I am glad to hear this opinion from you, Mr. Blount, for I think you are capable of judging," observed Mrs. Sterling. "People tell me there is an attachment between John Ledbitter and my niece;

so that we—if it is to come to anything—should naturally be interested in his getting on."

"I hope that is quite a mistaken idea, ma'am; and I think it is," fired Walter Grame. "You would never suffer Miss Cleeve to throw herself away on him! There are others ——"

Mrs. Sterling made a motion for silence, for the quadrille was over, and the two persons in question were approaching. Selina seated herself by her aunt, and the clergyman entered into conversation with John Ledbitter. Presently the music struck up again.

"It is my turn now, Selina," whispered Walter Grame.

She shook her head in an unconcerned manner, as she toyed with a spray of heliotrope. "I am engaged to Mr. Ledbitter."

"That is too bad," retorted Walter Grame, resentfully. "You danced with him the last dance."

"And I have promised him this. How unreasonable you are, Mr. Walter! I have danced with you—let me think—three times already."

Mr. Ledbitter turned from the vicar; and without speaking, took Selina's hand, and placed it within his arm. But after they moved away, he leaned down to whisper to her. There was evidently perfect confidence between them.

"I think it is so—that they are attached to each other," remarked Mrs. Cooper, who was watching them. "I hope their prospects will —— Oh, goodness! my best black silk gown!"

"It will not hurt, it is only white wine negus. Anne, get a cloth; call Molly," reiterated Mrs. Sterling. For Mr. Walter Grame's refreshment glass and its contents had fallen from his hand on the skirt of Mrs. Cooper's dress as it lay on the floor. Anne said nothing, then or afterwards, but her impression was that it was *thrown* down, and in passion. The glass lay in fragments.

Higham great market was being held; the first in the new year. This was only a few days after the party. Amongst other farmers who attended the market was Mr. Sterling. About three o'clock in the afternoon, when his business was over, he went into the post-office. The postmaster and his son were both there, the latter sitting down and reading the newspaper. It was not a busy hour.

"Good-day, Mr. Grame," said the farmer. "Good-day, Master Walter. I have come about that letter. I do think it must be lost. It never was so late before, that I can recollect."

"What letter?" inquired the postmaster.

"Why, that letter—with the fifty pounds in it. I don't expect any other. You are sure you have not overlooked it?"

"The letter went to Layton days ago," responded Mr. Grame. "Did you not receive it?"

Farmer Sterling's eyes opened wide with perplexity. "Went to Layton days ago!" he repeated. "Where is it, then?"

"If you have not had it, there must be some mismanagement at the Layton office. But such neglect is unusual with Marsh."

"Good mercy! I hope it has not been stolen."

"Which morning was it the letter came, Walter?" cried Mr. Grame, appealing to his son. "Oh—I remember—the day you and the girls were going over to the Hill House Farm. It was the very morning of your wife's ball, Mr. Sterling."

"The morning before, or the morning after?" asked the bewildered farmer.

"The same morning, the 6th of January. When Walter and the two girls went over in the evening."

"Now why didn't you tell me that night that it was come, Mr. Walter?" expostulated the farmer.

"I never thought of the letter," replied the young man. "And if I had thought of it, it would only have been to suppose you had received it. You ought to have had it that afternoon. Had you happened to mention the letter, I could have told you it was come."

"Now look at that!" groaned the farmer. "What with the people, and the eating and drinking, the letter never came into my head at all. Are you quite sure, Mr. Grame, that it was the very letter?"

"I am sure that it was a letter addressed to you, and that it came from London. I made the remark to Walter that your letter was come at last. I have not the slightest doubt it was the letter."

"And you sent it on to Layton?"

"Of course I did."

"But Miss Cleeve called at our post-office yesterday, and Marsh assured her no letter at all had arrived for me."

"I put it into the Layton bag myself, and secured the bag myself, as I always do," returned Mr. Grame, "and the bag was never out of my hands till I delivered it to John Ledbitter. My son was present and saw me put it in."

"I was," said Walter. "When my father exclaimed that Mr. Sterling's letter had come at last, I looked over his shoulder at the address, and I saw him drop it into the bag. They must have overlooked it at the Layton office, sir."

"Old Marsh is so careful a body," debated the farmer.

"He is," assented Mr. Grame. "I don't suppose he ever overlooked a letter in his life. Still such a thing may occur. Go to the office as soon as you return, Mr. Sterling, and tell him from me that the letter went on to Layton."

"It's a jolly vexatious thing to have all this bother. If that £50 note's gone, it will be my loss. Mr. Cleeve objected to send in that way, but I told him I'd run the risk."

And perhaps here lay the secret of Farmer Sterling's anxiety about the safe arrival of these letters—because he knew that the forwarding of the money in this way was in defiance of other people's opinion.

The letter never reached Layton—so old Mr. Marsh, the postmaster there, affirmed, when applied to by the farmer. He remembered perfectly the 6th—why it was not a week ago—the day he told Ledbitter of the accident to the bay mare. No soul but himself touched the letters; nobody but himself was present that day when he opened the bag; and he could swear that the letter for Farmer Sterling was not in it. Mr. Marsh's word was a guarantee in itself: he had held the situation two score years, and was perfectly trustworthy.

So the suspicion fell upon John Ledbitter. Indeed, it may not be too much to say that the guilt was traced home to him. The postmasters of Higham and Layton were known and tried public servants, above all suspicion: the one had put the letter in and secured the bag; the other, when he opened the bag, found the letter gone; and none could *or did* have access to the bag between those times but John Ledbitter. He was dismissed from his situation as driver; but, strange to say, he was not brought to trial. Mr. Sterling declined to prosecute, and no instructions were received on the subject from the Government; but John Ledbitter's guilt was as surely brought home to him as it could have been by twelve jurymen. Of course he made protest of his innocence—what man, under a similar accusation, does not?—but his crime was too palpable. Neither the letter nor its enclosure could be traced. Mr. Cleeve furnished the particulars of the lost note; it was stopped at the London and country banks, handbills describing it were also hung up in the different public-houses: but it was not presented for payment, and was never heard of. "Saucy Sir must have ate it up with his hay," quoth the joking farmers of Layton, one to another: but if they accidentally met the gentleman driver—as they were wont to style John Ledbitter—they regarded him with an aspect very different from a joking one.

John Ledbitter entered Mr. Sterling's house only once after this, and that was to resign Selina Cleeve; to release her from the tacit engagement which existed between them. However, he found there was little necessity for doing so: Selina released herself. He arrived at the Hill House for this purpose at an inopportune moment; for his rival—as he certainly aspired to be—was there before him.

It was Sunday, and when Mr. Sterling and his family got home from church in the morning they found Walter Grame there, who had ridden over from Higham. He received an invitation to remain and partake of their roast griskin and apple-pie. After dinner the farmer took his pipe, his wife lay back in her cushioned arm-chair on the opposite side of the hearth-rug; and while Anne presided over the wine—cowslip, sherry and port—and the filberts and cakes, Walter Grame watched Selina. The conversation turned upon John Ledbitter and his crime.

"I do not see how he could accomplish it," exclaimed Mrs. Sterling, "unless he stopped the mail-cart, and undid the bag in the road."

"Well, what was there to prevent his doing so?" responded her husband.

"But so *deliberate* a theft," repeated Mrs. Sterling. "I can understand—at least, I think I can—the being overcome by a moment of temptation; but a man who could stop his horse in a public road, unlock the box, and untie the letter-bag for the purpose of robbing it, must be one who would stand at scarcely any crime."

"Why that's just what I told him," cried the farmer, "when he came to me at Higham, wanting to make a declaration of his innocence. 'What's gone with the letter and the money,' I said, 'if you have not got it, Mr. Ledbitter?' And that shut him up; for all he could answer was that he wished he knew what *had* gone with it."

"Ah," broke in Walter Grame, "Ledbitter was a great favourite, but I did not like him. And Higham never noticed until now the singularity of his having taken to drive a mail-cart. It is the opinion of more than one man that the robbery was planned when he secured the place."

"What, to take that same identical letter of mine?" gasped the farmer, laying his pipe on his knee, while a startled look of dismay rose to Anne Sterling's face.

"Not yours in particular, Mr. Sterling. But probably yours happened to be the first letter that presented itself, as bearing an enclosure worth the risk."

"The villain! the double-faced rascal!" uttered the farmer. "That's putting the matter—and himself too—in a new light."

At that moment Molly entered the room with some silver forks and spoons, large and small, and shut the door behind her.

"It's him," she abruptly said, coming up to the table, with a face of terror. "He says he wants to see Miss Selina."

"Who does?" demanded everybody, in a breath.

"That dreadful young Ledbitter. He come sneaking in at the kitchen door: not the front way, or you'd have seen him from this winder, but right across the fold-yard. I was took all of a heap, and asked if he'd walk into the parlour—for I was afeard of him. 'No,' says he, 'I'll not go in. Is Miss Cleeve there?'"

"'Yes, she is,' I said, 'and the mistress, and Miss Anne, and the master, and Mr. Walter Grame; and Joan's close at hand, a skimming the cream.'" For I thought he should know I was not alone in the place, if he had come to steal anything.

"'Molly,' says he, quite humbly, 'go in and ask Miss Cleeve if she will step out and speak a word with me.' So I grabbed up the dinner silver, which, by ill-luck, was lying on the table, and away I came."

Miss Cleeve rose. "Selina!" said Mrs. Sterling, in a reproving tone.

"Aunt," was the rejoinder, "I have also a word to say to him."

"But —— my dear! Well, well, just for a minute, if you must. But remember, Selina, we cannot again admit Mr. Ledbitter."

"I'd as soon admit the public hangman," declared the farmer.

Scarcely had Selina left the room, when Walter Grame darted after her. He drew her into the best parlour, the door of which, adjacent to their sitting-room, stood open.

"Selina! you will never accord an interview to this man?"

"Yes," she answered. "For the last time."

"What infatuation! Do you believe in him still?"

"That is impossible," she murmured, looking wretchedly ill, and also wretchedly cross. "But, from the terms we were on, a last interview, a final understanding, is necessary."

"What terms?" he asked, biting his lips. "It cannot be that you were engaged to him?"

"Not really engaged. But, had it not been for this, had Ledbitter remained what I thought he was, we should soon have been."

"I am grieved to hear it. It is a lucky escape for you."

"Oh! and it is this which makes me so angry," she bitterly exclaimed. "Why did he monopolise my society, seek to make me like him, when he knew himself to be a base, bad man. I, who might have chosen from all the world! Let me go, Mr. Grame: I shall be more myself, when this last interview is over."

"You can have nothing to say to him, Selina, that may not be said by a friend," he persisted. "Suffer me to see him for you."

"Nonsense," she peevishly answered. "You cannot say what I have to say."

She walked, with a hasty step, along the passage. The two servants were whispering in the kitchen; but Selina could see no sign of Mr. Ledbitter. Molly pointed with her finger towards the door of the best kitchen, and Selina went into it.

In the middle of the cold, comfortless room, which had no fire in it, stood John Ledbitter. She walked up, and confronted him without speaking, her action and countenance expressing both anger and scorn.

"I see," began Mr. Ledbitter, as he looked at her. "I need not have come from Higham to do my errand this afternoon. It has been done for me."

"I feel it cold in this room," said Selina, glancing round, and striving, pretty successfully, to hide the agitation she really felt under a show of indifference. "Be so good as to tell me your business—that I may return to the fire."

"My business was, partly to see how this false accusation had affected you towards me: I see it too plainly now. Had it been otherwise ——"

He stopped: either from emotion, or from a loss to express himself. She stood as still as a statue, and did not help him on.

"Then I have only to say farewell," he resumed, "and to thank you for the many happy hours we have spent together. I came to say something else: but no matter: I see now it would be useless."

"And I beg," she said, raising herself proudly up, "that you will forget those hours you speak of, and which I shall never reflect on but with a sense of degradation. I blush—I *blush*," she vehemently repeated, "to think that the world may point to me, as I pass through the streets, and say, 'There goes she who was engaged to the man, John Ledbitter!' I pray that I may never see your face again."

"You never shall—by my seeking. Should I ever hold converse with you again willingly, it will be under different auspices."

He quitted the room, stalked through the kitchen, and across the fold-yard into the side-lane, his breast heaving with passionate anger; for she had aroused all the lion within him. Molly and Joan pressed their noses against the kitchen window, and stared after him till he was beyond view; just as they might have stared had some extraordinary foreign animal been on view there, and with quite as much curiosity. Whilst Selina Cleeve, repelling some softer emotions, which seemed inclined to make themselves felt within her, strove to shake John Ledbitter out of her thoughts, and to say to herself, as she returned to the sitting-room, that she had shaken him out of them for ever.

The years passed on, nearly two, and the postmaster at Higham became stricken with mortal illness. His disease was a lingering one, lasting over several months, during which time he was confined to his bed, and his son managed the business. One evening just before his death, when Walter was sitting in the room, the old man suddenly addressed him.

"Walter," he said, "I shall soon be gone, and after that they will no doubt make you postmaster. Be steady, punctual, diligent in your daily business, as I trust I have been; be just and merciful in your dealings with your fellow-men, as I have striven to be; be more urgent than I have ever been in serving your Maker, for there the very best of us fall short. You have been a dutiful son to me; a good son; and I pray that your children, in your old age, may be such to you."

Walter moved uneasily in his chair.

"There is only one thing in business matters which causes me regret for the past," resumed Mr. Grame—"that the particulars connected with John Ledbitter's theft should never have come to light. It is a weight on my conscience, having suffered him to assume a post for which his position unfitted him. If he sought it with the intention of doing wrong, my having refused him the situation would have removed the temptation from his way."

"You need not worry yourself over such a crochet as that, father," responded the younger man. "I cannot think why he does not leave the country. The thing would be done with then, and pass from men's minds."

"He has his punishment," observed Mr. Grame. "Abandoned by his relations, scorned by his friends, shunned by all good men, and driven to get his living in the fields, as a day labourer! Many a man would sink under it."

"He is a great fool to stay in Highamshire."

"No harsh names, Walter: John Ledbitter did not offend against *you.* Leave him to the stings of his own conscience."

Walter muttered some reply, and quitted the room. He never liked to be found fault with, in ever so small a degree.

During his absence, Mr. Grame dropped asleep and dreamt a very vivid dream. So vivid, that, in the first moments of waking up, he could not be persuaded it was not reality. Its subject must have been suggested by the previous conversation. He dreamt that John Ledbitter was innocent: he did not see or understand how, but in his sleep he felt the most solemn conviction that the fact was so.

"Walter, Walter," he gasped forth, after his confused relation of it, upon the return of his son, "when his innocence is brought to light, do you try and make it up to him. *I* would, if I were alive."

"When his innocence—what do you mean, sir? You must be asleep still. A dream is but a dream."

"Well—*if* it comes to light, if it shall be proved that John Ledbitter is an innocent and injured man, do you endeavour to compensate him for the injustice that has been heaped on his head. *It is a charge I leave you.*"

"The old man is wandering," whispered Mr. Walter to the nurse, who was then present.

"Like enough," answered the woman: and it was through her that this dream of the postmaster's got talked of in Higham. "Like enough he is, poor gentleman. Let me give you your composing draught, sir."

A goodly company were wending their way to Layton church, for the fairest flower in Layton parish was that day to be taken out of it. A stranger, who happened to be passing through Layton, stepped into the church with the crowd.

"She is a bonny bride," he observed to old Farmer Blount, who stood in the porch looking in.

"Ay, she is that. Some of the young men about here have been wild after her; but Walter Grame has distanced them. He is not bad-looking either, for a man."

"Extremely handsome, I think. Who is he?"

"The postmaster of Higham; as his father was before him. The old man died a year ago, and left a goodish bit of property behind him; but it turned out that Master Walter there had anticipated his share; and how the young fellow had kept his creditors quiet was a matter of wonder. But he has sown his wild oats now, they say; and unless he had, Miss Cleeve, I take it, would have seen him further before she'd married him. Her father's dead also, and there's fifteen hundred pounds told down with her this day."

"He is a lucky dog."

"It is sheer luck with him, for he was not her first fancy. Young Ledbitter was; and she was mighty fond of him. But he ran his head into trouble—robbed the Layton mail-bag. Of course, no decent young woman could stand that, though he slipped out of a prosecution. Since then he has been thankful to any farmer who would give him a job of work. He is on my grounds now."

The stranger gave a low whistle, forgetting he was in the porch of a church. "Is it not hazardous, sir, to employ a thief even on your out-door land?"

"Well, you see, the Ledbitters were so much respected; people cannot help feeling for them. A likelier, steadier young fellow than John was, one could not expect to meet. I say it must have been a moment of sudden madness, or some other sort of temptation. But he has got his treadmill on him: there's not a mad dog in the parish more shunned than he. Hush! Here they come."

Mr. Walter Grame and his bride, no longer Selina Cleeve, walked first; next came Anne Sterling with her father. Several friends followed. The two young ladies were dressed alike, in lavender silk, it was the custom then, the bride wearing orange-blossoms in her white bonnet; Anne, lilies of the valley. They brushed the stranger as they walked through the porch, so that he—to use his own expression—had a good look at them.

"She's a regular beauty," he remarked to Farmer Blount; "but for my choice give me the one that follows her, the bridesmaid. The first has a temper of her own, or I never read an eye yet; the last has goodness written on her face." Mr. Blount grunted forth an inaudible reply. None were more aware of Anne Sterling's goodness than the Blounts. George had proposed to her in secret the night of the ball, three years before, and she refused him.

But another person was also looking on at the bridal party; a man in a smock-frock; looking through a gap in the hedge, from an obscure corner of the churchyard. It was John Ledbitter. Oh, what a position was this unfortunate man's! Guilt does, indeed, bring its own punishment—as all Layton, and Higham too, had repeated, with reference to him, hundreds of times. Hunted down by his own class in life, condemned to labour hard for common sustenance with the hinds who tilled the ground—for in any more responsible situation, in an office, or where money would have passed through his hands, none would trust him—there he stood, a marked man, watching her, whom he had once so passionately loved, led forth, the bride of another. A bitter word rose in his heart for that hour when he had first ascended the mail-cart to drive it to Layton; and with a wild cry, which startled the air, and seemed to be wrung from the very depths of his spirit, he leaped the stile at the rear of the churchyard, and rushed back to his labour in the fields.

This statement, of the obloquy thrown upon John Ledbitter (as he is here called) and the manner in which he was shunned, is not exaggerated in the slightest degree. As those who are old enough to remember the circumstances well know.

PART THE SECOND.

A few years had gone by.

It was the dinner hour at Hill House Farm, an hour after midday. Mr. Sterling and his daughter sat down to it alone. Latterly the farmer had been ailing in health and could not look much after his out-door pursuits. People thought it singular that the farmer's only child, who was admired wherever she was known, and who would be the inheritor of his substance, no small one, should have gained her six-and-twentieth year without having changed her name; but she laughingly answered, when joked about it, that she could not afford to leave her father and mother.

"Shall I carve to-day, father, or will you?" inquired Anne.

"You carve, child. Cut for your mother first."

But Anne chose first of all to help her father. The dish was boiled beef, and she was careful to cut it for him as he best liked it. She then rose to take up her mother's dinner.

"Why are you leaving the table, Anne? Where's Molly, that she's not waiting on us?"

"Molly has Martha's work to do to-day as well as her own," replied Anne. "I shall be back directly."

When dinner was over, the farmer drew his arm-chair close to the fire. Anne gave him his pipe and tobacco, set his small jug of ale and glass beside him, and then went up to her mother's chamber. She smoothed the bed and the pillows, changed her mother's cap for a smarter one, in case any neighbours dropped in, put some lavender-water on her handkerchief, and gave her her usual glass of wine.

"What else can I do, mother?"

"Nothing, my dear. Sit down and be still. You must be tired, helping Molly so much this morning. Unless you will read a psalm. The book is here."

Anne Sterling took the Prayer-book, and read the evening psalms for the day in her clear and pleasant tone. She then sat talking. After a while, her mother seemed inclined to sleep; so Anne softly left the room, and went down to the kitchen. It was then four o'clock.

"Well, Molly, how are you getting on?"

"Oh, pretty well," crossly responded the old servant, who was not so active since a hurt she had given to her knee. "Martha hadn't need to go gadding for a holiday every day."

"Is my father gone out?"

"I have not seen anything of him since dinner, Miss Anne."

Anne went into the dining-room. Soon a wild cry echoed in the passages. Molly ran in as quickly as her lame knee would permit.

Mr. Sterling was in a fit. His pipe lay broken on the ground; his head had fallen on the elbow of his chair; froth issued from his lips. Molly screamed out that it was apoplexy.

"He will die, Miss Anne, unless something can be done. How in the world can we get the doctor here?" For the indoor man was absent: and no labourers that they knew of were near the house.

Anne Sterling, pale as a sheet, gathered her scared senses together. "I will run into Layton for the doctor," she said; "you would never get there. Hold his head up, Molly, and rub his hands while I am gone."

She darted off without bonnet or shawl across the fold-yard into the lane, which was the nearest way to the little town of Layton, flying along as if for her life. It was dirty, and the mud splashed up with every step. A stalwart labourer, at work in a smock-frock in an adjacent field, stared at her with astonishment, and then strode to the stile.

"Oh," she cried, as she darted up to him, her heart leaping at the sight of a human being, one who might perhaps be of service, "if you can run quicker than I, pray go for me into Layton. My father——I—I did not notice that it was you," she abruptly broke off; "I beg your pardon." And, swifter if possible than before, she flew on her way down the lane.

He was scarcely more than thirty years of age, yet lines of care were in his face, and silver was mixed with his luxuriant hair, but his countenance was open and pleasant to look upon. A tall agile man, he leaped the stile at a bound, and overtook Anne.

"Miss Sterling! Miss Sterling!" he impressively said, as he came up with her, "you are in some distress." And, strange to say—strange when contrasted with his dress and his menial occupation—his words and bearing were those of an educated and well-bred man. "Though it is I—myself; though I am a banned, persecuted outcast, need that neutralize any aid I can render? Surely no curse will follow that. What can I do for you?"

She hesitated; feeling that she could not run as quickly as he could. What though John Ledbitter *was* pointed to among his fellow-men as a criminal who, by luck, not merit, had escaped the galleys, was not her father dying for want of aid? Yes, she would waive prejudice at this time of need.

"My father is in a fit," she panted. "If you can get Mr. Jelf to him quicker than I can, we should be very thankful to you. I fear it is apoplexy."

"Apoplexy!" he repeated; "then no time should be lost in the treatment. It must be half an hour before Mr. Jelf can be with him, even should he be at home. Mr. Sterling must be bled instantly. Is there any one in the house who can do it?"

She shook her head as she ran on. "Not a soul is in the house but Molly. Except my mother—who is bedridden."

"Then I had better go back to your house—if it may be permitted me to enter it;" and he spoke the last words with conscious indecision. "I may be able to do something: if you can go on for Mr. Jelf."

"Be it so," she answered. "Lose no time."

He sped back swiftly, and entered the house by way of the kitchen. He knew the locality well. There was no one about; but he heard the voice of Molly—he remembered that well, also—calling out, in a sobbing tone, to know who had come in.

She started when she saw who it was. A look of blank dismay, not unmixed with resentment, overspread her countenance.

"What do *you* want, Master Ledbitter? What brings *you* here?"

"I am come to render aid—if any be in my power. By Miss Sterling's desire," he added distinctly. "By the time the doctor can get here he would be past aid," he continued, looking at the unfortunate man. "Get me a washhand-basin, and some linen to make a bandage. Have you any hot water?"

"Plenty of it," sobbed Molly.

"We must get his feet into it then. Bring in all the mustard you have in the house, while I take off his shoes and stockings. Make haste. We may restore him yet."

John Ledbitter spoke with an air of authority; and Molly to her own astonishment obeyed, much as she despised him. Little time lost he. There was no lancet at hand, but he bared the farmer's arm, and used his own sharp penknife. He was an intelligent man, and knew something of surgery; and when Anne Sterling returned she found her father had been rescued from immediate danger. Mr Jelf was not with her: he was on the other side of Layton, visiting a patient, but they had sent after him. A neighbour or two returned with Anne.

"He is not in favour with honest folk, that John Ledbitter," remarked Molly, when she came in, "but as sure as we are sinful creatures, you may thank him, Miss Anne, that you have yet a living father. The master was at the last gasp."

He did more, besides restoring him. He was strong and active, and with a little help from the women, he got Mr. Sterling up-stairs, undressed him, and placed him in bed. "I will remain and watch him, with your permission," he said, looking at Anne, "until the surgeon comes."

"If you will kindly do so," she answered. "I am very grateful to you; indeed I am," she added, through her tears, as she held out her hand to him. "My mother will not know how to thank you, when she hears that to you, under Heaven, he owes his life."

Mr. Ledbitter did not take her offered hand. He extended his own, and turned it round from side to side, as if to exhibit its horny, rough texture, bearing the impress of hard, out-door work, whilst a peculiar smile of mockery and bitterness rose to his face.

"It is not so fitting as it once was to come into contact with a lady's," he observed; "these last six years have left their traces on it. *You* would say also, as the world says, that worse marks than those of work are on it—that it bears the impress of its crime, as Cain bore his."

She looked distressed. What was there that she could answer?

"And yet, Anne—pardon me, the familiar name rose inadvertently, not from disrespect: I used to call you so, and you have never since, in my mind, been anything but *Anne* Sterling—what if I were to assert that the traces of rough usage are the worst guilt of which that hand can righteously be accused; that it is dyed with no deeper crime? What then?"

"I don't know," she faltered.

"I do," he answered. "You would throw my assertion to the winds, as others threw it, and leave me to toil and blanch and die in those winds, rather than accord me the sympathy so necessary from man to man, even though it were but the sympathy of pity. A messenger from Heaven might whisper such to a fallen angel."

The reproach of crime had lain upon John Ledbitter for more than six long years. Suitable employment would be accorded him by none; nobody would look at him or trust him. His motive for remaining in the locality could not be fathomed. Had he gone elsewhere, abroad for instance, he might have assumed his former standing and got on. But he did not go.

Mr. Sterling got better. But only for a short time: hardly long enough, as the old gentleman himself said, to make his peace with his Maker. He never left his bed again. Mrs. Sterling, whose disorder appeared to abate, and her strength to revive with the necessity of the case, now managed to reach her husband's room, and to sit with him for several hours daily.

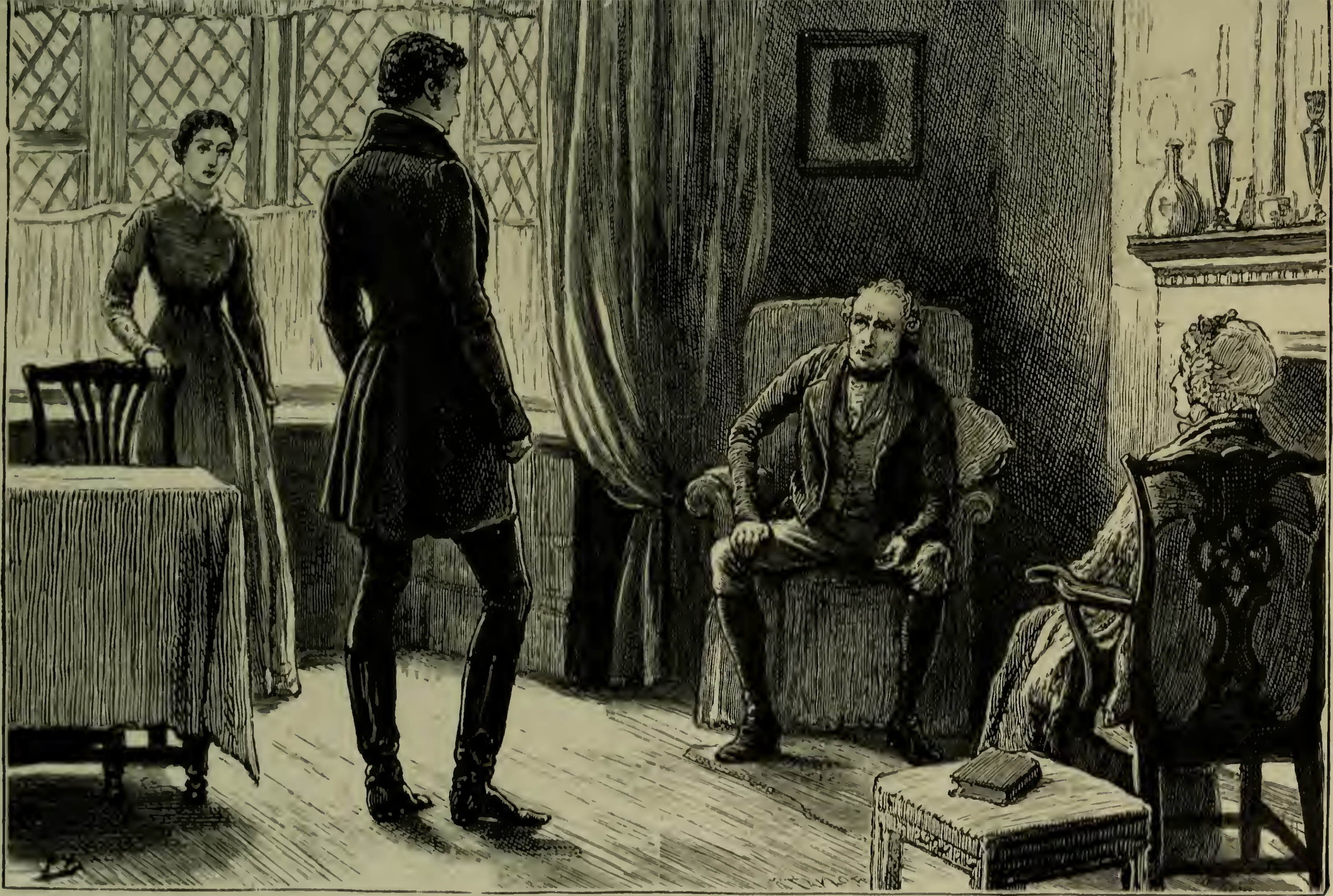
About three weeks subsequent to the farmer's attack, his daughter went to Higham by the morning coach, to see her cousin, Mrs. Grame. As she entered the passage of the house, the office was on her right, and Mr. Grame was there, stamping letters. He had succeeded to the postmastership when his father died. Anne waited a moment, thinking he might see her, and she observed that his eyes were red, and his hands shaking.

"Good morning, Walter," she said. "Is Selina upstairs?"

The postmaster looked up. "What, is it you, Anne? You have just come, I suppose. How is your father?"

"He is better, but gains no strength, and does not get up. This is the first day he has seemed sufficiently comfortable for me to leave him, or I should have been in to see Selina before."

"And I have been so bothered with one thing or other that I have not had a minute's leisure to ride over. What tale's that, about Ledbitter having saved his life?"



FRANK DADD. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

A DEEP CRIMSON DYED THE FACE OF JOHN LEDBITTER.

"He certainly did save it. My father must have been dead before the surgeon came, had it not been for John Ledbitter. He applied the necessary remedies, and bled him, as handily and effectually as Mr. Jelf could have done."

"Ah, women are easily frightened," carelessly repeated the postmaster. "We heard that you came across Ledbitter as you were running into Layton for Jelf."

"It was so."

"Well, then I must tell you, Anne, that I contradicted that report. For I never could have believed you would permit yourself to hold speech with the man, still less admit him inside the house."

"Not to save my father?" returned Anne. "I would use any means, any instrument, when his life was at stake."

"You did not know it would save his life," persisted Mr. Grame. "I am astonished at your imprudence, Anne."

"My father was dying for want of assistance," she retorted, warmly. "I am thankful that Providence threw even John Ledbitter in my way to render it."

"Providence?" sarcastically ejaculated the postmaster.

"Providence," quietly repeated Anne. "The longer I live, the more plainly do I see the hand of Providence in all the actions of our lives. Even in those which to us may appear insignificantly trivial."

"You will avow yourself a fatalist next," rejoined the postmaster.

"How is the baby?" inquired Anne, to turn the conversation.

"Oh, it's well enough, if one may judge by its crying. I never heard a young one with such lungs. I think Selina must manage it badly. You will find them all up-stairs."

She went up to the sitting-rooms, and then up again to Mrs. Grame's bed-chamber, and knocked at the door. But there was so great a noise within of children crying, that she had little chance of being heard, and opened it. Mrs. Grame sat in a rocking-chair, in an invalid wrapper and shawl, her countenance pale and worn, presenting a painful contrast to that of the once blooming and lovely Selina Cleeve. The infant in her arms was crying, as if in pain; another little fellow, of two years, stood by her knee, roaring with temper.

Anne went up and kissed her. "What are you doing here, with these crying children, Selina?"

"Oh, dear, do try and quiet them, Anne!" Mrs. Grame helplessly uttered, bursting into tears; "my very life is harrassed out of me. Since the nurse left, I have the trouble of them all day."

Anne threw her bonnet and shawl on the bed; and, taking a paper of home-made cakes from her pocket, drew the elder child's eye towards them. The tears were arrested half-way; the noise ceased.

"These cakes are for good little boys who don't cry," said Anne, seating the young gentleman on the floor, and putting some into his pinafore. Then she took the infant from its mother, and carried it about the room. When soothed to silence and sleep, she sat down with it on her knee.

"Selina," she began, "I am not going to tell you now that you are a bad manager, for I have told you that often enough when you were well. But how comes it that you have no nurse?"

"Ask Walter," replied Mrs. Grame, a flood of resentment in her tone.

"Now be calm, and speak quietly of things. I heard your children's maid had left, but you surely purpose taking another."

"*I* purpose!" bitterly retorted Mrs. Grame; "it is of very little use what I purpose or want. Walter squanders the money away on his own pleasures, and we cannot afford to keep two servants. Now you have the plain truth, Anne."

"I have thought," resumed Miss Sterling, after an awkward pause, "that you have sometimes appeared not quite at your ease as to money. But this is a case of necessity: your health is at stake. It is Mr. Grame's duty to provide an additional servant."

"Listen, Anne," resumed Mrs. Grame, speaking with an excitement her cousin in vain endeavoured to arrest. "You thought I married well: that if Walter had been living freely, as a young man, and anticipated his inheritance, he was steady then, had a good home to bring me to, and a liberal salary. You thought this—my uncle and aunt thought it—I thought it. But what were the facts? Before that child was born"—and she pointed to the little cake-eater—"I found he was over head and ears in debt; and the debts have been augmenting ever since. His quarter's salary, when paid, only serves to stop the most pressing of them, and to supply his private expenses, of which he appears to have an abundance. Such expenses are shameful for a married man."

"Be calm, Selina."

"Calm! how can I be calm? I wish I had never seen him! I wish I had been a thousand miles off, before I consented to marry him! I never did love him. Don't look reprovingly at me, Anne; it is the truth. I loved but one, and that was John Ledbitter. When he turned out worthless, I thought my heart would have broken, though I carried it off with a high hand, for I was bitterly incensed against him. Then came Walter Grame, with his insinuating whispers and his handsome face, and talked me into a liking for him. And then into a marriage——"

"Selina," interrupted Anne, "you should not speak so of your husband, even to me."

"I shall speak to the world, perhaps, by-and-by: he tries me enough for it. Night after night, night after night, since from a few months after our marriage, does he spend away from me. He comes home towards morning, sometimes sober, sometimes staggering from what he has taken. Beast!"

Anne could not stem the torrent of passion. Selina had always been excitable.

"I should not so much care now, for I have grown inured to it; and my former reproaches—how useless they were!—have given place to silent scorn and hatred, were it not for the money these habits of his consume. Circumstances have grown very poor with us; of ready money there seems to be none: it is with difficulty we provide for our daily wants, for tradespeople refuse us credit. How then can I bring another servant into the house, when we can hardly keep the one we have?"

"This state of things must be killing her," thought Anne.

"What it will come to I don't know," proceeded the invalid, "but a break-up seems inevitable, and then he will lose his situation as postmaster. In any case, I don't think he will keep it long, for if he could stave off pecuniary ruin, his health is so shattered that he is unfit to hold it. I now thank my dear aunt that she was firm in having my 1500*l.* settled on myself. The interest of it is not much, but, when the worst comes, it may buy dry bread to keep me and these poor children from starvation, and pay for a garret to lodge in."

"Oh, Selina!" sighed Anne Sterling, as the tears ran down her cheeks, "how terribly you shock me!"

"I have never betrayed this to a human being till now. You may have thought me grown cold, capricious, ill-tempered—no doubt you have, Anne, often, when you have come here. Not long ago, you said how marriage seemed to have altered me. But now you see what I have had to try me, the sort of existence mine has been."

"What can I do for you? how can I help?" inquired Anne. "I would take little Walter home with me, and relieve you of him for a time, but my father's state demands perfect quiet in the house. Money, beyond a trifle, I have not, of my own, to offer: perhaps my mother, when she knows, will——"

"She must not know," vehemently interrupted Selina. "I forbid you to tell her, Anne—I forbid you to tell anyone. As to money, if you were to put a hundred pounds down before me this minute, I would say throw it rather into the fire, for he would be sure to get scent of it, and squander it. No, let the crisis come. The sooner the better. Things may be smoother after it, or at any rate quieter; as it is, the house is dunned by creditors. Oh, Anne! if it were not for these children I would come back and find peace at the farm, if you would give me shelter. But now—to go from my own selfish troubles—tell me about my uncle. To think that it should be John Ledbitter, of all people, who came in to his help! Walter went on in a fine way about it, in one of his half-tipsy moods. He has an unconquerable hatred to him, as powerful as it is lasting. I suppose it arises from knowing I was once so much attached to him."

"Selina," returned Miss Sterling, lowering her voice, "you will say it is a strange fancy of mine; but, from a few words John Ledbitter spoke to me, the evening of my father's attack, I have been doubting whether he was guilty."

"What can you mean?" demanded Selina, with startling fervour. "What grounds have you for saying this? Did he assert his innocence?"

"On the contrary, he seemed rather to let me assume his guilt. He said, that of course I believed him guilty, as the rest of the world did, but then followed a hint that he *could* assert his innocence. His manner said more than his words. It was very peculiar, very resentfully independent, betraying the self-reliance of an innocent man smarting under a stinging sense of injury. I do believe ——"

"Don't go on, Anne," interrupted Mrs. Grame, with a shiver. "If it should ever turn out that John Ledbitter was accused unjustly, that I, of all others, helped to revile and scorn him, my sum of misery would be complete: I think I should go mad or die. I suppose you have seen him but that once."

"Indeed we have. He called the next day, and Molly let him go up to see my father."

"In his smock-frock," interposed Mrs. Grame, in a derisive tone.

"We have never seen him in anything else, except on Sundays, and then you know, he is dressed well. He comes every day now."

"No!"

"He proffered his services to me and my mother, if he could be of any use about the farm. We were at terrible fault for some one to replace my father, and a few things he undertook were so well executed that they led to more. Now he is regularly working for us."

"Not as bailiff?"

"No, not exactly as bailiff; but he looks after things generally during the bailiff's prolonged absence. He is no better, by the way, Selina: people often fall ill when they can be least spared."

Mrs. Grame leaned her head upon her hand and mused. "Is John much altered?" she asked.

"Oh yes. His hair is going grey, and his countenance has a look of care I never thought to see on one so smiling and sunny as was John Ledbitter's."

Anne Sterling returned to Layton that evening with sad and sorrowful thoughts; the more so, that she was forbidden to confide Selina's troubles to her mother. But she had little leisure to brood over them in the weeks ensuing. A change for the worse occurred in her father's state, and it was evident that his thread of life was worn nearly to its end. The farmer held many an anxious consultation with his wife and daughter, touching his worldly affairs. It was intended that the farm should be given up after his death, but several months must elapse before that could be effected—and who was to manage the land in the mean time? One Sunday evening, in particular, Mr. Sterling seemed unusually restless and anxious on this score. His wife in vain besought him not to disturb himself—that she and Anne should manage very well, and that perhaps the bailiff's illness might take a turn.

"I should have died at ease could I have left a trustworthy manager," he persisted. "If Ledbitter had not the mark upon him, there's no one else I'd so soon have appointed. He is a first-rate farmer."

"Father," spoke Anne, timidly, "I by no means feel sure that John Ledbitter was guilty. A doubt of it lies in my mind."

"Now, why do you say that, Anne?"

"I judge by his manner and by some words he let fall. Of course —— There he is," broke off Anne, seeing John Ledbitter advance, from her seat by the window. "I dare say he is coming to inquire after you."

"Let him come up," rejoined the farmer.

Mr. Ledbitter entered. None, looking at him now, could suppose he had the brand of a thief upon him, still less that he was a common day-labourer. For he bore the stamp of a gentleman in his dress and manner—in his manly form and countenance. One of his sisters had died lately, and John went into mourning for her, though she, as the rest of the family, had cast him off. Mr. Sterling invited him to take a chair.

"John Ledbitter," began the farmer, "since I lay here I have had a great many things in my mind; that old business of yours is one of them; and a remark of Anne's has now brought an impulse over me to ask you, if you can, or will, make things clearer. It's all over now, however it might have been, but I should like to know the truth. I am a dying man, John Ledbitter, and it would be a rest to my mind."

A deep crimson dyed the face of John Ledbitter. Once, twice, he essayed to speak, and no words came, but when he did find speech it was that of a truthful, earnest-minded man.

"Six years ago—more now—when that happened, I denied my guilt to you, Mr. Sterling. I told you that I was innocent as you were; but you answered me derisively, making a mockery of what I said, and sneered me into silence. I *was* innocent."

"What!" gasped the farmer, whilst Mrs. Sterling rose into a more upright position on her pillowed chair.

"I have not often been guilty of telling a lie: never that I can now recall to my recollection," he resumed. "But I could no more dare to assert one to you, hovering, as you are, on the confines of the next world, than I could, were I myself on its confines. Sir, as I said then, I repeat to you now—I never knew what became of the letter or the money; I never saw or touched either. In the presence of God I assert this."

"Then who did take it?" inquired the amazed farmer.

"I cannot tell; though my nights have been sleepless and my hair has grown grey with anxiety over this very question. Old Mr. Grame affirmed the letter was in the bag when he delivered it to me; Mr. Marsh affirmed it was not in the bag when I delivered it to him. They were both to be trusted; they were both above suspicion: but I will affirm that the bag between those points was never opened or touched, or the box of the mail-cart unlocked, except to take out the Weirford bag. It is a curious mystery, but a certainty has always rested upon me that time will unravel it."

"But why not have proclaimed your innocence then, as you have now?" inquired Mrs. Sterling.

"Dear madam, I did proclaim it," he answered with emotion. "To my relatives, to my friends, to the postmasters, to Mr. Sterling; as earnestly, as solemnly, as I now assert it this day. Not one listened to me. I met, even from my family, with nothing but disbelief and contumely. They were impressed with the conviction that my innocence was an impossibility. I do not blame them: I should myself so have judged another, accused under the same circumstances: and even she, who was more to me than my own life, joined in the scorn and shook me off. I took an oath, a rash one, perhaps, that I would never leave the spot until my innocence was established. So I have lived since, shunned by, and shunning my equals; never ceasing, in secret, my endeavours to trace out the lost note: but as yet without success. I have spoken truth, Mr. Sterling."

"I do believe you have," murmured the dying man. "May God make up to you the persecutions you have endured, John Ledbitter!"

Farmer Sterling died a man of substance, worth a great many thousand pounds, and John Ledbitter discarded his smock-frock when he was appointed manager of the farm by Mrs. Sterling. And thus a few weeks went by.

The post-office at Higham was closed for the night, and its master sat drinking brandy-and-water in his sitting-room. It was only ten o'clock, and very early for him to be at home; but he had come in saying he was not well. Mrs. Grame sat by his side in a sullen state of rebellion. He had received his salary two days before, had locked it up in one of his iron safes, and had given her none of it. A desperate resolution was stealing over her—and the reader may justify or condemn her according to his judgment—that as soon as her husband should sleep she would go down to the office, and *take* some of this money for her pressing necessities.

"Where's the sugar?" inquired Mr. Grame.

"I have no sugar for you," she resentfully answered. "I told you this morning there was none for the baby."

The postmaster, in a jocular tone, for he had taken enough to drink already, consigned his wife and child to York, drank some brandy neat, and pulled open the sideboard-cupboard in search of the sugar-basin. There it stood, full of moist sugar. So he paid his wife another worthy compliment.

"It is not yours," she exclaimed, "or meant for you. My cousin Anne was here to-day, and brought it for the baby."

He answered by dropping a full tea-spoonful of it into his glass. "And what news did Anne Sterling bring?" he said, in a mocking tone, as he lighted a cigar. "Fresh praises of their new manager, the thief Ledbitter?"

"It was not Ledbitter who was the thief; she told me that news," Mrs. Grame replied, in a raised, almost an hysterical voice; for Anne Sterling's information had had its effect upon her. "John Ledbitter was innocent; the crime was committed by another. *I* ought to have known that from the first."

A curious change came over Walter Grame. His face turned to a deadly whiteness, his cigar fell from his lips, his teeth for a moment chattered. "Ledbitter innocent!" he cried. "Did she say who took it? How did it come to light?"

"What is the matter with you?" asked his wife. "Are you so full of hatred to John Ledbitter that hearing of his innocence should affect you in this manner?"

"Woman!" he retorted, in agitation, "I asked you how it came to light!"

"Nothing has come to light; except that just before my uncle's death Ledbitter *convinced* him of his innocence. I wish the real criminal was discovered," she impetuously continued: "I, for one, would aid in persecuting him to the death. Whoever he may be, he has been hugging himself under the ruin of poor John Ledbitter."

Mr. Grame laughed, a forced laugh, and stooped to pick up his crushed cigar, for he had put his foot on it when it fell burning to the carpet. "That's his sort of innocence, is it," he derisively observed; "his own assertion! Honest men want something else, Mrs. Grame."

But Selina saw that his teeth chattered still, and his hand shook so as scarcely to be able to lift the bottle, draughts from which he kept pouring into his glass. "How very singular!" she repeated to herself. It was not at all unusual for Walter Grame to be shaky and tottering; but this emotion, telling of fear, was unusual.

The spirit at length told upon Mr. Grame, and he sank down upon the sofa and slept, an unconscious man. Then, her lips pressed together with angry resolution, Mrs. Grame possessed herself of his keys and the key of the private office, which he always kept in his pocket, and stole downstairs.

She stood before the iron safe, the smaller safe—his, in his father's time—and tried the keys, several of the bunch, before she came to the right one. The moment it was unlocked the door flew open and struck her on the forehead. A large bump rose instantly: she put up her hand and felt it. At any other time she would have been half stunned by the shock; it was not heeded now.

Two cash-boxes, and three small drawers were disclosed to view, and she had to try the keys again; each drawer opened with a different key. The first drawer was full of papers; in the second, as she drew it open, she saw no money, only one solitary letter lying at the end of it. An old letter, getting yellow now; still folded, but its seal broken. Its address was, "Mr. Sterling, Hill House Farm, Layton, Highamshire." A powerful curiosity excited her: she had recognised the writing of her own father: what should bring a letter of his, addressed to her uncle, in this secret safe of Walter Grame's? As she opened the letter, something fell from it, and Mrs. Grame sank almost fainting on to a chair.

It was the long-lost letter and money, which John Ledbitter had been accused of stealing, the bank-note for fifty pounds. Had the letter been mislaid by old Mr. Grame, and overlooked till this day, she asked, in the first bewildering moment of discovery. Or had Walter acted the traitor's part to bring disgrace upon Ledbitter? "The latter, oh! the latter," she convulsively uttered, when reason asserted its powers; "and, I, who once so truly loved John Ledbitter, discarded him for this man!"

She made no further search for the gold—this discovery absorbed every care and thought. Securing the letter and note upon her person, she locked the safe again, sped upstairs, and shook her husband violently, pouring forth her indignant accusation. He struggled up on the sofa and stared at her: she herself was a curious object just then, with that dark mound standing out on her forehead, and her dangerous excitement. Then he began to shake and shiver, for he misunderstood her excited words, and comprehended that the officers of justice were after him. The fright partially sobered him, but he was half-stupefied still.

"Nobody can prosecute but you, Selina," he abjectly stammered, in his confused terror. "You will not refuse to hush it up for your husband."

"Tell me the truth, and you shall *not* be prosecuted," she vehemently answered, humouring his fears. "Did you do it on purpose to ruin John Ledbitter?"

"No, no," he uttered. "I was hard up; I was indeed, Selina. I did not know where to turn to for money, and if my debts had come to the knowledge of the old man he would have disinherited me. So when this fifty pounds came before me, like a temptation, I took it. That's the whole truth."

"You took it," she repeated, "after it was given to John Ledbitter?"

"It never was given to him. As the master dropped it into the bag, some man came to the window with a question, and my father turned to answer him. It was Stone the barber, I remember. I twitched the letter out then, and the master closed the bag and never knew it. But I did not use it, Selina; the money's there now; I could not find an immediate opportunity of changing it away, and then such a hubbub was struck up that I never dared to change it. But I never thought then to harm Ledbitter."

"And I could make this man my husband!" she muttered—"the father of my unhappy children! Traitor! Coward! how dared you thrust yourself into the society of honest people?"

His only answer was to stagger to the table, and drink a deep draught of the spirit still standing on it. It revived his courage.

"Ha! ha! my old father had a dream a night or two before he died. He dreamed that Ledbitter was innocent, and charged me to make it up to him. *Me!* as if some inkling of the truth had penetrated to his brain. I did not like that dream: it has subdued me since whenever I have thought of it—and now it has come out. But there's one part, Selina, which is glorious to think of still—that it lost you to him, and gained you for me."

She might have struck him had she remained in the room longer, for her feelings were worked up to a pitch of exasperation bordering upon madness. She went up-stairs, bolted herself in the chamber with her children, and threw herself, undressed, on the bed. Her husband did not attempt to follow her.

The next afternoon she was at Layton, entering the Hill House Farm. At the front gate she encountered John Ledbitter. "It is you I have come to see," she said.

Not for years had they met; and she spoke and looked so strangely that, but for her voice, he would scarcely have recognised her. He followed her in. Anne Sterling, who was in the parlour alone, rose from her seat in surprise and inquired if all was well at Higham.

"Examine this, Mr. Ledbitter," was Mrs. Grame's only answer, drawing from her pocket the fatal letter. "Do you recognise it?"

Not at first did he understand; but when a shadowing, of what it was, burst upon him, he was much agitated. All three were standing round the table. "Am I to understand, Mrs. Grame, that this has been lost—mislaid—all these years?" he inquired. And it was a natural question, seeing the note intact.

"Mislaid!" burst forth Mrs. Grame, giving way to her excitement. "It was stolen, John Ledbitter; stolen from the bag before it went into your charge. And the thief—thief and coward—trembled at his act when he had done it, and dared not use the money. He has kept it since from the light of day. Look at it, Anne."

"And this thief was——?"

"Walter Grame. To you I will not screen him, though I am his wretched wife. To the world it may be allowed to appear as was your first thought now—if you, Mr. Ledbitter, will show mercy where none has been shown you. I would not ask it but for his innocent children. I have not seen him since last night. He is nowhere to be found. Everything is in confusion at home, and the letters this morning had to be sorted by a postman."

"Where is he?" inquired Anne.

"I know not: unless this discovery has so worked upon his fears that he means to abandon his home and his country. I pray that it may be so: I shall be more tranquil without him."

"You are not going? You will surely stay for some refreshment," reiterated Miss Sterling, as Mrs. Grame turned towards the front door, in the same abrupt manner that she had entered it.

"I cannot remain, Anne, I must go back to Higham; and for refreshment, I could not swallow it. A friend of ours drove me over in his gig, and is waiting for me at the gate. You will explain things to my aunt. I have only one more word to say, and that is to you, Mr. Ledbitter. Will you—will you —— "

John Ledbitter took her hands in his, looking down compassionately upon her, for her emotion was so great as to impede her utterance, and the corners of her mouth twitched convulsively.

"Will you forgive *me?*—it is that I want to say," she panted—"forgive my false heart for judging you as others judged? In our last interview—here, in this house—you said if we ever met again it should be under different auspices. The auspices *are* different."

What he answered, as he led her to the gig, was known to themselves alone. Her tears were flowing fast, and her hand was clasped in his. It may be that in that brief moment a trace of his once passionate tenderness for her was recalled to his heart. Anne Sterling was watching them from the window, but she never asked a question about it, then or afterwards.

It was rare news for Higham. Walter Grame, what with his unfortunate debts and his unfortunate habits, had found himself unable to make head against the storm, and had started off, poor fellow, and taken ship for America: and in the search, which followed, his wife had come upon the missing letter and money, amongst some old valueless papers. In what unaccountable manner it could have been mislaid, was useless to inquire now, since old Mr. Grame was dead and gone: but that no fraud was committed by anyone was proved by the money being found safe. Probably the old gentleman had inadvertently dropped the letter amidst some papers of his own, instead of into the mail-bag, and never discovered his mistake. So reasoned the town, as they pressed into the post-office to curiously handle the letter and note.

But John Ledbitter? Higham went very red with shame when it remembered him. How on earth could he be recompensed for all he had endured? Three parts of the city, rich and poor, flocked over to Layton in one day: some in carriages, some in gigs, some on horseback, some in vans, and the rest on their two good legs. When Mrs. Sterling saw the arrival of these masses from her bedroom window, she screamed out to Molly and Martha, believing the people must see a fire on the farm, and were coming to put it out. John Ledbitter's hands were nearly shaken off; and many a voice, bold at other times, was not ashamed of its own emotion, as it pleaded for forgiveness and renewed friendship. Everybody was for doing something by way of recompense, had they only known what. Some few were for asking the king to knight him; and John's brothers—who had got on in the world—whispered that the money to set him up, in any farm he chose to fix on in the county, was at his command. John good-humouredly thanked them all; and when the last visitor was got rid of, he turned to Miss Sterling.

"They have been speaking of a recompense," he said to her, in a low tone. "There is only one thing that would seem such to me; and that is not in their power to give. It is in yours, Anne."

Anne's eyes fell beneath his; a rich, conscious colour rose to her cheeks, and there was the same expression on her face that John Ledbitter had never seen but once before, many years ago, ere he had declared his love for Selina Cleeve. He had thought then—in his vanity—that it betrayed a liking for him; and he thought it—not in his vanity—again now.

"Anne," he tenderly whispered, drawing her to him, "that dreadful misfortune, which, when it overwhelmed me, seemed far worse than death, was certainly sent for at least one wise purpose. But for that, I should have linked my fate with your cousin's, and neglected you—most worthy, and long since best-loved. Will you forgive my early blindness—which I have lately wondered at—or will you shrink from sharing that name which has had a brand upon it?"

Closer and closer he held her to him, and she did not resist. No words escaped her lips; but she was inwardly resolving, in her new happiness, a glimpse of which had recently hovered on her spirit, that her love and care should make up to him for the past.

"It is good," said old Molly, nodding her head with satisfaction when she heard the news from her mistress. "We shan't have to give up the farm now, ma'am, for Mr. John can take it upon his own hands."

Mr. John did so; and he took his wife with it.

As to poor Selina Grame, Mrs. Sterling and other relatives made up her income to something comfortable. But when a few months had elapsed, they heard with surprise that she was about to join her husband in America. One and all remonstrated with her.

"Walter wants me," was her answer. "He writes me word that he has put all bad habits away and is as steady now as heart could wish: and he has a good post in an office in New York. One's husband is one's husband, after all, you know."

CHRISTMAS.

Hurrah, hurrah for Christmas,
  Brother mine, brother mine!
For the good old year, and the good old cheer,
  The turkey and the wine:
But hurrah, a loud hurrah!
For the dear old Christmas faces,
For the meetings and the greetings, the surprises, the embraces;
And still a loud hurrah,
Three times three!
For the smiles that brighten sadness, and the hopes that grow to gladness
With Christmas, dear old Christmas,
As he comes to you and me.

Hurrah, hurrah for Christmas,
  Brother mine, brother mine!
For the talk that flows, as the bottle goes,
  Merrily while we dine:
But hurrah, a loud hurrah!
For the pleasant speeches after,
For the toasts that pass to the brimming glass, the frolic and the laughter:
And still a loud hurrah,
Three times three!
For the precious sprigs of holly, and the hearts that will be jolly,
For a jolly old King Christmas,
And a bonny Christmas tree.

Hurrah, hurrah for Christmas,
  Brother mine, brother mine!
For the merry song that trills along,
  The forfeit and the fine:
But hurrah, a loud hurrah!
For the mistletoe bough above us,
And the blisses of the kisses from the laughing lips that love us:
And still a loud hurrah,
Three times three!
For the slender loves made stronger and the olden loves made younger
By Christmas, rare old Christmas,
The generous and the free.

Hurrah, hurrah for Christmas,
  Brother mine, brother mine!
For the flowing bowl and the flow of soul,
  Delicious and divine:
But hurrah, a loud hurrah!
For the fine old Christmas lesson—
Peace and goodwill are with us still to cheer us while we press on:
And still a loud hurrah,
Three times three, and three times more!
For the hearts that carry peace; and may all goodwill increase;
And the blessing of good old Christmas
Be at every good man's door.

George Cotterell.

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The Argosy

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