

OUT OF WEDLOCK



ALBERT ROSS

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BOOKS
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LONG BEACH, CALIF.

OUT OF WEDLOCK.

BY ALBERT ROSS.

AUTHOR OF

"LOVE AT SEVENTY," "AN ORIGINAL SINNER,"
"WHY I'M SINGLE," "THOU SHALT NOT,"
"YOUNG MISS GIDDY," ETC.

"There is no motherhood outside of wedlock that can be tolerated in a civilized country—none that will not bring to its possessor a terrible load of ignominy and suffering."—Page 125.



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TO MY READERS.

No question raised in recent years has touched thoughtful minds more than this—"Is Marriage a Failure?" When first uttered it seemed to strike at the very foundation of all things. If marriage was a failure, said many, what hope was there for mankind?

And still there have been some who, like Ella Drew, in the novel before you, "have found it heaven!" And there have been others, like George Brixton, whom it has cursed; and yet others, like his daughter Blanche, who have sought, in all good faith, to escape its trammels.

Eminent writers in Europe are now discussing whether there may not be some safe modification of the marriage vow. Socialists look with confidence toward a time when an advanced step will be taken through the economic enfranchisement of women. But to most of us it is plain that a few cannot with impunity step aside from the mass in this matter, any more than they can walk ashore from a steamer's deck before it reaches the pier.

The other subject of which this volume treats is also most serious. One of these days the continuation of the human race will receive as intelligent treatment as that of the breeding of domestic animals, or I am mistaken. In the meantime—under present conditions—wedlock is a hideous travesty unless there be common honesty between the parties to it.

This will reach the first instalment of my second million of readers. The evidence is ample that they are not limited to any section of this country, nor even to the Western continent. In return for the public's kindness I again promise my best efforts in a field where I have found such conspicuous appreciation.

ALBERT ROSS.

Cambridge, Mass.

Nov., 1894.

OUT OF WEDLOCK.

MR. MEDFORD'S STORY.

CHAPTER I.

BEGINNING WITH A MYSTERY.

“If you want a stranger tale than anything in fiction, you should learn the true history of Miss Brixton's baby.”

Thus spoke my friend, Joseph Medford, as we strolled together along the shore at Lake Lemán. We had met unexpectedly at the Hotel Suisse, Geneva, where I was stopping on my way to the resorts higher up the mountains.

Medford was the last man to whom I should have gone for the plot of a novel. He was a retired merchant, who had made a fortune. It surprised me very much when he remarked that he had read several of my works, and the conversation that ensued led to the statement quoted above.

"*Miss Brixton?*" I repeated, with a smile at what I supposed was his carelessness of pronunciation. "You mean *Mrs. Brixton*, I presume."

Medford put on the air of one who does not like to be corrected.

"If I had meant *Mrs. Brixton*, I should have said so," he responded, with a certain dignity. "I said *Miss Brixton*, I believe."

To this I vouchsafed a single syllable—"Ah!" Before my mind there arose the ever-recurring tragedy—a girl led away by specious promises or fallen a victim to her own wild and curbless passion. It is a theme that has been used by a thousand novelists, and it seemed impossible that there could be anything essentially new in such an experience.

"Does the case differ so much, then," I inquired, "from those that have already been made the subject of romance?"

"In every particular," replied my friend. "At least, it is totally unlike anything I have seen in print. Not only this, but I believe it unique as an actual occurrence. If you wish, I will outline it to you."

My curiosity was now fairly alive. I begged Mr. Medford to begin at once, and not to content himself with an outline either, but to give me the fullest details of which he was possessed. He answered that this would need considerable time, and I said I was at his disposal, even if it took all night.

"I cannot tell," he said, "whether it will require five hours or ten to give you the details I have gathered. They are in a somewhat chaotic state in my mind, and will have to be put together slowly. And, as I hinted in the first place, the most interesting part

On the matter is still veiled in mystery. Perhaps you will be able to unravel the hidden threads and complete the story to your own satisfaction; but certainly, none of Miss Brixton's friends have yet been able to learn the least thing beyond what she has chosen to tell them."

I asked Medford if he would permit me a few questions in advance of his narrative.

"By all means," he said. "As many as you please."

"To begin with, how did you learn the facts you are about to relate?"

"From George Brixton, Mrs. Brixton and Miss Brixton, mainly," was the affable response. "The young lady's father made a confidant of me in many things. Her mother I also knew to some extent. Then I have talked by the hour with Stephen Drew and his wife, with Dr. Robertson and Mrs. Reynolds. (You will hear more of these people presently.) Blanche—that is, Miss Brixton—has discussed matters with me as freely as if I were her brother, or even her sister. And the baby—Miss Brixton's baby—knows me as well as a young gentleman of his age could be expected to do, and has jumped and crowed in my arms within the last three weeks."

I was silent for a moment. Then I remarked in a subdued tone that such cases were very sad, especially when they happened among the better educated and more cultured classes. They made one doubt whether the world was not growing worse instead of better.

"Miss Brixton would not agree with you," said Medford, quickly. "She is the happiest young

mother I ever knew. In her sweet face there is not a single tinge of regret."

I stared at my friend in astonishment.

"And she is an unwedded mother!" I exclaimed.

"Precisely."

"Then her reason must be unhinged," I asserted, soberly.

"Certainly not in the ordinary sense," he answered. "Aside from this matter of the child, she appears as sensible as any other healthy girl. She conforms in nearly everything else to the prevailing fashions. She dresses, for instance, in the usual mode. She looks, lives and acts like the rest of her sex, so far as I can see. Her signature on a business paper is never disputed. She keeps to herself a good deal, but that is because the majority of women do not like to associate with one who has proved her belief in such ultra, or, as she would call them, 'advanced' doctrines. Blanche, however, does not care for society. Her time is more pleasantly spent with her child, whom she passionately adores. Sane? Why, yes. No jury would question her ability to care for herself, her boy or her property."

I waited a moment, and then inquired who was the father of the infant.

"That is the mystery," said Medford. "From the little we have learned it appears that the man is dead. Dr. Robertson drew this from her, with a few other particulars of little importance, during a few hours when she stood in imminent danger of dying, and she has never denied or modified her statements. The only trouble is, she will not add the least syllable to them."

"She does not appear to mourn him very deeply?" I suggested.

"No. Not as a woman would mourn a husband or a lover. The Doctor says the tears came into her eyes when she mentioned that he was no more, but she has not put on crape, either literally or figuratively. She sings, smiles, dines well, and acts quite the opposite of broken-hearted."

To this I remarked, after reflection, that her conduct was not to be wondered at, judged from one standpoint. A fellow of that kind did not deserve to be very sincerely regretted.

"A fellow of *what* kind?" asked Medford, quizzically.

"One who would deceive a girl and then desert her."

My companion smiled.

"But this man did nothing of the sort," said he.

"Did nothing of the sort?" I echoed. "Did not deceive or desert her?"

"Neither the one thing nor the other."

"Pshaw! That is a riddle," I replied.

"Nothing but the simple truth. Miss Brixton freely admits, to all who care to discuss the matter with her, that if there were any deception, it was on her part, not his."

I nodded ironically.

"Oh! It was Miss Brixton who deceived and deserted her lover!"

"Something of that nature," assented Medford, with another laugh. "But let me say that if you keep on at this rate you will take all the interest out of my story. It is a girl's way, rather than a man's,

to skip through the pages of a book and read the last chapter first."

I admitted the truth of the observation, and said there were only one or two other things that I wanted to know before settling myself into the attitude of a patient and uninterrupted listener.

"I presume you will tell me next," I added, "that the father of Miss Brixton's child met his death on account of a broken heart, superinduced by his regret at losing her."

"I would oblige you with the greatest pleasure," replied Medford, "if I were inventing a tale for the occasion. As mine is, unfortunately, a truthful one, I must do otherwise. No; as I understand it, the pangs of unrequited love did not cut short the career of this person, but a much more prosaic thing—a bullet."

It was getting interesting indeed!

"So she shot him!" I exclaimed. "Well, a man who would permit a woman to deceive, betray and desert him deserved no better fate."

Mr. Medford's amused face showed me, even before he spoke, that I had fallen into another error.

"She did not shoot him," he said.

"Then he shot himself, which was quite the best thing he could do."

"No, he did not shoot himself."

"Was there another woman in the case?" I asked.

"It is not believed that there was. When you have heard all I know about this matter—in case you are ever ready to let me tell you—your theories will be advanced with more precision. Dr. Robert

son and I have concluded, by comparing the little we have heard, that Miss Brixton cared about as much for this man as you do for that blonde lady on the opposite side of the way, to whom you have never spoken. He became the father of her child without the least affection on her part, and he did not live many days after she met him. He was dead and buried months and months before little Wallace was born."

There was a chilly air about the story. I was glad that Medford could assure me that the father came to his death by other hands than those of the fair Miss Blanche, even if it was "by some person or persons to the jurors unknown." Otherwise, thoughts of seraglio life, where guilty lovers of sultanas are sewn in sacks and dropped into the Bosphorus, would surely have obtruded themselves.

"If all you say is without deception," I said, "there is but one other tenable theory. Miss Brixton was the victim of an atrocious assault."

Medford laughed once more, the exasperating laugh of one who has a certainty of his secret.

"Wrong again!" he replied. "In that case the man would surely have died by her hand instead of by that of another. You would agree to this if you had met Miss Brixton. I should be happy to introduce you, by the way, if you ever happen to meet us together. Would you care to have me?"

I responded that I could tell better about that when I had heard the whole of his story.

"Very well," said Medford. "In order to get to the end of a tale, one of the principal essentials is to make a beginning; and that, if you will excuse me

from answering any more questions at this time, I will now proceed to do."

I bowed and asked him to proceed.

And Medford proceeded.

[The reader will please understand that the following chapters, to the end of the twenty-third, are in the language of Mr. Medford. And to ease the mind of those who remember that his story was begun while we were strolling on the lake shore, let me explain that it was finished very late that night in my apartment at the hotel.—A. R.]

MISS BRIXTON'S PARENTS.

CHAPTER II.

"THE TRAGEDY OF MY LIFE."

It has been well remarked by somebody (said Medford) that "one cannot be too careful in selecting his grandparents." Miss Brixton's chief error was in the choice of her father and mother. Her more remote ancestors, so far as I have been able to ascertain, were people who got along without making any particular impression upon the community; an eminently proper thing, let me remark, for ancestors to do. A person is better off, I contend, with progenitors of that kind, than with those who have

been either great geniuses or great rascals. He will have neither the bad reputation of the one to live down, nor the impossibly high standard of the other to emulate. But Blanche's father and mother got into trouble over her at a very early stage in her career, and their conduct must have contributed toward making her what she is to-day.

Before I had known George Brixton a week I knew that he was not on the most cordial terms with his wife. How did I find this out ; by making inquiries? I made just one, the answer to which informed me that he was not a widower.

Upon his desk were several photographs of his daughter, but nothing that indicated the nature of Mrs. B.'s lineaments. I commented upon the beauty of the child, and saw the devoted look in his face as he turned toward the pictures.

"Is she your only one?" I asked, and there was a most peculiar expression to his eyes as he answered, "Yes, my only one!"

Before I had called many times, Brixton began to give me more particulars about this child. He seemed delighted to tell of what a comrade she was to him, of excursions they made together, of evenings spent at home in her company. Never did he make the faintest allusion to his wife, and the whole tenor of his remarks indicated that he had none.

There are people one "takes to," as if by instinct. I got to liking Brixton in a very brief time. Soon a friendship sprang up between us such as does not often follow a mere mercantile transaction. This is the more noteworthy because, as he often told me, I was one of only three or four men with whom he had ever been in the least degree confidential. His face

brightened whenever I entered his office, and other business was always laid aside until my departure.

When I asked him to go to lunch with me, he replied that he invariably took his meals at home.

"Blanche expects me—my little girl, you know," he said, with infinite tenderness. "I never disappoint her. When I turn the corner I can always see her face at the window, in winter time like this, and in summer she runs to meet me. I fear we appear silly to the neighbors, now that she has grown so big. I have been told that I care too much for her, and perhaps I do. My feelings come very near to the prohibition against idolatry."

After this confidence I could not help remarking that it would give me great pleasure to see Miss Blanche, for whom I admitted I had conceived a warm admiration. Brixton did not reply to my suggestion for a moment, and I could see his face reddening as he realized that a question of politeness was at issue.

"I did not hesitate," he said, finally, "because I have any doubt that I should like to have you come, or that Blanche would be glad to see you. The fact is, we receive hardly any visitors. However, an exception shall be made in your case, and you may choose as early a date as you desire."

Having said this, Mr. Brixton launched into several complimentary expressions, which were very agreeable to me, coming from a man I esteemed so highly. I assured him that I should regard the privilege of entering his home all the more from the fact that it was one so seldom accorded.

"You put the case too strongly," he smiled. "We are very plain people. You will see an ordinary

house, with nothing extravagant in the furnishings. There is but one jewel within its walls—that child of mine.”

“She must be very dear to you,” I remarked.

“She is *everything* to me,” said he, gravely. “I guard her with the greatest care, and yet not in the way that most fathers would think of following. While I take pains that her companionships shall be of the best, I have not kept her ignorant of the fact that Sin forms a part of the arrangements of nature. She is hardly thirteen, and yet she is as wise—indeed, in a true sense, wiser—than many young women of twenty. The knowledge that is allowed to come to most girls in a perverted and distorted shape has been imparted to her so gradually that it contains nothing gross. When you have seen her I want you to say whether she is not as thoroughly unspoiled as if she had been lied to and cajoled out of information as necessary to her well-being as the air she breathes. I have been warned that it is a great mistake to be so frank with her, but I do not believe it. If my experiment were to fail, there would be some signs of it before now. If there is a danger point, she has passed it.”

As I did not pretend to understand the subject, and indeed, did not thoroughly comprehend at the time what he meant, I was silent. He repeated that he was at home nearly every evening and should be glad to see me at my earliest convenience.

“There are so few entertainments to take a young girl to,” he exclaimed, with a sigh. “One tires of concerts, be they ever so good. The theatres have reached a point where many of the plays are out of the question. We have done the art galleries re-

peatedly. There is no choice but to stay at home. Come any evening you like, you will be certain to find us in."

A night was chosen, the third one from the day on which we held this conversation, and at eight o'clock I ascended the steps of Mr. Brixton's residence. He was watching, and came immediately to meet me. As soon as my wraps were disposed of he took me into his library, and before sitting down went for his daughter.

"Here is my child," he said, leading her in. "Blanche, my friend, Mr. Medford."

Even if I had never heard anything about the girl—if I had been sitting there on ordinary business and had merely noticed her enter the room—I should have been strongly attracted toward her. My powers of description are wholly inadequate to convey to you the impression she made upon me. With the form and stature of a child of thirteen, she had a look and manner several years older. Though her face was not—understand this perfectly—one of those prematurely aged ones that make us wish the vanishing youth would tarry until its proper time for departure; it was as fresh and rosy as any infant's.

Before she spoke I noticed her extreme self-possession, the perfect confidence, the absence of timidity, and yet nothing like posing. The words that issued from her lips were correct in enunciation, but neither pedantic nor strained. Her tones were sweet and natural. She gave me her hand frankly, with a clasp something like that of a boy, attributable, no doubt, to the close companionship she had had with her father, rather than with girls of her

age. I felt toward her as I had done toward Mr. Brixton when I first knew him—I accepted her without reserve.

There was no attempt at formality in the talk that followed. We discussed the affairs of the day exactly as if Blanche had been a grown woman. She surprised me by proving, in the occasional remarks that she interjected, that she was a regular reader of the daily newspapers. She knew, for instance, a good deal about a tariff bill that was at that time being discussed in Congress, and expressed her opinion as to whether it would pass the House of Representatives, which was shown, by the way, in after days, to be a correct one. A ministerial trial for heresy had not escaped her observation. When it was alluded to by me, she showed much interest in it, asking a number of questions as to the points involved that I was entirely incapable of answering.

She knew the city from north to south, and from river to river, as well as a thousand things I should never have expected would enter the head of such a child. It was very seldom, to put it fairly, that her father and I touched any subject on which she had not a considerable stock of information. And where she did not understand, she was ready with her interrogations, anxious to let no opportunity escape to inform herself.

Two hours passed in this way, to my great entertainment. When the clock struck ten Mr. Brixton asked Blanche if she would not like to show Mr. Medford her dolls. Upon which the child smilingly acquiesced, and excusing herself in the most charming manner went to fetch them.

"Dolls!" I exclaimed, as soon as she was out of

hearing. "Has she kept the playthings of her childhood till now?"

"Her childhood?" echoed Brixton, with a start. "Her childhood? Why, she is in the very fruit and flower of it! Did you think childhood ended when a girl reached her teens? Blanche cares for her dolls as much as she did five years ago; in fact, I think she grows fonder of them every day."

This statement filled me with intense surprise. I had been noting this girl's remarkable stock of knowledge, and had come to consider her a prodigy of learning. She had carried herself in our company with all the ease of ten additional years, retaining still the gentleness and grace of her extreme youth. But, dolls! How could I conceive that the mind which had been devoted for the previous quarter-hour to the Triple Alliance and the Franco-Russian understanding would turn with equal interest to the puppets of babyhood!

"Papa," said the young voice, as its owner reappeared at the door, "don't you think, as there are so many, Mr. Medford had better come and see them in their own quarters?"

Mr. Brixton and I complied with the suggestion, and a moment later we were in a room such as I certainly had never seen before, though no doubt there are others somewhat like it. The furniture, with the exception of several larger chairs, was of a Lilliputian pattern, and consisted of beds, sofas, bureaus, etc., of a size to fit the mimic occupants, which were at least fifty in number. It was, in short, the most complete dolls' nursery you could imagine.

"And you still play with them?" I could not help

saying, for the fact was incomprehensible in view of what else I had seen and heard.

"Of course I do!" laughed the fresh young voice. "I spend two hours here every day. It is the greatest fun! I have names for them all; and their histories are written down in this book," showing me a large, ledger-like volume; "and I have medicines in this little chest, when they are sick; and each has her summer clothes as well as winter ones, as you can see by examining this closet. I think they are the sweetest things in the world—except—except," the child hesitated several seconds—"real, 'truly' babies."

Blanche had a wistful expression as she said this, that I shall never forget. It was a look like that of a starving child who spoke of food.

"Quite a nurse, isn't she?" said Mr. Brixton, gazing fondly at his offspring. "And she is just as capable of taking care of living children as of these imitations. We feel the same way about it—Blanche and I. You ought to be here some time when we have one of our infant parties. Blanche borrows half the babies in the neighborhood and puts them around the floor here, each with a toy to keep it quiet, and we have the most delightful time. I asked her once what she wanted to be when she grew up—we were speaking of professions—and she said, '*A mother.*'"

The little daughter nodded assent to the statement.

"I do envy the mothers so!" she cried, not attempting to conceal her enthusiasm. "Sometimes, when I have carried all my babies home, I sit down

and cry. Even my dear dolls do not seem the same to me after that."

Returning to the midgets in their cradles and beds, she took them up, one by one, and introduced them to me with great solemnity, giving the names of each, along with bits of personal gossip.

"Which is the eldest?" I asked, to show my interest, though my mind was wandering far from the subject under consideration.

"Why, the largest, of course!" she laughed, taking up a doll half as big as herself.

Brixton declared that the joke was on me that time. Then he said good-night to his daughter, who took my hand again in the same frank way she had grasped it when introduced, and we were left alone.

"There ought to be a baby in this house, for Blanche to play with," I said, unguardedly, as I stood a few moments later with my overcoat on in the front hall.

My host staggered as if about to faint, and his face paled.

"You have touched upon the tragedy of my life, my friend," he said, in a very low tone. "Some day I mean to tell you its history."

I wanted to say something in the nature of an apology, but could not exactly frame the expressions. It was evident, however, that he did not feel the need of anything of the kind, for he said "Good-night" in a kindly voice, as I stepped out into the snow-laden air.

CHAPTER III.

HOUSEKEEPING UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

When I thought over the events of that evening there were several things that I noted particularly. Mr. Brixton had but one member of his family upon whom he lavished his affection. That one, Blanche, was equally restricted in her love. Neither of them had alluded in the remotest manner to a wife or a mother. Mrs. Brixton, who certainly existed, and who as certainly was an occupant of that residence, had not made her appearance during my call. And then there was the strange remark of my friend as I was about to leave. When I said to him that there ought to be a baby in the house for Blanche to love, he responded, in tones that indicated the deepest feeling, that I had touched upon "the tragedy of his life!"

"Some day," he added, "I mean to give you its history."

The history of a personal tragedy must be a most interesting thing to hear. The story of a marital estrangement it was undoubtedly, judging by the contemporary evidence. But beyond any feeling of curiosity, I felt an intense longing to know what had made my friend the crushed and silent man I had found him—a man with few intimacies, and one whom hardly anyone could say they really knew or understood.

The promise he had given was fulfilled, though

not in the way I anticipated. He never gave me a consecutive account of his troubles in anything like the form I am going to give them to you. It was by one conversation after another, by hearing a little to-day and more to-morrow, by adding what I learned from others, and by using my own intelligence, that I fully comprehended at last what had happened.

It was not a "tragedy" in the ordinary sense of that abused word. There had been no killing in hot blood, no quick and angry blows. But to him it was a tragedy just the same, in that it deadened the best of his being, and made him for the rest of his days a misanthrope. Of a nature naturally open and frank, sunny to a degree, glad to walk in the brightness of all things human, he had been changed to a cynical man of business, whose only wholly unspoiled side was the one turned toward his daughter.

It appears that he was born in the village of Markham, in the western part of the State, and was at an early age left a half-orphan. He grew up with the reputation of being a good boy, faithful to his mother, reliable and trustworthy to the utmost. As the family had little in the way of property, George obtained employment, as soon as he graduated from the grammar school, in a chemical works.

For a while he devoted the whole of his small salary to his mother, who lived with him in a cottage she had inherited, doing her own work and caring for nothing but her boy. By the time he had reached his twenty-fifth year, everybody had set George Brixton down for a confirmed bachelor. He never

would marry as long as his mother lived, that was certain.

Their household was a most methodical affair. Mrs. Brixton was one of those women who have an instinct for order. She had a place for everything, and everything was always in its place. Her breakfasts were on the table at half-past six in summer, and seven in winter. The date at which the hour was changed was taken from the almanac, coming as regularly as the astronomical alterations. She had her washing done on Monday, her ironing on Tuesday, and her baking on Wednesday and Saturday as regularly as those days arrived.

On a certain day in April, Mrs. Brixton cleaned house. On a certain day in November she unpacked her furs. From the time he was old enough to understand anything, George knew substantially what each day in the year would bring forth in that house. He fell into his mother's habits as easily as he fell into the habits of breathing and walking. Indeed, until she was in her grave, it never occurred to him that any house could be much differently arranged.

Perhaps it was this quality that first attracted the attention of George's employers to him, and laid the foundation of his improved circumstances. No time was ever lost in Brixton's department. He could answer any question concerning his part of the building without delay and with mathematical accuracy. There was no waste, either through negligence or inadvertence. In every drop of his blood there was written the proverb, "Take care of the small things and the large ones will take care of themselves."

"If all my employés were like Brixton," said the manager once, "this concern would clear ten thousand dollars a year more than it now does."

With this carefulness about little things, with his horror of leaks, there was still a generous vein in this young man. He often remained for hours after work was over to teach a new employé to perform his duties better. If from those who were placed under him he exacted the fullest obedience and the best service, he was ever ready to praise work well performed. Though he was not on terms of close intimacy with anyone at the factory, not a man there would have been more deeply regretted had anything occurred to take him away.

He had but a few hours' warning of his mother's death. When he found himself alone he was stunned for a time. For some months he refused to allow anyone to take her place. He cooked his own meals, as well as he could, rather than have the culinary articles she had used touched by other hands. Then he dined outside, still sleeping in the cottage, and spending most of his evenings there—alone. This grew monotonous, and people began to say in such a way that it reached his ears that he ought to get married.

Get married! Oh, no! The idea was too strange.

He had never walked home even from church or singing school with any woman but his mother. He had never seen but one girl that he would have thought of in such a connection, were it possible to think of anyone, and she was now the wife of Stephen Drew, one of the travelling men in the employ of the chemical company for which he worked. When people grew bold enough to tell him

to his face that he ought to have a wife, he admitted in his heart that if Ella Drew were still single he might have asked her. This was as far as he could go.

But Ella was out of the question, and the life he lived was becoming unbearable. He thought of engaging a housekeeper. A second cousin of his father's applied for the situation, and during the next year this woman superintended his home.

On the whole it was worse than boarding out. Miss Fillmore was not at all like his mother. Her bump of order was situated in a cavity. After she had been three days in the house George could not find anything he wanted. She was determined to make the place look tidy, and to secure this result she put things away in places no one else would have thought of, promptly forgetting where. George fretted over this—mildly, at first—and begged her not to interfere with his personal property, but the fault was ingrained in her nature. Then, meals were served with astounding irregularity. Frequently he had to "snatch a bite," as he called it, and hasten to the factory at high speed, because the articles she was cooking were not "quite" done.

To a man whose life had been regulated by the clock these things were extremely annoying. Miss Fillmore showed, when remonstrated with, that she considered his requests unreasonable. To her, a half-hour either way in a meal was a matter of no importance. She did not believe, she used to say, that the manager would discharge him if he were a few minutes late once in a while. And if George hunted the house, from garret to cellar, for something he had left on the table in his experimenting

room six hours previous, Miss Fillmore's demeanor showed that she did not appreciate his condition of mind. She was like an automatic instrument that continually runs behind.

There are men who could face a lion with firm nerves, but are driven distracted by the continual buzzing of a mosquito. George Brixton was one of these men. He spent a great deal of time, when at home, with chemicals, hoping to invent something that would bring him a revenue greater than he could expect to receive as a mere employé. When he found, at a critical moment, that an important part of his work had been interfered with, his temper was sorely tried. Generally it seemed too small a matter to get into a rage about ; and besides, it was contrary to his nature to show anger to a woman. No matter what the trouble was, he always saw something of his venerated mother in the person of any member of her sex.

It is the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines. When a certain type of person has borne all he can he breaks in a twinkling. George had worked late at night for six evenings over a combination of chemicals from which he had great hopes. He had told Miss Fillmore several times each day that she must on no account disturb the shelf on which he had placed his bottles. At the last moment he discovered that she had done the mischief. The work of a week, under the most favorable conditions, had gone for naught.

When he stepped out into the sitting-room where his housekeeper was, she saw an unusual commotion in his countenance.

"You have been interfering with my things again," he said, in a low voice.

"I only straightened them up," she answered, with a defiant air. "It is not possible that I did any harm, and the shelf had to be dusted."

He could not trust himself to reply, but that noon he took all the materials with which he had worked at home, and carried them to the factory, where he began again the work that had been interfered with.

A thousand annoyances followed, however. He could not spend all his evenings away from home, and he did not wish to, if only for the looks of the thing. But, if he stayed in, there was invariably something to ruffle his disposition. It was his custom to don a pair of slippers after tea, take his evening paper and occupy himself with it for an hour. Now, it became the rule, rather than the exception, that when he got ready for his paper it was not to be found. Miss Fillmore, on being appealed to, would say she did not remember seeing it, and doubted if it had been delivered; or else that she might have put it into the stove by mistake, taking it for an old one. Sometimes she had wrapped up a parcel with it, to give a messenger who had taken it away.

Miss Fillmore believed in her inmost heart that George Brixton made a fuss about such things because it was his nature to find fault. The price of the newspaper was two cents, and to her mind that represented its full value. She did not stop to think that there were no others for sale in the village and that an hour's time was spoiled. When he had endured this as long as he could, he had a box

made with a lock and key, in which the carrier put the paper securely when he made his rounds.

It would require a book as large as this one merely to give a list of the things of this kind that, as Brixton used to say, "tore him up by the roots."

When anything could not be found in its proper place—and this became the normal condition of the establishment—Miss Fillmore had a stereotyped answer that drove him wild—"I will *hunt* for it." The shirts sent back from the laundry might be in the parlor or the pantry, but never in the drawer where they belonged. When, after a prolonged search, one was discovered, no cuff or collar was ever in its vicinity. At one time George began to think he could find his things by looking for them in the place most unreasonable to conceive of, and occasionally this plan served. But there was no rule even to the irregularities of the house.

A case that will illustrate the point as well as any was his night-dress.

Last night, for instance, he had found it hanging under a lot of other things in the closet of his bedroom. To-night he would look there for it, though quite certain it was not there, and he was right. After a hunt he would find it rolled in a wad under one of the pillows. To-morrow he would look in the closet, then under the pillows, then everywhere *else* he could think of, and have to go to bed without it. In the morning the maiden lady who was responsible for his annoyance would remark casually, as he watched the clock, that she believed she must have worn it herself, though she could not see how it got into her room. Which certainly was not amusing.

When he had stood this as long as he could, Brixton put an end to it. He paid Miss Fillmore twice as much as he had agreed to, and requested her to remove from his domicile forthwith. All he had gained by her presence there was the foundation of an irritable temper, such as he had never before known, and her everlasting hatred.

Going back to cooking his own meals again, for he did not like to run the gauntlet of the boarding-house questionings, George thought from time to time of the only remedy that seemed sufficient for his case. He wanted a home—a real home. It was not enough to see the familiar walls, the same pictures and furniture, the same lamp on the table. He wanted a home that would in some measure take the place of the one he had lost. He wanted it with a hunger that grew fiercer every day he lived.

Sitting alone at night he took a mental appraisal of the marriageable young women in Markham. He thought them over one by one, and rejected them all as unsuitable. He must go farther if he was to take a wife. But where? He was as ignorant as a babe of everything beyond his familiar horizon.

Suddenly he started as the first feasible idea came to his brain. He would go and talk with Ella Drew about it. Her husband was absent nearly all the time, except Sundays, travelling on business. George knew Ella better than he knew any other person in the world. It was the only house in Markham at which he was in the habit of calling.

He breathed easier as the conviction grew that she would be able to advise him. Yes, he would talk with Ella Drew.

CHAPTER IV.

GEORGE AND EMMA.

Brixton had known Mrs. Drew when she was Ella Smiley. They had attended school together, though she was in the primary when he was in the grammar grade. She had always liked him, and while she was superlatively happy with her husband, she could remember when she had stood at her gate to have little talks with George as he came past, wondering if he would ever ask her to marry him. He was so good, and so kind, such a pattern of all a young man should be !

But matters turned out as they often do—George was wedded to his mother, and Mr. Drew began to make love to her, and she accepted him. She had never regretted it, not for one of those brief instants that most married people can recall. And now there was another reason why she adored her husband and watched eagerly for his step when he came home at the end of his trips. After three years of disappointments, both of them were filled with joy, for Ella was to become a mother.

“You are getting terribly sober, George,” she said to him, when he made the call he had decided upon, the one at which he meant to ask her opinion about marriage. She was as frank as if he had been her brother. “It’s not to be wondered at, either, alone as you are so much in that empty house of yours.”

"I know it," he replied, simply. "People say—that I—ought to marry."

Mrs. Drew eyed him searchingly. Many things passed through her mind in the few seconds that followed.

"What do *you* think about it?" she asked, cautiously.

"I don't know. It is lonesome, certainly. I want you to advise me. If—if I should decide that I wanted a wife—I don't know where to find one. There's nobody left in Markham that isn't already married or engaged."

The lady nodded to show that she agreed with this statement. There was nobody in Markham good enough for George Brixton, and she did not know as there was outside of it, either.

"Yes, that is true," she said, thoughtfully. "You would have to go to Springfield, or Worcester, or Boston."

To Boston! What a very long distance that seemed!

"Have you thought just what sort of a girl you would like?" continued Mrs. Drew, still lost in wonder at the unexpected situation.

Brixton looked at the speaker. She was young and fair, with a tinge of rose in her cheeks; round, sweet and wholesome.

"I would like one," he answered, candidly, "just like *you*."

At this Ella turned the color of a peony.

"You must not flatter me," she stammered.

"Oh, no," he answered, quickly; "I do not mean **it** that way. I was thinking about it last night, at **my** house, when I sat there alone; and I remem-

bered, one by one, all the Markham girls that have married during the last five or ten years ; and I thought you were the nicest of them all. Yes, Ella," he continued, dropping into the familiar name by which he had always called her, "I am too late for Markham. As you suggest, I should have to go outside."

She would have liked to kiss his innocent, honest face, and had her husband been there she was sure she would have done it.

"You were a good son, George," she said, "and that is proof that you would be a good husband. If I hear of anyone that I think you would like, I will let you know. It seems so odd, though, to imagine you married !"

There was something that he wanted to ask her, and he did not know how to put it into the best form.

"It's all right—is it ?" he inquired, lamely. "I mean—marriage is a good thing ? You know there's been considerable in the papers about its being a failure."

She looked gravely at the earnest eyes.

"I have found it heaven !" she responded, with reverence. "There must be some grave fault where it is otherwise."

George Brixton was not so ignorant but that he knew of Mrs. Drew's approaching motherhood. As she uttered that statement with the lovelight in her eyes, and the smile of perfect content on her lips, she seemed more angel than human. As he walked home he resolved that he would marry, that he would know the experiences that could bring such happiness. He entered his solitary home, the walls of

which had never seemed quite so silent. They must echo to the sound of a new voice, they must feel the glory of another presence!

Within a few weeks a former friend of Mrs. Drew's—a young lady with whom she had spent a year at boarding-school—came to make her a visit. As Brixton passed the window one evening, on his way home, Ella called Miss Walker's attention to him.

"There is a man in a thousand," she said. "Do you know any very nice girl who wants a husband? I have promised to look up a wife for him."

Miss Walker had had her experience—falling desperately in love two years before with a young man of the town where she resided, who, after the wedding-day was set, suddenly disappeared and never was heard of again. For some time she took a violent dislike to all the male sex, and was heard to declare that she would live and die an old maid, no matter what offers she had. But she was still young—only twenty-three—and this story interested her.

Before long Miss Walker obtained an introduction to Mr. Brixton. Her visit to Markham lasted more than a month, and when she returned home she wrote to Ella Drew that they were engaged.

"You are not to mention it to anyone, for the world," she said. "It is to be kept a secret for the present. I know you will be surprised, and I feel a little that way myself. I had determined to live single, but perhaps I shall be happier in the married state. You can talk to him about it, but to no one else, mind, until I give you leave."

Mrs. Drew, to put it mildly, was not pleased at this news. She had not suspected what was going

on, and women do not fancy being humbugged in such matters. George was so slow with the female sex that she could not understand how he had made such progress after knowing Miss Walker but four weeks altogether. Emma was not the life-partner she would have picked out for him, and yet, had she been pressed for a reason, she could not have told you why. She felt piqued at not being consulted before the fatal words were spoken. But she was too good a woman to let these thoughts mar her congratulations, and the first time she saw George she told him he had her warmest wishes for a happy future.

"I suppose it seems rather sudden to you," he said, in a tone of apology; "but during the last month I have grown so lonesome I can hardly live. Then I knew that Emma—I mean Miss Walker—was a dear friend of yours, and that was commendation enough for her. We are only to wait two months—is that too soon? She said September was a very good time of year."

Mrs. Drew could see it all now. Miss Walker had done most of the courting. Certainly George would never have made such rapid progress with a less interested girl. Well, it might turn out all right. There was no use in worrying over it. But, say all she could, Emma was not the wife Ella would have chosen for this man.

"She was a dear friend of yours!" Sweet and pathetic reason. How dearly she hoped he would never regret the step! As for Emma, there was no question that the marriage was a good one for her. There were few men like George Brixton.

It was in September, the month she had selected,

that George brought his young wife to Markham, and took her to the home his mother had made sacred to him. She was to take the place—and more than the place—of that revered parent.

Mrs. Brixton the second was naturally a quiet girl. Previous to her wedding the conversations between the lovers had been of extremely limited extent. On his part everything had been taken for granted. He thought, in his simple-mindedness, that the duties of wives and husbands were fixed by immutable law. He had heard, to be sure, of cases that did not come up to the proper standard, but he believed them confined to a lower class of society, with which he had nothing to do. He weighed the solemn words of the minister before whom their vows were taken, and never dreamed that there could be evasion of the least thing that was spoken. And there were other things, not alluded to, established by custom so clearly that to repeat them would be the merest nonsense. Being willing to give to his wife all he was, all he had, all he could make himself, he expected the same in return.

The concern for which Brixton worked signalized the occasion of his marriage by adding five hundred dollars a year to his salary. It rather cooled the delight which he felt when he went home with this news to have Emma receive it with the announcement that the house needed quite that amount to make it habitable, in the way of furniture. He thought his things very good—they had been good enough for his mother. And when the wife added that the increase in salary would give him no excuse not to employ a servant, one of those clouds that he had thought gone forever crossed his forehead.

Brixton bought the furniture desired and engaged the servant, for he had no intention of denying Emma anything he could afford to give her ; but he did not change his opinion that the wife might have done the little work there was for the present, with the washings and ironings sent out. He had ambitions to raise himself above his present position. He believed a few thousand dollars would enable him to realize a fortune out of an invention in the chemical line on which he had spent his leisure moments for years. He had part of the money already saved, and the increase in his salary had meant a hastening of the day when he would have all he required for the purpose.

Still, he bought the things and hired the servant, as I have said, and the first months of his wedded life were not wholly devoid of happiness. The cottage was brighter for the presence of a young woman of some attractions, and the meals—thanks mainly to the servant—were well cooked and served on time.

Not being inclined to talkativeness, the new husband did not mind as much as some men might the constant novel reading for which Mrs. Brixton proved herself an adept. He was at the factory most of the day, and at night it was just as well to see her wrapped in a book as anything else, while he went on with his experiments, now conducted with perfect safety at home. There was no danger that the chemicals would be misplaced, for dust might have accumulated an inch deep on them without attracting his wife's attention. It was rather disappointing, sometimes, to note the languid look with which she met his delighted cries that he had

made a successful combination, but he grew used to this. She was not to blame if her enthusiasm did not equal his in a field of which she knew nothing.

When the great day should come, and he could show her the result of all this tiresome detail, she would appreciate it then! In the meantime, he could afford to wait.

There was another thing that troubled him more, something that he could not complain of, even to her, without feeling ashamed. Mrs. Brixton had a disinclination for the physical tokens of love, amounting almost to aversion. George would have hugged a different woman to her heart's content, but all such advances were received in a manner that made him timid.

At first he gave Emma a kiss when he left the house and when he returned, but she offered him her cheek more as if she expected a blow than a caress. If she was reading—and she usually was—he often had to speak twice before she answered his remark.

“Emma, I said good-bye,” he would repeat, with his hand on the door-knob; and with a slight start, as of one who would rather not be disturbed, she would say, without raising her eyes, “Oh, yes; good-bye; certainly.”

It was not marriage as he had conceived it. Earth brings nothing so sweet as the first months of wedded life to those who are happily mated. This blissful period was almost wholly lost to the Brixtons. They did not quarrel, but neither was there much love-making. There was no pair of birds in any tree in Markham that could not have set them a better example.

None of their neighbors noticed anything—none but Ella Drew, who still had this marriage on her conscience and whose eyes were watchful. She knew things were not exactly right, though she did not understand just how they were.

George took his wife to church, as do all self-respecting people in small towns, whether they have any interest in the doctrines preached or not. They also went to some of the parish meetings, and occasionally to entertainments of other kinds. When the weather was fine they walked together in the evening. George had always been a man of sober mien, and the absence of a smile on his face did not surprise his fellow-townsmen. Mrs. Drew alone noticed that there was a new expression there—one she did not like to see. She was the more sorry because she had such an ideal married life of her own, and was now the mother of a beautiful little girl that looked like its proud papa.

“Something is the matter with George and Emma,” she said to herself. “I wish I could help them. Ah! there is one thing that would bring them completely together,” she added, with a matronly blush. “If they ever get a beam of sunshine in the house like my little Mamie, it will end all their differences!”

CHAPTER V.

“TELL ME YOU LOVE HIM!”

But there was not likely to be any such beam of sunshine as baby Mamie in the home of the Brixtons. There are people who say that sun fades the carpets, as no doubt it does, and who take particular pains that it shall never shine in at their windows. There are many houses in America where shades are kept closed tightly and blinds pulled down, from January to December, lest a little of God's purest and sweetest light should penetrate and make its presence known. Thanks to Emma Brixton, her house was one of these.

“Mamie is looking finely,” said Emma to Mrs. Drew, one day in the spring that followed. “I see she is beginning to creep already.”

The fond mother gazed with pride at her offspring, sprawling in lovely helplessness on the floor of her sitting-room.

“Yes, indeed!” she exclaimed. “I don't see how we ever got along without her. A home with no baby seems to me now just no home at all. That is what you want, Emma, to make your house perfect.”

Mrs. Brixton shook her head with decision.

“Never!” she said. “If I had had any fear of that, I should not have married.”

Mrs. Drew recoiled. She felt danger of contamination from one who uttered such blasphemy.

"You can't imagine how awful your words sound!" she replied. "Marriage, with no children, and no hope of any! It would be like a desolate orchard, with neither shade nor fruit. Besides," she added, impressively, "George is remarkably fond of children."

"Let him have them, then!" said Mrs. Brixton, with a sarcastic smile. "I never shall, I assure you. There, it is useless to discuss the matter. My mind is wholly made up."

The young mother felt her lip beginning to tremble.

"Does—does he—know?" she faltered.

"Why, of course not. I'm not a goose, I hope! I don't see as it's any of his business."

After her visitor had gone Mrs. Drew cried for an hour. She was so sorry for George! She had said to herself a hundred times, "When the baby comes, that will make everything right." With never a child to bring their hearts together, there would be no real happiness for this couple. At tea-time, when Brixton passed on his way home, he smiled to see her at the window with Mamie in her lap, and threw the cherub a kiss that spoke volumes. How unjust life was to some of the best men! What had this poor fellow done to be condemned to such a marriage? No children! A deliberate, preconceived determination never to be a mother! Horrible! Surely God would punish in some fearful manner such a wicked woman!

On the first of July Brixton came home with a brighter look. He told his wife that his salary had been raised again—that it was now to be \$2,000 a year. He explained to her, in the fullness of his joy,

what plans he had made, talked of the hope he had nursed so long. If he could save a third of this salary for three years more, with what he already had, he would feel justified in embarking in his venture. And it would bring him—he felt sure—a handsome income, and independence by-and-by, a time when he could retire from work altogether and spend the rest of his days in peace and comfort.

He talked so fast at first that he did not notice how little she seemed to appreciate the importance of his communication.

“You know I have never liked this house,” she said, when he paused for breath. “I think the first thing you should do is to build or buy a better one. And there are many things we need that are more important than trying speculations, and perhaps losing it all. I have not said much, because I don’t like to keep asking, but my clothes are in a terrible condition, and—”

In one second he saw the truth. She was selfish to the core! She was absolutely indifferent to him or to his welfare. In all her thoughts he took a secondary place. He recalled a thousand evidences of her carelessness for his wishes. His anger was too great to allow him to utter a word, but he strode from the house and did not return till late.

That night there was the widest possible distance between them in their nuptial bed. Once when she touched his shoulder accidentally in a dream, he recoiled instinctively. He was like one chained to a fellow-prisoner whom he abominably detests. In the morning he arose at an unusual hour and made himself a cup of coffee, after which he went out. When Emma heard that he had gone it did not dis-

turb her in the least. She merely settled herself into a comfortable position and took another nap.

He came home to dinner and to tea, but he said nothing to his wife in any form, nor did she speak to him. After tea he went to his office and remained till eleven o'clock. This arrangement he practiced for the next week without finding that Emma objected. He had an idea that she might express her regret at what had occurred and promise amendment in future; but the fact was that she considered the injury all on his side. The novels she read were sufficient to console her. If he came home before ten he found her reading; if after that hour she was asleep. She did not act in a surly manner, but exactly as if she did not care what he did, one way or the other.

These things wore on Brixton more than he was willing to admit. He thought, with a sigh, that he now had even less of a home than before he married. The presence of one in the house with whom he was on disagreeable terms was worse than solitude.

He had not by nature a vindictive disposition, and the violence of his anger abated somewhat, but he cherished sentiments toward his wife the reverse of affectionate. Why had she married him? She had a home with her step-father. Why had she cared to change it for his? It was clear that she had not loved him, even at the beginning. He recalled her attitude at the threshold of their married life, that of submitting to the inevitable rather than of finding the happy haven she had sought. The more he thought the more puzzled he became. He wished there was someone to whom he could go for information.

There was no one but Ella Drew, and he did not want her to know of his dilemma. But how long was this to last ? He was less than thirty years of age. He might live to be ninety. Would that woman sit there, opposite to him, all those years, as sphynx-like as she was to-day ? Would she insist on calling herself his wife and render him none of the grace and sweetness of that position ?

The most aggravating thing of the whole matter was that the troubles came about such insignificant things. He thought how silly it would seem to another person. And yet it was killing all that was best in him.

Though Mr. and Mrs. Brixton continued to live under the same roof, and there was no rupture that the public knew of, marital relations ceased between them. One cannot clasp to his heart a woman with whom he is on terms of open warfare.

Mrs. Drew had never been to his house since that conversation with his wife, in which the cool determination to remain childless was announced ; though Mrs. Brixton had called on her occasionally, hardly seeming to notice that she was received with less warmth than formerly. Ella did not mean to quarrel with Emma—her manner toward her was the result of instinctive aversion that she could not in the least control. Meeting George in the street one evening, on his way back to his office, she stopped to ask about his health.

“ I never saw you looking so badly,” she said. “ You should go on a vacation. Why don’t you take Emma to Boston or New York for a week ? ”

Then, all at once, it came out :

“ If I went, I should not take *her* ! ” he snapped.

Mrs. Drew's face was very grave.

"What is the trouble, George?" she asked.

"Everything!" said Brixton, gloomily. "We should never have married. Everything is wrong—everything."

She looked at him in a puzzled way. Could he have learned the secret that Emma had told her?

"Won't you explain a little?" she asked. "Your wife comes in occasionally, and she never speaks of an estrangement. She has said nothing to show that she is unhappy."

"Oh, no. *She* is happy enough!" he answered, quickly.

Mrs. Drew murmured that she did not understand.

"And you are looking so very ill," she added. "You positively should consult a physician."

Brixton looked her full in the eyes.

"I did not mean to say a word," he said. "Now that it is out, let me tell you this: If I live with her a year longer it will *kill* me!"

The lady uttered a profound sigh.

"You do not *love* her?" she asked.

"*I hate her!*"

She could draw nothing more out of him. But the next day she made herself a committee of one and called on Mrs. Brixton for a decided talk.

Emma told her old friend that there had been no special friction that she knew of. George was a peculiar fellow, who made a great deal of trifles; but she thought he was improving a little in that respect as time went on. He did not spend many of his evenings at home, but this was on account of

things he had to do at the office, and as she went early to bed she did not mind it.

"But you love him, don't you?" asked Mrs. Drew, feverishly. "He is your husband. Tell me that you love him!"

"Love him?" repeated Mrs. Brixton, slowly. "I like him well enough, when he is not ill-tempered."

Mrs. Drew threw up both hands with a gesture of despair.

"You have only been married a year, Emma!" she cried. "You and George ought to love each other with all the passionate devotion conceivable! When he comes in to-night put your arms around his neck and kiss him on the lips! You are losing the best gift that God gives to a woman when you allow the slightest cloud to come between you and your husband!"

Mrs. Brixton smiled at her friend's enthusiasm.

"I don't think I understand that kind of love," she replied, thoughtfully.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. BRIXTON UNDERSTANDS.

Although Mrs. Brixton was not very impressionable, the talk that Ella had with her produced a certain effect. George noticed a difference in her manner as soon as he entered the house. He was more than willing to forget all that had passed if he could hope for a change in the future, and he

began to talk to Emma in the old way. His pleasure was great when he saw that she showed an interest in what he had to tell, and instead of returning to his office that evening he remained at home. When Emma retired for the night he gave her the first kiss she had received from him in months. Had he not been a little ashamed and afraid, he would have accompanied her to her room instead of going in a very lonely mood to his own.

The next day he thought the matter over a great deal, and resolved that he would never get into another such quarrel, no matter what the provocation. He had passed through an experience that was simply horrible. To find daylight again he was willing to make almost any sacrifice. Within a week he had improved so much in appearance that people began to mention it in the way of congratulations. Mrs. Drew was one of these, and no person in Markham could have been more pleased.

"Things are better, I am sure," she said to him brightly, coming to the gate, as he was going by. "Oh, George, I am so glad!"

He admitted that things were better. His home, he reflected, was far from the ideal; but it was better—it was endurable, and we judge things largely by their contrast with what we have passed through.

Mr. and Mrs. Brixton became man and wife again. George kissed Emma whenever he left the house, and sometimes—not always—when he returned. He did not like to have her think he was overdoing it. He knew he had never really been in love, but he had ceased to hate his wife. And this was certainly a very great gain.

On the first of January the chemical concern sur-

prised Brixton by offering him a much better position, if he would go to New York. He had never thought of living anywhere except in his native town, and the world seemed very wide when its doors were thus suddenly opened. The additional salary was certainly an inducement, for it made him hope again that something might be saved out of it toward the fund he longed to accumulate.

He wanted to please Emma, and he had no idea how she would like such a change. That evening he talked with her about the city, intending to learn her views upon that matter before he told her of the offer that had been made him.

It took but a minute to discover that she would be very glad to move.

"Don't you like Markham?" asked George, with a tinge of regret in his tone.

Personally he thought it the finest spot in the universe; but then, it was about the only one he had seen.

"I should like New York much better," she said, quietly. "But there is little use in talking about it, for I suppose we never shall go there."

When she heard that they could go—that he would go, if she wished it—there was an hour that came very near being filled with happiness. George was elated beyond measure. There was no question about it now; he would write to his employers that he would take the place and come as soon as he could make arrangements. In a new location, he thought, with a bounding heart, perhaps Emma and he could make another beginning under better auspices. The great hope of his life was a real, true

marriage existence. It was not too late, yet, for his wife to redeem herself.

In all Markham there was no one to whom he bade good-bye with deep regret except Ella Drew. She was so sorry to have him go that he was deeply touched. He could see the struggle to hide her feelings, forcing her eyes and lips to tell how glad she was at his success, and how certain that he would get along splendidly in his new location. She held Mamie up for him to kiss, and her lashes grew wet in spite of herself, as she noticed the tender way in which he caressed the infant.

"You must come and see us when we get settled," he said. "We shall not keep house at first, but that will make no difference. And you will write often, won't you? We shall want to hear the Markham news. Stephen will see us, and tell you how we are."

During the next three years the Brixtons boarded at various places on the west side, between Twenty-sixth and Fortieth Streets. As far as business success was concerned it came faster than George had anticipated, but his home affairs never were tranquil for long at a time. There were periods when he became so out of patience with Emma that he thought seriously of running away and never seeing her or anyone else he knew again. To offset these, there were times when he grew almost fond of her, though these were much briefer than the others.

The wife's indifference was usually so great that it nearly maddened him. If she had disgraced him in a way that he could take cognizance of—if she had thrown kisses to men out of her window, for

instance—he would have known just what to do. But the everlasting coldness—the eternal requests to be let alone—the disinclination to be interrupted in the reading of the interminable novels that she still affected—these were the things that darkened his life until at times he did not care how soon it ended.

There was one thing, however, for which he never ceased to hope and pray—a child of his own.

“How strange it is that we have been married almost five years and never had a little one!” he used to muse, when he met the perambulators in the street with their cherub occupants. “If there was a baby in my home I could forget all other disappointments in the joy of that acquisition!”

Stephen Drew used to see him frequently at the office, and always brought some message from Ella. During the second year another child came to the Drew's, but when it was just beginning to lisp the names of “papa,” and “mamma,” an epidemic carried the elder one away. Up to this time Ella had never accepted the invitation to visit the Brixtons. But when she recovered partially from the illness into which this loss threw her, and the local physician ordered her to take a complete change and rest, she made the trip to New York, leaving the new baby, Minnie, at Markham.

Mrs. Brixton had always liked Mrs. Drew, though they were so dissimilar in their tastes and habits, and she made her very welcome. As for George, she seemed to him a particularly bright angel, sent direct from the celestial spheres

In her mourning garments she was the picture of woe. The loss she had suffered was evidently a severe one to her. George pitied her from the bot-

tom of his heart, but he said little on the subject. He knew that sorrow is often doubled by a thoughtless display of too much sympathy.

The lack of a child in his own home was alluded to several times by Mr. Brixton, in his talks with his guest. He was still as anxious as ever about it, and Ella's blood boiled as she thought of the imposition being practiced upon him. She tried again and again to impress Mrs. Brixton with the falseness of her position, but to no purpose.

A child? She? No, indeed! The thought nearly drove her into spasms!

Mrs. Drew recovered so slowly that her husband decided that she ought not to return to Markham at present. The associations of their home were too closely allied with the baby's illness and death for her drooping spirits. So Baby Minnie was sent for, and rooms engaged in the house where the Brixtons boarded. A few weeks later this resulted in a proposition on Brixton's part to set up housekeeping where his friends could have ample accommodation as long as they chose to remain in the city. His salary was now \$4,000 and his prospects of an increased revenue from his discoveries were of the brightest kind. He was tired of boarding, and with the Drews in the house he thought the change a most desirable one to make.

As for Emma, she did not care. He agreed to get her a housekeeper who would relieve her of all responsibility. The house was engaged, furnished mainly under Mrs. Drew's direction, and the occupants moved in.

The family lived in Bohemian fashion. Mr. Drew was gone, on account of his business, a large share

of the time. Mrs. Brixton spent a good many evenings out, but rarely mentioned that she was going until she had her wraps on.

"You will have Ella to entertain you," she would remark to her husband, at the door.

Meals were served, almost literally, "at all hours." Emma rose a long time after George had gone to his office. It was not much like her own marriage, Mrs. Drew thought often, with a sigh.

"How different this house would be if we only had a baby!" Brixton exclaimed, one evening, when they had lived in this manner the larger part of a year. He and Mrs. Drew were sitting alone. "I don't believe a man ever lived who more ardently desired children!" he added, with a gasp. "Sometimes I have thought of adopting a waif, but that would not fill the awful void in my heart. I want a child of my own! Good God!" he cried, the tears standing to the full in his eyes. "Why is it denied me!"

The perspiration stood on his forehead in beads as he uttered this despairing wail. Woman to the core, Ella Drew felt the full force of his intensity.

"There are women who have more children than they desire," pursued Brixton, when he had partially recovered his equanimity. "And there are others who cannot have them, no matter how ardently they wish it. Heaven is very uneven in distributing its blessings. I do not see how the priests can claim that God is a beneficent being."

Shocked at what sounded to her like blasphemy, Mrs. Drew rose to leave the room. As she passed the chamber that Mrs. Brixton was accustomed to occupy she saw that the door stood wide open. The

pity so strongly aroused for the husband overcame her completely. With the step of a sleepwalker she entered the room and took something from the bureau. Then she walked slowly back to the parlor where Mr. Brixton was still sitting, with his head buried in his hands.

"Before you condemn your *Maker*," she said, in a trembling voice, "examine this!"

Raising his head he looked at the package she laid on the table before him. He realized from Ella's excited manner that something unusual was agitating her. Lifting the package to his nostrils he inhaled slowly. He was a chemist, and when he turned his gaze again upon his companion he uttered the word, "*Poison!*"

"Where did you find this?" he added, brusquely. "Do not equivocate! Answer at once!"

Already frightened at what she had done, Mrs. Drew shut her pale lips tightly together.

"You got that in Mrs. Brixton's room," he said, with a wild look. "What could she have bought it for—suicide?"

"No. *Murder!*"

The words had escaped her lips, uttered by an impulse she could not resist.

He stared at her with dilated eyes. All his customary courtesy vanished.

"Give it back to me!" she cried, starting up suddenly. "Give it back to me! I was mad to touch it! I did not know what I was doing! Please, oh! please, give it back!"

"I will," he answered, severely, "when I have examined further into its nature, and have learned for what use it was intended. Why did you bring

it to me, if you intended to surround it with all this mystery?"

"Oh, I have made an awful mistake!" she cried, weeping hysterically. "If you value your peace of mind in this life—your hope of Heaven—give it back to me!"

His only answer was to motion her rudely to leave the room. Then he went to the place where his chemicals were kept.

It was hours later when he finished his investigation, but the truth dawned upon him at last!

When Ella Drew met Brixton at breakfast the next morning she saw that she could tell him nothing. He had the look of a wild animal that has scented its prey and means to follow it with stealthy step till it is brought to earth!



CHAPTER VII.

AMONG THE ADIRONDACKS.

Each day now made Ella Drew more uncomfortable. While she could never bring herself to reopen the subject with Mr. Brixton it always stood between them, like the ghost of Banquo.

Mr. Drew, who was a comfortable, good-natured fellow, had but one creed in the world, which was that his wife was the best and wisest woman living. When she told him that she thought a change would do her good and that she would like to return to Markham for awhile, he acquiesced without demur,

and made the few preparations necessary to carry out that end. The family furniture had been left in the homestead and there was little to do but to proceed thither, engage the services of a maid-of-all-work and enter into possession. Accordingly Mr. Drew, Mrs. Drew and Miss Minnie Drew, now nearly two years of age, announced to the Brixtons that they were going home for the present. And the Brixtons, with the same politeness that had made them welcome, permitted them to do as they pleased about severing the slight cord that bound the families together.

Mrs. Drew meant to talk to Brixton before leaving his house, but he studiously avoided giving her an opportunity to be with him alone. He suspected what she had in mind and did not wish to debate the question with her. Ella had moments of alarm when she thought of what he had learned, and feared that after she was gone the gathering tempest would break loose with uncontrollable fury. She knew his state of mind could not be gauged by the calm exterior which he invariably wore. His sentiments toward his wife must be quite the reverse of those which appeared on the polished surface. She wanted to warn him against doing anything rash, but at the last moment she had to write her caution at the station and send it to him by a messenger.

The letter, though brief, was intense and earnest enough to have moved him on any ordinary occasion. It recited the long friendship the writer had enjoyed with him, and lamented that in one thoughtless instant she had committed an error that no code of hospitality could justify. If he cared for her he

would act as if the unfortunate affair had never occurred.

Brixton read the letter with a cold smile, after examining with a certain interest some stains on it that he took to be tear drops. Then he tore it into infinitesimal bits and scattered them to the four winds of heaven.

The season when everybody takes his annual outing soon approached. Mr. and Mrs. Brixton had arranged to go to a secluded spot in the heart of the Adirondacks, where George could secure an entire rest from business cares. Emma was not particularly pleased with the place selected, but she reflected that she could read novels as well there as anywhere else. So she bought an extra large number of the flimsiest kind and packed them into her trunk with dresses principally intended for roughing it.

Correspondence had arranged everything. A wagon met them at a small station and they rode thirty miles through the woods to the owner's dwelling. At night they alighted, quite prepared to believe it when told that their temporary home was several miles from any other dwelling.

That evening George Brixton walked out of doors and stayed till late. His face was set and his step rigid. What sound was it which rustled in the tree-tops, which stirred the grasses at his feet? It came to him again and again, shaping that fearful word that Ella Drew had let fall—*Murder!*"

Mr. and Mrs. Kelly, who owned this nest in the Adirondacks, were quiet people who had made a

living for many years by offering the hospitalities of their house to hunters and fishermen. During the winter Mr. Kelly did some trapping, or acted as guide to parties that came up from the city. He also cultivated a bit of ground that his own hands had cleared of underbrush and broken to the plow.

Brixton had not come to hunt, as the season did not permit of it, but to fish. The day following his arrival he set off with Kelly for a stream some distance away. When he returned at night he bore few specimens of his skill, but he had a contented look, as if the day had not been wholly misspent.

Life at this sequestered place was, as might have been expected, uneventful, and several days passed with nothing to mar its perfect serenity. Then Mrs. Brixton went out to meet her husband as he came home, and he saw that her face was troubled.

"There are thieves here," she said, when he asked her what the matter was. "I cannot leave a thing in my room but it is missing."

"Indeed!" he replied, with elevated eyebrows. "What have you lost?"

"Some—medicine," she said. "I am subject to dreadful headaches and I had something that helped them very much. It was on the mantel in our room this morning, and now it is gone."

George laughed at the idea that Mrs. Kelly would purloin an article of such slight value, and as there was no other occupant of the house he bade his wife search thoroughly.

"Have you no more?" he asked, thoughtfully.

"Not a bit. I shall feel uneasy all the time now that I know there are robbers about. It is most annoying. I have looked everywhere. I wish you

would leave here and go to some other place to finish the rest of your vacation," she added, pathetically.

They went to their bedroom, and she showed him the spot where the missing article had been seen that morning. He sat down and eyed her intently.

"What else have you lost?" he inquired. "You said there were other things."

"Nothing—worth—speaking—of," she stammered; "but it is just as unpleasant, for all that. I shall feel like locking the door all the time now."

He said the idea was not a bad one, though he could not bring himself to believe Mrs. Kelly would commit such an act. He told her on no account to say anything to the landlady conveying her suspicion, for the family had been recommended to him in the highest terms.

The next evening Emma met her husband again, some distance from the house.

"I am just dying of headache," she said. "I wish you would leave here to-morrow. You don't care so very much about this particular place, do you?"

Brixton allowed his fishing-rod to drop to the ground, while he leaned against a tree.

"Yes, Emma," he said, slowly. "I am very much in love with this section. I haven't felt as well in years as I do here. You can have your medicine sent easily enough. Give me the name of it and I will order all you wish. It will only take three or four days to get it. But, my dear," he added, passing his arm about his wife in a caressing way that astonished her, "you do not look ill. You are the picture of health."

She shook her head, while the roses climbed over her cheek.

"You don't know how my head feels," she said, pressing her hands to her forehead. "I have not said much, because I didn't like to disturb you, but the aches are terrible. When they are the worst I can't read at all, and then the dullness here is frightful."

He took out a memorandum book and pencil, with a look of sympathy.

"We will have a cargo immediately," he said, preparing to write. "What did you say it was called?"

Confused beyond measure, Mrs. Brixton stammered again. A Brooklyn druggist prepared it. No, he did not know her by name, only by sight. The right way was to return home and go for it in person. She was certain she would die before the express could come.

Something ailed the husband, surely. He stooped and gave his wife not less than a dozen kisses while they stood there discussing this question. He acted as if he had met her for the first time and fallen desperately in love. Between his caresses he bade her try to remember the name, or at least the location of the druggist, so that he—or she—could write. He did not like to go home at present. It was certainly too far to go and return again, in the brief time remaining. He would take her with him on his fishing jaunts and she would leave her neuralgias in the atmosphere of the mountain woods.

Mrs. Brixton shook her head sadly. She walked slowly with her husband to the house, but had no appetite for supper. When they were alone in their chamber she cried a little. He had never seen her in these moods and they were like revelations to

him. He had been married five years to his wife, and was just beginning to get acquainted with her. On her side, she was almost as much astonished. She had never imagined that his kisses could possess such ardor, that he would act the part of a lover with all the passion and warmth one reads of in a romance.

The next day when Mr. Kelly went for the mail to a station ten miles distant, Mrs. Brixton smuggled a note into his hand, addressed to a store in New York. Of course the honest backwoodsman managed to let Mr. Brixton know about this letter, and of course it never was sent. But the hopes aroused by it buoyed up the wife's spirits for the next three days, and she did not refuse, when pressed, to go to the fishing streams with her husband. They took a lunch along, and the time was not wholly unenjoyable. When four days had passed, she began to grow uneasy again. She asked Mr. Kelly if he was certain that he had posted her letter, saying that she expected a package.

"It may be a little late, ma'am," he told her. "Express things don't git delivered in these parts as quick's they do in the towns. It'll come all right, but it may be a little behindhand."

After that the wife declined to go with the fishing party, and George, apparently from pure sympathy, stayed at the farmhouse with her. Indeed, he did not allow her to get out of his sight during the next ten days. At the end of that time she packed her things with eagerness and audibly expressed her joy that the vacation was so soon to end.

Then there came a series of misfortunes.

The trapper's wagon was found on the morning

set for their departure to have broken a tire and to be totally unfit for use over the rough roads. Mr. Kelly swore at his ill-luck, and after trying for two days to mend the break with the tools at his disposal, went on horseback to the nearest settlement for a wheelwright. That functionary appeared to take his full time, for it was three days before he arrived. When he got there he discovered that it would be better to carry the wheel away with him and set a new tire at his shop. This was the last seen of him for several days more, and when Mr. Kelly rode after him on another horse he returned with the information that the man was sick abed with a slow fever and might not get well for a month.

"We must go back to New York!" exclaimed Mrs. Brixton, her patience completely exhausted. "I can ride a horse as far as the railroad. You seem to be very calm about it!" she added, complainingly, to her husband. "What do you suppose they will think at the office, to have you over-stay your time like this?"

"It is our dullest season," responded George, imperturbably, "and the agent told me when I went away to stay just as long as I liked. But we ought to return, and while I have not said much, I am annoyed as well as you. I shall tell Kelly that we must leave to-morrow, even if we have to go horseback, and he will send our baggage as soon as he can. I don't see," he continued, "why he can't ride over to town and get a carriage to come after us. It is a wonder we never thought of that before."

This plan, which on the whole suited Mrs. Brixton the best of any yet advanced, only served to make

more delay. Kelly started on the mission assigned to him, but had gone but a few miles when a nail in his horse's shoe compelled him to return, leading the animal by the bridle. The second morning the only other horse on the premises was taken with a colic, induced by getting loose in the night and gorging himself with meal, to which he was unaccustomed. Communication was now cut off entirely from civilization, and a week passed during which the Brixtons neither saw nor heard from anyone but their entertainers.

CHAPTER VIII.

“UGH! WHAT CAN YOU DO!”

Mrs. Brixton had fretted herself into something very like a real illness by this time. She was pale and wan, refused to eat her meals, and spent considerable of her time in weeping. In this emergency George proved the most devoted of husbands. When she was too sick to read, he read to her out of one of her novels. If she made the slightest motion at night he was wide awake, inquiring what he could do for her. And every time the luckless Kelly came within sound of his voice, that individual was rated in a high key for his inability to invent some plan to relieve the distressing situation.

At last after fully six weeks had elapsed from the

day the Brixtons came to the Kelly mansion, both of the horses suddenly recovered their healths, and the wheelwright his. The wagon was loaded with its passengers and their baggage, and its prow turned toward the railroad. Mrs. Kelly's affectionate good-bye and her warmly expressed hope that her guest would soon recover from her indisposition elicited no response from the lady addressed. But the good wife of the trapper consoled herself after the party had gone by counting a handsome roll of bankbills, left by Mr. Brixton, considerably larger than any season's profits she had ever known before.

It was late at night when our friends reached their residence, and early the next morning Brixton sent for a physician, without telling his wife of his intention. He had a few words with the medical man in the parlor, and then went to call Emma.

"This is Dr. Robertson," he said, gravely, when his astonished wife made her appearance. "I do not dare wait any longer without having your illness investigated. Mrs. Brixton," he went on, speaking to the physician, "is troubled with severe headaches which last for weeks at a time. Knowing your skill, I have confidence that you will be able to suggest the proper remedy."

Mrs. Brixton turned a variety of colors. She had a feminine idea of the discerning powers of her visitor's profession. It seemed to her that Dr. Robertson could read her through and through.

"My trouble is nothing that justifies special services," she stammered. "Only a slight headache, now and then. I am quite well to-day, for instance, and may not feel the pain again for a month or

two. My husband did not tell me he thought of calling you, or I should have laughed at him."

Both gentlemen rose, as she left the room. The Doctor and Mr. Brixton had a conversation that lasted for the next hour, during which time Mrs. Brixton was seen to leave the house.

Soon after the physician went away the wife returned.

"Emma, will you come here a moment?" called George Brixton, from the library. "I want to see you."

She came to him, reddening in spite of herself, for she dreaded the talk she expected. She did not like a conversation in which people differed. Not for a moment suspecting that he knew her secret, she was, nevertheless, disturbed. As she sat down near her husband she laid a package on the table, and George reached over and covered it with his palm.

"*I want this!*" he remarked, curtly.

A she-bear, caught in a trap, could not have presented a greater picture of baffled rage than did Emma Brixton at that moment. She saw everything in an instant. She tried to speak, thinking, that she could annihilate him with her sarcasm, but her vocal organs refused their office. Her eyes flushed blood red, her lips parted slightly, the cords of her neck swelled.

"You see that I *know!*" added Brixton, gutterally, bending toward the figure opposite to him. "Now, you will not be allowed to touch the contents of this package!"

In every line of her face was written the word HATE in capital letters. She shrank into the depths of the chair she occupied, as if to get as far

from him as possible. And still her lips gave forth no sound.

"I have been deceived, cheated, robbed by you," cried the husband, in a tempest of rage, "and I will endure it no longer! You bear a life that belongs to *me*, and—before God—I will have it!"

A new shade of deeper loathing came to the pale lips, already convulsed with detestation of the speaker. The thin hands moved slightly, as if they were in imagination crushing something between them. Then rousing herself, the wife rose majestically, still without uttering a syllable.

"Sit down!" he commanded, in a voice of thunder. "You are dealing no longer with an idiot, a dupe! I have not thought this over carelessly. I shall take good pains that you do not circumvent me this time!"

Pausing between him and the door, Mrs. Brixton glared at her husband.

"*Ugh!* What can *you* do?" she asked, with a contempt of manner and tone that cannot be described.

"You will see!" he replied, between his teeth. "I have made my preparations. You are not to leave this room alone. When I go a nurse, strong enough to bend you to her will, takes my place. When it is necessary for her to rest, another equally alert and powerful will watch you in her stead. From this hour we shall divide our time with you. Not for the fraction of a second will you be permitted to be out of the sight of one of us. If you are wise you may go about the house as you have done. If you are obdurate you will be limited to one room, to which your meals will be brought!"

No snarling leopard in its cage, annoyed by its keeper for the delectation of the gaping crowd, ever looked readier to bite its torturers than did this slight young woman. She showed her teeth in true leonine fashion as she hurled back her answer.

“Wretch! Coward! Stand out of my way! I will leave you this instant, never to return!”

“*No—you WON'T!*” he retorted, sharply, rising to bar her exit.

She laughed a wild, sneering laugh that chilled his blood.

“Fool!” she cried. “Do you think you can outwit a woman; you, as dull a man as ever lived! Chain me, will you! Tell me where and when I shall move about! Hire guards to watch me! And to what end? That I may be the mother of your child! If there were no other way to circumvent you, I would cut my throat! You don’t know the kind of woman I am!”

Brixton was surprised beyond measure at the passionate anger she had developed, but he had no idea of budging in the least from his position.

“Know the kind of woman you are!” he repeated, scornfully. “If I did not I might have tried to persuade you by soft words. Had I not been sure there was in your heart no throb that would respond to the higher and nobler sentiments of a wife—had I not proved you one of those creatures who devour their own offspring—I would have respected your position and given due consideration to your sex. But when one deals with a *murderer* he finds no place for delicate methods. I shall treat you like any criminal found with the proofs of guilt upon him.”

Mrs. Brixton laughed again, long and mockingly.

"Where, under what law, do you learn that woman must sacrifice health for a child she does not want?" she demanded. "It is well enough for a man to talk! If he had the risk to run he would sing another tune. I have a right to say whether I will or will not bear children!"

"Not now!" he replied, impressively. "The hour for that consideration has passed. I am your partner in the life that has begun, and my interests are sacred. You know that for five years I have worn my heart out praying for another inmate of my home. I have done injustice to Heaven, complaining that my chief desire was refused. I would never have contracted marriage but for the belief that children would bless it. When you stood with me before the clergyman at Markham, you took upon yourself obligations that you cannot throw aside at will. Your unborn infant is as much mine as if he lay in your arms! Emma, discussion is useless. I am not to be moved!"

The wife resumed her seat and rocked backward and forward in her chair, tapping the floor nervously with one of her feet. The excitement under which she labored was tiring her. She had begun, also, to feel a little afraid of this man, who had shown a side of his nature that she had never believed existed.

"You think you can compel me?" she said, presently. "You will find your mistake. I shall outwit you."

"I am afraid you don't understand me yet," was his cool reply. "I have indisputable evidence of your condition. If you succeed in 'outwitting me,'

as you call it, you will commit an offence recognized by the laws of the State. But I assure you I shall not rely upon that. The words you have already spoken convince me that you require the severest measures. I am prepared to apply them.”

The leopard-like snarl returned to the woman’s lips.

“I could utter one scream and arouse the neighborhood,” she said. “What could you do, then?”

“See that you did not repeat it,” he replied. “I would put a gag in your mouth and keep it there!”

She hissed at him the hate she could not put into verbal expression. Then, with a bound like that of a wild beast, she sprang toward the door of the room. In an instant he caught her. There was a quick collision, physical strength against physical strength. She got one of her arms free and drew blood on his face with her nails. It was all he could do to escape the teeth that menaced him. Seeing that he must overpower her, Brixton exerted all his strength and bore his wife heavily to the carpet.

The swoon that followed was too genuine to allow of the least doubt. Ringing a bell the husband summoned a strong-looking woman, and together they carried the still form upstairs and laid it on a bed.

“This is unfortunate,” said the attendant. “It will not do to let it happen again. You must not be here when she recovers her senses. Send my sister up, for if she begins to rave, it may take two of us to hold her.”

Brixton obeyed the suggestion, and when his errand was accomplished went back to the library and threw himself, all perspiration and trembling, upon a sofa.

"God forgive me," he moaned, "for laying such rough hands on her!"

He took out a handkerchief and wiped the blood from his face.

"I don't mind these scratches," he said, raising himself on his elbow to look into a mirror. "She might have the reddest blood in my heart, and welcome. But she *shall not* destroy that little, innocent life! No, no, *she shall not!*"

MISS BRIXTON'S GIRLHOOD.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BIRTH OF BLANCHE.

It is not my purpose to dwell at unnecessary length upon the scenes which filled the next few weeks. Some of them were little short of tragic. Mrs. Brixton's guardians had to be constantly on the alert to prevent her injuring herself. She developed a suicidal mania. **Twice she narrowly escaped** woundings with sharp instruments which she snatched up. Had she been able to get out of the house she would have thrown herself into the river. Each attempt of her husband to come into her presence made her almost uncontrollable. At last Dr. Robertson was called in, and his examination

proved that she was in a condition that fully justified the closest restraint.

The authority of the physician was now sponsor for the proceedings that had been begun in such a high-handed fashion. The "nurses," as they were called, were cautioned to use the greatest care. Nerve tonics and bromides were given as directed. For a long time there was little change in the patient's condition, but not once did Brixton falter in his determination. She should fulfill the duty on which she had embarked, if she lived. Later, her course might be decided by herself. He would never care for her again, even in the remotest manner. The glimpse he had had of her true nature would make him abhor her for the rest of her days.

Time mends many things, and at last, after six or seven weeks, Mrs. Brixton grew calmer. But her excitement was succeeded by a confirmed melancholy. She firmly believed that she was drifting with absolute certainty to death. Like a prisoner under sentence, she began to prepare for the inevitable hour with something like resignation. She begged the physician to see that her body was laid by her parents' graves, and on no account in the lot owned by her husband.

"Nonsense," replied Dr. Robertson, with a smile. "Lowness of spirits is a natural thing on such occasions. You will not only survive the birth of this child, but a dozen more."

Into the heavy eyes there shot a gleam of savagery.

"Do you imagine I will ever live with *him* again?" she demanded, in a half shriek.

Dr. Robertson shook his head in a positive way.

"My dear woman," said he, "you have no idea

how the possession of a child will alter your views. You will adore it ; and for its sake you will idolize its father."

Mrs. Brixton bit her lips and drew a long breath of distress.

"Hear what I tell you," she replied. "If I am so unhappy as to have it born alive, I will never touch that child ! I hate it now, and much more do I hate the wretch who has driven me to this agony !"

The physician rose to go, with the calm smile still on his mouth. He had seen them so often, these women. He did not believe this one any different from the others.

But he was mistaken. An hour after he had told Brixton of the birth of a little girl, he asked the wife if she would not like to see her offspring, and met with a rebuff so decided that he thought it wise to drop the matter for the time.

"Keep her away from me !" the woman said, with meaning. "I warn you !"

Convalescing took only the usual time. The young mother did not die, nor was she at any time in danger of doing so. In a fortnight she began to make preparations for quitting home. Brixton was informed of all she did, but he did not care to interfere with her plans. He told the domestics not to let her touch the baby, but said that in other respects she was to do as it best suited her. As for himself, he awaited developements.

One day a servant brought him a note in his wife's handwriting, reading as follows :

"It is with difficulty that I can bring myself to write to you, but it seems the only thing to do, for I could not bear

a personal interview. You and I can no longer live under one roof. I wish to go peaceably and quietly. If you put obstacles in my way you will only delay what must happen. You have no invalid now to deal with, but a woman of strength and will. If I forbear to take the revenge I owe, do not think I forgive you, for that I shall never do.

“E. W. B.”

To this he sent the following reply :

“I shall neither presume to advise nor direct you. You are at full liberty to live where you please, either in my home or out of it. But, as the mother of my child, it is my wish to support you in the style to which you have been accustomed. If you go away be kind enough to leave an address to which remittances can be sent.

“G. B.”

The tenor of this note surprised Mrs. Brixton. She had anticipated a sharp collision with her husband. She had believed that it would require legal proceedings to get money out of him, if she chose to desert her home. A slight revulsion took place in her feelings as she reviewed the altered situation. She did not like the idea of going to her step-father's (her mother had died since her marriage) and she was not over-sanguine as to earning a very good living at any employment.

After a struggle between her pride and her fears, she decided to take her husband at his word, and adopt a middle course. She left most of her belongings at the house, and made her exit with only a handbag, containing a few articles of daily necessity. She wanted to breathe for a time a new atmosphere, but not to cut herself entirely off from the old one. Before she departed she wrote another

brief note to Brixton, stating that she would receive what funds he chose to send her. His answer was a liberal allowance for a month in advance and a statement that the same amount was at her disposal regularly.

The wife went to a seaside resort that was just opening for the season, and stayed there several weeks. Then, when no one expected her, she came home.

The house occupied by the Brixtons was divided from this time into two parts. Mrs. Brixton took rooms on the second floor, and gave up all claim to the rest of the dwelling. Her meals were brought to her by her own maid, who had nothing to do with any other tenant of the premises. George, the baby, its nurse-in-ordinary, his housekeeper and cook occupied the other ten rooms. The household was thus maintained on what looked like an extravagant basis, compared with the recent expenditures, but the master did not complain. Though deprived of the society of his wife he found abundant consolation in that of his baby daughter, in whose company he spent nearly all of his waking hours that could be spared from business.

Mrs. Drew heard of the new arrival, and her curiosity to learn the full status of affairs brought her to the city on a visit, when little Blanche was about four months old. Brixton met her at the station, and as they were driven toward his house he tried to make her understand things without a too full explanation.

"You will have to divide your time between us," he said, in conclusion. "You can visit her by day, and see me in the evening. Meals you can vary as

it suits you. I believe the same kitchen supplies both of us."

Mrs. Drew uttered a cry of regret.

"It seems impossible!" she cried. "Doesn't she love her baby at all?"

"She hasn't seen it. She says she never will. We were warned at the start to keep it out of her reach if we did not wish it hurt."

"I almost wish I had not come," said Mrs. Drew, with a shudder.

"Don't say that," answered Brixton. "It does me a world of good to see you. And Blanche—I have told her what an awfully nice girl you are and she is crazy to put her chubby arms around your neck. Emma always liked you, and will welcome you just as heartily as if I were not in the question. Only, you will make a mess of it if you try to straighten things out. She won't let you go to advising her, and really, things are better as they are. I couldn't make a wife of that kind of a woman again, you see, and if she continues to observe the proprieties it is as much as I can ask."

Mrs. Drew put her hand involuntarily on the arm of her companion.

"I pity you so!" she said. "This is not the fate you deserve, as good and kind a man as you are. I wish Emma had not come to visit me at Markham, for then you never would have seen her. I feel as if it was in some way my fault that you are in this unhappy situation."

"Oh, you needn't pity me," he replied, with a bright smile. "Little Blanche atones for everything. My life is quite full now. Every moment I

can spare from business is spent with the darling, and I need nothing more."

The lady shook her head.

"You do need something more," she said, very earnestly. "You need the loving companionship of a good, true woman. You are capable of making one happy, and I cannot speak with patience of a creature who stands between you and your highest good. George, you ought to get a divorce!"

He laughed a little and then suddenly grew grave.

"On what ground?" he inquired. "If there has been any cruelty of the kind the law takes notice of it has been on my part. She would have killed this child as she had done others had I not placed her under the guard of two strong, determined women on whom I could absolutely rely. You may imagine the state of her mind toward me during that period. If she talks with you on the subject—which I am sure she will not unless you begin it—she will depict me as a monster in human form. Now, Ella, you know the circumstances, and you ought to be able to judge impartially. Was I justified, or was I not?"

Mrs. Drew hesitated to answer. She said she could not imagine such a condition of things. Her own married life was so cloudless that she had nothing to guide her. But she did know George and believed in his uprightness. If he had taken severe measures his provocation was excessive.

"You must see my baby, the first thing," he said, as they reached the house.

The child's nurse, a matronly woman named Mrs. Reynolds, brought forth the conquering heroine as

soon as she heard Mr. Brixton had arrived, and the young lady won the heart of her "Aunt Ella" instantly.

"How lovely she is!" was the warm exclamation with which the child was greeted. "See her hold out her little hands! I never saw a brighter child of her age. Come to me, sweetheart!"

Blanche, who had twined her arms around the neck of her father, lifted her head from his shoulder and gazed in the direction of the unfamiliar voice. Then, in response to another invitation, she plunged into the embrace waiting for her.

Reynolds retired and the two friends were alone with the child.

"And you say Emma has never seen her?" asked Mrs. Drew, incredulously. "Never?"

"Not once."

"Then she shall. It is an outrage. She cannot be made of stone. One glance at the dimpled face will win her, I am sure. There is no woman living who could look at this child, and realize that it was her own flesh and blood, without an overwhelming desire to take it to her heart."

George Brixton started.

"But I should never permit her to do that!" he said, quickly. "This is not *her* child; it is mine, all mine! She has forfeited every right she ever had in it. I would not let her touch it for all New York!"

His manner was so earnest that his friend was abashed for a moment.

"Now it is you who are unreasonable," she said, at last. "A mother cannot forfeit her rights in her baby. No matter what she has done, this is just as

much hers as yours. If she can be made to think so, you ought to thank God !”

He refused to be convinced in the least.

“I should be afraid to let her take it,” he said. “I should tremble if Reynolds were to let Blanche out of her sight. The bitterness Emma still feels toward me might find a vent on this little one. No, you must not try to alter her determination. Disagreeable as things are, a word from you might make them infinitely worse.”

“Ah !” she replied. “You are hard and unforgiving !”

“But you spoke as severely of her as I, a few moments ago.”

“Of what she had done, yes. But I would allow her to repent. Think what is before you. Thirty, forty, fifty years of this loveless life, this hatred toward the mother of the child you adore. What will you tell Blanche, when she is old enough to inquire why her home is different from that of other girls ?”

Mrs. Drew held the child in her arms, stroking its head as she spoke ; and the emotion she felt made a tremble in her voice.

“What shall I tell her ?” he repeated. “I shall tell her the truth ! Yes, I have made up my mind to that. I have had time to think of a great many things, Ella. Most children have two parents who share the responsibility for their bringing up. Blanche will have but one. Between us there will have to be the double relation of father and mother. I will tell her the truth, no matter what her inquiries are.”

The lady shook her head again.

"It is not feasible; you can't do it," she replied. "You will find it out, before she is five years old. As to her mother, leave that a little to my judgment. I want to know her line of defense."

To this Brixton gave a reluctant consent, but he added that the orders of Mrs. Reynolds would be relaxed in no way. Blanche must always be either in her custody or that of her father. He would not trust his wife with her on any consideration.

"You would trust her with me, I think," said Mrs. Drew, smiling.

"Not to take her out of Reynolds' sight," he answered, firmly, "in a house where Mrs. Brixton lives. You are neither quick enough nor strong enough to cope with her. I will bring Blanche to Markham, by-and-by, for a visit, and then you can have her all you wish."

"If you came with your child and not your wife, it would make gossip," suggested Ella.

"Oh, that's a thing I must expect," he said.

He held out his arms for the child, who went back to him, cooing softly, and then he rang the bell for the nurse.

When Reynolds reappeared, he gave the child to her and asked her to show Mrs. Drew to the guest chamber.

"Don't relax your vigilance," he added, significantly. "Never leave Blanche for one instant, when I am not present."

"I understand, sir," was the quiet reply of the woman.

CHAPTER X.

"I NEVER HAD A CHILD."

Mrs. Drew's visit to the Brixtons was not without its effect, in a certain way. She did not accomplish a reconciliation between the estranged husband and wife, nor did she succeed in arousing a love of her child in the breast of the mother; but she relieved the extreme strain of the conditions prevailing and made them less distressing to all parties.

Her first care was not to violate any of the restrictions that George had put upon her, in relation to Blanche; though, whatever her disposition in this respect, the faithful Reynolds would have prevented her overstepping the rules established. She was determined, however, that Emma should see her baby, and she studied out the way to arrange this with the best results.

Mrs. Brixton welcomed the friend of her girlhood with her usual cordiality. She avoided any direct allusion to her husband as long as she could do so, but the peculiar arrangement of matters in the house made it impossible to wholly escape the subject.

"You must take as many meals as possible with me," she said, "and I also expect the greater part of your time will be spent in my company while you remain. I hope you have come for a good, long visit."

"Only a week or ten days," was the reply. "You

know I have left my husband and Minnie at home, and when away from them time will go very slowly, no matter what else there is to entertain me. Ah, Emma! You ought to see Minnie now! I would have brought her, but your own child is so young that I feared all your available room would be taken up."

The ice was broken and Mrs. Brixton did not evade the issue.

"My child?" she repeated, with a rising inflection. "Perhaps you mean Mr. Brixton's."

"Oh, Emma!" The words came with a long drawn sigh. "How can a woman who has been through the experience of childbirth speak thus of her offspring? There are fathers who refuse to admit their paternity, but to a mother there can be no such thing as doubt."

Mrs. Brixton reiterated her statement.

"I don't know what you have heard," said she, "but I repeat that I have no child. It is a long time since I have even had a husband. The man whom I once called by that name proved to be cruel, revengeful and cowardly. Whatever regard I had conceived for him could not survive this treatment. I hear that *he* has a child. I have never seen it, nor do I wish to. And now, let us drop the subject, for it is most distasteful to me."

Thinking it wisest not to press the matter at that time, Mrs. Drew attempted to obey the request. But whatever form the conversation took, her husband and Minnie were forever getting into it. Her mind was too full of them to keep them out. It was "Stephen" who had said this and "Minnie" who had done that, in spite of all she could do.

Even though she ceased to speak of George and Blanche, they came before her vision at such times, and the situation was frequently very awkward.

"I don't believe I can stand it much longer," she said to Brixton, on the third day. "I must have it out with her, and if she takes it too hard I must leave sooner than I expected, that's all."

"You will have to leave *her*, perhaps," he smiled in return, "but you will not need on that account to cut short your visit with *me*. My part of the house is amply sufficient for your accommodation."

There was a beautiful picture of little Blanche—taken just before Mrs. Drew's arrival—a photograph done in water colors in the best style. The portrait was of such excellence that the artist had made a copy on his own account and placed it in his window as a sample of the quality of work customers might expect. On one of her walks Mrs. Drew saw this duplicate, and she resolved to show it to Mrs. Brixton the next time they were out together.

"I am thinking of getting some photographs while I am here," she remarked, pausing at the window as they were strolling down Broadway. "They seem to do very good work in these places. Wait a minute. Aren't those colored ones lovely? Oh, look at that beautiful child! Did you ever see such a perfect little darling!"

Mrs. Brixton looked at the picture and admitted that the subject was very pretty indeed. Unable to control herself a minute longer, Ella clasped her friend by the arm and told her the truth.

"Emma! It is your own little baby!"

For a moment the mother trembled under the

pressure of her companion. Then she became granite again.

"How can you be so foolish?" she asked. "I have no child."

The blood of Mrs. Drew was chilling in her veins.

"Her name is Blanche!" she whispered. "I never saw such a charming infant, except my own. Look again, Emma, and see how radiantly beautiful she is!"

Mrs. Brixton gazed unmoved at the photograph.

"I understand, I think," she said. "That is a picture of Mr. Brixton's child. And he calls her Blanche. I do not like the name, but people suit themselves in such matters. Shall you sit to-day? If not, we may as well be going."

The experiment, as far as could be judged by the result visible, was a total failure. Ella bit her lips and wiped a tear from her eyelash. What a heartless woman Emma had become! She could hardly bear to continue the walk with her. As soon as they arrived at the Brixton residence she left her companion, and going to the room she occupied indulged in that luxury to the injured feminine soul, "a real good cry."

When George came she told him about it. He shrugged his shoulders, and said perhaps she would believe him now.

"Where most women have a heart, she has a piece of flint," he said. "The liquid that courses through her veins is not blood but wormwood. She is, in a certain sense, a madwoman. Her mania does not require that she be closely confined, so long as the objects of her special wrath are not brought under her notice; but I honestly believe she would

kill either Blanche or myself without compunction, if she could do so and escape detection."

Ella spent a few hours each day during the remainder of her visit with the woman she now disliked so much, merely for the sake of form. The afternoon before she was to go, Mrs. Brixton abruptly alluded of her own accord to the subject her friend had decided to avoid.

"I feel, Ella," she said, "that you think me wholly to blame in the matters that have estranged me from the person who was once my husband. I have no intention of arguing the case with you, for we should come to no agreement. I never speak to him and hope I shall not be obliged to. So long as he continues to support me as well as he is now doing, and to give me the same perfect liberty of action, I shall not interfere with him or his. The notion which he entertains that his infant is in danger from me is absurd. He might act a little more like a rational being, and there would be less danger of the neighbors getting the impression that this is a private lunatic asylum."

George heard this, and though he said he should not relax his vigilance in the least, it had an effect that was perceptible by degrees. During the year that followed much progress was made toward a less scandalous state of affairs. One of the things that came to his ears was a statement of the nurse, that Mrs. Brixton had been seen watching Blanche for minutes at a time, from her window, when the little one was in the yard, taking her airings. The gaze of the mother was reported to be calm and interested, and not in the least malevolent.

One day Emma took a step still farther in the

direction of disarming her critics. She opened her window and spoke to Reynolds.

"Is that Mr. Brixton's child?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the nurse.

"She must be about a year and a half old."

"Seventeen months, ma'am."

"She looks well."

"Very well indeed, ma'am. She has always been a well baby."

Another time, some weeks later, when Blanche had a fall and alarmed the neighborhood with loud cries, the window went up again.

"What is the matter?" asked its mother's voice.

"Baby fell and bruised herself a little. It is nothing serious."

"Are you sure she has not broken a bone?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am. She has only scraped a bit of skin off her forehead."

Blanche ceased her cries, and realizing that the lady was inquiring about her hurt, looked up at the unfamiliar face and exhibited her bruise, calling attention to it with her chubby fingers. The lady bowed to show that she understood, but presently arose, shut the window again and went away.

A few months later Mrs. Brixton took a new idea into her head. She came down in the absence of her husband, and wandered through the rooms he occupied, to the astonishment, and somewhat to the consternation, of the servants there, who did not know whether they ought to permit the intrusion, and yet felt no authority to prevent it. Reynolds, whose charge was asleep at the time, accompanied her master's wife at a respectful distance, but Mrs. Brixton walked with her hands clasped behind her,

as if to show her pacific intentions. When she came to one room the nurse said simply, "The baby is asleep in there, ma'am," and the mother turned away, like a child when told that a certain direction is forbidden.

"I wish she wouldn't, but I can't see how to help it," was Brixton's comment, when he heard of this. "You must keep your eyes on Blanche, though, Mrs. Reynolds. Perhaps it was only a freak, and she won't come again."

But she did come again, and after awhile it became a daily habit of hers to descend to the lower part of the house, during the afternoon, when she was certain her husband would be out. She talked with no one except Mrs. Reynolds, and only a very little with her. If Blanche were awake she observed the child slightly, and sometimes, though seldom, spoke of her appearance, or asked after her health quite as if she were the daughter of people in whom she took no particular interest.

Brixton was informed of everything that occurred, and his fears wore away gradually. On the succeeding spring he took a short vacation—only a few days in extent—and went with Blanche and a young nurse that he had engaged for the trip, to Markham. Here he bore the cross-questioning in relation to his wife with equanimity, responding to inquirers that she was not very well and did not feel like taking a journey. Mr. and Mrs. Drew welcomed the visitors warmly and Blanche was taken to their hearts without restriction.

"I thought you were going to tell the truth, at any cost," remarked Ella, one day, when George had just repeated the stock story about his wife's

health to a person who stopped to speak to him. "I knew you would learn to prevaricate like the rest of the world, if you were only given a little time."

"You did not understand me," he answered. "I never said I should tell everything to curiosity-seekers who chose to bore me with questions. I treat them in any way that seems best for the moment. But to Blanche I shall never utter a deception. Whatever she asks me shall be answered as honestly as I can find words to express."

Mrs. Brixton had not been informed of her husband's intended journey and she did not ask about it until the second day.

"Where is your child?" she inquired of Mrs. Reynolds, after waiting as long as she thought advisable for the woman to say something of her own accord. "I have not seen her all day long."

The woman replied that she had gone out of town.

There was a dead silence for some minutes. Then Mrs. Brixton asked, in a low tone, if she would remain long.

"I don't know exactly," said Mrs. Reynolds. For this was what Brixton had told her to say in case she was interrogated.

The next day Mrs. Brixton came down earlier than usual and remained most of the morning. After lunch she returned and stayed all the afternoon. Several times she went to the street windows and peered through the curtains, as if she thought one of the passing cabs had stopped at the door.

At night the light in her window on the second floor burned late. Passers on the other side of the street saw a white-robed figure crouched at the sill

In the morning she came down again early, and watched the nurse as she received the mail from the postman, noticing that she opened none of it, after inspecting the addresses. But neither did she readdress any of it, which intimated that the wanderers would soon return.

It was on the third day after this, that Mrs. Brixton spoke again to Mrs. Reynolds about the absent child. She had been out for a walk, and on her return she came into her husband's apartments without going first to her own rooms.

"Has your little girl got home yet?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Not yet," was the composed reply.

"You—you are expecting her?"

"No."

Gathering up her draperies, Mrs. Brixton left the room and went upstairs. The maid who served her reported to the cook that she did not touch the dinner. During the evening Dr. Robertson, who still attended the family when his services were required, was sent for. He told Mrs. Reynolds when he came down that it was nothing serious, no more than a severe attack of nervousness, such as Mrs. Brixton was subject to.

"Where's Brixton?" he added, shortly.

"Out of town," replied the quiet Reynolds.

"I know that," said the doctor, with a snap.

"But where? I want to write to him."

"Leave the letter here and I will send it."

"The devil! I will do nothing of the kind. So he wants to keep his whereabouts a secret, does he? Well, I'll wait till he returns. When is he coming?"

"I don't know."

The physician grew impatient.

"Confound it, woman! I don't mean to an hour or a minute! Is he coming within a day or two, or will it be a month?"

"I don't know."

Muttering something about parrots Dr. Robertson beat a baffled retreat, and Mrs. Reynolds returned smiling to her sitting-room.

Midnight was striking on that very evening when the lost ones came home. Brixton ascended the steps with his sleeping daughter in his arms, and assisted the younger nurse to undress her and place her in her cot bed. Bending lovingly over her, he was aroused from a reverie by Mrs. Reynolds, who had hurriedly donned a portion of her attire and hastened to see them both.

"Perfectly well," he responded to her first inquiry. "Never better in her life. And how have you been yourself, Reynolds?"

"As usual," she said. "We have all been well, sir, but—but Mrs. Brixton. She had the doctor twice."

"M—m. What was the matter?"

"He said it was a nervous attack. You see, sir, she was down here most of the time after you left; and she asked after Blanche; and I couldn't tell her how long you were to be away, for you did not let me know exactly; and she seemed very uneasy; and when she went back upstairs she walked her room a good deal; and that evening she had asked me again—that evening she was taken—and I could not answer her; and she did not eat her dinner, and then Rachel went for the doctor."

Brixton gazed longingly at his sleeping child, as

if he envied the lids that hid her sweet eyes from him.

"She asked for Blanche, did she?"

"Yes, sir, and she seemed very anxious. I suppose you would not have liked me to tell her anything, would you?"

The husband straightened up in his chair.

"Certainly not!" he said.

"Dr. Robertson tried hard to find out where you were, too," continued the woman, "but he learned nothing from me."

"That was right," said Brixton, reflectively. "He might have told her. Be more careful than ever to-morrow, Reynolds. Keep Blanche out of sight as much as possible."

Then he kissed the child reverently, and with a peaceful smile went to his chamber.



CHAPTER XI.

MOTHER LOVE PREVAILS.

But this state of things could not go on forever. A couple who have sustained the relationship of husband and wife must find peculiar difficulty in living in one house in a state of armed neutrality, especially when there is a child to complicate the situation. It happened that Brixton came home one day and found his wife in his portion of the premises. To be sure, she withdrew immediately, but there was time to allow a dark cloud to form on his brow

which she did not fail to notice. He did not want her there at any time, even when he was absent, and he debated for some days whether to leave word that she must not pass her proper boundaries.

"Why can't she stay on her side of the line, as I do?" he muttered, in speaking of the matter to Mrs. Reynolds, with whom he naturally grew confidential. "I don't go into *her* rooms, prowling about."

The woman smiled knowingly.

"Perhaps you would, if Miss Blanche was there," she said.

"What is Blanche to her?" he demanded, hotly. "If she continues to annoy me I will take the child away where she never will see her. I never heard of such effrontery. I am afraid, Reynolds, that you make her too welcome here. A little coldness on your part might signify that she is not wanted."

Mrs. Reynolds made haste to defend herself.

"I have been anything but cordial, I assure you," she said. "We never, as you might say, talk together. It's only a word on either side, and then a long silence. Of late I have got to pitying her, but I've said nothing to show it."

Brixton opened his eyes wider.

"To pitying her!" he echoed. "On what account?"

"Why, sir, anybody can see that she suffers terribly. Her hair is growing white, and her maid tells me she sleeps badly. She is a most unhappy woman, sir, and one must notice it, if he has a heart in his bosom."

Mr. Brixton felt that she was arraigning him before the bar of her sentimentalism, and he resented the act mildly.

"Then I have none in mine," said he, "for I have noticed nothing of the kind. You imagine a great many things, Reynolds. I know more about the composition of that lady's mind than you do. Her people grow gray early; mine do not. If mental troubles turned hair white I should be crowned with snow already."

Mrs. Brixton knew instinctively that her husband did not like to meet her in his part of the house, and she tried not to encounter him there again. Two or three times, however, meetings took place unexpectedly, when he came home for something he had forgotten, or remained longer after lunch than she thought he would do. Not a word passed between them on any of these occasions. Finally, three years after she had heard the sound of his voice addressed to her, she received a note in his handwriting, to this effect :

"Mr. Brixton, having reserved the lower part of his house for his own use, objects to uninvited visits from any person whatsoever. If the annoyance from that source is repeated he will be obliged to remove from these premises and assign the other tenant new quarters in a separate locality."

After that the wife did not venture to intrude upon her husband's apartments. She sat a great deal, however, at the rear window, where she could see Reynolds on sunny days, amusing the child in the yard. Mrs. Brixton's maid was also deployed as a skirmisher, to call attention to any excursions that might be made with Blanche from the street side of the residence, and as the girl was on good terms with Reynolds she usually knew in advance when to

look for such sallies. The mother showed her interest in the child in other simple ways, such as leaving a door open at the top of the stairs when Blanche was passing in or out of the lower hall, to catch the faint sound of her voice; and on days when the weather kept her indoors altogether, she haunted the vicinity of the furnace register, where her anxious ears could detect now and then the treble of a baby tongue.

In this way another year went by.

One day Blanche was taken with a severe illness. It was one of those attacks to which children are subject, and Dr. Robertson could only say to the father, with a grave face, that he "hoped" she would recover from it. "Hoped!" The very word implied doubt, and the distracted man stayed by the bedside for three days and nights, unable to think of sleep for himself while the light of his soul hovered between life and death.

At last, overcome with exhaustion, he permitted himself to be led to his own chamber, where he fell into a profound slumber that lasted for seven hours. It was in the middle of the night that he awoke, and starting like a sentinel who has slept on his post, he hastened back to the side of his sick child. His slippered feet made no sound on the carpets, and he entered the room before any of the occupants heard him.

There were three persons there, besides Blanche. Dr. Robertson sat nearest the door. Not far from him was Mrs. Reynolds. And kneeling by the bedside, with its arms thrown across the coverlet, with one of the child's hands clasped in its own, was a

third figure, which the father immediately recognized as that of his wife.

With the instinct of preserving his adored one from threatening danger Mr. Brixton took one stride in the direction of the bed, when he was arrested by the physician's hand placed firmly on his sleeve.

The eyes of the men met, the one nervous and excited, the other quiet and determined. Much may be said without audible words. Dr. Robertson told Mr. Brixton with that look that he must not make a scene there, because it might disturb the slumbers of the child, and that if he would retire to a more retired spot he would discuss the matter with him.

Brixton glanced with pain at the figures on the bed and by it. Mrs. Brixton was too absorbed in her vigil to know what was going on so near her, and suspected nothing. There was a moment of irresolution and then the father yielded. He saw that the doctor was right, that he could not utter a sound without danger of doing harm. He lifted a finger warningly to Mrs. Reynolds, who nodded to show that she understood, and would watch over Blanche with the greatest care. Then he permitted Dr. Robertson to draw him slowly from the room into another some distance away.

"Don't speak yet," said the doctor, as soon as they were alone, with the doors closed behind them. "Hear what I have to say. In the first place, your child has passed the danger point, and is now certain of recovery. At this moment she is having a sweet and refreshing sleep. She will recognize you when she awakes."

The overjoyed listener would have embraced the

bearer of this delightful news, had he been allowed to do so. His eyes filled with tears of pleasure.

"Now," pursued the physician, after a slight pause, "for the other matter. As you know, I have been for several years, not only your medical adviser, but that of your wife. Don't cavil at the term," he added quickly, seeing that Brixton was about to interrupt him. "She is your wife before the law, whatever your differences have been; and she is the mother of the little girl there, as I can swear. Blanche has been very ill. No one could say up to five hours ago that she would escape with her life. Her mother begged an opportunity to see her, begged it on her knees, with tears streaming down her cheeks. Do you think I am made of adamant, to refuse her? I admit I did not intend you to know it. I thought you would sleep till daylight. When you came in and found her there I could not let you imperil your daughter's recovery."

Mr. Brixton's face, which had beamed with joy at the news of Blanche's condition, was now thoroughly clouded.

"I don't wish to criticize you," he said. "You were placed in an embarrassing situation. But you cannot imagine what a jar goes through my nerves whenever I see that woman trying to mix herself in Blanche's life. You know the history of her birth—I need not repeat it. Her mother cast her off completely. She not only would not look on her face, but she threatened—"

Dr. Robertson interrupted with an impatient gesture.

"I have heard that often enough," he said, "and it has now all the lack of charm of disagreeable

ancient history. Most of us have committed mistakes. How long should a penitent woman be punished?"

A sneer crossed the face of the husband.

"Who says she is penitent?" he asked. "She has never spoken a word or written a line to me that showed it."

"Are you blind!" exclaimed the physician. "Have you seen the way she haunted your rooms, when you were absent, till you forbade her to come—have you listened to Mrs. Reynolds' story of the sad face at the window whenever the child has been taken into the yard—have you watched the prostrate figure in the other room a moment ago—and yet understood nothing! A thousand letters could not tell as much as one glance at the form by that bedside. It is her child that lies there,—a child that she loves as only a mother can. If she came to you and begged your pardon with all the contrition in the world, would you grant it?"

Brixton walked to a window and looked out. The first signs of dawn were becoming visible. A few lights could be seen in the houses to the rear of his own.

"I don't want to seem like a brute," he said, presently, turning abruptly to face his judge. "I had as tender a heart once as ever beat in a human bosom. That woman's conduct drove all the softness away. Doctor, I think not only of this child, but of those others of which she robbed me. My life is broken in twain because of her. Except for Blanche I would not care to live an hour. I have tried to treat Mrs. Brixton with respect, during the years last past. I have provided for her, according

MOTHER LOVE PREVAILS.

so my means. I shall continue to do so, but—" and he paused to control his feelings—"she must keep away from me, and from my child. I cannot endure to see them together as they are now. She made her choice, which was to live a husbandless, childless life. If she has any honor left, let her abide by that decision."

Dr. Robertson shook his head slowly.

"I give you warning," he said, "that she will consent to this no longer. She knows she has a legal right to her child's society, and that she can enforce her claims."

The husband fairly trembled with rage.

"If she dares—" he began.

"She will, rest assured," replied the imperturbable physician. "As her medical adviser I shall recommend it. Why, man, nothing else will keep her from going to her grave within six months. I did not want to say this to you, but there is no help for it. You will either consent that Mrs. Brixton shall have an opportunity to see her child daily, or she will appeal to the law and compel you."

Mr. Brixton bit his lips and did not answer. He was in a quandary that did not admit of speech just then.

"Think it over sensibly," pursued the doctor, slapping him on the shoulder. "She does not ask for much, only that Blanche shall not be hidden from her sight, as she has been for the year past. She wants her brought to her apartments a few hours each day—kept in the charge of her nurse, if you will. Now, think it over. It will be either consent on your part, or a public scandal, a hearing before a court. And I tell you on my professional

reputation, no man sits on any bench in this State who will refuse to give her all she asks and more."

When the two men returned to the sick chamber the intruder had gone. A fortnight later, after the most intense mental struggle—and an interview with a prominent lawyer, who substantiated all that Dr. Robertson had said—Brixton astonished Mrs. Reynolds by telling her to take Blanche upstairs for a little while, to let her see that part of the house.

"She is not strong enough to stay out in the yard yet," he said, "and the carriage rides seem to tire her. Anything will do for a change, and she has never been above this floor. Don't stay too long, and be sure you keep the most perfect watch over her. We can't be too careful—now that she is convalescing."

Mrs. Reynolds smiled to herself, but her employer did not notice it. He took up a book and settled himself into a pretence of reading, for he could not think of going out of the house on that first occasion of Blanche's visit to the apartments occupied by his wife. Shrewd woman as she was, the nurse came back within an hour, thinking it wisest not to prolong his agony; but it seemed a month to him. When the child returned he took her in his arms as if she had been rescued from some terrible danger, and he did not leave her the whole of the morning.

How it came about no one could ever tell exactly, but the little girl drew her father and mother, slowly but surely, nearer together. Finally Emma did not spring up in affright if her husband happened to enter at the street door, when Blanche was visiting her, and George would stop and pat his child on the head even if his wife was coming down the stairs.

Blanche called her mother "Zat lady," and used to babble a great deal about her while at table. "Zat lady, zat nice lady give me zis," she would say, producing some toy; "zat pittty lady upstairs." And he grew accustomed to it, after a period when it cut him to the heart, until at last he did not mind it near so much.

The great change came, however, when he moved to another residence in the newer quarter of the city. Mrs. Reynolds and Dr. Robertson arranged things between them, without Brixton's suspecting their collusion, so that Mrs. Brixton's rooms were partly on the lower and partly on the second floor, thus bringing her and her daughter together without the old formality of ascending to another story. It took a long time to gain the next step, for the plotters knew that precipitation might spoil everything; but at last the father, mother and child would gather in the parlor after dinner, although no word was directly exchanged and seats were taken the farthest possible from each other. And later yet, in some mysterious way, "ze nice lady" was urged so hard by Blanche to dine with her that she consented, and after that the strange family was always united—though still very much divided—at that meal.

Mrs. Reynolds, faithful to the end, was the boundary line on these occasions. She saw that both George and Emma were waited upon, and that Blanche had everything that was good for her. Mrs. Brixton never spoke except to utter a "yes" or "no." The father and daughter monopolized the conversation; or, to put it even more accurately, Blanche did nearly all the talking, for which she proved fully competent.

But the worst was over, so far as outward show went. And when Ella Drew came to see her friends, on the occasion of Blanche's sixth birthday, bringing her husband and Minnie, she declared that she never would have believed so much could have been accomplished in the way of making those people behave decently to each other.

CHAPTER XII.

FORGIVENESS AND DEATH.

Behaving decently as far as the outside world can see is, however, far from fulfilling the requirements of a true marriage. Mrs. Drew could not end this visit without making a vigorous attempt to remedy the unfortunate condition of things she found, and for which she had always felt a certain sense of blame. Her first approach to the subject was made with Brixton. He had told her of the incident during Blanche's illness, and explained that it was on account of Dr. Robertson's insistence that the child was now allowed to be with considerable freedom in the company of her mother. There was nothing, however, in his manner or tone that implied the least affection toward the woman who was by law his wife.

"I am glad to see so much of an improvement," said Ella, earnestly. "It leads me to hope for a still greater one in the future."

"You see all you will ever see," was the cold response.

"You would have been equally certain that the present conditions could never prevail," smiled Mrs. Drew. "I notice that Blanche now speaks to Emma by the name of 'mother.' As she grows older she will wonder that her parents act unlike those of other girls."

Brixton shook his head.

"Blanche is no common child," said he. "She understands a great deal more than you give her credit for. Although she calls Mrs. Brixton 'mother' she means nothing by it. She cares quite as much for Reynolds or Rachel as for her."

The listener shuddered.

"Oh, why can't you forgive and forget all that is past!" she cried. "Why can't you and Emma begin life over again? It is terrible, the way you are living, with hate where there should be love, distrust where there should be confidence—you, the father and mother of that dear child!"

Brixton drew a long breath. She had aroused all that was most earnest in his nature.

"Ella," he replied, with a tender smile, "you are too good for such a world as this. There are times when it is one's duty to *remember!* A renewal of the marriage relations between Mrs. Brixton and myself would be one of the most horrible things conceivable. I know her so well that I never could respect her; she has hated me so long that love is out of the question. You and I do not differ as to what marriage is for. Should I take to my arms, then, a woman who would try to set the mark of Cain upon her brow each time the Almighty Father put his seal of blessing on her? Worse! Shall I give into her keeping—her education—that pure young soul so

liable to contamination from false views of right and wrong? We are separated by a boundless sea, and thus we must remain."

"But," persisted Ella, "if she would come to you and swear never to repeat the follies of the past; if she were to ask your forgiveness and say that her views had changed; would you repulse her then?"

To this he answered that the possibility was too remote to make it worth discussing; and suddenly branched off into another subject, refusing to be led back to the one she most wanted to talk about.

With Mrs. Brixton Ella was no more successful. The wife was much broken in health and spirit, but she had no thought of renewing her marital relations. All she wanted was to see as much as possible of her child, for whom she had developed a positive craze. She asked Mrs. Drew repeatedly if she believed Blanche cared for her, and the visitor was obliged to perpetrate something in the nature of a pious fraud in making her answers. When they were together Ella could not help noticing the anxious eyes with which Emma watched every movement that Blanche made. When the child turned toward Mrs. Brixton for any cause the weary face was suffused with light. When they spoke together a new animation came into the careworn features. And when Blanche left the room the cloud that settled down upon the mother was pitiful to behold.

"Don't you think you and George could reconcile your differences?" asked Mrs. Drew one day.

"No, no!" was the quick reply. "Never!"

"Then you hate him still?"

"No, I do not hate him now, although he hates me. Do not speak of it. I only want my child. I

only want her love. I only ask, sometime before I die, that she may put her arms around my neck in the same way she does around his."

It was pathetic to hear her low words, and to see the dimmed eyes as she spoke.

"Blanche likes you, I am sure," said Mrs. Drew, as one puts arnica on a burn, to lessen the pain.

"Yes," was the sad reply, "but she feels a difference between me and him. She has an instinct that tells her I do not deserve her love. If I could live till she was a little older, till she had more of the feeling of a woman, more of the knowledge of what it means to be a mother, she might be better able to understand."

Mrs. Drew had not expected so much of a confession of fault as this. It pained her exceedingly, for she felt that this woman's punishment was bitterer than she had supposed.

"You don't think, do you," continued the mother, after a pause, "that he teaches her to dislike me? He would not deliberately try to do that, would he?"

"I am sure he does not," replied Ella.

"Then," said Mrs. Brixton, wistfully, and with an air of patience under martyrdom, "it may come, in time."

During the next seven or eight years matters went on with very slight change. Though feeble in health Mrs. Brixton showed a wonderful vitality, and kept about the house as before. The husband and wife did not go anywhere in company, and thus they added no one to their set of mutual acquaintances. Mrs. Brixton found a new source of entertainment,

however, when Blanche was nine or ten years of age. She joined a church.

Mr. Brixton paid little attention to this episode, and certainly cared nothing about it ; though it was brought to his attention, in several disagreeable ways, that the church-members had taken up the cause of his wife against him, after the manner of their kind. He drew the line, however, when her pastor came to visit him and give advice which he considered impertinent.

“You will pardon me,” said the clergyman, “but Sister Brixton is very dear to our congregation, and we know it is the desire of her heart that her husband should be brought into the fold. Cannot I persuade you to accompany her next Sunday?”

Mr. Brixton looked the speaker over from head to foot.

“Next Sunday,” he responded, slowly, “I have an engagement to go driving.”

The minister looked properly shocked.

“You have a little daughter,” he said, upon recovering, “who ought to be in one of our Sunday-School classes. If you would send her—”

“She is too young to understand such matters,” said Brixton. “When she is old enough to judge I shall allow her to do as she chooses.”

This shocked the minister even more than the remark which had preceded it.

“I am sorry you hold those views,” he said, with a modest cough. “Of course I do not question your right to think as you please. But I want to ask you if you would object, in case her mother wished to take the child—”

Then Brixton's eyes flashed and he forgot his good nature.

"I should object decidedly," he retorted, rising to leave the room. "I wish you good-day."

The conversation was held in his office, and he left the clergyman standing there looking at the door that had closed behind his late companion.

The report of these scenes, duly spread among the congregation of the church Mrs. Brixton attended, drew forth a unanimous opinion that Mr. Brixton was a wretch. Some of the ladies remarked audibly that they wished he had *them* to deal with for awhile. A committee, self-formed for the purpose, called at the residence of Mrs. Brixton to condole with her.

"It is a shame, the way he treats you," said one sweet creature, who weighed about three hundred pounds. "If it were my case I would apply for a divorce; yes, I would."

"Oh, no, you quite misunderstand the matter," protested Mrs. Brixton, confusedly.

"Not at all!" exclaimed another lady, who had reached the age of sixty and who might have tipped the scales, in the buff, at seventy-five. "If I were you, Mrs. Brixton, I would take her to church in spite of him. A man has no right to dictate what shall be done with a girl, any way!"

It was in the hottest season of the year, and the door that led from Mrs. Brixton's rooms into the hallway was wide open. Blanche heard every word from the parlor, where she was sitting, with a book in her hand, and her young bosom swelled with indignation. When the committee came downstairs she met them, her eyes flashing defiance.

"You need not come here again," she cried, "if you want to say such things about my father! He knows better than you whether I ought to go anywhere or not. You are mean, cruel things to call him names, and I shall tell him just as soon as he comes home!"

The ladies drew their skirts closer around them.

"What a forward child!" said the stoutest one. "Really, I never heard anything quite so impudent!"

"Most extr'ordin'ry!" declared another. "If she were mine I should spank her and put her to bed."

Blanche, who in her brief life had never had such language addressed to her, walked up to the latter speaker and put her face within five inches of hers.

"Would you!" she cried, passionately. "Perhaps you are not big enough!"

At this unpleasant juncture Brixton arrived. He stared from one to another of the women who filled his hallway, and then at his daughter, almost hysterical with anger.

"Blanche, my darling," he said, "what is the matter?"

The child flew to his arms, and her voice was full of sobs as she replied:

"They said you were—a—a brute! and that you had no right to say what should be done with me, because I am a girl! And that mother ought to take me to church in spite of you! And when I told them they must not call you names they said I ought to be whipped!"

Brixton turned and surveyed the group of women. He controlled himself with difficulty. All he did was to raise his arm and point meaningly to the

door. Not caring to prolong the interview the committee filed out of it as fast as they were able. When the last one had gone he closed the door somewhat loudly behind her. Then he touched a bell that stood on the table.

"Bridget," he said, as the domestic of that name made her appearance, "I do not wish you to admit any of those people who have been here to-day, should they call again."

Taking Blanche into the sitting-room he questioned her closely about the entire affair, and then bade her forget it as soon as possible.

From this time till Blanche was thirteen years of age there was little if any change in the arrangements of the Brixton household. After that I became a frequent visitor, and saw with my own eyes a great deal that was going on. The first time I met Mrs. Brixton was at a dinner to which I was invited. There was something very pathetic in her pale face, her nearly white hair and her subdued demeanor. She was like a criminal who is permitted for form's sake to dine at the table with others who have not forfeited their right to consideration. Within a few weeks, however, I became such an intimate friend of the family that I dropped in at all sorts of hours and began to see her alone. Mrs. Drew also came to stay a few weeks and I got well acquainted with her and won her confidence. Thus, little by little, those parts of my story that could not be obtained from Brixton were woven into the woof along with his recital.

I did not take sides with either faction, and I do not intend to do so now. Dr. Robertson used to talk with me a good deal, when he found the posi-

tion in which I stood, and I have seldom met a more interesting man. It was he who told me, at a time when Blanche was about fifteen years of age, that Mrs. Brixton would not live through the summer. He had informed no one else, and he cautioned me to say nothing. There was little to be gained by hastening the knowledge of any of the family on this point.

A few days before Mrs. Brixton breathed her last she began to realize her situation. When the doctor told her that she would not recover she neither said nor acted as if the news gave her pain. She had but one thought—Blanche.

"She *must* forgive me, before I die!" she said, over and over. "She must forgive me! Doctor, tell her what is going to happen. She will not refuse, when she understands it is her last opportunity!"

The physician promised to speak to the child at once.

"And your husband?" he added. "Is there anything you wish me to say to him?"

She shook her head.

"No, no! Only Blanche! All I ask is to have Blanche say she forgives me!"

Dr. Robertson prepared the young mind as well as he could for the interview so keenly desired. He told her that a very few days would elapse before her mother would be beyond the sound of her voice, and that she must do everything possible to soothe the troubled spirit before its flight.

"But what does she wish?" asked the girl.

"She wants you—to—forgive her," replied the doctor, solemnly.

Blanche eyed him wistfully.

"I never quite understood what she had done to me," she answered, slowly. "I have always known that something stood between her and my father; but he has never told me what it was, and I have hesitated to ask him. If you would explain, doctor, it might help me."

The worthy man of medicine felt a tingle go through all his nerves.

"I would not go too deep into it, if I were you," he said. "Your mother is dying. She wants to have you say that you forgive her. All you need to answer is that you do."

The young girl's eyes gazed fearlessly into those of her companion.

"Should one say she forgives without even knowing the injury?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, "when the person who asks it is on her deathbed. We cannot carry our resentments into the next world, no matter how deep the hurt."

Blanche did not know about this. She wanted to understand the reason why her home had been such a strange one in its relations between father, mother and child. The next morning, when she went up to Mrs. Brixton's room, she felt that she stood at the threshold of a great secret.

"I am going to die!" said the pale lips. "I am not as sorry for that as you, so full of youth and health, might think. But before I go I must hear three little words from your lips, Blanche—just these three—'I forgive you.'"

The daughter did not answer for several seconds.

"Can't you say it?" asked the feeble voice.

"Mother," said the child, raising her eyes, "I don't know what you have done that requires to be forgiven."

The sick woman half raised herself on the pillow.

"Don't you?" she asked, breathlessly. "Has he never told you?"

"No one has told me," said Blanche. "If you mean father, he has not said a word. I asked Dr. Robertson yesterday and he would not tell me, either. What is it you did to me, mother, that has made all this sorrow and pain?"

The invalid sank back in her place. How could she tell this child, in language such as she could comprehend? It was a task for which she had not prepared herself. Ten long minutes went by, during which there was no sound in the room, and then, with a sudden effort, Mrs. Brixton put her hand on that of her daughter, and began to speak rapidly.

"Blanche, when the Almighty called you out of his infinite wisdom to come to this earth, I tried to thwart his will. I knew that the bearing of a child meant suffering for a woman. I was selfish and did not want to assume the care of an infant. I was too content with ease to be willing to carry out my destiny, to fulfill the obligations that go with the wedded bond. I did what others have done, what hundreds are still, I fear, doing, made preparations to still the life in you before it came into the world. By Heaven's mercy I was prevented from carrying out my plan. In the anger that followed I refused to look at you, to give you a mother's care. My husband and I were torn asunder by my conduct. I came to my senses years after, and conceived as strong a love as ever found rest in a mother's heart,

but it was too late to undo what I had done. Since that day I have endured a punishment such as I never dreamed could befall a human being. If death releases me from it, then I shall welcome death. But I cannot rest even in the grave unless I have your forgiveness. Blanche, speak only those words, that I may rest in peace."

The young heart beat rapidly. She understood every syllable that had been said to her. Bowing her head she whispered the words as directed, and allowed her mother to press her pallid lips to her forehead. Then she arose and slowly left the chamber.

Dr. Robertson had come in and she met him at the foot of the stairs.

"Have you seen her?" he asked, anxiously, and when she nodded he looked the question he did not put into words.

"Yes, I told her I forgave her. I thought as you did that it was right to say so, if it would make her last hours brighter."

The doctor stared at the young face, drawn with new lines of grief.

"And it was not *true!*" he exclaimed. "You *do not* forgive her!"

"*Oh, how could I?*" cried Blanche, bursting into tears.

CHAPTER XIII.

"THE RISK IS TOO GREAT."

The Rev. Mr. Sanger was with Mrs. Brixton during her last hours, as was also Ella Drew. Both of them had been sent for at her request, and with the full consent of her husband. Neither, after listening to the dying wishes of the invalid, made any demand upon him for his presence in the sick-room. He had feared, in an uncomfortable mood, that they would do so, and had not been quite able to make up his mind what he should do if the call came. A few hours before the end Blanche was asked to come in again, and the lips that were so soon to be silent forever thanked her for the forgiveness she had pronounced on the previous day. Once more a kiss was pressed on her forehead, softly and calmly.

"I never saw a more placid death," said the Rev. Mr. Sanger, in his sing-song way to Brixton, when he called to make arrangements about the funeral. "It shows how little terror it has for one whose life has been in accordance with the Divine precepts. May we all meet it with equal confidence," he added, evidently as a side thrust at the husband. "The dear departed requested me to conduct the services over her remains. I would like to hear any suggestions you wish to make in reference to the matter."

Mrs. Drew was sitting in the room with the

gentlemen, but Blanche was absent at the moment. Brixton moved uneasily in his chair.

“Let me tell you, then, to begin with,” said he, “that your services must be very brief and simple. There is to be no parading of family affairs, either by allusion or inuendo. You may read the burial service, if you wish, and have a hymn sung. But that is all.”

Mr. Sanger’s ministerial eyes dilated. He had supposed that at this stage he would be allowed to have his own way, much as a coroner does at an inquest. He had known many “unbelievers” who quailed in the presence of the pastor, and permitted a funeral that irritated them merely because they had not the nerve to dictate to the contrary. Before his astonishment permitted him to frame a reply, Brixton spoke again.

“Another thing,” he said. “There will be no persons present except my own small circle of intimate friends and the servants of the house. That body upstairs is not to be paraded before the eyes of the public. You will be allowed ten minutes to finish your readings and prayers. And if there is the remotest reference to the ‘sorrowing husband’ the affair will be cut short summarily. I know the tricks you are capable of, sir, and I warn you I will have none of them !”

Mrs. Drew murmured “George !” as if to remind him of the solemnity of the subject, but he would not heed her.

“I am not going to tell the story of my estrangement from that lady to you,” he went on, looking straight at the clergyman. “I will say, however, that we have not been husband and wife except in

name, for sixteen years. Although there have been times when I held hard feelings toward her, I believe, upon my soul, all vindictiveness is over now. I simply desire to have none of those things which our circumstances would make ridiculous. Promise what I ask, and I shall have nothing more to say."

Mr. Sanger replied, haltingly, that it would be a great disappointment to the members of his congregation, who had a very high regard for Sister Brixton, and who had hoped the services would be held in his church. He also had prepared—ahem!—a brief tribute to her womanly virtues and Christian fortitude in the midst of her sufferings. And it seemed to him—

"I know, I know," interrupted Brixton. "I understand all that, but you can't do it. The only question is, will you come here and perform the service I suggest, or shall I send for another minister?"

With several hems and haws the clergyman finally gave the requisite promise, though sorely disappointed. He had intended to give the husband some very neat raps before a large and appreciative audience. On the day of the funeral he kept reasonably close to his agreement, though one or two allusions to his hope that this occasion would prove a blessing to those still without the consolations of religion grated on Brixton's nervous ears.

The conduct of Blanche was noticeable. She sat by the side of her father, listening to all that was said and watching all that was done, with the quiet, well-bred air of a well-trained girl of her age. On the way to the cemetery she held one of his hands in hers, but neither of them uttered a word. She

shuddered a little as the sods were thrown on the coffin, but there were no tears from either father or daughter, though Mrs. Drew and Minnie, who had come, and Mrs. Reynolds, and the servants, wept copiously. When the party returned to the house, Blanche felt its emptiness—that void which the dead always leave in the habitations where they have been known.

She had grown older, in the week that was past. She could no longer be spoken of as a child. Everyone of the household noticed it. She gave directions, and suggested things, and assumed control of the premises as she had never done before. And all the time she was thinking, thinking, thinking!

The only thing that was left in her conduct that reminded us of the little girl we had known was the love for her dolls. It was a wonder to see her, after giving orders about the house that took Reynolds' breath away, sit down to her work-basket and sew on a new dress or a set of underclothing for one of her inanimate charges. She took her hair that had hung in a braid and wound it in a knot at the back of her head; she had her dresses let down several inches; she looked and acted, in everything but one, three years older than she was. But the dolls found her the same careful mother that she had been when she first learned the use of needle and thread.

The neighbors' children—the very tiniest ones—were also brought in as frequently, if not more so, than before. The spectacle of a dozen of the mid-gets on her nursery floor at once, entertained in a fashion that delighted their young hearts, was one that I saw many times during the next year, in my calls at the house. She never seemed so happy as

when surrounded with these Liliputians, one of them in her lap and the others babbling in chorus about her feet.

One evening—it was fully a year after Mrs. Brixton's funeral—I happened to be spending an hour with my friends. Mrs. Drew was there, and her husband, and Brixton, of course, and Blanche was occupied with one of her children's parties, in the manner above described. As usual, when she was present, the young girl was the centre of attraction for all of us, and our conversation turned mainly upon the little visitors.

"I'll tell you what you ought to do, Blanche," said Mrs. Drew. "You should found an orphan asylum. Amusing children is evidently your forte. I think you are never quite happy unless you have them near you."

Blanche held a blue-eyed boy in her lap at the moment, and was engaged in trying to make a part in his very thin, curly hair.

"Yes," she replied. "I do love them. It always makes me sad when I have to send them home."

"Blanche will be a splendid mother," interposed Mr. Drew, and I felt at the instant that he had put his foot in it.

The girl leaned toward us, as we sat in the group watching her, and her sweet face lit up with a radiance wonderful to behold.

"Oh, I hope so!" she said, softly, clasping her hands together. "What must it be to feel that one of these creatures is your own—your very own! Yes, Mr. Drew, it is what I long for, what I dream of at night. I have seen it in visions, that little

baby nestling close against my heart, touching my face with its velvet fingers, breathing zephyrs upon my neck !”

I felt my cheeks reddening, and was ashamed at the sensation. In the presence of such purity what right had a mistaken education to manifest its teachings in the movements of my blood? I glanced at the others. Brixton was smiling upon his daughter, as if he fully approved of what she said. Mrs. Drew’s hand had stolen across that of her husband, to warn him not to pursue the subject farther. With a man’s lack of tact, however, he tried to set things right, and made matters worse.

“It will be a long time before you can think of marriage,” he suggested.

Blanche straightened up in her chair ; and the child in her lap, realizing that he was being temporarily neglected, pulled at the tiny brush she had been using and proceeded to disarrange the locks she had straightened out.

“Marriage !” she repeated. “I do not think I shall *ever* marry. The risk is too great to run.”

I glanced at Brixton again, and on his face was the same smile of approval, that same contented look that always illumined it whenever his daughter was near.

Blanche turned again to her charge and resumed her motherly attentions, while Mrs. Drew, with the tact that her husband did not possess, began speaking of matters outside the house.

It had turned out, after Mrs. Brixton’s decease, that George was now a very prosperous man. His experiments had resulted in producing the most popular baking powder on the market, and he owned

considerably the largest share of the stock in the company for which he had formerly worked. During the lifetime of his wife this fact had been kept secret, but later the true state of affairs was made public. In his generosity he had allowed Mr. Drew to purchase several shares at a nominal rate, when the capital was being increased, as a token of his esteem for that gentleman and his wife. It was his intention to retire from active labor soon and make a long tour abroad with his daughter.

"I am rich enough," he said, in reply to some remark that was made. "I little thought, when I entered the chemical works at Markham, that I should be able to own most of the concern within a quarter-century. The business has got beyond the possibility of failure. My goods are sold in every hamlet of the country, and are even being exported in large quantities. And yet," he added, with a touch of pathos in his voice, "my life has been a failure, after all."

The babies had now been dispatched to their several homes, and Miss Blanche was sitting with the rest of us, listening to the conversation. Her face clouded as she heard these words.

"Don't say that, father!" she protested.

"I must say it," he replied, putting his arm around the young form. "All the best of my youth was spent in mental darkness. There is something wrong with our marriage system. The women of to-day have an idea that wedlock is a mere pastime, in which all the pleasure and none of the responsibilities are to be theirs. I sometimes think it is time the entire institution was abolished—that we returned to a more natural state of living. Public

opinion ties many a couple together through weary years, when the best interests of both demand a separation. There are exceptions, of course, like yours, Mr. Drew, but I question if they are not in a great minority. What can compensate a man like me for the suffering I underwent during the first five years of my marriage?”

I looked at Blanche, uneasy that she should hear this debate, but she seemed so much older than formerly, so much wiser, that my fears were quieted.

“You ought to remember,” replied Mrs. Drew, “that your wife acknowledged her errors and bitterly repented of them. It is unfair to arraign matrimony on account of one unfortunate experience. Besides, there is no use in abusing an institution without which the world would soon come to an end.”

I had never heard this lady speak so earnestly. She appeared as if defending her sex in a body from the assaults of all time.

“If that happened—if the world came to an end,” retorted Brixton, good-naturedly, “the only harm that would result, so far as I can see, would be a falling off in the sale of my baking powder. But you need have no fear that the human race is going to die out on account of any change in the ideas regarding marriage. Before a great many years, my dear Mrs. Drew, there will be such a renovation of the status of woman that each one will select the father of her children, and dispense with his society whenever she finds it agreeable to do so. Then the thing we now call marriage will be looked back upon as an unaccountable custom of a benighted age.”

Mrs. Drew rallied to the emergency without delay.

"You controvert your own position," said she, boldly. "The greatest fault you ever found with a woman was her disinclination to become a mother. In the time you predict will not she be even less willing to assume that position?"

Blanche listened intently. I wondered what they could be thinking of to utter such things in her presence; but they seemed to say them, not only in spite of her being there, but for her special benefit.

"Women will be honest, when that time comes," said Brixton, "and honesty is the chief of all virtues, it seems to me. The hypocrisy that obtains to-day is simply horrible. Women and men enter into a marriage contract, in which certain things are specified and others understood. Then one of them, deliberately, with malice aforethought, as the indictments say, sets to work to deceive the other in a point of first importance. In other words, she cheats and defrauds her partner, as no one would think of doing in any other business that is transacted. The way to make the world honest is to give woman greater freedom. Take away the incentive to falsehood and she will rise above the petty meanesses that she now employs. I do not blame you for criticizing me. I cannot defend myself for my conduct toward Mrs. Brixton, except on the principle by which we meet a burglar with any weapon that is convenient. When I discovered her deception I felt insulted, robbed, outraged! I acted as a man driven wild is liable to act. Enfranchise woman—make her economically free—and such questions cannot arise. It will be for her to say whether she will be a mother, and no man can question her

decision. To-day she enters into a contract which common honesty requires her to keep—and a contract made by two persons cannot be broken at the whim of one of them without danger of protest when the discovery is made!"

Then he turned abruptly, to my consternation, and put this inquiry to Blanche:

"What do *you* think about it, dear?"

The girl raised her sweet eyes to her father.

"I don't know as I can tell you, exactly," she said. "I am sure—I am almost sure, at least—that *I* never shall marry."

"And yet you told us a little while ago," exclaimed Mrs. Drew, unguardedly, "that it was the hope of your life to have a child of your own."

"Yes," said Blanche, softly, turning her slow gaze toward the speaker.

It was with one movement that we looked at Brixton. Surely he would protest with vigor when he heard this home assumption of the doctrine he had been advancing.

But he only stroked the hair of the daughter who was dearer than life to him, and smiled at her with the same affectionate gaze.



CHAPTER XIV.

AN ARTIFICIAL RULE.

I do not want to make my story more circumstantial than is absolutely necessary to show you the way in which the central idea of Miss Brixton's life

was formed and grew until it controlled her actions. Most of us are what our parentage and environments have made us. The thoughts that fill our brains have not come there at random. They are the product of what we have seen and heard and read, combined with our natural and inherited bents and inclinations. Under other circumstances this girl would never have entertained the dreams that now influenced her. Under still other, but different ones, she would have had them dispelled by the counsels of those set to be her teachers and advisers. In order to understand how she has come to her present beliefs, in spite of the world, and has even had the courage to act upon them, you must know each step she took on that strange path.

Brixton had loved his child from her birth ; indeed—as he himself said to me more than once—from a time long anterior to it. As she grew to woman's estate this love deepened into adoration. Whatever Blanche did was right ; her conduct must not be questioned. He would have fought the universe for her sake, convinced that a concensus of opinion was worthless if it opposed hers. In return she gave him the fullest confidence and veneration. They talked together more like brother and sister—husband and wife, if you will—than father and daughter. He had never drawn any line that she feared to pass. She asked him every question that came into her head as freely as if he were her mother and physician combined.

When Blanche reached the age of eighteen she began a systematic study of medicine. She seized upon its revelations with the ardor of a young discoverer. Dr. Robertson asked her banteringly if

she intended to practice, and try to take his patients away from him. He was astonished at the things she learned in an incredibly brief space of time. She devoured the text-books as if they were caramels, and clung to volumes of lectures with all the delight usually shown for a romance. At the end of a year she triumphantly announced to the good physician that she knew as much as he, in relation to one of the greatest problems of life.

"And yet," she added, thoughtfully, "I know no more than every woman ought to know. I have only got acquainted with Myself. How do so many dare enter a state of motherhood with their eyes blinded by total ignorance?"

Motherhood, motherhood! Always motherhood!

"You must not get false ideas, my child," said Dr. Robertson. "While there are women too ignorant, there is also such a thing as being too wise."

"In what way?" she asked, eagerly. "You know a great deal, doctor, and I want you to be frank, if you think I am making a mistake."

"Well, to be plain," he replied, "our great-grandmothers knew almost nothing about these things and yet they got along very well. Nature is worth relying on a little. She has done pretty fairly, take it altogether, during the last fifty or sixty thousand years. It is bad policy for a man in my profession to say this, for maternity cases put a pretty penny in our pockets; but when a girl like you asks for the truth, you should have it. Another thing, Miss Blanche, while we are on this subject. There is no motherhood outside of wedlock that can be tolerated in a civilized country—none that will not bring to

its possessor a terrible load of ignominy and suffering."

He told me afterward that he was driven to this direct statement by the suggestions that had been dropped from time to time in his presence. He had been medical adviser to this family for nearly twenty years, and had seen some pretty hard moments there. He did not mean to be remiss in a duty as plain as this one, just for the sake of choosing delicate language or special occasions.

Miss Brixton's eyes brightened as she listened to him. She was very glad the subject had been introduced.

"Wise men have been mistaken before now," she answered, deliberately. "Tell me one thing before we go any farther: Is the rule of which you speak a natural or an artificial one?"

He smiled at the casuistic vein that he could discern.

"Artificial, decidedly," he responded. "So is everything in our lives, for that matter. You live in a house, while a savage occupies a hut. You eat with a knife and fork, he with his fingers. You wear clothes, even in the hottest part of the summer; he dispenses with them when they do not suit his fancy. We can't run against the dictum of Society, my dear girl, any more than we can against the law of gravitation, without getting hurt. But in reference to this matter, even the lowest savages have some form of marriage, the taking in a public manner of wife and husband. Look the entire world over, you will find it everywhere."

The young lady nodded.

"Yes, I have learned all that," she said. "In

southern Arrica the suitor has to pay a certain number of cows for his bride, while in parts of Europe he father has to give the cows to induce the lover to take her away. Women are captured by horsemen, bought in the market, cajoled by soft words, frightened by the fear of being old maids, seduced by love of finery, persuaded by the lack of other means to find bread. But, doctor, let us consider my special case, not the subject in the abstract. I am rich and independent. I have one craze that fills my waking and my sleeping hours. It is to have a child of my own! Now, merely because it is the custom, must I go through a ceremony that will bind me to some man I do not love, as long as we both shall live?"

The doctor regarded her with quiet gravity. He saw that she was wholly in earnest in her strange proposition.

"Wait a minute," said he. "You are young—eighteen, I think. Who can tell that your hero will not come to you within a few years, the man with whom you will be glad and proud to take your place as long as you remain on the earth?"

"There is no such man," said Blanche, positively. "The only man I shall care for is my father. And if I liked one ever so much, the demands of matrimony would make me hate him in a very short time. To know that I was tied to him, that I had *got to* love him, would take away any affection I might have developed. Besides, when the baby came, I could think of nothing but the child! Its father would be so neglected that he would have a right to complain, and then would come recriminations, quarrels, a divorce. How much better to

avoid all this by violating one little canon of what you call Society, and making a law to suit my particular emergency."

How pure and sweet she looked, as she thus threw down the gauntlet to all the human race! No passion but that of maternity filled her young soul. Dr. Robertson knew that a low or unworthy thought could not enter that vestal mind. Blanche had become a very handsome woman by this time, as she is still. Her body was well made, and of medium height; her limbs slender but round; her hair dark and combed back in a roll from her broad forehead; her eyes large and intelligent; her mouth sensitive; her lips neither too thin nor too full.

"I can only answer you," he replied, after a pause, "as I have done already. The notion you are harboring is simply preposterous. You will see it yourself, if you give the matter thought enough. And here is something that will show you at one glance how ridiculous the idea is. You would want, for your child's father, would you not, a man of good principles, one whose mental and physical endowment would be worth copying! How, in the name of Heaven, could such a man be found to join in a wicked and foolish onslaught against the plainest laws of an intelligent community?"

Miss Brixton bowed as he finished.

"In that last thought," she replied,, you have struck the only rock which I have seen in my course. It has occurred to me, exactly as you have suggested it; but there may be cases that prove an exception to the rule. I can imagine a man good enough to be my child's father, and noble enough to appreciate the sentiments that thrill me. I can conceive of such

a one relinquishing all claim to me whenever I should request it, as men do other high and honorable acts, because it was his duty! Doctor," she continued leaning toward him and speaking in a low voice, "I have a greater hope than the satisfying of this devouring anxiety to own a child—I want to prove to other women, in a like situation, that matrimony is not essential. Unwedded mothers have met with the world's scorn hitherto because they have become so through surrendering all that was best and bravest in their natures. I wish to show the world such a mother, actuated only by her highest ideals, that it may note the difference. You cannot claim that the two kinds of women would stand on the same plane."

Dr. Robertson was growing uneasier every moment. He did not intend, by the least inadvertence, to give the impression that he thought she had the right of her argument, in the remotest degree.

"What a child you are!" he exclaimed. "If you had mingled a little more with your sex you would know that they are poor logicians. They have been taught from their cradles, and from the cradles of their remotest civilized ancestor, that a child born out of wedlock curses itself and its mother. The world would have no faith in your purity merely because you claimed to possess it. You would be ostracized by all the women you would care to know, and avoided by the rest of mankind. One of the requisites of living in comfort is to maintain a good reputation. Destroy it by such a silly plan as you are carrying in that head of yours, and life will prove too short to regain it. Blanche, if this goes on, I shall have to talk with your father!"

This threat, if meant for one, only brought a smile to the girl's thoughtful countenance.

"We have discussed it a hundred times," she said.

"And he approves!" cried the doctor.

"Well," was the slow answer, "I don't think he does, entirely. But he has faith in me. He wants me to follow my ideals. If everyone else said I was in the wrong he would stand by me. That is the kind of father to have."

Dr. Robertson stamped his foot on the carpet.

"The kind of father to have," he corrected, "is one that would drive such nonsense out of your head as soon as he detected it there. He would know you were laying the foundation of a life of misery."

"Could it be worse than the one *he* led?" asked the girl, quickly. "He was married, for many years, to a woman whom he thoroughly distrusted and disliked. Under the system in which you believe she might have borne him half-a-dozen children, while abating nothing of the hatred that filled her. In that way motherhood becomes not only an accident, but a sad and unfortunate one."

The medical man fidgeted in his chair, and tapped the table repeatedly with a ruler that he had picked up.

"You are two or three centuries ahead of your time," said he. "When the reign of all that is good comes in, and woman has her own pocket-book the world over, I have no doubt some will adopt your scheme. But you cannot enter into this sort of thing alone. Why, you couldn't put on the costume of an Asiatic and walk down Broadway without attracting a crowd of hoodlums. We have to march pretty nearly to the step of the procession.

Marriage has its drawbacks, I admit. So does travelling by rail. I had a friend smashed up in a train a month ago, but if I want to go to San Francisco I sha'n't walk! Keep in the ranks, little one. All the men are not as black as your fancy paints them. I will undertake to find you a nice, respectable, gentlemanly sort of a man, if you will give me a commission to that end, who will treat you like a precious jewel of a wife, as you deserve to be. You shall have your husband, and your baby—yes, a dozen babies, if you choose—and all the proprieties, which are more important than you seem to think, will still be observed.”

Blanche refused to be convinced. She had learned from infancy to detest marriage. To her it meant a scowling husband in one part of the house and a discontented wife in another. She had seen unhappy families besides the one of which she formed a part. The really felicitous ones that she knew could be counted much more quickly. But the children—the little sunbeams that kept these homes from utter darkness—they were all lovely, all beautiful, in her eyes.

A child of her own! She pined for it, as the traveller on a long voyage pines for the shore. She craved it as the weary tramper craves the shelter that is at his journey's end. She gazed with swimming eyes on each young cherub she saw and murmured, “Oh, if it were only mine!”

Though without much religious training, she used to pray to the good God above that he would send her the desire of her heart. In her artless phrase she told him of the care she would give it,

of the pains she would take to teach it what was pure and right.

Dr. Robertson talked with Mr. and Mrs. Drew about this strange freak, as he called it, and they tried, as well as he, to bring Mr. Brixton to make a decided stand. All in vain. He said Blanche should be her own judge in everything. All that he had was hers. He would not attempt to influence her when her mind and conscience were set in any given direction.

There was serious talk of calling in a commission in lunacy to decide whether the father was not insane, but a sudden attack of illness turned all our thoughts in another direction. One day, when both the Drews and Dr. Robertson were present at dinner, as well as myself, Brixton was attacked with partial paralysis. Though he recovered enough in a few days to attend to his business affairs, the physician told us that he could not rely on a much longer lease of life.

"I want the truth, doctor," said the patient. "I am not one of those to whom you need fear being perfectly frank."

And he got it. He might live six months, at the outside. He might have another attack within a week that would render him incapable of motion.

I never expect to witness anything more perfect in its way than the closing days of George Brixton's earthly existence. He brought to bear the calm philosophy of one who counts death a mere episode in the career of mankind, one neither to be sought nor avoided by undue means. His business affairs were in such a condition, owing to his lifelong habits of order, that but little time was required to

dispose of them. He designated to his attorney the person whom he would select as manager, and divulged several plans for increasing the output of his product that he had hitherto kept to himself. His will made provision for several bequests to faithful employés, gave \$10,000 to Minnie Drew, "in recognition of the long friendship he had entertained for her parents," and the rest, without restriction, to his daughter.

Mr. Sparrow, the attorney, and myself, were to be executors and trustees. These matters arranged, Brixton devoted the balance of his time almost altogether to Blanche. He met us at table, for the board still held the little circle of friends that had become so deeply attached to him, and for an hour after dinner we always sat in the parlor together. The rest of the time he gave to her who was dearest to him.

It is a strange sensation to sit, day after day, with one whose physician has told him that any moment may see his vital powers numbed ; one who may, at a second's warning, drop his head upon his breast and utter his last gasp. But of us all, so far as appearances showed, the one who bore the ordeal the best was the self-poised daughter of our host. She told me afterward that her father had directed her to act precisely as usual, and thus give him the strength he needed to face the parting. Each day was arranged much as it would have been had he been merely taking a business vacation. They rode out together, read the papers and magazines, even went to theatres occasionally. I have heard their joint laughter coming from the next room, over

some witticism made by one or the other, and a chill has run down my spinal column.

Each time I ascended the front steps I looked to see if the undertaker's insignia ornamented the handle of the door. Each morning I scanned my paper to see if among the news items there was an account of the sudden decease of George Brixton, the wealthy manufacturer. But it was quite four months after the first shock before the second one.

Mrs. Drew was a religious woman, though, as some one has remarked of a similar case, "not offensively so." She did her best to persuade Brixton to accept the offices of a minister of the church, without exceeding the bounds of good taste. Smilingly thanking her for her kindness, he refused to accept her advice, saying that his views would not permit him to do so.

"Your views?" she repeated. "What *are* your views? Don't you believe in another life after this one?"

"I don't know," he replied, good-naturedly, "but I mean to find out. Unless Dr. Robertson is mistaken I shall learn more about these matters in a few weeks than any of these gentlemen who would be so willing to instruct me can tell. I am not impatient, Ella; I can wait."

She was dissatisfied, but was unwilling to annoy him.

"It is surely well to repent of our sins," she murmured.

"And I have repented of mine," he answered, soberly. "Their punishment already has been very heavy. If more is still due I will accept it uncom-

plainly. I never yet asked a creditor to take less than a hundred cents on the dollar."

When the inevitable hour came, Brixton passed, seemingly without the least sensation of pain. He was talking with Blanche in his library, and in the midst of a sentence he stopped. She summoned assistance and Dr. Robertson was sent for, but the heart had ceased to beat before he arrived. The daughter wept, it is true, but with a calmness that surprised her friends, in spite of what they had already witnessed. She answered all questions with fortitude and made preparations for the obsequies, saying she knew exactly what her father desired and would not depart from it in the slightest degree.

It was not a funeral at all, judged by the usual standard. The dead body lay during one forenoon in the library where he had died, open to the gaze of any of his acquaintances who cared to come. Hundreds of people, from the establishment of which he had been the head, from the various concerns that had dealt with him, and from the public at large, passed into that room, stood for a moment by the bier, and then went their ways. At one o'clock the more intimate friends bade good-bye to the form they had loved, the daughter last.

Five or six carriages followed the casket to its burial place in Markham. Here the entire town seemed to have turned out, but all they saw was the reverent lowering of the coffin into its grave, without a prayer or a hymn.

The next Sunday several clergymen took this matter as a text for their sermons, calling the attention of their congregations to the "heathen-like" interment, and thanking God that such events were

rare indeed in this part of the world. No matter how little men professed to believe in the Gospel while they were living, they generally appealed to its ministers when the dread Angel of Death had spread its wings over them. So said the clergymen of many churches, but not those of Markham. In that town they realized the temper of the people too well and maintained a discreet silence.



CHAPTER XV.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES.

One of the first things that Blanche did after the funeral was to persuade the Drews to make their home again with her. She had formed a deep attachment for all of them, and especially for Minnie, who was now a fine girl about twenty years of age. Mrs. Drew, bearing in mind some of the peculiar theories that Blanche was known to hold, hesitated a little about throwing her daughter into the company of that young woman, but the consideration that she herself would always be at hand to counteract any possible injurious effect turned the scale. And, a very short time after the new arrangement was made, an affair connected with her daughter made all her care necessary in another direction.

Minnie fell in love!

Now, there is nothing remarkable in a pretty girl of twenty falling in love; Mrs. Drew had supposed

that such an event would happen in the course of time with her daughter as well as others. But she did not quite fancy the young man for whom Minnie had gone through that process.

In this, it is only fair to state, she did not differ from many other mothers. The fond parent is apt to believe that there are few men fitted to mate with the treasure they have been at such pains to prepare for him. Young Mr. Bartlett seemed, however, in the anxious eyes of this mother, to lack completely the qualities which are essential to success in this world, to have much less than is necessary of enterprise and push.

Although twenty-five years of age he still lived at his father's, and apparently had no expectations other than those which would come to him from that source. He was a nice-appearing fellow, with his clothes and hair well brushed, and his shoes always polished. He made a very good sort of lover, without doubt, but would he shine equally well as a husband? Mrs. Drew had grave doubts on this score, and used to talk for hours to her husband about it.

Stephen Drew listened to all that was said and acquiesced in his wife's conclusions. He had never done anything else since he had known her. He did not suggest a way out of her difficulty, however, and she did not expect that he would. Minnie loved the young man with all her heart, and it looked more dangerous to put the parental foot down and declare that she must give him up than to risk the other horn of the dilemma. So it was settled that they were to be married, and the happiness on the faces

of the engaged couple offset in a measure the tears that filled the eyes of their elders.

"I hope they'll be happy," Ella said to Blanche, when she imparted to her that the event had been decided upon. "Say that you think they will!" she added, pleadingly. "It will break my heart if Minnie makes a mistake."

Miss Brixton shook her head with a serious mien.

"I don't believe in it at all," she said. "I think the time for that sort of thing has passed."

Mrs. Drew's brow was covered with wrinkles.

"Oh, what do you mean!" she cried. "Would you have every pretty girl grow into an old maid?"

"That," answered Blanche, slowly, "I would leave to herself to decide."

The matron recognized the hated theory she so much detested, and raised both her hands in protest.

"We must never talk of such things," she said. "I would rather see Minnie in her grave than— No, no! She will marry, and I hope—I hope so dearly— she will be happy; as happy as Stephen and I have been! Mr. Bartlett is young and we must not judge him too severely. The love of a good woman has done marvels for a man before now."

Blanche took up a magazine she had laid down and said, gently:

"Very well, Mrs. Drew."

Ella fidgeted in her chair, by no means content to let the conversation end in this abrupt manner.

"You have heard, surely, of cases of that kind?" she asked. "Women have redeemed even the most hardened husbands, many times."

"Yes," said Blanche, seeing that she was expected

to answer. "That is true. It is also true, Mrs. Drew, that many husbands have dragged the best of wives through experiences that one shudders to contemplate. I know women, and so do you, who would be a thousand times happier if they had remained single. I tell you marriage has become a lottery in which the great prizes are so few that they attract the world's attention."

"You think the chance of getting a good husband is worse now than formerly?" said Mrs. Drew, interrogatively.

"It is growing worse every day," was the calm reply. "And the reason is that woman, having become more intelligent, suffers under the anomalous condition which marriage brings to her. In spite of all the talk one hears, the wife is still the property of her lord. She must submit to him or make him submit to her. In the latter case she will have an apology for a husband, that will only earn her the derision of the rest of her sex. There are marriages where the participants are still happy, but for every one of those, there are a hundred where all that is best in both of them is trampled in the mire."

Mrs. Drew uttered a helpless little sigh.

"How do you account for the change that is going on?" she asked.

"By the fact that marriage is in a transitory period. Have you ever watched the evolution of a city neighborhood? First there is a street of good, plain, ordinary houses. Then business creeps in here and there, the better class of residents begin to move away, a disreputable set takes their places, and finally the whole thing is torn down, and great,

modern blocks are erected. The institution of marriage has reached the disreputable state. The next era will bring us something better."

The elder lady clasped her hands together.

"If you think such things, Blanche, you ought not to say them," she replied. "I would not have Minnie hear you for anything."

"Have no fear," was the quiet reply. "Knowing your prejudices, I have refrained from putting any extra sense into the head of that young daughter of yours. If she comes to me to be congratulated on her engagement, I shall do the best I can to conceal my apprehensions."

Tears filled the mother's eyes.

"You hope for the best, I am sure," she said, in a low voice.

"With all my heart," said Blanche, rising and going over to kiss her.

The wedding took place with considerable formality, as that was the wish of the bride, who had many friends who desired to witness the launching of her bark on what most young people believe a lake where storms are unknown. Their mistake is often as great as that of the navigator who applied the term Pacific to one of the most tempestuous of seas. The presents were "numerous and costly," and included some very handsome ones from Miss Brixton, who had a deep affection for the girl. The "happy couple" departed on a tour of thirty days, and at the end of that time went to live at the residence of Mr. Bartlett, Sr.

But a few weeks passed before Mrs. Drew came to Blanche with a long face, to tell her that the

prospect of motherhood already afflicted her daughter.

Miss Brixton stared fixedly at the lady as if she could not comprehend her expressions.

"Minnie to be a mother!" she exclaimed. "How happy she ought to be!"

"But she is not!" was the quick reply. "Just think how young she is and how short a time she has been married. I went over there this morning and found her weeping as if her heart would burst."

Miss Brixton's eyes opened wider than before.

"*You* had a child when you were no older than she!"

"Yes," admitted Mrs. Drew; "but things are different now. It is the modern custom to wait awhile, to give the wife an opportunity to enjoy life before dragging her down with the care of an infant. Why, it will make an old woman of Minnie at once. She can't go anywhere for the next two or three years. I consider it a downright misfortune."

"It is at least an incident to be expected," said Blanche, thoughtfully. "I don't see that she has a right to complain. This is what your dearly loved institution of marriage brings, Mrs. Drew. Mothers learn to dislike their offspring before they can see their little faces. I tell you it is horrible! I would go down to the Grand Central Station, and throw myself under the first train, before I would give any man the rights over me that the marriage covenant prescribes!"

Mrs. Drew could only murmur:

"Oh, Blanche!"

“ I would ! ” repeated the girl, throwing back her head. “ Why did Minnie marry, if the prospect of motherhood causes her such grief ? She could have kept up her engagement and enjoyed the society amusements of which she now so deeply bemoans the loss. If she wanted to entertain herself for the next three or four years with the pleasures offered by fashion, why did she not leave herself free to participate in them ? I have no patience with such folly. No, Mrs. Drew, I must speak my mind. Common sense seems to have deserted this part of the universe. You say Minnie is grieved because, being married, she is to have a child. How does she know she will not have twenty ? Every tear she sheds is a testimony that I am right in denouncing the entire edifice of matrimony as antiquated, unsuitable, unfitted for the intelligent women of the last half of the Nineteenth Century ! ”

Quite carried away with her feelings, Miss Brixton swept from the room. But the next time she met Mrs. Drew she went up to her impulsively and put her arms around her neck. And within a few days she called on Minnie and brought her some lovely lace for the garments she had already begun to fabricate.

Young Mr. Bartlett evidently considered that he had now done about all that should be expected of him. For his present income he intended to rely on the \$10,000 that his wife possessed. Minnie believed that she only did the right thing when she put the whole of her small fortune into his hands, and allowed him to invest it in a very neat business of which he knew nothing except that it would not soil his clothes ; and it took him an incredibly short

time to lose it all, with the help of a few "flyers," in the stock market. He had, it appeared, gone a little beyond the bounds of honesty in these transactions and used other people's names without consulting them. And the result was that about a month before his wife expected to add to his joys and cares he executed a sudden flight for parts unknown, and did not take the formality of leaving his address with anyone.

While no careful arithmetician could make out that the desertion of Mr. Bartlett was of any particular loss to Minnie—her money having already gone beyond repair—she had the bad taste to get herself into a violent illness over it, bringing on distressing complications. As the Bartlett family were not very cordial to her now, she accepted the hospitality of her mother and Miss Brixton, and went to the latter's home.

Then it was that Blanche laid aside for the nonce her theories and her revilings at the world in general and men in especial. No sister could have given more affectionate care than she gave to the deserted wife. She comforted her by repeated assurances that "Horace" would certainly return. She inserted in a *Herald* "Personal" an announcement to the effect that if H. B. would communicate with Mr. Sparrow, attorney-at-law, Park Place, he would hear of something to his advantage. She also visited the indignant creditors of young Bartlett and secured a writing that would relieve him from all danger of prosecution, at the expense to her pocket of a good deal of money.

With the new hope that these things would give to Minnie, Blanche counted on bringing her through

all right. Dr. Robertson said they ought to have the best effect. He agreed with Blanche that Bartlett would be better in a jail than by the side of the young woman he had proved so ill fitted to care for. They only thought, however, of what was best for the wife. If they could get him there before the trial hour they wanted to do it. But Bartlett, scared terribly by what he had done, was in the far West, hiding in a ranche—where he officiated as a cow-puncher, to the great loss of whiteness of his pretty hands—and knew nothing of the kindly efforts made in his behalf.

All the kindness that was showered upon the young wife, all the skill of the most competent physician, failed to keep her from relapsing into such a state that her life was for some days in mortal peril. Affected by its mother's condition, no doubt, the child breathed but a few hours. It was just as well, Mrs. Drew said, in a way that made Blanche shudder. Minnie would be better off without it, the way matters had gone.

Had she not felt that the cup of this woman was already full, Blanche would have expressed her sentiments on this observation in a decidedly sharp fashion.

Miss Brixton had observed the weak condition of the infant from the first and had refused to believe, with Dr. Robertson, that life could not be kept in it. She sent, with his consent, for two other eminent physicians and begged them, if there was any virtue in medicine, to save the child. When they added their opinion to his, she fell on her knees by the nurse who held the baby in her lap and went scalding tears.

So little, so sweet, so innocent! Why should it touch this earthly shore so brief a time if it were not to be permitted to remain!

With its last breath Blanche grew so ill that the attention of the doctors had to be turned to her. This girl, who had borne the loss of a father with an equanimity that astounded us all, mourned for another's child with all the fervor of an own mother. Minnie was able to be about before her friend, for Blanche lay more than a month on her sick bed.

"Ah! The little thing! The pretty little thing!" she moaned, day and night, during the first week.

When she recovered, her spirits were so low that Dr. Robertson approved of her suggestion to take a foreign journey. Nothing had been heard of Mr. Bartlett, and Minnie was taking steps to sue for a divorce. The Drews, including their daughter, were to stay at the Brixton residence, and Blanche was to travel with a hired companion.

Miss Brixton was gone nearly two years, during which time she saw a great deal that was interesting and instructive. And one day Dr. Robertson received a letter to this effect:

"I expect to reach New York, on the 'Germanic' about Aug. 11th. I shall require your professional services in the neighborhood of Sept. 20th. Yours very truly,

"BLANCHE BRIXTON."

The physician read this letter over and over again, rubbing his spectacles and his eyes alternately.

"She *can't* mean—what *nonsense!*" he exclaimed, a

hundred times. "She wouldn't be such a fool, with her fortune and everything in the world to look forward to! But, I don't know. Her father was a mule, and she takes after him. 'Professional' fiddlesticks! Confound her, she's given me a regular start!"

MISS BRIXTON A MOTHER.

CHAPTER XVI.

"TOO LOVELY FOR ANYTHING."

When Mrs. Drew received word that Miss Brixton was coming home, coupled with an announcement much plainer than the one which had been sent to the physician, she was thrown into a state of consternation.

"It is simply dreadful!" she said, to her husband, when she had read him the letter. "I don't know how we can stay here. Her conduct will compromise all of us. Even if you and I could endure it, think of its effect on a young woman like Minnie. Her mind is still in a formative condition, and who can say what dangers might not come from such an example?"

Stephen assented, as he always did, though he may have entertained doubts whether a woman who

had been a wife and mother, and was now a divorced widow, should be considered in the light of a novice.

Ella was in a serious quandary. She loved Blanche dearly, both for her own sake and for that of her father. She could not forget the kindness shown to Minnie when deserted by her natural protector. Miss Brixton had taken the financial troubles of Mrs. Bartlett upon herself, and had instructed her agents to honor all calls she made upon them. Under this state of things it seemed peculiarly ungrateful to desert Blanche when she was in most need of her services.

“I don’t see how I can stay here,” said Mrs. Drew to her husband, “and I don’t see how I can leave. She has no other female friend nearly as close as I have been. She writes me as if there would be no question about it. How can I refuse to comply with her wishes?”

Stephen answered that he did not see how she could.

“But won’t it look as if I endorsed her?” queried his wife. “Won’t people get the idea that we are all filled with these immoral ideas? A woman has to be so careful of her reputation.”

“That is true,” said Stephen, whose sympathies were largely on the side of Miss Brixton, for whom he entertained a warm admiration. “But the mischief is done, and you can’t help it. Show yourself a good friend to her and it may have an effect on her future.”

Mrs. Drew uttered an exclamation.

“Her future, Stephen! She will have no future. **The world never forgives an affair of that kind,**

And she won't even ask to be forgiven. She will come home as proud as if she had done something to her credit. She has warmed these theories in her breast ever since she was a child. Oh, it is enough to drive me crazy!"

Stephen put on the proper look of sympathetic interest, for when his wife talked in this way he believed something serious was the matter.

"And Minnie—that is the worst of it, after all," pursued Ella. "How can I explain it to her? What can I say to defend Blanche? The dear girl has always had such a high opinion of her, and Blanche has done her a thousand kindnesses that she cannot forget. If you and I stay here Minnie will have to go somewhere. One can't be too careful when the eternal happiness of a daughter is at stake."

Accordingly, Mistress Minnie was packed off to Markham, where she had many friends, and the other Drews, with Dr. Robertson and myself as auxiliaries, prepared to receive the coming guest, or rather the real owner of the premises. It occurs to me now that our attitude was something like that assumed by a regiment anticipating a cavalry charge, or a ship's crew ordered to repel boarders. We were a gloomy set of people, without doubt, and walked about the house on tiptoe as if afraid to make the slightest noise.

"I should think there was a funeral going on here," said the physician, one day.

"It's worse than that," replied Mrs. Drew, with a sigh. "There are some things more terrible than death, doctor."

Dr. Robertson wore a look of profundity as he heard her.

"I think you put it a little strong," he said, "but I understand the way you view it. While Society is made up the way it is now, death is at least one of the most respectable things a person can have happen to him. I hope, however, that we shall not meet Blanche with quite so funereal an aspect as we have been wearing to each other. She is like other women, I suppose, and wants to see a little sunshine when she steps foot after so long a time on the soil of her native country."

An attempt at greater cheerfulness was then made by us all, but on the whole it was a dismal failure.

"Who is going to the steamer to meet her?" I asked suddenly, thinking that this matter was one that required settling.

Mr. Drew mildly offered to go, if that was agreeable, but his wife put in a very decided objection.

"Stephen! I could not think of letting you do anything of the kind."

Dr. Robertson finally volunteered, and this met the approval of all parties. He greeted his patient on the deck of the boat, at the wharf, and she grasped his hand with a pressure that showed the most perfect health. Blanche was looking older than when she went away, but not more than the two extra years would warrant. Her cheeks were red with the salt breeze and her eyes were as bright as diamonds.

"My dear, dear doctor!" she exclaimed, regardless of the listening ears that were about them. "You don't know how glad I am to see you and dear America again. You haven't changed a particle, not a white hair more or less. It was so sweet of you to come to meet me. My baggage is all ready to be

inspected, and Mathilde here has everything in her charge. Within half an hour we shall be ready to drive to the house."

When they were being taken through the familiar streets toward her home, Miss Brixton broke out into many expressions of rapture.

"Europe is nice," she said, "but there's nothing, after all, like one's 'ain countree.' Tell me all the news. How is Ella, and dear old Steve, and poor little Minnie? Ah, I have pitied that child so often, with all her troubles, her young life wrecked by her idiotic marriage! She's got the divorce, hasn't she? Well, that's one comfort; but a divorce is like getting cured of the small pox—the marks remain. I am so anxious to see her. I suppose they are all at the house, prepared to give me a royal welcome!"

Dr. Robertson told me he never was so upset in his life as he was at the manner of Miss Brixton on this occasion. Her spirits were at their very highest. She had never looked so truly lovely. And she seemed to expect that everyone would be as delighted as she. He had to tell her that Mrs. Bartlett was out of town, but he adroitly concealed the reason of her departure.

"Run in to-morrow, if you can," Blanche said to him, as they neared her home. "I have a great deal to tell you. To-day I suppose Ella will claim all of my time. I am impatient to see the dear woman."

I think we had some sort of an idea of standing in a row in the front hall and reciting in chorus an ode of welcome, but luckily we thought better of it. The final arrangement was that Mrs. Drew would meet Miss Brixton, and that Stephen and I would drop in a little later, when the strangeness of the sit-

uation had in a measure worn off. But Dr. Robertson, after bringing his charge and her maid into the house, left them with Ella and came out to advise us to keep out of the way for the present. He intimated that it would take more than ten minutes for the women to get upon a common footing, and that they had best be given all the time they wanted.

The meeting between the old friends was effusively joyful on the part of one and reservedly dignified on the part of the other. Miss Brixton was so occupied, however, in inspecting the premises and running her eyes over the furniture and walls, that at first she noticed nothing to arouse her suspicion. She was shown to her rooms, neat as a pin, as everything must be that had passed under the eye of the model housekeeper. Mathilde was disposed of as quickly as possible; and the moment she found herself really alone with Mrs. Drew, Blanche opened her arms to their fullest capacity, and stretched herself as if she would take all America in her embrace at once.

“Why don’t you congratulate me!” she cried, rapturously.

The two women must have made an interesting contrast. The younger all radiance, almost too happy to breathe, the other with her cheeks reddened from a far different cause.

“*Please!*” murmured Mrs. Drew, supplicatingly. “*Please, Blanche!* We must *not* talk about it. We never could agree—*never!* If we are not to quarrel, we must avoid *that* subject.”

Miss Brixton laughed patronizingly.

“Very well,” she said. “It shall be as you say. But tell me all about your family. They are both well, of course, Mr. Drew and Minnie?”

The sound of her daughter's name, spoken so familiarly by those lips, struck unpleasantly upon the ears of the mother.

"They are quite well," she said. "But—don't think me unreasonable, Blanche—let us not speak of them, either. It—it really—gives me pain."

The face of Miss Brixton showed the most intense sympathy.

"You have had some trouble, poor darling!" she murmured.

"No, no! There has been no trouble—none at all. It is not that; oh, I can't explain! We talked about it, Stephen and I—a long time. And we agreed that I ought to stay here, but—"

Miss Brixton stared at the speaker.

"You were in doubt?" she asked.

"At first. I—there is Minnie to think of, you know—"

There was a long pause and a sigh from Blanche.

"You thought, perhaps," she said, "that your stay here might injure her. I am very sorry. I will not keep you—no, not for the world. Good-bye, and—is it forever?"

The lady burst into tears.

"Blanche, don't send me away," she sobbed. "I couldn't forgive myself if I went now. Don't tell me to go!"

Miss Brixton quickly withdrew her proposition, and the conversation turned upon other matters. Enough had been said to show Blanche the situation of affairs. She carefully avoided, after that, trenching upon disagreeable ground, in her talks with Mrs. Drew. I met her several times at dinner and no one would have suspected from what was said

that a very large skeleton lay hid and grinning in the closet behind the door.

Dr. Robertson had to go through a somewhat similar experience before he and his patient had been in the same city for a week. With his blunt manner he precipitated himself into the middle of the subject with one of his first questions.

"Why, in the name of Goodness," he demanded, "didn't you stay abroad a few months longer? Then you could have pretended that your child was an adopted one, and nobody could have disputed you, whatever they might have thought."

"My dear doctor," replied Blanche, with her most winning smile, "how persistently you misapprehend my motives. I have nothing to conceal. No wife since the creation was ever happier to become a mother. I know I am doing an unusual thing, but from my own standpoint I am right, all the Grundys to the contrary notwithstanding."

The physician fumed silently as he listened.

"All right!" he snapped. "Let that go. There are several things that I wonder if you have thought of. I suppose you know your child will not be entitled to receive a penny of your property if you die. And women do die under such circumstances," he added, with a strong touch of acerbity.

"But *I* am not going to!" Blanche responded, brightly. "I assure you of that to begin with. There is no law to prevent my making a will and leaving my property to whom I please, is there?"

"No, but there ought to be," growled the physician, half audibly. "I want to ask you a question," he added, raising his voice. "Who is your child's

Miss Brixton's eyes fell before those of her interrogator. For an instant she seemed to lose her self-possession. But she did not speak.

"I hardly expected you would tell me," said the doctor, composedly. "I asked out of no mere curiosity. I only thought you might like, in case of accident, to have the infant know its father's name."

Not a syllable came from the girl's lips, which were now tightly compressed together. Tears filled her eyes.

"You must admit," continued the physician, "that there is a possibility that you will not arise from the illness you are about to undergo. In your case the chances are a hundred to one in your favor, but no one can predict these results with certainty."

He waited for her reply, but she shook her head.

"I have nothing to tell you," she said.

He bowed.

"Let me suggest, then, that you place an envelope containing the facts in the hands of some person, to be divulged in case—in case it should be necessary."

Blanche looked at her companion earnestly.

"My child could have no use for that information," she replied. "Perhaps I ought to say that the father—is dead."

Used as he was to everything, the old physician plainly showed the shock he felt upon hearing this statement.

"But the child will want a name," he remarked, desperately.

"If it is a boy I wish it called Wallace; if a girl, Miriam."

“And the surname—”

“Will be mine, of course.”

He knew he might as well try to change the direction of the wind as to turn her from her purpose, and he abruptly ended the conversation. The next day the lawyer who attended to the Brixton business was sent for and given instructions about the drawing of a will, which was duly signed soon after.

Toward the last Blanche lost a little of her courage, and began to predict that she would not survive her trial.

“I am not afraid of death,” she said to Mrs. Drew. “I know you do not think me such a coward. But all my soul is centred on my baby. No one can care for a child like its mother. It will be so little and helpless! It will want so many things! When it cries no one else will understand. Oh, at least I want to live long enough to fondle its limbs, to look for one instant at its tiny face!”

Miss Brixton’s health had been superb for years, and it stood her in good stead now.

“Blanche! Wouldn’t you like to look at Wallace?” asked Mrs. Drew’s voice, and the invalid heard it with a feeble cry of joy.

The boy’s face was red, his eyes of a doubtful shade, and his hair too scant to be given a color—but the mother gazed at him in rapt admiration.

“Isn’t he too lovely for anything!” she exclaimed, and then fell into a calm and peaceful slumber.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN AMATEUR DETECTIVE.

It is not to be supposed that an event like this could happen in an American city without attracting attention. The press began to contain veiled references to it. Ministers referred to it in their sermons as an evidence of what might be expected when the dictates of the carnal mind were followed instead of the teachings of inspiration. A few of the more "advanced" periodicals dared to compliment the young mother for her courage in facing the world to defend her convictions. But the great majority of people found Blanche guilty of an unpardonable offense, and wiped her off their books without ceremony.

An unexpected annoyance was early noted, for Miss Brixton cared not the snap of her finger about what the clergymen and newspapers did. It was the burdening of her mail with letters from men, or individuals who apparently called themselves so, approving her course and insinuating that their acquaintance would be to her personal advantage. Strong-minded as Blanche was, she recoiled so at these correspondents that she turned all her mail over to Dr. Robertson, begging him to give her only such of it as he thought she would like to receive. The beast in some men is so near the surface that it only requires the least encouragement to bring it into sight. I looked over those letters with the physician,

and learned that names famous enough to be known the country over had been signed to suggestions at which I cannot even hint.

Strange as had been the conduct of George Brixton's daughter, she always seemed to those of us who knew her best the very incarnation of high-mindedness and modesty. It would have required a temerity not often found to say anything in her presence that savored of indelicacy. The creatures who wrote her the letters to which I have alluded were to be excused, in a measure, by the fact that they had not the slightest idea of the personality of that charming girl. They knew nothing more than that she was a mother and unmarried; which, in itself, let us admit in all fairness, was not of a prepossessing nature. Had they seen her in the wondrous beauty of her young motherhood they must have shrunk abashed from their own base thoughts.

It can hardly be said that Miss Brixton defied the world; she rather ignored it. She did not flaunt her conduct in its face, but neither did she hide one atom of it from all who chose to gaze. Her delight in her little one was complete. Although she had a nurse especially for it, she did most of the necessary offices herself. A suggestion of a bottle was indignantly rejected. Blanche wanted everybody to understand that she was not one of those neglectful mothers who steal for fashion or pleasure the months that belong to their offspring. She rode out every afternoon with the child, when the weather was fair, not seeking to attract attention, and yet going boldly to any point she liked, regardless of the crowd.

It was not long before she got used to hearing the

whispered, "That is she!" and sometimes the suppressed giggle of a silly woman who imagined she had perpetrated a witticism upon the subject. More than this, she encountered frowning eyes, those of matrons who said in audible voices, "I should think she would have shame enough to hide her head." Blanche could not reply to such people without lowering herself by a wordy combat, and she chose the easier way of trying to live down their resentment. Time helped a great deal in this, but as long as she remained in New York she never quite escaped being a mark for the curiously inclined.

"I get almost exasperated sometimes when I hear these things," she said to us at table one evening. "But when I look at Wallace he pays me for everything."

I say "us," but at the time the Drews were away on a visit to Minnie, and only Dr. Robertson, Mrs. Reynolds and myself were present.

The doctor had quit arguing. He had never given up a single inch of his ground, but for the sake of peace he kept silence when he could. The attitude that I assumed was more acceptable to her, I think, for I would not contest a single point. It was none of my business to instruct or advise her. It was really to me that she confided her closest thoughts.

"I've another lot of newspaper clippings for you to-day," she would remark, when I called. "Things are getting worse and worse for the poor married people. Here are two cases of husbands beating their wives, one of them fatally. A woman is under arrest for poisoning her husband in order to marry her lover. An unfortunate young girl is in jail, under

the charge of murdering her infant, which her lord deserted. Then here are the records of the divorce courts in eleven States—inconstancy, desertion, cruelty, drunkenness. Marriage is a great institution, Mr. Medford! I don't wonder people insist on calling it *divine!*"

I knew that she patronized a clipping agency—Romeike's—and I took the pile of slips she gave me, looking with interest at the record attached to each, showing the journal from which it was taken, and the date on which it was published.

"Here is one," she said, "of a more personal nature. It hazards a guess as to the paternity of my little Wallace, with as much *sang froid* as if it was any business of the editor or his readers. There are women who would go down to his office with a horsewhip, but that would only make him more notorious, which would probably please him too well. I do not understand why the question of fatherhood is of the slightest importance to any human being. There is a country in Asia, where all the children take the name of their mothers, and where it is considered the height of impoliteness to hint at their paternal ancestry. Under the European rule the mother has hardly been worth discussing at all. Until recently she had very few legal rights in her own offspring, though she contributes ninety-nine per cent. to its life. If I had a husband, it would be within the power of a judge in this State to take my child and consign it perpetually to his care. They might as well claim the right to cut out my heart!"

As she was speaking, the nurse brought Master Wallace into the room. No truthful man could say

"no" when asked by the happy young mother if he had ever seen a prettier child. He was darker than his mamma, though she was a brunette. His hair had now grown abundantly and was inclined to curl. His eyes were nearly black, like hers.

"Come to your mother," she said, holding out her arms.

The boy was quick to hear the maternal voice and sprang joyfully into her embrace. When he had nestled in her lap they made the prettiest picture I ever saw, either on or off canvas. Blanche had wholly recovered her health, and the roses played bewitchingly with her dimples as she pressed the infant to her full, round bosom.

"Wallace," she said, with mock gravity, holding him away from her, "take your thumb out of your mouth and look at this gentleman. Do you realize that he has it in his power to make you a pauper, by running away with all your money to Canada, or Buenos Ayres or some of those terrible places? How would it suit you to have your poor mamma drag you about the street in a hand-cart, while she sold oranges or needles and thread to sympathetic passers?"

I could not help thinking of the anomaly presented before my eyes, for such it always was, thanks, perhaps, to my imperfect education; at least, that is what Miss Brixton would have called it. Why did not something—be it ever so little—tell of this girl's lowered standard, of her depraved taste? There was absolutely nothing. Her countenance was as pure as it was fair. She was transfigured by the motherhood that can make even a plain face beautiful. It was evident that she was as unconscious of

wrong as Adam and Eve when they strayed in that first twilight through the leafy groves of Eden. If, like them, she was naked, like them she was not ashamed!

"The story of this child would be an entertaining one," I suggested. "You might let me write it out. Then, when I had run away with your fortune, you could make more money by selling it than with your pins and needles."

She reddened, not guiltily, but from the very quality of her full veins.

"I did not know you were a writer of fiction," she answered.

"Neither am I; but there must be enough in the history of this pretty boy without drawing on one's inventive powers, to make a most fascinating story."

She raised the child again from her lap and pressed her lips to his cheek.

"Tell me one thing," she said, suddenly, looking me full in the face. "Do you hold as bad an opinion of me as the rest of them? Do you really consider me lacking in—what shall I call it—respectability?"

It was my own face that reddened now.

"I was afraid of it," she said, with an air of conviction, and acting as if not the least offended. "This is the test: If you had a sister you wouldn't wish her to associate with me. There is Mrs. Drew, the most intimate friend I ever had among women, frightened to death lest her divorced daughter should meet a girl who has evaded the stiff rules that have crushed her. I have not one friend to-day that deserves to be called such—neither woman nor man. Of course you treat me politely, and Dr. Robertson

comes to dinner occasionally ; but neither of you would care to walk down the avenue with me, I'm very certain. It is not surprising. The world is tied together by such little threads that people fear to break a single one of them—or rather, to admit having done so."

"You were gone abroad about two years," I remarked, reminiscently.

"Yes."

"Where did you spend most of your time?"

"Excuse me," she replied, with a smile. "I never talk about that journey."

"I have no desire to pry into your secrets," I answered. "But I am thinking of crossing the ocean soon myself, and I felt an interest in discussing the matter with one who had already been there."

She looked at me with a trace of suspicion, which vanished instantly.

"A good guide-book is worth more to you than all I could say," she laughed. "I did not know you were going, though. How long do you intend to remain?"

I replied that that would depend on circumstances. I felt the need of a change, after having devoted myself so closely to business.

"Mr. Sparrow will attend to your interests," I added, "with frequent consultations with me through the mail, of course."

She allowed me to kiss the baby, remarking that I was one of a very small circle who was permitted that wonderful privilege, and so I took my leave.

That evening, after retiring to my bed, the thought came over me, as it had often done before,

that I ought to make an effort to learn something about the origin of Master Wallace Brixton. In the process of time it was very possible I would be in the position of a trustee for him, as I now was for his mother. There are rights credited even to the child that is unborn, and certainly to those too young and helpless to speak for themselves.

Miss Brixton would not talk on this important theme. Every year that passed would make it harder to ascertain the truth. The position that I occupied relieved me from the charge of pruriency. But, how could I hope to uncover a mystery so carefully hidden from every eye?

If I could learn the route Miss Brixton had travelled, it would give me a clew to begin upon. Great things have been accomplished from small suggestions. A bit of colored netting such as pool table pockets are made of led to the fixing of a murder upon a man who collected chips from a factory. By a scratch on a safe door Gaboriau's hero traces his guilty heroine. It would amuse me, if nothing else, to assume the *rôle* of an amateur detective, and if, after all, I discovered nothing, no harm would be done.

There was but one person in whom I could safely confide my plan—Mr. Sparrow, my fellow trustee; but I believe a secret never yet was kept better by two persons than one, and I said nothing, even to him. The only interview I had was with Dr. Robertson, and that was conducted in such a way that the good man did not suspect my purpose. He was a most delightful old gentleman, who would have made an excellent subject for a story, all by himself.

The talk that I had with Robertson occurred the next day after my visit to Miss Brixton, last referred to. He was always pleased to rehearse the story as he knew it, and I made him tell it to me again, from the beginning. He lay back in his office chair and talked of "George" and "Emma" as if they had been his children. But when he came to the latest development of the family's peculiarity he grew animated and took on a high color.

"Was there ever anything like it!" he exclaimed. "Here is a young woman of ordinary sense in everything else, with good looks, with a fortune—equipped, in short, to take any place she pleased in society. And she throws it all away—every chance to be anything or anybody—on this ridiculous fad! I lost all patience with her long ago. There'll be trouble later, when the boy grows up. He'll tell her his opinion when he finds the inconvenience of being a—"

The doctor growled as he omitted the disagreeable word.

"Of course you believe his father is dead?" I said.

"Yes. Blanche has faults enough, but she can't tell an untruth. When she doesn't wish to answer she simply closes her lips, and no man is strong enough to compel her to open them."

I asked him incidentally if she had said much of her journey in the letters she wrote him from abroad.

"Nothing at all, hardly," he replied. "I did not have above ten letters altogether. They are all here," and he exhibited a package encased in a rubber band, taking it from a drawer in his desk. "You may look them over and welcome."

He tossed them to me, and as I began to open them a patient's call took the physician out of the

room. It was very opportune, for I wanted to copy the dates without attracting his attention. I took up a pencil and pad and began writing nervously :

"Liverpool, May 26 ; London, June 30 ; Paris, Sept. 2." This was the way they ran. "Venice, Jan. 10 ; Florence, May 12 ; Zurich, Aug. 4." A long interval, and then Algiers, Constantine, and afterwards points in Spain, and the final letter announcing that she was coming home.

This was the path she had travelled. It was something to go by, and it would certainly have interested a man like Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Not only the city and date were given, but usually the hotel. It was the letter dated at Algiers, however, that struck me particularly.

"Well, you didn't find much there," said Dr. Robertson, when he returned. "She is a deep girl, and knew enough to cover her tracks well. It is a shame ! In a world made up like ours, a boy is entitled to know who his father is. Not to have the least information about it leaves him in a devil of a state. He can't tell whether he is the offspring of a gentleman or a robber. One of these days Blanche will wake up to the mischief she's done."

I agreed with him in a mild way, for it was my policy not to take strong ground with anyone who assumed to criticize my ward too severely.

Five weeks later I alighted from a Messageries Maratimes steamer at Algiers, and registered at the beautifully situated Hotel de l'Oasis.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN AND ABOUT ALGIERS.

The city of Algiers is certainly one of the loveliest places on the habitable globe. As seen from the Mediterranean it has few rivals in point of artificial attractions. It is a veritable city set on a hill, that cannot be hid. Both the old town, or Arab quarter, and the new, or French city, are visible from the sea. The prevailing, almost the only exterior, of the buildings is of pure white. High above the water front a grand arcaded street is built, on which rows of stately buildings face the mother country, looking exactly as if they had been taken from the Rue de Rivoli and transplanted to these tropical shores. Long and easily ascended ways allow the wagon or foot passenger to reach this street from the landing quay, the whole affair being a masterpiece of architecture.

For a short distance to the rear of the hotels the ground is nearly level, and in this section most of the shops, the theatres and some most engaging small parks are found. Beyond these the hill rises gradually, giving to the Moorish-like edifices the appearance of being built in tiers, and ensuring magnificent views of each. The best of carriage roads, constructed by French engineers, who have no rivals in that line, wind gracefully to the summit of this elevation, which is called Mustapha Superieur.

The climate of Algiers has few equals, and during

a great part of the year it can have no superior. Although the vegetation indigenous to the tropics flourishes in December and January, there is seldom a day when the weather is uncomfortably warm. On the hottest in thirteen successive years the thermometer registered 77 deg. Fahrenheit, and on the coldest 48 deg. during those months. This is several degrees warmer than Nice or most of the Riviera. I found a tonic in the air that acted like medicine to my tired nerves and made me feel as if I could spend the entire winter there without wishing to go further.

The street scenes are most inspiring to one who sees, for the first time, as I then did, that mixture of races which is found so commonly in the towns of the East. At every step is met the veiled wife of the Mahomedan, with her Turkish trousers, her face hid in an impenetrability that the foreigner seldom succeeds in passing; her lord, the Othello-like Arab, with his turbaned head, his white burnous, and an air that stamps him as the most dignified and statuesque of men; the negro, blacker than any ace of spades, as thoroughly Mahomedan in religion as the sons of Ishmael; the Kabyle, of a stock somewhat similar to the Moors and yet of a race apart, his women having their faces uncovered; and besides these, representatives of almost every European people, attracted either by business or pleasure to this princess of winter resorts.

A writer who is evidently thoroughly familiar with the old or Arab quarter of Algiers describes it so well that I feel justified in quoting a few lines: "The streets," he says, "seem a curious rendezvous for Old Testament patriarchs and the actors in the 'Arabian Nights.' The idlers on the floor of the

Moorish *café*, over their coffee and draughts, group themselves like a picture of Joseph's brethren. It might be Abraham or Isaac who is driving the flock of brown goats or asses which push you off the pavement. You turn up some steep alley with the houses meeting overhead, and some lovely old brass-worked door opens, and Morgiana flits out, veiled in white, with her copper water-jar on her shoulder, giving you a momentary glimpse of cool court-yards with slender pillars and bright tiles. Across the sunlit opening at the top of the alley passes a slim, handsome boy, all in white except for a long mantle of grass-green. Then you meet a Jewess in a black skull-cap and a dandy in slashed blue satin over a gold vest."

But this is not the place to sing the loveliness of Algiers and its environs. I only note enough of them to show why I lingered there for weeks when the investigations I had begun bore no fruit. The pleasure of finding such a hotel as that of the Oasis, as good as most of those in Paris itself, and situated better than any of them, helped to beguile me. The young proprietor, M. Delrieu, and his girl-wife had evidently learned their business well. It was very interesting to watch the latter, then at an age when American girls would be conning their geographies and grammars, officiating at the cashier's desk with all the gravity of one twice her years, and giving orders to servants in a tone that showed how competent she felt for the management of her department. And there was a head-porter or *concierge* named Victor, who had mastered the art of *savoir faire* and could tell you anything you pleased to inquire, like a walking encyclopædia.

I soon discovered that Victor remembered Miss Brixton well. She was accompanied, when at the hotel, by a French maid and an Oriental courier, whose impressive robes made a sensation among the other guests. There was a legend that Blanche had said that she always felt ill-dressed in the presence of this magnificent fellow, in his blue and white. No, Victor did not remember that the lady had any acquaintances at Algiers; certainly none had called for her at the hotel, for his memory was perfect in such matters. Miss Brixton had spent money liberally, driving a great deal, going to the theatre and inspecting every quarter of the city with care. Her tips to the employés of the hotel had been so liberal as to make her a marked guest among them.

She did not stay in Algiers steadily, the winter she was there, although she retained her rooms. She went into the interior with her maid and courier, sometimes also with a native guide, and was gone as much as two weeks at a time. Victor was positive that nothing resembling a gentleman friend had loomed upon the horizon. He had marked that fact and commented upon it to his wife, who was a *femme de chambre*, and had taken care of Miss Brixton's apartments. They had come to the conclusion that the fair Americaine was a man-hater; for though she dined in the general room, and was the subject of many admiring glances, she seemed wholly blind to the interest she excited among the masculine set.

This information was not obtained all at once, but piecemeal, in a way not calculated to excite undue suspicion. Victor received the five-franc pieces that

I doled out to him and gave me the most charming "mercis" imaginable.

But that was all the good it did.

Believing that I should only waste my time by prolonging my stay in the city, I determined to tour the rest of Algeria, as a matter of pleasure. The travellers I met who had been to Constantine and Biskra gave me glowing accounts of the beauties of those places, and my expectations consoled me in some degree for the disappointment I had experienced.

But on the evening before I was to leave the city of Algiers I was witness to a most novel event. It made a great impression upon me, and I can do no less than describe it here.

I was strolling at random through the town, late in the afternoon, when my attention was attracted by what may have been either a military review or evening drill. A regiment of soldiers was going through manœuvres in an open square of large size, and as a small crowd was gathering in the vicinity, I followed the rest. Before the parade was dismissed and the soldiers had returned to their barracks I was treated to an unusual exhibition.

The troops were drawn up in a hollow square, and the look of expectancy on every face showed that something unusual was about to occur. A dead silence prevailed for some seconds, and then there emerged from a military prison near by a small file of soldiers, guarding a man and marching him at a quickstep toward the main body. The man under guard was dressed in dilapidated clothing, the coat of which was of military cut and color. He was evidently in great disgrace, for he was hurried along

by his escort, those behind him carrying their bayonets uncomfortably close to his legs.

It was now evident that the soldiers were drawn up for no other reason than to witness this spectacle. The drums began to beat a doleful tune, to which the culprit kept time. Twice was he marched around the square, and then the detachment that was with him halted in front of the chief officers of the military bodies present. A man in the uniform of a general stepped forward and in a very haughty and severe tone addressed some remarks to the prisoner, for such he undoubtedly was. My nearness to the parties was not so great that I could hear distinctly what was said, but I gathered that the prisoner was undergoing a sentence for some violation of rules and that this public disgrace was part of the penalty that had been pronounced upon him. At the end of his harangue the officer deliberately cut the military buttons from the coat worn by the other, signifying evidently that he was debarred from wearing those emblems of the service he had dishonored. Then the man was marched back into his jail, the band struck up a lively tune, and the soldiers were soon out of sight.

Much impressed with the entire affair, I could not take my eyes from the disgraced prisoner. It struck me that he bore his position with extraordinary fortitude, considering the trying circumstances of the case. There was nothing of the hangdog look in his face; nothing, in fact, but determination and courage. By this I do not mean bravado, either. He marched to the step set for him by the drums, as if it were the thing to do, knowing that any other course would be met with the severest treatment.

He listened respectfully to the insulting words of the officer, while a thousand of what were probably his old comrades looked on. When all was over he obeyed the order to return to the place of his incarceration, just as, it seemed to me, he would have marched to the knife of a guillotine, had that been the destiny in store for him.

During the major portion of his march the eyes of the prisoner were fixed on the ground. On the way back to the jail, however, he looked about him, like one who knows his present trial is nearly ended and allows his eyes to assume their natural position. I was so situated on the outskirts of the crowd that I could now see him plainly. The impression I had formed of his being above the ordinary soldier in intellectual endowment was strengthened. As he passed near me his gaze met mine. I suppose my face reflected the sympathy I felt, perhaps the only sentiment of the kind in all that throng, either civil or military. The prisoner had but a fraction of a second to return my look, but in that brief moment he had shot a glance of gratitude that moved me to the utmost. When he had passed I turned away with more than a suspicion of moisture in my eyes.

I wanted to ask someone the history of this man for it interested me greatly, but I could not bring myself to do so. I dreaded too much the possibility of hearing that he had done something which would lower him beyond repair in my estimation. His pathetic figure and proud face had made an impression on my rather susceptible imagination that I did not wish effaced. I decided that it was better to retain this picturesque figure in my memory than

to have it besmeared and defaced by such an unpromising iconoclast as Truth.

For the next three months I wandered over Algeria and Tunis, more and more bewitched with the fascinations of the climate and the people. Especially do I love the Kabyle race, whose sons combine the stature of the North American Indian with the gentleness of the Aztec and the intelligence of the Japanese. At Biskra I never tired of the Moorish cafés, where the dancing girls of that desert tribe which has furnished entertainment of this sort for centuries sway their lithe bodies to the music of weird instruments wholly barbaric in form and tone. One of the dancers, a creature of sixteen or thereabouts—who combined in her pretty face the attributes of the Kabyle and the European, the latter slightly predominating, and bore in her eyes a trace of some ancient admixture of Nubian blood—was as pretty as any piece of Dresden ware.

I met her in the market place one morning with a baby in her arms even prettier than herself, which it took but a glance to see was her own.

“*Qui est son père ?*” I asked, and she answered with all imaginable chic, “*Tout le monde.*”

From all these pleasures I tore myself as spring approached, though the delicious climate had not yet begun to be uncomfortably warm. Returning to Algiers I spent a few days in trying for the last time to learn something new about Miss Brixton's stay there, but without avail. And, to cap the climax, I finally received a letter from the lady herself, in which the irony was too evident to be mistaken. She had learned of my visit to this part of Africa and had guessed that it might not be wholly

unconnected with a desire to penetrate the mystery she had guarded so well.

The letter had made the rounds, having been forwarded a dozen times, and the envelope was well covered with postmarks. Miss Brixton had learned of my whereabouts from a newspaper paragraph—confound the reporter who wrote it!—and said she could not help expressing a hope that I would find pleasure in a country she had so much admired.

“I wish you had told me your destination,” she said, “for having passed a whole winter in that section I might have been able to tell you something of value. This will probably reach you too late to be of service. All I can do, then, is to beg you, if you will be so kind, to remember me to M. and Mme. Delrieu, of the Hotel de l’Oasis, and to Victor, the *concierge*, and his wife. If you go from Algiers to Spain, you will find the Roma the best hotel in Malaga, and the Madrid the best not only in Seville but in all the Peninsular. When are you to return to America? I shall be glad to meet you again now you have visited scenes where I experienced so much pleasure.”

It was easy to detect the sarcasm beneath these apparently innocent lines. Miss Brixton suspected that I was upon her track and wished me to understand that she laughed at my endeavors. Her mention of Spain convinced me that she believed I would follow her footsteps to that country, from Africa. She took pains not only to mention the cities but the very hotels at which she had stopped. She had no fear that I would discover anything, and her derision seemed well founded. I had been abroad five

months and had seen nothing that in the least explained the great puzzle I had started so blithely to solve.

CHAPTER XIX.

“HE INSULTED A WOMAN.”

My way to Spain was *via* Oran, where I was to take a steamer to Malaga. Most of the country on the way is of an uninteresting nature, but there are occasional points where the traveller may stay over with profit.

I walked about Oran for a day or two, taking in the views and learning the eventful history of the place, which has been the prey successively of the Berbers, Turks, Spaniards, Moors and French. The site was also occupied by the Romans, whose medals—those ever testifying evidences of the huge paper chase performed by the world’s conquerors—are still found occasionally by some excavator. Although most of the present inhabitants are of anything but French origin, the town, like everything else that the Gaul controls, is French in government to the smallest particular. I contend that the Frenchman makes the best colonist on African soil, and that it would be a good thing for Morocco and the world at large if every foot of that belated empire was under the direction of the Elysée.

The boats that cross to the European coast are good enough affairs, not remarkably large or fast,

but endurable. There were few passengers on the one I took, and after we had started, which was in the evening, I went upon the deck to have a smoke and enjoy the seclusion of a calm and rather dark tropical night.

There were not many settees, and what there were, scattered as far apart as possible. An English clergyman of the Established Church, with his wife, occupied one of these; a Frenchman with what appeared to be a very recently wedded bride had another; and three Spanish friends a third. I was not surprised, therefore, when a gentleman who had just come up the stairway approached me politely, and said, "Pardon, monsieur, but I think you have room for me."

The expression was in French, and though I am by no means an expert in that language, I have no difficulty either in understanding it or in making myself understood.

One of the pleasantest things to me in foreign journeys, let me say in passing, is the almost unvarying courtesy and good fellowship I have met with from travellers of other nationalities. In countries where I have had but the most meagre command of the language I have found natives so polite, so anxious to explain a knotty point or to do me a favor, that I have blushed at the contrast with my own countrymen on like occasions. In America the struggle of a foreigner with the English tongue is considered a thing for mirth, seldom wholly restrained, even in the best circles. The inability of a person to speak English is taken to imply ignorance on his part so gross as to be astonishing. In other lands, on the contrary, the traveller who finds himself in a

dilemma is offered the best services of everyone to whom he applies. A Frenchman once told me that the reason his people did not laugh at mispronounced French was because it had for them no element of humor. He could not understand why it seemed funny to anyone. A very sensible way of looking at it, it seems to me.

I therefore said, "Certainly, monsieur," to the stranger and further showed my good-will by offering him a cigar, which he accepted. In a few minutes we were talking familiarly, as travellers do. It was not light enough to make out his features distinctly, but his voice had a melodious sound that was most agreeable. Learning that I had been all winter in Africa he asked what part I liked best, to which I responded that, on the whole, I preferred Algiers.

"Do you!" he exclaimed, in a cynical tone. "I think it the most detestable spot on the globe!"

"Perhaps you did not remain long enough to appreciate its beauties," I suggested, mildly.

"I have been there five or six years, most of the time," he responded, with a laugh that was distinctly disagreeable.

I wished it were light enough to see his face. The mention of the word "Algiers" seemed to have wrought a complete change in him.

"For a man who disliked it so much, you made a fairly long stay," I remarked.

"Yes," he replied; "but sometimes there are circumstances over which one has no control."

I begged his pardon for the inquisitiveness I had unintentionally exhibited, but he disclaimed the least offense, and his voice again took on the tone

that had pleased me. Learning that I was an American—a Continental European seldom knows how to distinguish us from the English—he showed a deep interest in my country and overwhelmed me with questions about it. He said he had long wished to cross the Atlantic and believed he should soon do so.

“Then you will not return to Algiers,” I remarked, innocently.

“*Diable!* I hope not!” he exclaimed, and I saw that I had unwittingly touched a tender place again. “No, I never mean to see that cursed spot! I shall visit some relations in Spain, and then, if I do not change my mind, I shall go to France.”

The moon had begun to rise and as the night grew lighter I glanced with great interest toward my companion. His figure outlined itself by degrees, but it was some time before I could discern his features. As we were sitting, my own face came first into the light and I fancied my companion was looking at it intently, as if he had discovered something in it of peculiar interest. Suddenly the moon shone out, and as if a curtain had been drawn away, I saw distinctly the man who occupied the seat with me.

“You recognize me,” he said, with an uneasy laugh.

I bowed. He was the man who had been marched around the drawn-up ranks of soldiers, then reprimanded and taken back to confinement!

“You are not flattered at discovering with whom you have been talking so long,” he said. “Well, I do not blame you. And yet, when I saw you that

day, I believed there was in your eyes the quality of mercy.”

I hastened to assure him that he was judging me too quickly, if he imagined I had any disposition to avoid him. I admitted that I was slightly affected by the unexpectedness of the occurrence, but that I was quite as glad to have him for a companion as if I had not been the witness of his unhappy experience.

“You are not a Frenchman,” said he, after returning a low bow to my remarks. “Otherwise you would modify the sentiments which you mention, and which I am bound to believe you state correctly. It is plain to you that I have been undergoing the sentence of a court-martial, for an offense of which I was adjudged guilty. It is all very well for a convicted man to declare himself innocent—they all do that—but people are not supposed to believe them. Having, then, according to the record, disgraced my service, my family and my rank, I could only live in peace in France by assuming a false name and hiding myself either in some country village, or in the corners of our great capital. Neither of these things am I willing to do, and I shall consequently either emigrate to America, or go to some other distant point where I am unlikely to meet many of my countrymen.”

I again begged my companion to believe that he had not read incorrectly the sentiments which affected me on the day I first saw him ; and I added that I could say with equal earnestness that I felt assured that an injustice had been done him in some way.

“You are most kind to say so,” he answered. “If

we remain long together I will tell you the simple truth about the whole affair, and you may judge whether I have been wronged. For the present let us leave a disagreeable subject. Will you kindly tell me whether you are a member of any of the professions, or whether you are engaged in commercial pursuits. Though," he added, with a winning smile, "Americans are so stupendously wealthy, I suppose few of them do anything toward gaining a livelihood."

In response I handed him my card and received his own. On his were engraved the words, "Maurice Olivier Fantelli."

One of the first things that my new friend asked was that I should call him "Maurice," to which I consented with some demur. We passed a pleasant evening and the next day he agreed to go with me through the southern part of Spain, as he had some days to spare before he expected his brother to meet him.

A description of the pleasures of our journey would be superfluous here. But you may find more interesting an account of some conversations that I had with M. Fantelli, occurring from time to time on the trains as we passed through the country.

"Your name is not wholly French, is it?" I asked him, one day. "It sounds to me as if it had an Italian origin."

"You are partly right," said he. "It was originally Corsican, like that of the Buonapartes. But we think ourselves as French now as the President. My family has been very proud of its standing, our representatives having held office under most of the recent legitimate sovereigns and been selected for

important posts even under the Republic. This generation is the first," he added, bitterly, "to be accused of sullyng its fair name."

I took advantage of the opportunity to remind my friend that he had not yet told me anything of the trouble to which he referred.

"I will not deny that my curiosity has been much excited over your case," I said. "I felt, even by that brief look in your eyes, when you were marched by me a prisoner, that you were the victim of some terrible wrong. My closer acquaintance makes me all the more certain that such is the case—that you must have been punished for an offense you never committed."

He paused for some seconds, apparently engrossed with the hedges that lined the railway for miles—hedges from whence come the red and white roses that adorn the dark tresses of the Spanish beauties at church, theatre and ball.

"I intend to tell you everything, by-and-by," he said, slowly. "To-day let me only correct you in one important point. The offense with which I was charged was one I really did commit. It was an attempt on the life of a brother officer. The fact was as stated in the complaint—I did my best to kill him. Had I succeeded I might not be sitting here talking with you. Luckily, as I now view it, the bullet I fired did not penetrate as deeply as I intended it should."

I was surprised at this confession, which I had not in the least anticipated. Fantelli looked at me searchingly, to note the effect of his statement, and I did my best to conceal the shock it gave me.

"Before you condemn me too severely," he said,

“let me vouchsafe a word of explanation. In raising my hand against that man I had no private grief to satisfy. We had been friends for years—were at that very time, or a moment before, the closest comrades in our division. What was the matter, then? He did something that I could not forgive in any man, no matter what ties bound him to me. He insulted a woman in my presence.”



CHAPTER XX.

FANTELLI ASTONISHED.

It was growing interesting. The closing statement had indeed put a different aspect on the affair. My friend was no ordinary assassin, no mere quick-tempered slasher who could not control his temper when his pride was touched, but a chevalier who had resented an injury to the feelings of a lady!

“It must have been a very gross insult,” I suggested.

“It was. So gross that I found my blood on fire in an instant, and grasping a revolver I discharged it at my whilom friend before I had time to form a thought. In due time I was put on my trial. In spite of all attempts to entrap me I refused to explain the cause of my act. My brother soldier did all he could to save me, though his hurt was so great that he had to leave the service, and I fear will never fully recover. My sentence, at first much more severe, was commuted at last to five years imprison-

ment, with a semi-annual proceeding of the kind you witnessed. To the untiring efforts of the man I wounded I am indebted for the pardon which has set me free, but leaves me little better than an alien of the country to which I would gladly give my life."

The concluding words were spoken with deep feeling and enlisted my warmest sympathy. As Maurice had relapsed into silence I did not annoy him by questions, though I wanted very much to hear fuller particulars. It was several days later, after we had visited Grenada and were on our way to Seville, that the matter was referred to again.

"Does the lady for whom you struck your brother officer know of the trouble your act has caused you?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied.

"She should have been profoundly grateful," I said. "I hope her actions showed that she appreciated it."

"Ah," he answered, "there was no question of that!"

Ashamed to draw him out piecemeal, as I was doing, I could not help, nevertheless, from pursuing my investigations.

"A romance has sprung before now out of a lesser circumstance," I suggested. "To make it complete in your case this lady should have married you."

He shifted uneasily in his place and waited a minute before replying.

"A man under sentence—a disgraced man,—is not the finest match in the world," he said. "Besides—the fact is—I am married."

I said "Oh!" and bade adieu regretfully to what

I had hoped would prove a more entertaining episode.

"You have spoken of your brother officer so often and never of your wife," I explained, "that I naturally supposed you single. And madame, she is in France, I presume?"

A strange mixture of emotions convulsed my companion's features.

"It is a long time since I have seen her," he said. "We have separated for good—a sort of American custom, is it not? I have heard that your marriage ties are very easily arranged."

I could not help asking just one more question, when he had last seen the lady in whose behalf he had made so great a sacrifice. He answered that his arrest had prevented his seeing anyone until within the present month.

"But," I said, "you will now seek to renew your acquaintance with her."

"Although I am married!" he replied, with a rising inflection.

"There are friendships that do not depend on love," I replied, with some confusion.

"Even between men and women?" he asked, eyeing me narrowly.

"Certainly. Some of the best and truest."

He looked at me earnestly.

"I believe you wholly," he said. "In spite of all the evil there is in the world, some hearts remain true and good. But in the case to which you refer I fear my presence would not be welcome. I should only recall a scene that must have been very distasteful."

"But the lady," I asked. "Was she of your country?"

"No, she was English; or perhaps American. I know she spoke the English tongue, though I did not understand it well enough to talk much with her."

In an instant my imagination took a wild flight. Could it be that I had stumbled on something that would give me a clue to Miss Brixton's secret, after searching for it in vain so long? At Malaga all I had learned was that she had stopped at the Roma, with her maid, the courier having been dismissed at Oran. At Ronda, Grenada, and the other places *en route*, this was the only story in connection with her visit. Never a man that had been seen speaking to her, nothing in the least clandestine. She was seldom out at night and then the *concierge* of the hotel deputed someone to accompany the two women. She had left behind a memory of good nature, extreme politeness and generosity. Could it be that the English or American lady—and Continentals never can tell them apart—was the erratic daughter of George Brixton?

On what could I base such a theory? On the mere fact thus far that a lady who spoke English had been known by my new acquaintance in Algeria, had been insulted by his brother officer, and the officer had been wounded. Of what did the insult consist? A thousand possibilities filled my brain. My theory became so fascinating that I feared to ask anything more in relation to it lest it should by the first reply be dashed to the ground.

"Pardon me," I said, when I was unable to contain

myself any longer. "Do you know the name of this lady?"

He flushed, a not unbecoming habit that he had when cornered.

"If I did," he answered, "I could not, of course, divulge it. As a matter of fact, I do not. I only know what I presume are her initials, and of that I am not entirely certain."

I must find out whether there was anything in my guess and I hesitated no longer.

"Were those initials," I asked, "anything like 'B. B.?'"

Fantelli sprang up, greatly excited. Presently, however, he fell back into his seat and gasped out a question :

"Were those initials hazarded at random?"

"Not at all," I answered. "I know a lady who bears them and I know she was several years ago in Algiers for the winter. There are other things that lead me to fancy she may be the heroine of your story."

He breathed hard, evidently overcome with astonishment.

"What other things?" he asked.

"She has told me a very strange tale, including a statement that a certain man met with a violent death. You say that your brother officer narrowly escaped losing his life."

As Maurice gasped again, I thought how impossible it was for the one who attempts a homicide, even in the best cause, to forget what he has done.

"When did you last see the lady you speak of?" asked Fantelli, with great earnestness.

"Last autumn."

"In England?"

"In America."

"What was she doing there?"

"She was spending her time principally in the care of her infant."

Again the Frenchman rose to his feet, trembling in every limb.

"I think we had best drop the subject," I remarked uneasily.

"No!" he said, sharply. "I insist that you answer me. How old is this infant?"

I motioned him to regain his seat and he complied. Then I gave him the child's age as well as I could. Whereupon he deluged me with more questions than I could answer.

"Very well," he said, finally. "You are right; the best thing is for us to talk of something else."

"Not on my account," I said. "I am willing to admit, now that we have gone so far, that my chief object in coming to Africa and Spain was to obtain tidings of this very matter.

Another of his impetuous motions betrayed the nervous nature that was in him.

"She sent you?" he hazarded.

"No."

I explained to him my connection with the Brixton estate.

"And what do you conclude now?" he asked.

"I think the child of my friend, Miss B.," I answered, slowly, "is also that of the officer you assaulted."

My companion shook his head. Then he murmured "Absurd!" and seemed much agitated.

"I wish to know that officer's name, his rank, his

family, and his present residence," I continued. "When I have ascertained these facts, I shall have done."

"How will you get them?"

"By returning at once to Algiers."

Fantelli smiled faintly.

"I will save you all that trouble," he replied, politely. "He was a colonel, his name is Louis Desmoulins, and his city is Dijon."

Taking out a memorandum book I noted each of these facts carefully.

"Now," said Maurice, coldly, "there will be nothing, I presume, to detain you in Europe. Let me only suggest that if you speak of me to the lady we have been so freely discussing, you will use me as gently as you can. I assure you I have given correctly the information you craved. In return will you favor me with your full American address, in order that I may communicate with you in case I ever ascertain anything else of importance?"

I handed him my card, with the address of my banker at New York written thereon, and we parted without enthusiasm, when his brother met him at Seville.



CHAPTER XXI.

BLANCHE GOES ABROAD IN HASTE.

I will not pretend that I was wholly comfortable in mind after I parted from Monsieur Fantelli. I had endeavored to pry into the secrets of a fellow

BLANCHE GOES ABROAD IN HASTE.

traveller in a way that could hardly have raised me in his estimation. By answering my inquiries in respect to Monsieur Desmoulins in such a frank way, Maurice had given a final stroke to my self-abasement. He had been in all things the thorough gentleman, while I had acted like an emissary of the police, bent on discovering certain facts at any cost.

It was growing warmer and I journeyed leisurely toward the north. I had no desire to return to America at that time of year. The scorching rays of the sun on the soil of my country during a great part of the summer make it uninviting to one who has experienced the more temperate airs of Europe. But I could not refrain from writing an answer to the letter I had received from Miss Brixton, to show that her sarcasm was not wholly deserved, and that I was not in such total ignorance of her adventures as she believed. There was not much to tell, it is true, but I had enough to mystify her. This is the letter I wrote :

“MY DEAR MISS BRIXTON :—Your very considerate note reached me just as I was leaving Africa. I remembered you with pleasure to Monsieur and Madame Delrien, but I had already talked about you with them and discovered that they were much interested in your welfare. Victor and his pretty wife had also learned that I knew you. For a lady who spent so brief a season in Algiers I must say you left a remarkably pleasant impression.

‘I am now on my way to Paris, where I expect to stay till about the first of July. From there I shall go to Boulogne-sur-Mer, a place I would advise you to visit the next time you go abroad. I shall make but few stops on my way north and spend not more than a day or two in a place, unless it be at Dijon, where I intend to see some old friends

by the name of Desmoulins, whose son Louis was badly wounded some time ago in Algeria. I wondered if you knew of the circumstance? It is said that a peculiar affair of the heart preceded it; but these French call all sorts of things *affaires du cœur*? It made a sensation at the time. His assailant, the young and dashing M. F., was a general favorite and his sentence provoked widespread regret.

"May I beg that you will kiss Master Wallace for me, and that, if you have the time to spare, you will send me a line with the latest news, addressed in care of Hottinguer & Cie., 38 Rue de Provence.

Ever your friend,"

"J. M."

At Paris I engaged a pleasant suite of rooms on the Boulevard Hausmann. This was a pleasure I had promised myself years before, on the occasion of my first visit to the imperial city. I do not know what makes this boulevard seem to me the most majestic in all Paris, but that is the impression I have always had. There is an indefinable something that none of the others, grand though they be, can boast.

A letter from a banker at Dijon proved that Monsieur Desmoulins was well known there, as well as the fact that he was injured in Algeria in a private quarrel. His health was still poor and he was supposed to be travelling. This proved that Maurice had been honest with me.

A fortnight later I received a second letter from Miss Brixton. She had evidently wasted little time before replying to my communication, and she had thrown aside all of her badinage.

"Your letter (she said) interested me more than I can explain. And now I want to ask a favor of you. Tell me without circumlocution from whom you

learned the facts of the assault on Monsieur D. and the sentence of Monsieur F. Do what I ask and I may soon be able to tell you more than I have yet revealed to any human being of that episode in my life at which the world seems astounded and for which I am still unforgiven by my closest friends. Do not hesitate, I pray. The matter has gone beyond the trivial stage and is of the greatest seriousness to me."

I smiled with the air of a conqueror when I read these lines. It was plain that I had touched my correspondent in a tender place and that I should accomplish most of what I had resolved upon when I left Dr. Robertson's office, six months before. My next letter was brief, but written with care :

"Receive my assurance (I said), if you need it that I would do anything to serve your true interests. While I have learned much about your winter in Algeria, I have divulged nothing except the fact which you certainly do not appear to wish concealed, that you are a mother. My chief informant was M. Fantelli, who was for some time my traveling companion. He received his pardon two months ago or so, and has left Algeria."

I had been about a fortnight at Boulogne-sur-Mer. Each day I was growing fonder of the lazy life by the sea. The odd machines in which one takes his long ride into the surf; the cavaliers who draw the conveyances out or in, according to the direction the tide is moving; the picturesque figures in bathing costumes, that cover the littoral by the hundred; the fashionably attired ladies and gentlemen who occupy chairs along the beach, or sit under canopies to watch the never-ending show—all make Boulogne

one of the most delightful spots during the season. In the evening there are drives and climbs to the grand heights above, and the watching of the fishermen and fisherwomen, clad in their quaint costumes, bare-legged and crowned with the queerest hats you ever saw ; and then the handsome toilettes that fill the Casino and its illuminated grounds. In the village streets I could walk for days, glancing at the clean interiors of the low houses, where the heavy wooden beds and bureaus of the present occupants' grandfathers put to shame the modern spider-legged contrivances ; and where the indispensable *pendule* in all its glory of gilt seldom attempts in any way to indicate the passing hours.

Boulogne—I prefer you to Ostend, to Brighton—even to that loveliest of American seaside resorts, Narragansett Pier !

I knew that one of the Amsterdam steamers had made her landing, but something more attractive chained me to the hotel. A north of England girl, twenty years of age, with a physique that could not be excelled, was telling me that the only fault she found with Boulogne was the warmth of the water. She was accustomed to bathe every day at home in the North Sea, whose temperature, I understand, is about that of ordinary ice water, and the waves at Boulogne, which I thought rather chilly, struck her as merely tepid. The girl had the English color. Her eye was bright ; her arms, showing through the lace-like sleeves of her basque, were round as a child's. She weighed, as she herself informed me, thirteen stone—I had to reckon it into pounds—though she was but five feet three in height. She had a hand and foot that would not be considered

fashionably small in American circles, but they fitted the rest of her figure to perfection. I have always felt a sense of gratitude to Mr. Edgar Fawcett because he was willing that his gigantic heroine, Miriam Ballestier, should have feet in proportion to her size. This north of England girl was a fine specimen from every sensible standpoint, and no Atlantic liner was sufficient to lure me from her.

Time passes more rapidly than one can account for when such pleasant company is being enjoyed. Before I should have supposed it possible for the steamer's passengers to reach the hotel, a *garçon* came into the parlor and handed me a note. My surprise could hardly be exceeded when I saw the signature of Blanche Brixton at the end.

She had just arrived and wished to see me without delay in her private parlor.

Excusing myself to my buxom companion—I fancied a shade of pique came into her ruddy countenance—I went at once to Miss Brixton's rooms. The familiar face met my eyes as soon as the door was opened to me. But it was not the happy, composed face I had known in New York. It was that of one who had been in deep trouble.

"I beg pardon sincerely for sending for you in such haste," she said, as soon as she had taken my hand and motioned me to a seat. "I am very tired, and a sea voyage always unnerves me."

"You were ill on the ocean?" I asked.

"Yes; it was a most unpleasant passage. You did not expect me, did you? I thought at first of cabling, but it seemed absurd. Really, I am making you no end of annoyance. I wonder what you think of me."

I assured her that she had not troubled me at all, and that I was most pleased to see her and render any service in my power. Then I inquired after the health of the child, and with whom she had left it.

"Good heavens! Did you imagine I could go away so far without Wallace!" she exclaimed. "He is in the next room with Julia, being put to bed for his nap."

"You must have started in haste," I observed, "if you came after you received my last letter."

Miss Brixton clasped her hands nervously together.

"Oh, I did!" she replied. "I wanted to know so many things, and—and it takes so long for the mails."

I waited patiently for her to continue. She was evidently influenced by some intense emotion. I would gladly have helped to soothe her had I known the best way to do it.

"Why did you interest yourself in my secret?" she ejaculated, as if in pain. "I was happy and contented, and now I am utterly miserable!"

"I do not understand how anything have done should have that effect on you," I exclaimed, astonished.

Miss Brixton turned her face from me, apparently to conceal some spasm that was about to cross it.

"Of course you don't!" she answered, chokingly. "And I cannot make you, unless I tell you everything, which I cannot yet do. You have a theory, I am sure—about me—about this affair. Won't you tell me what it is?"

"Miss Brixton," I said, "the state of mind in which I find you puzzles me greatly. I supposed

from all that you had said to me, and what others had told me, that you were perfectly certain that you had done right—that you had no regrets on account of—your child. Now I am led to believe—”

She stopped me before I could go any farther.

“This is too cruel !” she cried. “You are imagining things that have no foundation. I love my child as much as ever, I have no regrets in connection with *him*, not one ! But you have been in Algeria—you have met—you say—a certain gentleman. And what I ask is, what theory—have you—formulated ?”

In spite of the assurances she had given me, I had a feeling of a decidedly unpleasant nature when I told her what I suspected—namely, that Monsieur Desmoulins was the father of Wallace. She uttered, a little “Oh !” and covered her face with both hands. For a minute I thought she was about to burst into tears.

“Monsieur Fantelli—he did not say that ?” she asked, in low, trembling tones.

“No. He said little except that he had tried to kill his friend on your account. And he gave me a few particulars about himself, such as that he had a brother at Lyons and a wife somewhere. He—”

My companion rose to her feet and stared at me wildly.

“A wife !” she exclaimed. “He has married, then, since I saw him ?”

“Long before,” I replied, “judging by the way he spoke. He said she had gone her way and he did not intend to search for her. He seemed embittered by her desertion at a time when he most needed her sympathy, and I connected the occurrence with his incarceration.”

A thousand emotions chased each other over the mobile face that was turned toward me, but at the time I had no key to a single one of them.

"And I think you wrote me that you told him about—Wallace?" she said next.

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He seemed intensely surprised."

Miss Brixton nodded her head, more to herself than to me, and gazed at the carpet for some seconds without speaking.

"You are going to remain at Boulogne for some time longer, I presume?" she said, finally. Then, when I had responded in the affirmative, she added, "I am so tired now that I will ask you to excuse me. To-morrow, if you are willing, I will talk with you again."

She bowed me out politely and I went in search of my North Sea divinity. But she had fled and the parlor that had known her knew her no more that day.

CHAPTER XXII.

"QUEL AGE AS TU, MON BÉBÉ?"

When Boulogne-sur-Mer is open to anyone who chooses to go there it ought not to have surprised me to see, a few days after the arrival of Miss Brixton, the two brothers Fantelli sauntering along the Plaza. I met them squarely, and all three of us

raised our hats after the European custom. I did not intend to stop, for my parting with Maurice had been rather cold, but Monsieur Maxime, first addressing some remark in a very low tone to his brother, stepped aside and gave me his hand cordially.

“I did not expect to meet you,” he said, with a smile. “It is some distance from here to Seville.”

“Yes,” I admitted, “but Boulogne is an old friend of mine. Besides,” I added, with a glance at Maurice, “I have acquaintances here from America; a certain lady of whom I spoke to Monsieur when we were in Spain.”

Maurice Fantelli flushed visibly at my statement. He seemed ill at ease, and turning abruptly to his brother, alluded to an engagement that they were on the way to keep when my presence interrupted their walk.

“It is eleven o’clock already,” he said. “We shall certainly be late.”

“Directly, *mon frère*,” replied Monsieur Maxime. “The lady is, then, of particular interest to you, I judge?” he said to me. “A sweetheart, perhaps, or—but I think you are not married?”

“Excuse us, won’t you?” spoke up Maurice, with unconcealed agitation. “We will see you later in the day. You are so careless about appointments,” he added, to his brother, “that I really must remind you again of the hour. Good-day, Monsieur Medford.”

At the same time that he said these words, Maurice telegraphed with his eyes a plea that I would make no further allusion to the American lady before his brother, and I saw no reason why I should

not oblige him. Consequently I mentioned that I also had an engagement, and that I hoped to meet them in the evening at the Casino.

Two hours later, as I was coming from breakfast—or lunch, as the Americans would say—I met Maurice, who craved a brief audience in my private apartment.

“Don’t criticize my conduct too strongly,” were his first words, when we were inside my parlor. “I know I seemed disagreeable to you at Seville, but I had things to trouble me. We are still friends, I hope, or at least not enemies. What I wish to ask is that you will refrain from alluding to madame in the presence of my brother. He—he does not understand—and it is for the advantage of all concerned that he should not. Give me your word as a gentleman that you will do this, and I shall feel secure. Otherwise, I must make an excuse to get him to leave Boulogne at once.”

More mystery!

“I shall be very glad to make your mind easy,” I said. “But he is likely to learn of the matter from others if he remains here. Miss Brixton is in this very hotel, with her child, and she may meet you and him at any moment.”

He glanced apprehensively at the door as if he expected she might enter.

“In this house!” he repeated. “She—and her child!”

“Yes. They arrived on the last Amsterdam steamer.”

He seemed lost in thought for several minutes.

“Pardon me,” he said, at last. “I answered a

great many questions for you, when we were at Oran. Will you answer a few for me ?”

“If I can.”

“Why did Mees—how do you pronounce her name—”

“Brixton.”

“Brees-ton. Why has she come to Europe at this time ?”

“Well,” I answered, “to be frank with you, she came on account of a letter I wrote, informing her that I had heard of her African experience.”

Maurice looked greatly puzzled.

“She came all the way across the ocean—on *that* account !” he said.

“Yes. She wanted to hear the fullest particulars from my own lips, and lost no time in doing so. An Atlantic journey is not so great an undertaking as it once was.”

The Frenchman measured his words with nicety.

“And when she arrived you told her—what ?”

“That I had met you—”

“*Diable !*”

“And that you had told me—”

“*Sacré bleu*, I told you nothing ! I beg your pardon !”

“I told her I had learned about her child’s father. That was it, in brief.”

Maurice blinked as if a musket ball had whizzed by his eyes.

“You told her—” he echoed.

“I told her what I knew.”

Fantelli’s face wore a strange expression.

“And what did the lady say ?” he asked.

“What could she say ?”

“How long will she remain abroad?”

“A long time, probably.”

“For what purpose?” he inquired, suspiciously.

“Perhaps to see Monsieur Desmoulins—or you,” I hazarded, at random.

He rose, took a few strides up and down the room, and ejaculated, “Oh, no!” with some vigor. “No, indeed! If she knew I was in Boulogne she would leave it to-morrow. I think you had best tell her, if you will be so kind. Maxime has planned to stay a month and we shall be in constant danger of running across Mees Brees-ton, which would be annoying.”

I remarked that I should certainly inform her that he was in the village, if he desired it, but that a brief note from his own hand would answer the same purpose.

“I write so execrably, after my long confinement at manual labor,” he said, in excuse, “that I fear she could never read it. Just mention that I am here—speak as if I were alone, you know, for of course she does not know anything about the other members of my family—and mark the result. On the next morning she will pack her things and start for some other quarter of the globe. By-the-way, monsieur, could you manage to let me see her boy?”

I called a servant and gave him a note to Miss Brixton, in which I stated that an acquaintance of mine wished to see her offspring, and would she allow him to be brought up for a few minutes. When Wallace reached the room, which was half an hour later, so anxious had the fond mamma been to make him thoroughly presentable, Fantelli examined him with the greatest interest.

"*Quel age as tu, mon bébé?*" he said, caressingly, passing his hands through the little fellow's curls.

"He does not speak French," I explained, when the boy looked blankly at the unfamiliar face and listened to the strange tongue.

"*Pas un mot?*"

"Not one. Who should have taught him?"

Fantelli said "To be sure," in a low tone and resumed his inspection of the infant.

"Why the deuce did I never learn English?" he exclaimed. "To think that I can't ask this chap his age in a way that he can understand! His mother is equally ignorant, I think, of the most beautiful tongue! Well, he is a pretty fellow, and I am infinitely obliged to you."

As he was apparently through with his inspection, I took Wallace to the maid, who was in waiting outside my door, and delivered him into her custody.

"What is that name you called him?" asked Maurice when I returned.

"Wallace."

"Vallees?" he repeated, struggling with the pronunciation. "What kind of name is that?"

I told him it was probably a mere fancy, a name that happened to suit the taste of his mother.

"Oh, I remember," he replied. "You do not name children after the saints, as we do. I thought there could be no St. Vallees. Well, the name is good enough. And the surname—you tell me she calls the boy Brees-ton."

"Wallace Brixton, yes."

Monsieur Fantelli shook his head.

"But—does not that excite comment?" he asked. "What kind of arrangements have you in America,

by which a child takes his mother's name instead of his father's? Is that the custom in your country? Explain it to me, please?"

I did not know as I had a right to enter into a full explanation, especially as it was doubtful if he would appreciate the very peculiar circumstances of this very peculiar case. So I told him it was another fancy of Miss Brixton's.

"She always calls herself *Mees Brees-ton*, does she?" he asked. "Not *Madame*?"

"Exactly. She is a very independent woman, with a fortune of her own, and does as she pleases."

He murmured that it was most unaccountable. Feeling that one good turn deserved another, and that I ought to receive something in return for all the information I was imparting, I tried to get him to tell me fuller particulars about his part in the Algerian affair. But he was reticent still.

"Won't you say in what your friend, the colonel's, insult consisted?" I asked.

"*Ah, mon ami!* You must excuse me. That matter is of such a painful nature that I cannot bear to recall it. Poor Louis has paid dearly for his fault!"

"But I do not see why she should avoid *you*," I said. "Your part in the matter seems to have been a most honorable one."

He thanked me by a low bow, and said it did not follow that madame held that opinion. Besides, why did I not question her in relation to it. If she was willing to tell me he would interpose no objection.

As there was no more to be got out of him I was not sorry when he brought the interview to a close

It had taken up an hour of my time—not worth much, it is true, but worse than wasted, so far as I could see.

That evening, while sitting on the veranda with Miss Brixton, who spent considerable of her leisure time in my company, I resolved to tell her that Monsieur Fantelli was at Boulogne and mark the effect of the news.

“I met an old acquaintance of yours to-day,” was the way I began it. Then, as she glanced at me inquiringly, I continued, “from Algiers.”

The color left her cheek, as she turned a frightened face toward me.

“Who?” she whispered.

“Monsieur Fantelli.”

“Here!” she cried, incredulously.

“Here, in this hotel. He was in my room for an hour this very afternoon.”

She drew a long breath and her eyes opened wider.

“And it was *he* to whom you showed my boy!”

I nodded to admit that she was right in her supposition.

“Mr. Medford,” she said, biting her lips, “that was not fair.”

“So far as I knew it was perfectly right,” I replied.

“If you persist in keeping the main facts of your case from me, you must not be surprised if I err in judgment, groping as I am in the dark.”

I could see that she relented.

“What did he say about Wallace?” she inquired, breathing heavily.

“That he was a handsome child, and that he regretted they could not speak a common tongue.”

"Was that all?"

"That was all."

"And about me?"

"That you would leave Boulogne if you knew he were here."

With the ingenuousness of a woman or a criminal lawyer she cross-questioned me for some minutes in relation to the Frenchman, but I had nothing more to tell her. When I asked again if she would not make me a participant in the full secret she was carrying, she shook her head and said: "Not quite yet," in a way that left me certain she had a pain at her heart that prevented her speaking.

The next day I did not see either of the brothers Fantelli. They must have kept out of sight on purpose, for I took my morning bath in the surf and spent much of the afternoon in the Casino, where all the men were in the habit of congregating.

After dinner I proposed to Miss Brixton that we take a stroll together, something we had been talking of doing the first pleasant evening, and she made the excuse that she had some letters to write and should not go out. Rather lonely, I waited till after nine o'clock and then took my solitary way along the path that led to the cathedral on the heights above. Having inspected the neighborhood often I walked listlessly along, bent merely on killing the heavy hours that intervened between me and bedtime. Occasionally figures passed me, mostly of the fisherfolk who live in that vicinity.

But a different sight suddenly met my vision—one that caused me to step aside and hide myself for a minute in the shade of a clump of trees. Two people were walking together, a man and a woman. They

passed within twenty feet of me,—Blanche Brixton and Maurice Fantelli! Their faces were close together, like those of people who do not mean to be overheard. The few words that reached my ears showed me that the woman was speaking French with a very broken accent, and that her companion was having difficulty in comprehending her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT BOULOGNE-SUR-MER.

Conceive anything you please, it cannot be too strong to express my surprise that two persons, who had both given me to understand that a cordial dislike kept them apart, should be walking in the most friendly manner along that unfrequented path at ten o'clock at night! And Miss Brixton, unacquainted so far as I knew with any foreign tongue, was trying to converse in French, proving that she was as anxious as he for the meeting.

Most of us have nerves that may be touched unpleasantly by the discovery that we have been outwitted. My head grew hot as I thought of the situation. I would have given a good deal to be able to follow those people without discovery, and learn what they were saying. As they had passed into the open this was, of course, impossible. The moon was bright enough to disclose any object not hidden by a tree or a building. I could only

stay till they had gone completely out of sight, and then return to my hotel and await developments.

These people were evidently too deep for my slender capacity as a detective. All I had discovered was the result of chance, not ability. So disgusted was I that I sank on the ground under the trees, and gave myself up to my thoughts.

Within a few minutes, however, I heard low voices, and peering through the shrubbery I saw my friends—if such I could now call them—returning. They had, apparently, little fear of being discovered, for the hour was late and there were few strollers but themselves on that side of the height. They walked very slowly, and every few moments stopped for a second or two. Miss Brixton's French was so imperfect that Maurice, with all his politeness, was obliged frequently to confess that he could not make it out. One of their stops was near enough to where I lay for me to hear a part of the conversation.

"I cannot you believe," was what Miss Brixton was saying, to translate her French into anything like its English equivalent. "I saw never anyone who looked like priest. I not French then spoke. That could not be good law. I have not anything understand."

"But I am sure," responded the mellifluous tones of Fantelli. "It was no priest, in that you are right; but the mayor of the place, which is according to our custom. He is there still, I presume; you could go and see."

Miss Brixton shook her head decidedly, like one who is unwilling to be convinced.

"Why have you learned French?" asked Maurice, as they began to move on.

"To with Wallace talk after," she answered. "He must the language learn of his father."

"But he has no father, according to your belief," replied the other. "If you call him Valleees Breston and tell him he is French he will ask you many questions."

"No ; I him will explain—"

They had gone too far for me to follow their conversation at that time, and I rose to my feet, more puzzled than ever. Miss Brixton had told Maurice that she had seen no one who resembled a priest, and he had said it was no priest, but a mayor. That meant nothing to me. The mayor, he had added, was still there. There? Where? At some place in Algeria, no doubt. She "could go to see him." Would she go? What would she do if she did go? The key to the entire mystery might be in that question.

After I reached my apartments I was surprised by a card from Miss Brixton's maid, who informed me that her mistress wished very much to see me for a few moments. I followed her to the salon occupied by my countrywoman and found the latter in a state of decided perturbation.

"I am in much trouble," she said, as soon as I had entered the room and closed the door. "There is no one else on this side of the ocean that I can call to my aid, and yet I fear you must by this time think me an intolerable nuisance."

I responded with due politeness, and waited for her to proceed.

"It may be necessary for me to make a journey to Algeria," she said, speaking hesitatingly. "Not at **this season**, of course, for it would endanger the

health of my boy, and I could not think of going without him. I want to ask if you intend to stay another winter abroad, and—it looks like a great request, doesn't it?—if you could make it convenient to spend a month or so in Africa with me, say in October."

I looked into the anxious face and marked the movements of the nervous hands.

"How much easier all this would be," I said, "if you would confide your entire story to me. How can you tell that I might not be able to give advice that would be of value. At present both of us are groping in the dark."

She shook her head doubtfully, and reddened in the charming way she had.

"I am so sorry," she said. "I would trust you sooner than anyone else, but I cannot tell my secret yet to any man."

"Not even to Monsieur Fantelli?" I asked, stung to the quick.

Miss Brixton's expression showed that the shot had struck home. She turned pale, recoiled a little, and then leaning forward, put both her hands on my arm.

"What did you mean by that?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Only what I said. If anyone is to go to Algeria with you, it ought to be he. He knows the country—he knows more than he has told me of the adventure that you had there. He is, so far as I am aware, free from engagements of any kind. Why not ask him?"

She eyed me with curiosity and an intense desire to learn what I knew.

"I *could* not ask him," she replied. "And if you are as wise as you like to have me believe, you will understand the reason."

"And yet," I answered, "you can walk about town with him under the moonlight."

"Walk—with him !" she exclaimed, with such well counterfeited astonishment, that nothing but my own eyesight would have made me doubt her.

"Certainly," I said. "I was not spying upon you, but I saw you, distinctly. Anyone could have seen you, for you made no attempt at concealment. I shall not admit that I am mistaken, for I know you very well, and I also know Maurice."

The lady had risen and seemed prepared at first to utter a vehement denial of my statement ; but when I closed she threw herself again into her chair, and attempted to regain her composure.

"So you saw me with Maurice?" she said. "Yes, I had something of importance to tell him, and, as you say, we did not attempt to conceal ourselves. I learned that he **was** going away, and I did not wish to lose the opportunity."

I said again that I thought Monsieur Maurice would be her best escort to Algeria. As for myself, I wanted to do **anything** reasonable in the way of obliging her, but I was **not** ambitious to be served in the way I had been. If I was to accompany her I must be put in possession of the reason why she proposed making the journey.

"And Maurice told you he was going away?" I added. "He is much more confidential with you than with me, for he mentioned nothing about it when I saw him this afternoon at the Casino."

"Yes," she answered, simply. "His brother went yesterday and he will go to-morrow."

"Where are they going?"

"He did not say."

We talked in this manner for fully an hour, with little result, so far as my learning anything was concerned. The upshot of the discussion was that I agreed to sleep over the matter, and let her know my answer on the following morning.

"You will go—I know you will," she said to me, in her sweetest manner. "It will only take a few weeks of your time and then I shall return to America with a more peaceful mind, I hope. Before you retire now, I want to show you the prettiest sight you ever saw. In a minute I will be with you."

Much wondering what she intended to exhibit, I waited while she stepped into an adjoining room. Presently she came to the door and beckoned me with a motion that enjoined quietness. I soon saw the object of her solicitude. In a small bed, by the side of her own larger one, lay Master Wallace, in the loveliest of childhood's slumbers.

"He is mine—mine alone!" said the mother, earnestly, when she had closed the door. "No one else can claim him, no one! I will never divide his ownership!"

The next morning after debating the matter as fully as I could, I told Miss Brixton I would go to Algeria with her, if she was of the same mind when October came. In the meantime I would resume my travels, as I intended to go to Norway and other points during the summer. If she wished to com-

municate with me she had only to send anything in care of Hottinguer, the banker.

She thanked me effusively, with a thousand kind expressions, and the following day I took my leave of Boulogne, sleeping the next night at Brussels.



MR. MEDFORD AGAIN.



CHAPTER XXIV.

EVERYTHING UP TO DATE.

Mr. Medford paused at last, with the sentence quoted at the close of the preceding chapter. Although he had taken the greater part of the afternoon and evening in his recital he had not tired me in the least.

“Is that the end?” I asked.

“For the present, yes. After I have been to Algeria with her there ought to be something more to tell.”

“And you will go?”

“If I live. I have promised, you remember. What do you think of my story?”

I answered that it was most interesting.

“Can you interpret the riddle?” he inquired.

“Hardly. If it was a piece of fiction I would hazard it, but real life is always playing unexpected tricks.”

Mr. Medford bowed to show that he agreed with this statement.

"You see how it is," he remarked. "M. Desmoulin is undoubtedly the father of this child. Notwithstanding the fact that he was wounded by Maurice Fantelli, the latter is still his staunch friend and would do anything to serve him. Now, what does M. Desmoulin want? Does he wish to claim his son or does he not? It is evident that Miss Brixton believed him dead until she received my letter informing her to the contrary. I have made every effort to find him, but without avail. Advices from Dijon only showed that he is travelling. Miss Brixton seems to place reliance on Maurice, as shown by her confidential talk with him the night I saw them together at Boulogne. And yet she would not let him accompany her to Algeria, even acting astounded at my proposition to that effect. If I could get an hour's talk with Louis Desmoulin I would find out something worth knowing."

As he seemed to expect me to say something I tried to oblige him, though I should have preferred to sit an hour in silence, the better to compare the various bits of evidence that presented themselves in the case.

"Is there no possibility," I said, "that someone else is this child's father—for instance, Maurice?"

Mr. Medford stared at me strangely.

"I don't see how you can think that," he replied.

"He tells me he has a wife."

I elevated my brows, and responded—

"Well?"

My companion looked at me with a puzzled face.

"Men have been known to break their vows," I

said. "Besides, Miss Brixton, you say, showed great astonishment when you told her Maurice was married."

"But he never was **shot!**" exclaimed Medford. "That is a vital thing in this affair. Desmoulins is living, but he was shot, and it was supposed he would die. Maurice, so far as I can learn, has had no bullet wound."

I had to admit that this was a point worth considering. Then I tried to sum up the facts that appeared to be undisputed. Somebody, who had been in Algeria in the winter of a certain year, was Wallace Brixton's father; that Somebody had been shot, and had been expected to die; the shooting had been performed by Maurice Fantelli, under a sudden impulse caused by an insult which Somebody had given to a lady whose initials were "B. B." and who was without doubt Miss Blanche Brixton; for this act Maurice had been sentenced to imprisonment, and after serving part of his term had been pardoned, largely on account of the efforts of the Somebody he had shot. *Ergo*, the Somebody must be Louis Desmoulins. Yes, I was obliged to admit that it looked like a clear case.

"But why is Blanche going to Africa?" I inquired. "That is the question at present."

"Yes," said Medford, "that is the question. Before I leave there with her I will have something more definite than a theory, too."

"She spoke about a priest, and about a mayor," I remarked, reflectively.

"And what does that signify?" asked Medford.

I acknowledged that I did not know. Both of those functionaries had a considerable place in the

arrangement of most French lives and were to be found in Algeria as well as elsewhere. But what connection they had with Miss Brixton I could not guess.

"The best thing for me," I added, with a smile, "in relation to this story, is to wait, as we do for other serials, until it 'comes out.' Speculations are rather useless."

"You wouldn't like to join the party and go to Algeria with us, would you?" asked Medford, tentatively.

"I would," said I, "but for one thing. I was there some time ago and explored the country quite thoroughly. I have planned to spend next winter in the West Indies. You are very kind to suggest my going, however, and I am infinitely obliged."

"It isn't altogether kindness that prompts me," said Medford, with the manner of one who makes a confession. "I want to find out the mystery in this affair, and I fear I shall never do it alone."

I responded that I believed he would, and added that nothing would give me greater pleasure than to meet him when he had done so.

"It would be worth putting into a book, wouldn't it?" he asked.

"Decidedly," I answered with enthusiasm.

The next day I parted from Mr. Medford, as our paths lay in opposite directions. It was nearly a year before we met again, and then it was on American soil, at the Sinclair House in Bethlehem, N. H.

"I can finish that story now," he exclaimed with a beaming smile, as he pressed my hand with the joy of our renewed meeting.

"Finish it, then," I said.

And he finished it.



MISS BRIXTON'S DILEMMA.



CHAPTER XXV.

MEETING MONSIEUR MARTINE.

It was about the middle of October [said Medford, when we had taken seats in an open carriage and were being driven toward the Profile], that Miss Brixton, Master Wallace and myself, with a couple of maids and a courier, started for Africa. Before we began the journey I had a long talk with Blanche, in which I endeavored to persuade her to give me at least an inkling of the purpose she had in view, but without effect. Even a hint that I should decline to accompany her after all did not swerve her from her reticent attitude.

"Go with me," she pleaded, "and as soon as I can possibly do so, I will tell you all about it. At present I really cannot."

Upon reaching Algiers we went to the Hotel de l'Oasis, where we were pleasantly greeted by the proprietor, by Victor, and the other members of the

establishment who remembered us. I soon discovered that something of a secret nature was going on, to which the new courier was a party, and my pride was slightly wounded by the reflection that Miss Brixton was willing to trust this fellow with matters which she did not wish me to know. They had frequent consultations that lasted for hours. Gustave would go away for one or two days at a time, and on his return find his mistress ready to see him, no matter what other engagement she might at the moment have on hand. I had occasion, once or twice, myself, to make way for him, and I have no hesitation in saying that I did not particularly like it.

Nearly a month was passed in this manner, and I began to find even beautiful Algiers very dull. I believe Heaven itself would grow wearisome if I had to wait within its golden streets for something to happen of whose nature and date I had no reasonable conception. I wandered about the streets, through the native quarter, over the Mustapha Hill, and into the suburbs—all of which I had thoroughly explored on my previous visit—until I grew as tired of it as I could well be. Then, when things were becoming almost unbearable, I met a very interesting stranger.

It was in the office of Cook & Son, that gigantic institution which one finds in every corner of the habitable globe. It was in the down-town office of the Cooks, not in the one near the Governor-general's palace—for there are two stations of the company in Algiers. I was making arrangements for a carriage in which to pay a visit to the monastery of La Trappe, a dozen miles or so inland, where I had spent a pleasant day the previous winter. A young Frenchman entered the room and inquired

about the Trappist monastery just as I had finished my arrangements and was about to leave. He seemed rather disappointed to find that there was no regular excursion carriage to the place, and remarked casually that he did not like the idea of going alone.

"I thought you might be getting up a party," he explained. "It is tiresome taking that kind of a journey all by oneself."

His words expressed so well the thought that had been in my own mind that I looked at him with interest. The next minute I decided to take advantage of that camaraderie that prevails among fellow-travellers, and invite him to share my equipage.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur," I said, "but I am going to take the same trip to-morrow and I shall be more than pleased if you will honor me with your company."

The Frenchman hesitated, eyeing me with some surprise.

"You are extremely kind," he replied. "As I was saying, I dislike these lonely journeys. Are you—is there anyone else to go with you?"

"No," I said. "Unless you accept, I shall be entirely alone."

"Then," he answered, as if relieved, "I shall do so with great pleasure."

Remarking to the agent that he would not need a carriage of his own now, the gentleman walked out of the office with me. Our conversation, begun so abruptly, continued as we strolled together along the line of the sea-coast, in an opposite direction from my hotel. When I tendered him my card he searched in his pocket for his own card-case; and then, finding that he had left it in his room, informed

me that his name was Jules Martine and that he was touring the country for pleasure, like myself. I learned in the course of the next hour that this was his second visit to Africa, and that he had also visited the monastery on a previous occasion.

"It is worth seeing a second time," he remarked, earnestly. "I think it one of the most entertaining places I ever saw. The last time I was there an event occurred that I shall not soon forget."

I looked the inquiry I did not need to put into words.

"It was a strange affair," continued M. Martine. "I was with a party of sight-seers, among whom was a very beautiful young lady of your country. But—perhaps I should bore you with the history."

I had caught so eagerly at the few words already uttered that I had difficulty in repressing my anxiety to hear the rest, lest I should excite his suspicions. I replied as calmly as possible that I should like very much to hear of the incident, as anything out of the common possessed a peculiar charm for me.

"Well," said M. Martine, after a moment's pause "it was this way :

"There was in the party a gentleman who had, it seemed, conceived a violent passion for the young lady, which she did not wholly return. He had formed the very unique plan of getting one of the monks to marry them, without her knowledge."

I uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Without her knowledge !" I repeated.

"Yes. It was this way : " (M. Martine had, like many other men, a warm attachment to a favorite phrase.) "The young lady understood very little, if

any French, which was the native tongue of her admirer. He believed, in his ardor—and you know there is nothing so blind as a lover—that if he could get a ceremony performed, he could persuade her to abide by it, and become his wife in reality.”

I interrupted to ask what had taken place up to that time ; whether the gentleman had told the lady of his love and been rejected, or whether he had held his secret locked in his own bosom.

“It was this way,” replied M. Martine : “The gentleman had been presented to the lady and had made known his passion. She had answered by the very strange statement that she was wholly averse to marriage and would not listen to a proposal of that kind from anyone. At first he thought this a mere pretext, a more courteous way of saying farewell than by a direct rejection. Being in love to an extreme degree he was not willing to surrender his hopes without doing his utmost to bring them to full fruition. He, therefore, as is customary in such cases, made liberal presents to the lady’s maid and courier, seeking to learn through them the real condition of her mind. In spite of his generosity, both of them persisted that mademoiselle had told him the truth. They said she was one of those women who have a positive aversion for matrimony, and being possessed of an ample fortune had determined to enjoy it alone, untrammelled by the restrictions of the wedded state. Do what he could, they stuck to one story, the same in effect that the lady had given him. Then it was that he resolved to try the plan I have mentioned, believing she might relent when he had a document in his hand averring that she was already his wife.”

It was an odd history, truly, and I showed the interest I felt so strongly that my companion looked gratified. One of the pleasantest things about any recital is to secure a thoroughly attentive listener.

"And did the scheme succeed?" I asked. Though feeling certain that Miss Brixton was the lady implicated, I need not say the question was superfluous.

"No," said M. Martine, and I thought he spoke regretfully. "It was this way: The idea was to arrange the matter with one of the oldest monks. The lady was told that she would see an exposition of the ritualistic work of the order. The way was led into the chapel and the services proceeded, to the evident entertainment of mademoiselle. All was apparently going well. There were no persons present, except the three I have mentioned, the lady's maid—and myself."

I interrupted to remark that my informant had evidently been let into the secret of his friend's purpose.

"Yes," he said. "It was this way: I sympathized fully with his ardent desire to possess that beautiful creature. His intentions were in the highest degree honorable, though his method of attaining the desired result could only be justified by the proverb, 'All's fair in love and war.' My friend, be it understood, belonged to both those branches, holding a commission in the service of the Republic, and being at the time quartered near here with his regiment. I reasoned that there would be no harm in the affair, for even if the monk performed a religious ceremony which the lady accepted, it would, according to French law, require still another ceremony—a civil

one—to make it legally binding. It was merely a bit of strategy to bring the lady to a sensible view of her natural destiny, and it would have been successful but for the fact that Father Ambrose had his suspicions aroused and refused to finish the work he had begun.”

As it was nearing the dinner hour, I suggested that we retrace our steps, which we did, walking slowly.

“You never saw anything progress better up to the critical moment,” continued my new acquaintance. “The lady was engrossed in the mysticism of the service she did not in the least comprehend. Her maid—bribed in advance—gave the most plausible explanations to each part of the ceremony, and the lady answered when told, without question. I don’t know what made it enter the head of that confounded monk that anything was wrong, but he certainly got that impression, and before he reached the more important words he called a young assistant and despatched him for a member of the fraternity who understood English. Realizing that his efforts were destined to be foiled, my friend admitted his fault to the friar, who upraided him without stint, and in such a tone that the lady became alarmed. The carriages in which we had come were sought without waiting for the arrival of the other monk, and we left the monastery disappointed in our scheme, but luckily without having the least suspicion aroused in the mind of the one most concerned.”

Was it Miss Brixton? I wanted desperately to know, but I did not intend to repeat the error, as I had always considered it, which I perpetrated with

Maurice Fantelli. It was for me to learn all I could from this stranger, and give him as little as possible in return. As coolly as possible I asked if this was the end of his remarkable story.

"No," he answered, with something like a sigh. "It is, however, all I feel justified in telling at present. Is it not the most peculiar account you ever heard?"

I admitted that it was indeed strange, but said I could match it, if I chose, with one equally out of the common. My only trouble was that I doubted my right to reveal what was the secret of another.

"I am sorry you are under that restriction," he said. "Is the matter one that came under your own observation?"

"It was told to me," I replied, evasively. "There was also a young lady in it, and—a French officer; yes, an officer stationed in Algeria."

M. Martine looked at me quickly. His eyes dilated and his cheeks grew red.

"You mean more than your words imply," he said. "If you have any knowledge of the lady of whom I have been speaking, monsieur, I trust you will confide it to me."

He had been too rapid for my plan. Now that the point was raised, I could do no less than try to meet it.

"How can I tell whether it be the same lady," I asked, "when you have not even given me her name?"

Monsieur Martine colored still more.

"You can understand that that might be impossible," he said.

"Hardly."

"One cannot use the name of a lady in such a case without her consent."

"Then," I said, "how shall we proceed to decide if it be the same one?"

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "It is indeed a difficulty. But have you told me all you can? The lady you speak of had some relations with a French officer stationed hereabouts. When was this?"

"About three years ago."

I could feel the almost imperceptible start that greeted my reply.

"Can you tell me where this lady is at the present time?" he asked with suppressed eagerness.

I smiled at the question.

"I have no right to do so without her consent," I said, using his own expression.

He bowed abstractedly, admitting the truth of my observation by his manner.

"You will perhaps tell whether you have ever met her?" he asked, his eagerness returning.

"I have no reason to deny that I have."

"Very long ago?"

"Some time after the Algerian episode," I answered.

"And—was she well in health?"

"Remarkably so."

Monsieur Martine seemed uneasy at the sharp looks with which I regarded him.

"You will comprehend the reason of my inquiries," he said, "when I tell you that I expect to meet my friend, the officer, soon, and I know he will be most anxious."

This was news indeed.

"You expect to return to France?" I said, interrogatively.

"Before a great while."

"You will be more lucky than other people if you find your friend," I could not help saying. "He has not been at Dijon for many months."

M. Martine opened his eyes wider.

"Why should you think he would be at Dijon?" he asked.

"Because it is the home of his family. While I cannot discuss the lady in this case beyond a certain point, there is no reason why we should hide the name of the gentleman. I trust if you have the present address of M. Desmoulins, you will give it to me, as I have most important business which I would be glad to transact with him."

My companion had stopped on the sidewalk, and was regarding me with an expression too peculiar to translate.

"M. Desmoulins!" he exclaimed. "M. Louis Desmoulins?"

"Precisely. The lady I speak of had relations of the most important character with that gentleman. I have tried my best to find him during the summer that is just past. I have a number of questions to ask him that I think he will not refuse to answer."

Monsieur Martine was unaccountably agitated.

"Let me tell you," he said, icily, "that the friend to whom I referred was not M. Desmoulins. When you say Mademoiselle—"

"Mlle. B—" I interrupted. "We will call her Mlle. B."

He caught his breath.

"We will call her Miss Brixton," he corrected

"Now, when you say that she had 'relations of an important character,' with M. Desmoulins, I wish you would indicate in some manner what you mean."

The attitude which M. Martine had suddenly assumed was so different from that of a few moments before—almost belligerent, in fact—that I did not know what to say. I was sorry that any controversy had arisen, for I had begun to like the fellow, and had contemplated the ride with him on the morrow with the greatest satisfaction. I could not get very angry, as I knew nothing that should cause the Frenchman's change toward me, and yet I did not like the dictatorial tone he used.

"There is a misunderstanding," I replied. "I had not the slightest doubt, until a minute ago, that you were talking all this time of M. Louis Desmoulins, of Dijon. The lady I mean certainly had the very closest friendship—if the word is sufficiently strong—with that gentleman. It was, so far as I knew, a matter of greater interest to themselves than to anyone else. Being connected with her family, in a financial way, I have reasons for wishing to meet him. Why you excite yourself over the affair I am at a loss to conceive."

My companion caught every word with breathless interest. When I had finished, he drew from his pocket a photograph and presented it before my eyes.

"Is that the lady?" he demanded.

It certainly was Miss Brixton. A glance at the card showed that it was taken by an Algiers photographer, and the likeness was excellent. There was

no need that I should admit as much in words, for my face must have told its story.

"I shall have to bid you adieu," said M. Martine, grimly, putting the picture back into his pocket. "And as I leave for France on the boat to-morrow, I shall be unable to accept your hospitality on the way to La Trappe."

He looked so dark, and was so evidently affected by some concealed emotion, that I viewed him with genuine concern. But I had so little idea what was the matter that I could say nothing to alter his determination.

"My friend," pursued M. Martine, in a cold, set voice, "will have business to transact with M. Desmoulins of more importance than yours can possibly be. Unless I misapprehend the probabilities, the gentleman from Dijon will be in no condition to see you after my friend has done with him."

Turning on his heel, with a lift of the hat, Monsieur Martine made his adieux. I was too astonished to follow him or to utter another word.

It was fully fifteen minutes later that I thoroughly comprehended what his wild expressions probably meant.

Louis Desmoulins had mortally offended an unknown admirer of Miss Brixton's and was likely to pay for the affront with his life!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A VISIT TO A MONASTERY.

I am sometimes a little slow in coming to a decision, but when made it is not long in being executed. The boats that ply between Algiers and Marseilles, the trains that go from thence to Dijon, are of reasonable swiftness ; but there is one thing that travels much faster than either—the telegraph.

If M. Martine was determined to send his friend to Dijon, with the intention of drawing M. Desmoulins into mortal combat—I did not for an instant accuse him of a more sinister purpose—there was but one manner in which I could prevent a collision. I must warn Desmoulins. In what manner? Clearly in a way that would not leave him to face the charge of cowardice. I could not wire him of the truth, because, however unwillingly, he would have to wait and meet his enemy. I must invent a plan that would take him away from Dijon before the friend of Monsieur Martine arrived there.

There are times when several birds may as well be killed with one stone as with more. If Desmoulins was at Dijon, no one wanted to see him more than I. If he could be induced to come to Algiers I might accomplish the double result of asking the questions I had waited for so long and putting him out of the reach, for the present, of Martine's friend. If he was not at Dijon, my telegram would not

reach him, but neither would his angry pursuer. It was worth trying.

After some hours of study I evolved the following despatch :

“Monsieur le Colonel Louis Desmoulins—Dijon. A matter involving your highest honor demands your presence instantly at Algiers. Come, without a second's delay.
MEDFORD, Hotel de l'Oasis.”

Proceeding to the post-office, from which all telegrams are sent in Algeria, as in most European countries, I copied this despatch on a blank that was handed me. Then, drawing out my purse, I awaited the announcement of the sum to be paid, jingling several louis in my hand. I knew that the telegram would have to be cabled five hundred miles under the Mediterranean, and then repeated and sent five hundred miles more to its destination. Familiarity with American rates, and the prices charged for use of the Atlantic cables, had made me believe that my message would cost eight or ten dollars. Judge of my surprise, then, when I was informed that the entire charge would be fifty-two cents !

“The rate is a cent a word in Algeria or France, you know,” said the clerk, when I repeated the figures in an astonished tone. “But for the cable the charge is also a cent, which makes the rate double.”

“Cheap enough, if it accomplishes the result hoped for !” was my mental comment, as I turned away.

I found Miss Brixton ready to dine and accompanied her to the pleasant *salle-à-manger*, which was nearly filled when we arrived. Among the

guests was an English actress, who a short time ago made a fortune by playing in the United States, and who at one time bore the reputation of being the handsomest lady in the world. She was accompanied by the grandson of one of the most famous English statesmen who ever lived, a fine-looking youth, some ten years her junior, and they were the observed of all observers. I whispered to Miss Brixton who they were, and immediately regretted having done so. For she replied coldly that she had no interest in such people, and did not care to look at them. Although they remained the next two days at the hotel with us, Blanche never saw their faces, the only woman there, I am sure, who could say as much.

I could not help thinking how much greater was the fault of the American lady, judged by the un pitying standard of the world, than that of the English one. The latter had at least no living evidence of her frailty, paraded in the face of all who cared to know. I had taken pains, on my own account, to give the impression to Victor and the Delrieus that Wallace was an adopted child, for otherwise we should have been watched as intently, if not more so, than the other party.

Miss Brixton realized what was passing in my mind, and when we had gone to her salon to take the coffee that was usually served to us there, she began to talk of the matter.

"You have never changed your opinion about me, I see," was the way she began. "I am the same foolish, wicked girl to you still."

I asked her why she said that.

"Don't you think I can read your mind?" she

inquired. "You considered it inconsistent of me to speak so harshly of Mrs. —, when I, myself, have ignored the opinion of Society. Let me beg you to tell me candidly—can you see no difference?"

I responded to this direct question that I had never debated the matter of her conduct, and did not intend to begin now.

"Very well," she said, smiling gravely at my discomfiture, which was evident. "I must defend myself without your aid. That woman you saw in the dining-room, if rumor is to be believed, married an English gentleman, and then left him in order to gratify her love for flattery and luxurious living. She is noted chiefly for her numerous lovers, and the fortune she has accumulated out of their gifts. That she has borne no child is presumptive evidence against her of a much more damaging character. And yet you think me as bad as she, because, to meet the mother-craving in my heart, I stepped aside just once!"

Her voice was trembling as she reached the concluding sentence, and her eyes were moist with tears.

"We shall gain nothing by this line of conversation," I said, "which must necessarily be one-sided. Let us return to something of more moment. I came here with you at your earnest solicitation. We have been here nearly three weeks, and I cannot see that I have been of the slightest use. By our understanding I was to remain a month, and I must remind you that the time will soon be ended."

"I am sorry you find it so dull," she replied, "but I know it must seem so, as you spent so long a time here before. The matter I am investigating has taken me a little longer than I supposed it would,

but I think it will be finished very soon now. Your presence is of immense moral value, and even if you should be compelled to stay a few days beyond the time I spoke of, I hope you will not be too much incommoded to oblige me."

I asked her if she was still unable to confide in me to any extent whatever.

"At present, yes," she answered, sadly. "But I am liable at any moment to need your advice, in which case I may be compelled to tell you everything."

I mentioned the intention I had of going to La Trappe on the following day, and noticed the start she gave at the name.

"Have you never been there?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. I have been everywhere in this neighborhood; but one must do something to pass the time. Would you like to go?" I added, as the thought struck me.

"I? No, I think not."

"You have been there?"

"Yes," she responded, reminiscently. "They are a set of nice old men, but I would not care to see them twice. Besides, Wallace would find the journey tedious, and I could not think of leaving him."

I had no desire to excite her suspicions and I said no more about the monastery. In the morning I made an early start, as it was rather warm in the middle of the day, being early in November. Upon arriving I inquired for Father Ambrose and put myself under his guidance. He had not seen me on my previous visit, and he went through the extensive farm which the monks cultivate, showing me the cattle, the wine-presses, the store-houses and other evidences

of prosperity which these strange recluses possess. When we reached the chapel I drew his attention gradually to the matter which M. Martine had confided to me, and found that he remembered it very well.

"It was a narrow escape," he said. "If my wits had not come to me just as they did I should have pronounced the couple man and wife. Their flight proves that I guessed correctly. The man did not dare await the coming of a brother who spoke English."

"A friend of the gentleman told me all about it," I explained. "He says the lover was so infatuated with the lady that he took this means to put a moral pressure upon her, intending later to have the civil ceremony in Algiers. She supposed you were simply giving them your blessing."

The monk crossed himself devoutly.

"The devil is fruitful of expedients to mislead the faithful," he said. "The lady was a very beautiful creature, one whose worth was evident to any who saw her countenance. I trust she has escaped the machinations of such a wicked man."

Something impelled me to relate a little of the subsequent history of Miss Brixton to this hermit. I wanted to know what he would say when I told him all I knew.

"She has very peculiar ideas, good father," I responded. "For instance, she believes that marriage is not a necessary precursor of motherhood."

"St. Denis preserve us!" cried the priest.

"Yes," I continued. "She is now the mother of a boy two years of age, and still unwedded. Understand, this is merely carrying out a doctrine that she

firmly believes in—not a yielding to passionate instinct.”

The monk crossed himself again.

“So innocent she looked!” he exclaimed. “Ah! How little one can tell by the faces of these women! One came here from Algiers, only the other day, of whom the most dreadful things are said, and before I knew I had remarked to one of our brothers who has a talent for painting that she would make a lovely Madonna!”

The simple lunch served at the monastery was partaken of, and I rested in the shadow of its walls until the sun was well on the way toward the horizon. Before departing I purchased a number of trinkets carved by the fraternity, to keep or give away as souvenirs.

When I reached the Hotel de l'Oasis, Miss Brixton had dined, it being so late that she had ceased to expect me. I soon found that she was holding an audience with my rival in her temporary regard—the courier, Gustave, who had been absent for the previous three or four days. Not caring to intrude on a conversation I had reason to suppose would have elements of privacy, I went out for a stroll along the Boulevard de la Republique, that magnificent way which cost, it is said, the sum of forty million dollars to create. When I returned, I was informed that Miss Brixton wished to see me immediately, and I went without delay to her rooms.

“Can you leave here with us in the morning?” was the question that greeted me, as she opened the door.

“For what point?” I asked, somewhat astonished.

“For Constantine.”

Having heard nothing about that city in connection with the business on hand, I was naturally much surprised.

"We shall stop for a night at Hamman-Meskoutine—on Wallace's account—and go on the next day," explained Miss Brixton.

I could not think of anything to prevent my going. My baggage could be packed in fifteen minutes.

"Have you heard news?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, and her voice lacked steadiness.

"But nothing you can tell me?"

"Not—not yet."

The beautiful eyes faltered before my gaze.

"After Constantine, shall I still be kept in ignorance?"

"That will depend," she said, hesitatingly.

"On your whim?" I inquired, without undue politeness.

"No! oh, no! On circumstances that may arise. Trust me a little longer, I pray. In the morning, remember," she added, as I rose to go. "Get the *garçon* to rouse you, for the train goes early."

I told her there was no need of informing the *garçon*, as I was an early riser, and would not fail to be on time. But when I was about ready for breakfast, on the following morning, one of the waiters came to call me, saying he had been asked to do so by Miss Brixton.

On the train I occupied myself with amusing Master Wallace, who grew interested from time to time in the cavalcades of Arabs queerly mounted, sometimes on camels, sometimes on donkeys and again on horses, which could be seen in the highway that is to be seen from the railroad. Across nearly the whole

of French Africa this road is to be seen, built of cracked stone, after the plan invented or applied by McAdam, and as well cared for as any suburban drive around Boston, New York or Chicago. Through lowlands it is built up to a higher level, with culverts at frequent intervals, for the quick rains. Through hills it is channelled as carefully as the railway itself, and even tunnels are found where required. The object of all this expense is military, the owners of the territory wishing to march their men, or draw their cannon with expedition in case of need. But the value to the country is as great as if it had been constructed solely for the use of peaceful travellers.

When the boy went to sleep, I talked with Miss Brixton about the territory through which we were passing, and which both of us had seen before. We said nothing that day in reference to her private affairs. They might have escaped my mind but for the silent witness to what had been—the pretty child lying on its pillow by its mother's side.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"THE PRIEST TOLD YOU?"

I was glad the stop was made at Hamman-Meskoutine. In passing through this section before, I had only caught a glimpse of that most remarkable natural wonder, the boiling Niagara which falls thirty feet over white rocks, at a temperature of 203 deg.

Fahrenheit. From whence comes this volume of water, the thousands of gallons that flow each minute, day after day the year through, and have done so for tens of centuries? Every little while the watcher from below the cataract can see small fish and crabs floating in the stream, showing that at some point below the surface rivers of cool water are precipitated into the cauldron and sent forth in those scalding bubbles. The steam, not only from the great fall, but from several smaller springs in the vicinity, is constantly clouding the air in the neighborhood and the effect of the whole scene is weird and marvellous. The heat is so great that even at a distance of seven hundred feet away one cannot hold his hand in the running water.

The "hotel" was the queerest I ever saw. It consisted of the owner's residence, the only part of which used by the guests appeared to be the dining-room and office; with bedrooms arranged in fours at some distance from the house, built in rows like negro cabins in the South of America. The wildness of the country made the appearance of these bedrooms anything but assuring, for they were unconnected with the main mansion by a bell or other contrivance; and to add to the strangeness of the situation we could see from our windows the camp-fires of wandering Kabyles, not a quarter of a mile away.

Miss Brixton declared at once that she could never close her eyes in such a place. She began to shut her windows and arrange a barricade for her door, besides ordering Gustave to sit at the entrance, armed to the teeth against possible invasion. The servants of the hotel laughed at her fears, saying

they had never heard of anyone being hurt by the natives thereabouts or of having anything stolen. It was the universal custom to leave all windows and doors wide open, both day and night, no matter what valuables were inside.

As the evening was warm and the rooms stifling if tightly closed, I decided to follow the advice given me, though I could not entirely quiet the alarm of my fair companion. I had seen plenty of Kabyles and liked them as a people immensely. Placing a chair by my window, which was only four feet from the ground, I hung my clothing upon it, with my purse and watch in their usual places; and then, with window and door wide open, passed into a sweet and refreshing sleep which lasted for eight hours.

You can do this in Africa, mind, where the native is called savage or half-civilized. But not in England or the United States, in any section of them with which I am acquainted.

Miss Brixton confessed, when we met at breakfast, that she also slept fairly well. She did not intend to close her eyes at all, so disturbed was her mind at the situation, but slumber came of its own accord. Gustave, who had lain on doormats before that night, looked completely refreshed, and all of us were ready to take the train for Constantine when it arrived.

There are few places so well designed by nature for a fortress as this same city of Constantine. It is an inland Gibraltar, reached by an artificial bridge, situated on a series of rocks, and surrounded by a very deep ravine. Though there are few things of great moment to the sight-seer, other than the place

itself, it is well worth visiting and remaining at for several days, if not more. As we approached the city I began to discuss its points of interest with Miss Brixton.

“You have been here, I believe?” I said.

She nodded assent.

“At what hotel shall you stay?”

“The Hotel de Paris. Gustave has arranged for rooms. I suppose you wish to remain with the party.”

I said it was immaterial, and that I would do as she desired. I then inquired with a slight vein of irony whether my services were likely to be wanted.

“Don’t annihilate me with sarcasm if I am obliged to make my usual reply,” she answered. “At any moment, your presence may be of the first importance. To-morrow you will be free. After that, if you will be so kind as to consult with me each evening—”

I bowed to show that the arrangement was entirely agreeable, and the subject was dropped for the present.

The next morning Miss Brixton ordered a carriage early and, with Gustave and her maid, drove away, saying she expected to be back to lunch. It would have been an easy matter to follow her, but I saw no reason to play the spy at this time. To tell the truth, I was getting tired of the entire matter and would have felt relieved had she told me she was about to return to Europe or America. I had stirred up a hornet’s nest, as the saying is, by some innocent letters written to her from Paris. I deserved, very likely, the punishment I was receiving and should bear it like a respectable martyr.

But at noon, when Miss Brixton returned to the hotel, she was in a state of the greatest nervousness. Her maid came to inform me, while I was waiting for lunch, that her mistress was actually ill and that a physician had been summoned. I asked the girl what had caused the relapse, and she said she did not know. Where had they been? To the mairie. Miss Brixton, with Gustave, had gone inside to see the mayor, while Mathilde remained in the ante-room. Suddenly she heard voices, one of which she recognized as Miss Brixton's, raised in earnest argument. She caught but a few words, "No, no! I will not believe it! That cannot be the law!" and similar utterances. When her mistress came out she was weeping and so weak that she had to be supported to her carriage. She knew no more.

These facts, it may readily be conceived, I drew out of the girl by the promise of a sufficient number of francs, which I promptly paid as soon as she finished. I saw the doctor who was called to attend my compatriot, who advised me that his patient was in a very nervous state and must not be unnecessarily disturbed. Gustave met me several times in the course of the next two hours, but as he volunteered no information, I was no wiser. I would not have propounded a single question to him to save his neck.

I put the words reported by the French maid, together with all I knew or suspected, into one lump, and they explained nothing.

The mairie? What had happened at the mairie? Over and over I asked myself this, and received no response. Then, all at once, the words spoken by

Maurice Fantelli to Miss Brixton on the hill at Boulogne-sur-Mer, came to me.

"It was no priest; in that you are right; but the mayor of the place, which is according to our custom. He is there still, I presume; you could go and see him!"

There was no doubt that the mayor of Constantine was the individual referred to in this ambiguous manner. That functionary knew more about the Brixton secret than I did. - Gustave had been sent to him, and having returned to Aigiers, Miss Brixton had decided to go for a personal interview. She had seen him, with the result that she was now prostrated on a bed of illness. And during the time she was in his office she had been heard to utter: "No, no! I will not believe it! That cannot be the law!"

Feeling justified in probing this affair to the bottom, at this stage I took a walk without delay to the Hotel de Ville, and asked for the mayor. Unfortunately, the attendant replied, his Excellency had taken the train shortly before for some point in the interior. He would be back in a day or two; exactly when, he could not say.

It was very exasperating. I had been within sight of the information I sought, and had stood supinely waiting until just too late to find it out.

Miss Brixton was still ill that night, but she sent for me, and I was asked to step into the chamber where she lay. When we were alone she turned toward me a pair of swollen eyes and looked so pitiful that I could not help sympathizing with her deeply.

"My friend," she said, "I have heard distressing

news. I have hopes that things are not as bad as they have been represented, but until I am sure I cannot help being troubled. In the morning I shall see one of the most eminent solicitors in the province. If he endorses what I have been told, I shall start immediately for Europe, whether the doctors call me sick or well.”

She paused, and I remained silent, there being nothing, so far as I could see, for me to say.

“You still wonder that I do not confide in you,” she cried. “I am afraid I cannot much longer refrain from doing so.”

“If you had chosen that course earlier, Miss Brixton, it would have been better,” I replied. “At present your attitude keeps me from discussing with you some discoveries of my own.”

She raised herself on her elbow and looked at me earnestly.

“Discoveries !” she repeated.

“Yes. They amount to nothing without the key which you so persistently hide ; but combined with what you yourself learn they might be of value.”

The girl let her head fall again on the pillow.

“You see how ill I am, and yet you tell me this !” she said. “What have you learned ? I beg you, conceal nothing.”

I remarked that the doctor had left word that she must not be excited.

“Ah !” she cried. “What can excite me more than these horrible possibilities, worse even than the knowledge that they were true ! It is uncertainty that gives the keenest pang. You have heard something here ?”

“Not here,” I replied. “At Algiers.”

She looked relieved.

"Oh, at Algiers!" she repeated.

"At La Trappe," I explained, laconically.

She regarded me with a vacant expression.

"You went to La Trappe once with a gentleman," I said. "One of the holy fathers took you into the chapel, where he began to hold a service. Suddenly he ceased to speak the words of his text, and appearing angry, addressed such language to your escort that he left the place precipitately with you. Do you remember that?"

Miss Brixton stretched her arms above her head in a disappointed way.

"Is that your discovery?" she asked. "Why, I would have told it to you and welcome. Perhaps you learned what we had done to enrage the monk."

"I did," was my response.

"What was it?" she asked, curiously.

"He found he had been within an ace of marrying you."

It is a part of Miss Brixton's nature to be strongest when under the severest trial. Many women would have fainted at this moment, for it was apparent that my statement was her first intimation of the truth. Instead of swooning, she sat almost upright in bed, and spoke in the calmest tone.

"Are you certain of this?"

"Yes."

"The priest told you he was repeating a *marriage* service?"

"He did."

"How came he to speak of it?"

"Because I asked him."

Her expression grew more puzzled than before.

“I don’t understand,” she said. “If you asked him, you must have heard of it before. How could that be?”

“A gentleman who was present in the chapel at the time told me,” I explained.

“A gen—”

Agitation the most extreme showed in my companion’s face.

“When did he tell you?” she demanded, almost imperiously.

“The day before we left Algiers,” I answered, calmly.

With a movement that was wholly maternal, Miss Brixton’s hand swept across the counterpane until it rested on the cot where her child lay, close to her own bed. When her eyes met mine again they were fixed and strange.

“I do not see why you should excite yourself,” said I. “The attempt to make you his wife would not have been binding on French territory, unless supplemented by a civil contract.”

She bowed absently and closed her eyes as if in pain.

“Good-night,” she said, reaching a hand toward me that wandered like that of a sleep-walker.

I took the sudden dismissal without comment, more in doubt than ever as to the cause of these peculiar manifestations.

The next morning I was informed that *mademoiselle* was rather better, and I took a carriage ride into the country to pass the time away till noon.

When I returned I was given a letter, containing the startling information that Miss Brixton with her

courier and maid had taken the train to Phillippeville an hour before !

“ I could not help it—there was no alternative—meet me in New York. BLANCHE.”

That was the extent of the epistle.

And, as if this was not enough to destroy my equanimity, a card was brought me while I read the letter, and on it were the names and titles of LOUIS DESMOULINS !

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A GREAT CLUE EXPLODED.

Why had Miss Brixton gone to Phillippeville ? Undoubtedly to catch the evening steamer for France. Why had she fled in this precipitate manner ? Evidently on account of learning the proximity of the man she feared.

While not flattered at her desertion after my devoted attachment to her fortunes, I could not help admitting that she was in a measure justified in her action. She had taken the quickest means to escape a meeting which she hated above all things. Phillippeville is but four hours' ride from Constantine, and the nearest port by which she could leave the country. There are times when one cannot spend many minutes in consideration. Miss Brixton had packed her things and embarked with her maid and courier because it was the only thing to do.

"Tell M. Desmoulins that I will see him here," was my reply to the *garçon* who brought the card.

A few minutes later I admitted to my *petit salon* a Frenchman of about forty years of age ; of medium height and a most courtly manner ; sallow, as if from a long residence under tropical suns ; pale, as might be expected from the wound he had received ; weak, like one whose vitality is being slowly but surely sapped.

"M. Medford?" he asked, with a low bow.

I acknowledged the intimation and pronounced his name in return, referring to his card, which I still held in my hand.

"Will you be seated?" I added, motioning him to a chair, which he graciously accepted.

For a moment we regarded each other with apparently equal interest.

"I did not expect you at Constantine," I ventured to say.

"I suppose not," he replied, pleasantly ; "but learning that you had left Algiers I thought it as well to join you at once. I judged from the tenor of your despatch that your business was of a pressing nature."

I wanted him to "lead" as much as possible.

"You have travelled very quickly, to go so soon from Dijon to Algiers and reach here to-day," I remarked.

"I made a much briefer journey," said he. "When I reached Marseilles I telegraphed to Algiers to say that I was coming, and the reply informed me that you had left the Hotel de l'Oasis for this city. Consequently I took the steamer and came *via* Phillippeville."

I said he was very kind to respond with so little delay.

"Not at all," he answered. "I have been filled with a lively curiosity on your account. I heard several months ago that a gentleman of your name was making inquiries for me, and when your interest took the shape of telegrams that summoned me to Algeria I could wait no longer."

I looked at him intently, and saw nothing in his countenance which indicated anything but perfect ingenuousness.

"Shall I understand," I asked, "that you have no idea what I want of you?"

"That is precisely what I mean to convey," he said, with a smile.

There was an awkward pause, for it was now evident that I must take the initiative.

"Then, monsieur," I said, "I shall be obliged to take you back to an experience that must prove unpleasant to your memory. Will you give me leave to be perfectly frank?"

He looked surprised, but replied that he hoped I would be completely so.

"Nearly three years ago," I began, "you were wounded by a pistol-bullet."

He bowed, flushing slightly.

"Shall I go on?"

"By all means."

"That wound was caused by the act of a brother officer—"

"Yes."

"Who was afterward tried and punished for the offense."

"All of which," interrupted Monsieur Desmoulins,

“is on record in the archives of the African branch of the War Department.”

I agreed to this with a nod.

“But the *cause* of your brother officer’s act—the reason that induced him to fire the shot—is not a matter of record,” I said, impressively.

“True. If that is what you wish to ascertain I shall oblige you without hesitation. Though it reflects anything but credit upon myself, I am glad to relieve my friend of blame in a matter through which he has suffered so deeply. The shot was richly deserved, as I have always admitted. I was intoxicated at the time, or the provocation never could have occurred. His reason for assaulting me was on account of—”

“An insult to a lady,” I broke in.

Rather surprised, M. Desmoulins admitted that my statement was correct.

“Which lady,” I continued, slowly, “you doubtless expected to find here with me at Constantine.”

At this Col. Desmoulins started from his chair.

“Here! With you!” he exclaimed. “I beg your pardon, monsieur, but how could I have such an expectation, when I had never heard your name in connection with hers, in the remotest way?”

I paused, reflecting how likely this was to be the correct state of the case.

“We mean to be frank with each other, I believe,” said I.

“On my part there is certainly the fullest intention of being so,” he replied.

“And you did not know that Miss Brixton had been here?”

"I assure you, no. At least, not during the past two years."

The best actor in the *Comédie Française* could not have looked as he did while telling a falsehood.

"Let me tell you, then," I said, "that she *has* been here with me. And that it is but an hour or two since she departed."

He drew a long breath that seemed to indicate relief.

"How does it happen," he asked, "that you did not accompany her?"

"I did not know she was going. I presume she heard of your arrival during my morning absence and acted without delay."

The Frenchman quivered a little about the shoulders, as if he did not relish my expressions.

"That seems incredible," he answered. "I would not have hurt her, poor girl! It is very unfortunate, if true. She did not know, then, that you had telegraphed to Dijon for me?"

"By no means," I said. "Later, when I explain everything, you will understand why."

"It is very mysterious," he remarked. "If I had gone to Algiers, it appears, in response to your earnest request, I should not have found you there."

It was the first time I had thought of the matter in that light. We had left so suddenly that the telegram to M. Desmoulins had for the time escaped my thoughts altogether.

"I left Algiers in great haste," was my reply. "I expected to return shortly, and having written for tidings of you several times I presumed you would be a week or more in coming, if indeed you came at

all. My main object, however, was to get you away from Dijon."

M. Desmoulins stared at me, and remarked with great coolness that I was speaking in riddles.

"I will be plain on at least one point," I answered. "The evening I sent you that despatch a gentleman left Algiers for Dijon with the apparent intention of inflicting upon you a serious injury."

There was a sarcastic curl to the Frenchman's lip, his *amour propre* touched by the insinuation.

"You have hardly made the point plain yet," he remarked, icily.

"I will do so," I answered. "The gentleman's name was Martine. Do you understand now?"

"Not in the least," he replied, promptly.

I confessed myself much puzzled by this answer.

"M. Martine had a friend—an intimate friend," said I, "who had a violent attachment for Miss Brixton. Having learned of your intimate relations with that lady—"

Col. Desmoulins uttered a loud exclamation.

"My relations—with—with Miss Brixton!" he cried.

"Exactly."

"What relations?" he inquired, testily. "Monsieur, I am getting out of patience!"

"The relations," I said, sharply, "that made you the father of her child!"

For a moment the Frenchman eyed me with an expression that I could not fathom.

"Are you sane?" he asked, "or some madman escaped from confinement?"

"Apparently in the possession of my senses," I said, boldly. "I am executor of the Brixton estate

and have the best of reasons for the interest I take in this matter. Your manner is a strange one, after the pains I have taken to warn you of your danger."

The next sentence uttered by M. Desmoulins was so mixed with profanity that I fear to use it in this narrative. All his polite demeanor vanished. He informed me roughly that he was afraid of nothing that walked the earth or traversed the air; if someone had gone to Dijon to call him to account for anything, I had done a great wrong to put him in the position of a fleeing coward. As to the lady whose name I had used, his only connection with her was on the unfortunate occasion which M. Fantelli had promptly avenged. He had never met her before or since that day. If she had become an unwedded mother—which he would have sworn impossible on any other evidence than mine—he could easily guess her child's paternity, though wild horses should not drag his suspicions out of him.

And he rattled on at this rate for at least five minutes, until he was so exhausted by his efforts that he could proceed no farther.

Somewhat abashed by the failure of my great discovery I begged the officer's pardon for my mistake. Then I told him the history of the Brixton family, the strange ideas advanced by the daughter and what facts I knew concerning the birth of her son. He grew calmer as I proceeded, and listened with the deepest interest, uttering many "Ah's" and "Oh's!"

"I give you my word as an officer and a gentleman," he said, when I had concluded, "that I never spoke a syllable to Miss Brixton but once, and that I never saw her alone. What I did was to use lan-

guage for which I am mortally ashamed, while under the influence of strong liquor, to which I am unaccustomed. M. Fantelli, acting under the impulse of the moment, drew a revolver and shot me, precisely as he ought to have done. If I had been *killed* I should have received only my just deserts. As it was, my life was cut short—the doctors tell me another year is all I can count on with certainty, You see, I extenuate nothing. I have succeeded in freeing poor Maurice, and now I await the execution of my own sentence.”

The suavity, the gentleness, the politeness of the Frenchman had returned with full force. I have never seen such perfect combination of courtesy, bravery and manhood.

“Why did you lay this sin at my door?” he asked, after a pause.

“On account of a chain of circumstantial evidence that seemed sufficient,” I replied, in a discouraged tone. “I saw M. Fantelli while he was undergoing his imprisonment at Algiers. Although we exchanged but one glance he knew that I sympathized with him. After his release we met accidentally and travelled together. He told me he was convicted of assaulting a brother officer with intent to kill. He said the cause was an insult to a lady so gross, that it set his blood on fire. Then he related how the injured man had labored to save him and had finally obtained his release. I easily recognized Miss Brixton as the probable heroine of this tale and informed M. Fantelli that I intended to return to Algiers and ascertain your identity. To this he answered quietly that he would save me that trouble, giving me your name and address. After obtaining it I told him my sus-

picion that you were Wallace Brixton's father. He replied, '*Absurd!*' but did not convince me.

"In writing to Miss Brixton, who was then in America, I told her what I had learned, though not all I guessed. In doing this I alluded to M. Fantelli as my informant. As soon as she could reach me—I was at Boulogne-sur-Mer—she came. I found her much excited. She asked me again and again to repeat what I had heard. When I reached my conclusion that *you* were her child's father, she only cried '*Oh!*' and had difficulty in restraining her tears. Within a short time I found that she was holding interviews with Maurice. Afterward she begged me to accompany her back to Algeria, seeming to carry with her a most portentous secret. Everything continued to point to you, as far as I could see. Miss Brixton and myself were pursuing our investigations separately, and I was kept in the dark completely as far as she was concerned. The climax came this noon, when in one moment there was placed in my hands a letter stating that she had fled the country and a card containing your name. What could I think but that the knowledge of your arrival had caused her flight?"

M. Desmoulins bowed abstractedly.

"It was a strange combination," he said. "You started with a wrong premise, and each step you took was consequently erroneous. But who is this fellow whose friend is to fight or assassinate me? I never heard of a man of his description. Was it—was it on account of what you said, that he started so indignantly for France?"

I had to admit with a blush, that it was. I told

my new acquaintance of the incident of La Trappe, repeating the conversation as it occurred.

"This grows clearer," he remarked, when I had finished, though I was obliged to admit that it did not to me. "Now, will you kindly give me a written statement, that you were mistaken in your reflections upon me, that I may show it to this Unknown if he ever turns up. He is undoubtedly a gentleman and not an assassin," he explained, "and intends to challenge me to a duel. I am a pretty good shot yet, even if my arm is a trifle weak, and should not like to kill a fellow-countryman for nothing. After I show him your letter, if he rushes to his fate it will be his own fault."

I said I would write the letter at once, and sat down at my desk to do so.

"If you could let any of that light which you see into *my* head," I remarked next, "it would be a genuine favor."

"But—I cannot," he replied, gently. "I suppose I know who is the father of that child, but I have no right even to breathe my suspicion."

"Is he still alive?" I asked, interrogatively.

"Oh, yes!"

"But she thought he was dead."

"I can understand how that was," he answered.

Our talk lasted for an hour longer, but nothing that unravelled the tangled skein was developed. M. Desmoulins said he should remain in Kabylia for some time, as the climate was very suitable to his health.

Before I retired that night, I heard some gentlemen in the reading-room, talking about the steamer from Phillippeville to Marseilles. A telegram had been

received, saying it would lie over in port another day for some necessary repairs. Anyone who wished to take passage on it could easily make connections by either of the morning trains.

I was rather pleased to learn this. Having been left in the lurch by Miss Brixton, it would be to a certain extent gratifying to overtake her so quickly. Besides, I could now assure her that M. Desmoulins had no intention of annoying her, which must be pleasant news. More than this, it would be much more agreeable to travel back to Europe or the United States with a party of people I knew than alone.

The severe set-back I had received within the past few hours convinced me that as an amateur detective I was far from being a shining success. If Miss Brixton wished to keep her secret she might do so thereafter, for all of me. When Master Wallace, some years later, should demand the name of his *père* I would tell him to wander over one or two continents and find him, if he could.

"Good-bye," said M. Desmoulins, the next morning, as I took the carriage for the station. "I am glad to have met you. It is a good thing you brought me to Kabylia at this season. We are not likely to meet again ; and so, adieu !"

We never did meet again. He died a few weeks later at Setif, expiating heroically the offense he had committed in a drunken folly, admitting to the end that he had deserved his punishment !

Miss Brixton responded to my call at her room in the Phillippeville hotel, looking like a hunted animal that fears its fate.

"You have not come to detain me !" she cried

"No, no! I want nothing now but to get home again!"

"My child," I said, for at that minute she seemed to me the little girl at her father's that played with dolls; "we will go together."

Passage was engaged on the steamer for myself with the others, but before she sailed a new complication had ruffled the surface of our perplexed affairs.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"HE IS HER HUSBAND."

While taking an afternoon walk, I came upon Maurice Fantelli in the Rue Nationale.

The surprise was evidently mutual.

"I thought you were at Constantine!" was the immediate exclamation of the Frenchman.

"You were better informed of my movements than I of yours," I answered. "I left Constantine this very morning."

"You are going on the steamer to-night, are you?" asked Maurice.

"That is my intention."

"To leave Africa for good!"

"Yes. I shall return to America. There are matters of business there which require my attention. But who told you I was in this part of the world?"

"A gentleman you met in Algiers."

"Ah! M. Martine!"

"Yes, M. Martine," replied Maurice, eyeing me strangely.

"I left Monsieur in an excited state," I remarked. "I wonder if you can tell me what ailed him?"

Maurice nodded gravely.

"It is a peculiar story," he said. "If you can spare the time to walk over to my room, I shall be glad to talk it over with you."

I saw no reason to refuse this invitation. If there was any late information about my hot-headed friend I should be glad to know it. Having disposed of M. Desmoulins I was anxious to learn what had become of his enemies.

"Let us make ourselves as comfortable as possible," remarked Maurice, when we had seated ourselves and lit some very fair cigars. "I believe M. Martine told you he should leave Algiers abruptly for France?"

I replied that this was true.

"For Dijon, I think?" continued M. Maurice.

"For Dijon. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he purposed going to see a friend who would probably make that journey."

M. Fantelli bowed and said, "*Précisement*. Well, M. Martine—and his friend—went to Dijon, about as fast as the regular conveyances could carry them; and when they arrived they found—"

"That M. Desmoulins was absent," I interrupted.

"Just so. They also learned that his absence was caused by a telegram from Algiers, and that he was supposed to have gone to that place."

I maintained silence.

"They discovered—this M. Martine and his friend,"

continued Maurice, “that the telegram summoning M. Martine to Algiers was signed by M. Medford; they also learned, for they took their bearings carefully, that M. Medford had left Algiers; that M. Desmoulins had made a similar discovery; and finally that both these gentlemen were at Constantine or on the way there. *Voilà!*”

Lost in admiration of the excellent detective qualities of these individuals I inquired how they had obtained possession of all these facts.

“By a free use of electricity,” said Maurice. “A telegram to Algiers and its answer proved that you had left there; another to Marseilles showed that M. Desmoulins had taken passage on a steamer for Phillippeville; another, sent yesterday, to Constantine, showed that you were both at the Hotel de Paris. Could anything be more simple?”

Nothing could, I was obliged to acknowledge.

“It follows from your statement,” I said, “that M. Martine and his friend are here.”

There was an instant of hesitation on the part of M. Fantelli.

“I let that out unwittingly,” he said, “but it can make no difference. M. Martine and his friend *were* here—naturally—when he sent the telegram yesterday. At the present moment they are at Constantine, without doubt, interviewing M. Desmoulins in relation to the statement you made about him.”

The perspiration sprang to my forehead.

“I am obliged to confess that I made that statement under a great error,” I replied. “I have left a written explanation to that effect with Col. Desmoulins. You will remember,” I continued, “that I believed M. Desmoulins the father of Miss

Brixton's child. Until my interview with him I still held that opinion, which I am now certain is erroneous. When I told M. Martine I was laboring under that delusion."

Maurice sprang to his feet and uttered a cry.

"And you meant that, and that only, by what you said of him to M. Martine!" he exclaimed.

"That and that only," I answered, surprised at his demeanor.

Without another word he strode at a quick pace from the room, leaving me for several minutes alone.

"You have astonished me intensely," said Maurice, when he returned. "Perhaps your explanation has come in time to prevent a very regrettable proceeding; perhaps, on the contrary, it has not. I have sent a message to M. Martine and his friend." He took out his watch and consulted it carefully. "It is a close shave," he continued, "but we will hope for the best."

I stared stupidly at the speaker.

"There could not have been much harm done," I stammered. "They would have read my written statement, and that would have ended the matter."

"They might and they might not," was the quiet reply. "When a gentleman feels that all his finer sentiments have been outraged—when he hears that one he considered his true friend has violated all the canons of amity—where, in short, he is led to believe that a woman dearer to him than life itself has been degraded for the second time by a certain person—he is in a condition of mind that does not easily accept explanations. The gentleman of whom I speak is now—with M. Martine—in the city of Con-

stantine, if the train which took him there is on time. He would not assassinate M. Desmoulins in cold blood, but he might give him such provocation that a duel could not be averted."

This was not pleasant to hear, to say the least. The murder, for I could call it no less, of an innocent man might be the result of my too hasty jump at an unwarranted conclusion. I was in a very nervous state, and the recollection that Miss Brixton was at the moment within a few hundred yards, liable to meet some of these people and learn the truth, did not add to my serenity. But what did M. Fantelli mean by his wholly mysterious remark about the friend of M. Martine holding that lady "dearer to him than life itself!" Who could this Unknown be that had conceived such a violent affection for Miss Brixton, a woman whose acquaintance with men had been of the most limited description?

"I am at a loss to know," I replied, when I could get breath, "who can claim such a deep interest in my American friend. He must have a very warm place in his heart for her, to travel hundreds of miles merely for the sake of this meeting."

It was now the turn of Maurice to stare.

"Do you wish me to understand," he asked, slowly, "that you have no conception whatever as to who this gentleman is?"

"I have none," was my positive answer.

"Then," he said, "I will tell you; for there is no longer any use in equivocation. *He is her husband!*"

"Her husband! *Whose* husband?" I asked him, feeling a blindness crossing my vision.

"The husband of the lady *you* call 'Mees Breston!'"

I heard him distinctly enough, but the words did not seem to have any definite meaning. I had never connected the word "husband" with George Brixton's daughter, and I could not do so now. She who hated marriage, who had denounced it, who had challenged the contumely of the whole world by her contempt of it, who had drunk to the confusion of all wives, who had upheld the standard of free and independent motherhood! Husband? Blanche Brixton's husband! It could not be!

"I think you are mistaken, monsieur," I managed to articulate at last.

"*Mais, non,*" he responded, sharply, and there is nothing that means more than this expression thus uttered by a French tongue.

Strange thoughts were passing through my brain. Poor Blanche! I wished I had never mixed in her private affairs. I wished I had let the paternity of her boy lie in the darkness where she wanted it to remain. She did not want a husband; she would blame me for saddling this infliction upon her. I had brought nothing but trouble to this girl whom I would have done anything to serve. How could I help her escape its consequences?

And all this time she was resting, in ignorance of her danger, within pistol-shot of the parlor in which we were talking!

"I cannot dispute you," I said, vacantly, at the same time rising with the intention of reaching my hotel as soon as possible. "I repeat that I was entirely unaware of the fact you state and that I cannot yet comprehend how it can be true. Will you give me any further enlightenment?" I added,

leaning my arm on the back of a heavy chair for the support I was beginning to need.

He bowed politely.

"Ask anything you wish," he said.

"When and where did this marriage take place?"

"In December, three years ago, at the mairie of Constantine."

The mairie!

"Where did the couple go then?"

"To the fort where the husband was undergoing confinement."

I began to wonder if I was not dreaming, after all.

"How long did they stay there?"

"She about a month, he several days longer," replied Fantelli, like a well-informed witness at some ordinary investigation. "The lady, being at liberty, as her husband was not, went out nearly every day into the city. On the occasion of one of her trips she failed to return."

It was growing slightly clearer, but there were still many things to explain.

"Can you account for her desertion?" I asked.

"One does not account for the actions of a woman," he replied.

"But Miss Brixton certainly told her friends," I remarked, with an effort, "that the father of her child was dead; that he died a long time before the boy's birth; and that the cause of his death was a bullet wound."

M. Fantelli, who had also risen and was standing near me, bowed with the utmost dignity.

"All of which," he said, "she had reason to be

lieve. At the time she left her husband he was under sentence of death."

Ah! The light was growing a little stronger. I could almost see the day-break in the mist that had so long surrounded this matter.

"That sentence must have been the reason why she married him at all," I said.

"The evidence points in that direction," was the solemn reply. "She thought he had but a few weeks to live. It was not a husband that she wanted, but a child. I can comprehend the case perfectly."

I wanted to get away. I was anxious to reach Miss Brixton—I could call her nothing else—but the fascination of this story chained me a minute longer to the room.

"And the husband—he suspected nothing?" I ventured.

"You may be certain of that. He is a man of the highest honor, who would have indignantly repudiated such an arrangement. He loved your country-woman then, as he does to-day, with a passionate devotion—the first and last love, let me add, that he has ever felt. The thought that Desmoulins had treated her wrongly made him almost insane, although he has never seen her since her sudden departure and does not expect to meet her again."

I caught eagerly at this straw. If Blanche's husband was content to leave her in peace, she might yet escape from this wretched entanglement into which I had led her, and never know the worst.

"Another question," I said. "If this gentleman was 'possessed of the highest sense of honor' how

did he happen to be under a death sentence? Had he committed no crime?"

"None whatever," replied Monsieur Fantelli. "His innocence was afterward fully established, and he was set free with a note of regret and full exoneration from the department."

CHAPTER XXX.

A DAY AT CONDE SMENDOU.

Plainer and plainer grew the horizon.

"But there is one thing I do not yet understand," I remarked. "If his love for Miss Brixton—for his wife—was and still is so strong, why did he permit her to desert him without protest? Is this the act of a man who loves?"

"Exactly that," replied M. Fantelli. "He had sought her by every honorable means, using an interpreter, for he could not speak her language, nor she his. He secured her hand in marriage only when it appeared to him that his days were numbered. He made a will, leaving her all the estate he possessed, which was not inconsiderable. The few weeks he passed with her were so blissful that he almost forgot the suspended sword that hung above his head. When she left him of her own free will, he could not pursue her. Her happiness was more to him than his own. To follow her, to seek her out and urge his love again, would only give her annoyance. He sacrificed himself on the altar of

his affection. No lover ever made a nobler resignation."

The dawn was quite clear. Miss Brixton's story was explained; all but her denial of the marriage; that was still to come.

"But now," pursued M. Fantelli, "matters have assumed a different aspect. This gentleman has learned that he is a father. He cannot be made to believe that his wife seriously wishes to go on bearing the imputation of being an unwedded mother. He means to find her and establish his son's legitimacy. He will not force himself upon his wife—his self-abasement is complete. He only wishes to serve her and his boy. When their interests are thoroughly protected, he will retire from the scene and trouble them no more."

I believed him completely. I determined to go to Miss Brixton and tell her all I had learned. It seemed to me I could do her no greater service. Perhaps now she would share her secret with me, when I had discovered most of it without her aid.

"*Au revoir, monsieur,*" I stammered. There was no use in attempting a more elaborate farewell.

"I shall see you again, I trust," he said, holding out his hand.

Although I did not believe he ever would, I acquiesced in his suggestion, and a minute later was walking rapidly to my hotel. A *garçon* met me at the door.

"I have been looking everywhere for you, monsieur," he exclaimed. "What a pity you were not here twenty minutes ago!"

"And why?"

"To go with the rest of your party. They took

the Constantine train, after waiting till the latest second for you. Here is a letter."

I must be dreaming again, or else Miss Brixton—I could not call her madame, even in my thoughts—had gone daft. To Constantine, when the boat for Marseilles would set sail within four hours! What was she thinking of!

"I have discovered here the presence of a man I most dread to meet," she wrote, "and see no way of escape but to take the railway, *via* Constantine, to some other point on the coast. He undoubtedly knows I am booked by to-night's steamer, and this will throw him off my track. I shall go to Bougie, if I can; if not, straight to Algiers. I wish to get out of French territory as speedily as possible, and shall aim for Italy or Spain. I still hope you will return to the hotel in time to go with us, but if not, pray believe me most sorry for the trouble I have caused you. As soon as I arrive on European soil, I will telegraph my address to Baring Bros., with instructions to give it to you on application. I long for America and shall waste no time in getting there when once I feel safe."

I stood rooted to the spot like one petrified. She was rushing to the city where the man she sought to avoid had gone before her! His face might be the first one she encountered at the Hotel de Paris. Could anything be done?

Turning from the astonished *garçon* I ran in anything but a dignified way down the street toward the station. I knew that people were stopping to look at me, that an impression was abroad that I was a lunatic, but I kept on till I arrived at my destination. Finding the *chef de gare* I demanded if there

was any possibility of hiring a locomotive and catching the train that had left half an hour previous.

Satisfying himself after awhile that I was sane, the official replied that such a proceeding was unprecedented; he had never heard of pursuing a train in the manner proposed; would it not be as well to wait until the next morning and take the regular conveyance? When I offered to pay any price he would name for the accommodation he said there was no schedule of rates for locomotives used as train chasers and he should not know what to charge me. In short, he would do nothing about it whatever.

I was perspiring plentifully. Was there anything else left? Yes—it struck me with a joyful sensation—the telegraph!

I wrote a message to “Miss Brixton, on board train for Constantine, at Robertville,” to make sure and allow for delay, that place being twenty-nine miles from Phillippeville. I told her to alight at the first station where the guard said there was a half-decent hotel; to remain there in the utmost seclusion till I arrived the next morning; and to telegraph me as soon as possible what town she had selected.

“The man you dread to meet has gone to Constantine before you,” I added, in explanation. “To prove that I know this let me tell you who he is—your husband.”

The answer came in due time, to my delight. She would alight at Conde Smendou.

So far, so good. I was sufficiently relieved to make a toilet and go down to dinner. I ate heartily and arose much refreshed from the table. Having nothing else to do, as there was no other train till

morning, I went down to the quay and watched the departure of the Marseilles steamer. As I was turning back toward the town Maurice Fantelli came up and addressed me.

"You did not sail, then?" he remarked, with a tone of slight surprise.

"No. I have been detained on a matter of business. I may have to return to Constantine."

"Indeed! I hope it will be by the morning train, then," he answered, "as I have decided to take it myself."

My ease vanished quickly. If there was anything I did not want it was to have him see me on that train.

There was nothing to do, however, but make the best of it. I began to whistle and found that the proverbial effect on my courage was forthcoming. I then went to Maurice's hotel and played cards with him, losing about two hundred francs, mainly through the fault of my preoccupation.

In the morning I went early to the station and selected a seat in a compartment that was already full with that exception, thinking thus to rid myself of the too close companionship I did not wish. But Fantelli came to the door with a winning smile, remarking that there was a whole side vacant in another part of the train, and that he wished I would come there and enjoy a cigar and a chat with him. There was nothing to do but accept, for to refuse would have savored of rudeness. The train started with us in the closest proximity—and, as it happened, quite alone.

"You wonder, no doubt," remarked Maurice, when we were well under way, "why I take such an

interest in your fair American friend. It is more than probable I shall be able to explain that fully soon after we arrive at Constantine. A message reached me this morning from M. Martine that is at least consoling on one point. His friend is perfectly satisfied with the statement you made regarding M. Desmoulins. Not only was a quarrel avoided in time, but the two gentlemen, who have had an attachment of long standing for each other, have met with all the amity imaginable. It only shows how little is sometimes needed to kindle a great fire, and how easily the right kind of chemicals will put it out."

"It shows more than that, begging your pardon," I replied. "It shows that much trouble may be avoided by timely explanations, and that there is little excuse for mystery among friends. I was possessed of enough strands in this affair to make a rope, if I had known how to combine them. For instance, I accidentally overheard, at Boulogne-sur-Mer, a part of the conversation you had with Miss Brixton, coming down the height that evening. I was not seeking it," I added, as I saw his quick flush, "but you paused within a few feet of me and your words were quite distinct. It is now clear that you were telling Miss Brixton that you knew of her marriage; and that the mayor you alluded to was the mayor of Constantine. What I do not yet comprehend is her statement that what you told her 'could not be good law.' She acted to me—in the light I now have—like one who was disposed to dispute your claim. She said also that she had not understood French at the time, which was certainly true. If I were to piece these things together I

should say that the marriage at Constantine was perpetrated in much the same manner as the one attempted before the priest at La Trappe."

Fantelli's silence for the next few minutes was of that kind which is more eloquent than any noise.

"If that were true," he said, at last, "would she have gone with him to his prison and accepted the position of a wife without concealment or equivocation?"

"I think so," I replied. "You must remember all the rest you have heard of this remarkable young woman."

He paused again, as if trying to bring his thoughts together.

"That is the trouble," he said. "What you told M. Martine—and he has told me—is like a *triste* of romance. I cannot bring myself to feel that it ought to be taken into serious consideration. It is so unlike anything I have ever heard of—so different from anything in the feminine mind, as we are taught to understand its workings—that my mind utterly fails to grasp it. One thing I can swear: Whatever the lady believed or disbelieved, the man she married was dishonest in that transaction. At La Trappe he did act a double part—but he knew that without the civil ceremony it would count for nothing, and he had no intention of taking advantage of it except to bring a moral pressure on the one he adored. At Constantine he was in the most serious of moods. An execution stared him in the face. He wanted the right to leave his property to the beautiful creature who had gained his heart, and he satisfied himself through an interpreter that she consented to the arrangement. That she would

have wedded him under other circumstances he had reason to doubt ; but he accepted her like a ray of sunshine in his sombre path for the few days he thought remained. I could tell you other things, and I hope soon to do so, which would convince even the most skeptical that if the lady was deceived it was not by him."

I could make nothing of this, and bluntly asked who else could have had an interest in the matter.

"I shall find out, when I reach Constantine," he replied, with a touch of the grim quality I had noted in him several times previously. His tone implied that it would be far from agreeable to the party implicated if the guilt could be brought to his door. "We shall go to the Hotel de Paris together, I hope," he added, "and perhaps in a few hours we may all arrive at a mutual understanding."

I was sorry not to be able to oblige him, but a prior engagement was to prevent. At Conde Smendou I made an excuse to alight, remarking that I wanted to stretch my legs and take a look at the place.

"It's a dull hole," he said, as I left the carriage. "You'll find nothing here worth seeing, I assure you."

But in this M. Fantelli was mistaken. One of the first things I saw was Gustave, with whom I took a brief walk which brought me into Miss Brixton's presence just as the train for Constantine was disappearing around the curve beyond.

MISS BRIXTON'S CONFESSION.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A GENTLEMAN OF FRANCE.

Blanche closed the door that would make us safe from eavesdroppers and sat down opposite to me. Her face was pale but determined. She had evidently not slept well the previous night. Little things tell the condition of a woman's mind. Through all the troubles she had had before that morning I had never found her in a state resembling untidiness. Now I could see at a glance that her hair had not felt a comb since she rose from her bed.

"We must throw aside all circumlocution," she said, looking me straight in the eyes. "I shall conceal nothing and I expect the same of you."

At last!

"How did you know my 'husband'—as he calls himself—was in Constantine?"

"I was told so by a friend of his, yesterday."

Miss Brixton's full bosom rose and fell rapidly.

"What is he doing there?" she asked next.

Then I had to tell a long story. Reminding her of the incident I had mentioned at La Trappe, I continued, telling of the sudden departure of M. Martine for France, of my telegrams to Louis Desmoulins, of his meeting with me at Constantine, of my accusations, and of his complete exoneration.

"What ever made yout hink it was he?" Blanche asked, with a sudden rush of ruddy color.

"Many things," I replied, with some asperity. "You may remember that I reached that conclusion when you first arrived at Boulogne, and that I told you of it. And what did you say? That it was untrue, that I was in error? Nothing of the kind. I remember very well what you said and all you said. It was comprised in the one word, '*Oh!*'"

She stretched her arms above her head and brought her hands for one brief moment over both her eyes. Then she resumed her ordinary attitude, and bade me proceed.

"Very well," I said. "This M. Martine, having gathered from what I told him that Col. Desmoulins was your child's father, goes post-haste to Dijon with his friend, the man who now is, or shall we say, *calls* himself your husband. Not finding M. Desmoulins there, they trace him to Marseilles and thence to Phillippeville. In some way you seem to have learned of his presence, but while you were thinking of going back to Constantine to escape him, he was already there, looking—not for you, but for M. Desmoulins, whose blood he wanted, and wanted badly. Luckily I happened to learn of his errand yesterday, and the telegraph played another part in the affair. This 'husband' of yours is now satisfied, it appears, that his friend Louis has committed no offense against him or you. If you had given me the least confidence," I concluded, in my own defense, "none of these things could have happened."

Miss Brixton nodded, to show that she would not attempt to controvert my assertion.

"You forget so much," she said, wearily. "In

your heart of hearts I am to you a woman lost to all sense of delicacy, if not of shame. You never will understand the depth of the sentiment that made me resolve to be a mother but no wife. I despair of making anyone comprehend it, and sometimes I almost wish I had endured my cross as other women do, without seeking to establish a little heaven of my own on this earth. I have tried and I have failed. The mayor of Constantine tells me the record pronounces M. Fantelli my husband, and that, according to human law, the child I have considered wholly mine is equally his if he chooses to claim it."

Rising from the chair I occupied I took a step nearer the speaker, before I realized what I was doing. Fantelli! Which of us had lost his senses? Fantelli! It could not be, for he himself had told me the husband was at Constantine, while he and I were discussing the matter in his hotel at Phillippeville.

"M. Fantelli! Your husband!" I gasped.

"Oh, dear! Didn't you know!" exclaimed Miss Brixton, in the most charming confusion.

"But—I don't understand—he was not at Constantine at all—he came on the train with me this morning!"

It was now the lady's turn to show astonishment. More than that, she exhibited decided fear, and her eyes wandered to an inner door, behind which I rightly guessed Master Wallace was hidden.

"M. Fantelli—came to Conde Smendou—with you!" she cried.

"Yes; but not to stop. I escaped him. He has

gone on to Constantine, where he supposed I would accompany him. He does not know you are in Africa—at least I think not,” I added. “It was he who told me that your husband was at Constantine, that he had gone there to meet M. Desmoulins. I am more at sea than ever.”

Blanche heaved a sigh of relief from a danger she had thought nearer.

“You are certain he went on with the train?” she asked. “He could not have alighted here without your knowledge?”

“I am quite certain.”

She took a guidebook from the table and consulted it.

“The first station is Bizot, thirteen kilometres away,” she mused. “The next steamer leaves Philippeville to-morrow evening. We may escape him yet.”

I could do no less than acquiesce. But I begged her to tell me her story, in something like consecutive form.

Although her mind was fully made up to this, she hesitated for several minutes, before beginning the recital. In the meantime, she went to the next room and brought Wallace in for me to see. When I had admired him sufficiently, she started to take him back to his nurse, but thought better of it and sat down with him in her lap, as if his presence would help her to the courage and strength she needed.

“I will do the best I can,” she said, at last. “But I shall make the story as brief as possible, and omit everything you already know, except such matters as are necessary to give continuity to the narrative.”

I bowed, and she began again.

"It was two years ago last October," she said, "that I first met M. Fantelli—at a hotel in a certain city in the south of Spain. I had recently discharged a courier with whom I had left Paris and was travelling alone with a maid. There was trouble over a bill which was so extortionate that I refused point-blank to pay it. I could not speak Spanish, and neither could my maid, and I was resolved not to be imposed upon so grossly as the landlord had attempted. A gentleman whom I had seen at table in the dining-room noticed my dilemma, and in the most courteous manner addressed me in French, asking if he could render any assistance. I bade my maid explain the situation to him, upon which he had some warm words with the proprietor of the hotel, the result being that the charge against me was reduced to proper dimensions. Having accomplished this he lifted his hat, bade me adieu, and went his way. So far there had been nothing between us but such a courtesy as a man may render at any time, in any country, to a woman in distress."

Miss Brixton paused, drew a long breath, kissed Wallace, glanced at me to note my expression, which was imperturbable, and then proceeded :

"The next city at which I stopped with my maid was a port at which I was to take ship for Oran. I wanted a courier and was about to engage one who presented himself when my newly-made friend, M. Fantelli, appeared again. Learning from my maid that I thought of hiring the fellow he urged her to advise me against it, saying that he knew him to be unreliable and dishonest. He recommended, in his place, an Oriental named Ali, who had just finished

a tour with another American lady, to whom he referred me. His advice was followed, and my thanks were conveyed to him. At this time I supposed the meeting was our last. Understand, he had never spoken to me directly except once, and that I could not comprehend or reply to him. All he had said was to Mathilde. But he had rendered me two important services."

I bowed. If there were questions I wanted to ask I knew the wiser way was not to interrupt her. She kissed the child again, lying against her breast with eyes wide open, as if he wanted to hear the story too.

"In the evening, when out at sea, M. Fantelli came upon the deck where I was. He looked surprised, I thought annoyed, and made no attempt to intrude himself upon me. Mathilde asked Ali about him, and that was the first time we learned his name.

He was, it appeared, a French gentleman of fortune, who had travelled extensively, and now held a commission in the Algerian army. At Oran we lost him. While we remained in that town and vicinity about a week he went directly to Algiers. But the second day after we reached the latter place we saw him again. It was at a review, and he was with his regiment."

A reminiscent expression crossed the face of the narrator at this point, and I listened intently for what was to follow.

"He saw me, and Ali called my attention to him. After that he appeared before me nearly every day, in some way or other. Sometimes he dined at the Hotel de l'Oasis, with a group of officers. One evening I recognized in his party a gentleman to whom

I had been introduced in France—a relation of a lady whom I knew at home. After dinner this gentleman spoke to me, and, as we were conversing, M. Fantelli passed. ‘Allow me to present my friend,’ said the American, and the formality was achieved. But knowing nothing of each other’s languages, this seemed of little moment. I am sure I thought nothing of it, and I should have left Algiers with only the faintest memory of M. Fantelli had he not sent me this letter.”

The missive which she handed me was in French, written in a bold hand and with unusually clear chirography. It was a plain, straightforward proposal of marriage.

“You will wonder,” said the letter, “at the extreme temerity of a man who has only met you once in a formal way; but I love you, mademoiselle. I have no patience to wait till I can acquire the tongue you speak, nor to take the slow and toilsome path that winds through the ordinary road to matrimony. I enclose a list of references as to my standing and reputation. I am a gentleman to whose family and fortunes you need not be ashamed to ally yourself. Trite as the expression may appear, it is the first time I have ever cared for a woman. Take time for your answer, if it is necessary, but at least give me the opportunity to meet you again, even should it be on terms of friendship alone.”

I am not quoting the letter literally, but its purport was to the effect I have stated.

“This letter,” continued Miss Brixton, when I had finished reading it, “aroused my interest still more in the gentleman. I had not the slightest idea of falling in love with him, and my aversion to matri-

mony was too firmly fixed to enable me to give him the answer he desired. But I had Mathilde indite for me a kind note, declining his offer and saying that I would be glad, nevertheless, to have him call on me at any time. After this was written it occurred to me that a meeting at the hotel would attract attention. I had the maid tear up that note and write another, containing only the declination and a statement that I would try to see him at some time to be decided later.

“It happened that while I was going to La Trappe, to visit the monastery, a carriage containing M. Fantelli overtook mine. The meeting was entirely accidental. He saluted me in answer to my bow and when the horses were stopped for a rest he came and spoke to me by the wheel of my vehicle. Ali interpreted his remarks, which were most courteous and respectful. Before we started again he requested permission to ride with myself and the courier, and it was granted, Mathilde taking the seat he had vacated in his carriage. Our conversation, carried on through the interpreter, was necessarily slow, but I found him interesting and learned much of the country through which we were passing and of Algeria in general during the next few hours. At the monastery a brother took us in charge and we visited the points usually shown to travellers, finishing with a light lunch. Then, Ali told me that I might see a mystical ceremony in the chapel if I chose to accompany the priest and M. Fantelli, and I went with eagerness. In the midst of this ceremony, to which Mathilde guided my responses, consisting only of the word ‘*Oui*,’ there was a pause. The monk ceased to speak to us, and stepping into

the courtyard called out something in a loud voice. Mathilde and M. Fantelli exchanged a dozen sentences, all of course Greek to me, and then we hastened to our carriages and drove away. All I could learn was that something had angered the friar and that it was best for us to leave at once. The true cause I never dreamed of until you told me the conversation you had with Monsieur—Monsieur—

“Martine?” I interrupted.

“Monsieur Martine. It now appears that a marriage service was being repeated and that the words I was interpolating were promises to love, honor and obey for the rest of my life a man I had recently refused. The ceremony would not have made me a wife in the eyes of the law without being supplemented by another from the civil authority, but it is none the less startling to think I should have been drawn into anything of the kind. Suspecting nothing, I returned to Algiers and parted with M. Fantelli just before entering the city.”

I wanted to ask about Martine's part in this affair, but I thought it best to let her finish her story first.

“A few days later,” continued Blanche, arranging Wallace in a more comfortable position (he having fallen asleep in her lap), “I went to Bougie. M. Fantelli, to my surprise, joined us there. He had been ordered to make a tour of some of the fortresses, and his proposition to take our party with him was accepted with little hesitation, affording such a fine opportunity to get at the inside of things in that semi-civilized land. I had Ali and Mathilde, besides my own strength and courage, and I felt sure at that time that M. Fantelli was one of the

most perfect gentlemen that ever breathed. During the next month my journey was made as agreeable as possible. Every point of interest was visited, and under such auspicious circumstances as few travellers enjoy. I grew to like the French gentleman very much. I trusted him, above all. His kindnesses, in the face of the refusal I had sent him, were remarkable. And in all this time he neither spoke nor wrote anything that would re-open the subject of his love for me. He was courteous, attentive, thoughtful, but never obtrusive. If I had not been so determined never to marry, I might have relented in the face of such admirable conduct.

“But my story is getting long, Mr. Medford. Are you certain it is not tiring you?”

CHAPTER XXXII.

“IF YOU HAD SEARCHED THE WORLD.”

Assuring her briefly on this point, I waited for her to proceed. Tired! I had never felt less so in my life.

“I returned to Algiers before M. Fantelli, and for a week did not see him. Then there came the most appalling misfortune, from which all our misery has arisen. I will choose the fewest words possible, for the remembrance makes me suffer horribly. I went one afternoon, upon invitation, to visit the barracks where M. Fantelli's regiment was quar-

tered. I was accompanied inside the buildings only by Mathilde, leaving Ali in the carriage. A young officer came to meet us, and announcing to me, through Mathilde, that he was M. Fantelli's brother, invited us into a parlor to await that gentleman, who was momentarily expected. While we were there a colonel—it was M. Desmoulins—

Blanche shuddered, and for an instant acted as if she could not continue.

“M. Desmoulins,” she repeated, “came in. He was partially intoxicated, and before any of us had the least idea what he meant to do he had reeled to my side of the room and, with an expression that Mathilde would never repeat, but which must have been wholly objectionable, placed his hands roughly on my shoulders. Instantly, as it seemed to me, there was a loud report and the colonel fell at my feet with a groan. The shooting had been performed on the spur of the moment, by M. Fantelli's brother, who would have fired a second time, had I not had the presence of mind to spring in front of him and grasp his arm. He was insane with rage. Mathilde and I together could not keep him from kicking the prostrate and apparently senseless form on the floor, upon which he would have wreaked still further vengeance, but for our combined efforts. In the midst of this tableau, M. Fantelli entered the room.”

I could not help speaking, in the interval which Miss Brixton took to recompose her nerves, shaken at the fearful recollections.

“But I always understood—certainly he told me so—that Maurice fired the shot himself!”

“So he did; it was Maurice—I have tried to make that plain enough. M. Fantelli had not yet arrived,

But he came in a moment too late. There lay Desmoulins, to all appearances a dead man. There stood the brother, with us two women between him and the colonel, the revolver still smoking in his hand, and his face convulsed with passionate anger. Luckily the noise had attracted no attention, for the sound of firearms is too common in a military post to be noticed. The first act of M. Fantelli was to lock the door by which he had entered. The second was to take the pistol from his brother. The third was to beg me to be seated, as I could tell he did by the motion which he made toward a chair. And the fourth was to ask Mathilde to give him, as quickly as possible, an explanation of the affair."

Ah! What a complicated story! Each hundred words of it offered some new puzzle. It was not Maurice, then, who had made an offer of marriage to Miss Brixton, who had piloted her over the provinces of Algeria and Constantine, but Maxime, who had now gone to Constantine, and Maurice was to meet him there. It was Maxime who was the "friend" of M. Martine, and the husband of Blanche, and the father of Wallace.

Heavens! How many men I had accused of that child's paternity!

"M. Fantelli was very grave at this moment," continued Miss Brixton. "The duty of an officer who had discovered a crime overcame for an instant every other feeling. Maurice essayed to speak, but he was sternly commanded to keep silence. He was no longer a brother, but an officer of inferior rank. In fifty words Mathilde told exactly what had happened, and the change wrought in M. Fantelli's countenance was terrible. He strode to the wounded

man and, turning him over roughly, hissed in his ear that he had received just punishment. Then he went up to Maurice and clasped him wildly in his arms, tears streaming down both his cheeks.

"Desmoulins was conscious, and began to speak in low but audible tones. I learned from Mathilde what he was saying. He believed his wound mortal, but made no attempt to defend his act or to accuse his assailant. 'Fly, Maurice!' he whispered. 'You can get the evening steamer for Italy. It was the brandy that did it, my friend, not I! Leave me, all of you, and reveal nothing till Maurice is free! Go, go; for the love of God!'

"M. Fantelli, upon recovering himself, turned to me and spoke rapidly. I must re-enter my carriage and drive to the hotel without delay. He would trust me to keep secret the affair that had led his brother into this deplorable action. It would be best for me to leave Algiers in the morning, lest I should be summoned as a witness and put to inconvenience. 'Tell her, Mathilde,' he said, as we were at the door, 'that I love her, that I never did and never shall love another, but my duty now is to Maurice! When he is safe, I trust to meet her again.'"

Miss Brixton's story was weakening her. I took the sleeping boy from her arms and laid him on a sofa. Pouring out a glass of wine, I made her sip it, and presently she was able to proceed :

"In the morning, as advised, we left Algiers. We took the train and stopped at various places where we had been before, till we reached Constantine. I bought the papers daily, and after awhile discovered an item to the effect that Col. Desmou.

lins had been found badly, probably fatally, wounded, and that M. Fantelli had 'confessed his guilt!' Mathilde prevented my going to Algiers and telling the truth, by saying that it was undoubtedly a ruse to enable Maurice to get far enough away before the truth was revealed. This proved to be a correct guess. For the sake of rendering his brother's escape certain, M. Fantelli was willing to risk his own life. Desmoulin had, however, no intention, as I have since learned, of allowing him to run any actual danger. He entered into the plot as far as he dared, but being a hospital patient he could act only through others. M. Fantelli was brought to Constantine for confinement, to await the result of his colonel's injuries. Then I learned, by means of Ali, that he was likely to be shot, whether Desmoulin recovered or not, as military law is very severe on such matters, and it was thought best to make an example to curb riotous spirits.

"I sent word to the prison that my evidence and that of my maid was at his disposal. In response I received an invitation to come to see the prisoner, but when I reached the gates I was informed that admission was refused. Then began the acts for which I reproach M. Fantelli. Ali had been his servant in other days and could be as easily controlled by him as his right hand. The courier came to me with a plausible story, saying that there was but one way to soothe the confinement of this gentleman, who had put himself in such a dilemma. I must go with him before the mayor and state that we were betrothed. If I would consent to do that I would occupy the position accorded to relations by

blood, and could go and come through the fortress gates when I pleased.

“I did not at once consent. But I thought the pretence a justifiable one and listened to Ali’s arguments in its favor till he carried the day. M. Fantelli was brought out under a guard and I went into the mayor’s presence with him, answering as directed by my courier to the questions asked me. I considered it merely a pious fraud, justifiable under the circumstances. When I went to the prison with him the paper he had obtained opened the door to me also. And well it might, for the mayor has since informed me that it was nothing more nor less than a certificate of our marriage !”

Overcome again by her feelings, Miss Brixton—as I could do no less than call her, in spite of her story—arose and began to pace slowly up and down the room.

“I could not take Mathilde with me, but I had no fear. The first night I returned to the hotel. The next M. Fantelli was ill and I stayed to care for him. Then I had my deposition taken and despatched to the judge who presided at the investigation, but I was never sent for. The authorities, it turned out, knew very well that Fantelli was innocent, and only held him in order that his brother might be induced to return. To keep up the delusion he was notified one day that he had but a few weeks to live. The French papers were filled with similar announcements. To him and to me it was a reality. When I next went to him it was with a kiss ! We can be very affectionate with the dying. In a few days those lips would be cold ! I gave myself into his arms, praying God to forgive me if it was wrong !”

She was weeping softly now.

"I did not soon leave him," she sobbed, "though I knew nothing of the record that justified me in the sight of men. I was possessed with a wild anxiety to save him, although I knew not how. I sent Ali to the Governor-general, to the judges, to everybody who might have influence, all to no purpose. They must have laughed at my efforts, possessed as they were of the truth. Desmoulins, feeling sure that Maurice was safe, had told everything. There was nothing more I could do and I could not bear to stay for his death. I resolved on sudden flight !

"Having no longer any wish to be accompanied by the servants who recalled such memories, I left Constantine without even saying farewell to them. Their wages, together with three months each in advance, I left for them, and went as fast as possible to Spain. The rest of my story you know."

There was a pause of some seconds. Blanche sipped the wine that stood on the table, drying at the same time the tears that remained in her eyes. Suddenly she threw herself into the chair she had vacated, and leaned toward me with clasped hands.

"What do you think of me?" she asked, beseechingly. "Am I bad, wicked, shameful? Ought I to be shunned by all who claim virtue? Is that boy on the sofa a witness to my dead womanhood? Or is there, anywhere in your mind, an excuse for me?"

"I could find one, if my suspicion is true," I answered, gravely. "But when I have told you, you will not acknowledge it."

Her swollen eyelids, heavy with weeping, were raised questioningly.

"You loved that man!" I said, curtly.

“No; oh, no!” she answered. “I was only *sorry* for him. His brother had tried to defend me from the slurs of a drunken brute, and through this his own life was, as I thought, in peril.”

I shook my head slowly.

“This is the first opinion I have expressed since I have known you, Blanche,” I said. “I tell you again, you loved him. You love him now!”

“*Now!*” She sat upright and stared at me. “*Now!* When I know that he bribed my courier and maid, to entrap me!”

I motioned her to be quiet and to listen.

“I am sure that he did neither of those things,” I said. “Maurice swears to me that his brother believed the marriage your free act. It must have been the courier (so devoted to his former master’s interests, that he took the responsibility on himself) who arranged the fraud. Everything I have heard of M. Fantelli stamps him as a true gentleman. He offered himself to you in the most honest and open manner. When refused, he acted the part of a straightforward, high-minded man. Remember how, during the month when he piloted you through the country, he refrained from spoiling your pleasure by renewing his overtures. He risked his life to save that of his brother. When you deserted him he forbore to pursue you, saying that your happiness was greater in his eyes than his own. Hearing that Desmoulins had violated the friendship renewed between them, he crossed the sea, to call him to a swift account for the harm to your good name. Would such a man intrigue with a courier to draw you into a false marriage? Never! I once heard you say that you would have for a father to your

child only one who was honorable, pure, upright and brave. If you had searched the world over, you could not have found a man who better answered the description !”

She was silenced, and I thought a faint ray of joy came into her pale face.

“He loves you,” I repeated, “and you love him. That may not justify, but it certainly palliates your conduct.”

But she insisted in saying, no, no ! She did not love him. She did not want to be a wife. She would never share her child with his father. And, catching up the guidebook again, she began to plan the way of escape from the province.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

Our plan was to remain in perfect quiet at Conde Smendou until the next afternoon, and then to take the train that connected with the steamer at Phillippeville. We were reasonably certain not to see anyone we had ever known in that little half-Moorish settlement. In the evening Blanche talked delightedly of home, of good Dr. Robertson, the Drews and her other acquaintances. We would return to them and never leave America again. If it should be claimed by her lawyers that she was legally married she could apply for a divorce on account of “desertion,” or “non-support,” or some of the other convenient reasons, and relieve herself of the night-

mare that would hang over her as long as any man had the shadow of a claim on her boy. I let her talk on, without much interruption, though I felt that she was disposed to be rather unjust to M. Fantelli, whose conduct in this entire matter appealed to my love of the chivalrous. I should be nearly as glad as she to reach New York again, and calculated that we ought to accomplish the journey in about two weeks, if everything went favorably.

There was no incident worthy of note during the night. The next day we arrived at Phillippeville, and were driven without delay to the steamer. Miss Brixton went at once to her stateroom and remained there until we were out at sea, and I did the same in mine, having some writing that I wished to accomplish. We were the last persons to dine, though the passenger list was a small one, and after dinner, it being then about half-past eight o'clock, we went to the deck for a little promenade.

It was a fine night. The Mediterranean was at its best. The air was at that happy stage when a degree warmer or colder could not be desired. The waves were only slightly ruffled by the breeze that blew from the west. We had walked some time and were debating whether we could do better than continue in that occupation for the next hour, when Master Wallace appeared in the arms of his maid for his good-night kiss. As the little fellow was wide awake and crowed joyfully at sight of his mother, Blanche told the nurse to remain on the deck for a time, and took the child in her lap.

While we were devoting our conversation to the cause of all his mamma's joys and woes, two gentlemen came up the companion way, and stopped,

staring at us with astonishment written on their faces. However surprised they may have been, we were certainly no less so. They were Maurice Fantelli and M. Martine !

Miss Brixton gave one quick glance about her, to see if any feasible avenue of escape presented itself, and then resigned herself to the inevitable. She would have to meet these men. Her bosom swelled with her emotions, as she pressed the child closer to her heart, and she gave me a look that constituted me her protector, whatever might be about to occur.

Assuming as much indifference as possible in my manner, I walked toward the new comers and greeted them with a "Good-evening." For a moment they could hardly summon enough *sang froid* to reply.

"It is she !" whispered M. Martine, in a startlingly distinct tone.

"Yes," said Maurice.

"And that—"

"Is the child."

Then they begged my pardon, and hastened to assure me that the meeting was totally unexpected to them.

"I knew you must have left the train purposely, at Conde Smendou," said Maurice, with dignity, "because you did not come to Constantine on the next one. That was, however, your own affair. I did not know—I did not think for a moment—that you were on this boat."

M. Martine hastened to add his testimony to this statement.

"I assure you, monsieur, that this is true," he said,

earnestly. "And I would thank you to say as much to—to madame!"

I wondered why M. Martine joined so earnestly in this message to Miss Brixton, but I accepted his statement with a bow.

"Where is your brother Maxime?" I asked Maurice. "Is he on the steamer with you?"

"No," he answered, with a start. "Why do you ask that?"

"Perhaps it was the knowledge that she"—I indicated Miss Brixton with a motion of my head—"would rather not see him."

Maurice and M. Martine looked at each other.

"Would rather not see Maxime!" interrupted Maurice. "I did not know that she had any such feeling."

The old trouble! We never could seem to understand each other, quite.

"Do you imagine," I asked, "that she is particularly anxious, at this moment, to look on the face of her child's father?"

M. Martine strode a step forward, but Maurice grasped him firmly by the sleeve.

"Her child's father!" exclaimed the former, in that fierce whisper of his. "Who told you this?"

"Why," I responded, astounded, "she did, for one. And—"

Martine, throwing off the hand that would have restrained him, took two steps more and his breath was in my face.

"Retract that," he said, "or—"

"For Heaven's sake!" interrupted Maurice, "wait! She will hear you—she will see that you

are quarrelling. Let me try to untangle this knot. Jules—a word! I insist!”

With a powerful movement the speaker drew the other back and began to catechise me.

“What did madame say—exactly?” he asked. “Quote her literal words, if you can.”

Much perturbed I tried to answer him.

“She said—why, you told me the same thing—are we all crazy?—that your brother was Wallace’s father.”

Maurice gave his companion a wise look. Then he said to me, “But she did not use the word ‘Maxime?’”

“I am not sure; but what is the difference? That *is* your brother’s name, is it not?”

M. Martine could not be restrained.

“She said ‘his brother,’ and you thought she meant Maxime?”

“Of course.”

M. Martine’s face was wreathed in smiles.

“It is all explained, then,” said Maurice, beaming also. “I have two brothers, you see. It was the other one.”

The other one! This made the fourth or fifth person I had accused of being the father of that unhappy child! Was it to rest here, I wondered, or were there still more to follow!

“It was the other one,” repeated Maurice, after exchanging a pressure of the hand with his companion. “In short, it was Jules here, whom we have been alluding to all the time as M. Martine. His name is Jules Martine Fantelli, and it was to him that the ceremony of marriage with your sweet

American friend took place in the mairie at Constantine."

I glanced at Blanche, hugging her child to her heart, at the other end of the deck, and her aspect of alarm justified the revelation. So this was the man she had dreaded to meet, that she had fled from Phillippeville to avoid. And, after all her pains, we were at sea with him, on a French vessel, in as pretty a trap as could be imagined. Were he disposed to assert his authority over her, there was no place more suitable. We could rely only on his forbearance.

"I am the husband of that lady and the father of that boy," said Martine, slowly. "Yet I have no wish to claim them against their will. Now that we have met so unexpectedly, however, I would like to talk long enough with Mme. Fantelli to disabuse her mind of some of the things she has harbored against me. M. Medford, I want, if possible, to set myself right before my wife. Will you tell her that for me?"

Bowing assent, I left the gentleman and went to Miss Brixton's side.

"I know what you are going to say," she broke out, "and I have made up my mind to refuse everything."

This seemed so unjust that I was moved to a slight deception.

"Has it occurred to you," I inquired, "that he can do what he pleases on a vessel that flies the French flag? But he asks very little. He only wants to show you that you have charged him in your thoughts with wrongs he never committed. He will not detain you long, I think, judging from what he

said ~~to me~~. Is it not better to hear him now, and have it ended?"

When I alluded to M. Fantelli's rights, Miss Brixton's lip grew firm and her independent spirit seemed about to assert itself in some determined phrase. When I changed and spoke of a matter of policy, she hesitated and then agreed with me.

"Very well," she said, reflectively. "But do not go far away. Stay where you can hear my voice if I call you."

She spoke like a child afraid of some ordeal, who wants the comforting assurance that its parent will be close at hand.

"And Wallace?" I suggested. "Had not his nurse better take him to the stateroom?"

She caught the child to her in sudden alarm.

"How can you think of such a thing?" she exclaimed. "He might have it stolen, while we were talking. No, I will keep the baby here. Wallace and I will meet this man together."

M. Jules thanked me when I brought the message that he could have the desired interview, but he said farther that he wanted me, by all means, to be a participator in it. He realized, he said, that madame would feel nervous if left in his sole presence, and he preferred that her pleasure should be consulted in all things. Accordingly I accompanied him to Miss Brixton's side of the boat.

"Blanche," I said, "this gentleman asks me to listen to what he has to tell you, and I have consented to do so, if it is your wish."

Miss Brixton—I can call her nothing else, try as I may—changed to a rosy red at my words. She turned her eyes toward me, avoiding those of M.

Fantelli, and bowed. It was plain that she was undergoing suppressed excitement of no ordinary character—that every nerve was at its severest tension.

When M. Fantelli began to speak a perceptible thrill passed over her body. His English was very good, but strongly marked with the French accent. His voice was low and sweet, his intonation that of a man who has no higher wish than to speak the truth. When I remembered that he had learned the language within three years I thought he did remarkably well.

“I hardly know how to address you, madame,” he said, “when I find you in this unexpected place, with my child in your arms. If I do not make my thoughts as plain as I could wish, you will remember that the situation is a trying one, as well for me as for you. I am speaking a tongue of which I did not know ten words when I met you, a little over three years ago. I have learned it for the sole purpose of conversing with you in it, if ever that happiness should be mine.”

He waited, apparently for some sign to guide him in what he should say farther, but the wife's face had no signal for him. The woman's eyes were fixed on the figure of her child.

“I have learned,” he proceeded, presently, “that you accuse me of grave offenses. It is true that I tried to have a religious service performed upon us at the monastery, but I call Heaven to witness that my intentions were the purest in the world. I would have told you what had happened, explained my reasons, and have left the rest to your judgment. I was very much in love with you. I could not

bring myself to believe that you would **not in time** reciprocate my affection. But, at Constantine—I swear to you before God!—I was as much deceived as you. It was Ali's too great fondness for me that led him into making the arrangements that he thought would please me best. I accepted you, before the law, as my true, wedded wife, with all honesty. I had, as I believed, but a few days more of earth. Indeed, your presence made me feel that heaven's gates had already been opened. Then you went away, and they came to tell me I was free; but I would rather have met the firing squad, with your kiss on my lips. Yes, I assure you!"

I glanced at Blanche from time to time, and saw that her mouth trembled. For myself I will not deny my eyes were moist. Fantelli's tone was so tender and his words so apt.

"I would like to know if you believe me," continued the speaker, pausing.

"Yes, yes," came the scarcely audible answer.

"That encourages me," he said, brightening. "And now that I have been the unfortunate means of making you a wife, when you did not wish to be one, what is there that I can do? And the little boy? You do not give him my name, I have heard, and you even call yourself 'mademoiselle' instead of 'madame.' That is not right. It will not be well for him—for the baby—by-and-by. Also, he must inherit my estate. If I were living with you as your husband I would not have to say these things, but—you do not want me, I am afraid."

Blanche shook her head slowly, as if the cords of her neck were swollen.

"You must have suffered—from those who knew

you a mother and thought you no wife," he said, very gently. "Let me at least go to your home with you and tell them I am your husband. Let me right you, my dearest one, before the slanderers. Then, if you bid me, I will depart. And, in the meantime, I will ask nothing of you."

The fair young head shook slowly again, but the lips did not open.

"You will think better of it some day, Blanche," said Fantelli, uttering her name as simply as the rest of the words he was speaking. "And now, this is all I wish to say to you at present. You do not need to be told how true my love is, what suffering I have to endure because I have lost you. You were my wife for twenty blissful days. You know; you know! And in all that time," he added, reminiscantly, "there was nothing to show that you hated me. Nothing."

Miss Brixton began to cry softly. Wallace perceived it and put his hand to her cheek with the single word, "Mamma!"

As Fantelli ceased, Blanche nerved herself for a brief reply. She realized the necessity of saying something that this terribly earnest man would understand.

"Monsieur," she said, in a voice so low that we had to bend forward to hear her. "If I were capable of loving any man I am sure it would be such a one as you. But I cannot love a man. I can only love a child. This infant has every drop of affection that runs through my being. He and I want nothing but each other. If you truly care for us, you can best show it by leaving us entirely alone."

M. Fantelli arose and stood, a very pathetic picture, gazing upon his sweetheart and offspring.

"I shall do it, madame," he said, and his tone had never sounded so musical. "From this moment you will not see me again unless by some accident I cannot prevent. I do not hold to the old views about marriage. To me no love of woman is desirable when it has to find its basis in duty alone. I will send you my permanent address at Paris. Should you ever want me, I will fly to you from any part of the earth where I may happen to be. Unless I receive such a message I shall never intrude myself upon your presence. I only ask one thing now. Let me kiss our child."

Impulsively for one second she drew the boy away from him. Then she raised Wallace to the face of his father.

"Adieu," said M. Fantelli.

"Adieu," murmured Miss Brixton.

As soon as the Frenchman had left the deck, which he did immediately with his brother, Blanche begged me to assist her to her stateroom. Her strength had left her completely. The maid, who had sat but a little way from us, came to carry the child, and I had to do almost as much for its mother. She leaned nearly her whole weight on me and her breath came in quick, short gasps.

"If it were not for my baby," she whispered to me, on the way, "I would throw myself into the sea. I would never have believed myself capable of inflicting such pain. Did you see his face when he kissed Wallace?"

I told her I did and that I pitied him sincerely.

"Not more than I," she said, passionately, "not

more than I! If there were only something I could do for him! But there is nothing—nothing but to become his wife, and that cannot be! How he must despise me, in his heart! I despise myself, I am sure. Oh, Wallace," she cried, "what have I not endured for your sweet sake! And you are still mine—all mine! No one else can claim a hair of your darling head!"



CHAPTER XXXIV.

"HE LOOKS LIKE WALLACE."

We did not see Jules Fantelli again on that steamer. Before we reached Marseilles Maurice came to bid me farewell, but refrained from alluding in any way to his brother. He gave me a hand that trembled, and I knew well that the sufferings of the husband and father were shared by this devoted relation. Their fraternal affection was of the strongest kind, one that I have seldom seen paralleled. I could not help feeling that I had never met men who appealed more to my sense of what brotherhood ought to mean than these same gentlemen.

On the pier at New York we found good Dr. Robertson awaiting us, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Drew. Blanche's home was in perfect order and she seemed like another child when she stepped across the familiar threshold. Only the usual common-places had been exchanged in the carriage, but now Blanche spoke to me with an earnestness

that attested her sincerity, and bade me tell her entire story to her friends as soon as I could find it convenient.

"They may as well know—now that the secret is out," she said.

And that very evening, when Blanche was in her private apartments with the baby, I outlined the strange story I have given to you.

"Thank God she is a wife, after all!" exclaimed Mrs. Drew, devoutly, when I had finished. "Thank God that little Wallace is the offspring of a legitimate union!"

"But she will never live with her husband," I said. "She has positively refused to recognize him in any way. The next thing likely is a divorce."

"That does not alter the case," replied the lady. "She has conformed to the law. We can tell everyone that their dreadful suspicions were untrue. It relieves us of a terrible load, and I for one breathe easier over this affair. Let her get the divorce, if that is her wish. People will not blame her seriously. Minnie had a divorce, you know, and now she is married again."

"Indeed! I had not heard of that."

"Oh, yes. To a very nice fellow, too. He was in the same trouble as she, married to a woman he could not get along with. So Minnie and he arranged it. She promised to marry him as soon as he was free, and a month ago they got the papers and were joined by a clergyman the same evening. She is quite happy at last, poor child!"

I thought of an expression that someone has applied to our American system of divorce and re-

marriage, "consecutive polygamy." It seemed to fit the present case excellently.

"Did she ever hear what became of Bartlett?" I inquired.

"Yes," said Mrs. Drew. "He married an Illinois lady, as soon as Minnie got her separation from him, and I learn is spending a small fortune that she had left her, as fast as he can. I shall feel so different about Blanche," she added, returning to that subject with evident satisfaction. "One can go anywhere with her now. If only she would call herself Madame What's-his-Name instead of 'Miss Brixton.' I shall talk to her. She owes something to those of us who have stood by her through all this affair. Don't you think she will give in that much for our sakes, Mr. Medford?"

I replied that I was very much in doubt of it; that I saw nothing to give me any such impression. She was very proud of her name and wanted to register it on the steamer's passenger list with the words "and child," added. The printer of the list had remedied what he took to be an error by changing the "Miss" to "Mrs." But her entry was plain, "Miss Blanche Brixton and child."

"Well, we will hope for the best," said Mrs. Drew, with a sigh. "And you say this Mr. —"

"Fantelli."

"He is a nice gentleman?"

"One of the most perfect I ever met," I answered.

On my own account I began a correspondence with M. Fantelli. I wanted to assure him of the state of my feelings, and to let him know that if I could at any time aid him in regaining his rightful position I should do so. Among other things

I requested his photograph, explaining that I wished to own it, in case anything happened to his wife and I was left the guardian of his child. In due course an answer came, breathing the same devotion to those he loved that I had seen in his attitude on the Mediterranean steamer, and with it the picture. He mentioned in his letter that he was anxious to visit America, and would be glad to see me, but intended to avoid a meeting that might be disagreeable to his wife. I answered that I would do all in my power to make his stay in New York enjoyable, and finally an answer came to this letter stating that Maurice and he would sail on the *Touraine* on a date not far distant.

Blanche seemed to have forgotten her intention of securing a divorce, now that she had the sea between her and her liege lord. Her life was spent in the old way, mainly with her son. I took dinner with them generally, by a sort of regular understanding, and one day at the table I took M. Fantelli's portrait from my pocket and handed it to Blanche.

To my surprise she made no fuss whatever. The only thing noticeable was a quiver of the eyelashes, as she remarked that the likeness was excellent.

"He is a splendid fellow!" she added, with enthusiasm. "Have you two of these? I would like one very much."

I told her I had but one, but she should take it with pleasure if she wished, for it was worth more to her than to me.

"It is, indeed!" she replied. Then she called the attention of the young gentleman in a high chair by her side. "See here, Master Wallace, this is your father. Is he not a handsome man? And he's as

good as he is handsome. If you want to make your mamma happy be as noble as he when you grow up.”

She accepted the picture and had it put in a frame on her mantel. I was in her rooms one day when Mrs. Clinton Eastlake—formerly Miss Minnie Drew and later Mrs. Bartlett—was calling there. Minnie’s attention was called to the photograph, and she casually inquired who it was.

“Oh, that?” said Blanche, raising her eyes. “That is Wallace’s father.”

“M. Fantelli!” exclaimed the other, inspecting it more closely.

“Yes.”

“He looks very dignified,” was Minnie’s next comment. “Not at all like I imagined him.”

Blanche let her eyes fall longingly on the picture.

“He is a good man,” she said, simply.

“Ah!”

“*Very* good,” repeated Blanche, absently. “He is the best man I ever knew, except my father.”

“I agree to that perfectly,” I remarked. “And I must add that Fate is too severe when it deprives him of a wife and child he adores.”

Miss Brixton was silent. She evidently did not like to enter into a discussion in which she must take the defensive.

“He looks like Wallace,” said Minnie, regarding the picture intently. “I should think you would want him with you, Blanche, to help guide your boy when he grows older. A father is needed then—a good father—and no mother can fill his place.”

Blanche turned toward us with both her hands outstretched.

"Why are you all so cruel to me?" she cried. "You know I have thought of all these things—that I would love to have him here for Wallace's sake—and you know the insuperable obstacles in my way. A father, yes, that is well enough. But to gain that relation, M. Fantelli would have to assume also that of a husband. To-day I am Blanche Brixton, free, independent, my own mistress. Married, I should be under the authority of one who could, if he chose, make my life a hell! It is well enough to say that M. Fantelli would not do that, but who knows? There are people in menageries who place their heads in the mouths of lions. For a number of seasons they do this with impunity, and then, without warning, the great jaws close. I cannot bear to give even the best of men such rights over me! I cannot; no, I cannot!"

Minnie looked at the speaker strangely.

"There is a difference in men," she said. "Mr. Bartlett and Mr. Eastlake are both men, but such a variation! I do exactly as I like now, and I think that is the way every wife should do."

Miss Brixton heard her impatiently.

"You do as you like because he *lets* you!" she said. "When he takes the notion, you will do as *he* likes. I know how it is. Authority is vested by the law in the man. Suppose I agreed to live with M. Fantelli as his wife. Everything would go smoothly for a number of weeks, perhaps. Then there would come a day when he would say yes, and I would say no. He would insist and I would insist. I would put on my hat to leave the house, and he would order me to take it off. Who would win? He, of course! My father kept my mother a prisoner for

months because the law constituted him her master. I have too much spirit to endure that kind of servitude. And I have no reason for surrendering my liberty. At present I can eat when I like, drink when I like, go to bed when I like, get up when I like. I have no one to consult, no one to ask consent of if I wish to take a trip to Fourteenth street or Tlemsen. A negro in Texas might as well demand another statute that would consign him to slavery as I to have the bonds of matrimony around my unchained limbs."

When Minnie was gone I asked Blanche if she remembered what I had told her at Conde Smendou, and I repeated it.

"You love Fantelli," I said. "You love him, as he loves you."

"Perhaps, perhaps," she answered. "But if I worshipped him, I would refuse just as strongly to be his wife. We could not live in that close proximity without my wanting to assassinate him."

Her half admission surprised me greatly. I was encouraged to tell her that her husband was coming to America on a tour of sight-seeing, and that I wished she would invite him to visit her.

"He may come ; I would like to have him come," she replied, without hesitation. "So long as he only asks my friendship, I shall be much pleased to see him."

When I repeated this to Dr. Robertson and asked him what he thought of it, he shook his gray mane savagely.

"Don't put conundrums to me !" he said. "I

used to think I knew something of the workings of the human mind, but I don't ! !"

A month later I entered the Brixton house with Jules Fantelli. Blanche came forward to greet us, in a wonderfully self-possessed mood, and introduced him to Dr. Robertson and Mrs. Drew, as "my friend, M. Fantelli, that you have heard me speak of so often." The Frenchman, much perturbed, acknowledged the salutations that he received, and acquitted himself admirably. If Blanche did not fall in love with him, she was the only one of the household of whom that could be said. Wallace seemed to like him immensely.

When Jules left he received an invitation to call again. The second time he was asked to remain to dinner and to bring Maurice with him.

You cannot imagine a queerer party than we all made, with this father, mother and child at one table, under the very strange circumstances of the case. Blanche addressed her husband as "Monsieur," and he called her "Madame." The boy was not well enough versed in any language to talk a great deal, or he might have complicated matters still more. Mrs. Drew was particularly sweet to Jules. Stephen followed her lead, as usual. Dr. Robertson was courteous to everybody ; but once in awhile I caught him throwing despairing looks at Blanche, as if to ask her when she would end the farcical part of this affair.

We managed to leave M. and Mme. Fantelli alone together more or less ; we guessed that there were things they might like to discuss in private ; but the

door to the parlor they occupied on these occasions seemed to be purposely left open, or at least ajar.

In this way several weeks passed. The brothers dined at the Brixton house nearly every day, and Jules usually remained most of the evening with Blanche. At eleven o'clock the visitors always took their leave. My own rooms were located in the direction of the hotel they occupied, and we walked out together. But nothing was said—nothing—by either of us.

One evening—this was only a few weeks ago—the clock struck the customary hour for leaving without having any perceptible effect on Blanche or her caller. We waited ten minutes, which seemed very long ones, and still they did not come. Maurice fidgeted slightly, but maintained silence.

Five minutes more! Mrs. Drew rose and tiptoed out of the room. A moment later she returned with her eyes wide open and her lips parted.

"Oh, Stephen," she exclaimed, "what do you think! I knocked gently, and they did not answer. And then I pushed open the door, and—"

"Well?" cried we all, in one breath.

"Why, Blanche was lying in his arms—her face all wet with tears, and—and—*he was kissing her!*"

READY FOR THE JURY.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AND NOW SUIT YOURSELVES.

Mr. Medford paused and turned to me with a look that said as clearly as words, "What have you got to say now?"

And he did not seem particularly flattered when I replied that his story had turned out precisely as I expected it would.

"Women are women, after all," I explained. "Let them get as far as they may out of the paths followed by their grandmothers, inherited instincts are stronger than innovating resolutions. Your friend will be Madame Fantelli the rest of her life, and probably all the happier for the roundabout way she took to achieve her destiny."

The retired grocer smiled, with one of his triumphant expressions.

"We don't know yet whether she will or not," he said. "She still lives at her own house and he at his hotel. Nearly every day he comes to dinner, and remains for the evening—and sometimes she walks out with him—but so far as we can see this is all. She has given us no indication that she intends to change this manner of life. In response to a direct question of mine, just before I left New York, she shook her head evasively."

"You are a man of sense," I answered, "and you know this can't go on forever! They are by your own account lovers, and time will surely bind them closer. Mark my prediction—"

He raised a finger to stop me.

"Don't prophesy! Miss Brixton is a puzzle that those who know her best have found impossible of solution. There is no doubt that she loves this Frenchman; but she has an overweening fear of putting herself, as she calls it, 'in his power.' She is now free to love or to cease to love, and she wishes to remain so. She wants the right to live near him or to go to the farthest end of the earth; to submit her lips to his kisses, or to close them, merely because she wills it. She insists that wifehood breaks from a woman the wings that God placed between her shoulders and compels her to suit her pace to that of a man she may learn to dread like death. To be sure, she may change all of these views; on the contrary, she may not. Neither of us can tell. That most women would change is no proof that she will, for Blanche is not like other women."

I remarked that I wished Miss Brixton or Madame Fantelli—or whatever she elected to be called—would make her decision and have done with it. And I gave as my very good reason that I had a novel to write and wanted to use her history as its basis, and could not wait a great while for the *denouement*.

"My readers, especially the feminine ones," I said, "will demand to know the result of this lady's peculiar doctrines, or in other words, 'how she came out.'"

Mr. Medford replied that he had thought of that.

He believed the best way was to write the story up to date, constituting the public a jury to try the case of the State *vs.* Brixton. They could argue it, pro and con, and fix up conclusions to suit their individual selves, and in a subsequent story I could tell them what the *real* ending was, after time had developed it.

The more I considered this idea the more I was pleased with it, and finally I told Medford that I should follow his suggestion.

"It will be necessary, will it not," I added, "to express my own opinion of the views Miss Brixton attempted to carry out? There is certainly nothing in the poor girl's history to induce any other woman to imitate her. As to her unfortunate mother, the pathetic lesson of her fault hardly needs anything more than the mere statement of it."

"You can easily show that you hold the same views as Dr. Robertson," was the reply. "Of course no really intelligent person could do otherwise. However sensible Blanche's notions may seem in the abstract they are certainly out of place in our civilization and in this age of the world. That there are hardships in some marriages for an open-hearted, high-souled woman, it is useless to deny; but to jump from frying pan to fire never yet cured a burn."

As there was no controverting this statement, which was a much wiser one than I should have expected from the mouth of a retired grocer, I merely bowed assent. And thus I leave these people with my readers.

There are so many novels whose ending you

would like different, it should be a pleasure to have one exactly as you want it. You are at liberty to make Fantelli the happiest of mortals, or to send him about his business as drones are sent by the bees when the queen of the hive has no further desire for their company. You can constitute Blanche a *femme seule*, with her baby boy her only care, or mould her into a plastic, yielding wife who loves her husband as so good a man might easily be loved.

All this you can do—for the space of six months. For by next June, when my next novel comes out, I hope to be able to tell you exactly what has happened.

THE END.

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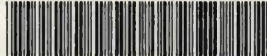
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