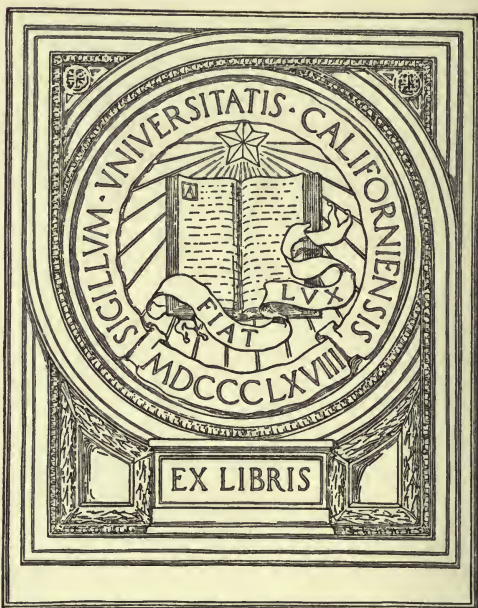


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THE
YOUNG HEIRESS.

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF

“FATHER EUSTACE,” “THE BARNABYS,” &c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE YOUNG HEIRESS.

CHAPTER I.

MY narrative must now return to those with whom it began, but from whom it has long been parted.

When the unfortunate Mrs. Lambert told Helen that it was her purpose to seek William, and not to rest until she found him, she very strictly spoke the truth; and, moreover, she adhered afterwards very faithfully to her promise. It has been already stated that her inquiries among the sailors at Falmouth, many of whom were of long standing acquaintance, had enabled her to ascertain that William Rixley had sailed from that port, on board a large boat which

called itself a fishing smack, but which was strongly suspected by the intimate associates of its owner, of occasionally doing a little business in the more profitable line of smuggling.

As to the probable destination of the little vessel she could learn absolutely nothing, but its captain had been long known to her as the brother of a woman who had once lived as servant with herself and her mother, while they were maintaining themselves by letting lodgings in Falmouth. After a few moments' reflection, therefore, she determined on returning to the Warren House for the purpose of removing from thence the trunks containing her wearing apparel, and on establishing herself in a lodging at Falmouth, till such time as the boat should return thither, on board of which William Rixley had taken his departure. Nor had she very long to wait before this happened—the 'Pretty Polly' again showing her saucy head in the offing within about ten days after she had left it. Her old acquaintance appeared rather shy, however, of answering her questions; but whether this reserve was the result

of caution on his own account, or on that of his late passenger, she could not for some time discover. It probably was the latter, for the report of the young man's having murdered his father, had been loudly and widely circulated through Falmouth, and its neighbourhood; and it was therefore to remove this that she exerted herself.

It was probably the deep sincerity with which she expressed both her own attachment to the unfortunate young man, and her firm conviction that he was innocent of the dreadful crime of which he was accused, that at length gained her point, and led the friendly smuggler to describe to her exactly the place at which he had parted from William. This was an out-of-the way spot on the coast of Holland; and when, while thanking him for his information, she gave him to understand that it was her purpose immediately to follow him, the blunt tar told her that she did not know what she was talking about, and that nobody but a downright raving mad woman would ever take such a wild notion into her head.

But Almeria Lambert was as well capable

of proving herself to be in her right senses as most people, and, moreover, she had little or no difficulty in convincing her old acquaintance that it was in her power very amply to reward any one who would promptly and effectually assist her in the search she was upon.

Having achieved thus much, her subsequent steps were comparatively easy.

Her smuggling friend soon made her very plainly perceive that if she had enough ready money at hand to prosecute the search she had in hand, her best plan would be to remain where she was, and commission him, whose profession it was to embrace from day to day whatever employment presented itself, to set about the task for her.

That the man meant to do her errand fairly was sufficiently proved by the terms which he himself proposed, and which stipulated that not one farthing of the fifty pounds which she offered to give for the recovery of her lost darling, should be paid before he had been found.

This bargain was very quickly concluded; the only objection made to it by Mrs. Lam-

bert being, that it might prove a very unprofitable one to Joe Burton, the smuggler, if the search lasted longer than he expected, or if it finally failed altogether.

But this scruple was removed in a spirit as honest as that by which it was dictated, by Joe Burton's assurance that he knew perfectly well what he was about. "There is not a sea-coast in Europe that I don't know as well as you do your sampler, Mrs. Lambert," said Joe, with the tone and manner of a man who was by no means ashamed of his profession; "and moreover," he added, with a good deal of self-complacency, "there is not a nook nor a corner where I have not had dealings, and where I have not got friends; and so it would be, you may take my word for it, if we were to go to war tomorrow, from one end of Europe to the other."

This assurance perfectly satisfied Mrs. Lambert, whose information respecting human affairs extended considerably beyond her sampler.

Within two days after this bargain was concluded, the 'Pretty Polly' was again

upon the high seas, and Mrs. Lambert established in the occupation of a garret, in her own house, in the town of Falmouth.

Her manner of life was very retired and quiet; but she affected nothing like concealment as to the object she had in view, distinctly declaring that her purpose in practising a greater degree of economy than her circumstances rendered necessary, was to save money enough to enable her to prosecute a search for the basely-maligned William Rixley, which search she would never abandon so long as she remained alive, and that there was the least shadow of a hope that it might eventually prove successful.

No great time was lost after this compact was concluded before the wanderer was traced, by the sagacious and indefatigable Joe Burton, till he finally discovered that he had enlisted in a foot regiment on the very eve of its starting for the Cape of Good Hope.

When this perfectly correct information was reported to his employer, Joe Burton received and pocketed the stipulated reward

with a well-pleased smile and an approving conscience; for he naturally enough supposed that it was as well calculated to set the good woman's mind at rest respecting William Rixley, as it was well possible any intelligence could do; for, whether innocent or guilty of the dreadful crime of which he stood accused, it clearly proved that he was very satisfactorily out of reach of pursuit, and safe from all the painful consequences which must have followed if he had been arrested.

Nor did Almeria Lambert give him reason to suppose, either by look or word, that she was less completely satisfied by his intelligence than he supposed her to be; and so they parted on the very best terms possible; the contented smuggler whistling as he went, and the stedfast-purposed Almeria remaining alone in her garret, and instantly becoming occupied with all the practical details necessary to be taken into consideration before she set out upon the expedition which was to enable her, with as little delay as might be, to follow the — Regiment of Infantry to the Cape of Good Hope. Nor did

she lose an hour in setting about it. But, notwithstanding all her eagerness to depart, she would not have done so, even if a vessel had that hour been ready to receive her, without first giving instructions to Mr. Lucas respecting his being left in charge of the will which was to bequeath her little wealth; and, moreover, taking leave of Mr. Bolton, whose pitying gentleness had left a deeper impression of compunction, as well as of gratitude, on the conscious sinner's mind, than could have been produced by the most indignant reprobation that human lips ever uttered.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. LAMBERT had never entered Crumpton parsonage since the day Helen left it. Two months had elapsed between that day and the one she now selected for her farewell visit to it; and, much as she had silently and secretly suffered during those two months, she felt that the penance she was about to inflict upon herself by now going there was harder to endure than all the rest.

It happens, oftener than we think for, that the passion of PRIDE makes as wild work in the human heart, and rules it with as absolute a tyranny, as either love, hatred, or any other of the fiercest passions which roar most loud, and thunder in the index. Any one who has often visited asylums for the insane,

in company with a professional guide, able and willing to answer questions concerning the causes of the various hallucinations which have peopled the sad abode, must, I think, have been surprised by the frequency with which the word '*pride*' is uttered in reply to such questions.

Mrs. Lambert was certainly not insane, according to the ordinary meaning of the word; but yet, from a very early period of her life, there had been little enough of sanity in her conduct whenever this master passion of her nature had been brought into action. That she had some fine qualities cannot be denied; and of these, the total absence of that detestable species of selfishness, which leads human beings to be too much occupied about themselves and their own little individual comforts to have any time or any interest left for those of others, was one. From this engrossing, hateful, paltry little sin, Almeria Lambert was wholly free. Moreover, her nature led her to be strongly and devotedly affectionate to those whom she loved, and who she believed loved her, and this to a degree which could lead her, as in the case

of her fatal attachment to her late master, to forget even the dictates of her pride, as well as of her reason. She was, too, notwithstanding her criminal life, still capable of discerning, and of duly appreciating, the purity and the holiness of such beings as Mr. and Mrs. Bolton; and her conquering her feelings of torturing shame, when now presenting herself before them, ought not to be left out of the scanty catalogue of her merits, because her motive for doing so was a good one, being perfectly unselfish, and arising from her wish to give them all the information she possessed herself respecting the unfortunate young man on whom they had bestowed so much kindness, and for whom they had proved themselves so deeply interested.

Her painful task in thus presenting herself was, however, rewarded by hearing more particulars respecting the situation of Helen than she had dared to flatter herself she should ever hear again; for neither Mr. Bolton, nor his gentle-hearted wife either, could resist the silent but unmistakable appeal made to them by the varying complexion

and anxious eye of the unfortunate woman upon hearing the name of Helen pronounced.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Bolton had received frequent letters from her, minutely detailing all the pleasant features of her present home ; nor did they shrink from repeating to the painfully-abashed being before them the affectionate terms in which she had been inquired for by the innocent girl whom she had so long loved, even as a mother loves her child. She was more cheered and soothed by this, than she would herself, an hour before, have believed possible, and so greatly did it tend to soften and to open her heart, that she not only told Mr. and Mrs. Bolton all the intelligence she had been able to gather respecting William, but explained to them, before she left the parsonage, what her own projects were respecting following him to the Cape.

Her auditors listened to her with great feeling and deep interest ; but Mr. Bolton shook his head as he did so, and when she had finished the detail of what she intended to do, told her candidly, though not without reluctance, that he feared she over-rated her

own strength, as well as the probabilities of ultimate success in the undertaking.

But on this point he had no influence ; her resolution was not to be shaken ; and this speedily became so evident, notwithstanding the extreme quietness of her manner while confessing that she did not think she could be induced to alter her mind, that Mr. Bolton changed his reasonable remonstrance into a most friendly and earnest expression of his good wishes for her success.

And so they parted ; Mrs. Lambert returning to Falmouth by aid of the same fisherman's cart which had brought her to Crumpton, and the good clergyman and his wife wandering down, arm in arm, to the sea-beach, moralizing on the strange mixture of good and evil so legible in the character of the unfortunate woman who had just left them.

Early on the following day Mrs. Lambert paid a visit to Mr. Lucas, the attorney. It did not appear, however, that she had any very particular business on which to consult him, as she had entrusted the care of her house, and the important business of letting

it, to an old female friend whom she well knew to be in all ways perfectly capable of executing the task to her satisfaction. It seemed, indeed, that she now sought Mr. Lucas rather to speak of past, than of present business, for what passed between them was on this wise :

“ Good morning, Mrs. Lambert,” said the friendly attorney, upon her presenting herself in his office ; “ I hope you are better than when I saw you last. That terrible business at the Warren House almost killed you, I believe. I shall never forget your looks when I came to the house to take the inventory with you, and put seals on the property ! And no wonder, I am sure ! It was a most shocking affair altogether. Do walk in and sit down.”

Mrs. Lambert accepted the invitation, and placed herself in the chair indicated, which was just in front of the desk at which the attorney himself was writing. “ Have you heard of that sweet pretty girl, the daughter ? ” he continued.

“ Yes, sir,” quietly replied Mrs. Lambert, “ I have heard very excellent news of her.

I have heard that she is well, and finds a very happy home in the family of her uncle."

"And is it true, Mrs. Lambert, that she is come into such a monstrous fine fortune by the death of her father?" said he.

"Yes, sir, it is perfectly true," she replied, with a slight augmentation of colour, and a tone that seemed to have some touch of pride in it. "Miss Beauchamp, I am told, has one of the finest fortunes of any young lady in England."

"So I hear," rejoined the attorney. "It must have come upon you as a great surprise, Mrs. Lambert, after so many years of service, to find out that your master was of a different name, and in such a very different situation of life from what you supposed."

"Yes, indeed, sir," she returned, "it was a great surprise to us all, and to no one more than to the dear young lady herself."

"I dare say," rejoined Mr. Lucas, "that it will not be very long before we hear of your joining her again. You have been a good and faithful servant to her, and her mother before her."

"If I had nothing but my own pleasure

to consult, there would be no duty I could so gladly undertake as that of personal attendant upon Miss Beauchamp," said Mrs. Lambert, earnestly, but in a voice of perfect composure. "But I believe, sir," she continued, "that it falls to the lot of very few to be able, without self-reproach, to do exactly the thing they like best. I am very strongly persuaded, sir, that it is my duty to seek for my late master's unfortunate son, for the purpose of telling him of the vile and most false reports that have been circulated against him, and of inducing him to return to his native land. Never were a brother and sister more tenderly attached to each other than Master William and Miss Helen; and the fine fortune she has inherited will enable her to provide for him very handsomely without injuring herself."

"And you really mean to set out upon a voyage round the world in search of him, Mrs. Lambert?" said the attorney, looking at her with great astonishment.

"Yes, sir, I do," was her succinct reply.

"But, my dear, good woman," he rejoined, "you ought to think a good deal about it,

before you set out upon such an expedition as this. I have a great respect for you, Mrs. Lambert, for I believe you to be a very excellent person, and I should think I really committed a great sin if I saw you set out upon such a scheme as this, without advising you against it. Think about it, Mrs. Lambert—think about it.”

“ I have done little or nothing else but think about it, sir, from the time I found he was gone, to this present hour ; and the more I have thought, the more entirely convinced I have become that it is my duty to follow him, and bring him back,” she replied.

“ But has it never occurred to you in all this thinking, that you may do the unfortunate young man considerably more harm than good, if you succeed in finding him, and bringing him back to this country with you ? The circumstantial evidence against him is very strong, Mrs. Lambert.”

“ Is it possible, sir, that you are one of those who suspect William Rixley of having murdered his father ? ” returned Mrs. Lambert, her eyes flashing, and her pale face suddenly becoming crimson, with what

appeared to be a burst of uncontrollable passion.

“ I have no wish to anger you, Mrs. Lambert,” returned the lawyer, gently, “ on the contrary, I do assure you that I feel very true respect for your warm attachment to these young people, to both of whom, I have heard, you have been a most faithful nurse, and useful friend in all ways. But I am sure you have good sense enough to be aware that I am much more likely to understand the degree of suspicion which rests against William Rixley than you are.”

“ No, Mr. Lucas. No, sir,” returned Mrs. Lambert, vehemently. “ I am not, and never can be aware that any one is so capable of forming a just opinion concerning William Rixley, as I am. His sister, with all her love, and all her confidence in him, is much too young to have the power of judging character; and though, of course, she would turn with abhorrent disbelief from the wicked slander, she might not be able to give such reason for her disbelief as I could do. Have I not known the boy from his infancy? And do I not know this most

wicked charge against him to be something so absolutely contrary to his nature as to render the belief of it impossible?"

"Who then do you suspect of this terrible deed?" said Mr. Lucas.

"Indeed, sir, I suspect no one," she replied, "and, if I did, I should certainly be very reluctant to say so, after the proof just given by so reasonable a gentleman as yourself, of the ease with which a word may be received as truth, which rests upon nothing but the most vague suspicion."

"True! very true!" replied Mr. Lucas. "It is much easier to throw suspicion on an innocent individual than to remove it, for it sticks like birdlime. There is one suspicion, however, which I know has come into the heads of several of our town's people, who knew a good deal of your late master's odd ways," continued the attorney, with a look which seemed to show that he was meditating deep matters.

"And what is that, sir, if I may be so bold as to ask?" said Mrs. Lambert, respectfully.

"Yes, certainly, you may ask," replied Mr. Lucas, "and I see no reason why I

should not answer you. I have heard more than one hint a pretty strong suspicion that it was the poisoned gentleman's own hand which administered the deadly draught. What is your opinion upon the likelihood of such a suggestion as that, Mrs. Lambert?"

It was a minute or more before this question received an answer, yet it did not appear that the person to whom it was addressed listened to it either with much emotion, or surprise. Her eyes, however, which during the former part of the dialogue had been pretty constantly fixed on the face of Mr. Lucas, now changed their direction, and fixed themselves upon the ground.

"Why do you not answer me, Mrs. Lambert?" said Mr. Lucas. "You can do no harm to anybody, you know, by throwing suspicion in that direction."

"Neither can I do any good, sir," she replied.

"But, indeed, it *may* do good by removing it from the innocent," said the lawyer.

"If I really and positively knew that my late master had destroyed himself," she rejoined, "I own that I should not hesitate

to throw the imputation on his memory ; but I am very far from being able to say that I know it."

" Well ! well ; for the present it certainly matters little to anybody whether you have any such suspicion or not, for the poor boy William is not very likely to be found, I take it, even by you, my good woman, persevering as I doubt not you will be in your search for him,"

" In that, sir, I trust you will be mistaken," she replied ; " and if I should be the happy means of restoring William to his sister and his country, I shall feel little, or rather no doubt as to his being able to prove his innocence. There is an old and a vulgar saying, sir, which I dare say you have heard, '*Murder will out!*' And if my late master really was murdered, we may be very sure that God will make it known in his own good time ; nor will I believe that the innocent will be made to suffer for the guilty."

" Altogether it certainly is a most mysterious business, and the chances in favour of its being his own work appear greatly more probable from the previous strangeness

of his conduct in concealing his real name, and circumstances," said Mr. Lucas, rising from his own chair in order to give his visitor a hint that he was busy, and that it was time she should rise from hers.

This hint was immediately attended to, Mrs. Lambert was on her feet in a moment.

"Is there anything in the way of business that I can do for you before you leave the town?" said Mr. Lucas, cordially, as she was preparing to take her leave.

"Nothing more than what you have already kindly done," was her reply. "The will which I made, sir, just before all this dreadful business happened, is in your hands," she continued, "and I will beg you to take care of it for me. If you remember, sir, it was sealed up in your presence as soon as it was executed, together with a letter addressed to our good clergyman, Mr. Bolton. If I return, you will be pleased to restore this packet to me in the state in which I gave it to you; but should you hear that I am dead, I will beg of you, sir, to break the seal of it immediately, and deliver the letter it contains according to the address, with as little delay

as possible. And as to the will, sir, you know that will speak for itself."

Mr. Lucas very cordially shook hands with her, uttering many friendly wishes for her safe return ; but promising that her instructions should be carefully remembered, and faithfully attended to in any case. And Mrs. Lambert, took her leave with great respect, and many expressions of gratitude.

CHAPTER III.

It would not be easy to imagine a situation more miserably forlorn than that of Almeria Lambert; while thus preparing, utterly alone, and unsupported by any human spirit but her own, for a long and perilous voyage, the result of which was so wildly uncertain, and cheered by hopes so vague, as almost to defy her efforts to give them any form approaching probability.

But her steadfast purpose was not to be shaken by any such considerations as these; on the contrary, the call thus made upon her courage and endurance seemed to awaken her to new life, and to renew all the original energy of her character.

But desperately resolute as was the pur-

pose which thus sent her forth in search of the unfortunate William Rixley, she could scarcely have undertaken it effectually had not a singularly well-timed piece of good fortune befallen her, which did, in fact, render an expedition *possible*, which without it must have been pretty evidently the reverse even to her excited and over-wrought mind.

The house in Falmouth which she had inherited from her mother had, contiguous to it, about half an acre of ground, which had hitherto been both pleasant and profitable as a garden, but which was now unexpectedly become a very valuable morsel of the earth's surface.

The quarter of the town in which the house was situated was by no means a particularly agreeable one, for it was at no great distance from the very busiest part of the sailors' quarter, and consequently noisily near the port.

It chanced that two speculating individuals happened at nearly one and the same time to conceive the idea, that, in consequence of the rapidly-increasing business,

great profit might be realized by erecting warehouses on this rare bit of unoccupied freehold ground, and proposals for the purchase of it were made to Mrs. Lambert on a certain Monday morning about ten o'clock.

To these proposals she very discreetly replied that they should receive an answer on the following morning. Before mid-day, however, of the same eventful Monday, another proposal, precisely of a similar nature, reached her from another quarter, to which she returned a similar reply; and then she tied on her bonnet and pinned on her shawl, and set forth to consult Mr. Ringwood the banker, a kind-hearted and sharp-witted old gentleman, who had been a kind friend both to her and her mother upon more occasions than one, and who now, on hearing the proposal of the first applicant, nodded his head and rubbed his hands, with an air of very considerable satisfaction.

But when his visitor resumed her narrative, and proceeded to state that in the course of an hour or two she had received a similar proposal from a second speculator, Mr. Ringwood uttered a long whistle, which

the intelligent Mrs. Lambert immediately felt must mean something more than met the ear.

“You must tell them both, my dear good woman, that you do not intend to sell your garden by private contract to anybody,” were the first words to which Mr. Ringwood gave utterance.

No one, when consulting another, could be more perfectly well-disposed to follow the advice they asked for, than was Mrs. Lambert upon this occasion, nevertheless she ventured to say, “I am quite sure, Mr. Ringwood, that you will tell me to do what will be best for my interest; but I must not conceal from you that the sale of this unexpectedly available bit of property would be very convenient to me.”

“Would it, indeed, Mrs. Lambert?” he replied, joyfully. “That’s all the better, and I am heartily glad to hear it, because money that is wanted, is worth ten times as much as money that is not. But you must not sell your garden by private contract for all that.”

“But how then shall I be able to manage it?” she replied, anxiously.

“Write a short civil little note to both the parties,” said Mr. Ringwood, “and tell them both exactly in the same words that the property is about to be sold by auction.”

“But how shall I be able to manage that, sir?” returned the eager Mrs. Lambert, looking a good deal annoyed. “I happen to want the money immediately, Mr. Ringwood, and I believe it takes a long time to get an auction over, and to settle everything.”

“I am sorry you are in such a violent hurry, my good friend,” replied the banker. “But will you give me three days? I don’t mean, observe, to undertake that I will get an auction over in three days, but I will undertake within that time to obtain sufficient information to enable you to judge whether it would not be worth your while to wait a little.”

This was spoken with so much earnest kindness, that Mrs. Lambert, though greatly annoyed at the idea of delay, could not refuse her compliance; and she was rewarded for her good behaviour by receiving a message

from her old friend, early on the second day, desiring to see her.

His report was a very pleasant one, but it astonished, as much as it pleased her, for he told her that he had ascertained from sources that might be relied upon, that for sundry commercial reasons into which it would be useless to enter at large, her garden, and her house too, were likely to become a very valuable property. "Tell me," he added, "what are your reasons for wishing to have the money directly?"

Mrs. Lambert looked for a moment somewhat embarrassed, for as yet she had made no mention of her projected voyage to Mr. Ringwood. She knew that he had much kind and friendly feeling towards her, but she knew also, that he was a very sober-minded reasonable sort of man, and she thought, not perhaps without some reason, that he might consider it his duty to dissuade her from undertaking an enterprize, of which all could see the dangers and difficulties, while none but herself could comprehend the motives, and feelings, which led her to undertake it.

Nor was she at all mistaken as to the result she anticipated from her avowal. Mr. Ringwood certainly did feel, and did express a good deal of astonishment when she told him, in answer to his question, that her reason for wishing to be put in immediate possession of whatever money her little freehold property might produce, was, that she was immediately going to set sail for the Cape of Good Hope.

No very long discussion, however, followed upon the wisdom of this measure after he had listened to the announcement of it; for Mr. Ringwood was a man of observation and discernment, and he speedily perceived that whether the resolution of his old acquaintance were wise, or not, it was immutable.

It required, therefore, but little meditation on the subject to make him aware, that with such a project firmly fixed upon, Mrs. Lambert was quite right in wishing to be put in possession of the money in question before she set out to execute it. There was a great deal of kindness shown in the zealous manner in which, as soon as

he felt her purpose to be a fixed one, he set himself to think in what manner he could most effectually assist her in the accomplishment of it. Like everybody else in Falmouth, and its neighbourhood, he had heard of the terrible suspicion thrown upon William Rixley, and as he now listened to the earnest, and almost passionate declarations of his being incapable of the crime attributed to him, uttered by the person who perhaps of all living, had most reason to believe herself capable of forming a correct judgment of his character, he could not but feel that if rash, she was decidedly righteous in seeking him out, and bringing him forward to brave the charge, and to disprove it.

Mr. Ringwood was too much a man of business to find any difficulty in so arranging matters as to guard the enterprising woman from any danger of being involved in pecuniary difficulties : but nevertheless he had become so fully aware of the probable value of her property that he was determined not to make the sale of it a hasty transaction. It was therefore finally arranged between them

that he should from time to time honour her drafts upon him, she leaving him full power to dispose of her property according to his own judgment and discretion; and having legally invested him with full powers to act for her, she lost not an hour more in preparing herself for her strangely adventurous expedition.

Notwithstanding all the desolate loneliness of her situation, notwithstanding the dangers, the fatigues, the anxiety of the enterprise she had undertaken, and all the miserable uncertainty as to its result—which she never for a moment permitted herself to forget—she was conscious of a feeling almost approaching to enjoyment as she seated herself as much apart as might be from all the bustle on the deck: and in silence, and alone, looked out upon that one of all the mysteries of creation which is the most distinctly divided from all the rest; and she felt as if she herself were now divided from all the scenes in which she had suffered.

“Is it not possible that I may in some degree FORGET?” thought she. “Is it not

possible that the distinctness of all the torturing scenes I have passed through may in some degree wear away?" There was luxury, positive luxury, in the thought that this *might be possible*; and as she rolled her large camlet cloak around her, contriving so to place herself as to see nothing but the waves on which she floated, she felt a sensation infinitely more like calmness of spirit than any she had experienced since the hour in which her destroyer had first informed her that he had fallen in love with a beautiful young lady, and was about to marry her.

It is not my purpose, however, minutely to follow the progress of Mrs. Lambert from Falmouth Harbour to the Cape of Good Hope. It proved on her arrival there, that the information she had received, respecting the regiment of infantry, was perfectly correct. The said regiment had arrived at the Cape only a few months before she reached it herself; but it was met by orders there which caused it to re-embark for India; and beyond this she could learn nothing, save

that it was expected to be immediately engaged on very active service.

That this intelligence was a disappointment is most certain, though she was in some degree prepared for it, by the surmises at least, if not by the positive information of the captain with whom she had sailed from Falmouth.

Her joy would indeed have been great, had she overtaken the unfortunate fugitive at that point; but it was not so to be. She had the great satisfaction, however, of learning that the regiment, into which she knew from good authority that William had enlisted, had arrived at the Cape with a clean bill of health; and departed again for its ultimate destination, a few weeks only before her arrival there. She found also that the letter of credit which she brought with her from the Falmouth banker was not only available for the purpose of immediately replenishing her purse, but enabled her to obtain a very considerable sum of money, if she should need it, from a correspondent resident in the settlement to which the

regiment she was pursuing was said to be destined.

Once again, therefore, the adventurous woman found herself on the high seas, with a still unconquered spirit, and with hopes of ultimate success in her quest, rather increased than lessened by the experience she had gained, and the information she had acquired, since her pilgrimage began.

CHAPTER IV.

THIS second voyage was got over as resolutely as the first; but at the termination of it she again found, poor soul, that the object of her search was as much as ever beyond her reach. Yet, still, the tidings she received, though full of present disappointment, were by no means such as to suggest the abandonment of her enterprize; on the contrary, she again heard that William's regiment had completed its long voyage very satisfactorily, and had been marched, together with other troops, upon a very important expedition into the interior.

Had Mrs. Lambert's object been an ordinary object, and had the quest she was upon been undertaken merely from the wish

of being reunited to an object of affection, this delay in the accomplishment of her affectionate wish of meeting him would have been felt as a heavier misfortune than it was at present.

But her objects were, in truth, of a more important character, and the knowing that the regiment, in which it was so perfectly well ascertained that he had enlisted, had actually been ordered upon an expedition, which was not likely to be very speedily terminated, sufficed to restore her to all the practical every-day steadiness of mind, which made so remarkable a feature in her character.

It may perhaps, be doubted whether, after the first feeling of disappointment at not immediately seeing him was over, she did not almost rejoice at the delay, for it gave her time to revolve at leisure all the various schemes which had suggested themselves for the purpose of releasing the unfortunate young man from the engagement into which he had so rashly entered, and for restoring him to his sister, and his country.

The great improvement in the state of her

own finances, made her feel very comfortably confident that she should be easily able to purchase his discharge; but she felt also, that even after this should have been accomplished, her difficulties would not be over. Had it not been for the frightful accusation which had been brought against him, her future plans would have arranged themselves readily enough, for all which would in that case have seemed necessary for his future well-doing, would have been easily within her power to achieve; it would only have been necessary to liberate him from his military thralldom, convey him back to Europe, and inform his sister of his arrival there, in order to secure to him the certainty of a happy destiny.

But how was this dreadful accusation to be met? Even presuming that he had at his command the most satisfactory proofs of his own innocence, the very fact of such a charge having been brought against him, would, as she very justly thought, be productive of so much pain, both to the brother and sister, as to render the success of her efforts to reunite them almost a doubtful good.

After many very painful hours bestowed upon meditating upon these difficulties, Mrs. Lambert at length came to the conclusion at which sundry wise people have arrived before her, namely that it would be best to spare herself the pain of debating the question as to what she would do, under circumstances which she could neither foresee, nor control; and having come to this conclusion she very quietly, rationally, and successfully set herself to arrange her affairs in such a manner as might enable her to act with promptitude whenever William should be sufficiently within her reach to benefit by her means of serving him.

She soon obtained all the necessary information respecting the purchase of his discharge, and found that on this point she was not likely to encounter any worse difficulty than a little delay. As to her money concerns, all was smooth and easy enough in that quarter, and all this being achieved she established herself as an inmate in the family of a very respectable English settler, and screwed her courage to the task of waiting patiently.

But this waiting was a considerably longer business than she had calculated upon, yet nevertheless she bore it admirably. She had been long ago taught to endure resolutely, what she had brought upon herself wilfully, and these lessons were very useful to her now.

The expedition upon which the English troops were now engaged was not only important, but of a nature as tedious and uncertain, as it was dangerous. From week to week, and occasionally almost from day to day, intelligence arrived, sometimes good, sometimes bad, but for many months nothing at all definitive was known concerning the success of the expedition. The matter at issue was one of considerable importance, as on it depended either the acquisition, or the loss of territory, which was considered on all sides to be of great importance. At length, however, the doubtful affair arrived at the conclusion to which British arms are the most accustomed, and a complete and very important victory was announced to the English authorities, as the result of the struggle.

The news, of course, was received with all natural triumph, and becoming joy; but by degrees it was rumoured that the victory had not been obtained without heavy loss of life on both sides, and having long remained doubtful, had been achieved at last by one of those desperate displays of resolute valour which are never called for, and never put in action, without appalling loss on both sides.

The listening to all this was a process of fearful suffering to the unfortunate Almeria Lambert, and to render her agonising anxiety more acute still, she had to listen day by day to statements all tending to prove that the regiment into which William had enlisted had been distinguished both by its bravery, and its heavy loss.

At length however, this regiment, as well as several others, was recalled to head-quarters, and then followed the anxious business of obtaining a correct list of the names of those who had fallen. This list was a fearfully long one; but the name of William Rixley did not appear in it. This fact of itself seemed for a time to bring enough of comfort to atone for much that she had

suffered; but she had still the difficult task before her of ascertaining where and how a private of the name of William Rixley could be found. In this difficult task she was assisted by the friendly offices of an English family with whom she had become acquainted, and whose daughter, being on the eve of marriage with an officer of the same regiment, was able to make the necessary enquiries; to please his beloved one, the young man took the trouble of procuring a roll-call, such as it was before the regiment went on this last service, and such as it was afterwards.

It was with a trembling hand that poor Mrs. Lambert received this proof of her young friend's influence, as well as of her kindness; and so conscious did she at that moment become of her own weakness, that she begged permission to retain the documents till she could examine them alone.

Great was her surprise, as well as her disappointment, upon discovering that the name she sought was in neither of these two lists. Was it possible, then, that she had been altogether misinformed and deceived from

the period of her earliest inquiries? Such obviously seemed to be the fact, for the accuracy of these official papers could not be doubted. She recurred to the quarter from whence she had received the intelligence that William Rixley had enlisted, and it was one that it would have been very difficult for her to doubt. It might be, indeed, that he had died on the passage, or had deserted either at the Cape of Good Hope or after his arrival in India. But on both these points she obtained such satisfactory assurances that no such event had happened, as to leave her perfectly at a loss to conjecture the cause of the discrepancy between actual facts and former evidence.

Her situation, poor woman, now became infinitely more painful to her feelings than she had ever felt it before since her departure from England. All that was before her now was a dark blank, without a ray of hope, or even the doubtful light of a vague and feeble uncertainty to sustain her.

There was a moment when she was not very far from deciding that the best course now left her was self-destruction; but despite her resolute temper and constitutional

courage, she shrunk from the 'end-all,' which has tempted so many miserable beings of a somewhat similar temperament.

For several weeks after her researches had brought her to the miserable conclusion that all she had done, and all she had suffered, in the hope of saving poor William from the consequences of his ill-timed flight had been utterly useless to him, she remained in a state of such profound discouragement that all things future, and present too, seemed matters of utter indifference to her. The results of the late splendid and most important victory, which was the theme of every tongue, were never dwelt upon in her hearing without causing her a feeling of desolate disappointment almost too painful to bear; and it was probably this consciousness, rather than any real longing for her native land, which made her suddenly resolve to take her passage in the next vessel that was bound to England.

Her preparations for this sad homeward voyage were not very elaborate, nor had she long to wait for a vessel bound to the land to which it was her purpose to go, though without the slightest hope, poor soul, of

finding herself less miserable there than she was sure to be everywhere else. The idea, the hope, the confident expectation of serving and saving the friendless and penniless William Rixley, had been to her what the soul is to the body; and now she had lost it, the idea of dying, and being buried and forgotten, was the only one from which she did not turn with weariness and disgust.

Perhaps if her feelings of apathy and discouragement had been less intense, she might not have shrunk, as she now did, from the idea of self-destruction. But as it was, she arranged all things for her homeward voyage, and heard the day fixed for her departure, with the consciousness of that sort of relief which is almost always found to attend a change of suffering.

The family which I have already mentioned as having, with friendly and active kindness, obtained for her the information she was so anxious to receive, and the result of which had so fatally blighted all her hopes, had never wearied in their kind attempts to soothe and comfort her. Her aspect, all faded as it was, could not easily be

contemplated without interest; and the total absence of all querulous complainings under a disappointment which had so evidently destroyed every hope that made life valuable, could not be witnessed without pity.

This interest and this pity showed itself in many acts of friendly attention, all of which were proffered so quietly that they were often accepted because there was less exertion necessary for the accepting than the refusing them. One of these habitual acts of kindness was the running up of the pretty young bride elect to the rooms which Mrs. Lambert inhabited in the neighbouring house, and taking her as a prisoner to their family tea-table.

This habit had for a long time been very precious to Mrs. Lambert, because it ensured her meeting the military adorer of her young friend, from whom she hoped to receive intelligence of William. Nor did the friendly habit cease when this long cherished hope was crushed by the intelligence that no one of the name of William Rixley had belonged to the corps since it had quitted England.

Only two or three days now remained before the vessel was to sail, on board of which she had secured her passage; and the gentle Lucy Wilmot failed not, though she left her lover in her mother's drawing-room, to go as usual for their evening guest.

As Lucy and her companion entered the room together, they found Captain Burney in the act of relating some anecdote with great animation, and it was moreover evidently listened to with great interest by her father and mother.

“What is that you are telling them, Captain Burney?” cried Lucy Wilmot, eagerly. “We must not lose that story, whatever it is, for I am sure it is something exceedingly interesting.”

“Yes, it is,” replied her mother, as she extended her hand to welcome her pale and silent guest; “and I think it will amuse Mrs. Lambert, too, for as Burney relates the story, it is a perfect romance.”

The little party then reseated themselves, and Captain Burney recommenced his narrative.

CHAPTER V.

“ONCE upon a time the noblest country in the world, which I scarcely need tell you was called England, was engaged in a very long and difficult warfare with another mighty country at a very considerable distance from itself.”

“Oh! goodness, Richard Burney, do not begin so!” exclaimed his betrothed, “or we shall have the whole history of England and its dependencies to listen to, before we come to the particular bit of romance that mamma has promised us.”

“I am afraid you are a very impatient young lady!” said her lover, looking at her with an aspect of great alarm. “However, for the present, I suppose my wisest course

will be to indulge you. I will, therefore, cashier my narrative of its very instructive preface, and state to you at once the dramatic anecdote for which you appear so impatient. When we all marched off in such violent haste, as you may perhaps remember, Miss Lucy, with the desperate determination of either thoroughly routing the confounded hordes which were rushing forward to overwhelm us, or of leaving our bodies with them for booty, one part of our force consisted of the recently arrived Regiment, concerning which our good Mrs. Lambert here was at one time so much interested. They had a monstrous large lot of new recruits among them, and our most experienced officers were very far from being greatly delighted by the parade display of these new arrivals. No choice was left them, however, so off we set, bag and baggage, raw recruits and worn-out veterans, rather thankful than not upon the whole at having a line of marching men, of which we could not examine the accoutrements of the van and the rear at one and the same moment; an advantage which we have not

always possessed, you know, in some of our *sorties*. You have heard enough, dearly beloved," added the young man, shaking his head, as if conscious of having already dilated sufficiently on the subject, "of our exploits on this occasion, but you could not have heard before this morning of the most gallant deed that has been recorded for many a day, for it was only late last night that the party concerned in it got back to head-quarters. There would be no use in my describing all the minor particulars to you, for unless you had seen a little fighting in the bush with your own eyes, it would be impossible to make you comprehend it. But the upshot of the affair is this;—our favourite old veteran, Captain Maclogan, one of the bravest fellows in the service, had been rash enough to follow a lot of rascally natives, who had got possession of the colours, right across a brook that would have swamped any fellow less like a giant than himself. His men, a score of them at the very least, seemed ready to follow him, but not one of the set got half across the stream before their discretion sent them back again. The old hero, however,

was not doomed to die in a ditch by himself, for in the very nick of time a stalwart young private of another company, seeing how the case stood, bethought him cleverly enough that there might be a better way of getting across a brook than wading through it, and thereupon, after pausing for an instant, as they say, to reconnoitre the ground, he took a vigorous run and cleared the stream at one noble leap. As to what happened after, it is absolutely necessary to hear Captain Maclogan himself describe it, in order either to understand, or believe the dauntless courage displayed by the young fellow when he overtook the party. And it is certain that the said young fellow gives as fine an account of the old fellow as the old fellow does of him, and the best proof that they both speak the truth is, that the colours have been marched back to the regiment in the highest style possible, being only a very little draggled, and a very little torn."

"And what have they done to reward the young soldier?" said Lucy.

"Why there is some little doubt and difficulty about that," replied Captain Burney, for

the young man is wounded, and therefore the making him a corporal, or a sergeant, or anything of that sort is out of the question, because the brave veteran whose life he has saved will not permit his being taken to the hospital, and therefore, instead of promotion, Captain Maclogan has obtained his discharge, and has taken him to his own lodgings where he is nursing him as if he were his own son."

"And so he ought," exclaimed Mrs. Wilmot, adding, "Your story really is a beautiful story, Captain Burney. Fancy a young fellow, with his musket to carry, too, taking such a leap as that, just for the slight hope of saving another man's life, and with such a terrible good chance of losing his own!"

"It was a fine action," said Lucy's father, "a very fine action. I hope the young man is not badly wounded?"

"No, not badly," was the reply, "it is only a flesh wound on the right arm, but he will not be able to draw his sword again for a week or two."

"Was this young man belonging to the Regiment which has recently arrived from Europe?" said Mrs. Lambert.

“Yes, ma’am,” replied the young officer, “and if there were a few more in it like him, they would soon acquire a name that would make their raw recruits forgotten.

“Do you happen to have heard his name, sir?” rejoined Mrs. Lambert.

“Do I happen to have heard it, my good lady!” It would have been a very strange hap if I had not, replied Captain Burney, “for I don’t believe that a single minute of the day passes, in which it is not repeated by some one or other. His name is WILLIAM MAURICE.”

Mrs. Lambert bowed very civilly in return for this information; and she sighed, too, poor soul, for there *was* a well-known name, which, if it had greeted her ear at that moment, would have almost seemed to repay her for all she had endured.

The next evening was the last she had to pass with her new but kind-hearted friends, before she was to embark upon her weary homeward voyage to England. When she entered the family sitting-room she found them again engaged in listening to further particulars respecting the same adventure

which had been discussed the evening before.

Captain Burney was now, however, recounting what he had heard at the mess respecting the future prospects of the wounded soldier; and these prospects, as he stated them, appeared to be fully as romantic as the adventure which led to them.

Captain Maclogan, he said, was a bachelor, on the shady side of fifty, of good connexions, and of easy fortune; and it was currently reported that he declared it to be his intention to purchase a commission for his preserver with as little loss of time as possible.

This report had, of course, created great interest and curiosity for the fortunate individual whose youthful prowess had been exerted in the service of one who was able to requite it so nobly. "It is quite the fashion, I can assure you, among the officers to go and call upon the young fellow; and, of course, I have gone among the rest: and there he is, lying on Captain Maclogan's sofa, wrapped up in the old Scotchman's handsome dressing-gown, and looking no

more like a common soldier than I to Hercules."

"What does he look like?" said Lucy, laughing.

"Why, that is exactly the most curious thing of all," replied Burney; "for I do assure you, without the slightest exaggeration, that he looks, and, what is more, that he speaks, too, exactly like a well-educated gentleman."

"That *is* very odd!" said Lucy.

"Very odd indeed," said her father, smiling; and adding, with an admonitory shake of the head, "Burney! my dear fellow! you are romantic."

"Not an atom of it, upon my life and honour!" returned the young man, eagerly. "If you will let me, Mr. Wilmot, I will bring him here some evening, when the doctor has dismissed him; and when you see him and converse with him I feel certain that you will agree with me."

"Ask him to describe his person," said Mrs. Lambert, in a low whisper, to Lucy.

The request was immediately complied with.

“Tell us exactly what he is like in appearance, Captain Burney,” said the young lady, with the authority of a *fiancée*.

“He is like an extremely handsome young man, Miss Lucy—so handsome, that I will give you leave to declare, when you see him, which I am quite sure will be the truth, that you never saw any man so handsome before. He is under twenty; but he is very tall, and as athletic as any man of his age ought to be, though you would call him a slight young man at the first glance, on account of his great height. His features are perfectly well formed; his mouth and teeth peculiarly handsome; his complexion clear, but rather dark than florid; and his hair, which, though not black, is very near it, curls naturally, but so close to his head as not in any degree to conceal its very peculiarly beautiful and intellectual formation. However, by far the handsomest, as well as the most peculiar features in his face, are his eyes, which, notwithstanding his dark complexion and hair, are of the very lightest blue, although the eye-lashes, which are very long, and completely black, give a general effect to his

countenance which might deceive one into thinking that he had dark eyes."

While Captain Burney was rapidly and eagerly giving this description, Mrs. Lambert kept her eyes immoveably fixed upon him, with an expression that was perfectly indescribable; for it varied from moment to moment; at one time seeming to express the most vehement and concentrated anger, and in the next, beaming upon him with a look of such deep affection, that one might have fancied her first movement would be to enfold him in her arms, and press him to her heart.

The moment he had finished, she stood up, and, walking round the table to the chair he occupied, she stood before it, and fixing her large eyes sternly upon him, she said, "You have, either by some secret means, which I know not how to trace, obtained a description of his person, or else you have seen him yourself!"

"To be sure, I have seen him myself, my good lady!" returned the young man, laughing, and looking at her with an expression of drollery which seemed to indicate

a considerable degree of amusement in contemplating her sublimely-tragic demeanour. "What is there so very extraordinary in my having seen him?"

"Nothing!" she replied, evidently endeavouring to compose herself, "nothing! If you could but tell me that his name was Rixley!"

"But I can't tell you that, Mrs. Lambert," replied the young man, "for he has told us all that his name is Maurice."

"May he not, from some motive or other, have changed his name?" suggested Mr. Wilmot.

"YES!" exclaimed Mrs. Lambert, vehemently; "for many, many reasons he might have done it!" And as she said this, she trembled so violently from head to foot, that Lucy, springing from her chair, hastily pushed it towards her; while Captain Burney, seizing her by the arm, placed her in it; a very well-timed act of kindness; for, without it, the unfortunate Mrs. Lambert would unquestionably have fallen to the ground.

A few moments, however, sufficed not

only to restore the fainting woman to life and reason, but to suggest to the by-standers a probable, and very satisfactory solution of the mystery which had produced so vehement an effect upon her.

“I will bet anything you please that the young man *has* changed his name,” said one.

“It is the most likely thing in the world!” exclaimed another.

“It is exactly what happens nine times out of ten,” said Captain Burney, “when a lad takes a freak for enlisting which he thinks would not be approved at home.”

And Lucy gently whispered in the ear of her *protégé*, “Do not let your hopes overpower your strength, dear Mrs. Lambert, after enduring despair so patiently.”

“You are right, my dear child!” replied Mrs. Lambert, with suddenly recovered firmness; “I at this moment feel as sure as if I had already seen him, that William Rixley is found!—You do not know, you cannot guess, all the consolation which this persuasion brings with it!”

She was silent for a few moments, and every one present was too much occupied

and interested in watching the effect of this newly born hope on the countenance and in the demeanour of the altered being before them to disturb her meditations.

At length, she said, with the propitiating smile which had so rarely visited her features since she had been parted from her nurslings, "It is to Captain Burney I must now look for procuring me the means of meeting William. An unknown poor woman might probably be refused admittance by the servants of the gentleman, who has afforded my dear boy an asylum.—Will you contrive, sir, to procure me admittance? Miss Lucy shall thank you for it, if you will?"

"Yes, Mrs. Lambert, I will contrive it," replied Captain Burney, gaily. "The only difficulty that I see in the business being respecting the time at which your introduction shall take place. I don't think we can attempt it to-night, because I know that Captain Maclogan is to have one or two of the officers with him to-night, who are almost as anxious as you are to be introduced to our young hero, William Maurice."

"Well, then!" returned Mrs. Lambert,

with a sigh, "I must wait as patiently as I can for to-morrow!"

"And yet I am afraid that the delay may be very inconvenient to you, Mrs. Lambert," he replied, "on account of the early hour at which the English-bound vessel sails to-morrow. You will scarcely be able to satisfy yourself on the question of his identity before you ought to be on board."

"I do not mean to go on board at all, Captain Burney," replied Mrs. Lambert, in a tone of the most undoubting decision.

"Do you indeed trust so implicitly to my description?" said Burney, in a tone of mingled interest and surprise. "If I have in any way deceived you, Mrs. Lambert, I should never forgive myself."

"No, no, no, you have not deceived me," said she, looking at him with a very friendly smile, "neither have you been deceived yourself, my dear young gentleman. You saw him, such as he is, and you described him with admirable exactness, exactly as you saw him. I do not believe that any one could paint in words such a portrait as you have given us of William from fancy. You have

seen him, Captain Burney, and you have seen him here; and that is enough to make me lay my head upon my pillow, and sleep better than I have slept for many a weary month."

"But your passage-money, Mrs. Lambert? Will you not endeavour to get back your passage-money?"

"No, Captain Burney," she replied, "I do assure you, that my passage-money is of no consequence. Perhaps, sir, I am richer than you think for—at any rate, I am a great deal richer than William will expect me to be; and I have so much to think of just at this moment, that I must beg of you not to mention the passage-money."

All this was said with a look and manner so perfectly unlike anything they had ever witnessed in her before, that there was not a single individual in the party who did not feel a sort of vague suspicion that she was seized with fever, and was already becoming light-headed.

Mrs. Wilmot came to her, and gently taking her hand, pressed her fingers upon her pulse.

Mrs. Lambert looked up into her face with a smile, but did not interrupt the operation. "You think I am delirious, my dear lady?" said she, very quietly, "and it is very possible that my head may be very strongly affected by this sudden change from despair, to something which I feel to be stronger than hope. But do not be alarmed for me. People never, I believe, suffer seriously in their health from being too happy."

"That is very true, Mrs. Lambert," said the good man of the house, in a voice that carried authority with it. "But if happiness is not likely to injure health, disappointment may. You must excuse me for being so peremptory, Burney, but I will not let Mrs. Lambert go to bed till this question of the young man's identity is settled upon surer evidence than your animated description. You must go immediately to Captain Maclogan, and state the case exactly as it stands, not forgetting this good lady's intended departure to-morrow; having done this, ask him, with my compliments, whether he will permit you to bring her to the room occupied

by the wounded soldier. One glance will suffice to settle the question, so he will not be disturbed for more than a minute, if our poor friend's hopeful fancy has deluded her. And if she is right in her notion, Captain Maclogan will doubtless be as glad as any of us to procure for his *protegé* the great comfort of seeing an old acquaintance."

"I will do your errand without wasting a single moment in unnecessary formalities," replied the young man, springing towards the door, which was closed behind him before the trembling Mrs. Lambert appeared to be fully aware of the nature of his embassy.

"What is he gone to do?" said she, looking anxiously in the face of Lucy, who was affectionately hanging over her. "Is he going to tell him that they have found out his real name? Do not let him say that! If he chose to have his name known, he would have told it himself, you know."

"No, no, dear Mrs. Lambert," replied Lucy, "Burney is not going to say anything about his name. He is only going to ask leave for you to go there to satisfy yourself

by looking at him whether you are right in fancying that he is the young man for whom you are so much interested."

"And you think it possible that I may see him to-night?" cried Mrs. Lambert, starting from her chair, and appearing, as if by magic, to recover all the strength and firmness of her character. "I am not often so pitifully weak as I must have appeared to you to-night, Mrs. Wilmot," she continued. "It was the sickening feeling of uncertainty which overwhelmed me. Is the distance long?" she added, fixing her eyes with a sort of resolute steadiness on the door, as if determined to seize the answer which the messenger would bring, even before he could deliver it.

"Not ten steps," replied Mr. Wilmot, contemplating her tall figure, her firm demeanour, and her fine eager eye with great interest. "Burney will be here in a moment, and before five more have passed over you, all your doubts will be solved."

Mrs. Lambert was clad exactly as if sitting in her own apartment, save that she had a large shawl over her shoulders. She now

prepared herself for her expedition by wrapping this shawl over her head, while at the same moment she advanced towards the door, and stationed herself beside it in such a manner as not to impede its opening.

“At least sit down, Mrs. Lambert,” said Lucy, kindly, and at the same time placing a chair for her beside the door. But before she could either accept or decline it, Captain Burney re-appeared, and upon her laying her hand upon his while she raised her speaking eyes to his face, he replied to the perfectly intelligible inquiry by taking her arm, and passing it under his own, while he nodded to the rest of the party, exclaiming, “Old Maclogan is a trump! He says the good lady shall be as welcome as flowers in May.”

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. LAMBERT made no attempt to speak during the short and rapid walk which took her from the dwelling of Mr. Wilmot to that of Captain Maclogan ; and yet she felt as if one short question might enable her to learn all she sought to know ; but she had literally no breath to utter it. And for some reason or other Captain Burney was as silent as herself, so that when they stood before the door of the apartment at which her companion stopped, and knocked, the words 'COME IN!' which were uttered in return, caused the trembling woman as vehement an emotion as the word 'FIRE!' might have done had she been tied at a stake to be shot.

The movement by which Captain Burney

obeyed this command was not a slow one, for in the next instant Almeria Lambert stood within a few feet of a sofa upon which lay a tall individual, whose head was in such deep shadow, and the features so nearly concealed by the cushions, and by the hand on which he was leaning, that it was not the first glance which sufficed, as she had predicted, to satisfy all her doubts in a moment.

But if the recumbent figure was in a great degree concealed from sight, it was not prevented from seeing, and while Mrs. Lambert was bending forward to ascertain, if possible, who it was that thus lay stretched before her, she suddenly found herself very firmly encircled by the tight grasp of a stalwart *left* arm, and her name pronounced in accents which made it quite unnecessary that any further discovery should take place.

It would be both a difficult and unnecessary task to attempt describing the feelings of either party at this recognition. To poor William it was scarcely less welcome than to the enterprising woman who had dared, and endured so much to obtain it.

The grateful warm-hearted Captain Mac-

logan, who had been still in his dining-room and alone when Burney called upon him, not only granted the mysterious old lady's request for an interview, but determined to enjoy the discovery scene that was likely to follow upon it, without destroying the fine effect of it by giving his young guest any hint of what was about to happen. Had his well-beloved preserver been less safely advanced towards recovery from all inflammatory effects from his wound, the grateful veteran would not have thus indulged his taste for romance; but as it was, he knew there would be no danger, and thought there might be much interest, from the scene. Nor was he disappointed, for it is rare that two human beings not bound together by the ties of blood, or the tender passion, could meet with such evident symptoms of delight on both sides.

“It is your mother, William,” said the old officer, advancing after the first greetings were over, to welcome his stately-looking guest with both his hands. “I am sure,” he added, “that she *is* your mother, first, because she has found you out with such

true maternal instinct; and secondly, because she is just such a finely formed and commanding-looking mother as you ought to have."

William remained silent for a moment, as not knowing well how to answer; but Mrs. Lambert quickly spared him from all embarrassment on the subject, by saying, "No, sir! I am not his mother, I am only his nurse; but circumstances have endeared us to each other with an affection, which I cannot think would have been much stronger had the tie between us been such as you, sir, imagined it to be."

"And I doubt not he deserved all your love, my good woman," replied Captain Maclogan, "and I don't find any difficulty in believing that the case is exactly as you say, and that you love the saucy fellow as well as if you were his mother; for to let you into a secret by speaking a little honest truth, I am beginning to love him myself very much as if he were my own son,"

When Captain Burney and Mrs. Lambert entered the room, they had found Captain Maclogan and William *tête-à-tête*; and now,

having so satisfactorily performed his mission, Lucy's lover seemed to think that his presence might be more welcome elsewhere; he therefore nodded a good-humoured farewell towards the sofa, where the nurse and nursing were now seated side by side, and left the room, saying, as he paused a moment to shake hands with its master, "They must have plenty to say to each other, I dare say."

This thoughtful hint was immediately seized, and acted upon by the kind-hearted Captain Maclogan, who instantly prepared to leave the room, saying, "You must both of you excuse my taking myself off, for I have an engagement down stairs, but I hope you will both make yourselves comfortable, and this good lady will make tea for you, William."

And in the next moment the long-revered Sarah Lambert, and her dear boy William, were once again in full and free communion together.

They had both of them much to say, and much to relate; but they were far from being equally unreserved in their communications. William, with the most perfect

frankness, confessed that the rage into which his father's taunting and cruel treatment had thrown him, led him to resolve that he would leave his home, and see whether the stranger world would treat him as harshly as his own father had done.

“The leaving my dear, dear Helen,” said he, “was terrible to think of; but I felt afraid of myself, Sarah Lambert, and I thought that I might run the risk of giving her more pain by staying than by going. And the leaving you, too, my dear and always kind friend, was dreadful too; but not both these sorrows together, nor yet the fear of all the destitute misery which lay before me, appeared so terrible in my eyes as the thought of living under the roof of a man who called himself my father, and who could speak in such terms of my unhappy mother! In short, Sarah Lambert, right or wrong, I suddenly made up my mind to endure my condition at the Warren House no longer. You know all the rest of my adventures, which, perhaps, you think may have ended better than I deserved. And now then, tell me how it comes to pass that

I have the immense happiness of seeing you here? Where have you left my darling Helen? How comes it that you *have* left her, and her father?"

"I should keep you up all night, my dear boy, if I attempted to answer all these questions at full length, and you are looking a little too pale to make that a prudent measure," she replied. "And yet, William," she added, "I have much to tell that I am most anxious you should hear immediately, as it may be likely to influence your own projects very essentially. The event which I must first communicate is that which has led to all the rest. Your father is dead, William!"

"Dead! Mrs. Lambert? My father dead!" exclaimed the young man, the happy calm of his aspect being metamorphosed into a look of horror. "Why I left him a few short months ago triumphant in health and in strength, and in the uncontrolled power of using it! Dead! I cannot believe it. What could cause the death of such a man as that? I never saw a human being who in health and strength could be compared to him."

“Nevertheless he is dead, William,” she replied in a tone of forced composure.

“But how did he die, Sarah Lambert?” reiterated William. “Tell me all the circumstances—all the particulars about it. I think it will be long before I shall bring myself to believe that this most unlikely event has come to pass. Dead! Sarah? Actually dead? If indeed this be really so, tell me how did it come to pass? Was it an accident? Had his wild boating anything to do with it?”

“I should have thought, William,” replied Mrs. Lambert quietly, “that your first anxiety would have been for Helen. Is not my having left her, as it should seem, *alone*, more extraordinary than the death of any mortal man, let him have been as healthy as he might?”

“True! Gracious heaven! What was he to me, compared to Helen? But as to my fancying that you left her alone, don’t you know, Sarah Lambert, that it is as impossible for me to suspect it as for you to do it? No, no! I am not afraid of your having left Helen alone—moreover I

dare say I can guess where she is. It is the kindness of the dear good Boltons which left you at liberty to look after the runaway! Have I not guessed rightly, Sarah?"

"Quite rightly in believing firmly in their constant kindness, my dear boy. But you have a strange tale to listen to, William. I will preface it, however, by telling you at once, that you have no need to be anxious about your sister. She has inherited a very noble fortune from her father, and is living under the protection of an excellent family, who were her father's near relations."

"Was my father really very rich, Sarah Lambert?" said William, looking at her with an air of great surprise, and a little as if he doubted the correctness of her information.

"Do you call the having an income of above eight thousand a-year being rich?" was her reply.

"Eight thousand a-year! Do you know, Sarah, that the seeing you sitting there close before me, when I have been so lately thinking that we should never, never meet again—the seeing you there, and the hearing

you make such very extraordinary statements by way of giving me a narrative of facts, makes me feel very suspicious about the state of my head. I know I was delirious the night after I received my wound, for the surgeon told me so, and upon my word I am beginning to suspect that I am falling back into the same condition again."

"No, my dear boy! There is no delirium either on your side, or mine. Your father's whole life was a wild and wicked romance, William, and his living in the humble style which he did at the Warren House was a part of it."

"But in his will, then, he disclosed his real condition, and confessed that Helen was his heiress?" said he.

"He did," she replied.

"And did he name me in his will, Mrs. Lambert?" demanded the young soldier, but in an accent which spoke more of scorn than of hope.

"No, William! he did not," was the reply.

"I rejoice to hear it! Truly and heartily do I rejoice," rejoined the young man, with a

look and tone that most honestly proclaimed his sincerity. "It would have galled me," he added, "had it been my fate to go through life living upon a bequest from a man I had injured by thinking worse of him than he deserved. I shall have no such burden upon my conscience now; and trust me, Sarah Lambert, I shall work my way through life with a lighter heart for it."

"I can easily believe that possible, my dear boy," was her reply.

"And you, Sarah? What did this rich man do for you, in return for your having so carefully watched over his neglected heiress?"

"In that matter, William, my conscience may rest as tranquilly as yours," she replied, almost with a smile. "In truth," she added, after the pause of a moment, "I should have been by no means well pleased if I had found that he had provided liberally for me in his will."

"But how have you contrived to get here, my dear, faithful, tender-hearted Sarah Lambert?" he resumed.

"I came here at the Queen's cost; but I

believe those who come at their own, have a heavy sum to pay."

"How did you contrive to manage this, my dear old friend?"

"I did not make the voyage in a very expensive style, William," she replied. "Moreover I am myself become, by a lucky chance, considerably more wealthy than I was when you ran away from me; I will explain how this happened when we are more at leisure. But before I bid you good night, my dear boy, you must tell me why it was that you took it into your head to change your name? You little guessed when you did it, my dear William, the miserable heart-breaking disappointment of which it would be the cause to your poor nurse."

"Had I guessed that it would have produced any such effect, I would not have done it," he replied, but as no such objection suggested itself, my reason for it seemed a very good one. You know, I believe, that in the last interview which I ever had with my father, he informed me, in no very soothing terms, that I had no right to his name?"

"I know it! I know it!" returned Mrs.

Lambert, her brow contracted into a frown, which spoke more sympathy for the suffering produced by that scene than any words could have done.

“Then, can you wonder that in my very soul I swore I never would be known by it,” he replied. “It was part of the temptation to the step I took.”

“And why did you choose the name of Maurice, my dear William?”

“You do not know that it was the name of my poor mother, or you would scarcely ask that question,” he replied.

“Indeed I should not! I never heard her name. How did it become known to you?” said she.

The young man remained silent for a moment. His eyes were full of tears, and his heart of emotion, too strong to permit his answering immediately. At length he said, “I have two little books, Mrs. Lambert; her name, ‘Selina Maurice,’ is written in both. They were put into my hands, and given to me by that most angelic of human beings, Helen’s mother. ‘Keep these little books, dear William,’ she said, ‘and love

them for your mother's sake. That is her name written by her own hand, and of course you will love it, my dear boy!' That angel woman, Mrs. Lambert, could not have been much more happy than my unfortunate mother! If I were wretch enough to forget all her tender, pitying kindness to myself, methinks I should still remember the tone of voice in which she said 'love them for your mother's sake!' I did not understand it then, but I do now; and can you wonder that at a moment when my unnatural father gave me so clearly to understand that I had no claim upon his protection, and no right to his name, I should deeply swear in my heart that I would no longer be supported by his niggard alms, nor ever acknowledge any other appellation than what I derived from my unfortunate mother?"

"No, dearest William!" she earnestly replied, "I neither blame nor wonder; nay, now that my sufferings in consequence of it are over, I go much further, for I very greatly approve and applaud the resolution you have taken. Adhere to it, my dear boy, firmly, and carefully too. Let us both forget for

the future that we have ever, in any way, been linked with a name which we can neither of us ever recall without pain."

"Agreed!" replied William, eagerly. "Were it not still borne by my darling Helen, I would hug myself in the hope that I should never hear it pronounced again."

"And you may hug yourself in that hope still, William," returned Mrs. Lambert, "for your dear Helen no longer bears it. Among the other disclosures made by your father's will, we learnt that his name was Beauchamp; and it is by that name you will have to address your sister when you meet—till such time, at least, as she shall have changed it by marriage."

"I will never address her by any name, Sarah Lambert, till she shall have heard that which I now bear pronounced with honour! Dearly as I love her, I would rather die without ever beholding her sweet face again than appear before her as the wretched refuse of her father's vices, with no claim upon her affection and esteem save that of my abject poverty."

These words were uttered not with vehe-

mence, but with a stedfast sternness of purpose that made his old friend at once aware that he would keep his word.

She did not immediately reply to him, but sat for a few moments with her head bent down, and her face covered by her hands, as if in deep meditation.

At length she said,—“Perhaps you are right, William Maurice! And yet, only a few short minutes ago the most earnest wish of my heart was that I should find means to bring you and your sister together with as little delay as possible! But I honour your pride, for it is of a noble quality, and I honour your self-reliance, which is fully justified by the opening of your unaided career. So be it then, dearest William! so be it! Your meeting will be of more unmixed happiness if it be waited for till she shall have heard you spoken of as I have already heard you spoken of here.”

“Alas! dear Sarah Lambert,” replied the young man, smiling, “how can I reasonably hope for such another happy chance as that to which this lucky scratch is owing?”

“And I may say alas! also, my dear boy,

as I think of the perilous nature of the warfare in which you are engaged, and the too frequent chances you are likely to have of proving that your heart, and your arm, too, are more likely to be useful in the strife than those of most men," she replied.

"That is only because there have been many moments in my young life, though you knew it not, my dear Sarah, when I would very gladly have risked its sudden termination against a very slight glimmer of hope that I might change my miserably degraded condition! But if I should have the blessed luck to get hits and honour, in consequence of the sudden fit of rage which led to my escapade from the Warren House, what a superlatively lucky fellow I ought to consider myself! If my —, if Mr. Rixley, as he called himself, had happened to die the night before he insulted my mother's memory, instead of the night after, I should never have saved dear old Maclogan's life, but have remained to become a pensioner on the bounty of my rich sister! I thank heaven for my well-timed fit of fury!"

"WELL TIMED!" thought Mrs. Lambert,

with a stifled groan. "So timed, thou poor unconscious boy, as to have brought upon thy innocent head the imputation of having murdered him!"

But her face was again covered with her hands, and William saw not its expression.

In the next moment, however, she had completely recovered herself, and it was with a perfectly tranquil accent that she said as she rose from her chair, "We must be prudent, dearest! You have too much colour in your cheeks now, instead of too little! Good night! good night! To-morrow we will contrive to meet again."

He wrung her hand affectionately—and so they parted.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT such a youth as we have described William Maurice, in such a country as India, and under such circumstances as those in which we left him at the end of the last Chapter—that such a one should speedily become not only an officer but a very distinguished one, can surprise no one.

The interest of his grateful, warm-hearted, and somewhat influential old friend, Captain Maclogan, was not without its use, for many a daring act, and many a brave deed, the fame of which might have reached the Horse Guards but slowly, without his zealous activity in assisting its transmission, were all made to tell very effectually in his favour.

No soldier of fortune could, indeed, have

more in his favour than the hitherto seemingly ill-starred William Maurice. A frame of very remarkable strength and activity; health, which neither fatigue nor climate had apparently any power to affect; the dauntless courage, which is only found when constitutional fearlessness is united with great moral firmness; and that ardent desire for fame which, in his profession, at least, can scarcely be classed as 'that last infirmity of noble minds,' for which Milton bespeaks indulgence, rather than applause; all these qualities together, joined to brilliant intelligence, and an almost irresistible charm of person and manner, produced, during the next half dozen years of his life, a result, the particulars of which must be given hereafter.

But, before we thus leave him to fight his way to fortune, one short conversation between himself and his umwhile nurse must be recorded.

Not many weeks had elapsed, after these strangely-paired friends had been re-united; before William was sufficiently recovered from his wound to permit his following Cap-

tain Maclogan upon another bush-fighting expedition, as a volunteer.

Almeria Lambert was not the sort of woman likely to dissuade him from such an enterprize; on the contrary, she felt quite as strongly as he himself could do that danger must be the element through which alone he could hope to rise to distinction, and that, if the ardent hope which glowed within him, of obliterating the disgrace of his birth, by the nobleness of his life, could ever be achieved, it was only to be done by his own individual efforts, for that not all that his sister could bestow on him, if it amounted to the donation of half her estate, could place him before the eyes of his fellow-creatures in the position he wished to occupy.

This conviction was so equally strong in the minds of both, that nothing like argument, and scarcely anything like discussion, took place between them on the subject. Till she had seen William, as she now saw him, with the path to fame and honour visibly open before his eyes, the utmost extent of her hopes had seemed to be limited to finding and to keeping him in safety from

the terrible dangers which threatened him in consequence of the suspicions thrown upon him by his father's death.

But now, her hope and her ambition went much further. No one living knew so well as herself what was really the quality of his mind, and the strength of his character ; and this knowledge, joined to the circumstances in which she had found him, fully justified the opinion at which she speedily arrived, that she should be doing him better service by permitting him, to pursue the career which happy accident had opened to him, than even by restoring him to the protection of his wealthy sister.

For a moment she thought there might be a middle course, and that the affection and assistance of Helen might be made to ease, without impeding his career ; but the energy with which William pleaded for the privilege of entire freedom from all dependence upon his father's bequeathed wealth, even though it should reach him through the hands of his beloved Helen, obtained its object, and Almeria Lambert consented to indulge him by keeping his very existence a secret, on con-

dition that he would promise that she herself should *never lose sight of him*.

To the giving this promise, he made no sort of objection, provided, as he told her, laughingly, that her phrase was not to be quite literally interpreted.

“ For instance,” said he, “ I should be decidedly averse, my dearest Sarah Lambert, to you being an eye-witness to my exploits, whenever it shall happen that I am engaged sword in hand in slicing and slashing my way through the bush, and the dark-skinned defenders thereof.”

This protest was uttered with a smile ; and therefore it was with an effort to return the smile that Mrs. Lambert answered it.

“ No ! William ! No ! I do not mean to follow you to the bush, but, nevertheless, my demand may be more literally interpreted than you may be inclined to think reasonable. Wherever it is possible I may be useful to you, I shall be more than ready, more than willing, to follow you in person. Nothing that life has left could make me feel so nearly happy as being near you, and with you, when my being so could be of use, or

comfort. But the *never losing sight of you*, for which I petition, has a different meaning. For many reasons of interest, many worldly reasons, my dear William, it is very desirable, and very important that I should be made acquainted with every step that you may take in life, before it is absolutely made. I do not mean about your falling in love, or marrying, or anything of that kind. In all such cases, I think you would be the best judge; but what I particularly allude to is *change of residence*. Only promise me, that while I remain alive you will never return to Europe without me, and then I shall be fully satisfied."

"And is that really all that you want me to promise?" he replied. "Well then, I do promise it, my dear old nurse; but a pretty sort of fellow you must think me, to fancy I would run off, and leave you behind!"

"No, no, no!" she replied. "But the time may come, William, when leave of absence might make your return to England the most natural thing possible, without your being accompanied by me. But this must never happen. *Remember! Never!*"

Such a promise was then gravely and affectionately given by the young soldier ; and Mrs. Lambert declared herself perfectly satisfied, and sufficiently at ease in spirit concerning him to enable her to resume again her functions of attending to all his wishes, and forestalling all his wants, which she did with as much quiet thoughtfulness, and business-like regularity, as if she had still been the *bonne* of the Warren House.

It was not, however, quite without a feeling of repugnance, that William found himself altogether dependent for his daily bread upon the bounty of his *ci-devant* nurse ; and this feeling would have been deeper, and more painful still, if he had been less capable of understanding the devoted affection of his benefactress. Not many words, however, passed between them on the subject, before they both seemed to forget that there could be any mixture of pain in the circumstances of their union. Once, and once only, William uttered an exclamation, expressive of mortification and regret, upon seeing her return to the lodging they occupied together, with the materials necessary for furnishing

his rather defective wardrobe, with sundry articles of which he very decidedly stood in need.

Her only answer at the moment was given by a few silent tears; and as this was not a weakness which often came upon her, it struck him the more forcibly. "My dearest Sarah Lambert!" he exclaimed, "I never saw you weep before! What have I said that could so pain you?"

"Nothing, William!" she replied, "nothing of which I have any right to complain. Nor do I complain, dearest! I only lament that I can never hope you to feel as if I were worthy of being your mother!"

This was the first and the last discussion that ever took place between them, respecting the pecuniary relation in which they stood to each other, but it sufficed to remove all uneasy feelings on the subject from both.

CHAPTER VIII.

WE must now return to Beauchamp Park, reminding our readers that the narrative, since we left it, has been retrospective, and that an interval of rather more than six years had elapsed between the period at which we left William Maurice, at the end of the last Chapter, and that at which we had arrived when we dropped the thread of his sister's story, in order to follow him in his bold effort to escape from a tyranny at home too painful to be endured.

When we left Helen, in order to follow her brother, she had nearly reached her twenty-second birthday, and had just given a very brilliant fancy ball, partly to please her well-beloved cousin Henry, but prin-

cipally, it must be confessed, for the purpose of dressing her cousin Anne to her heart's content, in order to prove to the already captivated Lord Lymp-ton that she could look still more lovely, and still more irresistibly enchanting, than he had ever yet seen her.

Nor had Helen any reason to doubt the successful effect of this very feminine manœuvre; for, considerably ere the waxen tapers had begun to fade before the light of day, the young man had very explicitly declared to his fascinating partner, that he neither would, nor could, live without her; and she, on her part (being, to confess the truth, as heartily in love as himself) had very sweetly assured him that she had not the least wish that he should make the experiment; provided always, that the papas and mammas on both sides made no particular objection to the course he seemed to prefer.

Had the amiable young nobleman been somewhat less of a spoiled son and heir, it is possible that the advantages attending a more brilliant connexion might have oc-

curred to his parents; but, as it was, his earnest assurances that he never could love any other woman as much as he loved Anne Rixley, were received as being so perfectly unanswerable a refutation to all objections, that preparations for the marriage were set about with as little delay as possible. Most certainly there can be no instance on record in which the course of true love ran more smooth, or was enlivened by a more brilliant atmosphere around it; for not only Rothewell Castle and Beauchamp Park became animated from garret to cellar with joyous preparations for the wedding, but the whole neighbourhood became more or less enlivened by it; for all the party-giving portion of the population seemed to think it a duty incumbent upon them to give either a fine dinner or a fine dance, for the express purpose of giving the happy young couple an opportunity of making love before the eyes of their friends and acquaintance.

And then came the bright and brilliant wedding; and then the delightful little tour upon the Continent, and the happy return to dear, beautiful Rothewell Castle, where

one wing had been splendidly fitted up for the young couple, who were to make it their home whenever it pleased them so to do.

All this happiness was not witnessed, even by my sober-minded heroine, without as much sympathy as sufficed to make her happy too; as happy, at least, as she thought she ever could be in this lower world of ours. And assuredly, notwithstanding the sorrow and disappointment which had fallen upon her, there was much in her situation to bring happiness to such a mind as hers.

She had learnt to be quietly and comfortably aware, that the untoward accident of her having been born had not proved of any very serious injury to her uncle's family, and this was a great comfort to her. She might even, perhaps, have taught herself to feel happy still, had it not been for the long and frequent visits of George Harrington at the house of his father. But these visits were very hostile to her peace. He always spoke of Speedhurst Abbey, indeed, as a residence he greatly admired, and for which he felt much partial attachment; nevertheless,

it was clearly evident that he liked his father's house better; for it rarely happened that he ever came there with the avowed intention of staying one week, without remaining for three or four; nay, even when, as not unfrequently happened, either his mother or his father, accompanied by one of his sisters, had established themselves at Speedhurst, as his guests, their visit seldom came to an end without his galloping across the country in the interval, to inquire concerning the health and welfare of those who had been left at home.

Helen neither was, nor could be insensible to all this, any more than she was to the enduring sentiment in her own bosom which taught her to understand it; but she gravely schooled herself into the belief that time would cure them both of the weakness of wishing for an union against which there were obstacles insurmountable, and which, though they might be concealed, could never be removed.

Poor Helen! all this time she strove hard to be reasonable, and sometimes, though not always, enjoyed the consolation of believing

that she was so ; but yet she might very easily have been convinced of the reverse, had some happy accident led to a discussion of any subject approaching the bugbear vision which kept them asunder.

But months and months went on, without any such lucky accident occurring, and without their advancing a single inch on either side towards a better understanding of each other.

Her valued old friend, Mr. Phelps, too, found all his philosophical speculations completely at fault. He had quite abandoned his notion that she was in love with her cousin Henry, from the time that he had witnessed the joyous sympathy with which she entered into his feelings when his regiment was ordered to Ireland ; but he only gave up this idea to make room for another. If Helen was not in love with her cousin, she certainly must be in love with George Harrington. But, if so, why did she not marry him ? As to George Harrington's being in love with her, he had long ago made up his mind on that point ; for, in the first place, he considered this result of their

frequent meetings as inevitable, and, in the next, he had seen with his eyes, and understood with his heart, quite enough to convince him that there was no room for doubt on that point.

But he was doomed, good man, to be puzzled for a while longer; for, though the frequent and very delightful companionship between himself and the fair mistress of Beauchamp Park continued to be enjoyed by them both as much as ever, there never was the least approach made on either side towards explaining the mystery.

This state of things tormented him considerably, and he had very nearly made up his mind to ask her in good set terms why she did not marry George Harrington, when several circumstances occurred which led him to think that it might be as well to delay this direct mode of examination a little longer.

Henry Rixley had not been many months quartered in Ireland, when the Regiment to which he was attached was recalled to England; and, soon afterwards, a short leave of absence was accorded him, for the purpose of paying a visit to his family.

One of the devices which George Harrington put in action, in order the more rationally to account for his so frequently forsaking his own splendid residence, while he occupied the identical little apartment in his father's house which had been allotted to him in his boyhood, was the mixing himself as much as possible in all the visiting in his father's neighbourhood, and promoting, by every means in his power, the frequency of these neighbourly meetings.

The hope, nay, pretty nearly the certainty, of meeting Helen upon these occasions was, of course, his primal motive for this; but it was not the only one, as was made evident by the readiness with which he accepted invitations for many dinner-parties to which no ladies were admitted. The real state of the case was, that his existence was so positively painful to him when he was too far distant to feel that the passing day, or the coming morrow, *might* be cheered by seeing her, if only during the fast-fleeting moments of a morning visit, that the avoiding it was the end and object of all he did.

The only individual of his family who had any suspicion of this was his sister Agnes; but it was rarely that he indulged himself in speaking of Helen even to her. The hearing her repeat her conviction that her simple-mannered, but very puzzling, friend still loved him, disturbed his tranquillity more than it consoled him, for his own heart perpetually told him that it was so, notwithstanding the cruel steadiness with which she checked every attempt he made to resume the tone of their former intercourse.

His only source of steady hope lay in his persuasion, that if she did not love him she loved no one else; and that time *might* teach her to feel that she was not wise in sacrificing a well-tryed affection for such vague reasonings as she had given him reason to believe had dictated her refusal of his hand.

Meanwhile he contrived to make his frequent abode at his father's assume a sort of systematic shape, which saved him the trouble of periodically accounting for it. He hired stables for coach and saddle-horses, and converted a *ci-devant* tithe-barn into a coach-

house: having achieved which, he discovered that both his mother and sisters found so much comfort from the arrangement, that he could not bear to think of depriving them of it.

Helen saw all this, and understood it too; but still the miserable feeling rested heavily upon her heart, that no attachment could ever atone to such a man as George Harrington for forming an alliance, any circumstance of which could be considered as degrading to him.

It is true that six long years had passed since her separation from her dear unhappy brother; and that during that long interval she had never even been comforted or terrified by hearing of him. She remembered, also,—for her uncle had deemed it best to check her restless efforts to obtain tidings of him, by making her, in some degree, acquainted therewith—the result of the inquest held on her father's body, and the suspicions that the flight of her brother had fixed upon him, and though she totally disbelieved, them she still remembered them;—but she felt in

every fibre of her heart that he was her brother, her fondly-loved brother, still; nor could even the love of George Harrington tempt her to endure the idea of placing herself in a position which might teach her to dread receiving tidings of him.

CHAPTER IX.

THINGS were in this state when Henry Rixley returned from Ireland to Beauchamp Park. He had always been a favourite in the neighbourhood; nor was he at all likely to be less so now, for every month that had passed over him since his destiny had been changed from what he greatly dreaded to what he greatly wished, had tended to improve him in many ways.

He was very nearly as tall in stature, and as stalwart in limb, as his uncle of the Warren House; and this, indeed, seemed to be the type of all the male descendants of the Rixley race. Nothing, therefore, was so favourable to their comeliness as a little military drilling and deportment; and Henry,

who, when he had left his home, was only considered as a fine well-grown youth, returned to it with the aspect and carriage of a military-looking and distinguished gentleman.

His sister's noble marriage, too, had certainly helped to make him an important personage in the neighbourhood; and the hunting-parties, dinner-parties, and dancing-parties given in honour of his return were rather more numerous than could be conveniently accommodated within the space of the three weeks during which he was to remain at home.

Had Anne Rixley been Anne Rixley still, there can be no doubt that Helen Beauchamp would have seized this occasion, as joyfully as she had previously done all others of the same kind, to promote every opportunity of obtaining for her petted cousin the amusements which she was so well fitted both to embellish and enjoy. But Lady Lymp-ton wanted no such aid; she was herself become the autocratic fête-queen of the whole neighbourhood; and though she would joyfully have admitted her cousin Helen as an ally,

she had no want of her as a prime minister, the Lady Honoria Curtis being as capable as she was willing to fill the office.

And thus it happened that my sober-minded heroine was not unfrequently permitted to stay at home and read to her rheumatic aunt, without being accused of anything worse than excessive kindness and inconceivable self-denial.

Kind she certainly was, but self-denying she was not. Had she at this time learnt from good authority that George Harrington was about to leave the neighbourhood with no intention of returning to it, she might probably have felt a pang at her heart which she might have been puzzled to explain to herself satisfactorily, for she was scarcely aware, perhaps, how much of interest, if not of positive pleasure, was given to her existence by frequently seeing him. But the meeting him at a fine dinner-party, or at a crowded ball, gave her no pleasure whatever; for in such scenes she was often inclined to reproach herself for not feeling as happy as she ought to be.

When she remembered her childhood, and

the many painful scenes and the many painful privations attending it, and compared her present brilliant position with what had preceded it, her heart reproached her with want of gratitude to heaven for the blessings she now enjoyed.

And yet it was the memory of this hard and comfortless childhood that furnished the images upon which her solitary thoughts were most apt to dwell: and even when her heart was aching from the conviction that she could never become the wife of George Harrington without forfeiting her own esteem, and deserving to forfeit his also—even then, the bitterest pang which accompanied the thought of her brother arose from the idea that she might live and die without ever beholding him again!

And it was in such moments as these that she felt it was better for her, when her aunt had dismissed her for the night, to sit in her own room and weep alone, than to deck her face in smiles, and parade a ball-room.

Henry Rixley, however, was not the only gay recruit who contributed at this time to enliven the neighbourhood. Sir Richard

Knighton, the son and successor of the late baronet of Knighton Hall, had recently fixed his bachelor residence there ; and at the time that Henry returned to Beauchamp Park his house was enlivened by a party of young men, whom its owner had brought down with him from London to enjoy for a week or two the field-sports for which the neighbourhood was celebrated.

Of course, wherever there was a ball or a hunt, Sir Richard Knighton and his three gay guests were sure to be present ; but the dinners with which they were regaled were enjoyed at the mansion of their hospitable host, who declared his party too large to be led out on foraging expeditions, without risking the imputation of taking unfair advantage of their numbers, for the purpose of laying waste the country.

The bachelor dinners at Knighton Hall, however, were repeated often enough to bring his guests sufficiently well acquainted with the gentlemen of the neighbourhood, to prevent their being looked upon or treated as strangers by any of his friends.

The festivities of the neighbourhood, how-

ever, were by no means confined during this time to hunting, shooting, and dining; on the contrary, a sudden mania for dancing seemed to seize all the young ladies in the vicinity of Knighton Hall; and the male part of the population were well pleased to content the females by indulging them, while they propitiated the favour of the party at Knighton Hall at one and the same time.

It was on the morning after the first of these well-timed dancing-parties that a quiet *tête-à-tête* between Helen and her aunt Rixley was interrupted by the arrival of the two Miss Harringtons and their brother, who had rode over, as Jane Harrington declared, for the express purpose of assuring Miss Beauchamp that she had lost by far the most agreeable party that had ever been given in the county by so foolishly choosing to stay at home the evening before.

“Has not your cousin Henry told you what a perfect ball it was?” demanded Jane Harrington, eagerly.

“Not yet, dear Jane,” replied Helen, “for I have not seen him. He set off to Rothe-well Castle before I was up, and as he is not

returned yet, I presume he went to breakfast there."

"And very right, too," replied the young lady, joyously clapping her hands. "I will bet you what you like that he is gone there on purpose to make Lady Lympton give a ball before this glorious constellation has left our hemisphere. Just fancy four superbly handsome young unmarried men in one house! And all such divine dancers, too! Just fancy, dearest Mrs. Rixley, the effect likely to be produced by such a phenomenon in a quiet neighbourhood like this!"

"Among the hearts of the young ladies, my dear?" said Mrs. Rixley, laughing. "Is that what you mean?"

"Yes, to be sure it is, my dear lady!" replied Jane, gaily, "and by way of a sign and symptom of the said effect, just look at Agnes. She began to blush, as I dare say you observed, the very first moment that I mentioned the Knighton Hall heroes, and her cheeks have been going on *crescendo* ever since. Just ask her, dear Helen, what she thinks of the magnificent Colonel Somebody that she danced with twice, besides the

cotillon. Or of the exquisitely elegant and enchantingly languishing Captain What's-his-name, who not only honoured her by devoting himself throughout an interminable polka to her service, but did her the still greater honour of directing his *lorgnette* towards her to the infinite advantage of her complexion during the supper, for she blushed then, very much, as she blushes now."

"Whatever happened to me at this famous ball must have been less overpowering in its effects than what happened there to you, Jane," replied her sister, rather gravely; "for it is evident that something or other has completely turned your head."

"Upon my word, young ladies," said Mrs. Rixley, laughing, "I begin very seriously to regret that I did not drive Helen away from me. My only complaint against her is that she is rather too reasonable for her age, and this defect might, very probably, have been cured if she had accepted Mrs. Wilcox's invitation for last night. But do let me hear *your* opinion of these brilliant strangers, Mr. Harrington."

"I must understand what you require of

me before I answer you, Mrs. Rixley," replied Mr. Harrington, assuming a look of profound meditation. "Do you ask my opinion of their intellects, their acquirements, their manners, their persons, or their dress?"

"Your catalogue of qualities reaches a climax, Mr. Harrington, and let me hear your answer to the last, and most important article first. How did you like their dress?" demanded the old lady, solemnly.

"Unimpeachable!" he replied, in the same tone.

"Now, then, go on to the rest," said she. "It does not matter so much, certainly, but, nevertheless, we must of course feel interested in every particular concerning those who have produced such conquering effects by their presence."

"Dear Mrs. Rixley! do not laugh at us so unmercifully!" said Jane Harrington, looking a little ashamed of her ecstasies, "but let George tell you in sober matter-of-fact style if the party assembled at Mrs. Wilcox's last night was not greatly enlivened by the presence of Sir Richard Knighton, and his three bachelor guests."

“ The difficulty lies in treating such matters-of-fact with sobriety,” replied George. “ However,” he added, “ I will, in all my best, obey you, madam. Of Sir Richard Knighton himself I need say nothing, for you have the pleasure of knowing him already. Of the three guests that he has now brought down to enliven his bachelor solitude, I should say, speaking collectively, that they seem to have been selected for the purpose of displaying the striking effect of contrast. The least invidious way of classing them as first, second, and third, will be by taking the eldest as number one, and so on. I must begin, therefore, with the gentleman called Hackwood—Captain Hackwood, I think Knighton called him. He is still a young man, certainly not more than four or five and thirty, and is, I dare say, generally considered as handsome; but no one, I should imagine, could ever have thought him so handsome as he evidently thinks himself. This is a disadvantage to him; at least it appeared so to me. What was your opinion upon this point, Agnes?”

“ I do beg to assure you all, relatives and

friends, that I did not consider Captain Hackwood's demeanour with sufficient attention to discover whether he thought himself handsome or not," replied Agnes, earnestly.

"Your attention, perhaps, was engaged elsewhere, my dear," said the old lady, looking rather mischievous.

The tell-tale cheeks of poor Agnes again excited a smile from her sister, but she only shook her head, and said nothing.

"The next in review," resumed Mr. Harrington, "was, if I mistake not, called Spencer, but I know nothing as to his rank or title, for I only heard Knighton call him 'Spencer,' and nothing more. Of him, I think, I may fairly say, that he neither was handsome nor thought himself so, but he seemed to be possessed of a degree of vivacity which knew no bounds. It repeatedly appeared to me that he was dancing with two or three ladies at once, and if I may judge from the smiles, or rather, I should say, the laughter, with which his various partners replied to all he said, his wit must have been as brisk as his heels."

“ And now then for the third portrait, George,” said his eldest sister, with a furtive glance at Agnes.

“ Yes, Jane ; I will endeavour to give the third portrait also, but it is by no means so easy a task as what has gone before it. The name of the third gentleman, ladies, is Maurice, Colonel Maurice, and most assuredly he is as little like the other two as it is well possible to imagine. I scarcely know why it is, that I feel persuaded of his being younger than either of the others, for his complexion, which must always have been rather the reverse of fair, is now evidently sunburnt, and not only has he the title of Colonel, but he decidedly looks like a man that has seen service. Nevertheless, I do not think he can be more than seven or eight and twenty. He is superbly tall, and, in my estimation, superbly handsome also. And here I feel that I must stop short, because I am quite at a loss to explain, or even to express, the sort of impression he has made upon me. I have a conviction, which is certainly anything but reasonable, considering that I know no more of him than

I do of the man in the moon, but, nevertheless, I *have* a strong conviction that he is—to speak in plain prose—worth meeting again.”

“And is that all you can say of him after so magnificent a preface?” said Jane.

“No,” replied her brother. “I can say something more for him. I can say that I should like Miss Beauchamp to see him. I should like to hear her opinion of him.”

These words produced a strangely different impression upon Helen herself, and upon her friend Agnes. The first thought of Agnes might be rendered thus—“Well! I suppose he is cured at last! If he were not, he could scarcely wish to set her upon a deliberate examination of the person and manners of Colonel Maurice!”

Whereas the first thought of Helen might be thus expressed. “Alas! Not all my reserve, not all my care has prevented him from knowing that I love him still!”

The visit did not last much longer, for both the sisters were fully bent upon making many other visits; partly for the purpose of learning what other people thought about

all that had occupied their own thoughts so much, and partly in the hope of hearing that the delightful party of the previous evening was likely to be assembled somewhere or other at no distant date, and at no distant spot.

CHAPTER X.

THE two Miss Harringtons were not the only persons who admired the guests at Knighton Hall sufficiently to desire to see more of them; and the consequence of this was, as they had hoped, that many more very delightful balls followed that which had first introduced them to the neighbourhood.

Nor did Helen feel at all disposed to be less hospitable on this occasion than she was wont to be on all others; on the contrary, she did not listen to George Harrington's more than once repeated expressions of admiration respecting the much-talked-of Colonel Maurice without feeling considerable curiosity to see him.

She had decided upon gratifying this very natural feeling at Rothewell Castle, where

her cousin Anne, as usual, had taken measures for the gayest entertainment which had as yet been given to the strangers. The *fête* was to begin by charades, in the arrangement of which Lady Lymp-ton was considered as unrivalled, and to conclude with dancing; and so attractive was this programme that not only Helen, but her invalid aunt also, decided upon being present on the occasion.

But destiny is stronger even than woman's will, and therefore they were not present, for on the morning of the festival Mr. Rixley broke his arm by a fall from his horse, and though no alarming symptoms followed the accident, his faithful woman-kind would not leave him, and thus it happened that this bright constellation came, blazed, and passed away, without either Helen or her aunt having been present upon any single occasion when it was visible.

There was certainly something like a feeling of regret in the mind of my heroine when she heard that the party was broken up, and that George Harrington was gone to Speedhurst Abbey accompanied by Colonel Maurice.

George Harrington assuredly did not leave the neighbourhood without making a farewell call at Beauchamp Park, and he came, too, accompanied by this new friend; but as ill-luck would have it (as the familiar phrase expresses such mishaps), its fair but unlucky lady was wandering away with Mr. Phelps and her cousin Henry, at too great a distance from the house to be recalled by the messenger whom her aunt despatched to look for her.

Helen had fully intended to see this Colonel Maurice before he left the neighbourhood, for the terms in which she had heard George Harrington speak of him had awakened a deeper feeling than mere curiosity. George Harrington was by no means apt to run into sudden intimacy with any one, and she had already heard enough of the terms on which they appeared to be together, to make her feel very deeply persuaded that he must be an individual of no common stamp.

The hearing of their setting off *tête-à-tête* for Speedhurst Abbey added considerably to this persuasion, as well as to her disappointment at not having seen him, and she felt, rather justly perhaps, angry with herself for

giving way as she had done to her growing dislike of gay society, to which she very fairly attributed it.

It was with even more pleasure than usual that she welcomed a visit from Jane and Agnes the morning after their brother's departure, for instead of feeling inclined to quiz them for their unceasing rhapsodies in praise of the marvellous stranger who had created so unusual a sensation in the neighbourhood, she was now anxious to hear all they had to say about him, and, contrary to custom, led to the subject herself, by saying, "And so, dear friends, your brother has carried off captive this wondrous hero of whom I have heard so much."

But instead of replying in the same gay strain, Agnes only sighed, while Jane answered in a sort of matter-of-fact, and not very well pleased tone, "Do not let us talk any more about him, dear Helen! I, for one, have talked of him, I am afraid, a great deal too much."

"Then at any rate do not talk of him any more!" returned Agnes, with considerably less than her usual gentleness of manner.

“You need not alarm yourself, Agnes,” said Jane, demurely. “I have not the least intention of talking of him at all. But we have agreed, you know, not to begin *now* having any secrets concealed from Helen, because we never have had any, so if you please, you must not interrupt me while I tell her what has just happened.”

“Upon condition that you never tell anybody else, I have no objection to your telling Helen,” said Agnes: “I should have no more idea of keeping a secret from her than I should of keeping it from you, Jane, for I love her quite as well as if she were my own sister. Only she must promise not to teaze me about it afterwards.”

“I do promise!” replied Helen, gaily, but blushing at the same time like a carnation at this allusion to sisterhood. “But pray make haste! I am all impatience. What is this secret about?”

“About love and marriage, of course, Helen,” replied Jane Harrington, laughing, “How can girls have any other secrets?”

“*Halte-là!*” interrupted Agnes, holding up her finger, and shaking her head. “Your

preface, Jane, is calculated to deceive Helen in a most important particular. This secret, as far as it concerns me, has no more to do with marriage than with murder."

"I should be sorry to deceive Helen in any way," returned Jane. "Nevertheless my tale has much more to do with marriage than with murder. Captain Hackwood never proposed to murder you, Agnes. At least I never heard that he had said anything about it as yet. But he did propose to marry you."

"After a fortnight's acquaintance!" cried Helen, with a gesture of astonishment.

"Yes, Helen, exactly so," replied her friend, in an accent which expressed very perfect sympathy with the feeling manifested by that gesture.

"Oh, yes, that is all very true," said Jane, with a look that seemed to express superior wisdom, "but nothing could be more evident than that he really was most devotedly attached—and it was evident from his proposals, too, that he would have been an excellent match."

"Excellent match! Fie upon you, Jane,"

exclaimed her sister, "I wonder how you would have liked to make an *excellent match* with a man of whom you knew absolutely nothing."

"Well, Agnes, nobody has blamed you for refusing him. Only, you know, it is impossible to deny that other people, besides this unfortunate Captain Hackwood, may fall in love in a very short space of time."

"Yes, Janè, that is quite true. Only, in general, people do not venture to propose marriage after the acquaintance of a few days," said Helen.

"Pray do not think that I wanted Agnes to marry him! Nothing could be further from my thoughts. I hope that if she ever marries at all, it will be some one that she really loves," returned Jane, "and in that case," she added, "I should not feel inclined to be at all severe upon her, even if I found out that she too had fallen in love before she had known the happy man for a fortnight."

"Let us look at your new garden, Helen!" said Agnes Harrington, suddenly starting up, and going to the window.

"You want to see my new garden?" re-

plied Helen. "Well then, I will take you to see it. But it does not lie in that direction, dear friend! I should have thought, Agnes, that you knew the geography of Beauchamp Park better than to look for the flower gardens in that direction."

"Agnes is very stupid sometimes, and not only forgets her geography, but her chronology, too, occasionally."

Helen had soon enveloped herself in her ever-ready garden costume, and the three young ladies set out to explore conservatories, and examine exotics. But the only person who upon this occasion seemed to take any real interest in the business, was Jane Harrington, and she speedily got into very earnest conversation with the head gardener, who was an old acquaintance, and not unfrequently the generous bestower of half a dozen ultra-precious flower-seeds.

This left the two friends *par excellence*, to all intents and purposes, *tête-à-tête*, and they neither of them seemed disposed to lose the opportunity of exchanging a few words in a more serious tone than accorded with the temper of the lively Jane.

“ Tell me, my dearest Agnes, what is it that Jane seems so bent upon tormenting you about ?” said Helen. “ Did this perfect stranger really and seriously propose to you ?”

“ Yes, indeed did he,” replied Agnes, “ but it is very disagreeable to me to confess it, even to you ; for it is next to impossible that you should not suppose me guilty of giving very extraordinary encouragement.”

“ Let it be *next* to impossible,” replied Helen, affectionately, “ provided you do not suspect its being so. I know you too well, Agnes,” she added, “ not to be quite aware that this Captain Hackwood’s presumption was no fault of yours. But do tell me, dearest, did it not make your brother very angry ?”

“ Yes, truly, it did ! I have rarely seen him look so gravely displeased at anything,” replied Agnes, “ and I strongly suspect that this very sudden fancy of his, for returning to Speedhurst, exactly at the time when we all so much desired to have him here, originated in his wish to avoid encountering Captain Hackwood again. When George

dislikes a person, I know of old that he finds it a difficult task to be civil, and in this case, the difficulty must be increased, you know, by there not being any very ostensible cause of offence. *Entre nous*, I certainly love George all the better for being in a rage with any man who could suppose that I should be ready to accept him as my husband upon the acquaintance of a few days; but, nevertheless, I have no doubt in the world that the man thought he was paying me a prodigious compliment, instead of being impertinent. However, it is quite as well, perhaps, that George should take himself off."

"Perhaps it is," replied Helen. And after a moment's pause, she added, "But it seems that he did not go alone? He appears to have fallen into a fit of friendship as suddenly as the unfortunate Captain fell into a fit of love."

"You don't mean to blame George for inviting such a man as Colonel Maurice to visit him, do you, Helen?" returned Agnes, colouring.

"Blame him? Good heavens, Agnes, no!" responded Helen, in rather an indignant tone,

and with a flushing cheek, which seemed to reflect that of her friend.

“ If you had not shut yourself up as you have done, since all our gaieties have been going on,” said Agnes, “ you might have had an opportunity of judging for yourself, as to Colonel Maurice’s claims to the honour of an invitation, even to Speedhurst Abbey. I very much wish that you *had* seen him, Helen.”

“ I wish so too, my dear,” replied her friend, with a quiet smile, which had a little the air of quizzing her vehemence.

“ If you think it extraordinary that George should have invited this gentleman to his house, you will find it still more so, I imagine, when I tell you that now, for the first time since he has been in possession of the property, George has made the notable discovery, that he has been over-negligent of the duties of hospitality towards his uncle’s old friends and neighbours, and that he has invited my father, mother, sister, and myself, to come to him next week for a fortnight, in order to assist him in obliterating the character which he fears he has acquired, of being a churlish neighbour.”

“ I am very glad to hear it,” said Helen, with great sincerity ; for it had more than once occurred to her that he was not exactly fulfilling the duties of his station, by so constantly absenting himself from his property and his dependants ; and if something like a consciousness that she was herself the cause of this, might bring with it a feeling that was not altogether painful, she nevertheless heard of his making this effort with pleasure, and the accent with which she had spoken made this so evident that Agnes quite forgave the symptoms of quizzing which had preceded it, and the farewell kiss that was exchanged between them was as cordial on both sides as long years of friendship could make it.

CHAPTER XI.

THERE are probably but few human actions which may not be traced to mixed motives, though one among them may have settled a wavering balance, and been the final cause of the act. And so it was in the case of this sudden resolution on the part of George Harrington. He really did think that he had not been sufficiently sociable in his intercourse with his Speedhurst neighbours; and he really did dislike the idea of again encountering the consummate puppyism and audacity of Captain Hackwood; moreover, he had never before met any man whose acquaintance he so much wished to cultivate as he did that of Colonel Maurice; but the final and immediate cause of the resolution he had taken, was the having heard from

Sir Richard Knighton, that his friend Hackwood had promised to remain with him for some weeks longer, for the purpose of superintending the training of a young horse, preparatory to his making his *debût* at the approaching races, which annually took place in the neighbourhood.

Now, if any one had hinted to George Harrington that it was possible his sister Agnes might change her mind, and end by accepting the man she had so promptly refused, he would have been excessively indignant at such a supposition; yet, nevertheless, it is certain that he did not like her remaining where she would, in all probability, meet him frequently; and it was this which first suggested the idea of opening his own house in a more hospitable style than he had yet done since he came into possession of it.

It is not necessary that we should follow George Harrington and his party to Speedhurst Abbey, in order to assure ourselves that the honours of that handsome and well-conducted mansion were well performed; neither have we any pages to spare for a description of the quiet, if not very happy days which

Helen passed during the absence of the whole Harrington family from her neighbourhood; but after the Speedhurst party was broken up, several circumstances occurred which must be related as essential to the progress of my narrative.

Helen and Agnes were not only sociable neighbours when within reach of each other, but very regular correspondents when they were separated, and there was no want, therefore, of many a pleasant document dispatched from Speedhurst Abbey to Beauchamp Park, redolent of gay doings, and of happy companionships.

The letters of my heroine, in return, were, it must be confessed, infinitely less amusing; for Helen had little or nothing to relate beyond the completion of some garden structure or the propitious birth of a seedling geranium.

It is certain that, from causes either well understood or misunderstood, the frequent near neighbourhood of George Harrington and Helen Beauchamp was a doubtful blessing to them both; nevertheless, it is certain, also, that the hours of my heroine passed

with less of hope, and more of heaviness, when all possibility of her meeting the man whose hand she had refused was beyond her reach, than when every sun that rose brought with it the possibility that she *might* see him before it set.

It was not, therefore, without a sensation, which a good deal resembled pleasure, that she listened to her maid's news, while her long tresses were under the brush; for that news went the pleasant length of declaring, that the family at the Oaks were expected to return on the morrow, and that the young squire of Speedhurst was coming with them.

It boots not to tell how many times Helen turned her head upon the pillow, before she went to sleep that night, but it is absolutely necessary to my narrative that I should mention, that Mr. George Harrington called at the Park at an unusually early hour on the following day, and omitting the ordinary ceremony of asking for Mrs. Rixley, inquired if Miss Beauchamp were at home, and upon being answered in the affirmative, sent in his name, with a request that he might see her immediately.

There was something sufficiently unusual in the form of this message to cause a slight palpitation of the heart to the lady of the mansion; she answered, however, with great apparent composure, that she should be glad to see him, and in the next moment he entered her morning sitting-room.

“You must forgive my want of ceremony, my dear Miss Beauchamp,” he said; “but I have news to tell that I feel sure will be interesting to you; and as my tidings are for the present to be kept secret from the world in general, I have ventured to make my way to you in the most direct manner possible.”

She shook hands with him in the way she had carefully taught herself, and which was the very perfection of neighbourly friendliness, and nothing either less or more.

“I am quite sure that your tidings are pleasant tidings,” she said, “by your manner of announcing them; so pray sit down, and tell me what they are.”

“I know you love Agnes,” he replied, “and the friendship between you is not of yesterday; you will not be greatly surprised,

therefore, when I tell you that I come, commissioned by herself, to tell you that she is going to be married—but not to Captain Hackwood, Miss Beauchamp.”

“Of that I am very sure, for reasons that shall be nameless,” replied Helen; “but I will venture to go still farther than that, Mr. Harrington;” she added, “I would venture a little bet, that I could guess, not only who it is not, but who it is.”

“Indeed!” he exclaimed; “that surprises me a little, I confess; for when you last saw Agnes, I very much doubt if she could have told as much herself.”

“Very likely not,” said Helen, laughing; “but lookers-on, you know, sometimes—. The proverb is somewhat musty, but there is truth in it.”

“Assuredly there is,” he replied; “only in this case it does not apply, fair lady; for, if I am not greatly mistaken, you never *were* a looker-on. I am tolerably sure, moreover, that you never saw the gentleman in question.”

“That may be very true,” returned Helen, “and yet I may be able to make good my

boast. Eyes are not the only means by which we can become acquainted with individuals."

"Then, perhaps, Agnes was not so heart-whole as I fancied when I took her away?" rejoined Mr. Harrington. "Perhaps you heard her speak of the person to whom you allude?"

"Scarcely, Mr. Harrington," replied Helen, earnestly, fearful lest she should do her friend injustice; "but I have heard *you* speak of him."

"Yes, you have," he replied; "I remember it. I remember thinking that you would agree with me in my judgment of him. And I think so still, Miss Beauchamp; and it is for that reason that I think also that the news I bring you is good news. Yes, you are quite right. My sister Agnes is engaged to be married to Colonel Maurice."

"It *is* good news to me!" replied Helen, with deep feeling. "The heart of Agnes is no common heart; and it is more than mere pleasure, it is happiness to me to know that her choice has fallen upon a man that you

can speak of as you did of this Colonel Maurice."

"And, believe me, it is a source of happiness to me, too, Miss Beauchamp," replied Mr. Harrington; "and I trust I do not flatter myself in believing that, when you shall have become acquainted with him, your own judgment will justify my opinion—my personal opinion of him. I am sure, it will," he added, with a slight augmentation of colour, which gave additional earnestness to his words; "but yet, Miss Beauchamp, your indulgence must go further still, before you will be able fully to approve this marriage for my sister."

"I understand you," she replied, smiling. "The sister of Speedhurst Abbey ought, perhaps, (*ought*, in one sense) to expect a larger settlement than this young soldier may have to offer. And yet the rank he has so early attained looks as if he had influential friends."

"No; that is not it. In the first place, he does not owe his rank to any influential friends, but solely, using his own modest phrase, to his good luck in the service,"

replied Harrington; "and as to his power of making a settlement," he added, "that has nothing to do with it either. I know he told me that he was enabled, by a recent legacy from his earliest military friend, to offer a very respectable sum for that purpose. But, no! the difficulty does not lie there, Helen; and I have a painful misgiving that, when I name it, you will consider it as a much more important objection than I do. I am a positive coward about it, for I declare to you that I dread the expression of your face upon hearing it."

"Nonsense, Mr. Harrington! I am sure you cannot be in earnest," she replied, laughing. "You must be quite sure, I should think, that a man beloved by Agnes, and approved by you, cannot be in much danger of appearing objectionable to me."

"You are all kindness," said he, "and I listen with full confidence to the assurance of toleration which you so cordially give. But, believe me, my kind friend, your phrase, *approved by me*, goes but a little way towards expressing what my feelings are respecting Colonel Maurice. You know Agnes well,

and, perhaps, I know her better still; but I suspect we shall both agree in confessing, dearly as we love her, that she is not quite perfect. She is much too fastidious in her likings, and in her dislikings. She is nearly three years older than you are, and yet it is a certain fact that, till she had the advantage of knowing you, she never formed any intimacy out of her own family. She has had repeated offers of marriage made in a less objectionable style than that of Captain Hackwood; but though upon former occasions she may have been less angry, she has never been at all more inclined to accept any. In short, Colonel Maurice is the first man she ever looked upon for a moment with an eye of favour; and, knowing her as I do, I feel convinced that the impression he has made upon her heart will never be obliterated. That this conviction has great weight with me, is certain; but is far, very far, from being my only, or even my chief, reason for wishing the connexion; but the real fact is, dear friend, that I have never met with any man whom I could wish to call my brother till I met with him."

“Need I tell you that it is a pleasure to me to hear you say so?” returned Helen, earnestly. “Dear Agnes!” she continued, while tears of tenderness started to her eyes, “with all her fastidiousness, she could never be happy without loving, and being loved; and now, thank Heaven! this destiny seems assured to her.”

“But you have not yet heard the ONE THING which I fear will appear so much more terrible in your eyes than it does in mine!” said he.

“I greatly doubt,” she replied, with a very cheering smile; “I greatly doubt that anything you can have left to tell will suffice to neutralize what I have heard already.”

“Well! I will hope so too,” replied he, starting up, and gaily approaching her; “and I believe you ought to be angry with me for doubting it: for, after all, it cannot be put in competition for a moment for one-hundredth part of what is on the other side of the balance. But the fact is, Helen Beauchamp, that the man whom my heart thus joyfully welcomes as a brother is a natural son.”

George Harrington, as he uttered these words, was standing immediately in front of Helen, and her eyes were earnestly fixed upon his face. He saw and felt this with the sort of trepidation which an earnest look from her always occasioned him; but he was totally unprepared for what followed. Her eyes, which were raised to his face with an expression of gentle tranquil confidence and hope, closed for an instant, and when they opened again, all the tranquillity was gone, and they were raised to heaven with a look that spoke more of rapturous thanksgiving than of doubts and fears, reasonably satisfied. She rose from her chair, and extending both her hands, placed them for a moment in both his, which seemed to open instinctively to receive them, and then she as suddenly withdrew them, and sat down again; and, finally, she burst into a passion of tears, laying her arms upon the little table which stood beside her, and hiding her face upon her hands while she continued to sob convulsively.

Notwithstanding the habitual sort of forbearance which the steady demeanour of

Helen had taught him to understand was necessary to the continuance of their friendship, George Harrington now lost all command of himself, and dropped on his knees before her.

The movement might, however, be described as involuntary, as he knew not himself what he meant by it, for he was most completely at a loss how to interpret the cause or signification of her emotion. Neither did she seem at all disposed to elucidate the mystery, for having indulged herself in the luxury of weeping without ceremony or restraint for the space of about two minutes and a half, she gently raised her head again, and looked at him with a smile which, instead of being likely to explain the cause of her tears, expressed nothing but the fullest and most radiant satisfaction.

“Pray do not kneel, dear friend!” she exclaimed, playfully extending her hand in very regal style as a signal that he might change his posture for one less humble; “pray do not kneel!” she repeated in a voice that had then nothing of playfulness in it. “It is I who ought rather to kneel to you, to

implore your forgiveness for having so vilely misunderstood your noble heart !”

“Helen !” he replied, looking at her with astonishment, which was, however, strongly blended with delight, “Helen ! dearest and best, ever best and dearest, though ever a mystery, you must long have seen that I am in your power. You may not have seen, perhaps, how sincerely I have struggled to escape. But this matters not ; you know, you must know, that these said struggles have been of none effect, and that a word, a look, a gesture is enough—has been enough you see—to bring me to your feet again, with the confession on my lips, that I never can be happy without you. You say that you have misunderstood me, Helen. How can this be ? What have I done or said that could be mistaken ? But it matters not, dearest ! It shall be enough for me to know that you misunderstand me no longer ! Whatever the delusion was, I feel assured you were not to blame for it, and only confirm by one word the hope that those dear eyes now give me, and I will ask for no further explanation.”

“But the explanation must be listened to,”

replied Helen, still vainly endeavouring to raise him from his kneeling posture, "and all I can say before you receive it is this, that if, after receiving it, you still persist in wishing me to become your wife, I shall no longer offer any opposition to that wish."

The animated delight likely to be experienced by a man both heartily and deliberately in love, upon listening to such words after having despaired of ever hearing them, is pretty nearly equal in its intensity to the dulness produced on the minds of others by all attempts at describing it. Not a word, therefore, shall be said about it. The interview, after all, was but a short one, for Helen sent him away by so very sincere an assurance that she longed to be alone, that he could neither doubt its truth nor resist it.

"Remember," she said, "that it is all very well for you, hot-headed and impetuous young man as you are, to make up your mind upon this most important question, without at all knowing what I may have to confess to you of a nature to make you alter your mind; but the case is different with me. My fate cannot be decided till you

have been made acquainted with the motives of my past conduct. If after this you shall still wish me to be your wife, I know of no reason in the world which should prevent my being so.—And now leave me, George Harrington! It will not take me long to commit to paper the confession I have promised you, and if neither men nor horses fail me, you shall not wait long for the document.”

Before she had ceased speaking, George Harrington was already on his feet, and having pressed his lips upon her hand as she uttered the last word, he sprang to the door, opened and closed it behind him, without the loss of a moment.

CHAPTER XII.

HELEN kept her word. She lost no time either in writing her despatch, or in sending it, and the following letter reached the hands of George Harrington at least an hour before he dared to expect it.

“I know not,” it began, “whether, after reading what I am about to write, you will consider it a self-accusation or a self-acquittal. All I can answer for is, that my statement shall be a true one. I presume that you have known, pretty nearly as long as you have known me, that the early part of my life, and as long as I was called Helen Rixley, was passed in a manner wholly unlike what it has been since I have been Helen Beauchamp. I know that I have talked to

you in days of yore about my beloved mother, and made you understand, I think, that her having been educated with the object of her becoming a governess, was the reason why I was not as ignorant when Agnes first took a fancy to me as might have been expected, from the homely manner of life to which I had been accustomed in other respects. But I was still very young when I lost her, and I should probably have relapsed into lamentable ignorance, had it not happened that the clergyman of the parish was a poor, as well as a highly instructed man, and that he made no objection to receiving a very meagre salary for very persevering lessons. But these lessons were not alone for me. I had a brother, my dear friend, who was four or five years older than myself, I think, but whose faculties were of so exalted and so brilliant a kind, as to make him fitter for my master than my fellow-student. Nevertheless we studied together, and I can hardly tell you now whether I admired or loved him most. You have never heard of this dear brother, George Harrington, but although the mention of his name, if not abso-

lutely forbidden, has been carefully avoided in my uncle's family, you would have heard of him ere now from me, had it not been for a certain conversation which took place between us upon the lawn at the Oaks, in the course of which you uttered sentiments and opinions which, according to my stupid judgment, rendered it impossible that you should ever hear his name and history without feeling deep repugnance to the idea of being brought into any close relation to him.

“ His history is this :—

“ He is the natural son of my father, and if he could be said to have any name, save that of William, it was Rixley. But neither he nor I knew anything of his unhappy mother, or of his disgraceful birth, till during the last hour that we ever passed together—and this was the last evening of my father's life.

“ We were in the parlour with my father, at table, if I remember rightly, and the good kind nurse who had ever had the care of us was either in attendance or sitting at the table likewise. My father became angry with William, for what cause I have no distinct recollection, but he became fearfully

violent, and in his fury told my unhappy brother the disgraceful secret of his birth, and that, too, in language the most cruelly degrading to his innocent, but most unhappy son, and most insulting to his unfortunate mother.

“ The faculties, the feelings, the affections, the temper of my poor brother, were all quick, impetuous, and vehement. I know not if he spoke in answer to the cruel taunt. I have no further recollection of anything that happened that evening till I was alone with my dearest William in the school-room, and the agony of indignation which he then expressed at the language my father had used to him made an impression upon me which can never be effaced ! On that same terrible night it was that my father died ; and on that same night my dear and ever dear William left the Warren House, where we both were born, and from that dreadful day to this I have never heard of him !

“ But I have not yet told you all.

“ Mr. Bolton, the good clergyman, who had been our friend and tutor, would not suffer

me to remain in the Warren House after my father's death; but he, and his kind wife, took me to their own home, and there I remained till the arrival of my good uncle Rixley, and my father's will was opened; and then, somehow or other, it was made manifest that my name was not Rixley, but Beauchamp, and also that my father's will had left me in the possession of a large fortune.

“ My kind uncle appeared inclined to be very fond of me, notwithstanding the estrangement which had existed between him and my father; and the happy home with him, and his dear family, which I have now enjoyed for years, was at once offered to me.

“ But I was not destined to enjoy it without carrying there with me a thorn which has never ceased, more or less, to torture me. I have never from that hour to this heard any tidings of my brother William, and till I knew you, George Harrington, I did not think that I ever could have loved any one as I loved him. I tell you this in order that you may more fully understand the strength of the feeling which has caused

me to act as I have done. Never, George, never have I seen nor heard tidings of this much-loved brother from the day he left our father's house to the present hour! But this has not been my only misery. Guess what I must have felt, young as I was, at accidentally overhearing a brutal sailor declare that he believed the sudden death of my father to have been the act of my unhappy brother! More than six long years have passed over me since I listened to those dreadful words, and yet I seem to remember the impression they made upon me as freshly as if the dreadful scene had occurred but yesterday! I was but little more than a child when it occurred, and I had neither sufficient strength of mind nor clearness of judgment to form a proper estimate either of the speaker or his words. I received them at the moment as the true statement of a known fact, and the effect they had upon me was to rob me for a time of my reason under the influence of a violent phrensy fever.

“ But while recovering from this, I had many long and reasonable conversations with

the good and affectionate old servant who had nursed both him and me ; and she, in a great degree, succeeded in removing from my mind the horrible impression which this frightful statement had made upon me. Her idea seemed to be, that my father had died from the effect of vehement passion, and that the departure of my unhappy brother was the result of the very natural feeling of resentment towards one who could reproach him with the infamy which he had himself brought upon his unfortunate mother, and which might well lead him to prefer the precarious support of his own talents to dependence upon such a father ! I have never ceased to have occasional intercourse, by letter, both with Mr. and Mrs. Bolton, and from them I have learnt that Mrs. Lambert, my nurse, left Cornwall within a few weeks after my uncle and I left it for London ; and that her purpose was to follow some trace she had obtained of my brother, in the hope of persuading him to return to his native country, and to me.

“ But the good Boltons have heard nothing of her since her departure, and I therefore

presume that her courageous pilgrimage has proved abortive. You will not wonder, my dear friend, that, young as I was when these events occurred, they have left an impression which nothing can ever efface, and I certainly have suffered more, rather than less, from the sort of systematic silence which my good uncle has thought it right to preserve upon the subject.

“ But when I became sufficiently acquainted with you to believe that I was still destined to be one of the very happiest women in the world, I began to indulge myself in speculations on the delight I should have in making you acquainted with the character of my noble-hearted brother, not only such as I remembered it, but such as my good friend, Mr. Bolton always declared it to be; nay, there have been moments, dear George, when I have imagined it possible that you, too, as well as poor Sarah Lambert, might be seized by a desire to find him, and knowing how rich we should be with our two great fortunes put together, I will not deny that there were moments, too, when I was silly enough to build castles in the air, making

my dear lost William the principal tenant of them all!

“ But these bright day-dreams, and a great many others besides, were all scattered to the winds and destroyed by the never-to-be-forgotten conversation on your father’s lawn.

“ I wonder if you remember it as well as I do? You had been uttering some pretty flights of romantic eloquence upon the superior advantages of being in love with a poor girl instead of a rich one. I thought in my heart, perhaps, that you were a little personal, but I did not much mind it, for I remembered the immense power lodged in that eloquent French word *quoique*, and I felt that it might as fairly be used by you as an excuse for taking me, as by the coquettish French nation for taking a Bourbon. So I listened, and laughed, and did not mind it. But then, George Harrington—then followed a burst of enthusiasm from your lips which has rung in my ears, and rested heavily upon my heart, from that day to this! I will not deny to you—for why should I, since you know it as well as I do—that I was at that time fully aware that you were

attached to me, and fully understood also that you were only waiting till I was perfectly my own mistress in order to tell me so; and I, on my side, was only waiting for this, in order to tell you the painful story which I now send you. Now that the mist which then fell upon my understanding is removed, and that I feel that your glowing tirade upon the subject of HONOUR did in no way justify my believing that your attachment to me could be affected by circumstances over which I had no control, it seems to me that the reasoning by which I destroyed your happiness, and my own, was little short of madness. Had I at that time asked myself how in a like case I should have felt towards you, the answer might have gone far towards making me see how greatly my excited feelings were leading me to exaggerate the strength of yours. My excuse can only be found in my utter ignorance of life, and all its intricacies. To no human being had I ever been able to speak of the strange events which I have now disclosed to you; and this solitary brooding over what I so darkly comprehended must doubtless have

produced the morbid state of mind which has led me to act as I have done.

“ But so firmly did I feel persuaded that the fact of my father’s having a natural son, to whom I was attached with the tenderest and strongest sisterly devotion, would be felt by you as a misfortune and a DISGRACE that I truly believe nothing could have removed the impression, short of my hearing you speak with pleasure and approval of your sister’s approaching marriage with a man who, in respect to his birth, is in the same unfortunate situation as my dear brother.

“ Shall I ever forget the overwhelming sensation of happiness with which I heard you state this fact? I hope not! That moment was, perhaps, the happiest of my life. And now, George Harrington, you know as much about me as I know myself, and the feeling this is, of itself, so great a pleasure to me, that I can only wonder at the strange delusion which has so long prevented my enjoying it.

“ HELEN BEAUCHAMP.”

CHAPTER XIII.

HELEN kept her word, and lost no time in forwarding her despatch. The above letter was written with great rapidity, but before she began it she allowed herself time to ring her bell, and order that a man and horse should be immediately prepared to take a note for her to the Oaks.

The visit of George Harrington had been made at an early hour; but as the said visit was not a short one, the letter of Helen was not written, and sent off, before four o'clock. Nevertheless she was destined to have another visit from the same gentleman, before that period of the day which fashionable people designate as the 'morning,' was over; that is to say, he was seen galloping at full speed

towards the portico a few minutes before the six o'clock dinner-bell sounded from the venerable turret over the stables.

Helen had not yet left her dressing-room, but fortunately her maid had left her, and therefore the crimson blush, and the radiant smile with which his appearance was welcomed, did not furnish the servant's hall with a theme for their evening's amusement.

George Harrington did not dine at home that day; Mr. Rixley dozed a good deal over his Quarterly Review, for the print was small; his son Henry was at Rothewell Castle, and nobody seemed inclined to enter into general conversation. But as for dear good aunt Rixley, she became very anxious about Helen before their friendly neighbour, George Harrington, ceased his, as it seemed to her, interminable visit; for, as the young people sat together at the table, which was always covered with literary novelties, looking over a variety of books of beauty, and other interesting publications, she observed that her dearly-beloved niece was often flushed to a degree that looked extremely like the effects of a sudden attack of fever.

But 'time and the hour,' as usual, brought all this, as it does everything else, to an end; Henry returned home; George Harrington wrung his hand very affectionately, and then (at last) wished them all good-night, and departed.

Helen Beauchamp had been a young, beautiful, loved, admired, well-born, and rich heiress when she left her bed on that eventful morning; and she was a young, beautiful, loved, admired, well-born, and rich heiress when she returned to it at night; yet the change which had come upon her between that rising up and that lying down involved all the difference between the most enviable happiness and the most hopeless reverse.

George Harrington and Miss Beauchamp had not turned over the leaves of half a dozen picture books without having found both time and opportunity to converse on subjects somewhat more interesting than the comparative beauty of rival eyes and noses; he contrived to tell her, during the three hours and a half which intervened between their leaving the dinner-table and the announcement of his pawing steed at the door, that it

was only since the sun rose that morning that he had become fully aware of the perfect accord which existed between them in their opinions on many important points; and that now he felt almost ashamed of himself for having loved her so devotedly while still ignorant of the noblest traits in her character. But for this weakness on his part he declared himself to have been sufficiently punished by the miserable condition of heart and spirit in which he had lived since the death of his uncle; and in his manner during this part of his discourse, as he hung over the volume which was before them, there was so much of mournful truth, that tears streamed almost unconsciously from Helen's eyes as she listened to him; and had it not been for some very clever management on the part of the young man, neither the gentle dose of Mr.' Rixley, nor the pretty steady reading of his wife, could have sufficed to prevent her emotion from being perceptible.

As it was, however, everything went well. The waning moon was quite high enough in the heavens by the time George Harrington had finally made up his mind to depart to

afford him light enough to make his ride agreeable; and in fact this light was so beautiful in its effect upon the park scenery, and the state of the atmosphere altogether so delightful, that he could not resist his inclination to run back into the drawing-room for the purpose of making Helen and her uncle come out to look at it.

The few moments they thus passed together in the portico gave her an opportunity of telling him that she should greatly like to receive an early visit from his sister Agnes on the morrow.

“Is she to drive over in solitary state, alone?” whispered George, rather piteously.

“Yes!” she replied, with inexorable firmness, after the hesitation of a moment.

The well-behaved young man received this answer in perfect silence, and turned submissively away, as if to set off immediately in order to obey her commands; and it was probably because she was touched by this meek obedience that she followed him with rather a hasty step, and laying a finger on his arm to arrest his retreat, said, rather kindly than otherwise, “I shall like to keep

her with me all day. We shall have much to say to each other. But perhaps you will dine with us, and escort her home at night."

This arrangement seemed, lover as he was, to content him tolerably well, for his final good night was uttered cheerily; and so they parted, for the first time for nearly three long years, without each having left an aching pain in the heart of the other.

The family at the Oaks were, of course, all gone to bed before George Harrington reached his home; but it was at rather an early hour on the following morning that he made his way to his sister Agnes, and delivered the message he had brought to her from Helen.

Had the heart and head of Agnes been less full of her own concerns, it is highly probable that she would have perceived some symptom, in the eye, or the voice of her brother, which might have led her to think that he was not precisely in the same state of mind which he had been in when she conversed with him last. All she perceived, however, was, that this invitation was not quite an ordinary invitation. The early hour at which it was stated that she would

be expected, and the circumstance of her being distinctly invited to come alone, fully justified her coming to this conclusion, and so much of the real state of the case suggested itself as to make her exclaim, with a blush which expressed more of happiness than of anger, "Then you have told her, George?"

"Yes, Agnes. I have told her," he replied, in a tone which she did not quite clearly understand. "Yes, I have told her; and she will tell you all I have said to her, I dare say, or at least a good deal of it."

"But what *did* you say to her, George?" returned his sister, rather anxiously. "Did she seem to think me wrong for accepting him?"

"No, Agnes; I did not perceive any feeling of that kind. However, you will be a better judge yourself of what she feels upon the subject, when you talk to her about it, than you can possibly be by my repeating what she said."

"I don't know what to make of your report," said Agnes, looking at him earnestly. "If she has expressed herself to you as

greatly shocked by the misfortune of his birth, I would rather not go to spend a long day with her.”

“Do not torment yourself by idle fancies, my dear Agnes; your friend Miss Beauchamp is a very sensible young woman, and I really don't think that you have any reason to fear that she should lecture you disagreeably upon the choice you have made. May I go and order the carriage for you? Shall I say that you will be ready in an hour?”

“Yes, you may,” she replied, cheerfully; “for I am quite sure you would not propose my going so early, if you thought she had anything disagreeable to say to me. I shall be ready in an hour, George.”

“You are quite right, Agnes, not to suffer yourself to be frightened. Miss Beauchamp certainly told me that she should have a great deal to say to you; but she will take care, I am sure, not to make herself really disagreeable.”

And having made this rather equivocal speech, he quitted the room, leaving the affianced bride of Colonel Maurice in rather a nervous state of spirits; but fully deter-

mined that not even her well-beloved and greatly-admired Helen should persuade her for a single instant to doubt that the choice she had made was as much for her honour as her happiness, and that no other human being could possibly be found so well calculated to ensure both.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was really a pity that the now gay and happy-hearted George Harrington could not have witnessed the first meeting of the two friends, for he would undoubtedly have found something exceedingly comic in the doubting and inquiring expression of both the fair faces, while each was endeavouring to guess how much, or how little, the other had been enlightened by him as to the exact state of the important affairs, which at that moment occupied the thoughts of each.

The sure remedy, however, against anything like really painful embarrassment between them for more than a few minutes, was found in the fact that they really loved each other dearly; and Agnes speedily

remembered that, however aristocratic and severe the notions of Miss Beauchamp might be on the subject of good and legitimate birth, her friend Helen would be easily led to forget them in her particular case; while Helen felt with equally confiding faith, that however surprised, or however puzzled, the sister of George might be at her sudden change of conduct towards him, her friend Agnes would not fail to make her feel that great as her surprise might be, her satisfaction was greater still.

Nothing could be more correct than the conclusions thus arrived at on both sides, and before the two blushing girls had been half an hour together they had exchanged a tender kiss of mutual congratulation, and were both in the full enjoyment of giving, and receiving, a multitude of anecdotes and confessions, all tending to prove the happiness of each.

“Can anything be so strange,” said Helen. “so unexpected, so improbable as that your accidentally making acquaintance, and accidentally falling in love with this young soldier of fortune, Agnes, should pave the

way to your brother's marrying me? I really cannot, with the exercise of all my ingenuity, imagine any other possible process which could have removed the mountain of adamant that stood between us!"

"Strange indeed!" replied Agnes; "and delightful as it is strange! But were the finale of the romance less likely to be propitious, I should feel inclined to preach you a pretty long sermon, Miss Beauchamp, upon the grievous sin of doubting those we love. You ought to have known my high-minded, noble-hearted brother better, Helen, than to have permitted yourself to believe him capable of such feelings as you laid to his charge."

"I suppose I was very wrong, Agnes," said poor Helen, meekly. "In truth I do believe I was! I seem to see it all now in a totally different light. However, sister dear, you may take my word for it, that I have suffered enough to punish me sufficiently for a very heavy sin."

"But, Helen;" returned George Harrington's unforgiving sister, "though you did blunder so grievously about his opinions, I do not think that even this explains your

so strongly miscalculating the power of his attachment to you. How could you doubt for a moment that his love for you was strong enough to swallow up and overcome every possible objection? Don't you think that you deserve a little more suffering on that score?"

"No, Agnes! no! There I was right, perfectly right. I was wrong in my estimate of the importance he would attach to the unfortunate situation of my beloved brother, but right in believing that if he thought it wrong so to connect himself, he would have shrunk from doing it. Trust me, I thought of all that, before I finally decided upon my own line of conduct. I was not blind to the fact that there might have been a struggle in his mind between what he wished, and what his judgment would approve; and the idea of using my influence for the purpose of warping his sense of right was more intolerable than the idea of losing him. No! No! You will bring me to no humble confessions on that point. With the notions I had conceived as to what his opinion would be, as to my position with respect to my unfortunate brother,

I was quite right not to make any experiments as to the power, I might possess over his feelings, in order to seduce him into acting in defiance of them. No! No! I was right there."

"You have stated the case so sublimely, Helen, and so clearly proved that it was your duty to make him as wretched as possible, that I have not a word to say against it," replied her friend. "All your fault, therefore, my poor dear, lies in the weakness of your intellectual capacity in forming so very monstrous a judgment concerning his notions of right and wrong, and for this I give you absolution, blended with pity. Poor dear Helen! I dare say you did feel very uncomfortable all the time that you were fancying yourself so very magnanimous."

"Well, Agnes! You may laugh at me now, for I can afford to bear it. The happiness side of my account is so miraculously improved within the last twenty-four hours, that it would not be very easy to make me complain of anything," replied Helen. "And yet," she added, with a sigh which was however scarcely audible, "and yet, dearest,

when I see this marvellous man who has contrived to turn the heads of yourself and your brother both, it will be difficult for me not to contrast his fate with that of my poor William! I shall be surprised if, with all my inclination to love and admire all that you and George love and admire, I certainly shall be surprised if I find this happy soldier more admirable in any way than I was wont to think my beautiful brother!"

"Put all comparisons out of your head, Helen, and I shall feel no doubts or fears respecting your judgment of this new friend of ours," said Agnes, gaily. "But what a strange fatality there seems to have been about your having never seen him. If your aunt was not well enough to go out when he was here, I wonder your cousin Henry never brought him to call on you. For nobody seemed more struck by his appearance than Henry Rixley did, the night that he was first shown off to the neighbourhood at Mrs. Wilcox's ball."

"Oh, yes, he quite raved about him," said Helen. "But you forget that Henry was obliged to go to London on regimental busi-

ness immediately afterwards. He never met him at any of Sir William Knighton's bachelor dinners, nor at Rothewell Castle either, where I know he dined more than once. Nay, do you know, I doubt, if Henry was ever introduced to him at all," she added.

"Well then," returned the happy Agnes, gaily, "he will only burst upon you all with the more effect when he shall be at length presented—for will he not have, in addition to all other good gifts, the honour and glory of being proclaimed as the affianced husband of Agnes Harrington?"

"There will be something in that, Agnes," replied Helen, laughing, "we shall be too much afraid of you not to be ready to accord our suffrages to him. But when is he to appear again above our horizon? We are expecting Henry back to-morrow; and as, notwithstanding his lengthened leave, we shall have him, I fear, only for a day or two longer, I think I must screw my courage to giving a dinner-party myself."

Then, after the silence of a few moments, she added, "What an enormous, what an astounding difference, Agnes, can a few short

hours and a few gentle words make in us! Do you not, in a hundred thousand ways, feel that you are no longer the same being that you were before you paid your brother that last visit at Speedhurst? And cannot you imagine that in a hundred thousand ways I feel myself a different being from what I was, before your brother favoured me with his early morning visit yesterday?"

"Imagine! I can do more than imagine," returned Agnes, placing her hands before her eyes, "I see it, I know it, I feel it all! It is not a dream, is it, Helen? Good Heaven, my dear, how dreadful it would be to wake up, and find the vision gone! But pray don't tell Colonel Maurice that I said so, however much you may admire him, or however intimate you may become. I really and truly should not choose that he should know for an absolute certainty, that I doubt if I could make up my mind to live without him."

"Do not let your brother hear you say that," said Helen, while tears started to her eyes, "for he knows that I had made up *my* mind to live without him."

“ Very true, Helen ! I think it would be quite as well to keep him in ignorance of the inferiority of your capacity in the loving line. But even if he did know it, I don't think that it would signify much. He is so infatuated that I should not be at all surprised to hear him declare that he loved you all the better for your hard-heartedness. But let me learn a little more about this dinner that you are going to give. I enjoy the idea excessively ! Do not delay it, for if you do, I am quite sure it never will take place at all. As a bit of useful information on the subject, I may announce to you that Colonel Maurice will make his first appearance at the Oaks in the character of an acknowledged and accepted lover on Saturday. That, you know, is the day after to-morrow. Now he, you must know, has military business to attend to, as well as master Henry ; and therefore I strongly advise that you should fix Monday next as the day for our dining, will you ? ”

“ *Soit,* ” replied Helen, joyously, “ I am by no means more inclined for delay than you are. But what must we do about the

ceremony of a morning call upon the brave Colonel? My uncle is knee-deep in flannel for the purpose of giving a friendly welcome to the gout which he is expecting to visit him, for really and truly it has not come yet. But I should not like to propose a morning visit to him. And as to Henry, it is his invariable custom to gallop over to Rothewell the moment breakfast is over, and we may think ourselves highly favoured if we see him again before the next morning. How, then, shall we manage a call at the Oaks, which is exactly in the contrary direction?"

"I will undertake that the omission shall cause no offence," replied Agnes. "But tell me, Helen, shall you think it a matter of absolute necessity to invite Lady Lympton, and all the other fine folks at the Castle?"

"No," replied Helen, thoughtfully, "my happiness, dear Agnes, runs too freshly, and has too suddenly come upon me to be worn with all the calm composure which ought to accompany it. You have long been a sister to me in heart, and now we are about to be sisters indeed; and therefore I feel as if there were something strange and unnatural in

my never having seen the man you are about to marry! But were it not for this, dearest, the 'dinner party' we have been projecting would not take place just yet. Of course, dear Jane will come to me, but my first meeting with your father and mother must not be at a dinner party, Agnes! Perhaps they will have the kindness to call upon me to-morrow, and if so, I could with confidence ask them to join our truly family party on Monday."

And so it was definitively settled between the two happy girls, who, after a morning visit of four hours' duration, during which they had talked with unceasing energy and animation, parted at length with infinite regret, because they had still both of them so very much that they wanted to say to the other.

CHAPTER XV.

WHO is there that does not know and understand the sort of accelerated movement and energetic activity communicated to a family, when one of its members is about to enter into the honourable state of matrimony? It may easily be imagined, therefore, that the two weddings so unexpectedly settled, and so speedily to be accomplished at the Oaks, must have thrown the whole Harrington family into a very unusual state of excitement and commotion.

As to the young squire of Speedhurst, indeed, he just at this time passed so few of his hours in his father's house, that it would be hardly fair to say that he added greatly to the commotion which reigned there. In

the larger field of the Beauchamp Park establishment the awful notes of preparation were not so easily detected; yet still excitement reigned there, though it was, for the most part, pretty well kept out of sight.

That every hour and every occupation of its fair owner's life was completely and altogether changed is nevertheless quite true; for when she walked in her noble gardens, lately the object of so much peaceful occupation to her, she now, with George Harrington by her side, positively forgot that the gardens *were* her gardens, or that they had any possible interest for her, except, as did now and then happen, they seemed (probably because their beauty was the result of her taste) to have some interest for him.

In her own pretty morning-room, too, where heretofore she really had in good earnest devoted some hours in every day to whatever her critical old friend, Mr. Phelps, dignified by the name of study, the difference between past and present time was very remarkable; for there it was that all George Harrington's morning visits (sometimes

amounting to three in a day) were received ; and it must therefore be obvious to the commonest capacity that it must have been difficult, not to say impossible, for her to have persevered in her by-gone literary habits.

But in sober truth, and quite apart from all the *idlesse* usually attributed to the social intercourse of lovers, Helen Beauchamp and George Harrington really had a great deal to say to each other, and a great deal that it was very essential to their future happiness should not remain unsaid. The systematic avoidance by Helen's uncle and his family of all allusion to her unfortunate brother, had taught, nay almost enforced, such an habitual reserve on her part, respecting everything connected with him, that probably nothing less incompatible with such reserve than their approaching marriage would have led her to infringe it, even with him. But now, for the first time since she had left Mr. Bolton's house, rather more than eight years ago, did she indulge herself in pouring forth all her young and fond recollections of her earliest days.

And it was indeed an indulgence ; for the silence in which these recollections had been hoarded, had, in no degree, tended to obliterate, or even to lessen their effect ; and it was long since the beautiful and richly-endowed girl had enjoyed anything so nearly approaching perfect happiness, as she now did while watching the eager and pleased attention of her lover, as he listened to her animated description of the endearing character and noble qualities of this long-lost brother.

“ We must find him, my Helen ! ” exclaimed George Harrington, after having heard her painful narrative to the end : “ Yes, dearest, we must find him, even if the doing so should involve the necessity of our setting off for India in the same romantic style which that wonderful old woman seems to have done of whom your Mr. Bolton speaks with so much admiration, or I should rather say, with so much astonishment ; for does it not strike you, Helen, that Mr. Bolton in that earliest of his letters there, which you have just read to me—does it not strike you that he does not speak of her affectionately,

though he talks so much of her singular devotion, and unflinching resolution? It seems to me as if he did not quite approve her setting off with so much enthusiasm in pursuit of her lost nursling."

"You must be an acute critic, dear George," replied Helen, with rather a melancholy smile, "to discover this seeming want of sympathy with our dear nurse Lambert, for it is quite certain that among the multitude of recollections and impressions which have been silently hoarded in my memory respecting everything connected with my childish life, there is one which completely justifies the observation you have now made. I seem to remember as freshly as if it all had happened yesterday, that when I had that dreadful illness at the Parsonage, I very often felt unhappy when I recovered my senses and was getting well again, because I thought that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Bolton loved my dear Sarah Lambert as I thought she ought to be loved. I perfectly well remember, too, that when this dear Sarah Lambert suddenly went away from me, and with the intention, as it

proved, of never returning, I thought that it was because she had found out that they did not like her as well as she knew she deserved. Dear, dear Sarah Lambert!" continued poor Helen, as tears of which she did not seem conscious ran down her cheeks, "Oh! how I wish that you could see her at this moment, George, exactly as my memory paints her to me now! Trust me she was no ordinary woman, although she was a servant. I never saw anybody like her, and I don't remember to have seen any one so beautiful as I think she must have been when she was young. Her ways, too, were so lovingly gentle with us! But somehow or other I am quite sure that you are right, and that Mr. Bolton did not like her, nor his wife either."

"How long is it, Helen, since you have heard anything about her, or her bold enterprise?" said Harrington.

"I have never heard her named at all since I left Cornwall," replied Helen, "nor have I found her name once mentioned in any letter of Mr. Bolton's since the one on which you made your critical remark."

Nor were the other pair of affianced lovers less fortunate in obtaining the wished-for privilege of a long and uninterrupted *tête-à-tête*; but to follow them through it would be to involve ourselves in a greater length of personal narrative on the part of the gentleman than we have now space for—for there were abundance of moving accidents by flood and field, and most literally true was it that ‘she loved him for the dangers he had passed, and he loved her that she did pity them.’

And then, towards the conclusion of the precious interval between luncheon and dinner, during which they were pretty certain of being left in peace, Colonel Maurice ventured to ask a few questions respecting the estimable friends with whom, as he had been informed, they were doomed to dine on the coming Monday. “I wish it had happened otherwise, dearest Agnes!” said he; “for I must be off to town on Tuesday, and I should so much better have liked to pass our last evening quietly at home.”

“And were we going to any other house, I should say so, too,” replied Agnes; “but

you forget that it is not among strangers and aliens that we are going to take you. It is to the house of a very lovely girl, who is a wealthy heiress."

"But what care I how fair she be, or how rich either," returned Colonel Maurice, laughingly interrupting her. "I want to spend these last precious hours quietly with you, and not in the fine drawing-room of any beautiful young lady in the world, even if she were as rich as a Jew."

"If you had not interrupted me, impetuous soldier as you are, I was going on to state that Miss Beauchamp has other claims upon us than merely being a beauty, or heiress, or even a kind neighbour," said Agnes. "I have positively had no time to tell you any further particulars about your friend George than that he, too, like your own rash self, is speedily about to be married. I really don't believe that I have ever said a single word to you about the lady. But it is this identical Miss Beauchamp, with whom we are going to dine on Monday, who is to be his bride."

"No, fairest and best! Most certainly I

never heard her name mentioned by any of you ; but I am now quite willing to confess that you stand excused for taking me there ; and as fellow-feeling, you know, generally makes us kind and considerate, I dare say that your fair sister elect will forgive us if we do happen to think of a good many things which we may possibly wish to say to each other before we part."

"Oh! You need have no fears on that score," replied Agnes, with an eloquent nod of the head, which was not only well calculated to reassure him, but to make him comprehend also that her brother's lady-love might be likely to require a little indulgence on that particular point as well as herself.

"And truly, truly," she added, in an accent which gave evidence that she was much in earnest, "I feel as if I had not time, either here or there, to hear you tell me one quarter of what I want to know about a hundred and fifty interesting points of your eventful history."

"Trust to my loquacity when we shall become man and wife," replied Colonel Maurice, laughing, "The love of spinning

long yarns is by no means confined to the nautical branch of Her Majesty's service. Soldiers love the occupation quite as well as sailors can do, and woe betide the tender-hearted bride who has listened before marriage to all that an enamoured husband would most particularly wish her to listen to respecting himself; for in that case she will run a great risk of having to listen to a twice-told tale. What I want to talk to you about, Agnes, and what I am pretty sure I shall want to continue talking about as long as I stay here, is the inconvenient and very unnecessary importance which your dear good mother and your dear darling fussy sister, attach to these horribly-lengthy preparations for your wardrobe, which Jane very coolly told me last night could not possibly be completed in less than six weeks or two months. Now the real fact is, Agnes, that we must either postpone our marriage or postpone the wardrobe."

"Postpone our marriage," repeated Agnes, gravely shaking her head. "The talking of the wardrobe at all, Colonel Maurice, is a very sufficient proof that matters have not

been unreasonably postponed. Remember, dear friend, how short our acquaintance has been !”

“Has it been too short to enable us to love one another, Agnes?” said the lover reproachfully. “If it has, you are quite right in asking, let me rather say in *demanding*, some further delay. But —”

“But nonsense, Maurice!” returned Agnes, interrupting him with a very petulant but not very solemn frown. “There is no truth in you! For neither do you in your heart suspect me of any want of love, nor do you believe the least in the world that I wish to demand delay.”

“Then you don’t call two months *delay* to a man who was hoping to be married in a fortnight?” returned the gallant Colonel, with a good deal of vehemence.

“A fortnight!” exclaimed Agnes, almost with a shriek. “You must be mad, Colonel Maurice! Completely and entirely lunatic! Be quiet, if you can, I do entreat you! Now hear me, then,” she gravely continued, upon seeing him assume the posture of a man in a strait waistcoat, “do pray listen

to me like a reasonable being! If we ever think of marrying at all—there now! Would not any one suppose that I had said something uncivil about *never* marrying at all? Hear me, I say, Colonel Maurice! If we really are both of us seriously in earnest about this very solemn business, we must take care not to disgrace ourselves in the eyes of Miss Beauchamp by proposing to do anything that may appear particularly shocking to her—and to tell you the real truth at once, your friend George has made up his mind that the two weddings must take place on the same day.”

“Where is George?” exclaimed Maurice, starting up, “I have no doubt that I shall get him to listen to reason, though it is so impossible to make you do it. Where is he, Agnes?”

“I have little doubt, my good friend,” she replied, “that he is engaged very much in the same manner as you are. That is to say, that I think it highly probable that if you track him skilfully, you will find him about the same distance from Miss Beauchamp that you are from me, scolding her

heartily because she cannot contrive to make hours suffice to do the business of days."

My researches have furnished me with no record as to the exact manner in which this terrible interview ended ; but as I purpose in the following Chapter to give some account of what passed at Helen's dinner-party, at which none of the guests whom she expected failed to appear, it is obvious that the scene above described did not end in any positive quarrel between the parties.

CHAPTER XVI.

IT must not be considered on the part of my heroine as any indication of cold indifference concerning the destiny of her friend Agnes, if I confess that her own situation, so new to her as the affianced wife of George Harrington, prevented her dwelling with all the interest which she would otherwise have felt upon the idea of first seeing and judging the man, upon whom the future happiness of that dear friend so greatly depended.

She in some sort took it for granted, indeed, that he must be both excellent and amiable; because George had said so; and it was therefore without any overpowering feelings of anxiety or emotion of any kind that she passed from her toilet to the drawing-room, in order to receive the guests, some of whom

were already so dear to her, and to all and every of whom she was so soon to be allied by the very closest ties which human beings have been able to invent to bind loving hearts together. Her aunt and uncle Rixley were already in the drawing-room ; and the few minutes which elapsed before their punctual guests arrived were passed in the expression of a little natural curiosity on the part of both respecting the utter stranger to whom they were about to be introduced in the character of very near connexions.

“It does seem odd,” said Mr. Rixley, “that we should all three of us have to receive this celebrated Colonel as something nearer and dearer than merely an intimate friend, without our either of us having ever beheld him before !”

“Odd indeed !” said Mrs. Rixley, gravely shaking her head, “and I cannot but fear that our poor dear Helen must feel it to be very awkward for her, as mistress of the house, to receive a guest whom she has never beheld before, and then feel herself obliged to treat him as an intimate friend !”

“Why, now you mention it, aunt, I think there is something a little preposterous in the idea of welcoming a young man as a dearly beloved, of whom I know absolutely nothing, excepting that Agnes and George Harrington have both fallen in love with him! I certainly do wish that I had happened to see him before!”

“Of course you do, my dear child!” returned her aunt in a very penitent tone, “and it is all owing to me, and my unfortunate rheumatism, that you did not become acquainted with him, like all the other people in the neighbourhood. I cannot forgive myself for having let you give up everything in order to stay at home, and take care of me.”

“No, my dear wife, your conscience may be quite at rest on that score. The fault was her own. She chooses to pet us, and humour us, to such an excess at home, that it is next to impossible that old folks on the high road to three-score should ever like to go out; and having done this, I verily believe that she finds a great deal of amusement in staying at home, and watching our

cat-like ways of enjoying ourselves. Is not that the fact, Helen?"

"Whatever the cause, dear uncle, my stay-at-home system during the last few months has been the result of my own will, and if blame there be, it must rest on me, and on me alone."

"But why does not Henry make his appearance?" said Mr. Rixley. "At any rate he has not been shut up at home; and as he must have made acquaintance with this newly-imported hero, the awkwardness of his reception here would be much less if there was one of the family who could shake hands with him as an acquaintance. Do ring the bell, Helen, and let us send for him."

Helen rang the bell very obediently; but said as she did so, "He will not help us much, uncle! He is as much a stranger to Colonel Maurice as we are."

"I beg your pardon, Helen dear," returned her uncle, "I can testify to having heard Henry rave for an hour by Shrewsbury clock concerning the excellences of this wonderful hero."

"And so have I, too, uncle Rixley," replied

Helen, "yet, nevertheless, he cannot help us by welcoming him as an acquaintance, for he has never been introduced to him. He only saw him one evening, which was at Mrs. Wilcox's famous ball. It was at breakfast the following morning that he amused us by the tirade you speak of; and two days afterwards he was off to London again, and so missed the dinner-party at Sir William Knighton's, to which he was invited, and where he would doubtless have been introduced to the stranger, like the rest of the neighbourhood."

"Quite true!" said Mrs. Rixley. "Henry is exactly in the same predicament as we are; nevertheless it is quite right to send for him. It is better that we should all be introduced at once, and then, you know, George Harrington can do it in the words of the critic: 'And these are all my poor relations!' while by a circular wave of the hand he can indicate us all."

Henry Rixley entered as she spoke, and being made acquainted with the subject under discussion, he confirmed the statement of his cousin, and his mother—declaring that no introduction had taken place; but that he

already felt that he knew him better than half the people with whom he had gone through that ceremony.

“His handsome and expressive countenance, his noble figure, his general aspect and bearing, at once riveted my attention upon him,” said he, eagerly. “But it is a positive fact, mother,” he added, “that though I am not in general celebrated for any very superabundant degree of modest shyness, it was that, and nothing else, which prevented my being introduced. You know I went with the Lymptons, who are always late, and he was talking so earnestly to the people about him, that really, and truly, I had not sufficient audacity to be led up, as if on purpose to interrupt him. But decidedly I never saw such a man in my life. His height is ——”

At this moment the two carriages which conveyed the party from the Oaks drove up to the door; the eloquence of Henry came to a sudden stop; and the group, who were all standing round Mrs. Rixley’s chair near the fire, remained both stationary and silent.

It was, however, but a very short interval

which intervened between the arrival of the carriages and the opening of the drawing-room door ; and the party that entered were so animated, and so joyous, that a minute or two was devoted to the loving embraces of the ladies, before the introduction of the stranger could take place.

He stood meanwhile with as much gentlemanlike avoidance of staring at the individual whom he was most anxious to see, as he could contrive to do without positively shutting his eyes. But, nevertheless, he certainly did feel a good deal of curiosity about the young and beautiful heiress who was about to bestow herself upon George Harrington.

Many circumstances had contributed to excite and increase this curiosity, the most effectual of all, perhaps, being the fact that she was the only young lady in the neighbourhood whom he had not seen. Another circumstance, also, had doubtless contributed not a little to the frequency with which her name and distinguished position in the county were made to attract his notice—and this was the peculiarly conspicuous situation of her house and grounds.

It was difficult to walk or to ride in any direction throughout the whole neighbourhood without coming, in some way or other, within sight of Beauchamp Park, its noble mansion, and its magnificent woods; and the having been told whenever this happened to him, and however varied the different points of view might be, that all he saw and admired belonged, not to the odious Lord Marquis of Carabas, but to a beautiful young lady, owning the sonorous name which appertained to her splendid domain, could scarcely fail to excite a certain degree of curiosity concerning the appearance and much vaunted beauty of this highly-favoured individual.

It is certain, indeed, that he was far too agreeably and too completely occupied while at Speedhurst Abbey, by the fascinating employment of falling in love, to retain any very distinct recollection of all he had heard about the beautiful lady of Beauchamp Park; but his interest upon the subject was effectually roused again by learning, upon his first visit as an accepted lover at the Oaks, that his future brother-in-law was the happy

and envied individual upon whom she had determined to bestow her heart, hand, and acres.

It was, therefore, certainly not without some effort, and a determination to behave particularly well, that he respectfully bowed to the tall young lady to whom he was immediately presented, and who was, of course, named to him as the Miss Beauchamp, of whom he had heard so much, and then followed his friend George to the chair of her aunt, without pausing an instant to look at the beautiful face he had heard so enthusiastically extolled.

Mrs. Rixley was, at that time, too near being a cripple for her to rise from her chair to receive the party, but she very cordially extended her hand to him, even before he was named, as an evidence that, though unknown, he was not held to be a stranger.

The promptitude with which this friendly welcome was offered caused their hands to meet before George Harrington had pronounced her name ; but, when he did so, the brave Colonel Maurice started as vehemently as if he had been a nervous young lady, who

was listening to something that particularly affected her sensibility, and abruptly dropping the hand which the good lady had so kindly extended, he stood looking at her with an air which had much less of gentleman-like ease in it, than of eager, but embarrassed curiosity.

She looked up into his face for a moment in a manner which certainly seemed to indicate a doubt as to his being in a perfectly sane state of mind. And perhaps she was right, for the abruptness with which he turned away from her and approached the mistress of the house, to whom he had just paid his compliments with so much observant decorum, fully justified the persuasion, which immediately took possession of her, that there certainly was 'something odd about him.'

But it required little time to perceive that this oddness was either infectious, or that, at any rate, it was shared by one who had never heretofore shown any symptoms of eccentricity, for on fixing her eyes upon her niece, as Colonel Maurice turned round and approached her, Mrs. Rixley, with equal

astonishment and alarm, perceived her to be as pale as death, and with her eyes fixed upon the gallant Colonel, with an expression which it was not very easy to interpret, but which certainly did not express either anger or aversion.

But thought, with all its rapidity, had barely time to suggest the question, 'What can all this mean?' before Colonel Maurice had sprung forward, and, throwing his arms round her, held her in a close embrace, bending his lofty head upon her shoulder, and vehemently exclaiming, "My Helen! my Helen! It is my own Helen!"

That the Rixley family were all three of them greatly startled and astonished is very certain, for one from the dead could scarcely have come among them more unexpectedly than did this long-lost wanderer; yet, nevertheless, it took no great time, and no great exertion of memory, before the truth suggested itself to them all; and they perceived, without a shadow of doubt as to the fact, that the magnificent-looking young man, whom they saw before them supporting their precious Helen in his arms, was no other

than the natural son of her father, upon whose name and existence an act of oblivion had been so systematically passed by the whole of the Rixley family, that the possibility of his being still among the living had for years ceased to suggest itself to their minds.

But the case was different with respect to George Harrington; for though but a few hours, comparatively speaking, had elapsed since Helen herself had narrated to him all the circumstances of her early history, and had, moreover, succeeded in awakening a warm and affectionate feeling of interest in his heart for the poor forlorn boy, whom she had only designated as her 'unhappy William,' no thought for an instant suggested itself that the highly distinguished man whom he had only seen in pride of place, and the honoured and admired of all observers could be one and the same. Yet so it was; while so unconscious was this umwhile 'poor William' that there could exist any doubt about his being Helen's brother, that, after again and again kissing her, and perceiving at last that the close

embrace in which she had held him seemed to relax, and that in the next moment she was sinking from his arms, he caught her up as unceremoniously as if she had been an infant, and carried her to the further extremity of the room, where stood a large sofa against the wall, permitting him to lay her down at full length, which was evidently the best thing to do; for she had fainted, and was completely insensible.

All this had passed almost in less time than it can be told; yet, nevertheless, the unfortunate George Harrington's brain found leisure to fabricate a romance, which very nearly drove him mad. In fact, at that moment he utterly forgot all Helen's explanations respecting the fanciful obstacles which had so long kept them asunder, and only remembered the manner in which, for such a length of time, she had clearly given him to understand that she would not, or could not, receive his addresses.

Here, then, was the explanation! The man whom she had so evidently loved had been waited for till she had ceased to hope for his return! And then she had accepted

HIM! Colonel Maurice's exclamation, '*Helen! my own Helen!*' rung in his ears; and it was with gestures very like those of a maniac that, after gazing for a moment on the spectacle which maddened him, he prepared to rush out of the room. The feelings of his family were decidedly in very perfect sympathy with his own. Not one of them had ever heard it hinted that the heiress of Beauchamp Park had any brother belonging to her. What inference, therefore, could they draw from the scene they witnessed, save that a long-lost lover had been restored to her in the person of Colonel Maurice? Both Jane Harrington and her mother were so deeply shocked and outraged by the sight of the endearments so audaciously displayed before them, that they indignantly turned away, each taking possession of a distant window; while the unhappy Agnes, quite as miserable, though not so vehemently distracted, as her brother, supported herself as she could by placing her trembling hands upon the back of a chair, and endeavouring to soothe her indignant father, who stood beside her, muttering something that did not

sound at all like a blessing, either upon her quondam lover or her quondam friend, or it might be upon both!

Meanwhile there was one, and but one, individual present who understood what had happened. The only individual capable of interpreting the whole scene was the reverend Mr. Rixley; and, to do him justice, he felt, as he contemplated the various systems of unhappiness before him, that he had been greatly to blame, for that he had in a very great measure been the cause of it all! Nor was he altogether wrong in this severe self-judgment.

He perfectly remembered the repugnance, for it was more than indifference, with which he had turned from Mr. Bolton when he had endeavoured to excite some degree of interest in his heart for the friendless boy whom his unprincipled brother had left in a state of such utter destitution; he remembered keenly, too, at that moment all the noble qualities, and brilliant talents for which the good clergyman of Crumpton had given him credit, and of which his subsequent success in his profession had now given ample and unan-

swerable proof. Neither could he forget in that moment of disagreeable self-examination how many a time and oft poor Helen had endeavoured, during the first few months of her residence with him, to awaken some feeling of kindness towards her unhappy brother, and he now felt, what he had never felt before, that he had been wrong, very wrong in hating the son for the sins of his father.

Of the facts which would have made it impossible for any feelings, however kind on his part, to have assisted the desolate boy, he knew nothing. Had he been better informed on that point, he might have felt less dissatisfied with himself at the present moment. As it was, however, the very obvious truth suggested itself that the best way to atone for his past blunders would be by correcting the effect of them; and this he immediately began to do in the most judicious and gentlemanlike manner possible.

He had been standing on the hearth-rug at the moment when the sound of his name had produced so startling an effect on the nerves of the distinguished officer, who, after having

been *fêted* throughout the whole neighbourhood, had now honoured Beauchamp Park with a visit for the first time. And it was from this same post on the hearth-rug that he had looked on upon the scene that has been described.

From the moment that the ‘Helen! my own Helen!’ had reached the ears of Mr. Rixley, he comprehended the whole of the mystery, which was doubtless less a mystery than it would have been, if he had not remembered the many vehement encomiums so vainly uttered by poor Helen upon her lost brother, to all of which he had thought it discreetest and best to turn a deaf ear.

Perceiving that George Harrington, upon hearing these words, was about to leave the room in a very demented state, Mr. Rixley stepped hastily towards him, and laying a gentle hand upon his arm, said, in the most quiet manner possible, “I must request you, my good friend, not to leave the room till you have listened to me for half a moment! You must excuse our dear Helen for suffering herself to be overcome by this most joyful surprise. Colonel Maurice is

my nephew, Mr. Harrington, and the brother of Helen."

Then, lowering his voice, he added in a whisper, "her natural brother, Mr. Harrington, and it is probable I think that he has preferred taking another name, perhaps that of his mother, to retaining that of Rixley; for I am sorry to say that my brother did not leave any provision for him by his will; and, as we have entirely lost sight of him since his father's death, and now find him again, so highly placed in the profession upon which he must have entered entirely without patronage or assistance of any kind, we have every reason to suppose that his conduct has been all that his best friends could have wished it to be."

It was evidently with some difficulty that the impetuous George Harrington permitted himself to be detained by the gentle voice and gentle hand of Helen's uncle till he had finished speaking; for, before one-half of his explanation was uttered, the penitent young man was ready to accuse himself of more base ingratitude and vile suspicion than was ever before exhibited by mortal man.

He restrained himself, however, with exemplary respect and deference, till Mr. Rixley paused, and removed his hand, and then bounded, in defiance of chairs and tables, to the sofa on which Helen was still lying, with her eyes closed, but with cheeks and lips less deadly pale than they had been.

Her brother was kneeling beside her, with her hand locked in his, and his eyes fixed upon her, with an expression which seemed very eloquently to tell how dearly and unchangeably he had loved her since they parted last.

Agnes Harrington, almost as penitent as her brother, was already stationed at the sofa, scarcely venturing to look at Colonel Maurice—for had she not dared to believe him capable of all sorts of sin and iniquity for the space of several seconds?

A word in good season is always good, and rarely have more seasonable words been uttered than those which Mr. Rixley had spoken, and continued to speak. The cloud of suspicion and distrust which had seemed to lower around Colonel Maurice suddenly

assumed the very brightest hues, and his being welcomed to Beauchamp Park as the beloved and honoured brother of its mistress, appeared likely to strengthen his pretensions to the hand of Agnes much more than the blot on his escutcheon had ever tended to weaken it. Such being the feeling produced by the scene I have described, it is scarcely necessary to add, that Helen opened her fair eyes upon a scene of much more perfect happiness than she had ever, in her most sanguine moments, dared to hope for; and, indeed, it might be difficult to find anywhere a party of more well-pleased, hopeful, and warmly-attached human beings, than those which sat down to dinner at Beauchamp Park on that eventful day.

CHAPTER XVII.

THERE are some sorts of contentment which seem to soothe people to sleep, and there are other sorts which are calculated to keep them waking. The recovery of her long-lost brother was not an event which produced anything like a tendency to sleep in Helen. A sense of happiness seemed to accompany every throb of her heart and every thought of her head; but neither the one nor the other suggested any idea of dreaming inactivity. On the contrary, she felt that her situation was greatly changed by the events of this important day, and that her first duty was to meditate upon this change in all its bearings, and then to decide according to her own best and most deliberate judgment upon what she ought to do in the

perfectly new situation in which she found herself placed.

Perhaps the first thought which presented itself to her mind, as she sat herself before the fire in the midnight solitude of her dressing-room, was, that whatever she did must be done by her own judgment, and be dictated by her own heart, for that it was quite impossible that any one—no, not even George Harrington himself—could share, or even understand, her life-long feelings for her brother.

And the thought which followed this came in the shape of a feeling of thankfulness that William had been restored to her before she had become the wife of any man. It is very possible that her lover might have been pained, had he been cognizant of this thought; but, if so, he would have been wrong, and blundering. The love which Helen bore to him, and which she had pledged to him with equal truth and devotion, was in no way affected by the thoughts which caused her to rejoice that she was not yet his wife.

She knew, with a feeling of the most un-

doubting certainty, that had the ceremony passed which would make his will her law, that will would have taken the colour of hers, in all that she might wish to do for her brother; but *then* he would have complied with her wishes, *because* she was his wife, and might have felt that no alternative was left him.

But now the case would be different. Perhaps she felt a little conscious, too, that her own idea of the claims which her brother had upon her might not precisely assimilate with the ideas of others, a discrepancy of judgment which she very fairly accounted for, by remembering that nobody but herself could know what William had been to her during the first fourteen years of her checquered life. Sarah Lambert, indeed, if she still existed, might remember how the boy would, day after day, give up his favourite pastimes, to cheer and comfort her. But not even Sarah Lambert could tell how much his mind had been the parent of her own, or how deep was the influence which his generous and noble spirit, and his bold clear intellect had left upon her.

“ I should have been a drone, a very clod, an animal with nothing of humanity but its weakness, had it not been for him ! Shall I forget the hours, ay, the years during which he made our dreary school-room at the Warren House the dearest spot on earth to me ? ” Such was the sort of soliloquy in which Helen Beauchamp indulged, during more than one long hour of that sleepless night, and most assuredly she was right in the conclusion to which she came, namely, that as nobody in the whole wide world, except herself, knew how much she owed to him, or how much she loved him, so nobody but herself could know with how good a right her heart claimed the privilege of dictating the manner in which he ought to be treated by her.

If she were wrong in thus thinking, she erred without guilt, for most conscientiously did she believe that she was right. The result of all this meditation may be gathered from the following letter, which she wrote the night after she had recovered her brother, before she laid her head upon her pillow.

“ MY DEAREST GEORGE HARRINGTON,

“ I need not tell you that I am happy, for you know it already. But what I would tell you, if I had the power, is the nature and species of the happiness which has been to-day added to the large stock I had before, by finding again the precious treasure I had lost. But I must have patience, my dearest friend. There is but one way by which you can be made to understand the value of this treasure, and that is by learning to know William as well as I know him. Then, and then only, will you be able to comprehend what it is you have bestowed upon me, by bringing us together, and what it is you have bestowed upon Agnes, instead of choosing her a husband by the assistance of the ‘ peerage,’ or the ‘ landed gentry.’

“ But ‘ for a’ that, and for a’ that,’ George Harrington, there is still a *discovery scene* to be opened to you, which most women as old as I am might consider as a tremendous touchstone to be applied to your affection; but I tell you very frankly, that I have not the very slightest shadow of alarm or trepi-

dation in applying it to you. And yet I am quite aware that I might not perhaps feel quite so indifferent about making the disclosure if either my dear good uncle or your dear good father were to be the recipient of it.

“ Not that I think that they would either of them eventually oppose me, but just at first they might neither of them receive it exactly as I should wish them to do.

“ It will not be feeling like a good-for-nothing Pharisee, will it George, if I always go on thinking, as I do at present, that *you* are not as other men are? I really do think so, however, whether it be pharisaical or not, and it is for that reason that I now venture so fearlessly to remind you, that I am no longer the wealthy heiress that I appeared to be when you offered me your hand.

“ I refused your hand then, George, because I thought that if you knew the whole truth about me, and my singular position, your pride might receive a wound too deep for even love to heal. You know how this fancy was cured, and since I recovered from

its baleful influence, my happiness has acquired a sort of healthy robustness which it will require something stronger than fancy to destroy.

“ It is, therefore, without any mixture of doubt or fear as to the result that I now announce to you a fact which I certainly believe would greatly shock many men, though I am very comfortably persuaded that it will not very greatly shock you. This redoubtable fact is, that the property which you believed me to possess has become only half as much as it has been represented to you, for it will have to be divided equally between my brother and myself.

“ For reasons which it is not necessary that I should dwell upon, the whole of what may be strictly called the *Beauchamp property* will form my portion ; but a large sum in the funds, together with the rents of three large out-standing farms, which have been purchased long since the *Beauchamp property*, and the *Beauchamp name* have been united, will produce an income fully equal to that which I retain for myself.

“ This epistle, dear George, would, I be-

lieve, be considered by most gentlemen as but a queer sort of love letter ;. nevertheless, I feel that nothing but my very perfect love for you could have inspired the feeling of happiness with which it is written, or the feeling of approval and happiness, too, with which I know it will be received. So, after all, you see, it is a very perfect love-letter and nothing else.

“ And now, dearest, ‘ good night,’ or rather ‘ good morning,’ for the turret-clock has long ago rung, in twelve sonorous strokes, the knell of yesterday. I dare say it will not be many hours before we meet again, and then we will talk over in proper business-like style the subject upon which I have opened in this midnight scrawl. Though I go to bed late, I think I shall get up early enough to despatch this in time to reach you before your lazily late breakfast.

“ Yours now and ever,

“ HELEN BEAUCHAMP.

“ P. S.—Tell William to leave Agnes, and come to me as soon as he can get permission to do so.”

Having finished and sealed this letter, the happy Helen crept noiselessly to bed, and fell into a most delicious sleep almost as soon as she laid her head upon the pillow. But habit was stronger than fatigue, and she waked early as usual, and, accordingly, as she had predicted, her letter reached George Harrington before the family had assembled for breakfast.

If the spirit of Helen could have been put '*en rapport*,' as the mesmerists call it, with the spirit of George Harrington, while he read this letter, she would have enjoyed another moment of that very perfect species of happiness which arises from feeling that we are loved even as we love, and understood even as we would be understood. The postscript produced its expected effect, and Colonel Maurice arrived at Beauchamp quite as soon as his sister expected him, which is equivalent to saying that he arrived as speedily as George Harrington's fleetest horse could bring him. The feelings produced in the hearts of these long-severed children of the Warren House by this meeting needs no description. A reunion under

almost any circumstances would have gratified what had certainly been the first wish of both their hearts for many long years; but under the circumstances in which they found each other now it required, as Helen said, a strong intellectual effort to enable them to believe that it was not a dream, but a reality. A few laughing moments were actually spent in what they both called improving their personal acquaintance, and when this was accomplished so effectually as to enable them both to declare that they should know each other again let them meet where they would, the eagerly anticipated delight of listening to each other's adventures began.

“You shall begin, Helen,” said Colonel Maurice, placing himself, not on the seat she offered him beside herself upon the sofa, but on a chair on the opposite side of the little table which stood before it. And he was right in so placing himself, for her countenance was indeed one of those in which feeling—

‘ So divinely wrought,
That one might almost say her body thought.’

“Where must I begin, William?” said she.

“At the very beginning, Helen,” he replied, and that is the moment when I wished you good night, after that dreadful scene with my father in the parlour!”

Something like a shudder passed over her at the mention of that scene, but she raised her eyes to the dear face opposite to her, and inwardly breathed the words, “Thank God!”

“Yes, I must begin there,” said she, with a happy smile, though tears were in her eyes at the same moment. “You wished me good night, William, and poor Sarah Lambert told me I must go to-bed, and to-bed I went, and, child-like, went to sleep too; though, even then, my heart, as I well remember, was very, very sad. But, oh! the dreadful waking, William! Shall I ever forget it!”

“Because you heard I was gone, dearest?” said Colonel Maurice, tenderly.

“No, no, that came after!” and again poor Helen shuddered, in spite of all her happiness. “No! I was waked by Sarah Lambert, and, when I opened my eyes, I saw her hanging over me with a face as

white as the sheet. I well remember that my first words were, 'What's the matter, Sarah?' and that her answer, spoken very gently and soothingly, was, 'Compose yourself, my dear! I have strange news to tell you—your father is dead!' I scarcely know what I did, or what I said. I suppose I uttered some cry, for I know that she told me to be reasonable, for that the house was in confusion, and that I must not make myself troublesome. And then I said, '*Where is William?*' Poor Sarah! I well remember that she did not answer me immediately; for she knew what her answer would be to me! But, on my saying again, '*Where is William?*' she replied, 'He is gone away, Helen. He is gone somewhere—I know not where;' but then she added, 'Of course, my dear, he won't stay long. Get up, Helen, get up! Perhaps he will come back, and want his breakfast.' But she did not speak as if you would come back; and when I went down-stairs and saw Rebecca Watkins, she told me that you had gone away in the night, and got out of your window."

“Gracious Heaven!” exclaimed Colonel Maurice, greatly agitated, “what a frightful coincidence!—What did my father die of, Helen?”

“They say he died from poison,” she replied.

“And I let myself down from my window by the help of my sheets during the night he died! Everybody must have thought I had poisoned him! Did not people say so, Helen?”

“My dearest William, I hardly know what they said,” she replied, her lips trembling, and her complexion varying from pale to red, “for I became very, very ill, and for a time I lost my senses.”

“And she never told me of this! She never told me a single word of it!”

“Who are you speaking of?” said Helen; “who is it could have told you of it?”

“Sarah Lambert,” he replied, with strong agitation.

“Did she find you, then? Did Sarah Lambert really find you, William?”

“To be sure she did, Helen; but her conduct seems to have been most mysterious!

You know, then, that she left England to seek me?"

"Yes, and that is all I know," returned his sister. Mr. Bolton wrote, to tell me that our old servant had left England, declaring to everybody she knew in Falmouth that she would never return till she had found you."

"And she did find me, Helen," said Colonel Maurice, "notwithstanding the immense distance to which I had wandered, and the further impediment of my having dropped the name, to which, as I had been so cruelly told, *I had no right*, and taken that of my unfortunate mother. But she found me, a poor soldier, just launched on my career in India, and from that time she never left me till she died!"

"She is dead, then!" cried Helen, mournfully. "Our poor Sarah Lambert is dead! I thought it must be so; I thought that she surely would have let me hear something of her, had she been alive."

"No, Helen," replied her brother. "Her death is of very recent date; it only happened a week or two before I quitted

the country. She seemed to have a strong and a strange repugnance to the idea of recalling herself to the memory of any one whom she had known while in the service of my father. It seems hardly consistent with the tone of her character in other respects, but I think it must have been some species of pride which dictated this reserve, for her feelings towards you were evidently as tenderly affectionate as ever. But she had come into the possession of some property before she joined me, and was in perfectly independent circumstances, and I presume that this must have been her reason for not wishing to preserve any intercourse with those who knew her only as a servant."

"If this be so," replied Helen, "her character must have been one of very extraordinary inconsistency, for to the best of my recollection she was the most perfectly indifferent to everything approaching pride of place, as far as it concerned herself at least, of any one I ever knew. I am quite sure that she would not have cared a farthing whether she had been looked upon as the confidential housekeeper, which she certainly

was, or as one of the hardest-working of kitchen-maids."

"I should have thought so, too," returned her brother, "but nevertheless it would be very difficult to find any other theory by which her conduct to you can be accounted for. She seemed to remember the kindness of dear good Mr. Bolton, however, very gratefully, and but a few days before she died, she employed herself for an hour or two in writing to him."

"Did you forward that letter to him immediately, William?" said Helen. "I do not think he could have received it," she added, "for I am almost sure that if he had got such a letter he would have told me of it."

"He never has had it as yet, Helen," returned Colonel Maurice, "for poor Sarah's dying request was, that I should deliver it to him myself. And I would have done so long ere this, notwithstanding the many things which have detained me in London, had it not been for an accident which has occasioned some months' delay in the arrival of the package containing the writing-desk

which contained it. In fact, my baggage got mixed with that of another officer when we changed our sailing-vessel for a steamer at the Cape, and as he did not come on with us, my very important packing-case was left behind. However, I got a letter from him the other day explaining the blunder, and telling me that he was about to forward the case immediately, consigned to my own agent in London, and you may depend upon it, dearest, that I will not unnecessarily delay the delivery of it, though in all probability it contains nothing more important than her grateful thanks for all the kindness he had shown her."

"I suppose so, poor thing! And indeed I well remember that he and his sweet wife also, were very, very kind to us both!" replied Helen. "But now, dearest William, tell me I entreat you, how it happens that after having heard all that Sarah Lambert must have been able to tell you, you could have been at any loss where to seek for me?"

"You are now touching upon a theme, Helen," he replied, "which is indeed most

strangely full of mystery. For some reason or other which I could never get her to explain, she never ceased repeating to me that if I knew my own interest I should avoid returning to England for some time to come. She more than hinted that I had enemies, and at length named your uncle Rixley as one very likely to treat me with the same indignity that my father had done. I was, from many fortunate accidents, rising rapidly in my profession; and I imagine that it was *this* she alluded to when she repeated, as she did almost every time that I had leisure to converse with her, ‘*The time will come, dear William, when you may venture to return and be afraid of no man. Only wait patiently for a year or two; it will not be very long, I think.*’

“Once I understood her to say that if she were dead, nobody would be able to annoy me afterwards, but when I pressed her to explain what she meant by this, she prevaricated strangely, and ended by saying that she did not mean it.”

“But why did you never write to me,

William," said Helen, in a tone of very gentle reproach. "I can easily imagine," she added, "that it would have been impossible for you to come to Europe without cutting short the brilliant career on which you had entered. But surely you might have written to me!"

"Surely I could have done no such thing, dear Helen," returned her brother, "for she positively assured me that she knew not to what part of the world your uncle had carried you; but she constantly added that she was sure all this mystery would be over in a year or two. 'Wait till you are still higher in rank, dearest William!' was her invariable reply to all my questionings about you; and I will confess to you, my Helen, that I did in some degree share in this feeling myself. It would have been otherwise had I not known you were in the hands, as she called it, of my father's brother, and as the higher rank she prophesied did certainly seem to be coming upon me very rapidly, I could not help thinking that she knew what she was talking about. Moreover, her advice was the more likely to be listened to, from the fact

that I could not have run counter to it if I would, for at no moment up to the time of her death, could I ever have quitted my regiment without such a dereliction of duty as must have rendered my doing it impossible under any circumstances ; and as to writing, it was of course vain to think of it, since I knew not where to address my letters."

Helen remained silent, and her expressive features shewed that she was in deep meditation. "What are you thinking of, dear one?" said her brother, taking her hand. "Are you still reproaching me in your heart for not coming back to look for you?"

"No, dearest William, no," she replied, endeavouring to return his smile. "I was only meditating on the singular manner in which poor Sarah Lambert seems to have conducted herself."

"I marvel not that it puzzles you, my Helen," he returned, "for it has never ceased to be a puzzle to me. But I must leave you now, sweet sister, or my termagant wife that is to be will accuse me of abusing her confidence. You are all to dine with us to-day,

are you not? And then I must absolutely and positively tear myself away from you both and hasten to London or else, instead of being made a K.C.B., I shall probably be sent to the right about."

He shook hands with her as he spoke, then gave a parting kiss, and left the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HELEN saw him go without making any effort to detain him, though she had still much to say which it was important for him to hear; for it was her purpose to tell of the division which she intended to make of her property, which she was quite aware that it was necessary he should know directly; on account of the difference it would doubtless make in the settlements upon which the lawyers were already employed, and she was aware also, that as he had delayed his departure for a day, for the sake of being with her for a few tranquil hours before they were again parted, she ought to have put it in his power to have written to his lawyer by that day's post.

But poor Helen felt that her troubles were not over yet, and at that moment she wished for nothing so ardently as to be left alone. Though she had spoken of the conduct of Mrs. Lambert as mysterious, and though she had felt it to be so as she listened to him, a dark memory of the past recurred to her. The dreadful scene which she had witnessed in Mr. Bolton's hall (the immediate effect of which had been to throw her into a phrensy fever) had never been forgotten, though it long rested upon her mind more like the recollection of a painful dream than of a reality; but as Colonel Maurice described to her the strange perseverance with which Sarah Lambert had reiterated her advice to him *not* to return to England till many years had passed, it occurred to her as highly probable that she also had remembered it, and that her advice was dictated by the fear that should it be discovered, notwithstanding his change of name, that he was again in England, and, as would probably happen, paying a grateful visit to Mr. Bolton, the Crumpton sailors, with Commodore Jack at their head, would be very likely to receive

him in a manner which, to say the least of it, would be exceedingly disagreeable.

What Sarah Lambert could have meant by stating that a few years would suffice to remove the obstacles to his return, it was difficult to say ; but it was not on this point that Helen was pondering when her brother took his hasty departure from her dressing-room ; she was, in truth, weighing the pros and cons respecting the wisdom of communicating to him the suspicions to which his departure had given rise.

It is probable that she would have decided against repeating what it must have given him so much pain to hear ; but he had vanished before she had reached a final decision on the subject ; and no sooner was he gone than these vague memories of the past vanished before the positive importance of the present, and she immediately sat down to her writing desk, and indited a letter to him, in which, without preface or circumlocution of any sort, she briefly stated to him the fact, that property which she believed to be of the value of about ninety thousand pounds, was about to be made over to him, and

stating also, with great sincerity, that her reason for sending after him in such haste was, that if he wished to make any alteration in his marriage-settlements he might have the advantage of that day's post to announce it to his lawyer. She added, also, that George Harrington had already been made perfectly aware of this division of their father's property, and that he highly approved it.

On this point, indeed, George Harrington did not leave it to the man who was to be doubly his brother-in-law to enter upon the subject with him; but even before Helen's letter had reached the hands of her brother, the Squire of Speedhurst, having way-laid him as he returned from Beauchamp Park, had stated to him in the simplest and most business-like manner possible, that such and such farms, in the neighbourhood, and such and such sums in the funds, were his. In short, the manner in which this announcement was made, both by his sister and his sister's affianced husband, was such as to render the whole transaction as soothing to his heart as it was advantageous to his fortune.

The hours of that busy, happy day soon made themselves wings, and flew away; and the following morning left the two affianced brides at full leisure to console themselves as well as they might for the absence of their departed lovers, for they agreed to pass the whole morning *tête-à-tête* together, because both Jane and Henry were so exceedingly tiresome and disagreeable.

And what with this soothing *tête-à-tête* for the present, and the prospect of all sorts of happiness for the future, tempers of worse texture than could be found either at Beauchamp Park or the Oaks, might have contrived to endure without any very grave grumbling, the tediousness even of lawyers and coachmakers, had these been all the evils which threatened to intervene between them and their bright future.

But such smooth sailing as this was not long destined to be their lot; and the fearful disappointment which awaited them was made the more bitter by its coming at the very moment when the arrival of those so eagerly and so gaily looked for was expected.

It had been settled that Beauchamp Park should be the scene of the happy reunion. Colonel Maurice was, of course, to take up his residence there till the day fixed for the double wedding, after which it was arranged that George Harrington and his bride should go at once to Speedhurst Abbey, but that Colonel Maurice and his Agnes should make a short tour upon the Continent, while a very charming mansion, which they had been lucky enough to find wanting a tenant, near Speedhurst, was being made ready for them, under the superintending care of their neighbours at the Abbey.

The train which was to bring the two gentlemen to the station, which was at no very great distance from the residence of either, was to arrive about an hour before the usual dinner-hour at Beauchamp Park, and under the superintending care of his sister Jane, who, as she said, was more in possession of her senses than Agnes could be expected to be, all things necessary for the toilet of George Harrington were laid ready for him there.

Colonel Maurice, as poor Helen delighted

to say, was 'coming home,' and never did any home look more smilingly ready than the apartment prepared for his use.

Helen herself, as may be easily imagined, was lingering at no great distance from the hall door, that she might be in readiness to meet them; nay, as she had on both her bonnet and shawl, it might be that she had some thoughts of taking a little stroll with her cousin Henry towards the Lodge.

But for some reason or other the train was upon this occasion rather before than after its time, and she was still waiting for Henry at the door of the billiard-room, when she heard steps in the hall, and rushing eagerly forward, she found herself in the next moment almost in the arms of George Harrington, who hurried forward upon seeing her in a state of very perceptible agitation, and in answer to her quick inquiry, "Where is William?" replied in a voice which he vainly attempted to render tranquil, "He is well, Helen! But I am alone. I could not bring him with me. Business has prevented his coming." "Business!" echoed Helen, with cheeks and lips as white as marble. "What

business could prevent his coming now?"
"It was impossible he could come, my dearest love!" replied the greatly agitated young man. Take me to your dressing-room, Helen! I have much, very much, to tell you."

Nevertheless George Harrington could not tell all which I wish my reader to know, for many circumstances respecting the events which he wished to narrate were as yet unknown to him. The narrative of them must be given more fully than Helen got it from him at that moment.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE circumstances which followed upon Colonel Maurice's arrival in London shall be given as briefly as possible.

His first call, as in duty bound, was made at the Horse Guards, and though it was not his first visit there since his return to Europe, he had the gratification of being received in a manner highly flattering to all his military feelings and military hopes.

Of course, he had a lawyer to visit, the construction of a travelling-carriage to superintend, no trifling amount of shopping commissions to attend to; and some few friendly calls to old acquaintance known in India, to pay.

But he managed to do it all; for he car-

ried an active mind, and a willing spirit to the work, and before three weeks had passed, both he and his friend Harrington had the gratification of wishing each other joy upon the probability of their being able to leave town before the end of the following week.

Colonel Maurice had accepted an invitation to dine with an old Indian acquaintance upon one of the five remaining days. The party, which consisted wholly of gentlemen, was a large one, and the first among the guests upon whom he happened to cast his eyes as he looked round the drawing-room, was the Captain Hackwood who had some months before been his fellow guest at Knighton Hall.

They were men so utterly dissimilar, both in intellect and character, that it was nearly impossible they should ever have become really intimate, even as companions, and the circumstance of their having passed a week or two together in the same house had tended to make them enemies rather than friends. On the part of Colonel Maurice, however, there was a stronger feeling of con-

tempt than of dislike, and had he never again heard Hackwood's name mentioned, it is possible that he might have lived long, and died late, without ever recalling the accident of having met him to his recollection.

But the case was widely different on the part of Captain Hackwood. Not many weeks had elapsed after his own coldly civil rejection by Agnes Harrington before the disagreeable news reached him that she was about to be married to Colonel Maurice.

It happened that the sister of Captain Hackwood had recently married a young barrister of the name of Bingley, whose father resided in Cornwall, at no great distance from the village of Crumpton, in which was situated the Warren House, where the earlier scenes of my narrative were laid.

It might have been for the purpose of diverting his thoughts from the disappointment of finding that his handsome person was not quite irresistible, that Captain Hackwood, immediately upon leaving the hospitable mansion of Sir Richard Knighton, announced his intention to his sister of

accepting the invitation of her father-in-law, Mr. Bingley, to meet her at his house near Crumpton.

Captain Hackwood was one of that numerous class of individuals whose principal intellectual resource in conversation is the discussing the persons, characters, and circumstances, of the last set of people he had left, for the edification of those who were present. The neighbourhood of Knighton Hall furnished an excellent opportunity for the exercise of this species of eloquence, for it boasted of more than one well-known name among its notabilities.

Among many other mansions which he named, was Beauchamp Park, which he declared was one of the finest places he had ever seen, "positively an ornament to the whole neighbourhood."

"It really is a fine place, is it, Captain Hackwood?" said Mr. Bingley, the father-in-law of Hackwood's sister. "Whom does it belong to now? The young heiress, I suppose, is married by this time."

"No, sir, I don't think she is, but I do not know much about her, for some of the family

were ill when I was staying with Knighton, and I did not go there; but I heard them talk of *Miss Beauchamp*. She is living there in very dashing style with an uncle of the name of Rixley. Old Rixley's daughter had made a very fine match, and she deserved it, too, for she is a most fascinating creature. She married Lord Lymp-ton, the son of the Earl of Rothewell, of Rothewell Castle. I met her brother, young Rixley, there, and a capital fellow he is."

"Whose brother did you meet?" said Mr. Bingley, addressing his talkative guest with an air of considerable interest. "Do you say that you met the brother of Miss Beauchamp?"

"No, sir, it was Henry Rixley, her cousin. Miss Beauchamp has got no brother."

"So much the better for her, Captain Hackwood," said Mr. Bingley; "but she had a brother once, and certainly the best thing that could happen for her, or for him either, perhaps, is that he should be dead and buried."

"Indeed, sir!" replied Captain Hackwood, with the interest which a constitutional

gossip, whether male or female, is sure to feel in everything that has the appearance of *sècret history*.

“I can easily understand,” he continued, “why the heiress should be worse off for having a brother, because you know it might prevent her being an heiress at all; but I don’t understand why the brother would be the better for being buried.”

“Here comes a fresh bottle of claret, Captain Hackwood,” said the host, and if you can resist following the ladies for ten minutes longer, I’ll tell you a romantic story about these Rixleys, or Beauchamps, as the owners of the estate are called. Many years ago, Captain Hackwood, when I was not much older than my son is now, though I was already in possession of this place (for my poor father died early), it may be some twenty-six or twenty-seven years ago, an old tumble-down sort of a mansion, known by the name of the Warren House, was purchased in this neighbourhood by a person of the name of Rixley. I should be sorry to say anything uncivil of any person connected with friends of yours, but I cannot say that

this Mr. Rixley of the Warren House was fortunate enough to make himself much respected in the neighbourhood. In the first place, he was as rude as a bear to us all, and as it was speedily circulated among the quidnuncs that the woman who lived with him was his mistress, and not his wife, he was very speedily left to follow his own devices without any one taking much heed of him. But in a few years the poor young woman died, leaving a little boy of two or three years old behind her; and the next thing we heard of our Warren House neighbour was, that he had brought home a wife to comfort him for the loss of his mistress. She was a very beautiful creature, was this wife, and everything we heard of her was to her credit. Her conduct to the poor motherless child she found on coming to her home was most admirable, and the worthy parson of the parish, who by the way is our worthy parson still, could not speak of her without enthusiasm. His own newly-married wife, too, described her as being very highly accomplished, and charming in every way; so by degrees several ladies of the neigh-

bourhood called upon her ; but greatly as she was approved and admired by them all, it was quite impossible to live upon anything like sociable terms with Rixley himself, for it was evident that the more we wished to be civil to him and his sweet wife, the more heartily he wished us all at the devil. In fact there was but one amusement—but one occupation—that he cared for, and that was boating. He seemed to delight in making himself a sort of king among the sailors of our little fishing town, but to feel the most sovereign contempt for every other human being. His wife added a daughter to his domestic treasures, but by all accounts neither son, daughter, nor wife had any great attractions for him, for he often left his house for months together, and when he returned to it, his days, and I believe his nights, too, were passed on the sea. The next thing we heard of him was that his beautiful wife was dead, and then that he had got that good fellow Bolton to supply her loss as far as teaching the poor unfortunate children went. And this he really did, and certainly gave a most excellent account of them both, as far

as learning went. But now comes the extraordinary part of my long story. There will always be gossiping, you know, in every place, and of course there was gossiping here, and the gossipers said that Rixley treated this natural son like a brute, and that the young man was driven half mad with it. But be this as it may, the finale was horrible on the other side. When the young man was about seventeen or eighteen years old, I believe, or thereabout, Rixley, the father, who had been away for several months, came home, if it was his home ; at any rate, he came to the Warren House, and, as the servants said, had a most violent quarrel with his son. The next day the miserable children were left in peace, for he spent the whole day on the sea, and when he came home he ate his supper and went to bed. But from his bed he never rose again ; when his old housekeeper went to wake him in the morning, she found him a corpse. The doctor was sent for, but dead he was ; and then the parson was sent for, to tell them what they were to do next. ‘But where was the son ?’ you will say. Gone, Captain

Hackwood—vanished—and nobody knew where. The only trace he left behind him was the open window of his bed-room, with his sheets knotted together hanging from one of the hinges of the casement. As it was well known that there had been a most furious quarrel between them, this scampish running away of the young man created a very strong suspicion that this very sudden death of the father, who had been in the most perfect health the day before, might have been the act and deed of the run-away son. In one word, to shorten a very long story, a post-mortem examination of the body was loudly called for, the result of which was that the unfortunate man had died from swallowing poison. I was applied to for a warrant to arrest the son, within an hour, I believe, after this verdict was recorded, and the warrant was given accordingly. But from that hour to this the scamp has never been heard of. As to the young heiress, she was immediately taken possession of by an uncle of the name of Rixley; but she, as Bolton told me, had to take the name of Beauchamp, as a condition, I believe, of

inheriting the property. And here ends my story; and now, if you like it better than more claret, we will join the ladies in the drawing-room."

It would have been difficult for Squire Bingley to have found any man unconnected with the parties more likely to listen with interest to such a narrative than Captain Hackwood. Of the relationship between his heartily-detested rival and the fair possessor of Beauchamp Park, he as yet knew nothing, but the having picked up so strange and eventful a history concerning the lineage and the history of a lady so important in her neighbourhood as Miss Beauchamp, was felt as a positive blessing by him, and the value he attached to it was manifested by his declaring at the breakfast-table on the following morning that he had received letters which obliged him, much against his inclination, to return immediately to London.

And to London he accordingly went without loss of time, and was greeted, infinitely to his satisfaction, by finding at his lodgings an invitation to dinner at a house where he felt sure of meeting society sufficiently dis-

tinguished to be worthy of being the first recipients of the bit of racy gossip which he had been fortunate enough to bring to town with him.

He felt that it was too good to be muttered to his next neighbour while the act of dining was still in process, but when this was over, he began, with the tact of one versed in the business, of making himself valued for his little anecdotes, to relate all the circumstances he had learned from Mr. Bingley, in a voice sufficiently distinct to be heard by the whole table.

As one of the guests seated at it was Colonel Maurice, it will be easily believed that his narrative was not listened to with indifference. Colonel Maurice, however, was a man who had great command over himself, and he steadily listened to the close of it. The last sentence was in these words, "It's a strange history, is it not? However, the fact of the run-away brother having committed the murder seems to be established on all hands. In fact it seems to me very difficult to understand how there ever could have been any feeling of doubt about it."

“Then permit me to enlighten your understanding now,” said Colonel Maurice, in a voice not loud, but of that clear and distinct quality which makes itself heard, when louder tones fail of being so; “I am the run-away brother, but I deny the fact of having committed the murder; and if you feel any difficulty in believing my assertion, I will beg you to say so immediately.”

The first effect of this rejoinder was to make Captain Hackwood for a moment look extremely pale, but in the next his complexion more than recovered itself, and he said, in a voice which, if not quite steady was perfectly audible, “Upon my word, sir, I am at a loss how to answer you with propriety;” then turning towards the master of the house, who was himself a highly distinguished military man, he added, “This is no place, is it, sir, for such an altercation?”

“Certainly not!” returned Colonel Maurice, rising. “You are not, I presume, Captain Hackwood, about to leave town immediately?”

“Oh dear no, sir,” replied Captain Hackwood; “I have no thoughts of it.”

“Then I will do myself the honour of calling upon you to-morrow, when I trust you will be so obliging as to inform me from what source you derived the statement upon the strength of which you have thought yourself justified in branding me as a murderer.”

To this speech Captain Hackwood answered not a word, nor did he look as if he had power to do so, for he was again as pale as ashes.

Colonel Maurice then turned to his host, saying, “I am sure, General, that you will, under the circumstances, forgive my taking an abrupt leave of you; but it is already getting late, and I have business to get through before to-morrow morning which makes it necessary that I should return to my lodgings as soon as possible. You are lodging in Jermyn Street, I think, Captain Hackwood?”

The only answer he received to this, was an affirmative nod of the head; and at the same moment General Pace, at whose table this very disagreeable discussion had arisen, stepped up to Colonel Maurice and cordially

extending his hand to him, said in a voice which he evidently intended should be heard by all his guests, " Good night, my dear Maurice. If I can be useful to you in any way, let me know it. I shall always be at your service."

CHAPTER XX.

CAPTAIN HACKWOOD had been made fully aware that Colonel Maurice had achieved immediate success in the quarter where he had met immediate failure, and the hatred he conceived towards him was as sincere as the mortification he had received was bitter.

That he was startled, and—as much as a young gentleman could be—that he was frightened, by the manner in which Captain Maurice addressed him, after having listened to his Crumpton narrative, is certain; but it is not less so that hate very speedily conquered fear; and that the hour which succeeded the breaking up of General Pace's dinner-party, during which important hour

he was at liberty to indulge his own cogitations without the least danger of being broken in upon by the stately apparition of his ireful rival's figure, was the happiest which Captain Hackwood had ever known.

It was, perhaps, impossible for one man to hate another more heartily than Captain Hackwood hated Colonel Maurice, for the rivalry between them in love made the least part of it. Captain Hackwood was as fully aware of the striking contrast in all respects between himself and his rival as George Harrington had been when he attempted to describe them both to Helen: and, for his torment, he was aware also that whenever they appeared together he was himself forgotten, while Maurice seemed the centre upon which every eye—masculine as well as feminine—was fixed; and his hatred was in due proportion to the acuteness and the justice of the remark.

To a man of such a temperament, and in such a state of mind, the discovering that the rival he so envied and so hated was a base-born felon, was likely enough to be agreeable, and to Captain Hackwood it appeared

like the consummation of all the dearest wishes of his heart.

Both gentlemen left the table of General Pace with the consciousness that they had a great deal of important business upon their hands, and they both set about performing it with energy.

The first occupation of both was to write letters. As Captain Hackwood completed his despatches first, they shall be first noticed. The first he indited was to Colonel Maurice, and was as follows :—

“ SIR,

“There may perhaps be some doubt whether I am not transgressing the laws and regulations of good society by addressing myself in any way to a man standing in so infamous a position as yourself; but as such a man as General Pace has shared in the delusion which has enabled you to thrust yourself into the presence of gentlemen, I prefer the chance of sinning against etiquette to the danger of having my conduct misunderstood. You had the insolence, notwithstanding the frightful disclosure which had taken place,

to threaten me with a call at my lodgings. I now write to give you notice that you will not find me there. I hope within an hour to be in the train that will convey me to the mansion of my friend Mr. Bingley, near Crumpton. But as I scorn to take an unfair advantage of any man, I deem it proper to inform you that he is a Justice of the Peace, and a very active one; so that if you should have the rashness to follow me thither, you would probably be in the hands of justice within a few minutes after your arrival.

“ I remain, Sir, &c.

“ RICHARD FITZGEORGE HACKWOOD.”

His next epistle was addressed to Sir Richard Knighton, at Knighton Hall; and this need not be given at length because it only contained a repetition of the statement respecting Colonel Maurice which he had given at the table of General Pace, together with the intelligence that “ the said Colonel had found it impossible to deny his identity with the fearful parricide of the Crumpton Warren House, and that probably before the

present letter could reach its destination he would be in the hands of justice.”

Having completed these epistles, and placed them in the hands of a trustworthy agent, to be duly forwarded on the morrow, Captain Hackwood and his carpet-bag got into the cab, that had been summoned for him while he wrote, and drove to the railway station in excellent time to be conveyed by the night train to Crumpton.

Colonel Maurice, meanwhile, was also occupied in writing. His first act was to write to his sister, telling her of the scene which had passed at the dinner-table, and begging her not to be unreasonably vexed about it, as, though decidedly disagreeable, it would only be considered as one of those bare-faced slanders to which disappointed men sometimes had recourse when they could hit upon no better expedient, to soothe their vexed feelings.

He wrote also to Agnes; but to her he was less explicit. A repugnance, which he could not conquer, to the idea of her knowing that such accusations had been brought against him, seemed to chain his pen, and to

render it absolutely impossible for him to enter upon any detail of what had passed. It was not, however, that he had the least intention of concealing from her what had taken place; but it was his purpose to see George Harrington early on the morrow, to whom of course it was his intention to communicate everything that had passed; and he greatly preferred the idea of her learning it from her brother than from himself.

Having written this letter, he resumed his pen, and set about making his will. In his case, at least, he felt, or fancied, that a duel was inevitable, and, despite the immensity of sound philosophy which he knew might be brought against such a mode of proving innocence, it appeared to him morally impossible that he could have recourse to any other. But in deciding upon this, he was so far ready to confess himself less magnanimous than he might have been, that in his short preface to his short will he confessed the act to be a proof of human weakness which he should probably blame in another, though he was not strong-minded enough to avoid it himself.

His will gave all he died possessed of to his sister, save five thousand pounds (the half of what he had inherited from the grateful Captain Maclogan), which he bequeathed to Agnes Harrington. The witnessing this document was of necessity postponed to the following morning, as by the time he had finished it everybody in the house had retired to rest except himself.

And then he retired to rest also.

Neither a tranquil conscience nor an undauntless spirit were wanting to ensure to him some hours of tranquil repose, but even this sufficed not to obtain it, for the thoughts of the frightful charge against him, which he had heard that day, and the effect which it might produce on his affianced wife, his friend, and his sister, haunted him in a thousand different shapes, and his night was very nearly a sleepless one.

The first event which occurred to him on the following morning was the receiving the letter of Captain Hackwood, which was given to him as soon as he left his room. The contents of it caused him immediately to change all his plans. The letters he had written

he did not send to the post, but he got his own servant and the mistress of the house to witness his will, and then he set forth, not to ask the friendly assistance of General Pace in a duel, but to tell the whole story to his friend George Harrington.

That this interview was a painful one will be readily believed, for the prevalent feeling in the minds of both the young men was sympathy with the agony which it would cause to the dear ones whom they had hoped so soon to meet, and to greet with all the happiness that love and hope could give.

The contrast was indeed terrible, and George Harrington declared, with great sincerity, that he thought himself the most to be pitied of the two. And perhaps he was right, for even the feverish agitation of those dreadful moments could not prevent Colonel Maurice from seeing and appreciating the perfect sympathy of his friend with every feeling of his own heart, nor could that noble heart itself more indignantly reject the calumny which caused them so much misery than did that of the man to whom he had

revealed it. But no verbal explanations were resorted to on either side, either to express or to welcome this sympathy; one glance exchanged between them, one momentary pressure of the hand, was quite enough, and they parted after an interview wonderfully short, considering the importance of it, with the mutual consolation in the heart of both that each had a friend whose attachment might atone for much sorrow.

And so they parted, George Harrington setting off upon his melancholy journey homeward, and Colonel Maurice upon his strangely eventful return to the place of his birth.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was no fault of George Harrington's that Colonel Maurice set off upon this tremendous expedition alone, for he had earnestly, and even vehemently, urged his friend to permit his going with him; but he yielded at length to the unanswerable argument that Helen and Agnes would need his presence more than he should do.

“That I shall not want you as my second in a duel with Captain Hackwood is made sufficiently evident, as you must I think allow, by his leaving town after what passed between us last night. I not only very distinctly told him that he would hear from me this morning, but General Pace very kindly declared with equal distinctness that

he was perfectly at my service if he could assist me in any way. This was intelligible enough, you will allow, to keep him in London, if he had had any intention of fighting. It is evident that he prefers policemen to pistols, and if he really believes the statement he made at the table of General Pace, it would be difficult to say that he was wrong. But at any rate, George, it is clear that I shall not want you in the capacity of my second, and in no other case can my claims upon you be equal to those of these dear girls. I shall, I am quite sure, find my old friend Bolton ready and willing to help me, if help be needed; and fortunately I have just recovered a letter which I promised to deliver to him in person, but which has been delayed by the box which contained it having been put on board the wrong vessel when I left the Cape. So you perceive that I really have business at Crumpton, besides that which Captain Hackwood has provided for me.

These arguments, very calmly stated by his friend, were too unanswerable to leave room for any further discussion.

Never, perhaps, was any arrival more completely unexpected than that of Colonel Maurice at the house of Mr. Bingley, for it was there that he ordered himself to be driven in the Crumpton post-chaise, immediately upon leaving the train which brought him to the entrance of the little town.

He had left London before mid-day, and having travelled by an express train, arrived at the end of his long journey, while the family party, of which Captain Hackwood made one, was still at table.

The servant who opened the door of the house to him had stated, on his inquiring for Mr. Bingley, that the family were at dinner.

“It is necessary, that I should immediately see Mr. Bingley,” was Colonel Maurice’s reply to this information, “but if you will permit me to go into the drawing-room, I will wait for him till his dinner is over.”

The servant, though a very prudent and discreet servant, did not, as it seemed, suspect that the individual who stood before him came there for the express purpose of being sent to the county gaol and tried for

his life. On the contrary, he bowed very respectfully, took a lamp which stood upon one of the hall tables, and lighted him to the drawing-room door. "What name shall I say, sir?" said the man, after stirring the fire, and setting a chair beside it.

"My name would give him no information, for he does not know it," replied Colonel Maurice. "Only tell him, if you please, that a stranger is here, who wishes to speak to him upon business, but that I beg him not to hasten his removal from table."

The servant again bowed very respectfully, for still it did not occur to him that the stranger was come there for the purpose of giving himself up into the hands of justice; and having quietly replied, "Very well, sir," left the room, and closed the door after him.

Colonel Maurice sat down, and very rationally employed the interval which followed in warming his feet, which, in consequence of English rail-road carriages not having yet adopted the delicious warm-water system of French ones, were suffering from cold.

But the civility of the worthy magistrate did not permit him to wait long before the drawing-room door was again opened, and three ladies and three gentlemen entered; thus evidently breaking through the customary ceremony of dividing males and females in order to prevent the awkwardness of letting the ladies introduce themselves to the "strange gentleman," whom the footman deponed he had never seen before.

No sooner did Colonel Maurice see the ladies than he became conscious of his indiscretion in not having asked to see Mr. Bingley alone; and his not having done so was a proof of his having been more occupied by the hope of immediately seeing Captain Hackwood, and witnessing his dismay at his arrival, than by any other idea.

Nor was he mistaken in thinking that the astonishment of this gentleman at seeing him there would considerably exceed his satisfaction. "D—n—n!" was the first articulate sound which greeted his ears after the entrance of the party, but this welcome Colonel Maurice did not think it necessary to acknowledge, beyond casting upon him

one look of recognition, not perhaps quite unblended with a smile; and passing on to the elderly gentleman who entered the room the last, and whom he readily divined to be the master of the house, he said, "I beg your pardon, sir, for not remembering, in my eagerness to bring myself before you, that it was possible that you might have company with you. But, as I learnt, not many hours ago, from that person," pointing to Captain Hackwood, "that you had stated me to stand charged with the crime of murder, and that you formerly issued a warrant for my apprehension, which was not executed because I was not to be found, I have hastened hither with as little delay as possible in order to surrender myself for trial. I am Colonel Maurice, Mr. Bingley, the natural son of the late Mr. Beauchamp, of Beauchamp Park, better known in this neighbourhood, I believe, as Mr. Rixley, of the Warren House, in the parish of Crumpton. As this gentleman," he added, turning himself round, and facing Captain Hackwood, "thought proper to declare, when he narrated the history of my father's death, yes-

terday, at the table of General Pace, that he felt it impossible not to believe the foul charge made against me, my first purpose, as I immediately gave him to understand, was to call upon *him* for an explanation of the words he had thought proper so use; but by his immediately leaving town, it is evident that the more business-like and prudent way of treating the matter would, in his opinion, be to place me safely, and with as little delay as possible, in the hands of justice. And perhaps he was right."

The three ladies had already left the room in obedience to a signal from the master of the house; and the door being closed after them, Mr. Bingley approached his self-constituted prisoner, and said, "Your conduct, Colonel Maurice, is such as would fully justify me, in my own opinion, if I were to decline such a course: believing you entirely innocent of the crime laid to your charge, I do not consider myself as in any way called upon to interfere with your freedom. But it may be, that you will not yourself consider this, as a sufficient exoneration from the charge."

"Certainly not, Mr. Bingley," returned

Colonel Maurice, with a smile. "But, while I reject your offer, let me thank you for it. It is consolatory to feel that all my fellow-creatures do not, like Captain Hackwood, consider it absolutely impossible that I should be innocent."

"I rather think, sir," replied the old gentleman, returning the smile, "that if all your fellow-creatures were brought to the poll, I should be found in the majority. But what is the course you wish me to pursue?"

"Nay, my dear sir, it is not for me to dictate to you on that point; all I can do in order to assist the course of justice, is to place myself in your hands, and I am here expressly for that purpose."

"I really think that the best course we can pursue," said Mr. Bingley, after the silent meditation of a minute or two, will be for you to accept an apartment in my house for to-night. To-morrow, I shall meet my fellow-justices at Crumpton, when all the circumstances of this strange case can be laid before them, and the proper steps to be taken may be decided on by more competent authority than my own. Will you do me the

favour of accepting hospitality so strangely offered?"

It was now Colonel Maurice's turn to pause before he returned an answer. There was something very decidedly the reverse of agreeable in becoming the fellow-guest of Captain Hackwood; nevertheless he felt that it would be more disagreeable still to decline being *garde-à-vue*, a position, which the offer, however courteously made, necessarily involved. He therefore replied, after a moment's consideration, "Assuredly, Mr. Bingley, I will; it will evidently save trouble to us both, not to mention the pleasure I shall feel in cultivating the acquaintance of a gentleman who has treated me with so much consideration, under circumstances so every-way disadvantageous to me."

This acceptance was as graciously received as it was given, and as Captain Hackwood had very judiciously joined the ladies, who had taken refuge in the dressing-room allotted to his sister, an hour or two was passed by Bingley father and Bingley son, with their strangely-situated guest, in a

manner much less disagreeable than might have been anticipated.

When it was drawing to a close, however, Colonel Maurice, of necessity, alluded to his position, by saying, "I owe you much gratitude, Mr. Bingley, for your kindness under circumstances in which I fear few persons would have ventured to show it; but I am constrained to ask still more at your hands. I have one personal friend in your neighbourhood, to whom I wish to communicate both my arrival here and all the circumstances attending it. This friend is no other than your worthy minister, Mr. Bolton, and I not only wish to see him on my own account, but also because I am the bearer of a letter to him which I promised the writer on her death-bed to deliver into his own hands. May I therefore request you to let him know that you wish to see him here as early as possible to-morrow?"

Mr. Bingley readily promised that the message should be transmitted to the parsonage at an early hour in the morning; and the next important occurrence was the sepa-

ration of the party for the night ; Mr. Bingley escorting his guest to the door of the handsome apartment prepared for him with as much ceremony, or, more properly speaking, with as much respect, as if he had not been a ' prisoner at large.'

CHAPTER XXII.

THE following day was an eventful one. Mr. Bolton, whose early habits made an early visit no matter of inconvenience to him, obeyed the somewhat urgent summons of Mr. Bingley by appearing before the family party had separated after breakfast. Colonel Maurice, though as little disposed as any gentleman under the circumstances could be, to make any fuss about the singularity of his position, nevertheless felt more repugnance than he thought it worth while to conquer, against being formally introduced to the assembled family of the Bingleys at the breakfast-table; he had therefore requested, without making any great ceremony about it, that his breakfast might be sent to him in

his own room. This was immediately done with the most observant attention; but in about ten minutes after his coffee reached him, the servant returned to inform him that Mr. Bolton had arrived. His wish to receive his former master alone had no doubt assisted his decision respecting his manner of breakfasting; and his reply to this message was a request to Mr. Bolton to come to him in his room.

On hearing of his arrival Mr. Bingley immediately rose from the breakfast-table, and met him at the door. Colonel Maurice had expressed a wish on the preceding evening that Mr. Bolton should not be told who it was that wished to see him, and Mr. Bingley himself conducted the good clergyman to his former pupil's door, in order to prevent inquiries being asked, or, at any rate, answered.

The words 'Come in!' by which Colonel Maurice replied to his host's gentle tap at his door, were immediately obeyed; Mr. Bingley as immediately retired; and Mr. Bolton and his old pupil stood face to face.

They stood thus for a moment, silently and earnestly gazing at each other; but there

was nothing approaching sympathy in their feelings : for whereas Colonel Maurice felt at his heart that he should have recognised his old master anywhere, Mr. Bolton felt equally sure that he had never seen the stately stranger before.

“ I beg your pardon, sir,” said Mr. Bolton, very respectfully, “ but I think my friend, Mr. Bingley, must have made some mistake. I understood from what he said that it was an old acquaintance who wished to see me.”

“ And have you no lingering recollection of me, my dear Mr. Bolton ?” said Colonel Maurice, holding out his hands towards him with a friendly smile.

The smile did more than any words could have done towards awakening the recollection of his old friend. Mr. Bolton looked at him from head to foot, as if measuring his noble stature ; and feeling that this could not help him, fixed his eyes on that smiling face, and then exclaimed, “ If it were possible, I should believe that I saw William Rixley before me.”

“ It is more than possible ; it is most soberly certain, my dear old friend, that I am

the William Rixley who owes you such a measureless debt of gratitude. I am at this moment, in some respects, under very disagreeable circumstances; but nevertheless, the seeing you again, looking so well, and so little changed, too, gives me a greater degree of pleasure than I can easily express."

"And your sister, my dear William," said Mr. Bolton, drawing a chair and placing it opposite to that which Colonel Maurice had occupied near the fire. "Has she had the great happiness of seeing you?"

"Yes! Thank heaven, we have at last met again! But it has only been very recently. You shall hear all my adventures at full length, if you will, my dear friend; but it must be when I have more leisure to recount them than at the present moment. My situation just now is rather a strange one. Your friend, Mr. Bingley, has been exceedingly civil, and, under the circumstances, I must say, exceedingly considerate and kind; but nevertheless, my dear friend, I am here rather as his prisoner than his guest. It seems that he issued a warrant against me nearly nine years ago, but as I was not to

be found, the warrant could not be served, and it has therefore become his duty, I believe, to issue another. I am accused of having murdered my father, Mr. Bolton.”

“I know it, William! I know it!” replied Mr. Bolton in great agitation.

“But you do not believe it, Mr. Bolton, do you?” said Colonel Maurice, looking earnestly at him.

“No more than I believe that I murdered him myself!” replied Mr. Bolton, earnestly.

“Then do not look uneasy about it, my dear friend!” returned the young man, cheerfully. “If I am brought to trial, be very sure that this strange annoyance will end there. An English jury will not bring me in guilty, my good friend.”

“No, no! I do not fear it—I cannot fear it. But my confidence in the result will not reconcile me to the idea of such a trial.”

“Nor can it reconcile me to the idea of it either, my dear Mr. Bolton,” replied Colonel Maurice, passing his hand across his lofty brow with a greater appearance of painful feeling than he had yet manifested. “But I know of no method which it would be

possible for me to adopt by which it can be avoided. I need scarcely tell you that my suffering under such circumstances would be more than doubled by the suffering of my sister. But this is not all, dear friend. Listen to me for a few minutes and I will make you understand what my position actually is, or rather was, before I knew of any such frightful charge having been brought against me."

"Colonel Maurice then gave, with great clearness, but with great rapidity, a sketch of his history from the hour in which he let himself down by his sheets from his bedroom window, to that in which he had listened to Captain Hackwood's statement at the dinner-table of General Pace; and then, without giving his attentive auditor time to make any observation on the eventful narrative, he added, "And now, dearest Mr. Bolton, tell me, I entreat you, in what manner, and with whom did the idea of my having committed this dreadful crime arise?"

"In the first place, the examination of your father's body proved beyond the reach

of doubt that he had died from the effects of poison. You must, I am sure, remember that his habits of life had made him very popular among the sailors, and no sooner was his death made known among them than a whole host of them, headed by a man known by the title of Commodore Jack, rushed to the Warren House, and into the room in which the corpse lay, calling for vengeance on his murderer. Your clandestine flight during the night, of course became immediately known to them, and you were immediately accused of being the culprit. A warrant for your apprehension was issued, and a most persevering search made, with what success I need not tell you. Nothing has ever transpired to throw light upon the mystery. My own opinion very decidedly is, that your father destroyed himself."

"I doubt it," replied Colonel Maurice, "I do more than doubt it, Mr. Bolton; I disbelieve it utterly: notwithstanding the unfatherly and unfilial terms we were upon, I knew him better than most lads of seventeen know their fathers; but he, and his

wild ways, were a study to me, and nothing, I am confident, will ever persuade me that he destroyed himself."

"Then how is it to be accounted for, William?" said Mr. Bolton, with a look of painful anxiety.

"Nay, I know not, my good friend," returned Colonel Maurice, shaking his head; "but if I am to be brought to trial, I certainly will not owe my safety to the suggestion of such a fallacy as that. I feel confident, that a man who is not guilty will not be declared to be so by an English jury! and I must trust both my honour and my life to that."

"You may be right, William, nay, I believe you are so," returned Mr. Bolton, in a voice which spoke, however, neither of hope, confidence, nor contentment. "But the trial—the trial itself—to a man situated as you now are, is a misfortune too great to contemplate with philosophical composure."

"I feel it to be so," returned the unhappy young man; and for a very painful interval they both remained silent.

At length Colonel Maurice roused himself

from a state of mind that was very unusual to him, and said firmly, if not cheerfully, "If this heavy misfortune of being tried in a court of justice for the murder of my father be inevitable, dear Bolton, it must be borne, and, with God's help, I will bear it manfully. Would that the task of bearing it fell upon me alone! I was taught to bear a good deal when I was young, and am doubtless the better able to endure suffering now. But there are others . . ." and there he stopt, and, for a few seconds perhaps, was completely overcome; but he did rally manfully, and, with more perfect self-possession and composure than most men could have commanded under similar circumstances, he commissioned his friend to learn from their host what it was his intention to do respecting him.

Mr. Bolton immediately left him, promising a speedy return; but it soon became evident that the decision of Mr. Bingley was not likely to be a prompt one, for more than an hour had elapsed before Mr. Bolton returned to him.

"Mr. Bingley seems greatly embarrassed,

my dear William," were his first words on entering; "so much so, indeed, that he altogether declines doing anything on his own responsibility, anything, at least, beyond requesting you to remain where you are till he has taken legal advice upon the subject.

"Poor gentleman!" replied Colonel Maurice, with a smile. "He certainly has, on the whole, behaved extremely well; but there is something rather ludicrous, is there not, in so very civilly requesting a gentleman, as a personal favour, to be so obliging as to stay where he is, in order to be brought into court and tried for murder? However, his confidence in me, if he really feels it, shall not be abused. There is no danger of my repeating the frolic of escaping through the window. Pray tell him, dear friend, that I am willing to stay here for three hours longer, which will give him time, I think, to consult a lawyer, and summon a quorum; but that the keeping me here beyond that time would look a little like false imprisonment. Don't you think so?"

"I will tell him what you say," replied

Mr. Bolton, returning the smile; "but I do assure you he is very much in earnest in wishing to do exactly what the law exacts from him, though he is certainly in some doubt as to what that may be."

"Let him take his time, by all means—let him take his time!" returned Colonel Maurice; "and by-the-by, my dear old friend, you must not leave me again till I have fulfilled a promise made to an old acquaintance of yours on her death-bed. You remember poor Sarah Lambert, our good old nurse, do you not, Mr. Bolton?"

"Yes, certainly. I remember her perfectly," replied the good man, with the stiff sort of gravity with which people are named whom we do not wish to talk about."

"Are you aware that she left her country in the hope of finding me?" demanded his companion.

"I was told so at Falmouth," returned Mr. Bolton; "but the statement appeared to me too improbable to be true."

"But it was true, nevertheless," resumed Maurice: "and she not only sought, but found me; and nothing short of death, I

believe, would have parted us again. Her health was already failing when she found me, and she died before she had been with me many years. In all my various campaignings, I always contrived to keep a fixed home for her, good soul; and when she died, she left me as a legacy *all her property!* Poor dear woman! She was most devotedly attached both to Helen and to me! I have never yet had leisure to inquire what all her property amounted to, poor dear soul!"

"And did she never tell you, during all the years you passed together, of the imputation which had been thrown upon you at the death of your father?" said Mr. Bolton.

"Never!" replied Colonel Maurice.

Then, suddenly starting from his chair, he explained; "Your question, however, suggests a solution to a mystery which has long puzzled me. During the whole of her residence with me, and especially upon every occasion when my rapid promotion in the service suggested the probability of my return to England, she unceasingly repeated to me, 'Do not go yet, my dearest William!

Wait ! wait only for a year or two, and then your going may be a blessing to yourself and your sister, both. But not yet, William ! It would not be a blessing to either of you as yet.' I perfectly comprehend it now, my dear friend. She fancied that a year or two longer, together with my change of name and station would, suffice to prevent any danger of this frightful charge being brought against me."

" I have no doubt but that you understand her rightly now," said Mr. Bolton, sadly. " She would have done better had she told you the whole truth."

" The whole truth would not have prevented my returning to England, Mr. Bolton," replied Colonel Maurice, quietly ; " but I have not told you yet that she seemed to change her mind about all this when she was dying, for she gave me a letter for you which would have been delivered long ago had not an accident occurred to my baggage ; and when she put it into my hands, which was but a short time before she breathed her last, she said, with great earnestness, ' Now, dear William, now the sooner you go back

to England, and to your dear sister, the better it will be for you both.' ”

Colonel Maurice had taken out his pocket-book as he spoke, and he now drew a letter from it, which he placed in the hands of Mr. Bolton.

There was no great eagerness in that gentleman's manner of receiving it. The writer had forfeited his esteem, and a farewell letter from her was more likely to be painful than interesting. He put it quietly in his pocket, saying, “I shall be more at leisure to read it when I get home.”

He then took his leave, promising to deliver the message he had received from Mr. Bingley, and to repeat his visit at an early hour on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. BOLTON kept his word, and did deliver the message of Colonel Maurice very distinctly, and then took his leave, saying that he should take the liberty of returning on the morrow, to learn what further steps had been taken.

Captain Hackwood was present when this message was delivered to his host.

“Insolent ruffian!” he exclaimed; “does he hope to escape the gallows by bullying? If I were you, Mr. Bingley, I would have him safe in prison before sunset.”

“I don’t think so badly of him as you seem to do,” replied the old gentleman, quietly; “but, nevertheless, I am quite aware that it is my duty to prevent his again

escaping from an investigation which the circumstances certainly call for. I have already dispatched a messenger to Falmouth to desire Mr. Lucas, the lawyer, to come to me; and my son is himself gone in the carriage to bring over Sir Thomas White from Crumpton Park. He is one of our best-informed and most active magistrates; and I dare say that between us we shall make out what we ought to do. After which there will be no delay in doing it, you may depend upon it."

The measures thus promptly taken were immediately effectual; and the result of the consultation which followed the arrival of these gentlemen was, that a warrant for the detention of the person now calling himself Colonel Maurice, but formerly known as William Rixley, should immediately be made out.

The next step was, of course, to commit the unfortunate object of this decision to the county gaol; and the worthy Mr. Bingley, with very sincere regret that he could do nothing better for his service, ordered his

carriage out to convey him thither. This order was already obeyed, and the carriage was already at the door, when Mr. Bolton was seen approaching the house with every appearance of violent haste and agitation.

Colonel Maurice, who was already at the hall-door in readiness to depart, was rather pained than comforted by seeing him, for he doubted not that his old friend had already heard of his committal, and was hastening to take leave of him before the doors of a prison were closed between them.

The moment was one in which everything tending to awaken feeling had better be avoided; and the unfortunate Colonel Maurice was so fully aware of this, that when Mr. Bolton stretched out his hand, apparently to impede his stepping into the carriage, he said, "You mean this visit most kindly, my dear friend; but if you would spare me all unnecessary suffering, do not attempt to delay my departure at this moment."

The triumphant eye of Captain Hackwood, who was standing on the door-steps, was on

him as he spoke—a circumstance which, no doubt, added to the earnestness with which this remonstrance was uttered.

But this earnestness did not produce its intended effect on Mr. Bolton. On the contrary, he persevered with a degree of vehemence, very unusual in him, to retain the arm of Colonel Maurice, which he had seized, endeavouring to draw him back by main force into the house. “What the devil are you about, sir?” exclaimed Captain Hackwood. “Do you mean to resist the warrant?”

“Yes, sir, I do,” replied the clergyman, immediately recovering his self-possession.

“You both know me, gentlemen,” he continued, turning to the two magistrates; “you both know me too well to doubt that I have some reason for what I do. I hold a document in my hand,” he added, drawing a letter from his pocket, “which will show you that the sending this gentleman to prison, after it has been offered for your perusal in evidence, may be attended with inconvenience to others as well as to him.”

“And you must know us too well, my

dear sir, to doubt our feeling well pleased at anything that may lawfully impede our performing so unpleasant a duty," said Sir Thomas White. Whereupon he himself re-entered the house, followed by the whole party.

Mr. Bolton was too eager to achieve the business he had to perform to wait till they had passed through the hall before he placed the important letter in the hands of Sir Thomas; but that gentleman had the discretion not to open it till he had entered the drawing-room, waited till all the party had entered it also, closed the door, and put on his spectacles.

This done, he opened the letter, and, at the request of Mr. Bolton, read it aloud. Its contents were as follows:—

“HONOURED SIR,

“I KNOW my own position, and I know yours, much too well to obtrude myself upon your recollection, unless I had such a reason for doing so as might justify the act in your eyes.

“ You already know the terrible secret of my sinful life ; you already know that, while living as the servant of the late Mrs. Rixley, and as the attendant of her children, I was the mistress of her husband, and their father.

“ Thus much I have already confessed to you, and I confessed it with shame and sorrow, a shame and a sorrow as genuine as was ever felt by a repentant sinner.

“ And I have now, sir, another confession to make to you ; but though the deed which I am now obliged to disclose is considered, I believe, as worse than any other, the remembrance of it causes me neither shame nor sorrow. I loved my master passionately, and devotedly, and I loved his children devotedly too, perhaps because they were his children. My love to the father was of that unprincipled kind which utterly obscures the judgment, making that appear pardonable in him which, in another, would have appeared hateful beyond the reach of forgiveness.

“ His cruel neglect of his faultless wife, and his utter indifference towards his chil-

dren, I more than forgave, for I believed both to be the result of his overpowering attachment to myself.

“ But my judgment became clearer when, upon his return to the Warren House, after an unusually long absence of several months, he coolly informed me that he was immediately going to be married.

“ It is no part of my task to describe the feeling which this announcement created in me. If it was hatred, it was not strong enough to have led to the catastrophe which followed, for it is certain that I should not have acted as I did act, had not his children been very dear to me.

“ In talking to me of his approaching nuptials, which he did without even affecting the slightest consideration for my feelings, he informed me for the first time that his real name was Beauchamp, which he had taken upon succeeding to a large estate—this estate, he gaily told me, would be inherited by the son, which he flattered himself would be born to him within a twelvemonth, adding, however, that he had,

nevertheless, made a will, leaving the property to his daughter Helen, in case this male heir was never born. The whole of the following day my master spent, as he often did, upon the water, leaving home early in the morning, and giving me orders to pack up clothes for him to take with him to London on the following day.

“ He also ordered me to prepare a supper for him at night.

“ How I got through that dreadful day matters to no one. Perhaps I was mad. I sometimes think it was so; but mad or not, I was not idle. I made my will. I went to Falmouth. I purchased some poison at a druggist’s shop, and I came back to the Warren House. Having reposed myself for a while, I prepared my master’s supper, and that so skilfully, that if he ate but a little, and drank but a little, I knew that when he lay down to sleep, he would rise no more, and that Helen, and not a son and heir, would inherit his property.

“ It was I who poisoned George Rixley,

of the Warren House, alias George Beauchamp, of Beauchamp Park.

“ The departure of poor William was an accidental coincidence. He went, poor boy, because his brutal father had treated him in a manner too bad to bear. The dear boy had often told me, that he thought he should be driven to run away at last.

“ I repeat, sir, that I do not feel any remorse for having prevented the father of Helen from leaving her destitute. I may have been mad, and I may be so still; but I firmly believe that I did more good than evil.”

“ Signed ALMERIA, commonly
called SARAH LAMBERT.”

It will readily be imagined that this strange document was not listened to with indifference by any of the persons present at the reading it.

The feelings of Colonel Maurice, though certainly not unmixed with pain, were those of deep thankfulness for this sudden change in his destiny, from he hardly knew what

of misery, to the recovery of a degree of happiness which he most sincerely believed to be greatly beyond the ordinary lot of mortals; and as he thought of the change which this wonderful transition brought to the distant dear ones, whose fate hung on his, the happiness he felt seemed to become as unselfish, and as holy, as it was intense.

The deep joy, and the delightful feeling of relief experienced by the truly sensitive heart of Mr. Bolton, may be easily enough conceived by all possessed of human affections and warm sympathies; and the other gentlemen present, with the exception of one, unquestionably experienced a very sincere feeling of satisfaction at the happy turn which the disagreeable affair that had brought them together had taken.

The exception, as may easily be guessed, was found in the person of the deeply-disappointed Captain Hackwood. But even at that very discouraging moment, the spirit within him did not leave him altogether without resource, for in the midst of the congratulations which were pouring in upon

Colonel Maurice, he gently touched the constable on the arm, and said, "Take care what you are about, my good fellow. It is likely enough to come out, I think, that this very improbable epistle has been concocted at the Parsonage, within the last twenty-four hours."

Captain Hackwood could not have addressed himself to a more promising subject, for the constable was both timid and punctilious.

"Thank you kindly for the hint, sir," replied the man; "it would not be the first time that such a trick may have been played, I'll answer for it."

And then, turning to Sir Thomas White, he said, "I ask your pardon, sir, but when a prisoner has been given over to my keeping, I must take care not to let him go without having to show good and sufficient cause for the same. Now it seems to me, your Honour, that we have not got any good and sufficient proof as to when that there letter was written. Even if there was anybody here to prove the woman's hand-

writing, we don't know but what she might have been persuaded by the young man to do it when she was dying, because in that case it might do him a deal of good without doing a bit of harm to her."

This speech was listened to by all with perhaps more attention than it deserved; but the effect was not lasting, for our old acquaintance, Mr. Lucas, the Falmouth attorney, immediately drew another letter from his pocket, together with the will of Almeria Lambert.

The letter, which was addressed to "William Rixley," expressly stated that it was her purpose to avenge herself, and him, by destroying his father by means of poison, which she had already procured, and which it was her fixed purpose to administer before she again closed her eyes in sleep. "By this just act of retribution," she added, "I shall ensure to your dear sister the noble fortune to which she was born, and which, if he lives, will in all probability be given to another." This letter was not only dated the day before the late Mr. Beauchamp's death,

but Mr. Lucas was ready to depose on oath that it had been confided to him on that day. He offered also to swear that it was in the hand-writing of Mrs. Lambert.

This seemed to satisfy everybody, except Captain Hackwood; but he evidently continued to entertain doubts as to its authenticity, for after casting a look of the utmost contempt upon Mr. Lucas, he turned on his heel and walked out of the room.

The rest of the party however seemed, one and all, to be exceedingly pleased with this happy termination of the disagreeable business which had brought them there, and it was not Mr. Bingley's fault if they did not all stay and dine with him. But Colonel Maurice pleaded the absolute necessity of his returning to London by the next train, together with his earnest wish of passing the short interval before he started with his old friends at the Parsonage.

The carriage which still stood at the door, ready to convey the gallant Colonel to the county gaol, was now offered to take him and his old master to the Parsonage, and

his meeting with Mrs. Bolton was as happy as that with her husband had been the reverse.

Yet nevertheless Colonel Maurice took care to be ready for the train, and in a time so short as would have seemed fabulous to our fathers, he found himself once more at Beauchamp Park, and surrounded by all that he loved best on earth.

* * * * *

And now my story is done.

Need it be added at full length that the double wedding came off exactly on the day originally fixed—exactly as it would have done, if Colonel Maurice's flying excursion to Crumpton had never taken place? The only difference was that Mr. Bolton came to perform the double ceremony; and then he learnt, happy man, that Helen had several years ago purchased the next presentation to a capital good living in her neighbourhood, the incumbent of which, at the time of the purchase, had already numbered nearly four-score years. The only consolation for this long delay was to be found in the evident

salubrity of the spot that was to be his future home.

The Warren House may be seen still standing in its desolate loneliness; but neither William nor Helen have ever taxed their courage so far as to enter it. And they acted wisely, for their present happiness is too perfect to require any contrast with former sufferings to increase their enjoyment of it.

THE END.

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